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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SLEUTH OF ST. JAMES'S SQUARE ***

THE SLEUTH OF ST. JAMES'S SQUARE

By Melville Davisson Post

Contents

[The SLEUTH of St. JAMES'S SQUARE](#)

- [I.](#) The Thing on the Hearth
 - [II.](#) The Reward
 - [III.](#) The Lost Lady
 - [IV.](#) The Cambered Foot
 - [V.](#) The Man in the Green Hat
 - [VI.](#) The Wrong Sign
 - [VII.](#) The Fortune Teller
 - [VIII.](#) The Hole in the Mahogany Panel
 - [IX.](#) The End of the Road
 - [X.](#) The Last Adventure
 - [XI.](#) American Horses
 - [XII.](#) The Spread Rails
 - [XIII.](#) The Pumpkin Coach
 - [XIV.](#) The Yellow Flower
 - [XV.](#) Satire of the Sea
 - [XVI.](#) The House by the Loch
-

The SLEUTH of St. JAMES'S SQUARE

I. The Thing on the Hearth

"THE first confirmatory evidence of the thing, Excellency, was the print of a woman's bare foot."

He was an immense creature. He sat in an upright chair that seemed to have been provided especially for him. The great bulk of him flowed out and filled the chair. It did not seem to be fat that enveloped him. It seemed rather to be some soft, tough fiber, like the pudgy mass making up the body of a deep-sea thing. One got an impression of strength.

The country was before the open window; the clusters of cultivated shrub on the sweep of velvet lawn extending to the great wall that inclosed the place, then the bend of the river and beyond the distant mountains, blue and mysterious, blending indiscernibly into the sky. A soft sun, clouded with the haze of autumn, shone over it.

"You know how the faint moisture in the bare foot will make an impression."

He paused as though there was some compelling force in the reflection. It was impossible to say, with accuracy, to what race the man belonged. He came from some queer blend of Eastern peoples. His body and the cast of his features were Mongolian. But one got always, before him, a feeling of the hot East lying low down against the stagnant Suez. One felt that he had risen slowly into our world of hard air and sun out of the vast sweltering ooze of it.

He spoke English with a certain care in the selection of the words, but with ease and an absence of effort, as though languages were instinctive to him—as though he could speak any language. And he impressed one with this same effortless facility in all the things he did.

It is necessary to try to understand this, because it explains the conception everybody got of the creature, when they saw him in charge of Rodman. I am using precisely the descriptive words; he was exclusively in charge of Rodman, as a jinn in an Arabian tale might have been in charge of a king's son.

The creature was servile—with almost a groveling servility. But one felt that this servility resulted from something potent and secret. One looked to see Rodman take Solomon's ring out of his waistcoat pocket.

I suppose there is no longer any doubt about the fact that Rodman was one of those gigantic human intelligences who sometimes appear in the world, and by their immense conceptions dwarf all human knowledge—a sort of mental monster that we feel nature has no right to produce. Lord Bayless Truxley said that Rodman was some generations in advance of the time; and Lord Bayless Truxley was, beyond question, the greatest authority on synthetic chemistry in the world.

Rodman was rich and, everybody supposed, indolent; no one ever thought very much about him until he published his brochure on the scientific manufacture of precious stones. Then instantly everybody with any pretension to a knowledge of synthetic chemistry turned toward him.

The brochure startled the world.

It proposed to adapt the luster and beauty of jewels to commercial uses. We were being content with crude imitation colors in our commercial glass, when we could quite as easily have the actual structure and the actual luster of the jewel in it. We were painfully hunting over the earth, and in its bowels, for a few crystals and prettily colored stones which we hoarded and treasured, when in a manufacturing laboratory we could easily produce them, more perfect than nature, and in unlimited quantity.

Now, if you want to understand what I am printing here about Rodman, you must think about this thing as a scientific possibility and not as a fantastic notion. Take, for example, Rodman's address before the Sorbonne, or his report to the International Congress of Science in Edinburgh, and you will begin to see what I mean. The Marchese Giovanni, who was a delegate to that congress, and Pastreaux, said that the something in the way of an actual practical realization of what Rodman outlined was the formulae. If Rodman could work out the formulae, jewel-stuff could be produced as cheaply as glass, and in any quantity—by the carload. Imagine it; sheet ruby, sheet emerald, all the beauty and luster of jewels in the windows of the corner drugstore!

And there is another thing that I want you to think about. Think about the immense destruction of value—not to us, so greatly, for our stocks of precious stones are not large; but the thing meant, practically, wiping out all the assembled wealth of Asia except the actual earth and its structures.

The destruction of value was incredible.

Put the thing some other way and consider it. Suppose we should suddenly discover that pure gold could be produced by treating common yellow clay with sulphuric acid, or that some genius should set up a machine on the border of the Sahara that received sand at one end and turned out sacked wheat at the other! What, then, would our hoarded gold be worth, or the wheat-lands of Australia, Canada or our Northwest?

The illustrations are fantastic. But the thing Rodman was after was a practical fact. He had it on the way. Giovanni and Lord Bayless Truxley were convinced that the man would work out the formulae. They tried, over their signatures, to prepare the world for it.

The whole of Asia was appalled. The rajahs of the native states in India prepared a memorial and sent it to the British Government.

The thing came out after the mysterious, incredible tragedy. I should not have written that final sentence. I want you to think, just now, about the great hulk of a man that sat in his big chair beyond me at the window.

It was like Rodman to turn up with an outlandish human creature attending him hand and foot. How the thing came about reads like a lie; it reads like a lie; the wildest lie that anybody ever put forward to explain a big yellow Oriental following one about.

But it was no lie. You could not think up a lie to equal the actual things that happened to Rodman. Take the way he died!....

The thing began in India. Rodman had gone there to consult with the Marchese Giovanni concerning some molecular theory that was involved in his formulas. Giovanni was digging up a buried temple on the northern border of the Punjab. One night, in the explorer's tent, near the excavations, this inscrutable creature walked in on Rodman. No one knew how he got into the tent or where he came from.

Giovanni told about it. The tent-flap simply opened, and the big Oriental appeared. He had something under his arm rolled up in a prayer-carpet. He gave no attention to Giovanni, but he salaamed like a coolie to the little American.

"Master," he said, "you were hard to find. I have looked over the world for you."

And he squatted down on the dirty floor by Rodman's camp stool.

Now, that's precisely the truth. I suppose any ordinary person would have started no end of fuss. But not Rodman, and not, I think, Giovanni. There's the attitude that we can't understand in a genius—did you ever know a man with an inventive mind who doubted a miracle? A thing like that did not seem unreasonable to Rodman.

The two men spent the remainder of the night looking at the present that the creature brought Rodman in his prayer-carpet. They wanted to know where the Oriental got it, and that's how his story came out.

He was something—searcher, seems our nearest English word to it—in the great Shan Monastery on the southeastern plateau of the Gobi. He was looking for Rodman because he had the light—here was another word that the two men could find no term in any modern language to translate; a little flame, was the literal meaning.

The present was from the treasure-room of the monastery; the very carpet around it, Giovanni said, was worth twenty thousand lire. There was another thing that came out in the talk that Giovanni afterward recalled. Rodman was to accept the present and the man who brought it to him. The Oriental would protect him, in every way, in every direction, from things visible and invisible. He made quite a speech about it. But, there was one thing from which he could not protect him.

The Oriental used a lot of his ancient words to explain, and he did not get it very clear. He seemed to mean that the creative Forces of the spirit would not tolerate a division of worship with the creative forces of the body—the celibate notion in the monastic idea.

Giovanni thought Rodman did not understand it; he thought he himself understood it better. The monk was pledging Rodman to a high virtue, in the lapse of which something awful was sure to happen.

Giovanni wrote a letter to the State Department when he learned what had happened to Rodman. The State Department turned it over to the court at the trial. I think it was one of the things that influenced the judge in his decision. Still, at the time, there seemed no other reasonable decision to make. The testimony must have appeared incredible; it must have appeared fantastic. No man reading the record could have come to any other conclusion about it. Yet it seemed impossible—at least, it seemed impossible for me—to consider this great vital bulk of a man as a monk of one of the oldest religious orders in the world. Every common, academic conception of such a monk he distinctly negatived. He impressed me, instead, as possessing the ultimate qualities of clever diplomacy—the subtle ambassador of some new Oriental power, shrewd, suave, accomplished.

When one read the yellow-backed court-record, the sense of old, obscure, mysterious agencies moving in sinister menace, invisibly, around Rodman could not be escaped from. You believed it. Against your reason, against all modern experience of life, you believed it.

And yet it could not be true! One had to find that verdict or topple over all human knowledge—that is, all human knowledge as we understand it. The judge, cutting short the criminal trial, took the only way out of the thing.

There was one man in the world that everybody wished could have been present at the time. That was Sir Henry Marquis. Marquis was chief of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard. He had been in charge of the English secret service on the frontier of the Shan states, and at the time he was in Asia.

As soon as Scotland Yard could release Sir Henry, it sent him. Rodman's genius was the common property of the world. The American Government could not, even with the verdict of a trial court, let Rodman's death go by under the smoke-screen of such a weird, inscrutable mystery.

I was to meet Sir Henry and come here with him. But my train into New England was delayed, and when I arrived at the station, I found that Marquis had gone down to have a look at Rodman's country-house, where the thing had happened.

It was on an isolated forest ridge of the Berkshires, no human soul within a dozen miles of it—a comfortable stone house in the English fashion. There was a big drawing-room across one end of it, with an immense fireplace framed in black marble under a great white panel to the ceiling. It had a wide black-marble hearth. There is an excellent photograph of it in the record, showing the single andiron, that mysterious andiron upon which the whole tragedy seemed to turn as on a hinge.

Rodman used this drawing-room for a workshop. He kept it close-shuttered and locked. Not even this big, yellow, servile creature who took exclusive care of him in the house was allowed to enter, except under Rodman's eye. What he saw in the final scenes of the tragedy, he saw looking in through a crack under the door. The earlier things he noticed when he put logs on the fire at dark.

Time is hardly a measure for the activities of the mind. These reflections winged by in a scarcely

perceptible interval of it. They have taken me some time to write out here, but they crowded past while the big Oriental was speaking—in the pause between his words.

"The print," he continued, "was the first confirmation of evidence, but it was not the first indicatory sign. I doubt if the Master himself noticed the thing at the beginning. The seductions of this disaster could not have come quickly; and besides that, Excellency, the agencies behind the material world get a footing in it only with continuous pressure. Do not receive a wrong impression, Excellency; to the eye a thing will suddenly appear, but the invisible pressure will have been for some time behind that materialization."

He paused.

"The Master was sunk in his labor, and while that enveloped him, the first advances of the lure would have gone by unnoticed—and the tension of the pressure. But the day was at hand when the Master was receptive. He had got his work completed; the formula, penciled out, were on his table. I knew by the relaxation. Of all periods this is the one most dangerous to the human spirit."

He sat silent for a moment, his big fingers moving on the arms of the chair.

"I knew," he added. Then he went on: "But it was the one thing against which I could not protect him. The test was to be permitted."

He made a vague gesture.

"The Master was indicated—but the peril antecedent to his elevation remained.... It was to be permitted, and at its leisure and in its choice of time."

He turned sharply toward me, the folds of his face unsteady.

"Excellency!" he cried. "I would have saved the Master, I would have saved him with my soul's damnation, but it was not permitted. On that first night in the Italian's tent I said all I could."

His voice went into a higher note.

"Twice, for the Master, I have been checked and reduced in merit. For that bias I was myself encircled. I was in an agony of spirit when I knew that the thing was beginning to advance, but my very will to aid was at the time environed."

His voice descended.

He sat motionless, as though the whole bulk of him were devitalized, and maintained its outline only by the inclosing frame of the chair.

"It began, Excellency, on an August night. There is a chill in these mountains at sunset. I had put wood into the fireplace, and lighted it, and was about the house. The Master, as I have said, had worked out his formulae. He was at leisure. I could not see him, for the door was closed, but the odor of his cigar escaped from the room. It was very silent. I was placing the Master's bed-candle on the table in the hall, when I heard his voice.... You have read it, Excellency, as the scribes wrote it down before the judge."

He paused.

"It was an exclamation of surprise, of astonishment. Then I heard the Master get up softly and go over to the fireplace... Presently he returned. He got a new cigar, Excellency, clipped it and lighted it. I could hear the blade of the knife on the fiber of the tobacco, and of course, clearly the rasp of the match. A moment later I knew that he was in the chair again. The odor of ignited tobacco returned. It was some time before there was another sound in the room; then suddenly I heard the Master swear. His voice was sharp and astonished. This time, Excellency, he got up swiftly and crossed the room to the fireplace... I could hear him distinctly. There was the sound of one tapping on metal, thumping it, as with the fingers."

He stopped again, for a brief moment, as in reflection.

"It was then that the Master unlocked the door and asked for the liquor." He indicated the court record in my pocket. "I brought it, a goblet of brandy, with some carbonated water. He drank it all without putting down the glass.... His face was strange, Excellency.... Then he looked at me.

"'Put a log on the fire,' he said.

"I went in and added wood to the fire and came out.

"The Master remained in the doorway; he reentered when I came out, and closed the door behind him.... There was a long silence after that; then I heard the voice, permitted to the devotion thin, metallic, offering the barter to the Master. It began and ceased because the Master was on his feet and before the fireplace. I heard him swear again, and presently return to his place by the table."

The big Oriental lifted his face and looked out at the sweep of country before the window.

"The thing went on, Excellency, the voice offering its lure, and presenting it in brief flashes of materialization, and the Master endeavoring to seize and detain the visitations, which ceased instantly at his approach to the hearth."

The man paused.

"I knew the Master contended in vain against the thing; if he would acquire possession of what it offered, he must destroy what the creative forces of the spirit had released to him."

Again he paused.

"Toward morning he went out of the house. I could hear him walking on the gravel before the door. He would walk the full length of the house and return. The night was clear; there was a chill in it, and every sound was audible.

"That was all, Excellency. The Master returned a little later and ascended to his bedroom as usual."

Then he added:

"It was when I went in to put wood on the fire that I saw the footprint on the hearth."

There was a force, compelling and vivid, in these meager details, the severe suppression of things, big and tragic. No elaboration could have equaled, in effect, the virtue of this restraint.

The man was going on, directly, with the story.

"The following night, Excellency, the thing happened. The Master had passed the day in the open. He dined with a good appetite, like a man in health. And there was a change in his demeanor. He had the aspect of men who are determined to have a thing out at any hazard.

"After his dinner the Master went into the drawing-room and closed the door behind him. He had not entered the room on this day. It had stood locked and close-shuttered!"

The big Oriental paused and made a gesture outward with his fingers, as of one dismissing an absurdity.

"No living human being could have been concealed in that room. There is only the bare floor, the Master's table and the fireplace. The great wood shutters were bolted in, as they had stood since the Master took the room for a workshop and removed the furniture. The door was always locked with that special thief-proof lock that the American smiths had made for it. No one could have entered."

It was the report of the experts at the trial. They showed by the casing of rust on the bolts that the shutters had not been moved; the walls, ceiling and floor were undisturbed; the throat of the chimney was coated evenly with old soot. Only the door was possible as an entry, and this was always locked except when Rodman was himself in the room. And at such times the big Oriental never left his post in the hall before it. That seemed a condition of his mysterious overcare of Rodman.

Everybody thought the trial court went to an excessive care. It scrutinized in minute detail every avenue that could possibly lead to a solution of the mystery. The whole country and every resident was inquisitioned. The conclusion was inevitable. There was no human creature on that forest crest of the Berkshires but Rodman and his servant.

But one can see why the trial judge kept at the thing; he was seeking an explanation consistent with the common experience of mankind. And when he could not find it, he did the only thing he could do. He was wrong, as we now know. But he had a hold in the dark on the truth—not the whole truth by any means; he never had a glimmer of that. He never had the faintest conception of the big, amazing truth. But as I have said, he had his fingers on one essential fact.

The man was going on with a slow, precise articulation as though he would thereby make a difficult matter clear.

"The night had fallen swiftly. It was incredibly silent. There was no sound in the Master's room, and no light except the flicker of the logs smoldering in the fireplace. The thin line of it appeared faintly along the sill of the door."

He paused.

"The fireplace, Excellency, is at the end of the great room, directly opposite this door into the hall, before which I always sat when the Master was within. The fireplace is of black marble with an immense black-marble hearth. And the gift which I had brought the Master stands on one side of the fire, on this marble hearth, as though it were a single andiron."

The man turned back into the heart of his story.

"I knew by the vague sense of pressure that the devocations of the thing were again on the way. And I began to suffer in the spirit for the Master's safety. Interference, both by act and by the will, were denied me. But there is an anxiety of spirit, Excellency, that the uncertainty of an issue makes intolerable."

The man paused.

"The pressure continued—and the silence. It was nearly midnight. I could not distinguish any act or motion of the Master, and in fear I crept over to the door and looked in through the crevice along the threshold.

"The Master sat by his table; he was straining forward, his hands gripping the arms of his chair. His eyes and every tense instinct of the man were concentrated on the fireplace. The red light of the embers was in the room. I could see him clearly, and the table beyond him with the calculations; but the fireplace seemed strangely out of perspective—it extended above me.

"My gift to the Master, not more than four handbreaths in length, including the base, stood now like an immense bronze on an extended marble slab beside a gigantic fireplace. This effect of extension put the top of the fireplace and the enlarged andiron, above its pedestal, out of my line of vision. Everything else in the chamber, holding its normal dimensions, was visible to me.

"The Master's face was a little lifted. He was looking at the elevated portions of the andiron which were invisible to me. He did not move. The steady light threw half of his face into shadow. But in the other half every feature stood out sharply as in a delicate etching. It had that refined sharpness and distinction which intense moments of stress stamp on the human face. He did not move, and there was no sound.

"I have said, Excellency, that my angle of vision along the crevice of the doorsill was sharply cut midway of this now enlarged fireplace. From the direction and lift of the Master's face, he was watching something above this line and directly over the pedestal of the andiron. I watched, also, flattening my face against the sill, for the thing to appear.

"And it did appear.

"A naked foot became slowly visible, as though some one were descending with extreme care from the elevation of the andiron to the great marble hearth, under this strange enlargement, now some distance below."

The big Oriental paused, and looked down at me.

"I knew then, Excellency, that the Master was lost! The creative energies of the Spirit suffer no division of worship; those of the body must be wholly denied. I had warned the Master. And in travail, Excellency, I turned over with my face to the floor.

"But there is always hope, hope over the certainties of experience, over the certainties of knowledge. Perhaps the Master, even now, sustained in the spirit, would put away the devocation.... No, Excellency, I was not misled. I knew the Master was beyond hope! But the will to hope moved me, and I turned back to the crevice at the doorsill."

He paused.

"There was now a delicate odor, everywhere, faintly, like the blossom of the little bitter apple here in your country. The red embers in the fireplace gave out a steady light; and in the glow of it, on the marble hearth, stood the one who had descended from the elevation of the andiron."

Again the man hesitated, as for an accurate method of expression.

"In the flesh, Excellency, there was color that would not appear in the image. The hair was yellow, and the eyes were blue; and against the black marble of the fireplace the body was conspicuously white. But in every other aspect of her, Excellency, the woman was on the hearth in the flesh as she is in the clutch of the savage male figure in the image.

"There is no dress or ornament, as you will recall, Excellency. Not even an ear-jewel or an anklet, as though the graver of the image felt that the inherent beauty of his figure could take nothing from these ostentations. The woman's heavy yellow hair was wound around her head, as in the image. She shivered a little, faintly, like a naked child in an unaccustomed draught of air, although she stood on the warm marble hearth and within the red glow of the fire.

"The voice from the male figure of the image, which I had brought the Master, and which stood as the andiron, now so immensely enlarged, was beginning again to speak. The thin metallic sounds seemed to splinter against the dense silence, as it went forward in the ritual prescribed.

"But the Master had already decided; he stood now on the great marble hearth with his papers crushed together. And as I looked on, through the crevice under the doorsill, he put out his free hand and with his finger touched the woman gently. The flesh under his finger yielded, and stooping over, he put the formulas into the fire."

Like one who has come to the end of his story, the huge Oriental stopped. He remained for some moments silent. Then he continued in an even, monotonous voice:

"I got up from the floor then, and purified myself with water. And after that I went into an upper chamber, opened the window to the east, and sat down to write my report to the brotherhood. For the thing which I had been sent to do was finished."

He put his hand somewhere into the loose folds of his Oriental garment and brought out a roll of thin vellum like onion-skin, painted in Chinese characters. It was of immense length, but on account of the thinness of the vellum, the roll wound on a tiny cylinder of wood was not above two inches in thickness.

"Excellency," he said, "I have carefully concealed this report through the misfortunes that have attended me. It is not certain that I shall be able to deliver it. Will you give it for me to the jewel merchant Vanderdick, in Amsterdam? He will send it to Mahadal in Bombay, and it will go north with the caravans."

His voice changed into a note of solicitation.

"You will not fail me, Excellency—already for my bias to the Master I am reduced in merit."

I put the scroll into my pocket and went out, for a motorcar had come into the park, and I knew that Marquis had arrived.

I met Sir Henry and the superintendent in the long corridor; they had been looking in at my interview through the elevated grating.

"Marquis," I cried, "the judge was right to cut short the criminal trial and issue a lunacy warrant. This creature is the maddest lunatic in this whole asylum. The human mind is capable of any absurdity."

Sir Henry looked at me with a queer ironical smile.

"The judge was wrong," he said. "The creature, as you call him, is as sane as any of us."

"Then you believe this amazing story?" I said.

"I believe Rodman was found at daylight dead on the hearth, with practically every bone in his body crushed," he replied.

"Certainly," I said. "We all know that is true. But why was he killed?"

Again Sir Henry regarded me with his ironical smile.

"Perhaps," he drawled, "there is some explanation in the report in your pocket, to the Monastic Head. It's only a theory, you know."

He smiled, showing his white, even teeth.

We went into the superintendent's room, and sat down by a smoldering fire of coals in the grate. I handed Marquis the roll of vellum. It was in one of the Shan dialects. He read it aloud. With the addition of certain formal expressions, it contained precisely the Oriental's testimony before the court, and no more.

"Ah!" he said in his curiously inflected Oxford voice.

And he held the scroll out to the heat of the fire. The vellum baked slowly, and as it baked, the black Chinese characters faded out and faint blue ones began to appear.

Marquis read the secret message in his emotionless drawl:

"The American is destroyed, and his accursed work is destroyed with him. Send the news to Bangkok and west to Burma. The treasures of India are saved."

I cried out in astonishment.

"An assassin! The creature was an assassin! He killed Rodman simply by crushing him in his arms!"

Sir Henry's drawl lengthened.

"It's Lal Gupta," he said, "the cleverest Oriental in the whole of Asia. The jewel-traders sent him to watch Rodman, and to kill him if he was ever able to get his formulae worked out. They must have paid him an incredible sum."

"And that is why the creature attached himself to Rodman!" I said.

"Surely," replied Sir Henry. "He brought that bronze Romulus carrying off the Sabine woman and staged the supernatural to work out his plan and to save his life. I knew the bronze as soon as I got my eye on it—old

Franz Josef gave it as a present to Mahadal in Bombay for matching up some rubies."

I swore bitterly.

"And we took him for a lunatic!"

"Ah, yes!" replied Sir Henry. "What was it you said as I came in? 'The human mind is capable of any absurdity!'"

II. The Reward

I was before one of those difficult positions unavoidable to a visitor in a foreign country.

I had to meet the obligations of professional courtesy. Captain Walker had asked me to go over the manuscript of his memoirs; and now he had called at the house in which I was a guest, for my opinion. We had long been friends; associated in innumerable cases, and I wished to suggest the difficulty rather than to express it. It was the twilight of an early Washington winter. The lights in the great library, softened with delicate shades, had been turned on. Outside, Sheridan Circle was almost a thing of beauty in its vague outlines; even the squat, ridiculous bronze horse had a certain dignity in the blue shadow.

If one had been speculating on the man, from his physical aspect one would have taken Walker for an engineer of some sort, rather than the head of the United States Secret Service. His lean face and his angular manner gave that impression. Even now, motionless in the big chair beyond the table, he seemed—how shall I say it?—mechanical.

And that was the very defect in his memoir. He had cut the great cases into a dry recital. There was no longer in them any pressure of a human impulse. The glow of inspired detail had been dissected out. Everything startling and wonderful had been devitalized.

The memoir was a report.

The bulky typewritten manuscript lay on the table beside the electric lamp, and I stood about uncertain how to tell him.

"Walker," I said, "did nothing wonderful ever happen to you in the adventure of these cases?"

"What precisely do you mean, Sir Henry?" he replied.

The practical nature of the man tempted me to extravagance.

"Well," I said, "for example, were you never kissed in a lonely street by a mysterious woman and the flash of your dark lantern reveal a face of startling beauty?"

"No," he said, as though he were answering a sensible question, "that never happened to me."

"Then," I continued, "perhaps you have found a prince of the church, pale as alabaster, sitting in his red robe, who put together the indicatory evidence of the crime that baffled you with such uncanny acumen that you stood aghast at his perspicacity?"

"No," he said; and then his face lighted. "But I'll tell you what I did find. I found a drunken hobo at Atlantic City who was the best detective I ever saw."

I sat down and tapped the manuscript with my fingers.

"It's not here," I said. "Why did you leave it out?"

He took a big gold watch out of his pocket and turned it about in his hand. The case was covered with an inscription.

"Well, Sir Henry," he said, "the boys in the department think a good deal of me. I shouldn't like them to know how a dirty tramp faked me at Atlantic City. I don't mind telling you, but I couldn't print it in a memoir."

He went directly ahead with the story and I was careful not to interrupt him:

"I was sitting in a rolling chair out there on the Boardwalk before the Traymore. I was nearly all in, and I had taken a run to Atlantic for a day or two of the sea air. The fact is the whole department was down and out. You may remember what we were up against; it finally got into the newspapers.

"The government plates of the Third Liberty Bond issue had disappeared. We knew how they had gotten out, and we thought we knew the man at the head of the thing. It was a Mulehaus job, as we figured it.

"It was too big a thing for a little crook. With the government plates they could print Liberty Bonds just as the Treasury would. And they could sow the world with them."

He paused and moved his gold-rimmed spectacles a little closer in on his nose.

"You see these war bonds are scattered all over the country. They are held by everybody. It's not what it used to be, a banker's business that we could round up. Nobody could round up the holders of these bonds.

"A big crook like Mulehaus could slip a hundred million of them into the country and never raise a ripple."

He paused and drew his fingers across his bony protruding chin.

"I'll say this for Mulehaus: He's the hardest man to identify in the whole kingdom of crooks. Scotland Yard, the Service de la Surete, everybody, says that. I don't mean dime-novel disguises—false whiskers and a limp. I mean the ability to be the character he pretends—the thing that used to make Joe Jefferson, Rip Van Winkle—and not an actor made up to look like him. That's the reason nobody could keep track of Mulehaus, especially in South American cities. He was a French banker in the Egypt business and a Swiss banker in the Argentine."

He turned back from the digression:

"And it was a clean job. They had got away with the plates. We didn't have a clew. We thought, naturally, that they'd make for Mexico or some South American country to start their printing press. And we had the

ports and border netted up. Nothing could have gone out across the border or, through any port. All the customs officers were, working with us, and every agent of the Department of Justice."

He looked at me steadily across the table.

"You see the Government had to get those plates back before the crook started to print, or else take up every bond of that issue over the whole country. It was a hell of a thing!

"Of course we had gone right after the record of all the big crooks to see whose line this sort of job was. And the thing narrowed down to Mulehaus or old Vronsky. We soon found out it wasn't Vronsky. He was in Joliet. It was Mulehaus. But we couldn't find him.

"We didn't even know that Mulehaus was in America. He's a big crook with a genius for selecting men. He might be directing the job from Rio or a Mexican port. But we were sure it was a Mulehaus' job. He sold the French securities in Egypt in '90; and he's the man who put the bogus Argentine bonds on our market—you'll find the case in the 115th Federal Reporter.

"Well," he went on, "I was sitting out there in the rolling chair, looking at the sun on the sea and thinking about the thing, when I noticed this hobo that I've been talking about. He was my chair attendant, but I hadn't looked at him before. He had moved round from behind me and was now leaning against the galvanized pipe railing.

"He was a big human creature, a little stooped, unshaved and dirty; his mouth was slack and loose, and he had a big mobile nose that seemed to move about like a piece of soft rubber. He had hardly any clothing; a cap that must have been fished out of an ash barrel, no shirt whatever, merely an old ragged coat buttoned round him, a pair of canvas breeches and carpet slippers tied on to his feet with burlap, and wrapped round his ankles to conceal the fact that he wore no socks.

"As I looked at him he darted out, picked up the stump of a cigarette that some one had thrown down, and came back to the railing to smoke it, his loose mouth and his big soft nose moving like kneaded putty.

"Altogether this tramp was the worst human derelict I ever saw. And it occurred to me that this was the one place in the whole of America where any sort of a creature could get a kind of employment and no questions asked.

"Anything that could move and push a chair could get fifteen cents an hour from McDuyal. Wise man, poor man, beggar man, thief, it was all one to McDuyal. And the creatures could sleep in the shed behind the rolling chairs.

"I suppose an impulse to offer the man a garment of some sort moved me to address him.

"'You're nearly naked,' I said.

"He crossed one leg over the other with the toe of the carpet slipper touching the walk, in the manner of a burlesque actor, took the cigarette out of his mouth with a little flourish, and replied to me:

"'Sure, Governor, I ain't dolled up like John Drew.'

"There was a sort of cocky unconcern about the creature that gave his miserable state a kind of beggarly distinction. He was in among the very dregs of life, and he was not depressed about it.

"'But if I had a sawbuck,'" he continued, "I could bulge your eye Couldn't point the way to one?"

"He arrested my answer with the little flourish of his fingers holding the stump of the cigarette.

"'Not work, Governor,' and he made a little duck of his head, 'and not murder.... Go as far as you please between 'em.'

"The fantastic manner of the derelict was infectious.

"'O. K.' I said. 'Go out and find me a man who is a deserter from the German Army, was a tanner in Bale and began life as a sailor, and I'll double your money—I'll give you a twenty-dollar bill.'

"The creature whistled softly in two short staccato notes.

"'Some little order,' he said. And taking a toothpick out of his pocket he stuck it into the stump of the cigarette which had become too short to hold between his fingers.

"At this moment a boy from the post office came to me with the daily report from Washington, and I got out of the chair, tipped the creature, and went into the hotel, stopping to pay McDuyal as I passed.

"There was nothing new from the department except that our organization over the country was in close touch. We had offered five thousand dollars reward for the recovery of the plates, and the Post Office Department was now posting the notice all over America in every office. The Secretary thought we had better let the public in on it and not keep it an underground offer to the service.

"I had forgotten the hobo, when about five o'clock he passed me a little below the Steel Pier. He was in a big stride and he had something clutched in his hand.

"He called to me as he hurried along: 'I got him, Governor.... See you later!'

"'See me now,' I said. 'What's the hurry?'

"He flashed his hand open, holding a silver dollar with his thumb against the palm.

"'Can't stop now, I'm going to get drunk. See you later.'

"I smiled at this disingenuous creature. He was saving me for the dry hour. He could point out Mulehaus in any passing chair, and I would give some coin to be rid of his pretension."

Walker paused. Then he went on:

"I was right. The hobo was waiting for me when I came out of the hotel the following morning.

"'Howdy, Governor,' he said; 'I located your man.'

"I was interested to see how he would frame up his case.

"'How did you find him?' I said.

"He grinned, moving his lip and his loose nose.

"'Some luck, Governor, and some sleuthin'. It was like this: I thought you was stringin' me. But I said to

myself I'll keep out an eye; maybe it's on the level—any damn thing can happen.'

"He put up his hand as though to hook his thumb into the armhole of his vest, remembered that he had only a coat buttoned round him and dropped it.

"'And believe me or not, Governor, it's the God's truth. About four o'clock up toward the Inlet I passed a big, well-dressed, banker-looking gent walking stiff from the hip and throwing out his leg. "Come eleven!" I said to myself. "It's the goosestep!" I had an empty roller, and I took a turn over to him.'

"'Chair, Admiral?" I said.

"'He looked at me sort of queer.

"'What makes you think I'm an admiral, my man?" he answers.

"Well," I says, lounging over on one foot reflective like, "nobody could be a-viewin' the sea with that lovin', ownership look unless he'd bossed her a bit.... If I'm right, Admiral, you takes the chair."

"'He laughed, but he got in. "I'm not an admiral," he said, "but it is true that I've followed the sea."

"The hobo paused, and put up his first and second fingers spread like a V.

"'Two points, Governor—the gent had been a sailor and a soldier; now how about the tanner business?

"'He scratched his head, moving his ridiculous cap.

"'That sort of puzzled me, and I pussyfooted along toward the Inlet thinkin' about it. If a man was a tanner, and especially a foreign, hand-workin' tanner, what would his markin's be?

"'I tried to remember everybody that I'd ever seen handlin' a hide, and all at once I recollected that the first thing a dago shoemaker done when he picked up a piece of leather was to smooth it out with his thumbs. An' I said to myself, now that'll be what a tanner does, only he does it more.... he's always doin' it. Then I asks myself what would be the markin's?'

"The hobo paused, his mouth open, his head twisted to one side. Then he jerked up as under a released spring.

"'And right away, Governor, I got the answer to it flat thumbs!'

"The hobo stepped back with an air of victory and flashed his hand up.

"'And he had 'em! I asked him what time it was so I could keep the hour straight for McDuyal, I told him, but the real reason was so I could see his hands.'"

Walker crossed one leg over the other.

"It was clever," he said, "and I hesitated to shatter it. But the question had to come.

"'Where is your man?' I said.

"The hobo executed a little deprecatory step, with his fingers picking at his coat pockets.

"'That's the trouble, Governor,' he answered; 'I intended to sleuth him for you, but he gave me a dollar and I got drunk... you saw me. That man had got out at McDuyal's place not five minutes before. I was flashin' to the booze can when you tried to stop me.... Nothin' doin' when I get the price.'"

Walker paused.

"It was a good fairy story and worth something. I offered him half a dollar. Then I got a surprise.

"The creature looked eagerly at the coin in my fingers, and he moved toward it. He was crazy for the liquor it would buy. But he set his teeth and pulled up.

"'No, Governor,' he said, 'I'm in it for the sawbuck. Where'll I find you about noon?'

"I promised to be on the Boardwalk before Heinz's Pier at two o'clock, and he turned to shuffle away. I called an inquiry after him... You see there were two things in his story: How did he get a dollar tip, and how did he happen to make his imaginary man banker-looking? Mulehaus had been banker-looking in both the Egypt and the Argentine affairs. I left the latter point suspended, as we say. But I asked about the dollar. He came back at once.

"'I forgot about that, Governor,' he said. 'It was like this: The admiral kept looking out at the sea where an old freighter was going South. You know, the fruit line from New York. One of them goes by every day or two. And I kept pushing him along. Finally we got up to the Inlet, and I was about to turn when he stopped me. You know the neck of ground out beyond where the street cars loop; there's an old board fence by the road, then sand to the sea, and about halfway between the fence and the water there's a shed with some junk in it. You've seen it. They made the old America out there and the shed was a tool house.

"'When I stopped the admiral says: "Cut across to the hole in that old board fence and see if an automobile has been there, and I'll give you a dollar." An' I done it, an' I got it.'

"Then he shuffled off.

"'Be on the spot, Governor, an' I'll lead him to you.'"

Walker leaned over, rested his elbows on the arms of his chair, and linked his fingers together.

"That gave me a new flash on the creature. He was a slicker article than I imagined. I was not to get off with a tip. He was taking some pains to touch me for a greenback. I thought I saw his line. It would not account for his hitting the description of Mulehaus in the make-up of his straw-man, but it would furnish the data for the dollar story. I had drawn the latter a little before he was ready. It belonged in what he planned to give me at two o'clock. But I thought I saw what the creature was about. And I was right."

Walker put out his hand and moved the pages of his memoir on the table. Then he went on:

"I was smoking a cigar on a bench at the entrance to Heinz's Pier when the hobo shuffled up. He came down one of the streets from Pacific Avenue, and the direction confirmed me in my theory. It also confirmed me in the opinion that I was all kinds of a fool to let this dirty hobo get a further chance at me.

"I was not in a very good humor. Everything I had set going after Mulehaus was marking time. The only report was progress in linking things up; not only along the Canadian and Mexican borders and the customhouses, but we had also done a further unusual thing, we had an agent on every ship going out of

America to follow through to the foreign port and look out for anything picked up on the way.

"It was a plan I had set at immediately the robbery was discovered. It would cut out the trick of reshipping at sea from some fishing craft or small boat. The reports were encouraging enough in that respect. We had the whole country as tight as a drum. But it was slender comfort when the Treasury was raising the devil for the plates and we hadn't a clew to them."

Walker stopped a moment. Then he went on:

"I felt like kicking the hobo when he got to me, he was so obviously the extreme of all worthless creatures, with that apologetic, confidential manner which seems to be an abominable attendant on human degeneracy. One may put up with it for a little while, but it presently becomes intolerable.

"'Governor,' he began, when he'd shuffled up, 'you won't git mad if I say a little somethin'?"

"'Go on and say it,' I said.

"The expression on his dirty unshaved face became, if possible, more foolish.

"'Well, then, Governor, askin' your pardon, you ain't Mr. Henry P. Johnson, from Erie; you're the Chief of the United States Secret Service, from Washington.'"

Walker moved in his chair.

"That made me ugly," he went on, "the assurance of the creature and my unspeakable carelessness in permitting the official letters brought to me on the day before by the post-office messenger to be seen. In my relaxation I had forgotten the eye of the chair attendant. I took the cigar out of my teeth and looked at him.

"'And I'll say a little something myself!' I could hardly keep my foot clear of him. 'When you got sober this morning and remembered who I was, you took a turn up round the post office to make sure of it, and while you were in there you saw the notice of the reward for the stolen bond plates. That gave you the notion with which you pieced out your fairy story about how you got the dollar tip. Having discovered my identity through a piece of damned carelessness on my part, and having seen the postal notice of the reward, you undertook to enlarge your little game. That's the reason you wouldn't take fifty cents. It was your notion in the beginning to make a touch for a tip. And it would have worked. But now you can't get a damned cent out of me.' Then I threw a little brush into him: 'I'd have stood a touch for your finding the fake tanner, because there isn't any such person.'

"I intended to put the hobo out of business," Walker went on, "but the effect of my words on him were even more startling than I anticipated. His jaw dropped and he looked at me in astonishment.

"'No such person!' he repeated. 'Why, Governor, before God, I found a man like that, an' he was a banker—one of the big ones, sure as there's a hell!'"

Walker put out his hands in a puzzled gesture.

"There it was again, the description of Mulehaus! And it puzzled me. Every motion of this hobo's mind in every direction about this affair was perfectly clear to me. I saw his intention in every turn of it and just where he got the material for the details of his story. But this absolutely distinguishing description of Mulehaus was beyond me. Everybody, of course, knew that we were looking for the lost plates, for there was the reward offered by the Treasury; but no human soul outside of the trusted agents of the department knew that we were looking for Mulehaus."

Walker did not move, but he stopped in his recital for a moment.

"The tramp shuffled up a step closer to the bench where I sat. The anxiety in his big slack face was sincere beyond question.

"'I can't find the banker man, Governor; he's skipped the coop. But I believe I can find what he's hid.'

"'Well,' I said, 'go and find it.'

"The hobo jerked out his limp hands in a sort of hopeless gesture.

"'Now, Governor,' he whimpered, 'what good would it do me to find them plates?'"

"'You'd get five thousand dollars,' I said.

"'I'd git kicked into the discard by the first cop that got to me,' he answered, 'that's what I'd git.'

"The creature's dirty, unshaved jowls began to shake, and his voice became wholly a whimper.

"'I've got a line on this thing, Governor, sure as there's a hell. That banker man was viewin' the layout. I've thought it all over, an' this is the way it would be. They're afraid of the border an' they're afraid of the customhouses, so they runs the loot down here in an automobile, hides it up about the Inlet, and plans to go out with it to one of them fruit steamers passing on the way to Tampico. They'd have them plates bundled up in a sailor's chest most like.

"'Now, Governor, you'd say why ain't they already done it? An' I'd answer, the main guy—this banker man—didn't know the automobile had got here until he sent me to look, and there ain't been no ship along since then.... I've been special careful to find that out.' And then the creature began to whine. 'Have a heart, Governor, come along with me. Gimme a show!'"

"It was not the creature's plea that moved me, nor his pretended deductions; I'm a bit old to be soft. It was the 'banker man' sticking like a bur in the hobo's talk. I wanted to keep him in sight until I understood where he got it. No doubt that seems a slight reason for going out to the Inlet with the creature; but you must remember that slight things are often big signboards in our business."

He continued, his voice precise and even

"We went directly from the end of the Boardwalk to the old shed; it was open, an unfastened door on a pair of leather hinges. The shed is small, about twenty feet by eleven, with a hard dirt floor packed down by the workmen who had used it; a combination of clay and sand like the Jersey roads put in to make a floor. All round it, from the sea to the board fence, was soft sand. There were some pieces of old junk lying about in the shed; but nothing of value or it would have been nailed up.

"The hobo led right off with his deductions. There, was the track of a man, clearly outlined in the soft sand,

leading from the board fence to the shed and returning, and no other track anywhere about.

"'Now, Governor,' he began, when he had taken a look at the tracks, 'the man that made them tracks carried something into this shed, and he left it here, and it was something heavy.'

"I was fairly certain that the hobo had salted the place for me, made the tracks himself; but I played out a line to him.

"'How do you know that?' I said.

"'Well, Governor,' he answered, 'take a look at them two lines of tracks. In the one comin' to the shed the man was walkin' with his feet apart and in the one goin' back he was walkin' with his feet in front of one another; that's because he was carryin' somethin' heavy when he come an' nothin' when he left.'

"It was an observation on footprints," he went on, "that had never occurred to me. The hobo saw my awakened interest, and he added:

"'Did you never notice a man carryin' a heavy load? He kind of totters, walkin' with his feet apart to keep his balance. That makes his foot tracks side by side like, instead of one before the other as he makes them when he's goin' light.'"

Walker interrupted his narrative with a comment:

"It's the truth. I've verified it a thousand times since that hobo put me onto it. A line running through the center of the heel prints of a man carrying a heavy burden will be a zigzag, while one through the heel prints of the same man without the burden will be almost straight.

"The tramp went right on with his deductions:

"'If it come in and didn't go out, it's here.'

"And he began to go over the inside of the shed. He searched it like a man searching a box for a jewel. He moved the pieces of old castings and he literally fingered the shed from end to end. He would have found a bird's egg.

"Finally he stopped and stood with his hand spread out over his mouth. And I selected this critical moment to touch the powder off under his game.

"'Suppose,' I said, 'that this man with the heavy load wished to mislead us; suppose that instead of bringing something here he took one of these old castings away?'

"The hobo looked at me without changing his position.

"'How could he, Governor; he was pointin' this way with the load?'

"'By walking backward,' I said. For it occurred to me that perhaps the creature had manufactured this evidence for the occasion, and I wished to test the theory."

Walker went on in his slow, even voice:

"The test produced more action than I expected.

"The hobo dived out through the door. I followed to see him disappear. But it was not in flight; he was squatting down over the footprints. And a moment later he rocked back on his haunches with a little exultant yelp.

"'Dope's wrong, Governor,' he said; 'he was sure comin' this way.' Then he explained: 'If a man's walkin' forward in sand or mud or snow the toe of his shoe flirts out a little of it, an' if he's walkin' backward his heel flirts it out.'

"At this point I began to have some respect for the creature's ability. He got up and came back into the shed. And there he stood, in his old position, with his fingers over his mouth, looking round at the empty shed, in which, as I have said, one could not have concealed a bird's egg.

"I watched him without offering any suggestion, for my interest in the thing had awakened and I was curious to see what he would do. He stood perfectly motionless for about a minute; and then suddenly he snapped his fingers and the light came into his face.

"'I got it, Governor!' Then he came over to where I stood. 'Gimme a quarter to git a bucket.'

"I gave him the coin, for I was now profoundly puzzled, and he went out. He was gone perhaps twenty minutes, and when he came in he had a bucket of water. But he had evidently been thinking on the way, for he set the bucket down carefully, wiped his hands on his canvas breeches, and began to speak, with a little apologetic whimper in his voice.

"'Now look here, Governor,' he said, 'I'm a-goin' to talk turkey; do I git the five thousand if I find this stuff?'

"'Surely,' I answered him.

"'An' there'll be no monkeyin', Governor; you'll take me down to a bank yourself an' put the money in my hand?'

"'I promise you that,' I assured him.

"But he was not entirely quiet in his mind about it. He shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, and his soft rubber nose worked.

"'Now, Governor,' he said, 'I'm leery about jokers—I gotta be. I don't want any string to this money. If I git it I want to go and blow it in. I don't want you to hand me a roll an' then start any reformin' stunt—a-holdin' of it in trust an' a probation officer a-pussyfootin' me, or any funny business. I want the wad an' a clear road to the bright lights, with no word passed along to pinch me. Do I git it?'

"'It's a trade!' I said.

"'O. K.,' he answered, and he took up the bucket. He began at the door and poured the water carefully on the hard tramped earth. When the bucket was empty he brought another and another. Finally about midway of the floor space he stopped.

"'Here it is!' he said.

"I was following beside him, but I saw nothing to justify his words.

"Why do you think the plates are buried here?' I said.

"Look at the air bubbles comin' up, Governor,' he answered."

Walker stopped, then he added:

"It's a thing which I did not know until that moment, but it's the truth. If hard-packed earth is dug up and repacked air gets into it, and if one pours water on the place air bubbles will come up."

He did not go on, and I flung at him the big query in his story.

"And you found the plates there?"

"Yes, Sir Henry," he replied, "in the false bottom of an old steamer trunk."

"And the hobo got the money?"

"Certainly," he answered. "I put it into his hand, and let him go with it, as I promised."

Again he was silent, and I turned toward him in astonishment.

"Then," I said, "why did you begin this story by saying the hobo faked you? I don't see the fake; he found the plates and he was entitled to the reward."

Walker put his hand into his pocket, took out a leather case, selected a paper from among its contents and handed it to me. "I didn't see the fake either," he said, "until I got this letter."

I unfolded the letter carefully. It was neatly written in a hand like copper plate and dated Buenos Aires.

DEAR COLONEL WALKER: When I discovered that you were planting an agent on every ship I had to abandon the plates and try for the reward. Thank you for the five thousand; it covered expenses.

Very sincerely yours,

D. Mulehaus.

III. The Lost Lady

It was a remark of old Major Carrington that incited this adventure.

"It is some distance through the wood—is she quite safe?"

It was a mere reflection as he went out. It was very late. I do not know how the dinner, or rather the after-hours of it, had lengthened. It must have been the incomparable charm of the woman. She had come, this night, luminously, it seemed to us, through the haze that had been on her—the smoke haze of a strange, blighting fortune. The three of us had been carried along in it with no sense of time; my sister, the ancient Major Carrington and I.

He turned back in the road, his decayed voice whipped by the stimulus of her into a higher note.

"Suppose the village coachman should think her as lovely as we do—what!"

He laughed and turned heavily up the road a hundred yards or so to his cottage set in the pine wood. I stood in the road watching the wheels of the absurd village vehicle, the yellow cut-under, disappear. The old Major called back to me; his voice seemed detached, eerie with the thin laugh in it.

"I thought him a particularly villainous-looking creature!"

It was an absurd remark. The man was one of the natives of the island, and besides, the innkeeper was a person of sound sense; he would know precisely about his driver.

I should not have gone on this adventure but for a further incident.

When I entered the house my sister was going up the stair, the butler was beyond in the drawing-room, and there was no other servant visible. She was on the first step and the elevation gave precisely the height that my sister ought to have received in the accident of birth. She would have been wonderful with those four inches added—lacking beauty, she had every other grace!

She spoke to me as I approached.

"Winthrop," she said, "what was in the package that Madame Barras carried away with her tonight?"

The query very greatly surprised me. I thought Madame Barras had carried this package away with her several evenings before when I had put her English bank-notes in my box at the local bank. My sister added the explanation which I should have been embarrassed to seek, at the moment.

"She asked me to put it somewhere, on Tuesday afternoon.... It was forgotten, I suppose.... I laid it in a drawer of the library table.... What did it contain?"

I managed an evasive reply, for the discovery opened possibilities that disturbed me.

"Some certificates, I believe," I said.

My sister made a little pretended gesture of dismay.

"I should have been more careful; such things are of value."

Of value indeed! The certificates in Madame Barras' package, that had lain about on the library table, were gold certificates of the United States Treasury—ninety odd of them, each of a value of one thousand dollars! My sister went:

"How oddly life has tossed her about.... She must have been a mere infant at Miss Page's. The attachment of incoming tots to the older girls was a custom.... I do not recall her.... There was always a string of mites with shiny pigtails and big-eyed wistful faces. The older girls never thought very much about them. One has a swarm-memory, but individuals escape one. The older girl, in these schools, fancied herself immensely. The little satellite that attached itself, with its adoration, had no identity. It had a nickname, I think, or a number.... I have forgotten. We minimized these midges out of everything that could distinguish them...."

Fancy one of these turning up in Madame Barras and coming to me on the memory of it."

"It was extremely lucky for her," I said. "Imagine arriving from the interior of Brazil on the invitation of Mrs. Jordan to find that lady dead and buried; with no friend, until, by chance, one happened on your name in the social register, and ventured on a school attachment of which there might remain, perhaps a memory only on the infant's side."

My sister went on up the stair.

"I am glad we happened to be here, and, especially, Winthrop, if you have been able to assist her.... She is charming."

Charming was the word descriptive of my sister, for it is a thing of manner from a nature elevated and noble, but it was not the word for Madame Barras. The woman was a lure. I mean the term in its large and catholic sense. I mean the bait of a great cosmic impulse—the most subtle and the most persistent of which one has any sense.

The cunning intelligences of that impulse had decked her out with every attractiveness as though they had taken thought to confound all masculine resistance; to sweep into their service those refractory units that withheld themselves from the common purpose. She was lovely, as the aged Major Carrington had uttered it—great violet eyes in a delicate skin sown with gold flecks, a skin so delicate that one felt that a kiss would tear it!

I do not know from what source I have that expression but it attaches itself, out of my memory of descriptive phrases, to Madame Barras. And it extends itself as wholly descriptive of her. You will say that the long and short of this is that I was in love with Madame Barras, but I point you a witness in Major Carrington.

He had the same impressions, and he had but one passion in his life, a distant worship of my sister that burned steadily even here at the end of life. During the few evenings that Madame Barras had been in to dinner with us, he sat in his chair beyond my sister in the drawing-room, perfect in his early-Victorian manner, while Madame Barras and I walked on the great terrace, or sat outside.

One had a magnificent sweep of the world, at night, from that terrace. It looked out over the forest of pines to the open sea.

Madame Barras confessed to the pull of this vista. She asked me at what direction the Atlantic entered, and when she knew, she kept it always in her sight.

It had a persisting fascination for her. At all times and in nearly any position, she was somehow sensible of this vista; she knew the lights almost immediately, and the common small craft blinking about. To-night she had sat for a long time in nearly utter silence here. There was a faint light on the open sea as she got up to take her leave of us; what would it be she wondered.

I replied that it was some small craft coming in.

"A fishing-boat?"

"Hardly that," I said, "from its lights and position it will be some swifter power-boat and, I should say, not precisely certain about the channel."

I have been drawn here into reminiscence that did not, at the time, detain me in the hall. What my sister had discovered to me, following Major Carrington's remark, left me distinctly uneasy. It was very nearly two miles to the village, the road was wholly forest and there would be no house on the way; for my father, with an utter disregard for cost, had sought the seclusion of a large acreage when he had built this absurdly elaborate villa on Mount Desert Island.

Besides I was in no mood for sleep.

And, over all probability, there might be some not entirely imaginary danger to Madame Barras. Not precisely the danger presented in Major Carrington's pleasantry, but the always possible danger to one who is carrying a sum of money about. It would be considered, in the world of criminal activities, a very large sum of money; and it had been lying here, as of no value, in a drawer of the library table since the day on which the gold certificates had arrived on my check from the Boston bank.

Madame Barras had not taken the currency away as I imagined. It was extremely careless of her, but was it not an act in character?

What would such a woman know of practical concern?

I spoke to the butler. He should not wait up, I would let myself in; and I went out.

I remember that I got a cap and a stick out of the rack; there was no element of selection in the cap, but there was a decided subconscious direction about the selection of the stick. It was a heavy blackthorn, with an iron ferrule and a silver weight set in the head; picked up—by my father at some Irish fair—a weapon in fact.

It was not dark. It was one of those clear hard nights that are not uncommon on this island in midsummer; with a full moon, the road was visible even in the wood. I swung along it with no particular precaution; I was not expecting anything to happen, and in fact, nothing did happen on the way into the village.

But in this attitude of confidence I failed to discover an event of this night that might have given the whole adventure a different ending.

There is a point near the village where a road enters our private one; skirts the border of the mountain, and, making a great turn, enters the village from the south. At this division of the road I heard distinctly a sound in the wood.

It was not a sound to incite inquiry. It was the sound of some considerable animal moving in the leaves, a few steps beyond the road. It did not impress me at the time; estrays were constantly at large in our forests in summer, and not infrequently a roaming buck from the near preserves. There was also here in addition to the other roads, an abandoned winter wood-road that ran westward across the island to a small farming settlement. Doubtless I took a slighter notice of the sound because estrays from the farmers' fields usually trespassed on us from this road.

At any rate I went on. I fear that I was very much engrossed with the memory of Madame Barras. Not wholly with the feminine lure of her, although as I have written she was the perfection of that lure. One passed women, at all milestones, on the way to age, and kept before them one's sound estimates of life, but before this woman one lost one's head, as though Nature, evaded heretofore, would not be denied. But the weird fortune that had attended her was in my mind.

Married to Senor Barras out of the door of a convent, carried to Rio de Janeiro to an unbearable life, escaping with a remnant of her inheritance in English bank-notes, she arrives here to visit the one, old, persisting friend, Mrs. Jordan, and finds her dead! And what seemed strange, incredible beyond belief, was that this creature Barras had thought only of her fortune which he had depleted in two years to the something less than twenty thousand pounds which I had exchanged for her into our money; a mere fragment of her great inheritance.

I had listened to the story entranced with the alluring teller of it; wondering as I now wondered, on the road to the village, how anything pretending to be man could think of money when she was before his eye.

What could he buy with money that equaled her! And yet this curious jackal had seen in her only the key to a strong-box. There was behind it, in explanation, shadowed out, the glamor of an empire that Senor Barras would set up with the millions in his country of revolutions, and the enthusiasms of a foolish mother.

And yet the jackal and this wreckage had not touched her. There was no stain, no crumpled leaf. She was a fresh wonder, even after this, out of a chrysalis. It was this amazing newness, this virginity of blossom from which one could not escape.

The word in my reflection brought me up. How had she escaped from Barras?

I had more than once in my reflections pivoted on the word.

The great hotel was very nearly deserted when I entered.

There was the glow of a cigar where some one smoked, at the end of the long porch. Within, there was only a sleepy clerk.

Madame Barras had not arrived... he was quite sure; she had gone out to dinner somewhere and had not come in!

I was profoundly concerned. But I took a moment to reflect before deciding what to do.

I stepped outside and there, coming up from the shadow of the porch, I met Sir Henry Marquis.

It was chance at its extreme of favor. If I had been given the selection, in all the world, I should have asked for Sir Henry Marquis at that decisive moment.

The relief I felt made my words extravagant.

"Marquis!" I cried. "You here!"

"Ah, Winthrop," he said, in his drawling Oxford voice, "what have you done with Madame Barras; I was waiting for her?"

I told him, in a word, how she had set out from my house—my concern—the walk down here and this result. I did not ask him at the moment how he happened to be here, or with a knowledge of our guest. I thought that Marquis was in Canada. But one does not, with success, inquire of a C.I.D. official even in his own country. One met him in the most unexpected places, unconcerned, and one would have said at leisure.

But he was concerned to-night. What I told brought him up. He stood for a moment silent. Then he said, softly, in order that the clerk behind us might not overhear.

"Don't speak of it. I will get a light and go with you!"

He returned in a moment and we went out. He asked me about the road, was there only one way down; and I told him precisely. There was only the one road into the village and no way to miss it unless one turned into the public road at the point where it entered our private one along the mountain.

He pitched at once upon this point and we hurried back.

We had hardly a further word on the way. I was decidedly uneasy about Madame Barras by now, and Marquis' concern was hardly less evident. He raced along in his immense stride, and I had all I could manage to keep up.

It may seem strange that I should have brought such a man as Sir Henry Marquis into the search of this adventure with so little explanation of my guest or the affair. But, one must remember, Marquis was an old acquaintance frequently seen about in the world. To thus, on the spot so to speak, draft into my service the first gentleman I found, was precisely what any one would have done. It was probable, after all, that there had been some reason why the cut-under had taken the other road, and Madame Barras was quite all right.

It was better to make sure before one raised the village—and Marquis, markedly, was beyond any aid the village could have furnished. This course was strikingly justified by every after-event.

I have said that the night was not dark. The sky was hard with stars, like a mosaic. This white moonlight entered through the tree-tops and in a measure illumined the road. We were easily able to see, when we reached the point, that the cut-under had turned out into the road circling the mountain to the west of the village. The track was so clearly visible in the light, that I must have observed it had I been thinking of the road instead of the one who had set out upon it.

I was going on quickly, when Marquis stopped. He was stooping over the track of the vehicle. He did not come on and I went back.

"What is it?" I said.

He answered, still stooping above the track.

"The cut-under stopped here."

"How do you know that?" I asked, for it seemed hardly possible to determine where a wheeled vehicle had stopped.

"It's quite clear," he replied. "The horse has moved about without going on."

I now saw it. The hoof-marks of the horse had displaced the dust where it had several times changed position.

"And that's not all," Marquis continued. "Something has happened to the cut-under here!"

I was now closely beside him.

"It was broken down, perhaps, or some accident to the harness?"

"No," he replied. "The wheel tracks are here broadened, as though they had skidded on a turn. This would mean little if the cut-under had been moving at the time. But it was not moving; the horse was standing. The cut-under had stopped."

He went on as though in a reflection to himself.

"The vehicle must have been violently thrown about here, by something."

I had a sudden inspiration.

"I see it!" I cried. "The horse took fright, stopped, and then bolted; there has been a run-away. That accounts for the turn out. Let's hurry!"

But Marquis detained me with a firm hand on my arm.

"No," he said, "the horse was not running when it turned out and it did not stop here in fright. The horse was entirely quiet here. The hoof marks would show any alarm in the animal, and, moreover, if it had stopped in fright there would have been an inevitable recoil which would have thrown the wheels of the vehicle backward out of their track. No moving animal, man included, stopped by fright fails to register this recoil. We always look for it in evidences of violent assault. Footprints invariably show it, and one learns thereby, unerringly, the direction of the attack."

He rose, his hand still extended and upon my arm.

"There is only one possible explanation," he added. "Something happened in the cut-under to throw it violently about in the road, and it happened with the horse undisturbed and the vehicle standing still. The wheel tracks are widened only at one point, showing a transverse but no lateral movement of the vehicle."

"A struggle?" I cried. "Major Carrington was right, Madame Barras has been attacked by the driver!"

Marquis' hand held me firmly in the excitement of that realization. He was entirely composed. There was even a drawl in his voice as he answered me.

"Major Carrington, whoever he may be," he said, "is wrong; if we exclude a third party, it was Madame Barras who attacked the driver."

His fingers tightened under my obvious protest.

"It is quite certain," he continued. "Taking the position of the standing horse, it will be the front wheels of the cut-under that have made, this widened track; the wheels under the driver's seat, and not the wheels under the guest seat, in the rear of the vehicle. There has been a violent struggle in this cut-under, but it was a struggle that took place wholly in the front of the vehicle."

He went on in his maddeningly imperturbable calm.

"No one attacked our guest, but some one, here at this precise point, did attack the driver of this vehicle."

"For God's sake," I cried, "let's hurry!"

He stepped back slowly to the edge of the road and the drawl in his voice lengthened.

"We do hurry," he said. "We hurry to the value of knowing that there was no accident here to the harness, no fright to the horse, no attack on the lady, and no change in the direction which the vehicle afterwards took. Suppose we had gone on, in a different form of hurry, ignorant of these facts?"

At this point I distinctly heard again the sound of a heavy animal in the wood. Marquis also heard it and he plunged into the thick bushes. Almost immediately we were at the spot, and before us some heavy object turned in the leaves.

Marquis whipped an electric-flash out of his pocket. The body of a man, tied at the hands and heels behind with a hitching-strap, and with a linen carriage lap-cloth wound around his head and knotted, lay there endeavoring to ease the rigor of his position by some movement.

We should now know, in a moment, what desperate thing had happened!

I cut the strap, while Marquis got the lap-cloth unwound from about the man's head. It was the driver of the cut-under. But we got no gain from his discovery. As soon as his face was clear, he tore out of our grasp and began to run.

He took the old road to the westward of the island, where perhaps he lived. We were wholly unable to stop him, and we got no reply to our shouted queries except his wild cry for help. He considered us his assailants from whom, by chance, he had escaped. It was folly to think of coming up with the man. He was set desperately for the westward of the island, and he would never stop until he reached it.

We turned back into the road:

Marquis' method now changed. He turned swiftly into the road along the mountain which the cut-under had taken after its capture.

I was at the extreme of a deadly anxiety about Madame Barras.

It seemed to me, now, certain that some gang of criminals having knowledge of the packet of money had waylaid the cut-under. Proud of my conclusion, I put the inquiry to Sir Henry as we hurried along. If we weren't too late!

He stopped suddenly like a man brought up at the point of a bayonet.

"My word!" He jerked the expression out through his tightened jaws. "Has she got ninety thousand dollars of your money!" And he set out again in his long stride. I explained briefly as I endeavored to keep his pace. It was her own money, not mine, but she did in fact have that large sum with her in the cut-under on this night. I gave him the story of the matter, briefly, for I had no breath to spare over it. And I asked him what he thought. Had a gang of thieves attacked the cut-under?

But he only repeated his expression.

"My word!... You got her ninety thousand dollars and let her drive away with no eye on her!.... Such trust in the honesty of our fellow creatures!... My word!"

I had to admit the deplorable negligence, but I had not thought of any peril, and I did not know that she carried the money with her until the conversation with my sister. There was some excuse for me. I could not remember a robbery on this island.

Marquis snapped his jaws.

"You'll remember this one!" he said.

It was a ridiculous remark. How could one ever forget if this incomparable creature were robbed and perhaps murdered. But were there not some extenuating circumstances in my favor. I presented them as we advanced; my sister and I lived in a rather protected atmosphere apart from all criminal activities, we could not foresee such a result. I had no knowledge of criminal methods.

"I can well believe it," was the only reply Marquis returned to me.

In addition to my extreme anxiety about Madame Barras I began now to realize a profound sense of responsibility; every one, it seemed, saw what I ought to have done, except myself. How had I managed to overlook it? It was clear to other men. Major Carrington had pointed it out to me as I was turning away; and now here Sir Henry Marquis was expressing in no uncertain words how negligent a creature he considered me—to permit my guest, a woman, to go alone, at night, with this large sum of money.

It was not a pleasant retrospect. Other men—the world—would scarcely hold me to a lesser negligence than Sir Henry Marquis!

I could not forbear, even in our haste, to seek some consolation.

"Do you think Madame Barras has been hurt?"

"Hurt!" he repeated. "How should Madame Barras be hurt?"

"In the robbery," I said.

"Robbery!" and he repeated that word. "There has been no robbery!"

I replied in some astonishment.

"Really, Sir Henry! You but now assured me that I would remember this night's robbery."

The drawl got back into his voice.

"Ah, yes," he said, "quite so. You will remember it."

The man was clearly, it seemed to me, so engrossed with the mystery that it was idle to interrogate him. And he was walking with a devil's stride.

Still the pointed query of the affair pressed me, and I made another effort.

"Why did these assailants take Madame Barras on with them?"

Marquis regarded me, I thought, with wonder.

"The devil, man!" he said. "They couldn't leave her behind."

"The danger would be too great to them?"

"No," he said, "the danger would be too great to her."

At this moment an object before us in the road diverted our attention. It was the cut-under and the horse. They were standing by the roadside where it makes a great turn to enter the village from the south. There is a wide border to the road at this point, clear of underbrush, where the forest edges it, and there are here, at the whim of some one, or by chance, two great flat stones, one lying upon the other, but not fitting by a hand's thickness by reason of the uneven surfaces.

What had now happened was evident. The assailants of the cut-under had abandoned it here before entering the village. They could not, of course, go on with this incriminating vehicle.

The sight of the cut-under here had on Marquis the usual effect of any important evidential sign. He at once ceased to hurry. He pulled up; looked over the cut-under and the horse, and began to saunter about.

This careless manner was difficult for me at such a time. But for his assurance that Madame Barras, was uninjured it would have been impossible. I had a blind confidence in the man although his expressions were so absurdly in conflict.

I started to go on toward the village, but as he did not follow I turned back. Marquis was sitting on the flat stones with a cigarette in his fingers:

"Good heavens, man," I cried, "you're not stopping to smoke a cigarette?"

"Not this cigarette, at any rate," he replied. "Madame Barras has already smoked it.... I can, perhaps, find you the burnt match."

He got the electric-flash out of his pocket, and stooped over. Immediately he made an exclamation of surprise.

I leaned down beside him.

There was a little heap of charred paper on the brown bed of pine-needles. Marquis was about to take up this charred paper when his eye caught something thrust in between the two stones. It was a handful of torn bits of paper.

Marquis got them out and laid them on the top of the flat stones under his light.

"Ah," he said, "Madame Barras, while she smoked, got rid of some money."

"The package of gold certificates!" I cried. "She has burned them?"

"No," he replied, "Madame Barras has favored your Treasury in her destructive process. These are five-pound notes, of the Bank of England."

I was astonished and I expressed it.

"But why should Madame Barras destroy notes of the Bank of England?"

"I imagine," he answered, "that they were some which she had, by chance, failed to give you for exchange."

"But why should she destroy them?" I went on.

"I conclude," he drawled, "that she was not wholly certain that she would escape."

"Escape!" I cried. "You have been assuring me all along that Madame Barras is making no effort to escape."

"Oh, no," he replied, "she is making every effort."

I was annoyed and puzzled.

"What is it," I said, "precisely, that Madame Barras did here; can you tell me in plain words?"

"Surely," he replied, "she sat here while something was decided, and while she sat here she smoked the cigarette, and while she smoked the cigarette, she destroyed the money. But," he added, "before she had quite finished, a decision was made and she hastily thrust the remaining bits of the torn notes into the crevice between these stones."

"What decision?" I said.

Marquis gathered up the bits of torn paper and put them into his pocket with the switched-off flash.

"I wish I knew that," he said.

"Knew what?"

"Which path they have taken," he replied; "there seem to be two branching from this point, but they pass over a bed of pine-needles and that retains no impression.... Where do these paths lead?"

I did not know that any paths came into the road at this point. But the island is veined over with old paths. The lead of paths here, however, was fairly evident.

"They must come out somewhere on the sea," I said.

"Right," he cried. "Take either, and let's be off... Madame's cigarette was not quite cold when I picked it up."

I was right about the direction of the paths but, as it happened, the one Marquis took was nearly double the distance of the other to the sea; and I have wondered always, if it was chance that selected the one taken by the assailants of the cut-under as it was chance that selected the one taken by us.

Marquis was instantly gone, and I hurried along the path, running nearly due east. There was light enough entering from the brilliant moon through the tree-tops to make out the abandoned trail.

And as I hurried, Marquis' contradicting expressions seemed to adjust themselves into a sort of order, and all at once I understood what had happened. The Brazilian adventurer had not taken the loss of his wife and the fortune in English pounds sterling, lying down. He had followed to recover them.

I now saw clearly the reason for everything that had happened: the attack on the driver, and my guest's concern to get rid of the English money which she discovered remaining in her possession; this man would have no knowledge of her gold certificates but he would be searching for his English pounds. And if she came clear of any trace of these five-pound notes, she might disclaim all knowledge of them and perhaps send him elsewhere on his search, since it was always the money and not the woman that he sought.

This explanation was hardly realized before it was confirmed.

I came out abruptly onto a slope of bracken, and before me at a few paces on the path were Madame Barras and two men; one at some distance in advance of her, disappearing at the moment behind a spur of the slope that hid us from the sea, and I got no conception of him; but the creature at her heels was a huge foreign beast of a man, in the dress of a common sailor.

What happened was over in a moment.

I was nearly on the man when I turned out of the wood, and with a shout to Madame Barras I struck at him with the heavy walking-stick. But the creature was not to be taken unaware; he darted to one side, wrenched the stick out of my hand, and dashed its heavy-weighted head into my face. I went down in the bracken, but I carried with me into unconsciousness a vision of Madame Barras that no shadow of the lengthening years can blur.

She had swung round sharply at the attack behind her, and she stood bare-haired and bare-shouldered, knee-deep in the golden bracken, with the glory of the moon on her; her arms hanging, her lips parted, her great eyes wide with terror—as lovely in her desperate extremity as a dream, as, a painted picture. I don't know how long I was down there, but when I finally got up, and, following along the path behind the spur of rock, came out onto the open sea, I found Sir Henry Marquis. He was standing with his hands in the pockets of his loose tweed coat, and he was cursing softly:

"The ferry and the mainland are patrolled... I didn't think of their having an ocean-going yacht...."

A gleam of light was disappearing into the open sea.

He put his hand into his pocket and took out the scraps of torn paper.

"These notes," he said, "like the ones which you hold in your bank-vault, were never issued by the Bank of England."

I stammered some incoherent sentence; and the great chief of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard turned toward me.

"Do you know who that woman is?"

"Surely," I cried, "she went to school with my sister at Miss Page's; she came to visit Mrs. Jordan...."

He looked at me steadily.

"She got the data about your sister out of the Back Bay biographies and she used the accident of Mrs. Jordan's death to get in with it... the rest was all fiction."

"Madame Barras?" I stuttered. "You mean Madame Barras?"

"Madame the Devil," he said. "That's Sunny Suzanne. Used to be in the Hungarian Follies until the Soviet

government of Austria picked her up to place the imitation English money that its presses were striking off in Vienna."

IV. The Cambered Foot

I shall not pretend that I knew the man in America or that he was a friend of my family or that some one had written to me about him. The plain truth is that I never laid eyes on him until Sir Henry Marquis pointed him out to me the day after I went down from here to London. It was in Piccadilly Circus.

"There's your American," said Sir Henry.

The girl paused for a few moments. There was profound silence.

"And that isn't all of it. Nobody presented him to me. I deliberately picked him up!"

Three persons were in the drawing-room. An old woman with high cheekbones, a bowed nose and a firm, thin-lipped mouth was the central figure. She sat very straight in her chair, her head up and her hands in her lap. An aged man, in the khaki uniform of a major of yeomanry, stood at a window looking out, his hands behind his back, his chin lifted as though he were endeavoring to see something far away over the English country—something beyond the little groups of Highland cattle and the great oak trees.

Beside the old woman, on a dark wood frame, there was a fire screen made of the pennant of a Highland regiment. Beyond her was a table with a glass top. Under this cover, in a sort of drawer lined with purple velvet, there were medals, trophies and decorations visible below the sheet of glass. And on the table, in a heavy metal frame, was the portrait of a young man in the uniform of a captain of Highland infantry.

The girl who had been speaking sat in a big armchair by this table. One knew instantly that she was an American. The liberty of manner, the independence of expression, could not be mistaken in a country of established forms. She had abundant brown hair skillfully arranged under a smart French hat. Her eyes were blue; not the blue of any painted color; it was the blue of remote spaces in the tropic sky.

The old woman spoke without looking at the girl.

"Then," she said, "it's all quite as"—she hesitated for a word—"extraordinary as we have been led to believe."

There was the slow accent of Southern blood in the girl's voice as she went on.

"Lady Mary," she said, "it's all far more extraordinary than you have been led to believe—than any one could ever have led you to believe. I deliberately picked the man up. I waited for him outside the Savoy, and pretended to be uncertain about an address. He volunteered to take me in his motor and I went with him. I told him I was alone in London, at the Ritz. It was Blackwell's bank I pretended to be looking for. Then we had tea."

The girl paused.

Presently she continued: "That's how it began: You're mistaken to imagine that Sir Henry Marquis presented me to this American. It was the other way about; I presented Sir Henry. I had the run of the Ritz," she went on. "We all do if we scatter money. Sir Henry came in to tea the next afternoon. That's how he met Mr. Meadows. And that's the only place he ever did meet him. Mr. Meadows came every day, and Sir Henry formed the habit of dropping in. We got to be a very friendly party."

The motionless old woman, a figure in plaster until now, kneaded her fingers as under some moving pressure. "At this time," she said, "you were engaged to Tony and expected to be his wife!"

The girl's voice did not change. It was slow and even. "Yes," she said.

"Tony, of course, knew nothing about this?"

"He knows nothing whatever about it unless you have written him."

Again the old woman moved slightly. "I have waited," she said, "for the benefit of your explanation. It seems as—as bad as I feared."

"Lady Mary," said the girl in her slow voice, "it's worse than you feared. I don't undertake to smooth it over. Everything that you have heard is quite true. I did go out with the man in his motor, in the evening. Sometimes it was quite dark before we returned. Mr. Meadows preferred to drive at night because he was not accustomed to the English rule of taking the left on the road, when one always takes the right in America. He was afraid he couldn't remember the rule, so it was safer at night and there was less traffic.

"I shall not try to make the thing appear better than it was. We sometimes took long runs. Mr. Meadows liked the high roads along the east coast, where one got a view of the sea and the cold salt air. We ran prodigious distances. He had the finest motor in England, the very latest American model. I didn't think so much about night coming on, the lights on the car were so wonderful. Mr. Meadows was an amazing driver. We made express-train time. The roads were usually clear at night and the motor was a perfect wonder. The only trouble we ever had was with the lights. Sometimes one, of them would go out. I think it was bad wiring. But there was always the sweep of the sea under the stars to look at while Mr. Meadows got the thing adjusted."

This long, detailed, shameless speech affected the aged soldier at the window. It seemed to him immodest bravado. And he suffered in his heart, as a man old and full of memories can suffer for the damaged honor of a son he loves.

Continuing, the girl said: "Of course it isn't true that we spent the nights touring the east coast of England in a racer. It was dark sometimes when we got in—occasionally after trouble with the lights—quite dark. We did go thundering distances."

"With this person, alone?" The old woman spoke slowly, like one delicately probing at a wound.

"Yes," the girl admitted. "You see, the car was a roadster; only two could go; and, besides, there was no one else. Mr. Meadows said he was alone in London, and of course I was alone. When Sir Henry asked me to go down from here I went straight off to the Ritz."

The old woman made a slight, shivering gesture. "You should have gone to my sister in Grosvenor Square. Monte would have put you up—and looked after you."

"The Ritz put me up very well," the girl continued. "And I am accustomed to looking after myself. Sir Henry thought it was quite all right."

The old woman spoke suddenly with energy and directness. "I don't understand Henry in the least," she said. "I was quite willing for you to go to London when he asked me for permission. But I thought he would take you to Monte's, and certainly I had the right to believe that he would not have lent himself to—to this escapade."

"He seemed to be very nice about it," the girl went on. "He came in to tea with us—Mr. Meadows and me—almost every evening. And he always had something amusing to relate, some blunder of Scotland Yard or some ripping mystery. I think he found it immense fun to be Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department. I loved the talk: Mr. Meadows was always interested and Sir Henry likes people to be interested."

The old woman continued to regard the girl as one hesitatingly touches an exquisite creature frightfully mangled.

"This person—was he a gentleman?" she inquired. The girl answered immediately. "I thought about that a good deal," she said. "He had perfect manners, quite Continental manners; but, as you say over here, Americans are so imitative one never can tell. He was not young—near fifty, I would say; very well dressed. He was from St. Paul; a London agent for some flouring mills in the Northwest. I don't know precisely. He explained it all to Sir Henry. I think he would have been glad of a little influence—some way to meet the purchasing agents for the government. He seemed to have the American notion that he could come to London and go ahead without knowing anybody. Anyway, he was immensely interesting—and he had a ripping motor."

The old man at the window did not move. He remained looking out over the English country with his big, veined hands clasped behind his back. He had left this interview to Lady Mary, as he had left most of the crucial affairs of life to her dominant nature. But the thing touched him far deeper than it touched the aged dowager. He had a man's faith in the fidelity of a loved woman.

He knew how his son, somewhere in France, trusted this girl, believed in her, as long ago in a like youth he had believed in another. He knew also how the charm of the girl was in the young soldier's blood, and how potent were these inscrutable mysteries. Every man who loved a woman wished to believe that she came to him out of the garden of a convent—out of a roc's egg, like the princess in the Arabian story.

All these things he had experienced in himself, in a shattered romance, in a disillusioned youth, when he was young like the lad somewhere in France. Lady Mary would see only broken conventions; but he saw immortal things, infinitely beyond conventions, awfully broken. He did not move. He remained like a painted picture.

The girl went on in her soft, slow voice. "You would have disliked Mr. Meadows, Lady Mary," she said. "You would dislike any American who came without letters and could not be precisely placed." The girl's voice grew suddenly firmer. "I don't mean to make it appear better," she said. "The worst would be nearer the truth. He was just an unknown American bagman, with a motor car, and a lot of time on his hands—and I picked him up. But Sir Henry Marquis took a fancy to him."

"I cannot understand Henry," the old woman repeated. "It's extraordinary."

"It doesn't seem extraordinary to me," said the girl. "Mr. Meadows was immensely clever, and Sir Henry was like a man with a new toy. The Home Secretary had just put him in as Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department. He was full of a lot of new ideas—dactyloscopic bureaus, photographie mitrique, and scientific methods of crime detection. He talked about it all the time. I didn't understand half the talk. But Mr. Meadows was very clever. Sir Henry said he was a charming person. Anybody who could discuss the whorls of the Galton finger-print tests was just then a charming person to Sir Henry."

The girl paused a moment, then she went on

"I suppose things had gone so far about a fortnight when your sister, Lady Monteith, wrote that she had seen Sir Henry with us—Mr. Meadows and me—in the motor. I have to shatter a pleasant fancy about that chaperonage! That was the only time Sir Henry was ever with us.

"It came about like this: It was Thursday morning about nine o'clock, I think, when Sir Henry, popped in at the Ritz. He was full of some amazing mystery that had turned up at Benton Court, a country house belonging to the Duke of Dorset, up the Thames beyond Richmond. He wanted to go there at once. He was fuming because an under secretary had his motor, and he couldn't catch up with him.

"I told him he could have 'our' motor. He laughed. And I telephoned Mr. Meadows to come over and take him up. Sir Henry asked me to go along. So that's how Lady Monteith happened to see the three of us crowded into the seat of the big roadster."

The girl went on in her deliberate, even voice

"Sir Henry was boiling full of the mystery. He got us all excited by the time we arrived at Benton Court. I think Mr. Meadows was as keen about the thing as Sir Henry. They were both immensely worked up. It was an amazing thing!"

"You see, Benton Court is a little house of the Georgian period. It has been closed up for ages, and now, all at once, the most mysterious things began to happen in it.

"A local inspector, a very reliable man named Millson, passing that way on his bicycle, saw a man lying on the doorstep. He also saw some one running away. It was early in the morning, just before daybreak.

"Millson saw only the man's back, but he could distinguish the color of his clothes. He was wearing a blue coat and reddish-brown trousers. Millson said he could hardly make out the blue coat in the darkness, but he

could distinctly see the reddish brown color of the man's trousers. He was very positive about this. Mr. Meadows and Sir Henry pressed him pretty hard, but he was firm about it. He could make out that the coat was blue, and he could see very distinctly that the trousers were reddish-brown.

"But the extraordinary thing came a little later. Millson hurried to a telephone to get Scotland Yard, then he returned to Benton Court; but when he got back the dead man had disappeared.

"He insists that he was not away beyond five minutes, but within that time the dead man had vanished. Millson could find no trace of him. That's the mystery that sent us tearing up there with Mr. Meadows and Sir Henry transformed into eager sleuths.

"We found the approaches to the house under a patrol from Scotland Yard. But nobody had gone in. The inspector was waiting for Sir Henry."

The old man stood like an image, and the aged woman sat in her chair like a figure in basalt.

But the girl ran on with a sort of eager unconcern: "Sir Henry and Mr. Meadows took the whole thing in charge. The door had been broken open. They examined the marks about the fractures very carefully; then they went inside. There were some naked footprints. They were small, as of a little, cramped foot, and they seemed to be tracked in blood on the hard oak floor. There was a wax candle partly burned on the table. And that's all there was.

"There were some tracks in the dust of the floor, but they were not very clearly outlined, and Sir Henry thought nothing could be made of them.

"It was awfully exciting. I went about behind the two men. Sir Henry talked all the time. Mr. Meadows was quite as much interested, but he didn't say anything. He seemed to say less as the thing went on.

"They went over everything—the ground outside and every inch of the house. Then they put everybody out and sat down by a table in the room where the footprints were.

"Sir Henry had been awfully careful. He had a big lens with which to examine the marks of the bloody footprints. He was like a man on the trail of a buried treasure. He shouted over everything, thrust his glass into Mr. Meadows' hand and bade him verify what he had seen. His ardor was infectious. I caught it myself.

"Mr. Meadows, in his quiet manner, was just as much concerned in unraveling the thing as Sir Henry. I never had so wild a time in all my life. Finally, when Sir Henry put everybody else out and closed the door, and the three of us sat down at the table to try to untangle the thing, I very nearly screamed with excitement. Mr. Meadows sat with his arms folded, not saying a word; but Sir Henry went ahead with his explanation."

The girl looked like a vivid portrait, the soft colors of her gown and all the cool, vivid extravagancies of youth distinguished in her. Her words indicated fervor and excited energy; but they were not evidenced in her face or manner. She was cool and lovely. One would have thought that she recounted the inanities of a curate's tea party.

The aged man, in the khaki uniform of a major of yeomanry, remained in his position at the window. The old woman sat with her implacable face, unchanging like a thing insensible and inorganic.

This unsympathetic aspect about the girl did not seem to disturb her. She went on:

"The thing was thrilling. It was better than any theater—the three of us at the old mahogany table in the room, and the Scotland Yard patrol outside.

"Sir Henry was bubbling over with his theory. 'I read this riddle like a printed page,' he said. 'It will be the work of a little band of expert cracksmen that the Continent has kindly sent us. We have had some samples of their work in Brompton Road. They are professional crooks of a high order—very clever at breaking in a door, and, like all the criminal groups that we get without an invitation from over the Channel, these crooks have absolutely no regard for human life.'

"That's the way Sir Henry led off with his explanation. Of course he had all that Scotland Yard knew about criminal groups to start him right. It was a good deal to have the identity of the criminal agents selected out; but I didn't see how he was going to manage to explain the mystery from the evidence. I was wild to hear him. Mr. Meadows was quite as interested, I thought, although he didn't say a word.

"Sir Henry nodded, as though he took the American's confirmation as a thing that followed. 'We are at the scene,' he said, 'of one of the most treacherous acts of all criminal drama. I mean the "doing in," as our criminals call it, of the unprofessional accomplice. It's a regulation piece of business with the hard-and-fast criminal organizations of the Continent, like the Nervi of Marseilles, or the Lecca of Paris.

"They take in a house servant, a shopkeeper's watchman, or a bank guard to help them in some big haul. Then they lure him into some abandoned house, under a pretense of dividing up the booty, and there put him out of the way. That's what's happened here. It's a common plan with these criminal groups, and clever of them. The picked-up accomplice would be sure to let the thing out. For safety the professionals must "do him in" at once, straight away after the big job, as a part of what the barrister chaps call the *res gestae*.'

"Sir Henry went on nodding at us and drumming the palm of his hand on the edge of the table.

"This thing happens all the time,' he said, 'all about, where professional criminals are at work. It accounts for a lot of mysteries that the police cannot make head or tail of, like this one, for example. Without our knowledge of this sinister custom, one could not begin or end with an affair like this.

"But it's simple when one has the cue—it's immensely simple. We know exactly what happened and the sort of crooks that were about the business. The barefoot prints show the Continental group. That's the trick of Southern Europe to go in barefoot behind a man to kill him.'

"Sir Henry jarred the whole table with his big hand. The surface of the table was covered with powdered chalk that the baronet had dusted over it in the hope of developing criminal finger prints. Now under the drumming of his palm the particles of white dust whirled like microscopic elfin dancers.

"The thing's clear as daylight,' he went on: 'One of the professional group brought the accomplice down here to divide the booty. He broke the door in. They sat down here at this table with the lighted candle as you see it. And while the stuff was being sorted out, another of the band slipped in behind the man and killed him.

"They started to carry the body out. Millson chanced by. They got in a funk and rushed the thing. Of course

they had a motor down the road, and equally of course it was no trick to whisk the body out of the neighborhood.'

"Sir Henry got half up on his feet with his energy in the solution of the thing. He thrust his spread-out fingers down on the table like a man, by that gesture, pressing in an inevitable, conclusive summing up."

The girl paused. "It was splendid, I thought. I applauded like an entranced pit!

"But Mr. Meadows didn't say a word. He took up the big glass we had used about the inspection of the place, and passed it over the prints Sir Henry was unconsciously making in the dust on the polished surface of the table. Then he put the glass down and looked the excited baronet calmly in the face.

"'There,' cried Sir Henry, 'the thing's no mystery.'

"For the first time Mr. Meadows opened his mouth. 'It's the profoundest mystery I ever heard of,' he said.

"Sir Henry was astonished. He sat down and looked across the table at the man. He wasn't able to speak for a moment, then he got it out: 'Why exactly do you say that?'

"Mr. Meadows put his elbows on the table. He twiddled the big reading glass in his fingers. His face got firm and decided.

"'To begin with,' he said, 'the door to this house was never broken by a professional cracksman. It's the work of a bungling amateur. A professional never undertakes to break a door at the lock. Naturally that's the firmest place about a door. The implement he intends to use as a lever on the door he puts in at the top or bottom. By that means he has half of the door as a lever against the resistance of the lock. Besides, a professional of any criminal group is a skilled workman. He doesn't waste effort. He doesn't fracture a door around the lock. This door's all mangled, splintered and broken around the lock.'"

"He stopped and looked about the room, and out through the window at the Scotland Yard patrol. The features of his face were contracted with the problem. One could imagine one saw the man's mind laboring at the mystery. 'And that's not all,' he said. 'Your man Millson is not telling the truth. He didn't see a dead body lying on the steps of this house; and he didn't see a man running away.'

"Sir Henry broke in at that. 'Impossible,' he said; 'Millson's a first-class inspector, absolutely reliable. Why do you say that he didn't see the dead man on the steps or the assassin running away?'

"Mr. Meadows answered in the same even voice. 'Because there was never any dead man here,' he said, 'for anybody to see. And because Millson's 'description of the man he saw is scientifically an impossible feat of vision.'

"Impossible?' cried Sir Henry.

"'Quite impossible,' Mr. Meadows insisted. 'Millson tells us that the man he saw running away in the night wore a blue coat and reddish-brown trousers. He says he was barely able to distinguish the blue coat, but that he could see the reddish-brown trousers very clearly. Now, as a matter of fact, it has been very accurately determined that red is the hardest color to distinguish at night, and blue the very easiest. A blue coat would be clearly visible long after reddish-brown trousers had become indistinguishable in the darkness.'

"Sir Henry's under jaw sagged a little. 'Why, yes,' he said, 'that's true; that's precisely true. Gross, at the University of Gratz, determined that by experiment in 1912. I never thought about it!'

"'There are some other things here that you have not, perhaps, precisely thought about,' Mr. Meadows went on.

"'For example, the things that happened in this room did not happen in the night. They happened in the day.'

"He pointed to the half-burned wax candle on the table. 'There's a headless joiner's nail driven into the table,' he said, 'and this candle is set down over the nail. That means that the person who placed it there wished it to remain there—to remain there firmly. He didn't put it down there for the brief requirements of a passing tragedy, he put it there to remain; that's one thing.

"'Another thing is that this candle thus firmly fastened on the table was never alight there. If it had ever been burning in its position on the table, some of the drops of melted wax would have fallen about it.

"'You will observe that, while the candle is firmly fixed, it does not set straight; it is inclined at least ten degrees out of perpendicular. In that position it couldn't have burned for a moment without dripping melted wax on the table. And there's none on the table; there has never been any on it. Your glass shows not the slightest evidence of a wax stain.' He added: 'Therefore the candle is a blind; false evidence to give us the impression of a night affair.'

"Sir Henry's jaw sagged; now his mouth gaped. 'True,' he said. 'True, true.' He seemed to get some relief to his damaged deductions out of the repeated word.

"The irony in Mr. Meadows' voice increased a little. 'Nor is that all,' he said. 'The smear on the floor, and the stains in which the naked foot tracked, are not human blood. They're not any sort of blood. It was clearly evident when you had your lens over them. They show no coagulated fiber. They show only the evidences of dye—weak dye—watered red ink, I'd say.'

"I thought Sir Henry was going to crumple up in his chair. He seemed to get loose and baggy in some extraordinary fashion, and his gaping jaw worked. 'But the footprints,' he said, 'the naked footprints?' His voice was a sort of stutter—the sort of shaken stutter of a man who has come a' tumbling cropper.

"The American actually laughed: he laughed as we sometimes laugh at a mental defective.

"'They're not footprints!' he said. 'Nobody ever had a foot cambered like that, or with a heel like it, or with toes like it. Somebody made those prints with his hand—the edge of his palm for the heel and the balls of his fingers for the toes. The wide, unstained distances between these heelprints and the prints of the ball of the toes show the impossible arch.'

"Sir Henry was like a man gone to pieces. 'But who—who made them?' he faltered.

"The American leaned forward and put the big glass over the prints that Sir Henry had made with his

fingers in the white dust on the mahogany table. 'I think you know the answer to your question,' he said. 'The whorls of these prints are identical with those of the toe tracks.'

"Then he laid the glass carefully down, sat back in his chair, folded his arms and looked at Sir Henry.

"'Now,' he said, 'will you kindly tell me why you have gone to the trouble of manufacturing all these false evidences of a crime?'"

The girl paused. There was intense silence in the drawing-room. The aged man at the window had turned and was looking at her. The face of the old woman seemed vague and uncertain.

The girl smiled.

"Then," she said, "the real, amazing miracle happened. Sir Henry got on his feet, his big body tense, his face like iron, his voice ringing.

"'I went to that trouble,' he said, 'because I wished to demonstrate—I wished to demonstrate beyond the possibility of any error—that Mr. Arthur Meadows, the pretended American from St. Paul, was in fact the celebrated criminologist, Karl Holweg Leibnich, of Bonn, giving us the favor of his learned presence while he signaled the German submarines off the east coast roads with his high-powered motor lights.'"

Now there was utter silence in the drawing-room but for the low of the Highland cattle and the singing of the birds outside.

For the first time there came a little tremor in the girl's voice.

"When Sir Henry doubted this American and asked me to go down and make sure before he set a trap for him, I thought—I thought, if Tony could risk his life for England, I could do that much."

At this moment a maid appeared in the doorway, the trim, immaculate, typical English maid. "Tea is served, my lady," she said.

The tall, fine old man crossed the room and offered his arm to the girl with the exquisite, gracious manner with which once upon a time he had offered it to a girlish queen at Windsor.

The ancient woman rose as if she would go out before them. Then suddenly, at the door, she stepped aside for the girl to pass, making the long, stooping, backward curtsy of the passed Victorian era.

"After you, my dear," she said, "always!"

V. The Man in the Green Hat

"Alas, monsieur, in spite of our fine courtesies, the conception of justice by one race must always seem outlandish to another!"

It was on the terrace of Sir Henry Marquis' villa at Cannes. The members of the little party were in conversation over their tobacco—the Englishman, with his brier-root pipe; the American Justice, with a Havana cigar; and the aged Italian, with his cigarette. The last was speaking.

He was a very old man, but he gave one the impression of incredible, preposterous age. He was bald; he had neither eyebrows nor eyelashes. A wiry mustache, yellow with nicotine, alone remained. Great wrinkles lay below the eyes and along the jaw, under a skin stretched like parchment over the bony protuberances of the face.

These things established the aspect of old age; but it was the man's expression and manner that gave one the sense of incalculable antiquity. The eyes seemed to look out from a window, where the man behind them had sat watching the human race from the beginning. And his manners had the completion of one whose experience of life is comprehensive and finished.

"It seems strange to you, monsieur"—he was addressing, in French, the American Justice—"that we should put our prisoners into an iron cage, as beasts are exhibited in a circus. You are shocked at that. It strikes you as the crudity of a race not quite civilized.

"You inquire about it with perfect courtesy; but, monsieur, you inquire as one inquires about a custom that his sense of justice rejects."

He paused.

"Your pardon, monsieur; but there are some conceptions of justice in the law of your admirable country that seem equally strange to me."

The men about the Count on the exquisite terrace, looking down over Cannes into the arc of the sea, felt that the great age of this man gave him a right of frankness, a privilege of direct expression, they could not resent. Somehow, at the extremity of life, he seemed beyond pretenses; and he had the right to omit the digressions by which younger men are accustomed to approach the truth.

"What is this strange thing in our law, Count?" said the American.

The old man made a vague gesture, as one who puts away an inquiry until the answer appears.

"Many years ago," he continued, "I read a story about the red Indians by your author, Cooper. It was named 'The Oak Openings,' and was included, I think, in a volume entitled Stories of the Prairie. I believe I have the names quite right, since the author impressed me as an inferior comer with an abundance of gold about him. In the story Corporal Flint was captured by the Indians under the leadership of Bough of Oak, a cruel and bloodthirsty savage.

"This hideous beast determined to put his prisoner to the torture of the saplings, a barbarity rivaling the crucifixion of the Romans. Two small trees standing near each other were selected, the tops lopped off and the branches removed; they were bent and the tops were lashed together. One of the victim's wrists was bound to the top of each of the young trees; then the saplings were released and the victim, his arms

wrenched and dislocated, hung suspended in excruciating agony, like a man nailed to a cross.

"It was fearful torture. The strain on the limbs was hideous, yet the victim might live for days. Nothing short of crucifixion—that beauty of the Roman law—ever equaled it."

He paused and flicked the ashes from his cigarette.

"Corporal Flint, who seemed to have a knowledge of the Indian character, had endeavored so to anger the Indians by taunt and invective that some brave would put an arrow into his heart, or dash his brains out with a stone ax.

"In this he failed. Bough of Oak controlled his braves and Corporal Flint was lashed to the saplings. But, as the trees sprang apart, wrenching the man's arms out of their sockets, a friendly Indian, Pigeonwing, concealed in a neighboring thicket, unable to rescue his friend and wishing to save him from the long hours of awful torture, shot Corporal Flint through the forehead.

"Now," continued the Count, "if there was no question about these facts, and Bough of Oak stood for trial before any civilized tribunal on this earth, do you think the laws of any country would acquit him of the murder of Corporal Flint?"

The whole company laughed.

"I am entirely serious," continued the Count. "What do you think? There are three great nations represented here."

"The exigencies of war," said Sir Henry Marquis, "might differentiate a barbarity from a crime."

"But let us assume," replied the Count, "that no state of war existed; that it was a time of peace; that Corporal Flint was innocent of wrong; and that Bough of Oak was acting entirely from a depraved instinct bent on murder. In other words, suppose this thing had occurred yesterday in one of the Middle States of the American Republic?"

The American felt that this question was directed primarily to himself. He put down his cigar and indicated the Englishman by a gesture.

"Your great jurist, Sir James Stephen," he began, "constantly reminds us that the criminal law is a machine so rough and dangerous that we can use it only with every safety device attached.

"And so, Count," he continued, to the Italian, "the administration of the criminal law in our country may seem to you subject to delays and indirections that are not justified. These abuses could be generally corrected by an intelligent presiding judge; but, in part, they are incidental to a fair and full investigation of the charge against the prisoner. I think, however, that our conception of justice does not differ from that of other nations."

The old Count shrugged his shoulders at the digression.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I do not refer to the mere administration of the criminal law in your country; though, monsieur, we have been interested in observing its peculiarities in such notable examples as the Thaw trials in New York, and the Anarchist cases in Chicago some years ago. I believe the judge in the latter trial gave about one hundred instructions on the subject of reasonable doubt—quite intelligible, I dare say, to an American jury; but, I must confess, somewhat beyond me in their metaphysical refinements.

"I should understand reasonable doubt if I were uninstructed, but I do not think I could explain it. I should be, concerning it, somewhat as Saint Augustine was with a certain doctrine of the Church when he said: 'I do not know if you ask me; but if you do not ask me I know very well.'"

He paused and blew a tiny ring of smoke out over the terrace toward the sea.

"There was a certain poetic justice finally in that case," he added.

"The prisoners were properly convicted of the Haymarket murders," said the American Justice.

"Ah, no doubt," returned the Count; "but I was not thinking of that. Following a custom of your courts, I believe, the judge at the end of the trial put the formal inquiry as to whether the prisoners had anything to say. Whereupon they rose and addressed him for six days!"

He bowed.

"After that, monsieur, I am glad to add, they were all very properly hanged.

"But, monsieur, permit me to return to my question: Do you think any intelligent tribunal on this earth would acquit Bough of Oak of the murder of Corporal Flint under the conditions I have indicated?"

"No," said the American. "It would be a cold-blooded murder; and in the end the creature would be executed."

The old Count turned suddenly in his chair.

"Yes," he said, "in a Continental court, it is certain; but in America, monsieur, under your admirable law, founded on the common law of England?"

"I am sure we should hang him," replied the American.

"Monsieur," cried the old Count, "you have me profoundly puzzled."

It seemed to the little group on the terrace that they, and not the Count, were indicated by that remark. He had stated a case about which there could be no two opinions under any civilized conception of justice. Sir Henry Marquis had pointed out the only element—a state of war—which could distinguish the case from plain premeditated murder in its highest degree. They looked to him for an explanation; but it did not immediately arrive.

The Count noticed it and offered a word of apology.

"Presently—presently," he said. "We have these two words in Italian—sparate! and aspetate! Monsieur."

He turned to the American:

"You do not know our language, I believe. Suppose I should suddenly call out one of these words and afterward it should prove that a life hung on your being able to say which word it was I uttered. Do you think, monsieur, you could be certain?"

"No, monsieur; and so courts are wise to require a full explanation of every extraordinary fact. George Goykovich, an Austrian, having no knowledge of the Italian language, swore in the court of an American state that he heard a prisoner use the Italian word *sparate!* and that he could not be mistaken.

"I would not believe him, monsieur, on that statement; but he explained that he was a coal miner, that the mines were worked by Italians, and that this word was called out when the coal was about to be shot down with powder.

"Ah, monsieur, the explanation is complete. George Goykovich must know this word; it was a danger signal. I would believe now his extraordinary statement."

The Count stopped a moment and lighted another cigarette.

"Pardon me if I seem to proceed obliquely. The incident is related to the case I approach; and it makes clear, monsieur, why the courts of France, for example, permit every variety of explanation in a criminal trial, while your country and the great English nation limit explanations.

"You do not permit hearsay evidence to save a man's life; with a fine distinction you permit it to save only his character!"

"The rule," replied the American justice, "everywhere among English-speaking people is that the best evidence of which the subject is capable shall be produced. We permit a witness to testify only to what he actually knows. That is the rule. It is true there are exceptions to it. In some instances he may testify as to what he has heard."

"Ah, yes," replied the Count; "you will not permit such evidence to take away a man's horse, but you will permit it to take away a woman's reputation! I shall never be able to understand these delicate refinements of the English law!"

"But, Count," suggested Sir Henry Marquis, "reputation is precisely that what the neighborhood says about one."

"Pardon, monsieur," returned the Count. "I do not criticize your customs. They are doubtless excellent in every variety of way. I deplore only my inability to comprehend them. For example, monsieur, why should you hold a citizen responsible in all other cases only for what he does, but in the case of his own character turn about and try him for what people say he does?"

"Thus, monsieur, as I understand it, the men of an English village could not take away my pig by merely proving that everybody said it was stolen; but they could brand me as a liar by merely proving what the villagers said! It seems incredible that men should put such value on a pig."

Sir Henry Marquis laughed.

"It is not entirely a question of values, Count."

"I beg you to pardon me, monsieur," the Italian went on. "Doubtless, on this subject I do nothing more than reveal an intelligence lamentably inefficient; but I had the idea that English people were accustomed to regard property of greater importance than life."

"I have never heard," replied the Englishman, smiling, "that our courts gave more attention to pigs than to murder."

"Why, yes, monsieur," said the Count—"that is precisely what they have been accustomed to do. It is only, I believe, within recent years that one convicted of murder in England could take an appeal to a higher court; though a controversy over pigs—or, at any rate, the pasture on which they gathered acorns—could always be carried up."

The great age of the Count—he seemed to be the representative in the world of some vanished empire—gave his irony a certain indirection. Everybody laughed. And he added: "Even your word 'murder,' I believe, was originally the name of a fine imposed by the Danes on a village unless it could be proved that the person found dead was an Englishman!"

"I wonder when, precisely, the world began to regard it as a crime to kill an Englishman?"

The parchment on the bones of his face wrinkled into a sort of smile. His greatest friend on the Riviera was this pipe-smoking Briton.

Then suddenly, with a nimble gesture that one would not believe possible in the aged, he stripped back his sleeve and exhibited a long, curiously twisted scar, as though a bullet had plowed along the arm.

"Alas, monsieur," he said, "I myself live in the most primitive condition of society! I pay a tribute for life.... Ah! no, monsieur; it is not to the Camorra that I pay. It is quite unromantic. I think my secretary carries it in his books as a pension to an indigent relative."

He turned to the American

"Believe me, monsieur, my estates in Salerno are not what they were; the olive trees are old and all drains on my income are a burden—even this gratuity. I thought I should be rid of it; but, alas, the extraordinary conception of justice in your country!"

He broke the cigarette in his fingers, and flung the pieces over the terrace.

"In the great range of mountains," he began, "slashing across the American states and beautifully named the Alleghanies, there is a vast measure of coal beds. It is thither that the emigrants from Southern Europe journey. They mine out the coal, sometimes descending into the earth through pits, or what in your language are called shafts, and sometimes following the stratum of the coal bed into the hill.

"This underworld, monsieur—this, sunless world, built underneath the mountains, is a section of Europe slipped under the American Republic. The language spoken there is not English. The men laboring in those buried communities cry out *sparate* when they are about to shoot down the coal with powder. It is Italy under there. There is a river called the Monongahela in those mountains. It is an Indian name."

He paused.

"And so, monsieur, what happened along it doubtless reminded me of Cooper's story—Bough of Oak and the case of Corporal Flint."

He took another cigarette out of a box on the table, but he did not light it.

"In one of the little mining villages along this river with the enchanting name there was a man physically like the people of the Iliad; and with that, monsieur, he had a certain cast of mind not unHellenic. He was tall, weighed two hundred and forty pounds, lean as a gladiator, and in the vigor of golden youth.

"There were no wars to journey after and no adventures; but there was danger and adventure here. This land was full of cockle, winnowed out of Italy, Austria and the whole south of Europe. It took courage and the iron hand of the state to keep the peace. Here was a life of danger; and this Ionian—big, powerful, muscled like the heroes of the Circus Maximus—entered this perilous service.

"Monsieur, I have said his mind was Hellenic, like his big, wonderful body. Mark you how of heroic antiquity it was! It was his boast, among the perils that constantly beset him, that no criminal should ever take his life; that, if ever he should receive a mortal wound from the hand of the assassins about him, he would not wait to die in agony by it. He himself would sever the damaged thread of life and go out like a man!

"Observe, monsieur, how like the great heroes of legend—like the wounded Saul when he ordered his armor-bearer to kill him; like Brutus when he fell on his sword!"

He looked intently at the American.

"Doubtless, monsieur," he went on, "those near this man along the Monongahela did not appreciate his attitude of grandeur; but to us, in the distance, it seemed great and noble."

He looked out over the Mediterranean, where the great adventurers who cherished these lofty pagan ideals once beat along in the morning of the world.

"On an afternoon of summer," he continued like one who begins a saga, "this man, alone and fearless, followed a violator of the law and arrested him in a house of the village. As he led the man away he noticed that an Italian followed. He was a little degenerate, wearing a green hat, and bearing now one name and now another. They traversed the village toward the municipal prison; and this creature, featured like a Parisian Apache, skulked behind.

"As they went along, two Austrians seated on the porch of a house heard the little man speak to the prisoner. He used the word *sparate*. They did not know what he meant, for he spoke in Italian; but they recognized the word, for it was the word used in the mines before the coal was shot down. The prisoner made his reply in Italian, which the Austrians did not understand.

"It seemed that this man who had made the arrest did not know Italian, for he stopped and asked the one behind him whether the prisoner was his brother. The man replied in the negative."

The Count paused, as though for an explanation. "What the Apache said was: 'Shall I shoot him here or wait until we reach the ravine?' And the prisoner replied: 'Wait until we come to the ravine.'"

"They went on. Presently they reached a sort of hollow, where the reeds grew along the road densely and to the height of a man's head. Here the Italian Apache, the degenerate with the green hat, following some three steps behind, suddenly drew a revolver from his pocket and shot the man twice in the back. It was a weapon carrying a lead bullet as large as the tip of one's little finger. The officer fell. The Apache and the prisoner fled.

"The wounded man got up. He spread out his arms; and he shouted, with a great voice, like the heroes of the Iliad. The two wounds were mortal; they were hideous, ghastly wounds, ripping up the vital organs in the man's body and severing the great arteries. The splendid pagan knew he had received his death wounds; and, true to his atavistic ideal, the ideal of the Greek, the Hebrew and the Roman, the ideal of the great pagan world to which he in spirit belonged, and of which the poets sing, he put his own weapon to his head and blew his brains out."

The old Count, his chin up, his withered, yellow face vitalized, lifted his hands like one before something elevated and noble. After some moments had passed he continued:

"On the following day the assassin was captured in a neighboring village. Feeling ran so high that it was with difficulty that the officers of the law saved him from being lynched. He was taken about from one prison to another. Finally he was put on trial for murder.

"There was never a clearer case before any tribunal in this world.

"Many witnesses identified the assassin—not merely English-speaking men, who might have been mistaken or prejudiced, but Austrians, Poles, Italians—the men of the mines who knew him; who had heard him cry out the fatal Italian word; who saw him following in the road behind his victim on that Sunday afternoon of summer; who knew his many names and every feature of his cruel, degenerate face. There was no doubt anywhere in the trial. Learned surgeons showed that the two wounds in the dead man's back from the big-calibered weapon were deadly, fatal wounds that no man could have survived.

"There was nothing incomplete in that trial.

"Everything was so certain that the assassin did not even undertake to contradict; not one statement, not one word of the evidence against him did he deny. It was a plain case of willful, deliberate and premeditated murder. The judge presiding at the trial instructed the jury that a man is presumed to intend that which he does; that whoever kills a human being with malice aforethought is guilty of murder; that murder which is perpetrated by any kind of willful, deliberate and premeditated killing is murder in the first degree. The jury found the assassin guilty and the judge sentenced him to be hanged."

The Count paused and looked at his companions about him on the terrace.

"Messieurs," he said, "do you think that conviction was just?"

There was a common assent. Some one said: "It was a cruel murder if ever there was one." And another: "It was wholly just; the creature deserved to hang."

The old Count bowed, putting out his hands.

"And so I hoped he would."

"What happened?" said the American.

The Count regarded him with a queer, ironical smile.

"Unlike the great British people, monsieur," he replied, "your courts have never given the pig, or the pasture on which he gathers his acorns, a consideration above the human family. The case was taken to your Court of Appeals of that province."

He stopped and lighted his cigarette deliberately, with a match scratched slowly on the table.

"Monsieur," he said, "I do not criticize your elevated court. It is composed of learned men—wise and patriotic, I have no doubt. They cannot make the laws, monsieur; they cannot coin a conception of justice for your people. They must enforce the precise rules of law that the conception of justice in your country has established.

"Nevertheless, monsieur"—and his thin yellow lips curled—"for the sake of my depleted revenues I could have wished that the decision of this court had been other than it was."

"And what did it decide?" asked the American.

"It decided, monsieur," replied the Count, "that my estates in Salerno must continue to be charged with the gratuity to the indigent relative.

"That is to say, monsieur, it decided, because the great pagan did not wait to die in agony, did not wait for the mortal wounds inflicted by the would-be assassin to kill him, that interesting person—the man in the green hat—was not guilty of murder in the first degree and could not be hanged!"

Note—See *State versus Angelina*; 80 *Southeastern Reporter*, 141: "The intervening responsible agent who wrongfully accelerates death is guilty of the murder, and not the one who inflicted the first injury, though in itself mortal."

VI. The Wrong Sign

It was an ancient diary in a faded leather cover. The writing was fine and delicate, and the ink yellow with age. Sir Henry Marquis turned the pages slowly and with care for the paper was fragile.

We had dined early at the Ritz and come in later to his great home in St. James's Square.

He wished to show me this old diary that had come to him from a branch of his mother's family in Virginia—a branch that had gone out with a King's grant when Virginia was a crown colony. The collateral ancestor, Pendleton, had been a justice of the peace in Virginia, and a spinster daughter had written down some of the strange cases with which her father had been concerned.

Sir Henry Marquis believed that these cases in their tragic details, and their inspirational, deductive handling, equaled any of our modern time. The great library overlooking St. James's Square, was curtained off from London. Sir Henry read by the fire; and I listened, returned, as by some recession of time to the Virginia of a vanished decade. The narrative of the diary follows:

My father used to say that the Justice of God was sometimes swift and terrible. He said we thought of it usually as remote and deliberate, a sort of calm adjustment in some supernatural Court of Equity. But this idea was far from the truth. He had seen the justice of God move on the heels of a man with appalling swiftness; with a crushing force and directness that simply staggered the human mind. I know the case he thought about.

Two men sat over a table when my father entered. One of them got up. He was a strange human creature, when you stood and looked calmly at him. You thought the Artificer had designed him for a priest of the church. He had the massive features and the fringe of hair around his bald head like a tonsure. At first, to your eye, it was the vestments of the church, he lacked; then you saw that the lack was something fundamental; something organic in the nature of the man. And as he held and stimulated your attention you got a fearful idea, that the purpose for which this human creature was shaped had been somehow artfully reversed!

He was big boned and tall when he stood up.

"Pendleton," he said, "I would have come to you, but for my guest."

And he indicated the elegant young man at the table.

"But I did not send you word to ride a dozen miles through the hills on any trivial business, or out of courtesy to me. It is a matter of some import, so I will pay ten eagles."

My father looked steadily at the man.

"I am not for hire," he said.

My father was a justice of the peace in Virginia, under the English system, by the theory of which the most substantial men in a county undertook to keep the peace for the welfare of the State. Like Washington in the service of the Colonial army, he took no pay.

The big man laughed.

"We are most of us for purchase, and all of us for hire," he said. "I will make it twenty!"

The young man at the table now interrupted. He was elegant in the costume of the time, in imported linen and cloth from an English loom. His hair was thick and black; his eyebrows straight, his body and his face rich in the blood and the vitalities of youth. But sensuality was on him like a shadow. The man was given over to a life of pleasure.

"Mr. Pendleton," he said, with a patronizing pedantic air, "the commonwealth is interested to see that litigation does not arise; and to that end, I hope you will not refuse us the benefit of your experience. We are about to draw up a deed of sale running into a considerable sum, and we would have it court proof."

He made a graceful gesture with his jeweled hand.

"I would be secure in my purchase, and Zindorf in his eagles, and you, Sir, in the knowledge that the State will not be vexed by any suit between us. Every contract, I believe, upon some theory of the law, is a triangular affair with the State a party. Let us say then, that you represent Virginia!"

"In the service of the commonwealth," replied my father coldly, "I am always to be commanded."

The man flicked a bit of dust from his immaculate coat sleeve.

"It will be a conference of high powers. I shall represent Eros; Mr. Pendleton, Virginia; and Zindorf" and he laughed—"his Imperial Master!"

And to the eye the three men fitted to their legend. The Hellenic God of pleasure in his sacred groves might have chosen for his disciple one from Athens with a face and figure like this youth. My father bore the severities of the law upon him. And I have written how strange a creature the third party to this conference was.

He now answered with an oath.

"You have a very pretty wit, Mr. Lucian Morrow," he said. "I add to my price a dozen eagles for it."

The young man shrugged his shoulders in his English coat.

"Smart money, eh, Zindorf... Well, it does not make me smart. It only makes me remember that Count Augsburg educated you in Bavaria for the Church and you fled away from it to be a slave trader in Virginia."

He got on his feet, and my father saw that the man was in liquor. He was not drunken, but the effect was on him with its daring and its indiscretions.

It was an April morning, bright with sun. The world was white with apple blossoms, the soft air entered through the great open windows. And my father thought that the liquor in the man had come with him out of a night of bargaining or revel.

Morrow put his hands on the table and looked at Zindorf; then, suddenly, the laughter in his face gave way to the comprehension of a swift, striking idea.

"Why, man," he cried, "it's the devil's truth! Everything about you is a negation! You ought to be a priest by all the lines and features of you; but you're not... Scorch me, but you're not!"

His voice went up on the final word as though to convey some impressive, sinister discovery.

It was true in every aspect of the man. The very clothes he wore, somber, wool-threaded homespun, crudely patched, reminded one of the coarse fabrics that monks affect for their abasement. But one saw, when one remembered the characteristic of the man, that they represented here only an extremity of avarice.

Zindorf looked coldly at his guest.

"Mr. Lucian Morrow," he said, "you will go on, and my price will go on!"

But the young blood, on his feet, was not brought up by the monetary threat. He looked about the room, at the ceiling, the thick walls. And, like a man who by a sudden recollection confounds his adversary with an overlooked illustrative fact, he suddenly cried out:

"By the soul of Satan, you're housed to suit! Send me to the pit! It's the very place for you! Eh! Zindorf, do you know who built the house you live in?"

"I do not, Mr. Lucian Morrow," said the man. "Who built it?"

One could see that he wished to divert the discourses of his guest. He failed.

"God built it!" cried Morrow.

He put out his hands as though to include the hose.

"Pendleton," he said, "you will remember. The people built these walls for a church. It burned, but the stone walls could not burn; they remained overgrown with creeper. Then, finally, old Wellington Monroe built a house into the walls for the young wife he was about to marry, but he went to the coffin instead of the bride-bed, and the house stood empty. It fell into the courts with the whole of Monroe's tangled business and finally Zindorf gets it at a sheriff's sale."

The big man now confronted the young blood with decision.

"Mr. Lucian Morrow," he said, "if you are finished with your fool talk, I will bid you good morning. I have decided not to sell the girl."

The face of Morrow changed. His voice wheedled in an anxious note.

"Not sell her, Zindorf!" he echoed. "Why man, you have promised her to me all along. You always said I should have her in spite of your cursed partner Ordez. You said you'd get her some day and sell her to me. Now, curse it, Zindorf, I want her... I've got the money: ten thousand dollars. It's a big lot of money. But I've got it. I've got it in gold."

He went on:

"Besides, Zindorf, you can have the money, it'll mean more to you. But it's the girl I want."

He stood up and in his anxiety the effect of the liquor faded out.

"I've waited on your promise, Zindorf. You said that some day, when Ordez was hard-pressed he would sell her for money, even if she was his natural daughter. You were right; you knew Ordez. You have got an assignment of all the slaves in possession, in the partnership, and Ordez has cleared out of the country. I know what you paid for his half-interest in this business, it's set out in the assignment. It was three thousand dollars.

"Think of it, man, three thousand dollars to Ordez for a wholesale, omnibus assignment of everything. An elastic legal note of an assignment that you can stretch to include this girl along with the half-dozen other slaves that you have on hand here; and I offer you ten thousand dollars for the girl alone!"

One could see how the repetition of the sum in gold affected Zindorf.

He had the love of money in that dominating control that the Apostle spoke of. But the elegant young man

was moved by a lure no less potent. And his anxiety, for the time, suppressed the evidences of liquor.

"I'll take the risk on the title, Zindorf. You and Ordez were partners in this traffic. Ordez gives you a general assignment of all slaves on hand for three thousand dollars and lights out of the country. He leaves his daughter here among the others. And this general assignment can be construed to include her. Her mother was a slave and that brings her within the law. We know precisely who her mother was, and all about it. You looked it up and my lawyer, Mr. Cable, looked it up. Her mother was the octoroon woman, Suzanne, owned by old Judge Marquette in New Orleans.

"There may have been some sort of church marriage, but there's no legal record, Cable says.

"The woman belonged to Marquette, and under the law the girl is a slave. You got a paper title out of Marquette's executors, privily, years ago. Now you have this indefinite assignment by Ordez. He's gone to the Spanish Islands, or the devil, or both. And if Mr. Pendleton can draw a deed of sale that will stand in the courts between us, I'll take the risk on the validity of my title."

He paused.

"The law's sound on slaves, Judge Madison has a dozen himself, not all black either; not three-eighths black!" and he laughed.

Then he turned to my father.

"Mr. Pendleton," he said, "I persuaded Zindorf to send for you to draw up this deed of sale. I have no confidence in the little practicing tricksters at the county seat. They take a fee and, with premeditation, write a word or phrase into the contract that leaves it open for a suit at law."

He made a courteous bow, accompanied by a dancing master's gesture.

"I do not offend you with the offer of a fee, but I present my gratitude for the conspicuous courtesy, and I indicate the service to the commonwealth of legal papers in form and court proof. May I hope, Sir, that you will not deny us the benefit of your highly distinguished service."

My father very slowly looked about him in calm reflection.

He had ridden ten miles through the hills on this April morning, at Zindorf's message sent the night before. The clay of the roads was still damp and plastic from the recent rain. There were flecks of mud on him and the splashing of the streams.

He was a big, dominating man, in the hardened strength and experience of middle life. He had come, as he believed, upon some service of the state. And here was a thing for the little dexterities of a lawyer's clerk. Everybody in Virginia, who knew my father, can realize how he was apt to meet the vague message of Zindorf that got him in this house, and the patronizing courtesies of Mr. Lucian Morrow.

He was direct and virile, and while he feared God, like the great figures in the Pentateuch, as though he were a judge of Israel enforcing his decrees with the weapon of iron, I cannot write here, that at any period of his life, or for any concern or reason, he very greatly regarded man.

He went over to the window and looked out at the hills and the road that he had traveled.

The mid-morning sun was on the fields and groves like a benediction. The soft vitalizing air entered and took up the stench of liquor, the ash of tobacco and the imported perfumes affected by Mr. Lucian Morrow.

The windows in the room were long, gothic like a church, and turning on a pivot. They ran into the ceiling that Monroe had built across the gutted walls. The house stood on the crown of a hill, in a cluster of oak trees. Below was the abandoned graveyard, the fence about it rotted down; the stone slabs overgrown with moss. The four roads running into the hills joined and crossed below this oak grove that the early people had selected for a house of God.

My father looked out on these roads and far back on the one that he had traveled.

There was no sound in the world, except the faint tolling of a bell in a distant wood on the road. It was far off on the way to my father's house, and the vague sound was to be heard only when a breath of wind carried from that way.

My father gathered his big chin, flat like a plowshare, into the trough of his bronze hand. He stood for some moments in reflection, then he turned to Mr. Lucian Morrow.

"I think you are right," he said. "I think this is a triangular affair with the state a party. I am in the service of the state. Will you kindly put the table by this window."

They thought he wished the air, and would thus escape the closeness of the room. And while my father stood aside, Zindorf and his guest carried the flat writing table to the window and placed a chair.

My father sat down behind the table by the great open window, and looked at Zindorf.

The man moved and acted like a monk. He had the figure and the tonsured head. His coarse, patched clothes cut like the homely garments of the simple people of the day, were not wholly out of keeping to the part. The idea was visualized about him; the simplicity and the poverty of the great monastic orders in their vast, noble humility. All striking and real until one saw his face!

My father used to say that the great orders of God were correct in this humility; for in its vast, comprehensive action, the justice of God moved in a great plain, where every indicatory event was precisely equal; a straw was a weaver's beam.

God hailed men to ruin in his court, not with spectacular devices, but by means of some homely, common thing, as though to abase and overcome our pride.

My father moved the sheets of foolscap, and tested the point of the quill pen like one who considers with deliberation. He dipped the point into the inkpot and slowly wrote a dozen formal words.

Then he stopped and put down the pen.

"The contests of the courts," he said, "are usually on the question of identity. I ought to see this slave for a correct description."

The two men seemed for a moment uncertain what to do.

Then Zindorf addressed my father.

"Pendleton," he said, "the fortunes of life change, and the ideas suited to one status are ridiculous in another. Ordez was a fool. He made believe to this girl a future that he never intended, and she is under the glamor of these fancies."

He stood in the posture of a monk, and he spoke each word with a clear enunciation.

"It is a very delicate affair, to bring this girl out of the extravagances with which Ordez filled her idle head, and not be brutal in it. We must conduct the thing with tact, and we will ask you, Pendleton, to observe the courtesies of our pretension."

When he had finished, he flung a door open and went down a stairway. For a time my father heard his footsteps, echoing, like those of a priest in the under chambers of a chapel. Then he ascended, and my father was astonished.

He came with a young girl on his arm, as in the ceremony of marriage sometimes the priest emerges with the bride. The girl was young and of a Spanish beauty. She was all in white with blossoms in her hair. And she was radiant, my father said, as in the glory of some happy contemplation. There was no slave like this on the block in Virginia. Young girls like this, my father had seen in Havana in the houses of Spanish Grantees.

"This is Mr. Pendleton, our neighbor," Zindorf said. "He comes to offer you his felicitations."

The girl made a little formal curtsy.

"When my father returns," she said in a queer, liquid accent, "he will thank you, Meester Pendleton; just now he is on a journey."

And she gave her hand to Lucian Morrow to kiss, like a lady of the time. Then Zindorf, mincing his big step, led her out.

And my father stood behind the table in the enclosure of the window, with his arms folded, and his chin lifted above his great black stock. I know how my father looked, for I have seen him stand like that before moving factors in great events, when he intended, at a certain cue, to enter.

He said that it was at this point that Mr. Lucian Morrow's early comment on Zindorf seemed, all at once, to discover the nature of this whole affair. He said that suddenly, with a range of vision like the great figures in the Pentateuch, he saw how things right and true would work out backward into abominations, if, by any chance, the virtue of God in events were displaced!

Zindorf returned, and as he stepped through the door, closing it behind him, the far-off tolling of the bell, faint, eerie, carried by a stronger breath of April air, entered through the window. My father extended his arm toward the distant wood.

"Zindorf," he said, "do you mark the sign?" The man listened.

"What sign?" he said.

"The sign of death!" replied my father.

The man made a deprecating gesture with his hands, "I do not believe in signs," he said.

My father replied like one corrected by a memory.

"Why, yes," he said, "that is true. I should have remembered that. You do not believe in signs, Zindorf, since you abandoned the sign of the cross, and set these coarse patches on your knees to remind you not to bend them in the sign of submission to the King of Kings."

The intent in the mended clothing was the economy of avarice, but my father turned it to his use.

The man's face clouded with anger.

"What I believe," he said, "is neither the concern of you nor another."

He paused with an oath.

"Whatever you may believe, Zindorf," replied my father, "the sound of that bell is unquestionably a sign of death." He pointed toward the distant wood. "In the edge of the forest yonder is the ancient church that the people built to replace the burned one here. It has been long abandoned, but in its graveyard lie a few old families. And now and then, when an old man dies, they bring him back to put him with his fathers. This morning, as I came along, they were digging the grave for old Adam Duncan, and the bell tolls for him. So you see," and he looked Zindorf in the face, "a belief in signs is justified."

Again the big man made his gesture as of one putting something of no importance out of the way.

"Believe what you like," he said, "I am not concerned with signs."

"Why, yes, Zindorf," replied my father, "of all men you are the very one most concerned about them. You must be careful not to use the wrong ones."

It was a moment of peculiar tension.

The room was flooded with sun. The tiny creatures of the air droned outside. Everywhere was peace and the gentle benevolence of peace. But within this room, split off from the great chamber of a church, events covert and sinister seemed preparing to assemble.

My father, big and dominant, was behind the table, his great shoulders blotting out the window.

Mr. Lucian Morrow sat doubled in a chair, and Zindorf stood with the closed door behind him.

"You see, Zindorf," he said, "each master has his set of signs. Most of us have learned the signs of one master only. But you have learned the signs of both. And you must be careful not to bring the signs of your first master into the service of your last one."

The big man did not move, he stood with the door closed behind him, and studied my father's face like one who feels the presence of a danger that he cannot locate.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"I mean," replied my father, "I mean, Zindorf, that each master has a certain intent in events, and this intent is indicated by his set of signs. Now the great purpose of these two masters, we believe, in all the

moving of events, is directly opposed. Thus, when we use a sign of one of these masters, we express by the symbol of it the hope that events will take the direction of his established purpose.

"Don't you see then... don't you see, that we dare not use the signs of one in the service of the other?"

"Pendleton," said the man, "I do not understand you."

He spoke slowly and precisely, like one moving with an excess of care.

My father went on, his voice strong and level, his eyes on Zindorf.

"The thing is a great mystery," he said. "It is not clear to any of us in its causes or its relations. But old legends and old beliefs, running down from the very morning of the world, tell us—warn us, Zindorf—that the signs of each of these masters are abhorrent to the other. Neither will tolerate the use of his adversary's sign. Moreover, Zindorf, there is a double peril in it."

And his voice rose.

"There is the peril that the new master will abandon the blunderer for the insult, and there is the peril that the old one will destroy him for the sacrilege!"

At this moment the door behind Zindorf opened, and the young girl entered. She was excited and her eyes danced.

"Oh!" she said, "people are coming on every road!"

She looked, my father said, like a painted picture, her dark Castilian beauty illumined by the pleasure in her interpretation of events. She thought the countryside assembled after the manner of my father to express its felicitations.

Zindorf crossed in great strides to the window: Mr. Lucian Morrow, sober and overwhelmed by the mystery of events about him, got unsteadily on his feet, holding with both hands to the oak back of a chair.

My father said that the tragedy of the thing was on him, and he acted under the pressure of it.

"My child," he said, "you are to go to the house of your grandfather in Havana. If Mr. Lucian Morrow wishes to renew his suit for your hand in marriage, he will do it there. Go now and make your preparations for the journey."

The girl cried out in pleasure at the words.

"My grandfather is a great person in New Spain. I have always longed to see him... father promised... and now I am to go ... when do we set out, Meester Pendleton?"

"At once," replied my father, "to-day." Then he crossed the room and opened the door for her to go out. He held the latch until the girl was down the stairway. Then he closed the door.

The big man, falsely in his aspect, like a monk, looking out at the far-off figures on the distant roads, now turned about.

"A clever ruse, Pendleton," he said, "We can send her now, on this pretended journey, to Morrow's house, after the sale."

My father went over and sat down at the table. He took a faded silk envelope out of his coat, and laid it down before him. Then he answered Zindorf.

"There will be no sale," he said.

Mr. Lucian Morrow interrupted.

"And why no sale, Sir?"

"Because there is no slave to sell," replied my father. "This girl is not the daughter of the octoroon woman, Suzanne."

Zindorf's big jaws tightened.

"How did you know that?" he said.

My father answered with deliberation.

"I would have known it," he said, "from the wording of the paper you exhibit from Marquette's executors. It is merely a release of any claim or color of title; the sort of legal paper one executes when one gives up a right or claim that one has no faith in. Marquette's executors were the ablest lawyers in New Orleans. They were not the men to sign away valuable property in a conveyance like that; that they did sign such a paper is conclusive evidence to me that they had nothing—and knew they had nothing—to release by it." He paused.

"I know it also," he said, "because I have before me here the girl's certificate of birth and Ordez's certificate of marriage."

He opened the silk envelope and took out some faded papers. He unfolded them and spread them out under his hand.

"I think Ordez feared for his child," he said, "and stored these papers against the day of danger to her, because they are copies taken from the records in Havana."

He looked up at the astonished Morrow.

"Ordez married the daughter of Pedro de Hernando. I find, by a note to these papers, that she is dead. I conclude that this great Spanish family objected to the adventurer, and he fled with his infant daughter to New Orleans." he paused.

"The intrigue with the octoroon woman, Suzanne, came after that."

Then he added:

"You must renew your negotiations, Sir, in, a somewhat different manner before a Spanish Grandee in Havana!"

Mr. Lucian Morrow did not reply. He stood in a sort of wonder. But Zindorf, his face like iron, addressed my father:

"Where did you get these papers, Pendleton?" he said.

"I got them from Ordez," replied my father.

"When did you see Ordez?"

"I saw him to-day," replied my father.

Zindorf did not move, but his big jaw worked and a faint spray of moisture came out on his face. Then, finally, with no change or quaver in his voice, he put his query.

"Where is Ordez?"

"Where?" echoed my father, and he rose. "Why, Zindorf, he is on his way here." And he extended his arm toward the open window. The big man lifted his head and looked out at the men and horses now clearly visible on the distant road.

"Who are these people," he said, "and why do they come?" He spoke as though he addressed some present but invisible authority.

My father answered him

"They are the people of Virginia," he said, "and they come, Zindorf, in the purpose of events that you have turned terribly backward!"

The man was in some desperate perplexity, but he had steel nerves and the devil's courage.

He looked my father calmly in the face.

"What does all this mean?" he said.

"It means, Zindorf," cried my father, "it means that the very things, the very particular things, that you ought to have used for the glory of God, God has used for your damnation!"

And again, in the clear April air, there entered through the open window the faint tolling of a bell.

"Listen, Zindorf! I will tell you. In the old abandoned church yonder, when they came to toll the bell for Duncan, the rope fell to pieces; I came along then, and Jacob Lance climbed into the steeple to toll the bell by hand. At the first crash of sound a wolf ran out of a thicket in the ravine below him, and fled away toward the mountains. Lance, from his elevated point, could see the wolf's muzzle was bloody. That would mean, that a lost horse had been killed or an estray steer. He called down and we went in to see what thing this scavenger had got hold of."

He paused.

"In the cut of an abandoned road we found the body of Ordez riddled with buckshot, and his pockets rifled. But sewed up in his coat was the silk envelope with these papers. I took possession of them as a Justice of the Peace, ordered the body sent on here, and the people to assemble."

He extended his arm toward the faint, quivering, distant sound.

"Listen, Zindorf," he cried; "the bell began to toll for Duncan, but it tolls now for the murderer of Ordez. It tolls to raise the country against the assassin!"

The false monk had the courage of his master. He stood out and faced my father.

"But can you find him, Pendleton," he said. And his harsh voice was firm. "You find Ordez dead; well, some assassin shot him and carried his body into the cut of the abandoned road. But who was that assassin? Is Virginia scant of murderers? Do you know the right one?"

My father answered in his great dominating voice

"God knows him, Zindorf, and I know him!... The man who murdered Ordez made a fatal blunder... He used a sign of God in the service of the devil and he is ruined!"

The big man stepped slowly backward into the room, while my father's voice, filling the big empty spaces of the house, followed after him.

"You are lost, Zindorf! Satan is insulted, and God is outraged! You are lost!"

There was a moment's silence; from outside came the sound of men and horses. The notes of the girl, light, happy, ascended from the lower chamber, as she sang about her preparations for the journey. Zindorf continued to step awfully backward. And Lucian Morrow, shaken and sober, cried out in the extremity of fear:

"In God's name, Pendleton, what do you mean; Zindorf, using a sign of God in the service of the devil."

And my father answered him:

"The corpse of Ordez lay in the bare cut of the abandoned road, and beside it, bedded in the damp clay where he had knelt down to rifle the pockets of the murdered body, were the patch prints of Zindorf's knees!"

VII. The Fortune Teller

Sir Henry Marquis continued to read; he made no comment; his voice clear and even.

It was a big sunny room. The long windows looked out on a formal garden, great beech trees and the bow of the river. Within it was a sort of library. There were bookcases built into the wall, to the height of a man's head, and at intervals between them, rising from the floor to the cornice of the shelves, were rows of mahogany drawers with glass knobs. There was also a flat writing table.

It was the room of a traveler, a man of letters, a dreamer. On the table were an inkpot of carved jade, a paperknife of ivory with gold butterflies set in; three bronze storks, with their backs together, held an exquisite Japanese crystal.

The room was in disorder—the drawers pulled out and the contents ransacked.

My father stood leaning against the casement of the window, looking out. The lawyer, Mr. Lewis, sat in a chair beside the table, his eyes on the violated room.

"Pendleton," he said, "I don't like this English man Gosford."

The words seemed to arouse my father out of the depths of some reflection, and he turned to the lawyer, Mr. Lewis.

"Gosford!" he echoed.

"He is behind this business, Pendleton," the lawyer, Mr. Lewis, went on. "Mark my word! He comes here when Marshall is dying; he forces his way to the man's bed; he puts the servants out; he locks the door. Now, what business had this Englishman with Marshall on his deathbed? What business of a secrecy so close that Marshall's son is barred out by a locked door?"

He paused and twisted the seal ring on his finger.

"When you and I came to visit the sick man, Gosford was always here, as though he kept a watch upon us, and when we left, he went always to this room to write his letters, as he said.

"And more than this, Pendleton; Marshall is hardly in his grave before Gosford writes me to inquire by what legal process the dead man's papers may be examined for a will. And it is Gosford who sends a negro riding, as if the devil were on the crupper, to summon me in the name of the Commonwealth of Virginia,—to appear and examine into the circumstances of this burglary.

"I mistrust the man. He used to hang about Marshall in his life, upon some enterprise of secrecy; and now he takes possession and leadership in his affairs, and sets the man's son aside. In what right, Pendleton, does this adventurous Englishman feel himself secure?"

My father did not reply to Lewis's discourse. His comment was in another quarter.

"Here is young Marshall and Gaeki," he said.

The lawyer rose and came over to the window.

Two persons were advancing from the direction of the stables—a tall, delicate boy, and a strange old man. The old man walked with a quick, jerky, stride. It was the old country doctor Gaeki. And, unlike any other man of his profession, he would work as long and as carefully on the body of a horse as he would on the body of a man, snapping out his quaint oaths, and in a stress of effort, as though he struggled with some invisible creature for its prey. The negroes used to say that the devil was afraid of Gaeki, and he might have been, if to disable a man or his horse were the devil's will. But I think, rather, the negroes imagined the devil to fear what they feared themselves.

"Now, what could bring Gaeki here?" said Lewis.

"It was the horse that Gosford overheated in his race to you," replied my father. "I saw him stop in the road where the negro boy was leading the horse about, and then call young Marshall."

"It was no fault of young Marshall, Pendleton," said the lawyer. "But, also, he is no match for Gosford. He is a dilettante. He paints little pictures after the fashion he learned in Paris, and he has no force or vigor in him. His father was a dreamer, a wanderer, one who loved the world and its frivolities, and the son takes that temperament, softened by his mother. He ought to have a guardian."

"He has one," replied my father.

"A guardian!" repeated Lewis. "What court has appointed a guardian for young Marshall?"

"A court," replied my father, "that does not sit under the authority of Virginia. The helpless, Lewis, in their youth and inexperience, are not wholly given over to the spoiler."

The boy they talked about was very young—under twenty, one would say. He was blue-eyed and fair-haired, with thin, delicate features, which showed good blood long inbred to the loss of vigor. He had the fine, open, generous face of one who takes the world as in a fairy story. But now there was care and anxiety in it, and a furtive shadow, as though the lad's dream of life had got some rude awakening.

At this moment the door behind my father and Lewis was thrown violently open, and a man entered. He was a person with the manner of a barrister, precise and dapper; he had a long, pink face, pale eyes, and a close-cropped beard that brought out the hard lines of his mouth. He bustled to the table, put down a sort of portfolio that held an inkpot, a writing-pad and pens, and drew up a chair like one about to take the minutes of a meeting. And all the while he apologized for his delay. He had important letters to get off in the post, and to make sure, had carried them to the tavern himself.

"And now, sirs, let us get about this business," he finished, like one who calls his assistants to a labor:

My father turned about and looked at the man.

"Is your name Gosford?" he said in his cold, level voice.

"It is, sir," replied the Englishman, "—Anthony Gosford."

"Well, Mr. Anthony Gosford," replied my father, "kindly close the door that you have opened."

Lewis plucked out his snuffbox and trumpeted in his many-colored handkerchief to hide his laughter.

The Englishman, thrown off his patronizing manner, hesitated, closed the door as he was bidden—and could not regain his fine air.

"Now, Mr. Gosford," my father went on, "why was this room violated as we see it?"

"It was searched for Peyton Marshall's will, sir," replied the man.

"How did you know that Marshall had a will?" said my father.

"I saw him write it," returned the Englishman, "here in this very room, on the eighteenth day of October, 1854."

"That was two years ago," said my father. "Was the will here at Marshall's death?"

"It was. He told me on his deathbed."

"And it is gone now?"

"It is," replied the Englishman.

"And now, Mr. Gosford," said my father, "how do you know this will is gone unless you also know precisely where it was?"

"I do know precisely where it was, sir," returned the man. "It was in the row of drawers on the right of the window where you stand—the second drawer from the top. Mr. Marshall put it there when he wrote it, and he told me on his deathbed that it remained there. You can see, sir, that the drawer has been rifled."

My father looked casually at the row of mahogany drawers rising along the end of the bookcase. The second one and the one above were open; the others below were closed.

"Mr. Gosford," he said, "you would have some interest in this will, to know about it so precisely."

"And so I have," replied the man, "it left me a sum of money."

"A large sum?"

"A very large sum, sir."

"Mr. Anthony Gosford," said my father, "for what purpose did Peyton Marshall bequeath you a large sum of money? You are no kin; nor was he in your debt."

The Englishman sat down and put his fingers together with a judicial air.

"Sir," he began, "I am not advised that the purpose of a bequest is relevant, when the bequest is direct and unencumbered by the testator with any indicative words of trust or uses. This will bequeathes me a sum of money. I am not required by any provision of the law to show the reasons moving the testator. Doubtless, Mr. Peyton Marshall had reasons which he deemed excellent for this course, but they are, sir, entombed in the grave with him."

My father looked steadily at the man, but he did not seem to consider his explanation, nor to go any further on that line.

"Is there another who would know about this will?" he said.

"This effeminate son would know," replied Gosford, a sneer in the epithet, "but no other. Marshall wrote the testament in his own hand, without witnesses, as he had the legal right to do under the laws of Virginia. The lawyer," he added, "Mr. Lewis, will confirm me in the legality of that."

"It is the law," said Lewis. "One may draw up a holograph will if he likes, in his own hand, and it is valid without a witness in this State, although the law does not so run in every commonwealth."

"And now, sir," continued the Englishman, turning to my father, "we will inquire into the theft of this testament."

But my father did not appear to notice Mr. Gosford. He seemed perplexed and in some concern.

"Lewis," he said, "what is your definition of a crime?"

"It is a violation of the law," replied the lawyer.

"I do not accept your definition," said my father. "It is, rather, I think, a violation of justice—a violation of something behind the law that makes an act a crime. I think," he went on, "that God must take a broader view than Mr. Blackstone and Lord Coke. I have seen a murder in the law that was, in fact, only a kind of awful accident, and I have seen your catalogue of crimes gone about by feeble men with no intent except an adjustment of their rights. Their crimes, Lewis, were merely errors of their impractical judgment."

Then he seemed to remember that the Englishman was present.

"And now, Mr. Gosford," he said, "will you kindly ask young Marshall to come in here?"

The man would have refused, with some rejoinder, but my father was looking at him, and he could not find the courage to resist my father's will. He got up and went out, and presently returned followed by the lad and Gaeki. The old country doctor sat down by the door, his leather case of bottles by the chair, his cloak still fastened under his chin. Gosford went back to the table and sat down with his writing materials to keep notes. The boy stood.

My father looked a long time at the lad. His face was grave, but when he spoke, his voice was gentle.

"My boy," he said, "I have had a good deal of experience in the examination of the devil's work." He paused and indicated the violated room. "It is often excellently done. His disciples are extremely clever. One's ingenuity is often taxed to trace out the evil design in it, and to stamp it as a false piece set into the natural sequence of events."

He paused again, and his big shoulders blotted out the window.

"Every natural event," he continued, "is intimately connected with innumerable events that precede and follow. It has so many serrated points of contact with other events that the human mind is not able to fit a false event so that no trace of the joinder will appear. The most skilled workmen in the devil's shop are only able to give their false piece a blurred joinder."

He stopped and turned to the row of mahogany drawers beside him.

"Now, my boy," he said, "can you tell me why the one who ransacked this room, in opening and tumbling the contents of all the drawers, about, did not open the two at the bottom of the row where I stand?"

"Because there was nothing in them of value, sir," replied the lad.

"What is in them?" said my father.

"Only old letters, sir, written to my father, when I was in Paris—nothing else."

"And who would know that?" said my father.

The boy went suddenly white.

"Precisely!" said my father. "You alone knew it, and when you undertook to give this library the appearance of a pillaged room, you unconsciously endowed your imaginary robber with the thing you knew yourself. Why search for loot in drawers that contained only old letters? So your imaginary robber reasoned, knowing what you knew. But a real robber, having no such knowledge, would have ransacked them lest he miss the things of value that he searched for."

He paused, his eyes on the lad, his voice deep and gentle.

"Where is the will?" he said.

The white in the boy's face changed to scarlet. He looked a moment about him in a sort of terror; then he lifted his head and put back his shoulders. He crossed the room to a bookcase, took down a volume, opened it and brought out a sheet of folded foolscap. He stood up and faced my father and the men about the room.

"This man," he said, indicating Gosford, "has no right to take all my father had. He persuaded my father and was trusted by him. But I did not trust him. My father saw this plan in a light that I did not see it, but I did not oppose him. If he wished to use his fortune to help our country in the thing which he thought he foresaw, I was willing for him to do it.

"But," he cried, "somebody deceived me, and I will not believe that it was my father. He told me all about this thing. I had not the health to fight for our country, when the time came, he said, and as he had no other son, our fortune must go to that purpose in our stead. But my father was just. He said that a portion would be set aside for me, and the remainder turned over to Mr. Gosford. But this will gives all to Mr. Gosford and leaves me nothing!"

Then he came forward and put the paper in my father's hand. There was silence except for the sharp voice of Mr. Gosford.

"I think there will be a criminal proceeding here!"

My father handed the paper to Lewis, who unfolded it and read it aloud. It directed the estate of Peyton Marshall to be sold, the sum of fifty thousand dollars paid to Anthony Gosford and the remainder to the son.

"But there will be no remainder," cried young Marshall. "My father's estate is worth precisely that sum. He valued it very carefully, item by item, and that is exactly the amount it came to."

"Nevertheless," said Lewis, "the will reads that way. It is in legal form, written in Marshall's hand, and signed with his signature, and sealed. Will you examine it, gentlemen? There can be no question of the writing or the signature."

My father took the paper and read it slowly, and old Gaeki nosed it over my father's arm, his eyes searching the structure of each word, while Mr. Gosford sat back comfortably in his chair like one elevated to a victory.

"It is in Marshall's hand and signature," said my father, and old Gaeki, nodded, wrinkling his face under his shaggy eyebrows. He went away still wagging his grizzled head, wrote a memorandum on an envelope from his pocket, and sat down in, his chair.

My father turned now to young Marshall.

"My boy," he said, "why do you say that some one has deceived you?"

"Because, sir," replied the lad, "my father was to leave me twenty thousand dollars. That was his plan. Thirty thousand dollars should be set aside for Mr. Gosford, and the remainder turned over to me."

"That would be thirty thousand dollars to Mr. Gosford, instead of fifty," said my father.

"Yes, sir," replied the boy; "that is the way my father said he would write his will. But it was not written that way. It is fifty thousand dollars to Mr. Gosford, and the remainder to me. If it were thirty thousand dollars to Mr. Gosford, as my father, said his will would be, that would have left me twenty thousand dollars from the estate; but giving Mr. Gosford fifty thousand dollars leaves me nothing."

"And so you adventured on a little larceny," sneered the Englishman.

The boy stood very straight and white.

"I do not understand this thing," he said, "but I do not believe that my father would deceive me. He never did deceive me in his life. I may have been a disappointment to him, but my father was a gentle man." His voice went up strong and clear. "And I refuse to believe that he would tell me one thing and do another!"

One could not fail to be impressed, or to believe that the boy spoke the truth.

"We are sorry," said Lewis, "but the will is valid and we cannot go behind it."

My father walked about the room, his face in reflection. Gosford sat at his ease, transcribing a note on his portfolio. Old Gaeki had gone back to his chair and to his little case of bottles; he got them up on his knees, as though he would be diverted by fingering the tools of his profession. Lewis was in plain distress, for he held the law and its disposition to be inviolable; the boy stood with a find defiance, ennobled by the trust in his father's honor. One could not take his stratagem for a criminal act; he was only a child, for all his twenty years of life. And yet Lewis saw the elements of crime, and he knew that Gosford was writing down the evidence.

It was my father who broke the silence.

"Gosford," he said, "what scheme were you and Marshall about?"

"You may wonder, sir," replied the Englishman, continuing to write at his notes; "I shall not tell you."

"But I will tell you," said the boy. "My father thought that the states in this republic could not hold together very much longer. He believed that the country would divide, and the South set up a separate government. He hoped this might come about without a war. He was in horror of a war. He had traveled; he had seen nations and read their history, and he knew what civil wars were. I have heard him say that men did not realize what they were talking when they urged war."

He paused and looked at Gosford.

"My father was convinced that the South would finally set up an independent government, but he hoped a war might not follow. He believed that if this new government were immediately recognized by Great Britain, the North would accept the inevitable and there would be no bloodshed. My father went to England with this scheme. He met Mr. Gosford somewhere—on the ship, I think. And Mr. Gosford succeeded in convincing my father that if he had a sum of money he could win over certain powerful persons in the English Government, and so pave the way to an immediate recognition of the Southern Republic by Great Britain. He followed my father home and hung about him, and so finally got his will. My father was careful; he wrote nothing; Mr. Gosford wrote nothing; there is no evidence of this plan; but my father told me, and it is true."

My father stopped by the table and lifted his great shoulders.

"And so," he said, "Peyton Marshall imagined a plan like that, and left its execution to a Mr. Gosford!"

The Englishman put down his pen and addressed my father.

"I would advise you, sir, to require a little proof for your conclusions. This is a very pretty story, but it is prefaced by an admission of no evidence, and it comes as a special pleading for a criminal act. Now, sir, if I chose, if the bequest required it, I could give a further explanation, with more substance; of moneys borrowed by the decedent in his travels and to be returned to me. But the will, sir, stands for itself, as Mr. Lewis will assure you."

Young Marshall looked anxiously at the lawyer.

"Is that the law, sir?"

"It is the law of Virginia," said Lewis, "that a will by a competent testator, drawn in form, requires no collateral explanation to support it."

My father seemed brought up in a cul-de-sac. His face was tense and disturbed. He stood by the table; and now, as by accident, he put out his hand and took up the Japanese crystal supported by the necks of the three bronze storks. He appeared unconscious of the act, for he was in deep reflection. Then, as though the weight in his hand drew his attention, he glanced at the thing. Something about it struck him, for his manner changed. He spread the will out on the table and began to move the crystal over it, his face close to the glass. Presently his hand stopped, and he stood stooped over, staring into the Oriental crystal, like those practitioners of black art who predict events from what they pretend to see in these spheres of glass.

Mr. Gosford, sitting at his ease, in victory, regarded my father with a supercilious, ironical smile.

"Sir," he said, "are you, by chance, a fortuneteller?"

"A misfortune-teller," replied my father, his face still held above the crystal. "I see here a misfortune to Mr. Anthony Gosford. I predict, from what I see, that he will release this bequest of moneys to Peyton Marshall's son."

"Your prediction, sir," said Gosford, in a harder note, "is not likely to come true."

"Why, yes," replied my father, "it is certain to come true. I see it very clearly. Mr. Gosford will write out a release, under his hand and seal, and go quietly out of Virginia, and Peyton Marshall's son will take his entire estate."

"Sir," said the Englishman, now provoked into a temper, "do you enjoy this foolery?"

"You are not interested in crystal-gazing, Mr. Gosford," replied my father in a tranquil voice. "Well, I find it most diverting. Permit me to piece out your fortune, or rather your misfortune, Mr. Gosford! By chance you fell in with this dreamer Marshall, wormed into his confidence, pretended a relation to great men in England; followed and persuaded him until, in his ill-health, you got this will. You saw it written two years ago. When Marshall fell ill, you hurried here, learned from the dying man that the will remained and where it was. You made sure by pretending to write letters in this room, bringing your portfolio with ink and pen and a pad of paper. Then, at Marshall's death, you inquired of Lewis for legal measures to discover the dead man's will. And when you find the room ransacked, you run after the law."

My father paused.

"That is your past, Mr. Gosford. Now let me tell your future. I see you in joy at the recovered will. I see you pleased at your foresight in getting a direct bequest, and at the care you urged on Marshall to leave no evidence of his plan, lest the authorities discover it. For I see, Mr. Gosford, that it was your intention all along to keep this sum of money for your own use and pleasure. But alas, Mr. Gosford, it was not to be! I see you writing this release; and Mr. Gosford"—my father's voice went up full and strong,—"I see you writing it in terror—sweat on your face!"

"The Devil take your nonsense!" cried the Englishman.

My father stood up with a twisted, ironical smile.

"If you doubt my skill, Mr. Gosford, as a fortune, or rather a misfortune-teller I will ask Mr. Lewis and Herman Gaeki to tell me what they see."

The two men crossed the room and stooped over the paper, while my father held the crystal. The manner and the bearing of the men changed. They grew on the instant tense and fired with interest.

"I see it!" said the old doctor, with a queer foreign expletive.

"And I," cried Lewis, "see something more than Pendleton's vision. I see the penitentiary in the distance."

The Englishman sprang up with an oath and leaned across the table. Then he saw the thing.

My father's hand held the crystal above the figures of the bequest written in the body of the will. The focused lens of glass magnified to a great diameter, and under the vast enlargement a thing that would escape the eye stood out. The top curl of a figure 3 had been erased, and the bar of a 5 added. One could see the broken fibers of the paper on the outline of the curl, and the bar of the five lay across the top of the three and the top of the o behind it like a black lath tacked across two uprights.

The figure 3 had been changed to 5 so cunningly is to deceive the eye, but not to deceive the vast magnification of the crystal. The thing stood out big and crude like a carpenter's patch.

Gosford's face became expressionless like wood, his body rigid; then he stood up and faced the three men across the table.

"Quite so!" he said in his vacuous English voice. "Marshall wrote a 3 by inadvertence and changed it. He borrowed my penknife to erase the figure."

My father and Lewis gaped like men who see a penned-in beast slip out through an unimagined passage. There was silence. Then suddenly, in the strained stillness of the room, old Doctor Gaeki laughed.

Gosford lifted his long pink face, with its cropped beard bringing out the ugly mouth.

"Why do you laugh, my good man?" he said.

"I laugh," replied Gaeki, "because a figure 5 can have so many colors."

And now my father and Lewis were no less astonished than Mr. Gosford.

"Colors!" they said, for the changed figure in the will was black.

"Why, yes," replied the old man, "it is very pretty."

He reached across the table and drew over Mr. Gosford's memorandum beside the will.

"You are progressive, sir," he went on; "you write in iron-nutgall ink, just made, commercially, in this year of fifty-six by Mr. Stephens. But we write here as Marshall wrote in 'fifty-four, with logwood."

He turned and fumbled in his little case of bottles.

"I carry a bit of acid for my people's indigestions. It has other uses." He whipped out the stopper of his vial and dabbed Gosford's notes and Marshall's signature.

"See!" he cried. "Your writing is blue, Mr. Gosford, and Marshall's red!"

With an oath the trapped man struck at Gaeki's hand. The vial fell and cracked on the table. The hydrochloric acid spread out over Marshall's will. And under the chemical reagent the figure in the bequest of fifty thousand dollars changed beautifully; the bar of the 5 turned blue, and the remainder of it a deep purple-red like the body of the will.

"Gaeki," cried my father, "you have trapped a rogue!"

"And I have lost a measure of good acid," replied the old man. And he began to gather up the bits of his broken bottle from the table.

VIII. The Hole in the Mahogany Panel

Sir Henry paused a moment, his finger between the pages of the ancient diary.

"It is the inspirational quality in these cases," he said, "that impresses me. It is very nearly absent in our modern methods of criminal investigation. We depend now on a certain formal routine. I rarely find a man in the whole of Scotland Yard with a trace of intuitive impulse to lead him.... Observe how this old justice in Virginia bridged the gaps between his incidents."

He paused.

"We call it the inspirational instinct, in criminal investigation ... genius, is the right word."

He looked up at the clock.

"We have an hour, yet, before the opera will be worth hearing; listen to this final case."

The narrative of the diary follows:

The girl was walking in the road. Her frock was covered with dust. Her arms hung limp. Her face with the great eyes and the exquisite mouth was the chalk face of a ghost. She walked with the terrible stiffened celerity of a human creature when it is trapped and ruined.

Night was coming on. Behind the girl sat the great old house at the end of a long lane of ancient poplars.

This was a strange scene my father came on. He pulled up his big red-roan horse at the crossroads, where the long lane entered the turnpike, and looked at the stiff, tragic figure. He rode home from a sitting of the county justices, alone, at peace, on this midsummer night, and God sent this tragic thing to meet him.

He got down and stood under the crossroads signboard beside his horse.

The earth was dry; in dust. The dead grass and the dead leaves made a sere, yellow world. It looked like a land of unending summer, but a breath of chill came out of the hollows with the sunset.

The girl would have gone on, oblivious. But my father went down into the road and took her by the arm. She stopped when she saw who it was, and spoke in the dead, uninflected voice of a person in extremity.

"Is the thing a lie?" she said.

"What thing, child?" replied my father.

"The thing he told me!"

"Dillworth?" said my father. "Do you mean Hambleton Dillworth?"

The girl put out her free arm in a stiff, circling gesture. "In all the world," she said, "is there any other man who would have told me?"

My father's face hardened as if of metal. "What did he tell you?"

The girl spoke plainly, frankly, in her dead voice, without equivocation, with no choice of words to soften what she said:

"He said that my father was not dead; that I was the daughter of a thief; that what I believed about my father was all made up to save the family name; that the truth was my father robbed him, stole his best horse and left the country when I was a baby. He said I was a burden on him, a pensioner, a drone; and to go and seek my father."

And suddenly she broke into a flood of tears. Her face pressed against my father's shoulder. He took her up in his big arms and got into his saddle.

"My child," he said, "let us take Hambleton Dillworth at his word."

And he turned the horse into the lane toward the ancient house. The girl in my father's arms made no resistance. There was this dominating quality in the man that one trusted to him and followed behind him. She lay in his arms, the tears wetting her white face and the long lashes.

The moon came up, a great golden moon, shouldered over the rim of the world by the backs of the crooked elves. The horse and the two persons made a black, distorted shadow that jerked along as though it were a thing evil and persistent. Far off in the thickets of the hills an owl cried, eerie and weird like a creature in

some bitter sorrow. The lane was deep with dust. The horse traveled with no sound, and the distorted black shadow followed, now blotted out by the heavy tree tops, and now only partly to be seen, but always there.

My father got down at the door and carried the girl up the steps and between the plaster pillars into the house. There was a hall paneled in white wood and with mahogany doors. He opened one of these doors and went in. The room he entered had been splendid in some ancient time. It was big; the pieces in it were exquisite; great mirrors and old portraits were on the wall.

A man sitting behind a table got up when my father entered. Four tallow candles, in ancient silver sticks, were on the table, and some sheets with figured accounts.

The man who got up was like some strange old child. He wore a number of little capes to hide his humped back, and his body, one thought, under his clothes was strapped together. He got on his feet nimbly like a spider, and they heard the click of a pistol lock as he whipped the weapon out of an open drawer, as though it were a habit thus always to keep a weapon at his hand to make him equal in stature with other men. Then he saw who it was and the double-barreled pistol slipped out of sight. He was startled and apprehensive, but he was not in fear.

He stood motionless behind the table, his head up, his eyes hard, his thin mouth closed like a trap and his long, dead black hair hanging on each side of his lank face over the huge, malformed ears. The man stood thus, unmoving, silent, with his twisted ironical smile, while my father put the girl into a chair and stood up behind it.

"Dillworth," said my father, "what do you mean by turning this child out of the house?"

The man looked steadily at the two persons before him.

"Pendleton," he said, and he spoke precisely, "I do not recognize the right of you, or any other man, to call my acts into account; however"—and he made a curious gesture with his extended hands "not at your command, but at my pleasure, I will tell you.

"This young woman had some estate from her mother at that lady's death. As her guardian I invested it by permission of the court's decree." He paused. "When the Maxwell lands were sold before the courthouse I bid them in for my ward. The judge confirmed this use of the guardian funds. It was done upon advice of counsel and within the letter of the law. Now it appears that Maxwell had only a life interest in these lands; Maxwell is dead, and one who has purchased the interest of his heirs sues in the courts for this estate.

"This new claimant will recover; since one who buys at a judicial sale, I find, buys under the doctrine of caveat emptor—that is to say, at his peril. He takes his chance upon the title. The court does not insure it. If it is defective he loses both the money and the lands. And so," he added, "my ward will have no income to support her, and I decline to assume that burden."

My father looked the hunchback in the face. "Who is the man bringing this suit at law?"

"A Mr. Henderson, I believe," replied Dillworth, "from Maryland."

"Do you know him?" said my father.

"I never heard of him," replied the hunchback.

The girl, huddled in the chair, interrupted. "I have seen letters," she said, "come in here with this man's return address at Baltimore written on the envelope."

The hunchback made an irrelevant gesture. "The man wrote—to inquire if I would buy his title. I declined." Then he turned to my father. "Pendleton," he said, "you know about this matter. You know that every step I took was legal. And with pains and care how I got an order out of chancery to make this purchase, and how careful I was to have this guardianship investment confirmed by the court. No affair was ever done so exactly within the law."

"Why were you so extremely careful?" said my father.

"Because I wanted the safeguard of the law about me at every step," replied the man.

"But why?"

"You ask me that, Pendleton?" cried the man. "Is not the wisdom of my precautions evident? I took them to prevent this very thing; to protect myself when this thing should happen!"

"Then," said my father, "you knew it was going to happen."

The man's eyes slipped about a moment in his head. "I knew it was going to happen that I would be charged with all sorts of crimes and misdemeanors if there should be any hooks on which to hang them. Because a man locks his door is it proof that he knows a robber is on the way? Human foresight and the experience of men move prudent persons to a reasonable precaution in the conduct of affairs."

"And what is it," said my father, "that moves them to an excessive caution?"

The hunchback snapped his fingers with an exasperated gesture. "I will not be annoyed by your big, dominating manner!" he cried.

My father was not concerned by this defiance. "Dillworth," he said, "you sent this child out to seek her father. Well, she took the right road to find him."

The hunchback stepped back quickly, his face changed. He sat down in his chair and looked up at my father. There was here suddenly uncovered something that he had not looked for. And he talked to gain time.

"I have cast up the accounts in proper form," he said while he studied my father, his hand moving the figured sheets. "They are correct and settled before two commissioners in chancery. Taking out my commission as guardian, the amounts allowed me for the maintenance and education of the ward, and no dollar of this personal estate remains."

His long, thin hand with the nimble fingers turned the sheets over on the table as though to conclude that phase of the affair.

"The real property," he continued, "will return nothing; the purchase money was applied on Maxwell's debts and cannot be followed. This new claimant, Henderson, who has bought up the outstanding title, will take the land."

"For some trifling sum," said my father.

The hunchback nodded slowly, his eyes in a study of my father's face.

"Doubtless," he said, "it was not known that Maxwell had only a life estate in the lands, and the remainder to the heirs was likely purchased for some slight amount. The language of the deeds that Henderson exhibits in his suit shows a transfer of all claim or title, as though he bought a thing which the grantees thought lay with the uncertainties of a decree in chancery."

"I have seen the deeds," said my father.

"Then," said the hunchback, "you know they are valid, and transfer the title." He paused. "I have no doubt that Mr. Henderson assembled these outstanding interests at no great cost, but his conveyances are in form and legal."

"Everything connected with this affair," said my father, "is strangely legal!"

The hunchback considered my father through his narrow eyelids.

"It is a strange world," he said.

"It is," replied my father. "It is profoundly, inconceivably strange."

There was a moment of silence. The two men regarded each other across the half-length of the room. The girl sat in the chair. She had got back her courage. The big, forceful presence of my father, like the shadow of a great rock, was there behind her. She had the fine courage of her blood, and, after the first cruel shock of this affair, she faced the tragedies that might lie within it calmly.

Shadows lay along the walls of the great room, along the gilt frames of the portraits, the empty fireplace, the rosewood furniture of ancient make and the oak floor. Only the hunchback was in the light, behind the four candles on the table.

"It was strange," continued my father over the long pause, "that your father's will discovered at his death left his lands to you, and no acre to your brother David."

"Not strange," replied the hunchback, "when you consider what my brother David proved to be. My father knew him. What was hidden from us, what the world got no hint of, what the man was in the deep and secret places of his heart, my father knew. Was it strange, then, that he should leave the lands to me?"

"It was a will drawn by an old man in his senility, and under your control."

"Under my care," cried the hunchback. "I will plead guilty, if you like, to that. I honored my father. I was beside his bed with loving-kindness, while my brother went about the pleasures of his life."

"But the testament," said my father, "was in strange terms. It bequeathed the lands to you, with no mention of the personal property, as though these lands were all the estate your father had."

"And so they were," replied the hunchback calmly. "The lands had been stripped of horse and steer, and every personal item, and every dollar in hand or debt owing to my father before his death." The man paused and put the tips of his fingers together. "My father had given to my brother so much money from these sources, from time to time, that he justly left me the lands to make us even."

"Your father was senile and for five years in his bed. It was you, Dillworth, who cleaned the estate of everything but land."

"I conducted my father's business," said the hunchback, "for him, since he was ill. But I put the moneys from these sales into his hand and he gave them to my brother."

"I have never heard that your brother David got a dollar of this money."

The hunchback was undisturbed.

"It was a family matter and not likely to be known."

"I see it," said my father. "It was managed in your legal manner and with cunning foresight. You took the lands only in the will, leaving the impression to go out that your brother had already received his share in the personal estate by advancement. It was shrewdly done. But there remained one peril in it: If any personal property should appear under the law you would be required to share it equally with your brother David."

"Or rather," replied the hunchback calmly, "to state the thing correctly, my brother David would be required to share any discovered personal property with me." Then he added: "I gave my brother David a hundred dollars for his share in the folderol about the premises, and took possession of the house and lands."

"And after that," said my father, "what happened?"

The hunchback uttered a queerly inflected expletive, like a bitter laugh.

"After that," he answered, "we saw the real man in my brother David, as my father, old and dying, had so clearly seen it. After that he turned thief and fugitive."

At the words the girl in the chair before my father rose. She stood beside him, her lithe figure firm, her chin up, her hair spun darkness. The courage, the fine, open, defiant courage of the first women of the world, coming with the patriarchs out of Asia, was in her lifted face. My father moved as though he would stop the hunchback's cruel speech. But she put her fingers firmly on his arm.

"He has gone so far," she said, "let him go on to the end. Let him omit no word, let us hear every ugly thing the creature has to say."

Dillworth sat back in his chair at ease, with a supercilious smile. He passed the girl and addressed my father.

"You will recall the details of that robbery," he said in his complacent, piping voice. "My brother David had married a wife, like the guest invited in the Scriptures. A child was born. My brother lived with his wife's people in their house. One night he came to me to borrow money."

He paused and pointed his long index finger through the doorway and across the hall.

"It was in my father's room that I received him. It did not please me to put money into his hands. But I admonished him with wise counsel. He did not receive my words with a proper brotherly regard. He flared up in unmanageable anger. He damned me with reproaches, said I had stolen his inheritance, poisoned his

father's mind against him and slipped into the house and lands. 'Pretentious and perfidious' is what he called me. I was firm and gentle. But he grew violent and a thing happened."

The man put up his hand and moved it along in the air above the table.

"There was a secretary beside the hearth in my father's room. It was an old piece with drawers below and glass doors above. These doors had not been opened for many years, for there was nothing on the shelves behind them—one could see that—except some rows of the little wooden boxes that indigo used to be sold in at the country stores."

The hunchback paused as though to get the details of his story precisely in relation.

"I sat at my father's table in the middle of the room. My brother David was a great, tall man, like Saul. In his anger, as he gesticulated by the hearth, his elbow crashed through the glass door of this secretary; the indigo boxes fell, burst open on the floor, and a hidden store of my father's money was revealed. The wooden boxes were full of gold pieces!"

He stopped and passed his fingers over his projecting chin.

"I was in fear, for I was alone in the house. Every negro was at a distant frolic. And I was justified in that fear. My brother leaped on me, struck me a stunning blow on the chest over the heart, gathered up the gold, took my horse and fled. At daybreak the negroes found me on the floor, unconscious. Then you came, Pendleton. The negroes had washed up the litter from the hearth where the indigo about the coins in the boxes had been shaken out."

My father interrupted:

"The negroes said the floor had been scrubbed when they found you."

"They were drunk," continued the hunchback with no concern. "And, does one hold a drunken negro to his fact? But you saw for yourself the wooden boxes, round, three inches high, with tin lids, and of a diameter to hold a stack of golden eagles, and you saw the indigo still sticking about the sides of these boxes where the coins had lain."

"I did," replied my father. "I observed it carefully, for I thought the gold pieces might turn up sometime, and the blue indigo stain might be on them when they first appeared."

Dillworth leaned far back in his chair, his legs tangled under him, his eyes on my father, in reflection. Finally he spoke.

"You are far-sighted," he said.

"Or God is," replied my father, and, stepping over to the table, he spun a gold piece on the polished surface of the mahogany board.

The hunchback watched the yellow disk turn and flit and wobble on its base and flutter down with its tingling reverberations.

"To-day, when I rode into the county seat to a sitting of the justices," continued my father, "the sheriff showed me some gold eagles that your man from Maryland, Mr. Henderson, had paid in on court costs. Look, Dillworth, there is one of them, and with your thumb nail on the milled edge you can scrape off the indigo!"

The hunchback looked at the spinning coin, but he did not touch it. His head, with its long, straight hair, swung a moment uncertain between his shoulders. Then, swiftly and with a firm grip, he took his resolution.

"The coins appear," he said. "My brother David must be in Baltimore behind this suit."

"He is not in Baltimore," said my father.

"Perhaps you know where he is," cried the hunchback, "since you speak with such authority."

"I do know where he is," said my father in his deep, level voice.

The hunchback got on his feet slowly beside his chair. And the girl came into the protection of my father's arm, her features white like plaster; but the fiber in her blood was good and she stood up to face the thing that might be coming. After the one long abandonment to tears in my father's saddle she had got herself in hand. She had gone, like the princes of the blood, through the fire, and the dross of weakness was burned out.

The hunchback got on his feet, in position like a duelist, his hard, bitter face turned slantwise toward my father.

"Then," he said, "if you know where David is you will take his daughter to him, if you please, and rid my house of the burden of her."

"We shall go to him," said my father slowly, "but he shall not return to us."

The hunchback's eyes blinked and bated in the candlelight.

"You quote the Scriptures," he said. "Is David in a grave?"

"He is not," replied my father.

The hunchback seemed to advance like a duelist who parries the first thrust of his opponent. But my father met him with an even voice.

"Dillworth," he said, "it was strange that no man ever saw your brother or the horse after the night he visited you in this house."

"It was dark," replied the man. "He rode from this door through the gap in the mountains into Maryland."

"He rode from this door," said my father slowly, "but not through the gap in the mountains into Maryland."

The hunchback began to twist his fingers.

"Where did he ride then? A man and a horse could not vanish."

"They did vanish," said my father.

"Now you utter fool talk!" cried Dillworth.

"I speak the living truth," replied my father. "Your brother David and your horse disappeared out of sound and hearing—disappeared out of the sight and knowledge of men—after he rode away from your door on that

fatal night."

"Well," said the hunchback, "since my brother David rode away from my door—and you know that—I am free of obligation for him."

"It is Cain's speech!" replied my father.

The hunchback put back his long hair with a swift brush of the fingers across his forehead.

"Dillworth," cried my father, and his voice filled the empty places of the room, "is the mark there?"

The hunchback began to curse. He walked around my father and the girl, the hair about his lank jaws, his fingers working, his face evil. In his front and menace he was like a weasel that would attack some larger creature. And while he made the great turn of his circle my father, with his arm about the girl, stepped before the drawer of the table where the pistol lay.

"Dillworth," he said calmly, "I know where he is. And the mark you felt for just now ought to be there."

"Fool!" cried the hunchback. "If I killed him how could he ride away from the door?"

"It was a thing that puzzled me," replied my father, "when I stood in this house on the morning of your pretended robbery. I knew what had happened. But I thought it wiser to let the evil thing remain a mystery, rather than unearth it to foul your family name and connect this child in gossip for all her days with a crime."

"With a thief," snarled the man.

"With a greater criminal than a thief," replied My father. "I was not certain about this gold on that morning when you showed me the empty boxes. They were too few to hold gold enough for such a motive. I thought a quarrel and violent hot blood were behind the thing; and for that reason I have been silent. But now, when the coins turn up, I see that the thing was all ruthless, cold-blooded love of money.

"I know what happened in that room. When your brother David struck the old secretary with his elbow, and the dozen indigo boxes fell and burst open on the hearth, you thought a great hidden treasure was uncovered. You thought swiftly. You had got the land by undue influence on your senile father, and you did not have to share that with your brother David. But here was a treasure you must share; you saw it in a flash. You sat at your father's table in the room. Your brother stood by the wall looking at the hearth. And you acted then, on the moment, with the quickness of the Evil One. It was cunning in you to select the body over the heart as the place to receive the imagined blow—the head or face would require some evidential mark to affirm your word. And it was cunning to think of the unconscious, for in that part one could get up and scrub the hearth and lie down again to play it."

He paused.

"But the other thing you did in that room was not so clever. A picture was newly hung on the wall—I saw the white square on the opposite wall from which it had been taken. It hung at the height of a man's shoulders directly behind the spot where your brother must have stood after he struck the secretary, and it hung in this new spot to cover the crash of a bullet into the mahogany panel!"

My father stopped and caught up the hunchback's double-barreled pistol out of the empty drawer.

The room was now illumined; the moon had got above the tree tops and its light slanted in through the long windows. The hunchback saw the thing and he paused; his face worked in the fantastic light.

"Yes," continued my father, in his deep, quiet voice, "this is your mistake to-night—to let me get your weapon. Your mistake that other night was to shoot before you counted the money. It was only a few hundred dollars. The dozen wooden boxes would hold no great sum. But the thing was done, and you must cover it."

He paused.

"And you did cover it—with fiendish cunning. It would not do for your brother to vanish from your house, alone and with no motive. But if he disappeared, with the gold to take him and a horse to ride, the explanation would have solid feet to go on. I give you credit here for the ingenuity of Satan. You managed the thing. You caused your brother David and the horse to vanish. I saw, on that morning, the tracks of the horse where you led him from the stable to the door, and his tracks where you led him, holding the dead man in the saddle, from the door to the ancient orchard where the grass grows over the fallen-down chimney of your grandsire's house. And there, at your cunning, they wholly vanished."

The mad courage in the hunchback got control, and he began to advance on my father with no weapon and with no hope to win. His fingers crooked, his body in a bow, his wizen, cruel face pallid in the ghostly light.

"Dillworth," cried my father, in a great voice, like one who would startle a creature out of mania, "you will write a deed in your legal manner granting these lands to your brother's child. And after that"—his words were like the blows of a hammer on an anvil—"I will give you until daybreak to vanish out of our sight and hearing—through the gap in the mountains into Maryland on your horse, as you say your brother David went, or into the abandoned cistern in the ancient orchard where he lies under the horse that you shot and tumbled in on his murdered body!"

The moon was now above the gable of the house. The candles were burned down. They guttered around the sheet of foolscap wet with the scrawls and splashes of Dillworth's quill. My father stood at a window looking out, the girl in a flood of tears, relaxed and helpless, in the protection of his arm.

And far down the long turnpike, white like an expanded ribbon, the hunchback rode his great horse in a gallop, perched like a monkey, his knees doubled, his head bobbing, his loose body rolling in the saddle—while the black, distorted shadow that had followed my father into this tragic house went on before him like some infernal messenger conveying the rider to the Pit.

IX. The End of the Road

The man laughed.

It was a faint cynical murmur of a laugh. Its expression hardly disturbed the composition of his features.

"I fear, Lady Muriel," he said, "that your profession is ruined. Our friend—'over the water'—is no longer concerned about the affairs of England."

The woman fingered at her gloves, turning them back about the wrists. Her face was anxious and drawn.

"I am rather desperately in need of money," she said.

The cynicism deepened in the man's face.

"Unfortunately," he replied, "a supply of money cannot be influenced by the intensity of one's necessity for it."

He was a man indefinite in age. His oily black hair was brushed carefully back. His clothes were excellent, with a precise detail. Everything about him was conspicuously correct in the English fashion. But the man was not English. One could not say from what race he came. Among the races of Southern Europe he could hardly have been distinguished. There was a chameleon quality strongly dominant in the creature.

The woman looked up quickly, as in a strong aversion.

"What shall you do?" she said.

"I?"

The man glanced about the room. There was a certain display within the sweep of his vision. Some rugs of great value, vases and bronzes; genuine and of extreme age. He made a careless gesture with his hands.

"I shall explore some ruins in Syria, and perhaps the aqueduct which the French think carried a water supply to the Carthage of Hanno. It will be convenient to be beyond British inquiry for some years to come; and after all, I am an antiquarian, like Prosper Merimee."

Lady Muriel continued to finger her gloves. They had been cleaned and the cryptic marks of the shopkeeper were visible along the inner side of the wrist hem. This was, to the woman, the first subterfuge of decaying smartness. When a woman began to send her gloves to the laundry she was on her way down. Other evidences were not entirely lacking in the woman's dress, but they were not patent to the casual eye. Lady Muriel was still, to the observer, of the gay top current in the London world.

The woman followed the man's glance about the room.

"You must be rich, Hecklemeir," she said. "Lend me a hundred pounds."

The man laughed again in his queer chuckle.

"Ah, no, my Lady," he replied, "I do not lend." Then he added.

"If you have anything of value, bring it to me.... not information from the ministry, and not war plans; the trade in such commodities is ended."

It was the woman's turn to laugh.

"The shopkeepers in Oxford Street have been before you, Baron.. .. I've nothing to sell."

Hecklemeir smiled, kneading his pudgy hands.

"It will be hard to borrow," he said. "Money is very dear to the Britisher just now—right against his heart.... Still.... perhaps one's family could be thumb screwed.....An elderly relative with no children would be the most favorable, I think. Have you got such a relative concealed somewhere in a nook of London? Think about it. If you could recall one, he would be like a buried nut."

The man paused; then he added, with the offensive chuckling laugh:

"Go to such an one, Lady Muriel. Who shall turn aside from virtue in distress? Perhaps, in the whole of London, I alone have the brutality—shall we call it—to resist that spectacle."

The woman rose. Her face was now flushed and angry.

"I do not know of any form of brutality in which you do not excel, Hecklemeir," she said. "I have a notion to, go to Scotland Yard with the whole story of your secret traffic."

The man continued to smile.

"Alas, my Lady," he replied, "we are coupled together. Scotland Yard would hardly separate us.... you could scarcely manage to drown me and, keep afloat yourself. Dismiss the notion; it is from the pit."

There was no virtue in her threat as the woman knew. Already her mind was on the way that Hecklemeir had ironically suggested—an elderly relative, with no children, from whom one might borrow,—she valued the ramifications of her family, running out to the remote, withered branches of that noble tree. She appraised the individuals and rejected them.

Finally her searching paused.

There was her father's brother who had gone in for science—deciding against the army and the church—Professor Bramwell Winton, the biologist. He lived somewhere toward Covent Garden.

She had not thought of him for years. Occasionally his name appeared in some note issued by the museum, or a college at Oxford.

For almost four years she had been relieved of this thought about one's family. The one "over the water" for whom Hecklemeir had stolen the Scottish toast to designate, had paid lavishly for what she could find out.

She had been richly, for these four years, in funds.

The habit was established of dipping her hand into the dish. And now to find the dish empty appalled her. She could not believe that it was empty. She had come again, and again to this apartment above the shops in Regent Street, selected for its safety of ingress; a modiste and a hairdresser on either side of a narrow flight of steps.

A carriage could stop here; one could be seen here.

Even on the right, above, at the landing of the flight of steps Nance Coleen altered evening gowns with the skill of one altering the plumage of the angels. It must have cost the one "over the water" a pretty penny to

keep this whole establishment running through four years of war.

She spoke finally.

"Have you a directory of London, Hecklemeir?"

The man had been watching her closely.

"If it is Scotland Yard, my Lady," he said, "you will not require a direction. I can give you the address. It is on the Embankment, near..."

"Don't be a fool, Hecklemeir," she interrupted, and taking the book from his hands, she whipped through the pages, got the address she sought, and went out onto the narrow landing and down the steps into Regent Street:

She took a hansom.

With some concern she examined the contents of her purse. There was a guinea, a half crown and some shillings in it—the dust of the bin. And her profession, as Hecklemeir had said, was ended.

She leaned over, like a man, resting her arms on the closed doors.

The future looked troublous. Money was the blood current in the life she knew. It was the vital element. It must be got.

And thus far she had been lucky.

Even in this necessity Bramwell Winton had emerged, when she could not think of any one. He would not have much. These scientific creatures never accumulated money, but he would have a hundred pounds. He had no wife or children to scatter the shillings of his income.

True these creatures spent a good deal on the absurd rubbish of their hobbies. But they got money sometimes, not by thrift but by a sort of chance. Had not one of them, Sir Isaac Martin, found the lost mines from which the ancient civilization of Syria drew its supply of copper. And Hector Bartlett, little more than a mummy in the Museum, had gone one fine day into Asia and dug up the gold plates that had roofed a temple of the Sun.

He had been shown in the drawing rooms, on his return, and she had stopped a moment to look him over—he was a sort of mummy. She was not hoping to find Bramwell Winton one of these elect. But he was a hive that had not been plundered.

She reflected, sitting bent forward in the hansom, her face determined and unchanging. She did not undertake to go forward beyond the hundred pounds. Something would turn up. She was lucky... others had gone to the tower; gone before the firing squad for lesser activities in what Hecklemeir called her profession, but she had floated through... carrying what she gleaned to the paymaster. Was it skill, or was she a child of Fortune?

And like every gambler, like every adventurer in a life of hazard, she determined for the favorite of some immense Fatality.

It was an old house she came to, built in the prehistoric age of London, with thick, heavy walls, one of a row, deadly in its monotony. The row was only partly tenanted.

She dismissed the hansom and got out.

It was a moment before she found the number. The houses adjoining on either side were empty, the windows were shuttered. One might have considered the middle house with the two, for its step was unscrubbed, and it presented unwashed windows.

It was a heavy, deep-walled structure like a monument. Even the street in the vicinity was empty. If the biologist had been seeking an undisturbed quarter of London, he had, beyond doubt, found it here.

There was a bridged-over court before the house. Lady Muriel crossed. She paused before the door. There had been a bell pull in the wall, but the brass handle was broken and only the wire remained.

She was uncertain whether one was supposed to pull this wire, and in the hesitation she took hold of the door latch. To her surprise the door yielded, and following the impulse of her extended hand, she went in.

The hall was empty. There was no servant to be seen. And immediately the domestic arrangement of the biologist were clear to her. They would be that of one who had a cleaning woman in on certain days, and so lived alone. She was not encouraged by this economy, and yet such a custom in a man like Bramwell Winton might be habit.

The scientist, in the popular conception, was not concerned with the luxury of life—they were a rum lot.

But the house was not empty. A smart hat and stick were in the rack and from what should be a drawing room, above, there descended faintly the sound of voices.

It seemed ridiculous to Lady Muriel to go out and struggle with the broken bell wire. She would go up, now that she had entered, and announce herself, since, in any event, it must come to that.

The heavy oak door closed without a sound, as it had opened. Lady Muriel went up the stairway. She had nothing to put down. The only thing she carried was a purse, and lest it should appear suggestive—as of one coming with his empty wallet in his hand—she tucked the gold mesh into the bosom of her jacket.

The door to the drawing room was partly open, and as Lady Muriel approached the top of the stair she heard the voices of two men in an eager colloquy; a smart English accent from the world that she was so desperately endeavoring to remain in, and a voice that paused and was unhurried. But they were both eager, as I have written, as though commonly impelled by an unusual concern.

And now that she was near, Lady Muriel realized that the conversation was not low or under uttered. The smart voice was, in fact, loud and incisive. It was the heavy house that reduced the sounds. In fact, the conversation was keyed up. The two men were excited about something.

A sentence arrested the woman's advancing feet.

"My word! Bramwell, if some one should go there and bring the things out, he would make a fortune, and would be famous. Nobody ever believed these stories."

"There was Le Petit, Sir Godfrey," replied the deliberate voice. "He declared over his signature that he had seen them."

"But who believed Le Petit," continued the other. "The world took him to be a French imaginalist like Chateaubriand... who the devil, Bramwell, supposed there was any truth in this old story? But by gad, sir, it's true! The water color shows it, and if you turn it over you will see that the map on the back of it gives the exact location of the spot. It's all exact work, even the fine lines of the map have the bearings indicated. The man who made that water color, and the drawing on the back of it, had been on the spot."

"Of course, we don't know conclusively who made it. Tony had gone in from the West coast after big game, and he found the thing put up as a sort of fetish in a devil house. It was one of the tribes near the Karamajo range. As I told you, we have only Tony's diary for it. I found the thing among his effects after he was killed in Flanders. It's pretty certain Tony did not understand the water color. There was only this single entry in the diary about how he found it, and a query in pencil."

"My word! if he had understood the water color, he would have beaten over every foot of Africa to Lake Leopold. And it would have been the biggest find of his time. Gad! what a splash he'd have made! But he never had any luck, the beggar... stopped a German bullet in the first week out."

"Now, how the devil, Bramwell, do you suppose that water color got into a native medicine house?"

The reflective voice replied slowly.

"I've thought about the thing, Sir Godfrey. It must have been the work of the Holland explorer, Maartin. He was all about in Africa, and he died in there somewhere, at least he never came out... that was ten years ago. I've looked him up, and I find that he could do a water color—in fact there's a collection of his water colors in, the Dutch museum. They're very fine work, like this one; exquisite, I'd say. The fellow was born an artist."

"How it got into the hands of a native devil doctor is not difficult to imagine. The sleeping sickness may have wiped Maartin out, or the natives may have rushed his camp some morning, or he may have been mauled by a beast. Any article of a white man is medicine stuff you know. When you first showed me the thing I was puzzled. I knew what it was because I had read Le Petit's pretension... I can't call it a pretension now; the things are there whether he saw them or not."

"I think he did not see them. But it is certain from this water color that some one did; and Maartin is the only explorer that could have done such a color. As soon as I thought of Maartin I knew the thing could have been done by no other."

Lady Muriel had remained motionless on the stair. The door to the drawing room, before her, was partly open. She stepped in to the angle of the wall and drew the door slowly back until it covered this angle in which she stood.

She was rich in such experiences, for her success had depended, not a little, on overhearing what was being said. Through the crack of the door the whole interior of the room was visible.

Sir Godfrey Halleck, a little dapper man, was sitting across the table from Bramwell Winton. His elbows were on the table, and he was looking eagerly at the biologist. Bramwell Winton had in his hands the thing under discussion.

It seemed to be a piece of cardboard or heavy paper about six inches in length by, perhaps, four in width. Lady Muriel could not see what was drawn or painted on this paper. But the heart in her bosom quickened. She had chanced on the spoor of something worth while.

The little dapper man flung his head up.

"Oh, it's certain, Bramwell; it's beyond any question now. My word! If Tony were only alive, or I twenty years younger! It's no great undertaking, to go in to the Karamajo Mountains. One could start from the West Coast, unship any place and pick up a bunch of natives. The map on the back of the water color is accurate. The man who made that knew how to travel in an unknown country. He must have had a theodolite and the very best equipment. Anybody could follow that map."

There was a battered old dispatch box on the table beside Sir Godfrey's arm—one that had seen rough service.

"Of course," he went on, "we don't know when Tony picked up this drawing. It was in this box here with his diary, an automatic pistol and some quinine. The date of the diary entry is the only clue. That would indicate that he was near the Karamajo range at the time, not far from the spot."

He snapped his fingers.

"What damned luck!"

He clinched his hands and brought them down on the table.

"I'm nearly seventy, Bramwell, but you're ten years under that. You could go in. No one need know the object of your expedition. Hector Bartlett didn't tell the whole of England when he went out to Syria for the gold plates. A scientist can go anywhere. No one wonders what he is about. It wouldn't take three months. And the climate isn't poisonous. I think it's mostly high ground. Tony didn't complain about it."

The biologist answered without looking up.

"I haven't got the money, Sir Godfrey."

The dapper little man jerked his head as over a triviality.

"I'll stake you. It wouldn't cost above five hundred pounds."

The biologist sat back in his chair, at the words, and looked over the table at his guest.

"That's awfully decent of you, Godfrey," he said, "and I'd go if I saw a way to get your money to you if anything happened."

"Damn the money!" cried the other.

The biologist smiled.

"Well," he said, "let me think about it. I could probably fix up some sort of insurance. Lloyd's will bet nearly

any sane man that he won't die for three months. And besides I should wish to look things up a little."

Sir Godfrey rose.

"Oh, to be sure," he said, "you want to make certain about the thing. We might be wrong. I hadn't an idea what it was until I brought it to you, and of course Tony hadn't an idea. Make certain of it by all means."

The biologist extended his long legs under the table. He indicated the water color in his hand.

"This thing's certain," he said. "I know what this thing is."

He rapped the water color with the fingers of his free hand.

"This thing was painted on the spot. Maartin was looking at this thing when he painted it. You can see the big shadows underneath. No living creature could have imagined this or painted it from hearsay. He had to see it. And he did see it. I wasn't thinking about this, Godfrey. I was thinking the Dutch government might help a bit in the hope of finding some trace of Maartin and I should wish to examine any information they might have about him."

"Damn the Dutch government!" cried the little man. "And damn Lloyd's. We will go it on our own hook."

The biologist smiled.

"Let me think about it, a little," he said.

The dapper man flipped a big watch out of his waistcoat pocket.

"Surely!" he cried, "I must get the next train up. Have you got a place to lock the stuff? I had to cut this lid open with a chisel."

He indicated the tin dispatch box.

"Better keep it all. You'll want to run through the diary, I imagine. Tony's got down the things explorer chaps are always keen about; temperature, water supply, food and all that.... Now, I'm off. See you Thursday afternoon at the United Service Club. Better lunch with me."

Then he pushed the dispatch box across the table. The biologist rose and turned back the lid of the box. The contents remained as Sir Godfrey's dead son had left them; a limp leather diary, an automatic pistol of some American make, a few glass tubes of quinine, packed in cotton wool.

He put the water color on the bottom of the box and replaced them.

Then he took the dispatch box over to an old iron safe at the farther end of the room, opened it, set the box within, locked the door, and, returning, thrust the key under a pile of journals on the corner of the table. Then he went out, and down the stairway with his guest to the door.

They passed within a finger touch of Lady Muriel.

The woman was quick to act. There would be no borrowing from Bramwell Winton. He would now, with this expedition on the way, have no penny for another. But here before her, as though arranged by favor of Fatality, was something evidently of enormous value that she could cash in to Hecklemeir.

There was fame and fortune on the bottom of that dispatch box.

Something that would have been the greatest find of the age to Tony Halleck... something that the biologist, clearly from his words and manner, valued beyond the gold plates of Sir Hector Bartlett.

It was a thing that Hecklemeir would buy with money... the very thing which he would be at this opportune moment interested to purchase. She saw it in the very first comprehensive glance.

Her luck was holding Fortune was more than favorable, merely. It exercised itself actively, with evident concern, in her behalf.

Lady Muriel went swiftly into the room. She slipped the key from under the pile of journals and crossed to the safe sitting against the wall.

It was an old safe of some antediluvian manufacture and the lock was worn. The stem of the key was smooth and it slipped in her gloved hands. She could not hold it firm enough to turn the lock. Finally with her bare fingers and with one hand to aid the other she was able to move the lock and so open the safe.

She heard the door to the street close below, and the faint sound of Bramwell Winton's footsteps as though he went along the hall into the service portion of the house. She was nervous and hurried, but this reassured her.

The battered dispatch box sat within on the empty bottom of the a safe.

She lifted the lid; an automatic pistol lay on a limp leather-backed journal, stained, discolored and worn. Lady Muriel slipped her hand under these articles and lifted out the thing she sought.

Even in the pressing haste of her adventure, the woman could not forbear to look at the thing upon which these two men set so great a value. She stopped then a moment on her knees beside the safe, the prized article in her hands.

A map, evidently drawn with extreme care, was before her. She glanced at it hastily and turned the thing quickly over. What she saw amazed and puzzled her. Even in this moment of tense emotions she was astonished: She saw a pool of water,—not a pool of water in the ordinary sense—but a segment of water, as one would take a certain limited area of the surface of the sea or a lake or river. It was amber-colored and as smooth as glass, and on the surface of this water, as though they floated, were what appeared to be three, reddish-purple colored flowers, and beneath them on the bottom of the water were huge indistinct shadows.

The water was not clear to make out the shadows. But the appearing flowers were delicately painted. They stood out conspicuously on the glassy surface of the water as though they were raised above it.

Amazement held the woman longer than she thought, over this extraordinary thing. Then she thrust it into the bosom of her jacket, fastening the button securely over it.

The act kept her head down. When she lifted it Bramwell Winton was standing in the door.

In terror her hand caught up the automatic pistol out of the tin box. She acted with no clear, no determined intent. It was a gesture of fear and of indecision; escape through menace was perhaps the subconscious motive; the most primitive, the most common motive of all creatures in the corner. It extends downward from

the human mind through all life.

To spring up, to drag the veil over her face with her free hand, and to thrust the weapon at the figure in the doorway was all simultaneous and instinctive acts in the expression of this primordial impulse of escape through menace.

Then a thing happened.

There was a sharp report and the figure standing in the doorway swayed a moment and fell forward into the room. The unconscious gripping of the woman's fingers had fired the pistol.

For a moment Lady Muriel stood unmoving, arrested in every muscle by this accident. But her steady wits—skilled in her profession—did not wholly desert her. She saw that the man was dead. There was peril in that—immense, uncalculated peril, but the prior and immediate peril, the peril of discovery in the very accomplishment of theft, was by this act averted.

She stooped over, her eyes fixed on the sprawling body and with her free hand closed the door of the safe. Then she crossed the room, put the pistol down on the floor near the dead man's hand and went out.

She went swiftly down the stairway and paused a moment at the door to look out. The street was empty. She hurried away.

She met no one. A cab in the distance was appearing. She hailed it as from a cross street and returned to Regent. It was characteristic of the woman that her mind dwelt upon the spoil she carried rather than upon the act she had done.

She puzzled at the water color. How could these things be flowers?

Bramwell Winton was a biologist; he would not be concerned with flowers. And Sir Godfrey Halleck and his son Tony, the big game hunter, were not men to bother themselves with blossoms. Sir Godfrey, as she now remembered vaguely, had, like his dead son, been a keen sportsman in his youth; his country house was full of trophies.

She carried buttoned in the bosom of her jacket something that these men valued. But, what was it? Well, at any rate it was something that would mean fame and fortune to the one who should bring it out of Africa. That one would now be Hecklemeir, and she should have her share of the spoil.

Lady Muriel found the drawing-room of her former employer in some confusion; rugs were rolled up, bronzes were being packed. But in the disorder of it the proprietor was imperturbable. He merely elevated his eyebrows at her reappearance. She went instantly to the point.

"Hecklemeir," she said, "how would you like to have a definite objective in your explorations?"

The man looked at her keenly.

"What do you mean precisely?" he replied.

"I mean," she continued, "something that would bring one fame and fortune if one found it." And she added, as a bit of lure, "You remember the gold plates Hector Bartlett dug up in Syria?"

He came over closer to her; his little eyes narrowed.

"What have you got?" he said.

His facetious manner—that vulgar persons imagine to be distinguished—was gone out of him. He was direct and simple.

She replied with no attempt at subterfuge.

"I've got a map of a route to some sort of treasure—I don't know what—It's in the Karamajo Mountains in the French Congo; a map to it and a water color of the thing."

Hecklemeir did not ask how Lady Muriel came by the thing she claimed; his profession always avoided such detail. But he knew that she had gone to Bramwell Winton; and what she had must have come from some scientific source. The mention of Hector Bartlett was not without its virtue.

Lady Muriel marked the man's changed manner, and pushed her trade.

"I want a check for a hundred pounds and a third of the thing when you bring it out."

Hecklemeir stood for a moment with the tips of his fingers pressed against his lips; then replied.

"If you have anything like the thing you describe, I'll give you a hundred pounds... let me see it."

She took the water color out of the bosom of her jacket and gave it to him.

He carried it over to the window and studied it a moment. Then he turned with a sneering oath.

"The devil take your treasure," he said, "these things are water-elephants. I don't care a farthing if they stand on the bottom of every lake in Africa!"

And he flung the water color toward her. Mechanically the stunned woman picked it up and smoothed it out in her fingers.

With the key to the picture she saw it clearly, the shadowy bodies of the beasts and the tips of their trunks distended on the surface like a purple flower. And vaguely, as though it were a memory from a distant life, she recalled hearing the French Ambassador and Baron Rudd discussing the report of an explorer who pretended to have seen these supposed fabulous elephants come out of an African forest and go down under the waters of Lake Leopold.

She stood there a moment, breaking the thing into pieces with her bare hands. Then she went out. At the door on the landing she very nearly stepped against a little cockney.

"My Lidy," he whined, "I was bringing your gloves; you dropped them on your way up."

She took them mechanically and began to draw them on... the cryptic sign of the cleaner on the wrist hem was now to her indicative of her submerged estate. The little cockney hung about a moment as for a gratuity delayed, then he disappeared down the stair before her.

She went slowly down, fitting the gloves to her fingers.

Midway of the flight she paused. The voice of the little cockney, but without the accent, speaking to a

Bobby standing beside the entrance reached her.

"It was Sir Henry Marquis who set the Yard to register all laundry marks in London. Great C. I. D. Chief, Sir Henry!"

And Lady Muriel remembered that she had removed these gloves in order to turn the slipping key in Bramwell Winton's safe lock.

X.-The Last Adventure

The talk had run on treasure.

I could not sleep and my friends had dropped in. I had the big South room on the second floor of the Hotel de Paris. It looks down on the Casino and the Mediterranean. Perhaps you know it.

Queer friends, you'd say. Every man-jack of them a gambler. But when one begins to sit about all night with his eyes open, the devil's a friend.

Barclay was standing before the fire. The others had drifted out. He's a big man pitted with the smallpox. He made a gesture, flinging out his hand toward the door.

"That bunch thinks there's a curse on treasure, Sir Henry. That's one of the oldest notions in the world... it's unlucky."

"But I know where there's a treasure that's not unlucky. At least it was not unlucky for poor Charlie Tavor. He did not get it, but there was no curse on it that reached to him. It helped poor Charlie finish in style. He died like a lord in a big country house, with a formal garden and a line of lackeys."

Barclay paused.

"Queer chap, Tavor. He was the best all round explorer in the world. I bar nobody. Charlie Tavor could take a nigger and cross the poisonous plateau south west of the Libyan desert. I've backed him. I know... but he had no business sense, anybody could fool him. He found the stock of bar silver on the west face of the Andes that made old Nute Hardman a quarter of a million dollars, clear, after the cursed beast had split it a half dozen ways with a crooked South American government."

Barclay's teeth set and he jerked up his clinched hand.

"It was a damned steal, Sir Henry. A piece of low down, dirty robbery; and it was like taking candy away from a child.... 'Sign here, Mr. Tavor,' and Charlie would scrawl on his fist.. .. Some people think there's no hell, but what's God Almighty going to do with Old Nute?"

He flung out his hand again.

"Still the thing didn't dent Charlie. He never missed a step. 'Don't bother, Barclay, old man,' he'd say, 'I'll find something else,' and then he'd go off into this dream he had of coming back when he'd struck it, to the old home county in England and laying it over the bunch that had called him 'no good.' He never talked much, but I gathered from odds and ends that he was the black sheep in a pretty smart flock.

"Then, I'd stake him to a cheap outfit—not much, I've said he could push through the Libyan desert with a nigger—and he'd drop out of the world. It wasn't charity. I got my money's worth. The clay pots he brought me from Yucatan would sell any day for more cash than I ever advanced him."

Barclay moved a little before the fire. I was listening in a big chair, my feet extended toward the hearth; a smoking jacket had replaced my dinner coat.

"It was five years ago, in London," Barclay went on, "that I fitted Charlie out for his last adventure. He wanted to land in the gulf of Pe-chi-li and go into the great desert of the Shamo in Central Mongolia. You'll find the Shamo all dotted out on the maps; but it's faked dope. No white man knows anything about the Shamo.

"It's a trick to lay off these great waste areas and call them elevated plateaus or sunken plateaus. You can't go by the atlas. Where's Kane's Open Polar Sea and Morris K. Jessup's Land? Still, Charlie thought the Shamo might be a low plain, and he thought he might find something in it. You see the great gold caravans used to cross it, three thousand years ago... and as Charlie kept saying, 'What's time in the Shamo?'

"Well, I bought him a kit of stuff, and he took a P. and O. through the Suez. I got a long letter from Pekin two months later; and then Charlie Tavor dropped out of the world. I went back to America. No word ever came from Charlie. I thought he was dead. I suppose a white man's life is about the cheapest thing there is northwest of the Yellow River; and Charlie never had an escort. A coolie and an old service pistol would about foot up his defenses.

"And there's every ghastly disease in Mongolia.... Still some word always came from Tavor inside of a year; a tramp around the Horn would bring in a dirty note, written God knows where, and carried out to the ship by a naked native swimming with the thing in his teeth; or some little embassy would send it to me in a big official envelope stamped with enough red wax to make a saint's candle.

"But the luck failed this time. A year ran on, then two, then three and I passed Charlie up. He'd surely 'gone west!'"

Barclay paused, thrust his hands into the pockets of his dinner jacket and looked down at me.

"One night in New York I got a call from the City Hospital. The telephone message came in about ten o'clock. I was in Albany; I found the message when I got back the following morning and I went ever to the hospital.

"The matron said that they had picked up a man on the North River docks in an epileptic fit and the only name they could find on him was my New York address. They thought he was going to die, he was cold and stiff for hours, and they had undertaken to reach me in order to identify him. But he did not die. He was up

this morning and she would bring him in.”

Barclay paused again.

“She brought in Charlie Tavor!... And I nearly screamed when I saw the man. He was dressed in one of those cheap hand-me-downs that the Germans used to sell in the tropics for a pound, three and six, his eyes looked as dead as glass and he was as white as plaster. How the man managed to keep on his feet I don't know.

“I didn't stop for any explanation. I got Tavor into a taxi, and over to my apartment.”

Barclay moved in his position before the fire.

“But on the way over a thing happened that some little god played in for a joke. There was a block just where Thirty-third crosses into Fifth Avenue, and our taxi pulled up by a limousine.”

Barclay suddenly thrust out his big pock-marked face.

“The thing couldn't have happened by itself. Some burlesque angel put it over when the Old Man wasn't looking. Spread out on the tapestry cushions of that limousine was Nute Hardman!

“There they were side by side. Not six feet apart; Old Nute in a sable-lined coat and Charlie in his hand-me-down, at a pound, three and six.”

The muscles in Barclay's big jaw tightened.

“Maybe there is a joker that runs the world, and maybe the devil runs it. Anyhow it's a queer system. Here was Charlie Tavor, straight as a string, down and out. And here was Nute Hardman, so crooked that a fly couldn't light on him and stand level, with everything that money could buy.

“I cast it up while the taxi stood there beside the car. Nute was consul in a South American port that you couldn't spell and couldn't find on the map. He didn't have two dollars to rub together, until Charlie Tavor turned up. There he sat, out of the world, forgotten, growing moss and getting ready to rot; and God Almighty, or the devil, or whatever it is, steered Charlie Tavor in to him with the bar silver.

“He picked Charlie to the bone and cut for the States. And this damned crooked luck went right along with him. He was in a big apartment, now, up on Fifth Avenue and four-flushing toward every point of the compass. His last stunt was 'patron of science.' He'd gotten into the Geographical Society, and he was laying lines for the Royal Society in London. He had a Harvard don working over in the Metropolitan library, building him a thesis!

“The thing made me ugly. I wanted to have a plain talk with the devil. He wasn't playing fair. Old Nute couldn't have been worth the whole run of us; I've legged some myself, and I had a right to be heard. The devil ought to make old Nute split up with Charlie. True, Charlie belonged in the other camp, but I didn't. And if I wanted a little favor I felt that the devil ought to come across with it... I put it up to him, or down to him, as you'd say, while I sat there in that taxi.”

There was a grim energy in Barclay's face. He was no ordinary person.

“I got Tavor up to my apartment, and a goblet of brandy in him. I never saw anybody look like Tavor as he sat there propped up in the chair with a lot of cushions around him. It was winter and cold. He had no clothes to speak of, but he did not seem to notice either the cold outside or the heat in the apartment, as though, somehow, he couldn't tell the difference.

“And he was the strangest color that any human being ever was in the world. I've said that he looked like plaster, and he did look like it, but he looked like a plaster man with a thin coat of tan colored paint on him.”

Barclay paused.

“It's hardly a wonder that no message reached me. The devil couldn't have got word out of the hell land he'd been in. Lost is no name for it. He'd been all over the Shamo, and the big Sahara's a park to it. He'd been North to the Kangai where they used to get the gold that the caravans carried across the Shamo, and he'd followed the old trails South to the great wall.

“It's all a Satan's country. I don't know why God Almighty wanted to make a hell hole like the Shamo!”

He paused, then he went on.

“But it wasn't in the Shamo that Tavor got track of the thing he was after. He said that the age he was trying to get back into was much more remote than he imagined. It must have been a good many thousands of years ago. He couldn't tell; long before anything like dependable history at any rate.... There must have been an immense age of great oriental splendor in the South of Asia and along the East African coast, dying out at about the time our knowledge of human history begins.”

Barclay went on, unmoving before the fire.

“I don't know why we imagine that the legends of a little tribe in Syria running back to the fifth or sixth century begins the world.... Anyway, Tavor got the notion, as I have said, of an age in decay at about the time these legends start in; with a trade moving west.

“He nosed it all out! God knows how. Of course it was only a theory—only a notion in fact. He hadn't anything to go on that I could see. But after two years' drifting about in the Shamo, this is how he finally figured it:

“Northern Asia traded gold in the west; the mined product would be molded into bricks in lower Mongolia. It was then carried over land to the southwest coast of Arabia. There was some great center of world commerce low down on the Red Sea about eight hundred miles south of Port Said.

“Tavor said that when he began to think about the thing the caravan route was pretty clear to him. Arabia seemed to have been connected, in that remote age, with Persia at the Strait of Ormus, so there was a direct overland route.... That put another notion into Tavor's head; these treasure caravans must have crossed the immense Sandy Desert of El-Khali. And this notion developed another; if one were seeking the wreck of any one of these treasure caravans he would be more likely to find it in the El-Khali than in the Shamo.”

Barclay moved away from the fire, got a chair and sat down. He was across the hearth from me. He looked about the room and at the curtained windows that shut out the blue night.

"You can't sleep," he went on, "so I might just as well tell you this. A good deal of it is what the lawyers called dicta... obiter dicta; when the judge gets to putting in stuff on the side ... but it's a long time 'til daylight."

He had taken a small chair and he sat straight in it after the manner of a big man.

"You see the treasure carried south across the Shamo would be 'gold wheat' (dust, we'd call it), packed in green skins... you couldn't find that. But the caravans crossing the El-Khali would carry this gold in bricks for the great west trade. Now a gold brick is indestructible; you can't think of anything that would last forever like a gold brick. Nothing would disturb it, water and sun are alike without effect on it....

"That was Tavor's notion, and he went right after it. Most of us would have slacked out after two years in the hell hole of Central Mongolia. But not Charlie Tavor. He got down to Arabia somehow; God knows, I never asked him,—and he went right on into the Great Sandy Desert of Roba El Khali. The oldest caravan route known runs straight across the desert from Muscat to Mecca. It's a thousand miles across—but you can strike the line of it nearly four hundred miles west in a hundred miles travel by going due South from the coast between fifty and fifty-five degrees.

"You'll find this old caravan route drawn on the map, a dead straight line across the thirty-third parallel. But the man that put it on there never traveled over it. He doesn't know whether it is a sunken plateau, or an elevated plateau, or what the devil it is that this old route runs across. And he doesn't know what the earth's like in the great basin of the El-Khali; maybe it's sand and maybe it's something else."

Barclay stopped and looked queerly at me.

"The Doctor Cooks have put a lot of stuff over on us. The fact is, there's six million square miles of the earth's surface that nobody knows anything about."

He got a package of American cigarettes out of his pocket, selected one and lighted it with a fragment of the box thrust into the fire.

"That's where Tavor was the last year. When the ambulance picked him up, he'd crawled around the Horn in a Siamese tramp."

He paused.

"Great people, the English; no fag-out to them. Look how Scott went on in the Antarctic with his feet frozen... It's in the blood; it was in Tavor.

"I sat there that winter night in my room in New York while he told me all about it.

"It was morning when he finished—the milk wagons were on the street,—and then, he added, quite simply, as though it were a matter of no importance,

"'But I can't go back, Barclay, old man; my tramping's over. That was no fit I had on the dock.'

"He looked at me with his dead eyes in his tan-colored plaster face. You've heard of the hemp-chewers and the betel-chewers; well, all that's baby-food to a thing they've got in the Shamo. It's a shredded root, bitter like cactus, and when you chew it, you don't get tired and you don't get hot... you go on and you don't know what the temperature is. Then some day, all at once, you go down, cold all over like a dead man... that time you don't die, but the next time..."

Barclay snapped his fingers without adding the word.'

"And you can calculate when the second one will strike you. It's a hundred and eighty-one days to the hour."

Then he added:

"That was the first one on the dock. Tavor had six months to live."

The big man broke the cigarette in his fingers and threw the pieces into the fire. Then he turned abruptly toward me.

"And I know where he wanted to live for those six months. The old dream was still with him. He wanted that country house in his native county in England, with the formal garden and the lackeys. The finish didn't bother him, but he wanted to round out his life with the dream that he had carried about with him.

"I put him to bed and went down into Broadway, and walked about all night. Tavor couldn't go back and he had to have a bunch of money.

"It was no good. I couldn't see it. I went back Tavor was up and I sat him down to a cross examination that would have delighted the soul of a Philadelphia lawyer."

Barclay paused.

"It was all at once that I saw it—like you'd snap your fingers. It was an accident of Charlie's talk... one of those obiter dicta, that I mentioned a while ago. But I stopped Charlie and went over to the Metropolitan Library; there I got me an expert—an astronomer chap, as it happened, reading calculus in French for fun—I gave him a twenty and I looked him in the eye.

"Now, Professor,' I said, 'this dope's got to be straight stuff, I'm risking money on it; every word you write has got to be the truth, and every line and figure that you put on your map has got to be correct with a capital K.'"

"'Surely,' he said, 'I shall follow Huxley for the text and I shall check the chart calculations for error.'

"'And there's another thing, professor. You've got to go dumb on this job, for which I double the twenty.' He looked puzzled, but when he finally understood me, he said 'Surely' again, and I went back to my apartment.

"'Charlie,' I said, 'how much money would it take for this English country life business?'

"His eyes lighted up a little.

"'Well, Barclay, old man,' he replied, 'I've estimated it pretty carefully a number of times. I could take Eldon's place for six months with the right to purchase for two thousand dollars paid down; and I could manage the servants and the living expenses for another four thousand. I fear I should not be able to get on with a less sum than six thousand dollars.'

"Then," he added—he was a child to the last—"perhaps Mr. Hardman will now be able to advance it; he promised me 'a further per cent'," those were his words, when the matter was finally concluded.

"Then ten thousand would do?"

"My word," he said, "I should go it like a lord on ten thousand. Do you think Mr. Hardman would consider that sum?"

"I'm going to try him," I said, "I've got some influence in a quarter that he depends on."

"And I went out. I went down to my bank and got twenty U. S. bonds of a thousand each. At five o'clock, the professor had his dope ready—the text and the chart, neatly folded in a big manilla envelope with a rubber band around it. And that evening I went up to see old Nute."

Barclay got another cigarette. There was a queer cynicism in his big pitted face.

"The church bunch," he said, "have got a strange conception of the devil; they think he's always ready to lie down on his friends. That's a fool notion. The devil couldn't do business if he didn't come across when you needed him."

"And there's another thing; the old-timers, when they went after their god for a favor, always began by reciting what they'd done for him.... That was sound dope! I tried it myself on the way up to old Nute's apartment on Fifth Avenue."

"I went over a lot of things. And whenever I made a point, I rapped it on the pavement with the ferule of my walking stick; as one would say, 'you owe me for that!'"

"You see I was worked up about Tavor. When a man's carried a dream over all the hell he'd pushed through he ought to have it in the end."

Barclay paused and flicked the ashes from his cigarette.

"You know the swell apartments on Fifth Avenue; no name, only a number; every floor a residence, only the elevators connecting them. I found old Nute in the seventh; and I was bucked the moment I got in."

"The door from the drawing room to the library was open. The Harvard don was going out, the one Nute had employed to get up his thesis for the Royal Society of London—I mentioned him a while ago. And I heard his final remark, flung back at the door. 'What you require, Sir, is the example case of some new exploration—one that you have yourself conducted.'"

"That bucked me; the devil was on the job!"

Barclay stopped again. He sat for a moment watching the smoke from the cigarette climb in a blue mist slowly into the beautiful fresco of the ceiling.

"I told old Nute precisely what I've told you. How I'd backed Tavor for his last adventure, and where he'd been; all over Central Mongolia and finally across the Great Sandy Desert of El-Khali. And I told him what Charlie was after; the theory he started with and his final conclusion when he made his last push along the old caravan route west from Muscat."

"I went into the details, and the big notion that Tavor had slowly pieced together; how the gold was mined in the ranges south of Siberia, carried in green skins to lower Mongolia, melted there and taken for trade Southwest across the El-Khali to an immense Babylon of Commerce of which the present Mecca is perhaps a decadent residuum."

"I put it all in; the accessibility of this desert from the coast on three sides, how the old caravan route parallels the thirty-third meridian and how Charlie struck it four hundred miles out into the desert in a hundred miles travel due south in longitude between 50 and 55 degrees; all the details of Tavor's hunt for the wreck of one of these treasure caravans."

"Old Nute looked at me with his little hard eyes slipping about."

"And he didn't find it?" he said.

"I didn't answer that. I went ahead and told him how I found Tavor and the shape he was in, and then I added, 'I'm not an explorer, and Charlie can't go back.'"

"Old Nute's thick neck shot out at that."

"Then he did find it?" he said.

"Now look here, Nute," I said, "you're not trading with Tavor on this deal. You're trading with me and I'm just as slick as you are. You'll get no chance to slip under on this. You forget all I've told you just as though it had nothing to do with what I'm going to tell you, and I'll come to the point."

"Forget it?" he said.

"Yes," I said, "forget it. I'm not going to put you on to what Charlie knows, with any strings to it, or with any pointers that you can run down without us. I've told you all about Tavor's big hunt through the Shamo and the El-Khali for a purpose of my own and not for the purpose of enabling you to locate the thing that Charlie Tavor knows about."

"Hardman's voice went down into a low note. 'What does he know?' he said."

"I looked him squarely in the little reptilian eyes. 'He knows where there is a treasure in gold equal in our money to three hundred thousand dollars!'"

"Old Nute's little eyes focused into his nose an instant. Then he took a chance at me."

"What's the country like?"

"I went on as though I didn't see the drift."

"Tavor says this area of the earth's surface is a great plain practically level, sloping gradually on one side and rising gradually on the other."

"Sand?" said Nute.

"No," I replied, "Tavor says that contrary to the common notion, this plain is not covered with sand, it's a kind of chalk deposit."

"Hard to get to?"

"Old Nute shot the query in with a little quick duck of his head.

"I went straight on with the answer.

"Tavor says it's about a five or six days' journey from a sea coast town.'

"Hard traveling?"

"No, Tavor says you can get within two miles of the place without any difficulty whatever—he says anybody can do it. The only difficulties are on the last two miles. But up to the last two miles, it's a holiday journey for a middle-aged woman.'

"Old Nute grunted. He put his fat hands together over his waistcoat and twiddled his thumbs.

"Well,' he said, 'what's in your mind about it?"

"We were now up to the trade and I stated the terms.

"It's like this,' I said, 'Tavor's down and out. He's got only six months to live. Fifth Avenue piled full of gold won't do him any good if he's got to wait for it. What he wants is a little money quick!"

"Old Nute's eyes squinted.

"How much money?' he said.

"Well,' I said, 'Tavor will turn his map over to you for ten thousand dollars... Death's crowding him.'

"Old Nute's fat fingers began to drum on his waistcoat.

"How do I know the gold's there and the map's straight?"

"Did you ever know Tavor to lie?' I said.

"No,' he said, 'Tavor's not a liar; but I am a business man, Mr. Barclay, and in business we do not go on verbal assurances, no matter how unquestioned.'

"That's right,' I replied, 'I'm a business man, too; that's why I came instead of sending Tavor.... you found out he wasn't a business man in the first deal.'

"Then I took my 'shooting irons' out of my pocket and laid them on the table.

"There,' I said, 'are twenty, one-thousand United States bonds, not registered,' and I put my hand on one of the big manilla envelopes; 'and here,' I said, 'is an accurate description of the place where this treasure lies and a map of the route to it,' and I put my hand on the other.

"Now,' I went on, 'I believe every word of this thing. Charles Tavor is the best all-round explorer in the world. I've known him a lifetime and what he says goes with me. We'll put up this bunch of stuff with a stakeholder for the term of a year, and if the gold isn't there and if the map showing the route to it isn't correct and if every word I've said about it isn't precisely the truth, you take down my bonds and keep them.'

"Old Nute got up and walked about the room. I knew what he was thinking. 'Here's another one of them—there's all kinds.'

"But it hooked him. We wrote out the terms and put the stuff up with old Commodore Harris—the straightest sport in America. Nute had the right to copy the map, and the text and a year to verify it. And I took the ten thousand back to Charlie Tavor."

Barclay got up and went over to the window. He drew back the heavy tapestry curtains. It was morning; the blue dawn was beginning to illumine Monaco and the polished arc of the sea. He stood looking down into it, holding the curtain in his hand.

"I give the devil his due for that, Sir Henry," he said. "Charlie Tavor got his dream at the end; he died like a gentleman in his English country house with the formal garden and the lackeys."

"And the other man got the treasure?" I said. Barclay replied without moving.

"No, he didn't get it."

"Then you lost your bonds?"

"No, I didn't lose them; Commodore Harris handed them back to me on the last day of the year."

I sat up in my big lounge chair.

"Didn't Hardman make a fight for them; if he didn't find the treasure—didn't he squeal?"

Barclay turned about, drawing the curtain close behind him.

"And he laughed out of the high-brow bunch that he was trying to get into?... I said old Nute was a crook, but I didn't say he was a fool."

I turned around in the chair.

"I don't understand this thing, Barclay. If the treasure was there, and you gave Hardman a correct map of the route to it, and it lay on a practically level plain, and he could get within two miles of it without difficulty in four or five days' travel from a sea coast town, why couldn't he get it? Was it all the truth?"

"It was every word precisely the truth," he said.

"Then why couldn't he get it?"

Barclay looked down at me; his big pitted face was illumined with a cynical smile.

"Well, Sir Henry," he said, "the trouble is with those last two miles. They're water... straight down. The level plain is the bed of the Atlantic ocean and that gold is in the hold of the Titanic."

XI.-American Horses

The thing began in the colony room of the Empire Club in London. The colony room is on the second floor and looks out over Piccadilly Circus. It was at an hour when nobody is in an English club. There was a drift of dirty fog outside. Such nights come along in October.

Douglas Hargrave did not see the Baronet until he closed the door behind him. Sir Henry was seated at a table, leaning over, his face between his hand, and his elbows resting on the polished mahogany board. There was a sheet of paper on the table between the Baronet's elbows. There were a few lines written on the paper and the man's faculties were concentrated on them. He did not see the jewel dealer until that person was half across the room, then he called to him.

"Hello, Hargrave," he said. "Do you know anything about ciphers?"

"Only the trade one that our firm uses," replied the jewel dealer. "And that's a modification of the A B C code."

"Well," he said, "take a look at this."

The jewel dealer sat down at the other side of the table and the Baronet handed him the sheet of paper. The man expected to see a lot of queer signs and figures; but instead he found a simple trade's message, as it seemed to him.

P.L.A. shipped nine hundred horses on freight steamer Don Carlow from N. Y.

Have the bill of lading handed over to our agent to check up.

"Well," said the jewel dealer, "somebody's going to ship nine hundred horses. Where's the mystery?"

The Baronet shrugged his big shoulders.

"The mystery," he said, "is everywhere. It's before and after and in the body of this message. There's hardly anything to it but mystery."

"Who sent it?" said Hargrave.

"That's one of the mysteries," replied the Baronet.

"Ah!" said the jewel dealer. "Who received it?"

"That's another," he answered.

"At any rate," continued Hargrave, "you know where you got it."

"Right," replied the Baronet. "I know where I got it." He took three newspapers out of the pocket of his big tweed coat. "There it is," he said, "in the personal column of three newspapers—today's Times printed in London; the Matin printed in Paris; and a Dutch daily printed in Amsterdam."

And there was the message set up in English, in two sentences precisely word for word, in three newspapers printed on the same day in London, Paris and Amsterdam.

"It seems to be a message all right," said Hargrave: "But why do you imagine it's a cipher?"

The Baronet looked closely at the American jewel dealer for a moment.

"Why should it be printed in English in these foreign papers," he said, "if it were not a cipher?"

"Perhaps," said Hargrave, "the person for whom it's intended does not know any other language."

The Baronet shrugged his shoulders.

"The persons for whom this message is intended," he said, "do not confine themselves to a single language. It's a pretty well-organized international concern."

"Well," said Hargrave, "it doesn't look like a mystery that ought to puzzle the ingenuity of the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department of the metropolitan police." He nodded to Sir Henry. "You have only to look out for the arrival of nine hundred horses and when they get in to see who takes them off the boat. The thing looks easy."

"It's not so easy as it looks," replied the Baronet. "Evidently these horses might go to France, Holland or England. That's the secret in this message. That's where the cipher comes in. The name of the port is in that cipher somewhere."

"But you can, watch the steamer," said Hargrave, "the Don Carlos."

The Baronet laughed.

"There's no such steamer!" He got up and began to walk round the table. "Nine hundred horses," he said. "This thing has got to stop. They're on the sea now, on the way over from America: We have got to find out where they will go ashore."

He stopped, stooped over and studied the message which he had written out and which also lay before him in the three newspapers.

"It's there," he said, "the name of the port of arrival, somewhere in those two sentences. But I can't get at it. It's no cipher that I have ever heard of. It's no one of the hundred figure or number ciphers that the experts in the department know anything about. If we knew the port of arrival we could pick up the clever gentleman who comes to take away the horses. But what's the port—English, French or Dutch? There are a score of ports." He struck the paper with his hand. "It's there, my word for it, if we could only decode the thing."

Then he stood up, his face lifted, his fingers linked behind his back. He crossed the room and stood looking out at the thin yellow fog drifting over Piccadilly Circus. Finally he came back, gathered up his papers and put them in the pocket of his big tweed coat.

"There's one man in Europe," he said, "who can read this thing. That's the Swiss expert criminologist, old Arnold, of Zurich. He's lecturing at the Sorbonne in Paris. I'm going to see him."

Then he went out.

Now that, as has been said, is how the thing began. It was the first episode in the series of events that began to go forward on this extraordinary night. One will say that the purchasing agent for a great New York jewel house ought to be accustomed to adventures. The writers of romance have stimulated that fancy. But

the fact is that such persons are practical people. They never do any of the things that the story writers tell us. They never carry jewels about with them. Of course they know the police departments of foreign cities. All jewel dealers make a point of that. Hargrave's father was an old friend of Sir Henry Marquis, chief of the C. I. D., and the young man always went to see him when he happened in London. That explains the freedom of his talk to Hargrave on this night in the Empire Club in Piccadilly.

The young man went over and sat down by the fire. The big room was empty. The sounds outside seemed muffled and distant. The incident that had just passed impressed him. He wondered why people should imagine that a purchasing agent of a jewel house must be a sort of expert in the devices of mystery. As has been said, the thing's a notion. Everything is shipped through reliable transportation companies and insured. There was much more mystery in a shipload of horses—the nine hundred horses that were galloping through the head of Sir Henry Marquis—than in all the five prosaic years during which young Hargrave had succeeded his father as a jewel buyer. The American was impressed by this mystery of the nine hundred horses. Sir Henry had said it was a mystery in every direction.

Now, as he sat alone before the fire in the colony room of the Empire Club and thought about it, the thing did seem inexplicable. Why should the metropolitan police care who imported horses, or in what port a shipload of them was landed? The war was over. Nobody was concerned about the importation of horses. Why should Sir Henry be so disturbed about it? But he was disturbed; and he had rushed off to Paris to see an expert on ciphers. That seemed a tremendous lot of trouble to take. The Baronet knew the horses were on the sea coming from America, he said. If he knew that much, how could he fail to discover the boat on which they were carried and the port at which they would arrive? Nobody could conceal nine hundred horses!

Hargrave was thinking about that, idly, before the glow of the coal fire, when the second episode in this extraordinary affair arrived.

A steward entered.

"Visitor, please," he said, "to see Mr. Hargrave."

Then he presented his tray with a card. The jewel dealer took the card with some surprise. Everybody knew that he was at the Empire Club. It is a colony thing with chambers for foreign guests. A list of arrivals is always printed. He saw at a glance that it was not a man's card; the size was too large. Then he turned it over before the light of the fire. The name was engraved in script, an American fashion at this time.

The woman's card had surprised him; but the name on it brought him up in his chair—"Mrs. A. B. Farmingham." It was not a name that he knew precisely; but he knew its genera, the family or group to which it belonged. Mr. Jefferson removed titles of nobility in the American republic, but his efforts did not eliminate caste zones. It only made the lines of cleavage more pronounced. One knew these zones by the name formation. Everybody knew "Alfa Baba" Farmingham, as the Sunday Press was accustomed to translate his enigmatical initials. Some wonderful Western bonanza was behind the man. Mrs. "Alfa Baba" Farmingham would be, then, one of the persons that Hargrave's house was concerned to reach. He looked again at the card. In the corner the engraved address, "Point View, Newport," was marked out with a pencil and "The Ritz" written over it.

He got his coat and hat and followed the steward out of the club. There was a carriage at the curb. A footman was holding the door open, and a woman, leaning over in the seat, was looking out. She was precisely what Hargrave expected to see, one of those dominant, impatient, aggressive women who force their way to the head of social affairs in America. She shot a volley of questions at him the moment he was before the door.

"Are you Douglas Hargrave, the purchasing agent for Bartholdi & Banks?"

The man said that he was, and at her service, and so forth. But she did not stop to listen to any reply.

"You look mighty young, but perhaps you know your business. At any rate, it's the best I can do. Get in."

Hargrave got in, the footman closed the door, and the carriage turned into Piccadilly Circus. The woman did not pay very much attention to him. She made a laconic explanation, the sort of explanation one would make to a shopkeeper.

"I want your opinion on some jewels," she said. "I have a lot to do—no time to fool away. When I found that I could see the jewels to-night I concluded to pick you up on my way down. I didn't find out about it in time to let you know."

Hargrave told her that he would be very glad to give her the benefit of his experience.

"Glad, nonsense!" she said. "I'll pay your fee. Do you know a jewel when you see it?"

"I think I do, madam," he replied.

She moved with energy.

"It won't do to think," she said. "I have got to know. I don't buy junk."

He tried to carry himself up to her level with a laugh.

"I assure you, madam," he said, "our house is not accustomed to buy junk. It's a perfectly simple matter to tell a spurious jewel."

And he began to explain the simple, decisive tests. But she did not listen to him.

"I don't care how a vet knows that a hunter's sound. All that I want to be certain about is that he does know it. I don't want to buy hunters on my own hook. Neither do I want to buy jewels on what I know about them. If you know, that's all I care about it. And you must know or old Bartholdi wouldn't trust you. That's what I'm going on."

She was a big aggressive woman, full of energy. Hargrave could not see her very well, but that much was abundantly clear. The carriage turned out of Piccadilly Circus, crossed Trafalgar Square and stopped before Blackwell's Hotel. Blackwell's has had a distinct clientele since the war; a sort of headquarters for Southeastern European visitors to London.

When the carriage stopped Mrs. Farmingham opened the door herself, before the footman could get down, and got out. It was the restless American impatience always cropping out in this woman.

"Come along, young man," she said, "and tell me whether this stuff is O. K. or junk."

They got in a lift and went up to the top floor of the hotel. Mrs. Farmingham got out and Hargrave followed her along the hall to a door at the end of a corridor. He could see her now clearly in the light. She had gray eyes, a big determined mouth, and a mass of hair dyed as only a Parisian expert, in the Rue de la Paix, can do it. She went directly to a door at the end of the corridor, rapped on it with her gloved hand, and turned the latch before anybody could possibly have responded.

Hargrave followed her into the room. It was a tiny sitting room, one of the inexpensive rooms in the hotel. There was a bit of fire in the grate, and standing by the mantelpiece was, a big old man with close-cropped hair and a pale, unhealthy face. It was the type of face that one associates with tribal races in Southeastern Europe. He was dressed in a uniform that fitted closely to his figure. It was a uniform of some elevated rank, from the apparent richness of it. There were one or two decorations on the coat, a star and a heavy bronze medal. The man looked to be of some importance; but this importance did not impress Mrs. Farmingham.

"Major," she said in her direct fashion, "I have brought an expert to look at the jewels."

She indicated Hargrave, and the foreign officer bowed courteously. Then he took two candles from the mantelpiece and placed them on a little table that stood in the center of the room.

He put three chairs round this table, sat down in one of them, unbuttoned the bosom of his coat and took out a big oblong jewel case. The case was in an Oriental design and of great age. The embroidered silk cover was falling apart. He opened the case carefully, delicately, like one handling fragile treasure. Inside, lying each in a little pocket that exactly fitted the outlines of the stone, were three rows of sapphires. He emptied the jewels out on the table.

"Sir," he said, speaking with a queer, hesitating accent, "it saddens one unspeakably to part with the ancient treasure of one's family."

Mrs. Farmingham said nothing whatever. Hargrave stooped over the jewels and spread them out on top of, the table. There were twenty-nine sapphires of the very finest quality. He had never seen better sapphires anywhere. He remembered seeing stones that were matched up better; but he had never seen individual stones that were any finer in anybody's collection. The foreigner was composed and silent while the American examined the jewels. But Mrs. Farmingham moved restlessly in her chair.

"Well," she said, "are they O. K.?"

"Yes, madam," said Hargrave; "they are first-class stones."

"Sure?" she asked.

"Quite sure, madam," replied the American. "There can be no question about it."

"Are they worth eighteen thousand dollars?"

She put the question in such a way that Hargrave understood her perfectly.

"Well," he said, "that depends upon a good many conditions. But I'm willing to say, quite frankly, that if you don't want the jewels I'm ready to take them for our house at eighteen thousand dollars."

The big, dominant, aggressive woman made the gesture of one who cracks a dog whip.

"That's all right," she said. Then she turned to the foreigner. "Now, major, when do you want this money?"

The big old officer shrugged his shoulders and put out his hands.

"To-morrow, madam; to-morrow as I have said to you; before midday I must return. I can by no means remain an hour longer; my leave of absence expires. I must be in Bucharest at sunrise on the morning of the twelfth of October. I can possibly arrive if I leave London to-morrow at midday, but not later."

Mrs. Farmingham began to wag her head in a determined fashion.

"Nonsense," she said, "I can't get the money by noon. I have telegraphed to the Credit Lyonnais in Paris. I can get it by the day after to-morrow, or perhaps to-morrow evening."

The foreigner looked down on the floor.

"It is impossible," he said.

The woman interrupted him.

"Now, major, that's all nonsense! A day longer can't make any difference."

He drew himself up and looked calmly at her.

"Madam," he said, "it would make all the difference in the world. If I should remain one day over my time I might just as well remain all the other days that are to follow it."

There was finality and conviction in the man's voice. Mrs. Farmingham got up and began to walk about the room. She seemed to speak to Hargrave, although he imagined that she was speaking to herself.

"Now this is a pretty how-de-do," she said "Lady Holbert told me about this find to-night at dinner. She said Major Mikos wanted the money at once; but I didn't suppose he wanted it cash on the hour like that. She brought me right away after dinner to see him. And then I went for you." She stopped, and again made the gesture as of one who, cracks a dog whip. "Now what shall I do?" she said.

The last remark was evidently not addressed to Hargrave. It was not addressed to anybody. It was merely the reflection of a dominant nature taking counsel with itself. She took another turn about the room. Then she pulled up short.

"See here," she said, "suppose you take these jewels and give the major his money in the morning. Then I'll buy them of you."

"Very well, madam," said Hargrave; "but in that event we shall charge you a ten per cent commission."

She stormed at that.

"Eighteen hundred dollars?" she said. "That's absurd, ridiculous! I'm willing to pay you five hundred dollars."

The American did not undertake to argue the matter with her.

"We don't handle any sale for a less commission," he said.

Then he explained that he could not act as any sort of agent in the matter; that the only thing he could do would be to buy the jewels outright and resell them to her. His house would not make any sale for a less profit than ten per cent. Hargrave did not propose to be involved in any but a straight-out transaction. He was quite willing to buy the sapphires for eighteen thousand dollars. There was five thousand dollars' profit in them on any market. He was perfectly safe either way about. If Mrs. Farmingham made the repurchase there was a profit of ten per cent. If not, there was five thousand dollars' profit in the bargain under any conditions.

They were Siamese stones, and the cutting was of an old design. They were not from any stock in Europe. Hargrave knew what Europe held of sapphires. These were from some Oriental stock. And everybody bought an Oriental stone wherever he could get it. How the seller got it did not matter. Nobody undertook to verify the title of a Siamese trader or a Burma agent.

Mrs. Farmingham walked about for several minutes, saying over to herself as she had said before:

"Now what shall I do?"

Then like the big, dominant, decisive nature that she was she came to a conclusion.

"All right," she said, "bring in the money in the morning and get the sapphires. I'll take them up in a day or two. Good-by, major; come along, Mr. Hargrave." And she went out of the room.

The American stopped at the door to bow to the old Rumanian officer who was standing up beside the table before the heap of sapphires. They got into the carriage at the curb before Blackwell's Hotel. Mrs. Farmingham put Hargrave down at the Empire Club, and the carriage passed on, across Piccadilly Circus toward the Ritz.

The following morning Hargrave got the sapphires from Major Mikos, and paid him eighteen thousand dollars in English sovereigns for them. He wanted gold to carry back with him for the jewels that he had brought out of the kingdom of Rumania. He seemed a simple, anxious person. He wished to carry his treasures with him like a peasant. The sapphires looked better in the daylight. There ought to have been seven thousand dollars' profit in them, perhaps more; seven thousand dollars, at any rate, that very day in the London market. Hargrave took them to the Empire Club and put them in a sealed envelope in the steward's safe.

The thin drift of yellow remained in the city; that sulphurous haze that the blanket of sea fog, moving over London, presses down into her streets. It was not heavy yet; it was only a mist of saffron; but it threatened to gather volume as the day advanced.

At luncheon Hargrave got a note from Mrs. Farmingham, a line scrawled on her card to say that she would call for him at three o'clock. Her carriage was before the door on the stroke of the hour, and she explained that the money to redeem the jewels had arrived. The Credit Lyonnais had sent it over from Paris. She seemed a bit puzzled about it. She had telegraphed the Credit Lyonnais yesterday to send her eighteen thousand dollars. And she had expected that the French banking house would have arranged for the payment of the money through its English correspondent. But its telegram directed her to go to the United Atlantic Express Company and receive the money.

A few minutes cleared the puzzle. The office of the company is on the Strand above the Savoy. Mrs. Farmingham went to the manager and showed him a lot of papers she had in an official-looking envelope. After a good bit of official pother the porters carried out a big portmanteau, a sort of heavy leather traveling case, and put it into the carriage. Mrs. Farmingham came to Hargrave where he stood by the door.

"Now, what do you think!" she said. "Of all the stupid idiots, give me a French idiot to be the stupidest; they have actually sent me eighteen thousand dollars in gold!"

"Well," said Hargrave, "perhaps you asked them to send you eighteen thousand dollars in gold."

She closed her mouth firmly for a moment and looked him vacantly in the face.

"What did I do?" she said, in the old manner of addressing an inquiry to herself. "The major wanted gold and perhaps I said gold. Why, yes, I must have said I wanted eighteen thousand dollars in gold. Well, at any rate, here's the money to pay you for the sapphires. I'll telegraph the Credit Lyonnais to send me your eighteen hundred, and you can come around to the Ritz for it in the morning."

She wished Hargrave to see that the telegram was properly worded, so the stupid French would not undertake to ship another bag of coin to her. He wrote it out, so there could be no mistake, and sent it from Charing Cross on the way back to the club.

Hargrave had to get two porters to carry the leather portmanteau into his room at the Empire Club. Mrs. Farmingham did not wait to receive the sapphires. She said he could bring them over to the Ritz after he had counted the money. She wanted a cup of tea; he could come along in an hour.

It took Hargrave the whole of the hour to verify the money. The case had been shipped, the straps were knotted tight and the lock was sealed. He had to get a man from the outside to break the lock open. The man said it was an American lock and he hadn't any implement to turn it.

There were eighteen thousand dollars in American twenty-dollar gold pieces packed in sawdust in the bag. The Credit Lyonnais had followed Mrs. Farmingham's directions to the letter. Such is the custom of the stupid French! She had asked for eighteen thousand dollars in gold, and they had sent her eighteen thousand dollars in gold. Hargrave put one of the pieces into his waistcoat pocket. He wanted to show Mrs. Farmingham how strangely the stupid French had made the blunder of doing precisely what she asked. Then he strapped up the portmanteau, pushed it under the bed, went out and locked the door. He asked the chief steward to put a man in the corridor to see that no one went into his room while he was out. Then he got the sapphires out of the safe and went over to the Ritz.

He met Mrs. Farmingham in the corridor coming out to her carriage.

"Ah, Mr. Hargrave," she said, "here you are. I just told the clerk to call you up and tell you to bring the sapphires over in the morning when you came for the draft. I promised Lady Holbert last night to come out to

tea at five. Forgot it until a moment ago."

She took Hargrave along out to the carriage and he gave her the envelope. She tore off the corner, emptied the sapphires into her hand, glanced at them, and dropped them loose into the pocket of her coat.

"Was the money all right?" she said.

"Precisely all right," replied the American. "The Credit Lyonnais, with amazing stupidity, sent you precisely what you asked for in your telegram." And he showed her the twenty-dollar gold piece.

"Well, well, the stupid darlings!" Then she laughed in her big, energetic manner. "I'm not always a fool. Come in the morning at nine. Good-night, Mr. Hargrave."

And the carriage rolled across Piccadilly into Bond Street in the direction of Grosvenor Square and Lady Holbert's.

The fog was settling down over London. Moving objects were beginning to take on the loom of gigantic figures. It was getting difficult to see.

It must have taken Hargrave half an hour to reach the club. The first man he saw when he went in was Sir Henry, his hands in the pockets of his tweed coat and his figure blocking the passage.

"Hello, Hargrave!" he cried. "What have you got in your room that old Ponsford won't let me go up?"

"Not nine hundred horses!" replied the American.

The Baronet laughed. Then he spoke in a lower voice:

"It's extraordinary lucky that I ran over to the Sorbonne. Come along up to your room and I'll tell you. This place is filling up with a lot of thirsty swine. We can't talk in any public room of it."

They went up the great stairway, lined with paintings of famous colonials celebrated in the English wars, and into the room. Hargrave turned on the light and poked up the fire. Sir Henry sat down by the table. He took out his three newspapers and laid them down before him.

"My word, Hargrave," he said, "old Arnold is a clever beggar! He cleared the thing up clean as rain." The Baronet spread the newspapers out before him.

"We knew here at the Criminal Investigation Department that this thing was a cipher of some sort, because we knew about these horses. We had caught up with this business of importing horses. We knew the shipment was on the way as I explained to you. But we didn't know the port that it would come into."

"Well," said the American, "did you find out?"

"My word," he cried, "old Arnold laughed in my face. 'Ach, monsieur,' he cried, mixing up several languages, 'it is Heidel's cipher! It is explained in the seventeenth Criminal Archive at Gratz. Attend and I will explain it, monsieur. It is always written in two paragraphs. The first paragraph contains the secret message, and the second paragraph contains the key to it. Voila! This message is in two paragraphs:

""P.L.A. shipped nine hundred horses on freight steamer Don Carlos from N. Y.

""Have the bill of lading handed over to our agent to check up."

""The hidden message is made up of certain words and capital letters contained in the first paragraph, while the presence of the letter t in the second paragraph indicates the words or capital letters that count in the first. One has only to note the numerical position of the letter t in the second paragraph in order to know what capital letter or word counts in the first paragraph.""

The Baronet took out a pencil and underscored the words in the second paragraph of the printed cipher: "Have the bill of lading handed over to our agent to check up."

"You will observe that the second, the eighth and the eleventh words in this paragraph begin with the letter t. Therefore, the second, the eighth and the eleventh capital letters or words in the first paragraph make up the hidden message."

And again with his pencil he underscored the letters of the first paragraph of the cipher: "P.L.A. shipped nine hundred horses on freight steamer Don Carlos from N. Y."

"So we get L, on, Don."

"London!" cried Hargrave. "The nine-hundred horses are to come into London!"

And in his excitement he took the gold piece out of his pocket and pitched it up. He had been stooping over the table. The fog was creeping into the room. And in the uncertain light about the ceiling he missed the gold piece and it fell on the table before Sir Henry. The gold piece did not ring, it fell dull and heavy, and the big Baronet looked at it openmouthed as though it had suddenly materialized out of the yellow fog entering the room.

"My word!" he cried. "One of the nine hundred horses!"

Hargrave stopped motionless like a man stricken by some sorcery.

"One of the nine hundred horses!" he echoed.

The Baronet was digging at the gold piece with the blade of his knife.

"Precisely! In the criminal argot a counterfeit American twenty-dollar gold piece is called a 'horse.'

"Look," he said, and he dug into the coin with his knife, "it's white inside, made of Babbit metal, milled with a file and gold-plated. Where did you get it?"

The American stammered.

"Where could I have gotten it?" he murmured.

"Well," the Baronet said, "you might have got it from a big, old, pasty-faced Alsatian; that would be 'Dago' Mulehaus. Or you might have got it from an energetic, middle-aged, American woman posing as a social leader in the States; that would be 'Hustling' Anne; both bad crooks, at the head of an international gang of counterfeiters."

XII. The Spread Rails

It was after dinner, in the great house of Sir Henry Marquis in St. James's Square.

The talk had run on the value of women in criminal investigation; their skill as detective agents... the suitability of the feminine intelligence to the hard, accurate labor of concrete deductions.

It was the American Ambassadors, Lisa Lewis, who told the story.

It was a fairy night, and the thing was a fairy story.

The sun had merely gone behind a colored window. The whole vault of the heaven was white with stars. The road was like a ribbon winding through the hills. In little whispers, in the dark places, Marion told me it. We sat together in the tonneau of the motor. It was past midnight, of a heavenly September. We were coming in from a stately dinner at the Fanshaws'.

A fairy story is a nice, comfortable human affair. It's about a hero, and a thing no man could do, and a princess and a dragon. It tells how the hero found the task that was too big for other men, how he accomplished it, circumvented the dragon and won the princess.

The Arabian formula fitted snugly to the facts.

The great Dominion railroad, extending from Montreal into New York, was having a run of terrible luck; one frightful wreck followed another. Nobody could get the thing straightened out. Old Crewe, the railroad commissioner of New York, was relentless in pressing hard conditions on the road. Then out of the West, had come young Clinton Howard, big, tawny, virile, like the race of heroes. He had cleaned out the tangles, set the thing going, restored order and method; and the confidence of Canada was flowing back. Then Howard had made love to Marion in his persistent dominating fashion.... and here, with her whispered confession, was the fairy story ended.

Marion pointed her finger out north, where, far across the valley, a great country-house sat on the summit of a wooded hill.

"Clinton has discovered the Commissioner's secret, Sarah," she said. "The safety of the public isn't the only thing moving old Crewe to hammer the railroad. He pretends it is. But in fact he wishes to get control of the road in a bankrupt court."

She paused.

"Crewe is a Nietzsche creature. Victory is the only thing with him. Nothing else counts. The way the road was going he would have got it in the bankrupt court by now. He's howling 'safety first' all over the country. 'Negligence' is the big word in every report he issues. It won't do for Clinton to have an accident now that any degree of human foresight could have prevented."

"Well," I said, "the dragon will give the hero no further trouble. Dr. Martin told mother to-day that Mr. Crewe's mind had broken down, and they had brought him out from New York. He got up in a directors' meeting and tried to kill the president of the Pacific Trust Company, with a chair. He went suddenly mad, Dr. Martin said."

Marion put out her hands in an unconscious gesture.

"I am not surprised," she said. "That sort of temperament in the strain of a great struggle is apt to break down and attempt to gain its end by some act of direct violence."

Then she added:

"My grandfather says in his work on evidence that the human mind if dominated by a single idea will finally break out in some bizarre act. And he cites the case of the minister who, having maneuvered in vain to compass the death of the king by some sort of accident, finally undertook to kill him with an andiron."

She reflected a moment.

"I am afraid," she continued, "that the harm is already done. Crewe has set the whole country on the watch. Clinton says there simply must not be a slip anywhere now. The road must be safe; he must make it safe." She repeated her expression.

"An accident now that any sort of human foresight could prevent would ruin him."

"Oh, dear, it's an awful strain on us... on him," she corrected. "He simply can't be everywhere to see that everything is right and everybody careful. And besides, there's the finances of the road to keep in shape. He had to go to Montreal to-day to see about that."

She leaned over toward me in her eager interest.

"I don't see how he can sleep with the thing on him. The big trains must go through on time, and every workman and every piece of machinery must be right as a clock. I get in a panic. I asked him to-day if he thought he could run a railroad like that, like a machine, everything in place on the second, and he said, 'Sure, Mike!'"

I laughed.

"'Sure, Mike,'" I said, "is the spirit in which the world is conquered."

And then the strange attraction of these two persons for one another arose before me; this big, crude, virile, direct son of the hustling West, and this delicate, refined, intellectual daughter of New England. The ancestors of the man had been the fighting and the building pioneer. And those of the girl, reflective people, ministers of the gospel and counselors at law. Marion's grandfather had been a writer on the law. Warfield on Evidence, had been the leading authority in this country. And this ambitious girl had taken a special course in college to fit her to revise her grandfather's great work. There was no grandson to undertake this labor, and she had gone about the task herself. She would not trust the great book to outside hands. A Warfield had written it, and a Warfield should keep the edition up. Her revision was now in the hands of a publisher in Boston, and it was sound and comprehensive, the critics said; the ablest textbook on circumstantial evidence

in America. I looked in a sort of wonder at this girl, carried off her feet by a tawny barbarian!

Marion was absorbed in the thing; and I understood her anxiety. But the most pressing danger, she did not seem to realize.

It lay, I thought, in the revenge of a discharged workman. Clinton Howard had to drop any number of incompetent persons, and they wrote him all sorts of threatening letters, I had been told. With all the awful things that happen over the country some of these angry people might do anything. There are always some half-mad people.

She went on.

"But Clinton says the public is as just as Daniel. If he has an accident in the ordinary course of affairs the public will hold him for it. But if anything should happen that he could not help, the public will not hold him responsible."

I realized the force of that. What reasonable human care could prevent he must answer for, but the outrage of a criminal would not be taken in the public mind against him. On the contrary, the sympathy of the public would flow in. When the people feel that a man is making every effort for their welfare, the criminal act of an outsider brings them over wholly to his support. Profound interest carried Marion off her feet.

"I was in a panic the other day, and Clinton said, 'Don't let rotten luck get your goat. I'm done if an engineer runs by a block, but nothing else can put it over on me!'"

She laughed with me at the direct, virile idiom of young America in action.

An event interrupted the discourse. The motor took a sharp curve and a young man running across the road suddenly flung himself face down in the grass beyond the curb.

"Is he hurt?" said Marion to the chauffeur.

"No, Miss, he's hiding, Miss," said the man, and we swept out of sight.

I thought it more likely that the creature was in liquor. In spite of the great country-houses, it was not good hunting-ground for the criminal class, during the season when everybody was about. The very number of servants, when a place is open, in a rather effective way, police it. Besides the young man looked like a sort of workman. One gets such impressions at a glance.

The motor descended the long hill toward the river and the flat valley. It hummed into the curves and hollows, through the pockets of chill air, and out again into the soft September night.

Then finally it swept out into the flat valley, and stopped with a grind of the emergency brake that caused the wheels to skid, ripping up the dust and gravel. For a moment in the jar and confusion we did not realize what had happened, then we saw a great locomotive lying on its side, and a line of Pullmans, sunk to the axles in the soft earth.

The whole "Montreal Express" was derailed, here in the flat land at the grade crossing. The thing had been done some time. The fire had been drawn from the engine; there was only a sputtering of steam. The passengers had been removed. A wrecking-car had come up from down the line. A telegrapher was setting up a little instrument on a box by the roadside. A lineman was climbing a pole to connect his wire. A track boss with a torch and a crew of men were coming up from an examination of the line littered with its wreck.

I hardly know what happened in the next few minutes. We were out of the motor and among the men almost before the car stopped.

No one had been hurt. The passenger-coaches were not turned over, and the engineer and fireman had jumped as the cab toppled. By the greatest good fortune the train had gone off the track in this low flat land almost level with the grade. Several things joined to avoid a terrible disaster; the flat ground that enabled the whole train to plow along upright until it stopped, the track lying flush with the highway where the engine went off, and the fact that trains must slow up for this grade crossing. Had there been an embankment, or a big ditch, or the train under its usual headway the wreck would have been a horror, for every wheel, from the engine to the last coach, had left the rails.

We were an excited group around the train's crew, when the trackman came up with his torch. Everybody asked the same question as the man approached.

"What caused the accident?"

"Spread rails," he said. "These big brutes," he pointed to the mammoth engine sprawling like a child's top on its side, the gigantic wheels in the air, "and these new steel coaches, are awful heavy. There's an upgrade here. When they struck it, they just spread out the rails."

And he pushed his closed hands out before him, slowly apart, in illustration.

The man knew Marion, for he spoke directly to her in reply to our concerted query. Then he added "If you step down the track, Miss Warfield, I'll show you exactly how it happened."

We followed the big workman with his torch. Marion walked beside him, and I a few steps behind. The girl had been plunged, on the instant, headlong into the horror she feared, into the ruin that she had lain awake over—and yet she met it with no sign, except that grim stiffening of the figure that disaster brings to persons of courage. She gave no attention to her exquisite gown. It was torn to pieces that night; my own was a ruin. The crushing effect of this disaster swept out every trivial thing.

In a moment we saw how the accident happened, the workman lighting the sweep of track with his torch. Here were the plow marks on the wooden cross ties, where the wheels had run after they left the rails. One saw instantly that the thing happened precisely as the workman explained it. When the heavy engine struck the up-grade, the rails had spread, the wheels had gone down on the cross-ties, and the whole train was derailed.

I saw it with a sickening realization of the fact.

Marion took the workman's torch and went over the short piece of track on which the thing had happened. All the evidences of the accident were within a short distance. The track was not torn up when the thing began. There was only the displaced rail pushed away, and the plow marks of the wheels on the ties. The

spread rails had merely switched the train off the track onto the level of the highway roadbed into the flat field.

Marion and the workman had gone a little way down the track. I was quite alone at the point of accident, when suddenly some one caught my hand.

I was so startled that I very nearly screamed. The thing happened so swiftly, with no word.

There behind me was a woman, an old foreign woman, a peasant from some land of southern Europe. She had my hand huddled up to her mouth.

And she began to speak, bending her aged body, and with every expression of respect.

"Ah, Contessa, he is not do it, my Umberto. He is run away in fear to hide in the Barrington quarry. It is accident. It is the doing of the good God. Ah, Contessa," and her old lips dabbed against my hand. "I beg him to not go, but he is discharge; an' he make the threat like the great fool. Ah, Contessa, Contessa," and she went over the words with absurd repetition, "believe it is by chance, believe it is the doing of the good God, I pray you." And so she ran on in her quaint old-world words.

Instantly I remembered the man lying by the roadside, and the threats of discharged workmen.

I told her the thing was a clean accident, and tried to show her how it came about. She was effusive in gratitude for my belief. But she seemed concerned about Marion and the others. She did not go away; she went over and sat down beside the track.

Presently the others returned. They were so engrossed that they did not notice my adventure or the aged woman seated on the ground.

Marion was putting questions to the workman.

"There was no obstruction on the track?"

"No, Miss."

"The engineer was watching?"

"Yes, Miss Warfield, he had to slow up and be careful about the crossing. There is no curve on this grade, he could see every foot of the way. The track was clear and in place, and he was watching it. There was nothing on it.—The rails simply spread under the weight of the engine."

And he began to comment on the excessive size and weight of the huge modern passenger engine.

"The brute drove the rails apart," he said, "that's all there is to it."

"Was the track in repair?" said Marion.

"It was patrolled to-day, Miss, and it was all in shape."

Then he repeated:

"The big engine just pushed the rails out."

"But the road is built for this type of engine," said Marion.

"Yes, Miss Warfield," replied the man, "it's supposed to be, but every roadbed gets a spread rail sometimes."

Then he added:

"It has to be mighty solid to hold these hundred ton engines on the rails at sixty miles an hour."

"It does hold them," said Marion.

"Yes, Miss Warfield, usually," said the man.

"Then why should it fail here?"

The man's big grimy face wrinkled into a sort of smile.

"Now, Miss Warfield," he said, "if we knew why an accident was likely to happen at one place more than another we wouldn't have any wrecks."

"Precisely," replied Marion, "but isn't it peculiar that the track should spread at the synclinal of this grade with the train running at a reduced speed, when it holds on the synclinal of other grades with the train running at full speed?"

The man's big face continued to smile.

"All accidents are peculiar, Miss Warfield; that's what makes them accidents."

"But," said Marion, "is not the aspect of these peculiarities indicative of either a natural event or one designed by a human intelligence?"

The man fingered his torch.

"Mighty strange things happen, Miss Warfield. I've seen a train go over into a canal and one coach lodge against a tree that was standing exactly in the right place to save it. And I've seen a passenger engine run by a signal and through a block and knock a single car out of a passing freight-train, at a crossing, and that car be the very one that the freight train's brakeman had just reached on his way to the caboose; just like somebody had timed it all, to the second, to kill him. And I've seen a whole wreck piled up, as high as a house, on top of a man, and the man not scratched."

"I do not mean the coincidence of accident," said Marion, "that is a mystery beyond us; what I mean is that there must be an organic difference in the indicatory signs of a thing as it happens in the course of nature, and as it happens by human arrangement."

The trackman was a person accustomed to the reality and not the theory of things.

"I don't see how the accident would have been any different," he said, "if somebody had put that tree in the right spot to catch the coach; or timed the minute with a stop-watch to kill that brakeman; or piled that wreck on the man so it wouldn't hurt him. The result would have been just the same."

"The result would have been the same," replied Marion, "but the arrangement of events would have been different."

"Just what way different, Miss Warfield?" said the man.

"We cannot formulate an iron rule about that," replied Marion, "but as a general thing catastrophes in nature seem to lack a motive, and their contributing events are not forced."

The big trackman was a person of sound practical sense. He knew what Marion was after, but he was confused by the unfamiliar terms in which the idea was stated.

"It's mighty hard to figure out," he said. "Of course, when you find an obstruction on the track or a crowbar under a rail, or some plain thing, you know."

Then he added:

"You've got to figure out a wreck from what seems likely."

"There you have it exactly," said Marion. "You must begin your investigation from what your common experience indicates is likely to happen. Now, your experience indicates that the rails of a track sometimes spread under these heavy engines."

"Yes, Miss Warfield."

"And your experience indicates that this is more likely to happen at the first rise of the synclinal on a grade than anywhere on a straight track."

"Yes, Miss Warfield."

"Good!" said Marion, "so far. But does not your experience also indicate that such an accident usually happens when the train is running at a high rate of speed?"

"Yes, Miss Warfield," said the man. "It's far more likely to happen then, because the engine strikes the rails at the first rise of the grade with more force. Naturally a thing hits harder when it's going... But it might happen with a slow train."

Marion made a gesture as of one rejecting the man's final sentence.

"When you turn that way," she said, "you at once leave the lines of greatest probability. Why should you follow the preponderance of common experience on two features here, and turn aside from it on the third feature?"

"Because the thing happened," replied the man, with the directness of those practical persons who drive through to the fact.

"That is to say an unlikely thing happened!" Marion made a decisive gesture with her clenched fingers. "Thus, the inquiry, beginning with two consistent elements, now comes up against one that is inconsistent."

"But not impossible," said the man.

"Possible," said Marion, "but not likely. Not to be expected, not in line with the preponderance of common experience; therefore, not to be passed. We have got to stop here and try to find out why this track spread under a slow train."

"But we see it spread, Miss Warfield," said the trackman with a conclusive gesture.

"True," replied Marion, "we see that it did spread, under this condition, but why?"

The old woman sitting beside the track seemed to realize what was under way; for she rose and came over to where I stood. "Contessa," she whispered, in those quaint, old world words, "do not reveal, what I have tol'. I pray you!"

And she followed me across the few steps to where the others stood.

I did not answer. I stood like one in some Hellenic drama, between two tragic figures. The love of woman lay in the solution of this problem—in the beginning and at the end of life.

Marion and the big track boss continued with this woman looking on.

I feared to speak or move; the thing was like a sort of trap, set with ghastly cunning, by some evil Fate. The ruin of a woman it would have. And perhaps on the vast level plain where it evilly dwelt, through its hard all-seeing eyes, the ruin and the sorrow either way would be precisely equal. How could I, then, lay a finger on the scale.

"Now," said Marion, "when the engine reached this point on the track, one of the rails gave way first."

The big workman looked steadily at her.

"How do you know that, Miss Warfield?" he said.

"Because," replied Marion, "the marks of the wheels of the locomotive on the ties are found, in the beginning, only on one side of the track, showing that the rail on that side gave way, when the engine struck it, and the other rail for some distance bore the weight of the train."

She illustrated with her hands.

"When the one rail was pushed out, the wheels on that side went down and continued on the ties, while the wheels on the other side went ahead on the firm rail."

The workman saw it.

"That's true, Miss Warfield," he said, "one rail sometimes spreads and the other holds solid."

Marion was absorbed in the problem.

"But why should the one rail give way like this and its companion hold?"

"One of the rails might not be as solid as the other," said the man.

"But it should have been nearly as solid," replied Marion. "This piece of track, you tell me, was examined to-day; the ties are equally sound on both sides, the rail is the same weight. We have the right to conclude then that each of these rails was about in the same condition. I do not say precisely in the same condition. Now, it is true that under these conditions one of the rails might have been pushed out of alignment before the other. We can grant a certain factor of difference, a certain reasonable factor of difference. But not a great factor of difference. We have a right to conclude that one rail would give way before the other. But not that one would very readily give way before the other. For some reason this particular rail did give way, much

more readily than it ought to have done."

The trackman was listening with the greatest interest.

"Just how do you know that, Miss Warfield?" he said.

"Why," replied Marion, "don't you see, from the mark on the ties, that the engine wheels left the rail almost at the moment they struck it. The marks of the wheels commence on the second tie ahead of the beginning of the rail. Therefore, this rail, for some reason, was more easily pushed out of alignment than it should have been. What was the reason?"

The track boss reflected.

"You see, Miss Warfield, this place is the beginning of an up-grade, the engine was coming down a long grade toward it, so when this train struck the first rails of the up-grade it struck it just like you'd drive in a wedge, and the hundred-ton brute of an engine jammed this rail out of alignment. That's all there is to it. When the rail sprung the wheels went down on the ties on that side and the train was ditched."

"It was a clean accident, then, you think?" said Marion.

"Sure, Miss Warfield," replied the man. "If anybody had tried to move that rail out of alignment, he would have to disconnect it at the other end, that is, take off the plate that joins it to the next rail. That would leave the end of the rail clean, with no broken plate. But the end of the rail is bent and the plate is twisted off. We looked at that the first thing. Nobody could twist that plate off. The engine did it when it left the track.

"You see, Miss Warfield, the weight of the engine, like a wedge, simply forced one of these rails out of alignment. Don't you understand how a hundred ton wedge driven against the track, at the start of an upgrade, could do it?"

The old peasant woman stood behind the track boss. The thing was a sort of awful game. She did not speak, but the vicissitudes of the inquiry advanced her, or retired her, with the effect of points, won or lost.

"I understand perfectly," replied Marion, "how the impact of the heavy engine might drive both rails out of alignment, if they offered an equal resistance, or one of them out if it offered a less resistance. This is straight track. The wedge would go in even. It should have spread the rails equally. That's the probable thing. But instead it did the improbable thing; it spread one. I hold the improbable thing always in question. Human knowledge is built up on that postulate.

"True, a certain factor of difference in conditions must be allowed, as I have said, but an excessive factor cannot be allowed. We have got to find it, or discard human reason as an implement for getting at the truth."

Again the big track boss smashed through the niceties of logic.

"These things happen all the time, Miss Warfield. You can't figure it out."

"One ought to be able to determine it," replied the girl.

The track boss shook his head.

"We can't tell what made that rail give."

"Of course, we can tell," said Marion. "It gave because it was weakened."

"But what weakened it?" replied the man. "You can't tell that? The rail's sound."

"There could be only two causes," said Marion. "It was either weakened by a natural agency or a human agency."

The track boss made an annoyed gesture, like a practical person vexed with the refinements of a theorist.

"But how are you going to tell?"

"Now," said Marion, "there is always a point as you follow a thing down, where the human design in it must appear, if there is a human design in it. The human mind can falsify events within a limited area. But if one keeps moving out, as from a center, he will find somewhere this point at which intelligence is no longer able to imitate the aspect of the result of natural forces... I think we have reached it."

She paused and drove her query at the track boss.

"The spikes on the outside of this rail held it in place, did they not?"

"Yes, Miss Warfield."

"Did the impact of the engine force these spikes out of the ties?"

"Yes, Miss Warfield, it forced them out."

"How do you know it forced them out?"

"Well, Miss Warfield," said the man, pointing to the rail and the denuded cross-ties, don't you see they're out?"

"I see that they are out," replied Marion, "but I do not yet see that they have been forced out."

She moved a step closer to the track boss and her voice hardened. "If these spikes were forced out by the impact of the engine, we ought to find torn spike holes inclining toward the end of the crossties.... Look!"

The big practical workman suddenly realized what the girl meant.

He stooped over and began to flash his torch along the end of the ties. We crowded against him. Every one of the spike holes, for the entire length of the rail, was straight and clean. The man seized one of the spikes and scrutinized it under his torch.

Then he stood up. For a moment he did not speak. He merely looked at Marion. "It's the holy truth!" he said. "Somebody pulled these spikes with a clawbar. That weakened the rail, and she bowed out when the engine struck her."

Then he turned around, and shouted down the track to his crew. "Hey, boys! Spread out along the right of way and see if you can't find a claw-bar. The devils that do these tricks always throw away their tools."

We stood together in a little tragic group. The old peasant woman came over to where I stood, she walked with a dead, wooden step. "Contessa," she whispered, her old lips against my hand. "You will save him?"

And suddenly with a wild human resentment, I longed to cut a way out of the trap of this Fatality; to force

its ruthless decree into a sort of equity, if I could do it.

"Yes," I said, "I will save him!"

It was an impulse with no plan behind it. But the dabbing of the withered mouth on my fingers was like actual physical contact with a human heart.

For a moment she looked at me as one among the damned might look at Michael. Then she went slowly away, down through the wooded copse of the meadow. And I turned about to meet Marion. I knew that she was now after the identity of the wrecker, and I faced her to foul her lines.

"This is not the work of one with murder in his heart," she said "A criminal agent set on a ruthless destruction of property and life would have drawn these spikes on a trestle or an embankment, at a point where the train would be running at high speed."

She paused for a moment, then she went on speaking to me as though she merely uttered her mental comment to herself.

"These spikes are drawn at a point where the train slows down for a crossing and precisely where the engine would go off onto the hard road-bed of the highway into a level meadow. That means some one planned this wreck to result in the least destruction of life and property possible. Now, what class of persons could be after the effect of a wreck, exclusive of a loss of life?"

I saw where her relentless deductions would presently lead. This was precisely the result that a discharged foreign workman would seek in his reprisal. This man would have hot blood, the southern Europe instinct for revenge, but with such a mother, no mere lust to kill. I tried to divert her from the fugitive.

"Train robbers," I said. "I wonder what was in the express-car?"

She very nearly laughed. "This is New York," she said, "not Arizona. And besides there was no express-car. This thing was done by somebody who wanted the effect of a wreck, and nothing else, and it was done by some one who knew about railroads.

"Now, what class of persons who know about railroads could be moved by that motive?"

She was driving straight now at the boy I stood to cover. At another step she would name the class. Discharged workmen would know about railroads; they would be interested to show how less efficient the road was without them; and a desperate one might plan such a wreck as a demonstration. If so, he would wish only the effect of the wreck, and not loss of life. Marion was going dead ahead on the right line, in another moment she would remember the man we passed, and the "black band" letters. I made a final desperate effort to divert her.

"Come along!" I called, "the first thing to do now is to talk with Clinton Howard. The nearest telephone will be at Crewe's house on the hill."

And it won.

"Lisa!" she cried, "you're right I We must tell him at once."

We hurried down the track to the motor-car. I had gained a little time. But how could I keep my promise. And the next moment the problem became more difficult. The track boss came up with a short iron bar that his men had found in the weeds along the right of way.

"There's the claw-bar, that the devil done it with," he said.

"You can tell it's just been handled by the way the rust's rubbed off."

It was conclusive evidence. Everybody could see how the workman's hands, as he labored with the claw-bar to draw the spikes, had cleaned off the rust.

I hurried the motor away. We raced up the long winding road to Crewe's country-house, sitting like a feudal castle on the summit. And I wondered, at every moment, how I could keep my promise. The boy was a criminal, deserving to be hanged, no doubt, but the naked mother's heart that had dabbed against my fingers overwhelmed me.

Almost in a flash, I thought, we were in the grounds and before Crewe's house. Then I noticed lights and a confusion of voices. No one came to meet us. And we got out of the motor and went in through the open door. We found a group of excited servants. An old butler began to stammer to Marion.

"It was his heart, Miss... the doctor warned the attendants. But he got away to-night. It was overexertion, Miss. He fell just now as the attendants brought him in." And he flung open the library door.

On a leather couch illumined by the brilliant light, Crewe lay; his massive relentless face with the great bowed nose, like the iron cast of what Marion had called a Nietzsche creature, motionless in death; his arms straight beside him with the great gloved hands open.

And all at once, at the sight, with a heavenly inspiration, I kept my promise.

"Look!" I cried. "Oh, everybody, how the palms of his gloves are covered with rust!"

XIII. The Pumpkin Coach

The story of the American Ambassadors was not the only one related on this night.

Sir Henry Marquis himself added another, in support of the contention of his guest... and from her own country.

The lawyer walked about the room. The restraint which he had assumed was now quite abandoned.

"That's all there is to it," he said. "I'm not trying this case for amusement. You have the money to pay me and you must bring it up here now, tonight."

The woman sat in a chair beyond the table. She was young, but she looked worn and faded. Misery and the long strain of the trial had worn her out. Her hands moved nervously in the frayed coat-cuffs.

"But we haven't any more money," she said. "The hundred dollars I paid you in the beginning is all we have."

The man laughed without disturbing the muscles of his face. "You can take your choice," he said. "Either bring the money up here now, to-night, or I withdraw from the case when court opens in the morning."

"But where am I to get any more money?" the woman said.

The lawyer was a big man. His hair, black and thin, was brushed close to his head as though wet with oil; his nose was thick and flattened at the base. The office contained only a table, some chairs and a file for legal papers. Night was beginning to descend. Lights were appearing in the city. The two persons had come in from the Criminal Court after the session for the day had ended.

The woman seemed bewildered. She looked at the man with the curious expression of a child that does not comprehend and is afraid to ask for an explanation.

"If we had any more money," she said, "I would bring it to you, but the hundred dollars was all we had."

Then she began to explain, reiterating minute details. When the tragedy occurred and her husband was arrested by the police they had a small sum painfully saved up. It was now wholly gone. Like persons in profound misery, she repeated. The man halted the recital with a brutal gesture.

"I'll not discuss it," he said. "You can bring the money in here before the court convenes in the morning, or I withdraw from the case."

He went over to the file, took out a packet of legal papers and threw them on the table.

"All right, my lady!" he said, "perhaps you think your husband can get along without a lawyer. Perhaps you think the devil will save him, or heaven, or Cinderella in a pumpkin coach!" There was biting irony in the bitter words.

A sudden comprehension began to appear in the woman's face. She realized now what the man was driving at. The expression in her face deepened into a sort of wonder, a sort of horror.

"You think he's guilty!" she said. "You think we got the money and we're trying to keep it, to hide it."

The lawyer turned about, put both hands on the table and leaned across it. He looked the woman in the face.

"Never mind what I believe; you heard what I said!"

For a moment the woman did not move. Then she got up slowly and went out. In the street she seemed lost. She remained for some time before the entrance of the building. Night had now arrived. Crowds of people were passing, intent on their affairs, unconcerned. No one seemed to see the figure motionless in the shadow of the great doorway.

Presently the woman began to walk along the street in the crowd without giving any attention to the people about her or to the direction she was taking. She was in that state of mental coma which attends persons in despair. She neither felt nor appreciated anything and she continued to walk in the direction in which the crowd was moving.

Some block in the traffic checked the crowd and the woman stopped. The block cleared and the human tide drifted on, but the woman remained. The crowd edged her over to the wall and she stood there before the shutter of a shop-window. After a time the crowd passed, thinned and disappeared, but the woman remained as though thrown out there by the human eddy.

The woman remained for a long time unmoving against the shutter of the shop-window. Finally she was awakened into life by a voice speaking to her. It was a soft, foreign voice that lisped the liquid accents of the occasional English words:

"Ma pauvre femme!" it said; "come with me. Vous etes malade!"

The woman followed mechanically in a sort of wonder. The person who had spoken to her was young and beautifully dressed in furs that covered her to her feet. She had gotten down from a motorcar that stood beside the curb—one of those modern vehicles, fitted with splendid trappings.

Beyond the shop-window was a great cafe. The girl entered and the woman followed. The attendants came forward to welcome the splendid visitor as one whose arrival at this precise hour of the evening had become a sort of custom. She gave some directions in a language which the woman did not understand, and they were seated at a table.

The waiters brought a silver dish filled with a clear, steaming soup and served it. The girl threw back her fur coat and the dazed woman realized how beautiful she was. Her hair was yellow like ripe corn and there were masses of it banked and clustered about her head; her eyes were blue, and her voice, soft and alluring, was like a friendly arm put around the heart.

The miserable woman was so confused by this transformation—by the sudden swing of the door in the wall that had admitted her into this new, unfamiliar world—that she was never afterward able to remember precisely by what introductory words her story was drawn out. She found herself taken up, comforted and made to tell it.

Her husband had been a butler in the service of a Mr. Marsh, an eccentric man who lived in one of the old downtown houses of the city. He was a retired banker with no family. The man lived alone. He permitted no servants in the house except the butler. Meals were sent in on order from a neighboring hotel and served by the butler as the man directed. He received few visitors in the house and no tradespeople were permitted to come in. There seemed no reason for this seclusion except the eccentricities of the man that had grown more pronounced with advancing years.

It was the custom of the butler to leave the house at eight o'clock in the evening and return in the morning at seven. On the morning of the third of February, when the butler entered the house, as he was accustomed to do at eight o'clock in the morning, he found his master dead.

The woman continued with her narrative, speaking slowly. Every detail was vividly impressed upon her memory and she gave it accurately, precisely.

There was a narrow passage or hall, not more than three feet in width, leading from the butler's pantry into a little dining-room. This dining-room the old man had fitted up as a sort of library. It was farther than any other room from the noises of the city. His library table was placed with one end against the left wall of the room and he sat with his back toward the passage into the butler's pantry. On the morning of the third of February he was found dead in his chair. He had been stabbed in the back, on the left side, where the neck joins to the shoulder. A carving-knife had been used and a single blow had accomplished the murder.

It was known that on the evening before the old banker had taken from a safety-deposit vault the sum of \$20,000, which it was his intention to invest in some securities. This money, in bills of very large denominations, was in the top drawer on the right side of the desk. The dead man had apparently not been touched after the crime, but the drawer had been pried open and the money taken. An ice-pick from the butler's pantry had been used to force it. The assassin had left no marks, finger-prints or tell-tale stains. The victim had been instantly killed with the blow of the knife which lay on the floor beside him.

The butler had been arrested, charged with the crime, and his trial was now going on in the Criminal Court. Circumstantial evidence was strong against him. The woman spoke as though she echoed the current comment of the courtroom without realizing how it affected her. She had done what she could. She had employed an attorney at the recommendation of a person who had come to interview her. She did not know who the person was nor why she should have employed this attorney at his suggestion, except that some one must be had to defend her husband, and uncertain what to do, she had gone to the first name suggested.

The girl listened, putting now and then a query. She spoke slowly, careful to use only English words. And while the woman talked she made a little drawing on the blank back of a menu card. Now she began to question the woman minutely about the details of the room and the position of the furniture where the tragedy had occurred, the desk, the attitude of the dead man, the location of the wound, and exact distances. And as the woman repeated the evidence of the police officers and the experts, the girl filled out her drawing with nice mathematical exactness like one accustomed to such a labor.

This was the whole story, and now the woman added the final interview with the attorney. She made a sort of hopeless gesture.

"Nobody believes us," she said. "My husband did not kill him. He was at home with me. He knew nothing about it until he found his master dead at the table in the morning. But there is only our word against all the lawyers and detectives and experts that Mr. Thompson has brought against us."

"Who is Mr. Thompson?" said the girl. She was deep in a study of her little drawing.

"He's Mr. Marsh's nephew, Mr. Percy Thompson."

The girl, absorbed in the study of her drawing, now put an unexpected question.

"Has your husband lost an arm?"

"No," she said, "he never had any sort of accident."

A great light came into the girl's face. "Then I believe you," she said. "I believe every word.... I think your husband is innocent."

The girl was aglow with an enthusiastic purpose. It was all there in her fine, expressive face.

"Now," she said, "tell me about this nephew, this Mr. Percy Thompson. Could we by any chance see him?"

"It won't do any good to see him," replied the woman. "He is determined to convict my husband. Nothing can change him."

The girl went on without paying any attention to the comment. "Where does he live—you must have heard?"

"He lives at the Markheim Hotel," she said.

"The Markheim Hotel," repeated the girl. "Where is it?"

The woman gave the street and number. The girl rose. "That's on my way; we'll stop."

The two went out of the cafe to the motor. The whole thing, incredible at any other hour, seemed to the woman like events happening in a dream or in some topsy-turvy country which she had mysteriously entered.

She sat back in the tonneau of the motor, huddled into the corner, a rug around her shoulders. The flashing lights seemed those of some distant, unknown city, as though she were transported into the scene of an Arabian tale.

The motor stopped before a little shabby hotel in a neighboring cross-street, and the footman, in livery beside the driver, got down at a direction of the girl and went up the steps. In a few moments a man came out and descended to the motor standing by the curb. He was about middle age. He looked as though Nature had intended him, in the beginning, for a person of some distinction, but he had the dissipated face of one at middle age who had devoted his years to a life of pleasure. There were hard lines about his mouth and a purple network of veins showing about the base of his nose.

As he approached the girl, leaning out of the open window of the tonneau, dropped her glove as by inadvertence. The man stooped, recovered it and returned it to her. The girl started with a perceptible gesture. Then she cried out in her charming voice,

"Merci, monsieur. I stopped a moment to thank you for the flowers you sent me last night. It was lovely of you!" and she indicated the bunch of roses pinned to her corsage.

The man seemed astonished. For a moment he hesitated as though about to make some explanation, but the girl went on without regarding his visible embarrassment.

"You shall not escape with a denial," she said. "There was no card and you did not do me the honor to wait at the door, but I know you sent them—an usher saw you; you shall not escape my appreciation. You did send them?" she said.

The man laughed. "Sure," he said, "if you insist." He was willing to profit by this unexpected error, and the girl went on:

"I have worn the roses to-day," she said, "for you. Will you wear one of them to-morrow for me?"

She detached a bud and leaned out of the door of the motor. She pinned the bud to the lapel of the man's coat. She did it slowly, deliberately, like one who makes the touch of the fingers do the service of a caress.

Then she spoke to the driver and the motor went on, leaving the amazed man on the curb before the shabby Markheim Hotel with the rosebud pinned to his coat—astonished at the incredible fortune of this favor from an inaccessible idol about whom the city raved.

The woman accepted the enigma of this interview as she had accepted the wonder of the girl's sudden appearance and the other, incidents of this extraordinary night. She did not undertake to imagine what the drawing on the menu meant, the words about the one-armed man, the glove dropped for Thompson to pick up, the rose pinned on his coat; it was all of a piece with the mystery that she had stumbled into.

When the motor stopped and she was taken through a little door by an attendant into a theater box, she accepted that as another of these things into which she could not inquire; things that happened to her outside of her volition and directed by authorities which she could not control.

The staging of the opera refined and extended the illusion that she had been transported out of the world by some occult agency. The wonderful creature that had taken her up out of her abandoned misery before the sordid shop-shutter appeared now in a fairy costume glittering with jewels. And the gnomes, the monsters and goblins appearing about her were all fabulous creatures, as the girl herself seemed a fabulous creature.

She sighed like one who must awaken from the splendor of a dream to realities of which the sleeper is vaguely conscious. Only the girl's voice seemed real. It seemed some great, heavenly reality like the sunlight or the sweep of the sea. It filled the packed places of the theater. She sang and one believed again in the benevolence of heaven; in immortal love. To the distressed woman effacing herself in the corner of the empty box it was all a sort of inconceivable witch-work.

And it was witch-work, as potent if not as amply fitted with dramatic properties as the witchwork of ancient legend.

The daughter of an obscure juge d'instruction of the Canton of Vaud, singing in a Swiss meadow, had been taken up by a wealthy American, traveling in Switzerland on an April morning-old, enervated with the sun of the Riviera, and displeased with life. And this rich old woman, her rheumatic fingers loaded with jewels, had transformed the daughter of the juge d'instruction of the Canton of Vaud into a singing wonder that made every human creature see again the dreams of his youth before him leading into the Elysian Fields.

And to the girl herself this transformation also seemed the wonder of witch-work. Her early life lay so far below in a world remote and detached; a little house in a village of the Canton of Vaud with the genteel poverty that attended the slender salary of a juge d'instruction, and the weight of duties that accumulated on her shoulders. Her father's life was given over to the labors of criminal investigation, but it was a field that returned nothing in the way of material gain. Honorable mention, a medal, the distinction of having his reports copied into the official archives, were the fruits of the man's life. She remembered the minutely exhaustive details of those reports which she used to copy painfully at night by the light of a candle. The old man, absorbed by his deductions, with his trained habits of observation and his prodigious memory, never seemed to realize the drudgery imposed upon the girl by his endless dictation.

"To-morrow," the heavenly creature had said softly, like a caress, in the woman's ear when an attendant had taken her through the little door into the empty box. But the to-morrow broke with every illusion vanished.

The woman sat beside her husband in the dismal court-room when the court convened. The judge, old and tired, was on the bench. A sulphurous, depressing fog entered from the city. The court-room smelled of a cleaner's mop. The jury entered; and a few spectators, who looked as though they might have spent the night on the benches of the park out, side, drifted in. The attorneys and the officials of the court were present and the trial resumed.

Every detail of the departed, evening was, to the woman, a mirage except the brutal threat of the attorney, uttered before she had gone down into the street. This threat, with that power of reality which evil things seem always to possess, now materialized. After the court had opened, but before the trial could proceed, the attorney for the defendant rose and addressed the court.

He spoke for some moments, handling his innuendoes with skill. His intent was to withdraw from the case. He realized that this was an unusual procedure and that the course must be justified upon a high ethical plane. He was a person of acumen and of no inconsiderable skill and he succeeded. Without making any direct charge, and disclaiming any intent to prejudice the prisoner and his defense, or to deprive him of any safeguard of the law, he was able to convey the impression that he had been misled in undertaking the defense of the case; that his confidence in the innocence of the accused had been removed by unquestionable evidence which he had been led to believe did not exist.

He made this explanation with profound regret. But he felt that, having been induced to undertake the defense by representations not justified in fact, and by an impression of the nature of the case which developments in the court-room had not confirmed, he had the right to step aside out of an equivocal position. He wished to do this without injury to the prisoner and while there was yet an opportunity for him to obtain other counsel. The whole tenor of the speech was the right to be relieved from the obligation of an error; an error that had involved him unwittingly by reason of assurances which the developments of the case had now set aside. And through it all there was the manifest wish to do the prisoner no vestige of injury.

After this speech of his attorney the conviction of the man was inevitable. He sat stooped over, his back bent, his head down, his thin hands aimlessly in his lap like one who has come to the end of all things; like one who no longer makes any effort against a destiny determined on his ruin.

The thing had the overpowering vitality which evil things seem always to possess, and the woman felt helpless against it; so utterly, so completely helpless that it was useless to protest by any word or gesture. She could have gotten up and explained the true motive behind this man's speech; she could have repeated the dialogue in his office; she could have asserted his unspeakable treachery; but she saw with an unerring

instinct that against the skill of the man her effort would be wholly useless. With his resources and his dominating cunning he would not only make her words appear obviously false, but he would make them fasten upon her a malicious intent to injure the man who had undertaken her husband's defense; and somehow he would be able, she felt, to divert the obliquity and cause it to react upon herself.

This was all clear to her, and like some little trapped creature of the wood that finds escape closed on every side and no longer makes any effort, she remained motionless.

The judge was an honorable man, concerned to accomplish justice and not always misled by an obvious intent. The proceeding did not please him, but he knew that no benefit, rather a continued injury, would result to the prisoner by forcing the attorney to go on with a case which it was evident that he no longer cared to make any effort to support. He permitted the man to withdraw. Then he spoke to the prisoner.

"Have you any other counsel?" he asked.

The prisoner did not look up. He replied in a low, almost inaudible voice.

"No, Your Honor," he said.

"Then I shall appoint some one to go on with the case," and he looked up over the docket before him and out at the few attorneys sitting within the rail.

It was at this moment that the woman, crying silently, without a sound and without moving in her chair, heard behind her the voice which she had heard the evening before, when, as now, at the bottom of the pit, she stood before the shutter of the shop-window.

"Will it be necessary, monsieur le judge?"

It was the same wonderful, moving, heavenly voice. Every sound in the court-room suddenly ceased. All eyes were lifted. And Thompson, sitting beside the district-attorney, saw, standing before the rail in the court-room, the splendid, alluring creature that had called him out of the sordid lobby of the Hotel Markheim and entranced him with an evidence of her favor. Unconsciously he put up his hand to feel for the bud in the lapel of his coat. It had remained there—not, as it happened, from her wish, but because he dare not lay the coat aside.

In the interval of intense interest arising at the withdrawal of the attorney from the case the girl had come in unnoticed. She might have appeared out of the floor. Her voice was the first indication of her presence.

The judge turned swiftly. "What do you mean?" he said.

"I mean, monsieur," she answered, "that if a man is innocent of a crime, he cannot require a lawyer to defend him."

The judge was astonished, but he was an old man and had seen many strange events happen along the way of a criminal trial.

"But why do you say this man is innocent," he said.

"I will show you, monsieur," and she came around the railing into the pit of the court before his bench. She carried in her hand the menu upon which, at the table in the cafe the night before, she had made a drawing of the scene of the homicide.

The extraordinary event had happened so swiftly that the attorney for the prosecution had not been able to interpose an objection. Now the nephew of the dead man spoke hurriedly, in whispers, and the attorney arose.

"I object to this irregular proceeding," he said. "If this person is a witness, let her be sworn in the usual manner and let her take her place in the witness-chair where she may be examined by the attorney whom the court may see fit to appoint for the defense."

It was evident that Mr. Thompson, urging the prosecutor, was alarmed. The folds of his obese neck lying above the collar of his coat took on a deeper color, and his mouth visibly sagged as with some unexpected emotion. He felt that he was becoming entangled in some vast, invisible net spread about him by this girl who had appeared as if by magic before the Hotel Markheim.

The judge looked down at the attorney. "I will have the witness sworn," he said, "but I shall not at present appoint anybody to conduct an examination. When a prisoner before me has no counsel, I sometimes look after his case myself."

He spoke to the girl. "Will you hold up your hand?" he said.

"Why, yes, monsieur," she said, "if you will also ask Mr. Thompson to hold up his hand."

"Do you wish him sworn as a witness?" said the judge.

The girl hesitated. "Yes, monsieur," she said, "if that is the way to have him hold up his hand."

Again Thompson was disturbed. Again he spoke to the prosecutor and again that attorney objected.

"We have not asked to have Mr. Thompson testify in this case," he said. "It is true Mr. Thompson is concerned about the result of this trial. He is the nephew of the decedent and his heir. It is only natural that he should properly concern himself to see that the assassin is brought to justice."

He spoke to the girl. "Do you wish to make Mr. Thompson your witness?" he said.

And again she replied with the hesitating formula:

"Why, yes, monsieur, if that is the way to cause him to hold up his hand."

The judge turned to the clerk. "Will you administer the oath to these two persons?" he said.

Thompson rose. His face was disconcerted and slack. He hesitated, but the prosecutor spoke to him. Then he faced the judge and put up his hand. Immediately the girl cried out:

"Look, monsieur," she said. "It is his left hand he is holding up!"

Immediately Thompson raised the other hand. "I beg your pardon, Your Honor," he muttered. "I am left-handed; I sometimes make that mistake."

And again the girl cried out: "You see... you notice it... it is true, then... he is left-handed."

"I see he is left-handed," said the judge, "but what has that to do with the case?"

"Oh, monsieur," she said, "it has everything to do with it. I will show you."

She moved up on the step before the judge's bench and laid the menu before him. The attorney for the prosecution also arose. He wished to prevent this proceeding, to object to it, but he feared to disturb the judge and he remained silent.

"Monsieur," she said, "I have made a little drawing... I know how such things are done.... My father was juge d'instruction of the Canton of Vaud. He always made little drawings of places where crimes were committed.... Here you will see," and she put her finger on the card, "the narrow passage leading from the butler's pantry into the dining-room used for a library. You will notice, monsieur, that the writing-table stood with one end against the wall, the left wall of the room, as one enters from the butler's pantry. It is a queer table. One side of it has a row of drawers coming to the floor and the other side is open so one may sit with one's knees under it. On the night of the tragedy this table was sitting at right angles to the left wall, that is to say, monsieur, with this end open for the writer's knees close up against the left wall of the room. That meant, monsieur, that on this night Mr. Marsh was sitting at the table with his back to the passage from the butler's pantry, close up against the left wall of the room.

"Therefore, monsieur," the girl went on, "the man who assassinated Mr. Marsh entered from the butler's pantry. He slipped into the room along the left wall close up behind his victim.... Did it not occur so?"

This was the evidence of the police officials and the experts. It was clear from the position of the desk in the room and from the details of the evidence.

"And, monsieur," she said, "will you tell me, is it true that the stab wound which killed Mr. Marsh was in the shoulder on the side next to the wall?"

"Yes," said the judge, "that is true."

The prosecutor, urged by Thompson, now made a verbal objection. The case was practically completed. The incident going on in the court-room followed no definite legal procedure and could not be permitted to proceed. The judge stopped him.

"Sit down," he said. He did not offer any explanation or comment. He merely silenced the man and returned to the girl standing eagerly on the step before the bench.

"The wound was in the base of the man's neck at the top of the left shoulder on the side next to the wall," he said. "But what has this fact to do with the case?"

"Oh, monsieur," she cried, "it has everything to do with it. If the assassin who slipped along the wall had carried the knife in his right hand, the wound would have been on the right side of the dead man's neck. But if, monsieur, the assassin carried the knife in his left hand, then the wound would be where it is, on the left side. That made me believe, at first, that the assassin had only one arm—had lost his right arm—and must use the other; then, a little later, I understood.... Oh, monsieur, don't you understand; don't you see that the assassin who stabbed Mr. Marsh was left-handed?"

In a moment it was all clear to everybody. Only a left-handed man could have committed the crime, for only a left-handed man standing close against the left side of a room above one sitting at a desk against that wall could have struck straight down into the left shoulder of the murdered man. A right-handed assassin would have struck straight down into the right shoulder, he would not have risked a doubtful blow, delivered awkwardly across his body, into the left shoulder of his victim.

The girl indicated Thompson with her hand. "He did it; he's left-handed. I found out by dropping my glove."

Panic enveloped the cornered man. He began to shake as with an ague. Sweat like a thin oil spread over his debauched face and the folds of his obese neck. With his fatal left hand he began to finger the lapel of his coat where the faded rosebud hung pinned into the buttonhole. And the girl's voice broke the profound silence of the court-room.

"He has the money, too," she said. "I felt a bulky packet when I gave him the flower out of my bouquet last night."

The big, thin-haired lawyer, leaving the courtroom after his withdrawal from the case, stopped at a window arrested by the amazing scene: The police taking the stolen money out of Thompson's pocket; the woman in the girl's arms, and the transfigured prisoner standing up as in the presence of a heavenly angel. This before him... and the splendid motor below under the sweep of the window, waiting before the courthouse door, brought back the memory of his biting, sarcastic words:

"... or Cinderella in a pumpkin coach!"

And there occurred to him a doubt of the exclusive dominance of life by the gods he served.

XIV. The Yellow Flower

The girl sat in a great chair before the fire, huddled, staring into the glow of the smoldering logs.

Her dark hair clouded her face. The evening gown was twisted and crumpled about her. There was no ornament on her; her arms, her shoulders, the exquisite column of her throat were bare.

She sat with her eyes wide, unmoving, in a profound reflection.

The library was softly lighted; richly furnished, a little beyond the permission of good taste. On a table at the girl's elbow were two objects; a ruby necklace, and a dried flower. The flower, fragile with age, seemed a sort of scrub poppy of a delicate yellow; the flower of some dwarfed bush, prickly like a cactus.

The necklace made a great heap of jewels on the buhl top of the table, above the intricate arabesque of silver and tortoise-shell.

It was nearly midnight. Outside, the dull rumble of London seemed a sound, continuous, unvarying, as though it were the distant roar of a world turning in some stellar space.

It was a great old house in Park Lane, heavy and of that gloomy architecture with which the feeling of the English people, at an earlier time, had been so strangely in accord. It stood before St. James's Park oppressive and monumental, and now in the midst of yellow fog its heavy front was like a mausoleum.

But within, the house had been treated to a modern re-casting, not entirely independent of the vanity of wealth.

After the dinner at the Ritz, the girl felt that she could not go on; and Lady Mary's party, on its way to the dancing, put her down at the door. She gave the excuse of a crippling headache. But it was a deeper, more profound aching that disturbed her. She was before the tragic hour, appearing in the lives of many women, when suddenly, as by the opening of a door, one realizes the irrevocable aspect of a marriage of which the details are beginning to be arranged. That hour in which a woman must consider, finally, the clipping of all threads, except the single one that shall cord her to a mate for life.

Until to-night, in spite of preparations on the way, the girl had not felt this marriage as inevitable. Her aunt had pressed for it, subtly, invisibly, as an older woman is able to do.

Her situation was always, clearly before her. She was alone in the world; with very little, almost nothing. The estate her father inherited he had finally spent in making great explorations. There was no unknown taste of the world that he had not undertaken to enter. The final dribbles of his fortune had gone into his last adventure in the Great Gobi Desert from which he had never returned.

The girl had been taken by this aunt in London, incredibly rich, but on the fringes of the fashionable society of England, which she longed to enter. Even to the young girl, her aunt's plan was visible. With a great settlement, such as this ambitious woman could manage, the girl could be a duchess.

The marriage to Lord Eckhart in the diplomatic service, who would one day be a peer of England, had been a lure dangled unavailingly before her, until that night, when, on his return from India, he had carried her off her feet with his amazing incredible sacrifice. It was the immense idealism, the immense romance of it that had swept her into this irrevocable thing.

She got up now, swiftly, as though she would again realize how the thing had happened and stooped over the table above the heap of jewels. They were great pigeon-blood rubies, twenty-seven of them, fastened together with ancient crude gold work. She lifted the long necklace until it hung with the last jewel on the table.

The thing was a treasure, an immense, incredible treasure. And it was for this—for the privilege of putting this into her hands, that the man had sold everything he had in England—and endured what the gossips said—endured it during the five years in India—kept silent and was now silent. She remembered every detail the rumor of a wild life, a dissolute reckless life, the gradual, piece by piece sale of everything that could be turned into money. London could not think of a ne'er-do-well to equal him in the memory of its oldest gossips—and all the time with every penny, he was putting together this immense treasure—for her. A dreamer writing a romance might imagine a thing like this, but had it any equal in the realities of life?

She looked down at the chain of great jewels, and the fragment of prickly shrub with its poppy-shaped yellow flower. They were symbols, each, of an immense idealism, an immense conception of sacrifice that lifted the actors in their dramas into gigantic figures illumined with the halos of romance.

Until to-night it had been this ideal figure of Lord Eckhart that the girl considered in this marriage. And to-night, suddenly, the actual physical man had replaced it. And, alarmed, she had drawn back. Perhaps it was the Teutonic blood in him—a grandmother of a German house. And, yet, who could say, perhaps this piece of consuming idealism was from that ancient extinct Germany of Beethoven.

But the man and the ideal seemed distinct things having no relation. She drew back from the one, and she stood on tip-toe, with arms extended longingly toward the other.

What should she do?

Had the example of her father thrown on Lord Eckhart a golden shadow? She moved the bit of flower, gently as in a caress. He had given up the income of a leading profession and gone to his death. His fortune and his life had gone in the same high careless manner for the thing he sought. For the treasure that he believed lay in the Gobi Desert—not for himself, but for every man to be born into the world. He was the great dreamer, the great idealist, a vague shining figure before the girl like the cloud in the Hebraic Myth.

The girl stood up and linked her fingers together behind her back. If her father were only here—for an hour, for a moment! Or if, in the world beyond sight and hearing, he could somehow get a message to her!

At this moment a bell, somewhere in the deeps of the house, jangled, and she heard the old butler moving through the hall to the door. The other servants had been dismissed for the night, and her aunt on the preliminaries of this marriage was in Paris.

A moment later the butler appeared with a card on his tray. It was a card newly engraved in some English shop and bore the name "Dr. Tsan-Sgam." The girl stood for a moment puzzled at the queer name, and then the memory of the strange outlandish human creatures, from the ends of the world, who used sometimes to visit her father, in the old time, returned, and with it there came a sudden upward sweep of the heart—was there an answer to her longing, somehow, incredibly on the way!

She gave a direction for the visitor to be brought in. He was a big old man. His body looked long and muscular like that of some type of Englishmen, but his head and his features were Mongolian. He was entirely bald, as bald as the palm of a hand, as though bald from his mother he had so remained to this incredible age. And age was the impression that he profoundly presented. But it was age that a tough vitality in the man resisted; as though the assault of time wore it down slowly and with almost an imperceptible detritus. The great naked head and the wide Mongolian face were unshrunk; they presented, rather, the aspect of some old child. He was dressed with extreme care, in the very best evening clothes that one could buy in a London shop.

He bowed, oddly, with a slow doubling of the body, and when he spoke the girl felt that he was translating

his words through more than one language; as though one were to put one's sentences into French or Italian and from that, as a sort of intermediary, into English—as though the way were long, and unfamiliar from the medium in which the man thought to the one in which he was undertaking to express it. But at the end of this involved mental process his English sentences appeared correctly, and with an accurate selection in the words.

"You must pardon the hour, Miss Carstair," he said, in his slow, precise articulation, "but I am required to see you and it is the only time I have."

Then his eyes caught the necklace on the table, and advancing with two steps he stooped over it.

For a moment everything else seemed removed, from about the man. His angular body, in its unfamiliar dress, was doubled like a finger; his great head with its wide Mongolian face was close down over the buhl top of the table and his finger moved the heap of rubies.

The girl had a sudden inspiration.

"Lord Eckhart got these jewels from you?"

The man paused, he seemed to be moving the girl's words backward through the intervening languages.

Then he replied.

"Yes," he said, "from us."

The girl's inspiration was now illumined by a further light.

"And you have not been paid for them?"

The man stood up now. And again this involved process of moving the words back through various translations was visible—and the answer up.

"Yes—" he said, "we have been paid."

Then he added, in explanation of his act.

"These rubies have no equal in the world—and the gold-work attaching them together is extremely old. I am always curious to admire it."

He looked down at the girl, at the necklace, at the space about them, as though he were deeply, profoundly puzzled.

"We had a fear," he said, "—it was wrong!"

Then he put his hand swiftly into the bosom pocket of his evening coat, took out a thin packet wrapped in a piece of vellum and handed it to the girl.

"It became necessary to treat with the English Government about the removal of records from Lhasa and I was sent—I was directed to get this packet to you from London. To-night, at dinner with Sir Henry Marquis in St. James's Square, I learned that you were here. I had then only this hour to come, as my boat leaves in the morning." He spoke with the extreme care of one putting together a delicate mosaic.

The girl stood staring at the thin packet. A single thought alone consumed her.

"It is a message from—my—father."

She spoke almost in a whisper.

The big Oriental replied immediately.

"No," he said, "your father is beyond sight and hearing."

The girl had no hope; only the will to hope. The reply was confirmation of what she already knew. She removed the thin vellum wrapper from the packet. Within she found a drawing on a plate of ivory. It represented a shaft of some white stone standing on the slight elevation of what seemed to be a barren plateau. And below on the plate, in fine English characters like an engraving, was the legend, "Erected to the memory of Major Judson Carstair by the monastery at the Head."

The man added a word of explanation.

"The Brotherhood thought that you would wish to know that your father's body had been recovered, and that it had received Christian burial, as nearly as we were able to interpret the forms. The stone is a sort of granite."

The girl wished to ask a thousand questions: How did her father meet his death, and where? What did they know? What had they recovered with his body?

The girl spoke impulsively, her words crowding one another. And the Oriental seemed able only to disengage the last query from the others.

"Unfortunately," he said, "some band of the desert people had passed before our expedition arrived, nothing was recovered but the body. It was not mutilated."

They had been standing. The girl now indicated the big library chair in which she had been huddled and got another for herself. Then she wished to know what they had learned about her father's death.

The Oriental sat down. He sat awkwardly, his big body, in a kind of squat posture, the broad Mongolian face emerging, as in a sort of deformity, from the collar of his evening coat. Then he began to speak, with that conscious effect of bringing his words through various mediums from a distance.

"We endeavored to discourage Major Carstair from undertaking this adventure. We were greatly concerned about his safety. The sunken plateau of the Gobi Desert, north of the Shan States, is exceedingly dangerous for an European, not so much on account of murderous attacks from the desert people, for this peril we could prevent; but there is a chill in this sunken plain after sunset that the native people only can resist. No white man has ever crossed the low land of the Gobi."

He paused.

"And there is in fact no reason why any one should wish to cross it. It is absolutely barren. We pointed out all this very carefully to Major Carstair when we learned what he had in plan, for as I have said his welfare was very pressing on our conscience. We were profoundly puzzled about what he was seeking in the Gobi.

He was not, evidently, intending to plot the region or to survey any route, or to acquire any scientific data. His equipment lacked all the implements for such work. It was a long time before we understood the impulse that was moving Major Carstair to enter this waste region of the Gobi to the north."

The man stopped, and sat for some moments quite motionless.

"Your father," he went on, "was a distinguished man in one of the departments of human endeavor which the East has always neglected; and in it he had what seemed to us incredible skill—with ease he was able to do things which we considered impossible. And for this reason the impulse taking him into the Gobi seemed entirely incredible to us; it seemed entirely inconsistent with this special ability which we knew the man to possess; and for a long time we rejected it, believing ourselves to be somehow misled."

The girl sat straight and silent, in her chair near the brass fender to the right of the buhl table; the drawing, showing the white granite shaft, held idly in her fingers; the illuminated vellum wrapper fallen to the floor.

The man continued speaking slowly.

"When, finally, it was borne in upon us that Major Carstair was seeking a treasure somewhere on the barren plateau of the Gobi, we took every measure, consistent with a proper courtesy, to show him how fantastic this notion was. We had, in fact, to exercise a certain care lest the very absurdity of the conception appear too conspicuously in our discourse."

He looked across the table at the girl.

The man's great bald head seemed to sink a little into his shoulders, as in some relaxation.

"We brought out our maps of the region and showed him the old routes and trails veining the whole of it. We explained the topography of this desert plateau; the exact physical character of its relief. There was hardly a square mile of it that we did not know in some degree, and of which we did not possess some fairly accurate data. It was entirely inconceivable that any object of value could exist in this region without our knowledge of it."

The man was speaking like one engaged in some extremely delicate mechanical affair, requiring an accuracy almost painful in its exactness.

"Then, profoundly puzzled, we endeavored to discover what data Major Carstair possessed that could in any way encourage him in this fantastic idea. It was a difficult thing to do, for we held him in the highest esteem and, outside of this bizarre notion, we had before us, beyond any question, the evidence of his especial knowledge; and, as I have said, his, to us, incredible skill."

He paused, as though the careful structure of the long sentence had fatigued him.

"Major Carstair's explanations were always in the imagery of romance. He sought 'a treasure—a treasure that would destroy a Kingdom.' And his indicatory data seemed to be the dried blossom of our desert poppy."

Again the Oriental paused. He put up his hand and passed his fingers over his face. The gaunt hand contrasted with the full contour.

"I confess that we did not know what to do. We realized that we had to deal with a nature possessing in one direction the exact accurate knowledge of a man of science, and in another the wonder extravagances of a child. The Dalai Lama was not yet able to be consulted, and it seemed to us a better plan to say no more about the impossible treasure, and address our endeavors to the practical side of Major Carstair's intelligence instead. We now pointed out the physical dangers of the region. The deadly chill in it coming on at sunset could not fail to inflame the lungs of a European, accustomed to an equable temperature, fever would follow; and within a few days the unfortunate victim would find his whole breathing space fatally congested."

The man removed his hand. The care in his articulation was marked.

"Major Carstair was not turned aside by these facts, and we permitted him to go on."

Again he paused as though troubled by a memory.

"In this course," he continued, "the Dalai Lama considered us to have acted at the extreme of folly. But it is to be remembered, in our behalf, that somewhat of the wonder at Major Carstair's knowledge of Western science dealing with the human body was on us, and we felt that perhaps the climatic peril of the Gobi might present no difficult problem to him.

"We were fatally misled."

Then he added.

"We were careful to direct him along the highest route of the plateau, and to have his expedition followed. But chance intervened. Major Carstair turned out of the route and our patrol went on, supposing him to be ahead on the course which we had indicated to him. When the error was at last discovered, our patrol was entering the Sirke range. No one could say at what point on the route Major Carstair had turned out, and our search of the vast waste of the Gobi desert began. The high wind on the plateau removes every trace of human travel. The whole of the region from the Sirke, south, had to be gone over. It took a long time."

The man stopped like one who has finished a story. The girl had not moved; her face was strained and white. The fog outside had thickened; the sounds of the city seemed distant. The girl had listened without a word, without a gesture. Now she spoke.

"But why were you so concerned about my father?"

The big Oriental turned about in the chair. He looked steadily at the girl, he seemed to be treating the query to his involved method of translation; and Miss Carstair felt that the man, because of this tedious mental process, might have difficulty to understand precisely what she meant.

What he wished to say, he could control and, therefore, could accurately present—but what was said to him began in the distant language.

"What Major Carstair did," he said, "it has not been made clear to you?"

"No," she replied, "I do not understand."

The man seemed puzzled.

"You have not understood!"

He repeated the sentence; his face reflective, his great bare head settling into the collar of his evening coat as though the man's neck were removed.

He remained for a moment thus puzzled and reflective. Then he began to speak as one would set in motion some delicate involved machinery running away into the hidden spaces of a workshop.

"The Dalai Lama had fallen—he was alone in the Image Room. His head striking the sharp edge of a table was cut. He had lost a great deal of blood when we found him and was close to death. Major Carstairs was at this time approaching the monastery from the south; his description sent to us from Lhasa contained the statement that he was an American surgeon. We sent at once asking him to visit the Dalai Lama, for the skill of Western people in this department of human knowledge is known to us."

The Oriental went on, slowly, with extreme care.

"Major Carstairs did not at once impress us. 'What this man needs,' he said, 'is blood.' That was clear to everybody. One of our, how shall I say it in your language, Cardinals, replied with some bitterness, that the Dalai Lama could hardly be imagined to lack anything else. Major Carstairs paid no attention to the irony. 'This man must have a supply of blood,' he added. The Cardinal, very old, and given to imagery in his discourse answered, that blood could be poured out but it could not be gathered up... and that man could spill it but only God could make.

"We interrupted then, for Major Carstairs was our guest and entitled to every courtesy, and inquired how it would be possible to restore blood to the Dalai Lama; it was not conceivable that the lost blood could be gathered up.

"He explained then that he would transfer it from the veins of a healthy man into the unconscious body."

The Oriental hesitated; then he went on.

"The thing seemed to us fantastic. But our text treating the life of the Dalai Lama admits of no doubt upon one point—'no measure presenting itself in extremity can be withheld.' He was in clear extremity and this measure, even though of foreign origin, had presented itself, and we felt after a brief reflection that we were bound to permit it."

He added.

"The result was a miracle to us. In a short time the Dalai Lama had recovered. But in the meantime Major Carstairs had gone on into the Gobi seeking the fantastic treasure."

The girl turned toward the man, a wide-eyed, eager, lighted face.

"Do you realize," she said, "the sort of treasure that my father sacrificed his life to search for?"

The Oriental spoke slowly.

"It was to destroy a Kingdom," he said.

"To destroy the Kingdom of Pain!" She replied, "My father was seeking an anesthetic more powerful than the derivatives of domestic opium. He searched the world for it. In the little, wild desert flower lay, he thought, the essence of this treasure. And he would seek it at any cost. Fortune was nothing; life was nothing. Is it any wonder that you could not stop him? A flaming sword moving at the entrance to the Gobi could not have barred him out!"

The big Oriental made a vague gesture as of one removing something clinging to his face.

"Wherefore this blindness?" he said.

The girl had turned away in an effort to control the emotion that possessed her. But the task was greater than her strength; when she came back to the table tears welled up in her eyes and trickled down her face. Emotion seemed now to overcome her.

"If my father were only here," her voice was broken, "if he were only here!"

The big Oriental moved his whole body, as by one motion, toward her. The house was very still; there was only the faint crackling of the logs on the fire.

"We had a fear," he said. "It remains!"

The girl went over and stood before the fire, her foot on the brass fender, her fingers linked behind her back. For sometime she was silent. Finally she spoke, without turning her head, in a low voice.

"You know Lord Eckhart?"

A strange expression passed over the Oriental's face.

"Yes, when Lhasa was entered, the Head moved north to our monastery on the edge of the Gobi—the English sovereignty extends to the Kahn line. Lord Eckhart was the political agent of the English government in the province nearest to us."

When the girl got up, the Oriental also rose. He stood awkwardly, his body stooped; his hand as for support resting on the corner of the table. The girl spoke again, in the same posture. Her face toward the fire.

"How do you feel about Lord Eckhart?"

"Feel!" The man repeated the word.

He hesitated a little.

"We trusted Lord Eckhart. We have found all English honorable."

"Lord Eckhart is partly German," the girl went on.

The man's voice in reply was like a foot-note to a discourse.

"Ah!" He drawled the expletive as though it were some Oriental word.

The girl continued. "You have perhaps heard that a marriage is arranged between us."

Her voice was steady, low, without emotion.

For a long time there was utter silence in the room.

Then, finally, when the Oriental spoke his voice had changed. It was gentle, and packed with sympathy. It

was like a voice within the gate of a confessional.

"Do you love him?" it said.

"I do not know."

The vast sympathy in the voice continued. "You do not know?—it is impossible! Love is or it is not. It is the longing of elements torn asunder, at the beginning of things, to be rejoined."

The girl turned swiftly, her body erect, her face lifted.

"But this great act," she cried. "My father, I, all of our blood, are moved by romance—by the romance of sacrifice. Look how my father died seeking an antidote for the pain of the world. How shall I meet this sacrifice of Lord Eckhart?"

Something strange began to dawn in the wide Mongolian face.

"What sacrifice?"

The girl came over swiftly to the table. She scattered the mass of jewels with a swift gesture.

"Did he not give everything he possessed, everything piece by piece, for this?"

She took the necklace up and twisted it around her fingers. Her hands appeared to be a mass of rubies.

A great light came into the Oriental's face.

"The necklace," he said, "is a present to you from the Dalai Lama. It was entrusted to Lord Eckhart to deliver."

XV. Satire of the Sea

"What was the mystery about St. Alban?" I asked.

The Baronet did not at once reply. He looked out over the English country through the ancient oak-trees, above the sweep of meadow across the dark, creeping river, to the white shaft rising beyond the wooded hills into the sky.

The war was over. I was a guest of Sir Henry Marquis for a week-end at his country-house. The man fascinated me. He seemed a sort of bottomless Stygian vat of mysteries. He had been the secret hand of England for many years in India. Then he was made a Baronet and put at the head of England's Secret Service at Scotland Yard.

A servant brought out the tea and we were alone on the grass terrace before the great oak-trees. He remained for some moments in reflection, then he replied:

"Do you mean the mystery of his death?"

"Was there any other mystery?" I said.

He looked at me narrowly across the table.

"There was hardly any mystery about his death," he said. "The man shot himself with an old dueling pistol that hung above the mantel in his library. The family, when they found him, put the pistol back on the nail and fitted the affair with the stock properties of a mysterious assassin.

"The explanation was at once accepted. The man's life, in the public mind, called for an end like that. St. Alban after his career, should by every canon of the tragic muse, go that way."

He made a careless gesture with his fingers.

"I saw the disturbed dust on the wall where the pistol had been moved, the bits of split cap under the hammer, and the powder marks on the muzzle.

"But I let the thing go. It seemed in keeping with the destiny of the man. And it completed the sardonic picture. It was all fated, as the Gaelic people say.... I saw no reason to disturb it."

"Then there was some other mystery?" I ventured.

He nodded his big head slowly.

"There is an ancient belief," he said, "that the hunted thing always turns on us. Well, if there was ever a man in this world on whom the hunted thing awfully turned, it was St. Alban."

He put out his hand.

"Look at the shaft yonder," he said, "lifted to his memory, towering over the whole of this English country, and cut on its base with his services to England and the brave words he said on that fatal morning on the Channel boat. Every schoolboy knows the words:

"Don't threaten, fire if you like!"

"First-class words for the English people to remember. No bravado, just the thing any decent chap would say. But the words are persistent. They remain in the memory. And it was a thrilling scene they fitted into. One must never forge that: The little hospital transport lying in the Channel in a choppy sea that ran streaks of foam; the grim turret and the long whaleback of a U-boat in the foam scruff; and the sun lying on the scrubbed deck of the jumping transport.

"Everybody was crowded about. St. Alban was in the center of the human pack, in a pace or two of clear deck, his injured arm in a sling; his split sleeve open around it; his shoulders thrown back; his head lifted; and before him, the Hun commander with his big automatic pistol.

"It's a wonderful, spirited picture, and it thrilled England. It was in accord with her legends. England has little favor of either the gods of the hills or the gods of the valleys. But always, in all her wars, the gods of the seas back her."

The big Baronet paused and poured out a cup of tea. He tasted it and set it down on the table.

"That's a fine monument," he said, indicating the white shaft that shot up into the cloudless evening sky. "The road makes a sharp turn by it. You have got to slow up, no matter how you travel. The road rises there. It's built that way; to make the passer go slow enough to read the legends on the base of the monument. It's a clever piece of business. Everybody is bound to give his tribute of attention to the conspicuous memorial.

"There are two faces to the monument that you must look at if you go that road. One recounts the man's services to England, and the other face bears his memorable words:

"Don't threaten, fire if you like!"

The Baronet fingered the handle of his teacup.

"The words are precisely suited to the English people," he said. "No heroics, no pretension, that's the whole spirit of England. It's the English policy in a line: We don't threaten, and we don't wish to be threatened by another. Let them fire if they like,—that's all in the game. But don't swing a gun on us with a threat. St. Alban was lucky to say it. He got the reserve, the restraint, the commonplace understatement that England affects, into the sentence. It was a piece of good fortune to catch the thing like that.

"The monument is tremendous. One can't avoid it. It's always before the eye here, like the White Horse of Alfred on the chalk hill in Berkshire. All the roads pass it through this countryside. But every mortal thing that travels, motor and cart, must slow up around the monument."

He stopped for a moment and looked at the white needle shimmering in the evening sun.

"But St. Alban's greatest monument," he said, "was the lucky sentence. It stuck in the English memory and it will never go out of it. One wouldn't give a half-penny for a monument if one could get a phrase fastened in a people's memory like that."

Sir Henry moved in his chair.

"I often wonder," he said, "whether the thing was an inspiration of St. Alban's that morning on the deck of the hospital transport, or had he thought about it at some other time? Was the sentence stored in the man's memory, or did it come with the first gleam of returning consciousness from a soul laid open by disaster? I think racial words, simple and unpretentious, may lie in any man close to the bone like that to be rived out with a mortal hurt. That's what keeps me wondering about the words he used. And he did use them.

"I don't doubt that a lot of our hero stuff has been edited after the fact. But this sentence wasn't edited. That's what he said, precisely. A hundred wounded soldiers on the hospital transport heard it. They were crowding round him. And they told the story when they got ashore. The story varied in trifling details as one would expect among so many witnesses to a tragic event like that. But it didn't vary about what the man said when the Hun commander was swinging his automatic pistol on him.

"There was no opportunity to edit a brave sentence to fit the affair. St. Alban said it. And he didn't think it up as he climbed out of the cabin of the transport. If he had been in a condition to think, he had enough of the devil's business to think about just then; a brave sentence would hardly have concerned him, as I said awhile ago.

"Besides, we have his word that, after what happened in the cabin, everything else that occurred that morning on the transport was a blank to the man; was walled off from his consciousness, and these words were the first impulse of one returning to a realization of events."

Sir Henry Marquis reflected.

"I think they were," he continued. "They have the mark of spontaneity; of the first disgust of one grasping the fact that he was being threatened."

The Baronet paused.

"The event had a great effect on England," he said. "And it helped to restore our shattered respect for a desperate enemy. The Hun commander didn't sink the transport, and he didn't shoot St. Alban. It's true there was a sort of gentleman's agreement among the enemies that hospital transports should not be sunk.

"But anything was likely to happen just then. The Hun had failed to subjugate the world, and he was a barbarous, mad creature. England believed that something noble in St. Alban worked the miracle.

"You're a brave man!"

"Some persons on the transport testified to such a comment from the submarine commander. At any rate, he went back to his U-boat and the undersea.

"That's the last they saw of him. The transport came on into Dover.

"England thought the affair was one of the adventures of the sea. A chance thing, that happened by accident. But there was one man in England who knew better."

"You?" I said.

The Baronet shrugged his shoulders.

"St. Alban," he answered.

He got up and began to walk about the terrace. I sat with the cup of tea cooling before me. The big man walked slowly with his fingers linked behind him. Finally he stopped. His voice was deep and reflective.

"Man is altogether the sport of fortune!... I read that in Herodotus, in a form at Rugby. I never thought about it again. But it's God's truth. St. Alban was at Rugby. I often wonder if he remembered it. My word, he lived to verify it! Herodotus couldn't cite a case to equal him. And the old Greek wasn't hemmed in by the truth. I maintain that the man's case has no parallel.

"To have all the painstaking labor of years negated by one enveloping, vicious misfortune; to be beaten out of life by it, and at the same time to gain that monument out yonder and one's niche as hero by the grim device of an enemy's satire; by the acting of a scene that one would never have taken part in if one had realized it, is beyond any complication of tragedy known to the Greek.

"Look at the three strange phases of it: To be a mediocre Englishman with no special talent; to die in

horrible despair; and to leave behind a glorious legend. And for all these three things to contradict one another in the same life is unequalled in the legends of any people."

The Baronet went on in a deep level voice.

"There was a vicious vitality behind the whole desperate business. Every visible impression of the thing was wrong. Every conception of it held today by the English people is wrong!

"The German submarine didn't overhaul the hospital transport in the Channel by accident. The Hun commander didn't fail to sink the transport out of any humane motives. He didn't fail to shoot St. Alban because he was moved by the heroism of the man. It was all grim calculation!

"He thought it was safe to let St. Alban go ahead. And he would have been right if St. Alban had been the great egotist that he was.

"The commander of that submarine was Plutonburg of Prussia. He was the right-hand man of old Von Tirpitz. He was the one man in the German navy who never ceased to urge its Admiralty to sink everything. He loathed every fiber of the English people. We had all sorts of testimony to that. The trawlers and freightboat captains brought it in. He staged his piracies to a theatrical frightfulness. 'Old England!' he would say, when he climbed up out of the sea onto the deck of a British ship and looked about him at the sailors, 'Old, is right, old and rotten!' Then he would smite his big chest and quote the diatribes of Treitschke. 'But in a world that the Prussian inhabits a nation, old and rotten, may endure for a time, but it shall not endure forever!'

"Plutonburg didn't let St. Alban and the transport go ahead out of the promptings of a noble nature. He did it because he hated England, and he wanted St. Alban to live on in the hell he had trapped him into. He counted on his keeping silent. But the Hun made a mistake.

"St. Alban didn't measure up to the standard of Prussian egoism by which Plutonburg estimated him."

Sir Henry continued in the same even voice. The levels of emotion in his narrative did not move him.

"Did you ever see the picture of Plutonburg, in Munich? He had a face like Chemosh. And he dressed the part. Other under-boat commanders wore the conventional naval cap, but Plutonburg always wore a steel helmet with a corrugated earpiece. Some artist under the frightfulness dogma must have designed it for him. It framed his face down to the jaw. The face looked like it was set in iron, and it was a thick-lidded, heavy, menacing face; the sort of face that a broad-line cartoonist gives to a threatening war-joss. At any rate, that's how the picture presents him. One thinks of Attila under his ox head. You can hardly imagine anything human in it, except a cruel satanic humor.

"He must have looked like Beelzebub that morning, on the transport, when he let St. Alban go on."

The Baronet looked down at me.

"Now, that's the truth about the fine conduct of Plutonburg that England applauded as an act of chivalry. It was a piece of sheer, hellish malignity, if there ever was an instance."

Sir Henry took a turn across the terrace, for a moment silent. Then he went on:

"And in fact, everything in the heroic event on the deck of the transport was a pretense. The Hun didn't intend to shoot St. Alban. As I have said, Plutonburg had him in just the sort of hell he wanted him in, and he didn't propose to let him out with a bullet. And St. Alban ought to have known it, unless, as he afterwards said, the whole thing from the first awful moment in the cabin was simply walled out of his consciousness, until he began dimly to realize up there in the sun, in the crowd, that he was being threatened and blurted out his words from a sort of awful disgust."

Again he paused.

"Plutonburg was right about having St. Alban in the crater of the pit. But he was wrong to measure him by his Prussian standard. St. Alban came on to London. He got the heads of the War Office together and told them. I was there. It was the devil's own muddle of a contrast. Outside, London was ringing with the man's striking act of personal heroism. And inside of the Foreign Office three or four amazed persons were listening to the bitter truth."

The Baronet spread out his hands with a sudden gesture.

"I shall always remember the man's strange, livid face; his fingers that jumped about the cuff of his coat sleeve; and his shaking jaw."

Sir Henry went over and sat down at the table. For a good while he was silent. The sun filtering through the limbs of the great oak-trees made mottled spots on his face. He seemed to turn away from the thing he had been concerned with, and to see something else, something wholly apart and at a distance from St. Alban's affairs.

"You must have wondered like everybody else," he said, "why the Allied drive on the Somme accomplished so little at first. Both England and France had made elaborate preparations for it over a long period of time. Every detail had been carefully, worked out. Every move had been estimated with mathematical exactness.

"The French divisions had been equipped and strategically grouped. England had put a million of fresh troops into France. And the line of the drive had been mapped. The advance, when it was opened on the first day of July, ought to have gone forward irresistibly from cog to cog like a wheel of a machine on the indentations of a track. But the thing didn't happen that way. The drive sagged and stuck."

The big Englishman pressed the table with his clinched hand.

"My word!" he said, "is it any wonder that the devil, Plutonburg, grinned when he put up his automatic pistol? Why shoot the Englishman? He would do it himself soon enough. He was right about that. If he had only been right about his measure of St. Alban, the drive on the Somme would have been a ghastly catastrophe for the Allied armies."

I hesitated to interrupt Sir Henry. But he had got my interest desperately worked up about what seemed to me great unjointed segments of this affair, that one couldn't understand till they were put together. I ventured a query.

"How did St. Alban come to be on the hospital transport?" I said. "Was he in the English army in France?"

"Oh, no," he said. "When the war opened St. Alban was in the Home Office, and, he set out to make England spy-proof. He organized the Confidential Department, and he went to work to take every precaution. He wasn't a great man in any direction, but he was a careful, thorough man. And with tireless, never-ceasing, persistent effort, he very nearly swept England clean of German espionage."

Sir Henry spoke with vigor and decision.

"Now, that's what St. Alban did in England—not because he was a man of any marked ability, but because he was a persistent person dominated by a single consuming idea. He started out to rid England of every form of espionage. And when he had accomplished that, as the cases of Ernest, Lody, and Schultz eloquently attest, he determined to see that every move of the English expeditionary force on the Continent should be guarded from German espionage."

Sir Henry paused and poured out a cup of tea. He tasted it. It was cold, and he put the cup down on the table.

"That's how St. Alban came to be in France," he said. "The great drive on the Somme had been planned at a meeting of military leaders in Paris. The French were confident that they could keep their plans secret from German espionage. They admitted frankly that signals were wireless out of France. But they had taken such precautions that only the briefest signals could go out.

"The Government radio stations were always alert. And they at once negated any unauthorized wireless so that German spies could only snap out a signal or two at any time. They could do this, however.

"They had a wireless apparatus inside a factory chimney at Auteuil. It wasn't located until the war was nearly over.

"The French didn't undertake to say that they could make their country spy-proof. They knew that there were German agents in France that nobody could tell from innocent French people. But they did undertake to say that nothing could be carried over into the German lines. And they justified that promise. They did see that nothing was carried out of France." The Baronet looked at me across the table.

"Now, that's what took St. Alban across the Channel," he said. "The English authorities wanted to be certain that there was no German espionage. And there was no man in England able to be certain of that except St. Alban. He went over to make sure. If the plans for the Somme drive should get out of France, they should not get out through any English avenue."

The Baronet paused.

"St. Alban went about the thing in his thorough, persistent manner. He didn't trust to subordinates. He went himself. That's what took him out on the English line. And that's how he came to be wounded in the elbow.

"It wasn't very much of a wound—a piece of shrapnel nearly spent when it hit him. But the French hospital service was very much concerned. It gave him every attention.

"The man came into Paris when he had finished. The French authorities put him up at the Hotel Meurice. You know the Hotel Meurice. It's on the Rue de la Rivoli. It looks out over the garden of the Tuileries. St. Alban was satisfied with the condition of affairs in France, and he was anxious to go back to London. Arrangements had been made for him to go on the hospital transport.

"He was in his room at the Meurice waiting for the train to Calais. He was, in fact, fatigued with the attention the French authorities had given him. Everything that one could think of had been anticipated, he said. He thought there could be nothing more. Then there was a timid knock, and a nurse came in to say that she had been sent to see that the dressing on his arm was all right. He said that he had found it easier to submit to the French attentions than to undertake to explain that he didn't need them.

"He was busy with some final orders, so he put out his arm and allowed the nurse to take the pins out of the split sleeve and adjust the dressing. She put on some bandages, made a little timid curtsy and went out.

"St. Alban didn't think of it again until the German U-boat stopped the transport the next morning in the Channel. He wasn't disturbed when the submarine commander came into his cabin. He knew enough not to carry any papers about with him. But Plutonburg didn't bother himself about luggage. He'd had his signal from the factory chimney at Auteuil. He stood there grinning in the cabin before St. Alban; that Satanic, Chemosh grin that the artist got in the Munich picture.

"I used to be something of a surgeon," he said, "Doctor Ulrich von Plutonburg, if you will remember. I'll take a look at your arm."

But, Alban said he thought the man might be moved by some humane consideration, so he put out his arm.

"Plutonburg took the pins out of the sleeve and removed the bandage that the nurse had put on in the Hotel Meurice. Then he held it up. The long, cotton bandage was lined with glazed cambric, and on it, in minute detail, was the exact position of all the Allied forces along the whole front in the region of the Somme, precisely as they had been massed for the drive on July first!"

I cried out in astonishment. "So that's what you meant," I said, "by the trailed thing turning on him!"

"Precisely," replied the Baronet. "The very thing that St. Alban labored to prevent another from doing, he did awfully himself!"

The big Englishman's fingers drummed on the table.

"It was a great moment for Plutonburg," he said. "No living man but that Prussian could have put the Satanic humor into the rest of the affair."

He paused as under the pressure of the memory.

"St. Alban always maintained that from the moment he saw the long map on the bandage everything blurred around him, and began to clear only when he spoke on the deck. He used to curse this blur. It made him a national figure and immortal, but it prevented him, he said, from striking the Prussian in the face."

XVI. The House by the Loch

There was a snapping fire in the chimney. I was cold through and I was glad to stand close beside it on the stone hearth. My greatcoat had kept out the rain, but it had not kept out the chill of the West Highland night. I shivered before the fire, my hands held out to the flame.

It was a long, low room. There was an ancient guncase on one side, but the racks were empty except for a service pistol hanging by its trigger-guard from the hook. There were some shelves of books on the other side. But the conspicuous thing in the room was an image of Buddha in a glass box on the mantelpiece.

It was about four inches high, cast in silver and, I thought, of immense age.

I had to wait for my uncle to come in. But I had enough to think about. Every event connected with this visit seemed to touch on some mystery. There was his strange letter to me in reply to my note that I was in England and coming up to Scotland. Surely no man ever wrote a queerer letter to a nephew coming on a visit to him.

It dwelt on the length of the journey and the remoteness of the place. I was to be discouraged in every sentence. I was to carry his affectionate regards to the family in America and say that he was in health.

It stood out plainly that I was not wanted.

This was strange in itself, but it was not the strangest thing about this letter. The strangest thing was a word written in a shaky cramped hand on the back of the sheet: the letters huddled together: "Come!"

I would have believed my uncle justified in his note. It was a long journey. I had great difficulty to find anyone to take me out from the railway station. There were idle men enough, but they shook their heads when I named the house. Finally, for a double wage, I got an old gillie with a cart to bring me as far on the way as the highroad ran. But he would not turn into the unkept road that led over the moor to the house. I could neither bribe nor persuade him. There was no alternative but to set out through the mist with my bag on my shoulder.

Night was coming on. The moor was a vast wilderness of gorse. The house loomed at the foot of it and beyond the loch that made a sort of estuary for the open sea. Nor was this the only thing. I got the impression as I tramped along that I was not alone on the moor. I don't know out of what evidences the impression was built up. I felt that someone was in the gorse beyond the road.

The house was closed up like a sleeping eye when I got before it. It was a big, old, rambling stone house with a tangle of vines half torn away by the winds: I hammered on the door and finally an aged man-servant holding a candle high above his head let me in.

This was the manner of my coming to Saint Conan's Landing.

I had some supper of cold meat brought in by this aged servant. He was a shrunken derelict of a human figure. He was disturbed at my arrival and ill at ease. But I thought there was relief and welcome in his expression. The master would be in directly; he would light a fire in the drawing-room and prepare a bedchamber for me.

One would hardly find outside of England such faithful creatures clinging to the fortunes of descending men. He was at the end of life and in some fearful perplexity, but one felt there was something stanch and sound in him.

I had no doubt that there, under my eye, was the hand that had added the cramped word to my uncle's letter.

I stood now before the fire in the long, low room. The flames and a tall candle at either end of the mantelpiece lit it up. I was looking at the Buddha in the glass box. I could not imagine a thing more out of note. Surely of all corners of the world this wild moor of the West Highlands was the least suited to an Oriental cult. The elements seemed under no control of Nature. The land was windswept, and the sea came crying into the loch.

I suppose it was the mood of my queer experiences that set me at this speculation.

One would expect to find some evidences of India in my uncle's house. He had been a long time in Asia, on the fringes of the English service. Toward the end he had been the Resident at the court of an obscure Rajah in one of the Northwest Provinces. It was on the edge of the Empire where it touches the little-known Mongolian states south of the Gobi.

The Home Office was only intermittently in touch with him. But something, never explained, finally drew its attention and he was put out of India. No one knew anything about it; "permitted to retire," was the text of the brief official notice.

And he had retired to the most remote place he could find in the British islands. There was no other house on that corner of the coast. The man was as alone as he would have been in the Gobi.

If he had planned to be alone one would have believed he had succeeded in that intention. And yet from the moment I got down from the gillie's cart I seemed drawn under a persisting surveillance. I felt now that some one was looking at me. I turned quickly. There was a door at the end of the room opening onto a bit of garden facing the sea. A man stood, now, just inside this door, his hand on the latch. His head and shoulders were stooped as though he had been there some moments, as though he had let himself noiselessly in, and remained there watching me before the fire.

But if so, he was prepared against my turning. He snapped the latch and came down the room to where I stood.

He was a big stoop-shouldered Englishman with a pale, pasty face beginning to sag at the jowls. There was a queer immobility about the features as though the man were always in some fear. His eyes were a pale tallow color and seemed too small for their immense sockets. One could see that the man had been a

gentleman. I write it in the past, because at the moment I felt it as in the past. I felt that something had dispossessed him.

"This will be Robin," he said. "My dear fellow, it was fine of you to travel all this way to see me."

He had a nervous cold hand with hardly any pressure in the grasp of it. His thin black hair was brushed across the top of his bald head, and the distended, apprehensive expression on his face did not change.

He made me sit down by the fire and asked me about the family in America. But there was, I thought, no real interest in this interrogation until he came to a reflective comment.

"I should like to go to America," he said; "there must be great wastes of country where one would be out of the world."

The sincerity of this expression stood out in the trivial talk. It indicated something that disturbed the man. He was as isolated as he could get in England, but that was not enough.

He sat for a moment silent, the fingers of his nervous hand moving on his knee. When he glanced up, with a sudden jerk of his head, he caught me looking at the little image of Buddha in its glass box on the mantelpiece.

Was this longing for solitude the influence of this mysterious religion?

Remote, lonely isolation was a cult of Buddha. The devotees of that cult sought the waste places of the earth for their meditations. To be out of the world, in its physical contact, was a prime postulate in the practice of this creed.

"Ah, Robin," he cried, as though he were in a jovial mood and careless of the subject, "do you have a hobby?"

I answered that I had not felt the need of one. The inquiry was a surprise and I could think of nothing better to reply with.

"Then, my boy," he went on, "what will you do when you are old? One must have something to occupy the mind."

He got up and turned the glass box a little on the mantelpiece.

"This is a very rare image," he said; "one does not find this image anywhere in India. It came from Tibet. The expression and the pose of the figure differ from the conventional Buddha. You might not see that, but to any one familiar with this religion these differences are marked. This is a monastery image, and you will see that it is cast, not graven."

He beckoned me to come closer, and I rose and stood beside him. He went on as with a lecture:

"The reason given by the natives why this image is not found in Southern Asia is that it cannot be cast anywhere but in the Tibetan monasteries. A certain ritual at the time of casting is necessary to produce a perfect figure. This ritual is a secret of the Khan monasteries. Castings of this form of image made without the ritual are always defective; so I was told in India."

He moved the glass box a little closer to the edge of the mantelpiece.

"Naturally," he went on, "I considered this story, to be a mere piece of religious pretension. It amused me to make some experiments, and to my surprise the castings were always defective. I brought the image to England."

He shrugged his shoulders as with a careless gesture.

"In my idle time here I tried it again. And incredibly the result was always the same; some portion of the figure showed a flaw. My interest in the thing was permanently aroused. I continued to experiment."

He laughed in a queer high cackle.

"And presently I found myself desperately astride a hobby. I got all the Babbitt metal that I could buy up in England and put in the days and not a few of the nights in trying to cast a perfect figure of this confounded Buddha. But I have never been able to do it."

He opened a drawer of the gun-case and brought over to the fire half a dozen castings of the Buddha in various sizes.

Not one among the number was perfect. Some portion of the figure was in every case wanting. A hand would be missing, a portion of a shoulder, a bit of the squat body or there would be a flaw where the running metal had not filled the mold.

"I'm hanged," he cried, "if the beggars are not right about it. The thing can't be done! I've tried it in all sorts of dimensions. You will see some of the big figures in the garden. I've used a ton of metal and every sort of mold."

Then he flung his hand out toward the bookcase.

"I've studied the art of molding in soft metal. I have all the books on it, and I've turned the boathouse into a sort of shop. I've spent a hundred pounds—and I can't do it!"

He paused, his big face relaxed.

"The country thinks I'm mad, working with such outlandish deviltry. But, curse the thing, I have set out to do it and I am not going to throw it up."

And suddenly with an unexpected heat he damned the Buddha, shaking his clenched hand before the box.

"Your pardon, Robin," he cried, the moment after. "But the thing's ridiculous, you know. The ritual story would be sheer rubbish. The beggars could not affect a metal casting with a form of words."

I have tried to set down here precisely what my uncle said. It was the last talk I ever had with the man in this world, and it profoundly impressed me. He was in fear, and his jovial manner was a ghastly pretence. I left him sitting by the fire drinking neat whisky from a tumbler.

The old man-servant took me up to my room. It was a big room in a wing of the house looking out on the garden and the sea. I saw that it had been cleaned and made ready against my coming; clearly the old man expected me.

He put the candle on the table and laid back the covers of the bed. And suddenly I determined to have the matter out with him.

"Andrew," I said, "why did you add that significant word to my uncle's letter?"

He turned sharply with a little whimpering cry.

"The master, sir!" he said, and then he stopped as though uncertain in what manner to go on. He made a hopeless sort of gesture with his extended hands.

"I thought your coming might interrupt the thing.... You are of his family and would be silent."

"What threatens my uncle?" I cried, "What is the thing?"

He hesitated, his eyes moving about the floor.

"Oh, sir," he said, "the master is in some wicked and dangerous business. You heard his talk, sir; that would not be the talk of a man at peace.... He has strange visitors, sir, and the place is watched. I cannot tell you any more than that, except that something is going to happen and I am shaken with the fear of it."

I looked out through the musty curtains before I went to bed. But the whole world was dark, packed down in the thick mist. Once, in the direction of the open sea, I thought I saw the flicker of a light.

I was tired and I slept profoundly, but somewhere in the sleep I saw my uncle and a priest of Tibet gibbering over a ladle of molten silver.

It was nearly midday when I awoke. The whole world had changed as under some enchantment; there was brilliant sun and afresh stimulating air with the salt breath of the sea in it. Old Andrew gave me some breakfast and a message.

His manner like everything else seemed to have undergone some transformation. He was silent and, I thought, evasive. He repeated the message without comment, as though he had committed it to memory from an unfamiliar language:

"The master directed me to say that he must make a journey to Oban. It is urgent business and will not be laid over."

"When does my uncle return," I said.

The old man shifted his weight from one foot to the other; he looked out through the open window onto the strip of meadow extending into the loch. Finally he replied:

"The master did not name the hour of his return."

I did not press the interrogation. I felt that there was something here that the old man was keeping back; but I had an impression of equal force that he ought to be allowed the run of his discretion with it. Besides, the brilliant morning had swept out my sinister impressions.

I got my cap and stick from the rack by the door and went out. The house was within a hundred paces of the loch, in a place of wild beauty on a bit of moor, yellow with gorse, extending from the great barren mountains behind it right down into the water. Immense banners of mist lay along the tops of these mountain peaks, and streams of water like skeins of silk marked the deep gorges in dazzling whiteness.

The loch was a crooked finger of the sea hooked into the land. It was clear as glass in the bright morning. The open sea was directly beyond the crook of the finger, barred out by a nest of needlepointed rocks. On this morning, with the sea motionless, they stood up like the teeth of a harrow, but in heavy weather I imagined that the waves covered them. To the eye they were not the height of a man above the level water; they glistened in the brilliant sun like a sheaf of black pikes.

This was Saint Conan's Landing, and it occurred to me that if the holy man came in rough weather from the Irish coast he required, in truth, all the perspicacity of a saint to get his boat in without having it impaled on these devil's needles.

There was no garden to speak of about the house. It was grown up like the moor. Two or three images of Buddhas stood about in it; one of them was quite large—three feet in height I should say at a guess. They were on rough stone pedestals. I examined them carefully. They were all defective; the large one had an immense flaw in the shoulder. The gorse nearly covered them; the unkept hedge let the moor in and there were no longer any paths, except one running to the boathouse.

I did not follow the path. But I looked down at the boathouse with some interest. This was the building that my uncle had turned into a sort of foundry for his weird experiments. There was a big lock on the door and a coal-black chimney standing above the roof.

It was afternoon. The whole coast about me was like an undiscovered country. I hardly knew in what direction to set out on my exploration. I stood in the path digging my stick into the gravel and undecided. Finally I determined to cross the bit of moor to the high ground overlooking the loch. It was the sloping base of one of the great peaks and purple with heather. It looked the best point for a full sweep of the sea and the coast.

I jumped the hedge and set out across the moor to the high ground.

There was no path through the gorse, but when I reached the heather where the foot of the mountain peak descended into the loch there was a sort of newly broken trail. The heather was high and dense and I followed the trail onto the high ground overlooking the sweep of the coast.

The loch was dappled with sun. The air was like wine. The mountains above the moor and the heather were colored like an Oriental carpet. I was full of the joy of life and swung into an immense stride, when suddenly a voice stopped me.

"My lad," it said, "which one of the Ten Commandments is it the most dangerous to break?"

Before me, at the end of the trail, seated on the ground, was a big Highlander. He was knitting a woollen stocking and his needles were clicking like an instrument. I was taken off my feet, but I tried to meet him on his ground.

"Well," I answered, "I suppose it would be the one against murder, the sixth."

"You suppose wrong," he replied. "It will be the first. You will read in the Book how Jehovah set aside the sixth. Aye, my lad, He ordered it broken when it pleased Him. But did you ever read that He set aside the first or that any man escaped who broke it?"

He spoke with the deep rich burr of his race and with a structure of speech that I cannot reproduce here.

"Did you observe," he added, "the graven images that your uncle has set up?... Where is the man the noo?"

"He is gone to Oban," I said.

He sprang up and thrust the stocking and needles into his sporrán.

"To Oban!" He stood a moment in some deep reflection. "There will be ships out of Oban." Then he put another question to me:

"What did auld Andrew say about it?"

"That my uncle was gone to Oban," I answered, "and had set no time for his return."

He looked at me queerly for a moment, towering above me in the deep heather.

"Do you think, my lad, that your uncle could be setting out for heathen parts to learn the witch words for his hell business in the boathouse?"

The suggestion startled me. The thing was not beyond all possibility.

But I felt that I had come to the end of this examination. I was not going to be questioned further like a small boy overtaken on the road I had answered a good many questions and I determined to ask one.

"Who are you?" I said. "And what have you got to do with my uncle's affairs?"

He cocked his eye at me, looking down as one looks down at a child.

"The first of your questions," he said, "you will find out if you can, and the second you cannot find out if you will." And he was gone, striding past me in the deep heather.

"I have some business with your uncle, of a pressing nature," he called back. "I will just take a look through Oban, the night and the morn's morn."

I was utterly at sea about the big Highlander. He might be a friend or an enemy of my uncle. But clearly he knew all about the man and the mysterious experiment in which he was engaged. He was keeping the place well within his eye; that was also evident. From his seat in the heather the whole place was spread out below him.

And his queer speech fitted with old Andrew's fear. Surely the Buddha was a heathen image and my uncle had set it up. The stern Scotch conscience would be outraged and see the Decalogue violated in its injunctions. This would explain the dread with which my uncle's house was regarded and the reason I could find no man to help me on the way to it. But it would not explain my uncle's apprehension.

But my adventure on this afternoon did not end with the big Highlander. I found out something more.

I returned along the edge of the loch and approached the boathouse from the waterside.

Here the path passed directly along the whole wall of the building. The path was padded with damp sod, and as it happened I made no sound on it. It was late afternoon, the shadows were beginning to extend, there was no wind and the whole world was intensely quiet. Midway of the wall I stopped to listen.

The house was not empty. There was some one in it. I could hear him moving about.

It was of no use to try to look in through the wall; every joint and crack of the stones was plastered. I went on.

Old Andrew was about setting me some supper. He came over and stood a moment by the window looking at the shadows on the loch. And I tried to take him unaware with a sudden question:

"Has my uncle returned from Oban?"

But I had no profit of the venture.

"The master," he said, "is where he went this morning."

The strange elements in this affair seemed on the point of converging upon some common center. The thing was in the air. Old Andrew voiced it when he went out with his candle.

"Ah, sir," he said, "it was the fool work of an old man to bring you into this affair. The master will have his way and he must meet what waits for him at the end of it."

I saw how he hoped that my visit might interrupt some plan that my uncle was about to put into effect, but realized that it was useless.

Clearly my uncle had not left the place; he had been at work all day in the boathouse. The journey was to account to me for his disappearance. I had passed the lie along to the queer sentinel that sat watching in the heather and I wondered whether I had sent a friend or an enemy into Oban on an empty mission, and whether I had fouled or forwarded my uncle's enterprise.

I put out the candle and sat down by the window to keep watch, for the boathouse, the loch and the open sea were under the sweep of it. But, alas, Nature overreaches our resolves when we are young. It was far into the night when I awoke.

A wind was coming up and I think it was the rattle of the window that aroused me. There was no moon, but under the open stars the world was filled with a thin, ghostly light, and the scene below the window was blurred a little like an impalpable picture.

A low-masted sailing ship lay in the open sea; there was a boat at the edge of the loch, and human figures were coming out of the boathouse with burdens which they were loading into the boat. Almost immediately the boat, manned with rowers, turned about and silently traversed the crook of the loch on its way to the ship. But certain of the human figures remained. They continued between the boathouse and the beach.

And I realized that I had opened my eyes on the loading of a ship. The boat was taking off a cargo.

Something stored in the boathouse was being transferred to the hold of the sailing ship. The scene was inconceivably unreal. There was no sound but the intermittent puffs of the wind, and the figures were like

phantoms in a sort of lighted mist. Directly as I looked two figures came out of the boathouse and along the path to the drawing-room door under my window. I took off my shoes and crept carefully out of the room and down the stairway. The door from the hall into the long, low room was ajar. I stood behind it, and looked in through the crack.

My uncle was burning letters and papers in the fireplace with a candle, and in the chair beyond him sat the strangest human creature that I had ever seen in the world.

He was a big Oriental with a sodden, brutal face fixed as by some sorcery into an expression of eternal calm. He wore the uniform of an English skipper. It was dirty and sea-stained as though picked up at some sailor's auction. He was speaking to my uncle and his careful precise sentences in the English tongue, coming from the creature, seemed thereby to take on added menace.

"Is it wise, Sahib," he said, "to leave any man behind us in this house?"

"We can do nothing else," replied my uncle.

The Oriental continued with the same carefully selected words:

"Easily we can do something else, Sahib," he said, "with a bar of pig securely lashed to the ankles, the sea would receive them."

"No, no," replied my uncle, busy with his letters and the candle. The big Oriental did not move.

"Reflect, Sahib," he went on. "We are entering an immense peril. The thing that will be hunting us has innumerable agencies everywhere in its service. If it shall discover that we have falsified its symbols, it will search the earth for us. And what are we, Sahib, against this thing? It does not die, nor wax old, nor grow weary."

"The lad knows nothing," replied my uncle, "and old Andrew will keep silent."

"Without trouble, Sahib," the creature continued, "I can put the young one beyond all knowledge and the old one beyond all speech. Is it permitted?"

My uncle got up from the fireplace, for he had finished with his work.

"No," he said, "let there be an end of it."

He turned about, and under the glimmer of the candle I could see that the man had changed; his big pale face was grim with some determined purpose, and there was about him the courage and the authority of one who, after long wavering, at last hazards a desperate venture. He broke the glass box and put the Buddha into his pocket.

"It is good silver," he said, "and it has served its purpose."

The Oriental got softly onto his feet like a great toy of cotton wood. His face remained in its expression of equanimity, and he added no further word of gesture to his argument.

My uncle held the door open for him to pass out, and after that he extinguished the candle and followed, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

The thing was like a scene acted in a playhouse. But it accomplished what the playhouse fails in. It put the fear of death into one who watched it. To me in the dark hall, looking through the crack of the door, the placid Oriental in his English uniform, and with his precise words like an Oxford don, was surely the most devilish agency that ever urged the murder of innocent men on an accomplice.

The wind was continuing to rise and the mist now covered the loch and the open sea. It was of no use to stand before the window, for the world was blotted out. I was cold and I lay down on the bed and wrapped the covers around me. It seemed only a moment later when old Andrew's hand was on me, and his thin voice crying in the room.

"Will you sleep, sir, and God's creatures going to their death!"

He ran, whimpering in his thin old voice, down the stair, and I followed him out of the house into the garden.

It was midmorning. A man was standing before the door, his hands behind him, looking out at the sea. In his long trousers and bowler hat I did not at once recognize him for the Highlander of my yesterday's adventure.

The coast was in the tail of a storm. The wind boomed, as though puffed by a bellows, driving in gusts of mist.

The ship I had seen in the night was hanging in the sea just beyond the crook of the loch. It fluttered like a snared bird. One could see the crew trying every device of sail and tacking, but with all their desperate ingenuities the ship merely hung there shivering like a stricken creature.

It was a fearful thing to look at. Now the mist covered everything and then for a moment the wind swept it out, and all the time, the silent, deadly struggle went on between the trapped ship and the sea running in among the needles of the loch. I don't think any of us spoke except the Highlander once in comment to himself.

"It's Ram Chad's tramp.... So that's the craft the man was depending on!"

Then the mist shut down. When it lifted, the doom of the ship was written. It was moving slowly into the deadly maw of the loch.

Again the mist shut down and, when again the wind swept it out, the ship had vanished.

There was the open sea and the long swells and the murderous current boiling around the sharp points of the needles; but there was no ship nor any human soul of the crew. Old Andrew screamed like a woman at the sight.

"The ship!" he cried. "Where is the ship and the master?"

The thing was so swift and awful that I spoke myself.

"My God!" I said. "How quickly the thing they feared destroyed them!"

The big Highlander came over where I stood. The burr of his speech and its sacred imagery were gone with

his change of dress.

"No," he said, "they escaped the thing they feared.... What do you think it was?"

"I don't know," I answered. "The creature in the English uniform said that it did not die, nor wax old, nor grow weary."

"Ram Chad was right," replied the Highlander. "The British government neither dies, ages, nor tires out. Do you realize what your uncle was doing here?"

"Molding images of Buddha," I said.

"Molding Indian rupees," he retorted.

"The Buddha business was a blind.... I'm Sir Henry Marquis, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard. ... We got track of him in India."

Then he added:

"There's a hundred thousand sterling in false coin at the bottom of the loch yonder!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SLEUTH OF ST. JAMES'S SQUARE ***

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