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and C. N. Williamson**

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Title: Lord John in New York

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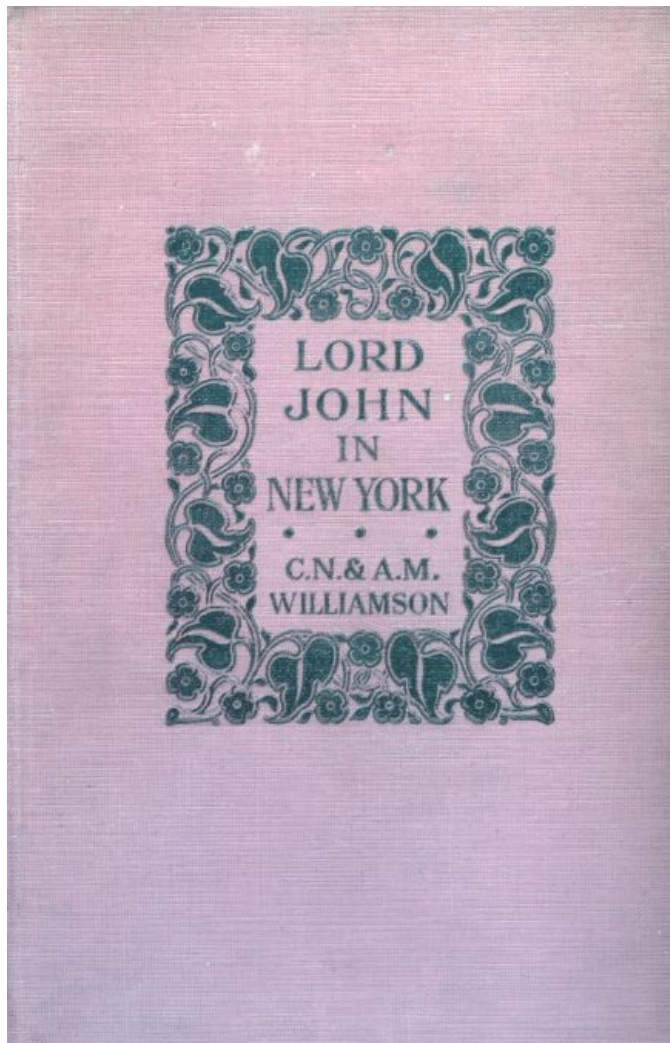
Release date: January 2, 2012 [EBook #38470]

Most recently updated: January 8, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Al Haines

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LORD JOHN IN NEW YORK ***



LORD JOHN

IN NEW YORK

BY

C. N. & A. M. WILLIAMSON

AUTHORS OF "THE LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR"

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

First Published in 1918

BY THE SAME AUTHORS

The Lightning Conductor
The Princess Passes
My Friend the Chauffeur
Lady Betty Across the Water
The Car of Destiny
The Botor Chaperon
Set in Silver
Lord Loveland Discovers America
The Golden Silence
The Guests of Hercules
The Demon
The Wedding Day
The Princess Virginia
The Heather Moon
The Love Pirate
It Happened in Egypt
A Soldier of the Legion
The Shop Girl
The War Wedding
The Lightning Conductress
Secret History
The Cowboy Countess
This Woman to this Man

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TO A CERTAIN KING
OF A CERTAIN CINEMA COMPANY
WHO PUT
"LORD JOHN IN NEW YORK"
ON THE SCREEN

LORD JOHN IN NEW YORK

EPISODE I

THE KEY

"More letters and flowers for you, Lord John," said my nurse.

Not that I needed a nurse; and, above all things, I needed no more letters or flowers. The

waste-paper basket was full. The room smelt like a perfume factory. The mantelpiece and all other receptacles having an army of occupation, vases and bowls were mobilising on the floor. This would, of course, not be tolerated in hospital; but I was off the sick list, recovering in a private convalescent home. I was fed up with being a wounded hero; the fragrance of too many flowers, and the kindness of too many ladies, was sapping and mining my brain power; consequently, I could invent no excuse for escape.

The nurse came in, put down the lilies, and gave me three letters.

My heart beat, for I was expecting a note from a woman to whom somehow or other I was almost engaged, and to whom I didn't in the least wish to be engaged. She would not have looked at me before the war, when I was only a younger brother of the Marquis of Haslemere—and the author of a successful detective story called *The Key*. Now, however; simply because I'd dropped a few bombs from a monoplane on to a Zeppelin hangar in Belgium, had been wounded in one arm and two legs, and through sheer instinct of self-preservation had contrived to escape, I was a toy worth playing with. She wanted to play with me. All the women I knew, not busy with better toys, wanted to play with me. My brother Haslemere, who had been ashamed of my extremely clever, rather successful book, and the undoubted detective talent it showed, was proud of me as a mere bomb-dropper. So, too, was my sister-in-law. I was the principal object of attraction at the moment in Violet's zoo—I mean her convalescent home. She had cried because men were not being wounded fast enough to fill its expensively appointed rooms; I was captured, therefore, to make up for deficiencies and shown off to Violet's many friends, who were duly photographed bending beautifully over me.

There was, as I had feared, a letter from Irene Anderson; there was also—even worse—one from Mrs. Allendale. But the third letter was from Carr Price. On the envelope was the address of the New York theatre where the play he had dramatised from my book would shortly be produced. He had come to England a million years ago, before the war, to consult me about his work, which would have been brought out in London if the war had not upset our manager's plans. I like Carr Price, who is as much poet as playwright; a charming, sensitive, nervous, wonderful fellow. I gave his letter precedence.

"DEAR LORD JOHN," he began, and I judged from the scrawl that he wrote in agitation—"for goodness' sake, what have you done to Roger Odell that he should have a grouch on you? It must have been something pretty bad. I wish to Heaven you'd given me the tip last summer that you'd made an enemy of him. Roger Odell, of all men in America! I suppose the brother of a marquis can stand on his own feet in his own country, but even if his brother's an archangel his feet are apt to get cold in New York if Roger Odell turns the heat off.

"The facts—as I've just heard from Julius Felborn—are these. Yesterday Odell sent for Julius, who went like a bird, for he and Odell are friends. Odell's money and influence put Julius where he is now, as a manager, up at the top, though still young. What was Julius's horror, however, when Odell blurted out a warning not to produce any play dramatised from a book of yours, because he—Odell—would do his best to ruin it! Julius asked what the dickens he meant. Odell wouldn't explain. All he'd say was, that he'd be sorry to hurt Julius and had nothing against me, but *The Key* would get no chance in New York or any old town in the United States where Roger Odell had a finger in the pie.

"Well, you must have heard enough about Odell to know what such a threat amounts to. There are mighty few pies he hasn't got a finger in. Not that he's a man who threatens as a rule. He's *made* a good many men. I never heard of his *breaking* one. But when he decides to do a thing, he does it. Julius is in a blue funk. He's not a coward, but even if he felt strong enough to fight Odell's newspapers and other influence, he says it would be an act of 'base ingratitude' to do so, as he'd be 'walking on his uppers' now but for Odell's help, tiding over rough places in the past. Julius took all night to reflect, and rang me up this morning. I'm writing in his office at the theatre now, after our interview. He says Odell would have put him wise before, but he saw the pars (in his own papers!) for the first time yesterday morning on the way back from the West Indies, where he'd been on a short business trip. Queer place for such a man to go on a business trip! But the whole thing is dashed queer. Now he's off again like a whirlwind to England for *another* 'short business trip,' so he told Julius. But J. let drop one little item of information about a woman, or rather a girl. *Can* that be where *you* come in on this? *Have you taken this girl away?* Anyhow, whatever you've done, the consequences seem likely to be serious. Julius is inclined to call a halt, bribe, wheedle or bluster the star into throwing up his part at the first rehearsal, by way of an excuse, and to put on Chumley Reed's *Queen Sweetheart*, which he kept up his sleeve in case *The Key* failed. But, of course, it *couldn't* fail, unless it was burked. The whole cast was wild over *The Key*. Julius himself was wild, and is sick at having to turn it down. But Odell's too big for him. And I guess O— has offered to stand the racket for the loss of wasted scenery, which has been begun on an elaborate scale. (Think of the great casino act at Monte Carlo!) Unfortunately, I'm constituted so I can't help seeing both sides of the shield and putting myself in others' places. I'm sorry for Julius. But I'm twenty times sorrier for Carr Price. For you, too, my dear fellow, of course. But I stand to lose more than you do on this deal.

"I told you confidentially last June just what depends on the success of *The Key*, and I've counted on that success as certain. So did *she*. I wish to Heaven she weren't so conscientious—

yet no, I love her all the better for what she is. I shan't ask her to break the promise she gave her father, who, you may remember, is Governor of my own State, not to be engaged definitely till I've made good. But if I'm to have even my *chance* to make good snatched away, it's hard lines. I wish to the Lord my dear girl weren't such a howling swell, with such an important parent! No use hustling around to other managers. Your book went like hot cakes here. So would your play, but no man will pit himself against Roger Odell, if Odell means fighting. And there's no doubt he does mean it—unless you can undo whatever the fool thing is you've done.

"Probably this letter will go to England in the same ship with Odell. If you're well enough by the time it reaches you, to crawl about, can't you see him? I've told Felborn that when you set your wits to work you're as much of a wonder as your Prime Minister in *The Key*. I've worked him up to some sort of superstitious belief in you. The next thing is, to make him merely *put off* the rehearsal on some pretext, and do nothing one way or the other till I get a cable. I shan't sleep or eat till I hear whether there's any hope of your straightening things with Odell.—Yours, C.P."

"Straightening things with Odell!" That might have been simple, if things had ever been crooked with Odell. But I had never met, I had never seen him. All I knew was what I had read, and vaguely heard from Americans: that Roger Odell was a millionaire, still a young man, a popular fellow who had made most of his money out of mines and had bought up an incredible number of newspapers in order to make his power felt in the world. But what grudge had he against me? How did he know that I existed? I decided that I owed it to myself as an expert even more than to Price and his girl, who was a "governor's daughter," to turn on the searchlight.

It was nearly my time for an outing. Lady Emily Boynton was coming in about an hour to collect me in her car, take me to the park and there let me try a combination of legs and crutches. But in my room was a telephone. In general I cursed the noisy thing. To-day I blessed it. I 'phoned to the doctor that, instead of his coming to me, I should prefer to call on him, explaining my reason when we met. Next I rang up Lady Emily to say that I was going to Harley Street. She mustn't trouble to send, as I was ordering a taxi in a hurry. And lest she should disobey, I hobbled off before her car could arrive—my first independent expedition since I had been interned by Violet.

I hoped that Roger Odell might be caught at some hotel in London, and resolved not to stop going till I found him. I began at the Savoy, and it seemed that luck was with me when I learned that he had arrived the night before. He had gone out, however, directly after breakfast, leaving no word as to his return. This was a blow, especially as it appeared that he had hired a powerful automobile; and even American millionaires do not hire powerful automobiles to run about town.

They take taxis.

I gave myself a minute's reflection, and decided that it would be tempting Providence to intern myself again before seeing Odell, or else definitely failing to see him. I refused to leave my name, saying that I would call later; and on the way to keep my Harley Street appointment stopped my taxi at a post office. Thence I sent a cable to Carr Price—

"Count on me to make everything right with Odell. Postpone rehearsals if necessary, but assure Felborn he can safely prepare production. Will wire further details.—JOHN HASLE."

Perhaps Price and Felborn would have considered this assurance premature had they known the little I possessed to go upon. But I had confidence in myself, and felt justified in rushing off a cheerful message. Delay and uncertainty were the two fatal obstacles to our scheme. It seemed fair to presume that, as I've never met nor harmed Odell, his objection to me must be founded on some misunderstanding which a few frank words ought to clear up. All I had to do was to see him; and I *would* see him if I had to camp at his door for a week.

Having got off my cable I called on the doctor, explaining to him, as man to man, that I was being killed with kindness, buried under flowers and jellies, as Tarpeia was buried under shields and bracelets. "I must get out from under," I said, "or I shall fade like a flower or dissolve into a jelly myself. Can't you save me?"

"I thought you were enjoying life," he replied. "You're well enough, as a matter of fact, to do almost anything except go back to the front. Your legs won't run to that, my boy, for the next six months at least. If you're such an ungrateful beggar that you want to leave Lady Haslemere's paradise and all its lovely hours, save yourself. Don't put the responsibility on me."

"Coward!" I said. (I would have hissed it, but, except in novels, it is physically impossible to hiss the word "coward.")

"The same to you," he retorted. "Get someone to send you on some mission and I'll back you up. I'll certify that you're strong enough to undertake it, if it doesn't depend on your legs, and is not too strenuous."

"I may need to run over to America," it suddenly occurred to me to say, as if by inspiration. "I should have to depend on brains, not legs. Would New York be too strenuous?"

"I hear they're pretty strenuous over there, but—well——"

"You don't know what I go through every day at that confounded home for milksops when your back is turned," I pleaded, as he hesitated. That settled it. We both laughed, and I knew he'd see me through. Five minutes before nothing had been further from my mind than a trip to New York; but now I felt that it had been my secret intention from the first. It was strongly impressed upon me that I should have to go. Why, I could not tell. But the thing would happen.

It was two o'clock and luncheon time when I got back to the Savoy, but Odell had not returned. I wired (I would not 'phone lest I should be unearthed like a fox from his hole) to the convalescent home, saying that all was well and I had the doctor's authority to stop out as long as I liked. I then ate a substantial meal and inquired again at the desk. No Odell. I said I would wait. Would they kindly let me know, in the reading-room, when Mr. Odell arrived? I being wounded and in khaki, they waived suspicion of a nameless caller. I was given the freedom of the Savoy, and I waited. I waited three hours, and read all the magazines and papers. Then I wandered into the foyer and ordered tea. While I was having it, up trotted a sympathetic clerk with a flurried manner to inform me that Mr. Odell was not coming back at all. A telegram had just been received, saying that important business called him home at once. He was on his way by automobile to Liverpool, whence he would sail next morning on the *Monarchic*. His luggage was to be forwarded by messenger in time to go on board the ship.

For a few seconds I felt as if what remained of my tea had been flung in my face, scalding hot. But by the time I'd thanked my informant, paid my waiter and picked up my crutches, I knew why I had had that presentiment. I taxied to Cook's and learned that, owing to the war, I could get a cabin on any ship I liked. From Cook's to the doctor's; found him going out, dragged him home with me, and utilised his services in wrestling with the matron and nurses. "The play of my book is being produced in New York, and I must be there, dead or alive," I explained. This seemed to them important, even unanswerable. It would not to my sister-in-law. But she was having influenza at home, and I sneaked off before she knew (having got leave from the War Office), sending her a grateful, regretful telegram from Liverpool.

Even the amateur sleuth doesn't let a ship carry him away to sea without making sure that his quarry is on board. Roger Odell's name was not on the passenger list, but neither was mine; we were late comers. Nevertheless, I knew he was certain to have a good cabin, and I inquired casually of a steward on the promenade deck whether he had "Seen Mr. Odell yet?" He fell into my trap and answered that he had not, but his "mate" would be looking after the gentleman who was in the bridal suite.

I pricked up my ears, remembering that, according to Carr Price, there was a girl in the case. Something unexpected had happened to upset Odell's plans in England. Could he be running off with anybody's wife or daughter?

"I didn't know that Mr. Odell was on his honeymoon," I ventured as a feeler.

The steward looked nonplussed, then grinned. "Oh, you're thinking of the bridal suite, sir!" he patronised my ignorance. "There's nothing in *that*. Probably the gentleman wired for the best there was. He's alone, sir. Do you wish to send word to him? I can fetch my mate——"

I broke in with thanks, saying that I would see Mr. Odell later. No doubt I would do so; but how I should recognise him was the question. Meanwhile, I limped about the deck, hoping to come across a chair labelled "Odell," and vainly searching I met a deck-steward. He took pity on my lameness, and offered to get me a chair at once. "Where would you like to sit, sir?"

I wanted to say, "Put me next to Mr. Roger Odell," but that was too crude a means towards the end. I looked around, hesitating and hoping—in a way I have which sometimes works well—for an inspiration, and my wandering eyes arrived at a girl. Then they ceased to wander. She was extraordinarily pretty, and therefore more important than twenty Roger Odells. She was just settling into her deck-chair. To the right was another chair, with a rug and a pillow on it. To the left was an unfilled space.

"There's room over there," I said. "It seems a well-sheltered place."

"It is, sir," replied the steward. Without allowing an eye to twinkle, he solemnly plumped down my chair at the left of the girl, not too near, yet not too far distant. She glanced up, as if faintly annoyed at being given a neighbour, but seeing my crutches, melted and gave me a brief yet angelic look of sympathy. If she had been a nurse in my sister-in-law's home I should never have left it. For she was one of those girls who, if there were only half a dozen men remaining in the world at the end of the war, would be certain to receive proposals from at least five. She was the type of the Eternal Feminine, the woman of our dreams, the face in the sunset and moonbeams. Perhaps you have seen such a face in real life—just once.

The girl had on a small squirrel toque and a long squirrel coat. She was wrapped in a squirrel rug to match. She had reddish-brown hair. All the girls who can take the last men in the world away from all the other women have more or less of that red glint in their hair. Yet she seemed

far from anxious to take the man who came striding along the deck and stopped in front of her as the ship got under way.

What she did was to look up and cry out a horrified "Oh!" Her cheeks, which had been pale, flamed red. She half threw off her fur rug, and would have struggled out of her chair if the man had not appealed to her mercy.

"Don't run away from me, Grace," he said, "after all these months."

The name "Grace" suited the girl, or rather expressed her. The man stared with hungry eyes. I was sorry for him. Somehow, I seemed to know how he felt. He had an American voice and looked like an American—that good, strong type of American who can hold his own anywhere: not tall, not short, not slim, not stout, not very dark, not very fair; square-jawed, square-shouldered; aggressive-featured, kind-eyed; one rebellious lock of brown hair falling over a white forehead.

"But—I *have* been running away from you all these months. I've been doing nothing else. I could do nothing else," she reproached him. They had both forgotten me. Besides, I was not obtrusively near.

"Don't I know you've been running away—to my sorrow?" he flung back at her. "I heard of you in the West Indies. I went there to hunt you down. You'd gone. I dashed home. You hadn't come back. I was told—I won't say by whom—that you were in England. I ran over and got on your track yesterday; flashed off to Bath in a fast auto; reached there just as you'd left for Liverpool to sail on this ship. So now I'm here."

She looked up at him, tears on her lashes. "Oh, Rod!" was all she said. It did not need that name to tell me who he was, but eyes and voice told me something more. She was not flirting with him. She was not pretending to wish that he had not come. With all her heart and soul she did wish it, yet—*she loved him*. I wondered if he knew that, or if not how much he would give to learn it.

"You can't get away from me this time," he said, not truculently, but pleadingly, as if he were afraid she might somehow slip out of his hands. "We'll have five days and a half—I hope six—together. If I can't persuade you in five days and a half—"

"You couldn't in five hundred years and a half! Rod, what do you *think* of me? Do you suppose I want you to *die*?"

"Do you suppose I'm *afraid*?"

"No. But I am—for you. Nothing on this earth can induce me to change my mind. You only make us both miserable by keeping on. Oh, Rod, here comes Aunt Marian! This is her chair."

Roger Odell glanced in the direction the girl's eyes gave him. I did likewise. A woman was coming, a tall woman in brown. A generation ago she would have been middle-aged; in our generation such women are young. She looked about thirty-eight, and so I put her down as ten years older. She was dusky olive, with a narrow face, banded black hair, and a swaying throat: rather a beautiful Leonardo da Vinci sort of woman.

Evidently she was as much astonished to see Odell as the girl had been, but she had a different way of showing it. She did not seem to mind his presence when she got over her surprise. She shook hands and let him put her into her chair, tucking the brown fur rug around her body and under her slim feet. I thought she seemed more Italian than American. She was very agreeable to Odell, in a cool, detached way, but when she inquired if he ought not to be going below to lunch, even a man of his determination was obliged to take the hint. "We are having something brought to us on deck," she explained. "Come back if you like when you have finished."

My lameness gave me an excuse for troubling the deck steward, who fetched me a plate of cold chicken at about the time when more elaborately furnished trays were placed before the two ladies. They had more to eat than I, but they finished sooner; at least, it was so with the younger. There was no sea on, yet she left her luncheon almost untouched, and after five minutes' playing with it went indoors. No sooner had she got safely away than Odell came back to accept the invitation given by "Aunt Marian," only to find it no longer worth his acceptance. (Recalling her words, I realised that she had never expected "Grace" to stay.) Odell asked for a chair, nevertheless, and had it put next to hers, evidently meaning to annex the place permanently. These were the right tactics, of course. Even I should have adopted them; but they were opposed to a more subtle and deadly strategy. "Grace" proceeded to prove that being on board the same ship with her did not mean being in her society. She did not appear on deck again. Odell was forced to realise that he had made the girl a prisoner in her cabin.

That afternoon the list of passengers was given out, and I searched eagerly for her name. I had not far down the alphabet to go. There she was among the "C's"—"Miss Grace Callender." The name was an electric shock; and seeing it I could guess but too easily why the girl might love a man and run away from him.

Nobody who read the newspapers three years ago could have helped knowing who Grace

Callender was; and if they forgot, she would certainly have been recalled to their minds a year and a half later. I, at least, had not forgotten. I owed to the "Callender-Graham Tragedy" one detail which had helped to make the success of my novel, and had suggested its name, *The Key*. Miss Callender was (and is) an American heiress, but England has its own reasons for being interested in American heiresses. Therefore, at the time of the two great sensational events in Grace Callender's life, London papers gave long paragraphs to the story.

Her parents—cousins—were both killed in a motor accident in France while she was a schoolgirl at home in charge of her aunt, a half-sister of the father, Graham Callender. Both parents were rich, having, for their lifetime, the use of an immense fortune, or rather the income derived from it. The principal could not be touched by them, but passed to their only child. This arrangement had come about through a family quarrel in the previous generation; but, as Graham Callender and his wife were of opinion that injustice had been done, they wished their daughter to atone for it by her marriage. Half the money ought rightly to have gone to Philip Callender-Graham, a cousin who had been disinherited in their favour. He had died poor, leaving a couple of sons a few years older than Grace. The two had been educated at Graham Callender's expense, and had spent their holidays at his houses in town and country. Grace had grown up to look upon both almost as brothers, though they were only her second cousins. She was fond of the pair—a little fonder of Perry, the elder, than of his younger brother Ned. As for the brothers themselves, it appeared later that both were in love with Grace; but Ned kept his secret and let Perry win the prize. The engagement of Grace Callender and Perry Callender-Graham was announced on the girl's nineteenth birthday. One night a few months later, and just one week before the day fixed for the wedding, Perry Callender-Graham was found dead in a quiet side street near Riverside Drive.

There were no marks of violence on his body, and apparently he had not been robbed. In his pockets were several letters which could have no bearing on the cause of his death, an empty envelope, a sum of money, a jewel-case containing a diamond pendant, probably intended as a gift for his fiancée, and two keys which seemed to be new. Both were latchkeys: one rather large and long, looking as if it might belong to the front door of a house; the other was small, not unlike the key to the door of the dead man's flat. Neither fitted any door of the private hotel in which he lived, however, and consequently suggested mystery. But as three specialists certified death by natural causes, the police came to regard the keys as of no importance. The doctors testified to a condition known as "status lymphaticus," which cannot be diagnosed during life, but which may cause a slight shock to be fatal. It was thought that Callender-Graham—whose body lay close to a street crossing—might have started back to save himself from being run over by a swift automobile suddenly turning the corner, and in the shock of falling have died of heart failure.

Grace Callender was grieved and distressed, but not prostrated with sorrow, as she would have been over the loss of an adored lover. Everyone who knew her knew that she had been going to marry her cousin not because she was in love, but in order to give him the fortune wrongfully diverted from his father. In these peculiar circumstances, many people prophesied the thing which happened a year later: her engagement to Ned Callender-Graham, through whom the restitution could equally well be made. He seemed to be a popular fellow, even better liked in general than his dreamy, poetical brother; and as his friends guessed that he had unselfishly stood in the background for Perry's sake, all were pleased with his good fortune. The engagement went on for six months; and then a week before the wedding was to take place, Ned Callender-Graham was found dead in the same street and almost on the same spot where his brother had fallen a year and a half before.

This extraordinary coincidence was rendered even more remarkable by the fact that nearly every detail of the first tragedy was repeated in the second. Not only had the brothers met their death in the same street, and almost on the eve of marriage with the same girl, but, according to doctors' evidence, they had died in the same way and at practically the same hour. Ned, like Perry, was afflicted with status lymphaticus. There was no trace of violence on his body. He had not been robbed, for his pockets were full of money. He carried his brother's watch which Perry's will had left to him—the watch which Perry had worn on the night of his death—and two or three letters, together with an empty envelope. Stranger than all, perhaps, he had in his possession two new latchkeys—duplicates of the keys found in his dead brother's pocket.

This time, owing to the almost miraculous resemblance between the cases, foul play was suspected. But it seemed that the brothers had no enemies and, so far as could be learned, no serious rivals with Miss Callender. The girl and her aunt clung to the belief that Perry and Ned had died natural deaths, and that the ghastly coincidence was no more than a coincidence. Miss Marian Callender's theory was that Ned had fallen a victim to his love for his brother, a too sensitive conviction of guilt in taking Perry's place, and an unhappy superstition which he had confided to her—though, naturally, not to her niece. He believed himself to be haunted by his brother's spirit, which influenced him to do things he did not wish. He said one day that he doubted if Perry would ever let him marry Grace, but would contrive to break off the engagement in some way, even if all went well until the last moment. Miss Marian Callender suggested that the apparently mysterious keys were the same keys which Perry had possessed, they having been given, with other souvenirs of the dead man, to his brother; that it was characteristic of Ned to keep them by him, as well as the watch, in a kind of remorseful loyalty to the brother he had superseded; and that the same half-affectionate, half-fearful superstition had led him that night into the street where Perry had fallen. Once there—at an hour the same as that of Perry's death a

week before his appointed marriage—in all probability Ned had imagined himself confronted by his brother's accusing ghost. The two were known to be temperamentally as well as physically alike, though Ned was undoubtedly stronger physically. It was not strange if Perry had a peculiar weakness of the heart that Ned should have the same; and the shock of a fancied meeting with Perry's spirit at such a time and such a place might easily have been too great for a man already at high nervous tension. Others than Miss Marian Callender talked freely with reporters and detectives, repeating her story that Ned Callender-Graham had felt oppressed with a sense of guilt, that he had worried himself into an emotional state which he had tried to hide, and that he had attended spiritualistic séances. All this, together with the fact that there was no evidence of murder, caused the second verdict to be the same as the first. But Grace Callender found herself so stared at and pointed at, and gossiped about wherever she went, that her life became a burden. She knew that terrible nicknames were fastened upon her, that she was called "Belladonna" and "The Poison Flower," as if her promise to marry had brought death upon her lovers. She heard women whispering behind her back, "If I were a man I simply shouldn't *dare* be engaged to her in spite of her millions"; and what she did not hear she imagined. She in her turn grew superstitious, or so it was said. She began to feel that there must be something fatal about her; that a curse which the father of Perry and Ned was said to have pronounced on her parents in his first fury at losing a fortune had been visited on her. Though she had twice come near her wedding she had never yet deeply loved a man; nevertheless, because of the "curse" and in fear of it, she resolved to give up all hope of happiness in love, never to marry, nor even engage herself again.

All this I remembered distinctly, not alone because my memory is a blotting-pad for such cases, but because the story had captured my imagination, and because I had used the detail of the keys for my own book, only substituting one for two.

"By Jove!" I said. "The key! Now, can that be the clue to Roger Odell's veto?"

I set myself deliberately to think the matter over from this new point of view. Evidently he was desperately in love with Grace Callender. Could the mere fact that I had named a book of mine *The Key*, and turned my plot upon a mysterious key found in a dead man's pocket, have inspired Odell with revengeful rage? Except for the title, and the key in the pocket, there was nothing in my book or in Carr Price's play which bore even the vaguest likeness to the Callender-Graham tragedy. I didn't see how the most loyal lover could feel that I had "butted in" upon what to him was sacred; still, the new idea had some substance in it. Not only had I hit on a possible clue to the man's enmity, but into my mind from another direction suddenly flashed so astounding a ray of light that I was almost blinded. I could hardly wait to try weapons with Odell.

How to get at him and hold him, so to speak, at my mercy was the next difficulty. I had to think that out too, and I did it by process of deduction. For reasons of my own, I had not yet secured a seat in the dining-saloon, but now I limped down below with my inspiration. Others had made their arrangements and gone, but I managed to catch the head steward.

"I suppose you're assigning seats for people who want to sit alone at these small tables?" I began.

"We have assigned only one such, sir," he cautiously admitted. "All we're able to give."

"Why all?" I wanted to know. "There are plenty of tables and only a few passengers."

"Yes, sir, that's true. But also, there's only a few stewards. We haven't enough to spare for scattering around."

"Is Mr. Roger Odell the one fortunate person to whom you've been able to give a table to himself?" I threw out this question like a lasso.

"Why, yes, sir, as a matter of fact he is," the caught steward confessed. "We've several tables with parties of two or three, but for one alone—"

"I may wish to be alone just as much as Mr. Odell does," I argued. "But the next best thing to being alone is to sit with another man who wants to be alone. Then there's no fear of too much conversation. Put me at Mr. Odell's table." As I spoke I slipped a five-pound note into a surprised but unresisting hand. (I had to bribe high to outbribe a millionaire.) Even as his fingers closed mechanically on the paper the steward's tongue began to stammer, "I—I'm afraid he may object, sir."

"He may at first; but not after three minutes. All I ask is to be put at the table when Mr. Odell is seated, and without his knowing beforehand that he's obliged to have a companion. If he still objects after three minutes of my company I've had my money's worth. I'll leave him in possession of the table; you can put me where you like."

It was a bargain. The steward pointed out the table selected by Odell.

I was dressed and ready for dinner before the bugle sounded, but did not go down until I thought that most of the passengers would be already seated. Hovering in the doorway, I saw that Odell was already in his place. Then I made straight for the table and sat down in the chair opposite his.

He had been gloomily eating his soup, and looked up from it with a glare.

"I think you must be making a mistake," he remarked with an effort at civility. "I asked to be alone."

"So did I," I said.

"But not at this table."

"At this very table."

"Then I'll leave it to you."

"Please don't," I said. "If one of us goes, I'll be the one, as I'm the last comer. But will you meanwhile be kind enough to answer two easy questions? First, are you Mr. Roger Odell of New York?"

"Yes, to question number one. If the next's as easy, perhaps I'll answer that too."

(He looked faintly amused. The space between his straight black eyebrows was growing visible again. I had still two minutes and a half out of the three.)

"Thank you," I said. "The next should be even easier. Why have you warned Julius Felborn that if he brings out Carr Price's play, *The Key*, you'll quash it?"

The man's face changed. From half-amused boredom it expressed white rage. "You are that fellow John Hasle," he said. His voice was low and in control, but his look was vitriolic. All the same, I liked him. He was a man, and I had a man's chance with him.

"Yes, I'm that fellow John Hasle. Let me introduce myself," I replied.

"You've hunted me down. You said you wanted to sit alone. That was not true."

"I said, 'I asked to sit alone.' I wanted to sit with you. It was my way of getting to do it. I took not only the table and the opportunity, but my ticket to New York with the same object. I think I have the right to inquire what's your motive for wishing to injure me and to expect that you'll answer. If you think differently, I'll get up at once and go. But I believe I shall have succeeded in spoiling your appetite."

"You're a cool hand," he said, with no softening of the eyes which gave me look for look. "Sit still. If you get up and hobble away on those crutches you'll have the whole room gaping at us." (Not for the first time were my crutches a blessing in disguise:) "Whether you've a right to question me or not, I don't mind telling you that I think Americans are better at detective literature than any Englishman, speaking generally, and a whole lot better than John Hasle, speaking particularly."

"I think," said I, "that I shall be able to prove my detective powers to you later on, speaking very particularly."

"Ah, indeed! In what way?"

"'Later on' was what I said."

"All right. I'm in no hurry."

"I am. Because several matters have got to be settled before I can progress much further. For one thing, you haven't answered my second question. Your opinion of my book or my British limitations as a detective has nothing to do with your attitude toward the play."

"If you know so much, perhaps you know more."

"Frankly, I don't. I ask you to tell me the rest as frankly."

"Very well. Perhaps the medicine will go to the spot quicker if you understand what it's for. It sounds sort of melodramatic, and maybe it is so; but my wish—my intention—to strangle your play at birth, or crush it afterwards, has revenge for its motive."

"Revenge for what?"

"For the cruel act of a member of your family to a member of mine."

"There's only one other member of my family beside myself—my brother."

"Exactly! That's the man. There's only one other member of *my* family beside myself. That's my adopted sister. I care more for her than anyone else in the world—except one. Through your brother, my sister's health and her hopes are both ruined. If you didn't know before, you know now what you're up against."

"I assure you I didn't know," I said. "This is the last thing that occurred to me. I admit I

thought of something else——"

"Oh, is there something else? It's not needed. Still, you may as well out with it, so I can put another black mark against the name."

"I'll tell you, when I'm ready to talk of the detective test I spoke of. But about my brother injuring your adopted sister. There must be some mistake——"

"Not on your life, if you're Lord John Hasle and your brother's the Marquis of Haslemere."

"I can't deny that."

"It's a pity!"

"So *he* often says. He's not proud of me as an author. He'd be still less proud of me on the stage. You'll be doing him a real service if you prevent *The Key* from being produced, and so keep the family name out of the papers in connection with the theatre."

"Oh, will I?" Odell echoed. He looked rather blank for a moment; then gathered himself and his black eyebrows together. "You're mighty intelligent, aren't you?" he sneered.

"I've always thought so. I'm glad you agree. But there's no use our rotting on like this. We're wasting time. Will you tell me what Haslemere can possibly have done?"

"Yes! What he positively *did* do!" the man broke out fiercely, then controlled himself and glanced quickly round the room as if looking for someone. But not even Miss Marian Callender had come into the saloon. Both she and her niece must have been dining in their own suite. "Lord Haslemere wrote a letter to your British Lord Chamberlain, or whatever you call his High Mightiness, and caused him to have my sister's presentation at Court cancelled three days before it should have come off in May last year."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "What an extraordinary thing to do!"

"What a monstrous, what a beastly thing to do! A defenceless girl. A beautiful girl. One of the best on earth. It broke her heart—the humiliation of it, and the shock. She wasn't very strong, and she'd been looking forward to making her bow to your Royalties. Lord knows why she should have cared so much. But she did. She loved England. She has English blood in her veins. She had a sort of loyal feeling to your King and Queen. That is what she got for it. She's never been the same since, and I doubt if she ever will be. All her friends knew she was going to be presented—and then she wasn't. The damned story leaked out somehow, and has been going the rounds ever since. That's why, if your play is produced in New York, I shall see it gets what it deserves—or, anyway, what your family deserves."

"How do you know Haslemere wrote that letter?" I asked.

"My sister got it from a woman who was to present her—a friend of Lord Haslemere's wife. She'd seen the letter."

"Then she must have seen some reason alleged."

"She did. That to his certain knowledge Miss Madeleine Odell wasn't a proper person to be introduced to their Majesties. Maida not a proper person! She's a saint."

"What lie about her could have been told to my brother?"

"I know what lie was told, because it has been told to others. It's blighted her life for years, go where she would on our side of the water. She hoped it wouldn't have got so far as England; and if it hadn't, she'd have settled down in that country to enjoy a little peace. But there it was, like a snake in the grass! The thing I'd give my head to find out is, *who spread the lie?*"

"You don't know, then?"

"No, I don't. It's a black mystery."

"Better let me use my despised detective talents to solve it."

"Oh, *that's* what you've been working up to, is it?"

"No. How could it be, as I hadn't heard the story when I began to work? But I'm willing to take it on as an extra by and by. My brother and I are scarcely friends. I'm not responsible for his act, and whatever the motive, I don't excuse it. Why go out of his way to hurt a woman? Yet I may be able to atone."

"Never!"

"Never's a long word. But just here the time has come to mention the two things I promised to tell you 'later on.' I thought what you had against me might be the name and the plot of my book, dramatised by Carr Price."

"What the devil is the name or plot of your play to me?"

"Ah, that was what I wanted to know. It occurred to me as possible that you resented the incident of a key being found in a dead man's pocket, and the title of the book and play which might recall a certain double tragedy to the public mind."

The blood rushed to the man's face. He understood instantly, and did not choose to pretend ignorance. "How dare you presume that I have a right to resent any such reference?" he challenged me.

"I dare, because of the second of the two things I reserved to tell you later: the wish I have to prove my detective powers for your benefit. I couldn't help seeing to-day your meeting on deck with Miss Callender. I couldn't help hearing a few words. Because I play at being a detective I keep my wits about me. Also I have a good memory for names and stories connected with them. Mr. Odell, will you separate me in your mind from my brother and give Carr Price's play a chance for its life if I tell you who killed Perry and Ned Callender-Graham, and prove to Miss Callender that there's no reason why she need be afraid to give her love to any man?"

Odell stared as if he thought I had gone mad or he was dreaming.

"Who *killed* Perry and Ned Graham?" he repeated. "No one killed them."

"You are wrong," I said quietly.

"That's your opinion!" he blurted out.

"That's my opinion. And if I'm right, if those two were murdered, and if the murderer or murderers can be found, won't Miss Callender feel she may safely marry a man she loves without delivering him up to danger?"

"Yes," Odell admitted. "Great Heaven, *if* you were right!"

"Supposing I am, and can prove it?"

"There's nothing on God's earth I wouldn't do for you."

"Well," I said, "I believe there's something in that opinion of mine. Don't dream that now I am getting at this truth I would bury it even if you did worse than crush my play. I'll go on, anyhow, but—"

"You say you are getting at the truth," he broke in. "What do you think—what do you know? But how can you, a stranger, *know* anything?"

"A stranger to you and those connected with the case, but not to the case itself. You may thank that despised detective instinct of mine for my keen interest in its details."

"If you thought you'd unearthed the clue to a mystery, why didn't you advertise yourself by pointing it out to the police a year and a half ago?"

"I certainly should if I'd got hold of it then, though not for the motive you suggest, Mr. Odell. My publishers were giving me all the publicity I wanted. As it happens, I picked up the clue in question only—a short time ago."

"Only a few hours ago" were the words which all but slipped out. I bit them back, however. My line with a keen business man like Roger Odell was not to give away something for nothing. It was to sell—for a price.

He tried to keep his countenance, but his eyes lit. I saw that my hint, like a spark to gun-cotton, had set him aflame with curiosity. Already, in spite of himself, he began to look on me less as an enemy than an agent; perhaps (a wonderful "perhaps" he could not help envisaging) a deliverer.

"For God's sake, speak out and say what you mean!" The appeal was forced from him. He looked half ashamed of it.

"I can't do that—yet," I returned. "I might tell you my suspicions; but that wouldn't be fair to myself, or you, or—anyone concerned. I must land first. Once off the ship, twenty-four hours are all I shall need to find—I won't say the '*missing* link,' because I have reason to think it will not be missing, but the link I can't touch this side of New York. I will make a rendezvous with you at the end of that time, either to tell you I've put two and two together with the link, or else to confess that the ends of the chain can't be made to fit."

Odell stared at me hungrily.

"You want only twenty-four hours to do what the best police in the world haven't done in a year and a half," he growled at me. "You think something of yourself, don't you?"

"You see, I've known myself for a long time," I said modestly. "You've only just been

introduced to me, and were prejudiced to begin with. About that rendezvous—do you consent to my appointing the place?"

"Yes," he agreed. "Your hotel?"

"No. In the manager's private office at the Felborn Theatre; the time, twenty-four hours after we get away from the dock. That will be the most convenient place for both of us in case of my success, for Julius Felborn and Carr Price can be called in to fix a date for the first rehearsal of *The Key*."

The man could not keep back a laugh. It was harsh and short; but it was a score for me and he knew it. "The Felborn Theatre let it be," he said grimly.

The weather was fine and we made almost a record trip in point of time. There was nothing for Odell to regret in the briefness of the voyage, for Grace Callender remained in her cabin till he sent a message by her aunt, promising not to try for a word or a look if she came on deck. After that she appeared again, as if to show appreciation, and Odell didn't abuse her confidence. He kept himself to the other side of the deck; but there was no reason why I should give up my place near the two ladies. After the first night's dinner *en tête-à-tête*, Odell and I had no more meals together; consequently, the Misses Callender, aunt and niece, were unaware of our acquaintanceship. They had no reason to shun their lame neighbour, and my crutches gave me their sympathy, as they have given me various other blessings. Instead of my picking up a dropped book, as a man usually contrives to do if he yearns to know a girl on shipboard, Grace Callender retrieved one for me. After that, I was permitted, even encouraged, to draw my deck-chair closer to theirs and "tell them things about the war." I noticed that the girl caught eagerly, nervously, at any subject which could hold her attention for a moment, even that of my book and Carr Price's play. I, having the secret clue, guessed that she was for ever trying to escape from a thought too engrossing. Her aunt, Miss Marian Callender, had the clue also; and often I caught her long dark eyes—eyes like those of La Gioconda—fixed with almost painful intentness on Grace. "She knows that her niece is thinking about Odell," I told myself. Evidently she approved the girl's decision to put him out of her life. If she had been Odell's friend and sympathiser, a woman of her superior age and strong personal charm (for she had a sort of hypnotic charm, like a velvet-petalled flower with a penetrating perfume) could surely have influenced an impressionable girl, especially one so devoted to her as Grace Callender was.

It was nine o'clock on an April morning when we escaped from the custom-house men and spun away from the White Star docks in a glittering grey car. When I say "we," I refer to myself and the two Misses Callender. They had befriended me to the extent of recommending me to an hotel and offering to motor me to it; and I was malicious enough to hope that Odell might see me going off with them. There was little doubt in my mind that he did so, and none at all of what feelings must have been roused by the sight. These would have been still more poignant had he known that it was Grace who impulsively invited me, Marian who merely followed with a polite echo. They lived in a large old-fashioned house in Park Avenue, where the car dropped the ladies and by their order took me on to the Hotel Belmont. There Carr Price was waiting, for when—the day before our landing—the Callenders had mentioned the Belmont I marconied him to meet me at the hotel.

"Why did you wire 'Don't come to the dock?'" he asked almost resentfully.

"Because I thought it might annoy Roger Odell if I dangled you under his nose," I explained.

"Roger Odell's nose!" Price gasped. "Where—where——"

"Was it? On the *Monarchic*. And I didn't pull it; neither did he pull mine. I even have hopes that the two features may come to terms. To-morrow, at exactly this hour, you're due to know why. But meanwhile I want you to promise me patience, blind faith and—unquestioning help. There's no time to waste over it, so here goes! Who's the most influential man you know in New York?"

"George Gould," he said.

"Pooh! a mere millionaire. He's no use to me. Do you know anyone in the police force—high enough up to do you a favour?"

Price pondered for an instant. "I know Sam Yelverton. Is that name familiar to you?"

"It is. Think we'll find him in now if you take me to call?"

"If this is our lucky day we shall."

"Let's put it to the test. I've noticed that New York has taxis as well as London."

"And you'll notice the difference when you've paid for one. But this is on me."

The omen of luck was good, for we found our man at the police head-quarters, and, true to his promise, Carr Price sat as still and expressionless as an owl while I did the talking. I had been introduced to the great Sam Yelverton by my own request as the author of *The Key*, and it really

was a stroke of luck that he had read and liked it. He looked interested when I said that I'd got an idea for my book from a *cause célèbre* in New York—"The Callender-Graham affair," I explained.

"Ah, the latchkeys in the dead men's pockets!" he caught me up.

"Exactly. Now it's a question of a play by Mr. Price, on the same lines as my book and with the same title, soon, *very* soon, to be produced at the Felborn Theatre. It will be of the greatest assistance to him and to me in working out an important detail if I can have Ned Callender-Graham's latchkeys—anyhow, the smaller one—in my hands for a few hours to-day. Indeed, I'm afraid we can't get much 'farrarder' if you refuse."

(This was the literal truth, for, unless I could obtain the more important of those two keys and do with it what I hoped to do, I should be unable to "deliver the goods" to Roger Odell. I should stand with him where I had stood before the "hold up" interview, and the play would be pigeon-holed indefinitely. Price's eyes were starting from his head, but he kept his tongue between his teeth.)

Mr. Yelverton seemed amused. "I guess I may be able to manage that," he said, "if one or both of those keys are still in our hands, as I believe they are. If I do the trick for you I'll expect a box for the play on the first night, eh?"

"It's a bargain, isn't it, Carr?" said I.

The dazed Price assented.

"Oh, and by the way, Mr. Yelverton"—I arrested the famous man as he picked up the receiver of his desk telephone—"if the letters and the empty envelopes found on the bodies of the two brothers are still among your police archives, would it be possible for me to have a look at them?"

Yelverton—a big man with a red face and the keenest eyes I ever saw, deep set between cushiony lids—threw me a quick glance. "You do remember the details of that case pretty well, Lord John!" he said.

"I'm an amateur follower in your famous footsteps," I reminded him. He smiled, called up a number and began telephoning. I admired the clear way in which he put what he wanted—or what I wanted—without wasting a word. He asked not only for the keys, but for the whole dossier in the double case of the Callender-Graham brothers. Then came a moment of waiting in which my heart ticked like a clock; but I contrived to answer Mr. Yelverton's mild questions about our weather on shipboard. At last a sharp ring heralded an end of suspense.

"Sorry, Lord John," the big man began, taking the receiver from the generous shell of his ear. "They're sending round the dossier, but our chaps have got none of the Callender-Graham 'exhibits in their possession—haven't had for nearly a year. I feared it was likely to be so. You see, there was no proof that any crime had been committed on either of the two brothers; in fact, the theory was against it. When the police definitely dropped the case—or cases—the family was entitled to all personal property of the deceased. Everything found on the body of Ned Callender-Graham was handed over to the relatives by their request, as had been done a few weeks after the elder brother's death, even the letters and those empty envelopes you were intelligent enough to single out for observation. We had done the same, naturally, but, in every sense of the word"—he grinned—"there was nothing in 'em."

"The keys on Ned's body were handed over to the Misses Callender, then?" I inquired, stiffening the muscles of my face to mask my disappointment.

"Yes. Perhaps, as you remember so much, you recall the fact that the first two keys were given to the relatives. Miss Marian Callender and her niece believed that Ned had Perry's keys in his pocket, which would mean there were but the two. The Callender ladies are the sole surviving relatives, or, anyhow, the nearest ones. But I've saved my bit of good news from head-quarters till the last. They 'phoned that there are duplicate keys. I thought I recalled something of the sort. Not sure but I suggested making them myself. That pretty millionairess girl might get herself engaged a third time, and if there were any more dead men found with latchkeys in their pockets, sample specimens might be very handy for our fellows."

Sam Yelverton finished with a laugh; but I couldn't echo it. I thought of Odell, of Grace Callender's lovely face and her young, spoilt life. I remembered the cruel nicknames "Belladonna" and "Poison Flower." If even the police prepared for a third tragedy, in case she thought again of marriage, no wonder the poor girl refused the man she loved.

"Will duplicates do for you, or do I lose my stage-box?" the big man asked.

I said aloud that I thought duplicates would answer my purpose, and silently to myself I said that they must do so.

Ten minutes later a policeman of some rank (what rank I couldn't tell, he being my first American specimen) brought in a parcel of considerable size. It contained many affidavits concerning the Callender-Graham tragedy; and on the top of these documents was a small, neatly labelled packet containing two keys.

The larger was entirely commonplace; and even the smaller one was at first glance a rather ordinary latchkey, of the Yale order. To an experienced and observant eye, however, it was of curious workmanship.

"Not a Yale, you see," said Yelverton, taking a magnifying glass from a small drawer of his tidy desk and passing it on to me. "What do you make of the thing?"

"Foreign, isn't it?" I remarked carelessly.

"Yes, we thought so. German—or Italian. Both the brothers had travelled abroad. On a Yale you would read the words 'Yale paracentric,' and a number. There's neither name nor number on that." He flung a gesture toward the key in my hand.

"May I take it away and keep it till to-morrow morning, to work out my plot with?" I asked. "The big one I don't care about. I give you my word I'll send this back in twenty-four—no, let's say twenty-five hours. I have an engagement for the twenty-fourth hour."

"All right," replied Yelverton good-naturedly. "You might bring the box-ticket with you. Ha, ha!"

"I will," I laughed. "And as to the dossier, may I sit somewhere out of your way and glance through it in case there's anything we can work up to strengthen the realism of our scenario? Of course, we'll guarantee to use nothing that might recall the Callender-Graham case to the public or dramatic critics."

"You can sit in the outer office and browse over the bundle till lunch-time, if you like," said Yelverton. "There's a table there in a quiet corner. I shall be off on business before you finish, I expect. See you later—at the Felborn Theatre, your first night. Wish you luck."

I thanked him and got up. Carr Price followed suit.

"Weren't you a bit premature mentioning the Felborn?" he reproached me in the next room, beyond earshot of Mr. Yelverton's secretaries and stenographers.

"No," I reassured him. "To-morrow, at this time or a little later, you'll know why. Meanwhile, don't worry, but take my word—and a taxi to the theatre. Tell Felborn I'm on the spot, and there's a truce between Odell and me, an armistice of twenty-four"—I pulled out my watch—"no, twenty-two and a half hours. Ask him to lend me his private office to-morrow morning from nine till ten o'clock. After that time you and he had better hold yourselves ready to be called in to discuss dates."

"You're either the wonder child of the British Empire or its champion fool," remarked Price somewhat waspishly, as he prepared to leave me alone with the Callender-Graham dossier.

"You've got till to-morrow to make up your mind which," said I, sitting down to my meal of manuscripts in order not to waste a minute out of the twenty-two and a half hours which remained to me. It would not have been wise to add that I didn't know which myself.

Many of the papers I passed over rapidly. Others gave me information that I couldn't have got from Odell without a confession of ignorance, or from the Misses Callender without impertinence. Among the latter was one summarising much of the family history; and, profiting by some smart detective's researches, I learned a good deal about Miss Grace Callender and her almost equally interesting aunt.

Even before the girl reached the age of sixteen, it seemed, she had begun to have offers of marriage. After her parents' death, when she was not quite fifteen, she had lived for a while with Miss Marian Callender at the house in Park Avenue left to her by her father. She had been taught by French governesses, German governesses and English governesses, but all had failed to prevent a kind of persecution by young men fascinated with the child's beauty or her money. At last Miss Callender senior had sent her niece to a boarding-school in the country where the supervision was notoriously strict, and had herself gone to Italy, her mother's native land, for a few months' visit. Eight or nine years before this Marian Callender had fallen in love with an Italian tenor, singing with enormous success in New York. The lady's half-brother—Grace's father—had objected to the marriage, and for that reason or some other the two had parted. Gossips said that the singer, Paolo Tostini, had not cared enough for Marian Callender to take her without a *dot*; and all she had come from her millionaire half-brother. At Graham Callender's death Marian's friends were surprised that she was left a yearly allowance (though a magnificently generous one) only while she "continued unmarried and acted as Grace's guardian." In the event of Grace's marriage, the girl was free to continue half the same allowance to her aunt if she chose. This was generally considered unjust to Marian, and the only excuse for the arrangement seemed to be that Graham Callender feared Paolo Tostini might come forward again if the woman he had jilted were left with a fortune.

The police of New York had apparently thought it worth while to ferret out further facts in connection with the singer, who had not again returned to America. They learned that the once celebrated tenor had lost his voice and had spent his money in extravagance, as many artists do. He was living in comparative poverty with his father (a skilled mechanic and inventor of a

successful time lock for safes) and his younger brother in Naples at the time of Miss Marian Callender's visit to Italy, and Grace's school life. Although these facts were inquired into only after some years had passed, and the two brothers Callender-Graham had died, Marian's movements must have been easily traced, for it was learned that she had openly visited the Tostinis at their small villa between Posilipo and Naples. The family had also called and dined at her hotel, where they were not unknown. After that their circumstances had apparently improved, and it appeared not improbable that Marian Callender had helped her late lover's people.

When she returned to New York it was to find that Grace was being bombarded with love letters at school, and that the hotel in the village near by had for its principal clients a crowd of young men whose whole business in life was lying in wait for the heiress. In consequence, Marian brought her niece back to the house in Park Avenue; and soon after, before the girl had been allowed to come out in society, Antonio, the younger brother of Paolo Tostini, arrived in New York. His business was that of an analytical chemist. He had first-rate recommendations, and was an extremely brilliant, as well as singularly good-looking young man, some (who remembered the tenor) thought even handsomer than Paolo. Antonio Tostini, thanks to his own ability and the introductions he had from Miss Callender and others, got on well both in business and society. No one was surprised, and no one blamed her, when Marian Callender threw the clever young Italian and Grace Callender together—except that the girl was young to make up her mind, and her dead father had favoured a match with one of the disinherited cousins.

From these rough notes, crudely classifying Antonio Tostini's courtship of Grace Callender, I gathered that the young Italian had fallen desperately in love with the girl. He had assured friends whom they had in common that even if, to marry him, she were obliged to give up her fortune, he would still think himself the happiest man on earth to win her. Grace's aunt, who had tried to keep the girl out of other men's way, evidently favoured her old love's brother. She chaperoned a yachting party, of which Grace and Antonio were the most important members, a party in which the Callender-Grahams were not included, though they wished for invitations. This match-making effort on Marion's part stifled all suspicion that she discouraged Grace from marrying in order to retain a charming home, a large, certain income, and all kinds of other luxuries for herself. She had taken Grace's refusal of Antonio Tostini almost as hard as he had taken it himself. She had even been ill for several weeks when for the third time Grace had sent him away, and he returned in despair to Italy. It was not long after this affair (the dossier informed me) that, in accordance with her father's desire, the girl engaged herself to Perry Callender-Graham, and Marian consented to the inevitable. Her affection and support during the tragic experiences that followed had given great comfort to Grace, and, so far as was known, Antonio Tostini had had the good taste never to appear on the scene again.

Here were many details which I had been anxious, but not decently able, to learn, as the Misses Callenders' shipboard friendship had confined itself to lending me books, telling me what to do in New York, inviting me to call, listening to talk about the war or the play, and allowing me to snapshot them on deck.

Having looked through the dossier, I took my departure with the key. It was only a duplicate, yet I couldn't rid myself of a queer, superstitious feeling for the thing, as if it were offered to me by the unseen hand of a dead man.

I taxied back to my hotel and mentioned to a clerk that I wanted to see houses and flats in the direction of Riverside Drive. Could he direct me to an agent who would have the letting of apartments in that neighbourhood? If my foreign way of expressing myself amused him, he hid his mirth and looked up in a big book the addresses of several agents.

I had not cared to be too specific in my questions, but I chose the address nearest the street I wanted, taxied there, found the agent, and inquired if there were anything to be let. It was the street in which Perry Callender-Graham and Ned, his brother, had met their death.

"I have been recommended to that particular street by an American friend in England," I said. "He has told me that it's very quiet. There are several apartment houses in it, are there not?"

"Yes," replied a spruce young man who looked willing to let me half residential New York. "But it's a favourite street; I'm afraid there's nothing doing there now. As for houses, they're all owned, or have been rented for many years. A little farther north or south——"

"Hold on," I pulled him back. "Somebody might be induced to let. My friend was telling me about a charming flat—oh, apartment you call it?—in that street which a friend of *his* took—let me see, it must have been three years ago or thereabouts. Anyhow, not later. He had reason to believe I might get that very flat. Stupid of me! I can't remember the number or name—whichever it was—of the house. I know the flat was a furnished one, however; and if your agency ——"

"Oh, if the apartment was furnished, and changed hands three years ago, there's only one it *could* be, if you're sure it's in that street?"

"I'm sure," I replied. I staked all on that sureness, though logically—— But I would not let my mind wander to any other deduction than the one to which, for better or worse, I pinned my faith.

"We had the letting of a furnished apartment in the Alhambra, as the house is named, put into our hands three years ago on the 30th of last month," said the youth, referring to a book. "To my certain knowledge no other furnished one was to be had in the street at that time, and there hasn't been since. Isn't likely to be either, so far as I can see. That was the grand chance. German-American lady and gentleman, Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Lowenstein, going unexpectedly to Europe, and glad to get rid of their apartment to a good tenant at a nominal price."

"You found the good tenant?" I asked.

"We did, sir—or the tenant found us. Wanted a furnished apartment, not too large or expensive, in a quiet street, quietness the great consideration. Above all, the proprietors mustn't want to use the place again for at least five years. That just fitted in, because our clients were anxious to let for seven years; the husband had a business opening in Hamburg. The new tenant took the place for that period; and as there's a long time to run yet, I shouldn't have thought there was much hope for you. However, your friend may have private information."

"Does the new tenant live there altogether?" I wanted to know.

"Only comes up from the country occasionally. Expensive fad, to rent a New York apartment that way. But what's money *for*? Some people have it to burn."

"Quite so," I admitted. "Have you ever met the tenant?"

"Only once—when the apartment was engaged; fixed up in one interview. The rent comes through the post."

"It must be the apartment my friend talked about!" I exclaimed.

"Can't be any other. Is the name of your friend's friend Paulling?"

"Why, yes, I have the impression of something like that. By the way, I might be able to find an old photograph, to make quite sure. Would you recognise it?"

"I might—and I mightn't. Three years is a long time."

"Well, I'll do my best through some acquaintances," I finished. "If we're speaking of the same person, you may be able to introduce me and save the delay of communicating with my friend in England."

Each was flattering himself on his discretion, the whole catechism having been gone through without the question on either side, "Is the person a man or a woman?" Eventually we parted with the understanding that I should return later if, after looking at the Alhambra from the outside, I fancied it as much as I expected to do. And then I was to bring the photograph with me.

So far so good. But the next steps were not so simple.

I stopped my taxi at the corner (not to advertise myself with unnecessary noise) and limped the short distance which Perry Callender-Graham and his brother Ned must have travelled on the secret errands that led them to their death. The Alhambra was neither as picturesque nor as imposing as its name suggested. It was just a substantial brick building, six or seven storeys in height, with facings of light-coloured stone, and large, cheerful windows. Luckily for my lame leg, the entrance was but a step above the street level. As I arrived the door was opened by a chocolate-brown negro in chocolate-brown livery. He helped a smart nurse to pass out with a baby in a white and gold chariot, and while he was thus engaged I hobbled into the hall. A hasty glance at a name board on the wall opposite gave me the list of occupants and the floor on which each tenant lived. Evidently there were two flats to each storey. T. Paulling had an apartment on the third, so also had G. Emmett. I had to risk something, and so when the brown hall-porter turned to me (which he did with embarrassing swiftness) I risked inquiring for Mr. Emmett. I believed, I added, that he was expecting me.

"That's all right, sir. He's in," was the welcome reply, with a compassionate grin at the crutches which guaranteed the harmlessness of an unknown visitor. "I'll take you in the elevator."

Up we shot to the third floor, where I feared that my conductor might insist on guiding me to the door of Mr. Emmett. Fortunately, however, someone rang for the lift and the porter shot down again, directing me to the right.

The instant he was out of sight I turned to the left, and, with the police key in my hand, I stood before the door of T. Paulling.

My blood leaped through my veins, and the hand that tried the key in the lock shook with the rush of it. I heard its pounding in my ears, and through the murmurous sound the question whispered, "What if the key won't fit? Down goes the whole theory. You'll have to confess yourself a fool to Roger Odell."

As I blundered at the lock in haste and fear that someone might pass, or that this might be one of T. Paulling's rare days at the flat, I was aghast at my late self-confidence. Face to face with the test, it seemed impossible that my-boast to Odell and Carr could succeed. I felt callow and

stupid, altogether incompetent. The key seemed too large and the wrong shape, which meant that the mystery of the brothers' death was closed to me, like the door. A voice not far off made my nerves jump, and—the key slipped into the lock! From somewhere above or below came the sound of voices, but I could not be seen from the lift. Almost before I knew what I was doing or what had happened, I was on the other side of the door, in a dark and stuffy vestibule.

The sound of voices was suddenly stilled. It was as if with a single step I had won my way into another world. I drew a long breath of relief after the strain, for the silence and darkness said that the tenant was not at home, and I might hope to have the flat to myself.

I groped for an electric switch, touched it, and flooded the vestibule with light. It was small, with nothing to distinguish it from any other vestibule of any other well-furnished flat. Beyond led a narrow corridor which, when lit, showed me several doors. I opened the nearest, switched on another light, and found myself on the threshold of a moderate-sized sitting-room or study, with bookshelves ranged along one of the walls. The window was so heavily curtained that I had no fear of the sudden illumination being noticed from the street. The air was heavy and smelled of moth powder. The mahogany table in the centre of the room and the desk under the window were coated with thin films of dust, but everything was stiffly in order: no books lying about, no woman's work, no trace of cigarette ash, dropped glove, nor pile of newspapers with a tell-tale date.

I walked over to the desk and, pulling out the swivel chair, sat down. In the silver inkstand the ink had dried. In a pen-rack were two pens, one stub, the other an old-fashioned quill, both almost new, but faintly stained with ink. Neither, it struck me, could have been used more than once or twice. There were several small drawers; all were empty. No paper nor envelopes, no sealing-wax nor seal, not so much as an end of twine. But the blotting-pad—the only movable thing on the desk beside the inkstand and pen-rack—was more repaying. It also appeared to be nearly new. Just inside the soft green leather cover lay two sheets of plain, unmonogrammed grey-blue paper with two envelopes to match. I annexed one of the latter and made a mental note that, in the police dossier of the Callender-Graham case the empty envelope found in the pocket of the younger brother was said to be blue-grey in colour and of thick texture. No record had been kept concerning the colour of the envelope in Perry's pocket, as little importance had been attributed to it, until the coincidence of the second envelope was remarked later.

The blotting-pad was as new-looking as the pens. The two uppermost sheets were of unspotted white, but the middle pages had both been used, and traces were visible of two short notes having been pressed against the paper while the ink was still very wet. Apparently these documents had had neither heading nor signature, and consisted of a few lines only. On another page a longer letter began "Dearest," and had been signed with an initial. There was no mirror in the room in which to reverse these writings, and, carefully separating the used sheets from their unsoiled fellows, I folded and slipped them into an inner pocket. There was nothing else in the room which could help me, with the exception, perhaps, of the books; and most of these were in sets, bound in a uniform way. These had a book-plate and the monogram "M.L.," no doubt meaning Maurice Lowenstein. Of new novels or other publications there were none: an additional proof (if it had been needed after the clue of the dried ink and almost unused blotter) that the new tenants were seldom in the place.

Having deduced this fact, I then went through the remaining six rooms of the flat without any discoveries, and finally reached, in its due order, the problem I had left for the last. This was the examination of the lock which the dead brothers' latchkeys had fitted. The work had to be done with the door open, and therefore I waited until the hour when most people lunch. It would look like burglarious business, what I had to do, and it was important not to be interrupted or arrested.

The hands of my watch were at one o'clock as mine were on the latch which, if I were right, could with a single click solve the Callender-Graham mystery. If I were wrong, not only were four out of my twenty-four hours wasted, but my theory fell to the ground and broke into pieces past mending.

I opened the door of the flat and made sure that, for the moment, no one was in the hall. Then, bending down with my back to possible passers-by, I whipped out a magnifying glass and pocket electric torch which I had bought on my way to the agent's.

During the next five minutes I had good cause to thank Heaven for the mechanical bent that had turned my mind to motors and aeroplanes.

The same evening, at a little after six, a "commuter's" train landed me at the station of a small Long Island town almost too far away from New York to be labelled suburban. Big automobiles and small runabouts were there to meet the tired business men who travelled many miles for the sake of salt breezes and the latest thing in Elizabethan houses. I was more tired than any business man; also, I had encountered as many setbacks as successes, but nobody and nothing came to welcome me. I was able, however, to get a place in an old-fashioned horse-drawn vehicle whose mission was to pick up chance arrivals. There were several of us, and as my rate of locomotion was slow, by the time I had hobbled off the platform the one seat left was beside the

driver. I was not sorry, as the other men appeared to be strangers in Sandy Plain, and having said I would go to the hotel (for the sake of saying something), I asked my companion if he knew anybody named Paulling.

"There's two families of that name hereabouts," he replied.

"My Paullings," I hazarded, "are retiring people, don't make friends, and are away a good deal."

"Ah, they'd be the Paullings of Bayview Farm!" returned the driver. "There's no others answer that description around here that I ever heard of, and I've lived at Sandy Plain since before the commuters discovered it."

"Yes, I mean the Paullings of Bayview Farm," I caught him up.

"The farm's about a mile and a half past Roselawn Hotel," my seat mate went on. "I can take you there after I drop the other folks."

I thanked him and said he might come back for me if he cared to after I had dined, and inquired casually if the Paullings were staying at their farm just then.

The driver shook his head. He didn't know. Few persons did know much about the Paullings, who weren't old residents, but had rented Bayview Farm two or three years ago. Maybe the hotel folks might be able to tell me whether I was likely to find them.

They could not do so, I soon learned. Mr. Paulling was said to be an invalid, though he never called in the local doctor. He was often at home alone for weeks together, except for a manservant, a foreigner as reserved as himself, whom he had brought with him to Sandy Plain. There was another servant sometimes—a woman—also a foreigner; but when the Paullings were both away a Mrs. Vandermans, a country dressmaker who lived in a cottage near by, looked after the house, going in occasionally to see that all was well.

I asked as many questions as I dared, but learned little; and as soon as dusk had begun to fall I started off in the nondescript vehicle which had returned for me. The driver spent most of the twenty minutes it took him to reach the farm in explaining that it wasn't really a farm except in name. Nothing was left of it but the house and two or three acres of orchard; all the rest had been sold off in lots by the owner before he let it to the Paullings. What "city folks" admired in it was beyond the knowledge of my companion, but when we arrived at the gate and saw the far-off house gleaming white behind a thick screen of ancient apple trees, I realised the attractions of the place, especially for such tenants as I believed the Paullings to be. The farm-house, with its wide clapboarding, its neat green shutters, and its almost classic "colonial" porch hung with roses, had the air of being on terms of long familiar friendship with the old-fashioned garden and the great trees which almost hid it from its neighbours and the road. Its front windows, closed and shuttered now, would look out when open over sloping lawns and flowerbeds to distant blue glints of the sea; and altogether Bayview Farm seemed an ideal retreat for persons who could be sufficient to themselves and each other.

Those shuttered windows, however, hinted at disappointment for me. Not a light showed, behind one of them, and when I had rung the bell of the front door, and pounded vainly at the back, I had to make up my mind that the Paullings were either away or determined to be thought so. "Mrs. Vandermans 'll know all about 'em," my conductor comforted me. "She lives next door, a quarter of a mile farther on."

We drove the quarter mile, only to be struck by another blow. The one person at home in Mrs. Vandermans' cottage was that widowed woman's mother, very old, very deaf, half blind, knowing little about anything, and nothing at all about the tenants of Bayview Farm.

"My darter's gone to my son's in Buffalo," she quavered when I had screamed at her. "He's sick, but she'll be back to-morrow to look after me. She knows them Paullings. You come again to-morrow afternoon if you want to talk to her."

"You seem sure disappointed," remarked my companion, as he drove me and my crutches back to Roselawn Hotel.

"I am," I admitted; but the words were as inadequate as most words are. I was bowled over, knocked out, or so I told myself in my first depression. Nothing was of any use to me after to-morrow morning at nine o'clock.

On my way back to New York in a slow train I gloomily thought over the situation. Certain startling yet not unexpected discoveries made early in the day had elated me too soon. I had collected evidence, but only circumstantial evidence. I had no absolute proof to give Roger Odell, and nothing less would suffice. I had counted on getting hold of proof at Sandy Plain, from which place on Long Island (I had learned from the agent) cheques came regularly each quarter to pay the rent of the flat in the Alhambra—cheques sometimes signed T. Paulling, sometimes M. Paulling. One had arrived only a few days before with the former signature, so I had reason to hope that T. Paulling might be unearthed at Sandy Plain.

I could, I told myself, write to Roger Odell and ask for a delay, but that would kill such feeble faith in me as I had forcibly implanted in him. He would think me a fraud, and believe that I had been trying to gain time in order to spring some trick upon him. Besides, the Paullings might come to New York, if they were not already there, and discover that some person unknown was on their track and had been tearing sheets out of their blotting-book. No, I must keep my appointment with Roger Odell or face the prospect of complete failure. But how to convince him of what I was myself convinced, with the disjointed bits of evidence in my possession? Just as my train came to a stop with a slight jolt in the Pennsylvania station, I saw as in an electric flash a way of doing it. Perhaps it was the jolt that gave the flash.

I could not wait to get back to my hotel. I inquired of a porter where I could get a messenger boy. He showed me. I begged two sheets of paper and two envelopes. They were pushed under my hand. I scratched off six lines to Roger Odell: "Don't think when you get this I'm going to ask you to put off our interview. On the contrary, I ask you to advance it. Please be in Julius Felborn's private office at a quarter to nine instead of nine. This is vitally important. If he has a large safe in his office, get the key or combination so that you can open it. Small safe no use.—Yours hopefully, J.H."

I finished this scrawl and sent it away by messenger to the club where Odell had said I might 'phone, if necessary, up to one o'clock that night. It was only just eleven.

The second letter was longer and more troublesome to compose. It was to Grace Callender, and I trusted for its effect to the kindness she professed for me. Her aunt also had been friendly and had shown interest in the prospects of Carr Price's play. Neither, however, dreamed that success depended in any way upon Roger Odell.

"DEAR MISS GRACE," I wrote,—*"You will think the request I'm going to make of you and Miss Callender a very strange one, but you promised that if you could help me you would do so. Well, extraordinary as it may seem, you can make my fortune if you will both come to the Felborn Theatre at the unearthly hour of nine to-morrow morning, and ask to be shown into Mr. Felborn's private office. I shall be there, waiting and hoping to see you two ladies arrive promptly, as more than I can tell depends upon that. You happened to mention in my presence something about dining out to-night and returning rather late, so I feel there is a chance of your getting this and sending me a line by the messenger to the Belmont. He will wait for you, and I will wait for him. —Yours sincerely, JOHN HASLE."*

An hour later the answer came to my hotel. "Of course we'll both be there on the stroke of nine. Depend upon us," Grace Callender replied.

"Thank Heaven!" I mumbled. Yet I was heavy with a sense of guilt. If it had been only for punishment, or only for my own advancement, I could not have done what I planned to do. No man could. But Grace Callender's happiness was at stake.

Roger Odell was five minutes before his time in Felborn's office next day, yet he found me on the spot. I saw by his face that his well-seasoned nerves were keyed not far from breaking-point. But he kept his rôle of the superior, indifferent man of the world. He hoped I didn't see the strain he was under, and I hoped that I hid my feelings from him. Each probably succeeded as well as the other.

"Well, what have you got to tell me?" he asked, when we were alone together in Julius Felborn's decorative private office.

"I've nothing to tell you," I said. "Nevertheless, I believe you will hear something if you've done as I suggested. Have you got the key or the combination of that big safe in the wall behind the desk?"

"I have the combination for to-day. Felborn was at the club last night when your letter came, and I asked him for it. There aren't many favours he wouldn't grant me. But what has Julius Felborn's safe to do with the case?"

"Please open it. We haven't much time to spare." I looked at my watch. In a quarter of an hour the Misses Callender ought to be announced. If they failed me after all—but I would not think of that "if."

Odell manipulated the combination, and the door of the safe swung open. I saw that there was room for a man inside, and explained to Odell that he must be the man. "It's absolutely necessary for you to hear for yourself," I insisted, "all that's said in this room during the next half-hour. If you didn't hear with your own ears, you'd never believe, and nothing would be said if you were known to be listening."

"You want me to eavesdrop!" he exclaimed, ready to be scornful.

"Yes," I admitted. "If you can call it eavesdropping to learn how and by whom Perry and Ned

Callender Graham were done to death."

Without another word Odell stepped into the safe.

"With the door ajar you can hear every word spoken in this room," I said. "In a few minutes you'll recognise two voices—those of Miss Grace and Miss Marian Callender. I tell you this that you mayn't be surprised into making an indiscreet appearance. Remember your future's at stake and that of the girl you love. All you have to do is to keep still until the moment when the mystery is cleared up."

"How can it be cleared up by either of those two?" Odell challenged me, anger smouldering in his eyes.

"It will be cleared up while they are in the room," I amended. "Further than that I can't satisfy you now. By Jove! there goes the 'phone! I expect it's to say they're here, though it's five minutes before the time."

My guess was correct, and my answer through the telephone, "Let them come up at once," passed on the news to the man behind the door of the safe. I went out to the head of the stairs to meet my visitors, and led them into Felborn's office. The two were charmingly though very simply dressed, far more *les grandes dames* in appearance than they had been on shipboard, and their first words were of amused admiration for the Oriental richness of Julius Felborn's office. It was evident that, whatever their secret preoccupations were, both wished to seem interested in their bizarre surroundings and in my success which they had come to promote. I made them sit down in the two most luxurious chairs the room possessed. Thus seated, their backs were toward the safe, and the light filtered becomingly through thin gold silk curtains on to their faces. I placed myself opposite, on an oak bench under the window. If the door of the safe moved, I could see it over the fashionable small hats of the ladies with their haloes of delicate, spiky plumes.

When I got past generalities I blurted out, "I've a confession to make. I won't excuse myself or explain, because when I've finished—though not *till* then—you'll understand. On shipboard I talked of my book, and told you it was called *The Key*, but I didn't tell you that the title and one incident in the story were suggested—forgive my startling you—by the murder of Perry and Ned Callender-Graham."

"Oh!" exclaimed Grace, half rising, "you asked us here to tell us *that*? It doesn't seem *like* you, Lord John."

"Give me the benefit of the doubt and hear me to the end," I pleaded, grieved by her stricken pallor and look of reproach as she sank into the chair again. Marian was pale also, even paler than usual, but her look was of anger, therefore easier to meet.

"You must not use the word 'murder,'" she commented, a quiver in her voice. "Your doing so shows that you've very little knowledge of the case."

"I beg your pardon," I said. "On the contrary, it precisely shows that I have knowledge of it. The brothers were murdered by the same hand, in the same way, and for the same motive."

Marian rose up, very straight and tall. "It would be more suitable to give your theories to the police than to us. I cannot stay and let my niece stay to listen to them."

"I shall have to give not my theories, but my knowledge, my proof, to the police," I warned her; "only it's better for everyone concerned for you to hear me first."

"You've brought us to this place under false pretences!" Marian cried, throwing her arm around the girl's waist. "It's not the act of a gentleman. Come, Grace, we'll go at once."

"For your own sakes you must not go," I insisted. "If you stay and hear me through some way may be found to save the family name from public dishonour."

"Dearest, we *must* stay," Grace said steadily, when the older woman urged her toward the door.

Marian looked at her niece with the compelling look of a Fate, but the girl stood firm. Gently she freed herself from the clinging arm and sat, or rather fell, into the big cushioned chair once more. Her aunt hesitated for a moment, I could see, whether or not to use force, but decided against the attempt. With a level gaze of scorn for me, she took her stand beside Grace's chair, her hand clenched on the carving of its high back. I realised the tension of her grip, because her grey suede glove split open across a curious ring she always wore on the third finger of her left hand, showing its great cabochon emerald. I had often noticed this stone, and thought it like the eye of a snake.

"Say what you wish to say quickly, then, and get it over," she sharply ordered.

"The double murder was suggested and carried out by a man, but he had accomplices, and his principal accomplice was a woman." (Miss Callender's command excused my brusqueness.) "They had the same interest to serve; purely a financial interest. It was vital to both that Miss

Grace Callender shouldn't marry—unless she married a person under their influence who would share with them. They preferred some such scheme, but it fell through. That drove them to extremes. Now I'll tell you something about this couple—this congenial husband and wife. Afterwards I'll give you details of their plot. They were married secretly years ago, and lived together when they could, abroad and on this side. The man was rich once, but lost his money—and the capacity to make it—by losing his health. Life wasn't worth living to either unless they could have the luxury they'd been used to. They took an old house on Long Island—Bay View Farm, near Sandy Plain. The man lived there for several months each year under the name of Paulling. His wife paid him flying visits. She provided the money, and had a banking account in the town. At Bay View Farm, when Miss Grace first engaged herself to her cousin, the two thought out their plot to suppress Perry. It took them some time to elaborate it, but a week before the wedding they were ready. The woman, still under the name of Paulling, engaged a furnished flat in New York, near Riverside Drive. She took this flat for a term of years, realising it might be needed more than once as time went on. In this apartment, in a house called the Alhambra, she sat down one day at her desk and wrote an anonymous letter to Perry Callender-Graham. She asked him to call at that address at midnight the next night and learn a secret concerning his cousin Grace's birth, which would change everything for them both if it came out. Her handwriting was disguised by the use of a quill pen, which used so much ink that most of the words left traces on the blotter. The envelope and paper were blue-grey, and thick. Inside was enclosed a small latchkey and a key to the front door of the house, for the hall-porter would be in bed by the time she named. Perry Callender-Graham could not resist the temptation to keep the appointment. He went to the Alhambra, let himself in, was seen by nobody, walked up to the third floor, and fitted the latchkey into the door on the right side of the hall. As he tried to turn the key something sharp as a needle pricked his forefinger. He was startled, yet he went on trying to unlock the door. The key turned all the way round, but the door stuck. It seemed to be bolted on the inside. He began to feel slightly faint, but he was so angry at being cheated that he pushed the electric bell, determined to get in at any cost. No answer came, however, and at last he gave up in despair. Some vague idea of warning the police and of going to see a doctor came to his mind, but he was already a dying man. Before he got as far as the street corner he fell dead. Exactly the same thing happened in the case of Ned, when every effort to frighten him into breaking his engagement had failed, when his love for his brother, his sensitive conscience and his superstitious fear had all been played upon in vain. Even the same formula was used for the anonymous letter, with a slightly different wording. That was safe enough, for if Perry had mentioned the first letter to Ned he would have told the police at the time of Perry's death; it would have been a valuable clue. It wasn't necessary to make new keys, for the two originals had been returned—'to the family.' They were sent anonymously to Ned as they'd been sent to Perry, and he also yielded to curiosity.

"The same ingenious lock, made for the plotters by a skilled mechanic (whom they had reason to trust), shot out its poisoned needle at the first turn of the latchkey in his hand. As for the poison, it, too, was supplied by a trusted one—one who had something to gain and vengeance to take as well. As the mechanic specialised in lock-making, so did the chemist employed specialise in poisons. The one he chose out of his repertory had two virtues: first, it began to stop the heart's action only after coursing through the blood for twenty or thirty minutes. Anything quicker might have struck down the victim in front of the door and put the police on the right track. Secondly, the poison's effect on the heart couldn't be detected by post-mortem, but presented all the symptoms of status lymphaticus, enlargement of the thyroid gland and so on. As for the lock, the second turn of the key caused the needle to retire; and for a further safeguard, an almost invisible stop, resembling a small screw-head, could hold the needle permanently in place inside the lock, so that the door might be opened by a latchkey and the existence of a secret mechanism never suspected, except by one who knew how to find it. The mechanism is in working order still, ready for use again, in case Miss Grace Callender should change her mind and decide to marry."

"Who is it you are accusing, Lord John?" Grace stammered in a choked voice.

I glanced from the drooping figure in the chair to the tall figure standing erect and straight beside it. Marian Callender no longer grasped the oak carving. The hand in the ragged glove was crushed against her mouth, her lips on the emerald which had pressed through the torn suede. The woman gave no other sign of emotion than this strange gesture.

"I accuse Paolo Tostini, with his father, his brother, and his wife—known still as Miss Marian Callender—as his accomplices," I said.

Grace uttered a cry sharp with horror, yet there was neither amazement nor unbelief in the pale face which she screened with two trembling hands. The story I had told—hastily yet circumstantially—had prepared her for the end. But the keen anguish in the girl's voice snapped the last strand of Odell's patience. He threw the iron door of the safe wide open, and in two bounds was at Grace's side. I saw her hold out both arms to him. I saw him snatch her up against his breast; and then I turned to Marian Tostini, who had not moved from her place beside the big carved chair. She was staring straight at me, her dark eyes wide and unwinking as the eyes of a person hypnotised. The hand in the torn glove had dropped from her lips again and clasped the carving. She seemed to lean upon the chair, as if for support. Her fingers clutched the wood. The grey suede glove was slit now all across its back, but the snake-eye of the emerald had ceased to shoot out its green glint. The stone hung from its setting like the hinged lid of a box, showing a

very small gold-lined aperture.

"There need be—no stain on the name of—Callender—if you are as clever in hiding the secret as you've been—in finding it out," she said, with a catch in her breath between words.

"What have you done?" I asked.

"You know—don't you—you who know everything? The ring was my Italian mother's—and her mother's before her. Who can tell how long it has been in our family? It was empty when it came to me, but—"

"But you put into it some of the same poison Antonio Tostini made up for Perry and Ned Callender-Graham?"

"Do you think you can force me to accuse the Tostinis? You shall not drag a word from me. When Paolo hears I am dead he will die also, before you can find him. Antonio you cannot touch. He is in Italy. Thank Heaven their father is dead! And now I think—I had better go home or—or to my doctor's. Grace and Roger Odell—wouldn't like me to die here. It might—start scandal. I am feeling—a little faint."

"Aunt Marian!" Grace sobbed. But Odell held the girl in his arms and would not let her go.

"Take Miss Callender away, Odell—quickly," I advised. "I'll attend to—Mrs. Tostini."

Like one who walks in a dream I shut the safe on my way to the desk, and telephoned downstairs for a taxi. "One of the ladies who called has been taken ill, I must drive her to a doctor's," I explained.

"You think of everything," Marian Tostini said. She laughed softly. "My heart has always been weak."

"Taxi is here, sir," a voice called up through the 'phone.

"Very well. We'll be down at once. Tell Mr. Felborn his office is free. Now, Miss Callender—I mean Mrs. Tostini, let me help you."

"I'm afraid I must say 'Yes,'" she smiled. "My heart—beats so slowly. Tell me, Lord John, as we go—how did you find out—the secret? It seemed so—well hid!"

"I guessed part, and bluffed the rest. I had to," I confessed, half guiltily. The woman could make no ill use of such a confession now. "I found the flat—and the lock—and two sheets of blotting paper. I made out the anonymous letters, and one to your husband. I showed the snapshot I got of you on shipboard to the house-agent. But he couldn't be sure—said Mrs. Paulling wore a veil when he saw her. The name 'Paulling' was a clue too—enough like Paolo to be suggestive. Some criminals love to twist their own names about. And Paolo Tostini is a criminal. He has brought you to this—"

"If there is guilt, I am the guilty one," she said calmly. "So sorry. I have to lean on you a little. Ah! it's good to be downstairs—and in the air. My doctor's name is Ryland. His address is The Montague, East 44th Street. It's so near—we can get there, I think, in time. You'll tell him—nothing?"

"I'll tell him nothing," I echoed.

As I put her into the taxi I noticed that she had snapped the emerald back in its setting, and the green snake-eye glinted up harmlessly once more from the limp hand in the torn glove.

EPISODE II

THE GREY SISTERHOOD

LORD JOHN'S FIRST ADVENTURE IN LOVE

When applause forced the curtain up again and again on the last scene of our play—Carr Price's and mine—I wasn't looking at the stage, but at a girl in the opposite box. The box was Roger Odell's, and I was sure that the girl must be his adopted sister Madeleine. But because of the insult she had suffered through my brother, I might not visit the box uninvited.

If Grace had been with her husband and sister-in-law there might have been hope. But the wedding had been private, because of Miss Marian Callender's death, and it was not to be supposed that the bride would show herself at the theatre, even as a proof of gratitude to me. I

was in Governor Estabrook's box, with him and Carr Price, and the girl whose engagement to Price depended, perhaps, on the success of this night; but I thanked my lucky stars—that I was invited by Grace to dine after the theatre, *en famille*.

"Surely I shall meet *Her*," I tried to persuade myself. "She's here with Roger, to show that she bears no grudge against my family. She can't stop away from supper when I'm to be the only guest."

This hopeful thought repeated itself in my head whenever I was thwarted by finding my eyes avoided by the girl—the wonderful girl who, with her lily face, and parted blonde hair rippling gold-and-silver lights was like a shining saint. She was so like a saint that I would have staked my life on her being one, which made me more furious than ever with Haslemere. I felt if she would give me one of her white roses lying on the red velvet of the box-rail, it would be worth more to me than the Victoria Cross I was wearing for the first time that night.

"Author! Author!" everybody shouted, as the curtain went down for the tenth time. I heard the call in a half-dream, for at that instant Madeleine Odell dropped the opera-glasses through which she had been taking a look at the audience. They fell on the boxrail among the roses, and pushed off one white beauty, which landed on the stage close to the footlights; but I had no time to yearn for that rose just then. I had thought only for the girl, who shrank back in her chair as if to hide herself. Startled, Roger bent down with a solicitous question. Thus he screened his sister from me, as a black cloud may screen the moon; and my impulse was to search the house for the cause of her alarm.

The audience as a whole had not yet risen, therefore the few on their feet were conspicuous, and I picked out the man who had seemingly annoyed Miss Odell. Just a glimpse I had of his face before he turned, to push past the people in his row of orchestra chairs. It was a strange face.

"That man has some connection with the mystery of Madeleine Odell's life!" was my thought. I knew I had to follow the fellow, and there wasn't a second to lose, because, though he was perhaps twice my age, I had to get about with a crutch and he had the full use of his long, active legs. Before I'd stopped to define my impulse I was on my feet, stammering excuses to Governor Estabrook and his daughter.

"You mustn't leave now. We're wanted on the stage!" Carr Price caught my arm; but a muttered, "For God's sake, don't stop me," told him that here was some matter of life or death for me, and he stood back. After that, I must have made the cripple's record; and I reached the street in time to see the quarry step into a private car. I knew him by the back of his head, prominent behind the ears and thatched with sleek pepper-and-salt hair; but as he bent forward to shut the door, he stared for half a second straight into my eyes. His were black and long—Egyptian eyes, and the whole personality of the man suggested Egypt; not the Arabianised Egypt of to-day, but rather the Egypt which left its tall, broad-shouldered types sculptured on walls of tombs. He made me think of a magnificent mummy "come alive," and dressed in modern evening clothes.

After the meeting of our eyes the man turned to his chauffeur for some word, and the theatre lights seemed to point a pale finger at a scar on the brown throat. The length of that thin throat was another Egyptian characteristic, and though the collar was higher than fashion decreed, it wasn't high enough to cover the mark when his neck stretched forward. It was the queerest scar I ever saw, the exact size and shape of a human eye. And on the white neck of Miss Odell I had noticed a black opal with a crystal centre, representing the eye of the Egyptian god Horus. This fetish was the only jewel she wore; and if I hadn't already been sure of some association between her and the man now escaping, that eye would have convinced me.

Roger Odell had forced on me the gift of an automobile, and Price and I had motored Governor Estabrook and his daughter to the theatre; but as it was waiting in the procession which had just begun to move, my only hope of following the man was to hail a passing taxi. I was about to try my luck, when a hand jerked me back.

"Good heavens, Lord John, are you going to leave us in the lurch? The audience are yelling their heads off!" panted Julius Felborn.

I would have thrown him off, but the second's delay was a second too much. The dark car was spinning away with its secret—which might be a double secret, for I caught a glimpse of a grey-clad woman. Somebody grabbed the taxi I'd hoped to hail, and it was too late to do anything except note the licence number. Since my war-experience and wounds, I've lost—temporarily, the doctors say—my memory for figures. It is one form which nerve-shock takes; and fearing to forget, I made a note with a pocket pencil, on my shirt cuff.

"A man like that is no needle in a haystack," I consoled myself. "I can't fail to lay my hand on him if he's wanted." Then, making the best of the business, I allowed Felborn to work his will. He dragged me back into the theatre, and on to the stage, where I bowed and smirked at the side of Price. Queer, how indifferent the vision of a girl made me to this vision of success! But I'd never fallen in love at first sight before, or, indeed, fallen in love at all in a way worth the name.

The vision was still there when I looked up, though it would soon be gone, for Roger had put on his sister's cloak, and both were standing. The girl shrank into the background; but as I raised

my eyes perhaps the S.O.S. call my heart sent out compelled some faint answer. Miss Odell leaned forward and it seemed that she threw me a glance with something faintly resembling interest in it. Perhaps it was only curiosity; or maybe she was looking for a rosebud she had lost. I couldn't let the flower perish, or be collected by some Philistine; so I bent and picked it up. I trusted that she would not be angry, but when I raised my head the vision and the vision's brother had both disappeared.

This was the happiest night of Carr Price's life, because Governor Estabrook had journeyed from his own state with his daughter to see the play. If he could, he would have kept me to supper in order that I might talk to the Governor while he talked to the fascinating Nora; but I had yet to learn whether there was a chance of its being the happiest night of my life, and I flashed off in my new car at the earliest moment, to find out. Down plumped my heart, however, when only Grace and Roger appeared to welcome me.

As soon as I dared, I invented an excuse to ask for the absent one; or rather, I blurted out what was in my mind. "I hoped," I stammered, "to see Miss Odell again—if only for a few minutes. I felt sure it was she at the theatre. And I wanted to beg—that she'd let me try to atone—to compel Haslemere to atone."

"Oh, she's sorry not to meet you," Roger broke in, "But she's not strong. And she—er—was rather upset in the theatre. She doesn't go out often; and she never takes late supper. She's probably in bed by this time——"

"Oh, Roger, do let me tell him the truth!" exclaimed Grace. "Think how he helped us in our trouble? What if he could help Maida? You must admit he has a mind for mysteries, and if he could put an end to the persecution which has spoiled her life, Maida wouldn't join the Sisterhood."

"She's going to join a Sisterhood?" I broke out, feeling as if a hand had squeezed my heart like a bath sponge.

"Yes," said Grace, glancing at Roger. "You see, Rod, it slipped out!"

"I suppose there's no harm done," he answered. "Only, it's for Maida to talk of her affairs. Lord John's a stranger to her."

"But," I said on a strong impulse, "I've taken the liberty of falling in love with Miss Odell, without being introduced, and in spite of the fact that she has a right to despise my family. This is the most serious thing that's ever happened to me. And if she goes into a Sisterhood the world won't be worth living in. Give me a chance to meet her—to offer myself——"

"Great Scott!" cried Roger. "And the British are called a slow race!"

"Offer myself as her knight," I finished. "Do you think I'd ask anything in return? Why, after what Haslemere did——"

"Oh, but who knows what might happen some day?" suggested Grace. "Rod, I *shall* make Maida come down."

Without waiting to argue, she ran out of the room. She was gone some time, and the secret being out, Roger talked with comparative freedom of his adopted sister's intentions. The Sisterhood she meant to join was not a religious order, but a club of women banded together for good work. At one time the Grey Sisters, as they called themselves, had been a thriving organisation for the rescue of unfortunate girls, the reformation of criminals, and the saving of neglected children; but the Head Sister—there was no "Mother Superior"—had died without a will, a promised fortune had gone back to her family, and had not a lady of wealth and force of character volunteered for the empty place, the Sisterhood might have had to disband. The new Head Sister had persuaded Madeleine Odell to join the depleted ranks. They had met in charity work, which was Maida's one pleasure, and the mystery surrounding the woman had fired the interest of the girl whose youth was wrecked by mystery. The New York home of the Sisterhood had been given up, owing to lack of money, but the new Head Sister, whose life and fortune seemed dedicated to good works, had taken and restored an old place on Long Island. More recruits were expected, and various charities were on the programme.

"It's a gloomy den," said Roger, "and stood empty for years because of some ghost story. But this friend of Maida's has a mind above ghosts. They're going to teach women thieves to make jam, and child pickpockets to be angels! No arguments of mine have had the slightest effect on Maida since she met this foreign woman.

"The child has vowed herself to live with the Sisterhood—I believe it consists at present of no more than five or six women—for a year. After that she can be free if she chooses. But I know her so well that my fear is, she *won't* choose. I'm afraid after all she's suffered she won't care to come back to the world. And the sword hanging over our heads is the knowledge that Maida's pledged herself to go whenever the summons comes."

If Roger's talk had been on any subject less engrossing, I should not have heard a word. As it was, I drank in every one. Yet the soul seemed to have walked out of my body and followed Grace

upstairs. It was as if I could see her pleading with my white-rose vision of the theatre; but I was far enough from picturing the scene as it really was. Afterward, when I heard Maida Odell's story, I knew what strange surroundings she had given herself in the rich commonplaceness of that old home which had been hers since childhood.

"The shrine" adjoined her bedroom, I know now, and for some girls would have been a boudoir. But the objects it contained put it out of the "boudoir" category. There were two life-size portraits, facing each other on the undecorated walls, on either side the only door; there was also a portrait of Roger's father; and opposite the door stood on end a magnificent painted mummy-case such as a museum would give a small fortune to possess. Even without its contents the case would have been of value; but behind a thick pane of glass showed the face of a perfectly preserved mummy, a middle-aged man no doubt of high birth, and of a dynasty when Greek influence had scarcely begun to degrade the methods of embalming. When I saw these treasures of Madeleine's and learned what they meant in her life, I said that no frame could have been more inappropriate for such a girl than such a "shrine."

Grace told me afterwards that she induced Maida to put on her dress again and come downstairs, only by assuring her that "Poor Lord John was dreadfully hurt." That plea touched the soft heart; and my fifteen minutes of suspense ended with a vision of the White Rose Girl coming down the Odells' rather spectacular stairway, with Grace's arm girdling her waist.

We were introduced, and Maida gave me a kind, sweet smile which was the most beautiful present I ever had. How it made me burn to know what her smile of love might be!

Supper was announced; indeed, it had been waiting, and we went into the oak-panelled dining-room where the girl was more than ever like a white flower seen in rosy dusk. At the table I could hardly take my eyes off her face. She was more lovely and lovable than I had thought in the theatre. Each minute that passed, while I talked of indifferent things, I spent in mentally "working up" to the Great Request—that she would show her forgiveness by accepting my help. At last, after butler and footman had been sent out, and words came to my lips—some sort of inspiration they seemed—a servant returned with a letter.

"For Miss Odell, by district messenger," he announced, offering the envelope on a silver tray.

"Is there an answer?" Maida asked, her face flushing.

The footman replied that the messenger had gone; and with fingers that trembled, Maida opened the envelope. Quite a common envelope it was, such as one might buy at a cheap stationer's; and the handwriting, which was in pencil, looked hurried. "I have to go to-morrow morning," the girl said simply. She spoke to Roger, but for an instant her eyes turned to me.

"Oh, darling," cried Grace, springing up as Maida rose, "it's not fair—such short notice! Send word that you can't."

"The only thing I *can't* do, dear, is to break my promise," the girl cut in. "I must go, and she asks me to travel alone to Salthaven. That's the nearest station for the Sisterhood House. She gives me the time of the train I'm to take—seven o'clock. After all, why isn't one day the same as another? Only, it's hard to say good-bye."

To leave my love thus, and without even the chance to win her, which instinct whispered I might have had, seemed unbearable. But there was no other course. She gave me her hand. "Could it be that she was sorry?" I dared ask myself. But before I had time to realise how irrevocable it all was, I stood outside Odell's closed door. I stared at the barrier for a minute before getting into my car, and tried to make the oak panels transparent. "I won't let her go out of my life like this," I said. "I'll fight."

Before I'd reached my hotel I had thought out the first move in a plan of action. But maybe there is another thing I ought to mention, before I speak of that plan. Roger gave me, when I left him, an interesting description of an electrical contrivance by which he protected the chief treasure of his sister's shrine from burglars. He insisted on giving me the secret in writing, also, because he would have to go away shortly, and wanted someone to know what to do "in case anything went wrong." The servants, though trustworthy, were aware only that such a protection existed and was dangerous to meddlers.

Consulting with West, the chauffeur, I learned that to reach Salthaven, Long Island (the nearest village to Pine Cliff), passengers must change at Jamaica. I told him to get to that junction in the morning without fail, before the seven o'clock train was due, and we arranged to start even earlier than necessary, to allow for delay. In the hotel office I asked to be waked at five, in the unlikely event that I should oversleep, and was going to the lift when the clerk at the information desk called after me, "I believe, Lord John, a big box arrived for you. It was before I came on duty, but you'll find it in your suite."

Nothing seemed less important in that mood of mine, than the arrival of a box. I had ordered nothing, expected nothing, wanted nothing—except a thing it seemed unlikely I could ever have; so when I found no box in my bedroom or small sitting-room, I supposed that it—whatever it might be—would be sent next morning. Then I forgot the matter.

I wished to sleep, for I needed clearness of brain for my task. But sleep wouldn't come. After I had courted it in the dark for a few minutes, I switched on the electric light over my bed, smoked a cigarette or two; and when my nerves were calmer, began studying Roger's electrical invention as described in two documents, a sketch of Miss Odell's famous mummy-case, with the wiring attached, and a separate paper of directions how to set and detach the mechanism.

Suddenly, in the midst, a wave of sleep poured over me, sweeping me to dreamland. I have a vague recollection of slipping one paper under the pillow, and I must have dropped off with the other in my hand. I was seeing Maida again, asking her permission to keep the white rose, and receiving it, when some sound brought me back to realities. I sat up in bed and looked around the room, my impression being that someone had been there. Nothing was disarranged, however. All seemed as I had left it—except—yes, there was one change! My eyes fastened upon the shirt cuff on which I had written the licence number of the automobile. I had flung the shirt over a low screen, and had forgotten, in the rush of crowding thoughts, to copy the number in my journal. There hung the shirt as I had left it, but the number, which I had written clearly and distinctly, had become a black blur on the glazed linen.

I sprang out of bed, and switched on more lights. Surely I had not smudged the number by any clumsy accident. The noise I had heard—that sound like the "click" of a lock? One swift look at the shirt cuff came near to convincing me that a bit of rubber eraser had been used, and then I remembered Roger's documents. The one I had slipped under my pillow was gone. Fortunately it was useless to the uninitiated without the other!

I got to the door almost as quickly as if I'd never been wounded, but found the key still turned in the lock. To have slipped out and locked the door on the *inside*, meant a clever thief, a skilled *rat d'hôtel*, provided with a special instrument; but that the trick could be done I knew from hearsay. I threw open the door and looked into the dimly lit corridor. No one was visible, except the flitting figure of a very small child, in a sort of red-riding-hood, cloak, with a hood. The little creature seemed startled at the noise I made, and ran to a door which it had nearly reached. Someone must have been waiting for its return, for it was let in and the door closed.

"If anyone's been in my rooms, he's probably there still," I said, and began to search in the obvious way—looking under the bed. What I found sent me to the door again; for a curious, collapsible box, just big enough to hold a small child, turned the innocent, flitting figure I'd seen into something sinister. Quicker than light, thoughts shot through my head; the arrival of a "big box," my failure to find it in my room, the click of the lock, some knowledge of me by the man with the scar, and a fear of my vaunted "detective skill." Slipping on a dressing-gown as I went, I stalked down the corridor to the door which opened to admit the child; and the knob was in my grasp when a voice spoke sharply at my back. "Haven't you mistaken the room, sir?" the night watchman warned me.

I had met the man before, when coming in late, and he knew my number. He was a big Irishman, twice my size. I foresaw trouble, but went to meet it. "I've reason to believe a thief's been in my rooms, and taken refuge here," I explained. "I want this door opened." With that I rattled the knob and knocked threateningly. Almost at once the door was unlocked, and the sweet face of a young woman in a neat, plain dressing-gown peeped out. "Oh, what's the matter?" she faltered. "Is it fire? We have a child here."

"I *thought* yuh was mistaken, sir!" cut in the watchman. "Two ladies and a little midget came in late. I saw 'em. No, madam, there's no fire. This gentleman thought a thief had slipped into one of your rooms."

"Indeed, he is mistaken," the young woman assured us. "We haven't finished undressing yet. I'm the child's nurse. If necessary, I can call my mistress, but she's very nervous." As she glanced back into the room I caught a glimpse of a woman in grey who hadn't taken off her hat. A sort of motor bonnet it seemed to be, with a long veil attached. I got no sight of her face, for the nurse hastily shut the door, all but a crack which scarcely showed her rather piquant nose.

"That's enough, I guess, sir?" suggested the watchman. "These ladies mustn't be disturbed. All the rooms along here are occupied by old clients. You go back to your suite and if there's any thief we'll find him. But maybe you was dreamin'?"

I heard the key turn again in the lock; but I realised that unless I wanted to risk a row and perhaps arrest for "disorderly conduct," I must bow to circumstances. For a moment I was tempted to persist, but I thought how much more important than anything it was to be free from entanglements, and able to reach Jamaica before seven o'clock. "Spilt milk," I said to myself, and took the watchman's advice. But outside the forbidden door, I picked up a tiny rosetted slipper.

In my own rooms, I searched again for traces of a hostile presence. The collapsible box was a strange thing to find under a bed, but I couldn't prove that Little Red Riding Hood had been in it. Neither could I prove that a small pile of silver that I had poured out of my pockets on to the dressing-table had diminished, or that two letters which I had received—one from my brother Haslemere, one from Grace Odell—had been stolen. Nevertheless, while putting off my principal researches, I did telephone down to inquire who occupied rooms 212, 214. The man who answered from the office had "come on" since the people arrived, but, the name in the hotel register was "Mrs. W. Smith, nurse and child, Sayville, Long Island." Nothing could sound less

offensive; but next morning when I descended at an unearthly hour it seemed that "the party" had already gone, by motor; and the man at the door "hadn't noticed no child." All I could do then was to reserve those rooms for myself, for two days, with orders that they should not be touched until investigated by me.

It lacked twenty minutes of train time when my chauffeur got me to Jamaica. This made me feel almost cheerful, but my heart sank as I reached the arrival platform. There were not many passengers, and even if there had been a crowd one figure would have stood out conspicuously—that of a tall woman in a grey dress, a long grey cloak, and a close-fitting grey bonnet with a thick grey veil falling over the face and breast. There was not a doubt in my mind but this was the formidable directress of the Grey Sisterhood, come in person to meet—I had almost said "her victim." If the woman had known of my plan she could hardly have found a better way of thwarting it.

As I glowered at the figure stalking up and down, I hated it. And I wondered if there were more than a coincidence in the fact that this was the third grey-veiled woman I had seen since last night. In the car at the theatre there had been too brief a glimpse to be sure of a resemblance, and the woman in 212 had left on my mind an impression of comparative shortness. But then, it is easy to stoop and disguise one's height, I told myself viciously, eager to find a connection between this woman and the others.

I could see nothing of her face, as we passed and repassed on the platform; but she was hovering not far off when I learned that the train from New York would be late. It was "hung up," a few miles away, owing to the breakdown of a "freighter." Instead of regret at this news, I felt joy. It gave me—with luck—a way out of my difficulty. Here was the Head Sister, waiting for Maida Odell; but if my car could get me to the delayed train before it was restarted only Maida herself could keep me from saying what I had come to say.

There wasn't a moment to waste, and I didn't waste one. Thinking I had won the first point in the game, I hurried to my car without glancing back at the veiled woman. I gave directions to West and was about to get into the auto, when a look in the chauffeur's eye made me turn. Close behind stood the grey lady. There was no doubt that her purpose was to speak to me. I took off my hat and faced her; but it was like trying to look at the moon through a thick London fog.

"You are Lord John Hasle, I believe?" she said, in a resonant contralto voice, with a slight suggestion of foreign accent. "I have heard of you," she went on. "You have been pointed out to me, and I know of your acquaintance with the Odells. You are going to motor back along the line. Your inquiries told me that. I would thank you, and so would Miss Odell, for taking me to her in your car."

Here was a situation! Rudely to refuse a favour asked by a lady, or—to lose, for ever, perhaps, my one hope? I chose to be rude. I stammered that I meant to go at such a pace it would be risking her life to grant the request. Very sorry; more lifting of the hat; a sheepish look of feigned regret; and then West, thoroughly ashamed of me, started the car. The next moment we had shot away, but not without a startling impression.

"The worst turn you can possibly do Miss Odell will be to prevent her coming into the Sisterhood House. It is the one place where she can be safe." Those were the words I heard over the noise of the starting motor; and as we left the tall statue of a woman, the high wind blew her thick veil partly aside. Instantly she pulled it into place; but I had time to see that the face underneath was covered with a grey mask. The effect on my mind of this revelation was of something so sinister that I felt physically sick. What could be the motive for such double precautions of concealment? Was it merely to hide a disfigurement, I wondered, or was there a more powerful reason? I determined to tell Miss Odell what I had seen.

Fortunately there was little traffic on the country road at that hour, and we did the eight miles in about eight minutes. I thanked my lucky stars that the hold-up train had not moved; and my heart bounded when I saw Maida among a number of passengers who had descended to wander about during the delay. She in a grey travelling dress and small winged toque, walked alone at a distance from the others. Here back was turned to me, but she was unmistakable, with the morning sun ringing her hair with a saint's halo. I tried not to frighten her by appearing too abruptly, but she gave a start, and there was pain rather than pleasure in her eyes.

"Do forgive me!" I pleaded. "I *had* to finish what I couldn't say last night. I wouldn't intrude by travelling in your train from New York without permission, but I thought if I came to Jamaica, maybe you'd grant me a few minutes. Won't you let me atone—won't you let me help? I feel that I can. Roger has hinted of trouble. If you would trust me, I'd put my whole soul into the fight to save you from it."

So I ran on, with a torrent of arguments and all the force of love behind them. Something of that force the girl must have felt, for slowly she yielded and told me this strange story.

Roger Odell's father—Roger senior—had fallen in love with a girl who afterwards became Maida's mother. He was a widower, and young Roger was a boy of eight or nine at the time. Old Roger—he was not old then—had acted as the girl's guardian, and she had promised to marry him, when suddenly she disappeared, leaving behind a letter saying that she was going with the

only man she could ever love.

Five years passed, and then one day she came back bringing a little daughter four years old. Both the Rogers were away when she called at the house in Fifth Avenue; one at his office, the other at school. A housekeeper received the pair, realising that the mother was desperately ill. She would say nothing of herself, except that they had come from England; could not even tell her married name. She had lived through the voyage, she said, to put her daughter under the protection of her only friend. Some strange luggage she had brought, on which were London labels. She forbade the servant to telephone the master of the house. She would write a letter, and then she would go. The letter was begun, but before it could be finished the writer fell into unconsciousness. For a few days she lingered, but never spoke again, and died in the arms of the man she had jilted.

"If you ever loved me, keep my child as if she were your own," began the written appeal. "She is Madeleine, named after me. Don't try to find out her other name. Give her yours, which might have been mine. Make no inquiries. If you do, the same fate may fall on her which has fallen on her father and others of his family. It is killing me now. Save my little Maida. The one legacy I can leave her is a jewel which I want her to keep; a miniature of myself taken for someone I loved, and an Egyptian relic which, for a reason I don't know, is immensely important. I promised her father that this child should never part with it. The one reward I can offer you is my grat—"

There the letter broke off.

Roger Odell, Senior, had obeyed every one of his dead love's requests. The "Egyptian relic" was a mummy case, with the human contents marvellously preserved; the jewel, an opal and crystal eye of Horus. In taking out the miniature from its frame, to be copied in a large portrait, Maida found the miniature of a man she supposed to be her father, and had ordered that enlarged also, to hang in her shrine. Her memories of the past before coming to America were vague; but her childhood, happy as it had been in other ways, was cursed by the dream of a terrible, dark face—a face appearing as a mere brown spot in the distance, then growing large as it drew nearer, coming close to her eyes at last in giant size, shutting out all the rest of the world. Whether she had ever seen this face in reality, before it obsessed her dreams, she could not be sure; but the impression was that she had. As she grew older, the dream came less frequently; but once or twice she had seen a face in a crowd which reminded her—perhaps morbidly—of the dream. Such a face had looked up from the audience last night.

This mystery was one of two which had clouded Maida's life. From the second had come her great trouble; and she did not see that between the two could exist any connection. When I heard the rest of the history, however, I differed from her. Some link there might be, I thought; and if I were to help, it must be my business to find it.

One day, on leaving school for the holidays, when she was seventeen, Maida, and a woman servant sent to fetch her from Milbrook to New York, had met with a slight railway accident, much like that of to-day. It was this coincidence, maybe, which inclined her to confide in me, for she had been thinking of it, she said, when I came. A young man had been "kind" to Miss Odell and her maid; had brought them water and food. Later he had introduced himself. He was Lieutenant Granville, of the Navy. Also he was an inventor, who believed he could make a fortune for himself and his mother, if he could patent and get taken up by some great firm an idea of his, in which he had vainly tried to interest the heads of the Navy. This concerned a secret means of throwing a powerful light under water, for the protection of warships or others threatened by submerged submarines. Granville believed that experiments would demonstrate immense usefulness for his invention and so interested was Maida that she tried to induce Roger to finance it. He refused, and did not like Granville when the girl brought them together.

This seeming injustice roused Maida's sympathy. She met Granville occasionally at his mother's house, without Roger's knowledge. It was the child's first adventure, and appealed to her love of romance. The natural consequences followed. Granville proposed. She asked to remain his friend. Then to give her "friend" a glorious surprise, she worked to interest a great financier, a friend of the Odell family, in Granville's undersea light.

Unfortunately for her unselfish plan, millionaire Orrin Adriance had a son, Jim, who had been in love with Maida since she was in the "flapper" stage. This fact complicated matters. When Granville's chemical formula, in a sealed envelope, was stolen from a safe in the Adriance house, before business was completed between financier and inventor, George Granville—already jealous of Jim Adriance—was mad enough to believe that Maida had joined in a plot to trick him. He accused the Adriances of wishing to get his secret without paying for it, prophesying that a tool of theirs would presently "invent" something of the kind, after they had refused to take up his proposition. Pretending illness, he had induced his mother to send for Maida, and she, only too anxious to defend herself, had gone to the Granville house. After a cruel scene between her and the sailor, he had locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and shot himself through the heart. Mrs. Granville, who had heard a scream from the girl, before the shot, swore to the belief that Maida had killed the young man to defend herself against his love-making.

Roger, learning of the tragedy, had stifled the lie as he would have crushed a snake. How he had done this, Maida was not sure. He had refused to tell. But her name had not been connected with Granville's at the inquest. Mrs. Granville, who had been poor and lived poorly, migrated to

France and was reported to have "come into money through a legacy." In any case she seemed to have been silenced. No word of scandal could be traced to her, though detectives had been employed by Roger. Nevertheless, the story had risen from time to time like the phoenix from its own ashes. Maida's fellow school-mates had whispered; her debut in society had been blighted by a paragraph in a notorious paper, afterwards gagged by Roger. Then, last and worse, had come the cancelling of the girl's presentation to the King and Queen of England.

"You see now," she said, "why I shall be happier out of the world, in a Sisterhood where I can try to help others even sadder than I have been."

"But," I threw out the bold suggestion, "what if there's a plot to get you into the Sisterhood—into this old house!"

"Oh, but that's impossible!" she cried. "You wouldn't dream of such a thing if you could meet the Head Sister and see what a splendid woman she is!"

There was my opportunity to tell about the mask, and I took it. But it availed me nothing. The mask, Miss Odell said, was no secret. She understood that the Head Sister, in saving a child from fire, had so injured her face that for the sake of others she kept it hidden. Another version had it that the motive for wearing the mask was some "sacred vow." In any case, Maida assured me, it was an honour to the good and charitable woman; and no arguments would break her resolution to give the next year to work with the Sisterhood. After that year—if I could solve the mystery of the stolen formula, and put an end for ever to scandal—she would come back and face the world again. But how could I, a stranger, do what Roger had failed to do?

That was the question. Yet I made up my mind that it must be answered in *one way*, or my life would be a failure. Not only would I solve that mystery, I told myself—though I dared not boast to the girl—but I would link together the old one with the new. The way to do this, I told myself, was to learn whether an enemy of Maida Odell's father had found her under her borrowed name, and had made the Granvilles and Adriances his conscious or unconscious tools.

This talk we had while the train stood still. We were sitting on a log together, out of earshot from the other passengers, when—with the name of the Grey Sisterhood on our lips—we looked up to see its veiled directress. She had, she said, been put to much trouble in securing an automobile to come for Madeleine, and see that she was not persuaded to break a promise. Maida, embarrassed and protesting, assured her friend that there was no thought of such disloyalty. Lord John—timidly the girl introduced us—had come only to try and help her throw off an old sorrow, as I had helped Roger and Grace. So she tried to "explain" me; and the Head Sister, having triumphed, could afford to heap coals of fire on my head by being coldly civil. Her one open revenge she took by requesting me not to follow them to their automobile. The chauffeur would fetch Miss Odell's hand luggage out of the train, and my "kindness would no longer be needed." I was dismissed by the conqueror; and left by the wayside with but one consolation: Maida had said "au revoir," not good-bye.

For a moment I stood crushed. Then a thought jumped into my mind: "What if this woman is the one I saw in the auto outside the theatre?"

I felt that I had been a fool to obey Maida, and took steps to retrieve my mistake. But the veiled lady had been too clever for me. The car was gone past recall. If it hadn't been for that viper-thought—and the thought of what had happened in my rooms last night—I might not have had the "cheek" to make my next move in the game. But things being as they were I couldn't stand still and take a rebuff.

Instead of motoring back to New York, I went to Salthaven, and breakfasted at a small inn there. Of the Sisterhood I could learn nothing, for it had but lately taken up its quarters near by. Of those quarters, however, I was able to pick up some queer stories. The place had been bought, it seemed, for a song, because of its ghostly reputation, which had frightened tenant after tenant away.

"What a good pitch to choose if any 'accident' were planned, and lay it to the ghosts!" I thought. And I knew that I couldn't go without learning more about the Sisterhood House than the landlord at Salthaven could tell me. I must see for myself if it were the sort of place where "anything could happen."

I meant to wait until late, when all the Grey Sisters and their protégées were safely asleep. Then, with a present of meat for a possible watch dog, I would try a prowl of inspection. I made a vague excuse of fancying the inn, and of wanting to rest till time to meet a friend who would motor back with me to New York. I engaged a room in order to take the alleged rest; but spent long hours in striving to piece together bits of the most intricate puzzle my wits had ever worked upon.

"In an hour more now I can start," I said at ten, and composed myself to forget the slow ticking of my watch. But suddenly it was as if Maida called. Actually I seemed to hear her voice. I sprang up, and in five minutes had paid the bill and was off in my car for Pine Cliff.

I left West sitting in the auto at a little distance from the high wall, which shut the old garden in from the rocks above the Sound. Then I struck my crutch into a patch of rain-sodden earth, and

used it to help me vault over the wall. Just as I bestrode the top, a dog gave out a bell-toned note. I saw his dark shape, and threw the meat I had brought from the inn. He was greedily silent, and I descended, to pat his head as he ate. Luckily he was an English bull, and perhaps recognised me as a fellow-countryman. At all events, he gave his sanction to my presence.

The neglected garden, which I could dimly see, was mysterious in the night hush. There was no sound except the whisper of water on the shore outside. The substantial building with its rows of closed blinds looked common place and comfortable enough. Lights showed faintly in two or three windows. Not all the household had gone to bed. As I stood staring at a low balcony not far above the ground, which somehow attracted and called my eyes, the blinds of a long French window looking out upon it were opened. I saw Maida herself, and a tall woman in grey, wearing a short veil. They stood together, talking. Then with an affectionate touch on the girl's shoulder, the Head Sister—I knew it must be she—bade her newest recruit good night.

The window was left open, but dark curtains were drawn across, no doubt by Maida. Presently the long strip of golden light between these draperies vanished. No scene could be more peaceful than the quiet garden and the sleeping house. Still, something held me bound. How long I stood there, I don't know: an hour, maybe; perhaps less, perhaps more. But suddenly a white figure flashed out upon the balcony. So dim was it in the darkness, I might have taken it for one of the famous ghosts, but Maida's voice cried out: "*The face—the face!* God send me help!"

"He has sent help. I've come, to take you away," I called, and held up my arms.

Five minutes later she was with me in my car, rushing towards New York and her brother's house.

* * * * *

"A gilded amateur detective," Roger Odell once called me in a joke. But I knew he would listen to theories I'd formed concerning this mystery which, like an evil spirit, had haunted his sister since childhood. All night I spent in elaborating these theories and dove-tailing them together. The girl had had a fright in the theatre. I had seen a man with strange eyes and a scar, looking at her; and through certain happenings at my hotel, I believed that a link between him and Maida's "Head Sister" might be found. That, of course, would free the girl from the promise she thought sacred.

By eight-thirty in the morning I was in touch with Pemberton's Private Detective Agency, and I had just been assured that a good man, Paul Teano, would be with me in ten minutes, when my telephone bell rang shrilly. It was the voice of Grace Odell which answered my "Hello!"

"Oh, Lord John," she called distressfully, "isn't it dreadful? Maida's going back to the Sisterhood House! The Head Sister has written her a letter. Maida's answering it. She doesn't blame the woman for *anything*. She thinks she herself was a coward to take fright at a bad dream. Do come and argue with her. The child wants to start this morning. That woman seems to have her hypnotised."

My answer goes without saying. I determined to put off the detective, but he arrived as I finished talking to Grace, and as his looks appealed to me I spared him a quarter of an hour. His eyes were as Italian as his name—with the shadow of tragedy in them. "Temperamental looking fellow," I said to myself.

My business with Teano had nothing to do directly with Maida. What I had to tell him was the invasion of my rooms two nights before, but out it came that I had been helping a woman, and that success in this case might mean her safety.

"I, too, work for a woman, my lord," the detective said. Though he had spent years in America, I noticed how little slang of the country he'd chosen to pick up. He spoke, perhaps in the wish to impress me, with singular correctness. "Now you have told me this, I shall be the more anxious to serve you. I turned detective to find her. I've been five years trying. But every morning I think, 'Perhaps it will be to-day.'"

There was no time then to draw him out as he would have liked to be drawn out. I showed him what there was to work upon, in my rooms as well as the two others, and then dashed off to Maida.

As my car stopped in front of Roger Odell's home, out of the house bounced a small boy—a very small boy indeed, with the eyes of an imp, and the clothes of a Sunday-school scholar. He looked at me as he flashed past, and it was as if he said, "So it's *you*, is it?"

I had never seen the boy before, but I thought of the collapsible box; and leaving a flabbergasted footman at the door, my crutch and I went after the small legs that twinkled around the corner. The elf was too quick, however. By the time I had got where he ought to have been, he had made himself invisible. Whether a taxi had swallowed him, or a door had opened to receive him, it was useless to wonder. All I could do was to question the footman. The child had brought a letter to Miss Odell, and had taken one away. "Meanwhile," the servant added, seeing my interest, "he has entertained below stairs, making faces and turning handspings. Quite a

acrobat, your lordship," remarked the man, who hailed from my country; "and that *sharp*, though dumb as a fish! We gave 'im cake and jam, but money seemed to please 'im most, an' his pockets was full of it already. 'E's got enough to go on a most glorious bust, beggin' your lordship's pardon."

I gave it—and something else as well. Then I asked him for the plate from which the child had eaten. It was to be wrapped in paper, and put into my car—for Teano. (It has never mattered that a footman should think his master, or his master's friends, insane!)

If the child messenger from the Sisterhood, and the child-thief in the collapsible box were one, the dumbness was an obstacle. Nevertheless Teano might catch him, I thought, little dreaming how my desire and his, working into one, were to be brought about.

I was shown into Roger's den, and confessed the theft of the document he had given me—luckily useless, without the plan. I told him also the history of the night. "Two and two generally make four," I said, "and though this affair is irritating, it may help eventually. The man who frightened Miss Odell had the look of an Egyptian. Now, isn't it more likely that a mummy should be wanted by an Egyptian than another? Miss Odell's treasure is a mummy, in a painted mummy-case. You know that several attempts have been made to break into the 'shrine,' as Miss Odell calls it. With what other object than to get the mummy? You've had its case protected with an ingenious system of electric wiring. Now, you are going away with your wife. You give me the secret of the mechanism. The same night somebody tries to steal it; also he rubs off my shirt-cuff the number of the Egyptian-looking fellow's car. Then, there's the directress of the Sisterhood. She fascinates Miss Odell. She revives the glory of a dying order. She takes an old ghost-ridden house by the seashore—where anything might happen. And something *does* happen. A dream—so vivid, that I venture to believe it wasn't a dream but a trick. The woman tries to induce a girl to bring all her possessions with her into seclusion. '*All* her possessions,' mind! That would have included the mummy-case, if you hadn't put your foot down. Have I your leave to repeat these ramblings to her?"

"She has heard them, Lord John!" I turned, and sprang to my feet. Maida was at the door, with Grace.

"You were talking so fast, we didn't interrupt. And I *wanted* to hear. I thought you'd wish me to. You have a wonderful theory, but it's *all* a mistake so far as the Sisterhood is concerned. The Head Sister is the *best* woman I ever knew. I'm breaking my heart with shame because I deserted my post. Oh, don't think I blame *you* for bringing me away, Lord John. I blame only myself. You were splendid. And I'm grateful for everything. To convince you of that, I promise if you can prove anything against the Sisterhood, I'll consider myself free from my bond—even before the twelve months are up. That's a *safe* promise. You can't think what a beautiful letter the Head Sister has sent me this morning. I'm eager to go back and earn her forgiveness by helping in the work she'll give me to do. In justice to her I *must* tell you a secret. That mask you saw—which prejudiced you—is to hide burns she got in saving a slum-child from death in a great fire. The Sister wears it to spare others pain. As for the *dream*—I have it everywhere, and often. Don't be anxious. I'll write, and—*you* can write if you will. Dear Roger, is the car ready?"

"No," said Roger bluntly. "I hoped John would make you see reason."

"I do see it," the girl answered. "I didn't last night."

"How I wish you weren't over twenty-one!" her adopted brother growled.

Maida laughed, almost gaily. "As it is, I'm an old maid, and must be allowed to go my own way."

"May I motor you and Roger to Pine Cliff, if you must go?" I begged.

She gave me a long look before answering. Then she said, "Yes."

I shall never forget that run from New York to Long Island. I made the most of every moment; but my heart turned to ice whenever a voice seemed to mutter in my ear, "You're going to lose her. You've failed, John Hasle, in the big crisis of her life and yours."

But I wouldn't believe the voice. So far as my own story was concerned, I thought this chapter of it had come to a close with the closing of the gate at the Sisterhood House between me and Maida Odell. Yet after all it hadn't, quite. There was more to come.

A little veiled woman had opened the gate at the sound of the motor-horn, evidently expecting Miss Odell. And the same little woman shut us out when the new sister had gone in. I noticed her particularly, because she shrank from our eyes, though her face was covered with the conventional mist of gauze. And it seemed that she was glad to get rid of us. Not rudely, but with eagerness, she pushed the gate to; and as she did so I noticed her hand. The left hand it was—small, daintily shaped, with delicate, tapering fingers; but the third finger was missing.

Teano was not in my rooms when I arrived once more at my hotel; but opening the door of

212 I found him at the telephone. So absorbed was he that he did not hear me enter, and I stood still in order not to disturb him. I supposed that he had called up the Agency, and was talking of my business.

"If I could get out of the job, I would," he almost groaned. "But they'd put another man on, and that would be worse for Jenny. Everyone heard of 'Three-Fingered Jenny' at the time of the gang's getaway. The only thing I can do is to keep her out of the business at any cost, and go along on other lines. I'll call you up again, Nella, if I get anything on my *own*, about Jenny."

"Who, pray, are Nella and Jenny, Mr. Teano?" I asked, realising that he meant to play me false.

He jumped as if I had shot him, and dropped the receiver. "I—thought I'd locked the door," he stammered.

"It's a good thing you didn't," I said. "I've heard enough to guess you came on some clue you didn't expect. That's why you forgot to lock the door, before you called up 'Nella.'"

"Nella's my sister," Teano blurted out. "She's employed in the Priscilla Alden, the hotel where only ladies stay. She's the telephone girl on the thirteenth floor."

"Thanks for the explanation," I replied with more coolness than I felt. "As for 'Jenny'—well, before I ask more questions I'll tell you what I think. 'Jenny' is the woman for whose sake you took up your profession. You'd lost, and wanted to find her. Now, you have found her—or rather, her fingerprints—unmistakable, because they happen to be those of her left hand. Rather than get her into trouble, you'd sacrifice my interests."

Teano remained dumb as the impish child, when I finished and waited for him to speak; so I went on. "I don't want to hurt a woman; yet you see I know so much I can carry on this case without you. Suppose we work together? I'll begin by laying my cards on the table. I can save you the trouble of a search if I choose. I know where 'Jenny' is, and can take you to her."

"You—you're bluffing!" Teano stammered.

"I swear I'm not. Luckily you're a *private* detective. The police needn't get an inkling of this case, unless you fail me, and I turn to them. All I want is to find out who instigated the affair of night before last. Who carried it out isn't so important to me, though it may be to you. And by the by, has 'Jenny' any personal interest in a little boy of four or five who is dumb?"

"My God!" broke out the detective.

"Don't you think I can be as useful to you as you can to me?" I insinuated. "Why not be frank about 'Jenny'? I promise to hold every word in confidence. Hang up that receiver. You'd better sit down or you'll fall! Now, let's have this out."

The man was at my mercy; yet I knew he was no traitor. "Probably," I reflected, "I'd have done the same in his place."

We sat facing each other, across the bare little table; and Teano began the story of Jenny. There was drama in it, and tragedy, though as yet the story had no end. The sad music was broken; but I began to see, as he went on, that he and I might find a way of ending it, on a different key.

Paul Teano and his sister had come to relatives in New York when he was nineteen and she twelve. That was ten years ago. Paul was now a naturalised American citizen, but at the time of the Italian war in Tripoli he hadn't taken out his papers. There had been other things to think of—such as falling in love. In those days Paul was a budding newspaper reporter. He had gone to "get" a fire, and incidentally had saved a girl's life. Her name was Jenny Trent. It was a case of love at first sight with both. The mother took lodgers, and Teano became one. In a fortnight, Jenny and he were engaged in spite of a rival with money and "position"—that of a bank clerk.

Mrs. Trent wanted Jenny to marry Richard Mayne, and Jenny had vaguely entertained the idea before she met Teano. There was something mysterious and different from the men she had known, about Mayne, which piqued her interest. But the mystery ceased to attract her after the Italian's appearance. Teano, afraid of Mrs. Trent's weakness for Mayne—or his presents, would have married Jenny at once, and trusted to luck for a living; but the girl's mother fell ill, and while Jenny was nursing her, Italy's war broke out. Paul was called to the colours, and sailed for "home" with thousands of other reservists. It was hard luck, and harder still to be wounded and taken prisoner in his first battle. Teano's adventures with his Arab captors would make a separate story, as exciting as Slatin's though not so long, for he suffered only a year and six months' imprisonment. At the end of that time he escaped, made his way to Sicily, and thence back to America as stoker in an Italian ship. His first thought was to see Jenny; but at Mrs. Trent's he found himself taken for a ghost. The report had come that he was dead; and Mrs. Trent had "thought it best" for Jenny to accept Dick Mayne. "For Heaven's sake, keep away," pleaded her mother. "She's not happy with Dick. There was trouble at the bank, and he lost his job. Jenny's wretched. But she's got a baby boy to live for—a poor little thing, born dumb. The sight of you will make things harder."

Perhaps Teano might have had strength to remain in the background if an old fellow-lodger had not whispered what "people were saying about Dick Mayne." It was asserted that for years he had led a "double life." Nothing had been actually proved against him, except, that he was a dope fiend. But gossip had it that he was a dope-seller as well, a receiver of stolen goods, and a friend of thieves and gunmen. There was likely to be an awful "bust-up" and then—Heaven help Jenny!

Naturally Teano went to the address given him—that of a tenement house a long way east of Fifth Avenue. There, Fate stage-managed him into the midst of a scene destined to change the course of two lives and put an end to one. His knock was unanswered; but something was happening in the kitchen of the wretched flat. The door was not locked; it had been forgotten. Teano burst in, to find Jenny fighting for her life with a madman. Mayne had snatched a bread-knife from the table, and Jenny's hand dripped blood. Without a word Teano sprang to her defence; but Mayne slipped out of his grasp. Darting to an adjoining room, he rushed back with a Colt revolver. To save Teano, Jenny flung herself between the two men; but Paul caught and put her behind him, leaping on Mayne with a spring of a tiger. Then came a life and death tussle. The revolver went off as both fought to get it, and Mayne fell, shot through the heart.

"You'd have thought things couldn't have been worse with us than they were," the detective groaned. "But you'd have thought wrong. We were up against it, Jenny and me. If I stayed and gave evidence, she was afraid of a scandal. If I made a getaway, she argued, she would be all right, on a plea of self-defence; because it was known by the neighbours what her husband was. I thought the same myself; and she persuaded me for her sake to disappear. That was the mistake of my life. What happened after I went, I don't know. I can only guess. But something caused Jenny to change her mind. I got off without being seen, and lay low to watch the papers. But if you believe me, for three days there was nothing! Then came out a paragraph about Mayne's body being discovered by some friend, who pounded in vain on the door, and at last broke it in, to find the man dead. Doctors testified that he'd been a corpse for forty-eight hours. The revolver lay beside him. The verdict was suicide. He was known for his habits, you see; and just by pulling the catch down, Jenny could get out, leaving the door locked on the *inside*. Folks thought she'd deserted him—and that and other troubles, brought on by himself, had preyed upon his mind. She and I hadn't been cool enough to plan a stunt like that, in the minutes before she forced me out of the place. But *somebody'd* helped her; and things that happened later put me on to guessing who.

"Never a word or a line has Jenny sent me from that day to this. Do you know why? Because a pack of thieves got hold of her and the child. One of Mayne's secret pals must have come along and offered to save her and the boy. I don't believe she knew what she was letting herself in for, till she was in. But—well, a girl called 'Three-Fingered Jenny' travelled with a gang of international thieves last year in France, and I bounced over there like a bomb when I heard. You see, when I found her struggling with Mayne, he'd been trying to cut off her finger, because she *would* stick to an old ring of mine; refused to give it up. She'd just time to tell me that and show me what he'd done. I saw the poor finger would have to come off. My poor little Jenny! She'd loved her pretty hands! The European war broke out just as I was getting on her track—or thought I was—and I lost her again. I'd stake my life she never stole a red cent's worth. But they may have forced her to act as a decoy—using the child to bring her up to time. I've always felt the gang's game would be to train the boy for a dip. It was a frame-up on Jenny from the first. Why, the little chap would do star turns, and never spill. He's dumb. Made for the job. I've seen babies in the business, sharp as traps! Now you see, my lord, what a knockout I had, finding those finger-marks on the window-sill:—three, of a small left hand, the third finger missing; and traces that a child had been let out of the window by a rope. The footprints are below in the court. 'Jenny and her boy,' I said to myself. I've prayed God I might find them; but it's the devil has sent them to me at last."

"I'm not so sure of that," I said, and told Teano where and how I had seen a slender little woman with big, scared eyes and a left hand with its third finger missing.

When I had explained my rapidly developed theory, we discussed the means of proving it. We might as well batter at the gates of Paradise as those of the Grey Sisterhood. We would be turned away, as with a flaming sword. Trust the Head Sister for that! But we were not at the end of our resources.

That evening towards dusk, two ruddy-faced coastguards left a somewhat dilapidated car in charge of a local youth. They walked for a short distance, where a group of pines on a promontory had suggested the name "Pine Cliff." They rang a gate bell, although aware that tradesmen were the only males of the human species allowed to cross the threshold. When their summons remained unanswered, they tugged again with violence, until a *grille* opened like a shutter. "Who is there?" questioned a timid voice.

The elder of the coastguards, seeing his companion start at the sound of her voice, answered, to give his comrade breathing space. They had come, he announced, by order, to search the garden for a suspected hiding hole of smuggled opium. Not that the Sisterhood was implicated! This was an old place, and had been used by dope smugglers. The coast police had received the "tip" that this had happened again.

The veiled eyes behind the *grille* vanished; and a moment later another voice took up the argument. As Teano had recognised Jenny's voice, I knew the Head Sister's. The idea was *absurd*, said the latter. We could not be admitted. I stepped aside, not trusting my disguise, and Teano held out a folded document to which we had given an official semblance.

"I don't want to make trouble for you, ladies, but—" he hinted. The paper and a glimpse of a red seal said the rest. Bolts slid back indignantly, and the gate was flung open. I beheld the Head Sister, tall and formidable. Behind her I glimpsed a group of other forms less imposing, among them Maida, flowers in her hands, and surrounded with children. As for Teano, no doubt he saw only the shy figure retiring from the gate.

"This is preposterous!" exclaimed the Head Sister. "But search the garden if you must. You will find *nothing*." She moved away to join her satellites, motioning to the door-keeper that the gate might be closed. Before the gesture could be obeyed, however, Teano put himself between the tall woman and the little one.

"Beg pardon, madam. I admit we've got in on false pretences," he said sharply; "but we're detectives sent to arrest Three-Fingered Jenny, and here's our warrant."

He flourished the faked document. Before the mistress of infinite resource had time to collect her forces—we had swept Jenny outside the gate, and slammed it. We raced with her to Teano's waiting car, and—cruel to be kind—stopped to explain nothing till Pine Cliff was more than a mile away.

I took the wheel and gave Paul a place by Jenny. I heard him plead, "Don't you *know* me, Jen?" But not once did I turn my head until Teano spoke my name.

"She's my Jenny," he said, "and she *cares*, but she doesn't *want* to be rescued! It's a question of her boy. She won't give him up."

"Quite right," I agreed. "Why should she give him up? Has she left him in the Sisterhood House?"

"No, he's lost," Jenny answered. "I don't know where he is—since this morning. But the House has been our home for weeks. The Head Sister took us in, and promised to save Nicky from bad people and bad ways. He'll go back there, and——"

"But where is he now?" I cut in, having slowed down the car. "Can't we head him off? The child has money, I know. Where would he go and spend his earnings?"

"I—can't tell," she stammered. "He's always wanted me to take him to Coney Island—to some amusement park. But——"

"To Coney Island we'll go," I exclaimed.

* * * * *

What followed was a wild adventure. I had never been to Coney Island. But I seemed to have been born knowing that it was a place dedicated to the people's pleasure. No doubt it was a toss-up which amusement ground to choose. By hazard, we began with Constellation Park; and almost at once came upon traces of Nicky. "A little dumb boy with black eyes, all alone, with plenty of money, and a grin when asked if he were lost?" Oh, yes, he was doing every stunt. We tracked him through peanuts and ice cream, lions' dens and upside-down houses, to the Maze of Mystery.

The name was no misnomer. Hampton Court, and the Labyrinth of Crete itself could have "nothing on it." In a bewildered procession Teano, Jenny and I wandered through streets of mirrors, complicated groves, walled concentric alley ways, with unexpected and disappointing outlets until at last a pair of elf-eyes stared at me from a distant and unreachable surface of glass. I cried out; so did Jenny and Teano, for all of us had had the same glimpse and quickly lost it.

"*Nicky*," gasped Jenny, just behind my back. "And, oh, *Red Joe's got hold of him!* It's all up—if we can't get between them. It's Red Joe I stole him back from when we went into the Sisterhood."

I looked back to console her—and she was gone. Teano, too, had suddenly separated from us, whether accidentally or for a purpose, I could not tell. But the maze would have put any rabbit warren to shame. When you thought you were in one place, you found to your astonishment that you were in another, with no visible way of getting out.

Then again, eyes looked at me from a mirror which might be far off or within ten yards. There were mirrors within mirrors, dazzling and endless vistas of mirrors. Child's eyes, mischievous as a squirrel's, met mine, peering from between crowding forms of grown-ups. The man Jenny had spoken of as "Red Joe" (I picked him out by a ferret face and rust-red hair) was trying to push past a fat father of a family, to reach the child in grey. Whether Nicky knew that he was a pawn in a game of chess, who could tell? There was but one thing certain. He was having "the time of his life."

"If I could get him for Jenny, what would Jenny do for me in return?" I asked myself. It might turn out that she could unlock the door that had shut between me and Maida Odell.

A desperate, a selfish desire to beat Red Joe, seized me; but now the mirrors told, if they did not deceive, that glassy depths of distance between us were increasing in space and mystery. Suddenly I reached a turning-point. Nicky was straight ahead. He paused, looked, made ready to dart away like a trout from the hook. But—inspiration ran with my blood.

I pulled a wad of greenbacks from my pocket and smiled. Red Joe had flattened pater familias unmercifully, and was squeezing past. A hand, a thief's hand if I ever saw one, caught at Nicky's collar. But he dipped from under, slipped between a surprised German's legs, and—I grabbed him in my arms.

EPISODE III

THE GIRL ON THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR

When Teano first spoke to me of his sister, nothing was further from my thoughts than a meeting with the telephone girl at the Priscilla Alden, a hotel sacred to ladies. But unexpected things happen in the best regulated lives, especially in New York, as anyone may learn by the Sunday papers. Not many days after the gate of the Sisterhood House shut for the second time between Maida and me, I changed my residence from New York to a hotel about five miles from Pine Cliff. Roger Odell and Roger's bride had gone to South America on one of those business trips which financiers seem to take as nonchalantly as we cross a street. His last words to me were: "You know, I rely on you to look after Maida, as well as she can be looked after, under that brute of a woman's thumb."

I did the best I could; but whether my wounds or my love sickness were to blame, the fact was that something had made me a bundle of raw nerves.

I slept badly, and my dreams were of some hideous thing happening to Maida; or else of the mummy-case being stolen. In my waking hours I chased back and forth between town and country, trying to find in New York the "Egyptian-looking man" who had disturbed Maida's peace of mind, and who had reasons for wishing me to forget the number of his automobile: trying to make sure on Long Island if a connection existed between this man and the head of the Sisterhood.

At last I realised that I was in no fit state of nerves for a guardian. The hotel people recommended me to a celebrated doctor practising on Long Island; and one morning, ashamed of myself as a "molly-coddle," I went to keep an appointment with him. Thorne was his name and he lived in a grey-shingled house set back from the road behind a small lawn. The place was outside the village; but since abandoning my crutch, I had begun to take as much exercise as possible. I walked, therefore, to the doctor's, rather than use the car presented to me by Roger. This seems a small detail to note, but deductions following certain events proved it to have been important.

I was received by the keen-eyed Thorne, in his private office, and during the catechism to which he subjected me, I thought nothing of what went on in the outer room through which I had passed. I should ill have earned Roger Odell's nickname ("the gilded amateur detective"), however, if I hadn't ferreted it out afterwards and "put two and two together."

It was an ordinary room, with a desk at which sat a young woman who answered the door and kept the doctor's appointments classified. I was vaguely aware that I had interrupted her business of stamping letters, which a boy would post. She had not finished when a few minutes later the next patient arrived. This person gave his name as Mr. Genardius, and confessed that he had no appointment; but his face—covered with bandages—presented such a pitiful appearance that the girl agreed to let him wait. "When the gentleman who's in the office now goes away," she explained, "the doctor's hour for receiving is over. But he may give you a few minutes."

"Isn't the gentleman an English officer, Lord John Hasle?" inquired the would-be patient, whose face as seen under a wide-brimmed, old-fashioned felt hat, and between linen wrappings, consisted of deep-set black eyes, wide nostrils, and a long-lipped mouth.

"Why, yes, he is," admitted the young woman, to whom I had given my name. "Do you know him?"

"Not at all," replied Mr. Genardius, who appeared to her a rather unusual figure in his quaint hat and an equally quaint overcoat. "But as I got out of my automobile I saw him at the gate. I recognised him from portraits in newspapers. He was an army aviator, I believe, who got leave on account of wounds, and came over to see a play produced."

"Oh, yes, *The Key*—a lovely detective play," was the flattering reply, as reported to me later.

As she spoke, the young woman (Miss Murphy) gave the letters to the boy, who went out, needing no directions. Hardly had the door shut, when Mr. Genardius rose. "Oh, that reminds me!" he exclaimed, "I should have wired to a friend! The doctor is sure to be engaged for some moments. I'll step out and send my chauffeur with the telegram." For an invalid, he walked briskly. The boy hadn't disposed of his letters and parcels, or mounted the bicycle which leaned against the fence, when Mr. Genardius reached the gate. Miss Murphy glanced from the window, interested in the queer personage. She was unable to see the motor from where she sat; but it must have been near, for the black felt hat and the black caped coat came flapping up the garden path again in less than five minutes. The thought flitted through Miss Murphy's head that the bandages worn by the invalid wouldn't make a bad disguise. Mr. Genardius returned to his chair, and selected a newspaper.

About this time came a telephone call, which Miss Murphy answered. And though two days had passed before I realised the need of questioning the young woman, she was able to recall a rustle as of tearing paper at this moment. Her attention was occupied at the 'phone; but when Genardius had departed, and she wished to glance at the theatrical advertisements, she noticed that a page was gone from *The World*. Had she not remembered the name of the paper, a link would have been missing from the chain of evidence. As it was, I was able to deduce that the torn page contained a news item "exclusive to *The World*." Mr. Genardius had doubtless read some other newspaper at home, and it had interested him that "Millionaire Roger Odell's Egyptian Present for His Bride" was likely to reach New York that night on an Italian liner.

How *The World* had got hold of this story remains a mystery. It had leaked out that Roger had bought for a great sum an opal "Eye of Horus," supposed to be the mate of a curious ornament possessed by his adopted sister, and the only other jewel resembling it, in existence. Grace Odell (nee Grace Callender) had admired Maida's fetish. That was enough for Roger. He made inquiries, and learned from a firm of jewellers that a duplicate of Miss Odell's opal had been sold years ago by a certain Sir Anthony Annesley to the Museum of Cairo.

How it had come into Annesley's hands was not known; and he had long ago died. Maida had been satisfied with her fetish, and did not covet its fellow, but Grace's chance word caused Roger to cable an agent in Egypt, and, after bargaining, the Museum authorities had consented to part with the treasure. This information the newspapers had obtained, but the time and the way of the opal's arrival in America had, Roger thought, been kept a dead secret.

In order that jewel-thieves, ever on the alert for a prize, should not stalk the messenger, Roger's agent had engaged the services of a private person. A relative of his, an American girl who had acted as stenographer in Naples, was giving up her position to return to New York. Taking advantage of this fact, and his confidence in her, the agent had given Miss Mary Gibson charge of the Eye of Horus. Having no connection with any jewel firm it was believed that she might pass unsuspected. The curio being thousands of years old, was not subject to duty, and could, it was hoped, be placed by Miss Gibson directly in the hands of its owner, before anyone discovered that it had been in hers. Roger Odell had intended to meet the young woman; but his suddenly arranged journey upset that plan, and the day before my visit to Dr. Thorne I had received the following cable:

"Stenographer will go straight from ship to Priscilla Alden. If ship late, meet her there early morning after. Will be expecting you."

Had I not come to an understanding with Roger before he sailed for Rio Janeiro, this message would have been gibberish. But he had asked me to take over the jewel because he hoped thus to bring me into touch with Maida. If I could bestow the opal in Roger's bank, Miss Odell (whose vows did not bind her to absolute seclusion) might run up to New York and compare it with her own curio. I had caught eagerly at the plan. Gladly would I have waited hours on the dock for Miss Gibson, but fearing I might be suspected as his agent, if thieves were on the watch, Roger had thought it best for the young woman not to be met. In order to avoid attention, she was to proceed as if she had been the insignificant stranger she was supposed to be. She was to inquire on shipboard for an hotel in New York, taking lady guests only. The Priscilla Alden would be mentioned, and she would send a wireless, engaging a room. As clients of the Priscilla Alden were allowed no male visitors after ten p.m., my call would have to depend upon the time the ship docked. Even before Roger's cable, I had ascertained that the *Reina Elenora* was likely to get in late, and I made up my mind to spend the night at my own old hotel in New York. That would enable me to present myself early next day at the Priscilla Alden.

While I described my nightmare dreams to the doctor (keeping Maida's name to myself), Miss Murphy left Mr. Genardius for a few moments. A rich old lady patient drew up at the gate in an automobile and sent her chauffeur to fetch the young woman. There was a verbal message to be delivered, and while Miss Murphy committed it to heart, doubtless the bandaged man listened at the keyhole. He heard enough to realise that John Hasle was close upon the trail of Miss Odell's enemies.

Thorne was sympathetic. He talked of nerve-shock in various forms, from which most returning soldiers suffered.

As he fumbled among medicine bottles he went on: "I'll prescribe you a tonic; I keep a few things at hand here, and I can fix you up from my stock. Some of the ingredients are rare. You couldn't get a prescription made up nearer than New York. No, by George! there's one thing missing from my lot! Luckily it's not one of the rare ones. Did you come in a car? What, you walked? Well, I'll get the boy to sprint into the village on his bike, to the pharmacy. He can be back inside fifteen minutes. I'll write to the druggist."

Thorne touched an electric button. No one came in response. Impatiently the doctor flung the door open to glare at Miss Murphy. Miss Murphy was not visible, however, and away dashed the master of the house, leaving me in his private office to wonder at his absence. This office being behind the outer room gave no view of the front gate, therefore I could not see what Thorne saw. It wasn't until he appeared that I learned why he had bolted. The boy whom he had intended to send for the missing ingredients had been run down by a motor-car, while bicycling to the post-office. The chauffeur had, through coincidence, been despatched by a patient waiting for Thorne. He had taken a corner too sharply, and knocked the boy off his bicycle, but Joey was more frightened than hurt. He had been picked up by the chauffeur, a foreigner, and when Thorne had looked from the window, it had been to see the lad lifted half-conscious from the returning car. At the gate stood not only Miss Murphy, but the owner of the automobile, who had hurried out on hearing the young woman's cry. So it was that the waiting-room had been left empty.

"Joey's as right as rain now, or will be when he's pulled himself together," Thorne explained. "My new patient, whoever he is—a stranger to me—seemed to feel worse than Joey. He gave the kid ten dollars! It may have been as much the boy's fault as the chauffeur's. Anyhow, I bet Joey won't complain. Your medicine will be ready as soon as if nothing had happened, for the owner of the auto (Genardius, his name is) offered to drive to the druggist's and back."

It was Miss Murphy who presently handed the doctor a small, neatly wrapped bottle. "That chauffeur brought me this," she announced. "It seems that Joey's accident upset the invalid gentleman more than he realised at first. He was taken faint at the pharmacy, and decided not to consult you this morning. He'll 'phone, and ask for an appointment."

Dr. Thorne tore the wrapper off the phial, and began pouring its colourless contents into a bottle already two-thirds full, which he had prepared. Suddenly he stopped. "I guess I'll let that do for this time! Take a tablespoonful when you get home, and twice more during the day; once just before bed."

Dr. Thorne inspired me with confidence; and, as I was anxious to keep my wits for Maida's sake, I intended to follow directions. Arriving at my hotel, however, I found a cablegram in answer to one I'd sent Haslemere, in London. I had demanded whence came the scandal which darkened the life of Maida Odell. Replying, he refused details, but deigned to admit that his informant was an American, the widow of a naval officer, of "unimpeachable respectability." That word "unimpeachable" was so characteristic of Haslemere that I laughed, but the description answered closely enough to Mrs. Granville to excite me, and I forgot the medicine.

Later, I had remembered it once more when Teano called, bringing the dumb child Nicky, now his adopted son. I set down the bottle and thought no more about it, for I hoped to learn something of the man who had frightened Maida. My hope that Nicky might turn informant seemed, however, doomed to disappointment. It was difficult to elicit facts, because of his dumbness; but Teano and I agreed that the imp took advantage of his infirmity to bottle up secrets. "He's in fear of some threat," pronounced the detective. "It's the same with his mother. Jenny and I were married the day after you found her. She says she's happy, and she ought to know I'm able to protect her. But she's afraid to speak against the Sisterhood. I shouldn't wonder if they've made her swear some oath."

We talked long on the subject, and Teano produced a list of Egyptians living in New York, obtained at my request. Some were rich. The greater number appeared to be engaged in the import of tobacco and curios, or Eastern carpets. A few were doctors; more were fortune-tellers; while one extraordinary creature whose description caught my fancy was a mixture of both: an exponent of ancient cults and religions, and a qualified physician who treated nervous ailments with hypnotism. This man gave weekly lectures on "Egyptian Wisdom applied to Modern Civilisation," and was known as "Doctor" or "Professor" Rameses. The name was, of course, assumed; but Teano had learned that Dr. Rameses was more than respectable; he was estimable. Following his religion, which claimed that each soul was a spark from the one Living Fire, he aimed to help all mankind, and was apparently a true philanthropist.

When Teano spoke of returning to New York it was time for me to start. I invited him into my car, and preparing to depart, I came upon the forgotten medicine. Thorne had prophesied that I would prove a bad patient; but I tried to atone by swallowing an extra large dose. The bottle I slipped into my overcoat pocket, intending to take the stuff again at bedtime.

"Stop at the Priscilla Alden Hotel," I directed my chauffeur; and it was only when Teano spoke of "Nella" that I recalled the sister employed there. I had seen Nella's photograph at Paul's rooms, taken with her fiancé, Maurice Morosini, and had pleased Teano with praise of the girl's beauty. Morosini, too, was of an interesting type. I was sorry to hear from the detective that he had been ordered to join the colours, and would sail at dawn for Naples.

"The worst thing is," Teano went on, as we sped toward New York, "that those two can't even bid each other good-bye. Anywhere but at the Priscilla Alden, Morosini might walk into the hotel, take the elevator and go to her floor for a word."

As Teano talked a pain behind my eyes began to run through my temples, and into the back of my neck to the spine.

Something queer was the matter. I was conscious that Teano was asking alarmed questions, and that Nickey was staring. I was thankful that we had got to New York before the attack overwhelmed me, for I must leave the letter at the Priscilla Alden. As the motor slowed down in front of the hotel I remember pushing Teano aside and stumbling out of the car, the letter in my hand. I wasn't even aware of dropping the envelope addressed to Miss Gibson. Only Nickey, peering from the depths of the car, saw the fall, and would have darted to retrieve it, had not a man grabbed the letter as it touched the pavement. Teano was occupied with me, and so it seems was Maurice Morosini, who had been wandering up and down before the hotel, in the hope that Nella might come out. He sprang to help Paul, and there was no one for Nickey to tell, in his queer way, by gestures and rough sketches on a slate, what had happened. Afterward the detective did learn in this fashion that the man who picked up the letter was a chauffeur from a car following us, which had stopped when we stopped. But then it was too late for the knowledge to be useful.

Despite protests from the doorman, Teano and Morosini half carried, half dragged me into the hotel. Once inside, they suggested that it would be inhuman not to give me shelter; they made great play with my name and title, and threatened reprisals if I should be turned out.

"I suppose under the circumstances we'll have to give his lordship a room and get a doctor in," groaned the manager. "But it's against rules. However, we'll smuggle Lord John up to the thirteenth floor, where there's a small room vacant."

It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and Morosini must have praised the saints for my illness when he found it giving him the chance he would have bought with half a year of life. He was going to the thirteenth floor of the sacred Priscilla Alden; and on that floor was Nella Teano!

One glance he threw at Paul across my head, as the two helped me out of the lift, and then his heart bounded with great joy, for close by was the telephone window.

"The only room disengaged to-night is farther down the corridor," the manager explained. "I wish we could spare this one just opposite, but there's a lady coming into it later," and he threw a regretful glance at a door barred by a chambermaid, her arms full of linen and towels. She had been getting ready Number 1313 for its next occupant, but in her surprise dropped a wad of sheets and pillow-cases. Stooping to pick them up, a sharp word from the manager sent her flying; and Morosini noticed that she had forgotten to take her pass-key from the lock.

I had revived enough to walk mechanically, like a man in a dream, without support, so Morosini left me to the guidance of Teano and the manager, and ran back to the lighted window which framed his adored one. She sprang to her feet as Morosini held out his arms.

"Oh, Maurice!" she gasped.

"Give me a kiss to take with me—perhaps to my death," he implored. The girl gave it, leaning over the narrow edge of her window. Nella Teano would have dared anything rather than refuse what might be a last request; yet the danger was great, and she started at sound of the lift. "What *shall* we do?" she gasped. "You mustn't be seen—"

But Morosini did not await the end of her sentence. For the girl's sake he must hide. Besides, he hoped to snatch another moment when the coast should be clear. With a bound he crossed the corridor, opened the door of 1313, and shut himself in. Meanwhile the manager, telephoning to the office from my room, had learned that the doctor he wished to get was in the hotel, just leaving a patient. Out hurried the manager to meet the doctor at the lift and discuss the case before returning to my room. That room, as fate would have it, happened to be on the other side of a narrow court, opposite 1313, the windows facing each other.

Poor Morosini had thought himself blessed by Heaven in his unhopd-for chance to see Nella. He still thought the same, as he stood inside the room across from the telephone bureau; but luck had turned. Hardly had the door closed upon Morosini, when the chambermaid crept back to lock number 1313, and regained the forgotten pass-key. Nella would desperately have called the girl, making some excuse, or, if worst came to worst, even telling her the truth. At that instant, however, the doctor came from the lift, to station himself in front of the telephone window. He could see the manager advancing, and so also could the maid. In fear of meeting this awe-inspiring personage again, she snatched the key with frenzy and fled, while Nella sat doomed to silence.

Morosini's first hint of trouble came with the grating of the key in the lock. He dared not try the door at the moment, for he could hear the voice of the manager. What could he do if Nella were unable to open the door? If there were a ledge or cornice running under the window, he might attempt to creep along it and find a way of descent by a fire escape. He had switched on a light, and had seen the window, covered with a dark blind, when a faint rattle of paper attracted

his eyes to the door. A white envelope was being slipped underneath. Morosini seized it, and read in Nella's handwriting, "I'll try to get a pass-key and let you out, but can't tell how or when. Turn off the electricity. It can be seen through the transom."

Meanwhile, in my room, while I lay in a half-doze on the bed, the doctor listened to Teano's story of my sudden seizure. The medicine bottle was found and produced, and as I had mentioned my visit to Thorne, the detective could supply some information. The New York doctor got into communication with the Long Island man over the 'phone, and thus started the train which enabled us later to make valuable deductions. The bandaged patient had doubtless tampered with the bottle in the shelter of his automobile, and remained at the pharmacy until the return of his chauffeur. The nature of the added ingredient was discovered eventually by analysis; and had I taken one more of the doses directed by Dr. Thorne, nothing could have saved my life. As it was, the effects were temporary; and when some nauseous stuff had been poured down my throat, increasing the heart action, consciousness of surroundings came like the waking from a dream. Teano it was who had run out with the hotel doctor's prescription and returned with it made up. So great had been his haste that Nella's appeal detained him at her window only for an instant. He had no time to give help, for my life might depend on promptness, but he promised aid later.

As it was, the effect of his treatment satisfied the doctor. He stopped by my bedside till I crudely invited him to go, and let me sleep. All I needed to restore me was a night's rest. My presence in the hotel was not to be talked about, but the manager would look in from time to time, and call the doctor if needed. I slept fitfully, glad of the cool air blowing through the open window. Suddenly light struck my eyelids. I was roused with a start, and sat up in bed. My impression was that someone had come in and switched on the electricity. But the room was dark, save for a radiant circle on the wall at the foot of my bed. From a bright surface of crystal framed in gold, a woman's face looked out.

For a dazed second, I thought I had to do with a ghost. I realised that what I saw was the reflection of a reflection. My narrow bed stood with its back to the wall beside the window. Opposite the window, and therefore facing the foot of the bed, was a round mirror in a gilt frame. A dark blind had suddenly been thrown up, across the narrow court, and a woman, pausing before the glass in her room, sent into the dusk of mine her image. She was taking off her hat, looking at herself; and there she was fantastically, at the foot of my bed, for me to look at too. The effect was so extraordinary that it held me fascinated, until another woman came into the room.

When Maurice Morosini heard the sound of a key in the lock, it was music to his ears. He believed that at last (hours had gone) Nella found herself able to open his prison. But another second undeceived him. A voice was saying, "One moment, madam. Let me find the electric switch before you go in."

All the young man's blood seemed to flow back upon his heart. The thought in his mind was, that Nella would suffer disgrace. While a hand groped for the switch he flung himself on the floor, and crept under the bed.

"My moment will come," he reflected, "when the woman falls asleep. Then I can let myself out."

But the occupant for whom 1313 had been reserved was in no hurry for sleep. Morosini heard her moving about, and ventured to peep. He saw a small woman, young and rather pretty, of what might be classified as the "governess type." She did not undress, but seemed restless. Fussing round the room, she shot up the green blind and opened the window. Then she flew to the door. There had been a faint knock. Maurice peered from his hiding-place, and saw another woman come in. She, too, was plainly dressed, but older and with a harder, more experienced face.

"What *can* Nella be doing?" the trapped prisoner wondered. If she were still at the telephone bureau she must know that 1313 now had an occupant. Poor girl! Her misery must be equal to his.

Nella did know. She had seen the young woman go in. When no alarm followed, however, the girl's stopped heart beat again. But the situation had become impossible. She seized the first chance to call Teano. "It's too late for you to help, even if you could get in again," she whispered into the telephone, fearing to be overheard by some one passing. "A lady has gone into 1313 for the night. And I'm supposed to shut my window and go off duty in half an hour. Here comes Shannon, the night watchman, now."

As she spoke, a woman knocked at the door of 1313. Nella listened; soon she could hear voices speaking earnestly. Then they grew loud and shrill. "The women are quarrelling!" she thought. "Can it have anything to do with Maurice?" The transom snapped shut as she asked herself the question. The speakers were afraid of being overheard. That, at least, proved they believed themselves alone together!

"Well, here I am. I've given you time enough to make up your mind, haven't I, Miss Gibson?" began the new-comer.

"Yes, and I have made it up," answered the younger. "I don't say you're not acting in good faith. The note you brought to the dock looks like Mr. Odell's handwriting. And it's just as you said it would be. I found no letter of instructions waiting here. All the same, Miss Parsons, I won't give up the jewel till morning, when I've made sure the person I expected is not going to call."

"You *are* silly!" cried the other. "Now, how *could* I have known there *was* a jewel coming with a Miss Gibson on this ship, if I wasn't all right?"

"That's true," the younger woman admitted. "I don't see how you could have known except from Mr. Odell. But I'm not taking chances! If nobody else shows up before nine to-morrow morning, why then——"

"I have to go west to-morrow morning," explained Miss Parsons, her voice quivering with impatience. "I can't wait. I told you so on the dock. You *must* give me the thing now."

"I won't—so there!" shrilled Miss Gibson.

The older woman stared at the obstinate young face in desperate silence. Then she broke out fiercely, all effort at suppression over. "I believe you want me to *bribe* you!" And she pulled from a velvet handbag a roll of bank-notes.

Mary Gibson drew in her breath with a gasp. "*Why*—you've got hundreds and hundreds of dollars! I believe you're a *fraud*! You're after me to steal the jewel. Get out of this room, you thief, or I'll call——"

The sentence broke off with a queer gurgle. The woman who called herself Miss Parsons had snatched a long hatpin from the other girl's hat on the table, and stabbed Mary Gibson through the heart. She fell without a cry.

This was the tragedy mirrored on my wall at the foot of my bed. I saw the fall. I saw the murderess stoop; I saw her rise with something in her hand—something that gleamed green and blue, like a wonderful butterfly's wing. As I stumbled out of bed and groped for the dressing-gown which Teano had unpacked, I saw the woman tiptoe towards the door. Then a man's face came into the picture.

The murderess turned and saw the face also. But instead of trying to escape, she did a wiser thing. Wide open she flung the door and screamed at the top of her lungs, "Help! Murder! A burglar has killed my friend!"

The big night watchman, who had paused on his round for a chat with Nella, seized Morosini as the Italian sprang on the woman at the threshold.

"Maurice!" shrieked Nella, betraying her secret, yet caring not at all. Her one thought was of the man she loved. "He's innocent. He came to see *me*, not to steal, or murder."

Morosini realised quickly how the case stood. He was lost if he could not get free, he thought. And so it might have been, if that lighted picture had not appeared on the wall at the crucial instant. I came tottering around the corner in time to shout:

"Don't let that woman go: she committed the murder. I saw it. I've enough evidence to convict her, and the jewel she did it for is in her hand now."

Miss Parsons stared at me like a mad creature, flung from her the Eye of Horus, and rushing back into the room of death, was out of the window before we could reach her.

Never before had the Priscilla Alden been smirched by scandal. The managers were in despair. But the suicide from a window on the thirteenth floor, and the story of my vision in the room opposite, combined with the romance of Nella and Morosini, attracted new clients instead of driving away the old.

"Miss Parsons," identified in death, proved to be an ex-convict, who had mysteriously disappeared from the ken of the police months before. Thanks, however, to that page of *The World*, missing from Dr. Thorne's office, her tragedy in an attempt to steal the Egyptian Eye of Horus carried me one step further on my own quest.

EPISODE IV

THE DEATH TRYST

For me, one of the strangest things in a strange world is this: the compelling influence exerted upon our lives by people apparently irrelevant, yet without whom the pattern of our

destiny would be different.

Take the case of Anne Garth and her connection with Maida Odell—through Maida Odell, with me. Of my adventures in America while attempting to protect Maida, that in which Anne Garth played her part was among the most curious.

It happened while Paul Teano, the private detective, and I were trying our hardest to bring "Doctor Rameses" to book. We were morally certain that he was the Egyptian who had, for a mysterious reason of his own, persecuted the girl's family, and followed her (as its last surviving member) from Europe to New York. Unfortunately, however, a moral certainty and a certainty which can be proved are as far from one another as the poles. We might believe if we liked that "Doctor Rameses," controlling the Grey Sisterhood, intended evil to the girl who had been induced to join it: but it was "up to us" to prove the connection. So far as the police could learn, Doctor Rameses was as philanthropic as wise. If, as we suggested, his was the spirit guiding more than one criminal organisation in New York, he was the cleverest man at proving an alibi ever known to the force. If we reported his presence in a certain place at a certain time, he was invariably able to show that he had been somewhere else, engaged in innocent if not useful pursuits. As for Maida, her confidence in the veiled woman at the head of the Sisterhood was apparently unbroken. Judging from the little I could find out, she was irritatingly happy in her work among rescued women and children, at the lonely old house on Long Island. No doubt there were genuine cases cared for, which made it hard to prove anything crooked, especially to a girl so high-minded.

She had promised to remain for a year, and I had met her too late to change that determination. The rules of the House did not permit the sisters (of whom there were only six) to receive the visits of men, and though now and then I contrived to snatch a glimpse of Maida, seldom or never since our real parting had I had word from her except by letter. How could I be sure the letters were genuine?

While I was in the state of mind engendered by these difficulties, Teano rushed in one morning to say that he was off to Sing Sing. "There may be something for us," he said, and asked me to go with him. It seemed that the Head Sister had departed at dawn in her automobile from the Sisterhood House (Teano had someone always watching the place night and day, in these times), and "putting two and two together" he deduced that she might be en route for the prison. He had learned that a notorious woman criminal was coming out that day, after serving a heavy sentence. She had been a member of an international band of thieves; and if the head of the Grey Sisterhood intended to meet her, it could hardly be a case of "rescue."

"I know a 'con. man' whose time is up," Teano went on, "and I shall make an excuse of meeting him if I see the lady's head turned my way. The same excuse would do for you, my lord. 'Twon't matter putting the woman on her guard, for if she's going to meet Diamond Doll, they'll have met before we give 'em the chance to spot us and we'll know what we want to know."

I was keen on the expedition, and offered my car for it. We overtook the Head Sister, and our hearts bounded with hope: but, though we were able to follow in her wake all the way, our hopes were dashed by finding that she had come to "rescue" a person of a different class from buxom "Diamond Doll." The latter was met at the moment of release by a virtuous looking mother; and the tall grey form of the Head Sister advanced toward a small, shabby young woman who might have been a teacher in a Sunday-school.

The latter, unless she were a good actress, could hardly have feigned the start of astonishment with which she received the veiled lady's greeting. She had been glancing about as if she expected someone but that one was not the head of the Grey Sisterhood. She listened with reserve for a moment, then brightened visibly. She had rather a tragic face, as if she were born for suffering, and could not escape. Evidently, so far, she had not escaped; but she was young, not more than twenty-eight. Her oval face was pale with prison paleness, and there were shadows under the deep-set grey eyes which held no light of hope.

Why should the Head Sister single this girl out? If her object were charitable, there were other women being released who needed encouragement; yet it was to this one alone that help was offered.

As the veiled lady explained herself with the dignity of manner which had won Maida Odell's admiration, a young man joined the two, with an apologetic air. He had to be introduced to the Head Sister, and as he pulled off his cap I recognised a vague likeness between him and the girl.

His decent, ready-made clothes were of the country, and proclaimed themselves "Sunday best." His sunburnt complexion was of the country, and his shy, yet frank manners were of the country too.

The new-comer was out of breath, and apparently had hurried to make up time lost. He kissed the girl; and presently, without seeming to notice us, the Head Sister walked away with the two. She was favourably known to the prison authorities for her "kindness" in finding work for discharged women prisoners, and for her offers of shelter in the Sisterhood House till work could be found. If we had attempted to give warning against her, we should have been laughed at for our pains, and there was nothing we could do but play watchdog.

This we did, making ourselves inconspicuous, but not resorting to the pretext Teano had suggested. We let the "con. man" go off to face the world without a salutation, and devoted our attention to the friends of the Head Sister. It was only the girl who went with her in the closed automobile. The man bade them good-bye, but not with an air of sorrow. He looked grave as he set off for Ossining station, but satisfied rather than sad. Plainly it pleased him to think that the young woman had a powerful protector.

"Well?" I asked, when Teano and I had let the strapping figure stride out of sight: for the detective had been trying to unearth some memory of the girl's features. "Have you got her dug up?"

"Yes, milord," said the Italian, grinning at my way of putting it. "She'll be no use to the grey dame in any shady job. They say I have 'camera eyes.' When I see a face—or even a photograph—I don't forget. Anne Garth is the girl's name. She was not bad at heart."

"She doesn't look it," I said. "She'd be beautiful if she were fattened up and happy."

On our way back to Long Island Teano told me Anne Garth's story. She was a country girl, ambitious to become a nurse. Somehow she had worked her way up with credit in a New York hospital. There she had fallen in love with one of the younger doctors; and when his engagement to another woman was announced, she had waited for him outside the hospital one day, and shot him. The wound was not serious, but Anne Garth had spent two years in Sing Sing to pay for the luxury of inflicting it.

"Doran the doctor's name was," Teano remembered. "Not much doubt he flirted with the girl and made her believe he would marry her. She might have got off with a lighter sentence, but she wouldn't show regret. The jury thought her hard. She doesn't look hard to me, though! I expect the fellow we saw was the brother—her only relative, I recall the papers saying. Let me think! Didn't he have some job in the mountains? Something queer—something not usual! I can't bring it to mind. But it doesn't matter."

"I suppose not," I agreed. "Did Doran marry the other girl?"

Teano shook his head. "No," he said. "After what happened, she was afraid to trust him, or else—but there's no use guessing!"

I agreed again. Neither was there much use in "guessing" the Head Sister's object in taking Anne Garth into the Sisterhood House; but there might be more use in trying to find out. During the weeks that followed I did try, with Teano's help, but succeeded only in learning that Miss Garth was employed as a nurse. She was seen in the garden by Teano's watchers, wearing a nurse's dress, but she did not appear outside the gates.

A month later, I happened to hear talk of a fancy dress ball in honour of an Egyptian prince visiting America. He was a relative of the ex-Khedive, and being a handsome man with romantic eyes, was being made much of by more than one hostess. The ball was to be given by Mrs. Gorst, a rich "climber," a lady who was, I heard from Teano, one of the hypnotist Rameses' devoted patients. She lived in the fashionable new Dominion Hotel, where the ball would take place. Her guests would dance, newspapers announced, in the "magnificent Arabian room, so congenial in its Eastern decorations to the taste of the principal guest, Prince Murad Ali."

It occurred to me that Dr. Rameses was certain to be one of these guests. I did not know Mrs. Gorst, but I knew some of her friends, and to get an invitation was "easy as falling off a log." As it was only a fancy dress affair, and no masks were to be worn, if Rameses were present I ought to recognise him. I hoped to make sure whether he was or was not the man with the scar, who had frightened Maida Odell at the theatre on the night when I met, fell in love, and—lost her. Since that night I had discovered Doctor Rameses' existence and had seen him more than once, but without the clue of the scar it was impossible to identify a man seen for a few seconds only. If Rameses' throat bore the mark, there could no longer be room for doubt, and I determined to lay hands on him if necessary.

How I was to manage this, I didn't see: but that was a detail. I secured the card, and 'phoned to my old hotel in New York for a room. If I had dined there, everything that followed would have been different, but I went with the man who had got me invited (a friend of Odell's) to dine at his club. There I stopped till it was time to go back and rig myself up as a Knight Templar: and taking my key from one of the clerks I was told that a young lady had called.

"A young lady?" I echoed. My thoughts created a white and gold vision of Maida, but the clerk's next words broke it like a bubble.

"She was dressed as a nurse," he explained. "She wouldn't give her name; said you'd not know it—but she mentioned that she'd called first at your Long Island hotel. When she told them there that her errand was urgent they consented to give this address."

"The errand was urgent!" I felt my blood leap. After all, the vision might not have been so far-fetched. What if this woman were the nurse from Sisterhood House—Anne Garth, whom I had seen come out of prison—Anne Garth with a message for me from Maida?

"What did you tell her?" I asked.

"Well," the clerk hedged, "she seemed anxious to know where she could find you—insisted it was a matter of life and death, so I suggested you might be at Mrs. Gorst's ball for that Egyptian Prince."

My first impulse was of anger. The man was a fool, not to have known that I must come back to dress! But in a flash I realised that if he hadn't known, it was my fault. I had left no word when I went out at a quarter to eight.

"I may see or hear from her later," I said, holding out a hand for my key. With it, the clerk gave me an envelope—one of the hotel envelopes, sealed and containing a thing which felt like a small account book. It was addressed in pencil, evidently in haste. Inside the flap I caught sight of something else hurriedly pencilled, luckily discovering it as I tore the envelope, to extract a black-covered note-book. "I was going to write a letter," I read, "but I fear I'm watched. This is the best I can do, unless they let me in at the ball."

There was no signature, not even an initial.

I went up to my room, and opened the book under the light of a reading-lamp. Its contents suggested a diary, with a number of disjointed notes dashed down in pencil (the same handwriting as that inside the envelope) with many blank spaces.

"I never hoped for anything like this," were the only words on the first page, under the vague date, "Wednesday." On the next page was jotted: "It's like heaven after hell, and *she* is an angel. I never saw anyone so beautiful or sweet. Would she be as kind if she *knew*?"

"This must mean Maida," my heart said. Certainly it could not refer to the Head Sister! But, after all, how did I *know* that the "woman dressed like a nurse" was Anne Garth? So far, I merely surmised. Eagerly I turned over the leaves. Often the writer spoke of herself, or of things that had no special meaning for me. Then came a note which held my eyes. "I've confessed to *her* the truth. She says I was more sinned against than sinning. Heaven bless her! She has confided in me what is making her ill. The poor child suffers! I never heard of one as sane as she, having illusions. I suppose they *are* illusions. She can have no enemies."

Again, on the next page: "She has told me her history. What a strange one! She *has* enemies. But none of them can have got in here? I'm glad she has a love story. I pray it may have a happier end than mine."

A few blank leaves, and then: "There's a room with a locked door over hers. Nobody sleeps in it. I wonder why they keep it locked? I suppose it's a coincidence. If they wished her harm why should they send for a nurse to take care of her, when she isn't ill, except for dreams.... A beautiful thing she said last night. 'I should die of horror if I didn't make *his* face come between me and the wicked face. His love saves me.' I envy her the *saving* love! Through mine I was lost. I wish I were allowed to sleep in her room. *She* wouldn't ask, because she thought it cowardly, but I did, and was refused. I'm needed at night for the children's room."

Further on, after more blanks: "It's against the rules for men to come here, but I saw a man going upstairs—or a ghost. They say there *are* ghosts in this house. A woman told me that the room over my sweet girl's is haunted. That's why it's locked. I wonder if the man-ghost was going to it? I wish it hadn't been dark in the hall, so I could have seen what he was like. He seemed a tall moving shadow."

Later: "I hope there's nothing wrong with *my* head! I was going to the room of our H.S. for orders. I thought the message was for me to tap at her door at nine o'clock, but before I had time to knock she came out and met me. She shut the door as she asked what I wanted—the first time she's spoken sharply! But I caught one glimpse of the room inside. Opposite the door, there's a picture of the desert by moonlight, and the Sphinx. It's in a carved black frame, set in the middle of a bookcase. The frame is part of the bookcase. But as I looked into the room this time—I didn't mean to look or spy—the picture of the Sphinx *wasn't there*. It seemed to have opened out like a door of a cabinet, and behind it was a white space with names and dates written in red. On top was a sign like an eye, and underneath I thought I saw the words, 'I watch, I wait.' Then came the dates. I can't be sure what they were, but I think the first was 1865. There was a General and a Captain, and a Madeleine or Margaret, all of the same name, which I *think* was Annesley. Anyhow, there were three dates and four names, and opposite the fourth name—that of my beautiful girl—was a question mark. A black line had been drawn through the other names as if they were done with, but there was no line through hers.

"It's queer how quickly one sees things—all in a flash. I'd only time to draw in my breath before the door of the room was closed, yet I kept the impression, as one goes on seeing the sun with one's eyes shut. Now, *could* I have imagined the whole thing? I *did* imagine things at night in my cell, but I *knew* they weren't there. They never seemed as real as this."

These notes, hastily pencilled, covered several of the blue-lined pages. There were more blanks; and then, in a shaky hand was written: "I'm frightened. I caught H.S. dropping something from a tiny bottle into the glass of milk on the tray I was getting ready to take upstairs. I'd turned my back to fetch a bunch of violets H.S. had brought in for me to put with the breakfast. I don't

know if she knew I caught her, but she said she put phosferine for a tonic into the milk twice a week, and asked if I approved. Perhaps I oughtn't to say I '*caught*' her. Perhaps it's all right. But if we had a cat in the house I'd have tried to make it drink the milk. I tasted it, and there was a faint bitter tang, yet phosferine would give that. I dared not drink more, because if anything were wrong, and I were ill or died, I couldn't protect *her*. But I poured out the milk and got fresh, in another glass, when I was sure H.S. was back in her study with the door shut. This can't go on. If anything is wrong, I mayn't be able to save *her*. And the fear is getting on my nerves. Yet I can't bear to give the poor child a warning. She has enough to worry about. All day this horrid thought has been in my head. Was *I* chosen because if *she* died, I could be blamed—a prison bird, with a black heart too full of evil to be reclaimed by kindness? If my darling girl will give me the name of the man who loves her and where he is, I'll make some excuse to get a day off—perhaps to meet my brother Larry—and tell her lover what has been going on."

This was the last entry in the book, and it gave me the certainty for which I groped. The nurse must have come from the Sisterhood House and from Maida; and—Maida cared for me more than I had made her confess.

I could hardly wait to get to the ball. My first object in going was forgotten in anxiety to find Anne Garth, to hear all she'd meant to tell me when she called, and missed me. It was still important—more than ever important, perhaps—to identify Dr. Rameses as a conspirator against Maida; but I could no longer concentrate my thoughts upon him. My fear was that Anne Garth might not have been admitted, lacking the card of invitation which every guest was asked to bring. But I judged that she would not give up easily. If her costume (which she might make pass as fancy dress) and her determination did not get her into the ballroom, I believed that she would think of some other plan.

Though the Dominion Hotel is new, its Arabian room is famous. It might be called "Aladdin's Cave," so gorgeous are its glimmering gold walls, and the stage jewels which star the ceiling and the gilded carvings of its boxes. Even its drapery is of gold tissue, embroidered with jewelled peacock feathers: its polished floor gleams like gold, reflecting thousands of golden lights, and its gold-framed panel-mirrors repeat again and again a golden vision. I was an early arrival, but there were many before me, because Prince Murad Ali had a reputation for un-oriental promptness, and lovers of pageants wished to see his entrance with his suite. If Doctor Rameses were present among the gorgeous groups scattered like bouquets about the ballroom, my most searching glances failed to pick him out. I had no intention of giving up the quest, however; and wishing to be independent I tried to evade my hostess's offer of pretty partners who "danced like angels." Unfortunately, as I thought, fortunately as it turned out, the lady conquered. I evaded a "Fox trot" on the plea that my wounded leg was too stiff: but I could not refuse to sit out with a countrywoman of mine, just over from England, who had "come to look on." We had known each other slightly at home, and I was obliged to sit through a dance telling Lady Mary Proudfit who people were.

"At least," I tried to console myself, "if Anne Garth or that brute Rameses comes along, I can see them."

But the crowd increased, and with many dancers on the floor it was difficult to distinguish faces. The Prince and his attendants arrived, magnificent as figures incarnated from the "Arabian Nights"; and the entrance of the principal guest was the signal for a charming surprise. From hidden apertures in the carved ceiling, rose petals—pink and white and golden yellow—began to flutter down, light as snowflakes. The great room was perfumed with attar of roses, and silver ribbon confetti, glittering like innumerable strands of spun glass, descended on the laughing dancers. My companion and I were lassoed by the fairy ropes, and looking up I was struck on the cheek with a rose thrown from a box.

The flower was thrown, not accidentally dropped. It came from a distance, aimed by a woman dressed as a nurse. She was sitting in a chair drawn close to the front of her box—a box in the second tier, close to the musicians' gallery—and was leaning on the ledge in order to take good aim. Behind her stood a tall man in chain armour, his visor so nearly covering his face as practically to mask it. He was bending over the nurse, as if to see where her rose fell.

Before I could grasp the flower it had fallen to the ground, and I had to stoop to pick it up. I was rude enough to have forgotten Lady Mary's existence until—as I was unwinding the thread which bound a thin bit of paper to the stem—she exclaimed, "A melodrama, Lord John! The jealous husband's on your track. Be careful, or he'll see that note—no, he's gone from behind her now. Perhaps he's coming down to you."

"Forgive me, Lady Mary," I said, "but this is serious. Not a love affair, I assure you, but it may be a vital matter. I must go to that box. I——"

"Don't mind me!" She took the cue, and changed her teasing tone to friendly common sense. "Here comes a man I know. He'll look after me. Go along! Why, how odd! Your friend who threw the rose is pretending to be asleep—or she's fainted!"

I glanced up from the note I had been reading while my companion talked. The nurse still leant on the broad ledge with its golden fringe, but she had laid her head on her arm. Her face I could not see.

I did not wait to make sure that Lady Mary had secured her friend in need: but semi-consciously I heard their greetings as I turned away. The entrance to the boxes was outside the ballroom, and there might have been some delay in identifying the one I wanted, but for the note attached to the rose. Anne Garth bade me come quickly to Box 18, as she feared she had been followed. "I have a letter for you from *her*," was added as a further inducement.

On the door of each box was a number. I knew 18 was in the second tier, and hurried up the narrow stairway which led to that row, almost rudely pushing past a Harlequin and Columbine who were coming down. Apart from them I had the stairs and corridor to myself. If the man in chain armour had altogether deserted Box 18, he had made haste to disappear—a fact so disquieting that I regretted not having smuggled Teano into the hotel to help. Being alone, I had to obey orders and go at once to the box, although I saw that keeping track of the man was equally important.

I knocked, and when no answer followed, opened the door of Number 18. The nurse sat in the same position which Lady Mary had remarked, bending forward from her chair across to the broad ledge and leaning her whole weight on it, her head on her arm.

"Miss Garth?" I said, knowing now for certain it was she, as in looking up I had recognised the face seen outside Sing Sing prison. How she had recognised me would have been a puzzle, had I not conceitedly deduced that Maida had annexed a photograph given by me to Roger. But it was not important to solve this puzzle. "Miss Garth?" I repeated, raising my voice over the music.

No reply: and a prickling cold as the touch of icicles shivered through my veins as I laid a hand on the grey-clad arm. It was responseless like her lips, and sick at heart I raised the limp figure in the chair. The head in its long veil and close-fitting bonnet lolled aside, and there was no consciousness in the half-open eyes. The girl had fallen into a dead faint, or—she had been murdered, I could guess by whom. But selfishly, my first thought was not for her. It was for the promised letter, and in her lap half concealed by the folds of her grey cloak—I found it: a blank envelope, unsealed, but evidently containing a sheet or two of paper.

"Thank God it's not been stolen!" I muttered, and pocketing the envelope turned my thoughts to the thing which must next be done.

No wound was visible, not even a drop of blood to cover a pinprick: but I could feel no beating of the heart; and the swift vanishing of the man in chain armour was ominous. I realised that, if the girl had died by violence, I might come under suspicion, unless I could quickly prove innocence. Needing my liberty in order to protect Maida, I could run no risk of losing it, and I realised that with Lady Mary Proudfit lay my best hope. There wasn't a minute to waste; and without a glance at the letter I was dying to read, I peered through the sparkling of ribbon confetti and rose petals. What a mockery the brilliance was, and the gay ragtime melody in the musicians' gallery next door! Yet the bright veil had its uses. It was like a screen of shattered crystal hiding the tragedy in Box 18.

Lady Mary, as I hoped, sat where I'd left her. I beckoned. Surprised, but evidently pleased, she spoke to her companion, a British financier on government business in New York. Instantly they began to thread their way through the crowd, and less than five minutes brought them to the box.

"This lady had important news for me," I explained, "news of a dear friend she has been nursing. It was as important for others that the news shouldn't reach my ears. I fear there's been foul play, and I want a doctor. Everything must be done quietly—and the girl can't be left alone. But the police must be called, if she turns out to be dead, and——"

"Oh, I can bear witness that her head dropped suddenly on her arm, while that man in chain armour bent over her—before you even left me. He was in fearful haste to get away!" Lady Mary interrupted.

"Hello, what's this!" exclaimed the financial magnate, Sir Felix Gottschild, stooping to drag from under a chair, pushed against the wall, a peculiar bundle. "Here is chain armour—a whole suit, rolled up and tucked under the chair! By Jove, it tells a tale—what? You'll be all right, whatever happens, Lord John. We'll stop till you get back."

I waited for no more, but went down to inform one of the men keeping the ballroom door what had happened. The police and a doctor were 'phoned for, and arrived with almost magical promptness. The gold tissue curtains were quietly drawn across Box 18 while two "plain clothes" men took note of what Lady Mary Proudfit and I had to tell, and the doctor probed the mystery of Anne Garth's condition. He was soon able to pronounce her dead, but it was not till later that he discovered the prick of a hypodermic syringe at the base of the brain. The girl had been killed as sick dogs are suppressed with an injection of strychnine. Pre-occupied as I was with my own affairs, I could not help remarking the doctor's emotion. He was a young man, and at the time I credited him with unusual sensitiveness and sympathy: but when I learned that his name was Doran I was less sure that he deserved credit. Poetic justice had gone out of its way to avenge Anne Garth by ordering this coincidence.

I told what I knew of the girl, beginning with the day I saw her leave Sing Sing prison with

the directress of the Grey Sisterhood, and going on to the episode of the note dropped, weighted with a rose. I had reason to emphasise Anne Garth's connection with the Sisterhood, hoping to fasten suspicion upon it, and secure aid more powerful than mine—that of the police—for Maida. I described the tall Harlequin who had passed me in the corridor as I hurried toward Box 18, and urged my theory that the murderer of Anne Garth had worn this disguise under his chain armour. With the help of a confederate (the Columbine) waiting in an adjoining box, he could have made the change, and so escaped without drawing attention. I did not hesitate to suggest, also, that the man was Doctor Rameses, the hypnotist: but the police of New York had come to consider me mad on the subject of Rameses and the Grey Sisterhood. I was assured that enquiries would be made: and they were made. It was ascertained that Doctor Rameses had accepted Mrs. Gorst's invitation, but at the last moment had telegraphed that an attack of "grippe" had laid him low. Another alibi as usual! It was proved (to the satisfaction of the police) that he had not left his house that night. The disjointed diary of Anne Garth contained no names, and was not even an accusation, still less a proof of evil intent on the part of any member of the Grey Sisterhood.

I heard early next day that the police had duly, if discreetly, visited Pine Cliff, and learned that all was "above board." Anne Garth had been impudent, and careless about her duties. She had been discharged some days before the ball, her principal patient having gone away on a visit, in order to "get rid of the nurse without a fuss." Some gossip in the house must have turned the woman's thoughts to Lord John Hasle, and she had seen a way of embarrassing the ladies of the Sisterhood. As for the murder, a theory was suggested by a bundle of love letters found among Anne Garth's effects, forgotten when she departed. From these it appeared that she had been in the habit of meeting a man who signed himself "Dick," whenever she was given a day off from her duties at Sisterhood House. The last letters threatened reprisals if she persisted in seeing a certain "Tom," otherwise unnamed.

As for the Harlequin and Columbine, they were as impossible to trace as ghosts. No one could be discovered who had seen them enter the ballroom or leave it. Had it not been for Lady Mary Proudfit's testimony, I might have floundered into serious difficulties, in spite of the chain armour. Thanks to her (and perhaps a little to my own position) I was free to come and go; which was well, because Anne Garth had left me a tryst to keep for the following night.

The one fact I hid was the existence of the letter found by me in the dead girl's lap. It was typed, and unsigned: but Anne Garth's journal proved to me, if not to the police, that she was loyal; and the note tied to the rose promised a letter from Maida. "From *her*," the nurse had written, expecting me to understand, and I had understood. I had also believed, because I could see no reason why Anne Garth, risking much to deliver the message, should deceive me. The man in chain armour had had too great a need for haste to seek a letter, nor had he reason to suspect the existence of one. His object, if I read it right, was to prevent Anne Garth from telling her story.

The note so fortunately hidden under the nurse's cloak was not in Maida's writing, but had been neatly typed. It was not the first time, however, that I had received typed letters from her. Sometimes I had doubted their genuineness, but one of them explained that she had learned to use a typewriter, to help the Head Sister with charitable correspondence. After that I had felt more at ease about those clearly typed communications.

"My dear Friend," the letter began (Maida never gave me a warmer title), "I've been ill with grippe, which is an epidemic here. Now I'm better, but so weak that I long for tonic air, and it has been decided to send me up to the Crescent Mountain Inn. I'm looking forward to the change after my hard work and illness. But how glorious it would be if you could come to see me! I hope to start the day after you receive this. If I can get off then, I shall arrive at the Crescent Mountain railway station in the train which reaches there at nine-fifteen. I don't know what time the train that connects with it leaves New York, but you can find out—if you care to! At the station a team of dogs with a driver who serves the Inn (his name is Garth) meets the train if ordered. As my departure is a little uncertain, because I'm not strong, no telegram has been sent so far, and the team is free for anyone who wishes to engage it. If you *should* do so, and I should happen to be in the train, I'm sure you wouldn't mind having me for an extra passenger! I've spoken only to one person about my brilliant idea of our meeting. Yours ever, M."

Nobody who reads this can wonder that I didn't show it to the police, or that I was ready to believe the letter genuine. Despite the gloom cast upon me by the death of Maida's messenger, despite my annoyance with the police, I was selfishly happy. I saw that I was in great luck to have got out of a tangle which might have enmeshed me in bonds of red tape; and it goes without saying that I telegraphed the Crescent Mountain Inn, ordering a room, and Larry Garth the dog-driver to meet me with his team.

I remembered Teano's mentioning that Anne Garth's brother lived in the mountains; and I 'phoned him to ask if the man were employed by the Crescent Mountain Inn. The answer was, "Yes, he drives their dog-team"; and I was the more firmly convinced that Maida and Anne Garth had concocted the typewritten letter together.

In deducing this, I belittled the Enemy's intelligence. But one lives and learns. Or, one dies and learns.

The Crescent Mountain Inn—as most people know—is one of the most famous winter resorts in America. It is also an autumn and spring resort for those who love winter sports, for snow falls early at that great height, and rests late. Its comparative accessibility from New York adds to the charm, and the sledge with a team of Alaskan dogs (instead of an ordinary sleigh drawn by mere horses) was an inspiration on the part of the landlord.

I told no one but Teano of my intention. He, oppressively prudent where I was concerned, wished to accompany me "in case of queer business," but I discouraged this idea without hurting his feelings. If there were hope of an "accidental" meeting with Maida in the train, I didn't want even a companion.

To my disappointment, I searched the train from end to end without finding her. But enquiring of the conductor, I learned that the morning train was preferred by ladies. Perhaps—I thought—she had already got off, in which case Garth might bring a note to the Crescent Mountain station. I hoped for Maida's sake it might be so, because if she'd started early she would not have heard of her messenger's fate, and I could break the news to her gently. As for the dead girl's brother, it seemed improbable that he would be informed by telegram. The pair were said by Teano to be alone in the world; and as Garth's evidence wouldn't be needed—anyhow for days to come—in the affair of Anne's murder, he would not be sent for post-haste.

Again I underrated the intelligence of the Enemy.

The train arrived on time at the little mountain station built for clients of the famous Inn. As it was still early in the season (it is only for Christmas that crowds begin going up), I wasn't surprised to find myself alone on the platform. The mountain train (into which I'd changed long ago from the train starting from New York) went no further that night. Snow-covered shoulders and peaks glistened dimly in half-veiled starlight, and I was glad to hear the jingle of bells. A big sledge, capable of carrying several passengers and a little light luggage, was in waiting with a fine team of impatient dogs: but the driver who touched his fur cap with a mittened hand was not the honest-faced country man who had met the released prisoner at Sing Sing.

"You're not Garth!" I exclaimed, when he asked if I were Lord John Hasle, and had been answered affirmatively.

The dim yellow light from the little station building shone into his face, and I thought it changed as if with chagrin. It was not as pleasant a face as the one I remembered. In fact, it was not pleasant at all. The eyes were brave enough, or anyhow bold; but the nose was big and red as if the fellow warmed his chilled blood generously with alcohol. He was older than Anne Garth's brother. The heavy features framed in fur ear-laps might have belonged to a man of forty.

"Oh, yes, I'm Garth," he assured me, in a voice roughened by the same agent which had empurpled his nose.

"You're not the Garth I've seen," I persisted.

"That may be," he admitted. "We're brothers. I'm a bit older than Larry. He had to go to New York. Between the two of us, we do the driving for the Crescent Inn."

This explanation was good enough, if Teano was wrong about the family. "Have you a note for me?" I asked.

"No note," was the reply. "But you're expected at the Inn all right."

"They have other guests by this time, I suppose?"

"Yes, a few. The last that came's a young lady. I took her up from the afternoon train."

This was what I had wanted to find out. My instinctive dislike of the ugly-faced chap vanished. I felt almost fond of him.

"Let's get on," I said.

Another man had been looking after his dogs, a man also coated and capped in fur—a big chap whose face I could not see, as he didn't trouble to salute or look my way before climbing into his seat beside the driver's place. The suitcase I'd brought from New York was disposed of: I tucked myself into the strong-smelling rugs of rough black fur, and the dogs flashed away like a lightning streak, their forms racing with shadow ghosts on the blue whiteness of starlit snow. Soon we came to a cross track, marked with a sign-post. A red lantern on the top seemed to drip blood over the words "Crescent Mountain Inn. Winter Sports."

To my surprise, though the dogs made as if to swerve leftward and dash up this beaten white way, the driver swore, and with his long whip forced them straight ahead.

"We take the short cut. 'Tisn't everyone who knows it," he deigned to fling over his shoulder at me.

I made no comment, and we sped along, until abruptly the dogs balked as at something unseen. With oaths and savage lashings they were goaded on through deep, new-fallen snow. The leaders yelped but obeyed. Then, suddenly, the driver flung reins and whip full in my face. The unlooked-for blow dazed me for a second as it was meant to do: but, as in one of those photographic dreams which come between sleeping and waking, I saw the two fur-coated figures in the front seat spring from the sledge into snow drifts. I tried to follow suit, too late, for down slid the team over the brim of a chasm dark as a cauldron, and dragged the sledge in their wake.

* * * * *

Teano, it seems, though too polite to say so, did not like my mountain expedition. As he was not allowed to join me, he decided that the next best thing was to watch my interests in New York. He and his wife Jenny (who had an exaggerated sense of gratitude for me) discussed, according to their habit, what they would have done and what they would do were they in the "Enemy's" place.

"I'll tell you how *I'd* have acted to begin with!" said Jenny, who knew too well the ways of the underworld; "I'd have had a letter ready to leave for Lord John on that poor dead girl's lap—a letter supposed to be from Miss Odell. Typing's easier than forging! Then, if I *found* a letter there I'd take it away and leave mine. Supposing *they* did that? They could get Lord John to go alone to that mountain place he told you about, and they could have him put out of the way, so he'd never bother them again as he's always doing. They could bring him to his death and make it seem an accident—they're so smart! Suppose, for instance, they telegraphed that brother of Anne Garth's, and told him his sister was murdered; why, he'd catch the morning train for New York. The Inn folks would be in a fix, and grab anyone who came along, and knew how to drive dogs."

Teano had reason to respect Jenny's suggestions, and he thought enough of this one to meet a train connecting with that which left Crescent Mountain station in the afternoon. My train had been gone only a short time, but—it had gone irrevocably.

Jenny's forebodings were justified. Teano recognised Larry Garth and accosted him, mentioning his own name and profession. Garth asked if he had sent the telegram received that morning, and produced it from his pocket. This told Teano, as the message was unsigned, that no member of the police had wired. He explained to Garth the circumstances of Anne's death, giving extra details which he had ferreted out that day: the fact that the girl had asked to see young Mr. Gorst (our hostess's son) privately, and begged to be allowed to sit in a box, because she had a "very important appointment with Lord John Hasle, and a letter to give him from a lady." It seemed certain, therefore, that her desire to see me had been genuine. Teano told Garth something of our suspicions, confessing however that nothing was proved. Still, he impressed the young man so forcibly that Garth gave up trying to see his sister's body, and instead was persuaded to return at once to Crescent Mountain.

There was no other train that day; but Teano, believing that my life might be at stake, drew some of his savings out of the bank and paid for a special. It reached its destination not ten minutes after the 9.15, but had to stop at a distance, owing to the presence of the latter on the track. By that time both train and station were deserted, but Garth quickly discovered the fresh traces of his dogs and sledge in the snow. He and Teano, armed with an electric torch, started on the trail. Reaching the cross road, Garth pointed to the tracks which led away instead of towards the hotel. In the dull red light of the lantern above, the two men looked into each other's eyes; and snow, falling anew, was like pink-edged feathers in the crimson glow. If evil deeds were doing, this new snowfall would help the doers, for soon their footsteps would be blotted out of sight, and all hope of tracing them might be lost for ever.

For the moment the only tracks to be seen were those of the team and the sledge-runners. Garth and Teano followed. Not far on a difference in level in the white blanket of the earth indicated a seldom-used road to a mountain farm. But the sledge had not taken that turn. It had dashed straight on.

"Good heavens!" stammered Garth. "That way leads nowhere—except to a precipice. They call it 'The Lovers' Leap!'"

The two hurried along, stumbling often, a strong cold wind blowing particles of snow almost as hard as ice into their faces. The glass bulb of the small electric lantern was misted over. Teano was obliged constantly to wipe it clear. Suddenly Garth seized him by the arm. "My God, stop!" he cried. "We're on the edge. The sledge has gone over here. Two men have jumped clear—one each side the sleigh. Oh, my poor dogs!"

It was of me Teano thought. Clearing his lantern he examined the holes where the men had jumped, so near the verge of a great gulf that they had had to throw themselves violently back in the snow to keep from falling over. His trained eye detected delicate markings in the snow which proved that both men had worn coats of stiff fur. Also their boots had been large and heavy. Teano knew that I had had no fur coat when I started, and that my boots had not been made for mountain wear.

"These two chaps were confederates," he announced confidently to Garth. "They knew when to save themselves, and Lord John has gone down with the sledge and the team."

Garth blurted out an oath, swearing vengeance for his dogs rather than for me, but Teano's face of despair struck him with pity.

"There's hope yet," he said, "if your lord guessed at the end what was up and had the wit to chuck himself out. Thirty feet down, just under this point, there's a knob sticking up they call the Giant's Nose. It's deep with snow now. It wouldn't hurt to fall on it—and there's a tree stump he could catch hold of to save himself if he kept his senses. But my poor dogs with the heavy sledge behind 'em wouldn't have the devil's chance. A man wouldn't either, unless he jumped as the sleigh went. Well, we shall see, when I've got the rope."

"What rope?" Teano managed to move his stiff lips.

"A rope we keep for the summer trippers," Garth explained. "More than once some silly gabe has got too close and lost his head, lookin' over the Lovers' Leap. It's a suicide place too—though we don't tell folks that. If anyone's caught on the Giant's nose, we can fish him up. The rope's in a hut near by, that's never locked."

Teano is a smaller man than Garth, and it was Teano who, with the rope in a sailor knot under his arms, was let down by the big fellow, to look for me. I had kept consciousness at first, and had saved myself in the way suggested by the mountaineer: but by the time Teano came prospecting, I had dropped into a pleasant sleep. An hour or two more in my bed of snow, I should have been hidden for ever by a smooth white winding-sheet, and so have kept my tryst with Death.

As it was, Death and I failed to meet. I lived not only to help avenge Anne Garth, but to go on with my work for the girl I loved, and—living or dead—shall love for ever. For a time after my adventure on Crescent Mountain (where it's needless to say Maida had neither arrived nor been expected) that vengeance and that work moved slowly. But so also move the mills of the gods.

EPISODE V

THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

I was bringing my journal up to date one day at my Long Island hotel, when a page-boy brought me a card engraved with the very last name I should ever have guessed: "Lady Allendale."

"Is the lady downstairs?" I asked, dazed.

"The lady is here!" answered a once familiar voice at the half-open door of my sitting-room; and I jumped up to face a tall, slim figure in widow's weeds. "I hope you don't mind my surprising you?" went on the charming voice. "I wanted to see how you looked, when you saw my name."

"How do you do?" I greeted her, as we shook hands, and the page melted away and was forgotten. I tried to sound sincerely welcoming, for here she was, and I didn't want to hurt her feelings. But I wasn't as glad as some men would have been to see a celebrated beauty and charmer.

She explained that she had found herself in need of rest after her war work (the last time I had seen her was the day when I fled from the private hospital in London of my sister-in-law, Lady Haslemere), and she had thought a sea voyage might be beneficial. She added, with an air of beautiful boldness, that perhaps she'd come partly to meet me again. "I read that you were at the Belmont in New York; so I went there. But they said you were staying on Long Island. Country air will be as good for a tired nurse of wounded officers as it is for the wounded officers themselves, *n'est ce pas?* And it will be nice hearing your news, for we were rather pals!"

"Don was my best friend," I reminded her. "Here's his picture." And I took from the flat top of the desk where I had been writing, one of several framed photographs. A flush sprang to her cheeks as the husband's eyes looked into hers, and snatching the frame she dashed it down so violently that the glass smashed on the parquet floor.

"How cruel of you!" she cried. "He was a thief! He threw away my love and made me hate him. I thank Heaven he died!"

An impulse of anger shook me. If she had been a man I should have struck her. I'm not sure I didn't want to, as it was, in spite of her beauty—or even because of it, so did it flaunt itself like an enemy flag.

"It's you who are cruel," I said. "Not to me, but to Don's memory. I could never believe he did what you thought. There may have been some horrible mistake. And his death has never been proved—"

"He's dead to me; and the proof's incontestable, or I shouldn't wear these things," she almost sobbed, indicating with a gesture her black dress and veil.

In my secret heart I had thought in London, and continued to think, that the motive for draping herself in black might be more complex than she admitted. Sir Donald Allendale had sailed for America on strange circumstances months ago; had disappeared, and a body found floating in the East River had been (superficially, I thought) identified as his. If widow's weeds hadn't been an effective frame for Irene Allendale's dazzling beauty, I wondered if she would have mourned in so many yards of crape for a husband she professed to hate?

"Oh, well," I said, controlling myself, and realising that she had some excuse to execrate Donald's memory, "let's not discuss Don now. There were faults on both sides. He was jealous, and you made him miserable. You were the greatest flirt as well as the greatest beauty in India that year, and—but come to think of it, we needn't discuss that either. The present's enough. You've arrived on this side, and——"

"You're not glad to see me. No use pretending. I *know*, and—here's the reason!" She darted forward and seized from the desk, close to my open journal, the greatest treasure I had in the world—Maida Odell's picture.

Roger had given it to me, knowing how I felt towards Maida. It was a miniature painted on ivory, and almost—though of course not quite—did Maida justice, as no photograph could do. I kept it in a gold, jewelled frame with doors like the doors of a shrine which could shut the angel face out of sight. Usually the doors of the frame were not only shut but locked. When I sat at the desk, however, and expected no visitors, I opened and put it where each time I glanced up from my writing I could look straight into Maida's eyes. Lady Allendale, however, had come as a bolt from the blue, and for once I neglected to shut the shrine.

If I had been angry before, I was doubly angry now; but I said not a word. Gently I took the frame, closed, and placed it in a drawer of the desk.

"Did you say you thought of spending a few days on Long Island?" I asked, when I could control my voice.

"I've engaged a suite at this hotel," Lady Allendale answered sharply. "My maid's putting my things in order now. I do think, Jack, you're being *horrid* to me, and if it weren't too late to change without making gossip I should give up the rooms and go somewhere else."

I didn't want a scene, so I reminded myself how sweet she had been when Don had brought her as a bride to India, and I had always been welcome at their bungalow. I soothed her as well as I could; refused to talk personalities, and when she decided that her visit to my sitting-room had better end, I took her to the door. At that moment a face almost as familiar as hers appeared at a door opposite—the face of Irene Allendale's French maid who had come with her to India four years ago. This woman (Pauline, I remembered hearing her called) was receiving big trunks with White Star labels on them; and I realised not only that the lady's new quarters were close to mine, but that she was provided for a long stay in them!

When she had gone, and the door of her sitting-room had been shut by Pauline (whose personality I disliked) I picked up Don's photograph, and sat down to look at it, reviewing old times.

Poor Don! Whatever his failings might have been, fate had been hard on him!

He was among the smartest officers my regiment ever had, one of the most popular—despite his hot temper—and the best looking. Everyone said when Irene Grey came to India to be married, chaperoned on the voyage by a dragon of a maid, that she and Donald were the handsomest couple ever seen. The trouble was—for trouble began at once—that Irene was *too* pretty. She was a flirt too; and her success as *the* beauty went to her head. She ought to have understood Don well enough to know that he was stupidly jealous. Perhaps she did know, and thought it "fun." But the fun soon turned to fighting. They quarrelled openly. She would do nothing that Don wanted her to do. In black rage, he told her to live her own life, and he would live his. Both were miserable, for she had loved him and he—had adored her. She flirted more than ever, and Don tried to forget his wretchedness by drinking too much and playing too high. So passed several years. I left the regiment and India, and took up flying. Then came the outbreak of war. Don was ordered to England. Irene sailed on the same ship, though by that time they were scarcely civil to each other. Don used influence and got ordered to America to buy horses for the army, he being a polo man and a judge of horseflesh.

I was in France then, but running over to England on leave, Irene sent for me to tell the astounding news that Don had taken with him all her jewellery. She had money of her own—not a great fortune; but her jewels, left her by a rich aunt, were magnificent and even famous. This scene between Irene and me, when she accused Don and I defended him, lingered in my memory as one of the most disagreeable of my life: and the maid Pauline was associated with it in my mind, as Irene had called her, to describe certain suspicious circumstances. Later I couldn't help admitting to myself, if not to Irene, that Don's disappearance on reaching New York, before he had begun to carry out his mission, did look queer. Search was made by the police of New York in

vain, until a body past recognition, but wearing a watch and identification papers belonging to Captain Sir Donald Allendale, was found in the East River. I induced Irene to give Don the benefit of the doubt, not to blacken his memory by connecting him with the loss of her jewels; and she seemed to think that yielding to my persuasions was a proof of friendship for me.

"Well," I said to myself, extracting bits of broken glass from the frame of Don's portrait, "better let sleeping dogs lie. Irene'll get tired of this quiet place before long, and be off to New York—or home."

I felt that it would be a relief to have her go; but I had no idea that it was in her power, even if she wished it, to do me harm.

But while I was thinking of her presence in the hotel as a harmless bore, the lady had instructed Pauline to make inquiries concerning me. This I learned later: but had I guessed, I should have supposed there would be nothing to find out. I had no idea that gossip about me and my affairs was a dining-room amusement among the maids and valets of the hotel guests: that all Lady Allendale's *femme de chambre* need do was to ask "What's the name of the girl Lord John Hasle's in love with?" in order to have my heart bared to her eyes. That first day she heard all about Maida—with embellishments: the beautiful Miss Odell, adopted sister of a well-known millionaire who had lately married and gone abroad with his bride: girl not fond of society: pledged to the Grey Sisterhood for a year: the Sisterhood House being near Pine Cliff, Lord John's reason for living in the one hotel of the neighbourhood.

That was enough for Irene. Her anger having brought "to the scratch" all the cat in her nature, she made herself acquainted with the visiting days and hours of the Grey Sisterhood. Though men were not received, ladies interested in the alleged charitable work of the Sisterhood were welcomed twice a week, between three and five in the afternoon. Maida was a valuable asset to the Head Sister, as a young hostess on these reception days, for she believed in the genuineness of the mission, and was enthusiastic on the subject of "saving" women and children. In her innocence she could not have been aware that most of those "saved" were hardened thieves protected in the old house at Pine Cliff till their "services" should be needed in New York. It was a splendid advertisement for the Sisterhood that so important a girl as Miss Odell should be a member, and she was always bidden to show visitors about, even if the veiled Head Sister were able to receive them.

So it fell out, while I was assuring myself of Irene's harmlessness, that she was making acquaintance with the original of the portrait in the gold frame. She wore, it seems, an open-faced locket containing a photograph of me, painted to look like an ivory miniature: and seeing Maida glance at it she asked if Miss Odell had ever met Lord John Hasle.

The girl admitted that she had; whereupon Lady Allendale said, "We are *very* good friends," and purposely said it in such a way as to convey a false impression. I had told Maida that I loved her, but she had given me no answer except that, if I cared, I must care enough to wait. Many weeks had passed since then, and it was long since we had set eyes upon each other. Lady Allendale was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen; and the miniature in the locket, the meaning of the smile which went with the words, were too much for the girl's faith in my constancy. She thought, "Why should he go on loving me when I've given him no real hope? No wonder he forgets me for such a dream of beauty!"

Perhaps no girl as lovely as Maida ever thought less of her own charm. She believed that the one interest which had held her to the world and given her strength to resist the Head Sister's persuasions was a false star. It came into her mind that the best way to forget would be to promise, as her friend the grey lady had begged her to do, that she would become a life member of the Sisterhood.

Maida made no irrevocable decision that day: but when the Head Sister said next time (there were many of these times), "Dear child, how happy I should be if I could count upon you in the future!" she answered, "Perhaps you may. I don't feel the same wish to go out into the world that I have had."

She was praised for this concession: and it seems to me probable that the grey lady set her intelligence to work at discovering the motive for the change. She had seen Irene, and had without doubt noticed the locket. She was aware that the visitor and the youngest, sweetest member of the Sisterhood had talked in the garden. She must have put "two and two together": and the thing that happened later proves that she reported all she knew and all she guessed to that "great philanthropist" Doctor Rameses. It was certain that, soon after Lady Allendale arrived, he was informed of her presence at my hotel. There were ways in which he could ascertain that my friendship had been for Donald Allendale and not his wife: therefore the theatrical effect of the locket would have been lost upon him.

Irene and I were on friendly terms, but I manoeuvred to keep her out of the way. This was comparatively simple, as I had a lot of work to do; but I invented extra engagements, and was never free to go anywhere with her. I even tried to take such meals as I ate in my hotel, at hours when she wasn't likely to be in the restaurant: but one evening, as I stepped out of my sitting-room dressed for dinner, she appeared at her door. It was almost as if she had been on the watch!

It was early, and I intended motoring to New York, for Carr Price and his bride were there for a day or two. I had my overcoat on my arm, and a hat in my hand, which advertised the fact that I was not dining in the hotel. Lady Allendale also was dressed for the evening, and Pauline was giving her a sable cloak.

"How do you do, stranger?" Irene exclaimed, with a kind of spurious gaiety, more bitter than merry. "I've been here a week, and this is the fourth time we've met."

As she spoke, and I composed a suitable answer, two messengers came along the corridor. One was a seedy-looking individual who might, I thought, be a messenger from Teano, and the other was a boy employed by the Grey Sisterhood to run errands. My heart leaped at sight of an envelope in his hand. It was of the peculiar dove grey used by the Sisters: and I know now that it was recognised by Lady Allendale. She'd sent money for the Sisterhood's charities, and had received their thanks written on this paper.

"No answer, sir," said the boy, giving me the letter, pocketing a "tip," and passing out of the way to let the shabby man advance, directed by a page. He, too, put a letter in my hand, with a mumble of "This is pressing."

Irene could not hide her curiosity; but she dared not stand staring in the hall. She went on, as if to go to the lift: but I learned later that she took refuge in the maid's room, to see (without being seen) what I might do next.

What I did do was to return for a moment to my own room. And there, despite the alleged "pressing" importance of the second letter, I opened Maida's first.

"Please don't feel in any way bound to me," she wrote. "Indeed, there's no real reason why you should: but lest there should be the slightest shadow over your happiness, I wish to tell you that most probably I shall become a life member of the Sisterhood. I must write Roger before deciding, but when he knows that after these many weeks I have less longing than ever for the world, I think he will withdraw his objections.—Yours ever sincerely, M.O."

This was a blow over the heart. I had hoped so much, since the wonderful night when she had let me take her home to Roger! True, she had gone back next day to the Sisterhood House, but I had thought I might read between the lines of the message left for me, and other messages since then.

I did not think of any connection between Irene Allendale and Maida's change of mind, but attributed the adverse influence wholly to the Head Sister. I determined to see Maida somehow: and then remembered the letter which I had not yet opened. Envelope and paper were of the cheapest, and the handwriting was crude, most of the words being absurdly spelt.

"If yu haven't furgot yur old friend Donald Allendale and wud like to help him in grate truble cum at wuns with the messenger and dont wate a secund or it may be tu late."

Nothing else could have taken me out of myself in a moment of deep depression, as did this cry from the grave of a lost friend. I had said to Irene "we have no proof of his death," yet I had hardly doubted it: and it was now as if I heard the voice of a dead man. If I had stopped to reflect I might have reasoned that the letter was more than likely a trick of the "enemy," as I named the Egyptian doctor to myself and Teano: but even if I had, I should have chanced it, for the call was too urgent to admit of delays—such as telephoning Teano to meet me, for instance. I ought to have seen (and perhaps did sub-consciously see) that the appeal for haste was in itself suspicious, framed in the hope of inducing me to do precisely what I did do, rush off on the instant without taking any companion or leaving word in the hotel that I was bound for an errand that might be dangerous.

The man who had brought the letter had prudently gone to wait outside, where, if needful, he could make a quick "getaway." This detail seemed of small importance at the time, but its influence on the fate of two others besides myself was great. If Lady Allendale had seen me starting with the messenger, she would have known that I was not going out in answer to the letter written on grey paper—the letter she believed to be from Maida Odell. Pauline's window overlooked the noisy front entrance of the otherwise quiet hotel. From behind the curtains Irene could see anyone coming or going. If the messenger had waited outside my door, she would have seen us together: but as he stood close against the wall, she could see only that I stopped to speak with someone. She could not hear the man explaining that he had been directed to travel back to New York in the taxi which had brought him to Long Island, and that instead of accompanying, I was to trail him. "Somebody's afraid I might get something out of you—what?" said I. Since argument with such a person was useless, Irene must have heard me order a taxi, and have telephoned down for one herself. If I'd suspected the interest she still felt in my movements, I might have been more on the alert, and have noticed a taxi always pursuing mine: but my eyes were for the one ahead.

When my leader's taxi drew up at last, it was the signal agreed upon for me to do the same.

The neighbourhood was unfamiliar, but as I followed the man on foot I soon saw that we were in the heart of Chinatown. It was agreed that I should not try to speak with him again, but simply to go where I saw him go. He entered a Chinese restaurant which made no pretence at picturesqueness for the attraction of sightseers. I, close upon his heels, entered also, and had scarcely an instant to take in the scene, so promptly did the man make for a row of doors at the back of a large, smoke-dimmed room. Determined not to be left behind, I too made for the little low-browed door he chose in the row, and saw a private dining-room just comfortably big enough for two.

"This is where you're to wait," my man announced, "and where my part of the business is done. Good night. I expect you won't be kept long."

I offered him money, which he refused. "I've been paid, thank you," he said; and touching his shabby cap with an attempt at a military salute, returned to the main restaurant. He shut the door behind him, but not quickly enough to prevent my recognising a face in the room outside: the face of Donald Allendale's valet.

"By Jove!" I heard myself say half aloud. I remembered now that the man—Hanson or some name like that—had left his master in England, not wishing, he explained, to go to America. Yet here he was; and I sprang to the rash conclusion that it was he who had sent for me with this mysterious ceremony.

The door was shut in my face before I could even jump up from the chair into which I had subsided; and when I threw the door open again to look out, the face had vanished. A number of Europeans of middle-class and a few Chinese, apparently respectable merchants, were dining at little tables. Some were already going: others were coming in: and I saw at the street door a tall woman in a long dark cloak and a kind of motor bonnet covered with a thick blue veil. She had the air of peering about through the veil, to find someone she expected to meet: and if I had ever happened to see Lady Allendale's maid Pauline in automobile get-up, when motoring with her mistress, my thoughts might possibly have flashed to Irene. They did not, however, and I should have passed the woman without remark if she had not darted at a man just making his exit. I didn't recall Don's valet well enough from Indian days to be as sure of his back as of his face, but I wondered if it were Hanson whom the veiled woman sought. I was half inclined to step out and accost him: but I knew by experience what errors arise from a change in the programme when an appointment has been planned. Possibly Hanson was not the person who should meet me here, and in following the valet I might miss my aim. After a few seconds' hesitation I went back into the tiny room and reluctantly closed the door.

It was a dull little hole, though clean. The walls or partitions which divided the place from others of its kind seemed to be of thin wood, papered with red and hung with cheap Chinese banners. Even the back wall was of wood, and boasted as decoration a large, ugly picture of a Chinese hunter, in a bamboo frame. The only furniture consisted of two chairs, and a small table laid for two persons. In one of these chairs I sat, staring at the door, hoping that it might soon open for Hanson or another.

Hanson, I learned afterwards, had never intended to meet me or be seen by me. His business in the restaurant concerned me, to be sure, but only indirectly: and catching sight of my face in the door of the private room, he had made a dash for the door of the street, to be stopped by the veiled woman on the threshold. The veil was impenetrable, but recognising the voice that spoke his name, he tried to shove her aside and escape. She seized his arms, however, obliging him to stop inside the restaurant or risk a street scene. She inquired why he had come to America, and if he had been with Sir Donald.

"No, your ladyship," the man stolidly answered to both questions, doubtless longing to ask some of his own in return. He mumbled that he had come to New York after his master died, for no object connected with Sir Donald—merely wishing to "find a good job with some rich American," a wish not yet realised. When asked if he had seen and recognised in the restaurant his master's old friend Lord John Hasle, at first he said, "No, he hadn't noticed anyone like him." But the next words, following swiftly and excitedly, for some reason quickened his memory as if by magic.

"Well, he is there. I saw him go in!" the veiled Lady Allendale insisted. "I believe you know he is there. I'm sure there's a *woman* in the case!"

On this, Hanson admitted that he had seen "a man who looked a bit *like* his lordship," and there was a woman with him, *not* the kind of woman her ladyship would want to know.

"I've got to get somewhere in a hurry," he added, "but if I might advise, the best thing for your ladyship is to do the same—go somewhere else, most *anywhere* else, in a hurry too."

With this, he took advantage of a relaxed hold on his arm, and was off like a frightened rabbit, old custom forcing him to touch his hat as he fled.

He doubtless hoped that Lady Allendale would be terrified into abandoning her project, whatever it might be: and intended to disclaim responsibility if she lingered. As it happened she did linger, summoning courage to enter the restaurant and take a table close to the door where,

for an instant, she had seen me appear.

"He was looking for *her*!" Irene said to herself; and as no woman had passed in while she talked to Hanson in the street, she determined to wait close to the door. It was almost incredible that Maida Odell should come from the house of the Grey Sisterhood to such a place as this, but Lady Allendale was in a mood when anything seemed possible. Anyhow, if it were not Maida, it was some other—some other about whose existence she might let Maida know—since Maida continued to write letters to the guilty one! Irene ordered food as an excuse to keep the table; but when it came she did little more than pretend to eat. Alternately she consulted her wrist-watch and frowned at the closed door.

All this time she supposed me to be sitting alone, fuming with impatience for the arrival of an unexpected woman: but as a matter of fact while she questioned Hanson the door had quickly opened and shut. It had admitted a man: and that man was with me when Lady Allendale sat down at her table near by to watch.

In appearance he was a Chinaman, a very tall, respectably dressed Chinaman with a flat-brimmed hat shading his eyes, and a generous pigtail whipping his back. But his long dark eyes were not Chinese eyes, though Eastern they might be. He was magnificently made up, so well that my impression of his falseness came by instinct rather than by reason. I would have given much if my brain had carried away a clearer picture of the "man with the scar" from the theatre, on the first night of the play. If I could have got nearer to him then, the difficulty of identifying him with Doctor Rameses might have disappeared altogether, despite the Egyptian's genius for establishing an alibi whenever I clamoured to the police. Now, in trying to pierce the surface calm of the dark eyes I should have had certainty to go upon, one way or the other. As it was I could only ask myself, "Is this the everlasting enemy? Or—am I a monomaniac on that subject?"

If it were Rameses, I could hardly help admiring his impudence in sending for and meeting face to face—even in disguise—the man whose business in life it had become to ruin him.

"Good evening, sir," he began politely, with the accent of an educated man and a suggestion of Chinese lisp—or a good imitation. "I am part owner of this place. I have come to know through my partner a sad case of a client of his, a poor man who was a friend of yours in another country. My partner is a good man but he is hard. He would have put this fellow out and not cared; but I said, keep him and I will send word to that friend he talks about, that Lord John Hasle. Maybe something can be done to help. My partner did not wish me to do this thing, because there might be danger for him, from the police. If you go further, you will soon understand why. But I have been years in England. I know Englishmen. I said to my partner, if this lord is asked to come alone, in a hurry, for the sake of his friend, he will not be a traitor. That is why I had to do things in a prudent way. I was right. You are here. But this is not all you have to do. You give me your word you will make no noise if I show you the secret of our place?"

"As to that, I give you my word," I said, curious, but far from trustful. "The message I received hints that Sir Donald Allendale didn't die. Is he here?"

"He is downstairs," replied the alleged Asiatic.

As he spoke, he touched one of the big, brass-headed tacks which appeared crudely to keep in place the bamboo frame of the Chinese Hunter. Instantly the picture moved out of the frame, like a sliding panel, and showed an opening or door in the wooden wall at the back of the room.

I felt that the long eyes watched to see if I "funked," but I think my features remained as noncommittal as those of Buddha himself. As a matter of fact I was scarcely surprised to find myself in one of those secret rabbit warrens of which I had read. I guessed that each of the private dining-rooms in the row I had seen, possessed a concealed door leading down to a hidden "opium den" underneath. I guessed, too, that only certain trusted habitués of the restaurant were allowed to learn the secret. Whether my being let into it were a compliment, or a sign that I shouldn't get a chance to betray it, I was not sure. But I wished that I had looked to the loading of my revolver which, so far as I remembered, held no more than one cartridge. I fancied that my Chinese friend was Rameses himself, and that he might indeed be a financial "power behind the throne" in the business of this house. Deliberately I went to the table and selected a steel knife which lay beside one of the plates. The tall Chinaman watched me pocket it, with a benevolent smile, such as he might have bestowed upon a child arming itself with a tin sword to fight a shadow. As he stood statue-like beside the aperture in the wall, two men in Chinese costume, dressed like the waiters of the restaurant, came through the panel-door from the mysterious dusk on the other side. Each had a small tray in his hand, as if to serve at a meal. With a bow for my companion and an extra one for me they moved along the wall, one on either side of the room, passing behind us both, and ranging themselves to right and left of the exit to the restaurant.

It was obvious that they were ready to prevent my making a dash if I were inclined to do so. They were big fellows, regular "chuckers out" in size; and my host himself was more than my equal in height. All the same, if I'd wanted to escape, I thought I could have downed the three, unless they were experts in ju jitsu, where I was an amateur. No such intention, however, was in my mind. I determined to see the adventure to the end, in the hope of finding Allendale. He might have fallen into such hands as these, and be held for some reason which I hoped to learn.

"After you!" I said politely to my guide who would have let me go ahead. We bowed like Chinese mandarins, and then, as if to prove that he meant no harm, he passed before me through the panel-door. Whether the two men closed it again in case of a police raid (which must always be dreaded in such a place) I don't know; but I guessed that they were under orders to follow at a distance.

There was just enough light in a narrow passage behind the panel to prevent those who entered it from stumbling over each other. I saw that it was a long, straight corridor running between the wooden back wall of the row of private dining-rooms and the house wall. Such light as there was came from the end of the passage, and from below, where it could be turned off in case of danger. I followed my companion, our feet making no noise on the matting-covered floor: and voices of those in the private rooms were audible through the thin partition. I smiled rather grimly for my own benefit as my fancy pictured a raid: how an alarm would be sent to those below stairs: an electric bell, perhaps: and how those in a condition to move would swarm up from secret, forbidden regions underground, running like rats through this corridor to take their places in the row of dining-rooms. There they would be found, calmly eating and drinking: and unless the "sleuths" had certain information concerning the concealed doors, there would be no excuse to look further!

At the far end of the passage, as I expected, there was a steep stairway. My guide still went in advance, as a proof of good faith. Having opened a baize door which muffled sound, he held it open for me to pass into a large room lit by green-shaded electric lamps that hung from the low ceiling. There was gas also, which could be used if the electricity failed. Here, men were gambling, silent as gambling ghosts. They played fan tan and other games: Chinese and Europeans, both men and women. Nobody glanced up when we arrived. We might have been flies for all the interest we excited. I looked over my shoulder as we came to the head of a second staircase leading down another storey, to see if the supposed "waiters" were behind us. They were not to be seen: nevertheless I "felt in my bones" that they were not far off.

The floor below the gambling-room was devoted to the smoking of opium. There were several doors no doubt leading into private rooms for those who could pay high prices: and ranged along the two side walls were rows of berths protected by curtains. Two "cooks" were at work making the pills to fill the pipes, handed to customers by attendants. There was practically no furniture in the large, low room, which was filled with the peculiar, heady fragrance of cooking opium.

Yet even then we had not reached our destination. A third staircase led down to a deeper cellar; and I could but think as I continued the game of "follow my leader," what a neat trap the fly was allowing the spider to land him in! However, I went quietly on, consoling myself with the thought that it's a wise fly who is up to the spider's tricks and watching for the lid of the trap to fall.

This last cellar was evidently for the cheapest class of customers. There were berths here too, but the curtains were poor, or non-existent, and many Chinamen lay about the floor on strips of matting. The atmosphere was foetid, and thick with opium smoke. As we moved towards a rough partition at the further end, our figures tore the grey cloud as if it had been made of gauze.

"Your friend lies very sick in a room there," said my guide, speaking for the first time since he had stepped through the panel. "We have paid for his keep a long time now."

I made no answer, only following with my eyes the gesture he made, pointing at the unpainted wooden partition. In this partition were three doors, also of rough, unpainted wood. Two stood ajar, showing small rooms which I fancied were used by the attendants and opium "cooks." One door was closed. My companion opened it, indicating, with a smile, that it possessed no lock, only an old-fashioned latch. "You need not fear to go in and talk with your friend alone," he said, in his low, monotonous voice. "You see, he is not a prisoner! And we cannot make you one."

I shrugged my shoulders, and passed him without a word, shutting the door behind me as I entered the wretched den on the other side. It was lit by one paraffin lamp, supported by a bracket attached to the wall, and such light as existed brought out from the shadows the vague lumpish shape of a mattress on the floor. Two or three odds and ends of furniture lurked in corners, but I scarcely saw their squalor. My one thought was for a dark form stretched on the grey heap of bedding.

I bent over it, and a hand seemed to grip my heart. "My God, poor old Don! What have they done to you?" I broke out.

A skeleton in rags lay on the filthy mattress. The yellow light from the bracket lamp lit his great eyes as they suddenly opened, in deep hollows. Even his face looked fleshless. There were streaks of grey in the dark hair at his temples, and an unkempt beard mingled with the shadows under his cheekbones. This was what remained of Donald Allendale, one of the smartest and handsomest men in the army.

He stared at me dully for an instant, his eyes like windows of glass With no intelligence behind them. Then abruptly they seemed to come alive. "Jack!" he gasped. "Am I—dreaming you?"

"No, dear old chap, no," I assured him, down on one knee by the mattress, slipping an arm under his head. "It's Jack right enough, come to take you out of this and make you the man you were again."

As I spoke, slowly and distinctly, so that the comforting words might reach his sick soul, I heard a faint, stealthy noise outside. There was a slight squeak as of iron scraping against wood, and in a flash I guessed what had happened. My guide had made a point of showing that the door could not be locked; and I, like a fool—in my haste to see Don—hadn't sought other means of fastening it, more efficient than any lock. I guessed that a bar of wood or iron had now been placed across the door, the two ends in rungs or brackets which I had passed unnoticed.

"Well!" I said to myself, "the mischief's done. No use kicking against the pricks till I'm ready to kick. And I shan't be ready till I've seen what can be done for Allendale."

The worst of it was that as I'd allowed myself to be trapped, it was difficult to see how anything could be done. My theory that I'd been let into a secret, because I should never be in a position to betray it, seemed to be the true one. But my fury at Donald's state gave me a sense of superabundant strength. I felt like Samson, able to pull down the pillars of the Temple.

"You're—too late!" the man on the mattress sighed, his voice strange and weak, sounding almost like a voice speaking through a telephone at "long distance." "But I'm glad to see you, Jack! I've thought of you. I've longed for you. Tell me—about Irene. Does she—believe I'm dead?"

"She's in New York, dear old boy," I said, evading his question.

His eyes lighted. It seemed that a faint colour stained his ash-white cheeks. "She came—to look for me! Oh, Jack, she did love me, then!"

"Of course," I answered truly enough: for she *had* loved him before everything went wrong. Even if I hadn't been as sure of Don's loyalty as of my own, I should have known by the radiance of his face. If he had stolen her jewels, he would not be coming back from death to life in the illusion that love had brought her across the sea.

"Thank God!" he breathed. "I can die in peace—but no, not yet. There's a thing I must tell you first, It's the thing they've kept me here to get out of me. They've tried every way they knew—torture, starvation, bribes of freedom; everything. They'd have killed me long ago, only if they had they could never have got the secret. But—how is it you're here? Is it another trick of theirs?"

As soon as I heard the word "secret" the mystery was clear. I was the catspaw with which the chestnuts were to be pulled out of the fire. If Doctor Rameses was the man who held us both, his intention was evidently to kill two birds, two rare and valuable birds, with one stone. How he had got Donald Allendale into his clutches I didn't know yet, though I soon should: but having him, and learning that he and I had been friends, he saw how to trap me securely and through me learn Don's secret.

Almost without telling I knew that the secret must concern Irene's jewels, which were worth at least twenty thousand pounds; a haul not to be despised. Bending over Don, I lifted my head and looked around. I was sure that a knothole in the wooden wall had come into being within the last five minutes. If there'd been an aperture there, it had been stuffed with rags, now noiselessly withdrawn. It was distant not a yard from Donald's face as he lay on the mattress, and a person crouching on the floor outside could catch every word, unless we whispered. Somebody had deduced that the prisoner would open his heart to me. The "secret" would thus become the property of those who coveted it; and once it was in their possession Donald and I could be suppressed. Thus the two birds would be felled with that one cleverly directed stone—so cleverly directed that I was sure of the hand which had placed it in the sling.

It was a case of kill or cure, to startle poor Don; but there was no other way, and I took the one I saw. "Yes," I said, "they got me here by a trick, but I don't regret coming. On the contrary. They—whoever they are—want to hear what you tell me. But we can prevent that. Let me help you to the other side of the mattress farther from that knothole, and you'll whisper what you have to say. If that annoys anyone—I know there are people made nervous by whispering!—why, they can come in, and get a warm welcome. Put the story into few words; and then we'll be prepared for the next thing."

It was a tonic I had given him. He threw a look of disgust and rage at the knothole, which was dark because, no doubt, the lights had been turned down outside to make our cubicle seem lighter. Sitting up without my help, Don flung himself to the other side of the mattress; and as I knelt beside him, whispered. Unless they had a concealed dictaphone the secret was safe.

As I advised, this man raised from the dead, told his story in few words. On shipboard, coming to America, he had been taken over the ship one day, by the first officer. To his astonishment, he recognised Hanson, his valet, in a rather clumsy disguise, travelling second class. Controlling himself, he appeared not to notice: but as Hanson had refused to make the voyage in his service, there must be some curious motive for this ruse. Don could not guess it, but he had once overheard a conversation between Hanson and Pauline which told him that they were more than friends. Don didn't like Pauline, and believed that she had set her mistress against him. After a little thought, he determined to spring a surprise on Hanson. He learned the

name under which the valet was travelling, found out that the man had a state-room to himself; and the night after his discovery opened the door and abruptly walked in. He expected to catch Hanson unawares and surprise a confession; but the room was empty. Don was amazed to see under the berth a dressing-bag which had belonged to Irene. He could not believe she had given it to Pauline or to Hanson, as it had been a present to her from a friend. It flashed into his head that the thing had been stolen, and that it might have valuable contents. Acting on impulse, he took the bag and returned to his own cabin. There he opened it with one of his own keys, and found most of his wife's jewellery.

This happened on the night when the ship docked. Don meant to telegraph Irene next day; and was debating whether to have Hanson arrested on board ship, or catechise him first. He determined upon the latter course, as he wished to learn if Pauline were involved in the theft. He wrote a note and sent it to Hanson, saying that his one chance lay in confession and that he—Sir Donald—would talk with him on the dock. The man kept the appointment, begged his ex-master's forgiveness, told a long story of temptation, exonerated Pauline, and promised to reform. Don, who had been fond of Hanson and valued him as a servant, decided that, as he now had the jewels in his own possession, he could afford to be generous. He bade the fellow "go and sin no more": and as far as Hanson was concerned, considered the episode closed. The dressing-bag he gave with other luggage to an express man to take to his hotel, but the jewels (a rope of pearls, a flexible tiara of diamonds, and a number of brooches, pendants and rings) he had put (congratulating himself on his own prudence) into a tobacco pouch in a pocket of his coat. He engaged a taxi, giving the name of a hotel; and had no suspicion that anything was wrong until he realised that, instead of leaving poor streets behind, he was being driven through a maze of slums. Not knowing New York, he still hoped that his chauffeur had chosen an unattractive short cut: but instinct cried loudly that he was the victim of a trick. Fancying that the taxi slowed down, he took the tobacco-pouch from his pocket and searched for a place to hide it, in case of trouble. He happened to find a curious repository. Lifting the leather cushion which formed the seat, he discovered an inconspicuous rip in the leather binding of the lower edge. He clawed out a piece of horsehair stuffing, threw it from the window, and tucked the tobacco-pouch into the hole that was left. Knowing the number of the taxi (Don was always great at remembering numbers) he could inform the police if necessary! Whereas, if all were well, and he found himself arriving safely at his destination he would take out the bag and laugh at his own suspicions.

No sooner had he hidden the valuables, however, than the taxi stopped. The chauffeur civilly informed him that a tyre was down, and apologised for having to stop in such a poor neighbourhood. The fellow seemed so frank, that Donald was ashamed of his own timidity. He stuck his head out of the window to speak with the man at work, and—remembered no more, till he came to himself in his present surroundings.

How long ago that was, he could not tell. He had waked to find severe wounds on his head, and fancied that he had been delirious. He had thought constantly of Irene, and bitterly regretted their quarrels. It occurred to him (as to me in hearing the story) that Hanson had crossed on Sir Donald Allendale's ship with the jewels, intending by the help of Pauline at home, to throw suspicion on his master.

My evasive answers and the news of Irene's presence in New York, gave Don new life and courage to fight for it, believing that through all she had kept her love and faith. I, alas, knew that this was not the case; but I hoped that Irene's heart would turn to him again if his innocence were proved. "You *must* get out of this for her sake," I urged. "Besides, I shan't try to escape without you. We stand or fall together."

"If I can find strength enough not to hinder instead of help!" he groaned. "But there's little chance for either of us. For heaven knows how long they've kept me chained to the wall. To-night, the Chinaman who takes care of me after a fashion unlocked the iron ring that was on my ankle. You can see the mark it's made! I wondered what was up, but thought as I was so weak, it was no longer worth while to waste the chain on me. Now I see they took it off because they didn't want you to see at first glance that I was a prisoner, not a *pensionaire*. The fact that they've left me free shows they've taken their precautions, though!"

"Perhaps they haven't taken enough," said I, still whispering as he did, that ears outside might strain in vain.

I rose from my knees, and began to look for the iron staple which I knew must exist. I soon found it in the solid wall at the back of the room; with the chain and the iron ankle-band attached. A heap of straw and rags had been used to cover these from sight. No effort of Don's wasted muscles could suffice to pull out the staple, as his gaolers knew: and as for my strength, it had not occurred to them that I might use it in that direction. Probably no one dreamed that blind Samson would pull down the pillars!

I made Don move to a position where his body blocked the knothole, and unless there was another, which I failed to see, I could work without being overlooked. Grasping the iron ring, with all my might I pulled and jerked at the staple till I loosened it in the wall. The rest was easy: and sooner than I'd dared hope I had in my hand a formidable weapon. If there were a chance of smashing the partition and breaking out on the other side, it lay in that. Also, it might be useful afterwards, for if we got into the main cellar, our troubles would be but just begun. Practically my one hope was that the men told off to deal with us might be cowards.

As for smashing the door, there was "nothing doing" there for us, because of the bar certainly securing it. On examination, however, the rough plank supporting the bracket lamp looked rotten. It had cracked when the bracket was nailed up, and had never been mended. This was good; and I had a plan too, in which the lamp itself was to play a part. I took it from the bracket, and set it carefully on a rickety stool which I propped against the back wall. Then I whispered to Don: "Now for it! If I break through, I'll try and get hold of that bar across the door. If I do, it will be another weapon: and besides, we can make a quick dash. Here's my revolver for you. There's only one cartridge in it; but nobody else knows that. And here's a knife I stole upstairs. I'll have the iron staple and chain which will make a good killing, and the bar too, if we're in luck."

"They may shoot through the partition when they find what we're up to," said Don.

"They haven't got their precious secret yet!" I reminded him. "They'll try and take us alive, and we'll give them a hot time doing it!"

To weaken the cracked plank, I wrenched off the bracket, and had the joy of hearing the wood tear as if a saw had bitten through. Then I dealt blow after blow on the wounded spot, and when the wood began to give I flung my weight against it. The noise drowned lesser sounds, but I was conscious of a babble of voices like the chatter of angry monkeys. Down went the upper half of the broken plank, and the one next it gave way. It was close to the door, and reaching out an arm I found the bar. Luckily it was held by a pair of wooden horns, for had it been slipped into rings I could not have succeeded. As it was a Chinaman jabbed at my hand with a knife: but I surprised him with a smashing blow over the eyes, and seized the bar before he came at me again. Instantly I had it out of the sockets, the door (which Don had unlatched) fell open, and I burst through like a whirlwind, with him behind me, carrying the lamp I'd yelled to him to bring.

Half a dozen Chinamen stood lined up to beat us back. Two with pistols, two armed with axes, and the one I had tackled brandishing his carving-knife. I went for the pair with the pistols. My iron bar cracked a shaved head like an egg-shell, and broke the hand of his mate. One dropped his weapon without a groan, the other let his fall with a yelp: and Don, unexpectedly darting forward, snatched up both the pistols. Thrusting one into my free hand he kept the other. We were thus doubly armed, and together made a rush for the stairs, I keeping my eyes open for a surprise attack from my late guide.

At the foot of the steps, I let Don lead with my revolver and the big pistol, while I backed up stair by stair, keeping off the four Chinamen who were still intact. It seemed too good to be true that we were to get away so easily. Perhaps, I thought, the tug-of-war would come on the floor above: but it was the enemy's game to finish us before we gained a higher level. Here, the sound of shots could not reach the street; and the witnesses of the fight were so besotted with their drug, so lost to decency, that even if they woke to see strange doings, all would be woven with their dreams. Above, there was more to fear; some of the clients were still alive to human feeling: they might take our part. An alarm might reach the police. Why then, if Rameses were the hidden enemy, did he let his best chance go by? Almost subconsciously I asked myself these questions, and half way up the stairs, my answer came. Men shielded with mattresses flung themselves upon us from above. They in turn were pushed forward by others and Don and I fell back. I tried to use the iron bar like a battering ram, but the weight I struggled against was too great. I stumbled, with Don on top of me; there was a sound of shouting, and suddenly the lights went out. I struggled in darkness with unseen enemies, as in a nightmare.

* * * * *

Two storeys above, in the restaurant, Irene Allendale sat pretending to eat, and glancing at her watch until she lost patience. It occurred to her that she had been a fool—that the woman she waited for might have arrived before her, might already be in the little private room, dining with John Hasle. She sprang up and on a furious impulse flung open the door which she had so long watched in vain. To her astonishment the room was empty.

This seemed a miracle; for she knew that John Hasle had gone in and hadn't come out. As she stood staring at the empty room which seemed to have no second exit, the Chinese proprietor came to her with a threatening air. "You do what we no 'low this place," he said bullyingly. "That plivate loom. You no pay plivate loom. You no light look in. You give me five dolahs you' dinnah, and you go 'way. We no like spies. You go, if you no want I call p'lice."

Already hysterical, Irene lost her head. "How dare you talk of police!" she cried. "I will call the police! You've very likely murdered a friend of mine here and hidden his body."

The man had threatened her in a low voice. She threatened him at the top of her lungs. The diners at little tables jumped to their feet. The Chinaman tried to catch her by the veil as she darted to the door, but only pulled off her motor bonnet and loosened her hair, which tumbled over her shoulders. In an instant the place was in an uproar. An American in defence of a beautiful woman knocked the Chinaman down. A policeman passing the restaurant window blew his whistle, and had hardly dashed in before he had a couple of comrades at his heels.

Nobody knew quite what had happened, but Lady Allendale gasped the word "Murder!" and pointed to the open door of the private room. In jumped two of the policemen, while the third tried to restore order in the restaurant. A glance under the table in the little dining-room showed

that no corpse lay hidden there, but the lovely lady's persistence put the idea of a secret entrance into their heads. One of them thumped with his fist on the picture of the Chinese hunter. The hollow sound suggested a space behind. An experienced hand passed over the bamboo frame found a spring, and the panel slid back. Somehow the cry of "Murder!" started by Irene flew from mouth to mouth. More policemen appeared, and Europeans who had been peacefully dining in the restaurant reinforced the courageous pair who had sprung through the opening behind the picture. So the rescue-party reached us in the nick of time, policemen's lanterns lighting up the darkness, revealing stealthy flitting forms that would escape at any price, and a mass of men struggling under and above a pile of mattresses.

My first thought (after I had seen that Don was safe) rushed to Rameses. But the tall Chinaman with the long dark eyes was not among the prisoners. That night (the police gleefully informed me later) Doctor Rameses was engaged in giving a lecture at his own house, and could not possibly have been in Chinatown. As usual, he had known how to save himself; and it was only long after that I learned the remarkable way in which he invariably established an alibi.

My hope for the reconciliation of Don and Irene was fulfilled even before the overwhelming proof of his truth was obtained by finding the tobacco-pouch intact, still hidden inside the seat of the ancient taxi whose number Don had never forgotten. The man who had driven it the night of the attack had been discharged, and could not be found. Hanson, too, contrived to elude the vigilance of the police, and Pauline passionately denied all knowledge of him. She was watched when Lady Allendale sent her away, but returned quietly to Europe, while Irene remained in New York to help nurse Donald back to health. With Hanson and his accomplice of the taxi missing, and the Master Mind past pursuit, it was impossible to clear up the mystery of the corpse found floating in the East River. But after all, that mattered only to the police, now that Captain Sir Donald Allendale was alive and safe, and happier than he had been for years.

The day that Irene and he made up their differences, she sent for me. "You won't tell Don that I said I hated him and threw his picture on the floor, will you?" she asked me piteously.

"Of course not!" I assured her.

"Ah, if I could atone!" she sighed.

"You have atoned. You saved our lives, and——"

"Oh, but you don't know all. If you did, you'd loathe me."

"I can think of nothing which would make me loath you, Lady Allendale."

"I—made Miss Odell believe—that—that—I can't tell you *what!* But—never mind. I've written to her now. I've confessed that it was a lie. If you wouldn't press me with questions, but just wait to hear from her, you'd be an *angel*, Lord John."

How long I could have remained an angel at that price I'm not sure. But a letter came to me from Maida next day to say that she had decided *not* to become a life member of the Grey Sisterhood.

EPISODE VI

THE CLUE IN THE AIR

If I had been fighting my own battle, not Maida's, against Doctor Rameses, I might have sometimes admired his cleverness. There seemed to be no way of catching him.

The police theory was that some person, not Rameses, took advantage of the "philanthropist's" conspicuous appearance to commit crimes in a disguise resembling his peculiarities. This, they thought, might be done not only as a means of escaping detection, but with the object of blackmail. My theory was different. I believed that Rameses had a confederate enough like him in looks to deceive an audience assembled for one of his lectures, or patients undergoing his treatment.

I did not hesitate to assert this opinion, hoping to provoke the man to open attack.

After the affair of the opium den, he lay low. Nothing happened in which, by any stretching of probabilities, he could have had a hand. Perhaps, thought I, he had learned that I was a hard nut to crack! Two-thirds of the time for which Maida had promised herself to the Grey Sisterhood passed. Her doubts of me had been swept away, and I hoped to find at the end of the year that I hadn't waited in vain. Now and then I saw, or believed that I saw, light on the mystery of Maida's

antecedents. Altogether I was happier than I had been and I was serving my country's interests while I served my own.

I had been ordered to buy desirable new types of aeroplanes, and luckily got hold of some good ones. The "story" of my mission suddenly appeared in the newspapers, and interest in my old exploits as a flying man were revived embarrassingly. I was "paragraphed" for a few days when war tidings happened to be dull; and to my surprise received an invitation to demonstrate my "stunt" of looping a double loop at a new aviation park, opened on Long Island. The exhibition resulted in another compliment. I was asked to instruct a class of young aviators, and was officially advised by the British Ambassador to accept. I did accept: and was given a "plane" and a hangar of my own; but I kept on my suite in the hotel near Sisterhood House, starting at an early hour most mornings to motor to the aviation ground.

After a few weeks of this, a big aviation meeting took place, and when my part in it was over I found myself holding quite a reception in my hangar. Friends and strangers had kind things to say: and while I explained new features of my 'plane to some pretty women, I saw a prettier woman gazing wistfully at me between hats.

Her face was familiar. I remembered that tremulous, wistful smile of eyes and lips, which (the thought flashed through my head) would be fine stock-in-trade for an actress. Still, for the life of me, I couldn't recall the girl's name or whether we had ever really met, until her chance came to dash into the breach made by disappearing plumes and feathers. She seized the opportunity with a promptness that argued well for her bump of decision: but she was helped to success by the tallest, thinnest, brightest-eyed young man I had ever seen.

"You've forgotten me, Lord John!" the girl reproached me. "I'm Helen Hartland. Does that name bring back anything?"

"Of course!" I answered, remembering where and how I had met Helen Hartland. She had made her debut on the stage several years ago in a curtain-raiser of mine, my first and last attempt at playwriting "on my own." Her part had been a small one, but she had played it well and looked lovely in it. I had congratulated her. When the run ended, she had asked for introductions to people I knew in the theatrical world, and I had given them. She had written me a few letters, telling of engagements she had got (nothing good unfortunately) and wanting me to see her act. I had never been able to do so; but I had sent her flowers once on a first night.

Not trusting to my recollection, she reminded me of these things, and introduced the tall, thin, bright-eyed young man.

"You must have heard of Charlie Bridges, the California Birdman, as everybody calls him!" she said. And then went on to explain, as if she didn't want their relations misunderstood: "We met on the ship coming over, and Mr. Bridges was *so* kind! Our steamer chairs were together, and he lent me a copy of *Sketch* with a picture of him in it! Wasn't it funny, there was a picture of *you*, too, and I mentioned knowing you? Next, it came out that he was bringing a letter of introduction to you from a friend of yours at home. We landed only two days ago. I was so happy, for I've had hard luck for months, and I thought I was falling into a ripping engagement. But it was a fraud—the *queerest* fraud! I can't understand it a bit. I want to tell you all about it and get your advice. Mr. Bridges brought me to the meeting here. It *was* nice of him. But now I've paid him back, haven't I, putting him in touch with you?"

Charlie Bridges listened to the monologue with varying emotions, as I could see in his face which was ingeniously expression-ful. Evidently he had fallen in love with Helen Hartland, and was not pleased to stand still listening to protestations of gratitude for small past favours from me. She realised his state of feeling as well as I did, perhaps better, being a woman: and what her motive in exciting him to jealousy was, I couldn't be sure. Maybe she wished to bring him to the point (though he looked eager to impale himself upon it!), maybe she simply didn't care how he felt, and wanted him to understand this once for all: or possibly it amused her to play us off against each other.

In any case, I put myself out to be pleasant to Bridges, who seemed a nice fellow, and was, I knew, a smart aviator. He had been in France at the time of my accident, and had not returned to America since then. He had news from London and Paris to give me, and even if Helen Hartland had not insisted, we should have struck up a friendship.

I invited them to have food with me at the brand new Aviation Park Hotel (as it called itself), saying that we'd "feed" in the roof-garden restaurant, of which the proprietors were proud. Bridges hesitated, possibly disliking to accept hospitality from the hated rival: but as Helen said "yes," rather than leave her to my tender mercies, the poor chap followed suit.

The hotel had been run up in next to no time, to catch aviation "fans," and the roof-garden was a smart idea, as patrons could sit there eating and drinking, and see the flying at the same time. It was small, but nicely arranged, partly glassed in, partly open, with a "lift" to rush dishes up from the kitchen (this was practically concealed with trellis-work covered with creepers trying to grow in pots), and a low wall or parapet with flowers planted in a shallow strip of earth. The weather was fine, so we chose a table in the open, for our late luncheon. My place—with Helen at my right, and Bridges opposite us both—was close to the parapet, so close that I could peer over

a row of pink geraniums, to the newly-sodded lawn and gravelled paths below. As it happened I did peer while we waited for our oysters, sub-consciously attracted perhaps by the interest an elderly waiter was taking in someone or somebody down there. I was just in time to see a face look up, not to me but to the waiter. Instantly the head ducked, presenting to my eyes only the top of a wide-brimmed soft hat of black felt—an old-fashioned hat.

"By Jove!" I said to myself, and had to beg Helen's pardon for losing a remark of hers: for that quick, snap-shot glance had shown me features like those of the priceless Rameses.

"Now, what can *he* be doing here—if it is he?" I wondered. It was absurd to fancy that he might bribe a waiter to poison my food, and so rid himself of me once for all. No: poisoning—anyhow at second hand—wasn't in Rameses' line. Besides, his waiter wasn't my waiter, which would complicate the plot for a neat murder. As the man walked away (I still watching) his back was not like that of Rameses, if I had ever seen the real Rameses. The police thought I had not. I thought I had: but the picture in my mind was of a person erect and distinguished: this figure was slouching and common.

I was not, however, to be caught napping. I called to the waiter who now, instead of looking down to the lawn, was picking dead leaves off the pink geraniums. "That was Doctor Rameses of New York, wasn't it?" I fired at him, staring into his anemic Austrian face. It did not change, unless to drop such little expression as it had worn. Utter blankness must mean complete innocence or extreme subtlety. I could hardly credit the fellow with the latter. "Doctor Ra—mps?" he echoed. "Who—where, sir?"

"Down below: the man you were looking at," I explained, still fixing him with a basilisk eye.

He shook his head. "I wasn't lookin' at no man, sir," he protested. "I was lookin' at nothin' at all."

Meanwhile the slouch hat and slouching figure had disappeared into the crowd which still ringed the aviation ground. I abandoned the inquest, and turned my attention to Helen and Bridges.

As we lunched, I learned the history of Helen's trip to America, and the "fraud" she had spoken of as "queer." It seemed that, a few days after the suburban theatre she was acting in had closed, she received a long cable message from New York. A man signing himself "William Morgan, Manager Excelsis Motion Picture Corporation" offered her the "lead" in a forthcoming production. He explained expensively that he had seen her act and thought her ideal for the part. She was to have six months' certain engagement with a salary of a hundred dollars a week, and her dresses and travelling expenses were to be paid by the management. She was to reply by wire, and if she accepted, five hundred dollars would be advanced to her by cable.

The address given, "29, Vandusen Street, New York," did not sound "swell" to an English actress who vaguely thought of Broadway and Fifth Avenue as being the only streets "over there." Still, the promise of an advance gave an air of bona-fides, and Helen had answered "Yes. Start on receipt of money."

By return, the money came, and the girl took the first ship available, telegraphing again to Mr. Morgan. She expected him to meet her at the docks, but he "never materialised," and "if it hadn't been for Mr. Bridges she didn't know what she would have done!" Bridges it was who took her in a taxi to 29, Vandusen Street, which address proved to be that of a tobacconist in a small way of business. There she was told that a man named William Morgan had paid for the privilege of receiving "mail," but only a couple of telegrams had come. He had called for them, but had not been seen since. The proprietor of the shop vowed that he knew nothing of Morgan. The man had walked in one day, bought a box of expensive cigars, and made the arrangement mentioned. Bridges inquired "what he was like," but the tobacconist shook his head dully. Morgan looked like everybody else, neither old nor young, fair nor dark, fat nor lean. If you met him once, you couldn't be sure you would know him again.

"I've three hundred and fifty dollars left," Helen said at last, "all I have in the world, for I was stoney-broke when the cable came. Of course I can't live on that money long. But as I'm here, I shall stop and try to get something to do. I'm puzzled to death, though, why 'Morgan'—whoever he is—picked *me* out, or why it was worth his while to send a hundred pounds and then never turn up at the ship."

"It does seem odd," I agreed. "He may have been scared off from meeting you—or arrested. However, you'd better be careful what acquaintances you make."

"I *want* to be careful," the girl said. "But I *must* find work. And I can't do that without making some acquaintances, can I?—whether they're dangerous or not! Unless—oh, Lord John, if you could *only* put me in the way of an engagement, no matter how small. I've heard your play was a great success. You must know a lot of managers over here and—"

"I don't," I answered her. "My activities lately haven't been in theatres! I'm afraid——" I was going on, but stopped suddenly. She had said "an engagement no matter how small." I would take her at her word!

"You've thought of something for me!" she exclaimed, while Bridges sulked because he numbered no theatrical potentates among his friends.

"I'm almost ashamed to suggest it," I said, "but I could get you a 'job' of a sort here. The proprietor of this hotel and his wife (good creatures and ambitious to cut a dash in the fashionable world) want a pretty girl—a 'real actress'—to sing and recite in the roof-garden these fine summer evenings. I don't suppose you——"

"Oh, yes I *would!* I'd love to be here. It would be *fun!*" Helen broke in. "I adore flying; and I should see *you* often—and Mr. Bridges too, perhaps. Anyhow, it would do to go on with till I got something else, if they'd pay me a 'living wage.'"

"I'll be your agent, sing your praises and screw up your price," I imprudently volunteered. Imprudently, because having arranged matters between the hotel people and Miss Hartland, I found her gratitude oppressive. She said it was gratitude; yet she seemed to think that I had got her placed at the Aviation Park Hotel in order to enjoy her society. This was not the case. Helen Hartland was pretty, with charming ways for those who liked them: but I was in the state of mind which sees superlative beauty and charm in one woman only. Because I was separated from Maida Odell by force of circumstances while she remained with the Grey Sisterhood, it was irritating to see other girls flitting about free to do as they pleased. It bored me when I had to lunch or dine at the hotel to find Helen always on hand with "something to tell," or my "advice to ask."

Whether the girl had taken a fancy to me, or whether she was amusing herself by exciting Bridges' jealousy, I didn't know: I knew only that I was bothered, and that Bridges was miserable.

Helen lived in the hotel from the first, partly through kindness on the part of her employers, partly perhaps because they thought her presence an attraction. They gave her a decent salary—more than she had ever earned in the small parts she'd played at home: she dressed well, and made a "hit" with her sweet soprano voice, her really glorious yellow-brown hair, and that wistful smile of hers. Next door to the best and biggest bedroom in the house was a small room which connected with the larger one, and could be used as a dressing-room. Nobody ever engaged it for that purpose, however, and Mrs. Edson, the landlady, suggested that Miss Hartland should occupy the little room until it was wanted. The girl described it to me as delightful. There were double doors between it and the large room adjoining, so that one wasn't disturbed by voices on the other side. There was also a door opening close to the service stairway which went up to the roof-garden. This was convenient for Helen, before and after her songs and recitations. She bought little knick-knacks to make her quarters pretty and, with a patent folding-bed and a screen or two was able to ask her friends in, as if she were the proud possessor of a private sitting-room.

I made excuses instead of calls; but one day I was lured in to see Charlie Bridges (who by then had a hangar on the grounds) do his wonderful "stunt," considered by the Edsons a fine advertisement for their hotel. It was not, however, for purposes of advertisement that the California Birdman performed the "stunt" in question, but rather for love of Helen Hartland. In the small, smart "one seater" which he was using, he would dive from a height, swoop past Helen's open window and throw in a bunch of roses. It was said that his aim was invariably true, a more difficult feat than might be supposed: anyhow the day that I was there to witness the exhibition it was a brilliant success. Whether by accident or design the flowers hit me on the head, and if Charlie were really jealous he accomplished a neat revenge.

"I could see you as plain as a pikestaff sitting there," he said afterwards. "Oh, I don't mean the 'plain' or the 'pikestaff' in a nasty way, Lord John. I only mean I recognised you as I flew by."

"And Mrs. Edson too, who was with us, I suppose," I hurried to say: for I didn't wish the boy to think that he had anything to fear from me. I saw from his manner, however, when we happened to meet, that he was worried, and to give him the chance which I didn't want for myself, I began to avoid Helen.

This course wasn't easy to steer, I found, while duty kept me often at the aviation grounds. She sent me notes. I had to answer them. She asked me to lend her books. I couldn't refuse. At last she wrote a letter, confessing that she had got into trouble about money. Her salary "wasn't bad, considering"; but she hadn't understood American prices. She'd been stupid enough to run into debt. Would I, as her countryman, help her out of just *one* scrape, and she wouldn't get into another? Of course, Mr. Bridges would be glad to do it, but she didn't want to take a favour from him. I was "different."

I sent her a hundred dollars, the sum she specified, but in writing her thanks, she "chuffed" me for not making out a cheque. "I believe you think me capable of trying to get a hold on you," she wrote. Naturally I didn't bother to reply to that taunt, but kept out of Helen's way more persistently than before, until one afternoon Mrs. Edson buttonholed me. I happened to have seen Helen on her way to New York, so I was venturing to lunch at the hotel.

"I'm worried about Miss Hartland, Lord John," she began. "A sweet girl, but I'm afraid she's being silly! Do you know what she goes to New York for so often?"

"I didn't know she did go often," I said.

"Well, she does. She's taking lessons in hypnotism or something and I believe she's paying a lot of money. A circular came to her about a course of lectures, claiming that the *will* could be strengthened, and any object in life accomplished. That caught poor Helen. She simply ate up the lectures, and became a pupil of the man who gave them. That's why her salary's gone as soon as she gets it—and sooner! Poor child, I'm sorry. The thing she *ought* to want, she won't take. The thing she does want she can't have, if she spends every cent trying to gain 'hypnotic power.'"

"What does she so violently want, if it's permitted to ask?" I inquired.

Mrs. Edson looked at me in a queer, sidewise way. "You'd only be cross if I told you," she said. So instead of repeating the question, I asked another. "Who is the professor of hypnotism who gives Miss Hartland lessons?"

"I can't remember," the landlady replied. "I saw the circular, but that was some time ago, and I've forgotten. Now, the child won't talk about him."

The thought of Rameses sprang into my mind. I recalled the mystery of Helen's summons to America. Could it be possible that Doctor Rameses had wanted a "cat's-paw" for some new chestnuts to be pulled out of the fire? What would Helen Hartland's poor little paw avail him for that work? I went on wondering. But the ways of the Egyptian were past finding out—or had been, up to date. It was within the bounds of possibility that thinking to compromise me, he had sought in England a girl—preferably an actress—whom I had known; within the same bounds that he might have induced her to cross the sea, in the hope that, once on this side, we might play his game. So far-fetched an idea would never have come into my head, had not Mrs. Edson mentioned the circular, and the professor of hypnotism. But once in, I couldn't get it out. I determined to take the next chance to catechise Helen.

It arrived by accident, or I thought so, believing myself a free agent; instead of which I was a fly blundering into a spider's web.

From Maida Odell and from the elderly waiter who had looked over the parapet at a man in a broad-brimmed hat, I have since obtained threads which show how the web was woven: but some disastrous days were to pass first.

During this time I heard nothing from Maida, but I had memories to comfort me, and it was good to feel how few miles were between us. Strange that, few as they were, no telepathic thrill was able to warn me of what was happening behind the high garden walls of the Sisterhood House!

Maida has told me since, how the Head Sister called her one day for a talk. "I want to make a little journey and try to do a little good," the grey-veiled lady said in the deep voice which Maida had once thought sweet as the tones of a 'cello. "I should like you to go with me, but—there is a reason why perhaps you would rather I took someone else. Still, I feel bound to give you the choice, as you are my dearly-loved and trusted friend through *everything*."

"Why should I want you to take someone else, Sister?" Maida asked.

"Because—a man who would steal you away from us if he could, is often at the place where we must go. He visits the young English girl I am asked to help; and I fear that his interest in her is not for her good. Now, dear child, don't be angry with me for saying this! I don't ask you to believe. I tell you only what I hear from my philanthropic friend in New York who enables us to do some of our best work. I wish he would let his name be mentioned, but even his right hand is never allowed to know what the left hand doeth! In any case the girl is in difficulties, as this doer of noble works hears from one of his assistants. She is an actress who sings in a gay, rowdy sort of hotel frequented by sportsmen and their friends. I am requested to offer her a home here, if she chooses to come, and eventually to send her back to England at the expense of the Sisterhood funds. Now you see why I spoke. You shall go or stay, as you wish."

Once Maida had thought all the Head Sister's precepts and acts beyond criticism. But things had passed in Sisterhood House which had slightly—almost imperceptibly—broken the crystal surface of perfect trust. She found herself wondering: "Why does Sister advise me not to think of Lord John? Why does she hint horrid things of him, yet take me where we may meet?"

There was no answer to this question in Maida's mind, but she said that she would go with the Head Sister on the "mission": and in her heart she hoped that we might meet. She had been tried and tested before, and again she was loyal in thought.

The conversation between those two at Sisterhood House took place the day after my talk with Mrs. Edson. And while Maida and the Head Sister discussed the short journey they planned to make, I was probably dashing off a hasty letter to Helen Hartland. "I want to see you," I wrote, "about something rather important. Please send a line in answer, and tell me at what time I may call to-morrow afternoon."

In answer to this, Helen replied that she would see me at five o'clock. "I'm very unhappy," she added. "I know you want me to go back to England, and I believe you're *afraid* of me. I think you

are cruel, but I'm thankful you're coming to see me of your own free will."

I should have been dumbfounded at this morbid nonsense, if the thought of Rameses hadn't been haunting my mind. If he were the power behind the throne in this business, he might have stuffed the girl with false ideas about me, or else actually have hypnotised her to write in this unbalanced fashion.

I had been in my hangar, or flying, most of the day, and came to the hotel half an hour before the appointment, to make myself tidy for a call. Looking out from the window I saw a grey automobile flash by and slow down as if to stop at the door. Whether it did stop or no, I couldn't be sure, as I could not see so far; nor should I have been interested had the thought not flashed through my head that it looked like the car which belonged to Sisterhood House.

Nothing seemed less likely than that it should come to the Aviation Park Hotel: and there were many autos of that make and colour on Long Island. I thought no more about it, little dreaming of the surprise Doctor Rameses' genius had prepared for Maida and for me. Now I ask myself where was my prophetic soul wandering at that moment? Perhaps it was searching for Maida: but it would only have to look close at hand to see her walking in to the hotel in the adorably becoming costume of the Grey Sisterhood. The inevitable Head Sister was with her, of course: but not in command, according to custom. Even before starting, she had complained of a headache, and Maida had suggested putting off the expedition: but the sufferer refused such self-indulgence. During the drive to the hotel, she was speechless with pain, and Maida, who had never seen the strong, vital directress in such a condition, was anxious. "I'm afraid we must take a room in the hotel for a while, where I may lie down until I'm able to see Miss Hartland," the Head Sister said as the grey car drew up at the door. Maida was thankful for this concession, but surprised that she should be told, in a faint voice, to engage the best room in the house. The Head Sister was usually spartan in her ways, setting an example of self-sacrifice to all those under her care.

Maida obeyed without comment, however, and the big room adjoining Helen Hartland's, with the double doors between, was given to the two ladies of the Grey Sisterhood.

These happenings—and certain developments which followed quickly—I learned long afterwards from Maida's own lips, when we were putting "two and two together." From the elderly Austrian who acted as a waiter in the roof-garden I forced another part of the same story, hearing from him that he had been one of Rameses' many servants. This I succeeded in doing too late to pull myself out of the pit which was waiting (at this very moment) for me to tumble into it. Nevertheless there was satisfaction later in knowing that my researches had never strayed from the right track.

It had been raining that day, I remember—an unlucky thing for the aviation "fans," come from far and near to see a new way of looping the loop demonstrated by two American pupils of mine, and myself: a lucky thing for the most daring experiment ever attempted by Doctor Rameses. People were walking about between nights, with umbrellas held low over their heads to protect them the better from a straight, steady downpour. Thus, roofed with wet silk domes they could see little except their own feet and each other. It was only when something happened aloft that it was worth while to unroof themselves: and at such moments all attention was concentrated on the sky. The air-show was a good one. Soaked enthusiasts rushed to the hotel for a "quick lunch" and drinks and rushed away again, or congregated on the roof with sandwiches in their hands. Waiters in the roof-restaurant walked with chins up: and there was a moment when one of their number—old Anton, the Austrian—was able to lure even the kitchen staff, cooks and all, out of doors for a few minutes. By a weird decree of fate, it was a flight of mine that they were invited to desert duty in order to witness!

While the kitchen was empty and the door open, with men's backs turned to it, Anton had given a signal. A mackintoshed figure slipped in, and finding the coast clear, made for the food elevator, which was ready to mount. Inside there was room for a man to crouch. Anton, darting into the kitchen, sent the lift up: then darted out again to tell the cook and cook's assistant a spicy anecdote about me!

There was no stop for the elevator between kitchen and roof. It was a slow traveller, and as the open front rose above the restaurant floor, the crouching man within could see at a glance what hope he had of running the gauntlet. The moment could not have been better chosen. I was in the act of doubling my loop, and everyone on the roof—guests and waiters—had crowded to the flower-fringed parapet. The lift was artistically concealed by an arbour of white painted trellis-work, as I have explained; but sharp eyes could peer between the squares overhung with climbing plants, and see all that went on upon the other side. The crouching figure crept out, rose, and precipitated itself down the service stairway whose railed-in wall was also masked by the trellis arbour.

It could not have been long after this that I finished my work for the day, and came to the hotel, as I have said, to keep my appointment with Helen Hartland; but meanwhile there had been time for the man in the high-collared mackintosh coat to finish *his* work also. He had not, of course, ventured to try returning by the way he came, but had run down the service stairs and walked out of the house by a side entrance. Thanks to the rain and the umbrellas, and the call of the sky, he escaped, as he entered, without being seen. If Anton had not been compelled to

betray him later, the mystery of the Aviation Park Hotel would never have been solved.

Before I went (as requested in Helen's last letter) to knock at her door, a new cause of excitement had arisen. Charlie Bridges had crashed to earth in his machine, close to the hotel, and crowds had collected round the fallen aeroplane. Those who saw the fall, were able to explain why the 'plane was scarcely injured. Bridges had been swooping at the time, so close to earth that the drop amounted to nothing: but for some curious reason he had lost control of the machine. He was far more seriously hurt than he ought to have been, for not having been strapped in, he had slid from his seat somehow, and been caught under the machine. Unconscious and suffering from concussion the "California Birdman" was carried into a ground floor room of the hotel, while a "hurry call" was sent over the telephone for the nearest doctor.

All this happened unknown to me, for the room in which I was dressing was on the opposite side of the house. Any shouts I heard, or running men I saw through the window, were only part of the ordinary show for me. At precisely five o'clock I went my way through various corridors and knocked at Helen's door, in ignorance of Charlie Bridges' misfortune.

The door stood slightly ajar, as if Helen had left it so purposely for me: but no answer followed my knock. I tapped again more loudly, and the door fell open at my touch. No one was in the room; but close to the window, on the floor, I saw a bunch of crimson roses, wet with rain.

"Bridges!" I said to myself, with a smile.

For a moment I hesitated outside the door: yet rather than go away and miss the girl when she arrived (I imagined that she had run up to the roof), or lurk in the corridor to be stared at by passing servants, I decided to walk into the room and wait. Probably, I thought, this was what Helen had meant, in leaving the door ajar.

If the door of the next room had opened at that instant, and Maida had looked out, the history of the wretched weeks which followed might have been different for us both. But the door remained closed, and no instinct told me who was behind it. No one saw me walk into Helen Hartland's room; and therefore no one could tell at what hour I had entered.

I did not look out of the window, or I should have seen the fallen aeroplane which must still have been on the ground. I left the flowers—red as their giver's blood—lying on the floor for Helen to find when she came: but minutes passed and Helen did not come.

I sat down in a chair drawn up by the table and glanced at a couple of books. Both had been lent by me at Helen's request, and had my name on the flyleaf. I laid them down again impatiently on the gaudy cotton tablecloth; and took out my watch. Ten minutes after five! ... Soon it was the quarter past. I was resolving impatiently to scrawl a line on a visiting-card, and go, when I heard a slight noise, as if someone in the adjoining room were unlocking a door. I knew from Helen's description that there were two doors, with a distance of at least twelve inches between.

"Can she be using that other room, too?" I wondered: when suddenly there rang out a scream of horror, in a woman's voice. It seemed to me that it was like Maida's, though that must be a mere obsession! but I sprang to my feet, dragging off the tablecloth and bringing down on the floor books, papers, and a vase of flowers. My chair fell over also: and all this confusion in the room was afterwards used against me.

I rushed to the door leading out to the corridor—which I had closed on entering—and found a swarm of people, guests and waiters, already pouring down the service stairs from the roof-garden just above. Everyone saw me come out of Helen Hartland's room: but even if they had not seen, there was my hat with my initials in it, on the floor with the rest of the fallen things, to testify to my late presence.

As we crowded the narrow corridor, the door of the "best room" whence the scream had come, was flung wide open, and to my amazement, Maida Odell—in her grey costume of the Sisterhood—rushed out pale as a dead girl.

"Murder! A woman murdered!" she whispered rather than cried, as one strives voicelessly to shriek in a dream. Just then she saw me, and held out both hands as if for help. I pushed past everyone else and got to her: but others surged forward and she and I gave way before the crowd. A dozen men at least must have jostled into the room after us; but at the instant I hardly knew that they were there. I saw a big woman in grey drawing a veil closely round her face as she rose from a cushioned lounge: and I saw lying on the floor the body of Helen Hartland with a thin stiletto sticking in her breast—a stiletto I had lent her to use as a paper knife. I recognised it instantly in redoubled horror, though not thinking then of consequences for myself.

By this time a policeman—one of those always present on the aviation grounds—forced his way through the crowd massed in the corridor. He got rid in summary fashion of everyone, except the two ladies, occupants of the room, myself (because I seemed to know and have some business with them) and the landlord. Another policeman who followed close on his heels, guarded the doors of the adjoining rooms, and doubtless a third busied himself in sending off frantic telephone calls.

Helen Hartland lay on her back on the pale grey carpet stained with her blood; and Maida told tremulously how the tragedy had been discovered. The Head Sister, feeling ill, had lain down on a sofa not far from the door of communication between this room and the next. She had fancied a noise on the other side, and asked Maida to try if the door were fastened. Strangely, it was not (though Edson cut in to protest that it, and all other communicating doors were invariably locked). The door had opened as the handle turned, and to the girl's horror the figure of a dead woman—standing squeezed in between the two doors—had fallen into the room.

Hardly had the faltering explanation reached this point when a doctor arrived—the man who had been in the hotel, attending Charlie Bridges. He examined the body, pronounced that life had not been extinct for half an hour, and thought from the position of the weapon, that death had been caused by another hand than Helen's own.

There was, of course, no difficulty in identifying the girl, for the landlord and I were both on the spot retained to give evidence. It soon came out that Helen Hartland had told Mrs. Edson she expected a visit from Lord John Hasle, and I without hesitation admitted making it. The Head Sister chimed in, saying that she and her friend had come for the express purpose of seeing Miss Hartland and persuading her to leave "her unsuitable position." The adjoining room was entered, for it was found that the second of the double doors was unlocked. The confusion was remarked, and silence was maintained when I told how in jumping up at the sound of the scream I had thrown down a chair and pulled off a tablecloth.

The books with my name written in them were handled by the policeman who had taken charge, and by his superior who soon arrived on the scene. Letters of mine—albeit innocent ones—were unearthed. A few drops of blood were discovered on the strawberry-coloured carpet between the table and the door, as well as between the double doors, in the narrow space into which the body had been thrust. Worse than all, my monogram was seen to adorn the stiletto paper-knife; and later (when I had been rather reluctantly arrested on suspicion) the last letter Helen had written turned up in my pocket. I had slipped it in and forgotten about it; but with so many damaging pieces of evidence that capped the climax. The girl accused me in so many words of wishing to get her out of the way, to send her back to England.

It seemed like a nightmare, and a stupid nightmare: one of those nightmares when you know you are awake yet cannot rouse yourself: I, John Hasle, brother and heir to the Marquis of Haslemere, lay under strong suspicion of having murdered a pretty little third-rate actress who had become troublesome to my "lordship"—Helen Hartland.

Everything was against me, nothing apparently for me: yet I was almost insolently sure that my innocence would prove itself, until the lawyer my friends engaged in my defence showed me how seriously he took the matter.

"You're in a bad fix," he said, "unless we can find someone to prove that you weren't in that room long enough to have killed the girl and hidden her between the doors. You see, that would have been a smart dodge on the murderer's part, putting her there. If the next room hadn't happened to be occupied (it seldom is, the landlady says) the man who did the trick would have had plenty of time to get away before the crime was found out. It was an accident that there were ladies on the other side to open the door of their room and see what was behind it. Your letters, your books, your stiletto—"

"It seems to me the stiletto is a proof of my innocence, not of my guilt," I ventured. "If I'd wanted to kill the girl, I wouldn't have done it in a way to incriminate myself, would I?"

"Hobson's choice," said the famous James Jeckelman, shrugging his shoulders. "You might have been in a rage and a hurry and had to take what there was at hand. You couldn't have shot her, because of the noise. It was a stab or nothing. No. If we're to save you, we must get hold of someone who *saw*."

That was easy to say, but not to do. Not a soul came forward to state that I had opened Helen Hartland's door at precisely five o'clock, to find the room empty; and that at a quarter past five the girl's body had fallen into the room next door. Even if there had been such evidence in my favour, it could not have freed me from suspicion. There might have been time to murder the girl, and hide her between the doors in less than fifteen minutes. But it was strange that she had not screamed.

Circumstantial evidence piled up: and the most hateful part for me was that Maida, as well as the directress of the Grey Sisterhood, should be called as a witness. I writhed at the thought that Maida was involved in the case, a case concerning the murder of a woman supposed to have loved me "not wisely but too well."

At first I thought only of this distressing phase of the business: but it wasn't long before I began to realise that Jeckelman had not exaggerated. My "position" was not to be allowed to tell in my favour, and socialists were hot in anger against the British "lord" who thought he could break any commandment he chose in America.

If only I had been sure how Maida felt, there might have been a rift in the dark sky. Could it be that her loyalty had stood this greatest test, or had the evidence and the Head Sister's hatred

done their work? I could not tell, and day after day I saw more clearly that I might go to my death without knowing.

The coroner's inquest had found against me: and the trial was coming on when one day Charlie Bridges suddenly woke to consciousness. For weeks he had lain between life and death. The concussion from which he suffered was so severe that for a time he had been a mere log. His soul seemed to have gone out of him. Delirium followed this state. Then he fell into a long, sound sleep, and waking, his first words were: "What's happened since I fell? Have they got the man who made Helen Hartland kill herself?"

The nurse who heard these questions thought that delirium had seized her patient again: but the doctor, coming in at that moment, understood that Bridges was in a normal state of mind. He realised that every word the sick man said might mean life or death for me. Cautiously he answered the question by another, speaking quietly, not to startle his patient. "Did Helen Hartland kill herself? Weeks have passed since you've been laid up, and the case was supposed to be murder."

"It was the same as murder," Bridges answered wearily. "Nearly everyone who knew us, knew I used to fly past her window and fling in a bunch of flowers. It was one of my stunts. I could always see what Helen was doing if she was in: and there was generally time for a smile. A smile's a thing quickly done. And that was the reward I got. This last time I saw a man standing over her in a strange way with his hand on her forehead, for all the world as if he was hypnotising her: a big tall man I'd never seen before. I was so surprised that I turned and flew back. The fellow must have seen my flowers fall into the room with my first go; but the second time I swooped past, Helen was *stabbing herself* with a kind of stiletto. That was all I saw. I went queer and sick, and felt that I'd lost control. My one thought was to get out and save her. I believe I must have tried to jump. That's the last thing I remember."

When he had finished, he fell back exhausted, and had to be revived. But there wasn't much time to waste. Knowing the immense importance of the statement, Doctor Graves got Bridges to repeat it as soon as he was able. As the words left his lips they were taken down, and then signed by him. Later he swore that the man he had seen with Helen was not Lord John Hasle.

"If it had been, I'd have let him go to the chair, even if he didn't kill her with his own hands. I'd not have opened my mouth to help him," Bridges said. "I hated the fellow because Helen liked him better than me. But I must say he didn't seem to encourage her much. Anyhow I can't keep still and let an innocent man die."

When asked if he could identify the hypnotist. Bridges was not sure. All he could say "for certain," he persisted, was that "John Hasle was younger and slighter and altogether a different type: there was no chance of a mistake."

I was saved—saved by my rival, poor Charlie Bridges, the last man on earth to whom I should have looked for help. But then, his help didn't precisely come from the earth: it came from the air.

I had been a fool, and I felt unworthy of the traditions I had made for myself, not to have suspected in what manner the crime had been committed. Of course I had thought of Doctor Rameses. I thought always of Doctor Rameses! But I had not seen any way of connecting him with the murder of Helen Hartland, even if he were the man to whom she had gone for lessons in "will power." Now, I saw the way, and I believed that at last the police would see also. Indeed, they were ready to see. When Rameses' name as one of the leading "crank doctors" of New York was earnestly brought forward by me, it was arranged that Bridges was to be given a sight of him. Unfortunately, however, on the day when the California Birdman first woke from his long trance, and it was prematurely announced in the papers that his delirium might be followed by a return of normal consciousness, Doctor Rameses left town for a holiday. His servants said that he had been suffering from nervous strain through hard work, and had been preparing for some time to take a rest. His favourite summer country resort was, it appeared, the White Mountains. He was sought there, but not found. And I believed that he never would be found—unless by me.

My only happy souvenir of these miserable weeks was a letter from Maida, which I shall keep as long as I live.

"I knew from the first that you were innocent," she wrote, "and if I had been called I intended to say so in the witness-box."

EPISODE VII

THE WATCHING EYE

"What shall I do?" I asked myself as I read a letter from Maida.

She begged a small and simple service, yet—I hesitated.

Roger Odell had begged me to look after her as well as I could in the circumstances, during his long absence. Those circumstances were difficult ones: for I was not allowed to visit her at the Sisterhood House, and she never went out unchaperoned by her "friend" the directress. Her wish was that I should give her the key of her "sanctum" at Roger Odell's shut-up house in New York. A caretaker named Winter, one of the old servants, was in charge of the place; but I had been appointed special guardian of the "shrine," as Maida called this sacred room.

"Shrine" was indeed rather an appropriate name; since it contained treasures which formed the sole link between the girl and her lost past. She had been brought, a child of four, by her dying mother to the father of Roger Odell, and her sole possessions had been a couple of miniatures, a curious Egyptian fetish, and an Egyptian mummy in a fine, painted mummy-case. The miniatures had been enlarged into life-size portraits of Maida's mother and a man in the uniform of a British officer, whom she believed to be her father. Both portraits hung on the wall of the "shrine," together with one of Roger Odell, Senior. These, with the mummy-case, were the sole contents of the room.

Roger and I had cause to think that enemies of Maida's unknown father had followed the child and her mother to America: and that the vendetta would not end until Maida—the last of the family—had paid with her happiness or even with her life for the sin of some ancestor. We had cause to think also, that the mummy in its painted case was of importance to them, and that they had tried in various ways to get hold of it. For its protection, Roger had had a clever electrical contrivance fitted up, by means of which anyone not in the secret and trying to touch the mummy-case would receive a violent shock. Before going away he had given me the plan of this mechanism, with directions for applying the current and turning it off. At the same time he had handed me the key of the shrine which Maida had left with him on departing for Long Island.

Now, she wanted this key.

"I went yesterday to my dear old home," she wrote, "to visit my treasures. But the shrine was locked; and Winter told me that Roger had given you the key. He said also that there was some kind of patent burglar alarm which had frightened a couple of thieves away, since I came to stay at Sisterhood House. Is that true? And is there danger in opening the door? I know I can depend upon you, when you send the key, to make it safe for me to go in. I'll post the key to you afterwards, if you like—and if Roger wants you still to be troubled with it. Please arrange for me to pay my visit to-morrow."

It seemed that there was only one way to answer this letter: by saying that I would arrange for the safety of the visit; and enclosing the key in my note. Nevertheless I hesitated. I was afraid to send Maida the key.

It was useless to explain to her the reasons for my seeming boorishness. She trusted the Head Sister. Nothing that had happened since she entered the Grey Sisterhood had opened the girl's eyes to the cruel falseness of the woman, as I saw it. Nothing, not even the affair of Helen Hartland, had made her believe that the friend she respected was one of the agents working for her destruction and my elimination. So I knew that if I refused the key I would seem a stupid blunderer to Maida.

"If only she'd waited a few days!" I thought. For after many unsuccessful attempts, we (I and Paul Teano) had contrived to get an employee—I may as well use the word "spy"—into Sisterhood House. She was a young but singularly intelligent girl whom Teano's wife, once known as "Three Fingered Jenny," had lately rescued from a set of pickpockets and "sneak thieves." We hoped great things from "Nippy Nance," as a protégée of the Head Sister, who did not suspect the girl's change of heart and profession. If she could get evidence that the directress of the Grey Sisterhood was the leader of a criminal gang, posing as a charitable reformer, I could not only say "I told you so!" to the incredulous police, but I could convince Maida of her own peril.

A few days more grace, and Nance might have been able to give us a satisfactory report! But I dared not delay. I had to decide, for Maida's letter must be answered. My desire to please her prevailed over prudence. I persuaded myself that I had no right to refuse such a request: that I must consent: that my vague fears were foolish. I had only to watch, and see that no harm came to Maida or to the mummy in its painted case.

I wrote that, in loyalty to the promise I had made Roger (made for her sake!) I couldn't leave the shrine without its "patent burglar protection" (as she called it) over night: but I would go to the house early in the morning and do everything necessary to ensure her safety if she wished to touch or open the mummy-case.

"I know if you had been willing to see me there, you would have suggested my meeting you at the house," I went on. "As you haven't, I daren't ask to be present: but I'll be in New York and at the Belmont Hotel all day, expecting a word. Will you call me up, or if not, will you send a line by messenger to say at what hour I shall go round again to make the "shrine" burglar proof? I enclose the key: and perhaps you will leave it for me with the caretaker."

Maida's letter had come to the Long Island hotel. I sent my answer from there by hand to Sisterhood House, where it would be taken in by a lay sister at the gate. The boy was ordered to wait for a reply, if reply there were, but I thought it unlikely Maida would answer so soon. I fancied she would consult the Head Sister, and that a response would be delayed till the last minute. I was mistaken, however. My messenger presently came back with a letter.

It was sweet, and full of gratitude for the "trouble" I was taking. "I am 'willing' to see you," she quoted. "I'm more than willing! I shall be glad to see you. I have *permission* to do so. Will you call at Roger's house about two o'clock? I don't know what time I shall arrive; perhaps much earlier; but I promise not to leave until I've had a talk with you. I'll tell Winter to show you into Roger's study to wait. I shall have a companion. But it's just possible I may be granted a few minutes alone with my brother's best friend!"

This made me happier than I had been since the night when I fell in love with Maida. Nevertheless, I didn't forget the need to watch Roger's house, from the moment that the "shrine" and the mummy-case were released from their patent protection. Not that I distrusted Maida. I believed in her as I believed in Heaven. But she might be deceived: and it was my business to guard her interests.

I went to the house, as I had agreed to do, early in the morning, and not only switched off the electric current which protected the shrine and its contents day and night, but removed the small visible parts of the apparatus in case someone had the intention of studying the mechanism. I informed Winter that he might expect Miss Odell with one of the ladies from the Grey Sisterhood, and that I would return at two o'clock. I then went back to the hotel where I stayed when in New York, for I could not bear to do the necessary spying myself. A man from Teano's agency was engaged to watch the house, and 'phone instantly if anyone other than the ladies in grey uniform entered; also if one or both of these ladies went away.

No message came: and a little before two o'clock I arrived at the door. My man, disguised as a member of the "white wings" brigade, was visible in the distance. I gave the signal agreed upon to mean "You can go!" and went, as arranged, into Roger's study at the back of the house, Winter having told me that "the ladies were upstairs."

I waited for half an hour; for three quarters: and then, growing anxious, sought the caretaker, who had potted down into the basement. He was surprised at my question. "Why, I thought the ladies was both in the library with you!" he stammered. "I was in the hall, where you told me to wait. They came down and said they were going to talk to you. Miss Maida's friend, the lady with the thick veil, had a telegram to send. She asked me to take it, and gave me something for myself. I supposed it was all right when I got back just now, to stop in my quarters for a bit, as the lady said they'd be staying some time."

What a fool I had been to think, because I had arrived on the scene, that it was safe to send the watcher away! It was my trust of Maida that had undone me. I had believed so blindly in her promise not to go without seeing me, that I had thought all danger of a trick was over. I hadn't reflected that the enemy was clever enough to trick her at the last minute, as well as me!

I dashed upstairs to the "shrine" found the door open and the mummy-case gone! This was the worst blow that could fall, because, once the mummy-case was actually in the hands of those who had schemed to get it, every hope of Maida's safety seemed to vanish. In the street, I could find no one who had seen the great painted box carried from the house or taken away in any vehicle. Next, I inquired at the houses adjoining, and opposite, with no better luck: but in the shame and confusion which obscured my mind, it appeared probable that the Sisterhood car had taken ladies and mummy-case as swiftly as possible to the Sisterhood House.

My own car was under repair, and I had been spinning round New York in a taxi. Now, I returned for a moment to my hotel, in the desperate hope of a message from Maida. There was nothing: but as I was hurrying out, I met Teano.

"Hurrah, my lord!" he exclaimed. "What luck to catch you like this! I thought perhaps you'd have got back from Mr. Odell's house by this time, but if you hadn't I was going round to find you. Is the young lady all right?"

"Why do you ask?" I caught him up.

"Because Nance is at our flat. She had leave for the afternoon—the first time she's got off: a sign they trust her. She's got a report, my lord. It's a blood-curdler!"

"Take me to your place and let me hear it," I said, reflecting that it would be stupid to flash off to Long Island, when Nance's news might save a wild goose chase. At worst, I should lose but a few minutes. And taxying to Teano's, I told him in a few words what a mess I'd made of things.

"They won't have gone back to Long Island," he said excitedly. "You'll understand when you hear Nance and perhaps you'll have some theory."

Nance—a sharp-faced midget who would make as good a thief-catcher as she had been a thief—was proud of her achievement. She was on the way to get proof of the Sisterhood's secret. A girl had half confided in her, and had stopped in fright; but Nance expected to prove soon that

the Grey Sisterhood was a "regular gang," associated with "high up ones" in New York. "There's a big boss over the whole shebang," she said, "but he's made a bolt. I don't know where—but I'll find out. I guess he's jumped the country; and I guess m'lady o' the mask (that's what we calls the Head Sister behind her back: we all know she wears somethin' under her veil to hide a beauty spot) will be joinin' him. She's been sort o' gatherin' things together as if for a flit, these last two days, but I couldn't make a break to get word to you."

Nance had more to tell, but nothing which directly concerned Maida. We could only draw our own deductions that the Head Sister wouldn't "flit" unless she could take the girl. Because Doctor Rameses had found America too hot for him after his last plot against me, no doubt the directress of the Grey Sisterhood had been waiting her chance to play Ruth to his Boaz.

She had now accomplished her great coup, in securing the mummy-case which interested Rameses; and if she'd been able to force or wheedle Maida into breaking faith with me, she could force or wheedle her to the ends of the world.

"Egypt!" I said aloud, as if the word had been spoken in my ear, and I echoed it. "These devils want to get the girl to Egypt and finish the vendetta that began there. What ships sail to-day?"

We learned that one was leaving for Bordeaux, and another for Naples. Both had been due to sail in the morning, but had been delayed, owing to the strict inspection of cargo. Some lively telephoning followed, but we could get no information from the agents concerning such passengers as we described. Nance was ordered back post-haste to Sisterhood House in case, contrary to our theory, the pair had returned. Teano sent a man to the ship sailing for France; and I myself started for the one Naples-bound, the night luggage I'd brought from Long Island on my taxi. I had a mission from my Government, which I served during my convalescence, and I had no right to leave without permission. But I was ready to sacrifice my whole career, rather than see Maida sail for Egypt with a cruel and unscrupulous enemy.

I arrived at the dock just in time to see the ship moving out. In desperation I tried to hire a tug, at no matter what price, to follow and board her when she shed her pilot. The thing was impossible. It was small consolation to be assured that no such ladies as I described were on board. I felt almost certain they were there, in ordinary dress, having changed from the uniform of the Grey Sisterhood. When every effort had failed in this direction, however, there remained half a hope that they might have been found by Teano's man on the ship starting for Bordeaux. There was a chance of reaching her before she steamed out, and that chance I took; but fate was against me again. She had been gone twenty minutes when my taxi rushed me to the wharf. "You've missed nothing. They weren't aboard," said the detective, who awaited my arrival. But how could I be sure that he was right?

The next thing was to cable the police at Naples and Bordeaux: yet so far we had no definite proof against the Head Sister, who had the luck as well as the ingenuity of her supposed partner, Doctor Rameses. She could merely be watched on her arrival at a foreign port, not held: and I dared not even take it firmly for granted that she and Maida had left America, till Teano's frantic energies should bring further particulars of their movements. I blamed myself for the embroglio: still, I would not say, even in the privacy of my own head, "If I hadn't trusted the girl so blindly!"

I spent that night in New York, hoping for news from one direction or other: and though it was not till the morning that Teano picked up anything authentic, I had better fortune. A sudden inspiration came as I walked up and down my room, smoking more cigarettes than were good for me, and racking my brain for a solution of the puzzle.

"What if Maida left a note for you in the shrine, hoping you'd have the sense to look?" a voice seemed to whisper in my ear.

Instantly I became certain that she had done so. It was past ten o'clock, but I jumped into a taxi and flashed back to Roger's house. After pressing the electric bell a dozen times at least, Winter appeared in deshabille, inclined to grumble. I went straight to the violated shrine, and switched on the electric light in its curious globes of golden glass. The portrait of Maida's beautiful mother faced the door and gazed into my eyes. Never had I quite realised its likeness to the girl. It was as if Maida looked at me.

"If there's anything, it will be behind that portrait," I thought. Going straight to it, I lifted the heavy gold frame, and a folded piece of paper fell to the floor. No writing was visible, but I knew I had found what I sought.

Opening the note, I had a shock of surprise. The paper had the name and crest of my New York hotel upon it; and the few lines scrawled in pencil were signed "John Hasle." So well was the writing imitated, that my best friend would have sworn it was mine.

The letter began abruptly (perhaps the forger didn't know how I was accustomed to address Maida): "Something has happened. I am sending a closed automobile to take you away and your friend also. Get her to consent. It is necessary for the safety of your future. The chauffeur and an assistant will carry down the mummy-case if you ask them. They have my instructions already, and will bring a packing-box in which it can be placed in the hall downstairs, in order not to be conspicuous. The mummy will no longer be safe where it is. I'll explain when we meet. I am

called away from America at once, on official business, and the man with the chauffeur knows the ship on which I sail this afternoon. I beg you will do what he asks, as you may depend on him as my mouthpiece, and I have time now for no more. Yours ever and in haste, John Hasle."

Underneath, Maida had scribbled, also in pencil, "Your letter has been handed me just outside the door of this house. I don't understand it. Though I suppose it's genuine, so many strange things have happened, I am a little afraid. If there's any trick, and you come to look for me, I earnestly pray you may find this in time. I shall leave a tiny end of paper showing behind my mother's portrait, where I'll hide it."

Rameses I believed to be far away, out of reach: but the assistant he had left behind was worthy of him. She had reason to know the New York hotel I frequented: the note-paper was easy to get: only the forgery business needed an expert. And what a clever idea that the summons should come from me! The Head Sister had known how hard, perhaps impossible, it would have been to make the girl break her promise. Now I saw why consent had been given to my calling on Maida at her brother's house. Unconsciously I had been but a catspaw: and had not my darling girl felt vaguely suspicious, I might never have guessed how she had been enticed away.

The message told little: but at least it confirmed my theory that the two had gone on board ship. How Maida had been induced actually to sail, was another question, but even that might be answered some day.

In the morning, Teano was surprised, instead of receiving word from Nance, to see her in person. She had been sent on an errand from Sisterhood House to the nearest village, and rather than return had simply—as she expressed it—"taken French leave." The Head Sister had gone, leaving everything in charge of a woman next in authority. The inmates, sisters, lay sisters, and protégées (women and children) were told that the directress had news of a near relative's illness; she was obliged to be absent for a few days, perhaps longer. Unless later instructions arrived, all was to go on as if she were at home. Nance knew that the grey automobile used by the Sisters had come back from New York with a bundle in it; a bundle composed of two grey uniform cloaks and bonnets with veils. Somehow the two ladies had changed their outer garments, probably in that "closed motor" mentioned in the forged letter: and the bundle had been transferred from one car to the other, by the man with the chauffeur, doubtless a servant of the Head Sister.

Nance, prying for other details, had found and pieced together a few torn scraps of paper—the remains of a letter—stuck between the braided wicker-work and ribbon of a waste-paper basket in the directress's study. There were three of these bits, the largest no larger than a child's thumb nail, the smallest not half that size; but patching them together Teano was able to show me the mutilated words "meet—possible—Cair—"

This strengthened my conviction that the Head Sister, with Maida and Maida's mysterious mummy-case, was on the way to Egypt, where she would meet Rameses in Cairo. The two must have been on board the ship sailing for Naples, in some disguise not easy to penetrate. I determined to act on this supposition, explain the circumstances as best I could to our Ambassador, trying with his aid and, that of the cable, to get leave for Europe. If leave were refused, rather than abandon Maida to the mercy of her enemies, I would "chuck" the army. Eventually I could volunteer again, when strong enough to serve. But leave was not refused. My affairs were settled with lightning speed, and I sailed a few days later.

At Naples I got no definite news; but it appeared that, on board the suspected ship, there had been a number of nurses wearing a navy-blue uniform, with long veils attached to their small bonnets. Most of the nurses wore their veils thrown back, but a few covered their faces on leaving the ship. This gave me a clue—and a hope. The costume of a nurse afforded the necessary concealment. I guessed that the Head Sister had adopted it for herself and Maida, and that, through Rameses' influence, she had obtained passports.

No nurses in uniform had, so far as I could learn, lately left Naples for Egypt; but with the aid of the police I learned that three days before my arrival a tall, elderly woman, heavily cloaked and veiled, accompanied by a beautiful blonde girl, had sailed for Alexandria. Their papers described them as the wife and daughter of a French doctor in Cairo, and though permission for women to enter Egypt was difficult to obtain from British authorities at that time, they had it.

Whether or no this "Madame and Mademoiselle Rameau" were the Head Sister and Maida Odell, I could not be sure: but in any case my destination must be Cairo. On arriving there I could hear of no such person as Doctor Rameau: but I found army friends: help from "high up" was forthcoming. I learned what non-military persons had travelled during the last week, and what direction they had taken. Among the few women on the list there were only two who might be those for whom I searched; and *they were Egyptian ladies*. The sister and aunt of an official in Government employ had left Cairo by rail for Asiut, whence they were to do some days' desert travel, to reach the country house belonging to their relative.

I determined to follow; and at Asiut I engaged a small caravan. The little oasis-town near which I had been told to find the house was two days' journey from "The City of Sacred Cats"; and when we reached the place, the servants of Ahmed Ali Bey were surprised by the questions of my interpreter. Their master was in Cairo with his family, and they had not been warned of the

arrival of visitors. They were discreet and guarded in their answers, after the first moment of blank astonishment: but I realised instantly that the women I had followed from Cairo were not bound for this place. I had come up against a blank wall, and had only my own deductions to go upon. Were the supposed aunt and sister of Ahmed Ali Bey, Maida and her companion, or had I taken a false trail? Something within myself said that I was right as to their identity, but that the two (protected by the name of some friend of Doctor Rameses) had never intended to come to his house. Where, then, should I look for them?

They must, I thought, have come as far as Asiut, otherwise their passes would not have availed them in these days of military supervision. But beyond Asiut the desert stretched wide and mysterious. My only hope lay in the fact that caravans could be tracked, and that there were only certain directions in which stopping-places could be found. My camel-leader, who spoke a little English, described to me the three or four routes, one of which all travellers must choose in order to reach a desert inn or "borg" on the way to distant oasis villages or towns. But which should I choose?

In any case, we were obliged to retrace our steps for ten or twelve miles, as far as a certain well, and there I should have to decide definitely. It was late in the afternoon when we reached the spot again, and a wind which threatened simoom had covered the heart-shaped footmarks made by our own and other camels, as with a tidal wave. The sky was overcast, and of a faint copper colour, clouded with greyish veils of blowing sand. The desert was empty, or so I thought at first; but as I turned my field-glasses north, south, east and west, I saw something very far off which moved uncertainly towards us. Presently I made out that this something was a camel, alone, and without pack or rider: yet he must, it seemed, have broken loose from a caravan.

As he came nearer—perhaps sighting us from afar off and wishing for our company—we saw that he was white, or a very pale grey. He was not an ordinary pack-camel, but was of the aristocratic type, a *mehari*, well bred, with graceful swaying movements and long slender legs. My first year in the army I had spent in Egypt, where I'd picked up some Arabic and Turkish, and had been enough impressed with the strangeness of native life to remember many customs and superstitions. As the white *mehari* approached, a timid air of wildness mingling with its longing for society, I realised that it had been a pampered beast, dear to the heart of its vanished owner. Round its neck was an elaborate collar of beads and shells, with dangling fetishes of all sorts: brass and silver "Hands of Fatma," metal tubes for texts from the Koran, horns of coral and lumps of amber.

It seemed to me that there was something strange about the beast. It held its head in a singular way, shaking it from time to time, and my camel man thought as I thought. "This animal has been looked on by the Evil Eye," he said. "It brings misfortune where it goes. Perhaps it has had a fit of madness, and how comes to us in a quiet interval, only to deceive and then attack us. I have seen such things in the desert. A camel goes mad, kills its master, and seeks other victims for the demon that has entered into it. I will drive it off."

"No," I said, as the Arab would have threatened the camel with his stick. "Keep out of the creature's way if you like. I'm going to see if it will let me touch it."

Very cautiously, in order not to frighten the wild-looking beast, I urged my own mount a few steps forward, and held out a handful of dates. The camel eagerly fixed its eyes on the food and moved towards me as if magnetised. It stretched its neck so that the queer, purse-like nostrils and loose lips quivered above the dates: it hesitated: in another instant it would have snatched a mouthful had I not exclaimed aloud at a thing I saw.

Among the tubes and horns and Hands of Fatma hung a gold bangle with the name "Maida" in emeralds, Madeline Odell's birthstone. I recognised the ornament at a glance. She wore it always, even with the uniform of the Grey Sisterhood. I knew she had ridden this camel and that this was her call for help. She had hoped desperately that I might follow, and feeble as was the chance that I should ever see the bangle, she had snatched it because there was no other.

"Good God!" I cried sharply—and foolishly, for the camel took fright, and went loping away into the cloud of sand. "Come along!" I yelled to my man, and rode after it. "We must keep up with the beast. We must see where it goes."

I explained no more. Doubtless the Arab thought me as mad as the white camel, but I didn't care. The *mehari* had come to me as a messenger from Maida, and to lose sight of it would be, I felt, to lose her.

Fortunately, after the first sprint, the creature slackened speed, even turning its long neck now and then to see if we followed. So we went on, behind the shadowy form in the sand-cloud, until we came to the high adobe wall of a desert inn, a borg which my camel-man knew well. Outside the closed gate our quarry paused: as we drew closer it bounded away, stopped and hovered as if watching to see whether the gate would be opened to let us in. It was opened; and we were greeted by the landlord, a dull-faced fellow, half Arab, half French, who looked as if his favourite tippie were absinthe. In the act of letting us into the big, bare courtyard he spied the white camel in the distance. "Oh, it's you again, is it?" he muttered, and would have shut the gate quickly as my camel leader and I with the three animals of our tiny caravan entered.

"Is that white *mehari* yours?" I inquired.

The landlord shook his head. "But no!" he protested. "It is mad. It is a beast of evil omen."

"What did I tell the honoured gentleman?" said my man, delighted. But I was obstinate. "Don't shut the beast out," I directed. "It doesn't seem dangerous. I will pay you well to let it in, and for its food—or any damage it may do."

The landlord shrugged his shoulders; and when we had passed into the courtyard, he left the gate standing open. A moment later the white camel walked in, and instead of joining my animals, or another which was squatting on the ground to munch a pile of green alfalfa, it moved with a queer air of purposeful certainty to a window of the inn. The shutters of this window were closed, but the camel pressed its face against them as if it were trying to peer in.

"Ah, that is what the brute always does!" exclaimed the landlord in his *patois* of Arabic and the worst *Marseillais* French. "One would say his master was there. But the room is empty."

"Tell me about this animal and what is the matter with it?" I said, when I had got off my mount and it had been led away with the others by my Arab.

"All I know I will tell willingly," replied the man. "This white camel was one of a caravan that stopped here perhaps ten days ago. There was no other *mehari*. The rest were of the ordinary sort. I noticed this one and wondered, for such fine animals are rare among my clients. But soon I saw it was not right in its head. It was not mad in the dangerous way, which kills; but it was restless and strange. As we say, it had been looked on by the Evil Eye. Perhaps the leader of the caravan had got the brute cheap for that reason. Unless he wished some misfortune to fall upon the person who rode the white camel."

"What sort of person rode it?" I asked.

The man shrugged his shoulders. "I cannot remember which one rode it, coming here. There were several men and several ladies, the family of the leader. They stopped here for the night—a night of simoom."

"One of the ladies may have ridden the *mehari*?" I suggested.

"May have: yes, monsieur."

"And did one of the ladies occupy that room with the closed shutters?" I persisted.

"I do not know," said the landlord. "It was one of the rooms taken by the party. We do not pry into the arrangements of a family when they are clients for a night."

I divined from his manner, despite an assumed carelessness, that on the night in question something had happened to set that night apart from other nights: so I carried on my catechism. I learned that the travelling company had consisted of two Egyptian women, one possibly a maid, under the protection of an elderly, bearded man who was in bearing and speech a gentleman though his costume was that of a well-to-do Bedouin; a long cloak and hood such as Arab camel-leaders wear. His face had hardly been visible. Food had been sent to his room, also to the women, one of whom seemed to be weak and ill. They were both veiled and cloaked. She who was ill had not spoken. She had been helped into the house by her companion. There had been a scream, and some commotion in the night caused no doubt by the illness of this lady. The landlord had been out attending to a sick camel in the *fondouk*, and returning he saw the shutters of a window thrown back. The window itself was open, and this mad *mehari* was staring in. Then the window had been suddenly closed, in the camel's face. The creature had seemed frightened, and had galloped wildly about the courtyard, refusing to rest in the *fondouk* with its fellows, even when food was offered as an inducement. It had returned again and again to the same window, as if determined to look through the shutters. Early in the morning, the travellers had made ready to start. The sick lady had been worse. The old gentleman and his servants, of whom there were several, all negroes, had to make a kind of couch for her on the *mehari's* back, but the brute kept jumping up and refusing to be touched. At last the old gentleman grew angry and struck the animal on the head and face. It "went for" him furiously, and had to be caught and chastised by the negroes. No further attempt was made to use it after that. The leader of the caravan bought a good, steady pack-camel from the landlord, and left the white aristocrat at the borg. At first the proprietor thought that he was in luck to come into possession of such a fine creature, but it soon proved worse than useless. It refused food: it would not sit down. It was constantly at the window into which it had previously stared, or else at the gate trying to escape. After a day or two the Arabs employed about the *fondouk* said it was accursed, and asked the *patron* to get rid of the brute, lest misfortune fall upon the place. Accordingly the once valuable *mehari* was driven out into the desert, disappearing in the distance. But apparently it had not gone far. Since then it had returned several times with caravans, entering the courtyard with them, and walking at once to the window in which it was so strangely interested. "That is why," explained the landlord, "I now keep the shutters closed. I fear this accursed animal may break the glass before we have time to drive it away. There is not much travel at this time of year, and we have plenty of other rooms."

"All the same I should like to be put into that room to-night," I said. "And as you tell me the

white *mehari* is not wicked, there can be no danger in your letting it stay in the courtyard till morning. I'm curious about the creature, and should like to see what it will do."

The man tried to persuade me that there was nothing in the seeming mystery. He had rooms more comfortable than the one with the closed shutters. That had not been properly cleaned since the last occupation. As for the white camel, it would probably roar and make a disturbance in the night. I silenced these objections, however, in the one effectual and classic way: and I refused to wait for the room to be swept and dusted. I wished to go in immediately, I said, and later the bed could be got ready while I dined. Reluctantly the landlord gave his consent to this arrangement, and himself escorted me to the room in question, bringing my bag and a lighted lamp. I watched him as we entered, and noticed that he glanced about anxiously as if he feared I might see something which it would be better for me not to see. But, either he found nothing conspicuously wrong, or else he decided that it was a case of "kismet."

When he had gone, I didn't open the shutters at once. I wanted to have a look round, unobserved. Indeed, I took the precaution of stuffing paper into the keyholes of the two doors: one which opened into the corridor; another which communicated with the next room.

I knew it would be useless to ask the fellow whether the room had been occupied since the departure of the caravan which first brought the white camel. He would lie if it suited him to lie: and if there were anything to find out, I must find it out for myself. Never in my life, however, had I felt so strong an impression as I felt now that Maida's wish, Maida's prayers, had brought me to this place. I was certain that she had at last suspected treachery in the woman she had worshipped: that she had prayed I might follow and search for her: that she had made friends with the white camel in order to add a souvenir of herself to his neck-adornment: that she had some reason to hope he might be left behind at this desert borg when she continued her journey: that she had been in this room (where I seemed distinctly to feel her presence) and that something had happened there which the landlord either knew or suspected. Anyhow, the white camel knew, and I said to myself that I would give all I had in the world if the animal's half-crazed intelligence could communicate its knowledge to me.

This borg, like most crude desert halting-places for men and beasts, was a one storey building which enclosed a large courtyard on three sides. The fourth side of the yard was composed of an ordinary wall nearly as high as the roof of the house. One wing of the latter contained a row of bedrooms for travellers, each room having a window that looked on the court. The middle part, or main building, consisted of dining-room and kitchens: the remaining wing was the dwelling-place of the landlord's family, and at the end had a large open shed for camels and horses. My room, therefore, was on the ground floor. It was roughly paved with broken tiles, and had in front of the bed a strip of torn Spanish matting with a pattern of flowers splashed on it in black and red. There was very little furniture: a tin wash-hand stand: a deal table: an iron bedstead: and two chairs; but what there was had been left in a state of disorder since the flitting of the last occupant. Both chairs had fallen: the table, which had evidently stood in the middle of the room, was pushed askew, its cotton covering on the floor, its legs twisted up in a torn woollen rug: and—significant sign of a struggle—a curtain of pink mosquito netting had been wrenched from its fastenings and hung, a limp rag, at the side of the window.

The wretched paraffin lamp served only to make darkness visible; but taking it in my hand I walked round, examining everything: and my heart missed a beat as I saw that, among the scarlet flowers on the matting, were spots of brownish red—that tell-tale red which cannot be mistaken. They were few and small, and therefore had passed unnoticed, perhaps, by the landlord: yet to me they cried aloud. I tried to tell myself that the stains might be old: that I had no reason to connect them with danger for Maida: that as she had been brought so far, doubtless there was a further destination to which it was intended to take her. But as I finished my examination of the disordered room, turned out the light, and threw open the shutters my soul was sick.

"What happened here?" I asked myself for the twentieth time; and as if in answer to my question the white camel came glimmering towards me through the dusk. It stopped at my window, and thrusting its neck through the opening, stared into the room. The faint light gleamed in its yellow eyes, and gave the illusion that they moved as if following with emotion *something they saw*. The creature paid no attention to me, though it could have seen me standing near the window. Even when I spoke, coaxingly, it did not turn its head; and when I walked back and forth, it remained indifferent. Its gaze concentrated on that part of the room nearest the door leading to the corridor; and a shiver ran through my nerves to see the white head float from right to left on its long neck, as though eagerly watching a scene to me invisible. I felt the impulse to chase the beast away, but I checked myself. I had a queer conviction that what it could see I ought to see also: that if it remained it might *make* me see.

I turned up the wick of the lamp, and walked slowly towards the door, glancing back to see what the camel would do. Its head was poked far into the room. It looked like a queer white ghost, with glinting eyes. For the first time they seemed to meet mine, and I felt that the animal had become conscious of my presence in the picture its memory constructed. Close to the door, in a crack between red tiles, I saw something round and white which I took for a button; but picking it up, it proved to be an American ten cent piece. Not far off lay an Egyptian piastre, but it was the "dime" which thrilled me. The tiny silver coin proved that an occupant of this room had lately come from the United States. A little farther away I discovered broken bits of a small bottle, with a torn label. Matching scraps of paper together I made out part of a word which told

its own sinister story. "Morph": the missing syllable was not needed. And the label had the name—or part of the name—of a New York druggist:

"C. Sarge——" "Broadw——"

Already I began to visualise what the scene near the door might have been. I went out hastily and questioned the landlord again as to the destination of the white camel's caravan. I offered him so big a bribe for information that, if he had known anything definite, he could hardly have resisted the temptation to tell. But he had only vague suggestions to make. Perhaps the party might have been bound for Hathor Set, a small oasis-town with one or two country houses of rich men on its outskirts. It was twenty miles distant, and he could think of no other place within a day's march where persons of importance lived. Farther away, however, there were oases where merchants and officials owned houses which they occupied now and then, and where their families sometimes stayed for months.

If it had been possible I would have travelled on that night, but to do so would have been madness. I must wait till dawn: and though I did not expect to sleep I went back to my room when I had eaten some vile food, and arranged for the start at five o'clock.

"Weather permitting," added the landlord, with an ear for the moan of the sickly south wind.

"Weather must permit," I answered.

My side of the house was somewhat sheltered from the blowing sand; still, on such a night most desert dwellers would have shut their windows. I kept my window open, however; and lying on the bed, the lamp burning dimly, I faced it. The head of the white camel, on its long, swaying neck, was always framed in the aperture. I had brought from the dining-room a plateful of dates to tempt the animal, but it refused to touch them; and the landlord had told me that, so far as he knew, the *mehari* had eaten no food for ten days, since it first appeared at the borg. This accounted in a normal way for its thinness and the wild look of its eyes; but according to the man and his servants the "mysterious curse" upon the beast was destroying it. "A camel accursed can live twice as long as others with nothing to eat, and even with no water," the landlord had announced gravely, as if stating a well-known fact. "Then, suddenly, when the evil spirit is ready to leave its body, the creature will fall dead."

I was anxious that the *mehari* should not fall dead until I had finished making use of it: therefore I was glad to see it staring bleakly through the window, hour after hour. I hoped that, in the morning, it might lead me along the way its lost caravan had gone, and wherever it went I intended to follow. It was making me superstitious.

Now and then I dozed for a few minutes, to wake with a start and look for the watching face at the window, but at last I fell heavily asleep; and I dreamed.

I dreamed of the camel: and it seemed as if I dreamed *into* it. My intense wish to see what it had seen, no doubt accounted for this impression, but it could not account entirely for what followed. It was as though the light of the lamp burned down, and blazed suddenly up in the brain of the animal. I saw through its eyes, as by two searchlights illuminating the sordid room.

Maida Odell was led in by a taller woman. Both wore Arab costumes, with cloaks and veils, as if they had been travelling. Maida moved languidly. She let her companion take off her wraps. Her face was white, her eyes dazed. I knew, in the dream, that she had been drugged, and I hated the woman who touched her. The girl walked unsteadily to the window and threw it open, drawing in long breaths; and then the white camel came. I felt that it had been waiting for this moment: that it loved and was grateful to the girl for kindness, as no camel save a *mehari* ever can be. She took lumps of sugar from her pocket and fed it. The animal accepted them daintily. The woman ordered it away, closed the shutters, and drew the ragged mosquito curtain across the window. Darkness fell between me and the two figures. I saw no more; but after an interval of blankness I was conscious that Maida, left alone in the room, had opened the shutters, leaving only the mosquito-netting between her and the night. The camel, which had refused to rest with its fellows in the *fondouk*, came sliding towards the girl and let her caress it. Apparently they were the best of friends. She slipped a bangle from her arm, and tied it to the *mehari's* collar. She patted the white head, and whispered in the flat ear. The animal was in an ecstasy. At last Maida pushed it away gently, and leaning out of the window searched the courtyard. I had the impression, in my dream, that she thought of climbing out and attempting to escape on the *mehari* whose confidence she had gained for that very purpose. But at this moment a tall, bent figure in a hooded cloak walked slowly past, and turning his head, looked at Maida. His face was so deeply shadowed by the hood that I could not see the features. There was a glimpse of venerable whitish beard tucked into the cloak; but I knew, in my dream, that the man was Rameses posing as the leader of the caravan. I tried to speak, to call Maida's name, to ask her how it was that she had trusted these people: but I was powerless to make the girl feel my presence. "I must wait," I said to myself. "Some day she will explain why she consented to sail for Naples, and why she went on to Egypt."

"Some day!" the words echoed in my brain. Would the day come in this world, or must I solve

the greatest secret of all before I solved Maida's?

The dream went on, but I saw nothing when the girl closed the shutters. Soon, however, she flung them wide again; and though she had put out the light, the moon was shining in. I could see her moving about. She listened at the door, as if she heard something in the corridor. She had fastened the bolt, but now she discovered that it was broken. The door could be opened from the outside. She placed a chair against it, with the back caught under the handle. Then she went and sat down close to the window. The camel was there, and she spoke to it, as if she were comforted by its nearness. For a time she was very still. Her head drooped; but it was impossible to sleep for long in the high, uncomfortable chair. Now and then the girl started awake, always turning to glance at the door: but at last she fell into a deeper doze. Slowly the door opened, almost without noise. Maida remained motionless: but the watching *mehari* uttered a snarl. The girl sprang to her feet, not knowing what to do. A cloaked figure which had slipped in attempted to hide behind the open door, but was too late. Maida saw the gliding shadow, shrieked, and would have run into the corridor, but the man in the Arab cloak caught her on the threshold, and muffled her head in his mantle. She struggled in his grasp, and almost escaped. Chairs were overturned: the rug under the table was twisted round the man's feet: I thought that he would trip and fall, but he saved himself. Holding Maida with one hand, with the other he drew a bottle from some pocket, and pulled out the cork with his teeth. The girl freed an arm, but before she could push the bottle away the man emptied a quantity of the liquid over the cloth that covered her face. A sickly scent of chloroform filled the air. Still she fought bravely, her freed hand seized the bottle, and dashed it on the floor, where it broke with a crash. At this instant a woman in Arab dress came swiftly into the room. She was very tall, as tall as the man, and I noticed a likeness between their figures, a remarkable breadth of shoulder, something peculiar in their bearing. The woman's face was unveiled, but in the darkness I could not make out its features.

She shut the door hastily. The two spoke to each other in a language I could not understand. Maida struggled no more. The chloroform had taken effect. In my dream I felt that the two did not wish her to die: the time had not come. There was a climax towards which they were working, had been working for a long time. Now it was close at hand. The woman held a much smaller bottle than the one which lay broken. She had also a glass with a little water, and a spoon. These she placed on the wash-hand stand, and went swiftly to the window. Driving away the camel with a threatening gesture, she closed the shutters. It seemed as if they slammed in my face. I waked with a great start, and found myself sitting up in bed, my face damp with sweat.

The shutters, which I'd kept wide open, had banged together in the rising wind. I bounded off the bed to the window, and flung them apart again. Sand stung my face and eyelids. The white camel had disappeared, but there was a wild snarling in the *fondouk*.

"My wish has been granted," I said to myself, "I have seen what the watching eye saw in this room. But what did it see after that? Which way did the caravan go?"

I must have slept soundly, and longer than I thought, for behind the cloud of sand dawn was grey in the sky. Half an hour later I was out of the room, in the courtyard, where the Arab servants had begun to stir. From his own part of the building the landlord appeared. I told him that I had sent to have my man roused, and that I would start in spite of the storm.

"What has become of the white *mehari*?" I asked. "Is he in the *fondouk* after all?"

The man called one of his Arabs, asked a question, got an answer, and turned to me. "The beast snarled so wickedly it waked my fellows," he explained, "and they, not knowing of my promise to you, drove it into the desert. That must have been two hours ago."

I was furious, but scolding was vain. I had hoped superstitiously for the guidance of the watcher, till the end; but this was not to be. I must trust to my own instinct.

Despite the arguments of the landlord and my own man that it was dangerous to set out in the face of a simoom, we started, taking the route towards Hathor Set.

The blown sand had obliterated the tracks of men and camels. The desert, so far as we could see, was a vast ocean of rippling waves. I had brought no compass, trusting to the sun: but the sun was hidden behind the copper veil of sand. "We shall be lost, sir," said my man. "Shall we not be wise while there is time, and go back before our own tracks are blotted out? See, there ahead is a lesson for us: a camel that has fallen and been choked to death by the sand. Before night we and our animals may lie as it lies now, with the shroud that the desert gives, wrapped round our heads."

"A camel that has fallen!" I echoed. And striking my beast I rode forward till I reached the low mound to which the brown hand pointed.

The white *mehari* lay on its side, the head and half the body buried, the bead collar faintly blue under a coating of yellow sand. The watching eye was closed for ever: but I had the needed clue.

"We're not lost," I said. "This is the right way. We'll push on to Hathor Set."

EPISODE VIII

THE HOUSE OF REVENGE

This chapter of my life, which stands last but one in my journal, is Maida Odell's chapter rather than mine: and to make my part in it clear, her part should come first. Then the two should join, like a double ring of platinum and gold bound together with a knot.

One day Maida waked, after confused dreams of pain and terror. The dreams were blurred, as she began remembering. It was as if she were in a dim room trying to see reflections in a dust-covered mirror; then, as if she brushed off the dust, and the pictures suddenly sharpened in outline.

She saw herself reading a letter signed John Hasle. It seemed to be a true letter, and if it were true she must obey the instructions it gave; yet—she doubted. She saw herself scribbling a few words on the back of the letter, and hiding it behind the portrait of her mother, in the room she always called her "shrine," leaving just an end of white paper visible in the hope that John Hasle's eyes might light on it there. This picture was clear, and that of the mummy-case being taken out of the shrine by two men in a hurry. Why were they taking it? Why did she let it go? Oh, she remembered! The Head Sister had promised long ago to try and discover the secret of the past. She knew people all over the world, who were grateful, and glad to repay her goodness to them. Because of the mummy-case and the eye of Horus, those two mysterious treasures, the Head Sister believed that the enemy who strove unceasingly to ruin the girl's life must be an Egyptian, working to avenge some wrong, or fancied wrong. She suggested photographing the mummy, and the pictures of Maida's father and mother, in order to send snapshots to a man she knew well in Egypt—a doctor. He would take up the affair, out of friendship for her, and with those clues to go upon might learn details of inestimable value. Maida remembered writing to John Hasle at the Head Sister's suggestion, asking him to send the key of the shrine. He had answered, agreeing reluctantly; and to prove her good faith, the Head Sister had offered permission for a meeting at Roger's house. Then had come the letter from John Hasle, with its warning that the mummy was no longer safe in the shrine. Maida had done what he told her to do, and let the mummy-case be taken away, although the Head Sister had objected, and had even seemed hurt. But the Head Sister had not objected to go to the ship on which John Hasle said he would sail. She wished to question him before he went, and was as anxious as Maida was to know what danger threatened the mummy.

The girl recalled how, according to John Hasle's advice (brought by his messenger), she and the Head Sister had exchanged their grey costumes for blue ones, with veils hanging from neat bonnets. They had done this in the closed motor according to instructions, and they had gone on board the ship to bid John Hasle good-bye. There instead of finding him they had found a second letter, written as before on his hotel paper. It said that the plot against Maida was even more serious than he had supposed. At the last moment he had been obliged to stop in New York, and appeal to the police to help him thwart it. Her life was in danger if she returned to Long Island, or even to the city, before the enemy had been caught. There was every prospect that he would be caught in a few days, after which John Hasle would sail for Egypt as he had meant to do, and there unravel the whole mystery. The vendetta which had cursed Maida's life, and her mother's before her, would be ended. She might come into a fortune in her own right, instead of depending upon money given by the Odells. He implored her to be brave and take passage on the ship for Naples, though no doubt the Head Sister would oppose the idea. The Head Sister had not opposed it. She had read John Hasle's letter, and had offered to be the girl's companion to Naples, to take her on to Egypt if necessary. Once, she had not liked John Hasle; but she was obliged to agree with his opinion. She believed that he was right about Maida's danger: things she had found out in her researches convinced her that it existed. The ship would not sail for an hour or more. The chauffeur was bidden to take a letter from Maida to John Hasle at the Hotel Belmont, to bring one if he were there, and also clothing necessary for the journey, of which the Head Sister made a hurried list.

A letter had come back—a hasty scrawl in John Hasle's handwriting—to express joy in Maida's decision, and to tell her that the mummy in its case would go with her on the ship, addressed to his name.

Maida remembered how ungrateful she had thought herself in doubting the Head Sister's intentions. She had tried not to doubt, for so far in her experience she had received only kindness and sympathy from that wonderful friend. Wonderful indeed! Everything the Head Sister did was magnetic and wonderful, like her whole personality. This sudden decision to go abroad for Maida's sake was no more extraordinary, perhaps, than things she had done to help others. She said that she would wire the woman who stood second in authority over the Grey Sisterhood, and explain that, for excellent reasons, she had determined to visit the lately established branch in Cairo (Maida had heard of it and had subscribed, for its object was an excellent one: the rescue of European girls stranded in Egypt); she would add that she might not return for many weeks.

Maida felt that she ought never to have doubted. As for the letters from John Hasle, the handwriting seemed unmistakable; they could not be forgeries: the idea was ridiculous. She remembered how she had argued this in her mind, and how she had tried not to think of herself as helpless. She was doing what she wished to do! And yet, when she had asked "What else could I do, if I didn't wish to do this?" the answer was disquieting. Short of making a scene on shipboard and appealing to the captain, it was difficult to see how she could go against the Head Sister's urgent advice. She did not try to go against it; and after sailing, two or three wireless messages signed John Hasle brought her comfort. It was a coincidence that there should be a band of nurses on board the ship, with costumes almost precisely like hers and the Head Sister's, chosen apparently at random by John Hasle: but then, after all, there was a strong resemblance in the dresses of all nurses, provided the colours happened to be the same.

Even more clearly than the days on shipboard, Maida remembered arriving at Naples, and being met by an Englishman who introduced himself as an agent of John Hasle. He had a long comprehensive telegram to show, purporting to come from his employer in New York. This announced that John Hasle had not been able to obtain leave as soon as he expected, but that he had learned the "whole secret of the past." Miss Odell was to put herself in the hands of his agent who would conduct her and her companion to Egypt and there to a house where all mysteries would be cleared up. She would find herself in charge of important persons, old acquaintances of her parents, who would watch over her interests and explain everything connected with her family. All trouble and danger would be over for ever. Her brother Roger with his wife, Grace, having just returned to New York from the Argentine, would sail with John Hasle a few days after the sending of the telegram, to join Miss Odell and bring her home by way of France and England.

Maida recalled with a dull aching of heart and head her disappointment, her uneasiness; how she had insisted upon sending telegrams to her adopted brother, and to John Hasle, in New York, waiting for answers before she would consent to go on. The answers came, apparently genuine, and she had gone on. There had been two days in Cairo, at the house of a rich, elderly man who called himself French, but looked like a Turk or Egyptian. He stated that he was a friend of Maida's grandfather who was, he said, a general in Ismail's service. He had done a great wrong to a noble family of ancient Egyptian aristocracy, who had sworn revenge, and had taken it for several generations. But now all its members were dead except one aged woman who wished to see and atone to Maida for the cruel punishment inflicted on her people. The mummy which had been stolen many years ago was to be given back; and in return Maida would not only learn a great secret, but receive a great fortune. The house was in the country, and could be reached by a short desert journey after travelling to Asiut by rail. In order to escape the surveillance of the British authorities, so strict in war time, she and her faithful friend the Head of the Grey Sisterhood, were advised to travel in the costumes of Egyptian women.

All this seemed hundreds of years ago to Maida, as she relived incident after incident. Everything was far in the background of a night in the desert inn when she had seen—or thought she had seen—a face which had been the terror of her life. Since her earliest childhood she had seen it in dreams, and sometimes—she believed—in reality. It was as like the face of the mummy in the painted mummy-case as a living face could be, except that the expression of the mummy was noble and even benign, whereas that of the dream-face—the living face—was malevolent. The hood of the caravan leader had been blown aside by the fierce desert wind in a sand-storm, and a pair of terrible eyes had looked at her for an instant before the hood was drawn close again; and, after that—but Maida could remember nothing after that, except a struggle and a sudden blotting out of consciousness.

She was afraid to wake fully lest she should find herself again in the desert inn where it seemed that something hideous had happened. But the room there had been shabby. This room in which she opened her eyes was beautiful, far more beautiful than any in the house at Cairo. It was soothingly simple, too, in its decorations, as the best Eastern rooms are. The walls were white, ornamented with a frieze of arabesques. There were one or two large plaques of lovely old tiles let into this pure whiteness, and a wonderful Persian rug in much the same faded rainbow hues hung between two uncurtained windows with carved, cedarwood blinds. The ceiling also was of carved cedar, painted with ancient designs in rich colours. There was very little furniture in the room, except the large divan-like bed on which Maida was lying; but on a fat embroidered cushion squatted a girl wearing the indoors dress of an Egyptian woman—a girl of the lower classes. She sat between Maida and the windows, so that her figure was silhouetted against the light: and outside the windows was a glimpse of garden: a tall cypress and a palm with a rose bush climbing up the trunk: dully, Maida thought that it must be an inner patio, such as her room had looked out upon in the house at Cairo.

"Where is the white camel?" she heard herself say, aloud: and it seemed that her voice was tired and weak, as if she had been ill.

The girl who was embroidering looked up. Her face was very brown, and the eyes were painted. She wore a dark blue dress, which was a lovely bit of colour against the white wall. Smiling at the invalid as at a child, she went to the door, and called out something in a language Maida could not understand. Then she effaced herself respectfully, stepping into the background, and the Head Sister came in—the Head Sister, just as she used to be at the Sisterhood House far away on Long Island. She wore a grey uniform and the short veil with which her face had always been covered in the house.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed, in her deep, pleasant voice, with its slight accent of foreignness which could never quite be defined. "How thankful I am to see you conscious! We have been waiting a long time. You've been ill, and delirious; but I can see from the look in your eyes that it's over now—those dreams of horror I could never persuade you were not real."

Maida looked earnestly at the Head Sister whom she had once so utterly loved and trusted. Did she love and trust her now? The girl felt that she did not. Yet she felt, too, that the sad change might be but the dregs in her cup of dreams. Never had the wonderful woman's voice been more kind. "If I tell you a piece of good news, will it make you better, or will it give you a temperature?" the Head Sister went on.

"It will make me better," Maida said, a faint thrill of hope at her heart. There was only one piece of news, she thought, which would be good.

"Very well, then. It is this: we are expecting your brother and Lord John Hasle in a few days. Are you pleased?"

"Yes," Maida answered. She composed her voice, and spoke quietly; but new life filled her veins. The dullness was gone from her brain, the lassitude from her limbs. She felt as if she had drunk a sparkling tonic.

"You look another girl already," said the Head Sister. "If this improvement keeps up, you'll be able to walk about your room a little to-day, and to-morrow you may be strong enough to be helped out into the balcony that runs along over the patio, and leads to the room of your hostess. She is impatient for you to be well enough to come there; and it will be a test of your strength. Besides—I know you are anxious to hear what you have travelled so far to find out."

Maida could not have explained then, or afterwards, why the Head Sister's suppressed eagerness brought back the fear she had known in her dreams. She would have liked to answer that she preferred to wait and see the unknown "hostess" after Roger and John had arrived. But something told her she had better not say that. Instead, she smiled, and answered that she would try to walk that afternoon, and test her strength.

The Head Sister seemed satisfied, seemed to take it for granted that the plan she was making would be carried out; and then she made an excuse to leave the room. The girl Hateb would watch over Maida, as she had watched faithfully since the day when the unconscious patient had been put into her care. Hateb, the Head Sister added, had learned in Cairo to speak a little English and French. Maida could ask for anything she wished. But for a long time Maida did not wish to ask for anything at all. She lay still and thought—and wondered: and Hateb went on embroidering. She finished a thing like a charming little table cover on which she had worked a design in dull blues and reds, a design like the patterns of old tiles from Tunis. Then, pausing to roll up the square of creamy tissue, she began to make the first purple flower of a new design on another square.

At last, as if fascinated, Maida did ask a question. She asked what Hateb did with these things when they were finished. Were they for her mistress?

The girl shook her head, and managed to make Maida understand that all the women of the household who could embroider sent their work by the negroes into the oasis town of Hathor Set where there was a shop which sold such things to tourists. Very few tourists came now, but sometimes there were officers and soldiers. They always bought souvenirs for their families at home. Harem ladies sold their work for charity among the poor, but their servants—well, it was pleasant to earn something extra. This house was often shut up for months. The master and mistress lived away, and seldom came, so there was much time—too much time—and it hung heavy on their hands unless they were kept busy.

"I know how to embroider, too," said Maida, "not as you do, but after the fashion of my country. I make my own designs. I should love to embroider an end of a scarf or something like that, to show you how fast I can work. Then you may sell what I do, and keep the money. If any English or American people come to that shop in the town you speak of they will be surprised to see such a thing if it is displayed well, and they will be glad to offer a good price, because they will be reminded of home. But you must let no one in this house see my work, or they may be angry with you for allowing me to exert myself. It will do me good, but they will not believe that."

The girl was delighted with the idea. Her curiosity was aroused to see the work of a foreigner, which would sell for much money, and she was pleased with the prospect of having that money for herself. She gave Maida materials, and the invalid sat up in bed to begin her task. With a pencil she traced a queer little border which might have represented breaking hearts or flashes of lightning. Inside this border she formed the word "Help" with her name "Maida" underneath, in elaborate old English letters impossible for Hateb to read with her scant knowledge of English. Despite her weakness, Maida worked with feverish haste, and finished the whole piece of embroidery, in blue and gold and reddish purple, before evening. She pronounced herself too ill to rise, but promised to make an effort next day. It was in her mind to delay the visit to her unknown "hostess," and meanwhile to send out a message, like a carrier pigeon. But there was the strong will of the Head Sister to reckon with. The latter gently, yet firmly insisted

that, now dear Maida's delirium had passed, it would do her good to take up life again where she had left it off. The Egyptian woman they had made this long journey to meet was impatient. She was unable to come to Maida. Maida must go to her. Besides, it would be discouraging to Roger Odell and John Hasle to arrive and find their dear one pale and ill. She must make the effort for their sakes if not for her own.

This solicitude for Roger and John was new on the part of the Head Sister, who had deliberately taken Maida away from one, and separated her from the other: but she frankly confessed that her point of view had changed. She saw that the girl had no real vocation for the Grey Sisterhood. If the mystery of her past could be solved, and happiness could come out of sorrow, Maida would have a place in the world, and John Hasle—the Head Sister admitted—deserved a reward for patience and loyalty.

These arguments did not ring true in the ears of Maida, but she had reached a place where it was impossible to turn back. She was in the woman's power, whether the woman were enemy or friend; and if she refused to follow the Head Sister's counsel, she believed that she would be forced to follow it. Maida was too proud to risk being coerced; and when the first day after the sending out of the embroidery passed without result, she obeyed the directress and let herself be dressed.

The girl suffered a great deal, but she had not lost physical or mental courage. She believed that she had sprung from a family of soldiers, and she wanted to be worthy of them, even if no one save herself ever knew how she faced a great danger. Something in the Head Sister's air of fiercely controlled excitement told her that she was about to face danger when, with the elder woman's supporting arm round her waist, she walked from her own room to the door of a room at the end of a long balcony—the balcony overlooking the patio garden.

As she went, the scent of magnolias and orange blossoms pressed heavily on her senses like the fragrance of flowers in a room of death. It was evening, just the hour of sunset, and as the girl looked up at the sapphire square of sky above the white walls and greenish-brown roofs, the pulsating light died down suddenly, as if an immense lamp had been extinguished.

Maida shivered. "What is the matter? Are you afraid?" the Head Sister asked.

"No, I am not afraid," Maida answered firmly. "It is only—as if someone walked on my grave."

"Your grave!" the woman echoed, with a slight laugh. "That is very far away to the west, let us hope."

Yet Maida's words must have brought to her mind the picture of a highballed garden of orange trees, no further to the west than the western end of that house. She must have seen the negroes digging there, under the trees, digging very fast, to be ready in time. She must even have known the depth and width and length of the long, narrow hole they dug, for it had been measured to fit the painted mummy-case brought to Egypt from Maida's "shrine" in New York. That mummy-case, long wanted, long sought, was useful no longer. Its occupant for thousands of years had been rifled of his secret. The jewels which had lain among the spices at his heart had been removed. They were safe in custody of those who claimed a right over them, and the revenge of generations might now be completed.

The Head Sister tapped at the door of the room, and then, after a slight pause, when no answer came, opened it. Gently she pushed Maida in ahead of her, and followed on the girl's heels, shutting the door behind them both.

The room was very large and very beautiful. Already the carved cedar-wood blinds inside the windows shut out the light of day. Not a sound in the room—if there should be a sound—could be heard even in the patio or the orange gardens. Two huge Egyptian oil lamps of old, hand-worked brass hung from the painted wooden ceiling. They lit with a flittering, golden light the white arabesqued walls, the dado of lovely tiling, the marble floor and the fountain pool in the centre where goldfish flashed. There was little furniture: a divan covered with a Persian rug; a low, inlaid table or two; some purple silk cushions piled near the fountain; and Maida's eyes searched vainly for the "hostess" who waited eagerly to tell her the secret. The only conspicuous object in the room was a familiar one—the painted mummy-case, standing upright as it had stood in the shrine, far away in Roger Odell's house in New York. It stood so that Maida, on entering the room, saw it in profile. She was not surprised to see it there, for she knew that it had travelled with them—by John Hasle's wish, she had been told—and certainly with his name on the packing-box in which it was contained. It was easy enough to believe that the mummy had a connection with the "secret" she was to hear, for always it had been for her a mystery as well as a treasure. It was easy, also, to understand why the "hostess" should have had the thing brought into her room and unpacked. But she—the hostess—was not there.

"Patience for a few minutes, my child," said the Head Sister, no doubt reading Maida's thought. "I have been asked to tell you a story. It is a long story, but you must hear it to understand what follows. Sit down with me, and listen quietly. Your questions may come at the end."

Maida would have taken a few steps further, to look into the mummy-case, and see if its

occupant were intact after the journey by sea and land: but the elder woman stopped her. With a hand on the girl's arm, she made her sit down on a divan where the mummy-case was visible still only in profile.

"This room was once made ready in honour of a bride," the Head Sister said. "All its beauties were for her: the pool, the rare old tiles, the Persian embroideries and rugs. The bridegroom was an Egyptian of a line which had been royal in the past. I speak of the long ago past, thousands of years ago. He had records which proved his descent without doubt. When I say he was an Egyptian, I don't mean a Turk. I mean a lineage far more ancient than the Turkish invasion in Egypt. The family, however, had intermarried with Turks and had become practically Turkish, except by tradition. This mummy-case and its contents was the dearest treasure of Essain Bey, the man who decorated the room you see for the woman he adored. Immemorable generations ago it had been taken from the Tombs of the Kings—not stolen, mind you, but taken secretly by a descendant who had proofs that the mummied man had been a famous, far-away ancestor of his own. Even so, though this forbear of Essain's had a right to the mummy, he would have let it lie in peace, hidden for ever in the rock-caverns of the tombs if illegal excavations had not been planned. He saved the mummy-case from violation, although he could not save the tomb; and though there was a legend that the body was filled with precious things he vowed that it should not be rifled—vowed for himself and his son and his son's son.

"The legend ran that the last Egyptian king hid the royal treasure inside the mummy of his father, before setting out to fight the invader, and that after his death in battle, the secret descended from one representative of the family to another: but the whereabouts of the tomb was lost, and only found again a century ago through the translation of a papyrus. As I said, the mummy in its case was sacredly preserved, and was considered to keep good fortune in the family so long as it remained intact. When Essain married his beautiful Greek bride he would have given her his soul if she had asked for it. Instead, she asked for the mummy of Hathor Set. It should be hers, he promised, the day she gave him his first boy, and he kept his word. But with the boy came a girl also. The Greek woman, Irene Xanthios, was the mother of twins. The mummy in its case—the luck of the family—was called hers. It was kept in this room, where she felt a pleasure in seeing it under her eyes. She delighted her husband by telling him she loved the dark face because of the likeness to his. He was happy, and believed that she was happy too. Perhaps she would always have remained faithful, had it not been for an Englishman, an officer in the service of Ismail.

"Now, when I speak of Ismail being in power, you will understand that all this happened many years ago; to be precise it was fifty-four years ago to-day that the twin boy and girl were born and the mummy given to their mother, Irene. How she met the Englishman I do not know. I suppose the monotony of harem life bored her, though she had adopted the religion and customs of Essain Bey. She was beautiful, and maybe she let her veil blow aside one day when she looked out of her carriage window at the handsome officer who passed. How long they knew each other in secret I cannot tell either; but the twins were four years old when their mother ran away with the Englishman. She left them behind, as if without regret, but—she took the luck of the family with her—the mummy of King Hathor Set in his painted case. So, you can guess who was the man: your grandfather. His name was Sir Percival Annesley. He was no boy at the time. Already he had been made a Lieutenant in Ismail's army; but he fled from Egypt with the woman he stole—and the booty—and after that they lived quietly in England. They hid from the world: but they could not hide from Essain's revenge.

"In this room—coming back from a council at the Khedivial Palace in Cairo—Essain learned how his wife had profited by his absence of a week. In this room he vowed vengeance, not only upon her and the man who took her from him, but upon that man's descendants, male or female, until the last one had paid the penalty of death. In this room he made his two children swear that, when they grew old enough, they would help exterminate the children of Percival Annesley, and if unfortunately these survived long enough to have children, exterminate them also. In this room he branded the flesh of his young son and daughter with the Eye of Horus, to remind them that their mission was to watch—ever to watch.

"Essain turned his back upon this house when it had become a house of disgrace, but he did not sell or dispose of it. He had made up his mind that, from a house of disgrace it must become a house of revenge. His will was that the place should be kept up; that servants should be ready to do anything they were bidden to do. With his own hands he killed your grandfather, in sight of Irene and her baby boy, your father. Later, Irene died of grief, but your father lived. He too came to Egypt, and served in the army, by that time in the hands of the British. Essain was dead, but Essain's son lived, and had one great aim in his life; to kill Perceval Annesley's son, and retrieve the mummy. Perceval Annesley's son was named Perceval too. He met your mother when she was travelling in Egypt as a girl, and followed her to America. The younger Essain would not have allowed him to leave Egypt, if the mummy had been there, but he had left it at home in England. So far as young Essain had been able to find out, the mummy had never been desecrated: this was the one virtue of the Annesleys: they had left it intact.

"In New York, your father persuaded your mother to run away with him, when she was on the eve of marrying Roger Odell—old Roger who became your guardian. They went together to England, and lived in the Annesley house, which is in Devonshire. Soon, young Essain's chance came. He shot your father dead, in your mother's presence; but in escaping he lost sight of her. She knew the curse which had fallen on the Annesleys. She feared for you, if not for herself. She

took you, and the mummy-case, and an Eye of Horus which had been a gift from the elder Essain to Irene, and she contrived to vanish from the knowledge of Essain the younger.

"It was only for a time, however, that he and his twin sister—able to help him now—searched in vain. He traced the travellers eventually by means of the mummy-case. Your mother was dead: but his vow to his father was not fulfilled while you were alive, and the mummy of Hathor Set under the roof of the Odells. You were too well protected to be easily reached, but there are many ways of accomplishing an end. You were never a strong girl. Plots against your peace of mind were planned and carried out. Once or twice you came near death, but always luck stood between you and what Essain and his sister Zorah believed to be justice. The drama of your life has been a strange one. Your death alone without the restoration of the mummy would not have sufficed, though, had you died, Essain would have moved heaven and earth to gain possession of the body of Hathor Set. At last he has obtained it. The oath of his father's ancestor not to open the mummy was but for the son and the son's son. That has run out many years ago, and Essain felt that the time had come to learn and profit by the secret. He has done so, and holds a wonderful treasure in his hands. The like of it has never been seen in the new world, except in museums of the East. Now the whole duty of Essain's son and daughter has been accomplished, except in one last detail. What that is, you, Madeleine Annesley can guess. I have finished my explanation. But if you would understand more, go now, and look at the mummy-case."

As if fascinated, Maida obeyed. Her brain was working fast. Was her instinct right? Had she been brought here to the House of Revenge to die, or would this soft, sweet voice, telling so calmly the terrible story of two families, add that the last sacrifice would not be permitted? Was the command to rise and look at the mummy-case a test of her physical courage after what she had heard?

To her own surprise, she was no longer conscious of fear. A strange, marble coldness held her in its grip, as if she were becoming a statue. She moved across the room and stopped in front of the mummy-case. Living eyes looked out at her. She saw the dark face so like in feature to the withered face of the mummy. This was the face of her dreams.

The girl recoiled from it and turned to the woman who had been her friend. For the first time the Head Sister had lifted her veil and taken off the mask always worn at the Sisterhood House. Her face seemed identical with that in the mummy-case. It also was the face of Maida's dreams, the haunting horror of her life. Without a word the mystery of the mask and veil became clear to her. The Head Sister's one reason for wearing them was to hide her startling likeness to Essain, her twin brother.

"The end has come," a voice said Maida did not know whether the man or woman spoke. As the mummy-case opened and the figure within stepped out, the world broke for the girl into a cataract of stars which overwhelmed her.

* * * * *

I have told already how I was guided in the direction of Hathor Set. I hoped and believed that I was right, but even so I was far from the end of my quest. Hathor Set is a small town, important only because of its situation and the fact that several rich Arabs have their country houses on the outskirts of the oasis. Each hour, each moment counted: yet how was I to learn which of the houses was Maida's prison? Judging by the precautions taken for the first stages of the journey, it was in no optimistic mood that I rode with my little caravan into the principal street—if street it could be called—of Hathor Set. Our camels trod sand, but to our left was the market, and beyond, a few shops. In the background the secretive white walls of houses clustered, the plumed heads of palms rose out of hidden gardens, and the green dome of a mosque glittered like a peacock's breast against the hot blue sky.

It was not market day, and the open square with its booths and enclosures was deserted: but men stood in the doors of two small shops hopefully designed to attract tourists. One exhibited coarse native pottery, and the other, more ambitious, showed alleged antiques, silk gandourahs, embroideries and hammered brasswork. Above the open door was the name "Said ben Hassan," and underneath was printed amateurishly in English: "Egyptian Curios: Fine Embroideries: French, English and American Spoken."

I had halted, meaning to descend and buy something as an excuse to ask questions, when a dirty, crouching figure which squatted near the floor scrambled up and flung itself before me whining for backsheesh. "Get away!" roared my camel-man, who was in a bad temper because of a forced march. He struck at the beggar with his goad, while the shopkeeper rushed forward to prove his zeal in ridding a customer of the nuisance.

"Wretch!" he exclaimed. "How often have I told thee to depart from my door and not annoy the honoured ones who come to buy? This time it is too much. Thou shalt spend thy next days in prison."

Between the two hustling the lame man, he fell, crying; and humbug though he might be, my gorge rose. For an instant I forgot that I had meant to ingratiate myself with the shopkeeper, and abused him in my most expressive Arabic. I scolded my own man, and, without waiting for my camel to bend its knees and let me down, I slid off to the rescue.

"The fellow is worthless," pleaded the shopkeeper, anxious to justify his violence. "It was for Effendi's sake that I pushed him. He is rich. He is the king of all the beggars—the scandal of Hathor Set."

"Whatever he may be, he's old and weak, and I won't have him struck," I said. "Here, let this dry your tears," I went on: and enjoying the suppressed rage of Abdullah my camel-man, I raised the weeping beggar from the ground and gave him a handful of piastres. With suspicious suddenness his sobs ceased and turned to blessings. He wished me a hundred years of life and twenty sons: and then, exulting in the rout of Said ben Hassan and Abdullah, defiantly returned to the rag of sacking he had spread like a mat on the sand. The keeper of the shop glared a menace: but his wish to sell his goods overcame the desire for revenge; and contenting himself with a look which said "Only wait!" he turned with a servile smile to me. Would the honoured master enter his mean shop, give himself the pain to examine the wonderful stock superior to any even in Cairo, and sip sherbet or Turkish coffee?

I paused, reflecting that it might be better to inquire somewhere else. Humble as the man's tone was, his eyes glittered with malice; and once he had my money he would delight in sending me on a wild-goose chase. As I thought what to answer, my eyes wandered over his show window, and suddenly concentrated on a piece of embroidery. Some small table-covers and scarfs of thin Eastern silk were draped on a brass jardinière. On the smallest of all I read, in old English lettering, the words "Help. Maida."

I kept my self-control with an effort. For a few seconds I could not speak. Then I inquired the price of that piece of embroidery, pointing it out. The shopkeeper's fat brown face became a study. He was asking himself in an anguish of greed how high he might dare to go. "Five hundred piastres," he replied, leaving generous room for the beating down process. But I did not beat him down.

"That's a large price," I said, "but I will pay if you tell me where the embroidery came from. It's an old English design. That's why I'm curious to know how you got it."

Said ben Hassan seemed distressed. "Honoured Sir, I would tell you if I could, but I cannot. It would be as much as my life is worth. Ladies of the harem make these embroideries, or their women. I sell them, and they use the money for their charities. It is a sacred custom. I can say no more."

"I will give you a thousand piastres," I said.

The man looked ready to cry, but persisted. "It is a great pain to refuse," he mourned. "But I would have to make the same answer if Effendi offered two thousand."

"I offer three," I went on.

But the man was not to be tempted. He groaned that it was a question of his life. Poor as it was, he valued it. He groaned, he apologised, he explained, he pressed upon me the true history of all the antiquities in his shop, and the five hundred piastres I was ready to pay for the bit of embroidery had shrunk in his eyes to a sum scarcely worth taking. At last, when I turned away, deaf to his eloquence, he caught me by the coat. "If Effendi must know, I will risk all and give him his will!" he wailed. "The embroidery came from Asiut. I will write down the name of the powerful pasha who is master of the house: that is, I will do so if Effendi is still ready to pay three thousand piastres."

I knew that the man was lying, yet my best hope lay in his knowledge—practically my one hope. How to get the truth out of him, was the question.

"I must think it over," I said. As I spoke I became conscious that the lame beggar who had crawled off his mat to the door of the shop was whining again.

To my astonishment he hurriedly jumbled in English words as if he wished to hide them. Under his appeal, in Arabic that I should buy a fetish he held up in a knotted old hand, he was mumbling in English, that he would tell me for gratitude, what Ben Hassan dared not tell me for money. "Do not give him one piastre: he is lying," muttered the beggar. "Buy this fetish. Inside you will find explanations."

The fetish was a tiny silver box of native make, one of those receptacles intended to contain a text from the Koran, and to hang from a string on the breast of the Faithful. I threw the man a look and I threw him money. Squatting there, he seemed to pick up both before he crawled away. I burned to call him back as I saw him wrap the sacking over head and shoulders, and start—without a backward glance—to hobble off. But I dared not make a sound. Hassan, if he suspected, might ruin the beggar's plan. I slipped the fetish into my pocket, and told the shopkeeper that I would content myself for the present with buying the piece of embroidery. I must reflect before paying the price he wanted for information. I should, I said, spend the night at the inn, for I was tired. There would be time to think.

The inn at Hathor Set is hardly worth the name, being little better than the desert borg which, in my mind, I called the Borg of the Watching Eye; but its goodness or badness did not matter. As for Abdullah, he was glad of the rest. I had made him start before dawn in the midst of

a sand-storm which had blown itself out only late in the baking heat of afternoon when we neared the oasis of Hathor Set. When I shut myself into an ill-smelling room of the inn, to open the silver fetish, it was still baking hot, but close upon sunset. If I had not felt some strange impulse of confidence in the lame beggar who hid his English under vulgar Arabic slang, I should have resented the coming of night. As it was, I was glad of the falling dusk. I could work to find Maida only under the cover of darkness, I knew: for there was no British consul here, no justice to whom I could appeal. There were only my own hands and my own brain: and such help as the beggar might give because he hated Said ben Hassan.

A torn scrap of paper was rolled inside the tiny silver box: but it was not a text from the Koran.

"Dine at eight to-night with the beggar Haroun and his friends and hear something to your advantage. Anyone can show you the house," I read, written in English with pencil. If I had had time to think of him much I should have been consumed with curiosity as to the brown-faced old man who begged by day, and in faultlessly spelled English invited strangers to dine with him by night. But I had time to think only of what I might hear "to my advantage." The mystery of the "beggar king of Hathor Set" was lost for me in the mystery of Maida Odell, as a bubble is lost in the sea.

The Eastern darkness fell like a purple curtain over a lighted lamp. I went out long before eight, and showed a coin as I asked the first cloaked figure I met for the house of Haroun the beggar. It was strange that a beggar should have a house, but everything about this beggar was strange!

The house was in the heart of the crowded town, a town of brown adobe turning to gold under a rising moon. All the buildings were huddled together like a family of lion cubs, but my guide led me to a square of blank wall on the lower edge of a hill. The door was placed at the foot of this hill; and when a negro opened it at my knock I found myself in a squalid cellar. At the far end was a flight of dilapidated stone steps: at the top of this another door, and beyond the door—a surprise. I came out into a small but charming garden court with orange trees and a fountain. A white embroidered cloth was spread on the tiled pavement, and surrounded with gay silk cushions for more than a dozen guests. Coloured lanterns hung from the trees and lit with fairy-like effect dishes of crystallised fruit and wonderful pink cakes.

Figures of men in gandourahs came forward respectfully, and the King of the Beggars bade me welcome. He offered a brass bowl of rose-water in which to dip my fingers, and as he himself dried them with a lace-trimmed napkin he spoke in English.

"I am grateful," he said, "for your trust. You shall not regret it." Then he went on, without giving me time to answer, "I am a beggar by day, and the beggars' king at night, as you see. This is my existence. It has its adventures, its pleasures; this meeting is one of the highest. It reminds me that I have English blood in my veins. Besides, if I help you I shall help myself to revenge. My father was English, but turned Mohammedan for the love of my mother. English was the first language I learned to speak. In the days of Ismail I was in his army—an officer. I was proud of my English blood and I promised my aid to an Englishman—an officer, too, named Annesley—aid against one of my own religion. I helped him to run away with a beautiful woman. He escaped with her. I was caught, wounded, and cruelly punished. My career was at an end—my money gone. Lame and penniless, I had no power to take revenge. Many years have passed. I was young then. Now, I am old. The man who broke me is dead, but his children live—twins, a son and a daughter. They have come home from some country far away, to their father's house. I saw them come—I, the lame beggar lying in the street, a Thing that does not count! Two women were with Essain, his sister and another who was ill—perhaps unconscious—lying upon a litter on camel back. The embroidery you saw, with the English words which I, too, could read—came from his house. It was brought by a negro, to-day, to the shop of Said ben Hassan, and put in his window an hour before you rode into Hathor Set. But Ben Hassan is afraid of Essain Pasha, the man I speak of, and he would never have told you anything about his house: he would only have lied and sent you off on a false track in repayment for your money. As for me, I can tell all you wish to know: and when you have honoured me by eating my food, I can show you the house. It is not more than a mile distant from the town. If you wish to injure Essain, so much the better. Because of what his father did to me, and because of your kindness, I should like to help you do it."

"For God's sake, come with me now," I broke in at last. "You asked me here to dine, but a girl's life may be hanging in the balance. Her name is Madeleine Annesley. She must be the granddaughter of the man who was your friend, and the woman you helped him take. You speak of revenge! It is for revenge she has been brought here by the man you call Essain and his sister who is as wicked as himself. I never knew till I heard your story what that woman was to him, or why they worked together. But now I understand all—or nearly all. I love Madeleine Annesley, and I know she's in danger of her life."

"I thought," said Haroun, "there might be some such matter afoot, and that is why I asked my friends to be here. They are ready to obey my orders, for they count me as their king; and I have chosen them from among others for their strength and courage. I am the only one who is old and lame, but I am strong enough for this work. When it is done, we can feast, and we will not break our fast till then. Essain has no fear of an attack in force. His house, though it is the great one of the place, is guarded but by a few negroes, the servants who have kept it in his absence. There

are orange gardens which surround the house. Without noise we will break open a little gate I remember, and once inside, with fifteen strong men at our service, the surprise will be complete—the house and all in it, male and female, at our mercy."

Not a man of the fifteen but had a weapon of some sort, an old-fashioned pistol or a long knife, and some had both.

We started in the blue, moony dusk, walking in groups that we might not be noticed as a band: and it was astonishing how fast the lame beggar could go. We led—he and I—and such was the greedy haste with which his limping legs covered the distance that he kept pace with me at my best.

Soon we were out of the huddled town, walking beside the rocky bed of the *oued* or river; and never leaving the oasis we came at last to a high white wall.

"This is Essain's garden," Haroun whispered. "And here is the little gate I spoke of. Listen! I thought I heard voices. But no. It may have been the wind rustling among the leaves."

"It wasn't the wind," I said. "There are people talking in the garden. Don't try to break the gate. You may make a noise. I'll get over the wall and open the gate from inside."

"The wall is high," said Haroun, measuring it with his eyes.

"And I am tall," I answered. "One of your men will give me a leg up."

In another moment I was letting myself cautiously down on a dark, dewy garden fragrant with the scent of orange blossoms. There was broken glass on the top of the wall, and my hands were cut: but that was a detail.

Noiselessly I slid back the big bolt which fastened the gate. The men filed in like a troop of ghosts, and followed me as I tiptoed along, crouching under trees as I walked.

The voices, speaking together in low, hushed tones, became more audible, though, even when we came near, we could catch no words. A singularly broad-shouldered man in European dress, with a fez on his rather small head, stood with his back to us, giving orders to four negroes. They were out in the open, where the moon touched their faces, and we in the shadow could see them distinctly. They had a long, narrow box somewhat resembling a coffin, which, by their master's directions, they were about to lower by means of ropes into a grave-like hole they had dug in the soft earth.

My heart gave a bound, and then missed a beat, as if my life had come to an end. I sprang on the man from behind, and the beggar king with his band followed my lead. Just what happened next I could hardly tell: I was too busy fighting. Down on the ground we two went together. Essain—whom I knew as Rameses—fought like a lion. Surprised as he was, he flashed out a knife somehow, and I felt its point bite between my ribs, before I got a chance to shoot. Even then, I shot at random, and it was only the sudden start and collapse of the body writhing under mine which told me that my bullet had found its billet. The man lay still. I jumped up, released from his hold. His face I could not see, but when I shook him he was limp as a marionette. "Dead!" I said to myself. "Well, it's all to the good!" and wasted no more time on him.

The four negroes were down: they had shown no fight; and already Haroun had begun with a great knife to prise open the coffin-shaped box. It lay on the ground in the moonlight and I saw that it was the mummy-case I had seen last in Maida's shrine in New York. There was no doubt—no hope, then! I had come too late!

Like a madman I snatched the knife from Haroun, and finished the work he had begun. There she lay—my darling—where the mummy had lain so long. But I was not too late after all. As the air touched her she gasped and opened her eyes.

There, you would say, with the girl I loved coming to life in my arms, the story of my fight against her enemies might end. But it was not to be so. There was still the one supreme struggle to come. For Essain, alias Rameses, was not dead. He had feigned death to save himself, and while we forgot him he crept away.

EPISODE IX

THE BELL BUOY

A white yacht steamed slowly through calm water silvered by the moon. Maida and I were the only passengers. We had been married that day, and the yacht *Lily Maid* was ours for the honeymoon, lent by Maida's newly found cousins, Sir Robert and Lady Annesley.

"Look," I said, as passing through the Downs I caught sight of two dark towers showing above a cloud of trees on the Kentish coast. "Those towers are my brother's house. To-morrow I shall be there making him eat humble pie—and my sister-in-law too."

"I don't want you to make them eat humble pie!" laughed Maida.

"Well, they shall eat whatever you like. But would you care to anchor now? It's nearly midnight."

"Let's go on a little further," she decided. "It's so heavenly."

It was. I felt that I had come almost as near heaven as I could hope to get. Maida was my wife at last, and she was happy. I believed that she was safe.

We went on, and the throb of the yacht's heart was like the throbbing of my own. Close together we stood, she and I, my arm clasping her. So we kept silence for a few moments, and my thoughts trailed back as the moonlit water trailed behind us. I remembered many things: but above all I remembered that other night of moonlight far away in Egypt, in a secret orange garden where men had dug a grave.

Why, yes, of course Maida was safe! One of her two enemies had died that night—the woman. Exactly how she died we did not know, but I and the "king of the beggars" had found her lying, face downward, in the marble basin of a great fountain, dead in water not a foot deep. The fountain was in a room whence, from one latticed window, the orange garden and the fight there could have been seen. That window was open. Doubtless Essain's sister had believed her twin brother captured or dead. She had thought that, for herself, the end of all things had come with his downfall: punishment, failure and humiliation worse than death. So she had chosen death. But the man had escaped and disappeared. The treasure hidden for thousands of years in the mummy—treasure which the Head Sister boasted to Maida had been found by Doctor Rameses—had disappeared with him.

The girl Hateb who had cared for Maida through her illness cared for her again that night, while Haroun and I guarded the shut door of their room. The next day Maida was able to start for Cairo, and Hateb (both veiled, and in Egyptian dress) acted as her maid. Had it not been for Haroun's testimony and the respect felt by the authorities for the rich beggar, the happenings of that night and the woman's death might have detained me at Hathor Set; but thanks to Haroun I was able to get Maida away. Thanks again partly to him and what he could tell (with what Maida had been told by the Head Sister) the girl's past was no longer a mystery. We knew the name of her people: and luckily it was a name to conjure with just then in Cairo. Colonel Sir Robert Annesley was stationed there. He was popular and important; and I blessed all my stars because I had met him in England.

I wanted Maida to marry me in Cairo, with her cousin Sir Robert to give her away: but the blow my brother had struck long ago had hurt her sensitive soul to the quick. She said that she could not be my wife until Lord Haslemere and Lady Haslemere were willing to welcome her. She wanted no revenge, but she did want satisfaction.

I had to yield, since a man can't marry a girl by force nowadays, even when she admits that she's in love. Sir Robert found her a chaperon, going to England, and I was allowed to sail on the same ship. Maida was invited to stay with Lady Annesley until the wedding could be arranged on the bride's own "terms"; but Fate was more eloquent than I: she induced Maida to change her mind.

Lady Annesley was as brave (for herself and her husband) as a soldier's wife must be; but she had three children. For them, she was a coward. Maida had not been two days at the Annesley's Devonshire place, and I hadn't yet been able to tackle Haslemere, when an anonymous letter arrived for the girl's hostess. It said that, if Lady Annesley wished her three little boys to see their father come home, she would turn out of her house the enemy of a noble family whose vendetta was not complete. At first, the recipient of the letter was at a loss what to make of it. Frightened and puzzled, she handed the document to Maida (this was at breakfast) and Maida was only too well able to explain.

The letter had a London postmark: and the girl knew then, with a shock of fear, that "Dr. Rameses" was in England—had perhaps reached there before her. An hour later I knew also—having motored from the hotel where I was stopping in Exeter. The question was, why did the enemy want to get the girl out of her cousin's house?—for that desire alone could have inspired the anonymous warning. Without it, he might have attempted a surprise stroke: but of his own accord, he had for some reason eliminated the element of surprise.

As for me, I was thankful. Not because Essain, alias Rameses, had come to England, but because he was throwing Maida into my arms. This result might be intended by him; but naturally I felt confident that she would be safe under my protection. I argued that she couldn't expose Lady Annesley and the children to danger; the Annesleys had suffered enough for a sin of generations ago: and if she gave up the shelter of her cousin's house she must come to me. What mattered it, in such circumstances, whether the family welcome came before or after the wedding? I guaranteed that it would come. And so—owing to the anonymous letter, and its visible

effect upon Lady Annesley, Maida abandoned the dream she had cherished. We were married by special licence: and now, on the Annesley's yacht—too small to be needed for war-service by the Admiralty—we stood on our wedding night.

"Nothing can ever separate us again, my darling!" I broke out suddenly, speaking my thought aloud.

"No, not even death," Maida said, softly, almost in a whisper.

"Don't think of death, my dearest!" I cut her short.

"I'll try not," she said. "But it seems so wonderful to dare be happy—after all. And the memory of that man—the thought of him—I won't call it fear, or let it be fear—is like a black spot in the brightness. It's like that big floating black shape, moving just enough to show it is there, in the silver water. Do you see?" and she pointed. "Does that sound we hear, come from it—like a bell—a funeral bell tolling?"

"That's a bell buoy," I explained. "I remember it well. You know, when I was a boy I spent holidays with my brother at Hasletowers; and I loved this old buoy. I've imagined a hundred stories about it; and—by Jove—I wonder what that chap can be up to!"

The "chap" whose manoeuvres had caused me to break off and forget my next sentence, was too far away to be made out distinctly. But he was in a boat which I took to be a motor-boat, as it had skimmed along the bright water like a bird. He had stopped close to the bell buoy, and was fitting a large round object over his head. Apparently it was a diver's helmet. In the boat I could see another figure, slimmer and smaller, which might be that of a boy; and this companion gave assistance when the helmeted one descended into the water over the side of the boat. For an instant I saw—or fancied that I saw—that he had something queer in his hand—something resembling a big bird-cage. Then he plunged under the surface, and was gone.

We were steaming slowly enough, however, for me to observe in retrospect, that the huge round head bobbed up a minute later, and that the black figure climbed back into the boat. But the cage-like object was no longer visible.

"Some repairs to the buoy, perhaps," I said, as the yacht took us on. But it seemed odd, I couldn't put the episode out of my mind. By and by I asked the yacht's captain to turn, and let us anchor not too far from the landing at Hasletowers, for me to go ashore comfortably when I wished to do so next day. The boat with the two figures had vanished. The bell buoy swayed back and forth, sending out its tolling notes; and the *Lily Maid* was the only other thing to be seen on the water's silver.

* * * * *

At three o'clock the following afternoon I rowed myself ashore, and from the private landing walked up to my brother's house. I hadn't seen him or my sister-in-law since the day when I ran—or rather limped—away from Violet's London nursing home with its crowding flowers and sentimental ladies. But I had written. I had told them that I intended to marry Miss Madeleine Odell, the girl whom they had driven from England, shamed and humiliated. I had told them who she really was, and something of her romantic history. I had added that they should learn more when they were ready to apologise and welcome her. Later, I had wired that we were being married unexpectedly soon, and that we should be pleased to have them at the wedding if they wished. Haslemere had wired back that they would be prevented by business of importance from leaving home, but their absence was not to be misunderstood. He invited me to call at Hasletowers and talk matters over. On this, I telegraphed, making an appointment for the day after my marriage; because to "talk things over" was what I wanted to do—though perhaps not in precisely the way meant by Haslemere.

If I'd expected my arrival to be considered an event of importance, I should have been disappointed. Haslemere and Violet had the air of forgetting that months had passed since we met, that I'd been through adventures, and that this was the day after my wedding. If we had parted half an hour before, they could hardly have been more casual!

I was shown into the library, where Haslemere (a big, gaunt fellow of thirty-eight, looking ten years older, and with the red hair of our Scottish ancestors) and Violet (of no particular age and much conscious charm) were passionately occupied in reading a telegram. I thought it might have been mine (delayed), but in this I was soon undeceived.

"Hello, Jack!" said Haslemere. "How are you, dear boy?" said Violet: and then both began to pour out what was in their hearts. It had not the remotest connection with Maida or me. It concerned themselves and the great charity sale of historic jewels which, it seemed, Violet was organising. What? I hadn't heard of it? They were astounded. England was talking of nothing else. Well, there was the war, of course! But this subject and the war were practically one. The sale was for the benefit of mutilated officers. Nobody else had ever thought of doing anything practical for *them*, only for the soldiers. Violet had started by giving the Douglas-heart ring which had come down to her from an ancestress made even more famous than she would have been otherwise, by Sir Walter Scott. This splendid example of generosity had set the ball rolling. Violet had only to ask and to have. All her friends had answered her call, and lots of outsiders who

hoped thereby to become her friends. Any number of *nouveaux riches* creatures had actually *bought* gorgeous antique jewels in order to lay them at Violet's shrine—and, incidentally, that of the Mutilated Officers.

"Nearly a hundred thousand pounds' worth of jewels is here, in this room, at this moment," my sister-in-law went on impressively, "but it won't be here many moments longer, I'm thankful to say! The responsibility has been too great for us both, this last week, while the collection grew, and we had to look after it. Now the whole lot is being sent to Christie's this afternoon, and the sale by auction will begin to-morrow. It's the event of the season, bar nothing! We hope to clear a quarter of a million if the bidding goes as we think. You *must* bring your bride, and make her buy something. If she's one of the *right* Annesleys, she must be aw'fly rich!"

"She is one of the right Annesleys," I managed to break in. "But, as I wrote you and Haslemere, she has always been known as Madeleine Odell. You and he——"

"Oh, never mind that!" Haslemere cut me short. "You have married her without consulting us. If you'd asked my advice, I should certainly—but we won't stir up the past! Let sleeping dogs lie, and bygones be bygones, and so on."

"Yes, we'll try and do our best for your wife," Violet added hastily, with an absent-minded eye. "When the sale is over, and we have time to breathe, you must bring her here, and——"

"You both seem to misunderstand the situation, although I thought I'd made things clear in my letter," I said. "You cruelly misjudged Maida. You believed lies about her, and put a public shame upon the innocent child. Do you think I'd ever bring her into my brother's house until he and his wife had begged her forgiveness, and atoned as far as in their power?"

"Good heavens, Jack, you must be mad!" Haslemere exclaimed. "I'd forgotten the affair until you revived it in my mind by announcing that you intended to marry a girl whose presentation I'd caused to be cancelled. Then I remembered. I acted at the time only as it was my duty to act, according to information received. An American acquaintance of Violet's—a widow of good birth whose word could not be doubted, told us a tragic story in which Miss Odell had played—well, to put it mildly, in consideration for you—had played an unfortunate part."

"The name of this American widow was Granville," I cut in, "and the tragedy was that of her son."

"It was. I see you know."

"I know the true version of the story. And I expect you and Violet to listen to it."

"We can't listen to anything further now, dear boy. We've more important—I beg your pardon—we've more *pressing* things to attend to," said Violet. "You've a right to your point of view, and we don't want to hurt your feelings. But I don't think you ought to want *us* to go against our convictions, unless to be civil, for your sake, and avoid scandal. We'll do our best, I told you; you must be satisfied with that. And really, we *can't* talk about this any longer, because just before you came we'd a telegram from Driveny to say he and Combes and Blackburn will be here an hour earlier than the appointment. That will land them on us at any instant; and I don't care to be agitated, please!"

"Driveny is the great jewel expert," Haslemere condescended to enlighten my amateurish intelligence. "Combes is the Scotland Yard man, as you know: and Blackburn is the famous detective from New York who's in London now. We don't understand why they come before their time, but no doubt they've an excellent reason and we shall hear it soon. You shall see them, if you like. You're interested in detectives."

"It sounds like a plot," I remarked, so angry with my brother and his wife that I found a mean pleasure in trying to upset them. "You'd better make jolly well sure that the right men come. As you are responsible for the jewels——"

Haslemere laughed. "You talk as if you were a detective in a boy's story paper! Not likely I should be such a fool as to hand the boodle over to men I didn't know by sight! They have been here before, in a bunch, Driveny judging the jewels, the detectives——"

"My lord, the three gentlemen from London have arrived in a motor-car," announced a footman. "They wished to send their cards to your lordship." He presented a silver tray with three crude but business-like cards lying on it.

"Show them in at once," said Haslemere. He stood in front of a bookcase containing the works of George Eliot, Charles Dickens and Sir Walter Scott. I knew that bookcase well, and the secret which it so respectably hid. Behind, was the safe in which our family had for several generations placed such valuables as happened to be in the house. Haslemere slid back with a touch a little bronze ornament decorating a hinge on the glass door. In a tiny recess underneath was the head of a spring, which he pressed. The whole bookcase slipped along the wall and revealed the safe. Haslemere opened this, and took out a despatch box. While Violet received the box from his hands and laid it on a table near by, my brother closed the safe, and replaced the bookcase. A moment later, the three important visitors were ushered into the room, their names

pronounced with respect by the servant: "Mr. Driveny: Mr. Blackburn: Mr. Combes."

Haslemere met his guests with civility and honoured them consciously by presenting the trio to Violet. "This is my brother, back from a military mission to America," he indicated me casually, without troubling to mention my name.

The three men looked at me, and I at them. It struck me that they would not have been sorry to dispense with my presence. There was just a flash of something like chagrin which passed across the faces: the thin, aquiline face of Driveny, spectacled, beetle-browed, clean-shaven: the square, puffy-cheeked face of Combes: the red, round face of the American, Blackburn. The flash vanished as quickly as it came, leaving the three middle-aged countenances impassive; but it made me wonder. Why should the jewel-expert and the two detectives object to the presence of another beside Lord and Lady Haslemere, when that other was a near relative of the family? Surely it was a trifling detail that I should witness the ceremony of their taking over the contents of the tin box?

Whatever their true feelings might have been, by tacit consent I was made to realise that I counted for no more in the scene than a fly on the wall, to Haslemere and Violet. No notice was taken of me while Haslemere unlocked the despatch box, and Violet—as the organiser of the scheme—took out the closely piled jewel-boxes it contained. This done, she proceeded to arrange them on the long oak table, cleared for the purpose. I stood in the background, as one by one the neatly numbered velvet, satin or Russia-leather cases were opened, and the description of the jewels within read aloud by Haslemere from a list. Each of the three new-comers had a duplicate list, and there was considerable talk before the cases were closed, and returned to the despatch box. Most of this talk came from Violet and Haslemere, both of whom were excited. As for Driveny, Blackburn and Combes, it seemed to me that, in their hearts, they would gladly have hastened proceedings. They were polite but intensely business-like, and as soon as they could manage it the box was stuffed into a commonplace brown kitbag which the footman had brought in with the visitors. The three had motored from London to Hasletowers; and they smiled drily when Violet asked if they "thought there was danger of an attack on the way back."

"None whatever," replied the square-faced Combes. "We've made sure of that. There's too much at stake to run risks."

"Don't you remember I told you, Violet, what Mr. Combes said before?" Haslemere reminded his wife: "that the road between here and Christie's would swarm with plain clothes men in motors and on bicycles. If every gang of jewel-thieves in England or Europe were on this job, they'd have their trouble for their pains."

"I remember," Violet admitted, "but there's been such a lot about this affair in the papers! Thieves are so clever——"

"Not so clever as our friends," Haslemere admonished her, with one of his slightly patronising smiles for the jewel-expert and the detectives. "That's why they've got the upper hand; that's why we've asked their co-operation."

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed Violet. They all spent the next sixty seconds in compliments: and at the end of that time Mr. Combes announced that he and his companions had better be off. It would be well to complete the business. Mr. Driveny asked Haslemere if he would care to go to Christie's in the car with them, as a matter of form, and Haslemere replied that he considered it unnecessary. The valuables, in such hands, were safe as in the Bank of England. The three men were invited to have drinks, but refused: and Haslemere himself accompanied them to their car. Violet and I stared at it from the window. It was an ordinary-looking grey car, with an ordinary-looking grey chauffeur.

When Haslemere came back to the library, I took up the subject which the arrival of the men had made me drop.

What did my brother and sister-in-law intend to do, to atone to my wife? Apparently they intended to do nothing: could not see why they should do anything: resented my assertion that they had done wrong in the past, and were not accustomed to being accused or called to account.

My heart had been set on obtaining poetic justice for Maida; but I knew she wouldn't wish me to plead. That would be for us both a new humiliation added to the old; an Ossa piled upon Pelion. Losing hope, I indulged myself by losing also my temper.

"Very well," I said. "Maida will be a success without help from you. As for me——"

"Mr. Driveny, Mr. Blackburn and Mr. Combes," announced a footman—not the same who had made the announcement before.

"What—they've come *back!*" Violet and Haslemere exclaimed together. "Show them in."

Evidently something had gone wrong! Even I, in the midst of my rage, was pricked to curiosity.

The three men came in: thin, aquiline Driveny, square, puffy-faced Combes, and red, round

Blackburn. It was not more than half an hour since they had gone, yet already they had changed their clothes. They were all dressed differently, not excepting boots and hats: and Combes had a black kitbag in place of the brown one. Even in their faces, figures and bearings there was some subtle change.

"Good gracious! What's happened?" Violet gasped.

The men seemed surprised.

"We're a little before our time, my lady," said Combes, "but——"

Haslemere snatched the words from his mouth. "But you telegraphed. You came here——"

"We didn't telegraph, my lord," the detective respectfully contradicted him.

Violet gave a cry, and put her hands up to her head, staring at the trio so subtly altered. As before, I was a back-ground figure. I said nothing, but I thought a good deal. The trick jokingly suggested by me had actually been played.

At first neither Violet nor Haslemere would believe the dreadful thing. It was too bad to be true. These, not the other three, were the impostors! Violet staggered towards the bell to call the servants, but Combes showed his police badge: and between the trio it was soon made clear that the Marquis and Marchioness of Haslemere had let themselves be utterly bamboozled. They had of their own free will handed over to a pack of thieves nearly one hundred thousand pounds worth of famous jewels: not even their own, but other people's jewels entrusted to them for charity!

There was, however, not a moment to waste in repinings. The local police were warned by telephone; the escaping car and chauffeur were described, and the genuine detectives, with the jewel-expert, dashed off in pursuit of their fraudulent understudies. Meantime, while the others talked, I reflected; and an astonishing idea began to crystallise in my brain. When Violet was left crying on Haslemere's shoulder (sobbing that she was ruined, that she would kill herself rather than face the blame of her friends) I made my voice heard.

"I know you and Haslemere always hated my detective talents—if any. But they might come in useful now, if I could get an inspiration," I remarked.

Violet caught me up.

"*Have* you an inspiration?"

"Perhaps."

"For heaven's sake what is it?"

"If I have one, it's my own," I drily replied. "I don't see why I should give it away. This is *your* business—yours and Haslemere's. Why should I be interested? Neither of you are interested in mine."

"You mean, your ideas are for sale?" Haslemere exclaimed, in virtuous disgust, seizing my point.

"My *help* is for sale—at a price."

"The price of our receiving your wife, I suppose!" he accused me bitterly.

"Oh, it's higher than that! I may have guessed something. I may be able to do something with that guess; but I'm hanged if I'll dedicate a thought or act to your service unless you, Haslemere, personally ask Maida's forgiveness for the cruel injustice you once did without stopping to make sure whether you were right or wrong: unless you, Violet, ask my wife—*ask* her, mind you!—to let you present her to the King and Queen at the first Court after the war."

"We'll do anything—anything!" wailed Violet. "I'll crawl on my knees for a mile to your Maida, if only you can really get the jewels back before people find out how we've been fooled."

"I don't want you to crawl," said I. "You can walk, or even motor to Maida—or come out in a boat to the yacht where she's waiting for me and my news. But if I can do any useful work, it will be to-night."

"Do you think you can—oh, do you *think* you can?" Violet implored.

"That's just what I must do. I must think," I said. "Perhaps meanwhile the police will make a lucky stroke. If so, you'll owe me nothing. If they don't——"

"They won't—I feel they won't!" my sister-in-law sobbed.

Suddenly I had become the sole person of importance in her world. She pinned her one forlorn hope to me, like a flag nailed to a mast in a storm. And I—saw a picture before my mind's

eye of a dark figure in a boat, putting on a thing that looked like a diver's helmet. Queer, that—very queer!

* * * * *

So utterly absorbed was I in my new-born theory and in trying to work it out, that for the first time since I met and loved her I ceased consciously to think of Maida. Of course she was the incentive. If I put myself into Haslemere's service, I was working for *her*: to earn their gratitude, and lay their payment at her feet. Far away in the dimmest background of my brain was the impression that I was a clever fellow: that I was being marvellously intelligent: and at that moment I was more of a fool than I had ever been in my life. I thought I saw Rameses' hand moving in the shadows, using my brother and his wife as pawns in his game of chess. Yet it didn't occur to my mind that he was using me also: that he had pushed me far along the board, for his convenience, while I believed myself acting in my own interests and Maida's. I had flattered myself that my white queen was safe on the square where I had placed her, guarded by knight, bishop and castle. Yet while I went on with the game at a far end of the board, Rameses said "Check!" Another move, and it would be checkmate.

I was gone longer than Maida had expected, but she was not anxious. The yacht at anchor, lay in sight of the towers which I had pointed out the night before, rising above a dusky cloud of trees. From Maida's deck-chair she could see them against the sky; and she could have seen the landing-place where I had gone ashore, had it not been hidden behind a miniature promontory. She tried to read, but it was hard to concentrate her mind on any book, while her future was being decided. In spite of herself, she would find her eyes wandering from the page and focussing on the little green promontory that screened the landing. At any moment I might appear from behind those rocks and bushes.

Suddenly, just as she had contrived to lose herself in a poem of Rupert Brooke's, the throb of a motor-boat caught her ear. She glanced eagerly up, to see a small automobile craft rounding the promontory. Apparently it had come from the private landing-place of Hasletowers, but the girl could not be certain of this until she had made sure it was headed for the yacht. Presently it had stopped alongside, and Maida saw that it had on board a man and a boy. The man, in a yachting cap and thick coat of the "pea-jacket" variety, absorbed himself deeply in the engine. What he was doing Maida neither knew nor cared; but it took his whole attention. He humped his back over his work and had not even the human curiosity to look up. It was the boy who hailed the *Lily Maid*, and announced that he had a message for Lady John Hasle from her sister-in-law, Lady Haslemere. It was a verbal message, which he had been ordered to deliver himself; and three minutes later he was on deck carrying out his duty.

"If you please, m'lady, the Marquis and Marchioness of Haslemere send their best compliments, and would you favour them by going in this boat to meet her ladyship on board the yacht of a friend? You will be joined a little later by the Marquis, and Lord John Hasle, who are at the house, kept by important business."

"I don't understand," Maida hesitated. "My hus—Lord John went on shore some time ago. I thought—was Lady Haslemere not at home after all?"

"That's it, m'lady," briskly explained the lad. "She was away on board this yacht I'm speaking of. Her ladyship hasn't been well—a bit of an invalid, or she'd come to you. But Lord John Hasle thought you might not mind——"

"Of course I don't mind," Maida answered him, believing that she began to see light upon the complicated situation. "I'll be ready to start in five minutes."

And she was. Her maid gave her a veiled hat and long cloak; and she was helped on board the motorboat. Still the elder member of its crew did not turn, but went on feverishly rubbing something with an oily rag. The dainty white-clad passenger was made comfortable, the boy tucking a rug over her knees. As he did this, he glanced up from under his cap, as if involuntarily, straight into Maida's chiffon-covered face. She had been too busy thinking of other things to notice the lad with particularity: but with his face so close to hers for an instant, it struck her for the first time that it was like another face remembered with distaste. There rose before Maida a fleeting picture of a young lay sister at the house of the Grey Sisterhood far away on Long Island. The girl had been of the monkey type, lithe and thin, brown and freckled, her age anything between seventeen and twenty-two; and she had seemed to regard Miss Odell, the Head Sister's favourite, with jealous dislike.

"The same type," thought Maida. "They might be brother and sister. But the boy is better looking than the girl. Funny they should look alike: she so American, he with his strong Cockney accent!"

A minute more, and the motor-boat had left the side of the *Lily Maid* and was shooting away past the private landing-place of Hasletowers. She took the direction whence the yacht had come the previous night, before the dark shapes above the trees had been pointed out by me. Still, there was no other yacht in sight: the waters were empty save for a little black speck far away which might be, Maida thought, the bell buoy of which we had talked. Indeed, as the boat glided on—at visibly reduced speed now—she fancied that she caught the doleful notes of the tolling

bell.

"The yacht where Lady Haslemere expects us, must be a long way from shore;" Maida said.

"Don't be impatient," the man's voice answered. "You will come to your destination soon enough."

A thrill of horror ran through her veins with an electric shock. She knew the voice. She had heard it last in a house in Egypt. The man turned deliberately as he spoke, and looked at her. The face was the face of her past dream, the still more dread reality of her present—

And so, after all, this was to be the end of her love story!

"You do not speak," Essain said.

"I have nothing to say," Maida heard herself answer; and she wondered at the calmness of her own voice. It was low, but it scarcely trembled. So sure she was that there was no hope, no help, she was not even frightened. Simply, she gave herself up for lost: and the sick stab of pain in her heart was for me. She was afraid—but only afraid that I might reproach myself for leaving her alone.

"You've no doubt now as to what your destination is?" the voice went on, quivering with exultation as Maida's did not quiver with dread.

"I have no doubt," she echoed.

"No appeal to my pity?"

"I made none before. It would have been worse than useless then—and it would now."

"You are right!" the man said. "It would be useless. I have lived for this. My one regret is that my sister sacrificed her life in vain. But she and I will meet—soon it may be—and I shall tell her that we did not fail."

"If you tell her the truth, you will have to say you couldn't make me die a coward," Maida answered, "and so your triumph isn't worth much."

"It is the end of the vendetta, and our promise to our father will have been kept," said Essain. "That is enough. I do not expect a woman of your ancestry to be a coward."

"She doesn't know yet what you're going to do with her," cut in his companion. The Cockney accent was gone. Maida started slightly in surprise, and stared at the brown, monkey face with its ears which stuck out on the close-cropped head. The voice was only too easy to recognise now.

"Be silent, you cat!" Essain commanded savagely. "Your business is to obey. Leave the rest to me."

He turned again to Maida. "You see," he said, "my sister and I never lacked for servants. I have many on this side of the water—as everywhere when I want them. But this one is rather over-zealous because she happened not to be among the admirers of Miss Odell at the Sisterhood House. She wants you to realise that she is enough in my confidence to know what is due to happen next. I intend to tell you—not to please her, but to please myself. I have earned the satisfaction! First, however, I have a few other explanations to make. I think they may interest you, Lady John Hasle! My organisations are as powerful in Europe as in the States. Through some of my best men your new family is going to be disgraced. There will be a first-class scandal, and they will have to pay, to the tune of one hundred thousand pounds, to crush it. They're far from rich. I'm not sure they can do the trick—unless your clever husband stumps up with the fortune he'll inherit from you, on your death. I shall be interested, as an outsider, to see the developments. Meanwhile I've put into my pocket, and my friends' pockets, the exact sum which must come out of theirs—or rather I shall in a few moments from now do so, as you yourself will see."

By this time they had come close to the bell buoy; and Maida remembered how, with me, she had leaned on the deck-rail idly watching the silhouettes of a man and a boy in a motor-boat.

"It was you we saw last night!" she exclaimed. "You put on a diver's helmet. You had a thing like an empty cage in your hand. You went down under the water—"

"Ah, you saw that from the yacht, did you?" broke in Essain. "I was afraid, when I caught sight of the passing yacht, that it might have been so! But it doesn't matter. Lord John fancies himself a detective—but it's luck, more than skill, which has favoured him so far: and his luck won't bring him to the bell buoy until I want him to come—which I shall do, later. The cage you saw isn't empty to-day, if any of Lord John's luck is on my friends' side, and I'm sure it is. I placed the receptacle ready last night. Now, I think it will be filled with jewelled fish, which I have come to catch. In their place I shall give it a feed of stones, heavy enough to hold it down. And deep under the still water you shall be its guardian, till I'm out of England and can let Lord John have a hint where to look for his lost wife."

Maida remembered what I had told her last night: how, when I was a boy I had loved the old bell buoy and "imagined a thousand stories about it." Surely I could never have invented one so strange as this—this end of our love story for which the bell tolled!

"When he finds me gone, he will never think of the bell buoy," Maida told herself.

But I had thought of it even without knowing that she was gone. I had put myself into Rameses' skin, and let my mind follow the workings of his since the sending of the anonymous letter to Lady Annesley, just up to the moment when those two dark silhouettes had passed near the moonlit bell buoy. I had cursed myself for not seeing how it might have suited Rameses' book to have Maida isolated on board the *Lily Maid*—certain to be offered to her if she left Annesley's house to be married in a hurry. I had called myself every kind of madman and fool for leaving her alone at the mercy of the enemy, and—having done all this I went straight to Southampton in my brother's highest-powered car, to hire a motorboat of my own.

That is how I got to the bell buoy just as Essain and his companion had emptied the iron cage of its treasures and were filling it with stones while Maida lay bound hand and foot in the bottom of the boat.

Rameses had ready a tiny bottle of Prussic acid which he crushed between his teeth at sight of me and the two policemen from Southampton. But the disguised girl lived, and through her we found the false Combes, Blackburn and Driveny, members all of the old New York gang who had played me so many tricks. Nobody outside has ever yet heard the story of the imposture and the theft; nor will they know till they see this story in print. By then the jewel auction will have been forgotten by the world. Only we shall not forget. But we are too happy, Maida and I, to remember with bitterness.

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