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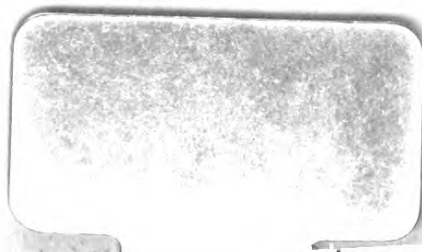


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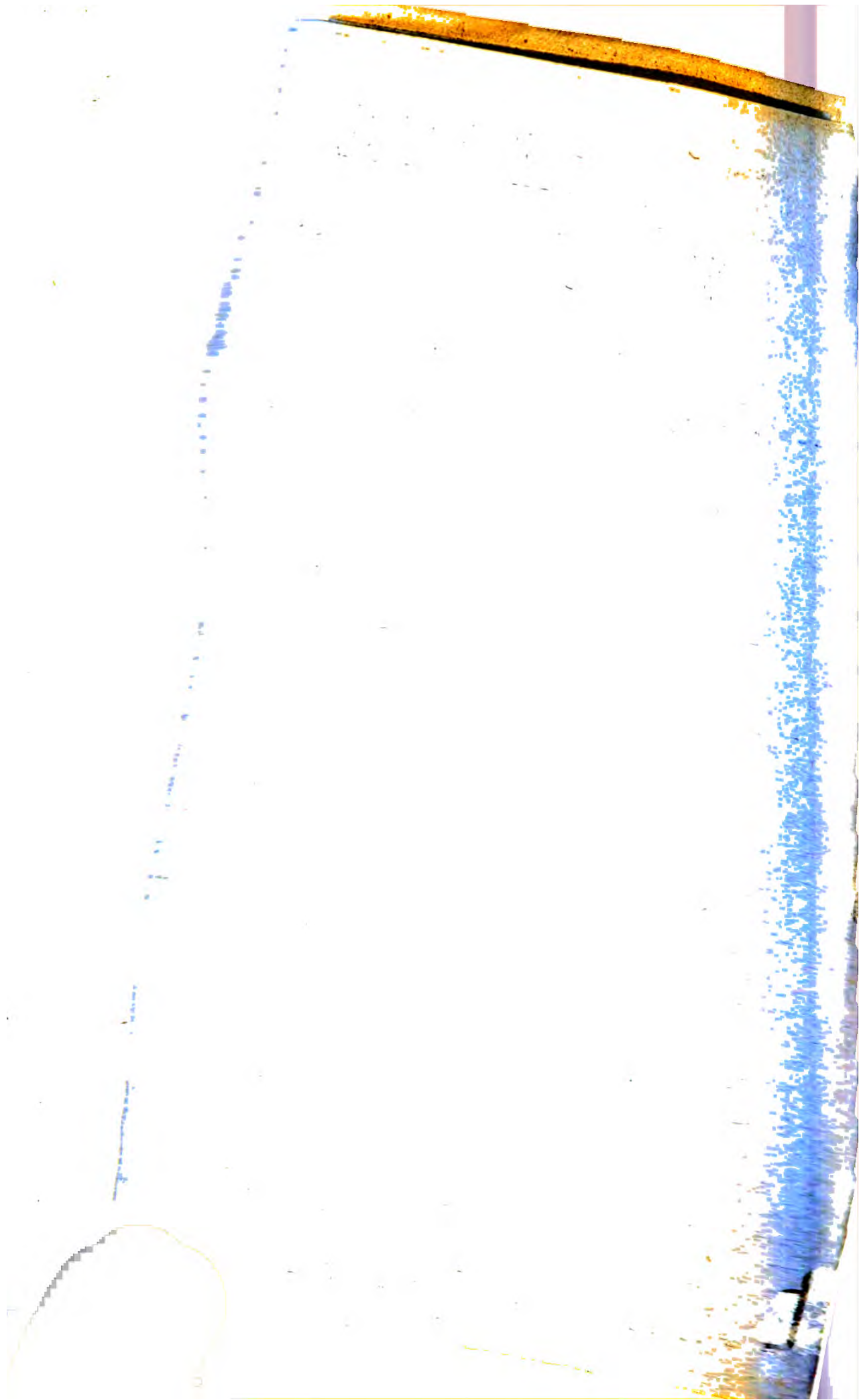
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PREFACE

IF it please you—if, Sirs and Ladies, you will do yourselves the service to glance within—here's all sorts for you. A collection as odd, as whimsical, as strange—may we say, as humorous?—as you may be pleased to want. Here's a bishop goes a-riding with a strange lady in a stranger's car—and the tragic sequel. Here's the cat that brought the pair together. Here's the man, who having by a misadventure killed his friend, turned him into gold—a wondrous narrative. Here's the girl, who, in perfect innocence, came on kisses through a hedge, and did not know the giver. Here's something to each special taste; for all Honourable People, a feast of sorts—If It Please You!



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(10)

THE BISHOP'S RIDE

THE BISHOP OF MIDHURST was strolling along a lane when he came upon a motor-car which was drawn up close to the hedge. In it was a lady—a young one. She was alone. She seemed to be doing something to what he would have described as the “mechanism” of the car; she was kneeling down by the driver’s seat, apparently doing something to a handle. He felt it his duty to stop and observe the courtesies which are usual among motorists.

“Is there anything wrong?”

She looked up. She was decidedly young—in fact, little more than a girl—and though, of course, that mattered nothing to a bishop, from a layman’s point of view she was uncommonly pretty. At sight of him she smiled, as though she thought there was something comical in his appearance, but that there could be anything comical about a bishop’s appearance seems doubtful.

“I am rather delicately placed; perhaps there is something wrong with the lubrication. Would you mind pulling this handle?”

He pulled it quite easily. There seemed to be nothing amiss with it. He said so.

"Perhaps there isn't; perhaps there's trouble somewhere else. Do you know anything about motor-cars?"

"Very little; not so much as I ought, considering that I have one of my own."

"Do you drive yourself?"

He shook his head.

"You can drive?"

"No man knows what he can do till he tries. In my case the trial has still to be made. I never have driven."

She looked at him very steadily. Although he was a bishop he could not but notice how blue her eyes were and how charmingly her lashes shaded them.

"Would you mind," she asked, in a voice which was as sweet as her smile, "doing me a favour, as there is no one else about?"

"What is the favour?"

"I am going to start the engine. I want you to sit on that seat by the driver—I'm the driver—and keep your eye upon the gauge and tell me what the pressure is; perhaps there's trouble there."

"It doesn't seem to be a very difficult thing to do."

"It isn't; nothing could be simpler."

She went to the front of the car and started the engine.

"Now you get in on your side and I'll get in on

mine, and then, when I pull the clutch in, you keep your eye upon the gauge and tell me what the pressure is."

A little doubtfully he got on to one seat, whereupon she got on to the other, inserting her person under the driving-wheel.

"Which," he asked, "is the gauge to which you refer?"

She pointed to what seemed to him to be a glass tube in which was a quantity of what appeared to be muddy oil.

"You keep your eye on that, and then when I've got the clutch in tell me how high the oil rises. Wait till I give you the word."

She did something to a handle with rather a jerk, and the car began to move.

"You've started the car," he said.

"I told you I was going to put the clutch in. Now keep both of your eyes fixed on the gauge."

The pace of the car was quickening; he showed signs of concern.

"The car is going faster."

"That's all right. You keep both your eyes fixed on the gauge, as I told you."

"But, pardon me, it is not all right. I have a meeting of the G.F.S. to address in a very few minutes. I merely came out to collect my thoughts and to take the air."

"What is the G.F.S.?"

The Bishop's tone as he replied was more than a trifle dry.

"I am afraid I have not much time to tell you

about the G.F.S. just now ; but if you will attend the meeting which is to be held presently I shall be happy to give you all the information you require. Be so good as to stop the car at once. There is Rutter, the vicar, standing at his gate with his family and some friends. I expect they have come out to look for me. Please put me down at the Vicarage."

Instead of showing signs of slowing, the car seemed to be going quicker. Certainly the party outside the Vicarage gate saw them coming, apparently with some symptoms of surprise. The Vicar took out his watch and shouted something. What it was was not quite clear ; probably he was calling the Bishop's attention to the hour. The young woman at the driving-wheel shouted back :

"The Bishop is taking me for a spin."

That the statement was palpably untrue did not seem to lessen the surprise of the party at the gate as the car, flying by, enveloped them in a cloud of dust.

"How dare you say such a thing," exclaimed the Bishop, "even in jest? Why did you not stop when I told you? Stop the car this instant!"

All that the young woman said was, "Keep your eyes on the gauge."

Instead of keeping them on the gauge her companion fixed his eyes on her. His tone was righteously stern.

"What is the meaning of this scandalous behaviour? Have I been mistaken in you? I bid you again to stop."

All she said was, "How about the pressure?"

"I warn you that if you don't stop the car at once of your own free will, I shall make you. I don't intend to allow you to play any tricks with me. Do you hear what I say? Are you going to stop or am I to make you?"

"I suppose," she observed, "we are going nearly fifty miles an hour; is that fast enough for you? If it isn't I'll get her going when she's warm." Turning half round in his seat he made a movement as if to grip her hand. "Take care!" she exclaimed. "If you start to monkey with the driver there will be a spill; and at this pace, that will mean sudden death for both of us."

"Are you going to stop the car?"

"How about that pressure?"

"I don't believe there was ever anything wrong with it."

"I never said there was."

"You led me to suppose it."

"Don't be silly."

Never had he been addressed in such fashion before—and by a young person who he was rapidly coming to the conclusion was little better than a minx. All bishops are famed for their dignity; the Bishop of Midhurst especially prided himself on his—he had to keep tight hold of it just then to keep it from becoming a minus quantity. He appreciated the truth of what she said, that to play tricks with a motor-car going at that pace would involve serious risks to both of them. He was a nervous man, which was one reason why he had

never tried to drive his own car ; the idea of what might happen if there was an accident made him go cold all over. Taking it for granted that every human being has a better side, he proceeded to appeal to that portion of this young woman.

"I cannot think that you realize of what outrageous conduct you are being guilty."

"Did you say faster? I suppose we are going at nearly three times the limit now ; goodness only knows what will happen to us if we are trapped."

That cold feeling became more pronounced ; probably it was accentuated by the rush of the air through which they were tearing. He had difficulty in keeping his hat on—he was not attired for motoring.

"Slower, please—slower !"

This appeal did seem to reach her ears ; she moderated the pace considerably ; perhaps that was because they were going round a corner ; as it was, they took it much faster than they ought to have done.

"I never care," she explained, "to go round a corner on less than two wheels. Some people do it on one, but I think that's wrong—don't you? Does this pace suit you better?"

"We are still going far too fast. I always instruct my own chauffeur never to exceed the legal limit, and, if possible, not to average more than fifteen miles an hour."

"Do you ever ask him to get out and push?"

"May I ask your name?"

"You may, but I don't see why I should tell it

you ; you're a stranger to me. Is it usual in the circles in which you move for men to ask women to whom they are unknown what their names are? Personally, I prefer to be properly introduced ; it seems to me that you are much too thrusting."

That such an accusation should be hurled at the Bishop of Midhurst was, it seemed to him, almost more than he could bear ; he who was famous for his almost strait-laced observance of the most rigid proprieties. He sat back in his seat with what was very like a gasp.

"I can only suppose, young woman, that you don't know what you say. I appeal to all your better instincts—stop this car and let me alight. I cannot conceive that you can realize even in the faintest degree the heinousness of the conduct of which you are being guilty."

"Have you any friends in the Church? You speak as if you were a parson."

"Is it possible that you don't realise that I am the Bishop of Midhurst?"

"Yes ; and I'm the Queen of Sheba. If I let her whiz it might clear the air ; it seems to want it."

The speed of the car increased so suddenly that he had to hold on to the brim of his hat with both hands.

"There will be an accident," he said.

"Think so? I wonder ! Let's calm her down." The speed of the car decreased.

"I should have thought," observed the Bishop,

“that your own instincts of self-preservation would have caused you to be more cautious. If there were an accident while we are moving at such a pace, to say nothing of ourselves, the probabilities are that your car would be irretrievably damaged.”

“It’s not my car.”

“Not your car?”

“Not hardly—you’ve stolen it.”

“I have stolen it!” The Bishop seemed to be reduced to the verge of gasping. “Do you seriously mean to say that this motor-car is not your own property?”

“I should think I do. I was coming along and I saw a motor-car, and I stopped to look at it, as I always do, and then you came along and put it into my head that it was just the sort of car to steal—and here you are bolting off with it.”

“Have you,” gasped the Bishop—he had come to gasping—“no idea to whom it belongs?”

“I rather fancy that it belongs to one of the people at the Vicarage. As we went past I saw an elderly party tearing down the path, with a chauffeur at his heels, and both of them seemed to be anxious about something.”

“Sir John Basingstoke! I remember Rutter saying that because there was no garage at the Vicarage Sir John had left his motor-car in the lane. It seems incredible! You audacious young woman!”

“You elderly old dear! I say, are you married?”

“I have been married nearly thirty years. My

wife was among the party of ladies who were standing at the Vicarage gate."

"No! I thought that one of them seemed to be a trifle flurried. Won't she talk to you about cutting the G.F.S. to take me out for an airing?"

"I had not dreamed that such things could be, nor that there could be such depravity in one so young."

"There you are—at it again. Here's a village; we'll let her whiz."

"Abandoned girl!"

The words were lost in the rush of air caused by the sudden quickening of the car. In another moment they were rushing through a village street at a pace which, in the circumstances, was distinctly monstrous. There was the usual dog in the centre of the road; to avoid it the car swerved to one side. The Bishop's hat flew off.

"My hat!" he screamed. But no one heeded; the car tore on. Had he been a judge of that kind of thing, and in a fit state of mind to play the critic, he would have been aware that, though the pace was wicked, the driving was first-rate. Had there been a bad, or even a poor, driver at the wheel there would soon have been trouble; but this girl drove with a coolness, knowledge, and skill which reduced the risk of danger to vanishing-point. The car might not be hers, but the trained hand would have been quick to see that in her time she had driven cars of all sorts and sizes, under all kinds of conditions.

"You ought to be thankful," declared the Bishop,

when the village street was left behind, "that you have come through that street without doing injury to yourself or to others."

"Why, bless you, that's nothing! I've brought much bigger cars through larger places at a much higher speed than that. I'd back myself to take the biggest car that's on the road from London to Manchester at fifty miles an hour, and never do worse than graze a chicken. My good man, it's the driving does it. You could crawl and lay out every living thing you met. You seem to have lost your hat."

"It blew off while we were going through the village; I called out to you, but you would not stop."

"That's all right—it was no loss; where you got the thing from I can't think. Are you a foreigner?"

"A foreigner! What makes you ask me such a thing?"

"I'm judging from your clothes."

"Judging from my clothes! Are you so ignorant as not to know what it is right and proper that a bishop should wear?"

"I only thought they might be a foreign make. Halloo!—here's larks! We're in to it!"

They were rolling along an open country road. About a hundred yards ahead were three or four cottages. From one of them two men came hurrying—constables—who placed themselves in the middle of the road. As they appeared, what was probably the entire population of the other cottages came out to see the fun.

"What's the matter?" asked the Bishop.

The answer was succinct. "Trapped."

"You don't mean to say that——" The Bishop stopped short, possibly because he realized that to ask if they had been exceeding the legal limit would be too absurd. She replied to his question as if it had been finished.

"We have never been inside the limit, except, perhaps, once or twice by accident when I couldn't help it; most of the time we have been going at a pace which will probably mean penal servitude for you, if they catch us. I shall have to run over those policemen if they don't look out."

"For goodness' sake take care what you're doing!"

"It's for them to take care. Look out!"

She sounded a blast on the Gabriel whistle which seemed to rend the air for miles; she hooted with the horn; she increased the speed, bearing down on the men in blue who were standing right in the middle of the road as if she had resolved to make an end of them. For a second they continued to hold up hands of warning and to stand their ground; then prudence prevailed. Each of them leaped to one side; the car whizzed between them, right over the spot on which they had just been standing.

"I thought you were going to kill them!" cried the Bishop, holding on to his seat with both hands.

"It would have been a case of suicide if anything had happened. They saw me coming."

"But aren't you going to stop? I implore you, young woman, with all the force that is in me,

to cease behaving in this horrible fashion, and to stop."

"Not much, while we are within reach of those two members of the constabulary—who, I expect, have lost some of the wool off the top of their heads. Hold on; I'm going to take this next corner rather sharply."

She did—at what seemed to the Bishop to be a criminal pace; only the most skilful driving could have brought them safely round it at all. He sat still, apparently realizing that expostulation was vain—the destinies of this demon ride were in other hands than his. He was covered with dust; his eyes, unprotected by glasses or goggles, were so much affected by the pace at which they had been going that he could scarcely see out of them; his attire was disordered; although the day was warm he was chilled to the bone. If only this dreadful young woman, who was playing him such a trick, would take pity on his hapless case! But not she. On and on and on she sped, through lanes, round corners, avoiding human habitations, traversing what seemed to him to be a network of country with which, he could only hope, she was familiar. East, west, south, and north had become all the same to him; he had not a notion where they were or in what direction they were speeding. Now and then they passed a vehicle—generally a farmer's cart; a bicyclist, a stray pedestrian; once some children with bunches of wild flowers in their hands. For the first time for some distance the young woman made a remark.

"There's another car coming; let's hope that they're driving carefully—there's only just room for two to pass."

Looking ahead, he saw a cloud of dust in front of them, which he presumed indicated the car which was coming.

"I suppose it is no use my asking you to slacken your speed or to take the most ordinary precautions?"

"Have you ever passed, at top speed, another car in a narrow lane? If you haven't you shall feel what it's like."

He said nothing, recognizing the futility of speech. He held on to his seat and hoped for the best; to be candid, he had begun to realize that this young woman, who had him in her power, could drive, and that it would not be her fault if anything went wrong. The cloud of dust came nearer. There was a straight stretch of road in front of them. The other car came in sight. His companion broke into exclamation.

"Halloa! Of all the comfortable coincidences! In the very nick of time!"

She sounded the whistle, decreased the speed, brought the car to a standstill.

"What-ho!" she shouted. The other driver, who was also feminine, seemed to recognize in the stentorian shout a familiar sound. The approaching car slowed, went slowly past, stopping, perhaps, a dozen yards beyond. The Bishop's companion slipped from her seat, ran back to the other car, clambered into it; it began to move off as, kneeling on the seat, she shouted back at him:

“ If you take her back to the G.F.S., look out for the police at the end of the lane.”

The car, quickening its pace, bore her with it, leaving the Bishop of Midhurst in the other car, alone. He stood up and looked behind him. He would have shouted if he had thought it would be the slightest use ; he knew it would be but to waste his breath. The car passed round a corner out of sight. He followed with his eyes the cloud of dust which marked its track ; the way in which it twisted and turned showed the devious road the car was taking. At last that also passed from sight ; he was indeed alone. He sank on to his seat with a sound which was half sigh, half gasp ; taking out his handkerchief he tried to wipe some of the dust from off his brow.

He had supposed, only an instant or two ago, in view of the treatment to which he had been subjected, that outrage could go no farther ; he had erred—this went a great deal farther. To have been fooled, kidnapped, borne off against his will in this mad, and even criminal—fashion, that was bad enough ; to be left, miles away from anywhere, in a country of which he knew nothing, stranded in a motor-car which belonged to some one else, and for which, probably, all the police of the country were by this time looking out—surely that was worse.

But the relief of ceasing to feel himself at the mercy of that wild young woman was so great that for the first few seconds he was positively content with his position. It was only by degrees

that its true inwardness forced itself upon him. He scanned with his eyes so much of the surrounding country as he could see. A far off, on the side of a hill perhaps two miles away, was a roof; no other human habitation was in sight. He was not a young man; he was portly, not much of a pedestrian: he realized that the strain of that mad rush through the air had tired him out physically and mentally. What was he to do? Wait there until some one came? In that case, what was he to say to the some one who did come? If he was not careful, a pretty story would go the round of the place concerning the Bishop of Midhurst. It might be up against him all the rest of his life—how, instead of attending a meeting of the G.F.S., he had been borne off by a wild young woman in a borrowed motor-car. If he started off to walk he would have to leave the motor-car by the roadside. He cared not a row of pins for the car or what became of it; still, a certain amount of responsibility might be laid at his door if he left it wholly unattended in that lonely lane. Driving it was out of the question. Although he had been the owner of a car now for several years, he had no more notion how to drive one than the ordinary passenger in an express train has of how to drive the engine.

While he was revolving in his mind the various alternatives there came from the field through the gate in front of him an ancient man. The Bishop hailed him.

“Where am I?” he inquired.

The ancient eyed him with weak and watery eyes, as if he found the question not an easy one to answer. Momentary reflection showed the Bishop that the man might not be so stupid as he seemed. He amended the form of his inquiry. "In what parish am I?"

"This is Horsebridge parish, this be."

"And where is Horsebridge parish?"

Again the ancient stared. The Bishop had honesty enough to perceive that, from his point of view, he might again have cause to. Another emendation. "How far am I from the nearest house?"

"Couldn't rightly say." An interval. "Whose house?"

"Anybody's house."

"Peter Wilkins—his be the nearest house, over on the hillside yonder."

The ancient pointed a trembling finger to the roof which the Bishop could see for himself.

"How far is that?"

"Maybe a mile across the fields, maybe four by the road. Peter's ill in bed; there's only his sister when you get there. What might you be wanting?"

"I want to get away from here."

It really was excusable if once more the ancient stared, since the Bishop might have gone away at any speed he liked by merely touching a handle.

"Anything wrong with the thing?" the ancient asked.

"So far as I know, nothing; only I can't drive it."

"But you're in it."

"Yes, I certainly am in it."

"Came here in it, didn't you?"

"Unfortunately; and the person who brought me has gone and left me stranded. I suppose you can't drive a motor-car?"

"Me? No, that I can't. I can't drive nothing but a plough." Then, after momentary reflection, "You're beyond me, you are, asking me if I can drive a motor-car; it ain't likely. I've got to get home, I have."

And he started off to do it. It seemed to the Bishop that it would be no use asking him to stay. Even if he consented, very little would be gained. His conversational powers did not seem great; he did not seem to be disposed to impart information even if he had it; he emphatically did not seem to be the kind of person who would be likely to be of practical service to a bishop in a delicate position. So the Bishop let him go; and he continued to be his own company for five-and-twenty minutes. He knew it was five-and-twenty minutes because every fifty seconds or so he referred to his watch. How slowly those five-and-twenty minutes went! He began by sitting still in the car; then he stood up to look around him, climbing on to the seat to increase his horizon; then he descended on to the road, walking a hundred yards or so in this direction and in that, if only to stretch his legs, which were stiff and cramped; then he peered at the mechanism of the car. If he had only been even moderately sure which

were the proper handles to touch! If ever there was a case in which ignorance was not bliss, this was one. It did seem ridiculous that he should have such a magnificent means of locomotion at his command and yet be rooted to the ground. So conscious did he become of this that at length he brought himself to the sticking-point of attempting to turn the handle which started the engine. The result was a lamentable failure; he had had no idea that it was so hard to turn. He gave it what he meant to be a good pull; the only consequence being that, though nothing happened to the engine, every muscle in his body was jarred. He had positively to sit down in the centre of the road to get over the shock to his system. If only one of the numerous photographers who were wont to request him for the honour of a sitting had come along just then!

That jar finished him. When he ascended from the road he got into the car; not on to the front, but on to the back seat. There were several rugs in the bottom of the car, among them a huge one of pony skins. Settling himself as comfortably as possible, with his legs up on the seat, he wrapped this about him. To judge from appearances, if no one came along in the shape of a rescue party, his intention was to stay there for the rest of the night. Already the sun was sinking, through banks of thin clouds, into the west. It was nearly dinner-time. He had had only a scanty lunch; practically no tea. The meeting of the G.F.S. had been fixed at an hour which would ensure its

being over in time for a rather postponed dinner. He had reason to believe that Rutter had arranged to have a banquet in his honour; if the banquet took place at the appointed time he certainly would not be there. He closed his eyes, as if to shut out the picture which his imagination conjured up.

Presently he looked again at his watch. About five minutes had passed since he got into the car. How the time did drag! If nothing else happened he would have to go somewhere in search of food. One of the chief ends and aims of his wife's existence was to see that he had proper and regular meals; what must she be feeling if she even guessed that he was actually faint with hunger! He would stay where he was, say, another quarter of an hour; then, somehow, somewhere, food must be sought.

The fifteen minutes went by—how slowly. He continued still another five. The moment had arrived at which something must be done. Although he had to be most careful of his digestion, with which so many kinds of food disagreed, just then he would have eaten anything that could be eaten, indifferent to what might follow. Allowing the pony-skin rug to slip back upon the floor, he began to get off the seat. No matter what happened to the car he would have to leave it; since no one ever seemed to come along that lane, the presumption was that it ran no risk of being stolen. He would have to start in one direction or the other in search of sustenance; if he delayed, exhausted nature might render him incapable of movement.

As he was stooping to open the door, the sound fell on his ear. It came from behind him ; a cloud of dust was floating towards him through the air ; some sort of motor was approaching ; not a large one, because the cloud was so small. He recognized the sound—it was a motor-bicycle. His spirits rose, his pulse quickened ; after that weary period of lonely waiting something was about to happen, help might be at hand. The bicycle came into sight—it was travelling at an illegal speed. The Bishop, getting on to the seat, waved his handkerchief, after the fashion of the shipwrecked mariner who, stories tell us, when a ship hoves in sight, waves a flag from the highest point of the desert island on which he has been stranded. It was plain that the bicyclist perceived the signal, as, unless he was purblind, he could hardly help doing. He slowed, and, as he drew alongside, stopped.

“ What’s up ? ” he asked.

“ Can you drive a motor-car ? ”

“ Rather ! ”

“ Then——” The Bishop hesitated. He scanned the bicyclist with dubious eyes. After what had occurred he was suspicious of every one ; but this was a case of any port in a storm—the motor-bicyclist represented the only port in sight.

“ Could you drive this one ? ”

“ Like a bird ! Where to ? ”

The celerity with which the fellow seemed to accede to his suggestion moved the Bishop to further hesitation.

"What will you do with your own machine?"

"Put it on the other side of this hedge and send for it to-morrow. It will be all right there; no one will sneak it, I bet a pound."

There was a quality about the man's speech which the Bishop did not like; he showed such curious willingness to desert and risk the safety of his own machine for the sake of assisting an utter stranger. The Bishop felt sure that, looking as he did then, no one could have known him at sight to be the personage he was; why, then, did this stranger show such eagerness to render him this really considerable service? He was already wheeling his machine to the gate through which that ancient man had come. Presently he returned without it.

"You are quite sure you can drive?" demanded the Bishop.

"I was born on a motor-car, or as good as."

This was obviously untrue. The man's age, if nothing else, made that impossible; he must have been born a good many years before motor-cars were invented. But he certainly manipulated the sparking-handle as one to whom such a thing was familiar; the engine was started, he climbed on to the driver's seat, the car was off.

"Where are you taking me?" said the Bishop.

"You didn't say where you wanted to go to," said the man at the wheel.

"You never gave me a chance. You ought not to have started as you did without giving me the opportunity of coming to an understanding."

"That's all right. I'll take you somewhere."

"It's not all right!"

The Bishop felt it was very far from being all right. The pace quickened; he had to sit down. It was a long-bodied car; from the back seat, when the car was moving fast, it was not easy to get the voice to travel to the driver in front.

"I insist upon knowing where you are taking me!" he shouted. The man drove on; perhaps he did not hear. The Bishop raised his voice still higher. "Do you hear what I say, sir? I insist upon knowing——"

He had to leave his sentence unfinished. He was sitting well forward, right on the edge of the seat, so as to give himself the best possible chance of being heard. Suddenly the car was taken round a corner, so unexpectedly that the Bishop, whose adherence to the seat was precarious, was swung off it on to the floor. The driver, in apparent ignorance of what had happened—it could scarcely be said to be his business to look behind—went gaily on. It seemed incredible to the Bishop that such a thing could have occurred to him and be entirely ignored; but he had got into the regions of the incredible that evening, in which only the unexpected seemed to happen. With some difficulty, the jolting being more obvious at the back of the car than in the front, he regained his seat. He was breathless, bumped, and shaken; for the time he was quite content to keep still and let things slide. After all, he could hardly have got out of the frying-pan into the fire. This fellow must be

taking him somewhere, and anywhere was better than nowhere at all.

When they had covered another ten or fifteen miles—at the best of times the Bishop was not much of a judge of distance ; he was not at all just then—the car began to slow. All at once, without the slightest warning it turned another corner—not into another road, but through a pair of great, wide-open iron gates into what seemed a gentleman's park. They were proceeding along what seemed to be an avenue bordered on either side by magnificent forest trees.

“Where are you taking me?” demanded the Bishop, who had regained his breath and was able to make himself more audible now that the pace had become more moderate.

The driver said nothing, but went steadily on. Presently, sweeping round a bend, on the other side of the wide stretch of Italian garden a great house appeared in view.

“I insist,” cried the irate and anxious passenger, “on your telling me, if you know, what place this is you are taking me to.”

Nothing came of his insistence ; the driver remained still. The car, continuing past what seemed to be endless pergolas, radiant with great masses of climbing and clustering flowers, drew up at the foot of a glorious flight of steps.

“What,” demanded the Bishop, holding on to the back of the driver's seat and speaking almost into his ear, “do you mean by this, sir? What is the name of this place? How dare you bring me here?”

Not a word from the driver. Two footmen in resplendent livery came hurrying down the steps. One held the door of the motor-car open, the other stood respectfully by.

"I'm not going to get out," the Bishop endeavoured to explain. "I did not intend to come here; I've been brought here against my will. I don't even know what this place is."

"The Bishop of Midhurst?" said one of the footmen, in tones of bland inquiry.

"I am the Bishop of Midhurst."

"Your lordship is expected."

"Expected? By whom? What is this place?"

"If your lordship will alight." Before he quite realized it the Bishop was alighting, with the aid of the footman's outstretched arm. When he reached terra firma he attempted to remonstrate.

"I cannot but think that there is some mistake; indeed, I feel sure of it. Please tell me what place this is?"

"This is St. Leonard's Castle, the seat of the Duke of Ashburnham. His Grace expects your lordship."

"His Grace expects me?" He looked at the footman as if he suspected him of still another practical joke. "But I don't know the Duke of Ashburnham."

"If your lordship will come into the house."

With what were almost faltering feet the Bishop ascended the steps, a footman in front, another behind. A great door was thrown wide open at the top. A personage, whom he took to be the

major-domo, ushered him into the house by way of one of the finest halls he had ever seen in all the great houses he had entered. He presently found himself in a delightful bedroom.

"Your lordship would like a bath? Dinner is in half an hour."

His guide was holding open the door of a most inviting bathroom. The Bishop looked at him fixedly. This did not look like a practical joker.

"Do I understand you to tell me seriously that I'm expected in this house?"

"I was instructed that your lordship was coming by motor-car and would join the family at dinner. I was informed also that, as the roads are very dusty, your lordship would probably like a bath on your arrival. Your lordship's clothes shall be ready for you by the time you have bathed. Holmes, here, will attend to your lordship's clothing."

The speaker made a gesture with his hand towards a person whose functions were probably those of a *valet de chambre*. In a very few minutes his lordship was enjoying one of the pleasantest baths he had ever had.

"This may be," he told himself, as he revelled in the refreshing water, "a waking dream, or it may even be a page out of the 'Arabian Nights,' but—a good deal seems to have happened since I saw that motor-car in the Vicarage lane."

He found his clothes all ready when his bath was done; and shortly he was being shown into a large room in which were several persons. A lady advanced to meet him, young, fair-haired, blue-

eyed, exquisitely dressed. She greeted him with outstretched hand and delicious smile.

"I do hope you enjoyed your spin."

Then he knew her for that young woman who had haled him off in that wild motor-car, though to look at her then one would never have supposed her to be capable of conduct so utterly outrageous. The Bishop, though he prided himself upon his ready wit and presence of mind, was taken wholly aback. A very few moments ago he would have asserted that, Christian though he was, it would be totally impossible for him to forgive the petticoated miscreant who had been guilty of such astounding misconduct—misconduct, indeed, which almost approached to sacrilege. But in the presence of this fair maiden those few minutes seemed to have become years ; to be almost forgotten. He hardly knew what attitude to assume—what words to use. For almost the first time in his life he stammered.

"I—I'm afraid you—you took serious advantage of my innocence. I—I scarcely know what to say."

A grey-haired man was standing by his side, addressing him :

"Say nothing to her now, but rub it well into her after dinner. I shall take it as a particular favour if, when you have dined, you will teach her a lesson which she will never forget ; she is sadly in need of one." The Bishop was aware that the speaker was his host. "By the way," continued his Grace, "I have taken the liberty to ask some other guests to meet you."

To his amazement—his faculty of surprise was not yet exhausted—his lordship saw his wife advancing towards him across the room. With her were the Rutters, the vicar and his wife, from whom he had been so unexpectedly borne away. Sir John Basingstoke was close at their heels ; he put the matter on a footing of its own.

“ So you and Adela stole my car ? ”

He had by the hand the young woman who had been the cause of all the mischief ; she said to him with an air which was extremely demure :

“ Will you please introduce me to the Bishop of Midhurst ? ”

“ This,” said Sir John, “ is Lady Adela Childerick, our host's youngest daughter. As she's engaged to me, and we are shortly to be married, I suppose she considers herself entitled to play tricks with my private property. I knew what had happened directly I saw you flying past with her in the car.”

“ I do hope,” said that young woman, with an expression on her face which made her look a perfect angel, “ that you will marry us. I know I shan't feel really and properly married unless you do. Will you please take me in to dinner ? ”

He took her in. When they were seated at table, and the *hors d'œuvres* had been handed round, she said to him with a smile which, while it became her, might have meant anything :

“ What is the G.F.S. ? ”

What explanation the Bishop gave is not recorded. The Lady Adela proved to be that most excellent society's local president.

MINERVA

I DID mean to commit suicide, I own it ; though, now, I don't quite know why. I am not sure that I did then. Only the world was simply horrid, and I was miserable, and I was not feeling very well, and the children were most trying, to say nothing of their mother, and it was perfectly clear to me that there was really nothing at all worth living for—and that is why I did it. At least, I suppose that the real actual reason was because the gun was there. I had gone up the mountain side, nearly to the Rochers de Naye, with some sort of vague idea that if I found a convenient place I might throw myself over ; but there did not seem to be a place that was at all suitable. And then I went down, nearly to Glion, and there was the garden on one side of the road, with a summer-house in it, and no one about, and the gate wide open ; so I went in. I was frightfully tired, and my idea was that in the summer-house I should find solitude, and be as unhappy all alone as I chose. Of course I was insane, because it was absurd to expect to find solitude in somebody else's summer-house, to say

nothing of the ridiculousness of expecting to be allowed to be unhappy on the property of a perfect stranger ; but at the time that did not matter, and I should have been angrier than ever if any one had suggested that I was behaving like a lunatic.

Directly I got into the summer-house I saw the gun. There was a roof to it—I mean to the summer-house—but it stood on one side of the garden up against a sort of high hedge, in a kind of thicket, with no walls about it anywhere. I do not know if I make it quite clear : I never was very good at explaining ; but there was no possible mistake about the gun. There it was on the half-broken-down table which stood on four stumps of logs which had been driven into the ground.

The sight of that gun seemed to me to be the voice of destiny. Why was it put there, when I had been looking all the afternoon for something of the kind, unless it was to help me shuffle off this mortal coil ? I looked at it for about three minutes very attentively. I did not know what kind of gun it was, but there could be no doubt it was a real one. I always have been afraid of fire-arms, and had never in my life touched one till then ; and I had a very strong disinclination to touch that. You see it is all very well to talk about a gun being a perfectly simple thing ; but when you have been brought up in a town and never done any shooting, it is nothing of the kind ; at least, it was not to me. To begin with, I was surprised to find how heavy it was—quite a weight ; such a weight that I had not lifted it quite off the

table before I put it down again. Of course I knew where the trigger was, and I had a sort of notion that if I stood at one end of it, and pulled the trigger, I could blow my brains out or something of the kind without lifting it at all. But it was quite a long gun, and when I stood at the end of it the trigger was beyond my reach.

I thought of a case I had seen in the papers about a man who stood a gun on the ground, then leaned over it, and pressed the trigger with his foot and did it that way. In my then frame of mind it seemed to me there would be no harm in trying the experiment, and it was with that idea that I started to pick it up; but directly I touched it, to this moment I do not know why, it went off. You never heard such a noise as it made in all your life. For some seconds I was not sure it had not blown me to pieces; I could not have been more frightened if it had. I could hear the echoes travelling up and down the mountains and across the lake; I was more than horror-struck—I was nearly paralysed. And the smoke! And the smell! Shall I ever forget it?

When I had come to the conclusion that I was not only still alive, but was not even hurt, and was just about to fly for my life before some one came and found out what I had done, I heard a sound which frightened me more than the firing of that gun had done. It was the sound of a human voice, of groans, of some one in pain—I am bound to write, of bad language in English.

I had shot some one. I had only to use my

ears and such modicum of common sense as I had left to be sure of that. The sounds came from behind me—from the other side of the hedge. Plainly there had been some one there without my knowing it, and the bullet had gone through the hedge right into him ; that it was a him I knew from his language. Quite possibly I had committed murder : because, although he was not dead already—he would not have gone on as he was doing if he had been—there was no reason whatever why he should not die presently. I had heard of the awful effects of gun-shot wounds, and even though he lingered in agony for weeks and months, I should be responsible for what happened to him in the end. If I had done anything rather than think of committing suicide ! What an idiot I had been ! For the first time in my life I understood what it means to feel that you are rooted to the ground ; I felt as if I was. For I do not know how long I could not have moved if you had paid me ; and when I could I did not know whether to stay where I was or to run away. Then I came to a resolution. There was silence on the other side of the hedge—an ominous, an awful silence. The sounds had ceased. I decided that if ever I was to escape, now was the time. So I escaped. That is, I walked out of the summer-house as calmly as ever I walked in my life, and out of the garden ; then conscience awoke, and I did not know whether to turn to the left or to the right. He was on the left ; the way of escape was down the hill on the right. Suppose he was dead, and

I left him there, untended, under the cloudless sky. Would he not haunt me, even if I never heard of him again?

I arrived at another resolution: I turned to the left; let the consequences be what they might, I could not leave him there. There was a gate into another garden; I passed through it and down a path until I came to a seat on which was a person with one of his trouser legs pulled up. Which of the two was the more surprised when he saw me I cannot say. He stared at me as if I were some mysterious being who had dropped out of the clouds.

"Who on earth——" he began; then remembered himself. He stood up, pulled down the leg of his trousers, and took off his cap. "I beg your pardon, but—I've had a little accident."

Could this be the person I had shot? I wondered what he meant by a little accident. He certainly did not look as if he were either dead or dying, or even suffering from one of those frightful gun-shot wounds of which I have heard. I managed to collect enough presence of mind to speak to him.

"I hope you are not hurt," I said.

"Hurt?" He looked at me as if in his turn he wondered what I meant. A curious look came on to his face. "Some—kind person"—I felt sure, from his manner, that that was not what he had meant to say—"has peppered me with duck-shot."

"Peppered you with duck-shot? I'm afraid I don't understand."

He laughed, actually, when I had expected him to writhe.

"There's no reason why you should. Only—some silly idiot—you'll excuse my language, has been behaving after the manner of his kind. Did you hear a gun-shot?"

Had I? What was I to say? Of course I had heard a gun-shot; I told him so. He went on:

"That was some bright specimen of humanity fooling about with a gun on the other side of that hedge; I'll do him the justice to believe that it went off without his meaning it, but although he must have heard me holler, he hasn't so far had the decency to inquire what he has done to me."

"What has he done to you?"

I hardly knew my own voice, it seemed such a small one.

"He has sent half a dozen pellets of lead into the calf of my leg."

"Do they—do they—hurt you?"

He smiled again; he really was quite good-looking, though he had red hair and freckles.

"They are not the most delightful things to get into the calf of your leg. But that's not all he's done; he's killed a cat; there it lies before you." He pointed to what I recognized, to my horror, as the body of a cat, which was lying all of a heap. "That was a Persian cat not long ago, and worth no end of money. There'll be a pretty rumpus when it's found out what has come to it. I've been wondering if he had a down on cats, and if that was really what he was shooting at." The

idea! I never dreamt of such a thing; I love cats; the sight of that poor pussy lying there so still made me feel like crying. "But he's not only shot the cat and me, I heard windows going; I shouldn't be surprised if he'd peppered half a dozen of them; in fact, I shouldn't wonder if he's done mischief enough to last him for one afternoon, and which will make him pull a face when it comes to paying. But I'm frightfully forgetful; I suppose you came to see my aunt?"

As I listened to the catalogue of ills which had been caused by that horrible gun, I felt as if all the life was oozing out of me. I was reduced to stammering.

"No, I—I didn't come to see your aunt." The way in which he looked at me made my confusion worse. "I—I heard a gun, and I heard some one shouting, so I—I came in to see if any one was hurt."

"That was I who was shouting; so if you heard me it is pretty clear that the idiot who fired must have heard me too, so there's no excuse for his not calling to make inquiries. It's tremendously good of you to come, though there's nothing happened to me to make a fuss about; though, mind you"—and here he winked at me—"when I see my firing friend I don't mean to tell him that. The worst part of the business is Minerva—that's the cat. My aunt thinks no end of her; she calls her Minerva because she thinks she's the wisest cat that ever was, to say nothing of her good looks. When my aunt sees this"—again he

pointed to the recumbent pussy—"what she'll say I can't think."

There was a dance at the hotel that night, and I was at it—with Mrs. Wade's consent, after all. I do love dancing, and when you are still young, and I am, it is not a sin. There had been three dances at the hotel while we had been there, and I had not been at one—it was dreadful. Mrs. Wade had promised that I could be at this one and I had looked forward to it; then in the morning, for no reason, she had said I couldn't. It may seem ridiculous to some people, especially elderly ones, but her refusal had nearly broken my heart. That was one of the things that had started me off to commit suicide; I felt I could have done anything, everything was so horrid. Then when I returned to the hotel I found her in the lounge, and she told me, straight off, that I could dance after all. I fancy she saw I was not looking like myself at all, and had an idea that it might do me good, since anything would be better than having me ill upon her hands.

So, as I have said, I was there. And I had quite a good time, although I did not have very many partners. I only knew one or two of the people in the hotel to speak to, and Mrs. Wade made me sit on a chair by her, so that somehow I did not have much chance of being introduced to strangers. But I did have some dances; one with old Doctor Hope, who had just come from India, and who danced very well considering what he

told me about his gout; another with Colonel Willis, who was so stout that he could scarcely get round the room without panting; and then one with some one whom Colonel Willis introduced to me, who danced divinely. He asked to see my programme, but I told him I had not got one, and that I could not engage myself very far ahead, as I did not know how long I should be allowed to stop. He said he was engaged for the next three dances, but that if I were still there for the fourth, he hoped that I would dance it with him. After the second dance Mrs. Wade said that she wanted to go and do something, and thought that I had better leave the ball-room and sit in a sort of ounge which ran beside it. Scarcely was I seated when who should I see but the man whom I had shot in the afternoon? As may easily be imagined, the sight of him gave me a terrific shock, especially as he was walking with a stick. He saw me almost in the same instant in which I saw him, and up he came sailing. I could have sunk through the floor, and should not be surprised to be told that I went all the colours of the rainbow at once. He sat down beside me with the easiest air, and started talking as if we were the oldest of friends.

"I thought somehow I should see you here." I had never dreamt that I should see him, or I am not at all sure that I should not have stayed away. "Rather rot that I can't dance."

"Can't you?" My tone was a little frigid; though goodness knows I was hot enough. He glanced at me as if he wondered what I meant.

“ I can, in a sense ; though in another sense, I can't. As a matter of fact I'm very keen on dancing ; but I've been having those lumps of lead dug out of my calf, and the operation hasn't left me feeling so fit for dancing as it might have done.”

I said nothing ; I did not even sympathize with him ; I was so frightfully ashamed. He went on :

“ I can scarcely get along without this wretched stick, and I never heard of any one dancing with a stick ; did you ? ”

I did manage to stammer out something.

“ I am so sorry.”

“ Oh, that's all right—it's nothing ; in a day or two I shall be as right as rain ; it's only the momentary inconvenience ; I should like to have had a dance with you, that is, if you would have given me one.” I again said nothing ; what could I say to that living accusation ? “ Do you know,” he continued, he was making figures with the end of his stick on the carpet ; “ it's an extraordinary thing, but I can't make out who fired the shot. After you had gone I went into the next garden to see, but there wasn't a soul about ; there was the gun right enough, but there was nothing and no one else ; and the queer part of it is that the chap who owns it seems, at the time, to have been ever so far away. That gun-shot is something of a mystery. You didn't see any one go out of the gate as you were coming along ? ”

“ I never saw a soul.”

“ Which way were you coming ? ”

"I had been up ever so far, and I was coming down."

"It's very queer, some one must have fired the gun; I don't envy his feelings, whoever he is." He certainly had no cause to envy me mine. "Are you stopping here long?" Before I could answer he started again. "Hullo, here's my aunt. Who's that she's with? By the way, what's your name? Mine is Chillingworth—Frank Chillingworth. I should like to introduce you to my aunt if you don't mind, and it's not easy—without knowing your name."

I looked round; a tall, broad-shouldered, grey-haired woman, who wore spectacles, was coming along with Mrs. Wade. He was glancing in her direction; could that be his aunt, whose cat I had killed?

"If that's your aunt," I told him, "the lady by her is Mrs. Wade, and I'm her governess, at least a sort of governess; and my name is Margaret Adams."

The tall lady in the glasses came marching along, and spoke to Mr. Chillingworth in a loud, clear voice, while she was still four or five feet away from him.

"I've been telling Mrs. Wade, Frank, who is an old friend whom I haven't seen for years, about the outrageous business of this afternoon." She turned to Mrs. Wade. "This is my nephew, Agnes, Frank Chillingworth, who was shot in the leg and might have been shot in the head; Doctor Nicolle cut seven large lumps of lead right out of him, and

how he can be here after that is more than I can understand. But Minerva was killed outright. I feel"—her voice trembled, "I almost feel as if I had lost a child. Frank may do as he pleases, he pooh-poohs any idea of going to the police; but so far as Minerva is concerned I shall leave no stone unturned till I discover the assassin—because I regard the wretch who killed her as an assassin; to say nothing of sending shots through my windows—if I had been there I might have been killed. Who is this young lady, Frank?"

It was Mrs. Wade who explained.

"This is Margaret Adams, who looks after my two small girls. I think it is time now that we went to bed, if you are ready."

I was not ready, but I had to go, because she went, and she would not have dreamt of letting me stay behind. Everybody was dancing away; the programme was not more than half way through; the band had just struck up another waltz, the very sound of it seemed to get into my veins; I could see the partner who had been introduced to me by Colonel Willis, standing at the ball-room door, and looking around. I knew he was looking for me; but it was not the slightest use, I was borne off from under his very nose. Mr. Chillingworth and his aunt went with us, and I had to listen to his aunt's version of the gun-shot, which made it seem as if an unspeakable crime had been committed, and made me feel as if I were one of the worst characters which had ever walked the earth. If I had only had the courage

to speak up boldly and tell the truth. But the fact is I am a contemptible little coward, hysterical as well as silly, and there is no goodness of any sort in me. I felt that if I did speak, I should have a fit of hysterics then and there, there would have been a scene; I did not know what Mr. Chillingworth's aunt would do, but I was sure that Mrs. Wade would be mad, and what should I do if she packed me off without even a day's notice?

That was a sleepless night. And when I slept I had such dreams. The man who was to have been my partner was standing at the ball-room door, and he had the dead cat in one hand, and with the other he was pointing to a gallows; Mr. Chillingworth's aunt was prepared to play the part of hangman, and was beckoning to me to come and be hanged; I knew that Mr. Chillingworth was somewhere, all blown to pieces; and Mrs. Wade, with a child in either hand, was telling every one that whatever happened, it served me right. That wasn't the kind of thing to make you feel rested, and when I got up in the morning I felt more tired than I had done when I went to bed.

It was two days afterwards that the strangest part of it began to happen. Mrs. Wade had taken the two children to call on some friends at Vevey, and as was usual on such occasions, I had been left behind. I was sitting near the little quay by the water side, and was wondering what it felt like to be drowned, when a voice accosted me, and, looking up, there was Mr. Chillingworth, still leaning on a stick.

"This is a great stroke of luck finding you here." Those were the first words with which he greeted me. Then he went on: "What do you say to a pull on the lake? I can't play tennis—this leg of mine is rather worse instead of better; you don't seem to be overdone with occupations; this is just the weather for the water."

I quite agreed with him, and at the very idea something inside me gave quite a jump; but, at the same time, there were other considerations.

"Is your leg really worse?"

"The thing is a nuisance; as you know, there is a tennis tournament on, and I was to play; but what's the good? I can only limp. Do say you'll come for a pull."

"Who is to pull?"

"I am—who do you suppose? Unless you'd like to bear a hand."

"I shouldn't mind." Mind! I knew I should love it. I hadn't been on the lake since we had been at Teritet, and I loved rowing almost as much as I did dancing. "But how can you pull if your legs are bad?"

He laughed at me.

"My dear Miss Adams, you don't row with your legs."

"No, but it tries them. Anyhow, I'm afraid I cannot come, thank you all the same."

"Why not? I happen to know that Mrs. Wade has gone over with my aunt to a tea fight at Vevey, and they won't be back till goodness knows when.

You can come, you will come, you shall come ; there's a boat, in you get.

Before I was in the least prepared for anything of the kind, I actually did find myself sitting in a boat, with a scull in either hand, and Mr. Chillingworth on the cushioned seat in front of me.

"You can take the first spell," he said, "and when you've had about enough of it, I'll come on." Then we were clear of the land and I was pulling ; he commented on my way of doing it. "It's not the first time you've handled a scull."

"I've rowed almost since I began to walk. When I get hold of a pair of oars I feel—I don't know how I feel, but—I just love it."

"And what else do you love ?"

"Oh—dancing, and swimming—and all sorts of things."

"Shooting ?"

What prompted the question I had no notion, but it so startled me that I almost caught a crab ; I pulled for some moments in silence. Then he said, with a persistence which I did not altogether like,

"You're not fond of shooting ?"

"I've only once fired a gun in my life."

As I said that I was careful not to meet his eyes ; I do not know why, except that I had a feeling that there might be something in his which I should not care to see.

"And when was that ?"

"What does it matter ? By the way, have you heard anything more about the—miscreant who shot the cat ?"

"Is that altogether a nice way of putting it, confining your reference to the cat—as if this didn't count?" He touched his leg.

"Does it hurt you—very much?"

"It's a worry, which I would just as soon be without. But you were quite right in the way you put it; Minerva is of the first importance; if my aunt does catch the murderer there will be trouble. She's been to the police and they've been what they call investigating; but their investigations seem to show, so far as I can make out, that the only persons who were in that neighbourhood about that time, were you and me."

"Does your aunt know that I was there?"

"Not a word. I'm the only person she knows was there. And, strictly between ourselves, I've a notion that she's beginning to have a feeling that it was I who shot myself and killed Minerva."

"What a ridiculous idea."

"Not from her point of view. Who else could have done it if no one else was there?"

It might have been my fancy, but it seemed to me that there was an undercurrent of significance in his tone which made me wince. I tried to pull myself together, and began to speak.

"Mr. Chillingworth?"

"Miss Adams?"

"Would you like me to throw myself overboard?"

"Good gracious, no! Why?"

"You know very well."

The silence that time was a long one. I

wondered if he was ever going to speak. I knew that he was sitting perfectly still with his eyes fixed on my face ; I would have given something to have been able to ask him what he thought he saw there. But I simply could not speak a word ; I had to wait for him. When his words did come, they took me aback. He just asked a question.

“ Why did you do it ? ”

I, in my turn, took my own time to answer.

“ When did you know I did it ? ”

“ The moment I saw you, the instant you spoke. It was written large all over you ; I heard you exclaim when the gun went off, I recognized your voice when I heard it again. And again, when I came down to the hotel in the evening, you could not have told me more plainly if you had shouted. You'll never make a success of a secret crime ; you lack the art of concealment.”

This was pleasant hearing. I had supposed he had not had the faintest suspicion ; and he had known all the time. I pulled another dozen strokes before I spoke again ; I wished he would take his eyes off my face. I dared not look at him.

“ You must think I'm an agreeable person.”

“ I do.”

It was said so promptly, and with what seemed to be such an air of sincerity, that it startled me almost as much as the discovery that he knew.

“ I did not mean to shoot you.”

“ As if I ever supposed you did.”

“ Or the cat.”

"Nor the cat."

"I meant—to shoot myself."

"That was a very nice intention to have had. May I ask how you came to have it?"

"If you are going to laugh at me——" I stopped. He said nothing. I kept on pulling; then, when he would persist in saying nothing, I went on: "What's the use of living?"

"Exactly; that's the question which I believe others have asked as well as you; it is not, I have been given to understand, always an easy one to answer. It depends—doesn't it?—somewhat, on the point of view."

"I'm not sure that I'm sorry that I did shoot you."

"I did not imagine that you were."

"Would you mind turning the boat round; I'm going to pull back to the shore. I've had enough of rowing."

"My dear child——"

"I am not a child."

"How old are you?"

"Age has nothing to do with it."

"No, that is true. There are those who never grow up, they are always children: they are the lucky ones. Personally, I am glad you shot me; I'm inclined to the opinion that, under the circumstances, it was the best thing you could have done."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"I think you'll begin to get at my meaning, if you think. To speak of nothing else, it made us known to each other, and that is something."

Instead of going straight back, it was quite late

when we returned. We actually rowed all the way to Bouveret, and there we had tea, and we talked ; then we rowed back, and we talked again. Before we said good-bye we were not on at all bad terms. There were, of course, heaps of subjects on which we differed, but I could see that there was something to be said for his point of view, and I feel sure that he was impressed by mine. What I objected to most of all, was the air he had of treating me as if I were excessively young. I might be only eighteen, but I've known so much trouble, and disappointment, and worry, that I have felt sometimes as if I were eighty. When I got into the hotel, Mrs. Wade had not yet returned, and when she did come back she was in the best of humour, so that was all right.

That was Friday ; nothing particular happened till the Monday, and on the Monday afternoon, as I was crossing the hall, who should I see but Mr. Chillingworth, apparently giving instructions about where some luggage which was coming in was to go. When I had said good afternoon, I asked him whose the luggage was.

"It's mine." He said it with a twinkle in his eyes, as I happened to notice, because at the moment I was looking at them.

"Yours? Where are you going? What is it doing here?"

"My aunt has cast me adrift."

"Your aunt? Cast you adrift?"

"She has at last come to the conclusion that it was I who killed Minerva."

“Mr. Chillingworth!” I believe my cheeks were flaming red.

“In consequence, as she cannot continue under the same roof with a person who is deceitful, untruthful, ungrateful, and a secret assassin, as well as several other things, she has not only asked me, but has commanded me, to depart,—in this letter. Would you like to see it? It’s a rather remarkable epistle.”

He held out towards me an envelope. I shrank away.

“You are not really in earnest?”

“Perfectly; as you will see for yourself if you read this letter.”

I would not read the letter. At that moment my feelings were such that I could scarcely answer him. I hurried away. As I passed Mrs. Wade’s sitting-room I noticed that the door was open, and that people were speaking within. One of the voices was an unfamiliar one; it was such a loud one that I could not help hearing something that was said.

“My dear Agnes, Frank Chillingworth and I have parted. His conduct has revealed to me at last what kind of character he is. I have long suspected him of entertaining a feeling towards my sweet Minerva of a kind which I would rather not particularize. But to think that he should have shot her, dead; and to prevent an iota of suspicion attaching to himself, that he even should have gone so far as to arrange that some of the selfsame shot should have been lodged in his own leg; that reveals a depth of depravity, of duplicity, of posi-

tive wickedness which makes it impossible for me to continue to entertain those feelings for him which I have had in the past. My intention was to pursue the criminal with the utmost rigour of the law; I had been offered sixty guineas for Minerva—there's the loss of the money! And even in the case of my own nephew I have hesitated as to whether justice did not demand me to take some steps. But he is my sister's son—and I would not. But all relations between us are at an end. One who could be guilty of such a cold-blooded crime, and resort to such measures to hide his guilt, I can never again look upon as a nephew of mine. Why, one day, he might shoot me—one who could shoot Minerva, in cold blood—I have a feeling, Agnes, that he could shoot any one."

Long before this speech was finished I knew that I had heard that unfamiliar voice at least once before—it was Mr. Chillingworth's aunt. She had come to announce to Mrs. Wade that she had cast her nephew from her—for a crime which was mine. I could not bear to think of it. I could not even stay there and try to. Unannounced, I pushed the door wide open, and strode into the room. Mrs. Wade has always told me that when she has a visitor she likes me to knock before I go into her room, but I never knocked, and she stared at me as if I were some strange thing.

"Miss Adams," she cried, "what is the matter with you, and why do you look like that?"

I suppose I must have looked very weird indeed; but I did not care. I burst out:

"I have come to give myself up."

Both ladies rose from their chairs. I am sure they thought that there was something wrong with me.

"Miss Adams," exclaimed Mrs. Wade, "are you not well? What is the meaning of this extraordinary conduct?"

I confronted Mr. Chillingworth's aunt—she was about twice my height, so I had to look up to her.

"The meaning is that I can no longer continue silent. I never meant to keep silent at the beginning, but somehow I began to, and what I have endured in consequence no one can ever know."

"What is the child talking about?" asked Mr. Chillingworth's aunt of Mrs. Wade.

I answered her, though every moment I was getting more and more afraid. I do not know how it is, but my spurts of courage never do last long.

"You have cast your nephew from you, as if he were the dirt beneath your feet; you have treated him as though he were a criminal; he is not. He is a high-souled, noble-hearted gentleman. It is I who am the criminal—yes, it is I! It was I who killed Minerva!"

"Miss Adams!" cried Mrs. Wade; and "Girl!" exclaimed Mr. Chillingworth's aunt. But I did not care—I faced them both. I told them the whole of the tragic story, hiding nothing, laying everything bare; but of course, in the very

middle, I must needs start crying, like a great baby ; and I made such a boo-hooing that I could scarcely speak plainly. And the more I cried, the madder I grew—that I should be such an idiot as to cry at all ; criminals do not cry when they are confessing. I dabbed at my eyes with my pocket handkerchief, and I mopped up the tears from my cheeks, and I stamped my feet with rage because they would keep rolling down, and altogether there was a pretty to-do. When I got to the end there was a momentary silence, except for my boo-hooing, which I would keep on. Then Mr. Chillingworth's aunt observed, as she surveyed me through her glasses :

“ Of all the extraordinary young women I ever encountered ! ”

Mrs. Wade was more deadly—she generally is.

“ Of course, Miss Adams, I don't know what this lady proposes to do, whether she does intend to hand you over to the police ; but so far as I am concerned the shameful story which you have just told us leaves me absolutely no option but to pay you the trifling sum that is due, and request you to consider yourself no longer in my employment.” She turned to Mr. Chillingworth's aunt. “ Do you wish her to go, or—— ? ”

The unfinished sentence was ominous ; I knew how she meant to end it. Mr. Chillingworth's aunt seemed more flustered than I should have thought a person of her appearance could have been.

“ Really I don't know what to say ; the position

is such an inconceivable one. I don't know whether to send for the police or not; there's the question of the sixty guineas I was offered for Minerva."

"Here, aunt, are the sixty guineas—I presume my cheque will be good enough." The words came from Mr. Chillingworth; he had an open cheque book in one hand and a fountain pen in the other. "I declined to pay any attention to your hints that I should recompense you for the loss of Minerva so long as you pretended to think that it was I who disposed of her; but now that the case is altered—here you are." He held out a cheque on which he had written something. "Whether such an offer was ever seriously made to you, you know better than I do; anyhow, here are the sixty guineas."

"Why should I take sixty guineas from you for what this young woman has done?"

"Because in the future I shall be responsible for whatever Miss Adams thinks it proper to do."

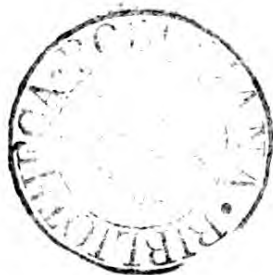
"Frank Chillingworth!—what do you mean?"

"Miss Adams is, I hope, about to do me the honour to become my wife. I believe that a husband generally is regarded as responsible for his wife's actions."

You never saw anything like the scene there was; I did not know if the world had turned upside down, or if I had. As for his aunt and Mrs. Wade, I pitied them; they were older than I was, and not so well able to bear the sudden shock. And that was a shock. I had

never had even so much as a ghost of an idea that he had such a thing in his mind, and that he should blurt it out like that, before those two women, without even giving me so much as a hint of what was coming—no wonder that I stopped boo-hooing and stared at him with my tear-grimed eyes as if he were the sea-serpent, or something quite as incredible. And before I knew it he put his arm round my waist and kissed me though my cheeks were still damp.

If ever any one had a stranger wooing than mine was I should like to hear the story ; it must be quite worth hearing. We were married in the shortest possible space of time, and I can safely declare that, so far, we have lived happy ever after ; and for that, in a rather peculiar sense, I have to thank Minerva.



THE TEN-POUND NOTES

IT had all come about so simply—or so it seemed to her. The familiar big envelope, addressed in her own handwriting, her returned MS. inside—“With the Editor’s compliments.” Listlessly turning the pages of her rejected story, something fell from between the leaves on to the table by which she was sitting. The something was three bank-notes of ten pounds each. She stared at them in amazement. For a moment she could not believe that they were real, genuine bank-notes. She still held them in her hand as the door opened to admit her landlady.

“I’m very sorry, miss,” began Mrs. Barry, without any sort of prelude, “but this can’t go on. You owe me three weeks’ rent, besides the things you’ve had of me, to say nothing of the other week that’s due the day after to-morrow, and my landlord is pressing me for his rent, so I’m afraid I must press you for yours. You’ll please to settle up to-day, Miss Griffiths.”

“What is the amount, Mrs. Barry?”

“You ought to know as well as I do: it’s six

pounds seven and elevenpence." She glanced at what the girl was holding in her fingers ; her eyes glistened. " Aren't those bank-notes that you have got there ? "

" Yes, Mrs. Barry, they are. Here is one for ten pounds ; have you the change ? "

Mrs. Barry's manner changed ; in an instant it became almost servile.

" I'm sure, miss, I'm very sorry to have troubled you, you know that as well as I do. The fact is, I'm nearly driven off my head trying to find the money to keep going—and you're not the only one in the house that owes me money."

" I quite understand, Mrs. Barry, that your struggle is as hard as mine ; you have been very lenient with me. I should be the last person to resent your wishing to be paid."

It was only when Mrs. Barry had left the room with the ten-pound note in her hand that Mary Griffiths had a chance of thinking the position out. The note with which she had satisfied the landlady's claim was certainly not hers ; of that there seemed ~~to~~ be no doubt whatever. There was nothing to show that it was hers. The envelope contained her own manuscript and a formal notice of rejection. The bank-notes seemed to have strayed among the pages in some more or less mysterious manner ; and, without being discovered, had been posted to her. Her bounden duty was to send them back at once to the office of the *Fleet Street Magazine*. She was about to summon Mrs. Barry and insist upon the bank-note being

returned, when the small servant maid appeared with a tray in her hand.

“If you please, Miss, Mrs. Barry has sent the change—three pound twelve and a penny; and she says, will you please count it and see that it’s right.”

Mary counted it; it obviously was right. The maid left the money and a receipted bill behind her, leaving the lodger to consider the position again. Three pound twelve and a penny, out of the ten-pound note; the die was cast. Mrs. Barry would certainly not return that bank-note now. She had probably paid it away herself; the girl knew what a “pressing” person that landlord was. Miss Griffiths asked herself what she was to do. Should she return the two notes with an explanation of what had become of the third? To say the least of it, she would find the explanation a very difficult one to make—was it to be made in person, or by letter? In either case, a pretty figure she would cut.

If she had not been so hideously short of money! Pawn tickets represented the chief part of her worldly wealth. In cash, she had less than six shillings in the world; where the next remittance was to come from she had no notion. The three pounds twelve and a penny which was lying in a pleasant little heap in front of her meant so much to her; while two ten-pound notes were unlimited wealth. If they were only really hers! But they were not; she would have to send them back to their possibly sorrowing owner at once.

She took a sheet of paper and began to write a

letter ; but somehow her pen would not travel ; that explanation hung fire—she could not make it clear in black-and-white. It was no use ; she could not write about a thing like that ; the tale would have to be told in person. She went into her bedroom to put on her hat : this was a matter in which delay might be dangerous.

While she was putting on her hat, there was a knock at the hall door, a loud and rather peremptory knock. Presently she was conscious that some one, who trod rather heavily, was being shown into her sitting-room. She wondered who it could be ; no one by any chance ever came to see her. Then she remembered that she had not only left that change upon the table, but the two ten-pound notes as well. The thought flustered her—who could tell who the caller might be ? Without waiting to be informed that some one had come to see her, she hurried through the folding doors back into her sitting-room. A stranger was standing by the table, the sight of whom filled her with wonder—he seemed such an unlikely sort of stranger to be found in such a place. He was quite young, probably not more than four- or five-and-twenty, quite good-looking, and quite beautifully dressed. He was apparently as much surprised to see her as she was to see him ; what he had expected to see was not clear, but apparently it was not what he saw. They stared at each other for some seconds in silence ; each of them might have been tonguetied. Then he began to stammer ; it was quite plain that the words would not come easily.

"I—I beg your pardon."

With quite peculiar awkwardness he stopped short, leaving her to guess what it was for which he apologized. A thought occurred to her.

"Are you—are you the editor of the *Fleet Street Magazine*?"

He shook his head with almost unnecessary vigour.

"Not I—nothing half so sensible; but I—I know him. He's a friend of mine—at least—well, he is a friend of mine."

"Has he sent you for——?" For some cause she left her sentence unfinished. Her glance fell on the table. The bank-notes were still there, also the change.

The visitor, whose manners were much more *gauche* than one would have expected from his appearance, seemed to be at a loss what to say. Then he made a dash for it.

"He—he gave me your name."

"You mean—he sent you?"

"Well, I don't know that he exactly sent me, but—it's like this. I'm afraid I'm not making this very plain."

He certainly was not. Mary began to wonder what was the matter with the man; he seemed to be in a state of such odd confusion. If he had come, as she supposed he had, on a certain errand, why did he not get it out and have done with it? Instead of which, as it seemed to her, he continued to blunder. His next words took her wholly aback.

"The—the fact is I—I'm thinking of starting a magazine."

"You are thinking of starting a magazine?" She seemed to be unconscious that she was echoing his words. The fact seemed to confuse him worse than before.

"And—and—Henderson gave me your name."

"Mr. Henderson gave you my name?"

As she was aware, Matthew Henderson was the editor of the *Fleet Street Magazine*. Since he had never accepted anything she had sent him, and had not even taken the trouble to comment upon any of her efforts, why should he have given a perfect stranger, who was thinking of starting a magazine, her name? She stared at the young gentleman open-eyed. He stumbled on.

"I hope I'm not interrupting you, but you see it was on business that I called, so I hoped you wouldn't mind. It's—it's about the new magazine. Would—I hope you won't think I'm putting it too suddenly, but—would you like to be editor?"

"Editor?" she gasped; this young man was certainly mad.

"Or—or would you like to be one of the principal contributors? Or what would you like to be? You see, so long as I get you on the staff, that's all that I care about."

"What is your name?" Her manner was distinctly frosty; she began to have suspicions about her visitor.

"My name is Borrowdale—Sir George Borrowdale. I was at the same college as Henderson."

"Then, Sir George Borrowdale, may I ask to what I am indebted for the honour of your presence here?"

"I told you, it's about the new magazine."

"Do you wish me to understand that you got my name from Mr. Henderson as a possible editor, or even contributor, to a new magazine which you propose to start?"

"Well—not exactly that, but—but I got your name from him—— By the way, Miss Griffiths——"

"I see that you at least do know my name."

"Yes, I told you I got it from Henderson. It's like this—I see you've got your hat on, and my car is at the door; if you'll come for a spin with me, we'll talk business as we go. It's just a day for talking business out of doors. I shall be awfully glad if you will come; it's a lovely day, and I'll take you for a topping run. Do say you'll come."

Clearly this young man was a really remarkable young man.

"Am I to gather, Sir George Borrowdale—if that is your name—that Mr. Henderson gave you my name with a view to your asking me to come for a run in your motor-car?"

"Not—not exactly——"

"So I should imagine. I'm afraid that you are interrupting me. May I ask you to go? You know the way out; or shall I show you the door?"

The young gentleman turned peony red.

“ I say ! I—I hope I haven’t annoyed you ? I know what an awful ass I can be when I like, and sometimes, worse luck, when I don’t like ; but I give you my word of honour that in coming here I had not the least intention——”

The young lady ruthlessly cut him short.

“ Must I again ask you to go, or—how can I put it plainer ? ”

When he had gone—he went, as it were, among a hurricane of stammered apologies—the young lady was left in an even more singular frame of mind than she had been in when he appeared. Under cover of the heavy curtain she peeped out into the street. There, sure enough, was a magnificent motor-car, into which her visitor presently climbed, and instantly vanished. What had he meant by coming to her at all ? Had Mr. Henderson given him her name ? If so, what for ? Perhaps, after all, he really had come about those bank-notes, and had been so extremely awkward and stupid that he had not even managed to broach the subject. She ought, metaphorically, to have thrown them in his face, and to have insisted on making them the subject of discussion. Though, how she would ever have succeeded in explaining to that wonderfully attired young man what had become of the missing note, she did not stop to think. What were three ten-pound notes to the owner of that motor-car ? And she would have had to confess to him that she had—what looked very like—stolen one. She covered her face with her hands, and shivered. It really would

have been impossible to have explained it all to him.

Sir George Borrowdale motored straight to the office of the *Fleet Street Magazine*. He marched upstairs, passed the scandalized young man, who wished to ask his name and business prior to announcing him, right into the editorial presence.

"Henderson," he burst out by way of introduction, "I'm the most complete and utter ass and idiot that ever walked on two legs!"

Mr. Henderson, looking up from the manuscript upon which he was engaged, marked the point he had reached with the butt of a pencil.

"Would it be any use my remarking that I'm engaged?"

The visitor behaved as if he had not heard the mildly uttered question.

"I could kick myself when I think of it; I could hammer my head against a brick wall and throw stones at myself for hours. No one knows what a blundering, doddering lunatic he can be until—until he does. Then—then of course it's too late; he's been it."

"Might I be permitted to observe that this is the day on which we go to press?"

The young gentleman paid no heed to him whatever; he was too occupied with his own affairs.

"Henderson, you remember I came here yesterday?"

"I'm not likely to forget it."

"There was a manuscript, or whatever you call

the thing, lying on an addressed envelope. I looked at the envelope and saw that it was addressed to a Miss Griffiths."

"I have a clear recollection that you took a liberty, which you had no right to take, with certain literary matter which was lying in this office."

"I asked you what the thing—story, or whatever it was—was doing there. You said that it was going to be returned to the author. I asked you if it was no good. You said that that was not so much the point as that you had no room for it."

"A magazine has only a certain number of pages, and when they're filled, they're filled."

"I did not tell you that my mother knew a Miss Griffiths, and that I had often heard her talk of her; seeing the name upon the envelope reminded me of her. It struck me that that Miss Griffiths might have some connection with my mother's Miss Griffiths. You told me that it was not by any means the first manuscript you had returned to her, and it occurred to me that that might be rather hard on her."

"It does sometimes come rather hard on authors to have their manuscripts returned to them."

"I'd been to the bank, I had got a lot of money in my pocket, and I thought—well——" The young gentleman began to stumble. "The long and short of it is that I told you that I'd put the manuscript back in the envelope, and I did; and I closed the envelope, and I put three ten-pound notes in with it."

For the first time the patient Mr. Henderson

showed some sign of interest ; he put down his pencil and sat up in his chair. He asked what might have been called a leading question.

"What did you say you were? I didn't quite catch some of the names you called yourself."

"I meant no harm. I thought they might come in useful ; the poor old girl might be hard up ; all the women who write haven't got money to burn."

"That certainly is a sound and well-substantiated truth. Do you propose to enclose three ten-pound notes with every manuscript which is returned from this office?"

Borrowdale ignored the inquiry as completely as if he had not heard it.

"I noticed that Miss Griffiths lived at an address in Walham Green. This morning I was trotting around in my motor and happened to find myself in those parts ; so I—I thought I might as well look in."

"What are we coming to?" Mr. Henderson's eyes looked towards the ceiling. He was sitting right back in his chair, with his legs stretched out in front of him, and his hands in his trouser pockets.

"So I—I called. Henderson, you might have knocked me flat."

"Could I? I should like to have done it—I should like to do it now."

"I expected to see my mother's Miss Griffiths or—or some elderly party like her."

"I don't see why. There's more than one Miss Griffiths in the world, and they're not all old."

"Henderson, there came into the room the most

perfect picture of a girl you ever saw—the most absolutely topping girl. The sight of her took all the wind clean out of me ; I didn't know what to say ; I felt, and looked, like—like——”

“ Yes ; I can guess what you looked like. Go on.”

“ The worst of it was that directly I got in I had noticed what I felt must be my beastly bank-notes lying on the table. The sight of them finished me. In the presence of that girl I could no more say what I'd come to say than—than fly to the moon.”

“ What had you come to say ? ”

“ I had come to talk to her about my mother, and that sort of thing, and to hint, delicately you know, that if she was hard up I should be glad to—to do what I could. I knew the Miss Griffiths I was thinking of was one of my mother's oldest friends.”

“ What right had you to take it for granted that that Miss Griffiths was any relation of your mother's Miss Griffiths ; still more, and much worse, to presume that she was hard up ? ”

“ That's what I asked myself the moment I saw that girl—you know how I always do rush my fences. When you were coaching me, you always said that I should never miss a chance of coming a cropper ; of course, I saw I'd come a cropper then—and it knocked me silly.”

“ I can quite believe it. Then did you drop that delicate hint ? ”

“ I'd rather have done anything—with those bank-notes staring me in the face ! I felt that

if she knew they'd come from me she'd want to cut my throat."

"How did you explain your presence there?"

"I told her I'd got her name from you."

"Borrowdale!" Mr. Henderson sat up suddenly. "That goes beyond a joke—you had no right to do that."

"I told her that I was going to start a new magazine, and that I wanted her to be editor."

Mr. Henderson looked at him steadily before he spoke.

"And did she take you for a lunatic or merely for a common cad?"

"She took me for a common cad—yes! You should have seen her eyes blaze up. Henderson, she is an absolute dream of a girl; I never saw one who came within a hundred miles of her—that's what did me, my being so knocked all of a heap. She asked me to leave the room and the house, and I did—and that's where it is. Didn't I tell you I could kick myself?"

"And I'm not at all sure that I couldn't kick you. Suppose this young lady comes to me and asks me what I mean by giving her name to a perfect stranger—what am I to say to her?"

"Tell her I'm a miserable bounder! Call me all the names you can! Henderson, I'd do anything for that girl—that's what makes me feel so cheerful. When I think of the three ten-pound notes I put in that envelope——"

There was a tapping at the door; the inquiry clerk entered.

"A lady wishes to see you, sir—a Miss Griffiths."

There was an interval of silence. The editor and the young gentleman looked at each other. Then the editor asked :

"What did you say the lady's name was?"

"Griffiths, sir—Miss Mary Griffiths."

"When I ring the bell, show the lady in." The clerk withdrew. Mr. Henderson said to Sir George, "Which of us is to see her?"

"Henderson, I wouldn't—I wouldn't see her——" Sir George had lowered his robust tones until they had almost become a whisper. He glanced about him. "What's behind that door?"

"Behind that door are certain sub-editors who are attached to the *Fleet Street Magazine*."

"Could I—could I just pop in—till she's gone?"

"I'm of opinion that you ought to stay here and interview Miss Griffiths, and that it is I who ought to what you call 'pop in.' You have no right to expect me to endure, on your behalf, what is bound to be a very unpleasant quarter of an hour."

The visitor had tiptoed across the room, and already had his fingers on the handle of the door to which he had referred.

"Henderson, you can tell her what you like; you—you may lay all the blame on me, you—you can tell her what you like, only——"

At that moment the editor struck the bell which stood beside him on the table. Sir George

vanished; presumably he had joined himself to the sub-editors in the room beyond. The inquiry clerk opened the door, and a lady entered.

Mr. Henderson rose from his seat. He was older than his friend, and of quite a different habit of body. He looked out on to the world with less enthusiastic eyes; particularly, it was suspected by those who knew him best, upon the feminine part of it. Therefore, in the person who entered the room he did not see all the wonderful things which Sir George had seen; but what he did see pleased him. He told himself that this was not only a pretty girl, but also a nice one; emphatically a lady. He waited for her to speak; when she did he liked her voice; it was soft, clear, musical.

"Mr. Henderson? I daresay you know my name?" He acknowledged that he did; he knew it very well—he did not tell her how well. He asked her to take a seat. She went on with an air of grave and solemn humility which he thought became her very well. "I expect, Mr. Henderson, you—know why I've come?" He guessed; but again he did not tell her so. He allowed her to continue; it was a habit of his to let the other party do the talking; plainly she found it a little difficult to put into words that which she had to say. "Yesterday you—you sent a story of mine back."

She paused for him to speak; so he had to, though he was careful to use the fewest possible words.

"I'm afraid I did."

"With it you sent these."

He was conscious when she came into the room that she had something in her hand. Now she held out whatever it was. He eyed it askance.

“What have you got there?”

“These—these are two bank-notes; two ten-pound bank-notes. And this is three pounds twelve and a penny.”

Unfolding the notes, she showed that she had wrapped up in them some coins. He smiled—because there was something in her air which touched him. He never allowed himself to show any signs of being moved to sympathy; it was his editorial rule. He feared he might find it too expensive.

“Pray, Miss Griffiths, what has that money to do with me?”

“You—you put it in the envelope with my story.”

“Pardon me, Miss Griffiths, I did nothing of the kind; nor, I am sure, did any one in this office. In this office we do not do such things.”

“Some one did. It was in the pages of my manuscript—three ten-pound notes. I—I had to change one to pay my rent.”

It burst from her almost, as it seemed, unawares. She first turned a vivid red, and then an equally vivid white. It hurt Mr. Henderson to see how white she was. When she continued there was a catching in her breath, as if her voice were playing her false.

“Three pound twelve and a penny was the change I got; I—I brought it.”

Mr. Henderson had seldom experienced a more uncomfortable few seconds than those which followed. Perhaps he was not so case-hardened as he supposed—something in the girl's face, in her eyes, her voice, her whole bearing, hurt him so. He was not without imagination, he seemed to see the whole tragedy at which these things hinted so plainly. A panorama of what this girl must have suffered seemed to pass before him, her hopes, her disappointments, her unrewarded struggles, with this at the end. To what a pass she must have been brought before she came to this! He could not speak to her, he found himself so wholly without any words to say. Without a word, or any hint of his intention, he rose from his seat and passed into the room which held the sub-editors, leaving her, with the money in the palm of her outstretched hand, to draw what deduction from his action she might choose.

His manner, when he got into the other room, was unusually brusque; generally, outwardly, he was the mildest of mortals. Three men were seated, working, as well as they could, with Sir George Borrowdale pacing restlessly round and about the tables at which they sat. Mr. Henderson said to these three men,

“Gentlemen, might I ask you to leave me alone with Sir George Borrowdale for a few seconds? I am very sorry to disturb you, but I've something which I must say to Sir George Borrowdale in private.”

The men went out. Sir George looked at Mr.

Henderson with an expression on his face of unmistakable concern.

"What's up? Don't stare at me like that! What's wrong? Has she gone?"

"She is sitting in there with the change of your three ten-pound notes in her hand; she has brought it back."

There was that in Mr. Henderson's manner which plainly did not increase the young gentleman's sense of ease. He was silent. The editor went on:

"She thinks that the notes got into the envelope by accident. She's had to change one to pay her rent; I don't know quite how that happened, but that is what she says; to pay her rent!"

"Henderson, you don't mean that."

"She had to pay her rent with a ten-pound note which wasn't hers; you can guess what that means. She has brought the change, three pound twelve and a penny. She is sitting in there with it in her hand, waiting for me to take it."

"What did you say to her?"

"I said nothing; I had nothing to say; I just came away and left her. It is you who have something to say; you must go and say it."

The young gentleman seemed to shrink back, almost as if he were physically afraid.

"Henderson, I can't; you don't know what I feel; I—I couldn't face her. What could I say—that—that wouldn't make things worse?"

"Tell her the truth, and do it at once, please.

This is your funeral, not mine. I can't have that girl stopping in there all day."

"But I haven't the faintest notion what to say to her, where to begin, how—how to explain. Henderson, I can't go."

But he did go. Almost before he knew it he was standing in the open doorway of the editorial room, holding on to the handle as if he were as reluctant to go forward as to go back. The girl was still sitting where the editor had left her. She turned as she heard the door open.

"You?" she cried. She half rose from her chair, staring as if she could scarcely believe her eyes. Then, suddenly, she drew herself straight up, her clenched fists at her sides, her cheeks aflame. "What are you doing here? I thought you came from the office." When he said nothing, she repeated, with such emphasis that she had to stamp her foot, "You did come from the office! Why did you say you didn't when you did? With your rubbish about starting a new magazine."

Apparently Sir George Borrowdale took his courage in both his hands. Closing the door, he advanced into the room. He spoke with greater composure than he had done when he had seen her on the first occasion, and with an air of humility which did not become him less because it was evidently so genuine.

"Miss Griffiths, I have to ask your pardon; it was I who put those bank-notes in your envelope."

She continued to stare as if yet she did not comprehend. Her question suggested the point at which her understanding ceased.

“By accident?”

“No, not by accident; on purpose.” Something which he saw in her face seemed to make him hurry on. “You see, Miss Griffiths, I’m a bit of an idiot, I always have been. It’s like this. When I saw the envelope with your name on it—my mother has an old friend named Griffiths—and when I saw the name on the envelope I thought it might be some connection of hers; of course I recognize now that I ought to have thought nothing of the kind, but that’s how it was. I felt that it was a beastly shame sending back the manuscript, so I thought I’d put something in to make up: that’s how I did it.”

“Why did you call on me this morning?”

“You see, I took it for granted, like the ass I was, that you might be a connection of my mother’s friend, so being in the neighbourhood, I thought I would just look in, and—and when I saw you weren’t the kind of person I had expected to see, you—you knocked the wind all out of me, and that’s how it was; but I declare I meant no harm. Henderson!” He opened the door of the adjoining room. “Henderson, just you come in here.” The editor appeared. “Be so good as to inform Miss Griffiths that I’m fairly respectable, that I’m not a person of notorious bad character, and that, though I’m not exactly strongest on the intellectual side, my intentions are all right, and I mean well.

That is, at least, oh, you know what I mean, go ahead and tell her."

Mr. Henderson's manner when he did his young friend's bidding in his own fashion, was dry; he was himself again.

"Miss Griffiths will have perceived for herself where your strongest point isn't; she won't need me to tell her. By the way, Miss Griffiths, if you'll let me have that story which I returned to you yesterday, I'll look it through again. I think that, after all, perhaps I might be able to do something with it."

"Thank you." She spoke, as it were, with a little gasp. Then there came a note of doubt. "Do you—do you mean it?"

"I am not in the habit of saying what I do not mean."

If this was by way of being, in some degree, a figure of speech, it might be excused. The girl's reply was perhaps a trifle unexpected.

"I will certainly send it back directly I get home; and I hope you will take it in part payment of the other ten-pound note."

The editor and his friend exchanged glances.

"But, pardon me, hasn't Borrowdale explained that that matter had nothing to do with me? Officially, I know nothing of any ten-pound note."

The girl was silent for a moment. Then she turned to Borrowdale.

"Here is what is left of your three notes. I let my landlady take her rent out of one of them

before—before I quite understood; I can only assure you that the amount shall be repaid the first opportunity which offers.”

Without another word she left the room, neither of them making an effort to stop her. The two bank-notes and the little pile of coins were on the table. The young gentleman, taking up the notes, touched them to his lips. The editor smiled. The remark he made could hardly have been drier.

“May I once more call your attention to the fact that this is the day on which we go to press?”

Mary Griffiths walked home all the way from Fleet Street to Walham Green; partly to save the fare, still more to enable her to collect her thoughts. She could think better when she was walking. At least, such was the case as a general rule. That was the exception. Whether she walked slow or fast, or loitered to look in the shop windows, or strayed purposely out of her way, she could not think. Try as she might, she could not get the apparatus which produced her thoughts into proper order; they would persist in muddling themselves up together in an indescribable jumble. There was that young man's face, and his voice, and the editor's grave manner, and the peculiarly orderly atmosphere of his room, all, as it were, in one composite photograph. A comical mental picture kept recurring to her, in which she saw the young man slipping the three bank-notes into her envelope, which might have been anybody's envelope, for all, it seemed, he either knew or cared, with an air of lordly, haphazard, grandilo-

quent, and even furtive carelessness, as if ten-pound notes were a matter of absolutely no consequence to him—and so, since there was an envelope, why not pop some into it? She saw, in imagination, the very gesture with which he did it, the look which was on his face; and each time she smiled. He seemed to be rather an amusing young person on the whole, even if, as he said, he was not strongest on the intellectual side. Then for some cause she sighed. All of a sudden her brain became, as it were, a hopeless blank; and she did not mind a bit, until, as it seemed to her, it became necessary to get it into thinking shape again.

Directly she got home she sent back that manuscript to Mr. Henderson. Though the post went never so quickly it could not have reached him until the evening; yet the next morning she received from him an intimation that he had decided to accept it, and begged to enclose a cheque for twenty guineas for the first serial use. No wonder the young woman gasped. He had kept it for more than three months on the first occasion; this was quite another kind of thing. The value of her work must all at once have been brought home to him with surprising suddenness.

She changed that cheque in the course of the day, and she got a post office order for six pounds seven and elevenpence, which she posted to Sir George Borrowdale, c/o the *Fleet Street Magazine*—"With Miss Griffiths' compliments, thanks, and apologies." The next day there came a note which began "Dear Miss Griffiths," and which was signed

in a big, sprawling, boyish hand, "George Borrowdale," in which the writer briefly informed her that it was awfully good of her to have sent that money ; that he hoped soon to see her again ; and that he hoped anyhow that she would forgive him for being such an ass. Oddly enough, the same post brought her another note from the editor of the *Fleet Street Magazine*. Mr. Henderson hoped that she would give his wife and himself the pleasure of lunching with them at their flat in Queen Anne's Mansions on the following Sunday.

"What," the girl asked herself, when she had read the invitation over for about the dozenth time, "does that mean ?"

She went to lunch, although she kept asking herself that question right up to the moment in which she was pressing the electric bell, with faltering finger, outside Mr. Henderson's front door. The first person she saw when she was ushered in was a young gentleman. She had expected it all along, she had felt in her bones that he would be there ; she would like to have flown at sight of him. Fortunately Mrs. Henderson's graceful expression of the pleasure she had in meeting her kept her from doing anything so silly.

"I do not think," remarked the lady, "that I need introduce you to Sir George Borrowdale. I believe you have met before."

Mary meant her bow to be Arctic in its frigidity ; but almost before she knew it, the young gentleman had taken her hand and was shaking it quite heartily.

It was a pleasant luncheon party of four. Mrs. Henderson was a charming hostess ; her husband, if he did not say much, had a knack of making her feel at home ; while the young gentleman, she was bound to admit, was not only distinctly amusing, but even almost something more. No girl that ever lived could have helped being flattered by the indescribable something which she knew was in his eyes every time he looked at her, and which seemed to lend a subtle music to every word he uttered. She would have been the last person to own it, even to herself, but by the time luncheon was over she had grown quite to like him.

“ I don't know what you two are doing,” observed Mr. Henderson in the most casual way when the meal was over, and cigarettes were being smoked with the coffee. “ Kit and I have to pay some calls which are very much overdue. Have you anything on, Miss Griffiths ? ”

Mary admitted that she had not. Borrowdale jumped at the opening.

“ If Miss Griffiths would be so awfully good as to permit me to take her for a spin in my car—it's perfect motoring weather—I'll take her anywhere she likes.”

Before the girl had a chance to speak, Mr. Henderson interposed.

“ Bravo, George, that's the best thing you can do on an afternoon like this. Miss Griffiths, you might run down to Brighton for tea ; or, perhaps, preferably, somewhere far from the madding crowd.”

“I haven't any motoring things.”

The girl's voice was a little feeble. Her impulse was to decline, but supported as the invitation was, she could not quite see her way.

“I've what you call motoring things enough to fill a shop; come and take your choice; something is bound to suit you.”

Mrs. Henderson sprang up from her chair. Before she clearly realised what was happening, Mary was in the lady's room being attired for a spin in the young gentleman's car.

It was the most perfect ride she had ever known; she had had no idea that any one could be so pleasant as he was that afternoon. She began with something more than a little dislike; she wound up with a different feeling altogether. As for Borrowdale, he started by being in love; every mile they went, with her sitting by his side, he sank deeper and deeper. He was not of the kind to conceal his feelings: besides, he was too far gone: when a young man is like that concealment is out of the question. By the time he put her down at her room in Walham Green, though not an actual word had been said upon the subject, she knew he loved her, with what is perhaps the best of all loves, that which comes at first sight. When at last she laid her head upon her pillow, she dreamed the strangest dream; she dreamed that she saw him slipping into an envelope which was addressed to her, not three ten-pound notes, but the heart which he had taken from his bosom.

TWO STORIES

I.—HER STORY

A MOST extraordinary thing happened on Wednesday night. It was a lovely evening; aunt was dozing, as, after dinner, she nearly always does, and I went out into the garden to get a breath of air. A hedge runs right round the garden, and at one place it is worn bare; that is, there is a sort of peep-hole at just about my height, and if you stand close up to the hedge, there is just about room to put your face right through it, and get a glimpse of the world beyond—not much of a glimpse, but a glimpse. I often do look through this peep-hole—I call it the peep-hole—and that evening I did what I am accustomed to do; and it was while I was doing it that the extraordinary thing took place.

I had, as it were, my face framed in the hedge, and had been there three or four seconds, and was beginning to think I could almost see something, when—something touched my lips. For a moment I could not think what it was; I stood quite still, and before I knew what it was, some one kissed

me. It was really little more than a butterfly-kiss, but still, all the same, unmistakably, somebody kissed me.

You can conceive my feelings, at least I doubt if you can actually conceive them, because they were simply chaotic, but, at any rate, you can try to conceive them. Of course I started back as if some one had shot me—I am sure I could not have started back more suddenly if some one had. I have read about people quivering all over; I never knew what it felt like till then. I never uttered a sound; some people would have screamed, but I declare that I was as still as the grave. For one thing, I was frightened; I not only could not think who had done it, but who would have dared to place himself in a position which would enable him to do it, in auntie's hedge. Then I did hear a sound; somebody was moving out of the hedge, secretively, and then, on almost noiseless footsteps, some one moved away down the lane. And I—well, for a moment I did not know what to do; I really did not know what to do; then I rushed into the house. I had really half a mind to tell auntie, but I knew how a dreadful thing like that would upset her, so, for her sake, I held my tongue; but when I got into my bedroom, no one can imagine how it haunted me. I woke up in the night thinking I heard things; it was just as though some one was tapping at one of the windows, and I almost got up to see who it was; then it stopped, and I suppose I must have gone to sleep again, for the very next thing I can remember was Jane

coming into the room with my morning cup of tea.

The following evening I went out into the garden again, just about the same time. I had been reading a book of auntie's which tells about the tricks which the imagination does play one, and I nearly convinced myself that it was a trick which my imagination had played me the night before. It is amazing, according to the writer of that book, what one can imagine, so I went back to the peep-hole, so that I might have some clear idea of how it was that my imagination had succeeded in tricking me. I put my face through, and had not been there two seconds, when—well, I do not know how to write it, but it all happened again, just exactly as it had happened the night before. Something touched my lips, with a gossamer touch ; before I had a chance of realizing what it was, the touch became more marked—became positive pressure—and I had been kissed again.

Now try to conceive my feelings ! Could anything be more inconceivable, more—more—altogether unthinkable ! You should have seen me jump—only it was so dark that I don't suppose you could have seen me, even if you had been there. That could not have been imagination, it simply could not have been, because I positively declare that that was more unmistakably a kiss even than the night before. Still, I grant, a butterfly-kiss, but—with distinctly less of the butterfly about it than on the first occasion. There must have

been some one in the hedge when I came out of the house, waiting. I could not guess who he was waiting for, but I do flatter myself that it certainly could not have been for me. Was I to make a scene? to scream? to exclaim? to ask him who he was? and how he dared? If I had done anything of the kind, it might have involved all sorts of explanations, and then where would my dignity have been? No; I have my own notions of how a young girl ought to behave. I was true to my own standard, and I never made a sound.

Exactly the same thing occurred as on the Wednesday. There were movements, secretive movements, in the hedge, then, on nearly noiseless footsteps, some one went down the lane. I very nearly did tell auntie; but consider what the result would have been. She would have fussed herself into a headache; she would never have slept a wink all night; she would have published it abroad that I had been kissed, by some unknown person, twice, through a hedge; she would almost certainly have told Burrows, our policeman, and ordered him to catch the wretch. Just try to imagine the position I should have been in if Burrows had caught him!

I decided that wild horses should not make me tell auntie, if I could help it; but talk about being haunted! The way in which I was haunted on the Wednesday was nothing compared to the way in which I was haunted when I was alone in my bedroom on the Thursday. I kept looking at myself in the glass; I had a most curious feeling

that something had happened to my lips, and, of course, something had, but not, thank goodness, the indescribable something with which I was haunted. And again that night I awoke to hear the same mysterious sounds ; I was nearly sure I heard them. I was on the very point of getting out of bed, when they ceased, just as they had done the night before ; and then, of course, I fell asleep again—and then Jane came in.

I read pages and pages of that book of auntie's, and the author did tell such wonderful tales about the tricks which the imagination does play people, that it all but persuaded me again ; so, after dinner, as soon as auntie slipped off into her doze, I went out into the garden once more, firmly resolved that this time I would make quite sure what power my imagination had on me. I simply could not rest if I had the least reason to suppose that I was the kind of person who imagines things happen when they don't. So the first thing I did was to march straight down to the gate, open it, go through, and look up and down the lane. I admit that it was not very light, because there was no moon, but it was lighter than the night before, there were heaps of stars, and you could see for quite a distance both up and down, and I am absolutely certain there was not a soul in sight. If there had been—well, I should have asked him who he was, and also what he was doing there ; that at the very least. As I saw that there was no one there, I went back into the garden, shut the gate, and walked along the hedge, until I came to the peep-

hole. No one can call me, at any time, a person who stamps ; I am convinced that never in my life have I walked more lightly than I did then, my feet might really have been shod with velvet for all the noise they made, and I held my skirts tight, well up, so that they should not rustle. So I am prepared absolutely to assert that I do not believe any one could have heard me coming.

So, as I have said, I got to the peep-hole, and I stood quite still. I scarcely even breathed ; but I listened—oh, how I did listen. And I never heard a sound ; I put my ear quite close to the hedge, and I heard no one breathing. So then—well, then, I looked through the peep-hole—of course to do that I had to put my face into the usual position, or how could I have looked ? and, well, you may believe me or not, but I had not been there one second when precisely the same thing happened. It really does seem incredible. Now I look back at it in cold blood, I find it difficult to believe myself that my imagination was not playing me one of the pranks which it does play people ; but whatever I may feel about it now, I was perfectly certain then that imagination had not the least to do with it. There came the gossamer touch, and I am absolutely convinced that a kiss did follow—that touch was only the first part of it. Because you see, on my part my action was in the nature of a test—one often has to test things, and I was wanting to make sure where imagination began and where it ended. Probably it was because of my anxiety to make

the test as complete as possible that I stayed still as long as I really could, and that on that account the—well, the kiss was much more of a kiss than on either of the previous occasions. It was—well, it was a positive osculation; and I know what osculation means, I do hope. Don't let any one tell me—the author of auntie's book, or any one else—that that was imagination, because I know better.

I trust that I need not repeat that when I sprang back from the hedge, and, in a sense, all was over, my feelings were of a kind which it is perfectly impossible to describe in words. There were the movements in the hedge, the footsteps down the lane, and—I was alone. Alone with what? With a memory—a memory of such a kind! Never, never after dusk will I again approach that peep-hole; to that decision I had arrived before I had re-entered the house, and in my bedroom I endorsed it.

I confess that, in a certain sense, I should have been willing to tear away the veil of mystery; I admitted as much to myself as I was undressing. The position was so—so uneven. The guilty wretch knew whom he had kissed; there would hardly be a shadow of doubt he knew it; but I, the victim, had not the faintest notion who had kissed me. It was, when you came to view it calmly, for me, a very dreadful, a very painful, and above all, a very delicate position. I might meet him face to face and talk to him perhaps for hours, and not even suspect; I might wonder

what he was looking at me like that for, but, with that in my mind, how could I—well, I certainly could not ask him. It was too terrible to think of, that I should always be meeting men, and not know which of them it was.

I decided that I would tell auntie the first thing in the morning, and I would do my very best to try to get her to understand that I meant what I said, that it was high time that I should take her away somewhere for a holiday, and, if I did succeed in getting her away, I would keep her away as long as ever I could.

It might have been—when you came to look at it quite calmly, it might have been any one of quite a dozen, some of them quite old, some of them quite young, some of them nice, and some of them horrid, and that was what made the uncertainty such a terrible thing.

II.—HIS

This is a rum world, this is a regular rum world. You don't know yourself, not really, not even when you get to my time of life. Who would have thought I would have thrown away a job for a thing like that? As nice and neat and paying a job as ever I had the chance of—just the kind of job I always have a leaning for. A pretty, old-fashioned country cottage, with no shutters to speak of, and no window fastenings neither, and no electric light; I tell you what it

is, electric light has spoilt our business. If a man has not got even to strike a match, but only to touch a button, to let the daylight in, where are you in my profession? Here was a house without any of your modern inconveniences, standing in its own ground, up a lane which no one ever came along, the nearest other house a good half mile away, and not a man about the place, leastways, nothing that could be called a man. Only occupants of the house, two ladies, an old and a young one, and three maids—country maids, the good old-fashioned sort, faithful but no intelligence. Stable, about two hundred yards off, with a party sleeping over it, what calls himself a coachman, but what I should call a fossil; about sixty, goodness knows what weight—I shouldn't have liked to have to lift him; hard of hearing when awake, and sleeping so sound that even dynamite would not rouse him.

If that is not the sort of place to tempt a gentleman what has to make an honest living cracking cribs, I should like to know what is. And when you have been made aware that there are quite a nice lot of things always left lying about the place: good old silver of all sorts, to say nothing of the old lady's jewels, which are kept in a box on the chest of drawers in her room, with a handle to it to help carry it off; and when you happen to have ascertained that the old lady likes to keep a bit of money in the house, in case it is wanted. When you have put all these things together, would not a man in my position have a sort of feeling

that this was a case in which Providence helps those who help themselves, and the quicker he is about it the better it will be.

I had that feeling—oh, yes, I had it strong—it got a powerful hold of me. I'm a workman, I am, and I do things like a workman—no one could have taken more trouble over readying that crib than I did; and I was pretty pushed at the time, mind that. And when I learnt that a hundred golden sovereigns had been brought from the bank that day for the old lady to do something special with, I said to myself, "Toff Simpson, this is the night for you." And it was—no moon, a dark night, though fine.

I suppose it was something after nine when I got to my place in the hedge. I knew the lay of the ground. There was a hedge going all round the garden; there was a place on the side of the lane which had worn quite bare, as even well-kept hedges sometimes will do, so as to form a sort of bay in which a man who was not over-tall nor over-big, could stow himself quite snugly without, if it was at all darkish, being seen by any one who might be passing by. I was inside that hedge at about the time I mentioned, waiting: they kept early hours at the house: lights were out at ten, in the good old-fashioned way, then every one to bed, and to sleep, in the dear old-fashioned way. I knew all about it. After they were asleep was my time. I put it like this, ten to bed, half-past asleep, a quarter to eleven me. I was looking at my watch, and was just thinking it would soon be

time for some of them in the house to get a move on them, when a face came through the hole in the hedge through which I had been spying, within a couple of inches of where I was.

You might have knocked me silly. I had no notion there was any one about, not a sound had I heard. I thought there was no one out there but the hedge and me, and then for that face to come quite close to me like that! It was darkish, but for all that I could see it was a girl's face. I've got cat's eyes, I have, see almost as well in the dark as in the light—chaps in my line have to; and what's more, I could see it was a pretty face, as pretty a face as I have seen on a girl since I don't know when—and a lady's, mind you. That's my one weakness, the ladies. If a pretty girl treats me properly she can twist me round her finger; I always was like that, and always shall be. A bit of skirt is more dangerous to me than any number of policemen; oh yes, and don't I know it!

That time I must have been—I don't like to say stark mad when a lady was concerned—but I really must have been some funny kind of fool. I don't know what took me, not to this moment I don't, I knew it still less then, I own it, straight and honest; but directly that face came through the hedge, as I have said, quite close to mine, a sort of feeling came over me all in a moment—mind you, I might have been hypnotized, I couldn't have had less control over myself if I had been—and what do you think I did; kissed her—kissed the girl who put her face through the hedge.

That was a rummy go. I did not mean to do it even when I did it. I just—I want to describe exactly what happened, so no laughing. I just leaned forward, I only had to move really, and there were my lips against hers. I have kissed girls more than once, and more than twice, but I never, no never, felt anything like the feeling the touch of that girl's lips sent through me, tell you I was all of a flutter from head to foot. Then I just, as it were, pushed my lips a little more home, and—she was gone, and, of course, I was done, done to the wide! But my sensations, as I heard a chap say to his girl the other day, my sensations they were "topping," although I got out of the hedge as fast as ever I could, and hopped it down the lane.

I did not care, not if, as I quite expected she would do, she went straight into the house and raised Cain, yet I did not care. Any one can smile who likes, but at that moment I would not have exchanged the kiss for the crib; there are other cribs, but for me there will never be another kiss like that, not if I live to be ninety.

She never made a fuss—that was a girl, that was; if she had, some one would have come out of the house, and I should have known it, but I hung about at the bend of the lane for quite a time, and no one came. I am free to admit that after a goodish while I did begin to say to myself that, after all, I was there for business and not for pleasure, and for me to throw away a first-class job for a thing like that it was too silly. So,

about midnight, back I went, across the garden, to the spot by which I had arranged to enter, and—I was almost in when, if you'll believe me, I chucked the whole thing, and took myself clean away.

Next morning you can imagine I said a thing or two—to myself. Coin was getting short; if more was not found soon there would be no more playing the gentleman for me. I could have kicked myself, I really could, when I thought of what kind of an ass I had made of myself the night before. There was one little consolation, the crib was still there; one night was as good as any other night, so I said to myself I would do that night what I ought to have done the night before. No more silly sentiment for me, not ever again.

I was like that all day, down on women, no use for them, pernicious interferers, I felt they were, with a man's chances of improving his position in life. And I was like it that night as I strolled along the lane, past the hedge, to the little open place. Then—it is a most remarkable thing how a man can feel what he never meant to feel. I had not been inside that hedge thirty seconds before I was feeling what you might call all over the shop. Business was going out of my head, really it was. I said to myself that it should not go, but it did. I had got my eyes fixed on that little round place where the face had been, and I could not get them off it, not spying through it like a business man ought to have been doing

but actually waiting for I really should be ashamed to say what. Hoping for it, too, longing for it, hardly daring to breathe for fear the noise I made should keep it away. I had not been there two minutes before I was saying to myself that rather than that face should not come again I would lose a thousand pounds, if I had had them to lose, mind, which, at that moment, I was very far from having.

And I was keeping on saying it when the face did come. Now, what does any one say to that? Just in the same mysterious way it came the night before, without warning, without a sound, without anything leading me to suppose it was within a hundred miles, all inside half a quarter of an instant. Talk about me being done with sentiment! My word, you should have seen me, and felt like I did. You have heard tell of poetry; I was all poetry then, soft and silly, and hot all over. That face coming through the hole in the hedge had lifted me from earth up to heaven, and if that's not poetry I don't know what is. I couldn't—I could not let it stop there, and nothing happen, not a single blessed second; it might be gone before, and if it did, my word, I was going to take no chances. There were lips to lips before you had time to wink your eye, and oh, the feeling of hers to mine! It was, I do not care who is laughing, I say it was rapture. I just pressed home, nicely home, well home, then she was gone, which was just as well, because, if she had stayed, I believe I should have gone at the knees all on

account of something which the touch of her lips had put inside me.

And out of the hedge I went, and down the lane, feeling as I never should have felt if I had earned a thousand pounds. There was something going on inside me which made me feel more satisfied with myself than if I had been drunk for a week. I thought that perhaps that time she would have told the tale, and would have roused the house ; but no, I do not believe she dropped so much as a hint to any one, she was, as the poem says, " My fancy's queen," a real tip-topper.

After a while it was the same silly old game—I could not find it in my heart to throw an A I chance clean away, not even for a glimpse into Paradise like I'd had—I do not care who is smiling, I say it was a glimpse into Paradise. Back I went, same as on the Wednesday, and I as good as got the window open, and then I left it—I was not going to burgle the house in which there was that girl I had kissed.

The next day it was the same thing all over again ; I kept calling myself names, which was easy enough, and I'm not denying I was all the things I called myself—pretty hard ones some of them were. I kept on saying to myself that I had behaved like an idiot two nights, but that the third night I would take everything out of the place that was worth having, I would crack that crib as I'd never cracked a crib before, not leaving even as much as a spoon to stir their tea with. I kept on saying that I'd do it, and when the proper

time for doing business came, I started off declaring that I would be as good as my word—but I knew I shouldn't. All real, active, healthy interest in my profession had gone, clean gone, I might never have done a job as it ought to be done, the way I was feeling then. There was the lane, there was the hedge, there was the darkness, and there was me, and only the stars looking on—all the conditions a man in my profession dreams of. Down the lane I went, and into the hedge, and as soon as I was in, my business there went as clean out of my mind as if it had never had any.

There was only one thing I wanted—only one—and I wanted it so bad I was all of a flutter; if you'd put your hand on the left side of my chest you would have felt my heart a-thumping—going like a steam hammer, my heart was. Never had I felt anything like that before, never, I will take my oath to it.

The queer part was that I knew that she would come; though I was shaking like a jelly for fear she would not, I knew she would. And she did. Ah! even now I seem to go all over goose-flesh every time I think of it.

Not a sound, not a warning, nothing to show she was within miles. She must have trod on air, she moved so noiselessly; yet all in a moment her face came through the hedge, the sweetest thing that ever did come through a hedge, and I started trembling, so I must have shaken the ground I was standing on. And, of course, I kissed

her. When I shut my eyes I can recall the rapture—something like a kiss that was, the one of the three ; better, more solid, more lasting, more tasty, than both the other two together. I leaned forward, found her lips—oh, yes, I found them—I had not far to go to do it, and what a thrill it did send through me ! The other two times it had been a touch, hardly more than a touch, and all was over ; but that third time—it was a bumper, filled to the brim, and I drained it, every drop ; and between ourselves, it pretty well drained me. When the face was gone, there was, so to speak, very little left of me to go. But I took it, right down the lane, clean off ; I never went back either, when, in the usual manner, I began to tell myself what a fool I was ; and I've never been back since. And when I do go back, if I ever do, it won't be with the idea of doing a little bit of business ; nothing of the sort, no. Sometimes I wonder what she would look like, in the daytime, if I saw more of her. Would, as a poet might say, the dream be shattered ? If she had red hair it would ; I'm a bit that way myself, so I like them dark. So perhaps I had better take no risks. I have three memories, quite apart from the crib I left uncracked, and I never shall forget them, so perhaps I'd better let it go at that, and draw my own picture of her in my own mind's eye.

As I remarked at the beginning, this is a rum world, and the rummiest part of it is that you do not know yourself, you are a surprise to yourself, even at my time of life.

III.—EPILOGUE

“Now, whoever’s that? Can’t they let you alone even for a moment?”

The lady rose with some show of precipitation—she had been sitting on the gentleman’s knee. The gentleman rose also.

“My dear,” he said to the lady, and a smile was in his eyes as well as on his lips, “a parson is always at his people’s call; you’ll find that out before you’ve been a parson’s wife very long.”

The person who had knocked at the door came in with an announcement that some one, a man, wished to see the Vicar, he would give no name, but declared that his business was “most particular.” The servant was instructed to show the man in. The Vicar said to the lady,

“You might wait in the Den; if the business on which my anonymous friend wishes to see me really is of a very special nature I’ll shut the door; if it isn’t there’ll be no harm in leaving it ajar.”

Presently the visitor was ushered in—an undersized man, with sandy hair and a bad complexion. The parson recognized him on the instant.

“Why, Simpson, of all men!”

There was something in the speaker’s manner which the new-comer did not seem to find altogether flattering; it seemed to occasion him discomfort. He seemed scarcely at his ease, looking at everything in the room except the Vicar.

Putting his hand up to his lips, he gave a little furtive cough as a sort of preface.

“Yes, Mr. Frye, it’s Simpson—once Toff Simpson, now Edward Simpson; I thought you’d be surprised to see me. But I’m a reformed character now; put my old ways all behind me—shouldn’t know them if I was to see ’em. The man as is has nothing to do with the man as was; no, Mr. Frye, nothing.”

“I hope, Simpson, that the reformation is likely to be lasting; you remember, on a previous occasion——”

Mr. Simpson cut the Vicar short.

“Yes, Mr. Frye, I do remember; I’m not likely to forget. But when I tell you that for more than three years I’ve given up the old game, turned teetotal, and haven’t eaten so much as a crust which I haven’t honestly earned, you’ll allow that it looks that I can keep straight if I set myself to do it.”

“I never doubted that, Simpson; what I have doubted, with only too good reason, is your own inclination.”

Again Mr. Simpson coughed behind his hand.

“Mr. Frye, I’d like, if you don’t mind, to tell you a little story; and then, perhaps, you’ll see how it is with me.”

Then Mr. Simpson told the parson the story which he has just told us; seriously enough, yet not without a suggestion of a sense of humour. Perhaps the most humorous touch came at the finish.

“I’ve heard of some queer ways of being saved, and being brought to see the error of your ways, and kissing a girl you never saw through a hedge in the dark does seem to me to be the queerest of them all—and that’s how it may strike you, sir; but that’s what did it, in my case, all the same. Three times I kissed her on three different nights, and somehow the taste of her kisses took the taste of the other sort of thing clean out of me. That’s the strict truth, Mr. Frye; I thought of what she’d feel if she ever came to know what sort of creature it was that kissed her, and one thing led to another; I made up my mind that I’d turn myself into something of which she should be as little ashamed as might be. And I’ve been doing it more than three years, Mr. Frye. I married——”

“Oh, you are married?”

“Yes, Mr. Frye, I married a most respectable young woman whose mother was in the green-grocery. When she died we took on the shop, and we’ve got a nice little business—and twins, Mr. Frye. It’s quite close to here, and if you was to favour us with an occasional order we’d do our very best to give you satisfaction. When I heard there was to be a new vicar here, and that his name was Frye, I wondered if it was the same Mr. Frye that used to be the curate down in Notting Dale—so I thought I’d call and see.”

A little later the Vicar passed into the adjoining apartment which he called the Den, and closed the door. It was a very small room, scarcely more

than a good sized cupboard, as became its name. He found in it the lady, who seemed to be in a singular state of agitation. Her dainty cheeks were flushed, an odd light was in her pretty eyes. He stared at her in surprise.

“Evelyn, what’s the matter?”

“Don’t you understand?”

The excitement which marked her bearing caused his surprise to increase.

“Don’t I understand—what?”

“The door was open, as you left it; I heard what he said, about the girl he kissed, three different nights, through the hedge, in the dark.” She drew herself to her full height, which was not very much; her apparent intention was to invest herself with every mite of dignity that inches could give. “Now don’t you understand?”

A light seemed to burst upon him.

“You don’t mean to say that you’re the girl he kissed?”

“Alec!” Her utterance of the name was seemingly meant as a protest against the baldness of his language. If such was the case, with masculine obtuseness, it was a protest he ignored.

“The mysterious episode of the peep-hole in the hedge resolves itself into—Simpson? What a solution; and what a finish for a romance.”

“Alec!” The lady, dropping on to a chair, covered her face with her hands. Kneeling by her side he put his arms about her waist. Nothing could have been more tender than the tone in which he spoke to her.

“Evelyn, you’re not behaving like a—goose? Could there have been a more romantic finish, after all? You heard him say there are some curious fashions of bringing a man to see the error of his ways; could there have been a more romantic one than this?”

When Mr. Simpson was beginning to wonder what had become of the Vicar that gentleman appeared with a lady by his side; a young and pretty lady, with cheeks like two red roses, and eyes like shining stars. She presented a dainty picture as she came shyly into the room.

“Simpson,” said the Vicar, “I also have been married since I saw you last; allow me to present you to my wife. Evelyn, this is Mr. Simpson, whom I knew when I was a curate in Notting Dale. He tells me that he has set up in the greengrocery business close by; perhaps you could manage to become a customer of his.”

“Perhaps, Mr. Simpson, you could let me have a bushel of potatoes in the morning.”

Probably never was so practical and commonplace an order given, even by the youngest of housewives, with such an air of bewildered confusion. Simpson’s susceptible heart was captured on the spot. He had not the faintest idea what caused her emotion, but he thought that he had never seen a more charming picture of feminine embarrassment.



THE TOUCHSTONE OF FORTUNE

I.—AN EXPERIMENT

I BEG to state it plainly, in black-and-white, that I am one of the most inoffensive of men. I believe, too, that I possess a fair amount of common sense, and I am quite sure that I have neither sympathy with, nor belief in, what is called the supernatural. That is to say, I had neither sympathy nor belief until—— But I will relate as calmly and clearly as possible my own experience.

I was brought up to be a civil engineer, but I have always had a mania for invention. I struggled for years against it, but the thing has been too strong for me. For nearly a generation civil engineering has gone by the board, and I have been that unhappiest of beings, an inventor. I say unhappiest of beings, because my experience has not been happy. A certain amount of success has attended my labours, else I would be writing from the workhouse, the lunatic asylum, or the county gaol, but I have invariably found that whenever I

have produced anything worth producing, somebody else has eaten of the feast, and I have had to be content with the crumbs which fell from the table. My wife says that I wear my heart on my sleeve, so that any one can suck my brains who has a mind to. There may be an appreciable grain of truth in what she says, but it seems to me that what has weighted me all through has been want of capital. I have invented, and another man has brought the invention out—on his terms, not mine.

On the evening of May 13 I was in my laboratory. I was wading through a volume of Salzinger's edition of the works of Raymond Lully. The treatise *De Auditu Cabbalístico* was, I cannot say, engrossing my attention, but open in front of me. I held the common opinion respecting alchemists, and as to Lully in particular; so far as I had considered the man at all, I inclined to the conviction that he was a mixture of madman, knave, and fool. With reference to his writings, there is a fair amount of trash being written now, but as a rule you can make head and tail of it, which, personally, was exactly what I could not do with the writings of Raymond Lully.

The copy I had in my hand belonged to George Palmer. Palmer would not make a bad nineteenth-century edition of Raymond Lully. He is himself a mixture of madman, knave, and fool. He has squandered all his money like a madman; he has behaved in very many matters like a knave; and his scheme for amending his fortunes could not have entered into the philosophy of any one but

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a fool. He believes in what is popularly known as the Philosopher's Stone—being something of a chemist, and having addled his brains by dabbings in what he calls alchemy.

Believing that Raymond Lully possessed THE SECRET, he has wasted an extraordinary amount of time in trying to glean the recipe for the transmutation of metals out of Raymond Lully's writings. Baffled in his efforts, he had lent me the volumes in the hope that I would succeed where he had failed. That I, Robert Birdwood, who had devoted my life to the discovery of new methods of stoppering bottles, printing calicoes, checking tramway conductors, *et hoc genus omne*, would discover the Philosopher's Stone!

I had just had a little discussion with my wife. The fact is, there was no money in the house. I was at my wits' end. Bills were pressing, tradesmen shy; we had neither money nor credit, and I held the treatise *De Auditu Cabbalistico* in my hand. That mediaeval humbug had pretended that he possessed the secret of boundless wealth; he had even pretended to impart the secret to the world. I held his pretended revelation in my hand—and I was penniless! So impressed was I by the difference between fact and fiction, that I threw the volume from me in disgust.

But the book was Palmer's. It was a costly work, a bibliographical treasure; he would not like it to receive ill-usage. It had fallen on the floor; I picked it up, examining it as I did so, to learn if any mischief had befallen it.

As I opened the covers I noticed that the paper which covered the inside of the board which preceded the title page was slightly torn.

"I shall have to mend this," was my inward comment, "or Mr. Palmer will make me pay twice the value of the damage."

I examined it closer. It seemed to me that there was something loose beneath the paper.

"I hope I have not done more damage than I intended ; my dear friend Palmer is not likely to overlook a misfortune to his precious volume."

There *was* something loose beneath the paper. I was curious to know what. I took my penknife and deliberately increased the original rent. Apparently it was a slip of paper on which was some writing.

"Palmer will thank me for my discovery."

With that reflection I quieted my scruples, and cut the paper open from top to bottom of the board.

It was, as I thought, a piece of paper was within. It was a very curious kind of paper ; I had seen nothing exactly like it before. Very thin, almost like the finest tissue-paper, it had yet the tenacity of a Bank of England note. My first impulse was to hold it up to the light to examine its fibre.

"Of Indian manufacture," I concluded. "Certainly not English."

It was as white as though it had just come from the mill. There was some writing on it. Both paper and writing were wholly unchanged by time. The writing was beautifully fine and clear. Some

ink with which I was unacquainted had been used, for the writing had a peculiar metallic appearance, as though each word had been cut out of an inconceivably fine piece of solid metal.

For reasons which follow, I am not going to put down all that was written on the paper. There were a number of chemical formulæ, and underneath these words :

“ The above is the PHILOSOPHER’S STONE. It will transmute all metal. Some will require longer treatment than others. Lead is the most susceptible. There is something non-metallic which it will instantly affect. Living, I would not tell my secret. I tell it dead.

“ PRICE ”

The signature was “ Price.” I had some hazy recollection of a Dr. Price who had pretended to be an adept, who was to have made public trial of his discovery, and who had committed suicide to escape exposure. The details of his case I had forgotten, if I ever knew them. Could there be any connection between that Price and the Price who had signed this paper? My common sense told me that such a supposition was absurd. Some one—perhaps Palmer himself—had perpetrated a practical joke.

I glanced at the prescription—it looked like nothing else so much as that. The ingredients were commonplace enough, with one exception—a remarkable exception. Combined, they would

make an extraordinary mixture. So far as I could judge, with the addition of the ingredient referred to, the result would be an acid of a peculiarly active character. I noticed at once the absence of mercury—that popular plaything of the alchemist.

With that one exception, I had all the ingredients on the shelves of my laboratory. Suppose, as a joke, I combined them as suggested in the paper? The result would at least be curious, if nothing else. I commenced to do so. As I proceeded with my little jest I became conscious of an overmastering excitement, such as is spoken of in apocryphal descriptions of persons who have found themselves in the presence of a ghost. I seemed to myself to be standing in the presence of something unseen—an invisible something, which kept me company in my experiment. At one point, when I was about to add a drop or two more than the prescribed quantity of a certain drug, I distinctly felt somebody grasp my wrist and prevent my making the addition. It was ridiculous, no doubt ; but it was a fact.

In an odd way, too, I became conscious that the mood in which I was conducting the experiment was changing from jest to earnest. Wild stories which are told by Albertus Magnus, Lully, Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, Joseph Francis Borri, and a host of others flocked unbidden to my brain. My hand shook as I continued the compounding. It seemed to me that my wrist was steadied by the sustained pressure of an unseen hand. Suppose, after all, there should be something in the stories?

Why not? Dumas—the chemist, not the great magician—had allowed that perhaps the riddle might be solved. Even Sir Humphry Davy had refused to declare that the alchemists were wrong. Modern doubt has thrown doubt upon the doubters. Suppose, after all, the incredible should be true?

I had compounded the prescription with the exception of that particular ingredient. I had no money with which to buy it. Had I had money, there was no place in the neighbourhood where it was likely to be obtained. Perhaps not half a dozen chemists in England have it among their stock.

I resolved that I would try George Palmer. He has a collection of curiosities, why not that among the number? I said to myself—I really can scarcely say why—that I would not tell him the purpose for which I wanted it. I even determined that I would not tell him of the discovery of the paper. If it were a joke, then it was a joke which I would keep to myself, at least for some time.

I found him poring over a wholly illegible manuscript which he believed—for what reason I never could understand—to have had something to do with the Rosicrucians. He rushed to me with eager eyes.

“Have you discovered anything? Tell me. Don’t stand dreaming there!”

“What should I discover? Palmer, you must forgive my telling you for about the hundredth time that you really are a fool.”

He laughed that loud, strident laugh of his, and

began his favourite trick of pacing about the room. I thought he looked madder than ever. The fire of actual insanity was in his eyes.

“Why am I a fool? Because my pockets are empty, and I would have them full. I hunger for the sight of gold. Do you think it is for the sake of the gold itself? Ah! then I were a fool! But it is because gold means life and excitement. Give me those, then you can have the gold, my friend.”

I asked him if he had any of the thing I sought for. He turned on me like a wild animal, and laid his cruel-looking white hand upon my shoulder. In the then state of my nerves, I shrank from his touch as though his were the claw of some wild beast.

“You have discovered something! Do not lie to me. Birdwood, if you try to cheat me, I will kill you like a dog!”

I laughed at him, his rage was so ludicrous.

“It is well for you that I know you, Palmer. With some men the sort of language you use might get you into trouble with the police; you are always breathing threatenings and slaughter. I happen to be aware that you intend your words to convey no meaning.”

He glared at me. No other method of expression would convey the sort of look with which he favoured me. When I thought he had looked long enough I repeated my request.

“What do you want it for?” he asked.

“I am trying some experiments in oxidation.”

I believe I can produce better results with an expenditure of less time and labour. I am not sure, but I think what I ask you for will facilitate the process. You can, of course, refuse me if you like."

He did not refuse me. As I had thought possible, he had it among the rest of his curiosities, and he handed me the quantity I asked for.

"This is not to be got for nothing ; you ought to pay me for this, my friend."

"Very well ; render me your account and I will render you your money."

I spoke jestingly, but I am very sure that if I had offered him the money he would very readily have taken it. But I happened to have none to offer him.

As I went his voice followed me.

"Take care, my friend ! You are a clever man—do not be too clever. Over-cleverness has brought you harm before to-day ; and I am a dog that bites, my friend."

The only answer I gave him was a laugh as I closed the door behind me.

I returned to my laboratory with my prize. The whole thing was so absurd ! The idea of such a man as myself trying experiments having reference to such a chimera as the Philosopher's Stone ! If it became known, I should be a general laughing-stock. And yet, when I added the last ingredient to the others, my blood boiled within my veins.

The result was a liquid which in colour was a

singularly vivid green. It struck me that if it was good for nothing else it ought to be of use as a dye—it was quite a new shade in greens. I stared at it for a moment with a strange new sense of wonder. Then I took a piece of lead piping, about six inches in length, which I had previously got ready, and immersed it in the liquid. I had an odd impression as though some one had snatched it from my hand and dropped it in quicker than I had myself intended.

I watched for something to come of it. Nothing came. I waited for a quarter of an hour, then with a pair of tongs I took the lead out again. It still obviously was lead. I waited an hour, then took it out again. It still was lead. It was, of course, exactly what I expected, yet I was conscious of a curious sense of irritation. I replaced the lead in the liquid. I was even childishly annoyed, and my annoyance expressed itself in strong language.

I went to bed. My wife had retired before me. As usual on such occasions, she wished to know what had kept me downstairs—what I had been “fooling” about with. I answered her sharply, and the result was that we quarrelled. That was the final straw. It drove away all thoughts of sleep. All night long I tossed and tumbled, and only towards morning did I sink into an uneasy slumber.

When I awoke the morning was far advanced. My wife had gone downstairs and breakfasted alone, and I was left to the enjoyment—or, rather, misery—of a solitary meal. To add to my sense of

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satisfaction, I found a peremptory letter threatening execution if a considerable debt was not paid before noon of the ensuing day. With that letter in my hand I entered my laboratory.

I had momentarily forgotten my experiment of the previous night, and it was with a sense of surprise that I recalled my foolishness. I determined to throw the evidence of my folly down the sink. For that purpose I approached the vessel which contained the bright green liquid. It was nothing else than a common basin, made of an amalgam of which, in all probability, the chief constituent was tin. To my surprise it had disappeared, and in its place stood a basin of the same size and shape which was yellow as virgin gold. My heart stood still. Had some one been playing a trick—carrying the joke one stage further? The bright green liquid still remained within. With a pair of tongs I took the piece of piping out. It, too, had turned as yellow as gold. It *was* gold. After a moment's examination I perceived that clearly. In the night, owing to the action of that curious combination of chemical properties, both the piece of lead piping and the basin in which the liquid was contained had become gold of very exceptional quality.

While I still gazed, wonderstruck, at what seemed to me nothing else than a miracle, the laboratory door was opened, and George Palmer entered.

II.—THE ELIXIR OF GOLD

His appearance was so unexpected that for a moment or two I lost my presence of mind. He remained standing in the doorway. I stood staring at him with the tongs in my hand.

“Well, Birdwood?”

He broke the silence. There was a ring as of mockery in his naturally unmusical voice, which was perceptible even in his utterance of the two words. It was as though he had taken me unawares in the performance of some unlawful act, and triumphed at having done so. A mirthless grin puckered his cadaverous cheeks.

“I am engaged, Mr. Palmer. If you will go to the parlour I will be with you in a minute. I must particularly ask you not to interrupt me now.”

“Why? What are you doing?”

“I am conducting an important experiment; this is a critical moment, interruption may mean failure.”

He smiled, not pleasantly. He put up one of the thin white hands of which he was so proud, and rubbed his beardless chin. I was conscious that the fixity of his gaze did not add to my composure. It happened that the position in which I stood prevented his seeing the piece of piping and the basin.

“There is something the matter with you; you are ill-at-ease, my friend. Your face is not a tell-tale one, but it tells tales just now. I wonder, for

instance, what it is that you are doing? Will you not make a confidant of an old friend?"

Some rapid reflections passed through my mind. I had but an instant to decide as to the course of action I should pursue. The consequences of my decision no one could foresee. Should I tell him? It appeared that I had discovered the secret of the transmutation of metals. Should I share my discovery with another? I well knew the character of the man who stood before me; that he was a hopeless, insensate spendthrift, that he had an insatiable thirst for gold, that he would ladle it out in shovelfuls if he only had the shoverfuls to ladle. It would seem that it could be produced with the greatest ease. Over-production would mean depreciation. Given the power, he was exactly the sort of man to produce it in quantities which would render it practically worthless in the market, which would revolutionize the currency of nations. Besides, in his cups he was a tell-tale. He would blow the secret to the first boon companion he met. I decided that at any risk I would keep the secret which I had made my own.

It will be observed that I had only an instant in which to arrive at this decision. But had I had longer I cannot see what else I could have done.

He stood rubbing his chin, repeating his question, which was rather a mocking entreaty.

"Will you not make a confidant of an old friend?"

"I have nothing to confide. I am simply making some experiments in oxidation. The

whole fruits of my thoughts and labour you are doing your best to destroy."

I half turned with the intention of securing the paper on which the secret was inscribed. I remembered that I had left it by the basin the night before.

"Will you not let me see what you are doing?"

He made a step forward.

"Mr. Palmer, this is my laboratory, not yours. When I ask you to leave it, it is for you to do so without subjecting me to what I cannot but call your impertinent curiosity."

"You have a secret, then?"

"If I have a thousand secrets, what is it to you? I dedicate my life to the discovery of secrets. I have yet to learn that I can be called upon to reveal them to you."

He turned towards the door. Suddenly he turned towards me again.

"Swear to me it is nothing to do with what I seek."

I hesitated a second. I was choosing a form of words. I did not choose to perjure myself right out.

"Birdwood, you play me false! I see by your face you play me false! Your cur's soul peeps from your eyes."

"I will not bandy words. Surely you yourself see that you had better go."

"Answer my question."

"What is your question?"

His emotion was extraordinary. The muscles

of his face twitched as though he was possessed with St. Vitus's dance. His eyes blazed as with insanity. There always was a contrast between his large, fierce, black eyes and his thin, white face. At that moment the contrast was intensified to a peculiar degree.

"By——! If you tricked me I would shoot you like a dog!"

"You have been drinking. Take my advice, and confine your libations to a later period of the day."

"Answer my question!"

"For the second time I ask, What is your question?"

"Swear to me that this secret of yours has nothing to do with what I seek."

"That is not a question. You ask me to go through a form of adjuration. I am prepared to do so."

"Birdwood, you are tricking me! You are juggling with phrases. You are wriggling, you snake! Let me see what you are doing."

"Palmer, stand still. Leave my laboratory before something happens which we shall both of us regret."

"Let me see what you are doing!"

"You shall not see."

He advanced. He was an agile man, his body seemed made of india-rubber. I endeavoured to arrest his progress, but he slipped from my grasp like an eel, and had passed me in a moment. He saw the basin and the piping. The sight of them

had a singular effect upon him. He stood trembling all over. He spoke in a sort of whisper.

“What is that?”

“It is nothing. It’s a copper basin, and a piece of copper piping.”

He made a sudden snatch and had the piece of piping in his hand.

“It is gold! gold! gold! The game is won! After all these years! I did not dream when I dreamed of millions! Who is the madman now?”

“Give me that back again.”

“I will not! It is mine! You are a thief! a cheat! a traitor! In the night I dreamed that you had played me false! You smoothed-tongued Judas!”

From the pistol-pocket in his trousers he drew a revolver and pointed it straight at me. No jury of reasonable men could have doubted his insanity.

“Confess, you cur! Tell me what is the secret you meant to rob me of, or I fire.”

“Put that dangerous plaything away. You are mad!”

“Mad or sane, it will make no difference to you if you are dead. Answer me! Speak before I count three, or I fire.”

“Put that foolish toy away and I will talk to you; not otherwise. Do you think I fear your braggadocio?”

“One!”

“Be reasonable! I do not even know what you

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wish me to say to you. How can I enter into complicated explanations with a pistol pointed at my head?"

"Two!"

"If you were so foolish as to put into execution your mad threat it would be a modern version of the fable of the man who killed the goose which laid the golden eggs. You can be sane enough if you try; try now."

"Three!"

He fired. Half mechanically, just at the moment I swerved aside. By a miracle he missed me. I felt the bullet graze my cheek. The wanton attempt to destroy a man who had never wrought him injury fired my blood. On a shelf at my back was a bayonet which I had tempered on a system of my own, and which I intended to submit to the authorities as an example of an improvement in tempered steel. I turned and snatched at it. As I did so he fired again. The bullet struck me in the fleshy part of the left arm. Moving quicker than I ever did in all my life before, I rushed at him with the bayonet in my hand. How it happened I do not know, but I do know that he fell—dead.

That was the first fruits of my discovery of the Philosopher's Stone. I knew instinctively that he was dead. He lay half on his back, with his face turned up to me. The revolver was still in his hand. He had not uttered a cry, nor so much as a gasp. The bayonet had gone straight to his heart. Consciously I had used no force, but it

was evident that I had used force enough to kill. His countenance wore exactly the same expression it had worn at that last mad moment of his life. His eyes were open, and they glared at me. His face was contorted rather than illumined by his mirthless smile. His face was that of a madman dead, as it had been that of a madman living.

The feelings of a murderer have often been to me a source of mental speculation. How does he feel, for instance, the moment after he has done the deed? It must, of course, depend upon difference of circumstances and differences of physical constitution. My own dominant sensation was a feeling of annoyance. The whole affair was most annoying. If the man had not intruded, if he had withdrawn when I asked him, if he had not been such an idiot as to commence potting at me, I should not have had his corpse littering my floor. I noticed with some satisfaction that there had been no flow of blood. Death had been too instantaneous for that. Even the bayonet was scarcely stained.

At the same time I was conscious that my situation was an awkward one. When two men are in a room alone, and one of them is killed, a system of jurisprudence which is too apt to generalize calls that murder. Justifiable homicide is easier to plead than prove. Supposing any one, my wife, for instance, should enter the room, I should be in Queer Street there and then. An unexpected corpse is such a very difficult thing to satisfactorily explain. What should I do?

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First of all I would lock the door—it was absolutely indispensable that I should have an interval for thought.

As I moved, my eye caught the golden basin—I had actually forgotten the original cause of quarrel. How would my great discovery avail me if I was to have that man's blood upon my hands? For a moment the thought stupefied me.

Of what use would it be—boundless wealth—if I was to hang? Of what use, even, if I was to suffer a term of imprisonment which might last my life? Should I flee? What! With wealth at my command before which the legends of a Monte Cristo or a Croesus faded into nothingness, was I to sneak into a hole and rot like a poisoned rat? Mine was the gift of Midas.

Precisely! And, as in the case of Midas, it bade fair to ruin my life. In my disgust I could have spurned the carcass of the meddlesome fool who lay on my floor. I even caught up the golden basin, and was about to throw its contents through the window.

My hands were a little unsteady. I spilled a drop or two. They fell on the dead man's face.

“The case of Clarence over again. One can have too much of one's favourite Malmsey wine.”

I looked down at the corpse. The liquid had fallen on the dead man's nose. It had turned yellow; it was as though he had a golden nose.

“Good God!”

The exclamation came from me unawares. In my bewilderment—before I knew what I did—I

spilled some more. I saw it fall upon his cheek. Where it fell the flesh became as yellow as gold!

I shook like a man with the palsy. I replaced the basin on the shelf. I could not trust myself to hold it. Putting pressure on myself, I endeavoured to control my agitated nerves. It was an optical delusion, doubtless engendered by the extraordinary nature of the position in which I was placed. In any case, the semblance would disappear as quickly as it came.

But it had not disappeared when I looked again. Still trembling like a leaf, I knelt beside the dead man on the floor. I touched his nose—it felt like metal. I even tapped it with my finger-nail—it gave forth a faint metallic sound.

Unless I was under the influence of some inconceivable hallucination, the corpse was in possession of a veritable golden nose.

I staggered to my feet again. My eye fell on the paper which was the original cause of all the mischief. I read the words:

“There is something—non-metallic—which it will *instantly* affect.”

The word “instantly” was underlined. Could it be?—

I took the basin in my hands again and deliberately spilled some of the contents on the other cheek. It changed before my eyes—it became yellow as gold. I knelt. So far as I could judge from the evidence of my senses of touch and sight, the flesh had become transmuted into metal.

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It seemed almost as if the something "non-metallic" which the liquid would instantly affect was a corpse.

I resolved to continue the experiment further. I spilled the liquid all over the face and hair—the corpse had a head of gold. I stripped the dead man naked, continuing to anoint him with the liquid.

I had a golden statue!

I am unable to enter into psychological details. As, for instance, when I endeavour to describe my sensations as the transformation proceeded, I find myself at a loss. Supposing another person were to find himself in a similar situation, I should like to know what he felt. I am unable to describe what I did. Under such circumstances a singular degree of interest would attach to an adequate portrayal of mental processes. I the more regret that the result of any attempt which I might make would be painfully inadequate.

For one thing, the operation occupied a very short space of time. I had no time to think—certainly none to analyse my thoughts. There was a golden statue growing literally like magic before my eyes.

When it was completed I gazed at my handiwork amazed. It was wonderful. There was the man—dead, shined in the habit which, living, he loved so well. It was something like embalming. We can conceive a less worthy ambition than to live in the hope of being turned, when dead, into solid gold. Had we all the certainty of such a

future we might, some of us, be of more solid use to our relatives and friends than at the present time we are.

III.—A GOLDEN STATUE

I raised the statue to a perpendicular position, and propped it up against the wall in a corner of the room. I am a small man, not physically strong, and to do so taxed all my energies. When I had propped it up, I stood for a moment to take breath. I looked at it. Classic sculptors worked in the precious metals. Some vague imaginings passed through my mind as to whether I could pass it off as a remnant of antiquity. I know nothing of art. Still, it seemed to me that critics could not deny its claims on the ground of its falling below a high-art level. I had heard, perhaps read, something of realism in art. I dimly wondered whether any of the masters of antiquity had been remarkable for realistic treatment. If so, which? It seemed to me that the chief difficulty lay in accounting for its coming into my possession. Remnants of antiquity can't tumble from the skies, especially when those remnants take the form of life-size statues in solid gold.

I was interrupted by the rapping of knuckles against the panels of the laboratory door. Some one wanted to come in. A large piece of canvas lay on the floor. I caught it up and threw it over the statue. I was conscious that it was abso-

THE TOUCHSTONE OF FORTUNE 123

lutely indispensable that I should keep my presence of mind. I was also conscious that I was utterly unable to do so. I remembered that after all I had omitted to lock the door.

It was opened, and my wife put her head in.

"Robert, Colonel Sparkler wishes to see you."

Colonel Sparkler was an official at the War Office, with whom I had had some correspondence with reference to my improvement in tempered steel. Apparently he had followed close upon my wife's heels, for when she opened the door he came in. A tall, overgrown man with a heavy, iron-grey moustache and the inevitable cavalry swagger. I noticed that he wore a single eyeglass.

"I have called to see you, Mr. Birdwood, with reference to the subject of our correspondence. It was thought desirable that I should drop in on you in this unceremonious manner in order that we might understand each other better."

I bowed. I could not speak. It seemed to me that my tongue was glued to the roof of my mouth. My wife was still standing in the open doorway behind the Colonel's back. I could see that her eyes were riveted on the canvas covering. I wanted her to leave the room.

"I hope my visit is not inopportune."

"Not at all," I managed to stammer.

I was even able to add :

"My dear, the Colonel would like to be left alone with me."

My wife went out, keeping her eyes glued on the

canvas covering. I was only too well aware that she would insist upon knowing what I had beneath it. I felt rather than saw that the Colonel had his single eyeglass fixed upon my countenance. Doubtless he thought my manner was peculiar. It was.

"I hope I do not disturb you, Mr. Birdwood?"

"No-o, I—am glad to see you, Colonel."

The words were jerked out rather than spoken.

I was aware that his glance was on me, if possible, even more intently than before. He looked round the room with a certain amount of curiosity. I knew that he perceived the canvas covering. He took up the piece of piping which lay close to his left hand. He examined it.

"Gold?"

"Lead," I answered.

"Lead?"

"I—I mean it was lead. It is—it's the result of a little experiment in oxidation."

"Oxidation!"

I think he began to suppose that I was drunk.

"And this?" He took up the basin. "What is this liquid? Another experiment in oxidation?"

Oddly enough, suddenly both my tongue and imagination became feverishly active.

"The basin is a family heirloom; it descended from my great grandfather. He was a silversmith in Old 'Change. Number Two; it used to be called the sign of 'The Golden Balls.' Perhaps you have come across his name—Peter Birdwood.

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It is held to be rather a curious example of eighteenth-century workmanship."

I am disposed to think that the Colonel was in doubt as to whether I was chaffing him.

"Is it gold?"

"Pure gold."

"It doesn't look to me like eighteenth-century work—nor, frankly," with a smile, "does it seem to me to have much artistic merit."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"These things are a question of taste. With reference to the subject of our correspondence. This bayonet."

I took up the bayonet. It was stained with blood! I dropped it as though it were a red-hot poker. It fell point downwards and stuck in the floor. Had the Colonel not sprung aside with agility surprising in one of his age and build, I believe it would have transfixed his foot.

"Good gracious! Mr. Birdwood, are you not well?"

I knew that I had turned as white as a sheet. I was trembling so that I had to lean against the shelf to save myself from falling. Leaning forward, he withdrew the bayonet from the floor. I snatched it from him. My volubility returned.

"The fact is I have not arrived at those results which I had hoped and expected. It is a question of temperature, of a fraction of a degree——"

"Mr. Birdwood, may I ask if there is anybody concealed beneath that canvas?"

I dropped the bayonet again. His arm was outstretched, and the index finger of his right hand pointed at the canvas covering.

"Colonel Sparkler!"

"I saw that canvas moving. Have we an unseen listener, Mr. Birdwood? If so, your friend had better, perhaps, come out."

The Colonel's tone was stern.

"You saw the canvas moving?" I sank into a chair. "It's a lie."

"Sir!"

"It's a lie."

I believe I spoke, if I may so describe it, in a sort of strangled whisper. The Colonel advanced and removed the canvas covering. I was incapable of interference.

"Bless my heart and soul! What have we here? A statue? I never saw anything so extraordinary in my life! I could have sworn I saw a man move beneath the canvas. Is it gold? Marvellous! Mr. Birdwood, is this another experiment in oxidation?"

My parched tongue refused its office. My imagination failed me. I had nothing to say, if I had been able to say it."

"The thing *is* dead?"

He rapped it with his knuckles.

"'Pon my word of honour, it is a miracle! It *appears* to be gold. Really, Mr. Birdwood, you must excuse my curiosity, but may I ask you how you became possessed of this marvellous work of art?"

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I was about to stammer out that it was a family heirloom—like the basin. But I had sense enough not to commit myself to that.

“It is a remnant of Greek art.”

The words were out before I knew they were on my tongue.

“A remnant of Greek art! Good God!”

The Colonel stared at it with all his might.

“But it is gold?”

“Pure gold, virgin gold.”

“But, my dear Mr. Birdwood, it must be of absolutely priceless value!”

“It is unique,” I muttered.

“Unique! I should think it is unique. Apart from the question of artistic value, I am not aware of any statue of such a size in gold at present existing in the world. And Greek! Who is supposed to have been the sculptor?”

“Phidias.”

It was the only name which occurred to me.

“Phidias! A golden statue by Phidias! Why, it must be worth millions—millions! But really, the features are not Greek, you know.”

“I don't know much about that kind of thing.”

“But you know the Greek type when you see it. This is certainly not Greek: it is Italian—modern Italian, I would almost venture to say. But the wonderful fact of it is that it is so life-like. It must have been a portrait. It looks to me like the portrait of a madman.”

“He was a madman!”

"He was a madman! Mr. Birdwood, are you acquainted with the history of the work?"

"The story is a curious one."

"I can well believe it. It should also be a story of national importance. May I ask how the work came into your possession?"

"It was brought——" I hesitated, then blurted out, "It was brought by parcel post—I mean by Carter, Paterson."

"Brought by Carter, Paterson? A statue in solid gold! An example of Greek art! One of the works of Phidias! Brought by ordinary parcels delivery! But, good gracious, sir! who sent it you?"

The man's cross-examination must be stopped. The most timid animal is bold when driven to bay. I felt that I should indeed be a contemptible fool if I allowed myself to be cornered by the first inquisitive stranger. Courage—or the semblance of it—came back to me.

"Colonel Sparkler, there are circumstances connected with this matter which render it impossible for me at present to answer questions. You will therefore forgive me if I request you not to ask them. I am also compelled to desire you to keep this accidental discovery to yourself, for a time at any rate."

"Robert!"

My wife was standing in the open doorway. She had entered unobserved. I could have cursed her.

"Mr. Cohen wishes to see you."

THE TOUCHSTONE OF FORTUNE 129

Mr. Cohen was the threatening creditor. I could have cursed him too.

The Colonel looked at me, then at the statue, then at my wife. He seemed uncertain what to say or do. My wife was staring at the statue as though she would have stared her eyes out of her head. At any moment she might make some blundering speech. I felt constrained to get her out of the room before she made the Colonel's suspicions greater than they evidently were already.

"Tell Mr. Cohen that I am engaged."

"Dat von't do for me, Mr. Pirdwood, not to-day."

That fellow Cohen was standing there washing his dirty hands with invisible soap and water. The Colonel spoke. In the language of a loquacious American, some of those War Office red-tapers seem to think "an almighty lot of themselves."

"I will consider the request you have made to me, Mr. Birdwood. I am bound to state my opinion that there are circumstances which require consideration. A statue in solid gold is not found on every dung-heap, nor is it a thing which every man receives through Carter, Paterson. You will hear from me again, sir."

He left the room. We could hear him swagger along the passage. Apparently the original purport of his visit had entirely vanished from his mind. I am inclined to think that he suspected me of being a professional fence, or, at any rate, of being in possession of stolen property.

Meanwhile, my wife was staring at the statue as though her eyes were struggling to leap out of her head. Behind her was the greasy Cohen. His little figure was oscillating gently to and fro as he continued to rub his hands and stare at me.

"I vant my money, Mr. Pirdwood. It is four pounds dirteen and fourpence. It seems to me it has been owing these hundert years."

"I can't give it you now. Call this time tomorrow ; you shall have it then."

"Dat von't do for me ; it is an old tale dat. Here I am, and, until I get my money, here I stay."

He came right into the room as he spoke the words. For the first time the statue caught his eye. I never saw such a change come over a human countenance before. It was the more surprising as this was the face of a Jew—that most expressionless of masks. His jaw dropped down, his head dropped forward, his eyes doubled their size.

"Great Abraham ! Vat—vat is dat ?"

I looked at my wife. I saw the interrogation shrieked in her spell-bound face. For the first time since I have known the woman, she had lost the power of audible speech. In her eager, parted lips, in her distended eyes, I could read a thousand variations of the question,

"Oh, Robert ! What is that ?"

I confess that I began to feel—if I may so describe it—a trifle wild. The chapter of accidents became too much. It either would not come to an end, or it was too rapidly "continued in our next."

THE TOUCHSTONE OF FORTUNE 131

I turned on Mr. Cohen with not unreasonable indignation.

“What the deuce is it to you what it is?”

“To me! What is it to me? My good friend, let me touch it. It is gold.”

He advanced in a sort of paralytic way, with his hand stretched out, as a blind man feels for a well-known landmark which will guide him on his road. I stepped in front of him.

“I’ll be hanged if I do. This is a progressive age! Soon you’ll be wanting to wipe your finger on a picture to see if the paint comes off. I seem to have become an object of public curiosity; I, one of the chief objects of whose life it is to baffle curiosity. See here, Mr. Cohen, I owe you four pounds thirteen and fourpence. You have scandalously overcharged me, but don’t forget the fourpence lest you should starve. I have not the actual coin, but here is something which will pay you and leave you some change besides.”

I handed him the piece of leaden piping which I had transmuted into gold. He clutched at it with a nervous hand; he feasted on it with his eyes; he spoke to himself as in a dream!

“Gold! Gold! Gold! Three ounces at the least! I will swear ’tis nearly four. And this man gives it to me to pay four dirteen four!—this man that never has no money all the time I’ve known him yet.”

“Well, Mr. Cohen, are you content? Then march outside.”

“He asks for no receipt, this golden man!”

“Oh, yes, I do. You move too fast. But you can give me a receipt equally well outside. Come, am I to show you the way, or can you find it alone?”

“It is you who move too fast, not me. How much you give me to keep still—eh, my goot friend?”

The brute laid his finger on the bridge of his monstrous nose, and leered at me out of his wicked eyes.

“Give you to keep still? What do you mean?”

“Should I give a hint to our goot friends at Scotland Yard—what do you say?”

I was silent for a moment. I tried to measure my man. If I was destined to undergo much of this sort of thing—from a dirty Jew—I had rather I had been the golden statue, and Palmer had discovered the Philosopher's Stone.

“Perhaps if you were to endeavour to explain yourself, Mr. Cohen, you might make yourself quite clear. At the present moment, I beg to inform you, you are nearer a good sound thrashing than ever you were in your life.”

“How came that here, eh? How came that here? down the spout?”

The animal pointed to the statue. I immediately resolved that strong measures were the best. This sort of thing must be nipped in the bud. I laid my two hands on Mr. Cohen's shoulders.

“Robert! Robert! Don't! For God's sake, speak to me first.”

My wife had found her voice at last—as usual,

at the most inconvenient time. For the moment I set Mr. Cohen free. He took advantage of my lenity at once.

“Yes, Mr. Pirdwood, let your goot lady say her little word to you first!”

“Helen, may I ask what you mean?”

She came and took me by the arm. Something in her manner compelled me to yield to her solicitation. I allowed her to lead me a little apart. She bent forward and whispered in my ear:

“Robert! Is he dead?”

A shudder went all over me. This woman was the worst of all. I saw that Cohen was watching us with his hungry eyes. I endeavoured to master the very curious sensation—I should like to be able to give it a scientific name—which had so suddenly come over me.

“Dead? What do you mean?”

She only repeated her inquiry. I had never supposed it was possible to express so much agony in so few words.

“Oh, Robert! Is he dead?”

IV.—MAGNIFICENT BRIBERY

All at once, while her words were still surging through my veins, I heard footsteps coming along the passage. I turned. There was Williams, George Palmer's servant, standing in the open door. So far as I could ascertain, this man had

been with Palmer nearly all his life and Palmer's—for they were about an age—and was an affectionate, half-witted sort of creature, who hung about his master like a dog.

I disengaged myself from my wife's hysteric clutch, and, springing back, caught the canvas which Colonel Sparkler had thrown upon the floor, and flung it over the statue. I saw Cohen looking at me, and at Williams standing in the door, asking, as plainly as though he spoke, what was the meaning of my act.

This Williams was a great, ungainly fellow, whose limbs all seemed to be misfits.

“Mr. Birdwood, sir, I'm sorry to trouble you, sir, but is the master here?”

“The master? What do you mean? How should I know where your master is?”

Williams seemed abashed. Possibly he took my nervous irritability for wrath.

“But, Mr. Birdwood, sir, he said that he was coming here.”

“Said! He always says that kind of thing.”

“But, sir, I came with him to the gate.”

“You came with him to the gate?”

“And I saw him, sir, come in. I have been waiting for him I don't know how long outside. He has never, sir, come out. He must be somewhere here.”

I stood with my back to him, my eyes fixed upon the canvas—and the thing beneath. I wiped the dew of perspiration from my forehead with what, I believe, was a trembling hand.

“Oh, you are mistaken, that is all.”

“It is a funny kind of mistake to make, that, too.” It was Cohen spoke. “Tell me, my goot friend, what is your master’s name?”

I could have cursed him for his impertinent intrusion into my affairs; but my tongue all at once seemed paralysed.

“Mr. Palmer, sir, is my master’s name. I saw him come in, and he has not come out again. I’m sure that he is here.”

“You are sure, Mr. Pirdwood, that nothing has happened to our goot friend, Mr. Palmer, eh?”

I faced round, moving steadily, doing my best to keep my feelings in control. I felt that already it was a tug-of-war between this man and me. I must crush him ere he crushed me.

“Mr. Cohen, my wife’s interruption has saved you once from being kicked head foremost from this room. A second time you will not be saved. Instantly quit this apartment or take the consequences.”

Our eyes met—mine and the Jew’s. I endeavoured to stare him out of countenance. I might as well have endeavoured to outstare the Sphinx. And, as I looked, a horrible change came over him. The man seemed to read something in my face or eyes—I know not which, and to gloat on what he read. His form seemed to dilate; a dreadful look of triumph came into his horrid eyes and about his glutton lips. He actually trembled with excitement.

“I will not go! I will not go!” all at once he

screamed, shaking his head at me like some carrion bird. "There is something here—here in dis room—it is goot for me to know. There is a smell of what some silly folk call crime!"

He yelled the word. He turned to Williams.

"My goot friend, what was your master like to look at, eh?"

But Williams seemed too frightened at the extraordinary appearance of the Jew to be able to reply. Cohen returned towards me.

"What was he like to look at, eh? Tell me, tell me!" He rushed at me as though he would rend out the secrets of my inmost soul. "What is it? What is it? I am very close. There is something! Yet—what is it in de air?" All at once he darted towards the statue. "Is the secret there?"

He had cowed me up to then. His almost demoniacal frenzy had, as it were, beaten down my guard. But when he made that move, a desperate sense of the necessity of self-preservation gave me back my presence of mind. I caught him by the arm.

"Stand back!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" He gave a series of yelps like a veritable wild beast. "So there is the secret there! Leave go my arm!"

I did as he bade me—I left go his arm. But I caught him by the throat with both my hands. My blood was getting to the full as hot as his could be.

"Try to move, and I will kill you like a dog."

"Robert! Robert! Robert!"

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It was my wife's voice. I saw that she had sunk upon her knees. But I paid no heed.

"You play the bully here! Why, Jew, I'll strangle you."

It came near to strangulation, too. The pressure on his throat became every instant sterner. But the wretch writhed like an eel. He gave some marvellous acrobatic twist and slipped from my grasp. From his throat there came a sort of choking note of exultation.

"Ah! Pirdwood," he yelped.

He was away. I bent forward to clutch at him. He darted beyond my reach. I went after him. It was too late. He caught at the canvas covering, and the statue stood revealed.

There was silence for, I suppose, at least a minute. I knew that my wife, still on her knees, covered her face with her hands. I knew that Cohen, still clutching the canvas, gazed at Williams with distended eyes. For myself, it seemed to me that I was a helpless actor in some hideous dream.

If these were the first fruits of unlimited wealth—poverty for me. It seemed the grossest, cruellest irony that a man with millions, billions, trillions at his command should be in the position I filled then.

But the interest centred upon Williams, George Palmer's half-idiot serving man. It was on him I kept my eyes. And well I might. He presented a study for physiognomists then. The peculiar scene which had been acted by the Jew and myself had had the effect of destroying the equilibrium of his nerves—he was a nervous kind of man.

And now the sudden discovery of the statue had on him the effect which that miserable platitude, the proverbial last straw, is supposed to have upon the camel's back. I never saw a man so horror-struck ; and panic-stricken, too. He was seized with palsy, as it were. His teeth chattered in his head. He stared at the statue like a man who sees a ghost, who is the victim of some transcendently horrid vision. Suddenly he found his voice. Bursting into a series of the wildest yells, he ran from the room as for his life. We could hear him yell as he tore upon his way. Afar in the distance we could hear him yelling still.

I confess that the noise that imbecile made had an unpleasant effect upon my own nervous organization. I judge it must have been quite five minutes before I was again able to fix my gaze upon the Jew—the cause of all. I found that already he was looking at me. He was pointing to the statue with an exultant leer.

“That is the secret, eh?”

“If it be the secret, it is a secret which you shall not live to reveal. You mistake my character, Mr. Cohen. It is not your fault, for I have become a new man within the last hour. Rather than place myself in the power of any man, I would take from that man his life.”

“So—that is it? We shall see?”

I saw that, reading my purpose, he was looking about for something with which to defend himself. His eyes were on the tempered bayonet. But I was on him before he had a chance to get at it.

I was a stronger man than he, heavier made, very much in earnest, too. And this time the desire to murder was in my heart, the desire to kill this man—to rub him out. He fought as gamely as he could. I conceive that when it comes to the point every man fights gamely for his life; for instance, I fought gamely then for mine, to the full, as gamely as he for his. He perceived that he was overmatched. With comparative ease I bore him on his back, and settled down upon his chest to throttle him. I observed the signs of strangulation in the convulsive twisting of his limbs, the darkened skin, the eyeballs starting from their sockets, and a thin line of foam about his lips. In another moment I should have carried the affair completely through, when I was interrupted by a voice which addressed me from behind. It was not my wife's. I am convinced that my wife was too paralysed with horror to utter a word or move a limb.

“Mr. Birdwood! Good heavens! What is the matter now!”

I turned. There was Colonel Sparkler standing in the door. If that door had only been locked at the first, I might have escaped all the tragedies, or, rather, succession of tragedies, which followed. Instead of being locked it was wide open still. There was that pompous swaggerer looking in.

Nor was he alone. He appeared to have brought a friend. I saw some one was standing at his elbow, but from my recumbent position I could not perceive what manner of man he was.

“Really, Mr. Birdwood! Do you mean to kill the man?”

He had entered the room, and stood looking down at me and the wretch I had beneath my knees. His tone nettled me. In the state of tension in which my nerves then were, it required little to do that.

“May I ask what business it is of yours?” It was an absurd question—I knew it directly it had passed my lips.

“What business it is of mine! Good heavens! Murder is the business of every man.” He bent over the Jew. Even in such a moment as that I was sufficiently cool to notice what an uncommonly ugly spectacle Mr. Cohen presented. “Upon my word, it seems to me that you have come within an ace of murder.”

I got up. I immediately noticed the Colonel's companion. A tall, thin man, with bright red hair and moustache, and a pair of the keenest blue eyes I ever saw. His countenance seemed to wear a perpetual smile which could scarcely be characterized as of a genial kind—it was so shrewd as to be almost mocking. He was the pink of fashion—patent shoes, irreproachable trousers, long frock-coat, glossiest top hat, resplendent tie, masher collar, lavender gloves, crutch stick—a band-box sort of man.

The Colonel was still examining the Jew.

“I think that something ought to be done for this unfortunate man—he seems in a pitiable state. And I can but hope, Mr. Birdwood, that only the

very strongest necessity urged you to use such violence."

I made no reply. I smiled. The red-haired man looked at me, smiling too.

"He'll do, Sparkler—see! he's taking a peep. And I am sure that Mr. Birdwood had a very good reason for what he did."

In his refined and easy tones it seemed to me that there was a trace of mockery too. The Colonel got up and began to introduce us.

"Mr. Birdwood, this is my friend, Major Bray, of the Criminal Investigation Department."

I started; not outwardly, I hope, but certainly within. The Jew sat up. *He* certainly was not dead. My wife was on her feet, leaning against the wall to help her stand. The Colonel went on:

"Perhaps, Mr. Birdwood, I had better speak to you in private?"

"We are all friends here."

I heard the Jew repeat the declaration from his seat upon the floor.

"We are all goot friends—all goot friends here."

"Then, in that case I can speak plainly. Of course, Mr. Birdwood, you understand that this visit is entirely—if I may use the phrase—of a confidential nature—nothing formal about it, you understand."

The Major interposed.

"I am sure that Mr. Birdwood understands that well."

I looked at him. I was not by any means sure that I did; but I let the Colonel blunder on.

"With reference to that statue by Phidias—by Phidias, Bray, you understand."

"Is this the one in question?" I had noticed that the Major had kept his beautiful blue eyes fixed upon the statue nearly all the time. "Have I your permission, Mr. Birdwood, to examine it? It seems to be a wonderful work of art." I merely shrugged my shoulders. He took the shrug for an assent, and proceeded to examine the statue with the minutest care. "May I ask where you got this masterpiece?"

"And may I ask, Major Bray, in what guise you are here?"

"In what guise? How do you mean?"

"Because, if you are here merely as an acquaintance of Colonel Sparkler's, who is himself a stranger to me, I would point out that even a stranger's house has doors."

The Colonel immediately began to ruffle his plumes, like an indignant turkey-cock who scents the battle from afar.

"This sort of language—eh? this sort of language—eh? I say—I do not understand."

The Major only laughed.

"This is not by Phidias. Of course, Mr. Birdwood, that was a joke of yours?"

"Precisely. That was a joke of mine."

"It has not been cast, it has not been carved; it is not a statue, in the ordinary sense, at all."

"As you say, it is not a statue in the ordinary sense at all."

"It is a phenomenon, in short."

“Exactly. It is a phenomenon, in short.”

“A freak of nature, let us say.”

“A freak of nature, let us say.”

He turned. We regarded each other intently. As I looked at him, conscious of his mocking smile, I became aware—bubbling up in my veins, as it seemed—of a sudden febrile desire to make a splash, a sensation ; to astonish this resplendent gentleman as he had never been astonished in his life before ; and with him the rest of the small company. The idea amused me excessively. I at once became preternaturally cool. I turned and locked the door. There should be no more intruders just for one short while.

“My dear wife and gentlemen.” I stood with my hands in my pockets in the centre of the room. I became conscious that their interest in me had suddenly taken an entirely new turn—especially was it so in the case of my wife. “I am going to treat you to a little scientific lecture. And yet my science will be of such an unscientific kind that I am persuaded, if you will pardon such extreme vulgarity, it will be found calculated to curl your hair. I desire to follow what I believe to be the orthodox custom when a man is about to make disclosures of an altogether incredible kind, and to declare I am not mad. At least I was not mad a couple of hours ago. I will leave you to judge whether my experiences during that period of time have not been sufficient to turn the strongest brain. I should not be surprised if their mere recital proves sufficient to turn yours.”

I paused. They were still. I felt persuaded that the Colonel began to be under the impression that he was listening to a madman. Not impossibly some such idea was generating in the brains of all.

“My dear wife and gentlemen, I wish to ask you a question. This. Have you ever, say, in your wildest dreams, fathomed what it would mean to be in possession of infinite wealth—of wealth not only beyond all dreams of avarice, or beyond the dreams of fiction, but beyond all dreams that ever were—absolute, unbounded, unending, infinite wealth? They say that every man has his price. That means every woman too. If it is true of every individual, it is true of every congregation of individuals—of all the multitudes of congregations, which we call peoples—of the whole world, in short. You could buy the whole world, if the price you offered was only large enough. That is one thing you could do if you were in possession of infinite wealth—price being no object; buy up the whole world, body and soul, mind and matter. That would not be a bad beginning to one’s dream. Last night I went to bed, to all intents and purposes, insolvent. I even saw no means of being able to pay the paltry sum of four pounds thirteen and fourpence. This morning I awoke in the position of the man I have suggested—in the position of the man who is in possession of infinite wealth.”

“Mad! Mad!” I heard the Colonel whisper to the Major. “Decidedly mad! Still, an interesting case. Let us hear him out.”

"I hear Colonel Sparkler suggests that I am mad. I am not at all surprised. I sound mad, no doubt. However, what I state is none the less the fact. I am at this moment in the position of the man who is in possession of infinite wealth."

"I do not follow you, Mr. Birdwood." It was the Major who spoke. "Of what nature is this wealth? Is it represented by that statue there?"

"You will follow me a little later on. You have all heard the story of King Midas, how he prayed that everything he touched might be changed into gold, and how his granted prayer, instead of a blessing, turned out to be a curse. The experience of King Midas has been repeated in my own person this very day."

"The fellow is mad—stark mad!" the Colonel growled.

"Do you suggest that everything you touch is changed into gold? In that case I beg you will exemplify your power by touching me."

"You move too fast, Major. Wait a while. I beg you to observe this statue. Examine it closely. I told Colonel Sparkler that it was by Phidias—a statue in solid gold. He observed that he was not aware that a statue of this size in solid gold existed in the world. He was right. There was not one—till this came into being. It is unique. Unique in the most emphatic sense of the word. I hope, for reasons which you will shortly understand, that it will remain unique."

They crowded round it—the Colonel, the Major, the Jew. But I observed that my wife still leaned for support against the wall. I went forward and touched the Major and the Jew upon the shoulders.

“Major Bray, Mr. Cohen, my friends, an hour ago that golden statue was a living man.”

They started—well they might! Even the self-possessed Major gave a little jump.

“A living man! As much alive as you and I! In his veins the blood coursed freely, in his heart wild hopes beat high. See what he is now! Is not the transformation strange?—a statue of solid gold!”

I tapped the statue with my knuckle. It gave out a clear, metallic ring.

“How came he there? I killed him with my own hands!”

The Major sprang from me as though I were some leprous thing. The Jew gasped out:

“That is the secret, then?”

“And when he was quite dead I changed him into gold. As Colonel Sparkler suggested, this is the only statue of solid gold of its size at present existing in the world. You look startled. I perceive Mr. Cohen thinks he has me in his grip. The Major thinks I am a criminal—I am not sure of that. If you will examine the wall on your left you will perceive two bullets embedded in the plaster. They were fired at me by the gentleman who is now a statue of solid gold. It was only when I perceived that it was his intention to take my life, that he would keep on firing at me till he had

succeeded in his aim, that in self-defence—only in self-defence, you understand—I caught up a bayonet, a bayonet of which Colonel Sparkler will be able to tell you something, if you ask him—it almost impaled his toes—and, well, briefly, in endeavouring to prevent his killing me I killed him.

“You will ask me, why this pertinacious desire upon his part to take my life? The fact is, he, too, was looking for the secret which I had found. He knew I had found it. He wished me to share my discovery with him. I did not quite see my way to doing so. He resolved, if he could not have my secret, to have my life. I objected to this resolution. And the result is that you perceive him gleaming, literally *gleaming* on you there.

“You will perhaps admire my candour. Wonder at it perhaps still more. Ask yourselves why I give myself away—place myself so completely in your hands. I must have an uncommon desire to hang; I assure you, it is quite the other way. Rather than hang myself, I would see you all hanged, any day. But, and here is a curious psychological problem—the burden of my secret, or secrets, I should say—was more than I, in solitude, could bear. I assure you that in less than a couple of hours they have, in a certain subtle sense, diseased my brain. What would they have done after a couple of years? I propose, therefore, to share with you the *burden* of my secrets, to place some of it upon your shoulders, the burden of my crime, the burden of my infinite wealth. I propose to make you my accomplices, in short.”

I paused so that they might have an opportunity of digesting the meaning of what I had said. Already I felt that I had done well. I felt easier, cooler, more myself now that I was in a fair way of having my secret shared. I examined the faces of my auditors—that is, the faces of three of them, for my wife's I could not see. She was leaning with her face against the wall, in an attitude of the most astonishing dejection. The flow of blood in *her* veins was not quickening by anything I had said.

While I was still regarding her, Major Bray broke the silence.

“May I ask, Mr. Birdwood, if you realize clearly who and what I am?”

“Perfectly. You are an officer of police—an investigator of crime.”

“And yet you make to me this amazing proposition?”

“Exactly. It is because it is an amazing proposition that I make it to you. I should be ashamed to offer you such a trifle as five hundred thousand pounds, or a million, for instance. To offer a pitiful sum to a man of such spotless reputation as yourself would be an insult. But five hundred thousand millions, or five hundred thousand billions, or trillions, let us say—for, after all, it is difficult for the human mind to realize even the approaches towards infinity; no man need feel insulted by being offered, as a preliminary, a sum like that.”

“Five hundred thousand millions! billions!

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trillions!" gasped out Cohen. "Great God of Abraham! at five per cent. Oh, Mr. Pirdwood, is there any of that little sum for me?"

"My good Cohen, that is only a beginning, you understand; but since it is well for a man to exercise great moderation lest his *finite* powers of enjoyment are brought too soon to an end, I would suggest that we should agree that no one of us is to spend more than a billion pounds each year—ten hundred thousand millions, you see."

"Ten hundred thousand million pounds sterling each year! Great heavens!"

Cohen began dancing about the room as though he were possessed. Colonel Sparkler caught me by the arm. He began to whisper in my ear in broken, trembling tones, stopping short every now and then to give a sort of gasp.

"Mr. Birdwood, I'm a poor man—the service of one's country is full of ingratitude. My income is fifteen hundred pounds a year at most—a beggarly pittance for a man of family, with—a wife and five unmarried daughters, and—an expensive son to keep. Mr. Birdwood, if you could make me a millionaire!"

"A millionaire!" I laughed. "I will place you in such a position, Colonel Sparkler, that you will be able to buy up all the millionaires at present existing in the world, and to do it with an insignificant expenditure of your small change."

The Colonel's jaw fell so far apart that it seemed an absurdity that the human mouth could extend so wide. Major Bray slipped his arm through

mine and took me aside. I noticed that while his eyes were brighter his lips were dry.

"Of course, Mr. Birdwood, this is only a fairy tale you have been telling us?"

I smiled at him. I knew he believed me then.

"At the same time, I have made it an invariable rule in all the investigations in which I have been engaged never to act on insufficient proof. Therefore, I beg you to believe that I do not desire to doubt your word. But the fact is, Mr. Birdwood, that, owing to circumstances on which I need not dwell, I am in immediate want of the sum of—of——"

I saw that he hesitated to name the exact amount.

"Of a million, I hope, at least. Between such friends, Major, as you and me, it is absurd to speak of smaller sums. You shall have a million certainly before this day week."

"A million!" I heard him murmur, as I disengaged my arm. "A million! before this day week!"

"Well, gentlemen—*now* I think I may say my friends—let the arrangement be this. During the remainder of the day think over all I have said. In the morning come to me again; I will have prepared for you a little surprise—about a hundred-weight or so of gold. What is more, I will instruct you in the art of making gold each man for himself."

I saw how they drank in my words. The Colonel's jaws were still unnaturally distended.

Cohen's joints cracked as though we were indulging in a spiritualistic *séance*.

"And for our friend, the statue in solid gold, what shall we say?"

No one spoke a word.

"Shall we say it has always been a statue of solid gold? A work by Phidias, to give an instance by the way?"

The Colonel's jaws twitched. He muttered:

"Worth millions!—millions!—if a pound."

The Major laughed at me, stroking his moustache.

"I would put it in the melting pot if I were you. Perhaps in its present state it is scarcely marketable. Bullion is bullion anywhere."

"But—it was a murder, you understand."

"My good Mr. Birdwood, that is, however, exactly what I don't understand."

"It is quite certain that I killed the man."

"According to your own account he would otherwise have killed you; he was the aggressor, you but endeavoured to save your life. Justifiable homicide is not murder—it is not even a crime. Besides, how can you speak of murder when you have to deal with a statue of solid gold?"

V.—PAWNING A BASIN

After they had gone I had the most extraordinary scene with my wife. It was amusing, by the way, to notice how each of the three was unwilling to go first. It was as though they were in some Ali

Baba's cave, and suspected that the one who stayed in last would be the one who came out best. They seemed by common consent to mistrust each other ; each taking it for granted that the other was a thief. I had at last to bundle them out all three together, protesting that by their further delay, time which was emphatically money, would inevitably be lost. I never parted from three such devoted friends.

When they were gone I was left alone with my wife.

"Well, Helen, it has been the dream of our married life to realize a competency, to be sure in the future of daily bread. I have surpassed our wildest dreams ; we are the masters of fabulous wealth. Yet, I am unwilling to believe it is so ; yet, you do not *seem* to be content."

When she turned to speak to me she appeared within the last minutes to have grown absolutely old—to have compressed a cycle of years within a few tickings of the clock.

"Oh, Robert ! Have you killed him ? "

"Have you not ears that you could not hear ? I can assure you that it is not a subject on which I particularly wish to dwell. I am as well aware as you are that it is the little rift within the lute."

"Would God that I first had died ! "

"I suppose you would rather he had killed me ? "

"Robert, would not you ? "

I admit the absurdity, but I turned away. I could not answer her. She came and touched me lightly on the hand.

"Robert, let us pray for forgiveness."

"Helen, you're a fool."

She fell upon her knees and burst into a storm of sobs. They were the first I had heard from her for years. She was not a crying woman as a rule.

"That it should have come to this! To have killed a man! For gold!"

"Did you not hear me say it was an accident? Do you suppose I lied?"

"You know you did! You know you lied, and robbed, and killed him too. What is this secret of whose discovery you boast? Was it not his? And when he wished to be master of his own did you not strike him dead? As to his first attempting to kill you, was it not because it was only by violence that he could obtain his own?"

I confess that I have a relish for logic, even on those rare occasions when it comes from feminine lips, but there was a certain flavour about this logic which grated on my palate. I could have spurned my wife.

"Liar! Thief! Murderer! You stand branded as all three! Do you think that you can lie to God as you have lied to men? Do you think that oceans brimming full of gold can wash the stain of blood from off your soul? Robert Birdwood, I tell you this. A wife may not be witness against her husband; but unless you make confession unto God, aye, and public confession unto man, this hour I leave you in solitude, the companion of your crime. I will not live with one who stains

his hands with another's gold and another's blood, and triumphs in his sin."

This was the sort of wife for an enterprising man to have—a Napoleon or an Alexander! A woman who calls a spade a spade, and who allows no nonsense of affection to betray her into the weakness of calling it an agricultural implement. This partner of my joys and sorrows had stood in my way before.

"You are free to go. You have been free to go any time these fifteen years. Leave me an address; I will send you a million or two a year—which you are also free to spend."

"You send me from you with a gibe and a jeer. Well, I go. As for your millions, keep them. I will not touch a penny piece which is the price of blood. Bread can be earned by honest labour. I will show to you the fact if you were not aware of it before."

I thought that she was going, but she stayed to have a parting shot.

"As for you, my husband, I will pray for you morning, noon, and night. The prayers of the earnest shall prevail. In that hour your home shall be my home once again."

These were her parting words. I wiped my brow when she had gone.

"That's a good riddance, anyhow."

I felt persuaded that it was. And yet, somehow, I was not quite sure.

"The fact is, Helen is too good to live; she undoubtedly is too good to live with me; though

I don't think I ever knew a woman who made such pies! Bah! That's because I never could afford good cookery. Wait till I start a *chef* to show them how it's done."

Just then I happened to look at the statue. Oddly enough, a shiver went all down my back.

"Bray suggested putting it into the melting-pot. Suppose I do? And yet, in a sort of way he was my friend. One may kill one's friend—by accident—but still be unwilling to boil him down."

My eye caught a piece of paper lying on the floor. I picked it up; it was the secret of infinite wealth. It had lain there unnoticed all the time. My mind recurred to Palmer's extraordinary—almost insane—belief in its existence. He had sought for it with a feverish expenditure both of time and money, practically his whole life long. Yet, after all, it had fallen by chance to me; and he himself—too late—had been the most convincing evidence conceivable of the absolute existence of the thing in which he had so implicitly believed. It is these curious freaks of fortune which induce men to babble of what they call the irony of fate.

Of course my wife had put it the other way. It was not of fortune she spoke, but of theft—of a thing stolen, not discovered. From one's wife no doubt that was the sort of thing to be expected—a prophet never does have honour among his own kin. And yet, to be candid—and in this plain narrative of fact I desire before all else to be candid—there can be no doubt that the thing was

stolen after all. I flatter myself that I should never have bought that trash of Lully's. The book was Palmer's, and, of course, all that it contained. That view of the situation gave an awkward appearance to the accident which followed. Palmer *was* trying to obtain his own. I immediately felt that to dwell upon that point of view too long would have an unhealthy effect upon my nerves—especially in the presence of the statue.

I suddenly found myself inclined to think that it would perhaps be as well to have the statue covered up—to place the canvas over it as I had done before. I was quite clear upon this point, still I felt an irritating unwillingness to actually do the deed—to blind the statue's eyes. And yet it was exactly the eyes I wished to blind. It was with a distinct mental exertion that I at last shrouded it beneath the canvas covering; and then—then I felt that the eyes were looking through. It was quite plain that my state of nervous tension had returned—aye, and worse than before.

I tried to mix some more of the prescription—I call it prescription for want of a better name—the *elixir* which was the secret of infinite wealth; but I could not lay my hand on the ingredient which I had obtained from Palmer, though I was sure that there had been some of it left. Had I found it I doubt if I could have obtained the compound; my hand trembled too much to guarantee the exact nicety of quantities necessary in the various parts. I decided to go out. Cohen had taken away the piece of piping. The basin remained.

Placing it in a cover, I sallied forth with it under my arm.

My first object was to turn the basin into sterling coin. Gold is gold, but you cannot in England, at any rate, buy bread and cheese with bullion. You might have a cellar full of bars of gold, yet starve. Tradesmen would regard any proffer of the virgin metal with suspicious eyes. It occurred to me, so soon as I had got outside, that I might find it difficult to transmute my basin into sovereigns. How should I proceed? Pawn it? Where? At a rough calculation it weighed about five pounds. In the scales it was worth considerably over two hundred pounds. There are not many pawnbrokers in London who will give you an adequate advance on such a pledge as that. Of course there are dealers in the precious metals. But I had had no experience in the sale of gold and silver. I had only the very vaguest notion of how the trade was carried on. I had a strong impression that if a perfect stranger offered for sale a large basin in solid gold, inconvenient questions might be put. Ordinarily, I could have had a tale quite pat, but, then, I had a ridiculous, yet none the less exasperating, feeling that I was followed, dogged, by the statue's eyes.

That basin became to me an Old Man of the Sea. I marched about with it beneath my arm through the remainder of the day. I dodged policemen. I became so nervous that if I thought one was in the neighbourhood, I hung about street corners till I was sure that he had gone.

I even on one occasion actually bolted from a man in blue. I was coming up Essex Street—for I hung about the purlieus of the Strand, under the vague impression that ultimately Attenborough would be the man for me, when suddenly a policeman darted out from a doorway. Probably the poor man had only been into the house on a little business of his own. Anyway, at sight of him I turned and ran helter-skelter down the street. What he thought of me I cannot say, but, so far as I know, he made no attempt to follow in pursuit. When I dared at last to stop, I found myself on the Embankment, and there were no signs of any chase. I sat down upon a seat to breathe. A disreputable-looking fellow occupied the greater portion of the seat, lying full length upon it at his ease. A bright idea occurred to me.

“I say, my friend, would you like to earn half a crown?”

He appeared to be more than half asleep. He looked at me out of a pair of sleepy, vicious, drunken-looking eyes.

“What’s that, matey? Earn half a dollar? D’ye take me for a working man?”

I certainly did not. Any one looking less like the ideal British working man I never saw.

“I don’t want you to work for it, if you mean that. I shouldn’t think of putting you to such extreme fatigue. It would be easily earned, and I might make it five shillings instead of half a crown.”

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He lazily sat up and looked at me out of his exceedingly unpleasant eyes.

"Put a name to it. I ain't got no more objection to an easy-got five bob than any other man."

"It's"—my nervousness returned when I came to the point; I stammered—"it's a trifle I want you to pawn."

"What! hard up! Shake hands, old pal!" He stretched out a grimy, wicked-looking paw. I positively shuddered with disgust. "You ain't no more stone broke than me, I'll lay odds." He took his legs from off the seat, and hitched himself closer to my side. "What have you got to spout? It ain't your boots, I hope, nor yet your shirt."

"It's—it's a basin."

"A what? A basin! Crikey! You must have come low down!"

"It's not a basin of the ordinary kind."

"I hope it ain't, old pal, or you won't get much on it from any pawnbroker I ever came across."

"It's made of gold."

"What?"

"It's made of gold—you understand."

"Blow my eyes, you're on the cross." He was wide awake at last—too wide awake, in fact. "I'm fly, my bloke; you couldn't have come across a better man. It's a fence you want. You come along o' me. I know the very decentest chap in all this blessed town."

"You are mistaken, I assure you; the basin is honestly my own. Only, I am unexpectedly

pressed for money, and as I am unused to pawnshops, I thought I would offer you five shillings to pledge it in my name."

"What! Me pledge a basin made of gold! See any green in my eye? Let's have a look at the thing, old pal."

"Thank you. I am sorry to have troubled you, but I think that, after all, I will try my hand myself."

I rose to go. He got up too.

"Halves, my bloke. Fen larks with me. You must think I'm jolly green. You just give me half of what you've nicked or I'll tip that copper the wink, and then we'll see."

"You will, will you?" The fellow's insolence drove my nervousness temporarily away. "Two can play at that game, my friend. Policeman!"

I called to a constable, who was slowly sauntering towards us.

Directly I did so, the fellow struck at me, with a bitter oath, and ran away. I waited till the policeman came.

"If you had been here a moment sooner, I'd have given that man in charge."

"What has he been up to?"

"Asked for a shilling. Said that he was starving, and if I didn't give him one, he'd throw me in the river."

"Ah, there's lots of that sort about."

The policeman regarded me with cold, official eyes. I felt that he knew that I had lied. He had his eyes, too, upon the basin underneath my

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arm. I wished that it was in the river. I walked away.

The policeman's eyes went after me. I returned to the Strand. There was a pawnshop at the corner. I saw the ruffian who had struck at me, some half a dozen shops off, evidently watching and waiting for me to come. I darted into the pawnbroker's; but I felt that I had not escaped his eye. I knew that I should find him waiting for me outside.

"What can I do for you?"

There was a spruce assistant behind the counter, regarding me with what, I have no doubt, was his usual air, but which, it seemed to me then, betokened very marked suspicion.

"What can you let me have on this?"

I uncovered the basin and gave it him. He looked at it with evident surprise.

"Is it gold?"

"Solid gold."

"Do you want to sell it?"

"I want to pledge it—though perhaps I might sell it if I got my price."

"Where did you get it from?"

"It is a family heirloom."

He eyed me, and then the basin. He did not seem to think that I looked as though I belonged to a family in which heirlooms—of that sort, at any rate—might be regarded as a rule.

"What do you want for it?"

"As much as you can let me have."

"Wait a moment."

I did. I waited several moments. I waited so long that I began to experience severe discomfort. My nervousness returned. What was going on within? Did they suppose I was a thief? They might at any rate compel me to give a satisfactory explanation of how the basin came into my possession. Rather than do that, I would leave it in their hands. I knew that that vagabond was hanging about for me outside. He would be sure to make a demand for his share of the spoil. The mere fact of my being accosted by such a ragamuffin would make the case suspicious. How should I shake him off? It would end in a row. I should possibly get away—if I got away at all—with a couple of black eyes, and without a penny after all.

The assistant had disappeared with the basin through the glass door into an inner room. Suddenly this door was opened. I heard some one speaking.

“I am convinced that this basin is the one referred to as having been stolen from the Earl of Stair’s. The chasing has been removed, but that is all. The man must be detained.”

The man must be detained. That was me. I was the man referred to. If I were given into custody, I knew now what might follow. Major Bray, for instance, might change his mind. I had only a moment to decide—it was now or never. I did decide. I bolted from the shop.

I ran right into the arms of that blackmailing ruffian, who, resolved that I should not escape

him, was actually waiting for me at the door. The shock of the encounter sent him flying on his back. His mouth vomited forth blasphemy as he fell.

Some one came darting out of the inner room. Some one leaped the counter. There was a cry of "Stop, thief!" With that cry ringing in my ears, I ran for my life along the Strand. It was certainly worth while to be the possessor of that most priceless of all possessions, the Philosopher's Stone!

VI.—REVERSING

I reached my home. I had distanced pursuit, but by a miracle! The cry of "Stop, thief!" had raised such a commotion in the Strand that, in the dim half-light, the traffic was instantly congested—the thoroughfare was blocked. Each man was anxious to seize the malefactor; each man asked his fellow which was he. In the confusion I escaped.

Thank God, I was home at last! Without the basin, without a shilling in my pocket, faint for want of food—I had had nothing to eat all day—fatigued by running and by walking, fatigued still more by the process of mental exhaustion which it had been my lot to undergo since I had left my bed.

I was alone in the house. I was glad of that at first. I locked, barred, and bolted the front door. I knew very well that the pursuit was not

likely to find me there; yet I was not safe. If only locks and bolts and bars would keep them out! I sank down upon the hall chair, utterly worn out. But I could not rest. I got up, and, impelled by an irresistible fascination, I moved towards my laboratory. I thought I heard a voice that called.

“Birdwood! Birdwood!” it seemed to say. Who could it be? Had the statue found a voice?

Outside the door I paused—I trembled. I dared not enter. On the other hand, I dared not stay outside. I listened. I felt sure that I heard a voice within, speaking in a sort of whisper. “Birdwood! Birdwood!” it seemed to say. Had that fool returned to life?

I turned the handle. I threw the door wide open. There is nothing so absurd as to be afraid of the dark. Yet I wonder how much I would have given to have had the place brilliantly illuminated then? I stood upon the threshold. I could feel, if I could not hear, my own heart beat. Who was that? Good God, there was some one who called to me within the room.

“Birdwood! Birdwood!” as I live I distinctly heard the unseen speaker say.

“Who’s that?” I screamed. “Who is that inside my room?”

In a sort of frenzy I rushed in. I searched about me for the matches. I kept exclaiming all the time:

“Who is that? Who is playing tricks with me? Only let me lay my hands on you, my friend!”

I found the matches on the mantelshelf. I struck a light. There was no one in the room—only the statue and I ; the statue in its shroud ! I lit the lamp.

“ I think that after all I shall have to put you in the melting pot—act on Major Bray’s advice—my golden friend. You are too much alive to suit my state of mind.”

It might have been my fancy—of course it was. I saw the canvas move ! I sprang at the statue with a yell. I tore the shroud aside. No ! It *was* but fancy—the thing was dead ! It gleamed at me with all the golden glamour of its madman’s eyes.

“ I shall have brain fever if I don’t take care, go mad like you ! I think you are better in your nakedness than in your shroud. I *can* see what you do.” I dropped the canvas on the floor. “ I must have something to eat and drink.”

But the pantry was on the other side of the house. True, that was not far, perhaps a dozen steps, for the house was but a band-box. Still I could not leave the room. My golden friend forbade it. I dare not disobey the cold command of his glittering eyes.

There was a bottle on the shelf containing a colourless liquid. It was laudanum. I grasped it and put the mouth to my lips.

When I awoke it was broad daylight. I lay upon the floor, a broken bottle by my side. A sickening smell filled the room—it was the laudanum the bottle had contained. My head

was racked with pain. I looked up. There was the statue grinning down at me as I lay, an opium-drinking brute, upon the floor. Crash! Crash! Crash! Some one was knocking at the front door. I staggered to my feet. I tried to collect my senses. Crash! crash! the knocker went again. I staggered towards the door. Trying to realize what it was that I was doing, I unlocked, unbarred, unbolted and threw it open. Some one rushed in and shut it with a bang.

"Who's that?" I managed to gasp out. Directly I had put the question I perceived that it was my wife.

"Robert, I have come to save you—you are my husband after all. What is the matter with you? Are you drunk?"

"Drunk! with the opium I took to kill my brain."

"So already the finger of God has touched you then? But there is a better way than opium, my man. But you must first of all escape, with your body to save your soul. It will go hard with you if they get you in their hands. Williams has charged you with the murder of his master. I believe that your crime has been revealed to him. The police are already on your track. Escape while a way is open, or they will find you here."

She spoke with voluble intensity. I could hardly be said to grasp the meaning of her words. My brain was drugged. It refused to keep pace with her rapid speech.

"Don't you understand me? It is murder

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which brings them here. The avengers of blood are already at your heels."

I moved with languid limbs to the laboratory, where the statue was. She followed me, continuing to address me in a sort of feverish rage.

"You do not seem to haste! Are you mad? Has the crime turned your brain? Every moment may mean to you your life! There is a prison in front and a gallows behind, and, after that, the bottomless abyss."

"Let them come! I am prepared to hang. Better that than a world in which there is nothing else but gold."

"Robert! Robert! Husband!" she cried.

"It is a mistake, this Philosopher's Stone. It is madness, not happiness, it brings. Anguish both of body and of mind."

"Too late! Too late! Oh, if you had been of that mind yesterday. But there still is time to flee. In the future you shall redeem the past."

"Not I. I will not try to flee. Put that fiction out of your mind—no man can redeem the past. It is with him till he dies, taking vengeance all the time. I would rather hang. See, here is the secret of the Philosopher's Stone. Consume it at the lamp."

I handed her that accursed prescription. The lamp was still burning, as it had continued to burn throughout the night. She went and held it in the flame. Suddenly she gave a cry.

"Robert, what is this? The heat is bringing some writing out."

It was as she said. The paper—which was of a curious kind—had not caught fire. Under the prescription was a blank space. On this blank space some writing began to appear before our eyes. It had probably been written by some species of what is popularly known as invisible ink. The heat of the flames was revealing it for the first time after all these years.

“It is some new stroke of irony which fate has in store for us. Perhaps the secret of making silver too.”

My wife held the paper firm. When it seemed that the writing had all appeared, she removed it from the neighbourhood of the flame for the purpose of examination.

“Robert! What is this?”

I took it from her, and read. No matter what were the details of what I read. I thought I had gone mad. Two ingredients were mentioned—two of the simplest ingredients in the whole of the medical pharmacopœia—but two which I do not think were ever before combined, and underneath were these amazing words:

“The above will restore a golden corpse to life!”

I stared at her and she at me.

“Robert, what does it mean?”

“The above will restore a golden corpse to life.” There were the words, glaring me in the face. Already the blood was coursing through my veins. From my brain, as by magic, the last fumes of the laudanum were chased away.

"I will soon see what it means," I cried. "Fetch me a basin or a pan of some sort, quick!"

She hastened away; but I could not wait. There was a large glass retort upon a shelf. The ingredients in considerable quantity—for they were things which I myself continually had in use—were close at hand. With swift, eager hands I mixed them in the requisite proportions. There came a loud knocking at the front door.

"Robert!" cried my wife. "Husband! Here they are!"

"Let them in. I am not afraid." The knocking came again. But already the ingredients were mixed. "Do you not hear me? Let them come in!"

I heard her go along the passage; I heard her undo the door; I heard strange voices and strange steps. I caught up the retort and flung its contents at the statue. It fell, face foremost on to the floor, as though it had been struck a heavy blow. But it fell down a statue and sprang up a living man.

Suddenly that imbecile Williams appeared at the door. I saw a policeman at his back. At the sight of Palmer standing there, in the garb in which he had been born, he ran forward and seized him in his arms.

"Master! master! I thought that you were dead."

While he presented this extraordinary spectacle—embracing a naked man—I held the paper in the flame of the lamp till it was consumed to ashes. Then I crumbled the ashes into dust between my hands, and spread what I could of it out upon the floor.

GIVING HIM HIS CHANCE

SHE started out of dreamless sleep, suddenly wide awake, quivering with apprehension. Some one was knocking, hammering with the knocker, rather, at the front door. Who could it be? What was it? It was still quite dark, especially for that season of the year, when the day began so soon. Who could be out so late—in that solitary place on Dartmoor? There was not another house for two miles, two miles by the shortest way across the moor. She was alone, the only living creature in the house. Her maid's sister had been married that day, over by Chudleigh—she had allowed the girl to go home, and to stay the night. She would be back almost at dawn, but till then she, her mistress, was a good two miles from the nearest living soul. Who could it be, at that hour, who was knocking at the door?

The knocking came again—crash ! crash ! crash ! In the silence it must have been audible for miles across the moor. She scrambled out of bed, opened the window, looked out.

“Who's there?”

"Come down and open this door at once—I'm a warder from Princetown Gaol."

Princetown Gaol? Why, that was—how many miles away, right on the other side of the moor; how came a warder to be there? Hurrying on some clothes, she went quickly down to the door. She turned the key—then hesitated; suppose—but what was the use of supposing—she drew the bolt and opened the door. A man came staggering in without waiting to be asked.

"Why," she exclaimed, "you're no warder."

He was in convict's clothes—hideous breeches, jacket, and stockings, the broad arrow stamped all over them. The lamp she had placed on a bracket in the passage-way shone on him. Her heart jumped into her mouth.

"I am a warder," declared the man, "I'm Warder Crow, of Princetown Gaol. A prisoner got away this evening, we've been following him all night, I and my mates—we lost him in the mist. It's not so bad down here, but up above there it's so thick that you can't see your way. I not only lost my man, I lost my mates too. I was wondering whereabouts they were, and where I was, when some one hit me on the head from behind. I knew who it was without turning to look. He downed me. I don't know what he had in his hand, but he downed me first time; see, he's broken my head right open."

She could see that the hair at the back of his head was all clotted with blood.

"With whatever it was he hit, he knocked me

silly ; as I lay there he stripped me of my uniform. I knew what he was doing, in a sort of a way, but I couldn't move a finger to stop it. Then I went clean off, lost my senses altogether. When I came to I hadn't on so much as a shirt—I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I hadn't ; but there was something lying close by me—it was this rig of his. So I got into it—what else was I to do?—and ever since I've been wandering about, shouting and hollering, trying to find a road or something that would tell me where I was ; the mist up there is still as thick as ever, and it's the first time I've been on this side of the moor. Then there was a break in the mist, and I saw this house just below, and I've been knocking, I should say, half a dozen times before I could get any one to hear. You haven't got a trap or anything of that sort ?”

“ I've nothing of the kind.”

“ But you've got stables.”

“ They're empty. This is let as a furnished cottage, and I'm a summer tenant.”

“ How far am I from Princetown ?”

“ That I could not tell you ; certainly several miles.”

“ Where's the nearest place I can get a trap or some sort of vehicle ?”

“ I should say Tormohan, Farmer Daniel's—that's about two miles across the moor.”

“ Across the moor ? How do you suppose I'm going to find my way across the moor in the darkness in a mist like this ?”

"You asked me a question, and I've answered it."

"How far is it along the road?"

"Much farther and not much easier to find."

The man uttered what sounded very like an oath.

"I suppose there is a high road somewhere. How far am I from it? And when I've found it how far shall I have to go to a place where there's a trap? I can't do much more walking; I'm pretty nearly done."

She gave him the directions he required as best she could. Since it was her first visit, and she had not yet been there three weeks, her acquaintance with the neighbourhood was not much more intimate than his. She said to him as he was going:

"I hope that what you've told me is not false, and that you really are a warder?"

He laughed—not over pleasantly.

"Why, if I wasn't a warder, do you think you'd get off as you are doing? If I was the man we're after he'd have everything about the place worth taking. He'd cut your throat, for—well, I'll put it at half a sovereign, but I shouldn't wonder, if he was a bit pushed, if he did it for less. You may thank your lucky stars I am a warder!"

He vanished in the mist, which all at once had gathered closer round the house. She shut the door, locked and bolted it. Then stood with her hand pressed to her side. What a fright she had! If, as he had said, he had not been a warder, but the awful man of whom he was in pursuit—who

would cut her throat for half a sovereign! Wedding or no wedding, Susan should never have spent the night at home had she dreamt, for an instant, that an adventure of this sort was possible. She had heard of prisoners escaping from Dartmoor, but she had supposed that that happened, as it were, only once in a blue moon; nor had she imagined that the chase ever reached so far as this, across those miles and miles of intervening moorland. When she got upstairs to her room she would thank God on her knees for the escape she had had.

She turned, still trembling, to take the lamp from the stand on the bracket, when there was a sound at the back of the house, the kitchen door was opened, and a man came out into the passage, who pointed a revolver at her head. The thing was so sudden, so unexpected, that sheer surprise deprived her for a moment of the faculty of speech.

“Who was that you were just now talking to?”

The man was asking her a question, still with the revolver pointed at her head. Her senses came back sufficiently to enable her to realize that he was in uniform; to her knowledge she had not seen one like it before, but her intuition told her that it was the uniform of a prison warder. He repeated his inquiry.

“You heard what I asked—who’s that you were just now talking to? I’m an officer of Princetown Gaol. A convict’s escaped. I just caught sight of him at the top of the hill there; he must

have come down to this house. I believe you were just talking to him outside that door—you're helping him to escape. Do you know what the penalty is for any one helping a convict to escape? Don't stand there as if you were dumb. You've got a tongue, I heard it just now. Now let me hear it again, and quick's the word. I suppose you know it's my duty to shoot any one at sight who helps a convict to escape?"

Then an answer did come; that it was nothing like the one he expected, his manner clearly showed.

"Mark!"

"What—who the—good God!—It's Letty Hogarth."

"Mark!" she cried. "Mark Willis! What does it mean? What are you doing here—in that uniform? Tell me, what does it mean?"

Regardless of the weapon he had levelled at her head, she had gone close up to him, and, as if in a sudden frenzy of excitement, was pointing to the garments he had on. The air of authority he had worn seemed to have dropped off him as completely as if it had never been there; he had become all at once a different man—a smaller man. The fear which had shone in her countenance had been transferred to his—he cowered in front of her, seeming, in his turn, to be as speechless as she had been. She, on the contrary, seemed to have regained even more than her natural volubility—words came streaming from her lips.

"Mark, tell me! I don't understand. What

does it mean? What are you doing here, at this time of night—tell me, what are you doing—in these—these things? I don't understand. I thought—they told me that you were—on the other side of the world. Tell me—can't you speak? Tell me, Mark, what you are doing here—in these things?"

He seemed to find it as difficult to answer as she had done a moment ago. He stood before her, with bowed head, the revolver drooping at his side, a pitiful figure of a man who was broken by his shame. He had been so fine a gentleman, holding more than his own with the very best of them—light-hearted, gay, nearly always with a jest on his lips and a smile in his eye. Could this be the same man?

She laid her hand lightly on his arm, as if seeking to give him courage, to put back into him some of the manhood she had known. And she dropped her voice, as if conscious that what they had to say to each other he might not care for all the world to hear—as if there was any one who could hear!

"Mark, tell me; don't be afraid—it isn't like you to be afraid; tell me what this means; I'll try to understand."

One might have thought, from the manner in which she pleaded with him, from the pain which was in her voice, that it was she who had cause to be ashamed, not he.

"Look at me, Mark; please, look—it's only Letty."

But he would not look up; if anything, his head sank still lower. When words did come they were spoken in a voice which no one would have recognized as the one which had addressed her, in such blustering fashion, only a very few seconds before.

“Letty, I—I’ve come to this.”

“Mark—to what?”

“I’m a convict in Dartmoor prison.” She had known what was coming, yet—her heart sank within her. Once before it had sunk very low—then he had been the cause of it; but it seemed to her that that had been as nothing to this. As he went on, in some dreadful, incredible fashion, the life seemed to be oozing out of every pore of her body. “I’ve escaped from gaol; they’ve been chasing me all night—I’ve killed one of them for all I know, one of the warders; this is his uniform that I’ve got on, I left him mine. If they catch me, they’ll take the skin off me with a cat o’ nine tails, and worse than that.”

She did not ask him of what crime he had been guilty; he had been guilty of a crime against her; she had forgiven him that and she could forgive him anything. This man had been her lover; she was to have been his wife; although a man could hardly use a woman worse than he had treated her, although, for very shame, she had not owned it even to herself until that moment, she loved him still.

“They shan’t—catch you if I can help it, you can be sure of that.”

She spoke, as it seemed, with a sharp catching of her breath. For the first time he looked up at her, as if her words had taken him by surprise, as if he had expected her to say something altogether different from what she had said. And when he looked up their glances met; in her eyes there was something which seemed to move him more even than her words had done. She said, in a broken whisper, as if she saw what was passing through his mind :

“Mark—dear Mark, don’t—break my heart by looking at me like that.”

His voice, when he replied, was as broken as hers, but from a different cause.

“Letty, if you only knew what a brute you make me feel. I was in the house when that fellow came to the door just now; if his few wits hadn’t come out of the hole which I made in the back of his head, he’d have searched the place for me; he’s got my clothes and I’ve got his; but, in spite of it, no one will take him for a convict, but they’ll spot me at once. A man can’t be long over there, without getting something which marks him out among other men; he knows it marks him—he feels that every decent man sees ‘convict’ written on his face. I believe there’s never been a case on record of a prisoner getting clear away from Dartmoor; I knew it, but—there was a chance, and I took it—fool that I was! because I had been given good conduct marks which would have earned remission; and now—they’ll catch

me again, flog the skin off my back, take my marks away and increase my sentence. After the way in which I handled Crow, I shouldn't wonder if they made it life."

He spoke with a violence which frightened her; yet she did her best to conceal her fears and to comfort him.

"They shan't catch you, Mark—don't think it; I tell you they shan't catch you if I can help it."

"If you can help it! How do you think that you can help it? They're all over the moor, the hue and cry is out against me, I'm worth five pounds to some one; how do you think I'm going to get clean off?"

"I'm trying to think; give me a moment or two, I'll find out a way; they—they shan't catch you."

"Who's in the house besides you?"

"No one; I'm all alone."

He stared at her, a new something in his eyes.

"All alone? In—this solitary place? Isn't there even a servant in the house?"

"My maid's spending the night with her parents at Chudleigh."

A new something had come not only into his eyes, but into his tone—his bearing; an eager something.

"Letty, the two chief things I want are clothes and money; have you a suit of men's clothes in the house?"

"I'm afraid I haven't."

"Where could you get me one—quickly—now

—at once?” He observed her hesitation. “If you can’t get me a suit of men’s clothes—how big is your servant? Is she as tall as I am? You’re too short.”

“I’m afraid I am: Susan’s bigger than I am.” Her glance was travelling up and down him. “Can’t you wait until the morning? I might manage to find a suit in the morning. I’ll keep you safe.”

“Suppose they come and look for me. Crow may fall in with some of them; when he tells them about this house they’ll tumble to the fool he’s been, they’ll come and search it: I know them. If they do come, how are you going to keep me safe? Listen!—what’s that? Put out the light!—put out that lamp!” He snatched the lamp from her hand and blew it out. “Didn’t you hear? I did; I’ve got sharper ears than you. I need them. Letty, there’s some one coming toward the house. Now, how are you going to keep me safe?”

Her breath was coming in gusts.

“Mark, I’m not so very much shorter than you. I’m as big as that man who was here just now. Take those clothes off: wear mine.”

“What good do you think that would do? Do you think they won’t spot me at sight? They’ll be on to me the moment I start to run; and they’ll shoot at sight.”

“I’ll keep them off for as long as I can.”

“How do you imagine you’re going to do it? You’re talking nonsense. They’re outside; I tell you I’m done.”

"Listen, Mark! I've quite a lot of money upstairs—forty or fifty pounds; it's in a little cash-box in a drawer. I'll go upstairs and get it. You go into that room and take off those things quickly. I'll leave the money on the table and some clothes, which you must try and get on. They'll be old ones; I'm sure you'll be able to manage. You can leave your things in that room. When you come up I'll come down."

"What will be the good of doing that? They're closing in on the house, they've found each other. There's all the lot of them. I'd better make an end of it with this."

He raised the revolver which he had in his hand. She caught at his wrist.

"Mark, don't do that?—you shan't! Give it to me!" Before he knew it she had snatched it from his fingers. "If you do as I tell you—at once, without wasting time, you've a chance—a good chance."

"Letty, don't be a fool! Give me that revolver. You don't know what you're talking about. Where do you think my chance comes in?"

"You're going to get into my things."

"Letty!"

"Quick! I can hear them! Go in there. The moment you have them off come upstairs. I'll be waiting for you with the money. Then—I'll come down."

"But, Letty, I tell you——"

"Tell me nothing! Do what I ask you—quick, Mark!—quick!"

She half-pushed him through a door which opened out of the passage on the right; then, closing it, ran swiftly up the stairs. Reaching her room, dropping on to her knees beside the bed, she crowded into a few flying seconds an agonized prayer. Rising from her knees, there were sounds without; it seemed that she had left her window open when she had gone down to unfasten the door; through it came the tramp of heavy footsteps, a voice which seemed to be issuing orders, a clank as of metal. She took her cash-box out of the drawer, brought it to the table, unlocked it, turned out of it all her precious store. Then, thrusting her feet into her thickest pair of boots, she laced them up. She went to the top of the stairs and listened—how long would he be? The footsteps had halted outside the house. She could not wait. Running down the stairs, she opened the door of the room in which he was.

“Mark, quickly! You’ll find everything ready. The clothes are on the table beside the money. I’m sure you’ll be able to get them on.”

“What’s the use?—they’re here! I don’t know what mad scheme you’ve got in your head, but I tell you——”

“Tell me nothing!—go! Up the stairs, to the right at the top—it’s the room in front of you. I left the door open so that there should be no mistake.”

A scantily clad figure, coming out of the room, passed up the stairs, obeying her injunctions. He

made more noise than she had done, the house seemed to shake as he mounted. She slipped into the room he had left; it was in black darkness, she had to find by the sense of touch the garments he had discarded, of which he had robbed the warder. With amazing rapidity, under the circumstances, she was into them; she had a dressing-gown over her night-dress, to be rid of was the work of an instant. She buttoned up the tunic, tightened the belt about her waist, crammed her hair under the peaked cap. She was ready. What was he doing upstairs? Was he as quick as she was? She had the revolver still; she had brought it down with her. Her impulse was to leave it on the table. God grant that she might not have to use it; but—it might be useful. She went close to the window to listen—some one was outside, it was no use trying that way. She went out of the room to the back of the house. Her idea was to get out of the kitchen window; it was open; some one was without—she could hear him speaking.

“Hullo, here’s a window open—looks as if this might have been his way in.”

A figure appeared outside; she felt sure there was another close by—was she caught like a rat in a trap? It was essential, if her part of the programme was to be carried out, that she should get out of the house—clear away. When she had got a decent start they might see her if they liked—she intended that they should; and, seeing,

they might give chase ; that also she intended. She was fleet of foot ; she counted on them being tired ; they had been out all night ; she ought to be able to keep out of their reach, in the mist and darkness, for, at any rate, a mile. By that time she would be at a distance from the house—he would be able to get off unsuspected in the opposite direction ; he would have his chance.

But this programme would fail at the very start if she could not quit the premises without rushing into their arms. She began to understand what they had been doing ; how it was they were so long in attracting the attention of the inmates of the cottage to their presence. There were outbuildings—stables, a wash-house, a barn ; they had been subjecting these to an exhaustive search before tackling the house. Now the turn of the house had come ; she did not know how many they were, he had not said, possibly he did not know, probably some one had an eye on all the loop-holes of escape. She drew suddenly back closer to the wall ; the man outside was coming through the open window, committing what was very like burglary under cover of the official ægis. She arrived at a sudden decision, slipping round the wall nearer to the window as he scrambled awkwardly into the room. When he was in, he was within a foot of her, though his words made it plain that he saw nothing.

“ It’s dark in here—as bad as it was on top ; can’t see a thing—haven’t you got any matches ? I must have some sort of a light ; if he was in here,

he could down me without my ever knowing who did it."

She had been right—there was some one else without; a second figure appeared outside. If a match were struck—there would be an end of her; she was conscious that the trick she was playing would be detected in an instant—if there was light. Neither of the men suspected, if Mark was to have his chance—it was now or never. She pulled the trigger of the revolver she had in her hand—the muzzle was pointed towards the floor; she had never fired a pistol in her life, she felt now as if she were exploding a dynamite bomb. The noise of the discharge made her jump—but it did not startle her to anything like the same extent that it did those two warders; to judge by their behaviour she might have wounded both of them; both exclaimed—the one without moved aside, the one within, who was probably the more startled of the two, jumped back; in an instant she was past him; through the window, and away. Before either realized what had happened she was a hundred yards off. Then a hubbub arose; she could hear oaths coming from the two startled men; it seemed to her that figures and voices were coming towards her from all sides of the house. Then something happened for which she had not bargained—there was a report, some one had fired at her, she heard the bullet go whistling past, she was not sure it had not grazed her as it went. So taken by surprise was she, just as those two warders had been, that for the

moment she lost her head—stumbled, fell. She was down and up in an instant—but that was an instant too long ; she had lost the start which she had won, they were almost on to her, three or four men seemed to be within a couple of yards of her heels. But she was not caught yet—she was not going to let him lose his chance quite so easily as that ; she knew the ground better than they did—she made for a low wall which divided the garden from the stable yard ; it was only a few inches high, she was over it unscathed ; her pursuers, unconscious that there was such an obstacle, went blundering against it. It seemed that each man, catching at his fellow for support, brought him with him, so that all came down. Blasphemies came volleying after her ; they were not much longer down than she had been. Then a voice rang out.

“Shoot! shoot! Why don't you shoot, you fools?”

Another voice rang out still higher, one which she knew well.

“It'll be murder if you do—it's a woman you're shooting at. I'm up here—at this window. Can't you either hear or see! If you want me you can come and fetch me ; but if you shoot that woman it will be murder!”

Others recognized the voice as well as her ; among them the man who had just called out the order to shoot.

“Oh, you are up there, are you? All right, my lad, we'll come up there and fetch you—you make

no error. You can see for yourself the game's up—are you coming down to us, or have we got to come to you? What fool is that shooting?"

Some one had shot—the shot was followed by a cry, a scream of pain.

"As I live," a hoarse voice exclaimed, "it is a woman, and I've shot her."

The chase was ended, so far as Letty was concerned; she was lying in a bunched-up heap when the warders reached her.

"Why the devil did you shoot?"

The question was asked by the voice which had given the order.

"You said shoot."

"You heard him shouting—you knew it wasn't him."

"Not till it was too late, I didn't."

"Let's hope you haven't killed her."

"You'll pay for it if you have."

Some one came bursting through them—some one who was in woman's clothes, some one who knelt beside the silent form which lay upon the ground.

"Letty, Letty—speak! For God's sake, Letty, speak to me."

She did speak, but what she said he alone heard. As he bent over her, she whispered in his ear,

"Mark, I am so sorry you haven't had the chance I tried to give you."

"Never mind me. Are you much hurt?"

"I don't think so; it's only my leg, that's all."

"Thank God it isn't worse. Letty, you'll see. I hope to show you that you've given me my chance." He stood up. "You've got me. I'm done—only be careful how you handle her."

They could not have borne her into the house more carefully had she been one of their own dear ones. When the daylight came, they left her in her maid's charge, who had returned from the wedding, and the doctor's, who had been fetched from a distance of half a dozen miles.

"It's nothing serious," the doctor told them; "a clean gunshot wound in the leg, that's all—she ought to be about again in a week or two."

"Then," said the recaptured convict, opening his shoulders and drawing a long breath, "I don't care what they do to me; she has given me my chance, and I'll prove it."

He kept smiling to himself as they haled him back to gaol.



TOM'S BARGAIN

TOM bought it from a friend, a bargain ; and he got it at a "ridiculous price."

That friend had had it from another friend, also, I have no doubt, at a "ridiculous price" ; and that friend from another friend, and so on ; so far as I could make out, down the ages it had passed from friend to friend. That fact, if I had been aware of it at the time, ought to have made me suspicious. I don't say that it would have done, I merely say that it ought ; the idea of having a motor-car for our very own so filled my mind with a haze of glory that there was no room for anything in the shape of being suspicious—even if I had known, which I did not.

"How would you like to spend our holidays motoring?"

That was the question which Tom hurled at me as we were going down to mid-day dinner after morning school. I did not attempt to answer ; I withered him.

"How should I like to spend them aeroplaning?"

That simple inquiry was the form my withering took. He did not wince ; he merely smiled.

“Aeroplanes are not, I believe, easily obtainable, as yet. Motors are more within the reach of the man of modest means ; indeed, I’ve bought one.”

Then he told me about the tri-car. I am not prepared to assert, positively, that a tri-car can be accurately described as a motor-car, although Tom said it could ; there were, he said, many varieties of motor-cars, and a tri-car was one of them. I am not going to deny it ; Tom is my husband of several years’ standing, and in those first moments of jubilation I felt that what he said must of course be right ; but since then I have had my doubts. I do not know under what heading of motor-cars tri-cars come ; I know where I should put them if I had my way.

Tom had the programme all cut and dried. The school broke up on the Tuesday ; on the Thursday we were to start for his mother’s. His mother’s house was, so he asserted, well under a hundred miles from ours. That tri-car was credited with the capacity of doing forty miles an hour easily ; directly I heard that I put my foot down.

“Don’t imagine for a moment, Tom, that I’m going at the rate of forty miles an hour. In the first place, it’s against the law ; in the second, it’s dangerous ; in the third, I will not be set down as a road-hog ; and, what’s more, nothing will make me believe that you can see the country properly and in comfort while you are rushing through it at the speed of an express train.”

“I have no more wish to scorch than you have,” observed Tom mildly ; as a matter of fact he is the

mildest of men; I found it rather difficult to conceive of him as scorching. "I imagine that the forty miles can only be done on a good road under favourable conditions. I suppose we shan't average more than twenty."

We did not; his supposition was founded on a rock. I will do him the justice to admit that in sketching out our time-table he did not credit us with even an average speed of twenty miles an hour.

"What we want," he remarked, "is to go along easily and pleasantly, and to see things as we go." That was precisely my view; I told him so. "Then if we allow for an average of say fifteen miles an hour, that ought to be enough, because that will really mean that sometimes we shall probably be going thirty." I acquiesced, explaining that an average of fifteen miles an hour would be quite enough for me. He went on: "What I propose to do is to leave home at nine, and do the first half of the journey before lunch, and the rest afterwards, so that we may arrive at the mother's somewhere about tea time."

The proposal suited me exactly. I am not sure now, if at the back of my mind there was a doubt as to whether it would be carried out in its entirety; the prospect was such an alluring one, and Tom spoke with such an air of conviction that I was not conscious of its presence if it was there. We started that Thursday morning at nine, followed by the good wishes of our maid, and by the cheers of the school-servants and such members

of the staff as were still lingering about the place. My heart beat high in my bosom, as it did each time the holidays began ; but it never had seemed lighter than when, on that morning, we swept past the flower-beds and through the garden gate.

This story is a tragedy ; if it does not seem so to those who read it, it is my fault, not the story's. I had on a new muslin dress ; I rather fancied myself in it ; Tom told me that it became me uncommonly well. Probably when I tell you that neither Tom nor I had ever been on a motor-car before you will understand why, on that occasion, I wore a brand new muslin frock, which I rather liked. Looking back, it is our courage which strikes me most. Tom knew absolutely nothing about machinery, and the constitution of a tri-car was as much a mystery to him as quadratic equations were to the smallest and dullest boys in the school. The friend from whom he had bought the thing had told him that the management of a tri-car was simplicity itself ; so to speak, you had only to touch the button and the engine did the rest. Tom, who was the most credulous of mortals, believed him ; and I, as became a dutiful wife, of course I thought as Tom did. It is only right to say that he had had one or two trials with the thing, under his friend's supervision, with such success that he had become almost persuaded that what he did not know about the working of the tri-car was not worth knowing.

At first everything did go smoothly ; but we had not gone more than three or four miles from home

before several little details were borne in on us. To begin with, I did not like my seat. It was one of those tri-cars in which the driver sits behind and the passenger in front. There was absolutely nothing to shield me either from the wind or dust ; in my raw ignorance I had not supposed that on a calm day, when, to an uninstructed eye, the road seemed in perfect order, there could have been so much of either. Whether it was owing to the position which I occupied on that most uncomfortable machine I cannot certainly affirm, but we had not gone far before it seemed to me that I had been blown nearly to pieces and was dust all over. Never had I seen anything like that tri-car for raising the dust. I had seen motors flashing along the road leaving trailing clouds of dust behind them ; I did not know what we were doing in that direction, and I did not care ; it seemed as if for some occult reason the dust rose in clouds in front of us, and we only left behind such minute particles of it as could not find a lodgment on me. And the wind ! Talk about a hurricane at sea ! Every scrap of clothing I had on me seemed to be doing its best to blow away. The muslin frock was an absurdity. It had promised to be so hot when we started that I had declined to be fastened in with a rug ; the consequences of my refusal were really most disastrous. Tom went gaily on in blissful unconsciousness of the fact that I had not a notion of what direction my skirt would try to blow next. And as to my hat, that pretty hat—oh dear ! what an idiot I was to think of coming out

in a thing like that! I had to hold on to it with all my might to prevent it leaving me entirely; as to my hair, what it must look like I did not venture to think. The idea of enjoying the country was in the highest degree ridiculous when every faculty was occupied with holding my hat on with one hand, and trying to keep my skirt in something like order with the other—to say nothing of the dust. It got into my mouth and eyes; I had no doubt my hair was powdered with it; clearly the first thing I should have to do, before I could face any of Tom's relations, would be to have a bath.

I did not like to stop Tom to tell him what I was suffering; taking it for granted that he was happy, I did not want to spoil his pleasure; but when a stop did come it found me prepared to make the most of it. All the same, I would just as soon it had not come in exactly the way it did. I had been conscious for some little distance of a tendency of the thing not so much to jump as bump.

"If it does that again," I called out to Tom, "I shall be thrown into the road."

I was gripping both sides of the seat to save myself from a disastrous fate, and as I wanted two hands to keep myself in order, the position was not a nice one. I could not tell whether it was because the engine, or something, was making such a noise, or because, owing to the dust which entered my throat every time I opened my mouth, I did not speak loud enough; but, for some reason, Tom seemed not to pay the slightest heed to the observation I made. There came a bigger bump

than ever. Not only did my hat seem to be flying backwards, and my clothes to be coming right off me, but I myself was sent a good foot from the seat, and how I ever got back on to it is a miracle.

"Tom!" I yelled—and that time I did yell. I had to, dust or no dust; as the bumping seemed to raise more of it than ever, I believe that in one single instant I swallowed a pint. But in spite of my yell Tom's conduct was most unsatisfactory.

"Confound the thing!" was the only observation I heard him make. What he was "confounding" I could not be sure, I could only hope it was not me. But when, without the slightest warning, just as it seemed about to start on a bigger bump than ever, it stopped dead, then I began to have some glimmering idea as to the meaning of his words. I was not shot out into the road—not quite; but I felt as if every bone had been wrenched out of place; as for my hat—I was conscious that that was suspended by a single hatpin. With what, under the circumstances, was surprising mildness, I observed to Tom:

"I really wish you wouldn't stop quite so suddenly."

"You don't suppose it was I who stopped," he retorted. "It was the engine which stopped, and almost threw me on the top of you."

I thanked goodness it had not done that. I should certainly have been shot out on to the road, Tom would have come on to me, the tri-car would have gone over me, and my first motor-ride would have been my last. As it was, I got

out of my place and was glad to feel the solid ground beneath my feet.

"Where are we?" I inquired.

"This is Windmill Hill; Rogers told me that the thing wasn't very good at hills, and it has refused to take it."

Rogers was the friend from whom he had bought the car. He had apparently spoken the truth in saying that the thing was not good at hills, because Windmill Hill was the merest slope, and why it should stop at the very beginning of it seemed strange.

"What made it bump like that?" I asked.

"I was trying to change the gear."

"Oh!"

That was all the answer I could manage. I was wrestling with my hat, and other things; and, also, I did not know what the "gear" was. Tom proceeded to explain; at least, I suppose he meant his remarks to be taken as an explanation.

"Unlike many tri-cars, this one has three speeds forward and a reverse. I was trying to get on to the second—that is, I think it's the second, because I'm not sure if we've been on the second or third; but whatever we've been on I was trying to change to the other, but somehow it didn't work smoothly, and that is why it bumped—at least I suppose so, I don't know of any other reason; and now it's stopped."

He made the last remark with the air of a man who had made a discovery. For the first time I was conscious of something which might have been, as it were, a qualm of doubt. Suppose there

was something about that tri-car with which Tom was not so intimately acquainted as he supposed? However, it was no use worrying about trifles of that sort now that we had fairly started; so I put the thought as far behind me as I conveniently could. Besides, a much more pressing matter was to discover a means of keeping my hat in something like a decorous position, to say nothing of the rest of my attire.

"Just look at me—what a sight I am! You know, Tom, I really must have something to keep my hat on straight, and my skirts in their place."

"You do look rather an object; your hat's on one side of your head and your hair on the other."

"Do you think I don't know that?" His was just the sort of remark a husband would make when you are looking for sympathy. "As, thanks to you, I have brought nothing with me, even as much as a handbag, perhaps you'll be able to lend me a pocket handkerchief which will be large enough to tie my hat on with."

All our luggage had gone on in front; and as Tom said that it was absolutely essential that we should carry as little weight as possible, I had not even brought with me another pair of gloves. I was already beginning to regret it; the ones I had on were rapidly becoming sights. With Tom's pocket handkerchief I tied my hat on somehow, using his watch-glass as a mirror; twisted my new muslin frock tightly round me, ruining it, I felt convinced, for ever; and repacked myself on that most uncomfortable seat in a way which I fondly

hoped would keep my skirts from blowing up, though I had no doubt it would complete the work of ruin. Then we started off again—or rather, the engine started, but we stood still.

“The worst of this tri-car is,” Tom explained, “that, as Rogers told me, on a hill you have to give it a push to get it well started. If you’ll stop where you are I’ll give it a shove.”

I stopped where I was, and he gave it a “shove”; that is he induced it to make a sort of sideways movement which almost turned it over, and me also. He repeated this performance two or three times, till I had had about enough of it; but further than that nothing happened.

“I’m afraid you’ll have to get out and help me shove; you’ll be able to get back on to your seat when the car is well started.”

The notion was not an agreeable one; I told him so.

“My dear Tom, if I have to get out and help you what you call ‘shove,’ and then have to scramble back into the seat while the thing is going, what will become of my skirt now that I have it so nicely twisted round me?”

“Oh, bother your skirt!” was the remark he made.

Then I knew that some of the joy of motoring was gone for Tom, or he would never have said a thing to me like that. There is no one who loves to see me looking nicer than my husband does, and I was quite sure he would never speak like that of my pretty skirt if everything was going well. I did get out and help him “shove”; I put

into the act of "shoving" every ounce I could ; we both of us did. But the car stood still ; though the engine was making noise enough for two. When I say that the car stood still I mean that it stood still when we ceased to "shove" ; so long as we pushed for all that we were worth, it slowly mounted that foolish slope which was so slight as scarcely to entitle it to call itself a hill.

It reached the top at last with our assistance. By that time I felt as if, to put it mildly, I had walked five miles. This was a kind of motoring for which I was not prepared.

"Are there," I inquired, "many hills upon the road you have chosen?"

Tom had his cap off and was wiping his brow, with what appeared to be a second handkerchief. It seemed lucky that he had two, since one was round my hat. He had done the major part of the "shoving"; I have known him walk ten miles and seem less heated. No one knows what it means to push a tri-car up even a moderate slope till he has tried.

"As a matter of fact," he observed, "there are two or three hills compared to which this one is a mere nothing." He looked back the way we had come with an air of distinct satisfaction. "Rogers said the thing goes better when it gets really warm ; let's hope it gets that before we come to something that's really a hill."

"If it is really a hill it seems to me it will have to get red hot if you wish to climb it unassisted."

Tom seemed to think that I wished my words to be taken literally.

"Excuse me, Louisa, but I hope it will get nothing approaching red hot. How do you suppose I am going to keep my seat if it does, perched, as it were, over a fiery furnace? And you, on the seat in front, you would suffer serious inconvenience, if nothing worse."

That tri-car could go down hill if it could not get up. The descent was much sharper than the rise had been ; it went down it in style ; that is, in a style of which I extremely disapproved. I doubted, at one point, if I should ever reach the foot alive, to say nothing of safely. It was a winding hill, with hedges on both sides. Tom went round the corners in a way which, to me, sitting in front there, seemed almost criminal. Never before had I been conscious of a feeling of such utter helplessness. He never sounded the horn ; I felt certain he had not put the brakes on ; we whizzed round the corners without having a notion of what was beyond, and the steering was dreadful. We were nearly into the hedge on one side of the road and then on the other ; to avoid utter disaster Tom wrenched the thing round in a way which again and again nearly jerked me from my seat. Never had I been so bumped about. Talk about enjoying the country ! Not only was there nothing of it to be seen, but constantly we could not see even a dozen yards ahead of us, the road so twisted and turned.

Once there nearly was an end of us, especially of me. Throughout I was conscious that if any thing happened to either of us it would be sure to happen

to me; that was the charm of having to hang on for dear life to the sides of that horrible seat. We had just come tearing round one corner, and went flying round another, when I all at once became aware that the gradient had suddenly increased. The road narrowed into little more than a lane, the hedges had grown higher, the turnings and twistings were worse, and the descent had become really precipitous.

"Tom," I demanded, "why don't you put the brakes on?"

I had very little breath left with which to shout; but though I used all I had my question seemingly went unheeded by Tom. Down we went, faster and faster, and just as we had rounded another corner at certainly forty miles an hour, I realized that a vehicle of some sort was coming up the hill, and the driver of the vehicle realized that we were coming down. Do not tell me that this is not an age of miracles, it was only by a miracle that we escaped complete destruction. I shut my eyes with a gasp and held on tighter; I did not see how we could escape that horse and cart. But we did, and I have no doubt that the driver was as much surprised as we were. I did think that that would be a lesson to Tom, and that he would have slowed. Down, down, down round corner after corner, and then, literally before I knew it, I was in the hedge, and brambles and all sorts of things were scratching me to pieces. I felt that some frightful catastrophe had happened until I was reassured by Tom.

"Thank goodness," he said, "the thing has come to a standstill."

I was vaguely conscious that the words were uttered with what sounded very like a sigh of relief. I looked about me, as well as I could ; and realized that, as Tom put it, the thing had come to a standstill without apparently either of us suffering positive injury. Tom had scrambled off his seat and was addressing me.

“ Can’t you get out of that ? ”

“ How can I,” I inquired, “ when I’m in the very middle of the hedge ? ”

His reply was not very reassuring.

“ It’s lucky you’re in no worse place. If you’ll sit still I’ll drag the thing back.”

I did sit still ; I could not see what else there was for me to do ; he dragged it back on to the road. He had run off it some distance in order to get into the hedge. I descended ; what was left of me.

“ Tom,” I said, more in sorrow than in anger, “ I never thought you could have been capable of such conduct.”

“ What do you mean ? ” he asked.

“ You know perfectly well what I mean. We might have been killed half a dozen times, to say nothing of killing other people ; how we escaped that cart I don’t understand. Why did you come down an unknown hill like that ? ”

To my surprise, instead of showing signs of penitence, my most reasonable question seemed to make him angry.

“ You don’t suppose I wanted to come down the hill like that.”

He actually glared at me,

"Then why did you come? Why didn't you stop the engine, or apply the brakes, or do something? I suppose there are brakes."

"I suppose there are—but I couldn't find them."

"You couldn't find them?"

"Not at the moment I couldn't. There was the thing running away."

"Running away? Do you mean to tell me, Tom, that the machine was running away?"

"What else do you suppose it was doing? The thing began running away directly we started; I tried to stop it, but I must have caught hold of the wrong handle or done something I oughtn't to have done, because it went all the faster. I tried to get hold of one of the brakes; it was all I could do to stick on and steer her, I simply didn't dare to let go; so there it was. I tell you what it is, Louisa, there's more about the engine of a tri-car than you might think."

"You might at least have sounded the horn to let people know we were coming."

This perfectly sound suggestion seemed to make him angrier still.

"Sound the horn! Don't I tell you that I didn't dare to let go of the handles even for a moment? We should have been killed to a certainty if I had."

"I know one thing, the very first place we come to I'll buy a horn of my own, and I will do the sounding. At least innocent wayfarers shall have some sort of warning of the dreadful fate which is rushing on to them."

At a village we came to some little distance farther on I bought a horn ; and there also Tom took a lesson from the proprietor of the cycle shop in the art and mystery of the engine of a tri-car. As I looked on and listened I learnt two things ; one was how much really wanted knowing, and the other was how little Tom really seemed to know. If, before, I had appreciated the position as I began to appreciate it then, I should never have left home on that motor tour—with Tom in charge. To make matters better, that cycle man was candid to a fault. Not only, it seemed, did that tri-car belong to an extinct species, but it was an example of the survival of the unfittest, since, according to the cycle man, there never had been anything in the species that was worth anything at all. It was full of faults. It was complicated, unreliable, even dangerous. It never had been worth anything even in its palmyest days ; but now—the expression on that cycle man's countenance rounded off the sentence which he left unfinished. It wanted this doing to it and that ; he did do one or two things, which occupied the better part of two hours, for which he charged quite a nice little sum. But even when he had done them and we were once more about to start, he assured us quite frankly, that he would much rather that we should travel by it than that he should.

This was pleasant hearing. We felt, when we had left him behind, that that type of man was rather a pleasant sort of person. One of the ideas underlying the expedition was that it should

be inexpensive. Although Tom had got it at a "ridiculous price" the tri-car had cost what to us was a considerable sum. The idea had been that as its original cost had practically been the entire sum we had planned to spend upon our holiday, our holiday should cost us nothing more. Here, almost at the outset, was the cost of the horn, and of that cycle man's repairs; added to which was his dreadful candour. We had gone quite a distance, and were quite clear of the village before either of us had heart enough for conversation. Then as we were going very slowly, I should say not more than eight miles an hour, we did begin to talk, more seriously than we had ever meant to. The upshot of it was that we decided that that cycle man was a most objectionable creature; and that even if there was anything in what he said to the detriment of Tom's excellent bargain—and we doubted if there was, because what could a country joskin know about a tri-car—it was no business of his. All that was required was that Tom should have a little practice; and he had had that already. He assured me, and I believed him, that he would not come down another hill as he had come down the last; and that if he did not get up the next one without any "shoving," he would know the reason why.

"The way to take a hill," that cycle man had said, "is to rush it. Go for it for all you're worth; if you go for it hard enough there are very few hills which on a tri-car—that is a tri-car—you oughtn't to get up on your top speed. I know



I would. Why, I took my wife once round the lakes on a tri-car—that was a tri-car, that was; there are some hills there, but there wasn't one of them gave me any trouble, not one."

We did not even wish to think that the man was nothing but a liar. We know the Lake Country; if he had romped up those hills as he said he had, then Tom was clear that he would not allow the apology for hills which we should have to encounter to bother him.

We did get up the next hill rather well, after a fashion. Directly he saw it Tom went at it full speed; it seemed to me that he began the full speed a little too soon; when that car went fast it did give me a shaking—but we got up the hill; and, by way of a little variety, we stuck going down it. That was because he had taken too much to heart my injunction to go slow and put on the brakes; I undertook to sound the horn—my own horn which I had just purchased with my own money. Tom said that the continual noise I made caused him to do something or other which he ought not to have done, and that it was that which stopped the engine. Anyhow, it would not start again, although we let the thing free-wheel down the hill as if it were a common bicycle. It ran down all right, but as soon as it reached the level it declined to go any farther; and nothing that Tom could do would induce it to go. We spent at the foot of that hill the best part of another two hours, and I daresay should have been there still if a real large motor

car had not come along, the driver of which stopped at sight of us, and asked if there was anything he could do. Tom explained, and in the nicest possible way the driver got down and began to search for the cause of our trouble. He presently announced that it was the sparking plug that was at fault. He seemed to know what he was talking about, but as it was the sparking plug we had just paid that cycle man to attend to, we hardly knew what to make of it. However, he went to a box in his motor and took out something, and then he did something to something on our tri-car, and put his something in the place of our something, and behold! it sparked. At any rate the engine began to make the noise which it had refused to make before. Our gratitude was quite beyond anything—especially mine; I had a notion that Tom was feeling that he had been made to look rather small and was not enjoying himself as much as he had meant to do. The driver of the motor made nothing at all of the matter, and would hardly let us thank him. He went his way and we went ours—thanks to him.

We did the best run we ever did do. Tom calculated that we did six or seven miles without having trouble; that is, practically. The engine did not run quite so evenly as we should have liked; Tom owned that he did not know why. Sometimes we would crawl along a perfectly level road at the rate of three or four miles an hour, and then, as Tom maintained, without his

doing anything, or without his having the slightest warning of what was about to happen, it would dash off at quite thirty. Once, so unexpected was this quickening of the speed, that Tom was all but thrown off on top of me. It was rather a thrilling moment. As usual, we were going round a corner, as we always seemed to be doing when the worst was happening; there was a ditch on one side; I thought we were in it; because, realizing that Tom was in trouble, I knew that he had lost control of the steering; but with great presence of mind he managed to retain his seat, and to twist the car half round, nearly into a ditch on the other side. I lost a hatpin, which must have been working loose for some time and almost stuck into him; but as we were going so well just then, Tom thought it a pity to stop and look for it. He explained to me afterwards that the flight of that hatpin past his cheek so took him aback that he really could not have stopped the engine if he had wanted to; if I had known that at the time I should have borne my loss with more equanimity. I do not pretend that I was enjoying myself; because I had long since made up my mind that, blown about by the wind, and smothered by dust, on the front seat of a tri-car, I never could do that; but at any rate we were getting along somehow, and I had arrived at a point at which that was a state of things for which to be thankful; and I daresay we should have continued to get along, somehow, if—well, I am coming to that. It is one of my most tragic memories.

We were going down still another hill—for some reason which I do not pretend to understand, Tom had chosen a road which was all ups and downs—very slowly; since our first hill, Tom seemed to have made up his mind that the best way to go down hill was at a funeral pace.

“Don't you think,” I ventured to suggest to him, “that if you were to go a little faster we should be in no danger of getting stuck half way?”

To say a thing like that to Tom is fatal. No sooner were the words out of my mouth than we simply flew. He might have given me some sort of a hint, but that was not his way; that I found the greatest difficulty in keeping myself from being flung out of both sides of the car at once seemed nothing to him. Whether it was a peculiarity of the car or Tom's driving I cannot say, but whenever we changed our pace either to go quicker or slower, we did it with a jerk which always caught me unprepared, and invariably hurt. I knew perfectly well that at the end of the day I should be black and blue—and aching. I knew that having once started it would be useless to ask Tom to try to find a pace which was something between that of a funeral and an express train, because at the best it would only result in my being jerked to pieces, so I tried to keep myself from being hurled into the neighbouring field, and hoped that too many of my garments would not be blown off by the way. As for the dust in my eyes and mouth—sometimes I dream

of it now. I had a strong suspicion, from the way we were travelling, that the engine had once more taken matters into its own hands, and that again we were running away, and could only trust that we should get safely round the corners somehow and find nothing to collide with.

We had just turned a corner and found that there was a long stretch of straight road running down on to the level beneath. About a couple of hundred yards off was a herd of cows, going, as cows do, all over the place at their own sweet will. Whether they were in charge of any one I could not make out, but, as is the way with cows, they were paying very little attention to their guardian if they had one.

“Look out!” I shouted to Tom. “Cows!”

It seemed unnecessary information to impart, because it was quite certain he must have seen them, though you would never have guessed it from the rate we were going. In a very few seconds, if he did not do something to the engine, which, so far as I could judge, he was not doing, we should be into those cows, and on top of them and among them, and goodness only knows where. There were probably thirty of them, and there was not room for a bicycle to slip between them, to say nothing of a tri-car. I sounded my horn as hard as ever I could, and I kept on sounding it, although, to enable me to do so, I had to let go of the sides of the car and run frightful risks; but the cows paid not the slightest attention. I became conscious that a small boy was about a

quarter of a mile behind them, whom I presumed was supposed to be in charge of them, but what he could have done if he had wanted to do anything, I do not know; he seemed no more moved by the noise I made than the cows.

Like an arrow from a bow we went, only a great deal more noisily, and I knew that all was over; even in that terrible instant I wondered, if we came out of it alive, how we should pay for the cows which we killed—there would certainly be an end of the tri-car. If those cows were slow in appreciating the situation, when they did, what a hubbub arose! What a picture it would have made for a painter—or a comic artist! In the middle of the tumult I was conscious that we must look funny.

I had never dreamt that cows could jump as those cows did, or had a tithe of their activity. They sprang several feet into the air; it seemed to me that some of them must have leaped over each other's backs; there was a whirlwind of movement—but they avoided us. It seemed incredible, and it was wonderful, but when the moment of danger came each of those awkward-looking creatures showed herself to be possessed of sufficient presence of mind and agility to get out of the way. We were through them without having killed or wounded one. And when we were through, now that immediate danger seemed past, the car not only slowed, but stopped dead—which, I presume, was in accordance with Tom's notions of careful driving. So far as I was con-

cerned, the sudden stoppage was the last straw. One cow was behind the rest ; if you know anything about cows you will notice that there always is one well in the rear, and there was then. She had seen the amazing thing which had descended upon her sisters, and cousins, and aunts, and she saw us, as she supposed, making a wild charge towards her. She raised herself on her hind legs, with a possible intention of letting us pass under her ; but Tom, with that sense of propriety which I was beginning to discover was a peculiarity of his, in bringing the car, without the slightest warning, from a rate of about fifty miles an hour to a dead standstill, thought it right to swerve to one side, so that we were at the back of the cow instead of the front. Tom had proved himself too much for the creature in spite of her sagacity. If she had dreamt that we were going to that end of her, she would probably have raised her hind legs. As it was, taken wholly by surprise, in her bewilderment, she raised her fore legs higher than she meant to do, and—it is an absolute fact !—she sat down on me.

Whether I was more amazed, or the cow, I am at a loss to say. Tom's remark was characteristic :

“What the dickens,” he inquired, “is the creature doing ?”

As if he did not know ! As if he could not see ! I said :

“My dear Tom, she's sitting on my knee.”

The bare fact that I made that statement shows I had not altogether lost my wits. The cow sat

there for quite an appreciable space of time ; then flutteringly lowered herself on to her front legs and gently ambled off. The small boy came up.

"What are you doing with that cow?" he asked.

"What," I asked in return, "has your cow been doing to me? Do you know that she has been sitting on my new muslin frock?"

There were unmistakable signs to prove it. But that small boy seemed to think that it was I who had been the aggressor, not the cow. He was scarcely ten years old, and was under four feet high ; but as he straggled past us he regarded us with an air of contempt that was not pleasing to behold.

"I suppose," I observed to Tom, when the cows and the boy had gone, "the engine ran away again."

"Well, it was not exactly that," he said. "I suppose I must have accelerated it instead of shutting off the gas." I did not know what he meant ; I did not care to inquire ; I doubted if he knew himself. Poor Tom ! I felt sorry for him ; he did look so worried and he was such a sight. His face was covered with dust and perspiration ; the use of a handkerchief only resulted in smudges. "I'm rather beginning to wish," he admitted, "that I hadn't been tempted by the price to buy this tri-car off Rogers."

That was an admission which as yet I had not openly made ; but within it was there before we had travelled a couple of miles.

"I think," I hinted, "if you were to stick to our original programme and try to average fifteen miles an hour, it would be just as well."

"It's all very well to talk about averaging, but to tell the truth, I don't know what it's going to do and what it isn't. I'm beginning to have a feeling that touching this engine is like playing with dynamite : I never know when it's going to go off."

I had suspected it all along ; now I knew ; but I was too much of a sportsman to take advantage of his frankness to rub it in. But I formed an internal resolution, and although I said nothing of it to him I put it into practice later on.

A crowning ignominy awaited us. After the episode of the cow we proceeded on our way—wobbled, would be a better word than proceeded, because ours was nothing but a wobbly progress. That engine was proving altogether too much for Tom. Most of the courage, born of ignorance, with which he had attacked it at the first, had gone ; nervousness supervened. He tried to realize our programme and to average that fifteen miles ; but it was a dismal failure. As I have said, the engine proved too much for him. Now we would spurt along at some incredible speed ; then, in his endeavours to bring it back to a more reasonable rate, would crawl instead ; scarcely ever did he succeed in reaching the just medium, then only for a few seconds at a time. A nice time I had. I knew that if I looked anything like I felt I must be frightful to behold. My hat was somewhere on my head—I did not quite know where ; my hair was

anyhow ; my frock was ruined, and I was covered with a thick powder of dust from head to foot. As for bruises—it seemed to me that all my bones had been shaken out of their sockets ; I doubted if I should be able to move in comfort for a month to come ; all ideas of pleasure had vanished ; I was hazily wondering to what point the agony would be prolonged.

It came to a sudden termination, I don't know how many miles farther on ; it seemed a hundred. I all at once became aware that Tom was having trouble with the engine—unusual trouble ; he was always having trouble of some kind, but that was of an uncommon kind. Instead of moving forward, the car seemed to be doing its best to bound into the air, with me on the front seat. Articulate speech was impossible ; I stammered out an inquiry.

“What—what's the matter—with the thing? Do—you think—it's going to blow us up?”

Tom did not answer, and the engine did not blow us up ; it stopped instead ; so far as we were concerned, for the last time. I got out of my seat—how glad I was to be able to do it ! Tom got down, and began to potter about with the works as if he could do anything. I said nothing, I looked on. At last he owned that he was beaten.

“I rather fear that this is a bit beyond me. I don't know if it's the sparking plug or what it is, but there's something wrong.” I knew that without his telling me ; my impression was that there had been something wrong ever since we started. He looked round the country, with dust and grime-

filled eyes. "There don't seem to be many people about, do there?"

He had not an elegant way of expressing himself, but I was of his opinion : there did not seem to be a creature within miles ; he had chosen the loneliest part of the country for a breakdown. I am afraid to say how long we stayed there, hoping that another real motor-car would come along, whose driver would again play the part of a good Samaritan. But none ever came. At last Tom trudged off in search of assistance, leaving me to mind the tri-car ; and after such a period of waiting, what assistance he brought ! A horse, a farm-horse, really and truly the biggest equine quadruped I ever saw, big, and gaunt, and bony. That was a day of wonders ; I had not imagined that there could exist so huge a creature. And when they harnessed it to our small tri-car, that was, as I have heard boys say, "the limit." Surely no comic artist could ever do it justice. If it had not been so tragic I could have split my sides.

It was a long procession ; it continued for miles. They said it was four miles to the next village ; it seemed to me to be fourteen. And when we got there I am inclined to the opinion that every inhabitant turned out to see the show. It was a wonderful spectacle.

We did the rest of the journey by train. I have not been in that tri-car since. Unfortunately, up to the present Tom has not succeeded in passing it on to a friend at a "ridiculous price."

THE PRISONER

I COULD not understand a word he said. I can speak French a little, I can ask for the things I want in German, but of the language which they speak in Luxembourg I know nothing—and he evidently knew nothing else.

I was walking back from the ruins of Bourschied Castle to Diekirch, by the banks of the Sûre—all alone. I had left Evelyn at Diekirch. She was not feeling very well ; and as it was such a glorious day, it seemed ridiculous to stay mooning in the garden of the hotel as she was doing—especially as I was feeling that I must do something. So I had trained to Bourschied and was walking back. When I was in what seemed the loneliest part of the valley, with the river brawling on my right, and the hills rising precipitously on either hand, I suddenly heard a shout. It came from above. Looking up, I saw tearing down a hill in front of me, a man. It was he who had shouted—as a matter of fact he was shouting still, though of what he said I had not the faintest notion.

I could not make out what he was after. He seemed to be in a tremendous hurry. He had on neither coat nor cap, and was waving a stick as he

came down—he might have been a tramp of the country, or he might have been anything. I did not altogether like the look of him ; I hurried on. When he saw that I was going to pass the point at which he would reach the road, he shouted louder than before, and hurried faster ; indeed, he shouted so loud that his voice seemed to wake echoes on all sides. He changed the direction of his descent, passed over a bluff, and slightly to my discomfiture, when I passed round a bend in the road I found him there already, awaiting me.

As I came up he began to talk, as it seemed to me, at the rate of about a dozen words a second ; and, as I have already remarked, I could not understand a single word he said. He was a biggish man, baked almost brown by the sun, with a rough thatch of brown hair, and an unruly, straggling moustache. So far as I could judge, he only wore a shirt and trousers ; his shirt was wide open at the neck ; his hairy chest seen beneath seemed to suggest that he was brown all over. And he had that great stick in his hand. Whether he was a Luxembourg equivalent for a bigand, or what he was, I had not the least idea. He seemed desperately anxious for me to do something—what, I could not guess. It would have been comical if he had not been so excited, and looked so wild, and I had not been so utterly alone.

The last condition, however, all at once ceased. Two men I had not hitherto noticed, who were apparently working by the river, came straggling towards us across the fields. I hoped, when I saw

them coming, that one of them would be able to speak a language which a civilized being could understand. Nothing of the kind. Luxembourg-geoise was all they knew. Presently they were all three of them shouting at me together, three big men at one not over-large girl. Seeing that words conveyed no meaning, they tried pantomime instead. They kept pointing up the hill down which the first man had descended. It seemed that they wanted me to go up it, why, I had no notion ; not only did they want me to go up it, but presently they began to make me ; the three of them began partly to push, and partly to drag me up the slope. It was most disconcerting. I was not exactly afraid ; but I certainly did wish that I had stayed with Evelyn in the hotel gardens at Diekirch. When I shouted for help and tried to resist, they seemed to pause to hold a council of war. Then, just as I thought that they were going to allow me to continue my walk in peace, they all three closed in on me and had borne me thirty or forty feet up the slope before I really knew what they were doing.

To resist would have been both undignified and absurd ; startled as I was, I realized that much—I was like a baby in their hands. They practically carried me up that steep hill as easily as if I had been one. That I was the subject of an outrage I had no doubt whatever ; every Englishwoman who is handled like that is the subject of an outrage ; but what object they had in view was beyond me altogether. I kept talking and expostulating as far as my scanty stock of breath permitted ; they

kept shouting, and pushing, and hauling, and carrying me altogether. In a surprisingly short time we reached the top; they must have had feet like chamois—there were parts of that ascent which I certainly should not have cared to have attempted alone. All at once we reached comparatively level ground, which was covered by fir-trees, which, so far as the eye could reach, ran straight up towards the sky, like columns in a cathedral. They hustled me through the trees as they had hustled me up the hill. Presently we came upon a hollow in which was some sort of a hut, quite one of the most rudimentary structures I had ever seen. It had no door: I was borne through where one ought to have been. In what seemed to be one bare room, lying on a sort of bed in the corner, was some one, who exclaimed, the moment I appeared:

“Can you speak English?”

It was a most welcome sound; I do not think I ever heard my own tongue with greater pleasure. The speaker was something masculine; quite what, in the dimness of the badly lighted hut, I could not make out.

“I certainly can speak English,” I replied, “because I am English; and I should like to know what these men mean by behaving in the way they have done, and why I’ve been brought here at all.”

“I’m afraid,” said the voice in the corner of the room, “that the fault is mine. I’m in rather a hole.”

The coolness of this took me aback; that I should have been dragged there in that fashion

because a perfect stranger happened to be in what he called "rather a hole."

"I'm very sorry," I told him, "but I really don't see what business that is of mine. I don't think you can be aware how disgracefully I've been treated."

"I can only express my regrets; but—the truth is I can't speak the language of the country."

"Can't speak the language of the country?" I echoed. "Do you think I can? I can't speak a single word."

"Then that's it."

"What's it?" The speaker's tone struck me as most peculiar.

"I fancy it is because you can't speak a word of the language of the country that they've treated you as they have done. They wanted to make you understand that I couldn't either, and that was the only way they had of doing it."

"I never heard of such a monstrous thing; in fact it's so monstrous that I—I don't know what you mean."

"If you will permit me I will try to tell you. The truth is, I've been nearly murdered."

"What?" I actually jumped; I took it for granted that he had been attacked by those dreadful men, and that a similar fate probably lay in store for me. But I was altogether wrong, as he presently made plain.

"I'm on a walking tour, and was walking from Wiltz to Diekirch. I sat down to rest and have my lunch under the firs by the side of the road. Presently some one came along on a bicycle. At

sight of me he stopped and asked, 'Are you English?' He alighted when I told him that I was and, although not at my invitation, he came up to me and began chatting. He was a very odd-looking man, and wore an old grey suit of surpassing shabbiness. I don't know if you can see it, the light isn't over good, but it's lying on the floor over there. I went to fill my drinking-cup at a little stream which ran among the trees, and while I was bending over, without the slightest warning, he—not to put too fine a point on it—knocked me senseless. There I must have lain until our friend here came and found me."

"Do you mean the man who came to me down the side of the hill?"

"Exactly; at least I suppose he came to you. When I returned to life I was still lying by the side of the stream, practically naked, and our friend was bending over me. He spoke to me, but I could not understand a word he said. As my senses returned, my first impulse was to conclude that I owed my condition to him—he was rather a rough-looking specimen. Then I recalled my English friend, and it all came back. Even while I lay unconscious, I had had a sort of hazy feeling that he was mishandling me. It seemed that he had taken himself off with my clothes and left his own instead—it was a pretty bad exchange for me; he not only took my clothes, but my knapsack, my money, my watch and chain, my return ticket to London, everything. Although he could not understand a word I said, my

rough-looking friend played the part of a good Samaritan. He bore me to this hut of his, and then, it seems, he went in search of some one who could speak my own tongue. I don't know if it's unfortunate from your point of view, but it seems that the first such person he lighted on was you."

I hardly knew what to say, it was such a very surprising position. To say the least of it, it did seem a high-handed thing to have done, to have dragged me from the valley below because on the hill above there was a strange man who wanted some one who could speak English. At the same time I realized that if the stranger's tale was true, his plight was a pretty bad one. So, for the moment, I ceased to show the resentment which I was quite entitled to feel. I put to him what might be called a sympathetic question—at least I meant it to be sympathetic.

"Are you very badly hurt?"

"I've a cracked skull and a broken leg."

"A broken leg? Oh dear! can't you walk?"

"If I could walk do you suppose I should be lying here? I should have been at Diekirch long ago. I couldn't hop there and carry a broken leg over my arm."

There was a bitterness in his tone which made me suddenly start thinking.

"Are you in pain?"

"Pretty bad; if any one is in worse I'm sorry for him."

Then I realized what a little brute I was, because all at once he moved and I could see his

face quite well ; it was so white and drawn, although he was quite young and quite good-looking. The worst of it was, I felt so useless. I am not one of those sensible girls who are brought up in the knowledge of how to render first aid to the injured ; I knew no more about broken legs than a child of three. I always have said you cannot know too much ; how insignificant I felt then because I knew so little. I confessed to him what a helpless little wretch I was.

“What can I do? I’m afraid I know nothing about how to treat broken legs or—or that sort of thing. I’m positively useless.”

“You can at least go to Diekirch and send some one from there who does know something ; and, if you won’t mind my saying it, the sooner you do send some one the better.”

Then I tried to explain to those three men. I endeavoured to make them understand that I was going to Diekirch in search of a doctor, whom I would send as soon as I had found him. But it was quite useless. When I began to talk to them, they began to shout at me ; of course their barbarous language conveyed no meaning whatever to my ears.

“You had better go,” said the man on the bed, “and leave explanations till afterwards. I’m afraid if the doctor doesn’t hurry along, he will find me with my senses gone, which won’t make things any better.”

I started off to Diekirch, and one of the two men who had been working by the river went with me. It really was a droll business in spite of

the tragedy of the man on the bed. I did not know the way to Diekirch from where the hut was, but I had a map, and when I took it out to consult it, they seemed to grasp what I was after. "Diekirch?" they kept saying, "Diekirch?" When I nodded they did seem to understand that that was where I wanted to go, and what I wanted to go for. They all began pointing. One of them took me by the wrist and began to march me along. I shook myself free from him, but strode on in the direction he was going. So off we went together, as I did not doubt, towards Diekirch.

When we reached the outskirts of Diekirch after one of the most extraordinary walks—he persisted in his efforts to make me understand something which he had in his head, though he must have been perfectly aware that I had not the least idea what he was driving at—he was greeted by a person whom I supposed to be an acquaintance, and deserted me on the spot. I went on alone to the hotel; it seemed to me that the best thing to do was to ask the hall porter for a doctor—one asked the hall porter everything. On the terrace in front was Evelyn; she was so full of news of her own that she gave me no chance to speak of mine.

"Tina!" she exclaimed, when I was still perhaps a dozen yards away, "I have had the most amazing adventure."

"One thing seems to have happened, you seem to be a good deal better. I thought you told me that you were not going to leave that chair in the garden."

"I never meant to, only I've had such a shock I was obliged to. A most surprising-looking person came to me and told me that on the road from Bourschied he had been robbed and nearly murdered."

"Whatever do you mean?" I asked.

"Exactly what I say. It seems that some well-known criminal has escaped from England. He's a burglar, or a murderer, or a forger, or else all three: I'm not sure of the details—who's taking refuge in these parts. I suppose he thought it was so out of the world that he would never be found. But he has been found; or at least they're on his track, the police are after him in red-hot pursuit; and the man who came to me met him only this afternoon."

"Evelyn, if you would be so good as to tell me what you're talking about I should be much obliged."

"Aren't I trying to, only you will interrupt. I was dozing on my seat in the garden—I'd had my lunch brought out to me, but when it came I could scarcely touch it—when I heard a sound. Looking up, there was a man devouring the lunch I couldn't touch. Of course I was surprised."

"I should think you were; I should have been something else as well as surprised."

"When he saw I was looking at him he began to apologize; he was a most curious-looking person. He told me he had been coming along the upper Bourschied road, over the top of the hills, which it seems passes through a great forest. He thought he would get down and eat the lunch which he had brought with him. He had hardly settled himself, and was going to take a bite out of his first

sandwich, when another man, also an Englishman, came along and asked if he could tell him the way to Diekirch. While my man was endeavouring to explain, and had his back turned to the other, the other man gave him a violent blow on the head, which struck him senseless. Wasn't it awful?"

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Tina! what do you mean? The man told me himself while he was eating my lunch. When he came to his senses his lunch was gone, and the other man too, so that when he reached Diekirch he was nearly starving, which was why he was devouring my lunch so greedily. Then when the head waiter came up and heard the story, he said that news had reached Diekirch about this dreadful criminal who has escaped from England, and, of course, the man who robbed my man must have been he."

"My dear Evelyn, you've been taken in. Your man was the criminal. Where is he?"

"He's bicycling to Luxembourg, where his wife is expecting him. He ought to have been there early this morning, he must have lain for hours senseless in that forest, so as he was anxious not to keep her waiting a moment longer than he could help, he had to start off riding to her as hard as ever he could."

"I daresay. Evelyn, if the burglar-murderer-forgery has been in this neighbourhood, you've let him slip through your fingers. The other man was not the villain, it was your man; the other man was robbed and nearly murdered by him."

Then I told her my story, as well as her continual interruptions would let me. Her view of the

matter surprised me ; she would have it that the man I had seen in the hut was not the victim, but the aggressor, and that if he really was hurt it was because he had got no more than his deserts. Then I had a genuine shock. The man who had accompanied me came up in the centre of a motley crowd. Two gendarmes, or policemen, or whatever they were, were with him—I do not know what they call such things in Luxembourg. He had told his tale, and as, apparently, they had already heard the man with the bicycle's tale, they took it for granted that not only was the man in the hut the one who was wanted, but that he had been continuing his nefarious exploits in their immediate neighbourhood. So far as I could make out, the whole crowd was going, *en masse*, to arrest him. They wanted me to go with them. I saw myself at it. I told them frankly my opinion of them, and warned them that the only thing that was really wanted was a doctor. A short, stout man took off his straw hat and assured me he was a doctor, and that any medical aid which the *scélérat*—he called the man in the hut a *scélérat*—required, should be rendered.

I repeat that it was no use my saying anything ; my knowledge of French was not sufficiently copious to admit of my saying what I should like to have said. A cart was procured from somewhere ; the gendarmes, the doctor, and as many more as it would hold, got into it. Sixty or seventy people walked with it, which, as it proceeded at a funeral pace, was quite easy ; and the whole troupe started, including, of course, the man

who had accompanied me from the hut. From what I could gather, he was to act as guide.

"Of all the absurd and monstrous things," I observed to Evelyn as soon as the cortège began to move, "this is the most preposterous. That man, poor fellow, is no more a criminal than you are. Your man on the bicycle is the villain. Who but a person of bad character would have stolen your lunch under your very nose?"

"My dear Tina, you are the most gullible child that ever was. I can see how he practised on your credulity. Wait till they bring the creature in, and then you'll see."

I had no patience with Evelyn; I was in no mood to talk to any one. Besides, I was very tired. I went upstairs and had a change and a bath; then when I came downstairs to tea there was Evelyn in a state of greater excitement than ever. The English post was in, and she had had a letter.

"Tina, Tom is coming."

"And pray who is Tom?"

"As if you didn't know—considering that I've talked to you about him dozens of times—that Tom is my brother."

"I'm quite aware that you have a brother whose name is Tom; but I thought it just possible that there might be more Toms in the world than one."

"Tina, you're a disagreeable little wretch. Now come and let us have tea together and I'll tell you all about it."

We had tea under a tree in the garden—the garden of the Hôtel des Ardennes is a lovely place

for tea ; while we were having it Evelyn read me her letter. It was from her elder sister. It seemed that her brother Tom had started off at a moment's notice for what he called a tramp abroad, and that sooner or later he would find himself in the neighbourhood of Diekirch, and proposed to take us by surprise. Evelyn's sister gave the surprise part of it away.

"When he comes," said Evelyn, "we won't say a word about this letter. We'll pretend that his coming has amazed us into speechlessness ; and then by degrees we'll let it all out. It's rather a weakness of Tom's, his fondness for taking people by surprise."

"If there is anything I dislike," I told her, "it is people who want to do that. If people are coming, I like to know they're coming ; if they take me by surprise, I feel like taking them by surprise in a way they wouldn't like. It's a horrible trick."

"Poor Tom ! When he comes I'll tell him what you say. Bee has been trying her new camera on him ; she has put the result in her letter : here it is."

She held out to me the usual amateur snap-shot. When I looked at it I had an odd sort of feeling. It was the ordinary full-length—why do amateurs always take people full-length when professionals never do?—and was supposed to be the portrait of a young man. It was no better done than those sort of things generally are, but, as I say, when I looked at it I had that odd feeling.

"I've seen this person somewhere before."

"My dear Tina, how can you have done ? You've never met Tom."

“ I’m aware that that’s a pleasure still to come : all the same, I’ve a notion that I’ve seen that face before. But as perhaps it is not a particularly good likeness, and probably represents a dozen other persons as well as the one it’s meant for, perhaps it’s one of them I’ve seen.”

Evelyn did not like it ; she wanted to make out that I was still disagreeable. She said that her sister was an excellent photographer ; that it was a capital likeness ; that her brother Tom was not only handsome, but of a most unusual type ; and that she was quite sure I had never seen any one the least bit like him.

“ In that case,” I informed her, “ I’ve seen his ghost ; because I’m perfectly certain that I’ve seen some one who strongly resembles the person in that photograph.”

Not very long afterwards, in fact, just as I was dressing for dinner, a fine hullabaloo arose in the distance. I guessed what it was without being told—they were bringing back the captive. The noise came nearer and nearer, and presently the cavalcade appeared in the street which led past the hotel. I never witnessed a more disgraceful scene. There on the bottom of the jolting, springless farm wagon, the unfortunate creature lay. What looked like a coarse rug had been thrown over him, so that nothing but his head was visible ; as he lay on his side with his face turned from the hotel window at which I was standing, in what I fear was rather considerable undress, his features were indistinguishable. But something within me

told me that it was the man in the hut. On one side of the cart were perched two gendarmes, or whatever the foolish persons call themselves; on the other was the doctor—he had the impudence to take off his hat when he saw me at the window. Before and behind the cart, and on either side of it, was the rag-tag and bobtail of Diekirch; also, I fear, more than one person, both male and female, who would not have cared to be numbered in that category. The crowd was making the most infamous hubbub; what they were shouting I could not say, but they might have been taking part in a triumphal procession. Evelyn came running into my room just as the cart was passing.

“They’ve got him!” she exclaimed. “Isn’t it dreadful?”

“It is dreadful,” I told her. “Are you aware that it’s an Englishman they’ve got in that cart, and that those wretched imbeciles are yelling at him as if he were so much carrion? Doesn’t it make your blood boil? it does mine.”

“I don’t see why it should; from all accounts he’s a dreadful character. Colonel Monteith tells me that the English papers are full of him, and that every one will rejoice when they hear he’s taken.”

“Evelyn, I could shake you; it’s as much as I can bear to hear you talk.”

“Whatever is the matter with you? I can’t help thinking that now I’m better it is you who are ill.”

“I shall be ill presently if I can’t knock sense into some one’s head. Can’t you understand that

the man in the cart is no more a criminal than you are, or than I am?"

"Then in that case he'll be able to prove it, and no harm will be done."

"Do you think that it's no harm, when a man has a broken leg besides other injuries, to be dragged through the streets over that abominable pavé in a horrible jolting cart, the centre of a hideous, yelling crowd? If you think that's a pleasant experience for an innocent man to have to undergo, we differ. I can't think of anything more outrageous."

"Really, Tina, I don't know what to say to you, and if I did I shouldn't know how to say it without hurting your feelings; I really can't help saying that one would think that the person in the cart was a particular friend of yours."

"I feel as if he were, so you can go on thinking it. Of one thing I'm sure, that he's perfectly worthy to be your friend or mine. In such matters I don't believe that my instinct errs, and my instinct tells me that he is not only an honest man, but he's a gentleman; so there! I should dearly like to rush out into the street, blow that crowd into nothingness, and snatch their victim from them!"

I have a suspicion that Evelyn thought I had suddenly lost my senses; I have an idea that she generally does think I am a little mad, but that is by the way. I cared nothing for what she thought; I do not think I was ever in such a singular mood before. I should have liked to shout from the window and tell those idiots what I thought of

them ; I should also have liked to have added a word of comfort to the man in the cart. I had an idea that he would have liked a word of comfort from me ; I do not know why I thought so, but I did.

When I had dressed, instead of going straight to dinner, I went to the hall porter. I asked him where they had put the prisoner.

"You perceive, Mademoiselle," he explained, "that there is no regular prison ; it is more than three years since any one was locked up in Diekirch ; so for the moment they have had to place him in the house of M. de la Grange. It is Monsieur de la Grange in whose custody he is."

"Then," I informed him, "I will go and pay Monsieur de la Grange a call."

The hall porter stared. I have no doubt he wondered what I meant and would have liked to ask, but I gave him no chance. I marched off to Monsieur de la Grange then and there.

It was not necessary to ask the way. The noise which the people were still making served as a guide. They were gathered round a house which stood close to the bridge. I walked right through the crowd to the door. It was open, and the doctor was just coming out. I went straight past him into the passage. There was a person in uniform whom I took to be Monsieur de la Grange. I asked him if he could speak French. He said that he could.

"Then," I informed him, "let me tell you that you have been guilty of a very serious action ; in fact, of a gross blunder. You have arrested a per-

fectly innocent man. If any ill consequences result, you will be held responsible, you and the doctor." This with a glance at the bald-headed man with a straw hat in his hand. I had not forgotten how he had bowed to me when I was at the window—when, if he had had the least sense of propriety, he would have pretended that he did not see. "I wish to speak to this gentleman whom you have injured. Where is he? Is he in there? I will go to him at once."

I moved towards a room at the back, in which I felt certain they had put him. They stared at me as if I were beyond their comprehension; I daresay my French was not so perfect as it might be, but it was good enough to reach their intellects. I fancy that the more they understood of what I said, the more they wondered.

I opened the door of the room at the back, and, sure enough, there he was, on an old-fashioned wooden bed which stood against the wall. He knew me at once, which was more than I did him. You remember that I only caught a glimpse of him in the bad light of the hut; now they had tied a white bandage round his poor broken head, which had altered him altogether.

"So it is you!" he exclaimed at sight of me. "What is this which has happened to me? What have you said to them? What do they take me for?"

"I have said absolutely nothing to them which could cause them to behave like the drivelling lunatics which they evidently are."

His eyes opened wider to stare at me. Ap-

parently the warmth of my manner, to say nothing of the strength of my language, took him by surprise. At first sight, his rejoinder seemed a little wide of the subject.

"If I hadn't been such a perfect ass when I was at school I daresay I shouldn't be in this pickle now."

"How do you make that out?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

"Why, if I hadn't fooled away my time I might have been able to speak some other language besides my own, and then I might have been able to understand what these chaps think they're up to and what they're after in treating me like this."

Suddenly a thought occurred to me; I believe it was originally prompted by something in the shape of his moustache.

"My goodness!" I cried. "I do believe you're Tom."

"I certainly am Tom." He spoke much more calmly than I did; as if there were nothing at all surprising in his being there. "How did you know it?"

"You're Tom Freeman, you're Evelyn's brother."

He seemed to consider, looking me up and down as if he meant to take the whole of me in. I felt sure that on a future occasion he would know me again.

"And you are Miss O'Brady," he observed at last. "This is funny." It did strike me as being a little that way myself. "And pray where is Evelyn?"

"She is at the hotel. This is—this is awful. She'll have a fit when she hears of it. Do you know they've arrested you under the impression

that you're some terrible criminal who has escaped from England—a burglar, forger, murderer, and I don't know what besides?"

"Have they? That's very nice for me. I wondered what they were after. I couldn't understand a word of what any one said. About fifty people were shouting at me all together, but the more they shouted the less I understood. What is this place in which I am? Is this what passes for gaol in this part of the world? They don't seem to be bad quarters."

"You're in the house of the policeman, or whatever he calls himself. As he evidently wants to know what we're talking about, I'll say a few words to him in his own tongue."

I said them. I told Monsieur de la Grange, if it was Monsieur de la Grange, what I thought of him, and of the doctor, and of the inhabitants of Diekirch generally. I informed them that the person they had been such imbeciles as to arrest, owing to their criminal ignorance of any language but their own, was an English gentleman of the very highest standing; that he actually had a sister at the Hôtel des Ardennes at that very moment, whom he had actually been on his way to visit, when he had been attacked and plundered by a ruffian, at whose escape, in their insensate and culpable stupidity, they had gone out of their way to connive. That was the ruffian for whom not only England, but all Europe, was searching; it was only owing to their almost incredible neglect of the first principles of common sense that he

was still at liberty. Oh, I gave it them! They crumpled up—especially the doctor. I told him that if any permanent injury resulted to Mr. Freeman, the responsibility would be laid at his door, he would have to answer. Was it, I asked him, right and proper for a medical man to allow a gentleman with a broken leg to be jolted in a springless cart over miles and miles of bad roads and abominable pavé? The doctor was abjectly apologetic—he assured me that the gentleman's leg was not broken. I turned to Tom—or perhaps rather I should have said Mr. Freeman.

“He says your leg is not broken.”

“It might just as well have been. I suppose that the gentleman who broke my head must have handled me, when I was unconscious, in such a fashion as to have twisted my leg till it was as painful, and as useless, as if it had been smashed in half a dozen places. It may not be broken, but the pain is as much as I can bear even now.”

I saw him wince. I warned the doctor that he need not think that he could escape responsibility by making out that nothing serious had happened to the English gentleman, who had been so unfortunate as to fall into such blundering hands; time would teach him better. Then I told Monsieur de la Grange, who was an undersized man with very short hair and a pronounced stoop, and looked as though he seldom washed, that I was going to tell Miss Freeman what had been done to her brother, and that he could consider himself lucky if the whole might of England did

not call him to account. Was this how English gentlemen of the highest social position might expect to be treated when they came to scatter their money among the inhabitants of Diekirch? Perhaps, in the way I put it, this did not sound so well in French as it does in English; but I distinctly saw him shrivel.

Back I marched to the hotel, pausing on the doorstep of Monsieur de la Grange's house to say a few words to the crowd.

"Animals," I called them. "Miserable idiots! Poor, ignorant, wretched imbeciles! Lower in intelligence than the beasts of the field!"

I do not know that they quite understood what I said to them; but I am pretty certain that they gathered it was not flattering. My manner must have told them that.

They were having dinner on the terrace—at the hotel if you wanted to have a separate table, you had to have it on the terrace; in the *salle à manger* there were only long tables. Evelyn was waiting for me at the top of the steps, in a fever, wondering what had become of me. When I appeared some of the diners broke into exclamation.

"Miss O'Brady!" cried old Colonel Monteith, "Miss Freeman was beginning to wonder if you had been arrested as an accomplice of the criminal."

Evelyn and I had been in the hotel nearly three weeks, and all the while I had been growing to like the Colonel less and less, so I had no hesitation in speaking my mind to him. Just then I was in the mood to speak my mind to any one.

"The criminal, as you call him, is no more a criminal than you are, Colonel Monteith; and perhaps if the whole truth were known, not half as much. I have just had the pleasure of paying him a visit; if you had been with me, standing up for your fellow-countryman in the face of a whole nation of foreigners, as you ought to have been, you'd have found that out for yourself."

"You have been to visit him?" cried Evelyn. Some of the others joined her in a sort of chorus. "Oh, Tina, what could you have been thinking of!"

I looked at Evelyn very straight indeed. If she had had the slightest sense of perception, she would have seen what a wealth of meaning there was in my glance, and she would have been warned in time, but as she had no sense of perception, I just spoke out.

"If you take my advice," I said, "you'll be careful what you say, or you'll never forgive yourself as long as you live."

You should have seen her countenance, it was like a large note of exclamation.

"Tina, I don't know what you're talking about but I wish you wouldn't look at me like that and say such things, but come to dinner like a sensible Christian."

"You talk of dinner, when your nearest and dearest lies rotting in gaol—at least I daresay he would rot if he were left there long enough."

"Tina, what do you mean? Have you gone mad, or are you indulging in one of those practical jokes of yours?"

"Do you know who the person is whom Colonel Monteith calls a criminal?"

"How do you suppose I am likely to know anything about a creature of that kind? Will you come to dinner; it won't be worth eating by the time we have it, they're more than half way through."

"I want no dinner, thank you. You call him a 'creature of that kind.' Very well." I took her by the arm and I whispered in her ear. "The 'creature of that kind' happens to be your brother Tom."

The way she looked at me and drew back, as if she feared I might be dangerous! I believe she did think that I really and truly had gone mad. But I was in no mood to spare her; I rubbed it in.

"Your brother Tom was walking to you to-day from Wiltz. On the way he was attacked by a cowardly ruffian who left him for dead by the roadside. You suffered that ruffian to eat your lunch."

"Tina!" It was like a wail.

"You assisted him to escape, the wretch who had all but slain your brother. You allowed the tale to be spread about that it was your brother who had attacked him; that your own brother was a notorious criminal whom all the European police were hunting. You set the hunters on your brother's track."

"Tina!" I could see that she was nearly crying; but I did not care. I was wound up. All the diners were staring at me; well they might.

"They set out—the bloodhounds—to where your brother was lying almost between life and

death. They dragged him from his shelter for miles and miles in a hideous, jolting cart, and now he lies in what serves Diekirch as a prison, awaiting goodness alone knows what further ignominy."

By this time Evelyn was as white as a sheet and trembling all over. Some of the people who were having their dinner had risen from their seats. I had been speaking louder, perhaps, than I had intended. I never felt anything like I felt then in all my life before. Colonel Monteith advanced.

"Are you serious, Miss O'Brady, in saying that the person who has been arrested is a relative of Miss Freeman's?"

"It's her brother, that's all; and if he's not as innocent as I am, I'll——" I was going to say I would eat my hat, but even in my agitation I was conscious that it would be undignified, so I stopped short. Evelyn burst out:

"Tina, do you really and truly mean that they have locked up—Tom?"

"I have just now seen him, and he told me he was Tom. If you were to go and see him for yourself, you might perhaps find out if he is an impostor."

When at last it did dawn upon her that I was not trifling, and that I was not mad, but that I actually meant what I said, I do believe she became even more excited than I was. Nothing could hold her. She was positively dancing about with excitement and rage, and a perfect tumult of feelings.

"Where is he? Take me to him!—Tom!—"

They really have locked up Tom, my brother!—Did you hear what I said, take me to him—now, at once, and I'll—oh, if it is Tom, I'll—I'll show them! Take me to him."

I took her, and half the hotel went with us. Colonel Monteith was in a most important frame of mind; I liked him better than I had ever done before. He could not only talk French, but Luxembourgeoise as well, and if there was any one who could tell them what they ought to be told, he could; and I could see that while he was in that mood he would too. We took Monsieur de la Grange's house by storm, Evelyn and I and Colonel Monteith in front, with most of the hotel behind, including the hall porter, and some of the waiters, and, I believe, even the cook. Before the business was finished I believe all the hotel was there, including the chambermaids and all the cooks. You see, Diekirch is a very small place, quite out of the world, and this really was a most tremendous sensation. Nothing like it had ever happened before; and as the hotel had a personal interest in the matter, I suppose that every one in it felt that he or she had to be there. At any rate, they were there, that I do know.

Monsieur de la Grange and the other policeman person—I never knew his name—and the doctor were in the open door talking to each other and to all sorts of people when we came up. Every one gave way to let us pass. It is my impression that Monsieur de la Grange, and the other policeman person, and the doctor, blanched at sight of us.

But I proved to be nothing compared to Colonel Monteith. The way he talked to them, as if they were the dirt beneath his feet! What he said I could not exactly tell, it was all in Luxembourgish, but I could guess. They did cower in front of him. Then he led the way into the room at the back, Evelyn and I hard on his heels, and when we got near it, Evelyn dashed past him and was in there first. And when she was in she gave such a cry.

"Tom!" she shouted. "Tom!—Tom!"—three times over she shouted his name, as if she could not shout it often enough.

By that time I was in, and the Colonel. Then there was a scene. It was most thrilling. The three weeks we had spent in Diekirch had been most delightful, but nothing had occurred in them which came within miles of that. And the best of it was, when something like calmness was restored, and people had a chance of being heard, if Evelyn's brother did not declare that I had practically saved his life, to say nothing of his honour, and his liberty, and I do not know what else besides. Then if Evelyn did not start kissing me, and she cried on my shoulder. She begged my pardon most humbly for ever thinking I was mad. Those two policemen persons meekly relinquished their prey. Each time the Colonel opened his mouth they shivered in their boots—and they were boots! Tom was borne in the bed, just as he was, to the hotel—it was less than a hundred yards from him. When the true state of affairs became known, the

mood of the people in the street entirely changed ; instead of shouting at him, they shouted for him. The progress over those hundred yards to the hotel was a triumphal procession indeed. He was taken to the best vacant bedroom on the ground floor overlooking the garden, and then a regular fête began. His leg seemed a good deal better, and his head did not seem to be so bad as I had feared ; or perhaps in the excitement he forgot how bad they really were. He was the most popular person in Diekirch that night. And the way he thanked me ; and the way Evelyn thanked me, and the way every one thanked me ; it was most surprising.

I hardly slept a wink that night ; and when I did, I dreamed so that I might just as well have been awake. Quite early in the morning Evelyn came to my room and said she had been down to see Tom, and that as soon as I was dressed he wanted to see me. I am not going to say what took place between us when I did see him. I had not thought that I could have felt stranger than I had done the night before, but I did while I was talking, that first morning, to him.

Evelyn and I stayed another fortnight in Diekirch ; and so did Tom. I saw a great deal of him while we were there ; and I have seen a good deal of him since. And, soon, I am going to see much more. When I consider the matter calmly, it seems to me the most surprising part of the whole strange story, that when we left Diekirch, really and truly, we were engaged to be married.

THE GOLD BAG

THERE was a lamp at the corner—they were lying in the roadway, a foot or so from the curb. Walking rather fast, I saw something gleam—it was a gold bangle, so twisted that it was nearly broken in two. Then I saw the purse, if you could call it a purse—a gold bag, perhaps five or six inches long; as I held it in my hand I stared at it in bewildered surprise. The sight of such a thing in Dawson's Rents was a trifle amazing. I daresay it was worth forty or fifty pounds. As I stared at it some one came quietly round the corner; a hand was laid upon my shoulder. A voice said:

“Halves.”

An undergrown young man had his unshaven, unhealthy, unwashed face close to mine. I resented his touch.

“Be so good as to take your hand off my shoulder and stand farther away.”

“Halves!” he repeated, coming if anything closer.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

I tried to draw myself away; his fingers had fastened like claws on my shoulder.

"You know very well what I mean—halves!"

"Do you mean that you want me to give you half of what I've found?"

"We'll call it finding."

"Call it finding! I just now picked it up from the road, where I saw it lying."

"Then it's mine."

Stretching out his other hand he would have snatched the bag away. I had to hold on tightly.

"Yours?" I echoed. "Do you think I am so simple?"

"It's as much mine as it is yours."

"That is very possible, since it belongs to neither."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I am going to take it to the nearest station-house and hand it over to the custody of the police."

There came from him a volley of oaths; he cast at me all the adjectives his tongue could find.

"You tell that for a tale—think I believe you; hand a thing like that over to the coppers? Oh, yes, I'll lay on it."

"If you care to come with me to the station-house you shall see me do it."

He stared at me with hungry eyes, set deep in his face, the bones of which were starting through the skin. It seemed that something which he saw in my eyes moved him to anger.

"I believe he means it—you——!" There were more adjectives. "D'you think I'll let you

take a thing like that to them there coppers, when I haven't even got the price of a drink? Instead of giving it to them, you give it to me."

He nearly took it—with one hand he almost grabbed it from me; when I managed to retain it in my grasp he fastened on it with both his hands, and almost as if he had been a hungry dog seizing a bone, began to struggle with me for its possession. While we were still contending, some one addressed us.

"What's all this? What have you two chaps got there?"

It was a constable who, assisted by his rubber-soled boots, had approached us unawares. My assailant, drawing suddenly back, said, as if moved by some natural instinct:

"It wasn't me—I ain't done nothing—it was him as took it."

He was off round the corner like a flash, leaving the constable alone with me. The officer looked first at my face and then at my hand.

"What is that you've got there?"

"It's something I found in the road."

Making a sudden forward movement before I expected anything of the kind, he had me by the shoulder, with a heavier grip than his predecessor.

"Found it in the road, did you? Let's have a look at what you found in the road."

The human voice could hardly have given incredulity plainer expression. I handed him the bag.

"I was just going to take it to the station-house when you came up."

"Oh, you were, were you? The sort of thing a chap like you would do; I've seen you before."

"I don't think so."

"You wouldn't. So you found this lying in the road, did you—just the sort of thing one might expect to find lying in the road round here. What have you put in your pocket?"

Quite unconsciously I had put the hand in which I had the bangle into my jacket pocket; I took it out.

"I found this lying in the roadway by the bag."

"I suppose that's why you put it in your pocket."

"I had forgotten for the moment that I had it."

"You would. I shouldn't wonder if you'd forgotten two or three other things you have; you come along with me."

"With pleasure; though I rather fancy, officer, that you are making a mistake."

He seemed to notice something in my tone.

"You're a cool hand; considering that I know you, you do carry it off."

"I doubt if you've ever seen me before, and you certainly don't know me."

"Don't I? We'll see. Are you coming quiet or how is it to be?"

He had never moved his hand from my shoulder; he was a big man; to have attempted resistance would probably have been vain, even if I had entertained the notion.

"Certainly I will come quietly. I believe the station-house is in the next street."

"Oh, you do know so much. Wonderful how little chaps like you do know when they like."

I said nothing—there was nothing to say. We walked on side by side, he keeping tight hold of my shoulder. I was conscious that from his point of view I was in custody; the position was as undignified as it was absurd. I had no doubt that it would all be put right when we reached the station. It was not to be so simple as I thought.

At the station we were received by two other constables. I was led up to a wicket hole between the three. On the other side was a constable with a huge ledger, into which he entered particulars while my captor told his story—his story was an example of how history may be written. I hardly recognized it as a narrative of simple facts. I was not allowed to interpolate a word.

According to him, he had been attracted by the noise of fighting. He had come upon the scene to find me struggling with a man whom he spoke of as Nosey; under which style and title my late assailant seemed to be recognized by each of the four policemen present. He reported "Nosey's" words, as that individual ran off, as conveying a distinct charge of theft against me.

"I took this bag from him," said the constable, holding up the article in question.

"You mean," I interrupted, "that I handed it to you."

"You be still," said the policeman who was writing in the ledger.

When I got it I noticed that there was something in his other hand which he had put in his pocket. I made him take it out—it was this gold bangle.”

He gave that also to the man with the ledger, who, turning back a page, began to read certain entries which were contained in it. Then he called out :

“Carter !”

Another officer appeared from the inner room. The man with the ledger, opening the bag, turned its contents out before him. There was an odd collection of gold, silver, and copper coins, a five-pound note, some hairpins, a lady’s handkerchief, a small silver box, which proved to contain powder and a puff, a tiny gold cigarette case, in which there was another five-pound note, to say nothing of various other trifles which I have forgotten.

“This looks as if it were the very thing,” said the man with the ledger.

“There’s not a doubt that it is,” said Carter.

“This chap says that he picked it up in the road.”

“Which I certainly did do ; how else do you suppose it came in my possession ?”

They ignored my words entirely, continuing their own line of investigation.

“And here is the bangle to which she says it was attached. No wonder they nearly broke her arm in wrenching it off ; the wonder is they didn’t quite. Look how it’s twisted.”

They spoke to each other in low tones ; and the

man with the ledger looked up at me, the pen between his fingers.

“What’s your name and address?”

Now there were reasons which seemed to me sufficiently sound and good why I was particularly anxious to give neither; in England I supposed that a perfectly innocent man was not compelled under any circumstance to give either. I told him as much.

“Whatever you may think to the contrary, I found that purse lying in the road. A perfectly unknown man came up and misunderstanding the position wanted me to share my find with him. While I was objecting, this officer appeared and—misunderstood the position still further. As I explained to him, I was just about to hand my find over to the custody of the police. As I have now done so, and explained how it came into my possession, my connexion with the matter ceases, and it seems to me to be quite unnecessary that I should give you either my name or my address.”

“In that case you will be entered as ‘name and address refused.’”

“That’s as you choose. Having done my duty, all that remains for me is to wish you good-night.”

“None of that.”

As I turned to move the three policemen closed round me; to have tried to break through them would have been ridiculous. The officer addressed as Carter vanished from the other side of the wicket; now he appeared in the outer office with a man at his side—a youngish man of singularly

unprepossessing appearance. The officer directed his attention to me.

"Have you ever," he asked him, "seen this man before?"

The fellow grinned as if in the enjoyment of some excellent joke. He spoke in a curiously hoarse whisper, as if there were something in his throat which prevented the free passage of his voice.

"Have I? As if you didn't know; my old friend Barney is no more a stranger to you than he is to me. So, my old dear, they've buckled you too."

Carter asked him, "Was he in this job with you to-night?"

"Of course he was; he ain't denied it, has he? If he has denied it, then of course he weren't." He said to me, "Of course if there was any chance of making out that you wasn't I'd be on to it; but it's always been a matter of mine that it pays best to own up if they can prove it against you."

The man with the ledger had been listening.

"Is Barney the only name you know him by?"

"Between pals it is, but I have heard that he calls himself Sam Coolidge."

It came on me with a flash; this was the man I had met in the lodging-house a couple of nights before, with whom I had had a difference of opinion. Was he formulating this monstrous charge against me by way of revenge?

"Do you admit," asked the man with the ledger, "that your name is Coolidge?"

"I admit nothing—to admit implies guilt ; I am a perfectly innocent and entirely honest man. The mistake I have apparently made was in doing what I took to be my duty. The next time I see anything lying in the road I'll leave it there."

Again the man with the ledger ignored me utterly.

"You are charged," he observed in a monotonous tone, "with robbery from the person with violence. That will do."

Before I realised what had happened, or was about to happen, a constable had me by each arm ; I was hustled out of the room into a passage on one side of which were doors. An officer with some keys attached to a chain which was fastened round his waist, opened one of them. I was pushed past it.

"Undress," said the man who pushed me.

"It is the most monstrous thing I have ever heard," I gasped ; "I thought that in England this sort of thing was impossible ; I'm an absolutely innocent man——" The policeman interrupted me.

"Yes, you can say all that sort of thing to the magistrate in the morning. Are you going to undress or have we got to do it for you ? You can have the things back after we have gone through them."

Almost before I had had time to realize the situation, I was standing with nothing on but my shirt and my socks ; the policeman had vanished ; the door had been shut with a clang ; I was alone

—a prisoner in the cell of a police station. I sat down on a sort of wooden shelf which was on one side, on which was piled what I took to be bedding. Things had moved so quickly and I was so dazed that I had to do some thinking. Before I was even half-way through it the door reopened, a policeman reappeared, my clothes over his arm, an open book in his hand.

“There hasn’t been much found on you—three and ninepence in bronze and coppers, a notebook in which there are entries in what seems to be shorthand, a pencil, an old pen-knife, a small key, a pocket handkerchief, a briar pipe, a rubber pouch with tobacco, half a box of matches—that’s all we’ve found. Do you claim that there was anything else in your clothing?”

“No; I believe your list is right. But let me warn you to be careful what you are doing; I am an American citizen——” Again I was cut short.

“I shouldn’t be surprised; it’s my duty to warn you that any statement you may make will be taken down in writing and used in evidence against you; let me give you a friendly tip—keep your mouth shut; don’t you say anything at all till you’ve been before the magistrate in the morning. You know all this sort of thing as well as I do, and perhaps better, but in case you shouldn’t, let me tell you that there will have to be a remand; if you think you’ll do any good by talking, talk then.”

He had gone before I could stop him. It did seem to me to be amazing, as if I had suddenly got into a world which was upside down. He had

taken it for granted that there would be a remand—that was the culminating point.

I did not sleep much that night—I tried to, but sleep would not come. I never felt cheaper than I did the next morning. They would not allow me to shave nor to have a bath; I had to wash in about three pints of water; there was no hair brush, I had to manage with a broken piece of comb; I began to understand how it is that the man in the dock so often looks as if he were an habitual criminal. I was conveyed to the police court in the vehicle which they call "Black Maria," in a sort of sentry box in which there was just room to sit down on a small shelf in the corner. A woman next door to me was singing hymns all the way; my neighbour on the other side was cursing her for doing it.

I descended from Black Maria in a kind of courtyard, across which I was hurried down a short flight of steps into a narrow, cemented passage, on either side of which were cells. It was not till I was in one of these that my handcuffs were removed—I had journeyed from the station house with gyves about my wrists. The officer who took them off asked if I was represented by a solicitor. I told him that it had not occurred to me that an absolutely innocent man required a solicitor. Smiling, he made cryptic reply.

"You never can tell. Sometimes you're better without a solicitor, sometimes with; it all depends."

"But in the case of a perfectly innocent man—surely his innocence is enough."

He smiled again.

“Well, you see, we’re all of us innocent until we’re proved to be guilty, and that’s what we all of us want to avoid. Though, from what I hear, any number of solicitors wouldn’t make any difference to you.”

He left me to ponder on his words ; what he meant was not easy to determine. It seemed incredible that he could even have hinted that things could go wrong with me ; yet to such a state of mind was I reduced by the tricks which fortune had played me, that I almost doubted.

It was hours before I was taken into court. It was usual, I learned, to place the “drunks” and summonses first ; only at the end of a long list did the magistrate come to me. Some one called out two names :

“Eric Mortimer. Sam Coolidge.”

Presently I was being hurried along by the side of the unwholesome-looking man whom I had seen at the station-house the night before. He condescended to address me.

“Well, Barney, let’s hope that old Pitchlock has had a good breakfast and a sound night’s sleep : it may make all the difference to us.”

I said nothing.

I guessed what he meant. If Pitchlock was the magistrate’s name, then his bodily well-being might make a difference to him ; it was inconceivable that it could matter to me. We were led up a short flight of stairs ; before I knew it I was standing in the dock of a police court ; it was

stuffy, ill-lighted, badly ventilated, overcrowded—there was an unwholesome something in the air. An elderly gentleman, wearing glasses, sitting behind a big desk on a raised dais, looked down on me and my companion. Some preliminaries were gone through which I did not understand. Presently some one called out:

“Call Emma Jane Anthony!”

A lady, perhaps somewhere in the fifties, appeared in a sort of pew on one side. Her name was asked; she was sworn; some one asked her questions. The tale she told was clear enough. She was walking, she said, yesterday evening from a public meeting which she had been attending in Holly Street, Mile End. She was alone. She knew the neighbourhood very well, being closely interested in several charitable associations which did their work there. She knew the locality was a poor one, but believed it to be reasonably honest. She had been there many times alone quite late at night, and had never met with the slightest molestation.

When she reached the end of the street, two men came quickly round a corner. One of them charged right into her with such violence and unexpectedness that she fell back on to the pavement. As she was falling some one snatched a gold bag which she was carrying, which was attached by a chain to a bangle which she wore on her wrist; snatched with such force that though the chain refused to yield, the bangle did; the force used was such and the pain so great that

at first she thought that her wrist was broken. She shrieked with all her might. A policeman came on to the scene while the man who had taken the bag was still in sight; he at once ran after him. The other man, she had supposed, had got clean away. She would know them both if she saw them again. At this point, putting up a pair of glasses, she stared at us, first at my companion, then at me. I took it for granted, since she had so glibly asserted that she would recognize her assailants, that the moment of my deliverance had come. To my amazement she declared that she had no doubt that she saw both the miscreants in front of her.

“Do you mean to say, madam,” I burst out, “that you recognize in me one of the men who attacked you?”

“Silence!” exclaimed the magistrate. “If you want to ask any questions you can do so presently.” He spoke to the witness. “Do I understand you to say that you recognize both these men?”

“Certainly; the man who spoke was the one who knocked me down; the other is the one who nearly broke my wrist when he snatched my bag.”

“Of that you have no doubt?”

“None whatever; I should know them again anywhere; I never forget a face when I have once seen it.”

She was staring me straight in the face as she said this. The magistrate observed:

“Have either of you men any questions which you wish to put to the witness?”

My companion was ready enough.

"Not me, may it please your worship ; it's a true bill so far as I'm concerned. I tripped as I was turning round the corner ; the constable was on to me before I was fairly up—so what's the use of talking ? "

I put a question on my own account.

" I assure you, madam, that I have never seen you before ; I doubt that you have ever seen me ; will you please look at me very carefully and consider."

She could hardly have looked at me more carefully than she did.

" It's no use your adding to your other offences by telling a lie, young man ; you know it was you, and I know it was you ; you had better imitate your companion and make a clean breast of it."

" I assure you, madam——" The magistrate interposed ; apparently no one would allow me to say a word—and I had heard so much about the superiority of English judicial methods.

" We require no assurances from you, prisoner, at this stage ; confine yourself to putting questions."

" Are you quite, quite sure, madam, it was I ? Try to put yourself into my place. I swear to you I am entirely innocent——"

Again the magistrate :

" No speeches, prisoner. Have you any other questions to put ? You have already asked that one."

" I wish to assure this lady, sir——" I spoke with all the earnestness of which I was capable ;

but once more the magistrate cut me short, this time addressing the lady.

“That will do, madam ; evidently this prisoner has no questions to put. We needn't trouble you any longer.”

She descended from the box. I did not know what to do or say ; I was tongue-tied, as if I were in the grip of some subtle form of paralysis. My confusion became unutterable, and the man at my side said :

“What did I tell you, boy? What is the use of pretending you're innocent when you know you're found out? You're only giving other people trouble, and you're doing yourself no good.”

What followed I am not quite clear. I know that the speaker was told to keep still, and that three constables followed each other into the box to give evidence ; I am not sure there were not four ; but exactly what they testified I am not prepared to say. My mind was blurred ; I had a hideous feeling that some dreadful, unseen bonds were being fastened on to each of my limbs, one after the other—bonds against which it was vain to struggle. Then something happened which affected me more than any other part of all that strange adventure—it happened at the moment when I was ceasing to take any intelligent interest in what seemed to me to be the preposterous things which were taking place about me. It was a very little thing—to the world ; to me it was all the world. Some one came into court—that was all. The some one was a woman—a girl—no more.

She was ushered into court by a policeman, who led her to where Miss Anthony was sitting. That over-confident lady rose to offer her greeting. They sat down together side by side. I could see that the elder was telling the younger woman what she believed to be the true tale of her adventure. I knew the point at which it came to me. Both the women looked round as the elder directed the younger's attention to the two miscreants in the box. That was the first time the girl had seen me since she had entered the court. If it were possible to describe the feelings with which I realized that she saw me then, into what a well of conflicting emotions my pen would have to be dipped.

She looked at my companion first ; then—at me. I saw, and understood, the wave of wonder which passed across her countenance as her eyes met mine : first the incredulity, then the pain, then the horror. I thought for a moment she would have cried out ; I would have given a good deal to have cried to her. Looking away from me, she turned again to the woman at her side. I guessed what she was saying. She was asking her in a hurried, eager, almost frightened whisper if she was sure that she had not made a mistake ; if some trick of a chance resemblance had not misled her. The elder shook her head. I knew what that meant, she was sure that she had done nothing of the kind. Beyond a doubt I was the cowardly brute who had knocked her down. She was saying this to her, and I was not allowed to breathe a

word of contradiction. Talk about Chinese torture. Could there be more exquisite torture than I endured then?

During the few remaining minutes in which I was in court the girl did not look at me again; she was sitting with her back to me beside Miss Anthony; she did not glance behind her once; she had had enough of looking at me—enough for ever. What form the rest of the proceedings took, I did not, and do not know. I have a hazy idea that we were asked if we had anything to say; that my companion replied that he had nothing to say; that I did not even say so much as that, but stood mumchance. We were hustled down the stairs again. As we went my companion said:

“Anyhow, Barney, we shan’t have to wait long—that’s one good thing; the sessions are next week.”

The sessions! What did he mean by the sessions? Was it possible that the case had been sent to trial; that it had been found that there was sufficient evidence against us to render it necessary that I should be tried on such a charge? Was chaos come—what did it mean? What had come to my wits that I was able to do nothing to save myself from what seemed to me to be this monstrous and palpable absurdity?

They were handcuffing me again when she appeared at the door of the cell in charge of a policeman.

“This young lady has permission to see the prisoner.”

That was how the policeman explained the situation—the officer in charge of me was just clipping on the second handcuff. I was horribly conscious of the spectacle I must present; the contrast I offered between the man I was then and the man she had seen last. The marvel was that she had recognized me at all; no wonder her first words hinted a doubt.

“Surely I’m not mistaken—it is Mr. Warrender?”

“You are not; it is.”

“But—I don’t understand; how do you come to be in this position?”

“It’s one of the biggest practical jokes, Miss Gaythorne, that ever yet was played upon me; that’s how I come to be here.”

“But my aunt says you₄ robbed her—and assaulted her.”

“Your aunt has made a little error.”

“But she was robbed and assaulted and—you had her bag.”

“I know nothing about its being her bag, Miss Gaythorne. I saw something lying in the roadway; I picked it up; and, in consequence, I am here. That’s where the joke comes in.”

“But you have been sent to trial.”

“I don’t know what I’ve been sent to; the sight of you coming into court drove the few remaining senses right out of me. I shouldn’t be surprised if I was sent to penal servitude for life; after what’s happened I shouldn’t be surprised at anything at all.”

"But that other man, who admits his guilt, says that you were his accomplice."

"I should say that he's the type of man who, for half a crown, or even less, would swear that black is white as well as blue, and grey, and green. He's just a liar."

"But if you're entirely innocent, it's the most dreadful thing of which I have ever heard. Haven't you told them you are innocent?"

"I've tried to once or twice, but it's the kind of remark which they don't seem to want to listen to."

Something which was on her face, in her eyes, about her lips, all over her, was doing me good. I began to see that I might come out on top in spite of the English ideas of law and justice. An officer coming down the passage stopped outside my cell. It was open. The man who had handcuffed me was at my side; the policeman who had escorted the girl was in the open doorway.

"Is that man ready?" asked the officer. "It's time you were off."

"What are they going to do to you?" inquired the girl. A look came into her wide-open eyes for which I could have blessed her.

The man who had handcuffed me replied:

"They are going to take him to Pentonville Gaol—they will keep him there till the trial."

"Pentonville Gaol!" She shivered as with pain. "But—he's innocent."

"Let's hope so, miss. What he's got to do and his friends have got to do is to prove it." Then to me: "Now then—come along."

Taking me by the arm, with what had already become the familiar official grip, he began to steer me out of the cell.

"Won't you let me shake hands with him?" she said when we came close to her.

"Shake hands with the young lady, Coolidge."

He issued his orders as if I were his galley slave. The lingering pressure of her fingers, the diamonds which glittered in the corners of her eyes! I was tingling from head to foot as he marched me down the passage. She had never pressed my hand like that before—it must be more than sympathy.

A long journey in Black Maria, not back to the police station, but to a regular gaol. Three passengers: my fellow-prisoner, Mr. Eric Mortimer, and myself; and a wizened old man, whom I had heard imparting the information that he was in for dog stealing, which, according to him, was hard lines, since he had not been out a month. In the reception-room of the gaol I was weighed, measured; other formalities were gone through. Then I was conducted to a cell. Later a tin was brought to me in which was some doubtful-looking fluid which I was informed was cocoa, and a chunk of very dark-coloured, very dry bread. As I had had practically nothing to eat since the preceding evening, even those viands were most welcome. What a tumult of conflicting emotions seemed to be raging in me somewhere while I discussed them! What a night that was in that prison cell! I felt so stupid; all my faculties

seemed numbed ; all I could clearly see was her face shining at me through the gloom. I had the queerest conviction that my salvation would be wrought by her. And it was.

In the morning, at some abnormal hour, the cell door was thrown wide open and a warder demanded why I had not cleaned up and made my bed. I replied, scarcely knowing what I said, that I was an innocent man, and that neither he, nor any one else, had the right to demand such things of me. He regarded me with what was very like surprise.

“ We don't allow talking like that here, you know ; you'll be reported.”

He went : his manner struck me as being not unfriendly, though official. They brought breakfast—more cocoa, more blackish bread. Then, to my amazement, they took me to church. The strangest service. I imagine that in my part of the prison were the prisoners awaiting trial. The door of the cell was thrown right back, I was told to stand at attention in the open doorway. I found the doors of all the other cells were open also, and that in each one stood a man. There were two more stories overhead ; for all I knew the same thing was happening there. A light bridge ran across the building ; in the centre stood a warder. He began to call out a series of numbers. I was G 39, the badge was pinned upon my breast. As the warder called out each number the bearer stepped out into the ward and followed another man who was some five or six

feet in front of him, taking care not to increase nor to decrease the difference which divided them. When my turn came I followed the example of the rest. As I moved a voice whispered behind me :

“ This is a bit of all right, ain't it? How goes it, Barney, man ? ”

Glancing round I saw that the speaker was Mr. Eric Mortimer. They had taken away his own clothes and put him into a suit of prison garments. A hideous cap was on his head. I might have been excused for failing to know him. A stentorian voice rang through the ward.

“ No talking there! G 39, don't look behind— eyes front ! ”

We came at last into a building which was already filled with the most amazing congregation. Rows and rows of men, on benches, three or four feet apart ; warders on raised seats, twelve or fourteen of them on either side ; a clergyman in white surplice beyond them ; at a harmonium an officer in uniform. The service was an abbreviated form of Morning Prayer, according to the Prayer Book of the Church of England. Each man had a copy. There were two hymns, in which every one heartily joined. I had never been present at what struck me as more spontaneous worship.

Afterwards, I take it, each man went back to his cell ; I know I was taken back to mine. I had not been in it many minutes when the door was reopened and the warder appearing bade me follow him. I was conducted to a comfortably

furnished room. At a big writing table sat an elderly gentleman, with a younger at one end. To my astonishment, Miss Gaythorne was standing by the elderly gentleman's side. On a chair close by was Miss Anthony—the Emma Jane Anthony who had sworn I was a thief. Two other men were also present; one with clean-shaven face and iron-grey hair who, some instinct told me, was a lawyer; the other, with brown hair parted in the middle, and bright eyes twinkling through gold-rimmed glasses, I knew was a fellow-countryman—an American. In the background were two policemen, the one who had arrested me and the one who had taken the charge at the station-house.

The elderly gentleman at the writing-table spoke first; I gathered that he was the governor of the gaol. He questioned me.

“What is your name?”

“My name is Frank Warrender.”

“How come you to be entered on the charge sheet as Sam Coolidge?”

I smiled. “That is rather a long story, one which concerns myself alone. I may, however, state that I represent an American newspaper, and that I came over here to do certain work which I thought that I should be able to do better if I concealed my identity under a pseudonym.”

“It seems to have got you into serious trouble, your pseudonym, Mr. Warrender.”

“On the contrary, it has furnished me with some excellent copy. I shall be able to give

my American readers what I believe will prove to be a unique insight into English judicial manners and methods."

"The fault of what has happened, Mr. Warrender, is to a great extent your own; had you chosen to give the police information which you easily might have done, the matter would have ended there and then."

"In view of the fact that this lady"—I looked at Miss Anthony—"swore that I first assaulted and then robbed her?"

Miss Anthony spoke.

"That was owing to an entire misunderstanding; if I had had the least idea who you were I should have of course known that it could not possibly have been you."

"Do I understand that because you didn't know who I was you swore that it was me?"

Miss Anthony's manner clearly showed that she was flustered.

"I can only say that I am unable to express the fullness of my regret for what has happened, while I, of course, withdraw all charges of every kind against you. I am still sure that the wretch who knocked me down was not at all unlike you."

At this point Mr. Eric Mortimer was brought into the room. The governor asked him:

"Mortimer, you have stated that this person was your accomplice in assaulting and robbing Miss Anthony. You are not compelled to answer, or, indeed, to say anything at all; but I am

going to ask you if you still adhere to that statement?"

Mr. Mortimer was smiling and quite at his ease. His sharp eyes had probably taken in the situation at a glance. He looked at every one in turn and smiled at each.

"Well?" observed the governor, "do you prefer not to answer?"

"That depends," said Mr. Mortimer.

"Depends? On what?"

"On where I come in."

"Does that mean that if it's made worth your while you'll swear that he wasn't?"

Mr. Mortimer shook his head. "Wouldn't tell a lie for anything; I'm a truthful man, I am."

"So I should imagine." The governor's manner could hardly have been drier. "That will do, take this man away."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Mr. Mortimer. "I ain't said nothing yet."

"As I pointed out to you: there was no compulsion on you to say anything; and, in any case, I think you have said enough."

Apparently Mr. Mortimer was not at all of that opinion.

"When I said," he explained, "what I did say about Barney——"

"Do you know this person as Barney?"

"Of course I don't. I've never seen him in my life before." That was a lie; he had certainly seen me at least once; but I said nothing. "What I said about him was on account of a friend of

mine. I didn't want to get my friend into trouble, as they ain't got him, why should I? He's always treated me fair—so I put it on to this bloke. I knew that, even if they brought it in against him, he'd get off cheap; while my friend—well, it might go hard with him; it's not his first little job, you know; so there you are, you know."

"Take this man away," was all the governor said. That was all any one said; I doubt if the general feeling could have been expressed in words. Mr. Mortimer was taken away.

"Am I a free man?" I asked; "seeing that all I did was to pick up a bag in the street in the hope of being able to restore it to its owner."

"I am afraid that technically you are not quite free. You see you have been sent to trial, and you'll have to be tried. In the meantime bail has been applied for and accepted; you are free to leave this place. Next week you'll have to put in an appearance at the sessions; when, as no evidence will be offered against you, so far as you're concerned the matter will be at an end."

So far as I was concerned the matter was at an end then. Within, I suppose, five minutes, I was outside that gaol and being treated as if I were something in the hero line. Every one congratulated me: my compatriot, the solicitor, the policeman who had entered the charge in the ledger. They all did their best to make me understand how strongly they felt that I was a wronged and injured man. I lunched with Miss Anthony; at the same table was Miss Gaythorne. She told

her aunt how she had crossed on the ship from New York which carried me ; how we had struck up an acquaintance on board ; how I had told her I was a newspaper man travelling to England to do some work for an American journal. And so I had told her ; but in telling her I had said the thing which was not. I had left New York for the benefit of my health ; because the police there had really become too pressing. They were looking for me all over the eastern states ; I had to travel, then or never. That young lady made such an impression upon my sensitive nature that I wished, sometimes quite sincerely, that I was what I represented myself to be. But I was not, and that is where the smile comes in.

I had gone into that job with Mr. Eric Mortimer. Miss Anthony was right, it was I who came against her with more force than I intended—that I do declare. I was hard pushed, or I would never have gone into a job of that sort at all. On the other side that is not my real line of business, but things are different over here. Mortimer snatched the bag, and as he went off with it down one street I went down the other. When he saw that he was caught he threw it in my direction. When I thought the coast was clear—I found it. Had I had any idea that that young gentleman who wanted to go halves was anywhere about I would have found it in some less ostentatious fashion ; especially if I had had the least suspicion that there was another policeman within a mile. It was a chapter of accidents.

From my special, private, and individual point of view the most unfortunate part of the business was that Miss Anthony should have been Miss Gaythorne's aunt. If I had guessed that I believe I would have turned straight rather than go into that job with Mortimer. When she came into the court the next morning I thought that all was up with me, from all and every point of view, for ever and a day. Instead of which—well, it just shows you what can come from striking up an acquaintance with a sympathetic person of the feminine gender while crossing the Pond.

I did not put in an appearance at the sessions; it would have been playing it too low down. I might have taken advantage of one of the finest openings a man in my line of business ever had: I might have taken advantage of my acquaintance with Miss Anthony and her niece to make quite a little fortune. A man has got to draw a line somewhere, which he won't cross; that was where I drew mine. I went for another travel trip instead. I don't know what Miss Gaythorne thought of me. I have often wondered. I owe her a good turn; some day I may have a chance of paying her. You can never tell. If I ever do, you can bet all you're worth that I will. I should like to pay her with about ten thousand per cent. compound interest—if only a chance of doing it would come my way!



IN THE TUNNEL—AND AFTERWARDS

JOHN DAWSON felt that he had never met a more entertaining person than this charming feminine creature who was relieving so effectively the tedium of the long railway journey. When the train was standing by the platform in the London terminus, she had entered the compartment in which he was seated alone, and, almost as soon as the train was off, had started a conversation which, on her side, had never been allowed to languish. Now she was proposing that, instead of going to the restaurant car for dinner, he should share with her the very appetizing-looking dainties which she was producing from a gorgeously appointed basket.

“I never go to a dining-car myself—horrid, stuffy, smelly thing ; I always bring my own food, but I hate eating alone, and if you won't be sociable, I may as well throw the whole lot out of the window ; there seems to be enough for half a dozen here.”

There certainly did seem to be sufficiency for two ; he was easily persuaded ; they dined together ; at the end she took a flask out of her dressing-case, from which she filled a tiny silver cup.

"There, there's a taste of the divine to finish with,—drink that at a single draught ; it will only be a small draught anyhow. That's a liqueur I'm sure you've never tasted before."

"What is it?"

"I call it nepenthe, because, like that fabled drug, it is a sworn foe to pain and sorrow. Drink and you'll prove my words."

He drank, and, in a sense, he proved them then and there ; the contents of the tiny cup certainly did banish the consciousness of pain and sorrow, and that for the very simple reason that, in an instant, as by a flash of lightning, it deprived him of consciousness altogether.

When John Dawson came back to some dim appreciation of the fact that he was still alive, he had not the faintest notion of what had happened, or of where he was. Two things he realized, that wherever he might be, he was in a very uncomfortable position, and that the place in which he was was pitchy dark. As he struggled to attain some faint conception of his whereabouts, there came a sound which both amazed and startled him. It was slight at first, but each second it increased until it became a stupefying roar. As he was asking himself if this could be some dreadful din to which he was listening in some awful nightmare, the noise came positively rushing on to him ; some amazing thing went tearing, roaring past, with such incredible velocity that the startled air became a raging blast. Just as he was wondering if the ear-splitting tumult would ever cease, the thing

which caused it seemed to sweep right past—the noise died away in the distance as it tore along.

For some instants he remained motionless, as if his whole being had been stunned, with his sense of hearing. By slow degrees sufficient of his faculties returned to permit of his making some attempt to think.

“It strikes me that that was a train, and that I’m in a tunnel. I shouldn’t wonder if I was lying in the six-foot way, on all sorts of things which were never meant for Christian folk to lie on.”

He tried to move, to raise himself, to get up, becoming aware on the instant that something had happened to his frame which made any sort of movement peculiarly painful. He gave up the effort with a groan.

“Now, what on earth am I to do? Seems as if something’s broken, or—something’s wrenched.”

If he had only known it, drops of sweat testified to the intensity of the pain he was enduring; it was all he could do to keep himself from swooning.

“I shall have to stop here till some one comes, that’s sure. Let’s hope that the next train won’t run over me; I wonder how far I am from the line; seems to me that the wheels of that last one were quite close to my head. I believe that platelayers and those sort of people do come through tunnels at regular intervals; let’s trust that one of the intervals is pretty close. If I have to stay here long I shall make a fool of myself, or go mad, or something will happen which will mean the end of me. My God, if only some one would come!”

It almost seemed as if in one and the same moment his prayer had been heard and answered ; something, some one, touched him with what felt like the toe of a boot, on a spot where to be touched meant agony. He gave an involuntary cry.

"Don't!" Then he added an instant question. "What's that? Is that—any one?"

His voice died away, as if he found it difficult to finish his sentence. There was silence. Then a voice inquired—a voice which seemed to find it hard to keep from trembling,

"Mr. Dawson! Is that you?"

The fact that his first sensation was not one of amazement spoke volumes for the condition he was in; it was as though he treated it as the most natural thing in the world that the speaker should be there.

"What's left of me. Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am. I've come to find you."

The voice was a girl's. He had some hazy recollection of having been in a railway carriage with a girl: how long ago was that? He asked himself if this voice was her voice; even in his misty state he decided that it was not. This one had quite a different intonation; he felt sure he had never heard it before. He realized that the owner of the voice was kneeling beside him; he could not see her, he could not move a finger so as to touch her, but he knew she was there.

"Are you hurt?"

"I'm—something; it's pretty bad—whatever it is."

A faint sound reached his ear which seemed very like a sigh. That, and the sudden change of

tone, seemed to suggest that the owner of the voice was troubled.

“Don’t you think that, if I were to help you, you could get up and—walk a little?”

“I’ll try; I’ve no wish to lie here a moment longer than I can help.”

“It’s so difficult in this darkness, where we can’t see each other; haven’t you a match?”

“I have, but I don’t know where; something’s happened to my arms, I don’t seem able to move them. If you want matches, they’re in one of my pockets—you’ll have to find them.”

“I’ll try to do without. Listen; this is not a very long tunnel, and we are near one end of it. I’m going to try to help you on to your feet; then, if you can only manage to walk quite a little way, only thirty or forty yards, we shall be out of the tunnel. There’s a road beyond; if you can only get so far I think I shall be able to procure help.”

“I’ll do all my share of trying I can, only—you mustn’t expect too much. I seem to be pretty well all pieces.”

It was indeed a delicate task, that of helping him on to his feet. It was agony for him to move; the owner of the voice had to bear nearly the whole burden of his weight; when he was almost up, something seemed to give way beneath him, so that he almost brought her with him to the ground again. And when at last he was upon his feet, he was very far from being upright. As for walking—the owner of the voice had, more than once, practically to carry him. It was, for him, a

work of infinite labour and exquisite pain to cover the few yards to the mouth of the tunnel. Two or three times he sank by the way ; it seemed to be all that she could do to get him on to his feet again. Neither spoke during that strange journey, unless his groans could be interpreted as speech ; it seemed to be tacitly understood that it was a case of husbanding breath. When they gained the open she did give what might have been meant for a little joyous exclamation, as she led him staggering to the side of the line ; but she had hardly got him there than he slipped, an inert mass, through her arms, and lay, helpless, silent, senseless, at her feet.

When John Dawson came to himself again, he found it even harder to make out where he was than he had done on that first occasion in the tunnel. He was a man with a small income—a managing clerk to a firm of solicitors is not over-paid ; his experience of bedrooms was confined, for the most part, to those which are to be found in the average suburban residence ; he had never been in a bedroom at all like that in which he found himself when he came back to life a second time. It was, as he realized even in those first moments of consciousness, the most delightful apartment he had ever seen. Big windows, four or five of them, ran from floor to ceiling ; the walls were hung with what appeared to be pale pink satin ; there were tables, couches, and chairs of, as it seemed to him, the most curious and exquisite kind ; the bed in which he was lying appeared to be of ivory and silver ; while, from the ceiling above his head, beings of angelic

loveliness smiled down at him. Where could this place be? How had he got there? Could it be the realistic imagining of some strange dream?

He shut his eyes, which he had so recently opened, and lay quite still; then, presently, he opened them again. It certainly was not a dream; of that he felt convinced. In a state of what seemed to be almost beatific comfort, he lay and looked about him. When, anxious to see more, he raised himself on his elbow, he became immediately aware that his arm was so weak that it refused to support him. As he sank back upon the pillow, there was a flutter of feminine voices and of feminine garments. A woman appeared at his bedside; it was not her garments which fluttered, she moved noiselessly; it seemed to him that he had never seen so comforting a form and face; in her very smile, as she bent over him, there was a quality which did him good. She was costumed as a nurse.

The voice and the fluttering garments had belonged to some one else, as was presently made clear when the owner of them came sailing into sight, as if she were both excited and in a hurry.

"Oh, nurse, what is the matter? Mr. Dawson! Oh, Mr. Dawson, your eyes are open! Can you see me?"

He could, quite plainly; he could hardly help it, since she was standing by the nurse's side, and leaning towards him right across the bed; a dainty figure she was, in keeping with the room. His words, uttered in so faint a voice that he hardly knew it for his own, made it plain that he saw her.

"Unless," as he put it, "I'm dreaming."

"Unless you're dreaming? But you're not dreaming now ; you have been this—I'm afraid to think how long. If you only knew how anxious I have been—how anxious we all have been. But—you're better now ; please, please say that you are better."

It was the nurse who answered her.

"I've no doubt, Miss Ella, that if you give Mr. Dawson time enough he'll tell you, as plainly as possible, that he's better, and prove it too, but I don't think this is quite the moment to make him say so."

"But, oh, nurse, if you only knew how much I do want to hear him say he's better."

"I am better, if I've ever been bad."

It was Mr. Dawson who spoke, replying to the tears which seemed to be in the girl's voice. The exertion of saying even so much brought tears to his own eyes. He shut them to keep the tears from slipping down his cheeks. The nurse put her finger to her lips ; the girl vanished, he could hear her skirts rustling across the room. The nurse's soft hands did some miraculous thing which made his comfort even greater than before. Between sleep and waking he lay still and tried to think. The effort was beyond him ; in a few seconds he was fast asleep. That was the first real sleep he had enjoyed for much longer than he knew. When the doctor came and saw him his verdict was decisive.

"He'll do ; sleep was the one thing which was wanted, better than all my medicines. He's round the corner ; when he wakes he'll be on the high road to himself again."

The doctor was right ; when he woke he was

already a colourable imitation of the John Dawson who used to be. When he opened his eyes the nurse was sitting by his bed, sewing. He watched her, no sign escaping her which showed whether or not she was conscious of his scrutiny. Presently he began to ask her questions, which, up to a certain point, she answered with the utmost meekness.

“Who are you?”

“I’m Sister Agnes.”

“What are you doing here?”

“I’m nursing you.”

“What for?”

“Because you’ve been ill.”

His silence seemed to hint that he was digesting what, under the circumstances, seemed to be this very unnecessary piece of information. Then he began again.

“Where am I?”

“You’re at Elsenham Manor.”

“Where?” He started almost into a sitting posture; and had to sink back again. Sister Agnes eyed him with what was perhaps meant to be severity.

“If you don’t keep perfectly still, I shan’t answer any of your questions, but I shall go to the other end of the room, and leave you all alone.”

This dire threat did not prevent his persistence in his inquiries. He spoke with a greater degree of earnestness than he had previously shown.

“Where did you say I was?”

“I said you were at Elsenham Manor, and you are.”

John Dawson lay silent for a considerable period;

in spite of his condition, this time it was not necessary to make an effort at thought. He was thinking with a vengeance. The girl who, before he went to sleep, had been so anxious that he should say he was better—where had he heard her voice before? And Elsenham Manor, where the soft-voiced, sweet-eyed person who appeared to be nursing him, had told him he at present was, with what was the name associated in his mind? It came back to him with a sudden sense of shock; Elsenham Manor was one of the seats of Sir Everard Gadsby, the man to whom he had been journeying when something happened to him in the train. Was that yesterday, or the day before? He put a question on the subject to his nurse.

“How long have I been here?”

Sister Agnes reflected, smoothing her lower lip with her thimbled finger, as if to jog her memory.

“Five weeks—the day after to-morrow.”

“Five weeks! Do you mean to say that I’ve been in this bed—five weeks?”

In his agitation he struggled to raise himself to a sitting posture; and failed, ignominiously. The nurse, bending over him, with deft hands put him straight upon his pillow; in her hands he was as helpless as a child. She chided him.

“You’ve been the best of patients, while you could not help yourself; now you are beginning to be able to help yourself I hope you’re not going to be the worst. You’ve talked enough, and you’ve moved more than enough, so perhaps you’ll be so good as to go to sleep again.”

He obeyed her, as if he had been some tired infant. During the next three days he slept most of the time; to him they were like some long, delicious dream; and on the fourth the story was told him.

He was lying wide awake, feeling altogether a different man, for he could actually move himself about as if his limbs and body were his own, when there entered the young lady who had been so anxious to know that he was better. With the demurest air in the world, she placed herself on the chair beside his bed which was generally occupied by the nurse.

“Mr. Dawson, can you ever forgive me? It’s through me you’ve been so—ill; it’s been all my fault.”

He stared at her, at a loss to understand what connexion this bright-eyed young woman could have with what he had recently gone through. She went on, as if answering an unspoken question.

“I am Ella Gadsby.”

“You are——!” A light was beginning to dawn on him, very dimly. “Not—the daughter of Sir Everard Gadsby.”

“I am.” She sighed, as if with the consciousness that the confession she had just made was a shameful one. “Isn’t it awful?”

He could not at all see in what sense the adjective could be appropriately applied to her position as that very rich man’s daughter; but she set herself to shed light upon his darkness, and very astonishing light it proved to be.

“You are Mr. John Dawson, the managing

clerk of Messrs. Clark, Dodds & Co., my father's solicitors—at least, you were their managing clerk.”

“I believe—I hope and trust—that I still am.”

“Well, that depends.” She sighed again; he wondered what at. “Messrs. Clark, Dodds & Co. had a telegram from my father asking them to send down to him the will which they had drawn up at his instructions; the new will, you remember?”

“I do remember, very well.”

“This is it.” She held out to him a document, at which he stared with feelings which were already getting beyond the power of words. “The telegram said that the new will—it was about the thirty-third new will—was to be sent down to him at once, because Sir Everard was dying, and if it wasn't, it might come too late. You still remember?”

“It is all coming back to me, now that you recall it to my mind.”

Judging from her manner she seemed to be experiencing some difficulty in continuing her remarks. She was picking at the silken coverlet with her finger tips, with a little air of abstraction which he thought became her rather well.

“I don't know if you are aware that at that time I was having one of the disagreements with my father, which, I am sorry to say, owing to certain peculiarities in his character, only too frequently occurred.” He was silent; she, glancing at him out of the corner of her downcast eyes, seemed to read in his silence the answer she required. “I see that you are aware. Did you know what the trouble was about?”

“I was given to understand that your father wished you to marry one gentleman, and that you wished to marry another.”

“Exactly, that’s precisely it ; how clearly you put it ; what it is to have a legal mind ! And the person my father wished me to marry, Mr. Dawson, was one I could not have married under any circumstances whatever ; while if I didn’t marry the one I wished to marry, my life would have been at an end before it was even begun.” She said this with an air of saint-like resignation. “I presume you know what kind of person my father was.”

“I hope you’ll forgive me if I say that I’ve always understood that Sir Everard Gadsby is a gentleman with a character of his own.”

“Is? Was, you mean. My father is dead.”

“Miss Gadsby ! You don’t mean it.”

“That’s what makes it so awful. You are quite right in saying that he had a character of his own. I do hope that for the sake of their daughters, no other fathers have characters like his. We had a frightful scene. The gentleman I—cared for was Mr. Arthur Cockerton.”

“I think I’ve heard the name mentioned.”

“Oh, you think? Well, now you’re sure. My father said that if I wouldn’t marry the man he cared for—and I didn’t—and if I wouldn’t promise that I’d never, never, marry Mr. Arthur Cockerton, he’d make a new will. You know he was always making new wills.”

“I’m aware that he had what might be called a habit of the kind.”

“And in the new will he wouldn't leave me a single farthing. It was that will which he telegraphed to Messrs. Clark, Dodds & Co. to have sent down at once. It seems that Mr. Clark was away, and that Mr. Dodds was ill, and that as you were the only person available, you were to take the will to Kingsmead. Kingsmead, as you, of course, know, is the name of my father's house in Devonshire, where he then was. It was at this point that Margaret Richmond came in.”

“And may I ask who is Margaret Richmond?”

“She's—well, she's the dearest girl, and she's the best friend I have in the world—girl friend, I mean. She was frightfully on our side—mine and Arthur's. She's lived a great deal in America, and she's imbibed American ideas on the subject of how girls ought to be treated. The idea that a girl was not allowed to marry the man she loved, but should be compelled, by an unreasonable parent, to marry the man she—didn't love, under pain of being left a penniless beggar, was to her most horrible. When she heard that you were going to Kingsmead with the will which was to make of me a pauper, she wanted to have the train blown off the lines with dynamite, or to do something desperate.”

“Miss Richmond would appear to be an estimable character.”

“She's absolutely delightful, as I believe you found her. You—have met her.”

“Indeed? Where and when have I had that pleasure?”

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“You met her in the train; she went down in the same carriage with you from town.”

The light which was beginning to illumine his mental darkness was growing clearer, and also more surprising. His eyes met Miss Gadby's; something was signalled from one to the other, something which, to do her justice, filled her with a certain amount of confusion.

“Yes, it was; it was she who gave you that— that terrible liqueur. Oh, Mr. Dawson, I cannot tell you how grieved and ashamed I am. I really had no clear idea of what she proposed to do, or I should never have countenanced it for a moment. She said the one thing to be done was to keep you from getting to Kingsmead with the will until— until it was too late; and she said she'd undertake to do it, but she never said how. I was in the next compartment——”

“Of the train?”

“Of the train in which you were travelling with Margaret; and when the train stopped—I suppose because of the signal, or because of something—and I looked out of the window, and saw her open the door, I knew that there was something wrong; and then when I saw, in the darkness, because, you know, we were in the tunnel, something drop out of her carriage on to the line, I—I—oh, you can't think how I felt.”

“Was the something which you saw drop out of Miss Richmond's carriage—me?”

“I—I'm afraid it was. I tried to open my own carriage door, but the handle stuck, or some-

thing, and I couldn't, and the train started and I was tearing at the handle, feeling I should go mad, but then it stopped again, thank goodness! Oh, you can't think how thankful I was; and the door opened at last; I jumped right out on to the line, and came down such a cropper; then the train started again. I heard Margaret scream something from her carriage window, but I couldn't catch what. Then I got up and walked back and found you in the tunnel."

"It seems to me, Miss Gadsby, that I owe to you my life."

"I don't know what you owe me; please don't say you owe me anything. I managed to get you out of the tunnel, and then—then I got you here. If you only knew what a job I had."

"I can easily imagine."

"And here you've been ever since, all these weeks and weeks; you've had concussion of the brain, and dislocations, and—I don't know what you haven't had; again and again the doctor has frightened me half out of my senses. I haven't been free from anxiety for a single instant; I certainly should have felt that I ought to be hanged if you had died."

"I don't quite see the sequitur; it strikes me that, in that case, Miss Margaret Richmond would be the lady to hang."

"Oh, Mr. Dawson, you won't do anything to her; promise me you won't; you won't say a word to the police, or—or to any one. I know she's absolutely mad, and frightfully wicked, but what she did do, she supposed herself to be doing

for me, and she is so American, and, you know, some Americans really are not quite sane. Mr. Dawson, father's dead, and he's left me all his money, and—I've settled ten thousand pounds on you, if—if you don't mind."

"You've settled ten thousand pounds on me! Miss Gadsby!"

"And—and Margaret Richmond says she's quite willing to marry you, if you'd like her to, to make up for what she did; she's heaps and heaps of money, and that might be some compensation."

"Marry a young woman who first drugged me and then threw me out of a railway carriage on to the line in the middle of a tunnel; the heavens forbend!"

"She's—she's not in the habit of doing that sort of thing, you know, Mr. Dawson."

"She might quite conceivably do it to her husband if she thought the circumstances rendered it desirable."

"Of course, I couldn't be sure, but I shouldn't think she would; one experience of that kind, I should say, would be enough. She's been worrying about you as well as I."

"I trust that the amount of worry she's been going through hasn't caused her any particular inconvenience."

"That I couldn't tell you; I know she told me that I'd no conception of what she felt like when she saw me jump out on to the line."

"When she saw you jump out of the carriage on to the line? Thank you."

"Oh, Mr. Dawson, say—say you will forgive

her! If you only would there's nothing, nothing in the world she wouldn't do for you."

The young lady's eloquence was more persuasive even than she supposed. When she had gone, Sister Agnes came to his bedside.

"Well, Mr. Dawson, have you decided to marry Miss Richmond, as a form of compensation?"

She asked the question with something besides a twinkle in her eye, something which set him desperately thinking. Marriage had for him been hitherto out of the question; a managing clerk's salary was not one to tempt him to indulge in such luxuries as that. But—with the ten thousand of which Miss Gadsby had spoken, and the similar sum which Miss Gadsby had hinted Miss Richmond would be only too glad to add to it—the position would be changed. He was an admitted solicitor. All he had needed was sufficient capital to enable him to live while he gathered a connexion. It might be a curious source from which to obtain his capital, yet—if ever a man had earned it, he had. Quite possibly both these remarkable young women might become his clients, might bring him others—these things which had happened to him in the train, the tunnel, and afterwards, might lead to fortune and to all good things.

He fell asleep again, and dreamed of a not-far-off future when John Dawson, solicitor, should have one of the finest practices in town; and in his dreams there continually appeared the face of Sister Agnes. It was very curious that she should have been there.

TWO OF A KIND

MR. SAMUEL WILKINS stood very still. Closing the shutter of his lantern, he hid it inside his coat. Something had caught his ear, just as he was about to investigate the contents of that very promising-looking plate chest. In the darkness he listened, not only with his ears, but with every sense he had ; in his profession there were times when the sense of hearing was more important than all the other senses put together. He certainly had heard a sound ; what was worse, the sound continued. He would have to take cover. It was not easy under such circumstances to say what cover was ; the modern cottage dining-room is neither designed nor furnished with a view to providing facilities for a game of hide-and-seek. He did not dare to try to leave the room ; the sound was coming from the direction of the door. He might not have time to get out of the window ; he had not entered that way and was not sure about the fastenings. Bungling might spell disaster. Besides, he did not wish to run until he was forced. He had it on what he believed to be the best authority that the contents of that plate chest were all solid silver ;

and—there were other things ; from his point of view of the most desirable kind.

There was a big leather arm-chair in one of the corners—that might serve as an effectual screen. If he could get behind it and put it in just the right position, with luck a person might walk right round the room and never guess that he was there. The sound was coming closer. The fact that it was a very faint sound made him more suspicious. It was as though some one were approaching the room who was particularly desirous of escaping notice. Down went Mr. Wilkins behind the arm-chair, opening the shutter of his lantern sufficiently wide to enable him to make sure that he was well behind it. Then he waited ; and as he waited he made certain comments to himself—disgusted comments.

“ Bedroom slippers, that’s what it is, or it might even be bed-socks. Some one has got out of a nice warm bed, and is risking catching cold by walking round the house. It can’t be because I disturbed them ; I’ve never disturbed so much as a sleeping babe in the whole of my professional career ; when I’ve been working no one has even so much as heard me breathe. It’s not me that’s been the cause of broken slumbers ; I’m afraid it’s a bad conscience, that’s what it is—unless it’s somebody walking in their sleep.—Hullo, here we are ; watch out, Sam ; let’s hope there’s not going to be any trouble.”

He had his hand on a revolver which was in his jacket pocket. The door began to open inch by

inch, with what Mr. Wilkins regarded as irritating slowness.

“Here, push along, don’t be all night opening that door ; anybody might think you were seeing how slow you could be. Who the something are you ? ”

Some one, having entered the room, was shutting the door, with the same singular caution ; and having closed it, stood quite still. Struck by what he deemed the peculiarity of the intruder’s proceedings, Mr. Wilkins was devoured by curiosity. His thoughts continued to shape themselves into unspoken words.

“What is this little game ? This is a rummy caper. If I only dare I’d throw a light on you.”

Mr. Wilkins was saved the trouble—the new-comer threw a light instead ; a light of so curious a kind that Mr. Wilkins almost jumped to his feet. It seemed as if some one had opened the shutter of a dark lantern just sufficiently wide to permit of a pencil of light gleaming through. The gleam passed round the room slowly, resting on objects as it revealed them. Mr. Wilkins, in his surprise, had all he could do to keep himself from giving vent to his feelings in a whistle. As if the holder of the lantern were satisfied with what had been revealed to him by the travelling gleam, the shutter was opened wider. Sufficient light was emitted to show that the new-comer was an under-sized man, with a cloth cap pulled well over his head, and a wool muffler wound round and round his neck in such a fashion that it served almost as

a disguise. A shabby brown jacket was buttoned closely to him ; below were a dirty pair of grey trousers which were much too big for him, and which were tied tightly about his ankles with pieces of string. A pair of felt overshoes accounted for his almost soundless movements.

From his post of vantage Mr. Samuel Wilkins observed this gentleman with emotions of a very mixed kind. When the stranger, shining his lantern on the plate chest, took something bright out of his jacket pocket, he could restrain himself no longer. Rising to his feet, he observed in a whisper which, while it was distinctly heard by the person to whom it was addressed, could scarcely have been audible outside the room,

“Excuse me—hands off. That’s mine.”

The instant Mr. Wilkins spoke the room was plunged into darkness—the shutter had been closed. There was perfect stillness, again broken by Mr. Wilkins, in the same insinuating whisper,

“All right, governor, all right ; I’ve got a little glimmer of my own.”

He proved it by opening the shutter of his lantern, to find that with surprising noiselessness the stranger had moved across the room, and, standing on the other side of the arm-chair, was pointing the muzzle of a revolver straight at his head.

“Who are you ?” When apparently Mr. Wilkins was too amazed even to answer, the stranger added a word or two of courteous warning. “Don’t move and don’t speak or I’ll make a hole clean through you.” The stranger, studying the other’s counten-

ance, seemed to draw his own conclusions. "So you think you can queer my crib."

"Your crib? I like that. Now put down that pop-gun; you make me tired. Do you think I'm afraid of your making a hole through me? Don't play the goat, act sensible."

The stranger seemed to take the hint Mr. Wilkins so elegantly conveyed; he lowered his revolver, and he grinned.

"You've got a nerve, you have, going and hiding behind that chair."

"It's you that's got the nerve, talking about your crib."

"I've been readying it for a fortnight."

"And I've had my eye on it for more than a month; I've got a plan of the house in my head as well as in my pocket, I know every corner; what I don't know about this house is not worth knowing. Besides, who got here first? Take yourself off, that's what you'd better do."

"I fancy I see myself doing it after all my trouble. What will you give me to go?"

"Give you to go?"

"Yes, give me to go. Name your figure."

"I never did see such a face; asking me to pay to get at my very own crib, what I've been preparing for more than a month and, what's more, which I got into first."

"Oh, shut all that; I'm no flat. What do you say to going shares? It's against my principles. I work single-handed, I do; but as this is an exception, how about it?"

“ Haven't I seen you somewhere before? Weren't you at Strangeways? ”

“ I might have been. Now I come to take a look at you, weren't you on the Moor? ”

“ Of course. I remember—I saw you at Dartmoor too; you were doing five; you're the bloke who downed the warder with a shovel—so they made it more.”

“ Made it ten, they did.” There followed a flood of invective which was not nice to hear. These two men were talking to each other in the peculiar, soundless whisper which does not travel beyond the person addressed, the art of which is only known to the habitual gaol-bird.

“ Mason was the name you were under, Robert Mason; of course, I remember; you were the talk of the place; they put you on the triangle.”

“ They cut me pretty nearly to pieces—I've got the marks on me yet, I shall never lose them——!” There came another stream of invective, uttered with a savage ferocity which the whisper in which he spoke seemed to make the more marked. “ But stow this chatter, how about going shares? ”

“ I'm the same as you, I like to work single-handed; but, as you say, this being an exception——Hullo—what's that? ”

“ Shut the light.”

The lantern was closed. All was so still that one could not even hear if the two men breathed. Even the singular quality of the whisper in which Mr. Wilkins presently spoke, scarcely seemed to break the silence.

"Some one coming down the stairs. There's a chair like this nearly as big on the other side, look sharp."

"Right."

Silence, in the room ; without, the sound of some one moving. Some one this time who clearly was not so anxious to escape attention. Presently the door was opened, and a voice inquired :

"Who is there?" It was a feminine voice, clear and distinct, if not loud. When there came no answer, the owner of the voice entered the room. Footsteps crossed the floor. A match was struck ; by its flickering flame one could see that this was a woman, in her dressing-gown, with her hair streaming over her shoulders. A paraffin lamp hung, suspended from the ceiling, in the centre of the room. The match she held went out. Striking another, raising the chimney of the lamp, she touched the match to the wick. The lamp was alight ; replacing the chimney, she turned up the wick. Then looked about her round the room.

"It's very odd, but I certainly thought that I heard voices."

If she had, her hearing must have been preternaturally keen ; unless an occult something had warned her in her sleep that evil had come into the house ; in which case she had shown a high courage in coming alone, unarmed, defenceless, to inquire into the reason of its presence. That she was married was shown by the ring on her finger, the only ring she wore ; yet she was little more than a girl. Tall and slender, in her light blue

dressing-gown, her abundant hair flowing loose, setting her lovely face against a golden background, she seemed almost like a visitant from another sphere, rather than a thing of flesh and blood.

"I suppose I must have dreamed it, yet I did not know that I was asleep. Nowadays, when I find it so hard to sleep, dreams which are with me when awake, are with me still when sleeping."

She sighed. Her dressing-gown was open at the neck, so that one could see how her dainty night-dress rose and fell. She spoke, as if unconsciously, aloud, with something in her manner which suggested that she herself was scarcely aware what audible expression she was giving to her thoughts.

In the centre of the mantelshelf, in the place of honour, was a man's framed portrait. Taking it in her hand, she began to address it as if the person it represented were before her in the flesh—with Mr. Wilkins behind the chair within a few feet of her on one side, and Mr. Mason on the other.

"Do you know, it is the quaintest thing, but I thought I heard your voice—it must have been in my dreams; perhaps I never shall hear it again with my waking ears. Oh, Harry, if I only knew where you were, if I could only tell you how sorry and ashamed I am of my bad temper, if I could only ask you to forgive me for all the things I said, never meaning them—no, I haven't meant one of the unkind things I've ever said to you. You know, women are such—curiosities; I believe men seldom understand how curious they are. When a woman's in a tantrum she is so apt to say the

first thing that comes to the tip of her tongue, and Satan, or whoever it is, is so quick at putting things there which she doesn't know are there until they have been said. When, that dreadful day, I told you that I wished I'd never seen you, and you replied that in that case I should never see you again, I didn't mean in the least what I said, and I suppose you didn't either, and now it seems that you did—and that's why my heart is breaking. When you rushed out of that window, I thought that probably by dinner time you'd be back; and when dinner time came, and bedtime, and you never came—shall I ever forget what that first night was like, when I could do nothing but cry and prowl about the house, waiting and watching all through the night for you to come; and you never came. Oh, what I felt like in the morning! If you had only known, if you had only dimly guessed, I'm sure you would have come rushing to me as fast as ever you could, unless your love for me had died because of the cruel things I said. Oh, Harry, if your love for me has died!"

Pressing the portrait to her lips, she kissed it with a lover's ecstasy.

"How long—how long ago it seems. Even if you've ceased to care for me as you used, I think you might let me know where you are, so that I could ask you to forgive me. I'm afraid I shall go mad if I don't know soon; it's—it's getting more than I can bear."

She pressed her hands to her temples. Still holding the portrait, moving across the room, she

drew aside a pair of heavy plush curtains, which veiled what proved to be a French window. This she unlatched, unbolted, and threw wide open. The night air came streaming in. She drew long breaths, as if she drew it into her lungs with a sense of physical rapture.

"How cool and sweet it is, scented with all the perfumes of the garden. So many flowers seem to smell so much sweeter at night than in the morning; it's their breath that I'm inhaling. How lovely it is, although it is so dark."

"You don't for one moment imagine that a man of experience like me would choose for a job like this a night when the moon was at the full?"

This is what Mr. Wilkins behind his chair was saying to himself. As to what Mr. Mason was saying, history is still.

The lady, unconscious of her audience, going farther through the window, stood on the steps without. Taking advantage of what she fondly imagined to be her perfect solitude, stretching out her hands in front of her, she gave utterance to her feelings in what, to her hearers, seemed a somewhat elevated strain.

"They say that lovers' voices travel very far at night. Oh, night, take mine to him, for though he's my husband, I'm his lover, and shall be ever, ever more. Tell him how much I want him; how much in need of him I am; how sad and sick at heart I am because he does not come; how all the sunshine has gone out of my life, and there is nothing left. Tell him how much I am in need of

him, this very moment, now, and bid him please to come, for if he does not come quickly, evil will befall me, and he'll be sorry."

"I shouldn't wonder," commented Mr. Wilkins behind his chair, "but what he would. If she's going on talking to the night like that, I wish she'd go out into the night and do it, and give a man a chance to do his business. How long does she suppose that I'm going to stop mewed up here? Them women!"

Instead of doing as Mr. Wilkins inwardly suggested, the lady came back into the room. She regarded the portrait, which she had still in her hand.

"If you heard—won't you come?" And again she kissed the pictured lips.

"This," declared Mr. Wilkins to himself, with what would have been a groan if he had dared to give it utterance, "is disgusting, wasting those sweet trifles on a piece of pasteboard. If she must kiss something, I wonder, if I were to show myself, if she'd kiss me."

He was presently to learn. Crossing to the fireplace, with the apparent intention of seating herself on the most comfortable chair the room contained, she drew forward that one behind which Mr. Wilkins was hidden—and he stood up.

"Excuse me, miss, but is there anything I can do for you?"

That was the observation which he addressed to her. Then, as if he felt it desirable that they should clearly understand each other, he added :

"Don't scream, miss, or do anything silly of that sort—it might make trouble. In a case like this, peace, perfect peace, is what makes things run smooth."

"I've not the slightest intention of screaming."

"I thought you hadn't. You don't look as if that sort of thing was in your line. If you'll pardon my saying so, you seem to be made of a different clay."

"What are you doing here?"

"Now, miss, what a question, what a question! What do you suppose I'm doing here, paying a little call at this hour of the night, and so anxious not to disturb you that I go hiding behind a chair?"

"You had better go." Turning, she made a gesture towards the open window.

"Yes, miss, I had—oh, I certainly had, and I'm much obliged to you for calling my attention to the window that you've left open so handy. But, you see, when I go, I want to take one or two things with me, little trifles, of more value to me than to the owner; and what I'm asking myself is, what am I to do with you while I'm putting them together."

"Do with me—you! What do you mean—by what you are going to do with me?"

"Well, you see, miss, it's awkward. I've got myself to look after; now, haven't I? And of course you've got yourself—and that's where it is; our interests, as you might put it, clash. I suppose I couldn't ask you to let me put a bandage over your eyes, and stuff something into your mouth, and tie your hands behind you, and lock you up inside

that sideboard, or something of that sort, could I? Now, miss, don't you move; don't you do anything which might look as if you were, what we might call, going to raise the alarm. See here!"

Over the top of the arm-chair gleamed the barrel of a revolver. The lady gave no outward sign of being disconcerted by its presence.

"Are you going to fire that at me?"

"I hope not, miss. I do most sincerely hope that I'm going to fire it at no one; believe me, that's the very last thing I want to do. But at the same time you must see for yourself that I cannot have you a-raising the alarm."

"You needn't be afraid of my doing that, considering that I'm all alone in the house."

"You're all alone in the house, are you? I thought you might be, but I wasn't sure. Both your servants are out, are they?"

"I've only one. Cook left me because my husband is not at home just now, and she declined to stay in the house in which there was no gentleman. Eliza, who is at present my only maid, is staying the night with some friends. She did not quite like going; but I told her that I was not in the least afraid of being in the house alone—and I'm not."

"I can see you're not afraid, miss, I can see that plainly; very straight you hold yourself, and—that photograph in your hand is not shaking."

"If it is—a little, it's because you have taken me by surprise."

"I shouldn't wonder but what I have—no, I shouldn't wonder. Perhaps you'll be more sur-

prised by the time we've finished our little conversation. Now, how are we going to manage this, miss, you and me, between ourselves?"

"As I told you before, you had better go—at once, please."

Mr. Wilkins shook his head.

"It can't; no, it really can't be done, not so much at once as you might wish. You've got some nice things in this house, some very nice things, and I'm a poor, hard-working man, what's pressed for money. I shall have to have those things to help me lead an honest life—all the lot of them I shall have to have. I don't want to deceive you, I'm not of a deceiving sort, but I'm not going to leave anything behind that's worth carrying away. Now, how are we going to arrange it, you and me—as I said, between ourselves?"

"Do you mean that you're going to steal my husband's property?"

"I was meaning something of the kind—yes, I must confess it; and yours too, if there's any of it worth stealing; and, in confidence, I expect there is."

"And what do you suppose I'm going to do while you're stealing?"

"What I've got to do is to see that you do nothing. Now, miss."

She had moved with the apparent intention of gaining the open window. He fired. Although, apparently, she had not been hit, the noise of the report had caused her to change her plan. Stopping half-way between Mr. Wilkins and the window, she turned to confront him.

"I heard the bullet whiz past my ear."

She said it as if she expected the announcement to surprise him as much as the fact had clearly surprised her. But he did not seem to be in the least surprised. He came from behind the chair with the revolver still levelled in her direction.

"You would have it—I warned you, but you would; you should keep still, you really should. That time I never hit you because I never meant to hit you, but next time I shall mean to hit you, and what I mean I do."

"You're a coward."

"I daresay I am. Now, will you give me your word that you won't scream or move, or do anything of any kind unless I tell you?"

"I'll do nothing of the kind."

"Then see in what a position I am placed—by you. I hate to have to handle a woman, save in the way of kindness, but if that really is the position you mean to take up, I shall have to. Now, ask yourself the question, Shan't I? Would you mind sitting down in this chair?"

He alluded to the one behind which he had been hiding, which she had just drawn forward.

"Why should I?"

"Ask all your questions when you are sitting, but none till then."

"I believe you—you mean to dare to touch me."

One could see that her breath was coming a little more quickly, the colour was mounting in her cheeks, as she began to realize that this man was really dangerous.

"If you were to tie your own hands behind you, bandage your eyes, shove something into your mouth, and rope yourself in this chair so that you couldn't move, or speak, or see, or do anything at all, then I wouldn't touch you, I give you my solemn word of honour. But as you couldn't do these things to yourself even if you would, consider the position in which you place me. What is a man to do?"

Moving suddenly forward, he had, before she guessed his purpose, his hand upon her throat. With a force for which he was, apparently, unprepared, in an instant, she not only drew herself free, but with her open palm she gave him two swinging blows, one on either side of his face. They seemed both to sting and to startle him.

"You—you vixen," he observed.

"How dare you touch me?"

"Now listen to me, my girl, I've had enough of your cackle; if you don't show fight I'll use you as gently as I can; but I'm going to make you safe. If you do show fight, if I have to wring your pretty neck, and break every bone in that nice little body of yours, I'll have you safe just the same. Now you make up your mind which it's going to be—quick. Are you going to sit down in that chair, as I told you, and behave like a good girl, or am I going to start my outing you? Now then, quick; how is it going to be? Sit down."

His manner had suddenly become unpleasantly like that of a savage cur. With clenched fists and burning cheeks, the swift rise and fall of her snowy

night-dress suggesting the force of the emotion which raged within, she stood before him like some startled wild thing which had suddenly become aware of imminent, threatening danger. She gasped as he made a half step forward.

"Now—for the last time, which is it going to be? Will you sit down, of your own free will, and keep on sitting down—or am I to make you?"

"All right, cully, I'll attend to that."

Mr. Mason, rising from behind his own particular chair like a Jack-in-the-Box, coming rapidly forward, caught the lady by the arm. The very force of the shock his coming gave her was her salvation. So startled was she by his unexpected appearance on the scene that, her muscles becoming unwontedly tense, she twisted herself out of his grip with a strength of which no one, to look at her, would have supposed her to be capable. Mr. Mason cursed. Mr. Wilkins made a grab at her on the other side. She, in her turn, making, with surprising presence of mind, a grab at him, snatched, before he had the slightest inkling of what she would be at, the revolver from his hand; and as she did so it went off. Mr. Wilkins gave a howl and a jump.

"She's shot me!" he yelled.

That the injury he had received was not very severe, the activity he displayed made evident.

"Where's she shot you?" asked Mr. Mason.

"The bullet's cut my leg like a red-hot knife. I believe it's in there now."

"What did you let her get hold of the pop-gun for?"

"Do you think I wanted her to, you silly——" There followed a string of epithets. "She's a something, something cat, that's what she is; but I'll cut her claws for her before I'm done."

"If either of you move, I'll shoot."

This remark came from the lady. She was standing very upright, with the revolver pointed straight at them.

"You put down that gun," cried its owner.

"Not I; I told you I wasn't afraid of being left in the house alone, and I will prove to you that I'm not—you pair of cowards. If either of you move I'll fire, and that will be your last movement for some time. This is not the first time I've handled a revolver, as you'll find."

The two men exchanged glances, on their faces a very curious expression.

"A pretty mess you've made of things," said Mr. Mason.

"If she hadn't as good as lamed me I'd take that gun from her before she knew where she was."

Mr. Mason addressed the lady in what he possibly meant to be a wheedling tone.

"Now, missy, you've got the best of us, I own it straight, I do—you let me go, and I'll say thank you."

"Then go."

"But begging your pardon, miss, I can't go without moving; if you mean to shoot me if I move, how am I to do it?"

"If you walk straight to that window and straight through it, I'll not shoot."

"Thank you kindly, miss. That's what I was meaning to do."

With a distinctly nervous air, and with one eye on the pistol, Mr. Mason began to move in the direction of the window; the muzzle of the revolver followed him. With what, in a lame man, was extraordinary quickness, taking advantage of the fact that he had ceased to be covered, Mr. Wilkins, bending nearly double, made a headlong dash at the girl, and caught her round the waist before she could swing the weapon back at him. And, indeed, the moment she tried to do so, Mr. Mason, ceasing to move towards the window, rushing at her instead, gripping her by the wrist, wrung the weapon from her hand.

"Look lively!" he exclaimed. "I've got her fixed. Down her."

Mr. Wilkins, acting on the hint, did down her; whirling her suddenly round, he brought her with a crash on to the floor. There, bewildered, shaken, bruised, she lay.

"Thought you'd got us nicely, didn't you, my dear? Bless your heart, my pretty lamb, there was more than one gun between the pair of us. Doesn't that look as if there were two?"

It did, very much, since Mr. Mason was holding a revolver in either hand, and both the weapons were being pointed at her.

"Now, I shouldn't have said a word about my gun," he continued, "not a word, if you hadn't

made me ; but when you talk about shooting me, that alters the complexion of affairs, because that's a game that two can play at. You were good enough to let us know that you knew something about the handling of a revolver, and, as it happens, so do I. Notice that? That shot went right through the sleeve of your pretty jacket ; if you'd moved so much as an inch it would have broken your arm. I'll back myself to shoot with one of these things against any man, or any lady either. You do as you're told, and you'll be all right ; you try any more of your sly games, and I'll make a pattern all over you, and then you'll see what kind of shot I am, what's left of you, that is."

"Look out!" cried Mr. Wilkins, who was standing by the lady, who still lay on the floor. "There's some one coming through the window."

"Who the—— What the——"

Mr. Wilkins's warning had come too late—some one was not only coming through the window, but had come ; some one who had gripped both his wrists, as he had done the lady's, and had twisted both the revolvers from him before he had even time to realize that they were in danger. And when he looked round to see who had done it, he was struck by the butt of one of the weapons in the centre of the forehead, and, dropping as if he had been pole-axed, lay where he fell. Mr. Wilkins did his very utmost not to stand upon the order of his going. The new-comer was a huge man, probably over six feet high, broad as he was tall. Mr. Wilkins, as an athlete, was not at his best ; in

a physical sense, he knew his master when he saw him—he was aware that he saw his master then. He made a dash for the door, but the stranger was the quicker. Before he reached it the stranger had his hands about his throat and, holding him in that uncomfortable fashion, lifting him off his feet, was handling him as Mr. Wilkins never had been handled before, and he had had some uncomfortable experiences in his time.

“You’re—choking—me,” he gasped.

“That’s what I mean to do,” the stranger said.

Help came from the lady on the floor.

“Harry!” she exclaimed, “please don’t kill him.”

“Why not? It’s all he’s good for—but perhaps you’re right. Let’s see what he’s got on him.”

He stripped the coat off Mr. Wilkins’s back, and then his waistcoat; then he felt him all over with his hand, Mr. Wilkins submitting to the process as meekly as if he had been some lay figure.

“Here are his tools in his jacket pocket, and a bag, in which he probably meant to carry away his haul; and there’s thirteen and sevenpence halfpenny in his trouser pocket, we’ll keep that to pay for the damage he’s done.”

Picking him up by the scruff of the neck as if he had been some cur, the stranger carried him to the open window.

“Now, my lad, I’m going to give you six seconds’ start, and then I’m going to shoot at whatever there is of you in sight. Scoot!”

And Mr. Wilkins scooted; before the six

seconds were gone, all of him was out of sight. The stranger, returning into the room, transferred his attention to Mr. Mason.

"Now, let's look at you. Hullo, this gentleman is playing 'possum, he's shamming senseless. I thought I hadn't given him quite so hard a tap as that: he's as much himself as I am. Wake up, laddie." Mr. Mason woke up with a sudden screech. "I thought a judicious pinch might rouse you. On to your feet."

Mr. Mason was on to his feet almost before he knew it, with the stranger's hand, as had been the case with his friend, on the scruff of his neck.

"I heard you threaten my wife that you'd make what you call a pattern on her with a revolver; I'm not going to do that to you, but I hope you can swim, because I am going to treat you as the cur you are, and throw you into the pond; in the centre, where you'll land, it's twelve feet deep."

"Can't swim a stroke," gasped Mr. Mason. "It will be murder if you do."

"Then murder it will be, because into the pond you go."

The lady having risen from the floor, came and laid her hand on the big man's arm.

"Harry, I don't think, if I were you, I should throw him into the pond."

"Not throw him into the pond? Oh. Why not?"

"It might be so bad for the fish, and you know it was only restocked last year. As he must feel such a very disappointed man, I think, if I were you, I should let him go."

"You would? Well—go."

And Mr. Mason went, being thrown through the window on to the path beyond. As soon as possible, after he had reached that path, he picked himself up and ran for his life. Then, when he was sure that he was gone, the gentleman turned to the lady.

"It's rather a bit of luck, my turning up like this."

"I suppose it is." She was looking up at him with a mischievous smile. "How tall you are! I never seem to notice it so much as when I have my shoes off and my hair down."

"That sort of thing makes all the difference to a woman; and anyhow, tall or short, like this you do look ripping. I hope you don't mind my coming back, even at this rather unconventional hour."

"I don't mind what hour it is, so long as you've come."

"Really? Honest Injin?"

"Honest Injin. Have you had—a good time, wherever you've been?"

"Beastly—rotten; I haven't been able to do a single blessed thing except think of you."

"I've been thinking of you." She was perched on the arm of the chair behind which Mr. Wilkins had been hiding: as she swung her foot one could see that, except for the slipper, it was bare.

"I say, you do look ripping."

"Think so?"

"I couldn't stick it any longer—I simply couldn't: I had to come; it's funny, but I had."

"It is funny."

"I said to myself this morning that I'd see you to-night, if you received me with a pail of boiling water. I've been travelling all day—the train would not go fast enough. When I reached the junction, of course our last train had gone, and there wasn't a cab or anything."

"That comes of living on a branch line."

"I know; so I walked it."

"Walked it? Why, it's more than fourteen miles."

"If you had felt like I did, you wouldn't have cared if it had been forty. Every step I took I said to myself, That's one nearer, and the farther I went the less tired I got. Of course I thought you'd be in bed. I meant to spend the night in the garden looking up at your window."

"Harry! I should have known you were there the instant you came. I should have opened my window and said, Will you please come in?"

"Would you?"

"I should."

He looked at her, and she at him. There was something in her eyes which made him laugh.

"Hadn't I better close the window?"

"Perhaps you had."

So he closed it.



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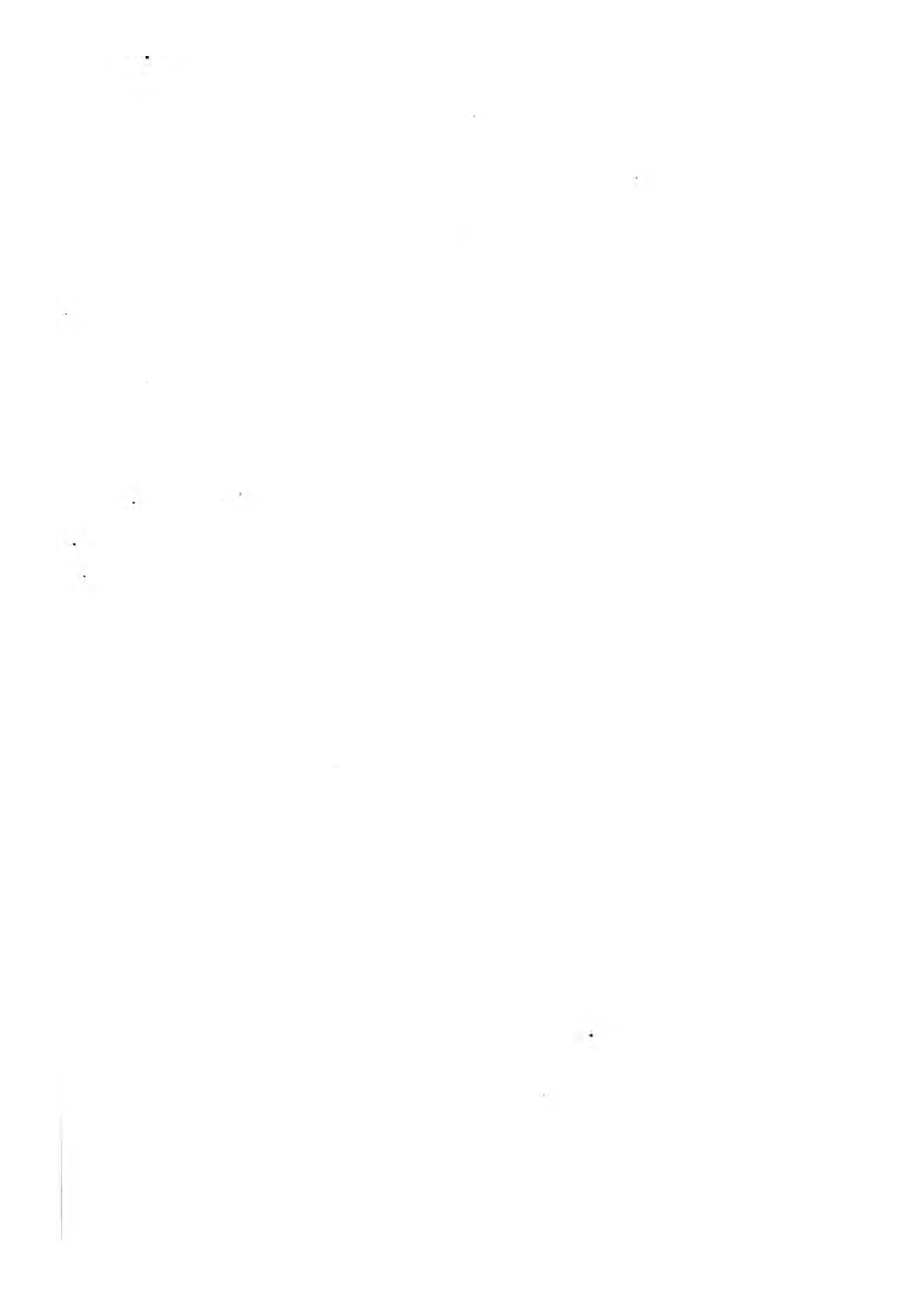
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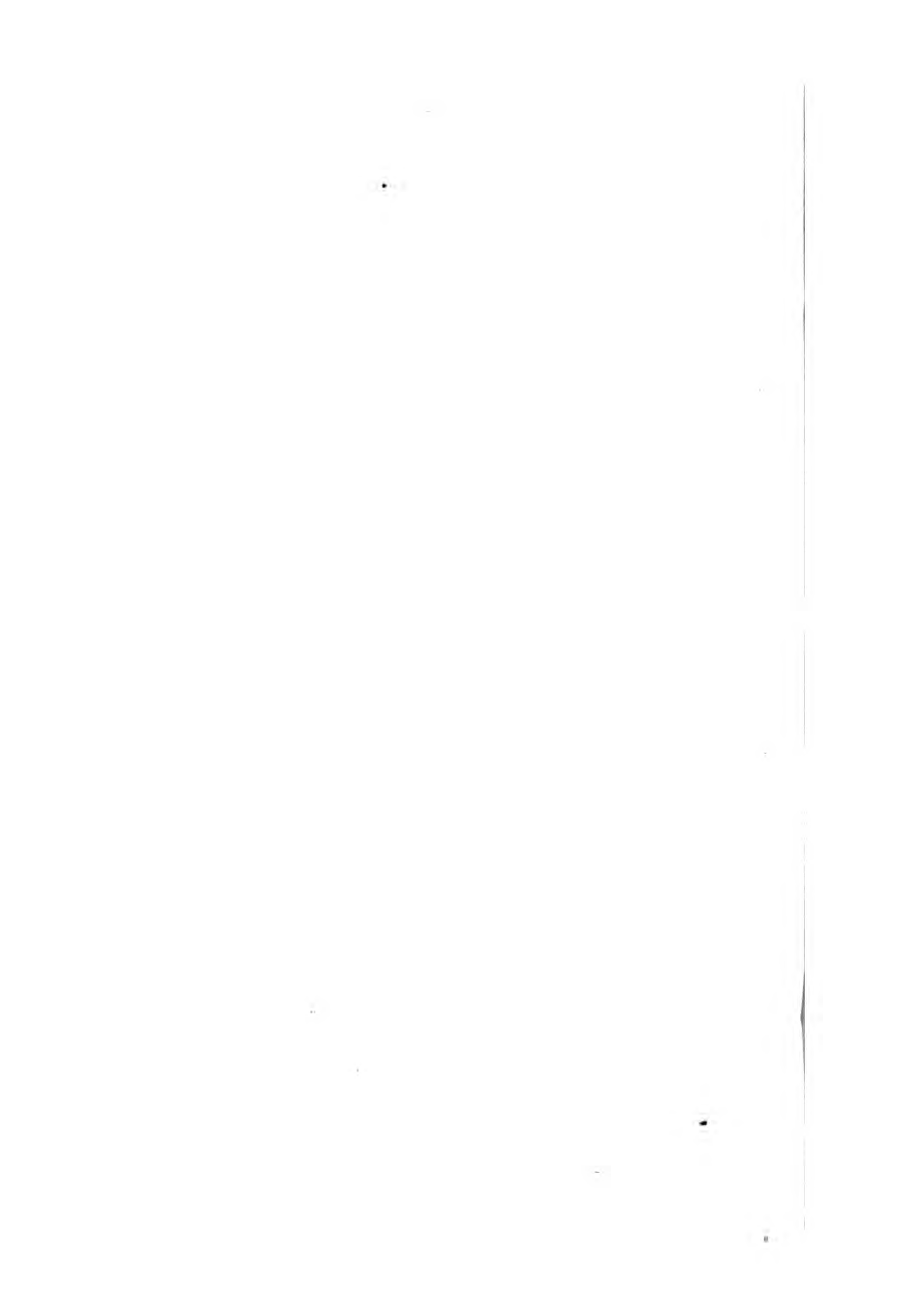
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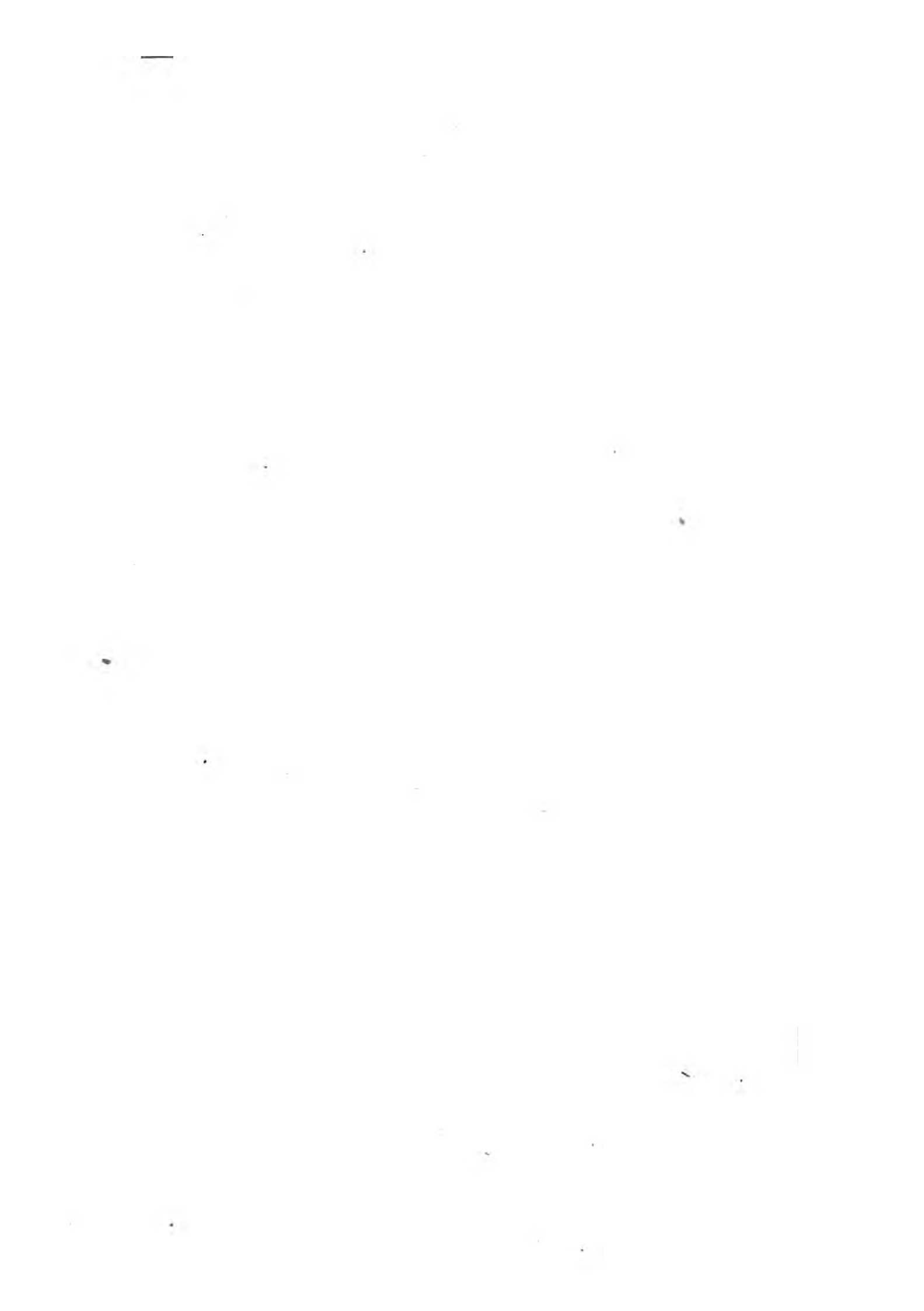
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In her new novel, Bertha Shelley has written emphatically a love story. It is a novel that goes straight to the heart of the reader and grips it until the very last page. The action of the story begins in Australia, but continues in London, and an effective contrast is made between the heroine's early life, with its open and rough surroundings, and the more complex environment of the somewhat raffish society in London into which she is thrown. But her charm and simplicity conquer all, and she remains faithful to her ideals. The book is glowing with interest, and the convincing charm of the narrative, with its strong and subtle grasp, leaves the reader with the impression that the oldest story in the world is the only story worth the telling.

HADOW OF 'SHAWS. By THEO DOUGLAS (Mrs. H. D. EVERETT).

The story of an unwilling wife, and her endeavour to escape the obligation of a nominal marriage, into which she was forced at the age of sixteen. When the story opens, the dreaded husband is returning from India after an absence of four years. The expedient to which she resorts, and its after consequences, supply the thread of a briskly moving romance. The scene is laid in a country village, not far remote from the London of 1796.

UNCONVENTIONAL MOLLY. By JOSEPH ADAMS, Author of 'Ten Thousand Miles through Canada.'

Unconventional Molly is an Irish romance. The heroine is a link between high life with its prejudices, and lowly life with its struggles. The destiny of the characters is worked out in an atmosphere where love and jealousy, tragedy and comedy, are brought into play. The setting of the story is on the shores of the most beautiful bay in the West, a fitting background for the ardour of the *grande passion* and the poetic temperament of a race which still have eyes for the fairies that swing in the purple heather and frolic in the moonlit glens.

THE WARE CASE. By GEORGE PLEYDELL.

In *The Ware Case* Mr. George Pleydell tells the story of a crime and its gradual unravelment. The central figures are Lady Ware, a beautiful, young, and well-bred woman, torn between deep passion and high ideals, and her pleasure-loving, shallow husband. A mysterious murder and its consequences hurl the woman into the overwhelming drama of life. The book is remarkable not only for its unflinching and intense dramatic interest, but its being a detective story about persons in whom one can believe.

PASSIONS OF STRAW. By EVELYN F. HEYWOOD.

This story unfolds the poignant tragedy of a woman who, proud, beautiful, ambitious, finds herself wedded to a cynic and a roué. This man having shattered her happiness, finally succeeds in drawing their only child into the whirlpool of his idle, vicious life. The detail of the boy's rescue by the Machiavellian scheming of the father, who seems to regret what he has so carelessly inaugurated, is of powerful interest. The fine steadfast character of Peggy Haslam lightens the darker shadows of the book.

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