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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN OLD MEERSCHAUM ***

AN OLD MEERSCHAUM

By David Christie Murray

**From: Coals Of Fire And Other Stories
By David Christie Murray
In Three Volumes Vol. II.**

Chatto & Windus, Piccadilly 1882

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CHAPTER I.

The market-place at Trieste lay in a blaze of colour under the June sunlight. The scent of fruits and flowers

was heavy on the air. A faint-hearted breeze which scarcely dared to blow came up from the harbour now and again, and made the heat just bearable. Mr. William Holmes Barndale, of Barndale in the county of Surrey, and King's Bench Walk-, Temple, sat in shadow in front of a restaurant with his legs comfortably thrust forth and his hat tilted over his eyes. He pulled his tawny beard lazily with one hand, and with the other caressed a great tumbler of iced beer. He was beautifully happy in his perfect idleness, and a sense was upon him of the eternal fitness of things in general. In the absolute serenity of his beatitude he fell asleep, with one hand still lazily clutching his beard, and the other still lingering lovingly near the great tumbler. This was surely not surprising, and on the face of things it would not have seemed that there was any reason for blushing at him. Yet a young lady, unmistakably English and undeniably pretty, gave a great start, beholding him, and blushed celestial rosy red. She was passing along the shady side of the square with papa and mamma, and the start and the blush came in with some hurried commonplace in answer to a commonplace. These things, papa and mamma noted not—good, easy, rosy, wholesome people, who had no great trouble in keeping their heads clear of fancies, and were chiefly engaged just then with devices for keeping cool.

Two minutes later, or thereabouts, came that way a young gentleman of whom the pretty young lady seemed a refined and feminine copy, save and except that the young lady was dearly and daintily demure, whilst from this youth impudence and mischief shone forth as light radiates from a lantern. He, pausing before the sleeping Barndale, blushed not, but poked him in the ribs with the end of his walking-stick, and regarded him with an eye of waggish joy, as who should say that to poke a sleeping man in the ribs was a stroke of comic genius whereof the world had never beheld the like. He sat on his stick, cocked Mr. Barndale's hat on one side, and awaited that gentleman's waking. Mr. Barndale, languidly stretching himself, arose, adjusted his hat, took a great drink of iced beer, and, being thereby in some degree primed for conversation, spoke.

'That you, Jimmy?' said Mr. Barndale.

'Billy, my boy?' said the awakener, 'how are you?'

'Thought you were in Oude, or somewhere,' said Mr. Barndale.

'Been back six months,' the other answered.

'Anybody with you here?'

'Yes,' said the awakener, 'the Mum, the Pater, and the Kid.'

Mr. Barndale did not look like the sort of man to be vastly shocked at these terms of irreverence, yet it is a fact that his brown and bearded cheeks flushed like any schoolgirl's.

'Stopping at the Hotel de la Ville,' said the awakener, 'and adoin'g of the Grand Tower, my pippin. I'm playing cicerone. Come up and have a smoke and a jaw.'

'All right,' said Mr. Barndale languidly. Nobody, to look at him now, would have guessed how fast his heart beat, and how every nerve in his body fluttered. 'I'm at the same place. When did you come?'

'Three hours ago. We're going on to Constantinople. Boat starts at six.'

'Ah!' said Barndale placidly. 'I'm going on to Constantinople too.'

'Now that's what I call jolly,' said the other. 'You're going to-night of course?'

'Of course. Nothing to stay here for.'

At the door of the hotel stood Barndale's servant, a sober-looking Scotchman dressed in dark tweed.

'Come with me, Bob,' said Barndale as he passed him. 'See you in the coffee-room in five minutes, Jimmy.'

In his own room Barndale sat down upon the bedside and addressed his servant.

'I have changed my mind about going home. Go to Lloyd's office and take places for this evening's boat to Constantinople. Wait a bit. Let me see what the fare is. There you are. Pack up and get everything down to the boat and wait there until I come.'

The man disappeared, and Barndale joined his friend. He had scarce seated himself when a feminine rustling was heard outside. The door opened, a voice of singular sweetness cried, 'Jimmy, dear!' and a young lady entered. It was the young lady who blushed and started when she saw Barndale asleep in front of the restaurant. She blushed again, but held her hand frankly out to him. He rose and took it with more tenderness than he knew of. The eyes of the third person twinkled, and he winked at his own reflection in a mirror.

'This,' Barndale said, 'is not an expected pleasure, and is all the greater on that account. By a curious coincidence I find we are travelling together to Constantinople.'

Her hand still lingered in his whilst he said this, and as he ceased to speak he gave it a little farewell pressure. Her sweet hazel eyes quite beamed upon him, and she returned the pressure cordially. But she answered only—

'Papa will be very pleased,'

'Isn't it singular,' said the guilty Barndale with an air of commonplace upon him, 'that we should all be making this journey together?'

'Very singular indeed,' said pretty Miss Le-land, with so bright a sparkle of mirth in those demure hazel eyes that Barndale, without knowing why, felt himself confounded.

Mr. James Leland winked once more at his reflection in the mirror, and was discovered in the act by Barndale, who became signally disconcerted in manner.

Miss Leland relieved his embarrassment by taking away her brother for a conference respecting the package of certain treasures purchased a day or two before in Venice. The lone one smoked, and lounged, and waited. He tried to read, and gave it up. He strayed down to the harbour, and, finding his servant solemnly mounting guard over his luggage on board the boat, he himself went aboard and inspected his berth, and chatted with the steward, in whom he discovered an old acquaintance.

But the time went drearily; and Barndale, who was naturally a man to be happy under all sorts of circumstances, suffered all the restlessness, chagrin, and envy with which love in certain of its stages has

power to disturb the spirit. He had made up a most heroic mind on this question of Miss Leland some three months ago, and had quite decided that she did not care for him. He wasn't going to break his heart for a woman who didn't care for him. Not he.

*If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?*

She had made fun of him in her own demure way. He ventured once on a little touch of sentiment, which she never neglected to repeat, when opportunity offered, in his presence. She repeated it with so serious an air, so precisely as if it were an original notion which had just then occurred to her, that Barndale winced under it every time she used it. His mind was quite made up on this matter. He would go away and forget her. He believed she liked him, in a friendly sisterly sort of way, and that made him feel more hopeless. There were evidences enough to convince you or me, had we been there to watch them, that this young lady was caught in the toils of love quite as inextricably as this young gentleman; but, with the pigheaded obstinacy and stupidity incident to his condition, he declined to see it, and voluntarily betook himself to misery, after the manner of young men in love from time immemorial. A maiden who can be caught without chasing is pretty generally not worth catching; and cynics have been known to say that the pleasure of stalking your bride is perhaps the best part of matrimony. This our young Barndale would not have believed. He believed, rather, that the tender hopes and chilling fears of love were among the chief pains of life, and would have laughed grimly if anyone had prophesied that he would ever look back to them with longing regret. We, who are wiser, will not commiserate but envy this young gentleman, remembering the time when those tender hopes and chilling fears were ours—when we were happier in our miseries than we have now the power to be in our joys.

The Lelands came at last, and Barndale had got the particular form of love's misery which he most coveted. The old gentleman was cordial, the old lady was effusive, the awakener was what he had always been, and Lilian was what she had always been to Barndale—a bewildering maddening witchery, namely, which set him fairly beside himself. Let it not be prejudicial to him in your judgment that you see him for the first time under these foolish circumstances. Under other conditions you would find much to admire in him. Even now, if you have any taste for live statuary, you shall admire this upright six feet two inches of finely-modelled bone and muscle. If manly good-nature can make a handsome sun-browned face pleasant to you, then shall Barndale's countenance find favour in your eyes. Of his manly ways, his good and honest heart, this story will tell you something, though perchance not much. If you do not like Barndale before you part with him, believe me, it is my fault, who tell his story clumsily, and not his. For the lady of his love there might be more to say, if I were one of those clever people who read women. As it is, you shall make your own reading of her, and shall dislike her on your own personal responsibility, or love her for her transparent merits, and for the sake of no stupid analysis of mine.

Do you know the Adriatic? It pleases me to begin a love story over its translucent sapphire and under its heavenly skies. I shall rejoice again in its splendours as I hover in fancy over these two impressionable young hearts, to whom a new glamour lives upon its beauties.

Papa and Mamma Leland are placidly asleep on the saloon deck, beneath the flapping awning. Leland Junior is carrying on a pronounced flirtation with a little Greek girl, and Lilian and Barndale are each enjoying their own charming spiritual discomforts. They say little, but, like the famous parrot, they think the more. Concerning one thing, however, Mr. Barndale thinks long and deeply, pulling his tawny beard meanwhile. Lilian, gazing with placid-seeming spirit on the deep, is apparently startled by the suddenness of his address.

'Miss Leland!'

'How you startled me!' she answers, turning her hazel eyes upon him. She has been waiting these last five minutes for him to speak, and knew that he was about it. But take notice that these small deceits in the gentle sex are natural, and by no means immoral.

'I am disturbed in mind,' says Barndale, blushing a little behind his bronze, 'about an incident of yesterday.'

'Conscience,' says Lilian, calmly didactic, 'will assert herself occasionally.'

'Conscience,' says Barndale, blushing a little more perceptibly, 'has little to do with this disturbance. Why did you laugh when I said that it was singular that we should be making this pleasant journey together?'

'Did I laugh?' she asked demurely. Then quite suddenly, and with an air of denunciation.

'Ask James.'

Barndale rises obediently.

'No, no,' says the lady. 'Sit down, Mr. Barndale. I was only joking. There was no reason.' And now the young lady is blushing. 'Did I really laugh?'

'You smiled,' says the guilty Barndale. 'At what?' inquires she with innocent inadvertency.

'Oh!' cries the young fellow, laughing outright, 'that is too bad. Why *did* you laugh when I said it was singular?'

'I am not prepared,' she answers, 'to account for all my smiles of yesterday.'

'Then,' says Barndale, 'I'll go and ask Jimmy.'

'You will do nothing of the kind.'

'Why?'

'Because you are too polite, Mr. Barndale, to pry into a lady's secrets.'

'There is a secret here, then?'

'No.'

'You are contradictory, Miss Leland?'

'You are obtuse, Mr. Barndale. If there be a secret it is as open as—'

'As what?'

'As your door was yesterday when you spoke to your servant.'

'Then you——?'

'Yes,' responds Miss Lilian, severely. I know you gentlemen. You were going home until you met that idle and dissolute James, by accident. Then you suddenly change your mind, and go out to Constantinople.' There for a moment she pauses and follows up her victory over the now crimson Barndale with a terrible whisper. '*On the spree!* Oh, you need scarcely look surprised. I have learned your vulgar terms from James.'

'I hope I am not so criminal as you fancy,' says Barndale, finding the proof of his guilt fall less heavily than he had feared.

'If you were thrice as criminal, this is not the tribunal,' and she waves her parasol round her feet, 'at which the felon should be tried.'

'But, Miss Leland, if it were not because I met your brother that—I came out here! If there were another reason!'

'If there were another reason I confess my smile out of time and apologise for it.' And therewith she shot him through and through with another smile. It was fatal to both, for he in falling caught her with him. These things have a habit of occurring all at once, and in anything rather than the meditated fashion.

'Lilian,' said the young Barndale, inwardly delirious at his own daring and the supernal beauty of her smile, but on the outside of him quite calm and assured, and a trifle masterful, 'I came because I learned that you were coming. If you are displeased with me for that, I will land at Corfu and go home. And bury my misery,' he added in a tone so hollow and sepulchral that you or I had laughed.

Miss Leland sat quite grave with downcast eyes.

'Are you displeased?'

'I have no right to be displeased,' she murmured.

Of course you and I can see quite clearly that he might have kissed her there and then, and settled the business, murmuring 'Mine own!' But he was in love, which we are not, and chose to interpret that pretty murmur wrongly. So there fell upon the pair an awkward silence. He was the first to break it.

'I will land at Corfu,' he said, with intense penitence.

'But not—not because of my displeasure,' she answered; a little too gaily for the gaiety to be quite real.

'Ah, then!' he said, catching at this ark of perfect safety, which looked like a straw to his love-blinded eyes, 'you are not displeased?'

'No,' she answered lightly, still playing with him, now she felt so sure of him, and inwardly melting and yearning over him; 'I am not displeased.'

'But are you pleased?' said he, growing bolder. 'Are you pleased that I came because you came—because I——?'

There he paused, and she took a demure look at him. He burst out all at once in a whisper—

'Because I love you?'

She did not answer him; but when next she looked at him he saw that the tears had gathered thickly in her lovely eyes.

'You are not pained at that,' he said. 'I have loved you ever since that day you were at my place in Surrey, when you came down with Jimmy, and my poor old dad was there.'

'Yes,' she said, looking up again, and smiling through the dimness of her eyes, 'I know.'

And so it came about that, when Leland Senior awoke, Barndale held a conference with him, which terminated in a great shaking of hands. There was another conference between Lilian and her mother, which ended, as it began, in tears, and kisses, and smiles. Tears, and kisses, and smiles made a running accompaniment to that second conference, and tender embraces broke in upon it often. It was settled between them all—papa, and mamma, and the lovers—that they should finish the journey together, and that the marriage should be solemnised a year after their arrival at home. It goes without saying that Barndale looked on this delay with very little approval. But Leland Senior insisted on it stoutly, and carried his point. And even in spite of this the young people were tolerably happy. They were together a good deal, and, in the particular stage at which they had arrived, the mere fact of being together is a bliss and a wonder. Leigh Hunt—less read in these days than he deserves to be—sings truly—

Heaven's in any roof that covers
On any one same night two lovers.

They went about in a state of Elysian beatitude, these young people. Love worked strange metamorphoses, as he does always. They found new joys in Tennyson, and rejoiced in the wonderful colours of the waves. I am not laughing at them for these things. I first read Tennyson when I was in love, and liked him, and understood him a great deal better than I have been able to do since I came out of Love's dear bondages. To be in love is a delicious and an altogether admirable thing. I would be in love again to-morrow if I could. You should be welcome to your foolish laugh at my raptures. Ah me! I shall never know those raptures any more; and the follies you will laugh at in me will be less noble, less tender, less innocently beautiful than those of young love. But to them, who were so sweet to each other, the moonlight was a revelation of marvellous sanctity, and the sea was holy by reason of their passionate hearts that hallowed it.

CHAPTER II.

Incidental mention has been made of the fact that Leland Junior engaged in a pronounced flirtation with a little Greek girl aboard the vessel wherein Barndale made love so stupidly and so successfully. It was out of

this incident that the strange story which follows arose. It would not have been easy to tell that story without relating the episode just concluded; and when one has to be tragic it is well to soften the horrors by a little love-making, or some other such emollient. I regret to say that the little Greek girl—who was tyrannously pretty by the way—was as thorough-paced a little flirt as ever yet the psychic philosopher dissected. She had very large eyes, and very pretty lips, and a very saucy manner with a kind of inviting shyness in it. Jimmy Leland's time had not yet come, or I know no reason why he should not have succumbed to this charming young daughter of Hellas. As it was, he flirted hugely, and cared not for her one copper halfpenny. She was a little taken with him, and was naturally a little indiscreet. Otherwise surely she would never have consented to meet James at the Concordia Garden on the evening of their arrival at Constantinople. He had been in Constantinople before, and was 'down to the ropes,' as he preferred to say. He made his appointment with the young lady and kept it, slipping out from Misserie's, and leaving the other members of his party trifling with their dessert at that dreary table d'hôte, and lost in wonder at the execrable pictures which are painted in distemper upon the walls of that dismal *salle à manger*. He strolled down the Grande Rue de Pera, drank a liqueur at Valori's, and turned into the Concordia in the summer dusk. He sat down at one of the little wooden tables, and aired his Turkish before the waiter by orders for vishnap, limoni, and attesh. Then he crossed his legs, lit his cigar, and waited and watched for the little Greek lady. The little Greek lady came not; but in her stead, as he watched the entrance place, appeared the manly form of his chum Barndale, clad in loose white serge. Barndale caught sight of Leland almost at the moment of his own entrance, and took a seat beside him.

'Lilian has gone to bed,' said Barndale, 'and I came in here by accident. Glad I found you.'

He looked about him with no great interest. The stream of people flowed round and round the little circle, and repeated itself once in five minutes or thereabouts, until he got to know nearly all the faces in the crowd. He noted one face especially, where many were notable.

It was the face of a Greek of a very severe and commanding type, shadowed in some strange way by a look which made the owner of the face absolutely irritating to Barndale. There are some opposites in nature—human nature—which can only meet to hate each other. These two crossed glances once, and each was displeased with what he saw in the other. The Greek saw a handsome, good-natured, bronzed face, the thoughtful eyes whereof looked at him with an expression of curiosity and analysis. The Englishman saw a pair of languid eyes, which flashed instantaneous defiance and anger back to scrutiny. The Greek went by, and in his after passages looked no more at Barndale, who continued to watch him with an unaccountable, disliking regard. The crowd had completed its circle some half score of times, and Barndale missed his Greek from it. Turning to address Leland, he missed him too. He rose and mingled with the circling procession, and listened to the music of the band, and speculated idly on the people who surrounded him, as lazy and unoccupied men will at times. Suddenly, in the shadow of the projecting orchestra, he caught sight of a figure which he fancied was familiar to him. Scarcely had he noticed it when it was joined by another figure, recognisable at once even in that deep shadow—Mr. James Leland. And the other personage was of course the pretty little Greek girl. 'No affair of mine,' said Barndale, who was slow to meddle, even in thought, with other people's doings; 'but neither wise nor right on Jimmy's side,' He walked round the little circle discontentedly, thinking this matter over with deepening displeasure. When he came to the orchestra again the handsome Greek was there, with an expression so devilish on his face that Barndale regarded him with amazement. Demetri Agryopoulo, salaried hanger-on to the Persian embassy, was glaring like a roused wild beast at these two shadowy figures in the shadow of the orchestra. The band was crashing away at the overture to 'Tannhäuser,' the people were laughing and chattering as they circled, and not an eye but Barndale's regarded this drama in the corner. The Greek's hand was in his bosom, where it clutched something with an ugly gesture. His face was in the sideway glare of the footlights which illumined the orchestra. Leland, unconscious of observation, stooped above the girl and chatted with her. He had one arm about her waist. She was nestling up to him in a trustful sort of way. Barndale's eyes were on the Greek, and every muscle in his body was ready for the spring which he knew might have to be made at any minute. Leland stooped lower, and kissed the face upturned to his. At that second the band gave its final crash, and dead silence fell. Out of that dead silence came a shriek of wrath, and hatred, and anguish from Demetri Agryopoulo's lips, and he leaped into the shadow with a hand upraised, and in the hand a blade that glittered as he raised it. One impulse seemed to shoot forth the jealous Greek and his watcher, and before Demetri Agryopoulo could form the faintest notion as to how the thing had happened, a sudden thunderbolt seemed launched against him, and he was lying all abroad with a sprained wrist. The stiletto flew clean over the wall, so swift and dexterous was the twist which Barndale gave the murderous hand that held it.

'Get the girl away,' said Barndale rapidly to Leland. The crowd gathered round, alarmed, curious, eager to observe. Barndale helped the Greek to his feet. 'Are you hurt?' he asked. Demetri glared at him, felt his sprained right wrist with his left hand, picked up his hat, shook off the dust from his disordered clothes, and went his way without a word. Barndale went his way also. The band crashed out again, and the crowd once more began its circle. When a torpedo is lowered into the sea, the wound it makes in the water is soon healed. But the torpedo goes on and explodes by-and-by, with terrible likelihood of damage.

Barndale came down heavily on Leland, in the latter's bedroom at the hotel, that night.

'Well,' said Jimmy, in sole answer to his friend's remonstrance and blame; 'there's one thing about the matter which may be looked on as a dead certainty. The beggar would have had my blood if it hadn't been for you, old man. It's only one more good turn out of a million, Billy, but I shan't forget it.'

With that he arose and shook Barndale's hand.

'What did you do with the girl?' asked Barndale.

'Took her home. The Bloke who had such strong objections to me is her sweetheart.

He's engaged to her; but she says she hates him, and is afraid of him. She'll be more afraid of him now than ever, and with better reason. I suppose I shall have to stop here a time, and see that she isn't murdered. Suppose I went to that Greek sweep, Billy—I've got his address—and explained to him politely that it was all a mistake, and that I'm sorry I went poaching on his manor, and told him that if he liked to have a pot at me

he'd be quite welcome! D'ye think that would be of any use, old man?'

'Leave ill alone!' said Barndale, pulling solemnly away at his pipe.

'I can't,' answered Leland. 'That cove's likelier to murder her than not, if he hasn't got me to murder. Look here, Billy, I'll marry the girl.'

'Don't be a fool,' said Barndale. 'What do you know about the girl?'

'Lots,' answered the imperturbable James.

'Highly connected. Lots of tin. Character irreproachable. That elderly Bulgarian party, Kesanlyk Attar of Roses man, knew all about her. The fat Bloke aboard the boat. You know.'

'He won't hurt her,' said Barndale, thinking of the Greek lover, 'and you're well out of it. Why should you marry the girl? There's nothing worse than I know, is there?'

'There's nothing at all in it but that confounded meeting at the Concordia.'

'Keep out of the way of the man in future,' Barndale counselled his friend, 'and leave him and his ladylove to make this matter up between them. That'll all blow over in time.' With that he said good-night, and rose to go. At the door he turned and asked—

'Who is the man?'

Leland produced his pocket-book, searched for a page, found it, and handed it over to Barndale. There, in a delicate but tremulous hand, was written, 'Demetri Agryopoulo, Hotel Misserie, Grande Rue de Pera.'

'He lives in this house,' said Barndale gravely. 'Lock your door before you go to bed.'

Leland took his advice.

The next morning at table d'hôte they met the Greek. He was evidently well known at the table, and was popular. His right wrist was bandaged, and in answer to many friendly inquiries, he said it had been sprained by a fall. He never looked at either Barndale or Leland, but chatted with his friends in a free and unembarrassed way which extorted the admiration of the two Englishmen, who were both somewhat silent and uncomfortable. But in Lilian's society it was not possible for Barndale to be gravely thoughtful just now. The business of the day was a trip to the Sweet Waters of Europe. Jimmy, who had been caught by that charming title on a former visit, proclaimed the show a swindle, and the Sweet Waters a dreary and dirty canal; but Lilian and her mother must needs go and see what everybody else went to see; and so an open vehicle having with infinitude of trouble been procured, and George Stamos, best of dragomans and staunchest of campaigning comrades, being engaged, Barndale and Leland mounted and rode behind the carriage. Papa Leland, in white serge and a big straw hat with a bigger puggaree on it, winked benevolent in the dazzling sunlight. The party crawled along the Grande Rue, and once off its execrable pavement took the road at a moderately good pace, saw the sights, enjoyed the drive, and started for home again, very much disappointed with the Sweet Waters, and but poorly impressed with the environs of Constantinople on the whole. On the return journey an accident happened which sent grief to Barndale's soul.

Five or six years ago, wandering aimlessly in Venice, Barndale had an adventure. He met a sculptor, a young Italian, by name Antoletti, a man of astonishing and daring genius. This man was engaged on a work of exquisite proportions—'Madeline and Porphyro' he called it. He had denied himself the very necessities of life, as genius will, to buy his marble and to hire his studio. He had paid a twelvemonth's rent in advance, not daring to trust hunger with the money. He lived, poor fellow, by carving meerschaum pipes for the trade, but he lived *for* 'Madeline and Porphyro' and his art. It took Barndale a long time to get into this young artist's confidence; but he got there at last, and made a bid for 'Madeline and Porphyro,' and paid something in advance for it, and had the work completed. He sold it to a connoisseur at an amazing profit, handed that profit to young Antoletti, and made a man of him. 'What can I do for you?' the artist asked him with all his grateful Italian soul on fire, and the tears sparkling in his beautiful Italian eyes. Barndale hesitated awhile: 'You won't feel hurt,' he said at length, 'if I seem to ask too small a thing. I'm a great smoker, and I should like a souvenir now I'm going away. Would you mind carving me a pipe, now? It would be pleasant to have a trifle like that turned out by the hands of genius. I should prize it more than a statue.' 'Ah!' said Antoletti, beaming on him, 'ah, signor! you shall have it. It shall be the last pipe I will ever carve, and I will remember you whilst I carve it.' So the pipe was carved—a work of exquisitely intricate and delicate art. On the rear of the bowl, in view of the smoker, was a female face with a wreath of flowers about the forehead, and with flowers and grapes hanging down in graceful intermingling with flowing bands of hair. These flowers ran into ragged weeds and bedraggled-looking grasses on the other side, and from these grinned a death's head. In at the open mouth of the skull and out at the eyes, and wrapped in sinuous windings at the base, coiled a snake. The pipe was not over large, for all its wealth of ornamentation. Barndale had hung over it when he smoked it first with the care of an affectionate nurse over a baby. It had rewarded his cares by colouring magnificently until it had grown a deep equable ebony everywhere. Not a trace of burn or scratch defaced its surface, and no touch of its first beauty was destroyed by use. Apart from its memories, Barndale would not have sold that pipe except at some astounding figure, which nobody would ever have been likely to bid for it. The precious souvenir was in his pocket, snug in its case. In an evil hour he drew it out, tenderly filled it and lit it. He and Leland were riding at a walk, and there seemed no danger, when suddenly his horse shied violently, and with the shock crash went Barndale's teeth through the delicate amber, and the precious pipe fell to the roadway. Barndale was down in a second, and picked it up in two pieces. The stem was broken within an inch of the marvellous bowl. He lamented over it with a chastened grief which here and there a smoker and an enthusiast will understand. The pathos of the situation may be caviare to the general, but the true amateur in pipes will sympathise with him. I have an ugly old meerschaum of my own which cheered me through a whole campaign, and, poor as I am, I would not part with it or break it for the price of this story.

Barndale was displaying his mangled darling to Papa Leland in the *salle à manger*, when Demetri Agryopoulo came in with a friend and went out again after a stay of two or three minutes. Barndale did not notice him, but Jimmy met him point-blank at the door, and made way for him to pass. The two friends crossed over to Stamboul and went to the bazaar with their dragoman, and there chattered with a skilled old Turkish artificer who asked just ten times what he meant to take for the job, and finally took it at only twice

his bottom price. A silver band was all it needed to restore it, and it was promised that the work should be done and the pipe ready to be called for at noon on the morrow. It chanced that as the friends left the bazaar they ran full against their Greek enemy, who raised his hat with well-dissembled rage, and stalked on. The Greek by ill hap passed the stall of the man to whom the precious pipe had been entrusted. Barn-dale had smoked this remarkable pipe that morning in the Greek's view in the reading-room, and Demetri knew it again at a glance. It lay there on the open stall in its open case. Now Demetri Agryopoulo was not a thief, and would have scorned theft under common circumstances. But, for revenge, and its sweet sake, there was no baseness to which he would not stoop. The stall's phlegmatic proprietor drowsed with the glass mouthpiece of his narghilly between his lips. The opposite shops were empty. Not a soul observed. Demetri Agryopoulo put forth his hand and seized the pipe. The case closed with a little snap, the whole thing went like lightning into his breast pocket, and he sauntered on. He had heard Barndale's lament to Leland Senior: 'I wouldn't have done it,' said Barndale, 'for a hundred pounds—for five hundred. It was the most valued souvenir I have.' So Agryopoulo Bey marched off happy in his revengeful mind. There was quite a whirlwind of emotion in the old Turk's stall at noon on the following day. The precious wonderful pipe, souvenir of dead Antoletti, greatest of modern sculptors, had disappeared, none could say whither. The old Turk was had up before the British Consul; but his character for honesty, his known wealth, the benevolence of his character, his own good honest old face, all pleaded too strongly for him. He was ordered to pay the price set on the pipe; but Barndale refused to take a price for it, and the old artificer and tradesman thereupon thanked him with flowing and beautiful Oriental courtesy. It was settled that the pipe had been stolen from the stall by some passer-by, but, as a matter of course, no suspicion fell upon the Greek. Why should it?

When the time came for the little party to leave Constantinople, and to take the boat for Smyrna, Barndale and his friend went first aboard with packages of Eastern produce bought for Lilian; and Lilian herself with her father and mother followed half-an-hour later, under the care of the faithful George, whom I delight to remember. The Greek was aboard when the two young Englishmen reached the boat. To their surprise he addressed them.

Lifting his hat formally he said, in admirable English:

'Gentlemen, our quarrel is not over, but it can wait for a little time. We shall meet again.'

With that he bowed and turned away. Leland ran after him, and, uncovering, stood bareheaded before him.

'I owe you an apology,' he said. 'I am extremely sorry and very much ashamed of my part in the quarrel.'

'I care little for your shame,' said Demetri Agryopoulo, with his voice quite low and calm and his eyes ablaze. 'I do not care about your shame, but you shall live to be more sorry than you are.'

He went down the ladder by the side of the boat, and was pulled away in a caique. As he went he laughed to himself, and pulled out Barndale's pipe—remembrancer of his mean triumph, since repaired by his own hands. He filled and lit it, smoking calmly as the sturdy caiquejee pulled him across the Golden Horn. Suddenly the caique fouled with another, and there came a volley of Turkish oaths and objurgations. The Greek looked up, and saw Miss Leland in the other boat. Her eyes were fixed upon him and the pipe. He passed his hand lazily over the bowl and took the pipe indolently from his lips, and addressed himself to the caiquejee. The boats got clear of each other. Lilian, coming aboard the boat, could not get speech with Barndale until the steamer was well under way. By then, she had time to think the matter over, and had come to the conclusion that she would say nothing about it. For, womanlike, she was half jealous of the pipe, and she was altogether afraid of two things—first, that Barndale would leave her to go back to Constantinople; and next, that the Greek and he would enter on a deadly quarrel. For she had a general belief that all Orientals were bloodthirsty. But the meerscham pipe was not yet done with, and it played its part in a tragedy before its tale was fully told.

CHAPTER III.

The English party reached London in the middle of July, and made haste out of it—Lilian and her elders to peaceful Suffolk, where they had a house they visited rarely; and her lover and her brother to Thames Ditton, where these two inseparables took a house-boat, aboard which they lived in Bohemian and barbaric ease, like rovers of the deep. Here they fished, and swam, and boated, and grew daily more and more mahogany coloured beneath the glorious summer sun. They cooked their own steaks, and ate with ravenous appetites, and enjoyed themselves like the two wholesome young giants they were, and grew and waxed in muscle, and appetite, and ruddiness until a city clerk had gone wild with envy, beholding them. Their demands for beer amazed the landlord of the historic 'Swan,' and their absorption of steaks left the village butcher in astonishment.

But in the midst of all this a purpose came upon Barndale quite suddenly one day as he lay beneath the awning, intent on doing nothing. He had not always been a wealthy man. There had been a time when he had had to write for a living, or, at least, to eke a not over-plentiful living out. At this time his name was known to the editors of most magazines. He had written a good deal of graceful verse, and one or two pretty idyllic stories, and there were people who looked very hopefully on him as a rising light of literature. His sudden accession to wealth had almost buried the poor taper of his genius when the hands of Love triumphant took it suddenly at the time of that lazy lounge beneath the awning, and gave it a chance once more. He was meditating, as lovers will, upon his own unworthiness and the all-worthy attributes of the divine Lilian. And it came to him to do something—such as in him lay—to be more worthy of her. 'I often used to say,' he said now within himself, 'that if I had time and money I would try to write a comedy. Well then, here goes. Not one of the flimsy Byron or Burnand frivolities, but a comedy with heart in it, and motive in it, and honest, patient labour.'

So, all on fire with this laudable ambition, he set to work at once. The plot had been laid long since, in the old impecunious hardworking days. He revised it now and strengthened it. Day after day the passers by upon the silent highway came in sight of this bronzed young giant under his awning, with a pipe in his mouth and a vast bottle by his side, and beheld him enthusiastically scrawling, or gazing with fixed eye at nothing in particular on the other side of the river. Once or twice being caught in the act of declaiming fragments of his dialogue, by easy-going scullers who pulled silently round the side of the houseboat, he dashed into the interior of that aquatic residence with much precipitation. At other times his meditations were broken in upon by the cheery invitations and restless invasions of a wild tribe of the youth of Twickenham and its neighbourhood who had a tent in a field hard by, and whose joy at morning, noon, and night, was beer. These savages had an accordion and a penny whistle and other instruments of music wherewith to make the night unbearable and the day a heavy burden. They were known as 'The Tribe of the Scorchers,' and were a happy and a genial people, but their presence was inimical to the rising hopes of the drama. Nevertheless, Barndale worked, and the comedy grew little by little towards completion. James, outwardly cynical regarding it, was inwardly delighted. He believed in Barndale with a full and firm conviction; and he used to read his friend's work at night, or listen to it when Barndale read, with internal enthusiasm and an exterior of coolness. Barndale knew him through and through, and in one scene in the comedy had drawn the better part of him to the life. Hearing this scene read over, it occurred to the genial youth himself that he would like to play the part.

'Billy, old man,' said he, 'I think Sir What's-his-name there's about my style of man. Before you put that immortal work upon the public stage you'd better try an amateur performance carefully rehearsed. You play George Rondel. I'll play Sir What's-his-name. Easily fill up the other characters. Ladies from London. Week's rehearsals. Bring it out at your own place at Christmas.'

Barndale caught at this idea so eagerly that he sat down that evening and wrote to a London manager requesting him to secure the services of three famous actresses, whom he named, for the first week of the next year. He stipulated also for the presence of a competent stage manager through the whole week, and promised instructions with respect to scenery, and so forth, later on. In his enthusiasm he drew up a list of critics and authors to invite, and he and Leland straightway began to study their respective parts. It was getting near the end of August now, and the evenings began to close in rapidly. The river was quite deserted as a rule by eight o'clock, and then the two friends used to rehearse one especial scene. There was a quarrel in this scene which, but for the intervening hand of the *deux ex machinâ*, bade fair to be deadly. When, after repeated trials, they warmed to their work, and got hold of something like the passion of their part, a listener might have acquitted them of all play-acting, and broken in himself to prevent bloodshed. For they both started from the assumption that the tones of the stage must be gradually built up into power from those used in ordinary speech, and so they avoided the least taint of staginess, and were on their way to become rather better actors than the best we have just now.

Leland's temperament was not of a nature to persuade him to perpetual effort in any direction; and so, whilst Barndale worked, the other amateur relieved vacuity with billiards. It got into a settled habit with him at last to leave Barndale nightly at his comedy, and to return to the house-boat at an hour little short of midnight. He would find Barndale still at work writing by the light of a lamp grown dim with incrustations of self-immolated insects. Moths fluttered to this light in incredible numbers, and literal thousands of lives were thus sacrificed nightly at the drama's shrine. It was nearly midnight, and as black as a wolf's mouth, when Leland sculled up from the 'Swan' to spend his last night but one aboard the house-boat.

'Billy, old man,' he cried, bursting in suddenly; 'look here! Ain't I in for it now? Read this!'

He handed to his friend a letter which Barndale read in silence.

'This is awkward,' the latter said after a long, grave pause.

Leland sat in constrained solemnity for awhile, but by-and-by a genial grin spread over his features, and he chuckled in deep enjoyment.

'It's a lark for all that, Billy. We shall have the noble Demetri here next, I suppose. Let's hire him for the great Christmas show. "Signor Demetri Agryopoulo will appear in his great stiletto trick, frustrated by Billy Barndale, the Bounding Brother of the Bosphorus."'

'What is to be done?' said Barndale, ignoring his companion's flippancies.

'Yes,' said Leland, sitting down and growing suddenly grave. 'What's to be done? Read the letter out, Billy, and let's consider the thing seriously.'

Barndale read aloud.

'My very dear Friend,—At what time you was at Constantinople, when trouble came, you made promise that you would not forget me if my poor Demetri should trouble about you. When you last wrote to me this was made again—the promise. My life for not one moment is safe. My aunt is dead and my possessions are now mine, but there is no friend in all the world. Demetri is mad. Of him I know not when I am safe. I fly then to London, where all is safe. But there it is not possible that I should be alone. If there is any lady in the circle of your knowledge who would be kind with me, and permit that I should live with her, it will have for ever my gratitude. I shall go as of old to the Palace Hotel at Westminster. Two days beyond this letter I shall be there.

'Always your friend,

'Thecla Perzio.'

After the reading of this epistle, the friends sat in silence, regarding each other with grave looks. In the silence they could hear the river lapping against the bank, and the rustling of the boughs on the roof, and the moaning and sighing of the wind. But they could not hear the suppressed breathing of Demetri Agryopoulo

where he stood knee-deep in water below the house-boat window, listening to their talk. Yet there he stood, not knowing that he was not on dry land; drunk with rage and jealousy; with murder plainly written in his heart and eyes, and all his blood on fire. He threw his soul into his ears, and listened.

'This letter has been a long time on its way, surely,' said Barndale, referring to the date. 'It can't take three weeks to bring a letter from Constantinople.'

'Where's the envelope?' asked. Leland. 'Look at that, and see what the London date is.'

The home stamp made it clear that the letter had reached England ten days back.

'My man brought it down this afternoon, the lazy scamp!' said Leland. 'He has never been near those blessed chambers since I left till now. A pile of letters came together, but I took no notice.'

'Listen to me,' said Barndale. 'You have done harm enough in this matter already, Jimmy, and you must do no more. You must keep clear of her. I will send her down to my sister for a time. Sophy is a good girl, and will be glad to have a companion whilst I am away. I will go up to town to-morrow and see Miss Perzio. You stay here. I shall either wire to you or come back in the evening.'

The weather had been hot and clear for weeks together, and the traditions of English summer were preparing to enforce themselves by the common thunderstorm. The wind moaned in swift and sudden gusts, and the distant thunder rumbled threateningly. The listener outside misheard this speech thus:

'You will be glad of a companion whilst I am away. I will go up to town to-morrow and see Miss Perzio.'

He ground his teeth, and clenched his hands, and held himself in resolute silence, fighting against the instinct which prompted him to cry aloud and dash in upon the two, and either slay them both, or sell his own life, then and there. But reflecting on the certainty of defeat, unarmed as he was, and dreading to declare himself too soon, and so put his enemy upon his guard, he fought the instinct down. Yet so strong was it upon him that he knew that sooner or later it would master him. He waded to the shore and crept along the field in the thick darkness, groping his way with both hands. Turning, he could see the dull gleam of the river, and the house-boat bulking black against it. He stood watching, whilst within and without the storm swept swiftly up. Dead silence. Then a creeping whisper in the grass at his feet and in the trees about him, but no wind. Then the slow dropping of heavy rain—drop, drop, drop—like blood. Then a fierce and sudden howl from the wind, like some hoarse demon's signal, and the storm began. But what a puny storm was that which raged outside could one have seen the tempest in this murderous soul! Not all the tones of great material nature's diapason could find this tortured spirit voice enough. Yet to find the very heavens in tune with his mood brought the Greek to a still madder ecstasy of passion.

At such times the mind, fearful for herself, catches at phrases and fancies, as drowning men catch at straws. So now, with terrible irrelevance, his mind caught at the simple couplet:—

*Nenni, nenni, vattienne, non me stà chiù' à seccar
Sta rosa che pretienne non la sto manco à gardar!*

There was nothing for the mind to hold to except that it was the last song the runaway Thecla had sung to him. He did not remember this, and had only a half consciousness of the words themselves. But in this mad whirl of the spiritual elements the mind was glad to cling to anything, and turned the refrain over, and over, and over,

*Nenni, nenni, vattienne, non me stà chiù' à seccar
Sta rosa che pretienne non la sto manco à gardar!*

Rain, and wind, and thunder, and Lightning, had their time without and within. Peace came to the summer heavens, and the pale stars took the brief night with beauty. But to the firmament of his soul no star of peace returned. There dwelt night and chaos. If his passion were blind, the blindness was wilful. For he saw clearly the end of what he meant to do, and chose it. Whatever his love might have been worth, he had been robbed of it, and for him life ended there. He was but an automaton of vengeance now.

So having set resolve before him, and having done with it, he went his way. His plan was long since laid, and was simple enough. Demetri Agrypoulo was not the man to perplex himself with details until the time came for them to be useful. When that time came he could rely upon himself for invention. And so his plan was simply to take James Leland alone, and then and there to put an end to him. He had taken a room in a river-side public-house near Kingston, and thither he walked. He made some grim excuse for the lateness of the hour and his bedraggled garments to the drowsy ostler who had sat up for him, and calmed the drowsy ostler's grumbles by a gift of half-a-crown. Then he drank a glass of neat brandy, and went to bed and slept like an innocent child.

Next morning he was up early, ate a cheerful breakfast, delighted his host with foreign affabilities, paid his bill, and went away by train to London. Leaving his luggage in a cloak-room at the station, he took a stroll about town, dropping into public-houses here and there, and drinking terrible brandy. At home he drank *mastica* as Englishmen drink beer, and brandy was insipid as water to his palate, and had just now almost as little effect upon his head. Demetri Agrypoulo had discovered the one secret of the true dissembler, that he who controls his features controls his mind. A man who can put a smile on his face while torments rack him, can thereby calm the torments. The resolute will which arrests the facial expression of grief or rage, allays the grief or rage. He went about with an aspect of calm insouciance, and therefore with a feeling of calm and ease within. Yet he was like one who walks with a madman, knowing that if his own courage should for one instant seem to waver, the maniac will be upon him. In his journey to town he had been alone, and between one station and another he had opened his portmanteau and taken therefrom a small breech-loading revolver and a stiletto. He laid his hand upon these now and again, and smiled to himself.

The afternoon grew into evening. He took train to Wimbledon, and thence struck across country in the direction of the houseboat. He skirted the village with its straggling lights, and made his way across the fields to the river side. Nearing the boat cautiously, he ensconced himself in the bushes on the bank, and watched and listened. There were two voices audible. Barndale and Leland were engaged in serious and indeed in angry talk. There was a woman in the question apparently, and it would seem that the friends were

quarrelling concerning her. But the Greek soon heard enough to convince him that this woman was not Thecla Perzio. The voices grew louder, and some open breach of the peace seemed imminent. The friends were rehearsing their own especial scene in Barndale's comedy.

It becomes necessary to this history at this point to set forth the fact that one Hodges, resident in the village, had within an hour of this time received intelligence of the straying of a cow. This man was a yokel of no interest to us, apart from this one episode in his career. He had supplied the inmates of the house-boat with new milk and fresh butter to the time of their first coming. And it was he who had set afloat a report, not unknown at the historic 'Swan,' to the effect that for all so sweet as them two young gents did go about wi' one another, they was a naggin' like blazes every night.' He came by now, driving his recovered cow before him, and passed within a foot of the Greek, who lay as still as death in the brushwood. The quarrel, when at its height, ceased suddenly, and the voices fell so low that neither Hodges nor the Greek could hear anything more than a murmur. The amateurs were criticising the dialogue and its rendering over pipes and beer.

'Well,' said Hodges, addressing vacancy, 'if theer ain't murder afore long, it *is* a pity.'

Then the bovine Hodges went his way. Events supplied him with an excitement which lasted him for life; and the younger Hodges who has succeeded to his father's cows and remembrances, will not willingly let die the story of his progenitor's association with this tragic tale.

The Greek lay hidden in the bushes, and listened to the soft retreating steps in the field and the murmur of voices in the boat. By-and-by the door opened, and the friends appeared.

'I shall not come back by the late train now, Jimmy,' Barndale said, as he placed a small portmanteau in the dingy. 'You had better come down with me to the "Swan" and scull up again.'

'No,' said Leland, unconscious of the impending fate, 'I'll walk down for the boat tomorrow. If I get down there to-night I shall stay, and I want to write some letters. Goodbye, old fellow. Send us a line in the morning.'

'All right,' said Barndale. 'Good-bye.'

The sculls dipped, and he shot into the darkness. For a few minutes we follow Barndale. He pulled down stream rapidly, for the train by which he intended to reach town was already nearly due. There was nobody at the landing place. He fastened the boat, and seizing his small portmanteau, dashed at full speed into the road, ran all the way to the station, and threw himself into the train panting, and just in time. At the bottom of the station steps he had spilt a countryman, to whom he threw out a hurried apology. The countryman was Mr. Hodges.

The Greek listened until the measured beat of Barndale's sculls had lost itself in silence. Then he crept forward from the bushes, stepped lightly to the margin of the stream, laid both hands on a sturdy branch which drooped above the house-boat, and swung himself light as a feather to the after deck. The door of the rear room, which served the inmates as a kitchen, was unsecured and open. He passed through, pistol in hand, and trod the matted floor stealthily, drawn and guided by the tiny beam of light which issued from the interstice between it and the doorway. With the motion of the boat the door beat idly and noiselessly to and fro, so that the beam was cut off at regular intervals, and at regular intervals again shone forth, keeping time with the Greek's noiseless footsteps, and his beating heart and his bated breath, and altogether taking to itself that importance and force which trifles always have in moments of intense passion or suffering. Even yet he would not let the madman within him loose. Even yet he would hold him back until he saw the object of his hate and rage, and then—

The door swung to and fro gently, and the Greek approached it with his hand, when suddenly the unconscious Leland from within banged it to noisily and fixed the hasp. Then with one resolute action Demetri threw it back and stepped into the doorway, pistol in hand. Leland rose and turned. He saw the Greek, and read murder in his face, and dashed himself upon him. But the murderous hand was quick and true. One shot rang out, and Leland, with outcast arms, fell backwards. The Greek, with a hand on the table, looked down upon him. Not a struggle or a groan stirred the prone figure. Demetri threw the revolver through the open window, and heard the splash with which it fell into the water. He drew the stiletto from his bosom, and threw that after it. Then closing the door lightly, and stepping still on tiptoe as though he feared to wake that prone figure from its awful sleep, he swung himself on shore again.

'Our rustic friend,' he said to himself as he stood and looked upon the boat, bulking black against the dull gleam of the river, like some uncouth animal standing at the bank and peering landward with fiery eyes, our rustic friend may not forget his prophecy.'

Therewith he went his way again, and the darkness shrouded him.

CHAPTER IV.

What should bring fashion, and wealth, and beauty in one charming person up to London from the country at the latter end of August? The town house long since dismantled for the grand tour now finished—the charms of the season abandoned for peaceful Suffolk—why should Lilian care to return thus at the fag end of London's feast of folly? Has the bronzed and bearded Barndale anything to do with it? Lady Dives Luxor gives a ball; and Lady Dives, being Lilian's especial patroness and guardian angel and divinity, insists on Lilian being present thereat. This ball is designed as the crowning festivity of a brilliant year; and to Lilian, blest with youth and beauty and high spirits, and such a splendid lover, shall it not be a night to remember until the grey curtain fall on the close of the last season, and nothing is any more remembered? But a cloud of sadness settles on Lilian's charming face when she misses the bronzed and bearded. Lady Dives knows all about the engagement, and is enthusiastic over it; and, when Lilian has a second's time to snatch an enquiry

concerning the absent one, she answers, 'He has never been near me once. I wrote him a special note, and told him you were coming. He will be here.' So Lady Dives strives to chase the cloud. Barndale does not come, having never, in point of fact, received that special note which Lady Dives had despatched to him. So the ball is a weariness, and Lilian goes back with mamma to the hotel with quite drooping spirits. She makes excuses for the absent Barndale, but fancies all manner of things in her feminine fashion, preferring to believe in fevers and boat accidents and other horrors rather than think that a valet has been lazy or a postman inaccurate.

Papa Leland, who is here to take care of his womankind, has ideas of his own on some matters.

'Hang your swell hotels,' says Papa Leland; 'I always stop at the Westminster, It's near the House, and quite convenient enough for anywhere.'

It was thus that Lilian found herself under the same roof with Thecla Perzio, who lived there with a sore and frightened heart, waiting for that shallow lover who had caught her in love's toils, and broken up her life for her, and who now left her poor appeal unanswered.

Poor indiscreet little Thecla had a suite of rooms on the first floor, and lived alone within them with her Greek maid, and agonised. She was for ever peering furtively through the door when any manly step sounded in the corridor, but she never saw the form she waited for. But it chanced, the morning after the ball, that she opened her door and looked out upon the corridor at the sound of Papa Leland's footstep. Papa Leland went by briskly; but Lilian caught sight of her and knew her in a moment, and stayed to speak. The two girls had been too closely engaged with their respective love-makings to form any very close acquaintance with each other; but during a week's imprisonment on board ship the friendships of women, and especially of young and gentle-hearted women, advance very rapidly. They had parted with a great deal of mutual liking, and met again now with mutual pleasure. In a minute Lilian was seated in the poor little Greek's big and dreary parlour. She was a proud creature was little Thecla, and would not chatter with her maid. She had given nobody her confidence; and now, having once confessed that she was unhappy, she broke out, with her pretty head on Lilian's lap, and had a grand, refreshing, honest cry. That over, she set forth her story. She told how Demetri was madly, foolishly jealous; how he had tried to murder the gentleman of whom he was jealous; and how at last, finding herself alone in the world, and being afraid of Demetri, she had sought an asylum in England. She did not say of whom Demetri was jealous, and Lilian had not the remotest notion of the truth. It very soon came out, however; and then Lilian was sore afraid for Thecla Perzio's happiness. She had no great belief in her brother. She loved him very much; but she was dimly afraid that James was an impracticable and unmarriageable man, a person who could set all the wiles and all the tenderness of the sex at calm defiance—a born bachelor. And, besides that, being, in spite of her many charms and virtues, an Englishwoman, she had a natural and ridiculous objection to the marriage of any person whom she valued to any other person of foreign blood, excepting in the case of British royalty, in whose foreign matches she felt unfeigned delight—wherefore, Heaven, perchance, knoweth. But then Lilian was not a woman of a logical turn of mind; she was inconsistent and amiable, as good girls always are; and being strongly opposed to marriages of this kind in general, determined to lay herself out, heart and soul, for the prosperity of this particular arrangement. So she kissed Thecla vivaciously, and went to mamma, and persuaded that estimable lady to a visit to Thames Ditton in search of James. Mamma, having regard to the missing Barndale, and being in some matronly alarm for him, consented, and the two set out together.

Barndale in the meantime had gone to his own chambers, and had there smoked many deliberative and lonely pipes. When he came near to the enterprise he had so readily undertaken in his friend's behalf, he began to feel signally nervous and uncomfortable about it. Of course he did not for one moment think of resigning it; but he was puzzled, and in his be-puzzlement retired within himself to concoct a plan of action. Having definitely failed in this attempt, he resolved to go off at once without preparation, and ask at the hotel for Miss Perzio, and then a round, unvarnished tale deliver. This resolution formed, he started at once and hurried, lest it should break by the way. Lilian and he were within twenty yards of each other, neither of them knowing it, when his cab rushed up to the door of the hotel.

Lilian knew the house-boat and its ways. One of the Amphibia of Ditton conveyed the two ladies in a capacious boat to the aquatic residence of the two friends. Lilian stepped lightly to the fore deck, and assisted mamma from the boat.

'They are both away,' said Lilian, smiling and blushing. 'And the careless creatures have left the doors open. We will wait for them and give them a surprise.'

The two women, full of fluttering complacency, entered the living room. Lilian went first, and fell upon her knees with a sudden shriek, beholding the prone figure on the floor; the mother darted to her side, saw and partly understood, whipped out a vinaigrette, seized a caraffe of water, and applied those innocent restoratives at once. Neither mother nor daughter had time to think of anything worse than a fainting fit, until Lilian, who had taken her brother's head upon her lap, found blood upon her hands. Then she turned white to the very lips, and tore open the blue serge coat and waistcoat. The white flannel shirt beneath was caked with blood. The two women moaned, but not a finger faltered. They opened the shirt tenderly, and there, on the right breast, saw a dull blue stain with a crimson thread in the middle of it. A gunshot wound looks to unaccustomed eyes altogether too innocent a thing to account for death or even for serious danger. But the cold pallor of the face and body, the limp and helpless limbs betokened something terrible.

'Take his poor head, mamma,' cried Lilian; and she darted from the cabin to the deck, The boatman was lounging quietly in the boat some thirty yards down stream. She called to him aloud—

'Go for a doctor. My brother is dying here. Be quick, be quick, be quick!' she almost screamed as the man stared at her. Understanding at last, the fellow snatched up his sculls and dashed through the water. Lilian flew back to her brother; and while the two women, not knowing what to do further, sat supporting the helpless head together; a man leapt aboard.

'You called for a doctor, madam,' he said quietly, 'I am a surgeon. Permit me to assist you.'

The women made way for him. He was a youngish man, with a sunburnt complexion and grey hair, a gentleman beyond denial, and beyond doubt self-possessed and accustomed to obedience. They trusted him

at once. He raised the recumbent figure to a couch, and then looked at the wound. He turned over the lappel of the coat and glanced at it. He had a habit of speaking to himself.

'Pistol shot,' he muttered. 'Close quarters. Coat quite burned. Decimal three-fifty or thereabouts I fancy from the look of it. Ah, here it is! Have you a penknife or a pair of scissors, madam? That small knife will do. Thank you.'

A dexterous touch, and from the little gaping lips carved by the penknife's point in the muscle of the back rolled out a flattened piece of lead with jagged edges like a battered shilling, but a trifle thicker.

'Yes,' said the surgeon, laying it on the table; 'decimal three-fifty. What's this? Wound on the head. Your handkerchief, please. Cold water. Thank you.'

His busy and practised hands were at work all the while.

'Now, ladies, wait here for a few moments. I must bring help.'

'Stop one minute!' cried the mother. 'Is he in danger?'

'Grave danger.'

'Will he die?'

'Not if I can help it,' And with that the stranger leaped on shore, and ran like a racehorse across the fields and into the nearest house, where he turned out the residents in a body, and made them unship a five-barred gate. There were plenty of cushions in the boat, and he wasted no time in getting others. The helpers beaten up by the doctor worked with a will; and one ran off in advance and seized upon a punt belonging to the Campers Out, and set it at the end of the house-boat, towards the shore. Over this they bore Leland, and laid him on the cushions which the doctor had arranged upon the gate. Then they carried him into the 'Swan' and got him to bed there.

Lilian and her mother, trembling and struggling with their tears, followed the bearers. The crowd which always accompanies disaster, even in a village, made its comments as the melancholy little cortege went along, and Lilian could not fail to overhear. Hodges was there.

'I know'd what it ud come to,' proclaimed Hodges loudly. 'They was a naggin' every night, like mad, they was. I told you all what it ud come to.'

'So a did,' said others in the crowd. Then some one asked 'Where's t'other chap?' and in the murmur Lilian heard her lover's name again and again repeated.

She knew well enough—she could not fail to know—the meaning of the murmurs; but she started as though she had been struck when Hodges said aloud, so that all might hear—

'They was a naggin' again last night, an' then theer was a shot; and then ten minutes arterwards that Barndale bolts and knocks me over at the bottom o' the station steps. What's all that pint to?'

'Oh,' said another, 'there can't be no mortal shadder of a doubt who done it.'

For a moment these cruel words turned her faint; but the swift reaction of certainty and resolve which followed them nerved her and braced her for all the troublous times to come. She waited calmly until all had been done that could be done. Then when the doctor had left his patient, she took him apart.

'My brother has been wounded by a pistol shot?' she asked him very bravely and steadily. The doctor nodded. 'I must find out who did it,' she went on, looking him full in the face with her hazel eyes.

'The people here seem to suspect a Mr. ———'

She snatched the word out of the doctor's mouth.

'My brother's dearest friend, sir. Why, sir, they would have died for each other.'

'As you would for one of them?' said the doctor to himself.

'You have experience in these matters, sir. Will you help me to examine the boat? There may perhaps be something there to help us to track the criminal.'

The doctor had but the poorest opinion of this scheme. 'But, yes,' he said, he would go, and then fell to thinking aloud. 'Poor thing. Wonderfully plucky. Bears it well. Brother half killed. Lover suspected. Go! Of course I'll go. Why the devil shouldn't I?' And he marched along unconscious of his utterances or of the heightened colour and the look of momentary surprise in Lilian's face. 'Pretty girl, too,' said the doctor, in audible thought. 'Devilish pretty! Good girl, I should fancy. Like the looks of her. Hard lines, poor thing—hard lines!'

They reached the bank and walked across the punt into the house-boat. As she entered the door Lilian gave a cry, and dashed at the table; then turned and held up before the doctor's eyes a meerschaum pipe—the identical Antoletti meerschaum stolen in the Stamboul Bazaar by Demetri Agryopoulo.

'This is it!' she gasped. 'The clue! Oh, it is certain! It is true! Who else could have wished him ill?'

Then she told the doctor the story of the pipe. She told her tale in verbal lightning. Every sentence flashed forth a fact; and in sixty seconds or thereabouts the doctor was a man convinced.

But meantime where was Barndale? Poor Leland could tell them nothing. For many a day he would bear no questioning. Could her lover, Lilian asked herself, have started for the ball last night, and come to any damage by the way?

'Here is a letter,' said the doctor, quietly taking up something from the table. 'A lady's handwriting. Postmark, Constantinople.'

He drew the letter from its envelope and read it as coolly as if he had a right to read it.

'The story is clear enough,' he said. 'The lady is in London. Your brother knew of her presence there. The Greek you speak of has followed her. The pipe proves his presence here. But how did he find out with whom the lady was in correspondence?'

'That I cannot guess,' said Lilian.

It had been late in the afternoon when Lilian and her mother reached the house-boat first. Twilight had fallen when the doctor and the girl started to walk back together. Lilian, turning to look at the house-boat as

they went, seized the doctor by the shoulder. He turned and looked at her. She pointed to a figure in the fields.

'The Greek!' she whispered.

She was right. Demetri Agryopoulo had come back again with twilight to the scene of his crime, drawn by an impulse, passionate, irresistible, supreme.

The doctor ran straight for him, leaping the hedge like a deer. Lilian, mad with the excitement of the moment, followed she knew not how. Demetri Agryopoulo turned and awaited the arrival of these two onward-rushing figures calmly. The doctor laid a hand upon him.

'I arrest you on a charge of murder,' he said, gasping for breath.

'Bah!' said Demetri Agryopoulo quietly, and threw the doctor's hand aside.

The doctor seized him again, but he was spent and breathless. The Greek threw him off as if he had been a child.

'Are you mad?' he asked. 'What murder? Where? When?'

'My brother's murder, here, last night,' panted Lilian, and flung herself, a mouse against a mountain, on the Greek, and grappled with him, and actually bore him to the ground. But before the doctor could lend a hand to aid her, Demetri was on his feet again, and with one bound sprang into a little skiff which lay with its nose upon the bank. He swung one of the sculls about his head, and shouted, 'Stand back!' But the doctor watched his time, and dashed in upon him, and before he knew it was struggling in the water, whilst Demetri in the skiff was a score of yards away tugging madly for the farther shore. The doctor scrambled to the bank and ran up and down the riverside looking for another boat. But he found none, and the Greek was already growing dim in the twilight mist. And again Demetri Agryopoulo went his own way, and the darkness shrouded him.

CHAPTER V.

Thecla Perzio received Barndale with much shyness and embarrassment; and he, seeing that she was a good deal afraid of him, plucked up courage and treated her rather wilfully. He insisted on her going down to his sister at his own house in Surrey and staying there under the old maid's chaperonage, at least until such time as she should be able to find another suitable companion. The more Thecla found herself overpowered by this masterful son of Anak, the more she felt resigned, and comfortable, and peaceful, and safe. Barndale, like the coward he was, felt his power and took advantage of it. He would have no 'nay' on any grounds, but exacted immediate obedience.

To make things smoother he set out that afternoon for Surrey, saw his sister, talked her into a great state of sympathy for little Thecla, and brought her back to town by the next morning's train. Then, having introduced the ladies to each other, he left them and went to his own chambers in King's Bench Walk. Arrived there he stooped at the keyhole, finding some trifle or other there opposing his latch-key. The key-hole was half-filled with putty. Barndale never lost his temper. 'Some genius takes this for a joke, I suppose,' he murmured philosophically, and proceeded by the aid of a pocket corkscrew to clear the keyhole. He had just succeeded when a hand was laid familiarly upon his shoulder. He turned and saw a stranger clean-shaven, calm, and in aspect business-like.

'Mr. Barndale, I think?' said the familiar stranger.

'Yes,' said Barndale, looking down at him in a somewhat stately way, in resentment of the familiar hand upon his shoulder.

'We'll do our little bit of business inside, sir, if *you* please.'

Barndale looked at him again inquiringly, opened the door, walked in, and allowed the stranger to follow. The man entered the room and stood before Barndale on the hearthrug. He had one hand in the breast of his coat; and somehow, as Barndale looked at him, he bethought him of the Greek who had stood with his hand at his breast in the Concordia Garden glaring at Leland.

'I hope you'll take it quietly,' said the clean-shaven man, 'but it's got to be done, and will be done whether you take it quietly or not. I'm an officer, and it's my duty to arrest you.'

There passed rapidly through Barndale's mind the remembrance of a disputed wine-bill, and the service of some legal document which he had thrown into the fire without reading.

He connected the clean-shaven stranger with these things, and was tickled at the idea of being arrested for some such trifle as a hundred pounds. He was so far tickled that he laughed outright.

'Come,' said Barndale, still smiling, 'this is absurd. I'll give you a cheque at once. Are you empowered to give a receipt?'

The clean-shaven stranger regarded him with a cool, observant, wary eye.

'It's my duty to arrest you,' he said again quietly, 'and I hope you'll come quietly and make no fuss about it.'

'My good man,' said Barndale, 'you can't arrest me if I pay the money.'

'Come, come, come, sir,' said the official, with calm superiority in his tone; 'that's all very well and very pretty, but it's Mr. Leland's affair that I want you for, sir.'

'Mr. Leland's affair?' said Barndale.

'That little attempted murder the night before last, that's all. Now, take it quiet; don't let's have any nonsense, you know.'

The clean-shaven stranger's lips pressed close together with a resolute look, and his hand came a little way

out of the breast of his coat.

'Will you have the goodness to tell me what you mean?' asked Barndale, bewildered, and a little angry to find himself so.

'Well, if you *won't* know anything about it, Mr. James Leland was found yesterday in a house-boat at Thames Ditton, with a pistol bullet into him, and he ain't expected to recover, and that's my business along with you, and I'll trouble you to come quiet.'

The tension on the official nerves made hash of the official's English. Barndale smote the mantel-piece with his clenched hand.

'Great God!' he cried. 'The Greek! Where is Mr. Leland?' he asked the official eagerly.

'In bed at the "Swan," abeing doctored. That's where *he* is,' replied the official curtly. 'Now, come along, and don't let's have no more palaver.'

Barndale discerned the nature of the situation, and remained master of himself.

'I will come with you,' he said with grave self-possession. 'I am somehow suspected of having a hand in the attempted murder of my friend. Now, you shall arrest me since you must, but you shall not tie the hands of justice by preventing me from tracing the criminal. The man who has committed this crime is Demetri Agrypoulo, a Greek, attached to the Persian Embassy at Constantinople. You look like a shrewd and wary man,' Barndale took out his cheque-book and wrote a cheque for one hundred pounds. 'When you have done with me, cash that cheque and spend every penny of it, if need be, in pursuit of that man. When it is gone come to me for more. When you have caught him, come to me for five hundred pounds. Wait a moment.'

He sat down and wrote in a great, broad hand: 'I promise to pay to Bearer the sum of Five Hundred Pounds (500L.) on the arrest of Demetri Agrypoulo, attaché to the Persian Embassy at Constantinople__W. Holmes Barn-dale.' He appended date and place, and handed it to the officer.

'Very good, sir,' said he, waving the papers to and fro in the air to dry the ink, and keeping all the while a wary eye on Barndale. 'I know that my opinion goes for nothing, but if I was a grand jury I should throw out the bill, most likely. We'll make it as quiet as we *can*, sir; but there's two of my men outside, and if there should be any need for force it'll have to be used, that's all.'

'I shall go with you quietly,' said Barndale. 'I have two things to impress upon you. Let no apparent evidence in any other direction throw you off the scent on which I have set you. Next: send a smart man to Thames Ditton and let him collect evidence of all the grounds on which I am suspected. Now I am ready.'

Thus torn with grief for his friend, and sorrow for his lover, but moved to no upbraiding of Fate for the cruel trick she had played him, this British gentleman surrendered himself to the emissary of Public Gossip and went away with him.

The officer, having ideas of his own, got into a cab with Barndale and drove straight to Scotland Yard. On the way Barndale set out the evidence in favour of his own theory of the crime and its motive. Inspector Webb's experience of criminals was large; but he had never known a criminal conduct himself after Barndale's fashion, and was convinced of his innocence, and hotly eager to be in pursuit of the Greek. When the cab drew up in the Yard a second cab drew up behind it, and from it emerged two clean-shaven, quiet-looking men in inconspicuous dresses, whom Barndale had seen in King's Bench Walk as he had gone that afternoon to his chambers. Scarcely had they alighted when a third cab came up, and from it dashed a mahogany-coloured young man with grey hair, and assisted a lady to alight. Catching sight of Barndale, the lady ran forward and took him by the arm.

'Oh, Will,' she said, 'you have heard this dreadful news?'

'My poor child!' he answered.

'This,' said Lilian, pointing out her companion, 'is Dr. Wattiss, who saved James's life.'

'Hundred and Ninety-first Foot,' said the medical man. 'I've had considerable experience in gunshot wounds, and I don't think Mr. Leland's case at all desperate, if that's any comfort to anybody,' There the doctor smiled. 'You are Mr. Barndale, I presume. Miss Leland has evidence of the name and even the whereabouts of the scoundrel who inflicted the wound, and we are here to hunt him up.'

'May I ask who's the suspected party?' asked Inspector Webb with his eye on the doctor.

'Demetri Agrypoulo,' said Lilian, 'a Greek——'

'Attached to the Persian Embassy at Constantinople.' said Inspector Webb. 'All right. Come with me, ma'am. This way, gentlemen.' And the inspector marshalled them all upstairs. There he gave a whispered order to an officer who lounged to the door, and placed his back against it, and there picked his teeth, insouciant. The inspector disappeared. In two minutes he was back again.

'This way, ma'am. This way, gentlemen,' And he ushered all three before him up a set of stone stairs, down a set of stone stairs, and into a carpeted apartment, where sat a gentleman of military aspect, behind a business-looking table overspread with papers.

'You have a statement to make to me, I believe,' he said to Lilian with grave politeness.

Lilian told her story without faltering and without superfluous words. When she mentioned the pipe Dr. Wattiss drew a packet from his pocket and unwound it carefully, and laid the precious meerschaum on the table.

'What is this statement of a nightly quarrel between the two residents in the house-boat, Webb?' Thus spoke the superior officer behind the business table.

'Man named Hodges, sir,' responded the inspector, 'states that he overheard violent rows after dusk.'

In spite of all his grief and anxiety Barn-dale laughed, and was about to speak in explanation when Lilian rose and laid a letter on the table.

'Will you kindly read that, sir, and then ask Mr. Barndale to explain?' she said simply.

The military-looking official took the letter and read it through. It ran thus:—

'On the Roaring Deep,

'Thames Ditton.

'Dear Lil,—

'Billy has struck ile. He's at work on an amazing comedy with which he intends to fire the Thames next first of April. He and I are both going to appear in it at Barndale in the Christmas week. Meantime we rehearse a terrific combat nightly.

'While words of learned length and thundering sound Amaze the wondering rustics gathered round.

'A genial idiot, Hodges yclept, has persuaded the whole village that a murder is on the carpet, and that Billy and I are at daggers drawn. Don't tell him this in any of your letters. It's a great tribute to our acting that even Hodges takes us to be in earnest. I can't call to mind any stage row I ever listened to that I shouldn't have spotted the hollowness of in a brace of shakes. At this minute Author summons Actor to Rehearsal. I close up. This Scrawl to tell you I haven't forgotten you. Would have written more, but authority's voice is urgent.

'Your affectionate brother,

'J.'

'I think you had something to say, sir,' said the military official turning to Barndale, and handing the letter back to Lilian.

'The supposed quarrel between poor Leland and myself is easily explained. We were rehearsing for amateur theatricals, almost nightly, in a somewhat animated scene, and I can only suppose that we were overheard, and that our play was taken for earnest.'

'Have you any clue to the whereabouts of this Greek?' the officer asked Lilian. The doctor broke in—

'Miss Leland was describing the Greek to me this morning with a view to his identification, when a man walked into the room, said he had overheard the lady through the open window, and had seen the man she described two hours before. He was the boots of an hotel at Kingston. We came here at once, after sending an officer to look after him.'

'That will do, Mr. Webb,' said the superior official. 'There can be no necessity for detaining this gentleman.'

Lilian and the doctor read this last sentence in its most superficial light, but Barndale rose and turned with a feeling of vast inward relief—

'Our bargain holds good still,' he said to the inspector, as they went downstairs together.

'Yes, sir,' said the inspector, and bade the trio adieu with great politeness.

They three took train for Thames Ditton at once, and by the way Barndale told the story of his arrest.

Arrived at the historic 'Swan,' they settled down to their separate avocations—Lilian and the doctor to nurse Leland, and Barndale to do all that in him lay to track the Greek. My story nears its close; and I may say at once, without word-spinning, that Demetri Agrypoulo disappeared, and was no more heard of. He was too wily to speak the English described in the advertisement of his peculiarities. He spoke German like an Alsatian, French like a Gascon, and Italian like a Piedmontese, and could pass for any one of the three. By what devices he held himself in secrecy it matters not here to say. But again, and for the last time in this story, he went his way, and the darkness shrouded him.

On the day following Barndale's arrest and release, Lilian sat by her brother's bedside, when the door of the bedroom opened noiselessly, and two women stole in on stealthy tiptoe.

One was Barndale's maiden sister, and the other was poor little Thecla Perzio.

Lilian kissed them both; and Thecla said, in a tearful, frightened whisper.

'It is all my wicked, wicked fault. But O mademoiselle, may I not help to nurse him?'

'Not mademoiselle, dear—Lilian!' was Lilian's sole answer.

So the three women stayed, together with mamma Leland, and nursed the invalid in couples. And it came to pass that the indiscreet little Thecla won everybody's heart about the place, and that everybody came to be assured that no lack of maidenly honour had made her indiscreet, but only a very natural, unsuspecting, childlike confidence. It came to pass also that when Leland Junior began to get better he saw good and sufficient reasons for setting a term to his bachelor existence.

And with no great difficulty Thecla Perzio was brought to his opinion.

By Christmas time Leland was well and strong again. The chase after the Greek was dismissed from the official mind by this time: and Barndale, being reminded of Inspector Webb by the receipt of the promissory note for five hundred pounds, wrote to that official to offer him a week or two in the country. The inspector came, and brought the marvellous pipe with him. It had been detained until then to be put in evidence in case of the Greek's arrest and trial.

The inspector heard the comedy, and told Barndale, later on, that he regarded the quarrel scene as a masterpiece of histrionic art.

'I don't wonder that bumpkin took it all for earnest,' he said. 'I should ha' done that myself. No, thankee, sir. I don't care about mixing with the lords and swells upstairs. I'll have a look in on the butler. Smoking the old pipe again, I see, sir. Not many old meerschaums knocking about with a tale like that attached to 'em.'

It pleases me to add that Doctor Wattiss officiated at Leland's wedding, and married the maiden sister.

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