The Four Corners of the World

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The Clock

Mr. Twiss was a great walker, and it was his habit, after his day's work was done, to walk from his pleasant office in the Adelphi to his home at Hampstead. On an afternoon he was detained to a later hour than usual by one of his clients, a Captain Brayton, over some matter of a mortgage. Mr. Twiss looked at his office clock.

"You are going west, I suppose?" he said. "I wonder if you would walk with me as far as Piccadilly? It will not be very much out of your way, and I have a reason for wishing your company."

"By all means," replied Captain Brayton, and the two men set forth.

Mr. Twiss, however, seemed in a difficulty as to how he should broach his subject, and for a while the pair walked in silence. They, indeed, reached Pall Mall, and were walking down that broad thoroughfare, before a word of any importance was uttered. And even then it was chance which furnished the occasion. A young man of Captain Brayton's age came down from the steps of a club and walked towards them. As he passed beneath a street lamp, Mr. Twiss noticed his face, and ever so slightly started with surprise. At almost the same moment, the young man swerved across the road at a run, as though suddenly he remembered a very pressing appointment. The two men walked on again for a few paces, and then Captain Brayton observed: "There is a screw loose there, I am afraid."

Mr. Twiss shook his head.

"I am sorry to hear you say so," he replied. "It was, indeed, about Archie Cranfield that I was anxious to speak to you. I promised his father that I would be something more than Archie's mere man of affairs, if I were allowed, and I confess that I am troubled by him. You know him well?"

Captain Brayton nodded his head.

"Perhaps I should say that I did know him well," he returned. "We were at the same school, we passed through Chatham together, but since he has relinquished actual service we have seen very little of one another." Here he hesitated, but eventually made up his mind to continue in a guarded fashion. "Also, I am

bound to admit that there has been cause for disagreement. We quarrelled."

Mr. Twiss was disappointed. "Then you can tell me nothing of him recently?" he asked, and Captain Brayton shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing but what all the little world of his acquaintances already knows. He has grown solitary, forbidding in his manner, and, what is most noticeable, sly—extraordinarily sly. While he is speaking with you, he will smile at some secret thought of his; the affairs of the world have lost their interest for him; he hardly listens and seldom speaks. He is concerned with some private matter, and he hides it cunningly. That is the character, at all events, which his friends give of him."

They had now reached the corner of St. James's Street, and as they turned up the hill, Mr. Twiss took up the tale.

"I am not surprised at what you tell me. It is a great pity, for we both remember him ambitious and a good soldier. I am inclined to blame the house in the country for the change in him."

Captain Brayton, however, did not agree.

"It goes deeper than that," he said. "Men who live alone in the country may show furtive ways in towns, no doubt. But why does he live alone in the country? No, that will not do"; and at the top of St. James's Street the two men parted.

Mr. Twiss walked up Bond Street, and the memory of that house in the country in which Archie Cranfield chose to bury himself kept him company. Mr. Twiss had travelled down into the eastern counties to see it for himself one Saturday afternoon when Cranfield was away from home, and a walk of six miles from the station had taken him to its door. It stood upon the borders of Essex and Suffolk, a small Elizabethan house backed upon the Stour, a place of black beams and low ceilings and great fireplaces. It had been buttressed behind, where the ground ran down to the river-bank, and hardly a window was on a level with its neighbour. A picturesque place enough, but Mr. Twiss was a lover of towns and of paved footways and illuminated streets. He imagined it on such an evening as this, dark, and the rain dripping cheerlessly from the trees. He imagined its inmate crouching over the fire with his sly smile upon his face, and of a sudden the picture took on a sinister look, and a strong sense of discomfort

made Mr. Twiss cast an uneasy glance behind him. He had in his pocket a letter of instructions from Archie Cranfield, bidding him buy the house outright with its furniture, since it had now all come into the market.

It was a week after this when next Captain Brayton came to Mr. Twiss's office, and, their business done, he spoke of his own accord of Archie Cranfield.

"I am going to stay with him," he said. "He wrote to me on the night of the day when we passed him in Pall Mall. He told me that he would make up a small bachelor party. I am very glad, for, to tell the truth, our quarrel was a sufficiently serious one, and here, it seems, is the end to it."

Mr. Twiss was delighted, and shook his client warmly by the hand.

"You shall bring me news of Archie Cranfield," he said—"better news than I have," he added, with a sudden gravity upon his face. For in making the arrangements for the purchase of the house, he had come into contact with various neighbours of Archie Cranfield, and from all of them he had had but one report. Cranfield had a bad name in those parts. There were no particular facts given to account for his reputation. It was all elusive and vague, an impression conveyed by Archie Cranfield himself, by something strange and sly in his demeanour. He would sit chuckling in a sort of triumph, to which no one had the clue, or, on the other hand, he fell into deep silences like a man with a trouble on his mind.

"Be sure you come to see me when you return," said Mr. Twiss, and Captain Brayton replied heartily: "Surely I will." But he never did. For in a few days the newspapers were busy with the strange enigma of his death.

II

The first hint of this enigma was conveyed to Mr. Twiss late one night at his private address. It came in the shape of a telegram from Archie Cranfield, which seemed to the agitated solicitor rather a cry of distress than a message sent across the wires.

“Come at once. I am in terrible need.—Cranfield.”

There were no trains at so late an hour by which Mr. Twiss could reach his client; he must needs wait until the morning. He travelled, however, by the first train from Liverpool Street. Although the newspapers were set out upon the bookstall, not one of them contained a word of anything amiss at Archie Cranfield’s house, and Mr. Twiss began to breathe more freely. It was too early for a cab to be in waiting at the station, and Mr. Twiss set out to walk the six miles. It was a fine, clear morning of November; but for the want of leaves and birds, and the dull look of the countryside, Mr. Twiss might have believed the season to be June. His spirits rose as he walked, his blood warmed to a comfortable glow, and by the time he came to the gates of the house, Cranfield’s summons had become a trifling thing. As he walked up to the door, however, his mood changed, for every blind in the house was drawn. The door was opened before he could touch the bell, and it was opened by Cranfield himself. His face was pale and disordered, his manner that of a man at his wits’ end.

“What has happened?” asked Mr. Twiss as he entered the hall.

“A terrible thing!” replied Cranfield. “It’s Brayton. Have you breakfasted? I suppose not. Come, and I will tell you while you eat.”

He walked up and down the room while Mr. Twiss ate his breakfast, and gradually, by question and by answer, the story took shape. Corroboration was easy and was secured. There was no real dispute about the facts; they were simple and clear.

There were two other visitors in the house besides Captain Brayton, one a barrister named Henry Chalmers, and the second, William Linfield, a man about town as the phrase goes. Both men stood in much the same relationship to Archie Cranfield as Captain Brayton did—that is to say, they were old friends who had seen little of their host of late, and were somewhat surprised to receive

his invitation after so long an interval. They had accepted it in the same spirit as Brayton, and the three men arrived together on Wednesday evening. On Thursday the party of four shot over some turnip fields and a few clumps of wood which belonged to the house, and played a game of bridge in the evening. In the opinion of all, Brayton was never in better spirits. On Friday the four men shot again and returned to the house as darkness was coming on. They took tea in the smoking-room, and after tea Brayton declared his intention to write some letters before dinner. He went upstairs to his room for that purpose.

The other three men remained in the smoking-room. Of that there was no doubt. Both Chalmers and Linfield were emphatic upon the point. Chalmers, in particular, said:

“We sat talking on a well-worn theme, I in a chair on one side of the fireplace, Archie Cranfield in another opposite to me, and Linfield sitting on the edge of the billiard-table between us. How the subject cropped up I cannot remember, but I found myself arguing that most men hid their real selves all their lives even from their most intimate friends, that there were secret chambers in a man’s consciousness wherein he lived a different life from that which the world saw and knew, and that it was only by some rare mistake the portals of that chamber were ever passed by any other man. Linfield would not hear of it. If this hidden man were the real man, he held, in some way or another the reality would triumph, and some vague suspicion of the truth would in the end be felt by all his intimates. I upheld my view by instances from the courts of law, Linfield his by the aid of a generous imagination, while Cranfield looked from one to the other of us with his sly, mocking smile. I turned to him, indeed, in some heat.

“‘Well, since you appear to know, Cranfield, tell me which of us is right,’ and his pipe fell from his fingers and broke upon the hearth. He stood up, with his face grown white and his lips drawn back from his teeth in a kind of snarl.

‘“What do you mean by that?’ he asked; and before I could answer, the door was thrown violently open, and Cranfield’s man-servant burst into the room. He mastered himself enough to say:

“‘May I speak to you, sir?’

“Cranfield went outside the door with him. He could not have moved six paces from the door, for though he closed it behind him, we heard the sound of his

voice and of his servant's speaking in low tones. Moreover, there was no appreciable moment of time between the cessation of the voices and Cranfield's reappearance in the room. He came back to the fireplace and said very quietly:

"'I have something terrible to tell you. Brayton has shot himself.'

"He then glanced from Linfield's face to mine, and sat down in a chair heavily. Then he crouched over the fire shivering. Both Linfield and myself were too shocked by the news to say a word for a moment or two. Then Linfield asked:

"'But is he dead?'

"'Humphreys says so,' Cranfield returned. 'I have telephoned to the police and to the doctor.'

"'But we had better go upstairs ourselves and see,' said I. And we did."

Thus Chalmers Humphreys, the man-servant, gave the following account:

"The bell rang from Captain Brayton's room at half-past five. I answered it at once myself, and Captain Brayton asked me at what hour the post left. I replied that we sent the letters from the house to the post-office in the village at six. He then asked me to return at that hour and fetch those of his which would be ready. I returned precisely at six, and I saw Captain Brayton lying in a heap upon the rug in front of the fire. He was dead, and he held a revolver tightly clenched in his hand. As I stepped over hun, I smelt that something was burning. He had shot himself through the heart, and his clothes were singed, as if he had held the revolver close to his side."

These stories were repeated at the inquest, and at this particular point in Humphreys' evidence the coroner asked a question:

"Did you recognise the revolver?"

"Not until Captain Brayton's hand was unclenched."

"But then you did?"

"Yes," said Humphreys.

The coroner pointed to the table on which a revolver lay.

“Is that the weapon?”

Humphreys took it up and looked at the handle, on which two initials were engraved—“A. C.”

“Yes,” said the man. “I recognised it as Mr. Cranfield’s. He kept it in a drawer by his bedside.”

No revolver was found amongst Captain Brayton’s possessions.

It became clear that, while the three men were talking in the billiard-room, Captain Brayton had gone to Cranfield’s room, taken his revolver, and killed himself with it. No evidence, however, was produced which supplied a reason for Brayton’s suicide. His affairs were in good order, his means sufficient, his prospects of advancement in his career sound. Nor was there a suggestion of any private unhappiness. The tragedy, therefore, was entered in that list of mysteries which are held insoluble.

“I might,” said Chalmers, “perhaps resume the argument which Humphreys interrupted in the billiard-room, with a better instance than any which I induced —the instance of Captain Brayton.”

III

“You won’t go?” Archie Cranfield pleaded with Mr. Twiss. “Linfield and Chalmers leave to-day. If you go too, I shall be entirely alone.”

“But why should you stay?” the lawyer returned. “Surely you hardly propose to remain through the winter in this house?”

“No, but I must stay on for a few days; I have to make arrangements before I can go,” said Cranfield; and seeing that he was in earnest in his intention to go, Mr. Twiss was persuaded. He stayed on, and recognised, in consequence, that the death of Captain Brayton had amongst its consequences one which he had not expected. The feeling in the neighbourhood changed towards Archie Cranfield. It cannot be said that he became popular—he wore too sad and joyless an air—but sympathy was shown to him in many acts of courtesy and in a greater charity of language.

A retired admiral, of a strong political complexion, who had been one of the foremost to dislike Archie Cranfield, called, indeed, to offer his condolences. Archie Cranfield did not see him, but Mr. Twiss walked down the drive with him to the gate.

“It’s hard on Cranfield,” said the admiral. “We all admit it. It wasn’t fair of Brayton to take his host’s revolver. But for the accident that Cranfield was in the billiard-room with Linfield and Chalmers, the affair might have taken on quite an ugly look. We all feel that in the neighbourhood, and we shall make it up to Cranfield. Just tell him that, Mr. Twiss, if you will.”

“It is very kind of you all, I am sure,” replied Mr. Twiss, “but I think Cranfield will not continue to live here. The death of Captain Brayton has been too much of a shock for him.”

Mr. Twiss said “Goodbye” to the admiral at the gate, and returned to the house. He was not easy in his mind, and as he walked round the lawn under the great trees, he cried to himself:

“It is lucky, indeed, that Archie Cranfield was in the billiard-room with Linfield and Chalmers; otherwise, Heaven knows what I might have been brought to believe myself.”

The two men had quarrelled; Brayton himself had imparted that piece of knowledge to Mr. Twiss. Then there was the queer change in Archie Cranfield's character, which had made for him enemies of strangers, and strangers of his friends—the slyness, the love of solitude, the indifference to the world, the furtive smile as of a man conscious of secret powers, the whole indescribable uncanniness of him. Mr. Twiss marshalled his impressions and stopped in the avenue.

"I should have had no just grounds for any suspicion," he concluded, "but I cannot say that I should not have suspected," and slowly he went on to the door.

He walked through the house into the billiard-room, and so became the witness of an incident which caused him an extraordinary disquiet. The room was empty. Mr. Twiss lit his pipe and took down a book from one of the shelves. A bright fire glowed upon the hearth, and drawing up a chair to the fender, he settled down to read. But the day was dull, and the fireplace stood at the dark end of the room. Mr. Twiss carried his book over to the window, which was a bay window with a broad seat. Now, the curtains were hung at the embrasure of the window, so that, when they were drawn, they shut the bay off altogether from the room, and when they were open, as now, they still concealed the corners of the window-seats. It was in one of these corners that Mr. Twiss took his seat, and there he read quietly for the space of five minutes.

At the end of that time he heard the latch of the door click, and looking out from his position behind the curtain, he saw the door slowly open. Archie Cranfield came through the doorway into the room, and shut the door behind him. Then he stood for a while by the door, very still, but breathing heavily. Mr. Twiss was on the point of coming forward and announcing his presence, but there was something so strange and secret in Cranfield's behaviour that, in spite of certain twinges of conscience, he remained hidden in his seat. He did more than remain hidden. He made a chink between the curtain and the wall, and watched. He saw Cranfield move swiftly over to the fireplace, seize a little old-fashioned clock in a case of satinwood which stood upon the mantelshelf, raise it in the air, and dash it with an ungovernable fury on to the stone hearth. Having done this unaccountable thing, Cranfield dropped into the chair which Mr. Twiss had drawn up. He covered his face with his hands and suddenly began to sob and wail in the most dreadful fashion, rocking his body from side to side in a very paroxysm of grief. Mr. Twiss was at his wits' end to know what to do. He felt that to catch a man sobbing would be to earn his undying resentment. Yet the

sound was so horrible, and produced in him so sharp a discomfort and distress, that, on the other hand, he could hardly keep still. The paroxysm passed, however, almost as quickly as it had come, and Cranfield, springing to his feet, rang the bell. Humphreys answered it.

“I have knocked the clock off the mantelshelf with my elbow, Humphreys,” he said. “I am afraid that it is broken, and the glass might cut somebody’s hand. Would you mind clearing the pieces away?”

He went out of the room, and Humphreys went off for a dustpan. Mr. Twiss was able to escape from the billiard-room unnoticed. But it was a long time before he recovered from the uneasiness which the incident aroused in him.

Four days later the two men left the house together. The servants had been paid off. Humphreys had gone with the luggage to London by an earlier train. Mr. Twiss and Archie Cranfield were the last to go. Cranfield turned the key in the lock of the front door as they stood upon the steps.

“I shall never see the inside of that house again,” he said with a gusty violence.

“Will you allow me to get rid of it for you?” asked Mr. Twiss; and for a moment Cranfield looked at him with knotted brows, blowing the while into the wards of the key.

“No,” he said at length, and, running down to the stream at the back of the house, he tossed the key into the water. “No,” he repeated sharply; “let the house rot empty as it stands. The rats shall have their will of it, and the sooner the better.”

He walked quickly to the gate, with Mr. Twiss at his heels, and as they covered the six miles to the railway station, very little was said between them.

IV

Time ran on, and Mr. Twiss was a busy man. The old house by the Stour began to vanish from his memory amongst the mists and the veils of rain which so often enshrouded it. Even the enigma of Captain Brayton's death was ceasing to perplex him, when the whole affair was revived in the most startling fashion. A labourer, making a short cut to his work one summer morning, passed through the grounds of Cranfield's closed and shuttered house. His way led him round the back of the building, and as he came to that corner where the great brick buttresses kept the house from slipping down into the river, he saw below him, at the edge of the water, a man sleeping. The man's back was turned towards him; he was lying half upon his side, half upon his face. The labourer, wondering who it was, went down to the river-bank, and the first thing he noticed was a revolver lying upon the grass, its black barrel and handle shining in the morning sunlight. The labourer turned the sleeper over on his back. There was some blood upon the left breast of his waistcoat. The sleeper was dead, and from the rigidity of the body had been dead for some hours. The labourer ran back to the village with the astounding news that he had found Mr. Cranfield shot through the heart at the back of his own empty house. People at first jumped naturally to the belief that murder had been done. The more judicious, however, shook their heads. Not a door nor a window was open in the house. When the locks were forced, it was seen that the dust lay deep on floor and chair and table, and nowhere was there any mark of a hand or a foot. Outside the house, too, in the long neglected grass, there were but two sets of footsteps visible, one set leading round the house—the marks made by the labourer on his way to his work—the other set leading directly to the spot where Archie Cranfield's body was found lying. Rumours, each contradicting the other, flew from cottage to cottage, and the men gathered about the police-station and in the street waiting for the next. In an hour or two, however, the mystery was at an end. It leaked out that upon Archie Cranfield's body a paper had been discovered, signed in his hand and by his name, with these words:

"I have shot myself with the same revolver with which I murdered Captain Brayton."

The statement created some stir when it was read out in the billiard-room, where the coroner held his inquest. But the coroner who presided now was the man who had held the court when Captain Brayton had been shot. He was quite clear

in his recollection of that case.

“Mr. Cranfield’s alibi on that occasion,” he said, “was incontrovertible. Mr. Cranfield was with two friends in this very room when Captain Brayton shot himself in his bedroom. There can be no doubt of that.” And under his direction the jury returned a verdict of “Suicide while of unsound mind.”

Mr. Twiss attended the inquest and the funeral. But though he welcomed the verdict, at the bottom of his mind he was uneasy. He remembered vividly that extraordinary moment when he had seen Cranfield creep into the billiard-room, lift the little clock in its case of satinwood high above his head, and dash it down upon the hearth in a wild gust of fury. He recollected how the fury had given way to despair —if it were despair and not remorse. He saw again Archie Cranfield dropping into the chair, holding his head and rocking his body in a paroxysm of sobs. The sound of his wailing rang horribly once more in the ears of Mr. Twiss. He was not satisfied.

“What should take Cranfield back to that deserted house, there to end his life, if not remorse,” he asked himself—“remorse for some evil done there”?

Over that question for some days he shook his head, finding it waiting for him at his fireside and lurking for him at the corner of the roads, as he took his daily walk between Hampstead and his office. It began to poison his life, a life of sane and customary ways, with eerie suggestions. There was an oppression upon his heart of which he could not rid it. On the outskirts of his pleasant world dim horrors loomed; he seemed to walk upon a frail crust, fearful of what lay beneath. The sly smile, the furtive triumph, the apparent consciousness of secret power—did they point to some corruption of the soul in Cranfield, of which none knew but he himself?

“At all events, he paid for it,” Mr. Twiss would insist, and from that reflection drew, after all, but little comfort. The riddle began even to invade his business hours, and take a seat within his private office, silently clamouring for his attention. So that it was with a veritable relief that he heard one morning from his clerk that a man called Humphreys wished particularly to see him.

“Show him in,” cried Mr. Twiss, and for his own ear he added: “Now I shall know.”

Humphreys entered the room with a letter in his hand. He laid the letter on the

office table. Mr. Twiss saw at a glance that it was addressed in Archie Cranfield's hand. He flung himself upon it and snatched it up. It was sealed by Cranfield's seal. It was addressed to himself, with a note upon the left-hand corner of the envelope:

"To be delivered after my death."

Mr. Twiss turned sternly to the man.

"Why did you not bring it before?"

"Mr. Cranfield told me to wait a month," Humphreys replied.

Mr. Twiss took a turn across the room with the letter in his hand.

"Then you knew," he cried, "that your master meant to kill himself? You knew, and remained silent?"

"No, sir, I did not know," Humphreys replied firmly. "Mr. Cranfield gave me the letter, saying that he had a long railway journey in front of him. He was smiling when he gave it me. I can remember the words with which he gave it: 'They offer you an insurance ticket at the booking-office, when they sell you your travelling ticket, so there is always, I suppose, a little risk. And it is of the utmost importance to me that, in the event of my death, this should reach Mr. Twiss.' He spoke so lightly that I could not have guessed what was on his mind, nor, do I think, sir, could you."

Mr. Twiss dismissed the man and summoned his clerk. "I shall not be in to anyone this afternoon," he said. He broke the seal and drew some closely written sheets of note-paper from the envelope. He spread the sheets in front of him with a trembling hand.

"Heaven knows in what spirit and with what knowledge I shall rise from my reading," he thought; and looking out of his pleasant window upon the barges swinging down the river on the tide, he was in half a mind to fling the sheets of paper into the fire. "But I shall be plagued with that question all my life," he added, and he bent his head over his desk and read.

"My DEAR FRIEND,—I am writing down for you the facts. I am not offering any explanation, for I have none to give. You will probably rise up, after reading

this letter, quite incredulous, and with the conviction in your mind that you have been reading the extravagancies of a madman. And I wish with all my heart that you could be right. But you are not. I have come to the end to-day. I am writing the last words I ever shall write, and therefore I am not likely to write a lie.

“You will remember the little manor-house on the borders of Essex, for you were always opposed to my purchase of it. You were like the British jury, my friend. Your conclusion was sound, but your reason for it very far from the mark. You disliked it for its isolation and the melancholy of its dripping trees, and I know not what other town-bred reasonings. I will give you a more solid cause. Picture to yourself the billiard-room and how it was furnished when I first took the house—the raised settee against the wall, the deep leather chairs by the fire, the high fender, and on the mantelshelf—what?—a little old-fashioned clock in a case of satinwood. You probably never noticed it. I did from the first evenings which I passed in the house. For I spent those evenings alone, smoking my pipe by the fire. It had a queer trick. For a while it would tick almost imperceptibly, and then, without reason, quite suddenly, the noise would become loud and hollow, as though the pendulum in its swing struck against the wooden case. To anyone sitting alone for hours in the room, as I did, this tick had the queerest effect. The clock almost became endowed with human qualities. At one time it seemed to wish to attract one’s attention, at another time to avoid it. For more than once, disturbed by the louder knocking, I rose and moved the clock. At once the knocking would cease, to begin again when I had settled afresh to my book, in a kind of tentative, secret way, as though it would accustom my ears to the sound, and so pass unnoticed. And often it did so pass, until one knock louder and more insistent than the rest would drag me in annoyance on to my feet once more. In a week, however, I got used to it, and then followed the strange incident which set in motion that chain of events of which tomorrow will see the end.

“It happened that a couple of my neighbours were calling on me. One of them you have met—Admiral Palkin, a prolix old gentleman, with a habit of saying nothing at remarkable length. The other was a Mr. Stiles, a country gentleman who had a thought of putting up for that division of the county. I led these two gentlemen into the billiard-room, and composed myself to listen while the admiral monologued. But the clock seemed to me to tick louder than ever, until, with one sharp and almost metallic thump, the sound ceased altogether. At exactly the same moment, Admiral Palkin stopped dead in the middle of a sentence. It was nothing of any consequence that he was saying, but I remember

the words at which he stopped. ‘I have often’ he said, and then he broke off, not with any abrupt start, or for any lack of words, but just as if he had completed all that he had meant to say. I looked at him across the fireplace, but his face wore its usual expression of complacent calm. He was in no way put out. Nor did it seem that any new train of thought had flashed into his mind and diverted it. I turned my eyes from him to Mr. Stiles. Mr. Stiles seemed actually to be unaware that the admiral had stopped talking at all. Admiral Palkin, you will remember, was a person of consequence in the district, and Mr. Stiles, who would subsequently need his vote and influence and motorcar, had thought fit to assume an air of great deference. From the beginning he had leaned towards the admiral, his elbow upon his knee, his chin propped upon his hand, and his head now and again nodding a thoughtful assent to the admiral’s nothings. In this attitude he still remained, not surprised, not even patiently waiting for the renewal of wisdom, but simply attentive.

“Nor did I move, for I was amused. The two men looked just like a couple of wax figures in Madame Tussaud’s, fixed in a stiff attitude and condemned so to remain until the building should take fire and the wax run. I sat watching them for minutes, and still neither moved nor spoke. I never saw in my life a couple of people so entirely ridiculous. I tried hard to keep my countenance—for to laugh at these great little men in my own house would not only be bad manners, but would certainly do for me in the neighbourhood—but I could not help it. I began to smile, and the smile became a laugh. Yet not a muscle on the faces of my visitors changed. Not a frown overshadowed the admiral’s complacency; not a glance diverted the admiring eyes of Mr. Stiles. And then the clock began to tick again, and, to my infinite astonishment, at the very same moment the admiral continued.

”’—said to myself in my lighter moments

And pray, sir, at what are you laughing?’

“Mr. Stiles turned with an angry glance towards me. Admiral Palkin had resumed his conversation, apparently unaware that there had been any interval at all. My laughter, on the other hand, had extended beyond the interval, had played an accompaniment to the words just spoken. I made my excuses as well as I could, but I recognised that they were deemed insufficient. The two gentlemen left my house with the coldest farewells you can imagine.

“The same extraordinary incident was repeated with other visitors, but I was on my guard against any injudicious merriment. Moreover, I had no longer any desire to laugh. I was too perplexed. My visitors never seemed to notice that there had been a lengthy interval or indeed any interval at all, while I, for my part, hesitated to ask them what had so completely hypnotised them.

“The next development took place when I was alone in the room. It was five o’clock in the afternoon. I had been out shooting a covert close to the house, and a few minutes after I had rung the bell, I remembered that I had forgotten some instructions which I had meant to give to the keeper. So I got up at once, thinking to catch him in the gun-room before he went home. As I rose from my chair, the clock, which had been ticking loudly—though, as I have said, it was rather a hollow, booming sound, as though the pendulum struck the wood of the case, than a mere ticking of the clock-work—ceased its noise with the abruptness to which I was growing used. I went out of the room into the hall, and I saw Humphreys with the tea-tray in his hands in the hall. He was turned towards the billiard-room door, but to my astonishment he was not moving. He was poised with one foot in the air, as though he had been struck, as the saying is, with a step half taken. You have seen, no doubt, instantaneous photographs of people in the act of walking. Well, Humphreys was exactly like one of those photographs. He had just the same stiff, ungainly look. I should have spoken to him, but I was anxious to catch my keeper before he went away. So I took no notice of him. I crossed the hall quickly and went out by the front door, leaving it open. The gun-room was really a small building of corrugated iron, standing apart at the back of the house. I went to it and tried the door. It was locked. I called aloud: ‘Martin! Martin!’

“But I received no answer. I ran round the house again, thinking that he might just have started home, but I saw no signs of him. There were some outhouses which it was his business to look after, and I visited them, opening the door of each of them and calling him by name. Then I went down the drive to the gate, thinking that I might perhaps catch a glimpse of him upon the road, but again I was disappointed. I then returned to the house, shut the front door, and there in the hall still stood Humphreys in his ridiculous attitude with the tea-tray in his hands. I passed him and went back into the billiard-room. He took no notice of me whatever. I looked at the clock upon the mantelshelf, and I saw that I had been away just fourteen minutes. For fourteen minutes Humphreys had been standing on one leg in the hall. It seemed as incredible as it was ludicrous. Yet there was the clock to bear me out. I sat down on my chair with my hands

trembling, my mind in a maze. The strangest thought had come to me, and while I revolved it in my mind, the clock resumed its ticking, the door opened, and Humphreys appeared with the tea-tray in his hand.

"'You have been a long time, Humphreys,' I said, and the man looked at me quickly. My voice was shaking with excitement, my face, no doubt, had a disordered look.

"'I prepared the tea at once, sir,' he answered.

"'It is twenty minutes by the clock since I rang the bell,' I said.

"Humphreys placed the tea on a small table at my side and then looked at the clock. An expression of surprise came over his face. He compared it with the dial of his own watch.

"'The clock wants regulating, *sir,'* he said. 'I set it by the kitchen clock this morning, and it has gained fourteen minutes.'

"I whipped my own watch out of my pocket and stared at it. Humphreys was quite right; the clock upon the mantelshelf had gained fourteen minutes upon all our watches. Yes, but it had gained those fourteen minutes in a second, and that was the least part of the marvel. I myself had had the benefit of those fourteen minutes. I had snatched them, as it were, from Time itself. I had looked at my watch when I rang the bell. It had marked five minutes to five. I had remained yet another four minutes in the room before I had remembered my forgotten instructions to the keeper. I had then gone out. I had visited the gun-room and the outhouses, I had walked to the front gate, I had returned. I had taken fourteen minutes over my search—I could not have taken less—and here were the hands of my watch now still pointing towards five, still short of the hour. Indeed, as I replaced my watch in my pocket, the clock in the hall outside struck five.

"'As you passed through the hall, Humphreys, you saw no one, I suppose?' I said.

"Humphreys raised his eyebrows with a look of perplexity. 'No, sir, I saw no one,' he returned, 'but it seemed to me that the front door banged. I think it must have been left open.'

'"Very likely,' said I. 'That will do,' and Humphreys went out of the room.

“Imagine my feelings. Time is relative, it is a condition of our senses, it is nothing more—that we know. But its relation to me was different from its relation to others. The clock had given me fourteen minutes which it denied to all the world besides. Fourteen full minutes for me, yet they passed for others in less than the fraction of a second. And not once only had it made me this gift, but many times. The admiral’s pause, unnoticed by Mr. Stiles, was now explained to me. He had not paused; he had gone straight on with his flow of talk, and Mr. Stiles had gone straight on listening. But between two of Admiral Palkin’s words, Time had stood still for me. Similarly, Humphreys had not poised himself upon one ridiculous leg in the hall. He had taken a step in the usual way, but while his leg was raised, fourteen minutes were given to me. I had walked through the hall, I had walked back through the hall, yet Humphreys had not seen me. He could not have seen me, for there had been no interval of time for him to use his eyes. I had gone and come quicker than any flash, for even a flash is appreciable as some fraction of a second.

“I asked you to imagine my feelings. Only with those which I first experienced would you, from your sane and comfortable outlook upon life, have any sympathy, for at the beginning I was shocked. I had more than an inclination then to dash that clock upon the hearth and deny myself its bizarre and unnatural gift. Would that I had done so! But the inclination was passed, and was succeeded by an incredible lightness of spirit. I had a gift which raised me above kings, which fanned into a flame every spark of vanity within me. I had so much more of time than any other man. I amused myself by making plans to use it, and thereupon I suffered a disappointment. For there was so little one could do in fourteen minutes, and the more I realised how little there was which I could do in my own private special stretch of time, the more I wanted to do, the more completely I wished to live in it, the more I wished to pluck power and advantage from it. Thus I began to look forward to the sudden cessation of the ticking of the clock; I began to wait for it, to live for it, and when it came, I could make no use of it. I gained fourteen minutes now and then, but I lost more and more of the hours which I shared with other men. They lost their salt for me. I became tortured with the waste of those minutes of my own. I had the power; what I wanted now was to employ it. The desire became an obsession occupying my thoughts, harassing my dreams.

“I was in this mood when I passed Brayton and yourself one evening in Pall Mall. I wrote to him that night, and I swear to you upon my conscience that I had no thought in writing but to put an end to an old disagreement, and re-establish,

if possible, an old friendship. I wrote in a sudden revulsion of feeling. The waste of my days was brought home to me. I recognised that the great gift was no more than a perpetual injury. I proposed to gather my acquaintances about me, discard my ambition for some striking illustration of my power, and take up once more the threads of customary life. Yet my determination lasted no longer than the time it took me to write the letter and run out with it to the post. I regretted its despatch even as I heard it fall to the bottom of the pillar-box.

“Of my quarrel with Brayton I need not write at length. It sprang from a rancorous jealousy. We had been friends and class-mates in the beginning. But as step by step he rose just a little above me, the friendship I had turned to gall and anger. I was never more than the second, he always the first. Had I been fourth or fifth, I think I should not have minded; but there was so little to separate us in merit or advancement. Yet there was always that little, and I dreaded the moment when he should take a bound and leave me far behind. The jealousy grew to a real hatred, made still more bitter to me by the knowledge that Brayton himself was unaware of it, and need not have been troubled had he been aware.

“After I left the Army and lost sight of him, the flame burnt low. I believed it was extinguished when I invited him to stay with me; but he had not been an hour in the house when it blazed up within me. His success, the confidence which it had given him, his easy friendliness with strangers, the talk of him as a coming man, bit into my soul. The very sound of his footstep sickened me. I was in this mood when the clock began to boom louder and louder in the billiard-room. Chalmers and Linfield were talking. I did not listen to them. My heart beat louder and louder within my breast, keeping pace with the clock. I knew that in a moment or two the sound would cease, and the doors of my private kingdom would be open for me to pass through. I sat back in my chair waiting while the devilish inspiration had birth and grew strong. Here was the great chance to use the power I had—the only chance which had ever come to me. Brayton was writing letters in his room. The room was in a wing of the house. The sound of a shot would not be heard. There would be an end of his success; there would be for me such a triumphant use of my great privilege as I had never dreamed of. The clock suddenly ceased. I slipped from the room and went upstairs. I was quite leisurely. I had time. I was back in my chair again before seven minutes had passed.

“ARCHIE CRANFIELD.”

Green Paint

I came up by the lift from the lower town, Harry Vandeleur strolled from his more respectable lodging in the upper quarter, and we met unexpectedly in Government Square. It was ten o'clock in the morning, and the Square, a floor of white within a ragged border of trees, glared blindingly under the tropical sun. On each side of the President's door a diminutive soldier rattled a rifle from time to time.

"What? Has he sent for you too?" said Harry, pointing to the President's house.

"Juan Ballester. Yes," said I, and Harry Vandeleur stopped with a sudden suspicion on his face.

"What does he want with us?" he asked.

"We volunteered in the war," said I. "We were both useful to him."

Harry Vandeleur shook his head.

"He is at the top of his power. He has won his three-weeks war. The Army has made him President for the second time. He has so skilfully organised his elections that he has a Parliament, not merely without an Opposition, but without a single man of any note in it except Santiago Calavera. It is not from such that humble people like us can expect gratitude."

Juan Ballester was, in fact, a very remarkable person. Very few people who had dealings with him ever forgot him. There was the affair of the Opera House, for instance, and a hundred instances. Who he really was I should think no one knew. He used to say that he was born in Mexico City, and when he wished to get the better of anyone with a sentimental turn, he would speak of his old mother in a broken voice. But since he never wrote to his old mother, nor she to him, I doubt very much whether she existed. The only certain fact known about him was that some thirteen years before, when he was crossing on foot a high pass of the Cordilleras without a dollar in his pocket, he met a stranger—but no! I have heard him attribute so many different nationalities to that stranger that I wouldn't kiss the Bible even on that story. Probably he *was* a Mexican and of a good stock. Certainly no Indian blood made a flaw in him. For though his hair was black and a pencil-line of black moustache decorated his lip, his skin was

fair like any Englishman's. He was thirty-eight years old, five feet eleven in height, strongly but not thickly built, and he had a pleasant, good-humoured face which attracted and deceived by its look of frankness. For the rest of him the story must speak.

He received us in a great room on the first floor overlooking the Square; and at once he advanced and laid a hand impressively upon my shoulder. He looked into my face silently. Then he said:

"Carlyon, I want you."

I did not believe him for a moment. But from time to time Juan Ballester did magnanimous things; not from magnanimity, of which quality he was entirely devoid, but from a passion for the *bran geste.* He would see himself a shining figure before men's eyes, the perfect cavalier; and the illusion would dazzle him into generosity. Accordingly, my hopes rose. I was living on credit in a very inferior hotel. "I had thought my work was done," he continued. "I had hoped to retire, like Cincinnatus, to my plough," and he gazed sentimentally out of the window across the city to the wooded hills of Santa Paula. "But since my country calls me, I must have someone about me whom I can trust." He broke off to ask: "I suppose your police are no longer searching for you?"

"They never were, your Excellency," I protested hotly.

"Well, perhaps not," he said indulgently. "No doubt the natural attractions of Maldivia brought you here. You did me some service in the war. I am not ungrateful. I appoint you my private secretary."

"Your Excellency!" I cried. He shook hands with me and added carelessly:

"There is no salary attached to the post, but there are opportunities."

And there were. That is why I now live in a neat little villa at Sorrento.

Ballester turned to Harry Vandeleur and took him by the arm. He looked from one to the other of us.

"Ever since the day when I walked over a high pass of the Cordilleras with nothing but the clothes I stood up in, and an unknown Englishman gave me the railway fare to this city, I have made what return I could to your nation. You, too,

have served me, Senor Vandeleur. I pay some small portion of my debt. Money! I have none to give you"; and he uttered the words without a blush, although the half a million pounds sterling received as war indemnity had already been paid into his private account.

"Nor would you take it if I had," Juan resumed. "But I will give you something of equal value."

He led Vandeleur to the window, and waving his hand impressively over the city, he said:

"I will give you the monopoly of green paint in the city of Santa Paula."

I stifled a laugh. Harry Vandeleur got red in the face. For, after all, no man likes to look a greater fool than he naturally is. He had, moreover, a special reason for disappointment.

"I don't suppose that there are twenty bucketsful used in Santa Paula in the year," he exclaimed bitterly.

"Wait, my friend," said Ballester; "there will be."

And a week afterwards the following proclamation appeared upon the walls of the public buildings:

"Owing to the numerous complaints which have been received of the discomfort produced by the glare of a tropical sun, the Government of the day, ever solicitous to further the wishes of its citizens, now orders that every house in Santa Paula, with the exception of the Government buildings, be painted in green paint within two months of the issue of this proclamation, and any resident who fails to obey this enactment shall be liable to a fine of fifty dollars for every day after the two months have elapsed until the order is carried out."

Juan Ballester was, no doubt, a very great man, but I cannot deny that he strained the loyalty of his friends by this proclamation. Grumblings were loud. No one could discover who had complained of the glare of the streets—for the simple reason that no one had complained at all. However, the order was carried out. Daily the streets of Santa Paula grew greener and greener, until the town had quite a restful look, and sank into its background and became a piece with its surroundings. Meanwhile, Harry Vandeleur sat in an office, rubbed his hands,

and put up the price of green paint. But, like most men upon whom good fortune has suddenly shone, he was not quite contented. He found his crumpled rose-leaf in the dingy aspect of the Government buildings and the President's house. They alone now reared fronts of dirty plaster and cracked stucco. I remember him leaning out of Juan Ballester's window and looking up and down with a discontented eye.

"Wants a coat of green paint, doesn't it?" he said with a sort of jocular eagerness.

Juan never even winked.

"There ought to be a distinction between this house and all the others," he said gravely. "The President is merely the butler of the citizens. They ought to know at a glance where they can find him."

Harry Vandeleur burst suddenly into a laugh. He was an impulsive youth, a regular bubble of high spirits.

"I am an ungrateful beast, and that's the truth," he said. "You have done a great deal for me, more than you know."

"Have I?" asked Juan Ballester drily.

"Yes," cried Harry Vandeleur, and out the story tumbled.

He was very anxious to marry Olivia Calavera—daughter, by the way, of Santiago Calavera, Ballester's Minister of the Interior—and Olivia Calavera was very anxious to marry him. Olivia was a dream. He, Harry Vandeleur, was a planter in a small way in Trinidad. Olivia and her father came from Trinidad. He had followed her from Trinidad, but Don Santiago, with a father's eye for worldly goods, had been obdurate. It was all very foolish and very young, and rather pleasant to listen to.

"Now, thanks to your Excellency," cried Harry, "I am an eligible suitor. I shall marry the Senorita Olivia."

"Is that so?" said Juan Ballester, with a polite congratulation. But there was just a suspicion of a note in his voice which made me lift my head sharply from the papers over which I was bending. It was impossible, of course—and yet he had drawled the words out in a slow, hard, quiet way which had startled me. I waited

for developments, and they were not slow in coming.

“But before you marry,” said Juan Ballester, “I want you to do me a service. I want you to go to London and negotiate a loan. I can trust you. Moreover, you will do the work more speedily than another, for you will be anxious to return.”

With a friendly smile he took Harry Vandeleur by the arm and led him into his private study. Harry could not refuse. The mission was one of honour, and would heighten his importance in Don Santiago’s eyes. He was, besides, under a considerable obligation to Ballester. He embarked accordingly at Las Cuevas, the port of call half an hour away from the city.

“Look after Olivia for me,” he said, as we shook hands upon the deck of the steamer.

“I will do the best I can,” I said, and I went down the gangway.

Harry Vandeleur travelled off to England. He was out of the way. Meanwhile, I stayed in Maldivia and waited for more developments. But this time they were not so quick in coming.

II

Ballester, like greater and lesser men, had his inconsistencies. Although he paid his private secretary with “opportunities” and bribed his friends with monopolies; although he had shamelessly rigged the elections, and paid as much of the country’s finances as he dared into his private banking account; and although there was that little affair of the Opera House, he was genuinely and sincerely determined to give to the Republic a cast-iron Constitution. He had an overpowering faith in law and order—for other people.

We hammered out the Constitution day and night for another fortnight, and then Ballester gabbled it over to a Council of his Ministers. Not one of them could make head or tail of what he was reading, with the exception of Santiago Calavera, a foxy-faced old rascal with a white moustache, who sat with a hand curved about his ear and listened to every word. I had always wondered why Ballester had given him office at all. At one point he interrupted in a smooth, smiling voice:

“But, your Excellency, that is not legal.”

“Legal or not legal,” said the President with a snap, “it is going through, Senor Santiago”; and the Constitution was duly passed by a unanimous vote, and became the law of Maldivia.

That event took place a couple of months after Harry Vandeleur had sailed for England. I stretched my arms and looked about for relaxation. The Constitution was passed at six o’clock in the evening. There was to be a ball that night at the house of the British Minister. I made up my mind to go. For a certainty I should find Olivia there; and I was seized with remorse. For, in spite of my promise to Harry Vandeleur, I had hardly set eyes upon her during the last two months.

I saw her at ten o’clock. She was dancing—a thing she loved. She was dressed in a white frock of satin and lace, with a single rope of pearls about her throat, and she looked divinely happy. She was a girl of nineteen years, fairly tall, with black hair, a beautiful white face, and big, dark eyes which shone with kindness. She had the hand and foot of her race, and her dancing was rather a liquid movement of her whole supple body than a matter of her limbs. I watched her for a few moments from a corner. She had brains as well as beauty, and though she spoke with a pleading graciousness, at the back of it one was aware of a

pride which would crack the moon. She worked, too, as few girls of her station work in the Republics of South America. For her father, from what I then thought to be no better than parsimony, used her as his secretary. As she swung by my corner for the second time she saw me and stopped.

“Senor Carlyon, it is two months since I have seen you,” she said reproachfully.

“Senorita, it is only four hours since our brand new Constitution was passed into law, and already I am looking for you.”

She shook her head.

“You have neglected me.”

“I regret to notice,” said I, “that my neglect has in no way impaired your health.”

Olivia laughed. She had a taking laugh, and the blood mounted very prettily into her cheeks.

“I could hardly be ill,” she said. “I had a letter to-day.”

“Lucky man to write you letters,” said I. “Let me read it, Senorita.”

She drew back swiftly and her hand went to her bosom.

“Oh, it is there!” said I.

Again she laughed, but this time with a certain shyness, and the colour deepened on her cheeks.

“He sails to-day,” said she.

“Then I have still three weeks,” said I lightly. “Will you dance with me for the rest of the evening?”

“Certainly not,” she answered with decision. “But after the fifth dance from now, you will find me, Senor Carlyon, here”; and turning again to her partner, she was caught up into the whirl of dancers.

After the fifth dance I returned to that corner of the ballroom. I found Olivia waiting. But it was an Olivia whom I did not know. The sparkle and the

freshness had gone out of her; fear and not kindness shone in her eyes.

Her face lit up for a moment when she saw me, and she stepped eagerly forward.

“Quick!” she said. “Somewhere where we shall be alone!”

Her hand trembled upon my arm. She walked quickly from the room, smiling as she went. She led me along a corridor into the garden of the house, a place of palms and white magnolias on the very edge of the upper town. She went without a word to the railings at the end of the garden, whence one looks straight down upon the lights of the lower town along the river bank. Then she turned. A beam of light from the windows shone upon her face. The smile had gone from it. Her lips shook.

“What has happened?” I asked.

She spoke in jerks.

“He came to me tonight…. He danced with me….”

“Who?” I asked.

“Juan Ballester,” said she.

I had half expected the name.

“He spoke of himself,” she resumed. “Sometimes it is not easy to tell whether he is acting or whether he is serious. It was easy tonight. He was serious.”

“What did he say?”

“That up till tonight all had been work with him…. That tonight had set the crown upon his work…. That now for the first time he could let other hopes, other thoughts, have play….”

“Yes, I see,” I replied slowly. “Having done his work, he wants his prize. He would.”

Ballester had toiled untiringly for thirteen years in both open and devious ways, and, as the consequence of his toil, he had lifted his Republic into an importance

which it had never possessed before. He had succeeded because what he wanted, he wanted very much. It certainly looked as if there were considerable trouble in front of Olivia and Harry Vandeleur—especially Harry Vandeleur.

“So he wants you to marry him,” I said; and Olivia gave me one swift look and turned her head away.

“No,” she answered in a whisper. “He wants his revenge, too.”

“Revenge?” I exclaimed.

Olivia nodded her head.

“He told me that I must go up to Benandalla”; and the remark took my breath away. Benandalla was the name of a farm which Ballester owned, up in the hills two hours away from Santa Paula; and the less said about it the better. Ballester was accustomed to retreat thither after any spell of unusually arduous work; and the great feastings which went on, the babel of laughter, the noise of music and castanets and the bright lights blazing upon the quiet night till dawn had made the farm notorious. Even at this moment, I knew, it was not nearly uninhabited.

“At Benandalla… you?” I cried; and, indeed, it seemed to me that the mere presence of Olivia must have brought discomfort into those coarse orgies, so set apart was she by her distinction. “And he tells you to go,” I continued, “as if you were his maidservant!”

Olivia clenched her small hands together and leaned upon the railings. Her eyes travelled along the river below and sought a brightness in the distant sky—the loom of the lights of Las Cuevas. For a little while she was strengthened by thoughts of escape, and then once more she drooped.

“I am frightened,” she said, and coming from her, the whispered and childish cry filled me with consternation. It was her manner and what she left unsaid rather than her words, which alarmed me. Where I should have expected pride and a flame of high anger, I found sheer terror, and the reason of that terror she had not yet given me.

“He spoke of Harry,” she resumed. “He said that Harry must not interfere…. He used threats.”

Yes, I thought, Juan Ballester would do that. It was not the usual way of conducting a courtship; but Juan Ballester's way was not the usual way of governing a country.

"What kind of threats?"

"Prisons," she answered with a break in her voice.

"What?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," she said. "Prisons—especially in the Northern Republics of South America…. He explained that, though you have more liberty here than anywhere else so long as you are free, you are more completely—destroyed—here than anywhere else if you once get into prison." From her hesitation I could guess that "destroyed" was a milder word than Juan Ballester had used.

"He described them to me," she went on. "Hovels where you sleep in the mud at night, and whence you are leased out by day to work in the fields without a hat—until, in a month or so, the sun puts an end to your misery."

I knew there was truth in that description. But it was not possible that Ballester could put his threat into force. It was anger now, not consternation, which filled me.

"Senorita, reflect!" I cried. "In whose garden are you standing now? The British Minister's—and Harry Vandeleur is an Englishman. It was no more than a brutal piece of bullying by Ballester. See! I am his secretary"—and she suddenly turned round towards me with a gleam in her eyes.

"Yes," she interrupted. "You are his secretary and Harry's friend. Will you help us, I wonder?"

"Show me how!" said I.

"It is not Harry whom he threatens, but my father"; and she lowered her eyes from mine and was silent.

"My father"; and her answer made my protestations mere vapourings and foolishness.

The danger was real. The British Minister could hold no shield in front of Santiago Calavera, even if there were no guilt upon him for which he could be properly imprisoned. But Olivia's extremity of terror and my knowledge of Santiago warned me that this condition was little likely to exist. I took Olivia's hands. They clung to mine in a desperate appeal for help.

"Come, Senorita," I said gravely. "If I am to help you, I must have the truth. What grounds had Ballester for his threat?"

She raised her head suddenly with a spurt of her old pride.

"My father is a good man," she said, challenging me to deny it. "What he did, he thought right to do. I am not ashamed of him. No!"—and then she would have stopped. But I would not let her. I dared not let her.

"Go on, please!" I insisted, and the pride died out of her face, and she turned in a second to pleading.

"But perhaps he was indiscreet—in what he wrote. He thought, perhaps, too much of his country, too little of those who governed it."

I dropped her hands. I had enough of the truth now. Rumour had always spoken of Santiago Calavera as an intriguer. His daughter was now telling me he was a traitor, too.

"We must find your father," I cried. "He brought you to the ball."

"Yes," said she. "He will be waiting to take me home."

We hurried back to the house and searched the rooms. Calavera was nowhere to be found.

"He cannot have gone!" cried Olivia, wringing her hands. In both of our minds the same question was urgent.

"Has he been taken away?"

I questioned the servants, and the door-keeper replied. A messenger had come for Don Santiago early in the evening. I found the British Minister at Olivia's side when I returned, and a smile of relief upon her face.

“My father made his excuses and went home,” she said. “Important business came. He has sent the carriage back.”

“May I take you home?” I asked.

“Thank you,” said she.

It was getting near to dawn when we drove away. The streets were empty, the houses dark. Olivia kept her face close to the window, and never stirred until we turned the corner into the Calle Madrid. Then she drew back with a low cry of joy. The windows of the great house were ablaze with light. I helped her out of the carriage and rang the bell. We stood in front of the door talking while the coachman drove away to his stables.

“Say nothing to my father,” Olivia pleaded. “Promise me, Senor.”

I promised readily enough.

“I will come in with you, Senorita,” I said. “I must talk with your father”; and I turned impatiently to the door and rang the bell again.

“Tonight?” said she.

“Yes,” said I. “I promised Harry Vandeleur to look after you.”

“Did you?” said she, and though her anxieties were heavy upon her, a tender smile parted her lips.

Still no one came to the door.

“They must have gone to bed,” I said, pushing against the panels. To my surprise the door yielded and quietly swung wide. We looked into a hall silent and empty and brightly lit. We were both in a mood to count each new phenomenon a disaster. To both of us there was something eerie in the silent swinging-in of the door, in the emptiness and bright illumination of the hall. We looked at one another in dismay. Then Olivia swept in, and I followed. She walked straight to a door at the back of the hall, hesitated with her hand upon the knob for just the fraction of a second, and flung it open. We went into a room furnished as a study. But the study, too, was empty and brightly lit. There was a green-shaded reading-lamp beside an armchair, as though but now the occupant had sat there

and read. Olivia stood in the centre of the room and in a clear and ringing voice she cried:

“Father!”

Her voice echoed along the passages and up the stairs. And no answer came. She turned abruptly, and, moving with a swift step, she opened door after door. Each door opened upon a brightly lit and empty room. She ran a few steps up the stairs and stood poised, holding up in her white gloved hand the glistening skirt of her white frock. One by one she called upon the servants by name, looking upwards. Not a door was opened above our heads. Not a sound of any movement reached our ears.

Olivia ran lightly up the stairs. I heard the swift rustle of her gown as she moved from room to room; and suddenly she was upon the stairs again looking down at me, with her hand like a flake of snow upon the bannister. She gleamed against the background of dark wood, a thing of silver.

“There is no one in the house,” she said simply, in a strange and quiet voice. She moved down the stairs and held out her hand to me.

“Good night,” she said.

Though her voice never shook, her eyes shone with tears. She was but waiting until I went, to shed them.

“I will come tomorrow,” I stammered; “in the morning. I may have news for you,” and I bent over her hand and kissed it.

“Good night,” she said again, and she stood with her hand upon the latch of the door. I went out. She closed the door behind me. I heard the key turn in the lock, the bolt shoot into its socket. There was a freshness in the air, a paling of the stars above my head. I waited for a while in the street, but no figure appeared at any window, nor was any light put out. I left her alone in that empty and illumined house, its windows blazing on the dawn.

III

I walked back to the President's house and sat comfortably down in my office to think the position over with the help of a pipe. But I had hardly struck the match when the President himself came in. He had changed his dress-coat for a smoking-jacket, and carried a few papers in his hand.

"I am glad to see that you are not tired," he said, "for I have still some work for you to do. I have been looking through some letters, and there are half-a-dozen of so much importance that I should like copies made of them before you go to bed."

He laid them on my writing-table with an intimation that he would return for them in an hour. I rose up with alacrity. I was in no mood for bed, and the mechanical work of copying a few letters appealed to me at the moment. A glance at them, however, startled me into an even greater wakefulness. They were letters, typewritten for the most part, but undoubtedly signed by Santiago Calavera, and all of them dated just before the outbreak of the war. They were addressed to the War Minister of Esmeralda, and they gave details as to where Maldivia was weak, where strong, what roads to the capital were unguarded, and for how many troops provisions could be requisitioned on the way. There was, besides, a memorandum, written, I rejoiced to see, from beginning to end in Santiago's own hand—a deadly document naming some twenty people in Santa Paula who would need attention when Juan Ballester had been overthrown. It was impossible to misunderstand the phrase. Those twenty citizens of Santa Paula were to be shot out of hand against the nearest wall. I was appalled as I copied it out. There was enough treachery here to convict a regiment. No wonder the great house in the Calle Madrid stood empty! No wonder that Calavera—But while I argued, the picture of the daughter in her shining frock, alone amidst the glitter and the silence, smote upon me as pitiful, and struck the heart out of all my argument.

Juan Ballester was at my elbow the moment after I had finished.

"It is five o'clock," he said, as he gathered the letters and copies together, "and no doubt you will want to be on foot early. You can tell her that I sent her father in a special train last night to the frontier. He is no doubt already with his friends in Esmeralda."

“Then the prisons—” I exclaimed.

“A lover’s embroideries—nothing more,” said Ballester, with a smile. “But it is interesting to know that you are so thoroughly acquainted with the position of affairs.” And he took himself off to bed.

His last remark, however, forced me to consider my own position, and reflection showed it to be delicate. On the one hand I was Ballester’s servant, on the other I was Harry Vandeleur’s friend. I could not side with both, and I must side with one. If I threw in my lot with Juan Ballester, I became a scoundrel. If I helped Olivia, I might lose my bread and butter. I hope that in any case I should have decided as I did, but there was a good deal of virtue in the “might.” For, after all, Juan seemed to recognise that I should be against him and to bear no malice. He had even bidden me relieve Olivia of her fears concerning her father’s disappearance. He was a brute, but a brute on rather a grand scale, who took what he wanted but, in spite of Olivia, disdained revenge. I decided to help Olivia, and before nine the next morning I knocked upon her house-door. She opened it herself.

“You have news?” she asked, watching me with anxious eyes, and she stood aside in the shadow of the door while I went in.

“Your father is safe. He was sent to the frontier last night on a special train. He is free.”

She had been steel to meet a blow. Now that it did not fall, her strength for a moment failed her. She leaned against a table with her hand to her heart; and her face suddenly told me that she had not slept.

“I will follow him,” she said, and she hurried up the stairs. I looked out a train. One left Santa Paula in an hour’s time. I went out, leaving the door ajar, and fetched a carriage. Then I shouted up the stairs to Olivia, and she came down in a travelling dress of light grey and a big black hat. Excitement had kindled her. I could no longer have guessed that she had not slept.

“You will see me off?” she said, as she handed me her bag; and she stepped gaily into the carriage.

“I will,” I answered, and I jumped in behind her.

The die was cast now.

“Drive down to the station!” I cried.

It was an open carriage. There were people in the street. Juan Ballester would soon learn that he had played the grand gentleman to his discomfiture.

“Yes, I will see you off, Senorita,” I said. “But I shall have a bad half-hour with Ballester afterwards.”

“Oh!” cried Olivia, with a start. She looked at me as though for the first time my existence had come within her field of vision.

“I am quite aware that you have never given a thought to me,” I said sulkily, “but you need hardly make the fact so painfully obvious.”

Olivia’s hand fell lightly upon mine and pressed.

“My friend!” she said, and her eyes dwelt softly upon mine. Oh, she knew her business as a woman! Then she looked heavenwards.

“A man who helps a woman in trouble—” she began.

“Yes,” I interrupted. “He must look up there for his reward. Meanwhile, Senorita, I am envying Harry Vandeleur,” and I waved my hand to the green houses. “For he has not only got you, but he has realised his nice little fortune out of green paint.” And all Olivia did was to smile divinely; and all she said was “Harry.” But there! She said it adorably, and I shook her by the hand.

“I forgive you,” she said sweetly. Yes, she had nerve enough for that!

We were driving down to the lower town. I began to consider how much of the events of the early morning I should tell her. Something of them she must know, but it was not easy for the informant. I told her how Juan Ballester had come to me with letters signed by her father and a memorandum in his handwriting.

“The President gave them to me to copy out,” I continued; and Olivia broke in, rather quickly:

“What did you do with them?”

I stared at her.

“I copied them out, of course.”

Olivia stared now. Her brows puckered in a frown.

“You—didn’t—destroy them when you had the chance?” she asked incredulously.

I jumped in my seat.

“Destroy them?” I cried indignantly. “Really, Senorita!”

“You are Harry’s friend,” she said. “I thought men did little things like that for one another.”

“Little things!” I gasped. But I recognised that it would be waste of breath to argue against a morality so crude.

“You shall take Harry’s opinion upon that point,” said I.

“Or perhaps Harry will take mine,” she said softly, with a faraway gaze; and the fly stopped at the station. I bought Olivia’s ticket, I placed her bag in the carriage, I stepped aside to let her mount the step; and I knocked against a brilliant creature with a sword at his side—he was merely a railway official. I begged his pardon, but he held his ground.

“Senor, you have, no doubt, his Excellency’s permit for the Senorita to travel,” he said, holding out his hand.

I was fairly staggered, but I did not misunderstand the man. Ballester had foreseen that Olivia would follow her father, and he meant to keep her in Santa Paula. I fumbled in my pocket to cover my confusion.

“I must have left it behind,” I said lamely. “But of course you know me—his Excellency’s secretary.”

“Who does not?” said the official, bowing politely. “And there is another train in the afternoon, so that the Senorita will, I hope, not be greatly inconvenienced.”

We got out of the station somehow. I was mad with myself. I had let myself be misled by the belief that Ballester was indulging in one of his exhibitions as a great gentleman. Whereas he was carefully isolating Olivia so that she might be the more helplessly at his disposition. We stumbled back again into a carriage. I dared not look at Olivia.

“The Calle Madrid!” I called to the driver, and Olivia cried “No!” She turned to me, with a spot of colour burning in each cheek, and her eyes very steady and ominous.

“Will you tell him to drive to the President’s?” she said calmly.

The conventions are fairly strict in Maldivia. Young ladies do not as a rule drop in casually upon men in the morning, and certainly not upon Presidents. However, conventions are for the unharassed. We drove to the President’s. A startled messenger took in Olivia’s name, and she was instantly admitted. I went to my office, but I left the door ajar. For down the passage outside of it Olivia would come when she had done with Juan Ballester. I waited anxiously for a quarter of an hour. Would she succeed with him? I had no great hopes. Anger so well became her. But as the second quarter drew on, my hopes rose; and when I heard the rustle of her dress, I flung open the door. A messenger was escorting her, and she just shook her head at me.

“What did he say?” I asked in English, and she replied in the same language.

“He will not let me go. He was—passionate. Underneath the passion he was hard. He is the cruellest of men.”

“I will see you this afternoon,” said I; and she passed on. I determined to have it out with Ballester at the earliest possible moment. And within the hour he gave me the opportunity. For he came into the room and said:

“Carlyon, I have not had my letters this morning.”

“No, your Excellency,” I replied. I admit that my heart began to beat more quickly than usual. “I took the Senorita Olivia to the station, where we were stopped.”

“I thought you would,” he said, with a grin. “But it is impossible that the Senorita should leave Santa Paula.”

“But you can’t keep her here!” I cried. “It’s—it’s—”

“Tyrannical” would not do, nor would “autocratic.” Neither epithet would sting him. At last I got the right one.

“Your Excellency, it’s barbaric!”

Juan Ballester flushed red. I had touched him on the raw. To be a thoroughly civilised person conducting a thoroughly civilised Government over a thoroughly civilised community—that was his wild, ambitious dream, and in rosy moments he would even flatter himself that his dream was realised.

“It’s nothing of the kind,” he exclaimed. “Don Santiago is a dangerous person. I was moved by chivalry, the most cultured of virtues, to let him go unpunished. But I am bound, from the necessities of the State, to retain some pledge for his decent behaviour.”

The words sounded very fine and politic, but they could not obscure the springs of his conduct. He had first got Harry Vandeleur out of the way; then, and not till then, he had pounced upon Don Santiago. His aim had been to isolate Olivia. There was very little chivalry about the matter.

“Besides,” he argued, “if there were any barbarism —and there isn’t—the Senorita can put an end to it by a word.”

“But she won’t say it!” I cried triumphantly. “No, she is already pledged. She won’t say it.”

Juan Ballester looked at me swiftly with a set and lowering face. No doubt I had gone a step too far with him. But I would not have taken back a word at that moment—no, not for the monopoly of green paint. I awaited my instant dismissal, but he suddenly tilted back his chair and grinned at me like a schoolboy.

“I like a good spirit,” he said, “whether it be in the Senorita or in my private secretary.”

It was apparent that he did not think much of me as an antagonist.

“Well,” I grumbled, “Harry Vandeleur will be back in three weeks, and your

Excellency must make your account with him."

"Yes, that's true," said Ballester, and—I don't know what it was in him. It was not a gesture, for he did not move; it was not a smile, for his face did not change. But I was immediately and absolutely certain that it was not true at all. Reflection confirmed me. He had taken so much pains to isolate Olivia that he would not have overlooked Harry Vandeleur's return. Somewhere, on some pretext, at Trinidad, or at our own port here, Las Cuevas, Harry Vandeleur would be stopped. I was sure of it. The net was closing tightly round Olivia. This morning the affair had seemed so simple—a mere matter of a six hours' journey in a train. Now it began to look rather grim. I stole a glance at Juan. He was still sitting with his chair tilted back and his hands in his pockets, but he was gazing out of the window, and his face was in repose. I recalled Olivia's phrase: "He is the cruellest of men." Was she right? I wondered. In any case, yes, the affair certainly began to look rather grim.

IV

I was not free until five that afternoon. But I was in the Calle Madrid before the quarter after five had struck. Again Olivia herself admitted me. She led the way to her father's study at the back of the house. Though I had hurried to the house, I followed her slowly into the study.

"You are still alone?" I asked.

"An old woman—we once befriended her—will come in secretly for an hour in the morning."

"Secretly?"

"She dare not do otherwise."

I was silent. There was a refinement about Juan Ballester's persecution which was simply devilish. He would not molest her, he left her apparently free. But he kept her in a great, empty house in the middle of the town, without servants, without power to leave, without—oh, much more than I had any idea of at the time. He marooned her in the midst of a great town even as Richard the Third did with Jane Shore in the old play. But, though I did not know, I noticed that she had changed since the morning. She had come out from her interview with Juan Ballester holding her head high. Now she stood in front of me twisting her hands, a creature of fear.

"You must escape," I said.

Her great eyes looked anxiously at me from a wan face.

"I must," she said. "Yes, I must." Then came a pause, and with a break in her voice she continued. "He warned me not to try. He said that it would not be pleasant for me if I were caught trying."

"A mere threat," I said contemptuously, "like the prisons." But I did not believe my own words, and my blood ran cold. It would be easy to implicate Olivia in the treachery of her father. And the police in Maldivia are not very gentle in their handling of their prisoners, women or men. Still, that risk must be run.

“The *Ariadne*—an English mail-steamer—calls at Las Cuevas in a fortnight,” I said. “We must smuggle you out on her.”

Olivia stared at me in consternation. She stood like one transfixed.

“A fortnight!” she said. Then she sat down in a chair clasping her hands together. “A fortnight!” she whispered to herself, and as I listened to her, and watched her eyes glancing this way and that like an animal trapped in a cage, it was borne in on me that since this morning some new thing had happened to frighten the very soul of her. I begged her to tell it me.

“No,” she said, rising to her feet. “No doubt I can wait for a fortnight.”

“That’s right, Olivia,” I said. “I will arrange a plan. Meanwhile, where can I hear from you and you from me? It will not do for us to meet too often. Have you friends who will be staunch?”

“I wonder,” she said slowly. “Enrique Gimeno and his wife, perhaps.”

“We will not strain their friendship very much. But we can meet at their house. You can leave a letter for me there, perhaps, and I one for you.”

Enrique Gimeno was a Spanish merchant and a gentleman. So far, I felt sure, we could trust him. There was one other man in Santa Paula on whom I could rely, the agent of the steamship company to which the *Ariadne* belonged. I rang him up on the telephone that afternoon and arranged a meeting after dark in a back room of that very inferior hotel in the lower town where for some weeks I had lived upon credit. The agent, a solid man with business interests of his own in Maldivia, listened to my story without a word of interruption. Then he said:

“There are four things I can do for you, and no more. In the first place, I can receive here the lady’s luggage in small parcels and put it together for her. In the second, I can guarantee that the *Ariadne* shall not put into Las Cuevas until dusk, and shall leave the same night. In the third, I will have every bale of cargo already loaded into her before the passenger train comes alongside from Santa Paula. And in the fourth, I will arrange that the *Ariadne* shall put to sea the moment the last of her passengers has crossed the gangway. The rest you must do for yourself.”

“Thank you,” said I. “That’s a great deal.”

But the confidence was all in my voice and none of it at all in my heart. I went back to Juan Ballester and tried persuasion with him.

“I have seen Olivia Calavera this afternoon,” I said to him.

“I know,” said he calmly.

I had personally no longer any fear that he might dismiss me. I would, I think, have thrown up my job myself, but that I seemed to have a better chance of helping the girl by staying on.

“You will never win her,” I continued, “your Excellency, by your way of wooing.”

“Oh, and why not?” he asked.

“She thinks you a brute,” I said frankly.

Juan Ballester reflected.

“I don’t much mind her thinking that,” he answered slowly.

“She hates you,” I went on.

“And I don’t seriously object to her thinking that,” he replied.

“She despises you,” I said in despair.

“Ah!” said Ballester, with a change of voice. “I should object to her doing that. But then it isn’t true.”

I gave up efforts to persuade him. After all, the brute knew something about women.

I was thrown back upon the first plan. Olivia must escape from the country on the *Ariadne.* How to smuggle her unnoticed out of her empty house, down to Las Cuevas, and on board the steamer? That was the problem; but though I lay awake over it o’ nights, and pondered it as I sat at my writing-table, the days crept on and brought me no nearer to a solution.

Meanwhile, the world was going very ill with Olivia. Santa Paula, fresh from its

war, was aflame with patriotism. The story of Santiago Calavera's treachery had gone abroad—Juan Ballester had seen to that—and since his daughter had been his secretary, she too was tarnished. Her friends, with the exception of Enrique Gimeno, closed their doors upon her. If she ventured abroad, she was insulted in the street, and at night a lamp in a window of her house would bring a stone crashing through the pane. Whenever I saw her, I noticed with an aching heart the tension under which she laboured. Her face grew thin, the tone had gone from her voice, the lustre from her eyes, the very gloss from her hair. Sometimes it seemed to me that she must drop into Ballester's net. I raged vainly over the problem, and the more because I knew that Ballester would reap prestige instead of shame if she did. The conventions were heavy on women in Maldivia, but they were not the outward signs of any spiritual grace in the population. On the contrary, they were evidence that the spiritual grace was lacking. If Olivia found her way in the end to the Benandalla farm, Ballester would be thought to have combined pleasure with the business of revenge in a subtle and enviable way. The thought made me mad. I could have knocked the heads together of the diminutive soldiers at the sides of the President's doorway whenever I went in and out. And then, when I was at my wits' end, a trivial incident suddenly showed me a way out.

I passed down the Calle Madrid one night, and the sight of the big, dark house, with here and there a broken window, brought before my mind so poignant a picture of the girl sitting in some back room alone and in misery, and contrasted that picture so vividly with another made familiar to me by many an evening in Santa Paula—that of a girl shining exquisite beyond her peers in the radiance and the clean strength of her youth—that upon returning to my room I took the receiver from the telephone with no other thought than to talk to her for a few moments and encourage her to keep a good heart. I gave the number of her house to the Exchange, and the answer came promptly back:

"The line is out of order."

I might have known that it would be. Olivia was to be marooned in her great town-house as effectively as though she had been set down in a lone island of the coral seas. I hung up the receiver again, and as I hung it up suddenly I saw part of the way clear. I suppose that I had used that telephone a hundred times during the past week. It had stood all day at my elbow. Yet not until tonight had it reminded me of that little matter of the Opera House—one of those matters in which dealings with Ballester had left their mark. I had the answer to a part of

the problem which troubled me. I saw a way to smuggle Olivia from Santa Paula on board the *Ariadne.* The more I thought upon it, the clearer grew that possibility. There still remained the question: How to get Olivia unnoticed from her house in the middle of a busy, narrow street on the night when the *Ariadne* was to sail. The difficulties there brought me to a stop. And I was still revolving the problem in my mind when the private bell rang from Ballester's room. I went to see what he wanted; and I had not been five minutes in his presence before, with a leaping heart, I realised that this question was being answered too.

Juan had of late been troubled. But not at all about Olivia. As far as she was concerned, he ate his meals, went about his business, and slept o' nights like any good man who has not a girl in torment upon his conscience. But he was troubled about a rumour which was spreading through the town.

"You have heard of it?" he asked of me. "It is said that I am proposing to run away secretly from Maldivia."

I nodded.

"I have laughed at it, of course."

"Yes," said he, with his face in a frown. "But the rumour grows. I doubt if laughter is enough"; and then he banged his fist violently upon the table and cried: "I suppose Santiago Calavera is at the bottom of it!"

Santiago had become something of an obsession to the President. I think he excused to himself his brutality towards Olivia by imagining everywhere Don Santiago's machinations. As a fact, the rumour was spontaneous in Santa Paula. It was generally suspected that the President had annexed the war indemnity and any other portions of the revenue which he could without too open a scandal. He was a bachelor. The whole of Santa Paula put itself in his place. What else should he do but retire secretly and expeditiously to some country where he could enjoy the fruits of his industry in peace and security? Calavera had nothing whatever to do with the story. But I did not contradict Ballester, and he continued:

"It is said that I have taken my passage in the *Ariadne."*

I started, but he was not looking at me.

“I must lay hold upon this rumour,” he said, “and strangle it. I have thought of a way. I will give a party here on the evening of the day the *Ariadne* calls at Las Cuevas. I will spend a great deal of money on that party. It will be plain that I have no thought of sailing on the *Ariadne. I* hope it will be plain that I have no thought of sailing at all. For I think everyone in Santa Paula,” he added with a grim laugh, “knows me well enough to feel sure that I should not spend a great deal of money on a party if I meant to run away from the place afterwards.”

Considering Santa Paula impartially, I found the reasoning to be sound. Juan Ballester was not a generous man. He took, but he did not give.

“This is what I propose,” he said, and he handed me a paper on which he had jotted down his arrangements. He had his heart set on his Republic, that I knew. But I knew too that it must have been a fearful wrench for him to decide upon the lavish expenditure of this entertainment. There was to be dancing in the ballroom, a conjuror where the Cabinet met—that seemed to be a happy touch—supper in a marquee, fairy lights and fireworks in the garden, and buffets everywhere.

“You yourself will see after the invitations,” he said, with a grin.

“Certainly, your Excellency,” I answered. They would come within the definition of opportunities.

“But here,” he continued, “is a list of those who must be asked”; and it was not until I had the list in my hand that I began to see that here I might find an answer to my question. I looked quickly down the names.

“Yes, she’s there,” said Juan Ballester; and there she was, as plain as a pikestaff —Olivia Calavera. I was not surprised. Ballester never troubled about such trifles as consistency. He wanted her, so he invited her. Nevertheless, I could have danced a *pas seul.* For though Olivia could hardly slip out of her own house in any guise without detection since she had no visitors, she would have a good chance of escaping from the throng of guests at the President’s party. I left Juan Ballester with a greatly lightened heart. I looked at my watch. It was not yet eleven. Full of my idea, nothing would serve me but I must this moment set it in motion. I went downstairs into the Square. Though the night was hot, I had slipped on an overcoat to conceal the noticeable breastplate of a white shirt, and I walked quickly for half a mile until I came opposite to a high and neglected

building, a place of darkness and rough shutters. This was the Opera House. Beside the Opera House was a little dwelling. I rang the bell, and the door was opened by a tall, lean gentleman in a frock-coat. For the third time that night good luck had stood my friend.

“Mr. Henry P. Crowninshield,” I said, “the world-famous *impresario,* I believe?”

“And you, Mr. Carlyon, are the President’s private secretary?” he said coldly.

“Not tonight, “said I.

With a grunt Mr. Crowninshield led the way into his parlour and stood with his finger-tips resting on the table and his long body bent over it. Mr. Crowninshield came from New York City, and I did not beat about the bush with him. I told him exactly the story of Olivia and Juan Ballester.

“She is in great trouble,” I concluded. “There is something which I do not understand. But it comes to this. She must escape. The railways are watched, so is her house. There is only one way of escape—and that is on the seventeenth, the night when the *Ariadne* calls at Las Cuevas and the President gives his party.”

Mr. Crowninshield nodded, and his long body slid with a sort of fluid motion into a chair.

“Go on, sir,” he said; “I am interested.”

“And I encouraged,” said I. “Let us follow the Senorita’s proceedings on the night of the seventeenth. She goes dressed in her best to the President’s party. She is on view to the last possible moment. She then slips quietly out into the garden. In the garden wall there is a private door, of which I have a key. I let her out by that door. Outside that door there is a closed, inconspicuous carriage waiting for her. She slips into that carriage—and that is where you come in.”

“How?” asked Mr. Crowninshield.

“Inside the carriage she finds a disguise—dress, wig, everything complete—a disguise easy to slip on over her ball-gown and sufficient to baffle a detective half a yard away.”

“You shall have it, sir! My heart bleeds for that young lady!” cried Mr. Crowninshield, and he grasped my hand in the noblest fashion. He had been a baritone in his day. “Besides,” and he descended swiftly to the mere level of a human being, “I have a score against Master Juan, and I should like to get a little of my own back.”

That was precisely the point of view upon which I had counted. Throughout his first term of office Juan Ballester had hired a box at the Opera. Needless to say, he had never paid for it, and Mr. Crowninshield unwisely pressed for payment. When requests failed, Mr. Crowninshield went to threats. He threatened the Law, the American Eagle, and the whole of the United States Navy. Ballester’s reply had been short, sharp, and decisive. The State telephone system was being overhauled. Juan Ballester moved the Exchange to a building on the other side of the Opera House, and then summarily closed the Opera House on the ground that the music prevented the operators from hearing the calls. It was not astonishing that Mr. Crowninshield was eager to help Olivia Calavera. He lit a candle and led me through his private door across the empty theatre, ghostly with its sheeted benches, to the wardrobe-room. We chose a nun’s dress, long enough to hide Olivia’s gown, and a coif which would conceal her hair and overshadow her face.

“In that her own father wouldn’t know her. It will be dark; the Quay is ill-lighted, she has only to shuffle like an old woman; she will go third-class, of course, in the train. Who is to see her off?”

“No one,” I answered. “I dread that half-hour in the train for her without a friend at her side. The Quay will be watched, too. She must run the gauntlet alone. Luckily there will be a crowd of harvesters returning to Spain. Luckily, also, she has courage. But it will be the worst of her trials. My absence would be noticed. I can’t go.”

“No, but I can!” cried Mr. Crowninshield. “An old padre seeing off an old nun to her new mission—eh? Juan will be gritting his teeth in the morning because I am an American citizen.”

Mr. Crowninshield was aflame with his project. He took a stick and tottered about the room in the most comical fashion. “I will bring the carriage myself to the garden door,” said he. “I will be inside of it. My property man—he comes from Poughkeepsie —shall be the driver. I will dress the young lady as we drive

slowly to the station, and Sister Pepita and the Padre Antonio will direct their feeble steps to the darkest corner of the worst-lit carriage in the train."

I thanked him with all my heart. It had seemed to me terrible that Olivia should have to make her way alone on board the steamer. Now she would have someone to enhearten and befriend her. I met Olivia once at the house of Enrique Gimeno, and made her acquainted with the scheme, and on the night of the sixteenth the steamship agent rang me up on the telephone.

"The *Ariadne* will arrive at nine tomorrow night. The passengers will leave Santa Paula at half-past ten. Good luck!"

I went to the window and looked out over the garden. The marquee was erected, the fairy lights strung upon the trees, a set piece with the portrait of Juan Ballester and a Latin motto—_semper fidelis_—raised its monstrous joinery against the moon. Twenty-four hours more and, if all went well, Olivia would be out upon the high seas, on her way to Trinidad. Surely all must go well. I went over in my mind every detail of our preparations. I recognised only one chance of failure—the chance that Mr. Crowninshield in his exuberance might over-act his part. But I was wrong. It was, after all, Olivia who brought our fine scheme to grief.

There is no doubt about it. Women are not reasonable beings. Otherwise Olivia would never have come to the President's party in a white lace coat over a clinging gown of white satin. She looked beautiful, but I was dismayed when I saw her. She had come with the Gimenos, and I took her aside, and I am afraid that I scolded her.

"But you told me," she expostulated, "I was to spare no pains. There must be nothing of the traveller about me"; and there was not. From the heels of her satin slippers to the topmost tress of her hair she was dressed as she alone could dress in Santa Paula.

"But of course I meant you to wear black," I whispered.

"Oh, I didn't think of it," Olivia exclaimed wearily. "Please don't lecture"; and she dropped into a chair with such a lassitude upon her face that I thought she was going to faint.

"It doesn't matter," I said hastily. "No doubt the disguise will cover it. At ten

o’clock, slip down into the garden. Until then, dance!”

“Dance!” she exclaimed, looking piteously up into my face.

“Yes,” I insisted impatiently, and taking her hand, I raised her from her chair.

She had no lack of partners, for the President himself singled her out and danced in a quadrille with her. Others timorously followed his example. But though she did dance, I was grievously disappointed —for a time. It seemed that her soul was flickering out in her. Just when she most needed her courage and her splendid spirit, she failed of them.

There were only two more hours after a long fortnight of endurance. Yet those two last hours, it seemed, she could not face. I know now that I never acted with greater cruelty than on that night when I kept her dancing. But even while she danced, there came to me some fear that I had misjudged her. I watched her from a corner of the ballroom. There was a great change in her. Her face seemed to me smaller, her eyes bigger, darker even, and luminous with some haunting look. But there was more. I could not define the change—at first. Then the word came to me. There was a spirituality in her aspect which was new to her, an unearthliness. Surely, I thought, the fruit of great suffering; and blundering, with the truth under my very nose, I began to ask myself a foolish question. Had Harry Vandeleur played her false?

A movement of the company awakened me. A premonitory sputter of rockets drew the guests to the cloakroom, from the cloakroom to the garden. I saw Olivia fetch her lace coat and slip it over her shoulders like the rest. It was close upon ten. The Fates were favouring us, or perhaps I was favouring the Fates. For I had arranged that the fireworks should begin just a few minutes before the hour struck. In the darkness of the garden Olivia could slip away, and her absence would not afterwards be noticed.

I waited at the garden door. I heard the clock strike. I saw Juan Ballester’s profile in fire against a dark blue sky of velvet and stars. I shook hands with myself in that the moon would not rise till one. And then a whiteness gleamed between the bushes, and Olivia was at my side. Her hand sought mine and clung to it. I opened the postern and looked out into a little street. The lamps of a closed carriage shone twenty yards away, and but for the carriage the street was empty.

“Now!” I whispered.

We ran out. I opened the carriage door. I caught a glimpse of horn spectacles, a lantern-jawed, unshaven face, a shovel hat; and I heard a stifled oath. Mr. Crowninshield, too, had noticed Olivia's white gown. She jumped in, I shut the door, and the carriage rolled away. I went back into the garden, where Juan Ballester's profile was growing ragged.

Of the next hour or two I have only confused memories. I counted stages in Olivia's progress as I passed from room to room among the guests. Now she would have reached the station; now the train had stopped on the Quay at Las Cuevas; now, perhaps, the gangway had been withdrawn and the great ship was warping out into the river. At one o'clock I smoked a cigarette in the garden. From the marquee came the clatter of supper. In the sky the moon was rising. And somewhere outside the three-mile limit a rippling path of silver struck across the *Ariadne's* dark bows. I was conscious of a swift exultation. I heard the throb of the screw and saw the water flashing from the ship's sides.

Then I remembered that I had left the garden door unlocked. I went to it and by chance looked out into the street. I received a shock. For, twenty yards away, the lights of a closed carriage shone quietly beside the kerb. I wondered whether the last few hours had been really the dream of a second. I even looked back into the garden, to make sure that the profile of Juan Ballester was not still sputtering in fire. Then a detail or two brought me relief. The carriage was clearly a private carriage; the driver on the box wore livery—at all events, I saw a flash of bright buttons on his coat. In my relief I walked from the garden towards the carriage. The driver recognised me most likely—recognised, at all events, that I came from the private door of the President's garden. For he made some kind of salute.

I supposed that he had been told to wait at this spot, away from the park of carriages, and I should have turned back but for a circumstance which struck me as singular. It was a very hot night, and yet not only were the windows of the carriage shut, but the blinds were drawn close besides. I could not see into the carriage, but there was light at the edges of the blinds. A lamp was burning inside. I stood on the pavement, and a chill struck into my blood and made me shiver. I listened. There was no sound of any movement within the carriage. It must be empty. I assured myself and again doubted. The little empty street, the closed carriage with the light upon the edges of the blinds, the absolute quiet, daunted me. I stepped forward and gently opened the door. I saw Olivia. There was no trace of the nun's gown, nor the coif. But that her hair was ruffled she might this moment have left Juan Ballester's drawing-room.

She turned her face to me, shook her head, and smiled.

“It was of no use, my friend,” she said gently. “They were on the watch at Las Cuevas. An officer brought me back. He has gone in to ask Juan what he shall do with me.”

Olivia had given up the struggle—that was clear.

“It was Crowninshield’s fault!” I cried.

“No, it was mine,” she answered.

And here is what had happened, as I learnt it afterwards. All had gone well until the train reached Las Cuevas. There the police were on the look-out for her. The Padre Antonio, however, excited no suspicion, and very likely Sister Pepita would have passed unnoticed too. But as she stepped down from the carriage on to the step, and from the step to the ground, an officer was startled by the unexpected appearance of a small foot in a white silk stocking and a white satin slipper. Now, the officer had seen nuns before, old and young, but never had he seen one in white satin shoes, to say nothing of the silk stockings. He became more than curious. He pointed her out to his companions. Sister Pepita was deftly separated in the crowd from the Padre Antonio—cut out, to borrow the old nautical phrase—and arrested. She was conducted towards a room in the station, but the steamer’s siren hooted its warning to the passengers, and despair seized upon Olivia. She made a rush for the gangway, she was seized, she was carried forcibly into the room and stripped of her nun’s disguise and coif. She was kept a prisoner in the room until the *Ariadne* had left the Quay. Then she was placed in a carriage and driven back, with an officer of the police at her side, to the garden door of the President’s house.

Something of this Olivia told me at the time, but she was interrupted by the return of the officer and a couple of Juan Ballester’s messengers.

“His Excellency will see you,” said the officer to her. He conducted her through the garden and by the private doorway into Ballester’s study. I had followed behind the servants and I remained in the room. We waited for a few minutes, and Juan himself came in. He went quickly over to Olivia’s side. His voice was all gentleness. But that was his way with her, and I set no hopes on it.

“I am grieved, Senorita, if you have suffered rougher treatment than befits you.

But you should not have tried to escape."

Olivia looked at him with a piteous helplessness in her eyes. "What am I to do, then?" she seemed to ask, and, with the question, to lose the last clutch upon her spirit. For her features quivered, she dropped into a chair, laid her arms upon the table, and burying her face in them, burst into tears.

It was uncomfortable—even for Juan Ballester. There came a look of trouble in his face, a shadow of compunction. For myself, the heaving of her young shoulders hurt my eyes, the sound of her young voice breaking in sobs tortured my ears. But this was not the worst of it, for she suddenly threw herself back in her chair with the tears wet upon her cheeks, and, beating the table piteously with the palms of her hands, she cried:

"I am hungry—oh, so hungry!"

"Good Heavens!" cried Ballester. He started forward, staring into her face.

"But you knew," said Olivia, and he turned away to one of the messengers, and bade him bring some supper into the room.

"And be quick," said I.

"Yes, yes, be quick," said Juan.

At last I had the key to her. She had been starving, in that great, empty house in the Calle Madrid. "A fortnight!" she had cried in dismay. I understood now the reason of her terror. She had known that she would have to starve. And she had held her head high, making no complaint, patiently enduring. It was not her spirit which had failed her. I cursed myself for a fool as once more I enthroned her. Her face had grown smaller, her eyes bigger. There was a look of spirituality which I had not seen before. I had noticed the signs, and I had misread them. Her lassitude this evening, her vain struggle with the police, her apathy under their treatment of her, were all explained. Not her courage, but her body had failed her. She was starving.

A tray was brought in and placed before her. She dried her eyes and with a sigh she drew her chair in to the table and ate, indifferent to the presence of Ballester, of the officer who remained at the door, and of myself. Ballester stood and watched her. "Good Heavens!" he said again softly, and going to her side he

filled her glass with champagne.

She nodded her thanks and raised it to her lips almost before he had finished pouring. A little colour came into her cheeks and she turned again to her supper. She was a healthy girl. There never had been anything of the drooping lily about Olivia. She had always taken an interest in her meals, however dainty she might look. The knowledge of that made her starvation doubly cruel—not only to her. Juan sat down opposite to her. There was no doubt now about the remorse in his face. He never took his eyes from her as she ate. Once she looked up and saw him watching her.

“But you knew,” she said. “I was alone in the house. How much money did you leave there for me when you took my father away? A few dollars which your men had not discovered.”

“But you yourself—” he stammered.

“I was at a ball,” said Olivia scornfully. “How much money does a girl take with her to a ball? Where would she put it?”

There was no answer to that question.

“The next day I went to the bank,” she continued. “My father’s money was impounded. You had seen to that. All the unpaid bills came in in a stream. I couldn’t pay them. I could get no credit. You had seen to that. My friends left me alone. Of course I starved; you knew that I should. You meant me to,” and, with the air of one who has been wasting time, she turned again to her supper.

“I never thought that you would hold out,” stammered Ballester. I had never seen him in an apologetic mood before, and he looked miserable. “I hadn’t *seen* that you were starving.”

Olivia looked up at him. It was not so much that her face relented, as that it showed an interest in something beyond her supper.

“Yes,” she said, nodding at him. “I think that’s true. You hadn’t seen with your own eyes that I was starving. So my starving wasn’t very real to you.”

Ballester changed her plate and filled her glass again.

“Ah!” said Olivia with satisfaction, hitching up her chair still closer. She was really having a good square meal.

“But why didn’t you tell me?” I asked.

“I told no one,” said Olivia, shaking her head. “I thought that I could manage till tonight. Once or twice I called on the Gimenos at luncheon-time, and I had one or two dollars. No; I would tell no one.”

“Yes,” said Juan, “I understand that. It’s the reason why I wanted you.” And at this sign of his comprehension of her, Olivia again looked at him, and again the interest in her eyes was evident.

At last she pushed back her chair. The tray was removed. Ballester offered her a cigarette. She smiled faintly as she took it. Certainly her supper had done her a world of good. She lit her cigarette and leaned her elbows on the table.

“And now,” she said, “what do you mean to do with me?”

Ballester went to his bureau, wrote on a sheet of paper and brought the paper to Olivia.

“You can show this at the railway-station tomorrow,” he said, and he laid the permit on the table and turned away.

Women are not reasonable people. For the second time that night Olivia forced me to contemplate that trite reflection. For now that she had got what she had suffered hunger and indignities to get, she merely played with it with the tips of her fingers, looking now upon the table, now at Juan Ballester’s back, and now upon the table again.

“And you?” she said gently. “What will become of you?”

I suppose Ballester was the only one in the room who did not notice the softness of her voice. To me it was extraordinary. He had tortured her with hunger, exposed her to the gentle methods of his police, yet the fact that he did these things because he wanted her seemed to make him suddenly valuable to her now that she was free of him.

Ballester turned round and leaned against the wall with his hands in his pockets.

“I?” he said. “I shall just stay on alone here until some day someone gets stronger than I am, perhaps, and puts me up against the wall outside—”

“Oh, no!” cried Olivia, interrupting him.

“Well, one never knows,” said his Excellency, shrugging his shoulders. He turned to the window and drew aside the curtains. The morning had come. It was broad daylight outside.

“Unless, Olivia,” he added, turning again towards her, “you will reconsider your refusal to marry me. Together we could do great things.”

It was the most splendid performance of the grand gentleman which Ballester ever gave. And he knew it. You could see him preening himself as he spoke. His gesture was as noble as his words. From head to foot he was the perfect cavalier, and consciousness of the perfection of his chivalry shone out from him like a nimbus. I looked quickly towards Olivia—in some alarm for Harry Vandeleur. She had lowered her head, so that it was impossible to see how she had taken Ballester’s honourable amendment. But when she raised her head again a smile of satisfaction was just disappearing from her face; and the smile betrayed her. She had been playing for this revenge from the moment when she had finished her supper.

“I am honoured, Senor Juan,” she said sedately, “but I am already promised.”

Ballester turned abruptly away. Whether he had seen the smile, whether, if he had seen it, he understood it, I never knew.

“You had better get the Senorita a carriage,” he said to the officer at the door. As the man went out, the music from the ballroom floated in. Juan Ballester hesitated, and no shock which Olivia had given to me came near the shock which his next words produced.

“Don Santiago shall have his money. You can draw on it, Senorita, tomorrow, before you go.”

“Thank you,” she said.

The messenger reappeared. A carriage was waiting. Olivia rose and looked at Juan timidly. He walked ceremoniously to the door and held it open.

“Good night,” she said.

He bowed and smiled in a friendly fashion enough, but he did not answer. It seemed that he had spoken his last word to her. She hesitated and went out. At once the President took a quick step towards me.

“Do you know what is said tonight?” he said violently.

I drew back. I could not think what he meant. To tell the truth, I found him rather alarming.

“No,” I answered.

“Why, that I have given this party as a farewell; that I am still going to bolt from Maldivia. Do you see? I have spent all this money for nothing.”

I drew a breath of relief. His violence was not aimed against me.

“That’s a pity,” I said. “But the rumour can still be killed. I thought of a way yesterday.”

“Will it cost much?” he asked.

“Very little.”

“What am I to do?”

“Paint the Presidential House,” said I. “It wants it badly, and all Santa Paula will be very sure that you wouldn’t spend money in paint if you meant to run away.”

“That’s a good idea,” said he, and he sat down at once and began to figure out the expense. “A couple of hundred dollars will do it.”

“Not well,” said I.

“We don’t want it done well,” said Juan. “Two men on a plank will be enough. A couple of hundred dollars is too much. Half that will be quite sufficient. By the way”—and he sat with his pen poised—“just run after—her—and tell her that Vandeleur is landing tomorrow at Trinidad. I invented some business for him there.”

He bent down over the desk. His back was towards the door. As I turned the handle, someone was opening it from the other side. It was Olivia Calavera.

“I came back,” she said, with the colour mantling in her face. “You see, I am going away tomorrow—and I hadn’t said ‘Goodbye.’”

Juan must have heard her voice.

“Please go and give that message,” he said sharply. “And shut the door! I don’t want to be disturbed.”

Olivia drew back quickly. I was amazed to see that she was hurt.

“His message is for you,” I said severely. “Harry Vandeleur lands at Trinidad tomorrow.”

“Thank you,” she said slowly; she turned away and walked as slowly down the passage. “Goodbye,” she said, with her back towards me.

“I will see you off tomorrow, Senorita,” I said; and she turned back to me.

“No,” she said gently. “Don’t do that! We will say ‘Goodbye’ here.”

She gave me her hand—she had been on the point of going without even doing that. “Thank you very much,” she added, and she walked rather listlessly away. She left me with an uneasy impression that her thanks were not very sincere. I am bound to admit that Olivia puzzled me that night. To extract the proposal of marriage from Ballester was within the rules of the game and good play into the bargain. But to come back again as she had done, was not quite fair. However, as I watched her go, I thought that I would keep my bewilderment to myself. I have never asked Harry Vandeleur, for instance, whether he could explain it. I went back to the study.

“I think fifty dollars will be ample,” said Ballester, still figuring on his paper. “Has she gone?”

“She is going,” said I. He rose from his chair, broke off a rose from a bowl of flowers which, on this night only, decorated the room. Then he opened the window and leaned out. Olivia, I reckoned, would be just at this moment stepping into the carriage. He tossed the rose down and drew back quickly out of

sight.

“Shall it be green paint, your Excellency?” I asked.

His Excellency, I regret to say, swore loudly.

“Never in this world!” said he.

I had left the door open. The music of a languorous and melting waltz filled the room.

“I do loathe music!” cried Juan Ballester violently. It was the nearest approach to a sentimental remark that I had ever heard him make.

North of the Tropic of Capricorn

The strong civic spirit of the Midlands makes them fertile in reformers; and Mr. Endicott even in his early youth was plagued by the divine discontent with things as they are. Neither a happy marriage, nor a prosperous business, nor an engaging daughter appeased him. But he was slow in discovering a remedy. The absence of any sense of humour blunted his wits and he lived in a vague distress, out of which it needed the death of his wife to quicken him. “Some result must come out of all these years of pondering and discomfort, if only as a memorial to her,” he reflected, and he burrowed again amongst the innumerable panaceas. Then at last he found it—on an afternoon walk in June when the sharp contrast between the grime of the town and the loveliness of green and leaf which embowered it so closely, smote upon him almost with pain. The Minimum Wage. Like Childe Roland’s Dark Tower, it had lain within his vision for many a long mile of his pilgrimage. His eyes had rested on it and had never taken it in; so simple and clear it was to the view.

Thereafter he was quick to act. Time was running on. He was forty-two. He disposed of his business, and a year later was elected to Parliament. Once in the House he walked warily. He had no personal ambition, but he was always afraid lest some indiscretion should set the House against him and delay his cause. Mr. Endicott had his plan quite clear in his mind. Samuel Plimsoll was his model. The great Bill for the establishment of the Minimum Wage should be a private member’s Bill moved from the back benches session after session if need be, and driven through Parliament into Law at last by the sheer weight of its public value.

Accordingly for a year he felt his way, learning the rules and orders, speaking now and then without subservience and without impertinence; and after the prorogation of the House for the summer, he took his daughter with him to a farm-house set apart in a dale of Cumberland. In that solitary place, inspired by the brown fells and the tumbling streams, and with the one person he loved as his companion, he proposed finally to smooth and round his Bill.

Accident or destiny, however—whichever you like to call the beginning of tragic things—put an Australian in the same compartment of the railway-carriage; and the Australian was led to converse by the sight of various cameras on the luggage rack.

“My father is very fond of photography,” said Elsie Endicott. “It amuses him, and the pictures which he takes if the day is clear, are sometimes quite recognisable.”

“My dear!” said Mr. Endicott.

Elsie turned to the window and shook hands with two young men who had come to see her off. One of them, whom Mr. Endicott vaguely remembered to have seen at meals in his house, climbed on the footboard.

“You will take care of Miss Endicott, sir,” he said firmly. “She has been overdoin’ it a bit, dancin’, you know, and that sort of thing, while you were at the House of Commons.”

Mr. Endicott chuckled.

“I’ll tell you something about my daughter,” he replied. “She may look like china, but she is pretty solid earthenware really. And if there are any others as anxious about her as you are you might spread the good news.”

The train moved off. “So you are in the House of Commons,” said the Australian, and he began to talk. “Our great trouble—yours and mine—is—”

“I know it,” Mr. Endicott interrupted with a smile of confidence.

“Of course you do,” replied the Australian. “It’s the overcrowding of the East under the protective rule of the British.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Mr. Endicott blankly.

“We could help a good deal,” the Australian continued, “if only our Government had got a ha’porth of common sense. North of the Tropic of Capricorn, there’s land and to spare which coloured labour could cultivate and white labour can’t.”

This was strange talk to Mr. Endicott. He was aware, but not conscious of great dominions and possessions outside the British Islands. He had indeed avoided the whole subject. He was shy of the phrase which described them, as a horse is shy of a newspaper blown about the street. The British Empire! The very words had a post-prandial sound. Instead of suggesting to him vast territories with myriads of men and women groping amongst enormous problems, they evoked a picture of a flamboyant gentleman in evening dress standing at the head of a table, his face congested with too much dinner, a glass of wine in his one hand, a fat cigar in the other, and talking vauntingly. This particular sentence of the Australian stuck inconveniently in his mind and smouldered there.

For instance. On the afternoon of their arrival Elsie was arranging his developing dishes and his chemicals on a small rough table in a corner of their one living-room. She put an old basket-chair by the table and set around it a screen which she had discovered in one of the bedrooms upstairs.

“There!” she said. “You can make all your messes here, father, and we can keep the room looking habitable, and I shan’t get all my frocks stained.”

“Very well, Elsie,” said her father absently, and he spoke his own thoughts. “That was a curious fear of the man in the train, Elsie. I think there’s no truth in it. No, the danger’s here in this country; here’s what’s to be done to avert it,” and he slapped his hand down upon his pile of statistics.

“No doubt, father,” said Elsie, and she went on with her work.

The very next evening he returned again to the subject. It was after dinner and about half-past nine o’clock. The blinds had not been lowered and Endicott looked out through the open windows on to a great flank of Scawfell which lay drenched in white moonlight a couple of fields away.

“North of the Tropic of Capricorn,” he said, “I wish we had an atlas, Elsie.”

“I’ll write to London and buy one,” said the girl. “We haven’t got more than a

‘Handy Gazetteer’ even at home. It’ll be amusing to plan out some long journeys which we can take together when you have passed your Bill into law.”

Endicott smiled grimly at his daughter.

“I reckon we won’t take many journeys together, Elsie. Oh, you needn’t look surprised and hurt! I am not taken in by you a bit, my dear. That young spark on the footboard who told me I didn’t take enough care of you”—and Elsie gurgled with laughter at the recollection—“threw a dreadful light upon your character and gave me a clue besides to the riddle of your vast correspondence. I hope you are telling them all that my persistent unkindness is not driving you into a decline.”

Elsie paused in the act of addressing an envelope —there was a growing pile of letters in front of her—to reassure her father.

“I tell them all,” she replied, “that you neither beat me nor starve me, and that if you weren’t so very messy with your chemicals in the corner over there, I should have very little reason to change my home.”

“Thank you, my dear,” said Mr. Endicott. He was very proud of his daughter and especially of her health. With her dark rebellious hair, the delicate colour in her cheeks, and her starry eyes, she had a quite delusive look of fragility. But she could dance any youth of her acquaintance to a standstill without ruffling her curls, as he very well knew. He gazed at her lowered head with a smile.

“However, all this doesn’t help me with the Minimum Wage,” he continued, and he turned again to the papers on his desk by the window, while Elsie at the table in the middle of the big low-roofed room, continued to write her letters.

They were still engaged in these pursuits when Mrs. Tyson, their landlady, came into the room to lower the blinds.

“No, please leave them up,” said Endicott, in an irritable voice. “I’ll draw them down myself before we go to bed.”

Mrs. Tyson accordingly left the blinds alone.

“And you’ll be careful of the Crown Derby,” she said imperturbably, nodding towards a china tea-set ranged in an open cabinet near to the door. “Gentlemen

from London have asked me to sell it over and over. For it's of great value. But I won't, as I promised my mother. She, poor woman "

"Yes, yes," interposed Mr. Endicott, "we'll be very careful. You may remember you told us all about it yesterday."

Mrs. Tyson turned down a little lower the one oil lamp which, with the candles upon Endicott's desk, lighted the room, and went back to the inner door.

"Will you be wanting anything more for a little while?" she asked. "For my girl's away, and I must go down the valley. I am sending some sheep away to market tomorrow morning."

"No, we want nothing at all," said Elsie, without paying much attention to what the woman was saying. Mrs. Tyson was obviously inclined to fuss, and would have to be suppressed. But she went out now without another word. There were two doors to the room at opposite ends, the inner one leading to a small hall, the kitchen and the staircase, the other, and outer door, opening directly close by the window on to a tiny garden with a flagged pathway. At the end of the path there was a gate, and a low garden wall. Beyond the gate a narrow lane and a brook separated the house from the fields and the great flank of fell.

The night was hot, and Endicott, unable to concentrate his attention upon his chosen theme, had the despairing sensation that he had lost grip of it altogether: his eyes wandered from his papers so continually to the hillside asleep in the bright moonlight. Here a great boulder threw a long motionless shadow down the slope, like a house; there a sharp rock-ridge cropping out of the hill, raised against the sky a line of black pinnacles like a file of soldiers.

"I can't work tonight, Elsie, and that's the truth," cried Endicott passionately, "though this is just the night when one ought to be most alive to the millions of men cooped in hot cities and living wretchedly. I'll go out of doors. Will you come?"

Elsie hesitated. Mr. Endicott was to carry that poignant recollection to his death. One word of persuasion and she would have come with him. But he did not speak it, and Elsie bent her head again to her work.

"No, thanks, father," she said. "I'll finish these letters. They must go off tomorrow morning."

Endicott blew out his candles, lit his pipe, and took up his cap. He was still smiling over her important air as of someone with great and urgent business. He went out into the garden. Elsie heard the latch of the gate click. He walked across the little bridge over the brook and at once his mood changed. He wandered across the fields and up the hillside, sorely discontented with himself. He had lost interest in the Minimum Wage. So much he admitted. The surroundings which were to inspire him had, on the contrary, merely provoked a disinclination to do any work whatever. The reaction after the strain of the Session was making itself felt. The question in his mind was “Why bother?” High up the hill he sat down upon a boulder to have it out with himself.

The sound of the stream dropping from pool to pool of rock on its way down the valley rose in a continuous thunder to his ears. He looked down at the little farm-house beneath him, and the golden light of the lamp within the windows of the sitting-room.

As he looked the light moved. Then it diminished; then it vanished altogether. Endicott chuckled and lit a second pipe, holding the lighted match in the hollow of his hands and bending his head close over it, because of a whisper of air. Elsie had finished her letters to the youths who besieged her and was off to bed. Only the moonlight blazed upon the windows now and turned them into mirrors of burnished silver.

Endicott smoked a third pipe whilst he wrestled with himself upon the hillside. Tomorrow he would get up very early, bathe in the big deep pool, transparent to the lowest of its thirty feet of water, and then spend a long morning with the wage-lists of the chain-making industry. That was settled. Nothing should change his plan. Meanwhile it was very pleasant up here under the cool sky of moonlight and faint stars.

He dragged himself up reluctantly from his seat, and went down towards the farm. There was a little stone bridge to cross over one of the many mountain streams which went to the making of the small river on the other side of the house. Then came the lane and the garden-gate. He closed the door behind him when he had gone in. Although there was no lamp burning, the room was not dark. A twilight, vaporous and silvery, crept into it, darkening towards the inner part and filling the corners with mystery; while the floor by the window was chequered with great panels of light precise and bright as day.

On the hillside Endicott had seen the light go out in the room, and he crossed over to the big table for the lamp. But it was no longer there. Elsie had taken it, no doubt, into the hall with her letters for the morning post and had not brought it back. He moved to his own table where the candles stood; and with a shock he perceived that he was not alone in that unlighted room. A movement amongst the shadows by the inner door caught and held his eyes.

He swung round and faced the spot. He saw against the wall near the screen which hid his photographic paraphernalia, a man standing, straight, upright and very still. The figure was vague and blurred, but Endicott could see that his legs were clothed in white, and that he wore some bulky and outlandish gear upon his head. Endicott quickly struck a match. At the scratch and spurt of flame, the man in the shadow ran forward towards the door with extraordinary swiftness. But his shoulder caught the case in which Mrs. Tyson's Crown Derby china was standing, and brought it with a crash of broken crockery to the floor. Before the intruder could recover, Endicott set his back against the door and held the burning match above his head. He was amazed by what he saw.

The intruder was an Asiatic with the conventional hawk-nose of the Jew in the shape of his face; a brown man wearing a coloured turban upon his head, an old tweed jacket on his shoulders, and a pair of dirty white linen trousers on his legs, narrowing until they fitted closely round his ankles. He wore neither shoes nor stockings. And he stood very still watching Endicott with alert, bright eyes. Endicott, without moving from the door, reached out and lit the candles upon the table.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded curiously. He had no personal fear, and he was not much troubled by the man's hiding in the room. Elsie, whom the fellow might have frightened, had long since gone to bed, and there was nothing of value, except the Crown Derby, which he could have stolen. On the other hand Endicott was immensely puzzled by the presence of an Asiatic at all in this inland and lonely valley far from railways and towns, at half-past ten of the night.

"I pass the house," the man answered in English which was astonishingly good. "I think you give me one piece opium to go on with."

"Opium!" cried Mr. Endicott, as if he had been stung. How many times had he voted for the suppression of everything to do with opium. "You'll find none of

that abominable drug here!”

He surveyed the Asiatic, outraged in every feeling. He lifted the latch. He was on the point of flinging open the door. He had actually begun to open it, when his mood changed. North of the Tropic of Capricorn. The lilt of the words was in his ears. He remembered the talk of the Australian in the railway-carriage about the overcrowding of the East. The coming of this strange brown man seemed to him of a sudden curiously relevant. He closed the door again.

“You passed the house? Where do you come from? Who are you? How do you come here?”

The Asiatic, who had stood gathered like a runner at the starting-point while the door was being opened, now cringed and smiled.

“Protector of the poor, I tell you my story”; and Mr. Endicott found himself listening in that quiet farm-house of the Cumberland dales to a most enlightening Odyssey.

The man’s name was Ahmed Ali, and he was a Pathan of the hills. His home was in the middle country between Peshawur and the borders of Afghanistan, and he belonged to a tribe of seven hundred men, every one of whom had left his home and his wife and his children behind him, and had gone down to Bombay to seek his livelihood in the stokeholds of ships. Ahmed had been taken on a steamer of the Peninsula and Oriental Line bound for Australia, where he hoped to make his fortune. But neither at Sydney nor at Melbourne had he been allowed to land.

“But I am a British citizen,” he said, having acquired some English.

“Well, and what of it?” said the Port authorities.

Nevertheless the night before the boat sailed he slipped overboard and swam ashore, to be caught when the smoke of that steamer was no more than a stain on the horizon. He was held in custody and would have been returned by the next steamer to India. But there was already in the harbour a cargo boat of the Clan Line bound for Quebec round the Cape; and the boat was short of its complement in the stokehold.

Ahmed Ali, accordingly, signed on, and sailed in her and acquired more English to help him on in the comfortable life he now proposed to make for himself in

Canada.

“But again they would not let me go away into the country,” he continued. “I told them I was British citizen, but it did not help me; no, not any more than in Australia. They put me on a ship for England, and I came to Liverpool steerage like a genelman. And at Liverpool I landed boldly. For I was a British citizen.”

“Ah!” interjected Mr. Endicott proudly. “Here, in England, you see the value of being a British citizen.”

“But, no, my genelman. For here there’s no work for British citizen. I land and I walk about and I ask for work. But everyone says, ‘Why don’t you stay in your own country?’ So I come away across the fields, and no man give me one piece opium.”

Mr. Endicott nodded his head when the story was ended.

“Well, after all, why don’t you stay in your own country?” he asked.

Mr. Endicott had already had his answer from the Australian, but he was now thirsty for details, and his ears in consequence were afflicted with a brief description of British rule from the Pathan’s point of view.

“The all-wise one will pardon me. You keep the peace. Therefore we cannot stay in our own country. For we grow crowded and there is no food. In old times, when we were crowded and hungry, we went down into the plains and took the land and the wives of the people of the plains and killed the men. But the *raj* does not allow it. It holds a sword between us and the plains, a sword with the edge towards us. Neither, on the other hand, does it feed us.”

Mr. Endicott was aghast at the perverted views thus calmly announced to him.

“But we can’t allow you to come down into India murdering and robbing and taking the wives.”

The Asiatic shrugged his shoulders.

“It is the law.”

Mr. Endicott was silent. If it were not the law, there were certainly a great many

precedents. The men of the hills and the people of the plains—yes, history would say it *was* the law. Mr. Endicott's eyes were opening upon unknown worlds. The British Power stood in India then cleaving a law of nature?

"Also, you send your doctors and make cures when the plague and the cholera come, so that fewer people die. Also, when the crops fail and there is famine, you distribute food, so that again fewer people die.

No, there is no room now for us in our own country because of you, and you will not let us into yours."

"But we can't do anything else," cried Mr. Endicott. "We keep the peace, we feed when there is famine, we send our doctors when there is plague, because that is the law, also—the law of our race."

Ahmed Ali did not move. He had placed the dilemma before Endicott. He neither solved nor accepted it. Nor was Endicott able to find any answer. There must be one, since his whole race was arraigned just for what it most prided itself upon—oh, no doubt there was an answer. But Mr. Endicott could not find it. His imagination, however, grasped the problem. He saw those seven hundred tribesmen travelling down the passes to the rail head, loading the Bombay train and dispersing upon the steamers. But he had no answer, and because he had no answer he was extremely uncomfortable. He had lived for a year in the world of politicians where, as a rule, there are answers all ready-made for any question, answers neatly framed in aphorisms and propositions and provided for our acceptance by thoughtful organisations. But he could not remember one to suit this occasion. He was at a loss, and he took the easy way to rid himself of discomfort. He dived into his trouser-pocket and fished out a handful of silver.

"Here!" he said. "This'll help you on a bit. Now go!"

He stood aside from the door and the Asiatic darted to it with an extraordinary eagerness. But once he had unlatched it, once it stood open to the hillside and the sky, and he free in the embrasure, he lost all his cringing aspect. He turned round upon Mr. Endicott.

"I go now," he cried in a high arrogant voice. "But I shall come back very soon, and all our peoples will come with me, all our hungry peoples from the East. Remember that, you genelman!" And then he ran noiselessly out of the house and down the pathway to the gate.

He ran with extraordinary swiftness; so that Endicott followed him to the gate and watched him go. He flew down the road, his shadow flitting in the moonlight like a bird. Once he looked over his shoulder, and seeing Endicott at the gate he leapt into the air. A few yards farther he doubled on his steps, climbed down into the little stream beside the lane and took to the hills. And in another moment he was not. The broad and kindly fell took him to its bosom. He was too tiny an atom to stand out against that great towering slope of grass and stones. Indeed, he vanished so instantly that it seemed he must have dived into a cave. The next moment Endicott almost doubted whether he had ever been at all, whether he was not some apparition born of his own troubled brain and the Australian's talk. But, as he turned back into the house, he saw upon the flags of the garden path the marks of the man's wet, bare feet. Not only had Ahmed Ali been to the farm-house, but he had crossed the stream to get there.

Mr. Endicott went back to his table in the window and seated himself in front of his lighted candles, more from habit than with any thought of work. He felt suddenly rather tired. He had not been conscious of any fear while Ahmed Ali was in the room, or indeed of any strain. But strain, and perhaps fear, there had been. Certainly a vague fear began to get hold of him now. He had a picture before his eyes of the Asiatic leaping into the air upon the road, and then doubling for the hills. Why had he fled so fast?"

"North of the Tropic of Capricorn!"

He repeated the words to himself aloud. Was the Australian right after all? And would they come from the East—those hungry people? Mr. Endicott seemed to feel the earth tremble beneath the feet of the myriads of Asia. He bent his ear and seemed to hear the distant confusion of their approach. He looked down at his papers and flicked them contemptuously. Of what use would be his fine Bill for the establishment of a Minimum Wage? Why, everything would go down—civilisation, the treasures of art, twenty centuries of man's painful growth—just as that Derby China teapot with its wonderful colour of dark blue and red and gold. The broken fragments of the teapot became a symbol to Endicott.

"And the women would go down too," he thought with a shiver. "They would take the wives."

He had come to this point in his speculations when the inner door opened, and the light broadened in the room. He heard Mrs. Tyson shuffle in, but he did not

turn towards her. He sat looking out upon the fell.

“I found the lamp burning on the hall table by the letters, sir,” she said, “and I thought you might want it.”

“Thank you,” said Endicott vaguely, and he was roused by a little gasping cry which she uttered.

“Oh, yes! I am very sorry, Mrs. Tyson. Your teapot has been knocked down. I went out. There was a man in the room when I came back. He knocked it down. Of course I’ll make its value good, though I doubt if I can replace it.”

Mrs. Tyson made no answer. She placed the lamp on the table. Endicott was still seated at his table in the window with his back to the room. But he had thrown back his head, and he saw the circle of reflected light upon the ceiling shake and quiver as Mrs. Tyson put the lamp down. The glass chimney, too, rattled as though her hands were shaking.

“I am very sorry indeed,” he continued.

Mrs. Tyson dropped upon her knees and began to pick up the broken pieces from the Soor.

“It doesn’t matter at all, sir,” she said, and Endicott was surprised by the utter tonelessness of her voice. He knew that she set great store upon this set of china; she had boasted of it. Yet now that it was spoilt she spoke of it with complete indifference. He turned round in his chair and watched her picking up the fragments—watched her idly until she sobbed.

“Good heavens,” he cried, “I knew that you valued it, Mrs. Tyson, but—” and then he stopped. For she turned to him and he knew that there was more than the china teapot at the bottom of her trouble. Her face, white and shaking and wet with tears, was terrible to see. There was a horror upon it as though she had beheld things not allowed, and a hopeless pain in her eyes as though she was sure that the appalling vision would never pass. But all she did was to repeat her phrase.

“It doesn’t matter at all, sir.”

Endicott started up and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

“What has happened, Mrs. Tyson?”

“Oh, I can’t tell you, sir.” She knelt upon the floor and covered her face with her hands and wept as Endicott had never dreamed that a human being could weep. Fear seized upon him and held him till he shivered with the chill of it. The woman had come in by the inner door. In the hall, then, was to be found the cause of her horror. He lifted the lamp and hurried towards it, but to reach the door he had to pass the screen which Elsie had arranged on the day of their coming. And at the screen he stopped. The terror which may come to a man once in his life clutched his heart so that he choked. For behind the screen he saw the gleam of a girl’s white frock.

“Elsie,” he cried, “you have been all this while here—asleep.” For he would not believe the thing he knew.

She was lying rather than sitting in the low basket chair in front of the little table on which the chemicals were ranged, with her back towards him, and her face buried in the padding of the chair. Endicott stretched his arm over her and set down the lamp upon the table. Then he spoke to her again chidingly and shaking her arm.

“Elsie, wake up! Don’t be ridiculous!”

He slipped an arm under her waist, and lifting her, turned her towards him. The girl’s head rolled upon her shoulders, and there was a look of such deadly horror upon her face that no pen could begin to describe it. Endicott caught her to his breast.

“Oh, my God,” he cried hoarsely. “My poor girl! My poor girl!”

Mrs. Tyson had come up behind him.

“It was he,” she whispered, “the man who was here. He killed her!” And as Endicott turned his head towards the woman, some little thing slipped from the chair on to the floor with a tiny rattle. Endicott laid her down and picked up a small, yellow, round tablet.

“No, he didn’t,” he said with a queer eagerness in his voice. The tablet came from a small bottle on the table at the end of his row of chemicals. It was labelled, “Intensifier” and “Poison,” and the cork was out of the bottle. The

bottle had been full that afternoon. There was more than one tablet missing now.

“No, she killed herself. Those tablets are cyanide of potassium. He never touched her. Look!”

Upon the boards of the floor the wet and muddy feet of the Asiatic had written the history of his movements beyond the possibility of mistake. Here he had stood in front of her—not a step nearer. Mrs. Tyson heard him whisper in her daughter’s ear. “Oh, my dear, I thank God!” He sank upon his knees beside her. Mrs. Tyson went out, and, closing the door gently, left him with his dead.

She sat and waited in the kitchen, and after a while she heard him moving. He opened the door into the hall and came out and went slowly and heavily up the stairs into Elsie’s room. In a little while he came down again and pushed open the kitchen door. He had aged by twenty years, but his face and his voice were calm.

“You found the lamp in the hall?” he said, in a low voice. “Beside the letters? Come! We must understand this. My mind will go unless I am quite sure.”

She followed him into the living-room and saw that his dead daughter was no longer there. She stood aside whilst, with a patience which wrung her heart, Endicott worked out by the footprints of the intruder and this and that sure sign the events of those tragic minutes, until there was no doubt left.

“Elsie wrote eight letters,” he said. “Seven are in the hall. Here is the eighth, addressed and stamped upon the table where she wrote.”

The letters had to be sent down the valley to the inn early in the morning. So when she had finished, she had carried them into the hall—all of them, she thought—and she had taken the lamp to light her steps. Whilst she was in the hall, and whilst all this side of the house was in darkness Ahmed Ali had slipped into the room from the lane by the brook. There were the marks of his feet coming from the door.

“But was that possible?” Endicott argued. “I was on the hillside, the moon shining from behind my shoulders on to the house. There were no shadows. It was all as clear as day. I must have seen the man come along the little footpath to the door, for I was watching the house. I saw the light in this room disappear. Wait a moment! Yes. Just after the light went out I struck a match and lit my

pipe.”

He had held the match close to his face in the hollow of his hands, and had carefully lit the pipe; and after the match had burned out, the glare had remained for a few seconds in his eyes. It was during those seconds that the Asiatic had crossed the lane and darted in by the door.

The next step then became clear. Elsie, counting her letters in the hall, had discovered that she had left one behind, she knew where she had left it. She knew that the moonlight was pouring into the room; and, leaving the lamp in the hall, she had returned to fetch it. In the moonlit room she had come face to face with the Asiatic.

He had been close to the screen when she met him, and there he had stood. No doubt he had begun by asking her for opium. No doubt, too—perhaps through some unanswered cry of hers, perhaps because she never cried out at all, perhaps on account of a tense attitude of terror not to be mistaken even in that vaporous silvery light—somehow, at all events, he had become aware that she was alone in the house; and his words and his demands had changed. She had backed away from him against the wall, moving the screen and the chair, and upsetting a book upon the table there. That was evident from the disorder in this corner. Upon the table stood Endicott’s chemicals for developing his photographs. Endicott saw the picture with a ghastly distinctness—her hand dropping for support upon the table and touching the bottles which she had arranged herself.

“Yes, she knew that that one nearest, the first she touched was the poison, and meant—what? Safety! It’s awful, but it’s the truth. Very probably she screamed, poor girl. But there was no one to hear her.”

The noise of the river leaping from rock pool to rock pool had drowned any sound of it which might else have reached to Endicott’s ears. The scream had failed. In front of her was a wild and desperate Pathan from the stokehold of a liner. Under her hand was the cyanide of potassium. Endicott could see her furtively moving the cork from the mouth of the bottle with the fingers of one hand, whilst she stood watching in horror the man smiling at her in silence.

“Don’t you feel that that is just how everything happened? Aren’t you sure of it?” he asked, turning to Mrs. Tyson with a dreadful appeal in his eyes. But she could answer it honestly.

“Yes, sir, that is how it all happened,” and for a moment Mr. Endicott was comforted. But immediately afterwards he sat down on a chair like a tired man and his fingers played upon the table.

“It would all be over in a few seconds,” he said lamentably to Mrs. Tyson. “But, oh, those seconds! They would have been terrible—terrible with pain.” His voice trailed away into silence. He sat still staring at the table. Then he raised his head towards Mrs. Tyson, and his face was disfigured by a smile of torment. “Hard luck on a young girl, eh, Mrs. Tyson?” and the very banality of the sentence made it poignant. “Everything just beginning for her—the sheer fun of life. Her beauty, and young men, and friends and dancing, the whole day a burst of music—and then suddenly—quite alone—that’s so horrible—quite alone, in a minute she had to—”

His voice choked and the tears began to run down his face.

“But the man?” Mrs. Tyson ventured.

“Oh, the man!” cried Endicott. “I will think of him tomorrow.”

He went up the stairs walking as heavily as when he had carried his daughter in his arms; and he went again into Elsie’s room. Mrs. Tyson blew out the candles upon his writing-table and arranged automatically some disordered sheets of foolscap. They were notes on the great principle of the Minimum Wage.

One of Them

At midnight on August 4th, Poldhu flung the news out to all ships, and Anthony Strange, on the *Boulotte,* took the message in the middle of the West Bay. He carried on accordingly past Weymouth, and in the morning was confronted with the wall of great breakers off St. Alban's Head. The little boat ran towards that barrier with extraordinary swiftness. Strange put her at a gap close into the shore where the waves broke lower, and with a lurch and a shudder she scooped the water in over her bows and clothed herself to her brass gunwale-top in a stinging veil of salt. Never had the *Boulotte* behaved better than she did that morning in the welter of the Race, and Strange, rejoicing to his very finger-tips, forgot the news which was bringing all the pleasure-boats, great and small, into the harbours of the south, forgot even that sinking of the heart which had troubled him throughout the night. But it was only in the Race that he knew any comfort. He dropped his anchor in Poole Harbour by mid-day, and fled through London to a house he owned on the Berkshire Downs.

There for a few days he found life possible. It was true there were sentries under the railway bridges, but the sun rose each day over a country ripe for the harvest, and the smoke curled from the chimneys of pleasant villages; and there was no sign of war. But soon the nights became a torture. For from midnight on, at intervals of five to ten minutes, the troop-trains roared along the Thames Valley towards Avonmouth, and the reproach of each of them ceased only with the morning. Strange leaned out of his window looking down the slopes where the corn in the moonlight was like a mist. Not a light showed in the railway carriages, but the sparks danced above the funnel of the engine, and the glare of the furnace burnished the leaves of the trees. Soldiers, soldiers, soldiers on the road to France. Then there came a morning when, not a hundred yards from his house, he saw a string of horses in the road and others being taken from the reaping-machines in a field. Strange returned to town and dined with a Mrs. Kenway, his best friend, and to her he unburdened his soul.

"I am ashamed… don't know how to look people in the face…. I never thought to be so utterly unhappy. I am thirty and useless. I cumber the ground."

The look of surprise with which his friend turned to him hurt him like the cut of a whip. "Of course you can't help," it seemed to say. "The world is for the strong, this year and the next, and for how many more?"

Strange had to lie on his back for some hours each day, and he suffered off and on always. But that had been his lot since boyhood, and he had made light of his infirmity and grown used to it until this 4th of August. He had consoled himself with the knowledge that to the world he looked only rather delicate. He was tall, and not set apart from his fellows.

“Now,” he said. “I wish that everybody knew. Yes, I wish that I showed that service was impossible. To think of us sitting here round a dinner-table—as we used to! Oh, I know what you’ll think! I have the morbid sensitiveness of sick men. Perhaps you are right.”

“I don’t think it at all,” she said, and she set herself to comfort him.

Strange went from the dinner-party to his club. There was the inevitable crowd, fighting the campaign differently, cutting up the conquered countries, or crying all was lost. Some of them had written to the papers, all were somehow swollen with importance as though the war was their private property. Strange began to take heart.

“They are not ashamed,” he thought. “They speak to me as if they expected I should be here. Perhaps I am a fool.”

A friend sat down by his side.

“Cross went yesterday,” he said. “George Crawley was killed at *Mons*. Of course you have heard.”

Strange had not heard, and there rose before his eyes suddenly a picture of George Crawley, the youngest colonel in the army, standing on the kerb in St. James’s Street and with uplifted face blaspheming to the skies at one o’clock in the morning because of a whiskered degenerate dandy with a frilled shirt to whom he had just before been introduced. But his friend was continuing his catalogue.

“Chalmers is training at Grantham. He’s with the new army. Linton has joined the Flying Corps. Every day someone slips quietly away. God knows how many of them will come back.”

Strange got up and walked out of the club.

“I shall see you tomorrow,” his friend cried after him.

“No, I am going back to my boat.”

“For how long?”

“Till the war’s over.”

The resolution had been taken that instant. He loved the *Boulotte* better than anything else in the world. For on board of her he was altogether a man. She was fifty-five feet long over all, fourteen feet in beam, twenty-five tons by Thames measurement, and his debt to her was enormous. He had found her in a shed in the Isle of Wight, re-coppered her, given her a new boiler, fixed her up with forced draught, and taken out for himself after a year’s hard work a master’s certificate. He took her over to Holland, and since her bows worked like a concertina in the heavy seaway between Dover and Dieppe he strengthened them with cross-pieces. He never ceased to tinker with her, he groused at her, and complained of her, and sneered at her, and doted on her in the true sailor’s fashion. For some years past life had begun for him in the spring, when he passed Portland Bill bound westward for Fowey and Falmouth and the Scillies, and had ended in the late autumn, when he pulled the *Boulotte* up on the mud of Wootton Creek. Now he turned to her in his distress, and made a most miserable Odyssey. He spent a month in the estuary above Salcombe, steamed across to Havre, went down through the canals to Marseilles in the autumn of 1914, and sought one of the neutral coasts of the Mediterranean. Here, where men wore buttons in their coats inscribed, “Don’t speak to me of the war,” he fancied that he might escape from the shame of his insufficiency. He came to a pleasant harbour, with a broad avenue of trees behind the quay, and a little ancient town behind the trees.

“I will drop my anchor here,” he said, “until the war ends”; and he remained, speaking to no one but his crew, sleeping in his little cabin, and only going on shore to buy his newspapers and take his coffee. And after five weeks the miracle began to happen. He was sitting on his deck one morning reading a local newspaper. At right angles to him half a dozen steamers, moored in a line, with their sterns to the quay and their anchors out forward, were loading with fruit. He looked up from his paper, and his eyes fell upon the nearest ship, which was showing him her starboard broadside. He looked first of all carelessly, then with interest, finally he laid his paper down and walked forward. The boat had

received on the lower part of her hull, up to the Plimsoll line, a brilliant fresh coat of red paint. So far, of course, there was nothing unusual, but forward, halfway between her bows and her midships, and again aft on her quarter, she had a broad perpendicular line of the same red paint standing out vividly from the black of her upper plates. Strange called to his engineer, John Shawe, and pointed to the streaks.

“What do you make of them?” he asked.

Shawe shrugged his shoulders.

“Very wasteful it do seem, *sir,”* he said; and to a casual glance it did indeed appear as if the paint had been allowed, through some carelessness on deck, to drip down the side at those two points. Strange, however, was not satisfied. The bands of scarlet were too regular, too broad. He had himself rowed out in his dinghy past the steamer’s bows.

“That will do, Harry,” he said. “We can go back.”

On the port bows and quarter of the steamer he had seen the same vivid streaks. Strange spoke again to John Shawe.

“Waste isn’t the explanation, that’s sure. You go about the town a bit, don’t you? You know some of the men about the port. You might find out for me—quietly, you know—what you can about that boat”; and the phrase “quietly, you know,” made all at once a different man of John Shawe. Strange at this time was really more moved by curiosity than suspicion, but he did use the phrase, and John Shawe, a big, simple, south countryman, who knew his engine and very little else, swelled at once into a being of mystery, full of brow-twisting wisdom and portentously sly.

“I understand, sir,” he said in a knowing whisper. “I know my dooty. It shall be done.” He put on his best brass-buttoned coat that evening, and went down the three steps of the gangway ladder with a secret air, a sleuth; but he brought back his news nevertheless.

“All those boats, sir, are chartered by a German here named Rehnke.”

“But some of them are English. They are flying the red flag,” cried Strange in revolt.

“It’s God’s truth, sir, and here’s more of it. Every one of them’s bound for England, consigned to English firms. One’s for Manchester, two for Cardiff, one for Liverpool.”

“But it’s impossible. It’s trading with the enemy,” Strange exclaimed.

“That don’t apply to the enemy in neutral countries, they say. Oh, there’s a deal of dirty work going on in England. Will you come on deck?”

Strange nodded. The saloon door opened into the cockpit, and the cabin roof was the deck of the after-part of the *Boulotte.* They climbed by a little ladder out of the cockpit. It was twelve o’clock on a night of full moon.

“Look, sir,” said Shawe.

The English boat had sailed that afternoon. The starboard side of its neighbour was now revealed. Strange looked through his glasses and he saw. Over the bows of that tramp steamer at midnight a man was suspended on a plank, and he was painting a broad, perpendicular, red streak.

Strange thought over his discovery lying on his back in the saloon. Distinguishing marks on a row of ships chartered by a German—there was just one explanation for them! Strange did not even whisper it to John Shawe, but he went ashore the next morning and called upon the British Consul.

His card was taken into a room where two men were speaking. At once the conversation stopped, and it was not resumed. There was not a whisper, nor the sound of any movement. Strange had a picture in his mind of two men with their heads together staring at his card and exchanging an unspoken question. Then the clerk appeared again.

“Mr. Taylor will see you with pleasure,” he said.

As Strange entered the room a slim, elderly, indifferent gentleman, seated at a knee-hole table, gazed vaguely at him through his spectacles and offered him a chair.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Strange?” he asked, and since Strange hesitated, he turned towards his companion.

“This is Major Slingsby,” said the Consul. “He will not be in your way.”

Major Slingsby, a square, short, rubicund man of forty, with the face of a faun, bowed, and, without moving from his chair, seemed, nevertheless, to remove himself completely from the room.

“Not at all,” said Strange. He had not an idea that he was in the presence of the two shrewdest men in those parts. To him they were just a couple of languid people whom it was his duty to arouse, and he told his story as vividly as he could.

“And what do you deduce from these mysterious signs?” asked the Consul.

Strange’s answer was prompt.

“German submarines in the Mediterranean.”

“Oh! And why not the Channel?” asked Mr. Taylor. “These steamers are on their way there.”

To that question there was no reply. Strange rose. “I thought that I ought to tell you what I had noticed,” he said stiffly.

“Thank you, yes. And I am very grateful,” replied Taylor.

Major Slingsby, however, followed Strange out of the room.

“Will you lunch with me?” he asked, and the question sent the blood rushing into Strange’s face. He swung between his instinct to hide his head from any man who was doing service and his craving to converse with a fellow-countryman. The craving won.

“I shall be very pleased,” he stammered.

“Right. It is half-past twelve now. Shall we say one at the Cafe de Rome?”

As they sat against the wall by the window of the cafe Slingsby talked of ordinary matters, which any one of those in the chairs outside upon the pavement might overhear and be none the wiser. But he talked sagely, neither parading mysteries nor pretending disclosures. He let the mere facts of companionship

and nationality work, and before luncheon was over Strange was won by them. He longed to confide, to justify himself before a fellow-citizen of his miserable inertness. Over the coffee, indeed, he would have begun, but Slingsby saw the torrent of confession coming.

“Do you often lunch here?” he said quickly. “I do whenever I happen to be in the town. Sit in this window for an hour and you will see all the town paraded before you like a show, its big men and little men, its plots and its intrigues. There, for instance,” and he nodded towards a large, stout person with a blonde moustache, “is Rehnke—yes, that’s your man. Take a good look at him.”

Strange looked at the German hard. He looked also towards a youth who had been sitting for the last hour over a cup of coffee and a newspaper outside the window. Slingsby interpreted the look.

“He’s all right. He’s trying to listen, of course. Most foreigners do, whether they understand your language or not. And he doesn’t—not a word of it. I have been watching him. However, we may as well go, for I would very much like you to show me your little boat.”

Strange, eager and enthusiastic, jumped up from the table.

“Rather,” he cried. “She’s not big, of course, but she can keep the sea, especially since I strengthened her bows.”

“Oh, you have done that, have you?” said Slingsby, as he paid the bill. “That’s interesting.”

They crossed the boulevard to the quay and went on board the *Bovlotte*. Every inch of brass on her, from the stanchions round the deck to the engine-room telegraph, flashed, and she was varnished and white and trim like a lady fresh from her maid.

“What can you do with your forced draught?” asked Slingsby.

“Thirteen,” replied Strange proudly. “With a good wind astern fourteen. Once I went out past the Needles buoy—” and off he went in a glowing account of a passage to Cherbourg at the end of a stormy September. Slingsby never once interrupted him. He followed meekly from the rudder to the bow, where he examined with some attention the famous struts and cross-pieces.

“You have got a wireless, I see,” he said, looking up to the aerial, which, slackened and disconnected, dangled from the masthead.

“Yes. But it’s a small affair. However, I can hear four hundred miles if the night’s still. I can only send seventy.”

Slingsby nodded, and the two men returned to the saloon. There, at last, over a whisky and soda, Strange was encouraged to unload his soul. The torture of the August nights on the Berkshire Downs above the Thames Valley, the intolerable sense of uselessness; the feeling that he wore a brand of shame upon his forehead for all men to see, and the poignancy of the remorse which had shrivelled him when a wounded soldier from Ypres or Le Cateau limped past him in the street; all tumbled from his lips in abrupt, half-finished sentences.

“Therefore I ran away,” he said.

Slingsby sat back in his chair.

“So that’s it,” he said, and he laughed in a friendly fashion. “Do you know that we have all been greatly worried about you? Oh, you have caused a deuce of a fluttering I can tell you.”

Strange flushed scarlet.

“I was suspected!” he cried. “Good God!” It just wanted that to complete his utter shame. He had been worse than useless; he had given trouble. He sat with his eyes fixed, in the depths of abasement. Then other words were spoken to him:

“How long will it take you to bring your boat to Marseilles?”

“You want it, then?” said Strange.

“I can use you,” said Slingsby. “What’s more, you are necessary.”

Strange, with a buzzing head, got out his chart from a locker and spread it on the table. He took paper and a lead pencil and his compasses. He marked his course and measured it.

“Forty-seven hours’ steaming and six hours to get up steam. It’s four o’clock

now, and the day's Tuesday. I can be at Marseilles on Thursday afternoon at four."

"I have done a good day's work," said Major Slingsby, as he rose to his feet, and he meant it. Slingsby was an intelligence officer as well as an officer of intelligence, and since he had neither boats to dispose of nor money to buy them with, Anthony Strange was a Godsend to him. "But I don't want you until to-day week. I shall want a little time to make arrangements with the French."

The *Boulotte* steamed round the point at three o'clock on the appointed afternoon. The pilot took her through the Naval Harbour into the small basin where the destroyers lie, and by half-past she was berthed against the quay. Strange had been for the best part of two days on his bridge, but at eleven he was knocking at a certain door without any inscription upon it in the Port office, and he was admitted to a new Major Slingsby in a khaki uniform, with red tabs on the collar, and clerks typewriting for dear life in a tiny room.

"Hallo," said Slingsby. He looked into a letter-tray on the edge of his desk and took a long envelope from it and handed it to Strange. "You might have a look at this. I'll come on board tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, if I were you I should go to bed, though I doubt if you'll get much sleep."

The reason for that doubt became more and more apparent as the evening wore on. In the first place, when Strange returned, he found workmen with drills and hammers and rivets spoiling, the white foredeck of his adored *Boulotte*. For a moment he was inclined, like Captain Hatteras when his crew cut down his bulwarks for firewood, to stand aside and weep, but he went forward, and when he saw the work which was going on his heart exulted. Then he went back to the saloon, but as he stretched himself out upon the cushions he remembered the envelope in his pocket. It was stamped "On His Majesty's Service," and it contained the announcement that one Anthony Strange had been granted a commission as sub-lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. After that sleep was altogether out of the question. There was the paper to be re-read at regular intervals lest its meaning should have been misunderstood. And when its meaning was at last firmly and joyfully fixed in Strange's mind there was the paper itself to be guarded and continually felt, lest it should lose itself, be stolen, or evaporate into air. Towards midnight, indeed, he did begin to doze off, but then a lighter came alongside and dumped ten tons of Welsh steam coal on board, all that he could hold, it's true, but that gave him ten days' steaming at

ordinary draught. And at eight o'clock to the minute Slingsby hailed him from the quay.

"You will go back now to your old harbour," he said. "You have been a little cruise down the coast, that's all. Just look out for a sailing schooner called the *Santa Maria del Pilar.* She ought to turn up in seven days from now to take on board a good many barrels of carbonate of soda. I'll come by train at the same time. If she arrives before and takes her cargo on board, you can wire to me through the Consul and then—act on your own discretion."

Strange drew a long breath, and his eyes shone.

"But she won't, I think," said Slingsby. "By the way, you were at Rugby with Russell of my regiment, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"And you know Cowper, who was admiral out here?"

"Yes, he's my uncle."

"Exactly."

Strange smiled. It was clear that a good many inquiries must have been made about him over the telegraph wires during the last week.

"Well, that's all, I think," said Slingsby. "You'll push off as soon as you can, and good luck."

But there was one further ceremony before the *Boulotte* was ready for sea. The small crew was signed on under the Naval Discipline Act. Then she put out, rounded the point, and headed for her destination over a smooth sunlit sea, with, by the way, an extra hand on board and a fine new capstan on her foredeck. Two days later she was moored in her old position, and Strange went to bed. The excitement was over, a black depression bore him down; he was deadly tired, and his back hurt him exceedingly. What was he doing at all with work of this kind? If he had to "act on his own discretion," could he do it with any sort of profit? Such questions plagued him for two days more, whilst he lay and suffered. But then relief came. He slept soundly and without pain, and rose the next morning in a terror lest the *Santa Maria del Pilar* should have come and

gone. He went up on to the deck and searched the harbour with his glasses. There was but one sailing boat taking in cargo, and she a brigantine named the *Richard,* with the Norwegian flag painted on her sides. Strange hurried to the Consul, and returned with a mind at ease. The *Santa Maria del Pilar* had not yet sailed in between the moles. Nor did she come until the next afternoon, by which time Slingsby was on board the *Baulotte.*

“There she is,” said Strange in a whisper of excitement, looking seawards. She sailed in with the sunset and a fair wind, a white schooner like a great golden bird of the sea, and she was nursed by a tug into a berth on the opposite side of the harbour. Slingsby and Strange dined at the Cafe de Rome and came on board again at nine. The great globes of electric light on their high pillars about the quays shone down upon the still, black water of the harbour. It was very quiet. From the cockpit of the *Boulotte* the two men looked across to the schooner.

“I think there’s a lighter alongside of her, isn’t there?” said Slingsby.

Strange, whose eyesight was remarkable, answered:

“Yes, a lighter loaded with barrels.”

“Some carbonate of soda,” said Slingsby, with a grin. They went into the cockpit, leaving the door open.

It was a hot night, and in a cafe beyond the trees a band was playing the compelling music of *Louise.* Strange listened to it, deeply stirred. Life had so changed for him that he had risen from the depths during the last weeks. Then Slingsby raised his hand.

“Listen!”

With the distant music there mingled now the creaking of a winch. Strange extinguished the light, and both men crept out from the cockpit. The sound came from the *Santa Maria del Pilar,* and they could see the spar of her hoisting tackle swing out over the lighter and inboard over the ship’s deck.

“She’s loading,” said Strange, in a low voice.

“Yes,” answered Slingsby; “she’s loading.” And his voice purred like a contented cat.

He slept on a bed made up in the saloon that night, Strange in his tiny cabin, and at nine o'clock the next morning, as they sat at breakfast, they saw the *Santa Maria del Pilar* make for the sea.

"We ought to follow, oughtn't we?" said Strange anxiously.

"There's no hurry."

"But she'll do nine knots in this breeze." Strange watched her with the eye of knowledge as she leaned over ever so slightly from the wind. "She might give us the slip."

Slingsby went on eating unconcernedly.

"She will," he answered. "We are not after her, my friend. Got your chart?"

Strange fetched it from the locker and spread it out on the table.

"Do you see a small island with a lighthouse?"

"Yes."

"Four miles west-south-west of the lighthouse. Got it?"

"Yes."

"How long will it take you to get to that point?"

Strange measured his course.

"Five to five and a half hours forced draught."

"Good. Suppose we start at six this evening."

The *Boulotte* went away to the minute. At eight it began to grow dark, but no steaming light was hoisted on the mast, and no sidelamps betrayed her presence. In the failing light she became one with the sea but for the tiniest wisp of smoke from her chimney, and soon the night hid that. A lantern flashed for a while here and there on the forward deck in the centre of a little group, and then Slingsby came back to Strange at the wheel.

“It’s all right,” he whispered softly.

Nights at sea! The cool, dark tent of stars, the hiss and tinkle of waves against the boat’s side, the dinghy, slung out upon the davits, progressing above the surface of the water, the lamp light from the compass striking up on the brasswork of the wheel and the face of the steersman; to nights at sea Strange owed all the spacious moments of his crippled life. But this night was a sacred thing. He was admitted to the band of the young strong men who serve, like a novice into the communion of a church; and his heart sang within his breast as he kept the *Boulotte* to her course. At a quarter past eleven he rang the telegraph and put the indicator to “slow.” Five minutes later he stopped the engine altogether. Four miles away to the north-eastward a light brightened and faded.

“We are there,” he said, and he looked out over an empty sea.

Under Singsby’s orders he steamed slowly round in a circle, ever increasing the circumference, for an hour, and then the new hand—who, by the way, was a master gunner—crept aft.

“There it is, sir.”

A hundred yards from the port bow a dark mass floated on the sea. The *Boulotte* slid gently alongside of it. It was a raft made of barrels lashed together.

“We have seen those barrels before, my friend,” said Slingsby, his nose wrinkling up in a grin of delight. Before daybreak the work was done. Fifty empty barrels floated loose; there was a layer of heavy oil over the sea and a rank smell in the air.

“Now,” said Slingsby, in a whisper, “shall we have any luck, I wonder?”

He went forward. The capstan head had been removed, and in its place sat a neat little automatic gun, which could fling two hundred and seventy three-pound shells six thousand yards in a minute. For the rest of that night the *Boulotte* lay motionless without a light showing or a word spoken. And just as the morning came, in the very first unearthly grey of it, a wave broke—a long, placid roller which had no right to break in that smooth, deep sea. Slingsby dipped his hand into the cartridge box and made sure that the band ran free; the gunner stood with one hand on the elevating wheel, the other on the trigger; eight hundred yards away from the *Boulotte* there was suddenly a wild commotion of the water,

and black against the misty grey a conning tower and a long, low body of steel rose into view. U-whatever-its-number was taken by surprise. The whole affair lasted a few seconds. With his third shot the gunner found the range, and then, planting his shells with precision in a level line like the perforations of a postage stamp, he ripped the submarine from amidships to its nose. Strange had a vision for a second of a couple of men trying to climb out from the conning tower, and then the nose went up in the air like the snout of some monstrous fish, and the sea gulped it down.

“One of ‘em,” said Slingsby. “But we won’t mention it. Lucky you saw those red streaks, my friend. If a destroyer had come prowling up this coast instead of the harmless little *Boulotte* there wouldn’t have been any raft on the sea or any submarine just here under the sea. What about breakfast?”

Strange set the boat’s course for Marseilles, and the rest of that voyage was remarkable only for a clear illustration of the difference between the amateur and the professional. For whereas Strange could not for the life of him keep still during one minute, Slingsby, stretched at his ease on the saloon sofa, beguiled the time with quotations from the “Bab Ballads” and “Departmental Ditties.”

Raymond Byatt

Dorman Royle was the oddest hero for such an adventure. He followed the profession of a solicitor, and the business he did was like himself, responsible and a trifle heavy. No piratical dashes into the Law Courts in the hope of a great haul were encouraged in his office. Clients as regular in their morals as in their payments alone sought his trustworthy and prosaic advice. Dorman Royle, in a word, was the last man you would think ever to feel the hair lifting upon his scalp or his heart sinking down into a fathomless pit of terror. Yet to him, nevertheless, these sensations happened. It may be that he was specially chosen just because of his unflighty qualities; that, at all events, became his own conviction. Certainly those qualities stood him in good stead. This, however, is surmise. The facts are beyond all dispute.

In June, Royle called upon his friend Henry Groome, and explained that he wanted Groome's country house for the summer.

"But it's very lonely," said Groome.

"I don't mind that," replied Dorman Royle, and his face beamed with the smile at once proud and sheepish and a little fatuous which has only meant one thing since the beginning of the world.

"You are going to be married!" said Groome.

"How in the world did you guess?" asked Royle; but it must be supposed that there had been some little note of regret or jealousy in his friend's voice, for the smile died away, and he nodded his head in comprehension.

"Yes, old man. That's the way of it. It's the snapping of the old ties—not a doubt. I shall meet you from time to time at the club in the afternoon, and you will dine with us whenever you care to. But we shall not talk very intimately any more of matters which concern us. We shall be just a trifle on our guard against each other. A woman means that—yes. However, I do what I can. I borrow your house for my honeymoon."

Groome heard the speech with surprise. He had not expected to be understood with so much accuracy. He seemed to be looking at a new man—a stranger, almost certainly no longer his friend, but a man who had put friendship behind

him and had reached out and grasped a treasure which had transfigured all his world.

“And whom are you going to marry?” Groome asked; and the answer surprised him still more.

“Ina Fayle.”

“Ina—you don’t mean?”

“Yes, I do,” said Royle, and the note of his voice was a challenge. But Groome did not take it up. Ina Fayle, of course, he knew by sight and by reputation, as who in London at that time did not? She was a young actress who had not been content to be beautiful.

“Yes, she’s a worker,” suddenly said Royle. “She has had to work since she was sixteen, and what she is, sheer industry has made her. Now she is going to give up all her success.”

Groome wondered for a moment how in the world she could bring herself to do it. A girl of twenty-three, she had gained already so much success that she must find the world a very pleasant place. She had the joy of doing superbly the work she loved, and a reward besides, tremendous because so immediate, in the adoration of the public, in the great salary after she had been poor, and while she was young enough to enjoy every penny of it. Groome was still wondering when once more Royle broke in upon him.

“Yes. It’s the sort of renunciation which is much more surprising in a girl than it would be in a man. For the art of the stage is of much the same stuff as a woman’s natural life, isn’t it? I mean that beauty, grace, the trick of wearing clothes, the power of swift response to another’s moods, play the same large part in both. But, you see, she has character, as well as gifts—that’s the explanation.”

Royle looked at his watch.

“Come and see her, will you?”

“Now?”

“Yes. I promised that I would bring you round,” and as he got up from his chair

he added: “Oh, by the way, as to your house, I ought to have told you. Ina has a dog—a black spaniel—do you mind?”

“Not a bit,” said Groome, and he put on his hat.

The two men walked northwards, Royle at once extremely shy and inordinately proud. They crossed the Marylebone Road into Regent’s Park.

“That’s her house,” said Royle, “the one at the end of the terrace.”

Ina Fayle lived with a companion; she was not quite so tall as Groome, who had only seen her upon the stage, expected her to be. He had thought to find a woman a trifle cadaverous and sallow. But she had the clear eyes and complexion of a child, and her wealth of fair, shining hair spoke of a resplendent health. She came across the room and took Groome into a window.

“You know Dorman very well, don’t you? I want to show you something I have bought for him. Oh, it’s nothing—but do you think he will like it?”

She was simple and direct in her manner, with more of the comrade than the woman. She showed Groome a gold cigarette-case.

“Of course it will do. But you have already made him a better wedding-gift than that,” said Groome.

“I?” Her forehead puckered in a frown. “What gift?”

“A very remarkable gift of insight, which he never had before.”

She coloured a little with pleasure, and her eyes and her voice softened together.

“I am very glad,” she answered. “One takes a great deal. It is pleasant to give something in return.”

Dorman Royle and Ina Fayle were duly married towards the end of the month, and began their life together in the house which Groome had lent them.

It stood on the top of a hill amongst bare uplands above the valley of the Thames, in a garden of roses and green lawns. But the house was new, and the trees about it small and of Groome’s own planting, so that every whisper of wind

became a breeze up there, and whistled about the windows. On the other hand, if the wind was still there was nowhere a place more quiet, and the slightest sound which would never have been heard in a street rang out loud with the presumption of a boast. Especially this was so at night. The roar of the great trains racing down to the west cleft the air like thunder; yet your eyes could only see far away down in the river-valley, a tiny line of bright lights winking amongst the trees. In this spot they stayed for a week, and then Ina showed her husband a telegram summoning her to the bedside of her mother.

“It’s not very serious, as you see,” she said. “But she wants me, and I think that for a day or two I must go.”

She went the next morning. Dorman Royle was left alone, and was thoroughly bored until late on the night before Ina’s return. It was, in fact, not far from twelve o’clock when Royle began to be interested. He was sitting in the library when he heard very distinctly through the open window a metallic click. The sound was unmistakable. Somewhere in the garden a gate had been opened and allowed to swing back. What he had heard was the latch catching in the socket. He was interested in his book, and for a moment paid no heed to the sound. But after a second or two he began to wonder who at this hour in that lonely garden had opened a gate. He sat up and listened but the sound was not repeated. He was inclined to think, clear and distinct though the sound had been, that he had imagined it, when his eyes fell upon Ina’s black spaniel. He could no longer believe in any delusion of his senses. For the dog had heard the sound too. He had been lying curled up on the varnished boards at the edge of the room, his black, shining coat making him invisible to a careless glance. Now he was sitting up, his ears cocked and his eyes upon the window with the extraordinary intentness which dogs display.

Dorman Royle rose from his chair.

“Come,” he said, in a whisper, but the spaniel did not move. He sat with his nose raised and the lip of the lower jaw trembling, and his eyes still fixed upon the window. Royle walked softly to the door of the room. It opened on to a hall paved with black and white stone which took up the middle part of the house. Upon his right a door opened on to the drive, on his left another led out to a loggia and a terrace. Royle opened this second door and called again in a whisper to the spaniel:

“Come, Duke! Seek him out!”

This time the dog obeyed, running swiftly past his legs into the open air. Royle followed. It was a bright, moonlit night, the stars hardly visible in the clear sky. Royle looked out across the broad valley to the forest-covered Chilterns, misty in the distance. Not a breath of wind was stirring; the trees stood as though they had been metal. Three brick steps led from the terrace to the tennis-lawn. On the opposite side of the tennis-lawn a small gate opened on to a paddock. It was this gate which had opened and swung to. But there was no one now on the lawn or in the paddock, and no tree stood near which could shade an intruder. Royle looked at the dog. He stood upon the edge of the terrace staring out over the lawn; Royle knew him to be a good house-dog, yet now not a growl escaped him. He stood waiting to leap forward—yes, but waiting also for a friendly call from a familiar voice before he leapt forward; and as Royle realised that a strange thought came to him. He had been lonely these last days; hardly a moment had passed but he had been conscious of the absence of Ina; hardly a moment when his heart had not ached for her and called her back. What if he had succeeded? He played with the question as he stood there in the quiet moonlight upon the paved terrace. It was she who had sped across the paddock twelve hours before her time and opened the gate. She had come so eagerly that she had not troubled to close it. She had let it swing sharply to behind her. She was here now, at his side. He reached out a hand to touch her, and take hers; and suddenly he became aware that he was no longer playing with a fancy—that he believed it. She was really here, close to him. He could not see her—no. But that was his fault. There was too much dross in Dorman Royle as yet for so supreme a gift. But that would follow—follow with the greater knowledge of her which their life together would bring.

“Come, Duke,” he said, and he went back into the house and sat late in the smoking-room, filled with the wonder of this new, strange life that was to be his. A month ago and now! He measured the difference of stature between the Dorman Royle of those days and the Dorman Royle of to-day, and he was sunk in humility and gratitude. But a few hours later that night his mood changed. He waked up in the dark, and, between sleep and consciousness, was aware of some regular, measured movement in the room. In a moment he became wide awake, and understood what had aroused him. The spaniel, lying on the coverlet at the foot of the bed, was thumping with his tail—just as if someone he loved was by him, fondling him. Royle sat up; the bed shook and creaked under him, but the dog paid no heed at all. He went on wagging his tail in the silence and darkness

of the room. Someone must be there, and suddenly Royle cried aloud, impetuously, so that he was surprised to hear his own voice:

“Ina! Ina!” and he listened, with his arms outstretched.

But no answer came at all. It seemed that he had rashly broken a spell. For the dog became still. Royle struck a match and lighted the candle by his bed, straining his eyes to the corners of the room. But there was no one visible.

He blew out the candle and lay down again, and the darkness blotted out all the room. But he could not sleep; and—and—he was very careful not to move. It was not fear which kept him still—though fear came later—but a thrilling expectation. He was on the threshold of a new world. He had been made conscious of it already; now he was to enter it—to see. But he saw nothing. Only in a little while the spaniel’s tail began once more to thump gently and regularly upon the bed. It was just as if the dog had waited for him to go to sleep before it once more resumed its invisible communion. This time he spoke to the dog.

“Duke!” he whispered, and he struck a match. The spaniel was lying upon his belly, his neck stretched out, his jaws resting upon his paws. “Duke, what is it?”

The animal raised its head and turned a little to one side. The human voice could not have said more clearly:

“What’s the matter? You are interrupting us.”

The match burned out between his forefinger and thumb. Royle did not light another. He laid himself down again. But the pleasant fancy born in him upon the moonlit terrace had gone altogether from his thoughts. There was something to him rather sinister in the notion of the dog waiting for him to go to sleep and then, without moving from its place—so certain it was of the neighbourhood of some unseen being to whom it gave allegiance—resuming a strange companionship. He no longer thought of Ina—Ina as the visitor. He began to wonder how the dog had come to her, who had owned it before her. He plunged into vague and uncomfortable surmises. No doubt the darkness, the silence of the night, and his own sleeplessness had their effects. He lay in a strange exaltation of spirit, which deepened slowly and gradually into fear. Yes, he was afraid now. He had a sense of danger, all the more alarming because it was reasonless. There were low breathings about his bed; now some one bent over him, now a hand lightly touched the coverlet. He, the most unimpressionable of men, rejoiced

when a grey beam of light shot through a chink of the curtain and spread like a fan into the room. He turned over on his side and slept until the sun was high.

In the clear light of a July morning Royle's thoughts took on a more sober colour. None the less, he made a cautious inquiry or two that day from the gardener, and from the shops in the village. The answer in each case was the same.

"The house had no history, no traditions. It had only been built ten years back. There was nothing but a field then where the house now stood. Even the 'trees had been planted at the time the house was built."

Indeed, the assurance was hardly needed; for the house was new and bright as a hospital. There was hardly a dark corner anywhere, certainly nowhere a harbour for dark thoughts. Royle began to revert to his original fancy; and when that evening his wife returned, he asked her:

"Last night, just before midnight—what were you doing?"

They were together in a small library upon the first floor, a room with big windows opening upon the side of the house. The night was hot and the windows stood open, and close to one of them at a little table Ina was writing a letter. She looked up with a smile.

"Last night—just before midnight? I was asleep."

"Are you sure?"

Some note of urgency in his voice made her smile waver. It disappeared altogether as she gazed at him.

"Of course," she answered, slowly, "I am sure;" and then, after a little pause and with a slight but a noticeable hesitation, she added: "Why do you ask?"

Dorman Royle crossed over to her side and most unwisely told her:

"Because at midnight the gate into the paddock was opened and swung to without any hand to touch it. I had been thinking of you, Ina—wanting you—and I wondered."

He spoke half in jest, but there was no jesting reply. For a little while, indeed, Ina did not answer him at all. He was standing just a step behind her as she sat at the table in the window, so that he could not see her face. But her body stiffened.

“It must have been a delusion,” she said, and he walked forward and sat down in a chair by the table facing her.

“If so, it was a delusion which the dog shared.”

She did not change her attitude; she did not stir. From head to foot she sat as though carved in stone. Nor did her face tell him anything. It became a mask; it seemed to him that she forced all expression out of it, by some miracle of self-command. But her eyes shone more than usually big, more than usually luminous; and they held their secret too, if they had a secret to hold. Then she leaned forward and touched his sleeve.

“Tell me!” she said, and she had trouble to find her voice; and, having found it, she could not keep it steady.

“I am sorry, Ina,” he said. “You are frightened. I should not have said a word.”

“But you have,” she replied. “Now I must know the rest.”

He told her all that there was to tell. Reduced to the simple terms of narrative, the story sounded, even to him, thin and unconvincing. There was so little of fact and event, so much of suggestion and vague emotion. But his recollection was still vivid, and something of the queer terror which he had felt as he had lain in the darkness was expressed in his aspect and in the vibrations of his voice. So, at all events, he judged. For he had almost expected her to laugh at the solemnity of his manner, and yet Ina did not so much as smile. She listened without even astonishment, paying close heed to every word, now and then nodding her head in assent, but never interrupting. He was vaguely reminded of clients listening to his advice in some grave crisis of their affairs. But when he had finished she made no comment. She just sat still and rigid, gazing at him with baffling and inscrutable eyes.

Dorman Royle rose. “So it wasn’t you, Ina, who returned last night?” he said.

“No,” she answered, in a voice which was low, but now quite clear and steady. “I slept soundly last night—much more soundly than I usually do.”

“That’s strange,” said Royle.

“I don’t think so,” Ina answered. “I think it follows. *I was let alone.* Yes, that’s all of a piece with your story, don’t you see?”

Dorman Royle sprang up, and at his abrupt movement his wife’s face flashed into life and fear.

“What are you saying?” he cried, and she shrank as if she realised now what a dangerous phrase she had allowed her lips to utter.

“Nothing, nothing!” she exclaimed, and she set herself obstinately to her letter.

Royle looked at the clock.

“It’s late,” he said. “I’ll take the dog out for a run.”

He went downstairs and out at the front of the house. Tonight the air was mistier, and the moon sailed through a fleece of clouds. Royle walked to a gate on the edge of the hill. It may have been a quarter of an hour before he whistled to the dog and turned back to the house. From the gate to the house was perhaps a hundred yards, and as he walked back first one, then another, of the windows of the library upon the first floor came within his view. These windows stood wide open to the night, and showed him, as in a miniature, this and that corner of the room, the bookcases, the lamps upon the tables, and the top-rails of the chair-backs, small but very clear. The one window which he could not as yet see at all was that in which his wife sat. For it was at the far end of the room and almost over the front door. Royle came within view of it at last, and stopped dead. He gazed at the window with amazement. Ina was still sitting at the writing-table in the window, but she was no longer alone. Just where he himself had stood a few minutes before, a step behind her shoulder, another man was now standing—a man with a strong, rather square, dark face, under a mane of black hair. He wore a dinner-jacket and a black tie, and he was bending forward and talking to Ina very earnestly. Ina herself sat with her hands pressed upon her face and her body huddled in her chair, not answering, but beaten down by the earnestness of the stranger’s pleading. Thus they appeared within the frame of the window, both extraordinarily distinct to Royle watching outside there in the darkness. He could see the muscles working in the stranger’s face and the twitching of Ina’s hands, but he could hear nothing. The man was speaking in too low a voice.

Royle did not move.

“But I know the man,” he was saying to himself. “I have seen him, at all events. Where? Where?” And suddenly he remembered. It was at the time of a General Election. He had arrived at King’s Cross Station from Scotland late one night, and, walking along the Marylebone Road, he had been attracted by a throng of people standing about a lamp-post, and above the throng the head and shoulders of a man addressing it had been thrown into a clear light. He had stopped for a moment to listen; he had asked a question of his neighbour. Yes, the speaker was one of the candidates, and he was the man who now stood by Ina’s side.

Royle tried to remember the name, but he could not. Then he began to wonder whence the stranger had come. It was a good two miles to the village. How, too, had he managed to get into the house? The servants had gone to bed an hour before Royle had come out. The hall-door stood open now. He had left it open. The man must have been waiting some such opportunity—as he had done no doubt last night. Such a passion of anger and jealousy flamed up in Royle as he had never known. He ran into the hall and shot the bolts. He hurried up the stairs and flung open the door. Ina was still sitting at the table, but she had withdrawn her hands from her face, and, but for her, the room was empty.

“Ina!” he cried, and she turned to him. Her face was quiet, her eyes steady; there was a smile upon her lips.

“Yes?”

She sat just as as he had left her. Looking at her in his bewilderment, he almost came to believe that his eyes had tricked him, that thus she had sat all this while. Almost! For the violence of his cry had been unmistakable, and she did not ask for the reason of it. He was out of breath, too, his face no doubt disordered; yet she put no question; she sat and smiled—tenderly. Yes, that was the word. Dorman Royle stood in front of her. It seemed to him that his happiness was crumbling down in ruins about him.

“Ina!” he repeated, and the dog barked for admission underneath the window. The current of his thoughts was altered by the sound. His passion fell away from him. It seemed to him that he dived under ice.

“Ina!”

He sat quietly down in the chair on the other side of that table.

“You have had that dog some time?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“How did you get it?”

The answer came quite steadily but slowly, and after a long silence.

“A friend gave it to me.”

“Who?”

There was no longer any smile upon the girl’s face. Nor, on the other hand, was there any fear. Her eyes never for a second wavered from his.

“Why do you ask?”

“I am curious,” replied Royle. “Who?”

“Raymond Byatt.”

The name conveyed nothing to Royle. He did not even recollect it. But he spoke as if it were quite familiar to him.

“Raymond Byatt? Didn’t he stand for Parliament once in Marylebone?”

“Yes. He was defeated.”

Royle rose from his chair.

“Well, I had better go down and let the dog in,” he said, and he went to the door, where he turned to her again.

“But if he’s a friend of yours, you should ask him down,” he remarked. Ina drew herself up in her chair, her hands clinging to the arms of it.

“He killed himself a fortnight ago.”

The answer turned Royle into a figure of stone. The two people stared at one

another across the room in a dreadful silence; and it seemed as if, having once spoken, Ina was forced by some terrible burden of anguish to speak yet more.

“Yes,” she continued in a whisper, “a week before we married.”

“Did you care for him?”

Ina shook her head.

“Never.”

There were words upon the tip of Royle’s tongue —words of bitterness:

“It was he who came back last night. He came back for you. He was with you tonight—the moment after I left you. I saw him.” But he knew they would be irrevocable words, and with an effort he held his tongue. He went downstairs and let the dog in. When he returned to the library Ina was standing up.

“I’ll go to bed,” she said, and her voice pleaded for silence. “I am tired. I have had a long journey;” and he let her go without a word.

He sat late himself, wondering what in the morning he should do. The house had become horrible to him. And unless Ina told him all there was to tell, how could they go on side by side anywhere? When he went upstairs Ina was in bed and asleep. He left the door wide open between her room and his and turned in himself. But he slept lightly, and at some time that night, whilst it was still dark, he was roused to wakefulness. A light was burning in his wife’s room, and through the doorway he could see her. She had in her hand the glass of water which usually stood on a little table beside her bed, and she was measuring out into it from a bottle some crystals. He knew that they were chloral crystals, for, since she slept badly, she always kept them by her. He watched her shaking out the dose, and as he watched such a fear clutched at his heart as made all the other terrors of that night pale and of no account. Ina was measuring out deliberately enough chloral into that tumbler of water to kill a company. Very cautiously he drew himself up in his bed. He heard the girl stifle a sob, and as she waited for the crystals to dissolve her face took on a look of grief and despair which he had never in his life seen before. He sprang out of bed, and in an instant was at her side. With a cry Ina raised the glass to her lips, but his hand was already upon her wrist.

“Let me go!” she cried, and she struggled to free herself. But he took the glass from her, and suddenly all her self-command gave way in a passion of tears. She became a frightened child. Her hands sought him, she hid her face from him, and she would not let him go.

“Ina,” he whispered, “what were you doing?”

“I was following,” she said. “I had to. He stands by me, always, commanding me.” And she shook like one in a fever.

“Good God!” he cried.

“Oh, I have fought,” she sobbed, “but he’s winning. Yes, that’s the truth. Sooner or later I shall have to follow.”

“Tell me everything,” said Royle.

“No.”

But he held her close within the comfort of his arms and wrestled for her and for himself. Gradually the story was told to him in broken sentences and with long silences between them, during which she lay in his clasp and shivered.

“He wanted me to marry him. But I wouldn’t. He had a sort of power over me—the power of a bully who cares very much,” she said; and a little later she gave the strangest glimpse of the man. He would hardly have believed it; but he had seen the man, and the story fitted him.

“I was in Paris for a few days—alone with my maid. I went to see a play which was to be translated for me. He was in the same hotel, quite alone as I was. It was after I had kept on refusing him. He seemed horribly lonely—that was part of his power. I never saw anyone who lived so completely in loneliness. He was shut away in it as if in some prison of glass through which you could see but not hear. It made him tragic—pitiful. I went up to him in the lounge and asked if we couldn’t be just friends, since we were both there alone. You’ll never imagine what he did. He stared at me without answering at all. He just walked away and went to the hotel manager. He asked him how it was that he allowed women in his hotel who came up and spoke to strangers.”

“Ina—he didn’t!” cried Royle.

“He did. Luckily the manager knew me. And that night, though he wouldn’t speak to me in the lounge, he wrote me a terrible letter. Then, when you and I were engaged, he killed himself—just a week before we married. He tried to do it twice. He went down to an hotel at Aylesbury and sat up all night, trying to do it. But the morning came and he had failed. The servant who called him found him sitting in his bedroom at the writing-table at which he had left him the night before; and all night he had written not one word. Next day he went to another hotel on the South Coast, and all that night he waited. But in the morning—after he had been called—quite suddenly he found the courage—yes—” and Ina’s voice trailed away into silence. In a little while she began again.

“Ever since he has been at my side, saying ‘I did it because of you. You must follow.’ There was the chloral always ready. I found myself night after night, when you were asleep, reaching out my hand obediently towards it—towards it “

“Except last night,” Royle interrupted, suddenly finding at last the explanation of some words of hers which had puzzled him, “when he came here, and you were away.”

“And I slept soundly in consequence,” she agreed. “Yes. But tonight—if you hadn’t been here—I should have obeyed altogether.”

“But I am here,” said Royle, gently; and, looking up, he saw that the morning had come. He rose and pulled aside the curtains so that the clear light flooded the room.

“Ina, do something for me,” he pleaded, and she understood. She took the bottle of crystals, poured them into the basin, and set the tap running.

“Stay with me,” she said. “Now that I have told you, I believe that I shall sleep, and sleep without fear. When you came into the room before I was only pretending.”

She nestled down, and this time she did sleep. It seemed to Royle that the victory was won.

Some months later, however, a client talking over his affairs with Royle in his private office mentioned Raymond Byatt’s name. Royle leaned forward with a start.

“You knew that man?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied the client with a laugh. “He forged my name for a thousand pounds—and not mine alone. He was clever with his pen. But he came to the end of his tether at last. He saved himself from penal servitude by blowing his brains out.”

Royle jumped out of his chair.

“Is that true?”

“Absolutely.”

And Royle sat down suddenly.

“That’s the best piece of news I have ever had in my life,” he cried. Now for a sure thing the victory was his. He went home that evening in the highest spirits.

“What do you think, Ina, I discovered to-day?” he blurted out. “You’ll be as glad to hear as I was. Raymond Byatt didn’t kill himself for you, after all. He did it to save himself from a prosecution for forgery.”

There was a moment’s silence, and then Ina replied:

“Indeed!” and that was all. But Dorman Royle, to his perplexity, detected a certain unexpected iciness in her voice. Somehow that new insight which Groome had discovered in him had on this evening failed him altogether.

The Crystal Trench

I

It was late in the season, and for the best part of a week the weather had been disheartening. Even to-day, though there had been no rain since last night, the mists swirled in masses over a sunless valley green as spring, and the hillsides ran with water. It pleased Dennis Challoner, however, to believe that better times were coming. He stood at a window of the Riffelalp Hotel, and imagined breaches in the dark canopy of cloud.

“Yes,” he said, hopefully, “the weather is taking up.”

He was speaking to a young girl whose name he did not know, a desultory acquaintance made during the twelve hours which he had passed at the hotel.

“I believe it is,” she answered. She looked out of the window at two men who were sitting disconsolately on a bench. “Those are your men, aren’t they? So you climb with guides!”

There was a note of deprecation in her voice quite unmistakable. She was trying not to show scorn, but the scorn was a little too strong for her. Challoner laughed.

“I do. With guides I can go where I like, when I like. I don’t have to hunt for companions or make arrangements beforehand. I have climbed with the Blauers for five years now, and we know each other’s ways.”

He broke off, conscious that in her eyes he was making rather feeble excuses to cover his timidity and incompetence.

“I have no doubt you are quite right,” she replied. There was a gentle indulgence in her voice, and a smile upon her lips which cried as plainly as words, “I could tell you something if I chose.” But she was content to keep her triumphant secret to herself. She laid her hand upon the ledge of the window, and beat a little tattoo with her finger-tips, so that Challoner could not but look at them. When he looked he understood why she thus called his attention. She wore a wedding-ring.

Challoner was surprised. For she was just a tall slip of a girl. He put her age at nineteen or less. She was clear-eyed and pretty, with the tremendous confidence

of one who looks out at life from the secure shelter of a school-room. Then, with too conscious an unconsciousness, she turned away, and Challoner saw no more of her that day.

But the hotel was still full, though most of the climbers had gone, and in the garden looking over the valley of Zermatt, at six o'clock that evening, a commotion broke out about the big telescope. Challoner was discussing plans for the morrow with his guides by the parapet at the time, and the three men turned as one towards the centre of the clamour. A German tourist was gesticulating excitedly amidst a group of his compatriots. He broke through the group and came towards Challoner, beaming like a man with good news.

"You should see—through the telescope—since you climb. It is very interesting. But you must be quick, or the clouds will close in again."

"What do you mean?" Challoner asked.

"There, on the top of the Weisshorn, I saw two men."

"Now? At six o'clock in the evening—on a day of storm?" Challoner cried. "It's impossible."

"But I have seen them, I tell you."

Challoner turned and looked down and across the valley. The great curtain of cloud hung down in front of the hills like wool. The lower slopes of dark green met it, and on them the black pines marched up into the mist. Of rock and glacier and soaring snow not an inch was visible. But the tourist clung to his story.

"It is my first visit to the mountains. I was never free before, and I must go down tomorrow morning. I thought that even now I should never see them—all the time I have been here the weather has been terrible. But at the last moment I have had the good fortune. Oh, I am very pleased."

The enthusiasm of this middleaged German business man, an enthusiasm childlike as it was sincere, did not surprise Challoner. He looked upon that as natural. But he doubted the truth of the man's vision. He wanted so much to see that he saw.

"Tell me exactly what you saw," Challoner asked, and this was the story which

the tourist told.

He was looking through the telescope when suddenly the clouds thinned, and through a film of vapour he saw, very far away and dimly, a soaring line of black like a jagged reef, and a great white slope more solid than the clouds, and holding light. He kept his eye to the lens, hoping with all his soul that the wonderful vision might be vouchsafed to him, and as he looked, the screen of vapour vanished, and he saw quite clearly the exquisite silver pyramid of the Weisshorn soaring up alone in the depths of a great cavern of grey cloud. For a little while he continued to watch, hoping for a ray of sunlight to complete a picture which he was never to forget, and then, to his amazement and delight, two men climbed suddenly into his vision on to the top of the peak. They came from the south or the south-west.

“By the Schalligrat!” exclaimed Challoner. “It’s not possible!”

“Yes,” the tourist protested. He was sure. There was no illusion at all. The two men did not halt for a second on the top. They crossed it, and began to descend the long ridge towards the St. Nicholas valley.

“I am sure,” he continued. “One of the climbers, the one in front, was moving very slowly and uncertainly like a man in an extremity of weakness. The last was strong. I saw him lift the rope between them, which was slack, and shake the snow off it “

“You saw that?” exclaimed Challoner. “What then?”

“Nothing. The clouds closed again over the peak, and I saw no more.”

Challoner had listened to the story with a growing anxiety. He took the chair behind the telescope, and sat with his eye to the lens for a long while. But he saw only writhing mists in a failing light. He rose and moved away. There was no mountaineer that day in the hotel except himself. Not one of the group about the telescope quite understood the gravity of the story which had been told them—if it were true. But it could not be true, Challoner assured himself.

It was just possible, of course, that on a fine day some party which had adventured upon a new ascent might find itself on the top of the Weisshorn at six o’clock in the evening. But on a day like this no man in his senses would be on any ridge or face of that mountain at all, even in the morning. Yet the tourist’s

story was circumstantial. That was the fact which troubled Challoner. The traverse of the Weisshorn from the Schallijoch, for instance, was one of the known difficult climbs of the Pennine Alps. There was that little detail, too, of the last man shaking the snow from the slack of the rope. But no doubt the tourist had read the year-books of the Austrian Alpine Club. Certainly he must have been mistaken. He wanted to see; therefore he saw. It was inconceivable that the story should be true.

Thus Challoner thought all through that evening and the next day. But as he left the dining-room the manageress met him with a grave face, and asked him into her office. She closed the door when he had entered the room, and said:

“There has been an accident.”

Challoner’s thoughts flew back to the story of the tourist.

“On the Weisshorn?”

“Yes. It is terrible!” And the woman sat down, while the tears came into her eyes and ran down her cheeks.

Two young Englishmen, it appeared, Mark Frobisher and George Listen, had come up from the valley a week ago. They would not hear of guides. They had climbed from Wasdale Head and in the Snowdon range. The Alpine Club was a body of old fogies. They did not think much of the Alps.

“They were so young—boys! Mr. Frobisher brought a wife with him.”

“A wife?” exclaimed Challoner.

“Yes. She was still younger than he was, and she spoke as he did—knowing nothing, but full of pride in her husband, and quite confident in his judgment. They were children—that is the truth—and very likely we might have persuaded them that they were wrong—if only Herr Ranks had not come, too, from Vienna about the same time.”

Challoner began dimly to understand the tragedy which had happened. Ranks was well known amongst mountaineers. Forty years old, the right age for endurance, he was known for a passion for long expeditions undertaken with very small equipment; and for a rather dangerous indifference as to the

companions he climbed with. He had at once proposed the Schalligrat ascent to the two Englishmen. They had gone down to Randa, slept the night there, and in bad weather had walked up to the Weisshorn hut, with provisions for three days. Nothing more had been heard of the party until this very afternoon, when Ranks and George Liston, both exhausted and the latter terribly frost-bitten, staggered into the Randa hotel.

“That’s terrible,” said Challoner. But still more terrible was the story which the Austrian had to tell. He had written it out at once very briefly, and sent it up to the Riffelalp. The manageress handed the letter to Challoner.

“We stayed in the hut two days,” it ran, “hoping that the weather would lift. The next morning there were promising signs, and taking our blankets we crossed the Schalliberg glacier, and camped on the usual spur of the Schallihorn. We had very little food left, and I know now that we ought to have returned to Randa. But I did not think of the youth of my companions. It was very cold during the night, but no snow fell, and in the morning there was a gleam of sunshine. Accordingly we started, and reached the Schallijoch in four hours and a half. Under the top of the col we breakfasted, and then attacked the ridge. The going was very difficult; there was often a glaze of black ice upon the rocks, and as not one of us knew the ridge at all, we wasted much time in trying to traverse some of the bigger gendarmes on the western side, whereas they were only possible on the east. Moreover, the sunlight did not keep its promise: it went out altogether at half-past ten; the ridge became bitterly and dangerously cold, and soon after midday the wind rose. We dared not stop anywhere, and our food was now altogether exhausted. At two o’clock we found a shelter under a huge tower of red rock, and there we rested. Frobisher complained of exhaustion, and was clearly very weak. Listen was stronger, but not in a condition for a climb which I think must always be difficult and was now hazardous in the extreme. The cold had made him very sleepy. We called a council of war. But it was quite evident to me that we could not get down in the state in which we were, and that a night upon the ridge without food or drink was not to be thought of. I was certain that we were not very far from the top, and I persuaded my friends to go forward. I climbed up and over the red tower by a small winding crack in its face, and with great difficulty managed, by the help of the rope, to draw my friends up after me. But this one tower took more than an hour to cross, and on a little snow-col like a knife-edge on the farther side of it, Frobisher collapsed altogether. What with the cold and his exhaustion his heart gave out. I swear that we stayed with him until he died—yes, I swear it—although the wind was very dangerous to the rest

of us, and he was evidently dying. We stayed with him—yes. When all was over, I tied him by the waist with a piece of spare rope we carried to a splinter of rock which cropped out of the col, and went on with Listen. I did not think that we should either of us now escape, but the rock-towers upon the arete came to an end at last, and at six o'clock we stood on the mountain-top. Then we changed the order, Liston going now first down the easy eastern ridge. The snow was granulated and did not bind, and we made very slow progress. We stopped for the night at a height, I should think, of thirteen thousand feet, with very little protection from the wind. The cold was terrible, and I did not think that Liston would live through the night. But he did, and today there was sunlight, and warmth in the sunlight, so that moving very carefully we got down to the hut by midday. There, by a happy chance, we found some crusts and odds and ends of food which we had left behind; and after a rest were able to come on to Randa, getting some milk at the halfway chalet on the way down. Liston is frost-bitten in the feet and hands, but I think will be able to be moved down to the clinic at Lucerne in a couple of days. It is all my fault. Yes. I say that frankly. I alone am to blame. I take it all upon my shoulders. You can say so freely at the Riffelalp. 'Ranks takes all the blame.' I shall indeed write tomorrow to the Zurich papers to say that the fault is mine."

Challoner read the message through again. The assumption of magnanimity in the last few lines was singularly displeasing, and the eager assertion that the party had not left Probisher until he was actually dead seemed to protest overmuch.

"That's a bad letter," said Challoner. "He left Frobisher still alive upon the ridge," and the desolation of that death in the cold and the darkness and the utter loneliness of those storm-riven pinnacles soaring above the world seemed to him appalling. But the manageress had no thoughts to spare for the letter.

"Who will tell her?" she asked, rocking her body to and fro, and fixing her troubled eyes on Challoner. "It is you. You are her countryman."

Challoner was startled.

"What do you mean?"

"I told you. Mr. Frobisher brought a wife with him. Yes. They had only been married a couple of months. She is a year or two younger than he is—a child.

Oh, and she was so proud of him. For my part I did not like him very much. I would not have trusted him with the happiness of anyone I cared for. But she had given him all her heart. And now she must be told!”

“She is in the hotel now?” Challoner asked.

“Yes. You were talking to her yesterday.”

Challoner did not need the answer.

“Very well. I will tell her.” And he turned away, his heart sick at the task which lay before him. But before he had reached the door the woman called him back.

“Could we not give her just one more night of confidence and contentment? Nothing can be done until tomorrow. No one in the hotel knows but you and I. She will have sorrow enough. She need not begin to suffer before she must. Just one more night of quiet sleep.”

So she pleaded, and Challoner clutched at the pica. He was twenty-six, and up to the moment life had hidden from him her stern ordeals. How should he break the news? He needed time carefully to prepare the way. He shrank from the vision of the pain which he must inflict.

“Yes, it can all wait until tomorrow,” he said, and he went out of the office into the hall. There was a sound of music in the big drawing-room—a waltz, and the visitors were dancing to it. The noise jarred upon his ears, and he crossed towards the garden door in order to escape from it. But to reach the garden he had to pass the ballroom, and as he passed it he looked in, and the irony of the world shocked him so that he stood staring upon the company with a white face and open-mouthed. Frobisher’s widow was dancing. She was dancing with all the supple grace of her nineteen years, her face flushed and smiling, whilst up there, fourteen thousand feet high on the storm-swept ridge of the Weisshorn, throughout that bitter night her dead husband bestrode the snow, and nodded and swayed to the gale. As she whirled past the door she saw him. She smiled with the pleasant friendliness of a girl who is perfectly happy, and with just a hint of condescension for the weaker vessel who found it necessary to climb with guides. Challoner hurried out into the garden.

He went up to her room the next morning and broke the news to her as gently as he could. He was prepared for tears, for an overwhelming grief. But she showed

him neither. She caught at an arm of a chair, and leaning upon it, seated herself when he began to speak. But after that she listened, frowning at him in a perplexity like a child over some difficult problem of her books. And when he had finished she drew a long breath.

“I don’t know why you should try to frighten me,” she said. “Of course, it is not true.”

She would not believe—no, not even with Ranks’s letter in her hand, at which she stared and stared as though it needed decoding.

“Perhaps I could read it if I were alone,” she said at last, and Challoner left her to herself.

In an hour she sent for him again. Now indeed she knew, but she had no tears wherewith to ease her knowledge. Challoner saw upon her face such an expression of misery and torture as he hoped never to see again. She spoke with a submission which was very strange. It was only the fact of her youth, not her consciousness of it, which seemed to protest against her anguish as against an injustice.

“I was abrupt to you,” she said. “I am sorry. You were kind to me. I did not understand. But I understand now, and there is something which I should like to ask you. You see, I do not know.”

“Yes?”

“Would it be possible that he should be brought back to me?”

She had turned to the window, and she spoke low, and with a world of yearning in her voice.

“We will try.”

“I should be so very grateful.”

She had so desolate a look that Challoner made a promise of it, even though he knew well the rashness of the promise.

“You will go yourself?” she asked, turning her face to him.

“Of course.”

“Thank you. I have no friends here, you see, but you.”

Eight guides were collected that afternoon in the valley. Challoner brought down his two, and the whole party, under the guide-chief, moved up to the Weisshorn hut. Starting the next morning with a clear sky of starlight above their heads, they crossed the mountain by the eastern arete, and descending the Schalligrat, found young Probisher tied by the waist and shoulders to a splinter of rock as Ranks had described. He was astride a narrow edge of snow, a leg dangling down each precipice. His eyes stared at them, his mouth hung open, and when any stray gust of wind struck the ridge, he nodded at them with a dreadful pleasantry. He had the air, to Challoner’s eyes, of a live paralytic rather than of a man frozen and dead. His face was the colour of cheese.

With infinite trouble they lifted him back on to the mountain summit, and roped him round in a piece of stout sacking. Then they dragged him down the snow of the upper part of the ridge, carried him over the lower section of rock, and, turning off the ridge to the right, brought him down to the glacier.

It was then three o’clock in the afternoon, and half an hour later the grimmest episode of all that terrible day occurred. The lashing of the rope got loose as they dragged the body down the glacier, and suddenly it worked out of the sacking and slid swiftly past them down a steep slope of ice. A cry of horror broke from the rescue party. For a moment or two they watched it helplessly as it gathered speed and leapt into the air from one little hummock to another, the arms tossing and whirling like the arms of a man taken off his guard. Then it disappeared with a crash into a crevasse, and the glacier was empty.

The party stood for a little while aghast, and the illusion which had seized upon Challoner when he had first come in sight of the red rock-tower on the other ridge attacked him again. He could not get it out of his thoughts that this was a living man who had disappeared from their gaze, so natural had all his movements been.

The party descended to the lip of the crevasse, and a guide was lowered into it. But he could not reach the bottom, and they drew him up again.

“That is his grave,” said Joseph Blauer, solemnly; and they turned away again and descended to Randa.

“How shall I meet that girl?” Challoner asked himself, in a passion of remorse. It seemed to him that he had betrayed a trust, and the sum of treachery deepened in him when he did tell it that night at the Riffelalp. For tears had their way with her at last. She buried her face in her arms upon the table, and sobbed as though her heart would burst.

“I had so hoped that you would bring him back to me,” she said. “I cannot bear to think of him lying for ever in that loneliness of ice.”

“I am very sorry,” Challoner stammered, and she was silent. “You have friends coming out to you?” he asked.

He went down into the hall, and a man whose face he remembered came eagerly towards him. Challoner was able to identify him the next moment. For the man cried out:

“It is done. Yes, it is in all the Zurich papers. I have said that I alone am to blame. I have taken the whole responsibility upon my shoulders.” Herr Ranks brimmed with magnanimity.

II

Towards Christmas of that year Challoner, at his chambers in the Temple, received a letter in an unfamiliar hand. It came from Mrs. Frobisher. It was a letter of apology. She had run away into hiding with her sorrow, and only during the last weeks had she grown conscious of the trouble which Challoner had taken for her. She had quite forgotten to thank him, but she did so now, though the thanks were overlate. Challoner was very glad to receive the letter. From the day when he had seen her off from the new station in the valley, he had lost sight of her altogether, but the recollection of her pale and wistful face at the carriage window had haunted him. With just that look, he had thought, might some exile leave behind every treasured thing and depart upon a long journey into perpetual banishment. This letter, however, had a hint, a perfume of spring-time. Stella Frobisher—by that name she signed—was beginning to recreate her life.

Challoner took a note of her address, and travelled into Dorsetshire on the Saturday. Stella Frobisher lived in a long and ancient house, half farm, half mansion, set apart in a rich country close to Arishmell Cove. Through a doorway one looked into a garden behind the house which even at that season was bright with flowers. She lived with the roar of the waves upon the shingle in her ears and the gorse-strewn downs before her eyes. Challoner had found a warm and cheerful welcome at that house, and came back again to it. Stella Frobisher neither played the hermit nor made a luxury out of her calamitous loss. She rebuilt her little world as well as she could, bearing herself with pride and courage. Challoner could not but admire her; he began to be troubled by what seemed to him the sterility of a valuable life. He could not but see that she looked forward to his visits. Other emotions were roused in him, and on one morning of summer, with the sea blue at her feet and the gorse a golden flame about her, he asked her to marry him.

Stella Frobisher’s face grew very grave.

“I am afraid that’s impossible,” she said, slowly, a little to his surprise and a great deal to his chagrin. Perhaps she noticed the chagrin, for she continued quickly, “I shall tell you why. Do you know Professor Kersley?”

Challoner looked at her with astonishment.

“I have met him in the Alps.”

Stella Frobisher nodded. “He is supposed to know more than anyone else about the movements of glaciers.”

Dimly Challoner began to understand, and he was startled.

“Yes,” he answered.

“I went to call on him at Cambridge. He was very civil. I told him about the accident on the Weisshorn. He promised to make a calculation. He took a great deal of trouble. He sent for me again and told me the month and the year. He even named a week, and a day in the week.” So far she had spoken quite slowly and calmly. Now, however, her voice broke, and she looked away. “On July 21st, twenty-four years from now, Mark will come out of the ice at the snout of the Hohlicht glacier.”

Challoner did not dispute the prophecy. Computations of the kind had been made before with extraordinary truth.

“But you won’t wait till then?” he cried, in protest.

For a little while she found it difficult to speak. Her thoughts were very far away from that shining sea and homely turf.

“Yes,” she said at last, in a whisper; “I am dedicated to that as a nun to her service.” And against that dead man wrapped in ice, his unconquerable rival, Challoner strove in vain.

“So you must look elsewhere,” Stella said. “You must not waste your life. I am not wasting mine. I live for an hour which will come.”

“I am in too deep, I am afraid, to look elsewhere,” said Challoner, gloomily. Stella Frobisher looked at him with a smile of humour playing about her mouth.

“I should like to feel sorry about that,” she said. “But I am not noble, and I can’t.”

They went together down to the house, and she said: “However, you are young. Many things will happen to you. You will change.”

But as a matter of fact he did not. He wanted this particular woman, and not

another. He cursed himself considerably for his folly in not making sure, when the rescue party got down from the rocks on to the glacier, that the rope about the sacking was not working loose. But such reproaches did not help forward his suit. And the years slipped away, each one a trifle more swiftly than that which had gone before. But in the press of a rising practice he hardly noticed their passage. From time to time Stella Frobisher came to town, sat in the Law Courts while he argued, was taken to shop in Bond Street, and entertained at theatres. Upon one such visit they motored—for motors had come now—on an evening in June down the Portsmouth road, and dined at the inn at Ockham. On their way she said, simply:

“It is the year.”

“I know,” replied Challoner. “Shall I come with you?”

She caught his hand tightly for a moment.

“Oh, if you could! I am a little afraid—now.”

He took her out to Randa. There were many changes in the valley. New hotels had sprung up; a railway climbed nowadays to the Riffelalp; the tourists came in hundreds instead of tens; the mountains were overrun. But Challoner’s eyes were closed to the changes. He went up through the cleft of the hills to where the glaciers come down from the Weisshorn and the Schallijoch and the Morning Pass; and as July drew on, he pitched a camp there, and stood on guard like a sentinel.

There came a morning when, coming out of his tent on to a knoll of grass, he saw below him on the white surface of the glacier, and not very far away, something small and black.

“It’s a pebble, no doubt,” he thought, but he took his axe and climbed down on to the ice. As he approached the object the surer he became. It was a round pebble, polished black and smooth by the friction of the ice. He almost turned back. But it was near, and he went on. Then a ray of sunlight shot down the valley, and the thing flickered. Challoner stooped over it curiously and picked it up. It was a gold watch, lying with its dial against the ice, and its case blackened save for a spot or two where it shone. The glass was missing and the hands broken, and it had stopped. Challoner opened it at the back; the tiny wheels, the coil of the mainspring, were as bright as on the day when the watch was sold. It

might have been dropped there out of a pocket a day or two ago. But ice has its whims and vagaries. Here it will grind to powder, there it will encase and preserve. The watch might have come out of the ice during this past night. Was the glacier indeed giving up its secrets?

Challoner held the watch in his hand, gazing out with blind eyes over the empty, silent world of rock and ice. The feel of it was magical. It was as though he gazed into the sorcerer's pot of ink, so vivid and near were those vanished days at the Riffelalp and the dreadful quest on the silver peak now soaring high above his head. He continued his search that morning. Late in the afternoon he burst into the hotel at Randa. Stella Frobisher drew him away into the garden, where they were alone. He gave the watch into her hands, and she clasped it swiftly against her heart with an unearthly look of exaltation upon her face.

"It is his?" asked Challoner.

"Yes. I will go up."

Challoner looked at her doubtfully. He had been prepared to refuse her plea, but he had seen, and having seen, he consented.

"Tomorrow—early. Trust me. That will be time enough."

He collected porters that evening, and at daybreak they walked out from the chalets and up the bank of the glacier, left the porters by his tent, and he led her alone across the glacier and stopped.

"Here," he said. In front of her the glacier spread out like a vast fan within the cup of the hills, but it was empty.

"Where?" she asked, in a whisper, and Challoner looked at her out of troubled eyes, and did not answer. Then she looked down, and at her feet just below the surface of the glacier, as under a thick sheet of crystal, she saw after all these years Mark Frobisher. She dropped on her knees with a loud cry, and to Challoner the truth about all these years came home with a dreadful shock.

Under the ice Mark Frobisher lay quietly, like a youth asleep. The twenty-four years had cut not a line about his mouth, not a wrinkle about his eyes. The glacier had used him even more tenderly than it had used his watch. The years had taken no toll of him. He was as young, his features were as clear and

handsome, as on the day when he had set out upon his tragic expedition. And over him bent his wife, a woman worn, lined, old. For the first time Challoner realised that all her youth had long since gone, and he understood for the first time that, as it was with her, so, too, it was with him. Often enough he had said, “Oh, yes, I am getting on. The years are passing.” But he had used the words with a laugh, deferring to convention by the utterance of the proper meaningless thing. Now he understood the meaningless thing meant the best part of everything. Stella Probisher and he were just a couple of old people, and their good years had all been wasted.

He gently raised Stella Frobisher to her feet.

“Will you stand aside for a little?” he said. “I will call you.”

She moved obediently a few yards away, and Challoner summoned the porters. Very carefully they cut the ice away. Then he called aloud:

“Stella!” And she returned.

There was no sheet of ice between them now; the young man and the worn woman who had spent a couple of months of their youth together met thus at last. But the meeting was as brief as a spark.

The airs of heaven beat upon Mark Frobisher, and suddenly his face seemed to quiver and his features to be obscured. Stella uttered a scream of terror, and covered her face with her hands. For from head to foot the youth crumbled into dust and was not. And some small trifle tinkled on the ice with a metallic sound.

Challoner saw it shining at the bottom of the shallow trench of ice. It was a gold locket on a thin chain. It was still quite bright, for it had been worn round the neck and under the clothes. Challoner stooped and picked it up and opened it. A face stared boldly out at him, the face of a girl, pretty and quite vulgar, and quite strange to him. A forgotten saying took shape slowly in his memory. What was it that the woman who had managed the hotel at the Riffelalp had said to him of Frobisher?

“I did not like him. I should not trust him.”

He looked up to see Stella Frobisher watching him with a white face and brooding eyes.

“What is that?” she asked.

Challoner shut the locket.

“A portrait of you,” he said, hastily.

“He had no locket with a portrait of me,” said Stella Frobisher.

Over the shoulder of a hill the sun leapt into the sky and flooded the world with gold.

The House of Terror

There are eager spirits who enter upon each morning like adventurers upon an unknown sea. Mr. Rupert Glynn, however, was not of that company. He had been christened “Rupert” in an ironical moment, for he preferred the day to be humdrum. Possessed of an easy independence, which he had never done a stroke of work to enlarge, he remained a bachelor, not from lack of opportunity to become a husband, but in order that his comfort might not be disarranged.

“A hunting-box in the Midlands,” he used to say, “a set of chambers in the Albany, the season in town, a cure in the autumn at some French spa where a modest game of baccarat can be enjoyed, and a five-pound note in my pocket at the service of a friend— these conditions satisfy my simple wants, and I can rub along.”

Contentment had rounded his figure, and he was a little thicker in the jaw and redder in the face than he used to be. But his eye was clear, and he had many friends, a fact for which it was easy to account. For there was a pleasant earthliness about him which made him restful company. It seemed impossible that strange startling things could happen in his presence; he had so stolid and comfortable a look, his life was so customary and sane. “When I am frightened by queer shuffling sounds in the dead of night,” said a nervous friend of his, “I think of Rupert Glynn and I am comforted.” Yet just because of this atmosphere of security which he diffused about him, Mr. Glynn was dragged into mysteries, and made acquainted with terrors.

In the first days of February Mr. Glynn found upon his breakfast-table at Melton a letter which he read through with an increasing gravity. Mr. Glynn being a man of method, kept a file of the *Morning Post.* He rang the bell for his servant, and fetched to the table his pocket diary. He turned back the pages until he read in the space reserved for November 15th, “My first run of the year.”

Then he spoke to his servant, who was now waiting in the room:

“Thompson, bring me the *Morning Post* of November 16th.”

Mr. Glynn remembered that he had read a particular announcement in the paper on the morning after his first run, when he was very stiff. Thompson brought him the copy for which he had asked, and, turning over the pages, he soon

lighted upon the paragraph.

“Mr. James Thresk has recovered from his recent breakdown, and left London yesterday with Mrs. Thresk for North Uist.”

Glynn laid down his newspaper and contemplated the immediate future with gloom. It was a very long way to the Outer Hebrides, and, moreover, he had eight horses in his stable. Yet he could hardly refuse to take the journey in the face of that paragraph. It was not, indeed, in his nature to refuse. For the letter written by Linda Thresk claimed his presence urgently. He took it up again. There was no reason expressed as to why he was needed. And there were instructions, besides, which puzzled him, very explicit instructions. He was to bring his guns, he was to send a telegram from Loch Boisdale, the last harbour into which the steamer from Oban put before it reached North Uist, and from no other place. He was, in a word, to pretend that he had been shooting in a neighbouring island to North Uist, and that, since he was so near, he ventured to trespass for a night or two on Mrs. Thresk’s hospitality. All these precautions seemed to Glynn ominous, but still more ominous was the style of the letter. A word here, a sentence there—nay, the very agitation of the handwriting, filled Glynn with uneasiness. The appeal was almost pitiful. He seemed to see Linda Thresk bending over the pages of the letter which he now held in his hand, writing hurriedly, with a twitching, terrified face, and every now and then looking up, and to this side and to that, with the eyes of a hunted animal. He remembered Linda’s appearance very well as he held her letter in his hand, although three years had passed since he had seen her—a fragile, slender woman with a pale, delicate face, big dark eyes, and masses of dark hair—a woman with the look of a girl and an almost hothouse air of refinement.

Mr. Glynn laid the letter down again, and again rang for his servant.

“Pack for a fortnight,” he said. “And get my guns out. I am going away.”

Thompson was as surprised as his self-respect allowed him to be.

“Your guns, sir?” he asked. “I think they are in town, but we have not used them for so long.”

“I know,” said Mr. Glynn impatiently. “But we are going to use them now.”

Thompson knew very well that Mr. Glynn could not hit a haystack twenty yards

away, and had altogether abandoned a sport in which he was so lamentably deficient. But a still greater shock was to be inflicted upon him.

“Thompson,” said Mr. Glynn, “I shall not take you with me. I shall go alone.”

And go alone he did. Here was the five-pound note, in a word, at the service of a friend. But he was not without perplexities, to keep his thoughts busy upon his journey.

Why had Linda Thresk sent for him out of all her friends?

For since her marriage three years before, he had clean lost sight of her, and even before her marriage he had, after all, been only one of many. He found no answer to that question. On the other hand, he faithfully fulfilled Mrs. Thresk’s instructions. He took his guns with him, and when the steamer stopped beside the little quay at Loch Boisdale he went ashore and sent off his telegram. Two hours later he disembarked at Lochmaddy in North Uist, and, hiring a trap at the inn, set off on his long drive across that flat and melancholy island. The sun set, the swift darkness followed, and the moon had risen before he heard the murmurous thunder of the sea upon the western shore. It was about ten minutes later when, beyond a turn of the road, he saw the house and lights shining brightly in its windows. It was a small white house with a few out-buildings at the back, set in a flat peat country on the edge of a great marsh. Ten yards from the house a great brake of reeds marked the beginning of the marsh, and beyond the reeds the bog stretched away glistening with pools to the low sand-hills. Beyond the sand-hills the Atlantic ran out to meet the darkness, a shimmering plain of silver. One sapling stood up from the middle of the marsh, and laid a finger across the moon. But except that sapling, there were not any trees.

To Glynn, fresh from the meadowlands of Leicestershire with their neat patterns of hedges, white gates and trees, this corner of the Outer Hebrides upon the edge of the Atlantic had the wildest and most desolate look. The seagulls and curlews cried perpetually above the marsh, and the quiet sea broke upon the sand with a haunting and mournful sound. Glynn looked at the little house set so far away in solitude, and was glad that he had come. To his southern way of thinking, trouble was best met and terrors most easily endured in the lighted ways of cities, where companionship was to be had by the mere stepping across the threshold.

When the trap drove up to the door, there was some delay in answering Glynn’s

summons. A middleaged man-servant came at last to the door, and peered out from the doorway in surprise.

“I sent a telegram,” said Glynn, “from Loch Boisdale. I am Mr. Glynn.”

“A telegram?” said the man. “It will not come up until the morning, sir.”

Then the voice of the driver broke in.

“I brought up a telegram from Lochmaddy. It’s from a gentleman who is coming to visit Mrs. Thresk from South Uist.”

In the outer islands, where all are curious, news is not always to be had, and the privacy of the telegraph system is not recognised. Glynn laughed, and the same moment the man-servant opened an inner door of the tiny hall. Glynn stepped into a low-roofed parlour which was obviously the one living-room of the house. On his right hand there was a great fireplace with a peat fire burning in the grate, and a high-backed horsehair sofa in front of it. On his left at a small round table Thresk and his wife were dining.

Both Thresk and his wife sprang up as he entered. Linda advanced to him with every mark of surprise upon her face.

“You!” she cried, holding out her hand. “Where have you sprung from?”

“South Uist,” said Glynn, repeating his lesson.

“And you have come on to us! That is kind of you! Martin, you must take Mr. Glynn’s bag up to the guest-room. I expect you will be wanting your dinner.”

“I sent you a telegram asking you whether you would mind if I trespassed upon your hospitality for a night or so.”

He saw Linda’s eyes fixed upon him with some anxiety, and he continued at once:

“I sent it from Loch Boisdale.”

A wave of relief passed over Linda’s face.

“It will not come up until the morning,” she said with a smile.

“As a matter of fact, the driver brought it up with him,” said Glynn. And Martin handed to Mrs. Thresk the telegram. Over his shoulder, Glynn saw Thresk raise his head. He had been standing by the table listening to what was said. Now he advanced. He was a tall man, powerfully built, with a strongly-marked, broad face, which was only saved from coarseness by its look of power. They made a strange contrast, the husband and wife, as they stood side by side—she slight and exquisitely delicate in her colour, dainty in her movements, he clumsy and big and masterful. Glynn suddenly recalled gossip which had run through the town about the time of their marriage. Linda had been engaged to another—a man whose name Glynn did not remember, but on whom, so the story ran, her heart was set.

“Of course you are very welcome,” said Thresk, as he held out his hand, and Glynn noticed with something of a shock that his throat was bandaged. He looked towards Linda. Her eyes were resting upon him with a look of agonised appeal. He was not to remark upon that wounded throat. He took Thresk’s hand.

“We shall be delighted if you will stay with us as long as you can,” said Thresk. “We have been up here for more than three months. You come to us from another world, and visitors from another world are always interesting, aren’t they, Linda?”

He spoke his question with a quiet smile, like a man secretly amused. But on Linda’s face fear flashed out suddenly and was gone. It seemed to Glynn that she was at pains to repress a shiver.

“Martin will show you your room,” said Thresk. “What’s the matter?”

Glynn was staring at the table in consternation. Where had been the use of all the pretence that he had come unexpectedly on an unpremeditated visit? His telegram had only this minute arrived—and yet there was the table laid for three people. Thresk followed the direction of his visitor’s eyes.

“Oh, I see,” he said with a laugh.

Glynn flushed. No wonder Thresk was amused. He had been sitting at the table; and between himself and his wife the third place was laid.

“I will go up and change,” said Glynn awkwardly.

“Well, don’t be long!” replied Thresk.

Glynn followed Martin to the guest-room. But he was annoyed. He did not, under any circumstances, like to look a fool. But he had the strongest possible objection to travelling three hundred miles in order to look it. If he wanted to look a fool, he grumbled, he could have managed it just as well in the Midlands.

But he was to be more deeply offended. For when he came down into the dining-room he walked to the table and drew out the vacant chair. At once Thresk shot out his hand and stopped him.

“You mustn’t sit there!” he cried violently. Then his face changed. Slowly the smile of amusement reappeared upon it. “After all, why not?” he said. “Try, yes, try,” and he watched Glynn with a strange intentness.

Glynn sat down slowly. A trick was being played upon him—of that he was sure. He was still more sure when Thresk’s face relaxed and he broke into a laugh.

“Well, that’s funny!” he cried, and Glynn, in exasperation, asked indignantly:

“What’s funny?”

But Thresk was no longer listening. He was staring across the room towards the front door, as though he heard outside yet another visitor. Glynn turned angrily towards Linda. At once his anger died away. Her face was white as paper, and her eyes full of fear. Her need was real, whatever it might be. Thresk turned sharply back again.

“It’s a long journey from London to North Uist,” he said pleasantly.

“No doubt,” replied Glynn, as he set himself to his dinner. “But I have come from South Uist. However, I am just as hungry as if I had come from London.”

He laughed, and Thresk joined in the laugh.

“I am glad of that,” he said, “for it’s quite a long time since we have seen you.”

“Yes, it is,” replied Glynn carelessly. “A year, I should think.”

“Three years,” said Thresk. “For I don’t think that you have ever come to see us in London.”

“We are so seldom there,” interrupted Linda.

“Three months a year, my dear,” said Thresk. “But I know very well that a man will take a day’s journey in the Outer Islands to see his friends, whereas he wouldn’t cross the street in London. And, in any case, we are very glad to see you. By the way,” and he reached out his hand carelessly for the salt, “isn’t this rather a new departure for you, Glynn? You were always a sociable fellow. A hunting-box in the Midlands, and all the lighted candles in the season. The Outer Islands were hardly in your line.” And he turned quickly towards him. “You have brought your guns?”

“Of course,” said Glynn, laughing as easily as he could under a cross-examination which he began to find anything but comfortable. “But I won’t guarantee that I can shoot any better than I used to.”

“Never mind,” said Thresk. “We’ll shoot the bog tomorrow, and it will be strange if you don’t bring down something. It’s full of duck. You don’t mind getting wet, I suppose? There was once a man named Channing—” he broke off upon the name, and laughed again with that air of secret amusement. “Did you ever hear of him?” he asked of Glynn.

“Yes,” replied Glynn slowly. “I knew him.”

At the mention of the name he had seen Linda flinch, and he knew why she flinched.

“Did you?” exclaimed Thresk, with a keen interest. “Then you will appreciate the story. He came up here on a visit.”

Glynn started.

“He came here!” he cried, and could have bitten out his tongue for uttering the cry.

“Oh, yes,” said Thresk easily, “I asked him,” and Glynn looked from Thresk to Thresk’s wife in amazement. Linda for once did not meet Glynn’s eyes. Her own were fixed upon the tablecloth. She was sitting in her chair rather rigidly. One

hand rested upon the tablecloth, and it was tightly clenched. Alone of the three James Thresk appeared at ease.

“I took him out to shoot that bog,” he continued with a laugh. “He loathed getting wet. He was always so very well dressed, wasn’t he, Linda? The reeds begin twenty yards from the front door, and within the first five minutes he was up to the waist!” Thresk suddenly checked his laughter. “However, it ceased to be a laughing matter. Channing got a little too near the sapling in the middle.”

“Is it dangerous there?” asked Glynn.

“Yes, it’s dangerous.” Thresk rose from his chair and walked across the room to the window. He pulled up the blind and, curving his hands about his eyes to shut out the light of the room, leaned his face against the windowframe and looked out. “It’s more than dangerous,” he said in a low voice. “Just round that sapling, it’s swift and certain death. You would sink to the waist,” and he spoke still more slowly, as though he were measuring by the utterance of the syllables the time it would take for the disaster to be complete —“from the waist to the shoulders, from the shoulders clean out of sight, before any help could reach you.”

He stopped abruptly, and Glynn, watching him from the table, saw his attitude change. He dropped his head, he hunched his back, and made a strange hissing sound with his breath.

“Linda!” he cried, in a low, startling voice, “Linda!”

Glynn, unimpressionable man that he was, started to his feet. The long journey, the loneliness of the little house set in this wild, flat country, the terror which hung over it and was heavy in the very atmosphere of the rooms, were working already upon his nerves.

“Who is it?” he cried.

Linda laid a hand upon his arm.

“There’s no one,” she said in a whisper. “Take no notice.”

And, looking at her quivering face, Glynn was inspired to ask a question, was wrought up to believe that the answer would explain to him why Thresk leaned his forehead against the window-pane and called upon his wife in so strange a

voice.

“Did Channing sink—by the sapling?”

“No,” said Linda hurriedly, and as hurriedly she drew away in her chair. Glynn turned and saw Thresk himself standing just behind his shoulder. He had crept down noiselessly behind them.

“No,” Thresk repeated. “But he is dead. Didn’t you know that? Oh, yes, he is dead,” and suddenly he broke out with a passionate violence. “A clever fellow—an infernally clever fellow. You are surprised to hear me say that, Glynn. You underrated him like the rest of us. We thought him a milksop, a tame cat, a poor, weak, interloping, unprofitable creature who would sidle obsequiously into your house, and make his home there. But we were wrong—all except Linda there.”

Linda sat with her head bowed, and said not a word. She was sitting so that Glynn could see her profile, and though she said nothing, her lips were trembling.

“Linda was right,” and Thresk turned carelessly to Glynn. “Did you know that Linda was at one time engaged to Channing?”

“Yes, I knew,” said Glynn awkwardly.

“It was difficult for most of us to understand,” said Thresk. “There seemed no sort of reason why a girl like Linda should select a man like Channing to fix her heart upon. But she was right. Channing was a clever fellow—oh, a very clever fellow,” and he leaned over and touched Glynn upon the sleeve, “for he died.”

Glynn started back.

“What are you saying?” he cried.

Thresk burst into a laugh.

“That my throat hurts me tonight,” he said.

Glynn recovered himself with an effort. “Oh, yes,” he said, as though now for the first time he had noticed the bandage. “Yes, I see you have hurt your throat. How did you do it?”

Thresk chuckled.

“Not very well done, Glynn. Will you smoke?”

The plates had been cleared from the table, and the coffee brought in. Thresk rose from his seat and crossed to the mantelshelf on which a box of cigars was laid. As he took up the box and turned again towards the table, a parchment scroll which hung on a nail at the side of the fireplace caught his eye.

“Do you see this?” he said, and he unrolled it. “It’s my landlord’s family tree. All the ancestors of Mr. Robert Donald McCullough right back to the days of Bruce. McCullough’s prouder of that scroll than of anything else in the world. He is more interested in it than in anything else in the world.”

For a moment he fingered it, and in the tone of a man communing with himself, he added:

“Now, isn’t that curious?”

Glynn rose from his chair, and moved down the table so that he could see the scroll unimpeded by Thresk’s bulky figure. Thresk, however, was not speaking any longer to his guest. Glynn sat down again. But he sat down now in the chair which Thresk had used; the chair in which he himself had been sitting between Thresk and Linda was empty.

“What interests me,” Thresk continued, like a man in a dream, “is what is happening now—and very strange, queer, interesting things are happening now —for those who have eyes to see. Yes, through centuries and centuries, McCulloughs have succeeded McCulloughs, and lived in this distant, little corner of the Outer Islands through forays and wars and rebellions, and the oversetting of kings, and yet nothing has ever happened in this house to any one of them half so interesting and half so strange as what is happening now to us, the shooting tenants of a year.”

Thresk dropped the scroll, and, coming out of his dream, brought the cigar-box to the table.

“You have changed your seat!” he said with a smile, as he offered the box to Glynn. Glynn took out of it a cigar, and leaning back, cut off the end. As he stooped forward to light it, he saw the cigar-box still held out to him. Thresk had

not moved. He seemed to have forgotten Glynn's presence in the room. His eyes were fixed upon the empty chair. He stood strangely rigid, and then he suddenly cried out:

"Take care, Linda!"

There was so sharp a note of warning in his voice that Linda sprang to her feet, with her hand pressed upon her heart. Glynn was startled too, and because he was startled he turned angrily to Thresk.

"Of what should Mrs. Thresk take care?"

Thresk took his eyes for a moment, and only for a moment, from the empty chair.

"Do you see nothing?" he asked, in a whisper, and his glance went back again. "Not a shadow which leans across the table there towards Linda, darkening the candle-light?"

"No; for there's nothing to cast a shadow."

"Is there not?" said Thresk, with a queer smile. "That's where you make your mistake. Aren't you conscious of something very strange, very insidious, close by us in this room?"

"I am aware that you are frightening Mrs. Thresk," said Glynn roughly; and, indeed, standing by the table, with her white face and her bosom heaving under her hand, she looked the very embodiment of terror. Thresk turned at once to her. A look of solicitude made his gross face quite tender. He took her by the arm, and in a chiding, affectionate tone he said very gently:

"You are not frightened, Linda, are you? Interested—yes, just as I am. But not frightened. There's nothing to be frightened at. We are not children."

"Oh, Jim," she said, and she leaned upon his arm. He led her across to the sofa, and sat down beside her.

"That's right. Now we are comfortable." But the last word was not completed. It seemed that it froze upon his lips. He stopped, looked for a second into space, and then, dropping his arm from about his wife's waist, he deliberately moved

aside from her, and made a space between them.

“Now we are in our proper places—the four of us,” he said bitterly.

“The three of us,” Glynn corrected, as he walked round the table. “Where’s the fourth?”

And then there came to him this extraordinary answer given in the quietest voice imaginable.

“Between my wife and me. Where should he be?”

Glynn stared. There was no one in the room but Linda, Thresk, and himself—no one. But—but—it was the loneliness of the spot, and its silence, and its great distance from his world, no doubt, which troubled him. Thresk’s manner, too, and his words were having their effect. That was all, Glynn declared stoutly to himself. But—but—he did not wonder that Linda had written so urgently for him to come to her. His back went cold, and the hair stirred upon his scalp.

“Who is it, then?” he cried violently.

Linda rose from the sofa, and took a quick step towards him. Her eyes implored him to silence.

“There is no one,” she protested in a low voice.

“No,” cried Glynn loudly. “Let us understand what wild fancy he has! Who is the fourth?”

Upon Thresk’s face came a look of sullenness.

“Who should he be?”

“Who is he?” Glynn insisted.

“Channing,” said Thresk. “Mildmay Channing.” He sat for a while, brooding with his head sunk upon his breast. And Glynn started back. Some vague recollection was stirring in his memory. There had been a story current amongst Linda’s friends at the time of her marriage. She had been in love with Channing, desperately in love with him. The marriage with Thresk had been forced on her

by her parents—yes, and by Thresk's persistency. It had been a civilised imitation of the Rape of the Sabine Women. That was how the story ran, Glynn remembered. He waited to hear more from James Thresk, and in a moment the words came, but in a thoroughly injured tone.

"It's strange that you can't see either."

"There is some one else, then, as blind as I am?" said Glynn.

"There was. Yes, yes, the dog," replied Thresk, gazing into the fire. "You and the dog," he repeated uneasily, "you and the dog. But the dog saw in the end, Glynn, and so will you—even you."

Linda turned quickly, but before she could speak, Glynn made a sign to her. He went over to her side. A glance at Thresk showed him that he was lost in his thoughts.

"If you want me to help you, you must leave us alone," he said.

She hesitated for a moment, and then swiftly crossed the room and went out at the door. Glynn, who had let his cigar go out, lit it again at the flame of one of the candles on the dining-table. Then he planted himself in front of Thresk.

"You are terrifying your wife," he said. "You are frightening her to death."

Thresk did not reply to the accusation directly. He smiled quietly at Glynn.

"She sent for you."

Glynn looked uncomfortable, and Thresk went on:

"You haven't come from South Uist. You have come from London."

"No," said Glynn.

"From Melton, then. You came because Linda sent for you."

"If it were so," stammered Glynn, "it would only be another proof that you are frightening her."

Thresk shook his head.

“It wasn’t because Linda was afraid that she sent for you,” he said stubbornly. “I know Linda. I’ll tell you the truth,” and he fixed his burning eyes on Glynn’s face. “She sent for you because she hates being here with me.”

“Hates being with you!” cried Glynn, and Thresk nodded his head. Glynn could hardly even so believe that he had heard aright. “Why, you must be mad!” he protested. “Mad or blind. There’s just one person of whom your wife is thinking, for whom she is caring, for whose health she is troubled. It has been evident to me ever since I have been in this house—in spite of her fears. Every time she looks at you her eyes are tender with solicitude. That one person is yourself.”

“No,” said Thresk. “It’s Channing.”

“But he’s dead, man!” cried Glynn in exasperation. “You told me so yourself not half an hour ago. He is dead.”

“Yes,” answered Thresk. “He’s dead. That’s where he beat me. You don’t understand that?”

“No, I don’t,” replied Glynn.

He was speaking aggressively; he stood with his legs apart in an aggressive attitude. Thresk looked him over from head to foot and agreed.

“No,” he said, “and I don’t see why you should. You are rather like me, comfortable and commonplace, and of the earth earthy. Before men of our gross stamp could believe and understand what I am going to tell you, they would have to reach—do you mind if I say a refinement?—by passing through the same fires which have tempered me.”

Glynn made no reply. He shifted his position so that the firelight might fall upon Thresk’s face with its full strength. Thresk leaned forward with his hands upon his knees, and very quietly, though now and then a note of scorn rang in his voice, he told his story.

“You tell me my wife cares for me. I reply that she would have cared, if Channing had not died. When I first met Linda she was engaged to him. You know that. She was devoted to him. You know that too. I knew it and I didn’t mind. I wasn’t afraid of Channing. A poor, feeble creature—heaps of opportunities, not one of them foreseen, not one of them grasped when it came

his way. A grumbler, a bag of envy, a beggar for sympathy at any woman's lap! Why should I have worried my head about Channing? And I didn't. Linda's people were all for breaking off their engagement. After all, I was some good. I had made my way. I had roughed it in South America; and I had come home a rich man—not such a very easy thing, as the superior people who haven't the heart even to try to be rich men are inclined to think. Well, the engagement was broken off, Channing hadn't a penny to marry on, and nobody would give him a job. Look here!" And he suddenly swung round upon Glynn.

"I gave Channing his chance. I knew he couldn't make any use of it. I wanted to prove he wasn't any good. So I put a bit of a railway in Chili into his hands, and he brought the thing to the edge of bankruptcy within twelve months. So the engagement was broken off. Linda clung to the fellow. I knew it, and I didn't mind. She didn't want to marry me. I knew it, and I didn't mind. Her parents broke her down to it. She sobbed through the night before we were married. I knew it, and I didn't mind. You think me a beast, of course," he added, with a look at Glynn. "But just consider the case from my point of view. Channing was no match for Linda. I was. I wanted time, that was all. Give me only time, and I knew that I could win her."

Boastful as the words sounded, there was nothing aggressive in Thresk's voice. He was speaking with a quiet simplicity which robbed them quite of offence. He was unassumingly certain.

"Why?" asked Glynn. "Why, given time, were you sure that you could win her?"

"Because I wanted enough. That's my creed, Glynn. If you want enough, want with every thought, and nerve, and pulse, the thing you want comes along all right. There was the difference between Channing and me. He hadn't the heart to want enough. I wanted enough to go to school again. I set myself to learn the small attentions which mean so much to women. They weren't in my line naturally. I pay so little heed to things of that kind myself that it did not easily occur to me that women might think differently. But I learnt my lesson, and I got my reward. Just simple little precautions, like having a cloak ready for her, almost before she was aware that she was cold. And I would see a look of surprise on her face, and the surprise flush into a smile of pleasure. Oh, I was holding her, Glynn, I can tell you. I went about it so very warily," and Thresk laughed with a knowing air. "I didn't shut my door on Channing either. Not I! I wasn't going to make a martyr of him. I let him sidle in and out of the house, and

I laughed. For I was holding her. Every day she came a step or two nearer to me."

He broke off suddenly, and his voice, which had taken on a tender and wistful note, incongruous in so big a creature, rose in a gust of anger.

"But he died! He died and caught her back again."

Glynn raised his hands in despair.

"That memory has long since faded," he argued, and Thresk burst out in a bitter laugh.

"Memory," he cried, flinging himself into a chair. "You are one of the imaginative people after all, Glynn." And Glynn stared in round-eyed surprise. Here to him was conclusive proof that there was something seriously wrong with Thresk's mind. Never had Mr. Glynn been called imaginative before, and his soul revolted against the aspersion. "Yes," said Thresk, pointing an accusing finger. "Imaginative!"

I am one of the practical people. I don't worry about memories. Actual real things interest me—such as Channing's presence now—in this house." And he spoke suddenly, leaning forward with so burning a fire in his eyes and voice that Glynn, in spite of himself, looked nervously across his shoulder. He rose hastily from the sofa, and rather in order to speak than with any thought of what he was saying, he asked:

"When did he die?"

"Four months ago. I was ill at the time."

"Ah!"

The exclamation sprang from Glynn's lips before he could check it. Here to him was the explanation of Thresk's illusions. But he was sorry that he had not kept silent. For he saw Thresk staring angrily at him.

"What did you mean by your 'Ah'?" Thresk asked roughly.

"Merely that I had seen a line about your illness in a newspaper," Glynn

explained hastily.

Thresk leaned back satisfied.

“Yes,” he resumed. “I broke down. I had had a hard life, you see, and I was paying for it. I am right enough now, however,” and his voice rose in a challenge to Glynn to contradict him.

Nothing was further from Glynn’s thoughts.

“Of course,” he said quickly.

“I saw Channing’s death in the obituary column whilst I was lying in bed, and, to tell you the truth, I was relieved by it.”

“But I thought you said you didn’t mind about Channing?” Glynn interrupted, and Thresk laughed with a little discomfort.

“Well, perhaps I did mind a little more than I care to admit,” Thresk confessed. “At all events, I felt relieved at his death. What a fool I was!” And he stopped for a moment as though he wondered now that his mind was so clear, at the delusion which had beset him.

“I thought that it was all over with Channing. Oh, what a fool I was! Even after he came back and would sidle up to my bedside in his old fawning style, I couldn’t bring myself to take him seriously, and I was only amused.”

“He came to your bedside!” exclaimed Glynn.

“Yes,” replied Thresk, and he laughed at the recollection. “He came with his humble smirk, and pottered about the room as if he were my nurse. I put out my tongue at him, and told him he was dead and done for, and that he had better not meddle with the bottles on my table. Yes, he amused me. What a fool I was! I thought no one else saw him. That was my first mistake. I thought he was helpless…. That was my second.”

Thresk got up from his chair, and, standing over the fireplace, knocked the ash off his cigar.

“Do you remember a great Danish boar-hound I used to have?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied Glynn, puzzled by the sudden change of subject. “But what has the boar-hound to do with your story?”

“A good deal,” said Thresk. “I was very fond of that dog.”

“The dog was fond of you,” said Glynn.

“Yes. Remember that!” Thresk cried suddenly. “For it’s true.” Then he relapsed again into a quiet, level voice.

“It took me some time to get well. I was moved up here. It was the one place where I wanted to be. But I wasn’t used to sitting round and doing nothing. So the time of my convalescence hung pretty heavily, and, casting about for some way of amusing myself, I wondered whether I could teach the dog to see Channing as I saw him. I tried. Whenever I saw Channing come in at the door, I used to call the dog to my side and point Channing out to him with my finger as Channing moved about the room.”

Thresk sat down in a chair opposite to Glynn, and with a singular alertness began to act over again the scenes which had taken place in his sick room upstairs.

“I used to say, ‘Hst! Hst!’ ‘There! Do you see? By the window!’ or if Channing moved towards Linda I would turn the dog’s head and make his eyes follow him across the room. At first the dog saw nothing. Then he began to avoid me, to slink away with his tail between his legs, to growl. He was frightened. Yes, he was frightened!” And Thresk nodded his head in a quick, interested way.

“He was frightened of you,” cried Glynn, “and I don’t wonder.”

For even to him there was something uncanny and impish in Thresk’s quick movements and vivid gestures.

“Wait a bit,” said Thresk. “He was frightened, but not of me. He saw Channing. His hair bristled under my fingers as I pointed the fellow out. I had to keep one hand on his neck, you see, to keep him by me. He began to yelp in a queer, panicky way, and tremble—a man in a fever couldn’t tremble and shake any more than that dog did. And then one day, when we were alone together, the dog and I and Channing —the dog sprang at my throat.”

“That’s how you were wounded!” cried Glynn, leaping from his sofa. He stood staring in horror at Thresk. “I wonder the dog didn’t kill you.”

“He very nearly did,” said Thresk. “Oh, very nearly.”

“You had frightened him out of his wits.”

Thresk laughed contemptuously.

“That’s the obvious explanation, of course,” he said. “But it’s not the true one. I have been living amongst the subtleties of life. I know about things now. The dog sprang at me because—“He stopped and glanced uneasily about the room. When he raised his face again, there was a look upon it which Glynn had not seen there before—a look of sudden terror. He leaned forward that he might be the nearer to Glynn, and his voice sank to a whisper—“well, because Channing set him on to me.”

It was no doubt less the statement itself than the crafty look which accompanied it, and the whisper which uttered it, that shocked Glynn. But he *was* shocked. There came upon him—yes, even upon him, the sane, prosaic Glynn—a sudden doubt whether, after all, Thresk was mad. It occurred to him as a possibility that Thresk was speaking the mere, bare truth. Suppose that it were the truth! Suppose that Channing were here! In this room! Glynn felt the flesh creep upon his bones.

“Ah, you are beginning to understand,” said Thresk, watching his companion. “You are beginning to get frightened, too.” And he nodded his head in comprehension. “I used not to know what fear meant. But I knew the meaning well enough as soon as I had guessed why the dog sprang at my throat. For I realised my helplessness.”

Throughout their conversation Glynn had been perpetually puzzled by something unexpected in Thresk’s conclusions. He followed his reasoning up to a point, and then came a word which left him at a loss. Thresk’s fear he understood. But why the sense of helplessness? And he asked for an explanation.

“Because I had no weapons to fight Channing with,” Thresk replied. “I could cope with the living man and win every time. But against the dead man I was helpless. I couldn’t hurt him. I couldn’t even come to grips with him. I had just to sit by and make room. And that’s what I have been doing ever since. I have

been sitting by and watching—without a single resource, without a single opportunity of a counter-stroke. Oh, I had my time—when Channing was alive. But upon my word, he has the best of it. Here I sit without raising a hand while he recaptures Linda."

"There you are wrong," cried Glynn, seizing gladly, in the midst of these subtleties, upon some fact of which he felt sure. "Your wife is yours. There has been no recapture. Besides, she doesn't believe that Channing is here."

Thresk laughed.

"Do you think she would tell me if she did?" he asked. "No."

He rose from his chair and, walking to the window, thrust back the curtains and looked out. So he stood for the space of a minute. Then he came back and, looking fixedly at Glynn, said with an air of extraordinary cunning:

"But I have a plan. Yes, I have a plan. I shall get on level terms with Mr. Channing again one of these fine days, and then I'll prove to him for a second time which of us two is the better man."

He made a sign to Glynn, and looked towards the door. It was already opening. He advanced to it as Linda came into the room.

"You have come back, Linda! I have been talking to Glynn at such a rate that he hasn't been able to get a word in edgeways," he said, with a swift change to a gaiety of voice and manner. "However, I'll show him a good day's sport tomorrow, Linda. We will shoot the bog, and perhaps you'll come out with the luncheon to the sand-hills?"

Linda Thresk smiled.

"Of course I will," she said. She showed to Glynn a face of gratitude. "It has done you good, Jim, to have a man to talk to," and she laid a hand upon her husband's arm and laughed quite happily. Glynn turned his back upon them and walked up to the window, leaving them standing side by side in the firelight. Outside, the moon shone from a clear sky upon the pools and the reeds of the marsh and the low white sand-hills, chequered with their tufts of grass. But upon the sea beyond, a white mist lay thick and low.

“There’s a sea-fog,” said Glynn; and Thresk, at the fire, suddenly lifted his head, and looked towards the window with a strange intensity. One might have thought that a sea-fog was a strange, unusual thing among the Outer Islands.

“Watch it!” he said, and there was a vibration in his voice which matched the intensity of his look. “You will see it suddenly creep through the gaps in the sand-hills and pass over the marsh like an army that obeys a command. I have watched it by the hour, time and time again. It gathers on the level of the sea and waits and waits until it seems that the word is given. Then it comes swirling through the gaps of the sand-hills and eats up the marsh in a minute.”

Even as he spoke Glynn cried out:

“That’s extraordinary!”

The fog had crept out through the gaps. Only the summits of the sand-hills rose in the moonlight like little peaks above clouds; and over the marsh the fog burst like cannon smoke and lay curling and writhing up to the very reeds twenty yards from the house. The sapling alone stood high above it, like the mast of a wreck in the sea.

“How high is it?” asked Thresk.

“Breast high,” replied Glynn.

“Only breast high,” said Thresk, and there seemed to be a note of disappointment in his voice. However, in the next moment he shook it off. “The fog will be gone before morning,” he said. “I’ll go and tell Donald to bring the dogs round at nine tomorrow, and have your guns ready. Nine is not too early for you, I suppose?”

“Not a bit,” said Glynn; and Thresk, going up to the door which led from the house, opened it, went out, and closed it again behind him.

Glynn turned at once towards Linda Thresk. But she held up a warning hand, and waited for the outer door to slam. No sound, however, broke the silence. Glynn went to the inner door and opened it. A bank of white fog, upon which he saw his own shadow most brightly limned by the light behind him, filled the outer passage and crept by him into the room. Glynn closed the latch quickly.

“He has left the outer door open,” he said, and, coming back into the room he stood beside the fire looking down into Linda’s face.

“He has been talking to me,” said Glynn.

Linda looked at him curiously.

“How much did he tell you?”

“There can be little he left unsaid. He told me of the dog, of Channing’s death “

“Yes?”

“Of Channing’s return.”

“Yes?”

“And of you.”

With each sentence Glynn’s embarrassment had increased. Linda, however, held him to his story.

“What did he say of me?”

“That but for Channing’s death he would have held you. That since Channing died—and came back —he had lost you.”

Linda nodded her head. Nothing in Glynn’s words surprised her—that was clear. It was a story already familiar to her which he was repeating.

“Is that all?” she said.

“I think so. Yes,” replied Glynn, glad to get the business over. Yet he had omitted the most important part of Thresk’s confession—the one part which Linda did not already know. He omitted it because he had forgotten it. There was something else which he had in his mind to say.

“When Thresk told me that Channing had won you back, I ventured to say that no one watching you and Thresk, even with the most indifferent eyes, could doubt that it was always and only of him that you were thinking.”

“Thank you,” said Linda, quietly. “That is true.”

“And now,” said Glynn, “I want, in my turn, to ask you a question. I have been a little curious. I want, too, to do what I can. Therefore, I ask you, why did you send for me? What is it that you think I can do? That other friends of yours can’t?”

A slight colour came into Linda’s cheeks; and for a moment she lowered her eyes. She spoke with an accent of apology.

“It is quite true that there are friends whom I see more constantly than you, Mr. Glynn, and upon whom I have, perhaps, greater claims.”

“Oh, I did not mean you to think that I was reluctant to come,” Glynn exclaimed, and Linda smiled, lifting her eyes to his.

“No,” she said. “I remembered your kindness. It was that recollection which helped me to appeal to you,” and she resumed her explanation as though he had never interrupted her.

“Nor was there any particular thing which I thought you could do. But—well, here’s the truth—I have been living in terror. This house has become a house of terror. I am frightened, and I have come almost to believe “and she looked about her with a shiver of her shoulders, sinking her voice to a whisper as she spoke —“that Jim was right—that _he is _here after all.”

And Glynn recoiled. Just for a moment the same fancy had occurred to him.

“You don’t believe that—really!” he cried.

“No—no,” she answered. “Once I think calmly. But it is so difficult to think calmly and reasonably here. Oh “and she threw up her arms suddenly, and her whole face and eyes were alight with terror—“the very air is to me heavy with fear in this house. It is Jim’s quiet certainty.”

“Yes, that’s it!” exclaimed Glynn, catching eagerly at that explanation because it absolved him to his own common sense for the inexplicable fear which he had felt invade himself. “Yes, Jim’s quiet, certain, commonplace way in which he speaks of Channing’s presence here. That’s what makes his illusion so convincing.”

“Well, I thought that if I could get you here, you who—” and she hesitated in order to make her description polite—“are not afflicted by fancies, who are pleasantly sensible”—thus did Linda express her faith that Mr. Glynn was of the earth, earthy—“I myself should lose my terror, and Jim, too, might lose his illusion. But now,” she looked at him keenly, “I think that Jim is affecting you—that you, too—yes” —she sprang up suddenly and stood before him, with her dark, terror-haunted eyes fixed upon him—“that you, too, believe Mildmay Channing is here.”

“No,” he protested violently—too violently unless the accusation were true.

“Yes,” she repeated, nodding her head quietly. “You, too, believe that Mildmay Channing is here.”

And before her horror-stricken face the protest which was on the tip of his tongue remained unuttered. His eyes sought the floor. With a sudden movement of despair Linda turned aside. Even the earthliness of Mr. Glynn had brought her no comfort or security. He had fallen under the spell, as she had done. It seemed that they had no more words to speak to one another. They stood and waited helplessly until Thresk should return.

But that return was delayed.

“He has been a long time speaking to the keeper,” said Linda listlessly, and rather to break a silence which was becoming intolerable, than with any intention in the words. But they struck a chord of terror in Glynn’s thoughts. He walked quickly to the window, and hastily tore the curtain aside.

The flurry of his movements aroused Linda’s attention. She followed him with her eyes. She saw him curve his hands about his forehead and press his face against the pane, even as Thresk had done an hour before. She started forward from the fireplace and Glynn swung round with his arms extended, barring the window. His face was white, his lips shook. The one important statement of Thresk’s he now recalled.

“Don’t look!” he cried, and as he spoke, Linda pushed past him. She flung up the window. Outside the fog curled and smoked upon the marsh breast high. The moonlight played upon it; above it the air was clear and pure, and in the sky stars shone faintly. Above the mist the bare sapling stood like a pointing finger, and halfway between the sapling and the house Thresk’s head and shoulders showed

plain to see. But they were turned away from the house.

“Jim! Jim!” cried Linda, shaking the windowframe with her hand. Her voice rang loudly out on the still air. But Thresk never so much as turned his head. He moved slowly towards the sapling, feeling the unstable ground beneath him with his feet.

“Jim! Jim!” again she cried. And behind her she heard a strange, unsteady whispering voice.

“‘On equal terms!’ That’s what he said—I did not understand. He said, ‘On equal terms.’”

And even as Glynn spoke, both Linda and he saw Thresk throw up his arms and sink suddenly beneath the bog. Linda ran to the door, stumbling as she ran, and with a queer, sobbing noise in her throat.

Glynn caught her by the arm.

“It is of no use. You know. Round the sapling—there is no chance of rescue. It is my fault, I should have understood; He had no fear of Channing—if only he could meet him on equal terms.”

Linda stared at Glynn. For a little while the meaning of the words did not sink into her mind.

“He said that!” she cried. “And you did not tell me.” She crept back to the fireplace and cowered in front of it, shivering.

“But he said he would come back to me,” she said in the voice of a child who has been deceived. “Yes, Jim said he would come back to me.”

Of course it was a chance, accident, coincidence, a breath of wind—call it what you will, except what Linda Thresk and Glynn called it. But even as she uttered her complaint, “He said he would come back to me,” the latch of the door clicked loudly. There was a rush of cold air into the room. The door swung slowly inwards and stood wide open.

Linda sprang to her feet. Both she and Glynn turned to the open door. The white fog billowed into the room. Glynn felt the hair stir and move upon his scalp. He

stood transfixed. Was it possible? he asked himself. Had Thresk indeed come back to fight for Linda once more, and to fight now as he had fought the first time—on equal terms? He stood expecting the white fog to shape itself into the likeness of a man. And then he heard a wild scream of laughter behind him. He turned in time to catch Linda as she fell.

The Brown Book

A few friends of Murgatroyd, the physician, sat about his dinner-table, discussing that perplexing question, “How much of the truth should a doctor tell?” In the middle of the discussion a quiet voice spoke up from a corner, and all turned towards a middleaged man of European reputation who sat fingering the stem of his wineglass.

“It is dangerous to lay down a general rule,” said Sir James Kelsey. “But I should say, if you want to keep a secret tell half the truth. People accept it and pass on to their own affairs.” He hesitated for a moment and continued, rather slowly: “I am thinking of a tremendous secret which has been kept that way for a good number of years. I call it the story of the Brown Book.”

At once the discussion ceased. It was so seldom that Kelsey indulged in anything like a confidence. Now on this one evening amongst his brethren it seemed that he was in the mood to talk.

“All of you will remember the name of John Rymer, and some of you his meteoric career and the tragic circumstances of his death. There was no doubt that he was a master of surgery. Yet at the age of thirty-seven, at eleven o’clock on a July morning, after performing three operations with all his accustomed skill, he walked into his consulting-room and blew his brains out.”

Here and there a voice was raised.

“Yes, I remember.”

“It was overwork, I think.”

Sir James Kelsey smiled.

“Exactly,” he said. “That’s the half-truth. Overwork there was. I am familiar with the details of the inquest, for I married John Rymer’s niece. It was proved, for instance, that during the last week of his life he had been curtailing his operations and spending more time over his dressings—a definite policy of his when the strain became too heavy. Moreover, there was some mention made of a sudden reasonless fear which had attacked him, a fear that his practice was dropping away, and that he would be left with a wife and young family to

support, and no means to do it with. Well, we all know round this table that that particular terror is one of the commonest results of overwork. So overwork there undoubtedly was. A spell of tropical heat no doubt, too, had its effect. Anyway, here was enough for a quite acceptable verdict, and so the world thought. The usual platitudes about the tension of modern life made their appearance. The public read, accepted, and passed on to its own affairs. But behind John Rymer's death there lay a tremendous secret."

Once more he hesitated. Then he took a cigar from the box which his host held out to him, and said, in a kind of rush: "No one could make any use of it now. For there's no longer any evidence but my word, and I should deny it. It's overwork John Rymer died of. Let us not forget it."

And then he told the story of the Brown Book. At the end of it his cigar was still alight, for he smoked while he talked. But it was the only cigar alight in that room.

I was twenty-five, and I had bought a practice at Chailsey, a village deep amongst tall, dark trees in the very heart of the Berkshire Downs. You'll hardly find a place more pastoral and remote in all that country of remote villages. But a couple of training stables were established there, and, what with kicks and jumping accidents, there was a good deal of work at times. I quite liked the spot, and I liked it still more when Bradley Rymer and his daughter took the big house on the slope of the Down above the village.

John Rymer, the surgeon, had then been dead eight months, and Bradley Rymer was his brother, a shortish, broad man of forty-five with a big, pleasant face. Gossip had it that he had been very poor, so poor, indeed, that his daughter had made her living at a typewriting machine. There was no doubt, however, that he was rich now. "Canada's the country," he used to say. "I made my money out of Canadian land," and when he fell into conversation of a morning with any of the stable-boys on the gallops he was always urging them to better themselves in that country.

His daughter Violet—a good many of you know her as my wife—had little of his fore-gathering disposition. She was an extremely pretty girl of nineteen, with eyes which matched her name. But she held herself apart. She seldom came down into the village, and even when one met her in her own house there was a constraint in her manner and a look upon her face which I was at a loss to

understand. It wasn't merely trouble. It was a kind of perplexity, as though she did not know where to turn. For the rest, the couple did not entertain.

"We have had hard lives," Bradley Rymer said to me one rare evening when I dined there, "and a year or two of quiet is what we want beyond everything." And never did man speak a truer word.

Bradley Rymer had lived for three months at Chailsey when Queen Victoria died, and all the great kings and the little kings flocked from Europe to her funeral. We at Chailsey—like the rest of Great Britain—determined to set up a memorial, and a committee of five was appointed to determine the form it was to take.

"It must be a drinking-fountain," said I.

"No; a stained-glass window," the vicar interrupted; and there we were, Grayly the trainer and I on one side, the vicar and Hollams the grocer on the other. The fifth member of the committee was absent.

"Well, I shall go up and see Mr. Bradley Rymer this afternoon," I said. "He has the casting vote."

"You may do just as you please," said the vicar, with some acerbity—Bradley Rymer did not go to church; "but until Mr. Bradley Rymer condescends to be present at our committee meetings, I shall pay not the slightest attention to his opinion."

Thereupon the committee broke up. I had a good many visits to pay to patients, and it was close upon eight o'clock when I set out upon my walk, and darker than it usually is at that time of the year. Bradley Rymer, I knew, did not dine until late, and I hoped to catch him just before he and Violet sat down.

The house stood a good half-mile from the village, even by the short cut which I took up the side of the Down. It was a big, square Georgian house with rows of high, flat windows; a large garden of lawns and flowers and beech trees surrounded it; and the whole property was enclosed in high red-brick walls. I was kept for a little while at the great wrought-iron gates. That always happened. You rang the big bell, the corner of a white curtain was cautiously lifted in the window of the lodge, you were inspected, and at last the gates swung open. Berkshire people were slow in those days, and, like most country-folk, curious. I

walked up the drive to the house. The front door stood open. I rang the bell. A big mastiff came out from the hall and sniffed at me. But we were good friends, and he retired again to the corner. Finally a maidservant appeared. It was perhaps a curious fact that Bradley Rymer had no man-servant living in the house.

“A butler is a spy you set upon yourself,” he once said to me. Another case of the half-truth, you see. I accepted it, and passed on to my own affairs. So when only a maid answered the bell I was not surprised.

“Can I see Mr. Rymer?” I asked.

“He is in the library, I think, sir,” she answered.

“Very well. I know my way.” And, putting down my hat, I climbed the stairs.

The library was a long, comfortably-furnished room upon the first floor, lighted by a row of windows upon one side and lined to the ceiling with bookshelves upon the other. Rymer had a wonderful collection of books bound in vellum and calf, but he had bought the lot at a sale, and I don’t think he ever read one of them. However, he liked the room, and it was the one which he usually used.

I opened the door and went into the library. But the servant had been mistaken. The library was empty. I waited, however, and while I waited a noise in the next room attracted my attention. I don’t think that I was conscious of it at first, for when I did notice it, it seemed to me that the room had perceptibly darkened. It was so familiar a noise, too, that one wouldn’t notice it unless there were some special unsuitability of time and place to provoke one’s curiosity. For a busy man walks through life to the sound of it. It was the sharp tack-tack-tack of a typewriting machine, with the little clang and break when the end of a line is reached. I listened to it first of all surprised at the relentless rapidity with which the machine was worked, and then, wondering why at this hour, in this house of leisure and wealth, so tremendous an assiduity was being employed. Then in a rush the gossip of the village came back to me. Violet Rymer, in the days of her father’s poverty, had made her living in a typewriting office. Yes; but why should she continue so monotonous a practice now? I couldn’t think that she, if it were she, was keeping up her proficiency for amusement. You can always tell whether the typist is interested or whether she is working against time from the sound of the machine. In the former case it becomes alive, one is conscious of a personality; in the latter one thinks of an absent-minded clergyman gabbling

through the Lessons in church.

Well, it was just that last note which was being struck. The machine was racing to the end of a wearisome task, and, since already Violet Rymer was very much to me, I thought with a real discomfort of her bending over the keys. Moreover, I seemed to be stumbling upon a secret which I was not meant to know. Was this tack-tack-tack-ing the explanation of why Chailsey saw so little of her?

While I was asking myself this question a door opened and shut violently. It was the door into that next room, and as it was banged the typewriting ceased altogether. There was a moment's pause, and then a voice was raised in passion. It was Bradley Rymer's voice, but I hardly recognised it.

"What is it now?" he cried, bitterly. "A novel, a volume of sermons, a pamphlet? Am I never to see you, Violet? You remain hidden in this room, breaking your back for sixpence an hour. Why, I bought this house for you. My one aim was to get rich for you." And the girl interrupted him with an agonised cry.

"Oh, don't say that, father!"

"But I do say it." And suddenly his voice softened. "It's true, Vi. You know it's true. The one thing I hated was that you should lose all the fun of your youth at that grinding work. And now you're still at it. Why? Why?"

And through the door came her voice, in a passionate, broken reply:

"Because—because—I feel—that not even the clothes I am wearing really belong to me."

The dispute suddenly ceased. A third voice spoke so low that I could not hear the words, but I heard Bradley Rymer's startled reply:

"In the library?"

I had just time to get away into the farthest window before he entered the room. It was almost dark now, and he peered about in search of me. I moved from the window towards him.

"Oh, you are there, Kelsey," he said suavely. "We'll have a light. It's so confoundedly dark that I can hardly see you."

He rang a bell and a lamp was brought, which he took from the hands of the servant and set down on the corner of his writing-table between us.

“How long have you been here?” he asked, and—I can’t account for it—he stood facing me in his dinner-jacket, with his usual pleasant, friendly smile; but I suddenly became quite sure that he was dangerous. Yes, that’s the word—dangerous.

“Just a minute or so,” I answered, as indifferently as I could, and then, with a strangely swift movement, he crossed the room again to the fireplace and rang the bell.

“Will you tell Miss Violet that Dr. Kelsey is here?” he said to the parlourmaid, as soon as she appeared. “You will find her in the next room.”

He came softly back and seated himself at the writing-table.

“And why do you want to see me?” he asked, in a queer voice.

I spoke about the memorial, and he answered at random. He was listening, but he was not listening to me. In a sort of abstraction he drew open a drawer in his writing-table on a level with his hand, and every now and then he shut it, and every now and then he drew it open again.

I cannot hope to make you realise the uncanny feeling of discomfort which crept over me. Most of us at this table, I imagine, have some knowledge of photography and its processes. We have placed a gaslight paper in the developing-dish, and seen the face of our portrait flash out in a second on the white surface. I can never get accustomed to it. I can never quite look upon it as not a miracle. Well, just that miracle seemed to me to be happening now. Bradley Rymer suddenly became visible to me, a rogue, a murderous rogue, and I watched with an increasing fear that drawer in his table. I waited for his hand to slip into it.

But while I waited the door of the next room was opened, and Rymer and I both ceased to talk. We pretended no more. We listened, and, although we heard voices, we could not distinguish words. Both Violet and the servant were speaking in their ordinary tones, and Rymer and I were now on the far side of the room. An expression of immense relief shone upon Bradley Rymer’s face for a moment, and he rose up with the smile and the friendliness I knew.

“Will you stay to dinner?” he asked. “Do!” But I dared not. I should have betrayed the trouble I was in. I made a lame excuse and left the house.

It was now quite dark, and in the cool night air I began, before I had reached the lodge, to wonder whether I had not been misled altogether by some hallucination. Bradley Rymer brought to my memory the tragic case of his brother, and I asked myself for a moment if the long and late hours of a country practice were unbalancing me. But I looked back towards the house as I took the track over the turf, and the scene through which I had passed returned too vividly to leave me in any doubt. I could see Bradley Rymer clearly as he opened and shut the drawer of his writing-table. I could hear his voice raised in bitter reproach to Violet and the click of the typewriting machine. No, I had not been dreaming.

I had walked about a hundred yards down the slope when a sharp whistle of two notes sounded a little way off upon my right, and almost before I had stopped a man sprang from the grass at my very feet with a guttural cry like a man awakened from a doze. Had I taken another step I should have trodden upon him. The next moment the light from an electric torch flashed upon my face, blinding me. I stepped back and put up my hand to my eyes. But even while I raised my hand the button of the torch was released and the light went out. I stood for a moment in utter blackness, then dimly I became aware of some one moving away from in front of me.

“What do you want?” I cried.

“Nothing,” was the word spoken in answer.

I should have put the fellow down for one of the gipsies who infest those Downs in the summer, and thought no more about him, but for one reason. He had spoken with a pronounced German accent. Besides, there was the warning whistle, the flash of the torch. I could not resist the conviction that Bradley Rymer’s house was being watched.

I walked on without quickening my pace, for perhaps a hundred yards. Then I ran, and as fast as I could, down to the village. I did not stop to reason things out. I was in a panic. Violet was in that house, and it was being watched by strangers. We had one policeman in the village, and he not the brainiest of men. I got out my bicycle and rode fourteen miles, walking up the hills and coasting down

them until I reached the town of Reading. I rode to the house of the Chief Constable, whom I happened to know.

“Is Captain Bowyer in?” I asked of the servant.

“No, sir; he’s dining out tonight.”

“In the town?”

“Yes, sir.”

I was white with dust and wet through with sweat. The girl looked me over and said:

“I have orders to telephone for him if he is wanted.”

“He is,” I replied, and she went off to the telephone at once.

I began to cool down in more ways than one while I waited. It seemed to me very likely that I had come upon a fool’s errand. After all, what had I got to go upon but a German accent, a low, sharp whistle, and an electric torch? I waited about half an hour before Bowyer came in. He was a big man, with a strong face and a fair moustache, capable, but not imaginative; and I began my story with a good deal of diffidence. But I had not got far before his face became serious, though he said not a word until I had done.

“Bradley Rymer’s house,” he then remarked. “I know it.” He went out into the passage, and I heard his voice at the telephone. He came back in a moment.

“I have sent for some men,” he said, “and a car. Will you wait here while I change?”

“Yes.”

I glanced at the clock. For now that he took the affair seriously all my fears had returned.

“What time did you leave the house?” he asked.

“Nine.”

“And it’s now eleven. Yes, we must hurry. Bradley Rymer’s house! So that’s where they are.”

He hurried away. But before he had changed his clothes a great touring motorcar whirred and stopped in front of the door. When we went out on to the steps of the house there were four constables waiting. We climbed into the car, and the hilly road to Streatley, which had taken me so long and painful a time to traverse, now rose and fell beneath the broad wheels like the waves of a sea. At Streatley we turned uphill along the Aldworth Road, and felt the fresh wind of the downland upon our faces. Then for the first time upon the journey I spoke.

“You know these men?” I asked of Captain Bowyer.

“I know of them,” he answered, and he bent forwards to me. “With all these kings and emperors in London for the funeral, of course a great many precautions were taken on the Continent. All the known Anarchists were marked down; most of them on some excuse or another were arrested. But three slipped through the net and reached England.”

“But they would be in London,” I urged.

“So you would think. We were warned to-day, however, that they had been traced into Berkshire and there lost sight of.”

A hundred questions rose to my lips, but I did not put them. We were all in the dark together.

“That’s the house,” I said at length, and Captain Bowyer touched the chauffeur on the shoulder.

“We’ll stop, then, by the road.”

Very quietly we got out of the car aud crept up the hill. The night was dark; only here and there in a chink of the clouds a star shone feebly. Down in the village a dog barked and the wind whistled amongst the grasses under our feet. We met no one. The lodge at the gates was dark; we could not see the house itself, but a glare striking upon the higher branches of the trees in the garden showed that a room was brightly lit.

“Do you know which room that is?” Bowyer asked of me in a whisper.

“The library.”

We spread out then and made a circuit of the garden wall. There was no one any longer watching, and we heard no whistle.

“They have gone,” I said to Bowyer.

“Or they are inside,” he replied, and as he spoke we heard feet brushing upon the grass and a constable loomed up in front of us.

“This way, sir,” he whispered. “They are inside.”

We followed him round to the back of the garden. Just about the middle of that back wall the men stood in a cluster. We joined them, and saw that an upright ladder rose to the parapet. On the other side of the wall a thick coppice of trees grew, dark and high. Without a word, one after another we mounted the ladder and let ourselves down by the trees into the garden. A few paces took us to the edge of the coppice, and the house stood in the open before us. Standing in the shadow of the branches, we looked up. The house was in complete darkness but for the long row of library windows upon the first floor. In these, however, the curtains were not drawn, and the light blazed out upon the green foliage. There was no sound, no sign of any disorder. Once more I began to think that I had brought Bowyer and his men here upon a fool’s errand. I said as much to him in a whisper.

“But the ladder?” he answered, “my men found it there.” And even while he spoke there appeared at one of these windows a stranger. It was as much as I could do in that awful moment to withhold a cry. I gripped Bowyer’s arm with so much violence that he could show me the bruises of my fingers a week afterwards. But he stood like a rock now.

“Is that Rymer?”

“No. I have never seen him in my life before.”

He was a dark man, and his hair and moustache were turning grey. He had the look of a foreigner, and he lounged at the window with as much assurance as if he owned the place. Then he turned his face towards the room with a smile, and, as if in obedience to an order, carelessly drew down the blinds.

They were in the house, then—these men who had slipped through the net of the Continental police; more, they were masters in the house; and there was no sound. They were in peaceful possession. My heart sank within me when I thought of Violet Rymer and her father. What had become of them? In what plight were they?

Bowyer made a sign, and, stepping carefully on the turf border and keeping within the shadow of the trees, we crept round to the back of the house. One of the party ran swiftly and silently across a gravel path to the house-wall and followed it for a little way. Then as swiftly he came back.

“Yes, there’s a window open,” he said. We crossed to it. It yawned upon black emptiness. We listened; not a sound reached us.

“What does it give on to?” asked Bowyer.

“A passage. At the end of the passage there’s a swing door. Beyond the swing door the hall.”

We climbed in through the window.

“There should be a mastiff in the hall,” I said.

“Oh!” and Bowyer came to a stop. “Do you think Rymer expected these men?” he asked. I had begun to ask myself that question already. It was clear the dog had not given any alarm. But we found out the reason when we crept into the hall. He was lying dead upon the stone floor, with a piece of meat at his side.

“Quick!” whispered Bowyer, and I led the way up the great staircase. At the head of it at last we heard voices, and stopped, holding our breath. A few words spoken in a foreign accent detached themselves from the general murmur.

“Where is it? You won’t say! Very well, then!” A muffled groan followed the words, and once more the voice spoke. “Wait, Adolf! He gives in. We shall know now,” and as the voice continued, some one, it was clear, between each question asked, answered with a sign, a shake of the head, or a nod. “It is in the bookcase? Yes. Behind the books? Good. There? No. To the right? Yes. Higher? Yes. On that shelf? Good. Search well, Adolf!” And with that Bowyer burst into the room with his men behind him. He held a revolver in his hand.

“I shall shoot the first man who moves,” he said; and no one did move. They stood like wax figures moulded in an attitude for ever. Imagine, if you can, the scene which confronted me! On the library ladder, with a hand thrust behind the books on one of the highest shelves, was mounted one of the three foreigners. A second—he whom we had seen at the window—stood over a chair into which Bradley Rymer was strapped with a gag over his mouth. The third supported Violet. She was standing in the middle of the room, with her hands tied behind her and a rope in a noose about her neck. The end of the rope had been passed through a big ring in the ceiling which had once carried a lamp. I sprang towards her, cast off the noose, and she fainted there and then in my arms.

At the back of the bookshelf we found a slim little book of brown morocco with a broken lock.

At this point in Sir James Kelsey’s story Dr. Murgatroyd leaned forward and interrupted.

“John Rymer’s private case-book,” he said.

“Exactly,” replied Kelsey, “and also Bradley Rymer’s boom in Canadian land.”

There was a quick stir about that table, and then a moment of uncomfortable silence. At last one spoke the thought in the minds of all.

“Blackmail!”

“Yes.”

There was hardly a man in the room who had not some record of a case locked away in a private drawer which was worth a fortune of gold, and each one began to think of the security of his locks.

“But where do your foreign revolutionaries come in?” asked Murgatroyd, and Kelsey took up his tale again.

“Bowyer and I went through that brown book together in my house, after the prisoners had been sent off. For a long time we could find no explanation. But right at the end of the book there was a case which puzzled me. A Mr. Johnson had entered Rymer’s nursing-home on June 17th of the year before at five o’clock in the morning, a strange time to arrive. But there it was, noted down

with every other particular of his case. Three days later Mr. Johnson was operated on for cancer of the throat. The operation was remarkably successful, and the patient left the home cured seven weeks later. I think it was the unusual time of Mr. Johnson's arrival which first directed my suspicions; and the more I thought of them the more credible they became. I had lighted a fire in the sitting-room, for the morning had come, and it was chilly. I said to Bowyer:

'"Just wait a moment here. I keep a file of _The Times,' _and I went upstairs, blessing the methodical instinct which had made me for so long keep in due order this record of events. I brought down the file of June of the year before, and, turning over the pages, I found under the date of June 14th the official paragraph of which I was in search. I put it under Bowyer's eyes. He read it through and sprang to his feet with a cry. The paragraph ran like this. I can remember every word of it. I am inventing a name for the country, that's all, instead of giving you the real one:

'"The Crown Prince of Galicia left the capital yesterday for his annual visit to his shooting-box in the Tyrol, where he will remain for two months. This news effectually dispels the rumours that His Royal Highness's recent indisposition was due to a malignant growth in the throat.'

"Underneath this paragraph there was an editorial note:

"'The importance of this news cannot be overrated. For by the constitution of Galicia no one suffering from or tainted by any malignant disease can ascend the throne.'

"Identify now Rymer's Mr. Johnson with the Crown Prince of Galicia, and not only Bradley Rymer's fortune but the attack upon his house by the revolutionaries was explained, for whether they meant to use the Brown Book for blackmail as Bradley Rymer had done, or to upset a monarchy, it would be of an inestimable value to them.

"'What are we to do?' asked Bowyer.

'"What John Rymer's executors would have done if the book had not been stolen,' I answered, balancing it above the fire.

"He hesitated. The official mind said 'No.' Then he realised the stupendous character of the secret. He burst through forms and rules.

“‘Yes, by Heaven,’ he cried, ‘destroy it!’ And we sat there till the last sheet blackened and curled up in the flames.

“I had not a doubt as to what had happened. I took the half-truth which the public knew and it fitted like a piece of a Chinese puzzle with our discovery. John Rymer, assailed with a causeless fear of penury, had consented for a huge fee to take the Crown Prince into his home under the false name. Bradley Rymer had got wind of the operation, had stolen the record of the case, and had the Galician Crown and Government at his mercy. John Rymer’s suicide followed logically. Accused of bad faith, and already unbalanced, aware that a deadly secret which he should have guarded with his life had escaped, he had put the muzzle of a revolver into his mouth and blown his brains out.”

“What became of the foreigners?” asked one of the guests, as Kelsey finished.

“They were kept under lock and key until the funeral was over. Then they were sent out of the country.”

Kelsey rose from his chair. The hands of the clock pointed to eleven. But before anyone else got up Dr. Murgatroyd asked a final question:

“And what of Mr. Johnson?”

Kelsey laughed.

“I told you Rymer was a great surgeon. Mr. Johnson has been King of Galicia, as we are calling it, for the past ten years.”

The Refuge

The basket of _petite fours _had been removed; cigars and cigarettes had been passed round; one or two of the half-dozen people gathered about the small round table, rashly careless of a sleepless night, were drinking coffee with their liqueurs; the conversation was sprightly, at all events, if it was not witty, and laughter ran easily in ripples; the little supper-party, in a word, was at its gayest when Harry Caston suddenly pushed back his chair. Though the movement was abrupt, it was not conspicuous; it did not interrupt the light interchange of chaff and pleasantries for a moment. It was probably not noticed, and certainly not understood by more than one in that small company. The one, however, was a woman to whom Harry Caston's movements were a matter of much greater interest than he knew. Mrs. Wordingham was sitting next to him, and she remarked quietly:

"So you are not going on to the Mirlitons' dance, after all?"

Harry Caston turned to her in surprise.

"You're a witch," he replied. "I have only just made up my mind to go home instead."

"I know," said Mrs. Wordingham.

"Then you oughtn't to," retorted Harry Caston carelessly. Mrs. Wordingham flushed.

"I wish I didn't," she answered in a low, submissive voice. She was not naturally a submissive woman, and it was only in his ears that this particular note was sounded.

"I meant that you had no right to be able to estimate so accurately the hidden feelings of your brother-man," he answered awkwardly, and wrapping up his awkwardness in an elaboration of words.

Harry Caston looked about the supper-room, with its walls of white and gold, its clusters of bright faces, its flash of silver, its running noise of merriment. His fingers twitched restlessly.

“Yes, I am going,” he said. “I shall leave London tomorrow. I have a house.”

“I know that too—in the Isle of Wight.”

“Not so very far, after all, is it?” he said.

“As far as Timbuctoo when you are there,” replied Mrs. Wordingham. Her great dark eyes rested wistfully upon his face; she leaned the least little bit towards him. Harry Caston was silent for a moment. Then he turned to her with a smile of apology.

“You know me—”

“Oh, don’t I!” she cried in a low voice. “We shall see you no more for—how many months?”

Harry Caston did not answer. His memories were busy with an afternoon of early summer in that same year, when, as his motorcar slid down a long straight slope into a village of red-brick cottages, he had seen, on the opposite incline, a row of tall stone-pines, and glowing beneath their shade the warm brown roof of a small and ancient house.

“Tell me about it,” said Mrs. Wordingham, once more interpreting his silence.

“There was a bridge at the bottom of the hill—a bridge across the neck of a creek, with an old flour mill and a tiny roof at one side of it. Inland of the bridge was a reach of quiet water running back towards the downs through woods and meadows. Already I seemed to have dropped from the crest of the hill into another century. Beyond the bridge the road curved upwards. I went up on my second speed between the hedge of a field which sloped down to the creek upon the one side, and a low brick wall topped by a bank of grass upon the other. The incline of the hill brought my head suddenly above the bank, and I looked straight across a smooth lawn broken by great trees on to the front of a house. And I stopped my car, believe me, almost with a gasp. There was no fence or hedge to impede my view. I had come at last across the perfect house, and I sat in the car and stared and stared at it, not at first with any conscious desire to possess it, but simply taken by the sheer beauty of the thing, just as one may gaze at a jewel.”

The lights went suddenly out in the supper-room, as a gentle warning that time

was up, and then were raised again. Harry Caston, however, seemed unaware of any change. He was at the moment neither of that party nor of that room.

“It was a small house of the E shape, raised upon a low parapet and clothed in ivy. The middle part, set back a few feet behind flowers, had big flat windows; the gabled ends had smaller ones and more of them. Oh, I can’t describe to you what I saw! The house in detail? Yes. But that would not give you an idea of it. The woodwork of the windows was painted white, and, where they stood open to the sunlight and the air, they showed you deep embrasures of black oak within.”

He stumbled on awkwardly, impelled to describe the house, yet aware that his description left all unsaid. The tiles of the roof were mellowed by centuries, so that shade ran into shade; and here they were almost purple, and there brown with a glint of gold. Two great chimney stacks stood high, not rising from the roof, but from the sides of the house, flanking it like sentinels, and over these, too, the ivy climbed.

But what had taken Caston by the throat was the glamour of repose on that old house. Birds flickered about the lawn, and though the windows stood open, and the grass was emerald green and smooth, no smoke rose from any of the chimney-tops.

“I ran on for a few yards,” he went on, “until I saw a road which branched off to the right. I drove up it, and came to a gate with a notice that the house was to be sold. I went in, and at the back of the house, in a second queer little grass garden, screened by big trees upon three sides and a low red-brick wall upon the fourth, over which you could see the upper reach of the estuary and the woods on the further hill, I found a garrulous old gardener.”

Mrs. Wordingham leaned forward.

“And what story had he to tell?”

“Oh, none!” answered Caston with a laugh. “There’s no tragic or romantic history connected with the house. Of course, it’s haunted—that goes without saying. There’s hardly a bedroom window where the ivy does not tap upon the panes. But for history! Four old ladies took it for a summer, and remained in it for forty years. The last one of them died two years ago. That’s all the history the gardener knew. But he showed me over the house, the quaintest place you ever dreamed of—a small stone-flagged hall, little staircases rising straight and

enclosed in the walls, great polished oak beams, rooms larger than you would expect, and a great one on the first floor, occupying the middle of the house and looking out upon the grass garden at the back, and over the sunk road to the creek in front. Anyway"—and he broke off abruptly—"I bought the house, and I've furnished it, and now "

"Now you are going to shut yourself up in it," said Mrs. Wordingham.

The lights were turned out now for the last time. The party sat almost in darkness. Caston turned towards his companion. He could just see the soft gleam of her dark eyes.

"For a little," he replied. "I have to, you know. I can't help it. I enjoy all this. I like running about London as much as any man; I—I am fond of my friends." The lady smiled with a little bitterness, and Caston went on: "But the time comes when everything suddenly jars on me—noise, company, everything—when I must get away with my books into some refuge of my own, when I must take my bath of solitude without anyone having a lien upon a single minute of my time. The need has come on me tonight. The house is ready—waiting. I shall go tomorrow."

Mrs. Wordingham glanced at him with a quick anxiety. There was a trifle of exasperation in his voice. He was suddenly on wires.

"Yes, you look tired," she said. The head waiter approached the table, and the party broke up and mounted the steps into the hall. Caston handed Mrs. Wordingham into her carriage.

"I shall see you when I come back?" said he, and Mrs. Wordingham answered with a well-assumed carelessness:

"I shall be in London in the autumn. Perhaps you will have some story to tell me of your old house. Has it a name?"

"Oh, yes—Hawk Hill," replied Caston. "But there's no story about that house," he repeated, and the carriage rolled away. Later on, however, he was inclined to doubt the accuracy of his statement, confidently though he had made it. And a little later still be became again aware of its truth.

Here, at all events, is what occurred. Harry Caston idled through his mornings

over his books, sailed his sloop down the creek and out past the black booms into the Solent in the afternoon, and came back to a solitary dinner in the cool of the evening. Thus he passed a month. He was not at all tired with his own company. The inevitable demand for comrades and a trifle of gaiety had not yet been whispered to his soul. The fret of his nerves ceased; London sank away into the mists. Even the noise of the motor-horns in the hidden road beneath his lawn merely reminded him pleasantly that he was free of that whirlpool and of all who whirled in it. If he needed conversation, there were the boatmen on the creek, with their interest in tides and shoals, or the homely politics of the village. But Caston needed very little. He drifted back, as it seemed to him, into the reposeful, lavender-scented life of a century and a half ago. For though the house was of the true E shape, and had its origin in Tudor times, it was with that later period that Caston linked it in his thoughts. Tudor times were stirring, and the recollection of them uncongenial to Caston's mood.

He had furnished the house to suit his mood, and the room which he chiefly favoured—a room at the back, with a great bay window thrown out upon the grass, and the floor just a step below the level of the garden—had the very look of some old parlour where Mr. Hardcastle might have sipped his port, and Kate stitched at her samplers. Here he was sitting at ten o'clock in the evening, about a month after he had left London, when the first of the incidents occurred. It was nothing very startling in itself—merely the sound of some small thing falling upon the boards of the floor and rolling into a corner—a crisp, sharp sound, as though a pebble had dropped.

Caston looked up from his book, at the first hardly curious. But in a minute or so, it occurred to him that he was alone, and that he had dropped nothing. Moreover, the sound had travelled from the other side of the room. He was not as yet curious enough to rise from his chair, and a round satinwood table impeded his view. But he looked about the room, and could see nothing from which an ornament could have dropped. He turned back to his book, but his attention wandered. Once or twice he looked sharply up, as though he expected to find another occupant in the room. Finally he rose, and walking round the table, he saw what seemed to be a big glass bead sparkling in the lamplight on the dark-stained boards in a corner of the room. He picked the object up, and found it to be not a large bead, but a small knob or handle of cut-glass. He knew now whence it had come.

Against the wall stood a small Louis Seize table in white and gold, which he

remembered to have picked up at a sale, with some other furniture, at some old mansion, across the water, in the New Forest. He had paid no particular attention to the table, had never even troubled to look inside of it. It had the appearance of being a lady's secretaire or something of the kind. But there were three shallow drawers, one above the other, in the middle part of it—it was what is inelegantly called a kidney table—and these drawers were fitted with small glass knobs such as that which he held in his hand.

Caston went over to the table, and saw that one of the knobs was missing. He stooped to replace it, and at once stood erect again, with the knob in his hand and a puzzled expression upon his face. He had expected that the handles would fit on to projecting screws. But he found that they were set into brass rings, and firmly set. This one which he held seemed to have been wrenched out of its setting by some violent jerk. He tried the drawers, but they were locked. There were some papers and books spread upon the top. He removed them, and found upon the white polish a half-erased crest. It was plain that the middle part of the top was a lid and lifted up, but it was now locked down. Caston did not replace the books and papers. He returned to his chair. The servants probably had been curious. No doubt they had tried to open the drawers, and in the attempt had loosened one of the handles.

Caston was content with the explanation—for that night. But the next evening, at the same hour, the legs of the table rattled on the wooden floor. He sprang up from his seat. The table was shaking. He stepped quickly across to it, and then stopped with his heart leaping in his breast. The books and papers had not been replaced, and he had seen—it might be that his eyes had played him a trick, but he had _seen_—a small slim hand suddenly withdrawn from the lid of the table. The hand had been lying flat upon its palm—Caston had just time enough to see that—and it was the left hand.

"That's exactly the position," he said to himself, "in which one would place the left hand to hold the table steady while one tried to force the drawers open with one's right."

He stood without a movement, but the hand did not appear again; and then he found himself saying in a quiet voice of reassurance:

"Can I help at all?"

The sound of his own words stirred him abruptly to laughter. Common sense reasserted itself; his eyes had played him a trick. Too much tobacco, very likely, was the cause and origin of his romantic vision. But, none the less, he remained standing quite still, with his eyes fixed upon the table's polished lid, for some minutes; and when he went back at last to his chair, from time to time he glanced abruptly from his book, in the hope that he might once more detect the hand upon the table. But he was disappointed.

The next morning he saw the old gardener sweeping the leaves from the front lawn, and he at once and rather eagerly went out to him.

"I think you told me, Hayes, that this house is supposed to be haunted," he said, with a laugh at the supposition.

The gardener took off his hat and scratched his head reflectively.

"Well, they do say, sir, as it is. But I've never seen anything myself, nor can I rightly say that I've ever come across anyone who has. A pack o' nonsense, I call it."

"Very likely, Hayes," said Caston. "And what sort of a person is it who's supposed to walk?"

"An old man in grey stockings," replied the gardener. "That's what I've heard. But what he's supposed to be doing I don't know, sir, any more than I know why there should be so much fuss about his wearing grey stockings. Live men do that, after all."

"To be sure," replied Caston. "You may count them by dozens on bicycles if you stand for an hour or two above the road here." And he went back to the house. It was quite clear that his visitant of last night, if there had been one, was not the native spectre of this small old manor-house.

"The slim white hand I saw," Caston argued, "belonged to no old man in grey stockings or out of them. It was the hand of a quite young woman. But if she doesn't belong to the house, if she isn't one of the fixtures to be taken on by the incoming tenant—if, in a word, she's a trespasser—how in the world did she find her way here?"

Caston suddenly saw an answer to the question—a queer and a rather attractive

answer, especially to a man who had fed for a month on solitude and had grown liable to fancies. He had all through this lonely month been gradually washing from his body and his mind the dust of his own times. He had sought to reproduce the quiet of an older age, and in the seeking had perhaps done more than reproduce. That was his thought. He had, perhaps, by ever so little, penetrated the dark veil which hides from men all days but their own—just enough, say, to catch a glimpse of a hand. He himself was becoming more and more harmonious with his house; the cries of the outer world hardly reached his ears in that little parlour which opened on to the hidden garden. It seemed to him that other times, through some thinning out of the thick curtain of his senses, were becoming actual and real just to him.

"The first month passed," he said to himself. "I was undisturbed; no sign was made. I was still too near to what I had left behind—London and the rest of it. But now I pass more and more over the threshold into that other century. First of all, I was only aware of a movement, a presence; then I was able to see—nothing much, it is true—only a small hand. But tonight I may see her to whom the hand belongs. In a week I may be admitted into her company."

Thus he argued, pretending to himself the while that he was merely playing with his fancy, pursuing it like a ball in a game, and ready to let it fall and lie the moment that he was tired. But the sudden hum of a motorcar upon his drive, and a joyous outcry of voices, soon dispelled the pretence. A party of his friends invaded him, clamouring for luncheon, and in his mind there sprang up a fear so strong that it surprised him. They would thicken the thinning curtain between himself and her whose hand had lain upon the table. They would drag him back into his own century. The whole process of isolation would have to begin again. The talk at luncheon was all of regattas and the tonnage of yachts. Caston sat at the table with his fear increasing. His visitors were friends he would have welcomed five weeks ago, and he would have gaily taken his part in their light talk. Now it was every moment on his lips to cry out:

"Hold your tongues and go!"

They went off at three o'clock, and a lady of the party wisely nodded a dainty head at him as he stood upon the steps, and remarked:

"You hated us visiting you, Mr. Caston. You have someone in that house—someone you won't show to us."

Caston coloured to the roots of his hair.

The lady laughed. “There—I knew I was right! Let me guess who it can be.”

Caston raised his head in a quick protest.

“No, there is no one.” He tried to laugh easily. “That’s my trouble. There is no one, I am afraid.”

They had driven his visitor away, without a doubt; and though he sat very still in his armchair that night, careful as a hunter by no abrupt movement to scare away his quarry, he sat undisturbed. He waited until the light was grey and the birds singing upon the lawn. He went to bed disappointed as a lover whose mistress had failed to keep her tryst.

On the next day he searched for and found the catalogue of the sale at which he had bought the table. The sale had been held at a house called Bylanes, some five miles from the Beaulieu river, and the furniture was advertised as the property of Geoffrey Trimingham, Esq., deceased, and sold by his young widow. Caston’s memory was quickened by these meagre details. He recollected stories which he had heard during the three days of the sale. The Triminghams were a branch of the old Norfolk family of that name, and had settled in the New Forest so far back as the reign of the first George. Geoffrey Trimingham, however, had delayed marriage until well sped in years, and then had committed the common fault of marrying a young woman, who, with no children and no traditions to detain her in a neighbourhood which she considered gloomy, had, as soon as she was free, sold off house and furniture—lock, stock, and barrel—so that she might retire to what she considered the more elegant neighbourhood of Blandford Square.

This was all very well, but it did not bring Harry Caston very much nearer to the identification of his visitor. She was a Trimingham, probably, but even that was by no means certain; and to what generation of Triminghams she belonged, he knew no more than he knew her Christian name. He searched the house for the keys of the table, but nowhere could he find them. He had never opened the drawers, he had never raised the lid. It seemed to him that he must have bought the table without the keys at all.

He might have broken it open, of course, and from time to time, as the evenings passed in an expectation which was not fulfilled, he was tempted to take a chisel

in his hand and set to work. But he resisted. The table was not his. It was *hers,* and in her presence alone it must be opened.

Thus Caston passed a week, and then one evening there fell a shadow across the open page of his book. He looked swiftly up. He saw nothing but the empty room, and the flame of the lamp burned bright and steady. She was here, then, and as the conviction grew within him to a veritable exultation, he was aware of rustling of a woman's gown. The sound came from behind him. He turned with a leap of his heart, and saw her—saw her from the crown of her small head, with its thick brown hair, to the hem of her dress—not a shadow, not a vague shape dimly to be apprehended, but as actual as flesh and blood could be. She was dressed in a gown of pale blue satin of an ancient mode, and was slender as a child. Her face, too, was the face of one little more than a child, though pain and trouble had ravaged it.

She stood as though she had just stepped from the garden on to the window-seat, and so to the floor, and in her dark eyes there was a look of the direst urgency. She moved swiftly across the room to the table, pulled at the glass handles, and sought to lift the lid, and all in a feverish haste, with her young and troubled face twitching as though she were at pains to check her tears. Caston watched her eagerly. He noticed that once more her left hand was pressed flat upon the lid, as she tried to open the drawer, and then a flash of gold caught and held his eyes. Young though she was, she wore a wedding-ring. He had barely noticed it, when she turned from the table and came straight towards him. Caston rose from his chair. He heard himself saying once more:

"Can I help?"

But this time he did not laugh upon the words. She stood before him with so pitiful an appeal, her hands clutched together in front of her, her face convulsed. He spoke with the deference due to those who have greatly suffered. Then came to him a whisper in reply, so low that he barely heard it—so low that perhaps he only imagined it.

"Yes."

Caston went across to the table, and, opening his knife, inserted it under the lid. The girl stood at his side, a gleam of hope in her eyes. Caston ran the blade of the knife along to the lock and turned it, prising up the lid. There was a sound of

the splitting of wood, and the lock gave. Caston lifted the lid. It rose on hinges, and had upon the under-side a bevelled mirror, and it disclosed, when open, a fixed tray lined with blue velvet. The tray was empty.

But now that the lid was raised in the centre of the table, the side-pieces could be opened too. The girl opened the one at her hand. Caston saw a well, lined, like the rest, with velvet, and filled with the knick-knacks and belongings of a girl. She took them out hurriedly, heaping them together on the tray—a walnut-wood housewife shaped and shut like a large card-case, with scissors, thimble, needle-case, tiny penknife, all complete—for she opened it, as she opened everything in the haste and urgency of her search—a large needle-case of ivory, a walnut-wood egg, which unscrewed and showed within a reel with silk still wound upon it, and a little oval box with a label on the top of it, and the royal arms. Caston read the label:

STRINGER’S CANDY.

PREPARED AND SOLD ONLY BY THE PROPRIETOR,

R. STRINGER,

DRUGGIST TO THE KING.

The top fell from the little box, and a shower of shells rattled out of it. Bags of beads followed, wash-leather bags carefully tied up, and some of them filled with the minutest of beads. It made Caston’s eyes ache to think of anyone stringing them together. In the end the well was emptied, and, with a gesture of despair, the girl slipped round to the other side of Caston. She turned back the flap upon this side.

On the other side were the implements of work; here was the finished product. She lifted out two small anti-macassars, completely made up of tiny beads in crystal and turquoise colours, and worked in the most intricate patterns. They were extraordinarily heavy, and must have taken months in the making. Under these were still more beads, in boxes and in bags and coiled in long strings. She heaped them out upon the tray, and looked into the well. Her face flashed into relief. She thrust her hands in; she drew out from the very bottom a faded bundle of letters. She clasped them for a moment close against her heart, then very swiftly, as though she feared to be stopped, she took them over to the fireplace.

A fire was burning in the grate, for the night was chilly. She dropped the bundle into the flames, and stood there while it was consumed. Caston saw the glare of the flames behind the paper light up here and there a word or a phrase, and then the edges curled over and the sparks ran across the sheets, and the letters changed to white ashes and black flakes. When all was done, she sighed and turned to Caston with a wistful smile of thanks. She moved back to the table, and with a queer orderliness which seemed somehow in keeping with her looks and manner, she replaced the beads, the little boxes, and the paraphernalia, of her work carefully in the wells, and shut the table up. She turned again to Caston at the end. Just for a second she stood before him, her face not happy, but cleared of its trouble, and with a smile upon her lips. She stood, surely a living thing. Caston advanced to her. “You will stay now!” he cried, and she was gone.

This is the story as Harry Caston told it to Mrs. Wordingham when he returned to London in the autumn. She ridiculed it gently and with a trifle of anxiety, believing that solitude had bred delusions.

“Thank you,” said Harry Caston grimly, and sitting up very erect. Mrs. Wordingham changed her note.

“It’s the most wonderful thing to have happened to you,” she said. “I should have been frightened out of my life. And you weren’t?”

Harry Caston’s face hardly relaxed.

“You don’t believe a word of it,” he asserted sternly.

“Of course I do,” she replied soothingly, “and I quite see that, with us nowhere near you, all your senses became refined, and you penetrated behind the curtain. Yes, I see all that, Harry. But she might, perhaps, have told you a little more, mightn’t she? As a story, it almost sounds unfinished.”

Harry Caston rose to his feet.

“I tell you what you are doing,” he said, standing over her—“you are getting a little of your own back.”

“But such a very little, Harry,” murmured Mrs. Wordingham; and Harry Caston flung out of the room.

He did not refer to the subject again for some little while. But in the month of December, on one foggy afternoon, he arrived with a new book under his arm. He put it down on the floor beside his chair rather ostentatiously, as one inviting questions. Mrs. Wordingham was serenely unaware of the book.

“Where have you been, Harry?” she asked as she gave him a cup of tea.

“In Norfolk—shooting,” he said.

“Many birds?”

“So few that we did not go out on the second day. We motored to a church instead—a very old church with a beautiful clerestory.”

Mrs. Wordingham affected an intense interest.

“Old churches are wonderful,” she said.

“You care no more about them than I do,” said Harry Caston brutally. “I am not going to tell you about the church.”

“Oh, aren’t you?” said Mrs. Wordingham.

“No. What I am going to tell you is this. The vicar is a friend of my host, and happened to be in the church when we arrived. He showed us the building himself, and then, taking us into the vestry, got out the parish register. It dates back a good many years. Well, turning over the leaves, I noticed quite carelessly an entry made by the vicar in the year 1786. It was a note of a donation which he had made to the parish as a thanksgiving for his recovery from a severe operation which had been performed upon him in Norwich by a famous surgeon of the day named Twiddy.”

“Yes?” said Mrs. Wordingham.

“That little entry occupied my mind much more than the church,” continued Caston. “I wondered what the vicar must have felt as he travelled into Norwich in those days of no chloroform, no antiseptics, of sloughing wounds, and hospital fevers. Not much chance of *his* ever coming back again, eh? And then the revulsion when he did recover—the return home to Frimley-next-the-Sea alive and well! It must all have been pretty wonderful to the vicar in 1786, eh?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Wordingham submissively.

“I couldn’t get him out of my head and when I returned to London a couple of days ago, I saw in a bookseller’s this book.”

Caston picked the volume up from the floor.

“It seems that Twiddy was no end of a swell with his knife, so some one of his devoted descendants has had a life written of him, with all his letters included. He kept up an extensive correspondence, as people did in those days. He had a shrewd eye and a knack of telling a story. There’s one here which I wish you to read if you will. No, not now—when I have gone. I have put a slip of paper in at the page. I think it will interest you.”

Harry Caston went away. Mrs. Wordingham had her curtains closed and her lamps lit. She drew her chair up to the fire, and she opened “The Life and Letters of Mr. Edmund Twiddy, Surgeon, of Norwich,” with a shrug of the shoulders and a little grimace of discontent. But the grimace soon left her face, and when her maid came with a warning that she had accepted an invitation for that night to dinner, she found her mistress with the book still open upon her knees, and her eyes staring with a look of wonder into the fire. For this is what she had read in “The Life and Letters of Mr. Edmund Twiddy.”

“I have lately had a curious case under my charge, which has given me more trouble than I care to confess. For sentiment is no part of the equipment of a surgeon. It perplexed as well as troubled me, and some clue to the explanation was only afforded me yesterday. Three months ago my servant brought me word one evening that there was a lady very urgent to see me, of the name of Mrs. Braxfield. I replied that my work was done, and she must return at a more seasonable time. But while I was giving this message the door was pushed open, and already she stood in front of me. She was a slip of a girl, very pretty to look at, and shrinking with alarm at her own audacity. Yet she held her ground.

“‘Mrs. Braxfield,’ I cried, ‘you have no right to be married—you are much too young! Young girls hooked at your age ought to be put back.’

‘“I am ill,’ she said, and I nodded to the servant to leave us.

“‘Very well,’ I said. ‘What’s the matter?’

‘“My throat,’ said she.

“I looked at it. There was trouble, but the trouble was not so very serious, though I recognised that at some time treatment would be advisable.

‘“There’s no hurry at all about it,’ I said, when my examination was concluded, ‘but, on the whole, you are right to get it looked to soon.’ I spoke roughly, for I shrank a little from having this tender bit of a girl under my knife. ‘Where’s your husband?’

“‘He is in Spain,’ she replied.

“‘Oh, indeed!’ said I with some surprise. ‘Well, when he returns, we can talk about it.’

“Mrs. Braxfield shook her head.

“‘No, I want it done now, while he’s away,’ she said, and nothing that I could say would shake her from her purpose. I fathered her, and bullied her, and lectured her, but she stood her ground. Her lips trembled; she was afraid of me, and still more desperately afraid of what waited for her. I could see her catch her breath and turn pale as she thought upon the ordeal. But the same sort of timid courage which had made her push into my room before I could refuse to see her, sustained her now. I raised my hands at last in despair.

“‘Very well,’ I said. ‘Give me your husband’s address. I will send a letter to him, and if he consents, we will not wait for his return.’

“‘No,’ she insisted stubbornly, ‘I do not want him to know anything about it. But if you will not attend me, no doubt someone else will.’

“That was my trouble. The throat, look at it how you will, is a ticklish affair. If she went away from me, Heaven knows into whose hands she might fall. She had some money and was well dressed. Some quack would have used his blundering knife. I could have shaken her for her obstinacy, and would have, if I had had a hope that I would shake it out of her. But she had screwed herself up to a pitch of determination almost unbelievable in her. I could make her cry; I could not make her draw back from her resolve. Nor, on the other hand, could I allow her to go out of my house and hand herself over to be butchered by any Tom, Dick, or Harry of a barber on the look-out for a fat fee. So I gave in.

“I got her a lodging in this town, and a woman to look after her, and I did what needed to be done with as little pain as might be.

‘“You won’t hurt me more than you can help,’ she said in a sort of childish wail. And then she shut her eyes and bore it with an extraordinary fortitude; while, for my part, I never worked more neatly or more quickly in my life, and in a few days she was quite comfortable again.

“But here she began to perplex me. For though the wound healed, and there was no fever, she did not mend. She lay from day to day in an increasing weakness, for which I could not account. I drew a chair up to her bed one morning and took my seat.

‘“My dear,’ I said, ‘a good many of us are father-confessors as well as doctors. We needs must be at times if our patients are to get well and do us credit. You are lying here surely with a great trouble on your mind. It shall be sacred to me, but I must know it if I am to cure you.’

“The girl looked at me with a poor little smile.

‘“No, there’s nothing at all,’ she said; and even while she spoke she lifted her head from the pillow, and a light dawned in her eyes.

“‘Listen!” she said.

“I heard a step coming nearer and nearer along the pavement outside. As it grew louder, she raised herself upon her elbow, and when the footsteps ceased outside the door, her whole soul leapt into her face.

“‘There will be a letter for me!’ she cried, with a joyous clapping of her hands.

“The footsteps moved on and became fainter and more faint. The girl remained propped up, with her eyes fixed upon the door. But no one came.

“‘It has been left in the hall,’ she said, turning wistfully to me.

“‘I will send it up if it is there,’ said I.

“I went downstairs rather heavy at heart. Here was the reason why she did not mend. Here it was, and I saw no cure for it. There was no letter in the hall, nor

did I expect to find one. I sent for the woman who waited upon her. ‘Does she always expect a letter?’

“The woman nodded.

“‘She knows the postman’s step, sir, even when he is a long way off. She singles it out from all other sounds. If he stops at the door, I must run down upon the instant. But whether he stops or not, it is always the same thing—there is no letter for her.’

“I went upstairs again and into her room. The girl was lying upon her side, with her faced pressed into the pillow, and crying. I patted her shoulder.

“‘Come, Mrs. Braxfield, you must tell me what the trouble is, and we will put our heads together and discover a remedy.’

“But she drew away from me. ‘There is nothing,’ she repeated. ‘I am weak—that is all.’

“I could get no more from her, and the next day I besought her to tell me where I might find her husband. But upon that point, too, she was silent. Then came a night, about a week later, when she fell into a delirium, and I sat by her side and wrestled with death for her. I fought hard with what resources I had, for there was no reason why she should die but the extreme weakness into which she had fallen.

“I sat by the bed, thinking that now at last I should learn the secret which ravaged her. But there was no coherency in what she said. She talked chiefly, I remember, of a work-table and of something hidden there which she must destroy. She was continually, in her delirium, searching its drawers, opening the lid and diving amongst her embroidery and beads, as though she could not die and let the thing be found.

“So till the grey of the morning, when she came out of her delirium, turned very wistfully to me with a feeble motion of her hands, and said:

‘“You have been very good to me, doctor.’

“She lay thus for a few moments, and then she cried in a low sad voice: ‘Oh, Arthur, Arthur!’ And with that name upon her lips she died.

“She carried her secret with her, leaving me in the dark as to who she was and how I was to lay my hands upon one of her relations. I buried the poor girl here, and I advertised for her husband in *The London Newsletter,* and I made inquiries of our ambassador in Spain. A week ago Mr. Braxfield appeared at my house. He was a man of sixty years of age, and his Christian name was Robert.

“He gave me some few details about his marriage, and from them I am able to put together the rest of the story. Mr. Braxfield is a Spanish merchant of means, and the girl, a Trimingham of that branch of the family which moved a long while since into Hampshire, was, no doubt, pressed into marriage with him owing to the straitened position of her parents. Mr. Braxfield and his young wife took up their residence in Soho Square, in London, until, at the beginning of this year, business called him once more to Spain for some months.

“His wife thereupon elected to return to her home, and there Mr. Braxfield believed her to be, until chance threw one of my advertisements in his way. Her own parents, for their part, understood that she had returned to her house in Soho Square. To me, then, the story is clear. Having married without love, she had given her heart to someone, probably after her return to her own home—someone called Arthur. Whether he had treated her ill, I cannot say. But I take it that he had grown cold, and she had looked upon this trouble with her throat as her opportunity to hold him. The risk, the suffering—these things, one can imagine her believing, must make their appeal. She had pretended to return to London. She had travelled, instead, to Norwich, letting him and him alone know what she was about. The great experiment failed. She looked for some letter; no letter came. But had letters passed? Are these letters locked up amongst the embroidery and the beads in that work-table, I wonder? Let us hope that, if they are, they trouble her no longer.”

Peiffer

For a moment I was surprised to see the stout and rubicund Slingsby in Lisbon. He was drinking a vermouth and seltzer at five o'clock in the afternoon at a cafe close to the big hotel. But at that time Portugal was still a neutral country and a happy hunting ground for a good many thousand Germans. Slingsby was lolling in his chair with such exceeding indolence that I could not doubt his business was pressing and serious. I accordingly passed him by as if I had never seen him in my life before. But he called out to me. So I took a seat at his table.

Of what we talked about I have not the least recollection, for my eyes were quite captivated by a strange being who sat alone fairly close to Slingsby, at one side and a little behind him. This was a man of middle age, with reddish hair, a red, square, inflamed face and a bristly moustache. He was dressed in a dirty suit of grey flannel; he wore a battered Panama pressed down upon his head; he carried pince-nez on the bridge of his nose, and he sat with a big bock of German beer in front of him. But I never saw him touch the beer. He sat in a studied attitude of ferocity, his elbow on the table, his chin propped on the palm of his hand, his head pushed aggressively forward, and he glared at Slingsby through his glasses with the fixed stare of hatred and fury which a master workman in wax might give to a figure in a Chamber of Horrors. Indeed, it seemed to me that he must have rehearsed his bearing in some such quarter, for there was nothing natural or convinced in him from the brim of his Panama to the black patent leather tips of his white canvas shoes.

I touched Slingsby on the arm.

"Who is that man, and what have you done to him?"

Slingsby looked round unconcernedly.

"Oh, that's only Peiffer," he replied. "Peiffer making frightfulness."

"Peiffer?"

The name was quite strange to me.

"Yes. Don't you know him? He's a product of 1914," and Slingsby leaned towards me a little. "Peiffer is an officer in the German Navy. You would hardly

guess it, but he is. Now that their country is at war, officers in the German Navy have a marked amount of spare time which they never had before. So Peiffer went to a wonderful Government school in Hamburg, where in twenty lessons they teach the gentle art of espionage, a sort of Berlitz school. Peiffer ate his dinners and got his degrees, so to speak, and now he's at Lisbon putting obi on me."

"It seems rather infantile, and must be annoying," I said; but Slingsby would only accept half the statement. "Infantile, yes. Annoying, not at all. For so long as Peiffer is near me, being frightful, I know he's not up to mischief."

"Mischief!" I cried. "That fellow? What mischief can he do?"

Slingsby viciously crushed the stub of his cigarette in the ashtray.

"A deuce of a lot, my friend. Don't make any mistake. Peiffer's methods are infantile and barbaric, but he has a low and fertile cunning in the matter of ideas. I know. I have had some."

And Slingsby was to have more, very much more: in the shape of a great many sleepless nights, during which he wrestled with a dreadful uncertainty to get behind that square red face and those shining pince-nez, and reach the dark places of Peiffer's mind.

The first faint wisp of cloud began to show six weeks later, when Slingsby happened to be in Spain.

"Something's up," he said, scratching his head. "But I'm hanged if I can guess what it is. See what you can make of it"; and here is the story which he told.

Three Germans dressed in the black velvet corduroy, the white stockings and the rope-soled white shoes of the Spanish peasant, arrived suddenly in the town of Cartagena, and put up at an inn in a side-street near the harbour. Cartagena, for all that it is one of the chief naval ports of Spain, is a small place, and the life of it ebbs and flows in one narrow street, the Calle Mayor; so that very little can happen which is not immediately known and discussed. The arrival of the three mysterious Germans provoked, consequently, a deal of gossip and curiosity, and the curiosity was increased when the German Consul sitting in front of the Casino loudly professed complete ignorance of these very doubtful compatriots of his, and an exceeding great contempt for them. The next morning, however,

brought a new development. The three Germans complained publicly to the Alcalde. They had walked through Valencia, Alicante, and Murcia in search of work, and everywhere they had been pestered and shadowed by the police.

“Our Consul will do nothing for us,” they protested indignantly. “He will not receive us, nor will any German in Cartagena. We are poor people.” And having protested, they disappeared in the night.

But a few days later the three had emerged again at Almeria, and at a mean cafe in one of the narrow, blue-washed Moorish streets of the old town. Peiffer was identified as one of the three—not the Peiffer who had practised frightfulness in Lisbon, but a new and wonderful Peiffer, who inveighed against the shamelessness of German officials on the coasts of Spain. At Almeria, in fact, Peiffer made a scene at the German Vice-Consulate, and, having been handed over to the police, was fined and threatened with imprisonment. At this point the story ended.

“What do you make of it?” asked Slingsby.

“First, that Peiffer is working south; and, secondly, that he is quarrelling with his own officials.”

“Yes, but quarrelling with marked publicity,” said Slingsby. “That, I think we shall find, is the point of real importance. Peiffer’s methods are not merely infantile; they are elaborate. He is working down South. I think that I will go to Gibraltar. I have always wished to see it.”

Whether Slingsby was speaking the truth, I had not an idea. But he went to Gibraltar, and there an astonishing thing happened to him. He received a letter, and the letter came from Peiffer. Peiffer was at Algeciras, just across the bay in Spain, and he wanted an interview. He wrote for it with the most brazen impertinence.

“I cannot, owing to this with-wisdom-so-easily-to-have-been-avoided war, come myself to Gibraltar, but I will remain at your disposition here.”

“*That,*” said Slingsby, “from the man who was making frightfulness at me a few weeks ago, is a proof of some nerve. We will go and see Peiffer. We will stay at Algeciras from Saturday to Monday, and we will hear what he has to say.”

A polite note was accordingly dispatched, and on Sunday morning Peiffer, decently clothed in a suit of serge, was shown into Slingsby's private sitting-room. He plunged at once into the story of his wanderings. We listened to it without a sign that we knew anything about it.

"So?" from time to time said Slingsby, with inflections of increasing surprise, but that was all. Then Peiffer went on to his grievances.

"Perhaps you have heard how I was treated by the Consuls?" he interrupted himself to ask suddenly.

"No," Slingsby replied calmly. "Continue!"

Peiffer wiped his forehead and his glasses. We were each one, in his way, all working for our respective countries. The work was honourable. But there were limits to endurance. All his fatigue and perils went for nothing in the eyes of comfortable officials sure of their salary. He had been fined; he had been threatened with imprisonment. It was *unverschamt* the way he had been treated.

"So?" said Slingsby firmly. There are fine inflections by which that simple word may be made to express most of the emotions. Slingsby's "So?" expressed a passionate agreement with the downtrodden Peiffer.

"Flesh and blood can stand it no longer," cried Peiffer, "and my heart is flesh. No, I have had enough."

Throughout the whole violent tirade, in his eyes, in his voice, in his gestures, there ran an eager, wistful plea that we should take him at his face value and believe every word he said.

"So I came to you," he said at last, slapping his knee and throwing out his hand afterwards like a man who has taken a mighty resolution. "Yes. I have no money, nothing. And they will give me none. It is *unverschamt.* So," and he screwed up his little eyes and wagged a podgy forefinger—"so the service I had begun for my Government I will now finish for you."

Slingsby examined the carpet curiously.

"Well, there are possibly some shillings to be had if the service is good enough. I do not know. But I cannot deal in the dark. What sort of a service is it?"

“Ah!”

Peiffer hitched his chair nearer.

“It is a question of rifles—rifles for over there,” and, looking out through the window, he nodded towards Gibel Musa and the coast of Morocco.

Slingsby did not so much as flinch. I almost groaned aloud. We were to be treated to the stock legend of the ports, the new edition of the Spanish prisoner story. I, the mere tourist in search of health, could have gone on with Peiffer’s story myself, even to the exact number of the rifles.

“It was a great plan,” Peiffer continued. “Fifty thousand rifles, no less.” There always were fifty-thousand rifles. “They are buried—near the sea.” They always were buried either near the sea or on the frontier of Portugal. “With ammunition. They are to be landed outside Melilla, where I have been about this very affair, and distributed amongst the Moors in the unsubdued country on the edge of the French zone.”

“So?” exclaimed Slingsby with the most admirable imitation of consternation.

“Yes, but you need not fear. You shall have the rifles—when I know exactly where they are buried.”

“Ah!” said Slingsby.

He had listened to the familiar rigmarole, certain that behind it there was something real and sinister which he did not know—something which he was desperately anxious to find out.

“Then you do not know where they are buried?”

“No, but I shall know if—I am allowed to go into Gibraltar. Yes, there is someone there. I must put myself into relations with him. Then I shall know, and so shall you.”

So here was some part of the truth, at all events. Peiffer wanted to get into Gibraltar. His disappearance from Lisbon, his reappearance in corduroys, his quarrelsome progress down the east coast, his letter to Slingsby, and his story, were all just the items of an elaborate piece of machinery invented to open the

gates of that fortress to him. Slingsby's only movement was to take his cigarette-case lazily from his pocket.

"But why in the world," he asked, "can't you get your man in Gibraltar to come out here and see you?"

Peiffer shook his head.

"He would not come. He has been told to expect me, and I shall give him certain tokens from which he can guess my trustworthiness. If I write to him, 'Come to me,' he will say 'This is a trap.'"

Slingsby raised another objection:

"But I shouldn't think that you can expect the authorities to give you a safe conduct into Gibraltar upon your story."

Peiffer swept that argument aside with a contemptuous wave of his hand.

"I have a Danish passport. See!" and he took the document from his breast pocket. It was complete, to his photograph.

"Yes, you can certainly come in on that," said Slingsby. He reflected for a moment before he added: "I have no power, of course. But I have some friends. I think you may reasonably reckon that you won't be molested."

I saw Peiffer's eyes glitter behind his glasses.

"But there's a condition," Slingsby continued sharply. "You must not leave Gibraltar without coming personally to me and giving me twenty-four hours' notice."

Peiffer was all smiles and agreement.

"But of course. We shall have matters to talk over —terms to arrange. I must see you."

"Exactly. Cross by the nine-fifty steamer tomorrow morning. Is that understood?"

“Yes, sir.” And suddenly Peiffer stood up and actually saluted, as though he had now taken service under Slingsby’s command.

The unexpected movement almost made me vomit. Slingsby himself moved quickly away, and his face lost for a second the mask of impassivity. He stood at the window and looked across the water to the city of Gibraltar.

Slingsby had been wounded in the early days of the war, and ever since he had been greatly troubled because he was not still in the trenches in Flanders. The casualty lists filled him with shame and discontent. So many of his friends, the men who had trained and marched with him, were laying down their gallant lives. He should have been with them. But during the last few days a new knowledge and inspiration had come to him. Gibraltar! A tedious, little, unlovely town of yellow houses and coal sheds, with an undesirable climate. Yes. But above it was the rock, the heart of a thousand memories and traditions which made it beautiful. He looked at it now with its steep wooded slopes, scarred by roads and catchments and the emplacements of guns. How much of England was recorded there! To how many British sailing on great ships from far dominions this huge buttress towering to its needle-ridge was the first outpost of the homeland! And for the moment he seemed to be its particular guardian, the ear which must listen night and day lest harm come to it. Harm the Rock, and all the Empire, built with such proud and arduous labour, would stagger under the blow, from St. Kilda to distant Lyttelton. He looked across the water and imagined Gibraltar as it looked at night, its house-lights twinkling like a crowded zone of stars, and its great search-beams turning the ships in the harbour and the stone of the moles into gleaming silver, and travelling far over the dark waters. No harm must come to Gibraltar. His honour was all bound up in that. This was his service, and as he thought upon it he was filled with a cold fury against the traitor who thought it so easy to make him fail. But every hint of his anger had passed from his face as he turned back into the room.

“If you bring me good information, why, we can do business,” he said; and Peiffer went away.

I was extremely irritated by the whole interview, and could hardly wait for the door to close.

“What knocks me over,” I cried, “is the impertinence of the man. Does he really think that any old yarn like the fifty thousand rifles is going to deceive you?”

Slingsby lit a cigarette.

“Peiffer’s true to type, that’s all,” he answered imperturbably. “They are vain, and vanity makes them think that you will at once believe what they want you to believe. So their deceits are a little crude.” Then a smile broke over his face, and to some tune with which I was unfamiliar he sang softly: “But he’s coming to Gibraltar in the morning.”

“You think he will?”

“I am sure of it.”

“And,” I added doubtfully—it was not my business to criticise—“on conditions he can walk out again?”

Slingsby’s smile became a broad grin.

“His business in Gibraltar, my friend, is not with me. He will not want to meet us any more; as soon as he has done what he came for he will go—or try to go. He thinks we are fools, you see.”

And in the end it seemed almost as though Peiffer was justified of his belief. He crossed the next morning. He went to a hotel of the second class; he slept in the hotel, and next morning he vanished. Suddenly there was no more Peiffer. Peiffer was not. For six hours Peiffer was not; and then at half-past five in the afternoon the telephone bell rang in an office where Slingsby was waiting. He rushed to the instrument.

“Who is it?” he cried, and I saw a wave of relief surge into his face. Peiffer had been caught outside the gates and within a hundred yards of the neutral zone. He had strolled out in the thick of the dockyard workmen going home to Linea in Spain.

“Search him and bring him up here at once,” said Slingsby, and he dropped into his chair and wiped his forehead. “Phew! Thirty seconds more and he might have snapped his fingers at us.” He turned to me. “I shall want a prisoner’s escort here in half an hour.”

I went about that business and returned in time to see Slingsby giving an admirable imitation of a Prussian police official.

“So, Peiffer,” he cried sternly, “you broke your word. Do not deny it. It will be useless.”

The habit of a lifetime asserted itself in Peiffer. He quailed before authority when authority began to bully.

“I did not know I was outside the walls,” he faltered. “I was taking a walk. No one stopped me.”

“Sol” Slingsby snorted. “And these, Peiffer—what have you to say of these?”

There were four separate passports which had been found in Peiffer’s pockets. He could be a Dane of Esbjerg, a Swede of Stockholm, a Norwegian of Christiania, or a Dutchman from Amsterdam. All four nationalities were open to Peiffer to select from.

“They provide you with these, no doubt, in your school at Hamburg,” and Slingsby paused to collect his best German. “You are a prisoner of war. *Das ist genug,”* he cried, and Peiffer climbed to the internment camp.

So far so good. Slingsby had annexed Peiffer, but more important than Peiffer was Peiffer’s little plot, and that he had not got. Nor did the most careful inquiry disclose what Peiffer had done and where he had been during the time when he was not. For six hours Peiffer had been loose in Gibraltar, and Slingsby began to get troubled. He tried to assume the mentality of Peiffer, and so reach his intention, but that did not help. He got out all the reports in which Peiffer’s name was mentioned and read them over again.

I saw him sit back in his chair and remain looking straight in front of him.

“Yes,” he said thoughtfully, and he turned over the report to me, pointing to a passage. It was written some months before, at Melilla, on the African side of the Mediterranean, and it ran like this:

“Peiffer frequents the low houses and cafes, where he spends a good deal of money and sometimes gets drunk. When drunk he gets very arrogant, and has been known to boast that he has been three times in Bordeaux since the war began, and, thanks to his passports, can travel as easily as if the world were at peace. On such occasions he expresses the utmost contempt for neutral nations. I myself have heard him burst out: ‘Wait until we have settled with our enemies.

Then we will deal properly with the neutral nations. They shall explain to us on their knees. Meanwhile,' and he thumped the table, making the glasses rattle, 'let them keep quiet and hold their tongues. We shall do what we like in neutral countries.'"

I read the passage.

"Do you see that last sentence? 'We shall do what we like in neutral countries.' No man ever spoke the mind of his nation better than Peiffer did that night in a squalid cafe in Melilla."

Slingsby looked out over the harbour to where the sun was setting on the sierras. He would have given an arm to be sure of what Peiffer had set on foot behind those hills.

"I wonder," he said uneasily, and from that day he began to sleep badly.

Then came another and a most disquieting phase of the affair. Peiffer began to write letters to Slingsby. He was not comfortable. He was not being treated as an officer should be. He had no amusements, and his food was too plain. Moreover, there were Germans and Austrians up in the camp who turned up their noses at him because their birth was better than his.

"You see what these letters mean?" said Slingsby. "Peiffer wants to be sent away from the Rock."

"You are reading your own ideas into them," I replied.

But Slingsby was right. Each letter under its simple and foolish excuses was a prayer for translation to a less dangerous place. For as the days passed and no answer was vouchsafed, the prayer became a real cry of fear.

"I claim to be sent to England without any delay. I must be sent," he wrote frankly and frantically.

Slingsby set his teeth with a grim satisfaction.

"No, my friend, you shall stay while the danger lasts. If it's a year, if you are alone in the camp, still you shall stay. The horrors you have planned you shall share with every man, woman and child in the town."

We were in this horrible and strange predicament. The whole colony was menaced, and from the Lines to Europa Point only two men knew of the peril. Of those two, one, in an office down by the harbour, ceaselessly and vainly, with a dreadful anxiety, asked “When?” The other, the prisoner, knew the very hour and minute of the catastrophe, and waited for it with the sinking fear of a criminal awaiting the fixed moment of his execution.

Thus another week passed.

Slingsby became a thing of broken nerves. If you shut the door noisily he cursed; if you came in noiselessly he cursed yet louder, and one evening he reached the stage when the sunset gun made him jump.

“That’s enough,” I said sternly. “To-day is Saturday. Tomorrow we borrow the car”—there is only one worth talking about on the Rock—“and we drive out.”

“I can’t do it,” he cried.

I continued:

“We will lunch somewhere by the road, and we will go on to the country house of the Claytons, who will give us tea. Then in the afternoon we will return.”

Slingsby hesitated. It is curious to remember on how small a matter so much depended. I believe he would have refused, but at that moment the sunset gun went off and he jumped out of his chair.

“Yes, I am fairly rocky,” he admitted. “I will take a day off.”

I borrowed the car, and we set off and lunched according to our programme. It was perhaps half an hour afterwards when we were going slowly over a remarkably bad road. A powerful car, driven at a furious pace, rushed round a corner towards us, swayed, lurched, and swept past us with a couple of inches to spare, whilst a young man seated at the wheel shouted a greeting and waved his hand.

“Who the dickens was that?” I asked.

“I know,” replied Slingsby. “It’s Morano. He’s a count, and will be a marquis and no end of a swell if he doesn’t get killed motoring. Which, after all, seems

likely.”

I thought no more of the man until his name cropped up whilst we were sitting at tea on the Claytons’ veranda.

“We passed Morano,” said Slingsby. And Mrs. Clayton said with some pride—she was a pretty, kindly woman, but she rather affected the Spanish nobility:

“He lunched with us to-day. You know he is staying in Gibraltar.”

“Yes, I know that,” said Slingsby. “For I met him a little time ago. He wanted to know if there was a good Government launch for sale.”

Mrs. Clayton raised her eyebrows in surprise.

“A launch? Surely you are wrong. He is devoting himself to aviation.”

“Is he?” said Slingsby, and a curious look flickered for a moment over his face.

We left the house half an hour afterwards, and as soon as we were out of sight of it Slingsby opened his hand. He was holding a visiting card.

“I stole this off the hall table,” he said. “Mrs. Clayton will never forgive me. Just look at it.”

His face had become extraordinarily grave. The card was Morano’s, and it was engraved after the Spanish custom. In Spain, when a woman marries she does not lose her name. She may be in appearance more subject to her husband than the women of other countries, though you will find many good judges to tell you that women rule Spain. In any case her name is not lost in that of her husband; the children will bear it as well as their father’s, and will have it printed on their cards. Thus, Mr. Jones will call on you, but on the card he leaves he will be styled:

MR. JONES AND ROBINSON,

if Robinson happens to be his mother’s name, and if you are scrupulous in your etiquette you will so address him.

Now, on the card which Slingsby had stolen, the Count Morano was described:

“I see,” I replied. “Morano had a German mother.”

I was interested. There might be nothing in it, of course. A noble of Spain might have a German mother and still not intrigue for the Germans against the owners of Gibraltar.. But no sane man would take a bet about it.

“The point is,” said Slingsby, “I am pretty sure that is not the card which he sent in to me when he came to ask about a launch. We will go straight to the office and make sure.”

By the time we got there we were both somewhat excited, and we searched feverishly in the drawers of Slingsby’s writing-table.

“I shouldn’t be such an ass as to throw it away,” he said, turning over his letters. “No! Here it is!” and a sharp exclamation burst from his lips.

“Look!”

He laid the card he had stolen side by side with the card which he had just found, and between the two there was a difference—to both of us a veritable world of difference. For from the second card the “y Goltz,” the evidence that Morano was half-German, had disappeared.

“And it’s not engraved,” said Slingsby, bending down over the table. “It’s just printed—printed in order to mislead us.”

Slingsby sat down in his chair. A great hope was bringing the life back to his tired face, but he would not give the reins to his hope.

“Let us go slow,” he said, warned by the experience of a hundred disappointments. “Let us see how it works out. Morano comes to Gibraltar and makes a prolonged stay in a hotel. Not being a fool, he is aware that I know who is in Gibraltar and who is not. Therefore he visits me with a plausible excuse for being in Gibraltar. But he takes the precaution to have this card specially printed. Why, if he is playing straight? He pretends he wants a launch, but he is really devoting himself to aviation. Is it possible that the Count Morano, not forgetting Goltz, knows exactly how the good Peiffer spent the six hours we can’t account

for, and what his little plan is?”

I sprang up. It did seem that Slingsby was getting at last to the heart of Peiffer’s secret.

“We will now take steps,” said Slingsby, and telegrams began to fly over the wires. In three days’ time the answers trickled in.

An agent of Morano’s had bought a German aeroplane in Lisbon. A German aviator was actually at the hotel there. Slingsby struck the table with his fist.

“What a fool I am!” he cried. “Give me a newspaper.”

I handed him one of that morning’s date. Slingsby turned it feverishly over, searching down the columns of the provincial news until he came to the heading “Portugal.”

“Here it is!” he cried, and he read aloud. “‘The great feature of the Festival week this year will be, of course, the aviation race from Villa Real to Seville. Amongst those who have entered machines is the Count Morano y Goltz.’”

He leaned back and lit a cigarette.

“We have got it! Morano’s machine, driven by the German aviator, rises from the aerodrome at Villa Real in Portugal with the others, heads for Seville, drops behind, turns and makes a bee-line for the Rock, Peiffer having already arranged with Morano for signals to be made where bombs should be dropped. When is the race to be?”

I took the newspaper.

“Ten days from now.”

“Good!”

Once more the telegrams began to fly. A week later Slingsby told me the result.

“Owing to unforeseen difficulties, the Festival committee at Villa Real has reorganised its arrangements, and there will be no aviation race. Oh, they’ll do what they like in neutral countries, will they? But Peiffer shan’t know,” he

added, with a grin. “Peiffer shall eat of his own frightfulness.”

The Ebony Box

“No, no,” said Colonel von Altrock, abruptly. “It is not always true.”

The conversation died away at once, and everyone about that dinner table in the Rue St. Florentin looked at him expectantly. He played nervously with the stem of his wineglass for a few moments, as though the complete silence distressed him. Then he resumed with a more diffident air:

“War no doubt inspires noble actions and brings out great qualities in men from whom you expected nothing. But there is another side to it which becomes apparent, not at once, but after a few months of campaigning. Your nerves get over-strained, fatigue and danger tell their tale. You lose your manners, sometimes you degenerate into a brute. I happen to know. Thirty years have passed since the siege of Paris, yet even to-day there is no part of my life which I regret so much as the hours between eleven and twelve o’clock of Christmas night in the year ‘Seventy. I will tell you about it if you like, although the story may make us late for the opera.”

The opera to be played that evening was “Faust,” which most had heard, and the rest could hear when they would. On the other hand Colonel von Altrock was habitually a silent man. The offer which he made now he was not likely to repeat. It was due, as his companions understood, to the accident that this night was the first which he had spent in Paris since the days of the great siege.

“It will not matter if we are a little late,” said his hostess, the Baroness Hammerstein, and her guests agreed with her.

“It is permitted to smoke?” asked the Colonel. For a moment the flame of a match lit up and exaggerated the hollows and the lines upon his lean, rugged face. Then, drawing his chair to the table, he told his story.

I was a lieutenant of the fifth company of the second battalion of the 103rd Regiment, which belonged to the 23rd Infantry Division. It is as well to be exact. That division was part of the 12th Army Corps under the Crown Prince of Saxony, and in the month of December formed the south-eastern segment of our circle about Paris. On Christmas night I happened to be on duty at a forepost in advance of Noisyle-Grand. The centrigrade thermometer was down to twelve degrees below zero, and our little wooden hut with the sloping roof, which

served us at once as kitchen, mess-room, and dormitory, seemed to us all a comfortable shelter. Outside its door the country glimmered away into darkness, a white silent plain of snow. Inside, the camp bedsteads were neatly ranged along the wall where the roof was lowest. A long table covered with a white cloth—for we were luxurious on Christmas night—occupied the middle of the floor. A huge fire blazed up the chimney, chairs of any style, from a Louis Quatorze fauteuil borrowed from the *salon* of a chateau to the wooden bench of a farm-house, were placed about the table, and in a corner stood a fine big barrel of Bavarian beer which had arrived that morning as a Christmas present from my mother at Leipzig. We were none of us anxious to turn out into the bitter cold, I can tell you. But we were not colonels in those days, and while the Hauptmann was proposing my mother's health the door was thrust open and an orderly muffled up to the eyes stood on the threshold at the salute.

"The Herr Oberst wishes to see the Herr Lieutenant von Altrock," said he, and before I had time even to grumble he turned on his heels and marched away.

I took down my great-coat, drew the cape over my head, and went out of the hut. There was no wind, nor was the snow falling, but the cold was terrible, and to me who had come straight from the noise of my companions the night seemed unnaturally still. I plodded away through the darkness. Behind me in the hut the Hauptmann struck up a song, and the words came to me quite clearly and very plaintively across the snow:

Ich hatte einen Kamaraden

Einen besseren findest du nicht.

I wondered whether in the morning, like that comrade, I should be a man to be mentioned in the past tense. For more than once a sentinel had been found frozen dead at his post, and I foresaw a long night's work before me. My Colonel had acquired a habit of choosing me for special services, and indeed to his kindness in this respect I owed my commission. For you must understand that I was a student at Heidelberg when the newsboys came running down the streets one evening in July with the telegram that M. Benedetti had left Ems. I joined the army as a volunteer, and I fought in the ranks at Gravelotte. However, I felt no gratitude to my Colonel that Christmas night as I tramped up the slope of Noisyle-Grand to the chateau where he had his quarters.

I found him sitting at a little table drawn close to the fire in a bare, dimly-lighted room. A lamp stood on the table, and he was peering at a crumpled scrap of paper and smoothing out its creases. So engrossed was he, indeed, in his scrutiny that it was some minutes before he raised his head and saw me waiting for his commands.

"Lieutenant von Altrock," he said, "you must ride to Raincy."

Raincy was only five miles distant, as the crow flies. Yes, but the French had made a sortie on the 21st, they had pushed back our lines, and they now held Ville Evrart and Maison Blanche between Raincy and Noisyle-Grand. I should have to make a circuit; my five miles became ten. I did not like the prospect at all. I liked it still less when the Colonel added:

"You must be careful. More than one German soldier has of late been killed upon that road. There are *francs-tireurs* about, and you *must* reach Raincy."

It was a verbal message which he gave me, and I was to deliver it in person to the commandant of the battery at Raincy. It bore its fruit upon the 27th, when the cross-fire from Raincy and Noisyle-Grand destroyed the new French fort upon Mount Avron in a snowstorm.

"There is a horse ready for you at the stables," said the Colonel, and with a nod he turned again to his scrap of paper. I saluted and walked to the door. As my

hand was on the knob he called me back.

“What do you make of it?” he asked, holding the paper out to me. “It was picked out of the Marne in a sealed wine-bottle.”

I took the paper, and saw that a single sentence was written upon it in a round and laborious hand with the words mis-spelt. The meaning of the sentence seemed simple enough. It was apparently a message from a M. Bonnet to his son in the Mobiles at Paris, and it stated that the big black sow had had a litter of fifteen.

“What do you make of it?” repeated the Colonel.

“Why, that M. Bonnet’s black sow has farrowed fifteen,” said I.

I handed the paper back. The Colonel looked at it again, shrugged his-shoulders, and laughed.

“Well, after all, perhaps it does mean no more than that,” said he.

But for the Colonel’s suspicions I should not have given another thought to that mis-spelt scrawl. M. Bonnet was probably some little farmer engrossed in his pigs and cows, who thought that no message could be more consoling to his son locked up in Paris than this great news about the black sow. The Colonel’s anxiety, however, fixed it for awhile in my mind.

The wildest rumours were flying about our camp at that time, as I think will always happen when you have a large body of men living under a great strain of cold and privation and peril. They perplexed the seasoned officers and they were readily swallowed by the youngsters, of whom I was one. Now, this scrap of paper happened to fit in with the rumour which most of all exercised our imaginations.

It was known that in spite of all our precautions news was continually leaking into Paris which we did not think it good for the Parisians to have. What we did think good for them—information, for instance, of the defeat of the Army of the Loire—we ourselves sent in without delay. But we ascertained from our prisoners that Paris was enlightened with extraordinary rapidity upon other matters which we wished to keep to ourselves. On that very Christmas Day they already knew that General Faidherbe, at Pont Noyelles, had repulsed a portion of

our first army under General Manteuffel. How did they know? We were not satisfied that pigeons and balloons completely explained the mystery. No, we believed that the news passed somewhere through our lines on the south-east of Paris. There was supposed to exist a regular system like the underground road in the Southern States of America during the slavery days. There the escaped slave was quickly and secretly passed on from appointed house to appointed house, until he reached freedom. Here it was news in cipher which was passed on and on to a house close to our lines, whence, as occasion served, it was carried into Paris.

That was the rumour. There may have been truth in it, or it may have been entirely false. But, at all events, it had just the necessary element of fancy to appeal to the imagination of a very young man, and as I walked to the stables and mounted the horse which the Colonel had lent me, I kept wondering whether this message, so simple in appearance, had travelled along that underground road and was covering its last stage between the undiscovered chateau and Paris in the sealed wine-bottle. I tried to make out what the black sow stood for in the cipher, and whose identity was concealed under the pseudonym of M. Bonnet. So I rode down the slope of Noisyle-Grand.

But at the bottom of the slope these speculations passed entirely from my mind. In front, hidden away in the darkness, lay the dangers of Ville Evrart and Maison Blanche. German soldiers had ridden along this path and had not returned; the *franca-tireurs* were abroad. Yet I must reach Raincy. Moreover, in my own mind, I was equally convinced that I must return. I saw the little beds against the wall of the hut under the sloping roof. I rode warily, determined to sleep in one of them that night, determined to keep my life if it could be kept. I believe I should have pistolled my dearest friend without a tinge of remorse had he tried to delay me for a second. Three months of campaigning, in a word, had told *their* tale.

I crossed the Marne and turned off the road into a forest path. Ville Evrart with its French garrison lay now upon my left behind the screen of trees. Fortunately there was no moon that night, and a mist hung in the air. The snow, too, deadened the sound of my horse’s hoofs. But I rode, nevertheless, very gently and with every sense alert. Each moment I expected the challenge of a sentinel in French. From any of the bushes which I passed I might suddenly see the spurt of flame from a *franc-tireur’s chassepot.* If a twig snapped in the frost at my side I was very sure the foot of an enemy was treading there.

I came to the end of the wood and rode on to Chesnay. Here the country was more open, and I had passed Ville Evrart. But I did not feel any greater security. I was possessed with a sort of rage to get my business done and live—yes, at all costs *live.* A mile beyond Chesnay I came to cross-roads, and within the angle which the two roads made a little cabin stood upon a plot of grass. I was in doubt which road to take. The cabin was all dark, and riding up to the door I hammered upon it with the butt of my pistol. It was not immediately opened. There must indeed have been some delay, since the inmates were evidently in bed. But I was not in any mood to show consideration. I wanted to get on—to get on and live. A little window was within my reach. I dashed the butt of the pistol violently through the glass.

"Will that waken you, eh?" I cried, and almost before I had finished I heard a shuffling footstep in the passage and the door was opened. A poor old peasant woman, crippled with rheumatism, stood in the doorway shading a lighted candle with a gnarled, trembling hand. In her haste to obey she had merely thrown a petticoat over the shoulders of her nightdress, and there she stood with bare feet, shivering in the cold, an old bent woman of eighty, and apologised.

"I am sorry, monsieur," she said, meekly. "But I cannot move as quickly as I could when I was young. How can I serve monsieur?"

Not a word of reproach about her broken window. You would think that the hardest man must have felt some remorse. I merely broke in upon her apologies with a rough demand for information.

"The road upon your right leads to Chelles, monsieur," she answered. "That upon your left to Raincy."

I rode off without another word. It is not a pretty description which I am giving to you, but it is a true one. That is my regret—it is a true one. I forgot the old peasant woman the moment I had passed the cabin. I thought only of the long avenues of trees which stretched across that flat country, and which could hide whole companies of *francs-tireura.* I strained my eyes forwards. I listened for the sound of voices. But the first voice which I heard spoke in my own tongue.

It was the voice of a sentry on the outposts of Raincy, and I could have climbed down from my saddle and hugged him to my heart. Instead, I sat impassively in my saddle and gave him the countersign. I was conducted to the quarters of the

commandant of artillery and I delivered my message.

“You have come quickly,” he said. “What road did you take?”

“That of Chesnay and Gagny.”

The commandant looked queerly at me.

“Did you?” said he. “You are lucky. You will return by Montfermeil and Chelles, Lieutenant von Altrock, and I will send an escort with you. Apparently we are better informed at Raincy than you are at Noisyle-Grand.”

“I knew there was danger, sir,” I replied.

A regiment of dragoons was quartered at Raincy, and from it two privates and a corporal were given me for escort. In the company of these men I started back by the longer road in the rear of our lines. And it was a quarter to ten when I started. For I noticed the time of a clock in the commandant’s quarters. I should think that it must have taken three-quarters of an hour to reach Montfermeil, for the snow was deep here and the mist very thick. Beyond Montfermeil, however, we came to higher ground; there were fewer drifts of snow, and the night began to clear, so that we made better going. We were now, of course, behind our lines, and the only risk we ran was that a few peasants armed with rifles from a battlefield or a small band of *francs-tireurs* might be lurking on the chance of picking off a straggler. But that risk was not very great now that there were four of us. I rode therefore with an easier mind, and the first thing which entered my thoughts was—what do you think? The old peasant-woman’s cabin with the broken window? Not a bit of it. No, it was M. Bonnet’s black sow. Had M. Bonnet’s sow farrowed fifteen? Or was that litter of fifteen intended to inform the people in Paris by some system of multiplication of the exact number of recruits which had joined one of the French armies still in the field—say, General Faidherbe’s, at Bapaume, and so to keep up their spirits and prolong the siege? I was still puzzling over this problem when in a most solitary place I came suddenly upon a chateau with lighted windows. This was the Chateau Villetaneuse. I reined in my horse and stopped. My escort halted behind me. It was after all an astonishing sight. There were many chateaux about Paris then, as there are now, but not one that I had ever come across was inhabited by more than a caretaker. The owners had long since fled. Breached walls, trampled gardens, gaping roofs, and silence and desertion—that is what we meant when

we spoke of a chateau near Paris in those days. But here was one with lighted windows on the first and second storeys staring out calmly on the snow as though never a Prussian soldier had crossed the Rhine. A thick clump of trees sheltered it behind, and it faced the eastern side of the long ridge of Mont Guichet, along the foot of which I rode—the side farthest from Paris. From the spot where I and my escort had halted an open park stretched level to the door. The house had, no doubt, a very homelike look on that cold night. It should have spoken to me, no doubt, of the well-ordered family life and the gentle occupations of women. But I was thinking of M. Bonnet's black sow. I was certain that none of our officers were quartered there and making the best of their Christmas night in France. Had that been the case, black paths and ruts would have been trampled in the snow up to the door, and before now I should have been challenged by a sentinel. No! The more I looked at the house and its lighted windows, the more I thought of M. Bonnet's sow. Was this solitary chateau the undiscovered last station on the underground road through which the news passed into Paris? If not, why was it still inhabited? Why did the lights blaze out upon the snow so late?

I commanded my escort to be silent. We rode across the park, and halfway to the door we came upon a wire fence and a gate. There we dismounted, and walked our horses. We tethered them to a tree about twenty yards from the house. I ordered one of my dragoons to go round the house, and watch any door which he might find at the back. I told the other two to stay where they were, and I advanced alone to the steps, but before I had reached them the front door was thrown open, and a girl with a lantern in her hand came out.

She held the lantern high above her head and peered forward, so that the light fell full upon her hair, her face, and dress. She was a tall girl and slight of figure, with big, dark eyes, and a face pretty and made for laughter. It was very pale now, however, and the brows were drawn together in a frown. She wore a white evening frock, which glistened in the lantern light, and over her bare shoulders she had flung a heavy, black, military cloak. So she stood and swung the lantern slowly from side to side as she stared into the darkness, while the lights and shadows chased each other swiftly across her white frock, her anxious face, and the waves of her fair hair.

"Whom do you expect at this hour, mademoiselle?" I asked.

I was quite close to her, but she had not seen me, for I stood at the bottom of the

steps and she was looking out over my head. Yet she did not start or utter any cry. Only the lantern rattled in her hand. Then she stood quite still for a moment or two, and afterwards lowered her arm until the light shone upon me.

“You are Prussian?” she said.

“A lieutenant of foot,” I answered. “You have nothing to fear.”

“I am not afraid,” she replied, quietly.

“Yet you tremble, mademoiselle. Your hand shakes.”

“That is the cold,” said she.

“Whom did you expect?”

“No one,” she replied. “I thought that I heard the rattle of iron as though a horse moved and a stirrup rang. It is lonely here since our neighbours have fled. I came out to see.”

“The lantern then was not a signal, mademoiselle?” I asked.

She looked at me in perplexity, and certainly the little piece of acting, I thought, was very well done. Many a man might have been taken in by it. But it was thrown away upon me, for I had noticed that heavy military cloak. How did it come to lie so conveniently to her hand in the hall?

“A signal?” she repeated. “To whom?”

“To some man hiding in the woods of Mont Guichet, a signal to him that he may come and fetch the news for Paris that has lately—very lately—been brought to the house.”

She bent forward and peered down at me, drawing the cloak closer about her neck.

“You are under some strange mistake, monsieur,” she said. “No news for Paris has been brought to this house by anyone.”

“Indeed?” I answered. “And is that so?” Then I stretched out my hand and said

triumphantly: “You will tell me perhaps that the cloak upon your shoulders is a woman’s cloak?”

And she laughed! It was humiliating; it is always humiliating to a young man not to be taken seriously, isn’t—especially if he is a conqueror? There was I thinking that I had fairly cross-examined her into a trap, and she laughed indulgently. Of course, a girl always claims the right to be ever so much older than a man of her own age, but she stood on the top of the steps and laughed down at me as though she had the advantage of as many years as there were steps between us. And she explained indulgently, too.

“The cloak I am wearing belongs to a wounded French officer who was taken prisoner and released upon parole. He is now in our house.”

‘Then I think I will make his acquaintance,” I said, and over my shoulder I called to the corporal. As he advanced to my side a look of alarm came into the girl’s face.

“You are not alone,” she said, and suddenly her face became wistful and her voice began to plead. “You have not come for him? He has done no harm. He could not, even if he would. And he would not, for he has given his parole. Oh, you are not going to take him away?”

“That we shall see, mademoiselle.”

I left one dragoon at the door. I ordered the corporal to wait in the hall, and I followed the girl up the stairs to the first floor. All her pride had gone; she led the way with a submission of manner which seemed to me only a fresh effort to quiet my suspicions. But they were not quieted. I distrusted her; I believed that I had under my fingers the proof of that rumour which flew about our camp. She stopped at a door, and as she turned the handle she said:

“This is my own parlour, monsieur. We all use it now, for it is warmer than the others, and all our servants but one have fled.”

It was a pretty room, and cheery enough to a young man who came into it from the darkness and the snow. A piano stood open in a corner with a rug thrown upon it to protect the strings from the cold; books lay upon the tables, heavy curtains were drawn close over the windows, there were cushioned sofas and deep armchairs, and a good fire of logs blazed upon the hearth. These details I

took in at once. Then I looked at the occupants. A youth lay stretched upon a sofa close to the fire with a wrap covering his legs. The wrap was raised by a cradle to keep off its weight. His face must have been, I think, unusually handsome when he had his health; at the moment it was so worn and pale, and the eyes were so sunk, that all its beauty had gone. The pallor was accentuated by a small black moustache he wore and his black hair. He lay with his head supported upon a pillow, and was playing a game of chess with an old lady who sat at a little table by his side. This old lady was actually making a move as I entered the room, for as she turned and stared at me she was holding a chessman in her hand. I advanced to the fire and warmed my hands at it.

“You, sir, are the wounded officer on parole?” I said in French. The officer bowed.

“And you, madame?” I asked of the old lady. The sight of my uniform seemed to have paralysed her with terror. She sat still holding the chessman in her hand, and staring at me with her mouth half-open.

“Come, come, madame,” I explained, impatiently; “it is a simple question.”

“Monsieur, you frighten her,” said the young lady. “It is my aunt, the Baroness Granville.”

“You tell me nothing of yourself,” I said to her, and she looked at me in surprise.

“Since you have come with an escort to this house I imagined you must know to whom it belonged. I am Sophie de Villetaneuse.”

“Exactly,” I replied, as though I had known all along, and had merely asked the question to see whether she would speak the truth. “Now, mademoiselle, will you please explain to me how it is that while your neighbours have fled you remain at your chateau?”

“It is quite simple,” she answered. “My mother is bedridden. She could not be moved. She could not be left alone.”

“You will pardon me,” said I, “if I test the statement.”

The wounded officer raised himself upon his elbow as though to protest, but Mademoiselle de Villetaneuse put out a hand and checked him. She showed me a

face flushed with anger, but she spoke quite quietly.

“I will myself take you to my mother’s room.”

I laughed. I said: “That is just what I expected. You will take me to your mother’s room and leave your friends here to make any little preparations in the way of burning awkward letters which they may think desirable. Thank you, no! I am not so easily caught.”

Mademoiselle Sophie was becoming irritated.

“There are no awkward letters!” she exclaimed.

“That statement, too, I shall put to the test.”

I went to the door, and standing so that I could still keep an eye upon the room, I called the corporal.

“You will search the house thoroughly,” I said, “and quickly. Bring me word how many people you find in it. You, mademoiselle, will remain in the room with us.”

She shrugged her shoulders as I closed the door and came back into the room.

“You were wounded, monsieur,” I said to the Frenchman. “Where?”

“In the sortie on Le Bourget.”

“And you came here the moment you were released on your parole?”

The wounded officer turned with a smile to Mademoiselle Sophie.

“Yes, for here live my best friends.”

He took her hand, and with a Frenchman’s grace he raised it to his lips and kissed it. And I was suddenly made acquainted with the relationship in which these two, youth and maid, stood to one another. Mademoiselle Sophie had cried out on the steps against the possibility that I might have come to claim my prisoner. But though she spoke no word, she was still more explicit now. With the officer that caress was plainly no more than a pretty way of saying thanks; it

had the look of a habit, it was so neatly given, and he gave it without carelessness, it is true, but without warmth. She, however, received it very differently. He did not see, because his head was bent above her hand, but I did.

I saw the look of pain in her face, the slight contraction of her shoulders and arms, as if to meet a blow. The kiss hurt her—no, not the kiss, but the finished grace with which it was given, the proof, in a word, that it was a way of saying "Thanks"—and nothing more. Here was a woman who loved and a man who did not love, and the woman knew. So much was evident to me who looked on, but when the officer raised his head there was nothing for him to see, and upon her lips only the conventional remark:

"We should have been hurt if you had not come."

I resumed my questions:

"Your doctor, monsieur, is in the house?"

"At this hour? No."

"Ah. That is a pity."

The young man lifted his head from his pillow and looked me over from head to foot with a stare of disdain.

"I do not quite understand. You doubt my word, monsieur?"

"Why not?" I asked sharply.

It was quite possible that the cradle, this rug across his legs, the pillow, were all pretences. Many a soldier in those days was pale and worn and had sunken eyes, and yet was sound of limb and could do a day's work of twenty-four hours if there were need. I had my theory and as yet I had come upon nothing to disprove it. This young officer might very well have brought in a cipher message to the Chateau Villetaneuse. Mademoiselle Sophie might very well have waved her lantern at the door to summon a fresh messenger.

"No; why should I not doubt your word?" I repeated.

He turned his face to the old lady. "It is your move, Baronne," he said, and she

placed the piece she held upon a square of the board. Mademoiselle Sophie took her stand by the table between the players, and the game went on just as though there were no intruder in the room. It was uncomfortable for me. I shifted my feet. I tried to appear at my ease; finally I sat down in a chair. They took no notice of me whatever. But that I felt hot upon a discovery, but that I knew if I could bring back to Noisyle-Grand proof of where the leakage through our lines occurred, I should earn approval and perhaps promotion, I should very deeply have regretted my entrance into the Chateau Villetaneuse. And I was extremely glad when at last the corporal opened the door. He had searched the house—he had found no one but Madame de Villetaneuse and an old servant who was watching by her bed.

“Very well,” said I, and the corporal returned to the hall.

Mademoiselle Sophie moved away from the chess-table. She came and stood opposite to me, and though her face was still, her eyes were hard with anger.

“And now perhaps you will tell me to what I owe your visit?” she said.

“Certainly,” I returned. I fixed my eyes on her, and I said slowly, “I have come to ask for more news of M. Bonnet’s black sow.”

Mademoiselle Sophie stared as if she were not sure whether I was mad or drunk, but was very sure I was one or the other. The young Frenchman started upon his couch, with the veins swelling upon his forehead and a flushed face.

“This is an insult,” he cried savagely, and no less savagely I answered him.

“Hold your tongue 1” I cried. “You forget too often that though you are on parole you are still a prisoner.”

He fell back upon the sofa with a groan of pain, and the girl hurried to his side.

“Your leg hurts you. You should not have moved,” she cried.

“It is nothing,” he said, faintly.

Meanwhile I had been looking about the room for a box or a case where the cipher messages might be hid. I saw nothing of the kind. Of course they might be hidden between the pages of a book. I went from table to table, taking them

by the boards and shaking the leaves. Not a scrap of paper tumbled out. There was another door in the room besides that which led on to the landing.

“Mademoiselle, what room is that?” I asked.

“My bedroom,” she answered, simply, and with a gesture full of dignity she threw open the door.

I carried the mud and snow and the grime of a camp without a scruple of remorse into that neat and pretty chamber. Mademoiselle Sophie followed me as I searched wardrobe and drawer and box. At last I came to one drawer in her dressing-table which was locked. I tried the handle again to make sure. Yes, it was locked. I looked suddenly at the young lady. She was watching me out of the corners of her eyes with a peculiar intentness. I felt at once that I was hot.

“Open that drawer, mademoiselle,” I said.

“It contains only some private things.”

“Open that drawer or I burst it open.”

“No,” she cried, as I jerked the handle. “I will open it.”

She fetched the key out of another drawer which was unlocked, and fitted it into the lock of the dressing-table. And all the while I saw that she was watching me. She meant to play me some trick, I was certain. So I watched too, and I did well to watch. She turned the key, opened the drawer, and then snatched out something with extraordinary rapidity and ran as hard as she could to the door—not the door through which we had entered, but a second door which gave on to the passage. She ran very fast and she ran very lightly, and she did not stumble over a chair as I did in pursuit of her. But she had to unlatch the door and pull it open. I caught her up and closed my arms about her. It was a little, carved, ebony box which she held, the very thing for which I searched.

“I thought so,” I cried with a laugh. “Drop the box, mademoiselle. Drop it on the floor!”

The noise of our struggle had been heard in the next room. The Baroness rushed through the doorway.

“What has happened?” she cried. “Mon Dieu! you are killing her!”

“Drop the box, mademoiselle!”

And as I spoke she threw it away. She threw it through the doorway; she tried to throw it over the banisters of the stairs, but my arms were about hers, and it fell into the passage just beyond the door. I darted from her and picked it up. When I returned with it she was taking a gold chain from her neck. At the end of the chain hung a little golden key. This she held out to me.

“Open it here,” she said in a low, eager voice.

The sudden change only increased my suspicions, or rather my conviction that I had now the proof which I needed. A minute ago she was trying as hard as she could to escape with the box, now she was imploring me to open it.

“Why, if you are so eager to show me the contents, did you try to throw it away?” I asked.

“I tried to throw it down into the hall,” she answered.

“My corporal would have picked it up.”

“Oh, what would that matter?” she exclaimed, impatiently. “You would have opened it in the hall. That was what I wanted. Open it here! At all events open it here!”

The very urgency of her pleading made me determined to refuse the plea.

“No, you have some other ruse, mademoiselle,” said I. “Perhaps you wish to gain time for your friend in the next room. No, we will return here and open it comfortably by the fire.”

I kept a tight hold upon the box. I shook it. To my delight I felt that there were papers within it. I carried it back to the fireside and sat down on a chair. Mademoiselle Sophie followed me close, and as I fixed the little gold key into the lock she laid her hand very gently upon my arm.

“I beg you not to unlock that box,” she said; “if you do you will bring upon me a great humiliation and upon yourself much remorse. There is nothing there which

concerns you. There are just my little secrets. A girl may have secrets, monsieur, which are sacred to her."

She was standing quite close to me, and her back was towards the French officer and her aunt. They could not see her face and they could hardly have heard more than a word here and there of what she said. For always she spoke in a low voice, and at times that low voice dropped to a whisper, so that I myself had to watch her lips. I answered her only by turning the key in the lock. She took her hand from my arm and laid it on the lid to hinder me from opening it.

"I wore the key on a chain about my neck, monsieur," she whispered. "Does that teach you nothing? Even though you are young, does it teach you nothing? I said that if you unlocked that box you would cause me great humiliation, thinking that would be enough to stop you. But I see I must tell you more. Read the letters, monsieur, question me about them, and you will make my life a very lonely one. I think so. I think you will destroy my chance of happiness. You would not wish that, monsieur? It is true that we are enemies, but some day this war will end, and you would not wish to prolong its sufferings beyond the end. Yet you will be doing that, monsieur, if you open that box. You would be sorry afterwards when you were back at home to know that a girl in France was suffering from a needless act of yours. Yes, you will be sorry if you open that box."

It seems now almost impossible to me that I could have doubted her sincerity; she spoke with so much simplicity, and so desperate an appeal looked out from her dark eyes. Ever since that Christmas night I can see her quite clearly at will, standing as she stood then—all the sincerity of her which I would not acknowledge, all the appeal which I would not hear; and I see her many times when for my peace I would rather not. Much remorse, she said very wisely, would be the consequence for me. She was pleading for her pride, and to do that the better she laid her pride aside; yet she never lost her dignity. She was pleading for her chance of happiness, foreseeing that it was likely to be destroyed, without any reason or any profit to a living being, by a stranger who would the next moment pass out of her life. Yet there was no outcry, and there were no tears. Had it been a trick—I ask the ladies —would there not have been tears?

But I thought it was a trick and a cheap one. She was trying to make me believe that there were love-letters in the box—compromising love-letters. Now, I *know*

that there were no love-letters in the box. I had seen the Frenchman's pretty way of saying thanks. I had noticed how the caress hurt her just through what it lacked. He was the friend, you see, and nothing more; she was the lover and the only lover of the pair. There could be no love-letters in the box unless she had written them herself and kept them. But I did not think she was the girl to do that. There was a dignity about her which would have stopped her pen.

I opened the box accordingly. Mademoiselle Sophie turned away abruptly, and sitting down in a chair shaded her eyes with her hand. I emptied the letters out on to a table, turning the box upside down, and thus the first which I took up and read was the one which lay at the very bottom. As I read it it seemed that every suspicion I had formed was established. She had hinted at love-letters, she had spoken of secrets sacred to a girl; and the letter was not even addressed to her. It was addressed to Madame de Villetaneuse; it was a letter which, if it meant no more than what was implied upon the surface, would have long since found destruction in the waste-paper basket. For it purported to be merely the acceptance of an invitation to dinner at the town house of Madame de Villetaneuse in the Faubourg St. Germain. It was signed only by a Christian name, "Armand," and the few sentences which composed the letter explained that M. Armand was a distant kinsman of Madame de Villetaneuse who had just come to Paris to pursue his studies, and who, up till now, had no acquaintance with the family.

I looked at Mademoiselle Sophie sternly. "So all this pother was about a mere invitation to dinner! Once let it be known that M. Armand will dine with Madame de Villetaneuse in the Faubourg St. Germain, and you are humiliated, you lose your chance of happiness, and I, too, shall find myself in good time suffering the pangs of remorse," and I read the letter slowly aloud to her, word by word.

She returned no answer. She sat with her hand shading her face, and she rocked her head backwards and forwards continually and rather quickly, like a child with a racking headache. Of course, to my mind all that was part of the game. The letter was dated two years back, but the month was December, and, of course, to antedate would be the first precaution.

"Come, mademoiselle," I said, changing my tone, "I invite you very seriously to make a clean breast of it. I wish to take no harsh measures with you if I can avoid them. Tell me frankly what news this letter plainly translated gives to

General Trochu in Paris."

"None," she answered.

"Very well," said I, and I took up the next letter. Ah, M. Armand writes again a week later. It was evidently a good dinner and M. Armand is properly grateful.

The gratitude, indeed, was rather excessive, rather provincial. It was just the effusion which a young man who had not yet learned self-possession might have written on his first introduction to the highest social life of Paris. Certainly the correspondence was very artfully designed. But what did it hide? I puzzled over the question; I took the words and the dates, and it seemed to me that I began to see light. So much stress was laid upon the dinner, that the word must signify some event of importance. The first letter spoke of a dinner in the future. I imagined that it had not been possible to pass this warning into Paris. The second letter mentioned with gratitude that the dinner had been successful. Well, suppose "dinner" stood for "engagement"! The letter would refer to the sortie from Paris which pushed back our lines and captured Ville Evrart and Maison Blanche. That seemed likely. Madame de Villetaneuse gave the dinner; General Trochu made the sortie. Then "Madame de Villetaneuse" stood for "General Trochu." Who would be Armand? Why, the French people outside Paris—the provincials! I had the explanation of that provincial expression of gratitude. Ah, no doubt it all seems far-fetched now that we sit quietly about this table. But put yourselves in the thick of war and take twenty years off your lives! Suppose yourselves young and green, eager for advancement, and just off your balance for want of sleep, want of food, want of rest, want of everything, and brutal from the facts of war. There are very few things which would seem far-fetched. It seemed to me that I was deciphering these letters with absolute accuracy. I saw myself promoted to captain, seconded to the General Staff. M. Armand represented the French people in the provinces. No doubt they would be grateful for that sortie. The only point which troubled me arose from M. Armand's presence at that dinner-party. Now, the one defect from the French point of view in that sortie on Ville Evrart was that the French outside Paris did not come to General Trochu's help. They were expected, but they did not take part in that dinner-party.

I went on with the letters, hoping to find an explanation there. The third letter was addressed to Mademoiselle de Villetaneuse, who had evidently written to M. Armand on behalf of her mother, inviting him to her box at the opera. M.

Armand regretted that he had not been fortunate enough to call at a time when mademoiselle was at home, and would look forward to the pleasure of seeing her at the opera. Was that an apology? I asked myself. An apology for absence at Ville Evrart and a pledge to be present at the next engagement!

“Mademoiselle,” I cried, “what does the opera stand for?”

Mademoiselle Sophie laughed disdainfully.

“For music, monsieur, for art, for refinement, for many things you do not understand.”

I sprang up in excitement. What did it matter what she said? M. Armand stood for the Army of the Loire. It was that army which had been expected at Ville Evrart. Here was a pledge that it would be reformed, that it would come to the help of Paris at the next sortie. That was valuable news—it could not but bring recognition to the man who brought evidence of it into the Prussian lines. I hurriedly read through the other letters, quoting a passage here and there, trying to startle Mademoiselle de Villetaneuse into a confession. But she never changed her attitude, she did not answer a word.

Her conduct was the more aggravating, for I began to get lost among these letters. They were all in the same handwriting; they were all signed “Armand,” and they seemed to give a picture of the life of a young man in Paris during the two years which preceded the war. They recorded dinner-parties, visits to the theatres, examinations passed, prizes won and lost, receptions, rides in the Bois, and Sunday excursions into the country. All these phrases, these appointments, these meetings, might have particular meanings. But if so, how stupendous a cipher! Besides, how was it that none of these messages had been passed into Paris? Very reluctantly I began to doubt my own conjecture. I read some more letters, and then I suddenly turned back to the earlier ones. I compared them with the later notes. I began to be afraid the correspondence after all was genuine, for the tone of the letters changed and changed so gradually, and yet so clearly, that the greatest literary art could hardly have deliberately composed them. I seemed to witness the actual progress of M. Armand, a hobbledehoy from the provinces losing his awkwardness, acquiring ease and polish in his contact with the refinement of Paris. Gratitude was now expressed without effusion, he was no longer gaping with admiration at the elegance of the women, a knowledge of the world began to show itself in his comments. M. Armand was growing master of

himself, he had gained a facility of style and a felicity of phrase. The last letters had the postmark of Paris, the first that of Auvergne.

They were genuine, then. And they were not love-letters. I looked at Mademoiselle Sophie with an increased perplexity. Why did she now sit rocking her head like a child in pain? Why had she so struggled to hinder me from opening them? They recorded a beginning of acquaintanceship and the growth of that into friendship between a young man and a young girl —nothing more. The friendship might eventually end in marriage no doubt if left to itself, but there was not a word of that in the letters. I was still wondering, when the French officer raised himself from his sofa and dragged himself across the room to Mademoiselle Sophie's chair. His left trouser leg had been slit down the side from the knee to the foot and laced lightly so as to make room for a bandage. He supported himself from chair to chair with evident pain, and I could not doubt that his wound was as genuine as the letters.

He bent down and gently took her hand away from her face.

"Sophie," he said, "I did not dare to think that you kept this place for me in your thoughts. A little more courage and I should long since have said to you what I say now. I beg your permission to ask Madame de Villetaneuse tomorrow for your hand in marriage."

My house of cards tumbled down in a second. The French officer was M. Armand. With the habit women have of treasuring tokens of the things which have happened, Mademoiselle Sophie had kept all these trifling notes and messages, and had even gathered to them the letters written by him to her mother, so that the story might be complete. But without M. Armand's knowledge; he was not to know; her pride must guard her secret from him. For she was the lover and he only the friend, and she knew it. Even in the little speech which he had just made, there was just too much formality, just too little sincerity of voice. I understood why she had tried to throw the ebony box down into the hall so that I might open it there—I understood that I had caused her great humiliation. But that was not all there was for me to understand.

In answer to Armand she raised her eyes quietly, and shook her head.

"You wish to spare me shame," she said, "and I thank you very much. But it is because of these letters that you spoke. I must think that. I must always think it."

“No!” he exclaimed.

“But yes,” she replied firmly. “If monsieur had not unlocked that box—I don’t know—but some day perhaps—oh, not yet, no, not yet—but some day perhaps you might have come of your own accord and said what you have just said. And I should have been very happy. But now you never must. For you see I shall always think that the letters are prompting you.”

And M. Armand bowed.

I had taken from her her chance of happiness. The friendship between them might have ended in marriage if left to itself. But I had not left it to itself.

“Mademoiselle,” I said, “I am very sorry.”

She turned her dark eyes on me.

“Monsieur, I warned you. It is too late to be sorry,” and as I stood shuffling awkwardly from one foot to the other, she added, gently, “Will you not go, monsieur?”

I went out of the room, called together my escort, mounted and rode off. It was past midnight now, and the night was clear. But I thought neither of the little beds under the slope of the roof nor of any danger on the road. There might have been a *franc-tireur* behind every tree. I would never have noticed it until one of them had brought me down. Remorse was heavy upon me. I had behaved without consideration, without chivalry, without any manners at all. I had not been able to distinguish truth when it stared me in the face, or to recognise honesty when it looked out from a young girl’s dark eyes. I had behaved, in a word, like the brute six months of war had made of me. I wondered with a vague hope whether after all time might not set matters right between M. Armand and Mademoiselle Sophie. And I wonder now whether it has. But even if I knew that it had, I should always remember that Christmas night of 1870 with acute regret. The only incident, indeed, which I can mention with the slightest satisfaction is this: On the way back to Noisyle-Grand I came to a point where the road from Chelles crossed the road from Montfermeil. I halted at a little cabin which stood upon a grass-plot within the angle of the roads, and tying up all the money I had on me in a pocket-handkerchief I dropped the handkerchief through a broken window-pane.

The Colonel let the end of his cigar fall upon his plate, and pushed back his chair from the table. “But I see we shall be late for the opera,” he said, as he glanced at the clock.

The Affair at the Semiramis Hotel

Mr. Ricardo, when the excitements of the Villa Rose were done with, returned to Grosvenor Square and resumed the busy, unnecessary life of an amateur. But the studios had lost their savour, artists their attractiveness, and even the Russian opera seemed a trifle flat. Life was altogether a disappointment; Fate, like an actress at a restaurant, had taken the wooden pestle in her hand and stirred all the sparkle out of the champagne; Mr. Ricardo languished—until one unforgettable morning.

He was sitting disconsolately at his breakfast-table when the door was burst open and a square, stout man, with the blue, shaven face of a French comedian, flung himself into the room. Ricardo sprang towards the new-comer with a cry of delight.

“My dear Hanaud!”

He seized his visitor by the arm, feeling it to make sure that here, in flesh and blood, stood the man who had introduced him to the acutest sensations of his life. He turned towards his butler, who was still bleating expostulations in the doorway at the unceremonious irruption of the French detective.

“Another place, Burton, at once,” he cried, and as soon as he and Hanaud were alone: “What good wind blows you to London?”

“Business, my friend. The disappearance of bullion somewhere on the line between Paris and London. But it is finished. Yes, I take a holiday.”

A light had suddenly flashed in Mr. Ricardo’s eyes, and was now no less suddenly extinguished. Hanaud paid no attention whatever to his friend’s disappointment. He pounced upon a piece of silver which adorned the tablecloth and took it over to the window.

“Everything is as it should be, my friend,” he exclaimed, with a grin. “Grosvenor Square, the *Times* open at the money column, and a false antique upon the table. Thus I have dreamed of you. All Mr. Ricardo is in that sentence.”

Ricardo laughed nervously. Recollection made him wary of Hanaud's sarcasms. He was shy even to protest the genuineness of his silver. But, indeed, he had not the time. For the door opened again and once more the butler appeared. On this occasion, however, he was alone.

"Mr. Calladine would like to speak to you, sir," he said.

"Calladine!" cried Ricardo in an extreme surprise. "That is the most extraordinary thing." He looked at the clock upon his mantelpiece. It was barely half-past eight. "At this hour, too?"

"Mr. Calladine is still wearing evening dress," the butler remarked.

Ricardo started in his chair. He began to dream of possibilities; and here was Hanaud miraculously at his side.

"Where is Mr. Calladine?" he asked.

"I have shown him into the library."

"Good," said Mr. Ricardo. "I will come to him."

But he was in no hurry. He sat and let his thoughts play with this incident of Calladine's early visit.

"It is very odd," he said. "I have not seen Calladine for months—no, nor has anyone. Yet, a little while ago, no one was more often seen."

He fell apparently into a muse, but he was merely seeking to provoke Hanaud's curiosity. In this attempt, however, he failed. Hanaud continued placidly to eat his breakfast, so that Mr. Ricardo was compelled to volunteer the story which he was burning to tell.

"Drink your coffee, Hanaud, and you shall hear about Calladine."

Hanaud grunted with resignation, and Mr. Ricardo flowed on:

"Calladine was one of England's young men. Everybody said so. He was going to do very wonderful things as soon as he had made up his mind exactly what sort of wonderful things he was going to do. Meanwhile, you met him in

Scotland, at Newmarket, at Ascot, at Cowes, in the box of some great lady at the Opera—not before half-past ten in the evening *there*—in any fine house where the candles that night happened to be lit. He went everywhere, and then a day came and he went nowhere. There was no scandal, no trouble, not a whisper against his good name. He simply vanished. For a little while a few people asked: 'What has become of Calladine?' But there never was any answer, and London has no time for unanswered questions. Other promising young men dined in his place. Calladine had joined the huge legion of the Come-to-nothings. No one even seemed to pass him in the street. Now unexpectedly, at half-past eight in the morning, and in evening dress, he calls upon me. 'Why?' I ask myself."

Mr. Ricardo sank once more into a reverie. Hanaud watched him with a broadening smile of pure enjoyment.

"And in time, I suppose," he remarked casually, "you will perhaps ask him?"

Mr. Ricardo sprang out of his pose to his feet.

"Before I discuss serious things with an acquaintance," he said with a scathing dignity, "I make it a rule to revive my impressions of his personality. The cigarettes are in the crystal box."

"They would be," said Hanaud, unabashed, as Ricardo stalked from the room. But in five minutes Mr. Ricardo came running back, all his composure gone.

"It is the greatest good fortune that you, my friend, should have chosen this morning to visit me," he cried, and Hanaud nodded with a little grimace of resignation.

"There goes my holiday. You shall command me now and always. I will make the acquaintance of your young friend."

He rose up and followed Ricardo into his study, where a young man was nervously pacing the floor.

"Mr. Calladine," said Ricardo. "This is Mr. Hanaud."

The young man turned eagerly. He was tall, with a noticeable elegance and distinction, and the face which he showed to Hanaud was, in spite of its

agitation, remarkably handsome.

“I am very glad,” he said. “You are not an official of this country. You can advise —without yourself taking action, if you’ll be so good.”

Hanaud frowned. He bent his eyes uncompromisingly upon Calladine.

“What does that mean?” he asked, with a note of sternness in his voice.

“It means that I must tell someone,” Calladine burst out in quivering tones. “That I don’t know what to do. I am in a difficulty too big for me. That’s the truth.”

Hanaud looked at the young man keenly. It seemed to Ricardo that he took in every excited gesture, every twitching feature, in one comprehensive glance. Then he said in a friendlier voice:

“Sit down and tell me”—and he himself drew up a chair to the table.

“I was at the Semiramis last night,” said Calladine, naming one of the great hotels upon the Embankment. “There was a fancy-dress ball.”

All this happened, by the way, in those far-off days before the war—nearly, in fact, three years ago today—when London, flinging aside its reticence, its shy self-consciousness, had become a city of carnivals and masquerades, rivalling its neighbours on the Continent in the spirit of its gaiety, and exceeding them by its stupendous luxury. “I went by the merest chance. My rooms are in the Adelphi Terrace.”

“There!” cried Mr. Ricardo in surprise, and Hanaud lifted a hand to check his interruptions.

“Yes,” continued Calladine. “The night was warm, the music floated through my open windows and stirred old memories. I happened to have a ticket. I went.”

Calladine drew up a chair opposite to Hanaud and, seating himself, told, with many nervous starts and in troubled tones, a story which, to Mr. Ricardo’s thinking, was as fabulous as any out of the “Arabian Nights.”

“I had a ticket,” he began, “but no domino. I was consequently stopped by an

attendant in the lounge at the top of the staircase leading down to the ballroom.

"'You can hire a domino in the cloakroom, Mr. Calladine,' he said to me. I had already begun to regret the impulse which had brought me, and I welcomed the excuse with which the absence of a costume provided me. I was, indeed, turning back to the door, when a girl who had at that moment run down from the stairs of the hotel into the lounge, cried gaily: 'That's not necessary'; and at the same moment she flung to me a long scarlet cloak which she had been wearing over her own dress. She was young, fair, rather tall, slim, and very pretty; her hair was drawn back from her face with a ribbon, and rippled down her shoulders in heavy curls; and she was dressed in a satin coat and knee-breeches of pale green and gold, with a white waistcoat and silk stockings and scarlet heels to her satin shoes. She was as straight-limbed as a boy, and exquisite like a figure in Dresden china. I caught the cloak and turned to thank her. But she did not wait. With a laugh she ran down the stairs a supple and shining figure, and was lost in the throng at the doorway of the ballroom. I was stirred by the prospect of an adventure. I ran down after her. She was standing just inside the room alone, and she was gazing at the scene with parted lips and dancing eyes. She laughed again as she saw the cloak about my shoulders, a delicious gurgle of amusement, and I said to her:

"'May I dance with you?'

"'Oh, do!' she cried, with a little jump, and clasping her hands. She was of a high and joyous spirit and not difficult in the matter of an introduction. 'This gentleman will do very well to present us," she said, leading me in front of a bust of the God Pan which stood in a niche of the wall. 'I am, as you see, straight out of an opera. My name is Celymene or anything with an eighteenth-century sound to it. You are—what you will. For this evening we are friends.'

'"And for tomorrow?' I asked.

"'I will tell you about that later on,' she replied, and she began to dance with a light step and a passion in her dancing which earned me many an envious glance from the other men. I was in luck, for Celymene knew no one, and though, of course, I saw the faces of a great many people whom I remembered, I kept them all at a distance. We had been dancing for about half an hour when the first queerish thing happened. She stopped suddenly in the midst of a sentence with a little gasp. I spoke to her, but she did not hear. She was gazing past me, her eyes

wide open, and such a rapt look upon her face as I had never seen. She was lost in a miraculous vision. I followed the direction of her eyes and, to my astonishment, I saw nothing more than a stout, short, middleaged woman, egregiously over-dressed as Marie Antoinette.

"'So you do know someone here?' I said, and I had to repeat the words sharply before my friend withdrew her eyes. But even then she was not aware of me. It was as if a voice had spoken to her whilst she was asleep and had disturbed, but not wakened her. Then she came to—there's really no other word I can think of which describes her at that moment—she came to with a deep sigh.

"'No,' she answered. 'She is a Mrs. Blumenstein from Chicago, a widow with ambitions and a great deal of money. But I don't know her.'

"'Yet you know all about her,' I remarked.

'"She crossed in the same boat with me,' Celymene replied. 'Did I tell you that I landed at Liverpool this morning? She is staying at the Semiramis too. Oh, let us dance!'

"She twitched my sleeve impatiently, and danced with a kind of violence and wildness as if she wished to banish some sinister thought. And she did undoubtedly banish it. We supped together and grew confidential, as under such conditions people will. She told me her real name. It was Joan Carew.

"'I have come over to get an engagement if I can at Covent Garden. I am supposed to sing all right. But I don't know anyone. I have been brought up in Italy.'

"'You have some letters of introduction, I suppose?' I asked.

"'Oh, yes. One from my teacher in Milan. One from an American manager.'

"In my turn I told her my name and where I lived, and I gave her my card. I thought, you see, that since I used to know a good many operatic people, I might be able to help her.

"'Thank you,' she said, and at that moment Mrs. Blumenstein, followed by a party, chiefly those lap-dog young men who always seem to gather about that kind of person, came into the supper-room and took a table close to us. There

was at once an end of all confidences—indeed, of all conversation. Joan Carew lost all the lightness of her spirit; she talked at random, and her eyes were drawn again and again to the grotesque slander on Marie Antoinette. Finally I became annoyed.

"'Shall we go?' I suggested impatiently, and to my surprise she whispered passionately:

"'Yes. Please! Let us go.'

"Her voice was actually shaking, her small hands clenched. We went back to the ballroom, but Joan Carew did not recover her gaiety, and halfway through a dance, when we were near to the door, she stopped abruptly—extraordinarily abruptly.

"'I shall go,' she said abruptly. 'I am tired. I have grown dull.'

"I protested, but she made a little grimace.

"'You'll hate me in half an hour. Let's be wise and stop now while we are friends,' she said, and whilst I removed the domino from my shoulders she stooped very quickly. It seemed to me that she picked up something which had lain hidden beneath the sole of her slipper. She certainly moved her foot, and I certainly saw something small and bright flash in the palm of her glove as she raised herself again. But I imagined merely that it was some object which she had dropped.

"'Yes, we'll go,' she said, and we went up the stairs into the lobby. Certainly all the sparkle had gone out of our adventure. I recognized her wisdom.

"'But I shall meet you again?' I asked.

"'Yes. I have your address. I'll write and fix a time when you will be sure to find me in. Good-night, and a thousand thanks. I should have been bored to tears if you hadn't come without a domino.'

"She was speaking lightly as she held out her hand, but her grip tightened a little and—clung. Her eyes darkened and grew troubled, her mouth trembled. The shadow of a great trouble had suddenly closed about her. She shivered.

“‘I am half inclined to ask you to stay, however dull I am; and dance with me till daylight—the safe daylight,’ she said.

“It was an extraordinary phrase for her to use, and it moved me.

“‘Let us go back then!’ I urged. She gave me an impression suddenly of someone quite forlorn. ‘But Joan Carew recovered her courage. ‘No, no,’ she answered quickly. She snatched her hand away and ran lightly up the staircase, turning at the corner to wave her hand and smile. It was then half-past one in the morning.”

So far Calladine had spoken without an interruption. Mr. Ricardo, it is true, was bursting to break in with the most important questions, but a salutary fear of Hanaud restrained him. Now, however, he had an opportunity, for Calladine paused.

“Half-past one,” he said sagely. “Ah!”

“And when did you go home?” Hanaud asked of Calladine.

“True,” said Mr. Ricardo. “It is of the greatest consequence.”

Calladine was not sure. His partner had left behind her the strangest medley of sensations in his breast. He was puzzled, haunted, and charmed. He had to think about her; he was a trifle uplifted; sleep was impossible. He wandered for a while about the ballroom. Then he walked to his chambers along the echoing streets and sat at his window; and some time afterwards the hoot of a motor-horn broke the silence and a car stopped and whirred in the street below. A moment later his bell rang.

He ran down the stairs in a queer excitement, unlocked the street door and opened it. Joan Carew, still in her masquerade dress with her scarlet cloak about her shoulders, slipped through the opening.

“Shut the door,” she whispered, drawing herself apart in a corner.

“Your cab?” asked Calladine.

“It has gone.”

Calladine latched the door. Above, in the well of the stairs, the light spread out

from the open door of his flat. Down here all was dark. He could just see the glimmer of her white face, the glitter of her dress, but she drew her breath like one who has run far. They mounted the stairs cautiously. He did not say a word until they were both safely in his parlour; and even then it was in a low voice.

“What has happened?”

“You remember the woman I stared at? You didn’t know why I stared, but any girl would have understood. She was wearing the loveliest pearls I ever saw in my life.”

Joan was standing by the edge of the table. She was tracing with her finger a pattern on the cloth as she spoke. Calladine started with a horrible presentiment.

“Yes,” she said. “I worship pearls. I always have done so. For one thing, they improve on me. I haven’t got any, of course. I have no money. But friends of mine who do own pearls have sometimes given theirs to me to wear when they were going sick, and they have always got back their lustre. I think that has had a little to do with my love of them. Oh, I have always longed for them—just a little string. Sometimes I have felt that I would have given my soul for them.”

She was speaking in a dull, monotonous voice. But Calladine recalled the ecstasy which had shone in her face when her eyes first had fallen on the pearls, the longing which had swept her quite into another world, the passion with which she had danced to throw the obsession off.

“And I never noticed them at all,” he said.

“Yet they were wonderful. The colour! The lustre! All the evening they tempted me. I was furious that a fat, coarse creature like that should have such exquisite things. Oh, I was mad.”

She covered her face suddenly with her hands and swayed. Calladine sprang towards her. But she held out her hand.

“No, I am all right.” And though he asked her to sit down she would not. “You remember when I stopped dancing suddenly?”

“Yes. You had something hidden under your foot?”

The girl nodded.

“Her key!” And under his breath Calladine uttered a startled cry.

For the first time since she had entered the room Joan Carew raised her head and looked at him. Her eyes were full of terror, and with the terror was mixed an incredulity as though she could not possibly believe that that had happened which she knew had happened.

“A little Yale key,” the girl continued. “I saw Mrs. Blumenstein looking on the floor for something, and then I saw it shining on the very spot. Mrs. Blumenstein’s suite was on the same floor as mine, and her maid slept above. All the maids do. I knew that. Oh, it seemed to me as if I had sold my soul and was being paid.”

Now Calladine understood what she had meant by her strange phrase—“the safe daylight.”

“I went up to my little suite,” Joan Carew continued. “I sat there with the key burning through my glove until I had given her time enough to fall asleep “—and though she hesitated before she spoke the words, she did speak them, not looking at Calladine, and with a shudder of remorse making her confession complete. “Then I crept out. The corridor was dimly lit. Far away below the music was throbbing. Up here it was as silent as the grave. I opened the door—her door. I found myself in a lobby. The suite, though bigger, was arranged like mine. I slipped in and closed the door behind me. I listened in the darkness. I couldn’t hear a sound. I crept forward to the door in front of me. I stood with my fingers on the handle and my heart beating fast enough to choke me. I had still time to turn back. But I couldn’t. There were those pearls in front of my eyes, lustrous and wonderful. I opened the door gently an inch or so and then it all happened in a second.”

Joan Carew faltered. The night was too near to her, its memory too poignant with terror. She shut her eyes tightly and cowered down in a chair. With the movement her cloak slipped from her shoulders and dropped on to the ground. Calladine leaned forward with an exclamation of horror; Joan Carew started up.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Nothing. Go on.”

“I found myself inside the room with the door shut behind me. I had shut it myself in a spasm of terror. And I dared not turn round to open it. I was helpless.”

“What do you mean? She was awake?”

Joan Carew shook her head.

“There were others in the room before me, and on the same errand—men!”

Calladine drew back, his eyes searching the girl’s face.

“Yes?” he said slowly.

“I didn’t see them at first. I didn’t hear them. The room was quite dark except for one jet of fierce white light which beat upon the door of a safe. And as I shut the door the jet moved swiftly and the light reached me and stopped. I was blinded. I stood in the full glare of it, drawn up against the panels of the door, shivering, sick with fear. Then I heard a quiet laugh, and someone moved softly towards me. Oh, it was terrible! I recovered the use of my limbs; in a panic I turned to the door, but I was too late. Whilst I fumbled with the handle I was seized; a hand covered my mouth. I was lifted to the centre of the room. The jet went out, the electric lights were turned on. There were two men dressed as apaches in velvet trousers and red scarves, like a hundred others in the ballroom below, and both were masked. I struggled furiously; but, of course, I was like a child in their grasp. ‘Tie her legs,’ the man whispered who was holding me; ‘she’s making too much noise.’ I kicked and fought, but the other man stooped and tied my ankles, and I fainted.”

Calladine nodded his head.

“Yes?” he said.

“When I came to, the lights were still burning, the door of the safe was open, the room empty; I had been flung on to a couch at the foot of the bed. I was lying there quite free.”

“Was the safe empty?” asked Calladine suddenly.

“I didn’t look,” she answered. “Oh!” and she covered her face spasmodically

with her hands. “I looked at the bed. Someone was lying there—under a sheet and quite still. There was a clock ticking in the room; it was the only sound. I was terrified. I was going mad with fear. If I didn’t get out of the room at once I felt that I should go mad, that I should scream and bring everyone to find me alone with—what was under the sheet in the bed. I ran to the door and looked out through a slit into the corridor. It was still quite empty, and below the music still throbbed in the ballroom. I crept down the stairs, meeting no one until I reached the hall. I looked into the ballroom as if I was searching for someone. I stayed long enough to show myself. Then I got a cab and came to you.”

A short silence followed. Joan Carew looked at her companion in appeal. “You are the only one I could come to,” she added. “I know no one else.”

Calladine sat watching the girl in silence. Then he asked, and his voice was hard:

“And is that all you have to tell me?”

“Yes.”

“You are quite sure?”

Joan Carew looked at him perplexed by the urgency of his question. She reflected for a moment or two.

“Quite.”

Calladine rose to his feet and stood beside her.

“Then how do you come to be wearing this?” he asked, and he lifted a chain of platinum and diamonds which she was wearing about her shoulders. “You weren’t wearing it when you danced with me.”

Joan Carew stared at the chain.

“No. It’s not mine. I have never seen it before.” Then a light came into her eyes. “The two men—they must have thrown it over my head when I was on the couch—before they went.” She looked at it more closely. “That’s it. The chain’s not very valuable. They could spare it, and—it would accuse me—of what they did.”

“Yes, that’s very good reasoning,” said Calladine coldly.

Joan Carew looked quickly up into his face.

“Oh, you don’t believe me,” she cried. “You think—oh, it’s impossible.” And, holding him by the edge of his coat, she burst into a storm of passionate denials.

“But you went to steal, you know,” he said gently, and she answered him at once:

“Yes, I did, but not this.” And she held up the necklace. “Should I have stolen this, should I have come to you wearing it, if I had stolen the pearls, if I had “—and she stopped—“if my story were not true?”

Calladine weighed her argument, and it affected him.

“No, I think you wouldn’t,” he said frankly.

Most crimes, no doubt, were brought home because the criminal had made some incomprehensibly stupid mistake; incomprehensibly stupid, that is, by the standards of normal life. Nevertheless, Calladine was inclined to believe her. He looked at her. That she should have murdered was absurd. Moreover, she was not making a parade of remorse, she was not playing the unctuous penitent; she had yielded to a temptation, had got herself into desperate straits, and was at her wits’ ends how to escape from them. She was frank about herself.

Calladine looked at the clock. It was nearly five o’clock in the morning, and though the music could still be heard from the ballroom in the Semiramis, the night had begun to wane upon the river.

“You must go back,” he said. “I’ll walk with you.”

They crept silently down the stairs and into the street. It was only a step to the Semiramis. They met no one until they reached the Strand. There many, like Joan Carew in masquerade, were standing about, or walking hither and thither in search of carriages and cabs. The whole street was in a bustle, what with drivers shouting and people coming away.

“You can slip in unnoticed,” said Calladine as he looked into the thronged courtyard. “I’ll telephone to you in the morning.”

“You will?” she cried eagerly, clinging for a moment to his arm.

“Yes, for certain,” he replied. “Wait in until you hear from me. I’ll think it over. I’ll do what I can.”

“Thank you,” she said fervently.

He watched her scarlet cloak flitting here and there in the crowd until it vanished through the doorway. Then, for the second time, he walked back to his chambers, while the morning crept up the river from the sea.

This was the story which Calladine told in Mr. Ricardo’s library. Mr. Ricardo heard it out with varying emotions. He began with a thrill of expectation like a man on a dark threshold of great excitements. The setting of the story appealed to him, too, by a sort of brilliant bizarrerie which he found in it. But, as it went on, he grew puzzled and a trifle disheartened. There were flaws and chinks; he began to bubble with unspoken criticisms, then swift and clever thrusts which he dared not deliver. He looked upon the young man with disfavour, as upon one who had half opened a door upon a theatre of great promise and shown him a spectacle not up to the mark. Hanaud, on the other hand, listened imperturbably, without an expression upon his face, until the end. Then he pointed a finger at Calladine and asked him what to Ricardo’s mind was a most irrelevant question.

“You got back to your rooms, then, before five, Mr. Calladine, and it is now nine o’clock less a few minutes.”

“Yes.”

“Yet you have not changed your clothes. Explain to me that. What did you do between five and half-past eight?”

Calladine looked down at his rumpled shirt front.

“Upon my word, I never thought of it,” he cried. “I was worried out of my mind. I couldn’t decide what to do. Finally, I determined to talk to Mr. Ricardo, and after I had come to that conclusion I just waited impatiently until I could come round with decency.”

Hanaud rose from his chair. His manner was grave, but conveyed no single hint of an opinion. He turned to Ricardo.

“Let us go round to your young friend’s rooms in the Adelphi,” he said; and the three men drove thither at once.

II

Calladine lodged in a corner house and upon the first floor. His rooms, large and square and lofty, with Adam mantelpieces and a delicate tracery upon their ceilings, breathed the grace of the eighteenth century. Broad high windows, embrasured in thick walls, overlooked the river and took in all the sunshine and the air which the river had to give. And they were furnished fittingly. When the three men entered the parlour, Mr. Ricardo was astounded. He had expected the untidy litter of a man run to seed, the neglect and the dust of the recluse. But the room was as clean as the deck of a yacht; an Aubusson carpet made the floor luxurious underfoot; a few coloured prints of real value decorated the walls; and the mahogany furniture was polished so that a lady could have used it as a mirror. There was even by the newspapers upon the round table a china bowl full of fresh red roses. If Calladine had turned hermit, he was a hermit of an unusually fastidious type. Indeed, as he stood with his two companions in his dishevelled dress he seemed quite out of keeping with his rooms.

“So you live here, Mr. Calladine?” said Hanaud, taking off his hat and laying it down.

“Yes.”

“With your servants, of course?”

“They come in during the day,” said Calladine, and Hanaud looked at him curiously.

“Do you mean that you sleep here alone?”

“Yes.”

“But your valet?”

“I don’t keep a valet,” said Calladine; and again the curious look came into Hanaud’s eyes.

“Yet,” he suggested gently, “there are rooms enough in your set of chambers to house a family.”

Calladine coloured and shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

“I prefer at night not to be disturbed,” he said, stumbling a little over the words. “I mean, I have a liking for quiet.”

Gabriel Hanaud nodded his head with sympathy.

“Yes, yes. And it is a difficult thing to get—as difficult as my holiday,” he said ruefully, with a smile for Mr. Ricardo. “However”—he turned towards Calladine—“no doubt, now that you are at home, you would like a bath and a change of clothes. And when you are dressed, perhaps you will telephone to the Semiramis and ask Miss Carew to come round here. Meanwhile, we will read your newspapers and smoke your cigarettes.”

Hanaud shut the door upon Calladine, but he turned neither to the papers nor the cigarettes. He crossed the room to Mr. Ricardo, who, seated at the open window, was plunged deep in reflections.

“You have an idea, my friend,” cried Hanaud. “It demands to express itself. That sees itself in your face. Let me hear it, I pray.”

Mr. Ricardo started out of an absorption which was altogether assumed.

“I was thinking,” he said, with a faraway smile, “that you might disappear in the forests of Africa, and at once everyone would be very busy about your disappearance. You might leave your village in Leicestershire and live in the fogs of Glasgow, and within a week the whole village would know your postal address. But London—what a city! How different! How indifferent! Turn out of St. James’s into the Adelphi Terrace and not a soul will say to you: ‘Dr. Livingstone, I presume?’”

“But why should they,” asked Hanaud, “if your name isn’t Dr. Livingstone?”

Mr. Ricardo smiled indulgently.

“Scoffer!” he said. “You understand me very well,” and he sought to turn the tables on his companion. “And you—does this room suggest nothing to you? Have you no ideas?” But he knew very well that Hanaud had. Ever since Hanaud had crossed the threshold he had been like a man stimulated by a drug. His eyes were bright and active, his body alert.

“Yes,” he said, “I have.”

He was standing now by Ricardo’s side with his hands in his pockets, looking out at the trees on the Embankment and the barges swinging down the river.

“You are thinking of the strange scene which took place in this room such a very few hours ago,” said Ricardo. “The girl in her masquerade dress making her confession with the stolen chain about her throat “

Hanaud looked backwards carelessly. “No, I wasn’t giving it a thought,” he said, and in a moment or two he began to walk about the room with that curiously light step which Ricardo was never able to reconcile with his cumbersome figure. With the heaviness of a bear he still padded. He went from corner to corner, opened a cupboard here, a drawer of the bureau there, and—stooped suddenly. He stood erect again with a small box of morocco leather in his hand. His body from head to foot seemed to Ricardo to be expressing the question, “Have I found it?” He pressed a spring and the lid of the box flew open. Hanaud emptied its contents into the palm of his hand. There were two or three sticks of sealing-wax and a seal. With a shrug of the shoulders he replaced them and shut the box.

“You are looking for something,” Ricardo announced with sagacity.

“I am,” replied Hanaud; and it seemed that in a second or two he found it. Yet—yet—he found it with his hands in his pockets, if he had found it. Mr. Ricardo saw him stop in that attitude in front of the mantelshelf, and heard him utter a long, low whistle. Upon the mantelshelf some photographs were arranged, a box of cigars stood at one end, a book or two lay between some delicate ornaments of china, and a small engraving in a thin gilt frame was propped at the back against the wall. Ricardo surveyed the shelf from his seat in the window, but he could not imagine which it was of these objects that so drew and held Hanaud’s eyes.

Hanaud, however, stepped forward. He looked into a vase and turned it upside down. Then he re moved the lid of a porcelain cup, and from the very look of his great shoulders Ricardo knew that he had discovered what he sought. He was holding something in his hands, turning it over, examining it. When he was satisfied he moved swiftly to the door and opened it cautiously. Both men could hear the splashing of water in a bath. Hanaud closed the door again with a nod of

contentment and crossed once more to the window.

“Yes, it is all very strange and curious,” he said, “and I do not regret that you dragged me into the affair. You were quite right, my friend, this morning. It is the personality of your young Mr. Calladine which is the interesting thing. For instance, here we are in London in the early summer. The trees out, freshly green, lilac and flowers in the gardens, and I don’t know what tingle of hope and expectation in the sunlight and the air. I am middleaged—yet there’s a riot in my blood, a recapture of youth, a belief that just round the corner, beyond the reach of my eyes, wonders wait for me. Don’t you, too, feel something like that? Well, then—“and he heaved his shoulders in astonishment.

“Can you understand a young man with money, with fastidious tastes, good-looking, hiding himself in a corner at such a time—except for some overpowering reason? No. Nor can I. There is another thing —I put a question or two to Calladine.”

“Yes,” said Ricardo.

“He has no servants here at night. He is quite alone and—here is what I find interesting—he has no valet. That seems a small thing to you?” Hanaud asked at a movement from Ricardo. “Well, it is no doubt a trifle, but it’s a significant trifle in the case of a young rich man. It is generally a sign that there is something strange, perhaps even something sinister, in his life. Mr. Calladine, some months ago, turned out of St. James’s into the Adelphi. Can you tell me why?”

“No,” replied Mr. Ricardo. “Can you?”

Hanaud stretched out a hand. In his open palm lay a small round hairy bulb about the size of a big button and of a colour between green and brown.

“Look!” he said. “What is that?”

Mr. Ricardo took the bulb wonderingly.

“It looks to me like the fruit of some kind of cactus.”

Hanaud nodded.

“It is. You will see some pots of it in the hothouses of any really good botanical gardens. Kew has them, I have no doubt. Paris certainly has. They are labelled ‘Anhalonium Luinii.’ But amongst the Indians of Yucatan the plant has a simpler name.”

“What name?” asked Ricardo.

“Mescal.”

Mr. Ricardo repeated the name. It conveyed nothing to him whatever.

“There are a good many bulbs just like that in the cup upon the mantelshelf,” said Hanaud.

Ricardo looked quickly up.

“Why?” he asked.

“Mescal is a drug.”

Ricardo started.

“Yes, you are beginning to understand now,” Hanaud continued, “why your young friend Calladine turned out of St. James’s into the Adelphi Terrace.”

Ricardo turned the little bulb over in his fingers.

“You make a decoction of it, I suppose?” he said.

“Or you can use it as the Indians do in Yucatan,” replied Hanaud. “Mescal enters into their religious ceremonies. They sit at night in a circle about a fire built in the forest and chew it, whilst one of their number beats perpetually upon a drum.”

Hanaud looked round the room and took notes of its luxurious carpet, its delicate appointments. Outside the window there was a thunder in the streets, a clamour of voices. Boats went swiftly down the river on the ebb. Beyond the mass of the Semiramis rose the great grey-white dome of St. Paul’s. Opposite, upon the Southwark bank, the giant sky-signs, the big Highlander drinking whisky, and the rest of them waited, gaunt skeletons, for the night to limn them in fire and

give them life. Below the trees in the gardens rustled and waved. In the air were the uplift and the sparkle of the young summer.

“It’s a long way from the forests of Yucatan to the Adelphi Terrace of London,” said Hanaud. “Yet here, I think, in these rooms, when the servants are all gone and the house is very quiet, there is a little corner of wild Mexico.”

A look of pity came into Mr. Ricardo’s face. He had seen more than one young man of great promise slacken his hold and let go, just for this reason. Calladine, it seemed, was another.

“It’s like bhang and kieff and the rest of the devilish things, I suppose,” he said, indignantly tossing the button upon the table.

Hanaud picked it up.

“No,” he replied. “It’s not quite like any other drug. It has a quality of its own which just now is of particular importance to you and me. Yes, my friend”—and he nodded his head very seriously—“we must watch that we do not make the big fools of ourselves in this affair.”

“There,” Mr. Ricardo agreed with an ineffable air of wisdom, “I am entirely with you.”

“Now, why?” Hanaud asked. Mr. Ricardo was at a loss for a reason, but Hanaud did not wait. “I will tell you. Mescal intoxicates, yes—but it does more—it gives to the man who eats of it colour-dreams.”

“Colour-dreams?” Mr. Ricardo repeated in a wondering voice.

“Yes, strange heated charms, in which violent things happen vividly amongst bright colours. Colour is the gift of this little prosaic brown button.” He spun the bulb in the air like a coin, and catching it again, took it over to the mantelpiece and dropped it into the porcelain cup.

“Are you sure of this?” Ricardo cried excitedly, and Hanaud raised his hand in warning. He went to the door, opened it for an inch or so, and closed it again.

“I am quite sure,” he returned. “I have for a friend a very learned chemist in the College de France. He is one of those enthusiasts who must experiment upon

themselves. He tried this drug."

"Yes," Ricardo said in a quieter voice. "And what did he see?"

"He had a vision of a wonderful garden bathed in sunlight, an old garden of gorgeous flowers and emerald lawns, ponds with golden lilies and thick yew hedges —a garden where peacocks stepped indolently and groups of gay people fantastically dressed quarrelled and fought with swords. That is what he saw. And he saw it so vividly that, when the vapours of the drug passed from his brain and he waked, he seemed to be coming out of the real world into a world of shifting illusions."

Hanaud's strong quiet voice stopped, and for a while there was a complete silence in the room. Neither of the two men stirred so much as a finger. Mr. Ricardo once more was conscious of the thrill of strange sensations. He looked round the room. He could hardly believe that a room which had been—nay was —the home and shrine of mysteries in the dark hours could wear so bright and innocent a freshness in the sunlight of the morning. There should be something sinister which leaped to the eyes as you crossed the threshold.

"Out of the real world," Mr. Ricardo quoted, "I begin to see."

"Yes, you begin to see, my friend, that we must be very careful not to make the big fools of ourselves. My friend of the College de France saw a garden. But had he been sitting alone in the window-seat where you are, listening through a summer night to the music of the masquerade at the Semiramis, might he not have seen the ballroom, the dancers, the scarlet cloak, and the rest of this story?"

"You mean," cried Ricardo, now fairly startled, "that Calladine came to us with the fumes of mescal still working in his brain, that the false world was the real one still for him."

"I 'do not know," said Hanaud. "At present I only put questions. I ask them of you. I wish to hear how they sound. Let us reason this problem out. Calladine, let us say, takes a great deal more of the drug than my professor. It will have on him a more powerful effect while it lasts, and it will last longer. Fancy dress balls are familiar things to Calladine. The music floating from the Semiramis will revive old memories. He sits here, the pageant takes shape before him, he sees himself taking his part in it. Oh, he is happier here sitting quietly in his window-seat than if he was actually at the Semiramis. For he *is* there more

intensely, more vividly, more really, than if he had actually descended this staircase. He lives his story through, the story of a heated brain, the scene of it changes in the way dreams have, it becomes tragic and sinister, it oppresses him with horror, and in the morning, so obsessed with it that he does not think to change his clothes, he is knocking at your door."

Mr. Ricardo raised his eyebrows and moved.

"Ah! You see a flaw in my argument," said Hanaud. But Mr. Ricardo was wary. Too often in other days he had been leaped upon and trounced for a careless remark.

"Let me hear the end of your argument," he said. "There was then to your thinking no temptation of jewels, no theft, no murder—in a word, no Celymene? She was born of recollections and the music of the Semiramis."

"No!" cried Hanaud. "Come with me, my friend. I am not so sure that there was no Celymene."

With a smile upon his face, Hanaud led the way across the room. He had the dramatic instinct, and rejoiced in it. He was going to produce a surprise for his companion and, savouring the moment in advance, he managed his effects. He walked towards the mantelpiece and stopped a few paces away from it.

"Look!"

Mr. Ricardo looked and saw a broad Adam mantelpiece. He turned a bewildered face to his friend.

"You see nothing?" Hanaud asked.

"Nothing!"

"Look again! I am not sure—but is it not that Celymene is posing before you?"

Mr. Ricardo looked again. There was nothing to fix his eyes. He saw a book or two, a cup, a vase or two, and nothing else really except a very pretty and apparently valuable piece of—and suddenly Mr. Ricardo understood. Straight in front of him, in the very centre of the mantelpiece, a figure in painted china was leaning against a china stile. It was the figure of a perfectly impossible courtier,

feminine and exquisite as could be, and apparelled also even to the scarlet heels exactly as Calladine had described Joan Carew.

Hanaud chuckled with satisfaction when he saw the expression upon Mr. Ricardo's face.

"Ah, you understand," he said. "Do you dream, my friend? At times—yes, like the rest of us. Then recollect your dreams? Things, people, which you have seen perhaps that day, perhaps months ago, pop in and out of them without making themselves prayed for. You cannot understand why. Yet sometimes they cut their strange capers there, logically, too, through subtle associations which the dreamer, once awake, does not apprehend. Thus, our friend here sits in the window, intoxicated by his drug, the music plays in the Semiramis, the curtain goes up in the heated theatre of his brain. He sees himself step upon the stage, and who else meets him but the china figure from his mantelpiece?"

Mr. Ricardo for a moment was all enthusiasm. Then his doubt returned to him.

"What you say, my dear Hanaud, is very ingenious. The figure upon the mantelpiece is also extremely convincing. And I should be absolutely convinced but for one thing."

"Yes?" said Hanaud, watching his friend closely.

"I am—I may say it, I think, a man of the world. And I ask myself"—Mr. Ricardo never could ask himself anything without assuming a manner of extreme pomposity—"I ask myself, whether a young man who has given up his social ties, who has become a hermit, and still more who has become the slave of a drug, would retain that scrupulous carefulness of his body which is indicated by dressing for dinner when alone?"

Hanaud struck the table with the palm of his hand and sat down in a chair.

"Yes. That is the weak point in my theory. You have hit it. I knew it was there—that weak point, and I wondered whether you would seize it. Yes, the consumers of drugs are careless, untidy—even unclean as a rule. But not always. We must be careful. We must wait."

"For what?" asked Ricardo, beaming with pride.

“For the answer to a telephone message,” replied Hanaud, with a nod towards the door.

Both men waited impatiently until Calladine came into the room. He wore now a suit of blue serge, he had a clearer eye, his skin a healthier look; he was altogether a more reputable person. But he was plainly very ill at ease. He offered his visitors cigarettes, he proposed refreshments, he avoided entirely and awkwardly the object of their visit. Hanaud smiled. His theory was working out. Sobered by his bath, Calladine had realised the foolishness of which he had been guilty.

“You telephone, to the Semiramis, of course?” said Hanaud cheerfully.

Calladine grew red.

“Yes,” he stammered.

“Yet I did not hear that volume of ‘Hallos’ which precedes telephonic connection in your country of leisure,” Hanaud continued.

“I telephoned from my bedroom. You would not hear anything in this room.”

“Yes, yes; the walls of these old houses are solid.” Hanaud was playing with his victim. “And when may we expect Miss Carew?”

“I can’t say,” replied Calladine. “It’s very strange. She is not in the hotel. I am afraid that she has gone away, fled.”

Mr. Ricardo and Hanaud exchanged a look. They were both satisfied now. There was no word of truth in Calladine’s story.

“Then there is no reason for us to wait,” said Hanaud. “I shall have my holiday after all.” And while he was yet speaking the voice of a newsboy calling out the first edition of an evening paper became distantly audible. Hanaud broke off his farewell. For a moment he listened, with his head bent. Then the voice was heard again, confused, indistinct; Hanaud picked up his hat and cane and, without another word to Calladine, raced down the stairs. Mr. Ricardo followed him, but when he reached the pavement, Hanaud was half down the little street. At the corner, however, he stopped, and Ricardo joined him, coughing and out of breath.

“What’s the matter?” he gasped.

“Listen,” said Hanaud.

At the bottom of Duke Street, by Charing Cross Station, the newsboy was shouting his wares. Both men listened, and now the words came to them mispronounced but decipherable.

“Mysterious crime at the Semiramis Hotel.”

Ricardo stared at his companion.

“You were wrong, then!” he cried. “Calladine’s story was true.”

For once in a way Hanaud was quite disconcerted.

“I don’t know yet,” he said. “We will buy a paper.”

But before he could move a step a taxi-cab turned into the Adelphi from the Strand, and wheeling in front of their faces, stopped at Calladine’s door. From the cab a girl descended.

“Let us go back,” said Hanaud.

III

Mr. Ricardo could no longer complain. It was half-past eight when Calladine had first disturbed the formalities of his house in Grosvenor Square. It was barely ten now, and during that short time he had been flung from surprise to surprise, he had looked underground on a morning of fresh summer, and had been thrilled by the contrast between the queer, sinister life below and within and the open call to joy of the green world above. He had passed from incredulity to belief, from belief to incredulity, and when at last incredulity was firmly established, and the story to which he had listened proved the emanation of a drugged and heated brain, lo! the facts buffeted him in the face, and the story was shown to be true.

“I am alive once more,” Mr. Ricardo thought as he turned back with Hanaud, and in his excitement he cried his thought aloud.

“Are you?” said Hanaud. “And what is life without a newspaper? If you will buy one from that remarkably raucous boy at the bottom of the street I will keep an eye upon Calladine’s house till you come back.”

Mr. Ricardo sped down to Charing Cross and brought back a copy of the fourth edition of the *Star.* He handed it to Hanaud, who stared at it doubtfully, folded as it was.

“Shall we see what it says?” Ricardo asked impatiently.

“By no means,” Hanaud answered, waking from his reverie and tucking briskly away the paper into the tail pocket of his coat. “We will hear what Miss Joan Carew has to say, with our minds undisturbed by any discoveries. I was wondering about something totally different.”

“Yes?” Mr. Ricardo encouraged him. “What was it?”

“I was wondering, since it is only ten o’clock, at what hour the first editions of the evening papers appear.”

“It is a question,” Mr. Ricardo replied sententiously, “which the greatest minds have failed to answer.”

And they walked along the street to the house. The front door stood open during

the day like the front door of any other house which is let off in sets of rooms. Hanaud and Ricardo went up the staircase and rang the bell of Calladine's door. A middleaged woman opened it.

"Mr. Calladine is in?" said Hanaud.

"I will ask," replied the woman. "What name shall I say?"

"It does not matter. I will go straight in," said Hanaud quietly. "I was here with my friend but a minute ago."

He went straight forward and into Calladine's parlour. Mr. Ricardo looked over his shoulder as he opened the door and saw a girl turn to them suddenly a white face of terror, and flinch as though already she felt the hand of a constable upon her shoulder. Calladine, on the other hand, uttered a cry of relief.

"These are my friends," he exclaimed to the girl, "the friends of whom I spoke to you"; and to Hanaud he said: "This is Miss Carew."

Hanaud bowed.

"You shall tell me your story, mademoiselle," he said very gently, and a little colour returned to the girl's cheeks, a little courage revived in her.

"But you have heard it," she answered.

"Not from you," said Hanaud.

So for a second time in that room she told the history of that night. Only this time the sunlight was warm upon the world, the comfortable sounds of life's routine were borne through the windows, and the girl herself wore the inconspicuous blue serge of a thousand other girls afoot that morning. These trifles of circumstance took the edge of sheer horror off her narrative, so that, to tell the truth, Mr. Ricardo was a trifle disappointed. He wanted a crescendo motive in his music, whereas it had begun at its fortissimo. Hanaud, however, was the perfect listener. He listened without stirring and with most compassionate eyes, so that Joan Carew spoke only to him, and to him, each moment that passed, with greater confidence. The life and sparkle of her had gone altogether. There was nothing in her manner now to suggest the waywardness, the gay irresponsibility, the radiance, which had attracted

Calladine the night before. She was just a very young and very pretty girl, telling in a low and remorseful voice of the tragic dilemma to which she had brought herself. Of Celymene all that remained was something exquisite and fragile in her beauty, in the slimness of her figure, in her daintiness of hand and foot—something almost of the hothouse. But the story she told was, detail for detail, the same which Calladine had already related.

“Thank you,” said Hanaud when she had done. “Now I must ask you two questions.”

“I will answer them.”

Mr. Ricardo sat up. He began to think of a third question which he might put himself, something uncommonly subtle and searching, which Hanaud would never have thought of. But Hanaud put his questions, and Ricardo almost jumped out of his chair.

“You will forgive me, Miss Carew. But have you ever stolen before?”

Joan Carew turned upon Hanaud with spirit. Then a change swept over her face.

“You have a right to ask,” she answered. “Never.” She looked into his eyes as she answered. Hanaud did not move. He sat with a hand upon each knee and led to his second question.

“Early this morning, when you left this room, you told Mr. Calladine that you would wait at the Semiramis until he telephoned to you?”

“Yes.”

“Yet when he telephoned, you had gone out?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I will tell you,” said Joan Carew. “I could not bear to keep the little diamond chain in my room.”

For a moment even Hanaud was surprised. He had lost sight of that

complication. Now he leaned forward anxiously; indeed, with a greater anxiety than he had yet shown in all this affair.

“I was terrified,” continued Joan Carew. “I kept thinking: ‘They must have found out by now. They will search everywhere.’ I didn’t reason. I lay in bed expecting to hear every moment a loud knocking on the door. Besides—the chain itself being there in my bedroom—her chain—the dead woman’s chain—no, I couldn’t endure it. I felt as if I had stolen it. Then my maid brought in my tea.”

“You had locked it away?” cried Hanaud.

“Yes. My maid did not see it.”

Joan Carew explained how she had risen, dressed, wrapped the chain in a pad of cotton-wool and enclosed it in an envelope. The envelope had not the stamp of the hotel upon it. It was a rather large envelope, one of a packet which she had bought in a crowded shop in Oxford Street on her way from Euston to the Semiramis. She had bought the envelopes of that particular size in order that when she sent her letter of introduction to the Director of the Opera at Covent Garden she might enclose with it a photograph.

“And to whom did you send it?” asked Mr. Ricardo.

“To Mrs. Blumenstein at the Semiramis. I printed the address carefully. Then I went out and posted it.”

“Where?” Hanaud inquired.

“In the big letter-box of the Post Office at the corner of Trafalgar Square.”

Hanaud looked at the girl sharply. “You had your wits about you, I see,” he said.

“What if the envelope gets lost?” said Ricardo.

Hanaud laughed grimly.

“If one envelope is delivered at its address in London to-day, it will be that one,” he said. “The news of the crime is published, you see,” and he swung round to Joan.

“Did you know that, Miss Carew?”

“No,” she answered in an awe-stricken voice.

“Well, then, it is. Let us see what the special investigator has to say about it.” And Hanaud, with a deliberation which Mr. Ricardo found quite excruciating, spread out the newspaper on the table in front of him.

IV

There was only one new fact in the couple of columns devoted to the mystery. Mrs. Blumenstein had died from chloroform poisoning. She was of a stout habit, and the thieves were not skilled in the administration of the anaesthetic.

“It’s murder none the less,” said Hanaud, and he gazed straight at Joan, asking her by the direct summons of his eyes what she was going to do.

“I must tell my story to the police,” she replied painfully and slowly. But she did not hesitate; she was announcing a meditated plan.

Hanaud neither agreed nor differed. His face was blank, and when he spoke there was no cordiality in his voice. “Well,” he asked, “and what is it that you have to say to the police, miss? That you went into the room to steal, and that you were attacked by two strangers, dressed as apaches, and masked? That is all?”

“Yes.”

“And how many men at the Semiramis ball were dressed as apaches and wore masks? Come! Make a guess. A hundred at the least?”

“I should think so.”

“Then what will your confession do beyond—I quote your English idiom—putting you in the coach?”

Mr. Ricardo now smiled with relief. Hanaud was taking a definite line. His knowledge of idiomatic English might be incomplete, but his heart was in the right place. The girl traced a vague pattern on the tablecloth with her fingers.

“Yet I think I must tell the police,” she repeated, looking up and dropping her eyes again. Mr. Ricardo noticed that her eyelashes were very long. For the first time Hanaud’s face relaxed.

“And I think you are quite right,” he cried heartily, to Mr. Ricardo’s surprise. “Tell them the truth before they suspect it, and they will help you out of the affair if they can. Not a doubt of it. Come, I will go with you myself to Scotland Yard.”

“Thank you,” said Joan, and the pair drove away in a cab together.

Hanaud returned to Grosvenor Square alone and lunched with Ricardo.

“It was all right,” he said. “The police were very kind. Miss Joan Carew told her story to them as she had told it to us. Fortunately, the envelope with the aluminium chain had already been delivered, and was in their hands. They were much mystified about it, but Miss Joan’s story gave them a reasonable explanation. I think they are inclined to believe her; and, if she is speaking the truth, they will keep her out of the witness-box if they can.”

“She is to stay here in London, then?” asked Ricardo.

“Oh, yes; she is not to go. She will present her letters at the Opera House and secure an engagement, if she can. The criminals might be lulled thereby into a belief that the girl had kept the whole strange incident to herself, and that there was nowhere even a knowledge of the disguise which they had used.” Hanaud spoke as carelessly as if the matter was not very important; and Ricardo, with an unusual flash of shrewdness, said:

“It is clear, my friend, that you do not think those two men will ever be caught at all.”

Hanaud shrugged his shoulders.

“There is always a chance. But listen. There is a room with a hundred guns, one of which is loaded. Outside the room there are a hundred pigeons, one of which is white. You are taken into the room blindfold. You choose the loaded gun and you shoot the one white pigeon. That is the value of the chance.”

“But,” exclaimed Ricardo, “those pearls were of great value, and I have heard at a trial expert evidence given by pearl merchants. All agree that the pearls of great value are known; so, when they come upon the market “

“That is true,” Hanaud interrupted imperturbably. “But how are they known?”

“By their weight,” said Mr. Ricardo.

“Exactly,” replied Hanaud. “But did you not also hear at this trial of yours that pearls can be peeled like an onion? No? It is true. Remove a skin, two skins, the

weight is altered, the pearl is a trifle smaller. It has lost a little of its value, yes—but you can no longer identify it as the so-and-so pearl which belonged to this or that sultan, was stolen by the vizier, bought by Messrs. Lustre and Steinopolis, of Hatton Garden, and subsequently sold to the wealthy Mrs. Blumenstein. No, your pearl has vanished altogether. There is a new pearl which can be traded." He looked at Ricardo. "Who shall say that those pearls are not already in one of the queer little back streets of Amsterdam, undergoing their transformation?"

Mr. Ricardo was not persuaded because he would not be. "I have some experience in these matters," he said loftily to Hanaud. "I am sure that we shall lay our hands upon the criminals. We have never failed."

Hanaud grinned from ear to ear. The only experience which Mr. Ricardo had ever had was gained on the shores of Geneva and at Aix under Hanaud's tuition. But Hanaud did not argue, and there the matter rested.

The days flew by. It was London's play-time. The green and gold of early summer deepened and darkened; wondrous warm nights under England's pale blue sky, when the streets rang with the joyous feet of youth, led in clear dawns and lovely glowing days. Hanaud made acquaintance with the wooded reaches of the Thames; Joan Carew sang "Louise" at Covent Garden with notable success; and the affair of the Semiramis Hotel, in the minds of the few who remembered it, was already added to the long list of unfathomed mysteries.

But towards the end of May there occurred a startling development. Joan Carew wrote to Mr. Ricardo that she would call upon him in the afternoon, and she begged him to secure the presence of Hanaud. She came as the clock struck; she was pale and agitated; and in the room where Calladine had first told the story of her visit she told another story which, to Mr. Ricardo's thinking, was yet more strange and—yes—yet more suspicious.

"It has been going on for some time," she began. "I thought of coming to you at once. Then I wondered whether, if I waited—oh, you'll never believe me!"

"Let us hear!" said Hanaud patiently.

"I began to dream of that room, the two men disguised and masked, the still figure in the bed. Night after night! I was terrified to go to sleep. I felt the hand upon my mouth. I used to catch myself falling asleep, and walk about the room with all the lights up to keep myself awake."

“But you couldn’t,” said Hanaud with a smile. “Only the old can do that.”

“No, I couldn’t,” she admitted; “and—oh, my nights were horrible until”—she paused and looked at her companions doubtfully—“until one night the mask slipped.”

“What—?” cried Hanaud, and a note of sternness rang suddenly in his voice. “What are you saying?”

With a desperate rush of words, and the colour staining her forehead and cheeks, Joan Carew continued:

“It is true. The mask slipped on the face of one of the men—of the man who held me. Only a little way; it just left his forehead visible—no more.”

“Well?” asked Hanaud, and Mr. Ricardo leaned forward, swaying between the austerity of criticism and the desire to believe so thrilling a revelation.

“I waked up,” the girl continued, “in the darkness, and for a moment the whole scene remained vividly with me—for just long enough for me to fix clearly in my mind the figure of the apache with the white forehead showing above the mask.”

“When was that?” asked Ricardo.

“A fortnight ago.”

“Why didn’t you come with your story then?”

“I waited,” said Joan. “What I had to tell wasn’t yet helpful. I thought that another night the mask might slip lower still. Besides, I—it is difficult to describe just what I felt. I felt it important just to keep that photograph in my mind, not to think about it, not to talk about it, not even to look at it too often lest I should begin to imagine the rest of the face and find something familiar in the man’s carriage and shape when there was nothing really familiar to me at all. Do you understand that?” she asked, with her eyes fixed in appeal on Hanaud’s face.

“Yes,” replied Hanaud. “I follow your thought.”

“I thought there was a chance now—the strangest chance—that the truth might

be reached. I did not wish to spoil it," and she turned eagerly to Ricardo, as if, having persuaded Hanaud, she would now turn her batteries on his companion. "My whole point of view was changed. I was no longer afraid of falling asleep lest I should dream. I wished to dream, but—"

"But you could not," suggested Hanaud.

"No, that is the truth," replied Joan Carew. "Whereas before I was anxious to keep awake and yet must sleep from sheer fatigue, now that I tried consciously to put myself to sleep I remained awake all through the night, and only towards morning, when the light was coming through the blinds, dropped off into a heavy, dreamless slumber."

Hanaud nodded.

"It is a very perverse world, Miss Carew, and things go by contraries."

Ricardo listened for some note of irony in Hanaud's voice, some look of disbelief in his face. But there was neither the one nor the other. Hanaud was listening patiently.

"Then came my rehearsals," Joan Carew continued, "and that wonderful opera drove everything else out of my head. I had such a chance, if only I could make use of it! When I went to bed now, I went with that haunting music in my ears—the call of Paris—oh, you must remember it. But can you realise what it must mean to a girl who is going to sing it for the first time in Covent Garden?"

Mr. Ricardo saw his opportunity. He, the connoisseur, to whom the psychology of the green room was as an open book, could answer that question.

"It is true, my friend," he informed Hanaud with quiet authority. "The great march of events leaves the artist cold. He lives aloof. While the tumbrils thunder in the streets he adds a delicate tint to the picture he is engaged upon or recalls his triumph in his last great part."

"Thank you," said Hanaud gravely. "And now Miss Carew may perhaps resume her story."

"It was the very night of my debut," she continued. "I had supper with some friends. A great artist, Carmen Valeri, honoured me with her presence. I went

home excited, and that night I dreamed again."

"Yes?"

"This time the chin, the lips, the eyes were visible. There was only a black strip across the middle of the face. And I thought—nay, I was sure—that if that strip vanished I should know the man."

"And it did vanish?"

"Three nights afterwards."

"And you did know the man?"

The girl's face became troubled. She frowned.

"I knew the face, that was all," she answered. "I was disappointed. I had never spoken to the man. I am sure of that still. But somewhere I have seen him."

"You don't even remember when?" asked Hanaud.

"No." Joan Carew reflected for a moment with her eyes upon the carpet, and then flung up her head with a gesture of despair. "No. I try all the time to remember. But it is no good."

Mr. Ricardo could not restrain a movement of indignation. He was being played with. The girl with her fantastic story had worked him up to a real pitch of excitement only to make a fool of him. All his earlier suspicions flowed back into his mind. What if, after all, she was implicated in the murder and the theft? What if, with a perverse cunning, she had told Hanaud and himself just enough of what she knew, just enough of the truth, to persuade them to protect her? What if her frank confession of her own overpowering impulse to steal the necklace was nothing more than a subtle appeal to the sentimental pity of men, an appeal based upon a wider knowledge of men's weaknesses than a girl of nineteen or twenty ought to have? Mr. Ricardo cleared his throat and sat forward in his chair. He was girding himself for a singularly searching interrogatory when Hanaud asked the most irrelevant of questions:

"How did you pass the evening of that night when you first dreamed complete the face of your assailant?"

Joan Carew reflected. Then her face cleared.

“I know,” she exclaimed. “I was at the opera.”

“And what was being given?”

“*The Jewels of the Madonna.”*

Hanaud nodded his head. To Ricardo it seemed that he had expected precisely that answer.

“Now,” he continued, “you are sure that you have seen this man?”

“Yes.”

“Very well,” said Hanaud. “There is a game you play at children’s parties—is there not?—animal, vegetable, or mineral, and always you get the answer. Let us play that game for a few minutes, you and I.”

Joan Carew drew up her chair to the table and sat with her chin propped upon her hands and her eyes fixed on Hanaud’s face. As he put each question she pondered on it and answered. If she answered doubtfully he pressed it.

“You crossed on the *Lucania* from New York?”

“Yes.”

“Picture to yourself the dining-room, the tables. You have the picture quite clear?”

“Yes.”

“Was it at breakfast that you saw him?”

“No.”

“At luncheon?”

“No.”

“At dinner?”

She paused for a moment, summoning before her eyes the travellers at the tables.

“No.”

“Not in the dining-table at all, then?”

“No.”

“In the library, when you were writing letters, did you not one day lift your head and see him?”

“No.”

“On the promenade deck? Did he pass you when you sat in your deck-chair, or did you pass him when he sat in his chair?”

“No.”

Step by step Hanaud took her back to New York to her hotel, to journeys in the train. Then he carried her to Milan where she had studied. It was extraordinary to Ricardo to realise how much Hanaud knew of the curriculum of a student aspiring to grand opera. From Milan he brought her again to New York, and at the last, with a start of joy, she cried: “Yes, it was there.”

Hanaud took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead.

“Ouf!” he grunted. “To concentrate the mind on a day like this, it makes one hot, I can tell you. Now, Miss Carew, let us hear.”

It was at a concert at the house of a Mrs. Starlingshield in Fifth Avenue and in the afternoon. Joan Carew sang. She was a stranger to New York and very nervous. She saw nothing but a mist of faces whilst she sang, but when she had finished the mist cleared, and as she left the improvised stage she saw the man. He was standing against the wall in a line of men. There was no particular reason why her eyes should single him out, except that he was paying no attention to her singing, and, indeed, she forgot him altogether afterwards.

“I just happened to see him clearly and distinctly,” she said. “He was tall, clean-shaven, rather dark, not particularly young—thirty-five or so, I should say —a man with a heavy face and beginning to grow stout. He moved away whilst I

was bowing to the audience, and I noticed him afterwards walking about, talking to people."

"Do you remember to whom?"

"No."

"Did he notice you, do you think?"

"I am sure he didn't," the girl replied emphatically. "He never looked at the stage where I was singing, and he never looked towards me afterwards."

She gave, so far as she could remember, the names of such guests and singers as she knew at that party. "And that is all," she said.

"Thank you," said Hanaud. "It is perhaps a good deal. But it is perhaps nothing at all."

"You will let me hear from you?" she cried, as she rose to her feet.

"Miss Carew, I am at your service," he returned. She gave him her hand timidly and he took it cordially. For Mr. Ricardo she had merely a bow, a bow which recognised that he distrusted her and that she had no right to be offended. Then she went, and Hanaud smiled across the table at Ricardo.

"Yes," he said, "all that you are thinking is true enough. A man who slips out of society to indulge a passion for a drug in greater peace, a girl who, on her own confession, tried to steal, and, to crown all, this fantastic story. It is natural to disbelieve every word of it. But we disbelieved before, when we left Calladine's lodging in the Adelphi, and we were wrong. Let us be warned."

"You have an idea?" exclaimed Ricardo.

"Perhaps!" said Hanaud. And he looked down the theatre column of the *Times*. "Let us distract ourselves by going to the theatre."

"You are the most irritating man!" Mr. Ricardo broke out impulsively. "If I had to paint your portrait, I should paint you with your finger against the side of your nose, saying mysteriously: 'I know,' when you know nothing at all."

Hanaud made a schoolboy's grimace. "We will go and sit in your box at the opera tonight," he said, "and you shall explain to me all through the beautiful music the theory of the tonic sol-fa."

They reached Covent Garden before the curtain rose. Mr. Ricardo's box was on the lowest tier and next to the omnibus box.

"We are near the stage," said Hanaud, as he took his seat in the corner and so arranged the curtain that he could see and yet was hidden from view. "I like that."

The theatre was full; stalls and boxes shimmered with jewels and satin, and all that was famous that season for beauty and distinction had made its tryst there that night.

"Yes, this is wonderful," said Hanaud. "What opera do they play?" He glanced at his programme and cried, with a little start of surprise: "We are in luck. It is *The Jewels of the Madonna"*

"Do you believe in omens?" Mr. Ricardo asked coldly. He had not yet recovered from his rebuff of the afternoon.

"No, but I believe that Carmen Valeri is at her best in this part," said Hanaud.

Mr. Ricardo belonged to that body of critics which must needs spoil your enjoyment by comparisons and recollections of other great artists. He was at a disadvantage certainly tonight, for the opera was new. But he did his best. He imagined others in the part, and when the great scene came at the end of the second act, and Carmen Valeri, on obtaining from her lover the jewels stolen from the sacred image, gave such a display of passion as fairly enthralled that audience, Mr. Ricardo sighed quietly and patiently.

"How Calve would have brought out the psychological value of that scene!" he murmured; and he was quite vexed with Hanaud, who sat with his opera glasses held to his eyes, and every sense apparently concentrated on the stage. The curtains rose and rose again when the act was concluded, and still Hanaud sat motionless as the Sphynx, staring through his glasses.

"That is all," said Ricardo when the curtains fell for the fifth time.

“They will come out,” said Hanaud. “Wait!” And from between the curtains Carmen Valeri was led out into the full glare of the footlights with the panoply of jewels flashing on her breast. Then at last Hanaud put down his glasses and turned to Ricardo with a look of exultation and genuine delight upon his face which filled that season-worn dilettante with envy.

“What a night!” said Hanaud. “What a wonderful night!” And he applauded until he split his gloves. At the end of the opera he cried: “We will go and take supper at the Semiramis. Yes, my friend, we will finish our evening like gallant gentlemen. Come! Let us not think of the morning.” And boisterously he slapped Ricardo in the small of the back.

In spite of his boast, however, Hanaud hardly touched his supper, and he played with, rather than drank, his brandy and soda. He had a little table to which he was accustomed beside a glass screen in the depths of the room, and he sat with his back to the wall watching the groups which poured in. Suddenly his face lighted up.

“Here is Carmen Valeri!” he cried. “Once more we are in luck. Is it not that she is beautiful?”

Mr. Ricardo turned languidly about in his chair and put up his eyeglass.

“So, so,” he said.

“Ah!” returned Hanaud. “Then her companion will interest you still more. For he is the man who murdered Mrs. Blumenstein.”

Mr. Ricardo jumped so that his eyeglass fell down and tinkled on its cord against the buttons of his waistcoat.

“What!” he exclaimed. “It’s impossible!” He looked again. “Certainly the man fits Joan Carew’s description. But—” He turned back to Hanaud utterly astounded. And as he looked at the Frenchman all his earlier recollections of him, of his swift deductions, of the subtle imagination which his heavy body so well concealed, crowded in upon Ricardo and convinced him.

“How long have you known?” he asked in a whisper of awe.

“Since ten o’clock tonight.”

“But you will have to find the necklace before you can prove it.”

“The necklace!” said Hanaud carelessly. “That is already found.”

Mr. Ricardo had been longing for a thrill. He had it now. He felt it in his very spine.

“It’s found?” he said in a startled whisper.

“Yes.”

Ricardo turned again, with as much indifference as he could assume, towards the couple who were settling down at their table, the man with a surly indifference, Carmen Valeri with the radiance of a woman who has just achieved a triumph and is now free to enjoy the fruits of it. Confusedly, recollections returned to Ricardo of questions put that afternoon by Hanaud to Joan Carew—subtle questions into which the name of Carmen Valeri was continually entering. She was a woman of thirty, certainly beautiful, with a clear, pale face and eyes like the night.

“Then she is implicated too!” he said. What a change for her, he thought, from the stage of Covent Garden to the felon’s cell, from the gay supper-room of the Semiramis, with its bright frocks and its babel of laughter, to the silence and the ignominious garb of the workrooms in Aylesbury Prison!

“She!” exclaimed Hanaud; and in his passion for the contrasts of drama Ricardo was almost disappointed. “She has nothing whatever to do with it. She knows nothing. Andre Favart there—yes. But Carmen Valeri! She’s as stupid as an owl, and loves him beyond words. Do you want to know how stupid she is? You shall know. I asked Mr. Clements, the director of the opera house, to take supper with us, and here he is.”

Hanaud stood up and shook hands with the director. He was of the world of business rather than of art, and long experience of the ways of tenors and prima-donnas had given him a good-humoured cynicism.

“They are spoilt children, all tantrums and vanity,” he said, “and they would ruin you to keep a rival out of the theatre.”

He told them anecdote upon anecdote.

“And Carmen Valeri,” Hanaud asked in a pause; “is she troublesome this season?”

“Has been,” replied Clements dryly. “At present she is playing at being good. But she gave me a turn some weeks ago.” He turned to Ricardo. “Superstition’s her trouble, and Andre Favart knows it. She left him behind in America this spring.”

“America!” suddenly cried Ricardo; so suddenly that Clements looked at him in surprise.

“She was singing in New York, of course, during the winter,” he returned. “Well, she left him behind, and I was shaking hands with myself when he began to deal the cards over there. She came to me in a panic. She had just had a cable. She couldn’t sing on Friday night. There was a black knave next to the nine of diamonds. She wouldn’t sing for worlds. And it was the first night of *The Jewels of the Madonna!* Imagine the fix I was in!”

“What did you do?” asked Ricardo.

“The only thing there was to do,” replied Clements with a shrug of the shoulders. “I cabled Favart some money and he dealt the cards again. She came to me beaming. Oh, she had been so distressed to put me in the cart! But what could she do? Now there was a red queen next to the ace of hearts, so she could sing without a scruple so long, of course, as she didn’t pass a funeral on the way down to the opera house. Luckily she didn’t. But my money brought Favart over here, and now I’m living on a volcano. For he’s the greatest scoundrel unhung. He never has a farthing, however much she gives him; he’s a blackmailer, he’s a swindler, he has no manners and no graces, he looks like a butcher and treats her as if she were dirt, he never goes near the opera except when she is singing in this part, and she worships the ground he walks on. Well, I suppose it’s time to go.”

The lights had been turned off, the great room was emptying. Mr. Ricardo and his friends rose to go, but at the door Hanaud detained Mr. Clements, and they talked together alone for some little while, greatly to Mr. Ricardo’s annoyance. Hanaud’s good humour, however, when he rejoined his friend, was enough for two.

“I apologise, my friend, with my hand on my heart. But it was for your sake that

I stayed behind. You have a meretricious taste for melodrama which I deeply deplore, but which I mean to gratify. I ought to leave for Paris tomorrow, but I shall not. I shall stay until Thursday." And he skipped upon the pavement as they walked home to Grosvenor Square.

Mr. Ricardo bubbled with questions, but he knew his man. He would get no answer to any one of them tonight. So he worked out the problem for himself as he lay awake in his bed, and he came down to breakfast next morning fatigued but triumphant. Hanaud was already chipping off the top of his egg at the table.

"So I see you have found it all out, my friend," he said.

"Not all," replied Ricardo modestly, "and you will not mind, I am sure, if I follow the usual custom and wish you a good morning."

"Not at all," said Hanaud. "I am all for good manners myself."

He dipped his spoon into his egg.

"But I am longing to hear the line of your reasoning."

Mr. Ricardo did not need much pressing.

"Joan Carew saw Andre Favart at Mrs. Starlingshield's party, and saw him with Carmen Valeri. For Carmen Valeri was there. I remember that you asked Joan for the names of the artists who sang, and Carmen Valeri was amongst them."

Hanaud nodded his head.

"Exactly."

"No doubt Joan Carew noticed Carmen Valeri particularly, and so took unconsciously into her mind an impression of the man who was with her, Andre Favart—of his build, of his walk, of his type."

Again Hanaud agreed.

"She forgets the man altogether, but the picture remains latent in her mind—an undeveloped film."

Hanaud looked up in surprise, and the surprise flattered Mr. Ricardo. Not for nothing had he tossed about in his bed for the greater part of the night.

“Then came the tragic night at the Semiramis. She does not consciously recognise her assailant, but she dreams the scene again and again, and by a process of unconscious cerebration the figure of the man becomes familiar. Finally she makes her debut, is entertained at supper afterwards, and meets once more Carmen Valeri.”

“Yes, for the first time since Mrs. Starlingshield’s party,” interjected Hanaud.

“She dreams again, she remembers asleep more than she remembers when awake. The presence of Carmen Valeri at her supper-party has its effect. By a process of association, she recalls Favart, and the mask slips on the face of her assailant. Some days later she goes to the opera. She hears Carmen Valeri sing in *The Jewels of the Madonna*. No doubt the passion of her acting, which I am more prepared to acknowledge this morning than I was last night, affects Joan Carew powerfully, emotionally. She goes to bed with her head full of Carmen Valeri, and she dreams not of Carmen Valeri, but of the man who is unconsciously associated with Carmen Valeri in her thoughts. The mask vanishes altogether. She sees her assailant now, has his portrait limned in her mind, would know him if she met him in the street, though she does not know by what means she identified him.”

“Yes,” said Hanaud. “It is curious the brain working while the body sleeps, the dream revealing what thought cannot recall.”

Mr. Ricardo was delighted. He was taken seriously.

“But of course,” he said, “I could not have worked the problem out but for you. You knew of Andre Favart and the kind of man he was.”

Hanaud laughed.

“Yes. That is always my one little advantage. I know all the cosmopolitan blackguards of Europe.” His laughter ceased suddenly, and he brought his clenched fist heavily down upon the table. “Here is one of them who will be very well out of the world, my friend,” he said very quietly, but there was a look of force in his face and a hard light in his eyes which made Mr. Ricardo shiver.

For a few moments there was silence. Then Ricardo asked: “But have you evidence enough?”

“Yes.”

“Your two chief witnesses, Calladine and Joan Carew—you said it yourself—there are facts to discredit them. Will they be believed?”

“But they won’t appear in the case at all,” Hanaud said. “Wait, wait!” and once more he smiled. “By the way, what is the number of Calladine’s house?”

Ricardo gave it, and Hanaud therefore wrote a letter. “It is all for your sake, my friend,” he said with a chuckle.

“Nonsense,” said Ricardo. “You have the spirit of the theatre in your bones.”

“Well, I shall not deny it,” said Hanaud, and he sent out the letter to the nearest pillar-box.

Mr. Ricardo waited in a fever of impatience until Thursday came. At breakfast Hanaud would talk of nothing but the news of the day. At luncheon he was no better. The affair of the Semiramis Hotel seemed a thousand miles from any of his thoughts. But at five o’clock he said as he drank his tea:

“You know, of course, that we go to the opera tonight?”

“Yes. Do we?”

“Yes. Your young friend Calladine, by the way, will join us in your box.”

“That is very kind of him, I am sure,” said Mr. Ricardo.

The two men arrived before the rising of the curtain, and in the crowded lobby a stranger spoke a few words to Hanaud, but what he said Ricardo could not hear. They took their seats in the box, and Hanaud looked at his programme.

“Ah! It is *Il Ballo de Maschera* tonight. We always seem to hit upon something appropriate, don’t we?”

Then he raised his eyebrows.

“Oh-o! Do you see that our pretty young friend, Joan Carew, is singing in the role of the page? It is a showy part. There is a particular melody with a long-sustained trill in it, as far as I remember.”

Mr. Ricardo was not deceived by Hanaud’s apparent ignorance of the opera to be given that night and of the part Joan Carew was to take. He was, therefore, not surprised when Hanaud added:

“By the way, I should let Calladine find it all out for himself.”

Mr. Ricardo nodded sagely.

“Yes. That is wise. I had thought of it myself.” But he had done nothing of the kind. He was only aware that the elaborate stage-management in which Hanaud delighted was working out to the desired climax, whatever that climax might be. Calladine entered the box a few minutes later and shook hands with them awkwardly.

“It was kind of you to invite me,” he said and, very ill at ease, he took a seat between them and concentrated his attention on the house as it filled up.

“There’s the overture,” said Hanaud. The curtains divided and were festooned on either side of the stage. The singers came on in their turn; the page appeared to a burst of delicate applause (Joan Carew had made a small name for herself that season), and with a stifled cry Calladine shot back in the box as if he had been struck. Even then Mr. Ricardo did not understand. He only realised that Joan Carew was looking extraordinarily trim and smart in her boy’s dress. He had to look from his programme to the stage and back again several times before the reason of Calladine’s exclamation dawned on him. When it did, he was horrified. Hanaud, in his craving for dramatic effects, must have lost hio head altogether. Joan Carew was wearing, from the ribbon in her hair to the scarlet heels of her buckled satin shoes, the same dress as she had worn on the tragic night at the Semiramis Hotel. He leaned forward in his agitation to Hanaud.

“You must be mad. Suppose Favart is in the theatre and sees her. He’ll be over on the Continent by one in the morning.”

“No, he won’t,” replied Hanaud. “For one thing, he never comes to Covent Garden unless one opera, with Carmen Valeri in the chief part, is being played, as you heard the other night at supper. For a second thing, he isn’t in the house. I

know where he is. He is gambling in Dean Street, Soho. For a third thing, my friend, he couldn't leave by the nine o'clock train for the Continent if he wanted to. Arrangements have been made. For a fourth thing, he wouldn't wish to. He has really remarkable reasons for desiring to stay in London. But he will come to the theatre later. Clements will send him an urgent message, with the result that he will go straight to Clements' office. Meanwhile, we can enjoy ourselves, eh?"

Never was the difference between the amateur dilettante and the genuine professional more clearly exhibited than by the behaviour of the two men during the rest of the performance. Mr. Ricardo might have been sitting on a coal fire from his jumps and twistings; Hanaud stolidly enjoyed the music, and when Joan Carew sang her famous solo his hands clamoured for an encore louder than anyone's in the boxes. Certainly, whether excitement was keeping her up or no, Joan Carew had never sung better in her life. Her voice was clear and fresh as a bird's—a bird with a soul inspiring its song. Even Calladine drew his chair forward again and sat with his eyes fixed upon the stage and quite carried out of himself. He drew a deep breath at the end.

"She is wonderful," he said, like a man waking up.

"She is very good," replied Mr. Ricardo, correcting Calladine's transports.

"We will go round to the back of the stage," said Hanaud.

They passed through the iron door and across the stage to a long corridor with a row of doors on one side. There were two or three men standing about in evening dress, as if waiting for friends in the dressing-rooms. At the third door Hanaud stopped and knocked. The door was opened by Joan Carew, still dressed in her green and gold. Her face was troubled, her eyes afraid.

"Courage, little one," said Hanaud, and he slipped past her into the room. "It is as well that my ugly, familiar face should not be seen too soon."

The door closed and one of the strangers loitered along the corridor and spoke to a call-boy. The call-boy ran off. For five minutes more Mr. Ricardo waited with a beating heart. He had the joy of a man in the centre of things. All those people driving homewards in their motorcars along the Strand—how he pitied them! Then, at the end of the corridor, he saw Clements and Andr6 Favart. They approached, discussing the possibility of Carmen Valeri's appearance in London opera during the next season.

“We have to look ahead, my dear friend,” said Clements, “and though I should be extremely sorry—”

At that moment they were exactly opposite Joan Carew’sdoor. It opened, she came out; with a nervous movement she shut the door behind her. At the sound Andre Favart turned, and he saw drawn up against the panels of the door, with a look of terror in her face, the same gay figure which had interrupted him in Mrs. Blumenstein’s bedroom. There was no need for Joan to act. In the presence of this man her fear was as real as it had been on the night of the Semiramis ball. She trembled from head to foot. Her eyes closed; she seemed about to swoon.

Favart stared and uttered an oath. His face turned white; he staggered back as if he had seen a ghost. Then he made a wild dash along the corridor, and was seized and held by two of the men in evening dress. Favart recovered his wits. He ceased to struggle.

“What does this outrage mean?” he asked, and one of the men drew a warrant and notebook from his pocket.

“You are arrested for the murder of Mrs. Blumenstein in the Semiramis Hotel,” he said, “and I have to warn you that anything you may say will be taken down and may be used in evidence against you.”

“Preposterous!” exclaimed Favart. “There’s a mistake. We will go along to the police and put it right. Where’s your evidence against me?”

Hanaud stepped out of the doorway of the dressing-room.

“In the property-room of the theatre,” he said.

At the sight of him Favart uttered a violent cry of rage. “You are here, too, are you?” he screamed, and he sprang at Hanaud’s throat. Hanaud stepped lightly aside. Favart was borne down to the ground, and when he stood up again the handcuffs were on his wrists.

Favart was led away, and Hanaud turned to Mr. Ricardo and Clements.

“Let us go to the property-room,” he said. They passed along the corridor, and Ricardo noticed that Calladine was no longer with them. He turned and saw him standing outside Joan Carew’s dressing-room.

“He would like to come, of course,” said Ricardo.

“Would he?” asked Hanaud. “Then why doesn’t he? He’s quite grown up, you know,” and he slipped his arm through Ricardo’s and led him back across the stage. In the property-room there was already a detective in plain clothes. Mr. Ricardo had still not as yet guessed the truth.

“What is it you really want, sir?” the property-master asked of the director.

“Only the jewels of the Madonna,” Hanaud answered.

The property-master unlocked a cupboard and took from it the sparkling cuirass. Hanaud pointed to it, and there, lost amongst the huge glittering stones of paste and false pearls, Mrs. Blumenstein’s necklace was entwined.

“Then that is why Favart came always to Covent Garden when *The Jewels of the Madonna* was being performed!” exclaimed Ricardo.

Hanaud nodded.

“He came to watch over his treasure.”

Ricardo was piecing together the sections of the puzzle.

“No doubt he knew of the necklace in America. No doubt he followed it to England.”

Hanaud agreed.

“Mrs. Blumenstein’s jewels were quite famous in New York.”

“But to hide them here!” cried Mr. Clements. “He must have been mad.”

“Why?” asked Hanaud. “Can you imagine a safer hiding-place? Who is going to burgle the property-room of Covent Garden? Who is going to look for a priceless string of pearls amongst the stage jewels of an opera house?”

“You did,” said Mr. Ricardo.

“I?” replied Hanaud, shrugging his shoulders. “Joan Carew’s dreams led me to Andre Favart. The first time we came here and saw the pearls of the Madonna, I

was on the look-out, naturally. I noticed Favart at the back of the stalls. But it was a stroke of luck that I noticed those pearls through my opera glasses."

"At the end of the second act?" cried Ricardo suddenly. "I remember now."

"Yes," replied Hanaud. "But for that second act the pearls would have stayed comfortably here all through the season. Carmen Valeri—a fool as I told you—would have tossed them about in her dressing-room without a notion of their value, and at the end of July, when the murder at the Semiramis Hotel had been forgotten, Favart would have taken them to Amsterdam and made his bargain."

"Shall we go?"

They left the theatre together and walked down to the grill-room of the Semiramis. But as Hanaud looked through the glass door he drew back.

"We will not go in, I think, eh?"

"Why?" asked Ricardo.

Hanaud pointed to a table. Calladine and Joan Carew were seated at it taking their supper.

"Perhaps," said Hanaud with a smile, "perhaps, my friend—what? Who shall say that the rooms in the Adelphi will not be given up?"

They turned away from the hotel. But Hanaud was right, and before the season was over Mr. Ricardo had to put his hand in his pocket for a wedding present.

Under Bignor Hill

The action of the play takes place on a night in summer at the foot of Bignor Hill on the north side of the Sussex Downs. The time is that of the Roman occupation of England. In the foreground is an open space of turf surrounded with gorse-bushes. The turf rises in a steep bank, at the back and melts into the side of the hill. The left of the stage is closed in by a wooded spur of the hill. The scene is wild and revealed by a strong moonlight. A fallen tree-trunk lies on the right, and a raised bank is at the left of the stage.

On the summit of the hill the glow of a camp-fire is seen, and from time to time a flame leaps up as though fuel had been added. Towards the end of the play the fire dies down and goes out.

When the curtain rises the stage is empty, but a sound of men marching is faintly heard. The sound is heard in pauses throughout the first part of the play.

[Gleva enters from the R. She is a British princess, clothed in skins. But she has added to her dress some of the refinements of the conquerors—_a shirt of fine linen, the high sandals of the Roman lady, the Roman comb in her hair,_ *some jewellery, a necklace of stones, and bracelets. She is followed by three men of her tribe, wild men in skins, armed with knives, and flint axes carried at the waist. Gleva comes forward silently into the open space of turf.]*

GLEVA: No one!

BRAN: The trumpet has not sounded the last call on the hill.

GLEVA: No. Yet the hour for it is past. By now the camp should be asleep. *(She looks up the hill and then turns to her men.)* Be ready to light the torch.

CARANSIUS: Everything is strange to-day.

[He sits R. under the shelter of a bush, and with a flint and steel kindles a tiny flame during the following scene. He has a torch in *his* hand which he lays by his side. When the fire is lighted he blows on it from time to time to keep it alight.]

BRAN: Yes. And yesterday. For many months we have been left in quiet. Now

once more the soldiers march through Anderida.

GLEVA *(holds up her hand):* Listen!

[A pause. The sound of marching is heard quite clearly, but at a distance.]

BRAN: It does not stop, Princess.

GLEVA: All yesterday, all through last night, all through this long day! Listen to it, steady as a heart beating, steady and terrible. *(She speaks with great discouragement, moving apart, L., and sitting on tree bole.)*

CARANSIUS *(lighting fire):* I crept to the edge of the forest to-day. I lay very quiet behind the bushes and looked out across the clearing to the road.

GLEVA: You!

[A general exclamation of astonishment.]

CARANSIUS: Oh, it's not easy to frighten me, I can tell you. I fought at Verulanium with the Iceni. I know. I carried a sling. *(He nods majestically at his companions.)* And there you have it.

GLEVA: Yes, yes, good friend. But which way did the soldiers march? What of the road? *[She goes over to him.]*

CARANSIUS: Mistress, there wasn't any road. There were only soldiers. As far as my eyes could see, bright helmets and brown faces and flashing shoulder plates bobbing up and down between the trees and a smother of dust until my head whirled.

BRAN AND BOTH ATTENDANTS: Oh!

GLEVA: But which way did they go?

CARANSIUS: I lost my dog, too—the brute. He ran from me and joined the marching men. I dared not call to him.

BRAN: Yes, that is the way of dogs.

GLEVA: Did they go north towards the Wall? *(She shakes him.)*

CARANSIUS *(who has been blowing on the fire, now sits up comfortably and smiles upon Gleva, who is tortured with impatience):* God bless you, mistress, there isn't any Wall. I know about the Romans; I know! I fought at Verulanium. Now!

[Gleva turns away in despair of getting any sense out of him. A trumpet sounds on the top of Bignor Hitt, faintly. All turn swiftly towards it.]

GLEVA: Ready! *[A sound of armed men moving, a clash of shields is heard from the top of Bignor Hill.]* Now fire the torch. Give it me! *(She springs on to the bank and waves it three times from side to side, steps down, and gives it back to an attendant, who puts it out.}*

CARANSIUS *(continuing placidly):* No, there's no Wall. There are a great many mistakes made about the Romans. They are no longer the men they were. I carried a sling at Verulanium, and there you have it. I'll tell you something. The soldiers were marching to Regnum.

GLEVA: To Regnum? Are you sure?

CARANSIUS : Yes. Up over the great Down they went. I saw their armour amongst the trees on the side of the hill, and the smoke of their marching on the round bare top.

GLEVA: They were going to Regnum and the sea. *(She speaks in despair.)*

THIRD ATTENDANT: I am afraid.

GLEVA *(turns on him scornfully):* You! Why should you fear if they are marching to the sea?

THIRD ATTENDANT: I have been afraid ever since yesterday. The noise of the marching scattered my wits. *[Glem and the others laugh contemptuously.]* And because I was afraid—I killed. *(A low cry of consternation bursts from Bran and Caransius.)*

BRAN: Madman! Madman!

GLEVA : You killed one of the Romans!

THIRD ATTENDANT *(stands before her):* I was afraid. It was by the old forge in the forest. There's a brook by the forge.

BRAN: Yes.

THIRD ATTENDANT: He had fallen out of the ranks. He was stooping over the brook. I saw the sun sparkle upon his helmet as he dipped it into the water, and his strong, brown neck as he raised it. I crept close to him and struck at his neck as he drank.

CARANSIUS: That was a good stroke.

BRAN: A mad stroke.

THIRD ATTENDANT: He fell over without a cry, and all his armour rattled once.

BRAN: It will be the fire for our barns, and death for every tenth man of the tribe.

THIRD ATTENDANT: No one saw.

GLEVA: Stand here! *[The third attendant stands before her.]* I gave an order.

CARANSIUS: Yet, mistress, it is better to strike against orders than to leave one's friends and, like my dog, follow the marching men.

[A cry bursts from Bran. He seizes Caransius. Gleva stands with her hand upon her knife. Then she turns away, and buries her face in her hands. A whistle is heard from the hillside above her on the left. She looks up, and her face changes. She turns to third attendant.]

GLEVA: Go up the hill—close to the camp, as close as you can creep, and watch. So may you earn your pardon. *(He goes off.)* You two stand aside—but not so far but that a cry may bring you instantly.

BRAN: We will be ready. *(Exeunt*)

[Gleva faces the spur of the hitt on her left as if all her world was there. There is a movement among the trees on the spur, a flash of armour in the moonlight, and

at the edge of the trees appears Quintus Calpurnius Aulus, a Captain about thirty-five years old, handsome, but in repose his face is stern and inscrutable. He is active, lithe, self-confident. He comes out into the open just below the trees, and stands quite stitt. His very attitude should suggest strength.]

QUINTUS: I am here. *(He speaks with the voice of a man accustomed to command, and to have his orders obeyed without question. Gleva stands erect questioning his authority. Then she crosses her hands upon her bosom and bows her head.)*

GLEVA: My Lord Calpurnius.

[Calpurnius laughs. He runs down the slope.]

CALPURNIUS: That's well. *(He takes her in his arms.)* You have a trick of saying "Calpurnius." I shall remember it till I die. *[Gleva drains away from him.]* Say it again.

GLEVA: With all my soul in the word. It is a prayer. Calpurnius!

[Calpurnius is moved by the passion of her voice. He takes her hands in his.]

CALPURNIUS: Yes. I shall remember till I die. *(They move towards the bank.)*

GLEVA: My lord is late tonight.

CALPURNIUS: Late! A Roman soldier of fifteen years' service late. My dear, let us talk sense. Come!

[The trumpet sounds again from the hill. Calpurnius stops.]

GLEVA: Why does the trumpet sound?

CALPURNIUS: To call some straggler back to Rome.

GLEVA: Rome! *(With a cry.)*

CALPUBNIUS: Yes. For every one of us, the camp on the empty hill-top there *is* Rome, and all Rome's in the trumpet call.

GLEVA: Is the sound so strange and moving?

CALPURNIUS: Yes. Most strange, most moving. For I know that at this actual minute every Roman soldier on guard throughout the world has the sound of it in his ears, here in the forest of Anderida, far away on some fortress wall in Syria. *(Throws off his seriousness.)* But I am talking of sacred things, and that one should be shy to do. Come, Gleva. We have little time. When the moon touches those trees I climb again.

GLEVA: Yet, my lord, for one more moment think of me not as the foolish, conquered slave. Listen! Turn your head this way and listen.

CALPURNIUS: What shall I hear? Some nightingale pouring out love upon a moonlit night? He'll not say "Calpurnius" with so sweet a note as you.

GLEVA: You'll hear no nightingale, nor any sound that has one memory of me in it. Listen, you'll hear—all Rome. *[He looks at her quickly. In the pause is heard the sound of men marching.]* That speaks louder than the trumpets. *[He is very still.]* Calpurnius! *(She sits by him, and puts an arm about his shoulder. She speaks his name as if she were afraid.)* The Romans flee from Britain.

CALPURNIUS *(with a start of contempt):* Madness! It's one legion going home. Another, with its rest still to earn, will take its place.

GLEVA: Which legion goes?

CALPURNIUS: How should I know? *(A pause.)* The Valeria Victrix.

GLEVA : Yours! *(She starts away from him.)* Calpurnius, yours!

CALPURNIUS: Yes, mine. My legion goes to Rome. *(His voice thrills with eagerness. He has been troubled through the scene how he shall break the news. Now it is out, he cannot conceal his joy.)*

GLEVA: But you—you stay behind.

CALPURNIUS *(gently):* This is our last night together. Let us not waste it. Never was there a night so made for love. *(He draws her towards him.)*

GLEVA: You go with your legion?

CALPURNIUS: Before the dawn.

GLEVA: It’s impossible. No. You’ll stay behind.

CALPURNIUS: No.

GLEVA : Listen to me. You shall be King with me.

CALPURNIUS (in *a burst of contempt):* King here! In the forests of Britain! I!

GLEVA: Yes. You’ll lie quiet here. I by your side. Your hand in mine. See! We’ll forget the hours. The dawn will come.

CALPURNIUS: And find me a traitor!

GLEVA : I am already one. There was a servant with me. He told me I was like a dog that leaves its own people to follow the marching men.

CALPURNIUS *(sits up):* And you let him live, with this knife ready in your girdle?

GLEVA: He spoke the truth.

CALPURNIUS: The truth! *(Contemptuously.)* There’s a word for you! Child! There’s a greater thing in the world than truth. Truth wins no battles.

GLEVA: What’s this greater thing?

CALPURNIUS: Discipline! You should have struck.

GLEVA: I wish I had. For he might have struck back.

CALPURNIUS: Discipline! So I go with my legion.

GLEVA *(with a cry accusingly):* You want to go.

CALPURNIUS *(springs up):* By all the gods I do. For ten years I have toiled in Britain building roads—roads—roads—till I’m sick of them. First the pounded earth, then the small stones, next the rubble, then the concrete, and last of all the pavement; here in Anderida, there across the swamps to Londinium, northwards through the fens to Eboracum—ten years of it. And now—Rome—the mother of me!

GLEVA: Rome? *(She speaks despairingly. Calpurnius has forgotten her: he answers her voice, not her.)*

CALPURNIUS: Just for a little while. Oh, I shall go out again, but just for a little while—to rise when I want to, not at the trumpet's call, the house all quiet till I clap my hands—to have one's mornings free—to saunter through the streets, picking up the last new thing of Juvenal in the Argiletum, or some fine piece of Corinthian bronze in the Campus Martius, and stopping on the steps of the Appian Way to send a basket of flowers or a bottle of new scent to some girl that has caught one's fancy. To go to the theatre, and see the new play, though, to be sure, people write to me that there are no plays nowadays.

GLEVA: Plays?

CALPURNIUS: And in the evening with a party of girls in their bravest, all without a care, to gallop in the cool along the Appian Way to Baiae and crowned with roses and violets have supper by the sea. Oh, to see one's women again—Lydia'll be getting on, by the way!—women dressed, jewelled, smelling of violets. Oh, just for a little while! By Castor and Pollux, I have deserved it.

GLEVA *(who has been listening in grief):* Yes, you must go. *(She goes to him and sits at his side.)* I have a plan.

CALPURNIUS: Yes. *(Absently.)*

GLEVA: Listen to me!—Calpurnius.

[He laughs affectionately at her pronunciation of his name.]

CALPURNIUS: Let me hear this wise plan!

GLEVA: I will go with you.

CALPURNIUS *(rising):* What?

[Gleva pulls him down.]

GLEVA: Yes, I'll give up my kingdom here, sacrifice it all, and go to Rome with you. Calpurnius (in a *whisper),* I'll be your Lydia. Oh, to drive with you on such a night as this, all crowned with roses, from Rome to Baiae on the sea.

CALPURNIUS: These are dreams.

GLEVA *(passionately):* Why? Why? Are these women in Rome more beautiful than I? Look! *(She rises.) I* can dress, too, as the Roman women do. I wear the combs you gave me. I don't think they are pretty, but I wear them. See, I wear, too, the sandals, the bracelets.

CALPURNIUS: No. There are no women in Rome more beautiful than you—but—but—

GLEVA *(all her passion dying away):* You would be ashamed of me.

[Calpurnius is uncomfortable.]

CALPURNIUS: You would be—unusual. People would turn and stare. Other women would laugh. Some scribbler would write a lampoon. Oh, you are beautiful, but this is your place, not Rome. Each to his own in the end, Gleva. I to Rome—you to your people.

GLEVA: My people! Oh, you did right to laugh at the thought of reigning here. What are my people? Slaves for your pleasure. It can't be! You to Rome, the lights, the women—oh, how I hate them! You would not reproach me because my knife hangs idle, had I your Roman women here! Calpurnius, be kind. From the first morning when I saw you in the forest, shining in brass, a god, there has been no kingdom, no people for me but you. I have watched you, learnt from you. Oh! I am of the Romans—I'll—

CALPUKNIUS: Each to his own in the end. That's the law.

GLEVA: A bitter, cruel one.

CALPURNIUS: Very likely. But it can't be changed. So long as the world lasts, centuries hence, whereever soldiers are, still it will be the law.

GLEVA: Soldiers! Say soldiers, and all must be forgiven!

CALPURNIUS: Much, at all events, by those with understanding. Hear what a soldier is. You see him strong, browned by the sun, flashing in armour, tramping the earth, a conqueror—a god, yes, a god! Ask his centurion who drills him in the barrack square.

GLEVA: But the centurion—

CALPURNIUS: The centurion's the god, then? Ask me, his Captain, who tells him off. Am I the god, then? Ask my Colonel, who tells me off. Is it my Colonel, my General? Ask the Emperor in Rome who, for a fault, strips them of their command and brings them home. Soldiers are men trained to endurance by a hard discipline, cursed, ridiculed, punished like children but with a man's punishments, so that when the great ordeal comes they may move, fight, die, like a machine. The soldier! He suffers discomfort, burns in the desert, freezes in the snow at another's orders. He has no liberty, he must not argue, he must not answer; and he gets an obol a day, and in the end —in the end, a man, he gives his life without complaint, without faltering, gladly as a mere trifle in the business of the day, so that his country may endure. And what's his reward? What does he get? A woman's smile in his hour of furlough. That's his reward. He takes it. Blame him who will. The woman thinks him a god, and he does not tell her of the barrack square. Good luck to him and her, I say. But at the last, there's the long parting, just as you and I part in the forest of Anderida tonight. Other soldiers will say good-bye here on this spot to other women in centuries from now. Their trouble will be heavy, my dear, but they'll obey the soldier's law.

GLEVA: Very well, then! Each to his own! I, too, will obey that law. *(She confronts him, erect and strong.)*

CALPURNIUS: You will? *(Doubtfully.)*

GLEVA: To the letter. To the very last letter. I'll gather my men. There shall be no more Romans in Anderida. There shall be only stubble in the fields where the scythes of my chariots have run.

CALPURNIUS: Silence! *(Sternly.)*

GLEVA: I learn my lesson from my Lord Calpurnius. Why should my teacher blame me if I learn it thoroughly?

CALPURNIUS: Gleva, you cannot conquer Rome. *(He speaks gently. She stands stubbornly.)* How shall I prove it to you—you who know only one wild corner of Britain! *(Thinks.)* There is that road where the soldiers march. You know—how much of it?—a few miles where it passes through the forest. That's all. But it runs to the Wall in the north.

GLEVA *(scornfully):* Is there a Wall?

CALPURNIUS: Is there a Wall? Ye gods! I kept my watch upon it through a winter under the coldest stars that ever made a night unfriendly. I freeze now when I think of it. Yes, there's a Wall in the north, and that road runs to it; and in the south, it does not end at Regnum.

GLEVA: Doesn't it? Wonderful road!

CALPURNIUS: Yes, wonderful road. For on the other side at the very edge of the sea in Gaul it lives again—yes, that's the word—the great road lives and runs straight as a ruled line to Rome. For forty days you drive, inns by the roadside, post horses ready and a cloud of traffic, merchants on business, governors on leave, pedlars, musicians and actors for the fairs, students for the universities, Jews, explorers, soldiers, pack-horses and waggons, gigs and litters. Oh, if I could make you see it—always on each side the shade of trees, until on its seven hills springs Rome. Nor does the road end there.

GLEVA: This same road? *(Her scorn has gone. She speaks doubtfully.)*

CALPURNIUS: This same road which runs by the brook down here in the forest. *(Pointing L.)* It crosses Rome and goes straight to the sea again—again beyond the sea it turns and strikes to Jerusalem four thousand miles from where we stand tonight. Rome made it. Rome guards it, and where it runs Rome rules. You cannot conquer Rome—until the road's destroyed.

GLEVA: I will destroy it.

CALPURNIUS: Only Rome can destroy it. *(A pause.)* Gleva, let what I say sink deep into your heart. A minute ago I sneered at the road. I blasphemed. The roads are my people's work. While it builds roads, it's Rome, it's the Unconquerable. But when there are no new roads in the making and the weeds sprout between the pavements of the old ones, then your moment's coming. When the slabs are broken and no company marches down from the hill to mend them, it has come. Launch your chariots then, Gleva! Rome's day is over, her hand tired. She has grown easy and forgotten. But while Rome does Rome's appointed work, beware of her! Not while the road runs straight from Regnum to the Wall, shall you or any of you prevail.

GLEVA *(looking inscrutably.)* No, I cannot conquer Rome.

[A moment's pause.] CALPURNIUS: Listen!

GLEVA: The sound upon the road has ceased.

CALPURNIUS: There are no longer men marching.

GLEVA: All have gone over the hill to the sea.

CALPURNIUS: Yes. There's a freshness in the air, a breath of wind. The morning comes—

GLEVA: I cannot conquer Rome.

[A trumpet rings out clear from the top of the hill. The morning is beginning to break. There is the strange light which comes when moonlight and the dawn meet.]

CALPURNIUS: The reveille! *(He turns to her.)*

GLEVA: And—

CALPURNIUS *(nods):* My summons. Gleva!

GLEVA: My Lord will bid farewell to his slaves. *(She calls aloud):* Bran, Caransius.

CALPURNIUS: Oh, before they come! _(He holds out his arms to her.) _Gleva! *(She comes slowly into his embrace.)* I shall remember this night. Some of our poets say that we are born again in another age. So may it be with us! We shall grow old and die, you here, I where my Emperor shall send me. May we be born again, love again, under a happier star.

[He kisses her, she clings to him. Behind enter Bran, Caransius. They approach carefully.] But now there's Rome in front of me. *[He tries to draw away from her. She clings about his neck.]* And I must go.

GLEVA: Not yet, my Lord—Calpurnius.

CALPURNIUS: Farewell! and the Gods prosper you.

(He is seized from behind on a gesture from Gleva. She utters a cry.)

GLEVA: Do him no hurt! Yet hold him safe. *(They bind him. Calpurnius struggles.)*

CALPURNIUS: Help! Romans, help!

[The two men gag him.]

GLEVA: Do him no hurt!

[They lay him on the bank. Gleva goes to him.] No, I cannot conquer Rome, but one Roman—yes. You taught me, Calpurnius, the lesson of the road. I thank you. I learn another lesson. *(She is speaking very gently.)* On that long, crowded way from the edge of Gaul to Rome many a soldier of your legion will be lost—lost and remain unheard of. Calpurnius, you shall stay with me, reign with me, over me. You shall forget Rome.

[Once more the trumpet sounds only more faintly. Calpurnius utters a stifled groan. The morning broadens. A cracking of bushes is heard. From the right enters third attendant excitedly.]

ATTENDANT: Mistress! Mistress!

GLEVA: Well?

[She turns, stands between Calpurnius and attendants, e.g.: BRAN. THIRD ATTENDANT. GLEVA. CALPURNIUS. CARANSIUS.]

[Footlights.]

ATTENDANT: They have gone! The hill is empty; the camp is scattered.

GLEVA: They march to the coast. The Valeria Victrix.

[A movement from Calpurnius, who is working his hands free.]

THIRD ATTENDANT: They are putting out to sea. The harbour’s black with ships. Some have reached the open water.

GLEVA: All have gone.

THIRD ATTENDANT: All. Already there’s a wolf in the camp on the hill.

CALPURNIUS *(freeing his hands and mouth, plucks out his sword. He buries it in his heart.)* Rome! Rome! *(In a whisper.)*

[Gleva turns and sees Calpurnius dead. She stands motionless. Then she waves her attendants away. They go silently. Gleva seats herself by Calpurnius's side. She runs her hand over his hair.]

GLEVA *(with a sob):* My Lord Calpurnius!

[THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY.]

The End

(E-text prepared by Joe Harvat)