

The House 'Round the Corner

Louis Tracy

An abstract geometric pattern composed of various purple lines and shapes on a teal background. The pattern includes horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines, as well as curved segments and a central inverted triangle. The lines vary in thickness and are scattered across the lower two-thirds of the page.

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THE HOUSE 'ROUND THE CORNER

BY GORDON HOLMES

AUTHOR OF

**A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE, THE ARNCLIFFE
PUZZLE, ETC.**

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CHAPTER I

WHEREIN THE HOUSE RECEIVES A NEW TENANT

The train had panted twelve miles up a sinuous valley, halting at three tiny stations on the way; it dwelt so long at the fourth that the occupant of a first-class carriage raised his eyes from the book he was reading. He found the platform packed with country folk, all heading in the same direction. Hitherto, this heedless traveller had been aware of some station-master or porter bawling an unintelligible name; now, his fellow-passengers seemed to know what place this was without being told; moreover, they seemed to be alighting there.

A porter, whose face, hands, and clothing were of one harmonious tint, suggesting that he had been dipped bodily in some brownish dye, and then left to dry in the sun, opened the door.

"Aren't you gettin' out, sir?" he inquired, and his tone implied both surprise and pain.

"Is this Nuttonby?" said the passenger.

"Yes, sir."

"Why this crush of traffic?"

"It's market day, sir."

"Thanks. I didn't expect to see such a crowd. Have you a parcels office, where I can leave some baggage?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hang on to this bag, then. There are three boxes in the van. You'll need a barrow—they're heavy!"

By this time, the man who knew so little of important Nuttonby—which held 3,005 inhabitants in the 1911 census, having increased by two since 1901—had risen, and was collecting a fisherman's outfit, and some odds and ends of personal belongings. He followed the porter, who, on eyeing the rods and

pannier, and with some knowledge of "county" manners, had accepted the stranger as entitled to hold a first-class ticket. Sure enough, the boxes were heavy. The guard had to assist in handling them.

"By gum!" said the porter, when he tried to lift the first on to a trolley.

"Books," explained the traveler.

"I thought mebbe they wuz lead," said the porter.

"Some books have that quality," said the other.

The guard, a reader in his spare time, smiled. The owner of so much solid literature seized a stout leather handle.

"I'll give you a hand," he said, and the porter soon added to his slight store of facts concerning the newcomer. This tall, sparsely-built man in tweeds and a deer-stalker cap was no weakling.

The platform was nearly empty when the porter began to trundle the loaded trolley along its length. A pert youth appeared from nowhere, and cried "Ticket!" firmly, almost threateningly. He was given a first-class ticket from York, and a receipt for excess luggage. The bit of white paste-board startled him. "Thank you, sir," he said. First-class passengers were rare birds at Nuttonby; too late, he knew he ought to have said "Ticket, please!"

The same pert youth, appearing again from nowhere, officiated in the parcels office. He noticed that none of the articles bore a name or initials; they were brand-new; their only railway labels were "York, from King's Cross," and "Nuttonby, from York."

"Book the bag and these small articles separately," he was instructed. "I may want them soon. The boxes may be sent for this afternoon; I don't know yet." He turned to the porter: "Is there a house agent in the town?"

"Yes, sir—two."

"Which is the better—the man with the larger *clientèle*—sorry, I mean with the greater number of houses on his books?"

"Well, sir, Walker an' Son have bin in business here fifty year an' more."

"I'll try Walker. Where's his place?"

"Next door the 'Red Lion,' sir."

Then the youth, anxious to atone, and rather quicker-witted than the brown-hued one, got in a word.

"The 'Red Lion' is halfway up the main street, sir. Turn to your right when you leave here, an' you're there in two minutes."

"I'll show the gentleman," said the porter, who had decided a month ago that this blooming kid was putting on airs. He was as good as his word—or nearly so. A tip of half a crown was stupefying, but he gathered his wits in time to say brokenly at the exit:

"Wu-Wu-Walker's is straight up, sir."

Straight up the stranger went. The wide street was crammed with stalls, farmers' carts, carriers' carts, dog-carts, even a couple of automobiles, for Wednesday, being market day, was also police-court day and Board of Guardians day. He passed unheeded. On Wednesdays, Nuttonby was a metropolis; on any other day in the week he would have drawn dozens of curious eyes, peeping surreptitiously over short curtains, or more candidly in the open. Of course, he was seen by many, since Nuttonby was not so metropolitan that it failed to detect a new face, even on Wednesdays; but his style and appearance were of the gentry; Nuttonby decided that he had strayed in from some "big" house in the district.

Walker & Son, it would seem, were auctioneers, land valuers, and probate estimators as well as house agents. Their office was small, but not retiring. It displayed a well-developed rash of sale posters, inside and out. One, in particular, was heroic in size. It told of a "spacious mansion, with well-timbered park," having been put up for auction—five years earlier. Whiteness of paper and blackness of type suggested that Walker & Son periodically renewed this aristocrat among auction announcements—perhaps to kindle a selling spirit among the landed gentry, a notoriously conservative and hold-tight class.

A young man, seated behind a counter, reading a sporting newspaper, and smoking a cigarette, rose hastily when the caller entered.

"Yes, sir," he said, thereby implying instant readiness to engage in one or all of the firm's activities.

"Are you Mr. Walker?" said the newcomer.

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! I thought you might be the son."

"Well, I am, if it comes to that. Do you want my father?"

Walker, junior, was a Nuttonby "nut"—a sharp young blade who did not tolerate chaff.

"I want to rent a furnished house in or near a quiet country village, where there is some good fishing," was the answer. "Now, you can determine whether I should trouble Mr. Walker, senior, or not?"

"No trouble at all, sir! He'll be here in ten seconds."

Walker, junior, had nearly made the same mistake as the ticket-collecting youth; however, he estimated time correctly. He went out, put his head through the open window of the "Red Lion's" bar-parlor, and shouted: "Dad, you're wanted!" Thus, within ten seconds, the stranger saw the firm!

He repeated his need, and there was a great parade of big-leafed books, while the elder Walker ascertained the prospective client's exact requirements. Whittled down to bare facts, they amounted to this: A house, in a small and remote village, and a trout stream. The absolute seclusion of the village and its diminutive proportions were insisted on, and property after property was rejected, though the Walkers were puzzled to know why.

This distinguished-looking man wished to find a dwelling far removed from any social center. His ideal was a tiny moorland hamlet, miles from the railway, and out of the beaten track of summer visitors. Suddenly, the son cried:

"Elmdale is the very place, dad!"

Dad's face brightened, but clouded again instantly.

"You mean—er—the house 'round the corner?" he said, pursing his lips.

"Yes."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't suit."

"Why not?" put in the stranger. "I rather like the name."

"I didn't mention any name, sir," and Walker, senior, still looked glum.

"You described it as the house 'round the corner—an excellent name. It attracts me. Where is Elmdale?"

The head of the firm pointed to a map of the North Riding hanging above the fireplace.

"Here you are," he said, seizing a pen and running it along the meandering black line of a stream. "Eight miles from Nuttonby, and thousands from every other town—on the edge of the moor—about forty houses in the village—and a first-rate beck, with trout running from four ounces to half a pound—but——"

"But what?"

"The house, sir. You won't like the house."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing. It's comfortable enough, and well furnished."

Yet again he hesitated.

"Why, it appears to be, as your son said, the very place."

Walker, senior, smiled drearily. He knew what was coming.

"I can't recommend it, sir, and for this reason. A gentleman named Garth—Mr. Stephen Garth; some sort of professor, I understand—lived there a many years, with his wife and daughter. Nice, quiet people they were, and the young lady was a beauty. No one could make out why they should wish to be buried alive in a hole like Elmdale, but they seemed happy enough. Then, two years since, in this very month of June, Mrs. Garth and the girl drove into Nuttonby in their governess car, and went off by train, sending the trap back by a hired man. Mr. Garth mooned about for a week or two, and then hanged himself one evening alongside a grandfather's clock which stands in the hall. That made a rare stir, I can tell you; since then, no one will look at the Grange, which is its proper name. I need hardly say that the villagers have seen Mr. Garth's ghost many times, particularly in June, because in that month the setting sun throws a peculiar shadow through a stained-glass window on the half landing. Last year I let the place to a Sheffield family who wanted moorland air. My! What a row there was when Mrs. Wilkins heard of the suicide, and, of course, saw the ghost! It was all I could do to stave off an action for damages. 'Never again,' said I. 'If anybody else rents or buys the house, they take the ghost with it.'"

"Is it for sale?"

"Oh, yes! Neither Mrs. Garth nor Miss Margu rite have come near Elmdale since they left. They didn't attend the funeral, and I may add, in confidence, that Messrs. Holloway & Dobb, solicitors in this town, who have charge of their affairs—so far as the ownership of the Grange goes, at any rate—do not know their whereabouts. It is a sad story, sir."

The would-be tenant was apparently unmoved by the story's sadness.

"What kind of house is it?" he inquired.

"Old-fashioned, roomy, with oaken rafters, and a Jacobean grate in the dining-room. Five bedrooms. Fine garden, with its own well, fed by a spring. The kind of seventeenth-century dwelling that would fetch a high rent nowadays if near a town. As it is, I'd be glad to take sixty pounds a year for it, or submit an offer."

"Furnished?"

"Yes, sir, and some decent stuff in it, too. I'm surprised Messrs. Holloway & Dobb don't sell that, anyhow; but I believe they have a sort of order from Mrs. Garth that the property is to be sold as it stands, and not broken up piece-meal."

"Why did you describe it as the house 'round the corner?"

Mr. Walker smiled.

"That was for my son's benefit, sir," he explained. "The Elmdale cottages are clustered together on the roadside. The Grange stands above them, at one end, and a few yards up a road leading to the moor. It commands a fine view, too," he added regretfully.

"I'll take it," said the stranger.

Walker, junior, looked jubilant, but his father's years had weakened confidence in mankind. Many a good let was lost ere the agreement was signed and this one was beset by special difficulties.

"If you give me your name and address, I'll consult Messrs. Holloway & Dobb——" he began, and was probably more astonished than he would care to confess by the would-be tenant's emphatic interruption—

"Is this property to let, or is it not?"

"Yes, sir. Haven't I said so?"

"Very well! I offer you a quarter's rent, payable to you or your son when I have looked at the place. As a matter of form, I would like one of you to accompany me to Elmdale at once, because I must inquire into the fishing. I suppose you can hire a conveyance of sorts to take us there? Of course, in any event, I shall pay your fee for the journey. My name is Robert Armathwaite. I am a stranger in this part of Yorkshire, but if you, or Messrs. Holloway & Dobb, care to call at the local bank, say, in three days' time, you will be satisfied as to my financial standing. I'll sign an agreement for a yearly tenancy, terminable thereafter by three months' written notice, when I pay the first installment of the rent. As the place is furnished, you will probably stipulate for payment in advance throughout. I fancy you can draw up such an agreement in half an hour, and, if there is an inventory, it should be checked and initialed when we visit the house. Does that arrangement suit you?"

The Walkers were prosperous and pompous, but they knew when to sink their pomposity.

"Yes, sir, it *can* be done," agreed the elder man.

"Thank you. Which is the leading bank here?"

Walker, senior, indicated a building directly opposite.

"I'll have a word with the manager," said Mr. Armathwaite. "If I'm here in half an hour, will you have a carriage waiting?"

"A dog-cart, sir. My own. My son will attend to you."

"Excellent. Evidently, your firm understands business."

And Mr. Armathwaite went out.

The Walkers watched as he crossed the road, and entered the bank. Their side of the street being higher than the other, they could see, above the frosted lower half of the bank's window, that he approached the counter, and was ushered into the manager's private room.

"What d'ye make of it, dad?" inquired the "nut," forgetting his importance in the absorbing interest of the moment.

"Dad" tickled his bald scalp with the handle of the pen.

"Tell you what," he said solemnly. "Some houses have an attraction for queer folk. Whoever built the Grange where it is must have been daft. The people who lived there when I was a young man were a bit touched. Mr. Garth was mad, we know, an' Mrs. Wilkins was the silliest woman I ever met. Now comes this one."

"*He* looks all right."

"You never can tell. At any rate, we'll take his money, and welcome. I asked sixty, but wouldn't have sneezed at forty. Neither would Holloway & Dobb; they've some costs to collect since the Wilkins' affair. Go and get the trap ready. And mind you, Jim, no hanky-panky."

The youthful Walker winked.

"You leave that to me," he said. "What about the fee—will he stand a guinea?"

"You might try it, at any rate."

At the appointed time, half-past eleven o'clock, Mr. Armathwaite came, carrying a large parcel wrapped in brown paper. He cast an appreciative eye at a wiry cob, put the parcel in the back of the waiting dog-cart, and climbed to the seat beside the younger Walker, now attired *de rigueur* for the country.

"Will you kindly call at the railway station?" he said.

The request was unexpected, but the driver nodded, and showed some skill in turning through the congeries of vehicles which crowded the street.

At the station, the bag and other small articles were withdrawn from the parcels office, and deposited beside the package in brown paper. James Walker was mystified, but said nothing. Returning through the main street, he answered a few questions concerning local matters, and, once in the open country, grew voluble under the influence of a first-rate Havana proffered by his companion. Men of his type often estimate their fellows by a tobacco standard, and Walker privately appraised the cigar as "worth a bob, at the lowest figure." From that instant, Mr. Robert Armathwaite and Mr. James Walker took up their relative positions without demur on the part of either.

Oddly enough, seeing that the newcomer had expressed his dislike for society, he listened with interest to bits of gossip concerning the owners of the various estates passed on the way. He was specially keen on names, even inquiring as to what families one titled landowner was connected with by marriage. Then, as to

the fishing, could the Walkers arrange that for him?

Forgetting his 'cuteness, Walker settled the point off-hand.

"You had better deal with the matter yourself, sir," he said. "There'll be no difficulty. Nearly all the Elmdale farms are freeholds, most of 'em with common rights on the moor. Why, when one of 'em changes hands, the buyer has the right to take over all the sheep footed on the seller's part of the moor. P'raps you don't know what 'footed' means. Sheep will always go back to the place where they were raised, and the habit is useful when they stray over an open moorland. So, you see, all you have to do is to get permission from two or three farmers, and you can fish for miles."

He tried to talk of the Garths, particularly of the pretty daughter, but his hearer's attention wandered; obviously, information as to the ways and habits of the local yeomanry was more to Mr. Armathwaite's taste than a "nut's" gushing about a good-looking girl.

Within an hour, after five miles of fair roadway and two of a switchback, mostly rising, Walker pointed with his whip to a thin line of red-tiled houses, here and there a thatched roof among them, nestling at the foot of a gill, or ravine, which pierced the side of a gaunt moorland. Above the hamlet, at the eastern end, rose an old-fashioned stone house, square, with a portico in the center, and a high-pitched roof of stone slabs.

"There's Elmdale," he said, "and that's the Grange. Looks a god-forsaken hole, doesn't it, sir?"

"If you pay heed to the real meanings of words, no place on earth merits that description," said Mr. Armathwaite.

Walker was no whit abashed.

"Well, no," he grinned.

"I ought to have asked sooner, but have you brought any keys?"

The agent instinct warned the other that his choice of an adjective had been unwise in more ways than one.

"That's all right, sir," he said cheerfully. "The keys are kept in the village—at Mrs. Jackson's. She's a useful old body. If you want a housekeeper, she and her

daughter would suit you down to the ground."

Little more was said until the steaming pony was pulled up in front of a thatched cottage. Seen thus intimately, and in the blaze of a June sun, Elmdale suggested coziness. Each house, no matter what its size, had a garden in front and an orchard behind. Long, narrow pastures ran steeply up to the moor, and cattle and sheep were grazing in them. There were crops on the lower land. For all its remoteness, Elmdale faced south, and its earth was fertile.

Armathwaite sat in the dog-cart while James Walker ran up the strip of flower-laden garden, and peered in through a low doorway. In later days, the singular fact was borne in on Armathwaite that had his companion adopted any other method of making known his business—had he, for instance, shouted to Mrs. Jackson or her daughter, Betty, and asked for the keys of the Grange—the whole course of his subsequent life would unquestionably have been altered. A loose stone under the foot of an emperor's horse may change the map of the world. In this instance, a remarkable, and, in some respects, unique series of events arose solely from the fact that Walker, junior, was of active habit, and alighted from the vehicle in preference to announcing his wishes for others to hear; because Betty Jackson, at that moment, was plucking gooseberries in the back garden, and knew nothing of what was going on until a country maid's belated wit failed completely to stem the tide of circumstance.

Armathwaite caught scraps of a brief but seemingly heated argument going on inside the cottage. It was couched in the Yorkshire dialect, which he understood, to some extent, but could not speak. Then Walker, a gallant figure in straw hat, gray coat, red waistcoat with gilded buttons, breeches and gaiters and brown boots, strutted into sight. He was red-faced and laughing, and a bundle of keys jingled in one hand.

"Mrs. Jackson's as bad as any of 'em," he cried, springing to his seat and taking the reins from a clip on the dash-board. "Made such a to-do about anyone looking over the house. Asked if you'd heard of the ghost, too. And, blow me, if she didn't pretend she'd mislaid the keys! We wouldn't have got 'em for a deuce of a time if I hadn't twigged 'em hanging on a nail, and grabbed 'em. Then she gave me my name for nothing, I can assure you."

"Yet you recommended her for the post of housekeeper," said Armathwaite, smiling.

"Yes, sir. She's a rare good cook, and tidy, too. Can't make out what's come over

her. She was fair scared to death."

Walker's statement as to Mrs. Jackson's behavior was by no means highly colored. Before he reached the dog-cart, the old woman had hurried into the back garden.

"Betty!" she shrilled. "Betty, where are you?"

A head in a poke-bonnet rose above a clump of tall gooseberry bushes, and a voice answered:

"Yes, mother, what is it?"

"Run, girl, run! What's to be done? Mr. Walker has brought a man to look at the house."

"What house?"

"The Grange, to be sure."

"Oh, mother!"

Betty ran quickly enough now. She was a strongly-built, apple-cheeked lass; but there was a glint of fear in her eyes, and the faces of both mother and daughter had gone gray under the tan of moor air and much work in the open.

"Whatever can we do?" cried Mrs. Jackson, with the hopeless distress of a woman overwhelmed by some unforeseen and tragic occurrence. "That impudent young Walker came and snatched at the keys before I could stop him. And they've gone there, the pair of 'em! There they are now—halfway up the hill."

All this, of course, was couched in "broad Yorkshire," which, however, need not enter into the record. The two gazed at the men in the dog-cart, who were partly visible above a yew hedge, since the by-road in which the Grange was situated turned up the hill by the gable of Mrs. Jackson's cottage.

"Oh, mother!" said the girl, in awe-stricken accents, "why didn't you hide 'em?"

"How was I to hide 'em? I was knocked all of a heap. Who'd have thought of anyone coming here to-day, of all days in the year?"

"Who's that with him?" Betty almost sobbed.

"The man who's going over the house, of course."

"Oh, dear! If only I'd known! I'd have taken the keys and gone with them."

"What good would that have done?"

"I might have humbugged them into waiting a minute or two. I'd have thought of some excuse. But don't worry too much, mother. Maybe they'll give the least little look round, and come away again."

"And maybe they won't," cried Mrs. Jackson angrily, for she was recovering from her fright, and her daughter's implied reproach was irritating. "I did my best, and it can't be helped now, no matter what happens. Run after them, Betty, and offer to help. You may manage something, even now."

The girl needed no second bidding. She was through the cottage and out in the road in a jiffy. But she had lost a minute or more already, and the sturdy galloway was climbing a steep hill quickly. When she reached a garden gate to which the reins were tied, the front door of the Grange stood open, and the visitors were inside.

"Oh, dear!" she breathed, in a heart-broken way. "Oh, dear! If only mother had called me sooner! Now, it's too late! And I promised that no one should know. Well, I must do my best. Just a bit of luck, and I may pull things straight yet!"



CHAPTER II

SHOWING HOW EVEN A HOUSE MAY HAVE A WAY OF ITS OWN

While Walker was fiddling with the lock, not being quite sure as to the right key, Armathwaite had eyed the southern landscape. Elmdale was six hundred feet above sea level, and the Grange stood fully a hundred feet higher than the village, so a far-flung panorama of tillage, pasture, and woodland provided a delightful picture on that glorious June day. To the north, he knew, stretched miles of wild moor, and the heather began where the spacious garden ended. A glance at the map in the Walkers' office had shown that this bleak waste was crossed by mere tracks, marked in the dotted lines which motorists abhor. Indeed, the very road leading to the house was not macadamized beyond the gate; two years of disuse had converted even the stone-covered portion into a sort of meadow, because grass, the sulkiest of vegetables in a well-tended lawn, will grow luxuriantly on a granite wall if left alone.

Truly, Elmdale seemed to be at the end of the world—the world of Yorkshire, at any rate—and Robert Armathwaite found its aspect pleasing. A lock clicked; he turned, and entered a domain he was now fully resolved to make his own.

"Well, I'm blest!" said Walker, speaking in a surprised way; "anyone 'ud think the place hadn't been empty an hour, let alone two years, not countin' Mrs. Wilkins's couple of nights. I wonder who left these clothes, and hats, and things!"

He had good reason for a certain stare of bewilderment.

The door, which was stoutly built, with a pane of sheet glass in the upper half, opened straight into a spacious, oak-paneled hall. Left and right were a dining-room and a drawing-room, each containing two windows. Behind the dining-room a wide staircase gave access to the upper floors, and a flood of rich and variously-tinted light from a long arched window glowed on the dark panels below, and glistened on the polished mahogany case of a grandfather's clock which faced the foot of the stairs. The wall opposite the entrance was pierced by a half-open door, through which could be seen laden bookshelves reaching up

eight feet or more. Another door, beyond the stairway, showed the only possible means of approach to the kitchen and domestic offices.

There were no pictures in the hall, but some antique plates and dishes of blue china were ranged on a shelf above the wainscot, and a narrow table and four straight-backed chairs, all of oak, were in tasteful keeping with the surroundings. On each side of the dining-room door were double rows of hooks, and on these hung the garments which had caught the agent's eye.

A bowler hat, a frayed panama, a cap, a couple of overcoats, even a lady's hat and mackintosh, lent an air of occupancy to the house, which was not diminished by the presence of several sticks and umbrellas in a couple of Chinese porcelain stands. Walker took down the panama. It was dust-laden, and the inner band of leather had a clammy feeling. He replaced it hastily.

"That's the Professor's," he said, trying to speak unconcernedly. "I remember seeing him in it, many a time."

Armathwaite noticed the action, and was aware of a peculiar *timbre* in Walker's voice.

"Now, suppose we lay that ghost, and have done with it," he said quietly. "Where did my worthy and retrospective landlord hang himself?"

"There," said Walker, indicating a solitary hook screwed through the china shelf near the clock. "That bronze thing," pointing to a Burmese gong lying on the floor, "used to hang there. He took it down, tied the rope to the hook, and kicked a chair away.... If you come here," and he advanced a few paces, "you'll see why a ghost appears."

"Mr. Walker," bleated someone timidly.

Mr. Walker unquestionably jumped, and quite as unquestionably swore, even when he recognized Betty Jackson, standing in the porch.

"Well, what is it?" he cried gruffly, hoping his companion has missed that display of nerves.

"Please, sir, mother thought—" began the girl; but the startled "nut" was annoyed, and showed it.

"I don't care what your mother thinks," he shouted. "Refusing me the keys,

indeed! What next? I've a good mind to report her to Messrs. Holloway & Dobb."

"But, sir, she only wanted to make the house a bit more tidy. It's dusty and stuffy. If you gentlemen would be kind enough to wait in the garden five minutes, I'd open up the rooms, and raise a window here and there."

Betty, tearful and repentant, had entered the hall in her eagerness to serve. Walker weakened; he had a soft spot in his heart for girls.

"No matter now," he said. "We shan't be here long. This gentleman is just going to look round and see if the place suits him."

"The best bedroom is all upside down," she persisted. "If you'd give me three minutes——"

"Run away and play, and don't bother us," he answered off-handedly. "As I was about to say, Mr. Armathwaite, someone in the old days put stained glass in that window on the landing. You'll notice it shows a knight in black armor—Edward, the Black Prince, it's believed to be—and, when the sun sets in the nor' west, it casts a strong shadow on the paneling beside the clock. Of course, it can be seen from the porch, and it accounts for this silly story about the ghost——"

"Oh!" screamed the girl. "Why talk of such horrid things? There's no ghost!"

Her cry was so unexpectedly shrill that Walker yielded to an anger almost as loud-voiced.

"Confound you!" he stormed at her; "take yourself off! One more word from you, and your mother loses her job."

Armathwaite looked into the girl's troubled face and saw there a fear, a foreboding, which were very real, if not to be accounted for readily.

"Kindly leave us," he said. "If I want Mrs. Jackson, or you, I'll call at the cottage."

There was an air of authority about Mr. Armathwaite that disconcerted Betty more than Walker's bluster. She went out and closed the front door. The agent ran and opened it again. The girl was standing on the path, clear of the porch, and gazing wistfully at the house.

"Will you mind your own business?" he grumbled. "The deuce take it, what's

come to you to-day? You and your mother seem half crazy."

"We don't like folk to see the place at its worst," she said, rather defiantly.

"You're doing your best to turn Mr. Armathwaite against it, *I* should think," was the angry comment. "Now, don't touch this door again, and clear out, d'ye hear?"

Betty flushed. She was distressed, but dales' blood boils quickly when subjected to the fire of contumely.

"I haven't asked such a favor," she said. "And you might keep a civil tongue in your head."

Walker sniffed his annoyance. But why bandy words with this aggressive young woman? He swung on his heel.

"Sorry you should have met with such a queer reception, Mr. Armathwaite," he said. "I can't account for it. I really can't. Perhaps Mrs. Jackson feels hurt that I didn't let her know you were coming, but——"

"Never mind Mrs. Jackson or her daughter," said Armathwaite placidly. "I'll soon settle matters with them. Now, you have an inventory, I believe? Suppose we start here."

"Then you've decided to take the house, sir?"

"Yes, two hours ago, in Nuttonby."

"I wish all our clients were like you," laughed Walker. "You know what you want and see that you get it... Well, sir, as it happens, the inventory begins with the hall. I'll read, and you might note the items, stopping me if there's any doubt."

The agent rattled through his task, but was pulled up several times in dining-room and drawing-room, when a picture or two, some Sheffield plate, and various bits of china were missing. Black doubt seized the sharp Walker when this had happened for the fourth time. In all, there were seven disappearances, and, in each instance, the article was old and fairly valuable. Country villages, he reflected, were ransacked nowadays by collectors of curios. When opportunity served, he and Mrs. Jackson would have some earnest words.

But surprise and relief came in the discovery of the seven; they were piled, with a number of books, on a table in the library.

"I suppose some kind of spring cleaning is going on," he said sheepishly. "Now the cat is out of the bag. Why the deuce didn't Betty say so, and have done with it!"

"I imagine she was trying to tell us something of the sort," smiled the other unconcernedly. "Surely we have not got to check the titles of all these books?"

"No, sir. They're lumped together—about eight hundred volumes."

Armathwaite surveyed the shelves with the eye of a reader.

"That must be nearly right," he said, after a little pause. "I must not get mine mixed with my predecessor's. I've brought nearly two hundred myself."

Walker thought of the brown paper parcel, which seemed to have a certain solidity, but said nothing. In the first place, if eight hundred books occupied so much space, a quarter of that number would fit in no ordinary sheet of brown paper. Secondly, Mr. Armathwaite's manner did not invite unnecessary questions. The kitchen and scullery were soon dealt with. There was coal in a cellar, and a supply of wood, and a number of lamps drew attention to some tins of oil.

"How much for this lot?" inquired the would-be tenant.

"Nothing," said Walker, in a sudden fit of generosity. "These stores were left by Mrs. Wilkins, and lost sight of during the row. My, what a bother she raised!"

"Yet there is no ghost; we have Betty's word for it. Now—the bedrooms."

The "best" bedroom—that in the south-east angle—was certainly not in disorder. Indeed, it looked fresher and cleaner than any of the others; the bed was spotless; even the window-sill had been dusted recently.

"Of course," said the agent, "those two silly women have been tidying things up a bit for the season. I'm getting the hang of things by degrees. They're afraid I might think it should have been done sooner."

"Probably," agreed Armathwaite, who, however, held a somewhat different view. The girl was not afraid of Mr. James Walker. Of whom, then, or of what? If the inquiry interested him he would find out.

The remaining bedrooms held at least one year's dust.

A box-room, lumber-room, and servant's bedroom occupied the second floor. In the ceiling of a small lobby there was a trap-door.

"That leads to a space beneath the roof," said Walker. "By the way, there ought to be a ladder. It's gone."

Being, as has been seen, of active habit, he brought a chair from the bedroom, stood on it, pushed up the flap, and peered into the semi-obscurity of a triangular, rafter-lined attic, lighted only by a tiny square of glass cemented into one of the flat stone slabs of the roof.

"Oh, here it is," he announced. "Shall I pull it out?"

"No, thanks," said Armathwaite. "I don't suppose I shall mount so high again during my tenancy."

The younger man closed the trap, and, as it had been unfastened previously, shot a bolt into its socket.

"Well, that ends it," he said, brushing some grime off his hands. "If you care to stroll through the garden you'll find plenty of fruit coming on. This should be a good year for apples and plums, I'm told. It's too late to raise any potatoes or vegetables, but the village will supply plenty of table stuff, and cheap, too."

"Let me see," mused Armathwaite aloud. "Fifteen pounds rent, and, say, two guineas for your fee, and another guinea for the conveyance—eighteen pounds three shillings in all. Let us adjourn to the library, and I'll pay you, sign the agreement, and initial the inventory. Then I need not detain you any longer, Mr. Walker."

The agent looked blank, as well he might. He was flustered, too, by the terms offered for his valuable services.

"You don't mean that you're going to stay here straightaway, sir?" he cried.

"Yes. I came prepared for immediate occupation. That is why I brought my bag, and some groceries."

"Groceries!"

Walker was so astonished that he could only repeat the word.

"That parcel, you know. I'm an old campaigner—that is, I have much experience

of camping out, under far less pleasant conditions than in a delightful house in a Yorkshire village. I shall be quite happy here."

"But there's a kind of an inn not far off; you'll come and have a snack there with me, sir?" was all that Walker could find to say at the moment.

"I'm much obliged to you, but I may not stir out again to-day. Shall we go down?"

They descended the stairs, which creaked loudly under their feet. Walker was puzzled to understand a cool customer of the Armathwaite type. He had never heard of a tenancy being entered into with such promptitude, yet there was no point in the stranger's behavior which he could fix on as definitely eccentric, or even unusual. The man evidently knew his own mind, and, if he paid up, the philosophy of Walker, senior, fitted the case admirably.

Still it was a slightly dazed Son who pocketed fifteen pounds in notes and three guineas in coin, and gave receipts for these sums, and exchanged copies of an agreement, and handed over the keys.

"Take another cigar," said the new tenant, bidding him good-bye at the front door, when bag and parcel had been brought in and dumped on the hall table. "Oh, there is one other small matter. I left three boxes at Nuttonby Station. Here is the voucher. Can you get some carter or farmer to bring them here, to-day or to-morrow? I'll pay him well for his trouble. They're rather heavy—books, mostly."

Conscious of a subdued feeling which he was wholly unable to explain, Walker took the cigar and the printed slip, raised his hat—an action which vexed him when he recalled it subsequently—and strolled down to the gate and the waiting dog-cart. Rattling the reins to let the pony know that he would stand no nonsense, he turned the corner on one wheel, and gave not the slightest heed to Betty Jackson's frantic efforts to attract his attention. Without slackening pace at the Fox and Hounds Inn, he whisked into the Nuttonby road, but pulled up on the crest of the first hill.

Looking back at Elmdale, lying snug and content in the blazing sunshine of early afternoon, he gazed at the Grange during a full minute. The front door was closed. So far as he could make out, no tall figure was sauntering in garden or orchard. Then he felt in his breeches pocket, to make sure, by the touch of notes and gold, that he was not dreaming.

"Well, I'm jiggered, if this isn't a rum go!" he muttered, and chirruped the pony into a trot again.

In the meantime, Mr. Robert Armathwaite had watched his hurried departure, in the first instance from the porch and subsequently from one of the windows in the dining-room.

"Perhaps I've made a mistake," he communed, with an amused smile, when he noted the momentary stopping of the dog-cart outside the village. "I've puzzled that young sprig, and I might have avoided that. Not that it matters a great deal. His father will inquire at the bank about my financial standing, and the pair of them will put me down as a well-to-do lunatic. Maybe they will prove right. Who can tell? At any rate, I've not felt so content with my lot since I left India. Now for some bread and cheese, and a thorough survey of my domain."

He unpacked the brown paper parcel on the kitchen table, and thereby proved himself at least well skilled as a caterer. Bacon, flour, bread, tea, coffee, sugar—all manner of simple domestic stores were there. He had, in fact, gone into a grocer's shop in Nuttonby, produced a written list, and asked that the articles named therein should be of the best quality and got ready at once.

While munching a frugal meal he bethought himself of the water supply. Unlocking the back door, he found the well, and drew a bucket of water, which was excellent in quality, and by no means suffering from disuse; indeed, he learnt later that the Jacksons and other cottagers took their supply from that source.

After a stroll round the garden and orchard—noting the laden gooseberry and currant bushes in the one, and several varieties of apples, pears, plums, and cherries in the other—he went back to the house. Going upstairs, he took possession of the "best" room, and distributed the contents of the bag among various drawers and on a dressing-table. A large wardrobe contained some feminine garments, old, but of good quality, and he left them undisturbed. Examining the bed, he found the sheets scrupulously clean and well-aired. To all seeming, they had been put there that very day, and he believed that the Jackson family meant to accommodate some friend in the Grange for the night, which reasonable surmise explained Betty Jackson's anxiety lest any hint of the project should reach the agent's ears.

"It's too bad if I've contrived to upset their plans," he mused. "They're welcome to any other room, for all that I care, and I'll tell them so if I come across either

of them this evening."

Nevertheless, meaning to be lord of his own realm, he locked the doors, both back and front, when he went for a ramble over the moors. He was willing to fall in with any hospitable arrangement the caretakers might have in view, but they must consult him, and he refused to have either of them prowling about the house in his absence.

He followed the moorland road for some miles, meeting no one, and seeing no living creature save hundreds of black-faced sheep. Not even a grouse scurried across the heather, for June is the nesting season, and the parent birds lie close. Noting the watershed, he found the source of the beck which brawled through Elmdale, and tracked it back to the village. It was alive with trout and grayling, and his fingers itched for a rod. He regretted now that he had not obtained the names of some of the riparian landowners from Walker, but realized that the village inn would soon yield all the information he needed, and probably contain some of the farmers in person that evening.

He reached his new abode, however, somewhat later than he had intended, approaching it from the east, which afforded not only a new point of view, but enabled him to detect Mrs. Jackson and Betty in a series of manoeuvres which were distinctly mysterious when taken into account with their earlier attitude.

Obviously, when he emerged from the depths of the tree-lined gill, and first caught sight of the house, mother and daughter had just quitted the front door, presumably after knocking, and failing to obtain an answer. Betty ran out into the road, and gazed up towards the moor. Apparently satisfied by her scrutiny of that bare upland she hurried to the rear of the premises, and reappeared, carrying a gardener's ladder, which she placed against the wall. Giving a rapid glance in the direction of the village, she mounted the ladder. It was rather short, and she was in some danger of falling, but, by clinging to a creeper, she managed to reach a sufficient height that she could peer into the bedroom in which Armathwaite had spread his belongings.

She descended again swiftly, took away the ladder, and returned to her mother. Both women eyed the upper windows anxiously, and, as the outcome of some talk, Betty went to the gate a second time, and looked along the bold curve of the moorland road. She shook her head. Her mother joined her, and the two went to their cottage.

Armathwaite smiled, and resolved to keep his knowledge of the Jacksons'

behavior to himself. He did not wish to quarrel with the women, who would be useful in many ways. In a day or two, when he had won their confidence, they would doubtless explain their queer proceedings; most likely, the explanation would prove so simple that it would never occur to a suspicious mind.

Having waited to fill his pipe, he entered the village, and walked up the narrow path to Mrs. Jackson's abode. He was met at the door by Betty. She seemed to be rather alarmed by the visit, yet pleased to see him.

"Can we do anything for you, sir?" she said. "Mother and I went to the house a while ago, but you were out."

In the oblique Yorkshire way she had partly told the reason of the visit. Mrs. Jackson, too, came and stood near her daughter, and it was curious to note the underlook of alarm, of poignant anxiety, in both faces.

"I wish to make your acquaintance, and to inquire about milk, butter, and eggs," he said pleasantly. "Mr. Walker suggested that you might be willing to attend to household matters, and that would take a burden off my mind."

"We'll be pleased to do it, and reasonable, too, sir," said Mrs. Jackson promptly.

"Very well. Come and see me in the morning. Meanwhile, can you arrange for a quart of milk, a pound of butter, and a few eggs to be sent in immediately?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said both together, and the expression of relief in the one face was mirrored in the other.

"You'll be wanting something cooked now, sir?" went on the older woman, with a new cheerfulness of tone, and Armathwaite would have been a far less capable student of human nature than he was had he failed to see that a much desired entry to the house was now regarded as an assured thing. Suddenly he made up his mind to solve the enigma, whatever it might be, since the theory of a spare bed being in request did not seem to fit the case.

"No," he said carelessly, treating the proposal as of slight import, one way or the other. "I wish to be alone this evening. But you can come in early to-morrow. Isn't there a spare key?"

"Yes, sir," broke in the girl, for her mother was utterly nonplussed again. "It's on the bunch with the others."

He produced the keys from his pocket, and saw that there were two alike.

"One of these?" he inquired, meeting the girl's eyes in a steady glance. Then he was sure of his ground. She was so excited that she could hardly answer. He gave her the key, ascertained that she would bring the milk and the rest in a few minutes, and left the two women staring after him.

Betty was as good as her word. She made no attempt to prolong her stay, but deposited her purchases on the hall-table, and promised that she or her mother would come about seven in the morning.

"Will you need to be called, sir?" she inquired, as an afterthought.

"Well, yes. I'm a sound sleeper," he assured her gravely.

The statement was true, but it required qualification. A man who had slept many a night under conditions that demanded instant wakefulness if any sinister sound threatened his very existence, did not rank in the class of sound sleepers known to quiet Elmdale.

Thereafter he cooked a meal of eggs and bacon, tea and toast, smoked, rambled in the garden, read, thought a good deal, and went to bed.

The light in his room was extinguished soon after ten o'clock. About half-past eleven, little more than twelve hours from the time he had first heard of "the house 'round the corner," he was aroused by a loud crash in the hall. He was up in an instant, laughing at the success of a booby trap compacted of the Burmese gong, some thread, and a piece of wood set as a trigger. His feet were not on the floor before the front door banged, and, hurrying to the window, he saw Betty Jackson flying down the path for dear life. He could not be mistaken. In that northern latitude a midsummer night is never wholly dark. He not only recognized the girl, but could note her heaving shoulders as she sobbed hysterically in her flight.

"I'm sorry if you're badly scared, my country maid, but you asked for it," he said aloud. "Now I think I'll be left to undisturbed slumber till seven o'clock."

Therein he erred. He had not quitted the window, being held by the solemn beauty of the gray landscape, ere a heavy thud, and then another, and yet a third, reached his ears. He might not have localized the first, but its successors came unmistakably from the attic. After a few seconds, the three knocks were repeated, and now he adjudged them to the precise bounds of the trap-door.

Slipping an automatic pistol into the pocket of his pyjama suit—merely as a precaution against the unforeseen, though he was a man devoid of fear, he took an electric torch from a drawer, but knew better than to bring it into use until its glare would disconcert others—not himself. He thrust his bare feet into slippers, unlocked the bedroom door, and passed out on to the landing.

"Now to unveil Isis!" he thought, as he felt for the first step of the upward stairway. It needed one of steel nerve and fine courage to creep about a strange house in the dark—a house where ill deeds had been done, and in which their memories lurked—but Robert Armathwaite had gone through experiences which reduced the present adventure to the proportions of a somewhat startling prank, closely akin to the success of the stratagem which had routed Betty Jackson.

And, as he mounted the stairs, keeping close to the wall, and thus preventing the old boards from creaking, again came those ominous knocks, louder, more insistent; but whether threatening or merely clamorous he could not decide—yet.



CHAPTER III

A MIDNIGHT SEANCE

Armathwaite had a foot on the upper landing when a stifled sob reached his ears, and a determined, almost angry, stamping or hammering shook the trap-door. One element, then, of the mystery attached to this reputedly ghost-ridden house was about to be dispelled. When James Walker shot the bolt which rendered the door as unyielding as the stout rafters which incased it, he had unwittingly imprisoned someone in the attic loft; and the someone, tiring of imprisonment, was making loud demand for release. Moreover, Betty Jackson was in the secret. She knew of the intruder's presence, but had not learnt the particular mode of concealment adopted—hence her renewed efforts to gain admission, her use of the ladder, and her somewhat daring visit during the dead hours of the night.

Now, Armathwaite scouted the notion of a couple of village women like Mrs. Jackson and her daughter being in league with midnight robbers, or worse. Even if some thievery was in prospect, they could not possibly have arranged that certain unknown miscreants should hide beneath the roof, since the arrival of Walker with an unexpected tenant was evidently the last thing they had dreamed of.

Therefore, smiling at the humor of the incident, he had to simulate a sternness he was far from feeling when he cried:

"Stop making that noise! Who are you, and how did you come to get yourself locked in in this way?"

"Please let me out!" came the muffled reply. "I'll explain everything—I will, indeed!"

Thereupon, Armathwaite was more surprised than ever. The appeal, though tearful and husky, was precisely opposite in character to that which he anticipated. He looked for gruff entreaty in the accents of the country of broad acres. What he actually heard was a cultured voice, a voice with a singularly soft and musical enunciation, and its note was of complaint rather than petition.

"All right!" he cried, hardly suppressing a laugh. "I'll bring a chair and draw the

bolt. I suppose you can lower the ladder yourself?"

"Of course I can—I drew it up!"

Again, the answer did not fit in with the conditions. But Armathwaite secured the same chair which Walker had used, pressed the button of the electric torch, and, having forced the bolt out of its socket, raised the door a few inches.

"Catch hold!" he said. "I'll show you a light."

The door was lifted, and he glimpsed a beardless face peering from the inner void. He sprang to the floor, put the chair on one side, and awaited developments. Soon the ladder appeared, and was adjusted. Then came two neat but strong brown brogues, with slim-ankled black stockings to match, and the turned-up ends of a pair of gray, flannel trousers. The owner of these articles of attire sat for an instant on the edge of the trap, as though reluctant to descend further, and Armathwaite noticed, to his very great bewilderment, that the black stockings were of silk.

"Will you kindly promise not to grab my legs as I come down?" said the voice.

"I have not the slightest desire to grab your legs, or your neck, for that matter, if you behave yourself," said Armathwaite.

"You don't understand, of course," came the curiously dignified protest; "but I am not misbehaving myself, and have no intention of so doing. This ridiculous thing would not have happened if that silly young fop had not fastened the trap-door. I can't imagine why he did it. It was no business of his, at any rate. And may I ask who *you* are?"

"I'll answer all polite inquiries, and, it may be, put a few on my own account, when you favor me with a closer view," said Armathwaite, not without a tinge of sarcasm in his politeness.

"Oh, this is too stupid for words!" was the petulant reply, and the speaker swung into sight. The ladder was tilted steeply, and the steps were narrow. Apparently, the young gentleman in a gray flannel suit who materialized in this manner preferred to gaze at his rescuer rather than adopt the safer method of descent which involved a momentary turning of his back. Possibly, too, he was more nervous than his remarks betokened, for he was yet some distance from the floor when the lower-most foot slipped, and he fell. The toe of the other foot caught in a rung, and he was thrown violently into Armathwaite's arms, who, to save him

from pitching headlong downstairs, had to clutch him with some force, whereupon the torch dropped, and the two were enfolded by a pall of darkness that seemed to have an actual quality of tangibleness.

"Oh!" shrieked the youth, now thoroughly frightened, "please don't hurt me! I haven't done anything wrong. I haven't really!"

Armathwaite's senses were steeped in the very essence of wonderment; he knew now that he was clasping a woman to his breast, hugging her most energetically, too, and the knowledge was at once disconcerting and irritating. But he had acquired the faculty long ago of remaining impassive in circumstances calling for rigid self-control, so he merely said, with curt reassurance:

"If you'll not make such a row, and stand still, I'll find that confounded torch and shed a light on the situation."

He stooped, and groped on the floor, being aware that the girl was panting with ill-repressed alarm the while. Luckily, his fingers soon closed on the nickel cylinder, and the almost overwhelming gloom was banished.

"Do you think you can manage to walk downstairs without stumbling, or shall I hold your arm?" he inquired, and the somewhat taunting question, no less than his obvious disregard of his companion's terror, supplied a needed tonic.

"The ladder was steep and slippery," she said tremulously. "The stairs offer no difficulty, so I can dispense with your assistance, thanks."

Certainly this young person's way of expressing herself differed in every essential from her distinctly agitated state. She was not yet aware of the innate chivalry of the man in refraining from thrusting the torch close to her face and staring at her, but already her panic was subsiding, and she turned and hurried away so quickly that Armathwaite thought she meant to escape.

"Just one moment!" he said, though not making the least effort to detain her otherwise. "Are there any more of you up here?"

His sheer unconcern could not fail to lessen her agitation still further, and she halted on the next landing.

"What do you mean?" she cried. Despite her qualms, she still maintained a curious attitude of defiance, as if she, and not the house's lawful tenant, had most cause to feel aggrieved.

"Exactly what I said. Were you alone in that attic?"

"Of course I was. What a question!"

"A natural one, from my point of view. I was sound asleep, when your ally, Betty Jackson, kicked up a din in the hall, and you began pounding on the trap-door."

"Poor Betty! Is she here? Betty! Betty!"

Leaning over the banisters, she peered into the blackness beneath. There was a glimmer of spectral light here, for a late-rising moon was adding to the silvery brightness of a perfect night, and some of its radiance was piercing the stained glass. Armathwaite noted her action with increasing bewilderment.

"Betty fled as though she were pursued by seven devils," he said, when no other answer came to her cry. "I guessed at some mischief being afoot, so planned a surprise for anyone crossing the hall without my knowledge. No matter what her earlier opinions, Betty believes in that ghost now."

"Ghost! What ghost? There is no ghost here. Do you think to scare me with a bogey, like a naughty child?"

They were descending the broad stairs of the lower flight together, and Armathwaite had stolen one glance at the lissom young figure. He was minded to smile at a cunningly-hidden safety pin which kept a broad-brimmed fisherman's hat of heather mixture cloth in position so that the girl's hair was concealed. The coat hung rather loosely on slender shoulders, but the disguise was fairly effective in other respects, and the masquerader moved with an easy grace that betokened a good walker.

"I have not occupied the house many hours, but I have come to the conclusion that it harbors certain strange fantasies," he said, taking the lead, and stopping to break a thread stretched across the foot of the stairs. "We'll find a lamp and matches in the dining-room," he added. "Suppose we go there and discuss matters?"

"Isn't it rather late? Whatever time is it?" was the hesitating comment.

"And aren't you rather hungry?" he replied, ignoring both questions.

"I'm simply ravenous. I haven't eaten a morsel since six o'clock this morning."

"I can offer you bread and butter and milk. Shall I boil you some eggs?"

"If you mention food again, I shall drop. Please, what time is it?"

"Nearly midnight."

"Oh, I must be going! I must, really. The Jacksons will find me something to eat."

"You're going into that room, and, unless I have your promise to remain there, you'll accompany me to the kitchen. Which is it to be—a comfortable chair, with a lamp, or a compulsory prowl through kitchen and larder?"

"I'll sit down, please," came the slow admission. "I'm very tired, and rather done up. I walked miles and miles this morning, and the long hours up there in the dark were horrid."

Without another word Armathwaite threw open the dining-room door, and lighted the lamp which he had left on the table. The girl sank wearily into an arm-chair; her action was a tacit acceptance of his terms. Somehow, he was convinced that she would not take advantage of his absence and slip out through the front door, which Betty Jackson had assuredly not waited to lock.

Among the kitchen utensils he had found a small oil-stove in working order. In a surprisingly short time, therefore, he was back in the dining-room with a laden tray.

"Do you like your eggs soft-boiled, medium, or hard?" he inquired, treating an extraordinary episode with a nonchalance which betokened either a temperament wholly devoid of emotion or a career crowded with uncommon experiences.

"Need I eat eggs at all?" said the girl. "I'm sure, Mrs. Jackson——"

"Do you want to rouse the village?"

"No; anything but that."

"Then I must point out that the one cottage in Elmdale whose inmates will be deaf and dumb at this moment is Mrs. Jackson's. Both mother and daughter are quaking because of the possible consequences of an attempt to enter this house at an hour which no person could choose for a legitimate purpose. Eat and drink, therefore. We'll deal with the Jacksons subsequently. No, don't begin by a long draught of milk. It is tempting, but harmful if taken in that way. Try some bread and butter. Now, two eggs. Oh, dash it! I've forgotten an egg-spoon, and I don't

know where such things are kept. I'll go and hunt for them."

"Don't trouble. Lend me that electric lamp—how useful it is!—and I'll bring one in a minute."

By this time Armathwaite had seen that his captive was a remarkably pretty girl. Male attire supplies the severest test of feminine beauty, since form and feature are deprived of adventitious aids; but a small, oval face, two pouting lips, a finely-modeled nose, brilliant brown eyes, swept by long curved lashes, and a smooth forehead, rising above arched and well-marked eyebrows, needed no art of milliner or dressmaker to enhance their charms. She was fairly tall, too—though dwarfed by Armathwaite's six feet and an inch of height in his slippared feet—and admirably proportioned, if slender and lithe. Evidently, she thought he had not penetrated her disguise, and was momentarily becoming more self-possessed. Again, she had some explanation of her presence in the house which could not fail of acceptance, and did not scruple, therefore, to display a close acquaintance with its arrangements denied to one who admittedly had taken up his abode there only that day.

The man listened to her quick, confident steps going to the kitchen, heard the rattle of a drawer in an antique dresser which stood there, and, with an emphatic gesture, seemed to appeal to the gods ere he bent over the stove to see if the water was yet a-boil.

The girl might be hungry, but feminine curiosity proved stronger than the urgent claims of an empty stomach. She went into the larder, and undoubtedly eyed the new tenant's stores. She implied as much when she re-entered the dining-room.

"Boiled eggs require pepper and salt," she explained. "You've got so many little paper bags that I didn't dare rummage among them, so I've secured a cruet which was left here when my—when the people who used to live here went away. The salt may be a bit damp, but the pepper should be all right."

Without more ado she tackled a slice of bread, breaking it into small pieces, and buttering each piece separately before munching it.

"Some wise person said in a newspaper the other day that one ought to give every mouthful of bread three hundred bites," she went on. "I wonder if he ever fasted eighteen hours before practicing his own precept. I'm afraid I wouldn't believe him if he said he did."

"People who study their digestion generally die young," said Armathwaite drily.

"Oh, I don't agree with you in that," she retorted. "My dad is great on food theories. He knows all about proteins and carbohydrates; he can tell you to a fourth decimal the caloric value of an egg; and *he's* a phenomenally healthy person. By the way, how are those eggs coming on?"

"Try this one. I think the water has been boiling three minutes!"

Armathwaite spoke calmly enough, but a stoutly-built edifice of circumstantial evidence had just crumbled in ruins about his ears. He was persuaded that, for some reason best known to herself, Miss Margu rite Garth had adopted this freakish method of revisiting her old home. Such a thesis made all things plausible. It explained her singularly self-contained pose, her knowledge of the house's contents, her wish to remain hidden from prying eyes, and, last but not least, it brought the peculiar conduct of the Jackson family into a commonplace category, for the two women would be governed by a clannish feeling which is almost as powerful in rural Yorkshire as in Scotland. A girl who had lived nearly all her life in the village would be looked on as a native. She might appeal confidently for their help and connivance in such a matter.

But this girl's father was alive, and Margu rite Garth's father had been in a suicide's grave two years. Who, then, was the audacious young lady now assuring him that he could boil eggs admirably? He was puzzled anew, almost piqued, because he flattered himself on a faculty for guessing accurately at the contents of a good many closed pages in a human document after a glance at the outer cover and its endorsement. He was spurred to fresh endeavor. He wanted to solve this riddle before its baffling intricacies were made plain by the all-satisfying statement which his companion obviously had it in mind to give.

"Won't you remove your hat?" he said, thinking to perplex her by a mischievous request.

"No, thanks," she said blithely. "I'll just demolish this second egg. Then I'll tell you why I am here, and awaken Mrs. Jackson, no matter what her neighbors may think. But, why wait? I can eat and talk—put the facts in an eggshell, so to speak. My relatives own this house. Mr. Garth has long wanted a few books and knick-knacks, and I've come to get them. Some are collected already on the library table; the remainder I'll gather in the morning, with your permission. But I don't wish my visit to be known to others than Mrs. Jackson and Betty, and that

is why I retreated to the loft when you and Mr. Walker arrived. It was a bother that anyone should select this day in particular to visit the property; but I imagined you would go away in an hour or so. Even when that vain young person, James Walker, locked me in, I believed Betty would come and release me after your departure. Besides, I wouldn't for worlds have let Walker see me. I—er—dislike him too much."

Armathwaite allowed to pass without comment her real motive for refusing to meet sharp-eyed James Walker; but again the problem of her identity called insistently for solution. If she was not Marguérite Garth, who on earth was she?

"Let me understand," he began. "The owner, and former occupant, of this house, was Mr. Stephen Garth?"

"Is," she corrected. "It remains his property, though he is living elsewhere."

Armathwaite so far forgot himself as to whistle softly between his teeth. And, indeed, such momentary impoliteness might be excused by his bewilderment. If Stephen Garth, who had owned and occupied the Grange, was still living, who was the man whose ghost had excited Elmdale, and driven back to prosaic Sheffield a certain Mrs. Wilkins, of nervous disposition and excitable habit?

"Ah!" he said judicially. "Messrs. Walker & Son, of Nuttonby, are his agents and Messrs. Holloway & Dobb, also of Nuttonby, his solicitors?"

"I suppose so," said the girl, deep in the second egg.

"But I understood that Mr. Stephen Garth had only one child, a daughter."

"Isn't he allowed to have a nephew, or an assorted lot of cousins?"

"Such contingencies are permissible, but they don't meet the present case."

"Why not?"

"Because, my dear young lady, anyone with half an eye in their head could see that you are a girl masquerading in a man's clothes. Now, who are you? I am entitled to ask. I have certain legal rights as the tenant of this house during the forthcoming three months, and as you have broken the law in more ways than you imagine, perhaps, I want to be enlightened before I condone your various offenses."

The girl was holding a glass of milk to her lips, and drank slowly until the glass

was emptied; but her eyes met Armathwaite's over the rim, and they were dilated with apprehension, for a heedless prank was spreading into realms she had never dreamed of.

"Does it really matter who I am?" she managed to say quietly, though there was a pitiful flutter in her voice, and the hand which replaced the tumbler on the table shook perceptibly.

"Yes, it matters a great deal," he said. With a generosity that was now beginning to dawn on her, he averted his gaze, and scrutinized a colored print on the wall.

"But why?" she persisted.

"Because I am convinced that you are Mr. Stephen Garth's daughter."

She drew a deep breath, and he was aware instantly that she was hovering on the verge of candid confession. She moved uneasily, propped her elbows on the table, and concealed some part of her features by placing her clenched fists against her cheeks.

"Well, what if I am?" she said at last, with a touch of the earlier defiance in her voice.

"Are you? Please answer outright."

"Yes."

"And your father is alive?"

"Of course he is!"

"Mother, too?"

"Yes."

"Do they know you are here?"

"No. For some reason, they have taken a dislike to Elmdale, and hardly ever mention it, or the Grange, for that matter. Yet my poor old dad is such a creature of habit that he is always missing something—a book, a favorite picture, a bit of china, and I schemed to come here, pack a few of the articles he most values, and have them sent to our cottage in Cornwall. Once they're there, they couldn't very well be sent back, could they? But as my people have forbidden me ever to speak of or come near Elmdale, I didn't quite know how to manage it, until I hit

on the notion of impersonating Percy Whittaker, the brother of a friend with whom I have been staying in Cheshire. Percy would do anything for me, but there was no sense in sending him, was there? He would be sure to bungle things awfully, so I borrowed his togs, and traveled all night to a station on the other side of the moor—and nobody—thought—I was—a girl—except you—and Betty, of course. She—knew me—at once."

"For goodness' sake, don't cry. I believe you—every word. But did you travel from Cheshire in that rig-out?"

"No, oh, no! I wore a mackintosh, and a lady's hat. They're hanging in the hall. I took them off while crossing the moor."

"A mackintosh!"

"Yes. Don't be horrid! I turned up my trousers, of course."

"I'm not being horrid. I want to help you. You walked—how many miles?"

"Fourteen."

"And breakfasted at York?"

"Yes. You see, Betty would have brought me some lunch. Then *you* came."

"The bedroom was prepared for your use, then?"

"Yes. It's my room, really. Dad likes to sleep with his head to the west, and that is where the door is in that room."

"Poor girl! I would have given a good deal that this thing should not have happened. But we must make the best of a bad job. Now, I hope you'll accept my advice. Let me go upstairs and remove the clothes I shall need in the morning. Then you retire there, lock the door, and sleep well till Betty comes."

"Oh, I can't! You are very kind, but I *must* go to Mrs. Jackson now."

She had blushed and paled in alternate seconds. Half rising, she sank back into the chair again; though the table was between them, the wearing of a boy's clothes was not quite so easy a matter as it had seemed earlier. The one thing she did not guess was that this serious-faced man was far more troubled by thoughts of a reputed ghost than by an escapade which now loomed large in her mind.

"I'm half inclined to make you obey me," he said angrily, gazing at her now with

fixed and troubled eyes.

"But you've been so good and kind," she almost sobbed. "Why should you be vexed with me now? I've told you the truth, I have, indeed."

"That is precisely the reason why I am sure you ought not to risk arousing the village to-night."

"But I won't. I'll tap at the window. Betty knows I'm here, somewhere, and she'll let me in at once."

Armathwaite was at his wits end to decide on the sanest course. A man less versed than he in the complexities of life would have counseled her retreat to the cottage as the only practicable means of escape from a position bristling with difficulties; but some subtle and intuitive sense warned him that Marguérite Garth should, if possible, leave Elmdale without the knowledge which credited that house with a veritable ghost.

"It's long after midnight," he persisted. "I'll have a snooze in a chair, and meet Betty Jackson before you show up. You can trust me absolutely to explain things to her."

"You forget that she is worrying dreadfully about me. Please let me go!"

"Very well," he said, driven to the half measures he had learnt to detest. "Promise me this—that you'll go straight to bed, and come here for breakfast without any conversation with the Jacksons."

The girl showed her relief, not unmixed with surprise at a strangely-worded stipulation.

"I'll do that," she said, after a little pause.

"Mind you—no talk. Just 'Good-night, I'm dead tired,' and that sort of thing."

"Yes," she agreed again, wonderingly.

"And the same in the morning?"

"I'll do my best."

"Off with you, then! I'll come to the door, and stand there, in case you're challenged by anybody."

"There's little fear of that in Elmdale at this hour," she said, with a new cheerfulness. He turned, ostensibly to pick up the electric torch. She was out in the hall instantly; when he rejoined her she was wearing the mackintosh.

"Good-night!" she said. "Next to dad, you're the nicest man I've ever met, and I don't even know your name."

"I'll introduce myself at breakfast," he growled, extinguishing the torch as he opened the door. He watched her swift run down the curving path to the gate, and heard her footsteps as she hurried into the village street. The night was so still that he knew when she turned into the front garden of the cottage, and he caught the tapping on a window, which, beginning timidly, soon grew more emphatic, perhaps more desperate.

Some minutes passed. He could see the back of the cottage, and no gleam of light shone in any of its tiny windows. Then followed some decided thumping on a door, but the tenement might have been an empty barn for all the response that was forthcoming.

Finally, he was aware of slow feet climbing dejectedly up the hill, and the garden gate creaked.

"I can't make anybody hear," wailed a tearful voice.

Armathwaite was even more surprised than the girl at this dramatic verification of his prophecy, but he availed himself of it as unscrupulously as any Delphic oracle.

"I told you so," he said. "Now, come in and go to bed!"

CHAPTER IV

SHOWING HOW EXPLANATIONS DO NOT ALWAYS EXPLAIN

Though weary and distraught, Margu rite Garth was of too frank a disposition to allow such an extraordinary incident to pass without comment. She halted in the porch by Armathwaite's side, and gazed blankly at the silent cottage.

"You spoke of a ghost," she murmured brokenly. "I'm beginning to think myself that I am bewitched. What can have happened? Why won't Betty or her mother let me in?"

"I'll have much pleasure in clearing up that trivial mystery about eight o'clock in the morning," he said with due gravity, fearing lest any attempt to relieve the situation by a joke might have the disastrous effect often achieved by a would-be humorist when a perplexed woman on the verge of tears is the subject of his wit. "Now, if you'll wait in the dining-room till I collect my garments, you'll be in bed and asleep within five minutes."

He gave her no further opportunity for argument or protestation. Closing and locking the door, he left the key in the lock, whereas, by virtue of the arrangement with Betty Jackson, it had reposed previously on the hall-table. In a few seconds he bustled in with an armful of clothes and a pair of boots. Handing over the torch, he said cheerfully:

"Now, leave everything to me, and you'll be astonished to find how all your woes will vanish by daylight. Good-night, and sleep well!"

Then the girl did a strange thing. She held the torch close to his face, and looked at him unflinchingly.

"I am very fortunate in having met a man like you," she said, and, without another word, turned and mounted the stairs. He waited until the bedroom door closed, and listened for the click of a lock, but listened in vain.

"It would appear that I'm still able to win the confidence of children and dogs," he muttered, smiling grimly. Then he made a pillow of his clothes on a couch

beneath the window, and, such was the force of habit, was asleep quite soon. A glint of sunlight reflected from the glass in a picture woke him at four o'clock. After glancing at his watch, he slept again, and was aroused the next time by the crunch of feet on the graveled path outside. He was at the door while Betty Jackson was yet trying to insert the key which she had withdrawn and pocketed overnight.

He admitted her, and said good-humoredly:

"I came downstairs when you ran away from a goblin gong, leaving the door unlocked. I don't suppose we are in danger of burglary in Elmdale, but it is customary to take reasonable precautions."

Betty, who was carrying a jug of milk, flushed till her cheeks resembled a ripe russet apple. Denial was useless, but she tried to wriggle.

"I didn't mean any harm, sir," she said. "I only wanted to have a look around. The house is so upset."

"Put that milk on the dining-room table," he said.

She obeyed, glad that a dreaded ordeal seemed to have ended ere it had well begun. Armathwaite followed, and closed the dining-room door. What he really feared was that she might drop the jug, and that the resultant crash would awaken his guest before Betty and he had engaged in a heart-to-heart talk.

"Now," he said, raising the blind, and flooding the room with clear morning light, "I take you for a sensible girl, Betty."

"I hope I am, sir," she answered shyly.

"Have you quite recovered from your fright?"

"Yes, sir."

She reddened again, thinking she knew what was coming. She could have dealt with Walker, but glib pertness would not avail when this tall stranger's eyes were piercing her very soul. Nevertheless, his tone was gentle and reassuring—at first.

"I was ignorant of the real facts, you see, so I had to defend myself," he said. "I know the truth now. Miss Garth is upstairs and asleep. She heard the commotion caused by the gong, and could not endure the strain and loneliness of that dark garret any longer—"

"Was Miss Meg there—in the loft?" cried Betty, blurting out the first vague thought that occurred to her bemused brain, because those words, "Miss Garth is upstairs and asleep," swamped her understanding with a veritable torrent of significance.

"Yes. She hid there when Mr. Walker and I entered the house, and, by the merest chance, she was fastened in. She remained there twelve hours."

"Oh, poor thing! She'd be nearly clemmed to death."

In Yorkshire, "clemmed" means "starved," and "starved" means "perished with cold." Armathwaite could follow many of the vernacular phrases, and this one did not bother him.

"She was hungry, without doubt," he said, "but I did not send her supperless to bed. Now, I have various questions to put before you go to her room, and I want straightforward, honest answers. If I am told the truth, I shall know how to act for the best in Miss Garth's interests; and that is what *you* wish, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I'm sure none of us had any notion of doing wrong."

"Don't speak so loudly. I want no explanations of your behavior yesterday. It would have been wise had you trusted in me at once, but that was hardly to be expected, seeing that I was a man fallen from the moon.... Why didn't you let Miss Garth enter when she knocked at your window and the door last night?"

The girl's eyes opened wide in sheer distress.

"Oh, sir!" she almost whispered; "what time did she come?"

"About midnight."

"There now! I half fancied that such a thing might happen. When I ran home, sir, I was fair scairt, because there *has* been talk of a ghost, and I wasn't too keen about coming in here in the dark. But mother was worried, and wouldn't go to bed. She would have it that Miss Meg had got clear of the house, and was hiding in a shed at the top of the lane. So, after a lot of talk, mother and I went there together. There was a light in the dining-room as we passed, but it had gone out when we came back."

"Solvitur ambulando," muttered the man, smiling at the simple solution of an occurrence which had puzzled him greatly at the time.

"What's that, sir?" demanded Betty.

"Sorry. I was thinking aloud—a bad habit. Those two Latin words mean that your walk to the shed disposes of a difficulty. Now for the next item, Betty. Miss Meg, as you call her, is the young lady who lived here a good many years?"

"She was born here, sir. She and I are nearly of an age—twenty-two, each of us."

"And her father was Mr. Stephen Garth?"

"Yes, sir."

"But isn't he dead?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Dead and buried two years this very month."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir. Mother was the first who saw his dead body. She was nearly frightened into a fit."

"Tell me the exact facts."

"Well, sir, Mrs. Garth and Miss Meg went away, all of a sudden. There was no quarrel that we know of, and Mr. Garth himself helped a man to carry out their boxes. They kissed on parting at the gate. I myself heard him saying that he would join them as soon as he had finished some book he was busy with. He was a great man for writing and studying, and he'd walk ten miles to get some granny's tale about dales ways, and the things people used to do in the old times. But no sooner had they left him than he changed. We all noticed it. He paid off the gardener, and dismissed two maids, and lived here alone. That didn't last long. I used to bring eggs and milk and things, and he'd take them in at the door. He'd talk pleasantly enough, but he looked awful worried. Then, one morning, I couldn't make anybody hear, and I thought he had gone out early. About seven o'clock that evening mother went and knocked, but there was no answer. Next morning it was the same; but when mother and I tried again in the evening, we noticed that the curtain, which can be drawn across the glass top of the door, had been pulled aside. At the inquest they wanted to know if it had been in the same position when we were there before, but we couldn't be certain, though we thought it must have been drawn. Anyhow, mother looked in, and ran away screaming, and I ran after her, not knowing why. In a minute or two she was able to speak, and said she had seen Mr. Garth hanging near the clock. Some men

went, and they saw him clearly, and one of them, Mr. Benson, rode to Bellerby for the policeman. He came in about an hour, and broke open the door, and cut poor Mr. Garth down. He had been dead a long time, the doctor said, and the worst thing was that nobody could find Mrs. Garth and Miss Meg. Not that any blame could be laid to them, because Mr. Garth himself said so in a letter addressed 'To the Coroner,' which was laid at the foot of the clock. We have a weekly paper in the cottage, sir, and you can see the whole account there."

"Get that paper, and give it to me privately sometime to-day," said Armathwaite. "Meanwhile, your story is ample for my present purpose. Were you surprised at seeing Miss Garth yesterday?"

"Sir, you could have knocked me down with a feather. And she in a man's clothes, and all. She came over the moor about ten o'clock—"

"Never mind the details now. Did she speak of her father?"

"In a sort of a way, sir."

"Did she give you the impression that he was still living?"

"Now that you mention it, sir, she did, but I couldn't quite understand what she said, and thought, for sure, I was mistaken. It wasn't the kind of thing one might ask questions about—was it, sir?"

"No, indeed. Knowing he had committed suicide, you didn't like to hurt her feelings?"

"That's it, sir, exactly."

"You hadn't much talk, I take it?"

"No, sir. She was all of a shake with excitement, and wanted to be let into the house before anyone else in the village could see her. I was to leave her alone till one o'clock, she said. Then I was to bring her something to eat, and we'd have a long chat. And that's the last I've seen of her, sir."

It has been noted that Armathwaite was no lover of the middle way in dealing with the hazards of existence. In fact, strength of will and inflexibility of purpose had already driven him from place and power to the haven of retirement, which he imagined he would find in Elmdale. He had made up his mind overnight as to the handling of the problem set by Margu rite Garth's presence in her father's

house, and he saw no reason now why he should depart from the decision reached then.

"You've been very candid, Betty Jackson," he said, looking steadily into the girl's wondering eyes, "and I mean to be equally outspoken with you. For some cause, which I cannot fathom, and may never inquire into, Miss Garth is not only unaware of any recent death in her family, but is convinced that her father is alive and well. There is a flaw in the argument somewhere, but it is hardly my business, nor yours, to discover the weak spot. Now, I propose that we let the young lady leave Elmdale as happy in her belief, or her ignorance, as she entered it. In plain English, I suggest that neither you, nor I, nor your mother, say one syllable about the suicide of Mr. Stephen Garth. If his daughter believes he is living, we should be hard put to it to convince her that he is dead."

"He *is* dead, sir. I saw him in his coffin," said Betty earnestly.

"I am not disputing your statement. My sole consideration, at this moment, is the happiness of the girl now lying asleep upstairs. Suppose, within the next hour or two, she says something about the surprise her father will receive when he sees some of the books and other articles she means to send to her present home, are you going to tell her that she is utterly mistaken—that Mr. Garth has been dead and buried—that she is talking like a lunatic?"

"Oh, no, sir! I wouldn't dream of speaking that way to Miss Meg."

"But don't you see, it has to be either one thing or the other. Either you accept her view that her father is alive, or you are constantly acting in a way that must arouse her suspicions. And, if once she begins to question you, what will happen then? You'll be in a ten times more difficult position than if you convince yourself, for the time being, that you were dreaming when you saw some man in a coffin."

"But I wasn't," persisted Betty. "Why, sir, the whole village knows——"

"I'm not doubting your word in the least. The point at issue is this—do you mean to perplex and worry Miss Meg by informing her that her father hanged himself in the hall of this very house two years ago?"

"No, sir. That I don't."

"You promise that?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"I'm glad you've come to my way of thinking. Miss Garth will leave here to-day, or to-morrow, at the latest. Till then, you must keep guard over your tongue. Go now, and tell your mother what I have told you. Make her understand the facts most clearly. If she agrees to help you and me in this matter, she is to come here and take up a housekeeper's duties. I'll pay her and you well for your services, but my instructions must be carried out to the letter. If she refuses, or feels unable, to obey my wishes in this matter, she is not to cross the threshold. Do you understand that fully?"

Armathwaite could be tersely emphatic in speech and manner when he chose. He had taken Betty Jackson into his confidence, but he had also expressed his intentions in a way that left her in no doubt as to the result if any lack of discretion on her part, or her mother's, led to a crisis. He had gauged the situation to a nicety. Mrs. Jackson and her daughter were well disposed towards Margu rite Garth, but there was no harm in stilling their tongues through the forceful medium of self-interest.

When the two came back together within a few minutes he knew that he had swept immediate obstacles from the path. Mrs. Jackson was a shrewd Yorkshire woman, and needed no blare of trumpets to inform her on which side her bread was buttered.

"Good morning, sir," she cried cheerfully. "Betty has told me what you said, and I think you're quite right. What time do you want breakfast, and what'll you have cooked?"

Armathwaite nodded his satisfaction.

"We three will get along famously," he laughed. "Now, Betty, put some water in one of the bedrooms, and, when you call Miss Garth, get my dressing-case, which is on the table, and bring it to me. She will answer your mother's questions about breakfast. Any hour that suits her will suit me. And let us all look as pleasant as though there wasn't such a thing as a ghost within a thousand miles of Elmdale."

The chance phrase reminded him of the elder Walker's words: "Elmdale is eight miles from Nuttonby, and thousands from every other town." Yet, remote as was this moor-edge hamlet, a sordid tragedy had been enacted there. Someone had died in that house under circumstances which called imperatively for a most

searching inquiry. A daylight phantom had replaced the grim specter which credulous villagers were wont to see on a summer's eve. Was it his business to exorcise the evil spirit? He did not know. He closed his eyes resolutely to that side of the difficulty. Margu rite Garth must be sent on her way first; then he would make a guarded investigation into the history of the man whom Mrs. Jackson had seen "hanging near the clock."

When summoned to the dining-room he received a shock. Man-like, he had pictured his unbidden guest as he had seen her the previous night. Now he was greeted by a smiling and prepossessed young lady, who had extracted a muslin gown from the stock in the wardrobe, and whose piquant face was crowned by a wealth of brown hair. The presence of woman's chief adornment naturally enhanced the girl's remarkable beauty. In defiance, too, of certain modern laws of hygiene—or perhaps because she couldn't help it, being built that way—she had a very slim waist. Last night she would have passed in a crowd for a boy of slender physique; this morning she was adorably feminine. During fifteen years of strenuous work in the East, Armathwaite had never given a thought to the opposite sex. He had seen little of his country-women, for the Indian frontier is not a haven for married officers, and he personally would have regarded a wife as a positive hindrance to his work; so it was a singular fact that his first reflection now should be that a certain Percy Whittaker, whom, in all probability, he would never set eyes on, was a person to be envied. He almost scowled at the absurdity of the notion, and the girl, extending her hand, caught the fleeting expression.

"Aren't you pleased to see me?" she cried. "I made sure you were aching for my appearance. Betty tells me you were up and about before she arrived, and I have been an unconscionable time dressing; you must be pining for breakfast."

"You shall not rob me of a chance of saying that I am glad to see you by that unnecessary tag about breakfast," he said.

"But isn't it an awful bore to find you have a girl lodger? Poor man! You hire a house in the country for a fishing holiday, and fate condemns you to play host!"

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares," he quoted.

"Is that from Proverbs?"

"No. It occurs in a certain epistle to the Hebrews."

She knitted her brows.

"I thought so," she said. "I'm rather good at Proverbs, and I don't remember that one. If you meant to give me a nasty knock you might have reminded me that it is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top than with a brawling woman in a wide house.... Do you like coffee, or tea?"

"Both."

"Mixed? Mrs. Jackson didn't know your tastes, so I told her to be extravagant."

"I'll try the coffee, please."

It was an odd sensation to find himself seated at table with such a vivacious companion. Marguérite Garth had evidently banished her overnight experiences into the limbo of yesterday's seven thousand years. She could not have smiled more gayly, or been more at ease with a friend of long standing.

"Betty and I have been exchanging impressions about you," she rattled on. "We agree that you're not half so severe as you look. But I'm not such a marvelous guesser as you are, so, will you tell me what I'm to call you?"

"Bob."

"Mr. Bob?"

"I don't mean that my name rhymes with Lobb, or Dobb or Hobb. Bob is a diminutive of Robert."

"But Robert what?"

"No, just Bob."

"Don't be silly. You must have another name."

"The name on Mr. Walker's register is such a mouthful—Armathwaite, if you *will* have it."

"What a queer way to put it! 'On Mr. Walker's register.' Isn't it your real name?"

"There! I was sure you would say that. Why not be content with blunt and honest-sounding Bob?"

"Shall we establish a sort of cousinship? You're Bob and I'm Meg."

"That would be a most excellent beginning, Meg."

She laughed delightedly.

"We're having quite an adventure!" she cried. "It sounds like a chapter out of an exciting novel. I hope you didn't think I was rude about your other name—the long one—Bob! You see, I used to be Meg Garth, but now I'm Meg Ogilvey. I'm hardly accustomed to the Ogilvey yet, but I rather like it. Don't you?"

Armathwaite's face darkened, and he swallowed a piece of bacon without giving it even one of the twenty-nine bites recommended by dietists as a minimum.

"Why, that makes you look at me black as thunder," she vowed. "It's a quite simple matter. My people came into some money when we left Elmdale, and the Ogilvey was part of the legacy. It reaches us from the maternal side of the family, and the change was easy enough for dad, because he always wrote under the pen-name of Stephen Ogilvey."

"Stephen Ogilvey—the man who is an authority on folk-lore?"

The genuine surprise in his voice evidently pleased his hearer.

"Yes. How thrilling that you should recognize him! That is real fame, isn't it?—to be regarded as top-dog in your particular line. But you seemed to be angry when I told you about it."

"I thought you were married," he said, secretly quaking at his own temerity.

Again she knitted her brows in a rather fascinating effort to appear sagacious.

"I don't quite see——" she began. Then she stopped suddenly.

"You think that if I were married I wouldn't be quite such a tom-boy—is that it?" she went on.

"No. You've failed so badly in your interpretation of my thought that I dare hardly tell you its true meaning."

"Please do. I hate to misunderstand people."

"Well, I'll try and explain. You have not forgotten, I hope, that I have already described you as an angel?"

"Your quotation wasn't a bit more applicable than mine."

"Be that as it may, I cannot imagine an angel married. Can you?"

"Good gracious! Am I to remain single all my life?"

"Who am I that I should choose between an angel and Meg Ogilvey?"

"I wouldn't limit your choice so narrowly," she said, eluding his point with ease. "Besides, I've been expecting every minute to hear that there is a Mrs. Armathwaite."

"There isn't!"

"I'm sorry. I wish there was, and that she was here now. Then, if she was nice, and you wouldn't have married her if she wasn't, she would ask me to stay a few days. And I would say 'Yes, please.' As it is, I must hurry over my packing, and take myself back to Cheshire."

"Yes," said he, compelling the words. "There is no doubt about that. You cannot remain here."

"Well, you needn't hammer in the fact that you'll be glad to be rid of me. Have some more coffee?"

A heavy step sounded on the path without. The girl, who was seated with her back to the window, turned and looked out.

"Here's Tom Bland, the Nuttonby carrier," she cried excitedly, smiling and nodding at some person visible only to herself. "Dear old Tom! Won't he be surprised at seeing me!"

Armathwaite's wandering wits were suddenly and sharply recalled to the extraordinary situation confronting him.

"You don't mean that some local man has recognized you?" he growled, and the note of real annoyance in his voice brought a wondering glance from the girl.

"We gazed straight at one another, at any rate," she said, with a perceptible stiffening of manner. "Considering that Tom knows me as well as I know him, it would be stupid to pretend that neither of us knows the other. It would be useless where Tom is concerned, at any rate. He grinned all over his face, so I may as well go to the door and have a word with him."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Armathwaite, springing to his feet, and

upsetting a plate in his hurry. "If Tom Bland says he has seen you here, I'll tell him he's several varieties of a liar. At this moment Margu rite Garth simply doesn't exist. She's a myth. The lady in this room is Meg Ogilvey, whom Tom Bland has never heard of before. Now, understand, that I forbid you to move or show your face again at the window."

"Oh, my!" pouted the girl, making believe to be very much afraid of him. That was the hardest part of the task confronting the Grange's latest tenant. He could awe and keep in check ten thousand turbulent and fanatical Pathans for many a year, but a clear-eyed English girl of twenty-two refused to be either awe-stricken or kept in restraint for as many minutes. Yet he must bend her to his will, for her own sake. He must force her away from Elmdale, from the hourly possibility of some ghastly revelation which would darken and embitter her life. The undertaking would go against the grain, but he dared not shirk it, and, once his mind was made up, he was not one whose resolution faltered.



CHAPTER V

GATHERING CLOUDS

The Nuttonby carrier took the new tenant of the Grange into his circle of acquaintances with the ready camaraderie of his class.

"Fine morning, sir," said he.

"An excellent morning," said Armathwaite. "Have you brought my boxes?"

"Yes, sir. They be rare an' heavy, an' all."

"You and I can manage them between us, I have no doubt," and Armathwaite led the way to the gate. As they passed the dining-room, Bland stared candidly through the window, but the girl was not visible.

"I didn't reckon on seein' Miss Meg to-day, sir," he said.

"Miss Meg? Who's Miss Meg?" smiled the other.

"Why, poor Mr. Garth's lass, to be sure."

"Ah! My cousin thought you were under the impression that you recognized her. But you are mistaken. The lady you saw is Miss Marguérite Ogilvey."

"Is she now? Well, that takes it! I could ha' sworn—Miss who, sir?"

Armathwaite repeated the name, and Tom Bland scratched his head. He was elderly, and weather-tanned as the Nuttonby porter, but his occupation had quickened his wits; there are times when one should not reiterate an opinion.

"You'll not have tried the beck yet, sir?" he said, twisting the conversation rather obviously. "I had a turn in the Swale meself last evenin'—this water runs into it, ye ken, an' the troot were risin' fine."

"What flies did you use?"

"Two March browns an' a black gnat. There's nowt like a March brown, to my thinkin'."

"Can you tell me who owns the land in that direction?" and Armathwaite pointed to the wooded gill which cut into the moorland to the eastward.

Bland gave some names, which Armathwaite entered in a notebook. He was wondering whether or not he should ask the man not to mention that he had seen a second occupant of the house, but decided that gossip would be stilled more quickly if the topic were left severely alone. He knew that Walker had told the carrier certain facts about himself. Possibly there would be some talk when next the two met, but, by that time, the Grange would have lost its highly interesting visitor, and Armathwaite smiled at the notion of the dapper young auctioneer trying to extract information from him.

The boxes, too, permitted of no waste of breath. When the third was dumped in the hall Bland was gasping, and Armathwaite's rather sallow face wore a heightened color.

"That was a stiff haul for your horse. How much?" said the owner of these solid trunks.

"It's eight miles——" began Bland. Despite a fixed tariff he could not forego an opportunity for bargaining, and Yorkshire will never give a direct answer if it can be avoided.

"Sixteen, really," broke in Armathwaite. "Will sixteen shillings meet the case?"

But Bland drew the line at downright extortion.

"Nay, nay!" he said. "I had a few calls on the way, an' there's some empties to go back from the Fox and Hounds. Take off the six, sir, an' I'll be very content."

Armathwaite paid him and added a florin "for a drink." As it happened, Betty Jackson crossed the hall, and nodded a greeting. This was fortunate. The girl's presence lent a needed touch of domesticity.

"Ye'll hae gotten Betty an' her mother to do for you?" commented the carrier.

"Yes. I was lucky to find them available."

"Ay, they're all right. They'll mak' ye comfortable. They will, an' all. I've known Mrs. Jackson these fot-ty year. Good mornin', sir. If you want owt frae Nuttonby just tell the postman. I come this way Tuesdays, Thursdays an' Saturdays."

With the departure of the carrier Armathwaite fancied that the irksomeness of

life would lessen. The "cousin" of recent adoption had evidently withdrawn to the farther part of the dining-room, because Bland, despite many attempts, had not set eyes on her again. She, of course, was aware when he mounted into the cart and rumbled out of sight around the corner of the cottage. She came out. Armathwaite was unstrapping the boxes. One was already open, revealing books in layers.

"Sorry I'm such a nuisance," she said quietly. "Of course, it was thoughtless of me to nod to Tom Bland, but he took me by surprise. Naturally, you don't wish people to know I am in Elmdale. Will you confer one last favor? Take your rods and pannier, and go for a couple of hours' fishing. I shall scoot before you return. I'll select the few things I require, and Betty will pack them, and hand them over to Bland on Saturday."

He was on his knees and looked up at her.

"By 'scooting' do you mean that you are going to walk across that moor again?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"If that is the only possible way of escape, I'll go with you."

"Walk twenty-eight miles? Ridiculous!"

"You're not going alone."

"I am." This with a little stamp of one of the brown brogues, mighty fetching.

"I shall not force my company on you, if that is what you fear."

"But how absurd! Do you intend following me?"

"Yes—until you are within easy range of the railway."

"Mr. Armathwaite, I'm perfectly well able to take care of myself."

"I'm sure of it, Meg. But a cousin should be cousinly. Our relationship will not be close. Say, a distance of two hundred yards."

He smiled into her eyes; his stern face softened wonderfully when he smiled.

"I couldn't think of permitting it," she pouted, eyeing him with a new interest.

He sat back on his heels, and affected a resigned attitude.

"Let's argue the point for two hours," he said. "I can't go fishing, because I shall be trespassing until I have acquired some rights. Moreover, nothing short of violence will stop me from escorting you over the moor. In this weather, moors contain tramps."

"I know. I met two yesterday."

"Did they speak to you?"

"One did. I didn't mind him. The second one turned and looked. I was ready to run, but he only stared."

"May I ask what costume you intend wearing for to-day's outing?"

"I haven't quite decided. It may be a blue Shantung or a white piqué, but it won't be gray flannel, if that's what you're hinting at."

He rose, and felt in his pockets.

"I think we can get through those two hours comfortably. May I smoke?" he said.

"Yes, please do. Then you won't be so grumpy. Walk twenty-eight miles on my account! The idea!"

"I've walked forty before to-day, and stood a very reasonable chance of being potted every inch of the way. You won't fire at me, at any rate, so twenty-eight is a mere stroll. In fact, if you are gracious, it can be a pleasant one, too."

"Potted! Were you in the army?"

"No. Soldiers like that sort of thing! I didn't so I gave it up. Sure you don't mind a pipe?"

"I love it. I often fill and light dad's for him when he's busy. You ought to see him when he's tracking some Norse legend to its lair, or clearing up a point left doubtful by Frazer in the *Golden Bough*. Have you ever read Frazer? I know him and Mannhardt almost by heart. I help dad a lot in my own little way. Have you ever played cat's cradle?"

"With a piece of string?"

"Yes. Well, games and folk-lore go together, and cat's cradle has been played since the ancient Britons wore—whatever ancient Britons did wear. Now, you're laughing at me."

"Indeed, I'm not. I was marveling at our kindred tastes. Have you heard of the Jatakas and Panchatantras of India?"

"I know that there are such things."

"I'll jot down two or three, with a translation."

"Oh, wouldn't dad love to meet you! He often growls because he can't read Sanskrit."

"Tell me where you live, and I'll look you up some day."

"Our permanent address is——Oh, my! Somebody's coming, and I don't want you to be cross with me again."

She fled into the kitchen. The door had hardly closed when a shadow darkened the porch. Armathwaite, lighting his pipe, gazed through a cloud of smoke at a red-faced policeman.

"Hello!" he said. "Who have *you* come for?"

The policeman grinned, and saluted.

"There's not much doing in Elmdale in my line, sir," he said. "I was told the Grange had a new tenant, so I just looked in. I come this way Thursday mornings and Monday nights, as a rule. I'm stationed at Bellerby, nearly three miles from here. Last time I was in this hall——"

Armathwaite was too quick for him. Residence in Mr. Walker's "house 'round the corner" had proved so rife in surprises that the long arm of coincidence might be expected to play its part at any moment. So he countered deftly.

"Sorry I can't be more hospitable," he broke in, advancing, and deliberately causing the constable to step back into the porch. "Everything is at sixes and sevens. I only arrived yesterday, and my boxes, as you see, are not yet unpacked."

He closed the door, feeling certain that his judgment had not erred. It was soon justified.

"Next time you're passing, give me a call," he went on. "I'll be able to offer you a whisky and soda or a bottle of beer. Are you the man who was brought here by a Mr. Benson on a certain occasion?"

"I am, sir, and it was a nasty job, too. I'm glad someone has taken the place. It's a nice property, but the garden has gone to wrack and ruin since poor Mr. Garth went. Just look at them dandelions, growin' where there used to be a bed of the finest begonias I've ever seen! 'Begonia Smith' was the gardener's nickname for miles around. And convolvulus instead of sweet peas! It's a sin, that's what it is!"

The policeman, clearly an enthusiast, took off his helmet, and wiped his forehead with a purple pocket-handkerchief.

"You knew Mr. Garth, I suppose?" said Armathwaite, strolling towards the dandelions, whose vigorous growth was so offensive to the horticultural eye. The other went with him, little thinking he was being headed off a scent which might lead to a greater tragedy than the devastation of a once well-kept garden.

"Knew him well, sir. A very pleasant-spoken gentleman he was, an' all. I brought him a party of plow stots one day—men who dance in the villages at Martinmas, sir—and he was as pleased as Punch because they sang some old verses he'd never heard before. The last man in the world I'd ever have thought of to kill himself."

"There was no doubt that he committed suicide?"

"No, sir, that there wasn't. He'd been dead two days when I cut him down. Well, no need to talk of it now, but even the doctor was rattled, though the weather was very hot that June."

Armathwaite felt as if he had been conjured by some spiteful necromancer out of a smiling and sunlit English countryside into a realm of ghouls and poison-growths. A minute ago a charming and sweet-spoken girl had been chatting glibly about her father's wanderings in the by-ways of folk-lore, and now this stolid policeman was hinting at the gruesomeness of his task when called on to release the lifeless body of that same man from its dolorous perch beside the clock.

For an instant he lost himself, and fixed such a penetrating glance on the constable that the latter grew uneasy, lest he had said something he ought not to have said. Armathwaite realized the mistake at once, and dropped those

searching eyes from the other's anxious face to some scraps of ribbon sewn on the left breast of the dark blue tunic.

"You have the Tirah medal, I see," he said. "Were you at Dargai?"

The question achieved the immediate effect counted on.

"I was, an' all, sir," and the ex-soldier squared his shoulders. "Though no Scottie, I was in the Gordon Highlanders. Were you there, sir?"

"I—er—yes, but as a non-combatant. I was in the Politicals—quite a youngster in those days, and I was fool enough to envy you that rush across the plateau."

"It was warm work while it lasted, sir."

"There have been few things to equal it in warfare. What time do you pass through the village on Monday?"

"Shortly after eleven, sir."

"If you see a light, come in. If not, look me up next Thursday. If I'm fishing, I'll leave word with Mrs. Jackson that you're to have a refresher should you be that way inclined."

"Thank you, sir. My name's Leadbitter, if ever you should want me."

"And a jolly good name, too, for a man who fought against the Afridis. By the way, can you tell me what time the post leaves here?"

"A rural postman calls at Thompson's shop for letters about half-past four, sir."

A cigar changed hands, and P. C. Leadbitter strode off, holding his head high. It was a red-letter day. He had met one who knew what the storming of the Dargai Pass meant. Even the memories of Stephen Garth pendant from a hook beneath the china shelf faded into the mists of a country policeman's humdrum routine. He was halfway to Bellerby when he remembered that he had not done the one thing he meant doing—he had not asked Mr. Armathwaite's intentions with regard to the garden. Begonia Smith had retired to a village lying between Bellerby and Nuttonby. Though too old to take a new situation, he would jump at the chance of setting his beloved Grange garden in order again, and, of course, he was just the man for the job. Leadbitter believed in doing a good turn when opportunity offered. After tea, he went in search of Smith of the order *Begoniaceae*. To save half a mile of a three miles' tramp by road, he passed

through the estate of Sir Berkeley Hutton, and met that redoubtable baronet himself strolling forth to see how the partridges were coming on.

"Ha!" cried Hutton, knowing that his land was not in the policeman's district, "has that rascally herd of mine been gettin' full again?"

"No, Sir Berkeley, Jim's keepin' steady these days," was the answer. "There's a new tenant at the Grange, Elmdale; he'll be wantin' a gardener, I'm thinkin', so I'm going to put Begonia Smith on his track."

"A new tenant! You don't tell me. What's his name?"

"A Mr. Robert Armathwaite, Sir Berkeley. A very nice gentleman, too. Been in India, in the Politicals, he said. I didn't quite know what he meant——"

"But I do, by Jove, and a decent lot of chaps they are. Picked men, all of 'em. I must look him up. I haven't met anyone of that name, but we're sure to own scores of friends in common. Glad I met you, Leadbitter. I'll drive over there some day soon. Armathwaite, you say? Sounds like an old Yorkshire name, but it's new to me. The coveys are strong on the wing this year, eh?"

So, all unwittingly so far as Armathwaite was concerned, his recognition of an Indian Frontier ribbon had set in motion strange forces, as a pebble falling from an Alpine summit can start an avalanche. In truth, he had not yet grasped the essential fact that residents in a secluded district of Yorkshire, or in any similar section of the United Kingdom, were close knit throughout astonishingly large areas. He had belonged to a ruling caste among an inferior race during so many active years that he still retained the habits of thought generated by knowledge of local conditions in India, where a town like Nuttonby would have little in common with a hamlet like Elmdale, whereas, in Yorkshire, Nuttonby knew the affairs of Elmdale almost as intimately as its own.

But enlightenment on this point, and on many others, was coming speedily. He received the first sharp lesson within a few hours.

Margu rite Ogilvey might be a most industrious young lady when circumstances were favorable, but she had so many questions to put, and so much local news to absorb from Mrs. Jackson and Betty, that the morning slipped by without any material progress being made in the avowed object of her visit.

Armathwaite, piling rows of books on the library floor, noticed that the collection of seven, ranging from a Sheffield cake-basket to a Baxter print, had

not been added to. The girl wanted to know, of course, why Leadbitter came, and was told, though his references to the disheveled state of the garden were suppressed. Then she volunteered to help in disposing of the new lot of books, but her services were peremptorily declined.

"You're a grumpy sort of cousin at times, Bob," she cried, and betook herself to the scullery and more entertaining company. She had been chatting there an hour, or longer, when she wheeled round on Mrs. Jackson with an astonished cry.

"I've been here all the morning, and you've never said a word about my father and mother," she declared. "They're quite well, thank you; but you might have inquired."

"Well, there!" stammered Mrs. Jackson, "It was on the tip of me tongue half a dozen times, an' something drove it away again. An' how are they, Miss Meg?"

"I've just told you. I do wish they'd come back to the Grange, but they seem to hate the very mention of it. I wonder why?"

"Elmdale's a long way frae Lunnon," said Betty, catching at a straw in this sudden whirlpool.

"We're just as far from London in Cornwall," laughed the girl.

"Oh, is that where you've gone?" put in Mrs. Jackson incautiously.

"Yes. Didn't you know? Hadn't you the address for letters?"

"No, miss. Miggles said"—Miggles was the peripatetic postman—"that all letters had to be sent to Holloway & Dobb, in Nuttonby."

Marguérite looked rather puzzled, because her recollection ran differently; she dropped the subject, thinking, doubtless, that her parents' behests had some good reason behind them, and ought to be respected.

"Anyhow," she went on, "now that I've broken the ice by coming here, my people may be willing to return. I don't suppose Mr. Armathwaite will stay beyond the summer."

"Mr. Walker tole me he thought of takin' the place for a year," said Mrs. Jackson.

"Indeed. I'll ask him at lunch. I've wasted the morning, so I'll stay another night, and start early to-morrow. You'll find me a bed in the cottage, won't you, Mrs.

Jackson?"

"Mebbe, Mr. Armathwaite will be vexed," said Betty, making a half-hearted effort to carry out the compact between herself and her employer.

"Leave Mr. Armathwaite to me," laughed Marguérite. "He's a bear, and he growls, but he has no claws, not for women, at any rate. No one could be nicer than he last night. I felt an awful fool, and looked it, too; but he didn't say a single word to cause me any embarrassment. Moreover, he intends crossing the moor with me, and I can't let him get lost in the dark. Men have died who were lost on that moor."

"Oh, but that's in the winter, miss, when the snow's deep," said Betty.

"Why, I do believe you want to get rid of me!" cried the other.

Betty flushed guiltily. She was floundering in deep waters, and struck out blindly.

"Oh, no, miss," she vowed. "You know me better than that. P'raps you'll be gettin' married one of these days, an' then you can please yourself, an' live here."

"Married! Me get married, and leave dad and mums! Oh, dear no! One young man has asked me already, and I—"

"Betty," said a voice from the doorway leading to the hall, "can you give me a duster?"

The conclave started apart, like so many disturbed sparrows; but Armathwaite could make a shrewd guess as to the name of the "one young man," since he had Marguérite Ogilvey's own testimony for it that Percy Whittaker would "do anything" to oblige her, and what more likely than that such devotion should lead to matrimony?

At luncheon he received with frigidity the girl's statement that she planned remaining in Elmdale till the morrow.

"There's really no reason to hurry," she said airily. "The Whittakers know where I am, and I'll send a postcard saying I'll be with them Friday evening."

"I must remind you that every hour you prolong your visit you add to the risk of discovery," he said.

"Discovery of what, or by whom?" she demanded.

"I am only endeavoring to fall in with your own wishes. You came here secretly. You took pains to prevent anyone from recognizing you. Have you changed your mind?"

"I—I think I have. You see, your being here makes a heap of difference."

"Precisely. You ought to get away all the sooner."

"First Betty—now you! I must indeed be an unwelcome guest in my father's house. Of course, I can't possibly stay now. There's a train from Leyburn at seven o'clock. I can catch it by leaving here at three, but I shan't start unless I go alone."

She looked prettier than ever when her brown eyes sparkled with anger, but Armathwaite hardened his heart because of the grim shadow which she could not see but which was hourly becoming more visible to him.

"Is Leyburn the station on the other side of the moor?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then you will remain here three weary months, Meg."

"I don't pretend to understand," she cried wrathfully.

"I've paid three months' rent, and here I shall stay if a regiment of girls and a whole army of Percy Whittakers try to eject me. As I am equally resolved not to allow you to cross the moor unaccompanied, you will readily perceive the only logical outcome of your own decision."

The brown eyes lost their fire, but acquired another sort of sheen.

"What has happened that you should speak so unkindly?" she quavered. "Last night and this morning you—you—didn't order me out. And I don't see why you should drag in Percy Whittaker. I only borrowed his togs."

Many times in the history of this gray old world have woman's tears pierced armor and sapped fortresses. This hapless man yielded at once.

"Confound it, Miss Ogilvey, I'd keep you here during the remainder of my days if I could arrange matters to my own liking and yours," he blurted out.

She recovered her self-possession with amazing readiness.

"Now, Bob, you're talking nonsense," she tittered. "Aren't we making mountains out of molehills? I have lots to do, and hate being rushed. I can stay with Mrs. Jackson to-night, and you and I will set out for Leyburn early to-morrow. Then, if you don't care to face the return journey, you shall take train to Nuttonby and drive here. Isn't that a good plan?"

"We must adopt it, at any rate," he said grudgingly. "But you promise to remain hidden all day?"

"Yes, even that. Now, let's stop squabbling, and eat. Tell me something about India. It must be an awfully jolly place. If I went there, should I be a mem-sahib?"

"It is highly probable."

"What a funny way to put it! Aren't all English ladies in India mem-sahibs?"

"The married ones are. The spinsters are miss-sahibs."

She laughed delightedly, and without any sense of awkwardness because of her own blunder.

"Naturally they would be. That's rather neat when you come to think of it," she cried.

Old jokes are ever new in someone's ears, or no comic paper could live beyond a year. When Betty came in with a gooseberry tart and cream, she heard the two calling each other "Bob" and "Meg," and reported thereon in the kitchen.

"It seems to me she's larnt summat (something) i' Cornwall," commented Mrs. Jackson.

"And him old enough to be her father!" marveled Betty.

"Fiddlesticks! It's the life he's led that's aged him. He's not a day more'n thirty-five."

Mrs. Jackson was no bad judge. Her employer was in his thirty-sixth year.

After luncheon, Marguérite Ogilvey collected her treasures, and, with Betty's help, packed them in boxes obtained at the village shop. Before tea, she wrote a letter, which Armathwaite took to the post. While there, he inquired about the

fishing, and the grocer pointed out a very tall and stoutly-built man stacking hay at the bottom of a long field.

"That's Mr. Burt," he said. "He owns a mile or more of the best water. If you were to go an' see him now, sir, you could settle things straight off."

"But I want to have a word with Miggles."

"He'll be here in ten minutes, sir, an' I'll tell him to give you a hail. The Nuttonby road passes the end of that field."

Matters seemed to be arranged conveniently; as, indeed, they were, if sprites were laying snares for Robert Armathwaite's feet.

He met Farmer Burt, and was given all fishing facilities at once. Nay, more, if this weather lasted, as was likely, and all the hay was saved by sunset, Burt himself would call next day, and reveal the lie of the land.

"Make it Saturday," said Armathwaite, mindful of another fixture.

"Right you are, sir!"

Someone shouted. It was Miggles, breast-high beyond a hedge. At that instant Armathwaite caught sight of a dog-cart swinging into Elmdale. A gallant figure at the reins seemed somehow familiar. Therefore, instead of describing the kind of bath he wished Tom Bland to bring from an ironmonger's, he said sharply to the postman:

"Who is that in the dog-cart?"

"Young Mr. Walker, o' Nuttonby, sir," was the answer.

James Walker! The man whom Margu rite Ogilvey said she hated, and such a phrase on a girl's lips with reference to a man like Walker almost invariably means that she has been pestered by his attentions. The Grange was nearly a mile distant, and Walker was now dashing through the village street.

"Damn!" said Armathwaite, making off at top speed.

Miggles gazed after him.

"Rum houses draws rum coves," he said, trudging away on his daily round. "Not that he's the first who's damned young Jimmy Walker, not by a jolly long way!"

Evidently, an Aristotelian postman.



CHAPTER VI

THE STORM BREAKS

Armathwaite's face, as he strode through Elmdale, was hardly that of a man who had found there the quiet and solitude he had stipulated for when in treaty with Walker & Son. Its stern and harassed aspect was seen and commented on by a score of people. Though most of the inhabitants were busy in the fields, there were watchers in plenty peering from each farm and cottage. Already the village held in common the scanty stock of information possessed by the Jacksons concerning the Grange's new tenant, because mother and daughter were far too shrewd to provoke discussion by withholding the facts stated by the house agent. They knew that every urchin who could toddle had peeped through gate and hedges that morning; they were more alive than Armathwaite himself to the risk Miss Meg ran of being seen if she went outside the house, front or back, for ten seconds. The best way to disarm gossip was to answer as best they might the four questions put by every inquirer: Who is he? Where does he come from? Is he married? How long will he stop?

Singularly enough, in a land of variable weather, Elmdale at this time was bathed in brilliant sunshine from morn till eve. The ripening crops, the green uplands, the moor, with its gorse just fading and its heather showing the first faint flush of purple, were steeped in the "great peacefulness of light" so dear to Ruskin. If one searched the earth it would be hard to find a nook where sorrow and evil were less likely to dree their weird; yet, Armathwaite expected to meet those grim sisters stalking through the ancient house when he saw an empty dog-cart and an open door; he seldom erred in such forecasts, and his divination was not at fault now.

As he entered the hall, he heard the girl's voice, clear and crisp and scornful.

"How dare you say such things to me! How dare you! My father is alive and well. If he were here now——"

James Walker chuckled.

"Tell that to the Marines," he began. The remainder of the sentence died on his lips when Armathwaite's tall form appeared in the doorway.

"You here, Mr. Walker?" said the Anglo-Indian calmly. Then, noting Margu rite Ogilvey's white face and distraught eyes, he assumed a mystified air, and cried:

"Hullo, Meg, what's gone wrong?"

She flew to him instantly, clasping his arm, and the confident touch of her fingers thrilled him to the core.

"Oh, Bob, I'm so glad you've come back," she almost sobbed. "That—that nasty little man has been telling such horrid fibs. He says—he says—Oh, Bob, won't you send him away?"

At that moment the mental equilibrium of James Walker, junior (his father was also James) was badly shaken. It oscillated violently in one direction when he noted the manner of address these two adopted the one to the other. It swung to another extreme on hearing himself described as "a nasty little man" by a girl for whom a long-dormant calf love had quickened in his veins when Tom Bland announced that "Meg Garth, or her ghost," was at the Grange that day. It positively wobbled when Armathwaite threw a protecting arm round the desired one's shoulders. So he listened, open-mouthed, when Armathwaite spoke.

"Sorry I wasn't at home, Meg, dear, when Mr. Walker arrived—or he wouldn't have troubled you," the mysterious stranger was saying. There was an unpleasant glint in the steely glance that accompanied the next words:

"Now, Mr. Walker, come outside, and explain your business."

But Walker was no country bumpkin, to be overawed and silenced by a man of superior social status. He was puzzled, and stung, stung beyond hope of cure. Yet he was not afraid. Certain qualities of sharpness and cuteness warned him that if he controlled his temper, and did not bluster, he held the whip hand in a situation of which the true inwardness was still hidden.

"My business is not with you, Mr. Armathwaite," he said, with the utmost civility his tongue was capable of. "I heard of Miss Garth's arrival, and came to see her. It's not my fault if she's vexed at what I've said. I meant no offense. I only told the truth."

"I have reason to believe that you forced yourself into Miss Garth's presence;" and, in repeating the name, Armathwaite pressed the girl's shoulder gently as an intimation that no good purpose would be served by any correction in that respect. "Again, and for the last time, I request you to leave her."

"There's no last time about it," said Walker, who was watching Margu rite's wan and terror-stricken face. "I had a perfect right to call on Meg Garth. She daren't pretend she doesn't know me, and a false name can't humbug me, or Tom Bland, for that matter."

"I know you only too well," broke in the girl with a vehemence that brought a momentary rush of color to her cheeks. "You annoyed me for two years, and I'm sorry now I didn't complain to my father about your ridiculous oglings and shilling boxes of chocolates, which I gave to the village children."

She struck harder than she knew. Walker bridled like an annoyed turkey-cock. Armathwaite pressed Margu rite's shoulder a second time, and withdrew his hand.

"If your ungracious admirer won't leave you, Meg, you had better leave him," he said, smiling into her woebegone face. "Go into the drawing-room, or join Mrs. Jackson. *I'll* deal with Mr. Walker."

He held the door open, purposely blotting Walker out of sight, and the girl obeyed. She went out bravely enough, but he caught a smothered sob as she passed towards the kitchen. There also, he was bitterly aware, danger lurked in other guise, though the two well-disposed women might perchance have the wit to discredit Walker's revelations, whatever they were.

Closing the door, which swung half open again without his knowledge, he turned an inquiring and most unfriendly eye on the unwanted visitor.

"I hope you are ashamed of yourself," he said quietly.

If Walker had understood mankind better, he would not have misinterpreted that suave utterance by imagining, as he did, that it betokened fear of exposure. Unhappily, he strutted, and slapped a gaitered leg with a switch he carried in place of a whip.

"Ashamed of nothing," he answered truculently. "I admit being sweet on the girl. What is there to be ashamed of in that, I'd like to know?"

"It's distinctly to your credit, in some ways," said Armathwaite. "I should have expected your tastes to run rather to barmaids, with an ultimate vote in favor of the daughter of a well-to-do butcher. I dislike class distinctions, Walker. Too often they savor of snobbery; but, in this instance, I am obliged to remind you that my cousin is a lady."

"Oh, is that it? Cousins, are you? I wish you'd told me sooner."

"Why?"

"It might have saved this bit of bother, anyhow."

"I don't think that any well-meant explanations on my part could cure you of an impertinent nature, Walker."

"Dash it all, Mr. Armathwaite, why couldn't I visit Meg? I've seen and spoken to her scores of times."

"But, even in Nuttonby, one does not thrust one's presence on a lady uninvited."

Walker laughed. He could stand any amount of reproof as to his manners, because he rather prided himself on a swaggering disregard of other people's feelings.

"We don't stand on ceremony in Yorkshire," he said jauntily. "I opened the door, and actually heard her voice. There was no sense in Betty Jackson sayin' Miss Garth wasn't here, and I told her so pretty plainly. Then, out she came. What would you have done, in my shoes? Now, I ask you, sir, as man to man."

"I would have striven not to insult her so grossly that she should be moved to tears."

"But I didn't. Don't you believe it. I was pleasant as could be. She behaved like a regular little spit-fire. Turned on me as though she'd been waitin' for the chance. I can stand a lot, but I'm jiggered if I'd let her tell me she'd complain to her father, and have him take away the agency of the property from our firm, when her father is buried these two years in Bellerby churchyard. Why, she must think I'm dotty."

Armathwaite moistened his lips with his tongue.

"You enlightened her ignorance, I presume?" he inquired blandly.

"I didn't know what she was gettin' at, but I asked her plump and plain who the 'Stephen Garth' was who hanged himself in this very house, and has his name and the date of his death on the stone over his grave.... It strikes me that even you don't know the facts, Mr. Armathwaite. If her father is alive, who was the man who committed suicide?... And, by jing, *did* he commit suicide?"

James Walker's theorizing ended suddenly.

"You poisonous little rat!" murmured Armathwaite, and seized him. Walker was young and active, and by no means a weakling or cowardly, but he resembled a jackal in the grip of a tiger when the hands closed on him which had choked the life out of Nas'r-ulla Khan, chief cut-throat of the Usman Khel. There was no struggle. He was flung face downwards on the table until the door was thrown wide. Then he was bundled neck and crop out of the house, and kicked along the twenty yards of curving path to the gate.

There Armathwaite released him, a limp and profane object.

"Now, go to Nuttonby, and stop there!" was the parting injunction he received. His bitterest humiliation lay in the knowledge that Margu rite Garth and Betty Jackson, hearing the racket, had rushed to hall and door, and were gloating over his discomfiture. A drop of bitterest gall was added by his assailant's subsequent behavior, for Armathwaite turned his back on him, and sauntered slowly to the house, seemingly quite assured that there would be no counter-attack. And, indeed, James Walker retained sufficient sense in his frenzied brain to realize that he had no earthly chance in a physical struggle with this demon of a man. So he climbed into the dog-cart, though not with his wonted agility, and drove away to Nuttonby without ever a backward glance.

But he vowed vengeance, vowed it with all the intensity of a mean and stubborn nature. He had visions, at first, of a successful action for assault and battery; but, as his rage moderated, he saw certain difficulties in the way. His only witnesses would be hostile, and it was even questionable if a bench of magistrates would convict Armathwaite when it was shown that he, Walker, had virtually forced an entry into the house, and refused to leave when requested.

But he could strike more subtly and vindictively through the authorities. Margu rite Garth had said that Stephen Garth was living, and Robert Armathwaite—that compound of iron knuckles and whip-cord muscles—had tacitly endorsed the statement. If that was true, who was the man buried in Stephen Garth's name and identity in the churchyard at Bellerby? He had a vague recollection of some difference of opinion between the coroner and a doctor at the inquest. He must refresh his memory by consulting a file of the *Nuttonby Gazette*. In any event, he could stir a hornets' nest into furious activity and search the innermost recesses of the Grange with anguish-laden darts. Curse Meg Garth and her cousin! He'd teach both of 'em, that he would! If they thought

that James Walker was done with because he had been flouted and ill-used, they were jolly well mistaken, see if they weren't!

Marguérite Ogilvey was as tender-hearted a girl as ever breathed, but it needed super-human qualities—qualities that no woman could possibly possess and have red blood in her veins—to restrain the fierce joy which thrilled her being when she saw her persecutor driven forth with contumely. Betty Jackson, the village maid, was delighted but shocked; Marguérite, the educated and well-bred young lady, rejoiced candidly.

"You've done just what I would have done if I were a strong man like you!" she cried tremulously, when Armathwaite faced her at the door. There was a light in her eyes which he gave no heed to at the moment—the light which comes into the eyes of woman when she is defended by her chosen mate—but he attributed it to excitement, and hastened to calm her.

"I may have acted rashly," he said; "but I couldn't help it. Sometimes, one has to take the law into one's own hands. Surely, this is one of the occasions."

"He'll keep clear of Elmdale for a bit," chortled Betty. "P'raps he thinks no one saw you kickin' him except ourselves. He's wrong! Half the village knows it! Old Mrs. Bolland nearly fell out of an upstairs window with cranin' her neck to see what was goin' on, an' there's little Johnnie Headlam runnin' down the ten-acre field now to tell Mr. Burt an' his men all about it."

The girl had thoughtlessly blurted out a fact of far-reaching import. Armathwaite swung on his heel, and found gaping faces at every cottage backwindow, and above every hedge. Sleepy Elmdale had waked. Its usually deserted street was pullulating with child life. The sharp Walkers were somewhat too sharp on the land agency side of their business, and were cordially hated in consequence. The bouncing of Walker, junior, had not made him popular; his trouncing would provide a joyous epic for many a day. As for Marguérite Ogilvey's presence in the house, it was known far and wide already. She had been recognized by dozens of people. Elmdale, which might have figured as Goldsmith's deserted village five minutes earlier, was now a thriving place, all eyes and cackling tongues.

Armathwaite had lost sight of that highly probable outcome of his action, nor did it trouble him greatly. The major happening, which he had striven so valiantly to avert, had come about through no fault of his; these minor issues were trivial and might be disregarded. In an earthquake the crumbling of a few bricks more or

less is a matter of small account. He knew that when Margu rite Ogilvey had almost forgotten the downfall of Walker she would remember its immediate cause the more poignantly.

"Hadn't we better go indoors till the weather is cooler?" he said, and the sound of his calm voice, no less than the smile he managed to summon in aid, relaxed the tension.

"Please, miss, shall I make a fresh pot of tea?" inquired Betty when the door was closed. There spoke the true Yorkshire breed. Let the heavens fall, but don't miss a meal.

"No," said Margu rite, holding her open hands pressed close to eyes and cheeks.

"Yes," said Armathwaite—"that is, if Miss Meg has not had her tea."

Betty nodded, and hastened into the drawing-room, where, it appeared, tea was awaiting Armathwaite's return when Walker arrived on the scene. She emerged, carrying a tea-pot, and went to the kitchen. Margu rite was now crying silently. When the man caught her arm, meaning to lead her gently into the drawing-room, she broke into a very tempest of weeping, just as a child yields to an abandonment of grief when most assured of sympathy and protection.

He took her to a chair, but did not attempt to pacify her. For one thing, he had a man's belief that a woman's hyper-sensitive nervous system may find benefit in what is known as "a good cry;" for another, he was not sorry to have a brief respite during which to collect and criticize his own ideas. He did not even try to conceal from himself the ugly fact that James Walker had put into one or two sentences of concentrated venom all that was known to him (Armathwaite) concerning the death in the house, and even a little more, because he had not learnt previously that Stephen Garth was buried at Bellerby. Nor did he permit himself to under-rate Margu rite's intelligence. Her heedless vivacity, and the occasional use of school-girl slang in her speech, were the mere externals of a thoughtful and well-stored mind. There was not the least chance that she would miss any phase of the tragedy which had puzzled and almost bewildered him by its vagueness and mystery. She would recall his own perplexed questions of the previous night. In all likelihood the Jacksons, mother and daughter, had said things which fuller knowledge would clothe with sinister significance. Walker's open-mouthed brutality had left nothing to the imagination. When Margu rite Ogilvey spoke, Armathwaite felt that he would be called on to deal with the most difficult problem he had ever tackled.

When Betty came with a replenished tea-pot she would have attempted to soothe the girl's convulsive sobbing had not Armathwaite intervened.

"Leave Miss Meg to me," he said. "She's going to stop crying in a minute, and vow that she looks a perfect fright, and must really go to her room and bathe her eyes. And I'm going to tell her that a handkerchief dipped in a teaspoonful of milk and dabbed on red eyes is more refreshing and healing than a bucketful of cold water. Then we'll have tea, and eke a stroll on the moor, and perchance Providence will send us a quiet hour in which to look at facts squarely in the face, whereupon some of us will know just where we are, and the world will not be quite so topsy-turvy as it appears at this moment."

Betty gathered that the "master's" harangue was not meant for her, and withdrew, whereupon Margu rite dropped her hands and lifted her swimming eyes to Armathwaite's grave and kindly face.

"Is that milk recipe of yours really intended for use?" she inquired, with a piteous attempt at a smile.

"The whole program has been carefully planned on the most up-to-date and utilitarian lines," he answered.

"Did you hurt Walker?" was her next rather unexpected question, while pouring some milk into a saucer.

"Yes."

"I'm glad."

"How many boxes of chocolates did he send you?"

"About half a dozen."

"Then I kicked him at least once for each box—gave good measure, too."

"It's horrid and un-Christian—still, I'm glad. Do you take sugar and cream?"

"Of course."

"Why of course? Some people don't."

"I'm an emphatic person in my likes and dislikes, so I talk that way."

"I don't know what I should have done if you were not here."

"You are too charitable. It is my being here that has caused all the worry."

"No, I cannot take that view. There are happenings in life which, at the hour, seem to be the outcome of mere chance, but one realizes later that they were inevitable as autumn after spring."

"What a libel on our English climate," he laughed. "Is there no summer, then? What about this present glorious revel of sunshine? Charles the Second, who never said a foolish thing and never did a wise one, remarked one day that, in his opinion, England possessed the best climate in the world, because no day was too hot or too cold to prevent a man from going out of doors. I've seen more of the world, geographically speaking, than his kingship, yet I agree with him."

"My father——" she began, but choked suddenly.

"Tell me this, Meg: how long is it since you last saw your father?" he demanded, well knowing the futility of any attempt to divert her mind from a topic which must surely occupy it to the exclusion of all else.

"Just a week ago," she faltered.

"Good! I need not insist, then, that our young friend in the red waistcoat is mistaken when he says that your father occupies a grave in Bellerby churchyard! Of course, I'm not pretending that you and I are not faced with a strange problem. With your permission, I propose that we solve it together. I'll keep nothing back. You, on your part, must answer such questions as I think necessary—unless, that is, you feel I am trespassing unduly into the private affairs of your family. I'm not well posted in the turns and twists of English country life, but I am quite certain of two things—first, the mystery attached to this house must be dissipated now, because the police authorities will insist on it; second, if they beat me, and you suffer, they'll have achieved something that no set of officials has succeeded in doing hitherto. Now, I want you to believe that, and to act in the assumption that God is in heaven, and all is well with the world."

The girl smiled through her tears, and strove gallantly to eat one of the cheesecakes for which Mrs. Jackson was renowned.

"Bob," she said, after a little while, "will you tell me why you came to Elmdale?"

"I wanted peace and solitude, plus some trout-fishing."

"Yet you speak of engaging in some terrible combat against the law on my

account."

"Aren't you rather jumping at conclusions? Circumstances have conspired to build a bogey. A ghost which all Elmdale has seen in the hall resolves itself, on inquiry, into a shadow cast by a stained-glass window. Certain murderous-sounding thumps which I heard last night materialize into a charming young lady. Why shouldn't a death which took place in this house two years since prove equally susceptible of a simple explanation? No, we're not going to convert ourselves into a committee of two until you have taken one more cup of tea, one more cake, or two slices of bread and butter. Then you'll put on a hat, and I'll light a pipe, and we'll climb up to the moor. On the way I'll impart every scrap of information I've gathered thus far, and, when you have considered the situation in such light as I am able to cast on it, you will decide whether or not you are justified in telling me something of your recent history. Is it a bargain?"

Armathwaite was only talking for the sake of keeping the girl's mind from brooding on the extraordinary facts thrust on her by Walker. He was sure she would treat a phenomenal set of affairs more rationally if she heard the story from his own lips. He would have liked, if possible, to have glanced over the report of the inquest in the newspaper promised by Betty, but decided that Marguérite Ogilvey must not be left to her own thoughts one instant longer than was absolutely necessary.

Examination of the newspaper was deferred, therefore. When the girl ran downstairs to join him she had tied some scrap of blue veil over her hat in such wise that her face was screened in profile, so, as they breasted the hill together, he could hardly judge of the effect of the curious story he had to relate. He omitted nothing, minimized no detail. From the moment of his entry into the office of Walker & Son, at Nuttonby, he gave a full and lucid narrative. Rather losing sight of his own altruism in his eagerness to show how essential it was that they should meet attack with the confidence engendered by being prepared for all possible developments, he was not aware of the wondering glances which Marguérite shot at him with increasing frequency.

At last, he made an end. They had walked a mile or more, he talking steadily and the girl listening, only interposing a word now and again to show that she followed what he was saying, when he saw a man seated by the roadside at a little distance. The road dipped sharply at this point. They had crossed the first of a series of undulations which formed the great plateau of the moor, and Elmdale and its pastures were completely hidden.

"Shall we turn back?" he said. "This fellow in front looks like a weary tourist, but I fancy you don't want to meet anyone just now, and I haven't noticed a branch path through the heather."

Marguérite was gazing curiously at the bent figure. Her eyes held the expression of one who sees something familiar while the other senses refuse to be convinced. Armathwaite, by reason of the veil, could not see that half-startled, wholly skeptical look, but her attitude was enough.

"Do you think you know that chap?" he said.

Perhaps, in that quiet moorland, his voice carried farther than he imagined. Be that as it may, the tired one raised his drooping head, and looked their way.

"Why, it is—it must be!" cried Marguérite excitedly, though no man could guess whether she was pleased or annoyed.

"There can be no doubt about it," agreed Armathwaite.

"But, don't you see, he's waving to us? It's Percy Whittaker! Has he dropped from the skies?"

"With a bump, I should guess," said Armathwaite.

But inwardly he raged. Were these complications never to cease? That dejected figure was eloquent of fate. Somehow, its worn and nerveless aspect was menacing.

Yet, he laughed, being one who flaunted fortune in that way.

"If it really is Percy, let's go and cheer him up," he said. "He looks as though he needed comforting."



CHAPTER VII

A FAINT-HEARTED ALLY

That moment was a vital one in the lives of those two; it influenced the lives of others in lesser degree, but to Margu rite Ogilvey and Robert Armathwaite it meant so much that the man, in calm review of events subsequently, saw that it stood out from minor incidents in exactly the same dominant proportion as James Walker's hurried descent on Mrs. Jackson's cottage on the preceding day.

Had Walker remained in the dog-cart, and shouted for the keys of the Grange, Mrs. Jackson would have contrived, by hook or by crook, to delay the examination of the house until Betty had smuggled "Miss Meg" into safety, in which case Armathwaite would never have met her. And, now, if the girl had quickened her pace—in eager delight, perhaps, breaking into a run—had she, either by voice or manner, shown that the unforeseen presence of Percy Whittaker on the moor was not only an extraordinary event in itself, but one which she hailed with unmitigated joy, Armathwaite would assuredly have stifled certain vague whisperings of imagination which, ere long, might exercise a disastrous influence on the theory he held in common with a well-known British general—namely, that empire-builders should not be married. But she stood stock still, and, without turning her head so that Armathwaite might see her face, said quietly:

"Well, it is the unexpected that happens, and the last person I dreamed of seeing to-day was Master Percy."

"Are you sure it *is* Whittaker?" inquired Armathwaite.

He put the question merely for the sake of saying something banal and commonplace. Not for an instant did he doubt the accuracy of Margu rite's clear brown eyes; but, oddly enough, the behavior of the dejected figure by the roadside lent reasonable cause for the implied doubt. Never did tired wayfarer look more weary or disconsolate. After that first glance, and a listless gesture, the stranger showed no other sign of recognition. To all seeming, he had reached the limit of his resources, physical and mental.

"Sure?" echoed the girl. "Of course, I'm sure. There's only one Percy, and it's

there now, beastly fagged after a long walk on a hot day in thin patent-leather shoes. Doesn't it remind you of a plucked weed drooping in the sunshine?"

She moved on, walking rapidly now, but a slight undertone of annoyance had crept into her voice, tinging her humor with sarcasm. Armathwaite said nothing. The sun-laved landscape glowed again after a few seconds of cold brilliance—a natural phenomenon all the more remarkable inasmuch as no cloud flecked the sky.

Thus, in silence, they neared the limp individuality huddled dejectedly on a strip of turf by the roadside. To Armathwaite's carefully suppressed amusement, he saw that the wanderer was indeed wearing thin, patent-leather shoes.

"Percy!" cried the girl.

Percy looked up again. He drew the fore-finger of his right hand around the back of his neck between collar and skin, as though his head required adjustment in this new position.

"Hallo, Meg!" he said, and the greeting was not only languid but bored.

"What in the world are you doing here?" she went on, halting in front of him.

"I dunno," he said. "I'm beastly fagged, I can tell you—"

Armathwaite smiled, but Margu rite laughed outright.

"There's nothing to grin at," came the querulous protest. "Once upon a time I labored under the impression that England was a civilized country, but now I find it's habitable only in parts, and this isn't one of the parts, not by a jolly long way. I say, Meg, you booked to Leyburn, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"But you never walked over this moor?"

"I did."

"Well, I wish I'd known as much about Yorkshire before I started as I do now—that's all."

Again he twisted his neck and freed it from the chafing contact of a tight collar. After a curious peep at Armathwaite, he bent a pair of gray-green eyes on the turf at his feet once more.

"Percy, don't be stupid, but tell me why you've come," cried Margu rite. "There's no bad news from home, is there?"

"No—that's all right. Edie sent me."

"Why?"

"You said you'd wire or write. When no telegram came yesterday, and no letter this morning, she bundled me off by the next train. 'Go and see what has become of her?' was the order, and here I am. Where am I, please?"

"Near Elmdale. I'm awfully sorry, Percy. I—I couldn't either telegraph or write yesterday. I've written to-day—"

"Near Elmdale!" he broke in. "Is it what the natives hereabouts call 'a canny bit away?'"

"No—only a little over a mile. Poor Percy!"

"Idiotic Percy! Percy, the silly ass! Percy, the blithering idiot! D'you see that suitcase?" and he swayed slightly, and directed a mournful glance at a small, leather portmanteau lying by his side. "I've sent that dashed thing, packed as it is now, by rail and parcels post scores of times, and they generally make it out as weighing about eleven pounds. That's a bally mistake. I must have swindled the railway companies and the Post Office out of a pot of money. It weighs a ton—one solid ton. And I've carried it dozens of miles. Me, mind you, who hates carrying things, clung to it as if my life depended on it. I started out from Leyburn station hours and hours ago. I asked a chap how far it was to Elmdale across the moor. He showed me the road, and said: 'It's a gay bit, maister.' I climbed a hill at least five miles high—higher than any mountain in Europe I can remember reading about—and met a man. 'Is this the way to Elmdale?' I inquired. 'Ay,' he said. 'How far?' said I. 'It's a nice bit, maister,' said he. Being, as I thought, on top of the hill, I imagined that all I had to do was to walk down the other side; so I left him and rambled on. After walking miles and miles I met another man. 'How far to Elmdale?' I said. 'It's a canny bit, maister,' was his contribution. That knocked me out. I left him without another word. I staggered more miles, till I got this far; but when I saw the next hill I gave in. Tell me the worst, Meg, before I lie down and die. How far is it to Elmdale, really?"

"Mr. Armathwaite will carry your suitcase, and I'll take your arm, and you'll be at the Grange in twenty minutes. It's all down hill after we leave this slight dip."

"Mr. Armathwaite?" inquired Percy dully, quite ignoring the other man's courteous smile at the implied introduction.

"Yes, the new tenant of our house."

"First I've heard of any new tenant."

"Nothing surprising in that," and Margu rite's voice grew almost snappy. "Get up, anyhow, unless you wish to have a mattress and a quilt brought here."

The young man rose. He was not affecting a weariness he did not feel. Being a weedy youth, not built for feats of athleticism, the long walk in a hot sun over difficult country had taxed his physique unduly.

"How d'ye do?" he said, raising lack-luster eyes to Armathwaite's.

"I'm fit as a fiddle," said Armathwaite cheerfully, grabbing the portmanteau. "So will you be to-morrow. In fact, you'll be surprised how quickly your muscles will lose their stiffness when you sight the journey's end."

"I've been doing that every five minutes during the past two hours," was the doleful answer.

Armathwaite nodded sympathetically. Percy Whittaker struck him as a flabby creature, whose conversational style was unintentionally funny. Like Falstaff, if not humorous in himself, he was "the cause of humor in others."

Truth to tell, Armathwaite gave him slight heed. He was mainly interested in Margu rite Ogilvey's attitude, and she was markedly irritated either by her friend's lackadaisical pose or because he had appeared at all. The girl softened, however, when she saw how Percy limped. She linked an arm in his, and the trio moved off.

"How often have I told you to wear strong boots with good, stout soles?" she said. "I'm a good walker myself, but I don't tackle these moor roads in house slippers. Isn't that so, Mr. Armathwaite? One ought to be properly shod for trudging about the country."

"You don't seem to understand that I hate trudging anywhere; the last thing I dreamed of when I left Chester this morning was that I should tramp half across Yorkshire," protested Whittaker.

"Even now, I don't see why you came."

"Couldn't help myself—Eddie's orders."

"But why?"

"Well—er—"

"If you mean that she knew I had gone away intending to wear a boy's clothes you needn't spare my feelings. Mr. Armathwaite knows all about that."

"Does he? In that case, I'm spared any explanation. You see, Eddie was naturally anxious. As for me, I hardly slept a wink last night through worrying about you. And then, a letter came for you this morning from your father. I recognized his handwriting, and it's marked 'Immediate.' Since there was no news from you, we were at a loss to decide on the best course to adopt. Now, I appeal to you, Mr. Armathwaite. Suppose—"

"I agree with you entirely," broke in Armathwaite. "I think Miss Ogilvey ought to be profoundly grateful for your self-sacrifice."

"There, Meg, do you hear that? Self-sacrifice! I'm literally skinned in your service, and you only pitch into me. Now, I've done most of the talking. It's your turn. When are you coming home?"

"To-morrow, perhaps."

"But, I say, Meg! There'll be a howling row with your people when they find out."

"Where is dad's letter? You've brought it, of course?"

"Yes. Eddie thought that was the best plan. Here you are!"

He produced a letter from a breast pocket, and sat down instantly when the girl murmured an apology and opened the envelope. Armathwaite refilled his pipe, and lit it. While doing so he became aware that Percy Whittaker was scrutinizing him with a curiously subtle underlook, and the notion was borne in on him that the newcomer, though effete in some respects, might be alert enough in others. For one thing, the tired gray-green eyes had suddenly become critical; for another, a weak mouth was balanced by a somewhat stubborn chin. For all his amusingly plaintive air, this young man could be vindictive if he chose. At any rate, Armathwaite realized that another barrier had been thrust in the way of Margu rite Ogilvey's untroubled departure from Elmdale. Percy Whittaker was

obviously an intimate friend, and the extraordinary crisis which had arisen in the Ogilvey household could hardly remain hidden from him. What use would he make of the knowledge? How would such a flabby youth act in circumstances which were utterly perplexing to a man ten years his senior in age and immeasurably more experienced? Armathwaite could not make up his mind. He must simply bide his time and act as he deemed expedient in conditions that varied so remarkably from hour to hour. At the moment, he was in the position of the master of a ship becalmed in the tropics, surrounded by an unvexed sea and a cloudless sky, yet warned by a sharp fall in the barometer that a typhoon was imminent.

His thoughts were interrupted by an exclamation from the girl.

"Just like dad!" she cried. "He writes asking me to search among the old bookshops of Chester for one of the very volumes I am bringing from his own library. He knows it is here, yet persists in disregarding the fact. Mr. Armathwaite, what *am* I to think? Isn't it enough to turn one's hair gray?"

"It is a puzzling situation, certainly," said Armathwaite, quickly alive to the fact that, in Whittaker's presence, at any rate, the cousinship had been dropped.

"What is?" demanded Whittaker. "Not much to make a fuss about in searching for a book, is there?"

"No. But suppose I tell you that people here declare my father is dead, that he committed suicide two years ago, that he is buried in a neighboring cemetery, that his ghost is seen o' nights in our own house—what would you say then, Percy?"

"I'd say that the inhabitants are well suited to their country, and the sooner you and I are away from both, the better for the pair of us."

Meg crumpled up the letter in one hand, and hauled Whittaker to his feet with the other.

"Come on," she said emphatically. "If you hear the whole story now you'll collapse. I'm glad you've arrived, though I thought at first you were adding to my worries. You can help in clearing up a mystery. Now, don't interrupt, but listen! I'm going to give you a plain, straightforward version of events which sound like the maddest sort of nonsense. You wouldn't believe a word I'm telling you if Mr. Armathwaite wasn't present. But he will vouch for every syllable, and, when I've

finished, you'll agree that when I said we would leave here, 'to-morrow, perhaps,' I might just as well have substituted 'next week' or 'next month' for 'to-morrow.' Isn't that so, Mr. Armathwaite?"

Armathwaite removed his pipe from between teeth that were biting savagely into its stem. He wished the girl had been more discreet, yet, how could he forbid these confidences?

"Yes, and no," he answered. "Yes, if you mean to constitute yourself into a court of inquiry; no, if you take my advice, and return to Chester with Mr. Whittaker without loss of time."

"How is that possible?" she insisted, turning wondering eyes on him. "You yourself said that nothing we can do now will stop the authorities from re-opening the whole affair. There is no hope of closing people's mouths, Bob! Well, I've said it, and now Percy will be wild to learn the facts, because Meg Ogilvey doesn't run around calling by their Christian names men whom she has known a day without very good reason. But you don't know our local folk if you think our affairs are not being talked of in Elmdale and Nuttonby at this moment. Bland saw me, and James Walker will spread the tale far and wide. What good will I do by running away? Don't imagine I didn't hear what Walker said. He blurted out what you have hinted at. Some man was found dead in our house. It wasn't my father. Then, who was it?"

In her excitement she was hurrying Percy along at a rare pace, and Armathwaite saw, with a chill of foreboding, that the other was stepping out without protest, all an ear for impending revelations.

"From that point of view, Mr. Whittaker's presence is unquestionably advantageous," he said. "He is a friend in whom you can trust. He is acquainted with your relatives, I take it. His opinions will consequently be far weightier than mine."

"That's the way Bob talks when he's grumpy," said the girl, apparently for Whittaker's benefit alone. "He doesn't mean it really, but he thinks he ought to behave like a stage uncle and prevent an impulsive young thing from acting foolishly. Yet, all the time, he knows quite well that we could no more change the course of events now than hold back the tide."

"Will you kindly remember that if you were talking Greek, I'd have just about as much grasp of what you're saying as I have at this moment?" put in Whittaker.

Thus recalled to her task, Margu rite did not deviate from it any further. By the time Percy Whittaker had dropped into a chair in the dining-room, he had heard exactly what had happened since Armathwaite arrived in Elmdale. As he was hungry, a meal was improvised. He said little, only interpolating a fairly shrewd question now and again while Margu rite was amplifying some part of her recital. About this time he developed a new trait. He seemed rather to shirk comments which would draw Armathwaite into the conversation. When the girl appealed to the latter to verify some statement of fact, Whittaker remained silent. Even when it was necessary to refer directly to Armathwaite, he did so obliquely.

"You've spun a jolly queer yarn, Meg," he said, after she had retailed, for the second time, and with evident gusto, the discomfiture of James Walker. "I think it would be a good notion now if we found out what really did occur in this house after you and your mother went away. Didn't you say there was a newspaper report of the inquest handy?"

"Betty Jackson promised to give it to Mr. Armathwaite."

"Well, couldn't we see it?"

"I'll go and ask her for it," said Armathwaite, and he left the room.

"Tell you what, Meg," drawled Percy, pouring out a third cup of tea, "you're making a howling mistake in letting that chap share your confidence."

Margu rite's eyebrows curved in astonishment. The very suddenness of this attack was disconcerting.

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"It's not always easy to give reasons for one's ideas. I was just thinking that he's a complete stranger, and here he is acting as though he was the head of the family. Who is he? Where does he come from? Why is he poking his nose into your private affairs? By gad, I can see Edie sniffing at him if she was here in my place!"

Some gleam of intuition warned the girl that she must repress the sharp retort on her lips.

"Then I am glad your sister is not here," she said quietly. "You must have woefully misunderstood every word I have uttered if you imagine that Mr. Armathwaite has done anything but strive manfully to keep a sordid story from

my ken. He tried to make me go away this morning, and again this afternoon. He would certainly send me off early to-morrow if he were not afraid of some terrible thing happening. Please don't begin by being prejudiced against Mr. Armathwaite. I have enough trouble staring me in the face to dispense with absurd suspicions of one who has been a very real friend."

Whittaker seemed to weigh the point. Marguérite's self-control probably angered him as greatly as any other of the amazing things which had come to his knowledge during the past hour. He had expected her to bridle in defense of the man in whom she reposed such trust; her very calmness was unexpected and annoying.

"What will your people say when the whole business comes out?" he grumbled. "Dash it, Meg, I must speak plainly! It's no joke, you know, your coming here and being alone in the house with some fellow whom you never heard of before in your life."

Her face paled, and her brown eyes had a glint of fire in them; but with a splendid effort, she managed again to frame words other than those eager to burst forth.

"You miss the real problem that calls for solution," she said tremulously. "The consequences of my actions, no matter how foolish they may have been, count for nothing in comparison with the tragedy with which my father's name is bound up. Oh, Percy, don't you see what people must think? A man committed suicide in this house, and every one believed it was my father. Yet you yourself, less than an hour ago, brought me a letter written by my father yesterday! Suppose I leave Elmdale this instant—suppose, which is impossible, that the present excitement dies down—how can I go through life with such a ghastly secret weighing me down? It would drive me crazy!"

Armathwaite's firm tread was audible as he crossed the hall.

"Anyhow, take my tip, and don't blurt out everything you know the minute you're asked," muttered her counselor, and the door opened.

Armathwaite drew a chair to the window and unfolded a frayed newspaper, laying another on his knees. To all appearance, he had noted neither the sullen discontent in one face nor the white anguish in the other.

"This is a copy of the *Nuttonby Gazette*, dated June 22nd, two years ago," he

said. "It contains what appears to be a verbatim report of the opening day's inquest, which seems to have created a rare stir, judging by the scare heads and space allotted to it. Will it distress you, Miss Ogilvey, if I go through it from beginning to end?"

"Yes, it will distress me very greatly, but I don't see how I can avoid hearing it. If one visits the dentist there is no use in pretending that having a tooth drawn doesn't hurt. Please read every word."

He obeyed without further preamble. It was a disagreeable task, but he did not flinch from it, though well aware that the gruesome details would shock one of his hearers inexpressibly. Divested of the loud-sounding phrases with which a country reporter loves to clothe any incident of a sensational character, the newspaper added nothing to the facts already related by Betty Jackson and Police-constable Leadbitter, except a letter written and signed by the deceased man, in which he declared he had taken his own life because he was suffering from an incurable disease. It was only when the succeeding issue of the *Nuttonby Gazette* was scanned, with its report of the adjourned inquest, that new light was vouchsafed.

The coroner was a Mr. Hill, a local solicitor; a Dr. Scaife, from Bellerby, who had conducted a post-mortem examination, had excited Mr. Hill's ire by his excessive caution in describing the cause of death.

"I found no symptoms of what is popularly known as 'incurable disease,'" said the doctor. "The brain, heart, liver, lungs, and internal organs generally were in a fairly healthy state except for ordinary post-mortem indications. Death by hanging is usually capable of clear diagnosis. There is excessive fluidity of the blood, with hyperæmia of the lungs. The right side of the heart is engorged, and the left nearly empty. The mucous membrane of the trachea is injected, and appears of a cinnabar-red color. The abdominal veins are congested, and apoplexy of the brain is present as a secondary symptom. Contrary to common belief, the eyes do not start from the head, and the tongue seldom protrudes beyond the teeth. Indeed, the expression of the face does not differ from that seen in other forms of death, and, in this connection, it must be remembered that death, the result of disease, may present all the signs of death by suffocation. The body showed few of these indices."

"Would you mind telling us what you are driving at, Dr. Scaife?" the coroner had asked. "Here is a man found hanging in his house, leaving a letter addressed to

me in which he states his intention beyond a doubt. Do you wish the jury to believe that his death may nevertheless have been a natural one?"

"No," was the reply. "I do not say that. But the absence of certain symptoms, and the presence of others, make it essential that I should state that Mr. Garth might just as well have died from apoplexy as from strangulation."

"Are we to understand that Mr. Garth may have died from apoplexy and afterwards hanged himself?"

"That would be nonsense," said Dr. Scaife.

"I agree, most emphatically. Do you refuse to certify as to the cause of death?"

"No. I am merely fulfilling a duty by pointing out what I regard as discrepancies in the post-mortem conditions. I looked for signs of organic disease. There was none."

Evidently, coroner and doctor were inclined to be testy with each other, and the newspaper report left the impression that Dr. Scaife was a hair-splitter. In the result, a verdict of "Suicide, while in a state of unsound mind," was returned.

There followed a description of the interment in Bellerby churchyard of "the mortal remains of Stephen Garth," when the vicar read a "modified form of the burial service," while the "continued absence from Elmdale of the dead man's wife and daughter," was referred to without other comment.

When Armathwaite laid aside the second newspaper, no one spoke for a minute or more. Percy Whittaker was seemingly interested in the effort of a fly to extract nutriment from a lump of sugar; Margu rite Ogilvey was staring at vacancy with wide-open, terror-laden eyes; Armathwaite himself appeared to be turning over the baffling problem in his mind.

At last, Whittaker stirred uneasily.

"What time does the post leave here, Meg?" he inquired. "I want to send Edie a line. She'll have a bad fit of the jumps if she hears from neither of us to-morrow."



CHAPTER VIII

WHEREIN PERCY WHITTAKER PROVES HIMSELF A MAN OF ACTION

The rather bizarre question startled the girl out of her melancholy thoughts. She looked at Whittaker as though she had completely forgotten his presence.

"The post," she repeated. "There is no post out of Elmdale this evening. Miggles passed through the village hours ago."

"Miggles?"

"He's the postman. We either see him ourselves or leave letters at Thompson's, the grocer's, before four o'clock."

"Then neither letter nor telegram can be dispatched to-night?"

"Yes. If you care to pay mileage to Bellerby, and the message is handed in before eight, Thompson will send a boy with a telegram."

Whittaker glanced at his watch. The hour was half-past six.

"How far is Bellerby?" he said. "Tell me in terms of the clock, not in miles, which, as a method of reckoning in Yorkshire, conveys a sense of infinity."

"A boy can bicycle there in half an hour."

"Then, footsore as I am, I shall hie me to Thompson's."

"Why not write your telegram here, and Betty will take it."

"No, thanks. I'll see to it myself. Then, if it doesn't reach Edie to-night, I can place a hand on my heart and vow I did all man could do, and failed."

"You are not forgetting that I have written to her?"

"No. Don't you see? A letter from you complicates matters even more. If she hears from Meg, and not a word is said about Percy, she'll wonder what has become of little me. I suppose Thompson's shop is not 'a nice bit' removed from

the village?"

"It is opposite the Fox and Hounds Inn. You can walk there in two minutes."

Armathwaite, who had risen, and was staring through the window during this brief colloquy, was struck by the quietly pertinacious note in Whittaker's voice. Moreover, he was listening carefully, since there was some faint trace of an accent which had a familiar sound in his ears. He waited, until the younger man had gone out and was walking gingerly down the garden path; progress downhill must have been a torture to sore toes, yet Whittaker was strangely determined to send that unnecessary telegram in person—unnecessary, that is, in view of the fact that a message dispatched next morning would have served the same purpose. Why? Armathwaite found that life bristled with interrogatives just then.

Turning to look at Margu rite, he said:

"Your friend doesn't like me."

She did not attempt to fence with him. Somehow, when her eyes met his, a new strength leaped in her heart.

"Percy flatters himself on the ease with which he follows the line of least resistance, but in reality he is a somewhat shallow and transparent person," she answered.

"There is a transparency of shallowness which occasionally hides a certain depth of mud."

"Oh, he means no harm! His widowed sister, Mrs. Suarez, is a great stickler for the conventions, and she has infected him with her notions. She is the 'Edie' he speaks of. My chum is a younger sister, Christabel."

"Suarez? An unusual name in England."

"She married a Calcutta merchant. The Whittakers are Anglo-Indians."

Armathwaite smiled. He knew now whence came that slightly sibilant accent. Whittaker was a blonde Eurasian, a species so rare that it was not surprising that even a close observer should have failed to detect the "touch of the tar-brush" at first sight. From that instant Armathwaite regarded him from an entirely new view-point. The Briton who has lived many years in the East holds firmly to the dogmatic principle that in the blend of two races the Eurasian is dowered with

the virtues of neither and the vices of both. More than ever did he regret the qualms of the conventional Mrs. Suarez which had brought Percy Whittaker to Elmdale that day.

"I'm sorry he deems it advisable to distrust me," he went on. "How long have you been acquainted with the family?"

"Ever since I went to school with Christabel at Brighton. She often came here during the summer holidays; and I used to visit her at Whitsuntide."

"They are aware of your change of name, of course?"

"Yes. How could it be otherwise?"

"A thoughtless question indeed. The notion was flitting through my mind that no one in Elmdale knew of it, or the fact was bound to have been made public at the inquest. The doctor who gave evidence—was he your regular medical attendant?"

"He was an intimate friend rather than a doctor. He knew dad so well that he would scout the idea of suicide. Perhaps that explains his hesitating statement to the coroner. Oh, Mr. Armathwaite, what does it all mean? Was ever girl plunged into such a sea of trouble? What *am* I to do?"

"Don't you think you ought to send for your mother?"

"If she were here now she could only say what I am saying—that my father is alive and in the best of health."

"Forgive me if I seem to be cross-examining you, but I am groping blindly towards some theory which shall satisfy two conditions wholly irreconcilable at present. Your mother and you went away from Elmdale, leaving your father here. Do you remember the exact reason given for your departure?"

"One day dad asked me to read some passages from a French treatise on Basque songs. It was rather technical stuff, and I stumbled over the translation, so he said I was losing my French, and that mother and I should go to Paris for a few weeks, and do a round of theaters. Of course, I was delighted—what girl wouldn't be? I couldn't pack quickly enough. When Paris emptied, towards the end of June, we went to Quimper, in Brittany. And there was another excuse, too. About that time we received news of the legacy, and dad thought we should get accustomed to the change of name more readily in a foreign country."

"How long did you remain abroad?"

"Nearly three months. But dad joined us within a fortnight of our departure from England. He only remained at home to finish a book and clear up the lawyer's business about the money."

"After your return, what happened?"

"We had a month in London. Then my people took a house in Cornwall, near the village of Warleggan, a place tucked in beneath the moors, just as Elmdale is. Dad explained that he wanted to study the miracle plays at first hand, because the remnants of the language possessed by the old inhabitants were more helpful than grammars and Oxford translations."

"Your mother raised no difficulties about the change of residence?"

"Not the least. In a way, it was rather agreeable, both to mother and me. Here we saw very few people. In Warleggan, where dad's pen-name, now his own legally, gave him some social standing, the county families called. We were richer, too, and could afford to entertain, which we never did while in Elmdale."

Armathwaite passed a hand over his mouth and chin in a gesture of sheer bewilderment.

"I still hold strongly to the opinion that you should send for Mrs. Ogilvey," he said, striving to cloak the motive underlying the suggestion, since he was assured now that the half-forgotten tragedy of the Grange would speedily burst into a new and sinister prominence in far-off Warleggan. "If she were here she could direct my efforts to choke off inquirers. We may be acting quite mistakenly. She knows everything—I am convinced of that—and her appearance would, in itself, serve to put matters on a more normal basis."

Margu rite sprang to her feet. Her fine eyes blazed with uncontrollable excitement, and her voice held a ring of defiance.

"If my mother ought to come, why not my father?" she cried vehemently. "I know what you are thinking, but dare not say. You believe my father is a murderer? Is that it? You imagine that a man who would not wilfully harm a fly is capable of committing a dreadful crime and shielding himself under the assumption that he took his own life?"

"Isn't that rather unjust of you?" said Armathwaite.

"I'm not considering the justice or injustice of my words now. I am defending one whom I love. I——"

She choked, and buried her face in her hands. Bitterly aware that he was only adding to her woes, he nerved himself for the ungracious task.

"You are trying, like myself, to explain a set of extraordinary circumstances," he said. "Woman-like, you do not scruple to place on my shoulders the burden of your own vague suspicions. I am not so greatly concerned as you seem to imagine because of the possibility that your father may have killed someone. Unhappily, I myself have killed several men, in fair fight, and in the service of my country, but there is no blood-guiltiness on my conscience. Before I venture to describe any man as a murderer, I want to know whom he killed, and why."

He made this amazing statement with the calm air of a sportsman contrasting the "bags" of rival grouse moors. Even in her bitter distress the girl was constrained to gaze at him in wonderment.

"You think that the taking of human life may be justifiable?" she gasped.

"Naturally. If not, why do we honor great soldiers with pensions and peerages?"

"But that is in warfare, when nations are struggling for what they conceive to be their rights."

"Sometimes. The hardest tussle I was ever engaged in dealt with no more sacred trust than the safe-guarding of half a dozen bullocks. Certain fierce-whiskered scoundrels swore by the Prophet that they would rieve those cattle, and perhaps a rifle or two, with a collection of women's ornaments as a side line, while I was equally resolved that the lawful possessors thereof should not be harried. Fifteen men died in five minutes before the matter was settled in accordance with my wishes, and I accounted for three of them. I am not boasting of the achievement. It was a disagreeable necessity. I tell you of it now merely to dissipate any notion you may have formed as to my squeamishness in looking unpleasant facts squarely in the face. A man died here two years ago, and it would be sheer folly to pretend that your father knew nothing about it. I believe you will find that the dead man not only wore Mr. Garth's clothes, but bore such a close facial and physical resemblance to him that people who had known him half a lifetime were deceived. Then, there is the letter read by the coroner. I take it for granted that it was in your father's handwriting. If these things are true, and common sense tells me that we ought to go on that assumption, and on no other, Mr. Garth

will surely be called upon to explain why he endeavored to hoodwink the authorities. If he comes here within the next few days he will certainly be arrested. That is why I ask you to send for your mother. Everything points to the belief that she knows why you left Elmdale. I reject the legacy theory *in toto*. By a strange coincidence, your parents may have had some money left to them by will about that time. If so, they merely took advantage of the fortunate chance which enabled them to explain the change of name without any violent wrenching of the probabilities. One word more to define my own position in this matter. I don't care tuppence whether or not your father killed anyone, or why. My sole concern is for you. I am responsible for the whole wretched muddle. Had I not gratified an impish taste for ferreting out mysteries, I would have allowed Betty Jackson to smuggle you out of the house yesterday. Had I obeyed the conventions—those shackles on the wayward-minded devised by generations of careful mammas—I would have bundled you off last night, or, if common charity forbade, sent you away at daybreak. Then, nothing would have happened, except that I should be burdened with a secret, no new thing in *my* life. Now, will you send for Mrs. Ogilvey?"

"No," came the instant reply.

"Despite Mr. Percy Whittaker's warning, will you trust me so far as to explain your reason for refusing?"

"What do you mean by 'Percy Whittaker's warning'? I have told you nothing of what he said."

"I understand the type of man. He could no more refrain from suggesting that I was actuated by some underhanded motive than a flea-ridden dog from scratching."

"Please, don't pick a quarrel with Percy on my account," she pleaded tearfully.

"On your account I shall suffer Percy, even though he bray me in a mortar."

"Well, then, I'm—I'm sorry if I turned on you a little while ago. I apologize. You are really the only one I can appeal to for help at this moment. It was just because I felt the truth of all that you have said that I tried to force the same confession from you. Heaven help me, I am compelled to believe that my poor father got himself involved in some dreadful crime. It will all come out now. If the police get hold of him he will be put in prison. I must save him. Never did daughter love a father more than I love mine, and I'll sacrifice everything,

reputation, happiness, even life itself, for his sake. And that is why my mother must not come here. I shall remain, and she will stay in Cornwall so as to safeguard him, if need be. You have no idea what an innocent he is in worldly affairs. If—if he had to escape—to get away from some foreign country—he could never manage it without her assistance. Don't you see, the decision must rest with me? I'll write to mother, and tell her what we know, and arrange some plan with her whereby dad will be able to avoid arrest. Oh, I can't make things clearer, but you are so kind and nice that you will understand—and help! Say you'll help, and I'll not cry any more—but be brave—and confident!"

While uttering that broken appeal she had come near, and a timid hand now rested on his shoulder. He looked down into her swimming eyes and saw there the perfect faith of a child. Never was man more tempted to take a woman in his arms and kiss away her fears than was Robert Armathwaite at that instant, but he recoiled from the notion as though a snake had reared its basilisk head from out of a bed of sweet-scented flowers. Nevertheless, he placed his hands on her shoulders, and now his left arm was entwined with her right arm, and they stood there in unconsciously lover-like pose.

"I'm glad you said that, little girl," he said quietly. "I shall not disappoint you, depend on that. If we have to break every statute therein made and provided, we'll save your father from the consequences of his own blundering or wrongdoing. Now, leave everything to me. If strangers, other than the police, ask you questions, refer them to your 'cousin.' Remember, you know nothing and can tell nothing as to bygone events, while you can say, if a demand is made for your father's present address, that I have advised you not to supply it. We must not appear to be actually defying the authorities. Our rôle is one of blank ignorance, combined with a pardonable curiosity to discover what all the fuss is about. I must not figure as a hindrance to inquiry, but merely as a distant relative who objects to your being bothered by a matter of which you, at least, have no knowledge. Now, one thing more—I want to see your father's handwriting. Will you give me the envelope which contained his letter?"

"Better still," said Marguérite, drying her eyes with a scrap of lace which was supposed to be a pocket-handkerchief, "I'll give you the letter itself. You'll find it a highly incriminating document."

To reach the letter, which she had tucked into a waistbelt, she had to withdraw the other hand from Armathwaite's shoulder. He had no excuse to hold her any longer in that protecting way, and his own hands fell. Suddenly, out of the corner

of his eye, he became aware that Percy Whittaker was gazing at them through the window.

His first impulse was to tell his companion of this covert espionage, for it was nothing less. The two were talking in the drawing-room, so Whittaker had purposely walked past the porch in order to look in at them. Then he decided that the girl had worries in plenty without embroiling her with one who was admittedly an admirer, so he indulged in a little bit of acting on his own account.

When she produced the letter, he turned his back on the window, ostensibly to obtain a better light, and, at the same time, drew slightly to one side. The handwriting was scholarly but curiously legible, betraying the habit of a dabbler in strange words who printed rather than wrote, lest some playful compositor should invent a new and confounding philology.

The text certainly afforded a weird commentary on the circumstances which laid at the writer's door responsibility for an audacious crime. It ran:

"MY DARLING MEG,—Chester has been a bookish city since the days of Julius Cæsar. I have small doubt, if one dug deep in its foundations, one would come across an original manuscript in J. C.'s own fist. I would impose a lighter task, however. Rummage one or two old bookshops, and get me Wentworth Webster's 'Basque Legends,' published in London in 1877 and 1879. I am hungering for it. Find it quickly, and come home. I need your sharp eyes.—Yours ever,

"Dad."

Marguélite watched Armathwaite's face while he read.

"Enough to hang anybody, isn't it?" she cried, with dolorous effort to speak in lighter vein.

"May I retain this? I shall take good care of it."

"Keep it as a souvenir. The identical book is lying on the library table."

Yet her mobile face clouded again, since it could not be denied that her father knew well that the book was in the Elmdale house, and was deliberately ignoring its existence there.

Armathwaite affected to look through the window.

"Hullo!" he said. "Whittaker has come back."

Whittaker, standing sideways, seemingly discovered them simultaneously. He came in.

"Thompson speaks a language of his own," he drawled; "but the dispatch of a boy on a bicycle, and the resultant charge of three shillings, gave color to my belief that he understood the meaning of 'telegram.' Otherwise, his remarks were gibberish."

"Percy," said Margu rite gravely, "Mr. Armathwaite and I have had a serious talk while you were out. He advised me to send for my mother, but, for various reasons, I have decided to fight this battle myself, with your aid, and Mr. Armathwaite's, of course."

Whittaker hesitated perceptibly before he spoke again. Like all neurotics, he had to flog himself into decision.

"I fully expected something of the sort, Meg," he said at last. "As I don't approve of the present state of affairs, I took it on myself to ask Edie to wire Mrs. Ogilvey, bidding her travel north by the next train."

"You didn't dare!" breathed the girl, whose very lips whitened with consternation.

"Oh, yes, I dared all right! A fellow must assert himself occasionally, you know. I can see plainly that you intend remaining in Elmdale till the mystery you have tumbled into is cleared up. In that case, your mother is the right person to take hold of the situation. You'll be vexed with me, no doubt, and tell me that I had no business to interfere, but I've thought this thing out, and I'm backing my judgment against yours. In a week, or less, you'll thank me. See if you don't."

"I shall never forgive you while I have breath in my body," she said, speaking with a slow laboriousness that revealed the tension of her feelings far more than the mere words.

"I was sure you'd say that, and must put up with it for the time being. Anyhow, the thing is beyond our control now, and you know Edie well enough to guess that she'll do as I tell her."

"What did you tell her? I have a right to ask."

"I kept a copy of the message," he said with seeming nonchalance. "I'll read it: 'Meg greatly disturbed by rumors concerning death which occurred in Grange two years ago. Telegraph her mother at once, and recommend immediate journey to Elmdale.' Unless I'm greatly mistaken, that will bring Mrs. Ogilvey here without delay, especially when Edie adds her own comments."

Margu rite sank into a chair. Her sky had fallen. She was too unnerved now to find relief even in tears. She continued to glower at Whittaker as though he had become some fearsome and abhorrent object. Evidently, however, he had steeled himself against some such attitude on her part.

"Don't forget there's two to one in this argument, Meg," he said, sitting down and producing a cigarette. "Since Mr. Armathwaite has elected to be your champion after a very brief acquaintance, I must point out that, by your own admission, he recommended the same thing. The only difference is that while he talked I acted."

For a little time there was silence. Whittaker, brazening the thing out, lighted the cigarette. Armathwaite, unable to indulge the impulse which suggested the one effective way in which this decadent half-breed could be restrained from future interference, could not trust himself to speak. As for the girl, she seemed to be tongue-tied, but her laboring breath gave eloquent testimony of surcharged emotions.

Finally, wishing to ease the strain, Armathwaite glanced at his watch. The time was a few minutes after seven.

"I'm going into the village," he said. "I believe the dinner hour is 7:30, but I may not return till much later, so you might kindly tell Betty that I shall forage for myself when I come in."

"Don't leave me, Bob," came the despairing cry. "I can't bear to be left alone to-night."

"Very well," he said, yielding instantly to that heart-felt appeal. "I'll entrust my business to a deputy. Look for me in ten minutes."

He went out. The two in the room heard the front door close, and followed his firm tread as he strode to the gate. Then Marguérite rose, and flung wide a window, and her sorrow-laden eyes dwelt unseeing on the far horizon. She stood there, motionless, until Whittaker stirred fretfully.

"Look here, Meg," he began, but was promptly stricken into silence again. Starting at the sound of his voice as though she had heard a serpent's hiss, the girl hurried away without a word, obviously making for the solitude of her own apartment.

He lighted another cigarette.

"By gad!" he cackled to himself, apparently extracting amusement from a situation in which the majority of men would have found small cause for humor, "I've stopped those two from billing and cooing, or my name ain't Percy. I can't stomach that big chap, and that's a fact. He's just the sort of fellow a girl might lose her head over, but I've put a spoke in his wheel by bringing ma on the scene. Now I must sit tight, and play naughty little boy in the corner till she arrives. After that, I'll make it my business to shunt pa into some climate better suited for his particular complaint. Maybe I shan't figure so badly in Meg's estimation when she realizes that I did some hard thinking while the other johnny was

making eyes at her. I've been looking for some sort of an explosion in this quarter ever since I read of the suicide of Stephen Garth at the Grange, Elmdale. I thought then there was something fishy going on, and I was jolly well not mistaken. If I hadn't been such a dashed fool as to tramp over that confounded moor I'd have been here hours sooner. But all's well that ends well, and this affair shan't slip out of my grip if I can help it."

He had chosen a strange way in which to woo a maid, but there is no accounting for the vagaries of a warped mind, and Percy Whittaker was a true degenerate, one of those physically weak and mentally perverted beings

"In whose cold blood no spark of honor bides."

Yet, even his sluggish pulses could be stirred. The house which had witnessed strange scenes played by stronger actors might be trusted to deal sternly with this popinjay. He got his first taste of its quality before he was an hour older.



CHAPTER IX

SHOWING THE REAL STRENGTH OF AN ILLUSION

Armathwaite went straight to Farmer Burt's house. He reasoned that Burt would be a likely possessor of a smart cob, and that among the farm hands would exist at least one boy of sufficient intelligence to carry through a simple commission without error. He was lucky in finding the farmer at home, watering his stock before completing the hay-making operations. In the bleak North the agriculturist wastes no time when the weather is propitious. If need be, Burt and his men would work till nearly midnight, and feel well pleased if thereby the last rick of dry, sweet-smelling hay was covered with a tarpaulin.

Explanation, backed by ample payment, produced both the boy and the cob. In the result, the following telegram was handed in at Bellerby post-office ten minutes before the closing hour of eight:

"Postmaster, York,—Kindly give this telegram and accompanying ten pounds to proprietor of principal garage in York. I want to hire powerful and reliable car with experienced chauffeur for one week at least. Will pay full rates on condition that car reaches me by noon to-morrow, Friday. Chauffeur should bring ample supply of petrol, as none available here. I send ten pounds as guarantee for order, and will remit balance of first week's charge in accordance with instructions conveyed by chauffeur. Owner of car will oblige by telegraphing acceptance of offer, with name and address, early to-morrow, paying portorage, which will be refunded.
—ARMATHWAITE, The Grange, Elmdale, viâ Bellerby."

It was a singular fact that the really effective means of burking inquiry by the local authorities only occurred to Armathwaite's perplexed brain as he was hurrying back to the Grange. When all was said and done, who in Elmdale actually knew that the erstwhile Stephen Garth was living? His daughter and Percy Whittaker! He, Armathwaite, could not even be certain that Whittaker had ever seen the man. Well, then, Marguérite had only to vow that her earlier statement was a sheer invention, a species of joke inspired by the worst possible taste—and Stephen Garth would rest quietly in his grave! The pretense left the

mystery insoluble as ever where the girl herself was concerned, but that phase of the difficulty might be dealt with in the privacy of her own home. The chief draw-back—an official inquiry, with its far-reaching developments—would be surmounted. The Jacksons might be trusted to forget everything they had heard that day. There remained James Walker. Well, his evidence was discredited at the outset. Armathwaite himself would be a most convincing witness against Walker. It would be easy to show that the pushful and amorous youth who had bluffed his way into the house in order to insult a lady who would have nothing to do with him, and was forcibly ejected by the new tenant, had fallen into a singular and most amazing blunder when he said that Margu rite Garth had told him that her father was still alive.

The more Armathwaite reviewed this possible way out of a really threatening situation the more he liked it. The surprising thing was that he had not thought of it sooner. Even Percy Whittaker's confounded impertinence in telegraphing to his sister was robbed of its sting. Suppose the police got wind of the message, they would make little of it. How did it run? "Meg greatly disturbed by rumors concerning death which occurred in Grange two years ago." It was awkwardly phrased, perhaps, but was capable of explanation. She was "disturbed" by the "rumors." What rumors? Not that her father was not dead, but that some other man had died and been buried in his place! Who had spread the rumors? Why, Walker himself! Had he not jeered at Margu rite, and endeavored to palliate his offense by repeating the absurd tittle-tattle to the man who had kicked him out of the house? Thin ice, this; but it might bear if not pressed unduly. By rare luck Whittaker had asked his sister to communicate with the girl's mother. There was no reference to her father. In effect, a friend of long standing had recognized the fact that she had only one parent left.

Armathwaite was bothered by no scruples in this matter. He had promised Margu rite Ogilvey his help in her efforts to safeguard the father whom she held so dear, and he would fulfill his bond to the letter. Personally, he ran no risk. His acquaintance with Elmdale and its strange tragedy was only a day old. As for Margu rite herself, no jury in the land would punish a daughter who lied to protect her own father. There remained Percy Whittaker. What crooked line would that curiously-constituted youth take? He could be bribed into acquiescence; but what terms would he exact? Armathwaite felt a certain tightening of his lips when he answered his own question. At any rate, the vitally important thing now was to gain time, and he was confident that a bold front would carry a most attractive and winsome girl past the dangers of the morrow.

Oddly enough, as he neared the Grange, the old house itself seemed to smile at him in a friendly and encouraging way. The setting sun lent warmth to its gray walls and glinted cheerfully from its windows. One pane of glass in particular—probably because it had a slightly convex surface—a pane in one of the windows of Meg's bedroom, winked continuously as his body swayed with each onward stride. It might have been saying:

"Leave it to me! Leave it to me! I've watched ten generations of men and women passing beneath, and I know how gently Time deals with humanity's sorrows."

The idea so obsessed him that he loitered inside the gate, and glanced up to see if, by any chance, Margu rite might be in the room and have noticed his approach. Yes, she was there! She threw open the window, which, in view of what happened within the next half-minute, moved upward with a noiseless ease that was absolutely uncanny.

"Dinner is just coming in," she said. "Betty has put some hot water in your bedroom, the one opposite this, and you must hurry over your toilet."

"I also have good news," he answered gayly. "I've hit on a plan that should rout the enemy."

"Which enemy?" she asked in a lower tone.

"The powers that be," and he waved a comprehensive arm to indicate the world at large. "By putting back the clock twenty-four hours we defeat every sort of combination that can take the field against us. I'll propound the scheme at dinner, so prepare to feast with a light heart."

With expressive pantomime she inquired if Percy Whittaker was to share their council, and he replied with a nod. He was loth to deprive his eyes of the perfect picture she offered there, with her elbows resting on the window-sill, her head and shoulders set, as it were, in a frame, and the last rays of the sun brightening her pallid cheeks and weaving strands of spun gold in her brown hair. But the summons from the kitchen was not to be flouted, so he made for the door.

It will be remembered that the hall was lighted directly from the upper part of the front door, and the stained-glass window on the half-landing of the stairs. Indirectly, its gloom could be dissipated by any one of three interior doors, but all of them happened to be closed. Thus, when Armathwaite's tall figure appeared in the porch, it effectually withdrew the light gained through the glass

in the front door until the door itself was opened.

He had his hand on the handle when he heard a most weird groaning and shrieking caused by the closing of the bedroom window. Practically in the same instant he caught an affrighted yell from inside the house, and some one shot violently down the stairs and into the hall, falling in a huddled heap on the floor. Armathwaite had the door open in a second, and found Percy Whittaker lying at the foot of the stairs, while Margu rite's voice came in a cry of alarm:

"What is it? What has happened? Percy, is that you?"

By that time Armathwaite had partly raised the fallen man, who did not seem to have an atom of breath left in his body. Mrs. Jackson, too, came from the kitchen with a lamp, and Margu rite appeared on the stairs.

"What's the matter?" she cried again. "Did Percy fall? Is he hurt?"

"I imagine he missed his footing on the stairs," said Armathwaite coolly. "At any rate, he struck the floor with such a thump that he is winded.... Now, old chap, pull yourself together! Can't you stand? Shall I carry you to a chair?"

In a dazed way Whittaker endeavored to stand upright. At once he uttered a croak of agony, and would have collapsed once more if Armathwaite were not supporting him.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the other, "I'm afraid he is more damaged than I thought. Show a light here, Mrs. Jackson. Now, go ahead, and open the door of Mr. Whittaker's room if it is closed. I'll take him there, and find out the extent of the mischief."

Even in the confusion of the moment Armathwaite noticed that Percy was gazing at the wall near the clock with the distended eyes of fear. Mrs. Jackson saw it, too, and with the outspokenness of her class, did not hesitate to put her thought into words.

"Eh, my, but t' poor young man'll hae seen t' ghost," she cried.

"I—I saw some spook," muttered Whittaker weakly. "Where is it? What was it? I'm sure I saw something."

"Go upstairs," Armathwaite commanded Mrs. Jackson angrily. "Or, better still, hand the lamp to Miss Meg, and stop talking nonsense."

Quickly he had Whittaker stretched on a bed, and soon ascertained that the trouble, whatever it might be, lay in the right ankle. The sufferer had taken off the patent-leather boots, and was wearing felt slippers, so examination of his injury was no difficult matter. Armathwaite, evidently no novice in such emergencies, shook his head when Whittaker flinched or cried aloud in pain if a tendon was touched or an effort made to twist the foot slightly.

"Put that lamp down," he said to Mrs. Jackson, "and bring me a basin of cold water. You, Meg," he went on, "might tear a sheet, or any piece of strong linen, into strips about three inches wide. Be as quick as you can, please! Every minute saved now may mean a week afterwards."

"What's gone wrong?" whispered Whittaker, when the women had flown. "Is it a smash?"

"No, thank goodness! You'd not get over a broken ankle in a hurry. But you've collected a very nasty sprain, and possibly lacerated some ligaments as well. Fortunately, I know what to do before the joint has time to swell. How in the world did you contrive to pitch downstairs? The steps are broad, and the grade less than the average."

"I—I didn't fall. That is, I mean I didn't trip or stumble over anything. I saw that thing—the ghost—and simply crumpled up. I think I must have nearly fainted."

"But, my dear fellow, what you took for a ghost was merely the reflection of a painted figure in a stained-glass window."

"It was more than that. I'm not quite a fool. I never saw anything so ghastly in my life. Didn't you say that the man was found hanging in the hall near the clock? Well, I saw him, I tell you. I had turned the corner of the stairs when suddenly the beastly thing loomed up right in front of my eyes. Then it groaned most horribly. I couldn't be mistaken. I was thinking of nothing of the sort. In fact, I was wondering whether Meg would take a sensible view of things, and agree that I did right in getting Edie to send for her mater. Then that cursed vision appeared. If I didn't see it I'm going dotty. Why, I felt my hair rising, and I dropped as though I'd been shot."

"Of course, I can't convince you now," said Armathwaite, "but when you are able to get about again I'll show you just what happened."

"Get about again? You don't mean to say I'm crocked for any length of time?"

"For a day or two, at least," came the diplomatic assurance. "As soon as I've tied a rough bandage we'll send for a doctor, and he will be able to give you a definite opinion."

Whittaker groaned, and his eyelids closed wearily over the gray-green eyes.

"Oh, d——n this house!" he muttered. "It's bewitched! Why the devil did I ever come here?"

Armathwaite bound the injured limb tightly, and enjoined on Whittaker the necessity of remaining prone till a doctor arrived. There was little call for any such insistence. The unfortunate Percy was suffering enough pain already without adding to it by movement. He was persuaded to drink some milk, but the mere raising of his head to put a glass to his lips caused exquisite torture. Then Armathwaite left him, meaning to appeal to Farmer Burt for further assistance. Dinner was not to be thought of until a messenger was sent to Dr. Scaife, at Bellerby, and Meg and Mrs. Jackson remained with Whittaker in the meantime.

While descending the stairs, Armathwaite gave special heed to the shadow cast by the window. It was dimly visible, but it seemed almost unbelievable that any person of ordinary intelligence could mistake it for a ghostly manifestation. Suddenly a thought struck him, and he summoned Betty Jackson.

"Would you mind walking to the front door and standing close to it, so as to block the light which enters through the upper portion?" he said when she came.

Wondering what he was driving at, she obeyed. Then the true cause of Whittaker's fright was revealed. The natural light through the plain glass of the door nearly overcame the weaker rays which filtered through the colored panes, but, as soon as the doorway was blocked, the figure of the Black Prince leaped into a prominence that was almost astounding, even to one who looked for some such development. The artist who had fashioned the window had followed the canons of medieval art. The armored knight, whose face gleamed palely through a raised visor, was poised as though standing on tip-toe, and a rib of the window rose straightly above his head. Thus, the reflection on the wall bore a most striking resemblance to a man hanging from the hook in the china shelf, while the sinister shadow deepened markedly when light was excluded from the only other source. The discovery of this simple fact not only explained the apparition which had sent Percy Whittaker headlong down the stairs, but also showed why gaping rustics could terrify themselves at will. The closer they peered the more visible became the "ghost." Even Betty understood what was happening, though

she had not heard the orchestral effect of the complaining window-sash.

"Mercy on us!" she whispered in a scared way. "Who'd ever ha' thought of the like of that? You must have bin comin' in, sir, the very minnit the poor young gentleman put foot on the second flight o' steps, an' that thing just lepped at him."

"Between us, at any rate, we have laid the ghost, Betty," said Armathwaite. "If Mr. Whittaker complains of increased pain while I am out, tell your mother or Miss Meg to pour cold water over the bandage. That will give him relief. Perhaps, later, warm fomentations may be required, but he is all right now till the doctor sees him."

As he walked a second time to Burt's farm-house, his mind dwelt on the singular coincidence that produced the shadow on the wall about the very anniversary of the suicide—or murder—which had vexed the peace of Elmdale two years ago. To one who was wont to relieve the long nights of duty in an Indian frontier station by a good deal of varied scientific reading, the mystery of the vision in the Grange was dissipated as soon as it was understood. Its occurrence was possible only during a few evenings before and after the summer solstice, when the sun had traveled farthest north in the northern hemisphere. Its duration was limited to ten minutes at the utmost, because the sun sinks rapidly when nearing the horizon, and the specter's visits were further curtailed by clouds, since strong sunlight and a clear sky were indispensable conditions to its appearance.

But, without posing as an authority on stained glass, Armathwaite was convinced that the window which had produced this disturbing phenomenon was not modern. The elder Walker had spoken of the Grange as a "seventeenth-century dwelling," and there was every likelihood that the painted effigy of the hero of Crecy had been installed by the original builder, who might have cherished the belief that he was a descendant of the gallant Edward and the Fair Maid of Kent.

If that was so, the "ghost" has existed, not two Junes, but nearer three hundred, and must have been observed and commented upon countless times. It was odd that Marguérite Ogilvey had not mentioned the fact specifically. It was still more odd that a man should have been found hanged in that exact spot. Somehow, Armathwaite thrilled with a sense of discovery when that phase of the problem dawned on him. He was still turning it over in his thoughts when he reached Burt's farm.

Here he was again fortunate. Some chance had kept the farmer at home, and, although the latter had neither man nor horse to spare for a second journey to Bellerby, he dispatched a messenger to a laborer in the village who owned a bicycle, and was always ready to ride the six miles for half a crown.

Armathwaite, of course, had told Burt of the accident, and the farmer shook his head sapiently when he heard its cause.

"Ay!" he said. "If I owned yon place I'd rive that window out by t' roots. It's done a fair share of mischief in its time—it has, an' all!"

"Do you mean that it has been responsible for other mishaps?" was the natural query.

"Yes, sir; three in my time, an' I'm the right side o' sixty yet."

"What were they?"

"I don't remember t' first, because I was nobbut a little 'un, but I've heerd my faither tell on 't. Some folk o' t' neäm o' Faulkner lived there then, an' one o' their gells, who'd married a man called Ogilvey, I think, kem yam (came home) to have her first bairn where her mother could look after her. This Mrs. Ogilvey must h' known t' hoos an' its ways well enough, but yon spook gev her a bad start one evenin', for all that, an' her bairn was born afore time, and she nearly lost her life."

"Are you sure the name was Ogilvey?" broke in Armathwaite.

"Oh, ay! I mind it well, because I've got a dictionary in t' hoose by a man o't same neäm."

"What became of this Mrs. Ogilvey?"

"By gum, she cleared off as soon as she and t' youngster could get into a carriage, an' never showed her nose i' Elmdale again. Owd Faulkner took te drink in his last years, an' had a notion that he and the Black Prince could finish a bottle of wine together. One night he was suppin' his share as usual on t' stairs, an' he fell backwards over, an' bruk his neck. Then there was poor Mr. Garth's case, which ye'll hae heerd aboot, mebbe?"

"Yes, I've heard of it," said Armathwaite. "How did Mr. Garth come into the property?"

"I don't rightly ken, but folk said it was through yan (one) o' Faulkner's married daughters. Gosh! He might ha' bin yon bairn. But, no! his neäm 'ud be Ogilvey then."

"Were you ever told why the window should be erected in memory of the Black Prince?"

"Ay; the story is that the man who dug the first sod out o' the foundations broke ground on the fifteenth o' June, an' some larned owd codger said the fifteenth was t' Black Prince's birthday."

"It seems to be rather a slight excuse for such an elaborate window."

Burt looked around cautiously, lest he should be overheard.

"There was queer folk livin' when that hoos was built," he muttered. "Happen there's more 'n one sort o' Black Prince. I'm thinking meself that mebbe some rascal of a pirate had Owd Nick in his mind when he planned yon article."

Armathwaite laughed. He was aware that a belief in witchcraft still lingered in these remote Yorkshire dales, but he was not prepared to find traces of devil-worship so far afield.

"It's a very interesting matter," he said, "and, when I've got the invalid off my hands, I'll inquire further into the historical side of it. You see, the style of coloring and craftsmanship should enable an expert to date the window within very few years of its actual period. Ah, here's your man! I hope he found the bicyclist at home?"

Assurance on that head was soon forthcoming. Armathwaite returned to the Grange, and, while going to Whittaker's room, he glanced curiously at the wall near the clock. Though a sufficiency of light still came through the window, and the mellow colors in a vignette border were surprisingly bright, there was not the slightest semblance of an apparition in the hall.

But, such was the force of suggestion, after Burt's hint at bygone practice of the black arts within those ancient walls, he found now that the face framed in the open visor was cadaverous in the extreme, and had a sinister and repellent aspect.

Cynic though he was in some respects, as he mounted the creaking stairs, he wondered.



CHAPTER X

ARMATHWAITE STATES A CASE

After endeavoring, with no marked success, to console a fretful invalid with promises of alleviation of his sufferings by a skilled hand—promises made with the best of intent, though doomed to disappointment, because the immediate use of a tight bandage was precisely the treatment which any doctor would have recommended—Armathwaite joined Marguérite in a belated meal.

The spirit of an infuriated cook must have raged in Mrs. Jackson's breast when she bade Betty "tell 'em to mak' the best of it, because everything is spiled." Nevertheless, they dined well, since Yorkshire love of good fare would not permit a real *débâcle* among the eatables.

Marguérite was utterly downcast when Armathwaite informed her that Percy Whittaker would be lucky if he could trust his weight on the injured ankle within the next month.

"What a load of misfortune I carried with me yesterday over the moor!" she cried bitterly. "Yet, how could I foresee that an interfering woman like Edith Suarez would send Percy hotfoot in pursuit?"

"I have formed a hazy idea of Mrs. Suarez from various remarks dropped by her brother and you," said Armathwaite. "If it is correct in the least particular, I am surprised that she ever let you leave Chester on such an errand."

"She didn't. I came away without her knowledge!"

"Ah!"

"You needn't say 'Ah!' in that disapproving way. Why shouldn't I visit Elmdale and this house if I wanted to?"

"You have quite failed to understand my exclamation. It was an involuntary tribute to my own powers."

"If you mean that Edith is a cat, I agree with you. When she hears that Percy has fallen downstairs and lamed himself, she won't believe a word of it. Before we

know where we are she will be here herself."

"We have five bedrooms. The house will then be full," he said placidly.

"Five? Oh! you include my mother in your reckoning. Bob, don't you think I ought to telegraph early in the morning and tell her not to come?"

"No. If you adopt the scheme I have evolved for the routing of all Walkers and the like, the arrival of your mother will be the one thing requisite to insure its complete triumph."

Then he laid bare his project. Stephen Garth was dead and buried. Let him remain so. Mrs. Ogilvey herself would be the first to approve of any fair means which would save her husband from the probing and prying of the police. There was always the probability that he was innocent of any crime. Even if, from the common-sense point of view, they must assume that he knew of the ghastly secret which the house could reveal sooner or later, it did not necessarily follow that such cognizance was a guilty one. Thus did Armathwaite juggle with words, until his hearer was convinced that he could secure her a respite from the tribulations of the morrow, at least, though the graver problem would remain to vex the future.

They were yet talking earnestly when the iron hasp of the gate clicked in its socket.

"Dr. Scaife!" cried Margu rite, rising hurriedly. Then she bethought herself. "I suppose it doesn't really matter now who sees me," she added, "and I should so much like to meet him. He is one of our oldest friends in Yorkshire."

"Meet him, by all means; but don't forget your new r le. In fact, it would be well if you rehearsed it at once. The doctor will be a valuable factor in the undoing of Walker."

The bell rang. Armathwaite himself went to the door. A slightly-built, elderly man, wearing a bowler hat and an overcoat, was standing there. In the lane beyond the gate gleamed the lamps of a dog-cart, and a groom was holding the horse's head.

"I'm Doctor Scaife," announced the newcomer. "I'm told you have had an accident of some sort here!"

"Yes," said Armathwaite. "Come in, doctor! You've probably heard my name—"

Armathwaite. I've just rented this place for the summer, and a young friend of mine, who arrived unexpectedly to-day, had the ill-luck to slip on the stairs and sprain his ankle. I've done what I could by way of first-aid. I hope you received my message correctly?"

"About the india-rubber bandage, do you mean? Yes, I've brought one. Lucky your man caught me. I was just starting for another village; but I can make the call on my way home. Where is the patient?"

At that minute the doctor set eyes on Margu rite, who had come to the door of the dining-room. Her face was in shadow, because the lamp on the table was directly behind her.

"Well, Uncle Ferdie, you dear old thing—don't you know me?" she cried.

Dr. Scaife was not a man of demonstrative habit; but, for once in his life, he literally gasped with surprise.

"Meg!" he stammered. "My own little Meg!"

He grasped her hands in both of his. A dozen questions were hovering on his lips, yet all he could find to say was:

"Is Mrs. Garth here, too?"

"No; mother comes to-morrow, or next day at latest."

"You intend remaining, I hope?"

"Well, our movements are rather erratic, but we shall have several opportunities of meeting you before we go."

Betty appeared, carrying a lamp, which she set on a bracket at the corner of the stairs. Scaife, still holding Meg's hand, drew her to the light.

"Come here!" he said. "Let me have a good look at you. Prettier than ever, 'pon me soul! And how is your dear mother? Where have you buried yourself all this time? How long is it? Two years! Never a line to a forlorn uncle, even at Christmas! I shan't forgive you to-morrow, but I'm so pleased to see you to-night that at present I'll forget your neglect."

"Uncle Ferdie, it was not my fault. Mother couldn't bear me to mention Elmdale or any of its associations."

"Ah, of course! of course! But time is the great healer. I'll pray for continued fine weather, so that her beloved moor may smile on her arrival. Well, well! I feel as though I had seen—er—seen a fairy. Mind you don't vanish before I come downstairs. I'm ready now, Mr. Armathwaite."

The worthy doctor had nearly blundered, but he had executed what Americans call a "side-step" neatly enough. Armathwaite smiled at the girl. She had passed this initial test with honors. A couple more such experiences, and James Walker would be flouted as a mischievous fool if he talked of Stephen Garth being alive.

As he piloted the doctor upstairs, Armathwaite glanced at the window of ill-omen. The light of the lamp had conquered the external gloaming. The leaded divisions of colored glass were apparently of one uniform tint. Even the somber figure in black armor had lost its predominance.

Whittaker, who was lying on his back, tried to turn when the two men entered his bedroom. He groaned, and said querulously:

"Couldn't you have got here sooner, doctor? I'm suffering the worst sort of agony. This confounded ankle of mine must have been tied up all wrong."

"We'll soon put that right," said Scaife, with professional cheerfulness. "Will you hold the lamp, Mr. Armathwaite, while I have a look? What time did the accident happen?"

"Exactly at half-past seven," said Armathwaite.

The doctor consulted his watch.

"Oh, come now, you're really very fortunate, Mr.——"

"Whittaker," put in Armathwaite.

"Ah, yes! Did you mention the name? The mere sight of Meg Garth drove everything else from my mind. But it's only a quarter to nine, Mr. Whittaker, and a messenger had to reach me at Bellerby, three miles away. Hello, who tied this bandage? You, Mr. Armathwaite? Have you had hospital training?"

"No; nothing beyond the rough and ready ways of a camp. A friend in the Indian Medical certainly taught me how to adjust a strip of lint."

"You shouldn't grumble, young man; you've been looked after in first-class style," said the doctor, smiling at Percy. "It may relieve your mind if I tell you

that I couldn't have done any better myself. Or, perhaps, if the pain is very bad, you'll think that the poorest sort of consolation. Fortunately, Mr. Armathwaite warned me as to what had happened, so I've brought a lotion which will give you some relief. Now, tell me when I touch a sore place. I shan't hurt you more than is needed to find out exactly where the trouble lies."

In a few minutes Scaife had reached the same conclusion as Armathwaite. Indeed, he gave the latter a look which was easily understandable. If it were not for the moral effect of his presence on the sufferer, he need not have been summoned from Bellerby that night. He applied the soothing lotion, however, and substituted a thin, india-rubber strip for the linen bandage. Then he and Armathwaite assisted Whittaker to undress, and placed him in bed as comfortably as possible.

"Now, I want to assure you that the prompt attention you received prevented a very awkward swelling," said the doctor, before taking his departure. "You've sprained that ankle rather badly. If it had been allowed to swell it would have given you a very nasty time. As it is, if you're careful, you'll be able to hobble about in a fortnight."

"A fortnight!" Whittaker almost shrieked. "I can't lie here a fortnight!"

"Whether you remain here or not, you'll be lucky if you can put that foot on the ground within that time. You may be moved, if you're carried, though I don't advise it."

"But it's perfect rot to talk about being stewed up in this room all that time," protested the other, his eyes gleaming yellow, and his fingers plucking nervously at the bed-clothes. "This isn't my house. I'm a stranger here. Besides, there are things I must do. I have to be up and about to-morrow, without fail."

Dr. Scaife nodded. He was far too wise a person to argue with an excited patient.

"Well, wait till I examine you in the morning," he said. "Sometimes, injuries of the sprain order yield very rapidly to treatment. Take this, and you'll have a night's rest, at any rate."

He shook some crystals out of a small bottle into a little water, and watched Whittaker drinking the decoction.

"Lie quiet now," he went on soothingly. "You'll soon be asleep. If that bandage hurts when you wake, you must grin and bear it. I'll be here about ten o'clock."

Downstairs, he told Armathwaite that he had given Whittaker a stiff dose of bromide.

"Here's the bottle," he said. "If he's awake in half an hour's time, let him have a similar lot. Don't be afraid. He can stand any amount of it."

Armathwaite smiled, and Scaife smiled back at him. They understood, without further speech, that a youngster of pronounced neurotic temperament could withstand a quantity of the drug that would prove dangerous to the average man.

"Who is he?" continued the doctor. "I haven't seen him here before. Is there any difficulty about his remaining in the Grange?"

"He is a friend of Meg's," explained Armathwaite. "She was staying with his sister at Chester, and we all reached Elmdale within a few hours of one another."

Thus was another pitfall safely skirted. By the time Dr. Scaife was in the dining-room and talking to Meg, he had arrived at conclusions which were perfectly reasonable and thoroughly erroneous.

In response to Armathwaite, he promised to bring a nurse in the morning, as he was confident that the sprain would keep Whittaker bed-ridden at least a couple of weeks. Then he took his leave.

"I'll go and sit with Percy a little while now," said Marguérite. "Poor fellow! What a shame he should have met with this mishap after his gallant walk to-day. Perhaps that is why he fell. His muscles may have relaxed owing to over-exertion. Will you ever forgive me, Bob, for all the worry I have caused you?"

"No," he said. "I want you to remind me of it so often that we shall lose count of the number of times. But, before you go upstairs, let me warn you that Dr. Scaife gave our young friend about twenty grains of bromide in one gulp. He may be dozing. If he is, don't wake him."

In a couple of minutes she was back in the library, where Armathwaite was seated with a book and a pipe.

"He's asleep," she whispered.

"I'm glad to hear it. Now, come and sit down. Are you too tired to answer questions?"

"Try me."

"Concerning your change of name—can you explain more definitely how it came about?"

"I told you. It was on account of a legacy."

"But from whom? Who was the Ogilvey who left the money? A relative on your father's side, or your mother's?"

"Dad's, I understood."

"Did you ever hear of anyone named Faulkner?"

"Yes. Some people of that name lived here years ago. We were distantly related. In fact, that is how the property came into dad's possession. But he never really went into details. One day he said he had made a will, leaving me everything, subject to a life interest for mother, and that when he was dead a lawyer would tell me all that I ought to know. Then I cried at the horrid thought that he would have to die at all, and he laughed at me, and that was the last I ever heard of it. Why do you ask?"

"You remember that we promised not to hide anything from one another?"

"Of course I remember."

"Well, then, I think I have hit on a sort of a clew to the Ogilvey part of the mystery, at any rate. By the merest chance, while awaiting the return of Mr. Burt's man from the village, our talk turned on the history of this house. He spoke of the Faulkners, and mentioned the fact that the eldest son of a daughter of the family, a Mrs. Ogilvey, was born here. That would be some fifty odd years ago. How old is your father?"

"Fifty-four."

"The dates tally, at all events."

Meg knitted her brows over this cryptic remark.

"But," she said, "if you imply that my father may be the son of a Mrs. Ogilvey, that would mean that his name never was Garth."

"Exactly."

"Isn't such a guess rather improbable? I am twenty-two, and I was born in this very house, and I lived here twenty years except during school terms at Brighton

and in Brussels, and we were known as Garths during all that long time."

Armathwaite blew a big ring of smoke into the air, and darted a number of smaller rings through it. The pattern, beautifully distinct at first, was soon caught in a current from an open window, and eddied into shapelessness. He was thinking hard, and had acted unconsciously, so it was with a sense of surprise that he heard the girl laugh half-heartedly.

"I've been forming mad and outrageous theories until my poor head aches," she said, answering the unspoken question in his eyes. "Some of them begin by being just as perfectly proportioned as your smoke-rings, but they fade away in the next breath."

"My present theory is nebulous enough," he admitted, "but it is not altogether demolished yet. Can you endure a brief analysis of my thoughts? You won't be afraid, and lie awake for hours?"

"No. I mean that I want to hear everything you wish to tell me."

"The man who died here two years ago must have resembled your father in no common degree. Dr. Scaife is not the sort of person who makes a mistake in such a vital matter as the identification of a dead body, especially when the subject is an old and valued friend of his. By the way, you called him uncle, but that, I take it, was merely an affectionate mode of address dating from your childhood?"

"Yes. It's a Yorkshire custom among intimates."

"Have you ever heard of a real uncle—your father's brother—or of a first cousin who was very like him?"

"No. I have asked my people about relatives but we seemed to have none. Even the Ogilvey of the legacy was never mentioned by either of them until mother read me a letter from dad received while we were in Paris."

"Exactly. This testamentary Ogilvey appeared on the scene soon after Stephen Garth died and was buried. Your father was well aware of that occurrence, because he contrived it. He knew that the man who died was coming here, so he sent your mother and you to Paris to get you safely out of the way. Now, don't begin to tremble, and frighten yourself into the belief that I am proving your father's guilt of some dreadful crime. You yourself are convinced that he is incapable of any such act. May I not share your good opinion of him, yet try to

reach some sort of firm ground in a quagmire where a false step may prove disastrous? Suppose, Mr. Garth, as he was called at that time, merely got rid of his wife and daughter until an unwelcome guest had been received and sent on his way again, and that fate, with the crassness it can display at times, contrived that the visitor died, or was killed, or committed suicide, at the most awkward moment it is possible to conceive, can you not imagine a hapless, middle-aged scholar availing himself of the most unlikely kind of expedient in order to escape a scandal? Your father is a student, a writer, almost a recluse, yet such a man, driven suddenly into panic-stricken use of his wits, oft-times devises ways and means of humbugging the authorities which an ordinarily clever criminal would neither think of nor dare. I am insisting on this phase of the matter so that you and I may concentrate our intelligence on the line of inquiry most likely to yield results. Let me tabulate my contentions in chronological sequence:

A.—Mr. Garth received some news which led him to disturb the peaceful conditions of life which had obtained during twenty years. His first care was to send his wife and daughter to a place far removed from Elmdale.

B.—Mrs. Garth shared her husband's uneasiness, and agreed to fall in with the plan he had devised.

C.—In order to secure complete secrecy, the whole staff of servants was dismissed, practically at a moment's notice, and probably paid liberal compensation.

D.—After a week of this gradual obliteration of himself in Elmdale, Mr. Garth is missed, with the inevitable outcome that his dead body is found hanging in the hall, and, lest there should be any doubt as to his identity, a letter is left for the coroner, in which he asserts a thing, which his friend, Dr. Scaife, knew to be untrue, namely, that he was suffering from incurable disease. The statement, conveyed otherwise than in a letter, would have been received with skepticism; it was made with the definite object of giving a reason for an apparent suicide, and leaving testimony, in his own handwriting, that the disfigured body could be that of no other person than Stephen Garth. If a general resemblance of the dead to the living did not suffice—if the wearing of certain clothes, and the finding of certain documents and trinkets, such as a watch and chain, for instance—"

Margu rite, who had been listening intently, could no longer restrain her excitement.

"Yes," she cried, "that is so correct that it is quite wonderful. My father had a half-hunter gold watch and a chain of twisted leather which he wore as long as I can remember. Both had gone when he came to us in Paris; when I missed them, and asked what had become of them, he said they were lost, much to his annoyance, and he had been obliged to buy a new watch in London."

"There is nothing wonderful in treating a watch and chain as the first objects which would lead to a man's identification," said Armathwaite. "Now, don't let your admiration for the excessive wisdom of the court tempt you to interrupt again, because the court has not fully made up its own mind and is marshaling its views aloud in order to hear how they sound. Where were we? Still in Section D, I think. Well, granted that an obtuse policeman or a perplexed doctor refused to admit that Stephen Garth was dead, the letter would clinch the matter. Indeed, from the report of the inquest, we see that it did achieve its purpose. The remaining heads of the argument may be set forth briefly:

E.—Stephen Garth is buried at Bellerby, and Stephen Ogilvey steps into new life in Paris, wearing a literary cloak already prepared by many years of patient industry, though no one in Elmdale knew that its well-known resident was a famous writer on folk-lore.

F.—After some months of foreign travel, it was deemed safe to return to England, and Cornwall was chosen as a place of residence. The connection between rural Cornwall and rural Yorkshire is almost as remote as the influence of Mars on the earth. Both belong to the same system, and there would be trouble if they became detached, but, otherwise, they move in different orbits; they have plenty of interests in common, but no active cohesion. In a word, Stephen Ogilvey ran little risk in Cornwall of being recognized as Stephen Garth.

G.—Mrs. Ogilvey, a most estimable lady, and quite as unlikely as her scholar-husband to be associated with a crime, was a party to all these mysterious proceedings, and the combined object of husband and wife was to keep their daughter in ignorance of the facts for a time, at least, if not forever.

"I don't think I need carry the demonstration any further to-night. You are not to retire to your room and sob yourself into a state of hysteria because your coming to Elmdale has threatened with destruction an edifice of deceit built with such care and skill. I am beginning to recognize now a fatalistic element in the events

of the past twenty-four hours that suggests the steady march of a Greek tragedy to its predestined end. But the dramatic art has undergone many changes since the days of Euripides. Let's see if we cannot avail ourselves of modern methods, and keep the tragic *dénouement* in the place where it has been put already, namely, in Bellerby churchyard."

The girl stood up, and gave him her hand.

"I'm almost certain, Bob, that if you and dad had five minutes' talk, there would be an end of the mystery," she said.

"And a commencement of a long friendship, I hope," he said.

Their eyes met, and Meg's steady gaze faltered for the first time. She almost ran out of the room, and Armathwaite sat many minutes in utter stillness, looking through the window at the dark crest of the moor silhouetted against a star-lit sky. Then he refilled his pipe, and picked up the book he had taken haphazard from the well-stored shelves of that curiously constituted person, Stephen Ogilvey.

It was a solid tome, entitled: "Scottish Criminal Trials," and lay side by side with "The Golden Bough," which Marguérite had spoken of, and a German work, "Geschichte des Teufels." Turning over the leaves, he found that someone had marked a passage with ink. The reference had been noted many years ago, because the marks were faded and brown, but the paragraph thus singled out had an extraordinary vivid bearing on the day's occurrences.

It read:

"A statute of James I., still in force, enacts that all persons invoking an evil spirit, or consulting, covenanting with, entertaining, employing, feeding or rewarding any evil spirit, shall be guilty of felony and suffer death."

Instantly there flitted before Armathwaite's vision a picture of the besotted Faulkner offering libations of wine to the black figure scowling from the stained-glass window. Perhaps the old toper had been lifting his head in a final bumper when he fell backward down the stairs and broke his neck.

Armathwaite shut the book with a bang. When he went out, he found that Betty had forgotten to leave a candle in the hall, and he must either go upstairs in the dark or carry with him the lamp still burning on its bracket.

He glared steadily at the dull outline of the effigy in armor.

"I'm not superstitious," he muttered, "but if I could have my own way with you, my beauty, I'd smash you into little bits!"

Then, to show his contempt for all ghouls and demons, he extinguished the lamp, and felt his way by holding the banisters. It was creepy work. Once, he was aware of a curious contraction of the skin at the nape of his neck. He turned in a fury, and eyed the window. Now that no light came from the hall, some of its color was restored, and certain blue and orange tints in the border were so perfect in tone that he was moved from resentment to admiration.

"Not for the first time in the history of art, the frame is better than the picture," he thought. "Very well, you imp of darkness, some day, and soon, I hope, we'll dislodge you and keep your setting."

He did not ask himself whom he included in that pronoun "we." There was no need. The mighty had fallen at last. He loved Margu rite Ogilvey, and would marry her if she would accept him though her parents had committed all the crimes in the calendar, and her ancestors were wizards and necromancers without exception.



CHAPTER XI

PREPARATIONS FOR BATTLE

James Walker, the younger, took thought while his cob paced the eight miles between Elmdale and Nuttonby. In the result, he changed his plans if not his intent. Pulling up outside the office of Holloway & Dobb, he signaled a clerk who peered out at him through a dust-laden window. It is a singular fact that more dust gathers on the windows of offices occupied by respectable country solicitors than on the windows of all other professional men collectively.

"Would you mind asking Mr. Dobb to come and see me for a minute on important business?" he said when the clerk came out.

After befitting delay, Mr. Dobb appeared. He was portly and bespectacled, and not inclined to hurry. Moreover, he did not make a practice of holding consultations with clients in the street. It needed a man of county rank to prefer such a request, and Mr. Dobb, Commissioner for Oaths, and leading solicitor in Nuttonby, was very much astonished when he heard that "young Walker, the auctioneer," had invited him to step outside.

"Well, what is it?" he inquired stiffly, standing in the doorway, and clearly resolved not to budge another inch.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," said Walker humbly, "but I can't leave this pony when so near his stable. He'd take off on his own account."

Dobb, though slightly mollified by an eminently reasonable explanation, did not offer to cross the pavement, so Walker, after glancing up and down the street to make sure that no passer-by could overhear, continued in a low tone:

"I've just come from the Grange, Elmdale, and saw Miss Meg Garth there. She passed a remark which seemed to imply that her father is still living, and got very angry when I told her that he was dead and buried two years ago."

Mr. Dobb descended from the doorway quickly enough then. Resting a fat hand on the rail of the dash-board, he looked up into Walker's red face. The scrutiny was not friendly. He was sure that the junior member of the firm of Walker &

Son had been drinking.

"Do you know what you are talking about?" he said, sternly.

Walker leaned down, until his ferret eyes peered closely into those of the angry solicitor.

"That's why I'm here, sir," he said, with the utmost deference of manner. "Of course, I'm aware that you represent the family—at any rate, with regard to the Elmdale property—and when Miss Meg herself said that her father was alive, and flew into a rage when I ventured to correct her, what was I to think? I admit I was knocked all of a heap, and may have put things rather bluntly, but there cannot be the slightest doubt as to what she meant. More than that, her cousin, Mr. Robert Armathwaite, bore out her statement, and got so mad with me for stickin' to it that Mr. Garth had committed suicide, that we almost came to blows."

Walker was quite sober—the solicitor had no doubt on that score now. Perhaps vague memories stirred in the shrewd, legal mind, and recalled certain curious discrepancies he had noted in events already passing into the limbo of forgetfulness. He, too, looked to right and left, lest some keen-eared citizen should have crept up unobserved.

"Can't you take your trap to the stable and come back here?" he asked, thereby admitting that Walker's breach of decorum was condoned.

"That's really what I had in mind, sir. I was afraid you might have left the office before I was at liberty, as I have a few matters to attend to when I reach our own place, and I didn't want to intrude by callin' at your house."

Dobb was watching him critically, and was evidently becoming more puzzled each moment.

"I need hardly tell you that you are bringing a very serious charge against someone," he said at last.

"No, that I'm not!" cried Walker emphatically. "I'm just telling you the plain facts. It's not my business to bring charges. I thought, in reality, that I was doing someone a good turn by comin' straight to you; but, if you don't agree, Mr. Dobb _____"

"No, no, I didn't mean my remark in that sense," explained the solicitor hastily,

not without a disagreeable feeling that this perky young auctioneer seemed to know exactly what he was about. "I only wanted you to understand that grave issues may be bound up with an extraordinary story of this nature. Look here! I'm busy now. Will you be free at six o'clock?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, come to my house, and we'll discuss matters fully. You say you saw and spoke to Miss Meg herself?"

"Oh, yes, sir! No mistake. I've known her all my life."

"Very well, then. Don't be later than six. I have some people coming to dinner at seven."

Walker saluted with the switch he carried instead of a whip, clicked his tongue at the cob, and rattled away down the High Street. Dobb looked after him dubiously. He had been friendly with the Garths, and James Walker, junior, was almost the last person in Nuttonby he would have entrusted with any scandal or secret which affected them. However, in another hour, he would endeavor to gauge the true value of Walker's information. It might be a cock and bull yarn, in which case it would be a pleasure to sit on Walker heavily. Meanwhile, he would avail himself of the opportunity to go through certain papers in his possession, and come to the forthcoming interview primed with the facts.

Every Thursday evening, at half-past five, the proprietor, editor, and manager of the *Nuttonby Gazette*—a journalistic trinity comprised in one fussy little man named Banks—looked in at Walker and Son's office for the "copy" of the week's advertisements, Mr. Banks being then on his way back to the printing-works after tea. Thus, he killed two birds with one stone, since the Walkers not only controlled a good deal of miscellaneous advertising, but, moving about the countryside as they did in the course of their business, often gave him news paragraphs not otherwise available.

Young Walker, of course, was prepared for this visit. Indeed, it loomed large in the scheme he had embarked on. Hurrying home, he changed into a suit of clothes calculated to impress Gwendoline Dobb, the solicitor's only unmarried daughter, if he met her, and then strolled to the High Street sanctum of the firm. Not a word did he say to his father as to happenings at Elmdale. The old man was altogether too cautious, he thought, and would assuredly tell him to shut his mouth, which was the last thing he meant to do where Meg Garth and her

"bounder of a cousin" were concerned.

Thus, when Banks hurried in, and asked the usual question: "Anything fresh, gentlemen?" Walker, senior, was by no means prepared for the thunderbolt which his son was about to launch.

The older man told the journalist that Lady Hutton was giving a special prize for honey at the next agricultural show; that hay had been a bumper crop in the district; and that mangel wurzel was distinctly falling out of favor, items of an interest to Nuttonby readers that far transcended the clash of empires in the Balkans. Banks was going, when the son said quietly:

"By the way, you might like to mention that a Mr. Robert Armathwaite, a relative of the former occupants, has rented the Grange, Elmdale, probably for a period of twelve months."

"A relative of the Garths, Jim—I didn't know that!" exclaimed his father.

"It's right enough. Meg Garth herself told me."

"Meg Garth! Is *she* here?"

"She's at the Grange. Tom Bland told me she was there, so, after calling about those cattle at Bellerby to-day, I drove on to Elmdale and saw her."

"Well, of all the surprising things! Then, Mr. Armathwaite must have known about the house when he came in yesterday?"

Yesterday! While the three men were gazing at each other in the Walkers' office, Armathwaite and Marguérite Ogilvey were escorting Percy Whittaker down the moor road, and even wily James Walker, junior, little guessed what a whirlwind had enwrapped the new tenant of the Grange since, as the older Walker had put it, "he came in yesterday."

"No, I'm jiggered if he did!" cried the younger man viciously. "Armathwaite had never heard the name of the place before we mentioned it. I'll swear that in any court of law in the land."

"And I'd bear you out," agreed his father. "Not that I can see any reason why it should come into court. He paid up promptly, and we have nothing to bother about until the next quarter is due."

"I'm not so sure of that," was the well-calculated answer.

"What are you driving at, Jim?"

"This. He's no more Meg Garth's cousin than I am. There's some queer game bein' played, and I'm a Dutchman if there isn't a row about it. I tell you, Meg Garth is there, alone, and, when I met her, she calmly informed me that her father was alive. She nearly jumped down my throat because I said he wasn't, and that fellow, Armathwaite, took her part. The Jacksons, too, mother and daughter, are mixed up in it somehow. If Stephen Garth is living, who is the man that was found hanged in the Grange two years ago, and why is he buried in Bellerby churchyard in Stephen Garth's name?"

"I say, Jim, you should be careful what you're saying."

Walker, senior, was troubled. He, like Dobb, fancied that strong liquor was inducing this fantasy, yet his son seldom erred in that respect; to-day his manner and appearance gave no other signs of intemperance.

"I'm tellin' you just what took place. Who should know Meg Garth if *I* didn't? She called Armathwaite 'Bob,' and he called her 'Meg,' and they were as thick as thieves; but they left me in no doubt as to old Garth bein' still on the map. In fact, we had a regular row about it."

"By Jove!" cried Banks, moistening his thin lips with his tongue. "This promises to be a sensation with a vengeance. Have you told the police?"

"No. It's not my business."

"I'm not so sure of that. Why, man, Stephen Garth left a letter for the coroner. Dr. Scaife was inclined to question the cause of death, but Mr. Hill closed him up like an oyster. Don't you see what it means? If Stephen Garth is living now, some unknown man was murdered in the Grange. He could neither have killed himself nor died from natural causes, since no one in their senses would have tried to conceal his death by letting it appear that they themselves were dead."

Mr. Banks expressed himself awkwardly, but his deduction was not at fault, and left his hearers under no doubt as to its significance. His eyes glistened. He could see the circulation of the *Nuttonby Gazette* rising by thousands during the next few weeks, and at a time, too, when people were generally too busy to read newspapers, or buy extra copies for dispatch to friends in other parts of the country. What a thrice happy chance that this thing should have come to light on a Thursday evening! There was nothing in it yet that he dared telegraph to the

morning newspapers in York and Leeds, but, by skillful manipulation, he could make plenty of it for his own sheet.

"But it simply can't be true!" bleated Walker, senior, in a voice that quavered with sheer distress.

"What isn't true?" demanded his son. "You don't doubt what I'm tellin' you, do you? Ask Tom Bland if Meg Garth isn't in Elmdale. He saw her, and she nodded at him through a window, but, when he asked about her, that pup, Armathwaite, swore she wasn't there, and that Bland had seen some other young lady. He couldn't take that line with me, because he was out when I called, and Meg and I were at it, hammer and tongs, when he came in."

"At what, hammer and tongs?" gasped his father distractedly.

"Arguin' about old Garth, she sayin' he was alive and well, and makin' out I was lyin' when I said he was dead."

"Excuse me, gentlemen, I must be off," said Banks, and the man who was still sore from the grip of Armathwaite's hands and the thrust of Armathwaite's boot knew that the first direct assault on the stronghold of Meg Garth's pride had begun.

"Look here, young fellow," said Walker, senior, recovering his wits with an effort, "you've set in motion more mischief than you reckon on. I wish to goodness you hadn't blurted out everything before Banks. You know what he is. He'll make a mountain out of a molehill."

"I've found no molehill at Elmdale—don't you believe it," came the angry retort. "Why, you ought to have seen my face when Meg sprang that tale on me about her father. I just laughed at it. 'Tell that to the marines,' I said. By jing, it's no make-believe, though. Between you and me, it's as clear as a whistle that Stephen Garth committed a murder, and humbugged the whole countryside into thinkin' he had killed himself. Just throw your mind back a bit, and you'll see how the pieces of the puzzle fit. Mother and daughter get out of the way; servants are discharged; the man is brought to the house over the moor from Leyburn, just as old Garth escaped and Meg returned, for I'll swear she never came through Nuttonby station. Dr. Scaife was the only man who half guessed at the truth, but fussy Hill squelched him, all because of the letter. Then, neither Holloway & Dobb, nor ourselves were given a free hand to deal with the house. Mrs. Garth didn't mean to part with it—twig? Of course, Garth daren't show his

nose there, but, when he pegs out in reality, the other two can come back. It's all plain as a white gate when you see through it, and, when we get hold of Armathwaite's connection with it, we'll know every move in the game. He's in it, somehow, and up to the neck, too. You want to blame me for speakin' before Banks, but you've forgotten that Tom Bland told me this afternoon he had seen Miss Meg, and that lots of people knew I was there later. If she goes round tellin' folk her father isn't dead it would soon come out that she and I quarreled about it. Where would I be then? When you're not quite so rattled you'll admit that I was bound to speak, and that I've chosen just the right way to do it. If the police want me now as a witness they'll have to come to me, and that's a jolly sight better than that I should go to them. Do, for goodness' sake, give me credit for a little common sense!"

And, having an eye on the clock, Walker, junior, bounced out, apparently in high dudgeon; but really well pleased with his own Machiavellian skill. Indeed, judged solely from a standard of evil-doing, he had been most successful. He knew well that Banks would go straight to the local superintendent of police, ostensibly for further information, but in reality to carry the great news, and set in motion the official mill which would grind out additional installments. But Walker's masterstroke lay with Dobb, who, in a sense, represented Mrs. Garth and her daughter. If Dobb could be brought to appreciate the gravity of the girl's statements anent her father—and his reception of Walker's story showed that he was prepared to treat it seriously—he would either write to Meg, asking her to visit Nuttonby, or go himself to Elmdale. In either event, she would be crushed into the dust. The elderly and trustworthy solicitor's testimony would carry weight. She could no longer deny that Stephen Garth was reputedly in his grave; she would be faced with the alternative that her father was an adroit criminal of the worst type, because public opinion invariably condemns a smug rogue far more heavily than the ne'er-do-well, who seems to be branded for the gallows from birth.

Yet, by operation of the law that it is the unexpected that happens, James Walker, the second, was fated not to retire for a night's well-earned and much-needed repose with a mind wholly freed from anxiety.

This came about in a peculiar way. By Mrs. Garth's request, soon after her departure from Elmdale, the solicitor invariably addressed her as Mrs. Ogilvey. At last, the notion got embedded in Mr. Dobb's mind that she had undoubtedly quarreled with her husband long before the latter committed suicide, and that the outcome of Garth's death was her speedy remarriage! From his recollection of

her, she was certainly not the sort of woman whom he would credit with such a callous proceeding, but no man can spend a lifetime in a lawyer's office without gaining an insight into strange by-ways of human nature. The profession necessitates a close knowledge of the hidden lives and recondite actions of scores of one's fellow-creatures. Mr. Dobb knew a vicar who had committed bigamy, and a county magistrate who had been a petty thief for years before he was caught. That Mrs. Garth should marry again within a few weeks of her husband's burial might indeed be strange, but it sank into a commonplace category in comparison with other queer events he could name.

Behold, then, young James arriving at The Beeches—a charming old house situated on the outskirts of Nuttonby; the "nut," as was becoming, was attired in a nut-brown suit, black shoes, a brown Homburg hat, socks and tie to match a shirt with heliotrope stripes, and yellow gloves.

He had passed in at the gate in full view of a couple of girls of his acquaintance, and knew that they were glancing over a yew hedge when the front door opened and he was admitted. He was shown into a library, where Mr. Dobb awaited him. The lawyer motioned him to a chair.

"Now, Mr. Walker," he said curtly, "would you mind telling me exactly what happened at Elmdale this afternoon?"

James sat down. Unfortunately, the furniture provided a placid harmony in oak, so the seat of the chair was hard, even though it shone with the subdued polish of a hundred years of careful use and elbow grease applied by many generations of vigorous housemaids.

"With your permission, sir, I—er—think I'd better begin—er—a little earlier."

"What's the matter? Isn't that chair comfortable?"

Mr. Dobb was clerk to the magistrates in the Nuttonby Petty Sessions; his pet abhorrence was a fidgety witness, and Walker was obviously ill at ease.

"The fact is, sir, I'm a bit saddle-galled. If you don't mind——"

"Certainly. Take that easy chair. What occurred 'a little earlier' which you think I ought to know?"

Walker had been disagreeably reminded of Armathwaite, but he kept a venomous tongue well under control. He told the lawyer the circumstances under

which Armathwaite, confessedly a complete stranger, had entered into the tenancy of the Grange, and described the journey to Elmdale, together with the curious behavior of the Jackson family. He was scrupulously accurate in his account of the cause and extent of his visit that day, even going so far as to admit that there was "a sort of a scuffle" between Armathwaite and himself.

Mr. Dobb listened in silence. At the end, he fixed a singularly penetrating glance on the narrator.

"In plain English, I suppose," he said, "this man, Armathwaite, bundled you out neck and crop?"

"No, sir. Not exactly that. But I couldn't fight him in Miss Meg's presence."

"Yet, from what you have told me, I gather that Mr. Armathwaite is a gentleman?"

"He has all the airs of one," said Walker.

"And he must have thought you had behaved discourteously to his cousin before he would use actual violence towards you!"

"Nothing of the sort, sir. Miss Meg jumped down my throat for no reason whatever. Of course, Mr. Armathwaite hadn't heard the beginning of it, and may have imagined I was to blame, but I wasn't."

"Perhaps there is an explanation that may be news to you. You are not aware, I take it, that Mrs. Garth is now Mrs. Ogilvey?"

"By jing!" cried Walker, rather forgetting himself, "that's the name Tom Bland tried to tell me, but he couldn't rightly get his tongue round it."

"Probably. But don't you see the bearing this important fact has on to-day's proceedings? I have reason to believe that Mrs. Garth and her daughter disagreed with Mr. Garth before his death. At any rate, she seems to have married again within a very short time, and Miss Meg may have fancied that you were trying purposely to insult and annoy her by referring to a bygone tragedy. The mere presence of this Mr. Armathwaite, who is wholly unknown here, lends color to that assumption. He may be a 'cousin' by the second marriage. It is even conceivable that Mrs. Ogilvey, as Mrs. Garth now is, did not wish her second husband's relatives to know of the way in which her first husband met his death. The fact that Mr. Armathwaite rented the Grange can be regarded as nothing

more than an ordinary coincidence. Isn't it possible, Mr. Walker, that you blundered very seriously in thrusting yourself into Miss Meg's presence, and forcing an unpalatable revelation on her?"

Walker's red face positively blanched. For one instant his nerve failed him.

"I never thought of that," he muttered, in dire confusion.

"It strikes me as a perfectly tenable theory," said Dobb, rising, and thereby showing that the interview was at an end. "You took me rather by surprise when you called me out of my office this afternoon, but I have given the matter some calm reflection in the interim, and have come to the conclusion that you found in Elmdale what is vulgarly known as a mare's nest."

Walker stood up, too. He realized that he was being dismissed with ignominy, and resented it. Thumping an oak table with his clenched fist, he cried passionately:

"Not me! You'll see in a day or two, Mr. Dobb, who's makin' the mistake. If I'm wrong I'll eat humble pie, but I'm not eatin' any now, thank you. I came to you, meanin' to do a good turn to all parties——"

"Restrain yourself, please," broke in the solicitor, speaking with cold dignity. "What kind of 'good turn' is it that rakes up bygone troubles, and spreads scandalous gossip?"

"You've missed my point entirely, Mr. Dobb," protested Walker. "I thought that you, being a friend of the Garths, could drop a quiet hint to Miss Meg not to talk about her dead-and-gone father as though he might arrive here by the next train—that's all."

"But it is not all. If it were, your attitude would be understandable, even praiseworthy. What you are saying indirectly is that Mr. Stephen Garth is alive, and that some unknown person lies in Bellerby churchyard."

Thus cornered, Walker floundered badly.

"I'm not able to argue with you, sir, and that's the truth," he said. "Neither do I want to be drawn into a squabble of this sort. Of course, I know nothing of any second marriage; but, even if I did, Miss Meg isn't a little girl, who might have forgotten her real father. Look here! I stick to my notion, and that's the long and the short of it. There's a mystery at Elmdale, and it's bound to come out, no matter what difference of opinion there may be between you and me."

A parlormaid entered with a telegram.

"Excuse me one moment," said Mr. Dobb; "that is, unless you wish to go!" he added.

Walker was constrained to put on a bold front before the servant.

"I can wait another couple of minutes," he said off-handedly. The lawyer smiled; but, for his own purposes, he did not wish to quarrel outright with his visitor. He opened the buff envelope, and read, and not even the experience of a lifetime served to mask the incredulous dismay which leaped to his face.

For the message ran:

"Have reason to believe that a gentleman passing under the name of Robert Armathwaite is in or near Nuttonby. Kindly make guarded inquiries and wire result.—SIGMATIC."

Now, "Sigmatic" was the code address of a department of the India Office in which Mr. Dobb's eldest son held a responsible position. That phrase, "passing under the name of," suggested many possibilities to the legal mind. Moreover, the fact that a Government department was interested, and that the ordinary official channel for investigation was not employed, gave him furiously to think. In any event, he had been saved from the exceeding unwisdom of treating James Walker too cavalierly.

"I'll just answer this, as the messenger is waiting," he said pleasantly. "If you're not in a hurry, Mr. Walker, sit down again. I'll send in a decanter of sherry and some cigarettes. Help yourself, will you?"

He went out. James Walker grinned, and plunged his clenched fists into his trousers pockets.

"That telegram knocked old Dobb into a cocked hat," he mused. "Wonder what was in it? Something to do with the Garths, I'll bet! Keep a steady hand on the reins, Jimmy, my boy, and you'll finish with the best of 'em yet!"



CHAPTER XII

THE DAWN OF A BLACK FRIDAY

There were three bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor of the Grange, all nearly of equal size, and remarkably spacious, since they corresponded in area with the rooms beneath. Percy Whittaker occupied the westerly front room, Marguérite had pre-empted the easterly one, and Armathwaite's room lay in the north-east angle. Thus, he was early aroused by the morning sun, and was up and about long before Mrs. Jackson or Betty put in an appearance. For lack of the bath which he had been prevented from ordering through Tom Bland, he splashed in an old-fashioned shallow zinc contrivance which reminded him of former days in Baluchistan. Crossing the landing afterwards, meaning to look in on Percy Whittaker, he glanced at the now oddly familiar black figure in the stained-glass window.

At the moment his thoughts were not dwelling on the topic which had occupied them, well nigh to the exclusion of all else, since he had first set eyes on Elmdale, yet, by some occult influence, no sooner did he meet the cold, unseeing glare of the painted effigy than his brain began to calculate the significance of certain dates. The *Nuttonby Gazette* dated Saturday, June 22nd, of two years ago, had stated that the inquest on Stephen Garth was held at the Fox and Hounds Inn, Elmdale, "to-day" (so the enterprising Banks had evidently brought out a special edition). Mrs. Jackson and Police Constable Leadbitter had deposed to the finding of the body on "Friday evening," which would be the 21st. Mrs. Jackson and Betty had last seen Garth alive on the Wednesday. Certain post-mortem indications showed that the death had taken place that night, the 19th. To-day, Friday, two years later, was the 19th! Armathwaite was not a nervous subject, but he was aware once more of a creepy sensation when he realized that this sunlit morning probably heralded in the fatal anniversary.

Seen in a clear and penetrating light, and closely examined at an hour when each line stood out boldly, the face of the figure revealed certain peculiarities. Artists in stained glass seldom attempt to convey subtleties in flesh tints. At best, their craft is mainly decorative, and effects are obtained by judicious grouping of colors, each of a distinct tone value, rather than by the skilled merging of light

into shadow, which is the painter's chief aim. But, in this instance, a deliberate attempt had been made to depict features of a truly malevolent cast. The oval formed by the open visor of the helmet gave scope for the use of an almost invisible casing of lead, which also provided the larger outline of the helmet itself, and of an enormous raven, with outstretched wings, perched on the crest.

Yet, instead of the youthful and noble countenance which tradition would surely ascribe to a gallant prince, the face which peered from the casque was that of an evil-minded ascetic. Indeed, the longer Armathwaite looked, the more he was convinced that the artist had tried to suggest a mere skull covered with dead skin. The nose was pinched, and the nostrils were unpleasantly prominent. The lips were mere seams of dried parchment, and the cavernous eyes were really two empty sockets.

This sinister and ghoulish visage was totally at variance with the remainder of the work. The armor was correct from helm to sollerets, with hauberk and corselet, greaves and jambards, while the gauntleted hands were crossed, in true warrior fashion, on the hilt of a long, straight sword. The vignette border of tendrils and vine-leaves was charming in design and rich in well-blended color, and an observer of critical taste could not fail to compare the gross offense of the portrait with the quiet beauty of its setting. To some minds, there is an element in art which denies a true sense of harmony to a distorted imagination, and the notion was suddenly borne in on Armathwaite that the same hand had never limned that demoniac face and the remainder of the window. The one might have been the product of some debauchee steeped in the worst excesses of a libidinous society, while the other breathed the calm serenity of the Renaissance. Armathwaite had in full measure the hunter's instinct which incites mankind to seek out and destroy ferocious beasts. If he had a weapon in his hands at the moment he would have smashed that diabolical mask out of existence.

The unaccountable spasm passed, and he entered Whittaker's room, to find that disconsolate youth lying on his back, wide awake, and staring blankly at the ceiling.

"Hullo!" he said cheerily. "Had a good night's rest?"

"Pretty fair," muttered the invalid, turning his eyes dully on the other. "That doctor chap doped me, I expect. Anyhow I slept till I heard you splashin' in the bath."

"How's the ankle?"

"Rotten. Look here, Mr. Armathwaite, you seem to understand this sort of thing. Bar jokes, how long must I remain here?"

"In bed, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"A week, at least. After that, you may be able to hop about on one leg."

"If *you* were in my place, would you stop in bed a week?"

"What else could I do? Even walking with a crutch is impossible because of the strain on the ligaments."

Whittaker moved involuntarily, and was given a sharp reminder that his informant was not exaggerating his disability.

"All right," he said sullenly. "What time is it?"

"About six o'clock. Betty will bring you some tea and an egg before seven."

"Miss Ogilvey isn't up yet?"

"No."

Half unconsciously, Armathwaite resented the studied formality of that "Miss Ogilvey." He fully appreciated its intent. He was a stranger and must be kept at arm's length. Moreover, the crippled Percy held him at a disadvantage. The younger man might be as insolent as he chose—Armathwaite was muzzled.

"Can I do anything for you," he said.

"In what way?"

"Well, if the pain is very bad, an extra bandage, soaked in cold water, will relieve the burning sensation."

"No, thanks. I'll wait till the doctor comes."

"He is bringing a nurse, by the way. You'll need proper attention for the next few days."

"Right. Don't let me keep you. I think I can sleep another hour or so."

Armathwaite was at no loss to understand why the cub wished to be rid of him.

Whittaker was not only torturing himself with the knowledge that his host would be free to enjoy Marguérite Ogilvey's company without let or hindrance, but he also felt a grudge against the fates which had snatched him out of active participation in the day's events. Neither dreamed that the accident would precipitate the crisis each wished to avoid. In fact, in view of what did actually happen, it would be interesting to speculate on the probable outcome if, by chance, Armathwaite had been disabled instead of Whittaker. But history, whether dealing with men or nations, reckons little of "what might have been." It is far too busily occupied in fashioning the present and concealing the past, for, let students dig and delve ever so industriously, they seldom obtain a true record of occurrences which have shaken the world, while, in the lives of the few people with whom this chronicle deals, there were then at work certain minor influences which no one of them ever discerned in their entirety. There was nothing surprising in this. A crystal-minded woman like Marguérite Ogilvey could never adjust her perceptive faculties to the plane of a decadent Percy, while Robert Armathwaite was too impatient of ignoble minds that he should ever seek to uncover the mole-burrowings of James Walker.

Certain developments took place which affected each and all in relative degrees, and each acted according to his or her bent. Beyond that, analysis of cause and effect can hardly be other than sheer guesswork.

Armathwaite rummaged in the larder for a crust, chewed it, and, having thus appeased the laws of hygiene, lighted the first joyous pipe of the morning.

He was smoking contentedly in the garden when a bent, elderly man approached. Though twisted with rheumatism—the painful tribute which Mother Earth exacts from those of her sons who know how to obtain her chief treasures—this man quickened into a new life when he saw Armathwaite. He cast a sorrowing glance at the wilderness of weeds as he came up the garden path, but his weather-lined face broke into a pleasant smile as he halted in front of the new tenant.

"Good mornin', sir," he said, touching his hat, though the action was devoid of any semblance of servility. "Things are in a nice mess, aren't they?" and he wheeled round to gaze at dandelions rampant in a bed sacred to begonias.

"They are, indeed!" agreed Armathwaite, wondering what white-haired philosopher had come on the scene.

"You'll be Mr. Armathwaite, I'm thinkin'?" went on the other.

"Yes."

"My name's Smith, sir. Mr. Leadbitter, the policeman, told me you had taken on the Grange. Mebbe you'll be wantin' a gardener."

A light broke in on Armathwaite.

"Oh! Begonia Smith!" he cried. "Come back to the old love—is that it?"

"That's it, sir. She looks as if she wanted someone to look after her."

"Very well. Take charge. It's too late in the year to grow flowers or vegetables, but you can tidy things up a bit."

"A man who has his heart in the job, sir, can grow flowers at any time of the year. If I was to drop a line to the Nuttonby carrier to-night, I'd have a fair show of geraniums, calceolarias, lobelia, an' marguerite daisies in the front here by to-morrow evenin'."

Armathwaite was not one to check enthusiasm. Moreover, the notion of brightening the surroundings appealed to him.

"That would be sharp work," he said, eyeing the jungle.

Smith, with the suspiciousness of an old man eager to show that he was as good as some of the young ones, misunderstood that critical survey.

"Before Tom Bland brings the plants from the nursery I'll have a canny bit o' soil ready for 'em," he vowed.

"I'm sure of it," said Armathwaite, quickly alive to the aged gardener's repudiation of any doubt cast on his powers. "But surely you can be better employed than in mere digging. Are there laborers to be hired in the village?"

Smith swept the bare meadow-land with the appraising eyes of knowledge.

"Plenty of 'em, sir. The hay is in, an' they'll be slack enough now for another month."

"Very well. Send your order to Bland, including such implements as you may need. Hire three or four men, and get them busy. By the way, have you heard that Miss Meg is here?"

"Miss Meg! Our Miss Meg?"

Smith's astonishment was not feigned. He was slightly dazzled already by the way in which his new employer had received suggestions for the regeneration of the garden; now, he was thoroughly bewildered.

"Yes," said Armathwaite, watching him narrowly. "She may join us any minute. Of course, if she expresses any preference for a particular method of laying out the flower-beds, you will adopt it without question."

"Why, sir," said the old man simply, "if it's the same Miss Meg as I hev' in mind I'll not charge you a penny for what little I can do about the place. It'll be enough for me to see her bonnie face again an' hear her voice."

"I'll tell her that," laughed Armathwaite. "But we don't trade on those terms. You were happy here, I suppose, before Mr. Garth died?"

"No man could ha' worked for nicer people, sir. It bruk me all to pieces when t' maister tellt me to go. An' I never rightly understood it, until—until the sad thing happened you'll hev' heard of. Mr. Garth was just as much cut up about me goin' as I was meself—that was the queer part of it.... Sir, tell me this, D'you mean to live here any length o' time?"

"I hope so."

"Well, it's a bold thing to say, afore I've known ye five minnits, so to speak, an' there may be nowt in it other than owd wives' blether, but, if you ain't such a great lover o' stained glass, I advise ye to hev' yon staircase window riven out by t' roots."

"Now, why in the world do you say that?"

"I can't put it into plain words, sir, an' that's a fact, but I'd be glad to see the house shut o' that grinnin' death's head. I well remember my own father tellin' me there was a curse in it, an' many's the time Mr. Garth laughed at me when I spoke on't. But t' owd man's prophecy kem yam (came home) to roost at last. It did, an' all."

"What reason did your father give for his belief?"

"It's a strange story, sir, but I know bits of it are true, so mebbe the rest isn't so far out. D'you see yon farm?" and Begonia Smith pointed to the Burt homestead.

"Yes," said Armathwaite. "I met Mr. Burt yesterday."

"It's built on the ruins o' Holand Castle, sir. It's barely ten years ago since Mr. Burt used the last o' t' stones for his new barn. These Holands were descended from a lady who married Edward, the Black Prince. She had three sons by her first husband, an' one of 'em kem to this part o' Yorksheer. As was the way in them days, he set a church alongside his castle, and was that proud of his step-father, who would ha' bin King of England had he lived, that he had that painted glass window med in his memory. In later times, when there was a cry about images, the owner of Holand Castle had the window taken out an' hidden. Then, to please somebody or another, he set fire to t' church. After that, things went badly with him, an' the castle was deserted, because it had the plague, though I'm thinking the only plague was bad drainage. Anyhow, nigh on two hundred year ago, a man named Faulkner settled i' this quiet spot—you can guess what it was like, sir, when there was no railways, an' the nearest main road ran through Leyburn on t' other side o' t' moor. This Faulkner had gathered his brass in no good way, robbin' ships an' killin' folk on the high seas, it was said. He used to import hogsheads o' wine all the way from Whitby, an' rare good wood was in 'em, because I saw the last of 'em used as a rain barrel, an' I'm not seventy yet. The story goes that one night, in his cups, he was annoyed by the way the Black Prince looked at him, hard an' condemning like a judge. He got a pair o' big pistols, an' fired one at the Prince's face. He shot the eyes out, an' then aimed the second one at the mouth, but that burst, and blew his own right hand off, an' he bled to death afore they could plug the veins. His son, who was a chip o' t' owd block, hired a drunken artist to paint another face. This man knew nowt about stained glass, but he was a rare hand at drawin' terrible things, so he planned yon devil's phiz on oiled paper, an' stuck it between two thin plates o' glass, an' it was leaded in. If you was to climb on a ladder you'd find the difference at once between that part o' t' window an' all t' remainder. Many's the time I've seen it when nailin' up the wistaria, an', if I'd dared, would have put the hammer-head through it. But Mr. Garth refused to have it touched. He called it an antiquarian curiosity. All the same, he wouldn't have Miss Meg told about it, because it might have frightened her but he was always careful to see that the blind was not drawn across the front door on June evenings. Mebbe, you'll have heerd of a ghost, sir?"

A window was raised, and both men looked up. Marguérite was leaning out, her face aglow with pleasure.

"Why, if it isn't my own dear Smith!" she cried. "What lucky wind brought *you* here? Mr. Armathwaite, is this *your* doing? Smith, I'll be down in a jiffy. Mind

you don't skedaddle before I come!"

Thus it befell that when Betty Jackson brought an early breakfast to Percy Whittaker, and she was asked where Miss Meg was, she answered:

"Out in the garden with Mr. Armathwaite. They're talkin' to Begonia Smith."

"Ah, I heard the voices. And who, pray, is Begonia Smith?" demanded Percy.

"The old gardener," said Betty. "He was here years an' years."

"Does Mr. Armathwaite mean to have the grounds attended to?"

"Looks like it, sir. He an' Miss Meg are measurin' bits, an' Smith's stickin' in pieces of wood. It'll be nice to have the place kept spick an' span again."

It was, perhaps, unfortunate that Meg's glimpse of her friend from the bedroom window should have brought her downstairs pell-mell without even a tap on Whittaker's door to inquire as to his well-being. It was perhaps, equally unfortunate that, when she remembered her remissness, she should have hurried to his room while her cheeks were flushed with the strong moorland air and her eyes shining with excitement.

"How are you, Percy dear?" she said, entering in response to his surly "Come in!" "I ought to have looked in on you sooner, but I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw Mr. Armathwaite in the garden with Smith, our own old gardener, whom I've known ever since I was a baby."

"Why has Armathwaite brought Smith here?" said Whittaker, peering at her fixedly, yet veiling those gray-green eyes under lowered lids.

"He didn't. Smith just came. But isn't it fortunate? He couldn't have found a better man, especially as Smith won't have any of the hard work on his hands. Mr. Armathwaite is giving him all the help he needs."

"To put the place in order?"

"Yes, of course. Smith promises marvels by to-morrow evening. But you haven't told me yet how your poor ankle feels."

"Never mind my poor ankle, Meg. I understood that the house was only let for three months?"

"Oh, much longer, I believe. Mr. Armathwaite——"

"Confound Mr. Armathwaite! The devil fly away with Mr. Armathwaite! I'm sick of his name: I spit on him!" He literally writhed in a paroxysm of anger.

"Percy!"

He had chosen an unhappy word when he spoke of spitting on his rival. He reminded her of a toad, and she hated toads.

With a desperate effort he sat bolt upright in the bed.

"It's high time you and I had a few straight words, Meg," he said, and his voice lost its drawl, and the blasé manner was dropped. "You haven't forgotten, I suppose, that I've asked you to marry me?"

"No. Perhaps, if you rack your memory, you'll remember my answer," she said indignantly, for she felt the innuendo, and was resolved to resent it with vigor.

"No, oh, no! You said you didn't mean to marry anybody. That is a maidenly sentiment which is right and proper, and I agreed with it at the time. But the position has altered considerably during the past couple of days. As matters stand now, Meg, you may change your mind, and I beg to inform you that when you do marry, you'll marry me."

"It is hardly fair to take advantage of your accident," she said, with a quiet scorn that only served to infuriate him the more.

"What do you mean?" he said thickly.

"You are not usually so dense. If you were not ill you would never dare speak to me in that fashion."

"Never mind my illness. That will soon pass. And the density you complain of is not so one-sided as you imagine. I pointed out that the position had changed. Two days ago you were free to say 'Yes' or 'No' to my proposal. To-day you are not. You've got to marry me now, Meg. You'll be my wife by fair means or foul. Need I explain myself further?"

"It—it would be as well."

"All right. You've asked for it, and you'll get it. Unless I have your promise here and now that our marriage will take place as soon as I can stand on my feet again, I'll have your father arrested for murder."

"Percy, you must be mad even to think of such a dreadful thing!"

"No, not mad, but sane, very sane and wide-eyed. That fellow, Armathwaite, wants you, and he'll snap you up while I'm lying in this infernal house unless I strike now, and strike hard. I mean exactly what I say. I've thought it all out here, though I'm suffering pain enough to drive me crazy. But the mind can conquer the body, and my mind is not only clear, but fixed. Tell me you'll marry me, and I'll be patient as a saint. I'll take your word for it. I don't want you to sit by my side and hold my hand, as some sniveling fools would wish. You can plan your gardens with Armathwaite, and smile at him and talk with him as much as you please. But you've got to be my wife. Refuse, and the only way you can save your father from arrest is by getting Armathwaite to commit another murder."

"You brute!" she almost whispered. Her lips were quivering pitifully, but the fount of tears was dried, and her eyes blazed with an intensity that conquered Whittaker for the moment.

He lay back on the pillows again, with a smile that was twisted into a rictus of agony as a twinge wrung the injured limb.

"Call me any hard names you like," he muttered, closing his eyes under the intolerable contempt and loathing of Margu rite's steadfast scrutiny. "I've said what I had to say, and I'll not depart from a syllable of it. You'd have married me one of these days if you hadn't met Armathwaite. He has turned your pretty little head with his knight-errant airs and cavalry officer appearance. So I've determined to pull you back by force—see? You'll get over it in time. You and I will be as good chums as ever when this gale has blown itself out. Don't think I shall hold you less dear because your father placed himself in danger of the law. He escaped neatly before, and can escape again. I'll even tell you how. No one here knows—"

He opened his eyes again, to ascertain if some dawning interest in the project he was about to reveal—which was precisely that already set forth by Armathwaite—had driven the horror from her drawn features; but Margu rite had vanished. He listened for her footsteps, and could hear no sound. He shouted loudly, and tugged frenziedly at a bell. Betty came running, thinking he had fallen out of bed, and needed assistance.

"Why, whatever is the matter?" she cried, with true Yorkshire abruptness, when she found him lying as she had left him a few minutes earlier.

"Where is Miss Meg?" he raged. "Tell her she must come here—at once! Tell her that! Use those very words—come at once!"

"My! What a to-do about nowt! I was sure the house was on fire!"

"Confound you, will you go!" he shouted.

"Yes, I'll go! For goodness' sake, keep quiet. You're doing yourself no good by gettin' that excited. Oh, you needn't bawl at me! I'll find her. It isn't such a big place that she can be lost for more'n a minnit or two."

Grumbling audibly at the funny ways some folk had, to be sure, Betty went downstairs. She looked into the drawing-room, dining-room, and library, but Margu rite was in none of those places. Then she passed out into the garden; through the open window Whittaker could hear her asking Armathwaite if he knew where Miss Meg was. He caught the answer, too.

"Yes. She left me to visit Mr. Whittaker."

"She's not there, sir, and he has just sent me for her in an awful hurry," said Betty.

"Is it anything I can do for him?"

"No, sir. He wants Miss Meg."

"Well, she can't be far away. She may be in her bedroom. Go and look there. If I see her, I'll hand on your message."

Soon, when Betty had ransacked the house, she came to the conclusion that Margu rite had gone into the village. For some reason, on hearing this, Whittaker appeared to be calmer, and only growled an order that he was to be informed instantly of Miss Garth's return. Betty retreated to the kitchen. When the door was safely closed she said to her mother:

"That Percy Whittaker is daft, an' it's easy to see what ails him. If I was Miss Meg I wouldn't have him if he was hung with diamonds."

"You're nobbut a fond lass," commented Mrs. Jackson, cracking an egg on the side of a basin preparatory to emptying its contents into a frying-pan. "Always thinkin' of young men, like the rest of 'em. Poor Meg Garth has other things to bother her. If you hadn't lost a good father when you were too little to ken owt about it, you'd know what she's goin' through now."

"But she says her father is livin'," said Betty.

"Tell me summat fresh," retorted her mother. "Wouldn't it be better for her if he wasn't? You mark my words. There'll be a bonny row i' this house afore we're much older. Now, hurry up with t' toast. No matter what else happens, folk mun eat."



CHAPTER XIII

DEUS EX MACHINA

After a while, Betty came to Armathwaite again.

"If you please, sir, breakfast is ready. Shall I bring it in, or will you wait for Miss Meg?" she said.

That a second inquiry as to Marguérite's whereabouts should be necessary seemed to surprise him.

"You were looking for Miss Garth a few minutes ago. Didn't you find her?" he inquired.

"No, sir. She's not in the house."

"But what can have become of her?"

"I thought, sir, she might ha' gone into t' village."

"Why?"

"She knows everybody i' t' place. She said last night that now she was makin' a bit of a stay she'd be seein' some o' t' folk."

"I think I should have noticed her if she had gone out by the gate," he said, weighing the point. "Smith!" he called, "has Miss Meg left the house recently—within the past ten minutes, I mean?"

"Not that I know of, sir," said Smith; "but I'm that worritted by the state of some o' these here beds that ammost owt (almost anything) might ha' happened without me givin' it heed."

"Bang that gong at the front door," said Armathwaite to Betty. "It should be heard in every house in Elmdale, and she will understand."

The gong was duly banged, and its effect on Elmdale was immediately perceptible. Old Mrs. Bolland vowed afterwards that she would sit permanently at the back bedroom window, because, being rheumatically, she couldn't get

upstairs quickly enough, and there was summat to see nowadays at t' Grange.

But the tocsin failed to reach the one ear for which it was intended. The village produced every live inhabitant except Margu rite Ogilvey.

"Was Miss Meg friendly with the Burts?" inquired Armathwaite, when he and Betty realized it was useless to gaze expectantly either at the corner of the roadway visible from the porch, or at such small cross-sections of the village "street" as could be seen at irregular intervals between the houses.

"Yes, sir. She'd often walk over there," said the girl, gazing at once in the direction of the Castle Farm, which was the name of the holding.

"She would know that breakfast was on the way?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I axed her meself when I brought her a cup of tea. She said that nine o'clock would suit."

Betty turned involuntarily to consult the grandfather's clock in the hall. The hands stood at ten minutes past nine; but, in the same moment, she remembered that the clock was not going. Armathwaite followed her glance, and looked at his watch.

"Ten minutes past nine," he answered, with a laugh. "The old clock is right to a tick. Was it in use while the Sheffield lady remained in the house?"

"No, sir. It stopped at that time when the old man died."

Then she giggled. There is hardly a man or woman in Yorkshire who does not know that the words of a famous song were suggested by the behavior of a clock which is still exhibited in an inn on the south side of the Tees at Pierce Bridge, and the girl had unconsciously repeated the tag of verses and chorus.

Armathwaite had yet to learn of this treasured possession of the county of broad acres, so he eyed Betty rather disapprovingly. Moved by an impulse which he regarded as nothing more than a desire to check such undue levity, he strode into the hall, found a key resting on a ledge of the clock's canopy, wound up the heavy weights, and started the pendulum.

"Perhaps our ancient friend may be more accurate than you, Betty," he said. "You mean, I suppose, that it stopped at that time because it was not wound. How do *you* know the hour, or even the day, anyone died here?"

"Well, I don't, sir, an' that's a fact," she admitted. "But what about breakfast?"

"Attend to Mr. Whittaker—I'll wait!"

He went out again, and saw Smith hobbling down the bye-road.

"Hi!" he cried, "if you're going into the village you might ask if anyone has seen Miss Meg!"

Smith replied with a hand wave. He was thinking mainly of begonias, planning a magician's stroke, because his new master had told him to spare no expense. Within ten minutes he returned, but not alone. Four able-bodied rustics came with him, each carrying a spade or a garden fork. But he had not forgotten Armathwaite's request.

"Miss Meg hasn't gone that way, sir," he said. "Plenty of folk saw her in t' garden, an' they couldn't ha' missed her had she been in t' street. But she'll be comin' i' now. No fear o' her bein' lost, stolen, or strayed i' Elmdale. These chaps are good for a day's diggin' at four shillin' an' two quarts o' beer each. Is that right, sir?"

"Make it five shillings and no beer," said Armathwaite.

The laborers grinned.

"No beer is even to be bought during working hours," he added sharply. "You can work harder and longer on tea. You may have all the tea, milk, bread and cheese you want, but not a drop of beer, this day or any other day, while at work here. I know what I am talking about. I am no teetotal fanatic, but I've proved the truth of that statement during many a day of more trying labor than digging soft earth."

The terms were agreed to without a murmur. The incident, slight as it was, had its bearing on the day's history. Smith was leading his cohort to the attack, when one of the men, apparently bethinking himself, approached Armathwaite and touched his cap.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but was ye axin' about Miss Meg?"

"Yes."

"Well, I seed her goin' up t' moor road nigh on half an hour sen" (since).

The Grange itself was the only house on the moor road for many a mile, and it was most unlikely that Margu rite would take a protracted stroll in that direction at such an hour. Somehow, Armathwaite was aware of a chill in the air which he had not felt earlier. It was his habit to disregard those strange glimpses of coming events, generally of misfortune, which men call premonitions. When confronted by accomplished facts, he acted as honor and experience dictated; for the rest, he said, with Milton—

"I argue not
Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart and hope; but still bear up and steer
Right onward."

But this all-sufficing rule of conduct had availed him little from the moment he crossed the threshold of the Grange. Right well had it served him in the strenuous years of vigilant governance now so remote; since his coming to Elmdale he seemed ever to be striving against shapeless phantoms. He had sought quiet and content in that peaceful-looking village; he had found only care and gnawing foreboding, brightened, it is true, by a day-dream, which itself left bitter communing when it waned. For he was his own severest censor. He regarded himself as one already in the sere and yellow leaf. Fortune had called him to the high places only to cast him forth discredited, if not humbled. That he, a man who believed he had done with the great world, should think of allying his shattered life with the sweet and winsome creature whose feminine charm was enhanced by a frank girlishness, was a tantalizing prospect which, like the mirage in a desert, merged with the arid wastes when subjected to close scrutiny. With Margu rite near, reason fled, and all things seemed possible; when the thrall of her presence was withdrawn, cold judgment warned him that gratitude for help rendered should not be mistaken for love.

He felt now that another crisis had arisen, yet the past yielded no ray of guidance. He glared at the poor laborer who, all unconsciously, was fate's herald in this new adversity, for he was instantly aware, without other spoken word, that Margu rite Ogilvey had fled. The man's troubled face showed that he feared he had done wrong.

"I'm main sorry, sir," said he, "if I've said owt te vex ye, but, hearin' the talk of Miss Meg, I thought——"

Armathwaite's drawn features relaxed, and he placed a friendly hand on the

villager's shoulder.

"You've done right," he said. "I am very much obliged to you. I have a stupid habit of allowing my mind to wander. Just then I was thinking of something wholly unconnected with Miss Garth's disappearance, which will arouse Mrs. Jackson's wrath because of bacon and eggs frizzled to a cinder. I must go and condole with her."

He was turning to re-enter the house, mainly to set at rest any suspicion that Margu rite's absence arose from other cause than sheer forgetfulness, when the clang of the gate stayed him. A youth had dismounted from a bicycle, and was hastening up the path with an air of brisk importance.

"Telegrams for Garth and Whittaker," he said. "Any answer, sir?"

Armathwaite took the two buff envelopes which the lad produced from a leather pouch.

"Have you come from Bellerby?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, wait a few minutes. There may be some reply."

He went into the dining-room. So sure was he that Margu rite had gone away that he had not the slightest hesitation about opening the telegram addressed to "Garth, The Grange, Elmdale." As he anticipated, it was from Mrs. Ogilvey. It had been dispatched at seven o'clock from Tavistock, and read:

"Arriving to-night if possible. Don't take any action until I am with you.
—MOTHER."

The early hour at which it had been sent off—from a town, too, which he rightly estimated as a good many miles distant from Warleggan, showed that Mrs. Suarez had contrived to get a telegram through to Cornwall the previous night, so Percy Whittaker's mischievous interference had proved quite successful.

Then, with lightning clarity came the belief that Percy Whittaker was responsible for Margu rite's flight. Armathwaite scouted the notion that she had such a thing in her mind when she came to him in the garden. Her nature was incapable of guile. Had she formed some fantastic scheme during the watches of the night she would never have put her troubles aside to share in his light-hearted planning of

a new and glorified garden. In fact, he recalled her sudden dismay because of her seeming neglect of the invalid, and now he knew that he had not seen her since she went upstairs, whereas Whittaker himself had sent more than one urgent summons for her subsequently.

Stifling his fury as best he might, Armathwaite hurried to Whittaker's room.

"A telegram has just come for you," he said, and watched the younger man's face as he read. It was a long screed, and evidently bored its recipient.

"Oh, it's only from my sister," came the languid explanation. "By the way, where's Miss Garth?"

"Gone, I think."

"Gone!" Whittaker rose on an elbow and glowered at Armathwaite. "What the devil do you mean by 'gone'? Where has she gone to?" he cried.

"I want you to answer that question," and Armathwaite's voice was strangely harsh and threatening. "She came to you half an hour ago. Did you say anything likely to distress her? Tell me the truth, or I'll pound your face to a jelly."

His aspect had suddenly become so menacing that Whittaker wilted; his head sank back to the pillow, and his eyelids twitched with fright.

"That's no way to talk——" he began, but the other seized him by the shoulder with his left hand and clenched his right fist suggestively.

"You think I ought not to threaten you with violence because you are lying there helpless," was the savage interruption; "but, if you have not forgotten the ways of Ind, you must know that a poisonous snake is never so venomous as when disabled. Speak, now, and speak truthfully, or, as sure as God is in heaven, I'll strike!"

There was no withstanding the set purpose revealed by those blazing eyes, and Whittaker was so alarmed that he dared not attempt to lie.

"I—I've asked Meg—half a dozen times—to marry me," he stuttered, "and this morning—I told her—she'd have to consent—now."

"Why now?" and the fierce grip tightened, drawing the livid face nearer.

"Because—she must."

"Explain yourself, you dog!"

"I—I was afraid of your influence, so I warned her—that if—she wanted to save her father.... Ah! Let go! Curse you, let go! You're breaking my bones!"

That eldritch scream restored Armathwaite's senses. It startled the men in the garden. It brought Mrs. Jackson and Betty running from the kitchen. Happily, Armathwaite struck no blow. He flung off Whittaker's limp body as though he were, indeed, one of the vicious reptiles to which he had compared him.

"You *sug!*" he breathed, using the bitterest term of contempt known to the East, for the Persian word means all that the Anglo-Saxon implies when he likens a fellow-creature to a dog, with the added force of an epithet which signifies "dog" in that despicable sense, and in none other.

Striding down the stairs, his fire-laden glance met the ghastly smile of the painted figure. With an active bound, he was on the window ledge, and the clenched fist which had ached to scatter some of the hapless Percy's features fell heavily on the scowling face in the window. The glass, which proved exceedingly thin and brittle, shattered into countless fragments within and without, and the inner sheet of transparent paper was so dry and tense that it shriveled instantly when exposed to the air. Indeed, Armathwaite, despite his rage, was aware of a peculiar sensation. It seemed as though he had struck at something impalpable as air. His hand was not cut. It appeared to have touched nothing. He thrust straight and hard, and the only evidence of his destroying zeal was a quantity of powdered glass on the landing, some curled wisps of paper adhering to the leaden frame, and an oval of blue sky shining through the visor.

As he leaped to the floor again, Mrs. Jackson reached the center of the hall. She screeched frantically, thinking that the Black Prince himself was springing from the window. But she was a stout-hearted old woman, and quickly recovered her wits when she saw what Armathwaite had done.

"They've long wanted a man i' this house!" she cried, in a voice that cracked with excitement, "and it's glad I am te see they've gotten yan at last! Eh, sir, ye med me jump! Ye did an' all! But ye'll never rue t' day when ye punched a hole in t' fëace o' that image of Owd Nick!"

By this time Smith and his helpers, aware that something unusual was going on inside the house, were gathered at the front door, which had remained wide open since the early morning.

"Listen, all of you!" said Armathwaite, addressing the two women and five men as though they were an army and he their emperor. "I am master here, and I expect you to obey my orders. I am going out now, and I may be away some hours, possibly all day. You, Smith, must put a padlock and chain on the gate and refuse to open it for anyone except Dr. Scaife and a nurse. You, Mrs. Jackson, must keep the doors locked while I am gone, and let no one enter, excepting, as I have told Smith, Dr. Scaife and the nurse who will accompany him. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you, Smith?"

"Yes, sir."

"Betty, put some thin slices of bread and meat between two small plates, and tie them in a napkin. Fill a bottle with milk. Quick! I have no time to lose."

He turned to the gaping boy who had brought the telegrams from Bellerby.

"Did you ride here on your own bicycle?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Is it a strong machine?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lend it to me for the day, and I'll give you a sovereign."

"Right you are, sir!" came the hearty response. "Is there anything to go back to the post office?"

"Nothing. Raise the saddle of your bicycle, and see that the tires are in good order. Here's your money."

In an incredibly short time Armathwaite was pushing the bicycle up the steep road to the moor. He walked with long, swinging strides, and was soon lost to sight, because the trees behind the Grange hid the highway from any part of the house or grounds, and no one dared risk his wrath by going out into the road to watch him.

He climbed swiftly yet steadily, and conquered the worst part of the hill in fifteen minutes. Then he mounted the bicycle, and got over the ground rapidly.

Thus, within less than an hour after Margu rite Ogilvey had escaped from the Grange—in the first instance by taking refuge in her bedroom, and, while Betty was talking to Whittaker, by slipping downstairs and climbing through a window in the library—Armathwaite saw her—a lonely figure in that far-flung moorland, walking in the direction of Leyburn.

Apparently, she had grabbed her hat and mackintosh coat when passing through the hall, and was carrying them, because the sun was glinting in her coils of brown hair. No stranger who met her would take her for other than a summer visitor. Certainly, no one would guess the storm of grief and terror that raged in her heart.

The bicycle sped along with a silent speed that soon lessened the distance between the two. Armathwaite did not wish to startle her by a too sudden appearance, so he rang the bell when yet fifty yards in the rear.

She turned instantly. When she saw who the pursuer was, she stopped. Neither spoke until Armathwaite had alighted, and the two had exchanged a long and questioning look.

Then she said:

"I'm going to my father. My place is with him. He must be hidden somewhere. I dare not wait until my mother came or wrote. I'm sorry, Bob. I could not even explain, though I should have telegraphed from York. Please don't ask me to say any more, or try to detain me."

"Any explanation is unnecessary," he said, smiling gravely into the sweet face with its aspect of unutterable pain. "I squeezed the facts out of Percy Whittaker. I'm afraid I hurt him, but that is immaterial."

"You made him tell you what he said to me?" and the brown eyes momentarily lost their wistfulness in a whirl of surprise and maidenly dismay.

"Yes."

"Everything—even his threat?"

"Everything."

"Oh, Bob! What am I to do? I must go to dad!"

"Undoubtedly; but I don't see why you should walk fourteen miles practically

without food. I've brought some breakfast—of a sort. We'll go shares—half the sandwiches and half the milk. Then you'll ride on the step of the bike when the road permits, and trudge the remainder, and we'll be in Leyburn in half the time it would take you to walk. Here are the eatables, and this is just the place for a picnic."

He spoke and behaved in such a matter-of-fact way that he almost persuaded the bewildered girl that her conduct, and his, and Percy Whittaker's was ruled and regulated by every-day conditions. Placing the bicycle by the roadside, he produced the package prepared by Betty, and was uncorking the milk when a strangled sob caught his ear.

Margu rite had turned to hide her face, for a rush of emotion had proved too much for her self-control. Laying the bottle on a bank of turf, he caught the girl's shoulder, and turned her gently until her swimming eyes met his.

"There's nothing to be gained by hailing trouble half way, Meg," he said. "I don't wish to hide my belief that you are faced with conditions of a most extraordinary nature, but I am convinced that they will shape themselves differently to any forecast we can arrive at now. I followed you for two reasons. I wanted you to begin a long journey better prepared than was possible after flight on a moment's notice, and I did not want you to go away thinking I was in ignorance of your motives. I can tell you here and now that you will save your father, if his position is such that he needs safe-guarding; further, you will never be compelled to marry Percy Whittaker."

"Bob," she whispered brokenly. "I would rather die!"

Then Armathwaite flung restraint to the winds. He gathered her in his arms, and lifted the tear-stained face to his.

"Sweetheart," he said, "in the midst of such madness, let you and me be sane. I love you! You are the only woman I have ever loved. If I am allowed by Providence to begin life once more, you are the only woman I shall ever love. You were brought to me by a kindly fate, and I refuse to let you go now without telling you that you carry my heart with you. I ask for no answer at this moment. Some day in the future, when the clouds have lifted from your young life, I'll come to you—"

But Margu rite gave him her answer then. Lifting herself on tip-toe, she kissed him on the lips.

"Bob," she said tremulously, "I think I knew you were my chosen mate, if God willed it, when we parted on that first night in the Grange."

That first night! It was hardly thirty-six hours ago, yet these two had crowded into that brief space more tribulation than many lovers undergo in a lifetime; and sorrow knits hearts more closely and lastingly than joy.

Armathwaite could hardly credit the evidence of his senses. He had come to regard himself as so immeasurably older than this delightful girl that it seemed wildly improbable that she could return the almost hopeless love which had sprung into sudden and fierce activity in his breast. Yet, here she was, lying snug in his embrace, and gazing up at him with glistening eyes, her lips distended, her arms clasping him, her heart beating tumultuously in the first transports of passion.

He kissed her again and again, and could have held her there seemingly forever; but they were driven apart by a curious humming sound which bore a singular resemblance to the purr of a powerful automobile climbing a steep hill.

Marguérite disengaged herself from her lover's embrace with a flushing self-consciousness that was, in itself, vastly attractive.

"Bob," she murmured, stooping to pick up a fallen hat and mackintosh, "miracles are happening. Here are you and I forgetting a world in which evil things find a place, and here is a motor-car crossing Elmdale moor for the first time in history."

"It would not surprise me in the least if the visitant proved to be a flying-machine," he laughed, finding it hard to withdraw his ardent gaze from those flushed cheeks and that tangled mass of brown hair.

But the insistent drumming of an engine grew ever louder, and soon a long, low-built touring car swept into view over the last undulation. Apparently, it was untenanted save by a chauffeur, and Armathwaite's brain, recovering its balance after a whirl of delirium, was beginning to guess at a possible explanation of this strange occurrence, when the car slowed as it neared them, and finally halted.

"Are you Mr. Armathwaite, sir?" inquired the chauffeur.

"Yes."

The man lifted his cap.

"This is the car you ordered from York last night, sir."

"How thoughtful of you to follow!" cried Armathwaite, overjoyed by this quite unexpected bit of good fortune. He had not only forgotten that the car was on order—an impulse of the moment when he realized how tied he and all others were to the house if anything in the nature of a sudden and rapid journey came on the *tapis*—but, in any event, he had not looked for its arrival before mid-day, and the hour was yet barely ten o'clock.

"Your servants thought you might need me, sir," explained the man, "so I came after you. It's a scorcher of a road for the first mile, but the rest isn't so bad, if it keeps in the same condition."

Now, what had actually happened was this. The chauffeur had reached the Grange about twenty minutes after Armathwaite's departure. At that moment Smith was chaining and padlocking the gate, but Betty heard the snorting of the car, and came to find out its cause.

When the chauffeur told her that he was there in response to an order, the quick-witted girl told him to hurry up the moor road. He looked at it, and grinned.

"What! Take a valuable machine over a track like that! Not me!" he said.

"Can't it go there?" she inquired.

"It can go anywhere, for that matter."

"Are you afraid, then?"

"Afraid of what? D'ye think I want to twist an axle or smash a wheel?"

Then one of the laboring men joined in.

"I reckon you don't know t' maister," he said. "He wouldn't care a pin if you smashed yourself, but you've got to obey orders. He's one of the sort who has his own way. Good pay, no beer, an' hard work is *his* motter. It is, an' all."

Between maid and man, the chauffeur decided to risk it. When all was said and done, it would be a bad beginning in a new job if the servants reported his refusal to follow on.

"Is he far ahead?" he inquired.

"Mebbe a mile over t' top."

Starting the engine on the switch, he put the car at the hill, and, like many another difficulty, it was not insurmountable when tackled boldly. So, behold! A comfortable and easy way was opened to Leyburn, at any rate, and Armathwaite laughed gayly.

"Now we'll breakfast, and discuss," said he. "The gods have sent us a chariot!"



CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH THE AREA WIDENS

If any critic, on perusing this chronicle, is moved to peevish condemnation of Armathwaite's amazing conduct that morning, the man himself would be the last to protest. He might urge that he was dazzled by the new and entrancing realm whose bright waters and fair meads he could discern beyond the present rough and dangerous ground. He might plead the literal truth—that when he went in pursuit of Marguérite Ogilvey he had no more intention of declaring his love than of hastening to Dover and endeavoring forthwith to swim the English Channel. But, making every allowance for a confirmed celibate who had suddenly become a devout lover, and to whose arms the lady of his choice had committed herself without any pretense of restraint, it must still be admitted that he was guilty of a most singular omission in failing to make known to her his very identity!

He remembered the phenomenal lapse when too late. Even to that practical side of his character which reproached the emotional side with a ridiculous forgetfulness, he could only say, in mitigation of sentence, that the sudden appearance of the car brought about such a novel situation that all else yielded to the need for prompt and skillful judgment in deciding Marguérite's immediate future.

It was all the more difficult to think logically and act decisively when Marguérite herself, ever and anon, was lifting adorably shy eyes to his while the two were making the best of the unusual meal he had provided. There, nevertheless, within a few feet, stood the obedient giant whose stout mechanism rendered many things possible that were hitherto impossible. The chauffeur, who gave his name as Storr, had taken off the bonnet for a critical glance at the six cylinders which had forced nearly two tons of metal and wood up the stony and rutted surface of one of the worst moorland tracks in Yorkshire. He seemed to be more than satisfied. The water in the radiator had got rather excited, but that was only to be expected. A close eye was given to other essentials, and the tire covers were examined, but every part of the car had withstood the strain of a fearsome hill splendidly.

Storr had never doubted, but, like a prudent general, he reviewed his forces after the engagement, and found them not only intact, but ready for mightier deeds. Then, merely to gratify the sense of touch, as a horseman strokes a willing and well-groomed steed, he fingered a tap or two, shut off the engine, and asked Armathwaite if he might smoke a cigarette while awaiting further orders.

His employer thanked him for the word. It recalled the motive of Margu rite's flight. Some plan of action must be arrived at, and without delay.

"Smoke, by all means," he said, summing up the man at a glance as a bluff and honest sort of fellow who would be thoroughly dependable if properly handled. "How long did the run from York to Elmdale take?"

"A little more than two hours, sir. I started at half-past seven. Your telegram said I was to arrive by noon, but our people thought they'd please a new customer by bein' a bit afore time. They didn't wire, because the car would be to hand almost as quick as a telegram."

"Can you go from Leyburn to York in two hours?"

"Easily, sir."

"Very well. Just pull your machine a few yards ahead, and Miss Ogilvey and I will discuss the day's program."

Storr obeyed, and Armathwaite outlined to a willing listener the project he had already formed.

"First," he said, "here is a telegram from your mother. I opened it. I thought it was best——"

"Why, of course, Bob dear; why shouldn't you?"

Bob dear! It was very pleasant to hear the phrase on Margu rite's lips, yet it rendered doubly distasteful the suggestion he had in mind; since where is the lover who will bring himself willingly to the task of telling his lady-love that they must part? But it had to be done. Margu rite must go—not quite so far as Cornwall, it is true, but much too far to please him, and he must return to the Grange, where, a sure instinct warned him, weighty matters would be settled that day.

A cry of dismay from the girl gave him the cue he wanted.

"Oh, she has started already!" she almost sobbed. "While I was flying to Warleggan she is traveling North. We shall pass each other on the way!"

"No," he said, "that must not happen. You are going to be a good little sweetheart, and do as I tell you. This most excellent and comfortable car will take you to York. There you will ascertain from an obliging station-master what time Mrs. Ogilvey can arrive from Tavistock, assuming she left there at or about the hour stated in the message, and you'll meet her. At a rough guess, Mrs. Ogilvey should be in York about six o'clock. You'll escort her to the station hotel, give her something to eat, and calmly discuss the whole affair while the same luxurious automobile is bringing you back to Elmdale."

"But, what of the danger dad may be in?"

"I am coming to that. I believe, somehow, that your mother will relieve your mind in that respect. Remember, I have always held, since the main features of this extraordinary affair became clear, that your father has acted throughout with his wife's cognizance, if not with her complete approval. Now, if that is so, she is the one person who can decide whether you return with her to Elmdale or hasten through the night to Warleggan. Again hazarding a guess, I don't think you could reach your father to-night, even though you caught the first available train from York. Cornwall is a long way from Yorkshire. By starting this minute, you might be in York by one o'clock. Allowing eleven hours for the journey, an estimate I am doubtful about, you would arrive at Tavistock at midnight, whereas it is highly probable there is no such train, nor one so rapid. By the way, why, do you think, did Mrs. Ogilvey telegraph from Tavistock?"

"She would drive there—some twelve miles. No telegram could be dispatched from Warleggan before the post office opened at eight."

"She may have had an even more powerful reason. The message is sent to 'Garth,' not to 'Ogilvey.' Isn't it quite rational to suppose that she hopes no one in Elmdale knows about the change of name?"

"Yes," said Meg, trying to look calmly judicial. "That sounds reasonable."

"Then every consideration points to the wisdom of awaiting your mother at York."

"But, Bob dear, have you thought of the awful result if Percy carries out his threat?"

"Percy will not do anything dramatic to-day, I promise you. I have scared him badly already, and I'm going back now with the full intent that he shall cause no more mischief until I hear from, or see, Mrs. Ogilvey and yourself, or one of you. Perhaps, to relieve my anxiety, you will send a message from York announcing your decision?"

"Yes; I'll do that. You are really convinced that I ought to meet mother?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Then you can trust me. I'll do as you say. You needn't have any fear that between here and York I'll change my mind. Bob, you believe me, don't you, when I tell you that I ran away this morning because I dared not take you into my confidence? I could not bring myself to explain the true meaning of Percy's horrid insinuations."

"Please, forget Percy. I'll deal with him."

"But you won't be too angry with him? It is hard to endure, I know, that he should play on his defenseless state, but, if he were quite well and uninjured, he could offer you no resistance."

He laughed. The notion of Percy Whittaker and himself engaging in a desperate conflict for physical supremacy was intensely amusing.

"If you mean that I am not to assault him, I promise that with all my heart," he said. "I gripped him rather strenuously an hour ago, I admit, but then I was angry with him. Now I feel that I owe him a deep debt of gratitude, because he has brought to pass something which I hardly dared dream of. Don't you see, dearest, that if Percy hadn't behaved meanly to you I shouldn't now be calling you dearest, and wishing that our sharp-eyed chauffeur were anywhere else in the wide world but where he is. Now, no more words, but deeds! Off you go to York! What money have you?"

"Plenty."

"What do you call plenty?"

"Dad gave me fifteen pounds when I left home, and I've spent less than five."

"Well, then, sweetheart, it is good-by till this evening."

"Oh, Bob darling, I shall pray that it may be so!"

Storr received his orders without lifting an eyelid, which was highly creditable to him, having regard to the peculiar conditions under which he had met his employer. Of course, he was ignorant of the state of affairs at the Grange. He imagined that Mr. Armathwaite was escorting a young lady over the moor to Leyburn, which was a funny way to reach York, when Nuttonby lay on a better road, which was also the more direct route. But there was nothing unusual in the fact that he should be taking Miss Ogilvey to meet her mother, while the car would make light of the three journeys.

"You'd better have this, sir, and see if it's right," he said, giving Armathwaite a note. A glance showed that it dealt with terms for the hire of the car.

"Tell your people it is quite satisfactory," said Armathwaite, and, after a farewell pressure of Meg's hand, and a look from the brown eyes which remained with him like a blessing, the car started. He watched until it had vanished over a long undulation of the road, and saw the last flutter of Meg's handkerchief ere she crossed the sky-line. Then he mounted the bicycle, and rode swiftly back to the tiny hamlet in which, during two short days, he had passed through so many and so much varied experiences.

Looking down from the crest of the hill at the sunlit panorama of farm and field, woodland and furze-grown common, with Elmdale's cluster of homesteads nestling close beneath the moor, and the spire of Bellerby Church (near which lay the mortal remains of "Stephen Garth") rising above a cluster of elms in the middle distance, it seemed to be a fantastic and unreal notion that so many of life's evils, so much of its beauty and happiness, could have found full scope for their expression in that tiny and remote place.

As the hill was too dangerous in parts to ride, he dismounted twice. He was about to coast down the last straight slope to the house when a thought struck him with such blinding force that he nearly lost control of the bicycle. Fool that he was, his first care should have been to tell Margu rite that his name was not Armathwaite; that he had adopted an incognito simply to avoid the prying eyes and inquisitive tongues of those with whom he might be brought in contact; that, in marrying him, she was stepping forth from the seclusion of a student's retreat into the full glare of public life. Oh, the deuce take all complications and worries! He had won Margu rite by extraordinary means—he must do his wooing in more orthodox manner, and in his true colors.

He was traveling at a rate which kept pace with the tornado in his mind, but the

second nature brought into being by an adventurous career bent a watchful eye on the inequalities of the road, so that he was actually slowing up somewhat short of the gate leading to the Grange garden when he became aware of an unusual concourse of people gathered in the roadway. A motor-car and two dog-carts were halted near the gable of Mrs. Jackson's cottage, and a number of men—among them two in police uniform—who seemed to have collected into a chatting group, dissolved into units when he approached.

He recognized a groom at a horse's head as Dr. Scaife's man; all the others were total strangers.

But not for long.

Sir Berkeley Hutton, brought to Elmdale by a neighborly curiosity strengthened by the call of the East, appeared to be overwhelmed with surprise at sight of Armathwaite. But the worthy baronet did not lose the faculty of speech. No conceivable catastrophe, short of instant death, could deprive him of that.

"God bless my soul!" he cried, advancing with outstretched hand. "Baluchi Bob! The last man breathing I ever expected to see in Elmdale! Did the monsoon break earlier than usual this year, or what wind of heaven blew *you* here?"

"Hullo, Barker!" cried Armathwaite, hailing him with manifest pleasure. "I didn't know you had pitched your tent in these parts!"

"Yes, but, dash it all, Bob, what's the game? They told me someone name of Armathwaite, in the Politicals, had taken the Grange."

"Quite true. But you know I came a cropper in India, and I was a bit tired of the *sturm und drang* of existence, so I hied me to cover under my mother's maiden name. I suppose I have a sort of right to it, though it doesn't seem to have proved altogether successful as a cloak."

"By gad! I can hardly agree with you there. I felt as though I'd come a purler over wire when I saw Baluchi Bob dropping off that bicycle. Great Scott! You on a bike! How have the mighty fallen! But I'll lend you a hack till you collect a few useful screws, unless you're bitten by this new craze for rushing about the country in a gastank. And won't Mollie be glad to see you! It was only the other day she was talkin' about the Pup, and sayin' that if it hadn't been for you——"

"Oh, tell Mollie to forget that old tale, or she'll make me nervous!"

Each word exchanged between the two was heard distinctly by the others, and, such is the queer way in which the affairs of life sometimes take an unexpected twist, there was a marked and instant change of attitude on the part of three men, at least, who had come to Elmdale that day prepared to treat the Grange's new tenant as a potential criminal. Banks, mouthpiece of the *Nuttonby Gazette*, who had bicycled thither in the hope of securing another batch of readable copy for a special Saturday edition, suddenly found himself reviewing, with a sinking heart, one or two rather ticklish paragraphs in the screed already published anent "The Elmdale mystery." As for the superintendent and inspector of police from Nuttonby, they forthwith recanted certain opinions formed after hearing Banks's story and reading the current issue of his newspaper.

For Sir Berkeley Hutton was a county magnate, chairman of the Nuttonby bench, an alderman of the County Council, a Deputy Lieutenant, and goodness knows what else of a power in civic and social circles, and here was he hailing this stranger as an intimate friend, being himself greeted by the nickname earned by a loud and strident utterance which never failed, speaking of Lady Hutton as "Mollie," of his eldest son as "the Pup." County police and country editors must be chary of accepting the evidence of James Walkers and Tom Blands against the guarantee of such a man, or they may get their corns trodden on most painfully!

All at once, Sir Berkeley Hutton seemed to recollect the talk which had been going on outside the locked and barred gate, for Begonia Smith and his henchmen had refused to pass anyone but the doctor and nurse, who were with their patient at that moment.

"I say, Bob," he went on, in a thunderous whisper quite as audible as his ordinary voice, "I'm devilish glad it's you—I am, 'pon my soul!—because some of these chaps have been spinnin' the queerest sort of yarn, in which a murder, a suicide, a ghost, and a pretty girl are mixed up in fine style. Just tell 'em all to go to blazes, will you?—except Dobb. Dobb's a decent fellow, and he acted for the people who used to live here—Hi! Dobb. This is——" Then it dawned on him that his friend might wish still to preserve his anonymity save in the sacred circle of the elect, so he broke off into "Come along, Dobb! I want you to meet one of the best fellows who ever wore shoe-leather!"

Dobb advanced. With him came a gentleman who was as unknown to Nuttonby as Armathwaite himself. Before the solicitor could speak, his companion said quietly:

"Sir Robert Dalrymple, I believe?"

"Yes," and Marguérite's "chosen mate" looked him very searchingly and squarely in the eyes.

"My name is Morand," said the other. "I am sent here by the India Office to tell you——" he glanced around in momentary hesitation.

"Pray, go on," said Dalrymple, as Armathwaite must be described henceforth. "There is nothing that the India Office has to communicate which I am not willing that all the world should hear."

"Happily, Sir Robert, this is a communication which all the world ought to hear. The Maharajah of Barapur is dead. He was assassinated last Monday while driving through the bazaar. His prime minister, Chalwar Singh, was with him, and was mortally wounded at the same time."

"Then India is well rid of two pestilent scoundrels," said Dalrymple unconcernedly.

"That is the view now held by the Government," was the grave answer.

"A death-bed conversion, of a sort," commented his hearer dryly.

"A death-bed confession, too," said Morand. "It was a fortunate thing that both men lived long enough to reveal that they had concocted the whole story of the Maharani's pearls in order to get you shelved. Your administration was too honest. They played on your well-known carelessness in trivial matters of detail, and bribed your native secretary, Muncherji, to include in your correspondence the letters which seemed to prove your complicity in a serious breach of trust. Muncherji, by rare good chance, was not in Barapur when the Maharajah and Chalwar Singh were riddled with bullets, so he was arrested before he knew of the affair. He, too, has confessed. In fact, I can convey everything in a sentence. The Government of India has reinstated you in the High Commissionership, and you are gazetted as absent on leave. I am the bearer of ample apologies from the India Office, which will be tendered to you in person by my chief when he meets you in London. Meanwhile, I am to request you to allow the announcement to be made public that you will return to India on a named date, while the appointment of your deputy is left open for your recommendation."

Dalrymple paled slightly, which was the only evidence he gave of the effect such a statement was bound to produce on a proud and ambitious nature, but Sir Berkeley Hutton was irrepressible.

"By gad!" he roared, "somebody's gold lace has been rolled in the dust of Calcutta before the India Department climbed down like that. I never heard anything like it—never! 'Pon me soul! Won't Mollie be pleased?"

Yet the man to whom the path of empire was again thrown open spoke no word. It was good to have his honor cleared of the stain put on it by a scheming Indian prince and his henchmen. It was good to find himself standing once more in the high place he had won by self-sacrificing work and unflinching adherence to an ideal of efficient government. But his thoughts were with a sorrow-stricken girl speeding to a sad tryst with a mother who might bring tidings that would blight her life for many a year.

Morand grew anxious. He shared Dalrymple's knowledge of the tremendous issues bound up with an affair of State of real magnitude, and he did not want to fail in this, his first confidential mission.

"If there is anything else I can say, Sir Robert——" he began, and his voice disrupted a dream.

"It's all right, Morand," said the other, letting a hand rest on the shoulder of the younger man in that characteristic way of his. "I'm not such a cur as to snarl when I have been proved right, and my traducers are ready to admit their blunder. I didn't yelp when the blow fell. I'm not going to kick up a bobbery now when I'm given back my spurs. Tell your chief that I'll come to him soon, within a week, if possible. I have business on my hands here that calls imperatively for settlement. I'll deal first with that; then I'll come. Are you returning to town at once?"

"By the first available train. More than that, I am to telegraph your decision to Whitehall. Between you and me, some people are in a howling funk lest a question should be put in the House."

"That isn't the frontier method. Men who appeal to Parliament when things go wrong are of no value to India. But I don't want to preach."

"Won't you come in?"

"If you'll pardon me, I'll hurry back to Nuttonby. That telegram is called for urgently. What about your deputy?"

"Collins was transferred to Oudh because he supported me. Send him to Barapur. The natives will understand that better than a dozen gazettes."

"Thanks. That clinches it, Sir Robert. Mr. Dobb, do you mind if we start immediately?"

Mr. Dobb did mind. For one thing, he had not spoken a word to Sir Robert Dalrymple yet. For another, Nuttonby loomed larger in his mind than some wrangle in far-away Hindustan, and Nuttonby was seething with rumors anent present and past inhabitants of the Grange.

"We, like the State of Barapur, have our little troubles," he said guardedly. "Sir Robert has shown already that he appreciates their gravity. My car will take you to Nuttonby, Mr. Morand, and come back for me."

The representative of the India Office was only too pleased to get away on any terms. He knew that a reassuring message was wanted in Whitehall. There were wheels within wheels. A question was put in the House that night, and an Under-Secretary scoffed at the notion that Sir Robert Dalrymple, "a trusted servant of his country, whose splendid work on the Indus was most thoroughly appreciated by the Government of India," had been requested to resign. As a matter of public

interest, he was pleased to inform the honorable questioner that Sir Robert Dalrymple, only that day, had put forward the name of Mr. Mortimer Collins, I.C.S., to act as his deputy in Barapur until he returned from short leave granted on "urgent private affairs."

The motor was already trumpeting its way through a mob of Elmdale urchins, who seldom saw a car, and had never before seen two in one day, when Dalrymple found himself regretting he had not inquired how Morand contrived to get on his track so easily. Some weeks elapsed before he learned that the only friend in London who knew his whereabouts thought it a duty to speak when the hue and cry went forth from the India Office.

Dalrymple was with his friend, a retired general, in his club when the vexed administrator announced his intention to retire from the arena and take a well-earned rest.

"I'll assume my mother's name, Armathwaite," he had said, "and rusticate in some place where Barapur is unknown and India never mentioned. Let's have a look at the map!"

He glanced at a motoring road-book lying on the club table.

"Here we are!" he laughed. "Judging by the condition of the highways, there are backwoods near Nuttonby, in Yorkshire. My postal address will be Armathwaite, near Nuttonby, for some months. But I'll write."

So that was how it happened that Sir Robert Dalrymple came to the Grange, and met Margu rite Ogilvey. Some part of the outcome of that meeting was foreshadowed while Smith of the Begonias was unlocking the gate, because a procession of three appeared in the porch.

Dr. Scaife and a nurse were carrying Percy Whittaker between them. The doctor's distress was almost comical when he caught sight of Dalrymple. He shouted brokenly, being rather breathless:

"For goodness' sake—Mr. Armathwaite—come and persuade this young man—to remain here. He insists—on being taken away—at once!"



CHAPTER XV

THE LAYING OF THE GHOST

It has been seen that Dalrymple had a short way with the Percy Whittakers of this world. He strode up the garden path and confronted Whittaker, who was standing on one foot and clinging in pain and terror to Dr. Scaife and the nurse.

"You had better remain here," he said sternly. "Miss Ogilvey has only gone to meet her mother at York. Both ladies will probably arrive this evening. Why are you making yourself a nuisance when everyone is doing all that is possible to serve you?"

Whittaker clutched the doctor even more tightly.

"He says that before witnesses," he quavered, "yet less than an hour ago he tried to strangle me."

"Stuff and nonsense! I don't believe it!" protested Scaife emphatically.

"I frightened him, undoubtedly," said Dalrymple. "It was necessary. Sometimes a threatened spanking is as effectual as the real thing, and Mr. Whittaker's nervous system has led him to take an exaggerated view of my intentions. The fact is that he himself was responsible for a show of violence on my part. Meanwhile, Margu rite Ogilvey, whom you have always known as Meg Garth, Dr. Scaife, has promised to become my wife, so Mr. Whittaker and I have no further cause for quarrel. Indeed, by the time he is able to walk downstairs unassisted, his own good sense will come to the rescue, and blot out any unpleasant memories as between him and me.... Now, Percy, my boy, let me use my muscles to better purpose than choking the life out of you. I'm going to carry you back to bed again."

His air of quiet domination, no less than the news which sounded the knell of Whittaker's hopes, seemed to mesmerize the neurotic youth into silence and submission. Dalrymple took him in his arms, lifted him off the ground with gentle care, and carried him to the bedroom he had insisted on leaving. The nurse followed, and he left the invalid in her care.

Hastening to the porch, he found Dr. Scaife mopping his forehead; the worthy doctor was more upset by the frenzied statements made by Percy than by the physical effort involved by carrying him downstairs.

"Wait one moment," he said. "I'm bringing in some men whom you know. Then I shall explain everything."

He passed on to the gate.

"I want you, Hutton, and you, Mr. Dobb, to come into the house. Those police officers also had better join us. Who is the other man?"

"Mr. Banks, of the *Nuttonby Gazette*," said the baronet.

"Very well. Let him come, too. Better tell him what he must not say rather than correct his blunders subsequently in a court of law."

Mr. Dobb, being a lawyer, doubted the wisdom of admitting a representative of the press to their conclave, but Dalrymple's air of authority kept him dumb. During the drive from Nuttonby the delegate of the India Office had discoursed on the important position this stranger occupied in India, and it was not for a country solicitor, who hardly guessed what was coming, to question his decision before he knew its scope.

And therein Dalrymple showed his genius. Banks, already in a flutter because of certain indiscretions in his printed references to the inquest, was at once soothed and gratified by the great man's tact. The police superintendent found the ground cut away from beneath his feet by the full and complete version of recent events which Dalrymple supplied. Sir Berkeley and the doctor listened to the recital with ill-suppressed amazement, but, at the end, they agreed, each and all, with Dalrymple's suggestion that judgment should be suspended until Mrs. Ogilvey was in Elmdale.

He did not attempt to argue that the law should not take its course.

"During the past ten years," he said, "I have held the lives and liberties of two millions of people in my keeping, so I need hardly say that I am a most unlikely person to fly in the face of authority. But there are circumstances connected with this inquiry which call for careful treatment. Some man died here, and was buried, and the law must be satisfied that Mr. Stephen Ogilvey was either ignorant of the occurrence, or had no guilty knowledge of it—which is not quite the same thing—before he can be exonerated from the grave suspicion at present

attached to his actions of two years ago. Now, I have not the honor of knowing either Mr. Ogilvey or his wife, but I do hold that they could not have won the respect of their neighbors during twenty years of residence in this house and yet be capable of planning and committing an atrocious murder. I would point out that Mrs. Ogilvey shares some of the blame, or the guilt, of her husband. If he is a criminal, she knows it. The law looks with lenient eyes on a woman who shields a man in such conditions, but that element in human affairs only goes to strengthen my contention that Mrs. Ogilvey can, if she chooses, throw a flood of light on this strange problem. She is now on her way North. Her daughter has gone to York to meet her. In all likelihood, one or both ladies will be in Elmdale to-night. Is it not reasonable to ask that investigation by the police into a singular occurrence now two years old should be postponed till to-morrow? Gentlemen, I promise you this. Come here to-morrow, say, about two o'clock, and you will be placed in possession of every fact then known to me. It is obvious, in my opinion, that the police can hardly adopt any other course, but I am bound to point out to Mr. Banks that the man who writes, and the newspaper which publishes, theories or speculations with regard to this matter before it is fully cleared up through the proper channel, will incur a most serious responsibility."

Sir Berkeley Hutton, of course, had a word to say.

"Mr. Garth, or Mr. Ogilvey as you now call him, is an old and valued friend of mine," he declared, "and it is my fixed and definite belief that if he was stung by a wasp he would find some excuse for a poor insect which was only trying to protect itself from imaginary danger. Stephen Garth kill anybody! Stuff and nonsense!"

Mr. Dobb, too, was incredulous in so far as his friend's criminality was concerned.

"Mr. Garth certainly wrote the letter to the coroner," he said. "I saw it, and recognized his handwriting. Therefore, he knew that a death had taken place, and used a remarkably ingenious method of hoodwinking the authorities. That, in itself, is a legal offense—the magnitude of which alone can be estimated when we know the truth. I agree with Sir Robert Dalrymple. We must await Mrs. Garth's, or, I suppose I must learn to say, Mrs. Ogilvey's, arrival before any other steps are taken. Meanwhile, it is of the utmost importance that no word of this discussion shall travel beyond these four walls."

"Will Sir Robert Dalrymple undertake to notify me of Mrs. Ogilvey's presence?"

was the very pertinent inquiry made by the police superintendent.

Dalrymple undertook readily to send a messenger into Nuttonby early next morning, and his diplomacy was rewarded by seeing the conclave break up on that understanding. Nevertheless, he passed a miserable and restless day. He had not stemmed the torrent, but diverted it. If his faith was not justified, if Margu rite's mother either refused to give any explanation of her husband's extraordinary ruse, or denied all knowledge of it, there was no getting away from the fact that the elderly recluse might soon be lodged in a felon's cell.

Margu rite herself would strain every nerve to save her father, if only by flight, but her lover realized how futile that would prove. He had secured a respite—and no more. If Mrs. Ogilvey's admissions led her daughter to journey on through the night to Warleggan, the girl might contrive to hurry her father out of England before the bolt fell. But to what avail? They would be traced with ease. Their flight, the pursuit, the arrest, would only add fuel to the flame lighted by inquisitive newspapers. Better, far better, that the man should face an inquiry at once rather than be put on trial after a vain attempt to escape.

It was almost a relief to visit Percy Whittaker during the afternoon, and endeavor to convert him from active enmity into a sulky acquiescence in things as they were, and not as he hoped they would be. Luckily, Dalrymple had estimated a curious temperament with singular accuracy. After a long conversation, in which the older man cajoled and flattered Percy by turns, the latter declared that he never meant to put his threat into force.

"I'm not such an ass as to want to marry a girl who loathed the sight of me," he said ruefully. "I tried to frighten Meg. I guessed she'd run off to Warleggan. My motive was to separate the pair of you. Then I'd follow, as soon as this confounded ankle of mine would permit, and tell her candidly that I was frantically jealous of you. Dash it all, and not without good cause! All's fair in love an' war, Mr. Armathwaite. I've a notion now that my splutter simply drove her into your arms."

"My name is not Armathwaite——" began Dalrymple, whereupon Whittaker glared at him in a new frenzy.

"I never thought it was!" he vociferated. "Let me tell you you're the biggest puzzle of the lot. I shan't be a bit surprised if you say you are the fellow who hanged somebody here, and persuaded old Garth to stand the racket."

So, to pass the time while the nurse was eating a meal, Dalrymple told him the story of Barapur, and Percy heard, and was subdued, since he knew now that, come what might, Marguérite Ogilvey was lost to him forever.

Then, while Dalrymple was surveying the day's work of Smith and his men, and declaring it was good, there came a messenger from Bellerby on a borrowed bicycle, bearing a telegram. It was from Marguérite, and Dalrymple's heart danced with joy when he read:

"All is well. Father leaves for York to-night. He will join mother and me early to-morrow. Expect us about ten o'clock. Am detaining car. Love, MEG."

All is well! What was well? It was a woman's message, which assumed everything and told nothing, except the one amazing fact that Stephen Ogilvey's wife had evidently decided that the period of concealment was ended, and that her husband should now vindicate himself in the eyes of his world.

At any rate, a youth returned to Bellerby with two bicycles and the richer by two sovereigns, so it is tolerably certain that Dalrymple's few words of congratulation were not delayed on the way.

The new tenant smoked and mused in the garden for another hour, until Betty came to summon him to dinner. He was entering the house when he saw the ghost again, a phantom divested now of eeriness, because a round blob of sunshine shone on the wall instead of the white sockets of eyes which lent such a ghoulish aspect to the shadowy face. Then he did a queer thing. Lifting the grandfather's clock, and disregarding the protest of weights and pendulum thumping against its wooden ribs, he placed it exactly where the reflection of the window fell. Instantly, the ghost vanished. The dark mahogany case absorbed the outlines of the figure. The old Spanish wood glowed richly here and there where the lights were strongest, and a disk of gold illumined the dull brass of the clock's face. And that was the end of the Elmdale ghost! Never again would it be seen until someone moved the clock, and Sir Robert Dalrymple vowed that such alteration should not occur in his time.

Luckily, Dr. Scaife came just as Dalrymple was sitting down to a solitary meal, and he was promptly bidden to the feast. Dalrymple showed him Marguérite's telegram, and they discussed it for an hour, or longer, though with no result, for they could only theorize, and, since truth is stranger than fiction, even two such acute minds failed to arrive at the actual solution of the mystery.

Dalrymple went late to bed, and awoke early, to find that the much-maligned British climate had produced another fine day. It was joyous to see the sun shining into his bedroom; it was still more joyous to descend the stairs, and glimpse the blue sky through the Black Prince's visor. A current of pure, sweet-scented air came through the orifice, and seemed to presage a new span of life to the old house; Dalrymple decided, then and there, that when the turmoil had subsided, he would commission the best obtainable artist in stained glass to restore the Black Prince's features in guise befitting his character as a warrior, statesman, and true lover.

A few minutes before ten Tom Bland came with a cartload of plants from a nursery. Smith and the laborers carried the boxes of flowers into the garden, and set them on both sides of the path, so that happy chance contrived that Marguérite should lead her parents to their old home through a blaze of color when the automobile brought them to the gate at ten o'clock.

It is not often that any collection of mortals is privileged to see a ghost in broad daylight, and in the rays of a powerful sun at that, but such was the lot of carrier Bland, gardener Smith, and four gaping yokels of Elmdale, not to mention a quite respectable number of other inhabitants, when Stephen Garth alighted from the car and walked jauntily up the garden to the porch of his own house. To save Mrs. Jackson and Betty from spasms, Dalrymple had warned them previously of Mr. Garth's coming, but the men, and Elmdale generally, were not thus enlightened, and some of them would certainly have bolted had they not seen "the new guv'nor" shaking hands with "the old guv'nor," and had not the latter stopped to greet Begonia Smith with the exceedingly trite remark:

"Well, Smith, I'm not so dead as you thought me!"

"No, sir," said Smith, who did not find his tongue again until the newcomers had gone into the Grange.

Then he turned to one of the men.

"All I can say, Henery, is this," he murmured huskily. "I've heerd of people lookin' as though they'd bin dead an' dug up, but I'll take my oath no one has dug Mr. Garth out o' Bellerby Churchyard."

"It must be all right, though," was the philosophic answer. "Miss Meg wouldn't look so happy if there was goin' to be trouble."

"Ay! But hurry up with those begonias. In with 'em!"

It would serve no good purpose to set forth in detail the manner in which Mr. and Mrs. Ogilvey cleared up the mystery on the one hand, and became mystified themselves on the other. Few parents can rear a charming daughter to womanhood without experiencing the surprise, almost the dismay, of finding that she has given her heart to a man of whom they know little. In this instance, a devoted father and an equally devoted mother could only listen in bewilderment when the girl, who was still a child in their eyes, introduced "Robert Armathwaite" as her promised husband, while their astonished eyes were only paralleled by Meg's own when the tall, grave-looking stranger proceeded to explain that he was not Robert Armathwaite, but Sir Robert Dalrymple, K.C.S.I.

Margu rite, at first, believed he was joking. When he assured her he was even more serious than usual, she relieved the situation by making an elaborate curtsy to her own reflection in an old-fashioned mirror in the drawing-room.

"Lady Dalrymple!" she cried. "Presented at court by her humble self! Sir Robert Dalrymple, K.C.S.I.! Lady Dalrymple, K.I.S.S.!"

Whereupon, she proceeded to invest each of them with her own order.

When the bench, the bar, the police, and the press were duly represented that afternoon, Mr. Stephen Ogilvey spoke fully and frankly. His wife and daughter were present, and, if Mrs. Ogilvey wept a little during the recital, it was only natural.

For she alone knew what this gentle-voiced, white-haired man had endured during those June days two years ago.

Even the tender-hearted Margu rite could never realize the exquisite torture which her father had suffered voluntarily. Perhaps the presence of her lover, combined with the reaction of the discovery that her father had committed no actual crime, rendered her temporarily incapable of appreciating the motives which accounted for his actions.

Be that as it may, this is his story:

"To make clear the reason which led me to deceive my friends in Elmdale in

such an extraordinary way, I must go back twenty-four years in my life. I was then thirty-five years of age, and Professor of Philology in a recently-formed University in the Midlands. I was married, but, as some of you know, my first and only child was not born until the events happened which drove me into retirement, and led my dear wife and myself to seek the peace and seclusion of Elmdale."

It is not to be wondered at if Dalrymple and Margu rite exchanged smiling glances at those words; but the Professor's strange narrative should not be interrupted by lovers' confidences.

"I am a man of highly sensitive nature," he went on, "and my mind almost gave way under the shock when my brother James, somewhat older than myself, who occupied a prominent position in Birmingham as manager of an important private bank, was reported missing from his office under circumstances which pointed to a serious and systematic embezzlement of the bank's funds. Day by day the scandal enlarged its bounds. The bank closed its doors; hundreds of people were ruined; there were several cases of suicide among the robbed depositors; and, at last, my brother, James Ogilvey, was arrested in France, owing to a chance meeting with a man who knew him. He was brought to trial, sentenced to a long term of penal servitude, and passed into seeming oblivion accompanied by the curses of thousands. My wife and I literally could not hold up our heads among our friends in the Midlands, and, as we were not wholly dependent on my earnings, we resolved to change our name and start life anew. At that crisis, my mother died. Undoubtedly her death was hastened by my brother's wrong-doing, and it is probable that she destroyed a will already in existence, meaning to make another, but was stricken down by apoplexy before she could carry out her intention. At any rate, no will was found, so her property became intestate. This house and ground belonged to her, but she was unknown locally, as she left Elmdale more than half a century ago, so, after settling some legal matters, my wife and I determined to live here, and adopt my wife's maiden name. There was no great difficulty. I still continued to do my work, which was mainly of a specialist nature, under my own name, but in Elmdale I was always 'Stephen Garth,' and the catastrophe in the Midlands soon passed into the mists when our child was born.

"We reasoned that by the time she grew to womanhood, the memory of James Ogilvey's crime would have died away. At any rate, there was nothing to be gained by letting her know that such a person had ever existed, and you can take it from me that she was ignorant of the fact until a late hour yesterday. Some

eight years ago, my unfortunate brother was released. I met him in London, supplied him with ample funds, and sent him to the Colonies, taking good care that he should know neither my altered name nor my address. I heard no more of him until the beginning of June, two years since, when he wrote to me as 'Stephen Garth,' said he was coming to live in my house, being tired of a roving life, and threatened to take lodgings in the village if I did not receive him. Now, my wife and I were determined that he should never cross our daughter's path if we could help it, so a journey to France was resolved on hastily and the two took their departure. For my own part, I decided to await my brother's coming, and try to reason with him. If he proved obdurate, I meant to join my wife and daughter abroad, and, to that end, as Mr. Dobb is aware, I made over all my property to my wife in trust for my daughter. This step was necessary, I believe, to save them from persecution at my brother's hands, because he had hinted at some grievance with regard to the disposition of my mother's estate, a grievance quite unfounded, since I had dealt with him most generously on his release from prison. In order to conceal his presence from the villagers until I had tried every argument to prevail on him to leave me and my family in peace, I arranged to meet him at Leyburn, and drive to the edge of the moor. I brought him to the house without anyone being the wiser, but I soon found I was a child in his hands. He played on my fear of publicity by agreeing to lie *perdu* if I would supply him with drink. I bore with the infliction for some days until, driven to despair, I refused to purchase any more alcohol. There was a furious scene between us, and he threatened not merely exposure, but legal proceedings to force me to 'disgorge,' as he put it, his share of the property left by our mother, whose maiden name, by the way, Faulkner, is well known here. I realize now that James was in a state verging on dementia, but I may sum up a distressing period of four days and nights of suffering by saying that, in a final paroxysm of rage, he was seized with apoplexy, and died almost instantaneously.

"Though convinced that he was dead, I hoped against hope for some hours. Then *rigor mortis* set in, and I knew that the only man who had ever inflicted an injury on my good name had struck his last and shrewdest blow by dying in my house. I want you to consider the position I was in. A man, a stranger, was lying there dead, in circumstances that demanded an inquest. I had not called for a doctor, or obtained any assistance locally. I had sent my wife and daughter to a foreign country, obviously to get them out of the way. A *post-mortem* examination would show that death had taken place nearly a day before I made any stir. If I destroyed certain documents in my brother's possession—such, for instance, as a ticket of leave, which he had retained long after its expiry for the mere purpose, I

firmly believe, of bringing pressure to bear on me—there would be nothing to show his identity. In a word, there was a *prima facie* case of murder ready to be established against me. Of course, the medical evidence would go to prove my innocence, but all the world—all of my small world, at any rate—would gape and gossip because of the scandal which my wife and I had given more than twenty years of our life to escape. For the sake of my wife and daughter I resolved upon a daring expedient. The 'Ogilvey fraud' of a previous generation was forgotten. Why should I not resume my own name, and let my brother die and be buried as Stephen Garth? I saw that my own behavior during the past week would help the assumption that I had committed suicide, while a rather marked resemblance between my brother and myself, together with the fact that he had died from apoplexy, would complete the illusion. Moreover, there exists, in connection with this very house, a curious legend which condemned seven generations of its owners to die by violence, either self-inflicted, or caused by others. James Ogilvey's death was the seventh, and I trusted to this alleged prophecy of a Spanish priest put to death by a sea-rover named Faulkner in the seventeenth century being sufficiently well known in connection with a shadow, or manifestation, cast on the wall by a stained-glass window in the staircase.

"At any rate, I steeled my heart to a dreadful undertaking, dressed my brother in my own clothes, tied his body to a hook in the hall where the shadow I have spoken of is seen at this time of the year, and stole away across the moor after writing a letter to the coroner.

"Gentlemen, I believe I have broken the law in some respects, and I am prepared to suffer for my misdeeds. Perhaps, a long and blameless and not wholly useless life may plead for me now. I acted as I did because of a certain pride in my work, and because of my love for a dear wife and daughter. I dreamed that the dead past had indeed buried its dead but, by a most unusual combination of simple circumstances, the whole strange story has been brought to light. I have nothing more to say. Now that a long ordeal of silence is ended, I am happier to-day than I ever thought to be again in my existence. I can produce a certain number of documents to prove what I may term the historical part of my confession. The really vital part of it—the manner of my brother's death—can receive no other testimony than my own, eked out by such statement as my friend, Dr. Scaife, may find himself able to make after hearing my version of the tragedy."

Marguérite ran to her father and threw her arms around his neck.

"If they take you before a judge, dad," she cried, "let me go into court and tell

them that I was the cause of all the trouble. Then he will warn me not to be such a bad little girl, and sympathize with you so greatly that he will say you leave the court without a stain on your character."

As a matter of fact, owing to the attitude of the authorities and with the active assistance of Banks in the columns of the *Nuttonby Gazette*, the official inquiry into the affair attracted very little notice. A ten-line paragraph explained that it was Mr. James Ogilvey who died, and not Mr. Stephen Garth, and a special faculty was obtained to correct the announcement on the stone in Bellerby churchyard. Naturally, the people in Elmdale and the neighborhood had a pretty fair knowledge of the truth, but everyone was so pleased to see the "professor" and his wife again that the thing was hushed up with remarkable ease. Even Percy Whittaker held his tongue.

Village gossip has it that Storr, the chauffeur, is badly smitten by Betty Jackson's charms. The girl's mother clinched matters by grumbling that "sen Betty's gotten a young man there's no doin' owt wi' her." And Begonia Smith turned the garden into a fairy-land that summer.

The Black Prince received his new and most impressive set of features before a certain noteworthy marriage took place, and beamed a courtly approval on the bride when she descended the stairs in her wedding dress. In fact, the Elmdale tragedy received its quietus when James Walker, senior, and James Walker, junior, watched Sir Robert and Lady Dalrymple drive past their office *en route* to Paris and the Continent.

Said the father:

"Little things often lead to the most surprising events. Who'd ha' thought, Jimmie, when we let the 'House 'Round the Corner' to a stranger named Robert Armathwaite, that we were indirectly bringing about the marriage of Meg Garth to Sir Robert Dalrymple?"

"Well, I didn't, for one!" said the son gloomily.

THE END

ZANE GREY'S NOVELS

THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS

A New York society girl buys a ranch which becomes the center of frontier warfare. Her loyal superintendent rescues her when she is captured by bandits. A surprising climax brings the story to a delightful close.

THE RAINBOW TRAIL

The story of a young clergyman who becomes a wanderer in the great western uplands—until at last love and faith awake.

DESERT GOLD

The story describes the recent uprising along the border, and ends with the finding of the gold which two prospectors had willed to the girl who is the story's heroine.

RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE

A picturesque romance of Utah of some forty years ago when Mormon authority ruled. The prosecution of Jane Withersteen is the theme of the story.

THE LAST OF THE PLAINSMEN

This is the record of a trip which the author took with Buffalo Jones, known as the preserver of the American bison, across the Arizona desert and of a hunt in "that wonderful country of deep canons and giant pines."

THE HERITAGE OF THE DESERT

A lovely girl, who has been reared among Mormons, learns to love a young New Englander. The Mormon religion, however, demands that the girl shall become the second wife of one of the Mormons—Well, that's the problem of this great story.

THE SHORT STOP

The young hero, tiring of his factory grind, starts out to win fame and fortune as a professional ball player. His hard knocks at the start are followed by such success as clean sportsmanship, courage and honesty ought to win.

BETTY ZANE

This story tells of the bravery and heroism of Betty, the beautiful young sister of old Colonel Zane, one of the bravest pioneers.

THE LONE STAR RANGER

After killing a man in self defense, Buck Duane becomes an outlaw along the Texas border. In a camp on the Mexican side of the river, he finds a young girl held prisoner, and in attempting to rescue her, brings down upon himself the wrath of her captors and henceforth is hunted on one side by honest men, on the other by outlaws.

THE BORDER LEGION

Joan Handle, in a spirit of anger, sent Jim Cleve out to a lawless Western mining camp, to prove his mettle. Then realizing that she loved him—she followed him out. On her way, she is captured by a bandit band, and trouble begins when she shoots Kells, the leader—and nurses him to health again. Here enters another romance—when Joan, disguised as an outlaw, observes Jim in the throes of dissipation. A gold strike, a thrilling robbery—gambling and gun play carry you along breathlessly.

THE LAST OF THE GREAT SCOUTS.

By Helen Cody Wetmore and Zane Grey

The life story of Colonel William F. Cody, "Buffalo Bill," as told by his sister and Zane Grey. It begins with his boyhood in Iowa and his first encounter with an Indian. We see "Bill" as a pony express rider, then near Fort Sumter as Chief of the Scouts, and later engaged in the most dangerous Indian campaigns. There is also a very interesting account of the travels of "The Wild West" Show. No character in public life makes a stronger appeal to the imagination of America than "Buffalo Bill," whose daring and bravery made him famous.

THE NOVELS OF MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

"K."

Illustrated.

K. LeMoyne, famous surgeon, drops out of the world that has known him, and goes to live in a little town where beautiful Sidney Page lives. She is in training to become a nurse. The joys and troubles of their young love are told with that keen and sympathetic appreciation which has made the author famous.

THE MAN IN LOWER TEN.

Illustrated by Howard Chandler Christy.

An absorbing detective story woven around the mysterious death of the "Man in Lower Ten." The strongest elements of Mrs. Rinehart's success are found in this book.

WHEN A MAN MARRIES.

Illustrated by Harrison Fisher and Mayo Bunker.

A young artist, whose wife had recently divorced him, finds that his aunt is soon to visit him. The aunt, who contributes to the family income and who has never seen the wife, knows nothing of the domestic upheaval. How the young man met the situation is humorously and most entertainingly told.

THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE.

Illus. by Lester Ralph.

The summer occupants of "Sunnyside" find the dead body of Arnold Armstrong, the son of the owner, on the circular staircase. Following the murder a bank failure is announced. Around these two events is woven a plot of absorbing interest.

THE STREET OF SEVEN STARS.

Illustrated (Photo Play Edition.)

Harmony Wells, studying in Vienna to be a great violinist, suddenly realizes that her money is almost gone. She meets a young ambitious doctor who offers her chivalry and sympathy, and together with world-worn Dr. Anna and Jimmie, the waif, they share their love and slender means.

BOOTH TARKINGTON'S NOVELS

SEVENTEEN.

Illustrated by Arthur William Brown.

No one but the creator of Penrod could have portrayed the immortal young people of this story. Its humor is irresistible and reminiscent of the time when the reader was Seventeen.

PENROD.

Illustrated by Gordon Grant.

This is a picture of a boy's heart, full of the lovable, humorous, tragic things which are locked secrets to most older folks. It is a finished, exquisite work.

PENROD AND SAM.

Illustrated by Worth Brehm.

Like "Penrod" and "Seventeen," this book contains some remarkable phases of real boyhood and some of the best stories of juvenile prankishness that have ever been written.

THE TURMOIL.

Illustrated by C. E. Chambers.

Bibbs Sheridan is a dreamy, imaginative youth, who revolts against his father's plans for him to be a servitor of big business. The love of a fine girl turns Bibb's life from failure to success.

THE GENTLEMAN FROM INDIANA.

Frontispiece.

A story of love and politics,—more especially a picture of a country editor's life in Indiana, but the charm of the book lies in the love interest.

THE FLIRT.

Illustrated by Clarence F. Underwood.

The "Flirt," the younger of two sisters, breaks one girl's engagement, drives one man to suicide, causes the murder of another, leads another to lose his fortune, and in the end marries a stupid and unpromising suitor, leaving the really worthy one to marry her sister.

KATHLEEN NORRIS' STORIES

MOTHER.

Illustrated by F. C. Yohn.

This book has a fairy-story touch, counterbalanced by the sturdy reality of struggle, sacrifice, and resulting peace and power of a mother's experiences.

SATURDAY'S CHILD.

Frontispiece by F. Graham Cootes.

Out on the Pacific coast a normal girl, obscure and lovely, makes a quest for happiness. She passes through three stages—poverty, wealth and service—and works out a creditable salvation.

THE RICH MRS. BURGOYNE.

Illustrated by Lucius H. Hitchcock.

The story of a sensible woman who keeps within her means, refuses to be swamped by social engagements, lives a normal human life of varied interests, and has her own romance.

THE STORY OF JULIA PAGE.

Frontispiece by Allan Gilbert.

How Julia Page, reared in rather unpromising surroundings, lifted herself through sheer determination to a higher plane of life.

THE HEART OF RACHAEL.

Frontispiece by Charles E. Chambers.

Rachael is called upon to solve many problems, and in working out these, there is shown the beauty and strength of soul of one of fiction's most appealing characters.



SEWELL FORD'S STORIES

SHORTY McCABE.

Illustrated by Francis Vaux Wilson.

A very humorous story, The hero, an independent and vigorous thinker, sees life, and tells about it in a very unconventional way.

SIDE-STEPPING WITH SHORTY.

Illustrated by Francis Vaux Wilson.

Twenty skits, presenting people with their foibles. Sympathy with human nature

and an abounding sense of humor are the requisites for "side-stepping with Shorty."

SHORTY McCABE ON THE JOB.

Illustrated by Francis Vaux Wilson.

Shorty McCabe reappears with his figures of speech revamped right up to the minute. He aids in the right distribution of a "conscience fund," and gives joy to all concerned.

SHORTY McCABE'S ODD NUMBERS.

Illustrated by Francis Vaux Wilson.

These further chronicles of Shorty McCabe tell of his studio for physical culture, and of his experiences both on the East side and at swell yachting parties.

TORCHY.

Illus, by Geo. Brehm and Jas. Montgomery Flagg.

A red-headed office boy, overflowing with wit and wisdom peculiar to the youths reared on the sidewalks of New York, tells the story of his experiences.

TRYING OUT TORCHY.

Illustrated by F. Foster Lincoln.

Torchy is just as deliriously funny in these stories as he was in the previous book.

ON WITH TORCHY.

Illustrated by F. Foster Lincoln.

Torchy falls desperately in love with "the only girl that ever was," but that young society woman's aunt tries to keep the young people apart, which brings about many hilariously funny situations.

TORCHY, PRIVATE SEC.

Illustrated by F. Foster Lincoln.

Torchy rises from the position of office boy to that of secretary for the Corrugated Iron Company. The story is full of humor and infectious American slang.

WILT THOU TORCHY.

Illus. by F. Snapp and A. W. Brown.

Torchy goes on a treasure search expedition to the Florida West Coast, in company with a group of friends of the Corrugated Trust and with his friend's aunt, on which trip Torchy wins the aunt's permission to place an engagement ring on Vee's finger.

NOVELS OF FRONTIER LIFE BY WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

MAVERICKS.

A tale of the western frontier, where the "rustler," whose depredations are so keenly resented by the early settlers of the range, abounds. One of the sweetest love stories ever told.

A TEXAS RANGER.

How a member of the most dauntless border police force carried law into the mesquite, saved the life of an innocent man after a series of thrilling adventures, followed a fugitive to Wyoming, and then passed through deadly peril to ultimate happiness.

WYOMING.

In this vivid story of the outdoor West the author has captured the breezy charm

of "cattleland," and brings out the turbid life of the frontier with all its engaging dash and vigor.

RIDGWAY OF MONTANA.

The scene is laid in the mining centers of Montana, where politics and mining industries are the religion of the country. The political contest, the love scene, and the fine character drawing give this story great strength and charm.

BUCKY O'CONNOR.

Every chapter teems with wholesome, stirring adventures, replete with the dashing spirit of the border, told with dramatic dash and absorbing fascination of style and plot.

CROOKED TRAILS AND STRAIGHT.

A story of Arizona; of swift-riding men and daring outlaws; of a bitter feud between cattle-men and sheep-herders. The heroine is a most unusual woman and her love story reaches a culmination that is fittingly characteristic of the great free West.

BRAND BLOTTERS.

A story of the Cattle Range. This story brings out the turbid life of the frontier, with all its engaging dash and vigor, with a charming love interest running through its 320 pages.

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