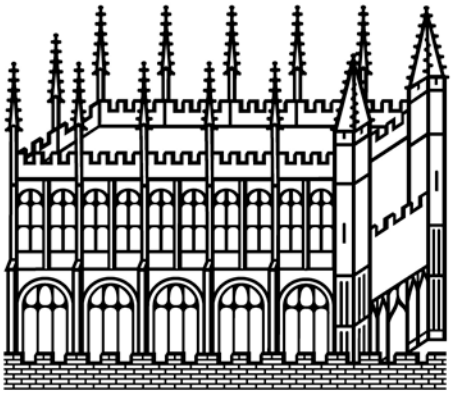

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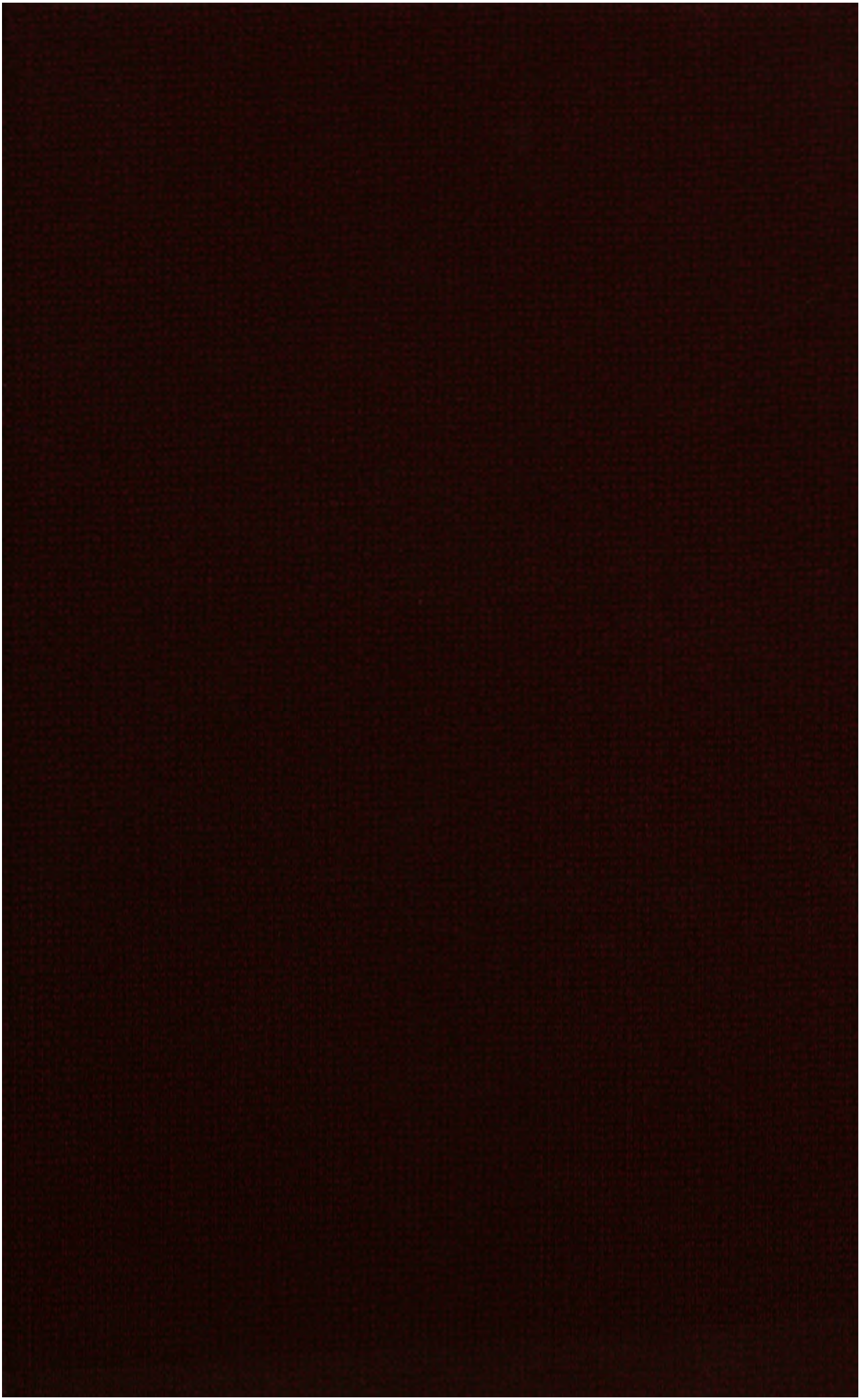

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Short Stories
of To-day and Yesterday

BARRY PAIN

SHORT STORIES *of*
TO-DAY & YESTERDAY

First Volumes

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G. K. CHESTERTON
BARRY PAIN
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Short Stories
of To-day and Yesterday

BARRY PAIN

GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
LONDON BOMBAY SYDNEY

First published 1928
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
39–41 *Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W.C.* 2

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, GLASGOW

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE inexorable law of brevity which is imposed upon writers of to-day by the exigencies of periodical publication is, by the majority, felt to be extremely irksome. Mr Barry Pain, on the contrary, openly welcomed it. "The condition of brevity," he once said, "pleases me . . . though of course it takes much longer to use a few words than to use many." In that qualification you have the key to his success. So many fail to recognize that the short story has a technique of its own and is not merely a long story cut down to magazine limits. Mr Barry Pain understood better than most that to be succinct is difficult, and he was always prepared to take the pains necessary for the overcoming of that difficulty. He did not quarrel with the laws of his craft; he utilized them to achieve success. The result was that his stories and short essays were masterpieces of their kind. In a very few lines he was able to create the desired effect, whether it was to thrill, to shock, or to amuse. And he was as good at precept as at practice, for his manuals on the subject of short-story writing are models of clear and sound exposition.

From the time when he first made his appearance in "Granta," the University magazine of Cambridge, he was indefatigable, and his work was never more fresh or full of zeal than at the time of his lamented death in May 1928. *In the long list that stands to his credit are novels and parodies, besides essays and*

short stories in almost every conceivable vein. Underlying an unfailing humour is a judgment that was never at fault, and to those who welcomed "Playthings and Parodies" and "Stories and Interludes" in the early nineties a new book by Barry Pain was always welcome.

F. H. P.

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THE TREE OF DEATH

I

In the cool of the evening I always saw her. She came up from the river with the other women. That was a great moment when she, who all the day had been in my heart, came at last into the sight of my eyes. Sometimes she would be soon lost to me, going into her father's house. Sometimes she would crouch with the others on the steps by the wall of a brown hut listening to the old story-teller, and it was wonderful to see that story reflected in her eyes as she heard it, like the image of the palm-tree in the deep river. Sometimes even she would walk by my side and speak with me, and those were evenings to be long remembered for rapture and for sorrow.

And one day I went to the story-teller. He was black-skinned and not of our race, and he had come from a far country, travelling for many months alongside the river. Some said that he had fled for his life.

"This evening," I said to him, "I beg that you will come out and tell your stories to us."

He waved his hand at me in refusal, saying that he would not. But when I showed him the gift I had brought for him, then he consented. And I did this because my eyes ached for the sight of

her, and I could not bear that this evening she should pass quickly by me.

And when the black man began to draw with his stick in the sand, and tell stories of that distant country from which he had come, she was among those that gathered round to listen. And I gazed at her as one tortured with thirst who sees far off the water he would drink.

He told us of a tree that is called the tree of death. He said that the seed was like bright silver to look at and of the size of a man's fist. If you set that seed in the ground, for two years nothing would appear, and then came the miracle, for betwixt sunrise and sunset the tree came to full maturity, growing with incredible rapidity to twice the height of a man, and died again. And in those short hours of life that tree sought to drink the blood of a man, sending out a heavy fragrance that brought sleep and death, and lashing its victim with long, writhing tendrils. And each tendril was covered with sucking mouths like the mouth of a leech.

And thereon he told us a story of a faithless woman and of a man's deferred vengeance. Secretly, by night, the man planted the seed of the tree of death in the garden of his wife's lover. But when in two years the tree came to being, it slew the woman for whom the lover had deserted the wife. They found her white body in the morning, buried beneath the dead and decaying ruin of the tree, and they found, moreover, the three silver seeds that the tree had produced.

" And in the whole earth," said the black man, " there are but those three seeds left, and because

the tree is so evil, those seeds have not yet been planted." Twice he stretched out the fingers of both hands and closed them again. "Yes, twenty times since then the river has risen and fallen. And for five years more the silver seed must be kept and guarded. And then the power of life, which is the power of evil, will have left those seeds and they will be harmless toys, and never any more will man or woman behold the great magic of the tree of death."

I give his story in a few words. He told it in many words, making it a living picture, so that we seemed to see all as it happened and to hear the very words that were spoken. And all the while my eyes were fixed upon the woman whom I loved in vain. She was as one entranced, breathing deeply, and her fingers tore to pieces the flowers of scarlet hibiscus that she carried, the petals dropping on the sand as drops of blood. The sunset, too, was blood-red that evening.

As he finished speaking we heard a jackal far away in the desert. And then a boy, laughing, said that the black man told many lies.

"Son of a dog, I lie not," said the black man, with sudden fury. "I tell you what I have seen and known. In this hand—this very hand—I have held the silver seed of the tree of death. Yes, yes." He rose and stood erect, and his voice dropped to a whisper. "Was it not I, myself," he said, "who planted that seed in the garden of my wife's lover?"

We were all silent, and he turned and left us. And then for the first time that evening the woman looked at me and her hand made a little

sign. So I followed her down to the river bank, and there for a while we sat and talked in the light of a great burnished moon.

II

"You praise me and say that I am very beautiful," she said. "It may be and it may not be, but it is pleasant to hear. You bring many gifts to my father's house, and again, it is pleasant to receive gifts. I think you paid the old story-teller, for clearly he showed more deference to you than to others. And that is the best of all, for one day is as another, and we go the same round continuously, like the ox with bandaged eyes that draws up the water for the garden; but in the hearing of stories we live many lives and are ever changing. But then—then—you pour out your love to me, and would have me give you mine. How can one give who has it not? Others also speak of love to me and have the same answer. It may be that I am still too young, for I am very young, and that one day the fire will burn up in me. But now, when you speak of love, it is as though I gazed at the writing of a scribe having no skill to read it. And yet—and yet—there was something I would say."

"Speak on. Your voice is sweet to hear."

"It is of the story that we have heard. I think there is truth in it, even if it be not all true. I will tell you why, and I have told no other of this. Two years ago an old woman lay dying in her house, and those that should have tended her had fled in fear. And I brought up water for her

from the river. She drank eagerly of it, for the fever was on her. And then she bade me pour a little of the water in the hollowed palm of my left hand and hold it so that she might gaze into it. She looked long into it, so that my little hand shook. And then she said words that I have never forgotten and never yet told. These are the words : ' The eyes of the dying have seen beyond, and as I say it shall be. The man of your love shall come to you holding in his hand a ball that is not of silver but of the colour of silver, and in that ball there shall be life and death.'

" To-night I knew that the ball must be the seed of the tree of death. I know not where the seed is. The old man said it was guarded. It may be that one must go a long and perilous journey, and that blood must be shed, and that a great price must be paid. But this I know—on the day that you come to me holding in your hand a seed of the tree of death, I shall be so filled with love for you that my head will droop and my eyes will faint, and my body and my soul will be yours."

And in a voice that had become suddenly hoarse I said : " And you have told no other of this ? "

" Have I not said it ? Also, if you swear that you will get for me the silver seed, I shall tell no other until it is clear that you have failed. I chose you for many reasons. You are gentle, and when my beauty is gone and you cease to love me you will not then begin to beat me. You are not so wealthy as some of those that seek me, but neither do you hold your wealth with so hard

a grip as they do. Did you not also pay the story-teller for my delight?"

"For your delight and for the delight of my eyes in you."

"It is as I thought. And without that I might never have heard of the tree of death or understood the secret of my future. And though I do not now love you—not in the very least—yet I come to you first. But if you think it too hard and hazardous for you, then——"

"Ah, wait!" I said. "Believe me that not for a moment has there been a doubt in my mind. If anywhere on earth there be that silver seed, I swear that I will find it, and bring it to you, and nothing save death shall stay me."

"It is enough," she said. "And when will you bring it?"

"I do not yet know how long it will be. Will you wait for me for a year if need be?"

"Yes, for a year. But I have seen love run away as water. If, when you hold the seed in your hand, you no longer love me, then bring it not to me, lest you bring sorrow with it."

I pointed to the river at our feet. "The river runs for ever," I said, "but the river is ever there. So is my love for you."

And as we parted I said to her: "Then you wish to have this seed of the tree?"

"To me," she said, "it is no more than a sign of destiny. If you bring it, then I shall love you. But if you are not destined, then another will bring it, and I shall love him. But for the seed itself, since it is evil, it shall be fuel for the fire. Or haply"—she looked at me with steady eyes—

" I may keep it till it has no more power to harm, and then it may serve as a toy for the children that I bear."

That night I slept ill, my thoughts going backward and forward between joy and sorrow like a ball that is struck by the hands of the players. It was joy that she had spoken to me seated close by my side, that she had trusted me with a secret, that of her own will she had given me the chance to gain her love.

It was sorrow that she loved me not yet, and that if I failed in the adventure she would never love me and would love another. Nay, the black man had said that there were three seeds of the tree of death. It might be that if I found one of them, another man also might find one, and he, going more swiftly or by a shorter road, might take from me my beloved.

Moreover, though in this adventure I might risk all, yet if I were not destined I should fail; and if I were destined, then, though I sat quietly in my house and risked nothing, the unseen hand would place in mine the silver seed of the tree. And so I came back to the wisdom that is old and strong and cruel as the granite rock—that which is written, is written, and that which will be, will be.

And yet what pleasure could I have of gold dust and gems, of herds and fertile land, if I had not this woman? Without her, life itself was worthless. So I was determined to risk all. Had I not seen this myself, and had I not heard of it in many stories—that he who of his own will makes a great sacrifice shall in the end have his reward?

III

I found the old black man, as I had expected, stretched upon his bed, though for some hours the sun had been up. He was ever idle, though he still had strength to work. Those that by chance listened to his stories would bring him small gifts. But if one would command a story, as I had done, then the gift was greater; and so he lived.

And at first, as I came in from the bright sunlight, the hut seemed dark. But presently I saw him well, and I knew who had given him the robe that he wore and who had given him the loose slippers that lay on the ground beside him.

And after our words of salutation I said to him: "I have in my mind a great matter of which I would speak with you, desiring your help. If you can help me, then in return I will give many and very rich presents. Come into my garden, where we may talk quietly, and there is pleasant shade, and the fruit of last year still hangs upon my orange-tree."

So he said courteously that I was without doubt of divine descent and that he was my servant. And, rising from the bed, he thrust his feet into his slippers and came shuffling after me.

Seated under the orange-tree, he sipped the coffee that was brought out to him, but the oranges that I gave him he wrapped in a fold of his robe for another time.

"Last night," I said, "you told us of the tree of death."

"And for that reason," he said, "a woman

brought me this morning bread and coffee, but the coffee was less good than this."

"She was beautiful?"

"She was a song of love, but unfortunately I am now old. When I had eaten and drunk, I went out and found that son of a dog who said that I lied, and beat him with my slipper until he howled. For I had told of things that have been and still are. True, I have also stories of things that might be, and these are more beautiful. What of it? Shall the young insult the old? But this matter in which you need my help, I beg you to tell me of it."

"I go to seek one of the three silver seeds of the tree of death. As beside that, my life and such wealth as I have are nothing. I must have that seed. You can tell me whither I must go and what I must do to attain it."

"If a man travel with the utmost rapidity and sparing nothing, he may make the journey in four months."

"Then in four months I will accomplish it."

"There are perils of the road—robbers and dangerous beasts."

"I fear them not." And I showed him the dagger that I carried.

"But you will come to a country where the stranger is suspect, and in the place where the silver seed lies guarded no stranger may enter at all; and the guard is threefold—a circle, and within it a second circle, and within that a third circle. You may stain your skin till it is as dark as mine, but you cannot speak in the tongue of that people, neither do you know their ways.

And if you would attain your end by violence, you will be one man against a myriad of men. So that if you go, two things are certain. The first is that you will never even see the silver seed, and the second is that you will die very soon."

"Have you no better help for me than this?"

"There may be another way. You said truly that this is a great matter. It is one that must be weighed well with long thought. I will, if you please, go back now and ponder upon it. And to-morrow at this time I will come again to you."

So I gave him a present and let him go, his robe curiously swollen with many oranges that he carried.

And next day he came back to me and said: "There is one way, and one only. It may bring you what you seek but it is not sure. If you would take it, two things will be necessary. The first is that you must trust me utterly, more than most men will trust their brothers. Secondly, the cost will be great, so that of all your possessions there will be but little left to you."

"You are sure that it is the only way?"

"It is the only way."

"Then I will take it. Tell me of it."

"You cannot go, but I can go for you. Also, I am very willing to go. Twenty years have I been a stranger in this little place, and my own country calls me. I know the tongue of the people and all their ways. Moreover, I myself have been of the innermost guard of the temple, and know much which is hidden from most men of my race. If there is any man on earth who can get the seed of the tree of death, then I can get it.

But I must be able to buy men, and they are such that a small present will not tempt them."

"When will you return?"

"In the ninth month from the day that I start you should have the silver seed either at my hand or at the hand of a sure messenger."

"If I trust you whom at least I know, that may be well. Must I trust also a messenger whom I do not know?"

"You may do so without fear. For he will not receive the last half of his reward until he has delivered the seed into your hands. Moreover, he will know that if he is treacherous, his own life and the life of his dearest that he leaves behind him will be forfeited."

"It is a great journey, and you are old."

"I still have strength, not having spent myself with too much labour. Moreover, there are two that travel speedily—the young man that goes to his beloved and the old man that returns at last to his native country."

"You have no fear that you will be robbed? For you will carry with you much wealth."

"If I went with a train of laden camels, travelling as a rich merchant, then the danger would be great. But my wealth will be hidden in a belt about my body and I shall seem to be a poor man. There is indeed the chance that death one way or another may overtake me, but both you and I must take that chance."

"How do you know that you will find the silver seeds? Since it is known that they are evil, may they not have been destroyed?"

"No, for it is known that the evil must die

of itself, and they who would destroy it will make yet worse evil that shall fall on their own heads."

"When you yourself planted that seed in the garden of your wife's lover, was it then guarded in the temple? And if that be so, how came you to be able to make these great gifts and so get possession of it?"

"The temple was triply guarded, and I myself was of the innermost guard. But the seed was not there then, neither was the nature of it known —save to me only—until two years after I had planted it. In quite another way did I obtain that seed, and I beg that you will not ask of it, for it was shameful to me."

Many other questions did I ask of him, and to all he had a ready answer. But I showed little judgment, my mind being filled with thoughts of my beloved. And in all things I did as he bade me.

Then for many days I sold my possessions until the black man said: "It is enough," and afterwards I journeyed with him for three days to a town where there was a great bazaar, but our business was not in the bazaar, but at the house of the principal merchants. For we bought diamonds, emeralds, and pearls. And among the pearls there were two that were twins, being perfectly alike in size and shape, in weight and colour. And when he secured this treasure into the belt that he would wear, he left out one of these twin pearls and placed it in my hand, bidding me to keep it with the utmost care.

"For," he said, "I am an old man and it is

more likely that I shall choose to die in the land of my fathers. The messenger that I send with the silver seed will take the great oath of my people, swearing that he will be guilty of no negligence, and no treachery, and no disobedience. If any man takes this oath and breaks it, then in the whole earth there is no place where he may hide from swift and terrible vengeance. For this reason no man of my people will take this oath unless for a great reward."

"It is justice," I said.

"Therefore I give him one of the twin pearls when he sets forth. And when he arrives and places in your hands the silver seed, you will give him the other. Then he will return and show me the two pearls, and that will be the sign that he has performed his oath, and I shall have written for him quittance of it. So he will sell the pearls and get himself a wife and a house, and I myself may die in peace."

And he found a brown-sailed boat that went up with a favouring wind to the next village carrying sugar-cane. And making a small payment to the owner of the boat, he stretched himself upon the sugar-cane and so was carried out of my sight. All the day he would sleep in the boat and at night he would leave the boat, and purchase an ass, swift and sure-footed, and ride all night. And so he would go on, by this way and that, taking the best that chance offered or his wit could devise, until he came to his journey's end.

IV

On the day that the black man went I made my computation. My house and my walled garden were left to me, and there was store enough for another month. All else—herds and fertile land, and the treasure that I had of my fathers—was changed into little stones, and these stones were being carried away from me round the belly of a black man whom I should never see again. In another month it seemed that I who had hired others to work for me must myself work for hire.

To most men these would have been black thoughts, and they would have rent their garments and cursed their own folly that had brought such ruin upon them. But to me all this was a source of joy. "Now truly," I said, "of mine own will have I made a great sacrifice, and in the end I shall have my reward."

And that evening, as my custom was, I waited to see my beloved come up from the river. And as she passed me she made a sign that I should wait. And having set the water-jar down in her father's house, she came back to me.

It was the first time she had spoken with me since the night when we heard of the tree of death and afterwards sat by the river together. True, I might have spoken to her, but I feared lest by being too importunate I should lose such favour as I had in her eyes.

"These last days," she said, "I have heard much foolish talk about you and about the old story-teller. Those that know a few things, yet

have not the key of them, must always guess wrongly. But I have the key; would you hear what I know?"

"Your words are to me the sweetest music."

"Some say that the black man has gone to tell his stories in other villages, that for one story he may receive many gifts. Others say he pays a visit to his own country, and others say that he goes to examine for you some house or land that you are minded to buy in place of that which you have sold. Certainly he is gone, and another will sleep in his hut this night. It is true that he has gone to his own country, but I know that he goes to get for you the silver seed, though you declared to me that you would go yourself, even if it cost you your life, so great was your love for me."

And then I told her all, as I have set it down, explaining that I had indeed been willing to go and why that could not be. And she said:

"If a man risk his life for a woman, that is his greatest praise of her. But if he buy another man to risk his life, that is a greater wisdom for him. Yet in other respects you have not acted wisely. For the old man may die, or he may be a thief; and even if he live and be worthy of trust, he may fail to get the silver seed; and even if he gets it, he may fail to render it to you. So that if the measure of your folly be the measure of your love for me, I am still commended, though with a lesser praise. Meanwhile, there will be none to tell me a story, making the cool evening pleasant for me. Moreover, that which you have given to get me you cannot give again

to keep me. Also, my father has scolded me, and——"

Here she stayed, and her brow cleared, and she laughed.

"Take no heed of these words. If you are destined for me, I shall certainly love you very much. It is this heavy air that makes me say bitter things to you. Nor is it I alone who am troubled by it. The river itself is troubled—fretting and tossing—and there is anger in the setting sun. Somewhere to-night there will be havoc and great misery."

And therein she spoke the truth. For that night the earthquake came, awakening me from a deep sleep. Scarce can the fringe of it have touched the village. In my house two jars were shattered and I felt the earth move under me; but three mud-huts were brought down in ruins, so that there was much praying and screaming until the dawn came.

I judged that the full force of the earthquake had spent itself in the desert, so when the dawn came I saddled an ass and rode into the desert to see what had befallen. And since the air was now fresh and serene, the ride was pleasant to me. And presently I saw that the outline of a great rock had changed from what it was aforetime. So I rode up to it. And then I saw that the rock had split, revealing the entrance to a tomb.

I dismounted and went in a little way, but it was so dark within that I could distinguish nothing. And I went back to my house and said nothing of what I had seen, lest some others should forestall me.

And that night, when the village slept and all was at peace, again I rode out, taking with me a spade and a good lantern. And all the night I spent in that tomb.

I think it was the tomb of one of royal blood. It had many chambers with marvellous paintings on the walls, ranged on each side of the entrance hall, and from thence there were fine wide steps that led downwards, but somewhat encumbered with sand and fallen fragments of the rock. And never had I seen such treasure—cups and platters, rings and figures, all of the purest gold. And there were also ornaments of precious stones.

Much of this treasure I had buried that night in another place, marking the spot in a way that none save he who set the mark could have the skill to see. And on many of the nights that followed I buried further treasure. And I had none to help me, for I could trust none.

So once more it became necessary for me to go to that great town. By night I loaded two camels with treasure, hiding it so that it would appear that they carried forage only. And even so I travelled in great fear, with my dagger ever ready to my hand, and urging the camels to their greatest speed.

But it was appointed that I should arrive safely. And I was well received in the houses of the principal merchants with whom I had traded before, and so disposed of my treasure.

Thus by chance all that which I had given up, in order that I might have the silver seed and

thereby the heart of my beloved, was restored to me again, and at first I was well content.

But afterwards my eyes were opened, and in great anguish I saw what had befallen me. For of my own free will had I made sacrifice and it had not been accepted, and that which I had given was returned into my hands again. What reward, then, could I hope?

"Without doubt," I said, "the earthquake overtook the old story-teller as he went through the night, and he is buried beneath fallen rocks or is drowned in the river. And the desire of my heart is taken from me."

And that very night I spoke with a man who, as he travelled towards the village on the day after the earthquake, had met the black man. Thus vainly do we fit our keys to the door that is ever locked. That which is written, is written, and that which will be, will be. So that now I no longer dared to forecast either my happiness or the manner of my suffering. I folded my hands and waited.

Once more in the evening my beloved spoke to me.

"They speak of you in the village after this manner," she said. "They say that you sold much and that now you buy much, and that in the difference of the price you have your advantage. This is the wisdom of fools who speak, not having the key. But I have the key. I know that, when you sold, the black man took it away with him, so that I even marvelled if my father would willingly give me to one who had become poor. Whence, then, have you the means

now to buy so much? Either you lied to me, and the black man bore no wealth of precious stones in his belt, or you have worked some great magic. And if it be the first, then the black man will not send you the silver seed, for it was not his habit to do much for little, nor are you destined for me. But if it be the second, then I beg that you will show me how to work the same magic, that I may make my father very content and also buy for myself a new robe and a bracelet of gold."

"Neither have I lied to you, nor have I worked any magic. Since you gave me your secret, and have kept close in your own heart what I have told you so far, I will trust you yet again. It was destined that I should find a great treasure, making up for all that I had bestowed on the black man. Ask me no more of this now, but tell me why you wish for a new robe and a bracelet of gold."

"I have a cousin, and she is beautiful, but not so beautiful as you think that I am. Also the time has come that she must be married. Neither she nor I know who her husband will be, but she is obedient and will leave the choice to her father. Undoubtedly he will choose a rich man, and there will be a very great festival of the marriage, lasting all the night through, with music and dancing-girls. Surely I shall be bidden to the festival, and I would not be ashamed there. But my father is not rich, neither does he ever find anything."

"Then it is you who must find."

"What shall I find?"

" A purse hidden in a basket of pomegranates. And this basket of pomegranates I will send to your father's house soon after the hour of sunrise to-morrow."

" Listen," she said. " Your love for me is as the desert, and my love for you is not yet even as one grain of sand. Will you still send this gift ? "

" I will still send it."

She said that, if it were known, the tongues of the malicious would speak evil of her, and, therefore, it would be a secret. And she was pleased, just as a child may be pleased with a little gift. She had said truly that she was still very young. She laughed and played with the maidens of her age. And neither for me nor for any other man had she one thought of love.

Yet even then love slept deep in her calm eyes, as the fish with golden scales lies sleeping at the bottom of a deep pool. And the time of awakening was near.

V

He that enjoys knows how swift the passage of time may be, and he that awaits an event knows how slow it may be. But at last eight months had passed since the departure of the old story-teller, and he had said that in the next month—the great month of fruition—I should receive the silver seed of the tree of death—if, indeed, I ever received it.

So now in every footstep I seemed to hear the sound of an approaching messenger, and in every

sound to hear my name called. My blood grew hot as with a fever and my sleep left me, so that for the greater part of the night I paced in my garden alone.

All night on the ninth night of the month I heard in the distance the sounds of music and revelry. It was the wedding of the cousin of my beloved, and there was a great festival. But towards dawn the sounds died away, and I paced to and fro in my garden. And suddenly, as I passed the door in the wall of the garden, I heard a little sound, and I was called by my name. But it was not the voice of any messenger that called. It was the voice of my beloved.

I opened the door and bade her enter. She came in without a word, wearing the new robe and the golden bracelet. And in the grey and awful light of the dawn her face seemed still wondrous beautiful, and yet changed.

"You are weary?" I said.

She made a sign of assent.

"Yes," I said, "the marriage festival was long. All night I have heard the music. Your eyes tell of your weariness." And I spread a silken carpet for her under a tree that she might rest, greatly wondering that she should come to me in this way.

She knelt on the carpet, bending her body and covering her face with her hands.

"I have not been at the festival," she said. "Oh, I have much to say and there is not one word of it that you can ever forgive. Yet promise to hear me to the end, and then—then do with me as you will."

Then my heart fainted and doom sang in my ears. And there was a long silence before I could say : " I will hear you to the end."

And now she stretched herself at full length on the rug, her hands clasped behind her head. And she spoke like a tired child that repeats a long lesson.

" Yesterday," she said, " at sunrise I went down to wash myself in the water of the river. And when I had put on my garment again and risen up, I was aware that a youth came towards me riding upon a white ass that was bedecked with silver ornaments. And he dismounted and looked long at me. He was darker than we are, yet not so dark as the old story-teller. And I read in his eyes that which I have read in yours and in the eyes of other men. I knew that he desired me. Every day a beautiful woman may read that language. Yet it moved me not, and it was as if there were a mist before my eyes.

" He named you and asked me where he might find you, speaking in our tongue but slowly, as one but newly accustomed to it.

" I said : ' If you follow me, I will take you to him.'

" ' And afterwards ? ' he said. ' For you are more beautiful than any woman on this earth, and it is for you that my love has waited.'

" I laughed, for there was still the mist before my eyes. Besides, such a speech was daring and sudden, since he now saw me for the first time. ' Afterwards,' I said, ' will be as it will be. Meantime what seek you with this man ? '

" He turned his eyes from me, as if he feared to look on me. ' It is forbidden to me,' he said, ' so much as to speak of it.'

" Now, whether you believe it or not, it is true that in the next words which I said I had no intent but to vex him a little. Was not the mist still before my eyes, so that I could not judge aright? Was I any more than the thistle-seed caught in the wind of destiny?

" I said, still laughing: ' You love me, and yet you refuse the first thing that I ask of you?'

" And now he looked long at me again, breathing deeply, and suddenly he thrust his hand into his robe and drew forth something that glistened.

" ' Since you ask it,' he said, ' behold! I go to render this to him.'

" And so he stood before me, holding in his hand a ball that was not of silver but of the colour of silver, and in the ball there was life and death. Thus was it determined in the beginning, before the stars were set and before the earth was shaped. The mist passed from my eyes, and I saw that there was no beauty like his beauty. And when he spoke his voice was dearer to me than any that I have ever heard. And never had there been such love as now burnt my whole being.

" ' See!' he cried. ' I have broken the great oath, and for that death will come soon upon me. My hours are numbered, and yet if they be hours of love, the price is small. Do I not love you? Do I not worship you?'

" My head drooped and my eyes fainted, and I sank down on my knees. ' Lord of my heart ! ' I said. ' Lord of my life ! ' "

And now she turned over on her face, and her whole body was shaken with weeping.

For a few moments I remained silent, and then I said : " Have you ended that which you would say to me ? "

" No, no ! " she cried. " No, no ! "

" Speak on, then," I said, " and I would beg you to speak quickly."

Now she rose to her feet, and thereafter she spoke standing, holding to the trunk of the tree as if for support.

" He had come by the way of the desert, and the night before he had come to the great rock. And finding a great tomb in the rock, he had rested there for the night, and there he had left his gear, setting forth with the white ass to find you, and so to complete his mission.

" Little thought had he now of that mission. And since already people were astir in the village he took me back with him to the tomb in the rock. I rode and he ran by my side, and in less than an hour we were there alone with our love in the cool dusk of the tomb.

" And when it drew near to the evening I was afraid lest my father should send out on all sides to seek me, and haply I should be found with my lover. So I arose and went to my father's house, and when he demanded why I had been away so long, I said that I had been helping in the preparation for my cousin's festival. Moreover, I put on my new robe and the gold bracelet on my arm,

and said to him that I now went to her wedding. And he was content, and disposed himself to sleep, for he is old and feeble and unsuited to a night of revelry.

"And so in breathless haste I went back to my lover, knowing that our hours were but few, and that eternity could scarce contain our love. Until an hour ago I was with him, and then it was necessary to see you. And I came near the latticed door of your garden, and, hearing your step, I called to you. And so I come to the very heart of the matter."

Here, pausing, she looked intently at me. And presently she went on speaking.

"There is neither anger nor mercy in your eyes. They have become like the eyes of a stone image in a temple—eyes that change not and see not. Hear me now to the end.

"He has broken the great oath, and the punishment is sure. One will come to him—he knows not when, but it will be very soon—and will say to him: 'Show me the twin pearls that are in all things alike, for this is the proof that you have fulfilled your oath.' And if he has them not, then must he be slain instantly. And, further, in that far country from whence he came the life of his mother will be forfeited, for she was the surety for him in the great oath. And shall not his death be also mine?

"He has but one of the twin pearls, and the other is in your keeping. So that now you hold in your hand three lives.

"It may be that you will say to yourself that I was very young, and that when I tempted him

to break his oath I knew not what I did. And you may say further that your hatred is against destiny, and not with these thistle-seeds that the wind of destiny has swept together. If that were so, and you gave me the twin pearl and let us depart with it to his own country, then in all the words of praise there is none that is worthy of such great nobility.

"But in that I ask, it may be, more than any man can give. So, if you still desire me, I will remain here. And if you would have me as a wife or as a slave, I will be ever faithful and obedient. And I ask no reward but that by some instant messenger you will send the twin pearl to my lover, that he may go in peace. And I myself will see him no more at all. Do with me as you will, but let not his blood be upon my head. The fault was mine. Moreover, he has in part fulfilled his oath, for by me he sends to you the seed of the tree of death. I pray you to answer me."

It is very truth that until then I knew not what I would answer. But as she spoke she drew from her garment that silver glistening ball, and held it out to me, and I took it. It was still warm with the warmth of her beautiful body.

In a moment I had buried my dagger deep in her body. She fell at my feet, and a shudder went through her, and she was dead.

I became quite calm again, and my mind was as clear water, and my heart beat steadily and quietly. I knew just what I would do.

I dug a deep grave for her in a corner of my garden. Then I drew forth the dagger, wrapped

her in the silken carpet, and so buried her and the silver seed with her.

I made the earth smooth over her, and cleaned my dagger. And at last it was all so ordered that the garden looked even as it looked the morning before, and there was no trace of that which had been done. Neither had any eye beheld it.

And then I rode forth to the tomb that I had found in the great rock, and that the woman's lover had also found. But there, even as I feared, I came too late, and my work had been done for me.

The man lay dead in the entrance to the tomb with a knife in his throat. The bundle of fodder that he had carried for the ass had been spread out like a couch, and beside it were a jar of water and a brass cup. But the white ass bedecked with silver ornaments was no longer there ; and I supposed that the man who had slain him had taken it, but he had not taken the twin pearl, for that lay on the open hand of the dead man. There I left it. And I left the dead man to the vultures and jackals. And I saw that all the time the messenger journeyed from that far country another had travelled close behind him, watching to see if he fulfilled his oath, and with the power to slay him if he broke it.

And after that I went back to my own house and lay on my bed, preparing for myself that which I believed should be my last sleep, merging itself in the end in death. But the drug that I took failed me. Sleep, indeed, I obtained, but at noon on the following day I waked again. And in my sleep it was revealed to me that not at this

time, nor after this manner, should my death be. There were to be yet two years of waiting for me, while the silver seed woke to life where I had set it, even in the very heart of death.

VI

It was said in the village that my beloved had fled with a man of another race—for the two had been seen together—thus bringing shame upon her father's house. It was also said by others that the river had taken her, for she was accustomed to wash herself in the water of the river. And some said one thing and some another, but none said the truth, nor did any accuse me.

And as the tale of the months grew, I became greatly changed. No longer could the beauty of any woman move me, nor could any enterprise attract me. Had fabulous wealth been within my reach I would not have put out my hand to it. I was almost without wishes, save the wish to be alone. Never was there a guest in my house, nor the sound of music, nor laughter. Long and sweet sleep at night had left me, and I slept fitfully at strange hours, haunted always by dreams that seemed so real, that waking I scarce knew whether I was awake or slept, nor which was the substance and which the shadow.

Waking or sleeping, the thought of her whom I loved was ever present with me. I longed to call her up from death that I might tell her how nearly I had come to forgiveness, and how slight a thing in the end had driven me to madness. It grieved me that she would never know that.

There was no longer any jealousy or rancour in my heart towards her. She had been ever as she had said, as thistledown caught in the wind of destiny.

After the first year of waiting, I sometimes saw her as I walked in my garden in the cool of the evening. She came and vanished again, like smoke scattered by the wind. And as the second year drew on, the vision came more frequently and remained longer with me. Even I heard her speak. She stood beneath my orange-tree, and she opened her robe wide and pointed to the wound in her breast.

" You have hurt me," she said. " How could you hurt her whom you loved ? "

And at last the day came when the tree of death should rise to twice the height of a man, and should drink my blood, and should die again, and all betwixt a sunrise and a sunset.

The sun was not fully risen when I examined the earth over her grave. None other but myself was permitted to come into that part of the garden, and it was with my own hands that I had kept it free of all chance growth. And I saw now that there were in the earth crevices like the picture of the sun's rays, and through the centres of these something hard pushed its way. It was rounded at the top, and it was dark green and crimson intermingled, and on the surface of it were little drops of moisture as though it sweated with the struggle to get through.

Then I went back through the empty garden to the empty house, for on the day before I had sent forth those that waited on me. And I

bathed myself and put on a white robe, and then I saw to it that the doors were securely locked, and came back to the tree of death. It had risen now to the height of my knee, and it was still a single shaft tapering upwards, and it seemed to me that a light vapour came from it. And sitting down I watched this great miracle.

When it was the height of a man many stems separated themselves from the main stem, save at the base where they were joined to it, and these lolled outwards and grew no more. But from these side stems a shower of tendrils began to descend, writhing in the air as if they had been serpents. And looking closely I saw that each of them was covered with little mouths that opened and shut continuously. But the centre stem grew upwards tapering still, but carrying at the summit a curious mass. This increased in size, and I knew that from it would come the flower of the tree.

It was the hour of noon. I withdrew myself a little and still watched. From the side stems the rain of tendrils descended continuously, and they covered the ground so that over the place where I had laid her there was a moving sea of green and crimson. And shortly after noon the heavy mass at the head of the stem separated into three pods ; the skin of them was like clear, thin silk, and they had veins like the veins of a man. I could see them swelling more and more, and that something white seemed to be struggling within them, and the top of the stem rocked to and fro a little as if in agony.

So far all had gone on in silence. But suddenly

the skin of one of those pods was rent from end to end, and in the rending it made a sound like a woman that is hurt. From the burst pod there leapt a white flower of gorgeous beauty, greater than I have ever seen, and from the flower there fell a cloud of gold dust, sparkling in the sunlight, and the perfume of it, even at the distance where I stood, was of almost intolerable richness.

Then I cried aloud the words that came to me :

" O tree of love ! " I cried. " You whose roots have devoured and taken into your being all that I have loved on earth, now take me also, that at the last we may be mingled together, and after the anguish and evil of life there may be peace. O tree of love and death, I come to you ! "

And I went forward slowly and knelt beside the tree, looking upwards. And twice I heard that cry as of a woman that is hurt as the second and third flower burst forth. The clouds of gold dust blinded my eyes, and the heavy scent suffocated me. I fell at full length among those ramping tendrils whose little mouths sought my blood. And the last sleep came.

. . . . . .

I have written this, I who have been long dead, so that my bones are dust and for countless years my name has been forgotten. And I have written in a strange language and in a strange land, and by the living hand of one whom I know not.

NOT ON THE PASSENGER-LIST

I HAD not slept. It may have been the noise which prevented me. The entire ship groaned, creaked, screamed, and sobbed. In the state-rooms near mine the flooring was being torn up, and somebody was busy with a very blunt saw just over my head—at least it sounded like that. The motion, too, was not favourable for sleep. There was nothing but strong personal magnetism to keep me in my bunk. If I had relaxed it for a moment I should have fallen out.

Then the big trunk under my berth began to be busy, and I switched on the light to look at it. In a slow and portly way it began to lollop across the floor towards the door. It was trying to get out of the ship, and I never blamed it. But before it could reach the door a suit-case dashed out from under the couch and kicked it in the stomach. I switched off the light again, and let them fight it out in the dark.

I recalled that an elderly pessimist in the smoking-room the night before had expressed his belief that we were overloaded and that if the ship met any heavy weather she'd break in two for sure. And then I was playing chess with a fat negress who said she was only black when she was playing the black pieces; but in the middle of it somebody knocked and said that my bath was ready.

The last part turned out to be true. My bath was even more than ready, it was impatient; as I entered the bathroom the water jumped out to meet me and did so. Then, when the bath and I had finished with each other, my steward came slanting down the passage, at an angle of thirty degrees to the floor, without spilling my morning tea, and said that the weather was improving.

There were very few early risers at breakfast that morning, but I was not the first. Mrs Derrison was coming out as I entered the saloon. I thought she looked ill, but it was not particularly surprising. We said good-morning, and then she hesitated for a moment.

"I want to speak to you," she said. "Do you mind? Not now. Come up on deck when you've finished breakfast."

She was not an experienced traveller, and had already consulted me about various small matters. I supposed she wanted to know what was the right tip for a stewardess or something of that kind. Accordingly, after breakfast I went up, and found her wrapped in furs—very expensive furs—in her deck-chair. I could see now that she was not in the least sea-sick, but she said she had not slept all night. I moved her chair into a better position, and chatted as I wrapped the rug round her. I confessed that with the exception of an hour's nightmare about a fat negress I also had not slept. As a rule, she would have smiled at this, for she smiled easily and readily. But now she stared out over the sea as if she had heard the words without understanding them. She was a woman of thirty-four or thirty-five, I

should think, and had what is generally called an interesting face. You noticed her eyes particularly.

"Well," I said, "the wind's dropping, and we shall all sleep better to-night. Look, there's the sun coming out at last. And now, what's the trouble? What can I do for you?"

"I don't think that even you can help," she said drearily, "though you've done lots of kind things for me. Still, I've got to tell somebody. I simply can't stand it alone. Oh, if I were only the captain of this ship!"

"I don't think you'd like it! Why, what would you do?"

"Turn round and go back to New York."

"It couldn't be done. The ship doesn't carry enough coal. And we shall be at Liverpool the morning after next. But why? What's the matter?"

She held out one hand in the sunlight. It looked very small and transparent. It shook.

"The matter is that I'm frightened. I'm simply frightened out of my life."

I looked hard at her. There was no doubt about it. She was a badly frightened woman. I resisted an impulse to pat her on the shoulder.

"But really, Mrs Derrison, if you'll forgive me for saying so, this is absolute nonsense. The boat's slower than she ought to be, and I'll admit that she rolls pretty badly, but she's as safe as a church all the same."

"Yes, I know. In any case, that is not the kind of thing that would frighten me. This is something quite different. And when I have

told you it, you will probably think that I am insane."

"No," I said, "I shall not think that."

"Very well. I told you that I was a widow. I wear no mourning, and I did not tell you that Alec, my husband, died only three months ago. Nor did I tell you, which is also the truth, that I am going to England in order to marry another man."

"I understand all that. Go on."

"Alec died three months ago. But he is on this boat. I saw him last night. I think he has come for me."

She made that amazing statement quietly and without excitement. But you cannot tell a ghost-story convincingly to a man who is sitting in the sun at half-past nine in the morning. I neither doubted her sincerity nor her sanity. I merely wondered how the illusion had been produced.

"Well," I said, "you know that's quite impossible, don't you?"

"Yesterday, I should have said so."

"So you will to-morrow. Tell me how it happened, and I will tell you the explanation."

"I went to my room at eleven last night. The door was a little way open—fixed by that hook arrangement—the way I generally leave it. I switched on the light and went in. He was sitting on the berth with his legs dangling, his profile towards me. The light shone on the bald place on his head. He wore blue pyjamas and red slippers—the kind that he always wore. The pocket of the coat was weighed down, and I remembered what he had told me—that when

he was travelling he put his watch, money, and keys there at night. He turned his head towards me. It came round very slowly, as if with an effort. That was strange, because so far I had been startled and surprised but not frightened. When the head turned round I became really frightened. You see, it was Alec—and yet it was not."

"I don't think I understand. How do you mean?"

"Well, it was like him—a roundish face, clean-shaven, heavily lined—he was fifteen years older than I was—with his very heavy eyebrows and his ridiculously small mouth. His mouth was really abnormal. But the whole thing looked as if it had been modelled out of wax and painted. And, then, when a head turns towards you, you expect the eyes to look at you. These did not. They remained with the lids half down —very much as I remembered him after the doctors had gone. Oh, I was frightened! I fumbled with one hand behind me, trying to find the bell-push. And yet I could not help speaking out loud. I said: 'What does this mean, Alec?' Just then I got my finger on the bell-push. He knew I had rung—I could see that. His lips kept opening and shutting as if he were trying hard to speak. When the voice came at last, it was only a whisper. He said: 'I want you!' when the stewardess tapped at the door, and I did not see him any more."

"Did you tell the stewardess?"

"Oh, no! I did not mean to tell anybody then. I pretended to be nervous about the ship

rolling too much, and managed to keep her with me for a long time. She offered to fetch the doctor for me, so that I could ask him for a sleeping-draught, but I wouldn't have that."

"Why not?"

"I was afraid to go to sleep. I wanted to be ready in case—in case it happened again. You see, I knew why it was."

"I don't think you did, Mrs Derrison. But I will tell you why it was, if you like. The explanation is very simple and also very prosaic."

"What is it?"

"The cause of the illusion was merely sea-sickness."

"But I've not felt ill at all."

"Very likely not. If you had been ill in the ordinary way, the way in which it has taken a good many of our friends, you would never have had the illusion. Brain and stomach act and react on one another. The motion of the boat, too, is particularly trying to the optic nerves. In some cases, not very common perhaps, but quite well-known and recognized—it is the brain and not the other organ which is temporarily affected."

I do not know anything about it really, and had merely invented the sea-sickness theory on the spur of the moment. It was necessary to think of something plausible and very commonplace. Mrs Derrison was suffering a good deal, and I had to stop it.

"If I could only think that," she said, "what a comfort it would be!"

"Whether you believe it or not, it's the truth,"

I said. "I've known a similar case. It won't happen to you again, because the weather's getting better, and so you won't be ill."

She wanted to know all about the "similar case," and I made up a convincing little story about it. Gradually she began to be reassured.

"I wish I had known about it before," she said. "All last night I sat in my room, with the light turned on, getting more and more frightened. I don't think there's anything hurts one so much as fear. I can understand people being driven mad by it. You see, I had a special reason to be afraid, because Alec was jealous, very jealous. He had even, I suppose, some grounds for jealousy."

She began to tell me her story. She had married Alec Derrison nine years before. She liked him at that time, but she did not love him, and she told him so. He said that it did not matter, and that in time she would come to love him. I dare say a good many marriages that begin in that way turn out happily, but this marriage was a mistake.

He took her to his house in New York, and there they lived for a year without actual disaster. He was very kind to her, and she was touched by his kindness. She had been quite poor, and she now had plenty of money to spend, and liked it. But it became clear to her in that year not only that she did not love her husband but that she never would love him. And she was, I could believe, a rather romantic and temperamental kind of woman, by whom many men were greatly attracted. Alec Derrison began to be

very jealous—at that time quite absurdly and without reason.

At the end of the year Derrison took her to Europe for a holiday. And there, in England, in her father's country rectory, she met the man whom she ought to have married—an artist of the same age as herself. The two fell desperately in love with one another. The man wanted to take her away with him and ultimately to marry her. She refused.

There is a curious mixture of conscience and temperament which is sometimes mistaken for cowardice, and is often accompanied by extraordinary courage. She went to her husband and, so to speak, put her cards down on the table. "I love another man," she said. "I love him in the way in which I wished to love you but cannot. I did not want this and I did not look for it, but it has happened to me. I am sorry it has happened, but I do not ask you to forgive me, for you have nothing to forgive. I want to know what you mean to do."

His answer was to take her straight back to New York. There for the eight years before he died he treated her with kindness and gave her every luxury, but all the time he had her watched. Traps were laid for her, but in vain. He had for business reasons to go to England every year, but he never took her with him. When he was away, two of his sisters came to the house and watched for him.

And yet, because in some things a woman is cleverer than a man, and also because the feminine conscience always has its limitations,

during the whole of those eight years she corresponded regularly with the other man without being found out. They never met, but she had his letters. And now she was going back to marry him.

It was, perhaps, a little curious that she should tell all this to a man whom she had known only for a few days. But intimacies grow quickly on board ship, and besides she wanted to explain her terror.

"You see how it was," she said. "If a dead man could come back again, then certainly he would come back. And when one begins to be frightened the fear grows and grows. One thinks of things. For instance, he crossed more than once in this very boat—I thought of that."

"Well, Mrs Derrison," I said, "the dead cannot and do not come back. But a disordered interior does sometimes produce an optical illusion. That's all there is to it. However, if you like, I'll go to the purser and get your room changed for another; I can manage that all right."

It was not a very wise suggestion, and she refused it. She said that it would be like admitting that there was something in it beyond sea-sickness.

"Good!" I said. "I think you're quite right. I thought it might ease your mind not to see again the room where you were frightened, but it is much better to be firm about it. In fact, you had better take a cup of soup and then go back to your room now, and get an hour's sleep before lunch."

"I wonder if I could."

"Of course you can. You're getting your colour back, and there's much less motion on the boat. You won't have another attack. You've had a sort of suppressed form of sea-sickness, that's all. And I can quite understand that it scared you at the time, when you didn't know; but there's no reason why it should scare you now when you do know."

She took my advice. A woman will generally take advice from any man except her husband—because he's the only man she really knows. She was disproportionately grateful. Gratitude is rare, but, when found, it is in very large streaks. She had also decided to believe that I knew everything, could do everything, and had other admirable qualities. When a woman decides to believe, facts do not hamper her.

She was much better at lunch and afterwards. Next day she was apparently normal, and was taking part in the usual deck-games. I began to think that my sea-sickness theory might have been a lucky shot. I consulted the ship's doctor about it, without giving him names or details, but he was very non-committal. He was a general practitioner, of course, and I was taking him into the specialist regions. Besides, naturally enough, a doctor does not care to talk his own shop with a layman. He gave me an impression that any conclusions to which I came would necessarily be wrong. But it did not worry me much. I did not see a great deal of Mrs Derrison, but it was quite obvious that she

had recovered her normal health and spirits. I believed that the trouble was over.

But it was not.

On the night before we arrived, after the smoking-room had been closed, old Bartlett asked me to come to his rooms for a chat and a whisky-and-soda. The old man slept badly, and was inclined to a late sitting. We discussed various subjects, and amongst them memory for faces.

"I've got that memory," he said. "Names bother me, but not faces. For instance, I remember the faces of the seventy or eighty in the first-class here."

"I thought we were more than that."

"No. People don't cross the Atlantic for fun in February. It's a pretty light list. It's a funny thing, too—we've got one man on board who's never showed up at all. I saw him for the first time this morning—to be accurate, yesterday morning—coming from the bath, and I've not seen him since. He must have been hiding in his state-room all the time."

"Ill, probably."

"No, not ill. I asked the doctor. I suppose he don't enjoy the society of his fellow-men for some reason or other."

"Well, now," I said, "let's test your memory. What was he like?"

"You've given me an easy one as it happens, for he was rather a curious chap to look at, and easy to remember in consequence. A man in the fifties, I should say; medium height; wore blue pyjamas with a gold watch-chain trickling

out of the pocket, and those red slippers that you buy in Cairo. But his face was what I noticed particularly. He's got a one-inch mouth—smallest mouth I ever saw on a man. But the whole look on his face was queer, just as if it had been painted and then varnished.

"He was bald, round-faced, wrinkled, and clean-shaven. He walked very slowly, and he looked as if he were worried out of his life. There's the portrait, and you can check it when we get off the boat—you're bound to see him then."

"Yes, you've a good memory. If I had just passed a man in a passage, I shouldn't have remembered a thing about him ten minutes afterwards. By the way, have you spoken about the hermit passenger to anybody else?"

"No. Oh, yes, I did mention it to some of the ladies after dinner! Why?"

"I wondered if anybody besides yourself had seen him."

"Well, they didn't say they had. Bless you, I've known men like that. It's a sort of sulkiness. They'd sooner be alone."

A few minutes later I said good-night and left him. It was between one and two in the morning. His story had made a strong impression upon me. My theory of sea-sickness had to go, and I was scared. Quite frankly, I was afraid of meeting something in blue pyjamas. But I was more afraid about Mrs Derrison. There were very few ladies on board, and it was almost certain she was in the group to whom Bartlett had told his story. If that were so,

anything might have happened. I decided to go past her state-room, listening as I did so.

But before I reached her room the door opened, and she swung out in her nightdress. She had got her mouth open and one hand at her throat. With the other hand she clutched the handle of the door, as if she were trying to hold it shut against somebody. I hurried towards her, and she turned and saw me. In an instant she was in my arms, clinging to me in sheer mad, helpless terror.

She was hysterical, of course, but fortunately she did not make much noise. She kept saying: "I've got to go back to him—into the sea!" It seemed a long time before I could get her calm enough to listen to me.

"You've had a bad dream, and it has frightened you, poor child."

"No, no. Not a dream!"

"It didn't seem like one to you, but that's what it was. You're all right now. I'm going to take care of you."

"Don't let go of me for a moment. He wants me. He's in there."

"Oh, no! I'll show you that he's not there."

I opened the door. Within all was darkness. I still kept one arm round her, or she would have fallen.

"I left the light on," she whispered.

"Yes," I said, "but your sleeve caught the switch as you came out. I saw it." It was a lie, of course, but one had to lie.

I switched the light on again. The room was empty. There were the tumbled bed-clothes on

the berth, and a pillow had fallen to the floor. On the table some toilet things gleamed brightly. There was a pile of feminine garments on the couch. I drew her in and closed the door.

"I'll put you back into bed again," I said, "if you don't mind."

"If you'll promise not to go."

"Oh, I won't go!"

I picked her up and laid her on the berth, and drew the clothes over her. I put the pillow back under her head. With both her hands she clutched one of mine.

"Now, then," I said, "do you happen to have any brandy here?"

"In a flask in my dressing-bag. It's been there for years. I don't know if it's any good still."

She seemed reluctant to let go my hand, and clutched it again eagerly when I brought the brandy. She was quite docile, and drank as I told her. I have not put down half of what she said. She was muttering the whole time. The phrase "into the sea" occurred frequently. All ordinary notions of the relationship of a man and a woman had vanished. I was simply a big brother who was looking after her. That was felt by both of us. We called each other "dear" that night frequently, but there was not a trace of sex-sentimentality between us.

Gradually she became more quiet, and I was no longer afraid that she would faint. Still holding my hand, she said:

"Shall I tell you what it was?"

"Yes, dear, if you like. But you needn't. It was only a dream, you know."

"I don't think it was a dream. I went to sleep, which I had never expected to do after the thing that Mr Bartlett told us. I couldn't have done it, only I argued that you must be right and the rest must be just a coincidence. Then I was awakened by the sound of somebody breathing close by my ear. It got further away, and I switched on the light quickly. He was standing just there—exactly as I described him to you—and he had picked up a pair of nail-scissors. He was opening and shutting them. Then he put them down open, and shook his head. (Look, they're open now, and I always close them.) And suddenly he lurched over, almost falling, and clutched the wooden edge of the berth. His red hands—they were terribly red, far redder than they used to be—came on to the wood with a slap. 'Go into the sea, Sheila,' he whispered. 'I'm waiting. I want you.' And after that I don't know what happened, but suddenly I was hanging on to you, dear. How long was it ago? Was it an hour? It doesn't matter. I'm safe while you're here."

I released her hands gently. Suddenly the paroxysm of terror returned.

"You're not going?" she cried, aghast.

"Of course not." I sat down on the couch opposite her. "But what makes you think you're safe while I'm here?"

"You're stronger than he is," she said.

She said it as if it were a self-evident fact which did not admit of argument. Certainly, though

no doubt unreasonably, it gave me confidence. I felt somehow that he and I were fighting for the woman's life and soul, and I had got him down. I knew that in some mysterious way I was the stronger.

"Well," I said, "the dream that one is awake is a fairly common dream. But what was the thing that Bartlett told you?"

"He saw him—in blue pyjamas and red slippers. He mentioned the mouth too."

"I'm glad you told me that," I said, and began a few useful inventions. "The man that Bartlett saw was Curwen. We've just been talking about it."

"Who's Curwen?"

"Not a bad chap—an electrical engineer, I believe. As soon as Bartlett mentioned the mole on the cheek and the little black moustache I spotted that it was Curwen."

"But he said he had never seen him before."

"Nor had he. Curwen's a bad sailor and has kept to his state-room—in fact, that was his first public appearance. But I saw Curwen when he came on board and had a talk with him. As soon as Barlett mentioned the mole, I knew who it was."

"Then the colour of the slippers and——"

"They were merely a coincidence, and a mighty unlucky one for you."

"I see," she said. Her muscles relaxed. She gave a little sigh of relief and sank back on the pillow. I was glad that I had invented Curwen and the mole.

I changed the subject now, and began to talk about Liverpool—not so many miles away now. I asked her if she had changed her American money yet. I spoke about the customs, and confessed to some successful smuggling that I had once done. In fact, I talked about anything that might take her mind away from her panic. Then I said :

" If you will give me about ten seconds start now, so that I can get back to my own room, you might ring for your stewardess to come and take care of you. It will mean an extra tip for her, and she won't mind."

" Yes," she said, " I ought not to keep you any longer. Indeed, it is very kind of you to have helped me and to have stayed so long. I'll never forget it. But even now I daren't be alone for a moment. Will you wait until she's actually here ? "

I was not ready for that.

" Well," I said hesitatingly.

" Of course," she said. " I hadn't thought of it. I can't keep you. You've had no sleep at all. And yet if you go, he'll—— Oh, what am I to do ? What am I to do ? "

I was afraid she would begin to cry.

" That's all right," I said. " I can stay for another hour or two easily enough."

She was full of gratitude. She told me to throw the things off the end of the couch so that I could lie at full length. I dozed for a while, but I do not think she slept at all. She was wide awake when I opened my eyes. I talked to her for a little, and found her much reassured and

calmed. People were beginning to move about. It was necessary for me to go immediately if I was not to be seen.

She agreed at once. When I shook hands with her, and told her to try for an hour's sleep, she kissed my hand fervently in a childish sort of way. Frightened people behave rather like children.

I was not seen as I came from her room. The luck was with me. It is just possible that on the other side of the ship, a steward saw me enter my own room in evening clothes at a little after five. If he did, it did not matter.

. . . . . .

I have had the most grateful and kindly letters from her and from her new husband—the cheery and handsome man who met her at Liverpool. In her letter she speaks of her " awful nightmare, that even now it seems sometimes as if it must have been real." She has sent me a cigarette-case that I am afraid I cannot use publicly. A gold cigarette-case with a diamond push-button would give a wrong impression of my income, and the inscription inside might easily be misunderstood. But I like to have it.

Thanks to my innocent mendacity, she has a theory which covers the whole ground. But I myself have no theory at all. I know this—that I might travel to New York by that same boat to-morrow, and that I am waiting three days for another.

I have suppressed the name of the boat, and I think I have said nothing by which she could

be identified. I do not want to spoil business. Besides, it may be funk and superstition that convinces me that on every trip she carries a passenger whose name is not on the list. But, for all that, I *am* quite convinced!

THE HARVEST MOON

I

MARY, a girl of twenty, lived alone at her London studio. The gallery at one end of the studio formed her bedroom. There, on the morning of Monday, October 1, 1917, she lay on a camp-bed in the deep sleep of exhaustion that had followed a sleepless night. She was wakened by a loud knock at the door of the outer studio below.

She started up in bed. The guns again? The raiders had come back?

No, it was no longer dark. Looking upwards she saw the day enter in a thin white line by the edge of the blind over the top-light. She pressed her cool fingers on her hot eyes, pushed back her heavy brown hair, and glanced at her watch. She was angry with herself that a postman's knock had been able to startle her. That night she had sat alone in the studio eating biscuits and expecting instant death—five bombs had fallen within a mile of the studio—and had kept her self-control. But now when it was all over she felt depressed, nervous, irritable. True, it was the second night in succession of strain, the second night of scanty and broken rest.

She put on a pair of slippers and an old ulster, since you must not be seen taking in the milk in

a dressing-gown, and came down the narrow and steep stairs into the studio. The light was mystic, green-tinted, and disquieting, and she hastened to change it. The blind over the big north window screamed and snapped as it went into retirement—surely it had never been so noisy before. A moment later the yielding of the doormat under her feet became horribly like the movement of a live thing. There was one letter in the wire cage on the door, and Mary recognized the writing on the envelope. She opened the door a little way, had a swift glimpse of a sunlit and empty street, and secured her milk-bottle with the cardboard seal. She looked at it with critical disapproval. Whoever else had lost their nerves, the milkman had apparently kept his. And if she complained of short measure she would simply be told that this country was at war.

She deposited the milk, together with a gaudy Italian plate with biscuit crumbs on it, on a table in the kitchen annexe, and opened her letter. Why had Connie Mortimer written in pencil? Illness?

DEAREST CHILD [the agitated lady wrote],

Arthur and I were coming to see you to-night, and then this awful raid, and the tube station was the only thing. I'm writing this in a tight-packed crowd of the most loathesome people I ever saw—poor souls! I pity them really. And what luck that Arthur always carries writing things. You never know, you see. This is just a line to implore you to come with us. It can't be stood. We've been through the most awful

experiences. Another night of it would mean a nervous collapse. So we meet on Monday night, 6.30, at Finchley Road Metropolitan. Train to Harrow or somewhere else and then ramble about all night. It will be great fun and such a lovely moon, besides being the duty of all to take proper precautions. So do, do come with us. We can't bear to think of you being in that studio all alone. We shall be so grateful if you will be our guest. Six-thirty sharp, remember. Don't trouble to answer. Just come.

"I won't," said Mary, out loud. Her nerves might be on edge but, she told herself, she was not going to run away.

She went on with the routine of the morning. She filled the big kettle for her bath and put it on the double gas-ring. And since her kitchen was also her bathroom, she put out the tin bath on the tiles—it made a noise like a barrage. Then, while the kettle boiled, she swept and dusted. These things she did every morning except Tuesday—every Tuesday came a blessed charwoman. After that, while she was dressing, her breakfast was cooking. She had salted porridge, brown bread and strawberry jam, and excellent China tea—the last had been a present from the Mortimers. Breakfast was inspiriting. The sun shone nobly through the top-light. Outside in the street cheerful Cockneys laughed and talked.

She felt better, but she did not try to work that morning. She doubted the absolute certainty of her touch. She wrote a brief letter in which she enclosed three one-pound notes.

Then, in her most comfortable chair with an open book in her lap, she thought over things until a pleasant sleep came.

II

Mary's father spent the first part of his adult life in getting gradually poorer. He had no vices unless inactivity could be counted as one. He had amiable qualities of no commercial value. He had fair general judgment though he did not foresee the Great War. He had unfailing bad luck in money matters. In 1914 that bad luck got tired of slow processes. The War brought him down to an income of £150 per annum at one jump. He had no profession, and at the age of sixty-two was unlikely to obtain remunerative work. Mary's mother was a placid and sweet-tempered woman, but unversed in the art of keeping a house on three pounds a week. It was decided that Mary was old enough to be called into the family council.

At this time Mary was receiving an expensive art education in London. She shut down that expensive education. Her gift was natural. She had learned to draw long before she could write. She had been drawing and learning ever since. She believed that she still had very much to learn, but that only a limited amount of it could be taught. And she would still, while she was earning her living, be able to get good teaching for very little. And as a black-and-white artist she felt that she ought to be able to make a living.

She succeeded beyond her hopes. She had that rare gift—originality without eccentricity—for which eccentricity without originality is so common a substitute. Not only had she new conceptions. Her work was astonishingly assured, virile, and solid for a girl of her age. Briefly, good work was the reason of her success, a simple reason, but one that those who have failed are not prone to accept.

She did not make immediate fame or immediate fortune. There was nothing at all fairy-tale about her progress. She got more work than she had expected in 1915, but not as much as she would have liked. In 1916 the public began to sit up and take notice. Two different editors claimed that they had discovered her, and she had to be careful not to do too much—not to lower her standard of quality. In 1917 her position was fairly assured, her income had increased considerably, and she was able to select the work that she would do. But it was not really until the end of the month of September that she yielded to advice and started her own bank-account. So far she had changed the cheques she had received, through old Mr Denison or the Mortimers, or some other long-suffering friend, and on several occasions the bureau in her studio might have been well worth a burglar's attention. But, from a devotion to art, or a cynical disbelief in its remunerative potentiality, burglars neglect studios. Mary was clear-sighted enough, but in some respects she was astonishingly careless. If she sent money to her parents, or to a tradesman, or to her

landlord, she sent it in Treasury notes and an unregistered envelope. She was too impulsive as well. Yet she had a passion for order, and disliked the untidiness of some of her Bohemian friends ; nor was she without business capacity.

In the spring of 1917 Mary was able to install her parents in a cottage on the outskirts of a Derbyshire village. They had taken their loss of fortune with a quiet placidity and courage that Mary admired immensely. Apart from her natural affection for them, she had a strong and instant sympathy for the stricken. For over two years they had suffered many things in apartments and boarding-houses without losing their sense of humour ; they would have suffered more but for Mary's help. It was a delight to her that they now had a home of their own. The garden of the cottage was a joy to her mother, and there were golf and fishing for her father's more strenuous days. They were perfectly happy and satisfied, and, since it would have been impossible without Mary, they were very grateful. The gratitude distressed Mary. " You ought to take it for granted," she wrote.

Mary herself liked simplicity, and in her studio she lived simply. She suffered no privations ; she was far too wise to suffer, if she could help it, anything that would lessen her working and earning efficiency. She did not attempt to make her own clothes, for her time and energy were too valuable. She even meditated the acquisition of a maid, but there was a glorious independence in the absence of any. Meanwhile the charwoman was a compromise.

She had friends of her own of both sexes, advanced students of art or music. They were mostly poor but enthusiastic. They had larks together. They worked together. They criticized one another, openly, poignantly, and humorously. They talked slang and rather over-worked the last word. They called one another by their first names and preferably by nicknames. The whole composition was set in the brother-and-sister key—love-making was tacitly taboo. Most of them were already wedded to a career, most of them were ardent anti-sentimentalists, and some of them were not very fierce. It worked quite well. But now most of the young men were in khaki. Already Mary had heard the Last Post sounded over the grave of one who had been her playfellow, had been made an officer, and had been shipped back to his country to die of his wounds. A heritage of beauty had been wasted there, for she knew his great gift. Wasted? What art could give a beauty so great and so uplifting as that selfless and incomparable sacrifice?

It was through one of these men, Roy Headland, that Mary had first met Arthur Mortimer and his wife Connie. They had taken to her at once and she to them. Their intimacy grew rapidly. Connie was prosaic in ordinary life, but became an angel with a piano in front of her. She was inconsequent, under-educated, cowardly, wildly generous, simple, and sincere. Arthur was just as generous and hospitable, and had a touching belief that his devoted wife was, at the age of forty-eight, of a dangerous beauty. But his

principle characteristic was his love of apparatus. If he could buy something from a shop which would enable him to do something which he had never needed to do, he was quite happy. With no knowledge of mechanics, he had a hearty welcome for the mechanical device and a ready excuse when he failed to make it work. In ordinary society he might have been described as a marvellous musician, but in the society in which he moved it was merely conceded that he was musical and had some knowledge. He had an independent income and his wife made money. They had a small house at Hampstead and entertained perpetually in a Bohemian way, and occasionally one heard very good music there. But they were ready for any game provided that it was silly enough. Possibly Arthur and Connie represented a mid-way stage between Mary's student friends and the few sedate people, such as old Mr Denison and Lady Harson, whom she had inherited from her parents.

But while her friendship with Arthur and Connie grew, her friendship with the man who had brought them together waned. Mary herself managed the waning. Roy was still available ; he was a good-looking boy with an athletic figure, but he had not been called up. It was stated that he was C 3, but Mary neither knew nor cared about that. The important point was that he had broken the taboo ; if he had not made love to her, he had come very near to it, She avoided meeting him as far as possible. If she did meet him she gave him the chill, fragrant sweetness of a vanilla ice. She had no room for

love in her life now, and he was disquieting; she remembered sometimes his bold and intelligent eyes, and was angry that she remembered.

Mary, like everybody else, wanted to do what she could for the War, and she was not impressed with a theory (which seemed to be generally accepted) that everybody who could do anything well, should at once proceed to do something else badly. She could draw and she wanted to give her best. Her lightning sketches in charcoal became very popular in many hospitals. She could get an exact portrait in a few lines, and it may be that her portraits of wounded soldiers and nurses were sometimes rather flattering. But her sketch of Hindenburg driving nails into his own statue was amusing. And she got a good deal of fun out of the Crown Prince. She generally finished her entertainment with a wickedly cruel caricature of herself. At the hospitals she gave these sketches away. At variety shows for charities she sold them by auction for the benefit of the Red Cross. But she never knitted a comforter or sewed a shirt.

III

Mary was much refreshed by her morning's rest. She decided to go out to lunch and had just put on her outdoor things when old Denison arrived in a taxi and bore her off to lunch with him. He was an old bachelor, white-haired, but very trim and alert. He was an able man and at present the Government was utilizing his ability. Some people considered him an old

reprobate. But Mary and he were great friends, despite the difference in their ages, and he respected her.

"Well," he said, "I came up from my funk-hole at Epsom this morning and saw in the papers that the blackguards had probably come your way last night. So I thought I'd see if you were still alive."

"Quite alive, thanks. But why are you at Epsom?"

"Funk-hole, as I said. I'm at a hotel there for the period of the harvest moon. I've got my work to think about. It's rather an important job and I'm more useful alive than dead. There's no great risk in London, of course, but the guns make no end of a row, and a bad night gives me a bad temper. If mine were night-work I'd stay. As I'm free to take cover, I take it. Why don't you do the same?"

"Yours is really important work. I read about it in the papers. My work is nothing."

"You're wrong, my dear. If a bomb drops through the top-light of your studio while you are there, who will go on doing for your parents what you are now doing?"

"I hadn't looked at it that way."

"Let me 'phone my hotel to get you a room somewhere."

"Oh, no. I needn't trouble you like that. The Mortimers are going out of town to-night and have asked me to go with them."

"I remember them . . . weird couple, very. Though she's a genius in her own line. That's all right. You go with them."

"I had meant not to, but now—perhaps I will."

She was not wholly convinced by Mr Denison. He was only plausible. What ultimately decided her to go was that she found, after her rest and her excellent luncheon, that her nerves were perfectly steady again. When she was quite sure that she was not afraid to remain, she could consider the expedition in the light of a lark. It occurred to her that it might be quite a good lark.

She put on a tweed coat and skirt, quite a short skirt. Under the coat she wore the jersey that she had got for hockey. Her stockings were thick. Her shoes were stout and sensible. Deformed feet might be fashionable, but as an artist Mary did not care for them. Her hat was soft, undecorated, took the shape that it was told, and did not matter. She was now equipped for walking, but there were other possibilities to be considered. Connie had written of rambling about all night, but this was probably poetical enthusiasm. Neither she nor her husband were constructed for feats of endurance, and in her daily practice Connie never walked where it could be avoided. There would probably be long periods of rest and it might get quite cold. So Mary took with her a big fur-lined cloak, heavy though it might be to carry. She also took with her the satchel that accompanied her on railway journeys. It contained in a small space a great variety of useful things, and Mary always kept it carefully stocked. The silver lighter in it had been a present from Arthur, and very often worked.

Mary arrived at the station five minutes before her time, but Arthur and Connie were already there. At their feet reposed a considerable picnic basket and a woollen bundle. Arthur's tall figure—the insufficient shoulders stooped a little—was clothed as it had been for golf. His thin and rather bird-like face was radiant with successful organization. He had shopped furiously that day for this expedition. Connie, always rather a podgy figure, looked fatter than usual. (This was explained later when she recounted to Mary what she had on underneath.)

"And I'm so glad," said Connie, after the first greetings, "that you've brought that cloak. You see, the night is rather a long time. Arthur thought of that, didn't you, Arthur? He's been thinking of things all day. And we mustn't let you overdo it with too much walking; so we shall probably encamp part of the time. And you'll be glad of your cloak then. I knew you'd bring something of the kind, didn't I, Arthur?"

"And those are your rugs?" asked Mary, touching the bundle with her toe.

"They can be rugs," said Arthur proudly, "or they can be worn as cloaks, or they can be utilized as sleeping-bags. It is a simple matter of adjusting a few buttons. An American invention, I believe. We have had them some time. Ingenious, eh?"

"Also, Mary," said Connie, "we've asked Roy to make the numbers even. You don't mind, do you?"

Mary minded furiously, but said nothing, for

just at this moment Roy came up to them, cheerful and unembarrassed. He wore a light tweed suit and cap and carried a thin raincoat over one arm. His attitude to Mary was frankly fraternal, and he paid her neither too much attention nor too little. He chaffed Arthur and Connie with the ease of long freedom. There was much laughter. Had the young man learned his lesson? As long as he kept that note it would be all right.

Arthur hurried them off to the train. The objective, he explained, was Rickmansworth, and he had already taken the tickets. Every train out had been packed since three that afternoon, and he was afraid they might have difficulty in getting seats. They did not get seats—at first, at any rate—and were lucky to get aboard the train at all for some were left behind. Everywhere in the carriage Mary seemed to see a look of relieved anxiety and to hear talk about air-raids. Roy was an exception. He looked as usual, cheerful and slightly sardonic. He seemed a little tired, but then Mary knew he had been playing at a concert that afternoon; he was a 'cellist by profession, but was accomplished in more than one art. He talked to her about pastel, a medium which she had never tried, and interested her. He had not seen a newspaper that day. Nervous of air-raids? Mary was confident that he was not even thinking about them.

At Harrow all the lights in the train and on the station were extinguished with a dramatic suddenness.

"There!" exclaimed Connie excitedly. "That means there's a raid."

"More likely a war-time economy in the electric light," said Roy. "Luckily we don't need it. That moon's considerably over life-size tonight."

They changed at Harrow and went on in another unlighted train to Rickmansworth. Arthur showed triumphantly that by holding his paper in the obling of moonlight he could see to read all but the smallest print. He was very fully stocked with evening papers. They were all seated now and far more comfortable. Arthur, Connie, and Mary chatted gaily together, but Roy had become silent. Outside, over field and moorland, the grey mists gathered and rose.

Roy was seated in the shadow, but at a turn of the line the oblong of moonlight shifted for a moment on to his face. It chanced that Mary was looking at him at the time. She was surprised—almost frightened—the face was tragic and suffering, the face of a man fighting without hope against overwhelming odds and now at the limit of his endurance. And it was the real man revealed; she felt that until that moment that night she had only seen a mask. Yet a minute or two later he had come back into the conversation again. He was asking Connie why she did not make Arthur moderate the exuberance of his golf stockings.

"I've no influence," laughed Connie. "Why, I told you not to get your hair cut, but you've been and done it."

"Camouflage," said Roy. "I'm trying to be

mistaken for an officer in mufti. No, the fact is that I've got an *ad libitum* subscription at the barber's; so any time that I'm not having my hair cut I'm wasting money."

The platforms at Rickmansworth seemed full of people. There were more people on the slope outside the station, standing still and looking towards London. The night was growing chilly, the grey mist was high in the valley.

"Our best plan," said Arthur, the great organizer, "will be to walk the first mile fairly quickly. Then when we are fairly warmed up we can put on our overcoats and have supper in comfort. And then on again."

They struck out along the white road, but they had not gone far when they stopped short at a sound beyond mistake. The guns of London barked sullenly and steadily like watch-dogs awakened.

"I knew it," said Connie fervently. "We did well to get away."

A moment later, high up in the sky, came a quick brief blaze of blue and white.

"Star shell," said Arthur, and his tone was so exactly that of a lecturer on pyrotechnics that Roy and Mary both laughed. And then, ominous and overhead, they heard a deep musical hum. They strained their eyes upwards, but could see nothing. It did not die away. It was as if the machine was circling round and round.

"Seems to be our busy evening," said Roy.

They were standing by the white garden gate of a modern bungalow. The front door of the

bungalow opened and a fat little man in evening clothes came running down the path. The moonlight gleamed on his bald head and white shirt-front.

"Come in at once," he called, hospitably and imperatively. "That's a Gotha. No mistake about it. I know the sound of our own machines."

"Thank you very much," said Connie, and was in at the gate in a moment.

"I really think we'd better," said Arthur. And perforce the other two followed him.

The fat little man led the way, chattering all the time, into a small square hall, where a bison's head with a silk hat hung on one of the horns fascinated Mary's gaze.

"Pilgrims from London, I see," said their fussy little host. "Don't blame you. Thousands are doing it. The whole place may be levelled with the dust to-night. Written letters to the papers myself. Half a moment, if you'll excuse me."

While he was speaking his eyes stared hard at Mary. He passed through a door into the room beyond. They heard a woman's incisive voice say: "What fool-trick is this, Willy?" and Willy making a rapid explanation in a subdued voice. Then he reappeared, holding open the door.

"Come in here, won't you?" he said. "There's a nice fire and it's a safer position. My mother would be so glad."

"Oh, we won't disturb your mother," said Mary, but it was of no avail. At the words

" safer position " Connie led the way, and the rest once more followed.

If Mother was really so glad, she dissembled. She was a thin figure, cut out of bone and draped in black. She sat upright in a straight-backed armchair by the fire. She did not rise nor speak when they entered. A faint and icy bow was her silent acknowledgment of salutations. The room appeared to be a dining-room. It possessed a large sideboard in black oak, despicably modern and vulgar, and probably quite useful. The little man opened a cupboard of the sideboard and produced decanters. He seemed disappointed that nobody wished to drink. He was kind, but much too persistent, worrying Mary particularly.

So far Mother had continued to knit with ferocious rapidity. Suddenly her hands dropped on her knee. She stared straight at Roy and spoke for the first time.

" I like to see a young man in khaki," she said bitterly.

Roy flushed very slightly and smiled. " I think we all do," he said.

Willy made desperate *sotto voce* apologies for his mother. A very old lady and somewhat eccentric—did not understand about reserved occupations, and so on. But he was interrupted by Mary's clear calm voice.

" I think our old Gotha must have vanished by now. I'm going out to see. Will you come with me, Roy ? "

" Thanks. Good idea," said Roy.

Willy protested that he could not hear of it.

The sound of the aeroplane was still audible directly overhead. Arthur and Connie also protested. Mary was polite but firm. She would come back at once if there seemed to be any danger; in any case she would come back and report. But she would go, and she did, Roy accompanying her.

"I don't believe it's a Gotha," she said when they got outside, "but if it is it's better company than that poisonous old imbecile with the knitting. I knew a few brainless flappers did that kind of thing at the beginning of the War, but I thought it was extinct now."

"Not extinct. After all, it's natural. What do you think yourself when you see a young man in civilian clothes?"

"I don't think—I know. I know there must be a good reason for it. And I know that these things are decided by people who can judge far better than I can. You're C_3, aren't you?"

"Not even that. Rejected at the start of the War. Rejected several times since, and still rejected. They won't even have me to lick stamps and tot up figures."

"I hate that old hag. Listen." The whirr of the aeroplane died away in the distance. "Fritz, if it really is Fritz, has gone home. Would you mind fetching Connie and Arthur? Convey my thanks, farewells, and excuses, to that little bounder. I can't go into his horrible house again."

"Right. I'll say you're tired and resting by the roadside."

IV

A quarter of a mile farther on they had supper, seated on a fallen log. The tree was wet—everything was wet now with the mist—but the wise Arthur had newspapers galore to spread on it. It was the great organizer's hour of triumph. He had forgotten nothing and all his apparatus worked. The soup was delicious and quite hot; so also was the stew of chicken and mushrooms. Their innocent drink was excellent coffee. Mary, munching a red apple at the close of the repast, said that she now definitely knew that Arthur was a genius. Roy addressed him either as Houdin or Escoffier, according to the fancy of the moment. Arthur beamed with justified satisfaction. They were all now in the highest spirits. Connie, who had some gift for mimicry, gave them imitations of Willy and Willy's mother, over which they screamed with laughter.

Then they made a holocaust of used cardboard plates and paper napkins, and took to the road again. But Connie had done as much walking as she liked, or even a little more. She was tired and beginning to be a little sleepy. She spoke of the delight of sleeping in the open under a stack. Ultimately they went down a track off the road and found two stacks in a field—or to be accurate one stack and three-quarters of a stack. The organizer began work again. There was much loose hay at the foot of the three-quarter stack and it was in the more sheltered position; so he assigned this to the two women.

He divided the stock of newspapers to be used to lie on. He didn't think they would be able to rest for long, for it was getting terribly cold. As soon as they thought of moving on again they had only to call him, and he would have hot tea ready for them in no time. Then he and Roy went off to the other stack.

Mary got to work energetically. She pulled quantities of dry hay out of the interior of the stack, and constructed two nests. She assisted Connie to put on the ingenious sleeping-bag, in which she looked like an illustration from an early Egyptian comic paper, and packed her into one of the nests. She took the other for herself. Her satchel formed her pillow. She had her fur-lined cloak wrapped tightly round her. The hay was piled thickly over her and under her. Outside, under the great harvest moon, the mist was like a calm sea, and the trees dripped and the cold increased, but Mary was snug and warm in her nest.

She could hear the men talking on the far side of their stack. Arthur was saying: "That coat of yours is far too thin. You'll be perished with cold."

"Not I," said Roy. "If I find it too cold I can always run about and warm myself. But I'm not going to take more of my share of the newspapers and it's no good your talking about it, my son."

He said something else. Mary could not hear it, but she heard Arthur laughing. Then the men were quiet. Down in the valley a train screamed and rattled on its way. On the road

a cart passed with people in it singing lugubriously.

Now in the silence of this grey night, Mary was conscious of an illusion, knowing it to be an illusion and yet fascinated by it. It seemed to her that she lay on a projecting cliff with the sea before her and on either side of her. It was the mist that gave that sea effect. She was at the end of things, at the end of the world, at the end of time, at the last jumping-off place into annihilation . . .

Mary fell asleep.

It was perhaps two hours later that she opened her eyes, wakened by the sound of a footstep. In front of her and with his back to her stood Roy, looking down into the valley. Both his hands were pressed to his left side; he shook violently.

In an instant she was out of her nest and coming towards him. He turned as he heard her.

" What is it, Roy ? " she said quickly in a low voice. " What's the matter ? "

His face was ghastly, but he managed to smile. He spoke in brief sentences with a catching of the breath.

" It's all right, Mary. Hope I didn't wake you. I got too cold. Thought I'd walk about and warm myself. But this cold has got my heart. And my heart's rotten, you know. All right directly."

Mary looked at his hands. They were like the hands of a dead man. " Wait a minute," she said, " I've got something for you."

She was back again in a moment with a brandy-

flask from her satchel. "Drink it," she ordered.

He could hardly hold the flask in his numbed hands. He drank, paused, and drank again.

"That's a good deal easier," he said. "Can't thank you enough, Mary. It's all right now." He still shivered violently.

"It's not," she said almost angrily. "Don't speak at all. Come with me now."

She brought him to her own warm nest. "Lie down in there."

He shook his head. "No," he said faintly. "Your place. Couldn't."

"Do you want to make me cry? I'm coming there too. Don't you see, it's the only way?"

He lay down as she directed. She stretched herself beside him under the heavy cloak. She drew him as close as she could to her, and pressed his numbed hands against her warm neck. He no longer tried to speak. At one moment she thought he would have died in her arms.

And then, slowly, the warmth of her strong young body—warmth that was life—beat back invading death. His breathing grew more easy. The fits of shivering grew less frequent, and then ceased. And the two slept like that—like two tired children.

When Mary awoke it seemed to her that already a first tinge of day mingled with the moonlight. Half-raised on one hand, Roy looked down at her. A few paces away Connie in her well-furnished nest snored peacefully. Roy's colour was better, his breathing was regular, his voice when he spoke seemed normal.

"Are you better, Roy?" said Mary anxiously.

" Much better," said Roy seriously. " I may be a little shaky still, but I can carry on till we get home with a shade of luck. I'm going to wake up Arthur. I shall tell him that I have been wandering about and that you are demanding breakfast. He'll turn out at once, good chap that he is, and get busy with his picnic breakfast. I shall find a way of taking his sleeping-bag until breakfast is ready. It's still pretty cold, you see, and the cold gets me. You'll wake up Connie and join us when we sing out that breakfast is ready. We say nothing of what's happened of course. That right ? "

" Yes, that's right, if you are sure that you can do it."

" Pretty sure. It should be getting warmer from now on. Oh, Mary, if I could only thank you, if there were only any words for what you did. Only you could have done it. Any other woman would have called for Connie and Arthur or run for help, and . . . "

" And you would have died. I knew it. There was no time. That's a good idea to get Arthur's sleeping-bag. Remain lying down in it as long as you can even while we're having breakfast. I'll manage to make a joke of it somehow. After I've got you home safely perhaps I'll be angry with you. You took a terrible risk."

" Yes," he said, " I took a risk."

He rose, stretched himself, said that he felt incredibly better, and walked slowly across to the stack where Arthur was encamped. Then Mary woke Connie. Connie said at first that

she had hardly slept at all, but later seemed less sure on this point. She admitted a dream wherein she had invented a kind of fly-paper that attracted aeroplanes and destroyed them. They were both rather dishevelled, but Mary had all manner of emergency toilet requisites in her priceless satchel. By the time that the call to breakfast came they were presentable, and had even tidied up the stack.

They found Arthur with his two patent spirit-stoves in action enjoying himself thoroughly. Roy, stretched at full length in Arthur's sleeping-bag, was jeering at him.

"Arthur," he said, "has washed his face in the morning dew, and now thinks he's a fairy and can cook buttered eggs. He has also shaved with a safety-razor and cut himself twice, which is the punishment of presumption."

"And what about yourself?" said Connie. "You ought to be up, Roy. You're lazy."

"Connie, your injustice pains me. I am slightly shop-soiled, but I am not lazy. I've been walking about all night, and what you mistake for laziness is well-earned repose. Arthur's patent sleeping-bag is the greatest invention of this or any other age."

"Come along, Connie," said Mary laughing. "You and I will be tea-shop girls and wait on him."

The joke appealed to Connie, who was good at impersonation. But while this little farce was being played—and rather well played—Mary suddenly put down a cup, and dashed up the track towards the road.

"What on earth is she up to now?" said Arthur.

"Well," said Roy, "there was a sound of a motor-drawn vehicle on the road. Apparently she's holding it up."

Mary returned breathless and triumphant.

"Stand down, Arthur," she said. "I've taken command of this expedition. It's the most wonderful luck. I've found a taxi. He drove people into Amersham late last night, slept in his cab, and was on his way back when I lassooed him. He'll drive us with joy and wait till we're ready, and he'd like a cup of tea, please."

And so in comfort and safety they all reached home.

V

It was not till a fortnight later that a letter from Roy reached Mary. Once a few days after the expedition she saw him in the distance in the street. Arthur and Connie had gone off to their cottage at St Ives or she might have met him there. Three days before the letter came she heard from a student friend that Roy was ill and in a nursing-home.

She received and read the letter in her studio one afternoon when the light was just beginning to fail.

MARY DEAR [he wrote],

I want to tell you all the truth. Some of it you already know, but some of it you do not.

A year ago I met you and loved you, as a man loves a woman. I had no choice. I knew that my chance of life was very precarious. I knew

that you were very far above me. I knew that, although you liked me well enough, you did not want my love. It all made no difference. You were always in my thoughts. It seemed to me that nothing could ever alter it.

Don't be angry that I tell you this, for I am speaking only of the past. It is not so now. You yourself have altered it.

On the morning of that Monday I was at a specialist's in Harley Street. He told me in guarded phrases that I had not long to live. I understood that it was a matter of days. I walked on down into Oxford Street and met Connie. She was full of the wild picnic that she had planned for that evening and urged me to come too. I nearly laughed for I knew that I had no life worth saving. And then she mentioned that you were coming too, and I accepted. I couldn't help it. I had to see you for one more time before I went. But I didn't mean to annoy you or to spoil anybody's fun. I should have brought a warmer coat, but I didn't know the programme included sleeping out, and in any case I didn't care. Condemned men are not careful to avoid catching cold.

It was the harvest moon, and the old reaper was out, but he met an angel who turned him back. For Mary, you are not of this earth. No woman of this earth could have done it. Self has its reservation in the noblest of them, and not in you. I lie here wondering how I could have ever dared to love you. You have raised me from that to the white ecstasy of passionless adoration. I know still that you are beautiful, and scarcely think of it—so overpowering is the consummate beauty of your soul.

Useless things words, aren't they? I cannot

tell you the half. This letter will come to you when I am dead. I die happy because of you. You've opened the gate, you've shown me the things that are beyond the earth and any words of the earth, the loveliness beyond speech and understanding.

The studio had grown so dark that she had switched on the light to read the last part of his letter. Now she put out the lights again. By the faint gleam of the fire she found her way back to her chair. She took up the dead man's letter and touched it gently with her lips.

THE REACTION

I

ERNEST PURDON had served his apprenticeship, passed his examinations with a little luck and not much margin, and was qualified to dispense medicines. He was now an assistant at one of Myer and Co.'s myriad shops. This particular shop was in Dunnivan Road, Whitechapel. It was not a sweet neighbourhood, and hardly a day passed when Mr Purdon was not asked to do something absolutely illegal. Such a proposal never even tempted him. He flicked the dirty, folded note back across the counter, and told the man or woman to go away. He had a conscience. Why, he went to church every Sunday morning with Ethel and her mother.

During business hours he was pontifical and impressive. He wore a fairly good black coat, and his hands were very white. He took care of his finger-nails, and his signet-ring was genuine. He was under thirty, but when he assumed his gilt-rimmed pince-nez you felt at once that he had only to look into it. He even had a local reputation. Clumsy, ill-dressed men, earning more money than our Mr Purdon ever did or could, lumbered up from the docks and addressed him with great respect. John Mace, ship's steward, was a walking testimonial.

"You go up to Myer's in Dunnivan Road," he would say, "and get a fair-haired bloke with eyeglasses. Can't miss him. He knows. Cured my leg. Took a pal of mine and sobered him up, so that he was fit to go aboard, in about record. Beats the doctors, to my mind."

It had been Mace himself and not a pal of his whom Mr Purdon, fear and suggestion concurring, had sobered with such rapidity. But Mace was not a pedantically accurate man in any respect.

Out of business hours Ernest Purdon was much less pontifical and impressive. Myer and Co. did not overpay their assistants. Purdon lived at a cheap boarding-house, run by an experienced, iron-faced lady who had worked out to a small fraction what was the least she could possibly give for the money she took, and never gave more. The food was of the worst quality, the rooms were not clean. Purdon had a well-founded suspicion that five mornings out of six his bed was not made but merely camouflaged. But still it was cheap. Purdon, who had no expensive vices, managed to put by a very little money. Also, though he did not know it, he was heartily afraid of the iron-faced lady. He would not have dared to say that he was dissatisfied. He had once ventured to complain that the window of his bedroom would not remain closed.

"You surprise me," said Mrs Bowes. "I should have thought that if there was one gentleman in my house to appreciate the value of fresh air, it would have been you, Mr Purdon, being practically on the borders of the medical profession."

He gave up. But the nights in November were cold, and he made a device of his own with a piece of stout wire to keep that window closed.

He had been engaged to Ethel nearly a year. Sometimes he wondered if he were really engaged to Ethel, or to Ethel and her mother, for they were inseparable. He was well aware that Ethel was much more attached to her mother than she was to him. The mother, Mrs Ratton, with Ethel's help ran a stationer's shop in Hampstead, which she had inherited from her deceased husband. They lived over the shop and did fairly well out of it. Every Sunday Ernest Purdon called for them, went to the morning service with them, and returned to their home for the midday meal. When it was finished, the same conversation nearly always took place, the responses coming with much the same regularity as the responses in church.

Purdon said: "Matter of fact, this is the only decent meal I get in the week."

Mrs Ratton said: "If not comfortable where you are, why not change?"

Ethel said: "That's what I always tell him."

And finally Purdon said: "Oh, well, you never know."

Once a month he took Ethel and her mother to the theatre. They always chose the piece, and he found to some dissatisfaction that it was only too often Shakespeare. He had once ventured to suggest that he should take Ethel alone.

"Why," said Ethel brightly, "what has poor Mamma done?"

And Purdon protested lamely that of course he had taken it for granted that poor Mamma would come too. She did.

Purdon found life dull, but was not very discontented. It was of no use to cry for the moon, and if he lost Ethel he might not get another. He recognized that he was not popular with the ladies—not like his friend Harry Bates. Bates was a man of good appearance and manner, knew how to talk, and was sometimes dryly humorous. He was in the same profession as Purdon and no better qualified. But he was making considerably more money. Bates was not employed by Myer and Co., but by a man who kept a very well-known and very discreet druggist's shop in Mayfair. Wealthy young men, suffering from the night before, consulted Bates, took what he gave them, and were not ungenerous. Some of Bates's caustic sayings were quoted in the West End clubs. Well, Bates had promised that if ever he saw an opening, he would give his friend Purdon a lift. That might happen at any time—it had not happened yet.

II

It was growing dark on a November afternoon, and the lights in Myer's shop in Dunnivan Road were already lit. John Mace peered in. At the moment, Ernest Purdon was talking to an old woman with a shawl over her head. He held a phial of tablets in his hand. The old woman spoke of a sense of tightness in the chest, and Purdon tapped his own chest with his white

fingers sympathetically. He quite understood. Then he tapped the phial. Two of those before each meal would probably remove the inconvenience. She purchased the phial and left the shop. Mace entered at once.

"Back again, Mr Mace," said Purdon genially.

"Yes, sir. Got in the day before yesterday. There was a little thing I wanted to see you about."

"Well, well, what's the trouble?"

"It's not trouble exactly," said Mace, pulling out a bulky pocket-book and taking from it a small package in oiled paper. "It's this sample. I don't know what it is, and I want to know. I was wondering if you could tell me."

"We're pharmaceutical chemists here," said Purdon, "not analytical. If you want to know just what this stuff is, you'll have to take it to an analytical chemist, and I may as well warn you that you may have to pay a pretty stiff fee for it."

"I don't want to go anything beyond five shillings," said Mace. "I've reason to know that you're a good deal cleverer than the usual, Mr Purdon. I've no doubt if you cared to take that home with you, you could tell me something about it by to-morrow evening. I don't say everything. I only want a general idea. Because I've reason to believe it might be pretty good."

"How do you mean? Where did you get it from?"

"Got it from a negro who died of pneumonia this trip and was buried at sea. He wasn't the

ordinary sort. Mr E. Matthews he was on the passenger-list, and letters after his name. An educated man I should say, and got money. Travelling in the first-class, he was. There weren't a lot of people wanted to talk to him, and he talked to me. Showed me this powder, and said he was going to make a fortune with it. That was all I could get out of him, and he was taken ill next day. If you'll take that home with you and look into it, I'll go to five shillings and chance it. You might find out something, or you might not."

"Very good," said Purdon, and slipped the little packet into his waistcoat-pocket. "See you to-morrow evening."

When he got back to the boarding-house he went to his bedroom and hung his overcoat and hat behind the door. He might have hung them up downstairs, but the boarding-house was one in which mistakes frequently happened, and Purdon was taking no risks. He took off his black business coat, brushed it and hung it in the wardrobe, and put on a light jacket. Then he took from his pocket the little packet which Mace had given him, and opened it. It contained a brown powder which was not of a regular consistency. Some of it was the finest dust, and some of it was much coarser, and there were even little unbroken lumps in it. The smell of it was terrific and unrecognizable. He had not the slightest notion what the stuff was. He tried a couple of simple tests, in order that he might have something to talk to Mace about. He found that the powder was easily soluble in

water, and that it was alkaline. The whole thing did not take him five minutes.

He did not propose to investigate any farther. The stuff simply stank, and he wanted to get it out of his small bedroom. Even when it was gone he would have to leave the window open for half an hour before the place was fit to sleep in. The window looked out at the back of the house, over a small blackened yard that Mrs Bowes called a garden. Purdon picked up the paper with the remainder of the powder, intending to throw it out of the window.

And then accident came in. As Purdon tried to undo that wire device of his which kept the window shut, he scratched the thumb of his left hand deeply, so that the blood came. And as he pushed the window open, a gust of wind blew a little of the fine powder over his bleeding thumb.

"Damn!" said Purdon. He went to his washstand and washed his thumb carefully. He heard the church clock outside strike eight. Then his eyes grew dark and his head swam. He groped his way to his bed and flung himself on it. And there for an hour he lay unconscious of his actual surroundings.

And in that hour he lived a whole year of the most perfect happiness.

It was nine o'clock when he became aware that he was lying on his bed in his own sordid room at the top of the boarding-house. But for a minute or two a thought persisted that he must have been unconscious for a year. Then he reflected that, if that had been so, he would

have been found in his room, and would have been removed. He pulled out his watch ; it was still going. He could only have been there an hour. It was marvellous, that time extension. In that one hour he had been through the countless incidents of a wonderful year—a year in which quiet bliss and triumphant ecstasy had alternated.

At a quarter-past nine Purdon saw it all, and began to be frightened. That brown powder was dope, and the accident to his thumb had practically given him a hypodermic injection of it. There was no dope like it in the world. Any man would spend his last penny—would give his soul—for a year such as Purdon had just been through.

But Purdon had never taken any form of dope before and, in his profession, he had seen something of it, and of the ghastly effects of it. That very day a little, shivering old lady with untidy hair had come into the shop with a prescription that was obviously and preposterously bogus, and had burst out crying when Purdon had tossed it back to her and told her not to come there again unless she wanted to be handed over to the police. Dope was appalling. Even now, with the memory of that great year still vivid in him, he had not the slightest inclination to renew the experiment. He could not have renewed it. He had no more of the drug in his possession.

Perhaps a man who has by accident taken a hypodermic injection of uncertain strength, of an unknown and potent drug, may be pardoned for feeling nervous. Purdon felt nervous. He did not know what the stuff might do to him.

He might be taken ill in the night. Locked up in his room he had an ordinary eight-ounce medicine bottle filled with brandy. He kept it for emergencies, and had had it for two years. He got it out now and put it on the table by his bedside. He undressed quickly and got into bed. He did not suppose he would be able to sleep. Even if he did, he felt sure that he would awake on the following morning with a splitting head and tremulous nerves, possibly even unable to go to business. And that would not do him any good with Myer and Co.

He fell asleep almost immediately and slept quite peacefully till seven on the following morning. He had no headache at all. He took his pulse and temperature and found them normal. If anything, he felt better than usual. It was almost as though some of the happiness and confidence of that wonderful dream-year still lingered in him. His recollections of the dream-year had grown very vague. He could recall that several beautiful women had been very much in love with him, that men had respected him, that crowds had cheered him, that he had done many things exceedingly well which in real life he could never have done at all. But the picture was blurred. The very effort of trying to recall it seemed to make it more indistinct.

He went downstairs with a very good appetite for a very bad breakfast. It was in the train on his way to business that the great idea came to him. He must get the rest of that drug away from Mace. The negro had been quite right—there was money in it.

III

Throughout the day Purdon kept a very close eye upon himself. He took his pulse and temperature frequently. He could find no departure from the normal at all. He had never been better. He did his work well and easily. And all through the day that scheme grew rapidly in his mind. He was going to get the stuff away from Mace. At any rate, he was going to get some of it. Enough for his purpose.

It was shortly after six that Mace came in.

"Well, sir," said Mace eagerly. "Got any news for me? Spotted what it is?"

"Well," said Mr Purdon, "there's not been much time. For that matter, you didn't give me nearly a big enough sample for a proper analysis. Still, I can tell you something. The stuff's in a very crude state, and full of impurities."

"Full of——?" suggested Mace.

"Impurities. Dirt. That would have to be put right before it could be used. The thing is a gum-resin—like gamboge or asafœtida, you know." (Purdon had not done much in the way of analysis, but he had done enough to show him that the stuff was not a resin.) "How many hundredweight of it have you got?"

"Hundredweights? Didn't I tell you? He carried it about with him in his hip-pocket. He'd got it in an old half-pound, flat tobacco tin. There's just over six ounces of it. What would that be worth?"

"In it's present state, probably nothing. If it had been properly manufactured, it might have

been worth a shilling or two. But you would never find a buyer."

"Then what did the nigger mean by telling me he was going to make a fortune with it?"

Purdon laughed.

"Well, your friend was a sick man, and may have been light-headed. Besides, what does a nigger know?"

"But I told you he was an educated man. Letters after his name."

"There are quite a number of people who have letters after their name, to which they are not entitled. I've known it happen in my own profession. Besides, all these niggers are superstitious. If you want me to tell you what I really think, it looks to me as if it were some kind of a crazy charm that he was carrying for luck. Not that it seems to have brought him much. But what made him give it to you?"

Mace appeared slightly embarrassed.

"Between ourselves, he didn't give it to me. I took a fancy to it. I wouldn't touch his money or jewellery. I never do. But a little thing like this that would never be missed, that's different. I expect you're right about it. The stuff's no good to me now I've got it. Worse than no good, because I've got to settle with you. What do I owe you?"

"Look here," said Purdon. "As a chemist, I don't like to be beaten. If you'll hand over the tin to me, that will give me enough to make a complete analysis, though in any case a crude gum-resin like that wouldn't be worth much. If you like to hand it over, I'll charge you nothing

for my time and the drugs I've used so far, and I'll slip you a couple of shillings for yourself. You'll get a drink out of it anyway."

"Suppose I can't do better," said Mace hesitatingly.

"I know you can't," said Mr Purdon lightly. "But if you like to try, I'm not stopping you."

"All right," said Mace, and drew the tin from his pocket and pushed it across the counter.

Mr Purdon opened the lid and glanced at the contents. "Two shillings," he said, and dropped them into Mace's hand. "Good evening, and don't forget to drink my health."

Outside in the street, Mace paused and looked back into the shop. He saw Purdon take up the tin, wrap it in paper, and put it in the pocket of his overcoat, which hung behind the screen. Mace did not like the expression on Purdon's face. As he walked slowly away, the truth dawned on him. That blighter in the black coat had done him.

Why, there could not be a doubt of it. Purdon had wanted the stuff for himself. Chemists' assistants had no money to burn. Purdon didn't throw away two shillings on buying a little puzzle for his amusement. Oh, no, not in this life. Purdon knew all about it. He said he didn't, but he did. Why, you only had to see his face as he put the tin in his pocket. That nigger knew what he was talking about. There was money in it, and Purdon had found out where the money was.

Mace turned into the aristocratic seclusion of the private bar of a public-house. He ordered

a drink and thought things over. Purdon had got the stuff now, but Purdon left his shop at seven, and Mace was not dead yet. That clever young man might not have it all his own way. Mace himself was clever enough in one or two little things.

Meanwhile Purdon's scheme went on rapidly. It seemed one dose of this new drug produced no bad after-effects at all. No doubt if the dose were repeated many times it might be injurious. Indeed, Purdon felt sure that it must be. But that drug would never go out of his own possession. It would be for him to say how many doses a customer might have. There was nothing illegal about it, for the law did not even know of the existence of such a drug. There was nothing even immoral about it. Purdon meant to do no harm. He would sooner sacrifice some of his profits than do any harm. All the same, the profits would be enormous. Ethel and her mother would be surprised. They would not have to be told everything, of course. Ethel's mother would be certain to ask questions. He would not tell her to mind her own business ; he would simply say that in the course of chemical study and research he had come upon a discovery of commercial value, about which he was not at liberty to say more. It would make a difference. Ethel's mother had seemed at times almost patronizing. There would be an end to anything of that kind.

The first thing to do, of course, was to get into touch with Harry Bates. Through him he would be able to get just the right *clientèle*.

The shop where Bates was employed had a great reputation with the big racing men and the stars of the theatrical world. Such people had money to spend and were willing to spend it. Purdon felt confident that they would have to spend it if they made but one experiment with the dope that gave you a year of paradise in an hour. Yes, as soon as he got back to his boarding-house he would write to Bates and make an appointment with him. It might not be wise to put down too much in actual writing.

At seven o'clock Purdon left the shop and made for the tube train. The crush on the platform, as usual at that hour, was terrific. As he struggled into the carriage he caught sight of Mace close beside him, and tossed him a little joke on the crowd. Once in the carriage he looked round for him again, but Mace had apparently been unable to fight his way in. And that was unlike Mace.

IV

Purdon hung up his overcoat, brushed and put away his business coat according to his usual routine, and turned to go downstairs again to write his letter to Bates.

But after all the night was not cold. It was a muggy night—unusually warm for the time of year. If he went downstairs the chances were that he would find the writing-tables all occupied. Even if he found a place, there were men and women in that boarding-house who were too much interested in other people. They found themselves accidentally in such a position that

they could glance over the shoulder of the letter-writer. Purdon decided to write his letter in his own room. He took his writing-block and fountain-pen, sat down, and began as follows :

DEAR HARRY,

I want to see you to-morrow if possible. I want your help. And when I say help, I don't mean money. On the contrary, I shall be able to pay very handsomely for——

Why, some of that powder must have been spilt in the room. He could smell it. He had not noticed it when he first came in. But now there could be no mistake. It grew in intensity. He would have to open the window before he could finish the letter.

He looked up from his writing-block. Outside the church clock struck eight, and at the same time there was a rattle of a chair being moved in the room.

As he looked up he saw opposite to him a gigantic negro, wearing a light tweed suit, sitting astride a chair with his arms on the back of it, and his chin on his arms, watching Purdon intently.

For a moment Purdon was not much perturbed. Mrs Bowes was not averse to making money from all nationalities and all colours. And this might be a boarder who had recently arrived and had mistaken his room.

" Begging your pardon," said Purdon firmly, " I think you've made a slight mistake. This is not——"

He stopped because the negro had suddenly vanished. And then, in a flash, he knew the truth. That paradise dope had its reaction. This was the beginning of the reaction.

He put down his writing-block, put his fountain-pen back in his pocket, and crossed over to the tiny looking-glass on his dressing-table. He could see that he looked ill. It seemed to him that his face had perceptibly changed. And then in the looking-glass he saw brown fingers come slowly round his throat. He felt them touch him and begin to press tightly. He made an effort and broke away. The negro in the light suit was standing opposite to him, laughing noiselessly.

Purdon decided on his line of action. The thing to do would be to lie down on his bed, close his eyes, and remain absolutely quiet until the whole thing had passed off. The only thing was that he dared not go past that negro in the light suit who stood opposite to him.

Once more the negro vanished. Now was his time.

He approached the bed, and from under it an arm shot out, and a hand gripped him by the ankle. This time he tried in vain to break away. He stood there sweating with terror.

This lasted for some seconds. And then suddenly the negro shot out from under the bed and sprang to his feet. He was not laughing now. He was breathing hard, and he looked like murder. Purdon noticed that the giant wore a double watch-chain, with a bunch of seals pendent from it, over his protuberant stomach,

and that there was an enormous diamond in his emerald-green necktie. There were diamond rings, too, on the brown hands that now slowly approached Purdon. Purdon felt himself unable to move.

The hands clutched him by the waist, raised him in the air, and then hurled him forward.

He fell with a crash and did not dare to get up again. He lay there with his hands pressed tightly over his eyes, in order that he might not see anything more. And deep in his mind was the conviction that he was lost—lost for ever—lost in this world and the next. He could still hear the negro's panting breath.

Then all was still. Slowly and timidly he raised himself and looked round the room. It seemed to be quite empty. A picture had been torn from one of the walls and lay on the floor with the glass broken. He supposed he must have clutched at it as he was hurled through the air. He waited some little time before he dared to cross the room to the locked drawer in which he kept his brandy. He took the glass from his washstand, poured out the entire contents of the bottle, and drank it at a draught. If only that would steady him sufficiently he would be able to get downstairs and send somebody to fetch a doctor for him. He would have to tell the doctor everything. That could not be helped.

Again the awful stench of the drug filled the room. Sickened with it, Purdon staggered to the window and tore it open. Instantly a furry hand shot across the window ledge, a great chimpanzee lumbered into the room and crouched.

Another followed, and another, and another. One of them was crouched before the door, so that there was no escape that way. They all had old, philosophical, weary expressions, and they all had their impartial eyes fixed on him.

The largest of the apes picked up a piece of the broken picture-frame, looked long at it as though he were trying to probe its secret, smelled it, broke it in two, sighed deeply, and as he scratched himself with one of the pieces fixed his eyes again on Purdon.

Purdon was backing along the edge of the table. It chanced that his hand knocked over the empty medicine-bottle.

The sound seemed suddenly to break up the melancholy calm of the chimpanzees. Their eyes became animated and angry. Their mouths twisted. One after another they put their hands on the floor, swung their bodies through their long arms, and advanced upon him.

Purdon tried to scream for help. His mouth opened wide, but no sound came. Desperate with terror, he flung the water-jug and the looking-glass at them. He picked up a chair and lashed out wildly with it till it broke in his hands. They leaped at him and got him down.

"Death—thank God!" thought Purdon.

And instantly he was sitting up and listening to Harry Bates. Harry Bates was not there. Purdon saw nobody in the room but himself, seated amid the furniture wreckage.

But the voice of Harry Bates was there—a resonant, confident bass.

"A thousand pities you didn't come to me at

the very first," said Bates. "I could have warned you. I know about the stuff, and have seen two cases. Cocaine is a baby's toy to it. After one hypodermic, the reaction lasts as long as life lasts. Life doesn't last long, because suicide is inevitable. The sooner the better. No human being can stand the damned torture of it. No known drug touches it. Nothing can alleviate it. Good-bye, Ernest. The window's open. It's a seventy-foot drop. It won't take more than a few seconds."

Purdon rose and walked as a doomed man towards the open window. It chanced that he nearly slipped upon a fragment of the broken picture-frame. He staggered into the closed door of his room, and clutched at his overcoat hanging there to save himself from falling. Why, there it was. The drug itself would save him. For a time, at any rate. And he had a tin full of the stuff in the pocket of that overcoat. In a few moments he would be back again in a year of paradise. He began to search in the pockets of the overcoat. Through the open window he heard the clock strike nine.

He searched very carefully, but the tin was not there. His pocket had been picked, and Purdon knew just when it had been done. Mace had taken it. That was why Mace had never got into the train. Mace was welcome to it. Purdon had no wish ever to see the stuff again. He went to the open window and drew in deep breaths of the cold, refreshing air. He was still feeling very shaky. He had knocked himself about, and was sore and bruised, but it was

nothing that could be called real suffering. The awful depression had gone. There were no more delusions and his mind seemed clear and logical. The reaction was over, and he knew it. His dream that he would make a fortune out of the drug was over too. And it did not seem to him to matter. He decided to sit down for half an hour or so and rest. After that, he would clear up his room, as best he could, and get a long night's sleep.

But now he heard voices and footsteps coming up the stairs. The loudest voice was that of Mrs Bowes, enjoining silence on the others. Purdon could also recognize the whining voice of William, a weak old man who did the boots and knives, and looked as if all his life he had never done anything else.

There was a pause, and whispering on the landing outside the door. Then Mrs Bowes's bony and decisive knuckles rapped twice.

"Come in," said Purdon. He recognized that the chance was coming to him to be quit of Mrs Bowes for evermore, and he welcomed it.

Mrs Bowes entered alone. She left the door ajar, and her reserves were marshalled outside to rush to her support if necessary. Purdon caught the suppressed giggle of a nervous maid. Mrs Bowes looked—it was almost habitual with her—like avenging justice.

"What am I to understand by this, Mr Purdon?" she said.

"Understand by what?" said Purdon, with a sudden calm courage.

"Pandemonium, Mr Purdon. Ladies and

gentlemen, living under my roof, saying that murder was being done upstairs. You ought to be ashamed. Look at the state of the room. Oh, look at the breakages."

"The breakages will be paid for at a fair valuation," said Purdon. "If you want to know, I have been experimenting upon myself with a potent and unknown drug—my own discovery, by the way. Men of science must make these sacrifices."

Mrs Bowes picked up the empty medicine-bottle and sniffed at it.

"Potent and unknown drug," said Mrs Bowes sardonically. "Not so very unknown. I could put a name to it. Just what I expected. Well, this is a respectable house, and——"

"You had better be careful, Mrs Bowes. If you dare to imply——"

"Oh, I'll tell you what I imply fast enough. I imply that I'm giving you notice to quit this house at the end of your week."

"That all?" said Purdon. "I've been thinking for weeks past that the place was a bit low class for me. Of course I'll go. Let me remind you that the law knows how to deal with slander. And now, Mrs Bowes, I should be obliged if you would get out of my room."

"Nothing but my strong sense of duty could ever have induced me to enter it," said Mrs Bowes, and retired in good order.

Purdon was pleased. The right words had come slick to the tip of his tongue. He had told that old girl off properly. He wondered a little how he had done it. He need not have

wondered. Reaction also has its reaction. Sudden cessation of acute suffering raises the spirit of a man.

V

"Well," said Ethel's mother, "you've given Mrs Bowes notice, and I'm glad you have. But as to seeking for other lodgings, what I say is, why need you?"

"Well," said Purdon, "one's got to live somewhere."

"No doubt. But I've talked this all out with Ethel. It's for you to say, of course. I think you said £79 13*s.* 4*d.* was what you'd put by, and no doubt it does not seem much on which to face the responsibilities of life. But look at the facts as they stand. There need be no question of setting up a second establishment. This house is big enough. Besides Ethel's room, there's the spare room which is never occupied. You see, you have been engaged for a year. Ethel is an attractive girl, though I say so. But naturally she does not get any younger. At present there are two young men who are after her, madly in love with her."

"If you'll kindly give me their names and addresses," said Purdon, "I think that's a matter that I'm competent to——"

"Oh, don't you worry. Ethel knows how to take care of herself. She can put a man in his place all right. But there's the advantage to yourself from an immediate marriage. You'd be better fed, better looked after, and it would cost you less money. I should be glad to have you

here too. Often and often Ethel and I have thought of spending the evening with friends, and hardly liked to, leaving the house empty. Of course, if we were leaving a man here, there would be no cause for anxiety."

"And Ethel agrees?"

"You know as well as I do how shy the girl is. I'll say this much—I think you could persuade her."

"I'll try," said Purdon.

He was entirely successful.

MIRACLES

I

BEST and Bliss, at that time unknown to one another, enlisted at the beginning of the Great War, Best making a declaration as to his age which was untrue, but accepted, for Best was very hard stuff. At the time, Best was building up a small business as a greengrocer, and had recently and indiscreetly married. Bliss was the son of a poor parson. He had just taken his degree in honours at Cambridge, and was reading for the Bar, his expenses being meanwhile defrayed by a wealthy uncle.

The middle-aged greengrocer and the young student met somewhere in France, and became fast friends. Both of them had the gift of rapid observation and memory to a quite unusual and remarkable extent, and they had weird competitions to see which was the better in these respects. Best would collect twenty or more small, miscellaneous articles, and put them on a table. Bliss would be allowed to see them for five seconds, and no more. Without making any written note of what he had seen he was required to say, twenty-four hours later, what each of the articles was, and to describe any peculiarity that any of them possessed. Then Bliss would put Best through a similar test. There was a

system of marking, and the winner took half a crown from the loser. They were very equal. Neither of them ever got ten shillings ahead of the other.

It was while he was lying in hospital that Bliss thought out the code for thought-reading which the two men afterwards used. It was a very good code, involving no speaking, but certain movements so slight as to be practically imperceptible. But it was not a code that everybody could use. It required very quick observation and a marvellous memory. Later, Best learned the code, and they practised together. Occasionally, they gave a friendly performance, calling it *Miracles*. One of the war correspondents saw it, and gave it rather an enthusiastic notice.

Best and Bliss both did well in France, but at home fortune was not kind to them. Best's friend, who had promised to keep an eye on the business for him, let him down, and the business was shut up. He also ran away with Best's wife, and as she had taken to drink and miscellaneousness, Best considered that about balanced the account. Best broke the man's nose without showing much interest in the performance.

"More a matter of etiquette than anything else," he said to Bliss.

Bliss's career at the Bar had to be abandoned. His wealthy uncle died, and left all that he possessed to the woman to whom he had long been secretly married. And Bliss said that he supposed that after the War he would have to be a blinking schoolmaster. Blinking was not the exact word used.

" What price *Miracles* ? " asked Best.

" What do you mean ? " said Bliss.

" We might do it on the halls. We might do it at shows in private houses. It's my belief there's a living in it, and nobody here has come within a million miles of finding out how the trick's done."

" Worth thinking over, anyhow," said Bliss.

And ultimately they did it. It was then that they took the assumed names, Best and Bliss, by which they are known in this story. They had the right to put certain letters, which both gain and deserve respect, after their real names, but these did not appear on their business card, which simply bore the words :

BEST AND BLISS
" MIRACLES "

Once more their fortunes turned. At the very first private engagement which they obtained through an entertainment agency, it chanced that Sir Charles Brotherton was present. He came late and left early as was his custom at such functions. He saw only the last part of the performance of Best and Bliss, but he recognized that this was something which he had never seen before, and for which he was unable to offer any explanation. He went up to Bliss and gave him his card. Bliss knew the name. Everybody did.

" If you and Mr Best can come to the office of the *Daily Triumph* for about ten minutes at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon I think it might do you some good."

Bliss looked at Best. Best nodded.

"Thank you very much, Sir Charles," said Bliss. "We shall be there without fail."

They were punctual at the office and were shown up immediately to Sir Charles's private room.

"I've not much time," said Sir Charles. "Show me the best you can do as quickly as you can."

"Very good," said Best. "Will you ring and have my friend taken to some room where he cannot see or hear what goes on here, and arrange to have him brought back when you ring again."

"Certainly," said Sir Charles. And it was done.

"You will excuse me," said Best, "if I seem to give directions, but will you take some object from your pocket and hide it anywhere you like?"

Sir Charles drew a handful of silver from his pocket, selected a sixpence, and put it under one of the three ink-bottles on his plain roll-top desk.

"And will you also write a telegram which you will permit me to see."

"I will," said Sir Charles. "As a matter of fact, it is a telegram which I shall be sending presently."

"I think that will do," said Best. "If you will leave the telegram on the desk and close the top over it, you can then ring for my friend and we will start."

Sir Charles pulled down the top of the desk, rang, and Bliss was brought in. Best was

seated in an easy natural attitude in a chair and did not speak. It was the impression of Sir Charles that he did not subsequently move any part of his body until the trick was over. But this was not quite correct.

Bliss talked slowly, but he began at once.

"Inside that desk, Sir Charles, you have an inkstand of walnut wood with three bottles in it. They are marked on ivory labels fixed to the wood, Black, Red, and Copying. Underneath the bottle marked Copying is the sixpence which you took from your pocket. The date of it is 1918, and there is a noticeable scratch right across it on the other side. You have a good deal of silver in that pocket—twenty-three shillings in all. Eight of the coins are half-crowns, and there is also a florin and a shilling. There is a blotting-pad inside that desk, and the colour of the blotting-pad is green. On it lies a telegram addressed to Peterson, 23 Shell Street, Brixton. The message consists of the two words, 'Nothing doing.' There is no signature on the front of the telegram, nor by the way, is the name and address filled in at the back. You have no less than eleven penholders on your desk, and I notice that you write with a gilt J. But the telegram is not written in ink. That was written with a common indelible pencil, which you took from your lower right-hand waistcoat-pocket."

Sir Charles showed no signs of surprise. "I know something of conjuring," he said, "but I am not an expert. Are you prepared to give me a similar performance to-morrow after-

noon at the same time here, when experts will be present who will suggest test conditions ? "

" Certainly," said Best.

Sir Charles scribbled a few words on a slip of paper and handed it to Best.

" Good afternoon, gentlemen," said Sir Charles. " Give that slip of paper to the cashier downstairs. Anybody will tell you where to find him."

The slip instructed the cashier to pay Best and Bliss ten guineas, and to take their receipt.

At the next performance there were present two expert illusionists, a man of science who was also a spiritualist, a very good descriptive writer, and of course Sir Charles Brotherton. Best and Bliss gave a more extended and elaborate show, and left when it was over.

" How's it done ? " Sir Charles asked the illusionists.

" Code, of course. Couldn't be done any other way."

" What code ? "

" Well, we might have to see that show twenty times before we could state that completely."

" Good. Will you two do all that Best and Bliss do in three weeks' time for a fee of two-fifty ? "

But they did not like to give a fixed guarantee, and besides they were very busy.

" I see," said Sir Charles, and turned to the man of science.

" Would you mind telling me your views ? "

" There is no code at all. The amount could not be transmitted in the time. The gift of

Mr Bliss, I take it, is analogous to the gift of a good medium. He probably is himself a good medium, though, of course, he may not know it."

There was a shortage of news at the time, and Best and Bliss got two columns in the next day's *Daily Triumph*. A leading article dealt with them judicially. Either these two men had some supernormal gift or they were amazingly clever. In a short time the public would probably have an opportunity of seeing them on the stage and could then form their own judgment. The only thing that Best and Bliss disliked about it was the interview with Professor Moon, the scientific spiritualist, suggesting that they had the gift of mediums, and the floods of letters from those who believed or were trying to believe in spiritualism, which immediately followed. They had been in war. They had seen the real thing. The idea that a dishonest medium should take money from a bereaved mother for pretending to put her into communication with her lost son, moved them to disgust, expressed in very plain and improper terms. They sent the briefest of letters to the *Daily Triumph*, saying that they made no claim to any supernatural gift whatever, and would be extremely sorry to be classed as mediums.

II

They had been in London for a year. Best had thought there might be a living in it. It seemed to them now that there was something approaching a fortune in it. During that year they had worked very hard and taken no holidays.

But they were able to do the provincial tour which the agent had mapped out for them quite comfortably in a four-figure motor-car.

They had played for a week in Manchester. On the fourth night they drove back to their hotel after the show and had a whisky-and-soda as their custom was.

Suddenly Best said to Bliss: "What about that woman in black?"

"Yes," said Bliss. "She's been there every night and also at the *matinée*. Third row of the stalls and the seat nearest the gangway on the right—stage right. Wonder what on earth she does it for?"

"She looks pretty awful," said Best. "Looks sort of as if some one was hurting her. Must have been a good-looking girl in her time too."

"She looks to me about half mad," said Bliss.

They thought no more about the subject until the following day, when a letter was handed to them at the theatre, signed Edna Durnavel.

She said that her only son, Arthur, had been killed in the War. Ever since then she had been trying to communicate with him, but she wished to be sure that the communication was genuine and authentic. And for that reason her first step was to make herself acquainted with the tricks practised by mediums. She had spent much money on mediums, and had found nothing—nothing that she could trust.

She had, however, recalled an article which appeared a long time ago in the *Daily Triumph*, in which Professor Moon expressed his opinion that Mr Bliss was certainly possessed of inex-

plicable and supernormal gifts, and was almost certainly, though perhaps unconsciously, a medium. Professor Moon had said much the same thing about Mr Best. She recalled also that they had written and disclaimed any such gift, but she thought there might have been a reason for that.

At any rate, she had now witnessed their performance several times, and all her study of the arts of illusion did not suggest to her any possible explanation, except that they really did possess some such power as Professor Moon had described.

If they were able and willing to put her into communication with her son, Arthur, they would have her undying gratitude. She might add that she was a wealthy woman, and would be glad to pay any fee they asked.

" Nothing doing," said Best.

" We'll talk about it afterwards," said Bliss. " We've got to hurry. The orchestra's started."

" Look here," said Bliss, after the show. " You remember our Mr Arthur Durnavel, don't you ? "

" Yes," said Best, " and wish I could forget him. Oh, chuck it. He's dead, anyhow. And there are things that don't stand talking about."

" I can't chuck it," said Bliss. " I've got that woman in my mind. Lucky for Durnavel the Huns got him when they did. It would have been far worse for him otherwise. But I suppose she thought a lot of him. Looks as if she hadn't thought of much else these last years. Suppose we put up something for her ? Just to—well, sort of comfort her."

Best had been pacing up and down the room. He paused and said angrily, "I won't touch it. Do it on your own if you must. I won't take any of the money."

"Did you think I meant to take any myself?"

"No, not really. Sorry."

They talked the matter over further, and in consequence Mrs Durnavel received a letter next day saying that Messrs Best and Bliss would, on certain conditions, attempt automatic writing on her behalf if she would come round to their dressing-room after the evening performance.

At the interview Mrs Durnavel was pale and trembled visibly with excitement. Her voice was very low and she seemed to find a difficulty in speaking. She thanked them for seeing her and said she was willing to accept any conditions.

"You must hear what the conditions are first," said Best. "Firstly, you will offer us no money or present of any kind for what we are going to do. Secondly, you will never let anybody know that we have done it. And lastly, you will promise never to ask us to do anything of the kind again."

"I agree and promise," said Mrs Durnavel.

"One more point. If we get a message it will naturally have a great effect upon you. We think it will be better for you if you go the moment you have read it. We wish to avoid emotional scenes."

"Yes, yes. Anything you wish."

"We will begin, then. Are you ready, Bliss?"

Bliss sat down at a little table at which was a writing-pad and pencil. He took up the pencil.

" Quite ready."

Best crossed over to him and made a few passes in the air before Bliss's eyes. This had been arranged between them. Suddenly Bliss's eyes closed. And this had not been arranged.

Best stood behind Bliss to read what he wrote, but Bliss's hand remained motionless. Outside in the dark and dirty passage some girl laughed loudly and uncontrollably.

Then the laughter stopped abruptly. Nothing could be heard but the dim sounds of traffic, like a distant sea. And immediately the hand moved and the pencil began to write. It wrote a few lines very rapidly and then the pencil dropped from the fingers.

Best's round and rubicund face showed no vestige of surprise or wonder. Nothing could upset that man's stolidity. Yet the words that Bliss had written were not what had been arranged between them. And there was another point that puzzled Best. He took the sheet from the pad and handed it over to Mrs Durnavel.

" But it's his handwriting," she said, breathless. " My boy's own handwriting ! "

She read the message and pressed it close to her. She looked up, her eyes full of tears. But all the tension and twist had gone from the face, and it was only happiness that was overpowering her. Bliss still sat with his eyes closed, quite motionless, his right hand on the table, his left arm hanging limply.

Best opened the door.

" You can find your way out, Mrs Durnavel ? "

" Yes, yes. My maid's waiting for me at

the further end of the passage. Good-bye. I can never thank you enough. It's hopeless."

She came towards the door. As she passed the table where Bliss was sitting, with an uncontrollable impulse she bent down and kissed the hand that had written the message. Then she went out quietly.

Best walked quickly to Bliss and tapped him on the shoulder. "Wake up," he said.

Bliss stood up and rubbed his eyes.

"I think I've been dead," he said.

"Dead asleep. But everything went all right. She's quite satisfied. Here, get your hat and let's get back to the hotel. If ever we wanted a drink we want one to-night."

As they sat over their whisky-and-soda, Best said: "Did you know that our Mr Arthur Durnavel called his mother 'Dearest,' and signed his letters to her 'Chick'?"

"I didn't."

"You wrote it anyhow."

"And what else did I write?"

"Oh, the usual things. It was all right."

"I didn't write a word of it," said Bliss. "And I don't know who did."

Best remembered every word of that letter perfectly, especially this sentence: "Within one hour we shall be happy together."

He thought of it next morning when he read in the newspaper the account of Mrs Durnavel's death in an accident to her motor when she was returning from the theatre. Bliss was not given a chance to see the paper that morning.

THE SERPENT IN THE GARDEN

I WENT to that little suburb soon after my second wife's death. I fancied a change, and that were quite a rustic spot after London, and I found I could get a room fairly reasonable. And my idea was to find a suitable situation, where I could do myself justice, and start work at once.

Yes, I'm a real worker within the natural limits. I might perhaps be called elderly now, and I've been a gardener since boyhood—mostly in the jobbing line in London. I can call myself a practical and experienced man, one that has always tried to give satisfaction to himself, and even to others.

Well, whether it was the change of air, or what it was, I can't say. But for over six weeks I couldn't even bring myself to think of work. It might very easily have been some form of nervous complaint, for I believe I've had a touch of it once or twice before.

What made me stop it was the finding that it couldn't go on. My savings had come down nearer the knuckle than I liked. Naturally you spend more when you're not working—you've got more time for it.

So I says to myself, I says, " Edwards, old man, it's one thing out of two, and that's not six. Either you'll find yourself a job of work, or

you'll have to go thirsty. It needn't be a hard job, at your time of life, but regular money every Saturday is what you're looking for."

There's no shilly-shally about me. As soon as I decides I acts. So I put my old hat on there and then, and out I went. The moment the bar of the Hen and Chickens was opened I stepped in to make my inquiries.

Old Makepeace, the landlord there, is a gloomy man, and takes what I should call sour views of life. But the beer's better at his house, and he can always give you the local news. He hears a good bit across the counter, and he's got a daughter in the post-office as well.

So after relieving the huskiness of my throat, I said to him that if he knew of any vacancy for a good-class gardener I should be glad to hear of it.

"What?" he says. "You? Why, I thought you'd retired long ago."

"Nothing of the kind," I says. "I'm a thorough gardener still, but these last few weeks I've been—well, resting and pulling myself together."

"That's what you call it, is it? Well, if that's pulling yourself together I hope you won't use my house when you're letting yourself go."

"Keeping to the point, Mr Makepeace," I says, "keeping to the point, do you know of anything in this neighbourhood that might suit me?"

"You're the fourth gardener that's asked me that question in the last two days. There's nothing doing, nor nothing likely to be. I

reckon there won't be a private garden in England in ten years' time. Them that used to employ gardeners is taxed into the earth and can't afford it no more. Where they employed five gardeners they cuts it to one, and where they employed less than five they does the work themselves. Young gardeners had better learn another trade quick, and old gardeners had better take strychnine."

Yes, he does talk most depressing, does old Makepeace, but it's good for his trade. Anyhow, I know I had to go quite beyond my usual that morning, just to keep myself from drooping. It might almost be said that I took it medicinal. And then I started out to take a look round on my own account. I never leaves a stone unturned.

Outside the village I happened to notice a little place with a sale-board up. It were what is called a bungalow—one of those houses where the builder got tired after he'd finished the ground floor. Most bungalows is either called "The Nest" or "The Rest," and this one had got "The Nest" painted up on the gate-post. It had got a rustic verandah, which Londoners is always partial to. There was about an acre of garden at the back, and I took the liberty of mooching round it. The garden had been let down something cruel, but the house had just been re-decorated, and I know the paint on the outside was fresh, for some of it come off on my trousers when I was looking through the window.

I thought it over. The garden were no more than I could manage, and I also thought I could

manage the kind of people that would buy that kind of place.

"Edwards, my old friend," I says to myself, "if the right class of person comes here this might very easy be your opportunity."

So I see that my proper course was to go straight back to the Hen and Chickens to make a few more inquiries. Which I done.

"Mr Makepeace," I says, after my preliminary pint, "I took a stroll down the road just now. They don't seem to be able to sell that place they calls 'The Nest.'"

"That were sold days ago," says he. "Man from the agent's looked in here just now, on his way to take the board down."

"Oh?" I says. "I suppose you don't happen to know who's bought it."

"It's a Mrs Gast—elderly widow—Londoner. The maids and the furniture are to come in to-morrow, and the old lady will follow when they gets everything ship-shape for her."

"The gardener's place there might suit me," I said.

"Aye," said he, "if you were about thirty years younger. Some strong young fellow will get that job. I should put it out of my mind if I was you."

"It's plain," I says, "that you knows very little about gardening, not but what I'm a active man still. What you wants in a gardener is science and experience. Boys is no good for it."

That Makepeace crabs everything, but I could quite see a prospect. I'm particular in my choice of an employer, and I prefers a

Londoner. As a rule he don't know too much about gardening, and don't start interfering.

Interference in my work is a thing as I never could stand. I mind when I was at Sutton Stokeley Rectory. Every morning the Rector would come out and shout at me, " Edwards, why the hell ain't you earthed up them Arran Chiefs ? " or some such remark as that. I wouldn't stick it and, as he give me the sack as well, I decided to go.

Then, again, I'd sooner work for a woman than a man. Tact is often thrown away on a man, but ladies answers to it. No doubt even a real lady sometimes likes to do a little in the garden herself on a fine morning if it's not too hot, but what of that ? I gives her the Dutch hoe and lets her knock the top off a few weeds. It don't hurt me, it don't hurt the weeds worth mentioning, and it pleases her. In about twenty minutes she gets the backache, and after I've paid her a few compliments on the work she's done she goes in to rest. And if you should have a fancy to smoke your old pipe in the potting-shed and to take a read of the newspaper, why, then's the time.

Yes, I could quite see myself as regular gardener at " The Nest."

But that afternoon I got a bit of a set-back. I happened on that young Jim Tyson and asked him how things was going.

" Looking up, Grandfather," says he. " ' The Nest ' is let to a London lady, and she's looking for a gardener. I ought to get it. Six years in my last place under a first-rate man and a tip-

top personal character. She won't beat that in this village."

"Sorry, my young lad," I said, "but it's no good encouraging vain hopes. I happen to know as that lady don't want a ignorant boy of your age. I've got half a century of experience behind me, I have. And as a matter of fact she's practically engaged me."

"Oh?" says he. "Done it by telegraph?"

"No telegraphing about it, and no need. Men of my age is foreseeing. I've been busy on the preliminaries for days past."

"That's funny. Makepeace told me you were in this morning, asking if the place were sold and who'd got it."

"Very like," I says. "I don't choose to let Makepeace into all my private affairs. He talks too much. So now and again I misleads him."

"Can't help that. All I know is that as soon as the old lady arrives she'll find me on her doorstep. If she's engaged you already that won't do you no harm. And if she ain't perhaps she won't—unless she collects fossils."

And off he went whistling. A little respect for one's elders is what needs to be taught in the County Council schools to-day.

I didn't altogether like it. That Tyson would be personally recommended by people living in the place. I'd got nothing but written testimonials, and the best of the bunch was thirty-one years old.

The best were the one I got from his lordship, and he gave it me with his own hands the day before they put him away in the asylum. I got

it out that night, and cleaned it up, and altered the date to make it more suitable, and put it in a fresh envelope. And even then I didn't feel easy in my mind; it looked to me as if that Tyson had the better chance.

Well, it seemed he was going to wait till the old lady arrived. I didn't mean to wait as long as that myself. The maids and furniture were coming down next day, and I thought I'd mooch round to see if there were anything to be done in the way of ground-bait.

I don't suppose I stopped more than five minutes at the Hen and Chickens next morning, and then I went on to see how the land lay. I'd had a good wash and a hair-cut, and were dressed very tidy. I can tell you, I looked something that morning.

The furniture vans had already arrived and were unloading. By the front door stood a middle-aged woman with a list in her hand. She were telling the men as they brought the stuff in where each bit was to go, and asking them to be particularly careful, and so forth. She looked rather worried. She also looked every inch a cook. I put her down as one of the trusted and valued sort.

Thinking it over, I decided to make a slight mistake.

I went up to her, and touched my hat in my old-fashioned way, and said: "Excuse me, ma'am, but I think you must be Mrs Gast."

I fancy she were rather pleased with that error

"Oh, no, I'm not," she says. "I'm Mrs

Mitcham, Mrs Gast's cook-housekeeper. And a pretty pickle I'm in, too, with everybody breaking their word all round."

"Sorry to hear that," I says. "Could I be of any assistance?"

And then she started pouring out her sorrows to me, occasionally putting in a bit for the furniture-men.

"It's like this. That young girl Agnes—she's the house-parlour—was to have come down with me, and of course she misses her train, as I knew she would, though she swore the contrary. And now she can't be here before three. And the vans was to have come this afternoon, instead of which they comes this morning out of aggravation. (Best bedroom, that one.) And what time does that give me to go down the village to do my bit of shopping? (Piano in the drawing-room. Where did you think I wanted it? In the bathroom?) It's enough to try the temper of a saint. You simply can't depend on nobody nowadays. I can't go and leave this place undefended, and I shall be lucky if I get my dinner before four, and so I told their foreman, and what he found amusing in it I can't tell you. (Smaller bedroom, both those. Yes, I said smaller. Don't you understand English?) Of course, if I'd known I was going to be betrayed like this, I might have brought a snack down with me, but as it is——"

There I struck in: "Look here," I says. "I've nothing particular to do, and I've got a pound or two in my pocket. I'll do your shopping for you and bring the things back

with me. Then you can have your dinner at the right time in peace and quietness."

"Well," she said. "It seems almost too much to ask of a stranger, but that would be a true kindness, that would. I don't know how to thank you."

Yes, she was very grateful, was Mrs Mitcham, and she trusted me enough to lend me a basket. I did them errands very careful, not forgetting the three bottles of stout nor nothing else, and a heavy lot it was to carry. What's more, when it come to settling I charged her less by sixpence than I had actually paid out.

"And now," she says, with her purse open in her hand, "what ought I to give you for doing all this for me?"

"Nothing at all, thank you," I says. "I always like to do a good turn for somebody when I can, for one day I may want somebody to do one for me."

"Anyhow," she says, "it's dry work carrying a basket this hot morning. You won't refuse a glass of stout."

I did not refuse. I sat in the kitchen while she bustled about. She got my name, and then she asked me my occupation.

"Well," I said, "I might call myself a gentleman of leisure at the present, but as a matter of fact I'm a scientific and practical gardener."

"Looking for work?" she says.

"It's rather the other way round. The work's looking for me. I've got two offers and I'm thinking them over, but neither of them is just what I want."

"What's wrong with them?"

"I've taken it into my head that I'll go single-handed this time, and both these gents wants me as head-gardener with men under me. Of course, I've done it before, and could do it again, and the pay's good. But there's too much disappointment about it. One or other of those under-gardeners is sure to be but half-trained, and perhaps he's intemperate as well. A man of that kind will do more mischief in a day than a good man can put right in a month. I'd sooner be in a smaller place—say, an acre or so—and single-handed. Then I know nothing can go wrong. And I can afford to pick and choose, for there's no other gardener to be had in this district. There may be a few young farm-labourers that choose to call themselves gardeners, but that's quite a different story."

"Well," says Mrs Mitcham, "we're looking for a gardener here, I know. Would you care to think about it?"

"Why," I says, "I'm told you've got three acres or more here. I'm an active man, but that's more than I could cover single-handed."

"Then you've been told wrong. It's less than an acre. But come out and see for yourself."

So out we went through the back-door, me and her. I cast my eye around, looked wiser than Solomon, and said nothing.

"Terrible neglected, ain't it?" says she.

"Yes," I says, "that's plain to see. But it's been a real garden once, and can be coaxed back into it again; and it wouldn't take so long neither, if it were handled by a man as knew. Just you

look at that border there and tell me what you see."

"Don't see nothing but a mess of weeds."

"Yes, that's how it would seem to the untrained eye. But I looks under the weeds and in between them. There's plenty of bulbs there. There's some very fair perennials. I won't be certain at this distance, but I think at the far end there I can spot a *Ipsiphyllia oblongata.* I hope so, for it's a lovely thing and right out of the common. I've known two guineas to be paid for a single root of it. Now all these things will grow and prosper if they're given the right treatment. But if you get one of these young so-called gardeners here, he'll go sloshing and slashing about, and driving his fork in haphazard, and the whole lot will be done in."

Well, she'd already seen that I was clean, honest, and obliging. Them last remarks of mine give her a high opinion of me as a gardener as well; anything that sounds like a Latin name always tells with the ladies. Then I put in what might be called a artistic touch—I were offered a second glass of stout, and I thanked her kindly, but refused it. It may seem reckless at first sight, but it established my character for sobriety. And I topped up by showing her that testimonial from his lordship.

That begun: "Edwards is a great gardener, and what he cannot grow is not worth growing." There were one or two things in it that certainly did read a little dotty, but I explained that his lordship had always been eccentric.

Well, that finished it. Mrs Mitcham were

convinced absolute that if they missed me they would be missing a diamond-mine. I'd fairly got her. A thoughtless person might think it was no good for me to get Mrs Mitcham, seeing as she was not the employer. But she were the old and trusted sort, and I thought a strong recommendation from her would go a long way. I put in Mrs Mitcham to get Mrs Gast, same as you might put in a ferret to get a rabbit. And it worked, too.

The old girl had to go up to town next day to see Mrs Gast, and she took that testimonial from his lordship up with her. I don't know, of course, what she said to Mrs Gast about me, but she must have done me justice, for I were engaged at three pounds a week on appro., to start work next day.

"Well," I says to Mrs Mitcham, "we won't say much about the money. I can't expect the same single-handed as when I'm head. And no doubt the wages will get better when my work is seen and appreciated."

So that was all right. As I were starting out next morning I met that Jim Tyson.

"Hullo, Grandfather," he says, "where are you off to?"

"Going to my job up at 'The Nest,' of course."

"Golly!" he said. "You've got it then? And I made certain you were lying."

"Yes, my young lad," I says, "that'll teach you not to judge others by yourself. You'll know better another time."

Mrs Gast came down a few days later. She

were a little old lady, white-haired, and walked with a limp. Owing to the lameness, she didn't go round the garden a great lot. But whenever I see her I found her pleasant-spoken. She'd not got all the garden tools requisite, and I sold her a few of my own. Jobbing gardeners, you know, picks up quite a collection of tools, here and there, as time goes on. She paid me my own price, without haggling about it. I got in some showy work the first few weeks, putting a straight edge on the grass marges, and mowing the lawn, and so forth, and she said herself I'd made a great improvement. No, I've nothing against Mrs Gast. She were not the serpent in the garden, nor were Mrs Mitcham.

The serpent was Mr Arthur Barnet, Mrs Gast's brother. He arrived when I'd been there a month, and was beginning to slow down a bit. My motto has always been to lay into it at first to give yourself the reputation, and then to keep easing of it off until you've found the limit. Any man who does more than he need is doing himself an injustice. I was beginning to give myself rather more time for my elevenses. There's no rule that I knows of as to how long elevenses should take. Sometimes, too, I'd drop off into a snooze after my dinner. The gardener's shed were not furnished luxurious, but I can always make myself comfortable with a few sacks and a wheelbarrow. Of course that snooze would tend, at times, to draw out the dinner-hour, because I ain't got the gift that some has of waking at any fixed time. Still, there's no doubt that a nice sleep does freshen a

man for his afternoon's work, and so is all in the interests of the employer.

The first time I see this Mr Barnet I didn't find much amiss with him. He was elderly, though years younger than Mrs Gast, and undersized same as she was. He wore a shady hat, and grey flannels, and white shoes. He come out with two or three books under his arm, and I put him down as a mild and hesitating sort of a bloke. I touched my hat, and he said " Good morning, Edwards," all correct. Then he plunked himself down on a garden seat, lit his pipe, and begun reading. Later in the morning he asked me the name of a rose that was growing on the house.

" That, sir," I says, " is commonly known as the glory rose. The Latin name for it is *Glordy Dijun.*" And that were all correct, too.

But then he turned round and pointed out another, and asked me the name of that. Well, there he had me, but I wasn't going to tell him so.

" That's a beautiful thing. The name's Mrs Hector Swift."

He thanked me and walked off. I don't know if there is a rose called by that name. There might be, and again there might not, and it don't matter. As a rule them that don't know the name of a rose don't know if they're told it wrong, and they forgets what they're told inside of three minutes. I knows four or five roses by name, and the rest can take their chance. I'm a gardener, I am, and not got the time to turn myself into a seedsman's catalogue.

But in the course of the next few days I noticed

several things that I didn't like about Mr Arthur Barnet. I didn't like those white shoes of his. They'd got those cowardly rubber soles. You couldn't hear him coming, and he was always giving me a start by turning up sudden where I didn't expect him. Then, again, except that he always had his books with him, he didn't seem to have no regular habits. You never could be certain when he was coming out, or how long he'd stop out. You couldn't be certain about nothing with him. He'd a nasty way of wheeling round sudden when you expected him to go on to the end of the path. If he'd always sat in the same seat and done his reading quiet I could have arranged my work according. But you never could tell where he'd sit, nor how long he'd stop there, nor which way he'd go next, and that's the kind of thing that distracts a gardener's mind from his work.

There was one biggish book bound in red as he nearly always had with him. I supposed as it were a dictionary, so as he could look up the meaning of any word as foxed him, for he were always wanting to know the meaning of everything, and the reason of everything, and the name of everything. Some days he nearly drove me out of my patience with his questions. I could mostly say something to satisfy him, but it were a strain. One morning he give me six in about as many minutes, and the only one as I really knew the answer to was if the sting of an earwig was dangerous.

One day I found I'd miscalculated the amount of refreshment I should be wanting. The

weather were particularly warm, and I'd been mowing part of the lawn. That's trying work, and a man has to keep himself up to it. I'd seen nothing of our Mr Barnet all the morning, and I thought I might as well slip off down to the Hen and Chickens to get what was requisite. So I put on my old hat and coat, and started. And there, standing in the gateway, I finds that Mr Barnet.

"Morning, sir," I says, touching my hat. "I were just stepping down to the village to get an edge put on our old shears. Can't do nothing with them the way they is now. I shan't be more than a few minutes."

"Yes, Edwards," he says, "but hadn't you better take the shears with you?"

"Why, bless my soul," I says, "it ain't often my memory plays me a trick like that. Lucky I found you there, sir, to remind me. Else I should have had my walk for nothing, and time's too precious to waste."

So I fetched the shears, and when I come back he was not about. And if he had been, I'd got that bottle of beer in an inside pocket of my coat as I have found handy for the purpose.

But I didn't like it. I didn't know him then for the serpent he was, but I were not satisfied with him. Meeting Mrs Mitcham in the garden, I says, "How long is this Mr Arthur Barnet going to stay?"

"I think he's going to be here permanent," she says. "That's the arrangement. There ain't much of him."

"No," I says, "but he can be a rare old inter-

ruption to a gardener's work. If it goes on I might have to speak to Mrs Gast about it."

After my dinner that day I pulled the door of the shed to, made myself comfortable in the wheelbarrow, and dropped off. It were a hot day, and that lawn-mowing is exhausting work, and I'd been very thirsty. Whatever the reason was, I didn't wake up as soon as I had expected. Matter of fact, I didn't wake till close on four, and what woke me were the click of the latch.

I opened my eyes. The door was still shut, but I never had no doubt that somebody had opened and shut it. The thought that anybody as I were associated with could stoop to spying made me fairly angry. However, I reasoned with myself.

"Edwards, my old friend," I says to myself, "you're the victim of a accident. You come over queer through a touch of the sun, and was compelled to lie down, as you will explain when needful. Do your duty and fear no man."

So I went out to finish mowing that old lawn. It's my belief that something had gone wrong with the machinery of that mower. First it give a list to the left, and then it made a sudden lurch round to the right. I don't believe there's a man on earth as could have kept that mower straight. Last of all it seemed to take the bit between its teeth, and dashed right off the lawn on to the gravel, and I found myself sitting in the grass-box.

Thinking it over, I decided to leave that machine where it was, and found a safer job away in the

shade—one that didn't need standing up to. About a hour later, that mower seemed to be quieter, and I put it away in the shed. It's my almost invariable rule to put everything away as I've been using before leaving a place.

First thing next morning I tidied up that lawn, and had it all cut straight and neat, so that you couldn't even see where the mower had broke down the day before. And I'd hardly finished that when out of the house comes that Mr Barnet, with his books under his arm. He come straight up, with that hesitating sort of a smile of his. And there and then he simply give himself away for the serpent that he was, and without so much as one blush of shame neither."

"Edwards," he says, "did you know I was interested in photography?"

"No, sir," I says, "I don't think you ever happened to mention it. But before I've been here three months there will be some little bits in this garden as will be well worth photographing, if you likes to bring your camera out."

"Oh, I've got some nice little bits already. I'll show you some of them."

"Funny I should never have seen you with your camera."

"But you have, Edwards, you have. It's true you didn't know it was a camera. When you're photographing—er—wild life, it's as well to have a camera that looks like something else. Otherwise the birds are so shy of you. The camera that I've been using looks like a big book, bound in red. I have it here. See? It's an ingenious little arrangement. And here are the

photographs. The first is called 'Oiling the Garden-roller.'"

I took it and looked at it. That were a picture of me sitting on the roller, with my head throwed back and a bottle of beer to my lips. It had been took sort of sideways from behind.

I looked at him pretty serious. "Excuse me, sir," I says, "but this was took unbeknown to me."

"Quite," he says, smiling.

"Well," I says, "that would do me no harm if it were shown to anybody who knows my habits, for he'd be aware that I likes to have a drop of cold tea to moisten my lips when I have a heavy job on such as rolling, and that I carries it in a screw-top bottle to save leakage. But a stranger might totally misunderstand me in consequence. The law might have something to say about that."

"Quite right. In human affairs I find, speaking as a barrister, that there is practically nothing on which the law will not have something to say if asked. True, it will not always say what those who know least about it expect. But, however, I'd like you to see another photograph in the series, entitled 'Putting an Edge on the Shears.'"

That were a photograph of me with the shears under my arm, going into the Hen and Chickens. That dirty serpent must have followed me down the street to get it. I come pretty near to losing my temper.

"And what of that, sir?" I says. "If I forgets the address of the man what does the shears—and I told you what my memory was—

I've got to go where I can get it. You don't know quite everything, sir."

"Right again. I don't even know why you call such a common rose as 'La France' by the fancy name of 'Mrs Hector Swift.' I don't know why you think that the earwig is poisonous in the breeding season. I don't know why it took you thirty-five minutes to get the address of the man who does the shears, or why you never went there when you had got it. I know very little. But we were speaking of my photographs. Here is a little thing I am proud of. I got it yesterday afternoon, and I call it 'The Afternoon's Work.' It represents you, Edwards, in a wheelbarrow, in your shed, and also in a state of coma. The light in the shed is not good, and it had to be a time-exposure. But every detail is clear, and the credit is partly due to you, for you never moved a hair; you can even read the name on the bottle of beer with a magnifying glass. I'm afraid I shut the door rather noisily when I was going. It may have awakened you."

I drew myself up rather dignified. "Mr Barnet," I says, "a man whose wages don't allow him a proper breakfast, who slaves in the boiling sun all the morning, is liable to a sudden collapse. It's a well-known scientific fact, and I admits it."

"Undoubtedly," says he. "I try to guard against the possibility of error. And here we have a series of three amusing snapshots. I've not quite decided whether to call them 'Gambols on the Grass' or 'Merriment with a Mower.' The last one, where you run off on to the path,

and then fall over the machine, is the most amusing, but they all——"

There I stopped him. "You've said enough, sir. I don't know what your locus standing is, as the phrase goes. I were engaged by Mrs Gast, and I'm sorry for her. I've never submitted to insult yet, nor I don't intend to begin now. I'll leave at the end of my week, and you can tell the lady so, and that's what you've brought on her."

"Now there, Edwards," he says, "for the first time I must disagree with you. You won't leave at the end of your week. Mrs Gast, on my advice, has decided that you shall leave instantly. Get your things together and be round at the front door in three minutes, and I will give you your money—which, by the way, you ought not to have. Don't be longer than three minutes, or I might get impatient."

And he was back in the house before I'd decided what the right answer was.

He may have been a clever lawyer, but even the cleverest may make a error. Our Mr Arthur Barnet had left his patent book-camera and other things on the garden table. That were very careless. Somebody might have come in and run off with them. So I put them away for him.

It wasn't but six steps to the rain-water butt. That were two-thirds full and had got a foot of black mud at the bottom of it. I plopped his blinking old camera in first, and that sunk to the bottom very nice. Then I tore up his photographs and dropped them and his other books in to keep the camera company. You can do a lot

in three minutes if you thinks quick and acts quick.

I puts on my hat and coat, and fetched the day's supply of beer from the shed where I'd left it. I also slipped a nice pair of secators through a hole in the lining of my coat, so that anybody could search my pockets and leave no stain on my character. Strictly speaking, that were a pair of secators as I had sold to Mrs Gast, but they is a article that a practical gardener can always do with. I've got five pairs of them what I've collected at different times.

I found Mr Barnet ready for me at the front door. I'd decided on the quiet and dignified line with that serpent.

So I touched my hat and said: "Hope I've not kept you waiting, sir."

"Punctuality itself, Edwards," he says, with that nasty smile of his.

He gave me the money, and I counted it twice, and forgot to say thank-you.

"And," I says, "I don't think my solicitors will keep you waiting neither. You'll hear from them to-morrow morning."

"Charmed at any time," he says. "You'll be careful of those bottles of cold tea in your bag, won't you? I think that's all.

And he shut the door in my face before I were ready with the next article.

I skipped down to the place where I lodged pretty lively, looking round once or twice to see as he weren't after me. I'd told nobody what the address was, that being a private matter as I likes to keep to myself in case of accidents.

There I finished the beer, and arranged with the old woman to pack my stuff and send it up by the carrier. I treated her more generous than I need have done about the rent, but beer always has that softening effect on me.

Then I dropped in at the Lion for a drink, as that serpent might have been looking for me at the Hen and Chickens. And there I found Jim Tyson.

"Hullo, Grandfather," he says. "Not working this morning?"

"No," I says. "I've had to chuck my work at 'The Nest.' I'm sorry to go, for I were doing well there, and they were pleasant people to work for, and I know they're sorry to lose me. But a gentleman in Leicestershire what I worked for as second man for three years has lost his head gardener, and he wrote to offer me the post. It's too good a thing to miss."

"Have they got another man at 'The Nest'?"

"Not yet. They did ask me if I could recommend one, but I thought you were fixed up."

"No, I'm only on temporary. I'd like to go there."

"Very good. I think as I can fix that for you. Just get me a pen and paper."

"So I wrote:

> "The enclosed is James Tyson, gardener, as I knows personal, and can be depended upon to give you the same satisfaction what I done myself.

"There," I says, "you ask for Mr Barnet, and give him that, and that ought to fix it."

He were very grateful, and after he had stood

me one more he went off. I was sorry I couldn't see the serpent's face when he got my letter, but I had the up train to catch.

Sitting in a third smoker, I says to myself:

"Edwards, my old sport," I says, "the suburbs ain't your class. You've done with them. You'll go back to London and take up the old jobbing line again."

Which I done.

THE MAN OF MYSTERY

I

"ONE of the reasons," said Mrs Harvey, the cook, to Mr Jobson, the butler, as they sat together after supper, "one of the reasons why I would never marry you, Mr Jobson, is——"

"One of the reasons," said Mr Jobson reflectively, "might be that you have never been asked, not that I know of."

"Well," said Mrs Harvey, "we'll put it this way, then. One of the reasons why I should never marry the kind of man you are is that I could never feel I had his confidence."

"I see," said Mr Jobson.

"You're what I should call a man of mystery. Evening after evening I sit here talking to you as free and trusting as can be. You know pretty near as much of my private affairs as I know myself. And what do you ever tell me about yourself?"

"Not a lot," said Mr Jobson.

"Well, I came upon a piece of news to-day that concerns me and you too. And I'm determined to say nothing about it."

"Ah," said Mr Jobson, picking up the newspaper.

"You don't deserve to hear anything about it. To my mind, life should be a matter of give and

take. If I had your confidence you would have mine."

Mr Jobson looked up from his newspaper, and said that the forecast had been a bit off that day.

"Well, I'll tell you this time, but it'll be the very last until you make some change in your ways. I was talking to the old lady this morning when she was giving the orders, and she remembered that I'd been in her service just fifteen years to-day. And she gave me to understand that both of us were mentioned in her will, provided we were in her service at the time of her death."

"Ah," said the man of mystery.

"You try my patience. Do put that newspaper down. When I tell you an important thing like that, have you got nothing to say about it?"

"You see," said Mr Jobson, "it's not exactly news to me. The old lady told me the same thing three weeks ago."

"And you never mentioned it! Really, I don't call it right. It doesn't seem to me to be common honesty. What do you suppose the sum would be?"

"Can't say," said Mr Jobson.

"I know this," said Mrs Harvey. "If you was to offer me a hundred pounds for my place to-day I wouldn't take it. I've known cases where a legacy of as much as five hundred pounds has been left to a cook. Of course we hope that the old lady will be spared for many years yet, but she must be well over seventy, and the years of a man are three score and ten, as it says in the

Scriptures. I wish I knew what her exact age was. I've given her a chance to mention it to me more than once, but she never seemed to care to say anything about it."

"Well," said Mr Jobson indulgently, "if that's all you want to know, I can tell you that. Mrs Jardine is seventy-eight."

"And I wouldn't have put her at a day over seventy-five. How did you find out? Did she tell you?"

"She didn't, so to speak, tell me—not intentionally. Speaking of the wine that came to her from her brother when he died, she mentioned that he was ten years younger than she was. He lived in Exeter, and I have got a cousin there. My cousin saw the tombstone."

"If you aren't a regular Sherlock Holmes! I expect you could find out what our legacies are, if you wanted to."

"I might—and I might not. Her solicitors live in the town; and solicitors have clerks; and sometimes clerks are thirsty."

"Well, if it was only a question of standing a man a few drinks I don't mind sharing half the expenses with you. I assure you that ever since the old lady told me that this morning I have been all of a tremble."

"What are you trembling about?"

"Why, the fear that I might do something to lose my place. The legacy's dependent on my being with her on her death. A kinder lady one would never wish to see. But if she thinks there is anything wrong she doesn't take long in making up her mind. I remember, more

than ten years ago, before you came here, she'd left some coppers on her dressing-table, and the housemaid helped herself to two or three of them. Fifteen minutes was the time that silly girl was given to pack and get out of the house, and she was told that if she was not gone in fifteen minutes she'd be handed over to the police."

"Well, you're not absolutely bound to sneak the old lady's coppers, are you?"

"Of course not. As if I would think of such a thing! But I might break valuable china, or forget an order, or something might go wrong with the dinner on a night when there was company. There are lots of accidents that might happen."

"I shouldn't let it worry you, if I were you," said Mr Jobson. "You know your work, and I know mine. Still, I've been thinking——"

He paused.

"Thinking what?" said Mrs Harvey eagerly.

"Well, you say I never give you any confidence. I've been thinking whether it wouldn't be worth my while to leave."

"What! With that legacy hanging over your head? You must have taken leave of your senses. Besides, a more comfortable place you'll never find. And you can't say you're overworked."

"No, that was not what I had in my mind. Of course, life here is mostly one damned thing after another. It's all routine, and I'm sick of it. But as I told you, I have a cousin in Exeter, and——"

An electric bell rang twice, sharply.

"Evening prayers," said Mrs Harvey, "and just as you were beginning to open out a little."

"Yes," said Mr Jobson, as he took off his light tweed jacket and resumed his evening coat, "just one damned thing after another, isn't it?"

Mrs Jardine's six servants were arranged in a row of chairs at one end of the dining-room. Mr Jobson, with the utmost gravity, placed a large Bible and a smaller book of devotion on the dining-room table, opened at the appointed places.

Mrs Jardine, a shrunken figure, looking too small for the great carved chair in which she sat, read without the aid of glasses, in the voice which she only employed for religious purposes.

When prayers were over, Mrs Jardine said good-night to the servants generally, and then remembered something.

"Jobson," she said, "I'd forgotten. The Fonseca '96 for to-morrow night, please."

"Very good, madam," said Jobson.

II

If anybody had been rude enough to tell Mrs Jardine that she was early Victorian and old-fashioned, she would not have been offended. On the contrary she would have taken it as a compliment. She considered the present generation to be on the whole irreligious, sloppy, and inefficient, and consequently detestable.

Mrs Jardine loved efficiency and method. Her nearest neighbour, Lady Sinden, who was

young, pretty, and frivolous, came to see her one Sunday afternoon.

"I wonder if you could help me," said Lady Sinden. "Not a soul in my house has got a postage-stamp. I never can remember to buy stamps, and I always try to do my shopping on the afternoon of early-closing day, and I'm hopeless. Could you possibly let me have three stamps?"

Mrs Jardine smiled pleasantly, and provided the visitor with tea and stamps, and a somewhat pungent criticism of the curate's sermon that morning. Later she made this brief entry in her diary: "Lady S. called. Feather-headed fool."

Mrs Jardine was never without stamps or anything else that she was likely to require, and she always possessed the time-table for the current month, and the clocks in her house never stopped. But she was conscious that her own memory was not the impeccable machine that it had once been. Age was beginning to tell. She could still remember perfectly the events of her youth, but she sometimes forgot the event of yesterday.

She had nearly forgotten to tell Jobson which port he was to decant. Mrs Jardine, like most people who have a knowledge of wine and a good palate, was very moderate. She drank a little vintage port after dinner every night, and when she was alone one bottle lasted one week. The wine was decanted in the ante-room of the cellar after breakfast, and the stopper was left out of the bottle until the evening, a sheet of paper being laid over the mouth of the decanter to keep out dust. That was the prescribed

ritual. In many respects Mrs Jardine knew how to live.

She was interested in her cellar. It contained far more wine than she would ever drink, and she was still adding to it from time to time. Good wine was a tradition in her family. She had inherited wine from her father and her brother, and she intended that others should inherit from her. She laid down wine for her grandchildren to drink, that so the memory of her might remain.

Mrs Jardine read family prayers at eight in the morning. She had a contempt for old ladies who breakfasted in bed. After breakfast came a very careful interview with the cook, for Mrs Jardine was a refined epicure. And then there was always something in the garden, or the stables, or the house which required her attention. Even if it did not require it, it received it, for Mrs Jardine had the inspecting habit. This morning she decided that it was time she inspected the cellar, and for that purpose she descended into the bowels of the earth.

Mrs Jardine and her butler alone had access to the cellar, and the door locked automatically when one closed it. Mrs Jardine let herself in with her own key, and switched on the light in the ante-room.

It was a small room sparsely furnished with a shelf, a rack for empty bottles, a table, and a fixed basin. On the shelf all the apparatus for the tasting and decanting of the wine was carefully disposed. On the table stood a decanter of port, with a card over the mouth of it, and

the stopper lying by its side. Mrs Jardine took the card from the decanter, and held it up to the light. Yes, a beautiful colour and perfectly clear. Everything in the ante-room was correct. Jobson, as he himself had said, knew his work. Mrs Jardine now passed into the cellar itself. There she remained for about twenty minutes. Here too she found everything correct. The Chambertin in bin No. 19 would probably have to be re-corked. Even if it did not require it immediately, it was better to be on the safe side. She would speak to Jobson about it. Returning to the ante-room she took off her rings, and rinsed the dust from her aristocratic fingers at the fixed basin. She then went upstairs again to write an order to her wine-merchant, which her inspection of the wine cellar had suggested to her.

As she was writing she became obsessed with an idea that there was something wrong. She felt uncomfortable, almost as if she had neglected a duty. And then it chanced that her eyes fell on her hands, and she realized what was wrong. She had left her rings downstairs in the ante-room of the cellar.

She rose to ring the bell, and then paused. She could, of course, send Jobson to fetch the rings for her, but it would be equivalent to an admission to him that she had been very careless and forgetful. Not once, but many times had she said severely to members of her domestic staff: "Forgetfulness is not an excuse. You can remember if you wish to remember." It would, no doubt, be more discreet if she fetched the rings herself, and said nothing about it.

She had worn five rings that day. She found four of them on the table by the decanter. The fifth she could not find at all.

The missing ring, containing a single diamond, was probably the least valuable of the five. It had been poor Aunt Agatha's. Mrs Jardine had put it on that morning from sentimental reasons, this being the day on which Aunt Agatha died many years before. Mrs Jardine proceeded to make a very careful search of every inch of the ante-room.

Mrs Jardine's servants took cocoa and bread-and-cheese, or bread-and-jam, at discretion, at eleven in the morning. Mr Jobson, who did not interpret the regulation too literally, took his cocoa from a screw-stoppered bottle which was labelled " Stout." Mrs Harvey, the cook, found him busy with it.

" There you are," she said. " All the morning I've been wanting to get a word with you. You remember what you told me last night—some nonsense about your going to leave ? "

" That's all right," said Jobson. " I am. I shall be in Exeter to-night."

" Now do take a word of advice," said Mrs Harvey, " and don't be so foolish. Think what you're sacrificing. Even if it's not very exciting here, it can't be very much longer that you will have to stick it. Besides, what excuse can you make to the old lady ? You've not even given notice yet."

" Shan't have to. I'm going to get the sack, I am."

" Not you," said Mrs Harvey. " She'd never

part with you. What are you going to get the sack for?"

"Oh, just dishonesty—thieving."

"You're trying to make fun of me, I suppose. What have you stolen?"

"Nothing," said the man of mystery; "but I'm going to get sacked for it all the same, and I'm going to do it because it suits my book. And that's all you need to know about it at present. Ah, there's my bell. I thought she'd be wanting to see me about now."

Mrs Jardine had recalled a fact, which seemed to her conclusive. On her first visit to the cellar not only had she forgotten her ring, she had also forgotten to replace the card on the mouth of the decanter. Of this she felt perfectly certain. Yet, on her second visit to the cellar she had found the card replaced. Obviously Jobson must have been in the cellar meanwhile.

He did not deny it. Asked if he had given way to gambling, he said that he occasionally had a bet on a horse. He suggested that the ring might possibly have caught in some part of Mrs Jardine's dress, and she said that she would not have sent for him till she had made herself absolutely sure that this was not the case. She expressed surprise that a man who had been for ten years in her service, and was well aware that he had some prospects if he remained in it, should sacrifice all this and his future career in such a foolish way.

"I do not suppose," said Mrs Jardine, "that the ring is worth more than ten or twelve pounds. Apart from the wickedness of it, I fail to

understand how you could have been such a fool."

"I should not have been, madam," said Jobson. "I did not take the ring, and I have not got it."

"Then perhaps you can offer some explanation of its disappearance."

Jobson apparently could not. He said very little, merely repeating at intervals that he had not got the ring. Finally Mrs Jardine said that in view of his previous good services she should not give him in charge of the police, but that he must pack up his things and go at once. One of the maids could be sent to the station to fetch a cab for him. As a matter of fact, Mrs Jardine considered it rather vulgar to have anything whatever to do with the police, and it would have required a much greater loss to have driven her to take this step. It is just possible that the man of mystery had some idea of this. He said as he left that he felt positive that some day the truth would come out, and that she would find she had misjudged him. It had been his experience that truth always prevailed in the end.

After these noble and pathetic words he sought out Mrs Harvey, and said cheerfully: "You're to send one of the maids to the station to get a cab for me. Those are Mrs Jardine's orders."

"Don't tell me you've gone and done it," said Mrs Harvey agitatedly.

"I told you before that I had. I don't waste as much time as you do in saying the same thing twice over."

"Oh, but you never gave me the slightest explanation."

"Can I stop Mrs Jardine ringing the bell if she wants to? And now there's no time for it, for I must get my trunks packed by the time the cab comes. Good-bye, my dear. Try hard, and wear flannel next your skin, and you'll get that legacy yet."

Mr Jobson ran lightly up the back staircase.

In view of her agitation, Mrs Jardine permitted herself no less than one and a half glasses of Fonseca '96 after dinner. She had reluctantly decided not to employ a man-servant again. The parlour-maid would probably never in her life become as expert and informed as Jobson had been, but men were all the same. Sooner or later they gave way to some vice or other. If it was not gambling, it would be something else.

But she was harassed with doubts. She felt that Jobson's trunk should have been searched before he left, but she could not possibly have brought the police in to do it, and still less could she have done it herself. However, there appeared to be nothing missing, except the ring. She hoped that it would be all right.

Then, again, she was not perfectly satisfied about her theory of Jobson. She supposed that he had been faced with the necessity to pay a gambling debt, and had succumbed to sudden temptation. But really it looked to her now more like insanity. And what would the poor man do? She had told him that if she were asked for a character she would have to speak the truth. Would he ever get another place? The last half-glass of port was haunted by sad reflections of the man who had decanted it.

Jobson had somewhat overstated his gambling propensities. One Christmas Lady Sinden had tipped him, and had laughingly told him to put the money on a certain horse. Now Jobson's opinion of Lady Sinden was precisely the same as Mrs Jardine's, but he was aware that Sir Charles Sinden was an owner of racehorses, and might conceivably know something. He multiplied Lady Sinden's gift by five, put it on early at a long price, won, and never made a bet again. It was perhaps characteristic of him that Mrs Harvey was not informed that he had ever made a bet at all.

"Yes," said Mrs Harvey that evening, gloomily to the parlour-maid. "If ever a man on this earth was a problem, Mr Jobson was. I probably knew more about him than anybody else, and I doubt if even I fully understood him."

The doubt was justified.

III

Mr Herbert Holt received a telegram that afternoon to say that his cousin, Mr George Jobson, might be expected in the evening. Mr Holt went upstairs to the sitting-room over the shop to communicate the news to Mrs Holt.

"And," said Herbert, "perhaps you'd better get busy. Supper, you know. George is used to good living, and——"

"You don't need to tell me anything about that. What I want to know is, what does it mean?"

"Well, my dear, it probably means that he is

coming in with us, or, if not, that he is seriously thinking about it."

"You won't make the terms too easy for him, will you? Look at the way the business has gone ahead these last three years. Why, he ought to jump at the chance."

"Well," said Herbert, "I know what I'm doing. You can leave it to me. George don't do much jumping. I've got the figures worked out all right, and if he can't see his own advantage, I shall find somebody else who can. But I'd sooner have George."

George was hospitably received by his cousin, and conversation was limited to general subjects until after supper. Mrs Holt retired early, having first seen that a decanter and syphon were placed conveniently for purposes of reference. Herbert Holt lit his pipe, and began cheerfully to lead up to the subject of business.

"Well, George," said Herbert, "I'm very glad you've managed to get away for a day."

"Yes," said Mr Jobson, "I managed to get away."

"Mrs Jardine well, I hope? You left her all right?"

"Yes, I left her all right. I may possibly be here a few days, if you can put me up."

"Well, there's the spare room, and we shall be glad to have you. I suppose this means that you've decided at last to take the plunge and come in with us."

"No, Herbert," said Mr Jobson, "I'm not taking any plunge at the moment, but I have come down to look at the water. I may be able to

let you know in a week. First, there'll be the telegram."

"What telegram?" asked Herbert.

"The one I'm expecting," said the man of mystery; "and after that there must be time for the letters to come and go."

Herbert checked an inclination to ask what letters. He was acquainted with some of his cousin's characteristics.

"But," Mr Jobson continued, "the time won't be wasted. I can begin to-morrow to go over the books."

"Well," said Herbert, "you can do that if you like. I sent you a plain statement of the working for the last three years, and I should have thought that would have been enough. Besides, do you understand bookkeeping?"

"If I didn't, I shouldn't want to see the books. And I expect yours aren't anything very elaborate."

Mrs Holt was awake when her husband came up to bed.

"Well," she said eagerly, "landed him?"

"No, and shan't do for a week. I don't see any reason for the delay, and he doesn't seem inclined to explain it. But he's nibbling—there's no doubt about that."

Four evenings afterwards it occurred to Mrs Jardine, after she had finished her first glass of port, that possibly a further half-glass might be indicated. She reached out her hand to the decanter, and as it passed under the light of the shaded candles Mrs Jardine saw something. She rose from her place and examined it care-

fully by a better light. Then she put down the decanter, and sat back in her chair, aghast. For, at the bottom of the decanter, in a beautiful bath of Fonseca '96, was a gold ring with a single diamond.

She reflected. The ring had always been a little too large for her. It might have slipped in when she first examined the decanter, or afterwards when she was removing her rings. She could not say, but she was early-Victorian, and her conscience was in full working order. She rang the bell and told the parlour-maid to send Mrs Harvey at once.

Mrs Harvey was not accustomed to be summoned at such a time. Instant dismissal and a cancelled legacy were the least that she expected. She entered the dining-room looking profoundly guilty of all the crimes she had never committed.

"I have made a mistake," said Mrs Jardine quietly. "I find that Jobson was not guilty of the act of dishonesty for which I dismissed him. I wish his character to be re-established at once. You will inform the other servants of this, please. That is all, thank you."

"Very good, madam," said Mrs Harvey. As she passed through the door she was not quite sure whether she was more perplexed or more relieved.

"Don't ask me for any details," she said to the other servants. "I have told you all I was authorized to tell you."

All the same, she would have been very glad of a few details herself. The man of mystery had become more mysterious than ever, and things

were happening just as he had said they would happen. In a way it was perfectly uncanny.

With the aid of a perfectly clean knitting-needle Mrs Jardine fished out the ring from the decanter, dropped it into her finger-bowl, dried it carefully, and replaced it on her hand. There was no doubt about it at all. It was certainly too loose. She should have had it altered before.

She never had that extra half-glass. She passed into the drawing-room, where conscience became reinforced by a wholesome dread of results. She had dismissed a butler for an act of dishonesty which he had not committed. She had told her servants, assembled for the purpose of family prayers, that the butler had been dismissed for theft. She had even introduced a reference to his crime in the course of the subsequent devotions. He would probably have some legal remedy. Such words as "slander," "defamation of character," "unlawful dismissal," floated in her mind. So perturbed was she that at evening prayers that night, instead of beginning at verse eight and ending at verse forty-one—the passage appointed—she began at verse one and ended at verse eight—a fact of which, I regret to say, the kitchen-maid subsequently expressed extreme approval.

As soon as the telegraph office was open next morning, Mrs Jardine herself wrote out and dispatched the following message to Jobson :

> Ring found. Very deepest regrets for my mistake. Am writing you to-day.

Later in the morning she drove to her solicitor's

office and had a long interview with the senior partner. It was obvious that he intended to be as consolatory as possible, and, as a matter of fact, he frightened her rather badly. He admitted the possibility that Jobson might now give her trouble.

"And if he does," said the solicitor, "then I think you'd better turn him over to me. You would probably not wish to fight the case."

"Most certainly not," said Mrs Jardine.

"Well, I shall go into it with him, and try to settle it for you as cheaply as I can."

"I'm not sure," said Mrs Jardine, "that I want you to settle it as cheaply as you can. People who act rashly, and make mistakes in consequence, should be punished for it, and make good any harm they may have done. That is my view."

On her return home Mrs Jardine wrote a letter to Jobson. It was a letter which had the full approval of her conscience, but would not have had the approval of her solicitor. It is, as a matter of fact, extremely difficult to have both.

In that letter she admitted quite simply that she had been altogether in the wrong. She told where the ring had been found, and gave her own theory of the way in which it had got there. If Jobson cared to return to his situation it would, of course, be open to him. Or, if he were seeking a situation elsewhere, he should have the highest possible character and all the assistance that she could give. In any case, she had decided she would not be happy until she had made some proper reparation for the

wrong she had done. Jobson would remember that she had mentioned to him that if he were in her service at the time of her death, he would receive a legacy. The amount of this legacy was to have been £250. What she proposed was to double this sum and to pay it to him immediately, if he would accept this in full settlement of any claim he might have against her.

To this letter Mr Jobson sent the following touching, if not absolutely truthful, reply :

MADAM,

I was most surprised and glad to hear that the ring had been recovered, thus bearing out my belief that the truth will always prevail in the end. It would never have occurred to me that the ring could have been in the decanter.

On leaving your house I went to stay with my cousin, Herbert Holt, who had been asking me to join him in business. I felt myself bound to tell him that I had been dismissed from your service for dishonesty. He was kind enough to believe my assertion of my innocence, but he insisted upon it that I must bring an action to clear my character. He said he could not afford to have a partner in the business who was under the suspicion of theft. I may say that he is a hard man, but not unreasonable.

To this I replied that circumstances had certainly looked very black against me ; that for ten years I had received nothing but kindness from you ; and that no consideration on earth would induce me to distress you by bringing any such action. I would prefer to leave for Australia, and start life afresh on the small sum that I have been able to save from my wages.

However, I have shown my cousin your telegram and the very kind letter which followed it, and although he still wished me to take proceedings, I have managed to persuade him that this is no longer necessary. The very generous reparation which you offer will help to buy my share in the business, which I think to be sound and progressive. I do not feel that I could return to service at your house, because I should always think that my presence would be a source of embarrassment to you. Nor, having once been in service with you, should I ever care to take a place elsewhere.

I, therefore, accept your very kind offer in full discharge of any claim that I may have against you, and beg to convey my most respectful thanks.

I am, Madam, your respectful and obedient servant,

GEORGE JOBSON

IV

" So you've got him at last ! " said Mrs Holt triumphantly.

" To be honest, my dear, I didn't have much to do with it. He took a look at my books, and said nothing. He went all over the new premises that I've got an option on, and said nothing about them either. I've been under cross-examination for about a week, and mind you, he never put a question that a fool would have put. But if ever I put a question to him, he seemed to be thinking about something else. When the telegram came I said I hoped it was not bad news. He just put it in his pocket and said, ' Not particularly.'

"To-day he suddenly said, when we were talking about something else, that he was coming in if we could arrange terms. I'd asked him rather more than I expected, and he knocked off just about as much as I feared. And then he knocked off another five pounds, which he said he would have to pay Mrs Jardine for leaving without due notice. We're just back from my lawyer's, and the whole thing will be signed and sealed to-morrow."

In business Mr Jobson had no secrets whatever from his partner, and discussed everything connected with the business openly and freely. So far as his private life was concerned his habit of reticence remained.

A year later, during which time the business had prospered greatly, Mr Jobson and his partner devoted the Sunday afternoon to the consumption of an excellent bottle of Fonseca '96. It happened that they were discussing strokes of luck, and high prices received for goods and services rendered.

"I'll tell you a thing," said Herbert Holt, "that I wouldn't tell everybody. I once got five pounds for a bottle of whisky. It was nine o'clock on a Sunday night, during the War. The chap rang, and I came down to the door myself. I knew him pretty well, or I wouldn't have risked it. He'd got one of those dispatch cases in his hand, and he opened it. There was a five-pound Bank of England note in it, and nothing else. 'Mr Holt,' he says, 'I want to make you a present.' And he handed me the five-pound note. 'And,' he says, 'if you care to make me a present in re-

turn, the thing I want most on earth, at the present moment, is a bottle of whisky, and, so far as talking is concerned, I can keep my mouth shut.'

"'Give me hold of that bag,' I said, and I brought it back to him with what he wanted inside. But that was a risk I'd never take again."

"Ah," said George Jobson, "I have done better than that in my time—a lot better."

"What was it?" asked Mr Holt.

"If I told you, you wouldn't believe it."

"Give me your word of honour, and I'll certainly believe it."

"Yes, but you'd bother me with a lot of questions about it afterwards."

"I'll swear I won't ask a single question."

"Very well," said George. "I once got five hundred pounds for dropping a ring in a decanter of port.'

"You're the limit," said Herbert gloomily.

THE MISSING YEARS

SYLVIA HETHERIL was the only daughter of James Hetheril, solicitor of Iddenside. She had one brother, Charles, seven years older than herself, who had been articled to his father and after his admission had continued to work in his father's office. The family lived together in a picturesque old house half a mile outside the town; the garden, in which Mr Hetheril took a great interest, sloped down to the banks of the river Idden. Every weekday morning at half-past nine the father and son walked into the town to their office. They did not always return together. Sometimes Mr Hetheril would return an hour or two earlier, to work in his beloved garden, leaving his son in charge.

Sylvia was beautiful and intelligent, and she thought a great deal more of her intelligence than she did of her beauty. Her father, whose ideas were a little old-fashioned, had not permitted Newnham. But Sylvia subscribed to a library in London which specialized in works of science, and studied hard. The science master at the big school in Iddenside helped her, and she was by far his most advanced pupil.

Somebody said one day to Sylvia's mother that Sylvia was perfectly charming.

"Well," said Mrs Hetheril, "Sylvia's a good girl and a good daughter, but I do wish she were

rather more like other girls. I don't want her to be vain, but really she never seems to think about clothes at all. Shopping actually bores her. If she hadn't me to see after her, she'd be—well, she'd be an absolute scarecrow. Books, books, books! She works far too hard. She prefers to play tennis with somebody who can just beat her. If she takes the punt out, it's to see how far she can get in a given time. Too strenuous altogether—I tell her so."

"She's the picture of health in spite of it," said the friend. "And she's very much admired."

"What's the use of it? It's my belief that she will never marry. She will be quite friendly with a man—till he falls in love with her. Then she's finished with him. I've seen it time after time."

One evening in June Sylvia's brother Charles, shortly after his return from the office, came into the library and found his sister at the writing-table.

"Sweltering evening," said Charles. "I'm going down to get a bathe before dinner. Coming along?"

"Don't think so," said Sylvia. "I had a swim this morning, while you were snoring. I was going to finish this library list and then stroll down the road, and post it."

Charles produced a letter from his pocket.

"Good," he said. "Then you might stuff this into the box for me. I meant to give it to the boy to post with the office letters, and forgot the damned thing."

"Right-o," said Sylvia cheerily.

Charles passed out through the open French windows, and went down the garden towards the boat-house, whistling as he went.

Suddenly a change came over Sylvia. She put her arms down on the table and rested her head on them. Her eyes closed. She was not asleep, but she was in a day-dream. It was delightful and it was new. Nothing of the kind had ever happened to her before. She was filled with happiness. She had forgotten library lists, and letters, and the room in which she sat. It seemed she was in a wood at twilight with a crescent moon above her. For nearly twenty minutes she remained motionless.

And then she suddenly started up, a little frightened. What on earth had happened to her? Feverishly she finished her library list. There would be just time to get to the pillar-box and back before she went up to dress for dinner. She put on the hat and gloves that lay on the table beside her, and snatched up the letters. Was there anything else? Yes, there was an envelope with bank-notes in it—a quarter's dress allowance. Her father would be annoyed if she left it lying about. She put it in the little bag she carried.

And then she hurried out of the house, expecting to be back again in five minutes.

Her father, mother, and brother sat down to dinner without her. It was not a very unusual occurrence, for Sylvia was sometimes a little unpunctual. It was expected that she would enter any moment, breathless, smiling, and apologetic.

As he finished his soup her father said, rather peevishly: "Where's Sylvia? I mean to say, what's she doing? She knows the dinner-hour. Reason in all things."

A maid was dispatched to find Miss Sylvia. Miss Sylvia was not to be found. There was definite evidence that she had not gone up to her room to get ready for dinner.

"She told me she was going down the road to post some letters," said Charles. "Probably she met some friends and they've collared her for dinner. She'll be telephoning directly."

By the end of dinner Sylvia had not returned nor had she telephoned. Her mother began to grow very anxious.

Mr Hetheril said it was really too bad of Sylvia. Charles telephoned the Ingates and the Morrisons. Sylvia was not there, but Mrs Morrison had seen her posting letters and had spoken to her. Sylvia had seemed quite well and happy. A little later Mr Hetheril went to the police-station. At ten news came of her. She had gone up to London by the 7.20 train. The booking-clerk knew her by sight, and could describe the dress she was wearing. She had no luggage with her, and had to hurry to catch the train. There were two down trains that night by either of which Sylvia might return. Charles met them both, but she was not in either train.

Two days later the portrait of the missing girl appeared in the principal London newspapers with a full description. Several people wrote and claimed to have seen her on the evening of her departure, but none of the claims would stand

investigation. Mr Hetheril then offered a reward of £1000 for information which would lead to her recovery. This also produced nothing but a great number of unsatisfactory letters. Some weeks later the body of an unknown woman was taken out of the Thames, and it was thought by the police that it answered to the description that had been given them. Charles went up to London and saw the body. It was not his sister.

At the end of a year Sylvia's father and mother had practically given up hope. Their loss had aged them both considerably. Charles was still optimistic. He said that Sylvia had no troubles, that she was in excellent health, and that if she pleased she was quite well equipped to earn her own living as a teacher. She had always been independent in character, and might have chosen this way to see how she could get along by herself. It was pointed out to him that it was unlike Sylvia to do anything so cruel, and that if she had done it, she would most certainly have been seen and recognized by scores of people.

But when Sylvia had been away two years, Charles was astounded one morning to receive a letter addressed to him in what seemed to be her handwriting. He tore the envelope open and took out the letter, expecting to find that after all the similarity of the handwriting had been merely a coincidence.

But the letter was from Sylvia. It was written from a London hotel and was very short. She said that she was perfectly well, and that she was returning home late that evening. She thought

it better for Charles to break this news to her father and mother. She could not tell them where she had been, or what she had been doing during the last two years. She had absolutely no recollection of it. She hoped that they would not ask her about it, because it worried her.

After a family consultation it was decided that her father and mother should go up to London to fetch Sylvia back, and a telegram was sent to her to tell her to expect them.

Sylvia could tell them very little. Four days before she had found herself in London, without luggage, without anything, except the clothes she stood up in, and with a handbag in which she found money. There was nearly £100 in notes, considerably more than she had in her possession when she left home. At one of the big London stores she had bought everything she required, had it packed in a couple of suit-cases, and had then taken her room at the hotel. She wanted time to pull herself together, time to decide what was the best course to take. She had finally decided to write to her brother. She was perfectly well, and she did not think she had been ill or unhappy during her absence. Her mother noticed that Sylvia was well and expensively dressed, and asked if she bought those things in London.

"No," said Sylvia, "I was wearing them when I came to London. Please don't ask me any questions. I would tell you if I could remember. It's all gone. Those two years have been missed out of my life."

Her eyes filled with tears and the subject was immediately changed.

But Sylvia had not told her parents quite everything. On her arrival in London she had noticed that she was wearing a plain gold wedding-ring. She had taken this off and hidden it. Later, she buried it in the garden.

She was not distressed with any further questions. This was in accordance with advice given by the family doctor. It had been, he thought, a case of secondary personality in which all recollection of the first personality had been lost. It was to be hoped that this secondary personality would not return, and meanwhile it would be better that her mind should be as undisturbed as possible, and that some sort of unobtrusive watch should be kept over her.

Mrs Hetheril made two little discoveries that she did not mention to Sylvia. The dress that she had been wearing on her return bore the mark of a fashionable draper in Helmstone, and the linen was embroidered with a monogram, and the monogram was quite distinctly S.M.

Sylvia quickly took up again the threads of her normal life. There was much talk about her in Iddenside, which she detested, but gradually the wonder of her absence and her return was forgotten. She continued her scientific studies as before. She acted as bridesmaid at her brother's wedding, and she herself refused two offers of marriage. At the age of thirty-two she died of pneumonia, following on influenza.

. . . . . .

It chanced that the letter which Charles

Hetheril gave to his sister to post was addressed to a business acquaintance temporarily resident at a hotel in Helmstone. As Sylvia walked to the post she knew that she must hurry in order to be back in time for dinner. The feeling that she must hurry still persisted, but she had quite forgotten why. It really annoyed her a little that Mrs Morrison met her and delayed her. As she dropped the letters in the pillar-box the word Helmstone caught her eye, though she would not have said that she had noticed it. She knew now that she must hurry because she was wanted. It was something important. She had not the least hesitation as to the direction she should take. It seemed to her that she knew it without thinking about it. She took the road to the railway station and just caught an up train.

Helmstone, she said to herself in the train. You went to it from Victoria. A taxi would get her to Victoria in ten minutes. She felt that she really ought to have looked up a train for Helmstone. But she supposed she must take her chance. Again chance aided her. She had not to wait five minutes. Of course, when she reached Helmstone, she would not be at her journey's end, but she could take a taxi most of the way.

"Where to, miss?" said the driver at Helmstone station.

"Go up to the sea front, turn to the left, and drive on till I tell you to stop."

"Will it be far, miss?"

"Five or six miles, perhaps. I'm not sure. I shall tell you when we get there."

Sylvia sat back in the cab, a little impatient to be at her journey's end, taking no notice whatever of the streets of Helmstone. Presently Helmstone was left behind. A little later the lights of a village blinked at her through the windows of the car. At intervals she could hear the constant murmur of the sea.

Suddenly she sat up and tapped the glass in front of her sharply. The driver pulled up on the near side, a little surprised, for there was no habitation in sight.

"This is as far as I can go by taxi," said Sylvia in explanation. "I have to walk the rest of the way. It's not far."

Sylvia had impressed the driver strongly. He would have remembered her face and the dress she was wearing. He would have seen the portrait of her which appeared in the newspapers. He would have communicated with the Hetherils. But on his return journey to Helmstone his car collided with another and he was thrown out and killed.

Sylvia went up across the downs. Soon she saw in front of her the wood for which she had been looking. It covered about two acres of ground and there was a high palisade round it. She found the gate in this palisade without any difficulty. There was a notice-board by the gate, but it was too dark for her to read it, and she did not trouble about it. The board stated that the wood was private property and that the public was not admitted. It also gave a warning that the dogs at large in the wood were dangerous. Sylvia entered, closing the gate behind her.

She had gone a few steps when a great mastiff leapt from a thicket and came slowly towards her, growling.

"Don't be so silly," said Sylvia to the dog. "I'm not going to hurt you. Just you come here at once."

It almost seemed as if the dog had recognized her voice. The growling ceased. He came up to her, sniffing suspiciously. Then he pushed his cold nose into her hand, and wagged his tail.

"That's right," said Sylvia, patting his head and then taking hold of the loose collar on his neck. "Now then. You take me by the nearest way up to the house."

Sylvia and the mastiff went on together by a grassy track to a clearing in the middle of the wood where stood a big brick-built bungalow. At some distance behind it there were out-buildings.

Sylvia rang, and the door was immediately opened by a manservant. At the sight of the man the dog began to growl again.

"Be quiet," said Sylvia to the dog, patting him on the head.

"You are Miss Sefton?" said the man anxiously.

"No," said Sylvia, "I——"

Suddenly a door into the hall opened and a man came out whom Sylvia had expected to see. He was young and very dark, and his expression was tragic. He was in evening dress with a short jacket and black tie. Sylvia turned to him at once.

"I had to come to you," she said. And then a wave of trouble passed over her. "I've lost my memory," she stammered. "Will you help me?"

"Of course I will," said the man quietly. "Come in here, won't you?" He turned sharply to the servant. "Carter, see that a room is got ready for this lady at once."

The room into which Sylvia was taken was furnished as a library, brightly lit with electric lights. The top drawer of a bureau was open and the man went quickly to it and closed it. He made Sylvia sit down on a couch, and drew up a chair beside it.

"Now then," he said, "you're quite all right here, aren't you? I did not expect you and yet you came just in time." He looked at her steadily. "Almost exactly the same," he said in a low voice. And then addressing her again: "My name is Richard Mordaunt, you know. I wonder if you can remember what yours is."

"My first name is Sylvia. I'm quite sure of that, but I do not know what the second name is. I think I've travelled a long way to get here. I had to come to you. You looked just as I expected. But you'll be happier now, won't you?"

"Of course I shall. I suppose you've not dined?"

"I don't remember. But I'm not a bit hungry. I'm rather tired."

"That's all right," he said in his pleasant, musical voice. "You shall go to bed early. Mrs Carter and her daughter Alice will look

after you. But I think we must have some supper first. You see, I did not dine this evening."

He touched the bell.

"That was very foolish," said Sylvia, looking up at him and smiling. "Why not?"

"It didn't seem worth while. The condemned man does not always——"

He broke off as Carter entered. "Carter," he said, "supper in the dining-room as soon as you can."

"Very good, sir. I was already preparing it. Mrs Carter thought it would be required."

"Sensible woman. And the room?"

"Alice is seeing to it."

"That's right. Send Alice here as soon as the room is ready."

As Carter left he turned again to Sylvia and pointed to the big mastiff who had followed her in and was now asleep on the hearthrug.

"You know, Sylvia," he said, "you're rather a miracle. That dog does not allow anybody but myself to touch him. A tripper from Helmstone was foolish enough one day to disregard the notice I put up and to come into my wood, and he got pretty badly mauled before I could get to him and take the dog off."

"He was quite gentle with me," said Sylvia. "He really showed me the way to the house."

Alice, a ruddy-cheeked, healthy-looking damsel, entered and said that the room was ready.

Mordaunt's eye caught the monogram S.H. on Sylvia's handbag, and he made up his mind quickly.

"That's right," he said to Alice. "Miss

Harding has lost her luggage. But you'll do the best you can for her, won't you ? "

When Sylvia had gone from the room, Mordaunt stood for a moment or two in deep thought.

" An absolute miracle," he said aloud.

He crossed over to the bureau and opened that drawer again. In it were two letters which he had spent the day in writing. One of them was to a Miss Sefton, and the other was addressed to his solicitors. On the top of them lay a revolver. He removed the cartridges from the revolver. They would not be wanted now. He tore the two letters across. Though the evening was warm there was a small fire smouldering in the fireplace before which the dog lay.

Mordaunt touched the dog with his foot. " Get out of the light, Leo," he said.

The dog rose obediently, and moved a few steps away. Mordaunt threw the torn letters on the fire and smiled as he watched them burn. The dog looked up at him inquiringly, obviously asking a permission.

" Yes," said Mordaunt, " you can go back. You ought to be out in the wood looking for people, instead of behaving like a pampered spaniel. But you've done a good work this evening, and you shall have your own way for once."

Soon after dinner Sylvia retired for the night. Mordaunt called to the dog, took a short stroll through the wood, and then he also went to his room. In the servants' quarters the event of the evening was being discussed by the Carter

family. Mr Carter smoked a cherrywood pipe and enjoyed a bottle of stout. Mrs Carter and Alice listened to him as to the fount of wisdom.

"I don't pretend to understand it," said Mr Carter, "but I'm glad of it. If things had gone on as they were going on, in another week my gentleman would have been either in his coffin or in a madhouse."

"And who do you take it that she is?" asked Mrs Carter.

"Ah, there you're asking something. When I opened the door I felt certain she was Miss Sefton come back again. She's pretty well the image of her to look at. Then she comes into the hall, turns to him, and says she's lost her memory, and will he help her? Yet that dog behaved as if he'd known her all his life. She was pulling him about in a way that none of us would like to do. When I waited on them at dinner he and she were talking exactly like old friends. What's more, he called her by her Christian name all the time. First time I've heard him laugh or seen him eat a meal as if he enjoyed it for many a long month. Why, he's a changed man. But if you ask me to explain it, I can't. One thing doesn't seem to fit with another."

"Well, George," said Mrs Carter, "I'll tell you an idea that has crossed my mind. The bit about her losing her memory and wanting him to help her may have been some sort of private joke between them."

"Don't you believe it, my dear. I saw her, and heard her, and she wasn't joking. What's more, he didn't expect her, or the room would

have been ready. I suppose she didn't happen to say anything to you, Alice?"

"Well," said Alice, "she was very pleasant and talked quite a good deal. But she didn't seem to tell me anything, and of course I couldn't ask."

"I wonder now," said Carter, "as a point of etiquette, if it's all right for her and him to be staying alone together in a house like this."

"You seem to forget there's us. Of course, if we weren't here I should give notice instantly—what I mean to say is, I shouldn't approve of it."

Richard and Sylvia, to neither of whom the "point of etiquette" had occurred, met at breakfast next morning. Sylvia said that she had slept perfectly.

"And you?" she asked.

"I also slept well," said Richard, "for the first time for four months."

"I'm glad. And what are we to do to-day?"

"If you don't mind, I'd like to drive you into Helmstone. You see, you arrived without luggage. You will have to buy heaps of things."

"That will be lovely," said Sylvia. "I find I've got some money in my handbag, though I've no notion where it came from."

"Oh, you will have to let me be your banker while you are here. I shall enjoy the drive too. For four months I've not been outside my wood."

"Four months again," said Sylvia meditatingly.

"Yes, I shall tell you all about that very soon, I think."

"And after we've bought everything?"

"Then I suppose we must go to the police-station and try to find out who you are, and see if you can be restored to your relatives again."

Tears came into Sylvia's eyes.

"No," she said, "I don't want that. I don't know anything about my relatives. Perhaps I have none. It must have been something bad that made me go away. I won't do anything to find out who I was. I'm content to be what I am. You must promise me that you won't do anything either."

"Well," he said hesitatingly.

"I don't want to be a bother to you. If you don't want me here I'll go away, of course. But I'm not going back again to the place I came from."

"You cannot guess how very much I want you here."

"Then promise you won't try to find out who I am."

And after some persuasion he gave his promise. He knew it was all wrong, but he would have promised her anything and kept his word if it had been humanly possible.

For Richard had fallen very much in love with Sylvia, and she with him. It had happened instantaneously—at first sight.

Sylvia's mother had said quite truly that Sylvia did not care for shopping and was careless about dress. But the new Sylvia that had come into being enjoyed her shopping immensely and was particularly careful to choose things that would suit her. They lunched together at a

hotel in Helmstone and drove back with the little car laden with packages. More were to be sent on later.

Sylvia was seen that morning by many shop assistants and by waiters at the hotel, but no description of her had yet appeared in the newspapers. It was not till three days later that her portrait was published.

Newspapers were delivered regularly at the house in the wood. For four months Richard had never looked at them because he had lost his interest in the world. He never looked at them now because he was too much interested in Sylvia. But Carter was careful to keep himself well informed. A really good murder was a great satisfaction to him. He would retail the newspaper account afterwards to his wife and daughter with his own theory of the case, and his astonishment at the ineptitude of Scotland Yard.

On the morning that Sylvia's portrait was published, Carter held a consultation with his wife and then brought the newspaper to his master.

"I don't know if I'm doing right, sir, but we thought I should show you this. Christian name is the same and there seems to be some likeness."

Richard looked at the portrait, glanced over the letterpress, and laughed.

The portrait in the newspaper had been taken from a bad and not very recent photograph of Sylvia. It was very hurriedly and badly reproduced. Richard honestly did not believe that this was the Sylvia he knew.

"Not a bit like Miss Harding," he said to Carter. "Thousands of girls have got *blond-cendré* hair and blue eyes. Thousands of girls are just about that height. Thousands of girls wear a dark blue coat and skirt. Besides, if the Christian names are the same, the surnames are different. Yes, it's all right to have shown it to me, but don't bother Miss Harding about it. Just put the idea out of your mind. You're too romantic, Carter."

Neither Carter, nor Mrs Carter, nor Alice was quite convinced. There were certainly many points of coincidence, but when they looked at the portrait again they could see that it was quite possibly a portrait of somebody else, and decidedly it was not for them to interfere.

It was after dinner that night that Richard Mordaunt told Sylvia something of his history. He was, so far as he knew, without a relative in the world. His income was derived principally from house property that he had inherited from his father. He owned several houses in Helmstone, and was rather sardonic about them. He employed an agent to look after his property and had himself very little taste for business. Six months before he had met Mabel Sefton at a friend's house. At the end of a month they became engaged, and the engagement lasted one more month. Then Mabel Sefton threw him over.

The four months which followed had been a period of increasing melancholy, depression, and insomnia. He had shut himself up alone in his house, seeing nobody except his servants, and

taking every precaution that his solitude should be uninterrupted. On the night of Sylvia's arrival he had decided to make an end of it all, and that life was not worth living. He had the revolver in his hand when Sylvia rang at the front door.

" And now ? " said Sylvia.

" Oh, Mabel was quite right. I can see that now, of course."

" What was she like ? "

" She was very much like you. Wonderfully like you. But you're better. Mabel was just a little bit metallic."

The night was hot and they strolled out through the French windows, taking the grass path through the wood. Suddenly Sylvia stopped short.

" Ah," she said.

" What is it ? " said Richard.

" I've been here before. The wood was just like this with that crescent moon above. The line of the trees against the sky was just like that, and I was very happy."

" And you're very happy now ? "

She did not speak, but pressed her lips together and bowed her head in assent.

" I, too," he said. He paused and quoted : " What are we waiting for, O my heart ? "

And in an instant he held her in his arms.

. . . . . .

They were married by licence as soon as possible in the village church. Sylvia's name was given as Sylvia Harding, and her age as twenty-two. She had no idea at this time what

her real age was. A honeymoon of three months was spent in Switzerland, and when they returned again to England to the house in the wood the search for Sylvia Hetheril had been practically given up.

Richard had several men friends whom it now seemed that he had neglected too long. Besides he was very proud of Sylvia. He wished to show the treasure that he possessed. And so, for the next month or two, there were generally men staying in the house. Richard knew there would be questions, and he was quite capable of dealing with them.

"You know, Richard," said an old friend of his one evening as they sat over their port after dinner, "you always were a curious sort of cuss, and you've sprung a great surprise on us with this sudden marriage of yours. If I am any judge, you are very much to be congratulated on it. But may I ask one question?"

"Anything you like," said Richard.

"Let's see. Your wife's maiden name was——"

"Harding," said Richard—"Sylvia Harding."

"When did you first meet her?"

"We first met," said Richard, "under very romantic circumstances, about which"—he paused and smiled humorously—"we are both of us determined not to say one word to anybody."

"Ah, well," said his friend, as he refilled his glass, "you always were unsatisfactory and mysterious, and I suppose you always will be."

Sylvia's baby, a girl, named after her, was born

just about one year after Sylvia Hetheril left her home. The younger Sylvia was a very gay and healthy baby, receiving much devotion from the entire household. Alice Carter became the baby's nurse, having developed a natural genius in that direction, and another maid was engaged to take Alice's place.

One evening, when the baby was about six months old, Richard said to his wife at dinner: "Sylvia, you don't look very happy this evening. Are you worried about anything?"

"Not worried exactly. But I've been thinking about something. You remember Mabel Sefton?"

"Good old Mabel," said Richard. "She did me a good deal better turn than she ever imagined."

"Yet when she left you, you grew melancholy. You were even on the point of suicide."

"You remind me of past follies. But you remind me too that it was you who saved me."

"If I died, or if for any other reason I went out of your life, would you again be tempted to do that?"

"I might be tempted. I should be as unhappy as a man could be. But I should never do it. Not now. I've got the baby Sylvia to look after, you know."

"Yes, I've thought of that."

"And apart from death, what reason could there possibly be that you should leave me?"

"When I came to you, you know, I had forgotten everything that had happened before.

It seems to me that I had changed in some way, that I was not quite the same person. I did not want to go back. I did not want to be the person that I had been before. I made you promise, you remember."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, the thing that has been haunting me is that something of the kind might happen again. I might suddenly remember the girl that I used to be, and quite forget the woman that I am now. Possibly somewhere or other, I have a father and mother living, and should want to go back to them. If that ever happened I want you to promise not to look for them."

"You ask a hard thing, Sylvia—an impossible thing. Why do you ask it?"

"Because I dread the conflict between the two people—the girl I was and the woman I am. The circumstances of neither would fit with the other. I should be confused. I think I should go mad. If you love me, promise it, Richard."

"Then I must promise it. It will probably never happen. I do not believe you can ever forget me. I do not believe you can ever forget the baby Sylvia. Still, there's the chance that the thing that happened once may happen again. I must see what ought to be done."

A few days later he brought her £100 in bank-notes.

"I'd like you, Sylvia," he said, "to put those in some pocket of that little bag you always carry. I don't believe you're ever going back to—to wherever you were before you were sent to me. But if you do, the change may

come suddenly when you are alone, and you must have money with you."

When the baby Sylvia was just a year old, Sylvia came out of the house one morning with two letters in her hand, invitations for the week-end. She found Richard reclining at full length in a comfortable chair on the verandah. He had been reading a newspaper, but had found the exertion too much, and had put it down. He was very nearly asleep.

"Richard," said Sylvia, "who is the laziest man on earth?"

"Can't say. I'm not in the first three. I cut a tree down yesterday. Where are you off to?"

"Just going to the pillar-box in the road to post these."

Richard pulled a somewhat crumpled letter from his pocket.

"You might post that as well," he said. "I carried the damned thing about all yesterday and didn't remember to post it. Hurry up or you'll be late for lunch."

"Right-o," said Sylvia.

It was as she posted the letters that the change came. Victoria Street was the address on one of them, and it caught her eye. She went straight on in the direction of the village. She must certainly hurry, for her father was always annoyed if she was late for dinner. Suddenly she pressed her hand to her forehead. Where was she? This was not Iddenside. She must get back to Victoria at once. In the village she took the motor omnibus into Helmstone. She felt dazed and horrified. She looked at her clothes.

That was not the dress she had been wearing when she went away. How long had she been away? It was not until she reached Victoria that her mind became clear at all. She knew now that she had been away for two years, but she did not know what she had been doing. Of her baby and her husband she had no recollection whatever.

. . . . . .

Shortly after her death, Dr Norton, who attended her in her illness, sat one evening talking over things with his partner.

"You knew poor Miss Hetheril, didn't you?" said Norton.

"Slightly. Didn't she go away in a mysterious way years and years ago?"

"She did. And I know now why she went."

"You don't mean to say——"

"I have not the slightest doubt of it. This is between ourselves, of course. Her people don't know. And it was not part of my duty to tell them."

Dr Norton's partner knocked out his pipe in the fender. "And she seemed such a nice quiet girl," he said meditatively. "One never knows."

Sylvia was thirty-two years old when she died. Her age in the newspaper announcement of her death, and also on her tombstone, was given as thirty. This was done at her express request. There were, so she said, two years of her life that had been missed out. She had never had them. Somebody had taken them from her.

FRIENDSHIPS AND ENMITIES

I

MR J. R. ROBERTSON sold his pony to his friend of twenty years' standing, Mr G. W. Barnes. It is better, if it can be avoided, not to sell a pony to an old friend. Within a fortnight the two men had quarrelled, did not speak to one another, and gave no sign of recognition when they met.

Mr Robertson and Mr Barnes were travelling together to the City, as was their custom, when Robertson observed that he was thinking of selling his pony.

"Nothing wrong with him, is there?"

"Not that I know of. I've had him three years, and he's never been sick or sorry for a day. The fact of the case is that since I bought the car Annie finds the governess-cart too slow for her. So the beggar's just eating his head off, and I have to take the gardener's boy off his proper job to exercise him."

"Half a minute, James. How'd he do for Tom? It's time the boy had his first riding-lessons."

"I should think he'd do very well. He's carried children before. He's not quick, and he's rather lazy, and he must be eleven years old by now, but he's as quiet as a sheep and as safe

as a church. If I had children of my own, I'd trust him with them."

"Well, that's good enough. What do you want for him?"

"I gave sixteen for him, but that was three years ago. I'll ask you ten pounds."

"Right." Barnes took two five-pound notes from his pocket-book and handed them over. "I'll send for the pony to-night. It's Tom's birthday to-morrow, and that pony's just the present he'll like."

So the pony was delivered to Mr Barnes, together with such provender as remained, the latter as a free gift, Mr Robertson being a generous man.

George William Barnes was pleased. Lucy, wife of the aforesaid, declared that the pony looked a beauty—which, by the way, it did not. Tom Barnes, eldest of their three sons, spent most of the day in telling other boys that he had got a real pony of his own, and the rest of the time in handfeeding the pony. And the pony, having been given in one day one pound and a half of the best lump sugar and five large carrots, in addition to the usual rations, thought the world was a brighter place than it had at one time supposed.

James Robert Robertson was also satisfied. Annie, his wife, said that he was really wonderful. (She often said that, but he did not get tired of it.) It was only at breakfast-time that he had decided to sell the pony, and in an hour he had done it. And that was always the way with him—nobody was ever as quick as he

was. Annie was ten years younger than her husband and adored him. But possibly her next remark shows that she was capable of leading up to things.

"Now there will be plenty of room for that little two-seater, darling. I mean, if you decide to get it."

"Yes, my dear, but room isn't money. I got ten for the pony—perhaps I might have asked a little more, but in dealing with an old friend one doesn't haggle. I know my brother Bill wants the cart and harness and will give me what he calls a fair price for them, and I suppose he must have them; but his ideas of a fair price are not always mine. That doesn't take one very far towards the price of a good two-seater, and it's got to be good if you're going to drive it yourself."

"Yes, dearest, but think of the economy. Think of the saving in petrol. Our big car's a glutton for petrol—Tilling says so. Then if I drive myself, that gives Tilling more time for the garden, and it wouldn't take him nearly as long to clean the little car."

"Look here," said James, smiling. "If I get the car, will you give me a kiss for it?"

"No," said Annie shyly. "I don't sell kisses. But I'll give you all the kisses I've got, just for sheer love of you, always, even if you never give me anything."

An instalment on account followed. It would appear that Mrs Robertson knew how to talk. At any rate, three days later she was driving the two-seater.

And then the storm broke which wrecked the old-established friendship between James Robert Robertson and George William Barnes.

The two men met on the platform for the 9.14 A.M. up-train, as usual. They exchanged greetings, but Barnes did not, as usual, make his humorous remark (one of a set of six) about the weather. In Robertson's opinion, George was not looking himself.

After they had entered the train, Barnes said gloomily: "I've rather an unpleasant bit of business to get through."

"Ah?" said Robertson genially. "Well, what's your trouble?"

"I'm afraid I must ask you, James, to take back that pony of yours, and to return me my ten pounds."

The geniality was switched off instantly.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Robertson icily.

"Then I'll tell you. That pony is lame, was lame when you sold him to me, and had been lame for some time."

"I don't know if the pony is lame now. He may be. He may have been knocked about by your son or your servants. If so, I'm sorry, but it's no affair of mine. But all the rest of your statement is untrue. My wife drove the pony on the very day I sold him to you, and if there had been anything wrong with him she would have told me instantly. My man Tilling (who worked six years in a racing stable before he took to motors) would have reported anything of the sort to me. And lastly, I know as much

about horses as you do—and perhaps a little more, and I know positively, and am prepared to swear it, that the pony was not lame when it was handed over to you. Make what you can of that, and then apologize for calling me a swindler."

"As I never called you a swindler, and never even thought you were, there's no necessity to talk about apologies. But I did think that you had acted in ignorance and would be anxious to put the matter right. I'm not giving you my opinion at all. I have here a certificate from a duly qualified veterinary surgeon. There's no getting away from that. Just cast your eye over it."

Robertson merely glanced at the signature of the certificate.

"Well," he said, "of course that explains everything. Who on earth told you to go to that man Dinlees? Mind you, I went to him once myself, before I knew better. A valuable dog of my wife's was ill, and we called Dinlees in because he was the nearest man. The very first day he came I had the strongest suspicions of him. The next day, at 11 o'clock in the morning, the man arrived drunk, and of course was sent about his business at once. I then got Masham to see the dog. He's quite as well qualified as Dinlees and a good deal more experienced. He made no bones about it at all. He said that Dinlees's diagnosis was wrong and that even if the diagnosis had been right the treatment was wrong. As Masham cured the dog in a fortnight it looks as if he knew what he was talking

about. I don't suppose Dinlees ever forgave me. He's probably been trying to get his silly knife into me ever since. You got him to see the pony and he knew very well that you'd got the pony from me, and he thought that was his chance. You've been fooled, my poor friend, but it's not I who have fooled you."

"Won't do," said Mr Barnes sulkily. "A man doesn't risk his professional income and reputation by signing a certificate like that unless there's truth in it. The sum at stake is of no great importance, but as a matter of principle I must ask you to return my ten pounds and take the pony back."

"You're quite right. The sum is of no very great importance. If you'd been short of money and had wanted ten pounds, or a hundred, or even more, I should have been very glad to have obliged you. But what you've got to see is that if I pay the ten pounds in this case I am admitting that I was either a scoundrel or a fool, and as I happen to be neither I won't do it. See? I won't do it."

"If you don't, then you are calling me a fool or a scoundrel, and that's not language that I can take from any man—however long I may have known him."

"Then if you don't like it, don't ask for it."

"I don't require you to tell me how to talk, thank you. There's just a little more in this than you know yet. You tell me you understand a lot about horses. I've got your word for it and that's all. I also had your word for it that the pony was eleven years old. Dinlees is ready to

go into the witness-box and swear that the pony is over fourteen."

"I don't doubt Dinlees is. And with two more drinks inside him he'd swear the pony was rising sixty-eight or any other old thing."

"Well, if you're going to talk in that foolish and fat-headed way you leave me no choice. I'm sorry, but I must go to my solicitor."

"You can go to the devil," said James Robertson and resumed his *Times* savagely and ostentatiously. George William Barnes, sad but determined, also transferred his attention to the leading article.

At the London terminus they parted without a word.

It had been their custom to return home in the same railway-carriage by the 6.15. On this occasion Mr Robertson took the 6.25 in order to avoid Mr Barnes, and found Mr Barnes had also taken the 6.25 in order to avoid Mr Robertson. But they got into different carriages.

That night a gipsy of the name of Lovell called at Mr Barnes's house and said that he understood that Mr Barnes had a pony which he wished to sell. If that was so, Lovell was disposed to make an offer. Lovell had not been long in that suburb, but every gipsy knows by instinct where there is any chance of either selling or buying a horse advantageously.

"You can have him for cat's-meat price," said Mr Barnes. "I warn you that he's lame and likely to remain so. Give me twelve pounds and you can take him away with you."

The gipsy examined the pony, suggested

thirty shillings, and was finally worked up to £2, though he said despondently that he was afraid he'd made a bad deal.

Mr Barnes consulted his solicitor on the following day. There was no warranty. Mr Dinlees's record was extremely bad. It was practically certain that the gipsy would not have offered £2 for the beast if he had not believed the lameness to be curable. Acting under advice, Mr Barnes decided not to invoke the aid of the law, but he wrote a very bitter letter to his old friend, beginning "Dear Mr Robertson." Mr Robertson replied with a few lines of pure Angostura, beginning "Dear Sir." Mr Robertson was therefore, on the accepted rules of quarrels, one up.

And after that the two men did not speak for five years.

The results, which were a little complicated, may be tabulated as follows :

1. Mr Barnes and Mr Robertson did not speak and did not recognize one another when they met, and no further invitations from one couple to the other couple were issued.

2. Mr Barnes always took off his hat when he met Annie Robertson and was rewarded with a slight bow. Mr Robertson did the same thing when he met Lucy Barnes and was similarly rewarded. You see, they were both of them perfect gentlemen. I ought to have made this much more clear than I have done.

3. Lucy Barnes and Annie Robertson, having no quarrel whatever with each other and being mutually satisfied that men were so silly, laughed

and chatted when they met. They were also not averse to tea and bridge at each other's houses on afternoons when their husbands were safely away at business.

A fortnight after the break between the two friends, Mr Robertson met that pony being driven along the road by a man of the name of Lovell. The pony was going very well indeed—rather better, in fact, than it cared about going. Mr Robertson stopped the gipsy and asked him what he wanted for the animal. The gipsy said he did not want to sell him, and nothing under £15 would tempt him anyhow.

This gave the sardonic Mr Robertson a very nice story to tell, and he told it frequently, concluding "and now we've only got to wait till George Barnes brings out his book *All About Horses.*"

II

At the end of five years Mr Robertson was engaged one afternoon in his garden doing things to the roses which would probably break his gardener's heart, when his wife came down the path towards him. There were tears in her eyes.

"James," she said. "Did you know that Mr Barnes was ill?"

"Well, I've not had the misfortune to see him at the station lately. I did notice this morning they'd got the straw down in the road in front of his house, but of course that might have been for anybody."

"He's very ill indeed, James. They think he's dying. Lucy Barnes has just been here with

a message for you. She said that George feels he would very much like, in consideration of your many years of friendship, to make it up with you again before he goes."

"Oh," said James. "Well, in that case—what do you think about it yourself?"

"What I told Lucy was that I knew your generosity so well that I felt sure you'd go."

"Is Lucy Barnes in the house still?"

"Yes. She's waiting to see what message she can take to her husband."

"Tell her," said Mr Robertson, slipping his secators into his pocket, "that I shall be there in a quarter of an hour."

Annie kissed him, said that he was really noble, and ran off to convey the glad news to Lucy.

James Robertson was away from the house about an hour, and on his return he found Annie waiting for him in the hall. She drew him into the library.

"Tell me all about it," she said earnestly.

"I'm afraid," said James in the same voice that he used when he read the lessons in church, "that there is very little to tell. It may be a matter of days, but I should be more inclined to think it a matter of hours. The nurse who was there—they've got two—seemed inclined to take a hopeful view, but I couldn't share it. He seemed terribly changed. Voice very weak."

"What did he say?"

"Very little. Something about letting bygones be bygones. And I said that was all right and we all made mistakes. And then I went

downstairs to see Lucy. She seemed very grateful to me. I'm thinking that when I'm in the City to-morrow I'll get a pint of the real turtle and bring it back with me. He might fancy it if he's still here."

"I think you're too splendid and wonderful," said Annie.

"I could not have done less," said James. His face showed every sign of the great emotional strain through which he had passed. Annie noticed it.

"James, will you do something just to please me? Don't ask what it is."

"I suppose I must if you put it like that."

"Very well, then. You will have a small bottle of champagne. You absolutely need it. I can see it."

He had the small bottle. Annie was particularly tactful in imploring her husband to do things which he would have done on his own initiative in any case.

"Yes," said James on his return from business the following day. "I got the turtle for poor old George, and I left it at his house. He was asleep—so I didn't go in. They say he had a fair night and has seemed a shade better to-day. That so often happens—a slight rally before the end comes."

He returned to the subject at dinner.

"I have to admit," he said—nobody had asked him to admit anything—"that poor George had his faults. When his mistakes were corrected it made him very touchy and quarrelsome. But which of us is perfect? Old friends are old

friends. It will be a great wrench to me when we're parted."

And Annie, who tempered a sense of humour with discretion, abstained from pointing out that James had put up with the wrench for five years with complete equanimity and even cheerfulness.

Meanwhile, the glad news had been brought to the invalid George that Mr Robertson had called to inquire and had brought an offering of turtle-soup.

"Kind of him. I know where he got it. He can make blunders, but not about questions of the table. I suppose, nurse, I mustn't touch it."

"Why not? If you feel you'd like it, it would be very good for you."

"With just one glass of my very old Madeira?"

"I don't think it would hurt you."

"In that case I suppose we should countermand the grilled sole?"

"I don't say that, Mr Barnes. Have it cooked, and then see how you feel."

"Well, nurse, I'll be guided by you," said Mr Barnes meekly.

But his voice was stronger this evening. It was the first time for many days that he had shown any interest in food. And the old-bottled Madeira had been opened three days before and was in consequence at its best.

Mr Barnes had the turtle-soup, and the grilled sole, and just four glasses of the Madeira. He slept eight hours without a break that night. He was better and brighter next morning. The doctor was pleased with him. And from that point onwards he advanced rapidly towards

complete recovery. In fact, in six weeks he was able to accept an invitation to a memorable dinner. "Memorable" was the word that Barnes himself used to describe it.

It was a dinner of only four people, the Robertsons entertaining Mr and Mrs Barnes in celebration of the recovery of Barnes and the restoration of complete amity. Mr Robertson took more care to make that dinner perfect than some will to make themselves perfect. It was such a dinner as one epicure might give to another—brief but exquisite.

When the servants were out of the room, and they were drinking the '78—one of only five remaining, I grieve to say—Mr Robertson rose in his place and said with a pleasant smile :

"It's old-fashioned to propose a toast, but please forgive it. I won't make a speech, but give my toast in two words, To Friendship ! "

All stood up to drink, and as Lucy Barnes subsided into her place again, she said to her host :

"Thanks. That was most frightfully nice of you."

After dinner they all played bridge (infamously) and greatly enjoyed it.

And all through the evening the word pony was never once used by anybody. There was not even a tacit implication that there was such an animal, or ever had been, or ever could be.

When in their turn shortly afterwards the Barnes couple invited the Robertson couple to dinner, Tom Barnes, aged fourteen, felt it his duty to issue a word of warning to his father.

"I suppose," said Tom, "it's all right—this getting so thick with the Robertsons again, but don't forget that he did you in the eye over that pony."

But his advice—it happens sometimes to the best of advice—was not well received. He was told that a boy just out of the nursery would do better not to pass comments on a man who was not only much older than he was, but also a far finer man than Tom could ever hope to be. Mr Robertson had never cheated anybody in his life and was incapable of any attempt to cheat. He had made a perfectly natural mistake, for which he had expressed his regret and made full reparation. (Here perhaps Mr Barnes wandered into the region of overstatement.) And if Tom failed in any way to show a proper respect for Mr Robertson, then Tom would be given some sound reasons to remember his manners in the future.

In fact, Tom, as he afterwards stated to an intimate friend, "got it in the neck."

It was another successful dinner. Mr Robertson expressed the warmest appreciation of the Madeira, and Mr Barnes, who had inherited a well-stocked cellar from his father, with Madeira as a principal feature, sent round a case of the wine with his compliments to Mr Robertson on the following morning.

The old relations were resumed. Once more the two men travelled to and from the City together. And if it happened to be raining when they met on the platform Mr Barnes never failed to observe that it was nice weather for the

ducks, and Mr Robertson always greeted this witty remark with an appreciative smile.

They played golf together frequently, and their renewed friendship stood even this strain. They sometimes were rather cross with their caddies. Mr Barnes once said that if on that particular day a stone-blind, one-armed imbecile offered him a stroke a hole he would not dare to play it. Mr Robertson on his off-day was equally vehement in self-depreciation. But they never quarrelled with one another. Never!

It seemed all right—quite all right. But then they decided to go down to the Derby together.

They did not take their wives with them. Annie Robertson disliked crowds. Lucy Barnes had been to the Derby once, and found it full, dusty, and detestable. So the two ladies were left to spend the day together. But the men did take with them a hamper that provided a sufficient margin for hospitality to the City friends they would probably encounter. They travelled in Mr Robertson's larger car, and Tilling (who, it will be remembered, had six years' racing-stable experience) drove them. It was a glorious morning. They made an early start and in the first five minutes the trouble began.

"Two months ago," said George William Barnes, "I little thought that I should see the Derby run this year."

"Two months ago, to be frank," said James Robert Robertson, "I never thought you'd be alive for it. You remember that afternoon when I came round to see you?"

"I do. I remember it to your credit. A man

who has the moral courage to own up to an error, and to express his regret for it, always has my respect."

"Glad to have your respect, George, but at the same time I don't want to get it by a misapprehension. I admitted no error——"

"You said distinctly, 'We all make mistakes.'"

"If you'd kindly allow me to speak, I admitted no error because in the matter in dispute I had committed none. What I said was in reply to the apology which came from you. You said 'Let bygones be bygones,' and if that was not asking me to overlook a past offence on your part, then the English language has no meaning."

"You may choose to put that complexion on it, but you know as well as I do that nothing was further from my thoughts. I remember the incident perfectly."

"Do you? Then that takes away your last excuse. If you'd been light-headed at the time I would have understood it."

"My temperature was under normal."

"Apparently it isn't now. Why can't you listen to sense? The day after our quarrel I saw that pony of mine trotting along the road without a thing the matter with him, and the gipsy who was driving him wouldn't let him go under fifteen pounds."

"Are you really as simple as all that? Don't you know that a clever horse-coper can often doctor a lame animal so that he'll look all right for an hour or two, and in that hour or two he sells him to some mug or other. The wonder is you didn't buy him."

"You can be as obstinate and thick-headed as you like, but there's no need to be offensive. It was tactless enough of you to raise the subject at all—absolutely spoiling our day."

"Oh, very good," said George. "I'm sure I've no anxiety to trespass any further on your hospitality. Stop the car at the next railway-station and I'll go back by train, and I'm damned sorry I ever came."

"As you please," said Mr Robertson coldly.

There was plenty of traffic on the road and for a time the car had perforce to proceed slowly. For nearly a quarter of an hour neither of the men spoke. But it gave them plenty of leisure to think.

What George thought was that he simply dared not go back to Lucy and tell her that he had once more quarrelled with James over that infernal old pony. It was not merely that Lucy would be angry with him, though she certainly would. She would also be extremely amused. And that was unendurable. It might even be that the story of the happy day at Epsom might get abroad. At all costs things must be put right. He would have to pocket his pride and apologize. He cleared his throat and was on the point of beginning the apology. But James Robert Robertson, who had possibly been pursuing a similar line of thought, got in first.

"Look here, George," said James. "I'm afraid I rather lost my temper just now and said a lot of things I shouldn't have said. I'm sorry and I hope you'll overlook it."

"With all the pleasure in the world," said George, extending his large hand. "For that

matter I was very much to blame myself, and I hope you'll overlook that too."

"Certainly," said James. "This is as it should be. Now I'll tell you what I propose. We are both of us men of decided opinions and strong will. You'll probably never change your mind about that pony, nor shall I. What we must do is to agree to drop the subject. And I'll tell you what I'll do. Have you backed anything yet?"

"No. I'm waiting. According to the papers the favourite's the only horse in the race. But look at the price. I'm not touching it."

"And I'm not buying money either. I'm going to put the ten pounds you paid me for that pony on the best outsider I can get. If it loses, it's my loss. If it wins, we divide up—fifty-fifty. How's that?"

"Extremely generous of you. I accept with pleasure."

Their mild flutters on minor races had no success, but they lunched admirably and Tilling, who waited on them, ventured on a word to his master.

"You'll excuse me, sir," he said, "but I've met with one or two of my old friends and had a word with them. There's a horse—Tremolo by Musician out of Quakeress—that they think something of. If he's fretted and messed about at the gate he'll be no good—he'll be dancing when he ought to be running. But if he gets away nicely they say he can win. The price is tempting too. It was better, but you can get thirty still."

"That's our horse," said Robertson with conviction.

"I'm entirely with you," said Barnes.

They put their money on at once and were only just in time to get the price that Tilling had mentioned.

The race was uneventful. At Tattenham Corner Tremolo had the lead and never lost it. He won by over a length and the favourite was not even placed.

Robertson and Barnes, with £150 apiece to come to them, felt joyous and convinced that they had little more to learn about racing. Some of their friends gathered round and drank to their health in Mr Robertson's champagne, but expressed a lowly opinion of them.

"It's a case of fool's luck," said Mr Smithers. "I've studied the thing from A to Z, and I've not found a winner to-day yet. You chaps go at it blind and pocket three hundred pounds. Tell me now, what made you do it?"

"We saw the horse in the paddock," said Robertson complacently, "and we fancied the looks of him."

"Quite so," said Barnes. "If ever a horse had winner stamped all over him, Tremolo had. Can't think how you wise men came to miss it."

"Well, he'd no business to win, anyhow," said Smithers. "He's no particular class, and a bad-tempered brute into the bargain. Fool's luck, that's what it is."

Robertson and Barnes did not wait to tempt fortune further. They were happy, they were

also weary, and they both slept placidly in the car during the greater part of the journey home.

Barnes was deposited at his house and Robertson proceeded home. He found Annie somewhat dejected.

"Perfectly rotten bridge this afternoon," said Annie. "I never held a card the whole time and went down 12*s.* 9*d.* Lucy did nearly as badly. I shouldn't mind so much if I'd lost to people who could play. I don't suppose you've done much better either. Cook says an outsider won. I don't know where she got it from."

"Yes, Tremolo won. I thought he would. I backed him, and so did dear old George—on my advice, but that is strictly between ourselves."

"James, you didn't! How did you?"

"Well, I saw the horse and I liked the looks of him. That was all there was to it. And if you happen to want a new hat you can go up to town to-morrow and buy one. Three, if you like. And what I want now is a whisky-and-soda with a large lump of ice in it, and a hot bath to follow."

"James," said Annie, "I think you're the most truly wonderful man that ever lived."

"Not at all," said James modestly, with the whisky decanter in his hand.

A SURE THING

I

THE little old lady stepped off the bus at the corner. She was not shabby. But perhaps an expert feminine eye could have detected that she took great pains not to be shabby. She carried a music-case in which were a few colour-prints.

She had only a short distance to walk to the shop. Yes—there it was with the name Sittingwell over the entrance. In the advertisement in the *Collectors' Monthly Monitor*, he had described himself as Mr R. Evan Sittingwell, and old colour-prints were among the articles which he professed to be anxious to purchase at their full value.

The windows of the shop were dignified even to austerity. There was no vulgar profusion. In the window on the left of the entrance there was a single small oil painting, a Dutch interior, in a deep gilt frame, against a background of black velvet. The old lady recognized that it was extremely good velvet, and wondered what terrific price Mr R. Evan Sittingwell must have paid for it. In the other window, against a similar background, were two exquisite silver-prints. But from these the old lady averted her eyes swiftly, for they were nudes.

She entered and trod on a very thick and very soft carpet, patternless, and of a purple hue. It made the old lady almost ashamed that she had actual feet and was treading on it. The shop was rather small and square in shape. You knew it was a shop, because on the left it had an actual counter. It was an abbreviated counter of rosewood, and half of it was occupied by a screened desk. In the centre of the room was a table on which were copies of *The Times* and *The Morning Post* neatly folded, and a cut-glass bowl of apricot-tinted roses. There were easy-chairs. There was not a picture to be seen. But through slightly-parted curtains one caught a glimpse of a long room with top-lighting. Doubtless it was in there that the pictures were shown. There was also a rosewood door, closed and looking inexorable.

The old lady approached the counter, and a young man emerged from behind the screened desk. He was very well dressed, with very smooth hair and a pleasantly deferential manner.

"Good morning, madam! What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"Oh—er—yes—good morning!" said the old lady, rather vaguely. "I saw the advertisement and—but are you Mr Sittingwell?"

"I am not, madam, though up to a certain extent I am empowered to act for him."

"I should rather have liked to see Mr Sittingwell himself."

"I am afraid, madam, that Mr Sittingwell is rather busy this morning, and I should hardly venture to interrupt him without some reason.

Perhaps you would kindly state what your business is."

"I have here sixteen colour-prints. I wish to dispose of them, and I understand that Mr Sittingwell is anxious to buy such things. They really belong to my sister, but she is an invalid and unable to bring them herself. However, I have her written authorization and——"

"Yes, yes," said the young man. "I'm quite sure that would be all right. Could you tell me anything about the prints?"

"They belonged to my grandfather. There are sixteen of them—all dealing with hunting or racing subjects. Some of them, I know, were given to him by the artist."

"Well, madam, I think the best thing I can do is to take the prints through to Mr Sittingwell."

She drew the packet of prints, carefully wrapped in white paper, from the music-case, and handed them over to him. He asked her to be seated in one of those luxurious easy-chairs, handed her a newspaper, and said he would not keep her waiting long.

He tapped gently at the inexorable rosewood door, paused, then entered. The old lady was left alone. She fixed her eyes on the advertisement page before her, but her attention was not on it. Emily's last words to her had been that the prints were not to be sold under eight pounds ten shillings. Suppose Mr Sittingwell offered five pounds, it would be tempting. If he went as far as seven pounds ten shillings it would be almost impossible to resist. The money was needed.

It seemed to her that she waited twenty minutes. Really less than five minutes had passed when the door opened and Mr Sittingwell entered. He was a tall, rather scholarly-looking man of forty-five. Behind him came the young man carrying the prints loose in the paper in which they had been wrapped. Mr Sittingwell never carried anything.

"I am sorry, madam," said Mr Sittingwell, in his rich and sonorous voice, "but these prints of yours do not interest me. You see, I deal principally with the museums and with wealthy collectors who are advised by experts. I'm afraid they wouldn't look at anything of this kind."

"Then are they worth nothing?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. They are worth nothing to me because my own *clientèle* wouldn't buy them. But if you are anxious to sell them, I might perhaps be able to help you."

"They are not really mine. They belong to my sister, an invalid. She was certainly anxious to sell them, and your advertisement was really what made me bring them here."

"I see. I see. I'm very sorry it misled you. I had hoped that the beginning of it made it clear that I confine myself to objects of some importance."

"Yes, but my sister and I did not know whether they were important or not."

"Of course not. Why should you?" said Mr Sittingwell genially. He turned to the young man. "Mr Sharp," he said, "just run through those prints and see if you can suggest a likely purchaser."

Mr Sharp retired with the prints to the desk. Mr Sittingwell offered appropriate observations on the weather. The old lady expressed admiration of the apricot-coloured roses. Mr Sittingwell expressed regret that so many of these new roses had no scent, and then Mr Sharp came forward.

"Well, sir," said Mr Sharp, "as far as I can tell, the only dealer who would be likely to make an offer for them would be Belton, in the Tottenham Court Road. He's in touch with the small collectors who don't want anything expensive."

"I believe you're right. You can do those prints up, Mr Sharp, and give me one of our cards."

He also jerked a thumb in the direction of the bowl of roses, and Mr Sharp understood.

Mr Sittingwell took out his fountain-pen.

"I'll just write a word or two on this card," he said, "and if you show that to Belton he will probably give you rather better treatment than if you came with no introduction. May I trouble you for your name?"

"I am Miss Dennis. It is really most kind of you to take this trouble, seeing that the prints are of no use to you."

Mr Sittingwell laughed pleasantly. "Ah," he said, "but I feel rather guilty about that advertisement of mine. It has given you a lot of trouble for nothing." He wrote on the card: "Introducing Miss Dennis, who has some prints to show you." She again thanked him and put the card in her music-case.

"If you are fond of roses," said Mr Sitting-

well, " I should like to show you rather a charming little picture I bought this morning. Have you a minute to spare ? I can't tell you the name of the artist because I don't know it, though I've made a guess. But it's a beautiful little flower piece."

He took her through the curtains into the long room and pointed to the picture on an easel. She did not like it very much. It did not seem to her to be conscientious. It was as if the man did not care whether his painting of roses was like roses or not. But at a little distance the colour and design were pleasing. Miss Dennis said it was so interesting—such a new way of looking at things.

When they came back into the shop Mr Sharp had packed the prints and put them back in the music-case. In one hand he held the apricot-coloured roses wrapped in white paper. Mr Sittingwell presented them. " I hope," he said, " you will allow me to send these flowers by you to your invalid sister. I have been an invalid myself."

She was still thanking him as he accompanied her to the door. When she had gone he turned to Mr Sharp.

" Get me Belton on the telephone at once."

II

Belton's shop was very different from Mr Sittingwell's. Here there was no air of wealth combined with good taste. His windows were crammed with all manner of antiques. His shop.

which was small, was also crammed, and not particularly clean. But then Mr Belton himself was not particularly clean. He wore a rather shabby tweed suit and a lovesick neck-tie. He looked at the card which Miss Dennis presented.

He examined the prints very carefully, occasionally stuffing a magnifying glass into his eye. He picked up a piece of dirty white paper from the floor and made calculations in pencil upon it. Then he turned to Miss Dennis.

"Well, mum," he said, "I can't be both buyer and seller. What do you want for this little lot?"

The old lady was on the point of saying eight pounds, but restrained herself.

"I want," she said, "as much as you can possibly afford to give me."

"Very well. Have it your own way. Sometimes I'll get a dozen customers for this sort of thing in a week. Sometimes I won't see one for months. There's one of these prints I shouldn't take less than three pounds for. There are others I should be glad to sell for three shillings. I don't want to do any haggling and wasting time. I'll tell you my top figure at once. I'll give you a pound apiece all through, sixteen pounds. Take it or leave it."

Miss Dennis nearly gasped. Sixteen pounds! Double what Emily had demanded—and Emily was always sanguine! Just for one moment she wondered if she could work Mr Belton up to twenty. But there was a final look on Mr Belton's face, and she did not venture. Mr Sittingwell had not wanted the prints at all.

The young man had implied that Belton was the only chance.

"Then I suppose I must accept that," she said. She tried to speak mournfully and to look sad. But she was full of joy and she was no actress.

Belton handed over sixteen pounds in Treasury notes. And when you saw Belton's Treasury notes you understood why lucre is called filthy.

Miss Dennis took a bus all the way back to Notting Hill. She had intended to walk half of it, but success justified the expenditure, and she was anxious to get the glad news to Emily as soon as possible.

There was great jubilation in the tiny flat that the two old ladies occupied. Emily declared that her sister was a born saleswoman, and that a windfall like that did her more good than a gallon of medicine. It was an occasion that had to be celebrated. Their evening meal was so sumptuous that it bore points of resemblance to dinner. They even permitted themselves the extravagance of a bottle of reasonably sound claret. And I can tell you that by the time the two old ladies had finished with it there was not much more than half a bottle left.

"And we owe it all to Mr Sittingwell," said Miss Dennis. "People seem to think that all dealers are rapacious and dishonest; but Mr Sittingwell has the heart of a gentleman. He did not want the prints himself, as they were not up to his standard, but he could not have been more kindly and helpful, or taken more trouble if he had been going to make a profit out of it."

" And those lovely roses," said Emily, indicating the flowers on the table.

" Quite so. I really think we must drink to his health."

They did.

" And if," said Miss Dennis, " we ever get a chance to recommend Mr Sittingwell, we must certainly do so."

" Most certainly," said Emily.

The picture of the kindliness of the dealer and the happiness that it brought is so charming that it seems a pity to spoil it. But however——

III

That smooth-haired gentleman, Mr Albert Sharp, had very recently married, and at present he told his wife, Imogen, everything. (He broke himself of the habit later, but that has nothing to do with this story.) Imogen was rather beautiful in the vampire style and dressed the part. In reality she was both moral and practical.

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, Albert and Imogen sat out on the verandah of their little house at Streatham, drinking China tea and smoking cigarettes. Imogen looked dangerous in yellow, Albert was not the beautifully dressed young man that he was required to be in business hours. He wore a reach-me-down sports coat, a pair of well-matured grey flannel trousers, and tennis shoes that were doing overtime. He said, in reply to her :

" How does old Sittingwell make his money ?

Well, that's a question that wants more than one answer. First place, he knows his job. He's made himself as good a judge of anything in the picture line as there is in this country. I know a bit myself—couldn't keep my berth if I didn't. But what the boss don't know ain't worth the trouble of learning. Second place, in the course of years he's gradually got together a very good connexion. Most of the big collectors deal with him. If he's got anything to sell he hasn't far to look for the market. You might almost say, if it don't seem fanciful, that they trusted him. His prices are steep, but his goods really are the goods. Third place, he always buys his stuff very cheap."

"That last is a matter of luck," said Imogen. "You've got to pay what you're asked or go without. Now those lemon soles we're having this evening were—but go on."

"There's no luck about it with our Mr Sittingwell. He's made a science of it. It's a sure thing. He works on the seller till the poor man is ready to take any price for his stuff and glad to get it."

"How?" asked Imogen.

"He's got more ways than one. I'll tell you the one he used the other day. He's used it often before. I play a small part in it myself, and I'm about word-perfect by now. I must tell you that the boss never advertises that he wants to sell anything. But he does advertise regularly that he wants to buy a lot of things. Anybody who had got some of those things, knew nothing about them, and read that advertisement, would

feel that if he didn't take the stuff round to Mr Sittingwell he'd be missing a gold mine.

"Well, an old lady came into the shop with a little lot of prints—sixteen of them. She didn't know anything. I saw those prints. They were in perfect condition—margins untouched—just about as fresh and bright as the day they were issued. Old ladies take care of their things. There was a set of six among them. That set in average condition never fetches less than thirty pounds. This set was particularly fine, and would have fetched more. The other prints were all first-class and easy sellers. I'd have been glad to offer her fifty pounds for the lot myself."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because I should have got the sack for it, and I don't lose four hundred every year for the sake of fifty once. What do you think the boss offered her?"

"Five, perhaps."

"Oh, no. If he'd offered her anything, she'd have known he wanted them. If he wanted them, she'd have known they were good. She wouldn't have closed till she got another opinion—perhaps two or three opinions—and if he did buy them in the end, it would have been with all the cream skimmed off the deal. No, the boss told her that he did not want them, and would make no offer of any kind for them, for they were not the class that collectors would even look at."

"But in that case he never got them."

"Wait a minute, dear. That brings the old

lady off the roof and right down into the basement. She's tamed. Her heart's broken. She's brought into the condition when she's easy to handle. All this time the boss had been kind and polite. As if sorry for her disappointment, he said that one of the smaller men might possibly give her something for the prints, and asked me to look through them and to see if I could suggest a possible buyer. I knew my part. I said the only man at all likely was Belton. So he gave her a card of introduction to Belton. He also gave her a bunch of flowers—oh, he's hot stuff, is the boss. Off she went as full of gratitude to him as an egg is of meat. Then the boss telephoned Belton and gave him his instructions.

"You see, Belton works for the boss at five per cent. on the profit. Belton bought the prints for sixteen quid. They were back in our shop the same afternoon. Of course it was a small deal—not like handling an important picture. Still, the boss has already made sixty clear out of those prints and he's still got one left to sell. No luck about it. It's a sure thing."

"Sure thing, is it?" said Imogen. "Dirty swindle is what I should call it."

"Business is business—and, I say, don't you mention a word of that to anybody."

THE THIEF OF THIEVES

I

TALENT AND GENIUS

I WENT into the bar soon after twelve that day. I hoped to see Steve, and to talk over things, for it was quite time I began to work again. Meanwhile I had my breakfast—a couple of olives and three dry Martinis. I was never a hog for food.

In came the small stranger, peering round with his little blinking eyes. His clothes were somewhat seedy and had not been made for him, but he was not in rags. I think if Albert, behind the bar, had caught sight of him he'd have got his orders to quit.

The little chap—he was not much over four feet—had got a small portfolio and went along the bar trying to sell photographs of London. I thought to myself that showed some enthusiasm. You see, that bar has its own special patrons—mostly high-class crooks, and a few on the outside fringe of the film industry, and an occasional flavouring of C.I.D. At any rate, we were all baked pretty hard. Most of us were trying to brace ourselves up to be able to face luncheon and the other strenuous work of the day. And the chance of selling a photograph of the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey for

the home mantelpiece to anybody in our crowd was not worth long and studious consideration.

Some of them took no notice of him whatever; some of them told him to get out. As I watched him, an idea came to me. I crooked my finger, and up he came smiling. Matter of fact, I never saw him when he didn't look good-tempered and happy.

"Nice views of some interesting features of London," he said. "All my own work. Moderate prices."

"Yes," I said. "I heard you say that before. Where's your camera?"

"You can't eat cameras," he said. "I've had to borrow money on it. When I've sold these interesting photographs, I get the camera out again. I've not done much here, though one of those gentlemen gave me a shilling, but I've never tried this place before. Americans are my best market."

"Could you go and photograph a house for me? You'd have to get permission. You probably would get it owing to your small size and your smile."

"Ah, yes, yes! If the terms were——"

"They are. Want a drink?"

"Not to deceive you, sir, and recognizing you to be a gentleman, I will say plainly that I should like a glass of bitter with a dash of gin in it."

The little beggar was so quaint and so good-humoured that he even put me in a good temper.

"Albert," I said, "I've got a little man down

here who's thirsty. Put a double gin into a pint tankard and fill up with Scotch ale."

He did, and I handed it down to Mr Smiler. He raised the tankard towards me in salutation, and then, I will not say that he drank the contents, but he emptied them into himself. The whole lot vanished in one pull. I have no idea where it went to. I'm inclined to think that he must have had hollow legs.

"And very nice, too," he said. "And now, sir, with reference to that house which you wish to have photographed."

"There's no more to say at the moment. You be here to-morrow at the same time. If I'm here I'll give you your instructions. If I'm not, you'll know there's nothing doing."

Off he went, and Steve, who had just come in, came up to me. Steve is a nice man. He is employed professionally as a diamond cutter. He has been in the same place for seven years, and during those seven years he has never cheated his employer out of one farthing. But Steve rather likes to put in a little overtime occasionally on his own account. He came quickly to the point.

"Well, Peter," he said, "got anything in my line?"

"There may be."

"There should be. You've been living in idleness for the last six weeks and spending your money in a silly way, I make no doubt."

"Quite right."

"Well, if you've got anything, what is it?"

I turned to Albert behind the bar.

"Albert," I said, "send a couple of dry Martinis over to the little table in the window. I've got weary of standing up."

So I took Steve off to the little table by the window where one could speak more freely, and gave him the idea.

"Did you ever hear of Sir Evan Battenclough?" I asked.

"Well, yes. At least, I know of the Battenclough diamond. Lives somewhere out beyond Edgware, doesn't he?"

"That's it," I said. "Last night or early this morning I had the pleasure of paying for a lot of drinks at a night club, for Battenclough's butler. He's an interesting man. He tells me the oldest boy is getting married in a week's time. The bride lives at St Albans and they will be married from her father's house. Battenclough and his wife will drive down to the wedding, dine there, and drive back home afterwards."

"I see. You think she'll wear the Battenclough diamond."

"I'm pretty certain she won't. It's to be a very quiet affair. There won't be more than eight or ten of them at that dinner. The butler's doing a little entertaining on his own account that night while his boss is away. Puts thoughts into your head, doesn't it?"

"What's the house like? Can you manage it?"

"I can't say. I'm sending a man down to photograph it to-morrow for me. You may have seen him just now. He's a simple little

beggar and will do what he's told. He's quite a good photographer. Rather a quaint bit of character, too. I'll back him to get in where the regular professional photographer would be thrown out."

"Well, don't expect too much. That diamond will have to be cut into four. It's a lot of work for me and a terrible risk. I'm not at all sure that I like it."

"If you don't like it you can leave it."

"And I wouldn't say that either. But you were always a man who expected too much. There will have to be reasonable limits."

He always talks like that before we do a deal. Still, I want him and he wants me. I'm the only man he deals with, and he'd never dare to get the stuff for himself. However, with the help of another Martini we fixed up our engagement.

The little man kept his appointment next morning, still smiling, and by way of seeing if he spoke the truth I took him to the place where he said he'd pledged his camera. Everything was correct. The camera was pledged for the exact sum that he told me—ten shillings. It was a good machine and he could have got more for it, but, as he explained, the more he got on it the longer it stopped in. I gave him his instructions and sent him off by train.

Next morning he turned up with six good photographs. One of them showed the approach to the house, and that was useful. Another showed the front of the house. It had a heavy pillared porch which was really almost like an invitation. I felt that Sir Evan might as well have

done his diamond up in a registered package and sent it to me by post.

The little man seemed to have had quite a good time at the Battencloughs'. Not only did he get the permission he wanted, but they gave him a good square meal in the servants' hall as well. He was able to tell me several little things that I wanted to know. I pitched him a yarn that I was collecting photographs of English country houses and that I had not been able to get permission to send a photographer to Battenclough's. But the little man was not at all curious. He seemed to take everything for granted. He lowered two pints with the same ease and rapidity with which he had previously lowered one, so probably both his legs were hollow. And he seemed quite satisfied with the pound that I paid him. He said that he hoped God would bless and prosper me, and off he went. I never asked him his name and he never asked me mine.

Well, the night came. I went out on a little two-seater and parked it out of sight in a field. At half-past eight I was walking round the house. Festivities had begun downstairs, and so far as I could see through one of the basement windows the servants were all there and thoroughly enjoying themselves. So there was no reason to waste time. I shinned up to the top of the porch as quickly as I could, pushed back the catch of the window, and soon found my way to Lady Battenclough's bedroom. Now I do not expect to be believed, but it is the solemn truth that the key had been left in the

safe built into the wall of that room. I had only to open the door. There was plenty of stuff there, but I wasted no time over it. I took the diamond in its little leather case, slipped it into my pocket, and made off. It was without exception the very easiest piece of work I ever did in my life. I was back in my motor-car and on my way home before nine o'clock. I was in rather a hurry to get back, for I had got a lot of hair stuck all over my face, and wanted to be quit of it.

I slowed up as I got into Hendon, and down a side street into the main road came staggering a very little man carrying a very big camera. He was not drunk, but his manner of walking certainly suggested that he had had some. Everything had gone well and I was at peace with all mankind. Also, I was curious to see if he would penetrate my disguise. So I pulled up.

" Want a lift into London ? " I said.

" Thank you very much indeed," he said. " I came into Hendon this afternoon to take photographs of some of my friends here and they pressed me to stay to supper. I'm afraid I've somewhat exceeded. If you would put me down at Cricklewood, that is quite near my house. Thank you very much."

He climbed in and promptly fell on the top of me. I steered him into a seat and put his camera in a safe place for him. He talked all the time I was driving, and I must say that the little beggar kept me amused. I decided that he had not recognized me. He certainly gave no sign of it.

I had no suspicion at all. I took a bath and changed into evening clothes to go on to the night club where I was to meet Steve, and it was only then that I began to go through the pockets of the suit I had been wearing at Edgware. The small leather case with the Battenclough diamond in it was not there. I hunted around, thinking it just possible that it might have fallen out. It was not until I had gone over every inch of the room and over the car in which I had travelled that I came to the conclusion that it had been taken from me.

There was only one man who could have taken it.

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I was ashamed of myself. I tried to think out some story that would save my face which I could dare to tell Steve. Finally I decided not to save my face and to tell him the plain truth. I did.

Steve is, as I think I have already said, a nice man. He does regular work for six hours a day, and he honestly does it. I do not know why. After the six hours he is as good a man to whom to take a stolen diamond as I know, or as you may be able to find. I've often suspected him of spending a good deal of time in thinking, and it may be that I was right. At any rate, when I had finished my story he neither cursed me nor laughed at me.

"Yes," he said, "long ago I saw this man would arrive one day—the man who makes it by stealing from thieves. He's on velvet, he is. He has no fear of the police and need have none.

No doubt there are plenty of people about who would put a knife or a bullet through him on sight, even if they knew they had to swing for it afterwards. But he plays a lone hand, has no accomplices, works Europe and America as well as this country, and is not easy to find. He's been at it two years now. The last *coup*—before he had you—was to take five thousand in bank-notes, the numbers of which were not known, from the confidence man who had just got them. I should call him a very clever little man."

"He's a dirty little tyke, and I'll break his neck the next time I see him."

"I don't think you'll see him again. He doesn't want you. He's got what you had. When you've sucked the juice of the orange you don't take any special trouble about the skin. I say the little chap's clever. He takes advantage of his small size to get you and your swell crowd to despise him. He takes advantage of the fact that a thief is never more triumphant and never more careless that when he has just got away with the goods. That's the moment when a baby can play with him. Mind, I don't want to run you down at all. You have your gifts, you've got talent. But that little chap has got genius.

"Just consider. You may be quite certain he knew all about that bar and what sort of a crowd he would find in it. He wanted something which would take him the whole length of the bar, moving not too quickly. So he sold photographs of the Tower of London and such-

like junk. He couldn't be bowled out, mind you. He really could photograph. He really had pawned his camera, and he must have laughed when he did it. He's got his own story quite solid. Of course, the luck was with him in finding you, because you're cleverer than some and make the mistake of thinking you're cleverer than the rest. When you sent him down to Battenclough's place to photograph it he knew all he wanted to know. He'd heard of the Battenclough diamond. He knew of the approaching marriage—it was in all the papers. And from that time forward he played you as an angler plays a fish, and he's got you lying on the bank and gasping your life out."

"I take it, then, that this is not the first time you've come across the little worm?"

"No. I've come on his work, or traces of it, two or three times. Long before that I saw he would happen some day—the man who realized that it was just as easy to steal from the thief as from the mug, and a great deal safer. You look despondent, my friend. Suppose we take a glass of champagne?"

"Suppose we do," I assented. "All the same, that won't alter the impression I've formed that that little blighter, that twopennyworth of tripe, has taken away my nerve and my self-respect and rendered me unfitted for the business. One more shock like this and I shall be driven into the paths of honesty."

II

JAMES JAMES

MR SEPTIMUS MUSGRAVE HURDLE had many advantages. He was well educated and quite good-looking. He was in the early years of what some hold to be the best decade of a man's life—from thirty to forty. He had a charming flat in Mayfair. He was a respected member of a good club. He had some pleasant friends. He had independent means, which he supplemented from time to time by certain activities.

These activities might be described, coarsely, as theft, but more accurately as the racing-and-betting variant of the confidence-trick. Except in so far as these activities were concerned, he was careful to be in all respects absolutely honest. If he found lost property in a cab, he took it to Scotland Yard, politely requesting that, if the article were claimed, the reward might be paid over to the Police Orphanage. He made an accurate income-tax return, except that he described his profits from theft as money earned, I am grieved to say, by the practice of authorship.

He was not known to the police and his finger-prints had never been taken, for he had never been found out. He did not associate with thieves nor understand their slang. He avoided every bar and restaurant where the clever crooks were supposed to foregather. He

never employed any confederate, never trusted anybody, and never said one word to anybody of the *coup* in which he was engaged. He attempted nothing which he could not carry out alone. He had patience and would, if necessary, devote a month or six weeks to gaining the confidence of his victim. He thought out all possibilities and the method by which he would meet them. He was cautious, and more than once had abandoned a *coup*, even though it involved a money loss to himself, when he found that it involved greater risks than he cared to take.

He was not greedy, and his profits for the last three years had averaged only six hundred pounds per annum. His victims were always wealthy men—Americans or Colonials—and most of them would sooner put up with a loss of two or three hundred than confess their folly to the smiling police. Had they lost thousands instead of hundreds, they would not have let their pride prevail over their common sense. And so Mr Hurdle went his way unsuspected and even respected.

He was not without humane qualities. When old Mrs Chrome, who had long been his cook and housekeeper, was compelled by her health to give up work and to go to live with her married daughter, he treated her quite generously. True, he was faced with no very grave domestic problem. It is probably easier for a bachelor to find a housekeeper than for any woman to fill up a domestic vacancy. And it was principally kindliness that led him, though his advertisement demanded the services of a

woman, to engage that curious little man, James James.

James James was absolutely frank. He arrived at ten on the morning that the advertisement appeared.

" I can't give you a personal character. I have a letter from the brother of the gentleman for whom I worked up at Elgin. I was in his service when he died, and had been with him two years. Here's the letter, and it speaks well of me, but the man who wrote it has gone to Canada, and can't see anybody for me."

Mr Hurdle read the letter.

" Well," he said, " the notepaper's stamped with the right address."

" Yes, sir, and it's all correct. But it might not be. And then I'm not everybody's money, because I'm so short, almost a dwarf. I'm a teetotaller, a good valet, and a very good cook. I'm quite sure that I could do all the work of this flat better than most women. All I want is a chance. I've been out of work and living on my savings for the last six weeks, and it can't go on. Give me a chance and you'll never regret it."

" What do you mean by a chance ? "

" Let me put the kitchen and your bedroom in order, go over the suit you wore last night, and cook lunch and dinner for you. If you're dissatisfied at the end of the day, throw me out, sir, and pay me nothing. If you're satisfied, take me for a week on appro. Then, after that, if I deserve it, engage me regularly."

" Right," said Hurdle. " Get on with it."

In thirty seconds James James had his coat off and was very quiet and busy. At luncheon he served a *soufflé* of fish, a ragout of mutton with *lyonnaise* potatoes, and cheese fritters. It was made entirely from the cold remnants he had found in the kitchen, and was excellently cooked and served. Mrs Chrome, even in her sunniest days, had never come within a mile of it.

"I shall be out this afternoon," said Mr Hurdle. "For dinner I shall want simply a sole Colbert and a savoury omelette. At seven-thirty. Go out and buy what you want. I'll tell the porter to let you in. Here's ten shillings."

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In the afternoon Mr Hurdle found from consulting the file of *The Times* at his club that a gentleman of the name that James had given had died on the date given at Elgin. None the less, he set various traps for James in the course of the week, and in every case the bait was left untouched. James got his engagement, and Mr Hurdle congratulated himself that he had stumbled on a perfect treasure. Besides, the little man was always smiling and happy, as if he enjoyed his work.

It was at this time that Mr Hurdle was engaged with Mr Albert Child.

Hurdle made it his practice to lunch or dine from time to time at one or other of the hotels most patronized by wealthy strangers. Sometimes he overheard things that were useful. Sometimes he put a question to a waiter.

On this occasion he noted an elderly man seated at a table not far from him and in front of

him. The elderly man was dressed in brand-new clothes of unmistakable American cut. He had before him two large dishes, one containing more mashed potatoes than anybody could possibly want, and the other fried sausages to an equal superfluity. By his side he had a silver tankard, a bottle of the highest-priced champagne on the list, and a large bottle of stout. From these he poured sometimes one and sometimes the other into the tankard.

His procedure was so unusual that Mr Hurdle felt himself justified in putting a question. Pointing with his thumb he said to the waiter: "Do you know who that freak is?"

"Yes, sir," said the waiter confidentially. "That's Mr Albert Child. Staying here. Comes, I believe, from the wilder parts of America. Very wealthy gentleman, I understand."

"Why don't somebody teach him how to live?" asked Mr Hurdle.

"Ah, yes, sir. Why indeed, sir? Perfectly shocking," said the waiter sympathetically.

Mr Albert Child seemed absolutely unperturbed. He wanted sausages and mashed potatoes and he had got them, and his appetite was excellent. He was indulging for the first time in his life in a drink of which he had heard on board the boat, known as the King's Peg. His complexion, including his bald head, deepened rapidly from a pale pink to a strong magenta. Mr Hurdle felt that here was an absolute present for him. The only thing that troubled him was that it seemed impossible that anybody so rich, so bovine, and so completely

innocent had not already fallen into the hands of the wicked.

Next morning Mr Hurdle was in the hotel lounge at ten. It seemed unlikely that anybody who had lunched in so injudicious a way on the day before would be out and about before eleven, but at ten minutes past ten Mr Albert Child, with his hat on, came blowing along the central passage and bestowed unnecessary *largesse* on the waiter who opened the outer glass door for him. Mr Hurdle quickly followed, but this time he drew blank. He could not find a suitable opportunity to carry out his favourite *coup*.

The next morning he was more successful. As Mr Child was entering the booking-hall of the Tube station, Mr Hurdle, in the act of thrusting a note-case into his breastpocket, pushed by him. The note-case fell on the floor, but Mr Hurdle went on, apparently oblivious.

"Hi, you!" called Mr Child. Hurdle turned round.

"You dropped that," said Mr Child, tapping the case with his stick.

It might conceivably have been done more graciously, but Mr Child did not cultivate the graces. Hurdle flew at the note-case, picked it up, took one glance inside, and then grasped Mr Child warmly by the hand.

"My dear sir," he said. "How can I thank you? I wouldn't have lost that case for five hundred pounds." The total value of the case and contents was at the time three-and-sixpence. "It is, of course—you are obviously a

gentleman—impossible to offer you any reward. But if there is any charity in which you are interested——"

"There is not. I am not interested in any charity. I disapprove of charity."

"At any rate, sir," said Hurdle, "you must give me an opportunity to thank you a little better. Are you going anywhere in any great hurry?"

"I was going to the British Museum."

"It will be there to-morrow, you know."

"So I should imagine."

"Do just step across the road and have a drink with me. You have no idea what a kindness you have bestowed on me. Let me at least have an opportunity of thanking you properly."

"I don't mind," said Mr Child. "Matter of fact, it's rather lonesome at my hotel. If I speak to anybody it's like as if they were up in the stars talking down to me in the mud. I take it this is not a friendly country."

"Friendly? Oh, I hope so. But we have not got the natural easy manners that, if I may say so, distinguish yourself. Come along, then."

They went along. Under the gentle influence of two-thirds of a bottle of champagne Mr Child became both confidential and boastful. He had money, he said, money to burn. The diamonds in the rings on his shop-soiled hands were not flash, but the real thing. He came from the far West and he had made his money in real estate. Further explanations showed that his father had bought virgin land for a song and he himself had sold it as things developed.

"I don't brag," said Mr Child, "but I consider I'm as good as the next man."

"And a good deal better in many cases," said Hurdle.

"Very well. But why is it that you're the first man that's said a friendly thing to me since I stepped ashore at Liverpool? I've been open with you. Would you mind telling me how you make your living?"

"Certainly," said Hurdle. "I make it by backing horses."

"Never been at a horse-race in my life," said Mr Child. "Never made a bet in my life. Never drank champagne in my life till we were leaving New York behind us."

"Ah, you've got Prohibition, haven't you?"

"Prohibish nothing. I got a cellar at home stacked up with rye whisky enough to last my time. Enough for a man to swim in. But this champagne, mind, hasn't come my way before. I like it. But tell me, if you make money by backing horses, how do you know they're going to win?"

"I don't always," said Hurdle, laughing. "But I study the form and I spend a lot of money on getting good information. I don't often make a mistake. I'll prove it to you. Put a pound on Beetle for the three-thirty race to-day. The price is short. You may not get better than threes. But it'll show you whether I know anything or not."

"I don't know how to do it," confessed Mr Child. "Perhaps you'd take the pound and——"

"Oh, no, that doesn't matter, a trifle like that.

I'll 'phone a bookmaker. Meet me here to-morrow at this time and I shall expect to have something for you. You won't mind if I rush off. The sooner I get on the better the price will be."

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For a week after that the two men met every day. Mr Child made four bets under the direction of Mr Hurdle, never staking more than one pound. According to Hurdle, who paid over, Mr Child had won the first and second, lost the third, and won the fourth. Mr Child was eleven pounds to the good and was beginning to think that there might be something in this horse-racing. Hurdle also took Child to see the sights of London, flattered him grossly, and gave him much good advice—as, for instance, hints on the propriety of using rather more soap and rather fewer diamonds for the hands.

But at the end of a week Hurdle, patient man though he was, had had enough of it. Every day he took a risk that Mr Child might fall into the hands of other operators. He decided it was time to finish the thing off. And for that purpose he invited Mr Child, who was a gross eater, to consume a dozen oysters and a porterhouse steak at a City restaurant.

Luncheon lasted a long time. At the end of it, when the coffee had been brought, the two men were alone in the room save for waiters and a little old lady who was reading the current number of the *Sunday at Home*. Hurdle had quite cleverly led Mr Child up to the right point.

"Look here," said Child. "In this week I've made twelve pounds by betting and lost one. You've probably done the same. Can you live as you live on eleven pounds a week?"

"The answer to that," said Hurdle, "is that I've not done the same. It's true that I backed the horses that you backed. But I backed them for fifty and a hundred pounds."

"Then why didn't you make me back them for the same?"

"It's obvious. We might have lost. What would you have thought of me then? Why, man, if you'd given me in charge I couldn't have blamed you. Just a pound for amusement with a small bookmaker was all right. Personally I never bet with a bookmaker."

"No? Why not?"

"Can't afford it. These bookmakers leave a good deal too much behind them when they die. That means they pinch the prices. I bet in my own club, and the club's the bookmaker. It's a mutual business. Every year there's a balance sheet and a distribution of dividends, and I get the right price, too. I can put a couple of hundred on a six to one chance, and win, and be certain to pick up twelve hundred within ten minutes of the result coming through on the tape. But of course I'm a professional backer. You're just doing it for fun."

"Suppose I wasn't. Could you make me a member of that club?"

"I couldn't even propose you, not having known you five years, as the rules require."

"What's the name of the club?"

" I can't even tell you that, and I'll show you why I can't. In this country they leave you alone if you're betting on credit, but they come down on you if you're betting for cash. For various reasons, some of which you can possibly guess, all the transactions of this club are cash transactions. We've not been raided yet and we don't want to be."

" I see," said Mr Child, who didn't. " Well, you needn't have been so nervous about me and my money. I have some. If I lost two hundred and fifty pounds on a single bet I could stand it. You wouldn't hear me squeal. See here." He drew out his pocket-book and opened it. " Look at that wad. I've not counted it recently, but there'll be over four hundred there. Is there any reason why I shouldn't hand you two hundred and fifty and ask you to put it on the next good thing ? You could act for me, I suppose ? "

" Well," said Hurdle reluctantly, " I could."

And in the end Mr Hurdle accepted two hundred and fifty pounds in notes of various values, for which he gave a receipt with a false name and address. The money was to be invested in a race to be run two days later on a horse which at present figured in the betting at thirty to one.

" Thirty to one," said Mr Child. " Seven thousand five hundred to come if I win."

" That's right," said Hurdle.

The old lady who had been reading the *Sunday at Home* now got up and left. She entered a taxi and drove to the mansion where

Mr Hurdle had his flat, and there she had about three minutes' talk with Mr James James.

When Mr Hurdle returned home that night and retired to rest he had two hundred and fifty pounds in notes in a case under his pillow. In the morning James James brought him his cup of tea, his letters, and the morning paper, and drew back the curtains. Mr Hurdle drank his tea.

When he recovered consciousness it was three in the afternoon. The note-case was still under the pillow, but the notes were not there, and on investigation he found that Mr James James was not in the flat. And as Mr James James had taken his belongings with him, there seemed to be no possibility that he would ever return to it. Nor did he.

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Mr Hurdle's head was very bad. He went back to bed and slept again until the evening. Then he worked the whole thing out. It was just two days after his first encounter with Albert Child that James James had offered himself for the post. Since then, Hurdle had no doubt, he had been kept continuously under observation by the agents of James James.

And he was sore afraid of that miserable little man.

It was three months before he had recovered his nerve sufficiently to resume his usual activities.

III

RESTING

In the lounge of the Royal Hotel, Helmstone-on-Sea, a very small man reclined in a very large chair. There were newspapers on a table by his side, and there were certain parts of newspapers which interested him profoundly, but he was not reading them. He was smoking a cigarette and talking to Mr John Mountshire.

The Royal Hotel was not by any means the largest hotel at Helmstone. It was much the dearest, and its *cuisine* and cellar were far beyond anything that the other hotels could boast. It was quiet and very comfortable, and it was admitted that Mountshire managed it admirably. No detail was too small for his attention. For instance, the notes with which you paid your bill might be dirty, but any note that the hotel paid to you was absolutely new. If the charges were high, there were at any rate no irritating little extras. The staff was adequate, respectful, and well-mannered. The place attracted the best class of visitors. Mountshire was not only the hard-working resident manager; he was also one of the small syndicate who owned the place. He was a man in the early forties, rather good-looking, but less English in appearance than his name might have led you to expect. He was fluent in three languages, and spoke English

much better than French ; but he spoke German even better than English.

" No, Mr Perth," he was saying to the little man, " we never found the thief. The theft might have taken place days before it was discovered, and it was easy to dispose of those bonds. The rooms and clothes of every one of the staff were examined by the police. Mine also. I myself demanded it and set the example. But the staff here is very carefully chosen—it was not one of them."

" Who else could it have been ? "

" It might have been a visitor."

" Quite so," said the little man, laughing. " I'm a thief myself."

Mr Mountshire gave the indulgent smile with which he always received the jest of an esteemed customer.

" No, Mr Perth, but you know how it is. We cannot ask visitors for references. And thieves of that kind may be very well-dressed, with nice manners and good education. I do not say a resident visitor. Unfortunately, as I think, the restaurant of the hotel is open to non-residents for luncheon and dinner. Anybody can come in. It is a busy time. My eyes cannot be everywhere. Nothing ever so much angered me as that theft did."

" Why ? You didn't lose anything by it."

" It does no good to the hotel. And what more can I do than I have done ? On every floor of this hotel and in every bedroom there is a notice in three languages imploring the visitor to hand in his valuables at my office and to take

a receipt for them, and saying that otherwise the hotel cannot be responsible for the loss. Then comes this careless American, with valuable securities in a satchel which he keeps in a suit-case in his room. True, the satchel and case are locked—but two rips with a good knife and the thing is done. How can I save such a one? It is to break the heart."

But at this moment a shy French lady's-maid in black approached.

"You are Meester Mountshire, I t'ink? My lady say I give you."

Mountshire tore open the note which was handed to him.

"Tell her ladyship that I will wait on her with the necklace at once."

The girl went away, and Mountshire turned to the little man again.

"Lady Favor, who, as you know, of course, has a suite on the first floor, deposited her pearls with me and took a receipt. She wants to wear them to-night and asks me to give them to her maid. That's all right, but she doesn't send back my receipt. She'll give it when I ask for it, but—oh, if people would be a little more businesslike!"

The little man smiled sympathetically and picked up a newspaper. Screened by the newspaper, his habitual expression of sunny cheerfulness vanished. He was thinking hard.

A year before he had read with interest the newspaper account of the robbery from an American staying at the Royal Hotel, Helmstone, of easily negotiable paper to the value

of fifteen hundred pounds. The newspapers had noted with approval the request of the manager that the rooms, boxes, and persons of the whole staff should be examined, beginning with his own.

To Mr Perth—to give him the name which he was using at present—the manager's action was suspicious. Mountshire was an able hotel-manager and no fool. Why, then, should he do a thing which was unnecessary and futile? It was unnecessary because the police would do any searching which they thought desirable without being requested. It was futile because the theft might have been committed some time before it was discovered, and it takes but a few minutes to put documents into an envelope and drop them into the post.

Why did he do it? Well, if the search were made and nothing were found, that might help to restore confidence in an hotel of which Mountshire was not only manager but part-proprietor. But how could Mountshire know that nothing would be found? He could only know it if he himself, or somebody acting for him, had already disposed of the contents of the satchel. Hotel-managers have good opportunities.

It was merely theory. But it seemed worth while to make a few inquiries in the guise of somebody wishing to purchase an interest in the hotel. These negotiations (in which of course Mr Perth never appeared) came to an early end, for nobody in the syndicate was willing to sell. But Perth had found out that Mountshire was a naturalized German-Swiss, who had legally assumed that name on naturalization, and

also that he was much the largest holder in the syndicate.

Other things occurred to occupy Mr Perth's attention closely for some months—certain operations which were distinctly profitable. But in the next summer he thought he would take a few weeks' holiday at the Royal Hotel. It would at any rate be recreation : it might involve business. He had already made some friends among the residents at the hotel. His diminutive stature seemed to inspire a sort of protective affection in the women, while the fact that he was always bright and happy made him popular with the men. Lady Favor, who was fond of bridge and an execrable player, had already included him in the little parties that she sometimes gave in her suite on the first floor.

But at present, half-hidden behind his newspaper, Mr Perth was thinking of business rather than of pleasure. He had, as we have seen, spoken of the theft of the bonds with Mr Mountshire, and he did not think that the way in which Mr Mountshire had talked was evidence of his innocence. He had protested a little too much. He had been too eager to point out that the theft must have been committed by a visitor. He had talked too readily and at too much length. Perth fancied that an innocent hotel manager, reminded of a year-old incident which was not creditable to the hotel, would have got away from the subject as soon as politeness permitted.

That Mountshire was habitually dishonest Perth did not believe. On the contrary, he felt certain that any valuables deposited at the office

would be forthcoming again as soon as you presented your receipt for them. But he considered that Mountshire had yielded on one occasion to the temptation of an easy opportunity, and there was always the possibility that it might happen again. If it did, Mr Perth considered that it would be of interest and might also be profitable.

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Mr Perth went up to dress for dinner. When he came down again the lounge was filled with men and women taking the *apéritif*. Perth joined two men who had hailed him, and ordered Martinis.

And then down the central aisle of the lounge came Lady Favor. She was middle-aged, rather fat, very good-humoured, and radiant. The French maid followed behind her to tuck her into the Rolls-Royce. Lady Favor waved her fat hand to Mr Perth.

"All dressed up, ain't we?" said Perth to one of the other men. "Wonder where she's off to?"

"There's no end of a jamboree going on at the Grand to-night. She knows people there. I should think that might be it."

"Very likely," said Perth. "Let's go and get something to eat."

At table Perth began to talk about the amount of organization that went to the making of a modern hotel.

"We sit here stuffing soup and things into ourselves, but we never think what a deuce of a lot of trouble is taken to bring one thing after another to us at the right moment. Here the

kitchens are on the same floor, and that makes things easier. But if you notice you'll see that nothing that has been used goes back into the kitchen again. It all goes behind that screen. There a man and a boy are kept busy piling it up as fast as they can into a service-lift—sort of cupboard arrangement. Down it goes into the basement, where they have the washing machines. Up comes the lift again and takes a fresh lot. It's going on as hard as it can all the time we're at dinner. And yet you never hear a sound of it. Then the same lift goes up to the first floor. When Lady Favor gives a little luncheon-party in her rooms it takes up the lunch."

"How the dickens do you know these things?"

"Nosing around," said Mr Perth. "Talking to people. Asking questions. I might want to run an hotel myself one of these days."

"I'd be jolly glad to have this one to run," said the other man. "I'll bet there's money in it."

"Judging from my last week's bill," said Perth, "there must be."

But the little man was thinking even while he chatted. Lady Favor would be home late that night, too late to return the pearl necklace to the office. She was good-natured and careless. You cannot be good-natured if you are very careful. The chances were that she would forget to hand in the necklace on the following day. It would lie there in her room. Possibly if Mr Mountshire were an absolutely honest man he would remind her of it and put the necklace away again in the hotel safe.

But if he were not an entirely honest man? If

he found the opportunity too tempting? Well, if it were a fine day practically everybody in the hotel would be out in the afternoon, Lady Favor among them. There would probably be nobody in the lounge between the hour of the after-luncheon coffee and the beginning of afternoon tea. Mr Mountshire would only have to stroll upstairs to the first floor with his master-key in his pocket, to take the necklace, to descend again, and to send it off by post to a safe address on the earliest opportunity.

Yes, that was a possibility. It was no more than that. It might never happen. But if it did happen how was Mr Perth to checkmate it? That was a question to which he gave a good deal of serious thought.

On the following afternoon, which was bright and warm, Mr Perth lingered on in the lounge after everybody else had gone out. He had a newspaper on his knee, but the exertion of reading it had apparently been too much for him. His head nodded forwards. He appeared to be asleep.

Mr Mountshire came out into the lounge from his private office. He looked all round it and noted the recumbent figure of little Mr Perth. He stood beside him for a moment watching him closely, and then proceeded slowly up the main staircase.

When he reached the first-floor landing his action accelerated considerably. Two minutes later he descended into the lounge, again surveyed the sleeping figure, and passed on into his private room.

And Mr Perth sat up, listening, alert.

When Mr Mountshire, with his hat on, came out of his private office to the front door he found Mr Perth lounging there.

"Going out for a little exercise?" said Mr Perth wearily.

"Yes," said Mr Mountshire. "I'm taking just a quarter of an hour off."

"Then you won't want to carry this with you, will you?"

Mr Perth made a sudden dive for Mr Mountshire's coat-pocket and extracted a box, packed, addressed, stamped, and ready for the post.

"What are you doing?" asked Mr Mountshire. "Give me that parcel at once."

"Don't raise your voice," said Mr Perth. "This is a thing to talk over quietly. Shall we come back to your office?"

"No. Why should I? Give me that parcel."

"I hate to discuss these things in a public place, but since you ask me, that box contains a pearl necklace, the property of Lady Favor. I may add that I myself saw you take it from her room. It is addressed in your handwriting to some gentleman with an address in Hatton Garden who happens to have the same name that you bore yourself before naturalization. Now, then, are we going into your office?"

"Very well," said Mr Mountshire gruffly.

They sat down, one on each side of the table, Mr Mountshire white to the lips, with his hat still on.

"You say you saw me take the necklace?"

"I did."

"You couldn't have done. You were asleep in the hall when I went up and when I came down again."

"Not quite asleep. The moment you were out of sight I nipped into the service lift. It's not intended for passengers. A man of ordinary size couldn't get into it. But I could. I pressed the button and ran myself up to the first floor. I was there with the lift door just ajar before you were. The entrance to Lady Favor's suite was immediately opposite to me. I saw you let yourself in—you left the door open, by the way—and I saw you putting the necklace into your pocket as you came out. I ran the little lift down again and was apparently asleep in my chair as you passed. I knew you would get those pearls out of the place as soon as possible in order that when the loss was discovered you might issue your usual invitation to the police. You see——"

"Look here, what are you going to do? That's all I want to know. Are you a detective? Scotland Yard?"

"Oh, dear, no! I am a thief. I've already told you so once. But my speciality is that I steal only what is already stolen. I should be sorry to do anything to prejudice your position in this hotel, which you manage so admirably. I shall say nothing whatever about this little incident. The only difference as far as you are concerned will be that I shall have the pearls."

Mr Mountshire was staggered, too absolutely surprised to show any fight or even to find a single word to say. At last he stammered:

"But—but suppose I turn on you?"

"Don't be too silly, Mr Mountshire. If you turn on me the necklace will be found in a box addressed in your handwriting to a relative of your own. What good would that do you?"

The little man passed out of the office holding his parcel somewhat ostentatiously and humming a tune as he went.

In his own room he sat down and thought. Poor Lady Favor! She would be distressed to lose those pearls. She was not a bad sort. She had been very kind to him—had helped to make his stay in the hotel pleasant. And after all he was not working at the moment, nor had he any pressing financial reason to work. He was resting. Well, the lock of an hotel bedroom door did not present any insuperable difficulty to him.

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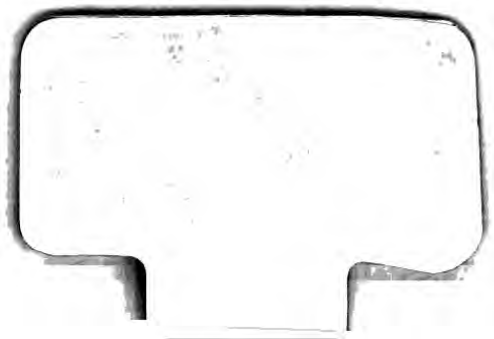
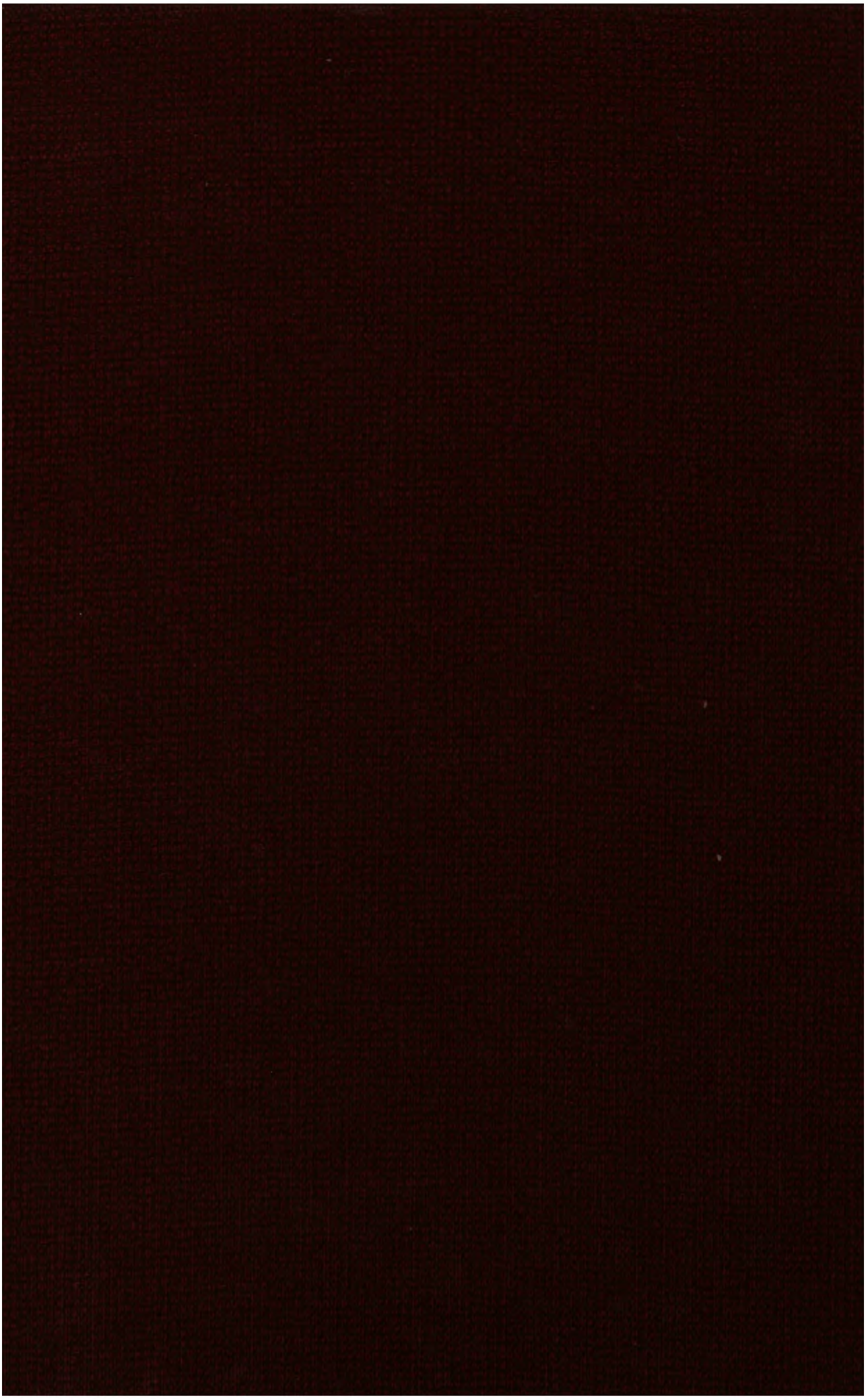
And so Mr Mountshire received a second shock that evening when Lady Favor, coming down to dinner, handed over to him the necklace in its case.

"I suppose," she said, "you'll get terribly savage if I don't give you this to take care of for me." And then she turned to the little man seated in a big chair just finishing his cocktail. He leaped up as she spoke.

"Mr Perth," she said, "you must come and sit next me at dinner. You always make me laugh, and I'm feeling so dull."

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