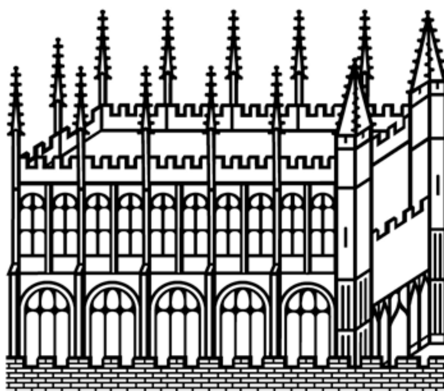


Bodleian Libraries
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

POPULAR LIBRARY
ODHAMS

Safeguard your Health with

Dr. J. Collis Browne's Chlorodyne

The Reliable Medicine.

The Best Remedy
known for

COUGHS,
COLDS,
ASTHMA,
BRONCHITIS.

Acts like a charm in
DIARRHŒA, COLIC,
and other bowel complaints.

Cuts short attacks of
SPASMS
PALPITATION,
HYSTERIA.

A true palliative in
TOOTHACHE,
NEURALGIA,
RHEUMATISM.

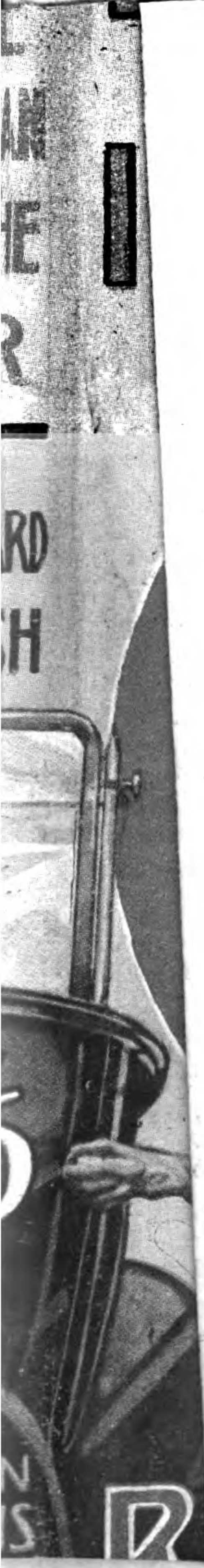
Always ask for a
"Dr. COLLIS BROWNE."

Of all
Chemists,

1/3
3/-

LIBRARY

Sa
DI
an
Alv
"Dr. CO
W
IN
C
RIC
MA
1
N
LON
ODH



LIBRARY

Cheery Soles

Dri-ped wearers, young or old, have a broad smile often, wet feet never, and comfort all the time ; and it's particularly cheering to know that wearing Dri-ped Leather saves half your boot bill.

Dri-ped, the Super-Leather for Soles, is absolutely waterproof; and the higher leather mounts in price, the more Dri-ped's DOUBLE WEAR saves you.

War needs restrict Dri-ped supplies for civilian wear, though a limited quantity IS available Soldiers and Sailors can always obtain Dri-ped from Repairers possessing Government permits.

See this Trade Mark in Purple every few inches on each sole.

Without it the leather is a substitute.

The Super-Leather for Soles

Sole Manufacturers :—

Wm. WALKER & SONS, Ltd. Bolton

When you are furnishing or having an old suite re-upholstered, ask your furnishing house to show you samples of

Rexine

Leather Cloth

—the perfect upholstering material—

Whilst it is indistinguishable from leather it costs only one-quarter the price, and yet it is better than leather in every way. "Rexine" never becomes shabby. It is stain and grease proof, and if soiled can be washed.

Your furnishing house can show you samples, or in case of difficulty write :

REXINE Ltd., Rexine Works, Hyde, nr. Manchester

G R

Enrol To-day in the

W.A.A.C.

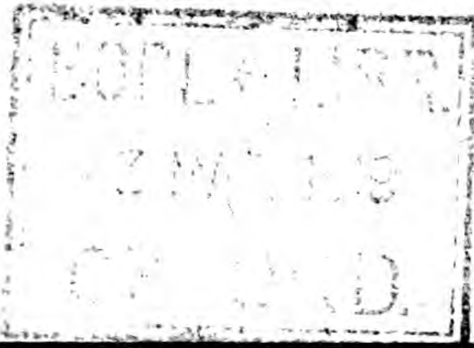
(Women's Army Auxiliary Corps)
as

Clerk, Typist, Cook, &c., &c.

Full particulars at any Employment Exchange. Ask at Post Office for address.

THE WOMAN IN THE CAR

By RICHARD MARSH
:: Author of "The Beetle," etc. ::



London : ODHAMS LIMITED
39 King Street, Covent Garden, W.C. 2

CAMPBELLS

Furnishing Co. Ltd.

Invite you

to Visit their Showrooms

where you will see huge selections of New and Second-hand Furniture for the Furnishing of a good Home in Flat, Cottage, or Villa.

Immediate Delivery for Cash

or on Our "FAIR-AND-SQUARE" Plan:

£20 Worth	10 0 Mthly.	£200 Worth	£4 4 0 Mthly.
£50 ,,	£1 6 0 ,,	£500 ,,	£10 0 0 ,,
£100 ,,	£2 2 0 ,,	Other amounts pro rata.	

10% (2/- in the £) Discount for Cash.
Free Rail Fares on orders £20 or more.
Free Insurance.

CAMPBELLS FURNISHING Co., Ltd.
248, 249, 250 Tottenham Court Road,
London, W.

TELEPHONE: MUSEUM 2483

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	IN PALL MALL	9
II.	WHAT THE CAR CONTAINED	14
III.	DR. LEACH	19
IV.	A VISITOR	23
V.	MY LORD AND MY LADY	29
VI.	AN ACCIDENT	35
VII.	MR. BAIRD IS QUESTIONED	40
VIII.	BY PARCEL POST	46
IX.	THE POND	51
X.	PAULINE	57
XI.	DR. LEACH'S THEORY	63
XII.	MISS WINTON'S STORY	68
XIII.	A COMMUNICATION FOR MR. GLOVER	76
XIV.	THE LADY ON THE CAR	83
XV.	MR. GLOVER MAKES SOME FRESH ACQUAINTANCES	92
XVI.	THE HÔTEL TONELLI	99
XVII.	A LETTER FROM CAWSTONE	103
XVIII.	MISS WINTON'S ADVENTURE	114
XIX.	ANOTHER VISITOR FOR MR. BAIRD	124
XX.	THE PROBLEM OF THE GREEN FELT HAT	131
XXI.	A MISSING GENTLEMAN	135
XXII.	TRACING THE ROUTE	142
XXIII.	"I HAVE FOUND THE CRIMINAL"	149
XXIV.	THE COINCIDENCE OF THE NOTES	157
XXV.	WORRALL'S FARM	165
XXVI.	A DIFFICULT PATIENT	172
XXVII.	JOHN BAIRD SEES MEN DIGGING	179
XXVIII.	HER DECISION	187
XXIX.	A MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE	195
XXX.	IN HER LADYSHIP'S CHAMBER	202
XXXI.	A TELEGRAM FOR THE SERGEANT	210
XXXII.	AN ATMOSPHERE OF TROUBLE	217
XXXIII.	HUSBAND AND WIFE	225
XXXIV.	THE BEDROOM AT THE HOTEL	236
XXXV.	AN ELOPEMENT WHICH FAILED	244
XXXVI.	THROUGH THE NIGHT	252
XXXVII.	MRS. ANTHONY DUNKELS	261
XXXVIII.	A REMARKABLE MAN	273
XXXIX.	THE POST	277

ODHAMS POPULAR LIBRARY

Fcp. 8vo. Bound cloth. Pictorial jackets

Secrets of Potsdam 1/6
By Count Ernst von Heltzendorff
(Edited by Wm. Le Queux)

More Secrets of Potsdam 1/6
By Count Ernst von Heltzendorff
(Edited by Wm. Le Queux)

Further Secrets of Potsdam 1/6
By Count Ernst von Heltzendorff
(Edited by Wm. Le Queux)

Behind the German Lines 1/6
By Col. Lt. Otto von Heynitz (16th Uhlans)
(Edited by Wm. Le Queux)

For the Queen 1/6
By E. Phillips Oppenheim

Those Other Days 1/6
By E. Phillips Oppenheim

The Triumphant Woman 1/6
By Flaneuse

Souls in Bondage 1/6
By Perceval Gibbon

The Secret Life of the ex-Tsaritza 1/6
By Baroness Zeneide Tzankoff
(Edited by Wm. Le Queux)

A Corner in Diamonds 1/6
By Morice Gerard

A Gentleman of London 1/6
By Morice Gerard

A Heather Mystery 1/6
By Morice Gerard

A Marked Woman 1/6
By Marie Connor Leighton

Dark Peril 1/6
By Marie Connor Leighton

The Woman in the Car 1/6
By Richard Marsh

THE WOMAN IN THE CAR

CHAPTER I

IN PALL MALL

THE hour was about a quarter to two in the morning. It had been raining. John Baird and Colonel Overton, coming out of the Climax Club, pausing on the steps, were conscious of a freshness and a sweetness in the air. Suddenly the Colonel said:

" Baird, rather an unpleasant thing happened as I was coming along Piccadilly perhaps rather more than an hour ago. I was hung up at the Circus, waiting for a chance to cross the road. The theatres were not long over and there was a crowd of people. A girl was standing by me in a greenish frock—a distinctly pretty girl; quite young. A man pushed past us and moved into the road as if he were in a hurry. She rushed after him; when she got to him she struck him in the back; he fell. She went running on. I saw her thread her way among the vehicles and vanish on the other side. The man never rose again—she had stabbed him in the back right to the heart; murdered him before my very eyes, and I had not the faintest idea what she was doing. The thing gave me quite a thrill. I was going home, but I came on here instead; somehow I did not feel like being alone. That girl's face haunts me."

" Did the police get her?"

" Not they. No one realised what she had done until she had vanished. Then the crowd swarmed round like bees."

" What did you do?"

" Nothing. I have been wondering if I ought to do anything now. The trouble wasn't mine; the fellow might have deserved what she gave him."

Baird looked at the Colonel with something odd on his saturnine face.

" I have been in places where, when a girl went for a man, it was taken for granted that she had sufficient reasons."

The Colonel was silent for several moments: he seemed to be looking at the shining pavement on the other side of the road. When he spoke his tone was grim.

" Exactly ; so have I ; and that's where it is. And that girl's face haunts me."

Baird was glancing at a motor-car which stood drawn up against the pavement perhaps thirty yards away.

" You see that car ? Its presence there reminds me that I also have had rather an odd little adventure in which a young woman figured."

The Colonel said nothing, but the glance which he bestowed on Baird seemed to convey a question. Baird went on:

" That car was standing there when I came in." He glanced at his watch. " It's now just on ten minutes to two ; I noticed that it was five minutes past one as I passed St. James's Palace. The car was there then. I stopped to look at it. The chauffeur seemed to be asleep in his seat. It is an unusually fine car, and even in that light I had a feeling that I had seen it before. It was raining pretty hard ; I wondered if the chauffeur knew that he was getting damp. All at once someone rose up in the body of the car, opened the door on the other side, shut it with a bang, tore across the road, and dashed into that alley which you know comes out by St. James's Theatre. It was a girl—she took me aback. I had been standing there quite a while. I had no notion anyone was in the car. As she rose she turned and stared at me ; if I had been a ghost the sight of me could not have seemed to inspire her with greater terror."

" Did you see her face ? "

" I did. I don't know that I could describe it, but I should know her if I saw her again. It struck me that she was little more than a child."

" I doubt if that girl in Piccadilly Circus was more than twenty."

For some seconds the two men said nothing ; they stood looking at the stationary car. Suddenly an exclamation came from Baird.

" Hullo ! who's this ? Again something feminine."

A taxi-cab had come down St. James's Street and had drawn up by the kerb directly opposite the car which was standing silent on the other side of the road. The door farthest from the pavement was opened, a feminine figure descended on to the miry road and hurried to the car which was standing still. When she reached it she opened the door and, mounting on to the step, without actually entering, seemed to be searching for something in the tonneau. Apparently she found it. The two men saw her catch up something in her hand. As she did so she turned towards the Climax Club, seeming for the first time to become conscious of the presence of others. The discovery seemed to

disturb her. She jumped off the step, shut the door, ran to the taxi, entered, even before the door was shut the driver started and the vehicle moved rapidly towards Waterloo Place. It was only when, turning toward St. James's Square, it disappeared from sight that the two men ceased to watch it. In Baird's voice as he turned to the Colonel there was a note of what almost might have been excitement.

"That was pretty queer. I wonder if that's the young woman I saw? What was she doing inside that car? Judging from the fashion in which she took to her heels when she saw us standing here, one is disposed to wonder."

The Colonel said nothing. The two men, descending to the pavement, moved side by side towards the motionless car. As if actuated by a common impulse, they stopped to regard it. It was a very large car. So far as one could judge in the imperfect light, it was appointed with unusual luxury, even for these days of extravagance.

"I feel sure," said John Baird, "that it isn't the first time I've seen it."

The Colonel was not looking so much at the car as at the figure on the driving-seat.

"Baird," he asked, "what's the matter with the driver? It strikes me that something is. Hi! you, sir!"

The latter words were addressed to the motionless figure on the driver's seat. Apparently they went unheeded.

"The man's asleep," said Baird. "I told you he was asleep when I saw him first. He sleeps soundly."

"Too soundly; there's something wrong with him."

"What should be wrong? Perhaps he's had to do too much driving and is exhausted. I know a man who kept his chauffeur at it for practically two days and nights; he told me that when he did go to sleep they couldn't wake him."

"And I tell you that this man is no more asleep in the ordinary sense than you are. A man couldn't sleep huddled up like he is. Hi, sir, aren't you well?" Moving closer to the car, the Colonel touched the figure on the seat. "Baird, he's dead!"

"Dead!" The word came as an echo. "How can he be dead?"

Colonel Overton had on a pair of bright yellow chamois leather gloves; he was staring at the one with which he had touched the silent figure with a very curious look upon his face.

"That's blood—wet. Something queer has happened here."

In Mr. Baird's voice as he replied there was something strident.

"What are you talking about? What do you mean? My dear man, I tell you that when I came along, at five minutes to

one, the fellow was sitting exactly as he is now; I took it for granted he was asleep."

"His is a sleep which knows no waking; what you say shows that he must have been dead more than an hour. He's a reek of blood—not only himself, but the whole place in which he is. My coat must have touched the side of the seat. See, where it has touched there's blood. This is a case for the police; we had better not meddle. Wasn't the porter in the hall?" He called. "Porter!" A uniformed figure came out of the club and passed to where they were. "How long has this car been standing here?"

"I came on duty at midnight. I had some jobs to do in the office; it was there when I looked out at a quarter to one; it was still there when I looked out again at a quarter past. Just as I put my head out of the door a lady got out of it and walked along the pavement towards the Park. I think she went in at the gate."

"You are sure it was a lady?"

"Well, I don't know about a lady She had on a long motor-coat; that's all I know."

The Colonel turned to Mr. Baird. "Then that looks as if the car had had three lady visitors—unless it was the same lady each time. Was the one you saw wearing a long motor-coat?"

"She was not. I particularly noticed that she wasn't dressed as if for motoring. She had on a short jacket and a big hat with a plume. And that woman we saw getting out of the taxi, she hadn't a motor-coat. She wore no hat; she had on what struck me as being some sort of theatre wrap over evening-dress."

"What I specially noticed as she got out of the cab," added the Colonel, "was that she had got on what looked like golden high-heeled slippers, and yellow silk stockings—she showed a good deal of them, and the lamp was shining right on her."

"Anything wrong with the car?" asked the porter. "If that's the driver, he seems pretty fast asleep; he hasn't moved since I've been here, though I should have thought us talking would have woke him."

"He'll never wake again; he's been murdered."

"Murdered!" The porter, although he was a big, burly man, gave a little jump. "Begging your pardon, sir, but how do you know he's been murdered?"

"I don't know—but we soon shall. As there doesn't seem to be a policeman in sight you'd better telephone to Scotland Yard, asking them to send an officer at once."

John Baird had gone round to the other side of the car. Stooping down, he picked up something off the dirty road—

something which he seemed to recognise with feelings of anything but pleasure.

"Good God!" he said to himself, "I thought I knew the car. What on earth does it mean?"

He glanced at the Colonel on the pavement; engrossed with the club porter, he was not noticing Mr. Baird. That gentleman slipped the something which he had picked up off the road into his overcoat pocket. Taking off his hat, although the night was not hot, he drew his handkerchief across his brow.

"That wasn't she, I'll swear to it." Who was the person to whom the words alluded there was nothing to show. The porter was moving towards the club. "Where is he going?" he asked.

"He's going to telephone to Scotland Yard for assistance."

"Assistance? From Scotland Yard? What do you want assistance from Scotland Yard for?"

Colonel Overton's tone was portentous.

"Baird, I saw one man killed, before my very eyes, by a woman at Piccadilly Circus; it looks very much as if this poor fellow had been killed by a woman too. I seem all at once to have got into an atmosphere of murder."

CHAPTER II

WHAT THE CAR CONTAINED

WITHIN fifteen minutes Scotland Yard's representative arrived upon the scene in the shape of Inspector Hextall, a biggish, grey-haired person, with moustache and beard. Within a couple of minutes he was followed by a medical man, also from Scotland Yard, Dr. Leach, a man in the thirties, lean and keen-eyed. They found Colonel Overton and two porters from the club. John Baird had gone.

"It's no use my stopping," he had announced. "I've had a long day; I'm off to bed."

"And what about me?" remonstrated the Colonel. "My dear Baird, I think you ought to remain until the police come, and see the thing through. You certainly ought not to leave me alone. You saw the car first and can tell them more than I can."

But Mr. Baird was not to be persuaded.

"I have nothing to tell the police," he declared. "If they think I have, they know where to find me. I don't propose to allow myself to be kept out of bed all night because I happened to see a motor-car standing in the road. I'm in want of sleep."

If he was, even when he was back in his rooms in South Audley Street he made no immediate attempt to get it. For a man who was so weary as he professed to be his proceedings were peculiar. He carefully locked the door when he had entered his sitting-room, although, since the household had long since retired to rest, he stood in no fear of intrusion. He looked about him as if he were watched by a dozen pairs of eyes. With an air of mystery he took from a pocket in his overcoat a shred of filmy cambric which was meant to be a woman's handkerchief. On one corner a crest was embroidered; at this crest he stood and stared as if it were some dreadful thing. There was a single initial beneath the crest—E—worked in sky-blue silk. Judging from the expression on his countenance, that initial made the thing more dreadful still.

"That's her handkerchief and it was his car; but I'll swear it was not she I saw get out of it. What was her handkerchief doing in his car, with a man on the driving-seat whose throat

was cut from ear to ear? He was no chauffeur. I wonder who the fellow was."

On one point Mr. John Baird was in error—the throat of the man who was on the driving-seat had not been cut at all, as Dr. Leach quickly made clear. Not only his throat, his whole person, his clothes without and his body beneath, seemed to have been almost torn to pieces. On the car in Pall Mall the doctor was able to make only the most cursory examination, yet he ventured on an opinion:

"No knife has done this; this is the work of something much worse than a knife."

Two constables had appeared. They took out a waterproof driving-sheet which was in the car and wrapped in it the dreadful remains of what had been a man; as the Colonel had phrased it, he was a reek of blood. Then one of them got on the driving-seat, which had lately had so gruesome an occupant, and with the doctor on board the car was driven to Scotland Yard to undergo a minute examination. Inspector Hextall remained to glean from Colonel Overton and the two porters what he could—which was very little. He made a note of the episode of the lady in the taxi-cab and the other woman whom the porter had seen. He was told about Mr. Baird—how he had seen still a third woman emerging from the car.

"I will look him up in the morning," he observed. "That motor-car seems to have attracted a good deal of attention from the ladies."

Then he departed for headquarters; Colonel Overton went home; the two porters returned to their duties, with a tale to tell which made them persons of importance in their own eyes.

Inspector Hextall learnt a variety of interesting facts on his arrival at the Yard. First of all there was the question of the identity of the motor-car—that was established at once. There had been no attempt at disguise. Whom the car belonged to was as clear as noonday; there was the registered number in its usual place on the back, and the owner's driving licence was in a leather pocket on the door.

"The car belongs to the Earl of Ditchling all right," commented the Inspector to himself, "which is rather awkward for his lordship, but that doesn't prove much after all. I wonder if his lordship is in town. It's latish, but as this matter presses perhaps with the aid of the telephone one might learn a thing or two."

The Earl of Ditchling's town house in Lowndes Square was rung up. After some delay an angry voice inquired, with excusable emphasis, who it was fooling with the telephone at

three o'clock in the morning. It was a subordinate officer who reported this inquiry; the Inspector took his place at the instrument.

" I am Inspector Hextall of Scotland Yard—I am speaking to you from Scotland Yard. Who are you? "

The information seemed to calm the individual who was at the other end.

" I'm William Taylor, and I'm in charge of Ditchling House," he replied. " I'm alone here with my wife. The family is away. What might you be wanting? "

" The family is away, is it? Where might the family be? "

" The Earl and the Countess are at their place in Devonshire—Cawstone, the other side of Exeter."

" Sure they're there? "

" Of course I can't say for certain, not at this hour of the morning, but they were there so recently as yesterday. We're expecting them back next week."

" Has his lordship got all his motor-cars with him? "

" I couldn't say; I know nothing about that. Why do you ask? "

" Hasn't he got a 60 h.p. Rolls-Royce—this year's model? "

" I know the one you mean. It's quite a new one. I believe the Earl bought it as a present for her ladyship. I expect she's got it with her. What about it? "

" You expect she's got it with her? Don't you know for certain? "

" I don't; I know nothing about it. I'm an indoor servant, I am, and I don't concern myself about anything outside my department. What has happened to the car? "

" You say that the Earl and Countess are at Cawstone, their place in Devonshire, or they were yesterday. That'll do. Go back to bed, only keep your ears open in case you're wanted again." The Inspector severed the connection. He made some remarks to himself. " I shouldn't wonder if Mr. and Mrs. Taylor talk over her ladyship's car together, and perhaps take it for granted she's wanted for furious driving. I fancy that I've heard of the Earl of Ditchling's name in that connection, and his wife's as well."

In the car were quite a number of things. There was a lady's dressing-case as well as a gentleman's. The lady's was a gorgeous affair. The numerous bottles had heavy gold tops marked 18 carat. The Inspector surveyed both the case and its contents with rather a puzzled expression.

" When a woman owns an article like this she generally has her initials, to say nothing of her crest, all over it—on the outside

of the bag, on the tops of the bottles, on the brushes, everywhere. It's queer that there should be nothing anywhere to show to whom this belongs. It strikes me that this is brand new, was bought for some particular purpose, and has probably only been out of the shop a few hours. Anyhow, bags like this are not sold every day; we ought to have no difficulty in finding out where this trifle was bought and what was the name of the purchaser."

He turned to the other bag. All the contents of the car had been brought into the room in which the Inspector was, and were exposed in front of him on a big, bare table. The gentleman's dressing-bag took the form of a suit-case. The fittings were of silver and ebony. On the top of the case, on practically everything it contained, were initials—A. T. Among the miscellaneous contents was a cheque-book. Five or six cheques had been taken out; there were the counterfoils to show it. The first of those which remained had been drawn and was apparently quite in order. May 13th was the date—yesterday; the Inspector was examining these articles early on the morning of the fourteenth. "Pay self," it ran, "five hundred pounds." The signature was Andrew Tozer, which was reproduced as an endorsement on the back.

"That seems plain enough," the Inspector told himself. "It looks as if Mr. Andrew Tozer was about to start on a little trip, and to provide himself with the necessary funds drew a cheque in his own favour for five hundred pounds, leaving it open so that he might get cash at his banker's. Andrew Tozer is rather an unusual name; it so happens that there is an Andrew Tozer who is as well known as any man in England. I wonder if that Andrew Tozer is any relation of this one."

The name Andrew Tozer was a prominent feature in the contents of the car. It recurred again and again. There was a Gladstone bag, on the side of which was the name in full. The Gladstone was packed with articles of clothing. There were two suits of clothes; on the tabs in the coats was the name of the tailor, and below it in writing that of the person for whom they were made—Andrew Tozer. On shirts, socks, and other garments were tapes inscribed Andrew Tozer. Besides the Gladstone bag was a magnificent fur-lined coat. As if to place the matter beyond all possible doubt, on this was a tab on which was the address as well as the name—"Andrew Tozer, Gilcott, Bucks."

"Clearly there is no doubt about the ownership of these—it's the Andrew Tozer. I've heard a few stories about Mr. Andrew Tozer, late of the Rand; it looks as if the world was going to

learn another. The presumption is that Mr. Andrew Tozer was going for a little motor run with a lady—a run which was to extend over several days. Who the lady was is not yet clear, or how the pair came to be in the Countess of Ditchling's car; possibly Mr. Tozer will be able to supply the omission. How and why the run came to be cut short in such a tragic fashion is a story which has yet to be unfolded, and which the world may find entertaining. I wonder who the lady was."

He had in his hand some dainty feminine garments which had been contained in a sort of cabin trunk. Trunk and garments were new, like the gold-fitted dressing-bag. Like the dressing-bag, there was nothing about them which would serve to identify the owner.

"There are some pretty curious things here considering; but unless I'm very much mistaken, the most curious are these."

The Inspector was staring at the moment at three articles which were spread out in front of him on the table. One was a shabby red purse, of that imitation leather which is called roan. It had been picked up from the bottom of the car. It contained three separate shillings and two penny pieces; a tress of light brown hair in a scrap of tissue paper, a tiny old silver cross, and a piece of time-stained white paper, on which was written, in a feminine hand, "Mrs. Gardner, 19 York Place, Chelsea." By it was an old, well-worn, black cotton glove, with a hole in the first finger and a button missing. The Inspector took each of these articles in his hand and turned them over and over.

"I call those very curious things to find in the Countess of Ditchling's motor-car; especially in conjunction with that gold-fitted dressing-bag, and those elegant articles of clothing which I'll be bound cost no end of money. The person who owns this purse and this glove, tenpence three farthings a pair when new twelve months ago, doesn't look as if she owns those other things, yet how came they to be there? And then there's this; this is really perhaps the most curious thing of the lot. Who's there?"

Someone opened the door. Dr. Leach came in with two assistants. All three men were in their shirt-sleeves and wore dark-blue overalls, on which were damp stains.

"It strikes me, Inspector," began the doctor without any preface, "that the man who was murdered wasn't a chauffeur at all. He was a man of good position, and I shouldn't wonder if his name was Andrew Tozer."

CHAPTER III

DR. LEACH

The Inspector allowed the thing he was holding to rest on the table, and he looked at the doctor.

"How do you know his name was Andrew Tozer?"

"I don't positively know, but it looks very like it—the name is on everything he wore, including his vest and his handkerchief. And his clothes are certainly not those of a chauffeur—all of them are from the most expensive people—apart from the fact that in one waistcoat pocket was a fine gold repeater by Leroy, and in the other a sovereign purse with the initials A. T. in diamonds on one side and a crest in emeralds on the other."

"That hardly looks as if he were the ordinary driver of a motor-car."

"It doesn't. Then in a letter case, initialled in gold, were nearly two hundred pounds in English bank-notes, besides a roll of French notes. In a pocket in his overcoat were a number of letters, some of yesterday's date, and all of them addressed to Andrew Tozer, Esq.—some of them to Gilcott, Bucks, some of them to Arlington Street, others to various clubs. Here they are: I have read none of them; in one or two cases I just glanced at the date."

The doctor placed a number of letters and envelopes on the table beside the Inspector. His assistants put down several articles of masculine attire, apparently everything the dead man had on him, from his boots to his hat. The Inspector glanced through the letters, reading the addresses on the envelopes:

"'Andrew Tozer, Esq., Gilcott, Bucks'—again, again; 'Andrew Tozer, Esq., 57 Arlington Street, W.'; 'Andrew Tozer, Esq., University Club'; 'Andrew Tozer, Esq., Turf Club'; and half a dozen other clubs. He seems to have been known at various addresses. How did he come by his death?"

The doctor, sitting down, leaning his elbows on the table, regarded his hands; they were caked with dried blood.

"That's the question; it's not altogether simple. Of course I've only made a superficial examination, but it looks as if he'd been murdered three times over." The Inspector eyed him with knitted brows.

"What do you mean? How can a man be murdered three times over? Isn't once enough? A man hasn't got nine lives like a cat."

"That's true; therefore one wonders why so much force was used. First of all he was stabbed by some sharp-edged instrument: I don't yet know quite how far it went, but pretty deep. Then he was shot on the right as well as on the left side, from the front. I have no doubt whatever, judging from their position and the look of them, that the shots inflicted a mortal wound. Then he was nearly torn to pieces by—something, but I don't know what. Whatever it was, the most frightful force was used; his chest was torn right open—look at his coat, waistcoat, and shirt, they are torn into strips. His head was nearly severed from his body; the blood was all drained out of him. Loss of blood would have killed him if nothing else had done."

The Inspector regarded the speaker with wide-open eyes.

"This is a curious story, doctor."

"It is, because it presents the problem of what killed him; he was attacked three times—which was the cause of his death? I should say, speaking off-hand, the two shots. I doubt if he was stabbed in a vital spot, and I fancy that whatever it was which almost tore him to pieces assailed him only after his death."

"How long would you say he has been dead?"

"When I examined him I should say he had been dead between four and five hours. I began my examination about half-past two; I should judge that he was killed between ten and eleven. You understand I'm only telling you in confidence what I think without expressing a positive opinion."

The Inspector considered. "So far, no one seems to know exactly when the car appeared in Pall Mall; we shall probably learn that later, but that second porter at the club declared that it was not there at half-past twelve; so, according to you, this man must have been dead before the car got there."

"I should certainly say that he was dead some time before half-past twelve—probably a couple of hours."

"I see complications ahead. Did the car arrive with the dead man on it, or was he placed there after its arrival?"

"I couldn't possibly tell you—if that question was addressed to me; that doesn't come within my province at all. Either way it doesn't seem simple. I don't see how a motor-car could have been driven with such a torso on the driving-seat—he is practically a torso. Where did the driver sit? He must have been between the dead man and the driving wheel. What a position! How could anyone drive a great car wedged in like that? On

the other hand, how could the body have been conveyed to the car after it had stopped? It is all in pieces—if it had had much handling it would have fallen to pieces, and how could such a thing have been carried through the streets and placed upon the box? Anyhow, you've got a puzzle. I prefer the solution that he was already on the driving-seat when the car drew up outside the Climax Club. Have you come on anything which simplifies the matter?"

"I've come on a good many things, but so far from simplifying, they seem to make the thing more complicated. At one time Mr. Tozer appears to have been in the car with a lady—who was furnished with an entirely new rig-out, from a new gold-fitted dressing-bag to a new set of underlinen. There's nothing whatever to show who she was. Then there's a woman's old purse and old cotton glove, which don't look as though they belong to a person who would aspire to the dignity of a gold-fitted bag, which probably cost four or five hundred pounds. Then there's this; what do you make of it?"

The Inspector held out the object which he had been examining when the doctor entered.

"It looks like the remnants of a glorified dog-collar."

"Then it must have belonged to a good-sized dog. There's a plate on it, and on the plate this is engraved: 'Boy. Born at Poona, June the 4th, 1910.' The whole thing is made of brass, and looks as if it had been smashed by a blow with some heavy, blunt instrument."

Dr. Leach took the metal collar which the Inspector was holding and examined it closely.

"There's something on the broken edge which looks as if it were blood, and something which looks as if it might be a hair. You'd better let me have this; I'll put it under a microscope."

"You'd better; often in this sort of thing there's nothing like a microscope for telling tales. Andrew Tozer, of Gilcott, Bucks, is an African millionaire—you must have heard of him; he owns a fleet of motor-cars. This motor-car is the property of the Countess of Ditchling. At present she is staying with her husband at Cawstone in Devonshire; she was there yesterday. How comes her car to be in Pall Mall to-night, with Andrew Tozer dead upon the driving-seat? If he wanted to have a little run with a lady, why couldn't he do it in a car of his own?"

The doctor was silent. He was looking at his blood-grimed hands as if he were considering the other's question. Presently he said:

"It isn't often that I have to handle two murdered men on the same night within a couple of hours of each other. That

man in Piccadilly Circus was stabbed in the back; there's no doubt about what happened to him—the knife went right through his lung."

Although the Inspector's eyes were fixed upon him, one felt somehow that he saw not the doctor but something else.

"That happened before I came in. Bradley has got the case, hasn't he?"

"I believe he has; he was present while I conducted the examination."

"You found out who the man was?"

"From papers which were found upon him Inspector Bradley inclines to the opinion that his name was Thomas Pepper, that he lived in the Vauxhall Bridge Road, and that he was by way of being a small bookmaker."

"Anything to show who did it?"

"Oddly enough, though the thing was done in the middle of a crowd, practically nothing. The driver of a motor-omnibus has come forward to say that he saw him struck by a woman, but he can't describe the woman or the blow. He says that he saw her put her hand upon his shoulder—as the driver supposed, because the man was an acquaintance of hers. The moment she touched him the man fell like a log; that was the first hint that motor-bus driver had that anything was wrong. He never rose again. That woman must have known where to strike; she had killed him in an instant. The thing seems queer; but the queerness is not in it with a man killed three times over, falling to pieces on the driving-seat of what you say is the Countess of Ditchling's motor-car."

When he answered the Inspector was sententious.

"Before that mystery is solved——"

The doctor interposed. "If it ever is solved."

The Inspector accepted the correction. "If it ever is solved; I shouldn't wonder if there's a washing of aristocratic dirty linen in public which the people of England will find vastly entertaining. If by some curious chance it ever comes to be shown that her ladyship of Ditchling, who owns that motor-car, had even a little finger in the doing to death of Mr. Andrew Tozer, the morning and evening papers will have a sale which will necessitate the buying of new presses to print them fast enough."

"Aren't you rather jumping at conclusions when you even remotely associate the Countess of Ditchling with such a horrid business?"

"We shall see what we shall see." The Inspector was oracular. "What I wonder is how this shabby purse and old glove came to be in the car with what you call this glorified dog-collar."

CHAPTER IV

A VISITOR

ON the morning of the following day, at what probably, for him, was quite a matutinal hour, the Earl of Ditchling paid a visit to Scotland Yard. He was shown into the office of the Chief Commissioner, Sir Franklin Terry, with whom, it appeared, he had some trifling acquaintance. After exchanging half a dozen words of greeting he broached the subject on which he had come.

"What's this I hear about some person who calls himself Inspector something ringing up my man Taylor in the middle of the night with a yarn about a motor-car?"

His lordship was a bluff, elderly gentleman who, before his accession to the title, had been in the Navy. People said that he had carried the breezy air of the quarter-deck into his private life. The Chief Commissioner was a thin, dried-up looking man who, before being promoted to his present post, had seen a good deal of service in the Indian army. With the toe of his boot he pressed the button of an electric bell which was let into the floor immediately in front of his seat. He desired the person who answered to request the immediate attendance of Inspector Hextall.

"I am afraid," he explained in the interval of waiting, "that a car which is supposed to belong to you figures prominently in rather an unpleasant manner. I hope the Countess is quite well."

The visitor ignored the latter part of the sentence.

"How can a car of mine have what you call figured prominently in an unpleasant matter? What the dickens do you mean?"

"Here is Inspector Hextall; he will be able to tell you all about it. Hextall, this is the Earl of Ditchling."

The Inspector, who had at that instant entered the room, glanced shrewdly at the figure on the chair with his top hat in his hands and his stick between his knees.

"I have had the pleasure of being introduced to his lordship before."

The Earl stared at him; his blue eyes looked out from under beetling brows.

"I was called in to look after the wedding presents on the occasion of your lordship's marriage with the Countess: Miss Eleanor Pearse she was then."

"Oh! were you? That's some time ago. I don't remember. Are you the man who rang up my man Taylor in the middle of the night?"

The Inspector replied to the question with another.

"Does your lordship own a 60 h.p. Rolls-Royce motor-car—this year's model?"

Judging from his manner his lordship seemed to consider the inquiry as almost of the nature of an impertinence.

"What if I do? What business of yours is it what motor-cars I own?"

"If the motor-car to which I refer happens to be your property it matters a good deal to you, since it is at this moment on our premises—in our charge."

"You talk nonsense." His lordship's air was not conciliatory. "You have got nothing of mine on your premises, since no motor-car belonging to me is nearer to London than Devonshire."

"Then how came this to be in the car we have—and this also." The Inspector held out two little cases of flexible leather. "One contains your driving licence, my lord, the other her ladyship's; while the car itself bears your registered number."

His lordship took the two little cases from the Inspector's hand; the examination of what they contained clearly disturbed him.

"How did you get hold of these? They were in my wife's motor-car; I saw them there myself no longer ago than yesterday. I took the car over to the station; I put something into the same pocket in which they were, and in doing so I came to notice them."

The Inspector eyed the visitor very attentively. He seemed to see something on his face which induced him to take a certain course of action.

"Is this what your lordship put in the pocket which contained those driving licences?" The speaker produced from one of his jacket pockets a small electro-plated revolver. "I've just been round to Tuffney's in Bond Street—their name is on the butt; they tell me there that rather more than three months ago they sold this weapon to your lordship."

"It begins to look as though you must have got hold of my car. That is what I put in the pocket."

"It wasn't found in the pocket; it was in a cavity under one of the front cushions The car was subjected to a thorough examination when we first got it, but because this was hidden

away in there it was overlooked till later. Was it loaded when you put it in that pocket?"

"Why do you ask? There is something about all this that I don't understand. How comes my car to be in your charge when I left it myself yesterday morning down in Devonshire?"

"That's what we want to learn. Would you mind answering my question; was that revolver loaded when you put it in the pocket?"

"The thing doesn't belong to me at all, it belongs to the Countess. I bought it for her—she had a craze for revolver practice."

"You haven't answered my question."

The Earl knitted his brows as if considering.

"I believe it was loaded; I know that it was, I noticed it. It was on the seat of the car under a rug. I have not the faintest notion how it came to be there, but I did notice it was loaded."

"All the chambers?"

"Yes, all of them; aren't they all loaded now?"

"Two of them have been discharged. Have you any acquaintance with a gentleman named Tozer?"

"Tozer?—the African man? I've met him, but I shouldn't call him an acquaintance."

"Does the Countess know him?"

The Earl sat up more stiffly on his chair.

"I can't tell you who the Countess knows."

"Was Mr. Andrew Tozer at Cawstone yesterday, or in its immediate neighbourhood?"

"How do I know? I came away yesterday morning by the ten o'clock train So far as I know, he wasn't; but how am I to tell you who was, say, within a ten-mile range? What the dickens do you mean by asking such questions?"

"Is her ladyship in town—or was she in town last night?"

"That I'll swear she wasn't. She wasn't up when I left the house. I had to come up to see my man of business, but I'm going back this morning, and the understanding is that she's to meet me at the station, in her car—the 60 Rolls-Royce you're talking about; so how can she have been in town last night?"

"The car was certainly in town last night."

The Inspector and the Chief Commissioner exchanged glances. It was the Commissioner who spoke next. He spoke with a dry judicial air, as though treating with a subject in which he had no personal concern.

"This morning, between one and two o'clock, the car of which Inspector Hextall speaks was found in Pall Mall standing by the pavement. The car itself was empty. On the driving-seat was

the figure of a man. From documents found on him, and other evidence, he appears to have been Mr. Andrew Tozer, of Gilcott, Bucks. He was quite dead; he had been murdered. The car is in our keeping; on the body of the dead man an inquest will presently be held. Your lordship will understand, since the car is your property, or her ladyship's, that it is necessary you should explain how it came to be at that hour of the morning where it was."

The changes which took place in the visitor's expression as the Commissioner spoke were worth studying; the Inspector watched them attentively. When the Commissioner ceased the expression on his lordship's face almost suggested stupefaction.

"My wife's new car in Pall Mall between one and two o'clock this morning!"

"With a dead man upon the driving-seat who had been murdered and whose name appears to have been Andrew Tozer." The aloofness with which the Commissioner seemed to speak was curious.

"But how did he come to be murdered?"

"That is the question which has to be answered, if possible with your assistance."

"With my assistance!" The Earl rose to his feet; his stick fell to the floor. "Are you suggesting, either of you, that my wife has—anything to do with what you are talking about?"

"We suggest nothing. We simply state the facts and ask for your assistance."

"But what assistance can I give you?"

"Your lordship is surely responsible for the movements of your own motor-car."

"I tell you it's not my motor-car; it's my wife's."

"Does that alter the position—appreciably? You recognised the revolver which the Inspector showed you as being the property of your wife. It was loaded, you say, in all its chambers when you saw it last. When we found it under the cushion of the car two of those chambers had been discharged; two shots had been fired at Andrew Tozer, presumably from your wife's revolver. A moment's reflection will show you that the sooner you furnish us with a clear and satisfactory explanation of what at present promises to be an unpleasant position, the better it will be for all the parties concerned."

The Earl had sat down again upon his chair; he seemed nearly in a state of collapse. He was wiping the top of his scantily covered head with a large white silk handkerchief.

"Terry, you amaze me more than I can tell you. I know

nothing whatever of the things you are talking about, and yet you seem to expect me to give you a cut-and-dried explanation. To begin with, let me look at that motor-car."

"With pleasure. The Inspector will take you down to it at once, and I will come with you."

The car was found in a large and airy sort of lock-up shed, of which it was the only occupant. His lordship recognised it on the instant.

"That's my wife's car right enough, but what have you been doing to it? The cushions have gone."

"We have stripped it of its furniture to facilitate examination."

"What's that great patch on the front there?"

"It's a blood stain. Practically everything in the car has been found to be more or less stained with blood. Almost every drop of blood was drained out of the unfortunate man's body."

"Terry! what a horrible thing! And that hideous blotch on the paint work of which Eleanor was so proud. She'll never want to ride in the thing again; I know her; she's sensitive almost to a fault. But what is beyond me is how the car which I left yesterday morning in Devonshire came to be in Pall Mall last night."

"It was of course quite easy for it to get there. Cawstone is about a hundred and eighty miles from town. A car of this power could do the distance in six hours."

The Earl gave what sounded like a sigh. "I'm afraid that my wife sometimes drives at more than thirty miles an hour."

The Inspector looked at him with a twinkle in his eyes. "I believe your lordship has been fined more than once for driving beyond the legal speed; on one occasion your speed was stated to be forty-seven miles an hour."

His lordship did not appear to be at all nonplussed. "That was in my old Mercèdes; it could do sixty; it wasn't easy to keep it down to twenty. I don't doubt that the car could get up to town in the time; it's other things I'm thinking about. I'm sure my wife never meant to leave Cawstone yesterday, and I don't believe she ever did. Someone has been having a joke with her car—someone who will have to pay for it."

"Can I trust your lordship to make the necessary inquiries of the Countess and report to us the result? We don't wish to cause you any more inconvenience than we can help; you will see for yourself the position in which the matter stands."

"I do, I see quite clearly. I am going down on the express and I'll let you know exactly what she says—I will telegraph you to-night. I shall probably write you as well."

When the Earl had departed the Chief Commissioner said to Inspector Hextall: " You're having observation kept on Cawstone ? "

The Inspector's reply was not only brief, it had something in it which a sensitive ear might have called ominous.

" A man went down on the 6.10; he should have been at Cawstone by eleven. His instructions are to keep us posted; I don't want to go down there till it's necessary."

" If it should be necessary."

" Exactly, if. There are inquiries to be made this end which will keep me occupied till I get news from Exeter."

This conversation took place in a corridor as the two men were returning to their respective quarters. When they came to the point at which their paths divided, the Commissioner halted.

" Do you know anything about the Countess of Ditchling ? "

" I remember her at the wedding as being a very beautiful girl. Of course she's young enough to be his daughter."

" Had she money of her own ? "

" From what I gathered, not a penny. She and her sister were the only children of her mother, and she was a widow. Marriage made their fortune."

The Commissioner made no comment. The two men parted. As the Inspector was turning into his room he met Dr. Leach.

" Hextall ! " that gentleman exclaimed, " I've been going over the corpse again, and I've come on something which I shouldn't wonder will provide us with another little surprise."

CHAPTER V

MY LORD AND MY LADY

WHEN the Earl of Ditchling reached Paddington Station the early editions of the evening journals were out. Going to the bookstall in search of literature with which to beguile his journey, his eye was caught by two placards which were boldly displayed. On one was, "Horror in Pall Mall"—those four words and nothing more. On the second the number of words was five; "Murder on a Motor car." He bought a copy of each paper. In the compartment which had been reserved for him he scanned them as soon as the train had started.

The motor-car had been discovered outside the Climax Club too late for mention in the morning papers—which was fortunate for those which were issued later. The accounts given did credit to the imagination of the reporters; they were hardly records of facts. That reliable details were not procurable mattered nothing; the up-to-date journalist is a master of the art of making bricks without straw. The Earl did not stop to ask himself how much of what was printed was true; it was enough for him to realise that that elegant car, which he had presented to the woman he loved, bade fair to become a very prominent figure in the public eye.

He got out of the train at St. David's Station. Almost as soon as his foot touched the platform he perceived a feminine person moving towards him, the very sight of whom made his pulses beat faster—even at his time of life. As she took both his hands in hers she seemed to be the living embodiment of life, hope, and happiness. She conducted him to a motor-car which was waiting without, chattering all the time while the footman was arranging his personal belongings. So soon as the car had started she overwhelmed him with questions.

"Well, what have you been doing in town? How is Mr. Widdicombe? Was everything all right? Did you see anybody interesting? Have you any news? Did anyone send any message to me? If I find out afterwards that people did send messages and you don't deliver them you know there'll be trouble. Were you up all night? Were you playing bridge or

doing something silly till cockcrow? Now I can see you I believe you're looking tired. Are you tired?"

She had his hand in hers under the cover of the rug. The question with which he replied was altogether away from anything she had been saying.

"Why have you brought the Fiat?"

He had a notion that she started; she certainly released his hand.

"My dear Hardy!" She stopped short as if in amazement.

"I asked you why you brought the Fiat."

"Is that all you have to say to me? Why have I brought the Fiat?" She looked at him with an air of grievance which he somehow felt was a trifle overdone. "Why shouldn't I bring the Fiat?"

"Why didn't you bring your own car?"

"My own car?" She seemed to hesitate; he had a horrible feeling that she was trying to invent something. "Why shouldn't I bring your car for once in a way?"

"Is anything wrong with yours?"

"What should be wrong? Did you see Pauline? I told you to see her if you could: I hope you did as I told you."

"I did not see Pauline." He wondered if she were eluding his questions. "Did you go anywhere yesterday?"

"Where should I go?"

"You seem to answer all my questions with others."

"Hardy! what do you mean? How queer you seem. Have you had any worries in town? Wouldn't Widdicombe do as you wanted him to?"

He considered before speaking again. It seemed to him to be clear that she did not mean to answer questions if she could help it. He did not care to press them while bowling over the country road at what was perhaps rather more than twenty miles an hour. He answered her instead, giving her all the information she pretended to desire; he had an uncomfortable suspicion that her desire to be acquainted with the petty details of what he had done during his twenty-four hours' absence was merely a pretext. When they reached Cawstone, which they did in an improperly short space of time, she said to him, as they stood in the hall:

"Now I'll run upstairs and change my gown and come down in less than ten minutes to give you some tea."

He laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"If you don't mind, Eleanor, I should like you to come into my study: there are one or two things of which I wish to speak to you."

"Before I change my gown?"

"If you please; I will try not to keep you long—your gown can wait."

"How very seriously you speak. Let's get into your study; when you have relieved your mind of what you have on it perhaps you will seem a little more lively."

In the oak-panelled apartment which was called his study he offered her a chair with an air of ceremony which seemed to tickle her.

"Won't you sit down?"

"My dear Hardy, I will, if you particularly wish it, but don't ask me with that air of grief, on a fine afternoon like this. Did you lose very much at bridge? Who was the scoundrel who revoked?"

He took up his position before the great fireplace with his hands behind his back. He thought what a delightful picture she presented, with the great motor-wrap still about her, and the becoming covering upon her shapely head; and of how much she meant to him; and instead of being comforted by the thought he was conscious of a vague sense of uneasiness. She was regarding him with what seemed to be quite genuine amazement.

"My dear good lord! why does your lordship look at me like that? I never saw you look so grave."

"Unfortunately, Eleanor, I have cause to be grave. Would you mind answering me one or two questions, without comment and—frankly."

He did not like to say "truthfully," though the word was on the tip of his tongue.

"There certainly does seem to be something wrong; I am beginning to wonder what it can be. Ask your questions."

"First of all—did you go anywhere yesterday?"

"Go anywhere? That's rather vague. Do you want me to tell you everywhere I went? Let me see; I shall have to think." She wrinkled her pretty forehead as if with the stress of her efforts at recollection; again it struck him that the thing was a trifle overdone. "In the morning I stayed in the house and never went anywhere; in the afternoon, indecently soon after lunch, Mrs. Mortimer came. As soon as she had gone I went for a little spin in the car."

"Which car?"

"Which car? Why, my car."

"Where did you go?"

"Oh, I went for a little run round; I'll give you my exact itinerary if you like—if it matters very much."

"Who drove you?"

"I drove myself. Hardy, why are you cross-examining me like this?"

"What time did you come back?"

"Who has been telling you things about me?" In her voice there was what struck him as a note of defiance. "I went towards Taunton. When I got near Sampford Arundel I had a burst. I had to run on the broken tyre to the town—more than three miles over a bad road."

"Couldn't you put the Stepney on?"

"I couldn't—the thing wouldn't go on; I tried and tried, got my hands into an awful state and then had to give it up. When I got to Sampford Arundel they told me that the flange of the wheel had all gone wrong—that was because I had been running on the rim. I had to leave the car and come back by train."

"Was that the reason you didn't meet me in your car at the station?"

"Of course it was."

"Why didn't you tell me so when I asked you?"

"Because I felt that I'd better leave it till I got you indoors, in case you were cross; now look how cross you are"

"What time did you get home?"

"I am afraid it was something after midnight."

"Is there a train so late as that from Sampford?"

"My dear Hardy, I came by the last train; I don't know exactly when it started, but it seemed as though it would never get here; I really am afraid it was past midnight when I got in."

"How did you get here from Exeter?"

She seemed to think for a moment before she answered.

"I wired to the garage at Exeter to have a car to meet me."

"What garage did you wire to?"

She had been lolling in her easy chair with her feet stretched out at length. Now she sat up straight; a new look came upon her face.

"Hardy, why are you asking me all this? It's so unlike you. What's at the back of your mind? What is it you want to know? I don't know. I let the Sampford people wire for me. I really can't tell you what was the name of the man to whom they wired." She rose from her seat. "Now, if you have quite finished with me I'll go up and change my gown for tea."

"I'm afraid I haven't finished; there's still a good deal which I must say to you. What time did you last see the car at Sampford Arundel?"

"What time?" She seemed to be casting about in her mind. "I'm afraid I can't quite tell you."

"Approximately?"

"It might have been eight—or even nine."

"So late as that? You are sure it was as late as that?"

"I am not sure at all. Why are you asking me these questions?"

She had her hands in the pockets of her wrap. He had a notion that her fists were clenched. In his turn he seemed to consider before he spoke again.

"Eleanor, do you know a man named Tozer—Andrew Tozer?"

This time she seemed surprised. He had a feeling that all his other questions had been expected.

"Andrew Tozer?—the African man? Of course I know him, and so do you; we have both of us met him more than once; several times."

"Did you see him yesterday at any time?"

"See Andrew Tozer yesterday?" Her whole bearing suggested amazement. "I haven't seen Mr. Tozer for weeks; I don't know when I saw him last; it was ages ago. What makes you ask if I saw him yesterday?"

"You are quite sure you didn't see him yesterday, at any time—think; a great deal may hang upon your answer."

"Hardy, what are you driving at? I tell you I haven't seen him for weeks and weeks. What bee have you got in your bonnet?"

He regarded her steadily for some seconds. Then, turning away, moving to a writing-table, he began to trifle with some of the papers with which it was littered She regarded him with what seemed to be genuine bewilderment, as if his whole bearing were a puzzle to her. When he spoke again it was with downcast eyes, and an air of unusual awkwardness.

"Eleanor, I'm sorry to have to tell you that there's likely to be trouble about your motor-car."

"Trouble about my motor-car! Hardy, what do you mean? You're talking in what is double Dutch to me." She moved impulsively towards him. "My dear child, if you've got anything on your mind, do get it off. What awful thing is it you think I have been doing?"

"Perhaps the shortest way to explain will be to show you those." He took out of his pocket the two evening papers which he had purchased at Paddington Station. He folded them at a particular place and handed them to her. "Look at that—and at that."

She glanced at the headlines, reading them aloud.

"'Horror in Pall Mall,' 'Murder on a Motor-car.' Hardy, what have you given me these dreadful papers for? They seem

to be full of some dreadful story about some vulgar crime. What interest have they for me?"

He had been watching her as she eyed the papers. Again he had that uncomfortable suspicion that it was with an effort that she concealed the real effect they had on her.

"That car which was found in Pall Mall, with the murdered man on the driving-seat, was your 60 Rolls-Royce—the one I gave you. The murdered man was Andrew Tozer."

The fashion of her countenance did change at last, as if the control of her muscles had escaped from her keeping. The pupils of her eyes dilated, the colour went from her cheeks, her jaw dropped open. She seemed all at once to be incapable of speaking above a whisper.

"Hardy, what—what are you saying?"

"Now you understand why I asked you those questions. The car—your car—was found in Pall Mall last night, so far as I understand, soon after midnight. You say you left it at Sampford Arundel at nine, and it was then in a state in which it needed several hours to be repaired—or I presume you would not have left it there. I suppose it is a hundred and seventy or a hundred and eighty miles from Sampford to London; say it took only three hours to repair, and the man set about the work at once, that would bring us to midnight. Less than an hour afterwards it was in Pall Mall. How do you explain it?"

CHAPTER VI

AN ACCIDENT

SHE made no immediate attempt to give him either an explanation or an answer. All the colour had gone from her cheeks; such a change had taken place in her during the last few minutes that she seemed like a different person. She crumpled up the copies of the papers he had given her between her fingers; although her eyes were fixed upon his face, one felt that she was not so much looking at him as at a picture which was present in her mind. After an appreciable space of time words came haltingly from her lips.

"I don't understand you at all—you are beyond me altogether; your questions have given me a headache. I am afraid you must let me go and lie down."

She made as if to move towards the door; he checked her.

"Eleanor, it is impossible that I should let you go until we have arrived at some sort of understanding. What was the name of the man at Sampford with whom you left your car to be repaired?"

"The name of the man at Sampford?" She had all at once acquired a trick of repeating his words. "How should I know?"

"Surely you know the name of the man with whom you left your car to be repaired."

"I don't know; I didn't notice."

"How long did he say it would take to repair?"

"I—I—I can't tell you."

"Do you mean you can't or you won't?"

She put her hand up to her head. "Hardy, you—you mustn't ask me any more questions; you—you've quite upset me—I don't know what I am saying."

Again she moved and again he stopped her. This time she leaned upon the back of a chair with both her hands, as if in need of its assistance to help her to stand.

"Eleanor, I wish you to understand this—this business, as I suppose I need hardly tell you, is in the hands of the police. I have given an undertaking to the Chief Commissioner at Scotland Yard to give him an explanation of how your car came to be

where it was—that is, to wire him an explanation to-night. You must be aware, without any comment from me, how lame your story is. My wire will have to run: 'The Countess of Ditchling can give no explanation.' The result will be that officers of police will be here in the morning, and you'll have a much worse time with them than, if you were frank, you'd have with me."

She seemed to make an effort to pull herself together; a pathetic smile flitted across her face.

"Do you really think I have anything to conceal?"

"You must be conscious of how incoherent your story is—as you have told it to me."

One could see how her fingers were twitching as she gripped the back of the chair; her lips were twitching also.

"Do you—do you—seriously suppose—or suggest—that I—know anything about what's in those—silly papers?"

"I suppose and suggest nothing. I merely ask you to give me an explanation, which it appears to me you—I won't say decline to do—but don't do."

"If you'll let me—go and lie down and get rid of this headache, I think you'll probably find—that I shall be able to tell you anything you want to know."

"When is that likely to be? I'm forced to ask because, you see, I promised to telegraph to-night; it was not said in so many words, but the understanding was that I should telegraph as soon as I got here."

She hesitated a moment, then she drew a long breath, and she said:

"Then—you may telegraph that I won't explain; I won't! I won't! I won't! My car is my car—you gave it me—and what I do with it is no one's business but my own. I'll not be questioned."

She went quickly towards the door, but he went hurrying after her, speaking all the while, so that again she had to stop.

"Eleanor, don't talk like that, for God's sake, don't! You don't—you can't understand. There's been murder done. That man Tozer was murdered on the seat of your motor-car. You admit to me that you took it out yesterday and that you didn't bring it back. If you won't tell me what you did with it—your story of the repairer whose name you don't know at Sampford Arundel is almost ludicrously vague——"

"I'll tell you this much—I didn't leave it at Sampford Arundel, and that's all I will tell you. I don't care what happens, I'll keep my own counsel."

Then she did leave the room; so suddenly that she was gone before her husband quite realised it. As she went she pulled the

door to after her with a bang. The Earl stood staring at it as if he would have liked his eyes to pierce the panels and follow her.

"What does it mean? It must mean something. What is it? What am I to tell them at Scotland Yard? We shall have them swarming down here if we don't take care."

An idea occurred to him; if he could get no information from his wife, he might glean information elsewhere. It was not a course of action which commended itself to him—it was a question of needs must. He went round to the garage, and there he found Stephen Ackroyd, who was chief in command. To his relief Ackroyd rendered it unnecessary for him to ask any questions by starting with a statement of his own—which he did with an air of grievance.

"Begging your pardon, my lord, but her ladyship took the Rolls-Royce out yesterday, driving herself, and she never brought it back, and this morning there's been a chap round here asking all sorts of things and throwing out hints about I don't know what. I've been over to the village on an errand, and as I was coming back the young man that drives for Mr. Sutton met me, and he gave me this."

Ackroyd held out one of those gorgeous bags which just then all the women were carrying. The Earl asked what it was.

"It seems it's her ladyship's bag, because there are a lot of her ladyship's things in it, and some of her jewels, and a purse full of money. I don't know how much there is myself, but that young man told me there must be more than five hundred pounds. He said he took Mr. Sutton over to Winchester last night, and Mr. Sutton sent him back with the car this morning. He came back by Salisbury, and just before he got there he had a puncture, just by where there was a gate into a field. He happened to glance over the gate and he saw something lying on the grass a good way from the hedge. He went to see what it was, and it was this bag. When he opened it he was surprised to find from what was inside that it seemed to belong to her ladyship. So he brought it back with him, and was bringing it up to the house when I met him."

The Earl had taken the bag from Ackroyd and was regarding it with rather a singular expression.

"It certainly does seem to be her ladyship's bag. I recognise it; in fact, I gave it to her. The man who found it must be rewarded; he mustn't suffer by having met you. What is his name?"

"Herbert Murray; he's a Londoner. He used to drive a taxi-cab before Mr. Sutton had him."

"You're sure he said he found it in a field on the other side of Salisbury?"

"Quite sure. There was a gate which opened into an avenue on the other side of the road. Murray could see a house between the trees. His first idea was to go up to the house and ask if it belonged to anyone in it; but when he found what seemed to be pretty strong evidence that it belonged to the Countess he changed his mind."

The Earl took the bag back with him to his study; although he had not asked a single question, apparently he had learnt all that he wished to know. The slight stoop with which of late he had begun to walk was more pronounced as he made certain comments to himself.

"Salisbury is not near Sampford Arundel, nor is it in that direction. That must have been a pretty good run round: Salisbury is more than ninety miles from this—half-way on the road to town. Unless she left very early she could scarcely have got to Salisbury from Sampford Arundel and back again. And what was she doing at Salisbury, anyhow?"

He wondered still more when he saw the contents of that bag, which he emptied out upon a table, not without hesitation. For the better part of a minute he suspended it between his fingers, as if considering; then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, he turned it inside out. It contained a miscellaneous collection. There was a case of rings.

"Her dress rings," he told himself. "What did she want with them when treating herself to a little spin in her car?"

There were three necklaces, one of diamonds, two of pearls; five bracelets; a diamond hair ornament; various jewelled odds and ends.

"She could scarcely want these things in the course of a little run round; it can hardly be her habit to carry such valuables as these loose in her bag." He had opened a leather porte-monnaie. "Stuffed with bank-notes; as Mr. Sutton's young man told Ackroyd, they must represent more than five hundred pounds. For use on a little spin! What's this? A telegram!" He straightened out the slip of pink paper. "Handed in at the Gilcott post-office at 12.20. Received 1.18. Date, May 11—that's three days ago.—'Yours received. Delighted. Everything arranged. Will meet as suggested. Never to part. Shan't sleep all night.' No signature. That's the message; who is it from? Addressed to the Countess of Ditchling, Cawstone. Who was her anonymous correspondent? It was evidently taken for granted that she would understand. May the 11th—that was Monday. On Monday morning I heard that

I should have to go up to town on Wednesday to see Widdicombe. Is it possible that she informed her anonymous correspondent of that fact by a telegram to which this is an answer? This was dispatched from the office at Gilcott—Andrew Tozer lived at Gilcott."

He sat down on the chair on which his wife had been, and for some seconds continued to stare at the pink slip of paper. Then with a sigh he let it drop on to his knee.

"I'm beginning to wonder if the foundations of the world are giving way beneath me. It's no use asking questions of a sheet of paper; I'll get an explanation of this telegram from her—and of the jewels, and the bank-notes found in the bag I gave her in a field on the other side of Salisbury. Headache or no headache—that woman's plea when she has her back against the wall—she'll have to explain."

He rose, bundled the things back into the bag, with which he left the room. As he was ascending the staircase a woman came rushing down. At the sight of him she stopped, and pressing both hands against her left breast she exclaimed:

"Oh, my lord—the Countess!"

"Woman," he demanded, "what's the matter with you?"

He glared at her in a fashion which was distinctly reminiscent of the quarter-deck. She seemed to shrink away from him, speaking in lowered tones.

"Oh, my lord, the Countess has taken something out of a bottle."

"What on earth does the fool mean?" Neither his tone nor his words were sympathetic. "Where is the Countess?"

"She's—she's in her bedroom—on the bed."

"Why shouldn't she be in her bedroom on the bed?" He hurried past her, gaining her ladyship's sleeping-apartment, the door of which was open. The sight of the open door seemed to cause him to pause—he entered as with unwilling steps.

On the bed, as her maid had said, was his wife; she lay as if she had fallen across it rather than laid herself down. She had removed neither her motor-wrap nor her hat, but was attired just as she had left him.

"Eleanor!" he cried, "for God's sake, what is the matter?"

In the fingers of her right hand was a blue phial labelled "Poison." He snatched it and held it to his nose, then he rushed out of the room again to the head of the staircase. Some men-servants were standing in the hall below. He shouted to them:

"Tell Ackroyd to take my car at once and fetch a doctor—as fast as he can go. Her ladyship has had an accident."

CHAPTER VII

MR. BAIRD IS QUESTIONED

WHEN Inspector Hextall returned to his own quarters, having seen the Earl of Ditchling off the premises, his subordinate officer handed him a typewritten sheet of paper.

" This message has just come over the telephone from Gilcott, sir."

His glance went rapidly over it; this is what he found:

" Andrew Tozer left his house at Gilcott yesterday—Wednesday—afternoon immediately after an early lunch, before 2 p.m. He had with him a brown leather suit-case with his name in full on the front. He was driven in a motor-car to the station by a chauffeur named Henry Willis. He went up by train to town. He had a friend who had been staying with him and who left before lunch, also for town. Nothing has been heard of either of them since. A young woman called at Gilcott this morning who was very anxious to see Mr. Tozer, insisting that she knew he was in. She would not believe them when the servants told her he was away, declaring that she knew better. She seems to have made quite a scene. She arrived about ten o'clock, in a state of much excitement; the servants are not sure if she was quite sane; it was more than an hour before they could get rid of her. The butler tells me that he thinks that if Mr. Tozer had been in and the girl could have got at him, there would have been trouble; some wild words she uttered seem to have given him the impression that she would have liked to murder him. No one seems to know what became of her. Shall I try to trace her? It ought to be easy. If I get any news of Mr. Tozer shall I send it on? "

The Inspector looked up from the paper at the attendant officer.

" If he does get news of Andrew Tozer he might send it on—at once. I doubt if he will get any. I suppose this message is from the officer in charge? "

" Yes, sir, from Sergeant Mannering. Gilcott is only a very small place; the sergeant is in command. If Mr. Tozer left Gilcott soon after two he probably got to Paddington at 3.30.

He's probably pretty well known there. Shall I find out if any-one noticed him?"

"You might, and let me hear. A taxi-cab carrying a lady in evening dress was in Pall Mall last night about twenty minutes past one. It stopped outside the Climax Club; the lady got out, crossed the road, and went back again. It was a green cab, possibly a Gamage. It came down St. James's Street, so it was probably picked up in one of the streets on the north side of Piccadilly. I want that cab found and the driver—quickly." The Inspector changed from one subject to another as he picked up his hat and buttoned his jacket. "I'm going up to South Audley Street, to pay a call on Mr. John Baird; he's got a tele-phone. Call to me if anything turns up and I'm particularly wanted. I'll let you know where I go after I leave him."

On his way to the front entrance the Inspector met a tall, well-set-up man, some years younger than himself.

"Hullo, Bradley, any news about that Piccadilly affair?"

Inspector Bradley put up his hand to rub the back of his neck.

"Well, there is and there isn't. The fact is, Hextall, something rather funny has happened. You know I told you the name of the man who that young woman did in was Pepper—Thomas Pepper—and that he was a small bookmaker who lived in the Vauxhall Bridge Road; so to speak, his clothing was stuffed full of papers to prove it; how they came there we've got to learn. It seems he wasn't Thomas Pepper."

"How do you know that?"

"Took his landlady to look at him. She described him when I called on her—somehow the description didn't seem to fit; there was his photograph on the mantelpiece—and that didn't fit either. The moment she saw him she said he wasn't Pepper; not a bit like him. Who it was she didn't know—he was a stranger to her; all she knew was that he wasn't Thomas Pepper. All the clothes he had on him were Pepper's, and in all his pockets were Pepper's belongings. How they came there she says she hasn't the faintest notion. Seems funny, doesn't it?"

"Where is Thomas Pepper? Does she know?"

"She says he was a little in liquor on Tuesday night. Her husband helped him up the stairs to his room—on the first floor. He told her husband that he had an appointment with a gentle-man yesterday which might be worth a thousand pounds to him. He seemed all right yesterday morning at breakfast; soon after he went out, as he generally did. Up to the present he hasn't returned. She isn't surprised—or alarmed. When he goes out he may be back in an hour or two, or he may be away for days. He seldom speaks to her about his movements. Once she rather

expected him back for midday dinner, and he was away for three weeks—and never said a word when he came in."

"With all due deference to that landlady, I shouldn't wonder if this time Mr. Thomas Pepper has found trouble; that gentleman who was at Piccadilly Circus yesterday for the last time might have told him what it was. I hope you'll have luck, Bradley. I've got a pretty hard nut of my own to crack."

Mr. John Baird had been engaged most of the morning looking through papers. He took them out of a drawer guarded by the flap of an old-fashioned bureau. Most of them seemed to be letters—probably all written by the same hand at different stages of the writer's life. The hand was feminine. The letters began at quite an early period of the writer's life—they were in a big, round hand on ruled paper. The writing grew less and less, though it never grew really small, and the ruling ceased. He turned each letter over, even the childish ones, with a curious tenderness which suggested that to him they were things of infinite value. Some he read through, some he merely glanced at, many of them he seemed to know by heart. Odds and ends were mixed up with the letters; dance programmes, faded flowers, even gloves and strips of ribbon. They seemed to mean a great deal to him.

When he had gone through the letters he opened a leather case in which were photographs—all of the same person at different ages. No doubt the original was the writer of those letters. First she was a little girl in quite short frocks; then a young hoyden with her hair in a plait; then a young woman of quite striking personality; then there was a large photograph of her in her bridal dress. Something about this made him smile—acidly.

"I never shall be able to think of her as the Countess of Ditchling, try how I like—never. Yet she has been married now nearly five years. What an odd world it is; and how age creeps on before we know it. I'm an old man, and she is still a girl; though anyhow I'm not as old as Ditchling by a good long way. I happen to know—it's in the books of reference—that he's fifty-eight, and I'm not yet forty-three. But I feel—God knows that I sometimes feel as if I were a hundred. I don't know what a centenarian does feel like, but he can hardly have more done with life than I have."

He got up and crossed the room to where a portrait of a handsome girl, painted on ivory, stood on an easel. He took it into his hand.

"That's how she was. Five years make a difference; it's that since I saw her; it seems like fifty to me. They say she's

grown more beautiful. That suggests she's happy. Why shouldn't she be? From all accounts Ditchling's an excellent sort. I've had just one glimpse of her in her motor-car, she driving. She was so hidden by her veil, and went so fast, that I couldn't see her face; yet I knew without being told that it was she. But I got a very good view of the car; and—that's the trouble."

He replaced the portrait; perched himself on the corner of a table, one foot on the ground and the other swinging in the air, and he gave utterance to an audible exclamation.

"Deuce take the thing! I'd have known it without the handkerchief. What did it mean, with that ghastly horror on the driving-seat? One thing's sure, it wasn't she who got out of the car. I'd know that girl again anywhere. I've got such an infernally good memory for faces and things, once seen I find it hard to forget. What shall I do? Send her the handkerchief? Say nothing and keep it? Drop her a line or—call on her and deliver it in person? I shall have to call on her some day and pretend to forget—as she has done—only I don't want to reintroduce myself as the bearer of a relic from that horrible thing."

There was a tapping at the door; a man-servant entered.

"Someone wishes to see you." A rather comical look came upon his face as someone pushed past him. "Oh, you've shown yourself in, sir, have you?"

The stranger addressed him with a little air of authority. "I want a little talk with Mr. Baird; let me see you go downstairs." He held the door open while the servant descended; then, shutting it, he addressed Mr. Baird. "Do you think he'll return to listen at the keyhole?"

Mr. Baird did not answer the question; he got off the table and looked at him.

"Who are you, sir? You have rather an unceremonious way of entering a gentleman's room."

"I'm Inspector Hextall of Scotland Yard. I've never had the pleasure of meeting you before, Mr. Baird, but I've heard of you in rather a curious way. It was at the Countess of Ditchling's wedding. I was looking after the wedding presents. People paid no attention to me; they seemed to think I was a sort of lay figure. I heard one gentleman say to another, standing within a yard of me, 'It may seem rummy, but I'd have bet anything that if ever I went to Eleanor Pearse's wedding, the bridegroom would be Jack Baird. Nowadays you never do know who a girl's going to marry!' From inquiries I've made since, I've learned that you're the John Baird to whom the gentleman alluded."

A shadow seemed to come over Mr. Baird's face; he made a half step forward—then seemed to wince as if the other had struck him a deadly blow.

"What do you mean," he cried, "by your infernal impertinence?"

"I said what I did say for a particular reason, Mr. Baird, and no impertinence was intended. You wouldn't wait for me to come to Pall Mall this morning; Colonel Overton told me that you had declined." He paused; but seeing that the other seemed to be a little bewildered, he went on: "I'll explain; I'm in charge of what I see the papers already call 'The Mystery of the Motor-Car.' You recognised the car as being the property of the Countess of Ditchling; I don't wonder that under the peculiar circumstances the discovery gave you rather a turn, and that you preferred not to wait for the coming of an inquisitive policeman. So as you didn't wait I've had to come round to ask you a few questions here."

Mr. Baird turned; he realised that the flap of his bureau was open, and that certain letters and photographs were lying exposed. He closed the bureau as the officer watched him; then he turned again to face him.

"Ask your questions, Inspector."

"When you first saw the motor-car did you notice the man sitting on the seat?"

"I noticed that there was a man there and I thought he was asleep, but I can't say that I took any particular notice of him or the car."

"I'm told that you did, and that while you were noticing it you were treated to a little surprise." Mr. Baird was silent. "Don't you know what I mean?"

"I presume you refer to the fact that while I was passing the car a young woman got out of it."

"You thought the car was empty until she did get out of it, didn't you?"

"I tell you I didn't take particular notice."

"You'd have noticed her if she'd been sitting on one of the seats?"

Mr. Baird considered. "I daresay I should."

"She wasn't sitting on one of the seats?"

"I don't think she was."

"Where was she"?

"I think she must have been in the bottom of the car."

"Hiding?"

"I couldn't say."

"How far from the car were you when you first saw her?"

"Perhaps two or three feet."

"And from that distance you thought the car was empty?"

"I did, until someone rose, as I suppose, from the bottom of the car—a woman. When she saw me she opened the door at the other side, jumped out, and made off."

"You had a good look at her. Can you describe her?"

"I'm afraid I can't."

"Think; was she young or old, dark or fair, tall or short?"

"The impression left upon my mind was that she was youngish, of medium height. I couldn't tell you the colour of her hair because it was covered by a huge hat."

"Can you describe the hat?"

"Except that it was big, and with flowers on it. I never can describe what a woman wears. I don't suppose I saw her for more than ten seconds, and the light was bad."

"But you'd recognise her if you saw her again?"

A thin smile passed over Mr. Baird's face. "I see you've been talking to Colonel Overton. I told him that I thought I should, but now I'm not so sure. Do you think you've found her?"

There was an odd something in the Inspector's glance as he answered:

"I fancy, Mr. Baird, that you know I haven't; I can't tell you why I fancy it, but I do. Queer, isn't it?"

When the Inspector departed, having asked a great many more questions to which he received vague answers, he said to himself when he got into the street:

"I wonder what Mr. John Baird knows that he won't tell me? I flatter myself that I can generally tell when a man's keeping something back, and I'm willing to bet a trifle he is. He's the sort of man who'd do anything to screen a woman he'd once cared for; sometimes when a man tries that game, trying to screen her does more harm than blurting out the truth."

Scarcely had the Inspector gone—he could hardly have been out of the street—than Mr. Baird had another visitor. As before, there came a tapping at his sitting-room door, which the man-servant opened, but before he could make an announcement Colonel Overton came rushing in.

"Baird," he exclaimed, "the most extraordinary thing has happened!"

CHAPTER VIII

BY PARCEL POST

THE Colonel, usually calmness itself, seemed to be in a state of some agitation. Laying his hat, stick, and gloves upon the table, he repeated his own announcement in rather louder tones :

" Yes, Baird, the most extraordinary thing has happened ! "

Instead of placing himself upon a seat he began to stride up and down the room as if in need of exercise. Baird eyed him with a grim look of amusement.

" It appears to me, Overton, that it generally is the extraordinary which happens. If this particular remarkable occurrence is of interest to me, don't you think you might deal with it to greater advantage if you sat down ? "

The Colonel, swinging round, extended his arms.

" My good man, what do you think ! I'm aware you're a friend of the lady's, so I hardly know how to put it ; still, I don't see that I've any alternative, as your friend, than to place you in possession of facts which will probably soon become public property. Baird, it seems extremely possible that the woman we saw get out of the taxi-cab last night and pass to that motor-car was the Countess of Ditchling."

If the words touched John Baird on a tender spot, he showed no signs of it. He smiled at the Colonel ; then, before speaking, he chose a cigarette out of a box which stood upon a table.

" What makes you say so ? Smoke, Overton ? "

" Thank you, I never could enjoy a cigarette—can't smoke paper. As I was coming out of my rooms I met Curtis—Sir Clifford, you know. He fell in at my side—I'm not fond of the man, but as he was going my way I could hardly help it. Boys were shouting out the evening papers. One of them had a placard in front of him, with on it, ' Horror in Pall Mall.' Curtis said, ' That's a funny thing about the Ditchling motor-car. I saw the Earl yesterday afternoon, and her ladyship in the evening twice.' I pricked up my ears at this, but I said nothing. ' The first time I suppose was about ten o'clock. She was racing along Knightsbridge in that car of hers. There was a man with her, but I couldn't see who it was. Some hours afterwards, to be

exact, somewhere about two, I was in Piccadilly and I saw her in a taxi-cab moving towards St. James's Street. I fancy that she was in evening dress—she was alone; I wondered where she was going to in a taxi at that hour, especially as the Ditchling mansion is in Lowndes Square.' Mind you, Baird, I don't say I've given you his exact words, but that's the sense of them; I paid particular attention to them, as you may fancy. Now, you see, he says he saw her in a taxi about two, going towards St. James's. It was soon after two when we saw that taxi-cab pull up and the woman get out. Doesn't it look, after Curtis's story, as if it might have been the Countess? I thought I knew her at the time." The Colonel went off at a tangent. "I saw that fellow, Inspector Hextall, coming out of your front door as I came along; what did he want with you?"

"He asked one or two questions, but he said nothing about the lady we saw getting out of the taxi-cab; I rather wondered why. Did you mention her to him?"

"I did last night—or rather early this morning. I told him everything there was to tell." The Colonel dropped on to a chair. "Baird, I seem to have struck a vein of bad luck. I purposely said nothing about what I saw at Piccadilly Circus, because I didn't wish to be mixed up with anything of the kind, though I expect I shall be dragged into it yet before it's done with. Then right on top of it comes this business of the motor-car—it's too horrible, too dreadful! I haven't seen so much of him since his marriage, but at one time Ditchling was quite an intimate friend of mine—especially when he was still in the Service. And of course I've met the Countess, and, with the rest of the world, think her one of the most charming women of my acquaintance. If, as Curtis says, she was in her car in Knightsbridge at ten o'clock, and she was the woman we saw pay that very queer visit to the car at two——" The Colonel paused. "Baird, I think it's about time I took a little run abroad. A little shooting in Africa would do me good. I'm not going to get mixed up in an affair of this kind if I can help it. If you won't think me impertinent, what do you propose to do? Why not pack a couple of bags and come with me? Even a few months on the Veldt would give the thing a chance of blowing over. There's a boat which starts on Saturday; we might easily catch it."

"You forget that I've just come back; I've been wandering over the face of the earth for practically five years. Nor would what you suggest do the lady any good. If that man Hextall, for instance, were to learn that you'd run away rather than run the risk of having to give evidence, and I'd gone with you, what construction do you suppose he'd put upon it? Our running

away would probably do her the worst possible service. My post is here; I prefer to stick to it."

There was something in his tone and manner which seemed to impress the keen-witted Colonel.

"You don't think——!" He stopped, as if taking it for granted that the other would be able to complete the question for himself.

Mr. Baird knocked the ash off his cigarette very carefully. Then he looked at the clock on his mantelshelf. What he saw there seemed to surprise him into ignoring the other's question.

"It's past one o'clock. Overton, I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me; I've got heaps of things to do, to say nothing of an appointment with a man for lunch. You won't mind my turning you out?"

The Colonel seemed unconscious that his question remained unanswered. He stood up—he referred to his watch.

"You're right—it is past one. How the morning slips away! Like you, I have things I ought to do; I'd better do them."

As Inspector Hextall had done, he communed with himself as he left John Baird's door behind him.

"If her ladyship of Ditchling had even a little finger in last night's business—and I believe he thinks she had—I wonder what he'll do. I've always understood that he'd go through a warm place for that woman. If she had, nothing he could do would be of any benefit to her. In which case his last state will be worse than his first."

Mr. Baird was on the point of preparing himself for out of doors, possibly to keep that appointment for lunch, when the postman brought him some letters and a parcel. Merely glancing at the addresses on the envelopes, he seemed disposed to leave them for another occasion; but to the parcel he showed greater attention.

It was a brown-paper parcel; the paper seemed neither very new nor very clean. It was tied about with coarse string—which also was not new. On the clumsy knot with which it was secured was a blob of sealing-wax. The address was written with what was apparently a quill pen on the paper itself. On one side were two words in great staring letters; a thick line had been drawn beneath them: "Immediate! Important!"

"Is that a woman's hand or a man's? It almost looks as though more than one person had been engaged on this address and superscription. What's in the thing?" He felt it. "Something soft Perhaps the shortest way to find out will be to open it and see. For a thing that's both immediate and important it doesn't seem to be very securely fastened."

He quite easily slipped the string over one of the corners and the whole thing came open. He could not make out for a second or two what the contents were. It appeared to be a garment of some sort. He took it out and held it up.

"It's a wrap, I believe a feminine wrap; a dainty one; one of those things with which women cover up their splendours when travelling or in a motor-car. Who has sent it to me, and why?" He turned it round, in search of some clue. "What's that on the front there?"

On one of the sides in the front there was a big, dark stain—an ominous dark red. This was the principal one, but there were others—spots and splashes; one sleeve seemed to have been soaking wet. The more he looked at it the graver became his expression. He looked at the thing inside. Just below the neck was a tab, with on it the maker's name—a famous Parisian house; below this, embroidered in gold, was what was apparently the owner's name—Countess of Ditchling.

When he saw that Mr. Baird began to understand. This thing had been sent to him with a special, malign intention. As he was turning the cloak about something fluttered on to the ground. He looked at it as if hesitating. His comment was curious.

"That's the poisoned arrow."

The words apparently referred to what had fallen to the ground. Still he hesitated. Then, with a curious smile, he stooped and picked it up. It was a half sheet of paper, on which was written, in a sprawling, unformed hand—it had neither commencement nor finish:

"To John Baird. This wrap was found on the high road last night. It seems to be the property of Lady Ditchling. As it is in rather a curious state—it was sopping wet when found, and made the finder's hands all over blood—it might be the occasion of family jars if returned to the lady at her own abode. As you are an old and dear friend of hers it is sent to you. Perhaps you would not mind finding out how it came to be where it was found and in such a condition. No doubt, if asked by you, Lady Ditchling will tell you all about it.

"It was so sopping wet that the blood must have gone right through to her very skin. Whose was it? One wonders what she looked like."

That was what was written on the half sheet of paper. John Baird read it again and again, as if in search of a meaning which might be behind the words. From its careful study he seemed to draw certain conclusions.

"This is the production not only of an enemy but of one who knows—how much? This was written by a woman. What's

the postmark ? " He referred to the wrapper. " Basingstoke—the hour at which it was posted is illegible, but presumably it could soon be learnt ; possibly also who handed this parcel across the counter. I don't know which is the road by which a man would motor from Cawstone to London, but he would probably go near Basingstoke on the way."

He put down the half sheet of paper and took up the wrap again, turning it over and over, feeling in the pockets, which were empty, studying the tab at the back.

" That's rather a tell-tale thing, under certain circumstances, to carry about with one—one's name upon one's clothing. One can conceive of conditions which would induce one to prefer, when a garment was lost or mislaid, that it should contain nothing by which its owner might be recognised." He seemed to be lost in thought. " What was the woman who got out of the taxi looking for in the car ? Was it for this ? "

CHAPTER IX

THE POND

JOHN BAIRD was journeying by the morning train to Exeter. He had a selection of newspapers. The inquest on the victim of the motor-car mystery had opened the day before. He was studying the report as it appeared in each, although he had it nearly by heart already. The proceedings had been brief enough. Inspector Hextall told the story of how he had been called to the car in Pall Mall and of the dead man he found upon the driving-seat. He was followed by Felix Vineal, who stated that he was valet to Mr. Andrew Tozer, of Gilcott, Bucks. He had seen the corpse, which had been found; he recognised it as the body of his late master. The accounts all agreed in saying that at this point the witness spoke with great emotion; indeed, as questions led him into ghastly details, he could hardly speak at all. The face of the dead man had been torn to pieces; his scalp had been ripped right off him—it was not easy to recognise him by his looks. None the less, he was sure that the body was that of Andrew Tozer; he had no doubt upon that point. He left home on Wednesday after lunch. He had with him the suit-case which was produced in court; he—Vineal—had packed it. He had seen his master slip the cheque-book in at the last moment. He saw him fill up the cheque for five hundred pounds, which was now the first in the book, just before he did so. He had drawn it up at a writing-table which was in his dressing-room; the valet was particularly struck by the fact that he broke into loud and continuous laughter when he had affixed his signature. He had wondered why Mr. Tozer laughed.

Witness did not know where Mr. Tozer was going; he said nothing about when he would be back again. He did not like to be asked questions—it would have been as much as witness's place was worth to have asked him; he vouchsafed no information. After Mr. Tozer had gone, witness picked up the telegram which was produced in his dressing-room. The telegram was read aloud. "I shall be ready for you on Wednesday. Any time. He will be away all day."

There was no signature It was addressed to Andrew Tozer,

Gilcott, and had been dispatched from Winchester post-office. It had arrived a little before noon. A few minutes after its receipt Mr. Tozer had instructed witness to pack a suit-case.

Witness had no idea who the telegram was from. Mr. Tozer was constantly receiving telegrams, sometimes twenty or thirty a day. It happened, however, that that was the only one which came for him that day. At this point counsel announced that he had at present no more questions to ask the witness. He proposed to produce no evidence that day. He asked for an adjournment, which was granted. The proceedings finished.

"I wonder what kind of man Mr. Andrew Tozer was," John Baird asked himself when he had come to the end of his papers. "There are men for whom murder is too good an ending—I wonder if he was one of that sort. Unfortunately the law does not discriminate, especially in this country; in England if you intentionally kill you're pretty sure to be hanged."

John Baird got out of the train at Exeter and took a taxi-cab to the Ditchling Arms at Cawstone. There he lunched, and during lunch he asked some questions of the maid who waited. She gave him all the information she had to give.

The Earl and Countess were at the great house. The Countess was ill. She had been taken ill last Thursday, almost directly after the Earl came back from town. Baird pricked up his ears at this. The maid could not say what was the matter with her, but she must have been pretty bad. The doctor was with her for hours. She had been in bed ever since. There was a man—a stranger—in the village who seemed very much interested in her illness, and in the great house generally. He was lodging at the cobbler's, but was hanging about the house and grounds all day, putting his nose everywhere, and asking such questions that Mr. Ackroyd, the Earl's chauffeur, had publicly announced that if he had much more of him he'd treat him to the toe of his boot. The maid seemed to think this was a joke; the idea of Mr. Ackroyd kicking the stranger made her smile.

Baird asked if strangers were admitted to the grounds. The maid said they were; they had been in the late lord's time, and were by the present lord as well—they might go pretty well anywhere so long as they did not interfere with the game. The chief entrance was just outside the village; but if you went along the lane there was a gate which opened on to the kennels, and then if you crossed a field you came to the park, and there was a nice walk right round it, past the lakes and past the house, and past the lodge at the back of it, to the chief entrance in the front; it was quite a walk round the park. Baird decided to try it.

He went out after his meal. At the garden gate in front of a

cobbler's shop a man was standing, smoking a pipe, with his hands in his pockets. He looked at him as he passed, and the man looked searchingly at him.

"That fellow's a policeman," he told himself when he had left the smoker behind. "A London plain-clothes man; probably an emissary from my friend, Inspector Hextall. That looks as if the Inspector had designs on a quarter from which, if he were well advised, he would keep clear. The fellow is going to follow me. I thought so; we'll see to what extent he proposes to try that game."

Mr. Baird proceeded perhaps another hundred yards, turned suddenly, and stood still. The man with the pipe was about twenty or thirty yards behind him. He came steadily on. Mr. Baird waited. The man advanced; Mr. Baird looked him very straight in the face as he came near; as if ignoring the other, the man looked straight ahead. When he had gone another thirty yards he, in his turn, stood still, and he looked round. Mr. Baird had not yet moved. When he saw that the man had stopped he advanced, again looking him very straight in the face as he went past.

"He's after me again. He turned to look directly I was past, but he only decided to follow when I was round the bend. I suppose he thought I shouldn't see him. The man's a fool. I'll say a few kind words to him."

He drew up close to the hedge so that he was hidden from the other till he was right upon him. The man with the pipe seemed surprised to find him awaiting his arrival. He had apparently taken it for granted that he was some distance ahead. Baird touched him on the shoulder with a cane he carried.

"One moment, my man."

The man with the pipe tried to look surprised.

"Who are you calling your man?" He spoke as if a very little would induce him to bluster Baird was quite cool.

"You're following me, my man. I don't like to be followed If you persist I shall take steps to prevent you. If you are wise you'll turn and go the other way."

"Shall I? This is a public road; I have as much right in it as you have. Who are you? Who do you think you're talking to?"

"You heard what I said. If you're looking for trouble you'll persist in trying to follow me; I've a right to object, and I do."

"How do you know I'm following you?"

"You heard what I said; and you understood. Good afternoon."

John Baird continued his walk. For some seconds there was

nothing to show that the man had not taken his advice, turned and gone back again. Nature had given him keen hearing; the life he had lived during the last five years, in the remote places of the world, had improved on nature. He had learnt to distinguish, at the dead of night, by the sense of hearing alone, one wild creature's movement from another's. He had perhaps gone a further two hundred yards when he suddenly became conscious that steps were coming behind him. He smiled to himself.

"He's trying to tread as lightly as he can so that I shan't hear; I should think he finds it rather difficult. I'll go a little farther until I find a convenient spot in which to receive him. This ought to do."

He came to a place in which, by the side of a footpath, there was a stile. By the stile he waited, and he listened.

"Fancy a fellow like that being sent down to spy on her; to make a story of her every movement for his employer's delectation. He has ears of his own; he's stopped; he ceased to hear my footsteps and he's wondering what has become of them. He's in doubt what to do. He's thought of the stile. He's come to the conclusion that I've crossed it; he's hurrying on to see." There was an interval. "Here he is."

There the man was—more surprised to see Baird than Baird was to see him. Indeed, the sight of the gentleman leaning against the stile, which stood a little back from the road, so that he was covered by the hedge, seemed to give him something like a shock. Baird was the first to speak.

"So you haven't taken my advice and turned and gone back?"

Again the man was disposed to bluster.

"Why should I? Who are you? It's a public highway. It's as much mine as yours. Do you think you own it?" Something he saw on the other's face seemed to warn him; he shrank back. "Don't you touch me! Don't you so much as lay a finger on me! I'm an officer of police. I give you notice——"

"I gave you notice, but you wouldn't take it."

"You let me go! By ——, if you don't leave hold of me——"

"I'll leave hold of you."

John Baird did, in a fashion the other had probably neither desired nor expected. He had gripped the man in some queer fashion which left him both amazed and helpless, though inclined to bawl at the top of his voice. With a sudden twist, without seeming to exert any particular force, he lifted him off the ground. The man was flung over his shoulder, over the stile, alighting head foremost in a miry pond which was close behind the footpath

on the other side. It was probably used to water cows; everyone knows how cows do churn up the approaches to a pond. The man dropped with a splash, to find himself, when he struggled to his feet, mired in the filth below. He presented an indescribable spectacle; half choked with mud, spluttering with rage.

"You'll pay for this!" he shouted, as well as what he had swallowed permitted him. "You've assaulted and struck an officer in the execution of his duty—the law will teach you a lesson!"

To the indignant man's surprise a voice addressed him, not from the other side of the stile, but from the pond.

"Will it? And if you come out this side it will have a chance of teaching me another." The speaker was a tall, strapping man, who wore his hat on the back of his head. He addressed himself to Mr. Baird. "I don't know who you are, sir, but I never enjoyed anything better than the way you handled him. My name's Ackroyd; I'm the Earl of Ditchling's chauffeur. That fellow's made himself a regular nuisance about the place. I told him myself that if I had any more trouble with him I'd give him a taste of what he didn't want, and so I will, though he's had more than a taste already." The speaker grinned. He spoke to the man who was making the best of his way through the filth to dry land. "I'm told your name is Barclay, and that you're something in the sneak business. Well, Mr. Barclay, this gentleman has given you what you deserved, I'm witness to that, and if you try to come any more of your sneaking games round here you'll get some more, from others as well as me. And you won't get out of it so easily next time. I'll have you know that you're on private property. You take yourself off it, and don't you set foot on it again."

Mr. Baird drew aside to let the man get over the stile, addressing him as he did so:

"If you had been discreet you'd have taken my advice and turned round. I allow no man to dog my steps with impunity. You go back to whence you came lest worse befall you."

The man strode off in the direction of the village. He was a singular figure, bareheaded—he had left his felt hat in the pond—sopping wet, covered with the green filth which settles on stagnant water. When he had gone some little distance he stopped and shouted back at Mr. Baird:

"I'll find out who you are. I can guess already, and if you're the party I think, you'll find this is the worst day's work you ever did in your life. You wait till I've had a chance of communicating with them in town, I'll teach you something, and your Lady Ditchling too!"

As he uttered the last words he raised his voice to a positive bellow. John Baird said nothing; but probably he would have liked to treat the impious speaker to another taste of the mud at the bottom of the pond.

CHAPTER X

PAULINE

JOHN BAIRD reached the clapper-gate to which he had been directed, crossed the field, and, entering what were clearly the precincts of the park, saw a little way in front of him, beneath the trees, a vision which brought his feet to a sudden stand. A feminine figure stood under a cluster of young beeches. For a few curious moments it seemed to him that the years which were gone were all at once bridged, and the woman who had played such a great part in his life was once more a girl and was advancing across the sward to greet him. He was almost disposed to ask himself if his senses were not playing him a trick, but it certainly was a girl, a real creature of flesh and blood, and she was coming towards him.

The resemblance to the woman he had known was at first so strong that he found it hard to believe it was not she, but as the figure came closer he realised that this might, in a manner of speaking, be a replica of the original. The amazing part of it was that this one was as fair as even flattering memory told him she had been. In height, shape, features, the grace with which she moved, the manner in which she held herself—in none of these was this one whit behind the other. He remained as if glued to the sod on which he stood, watching her approach, devouring her, as it were, with his eyes, until, having come within a few feet, the sound of her voice roused him to a consciousness of the singularity of his behaviour. Her words were the crowning wonder.

"Surely," she exclaimed, "you are John Baird." In an instant his hat was in his hand; how came she to know him? "And it was you who must have thrown that dreadful creature into the pond! Had you searched the whole world over you could not have rendered me a greater service. If you only knew how I've longed for someone to give him a little of what he deserves. Don't you know me?" It seemed to dawn upon her that his attitude suggested bewilderment. "I'm Pauline."

She announced the fact as if she took it for granted that it would clear all the mist of confusion away from his mind; so far,

however, from that being the case, his wits seemed to become still more fogged. There was hesitation in his speech.

"You're Pauline? Not the——" The break in his voice suggested that he was changing his mind about a word he proposed to use; "not the Pauline I used to know—how many years is it ago?"

"Of course I don't know how many Paulines you have known, but I'm Pauline Pearse. I should have known you anywhere; I rather hoped that you would have known me."

"Known you? But, my dear Miss Pearse——"

"Pauline, please; you always used to call me Pauline."

"Yes, but in those days——" He drew a long breath. "I should not have thought it possible for a person to be so changed."

"For the worse?" A light seemed to be dancing in her eyes.

"For the worse?" The trick he had of echoing her words as if to give them emphasis seemed to amuse her. The smile with which she favoured him gave him courage. "I don't see why I shouldn't make a clean breast of it."

"Do; I like people to make clean breasts"

"Shall I tell you what you were like when I saw you last, it you are Pauline Pearse?"

"There's no if about it; I am."

"You were gawky, lean, long-legged, your stockings were always too long for your skirts, and there generally was a hole in one of them; angular—I used to feel that you must be all points; you stooped, you were awkwardness itself; you were freckled——"

"Oh, come, I say, was I really freckled?"

"I am sure you were—I'm absolutely certain, because I remember once, when you had behaved worse to me than usual and I had lost my temper, I asked you if you couldn't find some soap which would wash your freckles off. It was rude, but effective—because you wouldn't speak to me for days afterwards."

"And that's the memory you have of me? How odd; because I have such a different one of you. I remember you as though it were yesterday. You have changed—there are lines about your mouth which I don't think used to be there; and I think you are a little leaner, and there's a new look in your eyes. But in all essentials, outwardly, at least, you are just the same as you always were. I don't know if you're aware that when I saw you last I was thirteen—an awful age for a girl; at thirteen all girls are beasts, inside and out; now I'm nineteen. I've been to boarding-school all those years, and now I've just been let loose upon the world at large. I'll tell you something; I don't believe

a week has passed, and very few days, since I was thirteen, in which I haven't thought of you. You see, you have known so many people, but I have known none. If you only knew how glad I am to see you again—not only in dreams and that sort of thing, but in the broad daylight—I'm sure you'd say you weren't sorry to see me. Are you sorry?"

There was something in the girl's voice, in her words, her looks, which affected him as only a few moments before he would have declared nothing could have done; she had almost deprived him of that precious possession, of which he prided himself he never could be bereft—his presence of mind. He could not find words in which to answer her appeal; in his speechlessness he was conscious that she must feel that now it was he who was awkward. He fumbled for words which he could not find; then put a question which he had never meant to ask.

"Do I look as if I were sorry?"

"To be quite candid, I'm rather wondering what you do look like. Well, I don't know how you feel, but I am glad to see you. Would you mind our shaking hands?" All at once her hand was in his and she was keeping it there. "It's the queerest thing—you'll soon find what an oddity I've become since you saw me last; the last time I saw you I was going to school; you shook hands with me, and you left in my hand a five-pound note. Do you know, I've never forgotten the feel of your hand. Ever since, night and day, I've only had to close my eyes to feel my hand in yours—as it is now. John Baird, I've heard a great deal about you during those intervening years, and you simply cannot realise how glad I am to see you; your treating that man Barclay to the pond—Ackroyd was there and saw it, and told me all about it—was the one touch needed to make our meeting perfect."

"You seem to have a particular dislike to Mr. Barclay."

"Dislike is not the word, no; the creature has haunted me. He has become an object of detestation to everyone about the place. You know Eleanor is ill, and the Earl, though he wouldn't like anyone to think it, is half beside himself with worry, and we are all of us in trouble, and that creature, Barclay, was about the very last straw. The Earl has forbidden anyone to touch him, because he is afraid of the mischief he might do us. But when he hears that you, who are quite outside the family, have had that little talk with him, he'll be happier than he has been since it all happened. By the way, what are you here for? I understood from Eleanor that you were at the other side of the world, and anyhow I didn't know that you visited at Cawstone."

He had been actuated in his coming by various reasons, some of them perhaps a little in conflict with each other. He had felt

an inclination which he could not resist to see the lady, to exchange at least a few words with her; then there was a certain handkerchief which she might not be indisposed to receive from his hands, and to learn that it had fallen into no one else's. Possibly, also, she might be willing to have news of a wrap which bore her name. Also, she might not be disinclined to receive from him the assurance that whatever befell she would have him on her side. These, among others, were the reasons which had brought him; yet when that young woman asked him point-blank what they were, he found himself rather at a loss to state them. They had fallen side by side, and were walking together over the turf, he, for one, knew not whither. When he was silent she stopped and looked at him, seeming to see something ominous on his face.

"You have brought no bad news?" He hastened to reassure her.

"I've brought no news at all. You must remember that it's years since I saw your sister; is it inexcusable that I should go a little out of my way for a chance of seeing her again?"

"You are one of those—who found that motor-car; have you come—to see Eleanor—about it?"

The rapidity with which this young woman drew inferences he found disconcerting. For some reason he was unwilling to admit that she had drawn a right one.

"Why should you jump to such a conclusion? I had no idea your sister was unwell until they told me in the village at the inn."

They continued to stand still; she searched his face with her eyes.

"Mr. Baird, will you answer me, please? Did you come to see Eleanor about that motor-car?" She apparently saw in his face an inclination to evade her question. Her tone became suddenly grave. "If you knew how much I have to bear, and how much I'm in need of someone who understands, you'd give me a straightforward answer to my question." She laid her hand upon his arm, her voice dropped to a whisper; a look of terror came into her eyes which positively hurt him. "Is it true that they've issued a warrant for Eleanor's arrest?"

"Miss Pearse!—Pauline! My dear child!"

"Don't talk to me like that—don't! If you only knew how I'm haunted by the thought! I know it haunts the Earl; I believe it haunts everyone about the place; I sometimes wonder if that creature Barclay has it in his pocket, and is only waiting for instructions to put it into force. If they arrest her I don't know what we shall do; she'll die—I believe the Earl will go

mad; and I—I shall feel like committing murder on my own account."

"But—what a dreadful idea! What can have put it into your head? It is inconceivable how such a thing could have entered your imagination. Why——"

"Please don't ask why such a warrant should be issued. You called me a child, but really, Mr. Baird, I'm a child no longer. As if you didn't know! You must not play with me. Surely you must understand that to me this is a question of life and death. You came here to see Eleanor about the motor-car, didn't you? Please tell me the truth; you did. Directly I heard of how you had treated Barclay I knew that you had come about it; and it was because he knew it also that he made himself offensive. You can't see Eleanor; I'd rather you didn't see the Earl; but you can see me. What is it you wish to say to Eleanor? Say it to me."

"You appear to be disposed to take this thing so seriously that I hardly care to speak—lest you should place dots over i's where they were never meant to be."

She was silent for some moments, steadily regarding him. Each second the effect which this young woman had on him grew greater and greater. On a sudden the colour had faded from her cheeks and the laughter from her eyes; a dreadful something seemed to be shining out of her face. It filled him with a longing to snatch at any means of comforting her, which was as vain as it was unreasonable. His position was rendered the more difficult by the fact that the fears to which she gave such singular expression had been his from the first; he knew it now—he owned it to himself. If a warrant were issued for the lady's arrest would the heavens fall? To the girl his silence seemed to be eloquent with meaning, though she construed it in a fashion for which he was wholly unprepared.

"Do you think—she is guilty? We shall have to ask ourselves the question sometime; others are asking it now If she isn't, how shall we prove it? It seems to me that no one is stirring a finger to do anything. The Earl endures agonies and keeps still. Eleanor is helpless. What can I do, single-handed? If she's innocent no stone ought to be left unturned which will enable us to prove it—to prove it at once, before it is too late, before they do things." Again her voice sank to a whisper. "And—if she isn't innocent we ought to think of some way—in which we can save her."

He did his best to make his answer as reassuring as he could.

"If you are suggesting for an instant that your sister had a

conscious hand in that man Tozer's dreadful end, I'm as sure that you are wrong as that you and I are standing here."

Her reply startled him.

"But are you sure? Are you really sure? Of course that's what everyone would say—especially to me; but I don't want you to say it, you of all people, just for the sake of saying it. Are you really and truly, perfectly and absolutely sure? If so, you and I must put our heads together and prove it, because it will have to be proved, you know it will. But are you sure—that Eleanor is completely and entirely innocent?"

Her manner was so serious, and there was such trouble in her eyes, that he was forced to a frankness which he had scarcely intended.

"I will tell you as exactly as I can what my own feeling is. That Lady Ditchling has not been as wise as she might have been, that she has perhaps allowed her car to play a part in a tragedy of which she never dreamed, that she has been indiscreet, I think is possible. How far her indiscretion may have gone I cannot say; but that she has been more than indiscreet—I have known your sister nearly the whole of her life; I know her to be incapable of being an active participator in the gruesome thing."

"Don't you see that in an affair of this kind indiscretion may become a very serious offence? Clearly my fears are yours, though you express them in words of your own. If you suppose I imagine my sister to have been guilty of what the law calls murder, you suppose nonsense; yet—I am afraid—and I can't keep still and do nothing; it's not in my nature. Will you help me find out exactly what is the extent of her—danger? When we know that, we shall be able to judge what steps ought to be taken to—help her. Will you do this for me?"

"I will do anything for you that a man may do."

"Then that's a bargain." She held out both her hands; he took them in his. "If you only knew how glad I am you came! Quite apart from your—lesson to Mr. Barclay somehow you've relieved my mind. I've had the horrors; the sight of you has driven them away; I know you're going to be the friend I need."

He retained her hands in his longer than seemed to be in any way necessary; but she seemed willing to let them stay there, and he was in no hurry to let them go

CHAPTER XI

DR. LEACH'S THEORY

THE proceedings on the second day of the inquest on the murdered remains of Andrew Tozer were much fuller of interest than they had been on the first. The police on that occasion were represented by that well-known expert on matters of criminal law, Martin Ellerker. He commenced by calling the Countess of Ditchling. A gentleman with a Hebraic cast of countenance, the well-known Benjamin Lazarus, getting on to his feet, addressed the coroner.

"The Countess is not here, sir. I propose to ask Sir Sydney Harding to give you the reason why."

A tall, upright, white-haired person stood up, with a very intellectual face, and suave, urbane manner, and said—what nearly everyone in the court knew already—that he was Sir Sydney Harding, of Harley Street, that he had seen the Countess of Ditchling on the preceding evening at her house in Devonshire, that she was in bed ill, and that, in his judgment, she was unlikely to be well enough to attend for an indefinite period, possibly one, two, or even three weeks. Mr. Ellerker announced curtly that he had no questions to ask Sir Sydney, and he called the Earl of Ditchling. The Earl took his place on the witness stand. He held himself so straight, looking his questioner so boldly in the face, that only those who knew him well realised that from a medical point of view he had probably as much right to be in bed as his wife.

Asked if he had seen the motor-car he replied that he had; he recognised it as being the property of his wife. He had no idea how it came to be in Pall Mall at that hour of the morning, or how the dead man came to be upon the driving-seat. So far as he knew, its presence there had nothing to do with his wife. He himself had only the very slightest acquaintance with Mr. Andrew Tozer; he believed that his wife knew him no better than he did. He had been in London on May the 13th. When, the next day, they told him the car had been found he returned home and made inquiries of the Countess. She was able to offer no explanation. She had not been to town herself, nor had she

seen anything of Mr. Andrew Tozer. The car was missing—that is, it was not in the garage. When Mr. Lazarus objected, on its being suggested to him that he should tell them what the Countess had said, Mr. Ellerker asked if her ladyship had met him at the railway station. The Earl told him that she had seemed quite well when he met her. He had an interview with her when they returned to Cawstone which might have lasted half an hour; it was not a painful interview; her ladyship had not been in a state of violent excitement, nor when she left him was she in a state of great agitation.

"After her ladyship had left you I believe you paid a visit to your garage. There you met Stephen Ackroyd, your head chauffeur. Did he give you anything?"

The Earl perceptibly hesitated. He began to perceive that the insinuating Mr. Ellerker was better informed on certain points than he had supposed. Mr. Ellerker repeated his question: Had Ackroyd given him anything? The Earl replied that he had given him a bag which he had recognised as the property of the Countess. Ackroyd told him that it had been found that morning in a field close to the high road within a short distance of Salisbury. He could not explain how it got there. He described the contents, the coroner remarking that it seemed odd that such an article, the contents of which were so valuable, should have been found in such a place, and no explanation be forthcoming.

"We have only just heard, sir," observed Mr. Ellerker, "of the existence of this bag, which later may prove to be a very valuable piece of evidence. I was informed of its existence only a few minutes before entering the court, or notice would have been served upon the Earl of Ditchling to produce it. Such notice will, in fact, be served upon him before he leaves the court. His lordship will, I am sure, appreciate the importance of the bag and its various contents being produced intact. You took the bag, I believe, my lord, to the study, in which you had an interview with her ladyship. What happened as you were leaving it? Did you meet anyone on the staircase?"

The Earl must have been aware that a very awkward moment was coming, but he never flinched; he still looked his questioner straight in the face.

"I met my wife's maid. She said something which I did not understand, something about my wife. I went to my wife's room and there I found that her ladyship was not quite well."

He did not say this in one sentence, but in reply to various questions.

"That is how you put it—you found your wife not quite well. What was the matter with her, my lord?"

"I cannot tell you. I'm not a medical man."

"Is that quite an ingenuous answer? I venture to remind you that our purpose here is to arrive at the truth, and that it is your lordship's duty to assist us. I will put my question in another form. When you entered her ladyship's room did you find that she had tried to poison herself?"

"I am not able to tell you what she had done."

"At any rate you can tell us if she had swallowed the contents of a bottle labelled poison."

The Earl considered; he saw no way out of it. "I believe she had."

"Was she lying insensible upon her bed, clothed as she had been when she came to meet you at the station?"

"She was."

"And was she holding a small blue bottle, labelled 'Poison,' which was empty?"

"That is so."

"And did you send at once for a doctor—your own local medical man? And did he tell you that her ladyship had swallowed enough of a certain poison to kill half a dozen people—that, in fact, she had overdone it; that in her desire to be sure of killing herself she had taken too much?"

"I am not able to repeat exactly what he said to me."

"You have taken care that I should have no opportunity of questioning him myself. Why was Sir Sydney Harding, who had only seen your wife once for a very few minutes, called to testify to her condition, when there was a competent medical man, who would have been able to give us so much more information on the subject of her ladyship's illness? I do not like to suggest to your lordship that he was not called as a witness because he knew too much, but I should like to ask if any information has been given to the authorities of her ladyship's attempt at self-destruction?"

"I believe not."

"You are a magistrate and, I take it, aware that an attempt at suicide is a serious offence against the law." Without waiting for an answer, Mr. Ellerker addressed the coroner. "I wish you, sir, to understand what is the true explanation of the Countess of Ditchling's absence on this occasion." Then he returned to the witness. "I have only at present one or two more questions to ask your lordship, which will not detain you long. I believe you have seen this revolver before."

Mr. Ellerker held out the weapon which had been found in the

car, which his lordship admitted was his wife's. He told how he had seen it in the car as he was being taken to the station, how then it was fully loaded—he could not explain how it came about, when it was found, that two barrels had been discharged.

Then the Earl was suffered to go. How much harm he had done to the being who meant so much to him he was not yet in a position to judge; but that he had been the first publicly to suggest that she might have had some privy cognisance of what had taken place he was only too well aware. When he got outside that court into the bright sunshine it seemed to him that a horror of black darkness was settling upon him, and that it was growing blacker and blacker.

Dr. Leach was called when the Earl was gone. He favoured the court with some very lurid details of the murdered man's condition. What he said amounted to this; he did not offer it as a positive fact, but rather as an expression of his opinion. He believed that the dead man had, in the first instance, been assailed by a knife—it might have been a big clasp knife. He had been struck by this apparently three times, without its doing much more than penetrate his clothing. While, possibly, he was struggling with his assailant some second person had fired at him twice, probably from a very short range. Both shots had penetrated his lungs, and must have produced almost instant death. How he came to have been almost torn to pieces it was not so easy to suggest. The doctor had a theory which he proffered with some deference, that while the unfortunate Andrew Tozer was lying dead upon the ground he was attacked by some savage creature, possibly some kind of tiger, which had been let loose for the purpose, and that it was this creature which had been responsible for the dreadful condition in which the body was when he had seen it.

This theory produced what is known as "sensation" in court. In support of his theory Dr. Leach produced the metal collar which had been found in the car, inscribed, "Boy. Born at Poona, 1910." He was of opinion that that collar had been worn by an animal such as he described. He had examined it through a microscope, and had found traces of hairs which undoubtedly belonged to one of the carnivora. How the collar came to be broken he could not say, but possibly in an attempt to drag the creature from its victim. The idea had perhaps been to lacerate the body, and to hint that in that way the unhappy man had come to his death; but possibly by the time the creature employed had gone as far as its owner desired, its lust for blood had become so great that only by the use of the greatest violence could it be dragged away.

That, explained Mr. Ellerker, when the doctor had reached this point, was as far as he proposed to go at present. The further adjournment for which he asked was granted; the proceedings came to an unexpectedly abrupt close. Inspector Hextall, meeting Dr. Leach outside the court, exchanged with him a few curious sentences.

"At your request," began the doctor, "I said nothing about the bullets. When they are mentioned there will be questions asked as to why nothing was said of them before—which you will have to satisfy."

"I'll do that easily." The Inspector smiled as if at the other's simplicity. "That's not the only evidence I'm keeping back; I don't say all I know till I'm obliged to. Sometimes it suits me to bring up my biggest guns at the last."

"If it's your intention, as I believe it is, to lay the onus of this thing upon that unhappy lady's head, I don't think you ought to have kept that back about the bullets."

"You," remarked the Inspector, after a pause, "are a medical man; it's your business to do one thing I'm a policeman, it's my business to do another. I've got to make the cap fit close."

CHAPTER XII

MISS WINTON'S STORY

JOHN BAIRD, coming out of his club—not the Climax, which he had not been to since that notorious night and felt that he could never enter again, but a more modest establishment abutting on Piccadilly—with his head, and for that matter his heart too, full of the accounts he had been reading of what had taken place before the coroner, chancing to glance up, saw, among the throng of people who were coming along the pavement, a face which caught his eye. He paused upon the steps to look at it again; then was uncertain what to do, for he recognised it as the face of the girl who had risen so unexpectedly from the body of that motor-car and fled from him into the night.

He was sure that it was she—though in the daylight she looked so different. She had not seen him; she was moving with what he felt to be unseeing eyes, indifferent to what was about her. When she came quite close he descended on to the pavement and stood right in her way. His action was so marked that she had to look at him; as she looked recognition came to her. Plainly she had seen enough of him to know him again. She stood still; then shrank back; before he suspected her intention she did just what she had done that night, dashed into the road, which just then was a chaos of vehicles, threaded her way through them somehow, then, in what seemed to him to be almost a mysterious fashion, she vanished from sight.

He was in doubt what to do. He had in his pocket a letter from Pauline Pearse—a singular letter. She was unhappy, the thing she dreaded was coming closer day by day; or she thought it was. She reminded him of his promise to help; asked for news of what he had been doing; trusted that he had done something.

As a matter of fact he had done nothing. So far as he was able to judge there was nothing he could do. All at once an opportunity had occurred of which he might have taken advantage to at least try to do something—and he had let it slip through his fingers. Brief consideration showed him that he might as well pursue a will-o'-the-wisp as chase that extremely agile,

quick-footed young woman. If fortune threw her across his path a second time he would make more sure of her—he had lost her now. So he turned in the direction of South Audley Street on his homeward way.

It happened, however, that though he had lost sight of the young woman she still saw him. When she reached the opposite pavement she turned and, through a break in the line of vehicles, she saw him looking in a direction in which she had not gone. There was a cart standing in front of a shop; using it as cover, she watched him. Presently he began to walk; keeping a little behind him, she suited her pace to his. So it came about that he had not been in his rooms many minutes when his landlord, who was his own chief servant, informed him that a young woman wished to see him, who refused to give her name.

"In fact," said the landlord, "I do not believe she knows your name either; she asked if she could see the gentleman who had just come in."

"What sort of person is she?" The description furnished was not very good, yet it might be she. "Show her up."

Presently the door was opened to admit the young woman whom he had seen during those few tragic moments and again just now on the Piccadilly pavement. John Baird was that rare person—a respecter of all sorts and conditions of women. With the sex generally he had but a very scant acquaintance; he had only had one woman friend, and she, he was still under the impression, had spoilt his life. He had been prejudiced against his visitor; when she came into his room he was all courtesy and deference. She was a little creature, pretty, and very young; it was her air of extreme youthfulness which struck him most; until the conviction was borne in on him as he eyed her steadily that she was suffering either from illness or from some great trouble. Her cheeks were white, black rings were about her eyes; she looked as if she had been crying for weeks, and the life had all gone out of her. She sank on to the chair he offered her with a sigh of infinite weariness. He was conscious that this was going to be an interview of an unusual kind He hardly knew how to begin; as she persisted in keeping silent he tried a sufficiently banal question:

"To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?"

There was nothing banal about her reply.

"My name is Elsie Winton, and I want you to tell me if you think I had anything to do with the murder of Mr. Andrew Tozer."

He stared at her, half disposed to ask if he had heard her aright.

"I don't understand."

Her lips trembled; he had a horrid feeling that at any moment she might burst into tears—a woman's tears being one of the few things of which he was afraid. Fortunately she did not; although there was an occasional tremor in her voice she spoke with a simplicity and directness which made her words seem more surprising.

"It would not be strange if you did; I don't understand myself, or I should not have come to you—for help. Only when I came to myself in that dreadful motor-car, I saw you standing by the side, and though I was so afraid I ran away as fast as ever I could, I felt somehow that you were the kind of man who would help a woman if she were very much in need of assistance—as I am." She stopped; then suddenly added: "I don't mean money." His answer was instant.

"I know you don't mean money."

"I've got more money than I know what to do with—that's part of my trouble."

Perhaps it was because there was something almost childlike in her tone that he smiled.

"There are not many of us who can say that—truthfully."

"But I can. Do you mind my telling you my story? I'll make it as short as I can. But I'm alone in the world—now; there is no one I can tell it to; and if I don't tell it to someone soon I don't know what will happen to me—I don't! I won't keep you a moment longer than I can help if you'll only listen."

"I am quite at your service. I have no immediate engagement and shall be very glad to hear all you have to say. But you look tired. If you have not had some already, won't you have some tea before you start? I've been told that a cup of tea is the best pick-me-up a woman can have."

Before she could answer the landlord was in the room and tea was being ordered, and was brought with a rapidity which did credit to the establishment. Baird's words about tea being a feminine pick-me-up seemed justified by the fact that as the girl sipped the cup he had poured out for her, some traces of animation did begin to show themselves in her pallid cheeks; he was telling himself as he watched what a very pretty person she must be when in the enjoyment of her usual health and spirits. Some explanation of her appearance came when she had emptied her cup.

"That's the first thing I've tasted to-day; I find it harder and harder to eat or drink; I simply can't swallow. You've heard of the iron maiden of Nuremberg? I feel as if I were fastened up in that, and it was squeezing me tighter and tighter each hour

of every day. I don't know what will become of me if something doesn't happen soon."

He did not ask if she would have a second cup; he refilled it. Presently she was telling him what she had called her story.

"As I said, my name is Elsie Winton. I was secretary to Mr. Andrew Tozer. At first I had quite a subordinate place in his office, then he noticed me, and I began to work for him in his private room. He found that I was not such a fool as most of them—those were his own words. Then he installed me in his house at Gilcott to attend to all his private correspondence; then I grew fond of him."

Her listener understood, at least in part, how much her use of the word "fond" meant to her.

"And he grew fond of me. At any rate he said he did; and I believe he did. We travelled all over Europe together; there was nothing he was not willing to give me—in the way of money. As you know, he was a very rich man. He owned a good deal of property in London, among other things some flats in the Battersea Park Road; he gave me all of them, settled the whole block on me, and a deal of money besides. Then I began to see him more and more seldom, until I scarcely ever saw him at all; and I did so want to see him. Then I heard that he had taken up with someone else—a lady; that is—because in all essential things which the word stands for I am a lady—one in a different position to mine. I began to understand that he was leaving me, had left me, for her; and she was a married woman I wrote to him, but he paid no attention to my letters. I grew desperate. One morning I went to Gilcott to try and see him; I knew he wouldn't see me, but I had to try. They told me he was away from home, abroad; when I returned to Paddington I saw him on the platform."

She stopped. He had been listening to her with growing amazement. She looked so young, so little more than a child, and yet she spoke, not only as a woman of education and refinement, but also in a peculiar, and not very pleasant sense, as a woman of the world. She sat back on her chair, lacing and unlacing her fingers—he noticed what exquisite hands she had—with a feverish restlessness which suddenly began to show itself in her voice and manner.

"He was moving towards a train which stood on one of the main line platforms. He was followed by a porter who had some luggage on a truck. I did not notice exactly of what the luggage consisted, but I did notice that there was a woman's dressing-bag. I watched the porter take him to a carriage and put the luggage in—there wasn't very much; I waited for someone else

to come. That dressing-bag had made me feel sure that a woman was coming But no one did come, and they began to shut the carriage door."

She stopped again. John Baird was listening with a degree of interest of which he was himself unconscious; he was interested not only in her story but in her personality; he was realising that Miss Elsie Winton was a young woman of an unusual type.

"You must understand"—she was leaning on the table on which was her tea-cup, and she emphasised her words with the index finger of her right hand—"that I was not, literally speaking, in my right mind. I was fonder of him than I thought; as I stood on that platform and watched that woman's dressing-bag being put into his compartment, I was beside myself with jealousy. If a woman had not already joined him, he was going to one. Just as the train was about to start I hastened along the platform and was hustled into a carriage, without a ticket. I had no idea where the train was going, and I did not care; at every station at which we stopped I looked to see if he had got out. When, at last, after what seemed an interminable journey, he did get out, I did also; you will smile, but I never even noticed what the station was. He was some distance in front of me, on a crowded platform. I did not want to get too close to him, I did not want him to see me; I had an insane desire to know what he was going to do. I had an odd feeling that something had happened to him since I saw him at Paddington—that he had grown shorter, that his walk had changed. I asked myself, in a curious sort of fashion—you cannot imagine how curious I felt—if he had been drinking, if he was drunk; that something had happened to him I was convinced. At the door I told them I was without a ticket; I paid them what they asked—still not knowing what the station was, nor taking the trouble to inquire. I hurried out, fearful that I had lost him—there he was!"

Pausing, she held both hands out in front of her, as if to plead to him.

"What I am going to tell you you will think incredible, and it is; but I assure you it is perfectly true Apparently a motor-car had come to meet him."

"You didn't notice what kind of motor-car it was?" struck in John Baird.

"I didn't; I didn't notice anything at all about it except that it was a motor-car; it is all the more strange because of what I am going to tell you. The porter was putting his luggage into the body of the car—it was an open car, I do know that much. He got on to the box beside the chauffeur. Then he said something to the chauffeur and got down again, and the chauffeur

followed, and they both of them went back and entered the station. What they had gone for I did not know, but all at once the wildest idea came into my head—I opened the door of the car and got inside."

Once more there was a break in her narrative; she seemed to be collecting her thoughts, so as to present what she had to say in the clearest and most forcible fashion.

"I told you I was practically insane; I had been worrying myself for days and weeks; something must all at once have gone wrong with the works, because I remember getting into the car, but I remember nothing more."

"Do you mean you fainted?"

"Clearly something must have happened to me, but I don't know what it was. I just don't remember anything after I got into that car outside that railway station—I don't even know what station it was—until I found myself looking at you over the side of the car, in what I afterwards learned was Pall Mall. You understand, there was a sort of misty something in my brain which might unwittingly have been recording facts. I seemed to have had a vague impression that the car was moving. Mr. Tozer must have taken his place again beside the driver, or he would certainly have seen me; I suppose I was lying where I afterwards found myself, at the bottom of the car. Later an unpleasant picture—an unpleasant something—seems to have got itself fixed to the retina of my eye, or to the grey matter of my brain, or to something or other up here."

She touched her forehead with the tips of her fingers.

"The car seems to have stopped—I couldn't tell you where; but wherever it was there was a quarrel. I couldn't tell you what it was about, or between whom. But I seem to have heard someone shooting; then there was a dreadful, yelping, snarling sound, and I seem to have got—or have been taken—out of that motor-car, and to have almost come to myself. Then something else seems to have happened, and the rest is a sheer blank, not even a misty anything any more, till I suddenly became conscious of cool air on my cheeks, and of something in my hand. I looked at it—it was a revolver. I dropped it; I got on to my feet, and there were you staring at me over the side of the car; and when I got home I found that there was blood on my hands and face and gown. Oh, if you could only conceive what I felt like when I saw that it was blood!"

He could see how she shuddered at the recollection As he was about to speak she continued, with quivering, eager intensity.

"There's my story! Don't you see how I had to tell it to someone? What a problem, what a mystery, what a horror I've

been carrying about with me ever since! Next day I read about the motor-car which had been found in Pall Mall, with him dead upon the seat, and I knew that I'd been a passenger in that car, and how I had found myself with a revolver in my hand. Exactly what state I had been in I did not know, but I knew that in the fury of my jealousy, even though I was practically witless, I might have been capable of anything. Now I hear that the motor-car belongs to the Countess of Ditchling, and that the very next day she made an attempt at suicide. How am I to know what hand I had in that? I might have been the occasion of a dreadful scene between her and him. That something of the sort did happen seems to be written here."

Again she raised her fingers to her brow. Then, getting off her chair, she put a remarkable question to John Baird.

"Do you think I killed him, or that I ought to go to the police and tell them what I know?"

We in England say that anything out of the common smacks of the melodramatic; perhaps her questions did—it was not that side of them which struck John Baird. What he perceived was the agony which forced the girl to ask them. After momentary consideration he replied:

"To your first question I say no. I won't say that the suggestion it conveys is absurd, but I do know it is unfounded. You appear to have had some very curious adventures; although I am no doctor I can understand how your mental condition affected you physically; you were brought by the strain to breaking point; it broke, you collapsed. I am very much obliged to you for coming here. In a sense, you have haunted me; I have been wondering what part you played in that horrid business. It is a relief to learn that you have played none."

"How can you say I had no part in it—how can you?"

"Because it is clear to me, if not to you, that that is the case. It so happens that I have interests of my own in this matter; what you have said may supply me with data which may enable me to take certain action which will result in throwing light on it. What we have to find out, as a preliminary, is the station at which you alighted. It was at night, in the country—the porter put Mr. Tozer's luggage in the car; the odds are considerable that either he, or someone else about the station, recognised the car; the moment we know who the owner was we shall have gone a long way towards untangling the whole thing."

"Then you don't think I need say anything to the police?"

"At present I should say no. The police have a way of their own of dealing with these affairs, and that way sometimes results in much unnecessary suffering to perfectly innocent people.

Take the case of the Countess of Ditchling. I will stake my life she is as innocent of any criminal complicity as you or I; but she may have had adventures with her motor-car that day which she is unwilling to make public. Rather than be compelled by the action of the police to make public what she would do almost anything to conceal, she does a very foolish thing. You and I will keep our own counsel, Miss Winton. And I may tell you, for your especial satisfaction, that to-night, for the first time, I shall be able to send a word of encouragement to a very anxious person."

John Baird smiled as he said this; it was perhaps by accident that his hand brushed against the pocket which contained the letter from Miss Pauline Pearse.

CHAPTER XIII

A COMMUNICATION FOR MR. GLOVER

THERE was present in the Coroner's Court that second day Mr. Samuel Glover, who, as everyone in the City was aware, was, in all commercial matters, Mr. Andrew Tozer's right-hand man. What he did not know about Mr. Tozer's financial doings it was currently believed was not worth knowing; but apart from business, where his chief was concerned, it so happened that he knew nothing, as he was explaining in that very fine apartment which was regarded as Mr. Tozer's private sanctum at Gilcott. The person to whom Mr. Glover was talking was Mr. Felix Vineal.

Felix Vineal was rather a remarkable person. By birth he was a Swiss, a native of Neuchâtel; on some of his visiting-cards the name was given as Monsieur Félix Vinéal. He had lived in most countries of the world, and had spent several years of his life in different parts of the African continent. What he had done there he only knew—he was not then acting as a servant to anyone. Andrew Tozer and Felix Vineal first met each other in the Transvaal. Vineal was in a very sorry condition, morally, mentally, and physically; Tozer's good offices probably saved his life. When he began to be himself again he became his rescuer's servant. That was, so far as it could be ascertained, a good many years ago, and he had remained in that position ever since. The connection between master and servant was of an unusual kind Sometimes the valet would sit down with his master as a friend, and they would drink and smoke together, and cap anecdotes; Tozer found at least as much pleasure in listening to the chequered narrative of Vineal's experiences as the valet found in listening to his.

Physically Vineal was about five foot eight or nine, slenderly built, thin-faced, grey-haired. He spoke many languages as if they were his own, and English was one of them. Since that very bad time he had had on the open veldt, he had never been quite the man he was before. His cheeks were hollow, his eyes were sunken; but he was stronger than he looked, and tales were told of him in the servants' hall, which he seldom or never visited, which suggested that he was a person who seldom lost

his presence of mind, and, although he might not wish the world to think it, had nerves of iron which served him so well that he was ready for any emergency. Mr. Glover was short and plumpish, suggesting a man of sedentary habits. He had rather a round face, and suffered from some peculiarity of vision which he declared made it necessary that he should carry about with him glasses of various powers. One pair was ostentatiously dangling from his neck, attached to a strip of black ribbon; these were for general use, and were, for the most part, thrust in between the buttons of his waistcoat. If he wished to take particular stock of a person to whom he was speaking he took a gold-rimmed pair of spectacles from his waistcoat pocket, and having fixed them in position, a process which occupied some seconds, would preserve a fixed stare which it was not always easy to meet. There were persons who said that he put on these spectacles to hide the eyes behind them. When he had to examine something which required close inspection a pair of black-rimmed glasses would emerge from some receptacle in his coat; while if he had to observe some object at a distance, he would take out a shagreen case, in which were a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles, with very big glasses, which some men use for shooting and playing games in which good sight is essential.

He was tapping with his ordinary glasses on the table at which he was seated, while he regarded Monsieur Vineal with his naked eyes; there were persons who were of opinion that he could see with those as much as was good for him—and for them.

"Singular man, Andrew Tozer—wonderful head for affairs, but quite a character. I sometimes used to think that he didn't like his right hand to know what his left was doing. I understand you knew him—tolerably well."

"It is possible that I knew him as well as anyone."

"Did you indeed? Dear, dear. Have you formed any hypothesis which could account for his unfortunate end?"

"A woman." Mr. Glover almost looked as if he were startled.

"A woman? But in spite of the circumstances under which all that was left of him was found I should have thought he was the last person in the world to be associated with a woman—with any woman—in the sense you mean. He has always struck me as being positively averse to the society of the opposite sex."

"Did you never hear of Elsie Winton?"

"I can't say, as far as my memory carries me, that I have."

Vineal was on a chair facing Mr. Glover. He smiled as if at the thoughts which were passing through his mind.

"I may tell you, Mr. Glover, in confidence, that though it suited Mr. Tozer to have me in the position which I occupied,

and it suited me to occupy it, I am not, even according to your standard, a poor man; nor am I a marrying man. I've seen too much of women to wish to be tied by the leg to any one of them. Yet, if Andrew Tozer had treated me fairly, and the lady fairly, Miss Elsie Winton would probably be my wife. He interfered. She was his secretary. What he made of her I don't quite know; at one time I thought he was going to make her his wife, but he never did."

Vineal thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, and, tilting his chair back on its hind legs, regarded the ceiling.

"If I'd been she I'd have made short work of him long ago; I'm wondering if she has done for him after all."

"What makes you entertain such a dreadful suspicion with respect to this apparently unfortunate young woman?"

"He's been treating her badly for some time now; he told me so himself, and I told him what I thought of him; we were always perfectly frank with each other, he and I. I happen to know that it was all she could do to stand his treatment. On that Wednesday she came here to ask for him; he had just gone to town. I'm wondering if she went after him, and, coming upon him somewhere somehow, got even."

Monsieur Vineal lowered the front legs of his chair and, drawing it up to the table, leaned across it towards the man of affairs.

"One of the chief reasons why I am disposed to doubt if Miss Winton treated him as he deserved, is that I chance to be aware that there was another woman in the case—and hers might have been the hand which did it."

"You are presenting my late principal in quite a new light to me, Mr. Vineal."

"Very possibly; though—now he is gone there should be no harm in mentioning it—I doubt if you could do as much for me, even as regards the inside of his account books."

"If what you say is correct—and I am not for a moment doubting it—I'm at a loss to understand how you come to be in such a—subordinate post."

"That's a long story. One of these days I may tell it you; especially as you'll wonder still more when you learn what's in his will. I think you'll find he left one. But to return If Andrew Tozer kept clear of the women it was because there had already been one in his life—before Miss Winton appeared upon the scene. She dropped out of his life, but just lately she came back into it."

"May I ask what is this lady's name?"

"For reasons which I may tell you later I'm not prepared at the moment to give it you. As a girl she was a very—shall I

say remarkable, young woman; she's not an old one now. How far they went together is no affair of mine. She wanted money, and you know it isn't many years since he began to get all he wanted. He's had as rough times as anyone—until certain events occurred. I know he thought she used him badly; anyhow, he was left lamenting, and since then she's married a title."

"You're not referring——"

Mr. Vineal waved his hand.

"I'm not referring to anyone; don't you try to fill up the spaces I leave blank. It seems she's not so happy with her title as she expected; or perhaps the discovery that he'd got gold enough to sink a ship turned her thoughts again his direction. Anyhow, the old intercourse has been renewed; Elsie Winton has had to go by the board—he's treated her like a scoundrel; and I shouldn't wonder if things weren't fixed up for him to take his old love off her husband's hands and—make hay of things all round."

"Do you mean that you think it was arranged that he should elope with a married woman?"

There was a box of cigars on the table; Mr. Vineal took one out, bit the end off, and began to smoke, talking all the while.

"The question which occurs to my mind is—what happened? Did he change his mind, or did the lady change hers, or did the husband appear upon the scene?"—and that is what happened. He had got the cigar in good going order, and leaned back in his chair the better to enjoy it. "Well, Mr. Glover, you ask me if I have got a hypothesis; you've got one; you can make of it what you please; just now on that subject I've nothing more to say. I understand that nothing can be done in the disposition of his estate, or the settlement of his affairs, till the coroner's inquest has come to an end. In the meanwhile we shall have to put up with those worrying policemen, who, it seems to me, never can see farther than the ends of their noses, and resist all temptations to break their heads for them."

"There must be policemen, Mr. Vineal. You wouldn't wish the perpetrators of a crime like this to go unpunished."

"The perpetrators of this crime will go unpunished, whatever I may wish, or you either."

"What possible grounds have you for saying that?"

"You'll find I'm right—never mind the grounds."

"But if I follow you, you yourself might put them on the track of the criminal."

"Then you don't follow me very well, Mr. Glover. When the police are about, I'm not. I've a constitutional distaste for the atmosphere they live in."

Mr. Glover adjusted his glasses as if he needed their aid to get a better view of the speaker.

"Do you mean to suggest, Mr. Vineal, that if you knew the person or persons responsible for Mr. Tozer's death you would not hand them over to the police?"

Mr. Vineal got up from his chair, took his cigar from between his lips, and surveyed the ash.

"If you wish to catch the train of which you spoke to town, Mr. Glover, you have no time to lose. I rather fancy the car is already at the door." He moved to the window to look out. "It is. Are there any directions you would like to leave?"

Before he quite knew it, Mr. Glover found himself being ushered by the valet down the stairs. As the car was bearing him to the station his mind was occupied with some distinctly curious thoughts.

"Few things are more unwise than to jump at conclusions; I do trust that fellow is not a scoundrel. He never has favourably impressed me. I wonder what were the relations between him and Tozer—he's the most unvalet-like valet I have yet encountered. To hear him talk, Tozer might have been the servant and he the master. If he knows as much as he insinuates, then he ought to place himself in communication with the police on the instant; his only reason for not doing so can be that he knows too much. Can the woman to whom he refers—who married a title—be the Countess of Ditchling? I believe some odd stories are told about her early years; I've always understood that she was engaged to at least one man before she married Ditchling. If she was the person with whom Tozer had those relations of which Vineal speaks, whether she actually killed her victim or no, or had a hand in his killing, what a truly dreadful creature she must be."

Mr. Andrew Tozer's offices were in Throgmorton Street—they comprised the whole first floor of a monstrous building. As Mr. Glover, on his return to the City, was entering his own private room, he was followed by the chief clerk, who was carrying something in his hand. He shut the door before he spoke.

"The postman has just brought this letter, Mr. Glover. I, perhaps fortunately, chanced to meet the postman on the stairs and he gave it me—so it has been seen by none of the others."

Mr. Glover took the envelope which the other held out. He gazed at it with unmistakable surprise.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, and continued to stare.

Apparently it dawned on him that the clerk was staring also. He put the envelope down upon his writing-table as if it were a thing of no account, and told the lingering clerk in his most

commonplace tones that he could go. Being left alone, he stared at the door through which the man had vanished.

"I wonder how much he knows?" He picked up the envelope "What does this mean? Probably nothing. Either this is an old envelope which has turned up again by chance or—someone is playing a trick. But who could play such a trick as this? Who knows?"

Mr. Glover looked at the envelope long and steadily, then, with it in his hand, he went to the door and turned the key in the lock. Returning, he sat down in his writing-chair, and, resting both elbows on the table, held the envelope up in front of him with his two hands, scrutinising it with the most singular keenness.

It was an ordinary, oblong, commercial envelope, and, according to the postmark, had been posted in the City before noon that day. The address was typewritten, and the only unusual feature was the fact that in the top left-hand corner six letters were associated in an apparently meaningless jumble It was at those six letters that Glover was staring, as if they conveyed to his mind something which taxed his powers of credulity to the utmost.

After he must have more than stared his fill, taking up a slender steel instrument, inserting it in the flap, he carefully cut the envelope along the top. With his fingers on the sheet of paper it contained, he hesitated to draw it out, indulging in some reflections which would have considerably surprised that large circle of acquaintances who took him to be, first and last, a practical, unimaginative, hard-headed man of business.

"Now what am I going to see? What's the matter with me? A premonition! It's ridiculous, but I almost feel as if I were in the presence of the supernatural." He gave himself a little shake, as if to dispel the cloud which hung about him—in broad daylight. "Stuff and nonsense! the thing's a joke." He snatched the sheet of paper from within the envelope rather than took it out in his usual sober fashion, and opened it out in front of him. There was nothing on it except half a typewritten line, which consisted of a number of letters placed together in the same haphazard jumble as the six which were in the top left-hand corner of the envelope. Had they been the most ominous portent which has visited mankind, they could not have confounded Mr. Glover more. He stared at them, and glared; then, letting the hand which held the sheet of paper fall to the table, leaning back in his chair, he seemed to gasp for breath. It was only after some seconds that his thoughts began to have shape and substance.

"This must be some infernal jugglery," he told himself, as if he were trying to convey conviction to his own mind. "Some confounded trick; unless——" He paused as if to relieve the pressure on his lungs by drawing a deep breath. "Well—we'll say, unless the days of miracles are past."

CHAPTER XIV

THE LADY ON THE CAR

For some moments Mr. Glover continued to lean back in his seat, with his eyes fixed steadily in front of him, as if he were gazing into vacant space. What he saw there he only knew; something seemed seriously to have affected his equilibrium—he seemed to find a difficulty in recovering his mental balance. After a while he stood up and, with a stealthy glance about him, as if he were ashamed of what he was about to do, opening a cupboard which was in a corner, he took out a bottle and a glass. He sipped at what he poured into the glass with the anxious mien of one who desires, with each taste, to regain fresh life.

"That's better"—he emptied the glass—"much better. I don't think I ever did such a thing before as drink neat brandy in the middle of the afternoon; but I had to have something—I had to."

He eyed the bottle, seeming to hesitate whether to pour some more of its contents into the glass.

"No—that's enough; if I were to take more I might undo all the good it's done me—one can easily exceed."

He went back to his table and his chair; sitting down, he took up the sheet of paper, with its odd half line of typescript, which he examined with the intensity with which, say, an Egyptologist might examine a cuneiform writing. The result of his scrutiny seemed scarcely satisfactory, for when he laid it down again he remarked:

"This is the most extraordinary thing which has happened in my experience—the most amazing. My first impulse was, since it seems incredible, to set it down as impossible; the more I look at it, the more I incline to the belief that, in spite of all the probabilities being against it, it is genuine. I cannot see how it can be anything else."

Getting on to his feet, again with that stealthy look around, as if fearful of he alone knew what unseen witness, he went to a safe which was built into the opposite wall. It was one of those contrivances of modern ingenuity to which even the owner, acquainted with all its congenital peculiarities, cannot gain access

in an instant. After going through performances with dials and handles, he swung back one great door of seemingly solid metal, then a second, to find himself confronted by a number of drawers, each of which required, apparently, a separate pass key. He drew one out, to find it roofed with polished steel. Inserting a delicate instrument into a point which yielded on being touched, the metal, parting, sprang open in the centre—and he had gained access to the drawer at last. He took out a small volume bound in vellum, regarding it with a grim smile.

"No one has touched this, so the genuineness of that seems established; unless—unless someone has got hold of his copy; which is always a possibility." He took the book back with him to the table. "I doubt if a stranger would understand what it's all about if he did get hold of it."

As he turned the leaves, once more he smiled—there seemed reason in his words. The book was a narrow oblong, containing, at most, twenty or thirty pages—so that it scarcely could be called a book at all. Each page was crowded with the letters of the alphabet, placed there by hand, arranged as if they were algebraical symbols. To the initiated there might have been order in their madness, but one could easily believe that what Mr. Glover said was true: that a stranger might have got hold of it without—even after studying it closely—having the least idea of what it all might mean.

Placing the book upon the table, side by side with the half line which had come by post, taking a blank sheet of paper, he copied on to it each typewritten letter, giving it a whole line to itself, and space above and below; then referring to the book of hieroglyphics he seemed to make certain elaborate calculations, which he transferred on to the blank sheet of paper. Treating the whole as if it were some abstruse problem in mathematics, which it certainly seemed to be, he arrived at a result which seemed surprisingly insignificant, compared to the labour which it had cost him; there, at the foot of his sheet of paper, were perhaps a dozen familiar English words.

None the less, the more he stared at them—and he did stare—the more his wonder grew. He seemed to make an effort to sum up his feelings in a single sentence.

"This is a position to which all the resources of language—any language—are ludicrously incapable of doing even elementary justice. Where's the continental Bradshaw?"

There was a copy on a shelf, from the examination of which he derived certain data which necessitated an examination of his watch.

"There is a train from Charing Cross at nine this evening; it

will get there at half-past five to-morrow morning, a monstrous hour; that means travelling all through the night in circumstances of the most extreme discomfort. I hate that kind of thing! There is no convenience of any sort on the trains, and at my time of life I'd rather not. Then there's one from Liverpool Street at 8.40, arriving to-morrow morning at ten—that's more like it. In this weather the crossing ought to be calm—one might have a comfortable night on the boat. All other things being equal, I think I'll try that way."

Not very long afterwards Mr. Glover was seated in a District train bound for East Putney. At that hour of the afternoon the compartment was filled with the first flood of City men going home. He did not notice that among his fellow-passengers was an undersized individual, whose cheeks were blue with a beard which was not allowed to grow, and who might have been a jockey, or something connected with horses. Mr. Glover was too much occupied with his own reflections, and with the study of the evening papers, in which the chief subject of interest was what the journalists had agreed to dub "The Mystery of the Motor-Car," to be aware of the interest which the blue-cheeked individual seemed to take in himself. Scarcely for an instant, from the moment the train started till its arrival at its destination, did the stranger cease his scrutiny; so far as his outer man was concerned, the stranger must have known Mr. Glover off by heart when they reached East Putney.

Nor did his interest in the gentleman cease with the stopping of the train. When Mr. Glover got out at the station he hailed a cab. The stranger hailed another. Mr. Glover's cab went up the hill; the stranger's kept close behind. When Mr. Glover's cab drew up before a creeper-covered villa looking on to the heath, the other did the same. So it came about that as Mr. Glover was paying his cabman, he became conscious that a stranger was standing close to his elbow who, as the vehicle he had paid off was departing, accosted him by name.

"Mr. Glover, I believe?"

"That is my name."

"Can I speak to you, Mr. Glover? I've followed you all the way from town."

The statement seemed to occasion Mr. Glover surprise.

"You've followed me all the way from town—why?"

"I want to see you very particular, on very special business, sir."

Putting his glasses on his nose, he regarded the speaker. There was something about his appearance which did not appeal to him at all; his manner as good as said so.

"I don't know who you are, sir, but on the subject of any business you may have with me you will please address yourself to the office. I am pressed for time; I cannot talk to you now."

"Pardon me, sir, but I think you'd better, I really do. I've got something very special to say to you"—the man dropped his voice—"about Mr. Andrew Tozer."

Mr. Glover liked this person less and less; there was an offensive familiarity about him, half fawning and half threatening, which he resented.

"What is your name, sir? I don't know who you are."

"No, Mr. Glover, I don't suppose you do; and it doesn't very much matter, does it? What matters is what I've got to say to you."

"What is it you have to say to me about Mr. Tozer? Out with it, man. I told you I am in a hurry; if you have anything to say to me, say it quickly."

"Well, you see, Mr. Glover, it's this way. What I've got to say to you about Mr. Tozer is not quite the sort of thing you might like to talk about out here—not in such a public place, I mean. If you are in a hurry I won't keep you longer than I can help, but I think you'd better let me say what I've got to say to you inside."

Mr Glover eyed the speaker shrewdly; there was something about him which was not healthy, he felt sure—he was not the sort of person he would care to receive inside his house. He was on the point of plainly telling him so when the man said something which startled him.

"I'm the party who met Mr. Tozer at the station that night—Wednesday night; met him with a car I did. I've been wondering if I ought to go to the police, but I thought that first I'd come to you, because there might be something which you'd rather was kept dark; in fact, I shouldn't wonder if there was a good deal. You'd better let me speak to you inside the house, Mr. Glover."

Mr. Glover was beginning to think so too. His dislike of this person was increasing every second, but there was that in his bearing which suggested that he might have some information to convey which it would be just as well to listen to, at least in the first instance, in private. He opened his garden gate.

"Come in." Then he saw that the vehicle which had brought this person was still standing in the roadway. "Hadn't you better discharge your cab?"

"If you don't mind, Mr. Glover, I'd rather not. It seems a good way to the station, and I'm not much of a walker, and as you're in a hurry I shan't want to keep you long."

Mr. Glover conducted the man to a little ante-room which led out of the hall, which he used sometimes to receive visitors

whom he did not wish should penetrate any farther into his house.

"Now, sir," he began directly they were in, "what is it you have to say to me and who are you? I repeat, I'm in a hurry; I cannot give you more than five minutes."

Now that the stranger had the chance to relieve his mind he seemed in no hurry to do so. He bore himself as if he had all at once become very uneasy. Mr. Glover, skilled in reading character, felt a sudden desire to take him by the scruff of the neck and hale him back into the road without waiting for him to speak. However, he conquered what he was conscious might be a very impolitic inclination, and he repeated his inquiry.

"You hear, my man; what is it you have to say? Either tell me at once or go. Don't stand shuffling there."

"Well, Mr. Glover, it's this way. What I've got to speak about is of rather—rather a delicate nature, and before I come to it I should like to have your promise that not a word I say shall be repeated outside these walls."

Mr. Glover considered; the feeling that scamp was written all over this individual brought him to a sudden decision.

"I shall make no promise of the kind; if that's a necessary preliminary to what you have to say, you'd better take yourself off at once."

Mr. Glover's words seemed to add to his visitor's uneasiness.

"I don't want to get myself into trouble, Mr. Glover, and that's straight. Owing to circumstances over which I had no control, certain facts have come my way, but I never have had any traffic with the law, nor never want to have. I may have my own ideas as to how Mr. Tozer came to his end——" Mr. Glover interposed, as if he courted the other's words.

"About how Mr. Tozer came to his what?"

"To his end, Mr. Glover, to his most unfortunate end. I say I may have my own ideas, I don't say I do have, and until I've got an undertaking from you, as a gentleman and a man of honour, that I shan't come into any—what I may call bother because of having them, I don't wish to go any further."

"You're talking nonsense, my man. You know no more how Mr. Tozer came to his end than the first man in the street. I can't afford to waste my time with you—you'd better go."

"You're quite wrong in saying I know nothing, Mr. Glover; you really are. Don't I tell you I met him that night at the station with a motor-car—and he was drunk as a lord."

He whispered the latter words behind the open palm of his hand.

"Who was drunk as a lord?"

"Mr. Tozer was; I don't say he was speechless drunk, or that

he couldn't use his legs, or anything like that, but he was too drunk to do himself justice in a game like the one he was after—and I as good as told him so."

"I don't believe Mr. Tozer was ever drunk in his life."

"I never saw him that way before—never."

"How often have you seen Mr. Tozer?"

The man assumed an air of mystery. He put his hand up to his mouth and coughed; he twiddled the rim of his hat between his fingers.

"Now, Mr. Glover, we're getting to a point on which I can't touch unless I have your promise that nothing which is said in here shall be repeated outside these walls."

Mr. Glover paused as if for reflection. It was quite possible that this fellow might have something to tell him which it was extremely desirable that he should know.

"Before I even consider your suggestion that I should keep silent I should like to have some idea of what is your object in coming here"

"Well, Mr. Glover—it's like this: I want to get out of the country."

"For your country's good?"

"No, Mr. Glover, not for my country's good; for my own good, circumstances having placed me in a very awkward situation"

"Do you want me to help you?"

"In a certain sense, Mr. Glover, you're right." Again he coughed behind his hand—adding, with an air of deprecation, "I'm sorry to say that my own resources are not as large as I could wish."

"I understand. Why should I add to them?"

"Well, Mr. Glover, it's this way"—it seemed to be a favourite phrase of his—"circumstances have placed me in possession of certain information about how Mr. Andrew Tozer came to his unhappy end, which I would much rather not have to make public, and which I feel sure you also would like to have kept private, which I mayn't be able to do if I remain in England."

"What's your name?"

"I've already remarked that it doesn't matter—and as far as we've got, it doesn't. I may add that I'm a chauffeur by profession."

"And do you suppose I should enter into an engagement such as you suggest with a person of whom I know no more than that he is a chauffeur by profession? You also may be a thorough-going scamp and an incorrigible liar."

"I may be, that's true; I may be. If that's the way you look

at it, Mr. Glover, I won't detain you, I'll go. Sorry I ever troubled you."

"Suppose I decline to let you go?"

Something which might have been a smile parted the visitor's lips, so that his teeth gleamed through.

"I don't quite follow you, Mr. Glover; how are you going to do that?"

"What you've said suggests that you have a guilty knowledge of what took place that Wednesday night; your whole attitude suggests that your hands are not clean. I'm not sure that it isn't my duty to detain you here till I've confronted you with a policeman."

"Very good, Mr. Glover, I'm quite willing. I'm in no hurry; send for the police; I'll wait. Only, when they do come, you'll be sorrier than I shall—that is, if you've any respect for your late employer's reputation; but perhaps you haven't. You won't mind my taking a chair, will you? You'll hardly expect me to stand."

Without waiting for permission, the visitor seated himself, placed his hat upon a table, and began to take a paper from his pocket. Mr. Glover eyed him with evident displeasure; the spectacle of his placidity seemed to move him to sudden anger.

"Take yourself off that chair, through that door, and out of my house—at once!"

The stranger looked up affably, as if surprised.

"Hullo! changed your mind? You're not going to send for the police? You'd rather I went? Very good, I'm willing—perfectly willing to oblige you in anything, Mr. Glover." Getting up, the visitor moved towards the door, pausing on the threshold to observe: "If you should change your mind again, Mr. Glover, and feel that you'd like to have certain information—valuable information—about how the late Mr. Tozer went out for one thing and got another, and will undertake to keep your mouth shut, a line addressed to the Spring Daisy, Brown's Motor Garage, Pimlico Road, might bring it; only you'll have to write within the next two days or it won't."

The visitor went across the hall and through the front door, Mr. Glover following to see him off the premises; at the garden gate he turned to address to the other a few parting words.

"I may as well observe before I go, Mr. Glover, that if there's a bigger scoundrel alive than your late master was I wouldn't like to meet him; I could tell you tales of him that would surprise even you. He deserved all he got, and more. If you want a few biographical details of his closing hours, you know where a line will find me."

He was on the pavement outside the garden, in the act of hailing his cab, when a motor-car came along the road, which a lady was driving, and of which she was the sole occupant. At the sight of Mr. Glover's visitor she brought the car to an instant standstill in a manner which did credit to her as a driver.

"Why," she exclaimed, "it's you, of all the unexpected people! And to think I should have come out without a gun!"

The little man appeared to have been unconscious of her approach until she spoke. At the sound of her voice he wheeled and saw her. With a rapidity which was undignified he was through Mr. Glover's gate and back in his garden.

"Don't you dare to come near me," he cried; "don't you dare!" He half turned to Mr. Glover. "Don't you let her touch me! I could tell you something about her."

The lady in the car laughed, with merriment in her voice.

"You could tell something about everyone—you little microbe!" She became conscious of Mr. Glover standing at his open front door. "This is not the first time I've seen you. Where was it I saw you last?" A light seemed to come to her. "Of course! you're Samuel Glover! Do you live here? What a pretty house. And so this Prince Charming has been to pay you a call. I hope he has given you as much as you can swallow." She might have been meditating a certain course of action. The little man sidled nearer and nearer to the house, as if fearful of what she might be about to do. Her words when she spoke were cryptic. "I might; but I won't." She started her car; as she moved off she said: "I'm sure you won't forget that certain people have their eyes upon you."

That the little man understood what she meant was plain His face was pasty white, he was visibly trembling—a picture of abject terror. Mr. Glover spoke to him sharply.

"Who is that woman—and how comes she to know me?"

The visitor's tongue seemed to have tied itself into a knot. He spoke with difficulty.

"I—I couldn't rightly say. She's—she's a stranger to me—I—I've never seen her before."

The speaker's condition was pitiful—his very teeth seemed to be chattering with fear. Mr. Glover spoke to him with some of the scorn he felt.

"You miserable liar and poltroon, take yourself off my premises at once!"

"If you don't mind, I'd—I'd like to give her a little start, so—that I shouldn't run up against her again."

In general Mr. Glover was a man of peace ; he became for the moment a man of war. Taking his visitor by the collar of his coat he ran him down the garden path and shot him out into the road.

CHAPTER XV

MR. GLOVER MAKES SOME FRESH ACQUAINTANCES

THE boat train from Antwerp arrived in Brussels a little late, as it is apt to do. Mr. Glover climbed down on to the platform with the air of a man who was not altogether at his ease. He looked anxiously about him; one instantly felt that he had seen something he had expected to see but would rather not have seen.

"She's there! Now what am I to do? I suppose I'd better obey instructions. After all, she's a perfect right to come to Brussels, via Antwerp, if she likes. She may not be taking the slightest interest in me; I've nothing to prove that she is."

He proceeded to the Hôtel Métropole. When he had obtained a room he inquired if there were any letters for him. There was one, which he slipped into his pocket with an eager rapidity which might have had something to do with the fact that at that moment a lady came from the boulevard into the hall. Paying, however, no attention to him, unconscious, apparently, of his presence, she passed into the bureau, which is a few feet from where Mr. Glover was standing. He heard her ask, in excellent French, if they had a good bedroom on the first floor. Then she added in a clear voice:

"I am Mrs. Cumberland, of The Grange, Chislehurst. I sent you a wire last night from London."

It seemed that she had. The book-keeper, with a wire in his hand, admitted it; a room had been reserved for her—a woman appeared to show it to her. Mr. Glover was asked if he would like to ascend to his apartment at the same time. Mr. Glover declined. The lady vanished in the lift.

"She says her name is Cumberland, does she?" he told himself when she had disappeared. "She's the woman who stopped her car outside my house yesterday afternoon to make a few remarks to that little worm, and who recognised me. She's followed me from town. The first time I saw her was as I had taken my seat in the train at Liverpool Street: she passed my carriage window. I saw her on the boat last night, and again this morning; she came with me on the train from Antwerp. It looks as if she knew I was coming to Brussels and where I was going to stay,

but how she came to do so, considering I only knew myself an hour or two before I started, is beyond me altogether. She's treating me as if she'd never seen me in her life before, yet yesterday she knew me the moment she set eyes on me. This sort of thing is altogether out of my line—I wish anyone else were concerned in it rather than I." The lift was coming down again. "Perhaps now I shall have a chance of having it all to myself."

He had his wish—when he reached it it was empty. When, however, he got out of it, as it stopped at the first floor, the first thing he saw was Mrs. Cumberland standing at the open door of an apartment which turned out to be exactly opposite his own. Having entered his own room, turned the key and shot the bolt, he dropped down on to the nearest chair with an appearance of discomposure which would have surprised those who had known him for years, and were under the impression that in no circumstances could he be induced to turn a hair. Just then he seemed to be not only genuinely distressed but oddly nervous.

"Is it by accident or design that she has that room—right facing me? She can't have known which they were going to give me, it must be by accident; yet of all the coincidences! I wonder if there's any way of getting into this room except through the door." He glanced anxiously round. "I suppose there's another door behind that curtain leading into another room, as there is in most of these continental hotels."

Going to it, he made sure that it was bolted on his own side. Clearly, also, it was locked.

"I don't see how anyone is going to get through that; but with these letters on me, without in the least knowing what they mean, I have a feeling as if I were moving among a number of bombs, any one of which may go off without my knowing how it was fired. It seems incredible that if she, or anyone else, got hold of that first letter, she could understand what it meant. But why has she followed me to Brussels, and pretends she has never seen me before? I suppose, in the privacy of my own bedroom, I shall be quite safe to see what's in this."

He took from his pocket the envelope which had been handed him by the porter, glancing furtively about him, as if conscious that in doing so he had been guilty of an improper action, and was afraid of being overlooked. The envelope was a replica of the one which had reached him in the City on the preceding afternoon—only there were no hieroglyphics in the top left-hand corner, and it was addressed to him at Brussels. It bore the Brussels post-mark of last night's date.

"It seems to have been taken for granted that I should be up

to time; there's something uncanny in all this. I feel as if I were being watched; as if every time I opened or shut my mouth a note was made of it. I suppose there cannot possibly be anyone spying on me in this room."

He examined it carefully. There was one of those big cupboards which the French call *placards*, which had a mirror let into the door. He searched it so thoroughly that he rapped against the sides with his knuckles to make sure that there was no secret hiding-place. The most minute investigation seemed to make it abundantly clear that the apartment contained no living creature but himself. Somewhat reassured, he seated himself, with a penknife cut open the envelope, and took out the sheet of paper it contained.

That sheet of paper was own brother to the one which had caused him so much perturbation in Throgmorton Street—a blank page, with in the centre half a line of typescript, consisting of the letters of the alphabet jumbled up together in a seemingly higgledy-piggledy confusion. Unbuttoning his waistcoat, from some receptacle in the lining he produced that little vellum-covered volume, and with its aid began—as yesterday—to unriddle the puzzle. It took him, if anything, rather longer than before: he did not appear to be quite satisfied with the result when set out in front of him.

"Hôtel Tonelli? Takes it for granted that I know Brussels better than I do. Whereabouts may the Hôtel Tonelli be? I suppose there's a directory in the house—I shall have to hunt it up. At 2.15? It's now nearly one o'clock; this has taken me even longer than I thought. No wonder I begin to feel the call of a healthy appetite: I've had practically nothing to eat since yesterday evening."

He returned the vellum-covered volume to its hiding-place, put back the half sheet of paper in its envelope, and went downstairs in search of food, taking a last look round the chamber before he left it.

"I suppose I don't stand in much fear of intrusion while I'm away, since my bag is the only temptation. I don't think anyone would gain very much by taking that, or by subjecting it to the closest possible examination."

In the *salle à manger* he seated himself at a table from which he could not only see the whole room, but particularly the entrances, and people going and coming. He was through the first course, and had seen the waiter take his plate away, with a feeling that even the worries of the world might be bearable so long as the food was good, before he had finally decided that nowhere among the eaters was Mrs. Cumberland

"Possibly she is watching me through a crack in the door; let her watch! This wine is first-rate—it puts heart into a man." He refilled his glass. "That's a fine woman come through the door—and she looks as if she had a fine temper. I shouldn't care to live with a woman like that—— Now what on earth——!"

The two sentences were left unfinished, probably owing to the fact that the fine woman to whom he had referred had come sailing across the room in his direction and, on reaching his table, without giving a hint of her intention, had placed herself on the chair in front of him. Drawing her chair closer to the table, she leaned her elbows on the edge, and she said:

"You are Mr. Samuel Glover."

Mr. Glover stared at her in a fashion which she could hardly have felt was complimentary. As he had put it, she was what some men might describe as a fine woman; that is, she was tall and straight, with a good bust and shoulders, black-haired, black-eyed, olive-cheeked, and she bore herself with an air which suggested strength, health, confidence—particularly, perhaps, the last. She was well dressed, in a rather flamboyant style—an enormous hat, an emphatic gown in the very latest mode. She was possibly about thirty years of age, and she looked as if the passage of the years had increased her natural capacity to take very good care of herself. Mr. Glover observed her with something very like alarm.

"My name is Glover, madam." He spoke with great precision, as he invariably did when addressing a woman. "I do not think I have the honour of knowing you."

"I am Sarah Driscoll, that's who I am; and either you or your master, or both of you together, have played me a trick which is going to cost one of you dear, or it may be both of you. What do you know about a man named Anthony Dunkels?"

"Nothing whatever I never heard the name in my life until you mentioned it, madam."

"That's what you say, and you may be speaking the truth. You're one of those old humbugs who'll say anything. Your master knows him, if you don't—and his blood is on his hands. I know more than you may think. There's Italian blood in my veins though my name may be Driscoll, and I'm not going to be treated as I have been without someone being made to pay for it. You may put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Glover."

Before the amazed gentleman had quite grasped what the lady had said she had got up as suddenly as she had sat down and was striding towards a table on the other side of the room—just in time to permit of the waiter's placing on the table Mr. Glover's second course. The incident, however, of the brief and un-

expected interview with Miss or Mrs. Sarah Driscoll had spoilt his appetite. He did not enjoy that second course nearly as much as he had done the first. There was the lady, at a table of her own, practically never taking her eyes off him as he sat at his; the mere consciousness of her presence took the savour out of his every mouthful. He sadly communed with himself.

"I've heard it said that one may know a man a great many years without knowing him at all; I'm beginning to understand what that means. Andrew Tozer is coming out in a character, or characters, in which he seems to be a complete stranger to me. I've a mind to ask Sarah Driscoll to be a little more explanatory, but as I've a notion that I should be sorry if she were, perhaps the less I see or hear of her the better it will be. I wonder if she has followed me from London, and, if so, why? Who was the man she spoke of? Anthony Dunkels? Dunkels? What a name! Sounds as if he might be an Africander." The possibility made him think. "I'm commencing to realise what Vineal hinted—that Andrew Tozer's adventures were not only financial ones. I wish that woman wouldn't stare at me like that; she never takes her eyes off me." He sighed. "If I'm to be dogged by Sarah Driscoll as well as Mrs. Cumberland I shall be forced to make it as clear as I possibly can to all the parties concerned that my connection with Andrew Tozer is merely a commercial one. The financial side of him I am prepared to deal with; but the scandalous side—I'm hanged if I am!"

Mr. Glover prided himself on never using anything that approached to what even a purist would call strong language; "hanged" coming from him was equal to a legion of adjectives proceeding from the mouth of another man. He did not do justice to what remained of his lunch—he did not even finish it; but, obviously to the waiter's distress, insisted on leaving the table before the whole of it was served. He might not have been disposed to own, even to himself, that Sarah Driscoll had driven him away. He was probably therefore the less pleased that the first person he encountered in the hall was Mrs. Cumberland. The sight of her exasperated him to a point at which he felt that something must be done. He went up to her with an air which he hoped would induce her to understand that he was not a man with whom liberties might be taken. His tone was curt.

"I believe I have had the pleasure of seeing you before."

Her tone was as curt as his, indeed, curter.

"Indeed; when?"

"Didn't you drive past my house on Putney Heath yesterday afternoon?"

She looked him up and down with a certain superciliousness which he did not like at all.

"Where is Putney Heath?"

The question took him aback—if only because of its sheer impudence. He was sure she knew where Putney Heath was; he told her so.

"I fancy, madam, you know where Putney Heath is as well as I do."

Again she looked him up and down, as if from her point of view he was some unspeakable thing. Her voice was icy.

"You are impertinent; unfortunately one may expect that sort of thing from elderly Englishmen when one is travelling abroad alone."

She went past him into the *salle à manger*. Her words had been perfectly audible. The hall porter spoke English as to the manner born. Mr. Glover had only to glance at him to realise that nothing had been lost on him. The fellow had the insolence to address him.

"A little stand-off, eh? That is the way with some of them; it does not always last. Sometimes they are like that, and half an hour afterwards with their hands in your pocket."

Could the fellow be insinuating that he had been trying to thrust his acquaintance on an unwilling country-woman? The idea made Mr. Glover tingle all over. He altogether ignored what the man had said.

"Have you a Brussels directory?" he inquired.

The porter handed him a portly, well-thumbed volume.

"Is there anything I can find for you?" he asked, wholly unabashed. "It is not always easy for a stranger."

Mr. Glover snubbed the possibly well-meant offer of assistance.

"Thank you; all I want I'll find for myself."

It took him some time to do it—especially with the porter looking on. Unfamiliar with the arrangement of the book, it took him some minutes to gain an even elementary knowledge of how to find his way about it. The porter was unduly sympathetic.

"If monsieur will permit I will find for him what he wants; if monsieur is not well acquainted with the system on which it is arranged it is not very easy."

Mr. Glover glared up at him.

"I have already told you that I prefer to find what I want for myself—thank you."

When successful, at least in a measure, Mr. Glover re-entered his bedroom—the time appointed was already near; if he wished to be punctual he would have to start at once.

'It's awkward that I was not able to tell the fellow what I wished to find out, or even ask him which is the best way of getting there. Sarah Driscoll and Mrs. Cumberland may have ears all over the place. Where did I put that letter? I put it in my side pocket." All at once he gave a great gasp. "I believe it's gone!—it has gone. Where can it have gone to? Can that woman have picked my pocket while she was insulting me under the porter's very nose? If she did—she's got it——"

He left the sentence unfinished in a fashion which was more eloquent than any rounding of it off would probably have been; he sank on to a chair, with a look on his face which a man might have worn who had been smitten by he knew not what.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HÔTEL TONELLI

MR. GLOVER had learnt, after much irritating study of the directory, that the Hôtel Tonelli was in a street off the Avenue Louise—practically right at the other side of Brussels. He told the taxi which took him there to put him down at the end of the street; then he walked. He found when he came to it that the Hôtel Tonelli was an insignificant building, apparently of the pension type. He paused for a moment to survey it.

"Now, what did it say? The first turning on the right past the Hôtel Tonelli, then the third on the left, then the second on the right, then the second café on the left-hand side of the street; it sounds as if someone were trying to be funny. However, we will see"

He pursued the devious course of which he had spoken. The distance was longer than might have been supposed; the turnings referred to were not by any means close together. He was not fond of pedestrian exercise; the afternoon was warm; by the time he reached the last second turning on the right he had had enough of walking.

"Why this show of mystery should be necessary, and what it all means, is beyond me altogether." He glanced down the street from the corner at which he stood. "Not high-class dwellings, though they seem new enough; one wonders who lives in a street of this kind.' He picked his way along the *trottoir* "Cheerful going for a man who has tender feet; curious that in a town like Brussels the inhabitants should still like cobblestones to walk on That looks like a café—the sort of place where you can buy brandy for two sous a glass."

The street was a long one; he was almost at the other end before he came upon the second café. This was of rather more imposing presence than the other, though still appealing to a humble class of clients Pushing open the glass door, with a lace curtain serving as a screen, Mr. Glover entered. He looked about him The place was clean, containing perhaps a dozen marble-topped tables, at none of which was anyone seated, and facing the door was a counter covered with bottles, behind which

an elderly woman was seated on a high chair, knitting. When she saw Mr. Glover she lifted up a beckoning knitting needle. When he was close up to the counter she whispered :

" Your name ? "

" I am Mr Samuel Glover."

She motioned with her needle to a door close to the counter shrouded by a dark green curtain, but she said nothing. Taking the hint, Mr. Glover turned the handle of the door and passed to the other side. He found himself in a small room in which were a single marble-topped table and five or six wooden chairs. He wondered what he was supposed to do in there. He glanced at his watch—it was half-past two, a quarter of an hour behind the appointed time As he was asking himself if he should order a cup of coffee or just simply wait, there was a sound behind him. He did a right about face. A door in a corner had opened ; a man had come through it, who stood with the handle in his hand. Mr. Glover stared at him with an amazement which was in its way grotesque ; his mouth gaped, his eyes were fixed ; it was with a perceptible effort that after some moments he spoke.

" It is you "

The new-comer put his finger to his lips as if urging discretion, and, smiling, he said :

" It's a joke—that's all ; a little joke of mine. Come this way."

He partly opened the door through which he had entered.

" Where are you going to take me ? "

" Out of this ; you don't suppose I want to talk to you here ? No, no ! I am going to take you to my own quarters, where we can talk at our ease without fear of interruption. There are a great many things I wish to say to you, as you may easily imagine, but just at present I have a feeling that there are eyes at every keyhole, at every window, set in every wall—and ears ! Just now I'm convinced that the world's all ears. But I promise you perfect seclusion in my own little establishment. Come—don't waste time ; moments are precious—and you're late already."

Mr. Glover's bearing hinted that he was lost in a maze of doubt as to whether—broad day though it was—he was playing a part in some waking dream. The new-comer held the door wide open, and beckoning with his finger said in a whisper :

" After me."

He vanished, and, as directed, Mr. Glover went after him The other led him into what was apparently one of the domestic apartments, across it to a passage beyond, to a door which it was clear must open into another street. Mr. Glover began to perceive what the other was after ; his desire was apparently to

avoid observation by taking him out of the building by a way which was not generally known to the café's frequenters. The pair found themselves in a very narrow street, with no pavement, only a *trottoir*. About twenty yards down, almost at the entrance, a motor-brougham was standing. Just as the newcomer was stepping into it—he made no bones about entering first—a woman came rushing out of a doorway within a dozen paces of where the vehicle was standing. The man entering the car caught just one glimpse of her—it was apparently enough. Seemingly indifferent to what became of Mr. Glover, he slammed the door, and the car was off—leaving the elderly gentleman who had come from town to confront the lady who he believed had followed him. Somewhat to Mr. Glover's relief, when she saw that the car had disappeared round the corner, she laughed—as she had done when she stopped her own car in front of his house on Putney Heath.

"Of all cucumbers," she exclaimed, "he's the coolest; and compared with him eels aren't in it for slitheriness! So, Mr. Glover, he's not only done me, he's done you too. Suppose we go and have a cup of coffee together, for I really don't think that either of us will see much of him again this afternoon—and it's just possible that we may have one or two things to say to each other which we might both of us find helpful."

Judging from the frank friendliness of her tone and manner her memory had come back to her with a rush, and she had forgotten the curious treatment which she had meted out to him in the hall of the hotel. Mr. Glover was altogether out of his element; he was not used to incidents which were altogether beyond his comprehension treading so close upon each other's heels. He stared at the lady as if he did not know what to make of her; and as he stared there came round the corner of the street still another lady—the one who had described herself to him, with what seemed almost familiarity, as Sarah Driscoll. She had on a long, loose-fitting, dark cloak, and as she strode towards them her hands were in her pockets. At sight of her Mrs. Cumberland evinced signs of discomposure. She made as if to retreat towards the door through which she had come. But the other was too quick for her; she came forward with long, swift strides, so that she was on her before she had a chance of getting away.

"So," cried Miss or Mrs. Driscoll, "I saw first him"—the reference was apparently to the car which had just gone—"now you"—this referred to Mr. Glover—"and now, of all creatures under God's heaven, you also!" This referred to Mrs. Cumberland. "It looks as if all three of you were in it together."

For some reason, which was hidden from Mr. Glover, the speaker seemed to be in a very bad temper. Mrs. Cumberland tried to bear herself as if she thought the woman was beneath her and wished to put her in her place.

" I've already told you that I wish to have nothing to do with you. If you suppose that by making yourself offensive you will gain anything you are very much mistaken. Please get out of my way and let me pass."

" Get out of your way ! " The other woman's voice rose all at once to a scream. " Get out of your way ! "

She took her right hand out of the pocket of her coat and raised her arm. Mr. Glover saw something bright flashing in the air as it descended. Before he realised what it was, or what was happening, an exclamation came from Mrs. Cumberland.

" She's stabbed me ! " she exclaimed.

She put her hands up to her breast; the horrified Mr. Glover perceived that they were instantly drabbled with blood. Before he could collect his scattered senses Mrs. Cumberland had fallen to the ground, and Sarah Driscoll had vanished round the corner of the street. To crown all, while, half stupefied, he hesitated what to do, the motor-brougham reappeared and a beckoning arm was thrust through the window. What actuated him he was never able to say, but, heedless of the claims of common humanity, he left the unfortunate woman lying where she had fallen, ran to the car, was dragged inside, and while he was still in a state of the most complete bewilderment, was being whirled he knew not whither

CHAPTER XVII

A LETTER FROM CAWSTONE

" CAWSTONE,
" *Thursday.*

" DEAR MR. BAIRD,—We are not having a very nice time, as you may imagine. If it were not that I feel I ought not to trouble you with our insignificant affairs I should have asked you to come down and see me, because I have reached that stage in which I feel that if I can't talk about things to someone outside the house—one on whom I can rely—something will happen. As I feel that I am hardly entitled to encroach upon your time and good nature to the extent of asking you to take that long journey from town just to act as a sort of crumb of comfort to me, I am writing to you in the hope that you'll excuse a rambling scrawl—don't read it if you would rather not, but some sort of a letter has simply got to be written."

These were the opening sentences of a letter to which Mr. Baird was giving his attention to the at least temporary neglect of the morning meal which was on the table at which he was sitting. At this point he paused in his reading to make a remark to himself—which he did with a smile shining out of his eyes and wrinkling his lips.

" If she only knew what an effect the feel of the paper which her hands have touched has on me she wouldn't write like that. The sight of her writing on a piece of paper is the most exciting thing that happens to me nowadays."

Then he went on with the letter.

" I had no idea that one could dislike a house as I am beginning to do Cawstone. It is quite a nice place in itself, as you know—the grounds are pretty ; you could not want a better house—yet sometimes I wish I were a thousand miles away. It is the atmosphere, I think, that does it. Everyone is depressed, nervous, anxious. People have such an uncomfortable expression on their faces, as if they are looking at what they are afraid to see, trying their hardest to listen for what they would much

rather not hear. In a sort of way the place is haunted. The Earl tries to pretend it isn't, but I can see that he lives in hourly expectation of what he dare not think. The doctor, who still comes twice a day, has an air of trying to hide the errand which brings him here. I ask him how Eleanor is with a horrid feeling that it would be perhaps as well that she should be no better.

"I am sure that the entire countryside has this consciousness that Cawstone is under a ban. No one ever comes to see us—except inquirers who have something or other to do with the police and who want to know how Eleanor is getting on. And Eleanor and the Earl are so popular that people were always in and out. Think what a difference it makes to us; only a doubtful individual coming up the avenue now and then with all of us wondering in which pocket he has his handcuffs, and if he has a warrant in another. Is it strange that it's rather difficult to look cheerful in the day, and that I don't find it easy to sleep at night?"

Again Mr. Baird lowered the epistle.

"It presents a disagreeable picture to the mind—a young girl living in such an atmosphere. At that age—at which she is entitled to the unclouded happiness which should be the appendage of youth—to find herself in such an environment; and what can I do to help her, to get her out of it—to lift from her a burden which may destroy for her all that life has that's worth living? Something will have to be done before long; if only I may be the one to do it!"

Once more he resumed his study of the letter.

"It would be well enough—indeed, I could put up with a great deal worse—if there seemed to be even a dim probability of light ahead. But there isn't; the probability grows less and less, and that's the candid truth; it's that which is making me bore you with this letter."

"Silly child!" commented the reader, "how can she talk such nonsense? As if she could bore me with anything, especially with a letter. One day I may be able to prove to her at least that much."

Then back to the letter.

"How ill Eleanor really is I don't know, and I don't think the doctor does. I sometimes think there is a conspiracy between them. Isn't that a dreadful thing to think of one's own sister? But I do. Everyone thinks she is still unconscious, but twice

she has spoken to me. I had had my doubts once or twice if she was so oblivious of her surroundings as she seemed, but the other afternoon I had quite a shock. The nurse had gone out and I was in charge. Eleanor lay quite still. I was reading. All at once there came a small voice from the bed which was like a ghost of Eleanor's really beautiful contralto, and it said:

"'Pauline, is that you?'

"It was Pauline, as I showed by jumping to my feet with more haste than sense—I doubt if I should make a good nurse, I'm too excitable—and I went rushing to the bed.

"'Oh, Eleanor,' I cried, 'darling, darling Eleanor!'

"I was quite gushing, so brimming over with desire to express my thankfulness for her return to life and reason. She was not gushing—quite the other way. She lay with her eyes shut—I noticed that she never opened them—and what do you think she said, in a thin, small voice which I had an uncomfortable notion must be put on? You must never, never breathe a word to anyone, least of all to Eleanor, of what I am telling you. I don't know what she would say if she found out. I have got into such a state of mental muddle that my sense of right and wrong is all anyhow, and I simply do not know if I ought not to tell you. I have got to tell you, so there it is. I know I can trust you. I have a sort of ridiculous conviction that though they subjected you to the tortures of the Spanish Inquisition you would never breathe a syllable which could injure either Eleanor or me—so I'm going to tell you."

"Why should she call it a ridiculous conviction?" inquired the reader of himself as he paused amidst the tangle of this young woman's somewhat excitable words. "What is there ridiculous in implicit faith? It's good to know that she can trust me, but I have yet to learn why, because she trusts me, she is doing anything absurd."

To the letter again.

"These were the first words she said to me after she had been hovering, as I imagined, all that time between life and death.

"'Go to my boudoir; on the mantelshelf there is a bronze copy of the Discobolus; at the base, behind his left foot, you'll find a little key. It's the key of that cloisonné cabinet which stands in the corner. If you open it, in the drawer in the top left-hand corner you will find some letters. Take them all out, everything that's in the drawer, tear everything up and burn them. You're to look at nothing, you understand, not even the writing on the letters. Can I trust you, Pauline?'

"I was so surprised at those being the first words she should utter at such a moment that for some moments I was dumb. Then she said, still without opening her eyes, in quite a different tone of voice:

"'Don't stand there gaping like an idiot. Didn't you hear what I said?'

"'Of course,' I told her, 'I heard what you said.'

"'Then will you do as I tell you—at once—before that woman returns?'

"She meant the nurse, who had been taking such tender care of her.

"'I will do exactly as you tell me,' I assured her. 'Is there anything else you would like to say?'

"I'm afraid there was an ironic flavour in my question; but at such a moment, after all we had gone through, one might be excused for wondering if she might not have something to say which would seem more suited to the occasion. For instance, she might have inquired after the Earl; but she did nothing of the kind. She observed, in a thinner and smaller voice than ever, which she still managed to make quite tart:

"'Mind you do exactly as I tell you; there's someone coming.'

"She must have had an amazingly keen sense of hearing; I heard nothing; yet almost directly afterwards the nurse came in—no one could be more soft-footed than she is—and I was off duty.

"'How has she been?' inquired the nurse.

"I hesitated for just one second. I had a feeling that Eleanor in the bed was holding her breath to listen to what I said; then I understood that Eleanor proposed to remain unconscious until goodness knows when. How she hoped to continue to take in the nurse, and above all the doctor, or how she had managed to take them in so far, was and is beyond me altogether. Can you wonder that I asked myself if they could be, the three of them, in a conspiracy together, and if so, what it means? It is not pleasant to have it borne in on one all of a sudden that one is being deceived in such an amazing manner by one's own sister.

"I found the key, I opened the cabinet, took out the letters, and 'everything' that was in it, tore the whole lot up, and burnt them; and when they were burnt I destroyed the ashes.

"The very next afternoon I was going for my usual afternoon walk in the park, when a man came towards me through the trees. He was a shabby-looking person, between forty and fifty, who shambled in his walk. He touched his hat as he came near and spoke very respectfully, though there was about his speech and

his manner that flavour of mystery which makes me long for some desert island on which everything is exactly what it seems."

"I can understand how she feels, poor child." The reader had resumed his comments. "At nineteen one loves candour, one hates dissimulation."

If John Baird had reflected he might not have been so sure of the accuracy of what he was saying—he was not in the mood to be critical. That letter was moving him in a fashion which its writer had probably never expected.

"'Miss Pearse, I believe, miss, her ladyship's sister?'

"That respectfully speaking person might have been imparting to me a state secret by the way in which he put to me this question. I admitted that I was Miss Pearse, and even her ladyship's sister. He went on:

"'I'm a porter at the station, miss—Exeter station. On the morning of Thursday, the fourteenth, her ladyship came down by the train which gets in at 4.30. After she had got out of the carriage I noticed there was something lying on the seat.' He lowered his voice in the horridest way. 'It was so soaked with blood that at first I didn't know what it was. Her ladyship was so quick in getting out of the station that I didn't know whether to give it to her or not. It was a handkerchief, miss. I took it home to my missis, and had it washed, and here it is.' He handed me something wrapped in a piece of tissue paper, speaking all the time. 'My son, miss, he was taking tickets that morning, and he tells me that as she hurried past him she said something about having no ticket, but without saying anything of where she'd come from, or anything of the kind, she put some coins in his hand and off she went. When my son found that she'd given him two sovereigns he couldn't make it out at all, because even if she'd come from London the first-class fare is only twenty-eight shillings, and she had asked for no change. When my son told me I told him to say nothing about who had given him the money, but just to hand the proper receipt in at the office. As things have turned out it seems lucky that we neither of us did say anything, because I believe that he and me were the only two who did see her ladyship get out of the train.'

"What was I to do—or say? Whether the man meant well it was impossible for me to decide. If the papers learned that the Countess of Ditchling came down from London at that hour of that morning, and left a blood-stained handkerchief behind her in the carriage, what might it not mean to us? This porter

man might be quite genuine in his desire to do us a service, but what, from his point of view, might not that handkerchief be worth to him, and how could he have found a better market than by bringing it to me? Then there was his son: might he not be of opinion that the two sovereigns that Eleanor had thrust into his palm would prove to be worth a great many more?

"Whatever he might be thinking I had no money on me—not a farthing—and before I could collect my thoughts enough to ask him to wait till I got some, I saw the Earl coming along a footpath. Directly he saw us he turned his steps in our direction. It was impossible to talk to that porter in front of him, nor did I at all wish that he should see what was in that piece of tissue paper. I asked the porter what his name was, and I added;

"'Be quick and tell me.'

"He was quick, because he also saw the Earl, and I fancy understood what I was after.

"'Alfred Emmett's my name; my son is named George. Anything addressed to me or to him at St. David's Station will always find us."

"Off he shambled when the Earl was within perhaps half a dozen yards of me. Of course he put to me the question I had expected.

"'Who's that man?' he asked.

"I did not know what to say. I had no time to think—to decide whether it would be wiser to tell him the truth or the other thing; so—you will think it shocking—I seemed quite naturally to give him the other thing.

"'I don't quite know,' I answered. 'He's a stranger to me; I have never seen him before. Have you had a nice walk? It's a lovely day for walking.'

"Although I said this with what I do hope was beautiful simplicity, he was not to be put off quite so easily.

"'What did he want with you?' he asked.

"'That's what I can't quite make out—something to do with some woman in the village.'

"'Some woman in the village?' You know what a trick he has of bringing his shaggy eyebrows right down over his eyes? He did it then. 'What woman in the village, since you say he's a stranger? What was that he gave you?'

"This was a question which I did not wish to answer, yet it was not easy to find a plausible lie. I slipped the handkerchief out of its covering and I crammed it into my belt, and I said with an air of innocence which was not convincing enough for him:

"Oh, nothing particular; just something I've had washed. Where did you go for your walk?'

"'Something you've had washed?' he growled. 'Why should a perfect stranger come all this way to give you something you've had washed? What is it you've had washed? Let me look at it.'

"I took it out of my belt and I gave it to him, devoutly trusting there was nothing about it that would give me away, or Eleanor, or anyone. He opened it out—not with too much gentleness.

"'This is a handkerchief.' It was a handkerchief. I could have told him it was a handkerchief. 'This is not a woman's handkerchief—it's not yours—it's a man's.'

"To my surprise, I perceived that it did not seem to be a woman's—that it was one of those small sheets which some men use. I held my peace. The Earl was peering at each of the four corners. Presently he made a discovery.

"'Here's an initial; it's B, plainly it's B. Your initial is not B. Who is B? Whose handkerchief is this?'

"I had not the dimmest notion; I was wondering myself. I doubted, however, if it was wise to confess my ignorance, so I refrained. I assumed a little air of grievance.

"'I suppose it is permissible to have an acquaintance, one of whose initials happens to be B? Am I forced to tell you who that initial stands for? Do you really consider that you're entitled to make me? Mayn't I have any little secret of my own?'

"Of course that finished him. I knew it would. In rather a crumpled condition, muttering something about making mysteries out of nothing, off he went. I departed in the opposite direction. When I was sure he was out of sight I carefully examined that handkerchief. It was a man's handkerchief, a beautifully fine one, of unusual size, and in one of the corners, as if it had been woven into the linen, was the letter B. Of course B might be anyone; Eleanor knows heaps of people whose names begin with B; but one thing is sure—there's no B about Andrew Tozer. Where could Eleanor have been that she got out of the train at 4.30 that Thursday morning, having omitted to buy a ticket at whatever station she had come from, and leaving behind on the carriage seat a man's handkerchief all soaked with blood and initialed B?

"You must allow that in the little tale which Alfred Emmett told there was much that was suggestive."

Again lifting his eyes from this seemingly interminable epistle, John Baird made some still further inward comments, apparently quite oblivious of the fact that his breakfast was getting cold.

"Every line she writes, everything which happens in the house in which she is like a prisoner, seems to me to be suggestive—suggestive of something the key to which, I am beginning to think, so far as I am concerned, I would rather be without. The atmosphere of Cawstone is getting more and more unsuited to a young girl who has just left school. The sooner she is out of it the better—she, the embodiment of perfect innocence."

An entirely impartial person reading that letter might have been disposed to be a trifle sceptical as to whether its writer was quite so perfectly innocent as Mr. Baird chose to think. It is odd how some eyes may see in a nice girl qualities which she can scarcely be said to possess—it all depends upon the eyes.

"When I got back to the house," the letter continued, "I went upstairs to Eleanor's room, meaning just to peep in—she had returned to unconsciousness since the day before, and so far as I was aware I was the only person about the house who knew that she had ever come out of it. Directly she saw me the nurse said:

"'If you are disengaged, Miss Pauline, do you mind waiting here for a few minutes while I go to attend to something which I am afraid I have overlooked?'

"Of course I stayed, and the woman was scarcely gone when back came Eleanor to consciousness. I am beginning to doubt everything; I am a chaos of doubts. Directly Eleanor began to open her lips I wondered if, after all, she and the nurse might not be in collusion. It seemed so odd that the moment I appeared the nurse should have remembered something she had overlooked, and so have given Eleanor an opportunity of speaking to me in what I supposed to be the strictest confidence.

"'Did you do yesterday as I asked you?' she began, speaking in the same thin voice.

"I told her that I had—observing her closely. Although she would keep her eyes closed she struck me as looking very well. How the doctor could keep on telling the Earl that her condition continued to be serious, when I felt sure that if she chose she could jump out of bed and dance about the room, and probably go for a twenty-mile walk, was one more thing which was beyond my comprehension. If he believed what he said he must be an idiot; and if she shared his opinion the nurse must be another. Eleanor went on—if she liked she could have shouted; the little piping voice in which she spoke was, I suppose, part of the comedy;

"'I'm not quite so ill as they suppose, Pauline, but I dare not get well just yet, because I'm afraid.'

"That was frank at any rate.

"'You look to me quite well,' I told her. 'Of what are you afraid?'

"'Can't you guess?'

"I could, but I preferred not to. She went on:

"'Pauline, I want you to help me.' She paused—she had reason to—and then she added: 'I am going to die.'

"'You're going to what?' I almost shouted it.

"'Hush,' she whispered, 'don't speak so loudly. I don't mean that I'm really going to die. I'm only going to pretend—but I must pretend. I want you to help me to prevent people finding out.'

"I sat down on the chair beside her bed, feeling that this was a position in which I could hardly venture to stand, lest all of a sudden my legs should give way beneath me, as I believe they probably would have done as I began really to grasp what it was she was driving at.

"'I am going to die next Saturday.' She said this with the most perfect calmness, and I am not sure if what I have seen described as a wintry smile did not flit across her inexpressive countenance. 'On Sunday I'm going to be put into my coffin; the funeral will take place on Wednesday——'

"'Are you going to be in your coffin when the funeral takes place?' I inquired, in what I should describe as my most sepulchral tones.

She was quite snappish.

"'Of course not—don't be absurd.' Coming from her that struck me as rather good. I wondered if anyone could be more absurd than she was. 'I shall be out of the coffin, and I hope out of England, long before the funeral. And it's here I want you to help me. I want you to come to me after everyone has gone to bed—nurse won't be here.'

"'Are you and she doing this together?' I asked.

"'Never mind; please don't ask any questions now, just listen to me. Come here about eleven o'clock. There are many things which I want to say to you, many ways in which I want you to help me. Say I can rely upon your coming?'

"There was a question on the tip of my tongue which I should have very much liked to ask her, but, to be candid, I was afraid of the effect it might have on her, and of the answer she might give. So I did something else instead. I held up the handkerchief which had been presented to me by Mr. Alfred Emmett.

"'Do you know what this is?

"She just raised her eyelids enough to peep out, then shut them again

"'I'd rather not open my eyes, if you don't mind; I'm afraid the light is too strong.'

"'Very good, that's as you please. In that case I shall have to ask someone else what it is."

"'What what is? What is it you've got there?'

"Again she just peeped out.

"'If you look you'll see. I don't believe one bit about your being afraid that the light is too strong; but if it really is I suppose I had better take it to the Earl.'

"At that she did open her eyes. When I saw them I was startled. You may smile, but there was something about them which was odd; they didn't look as if they were her eyes at all. You remember what beautiful dark-blue eyes she used to have? They had become so faint a blue that they were almost white, really. What had happened to them to cause them to change like that I could not guess.

"'What is it you have there?' she asked. 'I find it difficult to see.'

"She appeared to; I was really so startled that I spoke more roughly than I meant.

"'Can't you see that it's a handkerchief? It's a man's handkerchief, and in one corner there's the letter B.'

"'B'! I might have said something dreadful. In an instant she was sitting up in bed, groping for the handkerchief, feeling it between her fingers—somehow it hurt me to look at the way she handled it.

"'What is the matter with your eyes?' I asked.

"'I can't see,' she wailed. 'Don't tell anyone, above all don't tell Hardy, but I'm going blind.'

"In my horror I was speechless; I could see that she was blind. She continued to fumble with the handkerchief.

"'It feels like a man's handkerchief, it's so large. What did you say the letter in the corner was? Did you say it was B?'

"On a sudden, before I could answer, she changed her tone. She began to fold the handkerchief up with her slim fingers—you know what pretty fingers she has. She folded it in half, then again and again, till it was just a tiny white square, then she pressed it between her palms. 'I'll keep this. Say nothing of it to anyone. To-night you must tell me where you got it from. Go now; you needn't stay till nurse returns; I want to be alone. And, Pauline'—her voice dropped till it became the faintest whisper—'don't breathe a word to Hardy about my being blind.'

"As if I were likely to! When I got outside her bedroom—she would not let me stop—I was in that state which I have heard people call not knowing whether I was standing on my head or

my heels. This happened this afternoon, not more than an hour ago—at least I shouldn't think it was more than an hour ago. What it all means, what she is going to say to me when I go to her to-night, I'm in such a state that I do not even dare to try to guess. I have written this to prepare your mind for what I may have to write to-morrow. But perhaps I shan't be equal to writing; perhaps I shall not venture to put it down on paper, even though I am quite sure that only your eyes will ever see it. If you could come down to Cawstone, if you only would, by the same train as before, and would meet me by the clapper-gate—you know! I don't know what I may have to say to you, but I'm sure the sight of you would do me good.—P."

That was the only signature—the one initial; there was no attempt at rounding off, the letter just came to an end. John Baird sat with it between his fingers as if lost in thought. Then he spoke one sentence aloud.

"Perhaps if I were to have a cup of coffee it might help to clear some of the cobwebs out of my brain." Even as he was in the act of pouring out that cup he asked himself a question: "What can her ladyship of Ditchling have said to her last night?"

CHAPTER XVIII

MISS WINTON'S ADVENTURE

BEFORE breakfast that morning John Baird received a letter from one young lady, and after breakfast a visit from another. He was endeavouring to arrange his mental focus so as to gain something like a clear insight into the problems which were troubling Miss Pauline Pearse, and which she so eloquently described, when his landlord entered the room to announce that a young lady was below who wished to see him—the same young lady, he added, who had called before. Mr. Baird was so occupied with his efforts to get at the true inwardness of the things which were happening at Cawstone that the interruption rather took him aback. He glanced at his landlord as if startled.

"A young lady to see me who was here before? Did she give her name?"

"She gave her name as Miss Winton, sir; I understood her to say Miss Elsie Winton."

He emphasised the Christian name, as if the fact that the visitor had mentioned it was an act of impropriety. Mr. Baird seemed still more startled, as if the passage from one young lady to the other was sudden. He hesitated as if in doubt, which his landlord interpreted in his own fashion, as if his tenant needed his assistance in giving expression to what was passing through his mind.

"Shall I tell the young lady you're engaged, sir? Shall I ask her to call again?"

Mr. Baird woke to the hint his landlord's manner conveyed.

"No, no, certainly not. Bring her in at once; I am very glad to see her; show her up."

Presently the girl with the graceful, fragile figure, and the delicate, flower-like face, was being ushered in.

"Will you have breakfast, Miss Winton?" he asked as he greeted her, "or do you keep better hours than I do?"

The visitor declined; Baird motioned to the breakfast equipage, which his landlord removed.

"I have only one sitting-room," he explained, when the process was completed. "I have sometimes asked myself why I don't

have two, but I'm a pretty lonely animal; in the ordinary way I don't know what I should do with a second, so there you are. I've been wondering what you have been doing, Miss Winton. Any more news? If so, I hope it's good news."

"The other day I had this letter."

She took an envelope out of the handbag she was carrying and laid it on the table. As he looked at it his thoughts recurred to the letter he had received.

"Do you wish me to read it?"

"If you wouldn't mind. I'm afraid you will think I am intruding my affairs on you, but it's a simple fact that I haven't a creature in the world whom I can consult, and certainly nothing masculine. If you are engaged, and I rather gathered from the person who opened the door that you were, please say so and I'll go."

"The person who opened the door is my landlord. He acts as valet, butler, and general factotum, and his name is Burtonshaw, and he likes to convey to the very few people who ever do call the impression that I'm up to my neck in affairs, and that access to my presence is only to be gained as a very great favour. As a matter of fact, I have no engagement, and nothing at all to do; I am very glad to see you, and shall be pleased to render you any service which is in my power—so please make no more excuses. So I am to read the letter which is in this envelope?"

"If you wouldn't mind."

"I don't mind in the very least, thank you." He took out a sheet of paper on which were some typewritten lines. "I will read it aloud."

He read as follows:

"Miss Elsie Winton is informed that the sum of one thousand pounds has been paid into her account at the London County and Westminster Bank. It was felt that in case she should be in want of ready cash, and has received no communication from the bank, this intimation should be given her."

He stopped and turned the sheet of paper over to see if there was anything on the other side.

"That seems to be all—there's no address, no date, no beginning and no ending, but the information it conveys is surely satisfactory. From whom did it come?"

"I have no idea."

"That's odd. One doesn't often have a thousand pounds paid into one's banking-account by an utter stranger. Is the money there?"

"I went to the bank and asked. They told me it was. When I inquired who had paid it in they took me to the manager, and he informed me that a thousand pounds, in bank-notes, had come in a registered letter, accompanied by a communication which he showed me. It was on a sheet of paper exactly like the one I had. It merely said that the enclosed notes for one thousand pounds were to be paid into my account, and that I had been advised to that effect. You see my envelope was posted at the office which is quite close to where I live. I have a feeling that the money was sent in accordance with instructions which had been left by Mr. Tozer; but with whom they were left I should very much like to learn. Can you suggest any means by which I could find out?"

"You might begin by inquiring at his office in the City."

"I did. I know the name of his right-hand man—Samuel Glover. They told me Mr. Glover was away; they didn't know where he was or when he would return. The person who had been left in authority assured me that he knew nothing about those bank-notes, and they certainly did not come from that office. And I went to his lawyers—they knew nothing; they informed me—which I knew already—that they were not the only firm of solicitors he had employed, that sometimes he had employed a dozen different firms at once. Then I went to Gilcott and saw Monsieur Vineal, who was his confidential servant; he laughed at the idea of his having anything to do with the thousand pounds, and suggested that they might have come from Mr. Tozer's ghost. So, you see, there are the thousand pounds, but when I try to find out where they have come from it is as though I was up against a stone wall, which I can't get over, or under, or round, or through."

"You will—you'll get through that stone wall before you've done—it's only a question of time."

"You think so? I wonder. And yesterday something rather unpleasant happened. By the way, do you know they've issued a warrant for the arrest of the Countess of Ditchling?"

John Baird jumped—he stared at her.

"No! Is that true? How do you know?"

"In a flat above mine is a married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy; they are both of them journalists. He, as he phrases it, has been put on to this motor-car case. I was with his wife when he came in last night; he told us that he had just learned that a warrant had been issued for the arrest of the Countess, on information which had that day been obtained by the police. But the trouble, from his point of view, was that he had been told

this on his giving a distinct pledge that he would keep it to himself till permission was given him to publish it."

"What sort of man is Mr. Kennedy? Is he a gas bag? Some journalists are. Can what he says be implicitly relied upon?"

"That I should not care to affirm, but I feel pretty certain that he was telling the truth when he said that."

"Did he say that it was likely the warrant would be at once enforced?"

"He did not. You understand I am telling you this in confidence, as it was told me. He had only learnt the one fact that a warrant had been granted. If you please, I would rather not discuss that matter any further. I have only told you so much because—I thought I should like to. Now, if you don't mind, I will tell you what happened to me yesterday."

He listened, it is to be feared, with only half an ear; he was endeavouring to digest the intelligence she had just given him—to reconcile it with the statements in Pauline Pearse's letter. Was that the meaning of her sister's extraordinary announcement of her intention of what she called "dying"? Had she some subterranean means of learning what the police were doing? Could it possibly be intended that she should be dead and buried before the warrant could be put into execution?

He was brought back to realisation of where he was by a remark made by his visitor.

"I'm afraid you are not paying much attention to what I'm saying."

He was not—he was not paying any. He apologised—lamely.

"The truth is, that piece of news which you received from your journalistic friend has sent all my wits wool-gathering; I trust it isn't true; but—what is it you were saying?"

His thoughts were still some distance off, or he could scarcely have failed to notice the very singular look with which his visitor was regarding him.

"I don't believe you heard one word."

"I'm afraid I haven't. Do you mind beginning again?"

"I was telling you of an adventure which I had yesterday afternoon. I was coming out of a shop in Sloane Street, and just as I got on the pavement a man who was passing stopped dead, turned, stared at me, and broke into the most amazing volley of exclamations—in German, of which language I know enough to understand what remarkable words he was using."

"Was he a German?"

"I should say certainly not. I had the most uncanny feeling of having seen him before, but for the life of me I could not think

where or when; yet he was the kind of person who, once seen, it is not easy to forget. He was tall—I should say six foot two or three; I know I felt like a shrimp beside him—thin, and straight as a dart. He had rather a small head on the top of his long body, with a profile which reminded me of a hawk, or some other predatory bird. He had a wiry black moustache, turned up at the ends, and which somehow accentuated his hawk-like appearance. He wore a grey top hat, a grey frock-coat, white waistcoat, grey tie, and trousers of another shade of grey—he presented quite a remarkable figure. The more I looked at him, the more I was convinced that I had seen him somewhere before; yet as I have the most retentive memory for faces, it seemed incredible that I could have forgotten the circumstances under which we had previously met. We stared at each other for certainly some seconds, then he went his way and I went mine."

"Without speaking?"

"Without exchanging a syllable. As I went down Sloane Street I kept groping about in my mind for the pigeon-hole in which I felt sure he was; the more I groped, the more it eluded me. You cannot imagine how uncomfortable it made me feel."

"I can—I have had that same feeling myself in a mitigated form. Few things are more irritating than to feel that you know a man, and yet are unable to locate him."

"The worst of it was that the further I went the more I groped, the stronger the feeling grew that he had seen me under circumstances under which I had much rather he had not done; that volley of remarkable exclamations had told me that. He would hardly have used such extraordinary language at sight of a woman if his recollections of her had been pleasant ones. All of a sudden I had a sort of intuition. I can't describe how it was, but all at once it came to me that his personality had had something to do with the events of that dreadful Wednesday night. The notion—intuition, or whatever it was—was so disagreeable that for the instant it seemed to deprive me of the capacity of movement. I stopped short—and the moment I did so I knew that he was following."

"Who? The six-foot-two gentleman dressed all in grey?"

"You may laugh, but I can assure you——"

"I was not laughing, I don't think I ever felt less like laughter in my life."

"You might be excused if you were laughing, because I am conscious that my whole story smacks of melodrama, and I used to think melodrama was funny. I know better now."

She sighed. Although all his thoughts were not yet in that room, John Baird could not but realise—however dimly—what a

dainty picture she presented, in spite of the curious look of trouble which seemed to be as a shadow upon her face.

"I know better now. I know that when you yourself are playing a part in melodrama, it is not the amusing side which strikes you. As I stopped, brought to a standstill by the suspicion that he had been connected with the events of that dreadful night, and realised that though I had seen him go up towards Knightsbridge, directly my back was to him he had turned, and had been following me all the while, my heart seemed to cease to beat, my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth—I was as one paralysed."

"But why should you have been so afraid of him? I really don't see why."

"Nor I—that's the ridiculous part of it. Nor am I sure that I was exactly afraid; it was a sense of horror rather than fear which oppressed me. I remained stock still—for a second or two I was incapable of movement—and as he passed it was as though something dreadful, obscene, unspeakable, went by. You may think I am using exaggerated language, but I'm not; I am merely trying to describe to you how I felt."

"Yes, that I believe, Miss Winton; but, if you'll pardon my saying so, I don't see what reason you had for feeling what you have described. Do you know I have a sort of notion that I have met the man of whom you give so vivid a picture? Did you find out who he was?"

"I'm trying to tell you how much I did find out. I remained as if glued to that Sloane Street pavement, watching him as he strode on, conscious of an absurd feeling that he was looking at me through the back of his head, watching to see what I would do——"

"Oh, come, Miss Winton, this is a little too much! Are you ascribing to him supernatural powers?"

"I am not so silly—only I do know that when I hailed a taxi-cab, and got into it, just as my foot was on the step he turned right round and looked at me—which makes my feeling that he had been watching me through the back of his head not so absurd as you seem to think."

She paused, as if to challenge his comment. With his fingers thrust into his waistcoat pockets he stood and smiled, but he said nothing. She seemed to resent his silence.

"I can guess what you are thinking; I seem foolish even to myself. But if he had not had some suspicion of what I was doing why did he turn at just that moment?"

"I haven't an idea; perhaps he felt like turning."

"I have no doubt he felt like turning. I was so flurried that

I scarcely knew what I said to the driver. It was only when, seated in the cab, I passed him standing on the pavement, eyeing me as I went, that I realised that I had told the cabman to drive me home. We went down to Sloane Square: just as we were going on to Chelsea Bridge I put my head out of the window and looked behind, and there was another taxi within fifty feet of us."

"Why shouldn't there have been? Sometimes there's a long row of taxis going in the same direction, all within fifty feet of each other."

"My impulse was to stop my cab and see what became of the other, but I didn't, I just let the driver go his own way, and I was not in the least surprised when, on my cab drawing up in the Battersea Bridge Road, another stopped close behind us, and hat objectionable man—I felt he was an objectionable man, and he was—got out of it. He came right up to me, and without showing the least sense of shame at having spied on me in such a fashion, he took off his hat, and he said: 'I believe I have seen you before; can I speak to you?' I should liked to have said that he could not speak to me and to deny that he had seen me before, but there was something about him which—I can only put it in that way—sort of hypnotised me. I just said nothing to him, but I entered the house in which my flat is, and he went after me."

"You did not try what the effect would been have if you had asked him not to?"

"I didn't—I simply couldn't. To begin with, I was conscious of a kind of morbid desire to know what he wished to say to me. And then I had a feeling that even if I said no it would make no difference to him, he would have had his way just the same."

"You might at least have tried."

"I might, but I didn't; and when my maid opened the door of my flat he went in with me. When we were in I did try to pull myself together, and to behave as if I were not an utter idiot. 'Where have you seen me before?' I asked in as forbidding a tone as I could muster. He put up both hands and began to pull at the ends of his moustache."

"By Jove, I know that man; I have seen him do that very same thing."

"I have seen other men fondle their moustaches. Talk about women fussing with their hair—some men never can leave their moustaches alone."

"But coupled with your description of the man—I recognise that trick—I can't place him." John Baird snapped his fingers as if irritated at his own incapacity. "Who is the fellow?"

"If you will wait I will tell you all about him I know. I was about to remark that as he fiddled with his preposterous moustache, he said: 'Exactly—where have I seen you before? Of course you don't remember—women of your sort never do.' There was something so offensive in his tone that it made me angry, and that made me more able to hold my own. 'Will you please tell me at once where you saw me before, if you ever did—or go?' His reply was most amazing. 'You're a cool hand, upon my word you are. As if you didn't know all about it just as well as I do—perhaps better! Do you think my memory is as short as you pretend yours is? Go to! You and I are going to have an explanation before we part; it's essential that you should understand that a mere movement of my finger would send you to the gallows.' A cold shiver went all over me, though I could not but feel that he was talking nonsense."

"Of course he was, unless he was some blackguard who was aiming at something worse. Didn't you ask him his name?"

"I said: 'How dare you speak to me like that! Who are you? What's your name?' He replied, 'My name's Bill Brown,' and he smiled at me as I've seen Mephistopheles do on the stage."

"I should have rung the bell and desired your maid to show him the door."

"That's what I felt disposed to do, especially when he took up some letters which were lying on the table, glanced at the address, and said: 'Miss Elsie Winton, I suppose that's you—so you're Miss Elsie Winton. Well, Miss Winton, soon we shall begin to understand each other; at least I shall know what name to give the police in case of need.'"

"The fellow was an impudent scoundrel, and, as I hinted just now, something worse."

"I was so mad with him that if there had been something handy I should have liked to have thrown it at him if I could have been sure of hurting him. From his manner I might have been the most contemptible of living things. He carried himself as if he owned, not only my flat, but me too. He leaned against the edge of the table—he had not removed his hat when entering the room——"

"Hadn't he? I should have thrown something which would knock that off."

"He picked up the evening paper which was awaiting me on the table, and he said, as he turned the pages: 'I should like you, Miss Winton, to tell me why I should not at once communicate with the people at Scotland Yard, and so put an end to the growing sense of public irritation at the delay which

the authorities are showing in arriving at a solution to the mystery of that Pall Mall motor-car. You know what that solution is better than any other person.' He had got so far, and I was really going to throw something at him, when he paused; he drew himself away from the table and he glared at my evening paper, and again broke into a hurricane of German bad language. As I stood looking at him in amazement his flow of adjectives came to an end; he continued to stare at the paper, then he lowered the paper and looked at me, without, I feel sure, realising what he was looking at—there was such a far-away look in his eyes. Then he came back to himself, as it were, with a sort of start, and he said: 'I'll come to an understanding with you some other time, Miss Winton. In the meantime don't suppose for a moment that you're forgotten.' Without another word he marched out of the room and out of the flat, and directly afterwards I saw him striding along the pavement, waving his stick to a distant taxi-cab."

John Baird laughed.

"Your acquaintance seems to have been somewhat of a curiosity who would be more in place in the ward of an asylum."

"I am not so sure. I don't think he was any more mad than you are, Mr. Baird. I confess I don't understand, as yet, but I've a feeling that, had he chosen, he might have thrown light on what took place that Wednesday night, so that the mist in which I seem to be groping my way would be dispelled. This is the evening paper which was on my table, and this is the paragraph he was looking at. I noticed it particularly. What meaning it conveyed to him which can have induced him to make such a hurried retreat I cannot tell you; but that because of what is in this paragraph he rushed off like that I am convinced."

Again opening her bag, the lady took from it a copy of the *Evening Standard*. Going with it to Mr. Baird, opening out the page in front of him, she pointed to one of the columns. "That's the paragraph he was looking at when he favoured me with that second display of German bad language." Taking the paper from her hands, John Baird glanced at the paragraph to which she was drawing his attention. "You might read it aloud," she said, "and then tell me what you think it has to do with that person's remarkable behaviour."

He did as she suggested.

"'Brussels.—Thursday morning' This seems to be a communication from their own correspondent. 'A singular occurrence seems to have taken place yesterday afternoon in one of the new streets at the southern end of the Avenue Louise. As far as can at present be learned there seems to have been a

quarrel between two Englishwomen, in the course of which one of them stabbed the other and then made off. It turns out that the victim is a lady who arrived in Brussels only this morning. She had taken rooms at the Hôtel Métropole in the Place de Brouckère, where she was known as Mrs Cumberland. She lies seriously injured—indeed, it is doubted if she will survive her injuries. Nothing has been heard of her assailant or of the circumstances under which she received her injuries. Indeed, up to the present the whole affair is involved in mystery.' "

John Baird glanced at his visitor over the top of the journal.

" There doesn't seem to be much in that to have caused your visitor to behave in the eccentric style in which you say he did."

" Unless he knew Mrs. Cumberland."

" Mrs. Cumberland ? I see, that's the woman who was stabbed and seems not unlikely to die of her injuries. Of course he may have known her; this paragraph seems to be pretty flimsy Was it a street quarrel in which she was engaged ? It must have been a remarkable English lady who would stab another under any circumstances. Who was Mrs. Cumberland ? What could she have to do with your visitor ? Of course it is possible she might have been his wife, in which case his agitation could be understood; if that were so his name must be Cumberland. I'm certain I never knew anyone named Cumberland, and I'm almost as certain that I know the man you've been describing—if only I could recall his name. I've got his portrait here "—he touched his forehead—" if only I could get it labelled."

CHAPTER XIX

ANOTHER VISITOR FOR MR. BAIRD

THAT was destined to be a broken morning for John Baird. Scarcely had Miss Winton departed—which she did after a great deal more had been said than has been set down; and he was just beginning to make another effort to concentrate his mind on that letter from the young lady at Cawstone—in fact, he had started to read it all over again—when Burtonshaw, his landlord, appeared in the doorway to make an announcement which his manner showed he felt to be one of the greatest importance.

"The Earl of Ditchling is below, sir, and desires to see you."

John Baird jumped up. He dropped the letter he was holding. "The Earl of Ditchling—wants to see me! Did you tell him I was in?"

"His lordship mentioned that he wished to see you on particular business."

"Did he say that? Then—then I suppose, Burtonshaw, you'd better show him up." John Baird seemed fidgety. The letter from Cawstone covered several sheets; he folded them as rapidly as he could, slipped them into the envelope, which he slipped into his pocket. "What on earth does he want with me—with me!—of all men in the world?"

Looking round the room, his glance fell upon the portrait of a woman in a silver frame which stood upon an easel. He snatched it up, easel and all, pulled out a drawer in his writing-table, in which he had just deposited it as his lordship entered.

The acquaintance between these two men was of the slightest. Baird had met the Earl before, but that was five years ago: he was struck when his lordship entered by his appearance of age. He remembered him as a man who, if he was no longer young, was still in the prime of life and health and strength—yet in five years he had become an old man. His hair was white, his face was seamed, his form was bent—all about him were the unmistakable marks of age—and of more than age. John Baird's eyes were keen—it did not need a second glance to make him suspect that something had happened to make this man old before his time.

The first moments of their meeting were awkward ones Taken wholly by surprise—this was a visitor whom he neither expected nor wished to see—ignorant of what his presence there might mean, John Baird was at a loss what form of greeting to use. Moved by something in his visitor's bearing which suggested physical as well as mental weariness, his impulse was to lead him to a chair and beg him to rest; on the other hand, instinct warned him that the subject of his weakness might be a sore one to the Earl, any reference to which—even by implication—would be resented. Mr. Baird elected, therefore—having bowed to his visitor—to wait for him to speak.

Clearly words did not come easily to the Earl's lips, and when words did come they were certainly not such as John Baird had expected to hear, nor, probably, those which the speaker himself had meant to use.

" You are still a young man, Mr. Baird ; so far as my recollection goes, you are younger even than when I saw you last ; whilst I—I have grown old. Age has come upon me all in a moment. A few weeks ago I still thought myself young."

Mr. Baird tried to smile ; it was not a speech to which it was easy to find a suitable response. The visitor spoke with something in his tone which jarred on his listener's ears.

" Perhaps you have been rather worried lately. Sometimes, when I am worried, I feel as if I were ninety."

" Worried—that's a very weak word with which to describe what I've been through—that's what has made me find out how old I am. There was a time when I should have looked any worry in the face and dared it to do its worst ; but now—I've crumpled up as if there were no backbone in me. To such a condition am I brought that I have come to you, of all men in the world, not only for advice, but for—yes, I'll say it—help also." The Earl seemed to make an effort to stand straighter, and to look at the other with that unflinching directness of vision for which he had been famed. ' However, Mr. Baird, no doubt your time is of value. I seem to have lost the trick of coming rapidly to the point with anyone, but I'll do my best not to occupy a moment more of your leisure than I can help. You are one of the men who found that motor-car in Pall Mall—you and Overton."

John Baird acquiesced in the statement with a movement of his head.

" Can you tell me," the Earl went on, " how that motor-car came to be there ? " Mr. Baird stared at the questioner with what seemed to be genuine surprise ; its genuineness seemed to be doubted by the visitor. " I'm aware it is your cue to look

at me as if my question amazed you. We'll waive all that sort of thing, Mr. Baird. You know my wife—she is my wife—is in a serious position. Possibly you don't know how serious. In that case you can take it from me that it could hardly be graver. I ask you to tell me, as between man and man, bearing in mind the gravity of her position and the fact that I'm her husband, how my wife's motor-car came to be there that morning with that horror in front?"

The surprise—whose genuineness had been doubted—which had marked Mr. Baird's bearing had given place to something else; he held himself very upright, all traces of a smile had passed from him, he looked the other very full in the face, his manner was more than a trifle stern.

"May I ask, my lord, why you put to me such an astonishing question? What grounds have you for suggesting that I know anything of the movements of Lady Ditchling's motor-car?"

The touch of sternness in the one man's bearing reacted on the other; the Earl became stiffer and also curter.

"I have one or two reasons, Mr. Baird—they seem pretty good ones to me, or I should not have put to you a question of whose significance I am quite conscious. That you may take for granted."

"I should like to hear what your reasons are. I doubt if to me they will seem good ones."

"That's as may be, Mr. Baird. You must forgive me for beginning with what is a reference to ancient history. All the world knows that at one time you proposed to make the Countess your wife."

"What has that to do with the question you have just now put to me?"

"You did not see her, so far as I can learn, for some time after her marriage. Although you did not do me the honour of announcing the fact of your return to England, you appear to have resumed at once your former intimate relations with my wife."

"Is that a statement or a question? If it's a statement it's a lie; and if a question it's an impertinence."

"I expected you to say something of that kind, Mr. Baird; I am aware that in matters of this kind it is considered to be the proper thing to do."

"Do you think I say that simply because it's the proper thing to do? Let me tell you——"

The Earl held up his hand.

"Before you say anything more, let me tell you something, Mr. Baird. I may observe by way of preface, that I have neither

the wish nor intention to quarrel with you. You will perhaps remember that I told you that I am here to ask for assistance as well as advice—it is hardly the attitude of a man who wishes to be offensive."

" It is not a question of intention, but of fact. When you suggest what you did just now, you are monstrously unjust to the Countess and to me, and, I may add, to yourself also."

The Earl hesitated—as if he were considering. When he continued it was with a note of pathos in his voice which was more effective than his preceding stiffness.

" I must ask you to bear with me, Mr. Baird, a little, and ask you to believe that however for the moment it may seem to you, my wish is to avoid anything which may be painful to either of the three parties concerned. But matters have reached a point at which I desire, before all else—light. You esteemed her once, whatever may be your feeling towards her now——"

" I have never spoken to her since the day when she became your wife."

" Mr. Baird ! "

" Your manner expresses doubt. I cannot conceive what grounds you have for such a feeling. I but stated a fact which can easily be proved."

" You were driving with her, in her motor-car, on the thirteenth of May."

If the amazement which Mr. Baird seemed to radiate was not genuine, then he was a great actor.

" Someone has been telling you fairy tales, my lord."

" When you joined her, or when you left her, I am not yet quite sure, but you were with her in her car at Honiton, at Ilminster, at Yeovil and at Wimborne. She was driving, and you sat beside her on the front seat You were seen at each of these places by more than one person, who first of all described you and then recognised you from your photograph. I believe this information is not only in my possession, but, at least in part, in the possession of the police. After Wimborne I have no record of my wife's progress or of yours—it was dark; it is not easy to learn which road she travelled. At some period or other Mr. Andrew Tozer must have been taken on board ; I confess that at first I thought Mr. Tozer was with her all the time, but the facts, as I have them, show that that was not the case."

" The facts as you have them are the sheerest inventions Have you spoken with the Countess on this subject ? "

" I have had no opportunity, as I believe, Mr. Baird, you are aware ; it therefore behoves you to be careful of what you say lest she should contradict you."

"That is an absolutely indefensible remark to make, my lord. Have you found your wife to be untruthful?"

"I have not always found her particular about the literal truth, Mr. Baird, as you also must be aware."

Baird winced; he had the best of reasons for remembering that the lady's statements were not always to be taken at their face value.

"You may have your own opinion of your wife, my lord; I have made it the rule of my life to tell the truth. But since it seems not to be sufficient that I should give you my word, I will tell you exactly what I did on the thirteenth of May, and then you yourself will perceive that your informants have pract sed upon your credulity."

"There is such a thing as arranging an alibi, Mr. Baird. Where ladies are concerned I fancy it is still sometimes done. If you were not with her that day how comes it that two pieces of property of yours were found in her possession, under very singular circumstances? You understand, Mr. Baird, I'm imputing nothing to anyone because my wife chose to take you for a run in her motor-car. It is only when you deny the thing that it becomes serious. I may point out once more, what you must know already, that she is in positive danger of action on the part of the police. It is inconceivable to me that she could have had so much as a little finger in the business of that man's death, but so far appearances are not—I will say what we would like them to be. I want you to help me in improving the position. Tell me what happened after you left Wimborne, where you left her, and, so far as you know, what was the cause of her deserting the car. Surely you must see that by doing so you will clear the atmosphere in a fashion which will earn her eternal gratitude—and mine also, if that counts."

"If I could, I would, but I can't—how am I to make you believe it? You say two articles of mine were found in her possession; what were they?"

"Under the circumstances I don't know that you're entitled to ask, but I don't mind telling you. One was this."

The Earl was wearing a long light overcoat. From a pocket he took out a soft, green felt hat. He held it for the other to see.

"Do you recognise it?"

Clearly the other did—again with that appearance of amazement.

"It's my hat."

"So it seems. It bears your initial B, and the name of the maker, to whom I showed it He says he sold it to you on the sixth of May, exactly a week before you took my wife for that

run in the car. It was found in the pocket of my wife's motor-coat after she had tried to commit suicide. I found it myself, and am the only person who knows of its existence. I have no doubt that if it were examined those stains on it would be shown to be stains of blood. That was one piece of your property which was found in her possession; this is the other."

From another pocket he took what proved to be a handkerchief.

"I believe," he observed as he unfolded it, "you will find that this also is yours. In one of the corners is the same initial—B."

Mr. Baird took the square of linen from his lordship's hands, eyeing it as though it were one of the strangest things he had ever seen.

"It certainly does seem to be my handkerchief." He compared it with one which he took from his own pocket. "They're own brothers—it is my handkerchief, but how it, or my hat either, came to be in your possession, or your wife's, I should very much like you to explain."

"Does not the onus of the explanation lie with you? I have told you how I came by the hat; the handkerchief was brought to my wife's sister by a person whom I have since learned is a porter at the Great Western station at Exeter, St. David's. I may add that the young lady does not yet know I have it."

Mr. Baird's thoughts flew to those paragraphs in Miss Pearse's letter in which she told about the handkerchief which had been brought to her by the porter Alfred Emmett, and how she had prevaricated with the Earl when he questioned her as to what it meant. The Earl did not seem to have been so easily gulled as the young lady appeared to have supposed.

"Your lordship may imagine that you have lighted upon two pieces of evidence which show, or at least suggest, that my denial of your story that I was in the Countess's company in her motor-car on May the thirteenth, or on any other day, is but an attempt on my part to cover the truth. You ask me to explain how these two articles—my hat and my handkerchief—came to be where they were. I have not the least idea. How they came to be in your wife's keeping I have not the faintest notion. I have never missed the hat, which, as you say, is a new one, and which was kept on the rack outside the door of this room. As for the handkerchief—I have so many handkerchiefs that I daresay three or four could be taken without my ever becoming conscious of their loss. If the Countess had a companion on the day you mention it was certainly not me. I don't know that I am disposed to enter into details at this moment; later, if necessary, I will produce proofs which will satisfy even you. I do not know who her companion was, nor have I the vaguest

notion of what she did that day; but I am perfectly certain you will find that she did nothing of which she has any cause to be ashamed. I cannot explain any more than you the presence of her motor-car in Pall Mall. Is it not possible that she garaged it, and that improper use was made of it by the person in whose charge it had been placed? One has heard of such things."

"No doubt. I have been told, Mr. Baird, by those who pretend to know you, that your word may be relied on, but I daresay you will admit that there are occasions when even a truthful man would lie to shield a woman. I have your word against what seems to me to be a considerable body of evidence. I had hoped that you would have taken a view of the matter which would have enabled me to do something to stay the threatening action of the police. It is possible that you may be able to do nothing."

"It is as certain as that you stand there. Don't you understand, man, that in this case I should not be shielding her by lying?"

"I understand that perfectly; I wonder if you do."

John Baird threw up his hands with a gesture of despair.

"It's no use you and I continuing this conversation if you are going to persist in regarding me as something worse than a liar. I can only wish you good morning, my lord. If you propose to retain your bad opinion of me you must; at the moment I am powerless. Shortly I may be able to do something in what I am only too conscious is your very painful position. The moment I can do something—anything—I will. In the meanwhile, my lord, I have nothing more to add."

"Very good, Mr. Baird, then I wish you good-day. Shall I leave your hat and your handkerchief with you?"

"As you please. If you think that they can in any way be used as evidence of my bad faith pray take them with you."

The Earl looked at the speaker long and searchingly; one felt that his eyes might be old, but they were still very keen. What he saw on the other's face he kept to himself. Turning, he moved towards the door.

"I think," he said as he stood with it open, "I will leave them with you."

CHAPTER XX

THE PROBLEM OF THE GREEN FELT HAT

ONCE more alone, Mr. Baird seemed conscious that the nut he had to crack was harder than ever. He re-read that letter from Cawstone, stopping continually to comment; he examined the handkerchief which his visitor had left; he studied the hat.

"Let me try to think—I bought this hat, Ditchling says, on May the sixth, and I daresay he's right. I was going to motor down to Brighton with Turner, and it struck me that this would be the very thing to wear, so I bought it, and I wore it the day after to Brighton—it came home when the car was at the door and we were about to start. We motored back, and I hung this hat on the peg outside. I wore it twice afterwards, and then I seem to have forgotten its existence. It wasn't quite suited for motoring—it's on the soft side, and when there was any wind the brim waggled, which was a nuisance; so I returned to a cap. What became of this thing afterwards?"

He turned it over and over as if he hoped to find a solution in the hat itself.

"I hung it on the peg—I'm sure I hung it on the peg, though I can't remember when I saw it last. Several men have been in and out; one of them might have taken it in mistake for his own—but who? The man who took this hat knows more about the true inwardness of what occurred on the thirteenth of May than is good for him, or for the lady either."

He moved with the hat to a window and peered at it more closely than ever. Then he picked up a magnifying glass and examined it through that.

"I believe those are blood stains; they don't show up very much on this dark green, but I fancy Ditchling is right. If that is the case, about this hat there hangs the shadow of a tragedy. I wish it hadn't been found in the pocket of her motor-coat. How on earth did it come to be there? Who had been wearing it? Whoever took it off that peg? It could scarcely have been she."

He continued to study the hat through the glass, then, returning it to the table, he stood for some seconds as if lost in thought. He rang the bell; his landlord appeared.

"Burtonshaw," he said, "do you remember a soft felt hat coming for me one morning when I was going to motor with Mr. Turner to Brighton?"

"A dark green felt? Yes, sir, I do; I was wondering what you'd done with it."

"Do you mean that you missed it?"

"I can't exactly say I've missed it, sir, but, as you are aware, I brush the hats myself every morning, and one morning I noticed the dark green felt hat wasn't there. I supposed you'd got it in your own room—but I haven't seen it there."

"Can you recollect which was the morning on which you missed it?"

"The fourteenth of May, sir. I remember it particularly, because when I went downstairs meaning to mention it to the maids, Mrs. Burtonshaw called out to me about how Mr. Tozer—though it wasn't known to be Mr. Tozer at the time—had been found murdered on that motor-car outside the Climax Club, as it afterwards turned out, sir, by you."

"You are certain that the first time you missed that hat was on the morning of the fourteenth of May?"

"I'm certain that that was the first time I noticed it wasn't there, but I'm not prepared to swear that it was there on the morning of the thirteenth, though the impression on my mind is that it was, because I think I should have noticed if it wasn't. Has anything happened which makes the date on which I missed it important? Is it that hat which you're holding in your hand, sir? Did the Earl of Ditchling bring it to you, sir? How came he to have it?"

John Baird ignored the man's questions. He crumpled up the hat; he turned to the mantelshelf so that his back was towards Burtonshaw; somehow he felt that just then he would rather the man did not eye his face too closely. He put his next inquiry in as indifferent a tone as he could manage.

"You don't happen to remember who was in here on the thirteenth—that was the Wednesday."

"Yes, sir—that was the Wednesday. I have rather a good memory for that sort of thing, and I don't think anyone called to see you, sir. You were out all day."

"That is so, I was out most of the day."

Burtonshaw held up his finger, apparently in a sudden burst of recollection.

"Now I come to think of it, Barnes, the new housemaid, came on the Tuesday evening. On the Wednesday I was out with Mrs. Burtonshaw—it isn't often that we're out together, but on that Wednesday I took her to see her sister, and when we came

back Barnes she told us that someone had called to see you. She wasn't sure if you were in or if you weren't, and he—it was a gentleman—ran upstairs, to see for himself. Barnes let him go because, as she said, he seemed so much at home, which was of course no reason at all. You weren't in, down he came, and went, and so far as Barnes is concerned that seems to be about all."

"But who was the man? Didn't she know him or ask his name?"

"She didn't know him, sir, because, as I told you, she only came into the house the night before. She did ask his name, but he passed it off by saying that what he had come about was of no consequence, and that she needn't even tell you he had called. You may perhaps remember, sir, that I did tell you someone had called who did not leave his name."

"I think I do. Have the girl up; I should like to speak to her."

Mr. Burtonshaw rang the bell. A young woman appeared whom he introduced—unnecessarily, since Mr. Baird knew her already.

"This is Barnes, sir, the young woman of whom I was speaking."

"Mr. Burtonshaw informs me," said Mr. Baird, "that the day after you came a gentleman called to see me who showed himself upstairs and wouldn't give you his name. Can you tell me what he looked like?"

"No, sir, that I can't, except that he had a very light suit on, and was quite the gentleman, or I wouldn't never have let him into the house."

"That's not a very lucid description; can't you tell me more than that? Was he tall or short, young or old, dark or fair?"

Mr. Baird's smile seemed to reassure the girl, who apparently was in awe of a wigging.

"Well, sir, I should describe him as decidedly tall, decidedly dark, and no hair on his face—about his age I couldn't say."

"That's better. Did you come with him upstairs?"

"No, sir, I didn't. I know I ought to have done, but I didn't. He seemed so very much at home, and was so quick in his movements, that before I'd made my mind up to come and see what he was after he was down again. I don't suppose he was up here not a minute, sir; he just went up and down."

"You didn't notice if he had anything in his hand when he went out?"

"Anything in his hand, sir? No, I can't say that I did don't think he can have had or I should have noticed."

"Has he been here since?"

"No, sir, he has not, or Mr. Burtonshaw would have seen for himself that he was quite the gentleman; I never should have let him in if he hadn't been."

That was all which could be got out of Barnes, and Mr. Burtonshaw was able to add nothing on his own account. John Baird resumed his contemplation of the hat when the pair had gone.

"Tall, dark, clean-shaven, of uncertain age—that's not a very clear description, yet I can think of no one to whom it applies. It is quite within the range of possibility that that easy-going stranger, who, according to Barnes, was so very much at home, borrowed this hat. I don't quite see how I am going to discover who he was. If he did borrow this hat it is not likely that he will come this way again in a hurry since it looks as if he did know much more of what really happened that day than is good for him. But why on earth did he borrow the thing, how came it to be in the pocket of her motor-coat, and, hang it all! who was he?"

John Baird continued to stare at the green felt hat as if he were still hopeful that it would supply him with an answer to the puzzle.

CHAPTER XXI

A MISSING GENTLEMAN

When John Baird at last went out his footsteps instinctively turned in the direction of Hyde Park—he felt himself to be in need of such fresh air as London provided. He met several acquaintances. One of them—Leonard Marshall—said something which rather struck him. He signalled to him with his stick from across the road, then came hurrying over.

"I say, Jack," he began, "what's become of Francis? I owe him over a hundred, the result of a bad night at poker. He wrote asking me for the money because he was hard up; I went round to him with the coin in my pocket, but he wasn't in. So I put it in an envelope and enclosed a note asking him to dine with me on Saturday. I had no answer, so I called to see why. There was my envelope on the table just as I had left it, with a lot of other letters—Francis hadn't been in since I called. So I left another note, asking him to fix up something with me directly he did turn up, and to let me know. I don't know how many times I haven't called since, and still he hasn't showed. No one about his place seems to know what he's up to. Seeing you reminded me that you were rather a chum of his, so I thought I'd ask if you did. You see, it's this way: if he was hard up why hasn't he turned up to take my coin, or let the people at his place have an address to which they could send it? The fact is, Jack, I'm harder up than ever; everything's been going wrong, I seem to have struck a bad patch. When I think of that money of mine lying on his table, which he doesn't seem to want, while it would be most useful to me, between ourselves, more than once I've felt inclined to return it to its original owner. It's lying worse than idle there, confound the thing! I could let him have it when he condescends to appear. Do you know what the man's up to?"

Baird reflected; as he did so he realised how lately his habits had changed—until quite recently he had been seeing Francis Turner nearly every day.

"I can't say I do. Now I come to think of it, I haven't seen Turner since I don't know when, nor heard anything about him. When did you leave that money at his place?"

"On the thirteenth of May. What's the matter?" asked his friend, as if struck by the fact that John Baird looked a little startled.

"Nothing, only—it is a little odd how many things do seem to have happened on the thirteenth of May."

"Is that so? I wasn't aware of it. I happen to know it was the thirteenth of May because the Johnnie who looks after Francis's place told me so. I asked him when I had brought it—it seemed to me such a weary time ago—and it lying on the table eating its head off; and Francis's man told me it was the thirteenth of May. The point of it is that Turner went out on the morning of the thirteenth of May—not many minutes before I appeared; his chap told me he'd just gone, and he expected him back very shortly, or I don't think I should have left the money; I thought it might cheer him up when he came back and saw it there. You know that's quite a while ago, and nothing has been heard or seen of him since—unless you're in his confidence?"

"On this occasion I'm not; now that you recall him to my mind I remember that I missed him. I'll look him up and see what it means."

Mr. Francis Turner had quite a nice flat at Knightsbridge, on the second floor, overlooking the Park. When John Baird presented himself at the door it was opened by an old soldier servant of Turner's—Francis Turner had been in a line regiment, until a thoughtful uncle enabled him to retire into private life—who was by way of being a character. His name was Horace Lund; he was generally known to his master, and to his master's intimates, as Horace; it was by his Christian name that Mr. Baird addressed him.

"Good morning, Horace. Is the Captain in?" Turner had been a full captain when he retired. Horace shook his head.

"He's not, Mr. Baird—I wish he were; I'm wishing it more every day; and so is Eliza." Eliza was Mrs. Lund.

"I've just met Mr. Marshall, who tells me that the Captain has been absent quite a while. Can I come in?"

"I should be very glad if you would, Mr. Baird. I've been thinking of taking the liberty of calling on you myself, hoping that you might know something about the Captain yourself. You know he's a little uncertain, is the Captain, and I know my place better than to ask him questions. But this is an affair of weeks. He went out on the morning of the thirteenth of May; he said nothing to me, but I inferred that he was going out for a turn. I didn't feel surprised when two or three days passed and there were no signs of him—I just said to myself that it was a good turn he was taking. But now, Mr. Baird, the joke's getting

beyond a joke. Between ourselves, I don't believe he had much money on him; I know he was a little pushed; and he hadn't even a toothbrush in his pocket. You don't happen to know what he's up to, Mr. Baird, do you?"

"Mr. Marshall asked me exactly the same question, Horace. I've come to you for information, not to give it. There seem to be a good many letters and things awaiting his return."

John Baird had been shown into the very pleasant apartment which Francis Turner was wont to speak of as his own room.

"Letters, Mr. Baird? Why, we're overrun with them—and notes, and parcels, and messages, and all manner of things. There's some of these letters, sir, marked Immediate. Now, who's to tell me what I'm to do with them? It's certain that it's not immediately that the Captain would have had them. Here's one, Mr. Baird, which came when the Captain hadn't gone out above a quarter of an hour, and it's marked Immediate, with three thick lines drawn under the word. Look at that, sir."

John Baird did look at it—Horace held it up so that he could hardly help but look. His glance had been meant to be a casual one—he was not interested in Turner's correspondence: but the instant he saw the writing that was on the envelope his glance was arrested.

"That's a lady's writing," continued Horace. "It's not my way to interfere with what's no affair of mine, but I'm thinking that the lady who wrote that letter will be wondering why she's got no answer—with Immediate put large in the corner, with three lines under it. Maybe, Mr. Baird, that you know her writing—you know most of the Captain's friends. If you were to see her, by chance, as it might be, you might tell her, without saying anything about this letter, how the Captain's been away for a while, and then maybe she'll understand why she's got no answer—that is, of course, Mr. Baird, if you know the writing on this envelope."

John Baird did know the writing; he had taken the envelope out of the man's hand and was eyeing it with feelings which he was unwilling and unable to describe. He ought to have become used to curious sensations; they had come crowding on him of late; possibly the most curious of them all seemed to take him by the throat as he stared at that big, square envelope. It was with an effort that he kept his voice steady.

"Mr. Marshall tells me that the last time you saw Captain Turner was on the morning of the thirteenth of May. You say this came for him soon after he had gone out?"

"Within a quarter of an hour. Do you happen to know the

lady's writing, Mr. Baird? It's worried me that she should have been waiting for an answer all this while."

John Baird did know the writing, but he did not care to say so; if he had had any doubts the postmark would have settled it, "Cawstone"; and there was the Ditchling crest upon the back. He had seen that writing too many times not to know it well. By what coincidence had she been writing to Francis Turner on that day of ill omen on such very pressing business? Baird was perfectly conscious that it was no affair of his; but what had the business been? What was inside that envelope? Was it a matter of any real consequence that it should have reached Turner before he went out? Would it have made any difference to him, or to her? While Horace continued to talk, calling the visitor's attention to the various articles which awaited his return, including the envelope which contained Leonard Marshall's money, Mr. Baird was turning things over in his mind—to the best of his ability.

He had not been aware that Francis Turner even knew the Countess of Ditchling. He was one of his most intimate acquaintances, yet John Baird did not recall any instance of Francis Turner having mentioned the lady's name; and he was fond enough of talking of some of his feminine acquaintances. Yet, somehow, to Baird's thinking, this letter had an intimate appearance, as if the writer were on intimate terms with her correspondent, else why that Immediate in the corner of the envelope? Why was it so important that Francis Turner should know on the instant what the lady had written?

He would have liked to have put certain questions to Horace, only the process would have savoured of a desire on his part to pry into his friend's affairs. He might have learned in a roundabout way if Horace knew anything of his master's acquaintance with the Countess of Ditchling, only he refrained; not altogether from delicacy, but partly on account of an odd, an inexplicable sense of something which was very like awe, as though there was something about that envelope which, curious as he was, he would rather not know.

One or two questions with which the envelope had no direct concern he did put—he wanted to connect the answers with certain notions which were taking dim shape in his brain.

"What time did Captain Turner go out that Wednesday morning?"

"It was before eleven, because the eleven o'clock post came soon after he'd gone—it brought that letter."

"He gave you no idea whatever of where he was going?"

"He did not in so many words, but from a remark he made

after breakfast—paying no attention to me being in the room—he is a bit absent-minded is the Captain, and always has been in the habit of saying things out loud without paying any attention to me—I rather gathered that he might be going to call on you. The remark he made was, 'I wonder if Jack could do it?' and, begging your pardon, Mr. Baird, he always calls you Jack, and I believe you're the only Jack he knows."

Mr. Baird, reading between the lines of what the man was saying, was trying to put two and two together. He already had been endeavouring to reconstruct that day so far as it concerned himself. He had gone out soon after ten. The housemaid Barnes, as far as he remembered, had said nothing about the time that person, who was quite the gentleman and who had seemed so much at home, had called; he would get clear upon that point when he returned. He put another question.

"Do you remember what Captain Turner was wearing when he went out?"

"I do, Mr. Baird, very well. Four suits of clothes had come back from the tailor the day before; he was wearing one of them—a very pretty suit it was; you know his taste in dress—a sort of very light grey with a dash of fawn; that's another reason why I thought he might be going to call on you. It was the suit for motoring, and I thought he might be going for a run with you."

"Did he go in his motor?"

"No, Mr. Baird, he did not. He called a taxi-cab off the rank in Knightsbridge and got into it, because I saw him do it. His own car was in hospital; he smashed the bonnet by bumping into a market cart; but I heard you say when you were here a day or two before that you'd bought a car and that you expected it to be delivered every hour—so I thought that perhaps he might have gone for a trial run in yours."

"I was hourly expecting the delivery of my car, Horace, but motor-car dealers are promising creatures; it had not appeared on that Wednesday, and, as a matter of fact, it only turned up a few days ago."

When John Baird left Knightsbridge it was to retrace his steps across the Park. Mentally he kept harping on the same cord as he walked.

"Can it be Francis Turner who called to see me that Wednesday, and who that girl Barnes permitted to go up to my room? Could it have been he who borrowed the green felt hat? Why did he never mention to me that he knew Eleanor—so well that they were on letter-writing terms? He knew what she and I had been to each other. It is at least odd that a letter from her

at Cawstone should have reached him on the morning of that day—of all days—marked such a very prominent Immediate. I can't help wondering what was in it. I cannot help feeling that if, for instance, the Earl of Ditchling were to open that envelope he might have some of that 'light' he professes to want."

His thoughts were still running in such channels when, as he was going through Stanhope Gate, he almost cannoned into a gentleman who was hurrying on foot down Park Lane towards Piccadilly. This gentleman greeted him.

"Hullo, Baird, I haven't seen you for an age. Where have you been hiding? Do you know you nearly knocked me over?"

John Baird was not short, but the other towered above him. As he glanced up he smiled.

"Wasn't it rather the other way? Wasn't it you who nearly knocked me over? Look at the size of you!"

"My dear Baird, that's where you make a mistake. It's breadth, not height, that tells; I'm all length and no breadth, you are both length and breadth. But you mustn't stop me. I'm rushing off to Brussels; I've had bad news from my wife—just had a telegram to say so."

The long-limbed stranger went striding on. As Baird watched him go he burst into exclamations which were so audible as to startle two ladies who were passing by.

"As I live, Clifford Curtis! He's the man who frightened Miss Winton in Sloane Street and followed her home! I thought when she described him that I knew him, though I couldn't place him, couldn't find his name. Of course, Clifford Curtis—her description fits him like a glove; there's no other man like him in England, or, I should say, on the continent either. And then"—a second thought occurred to him which again brought him to a sudden stop—"the paragraph in the *Evening Standard* which so took him aback about the woman who had been stabbed in Brussels. Didn't he just now say that he was rushing off to Brussels because he'd had bad news of his wife? Can the paragraph in the paper have had anything to do with his wife, or with the telegram which he said he'd just received? I've always understood that Sir Clifford Curtis was something of a curiosity, and that his wife was something more. Why did he behave to Miss Winton in the extraordinary way he did?"

With still one more problem added to the others to which it seemed to him he had to find a solution he pursued his way. This man, whom he now knew to be Sir Clifford Curtis, had been connected—when he forced himself upon her—in Miss Winton's mind with a vague horror of that dreadful night, in some fashion she herself was unable to understand. His own words to her had

shown that that feeling was well founded. He had, in effect, charged her with complicity in events which were like so much fog to her; presumably they had been clear enough to him. His knowledge of them could only have been guilty knowledge.

It became necessary that Mr. Baird—so at least he felt—should look up the record of Sir Clifford Curtis. Strange tales which had been told of him were floating vaguely in John Baird's brain. Could the solution of all which seemed so insoluble be found in his direction—could he put his finger on the key of the riddle? He had told Miss Winton that he knew that she had the solution; probably he had meant that he had.

John Baird, always bearing in mind Miss Pauline's letter, resolved that without delay he would commence investigations in a quarter of which hitherto he had not dreamed. He was strong in that resolution as he slipped the latch-key into his front door. When he got upstairs he found a telegram awaiting him on the table. It ran:

"I am in a frightful mess. Been unable to communicate before. Come at once for the sake of auld lang syne to Frank Taylor, Worrall's Farm, Bruford."

Having read this message through he stared at it as if doubting if he had read it wrong. He re-read it once, twice, and yet again; then when he was sure that at least he did not misunderstand the written words he presented a pretty picture of a bewildered man.

"What in the name of all that's wonderful does this thing mean? It's addressed to me all right. I'm John Baird, and this is South Audley Street. But who Frank Taylor is or what he means by sending me such a message, with his talk of auld lang syne, I know no more than Adam. Frank Taylor? Let me think. Have I ever known a Taylor who is likely to send me such a message? Frank? Surely"—he stared at the message again, "why don't they telegraph a man's writing? When will those scientific Johnnies have reached that stage so that one can have some clue to a thing like this? Frank Taylor? Their initials are the same, Francis Turner. Can it be Francis Turner who has got himself into some scrape which has laid him by the leg, and which has made it necessary for him to adopt an alias? He's just the sort of man who's likely to do it. 'Worrall's Farm, Bruford.' Where's Bruford? If it's not too far off I might run down, and pursue my investigations into Sir Clifford Curtis when I come back again. If this should be from Turner, it must be a deuce of a hole he's in; and he's been in it since the thirteenth of May."

CHAPTER XXII

TRACING THE ROUTE

A SHORT, thin man was closeted with Inspector Hextall in a small apartment at Scotland Yard. Maps and plans were on the table at which they were sitting, volumes which seemed to be of the nature of guide-books, open books of memoranda, and a number of sheets of paper covered with a fine handwriting.

The short, thin man was Mr. Lewis Kohn. What exactly was the position which he occupied on the staff of the building in which he then was he himself would perhaps have found it difficult to set forth plainly. It is certain that he was occasionally engaged in investigations with which, when they came into court—if they ever did—he was not publicly associated either in person or by name. Only a few of the higher officials were aware that he was ever concerned in such matters. As a rule he was interested in crowned heads, diplomatic mysteries, foreign office secrets—in short, in investigations of a kind in which the ordinary police official would be worse than useless and entirely at sea. Not often was he concerned in such a matter as the one which he was then discussing with Inspector Hextall.

But the case of the Pall Mall motor-car had assumed unexpected dimensions. The Countess of Ditchling was connected with many great families; the Earl, her husband, was related to half the peerage, to say nothing of his record of distinguished service. It was understood that he was a *persona grata* at Court; he had been in command of ships on which the King had served as sailor, and of others on which he had made official progresses. So it came about that the people at the Yard knew perfectly well that this was a case in which they must step warily.

If the impression on the public mind was right, that the Countess of Ditchling had had some guilty association with this terrible crime, popular interest in which had by no means diminished, then beyond a doubt she would have to be treated as any other criminal and called to account. But at the same time there must be no blundering. Scotland Yard must be quite sure of its facts. Someone would suffer if her ladyship were subjected to the indignity of actual arrest and then nothing

could be proved against her. So the services of Mr. Lewis Kohn were requisitioned to make sure. In one sense this was a case in which his peculiar qualities would be of the greatest value.

He had been tracing the course which that motor-car, with its gruesome burden, had taken on its road to London. He believed himself to have discovered a good many things.

"You think," observed Inspector Hextall, "that when the car was taken to that point in Pall Mall at which it was found it had been driven by a woman?"

"The car came along Piccadilly. More than one taxi-cab driver who was on the Knightsbridge stand saw it pass; they vary a little in their times, but they agree about the car. One man says he took particular notice of it because he was struck by the peculiar way in which the woman who was driving leaned across the man who was on the driving-seat—the man is not sure that she was even seated; she seemed to be standing in a sort of crouching position, so that the whole upper part of her body was over the wheel."

"In such a position she could not have had much control over the car. The first policeman she passed would have been justified in stopping her."

"The taxi-cabman supposed that she'd just assumed that position—that she was doing it, perhaps, for a lark, or because, as he puts it, the driver was a little bit on. He said to a man who was standing by him that she hadn't better keep that up long or she'd find herself where they hadn't any sympathy with larks. The car came through Hammersmith. It was half-past twelve. There were very few people about, and, so far as I can trace, the car was only noticed by a man who was selling the late editions in the Broadway. As you know, as you come through King Street, when you reach the Broadway there are roads branching off in several directions. The lad says that the car slowed, and he ran across to it, hoping he might be able to sell a paper. The only person he noticed was the man on the driving-seat, but to his surprise, when he got close to the car, he saw that someone was at the bottom of the car, between the man on the seat and the driving-wheel. The car flew off—he says at the rate of sixty miles an hour—directly he got close to it, so that he could not be sure whether this person was a man or a woman; he thought it was a child—as he puts it, a kid. He does not see how any grown-up person could have been crammed into such a position. One thing he did notice as the car whirled off: the man on the driving-seat swayed so violently as the car drove off that he was almost thrown on to the road, and then the lad realised that he could have had nothing to do with the driving of the car."

"Then whoever it was who was driving must have squeezed out of that position between Hammersmith Broadway and Knightsbridge."

"Apparently. I find no trace of the car between Hammersmith Broadway and Kew Bridge. There the driver of a tramcar had good reason to notice it, because in attempting to pass on his wrong side it grazed against his platform so that for a moment he thought he was derailed. I've been examining the motor-car, and the paint is scratched just where the driver told me I should find it was if that was the one which struck him."

"You've got that all right—the car is scratched. That seems to me to be the first tangible piece of evidence you've got."

Mr. Lewis Kohn smiled; he kept his eyes fixed on the map in front of him, on which he was following a course with the butt end of a lead pencil.

"The driver of the tramcar saw nothing of any woman. His impression was that it was being driven by the man on the driving-seat; that he was drunk, and not in a condition to handle a car. We have to take a pretty big jump. The next point at which the car was noticed was seven miles farther on—at East Bedfont. The car passed through East Bedfont about ten minutes after midnight. You see it must have been moving, because it covered twelve pretty bad miles—going, for instance, through Brentford High Street, one of the worst possible roads for a motor-car, in rather under than over twenty minutes. It was moving so fast through Bedfont that a policeman there, a man named Sturry, tried his best to stop it. He says that he saw it coming along the road a good way off, and it was travelling so fast that he planted himself in the middle of the road, showing his lantern, blowing his whistle, and signalling for it to stop; but, paying no heed to any of his signals, it came right at him as though trying to run him down. If he had not jumped to one side it would have bowled him over; as it was, the front wheel grazed his trousers as it passed. The impression left on his mind was that the car was running away; he saw a man on the driving-seat, but he also saw quite clearly that the man wasn't driving; from the way he was huddled up and swayed about he thought there was something wrong with him, and that the car, as he put it, was driving itself."

"He saw nothing of your mysterious lady?"

"Nothing. If there had been a telephone available, or a telegraph, he would have sent a message down the road to tell them what was coming; but at East Bedfont there was nothing he could get at quick enough. When he met the next man on point duty he told him of the runaway car. The car was seen

by three or four people at Staines, about four miles farther on. Then all trace of it seemed lost, and I was coming to the conclusion that Staines or its neighbourhood must have been the starting-point. Then one day I was in an inn at Blackwater, fifteen miles farther on, when the landlord told me a story which showed that if I had taken it for granted that the starting-place had been Staines I should have made a biggish error. I'd been in that inn before and learnt nothing, but on my previous visit the landlord wasn't in. He was there when I went the second time."

"Where," asked Inspector Hextall, "is Blackwater? You're getting rather out of my beat."

"It's on the Basingstoke road, within perhaps three miles of Sandhurst College. We were talking about the weather, the landlord and I. I said we hadn't had any rain for a goodish time; he replied by saying that down that way they'd had no heavy rain since the night of the thirteenth of May. I pricked up my ears at this, pretending that I thought the rain had been on the fourteenth. He said that it was on the thirteenth; it started to rain there soon after ten o'clock. There had been a smoking-concert in his house that night, and an extension of time to half-past eleven. He was going to bed after the people had gone and the house was shut when he heard the sound of a motor-car on the road outside. Suddenly it stopped, he thought at his own door. Looking at his watch, he saw that it was a quarter to twelve; opening the window to see who was there, because he was tired and didn't want anyone else in if he could help it, he found that it was coming down in bucketsful; the tail light of the car was towards him, so that he knew it was heading towards London. His wife, looking through the window by his side, said that perhaps the people had lost their way, or something had happened to the car, and why didn't he go down to see what was the matter. Against his will, he went down and opened the front door; the car was perhaps twelve or fourteen feet from where he was and he could see it quite plainly. He saw that someone was on the driving-seat, and that a man and woman were standing by the car; they seemed to be quarrelling. Then he saw that something was lying on the pavement; the man opened the door of the car, picked this something up, and placed it inside. The landlord says that it seemed to him that what the man picked up off the pavement was a woman. He wondered what was the matter with her—if she were drunk or ill. He took an umbrella out of a stand and went out to see. Directly he put his foot on the pavement, the woman turned, saw him, jumped on to the front of the car, and was off like a flash. How

it was managed the landlord could not understand. He declares that the driver did nothing—he was sitting too far back. The woman must have snatched the driving-wheel, and without paying any attention to the driver, started the car herself. The man had been left behind; he was enveloped from head to foot in a mackintosh coat and a hood was drawn over his head. The landlord could not see his face, but he was struck by his height—he was one of the tallest men he had ever seen. He was just going to address him when the man went striding away towards Basingstoke, the landlord says, at the rate of eight miles an hour. Struck by what seemed to him to be the stranger's churlishness—he had come down from his bedroom and out of the house with the most benevolent intentions—the landlord stood staring after him, in the rain. He turned into a side street; suddenly the landlord heard the sound of a motor-engine. A car came out into the high road and went tearing off towards Basingstoke."

"What connection," inquired the Inspector, "is there between the landlord's story and our car?"

"Obviously the car in which the woman drove off was ours. It must have been then about ten minutes to twelve—she covered fifteen miles in twenty minutes. She had the road all to herself and it was not difficult." Leaning back, Mr. Kohn tapped his big white teeth with his pencil. "It appears to me that the landlord's story explains one or two things. You remember when you searched our car you found an old purse. There were some coins in it, some odds and ends, and a scrap of paper on which was written, 'Mrs. Gardner, 19 York Place, Chelsea.'"

"In this desk"—the Inspector laid his hand on the tall office desk which stood against the wall—"is that purse with its contents."

"You made inquiries, I believe, about the Mrs. Gardner on the scrap of paper?"

"I did, without result. No one named Gardner, Mr. or Mrs., seems to have been known at 19 York Place within the memory of man."

"You also found an old cotton glove. The question was, How did such a purse and such a glove come to be in the Countess of Ditchling's brand-new motor-car? That landlord's story suggests one step towards a solution. The purse and the glove might have been the property of the woman he saw the man pick up off the pavement."

"How did she come to be on the pavement for the man to pick up at that time of night, and in such weather?"

"Those are still open questions. My theory is that she was

in the second car which the stranger brought out of that side street—it looks as though that car was waiting for the other. After Blackwater I have found what I believe to be traces of two cars. The constable at Hook, nine miles farther back, saw two motor-cars go through the village; one at about a quarter past eleven. That was a smallish car, and was being driven by a man, who was the only passenger; it was being driven at a normal pace, and the constable noticed nothing unusual about it. About ten minutes afterwards a second car came flying past him, at a terrific pace—he says that it must have been going nearly sixty miles an hour. He wasn't far wrong, because it seems to have been at Blackwater, nine miles off, some ten minutes afterwards. He had but a glimpse, but he says it struck him as being a long white car; who was in it, or who was driving, he has no notion. It came out of the darkness and was back into the darkness in a flash. The same thing recurred at Basingstoke, six miles farther on—only there twenty minutes divided the cars. Sergeant Bruff was opposite the Town Hall at eleven o'clock—it seems it's the custom at Basingstoke for someone to be at that point about the time the licensed houses are closing. The street there is well lit The Sergeant says that a motor-car went past him within five minutes of either side of eleven. It was a dark red car, the cape hood was up, a man was driving, there was no other passenger. There's a speed limit. He estimated it was not going at more than eight miles an hour, so that he had a good look at it. He took it to be an old car, possibly an old Panhard—Sergeant Bruff seems to know something about different types of cars. Some twenty minutes later the Sergeant had done what seems to be a regular round, and was back again at the Town Hall; just as he got there a big white car came rushing past, moving faster than he had ever seen a car move before. He estimates the pace at quite sixty miles an hour. As at Hook, it had come and gone before he had time to get his wits together; his impression was that it was running away. There was a man on the driving-seat, but he conveyed to the Sergeant the idea that he was not driving; his feeling was that either the man was ill or drunk; certainly the car was not under proper control. It was incredible that any one in their sober senses could have been so reckless—such a monster was a danger to itself and to everything else on the road. He tore off to the telephone at the station, but before he got there he realised that nothing could really be done. Telephonic communication between country police stations at night is not what it ought to be, and telegraphing is impossible. Besides, he could not be sure in which direction the car was going; it might have been making for any one of half a dozen places, for

Reading, for London, or even for Alton. If it had been earlier he might possibly have found out and sent a warning along the road, but not at that hour of the night."

"What beats me," interposed the Inspector "—if you are suggesting that that man on the driving-seat was already dead—is why he wasn't flung off into the road or off his perch."

"He was fastened on."

"He was strapped to the back of the seat; but as he was as limp as dead mutton that couldn't have held him very securely. What kept him upright while the car was going at the pace you mention?"

"The answer is that he doesn't seem to have been sitting up straight. Sergeant Bruff's impression is that the man on the driving-seat was, as he puts it, all of a heap; which is one reason why he felt that no one in such a position could have the car under his control. At this moment, I would remind you, I am only tracing the course of the car. My instructions were to discover the point from which it started. All other inquiries, I take it, are to come after."

There was a certain dryness in Mr. Kohn's intonation which seemed to nettle the Inspector; it was whispered that some of the more prominent officials at Scotland Yard were not so attached to Mr. Kohn as they might have been. There was a dryness in the Inspector's manner as he asked a question.

"And you think you've discovered the point from which it started?"

"Practically."

"What do you mean by practically? 'Practically' isn't evidence; you either establish a fact or you don't—you can't say you've practically established it. You'd be laughed out of the witness-box."

"If you'll allow me to finish you may be able to grasp my meaning."

CHAPTER XXIII

"I HAVE FOUND THE CRIMINAL"

As he studied the map, touching it here and there with the butt of his pencil, Mr. Lewis Kohn asked the Inspector a question.

"Do you know the road between Basingstoke and Andover?"

"I've been over it."

"Then you're aware that it's a hilly and a lonely road. A good deal of it passes through open country and over long stretches; even in the daytime you scarcely meet a soul; at night, in bad weather, it is deserted—which is one reason why, after Basingstoke, I found it hard to come upon any traces of the car. I don't want to keep you, so I'll merely remark that I made inquiries on every road leading out of Basingstoke before I came to the conclusion that not only one of the cars, but both of them, had come from Andover. The first news I got was at Whitchurch, more than eleven miles from Salisbury. A doctor going to a patient in his own little two-seater met the big white car between Whitchurch and Hurstbourne Priors. He saw the light of its lamps flaring over the crest of a hill in front of him. They reached the top, and in a second came blazing down at him, almost blinding him with their brilliance—had he not turned his own two-seater on to the side of the road the big car would have been into him. He stopped and stood up to look at the vanishing monster. The great lamps had so dazzled him that he supposed himself to have been mistaken in thinking that there was no driver on the seat at all."

Looking up at the Inspector, Mr. Kohn punctuated his words with his pencil.

"You said that you did not understand how all that was left of that dead man came to keep its place upon the driving-seat; that Whitchurch doctor explains. When the car went past him there was no one on the seat. The driver was crouched down between the seat and the dashboard."

"Have you learnt, as a positive fact, that a person in that position can drive a motor-car?"

"A youth of average height and build drove me twenty miles the other day while he was in that position; that is, I was on

the driving-seat with my legs wide open; he was between them as he knelt upon the floor. His chief difficulty was with the foot-brake, which he couldn't manage at all, but he used the hand-brake and the change speed levers. He didn't seem to suffer any distress; the car went well. When he had done our twenty miles he expressed his willingness to do another twenty. That showed that it is quite possible to drive a motor-car in such a way that, moving quickly through the night, the driver shall be invisible to the ordinary passer-by—which, possibly, is why several people, seeing no driver where they were used to see him, thought that that car was running away. After the doctor saw it at Whitchurch, the white car gets lost again. I next come upon traces of the red car at Andover. The proprietor of a motor-shop at Andover says that on the night of the thirteenth of May a chauffeur rang him up after he was closed and bought three gallon tins of petrol."

"A chauffeur? You said nothing about a chauffeur when you were talking about a car at—what's the name of the place?—at Blackwater."

"I'm aware of it. Pilcher, the proprietor of the shop, says that the chauffeur was an undersized individual, in his opinion, a Londoner; he knows all the chauffeurs for miles round, and the man was a stranger to him. As he gave him the tins he asked where he'd come from. The fellow said, 'From New York, via the Pacific Ocean.' Pilcher, nettled by the man's manner, said: 'Want to keep it to yourself, do you?' and the chauffeur retorted that if he'd been to see the Chinese Emperor and had got one of his dead wives on board he might want to keep it to himself. The chauffeur carried two of the tins into the street, and Pilcher the third. He found what seemed to him to be a 10-15 Panhard car, probably six or seven years old—it was painted red. A man was sitting by the driver with a hood over his head. There was no one in the body of the car, but Pilcher noticed that under some rugs was what he took to be luggage. He believes himself to know all the cars within a radius of a good many miles round Andover—he had never seen that one before."

"You are suggesting that this was the second car you've been telling me about?"

"I am. Something must have happened to that chauffeur between Andover and Basingstoke, because Sergeant Bruft is certain that the tall man with the hood over his head had the car all to himself when it passed him. The question which occurs to me is, Was what Pilcher took to be luggage, under those rugs, the young woman the landlord saw on the pavement at

Blackwater—the owner of the shabby purse and black cotton glove which you have in that desk there?"

"Candidly, Kohn, I may be dull, but I don't see what you're driving at. Are you suggesting that this mysterious young woman of yours was also murdered? If she wasn't how came she to allow herself to be handed about as if she were a carcass of beef, and what became of her when the car was in Pall Mall? She wasn't in it then."

"I have already told you that I have only been trying to discover that car's starting-point; all else I regard as mere embroidery by the way. We will inquire later on into what at present seems puzzling. But I don't want you to say presently, Why didn't you mention these things before?—so I'm mentioning them now. Pilcher puts the time at which the car was at his shop as a little before ten, so it would seem that it took an hour to get to Andover, which is under twenty miles. As Pilcher thinks that the car might have got there in little more than half the time—say, forty minutes—if it had been pushed, there were a few minutes to spare to permit of the chauffeur being dropped on the road."

"Why should he have been dropped? If your young woman was underneath those rugs he must have known it. What was the point in dropping him?"

"According to Pilcher he had been drinking—he was 'three parts drunk.' Drink may have made him saucy; Pilcher says he was a cheeky piece; there may have been words with his employer, and the man was dropped; that is not intended as a definite theory but only as the merest surmise. About half an hour afterwards, as Pilcher was getting into bed, he heard a great car come tearing along the street; he could tell by the noise it made that it was a big car and going at a terrific speed. It's a ten mile limit at Andover, and the police are keen. Pilcher said to his wife that the car would be stopped before it got clear of the town, and someone made to smart; but so far as I am able to ascertain, Pilcher was the only person who noticed it, and the car was certainly not stopped."

Mr. Kohn paused, as if he were endeavouring to find words which would give exact expression to what he had to say.

"After Andover I can find no traces of either of the cars, in a manner of speaking—that is, no one seems to have seen them actually moving over the road."

"Then you are suggesting that Andover was the starting-point?"

"Wait a bit. From Andover to Salisbury is nearly eighteen miles. The road, which is extremely hilly, and not a very good

one, passes through a very scantily populated district; some parts of it are not populated at all. Half a dozen cars might come over it on a dark night in doubtful weather without being noticed, because there would be no one to notice them. When I got to Salisbury I learnt two facts—one was in Salisbury itself. That old red Panhard was at Salisbury station to meet the 7.45 from London. Sunset that day was at 7.38, but there was no sun, it was dull and dreary; when the train came in it was already dark."

Leaning towards Inspector Hextall across the table, Mr. Kohn lowered his voice as if to italicise the gravity of what he was saying.

"That old red Panhard was at Salisbury station to meet Mr. Andrew Tozer, who got there on the 7.45 from Paddington."

The Inspector was some seconds before he answered; he seemed to be studying the speaker as well as weighing his words.

"That's a very important fact, Kohn, if it is a fact; but you've been some time in getting to it. What grounds have you for that statement?"

"The car was noticed by at least four persons. One, the driver of another car, noticed it as it came up to the station; two more, the driver of an omnibus and a porter, noticed it as it was standing there, and a fourth, a railway porter, noticed it after the train was in. He was hailed by a passenger who was alone in a first-class compartment. As he opened the door of the carriage he asked if there was any luggage in the van and if he would like a cab. The passenger said that all his luggage was in the compartment, and that there was a motor-car to meet him. The porter got the luggage out of the carriage. He says that there was a fur coat, a lady's dressing-bag—brand new—a man's suit-case, and a Gladstone. On the side of the Gladstone the owner's name was stamped in full. The porter noticed it—'Andrew Tozer'! I believe, Inspector, that that fur coat, dressing-bag, suit-case, and Gladstone are at present in your keeping; they were found by you in that Pall Mall motor-car."

"Articles resembling those which you describe were in the Countess of Ditchling's motor-car and are at present in my keeping. I am not prepared to say that they are those which that porter took out of the train."

"Of course that has yet to be proved; I believe it easily can be. The porter went with the passenger, who, I fancy, you will find was Mr. Andrew Tozer, to the old red Panhard standing outside the station. On the driving-seat was a chauffeur. The chauffeur has been described to me by the four different persons who observed the car—the other chauffeur took particular notice

of him. I think he will be found to be the chauffeur who entered Pilcher's shop at Andover. There's another fact: Tozer fraternised with the driver of the waiting car; he invited him to have a drink. The two men, the passenger and the chauffeur, went to the refreshment room: the young woman who served them remembers them quite well. They stayed there for about ten minutes. During that time the passenger had four whiskies, drinking them off as fast as they were placed in front of him. The chauffeur had three. The barmaid admits that when they went both men had had quite enough to drink. The porter who took charge of the passenger's luggage says that he thought the passenger was a little on when he quitted the train; he stumbled and almost fell as he got out of the carriage; his manner was queer."

"Let me tell you, Kohn," interposed the Inspector, "that I have it on good authority that the late Mr. Andrew Tozer was to all intents and purposes a teetotaller."

"Is that so? I am merely repeating to you what I was told: the witnesses can be produced. But I may observe that it is your abstemious man who is most easily affected when he indulges himself even slightly. Another fact I incidentally picked up. By the same train came a young woman who had travelled from London without a ticket. She paid her fare to the porter who was taking the tickets on the platform. He noticed that she took the money out of a red leather purse. You have a red leather purse in the desk there."

"I have. Are you going to connect it with your ticketless young woman?" The Inspector smiled, as if he found Mr. Kohn amusing. "What became of her?"

"No one seems to know; she disappeared from the moment in which she paid for her ticket. I am not suggesting that there is any connection between her red purse and the one you have in your desk."

"And Mr. Tozer, and the chauffeur, and the old red car. What became of them?"

"That also I am unable to tell you. The chauffeur drove Mr. Tozer from the station in the red car; where to I have so far tried in vain to discover. The car was strange, the chauffeur was a stranger; no one at the station at Salisbury seems to have known anything of either. What became of the car or its passenger when it left the station yard is, so far, wrapt in mystery, which is why I told you that I was unable to find any traces of the car before Andover. Between the station and Pilcher's shop there is a hiatus which has still to be filled."

"You take it for granted that the car which met the train was

the one which called for three gallons of petrol at Andover, got rid of the chauffeur before it reached Basingstoke, and picked up the young woman from the pavement at Blackwater?"

If Inspector Hextall's tone was meant to be ironical Mr. Kohn seemed to be unconscious of the fact.

"I take nothing for granted," said Mr. Kohn, in his monotonous, even voice. "But I think I can put evidence into a witness-box which would prove that much to the satisfaction of a judge and jury. There now remains the car in which we are chiefly interested. My report has been delayed. It would have been presented more than a week ago had I not been unwilling to admit that I could learn nothing of it before it rushed through Andover under Pilcher's window."

"If that was the car in which, as you put it, we are chiefly interested."

Mr. Kohn took no heed of the interpolation; he went quietly on:

"Only a few hours ago I became acquainted with facts which shed quite a new light upon the matter. I have been scouring the country between Andover and Salisbury and beyond, looking, as it were, for footprints. Fortune—in the guise of misfortune—came to my assistance. I have been conducting some of my inquiries in a little runabout. Yesterday, as I was coming into Salisbury from Wilton, I was so unfortunate as to burst a tyre. I was my own driver as well as mechanic, and while I was repairing the mischief an individual came out of a gate and stood looking on. He was a venerable gentleman of, I suppose, between sixty and seventy, an old-fashioned farmer. The remarks he made soon showed me that. Presently he began to tell me a rambling story about an accident which had occurred to a car a few yards from where I found trouble. As he went on I began to prick up my ears. He cast about in his mind for the date on which the thing happened, concluding, from data of his own, that it was on the evening of Wednesday, May the thirteenth. He was coming home rather late from market when he heard the sound of voices raised in heated altercation. As he approached they ceased; all was still. As he was about to turn through the gate out of which I had just seen him come with his cart, he noticed that on the opposite side of the road to that on which my accident had happened was a motor-car. So far as he could see there was no one about who might be its owner. He drove up to his house, had supper, and after supper came out to see a cow which had just calved in a shed which he pointed out. As he went he looked over the hedge, and there was the car which he had seen on his return home. That was

apparently between half-past eight and nine. He went out into the road to look at it; he knows nothing about motor-cars, but according to him it was a great big dirty white car. It was not standing in the road, but on the grass at one side, and the right front wheel was in a ditch. It looked, said Mr. Shaw, as if someone had been trying to send the whole thing into the hedge—there was a high bank and a hedge on the other side of the ditch."

"Was it in the same position when he saw it first, on his return home?"

"Mr. Shaw is not certain, but he doesn't think it was; he believes it was standing on the road itself. According to him, he had a good look at the car all over; he had never before had an opportunity of examining a motor-car so closely; and then he went indoors. He had not been in many minutes before a hubbub arose; in his opinion, the two persons who had been disputing as he came home had returned to renew their quarrel where it had left off. Presently there was another sound—someone was starting the engine of the car; then the car was driven off, and all was still again. I have little doubt that the car which Shaw described is the one whose history we are anxious to learn."

Getting up from his chair, the Inspector stood with his back against his desk.

"But I don't follow you, Mr. Kohn. Do you say that the starting-point of the Countess of Ditchling's car was the roadside opposite that farm?"

"Early the next morning when Shaw went out he found that the road was all ploughed up, and particularly the grass by the side of it; it looked, he says, as if someone had been having a rare old scrimmage. We know that the car originally came from her ladyship's residence at Cawstone, more than ninety miles from where old Shaw found it. I have not traced it beyond Shaw's farm. I have not seriously tried to. I have—shall I say—an intuition, although you may laugh at me, that Andrew Tozer was done to death within a mile, or thereabouts, of where old Shaw saw that motor-car. The noise of quarrelling which Shaw heard came from Tozer's murderers. If Shaw had gone out to see what the fuss was about he would have caught them red-handed; you understand, I've not breathed a syllable on the subject to Shaw. I begged a cup of tea of the old man, and he introduced me to Mrs. Shaw. She is of opinion—this is very essential—that there were two motor-cars on the road. She says that she heard a car coming along before the noise of the voices began. Her husband pooh-poohed her, but if she is right, as she may be, we have got a good deal further; that

second car might have been the one which was bringing Andrew Tozer from the station. Of course what happened——"

"If anything did happen where you say it did."

"Exactly; what happened, if anything happened at all, we can scarcely even conjecture; the more we look into the business the more inexplicable it seems to become. But—and this again is material—if anything did happen and there were two cars, we have the explanation of how, while Andrew Tozer was met at the station by one car, he was found dead in London in another, and that is one thing gained."

"Is that as far as you've got?"

"Is it not some distance? I have located the crime."

"And found something which points to the criminal?"

"That I did not set out to do. I reached the point at which I aimed."

"From your point of view."

"Are you of opinion that I haven't?"

"I express no opinion. I merely remark that I have gone a little farther than you have—I have found the criminal!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE COINCIDENCE OF THE NOTES

THE two men were silent. Inspector Hextall, his back against the desk, hands in his jacket-pockets, stood looking down at Mr. Lewis Kohn seated at the table with the smile of a person who is not only well satisfied with himself, but is conscious of triumph over one whom he regards as a possible rival.

Kohn did not appear to notice that there was anything in the other's demeanour which called for his attention. His own face was like an expressionless mask; his voice when he spoke was as expressionless as his face.

"Are you sure of that?"

Hextall laid one hand on the lid of his desk.

"There's the warrant in there—I'm sure enough for that."

"A warrant has been issued for many persons who have been afterwards shown to be innocent."

The Inspector's smile grew still broader—as if the other were really too funny.

"No doubt; who denies it? Sometimes, also, one arrests the wrong person as a sort of half-way house to the right one."

"Is that what you're going to do in this instance?"

"I don't say so. I say I have found the criminal."

"May I ask for names?"

"It will cease to be an official secret probably within four-and-twenty hours." Someone tapped at the door. "Who's there?" A tall, straight-standing man came into the room. "Hullo, Bradley, is there anything I can do for you?"

Inspector Bradley did what we have seen him do before, he put his hand up to the back of his neck.

"The fact is, Hextall, I'm rather at a deadlock about that Piccadilly affair."

"Is that so, Bradley? It seems incredible—in a man of your perception."

Hextall grinned; he seemed to have a genial sense of humour. His colleague clearly did his best to give him back as good as he sent.

"Aren't you supposed to have some perception, Hextall?

Yet you don't seem to have got on very far with that motor-car business. I've just been reading some very nasty remarks in one of the evening papers; the chap who wrote them wants to know what the police are doing."

The Inspector shook his head, as if the other had been joking.

"Now, that's not fair; that really isn't fair. Look at what Kohn has been doing; when the public learns what Kohn's been doing there won't be standing-room in the street when Kohn is going by. What's the trouble, Bradley, anything in which I can help? Kohn and I have reached rather an interesting point in our conversation."

Inspector Bradley placed himself upon a chair, with his long legs out in front of him. Somehow, in that position he did not strike one as the most intelligent possible type of officer.

"I'd give a trifle to know where Thomas Pepper is."

"And who may Mr. Thomas Pepper happen to be?"

"The chap who was done in at Piccadilly Circus, and whose case they put me on; wore Thomas Pepper's clothes, and had his pockets stuffed with Thomas Pepper's papers."

"The inference seems to be that that gentleman knew more about Thomas Pepper than was good for his health."

"That's what I can't make out. A woman turned up, and when we showed her the photograph we had of him she said it was her husband, and it seems he was. She was a Mrs. Gardner——"

Inspector Hextall, swinging round on his heel, stopped him.

"What name?"

"Gardner—she's Mrs. Gardner; her husband was John Gardner."

Hextall addressed a question to Mr. Kohn.

"Wasn't that the name that was on the scrap of paper that was in the leather purse?" Kohn nodded. Hextall turned again to Bradley. "Did she ever live in York Place, Chelsea?"

"Couldn't say, but I shouldn't wonder; she seems to have lived in a good many places. What brings me here is the little coincidence that she seems to be mixed up with your man."

Inspector Hextall stared. "My man? What do you mean by my man?"

"Mr. Andrew Tozer, the gentleman who was found—all that was left of him—on the seat of that motor-car, and into the circumstances of whose tragic end you are not giving the public all the information they think they are entitled to."

If Inspector Bradley's intention, in his turn, was to be humorous, his colleague ignored it. He himself was suddenly serious. Indeed, his manner was almost truculent.

"What has your Mrs. Gardner to do with my Andrew Tozer?"
Bradley was almost resentful.

"I don't know that my Mrs. Gardner, as you call her, has anything to do with your Mr. Andrew Tozer, at least, not what I understand by anything to do. She was at one time housekeeper in his City offices."

Inspector Hextall seemed to have grown all at once quite excited.

"Bradley, I shouldn't wonder if you've put me on to the very thing I've been looking for. Where is your Mrs. Gardner? When can I see her? What has she got to do, anyhow, with that Piccadilly business?"

"Only that she was the murdered man's wife; that seems to be all that she's got to do with it, at least as far as I've got."

Inspector Hextall, seating himself at the writing-table, took up a pen, and drew some sheets of paper towards him as if he were about to make notes.

"Now tell me all about it. I shouldn't wonder, when I've grasped what it is you're after, if we were able to help each other. How far have you taken the case?"

Inspector Bradley's manner was a little gloomy, as if he were not sure that he altogether relished his colleague's sudden show of interest.

"The man was killed in Piccadilly Circus—got a knife in his back. Everything on him belonged to Thomas Pepper. I took it that he was Thomas Pepper—but he wasn't. Couldn't make out who he was, or anything about him, until the other day a woman came who said she was Mrs. Gardner and that she had lost her husband. After I had listened to her a bit I showed her the dead man's photograph. She recognised it on the instant—the man was her husband, she hadn't the slightest doubt about it. Then she told me her story. She had assisted her mother, who was acting as housekeeper in Mr. Andrew Tozer's City offices; a porter was in the same employ named Gardner—John Gardner. She had married him. Not long after the marriage Gardner left his employment with Mr. Tozer and became associated with a man named Pepper—Thomas Pepper. Pepper was a small bookmaker—I'm not at all sure, by the way, that his real name was Pepper; I shouldn't wonder if it turns out that he was charged with ready-money betting under half a dozen different aliases—and fined under each. Gardner and Pepper seem to have played a nice game together; when things got too warm for either, the other would take his place and cover him, so that a good many people who did business with them didn't know which was Gardner and which was Pepper."

"That game is played every day with gentlemen of that kidney."

"Some little time ago—Mrs. Gardner is not very strong on dates—her husband came home one night more than a little bit on. He told her—she couldn't make out if he was joking or not—that for the next week or so she was going to lose him, because he was going to be Tom Pepper. When she asked if Tom Pepper was going to be him he became mysterious—he said he wasn't—he was going to be someone else altogether; one of the biggest and richest men in England. Mrs. Gardner says those were his very words; then he added with a wink that she knew him too. Then he went on with what she took to be a cock-and-bull story of how he and Pepper had tossed up who was to be this other party, how it had turned up that Pepper was to be, how he was to receive a thousand pounds for being this someone else, besides extras."

"The confiding husband dropped no hint of who that other person was who was willing to pay such liberal terms for being personated by such an unsavoury character as Pepper seems to be—I presume he's still in the land of the living?"

"Mrs. Gardner thought the tale all nonsense, the result of too many whiskies, until one morning Pepper turned up at the house in a taxi-cab, which, according to her, was loaded up with luggage. Gardner went out to see him at the door. Pepper never came in; the two men remained talking together in the street for several minutes. Then Gardner came in and told his wife that he was going away for a few days, and he gave her four five-pound notes to get along with while he was away. Mrs. G. was used to her husband going away without leaving any address, but she wasn't used to his giving her fivers. His manner, she says, and the fivers, made her think that something extra special was in the wind; her husband had been nearly sent to prison without the option of a fine only a little while before for a job which, according to her, was really Pepper's. She asked him if Pepper was going to play that little trick again, because if so she wouldn't have it. Her husband laughed, said that Pepper had embarked on a little adventure with a lady which meant his being away from town for a while, and he was going to take his place while he was absent; his wife needn't worry, he would be perfectly all right."

"And she let him go?"

"She couldn't help it; he doesn't seem to have been the sort of man who wanted letting; he went. And that same night a woman put a knife into his back at Piccadilly Circus, apparently taking him to be Thomas Pepper."

"Where was Mr. Thomas Pepper—or where is he?"

"That is what Mrs. Gardner would like to know, and what I should like to know, and what several other people would like to know. Thomas Pepper is rather a sought-after gentleman. One of the most singular parts of my story is coming."

Inspector Bradley, sitting up a little straighter on his chair, began to show signs of interest in his own narrative.

"Mrs. Gardner has still three of those five-pound notes which her husband gave her. I asked her to let me look at them; she did; I took the numbers; they were brand-new notes, the name of the bank was stamped at the back. I visited that bank."

Turning more towards Hextall, Bradley laid his great hand flat upon the table.

"This is where you come in. That bank-note had been paid across the counter, together with a good many others, to a person who presented a cheque drawn in his own favour for three hundred pounds by Andrew Tozer. I took the number of that cheque. I fancy that you have a cheque-book which was found in a suit-case which was on—you know what motor-car. I shouldn't be surprised if a counterfoil in that cheque-book tallies with the number of the cheque I've got."

"You don't say so? Then—if that proves to be the case—it looks as if we were getting a little closer."

Inspector Hextall took a cheque-book out of his desk; Inspector Bradley a notebook from his jacket-pocket; from the notebook a slip of paper, which he laid in front of Hextall.

"There's the number of the cheque which was drawn to 'self' by Andrew Tozer, which was paid in cash across the counter on the morning of the thirteenth of May."

"And here," observed Hextall, "is the counterfoil." He had the cheque-book open in front of him. "The cheque which follows was also left open. 'Pay self five hundred pounds. Andrew Tozer.' Your cheque, which was presented and paid, was dated May twelfth; this one"—Inspector Hextall touched with his fingers the cheque which was still in the book—"is dated May thirteenth. Mr. Tozer seems to have thought that he might be in instant want of ready cash, drawing cheques for three hundred and five hundred pounds on consecutive days. Who was the man who presented your cheque?"

"Thomas Pepper. The paying-clerk asked him his name; he gave it and his correct address without the slightest hesitation. I had an idea that you might know something about the counterfoil of that cheque; that's why I came. There were some bank-notes found in Mr. Andrew Tozer's pocket?"

"In his letter-case. There were two hundred pounds in English notes, besides a lot of French ones."

"Have you made any inquiries about those bank-notes—where they came from?"

"Why should I? There was nothing surprising in their being in his possession."

"I don't say there is; but I have got the numbers of the notes which Gardner gave his wife. You look at your notes. We might make another discovery."

Inspector Hextall eyed his colleague as if he were asking himself what it was he was driving at. Then from the same receptacle which had contained the cheque-book he produced a letter-case, and from it some bank-notes. Bradley picked up the letter-case.

"That's an elegant and expensive article, a rich man's whim—'A. T.' in gold; there's no doubt that was Andrew Tozer's. Now, what's the number of your notes? Here are the numbers of Mrs. Gardner's four."

Bradley handed a memorandum book to the other—opened at a page on which were figures. Hextall compared these figures with the notes which he had taken from the letter-case.

"My word!" he exclaimed. "Do you know, Bradley, that that man Gardner gave his wife the notes which come next in order to those which I have here?"

"I was thinking that might be the case."

"Then these notes must be the ones which were paid to Pepper across the counter."

"It looks like it. I've got the numbers of those notes on that page; you can easily compare them."

Hextall did compare them, with a result which apparently both surprised and bewildered him.

"Yes, these are the notes which were paid to Pepper—then Pepper must have been acting as his agent; but why, if the facts are as you have given them? It strikes me that I've been tackling this job from the wrong end. I was after the car. I thought—and still think—that everything would be explained if the car was. Explain how Lady Ditchling's motor-car came to be in Pall Mall with Andrew Tozer dead upon the driving-seat—and you've got everything. That was, and still is, my view; but it seems that information might have been obtained from little things which, I admit, I overlooked; in other words, instead of beginning with them I thought they'd come after."

This was such a surprising confession for Inspector Hextall to make, who, his colleagues declared, never had admitted that

he ever had been wrong in any jot or tittle, that it moved Inspector Bradley to be magnanimous on his own account.

"Hextall, this business is a puzzler. You've got, as you told me before, a hard nut to crack, and I've got another. I don't mind admitting to you that I never found Mrs. Gardner; she found me. I didn't know there was such a party; as for the bank-notes, if she hadn't brought them in as a sort of tag at the end of her story, I should never have guessed there were such things. In this business of ours, Hextall, there's a lot of luck, good and bad; if there wasn't I don't know what we should do. There are cases in which everything's plain sailing, and you're on to your man almost as soon as you've started; and there are plenty of others in which if it weren't for flukes I don't know where we should be."

"That's true. It's only Mr. Kohn who never admits that the element of chance has anything to do with his investigations. His is a scientific mind, everything by line and rule—isn't it, Kohn?"

Mr. Kohn smiled, but he said nothing; he had been listening to what the two men had been saying with every appearance of the greatest interest. Hextall continued to address his remarks to his colleague.

"What we have to do, Bradley, you and I, is put our heads together and find how out some of the notes which were paid to Pepper came to be in Mr. Tozer's possession, and some in Mrs. Gardner's. When we've found that out——" The Inspector paused; once more there was a tapping at the door. "Confound it, who's that? We don't want to be interrupted just now. Who's there? Come in."

A constable entered with something in his hand.

"This package has just come for you, sir," he said, addressing Inspector Hextall, "and this letter. As the package is marked urgent I thought I had better bring it in at once."

He placed an envelope and a long narrow parcel in front of the Inspector and withdrew. Hextall took up the packet, balancing it in his hand as he studied the address.

"What's this? It's heavyish; 'Inspector Hextall, in charge of The Motor Murder Case, Scotland Yard. Urgent.' One gets a good many queer things covered by such an address as this; let's see what's in here."

Within the brown paper cover was a narrow box. In the box was a revolver. On the revolver was a sheet of paper. The Inspector read aloud what was written on it.

"'Wasn't this the revolver with which Mr. Andrew Tozer was shot?' Now who's sent that? It's another little trick."

He examined the wrapper. "Posted this morning at South Kensington as a letter, addressed in Roman letters. What's in the envelope? 'In Naylor's field at Bemerton, twelve paces from the gate on the left as you go in, there is something buried which you may find of interest.' No beginning, no end, no date, no address, no nothing. This was posted also this morning at Stoke Newington. The question is—this is a Belgian revolver—is this a practical joke or—what is it?"

CHAPTER XXV

WORRALL'S FARM

MENTALLY John Baird was being drawn in three different directions—indeed, in a sense, physically also. He was drawn towards investigating into Sir Clifford Curtis; Miss Winton's story had roused his curiosity. He did not know, he could not even be said to have a definite suspicion, yet a vague something seemed to hint that if Curtis chose he might throw light upon matters which were at present enveloped in what was rather worse than Cimmerian darkness.

Then there was Miss Pearse. In a way she was first and foremost, the beginning and the end. If he had followed his inclinations he would have jumped into a train, rushed down to Cawstone, and done everything that man could do to comfort and sustain a young woman who, in her new shape, he had only met once in her life, but with whom he had already had quite a considerable correspondence. A fresh communication of some sort came from her nearly every morning. There was that long epistle, which he studied again and again, in which she gave a detailed account of the strange happenings at Cawstone, and which had concluded with such an ingenuous expression of her desire to see him once more coming through the clapper-gate. Had he acted on impulse he would have been passing through that clapper-gate in the shortest possible space of time in which a train could take him from town. The one consideration which constrained him was the mysterious telegram, signed Frank Taylor, and purporting to come from Worrall's Farm, Bruford. The appeal for immediate help, coming from one who apparently claimed to be an old friend, yet whose name was unfamiliar, prevailed. He put off Sir Clifford Curtis and Miss Pauline Pearse to go on what might turn out to be a wild-goose chase to a person who called himself by an unknown name, and who apparently resided in a district of which he had never heard. He had to search out Bruford in a gazetteer. He learned that it was an insignificant village five miles from Salisbury, at which town was its nearest railway station. Having learnt so much, away he went—to Waterloo Station to catch the very next train.

It was a few minutes to four when he reached Salisbury. There was no taxi-cab at the station. The driver of an ancient fly not only knew Bruford, he knew Worrall's Farm.

"Old Mrs. Jolliffe, her son George—he looks after the farm, but she's the tenant. It's a good way Worrall's is from here—eight miles."

Mr. Baird had his doubts about the distance—the gazetteer had made it considerably less—but he got into the fly and told the driver to take him to Worrall's Farm.

It did seem to be eight miles from the station after all. He had ridden so seldom of late in a horse-drawn vehicle, the driver was sparing of his steed, and the steed knew it, so that it seemed to the fare that he could have walked as fast as that horse was taking him. When he passed a taxi-cab in the town he was moved to stop it and change vehicles, but the taxi had gone before he had really made up his mind, and he had a sort of sheepish feeling that his doing so would be a blow to the old gentleman upon the box from which he might not easily recover. So he dragged along a dusty and not over-picturesque country road in a fashion which moved him more than once to ask the driver if they had very much farther to go; as the driver each time stopped his vehicle in order to enable himself to give proper consideration to his answer he did not gain much by that.

Worrall's Farm was approached by a long, narrow, ill-kept lane. The house proved to be both old and ugly; its position between pigsties and cowsheds on one side, and a fetid pond on the other, did not strike John Baird as unduly sanitary. The door stood wide open; a buxom girl came when he tapped.

"Can I see Mr. Frank Taylor?"

The girl eyed him with surprise, which Baird felt was not without justification; in that part of the world strangers were doubtless rare.

"The doctor's with him now, but I daresay you can when he comes out. He seems worse again this afternoon."

"Does he?" Baird was conscious that his question did not suggest much interest in Mr. Taylor's condition, but he had not even been aware that he was ill. He hardly knew whether to say so and to ask what ailed him. Doubt seemed to come into the girl's eyes as she observed his hesitation.

"Are you a friend of his?" she asked.

Again John Baird knew not what to answer. He was saved from the trouble of casting about in his mind for the best means of evasion by the appearance, within the house, of a short, broad-shouldered man, with grey hair and a brick-red complexion.

In her own way the girl introduced him—nodding her head towards Mr. Baird:

"Here's someone come to see Mr. Taylor." Then to Baird: "This is Dr. Jordan."

The square-shouldered person, coming forward, offered Mr. Baird his hand.

"Glad to see any friend of Mr. Taylor. He's in want of a friend if ever a man was." He searched John Baird's face with his shrewd grey eyes. "Can I speak to you before you go in and see your friend?"

Baird understood that he wished to say a word to him in private. He followed him to where a horse, attached to an old-fashioned dogcart, was enjoying some grass which grew in front of the house.

"May I ask your name, sir?" John Baird told him his name. "I am glad to meet you, sir, very glad indeed. You know someone ought to have been down here before this. I've been placed in a very awkward position; indeed, I'm in an awkward position still: we all are."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

John Baird looked what he felt—puzzled. The doctor, who was preparing to get into his cart, stood with the reins in his hand to take another stare at him.

"May I ask if you're a particular friend of Mr. Taylor's?" Baird's puzzlement clearly increased, so that it seemed to infect even the doctor, as the question which he presently put showed.

"I suppose you have come to see Mr. Taylor, and that you are a friend of his?"

John Baird smiled; he was favourably impressed by the other's manner.

"Candidly, I don't know. Can you describe your patient?"

"Didn't I understand Mary Jolliffe to say that you'd come to see him?"

"I certainly have come to see Mr. Taylor, but it doesn't necessarily follow, does it, that he's a friend of mine? What's the matter with him?"

The doctor seemed to be considering, his grey eyes always on the other's face.

"This is awkward. I don't want to talk about him to a perfect stranger. I've no right to, yet, as the position is more irregular than I care for, I should like to discuss it with somebody. What do you want to see him about?"

"You will regard what I say to you as confidential?"

"I'd rather not; I've been regarding too much as confidential already. Do you mind tell ng me if you are a lawyer?"

"I certainly am not. I will tell you exactly what the position is so far as I am concerned, and will leave it to you to talk if you please. This morning I had a telegram asking me to come at once to Frank Taylor couched in terms which suggested that Frank Taylor was an old friend. Now I never knew a Frank Taylor, but all the same I shan't be surprised if he does turn out to be an old friend of mine, as I'm rather anxious about an old friend who disappeared some little time ago."

"When did he, as you put it, disappear?"

John Baird in his turn eyed the doctor very steadily; apparently what he saw satisfied him.

"He disappeared on the thirteenth of May."

"Then that's your friend inside there; he turned up on the thirteenth of May, or rather, early on the morning of the fourteenth. Was your friend in trouble?"

"So far as I am aware, no. Anyhow, I should say that trouble was to him like water on a duck's back; it would take a lot of trouble to trouble him. Why do you ask?"

"That's it; he won't say a word himself; he's forbidden me to say a word, and, like a fool, I promised I wouldn't. Do you know he's nearly dying? This is the second time I've been to-day. Your coming may do him good, or it mayn't; if it doesn't, anything may happen within twenty-four hours, and then where shall I be?—where shall we all be?"

"Again I can only say that I'm afraid I do not understand, and again I ask what is the matter with your patient? You can trust me to respect your confidence."

The doctor lowered his voice a tone or two.

"He's either shot himself or someone has shot him. It's a case of either attempted suicide or murder, and I'll be hanged if I know which it is."

John Baird regarded the other gravely. Clearly he was more than a little startled.

"I am glad I met you before I went in; explanation would have been a little awkward, especially if he's the person I think it possible he is."

"I'm absolutely certain he'd not given his right name to the people here, or to me. Now we've got so far I may as well tell you the rest, as far as I'm concerned. Is that your cab?" Baird nodded. "I'll walk my pony down the lane, and if you won't mind coming with me we shall run no risk of being overheard. You'll see for yourself that the position is delicate; as a medical man I am naturally anxious. I have never been in a position of this sort before, and hope I never shall be again."

John Baird, the doctor, and his pony, proceeded down the narrow

lane; it was only when they were out of earshot of the house that the doctor went on. "I was fetched here by George Jolliffe, that's the old lady's son; she's the tenant of the farm; that girl you saw at the door is her daughter. Someone had roused the household out of sleep, and when mother, son, and daughter went down, a man—evidently a gentleman—came staggering through the front door, dropped on to a chair, and gasped out that if anyone would fetch a doctor without telling him what he was wanted for he'd give them a five-pound note. George fetched me. I found the man as good as dead. The mother and daughter hadn't known what to do; indeed, they hadn't dared to do anything. He had on a light suit of clothes——"

John Baird interposed. "He had on a light suit? I think he's my man."

"Was your friend wearing a light suit when he disappeared? Owing to his wearing a light suit this man—Taylor as he calls himself—was a sight. He had as nearly as possible bled to death. His clothes were soaked with his own blood. Their light colour made it worse. I found the two women half out of their wits. The mother was in hysterics; the girl, between not knowing what to do with her mother or the man, was pretty well beside herself; there was a nice how-to-do, I can tell you! And the idiot George, hoping to gain the stranger's promised five-pound note, had not told me what was the matter, so I'd come without my instruments or practically anything, and I had to manage with what was in the house."

"But what had happened to the man? You say he had been shot?"

"He'd been shot either by himself or by someone else Owing to the position of the wound it might have been either way. He hasn't positively affirmed it, but he has suggested that he shot himself, which is one reason why I believe he didn't. I am convinced that the one thing he wants is that the truth should be concealed. A bullet had entered his left breast, touched his lung, twisted itself about inside him, and worked more havoc than I'd ever heard of a bullet working before. And this was such a small one, I had a job in getting it out, but I got it; the sort of thing which might have come—and probably did come—out of a sort of toy revolver—the kind of thing which some women use as playthings."

"Isn't it odd that a little thing of that kind should have done so much mischief?"

"Of course it's odd; but then, in the first place, the revolver was held by someone quite close to his breast. I should say there'd been a struggle of some kind in which the top buttons

of his waistcoat had been torn open, because the bullet had entered directly through his thin zephyr shirt—he wore no under-vest. Then, a long time had elapsed before it was attended to. I imagine that its first effect on him was to knock him silly; he had gone down where he was standing and had stayed there; then when he came to and began to realise what had happened he started tramping, I suppose in search of help. He had probably tramped some distance, possibly three or four miles, and in his state that was the very worst thing he could have done; in his struggles to cover the ground he had practically torn his inside to pieces: that's where the mischief was."

"Hasn't he told you where the accident—let's call it an accident, it may have been one—happened?"

Checking his pony, the doctor turned sharply towards John Baird.

"That's one of the chief things which he wishes to conceal—where it happened. That's why he dragged himself along, though he must have been suffering agonies; he's afraid that if it's found out where it happened other things may be found out too, and that's another thing that makes me feel that he never shot himself, but that someone shot him, under circumstances which he'd rather die than tell."

"Has he been conscious?"

"That he has ever been entirely himself I am not prepared to assert. He has never behaved quite like a normal person. That first morning, when I got him to bed and had done what I could, he came to himself with an almost superhuman effort—there must have been a sort of subconsciousness about him the whole time, because in the state in which he then was I am sure that only by a great effort of will was he able to bring himself to a sense of his surroundings. He whispered, 'Doctor, swear that you won't breathe a word about the state I'm in to anyone until I give you leave.' He must have seen I hesitated, because he immediately added, 'If you'll swear, I promise you I'll live, and if you won't swear, I'll die. Swear!' It was such an amazing thing that a man who had scarcely a drop of blood left in him should be able to speak at all, still less make such a request, that—well, I'm bound to admit that I practically gave him the promise he required."

"But suppose he had died, wouldn't you be in an awkward position?"

"Wouldn't I? Shouldn't I? And I should be in a still more awkward position if he were to slip away now. That confounded wound of his keeps opening internally—it happened again last night; although he's a little easier the odds are still against my pulling him through."

"Wouldn't you like to have further advice—consult with someone?"

Again the doctor checked his pony as if to permit of his inspecting John Baird to more advantage.

"My dear sir, I began life as an Army doctor in India. I went through more than one campaign—ghastly ones. I've seen as much of gunshot wounds as any of your English big-wigs; I should say more. If you like to call in one of them and pay him through the nose I am willing, but I honestly believe that if anyone can pull that man through I can, single-handed; and there's the truth for you." He glanced at his watch. "However, I must be getting on; there's a dear lady who expected me half an hour ago. What I wished to say at the beginning was this."

Climbing into his dogcart, he continued his remarks from the seat.

"When a man's shot, by himself or by anyone else, it's the first duty of the doctor who learns the fact to communicate with the police. I ought to have told them about that chap in there the very first morning. I haven't breathed a word; we none of us have. Of course it's known that there's a man in there who has had an accident, but I doubt if anyone knows what sort of accident. So you see if Taylor were to die that would mean trouble for me. What I ought to do is to call on the local constable as I go by—but I shan't. What I should like you to do, if he does turn out to be a friend of yours, is to get the truth out of him if you can. I'll look in as I come back. If he isn't better—he's either going to mend or end—you'll be able to advise me, and at least share my responsibility. I tell you I've had some bad half-hours since Taylor came to Worrall's Farm. But I've a sort of fellow-feeling for the man; I like his look and I like his pluck, and if, as I suspect, he's had some little misunderstanding with a lady, the last thing I should like to do is to give him away. But if he is going to die—and most other men would have been dead before this—why, I don't want to be charged as an accomplice after the event in either suicide or murder; and that's how it is Good-day—for the present!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A DIFFICULT PATIENT

THE doctor twirled his whip, his pony broke into a smart trot, John Baird was left alone. What he had heard had rather upset his mental equilibrium ; it was something for which he had been so wholly unprepared. What the telegram had meant he had not been able to guess, but he knew his Francis Turner, and he pictured him as hiding from the consequences of some wild prank that he had played. Dr. Jordan had placed the matter in a more serious aspect than he had expected ; the man he had come to see seemed to have played a part in a tragedy rather than a prank.

John Baird retraced his steps towards the house. He found the young woman talking to the driver of his fly.

" Aren't you going in to see Mr. Taylor, sir ? " she asked. " I told him a visitor had come, and he's quite excited—for him."

Her words made him wonder if excitement was quite the best thing for a man in the condition the doctor had described ; if indeed he was in a fit state to see visitors at all. The doctor had not forbidden Mr. Baird to see his patient, he had not even issued any warning ; the sick man expected him, he had telegraphed for him to come. However it might be in an ordinary case, perhaps letting him have his own way might do him good—his medical adviser did not seem to consider him a normal man. So John Baird was shown into the sick man's room.

The instant he was in he knew—the white face, looking out from the sheets on the old wooden four-poster bed, was Francis Turner. The girl who had shown him in went through a sort of ceremony of introduction.

" Here's the gentleman who's come to see you, Mr. Taylor."

Both men waited for the girl to go before either spoke. Turner's first words were :

" Make sure that the door is shut."

Baird made sure. Then he sat down beside the bed.

" My dear Francis, in the name of all that's wonderful what's the meaning of this ? I was in at Park Court only a few hours ago. Horace was in quite a state ; he says you have never been away from home quite so long before without giving him some idea of your whereabouts."

"Poor, dear old Horace. Would it distress him if he never saw me again? The painter's worn so thin that with ever so little it would break and I should slip my moorings out into the open sea."

"The doctor has told me; you mustn't talk much."

"The doctor has told you, has he? What did he say?"

"He told me you were suffering from the effects of having a bullet inside you—not a nice thing to have."

"Is that all he said?"

"He seemed rather curious as to how the bullet got there, but I don't think he said much more—except that he said you've had a baddish time of it and that you still weren't out of the wood. I can see for myself that you oughtn't to do much talking."

"What do you think I've brought you here for except to talk? Did you wonder who the wire was from?"

The speaker's face was so white that Baird thought it probable that there was still scarcely a drop of red blood in him. His voice, though clear, was so subdued that his visitor had to stoop forward to hear what he said. The smile with which he put his question added to the wanness of his appearance. Baird smiled back—with rather a lump in his throat.

"I did rather wonder, but after a bit I guessed. Horace had told me you were missing, and the initials were the same, F. T."

"I wondered if you'd notice that." The speaker gave the oddest little sigh. "If you only knew how glad I am to see you."

"I'm very glad to see you, though I'd rather you didn't seem to be quite so much under the weather. What does it all mean—or is it very private?"

"It is very private, but I'm not quite sure that I know myself what it all means. As I told you in the wire, I'm in a devil of a mess, but now you're here I don't know what you're going to do to get me out of it."

"Is it so bad as that?"

"It's worse; and what makes it worse still is that I'm beginning to doubt if I shan't be taken out of this room in a box. That would make it the worst of all, because then I don't know what would happen."

John Baird reflected. That there was a good deal more in the speaker's words than appeared on the surface was clear. He fancied that in a measure he understood what was not expressed.

"You mean that the consequences might be serious for those who were left behind?"

"That's about it: you always were a pretty quick chap at catching a fellow's meaning."

John Baird's next speech referred to his own words.

"If you don't explain how that bullet got into you the consequences for someone might be awkward. In such cases the law not only wants to know, it takes so much trouble to find out, and it is apt to put a false construction upon what might be susceptible of an innocent explanation."

"Just so; you've hit it again. You're a marvel, Jack."

"Have you sent for me to tell me how that bullet came to be where it was?"

It was the sick man's turn to be silent; he was considering. Baird was struck by the look which came on his face and in his eyes—as of sudden anguish. When he spoke again his voice was even lower, as if to speak at all were an effort.

"I'm not sure; if I were certain I should pull through I shouldn't speak a word; but I almost went last night. There's still something wrong inside me, something which induces hemorrhage. Jordan told me—he's a first-rate chap and as clever as they make them—that if it were to break out again, as it might do at any moment—if, for instance, I gave some sudden movement; that's why I keep so still—I should be a goner. And that's how it is. If I am going I ought to say something to someone before I go, and I don't know anyone to whom I'd rather say it than to you; though you won't approve of me when I have said it, and that's another little bit of worry."

"What is it you wish to say? I'm a broad-minded sort of person; it's the first time you've ever shown signs of fearing my disapproval."

"Yes, that's it; it's the first time I've done this sort of thing."

Again there was silence. Clearly the sick man found it hard to bring himself to the point of what he had to say; so hard that he all at once evaded it.

"Anything happened in town, Jack—to the people I know?"

"Leonard Marshall is worrying about some money which he owes you. He took it to your rooms the morning you went—indeed, directly after you had gone. It's lying there still, awaiting your return. By the way, there are a lot of letters waiting for you. If I'd known I was coming I might have brought them—or at least a selection. There was one from Cawstone, from Lady Ditchling. Horace insisted on showing it me because it is marked Immediate, and I couldn't help but recognise the hand. Horace says that the postman brought it only a minute or two after you'd gone; he's in quite a fuss

because it's marked Immediate, and he thinks the lady may still be awaiting an answer."

Baird was conscious that something had happened to the listener's face. When he mentioned the letter and from whom it had come, the ashen countenance which confronted him had grown more rigid; the lips were compressed more tightly; the eyes seemed to have sunk deeper in the head. When once more Turner spoke his voice was scarcely audible.

"I rather wish, Jack"—his voice seemed to break; it was with an effort that he recovered it—"that you'd brought that letter with you. How long—would it take you to go back to town—and get it? Or you might wire to Horace to burn it—at once—with all the other letters."

Baird felt sure that the last five words were added as an afterthought.

"Horace would scarcely care to act on such instruction from me, especially if it came in the shape of a telegram."

"You think not? You might try."

Possibly thirty seconds passed before either man spoke again. Baird looked at the sick man's face, then he turned his eyes away and looked through the open window, which was on the other side of the room; but he said nothing. It was Turner who broke the silence.

"What bee have you got in your bonnet, Jack?'

Then Baird spoke, still with his eyes on the open window.

"I'm in trouble as well as you, Francis; I wonder if my trouble has anything to do with yours."

Again silence. The words seemed to startle the sick man.

"You mustn't—you mustn't try me too much, Jack. I'm—rather nervy."

Baird, looking towards the bed, found that the speaker's eyes were closed, and that there was something on his face which again brought that lump into his throat. He spoke very softly.

"Don't you think, Francie, that we'd better put off this conversation till you're feeling a little more fit? The doctor is coming back soon; don't you think we'd better wait until he's been? It seems to me that what you want is quiet, rest—nothing to excite you, or disturb you either. Couldn't you sleep if you were to try? That might do you good."

Another silent interval. The sick man did not open his eyes. Presently Baird saw that his lips were moving—he had to stoop still lower to catch his words.

"Sleep? Fancy me asleep. Jordan says I've been unconscious for days together, but—however I may have seemed to him—I've never slept; never—once."

The visitor said nothing; he eyed the other as if he were trying to decipher something which he believed to be written in secret characters on his face. Although the sick man's eyes continued shut, some delicate sense made him conscious of the other's gaze.

"Why are you looking at me like that, Jack?" he asked. "Do you think there's a riddle on me somewhere which you're trying to solve?"

"I'm wondering." He leaned closer towards the other; his voice dropped. "Francis, there's something which I ought to say to you—before it's too late."

"Well, say it. I'll keep myself in hand well enough to listen."

"You've heard nothing since you were here?"

"Nothing—from outside; I hear—enough inside. Well, why don't you go on?"

"I find it difficult; your life is more valuable than you suppose."

"It might easily—be that."

"You're not to die, Francis—you understand, you're not to die."

"Any particular reason? Come, out with it, Jack. You've got something on your chest—get it off."

"The position is not an easy one—I'm afraid; you frighten me, Francis. It's of the greatest importance that you should live—apart from all questions of personal friendship; but—if not—it's almost more important that you should not go without saying something."

"On what subject? What does it matter to anyone how I came here?"

"Francis, Lady Ditchling may at any moment be arrested for murder."

"Murder!" Francis Turner opened his eyes; the word came from him in a sort of croak; he raised himself in bed, then sank back again and was still. John Baird bent over him.

"Francis!" Whether the other heard or not he made no sign. "Francis! He has fainted or something. Was it what I said which did it?" Baird sat up; his own face had all at once grown grim. "I can't help it, it had to be said, or rather, it still has to be. If, after all, it is he who has the answer to the riddle, and were to die without giving so much as a hint of what it is!"

Again he bent over the bed. "Francis! There's something seriously wrong. I don't like the look of him at all."

He went to the door and called. The girl appeared who had received him on his arrival.

"Can you do anything?" he asked her. "Mr. Turner has had a sudden attack; he seems to be unconscious."

"Mr. Turner!" She stared at him. "Who is Mr. Turner?"

Baird, realising the slip he had made, tried to make the best of it.

"Did I say Turner? I meant Taylor. Mr. Taylor has had a sudden attack of faintness."

Coming into the room the girl leaned over the bed.

"He was like this last night; we thought he was dead. Is his name Turner?"

The direct question took John Baird aback. He did not wish to commit himself to a deliberate lie.

"Can you do nothing?" he demanded. "Has the doctor given you no hint as to some simple thing which can be done when he gets like that?"

"Some simple thing." The girl's manner was scornful. "Dr. Jordan can't do anything himself. He says that there's so little life left in him that all that can be done is to wait until it shows itself; last night it was more than two hours before it showed itself." The girl looked at him with a sort of defiance. "You know if he is dead we're in a fix, mother and George and me, to say nothing of Dr. Jordan. We ought to have told the constable about him long ago. We know nothing about him except what he told us, which was precious little, and most of that wasn't true. I asked you if his name was Turner. You heard me. Why didn't you answer?"

Again he evaded her question.

"Where is Dr. Jordan? Can't he be sent for? I feel sure that something ought to be done at once."

"Dr. Jordan's over with Mrs. Burnett. She's housekeeper at Sir Clifford Curtis's."

"What?" Baird, who had been stooping over the silent man, started up as if he had had a sudden shock.

"I said," repeated the girl a little doggedly, "that Dr. Jordan is over with Mrs. Burnett, the housekeeper at Sir Clifford Curtis's."

"Sir Clifford Curtis? You said Sir Clifford Curtis? Does—he live near here?"

"He lives at Henbean, three miles off. If you came from Salisbury you passed his house on the way." All at once she seemed to be struck by the singularity of his bearing. "Do you know Sir Clifford Curtis?"

"I know a Sir Clifford Curtis, but——" All kinds of thoughts seemed to be flitting through his brain. The one thing of which he was clearly conscious was that if he was not careful he might commit himself to something which he would rather leave unsaid.

Possibly the girl was in an irritable frame of mind; she had probably been going through trying times lately; something about John Baird caused her to fly into sudden anger—wholly indifferent to the figure lying so still between the sheets.

"I wish I'd never seen you, nor him either." She pointed to the bed. "We've had nothing but trouble since he came, trouble of all sorts, and now I shouldn't wonder if we had more—I feel it coming. Who is he? and who are you? You gave me no name, and if you're a friend of Sir Clifford's, or his wife's either, I don't think more of you on that account. We don't hold Sir Clifford Curtis in much account round here, or his wife either. We know too much about them. He's a nice sort, he is, to call himself a gentleman, and his wife's as bad, if not worse. If you like, if he is a friend of yours, you can tell him I said so, Mary Jolliffe. He knows we've not much cause to think well of him at Worrall's. I've told him what I thought of him before to-day. He's a swindler, that's what Sir Clifford Curtis is. He's owed us money for many a day, and he's likely to keep on owing it. I shall be surprised if we get a penny for every pound. Is he a friend of Sir Clifford Curtis's?"

Again she pointed at the man who continued to lie so still.

"I cannot tell you. I daresay he may have met Sir Clifford Curtis and his wife, but I doubt if he would consider either of them to be a friend of his. How long do you think it will be before Dr. Jordan returns?"

The girl was looking at the white face which stared out from between the sheets.

"I'm sure I can't tell you, and for my part I don't think it matters—I believe he's dead—that's what I believe—at last."

CHAPTER XXVII

JOHN BAIRD SEES MEN DIGGING

DR. JORDAN, coming out of the house, found John Baird pacing up and down in front of it. He had returned in time to prove that Mary Jolliffe was wrong—Francis Turner was not yet dead.

"Just not quite dead," was the doctor's verdict after he had been with him the better part of an hour.

"Can I speak to him?" inquired Baird. "My time is valuable; I ought to be going."

"If that is so you'd better go; you won't be able to speak to him again to-day. It's your speaking to him which has brought on this. Each time this happens it's harder to get him back again, until presently it will be impossible. I gather that he is your friend, the one you expected to see?"

Baird nodded. The doctor glanced at him curiously out of the corners of his eyes.

"Well? Did he say anything for publication?"

"He did not. Practically he said nothing at all I'm afraid it was what I said that's responsible for his condition."

"And what did you say? Is that for publication?" John Baird emitted a sound which was very like a sigh. "Is it so bad as that?"

John Baird smiled—tepidly; then sighed again.

"Doctor, I don't suppose that a man ever was in a greater tangle than I am now. Since we are only casual acquaintances I doubt if that fact will interest you: but there it is."

"You're wrong—it interests me a lot. You see, I'm in a bit of a tangle myself, and I shouldn't wonder if our friend in there has something to do with your tangle as well as mine. I can sometimes put two and two together; from certain little things which have come to my knowledge, if anything does happen to him, I shouldn't wonder if some of his friends did find themselves in rather a tangle."

Baird made no comment; instead, he asked a question.

"Doctor, do you know Sir Clifford Curtis?"

The doctor gave what almost amounted to a little jump.

"Know Sir Clifford Curtis! My word! Don't I know Sir

Clifford Curtis? And doesn't the whole countryside know Sir Clifford Curtis? And doesn't a large part of it wish it didn't? What do you know about that fine gentleman? Is he another friend of yours? Because, if so, this time, saving your presence, you haven't my congratulations."

"He doesn't seem to be highly esteemed in his own country—this is his own country, isn't it? I believes he lives not far from here."

"He does, at a place called Henbean, in an old house built in the time of the first George, and I should say never repaired since. I hadn't the honour of knowing his father, but I understand he was a delectable kind of creature—there was something funny about his manner of leaving the world which has never been quite explained. When he went the present Sir Clifford was God knows where. I have heard that he was in prison in one of the western states of America—that may be embroidery. He came here with apparently just enough money to pay his cab from the station; he's never paid anybody round here anything since. After he'd been here a while a beautiful lady came, with a motor-car and all sorts of pretty things, and it was announced that Lady Clifford Curtis had come to reside with her husband in his ancestral home. It was whispered that he set the dogs at her when she first appeared and emptied every barrel of everything he'd got in the house that would shoot; that again may be embroidery. You know her ladyship?"

"I have met Lady Clifford Curtis."

"Then you've met a remarkably fine woman, fine in every possible sense. Speaking as a mere country sawbones, who once saw active service with His Majesty's colours, I should say that her ladyship is as full of mischief as a cocoanut is of milk, and as dangerous as a bomb which explodes when you touch it. I know nothing of her ladyship's history, except that I've been told that she's a daughter of one of the old Virginian families, but I should like to bet that to one warm episode in her husband's adventurous career there have been twenty in hers; and she's as clever as she is mischievous. She's levied tribute on every man round here. She owes me twenty pounds, besides what her husband owes for medicine and attendance. I called one day at Henbean to hear if he couldn't pay at least a small instalment, and before I was out of the house she had borrowed twenty pounds. I've not been there since, and I'm not going again; I'll cut the debt. Collecting bills on those terms is too expensive an amusement for me."

"How long is it since they were here—Sir Clifford and his wife?"

"Let me see; I've been attending Mrs. Burnett—although she's only Curtis's housekeeper she does pay; I believe she steals the money to do it. I get a good many facts about the family from her. Sir Clifford and his lady left Henbean—it must have been the second week in May."

"You can't give me the exact date?"

"I can; they left Henbean the same day your friend who calls himself Taylor turned up here." The doctor stopped—started—turned to John Baird. "You're not suggesting there's any connection between his coming and their going?"

John Baird seemed to be mildly surprised by the talkative doctor's sudden change of manner.

"I am suggesting nothing; I'm merely inquiring for reasons wholly unconnected with your patient."

"Still, it seems odd that they should have gone—and he came—the same night; because it seems it was in the middle of the night they went; let me see, that was the night of the thirteenth of May. Now I think of it, I've asked myself more than once what happened at Henbean that night; it's queer how dull one can be until something touches a handle which opens a door in one's brain, and one's thoughts come whirling out. Something did happen; early on the morning of the fourteenth I was called in to Mrs. Burnett. Something queer was the matter with her, but I couldn't make out what, and she didn't give me much help with explanations. Between ourselves, I don't know what's the matter with her to this hour; she's still not well. Now, that's odd—and odder still that it never struck me before; Sir Clifford and Lady Curtis left Henbean in the middle of the night of the thirteenth of May; the same night your friend came here with a bullet inside him; and—again the same night—something upset Mrs. Burnett so completely that she's never been the same woman since. Now, on the face of it, it does look as if there were some connection between those three things, doesn't it? What are you thinking about? I wonder what you know. You come down here to see your friend—Mary Jolliffe says you call him Turner—although you didn't know he was your friend; you drop from the clouds, you say something to him which undoes all I've done, and you ask questions about Sir Clifford and Lady Curtis. Mr. Baird, if your friend dies will you be able to come with me to the county police and tell them how he came by his tragic end—and, generally speaking, explain all about it?"

John Baird referred to his watch.

"I'm afraid, doctor, I must return to town; I only came down for an hour or two. You are attributing to me qualities and

knowledge which I do not possess. When is Mr. Taylor likely to be in a condition to see me again?"

"It is quite probable that by the morning Mr. Taylor—as we will call him—will be dead. You talk very lightly about going back to town, but how if I take steps to prevent you? Oh, it's no use your looking at me like that; they could easily be taken."

"I don't quite follow you, Dr. Jordan; you're getting out of my depth."

"You follow me quite well, Mr. Baird. That man in there is your friend, not mine. The wonder is that the Jolliffes haven't sent him to the workhouse infirmary; they'd have been quite within their right if they had."

"You mean that he hasn't paid for what he's had?"

"He's paid—there were twenty five-pound notes in his waistcoat pocket. I took charge of them and I have done the paying. They are not yet all gone. That's everything there was upon him, with the exception of watch, chain, sovereign purse, penknife, and pencil. There was no initial on his linen; not even the maker's name upon any article of clothing. It struck me that he had taken particularly good care to have nothing about him to reveal his identity. You know who he is, and before you go you will have to tell me—or a policeman. If he dies there will have to be an inquest; I shall be the chief witness. A nice figure I shall cut if I have to admit that the man has been lying here all this time, suffering from attempted suicide, or attempted murder, and I have kept my mouth shut. I may tell you, Mr. Baird, that I'm now convinced that there's been nothing suicidal about him; if he dies he will have been murdered. What should I look like if I have to tell the coroner when he asks me what I've found out about him, that a friend of his came down for an hour or two—out of the clouds—and that I let him go again without making a serious attempt to get something out of him which would shed light upon what promises to be a very mysterious tragedy? No, Mr. Baird, I'm sorry to appear disagreeable or officious, but I cannot let you go without your doing or saying something which will relieve me of a much greater responsibility than I care to face. Don't you see that that's reasonable?"

"I do; and since I'm persuaded that you're not a man who allows his tongue to wag, I will do my best to place you in possession of such information as you may think it necessary that you should have. When I have done so you yourself will see that this is eminently a matter in which, at least for the present, the least said the better."

It took John Baird a good half-hour to tell Dr. Jordan all that he desired to know; even then he left Worrall's Farm before the

doctor's curiosity was really assuaged. When he went it was on the understanding that he should return at the earliest possible moment, and that in any event he should be kept posted in how things went with Mr. Taylor.

"Wire me to-night," he observed as he was going, "if you think it desirable, or even possible, to have any sustained conversation with your patient. Immediately on receipt of your wire I will let you know what is the earliest moment at which I can come. Once more, before I leave—you are sure that you would not like to have some surgeon down from town with whom you could talk things over? It is not a case in which money need be spared."

"If it were a case in which I thought two heads would be better than one I'd say so at once, but I've kept him alive so far, when I believe that in the hands of some of your eminent surgeons he would have died, and if any mortal man can keep on keeping him alive, I believe I am he. I tell you again that there is no man in England who knows more about gunshot wounds than I do."

"That's rather a singular person," John Baird told himself as he was leaving Worrall's Farm behind him. "It's refreshing nowadays to meet a man who has not only so much faith in his own powers, but has the courage to admit it. It's as well that for the sake of auld lang syne I attended to that telegram the very first thing, whether Francis lives or dies—and I hope to goodness he won't die. I shouldn't wonder if Worrall's Farm wasn't one of the most likely places in which to apply for information on the subject of the Pall Mall motor-car. So Clifford Curtis lives hereabouts? It strikes me, as it does the doctor, that that's rather an odd coincidence. I wonder what information one could get if one applied at Henbean—that Georgian abode which, according to Dr. Jordan, stands so much in need of repair."

When the fly had proceeded some distance, the passenger addressed the driver.

"I'll get out here; I think I'll walk the rest of the way. It isn't very far, and the walk will do me good. Can you tell me which of the houses hereabouts is Henbean?"

"You take the next turning on your left and it brings you to the front gate; there's a footpath across the fields over the stile just before you come to the gate, which is a short cut to Salisbury."

Mr. Baird thanked the driver for his information, and, the fly having gone on, presently found himself turning into the road to which his attention had been directed; and before very long,

crossing the stile, took the short cut across the fields. He had a good view of the house when he had gone along the path perhaps a quarter of a mile; he could see it through a break in the trees which had evidently been left open to permit of the inhabitants getting a glimpse of the open country. It was a Georgian red-brick house, and one could see at a glance that the doctor had been right in his suggestion that a good deal of money might be spent on it to excellent advantage. Baird's first intention had been to call at the house, pretending that he did not know the family were away, and put questions, the answers to which might tell him a good deal which he would have liked to know. But, anxious though he was for information, he felt that one could pay too much for it; the idea of inducing servants to betray what might be confidences did not appeal to him at all—so he left the house behind and went on across the fields.

After a while he came to what was evidently the high road. In a field on the opposite side some men were digging. There was something about them which attracted his attention. In the first place, it was a meadow in which they were digging, and one does not often dig in meadows which are covered with good old turf. Then there was that about the way in which they did the actual digging which seemed to him to be odd. There were three or four men with spades and a little crowd of eight or ten more men looking on. Perching himself for a moment on the top of the stile which led into the road, Mr. Baird wondered what it was they were digging for; from his post of vantage he had a good view of the proceedings. One of the onlookers seemed to be the owner of the land; something about him conveyed the idea that the digging was being done against his will. Every now and then he appeared to remonstrate with a biggish, square-shouldered, rather bulky person, who seemed to be in command of the party, and whose directions the diggers were doing their best to follow.

As Mr. Baird continued to watch he became conscious that two men were on the road itself, one on his right and one on his eft; they were taking even more interest in him than he was taking in the proceedings in the opposite field. As if by mutual consent, they approached the stile on which he was. Baird noticed particularly the one on his right—the way in which he held himself, the swing with which he walked, the manner in which he brought his feet to the ground.

"If that's not a London policeman I'm no judge of the type. What's he doing here? I rather fancy I've seen the man before, and from the way in which he stares he seems to think that he's seen me."

A sudden idea occurred to Mr. Baird. He glanced again at the man who was directing the diggers; he all at once remembered.

"I'd a dim feeling, directly I looked his way, that that was not the first time I'd seen him, that there was something familiar about the fellow; of course, it's Inspector Hextall! There's no mistake about his being a policeman. What can have brought him from Scotland Yard to look after a job of digging? Hullo! his satellite intends to address me."

The man whom he had recognised as a London policeman proved that he was right by recognising him. He raised his fingers in military fashion to the brim of his bowler hat.

"Excuse me, Mr. Baird, but would you mind not stopping there? My instructions are to keep the road clear."

"Well, keep it clear. I'm not on the road, am I? Under what authority are you acting, anyhow? Where have I seen you before?"

The man left the question unanswered.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Baird, I can't allow you to stop there. You must either go back the way you came or pass on."

"Since when has the high road become private property? I see Inspector Hextall over there. Perhaps you'll be so good as to ask him to come and speak to me. What's going on in that field?"

At that moment an exclamation came from one of the diggers, then from the others. The little crowd gathered round the sort of pit which they had dug. Leaning over as if to look at something which the spades had just revealed, Inspector Hextall's voice rang out loud and clear.

"Wait a minute, you men; don't do anything till I tell you." Turning from the diggers, he looked across at the person on the stile. His voice was raised in the tones of authority. "Now you, sir, will you be so good as to move either in one direction or the other? Kenton, request that gentleman to pass on and see that he does it."

Kenton—the man addressed—came into rather disagreeable proximity to John Baird; the man on his left came near him also.

"Now, sir," said Kenton, "will you be so good as to pass on? There's something going on over there which it is particularly wished to keep private. Pass on, sir, please."

John Baird recognised the futility of arguing with two constables, with, for all he knew, half a dozen more close at hand. Descending from the stile, he passed on towards Salisbury. He was aware that the two policemen were keeping rather closer

to his heels than he quite cared for, but he never once looked round, and when he had gone perhaps fifty yards they stopped and let him continue alone.

"I wonder," he asked himself as he went, "what that little, unexpected episode means, what they are digging for, and what they have found."

He was still wondering when he reached Salisbury.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HER DECISION

JOHN BAIRD, having come through the clapper-gate, had scarcely taken a dozen paces when he saw a feminine figure advancing towards him along the path which led from the park. He had been conscious of a curious physical and mental tremblement before; when he saw that figure his singular condition intensified to such a degree that he felt that unless he held himself well in hand he would behave in some fashion which would make him ridiculous in the lady's eyes. It was necessary that he should keep on reminding himself that, although he had seen a good deal of this young person when she was still a child, he had only met her once since she had attained to riper years, and that, therefore, to all intents and purposes, she was practically a stranger. Whatever he would have liked to do, the proper way in which to greet her was to raise his hat and offer his hand.

Therefore his amazement was all the greater when, regardless of the somewhat conspicuous place in which they were, oblivious of the canons which rule the conduct of two persons of the opposite sex who are but slight acquaintances, this young woman, at sight of him, not only quickened her pace, but when she came quite close, she put her arms about his neck and broke into a mixture of tears, laughter, and exclamations.

"Thank goodness you've come," she cried. "Oh, if you only knew how I've longed to see you."

Her voice broke, emotion choked her utterance, apparently she could get no further. His emotions were also of a kind which he would have found it very difficult to diagnose. Had time been given him, he would have said that this was a position in which he had not the slightest notion what to do. But time was not given him; there was the young woman, there was her obvious distress. She had put her arms about his neck, the least he could do was to put his about her waist; he could feel her trembling so that it seemed to him that if he were to loose her she would be sure to fall; so he did not loose her, but held her closer instead. As he did so, and her girlish form shivered when it came against his own, his sensations were of a sort which, only

a few moments before, he could have declared never could come to him again.

"My dear child," he murmured; he would have liked to say something a great deal stronger, but with an effort he refrained. Therefore it seemed ungrateful of her, instead of applauding his self-restraint, to start back and regard him with eyes that flashed, though they were still dimmed by tears.

"I'm not a child!" Under the circumstances even her tone seemed unbecoming; she positively broke into something which was very like a sudden flame of anger, as if he had said or done anything which could justify such a display. "I've told you before not to call me a child, and you're not to; the sooner you understand that I'm very far from being a child—in experience I'm an old woman—the better it will be. Will you please to remember that I'm not a child?"

He thought, so far as he was capable of thinking anything, that at that moment she looked more of a child than ever; a delicious child; but certainly nothing which recalled in even the dimmest degree a feminine antique. But with that gleam in her eyes, on her cheeks, about her lips, he did not dare to tell her so. In fact he did not know what to say to her; he made rather a mess of it when at last he did say something.

"I wish that your years were mine; you might call me a child all day long if they were."

"I shouldn't be so silly. Besides, I was reading not long ago that one does not measure age by years. For instance, in some of the London slums babies are born old. I think that perhaps I was."

Again he was at a loss for words. He did not venture to smile; her intention being at the moment to impress him, he judged it better not to credit her with a sense of humour. He endeavoured to get the conversation on to less debatable ground.

"You got my telegram?" He took it for granted, since she was there to meet him, that she had had his telegram; but there are occasions when the atmosphere is disposed to be strained, when even unnecessary questions are to be commended.

She took his inquiry a little hardly. Her bearing became almost severe.

"Yes, I did have your telegram; and if I hadn't I don't know what I should have done. I wrote to you on Thursday and this is Saturday, and there was no acknowledgment of my letter, nor anything to show that you'd ever had it, though I had told you things which must have shown you that I was being driven nearly out of my mind, and you promised, when I saw you, that you would do anything you possibly could to—to help me."

Just about there her voice failed her again. "As things were, if you couldn't send me a line directly you had my letter, you might have—have sent me a wire; instead of—waiting till only half an hour ago. Although you must have realised how anxious I was for sympathy and help, you waited till you had actually started to let me know that you were coming; it was only by a miracle that I got it at all. Indeed, in this house nowadays it's only by a miracle that one gets anything. Everyone seems to be watching everyone else. Eleanor's husband suspects me—though he only knows what of; he suspects Eleanor—I am sorry to say it of my own sister—with very good reason; I believe he suspects the doctor and the nurse and every soul about the place. Do you know that Eleanor's dying?"

They had crossed the field and were in the spacious park which surrounded the house. Before he could speak she turned into a path which wound through underwood and bracken.

"We'd better go this way," she said. "Perhaps this way we shall escape the notice of the dozen people who nowadays are always spying on one!"

It seemed not unlikely, since the bushes and ferns in their summer luxuriance grew in some places higher than a man's head. The grassy path which pursued its devious way among them was so narrow that it was not always easy for two to keep abreast; yet when he fell behind she seemed to be annoyed.

"Why can't you keep beside me?" she inquired. "I don't want to shout." She was speaking rather loudly at that moment. "You know perfectly well that what I have to say must reach no other ears than yours; and how can I whisper when I don't even know how far you are behind me?"

He ranged himself at her side, though space was limited.

"The path is so narrow," he observed with meekness—the whole atmosphere of the position was so unexpected that he was himself surprised at his own meekness—"that there's barely room for me to walk at your side, unless I keep very close."

"And have I hinted that I object to your keeping very close? Of course if my near neighbourhood is objectionable to you, as you told me quite frankly it used to be, then that's another matter. In that case pray keep as far behind me as you like."

He made no comment on this speech. He understood that there was something about Miss Pauline Pearse which, athough he did not understand it, was not altogether unpleasant He harked back to her previous observation.

"Were you serious in saying that your sister was dying?"

"Perfectly; why do you suppose I wasn't? I suppose you

did do me the honour to read the letter which you have not acknowledged ?"

"I have not had a moment in which to acknowledge it, as presently, if you will permit me, I will make quite clear."

"I daresay; some people can explain anything. Eleanor is dying—at least she's pretending that she is, though, to my mind, it's horrible. What she's afraid of I don't quite know, and I don't want to think: but she's frightfully afraid of something—something dreadful—or she wouldn't try such a horrible means of escape. Do you think it's the police she's afraid of?"

He was so long in considering that the young lady turned hotly towards him, as if she resented his prolonged silence.

"Can't you answer? Didn't you hear what I said? Do you think it's the police she's afraid of, and that that is making her do this horrible thing?"

"I think it possible that your sister may be afraid of one or two things."

She stood still, facing him, and, taking him by the arm, drew him round till he faced her. She lowered her voice.

"What have you found out?"

"I've not, as you phrase it, found out anything, but I've stumbled upon something which has set me thinking. The mischief is that I'm not sure that it's a subject which I ought to discuss with you."

"Pray, why not?"

"Well, for various reasons."

"Name one of them."

There seemed to be something in her tone which gave him courage to smile.

"Your temper used to be a little uncertain in the old days."

"Did it? That also you told me when I saw you last. All your recollections of me seem to be unpleasant ones. Why need you make a remark about my temper when I ask you to give me a reason why you will not tell me what you have found out about my sister? You promised—I'm sorry to have again to remind you—that you'd do everything you could to help me. Was it merely the sort of promise which one makes to a child—you say I'm a child—merely to keep it from asking questions and in its proper place as a thing which should be seen and not heard?"

"You are not just to me, Miss Pearse."

"Am I not, Mr. Baird? Miss Pearse indeed! when you used to take me on your knee. Is it necessary that I should remind you of that? One would think we had only met the other day, when, from my point of view, you are the oldest, and indeed the only friend I have in the world. However, it's no use our

continuing the discussion. You go back to town, or find someone with whom you'll be able to talk about any subject. I may as well go and throw myself into the lake, or do something equally sensible—you won't care. And as you've already made it sufficiently clear that, as a child, I'm incapable of doing good to anyone, even to my own sister, I wish you good-day, Mr. Baird."

He prevented her from carrying out her apparent intention to march off to some unknown spot and leave him to the enjoyment of his own society. His air of awkwardness seemed to fall from him; he all at once assumed an air of authority which caused her to regard him with evident surprise.

"If you have ceased to be a child, will you be so good as to put behind you childish airs and graces? Since I saw you I've never ceased to do all I can to help you and your sister. Do you know Francis Turner?"

"I do not."

There was something in her air which caused him to press his question further "Does she—does your sister?"

"I know very little about her acquaintances; I never heard his name until I came upon it by chance the other day. You remember those letters which I told you she asked me to destroy? I have since come upon something which makes me think they were written to her by a Francis Turner, though who Francis Turner is I have not the vaguest notion. Do you know him?"

"He is one of my most intimate acquaintances; I believe he looks upon me as one of his oldest friends."

"There appear to be a good many persons who look upon you as their oldest friend; you are fortunate. What sort of person is he?"

"He's one of the best fellows in the world, and also I am afraid I must add one of the most feather-brained. He does a thing first and thinks afterwards, if he ever thinks at all; but in one respect, if what people say is true, he's old-fashioned; he would rather anything should happen to himself than that a woman should suffer even in the slightest degree from anything he had said or done."

Miss Pearse sighed. "One could wish there were more men about like that. I think I should like your Francis Turner."

"That's what your sister seems to have thought."

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Baird?"

"Look here, Pauline. I'm going to call you Pauline."

"Very well, call me Pauline. I have no objection to your calling me Pauline; considering that I used to sit upon your knee, why should I object?"

Her references to that far-off period when she used to sit upon his knee seemed to the gentleman to be slightly invidious ; he was not sure that he liked them.

" You seem to be rather fond of reminding me of what took place before the flood."

" Since I was there that clearly shows that I certainly am no longer a child. Please, will you continue the remark you were about to make when you observed that you intended to call me Pauline, as if I objected. I said I thought that I might like your Francis Turner, and you said it seemed that Eleanor thought so also. I asked what you meant by that, and I ask it again."

The gentleman seemed a little nonplussed. This young woman might be, as he had said, a child, but she had the knack of placing him in positions in which, judging from his demeanour, he might almost have been the younger of the two. He seemed to find a difficulty in answering her question—ending by asking another.

" Do you know what your sister did on the thirteenth of May ? "

" I don't. I've gathered snippety bits of information from various persons and I've tried to piece them together, with practically no result whatever."

" Lord Ditchling does me the honour to suggest that she spent the greater part of it with me."

" With you ! " She looked at him as if she were more than surprised. " I never heard that. I thought that you'd practically seen nothing of her since the day she was married. I had no idea that you were in the habit of spending whole days with her."

" You are right. Lord Ditchling is wrong. Since she became Lady Ditchling I have scarcely exchanged a dozen sentences with her. She seems to have spent the thirteenth of May with someone, but it certainly was not with me."

" What makes Lord Ditchling think it was ? He's not the sort of person who jumps at conclusions, and he would not think such a thing as that unless he believed himself to have good reasons."

" Do you remember the handkerchief which, as you told me in your letter, the porter brought you from Exeter station ? "

" Perfectly ; someone has stolen it "

" That someone was Lord Ditchling."

" Lord Ditchling ! Do you mean to say he came to my drawer and took that handkerchief out ? How did he get at the drawer ? What a thing for him to do ! It was locked ; I had the key. You don't mean to say that he broke open my private drawer ? "

" I can't tell you. That handkerchief belonged to me."

" That handkerchief belonged to you. What are you talking

about? It was marked—why, it was marked B; is that you?"

"It is, short for John Baird. If, as you say, you put the handkerchief in one of your drawers, I presume that Lord Ditchling took it out."

"I never heard such a thing in my life. You know I gave the handkerchief to Eleanor; she gave it back to me because she thought it would be safer in my charge. I put it in a drawer in my wardrobe which I keep locked up—I always keep it locked up. What can Lord Ditchling have been thinking of to break open a drawer belonging to me? It looks to me very like committing burglary!"

"He came to my rooms and he confronted me with that handkerchief. He asked me if it was mine. I told him it was, because it is: then he told me how it had been found all soaked with blood in the carriage in which Lady Ditchling travelled from London—the whole story as you told it in your letter; and from that he drew certain inferences which are all wrong."

"Goodness! To think of his condescending to play the spy like that. Didn't I tell you that in this house everyone spied upon everyone else?"

"That pocket handkerchief was not his only piece of evidence. In the pocket of the motor-coat which Lady Ditchling wore that day he found a hat, a soft felt hat, which you can squash up till it becomes almost small enough to put in your waistcoat pocket. That hat belongs to me."

"Really? Then if your handkerchief and your hat were found under such peculiar circumstances—with whom did she spend the day if it wasn't you? I suppose you carried your own handkerchief, and I take it you wore your own hat."

"As it happened, I did neither. I have at this moment no actual proof of what I am going to say to you which could be produced in a court of law, but I have my own reasons for believing that that day Francis Turner had my handkerchief in his pocket and my hat on his head."

"Then he must be rather a remarkable person. Does he always make free with your wardrobe in that fashion?"

"Pauline, just now you asked me of what I thought your sister was afraid; again I have no actual proof of what I'm going to say, but I can guess."

"Oh, anyone can guess. I can guess."

"Can you? Then guess."

"Pray what is your guess?"

"Mine is a guess which is founded on something; I wish it weren't."

"You haven't said yet what it is you've guessed. I'm waiting to hear."

"Pauline, yesterday Francis Turner telegraphed to me to go and see him. He had disappeared since the thirteenth of May, and no one knew what had become of him. I found him in a farm near Salisbury, on the verge of death. He was not merely pretending, as you suggest your sister is; his plight was real enough. I told you that he's the sort of man who would do anything to shield a woman. I believe that's what he has been doing. He is there under a feigned name; he has refused to give any account of himself or of how he came to be in the state in which he is."

"In what state is he? What has happened to him? Is that what I'm to guess? I'd rather you told me."

"He has been shot."

The girl's eyes seemed all at once to dilate; her cheeks paled.

"Are you suggesting—you can't be suggesting—you don't mean that you wish me to think——"

Each time she left her sentence unfinished, as if she were conscious that the question she would not ask was written large on her face, in her eyes, in her whole bearing.

"He is shielding someone, so much is certain; I believe that someone to be your sister."

"But why? What conceivable grounds can you have for making such a terrible accusation?"

"I am making no accusation. You asked me of what I think she is afraid; I tell you what I think. You and I must be frank with each other. Is not that what you want? If not, tell me; in that case I will keep my thoughts to myself. But if I do that how am I to put you in a position in which you can help and guard your sister, if you have not the faintest notion what you are to guard her from? I may tell you that, so far, I believe myself to be the only person who has the faintest idea of the danger with which she is threatened. Shall I tell you what I believe that is, or would you rather I did not? The decision is with you."

"Then—tell me."

CHAPTER XXIX

A MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

For some instants they had been standing under the shadow of a great oak which raised its majestic form far above the surrounding undergrowth. John Baird looked about him before he spoke again.

"After what you've told me," he said, "I have what perhaps is a ridiculous feeling that there's a listener behind every bush. I think I should prefer to tell you what I have to say while we're moving."

They passed on together down the path, she not saying a word. Since he spoke in such lowered tones he had to keep very close to her in order that she should hear.

"You understand that, while what I am going to say to you in a sense is surmise, it is in reality a good deal more. I cannot at this moment go into all the grounds on which it is based. I can only ask you to accept my assurance that they are pretty sound ones. Now let me get to the point of what I have come to tell you. Pauline, I am afraid your sister has been flirting with Francis Turner; I also think it possible that what she meant to be flirtation he took to be something more."

"You know I can't help admitting that Eleanor has sometimes what I cannot help but call a flirtatious way about her. That's a horrid word, but just now I can't think of one which expresses better what I mean."

"I suppose that there is no man living who is better able to appreciate the truth of what you say than I am."

She had spoken with an air of simple gravity which, if he had been in a position to notice it, he might have found bewitching. She glanced suddenly round at him, as if impelled by something in his tone. Their arms were swinging close together; she touched his hand with her fingers.

"If you knew how sorry I was for you," she whispered.

"Were you? That was sweet of you. May I ask what you knew about it?"

"I knew everything. Do you suppose I haven't eyes, or ears? I told her what I thought of her when I heard what she was going

to do. You may laugh, but I've never ceased thinking of you since, because I was so sorry."

"I was sorry for myself at the time, and indeed for some time afterwards. To be candid, I only ceased to be sorry when—but perhaps I'd better not go on."

"Why had you better not go on? Why do you always stop when you are just going to say the thing to which I want to listen? What were you going to say? I insist upon your saying it."

Again she stood still, and again the flame came into her eyes which seemed to be as mirrors to her most transient moods.

"If you insist, why, then I'll tell you. I was sorry for myself until—I met you."

She seemed for a second to be considering; then, as an inkling of his meaning came to her, her face and neck and ears, the whole upper part of her, became fiery red. She went striding on; it was an instant or two before he was at her side again.

"I did not mean to offend you." She was silent, although he paused. "You insisted on my telling you. Now that I have obeyed we will consider the subject closed. I'll go on with my story."

He continued as though there had been no departure from the matter they had been discussing:

"I believe it was Francis Turner who passed the greater part of the thirteenth of May with your sister. I think they met by appointment, and at the ast moment she salved her conscience by a pretence at postponement. I believe she wrote to him a letter saying she had changed her mind, and that he wasn't to come, which, however, she posted so that it did not reach his address until he had already started. That she expected him seems pretty clear, because I take it she was at the appointed place at the appointed time. What happened when they met there seems at present to be nothing to show, except this—that when it came to parting they quarrelled. I have been lying awake all night thinking, and the conclusion at which I have arrived is this."

She kept her eyes fixed on the ground, and indeed his companion's whole bearing had so changed that at last the gentleman noticed it.

"I hope I'm not boring you, and that you're not taking it for granted that what I'm telling you is the merest guess-work without any solid foundation. If so I'll stop till I can bring you the tangible proofs; I fancy they can be easily procured."

"I don't know why you should talk like that to me, as if I

were not listening. I am listening. Please, will you go on? Don't look at me, but just go on."

He seemed to find it rather difficult to comply with her request not to look at her, but he managed to go on.

"Whatever your sister may have intended, I suspect that Turner rather took it for granted that she meant a good deal more than a mere flirtation, and that he met her that thirteenth of May expecting, hoping, and intending to elope with her."

Then the girl did look up.

"Do you really think that?"

"I think it's possible—reminding you that I've already pointed out what a feather-brained sort of person he is. And when they met, I shouldn't be surprised if what took place was something like this: I really shouldn't wonder if they drove about pretty nearly the whole day in your sister's motor-car—she was driving, they were alone in it—arguing the question."

"Arguing what question?"

"The question as to whether they should elope."

"How absurd, as if such a question could be argued! Do you take Eleanor to be a perfect idiot?"

"I take her to be a lady with a taste for playing with fire. I even think it possible that she had gone so far as to give Turner the impression that she would elope with him, and when he found that she wouldn't she was yet content to spend the better part of a day in explaining why she wouldn't, while he did his utmost to explain her explanation away."

"But what sort of a man can Mr. Francis Turner be if he can behave like that to another man's wife?"

"Perhaps one day you'll meet him, and then you'll be able to judge for yourself."

"I sincerely trust I shall never meet him; I'd go a good long way to avoid him."

John Baird, thinking of the handsome, sunny, light-hearted, careless, susceptible gentleman he knew so well, said nothing.

"I offer no excuse for him; I am only telling you what I think occurred—of what I believe your sister to be afraid. As the day went on it is conceivable that the argument began to have more a flavour of bitterness. The lady wanted the gentleman to leave her, and he would not. He told her, feeling himself aggrieved, what he judged to be some home truths, which she resented. There was probably more than one scene."

"As she was driving him in her motor-car?"

"As she was driving him in her motor-car. Knowing both the parties as I do, I can believe that they quarrelled more than once and made it up again; more than once she yielded, then

drew back, until, towards evening, there was what I hope you'll forgive me for describing as a row royal. Turner's temper is not always to be relied upon"—there came a quick glance from the girl at his side—"when he does get roused he's not easy to manage. I can conceive of him as telling her that she had promised, and that she would be made to keep her promise; that she should not play with him as she had done with other men. And then perhaps he said things which he should not have said even under the extremest provocation, and tried to do things which were still less excusable. Your sister had a revolver in the car. She also is a person whose temper sometimes gets the upper hand."

"You appear to think that that kind of thing is in the family."

The girl's tone was warm; her companion's was coolness itself.

"A person without a temper is a negligible quantity."

"Indeed, is that so? And pray what do you consider to be a negligible quantity?"

"I certainly don't consider you to be a negligible quantity."

The girl seemed to jump at the conclusion that his words conveyed much more than was on the surface.

"If you mean that my temper is so bad——!"

She stopped, as if at the sight of something which she saw upon his face. When he spoke there seemed to be something in his tone which startled her, so that she drew a little away from him.

"As at present advised, I would not have you different from what you are in one jot or tittle. Later I may discover points in your character which I should like to have amended; when I do I'll tell you what they are."

She seemed on a sudden to have grown afraid of him. Her face had gone all red again.

"How dare you speak to me like that, as if—as if I cared what you think, or as if my character were any affair of yours?"

"I was remarking that your sister's temper, like that of other people, sometimes gets a little out of hand. Quite possibly there came a moment in which both she and Turner were beside themselves with rage. That revolver may have been in her coat pocket; or, the car being at a standstill, she may have taken it out of the place in which she kept it in the body. What precisely happened I can only imagine. Turner pushed her too far; she had the revolver in her hand; she threatened to do something with it; he tried to snatch it from her; it went off. Both the parties, I take it, were in a whirl of wild agitation. Neither knew clearly what was happening. There was a report; she probably saw him lying on the ground. There were probably several instants in which she suffered almost as much as her folly

deserved. She saw him on the ground at her feet, something was staining the light summer coat which he wore; as she bent over she perceived that it was blood—she realised that she had shot him. Just then, possibly, she heard someone coming along the road, or she thought that she heard someone. Panic seized her, she quite lost her head, having nearly lost it half a dozen times already. She took to her heels and she ran, as I suppose people do run whose nerves have been shattered by some terrible shock, and who fear that the devil is upon them. She ran away, wholly oblivious of the man she had left upon the road and of the car which stood close by him. You understand, of course, that I am merely giving you a picture drawn by my imagination."

"Then your imagination must be a very lively one."

"As I told you, I spent the greater part of the night in thinking things out, and I am giving you the result. She did not stay to see what had occurred—she does not know to this hour; what is worse, she dare not inquire. Quite probably she thinks him dead."

"And is he dead?"

"He was not when I saw him yesterday afternoon; but he was so near to death that he quite possibly is now. I arranged with the doctor who was in attendance to wire the moment a change took place in either direction; I think it very possible that when I get back to the village I shall find a telegram waiting for me."

"And if he dies, and the picture which you have drawn from imagination is a real one, what will happen to Eleanor?"

"I do not care to think; I hope with all my heart and soul that he won't die."

"No wonder she's in such a state, knowing nothing, fearing everything. Then do you think she had anything to do with what happened to Mr. Andrew Tozer?"

"I should say nothing. The after-adventures of her motor-car after she ran away from it are to me so far a mystery. Yet there again one may venture on guesses. There was her motor-car left stranded by the roadside. Someone coming along, perceiving it to be a derelict, used it in a manner which is puzzling the police; but that your sister had anything to do with its presence in Pall Mall I do not believe for a moment."

"But the police suspect her, I am sure that they suspect her, or why do they watch the house as they are doing? Ackroyd, Lord Ditchling's chauffeur, says that there are at least six of them about the place, and Lord Ditchling told me that he meets a policeman wherever he goes. I feel certain that they think they know something which would justify them in arresting her.

If they do, after what you have told me, it seems as if there were no escape for her anywhere; if she proves herself innocent of one thing, she will have to plead guilty to the other It looks as if she were quite right in wanting to die. You've not brought me much comfort, or help either. I did so look forward to your coming, and now you've made the world darker than ever, and the outlook perfectly hopeless."

"I do not think you're quite entitled to say that. If Turner doesn't die——"

"But if he does—and you seem to think it extremely likely that he will—what an awful situation Eleanor will be in then."

"If he lives, as I prefer on every ground to take it that he will, the darkness of which you speak will soon be cleared away. Whereas, if matters were as you fear, the position would be hopeless indeed."

She had been glancing behind her while he was speaking. Now she caught him by the sleeve of his coat

"There's someone coming through the bracken," she whispered. "What shall we do? I'd better go; I don't want anyone to see us talking together."

"You are too late. It is Lord Ditchling who is coming; he has seen us already."

His lordship unmistakably had, and the sight did not seem to have given him pleasure. He came bursting through the great green fronds in what clearly was a state of considerable agitation. His anger, indeed, was so great that he forgot his manners. By way of greeting he caught the girl by the arm and pushed her rudely on one side. Having done that he seemed to be at a loss for words with which to express his feelings; indeed, each of the three seemed to be in the same predicament, a fact on which the newcomer presently commented.

"You don't seem to have much to say for yourselves, either of you. I congratulate you, Mr. Baird. First it is my wife, and then it is her sister; or is her sister merely acting as a go-between?"

Then John Baird spoke.

"You misunderstand the situation entirely," he said.

"Do I? Then I'll take care you shan't. This is private property, Mr. Baird. I allow the villagers to walk in certain parts of my grounds so long as they behave themselves; but not such persons as you. I entirely object to your presence on my property. Is it necessary to make that—hint stronger, Mr. Baird?"

Raising his hat, John Baird was about to act on the "hint" which the other had given when someone was heard calling on the edge of the thicket.

"My lord, oh, my lord."

Apparently the speaker had seen the trio standing together, because he came scrambling towards them. He seemed to be one of the house servants.

"What are you making all this bother about?" demanded his master. "What do you want with me?"

"My lord, the doctor told me to come and fetch you at once. They are looking for you all over the park."

"Why should they do that? What's the matter with you, man? Can't you speak?"

The haste which the man had made did seem to have deprived him of some of his breath. The answer to his master's question came from him in gasps.

"Her—ladyship's—dying."

Pauline, returning to John Baird's side, gripped his arm with both her hands, as if she feared that he would leave her.

CHAPTER XXX

IN HER LADYSHIP'S CHAMBER

LORD DITCHLING set off towards the house with a rapidity which did credit to his years. The manservant who had acted as messenger hesitated, stared at John Baird and the young lady as if to ascertain what it was they proposed to do, then went after his master. Directly his back was turned the girl said to John Baird, speaking as if she were afraid of being overheard:

"Don't go! Come to the house! I may want you!"

The gentleman seemed as if the lady's suggestion were not altogether to his taste.

"I can hardly do that after what your brother-in-law has just now said. I don't wish my misunderstanding with him to become worse than it is already."

The girl was insistent; her grip tightened on his arm.

"I may want you: you mustn't leave me, you mustn't. I daren't let you go. I don't know what may be happening in the house. You can't go. You must come with me and see what's happening."

Her cheeks had grown so white, her heart seemed to be so in her mouth, she was in such a tremor of excitement, that it seemed to him—in spite of all Lord Ditchling had said—that resistance to her wishes was out of the question. Lord Ditchling and his servant had scrambled through the bracken and the undergrowth; John Baird and the girl made a way of their own, stepping out when they reached the open ground, with the evident intention of putting their best feet foremost. They exchanged some disjointed remarks as they went along, he beginning with a question.

"Do you think she is really dying?"

She shook her head; took a few steps in silence; then spoke.

"Of course not. I don't suppose she's any more near dying than I am. It's a plot between her, and the doctor, and the nurse."

"But I don't quite follow the idea."

"If they put her in a coffin and screw down the lid someone will open it again and she'll get out, and go right away. She

thinks she need fear nothing if people suppose that she's been buried"

"It's not so easy to make people suppose that. What are they going to put in the coffin to take her place?"

"I can't tell you. I expect they've made their plans. I prefer to have nothing to do with them."

"If their plot succeeds, which seems to me to be extremely unlikely, any one of a thousand things may cause it to go all wrong; but if they succeed, and she does get away, at least she'll have to tell you where she's gone; that will make a conspirator of you. She has no right to expect you to associate yourself with such a business."

"I don't know. I can't tell you. I'd rather not speak of it. Please don't speak of it"

Presently they reached the entrance to the house.

"Who's that standing at the bottom of the steps?" asked the girl.

Marble steps rose on either side to the terrace from which the house was reached. At the foot of each flight a man was standing, an authoritative something in their bearing which struck Baird as ominous.

"They're policemen," he told her half beneath his breath. "I'm afraid we're going to have trouble."

The girl pressed her hand against her breast as if something hurt her. She spoke with an effort.

"They won't dare to touch her if they hear that she's dying. Perhaps she knew they were coming, and that made her die so soon."

They ascended the steps in silence, the men at the foot eyeing them intently as they went. When they entered the great hall two other men came forward; one of them addressed the girl. His tone was not discourteous, but to her it seemed to be stern.

"You are Miss Pearse; I must see your sister, Lady Ditchling, at once." He was a tall, not bad-looking man, with an iron-grey moustache.

Again the girl pressed her hand to her side, as if the pain were worse.

"You can't see her—possibly; she is very ill."

"I am afraid that makes no difference, Miss Pearse. I must see her, even if she's dying."

"She is dying." There was that in the way in which the girl was holding herself which induced Baird to put his arm through hers.

The stranger's manner was still not uncivil—it was persistent

"I am sorry to hear that, Miss Pearse, but, as I said, I'm

afraid it makes no difference, I still must see her. We know she's upstairs. Will you take me to her, or shall I go up without you? I can find the way."

John Baird interposed. He was conscious that servants were peeping at them from the back of the hall.

"Who are you, sir, that you should address Miss Pearse—who has just received news of Lady Ditchling's serious illness—in such a way?"

"I am an officer of police, Mr. Baird, as I believe you are aware."

"Why do you say that I am aware of it?"

"Because I believe it to be correct; I fancy Miss Pearse also knows that I am. I have a warrant for the arrest of Lady Ditchling. It is my duty to execute that warrant with the least possible delay. I cannot stop here talking to you about what you know perfectly well already. If Miss Pearse will not take me up to her sister I must go by myself. I may remark that it will not be the slightest use for Lady Ditchling to attempt to escape—if she should be so unwise as to think of such a thing—I have my men all round the house"

He moved towards the staircase. As he had his foot on the first step someone, leaning over the banisters above, exclaimed: "Lady Ditchling is dead."

The announcement was followed by what seemed to be a singular silence—as if each of those who heard hardly knew what to make of it. The girl had drawn a little away from John Baird; she moved closer to him again—she seemed to have an instinctive tendency to regard him as a place of refuge. Careless of onlookers, he put his arm about her waist, in a fashion which scarcely suggested that they were but slight acquaintances. The officer stood still with his foot on the first tread of the staircase. He turned to the man who stood just behind him, who appeared to be an understrapper, and he said in a perfectly audible tone of voice:

"Lady Ditchling has died at a very convenient moment."

The man smiled as if he saw something humorous in his superior's words. The servants at the back of the hall came a little forward, as if their curiosity was too much for their discretion. Feet could be heard fluttering about on the landing above. The officer continued:

"It will be my unpleasant duty to arrest Lady Ditchling—dead."

He began to ascend the stairs, his underling keeping just a tread behind. Miss Pearse, her voice all of a tremor, said to Baird:

"Don't let him—don't let him do it."

John Baird, quitting her side, mounting the noble staircase three steps at a time, quickly reached the officer—passed him, placed himself in his way.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

The officer, forced willy-nilly to stop, looked his questioner very straight in the face.

"It's no business of yours, Mr. Baird, what I am going to do; nor have you any right to ask me. Stand out of my way, sir."

"You are not going to desecrate with your presence that dead lady's chamber. Have you no sense of decency?"

"Once before, Mr. Baird, you took a liberty with an officer of the law—not very far from here; take my advice and don't attempt anything of that sort again. Once more I ask you to stand aside."

"Don't you understand that Lord Ditchling is probably beside himself with grief—that this lady has just died? If you must go through this farce of pretending to arrest what is left of her, you can at least wait a few minutes in order to give the bereaved husband an opportunity to recover from the first shock of his loss."

For answer the officer turned to his subordinate.

"Fetch those two men who are at the bottom of the steps."

The man went quickly back into the hall. His superior turned to Baird. "I am going to arrest Lady Ditchling, dead or alive, at once; if you attempt to interfere with me in the slightest degree in the execution of my duty I'll arrest you also. If you suppose yourself to be above the law, you will quickly learn that you are mistaken."

The two men had entered the hall and were crossing towards the staircase with the one who had gone to fetch them. Half a dozen servants were gathered in a group below, watching the proceedings with excited interest.

"Now, Mr. Baird, are you going to get out of my way or am I to make you my prisoner?"

The girl rushed up the stairs.

"You don't understand," she exclaimed, "that my sister has only just died! You can't wish to force your way into the room where she is lying dead; you can't want to do a thing like that."

The officer said to his subordinate:

"Take this young woman away."

A man took the girl by the arm. John Baird sprang down.

"Don't you dare to touch her! Take your hand away."

The second he moved the officer passed up. He was already

on the landing above before Baird awoke to his manœuvre. As he turned towards the Countess's room someone came out of it and barred his way, demanding:

"Who are you, sir? What's the meaning of this scandalous scene?"

"I am Sergeant Griffin of Scotland Yard. I have a warrant in my pocket for the arrest of the Countess of Ditchling which I am instructed to execute at once. You, I believe, are Dr. Norris, who has been in attendance on her ladyship. You are probably going to tell me that she is dead. It is my duty to inform you, Dr. Norris, that my instructions are to allow that to make no difference. I am going to place her ladyship under formal arrest whether she's dead or alive."

"And what can you possibly gain by arresting a corpse? It's scandalous."

"That is your opinion, Dr. Norris, which is without interest to me. I must do my duty. I may as well tell you, doctor, that I was prepared for something like this. I have a number of men about the house in order to be ready for all eventualities. Stand aside, sir, and let me enter that room."

The doctor let him pass, a very curious expression on his countenance. He was a man of about forty, with black hair, clean-shaven face, and high cheekbones. One felt that he was not a person who was easily disconcerted—yet he looked disconcerted just then.

Sergeant Griffin opened the door of the bedroom and went in, without any preliminary announcement to those within of his coming. A grey-haired woman came hastily towards him. A silent figure lay on the great bed. Lord Ditchling, seated on a chair at the bedside, stared fixedly at it. He appeared to be unconscious of his surroundings, as if he were in a waking dream; he was leaning a little forward, rigid, motionless, staring with unblinking eyes. Clearly he was unaware that anyone had come into the room.

The grey-haired woman seemed to misunderstand the meaning of the stranger's intrusion. She whispered:

"Whoever you are, will you please take his lordship away? I must lay her ladyship out; it ought to be done at once."

The sergeant's eyes were roving round the room; his manner was a trifle grim.

"Are you the nurse?"

"I am; it's my duty to perform the last offices for her ladyship—poor dear! Who are you, sir?"

The sergeant repeated what had probably become to him a sort of formula:

"I am Sergeant Griffin of Scotland Yard, and it is my duty to arrest Lady Ditchling; I am sorry, but I must do my duty. You say she is dead?"

"Oh, sir! are you a policeman? But you've come too late; her ladyship died a few minutes ago—died without saying a word."

The woman changed countenance. She seemed to find it hard to meet the sergeant's steady gaze; one suspected her of being more uneasy than she chose to appear. The sergeant repeated her words, giving them quite a different intonation.

"She died without saying a word. Is that so? Presently I shall request you to give me an exact statement of all that has occurred."

He moved towards the bed. The Earl, on the other side, still seemed to be oblivious of his presence. Bending over, he steadily regarded the face which was turned towards him.

"Who closed her eyes?"

The nurse was behind him, so possibly he did not notice how she started. There was a perceptible interval before she answered.

"I did."

"You are sure of that?"

"Of course I'm sure. What a question."

"I've always understood that it is not easy to keep the eyes of a dead person closed, especially immediately after death, without placing coins, or something of the kind, upon the eyelids."

"Sometimes that is so, but it isn't by any means always the case, as you can see for yourself."

"I see that her eyes keep very tightly shut."

He put out his hand and touched them with his fingers. The nurse began to exclaim.

"You mustn't do that! Because you're a policeman there's no reason why you shouldn't behave yourself. How dare you touch her under his lordship's very nose. Please will you take his lordship away? Don't I tell you I've got to wash her and lay her out?"

The woman spoke like one who was in extreme agitation, which served to make the officer's perfect calmness the more conspicuous. Ignoring her importunity, he continued to regard the face upon the pillow.

"Of what did she die?"

"Here is the doctor," said the woman, as the opening door admitted Dr. Norris. "You'd better ask him."

"That is what I propose to do. Dr. Norris, of what did Lady Ditchling die?"

The Earl of Ditchling had glanced up when the sergeant had touched her ladyship's eyes with the tips of his fingers. He recognised his presence with what, under the circumstances, was an air of singular unconcern; eyeing him quietly as if it were the most natural thing in the world that a stranger should suddenly appear at the deathbed of his wife. When he spoke—which he did as soon as the sergeant had stopped—his voice was marked with the same singular absence of any sort of concern. It might have been some commonplace occasion in which he was taking a casual part.

"That is the question which I was about to put to Dr. Norris—of what did Lady Ditchling die?"

Dr. Norris had advanced to the foot of the bed, where he stood confronting his questioners. He considered for a moment before he answered; when he did his tone was scarcely genial.

"My certificate will set out the cause of death in the usual way. You must be aware, Sergeant Griffin, that—to use no stronger language—your conduct is most irregular. I don't know if the law of England permits a policeman to make such a monstrous misuse of his power as to arrest a corpse. Granting that it does, am I to take it that you have arrested Lady Ditchling? In which case I presume that you are not afraid of her being spirited away. I, as a medical man, also have duties to perform; you will prevent my performing them at your peril, Sergeant Griffin. Certain offices have to be performed for the dead lady by the nurse who is in attendance. I certainly do not intend to allow you to remain in this room while they are being performed; such an outrage is unthinkable. Since, therefore, it is essential that the nurse does what has to be done as soon as possible—as you must be aware, Sergeant Griffin—I must ask you to leave this room. And you also, Lord Ditchling. After everything has been done that has to be done, you can return to this room if you please, Sergeant Griffin, if your sense of what is due to the dead permits it, and you can continue to take charge of your prisoner until she is placed in her coffin and buried. I presume you will allow her to be buried?"

"I am not so sure of that, Dr. Norris. I'm not even sure that you will venture to bury her."

"Sergeant Griffin, what prompts you to make such an extraordinary remark? Even an officer of police may not presume too far. I recommend you to be careful."

"That's precisely what I intend to be, Dr. Norris; to show you how careful I wish to be I propose to commence by summoning another medical gentleman."

"What good do you expect to gain by that? Are you suggest-

ing that there has been anything irregular in my treatment of the dead lady? Or that I failed to do all that was possible?"

"At this moment I suggest nothing, Dr. Norris." The sergeant raised his voice. "Osborne!" His understrapper appeared "Where is Dr. Leach?"

"Dr. Leach is outside, sir."

"Bring him here." Osborne departed. The sergeant addressed Dr. Norris. "Dr. Leach is a medical gentleman attached to the staff at Scotland Yard—you may have heard of him. As the authorities at Scotland Yard had reason to believe that the state of Lady Ditchling's health might be alleged as a reason for her not being treated as an ordinary prisoner, it was considered wise that I should be accompanied by one of our official medical gentlemen, in order that I might have the benefit of his advice and assistance in any eventuality which might arise. I asked you of what Lady Ditchling died. You evaded my question, putting me off with some nonsense about setting out the cause of death in your certificate. Lord Ditchling is equally anxious to know of what Lady Ditchling died. You will hardly refuse to give to another medical man the information which it is essential I should have."

CHAPTER XXXI

A TELEGRAM FOR THE SERGEANT

No one spoke after the sergeant had finished. Dr. Norris stood leaning over the foot of the big brass bedstead. He kept his eyes on the sergeant while he was speaking. When he ceased there was a slight movement of his lips as if he were about to make some comment. If so, he changed his mind. His was one of those faces which seem bigger below than above; when he shut his mouth tightly this became more noticeable. His glance passed from the sergeant to the Earl, then to the figure on the bed; by degrees, what might have been the shadow of a grim smile passed over his saturnine visage. It was to be observed that he never glanced towards the nurse; she, on the other hand, was constantly glancing towards him. It seemed as if her eyes could not be kept from wandering in his direction. She might have been looking to him for a hint, for inspiration; as if she recognised that this was a difficult situation in which she sought advice on how to bear herself. Whatever she sought, nothing came; her dumb plea for assistance went unheeded; it seemed to make her uneasy. One felt that she was indisposed to act on her own initiative.

The most striking figure was the Earl of Ditchling. There was a period of perhaps more than a minute before the man who had been sent for appeared; during that period the Earl seemed to pass through various phases. As he listened to the sergeant speaking he seemed to be emerging from a state of stupor to comprehension of what was going on. He held himself straighter, glanced at the bed, and started, as if for the first time realising what was lying there. His lips twitched as he peered at the set face. A look as of resentment came into his eyes as he turned them first towards the nurse and then towards the doctor. One guessed that some feeling was being born within him to which he would presently give heated expression. As he turned from the doctor to the sergeant the look of resentment gave place to one of indecision, as if he were not sure what to make of him.

To these four silent figures entered Dr. Leach. Dr. Norris continued motionless, not troubling himself even to turn.

The nurse glanced quickly towards the door; as she saw what manner of man he was who entered, some little thing seemed to happen to her face which made it appear a trifle haggard. The Earl regarded him with a fixed stare, as if it were dawning on him that he had seen this man before—and when, and where. The sergeant performed the ceremony of introduction.

"Dr. Leach, I believe you have met the Earl of Ditchling before." The Earl never moved; Leach bowed. "Dr. Norris, this is Dr. Leach; this is the nurse who has been in charge of the case. Dr. Leach, I came, as you are aware, to arrest the Countess of Ditchling. When I reached the house I was told that she was dying; almost as soon as I entered the hall I was told that she was dead. The end must have come very quickly, because I have reason to know that less than an hour since she was as well as she has been any time since the thirteenth of May. I have asked Dr. Norris what is the cause of death; he declines to tell me."

The gentleman referred to interposed.

"Pardon me, I have not declined to tell you. You asked me what was the cause of death. I told you that it would be set out in my certificate. Dr. Leach will inform you that it is not usual to give such information to anyone within five minutes of the patient's death. There are occasions, not infrequent ones, on which a medical man should have time to consider the exact terms in which the cause of death has to be stated I believe, Dr. Leach, you will bear me out in this."

Dr. Leach did. "That is so; such cases are quite common."

"I can quite believe that this is one of them." One might have been excused for thinking that the sergeant's tone was dry. "Will you be so good as to inform Dr. Leach what exactly was the cause of Lady Ditchling's death?"

"It is a case of collapse after attempted poisoning."

"Isn't that rather vague?"

"Quite frankly, in my opinion, the whole history of the case is rather vague. I wished to have further advice, but her ladyship declined."

"You speak of attempted poisoning. Did not her ladyship try to commit suicide—on the fourteenth of May last?"

"I am afraid she did."

"What poison did she use?"

"That I've been unable exactly to determine"

"In that case there will have to be an inquest."

Dr. Norris hesitated before replying, which he did with a certain grimness. As he answered the nurse started,

"I presume there will,"

"Have you no idea of the poison which was employed? For what have you been treating her?"

"I have been varying the treatment at different times. At one period I fancied that strychnine in some form had been used. Later I judged it to have been some preparation of the nature of aconite."

"Surely the effects of strychnine and of aconite are so different that one would hardly be mistaken for the other. Then again, the fourteenth of May is a good while ago. Is it possible to poison a person slowly with either? Doesn't death or recovery follow within a relatively short time? Then, in the third place, in what form was the poison taken? Surely there was either a paper, or a box, or a bottle, in which the poison had been contained."

Again Dr. Norris hesitated.

"In this case there was neither. I understand that Lady Ditchling swallowed something which was in a bottle, but the bottle had been removed before I came. I have never seen it."

"Who removed the bottle?"

"I don't know; I cannot tell you."

"Do you mean to say you made no inquiries?"

"I made all possible inquiries, or so it seemed to me at the time. The position was a delicate one. In the confusion the bottle had been taken away. As it was wished to conceal the cause of her ladyship's illness, it was not easy to follow its history with too much particularity."

"I presume I need not inform you, Dr. Norris, that in your whole treatment of the case, from first to last, you have been guilty of more than one irregularity, of which you are likely to hear again. When you learnt what Lady Ditchling had done your first duty was to communicate with the police; as a medical man of some years' standing you were, of course, well aware of that."

Dr. Norris eyed the speaker for a minute or two before he answered. When he did, to use a colloquialism, he gave him as good as he sent.

"Let me point something out to you, Sergeant Griffin; it is not your duty to instruct me in mine. When I need advice on niceties of medical etiquette I probably shan't come for them to a policeman. I may add that I've answered all the questions I intend to. With what seems to me to be a monstrous abuse of your powers you have arrested a dead woman——"

"Pardon me, Dr. Norris; there you are wrong." The interruption came from Dr. Leach who, while the sergeant and Dr.

Norris had been exchanging questions and answers, had moved to the bed "Or, at least, if you are right I am wrong."

As he eyed his colleague Dr. Norris's jaw seemed to be still more prominent.

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

Dr Leach's tone as he rejoined was in marked contrast to the other's; it was affability itself.

"You said that Sergeant Griffin had arrested a dead body I merely intended to remark that in so saying I think you were wrong. Quite what is the matter with her ladyship I don't know, but I doubt that she is dead."

"Not dead!" Somehow one felt that the start which the doctor gave was not quite so spontaneous as he might have wished it to appear. "Are you pleased to be humorous, Dr Leach?"

"Don't you know, Dr. Norris, that her ladyship is not dead?"

This direct question the man at the foot of the bed seemed to find it rather difficult to tackle. He seemed to be casting about in his mind for means of evading it.

"On what possible grounds, Dr. Leach, do you suggest that she is not dead? I must ask you to be careful what you say."

"A person with medical qualifications of even the most rudimentary sort need only glance at this lady's face to doubt if she is dead. It may be possible to imitate death; but if that is the intention here, the imitation is a very bad one. I cannot conceive it to be possible that you were ever taken in by it, Dr. Norris." He turned to the woman who stood behind him. "Are you a qualified nurse?"

"I've had some of my certificates for more than fifteen years."

"Then you must be in a position to have informed Dr. Norris that this lady is not dead."

After a brief silence the woman answered sullenly:

"It's not my business to give information to the doctor in charge of a case. I take my orders from him."

"Did he order you to give out that this lady is dead—which you knew to be a lie, or your certificates are not worth the paper they're written on?"

"You have no right to say that. My certificates are as good as any you've got."

Dr. Leach ignored the woman, whose anger struck one as being rather simulated than real. He pointed to the figure outlined beneath the sheets.

"Lord Ditchling, a gross imposition has been practised on you.

On the motive it is not my business to comment. Lady Ditchling is not dead, nor, judging from her appearance, is she likely to die. Dr. Norris and this woman, not counting probably on the interference of outsiders, have conspired together in an attempt at barefaced and impudent imposture. I imagine that her ladyship has been given some drug, at whose nature I can guess, which would have the effect of making her comatose or torpid for a certain space of time, and so lend her an appearance which might cause the untrained eye to suppose that she was dead. That drug, if I am right in my diagnosis, is one which can only be given in very minute quantities, or real instead of apparent death would ensue. I imagine, Lord Ditchling, that the intention was to deceive you, and, having done that, to hurry you out of the room, and in your absence her ladyship would have recovered, as she is recovering now. Care would have been taken to repeat the doses each time your return to the room was to be feared or suspected; but on that point her ladyship may be able to give you more exact information than I can. I think she is already coming back to life. Dr. Norris, what is the precise form of treatment which you intended to pursue when your patient began to shake off the effects of the drug which you have given her? The time has come for you to put it into practice."

Dr. Leach had only ceased speaking for a few instants when the bedclothes were seen to tremble; the figure beneath them began to move; a spasm constricted the muscles of the face; the hands were brought out of the bed; a gasping sound issued from the throat of the figure which had seemed so ominously silent. Regardless of the spectators, the nurse went hurrying towards the bed.

"Quick, doctor, give me the bottle," she exclaimed.

Dr. Norris left his position at the foot of the bed, his face distorted by a smile.

"Since the farce seems to have fizzled out, I'd better do all that is needful myself."

The nurse lifted the head upon the pillow. Norris, taking a minute phial from his waistcoat pocket, inserted what seemed to be a flat piece of silver between the patient's teeth, opened the mouth sufficiently wide to deposit within it the contents of the phial. The effect was instantaneous. The whole form seemed to become momentarily rigid, then to throb, and shake, and struggle; then all at once the lady sat straight up in bed, seeming to be restored again to life.

"Nurse! is that you?" she asked.

The woman whispered as she leaned over the bed, her whole face charged with emotion.

"Yes, my dear, I'm here; and there are others here as well. His lordship is here."

"Ditchling! What is he doing here?" Without waiting for an answer she called her husband by his Christian name. "Hardy! Where are you?"

Since Dr. Leach had come into the room the Earl had remained silent, listening to what was being said, watching what was being done. When the first movement had taken place beneath the bedclothes, he also had trembled. When his wife had sat up it seemed that it was only with an effort that he restrained himself from making some affectionate movement towards her. Now he was staring at her with something more than bewilderment.

"Eleanor, can't you see that I am here?"

"See!" She put her hands up to her face, hiding her eyes, her voice breaking into a wail which touched everyone who heard. "I can't see! Oh, I can't see! I'm blind!"

"Blind! Eleanor, my darling!"

The Earl leaned towards her as if he would take her in his arms. Sergeant Griffin chose that moment to intervene.

"Pardon me, my lord, but I cannot allow you to touch my prisoner. Lady Ditchling, I am Sergeant Griffin of Scotland Yard, and I arrest you on a charge of wilful murder. After what has occurred I can't allow anyone to touch my prisoner. Lord Ditchling, please stand back."

"Stand back from my own wife! Are you mad, sir? Who are you that you should dare to keep me from my own wife? I'd have you know that this lady is my wife, my loved and honoured wife, and neither you, nor a dozen like you, shall keep me from taking her in my arms."

The Earl proved it by taking her in his arms then and there. For her part, she put her arms about her husband's neck and broke into a passion of sobs. As the sergeant was about to display his authority Dr. Leach touched him on the arm.

"Patience, Griffin; gently, my friend. The lady is not in a fit state to stand the strain of a scene; she is quite safe in Lord Ditchling's arms. Presently will be time enough to use those powers with which the law has armed you."

As the sergeant hesitated a uniformed policeman came bursting into the room as if his one and only aim was not to stand on ceremony, but to lose no time. He was holding the familiar yellow envelope.

"Is Sergeant Griffin here? This telegram has come for you. Ellis, the postmaster, brought it himself; as he told me it was most important I borrowed a motor-bicycle and brought it over

at once. I don't think it's much more than ten minutes ago that it came."

Having handed the sergeant the envelope, he took off his helmet to wipe his brow with a big, parti-coloured handkerchief. The sergeant tore open the envelope.

CHAPTER XXXII

AN ATMOSPHERE OF TROUBLE

Sergeant Griffin read the telegram which the envelope contained, not once, nor twice, but four or five times. Then he compared something which was on it with an entry in his pocket-book. Then he handed it to Dr. Leach, observing:

"The cipher for the day is all right."

Dr. Leach read the telegram almost as carefully as the sergeant had done.

"Is that so? Then, in that case, the whole business is at an end."

"It would look like it." Dr. Leach returned the telegram to the sergeant, who examined it once more. "Lady Ditchling, and you, my lord, I have here a telegram which has just arrived from Sir Franklin Terry, who, as you may know, is in command at Scotland Yard. It says: 'Warrant for Lady Ditchling's arrest withdrawn. Await instructions before you do anything. Will wire further shortly.—Franklin Terry.' You will perceive for yourselves that this telegram has only just reached my hands. I came down from London with strict instructions to arrest her ladyship at once on my arrival. What this telegram means I cannot say. I can only trust that facts have been discovered which relieve her ladyship of any shadow of suspicion, and apologise for my intrusion."

The various expressions on the faces of those who listened to the sergeant would have provided excellent matter for the artist whose study is the human countenance. There was relief on the nurse's face; surprise on Dr. Norris's; bewilderment on the Earl's; while on the lady's, as she sat up straight in her dainty nightdress, there was a conflict of emotion which seemed, in some strange fashion, to make it more than ever beautiful.

"Who are all these people in my room?" she asked. "What does their presence mean? What are they doing here?" Then suddenly she broke into an exclamation, "Pauline!"

Some subtle sense must have told her that her sister was not very far away. It chanced that the young lady was standing just inside the door, still very close to Mr. Baird. The instant her name was called she went running forward.

"Eleanor!"

Kneeling by the bed, she took both her sister's hands in hers.

"Pauline, who are all these people? Who's that man who has just been speaking?"

The sergeant, touching the girl very lightly on the shoulder, said in a whisper:

"I think you had better explain when I've gone. I will take my men with me."

The lady heard him moving.

"Pauline, why is that man going? Who is he? What is he doing here?"

Pauline, drawing closer to her sister, put an arm about her shoulders.

"My dear, it all seems to have been a mistake—some horrid mistake."

The lady drew herself away from her.

"Don't! Pauline, don't touch me. Answer my questions, make no comments of your own, but just answer them. Now, who's in the room?"

"There's Lord Ditchling and Dr. Norris, and the nurse"—the girl was about to add Dr. Leach to her list, but that gentleman, putting his finger to his lips, moved towards the door, so she brought her sentence to a close—"and that is all."

Apparently she had not thought it necessary to mention the fact, but John Baird had just stepped back through the open door. The lady looked with her sightless eyes in the direction in which the visitor was moving.

"There's someone else just going out. Who is it?"

"That's Dr. Leach."

"And who is Dr. Leach?"

"I really don't quite know. I fancy he's someone who came to see how you were getting on."

"Came to see how I was getting on? Why should he do that? Who sent for him? Dr. Norris, did you?"

"No, your ladyship, I certainly did not."

Her ladyship seemed to be reflecting.

"Pauline, what was that you said about a mistake? What kind of mistake has been made that should bring all those people into my bedroom?"

There was silence. The girl looked at Dr. Norris and the Earl, as if in search of an answer. The lady, perceiving her hesitation, resented it

"Why don't you answer? Will you tell me what the mistake was that brought those people to my room?"

Again the girl looked at Dr. Norris, who, this time, came to her aid.

"I will give you all the information your ladyship desires a little later. At present you need rest."

The lady's fingers fastened on the girl's shoulder as if she feared that she would leave her.

"There's something you are hiding, all of you. Pauline, don't be a little wretch and join them in deceiving me, just because I'm blind! Tell me what those men wanted in my room."

The girl did her best to do as her sister wished.

"You remember that some time ago your motor-car was found in Pall Mall?" The lady was listening with knitted brows, her fingers gripping her sister more tightly than she supposed. "A gentleman named Tozer was found dead upon the seat."

The girl paused; the lady seemed to make an effort at recollection.

"I remember Ditchling telling me something about it—some nonsense."

"A stupid idea seems to have got about that you knew something about it."

"About what? Go on! Go on!"

The grip of the fingers tightened still more. The girl winced.

"Eleanor, please don't hold me quite so tight—you hurt."

"Then you shouldn't keep on stopping. You know I'm helpless; why won't you tell me what I want to know? What am I supposed to have known about?"

"About how Mr. Tozer came to be on your motor-car."

"But what has that to do with those men being in my room?"

"Eleanor, it doesn't matter now it's all over. It was a mistake. They—came to arrest you."

The lady repeated the words in a crescendo scale.

"Arrest me! Arrest me! What for?"

The words were uttered with such intensity, the grip of the fingers became suddenly so painful, that words came from the girl's lips which, if she had paused for consideration, she would probably not have uttered.

"They came to arrest you for the murder of Mr. Andrew Tozer."

"For the murder of Andrew Tozer!—Andrew Tozer."

Her sister's statement seemed to amuse the lady in a very uncanny fashion. She broke into peal after peal of strident laughter, growing each second more strident still. Then, as if overcome by a paroxysm of dreadful mirth, she shrank back shrieking on to her pillow. Dr. Norris motioned to Pauline.

"You had better go, Miss Pearse, and you also, my lord As the natural outcome of such excitement her ladyship is suffering

from an attack of hysteria. Nurse and I will be better able to deal with her if we are left alone."

Both the girl and the old man acted on the doctor's suggestion: they quitted the room, followed as they went by the lady's horrid laughter. When they were without, and the door was shut, the girl looked at her brother-in-law, as if struck by the look of suffering which was on his face.

"Is there anything I can do for you? Hadn't you better go and lie down? You don't look very well."

The tone in which he answered was even more hopeless than his words.

"I don't feel very well. I doubt if I ever shall feel well again. There is nothing you can do for me, thank you; nothing anyone can do—nothing."

He moved towards his own apartment on the opposite side of the landing. Watching him as he went, noticing how uncertain his footsteps seemed to be, she would have followed, if only to lend him the support of her arm. Perceiving her intention, he stopped and motioned her away.

"Go! Don't come near me! Go!"

He pointed to the staircase. Fearing that his feelings might be too much for him, as had been the case with her sister, his wife, she attempted no further remonstrance—she ran quickly down the stairs. When she reached the hall she looked about her as if in search of someone; then passed through the front door on to the terrace without, and looked again. At the foot of one of the flights of steps stood John Baird. She ran down to him, as if it had been he she had been seeking.

"Oh," she cried, "I thought that you had gone" He shook his head. Perhaps she was unconscious of how close she was to him. Again she glanced about her. "Are those—men all gone?"

"I fancy so—clean gone, for the present. I was just wondering how long it will be before they're back again."

She drew quickly away from him, glancing at him almost with anger as she did so.

"Now, why should you say a thing like that, just as I was feeling what a burden it was off my mind to think that that dreadful Sergeant Griffin had gone—for good? Why were you wondering when he would come back? Why should he ever come back at all?"

His manner, as he answered, was perhaps meant to express contrition.

"I'm very sorry. I ought not to have said it. I ought to have realised what you were feeling and—held my tongue."

She appeared to be searching his face with her big eyes.

"There is some fresh trouble coming; I can see there is." It was as if her breath caught in her throat. "Shall I ever get out of this atmosphere, in which there is nothing else but trouble? Tell me what has happened now." When he did not immediately reply, she stamped her foot; it was as though she commanded him. "Tell me."

"If it could be helped I wouldn't, but as I fail to see what good will be gained by letting you be taken unawares and unprepared, I cannot but feel that it will be the greater kindness to let you know at once."

"You are a long while about it. Pray, by all means, do let me know the worst."

"Directly after that policeman came on his motor-bicycle with the telegram for Sergeant Griffin, someone from the inn brought a telegram for me. I told them that if one did arrive while I was out to come on with it to me here. This is a telegram he brought me."

He held out the piece of pink paper to the girl, but she would have none of it. She put her hands behind her, and drew a step back.

"No, I won't touch it. I have learnt to look upon telegrams as things which nearly always hurt. You tell me what it says."

"It contains only a few words." He read them to her:

"Frank Taylor died last night. You must come at once. Every moment's delay makes matters worse. Wire when I may expect you.—Jordan."

"And who," asked the girl "may Frank Taylor be? And who is Jordan?"

"Frank Taylor is, as I told you, the name under which Francis Turner has been masquerading. Jordan is Dr. Jordan, the doctor who has been attending him." Seeing that the girl still looked puzzled he carried his explanation further. "If what I suppose is true, Lady Ditchling may be called to account for Turner's death. Don't you think she ought to be prepared?"

"If—if you're right—how is she going to be prepared—for a thing like that?"

"While I have been waiting for you I have been thinking things over. Don't you think it might be possible for me to see your sister—alone? I fancy that if I could have a few minutes' talk with her I might do more good than by keeping silence—until the blow falls. In any event, candour on her part will be better than reticence. If she had only been frank at the begin-

ning she might have saved herself no end of trouble, and possibly the worst part of it yet to come. Do you think I can see her?"

"I don't know when. You certainly can't see her now."

"You observe that Dr. Jordan, the sender of this telegram, wishes that I should go at once to Worrall's Farm, where this man is lying dead. There the police are probably in possession of the premises. So soon as I appear upon the scene they will want to hear from me what I know about the business. They will put pressure on me to put them in the way of ascertaining who Frank Taylor really was, and how he came to meet his death. I think it possible that an early result of this will be that they will come upon facts which will point them towards your sister, with consequences which may prove exceedingly unpleasant for her. Therefore, before I go to Worrall's Farm it seems to me to be desirable that I should have your sister's story from her own lips. Don't you think it better that she should tell the tale to me rather than to a policeman? because that is what it comes to. And since the sooner I am off the better, if any good is to be done by seeing Lady Ditchling I must see her now. Don't you see that it's a case of her choosing the lesser of two evils?"

"Oh, I wish I were at the other side of the world, and away from the whole business. Why should I continually be mixed up with the troubles of people who behave like idiots? What do you want me to do? Do you want me to walk up to Eleanor's bedroom and ask her if she will see you? She has no idea you are within a thousand miles of this. I am quite sure that when she's recovered from the first shock of learning that you're here, she'll want to know what you wish to see her about; she won't see you unless she has some sort of notion; considering that she's in bed, and has practically just risen from the dead, I don't see how you can expect it. She was indulging in a fit of hysterics when I saw her last. If I do give her a notion of what you want to see her about, I shouldn't wonder if she has another, which will really and truly be the end of her. I am absolutely certain that, at present, she is not in a condition to discuss unpleasant matters with you or with anyone else."

"Then all that remains for me to do is to get to Dr. Jordan and Worrall's Farm as soon as I can; unless—the alternative occurred to me just now—I take a trip abroad until I learn from you that your sister's physical condition is such that I might be able to see her. It is clear to me that if, before I see her, I am cross-examined by the police, I may unwittingly do her serious harm."

"Then, if that is so, you had better go and take a trip abroad;

and don't I wish that I could go with you!" Then, as if realising that her words might convey a meaning which was not intended, she added: "By which I mean that I wish I could go anywhere so long as it is away from this. When will you start?"

"I will walk over to the village at once and catch the next train to town. I'll be out of England to-night."

"If you don't mind I'll walk to the village with you—and don't I wish that I was going out of England to-night! You're a lucky man, but then men always do have all the luck. You talk about catching the next train up to town and being out of England to-night as if nothing could be simpler. Why, when I go abroad, I have to plan, and arrange, and have my trunks packed, and be bothered in all sorts of ways; while you have only to make up your mind to go to a place, and you're there."

He laughed. "It is not quite so easy as that. Very seldom have I found myself in a place by merely wishing to be there. Who's this? I shouldn't wonder if this is someone who is going to make himself disagreeable."

They had turned and were already strolling together across the turf, when a man appeared coming towards them. With that odd inclination which the girl had shown to turn to Baird in moments of difficulty, she drew closer to his side.

"Isn't it a policeman? Is he one of those come back again?"

"He's an inspector of police, I fancy, and I don't think he has anything to do with Sergeant Griffin's lot; at least I didn't see him with them. However, we shall soon know. Let's go and meet him."

"No—don't let's meet him. Let him come to us. I—I don't want to meet trouble half-way."

The new-comer, as he drew near them, raised his peaked cap and greeted them with a smile. He was not bad-looking; his light brown beard was cut very close; there was a friendly light in his eyes.

"Am I speaking to Mr. John Baird?"

"You are; I am that individual."

"I'm Inspector Henson, from Salisbury." As the speaker paused, Baird caught himself wondering how many more sergeants and inspectors would introduce themselves to him that day. "I have your name from Dr. Jordan, with whom I believe you are slightly acquainted. Your friend, who gave his name as Frank Taylor, died at Worrall's Farm last night."

"I have just had a wire from Dr. Jordan to tell me so."

"He told me he had wired you; I hoped to reach you as soon as the wire. Dr. Jordan informs me that you can give me

information about your friend. The inquest opens to-morrow. I am in charge of it. You will, of course, realise that I should be in possession of as many facts as possible before the proceedings commence. I am sure that I shall not look to you for assistance in vain, Mr. Baird"

CHAPTER XXXIII

HUSBAND AND WIFE

A REMARKABLE conversation took place in the Countess's bedroom when her ladyship had recovered from her attack of hysterics, her recovery taking place not very long after the departure of her husband and sister. Her return to calmness was followed by an interval of silence. Mrs. Anderson, the nurse, rendered the lady little services, while Dr. Norris seemed to be the victim of a fit of the fidgets, moving here and there about the room as if he found it difficult to remain on one spot for long. He was the first to speak.

"I presume that I need not point out that your ladyship has placed me in a very awkward position."

His tone suggested something more than irritation; hers was scarcely sympathetic as she answered with a single word.

"Indeed?"

He cast a glance towards the bed which was hardly of the kind which a sick person is entitled to expect from the doctor in attendance; his voice was harsher even than before.

"I quite understand that it's a matter of no importance to your ladyship, and that it is nothing to you if I am ruined."

A faint smile passed over the lady's features—a weary smile.

"I thought we had gone into that sort of thing thoroughly more than once. Is it necessary to go into it again?"

"Your ladyship must allow me to point out that you never gave me the slightest premonitory hint that what has occurred might be expected to occur, or I certainly would not have acceded to the proposition you made."

The lady sighed.

"You are surely doctor enough to be aware that I'm not well enough to go into that sort of thing all over again."

"Your ladyship never will be well enough for that; you will do anything rather than look an unpleasant position straight in the face."

"Poor Dr. Norris."

Again the lady sighed—and smiled. The doctor's tone grew a trifle rougher, as if his irritation were increasing.

"Fortune has so favoured you that what means ruin to me means little or nothing to you. Exactly of what offence against the law I have been guilty I cannot say, but I'm aware that that man Griffin, and his friend Dr. Leach, may bring some charge against me which may place me in a felon's dock. For that I shall have to thank you, Lady Ditchling."

"Will you? Then thank me and have done with it."

"Is that the only remark you have to make?"

"I'd rather not have the bother of making that, but you force me."

"Does your ladyship realise that I can remain in this neighbourhood no longer? The story of what has taken place in this room will be all over the place in twenty-four hours."

"That is sad. Who will tell it?"

"It's known to every creature in the house. Do you suppose they can all of them be counted on to hold their tongues?"

"I suppose not; that would be to expect rather a deal."

"I'm ruined—ruined! I dare not face the people among whom I have passed a large portion of my life. I must relinquish the practice which I have taken so many years to build up. I shall probably be struck off the medical register, be forbidden to practise, hounded out of the society of respectable folk—if I don't have to stand my trial in a criminal dock. All this, I take it, Lady Ditchling, is nothing to you."

"On the contrary, Dr. Norris, no one knows better than you that it is a great deal to me, since it cost me a large sum of money. You quite realised the consequences which would follow the attempt which has failed; I paid you compensation—ample compensation—in advance. You knew perfectly well that you would probably have to take to your heels after you had done the job for which I paid you. Try to be enough of a man not to inflict on me another scene. Take to your heels. You are in possession of a larger sum of money than you would have been even if you had sold your practice——"

"Dr. Norris has sold his practice, my lady."

The interposition came from Mrs. Anderson. The doctor turned on her.

"Who told you that?" he demanded.

"It does not matter to you who told me, Dr. Norris. I have the information from a reliable quarter. The gentleman who has bought it comes into residence next week. I'm afraid he won't find he's made a very remunerative bargain."

"So, Dr. Norris," continued the lady, "you are a gainer either way. Are you blustering to get more out of me? If so, you

won't succeed. Nurse, open the door for Dr. Norris, and give instructions that he's not to be admitted again."

"I don't think it will be necessary to do that, my lady. I don't think he'll venture to show his face near this house again." Mrs. Anderson held the door invitingly open. "Dr. Norris, you heard what her ladyship said."

The doctor seemed to be in two minds whether to go or stay. Clearly he would have liked to say a few more plain words—even plainer than before. Then he decided, as it were, to crystallise them in a single sentence.

"I promise you this, Lady Ditchling, and you also, woman"—this to the nurse—"that if I do have to stand in a felon's dock I won't stand there alone."

With that he went, and Mrs. Anderson closed the door. When she returned to the bed, the lady asked a rather strange question.

"Have I made that man a rogue, or was nature before me?"

Mrs. Anderson smoothed the coverlet. Then, as she was preparing something in a tumbler, she said:

"My dear, so many of us are rogues in embryo. Look at my case. I never thought that I could do anything of which I should have cause to be ashamed."

As the nurse went on mixing there was silence. Then there came an observation from the bed.

"It's very odd, nurse, but I never thought so either; yet I have been the arch-villain of the piece."

At the nurse's invitation she raised herself sufficiently to empty the glass of its contents. Silence reigned for several minutes after she had replaced her head on the pillow. Then she spoke again.

"Nurse, do you mind going yourself to Lord Ditchling, and telling him that I should like to speak to him, particularly."

The nurse looked towards the bed with a show of what was very like anxiety; there was anxiety in her voice.

"What are you going to say to him, my dear?"

The lady was still, as if she were thinking what answer to give.

"I am going to seek peace in confession. I am going to try to bare my breast and own up to all my sins. I've a queer feeling that it would be a relief to let my husband know what a wretch I've been. He might forgive me."

The nurse stood looking at her, as if waiting for her to say something else. When she remained silent she moved with professional noiselessness towards the bedroom door. Lady Ditchling was left alone.

"I wonder," she asked herself, "if, instead of forgiving me, he will put me out of the house? I deserve it."

When the moments passed and no one entered her thoughts took a different shape.

"Suppose he doesn't come; suppose he won't—that would be the worst of all. Yet I shall deserve that too."

When, after the seconds had become minutes, the door was opened, she started up in the bed.

"Who's there?" she asked.

She strained her ears to listen for the voice, which was some seconds before it came.

"Nurse tells me you wish to see me."

The voice was Lord Ditchling's. She sank back on to her pillow with again that shadow of a sigh and smile. Then she asked:

"Is nurse with you?"

Again the perceptible interval before the answer.

"No; I am alone."

The smile upon her face became less shadowy.

"It's no use your standing there by the door. I can't shout. Won't you come closer—please? You'll get no harm at my bedside."

Crossing the room, he rested his hand on the back of the chair on which he had previously sat; but he said nothing. That she was conscious of his gaze she presently showed.

"Why are you looking at me like that? Have I changed? Have I grown hideous? You know I shall never be able to see myself again."

"What has happened to your eyes?"

It did not need her quick sense of hearing to perceive the something in his voice which suggested suffering. It so affected her that she also seemed to find it hard to speak.

"I think I must have burnt them."

"How can you have done that? When did you do it? Since you have been here in bed?"

"I did it on the night of the thirteenth of May."

He seemed to be making an effort to arrive at some chronological point, without altogether succeeding.

"The thirteenth of May? But didn't I see you on the fourteenth? And then they were all right."

"Indeed, they weren't—they were all wrong. I told nurse to ask you to come here because I wish to tell you all about it—everything. Do you mind?"

"That is not an easy question to answer. I think I know a great deal already. I am afraid to know more."

"I don't believe you know anything. What you think you know is all wrong. Perhaps you know I almost ran away from you."

"I suspected you of having had some intention of the kind—with your old flame, John Baird."

As she turned her face more towards him her smile had grown more pronounced.

"John Baird! Old Jack! Of all the funny things to say. I doubt, if I asked him on my knees, if he'd run with me across the road. My dear Hardy, how did such an idea get into your head? Why, the man hardly condescends to bow to me. And—let me get in front of you!—it wasn't Andrew Tozer either. I've come to the conclusion that when a woman does think of running away it is generally with the one man whom her husband doesn't suspect."

"Your ladyship will do me the justice to believe that I never suspected you of the intention of running away with any man."

"Until I'd done it? Oh, that I perfectly understand." There was a pause, during which the lady appeared to be reflecting. "Hardy, I understand that this morning I was arrested for the murder of Mr. Andrew Tozer. I don't know why, it seems quite funny to me; but I may inform you—to give me a chance of doing so is one reason why I've asked for your presence here—that I think it possible that shortly I shall be arrested for the murder of someone else."

She said this with a smile which had grown so quizzical that the inquiry which he put to her was justified.

"Are you speaking seriously?"

"Does one often joke upon a subject of the kind?"

"I am only just beginning to realise that your sense of humour may be abnormal—peculiar to yourself."

"Please don't speak to me like that; I don't seem to know your voice when you're sarcastic, and the sense of hearing is all that is left to me."

He was still. The muscles of his face seemed to grow more tense; he clenched his fingers into fists, then unclenched them; his whole form seemed twitching. Some subtle sense seemed to tell her that for the instant emotion held him gripped. She whispered:

"Hardy, are you very angry with me?" She stretched out her arm across the coverlet. "Do you mind putting your hand on mine? I think if I could touch you I could tell exactly how you are feeling. I shall have to develop my sense of touch as well as my sense of hearing. I've heard that blind people's fingers are like eyes to them. Won't you let me feel your hand?"

He edged a little farther from the bed, as if withdrawing himself from temptation. He gazed at the beautiful white hand, with the tapering fingers, pretty nails, as a hungry dog might at a bone. His voice sounded harsher; as it were, it creaked.

"I'd rather—you'd give me the name—of the gentleman—you proposed to honour."

She seemed to be listening not only to his words, but to something which lay behind them; and to hear that something—it made her smile.

"You daren't touch me; that's why. You're afraid you'd give yourself away. Hardy, you still love me—almost as much as I love you."

"Have you ever loved me? Do you know what love is? Have you always taken it for granted that there's no fool like an old one?"

"I have loved you since I almost eloped—on the thirteenth of May."

"You have a pretty assurance to talk to me like this. Who was the man?"

"You'd never guess—not in a hundred guesses." She paused; presently adding, with what was very like a malicious smile: "It was Francis Turner."

He seemed to be searching his mind for something with which to associate the name.

"Francis Turner? Is it a name of your own invention, or is the gentleman a stranger to me?" Suddenly memory gave him a clue. "Isn't that the fool fellow who taught you how to drive a motor-car? Wasn't his name Turner?"

"It is that fool fellow; and his name is Turner."

"Why, the man's a puppy, a walking advertisement for a tailor's shop; an authority on the latest thing in socks and neck-wear. A woman is past a man's finding out. What can you have possibly seen in such a barber's clerk?"

"You are hardly fair, Hardy; he is a little more than that; though I myself am beginning to wonder what I can have seen in him. A woman is not only beyond a man's finding out; sometimes she's beyond her own. He said he was very much in love with me, and of course that was something."

"It was; it was the sort of compliment which some men pay to women of the town—did he take you for that sort?"

"You make it rather difficult, Hardy, when you speak like that. And I do so want to tell you everything—before the police come and fetch me."

"What nonsense do you keep talking about the police?

What's happened to the man? Did you break his neck for him?"

She moved her head from side to side as it lay upon the snow-white pillow.

"No, I didn't break his neck for him, though there were moments in which I really should have liked to."

"If you'd given me the chance I would have done it for you. In the hands of even an old man like me he'd have snapped like a twig."

"Do you think he would? I wonder. I found him pretty strong when it came to the point; that's how it happened. Will you please let me tell my story—in my own way—or it never will be told. You see, Hardy, we philandered. I meant nothing; I thought he meant the same; he piqued my curiosity, so that I began to wonder what he meant. I told him he ought not to say he loved me, even though he might feel that that was the sort of thing he ought to say to every woman."

"How women can stand such puppies! It were better for the world, and for themselves, for everyone, if they were drowned at birth"

"Yes, but sometimes they aren't. When he talked wildly I laughed; it made him angry when I told him that he'd look exceedingly well on the stage. He would not believe that I meant a compliment. Then, Hardy, you were unkind to me."

"I was unkind to you! When was I unkind? When have I ever said or done a thing that was unkind?"

She sighed; and the sigh was accompanied by a look which certainly became her.

"I don't want to touch old sores; I've suffered enough; but—you were unkind; and life seemed to have nothing left to offer. It was when I was unhappiest that he was maddest. He talked about flying to the moon, and—well, I didn't say I would, but I told him that if he would meet me on an appointed day I'd explain how his proposal shocked me. The day appointed was the thirteenth of May. The night before it struck me that my explanation might not have quite the effect I intended; so I wrote to say that I had changed my mind, and that he wasn't on any account to come, and I marked the envelope Immediate, and I posted it. On the thirteenth it was beautiful weather. I wasn't at all sure that my letter had caught the post, and if it hadn't, and he were to come and not find me, the effect on him might be tragic. He might have been capable of coming to this very house and actually making a scene."

"I should like to have had an interview with him if he had come."

His lordship's tone could hardly have been grimmer.

"But what would my feelings have been? Think of the scandal of it! I could never have faced anyone again. So, rather than anything dreadful like that should happen, I went to see if, by some unfortunate chance, my letter had missed him and he was there. And he was there."

"Where?"

"At Axminster, which was the place I had appointed."

"And you actually went to meet this scamp at Axminster, which is God knows how many miles from here, in the car I had given you?"

"It isn't so very many miles, Hardy, when you really know the way. In what other car was I to go? I could hardly take one of yours. Now, if you like, that wouldn't have been very nice. I just meant to tell him what I'd written, and say good-day, and go straight on, but somehow that didn't seem to be quite the thing which one could tell him when he was standing on the pavement in the open street; so I let him get into the car, and then I couldn't get him out again."

"Which is probably what you expected."

"Hardy, I did not expect anything of the kind, and I told him so. And, do you know, it took me practically the whole day before I could get him to understand that I really meant what I said, and by that time he was so mad that if there had been an asylum near I should have driven him straight to it. At last we got to Salisbury—at least, quite near to Salisbury."

"From Axminster? And how many places had you been to on the road there?"

"Hardy, I could not tell you—heaps All the while I had been trying to get rid of him."

"No doubt."

"Yes, no doubt; but it isn't easy for a woman to get a man like that out of her motor-car when she's all alone with him—without a dreadful scene. And that's what it did come to in the end. When we got near Salisbury I had had much more than enough of it—and of him. I told him that either he must get out of the car or I should. He was simply raving—he declared that he would never leave me again. I had got that revolver you gave me in the car——"

"I saw it there when I went that morning in the car to the station."

"I took it up, quite in fun, and I told him that if he talked like that I should have to shoot him. He was madder than ever—he could not have thought that I meant it, but he caught hold of my wrist and the revolver went off twice. The first time the

shot went right across my face, the flash did something to my eyes; the second time I looked down, and there he was lying at my feet. At first I was so unhinged that I simply did nothing. Then I kneeled down, and I turned him over. He was lying on his face—and then I saw that my hands were all covered with blood. There was the corner of a handkerchief sticking out of his jacket-pocket. I snatched it and used it to wipe my hands. As I was doing so, dazed, not the least myself, I heard someone coming. That finished it—I went as mad as he had been. To save my life I couldn't tell you exactly what I did afterwards. I believe I went to Salisbury station and took a train to town, and then another train back to Exeter."

"And the car—what did you do with that?"

"I have a hazy notion that I left the car where it was, which was in a ditch. When I wanted to get out he wouldn't let me, and the car swerved; luckily it only got as far as a dry ditch and didn't turn over. I must have got to Exeter in the middle of the night. There was no cab, nothing; I had to walk home—and nurse let me in. You know she nursed me when I was a baby, and then when I ceased to be a baby and didn't want a nurse she became qualified as a surgical nurse, and then when I married you I had her back again as my maid—she can dress hair and simply do anything, and she's been with me ever since; and she's the one person in the world I know I can trust."

"I presume, then, that you have not that feeling towards me?"

"That's where you're wrong, because I have, but in a different way. I can't tell you when I've been misbehaving, because you'd scold me, and it hurts when you scold; but I don't mind nurse's scolding a little bit, which makes all the difference. Nurse asked no questions; she never does ask questions, that's the beauty of her——"

"Let me tell you that if a woman were asked questions which she had to answer it would often be a good deal better for her."

"I'm not sure that you're not right; anyhow, nurse doesn't ask questions, and she'd get no answers if she did. Although nurse made me go to bed, I never slept, and when the day came I knew there was something wrong with my eyes. When you returned from London you made things a great deal worse, and then I took that stupid stuff out of that stupid bottle, and that was the climax. When I came to again I was blind—the flash of that revolver had done it; and I was frightened out of my life lest you should find out what had happened. And then I got that ridiculous idea about pretending to be dead, which resulted in the fiasco you've seen. But oh, Hardy, if you only knew what I've gone through you'd be sorry for me."

"I am sorry for you—and for myself."

"Did I kill that man?"

"So far as I've been able to get any sense out of your story as you've told it, I don't see, even if he was killed, that it was any fault of yours."

"There's only my word for that. It was my revolver; I did quarrel with him; and I did leave him by the roadside; a policeman might think that those three little facts need a good deal of explaining. You haven't heard if when they found him he was dead?"

"I've heard nothing. I don't know if they ever did find him; and I care less."

"Hasn't it been in all the papers?"

"I'm not in the habit of searching the papers for news of that kind. Eleanor, I presume you don't need me to tell you what a perfect idiot you've been?"

"I do not; but although I do not need you to tell me I'm sure you will. I've a theory that at least once in her life every woman is an absolute fool. Why should I escape the common lot?"

"It happens that your folly has taken an unfortunate form. I suppose you will frivol with men as long as they'll do the same with you. I came to the conclusion some time ago that you are that kind of person."

"Hardy! what an awful thing to say—of your own wife."

"Whether his name is Francis Turner or Bill Brown, you'll always have a towline attached to something male. It's not that kind of folly I'm thinking of. Why, in the name of all that's wonderful, when I was talking to you that morning, didn't you give me a hint of what you've told me now?"

"You've answered your own question: because I was the wise person you've called me. I did not think I could be afraid of anything or anyone until that morning, and then I was afraid of everything. I did not even dare tell myself what had happened. And as for telling you—I could not even begin to think of it. I was just a quivering bundle of nerves—all fear. Can't you conceive what I have suffered, lying here wondering, day and night? I've never ceased wondering for a single instant if Francis Turner was dead."

The Earl and the Countess were too engrossed with each other to notice that the door had been softly opened, and that Miss Pearse had slipped into the room. When she saw that her entrance was unnoticed she seemed disposed to steal away again as gently as she had come. Her fingers were actually turning the handle when the lady on the bed made the remark about what she had been wondering. Pauline took it to be a query, which

she was prompt to answer—retailing for the benefit o the husband and wife the information which Inspector Henson had just been giving Mr. Baird.

"Francis Turner died last night."

The Countess started up from between the sheets.

"Pauline," she cried, "how do you know that?"

Ignoring the question, the young lady went straight on.

"Before he died he made a statement which was taken down, in which he admitted that the shot which killed him was fired by his own hand. Inspector Henson has just told Mr. Baird so."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE BEDROOM AT THE HOTEL

MRS. CUMBERLAND lay in one of the best bedrooms in the Hôtel Métropole at Brussels. She was informed that a visitor had called to see her. The nurse who was in attendance brought her the visitor's card, and presently the visitor himself was ushered into the room—a man of medium height, slightly built, clean shaven, with a nose which inclined to be too long and too thin at the point, a wide, thin-lipped mouth, and smallish, dark-brown eyes. He might have been anything between forty and sixty, being one of those persons of undistinguished appearance who are apt not only to escape notice in a crowd, but even to elude the observation of the passing years. He wore a dark-grey jacket suit, a turned-down collar, a narrow black necktie, which was tied in a bow, and he carried in his hand a dark-grey felt hat—his attire being as undistinguished as his person.

When he entered the room he remained standing just inside the door, glancing from the figure in the bed towards the big Belgian *bonne*. As if obeying a hint which he had given her, Mrs. Cumberland said two or three words to the nurse, who immediately withdrew, and the lady and her visitor were alone together. He moved to the foot of the bed, where he stood, as it were, a little woodenly. No greetings were exchanged; the lady was the first to speak.

"So you have the courtesy to come and see me—or is it the courage?"

He attempted no reply, but asked a question of his own, still, as it were, a little woodenly. The whole man seemed to be stiff.

"Have you got it badly?"

"Got what badly? Do you mean that woman's knife? What a genial way you have of making kind inquiries. Thank you, I've not got it very badly; only badly enough."

"Who was she?"

"I've not the faintest notion; I'm not likely to have; I never had a really good look at her, and she never left her card. She came up as I was talking to your Mr. Glover, and so far as I was concerned that was the end of things. I was told afterwards

that she put a knife into me. Why, you probably know better than I do. No doubt she was a friend of yours. Andrew Tozer, what a remarkable man you are."

The visitor said nothing. He continued to regard her from over the foot of the bed with the same expressionless, unblinking gaze, which almost suggested the vacuous stare of a lay figure. The few words which came from him when he did speak seemed to be spoken with difficulty.

"We have made a hash of things between us."

The lady made a little grimace.

"Between us! That's rather good—considering!"

"Lucy, I've come to see you because I want to have a final understanding with you."

"Do you indeed? That's very good of you; especially as, so far, you've been beyond my understanding altogether. I doubt if any reasonable man or woman ever did understand you. I certainly never have."

"I always understood you."

"Yes, my dear man, you've always had, beyond anyone I've ever met, the faculty of seeing through a brick wall. I never knew the person you didn't understand; just—as I a second ago remarked—as I never met one who understood you. You must admit that I have pluck."

"Some of the silliest women I ever met were the pluckiest. What you call pluck often takes the place of brains."

"Thank you—you always were a neat hand at compliments. If want of pluck denotes brains, then where you are concerned I must have plenty, because from the first moment, looking through the window of that tin hut at Vryberg, I've been afraid of you."

"Not afraid enough."

"I'm beginning to think you're right. I doubt if any woman could be afraid enough of you, or, if it comes to that, any man either."

"I rather liked you when I first met you."

"You hadn't a penny in your pocket. What an object you were! You never have been much to look at, but—when I saw you first!"

"When luck began to change I grew fonder of you; you pretended to be fond of me."

"It wasn't all pretence. They say that women are fond of the men they fear; perhaps that is why I was fond of you."

"Then you threw me over."

"That's one way of putting it. Your ideas of how a woman ought to be treated by the superior animal man were new to me. I'd had some funny experiences even in those days, but as an

experience you were one too many; I didn't think so much of a man as you did—so we parted."

"And then you met Curtis."

"Ultimately I met Curtis—Sir Clifford Curtis, Mr. Tozer, if you please."

"And you married him; why?"

"Oh, one has one's reasons, sometimes, for a step of that sort. He had a house—a real family mansion——"

"In ruins! I know."

"I didn't then. He hinted once that it might want something done to it; it was only later that he told me it might be cheaper to rebuild. Then he had a title."

"Smudged."

"You see, on the Rand in those days so many of us were smudged, even those who hadn't titles."

"That's true."

"And then he had a little money."

"How much?"

"I can't tell you the exact figures, but I know he won nearly three thousand pounds from an American who was prospecting for gold. He showed it to me; the money was in notes and gold. I didn't count, but I'm pretty sure that the pile he showed me was worth all of three thousand. So I married him."

"On the strength of what he won at poker."

"Practically; that's what it comes to."

"A sound foundation for a happy marriage! The next time I saw you was in town, at some woman's party."

"It was not at some woman's, my dear Andrew; it was at Lady Darlington's."

"If you hadn't exactly improved in appearance—you couldn't have done that; you were the handsomest woman I ever knew when I first saw you—you hadn't changed very much for the worse. If you'd lost, you'd gained; I'm not sure you hadn't gained more than you'd lost. You used to be a trifle vulgar."

"A woman had to be in those days on the Rand, if she wanted to be a success with men."

"No doubt you're a trifle vulgar still, and more than a trifle. But you'd learned the knack of hiding it. You'd all the airs of a real great lady. It amused me to notice how much more real you were than the actual thing. Nowadays great ladies aren't ladies; sometimes when I'm with one I keep asking myself if she was ever a barmaid. Before we parted that first night you were at your old tricks."

"I told you as clearly as I could that I'd gone to Lady Darlington's on purpose to meet you—after all those years."

"You went for me bald-headed."

"Isn't that rather a vulgar way of putting it?"

"I was in two minds about you for a while. I understood your game; I had no delusions on that point. You and Sir Clifford Curtis were a good deal worse than penniless."

"We owed money to everyone who'd let us owe it. We were both of us absolutely at the end of our resources."

"In the case of a lady and gentleman of your sort that means something."

"Andrew, that means much."

"To you I represented money."

"You did—piles and piles."

"But I didn't understand all your game until it was revealed to me by—shall we call it the hand of Providence?"

"Was the whole thing ever revealed to you—even by the hand of Providence?"

"You shall hear. We were to run off together, you and I; we were to have a trip to South America. Europe was a chestnut; you didn't care for the States; South America was virgin ground; there we could live our lives over again, at any rate for a few months. It was to be all romance."

"Every bit of it, Andrew; every second of every day."

"My arrangements were made. Then, a few days before I was to start, the revelation came."

"Did it, Andrew? Was Providence the channel?"

"I heard your husband talking."

"Clifford always was a conversationalist; you've no idea how well he can talk. If you could only hear him when he's at his best."

"He was at his best then; he was talking to you."

"Was he? Where?"

"When I repeat to you some of the remarks he made they may recall to you the circumstances and the place. You had been winning some money at bridge so far as I could gather—about six hundred pounds; quite a lot of money."

These two had never removed their eyes from each other's faces. They seemed to be looking all the while for meanings which were behind the spoken words. At this point the lady's eyes seemed to grow brighter, as if she began to appreciate the situation in a fashion which was known only to herself.

"The occasion already commences to return to me. Yes, it was a deal of money."

"Curtis wanted you to share it with him, to go halves. You explained that you had the most pressing need of five hundred pounds, and that he might have what I took to be the hundred

left. He pointed out that he must have at least three hundred, or things would be awkward. Then you began to talk about me."

"Of course; it all comes back. But where were you playing the part of eavesdropper, Andrew dear?"

"I learnt that I was to be blackmailed on what to me were new lines. I have been blackmailed again and again; I'm still being blackmailed practically every day. It pays me to pay blackmail. I look upon it as a sort of secret service money. A certain amount is written off every year to meet such charges; but the sort of backmail you proposed to levy I didn't fancy at all."

"And yet you must have expected something of the kind, dear Andrew."

"I expected to have to pay for my whistle, but not quite in that way. You and I were to run away, as I supposed, to South America. But we were never to get there. Before we reached the boat you were to have an attack of conscience; you were to repent when it was too late. You were to write and tell your husband how you had repented—too late, and how I had tempted you with my bag full of gold—and a nice long string of lies. He was to bring an action for divorce and state the damages at a hundred thousand pounds. And you and he were both quite sure that if you didn't get the whole hundred thousand you'd get something which wasn't very far off. You were to come together again, and cut the money up between you, and live happy ever afterwards; and I was to be left smiling. That, I gathered from the little talk you had together, was the scheme you had contrived to bring it home to the 'old fossil'—by which term you meant me—that the age of romance was not dead."

"Is it any use my assuring you that someone has been libelling us—Sir Clifford and me; especially me?"

The lady said this with an archness which hardly harmonised with the light that was in her eyes. He ignored her question utterly.

"That little talk of yours settled the question. I threw that limelight on the scene which, according to your programme, was only to have come later; fortunately it came just in time for me. It set me thinking how to get the first blow in. And I got it."

"You certainly did do that; and that's how you got it, because you overheard our foolish little conversation, or was it reported to you, Andrew? Now I do begin to understand."

"You had prepared a mine for me; I countermined, and fired my mine first. You had arranged to make a bolt of it, and, so far as I could gather, your affectionate husband, Sir Clifford Curtis,

that paragon of chivalry, had arranged to help you. I made up my mind that you shouldn't be disappointed; you should have your chance of bolting."

The speaker paused. He spoke always with the same stolid woodenness, which gave to his words a sinister significance which a display of passion would not have done. Mrs. Cumberland seemed to realise this; though she continued to smile and bear herself with a brave front, one felt that somewhere she was quivering.

"In other words, you were resolved that the chivalry should be on your side, Andrew, and in the end it was. I wonder if you are really human."

Again he wholly ignored her observation.

"I knew a man named Pepper—Thomas Pepper. He was a bookmaker by profession—it's a profession which tends to virtue; for a thief is a fairly honest man. But he had one great quality—people said that he was very much like me. As he is one of the meanest-looking rascals of my acquaintance I used to look at myself in the glass and wonder. There was a likeness, but it was superficial. He was what I might have been; I was what he never could be—but he was good enough for you."

"Andrew, when you talk like that I feel——!" She left her sentence unfinished; he left it unheeded.

"I asked Pepper to lunch. I told him that there was a woman who called herself Lady Curtis who had squeezed me into promising to bolt with her, but that I didn't mean to all the same; I meant to put her in the cart. I added that if he would bolt with her by proxy he'd do me a favour—a favour which might be worth to me as much as a thousand pounds. A thousand pounds was a good deal of money to Tom Pepper, but he didn't fancy trusting himself in the society of the kind of woman I told him you were, even for that amount of money. I made it quite clear to him that you were a lying cat. I didn't want to put him in the cart more than I could help; in his way he was a decent sort of fellow—he was not like you."

"My dear Andrew, Clifford's in the town. Wouldn't you like to continue your remarks after he's returned?"

"Is that a threat?"

Although there was no perceptible change of tone there was something in the way in which he asked the question which made the woman shiver.

"Of course it's not a threat! Why should you suppose it was a threat?"

"If it is I have done with you. And I'll wait till that blackguard husband of yours does return, and then I'll have done with

him. Before he's been in this room ten minutes I'll have sent the pair of you on the road to the gallows."

He stopped, and the woman was still. Some of the colour seemed to have left her lips and her cheeks. The smile which accompanied her words when she did speak was forced.

"My dear Andrew, there is not—not the slightest reason why you should speak to me like that."

"I am going to talk to you just as I please. I'm going to have that much satisfaction, and if you even remotely suggest that I wouldn't talk to you as I please if your hound of a husband were here, I'll pay what I owe you in full; and I'll take a receipt from the hangman."

Somehow the colourless, expressionless fashion in which he spoke gave his words a malignant quality which was horrible. One felt that he conjured up in the imagination of his listener pictures at which she quailed.

"I had to increase that thousand pounds before Pepper saw his way. But at last we came to terms. He was to make himself up as much like me as he possibly could; I was to provide him with an entire outfit of my wearing apparel, marked in full with my historic name. As regards travelling kit, I met his every wish; I even saw that he was provided with the nucleus of a wardrobe for you. I could scarcely have been more generous if I had meant to bolt with you myself. At the appointed time he started to keep the rendezvous I had made with you. I wished him good luck, and off I went for a little change of air. I realised that when you had quite done enjoying the little joke I had planned, you still might want to have a little interview with me—both you and your husband; and I didn't mean that you should have it except on terms of my own. If after you'd done laughing at my sense of humour you'd tried to blackmail me, Lady Curtis, every word you uttered would have been overheard; I'd have trapped you, put you in the dock, and sent you to penal servitude, the pair of you. But things didn't turn out quite as I expected."

"I'm sorry for that. I might have tried to realise your expectations if I had known what they were; you shouldn't have kept them so dark."

"I should like to know from you, Lady Curtis, exactly what did take place."

"Don't you know already?"

"I do not. I know that Pepper was killed, and—chiefly I suppose because my clothes and other belongings were all over him—that they mistook him for me. But I should like to know just how that came about. To me it seems a trifle hazy

Besides, I should like to hear the story from your own lips—that's one of the things I've come for."

"And if I refuse to tell it you?"

"You won't."

"If I tell you lies?"

"You may start with telling lies; but you'll tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before you're through. I'll see to that. You won't keep on lying however you may begin."

"And when I've told you the truth, what do you propose to do? Hang me? Do you suppose I'll assist you in doing that?"

"You would if I chose; but I don't choose. You tell me exactly what happened; it will make a good story; coming from a woman's lips it will be a new sensation. When you've told the story—to my satisfaction—I'll make it my special business to look after your future—and your husband's."

"What do you call looking after our future?"

"You can't stay in Europe, either of you; I don't choose that you should stay. I have a nice little property in Mexico. I proposed that we should visit it, you and I, when, in search of romance, we started to live our lives all over again. You and your husband shall visit it instead. And while you continue to be my visitors I will provide you with an income which will be more than ample for your every need."

"Is this nice little place of yours in Mexico a death trap? Are you sure that we shall be dead inside six weeks, or perhaps six months?"

"Not at all; the climate is good, the country beautiful, the society pleasant; from every point of view you really could not desire a more delightful property. Don't I tell you that I intended it for ourselves?"

"But why are you placing it at our disposal?"

"Because I want you out of the way. And while you are there, living on my bounty, you will be on your good behaviour, at least so far as I am concerned. You can treat everyone else as badly as you like, but if you point so much as a finger in my direction I'll have you out of it, penniless, hounded, hunted, within four-and-twenty hours of the story reaching me. That is why I'm putting the place at your disposal, together with an income on which you will be able to live in luxury. The only consideration I require from you is the story of what happened at Henbean on the night of the thirteenth of May."

Mrs. Cumberland drew a great breath.

"And if I tell you you'll keep your word; you'll help us to get away; is it a bargain?"

"It is; tell your story; you shall receive your fee."

CHAPTER XXXV

AN ELOPEMENT WHICH FAILED

"It's not an easy story to tell."

Lady Curtis, or Mrs. Cumberland, as she was known in the hotel register, moistened her lips with the tip of her scarlet tongue, as though they were dry. Mr. Andrew Tozer observed the action with an air of stolidity which almost suggested that he might have been carved—face, and form, and all—out of wood.

"I hope, however, to find it a pleasant one to listen to."

There was something about the way in which she looked at him which almost hinted that she was asking herself what kind of creature this was she was looking at.

"You must have more remarkable tastes even than I supposed."

"That is always possible. My time is limited; will you please get on?"

"I don't know where to begin."

"At the beginning. Draw a vivid picture of the anxiety with which you kept your eyes upon the clock, of how you longed for the minutes to fly, yearning for the moment to come for you to leap into the arms in which you were to begin your life all over again."

"You told me to tell no lies. I won't even begin with them."

"That's right; begin as you mean to go on. Only—begin."

She repeated that little trick with the tip of her tongue.

"Give me something to drink; there's water in the jug. My lips, and tongue, and throat are parched."

He filled a glass at the washhand jug; she sipped the contents and pulled a face.

"It's lukewarm; I don't believe the water has been changed in that jug for days."

"Perhaps not; does it matter? Minutes are flying. You'll have to finish your tale before your husband returns from his stroll if you wish to visit that little place of mine in Mexico."

She held the glass whose contents she had sipped with what was almost convulsive force; she seemed to steady her nerves; then she began.

"You remember the hour at which we had agreed you should come to me?"

"Am I likely to forget so tender a memory?"

"I spent the evening with Clifford, going over with him, for the last time, the arrangements we had made—into which you appear to have gained an insight."

"Just an insight, no more—yet enough."

"Reed went to meet you at the station. Your train was late."

"Reed? Why Reed? Would it not have been more discreet, and more romantic, to have gone yourself to the station to meet me?"

"I had to trust someone; I decided to trust Reed—to that extent. The idea was that he should bring you to the house, to Henbean; you were not supposed to know that Clifford was there. You were to suppose that I was all alone in the house, that I had come down from London, all alone, to that lonely house, for the sole purpose of meeting you."

"When you come to think of it, the whole idea was rather silly. Why should you have gone down to that ancient ruin at all? Why couldn't I have met you in town and started right away?"

"I preferred that you should meet me at Henbean. It was exactly the house, standing all alone there in the great park which had run to seed, for the kind of meeting which I proposed ours should be. You have got, as you said yourself, an insight into what Clifford and I had arranged; but as you also added, you had no more."

"There was more?"

"A great deal. Your glimpse had been at the plan as we first outlined it; but we outlined a dozen plans—and threw them all overboard. The plan which remained was one into which you hadn't even had an insight. It would have worked so well—I'm sure it would have worked so well. The pity is that the conversation on which you blundered should have spoilt it all. The car that was to bring you from the station was late; I went out half a dozen times into the avenue to hear if it was coming. As you know, Henbean is leagues away from anywhere. At night it is so still that you can hear a motor-car a good deal more than a mile away. When at last there was the sound of wheels my nerves were a bit like fiddle-strings. I had a feeling that with a little more strain they'd snap. There had been a good many arrangements to make, and things to think of; you'll understand that I wasn't quite my usual self."

"Your usual sunny self, you should say. I can understand that perfectly."

"You've no idea how overdone we were with worries, both

Clifford and I. It's an actual fact that there weren't five pounds in the house—between us. Clifford had been in town all day trying to get a loan from someone, and he hadn't got a stiver."

"It wouldn't have been much use if he had; stivers aren't legal tender. As I said, I can quite understand how keen you were for the coming of that motor-car—it was bringing you money; that it was also bringing you a lover was a detail not worth notice. Did Sir Clifford Curtis go out with you into the avenue to listen?"

"Once or twice he did; he was as anxious as I was."

"He would be; like a good husband, he made his wife's troubles his own."

"When at last I did hear the car, and it began to come down the drive towards the house, it struck me that there was something odd about the noise it was making. When I saw it I understood. Reed was drunk."

"And who was Reed? I don't seem to have heard of him before."

"Reed was the chauffeur—a little, undersized animal, who had been turned out of endless places for all sorts of offences. Clifford thought he was just the person for us."

"He naturally would. Sir Clifford has an eye for a kindred spirit, even in a servant."

"He knew one or two things about the man, which made him think that he wouldn't be likely to give us away, if only for his own sake. And he could drive. He had driven cars at Brooklands and done well with them. But he would drink. I don't believe he ever was quite sober, and when he was drunk his driving was a thing to wonder at."

"I can fancy myself on a big car with a drunken chauffeur whose driving was 'a thing to wonder at.'"

"I knew he was very drunk from the way in which he sent the car from side to side of the avenue; the way in which it didn't just crash into the trees was a sight to see. I wondered what you were thinking of his proceedings, knowing that you were practically a total abstainer. I sent Clifford into the house when I heard the car, but he put his head out and said to me: 'Bob Reed is as drunk as blazes—that can't be Tozer's doing.' I had just time to tell him I didn't think it could be when he had to skip back into the house because of the car turning the last corner Instead of bringing the car to a proper standstill, Reed seemed as if he meant to take it right up the steps into the house; he stopped it just as the front wheels were touching the bottom step. I had meant to make a great fuss of you, but there was something about the whole business which bothered me. I

wondered if by any chance Reed had missed you, and if that explained the state he was in. When the car did stop an altercation began between Reed and his passenger, which mystified me still more. Apparently Reed wanted the passenger to alight. And the passenger wouldn't, or couldn't; I wasn't sure which it was. Presently Reed got up in his seat and actually began to force the passenger, who was seated beside him, out of his. This was a little too much. I moved forward. 'Reed!' I exclaimed, 'what are you doing?' 'If you please, your ladyship,' he replied, 'Mr. Tozer's drunk; he can't stand, can't hardly speak, can't make nothing of what he says; he's damn drunk, that's what Mr. Tozer is. Can't do nothing with him at all.' He addressed his passenger. 'Now then, governor, out you get! I don't want to stop in this here car all night if you do.' Before I could stop him, Reed had taken his passenger somehow by the shoulder and assisted him on to the ground. 'Oh, Andrew,' I cried, rushing towards you—as I supposed, 'what is the matter? Do you know how late you are? I've been watching the hands of the clock.' I remember quite distinctly—I never shall forget that I got as far as that when you—I still supposed it was you—came blundering against me, put your arms about my shoulders—or tried to, because one went where you never meant it should go—and you actually kissed me—before Bob Reed, observing in a husky voice: 'That's all right, old dear—no fault of mine, never keep a lady waiting. Hold on, my love, or I shall fall.'"

The lady paused, an expression on her face which it would not have been easy to describe. Her auditor interposed a comment.

"I had no idea that Tom Pepper was such a gallant soul where a woman was concerned. It only shows, as has been remarked by someone else, that you may know a man pretty well and yet not know him at all."

"I won't ask you to imagine my sensations, because I am aware that they were of a peculiarly complicated kind, altogether beyond your reach. You may not think so, but I know that imagination is not your strongest point. Who the creature was who ventured to use me in such a fashion I could not conceive—that you certainly may imagine. For some moments I still thought it was you. In the uncertain light—although there was a light in the hall it was quite dark at the foot of the steps—the creature looked like you, and you must remember that the possibility of your playing me such a trick had never entered my wildest imaginings."

"So it would seem that, at any rate on that one point, my imagination was the better horse."

"When it began to dawn on me, as of course it instantly did,

that this drunken animal who had thrown his arms about me, and had actually polluted me with his lips, was not you, was a perfect stranger, my first feeling was one of utter bewilderment. I supposed that Reed had been to blame. 'Who is this man you've brought here?' I asked him. 'This is not Mr. Tozer.' 'Pardon me, your ladyship,' he replied, 'but that's where you're wrong. He is Mr. Tozer, because he told me himself that he was Mr. Tozer. Aren't you Mr. Tozer?' The stranger hiccoughed an answer. 'Certainly I am, I'm Andrew Tozer, I'm Mr. Andrew Tozer—that's me. How are you, my love?' and he lurched in my direction. A wild suspicion came into my head that there might be something which required investigation not in the presence of Bob Reed. So I sent Reed off. The stranger and I were left alone."

"That must have been a pleasant moment for both of you."

"The stranger was standing by the side of the car, without whose aid he would have found it difficult to stand at all. I asked him directly Reed had gone: 'Now, my man, perhaps you will be so good as to explain what this means. What are you doing here? Why do you call yourself by a name which doesn't belong to you?' 'It's like this, my dear,' he said. 'I am Andrew Tozer in a manner of speaking. It's as Mr. Andrew Tozer I've come here to elope with you. There's all my luggage in the car, if you doubt me, and I've got the money in my pocket. Mr. Andrew Tozer—he's my friend—he said to me: "There's a lady who's a devil of a piece who wants me to take her for a little run abroad. I have promised I'll do it too," he said, "but I don't want to do it. I'd sooner travel with a wagon-load of monkeys," he said; "she's the devil of a piece. If you'll go with her instead of me," he said, "I'll make it well worth your while." I said I would, and here I am, ready, my love, when you are. All you've got to do is say the word and off we'll start—with my friend the chauffeur. Mr. Tozer, his last words to me were: "Now you're Andrew Tozer, seeing that you're taking my place, and don't you forget it; and mind you explain that to the lady" And here I am explaining it; I'm all the Andrew Tozer you'll ever get.'"

"If that's an accurate account of what Tom Pepper really did say, it does credit to your memory."

"I don't think I've forgotten a word the creature said; I don't think I ever shall forget. The whole of that night is stamped upon my brain with a die whose impress will never grow faint."

"Very well expressed. You're capable of touches of eloquence."

If Mr. Tozer's words were said with a grin, the grin was an

internal one ; there was nothing to suggest it in his tone or on his face.

"I wonder," said Mrs. Cumberland, "if there is in you anywhere anything of a man."

"I'm sure," he retorted, "that there's nothing in you of what I took to be womanly when I was a child at my mother's knee. Go on with your story ; you're just getting to an interesting point. Don't waste time by pretending to play a part for which you're not suited. Just go straight on."

She seemed to be reflecting, watching his face as a mouse might watch a cat ; then, because of something which she saw on it, to arrive at a final decision.

"Before I had a chance to ask myself if the creature was too drunk to know what he was saying, or just sober enough to get somewhere near the truth, he was on me again ; the fact being that directly he moved away from the car he had to make for me to save himself from falling to the ground. It was done so quickly that he had his arms about me before I guessed what he would be at. And he kept his arms round me ; whether drink had given him the strength which he did not seem to possess I can't say, but he held me in a hug which was like a bear's. I'll do him the justice to say that I believe quite unwittingly he got his arms so round me that my own arms were pinned to my sides ; I could scarcely even struggle ; and when he began to kiss me, as he did again and again, I couldn't even loose my hands to strike him. I believe I screamed ; I have laughed at the idea of women screaming, but at the moment there was simply nothing else I could do—and all at once Clifford came out of the front door."

"Just in the nick of time. The 'all at once' is rather a neat touch. Was he to have done the same thing if you had been struggling in my arms ?"

This time it was the gentleman's remark which went unheeded. The lady continued, as if describing a scene which was being enacted right in front of her. Each moment her voice grew tenser.

"When Clifford saw me going on like that I fancy he rather lost his head. He's very fond of me, is Clifford——"

"Is he ?"

"He is. He had never fancied the part I was to play with you ; it was only the absolutely desperate state we were in which had made him agree. The sight of me struggling in another man's arms just made him see red. He thought it was you I was struggling with, and that made it worse. 'Clifford,' I screamed, 'Clifford ! take him away !' He came down the

steps. I didn't know till he told me afterwards that he had in his hand the revolver with which we meant to frighten you."

"Was that to have been part of the fresh programme?"

"Taking it for granted that it was with you that I was struggling, he tried to frighten you with that revolver then. He held it up and he said—I heard him say it quite plainly; I shall always keep on hearing him say it—'Mr. Tozer, if you don't release my wife I'll put a bullet through your brain.' He thought the revolver was unloaded, or rather that it was only loaded with blank cartridge; we both thought so."

"Naturally concluding that blank cartridge would be good enough to frighten a simple soul like me."

"I don't know that the creature knew what he said, or even heard; I doubt if he did either. Clifford was in such a rage that he certainly did not understand what was happening. When he saw that I was still being held tight, and that the creature was behaving worse every second, Clifford lost his head entirely. He just swore and fired. He tells me that he only meant to fire once, but the instant he fired the creature, lurching backwards, struck against the revolver, so that it was fired a second time. The creature let go of me and went down in a lump. 'Clifford,' I said, 'what have you done?' 'By God!' he said, 'I believe those cartridges were loaded.' I knew they were. I know the sound of a loaded cartridge as well as most men. Clifford looked at me, and I looked at him, and neither of us saw anything very encouraging. The creature had never stirred. Clifford stooped over him. 'Nell,' he whispered, 'I believe I've shot him dead.' I knew he had before he spoke; something in the convulsive way in which that creature had loosed his hold of me had told me so. Clifford stood up and looked at me again. 'What are we to do?' he asked. It was like Clifford all over to ask a question like that. When we are really in a tight fix he always asks me what's to be done. Sometimes I wish he'd ask me a little sooner—I wished it then. If he'd only kept his head a little the thing would not have happened. But it was too late to talk; the thing had happened. 'Do you think,' I asked, 'that anybody in the house heard the shots? Reed is too drunk. Is anyone else up?' He shook his head. 'Let's put him on the car and take him away again. You can drive.' I could see he didn't fancy driving a load like that. 'At any rate,' he said, 'let's put him into the car. Afterwards we'll talk about who's to drive. I want a few minutes in which to pull myself together.' He went to open the door of the car, and then——"

She stopped, as if her own words had conjured up memories which were too dreadful even for her. The immobile Mr. Tozer

seemed never to have taken his eyes from off her face. She might have been talking of the most commonplace topics for all the emotion he showed. There was an aloofness about him, an air of keeping himself outside the woman's dreadful tale, which was scarcely human. His very tone was bloodless.

"And then? Well? What then? Why pause?"

Mrs. Cumberland shuddered. She shut her eyes; when she opened them again tiny beads of perspiration stood upon her brow.

"Clifford gave an exclamation which startled me even more than the two shots had done. 'Nell,' he said, 'in the name of all that's wonderful what have you got in here?' Then he added as he leaned farther into the car: 'Who have you got?' I hadn't a notion what he meant. I was beginning not to have a notion of what any of it meant; the whole thing was resolving itself into one of those nightmares in which all that one is conscious of is a sense of horror. I didn't move towards the car; I stood quite still and watched; I couldn't have moved. Clifford thrust his whole long body into the open tonneau. Then as with an effort he drew himself upright; as he straightened himself inch by inch, I realised that he was straining himself to raise some heavy object; and all at once I realised that it was a woman."

Mrs. Cumberland's voice was broken by an odd little sound, as if some foreign object had got into her throat and impeded her utterance.

"Just as Clifford had got her upright something happened to her—she came to life. 'Where am I?' she asked. Clifford fell back. No wonder, for until that second he had thought that she was dead. Then he fired at her a volley of questions. 'Who are you? How did you get into that car? What do you mean by coming here? Tell me your name.' He spoke with so much violence that she told it him. 'My name? My name is Elsie Winton.'"

"What?" The interjection came from the listener at the foot of the bed. For the first time his voice showed a trace of emotion. He put his hands on the brass rail of the bedstead. "What did you say her name was?"

The lady seemed surprised at his sudden show of interest.

"She said her name was Elsie Winton."

Something queer happened to Mr. Tozer, as though the husk in which he had prisoned himself was broken and the man came out. Quitting his position at the foot of the bed, he strode towards the woman who was on it as though he were going to strike her.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THROUGH THE NIGHT

As the gentleman waxed warm the lady grew cooler. A puzzled look came on her face, as if the change in his attitude suggested to her something in the nature of a problem. The acute bitterness which had marked her tone gave place to a sort of sullen curiosity.

"Does a young woman named Elsie Winton chance to be among your friends or acquaintances?" He said nothing, but she seemed to see an answer in his attitude. "I see, it's like that. Since Miss Winton is a friend of yours perhaps you will be so good as to explain her presence in that motor-car."

"I explain? It's for you to explain. Didn't she explain? But she could not have been the Miss Winton I know. What kind of person was she—to look at?"

"She was short, and fair, and pretty, and she said that she lived in the Battersea Park Road."

Andrew Tozer went so close to the lady that she drew herself away from him—as if she were afraid.

"Andrew! If you could only see your own face! I thought you were going to take me by the throat."

He hesitated, as if he still meditated something of the kind.

"Is this all lies you're telling me? Was there a girl inside that motor-car—your motor-car, which took to you that drunkard—Pepper?"

"There was; I am telling you no lies—only the simple truth, which you desired."

"What did you say to her? What did you do? If you did anything to hurt her——!" The man's rage prevented his finishing his own sentence.

"We did nothing to hurt her. It's no use your glaring at me like that. Do you suppose your friend, Miss Winton, was there at our request?"

"Don't you talk to me like that—don't you! or—or I'll have you hanged. Tell me what you said to her, tell me every word—and what you did."

"We said a good deal to her, but she said very little to us.

We took her into the house—she could hardly stand by herself; Clifford and I had each to take an arm. What was the matter with her we couldn't make out. Our first impression was that she had been drinking—with Bob Reed and your friend, the creature."

"Drinking! Elsie! You——" Again he left his sentence unfinished.

"If your intention is to strike me, Andrew, strike me and have done with it; but please don't gibber. You're not a pleasant object to contemplate when you do that. I said that that was our first impression. When we got her into the house, and to the light, we saw that it was a wrong one. Something ailed her. Whether she was suffering from shock, or from what, we could not tell—she was suffering from something. She seemed dazed, incapable of speech; she was in a pitiable plight. How she came to be in that car was and, so far as we are concerned, is a mystery. We could make nothing of her; we couldn't even make out if she had seen that creature's behaviour to me, or even if she knew him—or even if she had heard those two shots. A doctor might have done something with her; we couldn't."

"What did you do? You did something—what was it?"

"I gave her a sleeping-draught."

"And what might you happen to mean by a sleeping-draught?"

"Just what I say. I gave her a little preparation of chloral which I keep for my own use. I suffer from sleeplessness; and when it had taken effect, which it does immediately, Clifford and I started to carry her back to the car; but when we got into the open air we found that something very awful had happened."

There was a pause in the narrative which savoured of the ominous. Andrew Tozer, standing by the bed, leaned towards the lady. He spoke in lowered tones—which also had something in them which was ominous.

"If that awful thing happened to Elsie Winton——"

The trick which he had fallen into of leaving his sentences unfinished seemed to give to them a more sinister significance than a mere conclusion would have done.

"It hadn't; in a way I rather wish it had."

"By — you do! What had happened?"

"I thought, while Clifford and I were in the house, trying to make something of Miss Winton, that more than once I had heard something for which I couldn't account. But we were so engrossed that I wasn't sure; but I was when we got outside. Clifford was carrying the girl's head and I her feet. The instant we were out of the door—I dropped her."

The listener started; made as if to speak; said nothing. The

lady went on—to a part of her story which she seemed reluctant to approach.

"I had to drop her feet; I had to do something. Clifford nearly dropped her head, but that he just managed not to do. I knew on the instant what had happened, I knew the sound—I knew it was that which I had heard in the house, that it had not been imagination. You remember Boy?"

Mr. Tozer had been bending over the bed; all at once he stood straight up. For the second time some sort of expression came on to his face, as if he were startled. He only uttered two words; if they had been two hundred they could not have been more pregnant with meaning.

"I remember."

"The tiger cub you brought me from India."

"I thought he was dead."

"Why should you have thought that? I never told you he was."

"That is so; it was a sort of general impression."

"Until lately he was a mere plaything, harmless as a puppy; but quite recently there have been little things which made us consider the advisability of getting rid of him; we thought of offering him to the Zoo, but—had got no farther. Once he had got loose and killed a sheep, and once a dog—a huge mastiff which I saw him kill with a blow of his paw. As Clifford and I stood on the steps with the girl between us, we recognised the sound which he had made when he attacked the dog. I can't describe it, though I can hear it now—it was a sort of purring, growling whine. I knew what had happened before I looked. He had broken loose again. He had found that drunken friend of yours lying in a heap, and, attracted perhaps by the smell of his blood, had begun to make a meal of him. It was not a pretty sight. Clifford had put that revolver back in his pocket. He took it out. He laid the girl carefully down upon the step; he said to me, 'Stay by her,' and he went down the steps to Boy. Boy was too much occupied to take any heed of him—or Clifford would have had to fight for his own life. He got the muzzle of the revolver close to Boy's ear, and he shot him dead—so we were confronted by the problem of what to do with two dead bodies—as well as an unconscious girl."

"So long as you did nothing to harm her——"

"We did nothing to harm her. We put her back where she came from—on the bottom of the car. We placed what was left of your friend on the back seat, and near him what was left of Boy. I got up beside Clifford, and off we went."

"You appear to have had a pleasant load."

"Looking back, I wonder how we ever did it; I wouldn't be in such a position again for all the money in the world; it had all come so quickly that I don't think we realised what we were doing. We had a spade on the car. Our idea was to begin by burying Boy, and then to take the car for a little run and do something with your friend. We came to Naylor's field at Bemerton; it's on the high road to Salisbury, by the side of the road. The farm of which it forms part is our property, though no part of the rent which old Shaw, the tenant, pays comes to us. Clifford stopped the car, got down, carried Boy into the field, and the spade, leaving me to look after what was left. It was raining pretty fast by that time, and we had started in such a hurry that I had put my things on anyhow. I got into the road to make myself as comfortable as I could. I had thought, as we came along, that I had seen something lying on the road, so close that I had said to Clifford: 'Look out, there's something there.' And he had turned off just in time or, whatever it was, we should have been over it. When I had got my mackintosh properly fastened, and the hood over my head, I went back to see what it was. It was a man—he was lying there in the wet. I was pretty startled—we didn't want any men about just then. I didn't know what to do. As I stood staring he got up—with difficulty; he made such a business of getting up that I thought he was drunk. When he was on his feet he stared at me and I at him. Andrew, have you ever met an individual named Francis Turner—or heard of him?"

"I've heard the name; I may have met him; I don't know."

"He's a very fine gentleman, is Mr. Francis Turner; he is a welcome guest in some of the best houses in town, and his name has been coupled with the names of half a dozen beautiful ladies. I have heard him called the most popular man in town. And there he was, staring at me in the darkness and the rain, as pitiable an object as you could wish to see. He was without a hat, seemed to be covered with mud—face, and clothes, and all—and something seemed to have happened to his legs which made it difficult for him to stand. I never spoke a word, nor he either; just as I was about to speak he moved away and went lurching off along the road, as if it were not wide enough. There was something odd about his manner, going off without a word—I did not know if he had recognised me—the way in which he moved—about the whole encounter. Fancy finding one of the most popular men in London lying by the roadside in that remote part of the country, at that hour of the night, and in that weather."

"The man had drunk too much and was sleeping it off."

"When he had gone, and I was just about to go, I kicked against something which was lying on the road. I picked it up. It was a tiny revolver. That was another startler, especially considering the way in which Mr. Turner had gone lurching off along the road. I struck a match and looked at the place where he had been lying. It was not very easy to be sure in a light like that, but it seemed to me that he had been lying on ground which was stained with blood. The match's expiring flicker revealed an object which seemed to be drawn close up to the hedge. The match went out before I could decide what it was. You have no idea what it felt like to be standing there in the darkness and the rain with that revolver in my hand, wondering what the object could be."

"You appear to have spent an agreeable evening; or what is perhaps still better, an eventful one. The result of my little jest seems to have surpassed all my anticipations."

"I didn't care to light another match; a little light shows far in the darkness—we did not want to attract unnecessary attention, so I felt my way to where I had seen the object. Directly I got to within a few feet of it I knew what it was—it was a motor-car, a big, apparently new motor-car, fitted with all those extravagant extras which a dealer's ingenuity can devise. I tell you, Andrew, that was a night of surprises, that night of the thirteenth of May."

"The more interesting on that account; life has so few surprises."

Mrs. Cumberland gave a great sigh.

"Thank goodness! if they are surprises like those. I did not know what to make of it nor what to do. That car, and that revolver, and Mr. Turner had something to do with each other—but what? If the car was his he was not likely to have been in it all alone. If someone had been with him, who was that someone, and where had that someone gone? How came a costly car like that, with all its expensive trimmings, to have been left stranded in a place a dozen miles away from anywhere, as if it were a trifle of no account and as if it belonged to no one? Under no circumstances of which I could conceive was one likely to treat a car like that as if it were a matter of no account. There were things inside the body of the car, rugs, wraps, and things like that. I got hold of a grey silk wrap—a woman's wrap, a wrap which was only likely to belong to a woman who would ride in a car like that. There was something in one of the pockets—a gold cigarette case. There was something on one of the sides—either a crest or a monogram."

"Pray what was the estimable Sir Clifford doing while you

pursued your investigations into the mystery of Mr. Turner and the derelict motor-car ?"

"He was burying Boy. I ran back to him with the cigarette case in my hand. He was just finishing. I waited till he had stamped down the earth and replaced the turf as well as he could. When he came on to the road I told him what had occurred. I showed him the cigarette case. He looked at it by the light of one of our head lamps."

"Your lamps were lighted; you were not afraid of lights to that extent ?"

"We were in a quandary. If our lamps weren't lighted, and a policeman came along who patrols the road at night——"

"There is such a person in the country ?"

"We know the policeman who patrolled that road, but that would make it no better for us if he came upon us with our lamps unlighted. On the other hand, if they were lighted we might manage to stall off inquiries; so we had lighted them as the lesser evil. Clifford held the cigarette case to one of our head lights. 'What's on it ?' I asked. 'A crest.' 'Whose ?' Clifford knows everything about crests and that sort of thing and I know nothing. 'I can't quite make out—I seem to know it.' Suddenly he stood right up. 'I've got it. Let me see that car.' He took one of the lights out of our car and carried it to the other."

"All the while what was left of my friend Pepper was on one seat of your car, and that young lady was what you would probably call asleep at the bottom ?"

She nodded, going on with her story without giving an answer in words.

"When Clifford had seen the other car, and had examined it as well as he could by the light of the lamp, he turned to me and he laughed—not loudly, but it seemed to make my blood run cold to hear him. 'Don't,' I gasped. 'Clifford, for God's sake don't do that.' He laughed again; though it was ever so faintly, I wished he wouldn't. 'Nell,' he said, 'this car is the one which the other day you were wishing was yours.' I couldn't think what he meant: I was always wishing other people's cars were mine. 'This,' he went on, 'is Lady Ditchling's new Rolls-Royce, an own brother to the one which you declared you'd buy yourself out of old Tozer's money, if he didn't buy you one himself before the trouble began.'"

Mr. Tozer held up his hand to stop her, apparently wishing to make a remark of his own.

"One moment. I remember her ladyship's new car; the old man gave it to her. So you proposed to yourself that I should buy you one like it ?"

"So Clifford said, and I daresay he was right."

What might have been a twinkle of malice came and went in the lady's eyes.

"How came the Countess of Ditchling's motor-car to have been left stranded at that hour in such a place as you describe? Had there been an accident? Had anything gone wrong with the works? Had it broken down?"

"I have no more idea how it came to be there than you have; but I can tell you this: there had been no accident and there was nothing wrong with the works. Its presence put a great idea into Clifford's head. 'I tell you what,' he said; 'let's get Tozer's substitute on this, you drive off with him, and leave him somewhere with the car. When they see whose car he's on, people may form conclusions which will divert attention from us.' We acted on his idea—only I amended it. I didn't want to be seen driving; I decided that your friend should drive himself. We rigged him up upon the driver's seat, while I screwed myself in between him and the wheel, so that people might think he was alone on the car. I am pretty handy with a car, and I managed pretty well."

"You must be pretty handy to have managed to do that."

"The idea was that Clifford should start first in our own car with your young lady friend, and that I should follow by another road. We were to meet at Blackwater, which is a village on the London road, more than fifty miles from where we were, and not far from Bagshot. Somewhere near there—which was a long way from us—the Countess's car was to be abandoned; I was to join Clifford in our own car, and we were to go back home. That was the programme as it originally stood, but it wasn't quite carried out. Long before I reached Blackwater it had become clear to me that it would be much better to leave the car either on the outskirts of London, or London itself—if the thing were possible—and I believed it to be possible. I didn't know what we were going to do with your Miss Winton——"

"Kindly don't speak of that lady in quite that tone; it has perhaps escaped your memory that that is a request which I have already made."

"I did not know what we could do with Miss Elsie Winton if we kept her in our own car. I doubted if she had the least idea of what had happened; if we could dispose of her comfortably I doubted if she ever would. So I thought that if we transferred her to her ladyship's car, so that when she woke up in a London suburb she would find herself inside it, how she came to be there would be as much a mystery to her as her presence in our car was a mystery to us, and why, then, she would not be able to

give much information about us. Or should she be so unfortunate as to be found inside the car before she woke up, why, then, she might be able to give less information still. When I met Clifford I told him my scheme, and I made him hand her over. He was disposed to argue, to cavil; he fancied that the risk would be too great; that I was sure to be stopped, detected—I don't know what. But I wouldn't listen. I meant to have my own way, and I had it. He brought Miss Winton to me, and with two passengers instead of one off I went."

She paused, as if to get a mental picture of the events in their proper sequence.

"Blackwater is thirty-five miles from London. I've gone over the road times without number. It's not a pretty one—not so bad through Bagshot and Staines, but afterwards through Hounslow, through the horrors of Brentford, by the tramlines to Hammersmith—all that is not nice. That night those thirty-five miles were one long nightmare. I wanted to go as fast as I could, and again and again I daren't. I had to crawl. I did not find it easy to keep your friend on his seat and myself out of sight—and do both these things while driving the car. And every now and then the rain came down in sheets; sometimes in spite of the powerful headlights I could not see half a dozen yards ahead. Have you ever driven a big motor-car at night through a blinding rain? It isn't easy even from the driver's seat; but from where I was—if you were to cut my head open you'd find the details of each one of those thirty-five miles photographed on my brain, especially the bit from Hounslow, through Brentford, to Kew Bridge. There were lots of people in Brentford High Street, and policemen; I had to crawl, though the light was so strong that I expected each second that someone would stop the car, and ask what was the matter with my passenger, who was supposed to be driving. But no one did. I almost collided with a tramcar at Kew Bridge; that nearly knocked my passenger off the seat. If I hadn't given the driving-wheel a wrench there would have been an end both to the tram and us. In Hammersmith Broadway I stopped; I couldn't make up my mind what to do. There had been no real chance of abandoning the car since leaving Hounslow. I wondered if I should run down to Brook Green and leave it there. A pushing paper-boy came towards me, and off I went again—straight on—until I reached Pall Mall; and then I could endure it no longer. I was beginning to have a feeling that if something wasn't done, like the Wandering Jew I should have to keep on for ever; the mere thought meant madness. Pall Mall was deserted; when I got there the rain was coming down in sheets. I pulled up near the Climax

Club ; and I skipped. And there, so far as I know it, is the whole history of the night of the thirteenth of May ; the whole pretty story, exactly as it happened. I have told it—it hasn't been an agreeable task—in compliance with your wishes, and relying on your promise. Now how about that little place in Mexico? Clifford has gone up to that club on the Boulevard de Waterloo. Perhaps you'll be able to give me the details before he returns. The sooner everything is arranged and we're off the better—for the three of us. If we are called to an account you will be also. You have more to lose than we have. I need not point out that that funny joke of yours was the cause of all, and that therefore you're responsible for everything that happened."

CHAPTER XXXVII

MRS. ANTHONY DUNKELS

INSPECTORS HEXTALL and Bradley were closeted with the Chief Commissioner in his apartment at Scotland Yard. With them was a fourth person, tall, dark, square faced, clean shaved—Alfred Sturgess, one of the heads of the Criminal Investigation Department. A sort of consultation was being held on one or two problems which were engaging the attention of the department. First and foremost was the affair of the Pall Mall motor-car: The Chief Commissioner was speaking.

"It will be a very serious thing if the Earl of Ditchling does choose to make trouble. I understand from Sergeant Griffin that he actually did arrest the Countess—on your instructions."

Inspector Hextall looked as if he were not quite happy; indeed, he as good as admitted that he was not.

"That is so, Sir Franklin; but Griffin moved rather quicker than I expected. The finding of the body of the tiger placed a different complexion on the matter. It seems quite clear that Mr. Tozer was savaged by some creature of the kind, and there's nothing to connect such a creature with the Countess of Ditchling."

"You found the body of the tiger in a field on property which belongs to Sir Clifford Curtis."

"I did; there's no doubt that the tiger belonged to Sir Clifford Curtis—or rather, to his wife. It was given to her when a small cub by Mr. Tozer himself. It was alive at ten o'clock on the night of the thirteenth of May, and nothing was seen of it afterwards till I found the body. Something happened at Henbean on the night of the thirteenth of May, and Mr. Kohn is down there making inquiries."

"I have a report from him here."

This was Superintendent Sturgess; he held up some sheets of paper. Sir Franklin Terry was the next speaker.

"Then there's the statement of the man Reed, Robert Reed—Sir Clifford Curtis's chauffeur—that he met Andrew Tozer at the station, took him to Henbean, and that he was met at the door of the house by Lady Curtis, who, so far as Reed knows, was

its only occupant. That seems pretty significant; but on the other side there's the fact that the fellow, on his own showing, is a pretty sort of blackguard. Then Lady Curtis was seen in town the next day—she was met in two houses by friends of my own—while her husband, Sir Clifford, did not alter his manner of living in the slightest degree. If the conclusion to which Reed's statement points is the correct one, Sir Clifford and Lady Curtis must be a remarkable pair."

"You must remember, sir," observed the Superintendent, "that there seems to be no doubt—whatever sort of character Reed may be—that Mr. Tozer did go down by the train he mentions, and that he did meet him at the station. Kohn here adds a good deal more. You have before you the account from Salisbury of the death of Mr. Francis Turner at Worrall's Farm, Bruford, which is within a short distance of Henbean. Mr. Turner's statement that he committed suicide does not seem to be accepted in its entirety by the medical man in attendance. So far as can be gathered, he shot himself within less than a hundred yards of the place where Inspector Hextall unearthed the remains of the tiger. Mr. Kohn professes to connect what happened to him with what happened to Mr. Tozer; but to me the connection seems misty."

"The first thing we have to do is to interview Sir Clifford and Lady Curtis."

"Hasn't that been done already?"

"We have tried to do so, but failed. What you say is correct; Sir Clifford and Lady Curtis were in town, but now they are away—no one seems to know where. We are endeavouring to trace them. I think that when we find them it is extremely likely they will be able to throw a great deal of light upon the matter."

The Superintendent had scarcely ceased speaking when a constable appeared in the doorway.

"A woman wishes to see the Chief Commissioner."

"A woman?" Sir Franklin glanced at the officer. "What kind of woman? What's her name and business? Why doesn't Levison see her?"

"Mr. Levison has seen her, sir. She says she has come to see you about the man who was murdered in Piccadilly Circus; she told Mr. Levison that she wouldn't be put off with anybody but you. Mr. Levison thinks that if you have a minute or two to spare you might do no harm by seeing her."

The Chief Commissioner glanced at Inspector Bradley.

"This sounds as if it were your affair. What do you say, Sturgess; shall we have her in here?"

"As you like, sir. We're in a position in which assistance is welcome from any quarter; as Levison puts it, we can do no harm."

"Show the woman in, and place a couple of men on duty outside the room."

The constable vanished, presently returning with a tall, upstanding, not bad-looking woman, dressed in the height of fashion, who bore herself as if she were conscious of her own importance.

"To whom have I the pleasure of speaking?" the Commissioner asked.

Before replying, the woman glanced at his companions.

"I asked to see you, not your whole force. Who are these men?"

The Commissioner seemed to be amused by the woman's air.

"This," he remarked, pointing with the end of a pen to the person in question, "is Inspector Bradley. I'm told that you wish to speak to me about the case of the man who was murdered in Piccadilly Circus; Inspector Bradley is in charge of the case."

"Is he? Then he'd better make me his prisoner; I'm the one who did it; and I'd do it again if I knew I should have to hang for it five minutes afterwards."

The four men looked at the speaker. Her words were startling, yet they were not uttered as if for the sake of effect. She spoke with a scornful callousness, as if she were very much in earnest.

"What's your name?" asked the Commissioner.

"That's it—my name; that was the beginning of it all. My maiden name was Driscoll—Sarah Driscoll—known to my friends, or those who called themselves my friends, because I don't believe anyone has any real friend in this world—not what I understand as friends—as Sally. I occupy rooms in Drayton Road, Fulham, and there I'm known as Miss Driscoll. But that's not my name—not now it isn't; I'm a married woman, though my husband never let anyone know it—why, always was beyond me, and always will be. If he'd let me use his name, and take my proper place as his wife, I shouldn't be where I am now."

"Before you go on," observed the Commissioner, when the visitor's volubility gave him a chance to speak, "it is my duty to inform you, in view of the statement you have just now made, that anything you may say will be taken down and used in evidence against you."

"That's what I want it to be, isn't it?" The woman's manner was even more scornful. "I'm as nearly mad as a woman may be without being quite. Everything has gone against me, everything in the whole world; and because I can't

stand the strain any longer I've come here to make a clean breast of things. By the time I've done you'll see that what I have to say has almost as much to do with the case of that Pall Mall motor-car as with the murder in the Circus—I want my statement to be taken down in writing. Who is going to do it?"

The Commissioner touched the button of an electric bell. A person in civilian costume appeared through the door which was at the other end of the room.

"Send Grant in here, with pens, ink, and paper."

The civilian, retreating, was replaced by an elder man, who brought with him the requisite materials for writing. The Commissioner addressed him, designating a chair which was by his side.

"Mr. Grant, will you please sit here and take down the statement which this lady informs us she is about to make?" Mr. Grant placed himself on the chair to which he was directed. "Inspector Bradley, will you be so good as to offer the lady a seat?"

The visitor shook her head.

"No, I can't sit down. I've got to that state in which I can't sit anywhere; I can't even stop still in bed."

While the visitor was speaking the Chief Commissioner was writing. When she ceased he touched his bell, and the civilian reappeared. Sir Franklin gave him what he had written. The clerk glanced at it, and without a word bore it away.

"Now, madam," resumed Sir Franklin, "if you prefer to stand, and are quite ready, we are. It is quite clear to you that whatever you may say will be taken down by Mr. Grant here, and if necessary used in evidence against you."

"I'm not a fool." The woman was contemptuous. "It's not necessary for me to be told a thing twice. Haven't I told you what I've come for? I don't want to waste time. You try your red-tape ways on somebody else; I want to get to business." At that moment the door through which Mr. Grant had come reopened to admit Dr. Leach. The visitor stared at him. When he showed signs of taking a seat next to the Chief Commissioner she asked, with sufficient brusqueness, "Who's this?"

The Chief Commissioner was a picture of smiling suavity.

"This is a gentleman connected with the department whom I had asked to be present during your statement. You will not suffer in any way by his being here."

Sir Franklin said nothing about the message which he had written on the sheet of paper and handed to the clerk in silence: "Ask Dr. Leach to come here at once. Tell him I wish him to pronounce an opinion on the sanity of the woman whom he will

find in my room." The woman commented on the closing words of the remark which the Commissioner had addressed to her—in her manner not only contempt, but also a sort of ferocity.

"I'm not afraid of suffering from his presence here or anyone else's; you can't put more into a cup than it will hold, and my cup's full. Now you, sir"—this was to Mr. Grant—"if you're going to take down what I'm going to say, you'd better do it properly and start at the beginning." She repeated her previous statement, with an addition. "I live in Drayton Road, Fulham, where I'm known as Miss Sarah Driscoll, spinster; but as a matter of fact I'm a married woman. I'm really Mrs. Dunkels, Mrs. Anthony Dunkels—at least, so far as I know; because so little do I know of my husband that I'm not at all sure that that is his real name, but anyhow that's the name by which he married me."

Her listeners glanced at each other. The Commissioner interposed. The visitor's volubility was surprising; it bade fair to run on for an indefinite period.

"Excuse me, but my time is very valuable. Will you please come to the point as quickly as you can, and stick to it."

The visitor's manner grew suddenly more ferocious; it was as though she snapped at him.

"I'm coming to the point, and when I've got there I'll stick to it—you can trust me to do that. But if I'm making this statement I'll make it; if you're making it, you make it; but if I am, you let me make it my own way. You won't improve matters by trying to drive me into making it your way instead of mine."

Under cover of the table, Dr. Leach touched the Chief Commissioner on the knee. He suffered the lady to continue.

"I was a barmaid before I was married. There are people who look upon barmaids as so much dirt, but you can't lump a class like that. There are barmaids who are as respectable as any young lady in the land—I know I was, and I am. I was in the saloon bar at the Crown and Unicorn, in Holborn, when I first met him. He used to come in nearly every day. He told me he was a commercial traveller—in furniture for horses, whatever that might be. But it seemed to me that what he principally did was betting. The governor didn't like it—the way he made bets while he was in our place, sometimes thirty or forty at a time—and he told him so. There were words. Dunkels ceased coming so often. Then he asked me to dine with him, and I did. Why shouldn't I? The highest ladies in the land dine alone with gentlemen nowadays. We dined at the Holborn Restaurant, then we went to the theatre. That was the begin-

ning of it—as he wasn't coming so often to the Crown he got me to come to him. It wasn't very long after that we were married, at the registrar's office in Bloomsbury—and here's my marriage lines. Now let anyone say we weren't married."

The lady placed a bit of paper in front of the Chief Commissioner. He examined it.

"This purports to be the certificate of a marriage between Anthony Dunkels, bachelor, and Sarah Driscoll, spinster, signed by the registrar who married them in his office in Bloomsbury. This seems to be all right. So you're Mrs. Dunkels?"

"That's the name by which he married me, but whether it was his real name I can't say, as you'll see when I get on. He wanted the marriage kept dark, why, I couldn't say—it wasn't what I wanted, I can tell you; but as he told me what he wanted before we actually were married, and I agreed, I wasn't the sort to go back on a bargain; so I took rooms in Drayton Road. He made me a good housekeeping allowance, though up-and-downy—sometimes it was ten pounds a week, and sometimes it was five. But I never saw such a bag of mystery as he was; he was mysterious about everything. It was only by accident that I found out what he really was—he was a bookmaker, that was his trade, and he carried on his business under the name of Pepper—Thomas Pepper."

"What!" The exclamation came from Inspector Bradley, who had half risen from his chair.

The lady regarded him with flashing eyes.

"May I ask what you mean by your whats, and who you are? I tell you he carried on his bookmaking business as Thomas Pepper. Are you going to say he didn't?"

The Chief Commissioner made a motion with his hand to Inspector Bradley.

"I don't think Inspector Bradley meant much by his exclamation, Mrs. Dunkels. You must remember that he has a professional interest in the case."

The lady proceeded, giving occasional sidelong glances towards Inspector Bradley as though she dared him to interrupt her again.

"My husband's goings on were beyond me altogether. Thomas Pepper was the name under which he did business—the chief name, but it wasn't the only one, not by a long way. There was a man named Gardner—John Gardner. My husband was mixed up with a gentleman in the City named Tozer—Andrew Tozer. What there was between them I can't say, but I know that he and my husband sometimes did business together. Gardner was in Mr. Tozer's office as porter or something. When he left he became a sort of partner with my husband—my

husband used to give him a commission on the business he brought. I didn't like Gardner—never did; he was always trying to get my husband to do things when he didn't fancy them. Mr. Dunkels did enough funny things on his own account; he wanted no help in that direction from anyone else. Gardner was always getting my husband into trouble with the police—they fined him something cruel."

"Excuse me," burst out Inspector Bradley, "if I interrupt you, but isn't it possible that your husband, who was the stronger man of the two, merely used Gardner as a cover?"

The lady took the interruption more placidly than she had done before.

"Sometimes I thought it might be that way. My husband certainly was a masterpiece at getting people to do what he wanted. Then one day he came to me with a story of which I couldn't make head or tail."

Inspector Bradley interposed once more.

"Forgive me again, Mrs. Dunkels, but was your husband living with you at this time at Drayton Road?"

"No, he wasn't, and that was the greatest of my worries. He had a place over in the Vauxhall Bridge Road—he might have had half a dozen more for all I could tell, but I did know he had that. And there was me, with him coming to see me nearly every day, calling myself a spinster, with people thinking all manner of things. Oh, I sometimes felt I'd like to twist their necks for them!" The lady looked as if she would have been perfectly capable of such an act. "If he'd only let me show them my marriage lines once, or even drop a hint, but he wouldn't; and I'd promised, so I didn't. Then, as I said, he came one day with this tale of his."

The lady paused—apparently to remove her gloves. She stretched out her fingers as though her hands were hot. Then she did a singular thing. She extended her hand towards the Chief Commissioner.

"That's the one with which I did it." Clenching her fist, she went through the action of striking a blow—it might be with a knife. "I've got a wrist like iron—few women have got a wrist like I have."

She felt the muscles of her right wrist with the fingers of the other hand with what seemed to be a smile of satisfaction. Dr. Leach and the Commissioner exchanged glances. As if ignoring her own digression she went on with her story.

"My husband was a bit too fond of drink. I noticed it when he used to come to the Crown and the Unicorn. When he was in drink you never knew what he would do or say; I used to ask

him to be careful, but you might as well have spoken to that wall. He'd had more than enough when he came to see me that day; and if I hadn't noticed it before I should have known it directly he opened his mouth, because almost the first thing he said was: 'How would you like Jack Gardner for a husband, say for a month of Sundays?' He wouldn't have asked me a question like that if he had been sober. I told him what I thought of him. 'Well, you've got to have him,' he said, 'because I am going to run off with another lady.' 'You've got a face,' I said, 'to talk to me like this. You ought to know better than to talk like that even if you have been drinking.' He laughed again. 'And I'm going to be paid for it,' he said. 'This is the first time I ever have been paid for running off with a girl—paid handsomely I've been. And there's some of the money. You can spend that, my dear Sally, in heightening those charms which I've always admired—and always shall, even though sometimes, in the ordinary course of events, I have to run off with other ladies.' He held out to me ten five-pound notes; nice and crisp they were, fresh from the bank. 'What's this for?' I asked. 'Where did you get this money from?' 'It's part of the little lot,' he said, 'I've got for running off with the pretty lady.' I didn't know if he was in jest or earnest. 'How dare you talk to me like that?' I said, 'me, your own lawful wife!' 'You haven't answered my question,' he said. 'What do you think of having Jack Gardner for a husband for a month of Sundays?' 'What do you mean by this nonsense?' I cried, for I was getting mad. He was that provoking I could have hit him. 'It's no nonsense,' he said, 'no nonsense. I'm going to disappear for a little while; I can't say exactly how long; and while I'm away Jack's going to be me and take my place, though as far as you're concerned it's as you please. And that fifty pounds is to soothe the pangs of parting.' He got up and went to the door. 'Where are you going?' I asked. 'I'm going to make final arrangements to bolt with the lady. For further information you apply to Jack Gardner: it's his idea.' Before I could stop him he was out of the room and running down the stairs like a hunted hare. I couldn't have caught him except by running after him, and I wasn't going to demean myself by doing that. No one shall say I ever ran after any man. I've never seen my husband again from that hour to this."

"What date was that, Mrs. Dunkels?"

The question came from Inspector Bradley.

"I'm not likely to forget that date. It was the twelfth of May, that was the date it was. He left me about half-past twelve. I tried to think things over when he'd gone; I looked

at the notes he'd given me, and somehow I didn't like the look of them—and the more I thought of what he had said the less I liked that. I stopped indoors thinking all that afternoon till I'd thought myself into a kind of fever. I couldn't stop indoors any longer. I put on my hat and I went to call on Mrs. Gardner. I thought I might get something out of her. She had as much to put up with from her husband as I had from mine. He was a beauty, Jack Gardner; I could tell you some tales of him. Mrs. Gardner was out, but her husband was in. He opened the door himself and told me so. I asked him what nonsense it was which my husband had been talking about bolting off with some other woman."

"Mr. Gardner knew you were married?" This again was Bradley.

"Oh, yes, he knew; so did his wife; they both knew, only they'd promised my husband they wouldn't tell. Gardner, he'd been drinking, only when he'd been drinking he was worse than Dunkels—he was a perfect devil, he was. He told me things that made me mad, just stark mad. He made out that Dunkels had been quite in earnest in what he'd been saying; that he was going to run off with another woman, and that he'd been paid for doing it—who the woman was, and who he'd been paid by, I could not make out. Gardner told me it was no business of mine. The idea of his saying such a thing! Garduer went on to say that it was all correct what my husband had said about his taking his place, and that I was only to give the hint and he was always at my service. I slapped his face, and I asked him who had been putting my husband up to such wickedness. He said, while he rubbed his cheek, that he had. He didn't believe, he said, in men having no changes. And since he'd come into a bit of money he thought that that was the time for him to have one. According to him, he'd put him up to the whole thing. 'Very well, Jack Gardner,' I said to him, 'if what you say is true, and I don't have an explanation from my husband very soon, you'll be the sorriest man that ever lived, as sure as you're standing there.' And off I flounced, his sneering laughter coming after me as I walked along the pavement.

"That, I understand, was on the night of the twelfth of May?"

The questioner was still Inspector Bradley. This time the lady showed signs of resentment.

"I don't know why you keep asking questions, but it was the night of the twelfth of May, and that night I never slept a wink. Every time I closed my eyes I had the horrors. I'd been having a bad time of it lately; I hadn't been very well, my nerves were all prickly. I knew there was something wrong with me, I knew

it all the time. I have sort of attacks sometimes. I don't always know what's the cause of it, but when I do have them I know I'm not myself. When the morning came I was all over the place. I never have been a drinker. I was as good as a teetotaller when I was a barmaid; but I've heard men say what they felt like after a night's hard drinking, and though I never touched a drop that's what I felt like then, only worse. The way I felt I might have been on the drink for a month. I always had something from my husband every morning; if he couldn't come himself he sent a note or a wire. When I had nothing from him that morning, off I went to his rooms in the Vauxhall Bridge Road. His landlady told me he'd just gone out; the way she looked at me made me smart. She taking me for a trollop and I knowing myself to be his lawful wife. The whole of that day I wasn't in my right senses. I felt—I can't tell how I felt! There have been times when I've felt like that. I went back to my rooms, hoping there would be news of him; there was none. That made me worse, waiting and watching for him, or the postman, or the telegraph boy. My nerves seemed to be singing and shrieking as if they were fiddle-strings by the time that the evening came. When the night came I felt that if I didn't get out into the air something would burst. As I was putting on my hat I came upon a knife which my husband had given me—it was a queer sort of knife with a sharp point, more like a dagger. When he gave it me he told me one of those yarns which he was always telling, and which I never knew if they were true. He said that knife had been the making of him. When he was a lad, he was at a race meeting when a gentleman with whom he had some slight acquaintance came up to him and told him that if a certain horse which he named didn't win it would put fifty pounds in his pocket, and he gave him that knife, and round the handle was wrapped a ten-pound note. There was fifty pounds to follow that, said the gentleman, if all went well. So Dunkels, he went round to where it was they kept the horses and he got into where that one was without anybody seeing him. How he did it I don't know—that's what he told me; and he slipped that knife into the horse just at the top of the off hind leg."

"Your husband must have been a pretty character, Mrs. Dunkels." This was the Chief Commissioner.

"A pretty character!" The lady laughed; it was not nice to hear her. "There was scarcely any roguery he hadn't been up to, to listen to him, but to say nothing of one never knowing if he was lying or if he wasn't—it seemed to me he told lies just for the love of them; but all that apart, what does that matter to a woman if she loves a man? There's only one man I ever loved,

ever cared a snap of the fingers for. I thought that sort of thing wasn't in my life, but there was something about Dunkels which drew me. I don't know what it was. It wasn't his looks, because, goodness knows, he wasn't much to look at; but there it was. I'd have gone through hell for that man, although I knew what a fool I was ever to have had anything to do with him. A woman loves a man, not because he's good or bad—women like me don't think of that sort of thing at all; she just loves him."

The lady stopped, to go through rather a curious pantomime. She shut her eyes, and with the tips of her fingers she smoothed her eyebrows, again and again and again. She was still smoothing them when she resumed her narrative, her audience of men watching as if they found in her an interesting study. Taking advantage of her closed eyes, Dr. Leach whispered to the Commissioner, who nodded. With uplifted pen Mr. Grant waited for her to continue.

"Well," she began, her impetuous heat seeming to have changed to a lazy drawl, "as I said, I was looking at this knife as I was putting on my hat. I liked the look of it; I don't know why, but I did. I slipped it up my sleeve. I don't know why I did that either. Then I went out; I didn't care where; I just went. Up and down the streets, I don't know where I did go. I know I came down Regent Street. That was about midnight. Then I got to Piccadilly Circus, where there was a crowd. I stood wondering where I should go next. Then I swung my arm, and the knife dropped out of my sleeve on to the pavement. It startled me: I had forgotten it was there. A man stepped on it as I was stooping to pick it up. I thought he had broken it, but he hadn't; it was all right. Just as I was putting it back in my sleeve a man came past me who I thought for a moment was my husband. He had on his clothes; I knew most of my husband's clothes, and I knew that the suit which the man wore was his. He did not notice me, or if he did he showed no signs; he went quickly past me. Then the moment he had gone of course I knew who it was. It was Jack Gardner. He was wearing my husband's clothes and pretending he was him—and it was he who had put Dunkels up to whatever trick he was playing me. I felt that knife. I got a good hold of the handle, and I went after Mr. Gardner. I caught him up as he was crossing the road at the Piccadilly corner. Before he knew that I was behind him I put that knife into his back, under the left shoulder blade. When I pulled it out he fell forward on his face and I went on. There was such a crowd, and the people were all so occupied with each other, that I don't think anyone saw what had happened. No one came after me, I do know that. I was half-way down

Waterloo Place before I realised what I had done; then I slipped the knife up my sleeve again and strolled home. If my husband had turned up, if I had heard anything of him, I don't suppose I should have said a word. It served Jack Gardner right. But whether Dunkels is dead, or whether he is with that woman, I can't guess, but I can stand it no longer. I don't think I've been quite right in my head since that night. If you were to offer me untold gold I couldn't tell you where I've been or what I've been doing. I know that one day I found myself getting off a steamer, and they told me it was Dover, that the boat had come from Ostend, and that I'd come from Brussels; and they proved it by a ticket which I had in my bag. But whether I had come from Ostend, or Brussels either, I don't know. I didn't believe them then, and I don't now. I don't know how I got hold of that ticket, or how I came to be where I was, but it's my belief that I was never out of England in my life—I'm not a travelling sort. But I do know that I killed Jack Gardner, and here's the knife with which I did it."

Taking an ugly-looking weapon, with what seemed to be a rusty steel blade, out of the sleeve of her jacket, she threw it on to the table. She burst into peal after peal of the most unmirthful laughter. Dr. Leach whispered to the Chief Commissioner:

"The woman's mad. I've no doubt her story is true as far as she has taken it, but she hasn't taken it far enough. Quite possibly she has played a part in some curious happening since, which one day she may remember. What she says about coming off that steamer would be worth looking into; it might lead to something."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A REMARKABLE MAN

It was not easy to get the woman out of that room, but they got her. The sound of her dreadful laughter was still audible when an officer brought in a visiting-card which he handed to the Chief Commissioner. As he glanced at it the Commissioner rose from his chair.

"What's this? Where is the person who gave you this card?"

"The gentleman's waiting outside, sir."

"Excuse me, you're mistaken; the gentleman's here."

The amazed Chief Commissioner saw a masculine figure framed in the doorway.

"Who are you, sir, and what business have you to come in here?"

"I'm Andrew Tozer, and I've come here, Sir Franklin Terry, because I wish to know what business you have to announce to the world that I'm dead?"

The Chief Commissioner stared. The officers who were about the table stared. The visitor's announcement of his name affected them almost as much as if he had thrown a bombshell in their midst. The Commissioner was inclined to splutter; for a moment his self-possession forsook him.

"You are Mr. Andrew Tozer?"

"I am; there are about five thousand people in this city who can prove that fact to the satisfaction of the most thick-headed and dull-witted policeman that ever lived. I don't know if an action will lie against you and your associates for the damage you have done by giving me out as dead; if one will I shall consider about taking it."

"But, Mr. Tozer—if you are Mr. Tozer——"

"If I am Mr. Tozer!"

"You have been identified as the unfortunate man who was found almost in pieces on the driving-seat of the Countess of Ditchling's motor-car."

"Go to, Sir Franklin. Someone has made a fool of you. It always has struck me as the easiest thing in this world to make a

fool of a policeman. I've been making inquiries on my own account, and I shouldn't wonder if that man who had been making free with articles belonging to me was a party named Pepper—Thomas Pepper, *alias* Anthony Dunkels, *alias* a dozen other names besides. An all-round bad lot he was, and whoever put him out of the way did the world a service. Such people ought to be placed in a lethal chamber the day they're born; it would be better for honest men."

"If this man was Dunkels or Pepper, do you know how he came by his dreadful end?"

"How should I? He seems to have taken advantage of my absence to be up to some of his pretty tricks. He seems to have made free with certain cheques I drew, and with certain property of mine to which he had no right, but what his game was—that's another matter altogether. Who can tell what the game of a scamp like that is? Whatever it was he seems to have made a mess of it. But that part is for you gentlemen, the police. I am no policeman. I've just dropped in to tell you that I'm alive, that's all. I thought you might like to know."

That was practically all they got out of him—that he was alive. Each man present in that room tried his best to get more, but without success. When he had gone, which was at the earliest possible moment, those big-wigs of Scotland Yard regarded each other as if the situation were beyond them altogether. The Chief Commissioner was the first to speak.

"That's a very remarkable man, that Mr. Tozer. I've always heard he was a remarkable man; but I didn't know he was as remarkable as he seems to be."

Inspector Hextall leaned across the table towards the chief.

"He knows about the whole business, Mr. Andrew Tozer does." The Inspector spoke like one who is in a state of considerable agitation. "He has been pulling the strings and playing with us all along; you mark my words. If that was Dunkels—or Pepper, or whatever his name was then—Mr. Andrew Tozer knows how he came to be where he was, and I think, sir, that we may be able to get the truth out of him before we've done, though he has his own ideas of joking."

The Commissioner was not so confident as the Inspector. Over-confidence was Inspector Hextall's chief weakness.

"I'm not so sure of that. You saw his attitude when we questioned him just now—he was laughing at us all the time. We can't compel him to answer questions as matters stand. We can't force him to admit that he knows what you call everything if he persists in asserting that he knows nothing. Mr. Andrew Tozer is, I understand, a multi-millionaire, a person of the highest

standing in the city of London. How are we going to get at him, on what grounds?"

"You can't get at him," declared the Superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department, "unless you intend to charge him with being concerned in the murder. Is that what you propose to do, Hextall?"

Inspector Hextall did not propose to do anything of the kind, and said so.

While these astute gentlemen were trying to make out to their own satisfaction that they had not made quite such a mess of things as they really had done, Miss Elsie Winton, having just come in from a walk, had returned to her own apartments to find a telegram awaiting her on her sitting-room table. It only contained eight words, but it seemed to put as great a tax upon her understanding as if it had contained eight million. "Am not dead. Coming to see you.—Tozer." Those were the eight words of the telegram. Considering all the circumstances of the case it was not strange if she found them a little beyond her comprehension. As a matter of fact she did not seem to have arrived at a state of clear comprehension when the door of her sitting-room opened and Andrew Tozer entered. At sight of him she screamed, which again was not surprising.

"Andrew!"—and the next second she was in his arms.

The thing called love is past man's finding out. Within the next few moments it was made clear beyond all possible doubt that that extremely desirable-looking young woman loved that by no means prepossessing man. Had he been an Adonis she could not have made more fuss of him, and had he been a paragon of all the virtues she could not have taken it more for granted that that was the proper thing for her to do. When the ecstasies had become a trifle less ecstatic he delivered himself of an observation which brought them all back again.

"I'm going to marry you," he said.

"Andrew!" From her tone, imagination might have conveyed something to Miss Winton's hearing which was altogether too transcendentally beautiful to be real. "You—you don't mean that?"

"I never meant anything more in my life. I've got the licence in my pocket, and I've got an appointment with a parson to marry us in half an hour—and you're going to lunch with me afterwards."

Then there came the ecstasies again, as if there had been nothing in his speech which suggested a descent into bathos. Presently a practical aspect offered itself to the lady's mind.

"Andrew—did you say in half an hour? But in what am

I going to be married? I shan't have even time to change."

"I shouldn't think you would—unless you can change inside ten seconds."

"Don't be ridiculous. I can't be married in this old frock."

"Then be married without it. You can take it off on the way to the church."

"Do be sensible! You are such an amazing person. After I've been thinking for ever so long that you were dead—what I have gone through on your account you'll never know—you spring up like a Jack-in-the-box and tell me we're to be married in half an hour. I ask you again, whatever am I to be married in?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. All I know is that you're going to be married."

And she was—in very little more than half an hour—in what she stood up in.

"I never thought," she protested as they were leaving the church—two in a taxi—on their way to lunch, "that I should be married in the oldest frock I've got."

"I've not married your frock," declared her most remarkable husband. "I'm marrying you; and thank goodness I've done it. How about the honeymoon?"

They discussed that while they were having lunch. It was an amazing business altogether.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE POST

"DITCHLING is going to take Eleanor to Wiesbaden to consult Professor Lichtentochter: he's the great oculist, you know. There seems to be some doubt as to whether she's really blind for good; some of the eye people think she may be cured. So Ditchling is going to take her to this professor man, who is supposed to be the greatest authority on eyes in Europe, and nurse is going with her."

"And what's going to become of you?"

"I'm going to stay behind."

"Behind? Where? Here?"

"Well—until I get a post."

"Get a what?"

"I'm going to start looking out for a post at once—I have to earn my living."

"Oh, have you?"

There was a grimness in John Baird's tone which seemed to strike the girl. He had come into the park at Cawstone through the clapper-gate with which we have already made acquaintance, and, as before, Miss Pauline Pearse had met him. They had walked, and talked—about generalities, and now for the first time had touched upon something in which they both had a personal interest.

The girl, raising her chin, replied to her companion's grimness with a little show of heat.

"You know perfectly well that I'm as poor as a church mouse; really I don't own a single thing I've got on—they're all alms. I haven't a penny in the world, except what I get from Eleanor, and that means from Ditchling; and after the way she's treated him, and all that's happened, I have made up my mind that I'll subsist no longer on his charity. It's enough for him to have to support one sister; he shan't have to support two—especially as things are. I know quite well that it isn't easy for a woman to earn much money."

"No—it isn't."

"I know it isn't, you needn't tell me that; I tell you I know

it isn't. But I can earn something, at least enough to keep me alive."

"If you're content with being kept alive."

She was nearly as tall as he was, and stood as straight, so that when she confronted him their faces were nearly on a level. Just then she stopped, and turned, and looked at him with a glitter in her eyes.

"There's something about you sometimes which makes me feel——"

"Yes?" She had left her sentence unfinished; he offered to assist her in bringing it to a close. "Makes you feel like what?"

"Which makes me feel as if I'd like to box your ears, and now you have it."

Not only did he leave her rather surprising remark unnoticed, without any sort of warning he started a new theme.

"The inquest on poor Turner is closed; the jury have returned their verdict."

The expression of her face changed—she seemed startled.

"Have they? What is it?"

"Suicide while temporarily insane; that isn't exactly how they put it, but that's what it amounts to. They were a long time making up their minds; three times they handed in a verdict which the coroner declined to accept, because it was one of which no one could make head or tail. Then at last they agreed to what amounts to a verdict of suicide."

"Then——" The girl uttered that one word and stopped, as if she shrank from putting the question which was on the tip of her tongue.

Whether John Baird understood what the question would have been there was nothing to show; if he did he left it unanswered. He went placidly on on lines of his own.

"There was Francis Turner's own statement, which it seems they didn't see their way to get behind. In that he says that he went down from London because he had a pain in the head——"

"Really? Does he say that really?"

"Those are his own words; and the best of it was that his man-servant, Horace Lund, was called as a witness, and he said that his master had complained of headaches a good deal lately, and indeed had complained of one that very morning before he left his chambers"

"What an extraordinary thing."

"I also remember that he often complained of having a headache. He used to be very queer sometimes, and when I asked him what was the matter, he used to say that his head was aching

fit to split. I shouldn't wonder if those headaches accounted for some of his flightiness. Anyhow, there were his own words as given to the policeman in the presence of Dr. Jordan and other witnesses. He muttered—he had to mutter; he was as good as dead at the time and was only capable of muttering—that he left town because he had a headache, that his headache got worse when he reached Salisbury, that he wandered about feeling that he was going mad, then he sat down in a field which he couldn't locate—he was an entire stranger to that part of the world, that he took out a little revolver which he had in his pocket and began to play with it. At that point his breathing became very bad, it was not easy to distinguish his words, but so far as they could make them out he said that he held the muzzle close to him, half in jest and half in earnest, and—somehow pulled the trigger. He had hardly got as far as that when his breathing stopped altogether and he was dead. Practically that was all the evidence there was before the court. There was nothing to show what was the field to which he referred—which perhaps explained how it was that nothing was found of the revolver. There was a man from London down there, a man named Kohn—I don't know if he was a regular detective, but he had something to do with Scotland Yard. He introduced himself to me, and he made one or two remarks for which I felt inclined to kick him. But I didn't."

"What sort of remarks were they?"

"They mostly took the form of questions. He pointed out that I was a friend of Turner's and a friend of your sister's; he asked me if Turner was also a friend of hers. When I told him that I never gave information about my friends to perfect strangers, and one or two little things besides, although he sort of crumpled up he still managed to suggest that some mysterious influence was being brought to bear to keep certain matters dark, but that the law had a way of getting at the truth in spite of everything. I said that I was very glad to hear it, and walked away."

Miss Pearse seemed to be struggling with words which were shivering in her throat—and which on a sudden came out with a rush in spite of her.

"So, then, Eleanor's safe?"

John Baird looked at her with an air of mild surprise; he seemed not quite to take her meaning.

"She ought to be, if Professor Lichtentochter is half the man he's said to be; I have heard on all sides of the wonderful things he has done with people's eyes."

She seemed puzzled.

"I wasn't thinking," she began—she never got any farther than the beginning; he unceremoniously cut her short, switching the conversation on to still another subject.

"Referring to the remarks you were making about seeking a post. I think it is quite right that you should do so."

She stared at him with her mouth a little open, as if wondering what he meant by such a sudden digression.

"I think every young woman ought to occupy a post of some sort."

"Do you? That's very nice of you; very informative."

"It's fortunate that you should be seeking a post at this particular moment, because it so happens that I have one which I can offer you."

"You have!" Her lips opened a little wider.

"It is one for which I think you are eminently fitted."

"Indeed, how can you tell? You don't know what my qualifications are. What is the post you have to offer? I expect it's some absurd one."

"I don't fancy you'll think so when you've heard what it is."

"Is it cook, or is it secretary? I'm fitted for neither of those."

"That's lucky; because it happens to be neither of those."

"Then what is it?"

"It's the post of wife."

"What?"

Although she obviously had no clear comprehension of what it was he meant, her cheeks burned and her eyes blazed. He was calmness itself.

"The post which I have to offer is the post of wife—my wife. Pauline, will you marry me?"

"I never—I never——"

The words would not come. She stopped short; she seemed fogged, bewildered, dazed—as she put it afterwards, "I felt as if the world had turned topsy-turvy, and I didn't know if I was on my head or my heels."

At the time he put his arms about her and drew her to him. When he had her very close he whispered:

"Say yes."

But she replied in a shivery, shakery sort of voice:

"John!" amending that recondite observation a few minutes later in rather an odd fashion—"Jack!" She hid her face on his shoulder as she substituted the one name for the other. Presently she added, "Was ever girl proposed to in such a fashion?"

Printed by the Southampton Times Company, Limited, 70 Above Bar

" In these days half our diseases come from the neglect of the body in the overwork of the brain."

—BULWER LYTTON.

INDOOR WORKERS

When lack of exercise, excessive brainwork or nerve strain make you feel languid—tired—depressed—a little

"FRUIT SALT" Trade Mark

in a glass of cold water will clear your head and tone your nerves.

This world-famous natural aperient gently stimulates the liver, the body's filter. With this important organ working properly the blood becomes pure and the nerves normal. Sound refreshing sleep, a clear brain, and good digestion are sure to follow.

CAUTION.—Examine carefully the wrapper, bottle, and capsule, and remember that "**FRUIT SALT**" IS PREPARED **ONLY** BY **J. C. ENO, LIMITED.**

DO NOT BE IMPOSED UPON BY IMITATIONS.

"FRUIT SALT" WORKS, Pomeroy St., London, S.E.

SOLD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

London Mail Fountain Pens

British Made & Guaranteed for Two Years

3/- Postage & Packing 3d. extra

The L.M. Special.

Chased vulcanite, 14ct. gold nib, iridium tipped, with spoon feed and reservoir, which carries the ink from the barrel on to the nib and gives a constant flow. This is the most perfect feed yet invented.

State whether Fine, Medium, or Broad Nib is required.

3/- Postage & Packing 3d. extra

3/6 Postage & Packing 3d. extra

The L.M. Screw Cap Safety.

14ct. gold nib, iridium tipped, with spoon feed. This Pen is suitable for ladies and gentlemen, as it can be carried with safety in handbags and waistcoat pockets, as no ink can possibly get out of the Pen unless the cap is unscrewed and taken off. A short Pen when screwed up for pocket, and a long Pen when ready for use.

State whether Fine, Medium, or Broad Nib is required.

3/6 Postage & Packing 3d. extra

4/- Postage & Packing 3d. extra

The L.M. Self-Filler.

14ct. gold nib, iridium tipped, with spoon feed. This Pen is a perfect self-filler and self-cleaner, and is equal to any Pen on the market at three times the price. The ever-ready Pen.

State whether Fine, Medium, or Broad Nib is required.

4/- Postage & Packing 3d. extra

5/6 Postage & Packing 3d. extra

The L.M Pen de Luxe.

14ct. gold nib, iridium tipped, with spoon feed. The last word in Fountain Pens. It can be carried in any position in pocket, bag, or trunk. It cannot leak. When the Pen is closed the nib is in the ink, and when you open it, the ink is in the nib ready to write.

State whether Fine, Medium, or Broad Nib is required.

5/6 Postage & Packing 3d. extra

Address:

"PENS," "LONDON MAIL," 39 King St., Covent Garden, W.C. 2.

"For England and St. George"

An old cry, yet modern enough to be the key to the policy of

The National News

The ONLY Penny Sunday Newspaper

Which is now entirely under the control of ODHAMS LIMITED

And therefore

"BRITISH as a 'BRADBURY'— and as RELIABLE"

In the Press Crown 8vo, 256 pp.

"Truth is stranger than fiction."
—*Byron.*

A MASTER OF CRIME

The Life Story of Charles Williams XH 511

This book is of absorbing interest from start to finish and has the merit of being true in every particular.

Charles Williams has travelled much, and the scenes of his exploits cover most of the Capitals of Europe. He has been concerned in many of the big jewel robberies, and the details of planning and landing his grand coups make startling reading. The chapter devoted to his partnership in crime with the notorious Charles Peace is crammed full of incident and humorous to a degree, in spite of the nature of the subject.

It is a significant fact that although Charles Williams received a life sentence he is now released under King's Pardon and has become a worthy citizen.

LONDON:

ODHAMS LIMITED

39 KING STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C. 2

SERIOUS SHORTAGE OF MOTOR DRIVERS

FOR WORK OF

Urgent National Importance

Ladies Wanted

17 to 45

to learn in the shortest possible time

Call or write to-day for particulars

The . .

British School of Motoring Ltd.

Coventry House

5 Coventry Street, Piccadilly Circus, W. 1

(Opposite Prince of Wales Theatre)

THE S.A.D.S.

IN case you don't know it, let me tell you that the S.A.D.S. is the Society for the Abolition of Domestic Servants.

Bagley got the idea as he was coming home in the Tube. Mrs. Bagley said it was the most brilliant suggestion she had ever heard. (Her appeal for a new frock was timed for 10.30 that evening.)

The first meeting of the society was held the next evening in Becker's drawing-room. All you had to do in order to be a member was to promise that you would never employ a domestic servant of any kind. There were several interruptions at the meeting, because Becker's servant had left that morning (with the only silver spoons that Becker possessed), and the meeting had to take it in turns to open the front door for members who were late.

In Bagley's opening speech he said that if the idea caught on, as he had no doubt that it would, any house in which a servant was kept would soon be regarded as an unpatriotic hovel.

"Awfully sorry for Buckingham Palace," said Becker.

"A few exceptions will be allowed," said Bagley sternly, "but not in this district."

"Mother will be pleased," said Becker, "because, as a matter of fact, what with the high price of whisky and one thing and another, we can't afford a servant."

We couldn't sit on him very hard, because we were in his house; besides, he promised that he would do his best for the society. He assured us that he would have no difficulty in observing the principal rule of the society, since he was far more likely to get the sack from his office than a rise. Knowing Becker, we believed him—for once.

Then we all drank to the success of the society, and helped Mrs. Becker to wash up the glasses afterwards.

In the days that followed the members of the S.A.D.S. developed an extraordinary capacity for "swank." Mrs. Dobson Smyth began it by proclaiming that she had washed her own doorstep.

Becker twiddled his moustache and said pompously, "That's nothing—absolutely nothing. My wife had her third attack of spring cleaning yesterday, and I'm learning to boil an egg."

The most intimate details of the members' "washing" became known to all of them. We knew, for example, the exact relationship which exists between ribbons and certain parts of a woman's underclothing, and we knew also—but perhaps you're too young for that.

Then, suddenly, just as the society was booming, one of its principal members made a bad mistake, and the movement collapsed. Of course, you have guessed that it was Becker.

He called a special meeting, and demanded that one of the principal members should be expelled for breaking the chief rule. He named the offender.

We winked at Becker. We tugged at his coat. We did our utmost to make him sit down, but he declined to be silent. Instead, he insisted on describing the particular registry office which the offending member had visited. Then the meeting broke up quietly, and we knew that the S.A.D.S. was at an end.

Becker's excuse is that he didn't know, but I shall always maintain that he should have known that the term "domestic servant" does not include every kind of nurse. **W. P.**

This is one of the Nutshell Novels which form so attractive a feature in LONDON MAIL each week. Buy this week's issue and see the other good things in it.

Puts a Wave in every Hair

Quin-Quenna used as an ordinary Shampoo makes your hair beautifully thick, silky, wavy, and lustrous.

Thoroughly cleanses and frees the hair from dandruff; positively stops falling out; induces a luxuriant growth; prevents greyness, and restores to dull, faded hair all the radiance of youthful charm.

QUIN-QUENNA in packets, **2** for **1/-**; **6** pkts., **2/9**; **12** pkts., **5/-**; of all Stores and Chemists; or post free from **LEIG ION LABORATORIES** (Dept. 78), 35 Gray's Inn Road, London. W.C. 1

"Are you there?"
"Yes, what is it?"
"I am weaning Baby."
"All right, feed Baby on

ROBINSON'S

"Patent" GROATS

(made with milk)

morning and night, and baby will thrive wonderfully."

Apply for pamphl "

(Dept. O.L.), KEEN, RO N, E. 1.

Fry's
BREAKFAST COCOA