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DEAD MAN'S LOVE

BY
TOM GALLON

DEAD MAN'S LOVE

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Author of "Tatterley," "Jarwick the Prodigal," "Tinman," etc.

BRENTANO'S
5TH AVENUE, AND 27TH STREET
NEW YORK CITY

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DEAD MAN'S LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

I COME TO THE SURFACE OF THINGS.

I came out of Penthouse Prison on a certain Monday morning in May. Let there be no misunderstanding about it; I came out by way of the roof. And the time was four in the morning; I heard the big clock over the entrance gates chime in a dull, heavy, sleepy fashion as I lay crouched on the roof under shadow of the big tower at the north end, and looked about me.

Looking back at it now, it seems like a dream, and even then I could not realise exactly how it had happened. All I know is that there had been an alarm of fire earlier in the night, and a great running to and fro of warders, and a battering at doors by frantic locked-in men, with oaths, and threats, and shrieks. The smell of burning wood had reached my nostrils, and little whiffs and wreaths of smoke had drifted in through the ventilator in my door, before that door was opened, and I found myself huddled outside in the long corridor with other fellow-captives. And at that time I had not thought of escaping at all, probably from the fact that I was too frightened to do anything but obey orders.

But it came about that, even in that well-conducted prison, something had gone wrong with the fire-hose; and it became a matter of a great passing of buckets from hand to hand, and I, as a trusted prisoner, and a model one, too, was put at the end of the line that was the least guarded. Smoke was all about me, and I could only see the faces of convicts and warders looming at me through the haze, indistinctly. I handed the buckets mechanically, as I had done everything else in that place during the few months I had been there.

I heard an order shouted in the distance, and I lost the faces that had seemed to be so near to me; the fire had broken out in a fresh place, and there was a sudden call for help. I hesitated—the last of the line of men—for a moment; then I set down my bucket, and turned in the opposite direction and ran for it. I knew where there was a flight of stairs; I guessed that one particular door I had seen but once would be open; the rest I left to chance. With my heart thumping madly I fled up the stairs, and flung myself against the door; it yielded, and I stumbled through on to the roof of the prison.

I could hear down below me a great hubbub, but the roar of the flames had subsided somewhat, and I knew that the fire had been conquered. That meant for me a shorter time in which to make good my escape. I went slipping and sliding along the roof, half wishing myself back inside the prison, and wondering how I should get from that dizzy height to the ground. Fortunately I was young, and fit, and strong, and they had put me to the hardest work in the prison for those first months, thereby hardening my muscles to their own undoing; and I was active as a cat. After lying on the roof for what seemed a long time—until, in fact, the hubbub below had almost subsided entirely—I determined that I could afford to wait no longer. I raised my head where I lay and peered over the edge, as I have said, just as the great clock struck four.

I looked straight into the open mouth of a rain-water pipe a few inches below me. It was almost full daylight by this time, but a hazy, misty morning. I worked my way to the very edge of the roof, and lay along it; then I got my arms over the edge and gripped the broad top of the pipe. There could be no half measures about such a matter; I threw myself over bodily, and dropped to the stretch of my arms, and hung there. Then I quickly lowered one hand and gripped the smooth, round pipe, and began to slide down. I remember wondering if by some fatality I should drop into the arms of an expectant warder.

But that didn't happen. I reached the ground in safety and crouched there, waiting; there was still the outer wall to scale. In that I was less fortunate, for although in the grey light I made the circuit of it inside twice over, I failed to discover anything by which I could mount. But at last I came upon a shed that was used for storing the oakum, picked and unpicked; it had a heavy padlock on the wooden door, and the roof of the shed inclined at an angle against the high wall. It was my only chance, and there was but one way to do it.

I stepped back a few paces, and took a running leap for the edge of the roof, jumping for the padlock. I tried three times, and the third time I got my foot upon the padlock, and caught the gutter with my hands. Exerting all my strength, I drew myself up until I lay flat upon the shelving roof of the shed, scrambled up that, and stood upright against the outer wall, with the topmost stones about a foot above the reach of my hands.

That was the most ticklish work of all, because the first time I tried to make a jump for the top of the wall I slipped, and nearly rolled off the sloping roof altogether. The second time I was more

successful, and I got my fingers firmly hitched on to the top of the wall. I hung there for a moment, fully expecting that I should have to let go; but I heard a shout—or thought I heard one—from the direction of the prison, and that urged me on as nothing else could have done. I drew myself up until I lay flat on the top of the wall, and then I rolled over into freedom.

Incidentally in my hurry I rolled over on to a particularly hard road, without much care how I fell. I picked myself up and looked about me, and began for the first time to realise my desperate situation. What earthly chance was there for me, clad as I was in convict garb, in a wild country place, at something after four o'clock in the morning? I was branded before all men; I was a pariah, to be captured by hook or by crook; the hand of the meanest thing I might meet would legitimately be against me.

But then I was only five-and-twenty, and the coming day had in it a promise of sweetness and of beauty—and I was free! Even while I cast about in my mind to know what I should do, I know that I rejoiced in my strength and in my young manhood; I know that I could have grappled almost gleefully with any adverse fate that might have risen up against me. But I recognised that the first thing to do would be to make for cover of some kind, until I could make shift to get a change of clothing, or to decide after my hurried flight what the next move was to be.

After going some little way I dropped down into a ditch, and looked back at the prison. It stood up grim and silent against the morning sky, and there was now no sign of any disturbance about it. Evidently for the present I had not been missed; only later would come a mustering of the prisoners, and my number would be called, and there would be no answer. That gave me time, but not time enough. I determined to make my way across country as quickly as I could before the world was astir, and so put as great a distance as possible between myself and the prison.

But by the time I had run a few miles, and could see in the near distance the roofs of cottages, I began to realise that in the country people have a bad habit of rising at a most unearthly hour. It was but little after five o'clock, and yet already smoke was coming from cottage chimneys; more than once I had a narrow squeak of it, in coming almost face to face with some labourer trudging early to his work in the fields. Daylight was not my time, it was evident; I must wait for the friendly darkness, even though I waited hungry.

The record of a great part of that day is easily set down. I lay perdu in a little wood, where, by raising my head, I could see out on to the broad highway that was presently in some indefinite fashion to set me on the greater road for freedom. All day long the sun blazed down on that road, and all day long from my hiding-place I watched vehicles and pedestrians passing to and fro; I had much time for thought. Once some little children toddled down hand-in-hand into the wood, and began to pick flowers near where I lay hidden; that was the first sight of anything beautiful I had had for a good long time, as you shall presently understand. Despite the danger to myself, if they should have seen me and raised any alarm, I was sorry enough when they toddled away again.

There was so much to be thought about, as I lay there on my face, plucking at the cool green grasses, and drinking in the beauty of the wood. For I was but five-and-twenty, and yet had never known really what life was like. I had been shut away all my days in a prison, almost as grim and as bad as that from which I had this day escaped; and I had left it for that greater prison where they branded men and set them to toil like beasts.

My earliest recollections had been of my uncle—Zabdiel Blowfield. I seemed to have a vision of him when I was very, very small, and when I lay quaking in a big bed in a horrible great room, bending over me, and flaring a candle at me, as though with the amiable intention of starting my night's rest well with a personal nightmare. Uncle Zabdiel had brought me up. It seems that I was left on his hands when I was a mere child; I easily developed and degenerated into his slave. At the age of fourteen I knew no more of the world than a baby of fourteen months, and what smattering of education I had had was pressed then into my uncle's service; I became his clerk.

He lived in a great house near Barnet, and from there he conducted his business. It was a paying business, and although I touched at first only the fringe of it, I came to understand that Zabdiel Blowfield was something of a human spider, gathering into his clutches any number of fools who had money to lose, together with others who wanted money, and were prepared to pay a price for it. He taught me his business, or just so much of it as should make me useful in the drudgery of it; and, as it happened, he taught me too much.

I had ten years of that slavery—ten years, during which I grew to manhood, and to strength and vigour. For while he thought he suppressed me, and while, as a matter of fact, he half-starved me, and dressed me in his own cast-off clothing, and kept my young nose to the grindstone of his business, I contrived, within the last year or so at least, to lead something of a double life. I was young, and that alone shall plead my excuse. If another excuse were wanted, it might be summed up in this: that the world called me—that world that was a glorious uncertainty, of which I knew nothing and longed to know a great deal.

Uncle Zabdiel regarded me as very much of a poor fool; it never entered into his head for a moment to suspect the machine he had taught to do certain mechanical things. But I, who never had a penny for my own, constantly had gold passing through my fingers, and gold spelt a way out into the great world. I was tempted, and I fell; it was quite easy to alter the books.

I had two years of it. They were two years during which I worked as hard as ever during the day, and escaped from that prison when darkness had fallen. I always contrived to get back before the

dawn, or before my uncle had come into the place he called his office; and by that time I had changed back into the shabby, apparently broken, creature he knew for his slave. For the rest I did nothing very vicious; but I saw something of the world outside, and I spent what I could get of my uncle's money.

The blow fell, as I might have expected—and that, too, by the merest chance. I had grown reckless; there seemed no possibility of my being found out. But my Uncle Zabdiel happened to light upon a something that made him suspicious, and from that he went to something else. Without saying a word to me, he must have unwound the tangle slowly bit by bit, until it stood out before him clearly; and then he took to watching.

I shall never forget the morning when he caught me. I got into my accustomed window, in those gayer clothes I affected in my brief holidays, and I came face to face with the old man in my room. He was sitting on the side of the bed, with his black skull-cap thrust on the back of his head, and with his chin resting on his stick; and for a long time after I knew the game was up he neither spoke nor moved. As for me, I had had my good time, and I simply wondered in a dull fashion what he was going to do.

"You needn't say anything, Norton Hyde," said Uncle Zabdiel at last. "I know quite as much as you can tell me, and perhaps a little more. You're an ungrateful dog, and like other ungrateful dogs you shall be punished."

"I wanted to live like other men," I said sullenly.

"Haven't I fed you, lodged you, looked after you?" he snapped out. "Where would you have been, but for me?"

"I might have been a better man," I answered him. "I've slaved for you for ten long years, and you've done your best to starve me, body and soul. I've taken your money, but it isn't as much as you'd have had to pay me in those ten years, if I'd been some poor devil of a clerk independent of you!"

"We won't bandy words," said my uncle, getting up from my bed. "Go to bed; I'll decide what to do with you in the morning."

Now, wisely speaking, of course, I ought to have made good my escape that night. But there was a certain bravado in me—a certain feeling, however wrong, that I was justified to an extent in what I had done—for the labourer is worthy of his hire. So I went to bed, and awaited the morning with what confidence I could. Being young, I slept soundly.

I was the only living relative of Zabdiel Blowfield, and one would have thought—one, at least, who did not know him—that he would have shown some mercy. But mercy was not in his nature, and I had wounded the man in that tenderest part of him—the pocket. Incredible as it may seem, I was handed over to justice on a charge of forgery and falsification of books, and in due course I stood my trial, with my uncle as the chief witness against me.

Uncle Zabdiel made a very excellent witness, too, from the point of view of the prosecution. I—Norton Hyde—stood in the dock, I flatter myself, rather a fine figure of a young man, tall, and straight, and dark-haired; the prosecutor—and a reluctant one at that—stood bowed, and old, and trembling, and told the story of my ingratitude. He had brought me up, and he had educated me; he had fed, and clothed, and lodged me; but for him I must have died ignominiously long before. And I had robbed him, and had spent his money in riotous living. He wept while he told the tale, for the loss of the money was a greater thing than most men would suppose.

The limb of the law he had retained for the prosecution had a separate cut at me on his account. According to that gentleman I was a monster; I would have robbed a church; there was scarcely any crime in the calendar of which I would not have been capable. It was plainly suggested that the best thing that could happen to society would be to get me out of the way for as many years as possible.

The judge took up the case on something of the same lines. He preached a neat little sermon on the sin of ingratitude, and incidentally wondered what the youth of the country were coming to in these degenerate days; he left me with confidence to a jury of respectable citizens, who were, I was convinced, every man Jack of them, fathers of families. I was doomed from the beginning, and I refused to say anything in my own defence.

So they packed me off quietly out of the way for ten years; and Uncle Zabdiel, I have no doubt, went back to his old house, and thereafter engaged a clerk at a starvation wage, and kept a pretty close eye upon him. I only know that, so far as I was concerned, he sidled up to me as I was leaving the dock, and whispered, with a leer—

"You'll come out a better man, Norton—a very much better man."

Perhaps I had not realised the tragedy of the business at that time, for it must be understood that I had not in any sense of the word lived. Such small excursions as I had made into life had been but mere dippings into the great sea of it; of life itself I knew nothing. And now they were to shut me away for ten years—or a little less, if I behaved myself with decorum—and after that I was to be given an opportunity to make a real start, if the gods were kind to me.

However, it is fair to say that up to the actual moment of my escape from Penthouse Prison I had

accepted my fate with some measure of resignation. I had enough to eat, and work for my hands, and I slept well; in that sense I was a young and healthy animal, with a past that had not been interesting, and a future about which I did not care to think. But as I lay in the wood all that long day better thoughts came to me; I had hopes and desires such as I had not had before. I saw in a mental vision sweet country places, and fair homes, and decent men and women; I was to meet and touch them all some day, when I had worked myself out of this present tangle. Alas! I did not then know how much I was to go through first!

I had lain so long, with but the smallest idea of where I actually was, and with a ravening hunger upon me, that I had actually seen men returning from their work to their homes in the late afternoon before I bestirred myself to think of what I was to do. More than once, as I lay there, I had seen, speeding along the great road above me, motor-cars that annihilated space, and were gone in a cloud of dust. I had a ridiculous feeling that if I were nimble enough I might manage to board one of those, and so get away beyond the reach of pursuit. For always the great prison menaced me, standing as it did within a mile or two of where I lay. I knew that the pursuit must already have started; I wondered that I had not yet seen a warder.

And then came deliverance. You may say it was miraculous, if you will; I can only set down here the fact as it happened. I saw in the distance, winding down a long hill, a grey monster scarcely darker than the road over which it swept, and I knew without the telling that the grey monster was a racing car. As it drew nearer I saw that it had a sharpened front like an inverted boat, and behind that sharpened front crouched a man, with his hands upon the wheel and his face masked by hideous goggles. He swept down towards the place where I lay at a terrific pace, and, half in wonder at the sight, and half fascinated by it, I drew myself forward through the bushes until I lay at the very side of the road, with my chin uplifted and my face literally peering through the hedge.

The grey monster came on and on, and the curious thing was that it slackened speed a little as it got near to me, so that I saw the dusty outlines of it, and the great bulk of it set low between its wheels, and caught the sound of its sobbing breath. And then it stopped at the side of the road, so near to me that I could almost have stretched out a hand and touched the nearest wheel.

The man got down stiffly out of his seat, and thrust the goggles up over his cap and began to pull off his driving-gloves. Something had gone wrong with the monster, and I heard the man heave a quick sigh as he bent down to examine the machinery. For a little time his head disappeared among the works, and then, with a grunt of relief, he straightened himself and began pulling on his gloves; and so, by a miracle, turning his head a little, looked down into my upturned face.

He was a youngish man with a thin, keen, shaven face, tight-lipped and clear-eyed. He had on a long grey coat, buttoned close about him, and his appearance, with the cap drawn down over his ears and the goggles set on the front of it, was not altogether prepossessing. But the man looked a sportsman, and somehow or other I was attracted to him. Scarcely knowing what I did, I glanced to right and left along the road, and then rose to my feet in the ditch.

He gave a low whistle, and nodded slowly, finished pulling on his gloves, and set his gloved hands against his sides. "Hullo, my friend," he said at last, "I heard about you on the hill up yonder. You're wanted badly."

"I know that," I said huskily, for my throat was dry, alike from thirst and from a new fear that had sprung up in me. "Perhaps you'd like to drive me back to meet them."

"If you're anxious," he retorted, with a laugh. "Only it happens that I'm not that sort. It would be playing it rather low down to do that, wouldn't it?"

"I should think so," I said, answering his laugh with another that had something of a sob in it.

"What's your particular crime?" he asked. "Murder?"

"Nothing half so bad as that," I answered him. "I stole some money, and had a good time; now I've been paying the penalty. I've done nearly one out of my ten years."

He turned away abruptly, and I heard him mutter something which sounded like "Poor devil!" but I would not be sure of that. Then, after bending for a moment again over his car, he said, without looking up at me, "I take it you'd like to get out of this part of the country, if possible?"

"Anywhere!" I exclaimed, in a shaking whisper. "I only want a chance."

He looked along the lines of the grey monster, and laid his hand upon the machine affectionately. "Then you can't do better than travel with me," he said. "I can swing you along at a pace that'll knock the breath out of you if you're not used to it, and I can drop you a hundred miles or so along the road. There's no one in sight; get in. Here's a spare pair of goggles."

I adjusted the goggles with a shaking hand, and tried to thank him. He had tossed a short grey coat to me, and that I put about my shoulders. Almost before I was in the seat beside him the grey car began to move, and then I saw the landscape slipping past us in two streaks. I tried once or twice to speak, but the words were driven back into my mouth, and I could not get anything articulate out.

My recollection of that journey is dim and obscure. I only know that now and then, as we flew along, the man jerked out questions at me, and so discovered that I had had nothing to eat all

day, and was practically famished. He slowed down the car and showed me where, in a tin case under my feet, were some sandwiches and a flask; and I took in sandwiches and dust gratefully enough for the next few miles, and gulped down a little out of the flask. The houses were beginning to be more frequent, and we met more vehicles on the road, when presently he slowed down to light his lamps.

"At what particular spot would you like to be dropped?" he asked, as he came round my side of the car and bent down over the lamp there. "Choose for yourself."

I told him I hardly knew; I think then, for the first time, I realised that I was in as bad a case as ever, and that, save for my short coat and the goggles, I was clad exactly as when I had dropped over my prison wall. I think I told him that all places were alike to me, and that I would leave it to him.

So we went on again at a diminishing speed, with the motor horn sounding continuously; flashed through an outlying village or two, until I saw, something to my horror, that the man was drawing into London. I turned to him to protest, but he smiled and shook his head.

"Don't you worry; I'm going to see you through this—just for the sport of the thing," he said, raising his voice to a shout, so that he might be heard above the roar of the flying wheels. "I'm going to take you slap through London to my place, and I'm going to give you a change of clothes and some food. To-morrow, if you like, I'll whack you down to the coast, and ship you off somewhere. You're as safe as houses with me; I've taken an interest in you."

I could only sit still, and wonder what good providence had suddenly tossed this man into my world to do this thing for me. I could have kissed his hands; I could have worshipped him, as one might worship a god. I felt that my troubles were over; for the first time in all my life I had someone to lean upon, someone willing and anxious to help me.

And then as suddenly the whole thing came to an end. We had got through a village in safety, and had swung at a terrific pace round a corner, and there was a huge hay-waggon in the very middle of the road. There was no time to pull up, and the road was too narrow to allow the car free passage on either side. I heard the man beside me give a gasp as he bent over his wheel, and then we swerved to the right, and flew up the bank at the side of the road, in a mad endeavour to pass the waggon.

We shot past it somehow, and I thought we should drop to the road again; instead, the car continued up the bank, seemed to hang there for a moment, even at the terrific pace we were going, and then began to turn over. I say began to turn over because in that fraction of a second events seemed to take hours to finish. I know I jumped, and landed all in a heap, and seemed to see, as I fell, the car before me turning over; and then for a moment or two I knew nothing.

When I recovered consciousness I got slowly to my knees, and looked about me. My head ached fearfully, but I seemed to have no very great injuries. A dozen yards in front of me lay the grey monster, with three wheels left to it, and those three upreared helplessly in the air. My friend the driver I could not see anywhere. I staggered to my feet, relieved to find that I could walk, and went forward to the car; and there, on the other side of it, lay my friend, doubled up and unconscious. He, too, seemed to have escaped any very great injury as by a miracle. I straightened him out and touched him here and there, in the hope to discover if any bones were broken; he only groaned a little, and even that sound was cheering. The man was not dead.

I had no thought of my own safety until I heard the rumble of wheels, and saw the cause of all the disaster—that hay-waggon—coming towards me. From the opposite direction, too, I heard the sharp toot-toot of a motor horn, and knew that help was coming. And then, for the first time, I realised that that help was not for me, and that I must not remain where I was a moment longer: for if my situation had been bad before, it was now truly frightful. I was somewhere in the neighbourhood of London—near to a northern suburb—and I was in convict garb, partially concealed by a short grey coat, and I was hatless.

Fortunately for me, by this time it was dark, and I had only seen that hay-waggon looming up, as it were, against the evening sky. Knowing that my friend must soon receive better help than I could give him, I decided that that episode in my life at least was closed. I slipped off my goggles and dropped them beside him; then, after a momentary glance round, I decided to try for a fence at one side, opposite that bank that had been our undoing. It was not very high, just within reach of my hands. I made a jump for the top and scrambled over, and dropped among some undergrowth on the further side of it.

There is a humorous side to everything; even in my plight I was compelled to laugh at what I now saw through a chink in the fence. I peered out to see what became of my friend, and as I did so I saw that another motor-car had stopped by the overturned one, and that the driver had got down. Greatly to my relief I saw my friend sit up and stare about him; even saw him smile a little ruefully at the sight of his grey monster in its present condition. And then, although I could not hear what he said, I saw that he was asking questions eagerly about me.

For he had lost me entirely; it was evident that the poor fellow was in a great state of perplexity. I sincerely hope that some day he may read these lines, and so may come to an understanding of what happened to me; I heartily wished, as I looked through the fence then, that I could have relieved his perplexity. It was evident that after his accident he was not at all sure whether he had left me on the road at some place or other, or whether by a miracle I had been in some

fashion snatched off the earth, and so snatched out of my predicament. As I feared, however, that he and the other man, together with the driver of the waggon, might begin some regular search for me, I decided that I could no longer remain where I was. I began to walk away, through thick rank grass and among trees, going cautiously, and wondering where I was.

In truth I was so shaken that I staggered and swayed a little as I walked. I tried to get my ideas into some order, that I might make myself understand what was the best thing for me to do. I came to the conclusion that I must first get a change of clothing; there was no hope for me unless I could do that. By this time telegraph wires would have carried messages to all parts describing me, and those messages would have travelled much faster even than that unfortunate racing car by which I had come so far. If I could break into a house, and by some great good chance find clothing that would fit me, all might be well. But at the moment I stood marked and branded for all men to discover.

Somewhat to my relief and also to my dismay, I found presently that I was walking in the grounds of a private house. I came upon a large artificial lake or pond, with stone seats dotted about here and there near the margin of it; the stone seats were green and brown with moss and climbing plants that had been allowed to work their will upon them. In fact, all the grounds had a neglected appearance, and so had the house, too, when presently I came to it. I was just making up my mind which was the best window by which I might effect an entry, when I heard voices quite near to me, and dropped at once on an instinct, and lay still.

The two figures, I now discovered, were those of a man and woman, standing close together in a little clump of trees. They had been so still that I had walked almost up to them, and might indeed have blundered against them but for the voices. As I lay now I could hear distinctly every word they said. The man was speaking.

"My dear, dear little friend," he said, "you know I would do anything in all the world to help you. You're not safe here; I dread that man, and for your sake I fear him. Why don't you let me take you away from this dreadful house? You know I would be good to you."

"Yes, I know that, Gregory," replied the girl softly. "But I can't make up my mind—I can't be sure of myself. I can't be sure even that I love you well enough to let you take care of me."

"But you don't love anyone else?" he pleaded. And now, for the first time, as he turned his head a little, I saw the man's face. He was quite young, and I noticed that he was tall, and big, and dark, of about the same style and appearance, and even of the same age, I should conjecture, as myself. He was holding the girl's hands and looking down into her eyes. I could not see her face clearly, but I judged her to be small, and fair, and slight of figure.

"No, there is no one else I love," she answered him. "Perhaps, some day, Gregory, I may make up my mind—some day, when things get too terrible to be borne any longer here. I'm not afraid; I have a greater courage than you think. And, after all, the man dare not kill me."

"I'm not so sure of that, Debora," said the man.

They walked away in the direction of the house, and I lay still among the dank grasses, watching them as they went. They disappeared round a corner of it, and still I dared not move.

After quite a long time I thought I heard in the house itself a sharp cry. Perhaps I had been half asleep, lying there with my head on my arms, but the night was very still, and it had seemed to me that I heard the cry distinctly. At all events it roused me, and startled me to a purpose. I must get into that house, and I must get a change of clothing. I made straight for it now, and presently found a window at a convenient height from the ground, and some thick stems of creeper up which I could climb to reach it. I stood there on the window-sill for a moment or two, a grey shadow among grey shadows; then I opened the window, and, hearing nothing, stepped down into a room.

I found myself in intense darkness. I left the window open so that I might make good my escape, and I began to fumble about for something by which I could get a light. I stumbled against a chair, and stood still to listen; there seemed to be no sound in the room. And then while I moved, in the hope to find a fireplace and some matches, I had that curious skin-stirring feeling that there was someone or something in the room with me, silent, and watchful, and waiting. I could almost have sworn that I heard someone breathing, and restraining their breathing at that.

I failed to find the mantelshelf, but I stumbled presently against a table. I stretched out my hands cautiously about it, leaning well forward over it as I did so, and my forehead struck against something that moved away and moved back again—something swinging in mid-air above the table.

I thought it might be a lamp, and I put out my hand to steady it. But that which I touched was so surprising and so horrifying that for a moment I held it, and stood there in the darkness fumbling with it, and on the verge of shrieking. For it was a man's boot I held, and there was a foot inside it. Someone was hanging there above me.

I made straight for the window at once; I felt I was going mad. Needless to say, I failed to find the window at all, but this time I found the mantelshelf. There my hand struck against a match-box, and knocked over a candlestick with a clatter. After two or three tries I got a light, and stooped with the lighted match in my hands and found the candlestick, and set it upright on the floor. So soon as I had steadied my hands to the wick and had got a flame, I looked up at the dreadful

thing above me.

Suspended from a beam that went across the ceiling was a man hanging by the neck, dead—and the distorted, livid face was the face of the man I had seen in the garden but a little time before—the face of the man who had talked with the girl!

Nor was that all. Seated at the table was another man, with arms stretched straight across it, so that the hands were under the dangling feet of the other, and with his face sunk on the table between the arms. And this seemed to be an old man with grey hair.

CHAPTER II.

I AM HANGED—AND DONE FOR.

So soon as I could get my eyes away from that thing that swung horribly above the table, I forced them to find the window. But even then I could not move. It was as though my limbs were frozen with the sheer horror of this business into which I had blundered. You will own that I had had enough of sensations for that day; I wonder now that I was able to get back to sane thoughts at all. I stood there, with my teeth chattering, and my hands clutching at the grey coat I wore, striving to pull myself together, and to decide what was best to be done. To add to the horror of the thing, the man who lay half across the table began to stir, and presently sat up slowly, like one waking from a long and heavy sleep. He sat for some moments, staring in front of him, with his hands spread out palms downwards on the table. He did not seem to see me at all. I watched him, wondering what he would do when presently he should look round and catch sight of me; wondering, for my part, whether, if he cried out with the shock of seeing me, I should grapple with him, or make for the window and dash out into the darkness.

He did a surprising thing at last. He raised his eyes slowly, until they rested upon what gyrated and swung above him, and then, as his eyes travelled upwards to the face, he smiled very slowly and very gently; and almost on the instant turned his head, perhaps at some noise I made, and looked squarely at me.

"Good evening, sir!" he said in a low tone.

Think of it! To be calmly greeted in that fashion, in a room into which I had blundered, clad grotesquely as I was, and with that dead thing hanging above us! Idiotically enough I tried to get out an answer to the man, but I found my tongue staggering about among my teeth and doing nothing in the way of shaping words. So I stared at him with, I suppose, a very white face, and pointed to that which hung above us.

"He's very quiet, sir," said the old man, getting to his feet slowly. "I was afraid at first—I didn't understand. I was afraid of him. Think of that!" He laughed again with a laughter that was ghastly.

"Cut—cut him down!" I stammered in a whisper, holding on to the edge of the mantelshelf and beginning to feel a horrible nausea stealing over me.

He shook his head. "I can't touch him—I'm afraid again," said the old man, and backed away into a corner.

What I should have done within a minute or two I do not really know, if by chance I could have kept my reason at all, but I heard someone moving in the house, and coming towards the room in which I stood. I did not think of my danger; everything was so far removed from the ordinary that it was as though I moved and walked in some dream, from which presently, with a shudder and a sigh of relief, I should awake. Therefore, even when I heard footsteps coming towards the room I did not move, nor did it seem strange that whoever came seemed to step with something of a jaunty air, singing loudly as he moved, with a rather fine baritone voice. In just such a fashion a man flung open the door and marched straight into the room, and stopped there, surveying the picture we made, the three of us—one dead and two alive—with a pair of very bright, keen eyes.

He was a tall, thin man, with sleek black hair gone grey at the temples. He had a cleanly-shaven face, much lined and wrinkled at the corners of the eyes and of the mouth; and when he presently spoke I discovered that his lips parted quickly, showing the line of his white teeth, and yet with nothing of a smile. It was as though the lips moved mechanically in some still strong mask; only the eyes were very much alive. And after his first glance round the room I saw that his eyes rested only on me.

"Who are you? What do you want?" he demanded sharply.

I did not answer his question; I pointed weakly to the hanging man. "Aren't you going—going to do anything with him?" I blurted out.

He shrugged his shoulders. "He's dead; and the other one,"—he let his eyes rest for a moment on the old man—"the other one is as good as dead for anything he understands. The matter is between us, and perhaps I'd better hear you first."

"I can't—not with that in the room!" I whispered, striving to steady my voice.

He shrugged his shoulders again, and drew from his pocket a knife. Keeping his eyes fixed on the swaying figure above him, he mounted to a chair, and so to the table, deftly and strongly lifted the dead man upon one shoulder while he severed the rope above his head. Then he stepped down, first to the chair and then to the floor, and laid the thing, not ungently, on a couch in the corner. I was able now to avert my eyes from it.

"Does that please you?" he asked, with something of a sneer. "Get forward into the light a little; I want to see you."

I stepped forward, and he looked me up and down; then he nodded slowly, and showed that white gleam of his teeth. "I see—a convict," he said. "From what prison?"

"Many miles from here," I answered him. "I escaped early this morning; someone brought me as far as this on a motor-car. I broke in—because I wanted food and a change of clothing. I was desperate."

"I see—I see," he said, in his smooth voice. "A change of clothing, and food. Perhaps we may be able to provide you with both."

"You mean you'll promise to do so, while you communicate with the police, I suppose?" I answered sullenly.

He smiled, and shook his head. "That is not my way of doing things at all," he said. "You are desperate, you tell me, and I have no particular interest in your recapture. If it comes to that, I have trouble enough of my own." He glanced for a moment at the body behind him. "I should like to know how it comes about that you are a convict—for what particular crime, I mean?"

I told him, as briefly as I could, the whole story, not painting myself too black, you may be sure. He listened with deep attention until I had finished, and then for a minute or two he stood still, with his arms folded, evidently considering some point deeply. I waited, forgetful of all else but the man before me, for he seemed to hold my fate in his hands. All this time the old man I had found in the room stood in a corner, smiling foolishly, and nibbing his hands one over the other. The other man who dominated the situation took not the faintest notice of him.

"How long have you been hanging about this place, waiting to break in?" demanded the man who had come into the room last. "Speak the truth."

"I don't exactly know," I answered. "I fell asleep while I lay in the grounds, and lost count of time. But I saw him,"—I nodded my head towards that prone figure on the couch—"I saw him in the grounds."

"Alone?" He jerked the word out at me.

"No, there was a lady."

"Since you know that, you may as well know the rest," he replied. "This young man has had a most unhappy attachment for a young lady in this house, who is my ward. He has persecuted her with his attentions; he has come here under cover of the darkness, over and over again, against my wishes. She liked him——"

"I heard her say that," I broke in, incautiously.

"Then you only confirm my words," he said, after a sharp glance at me. "Perhaps you may imagine my feelings when to-night I discovered that the unhappy boy had absolutely taken his revenge upon me, and upon her, by hanging himself in this very room. So far I have been able to keep the knowledge from my ward,—I think there's a possibility that I may be able to keep it from her altogether."

I did not understand the drift of his thought then, nor did I see in what way I was to be concerned in the matter. He came a little nearer to me, and seated himself on the table, and bent his keen glance on me before going on again. I think I muttered something, for my own part, about being sorry, but it was a feeble mutter at the best.

"Perhaps you may wonder why I have not sent at once, in the ordinary course, for a doctor," he went on. "That is quite easily explained when I tell you that I am a doctor myself. The situation is absurd, of course. Perhaps I had better introduce myself. I am Dr. Bardolph Just." He paused, as though expecting that I should supply information on my side.

"My name is Norton Hyde," I said brusquely.

"And you speak like a gentleman, which is a passport at once to my favour," he assured me, with a bow. "Now, let us get to business. A young man comes here to-night and hangs himself in my house. I have a deep respect and liking for that young man, although I am opposed to the idea of his aspiring to the hand of my ward. He hangs himself, and at once scandal springs up, bell-mouthed, to shout the thing to the world. The name of an innocent girl is dragged in; my name is dragged in; innocent people suffer for the foolish act of a thoughtless boy. The question in my mind at once is: Can the penalty be averted from us?"

I must own the man fascinated me. I began to feel that I would do much to help him, and to help the girl I had seen that night in the grounds of the house. Fool that I was then, I did not

understand and did not know what deep game he was playing; indeed, had I known, how could I have stood against him?

"I am, I trust, always a friend to the friendless and the helpless," he went on. "You are friendless, I take it, and very helpless, and although I am no opponent of the law, I have yet the instinct which tells me that I should help a fugitive. Now let us understand one another."

At this point we were interrupted, horribly enough, by a cry from the old man in the corner—a cry like nothing earthly. He advanced a few steps towards where we stood, and looked from one to the other of us, with his hands plucking nervously at his lips.

"I don't understand, gentlemen—I don't understand," he said, in a feeble voice. "He was alive and well and strong this morning; he clapped me on the shoulder, and said—what was it that he said?" The man put one hand to his head and looked at me in a lost fashion. "I forget what it was; something seems to have gone here!" He struck his forehead sharply with his knuckles, and again looked at us with that feeble smile.

"Get out of the way!" said Dr. Just fiercely. "Take no notice of him," he added to me. "He babbles about things he doesn't understand."

The old man slunk away, and sat down on a chair in the corner and dropped his forehead in his hands. And from that time he did not move until my strange interview with Dr. Just was over.

"Now, what I suggest is this," the doctor said, leaning towards me and impressing his points upon me by stabbing one white forefinger into the palm of his other hand. "We will say that you have suffered for a crime which was not morally a crime at all. We will put it that you, by all the laws of humanity, had a right to escape from the hideous doom to which you had been consigned. You have escaped, and by the strangest chance you have found a friend at the very outset."

He smiled at me, if that quick baring of his teeth could be called a smile, and I tried to thank him with broken words. Then he went on again—

"Before you can enter the world again it is necessary that you should have clothing which does not brand you as that dress does," he said. "Therefore I want for a moment to put a case clearly to you—to let you see what is in my mind. Suppose that this convict, fleeing from pursuit, haunted by the thought that he may be recaptured, and may have to serve a yet longer period for his escapade—starving, and fainting, and hopeless; suppose this convict enters a house, and, finding the means ready to his hand, puts an end to the business once for all, and throws up the sponge. In other words, suppose that convict hangs himself, and so gets the laugh of those who are hunting him down. Do you follow me?"

I was so far from following him that I shook my head feebly, and glanced first at my own clothes and then at the man who had hanged himself, and who now lay on the couch. Then I shook my head again.

The doctor seemed to lose patience. "I'm afraid you haven't a very quick brain," he exclaimed testily. "Let me make myself more clear. A young man of good family and good standing in the world, comes in here to-night and commits suicide; soon after an outcast, flying from justice, follows him, and breaks in also. In appearance the two are something alike; both are tall, and strong, and dark; each man—the one from compulsion—has closely cropped dark hair. Suppose I suggest that, to avoid a scandal, it is the convict who has hanged himself, and that the other man has not been here at all. In other words, as you need a change of clothing, I propose you change with that!"

I gasped at the mere horror of the idea; I shuddered as I looked at the dead man. "I couldn't—I couldn't!" I whispered. "Besides, what would become of me?"

"I don't ask you to take the place of the other man; that would be too risky, and would, in fact, be impossible," he said quietly. "I am merely asking you to assist me to cover up this unfortunate business and at the same time to save yourself."

There was no time for me to think; I was like a rat in a trap. Nevertheless, on an impulse, I refused to have anything to do with so mad a notion. "I won't do it; it's impossible!" I said.

"Very good, my friend!" He shrugged his shoulders and moved quietly across the room towards the bell. "Then my duty is clear—I give you up to those who must be anxious concerning your safety. I've given you your chance, and you refuse to take it."

His hand was on the bell when I called to him, "Stop! is there no other way?"

He shook his head. "No other way at all," he replied. "Come, be reasonable; I'm not going to land you into a trap. Put the matter clearly to yourself. You are a pariah, outside the pale of civilised things; I offer you a fresh start. Mr. Norton Hyde, the convict, commits suicide—I pledge my word to you that the fraud shall not be discovered. A certain young girl is saved from much trouble, and sorrow, and anxiety; I also am saved from the consequences of a very rash act, committed by our dead friend here. So far as you are concerned, you can start afresh, with your record wiped out. Come—yes or no?"

"I don't trust you," I said. "What do you want to do with me? what purpose have you in this, apart from the hushing up of a scandal?"

He became thoughtful at that; presently, looking up, he answered me with what seemed to be a charming frankness, "You have the right to ask, and although I might refuse to reply, I want to treat you fairly," he said. "In a certain business in which I am interested—a certain scheme I have on hand—I want help. You will be a man who has thrown everything, as it were, into the melting-pot of life: you will have everything to win, and nothing to lose. In other words, you are just the creature I want—the man ready to my hand, to do anything I may suggest. You haven't answered me yet; is it to be yes or no?"

I said, "No!" quickly, and he moved towards the bell with an impatient frown. He had only three steps to take, but in that brief moment I had a vision of myself handcuffed and going back to my prison; I could not bear it. He was within an inch of the bell, when I cried out the word that was to change all my life, and was to set me upon the most desperate venture I had yet had anything to do with. I cried out, "Yes."

He smiled, and came back to me. "You should learn to make up your mind more quickly," he said. "Now, let us see what we have to do. You've nothing to be afraid of, and you need take no notice of that creature in the corner there; he knows nothing, and will remember nothing. Strip yourself to the skin."

As I began to undress, I glanced at the old man in the corner; he sat in the same attitude, with his head sunk in his hands. "What is wrong with him?" I asked.

Dr. Bardolph just was bending over the body of the man on the couch; he did not look round. "Something snapped in his brain a little time ago," he answered me. "It is as though you had snapped the mainspring of a watch; the brain in him died at that moment."

"What caused it?" I asked, still shedding my clothes.

"Shock. Get your clothes off, and don't talk so much," he snapped.

He tossed certain garments to me one by one, and I flung him my own in return. So the change was made, and I presently stood up and looked down at myself, and saw myself as that young man who had stood in the garden and had talked to the girl. For, indeed, I was something like him in figure, and height, and appearance. When the doctor moved away from the couch I gasped, for there I lay, in the dress I had worn for a year, branded and numbered—and dead. It was not a pretty sight; I turned away from it, shuddering.

But the doctor laughed softly. "It is not given to every man to see himself as he will one day be," he said.

"What was his name?" I whispered.

"Gregory Pennington," he answered, looking at the body. "So you see at one stroke we get rid of Gregory Pennington, and of a certain unfortunate convict, named Norton Hyde. So far as your further christening is concerned, we must arrange that later, for this matter must be taken with a certain boldness, or weak spots may be discovered in it. I think you said you were hungry, and I daresay you've had enough of this room for the present."

"More than enough," I replied.

"Then come along, and let us see if we can find something to put better courage into you," he said. And gratefully enough I followed him from the room in that new disguise.

The house was a very large one. We traversed a number of corridors before coming to a room which seemed to be half-study and half-surgery. I should not have known as to the latter half of it, but for the fact that the doctor, who did not seem to care to summon any servants there may have been, left me there while he went in search of food. I peeped behind a screen at one end of the room, and saw an array of bottles, and test tubes in stands, and other paraphernalia. At the further end of the room were great book cases reaching to the ceiling, and a big desk with a reading-lamp upon it. But even here, though the furniture was handsome, the room had a neglected appearance, as, indeed, I afterwards found every room in that house had.

Bardolph just came back in a little while, carrying food and a decanter. After he had set the food out on a table, and I had fallen to with a relish, he laughed softly, and said that, after all, he had forgotten to bring me a glass. He declared, however, that that was a matter soon remedied, and he went behind the screen, and came out with a tall measuring-glass in his hand. It seemed an uncanny thing to drink wine out of; but I had no choice.

He presently pulled open a drawer in the desk, and took out a cigar, and lighted it; as I had finished my meal, he tossed one to me, and I gratefully began to smoke. The man was evidently still turning over some matter in his mind, for he said nothing while he sat twisting the cigar round between his lips and looking at me. His back was turned towards the door of the room, and presently in that house of horror I saw the door begin slowly to open.

I suppose I ought to have cried out, but once again I was fascinated by what might happen at any moment, and perhaps in sheer wonder as to what was coming in. It was nothing worse, as it turned out, than the little, old grey-haired man I had seen in the further room, and who had evidently followed us. He crept in now, step by step, with that curious smile upon his face, and when he was fairly in the room closed the door—I noticed that it closed with a sharp little click, as though it had a spring lock.

Dr. Bardolph Just did a curious thing. As the lock clicked he suddenly sat rigid, gripping the arms of his chair, and staring at me as though from my face he would learn what was behind him. Seeing, I suppose, nothing in my expression to guide him, he suddenly swung sharply round and faced the little old man; and I thought at that moment that a quick sigh broke from him, as of relief. I wondered what he had expected to see.

"What the devil do you want?" he demanded, in a voice raised but little above a whisper. "Why do you follow me about?"

The old man spread out his hands in a deprecating fashion, and shook his head. "Nothing, sir," he said, "nothing at all. But he won't speak to me—and he has never been like that before. I don't understand it. I knelt beside him just now, and his dress was different—and—and—" I saw his hands go up to his lips, and pluck at them in that strange fashion—"and he won't speak to me."

The doctor turned from him to me, and shrugged his shoulders. "This is a nice apparition to be following a man about," he said petulantly. "I can't make him out at all."

"Who is he?" I ventured to ask in a whisper.

"The servant of the dead man—one of those faithful old fools that attach themselves to you, and won't be shaken off, I suppose. He came here to-night, following his unfortunate master. What the deuce am I to do with him?"

"He seems harmless enough," I whispered. "But isn't it rather dangerous to have him about here, after the fraud that has been committed. Won't he speak? Won't he say that this dead man is not the escaped convict, but his master?"

"There's no fear of that," replied the other. "I tell you something has snapped in his brain; he doesn't understand. If I turned him out into the world now, he would remember nothing, and would have no story to tell, even if he were questioned. But I don't want to turn him out—and yet he haunts me."

"You say he changed in a moment?" I asked.

Dr. Just nodded. "When he saw his master dead, he simply cried out, and afterwards remained as you see him now. I must dispose of him for the night, at least," he said, getting to his feet, and approaching the old man. "Come, Capper, I want you."

The little old man looked round at him as he said that name, and I saw a faint fear come into his eyes. He shrank away a little, but the doctor grasped his arm quickly, and drew him towards the door. He went out in that grasp passively enough, and I was left alone again.

I had almost fallen asleep, worn out with the excitements of the day, when the doctor came back again. I started to my feet drowsily, and faced him.

"Good-night!" he said, and held out his hand to me—a cold hand, but firm and strong in its touch. "You may see and hear strange things in this house," he added, "but it is not your business to take any notice of them. You will be, I hope, properly grateful to me—the man who has saved you, and given you a new lease of life."

"Yes, I shall be grateful," I promised him.

He conducted me to a room in what seemed to be an outlying wing of the house, and left me to my own reflections. In truth, I was too tired to give much time to thought. I slipped off my clothes and got into bed, and was asleep in five minutes.

But I was not destined to sleep well, after all. In the first place, I was troubled most unaccountably by dreams, in which I saw myself going through the most extraordinary adventures, and finally hanging to what seemed to be the roof of Penthouse Prison, with the little old man of the grey hair grinning up at me from the ground below. And through my dreams there appeared always to go the light, quick figure of that girl I had seen in the grounds of the house; and always she went searching for someone. I dreamed at last that she came straight to me, and took me by the arms, and stared at me, and cried out that she had found the man she wanted. And so I sat up in bed in the darkness, struggling with someone very real, who was gripping me.

I almost shrieked, as I rolled out of bed, and tried to disengage myself from the arms of a man who was clinging to me. I contrived to drag him towards the window, where, by the faint light of the stars outside, I saw that it was the man Capper—that seemingly half-witted creature who had been the servant of the dead man.

"What do you want?" I ejaculated.

"I've been dreaming," said Capper.

"Well, what of that?" I demanded testily, "I've been dreaming, too."

"Yes, but not dreams like mine," whispered the old man, looking fearfully over his shoulder. "Tell me, do you think they'll come true?"

"I don't know what they were," I reminded him.

He clutched me by the arm, and stared up in my face. There seemed almost a light of madness in his eyes. "I dreamed that it happened a long time ago—before my head went wrong. I dreamed of

a blow struck in the dark; I thought someone (it might have been myself, but I'm not sure even of that)—I dreamed that someone screamed, 'Murder!'"

In a growing excitement he had raised his voice almost to a scream; I clapped my hand over his lips as he got out the dreadful word. I felt my hair stirring on my scalp. I wondered if by chance something dreadful had happened in that house, of which this old man knew, and the memory of which was locked away in that closed brain of his.

"Let me stay here to-night," he pleaded, clinging to me. "I'll be still as a mouse; I'll lie in this corner on the floor."

So I let him lie there, and I went back to my bed. For a long time I lay awake, watching him and thinking about him; but gradually towards the morning I fell asleep, and slept heavily. When I awoke at last, with the sun shining in at my window, the man was gone, and my door stood open.

That was to be a day of happenings. Even now my mind holds but a confused memory of them, in which I seem to be now myself, and now some other man; now living on hope, and now sunk into the depths of fear and despair. For what I have to tell seems so incredible, that only by some knowledge of the man who carried the plot boldly through can any idea of how the business was arranged be arrived at.

Dr. Bardolph Just acted with promptness and decision that day. A messenger flew down towards London to summon the police; and a telegram sped over the wires back to Penthouse Prison. The missing convict had been found; all the world might come to the house of Dr. Bardolph Just, and see this thing for themselves. At the last, when we actually expected the enemy to arrive at our gates, as it were, I nervously plucked the doctor's sleeve, and whispered a question.

"What about his hair? They'll be sure to notice that."

He smiled a little pityingly, I thought; but then, to the very end the man retained some contempt for me. "Come and see for yourself," he said.

So I went back with him into that room where we had left the dead man, and there I saw a miracle. For while I slept the doctor had been at work, and the head of poor Gregory Pennington was cropped as closely as my own. I shuddered and turned away.

"How you ever contrived to escape puzzles me," said Bardolph Just. "You haven't half my courage."

The man was certainly amazing. He met everything blandly; he was firm, and quiet, and dignified with this official and with that. He told me afterwards all that he did, and I had no reason to disbelieve him. For my own part, of course, I had to keep out of the way, and I spent most of my time in the spacious grounds surrounding the house. There was an old ruined summer-house at one corner, under a high wall; and there, fortified with a few of the doctor's cigars, I awaited quietly the turn of events. According to the doctor's description to me afterwards, what happened was this:

In the first place, the puzzle fitted so neatly together that there was no feeling of suspicion. A tall, well-built, dark-haired man, in the clothes of a convict, was roaming over the country; by a miracle a man answering that description, and dressed in those clothes, and having the necessary number upon him, had got to this house on the northern heights above London, and there, in despair of escaping further, had hanged himself. Dr. Bardolph Just was a man of standing in the scientific world—a man who had made discoveries; there was no thought of calling his word in question. This dead man was undoubtedly the escaped convict—Norton Hyde.

A very necessary inquest was held, and twelve good men and true settled that matter once and for all. There had been one curious point in the evidence, but even that was a point that had been miraculously explained. The doctor spoke of it airily, and I wondered a little why he did not explain the matter with more exactitude.

"It seems," he said, "that they discovered on the head of the unfortunate man the mark of a blow—a blow which had undoubtedly stunned him—or so, at least, they thought. It's impossible for me to say how the unfortunate Gregory Pennington came by such an injury, but at all events even that was accounted for in the case of Norton Hyde."

"How?" I asked.

Dr. Just laughed. "A certain motorist put in an appearance, and frankly explained that he had picked you up on the roadside near Penthouse Prison, and had given you a lift as far as this very house. Then there was an accident, and he and his passenger were both pitched out; he was convinced that in that way you got your injury. The thing was as simple as possible—you had recovered consciousness before he did, and had scrambled over the fence here."

"But did they swallow the story of my being in the house—of my breaking in?" I asked.

"I had thought of that," said the doctor. "So my tale was that you had hanged yourself from a beam in an outhouse—probably because you failed in your purpose of breaking into my dwelling. As a doctor, the moment I discovered you I cut you down, and carried you in, and did my best to restore animation, but in vain. You will like to know, Mr. Norton Hyde, that my humanity was warmly commended by the jury and coroner."

I laughed in a sickly fashion. "But I am not Norton Hyde any longer," I reminded him.

"True—and I have thought of a name for you that shall, in a fashion, mark your entry into another phase of existence. A nice name, and a short one. What do you say to the title of John New, a personal friend of my own?"

I told him that any name would suit me that was not the old one, and so that matter was settled.

He displayed so great an anxiety to see the matter ended, and was altogether so sympathetic with that poor convict who in his despair had hanged himself, that he even attended the funeral. Which is to say, that he carried the fraud so far as to go to Penthouse Prison, what time that disguised body of Godfrey Pennington was carried there, and to see it interred with all due solemnity within the prison precincts; I believe he lunched with the governor of the prison on that occasion, and, altogether, played his part very well.

It is left to me to record here one other happening of that time, and one which made a deep impression upon me. On the night of that strange finishing of the fraud, when Dr. Bardolph Just returned, I was sitting smoking in the summer-house, and enjoying the evening air, when I heard what seemed to be the quick, half-strangled cry of a woman. I tossed aside my cigar and started to my feet and came out of the summer-house. It was very dark in that corner of the grounds, and the summer-house in particular had great deep shadows inside it.

There came towards me, flying among the trees, and looking back in a scared fashion over her shoulder, the girl I had seen with Gregory Pennington—the girl he had called Debora. She came straight at me, not seeing me; and in the distance I saw Bardolph Just running, and heard him calling to her. On an instinct I caught at her, and laid a finger on my lips, and thrust her into the summer-house. Bardolph Just came running up a moment later, and stopped a little foolishly on seeing me. And by that time I was stretching my arms and yawning.

He made some casual remark, and turned back towards the house. When he had gone I called to the girl, and she came out; she was white-faced and trembling, and there were tears in her eyes. I felt that I hated Bardolph Just, with a hatred that was altogether unreasonable.

"I saw you here yesterday," she said, looking at me earnestly. "I need friends badly—and you have a good, kind face. Will you be my friend?"

I do not know what words I said; I only know that there, in the dark garden, as I bent over her little hands and put them to my lips, I vowed myself in my heart to her service.

CHAPTER III.

THE MISSING MAN.

I find it difficult to write, in my halting fashion, of what my sensations were at that time. God knows what good was in me, and only God and time could bring that good out of me; for I had had no childhood, and my manhood had been a thing thwarted and blighted.

You have to understand that in a matter of a few days I had lived years of an ordinary life; had been in prison, and had escaped; had come near to death; had found myself buried and done with, and yet enlisted on life under a new name; and, to crown it all, now come face to face with someone who believed in me and trusted me—broken reed though I was to lean upon.

I stood in the dark grounds, holding the girl's hands and looking into her eyes: and that was a new experience for me. I remembered how someone else—dead, and shamefully buried in the precincts of a prison—had held her hands but a little time before, and had begged that he might help her. Well, he was past all that now; and I, with my poor record behind me, stood, miraculously enough, in his place. Yet there were things I must understand, if I would help her at all: I wanted to know why she had fled from her guardian, and why, in his turn, he had chased her through the grounds.

"What were you afraid of?" I asked her gently; and it was pleasant to me that she should forget to take her hands out of mine.

"Of him," she said, with a glance towards the house; and I thought she shivered. "I wonder if you can understand what I feel, and of what I am afraid?" she went on, looking at me curiously. "I do not even know your name."

I laughed a little bitterly. "You must indeed be in need of friends if you come to me," I answered.

"But my name is John New, and I am a—a friend of Dr. Just."

"Oh!" She shrank away from me with a startled look. "I did not understand that."

"I am a friend of Dr. Just," I repeated, "because it happens that I am very much in his power, and I must be his friend if I would live at all. If that is your case, too, surely we might form some small conspiracy together against him. You're not fond of the man?" I hazarded.

She shook her head. "I hate him—and I'm afraid of him," she said vehemently. "And yet I have to

look to him for everything in the world."

"Sit down, and tell me about it," I said; and I drew her into the summer-house, and sat by her side while she talked to me. She was like a child in the ease with which she gave me her confidence; and as I listened to her, years seemed to separate me from my prison and from the life I had led. For this was the first gentle soul with whom I had yet come in contact.

"You must first tell me," she urged, "why you are in the doctor's power. Who are you? and what have you done, that he should be able to hold you in his hands? You are a man; you're not a weak girl."

It was difficult to answer her. "Well," I began, after a pause, "I did something, a long time ago, of which the doctor knows; and he holds that knowledge over me. That's all I can tell you."

She looked straight into my eyes, and I found, to my relief, that I was able to look at her with some frankness in return. "I don't believe it was anything very wrong," she said at last.

"Thank you," I answered, and I prayed that she might never know what my sin had been.

"You see," she went on confidentially, while the shadows grew about us; "I am really all alone in the world, except for Dr. Just, who is my guardian. He was made my guardian by my poor, dear father, who died some two years ago; my father believed in the doctor very much. They had written a scientific treatise together—because the doctor is very clever, and father quite looked up to him. So when he died he left directions that I was to be taken care of by the doctor. That was two years ago, and I have lived in this house ever since, with one short interval."

"And the interval?" I asked.

"We went down to a country house belonging to the doctor—a place in Essex, called Green Barn. It's a gloomy old house—worse than this one; the doctor goes there to shoot."

"But you haven't told me yet why you were running away from him," I reminded her.

She bent her head, so that I could not see her face. "Lately," she said in a low voice, "his manner to me has changed. At first he was courteous and kind—he treated me as though I had been his daughter. But now it's all different; he looks at me in a fashion I understand—and yet don't understand. To-day he tried to put his arm round me, and to kiss me; then when I ran away he ran after me."

I felt that I hated the doctor very cordially; I had an insane desire to be present if by any chance he should repeat his conduct. I felt my muscles stiffen as I looked at the girl; in my thoughts I was like some knight of old, ready to do doughty deeds for this fair, pretty girl, who was so ready to confide in me. I forgot all about who I was, or what had happened to me; I had only strangely come out into the world—into a world of love.

But the fact that it was a world of love reminded me that I had had a rival—another man who had held her hands and looked into her eyes, and pleaded that he might help her. I could not, of course, ask about him, because I held the key to his fate, and that fate intimately concerned my own safety; but I was consumed with curiosity, nevertheless. Strangely enough, she voiced my thoughts by beginning to speak of him.

"There is something else that troubles me," she said earnestly. "I have one friend—a dear, good, loyal fellow; but he has unaccountably gone away, and I can hear nothing of him."

I felt myself turning hot and cold; I blessed the darkness of the summer-house. "What was his name?" I asked.

"Gregory Pennington," she answered softly.

"He was my friend before my father died; he followed me here when the doctor took charge of me. He was afraid of the doctor—not for himself, but on my account; he had a strange idea, and one that I have tried to laugh at, that the doctor wanted to kill me."

She looked at me with smiling eyes, laughing at such a suggestion; but I, remembering the earnestness of Gregory Pennington's words to the girl on that first occasion of my coming to the house, seemed now to hear that warning as though it came indeed from the dead. And I could not answer her.

"That was foolish, wasn't it?" she said, with a little laugh. "But then, I think poor Gregory loves me, and that made him afraid for me. You have been in the house here for some days; have you seen nothing of him?"

I was obliged to lie; there was nothing else for it. I shook my head, and lied stoutly. "No," I replied, "I have never seen him."

"It's all so strange," she said, as she got to her feet. "The doctor did not like him, and had forbidden him the house, in spite of my remonstrances. As he was my friend, Gregory and I used to meet secretly in these grounds in the evening."

I remembered how I had seen them together; I remembered, with a shudder, all that had happened afterwards. But still I said nothing; for what could I say?

"It was all so strange," she went on; and her voice sounded ghostly in the darkness. I had risen,

and was standing opposite to her; I seemed to feel that the air had grown suddenly very chill. "The last time I saw him he told me that he would go to the house, and would see my guardian. I did all I could," she proceeded helplessly, "to dissuade him, but he would not listen. He said he must have an understanding with Dr. Just, and must take me away; although I think I should never have consented to that, in any case—because, you see, I did not really love him. He had always been like a good, kind brother to me, but nothing more."

"And did he go to the house?" I asked, for the want of something better to say.

She nodded. "I would not go in with him," she replied, "but I saw him go towards the doctor's study. I went off to my own room."

"And you heard nothing, and saw nothing after that?" I asked breathlessly.

"Nothing at all," she whispered. "Early the next morning the doctor sent me off to Green Barn, with a woman who is his housekeeper; I only came back to-day. I expected a letter from Gregory—even expected to see him. It's all so funny; it is just as though he had walked into that study—and had disappeared from that time."

"You mustn't think such things as that," I exclaimed hurriedly. "A dozen things may have happened; he may have been repulsed by the doctor, and so have decided to go away. If he knew you did not love him, he would feel pretty hopeless about the matter."

"That is possible, perhaps," she said. Then, suddenly, she held out her hand to me. "I have one friend at least," she said, "and his name is Mr. John New. It's a curious name, and I shan't forget it. You tell me that you are in trouble, too: so that is a bond between us. Good-night!"

I watched her as she flitted away through the garden. Even in my relief at the thought that she did not love Gregory Pennington, there was the dismal feeling that some day she must learn the truth—the ghastly thought that I stood there, actually in the clothes of the dead man. The whole business was a nightmare from beginning to end, in which alone she stood out as something bright, and fair, and unsullied.

We were a curious household. There were one or two rather scared-looking servants, presided over by a woman to whom the doctor referred always as "Leach"; in fact, he called her by that name when speaking to her. As she was destined to play rather an important part in that strange business upon which we were all entering, she deserves a word or two of description.

She must have been about forty years of age, and had once been, and still was, in a way, astonishingly handsome. She was tall and very dark; she had hair of that blue-black quality that is so rarely seen. Her eyes were as brilliant as those of Dr. Bardolph Just himself, save that there was in hers a curious slumbrous quality, quite unlike the sparkle in the man's. I may best describe her by saying that she suggested to me that in the very soul of her was something lurking and waiting for expression—some smouldering fire that a touch or a word might start into flame.

So far as I could gather, Dr. Just was exceedingly contemptible of her, and treated her with a sort of bitter playfulness. He seemed to take a delight in making her perform the most menial offices; and to me it was rather pitiful to see the eagerness with which she anticipated his every wish or command. I did not know at that time what bond there was between them; only, whenever I think of them in this later time one scene always rises before my memory.

It was on a morning soon after I had arrived at the house, and the doctor was in a ferocious mood. Everything had gone wrong, and I had seen the woman Leach, who ordinarily waited behind his chair, and by quick signs directed the servants what to do, cower under the lash of his words more than once. It happened to be at the breakfast table, and I was seated at one end, facing the doctor. It was the morning after that memorable night when I had talked with the girl Debora in the grounds; and now she sat on my right hand, at one side of the table, between the doctor and myself.

Absurd as the suggestion is, it almost seemed to me that the doctor was striking a balance between the two women for the mortification of them both. He pressed dishes upon the girl, with suave compliments at one moment, and in the next turned to Leach behind him with what was almost a coarse threat.

"Why the devil don't you wait on your young mistress?" he snapped. "What do you think I keep you here for? What do I pay you for?"

He turned to the table again, and, looking down the length of it, I saw the woman swiftly clench and unclench her hands behind him, as though she would have struck him. And if ever I saw murder in a face I saw it then; yet she looked not at the doctor, but at the bowed head of the girl beside me.

"Come—move—stir yourself!" cried the man, bringing down his fist with a bang on the table beside him. "Don't wait for the servants to carry things; carry them yourself. Take this dish to your mistress—Miss Debora Matchwick."

It was the first time I had heard the girl's name in full; but I took but little notice of it then, so interested was I in watching the little scene that was going forward. While the doctor sat looking at the girl, I saw the woman behind him draw herself up, and I saw her nostrils dilate; then she

seemed to swoop to the table, and to catch up the dish he had indicated. She moved round slowly to where the girl sat, and purposely handed the dish from the wrong side. And down came Bardolph Just's fist again on the table.

"The other side, you jade!" he roared; and with a glance at him she moved round, and presented it to the girl in the proper fashion. And the face that bent above the fair hair of the girl was the face of a devil—of a soul in torment.

"I want nothing, thank you," said Debora in a low voice.

"Come, my dear child, we shall have you pining away to a shadow if you don't eat," broke in the doctor, with a mocking smile. "Is it possible that you are fretting over something—hungering for someone? We must have a private talk about this after breakfast; you must confide your troubles to me. And may I ask," he went on, with bitter politeness, as he turned to the other woman, "may I ask why you are standing in that absurd attitude, when your mistress tells you she wants nothing?"

The woman Leach turned away abruptly, and set down the dish. Debora had risen from the table, as if to make her escape, and the other woman, after a quick glance at her, was preparing to go from the room also. But her humiliation was not yet completed; the doctor called her back.

"Wait, Leach," he said, and she stopped on the instant. "You are in a tempestuous humour this morning, and that sort of humour must be quelled. Ring the bell."

She gave a quick, nervous glance at him, and then walked across the room and rang the bell. She waited, with her eyes cast on the ground, until a servant came in, carrying in his hand a pair of shoes. The doctor turned round in his chair, and the man carrying the shoes dropped on one knee, as if to put them on. But Bardolph Just waved him aside.

"You needn't trouble; get up," he said; and the man rose from his knees, looking a little bewildered. "Leach, come here!"

The woman stood still for a moment, and then walked slowly across the floor, till she stood in front of him. He pointed to the shoes at his feet, and smiled; and I, who had risen in my place, stood helplessly, waiting to see what would happen.

It took her quite a long time to get to her knees, but she did it at last, and began to put on the shoes. All this time the man-servant stood gaping, not knowing whether to go or stay. Debora, too, had paused at the door, in amazement at the scene. And in that oppressive silence the woman Leach fastened the shoes with fingers that seemed clumsy enough for that work. Nor were the doctor's words likely to mend her confusion.

"You're precious slow, I must say! What's the matter with you? are you getting past your work? You know what happens to people who are no longer fit to work, don't you? We have to cast them out into the street, to make a living as best they can—or to die. There—that'll do; you've been long enough to fasten a dozen pairs of shoes."

I think he struck her with his foot as she was rising from her knees, but of that I cannot be sure. I know that she turned away abruptly, but not before I had had time to see that those great eyes of hers were blinded with tears. Yet her gait, as she went from the room, was as stately as ever.

But perhaps the strangest being in that strange house at that time was William Capper. He wandered like a lost spirit, and one never knew quite where he would appear. Knowing what I did as to what had become of the dead man, this man who looked for him and waited for him was as a ghost that would not be laid. More than that, he was a ghost who might suddenly spring into live flesh and blood, and tell what he knew.

The doctor seemed as disconcerted by his presence as I was, and yet he made no effort to get rid of the man. Capper wandered about the house and about the grounds just as he pleased, while those peering eyes of his seemed always to be searching for his master. But it happened that, as Debora had been sent away on the very morning following the death of poor Gregory Pennington, and had only returned now, she had not yet come in contact with the man Capper. I found myself wondering what would happen when she did.

She was destined to meet him under curious circumstances. On that morning which had seen the degradation of the woman Leach before us all, Dr. Bardolph Just called me into that room that was half study and half surgery, and told me quite abruptly that he wanted me to go down into London for him. I suppose my startled face told its own tale, for he laughed a little contemptuously.

"Do you imagine anyone will be seeking you, or even expecting to find you above ground?" he asked. "Can't you get into your mind the idea that Norton Hyde is dead and buried in his own prison, and that another man—John New—has come alive in his place? People only look for what they expect to find, my dear John New; you are as safe as though by a miracle you had changed your features. I merely want you to go down into Holborn, to inquire about a certain scientific book which was promised to be sent to me and has not arrived. If it has not already been sent, you can bring it back with you."

He gave me the address, and money wherewith to travel; and I felt my heart sink at the prospect of going down, in this bare-faced fashion, into the great world. In my heart of hearts I determined

that I would not go; the book might arrive in my absence, and the doctor might forget that he had sent me at all. So I made a feint of going, but in reality did not pass beyond the grounds.

It was a slumbrous day in early summer, and the grounds being very wide and extensive, I had rather an enjoyable forenoon of it. I determined that I would calculate to a nicety how long it should have taken me to get down to Holborn and back again, allowing a margin for accidental delays. Then I would put in an appearance at the house, and tell the doctor that I had reached the shop, only to find that the book had been sent off.

It may have been some sentimental feeling that carried my feet in the direction of that dark and half-ruined summer-house; or, as I think now, some direct Providence guiding me. Believing that it would be deserted, and that I might kill time there with some comfort, I was making straight for it among the tangled grasses and dead leaves of the garden, when I stopped, and drew away from it. For I had heard voices.

I make no attempt to excuse my conduct; I only urge that at that time I was surrounded by mysteries, and by trickery of every sort, and that I was, moreover, in hiding, in peril of my liberty. All the world might be conspiring against me—above all, those in this house, with one exception, might be only too glad to give me up to justice. I was fighting for myself; I make no excuse that I crept near to the summer-house, and listened. More than that, I looked in, for through a chink of the ruined boarding at the back of it I could see clearly all that happened.

Debora Matchwick was seated in a corner, drawn up tense and still, with her hands gripping the seat on either side of her; and in the doorway, with his arms folded, completely blocking her way of escape, stood the doctor.

It would seem that I had arrived at the very moment the man had discovered her, for his first words referred to the previous day. Whatever other words I had heard had been but a mere skirmishing before the actual battle began.

"I lost you in this direction yesterday, Debora," said the man; "you managed to elude me rather cleverly. What makes you afraid of me?"

"I—I'm not afraid of you," she said, with more bravery than she seemed to feel.

He laughed at her, showing his white teeth. "You're very much afraid of me," he corrected her. "And yet you have no reason to be; we should never be afraid of those who love us."

"You are my guardian, and you were my father's friend," she said quietly. "Beyond that guardianship you have nothing to do with me, and I will not—"

"You talk like a child, and you have a child's knowledge of the world," he broke in roughly. "I that am a man can teach you, as only a man can teach a woman, what life and the world hold for her. Prudishly you step aside; with false modesty you refuse to look at facts as they are. You are a child no longer, in the ordinary sense of things; and I am a man that loves you. Your father liked me—"

"To my everlasting sorrow, he did!" she exclaimed passionately.

"And he would have approved of the arrangement. Above all things, the management of your extremely troublesome affairs are in my hands, and if you belonged to me the whole thing would be solidified. I have great power in regard to your fortune now; I should have greater powers then."

"It's the fortune that tempts you!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet. "God forgive me for saying it, but my father must have been mad when he made up his mind to place me in your care. I hate you—but I'm not afraid of you. I hate you!"

Bardolph Just stepped forward quickly, and took her prisoner in his arms. I had made a sudden movement, recklessly enough, to run round the summer-house and spring upon the man, as I heard her give a little gasping cry, when there came a strange interruption; and it came from outside and from inside the summer-house almost at the same moment.

I had heard the doctor say, over and over again, with a sort of savage triumph, as he held her, "You shall love me! You shall love me! You shall love me!" and I had made that movement of which I speak, when there broke in the sound of someone singing, in a high querulous voice, and that someone was moving towards the summer-house. The girl heard the sound, and she broke away from the man who held her; she seemed literally to shriek out a name—

"Capper!"

All the rest happened in a flash. Scarcely knowing what I did, I ran round and confronted them all—and that, too, at the moment that the girl, breaking from the summer-house, ran swiftly to where the little grey-headed old man was emerging from the trees. In her agitation she flung herself at his feet, and caught at his hands, and cried out her question:

"Capper, dear, good Capper!—where's your master?"

We stood there in silence, waiting to see what would happen. For both Bardolph Just and myself could have answered the question, but what was the man Capper about to say? This was just such a crisis as I had been expecting and fearing; it seemed hours before the little grey-haired man, who had been looking down at her in a bewildered fashion, made any reply.

"I don't—don't know," he said, and he smiled round upon us rather foolishly, I thought.

"But, Capper—you remember me, Capper; I was your master's friend," went on the girl despairingly. "You remember that Mr. Pennington came to this house—oh!—oh, a week ago!"

She had risen to her feet, and was staring into his eyes. He put a hand over those eyes for a moment, and seemed to ponder something; then he looked up, and slowly shook his head. "I can't—I can't remember," he said. "Something has gone from me—here"—he laid the hand upon his forehead—"and I can't remember."

The doctor drew a deep breath, and took a step towards the girl; of me he seemed to take but little notice. "Don't worry the man, Debora," he said in a gentle tone; "I can't make him out myself, sometimes. Why he should remain here, where his master is not, I cannot understand."

Both Just and the girl spoke of the old man in hushed tones, as they might have spoken of someone who was ill. But Capper himself stood looking smilingly from one face to the other, as if his eyes would question them concerning this mystery in which he was involved.

"Has he been here ever since—since Mr. Pennington disappeared?" asked the girl.

"I don't know what you're talking about," retorted the doctor, with a perplexed frown. "Disappeared? How could Gregory Pennington disappear? I refused to allow him to come here; I have seen nothing of him for some time."

I knew, of course, that the doctor was keeping from her the knowledge of the unfortunate young man's suicide—I realised that that knowledge must be kept from her, for my sake as well, unless disaster was to fall upon me. But the girl was looking at Bardolph Just keenly, and I wondered how he could meet her eyes as calmly as he did.

"The night before I went to Green Barn with Leach," she said slowly, "I was in these grounds with Gregory. And that night he went into the house to see you."

"To see me?" The doctor twisted about from one to the other of us in apparent perplexity. "To see me? I haven't seen the young man for months."

"Then what, in the name of all that's wonderful, is Capper doing here?" demanded Debora, pointing to that strange, smiling creature, who seemed the least interested of any of us.

For a moment even the doctor was nonplussed, for that was a question to which there seemed to be no possible answer—or, at least, no answer that should prove satisfactory. It was, indeed, the strangest scene, to us, at least, who understood the true inwardness of it: that little grey-haired man, who might carry locked up in his numbed brain something that presently should leak out; the girl demanding to know the reason of his presence there; and the doctor and myself with the full knowledge of what had really happened, and of where Gregory Pennington lay hidden.

Bardolph Just, however, was the last man to be placed at a disadvantage for any length of time. In a moment or two he laughed easily, and shrugged his shoulders. "'Pon my word, I don't know!" he replied, in reference to the girl's question. "I can make neither head nor tail of him; but as his master is not here, I scarcely care to turn him out into the world in his present condition."

"What's the matter with him?" asked Debora. "I never saw him like this before."

"Can't say," retorted the doctor quickly. "But I should judge him to have had a stroke of some kind. At all events, Debora, I don't want you to think that I'm a brute; and as Gregory Pennington was a friend of yours—I should say, is a friend of yours—the old man shall stay here until—until his master returns."

I noticed that Capper kept close beside the girl as she moved away towards the house; he looked up at her trustingly, as a child might have done who wanted a guide. As they walked away together, Bardolph Just stepped forward and laid a hand on the girl's arm. I heard what he said distinctly.

"I have not said my last word, by any means," he said in his smooth voice; "nor is this the end."

"It is the end so far as I am concerned," she retorted, without slackening her pace. "You shall be my guardian no longer; I'll arrange something, so that I can get out into the world and live for myself and in my own fashion."

"We'll see about that," he retorted, between his teeth. "Go to your room, and remain there."

She gave him a glance of contempt, that had yet in it some spice of fear, as she turned away and made for the house, with old Capper trotting dog-like beside her. Then the doctor turned to me, and although I saw that there were certain white spots coming and going at the edges of his nostrils and on his cheek bones, he yet spoke calmly enough—indeed, a little amusedly.

"What do you think of that for pretty defiance?" he asked; then, sinking his voice to a lower tone, and taking a step nearer to me, he went on—"She's getting suspicious about that boy; and the madman who's gone off with her now is likely to cause trouble. I don't know what to do with him, but I shall have to devise something. Don't forget, my friend, that if the worst comes to the worst you're in the same boat with me—or in a worse boat. I've only cheated the authorities for your sake; I can plead human sympathy and kindness, and all sorts of things—which you can't."

"Is that a threat?" I demanded, for now my gratitude was being fast swallowed up in a growing dislike of the man.

"Yes, and no," he replied, with a faint smile. "I'm only suggesting that you will find it wise, whatever happens, to fight on my side, and on mine only. I think you understand?"

I answered nothing; I followed him, sullenly enough, to the house. By that time I had quite forgotten the errand on which I had been sent, and which I had made no effort to accomplish; only when we were near to the house he turned quickly, and startled me by referring to it.

"By the way, you had your journey for nothing," he said. "The book arrived while you were gone. Did you meet with any adventures?"

"None at all," I answered curtly.

I was destined for another adventure, and a more alarming one, that night. There was no ceremony used in the doctor's house, and he made no attempt to dress for dinner. For that matter, I had not as yet seen any guests, and the doctor, on one or two occasions at least, had had his meals carried up to his study. So far as dinner was concerned, it usually happened that in the recesses of the house someone clanged a dismal bell at the time the food was actually put upon the table, and I would go down, either to sit alone, or to find the doctor awaiting me. You will remember that the girl Debora had been away for the whole of that eventful week.

The dining-room was dimly lighted by a big, shaded lamp, standing on the centre of the table; so that when I went in on this night, and looked about me, I could see figures seated, but could not clearly distinguish faces. The doctor I saw in his usual place, stooping forward into the light of the lamp to sup at his soup; I saw the bent head of the girl at one side of the table. I moved round the table to reach my place, and as I did so saw that another man was seated opposite the girl, so making a fourth. I could not see his face, as it was in shadow. I wondered who he might be.

The doctor bent forward, so as to look round the lamp at me, called me (God be praised for it!) by that new name he had given me—

"John New, let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Harvey Scoffold."

I sat frozen in my chair, keeping my face in shadow, and wondering what I should do. For I knew the man—had known him intimately on those occasions when I had broken out of my uncle's house at night, and had gone on wild excursions. I saw him glance towards me; I knew that he knew my history, and what had become of me; and I wondered how soon he was to start up in his place, and cry out who I was, and demand to know who lay buried in my place. I left my soup untasted, and sat upright, keeping my face above the light cast by the lamp.

"Mr. Harvey Scoffold is an old friend of mine," said Bardolph Just, "although we have not met for some time. A worthy fellow—though he does not take quite so deep an interest in the serious things of life as I do."

"Not I," exclaimed the other man, squaring his shoulders, and giving vent to a hearty laugh that rang through the room. "I'm a very butterfly, if a large one; and life's the biggest joke that ever I tasted. I hope our new friend is of the same order?"

I mumbled something unintelligible, and, after looking at me intently for a moment, he turned and began to speak to his host. I think I had just decided that I had better feign illness, and get up and make a run for dear life, when he staggered us all by a question, put in his hearty, careless fashion.

"By the way," he said, looking from the doctor to the girl, and back again, "what's become of that youngster I used to see here—Gregory Pennington? I took quite a fancy to the boy. Does anyone know where he is?"

CHAPTER IV.

A LITTLE WHITE GHOST.

With the putting of that most awkward question as to what had become of Gregory Pennington, it may be said that a sort of bombshell fell into our midst. I leaned further back, determined to gain what respite I could in the shadows of the room before the inevitable discovery should fall upon me; and of the four of us only the girl, Debora Matchwick, leaned forward eagerly, peering round the lamp at the man who had asked the question.

"That's what we want to know," she said, in a quick, nervous voice. "Gregory has disappeared."

"Nonsense!" It was the doctor who broke in testily, still keeping his face in shadow. "You mustn't get such ideas into your head, child. Young men, strong, and well, and healthy, don't disappear in that fashion. I ordered him away from the house, and he has respected my wishes. Don't let me hear such nonsensical talk again."

The girl drew back, with a little quick sigh, and for a moment or two there was an abashed

silence on the part of Scoffold and myself. But Scoffold was never the man to be abashed long by anything; in a moment or two he leaned his big body forward over the table, so that I saw his face fully in the light of the shaded lamp, and glanced quickly from one to the other of us, and began to put questions. And with each question it seemed that he probed the matter more deeply.

"But tell me, what had my young friend done to be forbidden the house?" he asked. Then, answered in a fashion by the silence about him, he shrugged his shoulders, and spread out his great hands deprecatingly.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" he went on. "I see that I'm prying into secrets, and that was never my way at all. Only I was interested in Gregory—a fine fellow, with a future before him. A little reckless, perhaps—a little given to the spending of money; but then, that is ever a fault of the young. If I did not wish to pry into secrets," he added a little maliciously, as he peered round the lamp at the girl, "I might suggest that perhaps his disappearance may have had something to do with Miss Debora here—eh? There are so many hearts to be broken in this world of pretty faces, Miss Debora."

The girl sat rigid and silent; presently the man leaned back in his chair again, with a little laugh, as the servants entered with the next course. I saw the woman Leach hovering about near the doorway; I wondered if we were to have another such scene as we had had that morning. But nothing happened until the servants had gone, with Leach following last. Then this unlucky guest had another word to say.

"I see you still keep your faithful retainer," said Harvey Scoffold, with a jerk of his great head towards the door. "Remarkable woman, that—and quite devoted to you, doctor."

"Servants are servants, and are kept in their places," retorted Bardolph Just coldly.

"But, my dear Just," broke in the irrepressible one again, "Leach is surely more than a servant. How many years has she been with you?"

"I haven't taken the trouble to count," replied the doctor. "Shall we change the conversation?"

Mr. Scoffold abruptly complied, by turning his attention to me, somewhat to my dismay. "Do you belong to these parts, Mr.—Mr. John New?" he asked.

I murmured in a low tone that I belonged to London, and as I spoke I saw him lean forward quickly, as if to get a better glimpse of me; but I obstinately kept my face in shadow.

"Ah!" he went on. "London's a fine place, but with temptations. I often think that it would be well if we could prevent young men from ever going to London at all—let 'em wait until they have reached years of discretion, and know what the world is like. I've seen so much in that direction—so many lives that have gone down into the shadows, and never emerged again. I could give you a case in point—rather an interesting story, if you would not be bored by it." He glanced round the table amid silence.

Now, I knew instinctively what story he was going to tell, before ever he said a word of it; I knew the story was my own. I sat there, spellbound; I strove to get a glimpse of Bardolph Just at the further end of the table, but he did not move, and the only face of the four of us that could be seen was the face, animated and smiling, of Harvey Scoffold.

"The story is a little sad—and I detest sad things," the man began, "but it has the merit of a moral. You are to imagine a young man, of good education, and with a credulous and doting old man—an uncle, in fact—as his sole guardian. He rewards the credulous old man by robbing him right and left, and he spends the proceeds of his robberies in vicious haunts in London."

I may here interpolate that the only vicious haunt I had known in London had been the house of Mr. Harvey Scoffold, and that most of the money I had stolen had gone, in one way and another, into his pockets—but this by the way.

"His name was Norton Hyde," went on Scoffold. "I beg your pardon—did you speak?" This last was to the doctor, who had leaned forward, so that I saw his face clearly, and had uttered an exclamation.

"No," he replied. "Pray proceed with your story." He leaned sideways, under pretence of filling his glass, and gave me a warning glance down the length of the table.

"Well, this Norton Hyde paid the penalty, in due course, of his crime," went on Scoffold, leaning back in his chair again. "He was sentenced to a certain term of penal servitude, served part of it, escaped from his prison—"

"The story is well known, and we need hear no more, my dear Scoffold," broke in the doctor. "I don't want to shock Miss Debora, nor to have her shocked."

"But I am interested," said the girl, leaning forward. "Please go on, Mr. Scoffold."

"You hear—she's interested," said the man with a smile, as he leaned forward again, and looked round the lamp at the girl. "It's very dreadful, but very fascinating. You must know, then, Miss Debora, that the fellow broke prison, and made a desperate attempt to get back to London; reached a house somewhere on its outskirts; and then, being evidently hard pressed, gave up the game in despair, and committed suicide."

"Poor, poor fellow!" commented the girl, in a low tone; and I felt my heart go out to her in gratitude.

"And that was the end of him," went on Mr. Scoffold, with a snap of the fingers. "They carried him back—dead—to his prison; and they buried him within its walls. So much for Buckingham!"

"Now, perhaps, you can contrive to talk of something a little more pleasant," said the doctor testily. "You've given us all the horrors, with your talk of imprisonments, and suicides, and what not. You used to be pleasant company at one time, Harvey."

"And can be so still," exclaimed the other lightly. "But I'm afraid it's this dark room of yours that gave that turn to the conversation: one sits in shadow among shadows. May I move this lamp, or may I at least take the shade off?" He put a hand to it as he spoke.

If ever I had trembled in my life, I trembled then; but I sat rigid, and waited, trusting in that stronger man at the further end of the table. Nor was my trust in him betrayed.

"Leave the lamp alone," he said sharply. "It's not safe to be moved; it's rather an old one, and shaky. Besides, I prefer this light."

"You always were a queer fellow," said Scoffold, dropping back into his seat again. "And to-night you're a dull one. I swear I couldn't endure your company," he proceeded with a laugh, "if it were not for the charming lady who faces me, and who is mostly hidden by your beast of a lamp. Even our friend, Mr. New here, hasn't a word to say for himself; but perhaps he'll come out stronger under the influence of one of your cigars presently."

I vowed in my heart that there should be no cigars for me that night in his company; my brain was active with the thought of how best I could escape. I was perplexed to know how it was that he had not remembered that it was in this very house, according to the tale, that Norton Hyde had committed suicide; but for that point, he had the whole thing in chapter and verse. I was comforted, however, by the thought that it was to the interests of Bardolph Just to help me out of the scrape; I saw that he was as much astonished to learn that Harvey Scoffold knew me as I was to find the man in that house.

But for my desperate strait, I must have been amused at the doctor's perplexity. I saw, just as surely as though he had stated it in words, that he was working hard at that puzzle: how to get Norton Hyde out of that room unobserved. Fortunately for the solution of that problem, he must have known how eager I was to get away; and presently he contrived the business in the simplest fashion.

We had come near to the end of the dinner, and it was about time for Debora to leave us. I knew that he dreaded that if she got up it would mean a breaking-up of our relative positions at the table, and I must be discovered. I was dreading that, too, when relief came.

"I say, New," he called to me down the length of the table, "I know you have that business of which you spoke to clear up to-night. We're all friends here, and we'll excuse you."

I murmured my thanks, and got up, designing to pass behind Harvey Scoffold, and so escape observation. But, as ill luck would have it, Debora saw in the movement an opportunity for her own escape; she rose quickly, and the inevitable happened. Harvey Scoffold blundered to his feet to open the door.

And there we were in a moment, above the light of the lamp, and all making for the door together; for the doctor, in his consternation, had risen also. Scoffold got to the door before me, and held it open for the girl; and for one disastrous moment I hesitated. For there was a light outside in the hall, and I dared not face it. Properly, of course, I should have followed the girl with my face averted; but even in that I blundered, and so found myself suddenly looking into the eyes of Harvey Scoffold, as he stood there holding the door.

It was as though he had seen a ghost. He gasped, and took a step back; and the next moment I was out of the room, and had pulled the door close after me. Even as I did so, I heard his voice raised loudly and excitedly in the room, and heard the deeper tones of Bardolph Just.

There was no time to be lost, and I looked about me for the quickest way of escape. I was groping in the dark, as it were, because I did not even know whether the man was a chance visitor, and I might safely hide in some other room of the house, or whether he was staying there, and so could leave me no choice but to get away altogether. And while I hesitated, my mind was made up for me, as it has been so often in my life, in the most curious fashion.

I saw that Debora had stopped at the foot of the stairs, and was looking back at me; and in a moment, in the thought of her, I forgot my own peril. I took a step towards her, and she bent her head towards mine, as she stood a step or two above me on the stairs, and whispered—

"For the love of God, don't leave me alone in this house to-night!"

Then she was gone, before I could make reply, and I was left there, standing helplessly looking after her.

In that moment I lost my chance. The dining-room door was opened, and the two men came out quickly; it seemed to me that Harvey Scoffold was speaking excitedly, and that the doctor, who had a hand on his arm, was striving to soothe him. I made a dart for the stairs—too late, for the

voice of Scoffold called me back.

"Here, don't run away; I want to talk to you!" he cried. "There's a mystery here——"

"Not so loud!" exclaimed the doctor sternly, in a low tone. "If you've anything to say, don't shout it in the hall in that fashion. I trust we're gentlemen; let us go and talk quietly in my study. John, you know the way—lead on."

So, knowing well what was to follow, I went on up the stairs, until I came to the door of that room that was half study and half surgery; I opened the door and went in. To gain time, I went to the further end of it, and stood looking out of the window into the darkness. I calculated that it might be a drop of twelve or fourteen feet, if he drove me too far and I had to take flight. I was prepared for everything, and had for the moment—God forgive me!—clean forgotten what the girl had said to me. The two other men came into the room, and the door was closed. I heard the doctor speak in his most genial tones.

"Now, my dear Harvey, let's understand what bee you have in your bonnet. What's this about an escaped convict—and in my house? If I didn't know you better, I should suggest that my wine had been too much for you."

"Don't bluff, doctor: it would be far better to ask our friend there to show us his face clearly. If a man's honest he doesn't turn his back on his friends."

At that I threw discretion to the winds; I faced round upon him savagely. "Friends!" I exclaimed bitterly. "When were you ever a friend to me, Harvey Scoffold?"

The man laughed, and shrugged his shoulders. "Truly you are indiscreet," he said, with a triumphant glance at the doctor. "But youth is ever impatient, and one cannot expect that you, of all men, should be cautious. You never were. Come—can't we sit down and talk quietly, and see what is to be done?"

"There is nothing to be done—at least nothing that concerns you," said Bardolph Just quickly, as he stopped in the act of pulling open that drawer in his desk which held the cigars. "What in the world is it to do with you?"

"Oh-o! so *you* are in the swim, too, eh?" exclaimed Scoffold, turning upon him with raised eyebrows. "I thought it possible that you might have been deceived—that our friend here might have come upon you suddenly, and induced you to help him, without your knowing who he was."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, and took out a cigar. In the act of biting the end of it with his sharp white teeth he looked at the other man with a smile that was deadly—it was as though he snarled over the cigar. "I knew all about our friend here from the beginning," he said. "Be careful, Harvey; you know me by this time, and you know it's better to have me for a friend than an enemy. Once more I warn you not to ask questions, and not to interfere in what does not concern you. Take a cigar, and sit down and smoke."

Scoffold took the cigar, and stood for a moment or two, while he lighted it, looking from one to the other of us, as though weighing the matter carefully in his mind. He voiced his feelings as he put the match to the cigar, and puffed at it.

"Norton Hyde escaped from prison"—puff—"Norton Hyde hangs himself"—puff—"Norton Hyde is duly sat upon by a coroner and a jury"—puff—"Norton Hyde is buried in a prison grave." He looked at the lighted end of his cigar carefully, and tossed the match from him. "And yet my dear friend, Norton Hyde, stands before me. Any answer to that puzzle?" He looked at me and at the doctor, and laughed quietly.

Truly the game appeared to be in his hands, and I knew enough of him to know that he was a man to be feared. It was, of course, a mere coincidence that the man who had helped me to my ruin was a friend of this man upon whose hospitality I had so unceremoniously flung myself; nor did it mend matters to know that he was a friend of the dead boy. I think we both waited for his next remark, knowing pretty well what it would be.

"A natural answer springs up at once to the puzzle," he went on, seeming literally to swell his great bulk at us in his triumph. "Some man was buried as Norton Hyde—some man who must have been able to pass muster for him. What man could that have been?"

"You're getting on dangerous ground: I tell you you'd better let it alone," broke in the doctor warningly.

But the other man went on as though the doctor had not spoken. "Some man lies in that grave, who has disappeared, and for whom no enquiry has been made. Now, who can that man be? What man is there that hasn't been seen for some days—what man is there that is being looked for now?"

In the tense silence of the room, while the man looked from one to the other of us, absolutely dominating the situation, there came an interruption that was so terrible, and so much an answer to what the man was asking, that I could have shrieked out like a frightened woman. Behind him, where he stood, I saw the door of the study slowly opening, and then the smiling face of the little grey-haired man looked round it. Scoffold did not see him; only the doctor and I turned our startled faces to the smiling face of Capper. And Capper spoke—

"Forgive me, gentlemen"—and Scoffold swung round on the words and faced him—"I'm looking for my master, Mr. Pennington."

"Gregory Pennington, by the Lord!" shouted Harvey Scoffold, with a great clap of his hands together.

The doctor turned quickly to the door. I saw him thrust Capper outside, and close the door, and turn the key in it. He put the key in his pocket, and his eyes looked dangerous; he was as a man driven at bay.

"Well, you think you've made some great and wonderful discovery," he snapped. "Perhaps you have—at all events, you shall know the truth of the matter from beginning to end. I'll keep nothing back."

"You can't, you know," sneered the other, dropping his great bulk into an arm-chair, and puffing luxuriously at his cigar.

I stood with my back to the window while the doctor told the story. He told it from beginning to end, and quite clearly. Of the coming of the disappointed Gregory Pennington to the house, after an interview with the girl; of that mad, rash act of the unsuccessful lover; of the finding of him hanging dead. He told of my coming, and painted a little luridly my desperate threats and pleadings; told of how he had given way, and had dressed poor Gregory Pennington in my shameful clothes. When he had finished the narrative Harvey Scoffold nodded, as if satisfied with that part of it, and sat for a time smoking, while we awaited what he had to say.

"It never struck me that it was in this house the convict (as the newspapers called him) hanged himself," he said at last. "Upon my word, the puzzle fits together very neatly. But what happens, my friends, when someone enquires for young Pennington? For instance, myself."

"You've no purpose to serve," I broke in quickly.

He laughed, and shook his head gaily. "Not so fast, my young friend, not so fast!" he answered me. "I may have an axe to grind—I have ground many in my time. Besides—putting me right out of the question—what of the girl? How do you silence her?"

"I can find a way even to do that," replied the doctor in a low voice. "Only let me warn you again, Harvey Scoffold, we are desperate men here—or at least one of us—fighting for something more even than liberty. I am fighting to keep this innocent girl's name out of the business, and to keep scandal away from this house. Let Norton Hyde rest in his grave; Gregory Pennington is not likely to be enquired for. He was young and restless; he may have gone abroad—enlisted—anything. That's our tale for the world, if questions are asked."

"It only occurs to me that the virtuous uncle of our young friend here—the man who was robbed so audaciously—would give a great deal to know that the nephew who robbed him was at large," suggested Harvey Scoffold musingly over his cigar.

I took a quick step towards him. "You wouldn't dare!" I exclaimed threateningly.

He held up a large protesting hand. "My dear boy, I am your friend; I was always your friend. You are quite safe with me," he said. Yet I knew that he lied.

He made one other comment on the matter before wisely leaving the subject alone. "It seems to me strange," he observed, with a furtive look at the doctor, "that you should be so willing to help our young friend here—a man you have never seen."

"I do that," replied the other quickly, "because in that way I can cover up the miserable business of young Pennington. Unless you speak, it is scarcely likely that anyone else will ever drag that business into the light of day. Both Gregory Pennington and our friend here happen to have been particularly alone in the world: in neither case is there anyone who is likely to make awkward inquiries."

"Always excepting the girl," Harvey Scoffold reminded him. "So far as I am concerned, you have nothing to fear from me; I shall merely be an amused spectator of the little comedy; I don't know yet exactly how it's going to end."

He was tactful enough to say nothing more then, and we presently drifted, almost with cheerfulness, into some more ordinary conversation. Yet I saw that the man watched us both from between half-closed eyelids while he smoked and lounged in his chair; and I was far from comfortable. It was late when the doctor rose, and with a glance at the clock said that he had still much work to do before he could sleep. He unlocked the door; at which hint Harvey Scoffold and I left him for the night.

The excitement of the meeting had quite thrust out of my mind the question whether the man was stopping in the house or had merely come there as a chance visitor; but the question was answered now, when Harvey Scoffold told me that he had a long walk before him, and was glad that the night was fine. I felt some sudden uplifting of the heart at the thought that at least I should be relieved of his presence, only to feel that heart sinking the next moment, at the remembrance that he would be free to spread his news in the outer world, if he cared to do so. For it must be understood that my public trial, and all the disclosures thereat, had given to the world the address of my uncle, and my own movements on those secret expeditions of mine; it was possible for Harvey Scoffold to put that veiled threat of his into instant execution.

I knew, moreover, that he was a dangerous man, by reason of the fact that he was chronically in want of money, and had never hesitated as to the methods employed to obtain it. However, there was no help for it now; the murder was out, and I could only trust to that extraordinary luck that had befriended me up to the present.

I walked with him out into the grounds, and he shook hands with me at parting, with some cordiality. "You have had a miraculous escape, dear boy," he said, in his jovial fashion, "and you are quite a little romance in yourself. I shall watch your career with interest. And you have nothing to fear—I shall be as silent as the grave in which you ought to be lying."

He laughed noisily at that grim jest, and took his way down the road in the direction of London. I went back into the house and went to my room, and slept heavily until late the next morning.

The doctor had left the house when I went down to breakfast, and I had a dim hope that I might see the girl alone. But she did not put in an appearance, nor did I see anything of her until the evening, when the doctor had returned, and the three of us sat down to dinner. I had been roaming desolately about the grounds, smoking the doctor's cigars, and inwardly wondering what I was going to do with the rest of the life that had been miraculously given back to me; and I did not know at what hour Bardolph Just had returned. Yet I had a feeling that there had been some strange interview between the doctor and the girl before I had come upon the scene—and a stormy interview at that. Bardolph Just sat at his end of the table, grim and silent, with his brows contracted, and with his habitual smile gone from his lips; the girl sat white and silent, sipping a little wine, but touching no food. During the course of a melancholy meal no single word was heard in the room, for the doctor did not even address the servants.

At the end of the meal, however, when the girl rose to quit the room, the doctor rose also, and barred her way. "Stop!" he said quickly. "I've got to speak to you. We'll have this matter cleared up—once and for all."

"I have nothing more to say," she replied, looking at him steadily. "My answer is what it has always been—No!"

"You can go, John New," said the man harshly, turning towards me. "I want to talk to Miss Matchwick alone."

"No, no!" exclaimed the girl, stretching out her hands towards me; and on the instant I stopped on my way to the door, and faced about.

But the doctor took a quick step towards me, and opened the door, and jerked his head towards the hall. "I am master here," he said. "Go!"

I saw that I should not mend matters by remaining, but I determined to be within call. I passed quickly along the hall after the door was closed; I knew that just within the great hall door itself was another smaller door, opening to a verandah which ran round the front of the dining-room windows, on the old-fashioned early Victorian model. I knew that the windows were open, and I thought that I might by good fortune both see and hear what went on in the room.

And so it turned out. I slipped through that smaller door, and came on to the verandah; and so stood drawn up in the shadows against the side of the window, looking in and listening.

"I have given you the last chance," the doctor was saying, "and now I shall trouble you no more. There is another way, and perhaps a better one. I have treated you well. I have offered to make you my wife—to place you in the position your father would have been glad to see you occupy. Now I have done with you, and we must try the other way. Look into my eyes!"

Then I saw a curious thing happen. At first, while the man looked intently at her with those extraordinarily bright eyes of his, she covered her own with her hands, and strove to look away; but after a moment or two she dropped her hands helplessly, and shivered, and looked intently at him full. It was like the fascination of some helpless bird by a snake. I saw her sink slowly into a chair behind her; and still she never took her eyes from those of the doctor, until at last her lids fell, and she seemed to lie there asleep. Then I heard the man's voice saying words that had no meaning for my ears at that time.

"You will not sleep well to-night, little one," he said, in a curious crooning voice. "You will rise from your bed, and you will come out in search of something. Is it not so?"

Very softly she answered him: "Yes, I understand."

"You will be restless, and you will seek to get out into the air. But all the doors will be bolted, and the windows fastened. So you will turn to the eastern corridor and will pass along there to the end wall. Do you understand?"

And again she murmured: "Yes, I understand."

"And then you will walk on—into the air. You will do this at midnight."

She murmured, "At midnight"; and on a sudden he snapped his fingers violently three times before her eyes, and she sprang up, wide awake, and stared at him, looking at him in perplexity.

"You've been asleep for ever so long," he said, with a smile. "You must be tired; go to your room."

She looked at him in a dazed fashion, and passed her hand across her forehead. "What were we

speaking of?" she asked him, as though referring to the conversation they had had before he had sent her into that species of trance.

"Nothing—nothing that matters now," he said, moving towards the door.

Fearing that he might come in my direction after he had sent her from the room, I vaulted over the railing of the verandah, which was only raised a few feet above the level of the ground. And so presently came round by the side entrance into the house, and, as was my custom, went up to the doctor's study to smoke with him.

I found him pacing up and down, chewing the butt of a cigar that had long gone out. He glanced up quickly when I entered, and jerked his head towards the open drawer in the desk where the cigars were.

"I must ask you to take your cigar and smoke it elsewhere to-night," he said. "I have work to do, and I am very busy. Good-night."

I longed to stop and talk with him—cursed my own impotent position, which gave me no chance of trying conclusions with him and befriending the girl. I remembered bitterly the words she had said to me at the foot of the staircase on the previous night, when she had begged me not to leave her alone in that house. So I went away, reluctantly enough, to smoke my cigar elsewhere.

I wandered down into the dining-room, and dropped into a chair, and closed my eyes. Suddenly I remembered that it was that chair into which the girl had dropped when the doctor had said those words I did not understand. I sat up, very wide awake, remembering.

She was to walk along the eastern corridor, and was to come to a wall at the end. And yet she was to walk out into the air! What did it all mean? What trick was the man about to play upon her? What devilry was afoot?

I got up at once, and threw away my cigar, and set off to explore the house. I wanted to know where this eastern corridor was, if such a place existed, and what was meant by the doctor's words. I went up to my own room first, and made out, as well as I could, by remembering which way the sun rose, and other matters, in what direction the house was situated; and so came to the conclusion that the room to which I had been assigned was at the end of the eastern corridor, nearest to the great bulk of the house. Which is to say, that if I stood in the doorway of my room, and faced the corridor, the other rooms of the house would be on my right hand, while on my left the corridor stretched away into darkness, past rooms that, so far as I knew, were unoccupied.

Lest by any chance my windows should be watched, I lit the lamp in my room and left it; then I came out into the corridor, and closed the door. I looked over the head of the great staircase; the house was in complete silence, though not yet in darkness. Listening carefully, I moved away swiftly into the gathering darkness to the left, until at last, at the end of the corridor, my outstretched hand touched the wall. This was exactly as it should be, according to the doctor's words. I now turned my attention to the wall itself, and found that it was recessed—much as though at some time or other it had been a window that had been bricked up. I could make nothing of it, and I went back to my room, sorely puzzled.

I must have a torpid brain, for I was ever given to much sleeping. On this occasion I sank down into a chair, intending to sit there for a few minutes and think the matter out. In less than five, I was asleep. When I awoke I felt chilled and stiff, and I blamed myself heartily for not having gone to bed. While I yawned and stretched my arms, I became aware of a curious noise going on in the house. With my arms still raised above my head, I stopped to listen.

Whatever noise it was came from the end of the corridor where I had found that blank wall. Some instinct made me put out the light; then in the darkness I stole towards the door, and cautiously opened it. Outside the corridor was dark, or seemed to be at my first glance; I dropped to my knees, and peered round the edge of the door, looking to right and left.

To the right all was in darkness; the servants had gone to bed, after extinguishing the lights and locking up. To the left, strangely enough, a faint light shone; and as I turned my eyes in that direction I saw that a small hand-lamp was standing on the floor, and that above it loomed the figure of a man, casting a grotesque shadow on the walls and ceiling above him. I made enough of the figure to know that it was the doctor, and that he was working hard at that end wall.

I was puzzling my brains to know what he was doing, and was striving hard to connect his presence there with what he had said to the girl, when I heard a grinding and a creaking, and suddenly the lamp that stood beside him was blown out in a gust of wind that came down the corridor and touched my face softly as I knelt there. Then, to my utter amazement, I saw the night sky and the stars out beyond where that end wall had been.

I had just time to get back into my room and to close the door, when the doctor came tiptoeing back along the corridor, and vanished like a shadow into the shadows of the house. I waited for a time, and then struck a match, and looked at the little clock on the mantelpiece. It wanted four minutes of midnight.

I opened the door again, and looked out into the corridor; then, on an impulse, I stole along towards that newly-opened door, or whatever it was, and, coming to it, looked out into the night. It was at a greater height from the ground than I had thought possible, because on that side of the house the ground shelved away sharply, and there was in addition a deep, moat-like trough,

into which the basement windows looked. More than ever puzzled, I was retracing my steps, when I heard a slight sound at the further end, like the light rustle of a garment mingled with the swift patter of feet.

I will confess that my nerves were unstrung, and they were therefore scarcely prepared for the shock they had now to endure. For coming down the corridor, straight towards where I stood drawn up against the wall, was a little figure in a white garment, and with fair flowing hair over its shoulders; and that figure came swiftly straight towards that new door which opened to the floor. While I stood there, paralysed by the sight, certain words floated back to my mind.

"You will be restless, and you will seek to get out into the air. But all the doors will be bolted, and the windows fastened. So you will turn to the eastern corridor, and will pass along there to the end wall ... and then you will walk on into the air.... You will do this at midnight!"

With a great horror upon me, I leapt in a moment, though dimly, to what was meant. The girl was walking to her death, and walking in her sleep. In what devilish fashion Bardolph Just had contrived the thing, or what ascendancy he had gained over her that he could suggest the very hour at which she should rise from her bed and do it, I did not understand; but here was the thing nearly accomplished. She was within a couple of feet of the opening, and was walking straight out into the air at that giddy height, when I sprang forward and caught her in my arms.

She shrieked once—a shriek that seemed to echo through the night; then, with a long sobbing cry, she sank into my arms, and hid her face on my shoulder. And at the same moment I heard a door open down below in the house, and heard running footsteps coming towards me. I knew it was the doctor, and I knew for what he had waited.

CHAPTER V.

I AM DRAWN FROM THE GRAVE.

You are to picture me, then, standing in that wind-swept corridor, open at one end to the stars, and holding in my arms the sobbing form of Debora Matchwick, and waiting the coming of Dr. Bardolph Just. I awaited that coming with no trepidation, for now it seemed as though I stood an equal match for the man, by reason of this night's work; for if someone had shouted "Murder!" in the silence of the house, the thing could not have been proclaimed more clearly. I saw now that in that trance into which he had thrown her he had by some devilish art suggested to the girl what she should do, and at what hour, and then had thrown open the end of the corridor, that she might step out to her death.

Exactly how much she suspected herself, or how much she had had time to grasp, since the moment when I had so roughly awakened her, I could not tell; but she clung to me, and begged me incoherently not to let her go, and not to let the man come near her. Feeling that the thing must be met bravely, I got my arm about her, and advanced with her down the corridor to meet the doctor.

He came with a light held above his head; he was panting from excitement and hurry. I know that he expected to run to the end of that corridor, and to look out, and to see what should have lain far below him; but he came upon us advancing towards him instead, and he stopped dead and lowered his light.

"What's the matter?" he stammered.

"You should know that best," I answered him boldly. "Death might have been the matter. With your leave, I'll take this lady to her room."

He stood back against the wall, and watched us as we went past him. His brows were drawn down, and his eyes were glittering, and the faint white line of his teeth showed between his lips. In that attitude he remained, like some figure turned to stone, while I drew the girl along, and down the stairs; I had to ask her the way to her room, for, of course, I did not know it. Coming to it at last, I took her cold hands in mine and held them for a moment, and smiled as cheerfully as I could.

"This is not the time for explanations," I said; "leave all that till the morning. Go to bed, and try not to remember anything that has happened; and lock your door."

I heard the key turn in the lock before I came away; not till then did I retrace my steps back to the corridor. I was scarcely surprised to find the man standing almost in the same attitude—only now his head had lowered a little, and he seemed to be musing. Without moving he looked up at me, and a queer sort of grin spread over his features.

"Smart man!" he whispered, with a sneer. "How did it happen? How much do you know?"

"More than you would have me know?" I replied. "Would it not be well to fasten up that door again?" I jerked my head in the direction of the end of the corridor.

Without a word he handed the lamp to me, and started towards the opening. He went so quickly

that I thought for the moment he meant to hurl himself upon that death he had intended for the girl; but he stopped at the end, and seemed to be fumbling with the doors.

By that time I had reached him, and, with the aid of the lamp, I could see that there were two heavy doors opening inwards and fastened with a great bar that dropped across them, and with bolts at the top and at the bottom. Quite as though he had forgotten the incidents of the night, he turned to me, and gave an explanation of the doors.

"There used to be an iron staircase against the wall of the house, leading down from here at one time," he said. "It was the whim of some former owner. I found these doors by accident."

"And opened them with a purpose," I reminded him.

He said nothing in reply. Having secured the doors, he motioned to me to go in front, which I did, carrying the light, and in that order we came to my room. I would have handed him the lamp at the door, but he motioned to me to go in, and, following himself, closed the door. I set down the lamp, and waited for what he had to say. He was a long time coming to it; he wandered about the room for a time, stopping now and then, with his back to me, and with his finger tracing out the pattern of the wall paper. When at last he spoke he was still tracing that pattern, and he did not look round.

"You have done me a service to-night, and one I'm not likely to forget," he said.

"A service?" I asked in amazement. "I should scarcely have thought you'd call it that."

"I do—I do!" he exclaimed, swinging round upon me suddenly. "I meant to kill her, and you've saved me from that. I thank my God for it!"

"I don't believe you," I said doggedly. "You planned the thing too well for that."

"I did not plan it, except by the opening of the doors," he said. "I knew that she walked in her sleep sometimes, and I thought——"

"You lie!" I exclaimed fiercely. "I watched you, and heard you while you suggested to her that she should walk in this eastern corridor at midnight, and should come to the end wall. And you knew that there would be no wall there."

He looked at me in a bewildered fashion for what seemed a long time; then he nodded slowly twice. "So you heard that, did you? Well, I suppose there's nothing for it but confession. I did plan the thing; it was by a method you don't understand—what we call hypnotic suggestion. That means that you tell a person that they are to do a certain thing at a certain hour, and when that hour arrives they must inevitably set about to do it."

"Why did you want to kill her?"

"Why do we always desire to crush the thing that we can't possess?" he snapped back at me. "Because I love her—because I would sell my immortal soul—if I have one—to bend her or break her to my will. You are a sleepy dolt, understanding nothing of passions such as sway stronger men; you are not likely to understand this. But she maddens me when she sticks that pretty chin of hers in the air, and I see the contempt flash out of her eyes. If you saw so much, you probably saw the beginning of it, when she said she would have nothing further to do with me, and threatened to get away out of the house. Then the thought came over me that I would put an end to it all; and I made that suggestion to her that she should walk here to-night; and I came first, and opened the old doors. I thank God you saved her!"

He suddenly dropped his head in his hands and groaned aloud; and my heart melted a little with pity for him. I guessed something of what a stormy nature was hidden in the man; and I, who thought I had read something of love in her eyes for me, could afford to pity the man to whose pleadings she turned a deaf ear. Fool that I was, I did not realise the cunning of the creature who stood with hidden face before me; I did not understand that this was but a bit of play-acting, to put me off my guard. I was to learn all that later.

"Do you think you'll help your case by such a business as this of to-night?" I asked. "It's a poor way to make love, to strive to kill the woman."

"She won't know anything about it; she won't guess," he exclaimed eagerly, looking up at me. "She does not know that I suggested to her what to do; she will only wonder at finding the doors open. I can give some explanation of that, if necessary."

"And what will you do now?" I asked him, as I lighted my own lamp and put his into his hand.

"Give up the game," he replied, with a faint smile. "This has taught me a lesson to-night; it has shown me how near the best of us may come to a crime. I am sincere in that; I thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you've done. The lover in me is gone; henceforth I'm her guardian and the friend of her dead father. There's my hand on it!"

I looked into his eyes, and once again I believed him; I began to feel that I had misjudged the man. True, his hand was cold enough in my grasp, but I paid no heed to that; I seemed to see only before me a changed and humbled man. He wished me "Good-night!" with much cordiality, and went off to his own room. For my part, I felt something of a missionary, and congratulated myself upon the night's work.

I had made up my mind that I would see Debora as early as possible on the following morning. I was anxious to know what impression that startling occurrence of the previous night had made upon her. I wanted to see her before there was any possibility of Bardolph Just confronting her; and in that I was successful.

It was a very fine morning, and I supposed that I should find her in the grounds. I felt that I might reasonably expect that she would make her way to that summer-house in which we had met and talked before; and in that also I was right. Quite early, before breakfast was announced, I came upon her in the morning sunlight; and for a long time, as it seemed, we held hands without a word.

"You slept well?" I asked her.

She nodded brightly. "Better than I should have done, I suppose," she said, with a smile; "but then, I was sure of my friend—certain that no harm could come to me. How much have you to tell me of last night?"

"Nothing," I said, shaking my head. "There is nothing that you need be told, now that everything is ended. For the future you have to trust to me—just as you trusted last night. You said I was your friend; and I am going to look after you."

"That makes me very happy. By the way, what am I to call you?" she asked artlessly.

I felt the colour mounting in my cheeks. "You know my name," I said.

"Yes—John," she replied, and we both laughed.

Now this is, of course, all very shameful, and I had no right to be standing there, holding her hands, and letting her talk to me in that fashion; but I did not remember then what I was, or from what I had come. Indeed, it is more than possible that if I had remembered I should scarcely have changed my attitude, for but little joy had ever come into my life. I merely set this down here, in order to record the fact that, save for one lamentable lapse, we were "John" and "Debora" to each other from that day forward.

But I had some instructions to give her for her own safety. She listened attentively while I gave them.

"You had better not refer to last night at all," I said. "Let the doctor imagine that you have forgotten about it, or at least have believed that it was some ugly dream. Meet him as usual—show him, if anything, a little more kindness than you have done."

"I can't do that," she said hastily.

"You must; it is imperative," I urged. "I can tell you this, at least: I have his promise that he will not molest you again, and that he will be for the future simply your guardian, and nothing else."

"He said that?" she asked in astonishment.

"Yes, and I believe he means it," I answered steadily.

"I don't believe it, John; it's a trick," she said, shaking her head. "I've seen too much of him; I know him too well. He is trying to throw you off the scent. Don't you understand how helpless we both are? You tell me that you are in his power, because he knows something about your past life: how can you fight against him, or help me?"

"I can, and I will," I assured her. "And you can help, by being discreet, and by waiting until we have an opportunity to do something in concert."

She promised faithfully that she would do that, and she left me, with a smile and a wave of the hand. I followed her slowly to the house, and found the doctor in his usual place at the breakfast table, talking quietly to her. The woman Leach was behind him, as usual.

It became obvious, in a minute or two, that Bardolph Just was anxious to find out how much she remembered, or how much she understood, of the events of the previous night; he had already begun to question Debora cautiously. He appeared to be in a genial mood, and yet in a softened mood; he gave me a smile as I took my place.

"So you slept well?" said Bardolph Just to the girl, as he leaned towards her. "Not disturbed by anything?"

She shook her head, and looked at him with raised eyebrows of perplexity; truly I felt that she had learnt her lesson well. "What should disturb me?"

"Nothing, nothing!" he replied, evidently at a loss. "Only I thought that there was some noise in the house last night; I almost went out to investigate. But, of course, if you heard nothing——"

It happened that at that moment I glanced up over his head, and I saw the woman behind him turn a swift glance out of those dark eyes of hers at the girl; it was but a momentary thing, and then her eyes were cast down in the usual humble fashion; but in that instant I had read something that I had not understood before. I read not only hatred of the girl, and defiance of her; I saw, as clearly as though it had been written, that she knew of the events of the night before, and that she knew that the girl was not speaking the truth. I wondered exactly what had happened, or in what way she had gained her knowledge: I was to learn that swiftly enough.

Somewhat later in the forenoon, I was practically alone in the house. I knew that Debora had gone off into the grounds with a book, and I did not care to disturb her. Bardolph Just had gone down into London on business. I was lounging at my full length in an easy chair in the dining-room, smoking, and reading the newspaper, when the door opened softly, and Martha Leach came in. I did not turn my head, but I saw her moving round the room in a large mirror hanging on the wall opposite my chair. Indeed, our eyes met in that mirror, before they met elsewhere. She stopped, and, somewhat to my surprise, spoke.

"You are a very brave man," she said, with a quick glance at the long windows, as though fearing interruption. "And a strong man, too."

"Who told you that?" I asked, without shifting my position.

"No one tells me anything, and I don't need to be told," she answered. "I find out things for myself; I watch, and discover."

I seemed to have a dim inkling of what was coming, but I think my face betrayed nothing. I lowered the newspaper to my knee, and went on smoking, and watching her in the mirror.

"I saw you last night in the eastern corridor; I saw you catch that girl just in time," she went on, in the same breathless sort of whisper. "A moment later, and that would have been death."

"You seem to know a great deal about it," I answered. "Perhaps you can tell me something else."

She laughed insolently, and shrugged her shoulders. I kept my eyes upon her in the mirror. "Anything you like," she replied.

"Then tell me how you could see anything that happened in the eastern corridor last night," was my answer.

"I was in the grounds—I had been there a long time," she whispered, her eyes growing more excited. "I did not know about the door; I only knew that something was going to happen, because the doctor kept moving about all the evening. I watched him go out of his room—I mean that I saw the light disappear, and knew that he had not put it out; I saw it go across the windows as he moved. I thought he was going to your room, and so I went round there; and then I saw your light go out. And then, as by a miracle, I saw that wall open, and the doctor stood there, like a spirit. I saw him before the light was puffed out. Then I waited to see what would happen."

"Well, I hope you were satisfied with what you saw?" I said carelessly.

She snapped her fingers quickly, and laughed. "Bah! you think you will put me off; you think I don't understand," she said. "I tell you I saw you come to that door and look out; I saw you in the starlight. And then I saw her come; heard the shriek; saw you catch her in your arms. After that, the fastening of the door by the doctor, while you held the lamp. And yet this morning"—her voice changed to a tone of bitter irony—"this morning, if you please, no one knows anything about it, and everyone has slept well. Bah!"

She snapped her fingers again, and it seemed almost as if she waited to know what I should say. But I realised that this woman was an intimate of the doctor; and it was my business, then, to fear everyone in that house, save Debora. So I went on smoking, and, still without turning my head, talked to the woman I saw in the mirror.

"Have you anything else to say?" I asked calmly.

"Oh! a great deal," she flashed back at me, forgetting the cautious voice in which she had spoken. "I want, first of all, to know who you are, and how you come to be in this house so mysteriously and so suddenly; for who saw you arrive? That I shall discover some day for myself. I discover everything in time. And I want to tell you something."

She moved a step nearer to my chair, and now I turned my head and looked into her eyes.

"He did not succeed last night; but perhaps the next time he will not fail. So surely as I stand here, so surely do I know that he will kill her." She nodded her head with incredible swiftness two or three times, and drew back from me, with her lips tightly pursed.

I lost control of myself in the sudden shock of her words; I sprang to my feet. "What do you mean?" I asked in horror. "What do you know?"

"Only what I have said," she mocked at me, as she made for the door. "I would advise you, Mr. Mysterious, to look well after this girl you love—this frail thing of prettiness. For the doctor will surely kill her!" Then she was gone, and I was left staring helplessly at the closed door.

So much had that thought been in my own mind that her words seemed but an echo. I thought I saw that this man, Bardolph Just, cheated of his purpose in securing the girl, had made up his mind to get rid of her—out of some insane jealousy that prompted him not to allow her to go to the arms of another man. Yet, when I came to think over the problem, it occurred to me that if, as he had faintly suggested, he wanted control of her fortune, this would be but the act of a madman. The only possibility was that the fortune might in some way be secured by him without her.

But now that the matter had been confirmed in this startling fashion I knew that it was imperative that I should keep a stricter watch than ever upon Debora. For suddenly it seemed to

me that my absurd belief in the man was no longer justified. I saw that the doctor had merely adopted that attitude of penitence, the better to put me off my guard. Yet, even while I promised myself that I would do valiant things, I could only remember my own helplessness, in being entirely dependent upon the very man against whom I wished to arm myself. I had in my pocket but a shilling or two, which he had given me for my journey down into London—that journey which I had never taken.

As for any future that might once have seemed bright before me—what future had I? I was practically in hiding under another name, and I had no resources save those I might derive from one who knew my secret, and was, in a great sense, my enemy. I was in love—surely more hopelessly than mortal man had ever been before; and I was liable at any moment to be betrayed by the man Harvey Scoffold, who had penetrated my story. Altogether, as I came to review the position, I could have heartily wished myself back in my prison again, save for one element in the business. That element was Debora Matchwick, and I knew that in the strange game I was playing Fate had destined me to fight on her side, in a matter of life and death.

Bardolph Just returned early in the afternoon, and went straight to his study. Debora I had seen for an instant as she crossed the hall; she gave me a quick smile, and that was all. There seemed to be brooding over the whole house an atmosphere of expectancy—quite as though we waited for something that was to happen, and faced it each in his or her particular way. I found myself listening for the doctor's step in the house, while I felt equally certain that for his part he was wondering what move I should take, and was calmly preparing to meet such a move, whatever it might be.

The long day drew to a close, and presently the harsh bell clanged through the house as a summons to dinner. I happened to be in my room at the time, and as I stepped out of it to go down the stairs, I saw that the doctor was waiting at the head of the stairs, and was peering over into the hall below. He turned his head when he heard my step behind him, and spoke in a whisper. He spoke as though we were on the friendliest terms, and almost as if there were some secret understanding between us. As I stepped up to him he put his hand on my shoulder, and, laughable as it may seem, I felt a little thrill of gratitude and tenderness for the man run through me—such was the fascination of him. All my suspicions of him seemed to go to the wind.

"I thought I ought to prepare you, John, in case you didn't know," he whispered. "Two bits of news—Harvey Scoffold has come to dinner, which may mean mischief; and Capper's missing."

He imparted that last scrap of information with something so like a chuckle that I looked at him quickly, with a new suspicion in my mind. Oddly enough, he must have guessed what I meant, for he shook his head and grinned.

"Oh, nothing to do with me, I assure you," he said. "Only he has gone off without a word to anyone—and I don't quite like it. Of course, I'm relieved to know that he has gone; the old fool was like a ghost wandering about the place. But still, I'd like to know where he is."

"I don't see that it matters very much," I replied. "But what makes you think that Scoffold may mean mischief?"

Still keeping his hand on my shoulder, he turned me about, and began to walk with me down the stairs. "Because it's a long time since he has visited me until the other night, and now he comes again. You see, he knows our story, and he's utterly unscrupulous. More than that, he's always in want of money."

"I'll try what personal violence will do, if he tries any tricks with me," I muttered savagely. And once again I heard the doctor chuckle.

Harvey Scoffold was in the dining-room when we entered, and was talking to Debora. He was flourishing about in his big, bullying way, with his hands thrust in his pockets, and his feet wide apart. He turned round to greet us at once. I noticed that he looked sharply from the doctor to me, and back again, as though he suspected we had been discussing him; but the next moment he gripped our hands warmly, and began to pour out apologies.

"I hope you don't mind a lonely man coming in, and taking advantage of your hospitality in this fashion," he began to the doctor. "But it suddenly occurred to me that I might run over to see you—and I acted on the impulse of a moment."

"Delighted, I'm sure," murmured Bardolph Just. Yet he scarcely looked delighted. "You know you're always welcome, Harvey."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks!" exclaimed the big man. "You fellows interested me so much the other night while we smoked our cigars, that I rather wanted to have that little discussion out with you. You don't mind?"

We were seated at the table by this time, and I saw the doctor look up quickly at him, with something of a scowl on his face. "I mind very much," he said sharply. "Drop it."

A little startled, Harvey Scoffold sat upright, looking at him for a moment; then he nodded slowly. "Very good—then the subject is dropped," he said. "It would not have been mentioned again by me, but that I thought I might be of some assistance in the matter."

There was no reply to that, and we presently drifted into other topics of conversation. But after a

time it seemed as though Harvey Scoffold, in sheer venom, must get back to that subject, if only by a side door, for he presently asked a question casually that bore straight upon it.

"By the way, that quaint old servant, Capper—is he any better?"

The doctor slowly finished the wine he was drinking, and set the glass down, and wiped his lips; then, without looking at his questioner, he answered—

"Capper is gone!" he said.

Two persons at the table echoed that last word together—Harvey Scoffold and Debora exclaimed, as in one voice, "Gone!"

"Having had enough of our society, the man has taken himself off as mysteriously as he came," went on the doctor calmly. "I never understood his coming; still less do I understand his going, although I confess that the latter movement is the more reasonable. Perhaps he has remembered where his master is, and has gone to join him."

I stole a glance at the startled face of the girl. She seemed strangely excited. Harvey Scoffold, evidently at a loss for conversation, hummed the mere shred of an air between his lips, and looked at the ceiling. The doctor's face I could not see, because he was behind the lamp. I longed for the dinner to pass, because I wanted to get at my man, and find out just what game was afoot; I was in a mood to choke whatever news he had out of him, if necessary.

Debora rose at last, and went out of the room. No sooner was the door closed than the doctor shifted his chair a little, so as to bring him clear of the lamp, and brought a fist down on the table with a bang.

"Now, Scoffold," he said violently, "what's the move?"

"Yes, what's the move?" I echoed, leaning towards the man also.

He glanced from one to the other of us with a look of smiling innocence on his face. "The move?" he said. "I'm afraid I don't understand. In the name of all that's marvellous, can't a man come to dinner with friends without being asked what the move is?"

"You're not the man to do anything without a purpose," cried Bardolph Just. "You discovered something the last time you were here, and you evidently want to discover something else. Let me warn you—"

"Stop! stop!" broke in Harvey Scoffold, raising his hands protestingly. "I need no threats and no warnings, because there is nothing to threaten about, nor to warn about. My hands are clean, and I trust they may remain so. If I referred to the matter at all to-night, it was simply because I was naturally very deeply interested in the story I heard, and I wanted to know what further developments there might be, that is all."

"Well, there are no further developments," growled the doctor. "I doubt if there will be any further developments."

"I'm delighted to hear it, and I'm only worried about one thing—that's the man Capper. He may make mischief, and he may get himself into trouble—poor old fellow!—wandering about the world friendless. I'm quite sorry for Capper."

The doctor excused himself almost immediately, and went to his study. To my surprise, Scoffold linked his arm in mine, and drew me with him towards the door of the house. "It's a fine night, and a walk will do you good," he said. "Walk back with me to my place."

"That's rather too far," I said, for I remembered that he had chambers in the West-end of London.

"I've taken another lodging," he said, without looking at me. "It's about a mile from here—or perhaps a little more—in a sort of rural cottage, where I can smell the roses when I wake in the morning. Cheap and wholesome, and all that sort of thing. Come along."

It was still quite early, and I reflected that no harm was likely to come to the girl in the short time I should be away. Besides, in a fashion, this man drew me to him, by reason of the fact that I was afraid of him, and of what he might do or say. So we went out of the house together, and traversed the dark grounds, and so came arm-in-arm into the open road. Smoking our cigars like two gentlemen at ease, we strolled along under the stars.

I found that he had taken a lodging in a quaint little cottage, with a long garden in front of it, in a queer little back street in Highgate—I should scarcely have believed that such a place existed in what was really London. He fitted his key into the door, and we went into a tiny passage and up some stairs. As we reached the top of the stairs, a clean-looking old woman came out of the room below, and called to him.

"Your servant is waiting up for you, sir," she said.

"Thank you very much indeed," replied Harvey Scoffold blandly, and the woman retired.

I found myself wondering a little what sort of servant he had brought to such a place as this. I followed him into a little clean sitting-room, with two doors opening out of it into what were evidently bedrooms.

At one side of the room a little table was set out with decanters, and glasses, and syphons: he proceeded to mix for himself and for me. Looking about him in search of something which he could not find, he struck his hand on a little bell, and I saw one of the doors open, and someone come in. I stared with a dropping jaw when I saw that the mysterious servant who now came in smiling was Capper!

Capper did not look at me. He received his instructions, and went out of the room in search of what was wanted. He came noiselessly back in a moment or two, and during his absence no word was spoken. When the door was finally closed again, I spoke in a tone I vainly endeavoured to control.

"What is the meaning of this?" I demanded.

"Of what?" asked Harvey Scoffold innocently. "Oh! you mean Capper? Purely an act of charity, my dear boy. I wouldn't have wished the old man to starve."

"You're lying," I said hotly. "You asked all those questions to-night during dinner, knowing well that the old man was here. Come, what's the motive?"

He took a long drink and set down his glass with a sigh of satisfaction. "The motive is this," he said, with a curious grin stealing over his features. "While I wish no direct harm to you, my dear boy, I always like to be prepared for anything that may happen. I am in possession of your story—I know practically all that I want to know. But in the fulness of time that story must change and move; something's got to happen to you at some time or other. Now this man Capper—this creature of the lost memory—may be a mere pawn in the game, or he may be something more. Who shall say what is locked away in that numbed brain of his?—who shall say when or under what circumstances he may wake up? I shall be curious to know what he will say when he wakes—curious to understand what the shock was that drove him into his present condition."

"Why should you concern yourself about the matter at all?" I demanded.

"Because I wish to concern myself on your account, my dear fellow," he said blandly. "Really you ought to be very much obliged to me. Bardolph Just would have sent the man packing, or would have let him drift out into the world, with the possibility that at some time or other Capper would wake up and tell his story, and demand sanely to know where his master was. Here I have him safely, and if he blurts out the story at all—always supposing that he has one to blurt out—he can only tell it to a friend. Don't be hasty, and don't misjudge people."

Nevertheless, I did not like it. I knew that I was in the power of this man Scoffold, and I saw, in the line of conduct he was taking, so many steps towards using me for his own ends. The coming to dinner, the taking of this lodging so near to where I lived, the securing of the man Capper. I felt that he was drawing a net about me, out of which I might not be able to struggle.

We sat talking for a long time, and gradually, with his plausible tongue, he persuaded me that he was my friend, and that he meant to help me. He suspected the doctor, he told me, and his real motive in coming to that lodging was to be near me in case of necessity.

"Trust me," he said, "and I will stand your friend. More than that, I want to show you now that my help shall be of a practical nature. I take it that you have no money; that you are dependent upon Bardolph Just for everything?" As I was silent, he nodded, and went on, "Just as I thought. Well, we'll remedy that; you must let me lend you a little money."

I protested feebly for a time, but he was insistent, and at last I yielded. I took only a few shillings, because I really needed them, and I did not know at what moment I might be thrown on my own resources, and left to face the world once more. Then, with something amounting to friendliness, I left Harvey Scoffold at the little gate in the fence, at the end of the long garden which led to the cottage, and took my way back towards the doctor's house.

It was very late, and very dark. I was going along at a swinging pace, when I saw a man rise from beside the road and come hobbling towards me, pleading volubly as he came. Having nothing for beggars, I was pressing on, while he jogged along beside me, about a foot in my rear, still pleading.

"S'welp me, guv'nor, yer might spare a tanner to 'elp a pore bloke to a night's lodging. I've bin trampin' it all day, an' I've scarcely 'ad a mouthful of food; it wouldn't 'urt yer to give me a tanner. I wouldn't be like this 'ere if I 'adn't bin unfort'nit; but wot's a pore bloke to do wot's been in jail—an' gits chivied abaht—"

I stopped and wheeled round on him. "You say you've been in prison?" I asked. "What prison was it?"

"Pent'ouse," he replied; and on that I thrust the money I had ready in my hand into his, and turned abruptly and made off.

But, as ill-luck would have it, we had been standing squarely under a lamp, and as I turned round I saw the man give a start of surprise. I was in a mood to run, knowing well that I could out-distance him easily, but as I went striding away, I heard him come pounding after me, and heard him shouting something. The mischief was done; there was nothing for it but to meet him.

So I turned back slowly and then stood still, and waited for him.

CHAPTER VI.

I BEHAVE DISGRACEFULLY.

The man I now faced on that solitary road had all the appearance of a tramp. By the light of the lamp above us I saw that he was clad in a dingy old tweed suit, very much frayed at the cuffs and the trouser-ends, while upon his head was a cap much too large for him, the peak of which was worn over one ear. And this not from any rakishness, but rather, as it seemed, as a sullen protest against the more orderly habits of his fellows. As the game was in his hands for the moment, I left the first move to him.

"Well, strike me pink!" he exclaimed under his breath, as he looked me up and down. "Wot's walkin' to-night—live men or spooks? Jail-bird or gent—w'ich is it?"

"I don't know what you mean," I said lamely. "I know nothing about you——"

"Come orf it!" he exclaimed, with a disgusted shrug. "If you don't know nothink abaht me, wot did yer come back for w'en I 'ollered? W'y—we worked in the same gang!"

"I never saw you in my life before," I said, feeling now that all was up with me.

"Oh, yus, yer did!" he retorted. "You an' me worked in the same gang, an' slep' at night in cells wot was next to each uvver. An' then one day you cut yer lucky, an' they brought you back a dead 'un. 'Ere, ketch 'old of my 'and!"

He stretched out a grimy hand to me as he spoke and quite mechanically I put my own into it. He gripped it for a moment, and then tossed it from him with a laugh.

"You ain't no spook," he said, "an' you ain't no bloomin' twin brother. You won't kid old George Rabbit."

"I don't want to kid anybody," I said. "And I shouldn't think you'd be the sort to go back on a pal. Why, you're free yourself!"

"Yes, in a proper sort o' way," he retorted. "Got my discharge reg'lar, an' a nice little pat on the back w'en I come out fer bein' a good boy. Not that that does yer much good—'cos 'ere I am starving, w'ile the bloke that comes out through the roof, an' cuts his lucky, dresses like a toff, an' smokes a cigar you could smell a mile orf. As fer me, it don't 'ardly run to 'alf a hounce an' a inch of clay."

"Well, at any rate you're better off now, and as to freedom—well, we can cry quits as to that," I said. "Here's some more money for you, all I can spare. I'll wish you good-night."

"'Arf a mo'—'arf a mo'!" he cried, catching at my sleeve and detaining me. "Do yer fink I'm goin' to let yer go like that? W'y, there's lots of fings wants explainin'. 'Ow do you come to be walkin' at large like this 'ere, after they've tolled the bloomin' bell for yer at Pent'ouse?"

"I can't explain everything to you; it would take too long," I said. "Suffice it that I've found friends who have helped me; there was another man buried in my place. And now, Mr. George Rabbit," I added fiercely, "you'll please to understand that Norton Hyde, convict, lies buried in a certain grave you know of, and quite another man has given you money to-night. Get that into your thick head, and once more 'good-night' to you."

I turned away abruptly to resume my walk. After all, I felt that I was pretty safe; such a shifty, shambling creature as this would only be regarded as a madman if he told any tale about me, especially any tale that would seem as absurd as this one of a man alive that should properly be dead. So I strode away, whistling.

But after a moment or two, glancing furtively over my shoulder, I saw that he was following, coming along on the other side of the road at a sort of hobbling trot that carried him over the ground as fast as my longer stride. I stopped, and looked back at him; and in a moment he stopped too, and waited.

"You'd better go back," I called across to him threateningly, but he did not answer.

On I went again, and once more, as I glanced over my shoulder, I saw him coming along in the same way, like a grim Fate that would not be shaken off. I had just made up my mind to try conclusions with him in the shape of personal violence, and had stopped with that purpose in my mind, when a voice broke in out of the darkness that startled me even more than it could have startled Mr. Rabbit.

"Is that man following you, sir?"

It was a constable, standing in the shadow of a doorway, and he had evidently been watching our approach. I knew by the fact that George Rabbit stood his ground, and even edged a little nearer, that he felt he had nothing to fear; while, for my part, the mere sight of the uniformed constable, coming at that juncture, had thrown me into such a sweat of terror that I could scarcely speak. However, I managed to jerk out some words which were perhaps the most stupid I could have used, because I doubt not that had I braved the matter out, George Rabbit would have taken to

his heels, and so have left me in peace. But my words only strengthened whatever ties the man meant to bind me with.

"It's all right, constable," I blurted out; "the man's a friend of mine in—in reduced circumstances. I'm going to find him a lodging."

So we shuffled on in our original order past the constable, and now I began to feel that I had indeed taken a load upon me that was more than I could support. By this time George Rabbit had drawn nearer to me, and was shuffling along contentedly at my side, and with each step I was coming nearer to the house of Dr. Bardolph Just. In desperation at last I turned about, and caught him suddenly by the throat and shook him. I remember now that he tumbled about in my hands as though he had been the mere bundle of rags he looked, so that I was a little ashamed of my violence.

"You dog!" I exclaimed savagely, "what the devil do you mean by following me like this? What do you think you'll gain?"

"I dunno, yet," he said shakily, while his head rolled from side to side. "I can't be much worse off than wot I am, an' I may be a deal better."

"I'll give you all I have in my pockets if you'll turn back now, and forget you've ever seen me," I said, releasing him.

He grinned at me. "I've got sich a 'orrible good memory," he said. "Besides, I couldn't fergit that face under any circs."

"What do you think you'll get?" I demanded again.

"I'll put it plain, guv'nor," he said, standing in the road before me, and looking at me with his head on one side. "I've bin out o' luck a long time; even my pals don't seem to cotton to me some'ow. Nah, you've got friends—real tip-toppers, I'll be bound—wot spells it in quids w'ere I spells it in brown 'uns. Also likewise you don't want it blowed about that you ain't wot you seem, an' that your proper place fer the next few years is Pent'ouse, to say nothink of awkward enquiries about somebody else wot was buried by mistake. In case there's any questions asked, you want a pal wot'll s'welp 'is never that 'e don't know any more abaht yer than the King on 'is golding throne. An' that's me—that's George Rabbit!"

"I don't want your help," I said.

"But you've got to 'ave it, all the same," he remarked cheerfully.

So it happened that I had to go on again, with this ragged retainer trailing behind. In that order we came to the gate leading into the grounds, and I went in, still puzzled to know what to do with the man. By this time I realised that, however much the doctor might resent his appearance, it was vitally necessary that for his own sake, as well as for mine, Bardolph Just should assist me in silencing that too free tongue which wagged in the head of George Rabbit. While I was debating what to do with the man, he settled that question for himself.

"It's a nice warm night, guv'nor; if you could give me some place w'ere I could jist lay meself dahn, an' do a snooze, I should be as comfy as comfy. Only if I could git summink to eat, an' a drop o' drink fust, I should be 'appier still."

"You'd better wait here while I go to the house," I replied. "I'll bring you out something to eat, and I'll show you where to sleep."

I left him standing under the trees, and, greatly perturbed in mind, made my way to the house. I had seen a light in the doctor's study, and I now made straight for it, for this was a matter in which I must have advice. Without troubling to knock at the door, I opened it and walked straight in.

At first I thought the room was empty, and I was withdrawing again when I heard voices at the further end of it. The voices proceeded from behind the screen which hid that part of the room which was the surgery, and it was evident that whoever was there, believing that they had the place to themselves, were at no pains to mask their voices.

The first voice I heard was one which I recognised easily as that of the woman Martha Leach. She was evidently greatly excited, and labouring under strong emotion.

"God help me! why have I clung to you all these years—for you to make a mock of me now, and to try to fling me aside? What has my life been that I should stand calmly by and be slighted, and treated like the dirt under your feet?"

It was the doctor's voice that broke in, sharply and angrily. "You've remained with me because it suited your purpose to do so," he said. "Years ago I befriended you—you know under what circumstances. You know how I imperilled my position to do it; you know that, but for me, you would have stood in a criminal dock——"

"I know—I know!" she cried. "And after that my life was given to you. I became as something that did not exist for myself, but for another. And now—now all that is forgotten."

"It was forgotten years ago, and will never be remembered now," he said. "If you are not content with your position here, the remedy lies in your own hands: you can leave the house, and start

somewhere again for yourself."

"You know I can't do that," she said, in a lower tone. "Only you might be fair to me; you might let me understand that even if I am nothing, this girl is less. Why should you degrade me before her?"

"Because you were growing insolent," he said. "Leave Miss Matchwick's name out of the question."

"You tried to kill her," said the woman, sinking her voice yet more. "I saw that; I know why you opened those doors last night."

There was a long pause, and then I heard the doctor give a quick laugh. "Well, doesn't that satisfy you?" he asked.

She seemed to laugh in response. "But you won't have the courage again," she taunted him.

"Won't I?" I heard him move as though he took a step towards her. "I shall. And next time it will be something more subtle than any such bungling business of an accident at night. I gave a certificate once, in the case of a certain Martha Leach, concerning the death——"

"Don't speak of that!" she exclaimed.

"And I can give one in the case of the death of a certain Debora——What's that?"

I had been so startled that I had stumbled back against the door, closing it noisily. I had the sense now to open it quickly, and apparently to march into the room, cheerily whistling. As I did so the doctor came quickly round the screen and confronted me.

"Hullo!" I exclaimed. "Forgive my bursting in like that; I wanted to see you."

He drew a breath of relief, and smiled in a ghastly fashion; he seemed strangely shaken. "You did startle me rather," he said. "What's the matter?"

Now I knew that the woman Leach was still behind the screen, and that she must hear every word that I might have to say, and Bardolph Just knew that also. Yet we must play the game of pretences in such a fashion as to make each believe that we were certain we were the only two persons in the room. More than that, having had a sample of the woman's curiosity that morning, I was in no mood to talk about myself, or of that fellow jail-bird I had met, within her hearing. Yet I could not suggest talking with the doctor elsewhere, because that must at once show him that I knew we had a listener. There was nothing for it but to speak as vaguely as possible, and to try and get him away from that room.

"I've had an adventure to-night, and I rather want to tell you about it," I said. "I've met a man, by the merest accident, whom I know."

He glanced quickly at the screen, and then looked again at me. "Won't your news keep till the morning?" he asked.

"Well, hardly," I replied, with a laugh. "The friend of whom I speak is here now."

"Here?" The doctor looked puzzled.

"Yes," I said. "You see, it happens that he was with me in a certain place of which you know, and he is rather anxious to renew an acquaintance so auspiciously begun."

The doctor whistled softly, and once more glanced at the screen. "We'll go downstairs and talk about this," he said. "This room is intolerably hot."

He opened the door for me to pass out, and as I preceded him murmured an excuse that he had forgotten something, and went quickly back. I went downstairs, and in a moment or two he joined me in the dining-room. I could scarcely refrain from smiling at my secret knowledge of what had taken place in the other room, even though I was agitated by dreadful fears concerning Debora. I had gleaned but a dim notion of what the pair had been talking about, but it had been enough to show me that Bardolph Just had by no means repented of his purpose. I shuddered at the connection of Debora's name with death. Moreover, guessing something of the character of the woman Leach, and adding to that the remembrance of what she had said to me that morning, I saw that matters were indeed desperate. And, to add to my perplexities, there was the man George Rabbit, waiting all this time under the trees for my reappearance.

"Now, what has happened?" asked the doctor sharply.

"I met a man to-night, by the greatest ill-fortune, who worked in the same gang with me in Penthouse prison," I answered him. "A mean dog, who intends to trade on the knowledge, and to get what he can out of me. I tried to shake him off, but he stuck to me like wax."

"What have you done with him?" he asked.

"I left him in the grounds; I promised to take food and drink to him," I said.

He paced about the room for a moment or two, with his arms folded, and his chin in the hollow of one hand. "I don't like the look of things at all; it seems almost as if a net were closing in about us," he said at last. "Harvey Scoffold was bad enough; now comes someone who, according to

your description, is scarcely likely to prove as reasonable even as Scoffold might be. This dog scents money, I take it?"

"He scents everything that means easy living, and no work, and safety," I answered.

"Bring him in here; perhaps I may be able to deal with him better than you," said the doctor suddenly. "We'll feed him, and we'll see what he has to say for himself. That's the ticket; bring him in here."

I went out at once into the grounds, and was relieved to see George Rabbit slouch out from the shadows of the trees, and come towards me. "Bin a bloomin' long time, you 'ave," he growled resentfully.

"Don't be impudent," I said sharply. "Come into the house, and I'll give you a meal."

He drew back and shook his head. "Not me," he replied. "I ain't goin' to run into no traps. 'Ow do I know who's inside, or wot's goin' to 'appen to me? I'm safe 'ere, an' 'ere I'll stop."

"What's to harm you?" I asked him. "You've nothing to fear; you've worked out your time, and are a free man. If anyone has to be afraid of what's going to happen, I think I'm the man."

"Never mind abaht that; I tell yer I ain't goin' in," he said doggedly.

I shrugged my shoulders and turned away. "Then stop outside; you'll get nothing," was my reply.

As I expected, I had not gone a dozen yards when he came limping after me. "All right, guv'nor, I'll risk it," he said eagerly, "I'm down on my luck, an' I must have a bite an' a drink. An' after all, w'en yer come to think of it, I'm top dog, ain't I?"

In my own mind I had to acknowledge as much, though I wondered what his attitude would be when he came face to face with that stronger man, Bardolph Just. I made my way into the house and into the dining-room, while George Rabbit shuffled along behind me. He had pulled off his cap, and now revealed the thin stubble of hair with which his head was covered.

As he shuffled in after me into the dining-room he caught sight of the doctor, standing up with his hands in his pockets, looking at him. He drew back instantly, and looked very much as though he meant to make a bolt for it, after all.

"You can come in, my friend," said the doctor, regarding him steadily. "I know all about you."

"I said it was a bloomin' trap," muttered Rabbit, as he shuffled into the room.

I saw that the doctor had been busy in my absence. Apparently he had visited the larder, and had brought therefrom the remains of a pie and some bread and cheese, all of which were set out on a tray, together with a bottle and a glass. Our new guest eyed these things hungrily, forgetful of everything else. At a sign from the doctor he seated himself at the table, and fell to like a ravening wolf.

"I thought it better not to disturb the servants," said Bardolph Just to me in a low tone, "so I foraged for myself. He'll be more amenable when he's taken the edge off his appetite."

Mr. George Rabbit feeding was not a pretty sight. Making all allowances for a tremendous hunger, it was not exactly nice to see him cramming food into himself with the aid of his knife as well as his fork, and with an occasional resort to his more primitive fingers; nor did he forget to apply himself to the bottle at intervals. And all the time he eyed us furtively, as though wondering what would happen when his meal was finished.

But at last even he was satisfied—or perhaps I should put it that the pie had given out. He sat back in his chair, and wiped his lips with the lining of his deplorable cap, and heaved a huge sigh of satisfaction. "That's done me a treat, guv'nors both," he murmured hoarsely.

"We're pleased, I'm sure," replied Bardolph Just. "Now we can get to business. It seems that you've got a sort of idea in your head that you are acquainted with this gentleman?" He indicated me as he spoke.

George Rabbit winked impudently. "Never forgot a pal in my life, an' I 'ope I never shall," he said. "W'y, me an' Norton 'Ide was unfort'nit togevvver, an' now 'e's struck it rich, it ain't likely I wouldn't stick to 'im. See?"

"Now listen to me, my man," said Bardolph Just, coming to the other end of the table, and leaning his hands on it, and staring down at the other man. "A great many things happen in this world that it's well to know nothing about. You've made a mistake; the gentleman you think is Norton Hyde is not Norton Hyde at all. What do you say to that?"

"Wot I say to that is—try summink else," answered Rabbit. "You fink you'll kid me; you fink you'll git rid of me jist fer a supper? Not much. I know a good thing w'en I see it, an' I'm goin' to freeze on to it."

"You will not only have a good supper, but you'll have somewhere to sleep as well," said the doctor. "More than that, you'll have money."

"I'll lay I do!" exclaimed the man boisterously.

Bardolph Just laid a sovereign on the edge of the table, and pushed it gently towards the man. "You've never seen this gentleman before?" he hinted.

George Rabbit shook his head. "Not 'arf enough," he said disdainfully.

The process was repeated until five sovereigns lay in a little shining row along the edge of the table. It was too much for George Rabbit; he leaned forward eagerly. "I don't know the gent from Adam!" he exclaimed.

"Ah!" The doctor laughed, and drew a deep breath, and then suddenly dropped his hand down so that the coins were covered. "But not so fast; there's something else. This money is yours—and you will have a shakedown for the night—only on condition that you stick to what you've said. If you give any trouble, or if you start any ridiculous story such as you hinted at to-night, I shall find a way of dealing with you. Do you understand?"

The man looked up at him suspiciously. "You could do a precious lot, I don't fink!" he exclaimed.

"I'd do this," said the doctor viciously. "I'd hunt you out of the country, my friend; I'd look up past records and see what took you into prison; I'd see if you couldn't be got back there again. How do you think your word would stand against mine, when it came to a cock-and-bull story of the wrong man buried and the right man alive? Think yourself lucky you've been treated as well as you have."

George Rabbit eyed him resentfully, and had a long look at me; then he slowly shuffled to his feet. "Give us the rhino, an' show me w'ere I'm to sleep," he said. "I shall keep me face shut; you needn't be afraid."

The doctor pushed the coins towards him, and he was in the very act of gathering them up with some deliberateness, when the door was opened, and Martha Leach walked in. What she had expected to find, or whether she had anticipated discovering the doctor alone, it is impossible to say; certain it is that she stopped dead, taking in the little picture before her, and something of its meaning. George Rabbit swept the coins into his hand, and jingled them for a moment, and dropped them into his pocket.

"What do you want?" snarled Bardolph Just.

"Nothing," replied the woman, in some dismay. "I only thought—I only wondered if you wanted anything more to-night. I'm very sorry."

"I want nothing. Go to bed," he said curtly; and with another swift glance round the room that seemed to embrace us all, she walked out of the room and closed the door.

"Now, show this man where he can sleep," he said, turning to me. "There's a loft over the stable, with plenty of straw in it; if he doesn't set fire to himself he'll be comfortable enough. You know where it is?"

I nodded, and signed to George Rabbit to follow me. He made an elaborate and somewhat ironical bow to the doctor in the doorway of the room. The doctor called him back for a moment.

"You can slip away in the morning when you like," he said. "And don't let us see your ugly face again."

"Not so much about my face, if yer don't mind," said Mr. Rabbit. "An' I shan't be at all sorry ter go; I don't 'alf like the company you keep!"

With this doubtful compliment flung at me, Mr. George Rabbit shuffled out of the room, with a parting grin at the doctor. I took him out of the house and across the grounds towards the stable, showed him where, by mounting a ladder, he could get to his nest among the straw in the loft. "And don't smoke there," I said, "if only for your own sake."

"I 'aven't got anythink to smoke," he said, a little disgustedly. "I never thought of it. I 'aven't so much as a match on me."

I knew that the stable was deserted, because I had never seen any horses there, and I knew that the doctor kept none. I left George Rabbit in the dark, and retraced my steps to the house. I met the doctor in the hall; he had evidently been waiting for me.

"Well?" he asked, looking at me with a smile.

"I don't think he'll trouble us again," I said. "As you suggested, he won't get anyone to believe his story, even if he tells it, and a great many things may happen before he gets rid of his five pounds. Take my word for it, we've seen the last of him."

I went to my room and prepared for bed. At the last moment it occurred to me that I had said nothing to the doctor about Capper, or about the treachery of Harvey Scoffold, and I decided that that omission was perhaps, after all, for the best. The business of the man Capper was one which concerned Debora, in a sense, and I knew that the doctor was no friend to Debora. I determined to say nothing at present.

It was a particularly warm night, with a suggestion in the air of a coming storm. I threw back the curtains from my window, and flung the window wide, and then, as there was light enough for me to undress by without the lamp, I put that out, and sat in the semi-darkness of the room, smoking.

I was thinking of many things while I slipped off my upper garments, and only gradually did it dawn upon me that across the grounds a light was showing where no light should surely be. Taking my bearings in regard to the position of the house itself, I saw that that light would come from the loft above the disused stable.

I cursed George Rabbit and my own folly for trusting him. At the same time it occurred to me that I did not want to make an enemy of the man, and that I might well let him alone, to take what risks he chose. The light was perfectly steady, and there was no suggestion of the flicker of a blaze; I thought it possible that he might have discovered some old stable lantern, with an end of candle in it, and so have armed himself against the terrors of the darkness. Nevertheless, while I leaned on the window-sill and smoked I watched that light.

Presently I saw it move, and then disappear; and while I was congratulating myself on the fact that the man had probably put out the light, I saw it appear again near the ground, and this time it was swinging, as though someone carried it. I drew back a little from the window, lest I should be seen, and watched the light.

Whoever carried it was coming towards the house, and as it swung I saw that it was a lantern, and that it was knocking gently, not against the leg of a man, as I had anticipated, but against the skirts of a woman; so much I made out clearly. When the light was so close as to be almost under my window I craned forward, and looked, for it had stopped.

The next moment I saw what I wanted to see clearly. The lantern was raised, and opened; a face was set close to it that the light might be blown out. In the second before the light was puffed out I saw that face clearly—the face of Martha Leach!

Long after she had gone into the house I stood there puzzling about the matter, wondering what she could have had to say to George Rabbit. I remembered how she had come into the room when he was taking the money from the table; I remembered, too, her threat to me, at an earlier time, that she would find out how I came into the house and all about me. And I knew that, whether she had succeeded or not, she had paid that nocturnal visit to George Rabbit to find out from him what he knew.

I found myself wondering whether the man had stood firm, or whether he had been induced to tell the truth. I knew that in the latter case I had an enemy in the house more powerful than any I had encountered yet; so much justice at least I did her.

At breakfast the next morning the doctor was in a new mood. Something to my surprise, I found both him and Debora at the breakfast table when I entered; I may say that I had been to that loft over the stable, only to find, as I had hoped, that my bird was flown. Now I murmured a word of apology as I moved round to my place, and was laughingly answered by Bardolph Just.

"You should indeed apologise, my dear John, on such an occasion as this," he said. "And not to me, but to the lady. Don't you know what to-day is?"

I think I murmured stupidly that I thought it was Tuesday, but the doctor caught me up on the word, with another laugh.

"Yes, but what a Tuesday! It is Debora's birthday!"

"All my good wishes," I said, turning to her at once; and I was rewarded by a quick shy glance and a smile.

"Come, show John what I've given you; let him see it," exclaimed the doctor. "Or stay—let me put it on!"

I saw then that there was lying beside her plate a little red morocco case. Without looking at him, she pushed it along the table until his hand could reach it, and let her own arm lie passive there afterwards. He unfastened the case, and displayed a glittering and very beautiful bracelet.

"What do you think of that?" he cried. "Fit to adorn the prettiest and whitest arm in the world."

It was curious that, while her arm lay along the table, and he took his time in fitting the bracelet round the wrist, she kept her eyes fixed on me, so that her head was averted from him. Even when he had finished the business, and had put her hand to his lips for a moment, she did not look round; she only withdrew the hand quickly, and put it in her lap under the table. I saw his face darken at that, and those white dots come and go in his nostrils.

"A great day, I assure you, John, and we'll make a great day of it. We're having a little dinner-party to-night in honour of the event. Debora doesn't seem to care for pretty things much," he added a little sourly.

"Thank you; it is very kind of you," she murmured in a constrained voice; and put the arm that held the bracelet on the table.

I felt a poor creature, in more senses than one, in being able to give her nothing, and I felt that I wanted to tell her that. So I contrived a meeting in the grounds, out of sight of the house, and there for a moment I held her hand, and stumbled over what was in my heart.

"You know all the good things I wish you, dear Debora," I said. "I have no gift for you, because I'm too poor; besides, I didn't know what day it was. But my heart goes out to you, in loyalty and in service."

"I know—I know," she answered simply. "And that is why I want to say something to you—something that you must not laugh at."

"I should never do that," I assured her earnestly.

"John, I am growing desperately afraid," she said, glancing over her shoulder as she spoke, and shuddering. "It is not that anything fresh has happened; it is only that I feel somehow that something is hanging over me. It is in the air—in the doctor's eyes—in the looks of the woman Leach; it is like some storm brewing, that must presently sweep down upon me, and sweep me away. I know it—I know it."

In sheer blind terror at what was in her own thoughts she clung to me, weeping hysterically, and for my own part I was more shaken than I dared to say. For that thought had been in my mind, too; and now instantly I recalled what I had heard behind the screen in the study the night before. But I would not let her see that I agreed with her; I did my best to laugh her out of that mood, and to get her into a more cheerful one.

In part, at least, I succeeded; I assured her over and over again that no harm should come to her while I was near. Yet even as I said it I realised my own helplessness, and how difficult a task I had to fight against those who were her enemies. For I was convinced that the woman Leach was, if anything, the greater enemy of the two, by reason of that mad jealousy to which she had already given expression.

In the strangest way it was Martha Leach who precipitated matters that night, as I shall endeavour to explain, in the order of the strange events as they happened. In the first place, you are to know that Harvey Scoffold, having doubtless been duly warned, put in an appearance that night, resplendent in evening dress, while the doctor did equal honour to the occasion. I had a tweed suit which the doctor had procured for me; and glad enough I had been, I can assure you, to discard the garments of the dead man. I thought but little of my dress, however, that night, so intent was I upon watching what was taking place at the table.

Harvey Scoffold took a great quantity of champagne, and the doctor appeared to do so also; in reality, however, I saw that he drank very little. He pressed wine upon Debora again and again, and Martha Leach, who stood behind his chair, was constantly at the girl's elbow with a freshly-opened bottle. Debora did no more than sip the wine, however, despite the doctor's entreaties. In a lull in the conversation, while the servants were out of the room and only Martha Leach was present behind the doctor's chair, I distinctly saw him noiselessly snap his fingers, and whisper something to her, and glance towards the girl. It was as though there was a secret understanding between the man and the woman.

Then it was that I came to my resolution; then it was that, to the astonishment of everyone, I began to get noisy. I had all my wits about me, for I had drunk but little, and my head was clear; but at my end of the table it was impossible for them to tell how much I had really taken. I made a pretence of staggering to my feet and proposing a toast, only to be pushed down into my seat again by Harvey Scoffold.

"Be careful," he whispered, with a laugh. "You're not used to this sort of drink; you've taken too much already."

I staggered to my feet again, demanding to know what he meant by it, and asserting my ability, drunkenly, to carry as much as any gentleman. I saw Debora, with a distressed face, rise from the table and go, and desperately enough I longed to be able to explain to her what I was doing.

I insisted, with threats, upon having more wine, until at last the doctor and Scoffold got up and made their way upstairs. There, in the study, Scoffold said that he had a walk before him, and must be going.

"Well, we'll have Debora in, and you shall wish her many happy returns of the day once more before you go," said the doctor, as he rang the bell. "John looks as if he were asleep."

I was not asleep by any means; but I was sunk all of a heap in an arm-chair, snoring, and with my eyes apparently shut. It did not escape me that, on the ringing of that bell, Martha Leach appeared at once, with a bottle and glasses on a tray; and once again I saw that meaning glance flash from her to the doctor, and back again.

Then, very slowly, the door opened, and Debora came in, looking about her. And I lay in that apparent drunken sleep, with every sense attuned to what was about to happen, and with my eyes watching through their half-closed lids.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY.

As I lay huddled up in that deep arm-chair, watching what was going on, I noticed with satisfaction that they took no more notice of me than if I had really been in the drunken slumber in which they assumed me to be—which was well for my purpose. So carefully and deliberately

had I thought the matter out, that I had even arranged my position in the room with a view to the proving of my suspicions; for I had seen, in the bringing of this quite unnecessary bottle of wine, something about to be done which should concern the girl. And everything in the attitude of the doctor and Martha Leach seemed to scream "Danger" to my ears.

The position I had chosen was such that I could see not only the room in which Harvey Scoffold, the doctor, and Debora were standing grouped about the table, but also behind the screen which hid the many bottles in that part of the room I have called the surgery. The better to keep up the illusion of my drunkenness, I now began feebly to wave my arms, and to croon a song, as I lay doubled up with my chin sunk on my breast; and I saw the doctor look at me with some contempt, and shrug his shoulders, and then glance at Martha Leach, who had remained waiting as though to assist with the bottle and glasses. The glance he gave her spoke as plainly as words could do his satisfaction in my condition—Debora's protector was inert and useless.

What now happened was this. Harvey Scoffold, who I am convinced had nothing whatever to do with the business in hand, had engaged the girl in conversation, and had interposed his broad bulk between her and the doctor and Leach. He had his legs set wide apart, and his hands were clasped behind his back, and he was talking in a loud tone to Debora, who seemed somewhat mystified by the whole proceedings. And the doctor and Martha Leach had drawn close together, and while the doctor watched the broad back of Harvey Scoffold, he covertly whispered to the woman.

"And so, my dear young lady, I am to have the pleasure of toasting you in a special glass before I retire to my humble bachelor quarters—eh?" Harvey Scoffold was saying in his loud tones. "This is a new experience for me—bright eyes—sparkling wine—merry hearts!"

"I don't think anyone wants any more wine to-night," I heard Debora say quickly. "One, at least, of us has had more than enough."

I knew that was meant for me, and my heart was bitter at the thought of what she must be thinking of the man who had called himself her friend. But there was no help for it; I had to play the game out to the end, for her sake.

The doctor had made a quick sign to Leach, and she had gone behind the screen. From where I lay, with my hands foolishly and feebly waving, and my lips crooning out the song, I could see her distinctly; and what I saw caused my heart almost to stand still. She picked up a small phial from the corner of a shelf, and slipped it within the folds of her dress; and the next moment was standing beside the doctor again. I saw their hands meet, and I saw the phial pass from the one to the other. Then the doctor slipped both hands into his pockets, and moved towards the table, which, as it happened, stood between him and Harvey Scoffold.

He kept his eyes fixed on Scoffold and the girl, and very quietly and very stealthily drew the phial from his pocket, and opened it. Moving his hand a little to the right, he dropped the contents of the phial into the glass nearest to me. It was a mere colourless liquid, and would not have been noticed in the bottom of the glass. Then the phial was slipped back into his pocket, and somewhat boisterously he picked up the bottle and proceeded to open it. Martha Leach, with one long glance at the girl, passed silently out of the room, and closed the door.

"Come—just one glass of wine before this merry party separates!" cried Bardolph Just as the cork popped out. "And we'll have no heel-taps; we'll drain our glasses. I insist!"

Harvey Scoffold turned round and advanced to the table. Bardolph Just had filled that glass into which he had dropped the contents of the phial, and was filling the second glass. I felt that the time for action had arrived. Just as he got to the third glass I staggered to my feet, apparently tripped on the carpet, and went headlong against him and the table. I heard him splutter out an oath as the table went over and the glasses fell with a crash to the floor.

He swung round upon me menacingly, but before he could do anything I had wrenched the bottle from his hand, and with a wild laugh had swung it round my head, spilling the wine over me as I did so. Then, with a last drunken hiccough, I flung the bottle clean against the window, and heard it crash through, and fall to the ground below.

"To the devil with all drink!" I exclaimed thickly, and dropped back into my chair again.

For a moment the two men stared blankly at each other, and at the wreck of glass and wine upon the carpet. I was waiting for an attack from the doctor, and bracing myself for it; but the attack did not come. True, he made one step towards me, and then drew himself up, and turned with a smile to Debora.

"I'm sorry, my child," he said, in his most winning tones. "I did not mean to have had your pleasure spoilt like this. If you will go to your room, I will try to get rid of this fellow. Harvey," he added in a lower tone to Scoffold, "give an eye to him for a moment."

He followed Debora out of the room, closing the door behind him. I had determined by this time to show my hand, and Harvey Scoffold gave me the opportunity. He strode across to me, and took me by the shoulder, and shook me violently.

"Come, pull yourself together; it's time you were in bed," he said.

I sprang to my feet, and thrust him aside. I think I never saw a man so astonished in all his life as

he was, to see me alert and quick and clear-eyed. "That's all you know about the business," I said. "I'm more sober than either of you. Now, hold your tongue, and wait; I've a word to say to Bardolph Just, and it won't keep."

Bardolph Just opened the door at that moment, and came in. By that time I was standing, with my hands in my pockets, watching him, and something in my face and in my attitude seemed to give him pause; he stopped just inside the door, staring at me. Harvey Scoffold looked from one to the other of us, as though wondering what game was afoot.

"Now, Dr. Bardolph Just," I said, "I'll trouble you for that phial. It's in your right-hand trouser pocket. Pass it over."

Instead of complying with that request, he suddenly sucked in a deep breath, and made a rush at me. But he had mistaken his man; I caught him squarely on the jaw with my fist, and he went down at my feet. After a moment or two he looked up at me, sitting there foolishly enough on the floor, and began to tell me what he thought of me.

"You dog! So this is the way you repay my kindness to you, is it?" he muttered. "You scum of a jail!—this is what I get for befriending you."

"Never mind about me," I retorted, "we'll come to my case presently. Just now I want to talk about Miss Debora Matchwick, and I want to know exactly what it was you put into the wine destined for her to-night."

"You're mad!" he said, getting slowly to his feet, and looking at me in a frightened way.

"No, I'm not mad; nor am I drunk," I retorted. "You and the woman Leach thought you were safe enough; look at me now, and tell me how much you think I have seen. Your fine words mean nothing; murder's your game, and you know it!"

All this time Harvey Scoffold had said nothing; he had merely looked from one to the other of us, with something like a growing alarm in his face. But now he stepped forward as though he would understand the matter better, or would at least put an end to the scene.

"My dear Just, and you, Norton Hyde, what does all this mean? Can't you be reasonable, and talk over the matter like gentlemen. What's this talk of phials and stuff put into wine, and murder, and what not?"

"It's true!" I exclaimed passionately. "This is the second time that man has tried to kill her, but it shall be the last. The thing is too bare-faced—too outrageous!"

"Well, my fine jail-bird, and what are you going to do?" demanded the doctor, having now regained the mastery over himself. "Fine words and high sentiments; but they never broke any bones yet. Tell me your accusation clearly, and I shall know how to meet it."

So I gave it them then and there, in chapter and verse; thus letting Harvey Scoffold know, for the first time, of that business of the eastern corridor, and of the mysterious door that opened only once to the road to death; moreover, I put it plainly now, that I had seen the woman Martha Leach take the phial and hand it to him; that I had pretended drunkenness to lull his suspicions of me, and to be ready when he least expected me to upset his plot.

He listened in silence, with his teeth set firmly, and his dark eyes glittering at me; then he nodded slowly, and spoke.

"And the man you accuse is one holding a big position in the world—a man against whom no breath of scandal or suspicion has ever been sent forth," he said. "A man known in many countries of the world—member of learned societies—a man with a name to conjure with. And what of his accuser?"

I knew that he would say that; I knew before-hand the helplessness of my position. But I was reckless, and I did not care what I said or what I did.

"Your accuser is a fugitive from the law; a man who lives under an assumed name, and who has taken advantage of the death of an innocent man to begin life again on his own account. You need not remind me of that," I went on, "because I admit it all. So far, I am in your power; but my position, as something outside the pale of ordinary society, gives me a greater power than you think. I have everything to win; I have nothing to lose. If you had chosen a better man, and had given him the chance to pry into your secrets, you might have had some hold upon him. So far as I am concerned, I am utterly reckless, and utterly determined to save this girl."

"Brave words—very brave words!" he said, with a sneer. "And how do you propose to set about it?"

"I intend to get her out of this house. I intend to look after her, if I have to steal to do it. I'm an adept at that, you will remember," I said bitterly, "only this time I shall do it in a good cause. I mean to get her out of this house, and it will go ill with you if you try to prevent me."

He laughed and shrugged his shoulders; then he turned to Scoffold. "If he were not so mad he would be amusing, this fellow," he said. But Harvey Scoffold, somewhat to my surprise, was silent, and did not look at him. I saw a frown come quickly upon the face of Bardolph Just.

"And pray what's the matter with *you*?" snapped the doctor at him.

"Nothing—nothing at all!" said Scoffold, in a constrained tone. "I'll say good-night!" He turned towards the door, and I noticed that his head was bowed, and that he looked at the carpet as he moved.

Bardolph Just stepped suddenly in front of him. "Look here, you're not going like that?" he said. "I'll have some word from you about this affair before you leave my house."

Harvey Scoffold looked up quickly. "Then here's the word," he said aggressively. "I'm rather inclined to believe your friend here, and I don't like the business. It's a dirty business, and I've seen enough of it, and of you. Good-night!"

He thrust his way past the other man, and swaggered out of the room. I was so surprised and so relieved that I was in a mood to run after him, and hug him, in sheer joy at finding an honest man; but I refrained.

With the closing of the door the doctor stood for a moment, dazed; then he opened the door again, and ran out after the other. I pitied him for his weakness in doing that, because I felt absolutely certain in my own mind that he would not change Harvey Scoffold's opinion of him. I had hated Harvey Scoffold pretty cordially on my own account, and by reason of my misfortunes; now I began to see (as, alas! I had seen so often with other men, and all to my own undoing) that I had cruelly misjudged him. However, I had said all I wanted to say to the doctor, and I started off to my room.

Now, had I been of a suspicious nature, I must have been disturbed at the sight of the doctor and Harvey Scoffold engaged in earnest talk at the end of the corridor which led from the study; but as, the moment I appeared, Scoffold shook himself angrily free of the other's clutch, and burst out with a shout, I was more than ever convinced that the doctor had been pleading with him in vain.

"I tell you I'll have nothing to do with you!" exclaimed Scoffold. "I wish I'd never come into the house. Not another word; I've done with you!"

I heard the great hall door bang, and I knew that Scoffold was gone; the doctor, retracing his steps, favoured me with a scowl as he went past, but said never a word; while I, greatly elated at having found a friend in this business, went off to my room, determined that in some vague fashion I would put matters right in the morning, and defy Bardolph Just to do his worst.

As ill luck would have it, I had forgotten one important point. In the eyes of Debora I had disgraced myself; she had every reason to believe me the drunken madman who had hurled bottles, and broken windows, and upset furniture the night before. I had forgotten that when I entered the breakfast-room in the morning, and found her standing by the window. I made my way eagerly to her. To my momentary surprise, she drew back, as though fearing contact with me.

"Debora!" I began eagerly; but she drew herself up and looked at me haughtily.

"Mr. New, your memory is a poor one," she said. "I'm afraid you don't remember what happened last night."

"My dear Debora," I exclaimed eagerly, "I can explain all that—I can show you——"

I heard the door open behind me, and I stopped. Bardolph Just came into the room, and stopped on seeing me, looking at me frowningly. It was with a very virtuous air that he addressed me.

"I'm glad to see you are striving to make your peace with Miss Matchwick," he said. "She has been in the habit of dealing with gentlemen, and is not used to such scenes as she witnessed last night."

I gave him a look which showed him I understood his drift; he was silent for the moment or two that it took us to get to our places at the table. But he evidently felt that he must labour the point, for he was at me again before ever I had tasted a mouthful.

"I expect you'll have but a poor appetite this morning, John New," he said, "therefore I won't trouble you with food. Take Mr. New a cup of tea," he added to Martha Leach, who stood behind him.

I felt that that was rather petty, but somehow worthy of the man. I drank my tea, and went without the substantial breakfast I should have been glad to have eaten. After all, I felt that the game was in my hands, and that I could well afford to let him wreak such petty vengeance as this upon me. I waited eagerly until the meal was finished; I meant to get speech with the girl, by hook or by crook, at the earliest opportunity. I knew how pressing was the need; I knew how relentless the man at the head of the table and the apparently docile woman behind him would be in regard to Debora, and how powerless I, a creature of no real name or position, would be in the matter, unless I could win the girl to believe me.

I found that a more difficult task even than I had anticipated. Indeed, she avoided me for some time, and when at last I came in touch with her, she drew herself up, with that pretty little lift of her chin I had noticed before, and warned me away.

"I want nothing to do with you, Mr. New," she began. But I was not to be repulsed; the matter was much too urgent for that. I walked close up to her, determined that I would have the matter

out then and there.

"You must let me explain," I said. "If you don't you will regret it all your life. You thought I was drunk last night, but I was not."

I waited for some response from her, but she said nothing. I went on again eagerly.

"I was shamming, and with a purpose. Only by that means—only by making the doctor think that I was practically unconscious of what he was doing, was I able to observe him clearly. They tried to poison you last night."

I suppose she saw the truth in my face; she came suddenly to me, and laid her hands on my arm, and looked at me with startled eyes. "To poison me?" she echoed breathlessly.

"Yes, the doctor and Martha Leach. That was why I upset the table and flung the wine away. If you had seen me five minutes after you left the room, you would have known what my real condition was. The doctor knew it, I can assure you!" I laughed at the recollection.

Debora looked quickly all round about her, with the frightened air of one who would escape, but sees no way; there was a hunted look in her eyes that appalled me. "What shall I do?" she whispered. "I am more frightened than I care to say, because I know Dr. Just, and I know how relentless he can be. Don't you understand, John," she went on piteously, "how utterly powerless I am? Anything may happen to me in this dreadful house. I may be killed in any one of a dozen ways; and this well-known physician and scientist, against whom no word of suspicion would be spoken, can give an easy account of my death. What am I to do?"

"I can't for the life of me understand why he should wish to kill you," I said, "unless it be a mere matter of revenge."

"It isn't that," she answered me slowly. "You see, my poor father trusted him so completely, and believed in him so much, that in addition to placing me under his guardianship he put a clause in his will which, in the event of my death, leaves the whole of my property to Dr. Bardolph Just."

Now, for the first time, I saw into the heart of this amazing business; I had probed the motive. He would have secured the girl if he could; failing that, he would secure her property. As he knew that she might, in any ordinary event, pass out of his life, if only by the common gate of marriage, he had determined to get rid of her, and so secure easily what was hers. The whole thing was explained now clearly enough.

"What you must do," I answered steadily, wondering a little at my own bravery in suggesting it, "is to come away from this house with me. You must trust me to look after you."

I realise now how mad a proposition that was; but I did not see it in that light then. I loved her, and I dreaded what might happen to her; more than all else, I saw no greater happiness than in gaining for myself the dear privilege of watching over her. You may imagine what my feelings were when I heard her glad and eager assent.

"Yes, yes, I will come willingly," she said. "Where will you take me?"

"I don't know," I said a little ruefully, "but we can settle that matter afterwards. Far better for us to tramp the roads, side by side, in safety, than for you to remain in this place a day longer. Now listen to me, while I tell you what my plan is."

We were pacing up and down a grass-grown walk while we talked; we were well out of sight of the house. While I write this I seem to see again her glowing face turned towards mine; to feel the touch of her hands in mine; to hear the quick, eager whisper with which she answered me. I had cause to remember that afterwards, with bitterness, as you shall presently hear.

"The chances are that we shall be watched," I began, "because I was foolish enough last night to tell the doctor of my intention. Consequently, we must not be seen together during the day; we must escape under cover of darkness. At ten o'clock to-night walk quietly out of the house, as though you were going for a stroll in the grounds; when you come to the gate, go out into the road, where I shall be waiting. After that we must leave the rest to whatever good or ill fortune awaits us. At some convenient time during the day put whatever you need to take with you in the old summer-house where we first met; no one visits that, and you can easily take the things from there when you finally leave the house."

So it was settled; and for that time I knew that we should both wait eagerly. I laughed a little ruefully to myself at the thought of how little money I had in my pocket; but that matter did not greatly trouble me. The future must take care of itself; I liked to think that Debora and I were two waifs, setting out alone together, to explore a great unknown world in which as yet we had neither of us had any real chance of living. I painted a wholly impossible future for us both; for my own part, I think I felt capable of conquering worlds, and carving out a position for myself and for her.

The doctor chose to shut himself up in his study during the day, and although Debora and I had lunch and dinner together in the big dining-room, the woman Martha Leach never left us for a moment, and our conversation was, perforce, confined to the most trivial things. To any outside observer Martha Leach would have appeared to be merely a highly-trained servant, devoted to us, and anxious to anticipate our every want; to my clearer understanding she was a spy, eager to bring about that which the doctor wished, at all costs. I seemed to see her again slipping the

phial into the doctor's hand.

So closely were we watched during the progress of those meals, and so careful did we deem it necessary to be in our behaviour towards each other, that I had no opportunity of learning whether Debora had succeeded in getting her hat and coat and such things as she might need, into the safe shelter of the summer-house. Therefore I determined, about an hour before the time arranged for the girl to meet me, that I would saunter down to the place, to see for myself that all was well. My preparations were soon made; I had merely to put my cap in my pocket, and so saunter out of the house, as though about to stroll in the grounds.

So I came to the summer-house, and, walking quickly into it quite unsuspectingly, came face to face with Mr. Harvey Scofield, seated on the bench, with his head leaning back against the wall, and his eyes closed. He had a cigar between his lips, at which he was lazily puffing. And beside him on the seat was a little bag, and Debora's hat and coat.

Here, I felt, was an end of the game—so far, at least, as that day was concerned. How he had contrived to blunder upon the affair I could not tell; I only knew that the mere presence of those things there at his side must have given away the little plot at once. While I stared at him he opened his eyes, and looked at me with a smile.

"Well, dear boy, so here you are at last!" he exclaimed pleasantly. "I've been waiting for you."

"Much obliged to you," I retorted curtly. "What are you doing here at all?"

He shook his head at me, with an air almost of whimsical sadness.

"My dear boy—my poor, misguided boy!" he said, "why will you always blunder so infernally over your friends and your enemies?"

"I can distinguish pretty well between them, thank you," I assured him with meaning.

He shook his head again and laughed. "Indeed you can't," he answered. "Now, at the present moment, you never needed a friend so much in all your life; and yet you endeavour to insult one who stands waiting to help you. Didn't I show last night what my real feelings were in regard to this business?"

I hesitated, for I remembered how loyal he had seemed to be to Debora, and how much repugnance he had shown to what the doctor had endeavoured to do. I suppose now he saw his opportunity, for he began to push the matter home.

"My dear boy," he said eagerly, leaning forward towards me, "what earthly chance will you have of helping this girl, if you set out on a wild goose-chase through the world with her, without enough to pay even for a night's lodging? Think for one moment: she has been used to every comfort, she is a lady in every sense of the word."

"God knows that's true!" I exclaimed fervently.

"Very well, then; don't you see how mad it is?" he pleaded.

"Nevertheless, I mean to do it," I said doggedly. "Besides, how comes it that you know what we're going to do?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and laughed. "My dear boy, the thing is so transparent! I know enough of you to guess that you wouldn't allow her to stay in this place; and then, by the merest chance, I saw her creeping through the grounds this evening, and making for this summer-house. Later I discovered these things which she had left. There's the whole matter in a nutshell."

"And I suppose you think you'll prevent our going—or warn the doctor?" I said, in a threatening tone.

He threw up his hands with a gesture of despair, and seemed to appeal to the very trees and the stars against me. "Look at this fellow!" he exclaimed. "What is one to make of him? As if I had suggested trying to stop you—or suggested warning Bardolph Just! On the contrary, I swear to you that I am here to help you."

He seemed so honest about the matter, and had taken my suspicions so good-temperedly, that I was disarmed. "Tell me," I said, "what do you mean to do? How will you help us?"

He sprang to his feet, and spread out his arms; and then suddenly touched me lightly with his fingers on each shoulder—almost as though he would embrace me. "My dear boy," he said in his eager fashion, "I am all for romance. When I see a boy and a girl taking their way out on to the great highway of life, ready to walk hand in hand together to the very end of the road, my heart leaps out towards them. Consequently, when I guessed your secret, I asked myself what I could do to help you. And I have found a way."

"What is the way?" I asked.

"Our common foe is Dr. Bardolph Just," he said, lowering his voice, and looking about him as though he feared that even in that secluded spot we might be overheard. "Now, Dr. Bardolph Just does not know that I have changed my abode; he is totally unaware of the fact that I reside within a mile or so of this house. Consequently, what is to prevent your bringing the young lady to that little cottage of which we both know, and where there is a decent woman to look after her? Let

the future take care of itself, if you like—but be careful of the present. I will provide you with what money is necessary, so that while the doctor is eating his heart out with rage, and is moving heaven and earth to discover the runaways, you will be lying snug at my place, making your arrangements for the time to come."

I began to think that it was a good enough plan. I would, of course, infinitely have preferred to start off with Debora on some journey of which we did not even know the end; but that was, perhaps, a foolish idea, and not one to be encouraged with a young girl to be considered. More than that, as Harvey Scoffold had blundered upon the story, it was quite impossible to keep him out of it; and I knew that he was a man of that temper that, if I curtly refused his offer, he might well betake himself to Bardolph Just at once, and let him into the whole secret. There were many reasons urging me to close with his offer, and, although with reluctance, I did so.

"Very well, then; I accept," I said. "Only, heaven help you if you play any tricks with us!"

He shrugged his shoulders, and laughed again. "I hope some day to be able to convince you that I am not a scoundrel," he replied lightly.

That Debora might not be disconcerted by coming upon the man unexpectedly, I persuaded him to walk on a little towards his house. I would meet the girl, and follow him. To that he consented, and together we walked to the gate leading into the road. Mindful of what I had promised Debora, I stepped out into the road myself, and watched the man as he strode rapidly away. Then I set myself to wait, with what patience I could muster, for the coming of Debora.

It was a fine night, and as I leaned against the wall, waiting, I heard a clock in the distance chime the hour of ten. Then I heard the click of the gate, and my heart gave a little leap as I thought of who was coming. Imagine my surprise when, on turning my head, I saw a man advancing towards me through the shadows. I was turning abruptly away, not desiring to be seen by anyone then, when the man quickened his steps and came after me.

"'Ere, 'old 'ard!—'old 'ard a bit!" he called; and I stopped and faced about.

The man was George Rabbit, and he was in altogether different trim from anything I had seen before. The shabby clothes were replaced by a suit of tweeds of a rather smart cut, and a billycock hat of a sporting type was perched on his head. He nodded impudently, and held out his hand. Of that I took no notice.

"Too proud to shake 'ands with a pal—eh?" he said. "There's some people wants to be learnt a lesson, it seems to me. I've jist bin up to the 'ouse, and 'is nibs there says 'e don't know me, an' don't want anythink to do wiv me. An' I on'y wanted to touch 'im fer a quid."

"You've had all the money you'll get out of either of us," I said sternly. "And you'd better go away now; I don't want to talk to you."

"That's w'ere we differ, guv'nor," said Mr. Rabbit impudently. "I'm goin' to stick to you fer a bit, an' see if I can't make summink out of yer."

I wondered what I was to do. I knew that in another moment that gate might open again, and Debora come out; and I was quite certain that George Rabbit would be only too eager to follow us, and to make capital out of our adventure. I thought I would try something more than threats; so I advanced upon the man, and suddenly took him by the throat, and banged his head lustily with the flat of my hand.

"When I tell you I want you to go away I mean it," I said between my teeth, as I towered over him in my wrath. "If you don't get out of this I'll kick you into the middle of next week."

He wriggled out of my grasp, and picked up his billycock hat, which had fallen into the road. He gave me an ugly scowl as he backed away.

"I'll knife yer one of these days," he whimpered—"see if I don't. You know wot I could say if I'd a mind to say it—an' I—"

The door in the wall had clicked again, and I saw Debora coming swiftly towards me. The voice of George Rabbit died away as he gazed on this new apparition; he stood still at the other side of the road. I took the bag from Debora's hand, and turned, and hurried away with her without a word; but I had an uneasy feeling that Rabbit was following. I stopped once in the darkness, and looked back; and I was certain that he stopped, too, and waited. I did not wish to alarm the girl by calling out to him; I could only hope that we might manage to elude him before coming to Harvey Scoffold's cottage.

On the way I told Debora exactly what had happened, and explained to her that this seemed the best and the only thing for us to do. She was a little disconcerted, and urged me to remember that Harvey Scoffold was a personal friend of the doctor; but on that point I endeavoured to reassure her, by telling her of the scene in the study the night before, and of the attitude Scoffold had taken. Looking back on the matter now, I wish with all my heart that I had adopted her suggestion, and had flung caution to the winds, and had gone off with her in some new direction; how much sorrow and misery might have been spared us if we had done that you shall know hereafter.

We came at last to the cottage where Harvey Scoffold was lodging, and there I found the man awaiting us. He was courtesy itself to Debora; put a finger on his lips mysteriously when she

would have thanked him; and introduced us both to the old woman who kept the house. I was beginning to think that all was very right, when I heard a knock at the door of the cottage, and the old woman, who had been preparing supper, came out of some room at the back to answer the summons. And then for the first time I remembered George Rabbit.

It was his voice, sure enough; he wanted to speak to "the gent 'oo'd jist gorn in." I gave a glance at Harvey Scoffold, and went out into the passage to speak to the man; for I felt that I was in a tight place.

"Nah then," said George Rabbit loudly—"you an' me 'as got to come to some sort of unnerstandin'. I'm a honest man, I am, wot's worked out 'is time, and done 'is little bit right an' proper; I ain't no blooming jail-bird, wot's cut 'is lucky afore 'is time."

I clapped a hand over his mouth; but it was too late. Even as I struggled with him, I saw the door of the room in which Harvey Scoffold and the girl were slowly opening, and the face of Harvey Scoffold looked out. George Rabbit slipped out of my grasp like an eel, and rushed to the door of the room, and forced his way in. He was absolutely mad with rage, and not responsible for anything he said.

"What's to do here—what's to do?" asked Scoffold mildly; yet I thought he watched Debora as he asked the question.

"Ask that man 'is name!" cried Rabbit, pointing fiercely to me. "Ask 'im 'is name—an' w'ere 'e come from—an' wot jail 'e broke out of!"

I stood still, watching Debora; my fate lay in her hands. Very slowly she came across to me, and looked into my face, and asked me a question.

"What does the man mean, John?" she asked. "You must please tell me."

I glanced appealingly at Harvey Scoffold; and in a moment I read in his grimly set lips that he meant that the exposure should be carried through. I knew that if I did not tell the tale he would, in some more garbled fashion. Therefore when I spoke it was to him.

"If you'll take this man away," I said slowly—"I'll tell her the truth."

"The truth is always best, dear boy," he said, with a grin.

So I waited in a horrible silence, while the two men went out of the room. Then when the door was closed I turned to the girl, who was more to me than life itself; and my heart sank at the thought of what I had to say to her.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISERY'S BEDFELLOW.

For what seemed a long time, but was after all but a matter of moments, we stood in that room, facing each other; and perhaps the bitterest thing to me then, with the knowledge in my mind of what I had to say, was that when at last she broke silence she should speak to me with tenderness.

"John, dear," she said softly, "there is some mystery here that I don't understand; I want to know all about it—all about you. I trust you as I trust no other man on earth; there can be nothing you are afraid to tell me."

Having struck me that unconscious blow, she sat down calmly, and smiled at me, and waited; I thought that never had poor prisoner trembled before his judge as I trembled then.

"I want you to throw your mind back," I began at last, seeing that I must get the business over, "to the night when last you saw Gregory Pennington."

She started, and looked at me more keenly; leaned forward over the table beside her, and kept her eyes fixed on my face.

"I remember the evening well," she said. "We stood together in the grounds of the house; he left me to go into that house to see my guardian. And I have never seen him since."

"When you met Gregory Pennington that night," I went on, "I lay in the darkness quite near to you, a forlorn and hunted wretch, clad in a dress such as you have never seen—the dress of a convict."

She got up quickly from her chair, and retreated from me; yet still she kept her eyes fixed on my face. And now I began to see that my cause was hopeless.

"I had broken out of my prison that day, a prison far away in the country. I was hunted, and hopeless, and wretched; the hand of every man was against me. I had taken money that did not belong to me, and I had received a savage sentence of ten years' imprisonment. I had served but one, when the life and the manhood in me cried aloud for liberty; and on that night when you met

Pennington in the garden I was free."

"Why were you in that place at all?" she whispered.

"That place was as good as any other, if it could provide me with that I wanted, food and clothing," I answered her. "I saw young Pennington go into the house; a little later I followed him. Only, as you will understand, I could not enter by the door; I broke into the place like the thief I was."

"I understand that that was necessary," she said, nodding slowly. "I do not judge you for that."

"When I got into the house," I went on hurriedly, "I found that a tragedy had taken place. I implore you to believe that I am telling the truth and nothing but the truth; I could not lie to you. Your friend Gregory Pennington had met with an accident."

She read what was in my face; she drew a deep breath, and caught at the back of the chair by which she stood. "You mean that he was dead?" she whispered.

I nodded. "For what reason I know not, although I can guess; but Gregory Pennington had hanged himself."

She closed her eyes for a moment, and I thought as she swayed a little that she was going to faint. I had taken a step towards her when she opened her eyes suddenly, and I saw a great anger and indignation blazing in them. "It's a lie!" she exclaimed, "he was the last person to do such a thing. He was the brightest, and best, and sweetest lad that ever loved a girl, and loved her hopelessly."

"There you have it," I suggested. "Had you not told him that night that you could not love him?"

"Yes, but that would not have sent him to his death," she retorted. "But go on; I want to know what was done, and why I never heard about this until now."

"I want you to understand, if you can, two things," I went on steadily. "First, there was a dead man and a living one; and the living one was a hunted fugitive. Second, there was, in a slight degree, a faint resemblance between the dead man and the living, in colouring, and height, and general appearance."

She looked at me for a moment or two in silence; then she nodded her head. "Yes, I see that now," she answered, "although I never noticed it before."

"While I was in the room with the dead man, Dr. Just put in an appearance. To be brief, he wanted to keep the matter from you, because he knew the boy had been your friend; he took pity on me, and wanted to save me. He knew that they were hunting for a convict, who might perhaps be thought to be something like the dead man; at his suggestion I changed clothes with Gregory Pennington, and started under another name."

I turned away from her then; I dared not look at her. For a time there was a dead silence in the room, broken only by the curious slow ticking of an old eight-day clock in the corner. I remember that I found myself mechanically counting the strokes while I waited for her to speak.

When at last I could bear the tension no longer I looked round at her. She stood there, frozen, as it were, in the attitude in which I had seen her, looking at me with a face of horror. Then at last, in a sort of broken whisper, she got out a sentence or two.

"You—you changed clothes? Then he—he became the convict—dead? What—what became of him?"

"He lies buried—in my name—within the walls of Penthouse Prison."

She stared at me for a moment as though not understanding; seemed to murmur the words under her breath. Then she clapped her hands suddenly over her face.

"Oh—dear God!" she cried out.

I began to murmur excuses and pleadings. "The fault was not mine, the boy was dead, and no further harm could come to him. I wanted to live—I was so young myself, and I wanted to begin life again. I never thought—"

She dropped her hands, and faced me boldly; I saw the tears swimming in her eyes. "You never thought!" she cried. "You never thought of what it meant for him, with no sin upon him, to lie in a felon's grave! You never thought that there was anyone on earth might miss him, and sorrow for him, and long for him! You wanted to live—you, that had broken prison—you, a common thief! You coward!"

I said no more; it seemed almost as if the solid earth was slipping away from under my feet. I cared nothing for what might happen to me; I knew that I had lost her, and that I should never touch her hand again in friendship. I stood there, waiting, as though for the sentence she must pronounce.

"I never want to see your face again," she said at last, in a low voice. "I do not know yet what I shall do; I have not had time to think. But I want you to go away, to leave me; I have done with you."

"I will not leave you," I said doggedly. "You are in danger!"

She laughed contemptuously. "Then I won't be saved by you!" she exclaimed. "There are honest men in the world; I would not trust you, nor appeal to you, if I had no other friend on earth."

"I know the danger better than you do," I answered, "and I will not leave you."

"That man who burst into the house just now, he seemed to know you," she said, after a moment's pause. "Who is he?"

"A fellow jail-bird of mine," I answered bitterly.

"Then go to him," she said. "Are you so dense that you don't understand what I think of you, you thing without a name! Will nothing move you?"

"Nothing, until I know that you are safe," I answered.

There was a light cane lying on the table with Harvey Scoffold's hat and gloves. In a very fury of passion she suddenly dropped her hand upon it, and caught it up. I know that my face turned darkly red as I saw what her intention was; but I did not flinch. She struck me full across the face with it, crying as she did so, "Now go!" dropped the cane, and burst into tears at the same moment. I could bear no more; I turned about, and walked out of the room, and out of the house. I did not seem to remember anything until I found myself walking at a great rate under the stars, down towards London.

My feelings then I will not attempt to describe. I seemed to be more utterly lost than ever; the sorry comedy was played out, and I walked utterly friendless and alone, caring nothing what became of me. If I remembered that Debora stood in peril of her life, and had but small chance of escape from some horrible death, I tried to thrust that thought away from me; for the blow she had struck me seemed to have cut deep into my soul. Of all the homeless wretches under the stars that night, surely I was the one most to be pitied!

I found myself after a time on Hampstead Heath, and lay down there in a quiet spot under the trees, and stared up at the stars, wondering a little, perhaps, why Fate had dealt so hardly with me, and had never given me a real chance. I remembered my unhappy boyhood, and my long years of drudgery in my uncle's house; I remembered with bitterness that now to-night I was a creature with no name and no place in the world, with no hopes and no ambitions. Tears of self-pity sprung to my eyes as I lay there in the darkness, wondering what the day was to bring me.

I had a few shillings in my pocket, and when I knew the dawn was coming I started off down into London, in the hope to lose myself and my miseries in the crowded streets. But there I found that apparently everyone had some business to be engaged upon; everyone was hurrying hither and thither, far too busy to take note of me or of my downcast face. The mere instinct to live kept me clear of the traffic, or I must have been run over a hundred times in the day, so little did I trouble where I walked, or what became of me. When my body craved for food I went into an eating-house, and sat shoulder to shoulder with other men, who little suspected who I was, or what was my strange story. But then everyone against whom one rubs shoulders in a great city must have some strange story of their own to tell, if they cared to say what it was.

I spent the long day in the streets; but at night a curious fascination drew me across Hampstead Heath, and so in the direction of the cottage in which Harvey Scoffold lived. I had no hope of seeing the girl; I only felt it would be some poor satisfaction to me to see the house in which she was; perhaps my very presence there might serve in some vague way to shield her from harm; for by this time I had come to the conclusion that Scoffold was as much her enemy and mine as anyone else by whom she was surrounded.

I wandered about unhappily there for more than an hour; I was just turning away, when the old woman I had seen on the previous night came out of the door of the cottage, and advanced down the garden to the little gate in the fence. I think a cat must have got astray; for she called to some animal fretfully more than once. She was just turning away again, when I ventured to step up to the gate.

"I hope the young lady is quite well?" I said, in a low tone.

She looked at me curiously; looked especially, I thought, at the long livid weal across my face. "Ah! I remember you now, sir," she said; "I didn't recognise you for a moment. But, bless you, sir, they've all gone away."

"Gone away?" I echoed.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Scoffold and the young lady went off early this morning, sir; Mr. Scoffold said that letters were to be addressed to him at the house of Dr. Bardolph Just. I've got the address inside, sir, if you should want it."

I told her I did not want it, and I turned away abruptly. I could not understand the position at all; I wondered how Harvey Scoffold had persuaded her to go back to that house, and to the man she so much dreaded. I saw how badly I had blundered in the matter, and how I had done the very thing I had striven not to do. She would trust Harvey Scoffold; she would believe in his honesty, as I had believed in it; and I was convinced now that he was working hand in glove with Bardolph Just. I stood out there in the darkness, cursing myself, and the world, and everyone, with the solitary exception of Debora Matchwick.

On one point I was resolute; I would go on to the house of the doctor, and would be near at hand in case the girl wanted me. It was a mad idea, and I now recognise it as such; but at the time it seemed that I might be able to do some good. I set off at once, tired out as I was, for Bardolph Just's house.

It was not yet late, and the house was still lighted up when at last I came to it. I opened the gate in the wall noiselessly, and went in; crept forward among the trees, until I was quite near to the house. I think I had a sort of vague idea that I would get in somehow, and confront the doctor; for, after all, nothing much worse could happen to me than had already befallen me. While I waited irresolutely in the grounds, a door opened at one side of the house, letting out a little flood of light for a moment; then the door was closed again, and I saw a figure coming swiftly towards me through the trees. I drew back behind one of the trees, and watched; presently the figure passed so close to me, going steadily in the direction of the gate, that I could see the face clearly. It was Martha Leach, habited for a journey.

There was such a grim, set purpose in the face that, after she had gone a yard or two, I turned on an instinct and followed her. I heard the latch of the gate click, as she went out, closing the gate after her; unfortunately it clicked again a moment or two later, when I in turn passed out in her wake. I flattened myself against the wall, because Martha Leach had stopped in the road, and had looked back. Fortunately for me she did not return; after a momentary pause she went on again rapidly, taking a northern direction.

Now, by all the laws of the game I ought to have returned to the house to keep my vigil there; for what earthly purpose could I hope to serve in chasing this woman about the northern suburbs of London, at something near to nine o'clock on a summer's evening? But I felt impelled to go on after her; and my heart sank a little when presently I saw her hail a four-wheeled cab, and range herself up beside the front wheel, to drive a bargain with the cabman. Without her knowledge I had come to the back of the cab, and could hear distinctly what she said.

I felt at first that I was dreaming when I heard her asking the man if he could drive her to an address near Barnet; and that address was the house of my Uncle Zabdiel! After some demur the man agreed; and the woman got inside, and the cab started. And now I was determined that I would follow this thing out to the bitter end; for I began to understand vaguely what her mission was to my uncle.

As I ran behind the cab, now and then resting myself by perching perilously on the springs, I had time to think of the events that had followed the coming of George Rabbit to the doctor's house, and his discovery of me. I remembered that light I had seen in the loft; I remembered how Martha Leach had come from that loft, carrying a lantern; I remembered how she had threatened to find out who I was, and from whence I came. And I knew now with certainty that she was on her way to my uncle, with the purpose of letting him know the exact state of affairs.

I own that I was puzzled to know why she should be concerning herself in the matter at all. That she hated Debora I knew, and I could only judge that she felt I might be dangerous, and had best be got rid of in some fashion or other. The newspaper reports of my trial and sentence had made my life, of necessity, common property; she would be able easily to discover the address of Uncle Zabdiel. That she was working, as she believed, in the interests of the doctor I could well understand; but whether by his inspiration or not it was impossible for me to know.

The cab stopped at last outside that grim old house I remembered so well, that house from which I had been taken on my uncle's accusation. By that time, of course, I was some yards away from it, watching from the shelter of a doorway; but I heard the bell peal in the great, hollow old place, and presently saw the gate open, and Martha Leach, after some parley, pass in. Then the gate was closed again, and I was left outside, to conjecture for myself what was happening within.

I determined at last that I would get into the place myself; it might be possible for me to forestall Martha Leach, and take some of the wind out of her sails. Moreover, the prospect of appearing before my uncle in a ghostly character rather appealed to me than not; he had given me one or two bad shocks in my life, and I might return the compliment. For, of course, I was well aware that he must long since have believed that I was dead and buried, as had been reported. I went near to the house, and tried the gate; found, somewhat to my relief, that it was not fastened. I slipped in, and closed the gate after me, and found myself standing in the narrow garden that surrounded the house.

Strange memories came flocking back to me as I stood there looking up at the dark house. How much had I not suffered in this place, in what terror of the darkness I had lain, night after night, as a boy, dreading to hear the footsteps of Uncle Zabdiel, and yet feeling some relief at hearing them in that grim and silent place! I thought then, as I stood there, how absolutely alone I was in the great world—how shut out from everything my strength and manhood seemed to have a right to demand. And with that thought came a recklessness upon me, greater even than I had felt before, almost, indeed, a feeling of devilry.

I had been questioning myself as to my motive in coming there at all; now I seemed to see it clearly. The woman now in the house was doubtless giving my uncle chapter and verse concerning my strange coming to life; left in her hands, I was as good as done for already. I felt sure that the first thought in Uncle Zabdiel's mind, if he realised the truth of what she said, would be one of deadly fear for his own safety; for he believed me reckless and steeped in wickedness, and he knew that I had no reason to love him. He would seek protection; and in

seeking it would give me up to those who had the right to hold me.

Nor was this all. In giving me up he must perforce open a certain grave wherein lay poor Gregory Pennington, and show what that grave contained. He must drag that miserable story into the light, and must drag Debora into the light with it. I could see Uncle Zabdiel, in imagination, rubbing his hands, and telling the whole thing glibly, and making much of it; and I determined that Uncle Zabdiel's mouth must be closed.

If in no other fashion, then I felt that I must silence him by threats. I was an outlaw, fighting a lone hand in a losing cause; he would know at least that I was scarcely likely to be over-scrupulous in my dealing with him or anyone else. But the first thing to do was to get into the house.

Now, I knew the place well, of course, and, moreover, it will be remembered that in those night excursions of mine which had led to so much disaster I had been in the habit of coming and going without his knowledge. It seems to me that I was born to make use more of windows than of doors; but then, as you will have gathered by this time, I was never one for ceremony. On this occasion I recalled old times, and made my way to a certain window, out of which and into which I had crept many a night and many a morning. It was a window at the end of a passage which led to my own old room, in which for so many years I had slept. I got in in safety, and crept along the passage; and then, out of sheer curiosity, opened the door of that old room, and went in.

And then, in a moment, I was grappling in the semi-darkness with what seemed to be a tall man, who was buffeting me in the wildest fashion with his fists, and shrieking the very house down with a high, raucous voice. Indeed, he let off a succession of yells, in which the only words I could discover were, "Murder!" "Fire!" "Thieves!" and other like things. And all the while I fought for his mouth with my hands in the darkness, and threatened all manner of horrible things if he would not be silent.

At last I overmastered him, and got him on his back on the floor, and knelt upon him there, and glared down into his eyes, which I could see dimly by the light which came through the uncurtained window.

"Now, then," I panted, "if you want to live, be quiet. I can hear someone coming. If you say a word about me, I'll blow your brains out. I'm armed, and I'm desperate."

He assured me earnestly, as well as he could by reason of my weight upon him, that he would say not a word about me; and as I heard the steps coming nearer, I made a dart for the head of the old-fashioned bedstead, and slipped behind the curtains there. The next moment the room was filled with light, and I heard Uncle Zabdiel's voice.

"What's the matter? What's the matter? What the devil are you making all that bother about? I thought someone was murdering you."

Peering through a rent in the curtain, I could see that the man I had grappled with, and who now faced my uncle tremblingly, was a tall, ungainly youth, so thin and weedy-looking that I wondered he had resisted me so long. He was clad only in a long white night-shirt, which hung upon him as though he had been mere skin and bone; he had a weak, foolish face, and rather long, fair hair. He stood trembling, and saying nothing, and he was shaking from head to foot.

"Can't you speak?" snapped Uncle Zabdiel (and how well I remembered those tones!).

"I had—had the nightmare," stammered the youth. "Woke myself up with it, sir."

"I never knew you have that before," was my uncle's comment. "Get to bed, and let's hear no more of you. What did you have for supper?"

"Didn't have any supper," replied the youth. "You know I never do."

"Then it couldn't have been that," retorted Uncle Zabdiel. "Come, let's see you get into bed."

Now, the unfortunate fellow knew that a desperate ruffian was concealed behind the curtains of the bedstead; yet his dread of that ruffian was so great that he dared not cry out the truth. More than that, I saw that he dared not disobey my uncle; and between the two of us he was in a nice quandary. At last, however, with a sort of groan he made a leap at the bed, and dived in under the bedclothes and pulled them over his head. Without a word, Uncle Zabdiel walked out of the room, and closed the door, leaving us both in the dark. And for quite a long minute there was no sound in the room.

I began to feel sorry for the youth in the bed, because I knew what he must be suffering. I moved to come out into the room, and he gave a sort of muffled shriek and dived deeper under the clothes. I stood beside him, and I began to talk to him as gently as I could.

"Now, look here," I whispered. "I'm not going to hurt you if you keep quiet. Come out from under those clothes, and let me have a look at you, and tell me who you are."

Very slowly he came out from his refuge, and sat up in bed, and looked at me fearfully; and very ghostly he looked, with his fair hair, and his white face, and his white garment, against the dark hangings of the bed.

"I'm old Zabdiel Blowfield's clerk," he said slowly.

"Well, you're not a very respectful clerk, at all events," I retorted with a laugh, as I seated myself on the side of the bed. "And you don't look a very happy one."

"This ain't exactly a house to be happy in," he said. "It's grind—grind—grind—from morning till night, and nothing much to eat—and that not very good. And I'm growing so fast that I seem to need a lot more than what he does."

"I know," I responded solemnly. "I've been through it all myself. I was once old Zabdiel Blowfield's clerk, and I also had the misfortune to be his nephew."

"Oh, Lord!" The boy stared at me as though his eyes would drop out of his head. "Are you the chap that stole the money, and got chokey for it?"

I nodded. "I'm that desperate villain," I said, "and I've broken out of 'chokey,' as you call it, and have come back to revisit the glimpses of the moon. Therefore you see how necessary it was that Uncle Zabdiel should not see me. Do you tumble to that?"

He looked me up and down wonderingly, much as though I had been about eight feet high. "Old Blowfield told me about you when I first came," he said. "He said it would be a warning to me not to do likewise. But he put in a bit too much; he said that you were dead."

"He wanted to make the warning more awful," I suggested, for I did not feel called upon to give him an explanation concerning that most mysterious matter. "And don't think," I added, "that I am in any sense of the word a hero, or that I am anything wonderful. At the present time I've scarcely a coin in my pocket, and I don't know where I'm to sleep to-night. It's no fun doing deeds of darkness, and breaking prison, and all that sort of thing, I can assure you."

The youth shook his head dismally. "I ain't so sure of that," he said. "At any rate, I should think it would be better than the sort of life I lead. There's something dashing about you—but look at me!"

He spread out his thin arms as he spoke, and looked at me with his pathetic head on one side. I began to hate my uncle with fresh vigour, and to wonder when some long-sleeping justice would overtake him. For I saw that this boy was not made of the stuff that I had been made of; this was a mere drudge, who would go on being a drudge to the end of his days.

"What's your name?" I asked abruptly.

"Andrew Ferkoe," he replied.

"Well, Mr. Andrew Ferkoe, and how did you come to drop into this place?" I asked.

"My father owed old Blowfield a lot of money; and my father died," he said slowly.

"And you were taken in exchange for the debt," I said. "I think I understand. Well, don't be downhearted about it. By the way, are you hungry?"

"I'm never anything else," he replied, with a grin.

"Then we'll have a feast, for I'm hungry, too."

I started for the door, with the full determination to raid the larder; but he called after me in a frightened voice—

"Come back, come back!" I turned about, and looked at him. "He'll kill me if I take anything that doesn't belong to me, or have me locked up."

"Oh, he'll put it down to me," I assured the boy. "I'm going to interview him in the morning, and I'll see that you don't get into trouble."

I left him sitting up in bed, and I went out into the house, knowing my way perfectly, in search of food. I knew that in that meagre household I might find nothing at all, or at all events nothing worth having; but still, I meant to get something, if possible. I got down into the basement, and found the larder, and, to my surprise, found it better stocked than I could have hoped. I loaded my arms with good things, and started to make my way back to my old room.

And then it was that I saw Martha Leach and my uncle. The door of the room in which my uncle used always to work was opened, and the woman came out first. I was below, in an angle of the stairs leading to the basement, and I wondered what would have happened if they had known that I was there. Uncle Zabdiel, looking not a day older than when he had spoken to me in the court after my sentence, followed the woman out, bearing a candle in his hand. He had on an ancient dressing-gown, and the black skull cap in which I think he must always have slept—certainly I never saw him without it.

"I'm much obliged to you, my good woman," he said in a low voice—"much obliged to you, indeed, for your warning. It's upset me, I can assure you, to hear that the fellow's alive; but he shall be hunted down, and given back to the law."

I set my teeth as I listened, and I felt that I might be able to persuade Uncle Zabdiel to a different purpose.

"The difficulty will be to get hold of him," said Martha Leach. "I only heard the real story, as I have told you, from the lips of his fellow-prisoner—the man they call George Rabbit."

"Then the best thing you can do," said Uncle Zabdiel, touching her for a moment on the arm, "the wisest thing you can do, is to get hold of George Rabbit and send him to me. Tell him I'll pay him well; it'll be a question of 'set a thief to catch a thief.' He'll track the dog down. Tell him I'll pay him liberally—I'm known as a liberal man in my dealings."

While he went to the door to show the woman out, I crept round the corner of the stairs, and up to the room where I had left the boy. I found him awaiting me eagerly; it was pleasant to see the fashion in which his gaunt face lighted up when I set out the food upon the bed. He was so greedy with famine that he began to cram the food into his mouth—almost whimpering over the good things—before I had had time to begin.

We feasted well, sitting there in the dark; we were very still as we heard Zabdiel Blowfield pause at the door on his way upstairs, and listen to be sure that all was silent. Fortunately for us, he did not come in; we heard his shuffling feet take their way towards his own room.

"Safe for the night!" I whispered. "And now I suppose you feel better—eh?"

He nodded gratefully. "I wish I'd got your courage," he answered wistfully. "But when he looks at me I begin to tremble, and when he speaks I shake all over."

"Go to sleep now," I commanded him, "and comfort yourself with the reflection that in the morning he is going to do the shaking and the trembling for once. Bless your heart!" I added, "I was once like you, and dared not call my soul my own. I'll have no mercy on him, I promise you."

He smiled and lay down, and was asleep in no time at all. I had removed the dishes from the bed, meaning to take them downstairs so soon as I could be sure that Uncle Zabdiel was asleep. I sat down on a chair by the open window, and looked out into the night, striving perhaps to see some way for myself—some future in which I might live in some new and wholly impossible world.

Most bitterly then did I think of the girl who was lost to me for ever. My situation had not seemed to be so desperate while I carried the knowledge in my heart that she believed in me and trusted me; but now all that was past and done with. In the morning I must begin that fight with my ancient enemy as to whether I should live, or whether I should be condemned to that living death from which I had escaped; and I knew enough now, in this calmer moment, to recognise the cunning of the man with whom I must fight, and that the power he held was greater than mine.

Sitting there, I must at last have fallen asleep, with my head upon the window sill; it was hours later when I awoke. The dawn was growing in the sky, and the boy still slept heavily. I gathered up the dishes silently, and crept out of the room, and put them back in some disorder into the larder; for to the consumption of that meal I meant to confess solely on my own account. Then I began to mount the stairs again, to get back to the room I had left.

I heard a noise above me in the house, and I knew instinctively that my uncle had been roused, and was coming down. There was no chance for me to hide, and above all things I knew that he would search the place from top to bottom until he found the intruder. More than that, the inevitable meeting must take place at some time, and this time was as good as, if not better than, any other. So I mounted the stairs, until at last I saw him on a landing above me, standing in the grey light of the morning, with a heavy stick poised in his hands, ready to strike.

"It's all right, uncle," I said cheerfully, "I was coming to meet you."

He lowered the stick slowly, and looked at me for a moment or two in silence; then I heard him chuckle ironically.

"Good-morning, nephew," he said; "welcome home again!"

CHAPTER IX.

A SHOOTING PARTY.

Now, my Uncle Zabdiel had known me always as something subservient to his will, and apparently anxious to please him; he was to meet me now in a different mood. As we stood facing each other, in the grey light of the morning which filtered through a high window on to the staircase where we had met, I was able to realise that he would once more play the bully with me, if he felt it possible to do so, and that it behoved me to get the upper hand at once if I would bring myself with any credit out of the tangle. So I spoke sharply after that first ironical greeting of his; I wanted the man to understand that he had not to deal with the milk-and-water boy he had known something over a year before.

"I want a word with you," I said, "and I'll say it where it suits you best to hear it."

"By all means, my dear nephew," he said suavely. "If you will allow me to pass you, I will show you where we can talk in comfort."

I did not like his tone in the least; I began to understand that he had had the night in which to think over matters, and had doubtless made good use of the time. However, I followed him into that room from which not so long before I had seen Martha Leach emerge; and there I faced him,

with the door shut behind me.

"You're only partly surprised to see me," I began at once. "You heard last night that I was alive, and almost in your neighbourhood. A woman told you."

That seemed to stagger him a little; he looked at me keenly and with a new interest. "How do you know that?" he demanded.

I laughed. "I know the woman who told you; she is no friend of mine, as you may imagine," I answered him. "It must have been rather a shock to you to know that the nephew of whom you had got rid so easily, and who had even apparently had the good sense to put an end to his miserable existence, was very much alive, and likely to trouble you again. Therefore I thought I'd follow up the tale by putting in an appearance at once, the better to relieve your pardonable anxiety."

He grinned at me in a fashion that would have been disconcerting to anyone else; but I was no longer afraid of him. "And what are your demands now?" he asked.

"I'm glad you use the right word," I retorted. "I do demand one or two things, and I'm sure that you'll see that it is best to comply with them. In the first place, I demand your silence as to myself."

"And if I refuse?" He had seated himself by this time in his usual chair, and he sat looking at me, with the heavy stick he carried laid across his knees. "What then?"

I had made up my mind what to say, and I said it at once, though with no real intention of ever putting my threat into execution; I merely wanted to frighten him.

"Then I shall kill you," I said quietly. "That is no idle threat, as you may perhaps understand. You're a cleverer man than I am, because I was never blessed with much brains; and you will see for yourself that, hunted wretch as I am, it does not matter very much what becomes of me. Nevertheless, I have the natural desire to live, and I only ask to be let alone. The Norton Hyde you knew is buried in the prison to which you sent him; let him rest there. A certain other man, who bears a resemblance to him, finds it necessary to pay you a visit——"

"To break into my house, you mean!" he exclaimed violently. "Your own action is the best answer that can be given to any such suggestion as you make in regard to secrecy. What safety is there for me while you are at large in the world? I'm an old and feeble man; you come here with threats on your lips to begin with."

"I threaten you only because I know what you intend to do," I replied. "I overheard you last night, promising the woman that I should be hunted down; even making arrangements with her as to how best to set about that hunting down. Consequently I have to protect myself."

He looked at me sourly for a moment or two, as though making up his mind how best to work round me. "So you've been in the house all night, have you?" he said. "I shouldn't have slept quite so soundly if I'd known that, I can assure you. My duty is clear; respectable citizens must be protected against escaped jail-birds and vagrants of your order."

He sprang from his chair, and made a movement towards a great bell rope that hung at the side of the fireplace. But I was too quick for him; I caught him by the arm, and swung him away from it, so that he lurched and staggered towards the other side of the room. There, panting, and with his stick half raised as though to strike me down, he stood watching me.

"Now, I don't want to hurt you," I said; "but in this matter I am desperate. There is more hangs to it than you can understand. You've done evil enough; the money I stole from you has been paid for in one long year of bitter bondage—paid for doubly, by reason of the fact that I have no name, and no place in the world, and no hope, and no future. You've taken your toll out of me; all I ask now is to be let alone."

"I won't do it!" he almost shrieked at me. "You shall go back to your prison; you shall rot there for just so many years as they will add to your original sentence. You shan't live among honest men; you shall go back to your prison."

I think no shame even now of what I did. My rage against the vindictive old man was so great that I wonder I did not strike the feeble life out of him where he stood mouthing at me. I strode up to him and wrenched the stick out of his hands, took him by the collar of his dressing-gown and shook him backwards and forwards, until at last, half in terror and half in weakness, he dropped upon his knees before me.

"Don't—don't kill me, Norton," he whimpered.

"Then you must swear to me to let me alone," I said. "Promise that, and I'll never come near you again, and you shall never hear of me again. It's an easy thing to do; surely you must see for yourself that I can't rush into the light of day; I should never have come near you to-night, but that by the merest chance I found out that the woman Martha Leach was coming to you, and so guessed what her errand was. Come—swear to leave me alone!"

"I swear—I do truly swear!" he said; and I took my hands from him and let him stagger to his feet.

He got back to his chair again, and sat there, breathing hard, with his lips opening and shutting; I

saw that he had had a bad fright. I do not think, after all, that even in my rage I could have killed him, badly as he had served me; but I was relieved now to see that I had effected my purpose. I did not think he would be likely to trouble me again with any threats of exposure; for the first time in his life he appeared to have a very wholesome dread of me. Indeed, now he began, as soon as he had got his breath, to seek in some measure to propitiate me.

"I was excited—annoyed," he said. "Of course, my dear boy, I should never have done anything against you—not really, you know. But it was a great shock to me, when that woman came and told me that you were alive and in the neighbourhood—that was a horrible shock. Not but what, Norton, I was glad, in a way—glad to know that you were alive again."

"We'll take that for granted," I said with a laugh. "We have no reason to love each other, you and I, Uncle Zabdiel; and all I ask is that you shall forget that you ever saw me after I disappeared into my prison. To you, and to anyone else in the world who may be interested in the information, I am John New."

"Is that the name you have given yourself?" he asked sharply.

"The name that has been given to me by a certain friend I have found," I replied. "I spoke just now of a second matter about which I wanted to talk to you—a matter of serious moment to myself, and one in which you can do a kindly action."

He looked at me in the old suspicious manner; yet I saw that in his fear of me he was anxious to please me. "What is it?" he demanded. "And why should I do it? I don't believe in kindly actions."

I seated myself on the table beside him, and laid the heavy stick behind me. "Uncle Zabdiel," I began, leaning down so as to look into his eyes, "you're an old man, and, in the ordinary course of things, you can't have very long to live."

"What the devil are you talking about?" he exclaimed angrily. "There's nothing the matter with me; I'm younger and stronger, in my feelings at least, than I ever was. I'm hale and hearty."

"You're a weak and defenceless old man, living all alone, with no one in the world to care for you—with no one to trouble much whether you live or whether you die," I went on persistently. "God knows you might have made something of me, if you'd ever set about it in any other fashion than that you chose to adopt; but you killed Norton Hyde, and he's done with and forgotten. And you're going on in the same hard, grinding fashion for the rest of your days, until some day, if nothing happens to you——"

He looked at me with gaping mouth. "What should happen to me?" he asked in a whisper.

I shrugged my shoulders. "How can I possibly tell?" I answered. "I say that if nothing happens to you, some fine morning you'll be found lying out stark and stiff on that great bed of yours upstairs, with your eyes open or shut, as the case may be; and you'll be just the husk of a poor old creature who couldn't take his gold with him, and has slipped away in the night to meet the God whose laws of humanity and tenderness he had outraged from the beginning. Yes, Uncle Zabdiel, you'll be just a dead old man, leaving behind you certain property, to be squabbled over and fought over. And that will be the end of you."

"You're trying to frighten me," he said, with nervous fingers plucking at his lips. "I'm very well, and I'm very strong."

"I'm not trying to frighten you; I'm telling you facts. It is just left for you to set against all the wrong you have done one little good deed that may help to balance matters at the finish. And you won't do it."

"I never said I wouldn't do it," he pleaded. "You take me up so suddenly, Norton; you've no patience. I am an old man, as you say, and sometimes my health and strength are not what they were; but, then, doctors are so infernally expensive. Tell me what you want me to do, my boy; I'll do it if I can."

I was so certain that I had absolutely subdued him that I did not hesitate to lay my plan before him: it was a plan I had had in my mind all the day before, and for some part at least of that night I had spent in the house.

"There is a young lady whom I have met under curious circumstances," I began earnestly, "and that young lady is in great danger."

"What's that to do with me?" he snapped, with something of his old manner.

"Will you listen?" I asked impatiently. "Just understand that this young lady is nothing to me, and never can be anything; but I want to help her. She hasn't a friend in the world except myself, and I want to find some place to which, in an emergency, I can bring her, and where she will be safe. I tell you frankly I wouldn't suggest this to you if there were any other place on earth to which I could take her; but every other way of escape seems barred. If I can persuade her to trust me, will you give her shelter here?"

He looked up at me for a moment or two. I saw that it was in his mind to refuse flatly to have anything to do with the matter. But he had been more shaken that night even than I suspected, and he was afraid to refuse me anything. Nevertheless, he began to beat round the question, in the hope of evading a direct answer to it.

"What should I do with a girl here?" he asked. "There's only one old woman who comes to the house to look after me. This is no place for a girl; besides, if she's a decent sort of girl, she ought to have a mother or a father, or some sort of relative, to look after her."

"I've told you that she's absolutely alone in the world," I replied to that.

"And what's her danger?" he asked. "We live in the twentieth century, and there are the police —"

"Can I apply to the police?" I asked him.

"No, I suppose you can't," he acknowledged. "Well, at any rate, let me know what you want me to do, and how long the girl will stop—and I'll do the best I can. After all, perhaps what you said about me being an old man, and being found dead, and all that sort of thing—perhaps it may have some truth in it. And I've not been so very hard on people, and even if I have, you seem to think that this kindness to the young lady will make it all right for me. Because, you know," he added, with a shake of the head, "it's a great deal to ask anyone to do. Girls are more nuisance than they're worth. Boys are bad enough—but girls!" He held up his hands in horror at the mere thought of them.

I felt very grateful to him, and quite elated at my success. I took one of his feeble old hands, which he yielded with reluctance, and shook it warmly. "You're doing a greater kindness than you can imagine," I said. "I'll let you know if I can persuade the girl to come here; I won't take you by surprise again."

"I'm glad to know that, at least," he said. "You've given me an awful shock as it is. Now I suppose you'll go away again quietly?"

"Yes," I said, getting down from the table, "I'll go away again. But let me give you a word of warning, Uncle Zabdiel: even the best of us are inclined to forget promises in this world. You have sworn that you will not tell any one my secret."

"My dear boy," he whined, "do you seriously think that I should betray you?"

"No," I answered, "I don't think you would. It would be bad for you if you did; my vengeance would reach quite a long way."

"All right, my boy," he replied hastily, as he got to his feet and moved away from me. "No threats; no threats; they are quite unnecessary."

When I left him it was fully daylight. I came out of the house into the narrow, high-walled garden, and left him standing at the door in his black skull-cap and dressing-gown, peering out at me; then the door was closed, and the dark house swallowed him up.

I was now quite determined that I would go back to the house of Bardolph Just, and would find out for myself what was happening there. I had no real hope of meeting Debora, save by accident; I knew that since my disclosure I was less to her than any common tramp she might meet upon the roadside. But when I thought of her, without a friend, in that great house, and with one man and one woman at least bent upon her death, I felt that private considerations must be tossed aside, and that I must swallow my pride and my sense of injury, and must go to her help. If by some good fortune I could persuade her that the jail-bird she knew me to be was swallowed up in the man who hopelessly loved her, and was eager to help her, I might yet be able to perform that miracle of saving her. I felt that I had conquered the man I had least hope of conquering—Uncle Zabdiel; I was less afraid of others than I had been of him.

The thought of Martha Leach troubled me most; there was something so implacable about her enmity. That she meant to destroy the girl, I knew; and I felt certain, from what I had heard, that she was equally bent on destroying me. I chuckled to myself at the thought that in that second business I had defeated her; I was equally confident that I should defeat her in the first. For in defeating her I knew that my surest weapon would be the doctor himself, because anything that happened to me in the way of exposure must bring that dead man from his grave, and must revive that scandal he was so anxious to cover up. I made a shrewd guess that the woman, in rushing full tilt against me, was doing so blindly, and without consulting Bardolph Just. Knowing the power of that man over her, I thought that I could stop her even more easily than I had stopped my uncle.

However, I had blundered badly once or twice by plunging headlong into matters that required careful consideration; with a new wisdom that was coming to me, I determined to reform that trait in my character, and to weigh what I purposed doing for a few hours before setting about it. I would marshal my facts, and so have them ready at my tongue's end when I wanted them.

Thus it happened that I spent a large part of the day wandering about, and striving to arrive at some definite plan of action. It was late in the afternoon when I went at last to the house of Bardolph Just, and opened the outer gate and walked into the grounds. I will confess that my heart was beating a little heavily, because I knew that I might at any moment meet Debora, and I could guess what her attitude would be. However, I came to the house, and rang the bell, and waited to be admitted.

The servant who came to the door at last looked at me in some little surprise, I thought, but greeted me civilly enough. I enquired for the doctor as I stood in the hall; I thought the man

seemed astonished that I should ask the question.

"Dr. Just is away, sir. Everybody's away, sir," he said.

"Away?" I stared at the man in a dazed fashion, wondering what he meant. "Everybody?"

"Yes, sir. Dr. Just, and Mr. Scoffold, and Miss Debora. They've all gone down to Green Barn, in Essex, sir. Quite a large party, sir," went on the man garrulously. "Mrs. Leach has gone with them."

I kept my head lowered, that the man might not see the expression on my face. "When did they go?" I asked slowly.

"Yesterday, sir. Dr. Just said they would go down for some shooting."

The man spoke glibly enough as he told his news, and I stood awkwardly in front of him, wondering what I should do. After a long pause I looked up, and asked, "Is there no one here at all, except yourself and the other servants?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I quite forgot," said the man. "Old Capper is here, and another party that the doctor left behind to look after him. Rather a rough sort of party, sir—name of Rabbit."

"Where are they?" I asked quickly. "I want to see them."

The man told me that they were in a little room at the back of the house, and I went there at once. I was more disturbed in my mind about this than about anything else; filled with perplexity that Capper should have been brought back to that house, as I guessed he must have been by Harvey Scoffold; still more puzzled to know why George Rabbit had appeared on the scene, and what the purpose could be in putting him in charge of that amiable old madman, Capper. I opened the door of the room and walked in.

George Rabbit was lounging on a window-seat by an open window, smoking a pipe; Capper sat upright on a chair, looking at the other man with that curious half-wistful, half-puzzled expression that I had seen on his face before. Mr. Rabbit did not take the trouble to move when I entered; he merely waved a hand nonchalantly, and went on smoking.

"What are you doing here?" I demanded of him.

"Got a noo job—an' a rummy sort o' job at that," he replied, with a jerk of his head in the direction of Capper. "Plenty to eat an' drink, 'an a nice fevver bed to sleep in, 'an on'y him to keep a eye on. Rum ole cove, ain't 'e?"

"I thought I warned you to keep away from this place, and to keep away from me," I said sternly.

"You did, 'an you wasn't too nice about the language you put it in," he said complacently, as he puffed out a huge volume of smoke. "But, yer see, I wasn't goin' to be ordered abaht by the likes o' you, an' so I jist made up my mind I'd come along, an' 'ave a little talk wiv the doctor. Nice man, the doctor—real tip-top gent."

"But Dr. Just warned you to keep away from here," I reminded him.

"Yus, but, yer see, I put it plain to the doctor that I might be a bit useful to 'is nibs—a deal more useful inside, w'ere I couldn't talk, than outside, w'ere I could. The doctor seemed to see it in the same way, an' so 'e left me in charge of this ole chap, wot seems to 'ave a tile loose; an' 'e's gorn orf into the country to 'ave a pot at the dicky birds, an' the rabbits an' fings."

"And are you to stop here until he comes back?" I asked.

"That's the ticket," he replied. "An' wot's yer 'ighness goin' to do?"

"I don't know; at all events, nothing that concerns you," I answered.

"Perlite and haffable as ever!" commented Mr. Rabbit. "By the way, I unnerstood that you'd gorn, an' that we wasn't goin' to see any more of yer. You might let me know w'ere you're goin' to live—fer the sake of ole times."

I guessed why he wanted to know my movements. I shrewdly suspected that the woman Martha Leach had already given him Zabdiel Blowfield's message. Therefore, although my mind was pretty firmly made up as to what I must do, I determined to put him off the scent.

"Oh, in all probability, I shall remain here for the present," I said.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Rabbit heartily. "Then I shall 'ave company. Between you an' me, I'm a little tired of ole waxworks 'ere, wot sits smilin' an' never syin' a word, except to ask about 'is young master. I tell yer, 'e fair gits on my nerves."

"I'll go and see if my room's ready," I said; and walked out of the room.

Going into the dining-room, I rang the bell, and waited until the servant who had admitted me put in an appearance; then I asked a question quite casually.

"By the way, what place did you say the doctor had gone to? Was it Green Barn?"

"Yes, sir. I was down there myself last year. Very pretty place, sir. Comerford is the station. Essex, sir."

"Oh, I see!" I answered with a yawn. "By the way, I shall stay here to-night. Is my room ready?"

"Just as you left it, sir," said the man.

I dismissed him, and then proceeded to empty my pockets, to discover what money I had. I knew that I must get to Comerford that night; I began to be oppressed with dreadful fears of what might happen in a lonely country house, with the girl at the mercy of these three people, all conspiring against her. For by this time I reckoned Harvey Scoffold as being shoulder to shoulder with the other two in the business.

I found that I had exactly two shillings and threepence, and there seemed no prospect of my getting any more. I was desperate by this time, and I knew that every moment was precious; if I missed the last train I might as well not go at all. I determined that in such a cause as this any scruples of conscience I might have must go to the winds; I must resume my old trade which had once brought me into disaster.

I looked about for the most valuable article I could discover, and presently found it, in a beautiful old-fashioned watch, lying upon a cabinet merely as an ornament; it was a wonderful piece of workmanship, in three exquisitely engraved and pierced cases. I slipped it into my pocket, and got my cap and a walking-stick from the hall, and slipped unobserved out of the house.

In an old curiosity shop in Heath Street, Hampstead, I sold the watch—after some haggling I got six pounds for it. Coming out of the place the richer by that sum, I found a cab, and drove at once to Liverpool Street Station. There I found, by great good fortune, that a train was to leave for Comerford in less than a quarter of an hour. I took my seat, and in due course alighted without further adventure at the little out-of-the-way station bearing that name. Not wishing to attract attention in a place where, doubtless, the doctor was well known, I strolled out of the station into the quiet dusk of the summer evening, and took my way down into the village.

You may be sure that I kept a sharp look-out, lest by any chance I should stumble upon anyone from Green Barn; and I determined that when I made enquiries for the place it should be from someone not likely to pay much attention to me or to note my appearance. I meant to move slowly but steadily, making as few false steps as possible; and I knew that the first thing to be done was to get to the house and find out what was happening there.

In the first place, however, I made up my mind that I would procure a bed for the night. I chose a little clean inn in a back street, and for a matter of a shilling or two settled to keep the room as long as I wanted it. Lounging in the doorway of it with the landlord, I made a casual enquiry as to what places of interest there were in the neighbourhood; and the man, after reeling off a long catalogue of places about which I cared nothing, came at last to Green Barn, and told me where it lay. I stored that information in my mind, and a little later strolled out to find the place.

I found that it lay some little distance from the village, and was surrounded by very considerable grounds and fields, and a great growth of trees that might, perhaps, by a stretch be called a wood. In the twilight I saw rabbits hopping about, and heard the cries of birds among the trees and bushes. I gathered that there would be there what I believe is known as "good mixed shooting."

The house itself stood in a hollow, and I set it down at once as being decidedly lonely and damp. It had unwholesome-looking green lichens stuck about it here and there, and the outhouses were in a bad state of repair. As I moved cautiously round it, keeping well within shelter, I saw no dogs, nor did I observe any stir of life about it, as one might expect to see about the country house of a prosperous man. A few lights were showing in the windows, and when presently I came to the front of the house, I saw that the great hall door was standing wide open. Once or twice I saw a servant cross this, and disappear, as though going from one room to the other. Presently, as I lay hidden, I saw Harvey Scoffold come out with a big cigar between his lips, and his arms swaying about lazily above his head, as he stretched himself. He seated himself in a creaking wicker chair on the porch, and I lay watching the glowing end of his cigar for a long time.

Bardolph Just came out presently, and joined him. They sat knee to knee for a while, with their heads bent forward, talking in low tones; I could not distinguish what was said. Presently both the heads turned, and the men glanced towards the lighted hall behind them; then the doctor sprang up, and pushed back his chair.

Then I saw Debora come slowly down the hall to the porch. The doctor spoke to her, and I saw her shake her head. My heart was thumping so that I had a foolish feeling that they must hear it, and discover me where I lay hidden.

The girl came down the few steps from the porch, and turned off into the grounds. Bardolph Just, after standing looking after her for a long minute, sat down again, and went on talking to Scoffold. So far as Debora was concerned, she confined her walk to an avenue among the trees, up and down which she paced for half an hour, with her hands hanging loosely at her sides, and with an air of utter desolation and dejection upon her. During all that time she only stopped once.

It was at the end of the avenue furthest from the house, and nearest to where I lay among the bushes. She stopped, and laid an arm against the trunk of a tree, and put her head against the arm; and so stood for a long time, as I felt sure, weeping softly. What I suffered in that time I will not try to explain; I would have given anything and everything to be able to steal up to her, and to

put my arms about her, and to comfort her. But that was, of course, clearly impossible.

She went back into the house at last, passing between the two men and leaving them together on the porch. I determined that I would keep my vigil as long as they did, even though I could not overhear what was said. I could see that the doctor was laying down the law upon some matter to Harvey Scoffold. I could see every now and then first one and then the other turn sharply and glance into the lighted hall, as though fearing to be overheard. At last Scoffold, with a gesture of impatience, got up and came down the steps; the great bulk of him blotted out the other man for a moment.

Immediately afterwards the doctor rose, and marched down the steps also, until he came to where Harvey Scoffold was standing. They moved off arm-in-arm into that avenue in which but a little time before the girl had walked so long; and now I strained my ears, in the hope that I might catch what they said. But only scraps of conversation floated to me.

"Don't be a fool, Harvey," I heard the doctor say, "there is absolutely no danger ... the merest accident."

"I can't say I like it at all; it may seem suspicious. Lonely country place, and you with an interest in the girl's death. I consider it much too risky."

They passed me, and came slowly back again. And what I heard then was startling enough, in all conscience. It was the doctor who spoke.

"Gun accidents have happened before to-day, and will happen again, especially over such land as this."

I remembered then what I had been told about this shooting party that had been organised; I wondered what they meant to do. I could only shrewdly guess that in some fashion the girl was to be drawn into the matter, and that the doctor had plotted with Harvey Scoffold that an apparent accident of some sort should take place. I did not need to be told who the victim was to be. I lay there, long after they had gone into the house and the door had been closed, wondering what I should do, and realising more and more with every minute how utterly helpless I was. To warn the girl was impossible, because, even if I got speech with her, she would in all probability refuse to believe anything I said. To set myself face to face with Harvey Scoffold and the doctor would be absurd, because they would, of course, deny that any such conversation had taken place, or at least deny the construction I had put upon their words. I lay there until very late, debating the matter, and at last came to a desperate resolve.

If they meant murder, then I determined that murder should be met with murder. In some way that was at present vague in my mind I determined that I would follow the party on the morrow, if that was the time arranged, and if I could only secure some weapon, even if I were not in time to save her, her death should be avenged. I went home with my head singing, and with, as it seemed, the sky blood-red above me.

I thought at first that I would borrow a gun from the landlord of the inn, but as I looked a peaceful sort of fellow, I came to the conclusion that that must at once throw suspicion upon me. I determined, just before I went to bed, that I would go very early to Green Barn in the morning, and there would let Fate decide for me at the last moment. I undressed and went to bed, but it was long before my eyes closed in sleep.

I was abroad early, and was actually in the grounds before the house was astir. I guessed that if this was the date on which they meant to put their plan into execution, they would make for that more secluded wood I had observed the night before, and I determined that when the time came I would take my station there. But first I made up my mind that I must have a weapon, and boldly enough I decided that I would get that, if the worst came to the worst, from the house itself. With that purpose in mind, I crept as near to the house as I could, with a view to observing how the rooms were placed, and in the hope that I might discover the gun-room, if such a place existed.

Fortune favoured me. I worked my way gradually round towards the back of the house, and judged that the party were at breakfast, by the fact that now and then a servant crossed a small paved yard, bearing dishes. I counted the number of times she went, and I reckoned my chances on two things. First, I guessed that some of the servants would be in the dining-room, and the others in the kitchens, which were detached from the house; the servant I saw pass to and fro was the messenger between both. And while I noted that fact, I saw that the gun-room was just off the small hall into which she went each time she carried anything across. I could see the shining barrels against the walls distinctly.

What I purposed doing was this. Counting the time carefully, I would wait for her to cross the yard and to go into the house; then, when she had disappeared, I would follow, and would get into the gun-room. Before she came out of the house again I should have time to select a weapon and to load it; to remain concealed in the gun-room, into which she was not likely to look; and to come out and make my way into the grounds after she had disappeared into the kitchens.

My plan prospered as well as I had hoped. I slipped into the gun-room as the girl disappeared into the house, and in a moment I had a gun down from its place, and had slipped the cartridges into position. Making sure that all was right, I crouched behind the door, and saw the girl pass and cross the yard, and disappear; then I stole out, and, getting clear of the house, ran hard for the woods. There I dropped down into a little hollow in the thickest part of the trees, and waited.

In something less than half an hour I saw them coming towards me from the direction of the house; Harvey Scoffold and the doctor, with Debora walking between. She was dressed smartly in a shooting costume, and carried a light gun over her shoulder, as did the others. They made straight for the woods; and I lay there, with murder in my heart and the gun gripped in my fingers.

CHAPTER X.

I TOUCH THE SKIRTS OF HAPPINESS.

My feeling of horror at what I instinctively knew was soon to happen was perhaps increased by the fact that this morning the girl seemed to be in the brightest possible humour. She was laughing and chatting, turning first to one man and then to the other, as she stepped gaily along between them. Nor were Harvey Scoffold and Bardolph Just lacking in apparent good humour; Harvey Scoffold, in particular, was laughing boisterously. Every now and then the two men would exchange glances behind the unconscious girl, as though assuring each other that they were ready for some signal to pass from one to the other.

They came straight on down through the wood, with one figure now hidden for a moment by the trees, and then the three of them fully in sight again. In the hollow where I lay I now and then heard a quick rustling, and saw a rabbit dart across and disappear; I realised that I might be in some danger if the party fired in my direction. But concerning that I was quite reckless.

Debora proved to be a capital shot, and Harvey Scoffold was second only to her. The doctor fired only once, and then he missed; I saw the girl turn and look at him, and laugh. And his face was not pleasant to see.

At last I saw what I had expected. Harvey Scoffold and the girl moved forward a little, and the doctor stopped. I saw Scoffold look back, with a sharp turn of the head for a moment; saw him glance sideways at the girl. I raised myself a little, and, with my heart thumping against my ribs, levelled the gun I held, and looked along the smooth, shining barrel of it until I had Bardolph Just squarely at the end of it.

A rabbit darted across, straight in front of Harvey Scoffold and the girl; I saw it out of the tail of my eye as I watched the doctor. Both guns spoke, and even as they did so I saw Bardolph Just with his gun to his shoulder, and the barrel pointing straight at the girl's back, not five yards in front of him. It was all so sudden—first the bark of the two guns in front—then my own weapon seemed to go off at the same moment. In my excitement I let him have both barrels; I saw his own gun explode harmlessly in the air, and then fall from his hands. He dropped to his knees with a cry, and held his left wrist with the fingers of his right hand locked round it. His face was very white, and he rocked himself backwards and forwards as he knelt there, and bit his lower lip until I saw a faint trickle of blood down his chin.

I knew that I had in all probability shattered his wrist; so much at least I hoped. The others had run back, and the girl was kneeling beside him, while Scoffold stood staring at him in very genuine amazement. I saw the doctor turn his head swiftly and look sharply in my direction; then he said something in a low tone to Scoffold. I could not hear what was said, but I saw him stagger to his feet, with the help of the girl, and saw them go slowly towards the house. Harvey Scoffold stood still, looking after them for a moment; then he turned sharply and faced towards where I was. I saw him open the breech of his gun and slip a cartridge in; then he walked straight towards me.

My gun was of course empty, but when he first caught sight of me I was kneeling in a very business-like attitude, with the weapon levelled. He looked straight down the barrels of it. He stopped, and I saw him fumbling with the trigger of his own.

"Have a care, Mr. Scoffold," I said quietly. "I have you covered."

"What are you doing there?" he stammered.

"I'll tell you presently," I answered him, still keeping my gun raised. "Now, reverse that gun of yours; come a little nearer. That's it; now lay it on the grass. Go back a pace or two; now stand still. And remember that if you play any tricks I'm in a mood to blow your brains out. I shall shoot *you* through the head, Mr. Harvey Scoffold—not through the arm."

By this time he was standing some paces away, his arms hanging by his sides. I got up, and stepped forward to where his gun lay, and picked it up. I dropped my own behind me. "Perhaps you'd like to know," I said, after I had made sure that the gun I had taken from him was loaded, "that my own weapon was unloaded. The doctor had both barrels."

I heard him mutter something under his breath, and I guessed pretty accurately what it was. He kept his eyes on me, evidently watching for a way of escape; he shifted his feet uneasily, as he stood there covered by his own gun.

"Now, Harvey Scoffold, I'll have a little explanation with you before I go up to the house," I said. "You were in the plot to murder this young girl. Be careful how you answer me, for my temper is

such at this moment that my fingers itch for this trigger."

"My dear fellow—I do assure you——" he began; but at the look in my eyes he hung his head, and blurted out the truth.

"What could I do?" he muttered. "I did my best to stop it—to persuade the doctor to abandon the idea. I only came out this morning because I thought—because I hoped I might be able to prevent it."

"You are lying, Harvey Scoffold," I told him. "I have been here both last night and since early this morning; I have seen everything, and heard a great deal. You were in the plot; you were to hold the attention of the girl while murder was done. If I had not been here she would be lying dead now."

"It's true," he said. "I'm bound to confess it's true. But I thank God you came in time!"

"Bah!" I ejaculated contemptuously. "I don't like your penitence, Mr. Scoffold. Now turn about and go up to the house. I'll follow you."

He hesitated for a moment, and then turned and walked towards the house. I picked up the other gun and followed him, and in that order we came to the house, and marched up the steps and into the hall. He looked back at me over his shoulder then.

"Which way?" he asked sulkily.

"I want to see the doctor," I replied, setting the guns down in a corner. "Lead the way; I'll follow you."

He turned into a room on the right, crossed it, and came to a door at the other side. Opening this, he passed through, and I followed him. Directly I got into the room I saw before me a curious little scene, and one that, even now, in the recollection of it, sends a thrill at once of pity and of admiration through me, however unwillingly. The doctor was seated by a table, on which was spread a white cloth; an open case of surgical instruments was by his side. Leaning across the table was Martha Leach, doing something with a bowl of water and a small sponge. Very slowly and calmly Bardolph Just was cleaning the broken flesh and bone, quite as calmly, save for an occasional spasm of pain that crossed his face, as though he had been operating on a patient. He turned his head for a moment as we came into the room, and stopped what he was doing.

"Take that fellow away!" he shouted.

But I stood my ground. "Thanks," I replied, "I prefer to remain. There is a word or two to be said between us, doctor; but pray don't let me interrupt what you are doing. Your injury is not quite as bad as I had hoped; but then I am not much good behind a gun. I hoped to hit a vital spot."

"Why did you shoot me?" he asked sullenly.

"Don't ask idle questions," I retorted. "Get on with your work."

He rewarded me for that remark with a scowl, and went on again with the work in hand. Now and then he gave a quick order, half under his breath, to the obedient Martha Leach, who waited upon him slavishly; under his direction she presently bound up the arm, after cutting splints for it according to a fashion he told her. Then, in obedience to a sign from him, she brought him a small glass of spirits, which he drank quickly; I saw the colour begin to come back into his white face.

"That was an ordeal, Harvey," he said. "Upon my word, I didn't think I had the courage. I think it'll mend all right now; both bones were shattered."

He took not the faintest notice of me, as he presently laid his hand in a sling which the woman Leach dexterously twisted round his neck. He nodded to her in token that she should go; and she went slowly out of the room, carrying the cloth and basin with her; she gave me a deadly look as she passed me. But for her looks I no longer cared.

Perhaps the least composed of the three of us was Harvey Scoffold; he fidgeted about from one foot to the other, and strove to whistle a tune; and all the while glanced furtively at Bardolph Just or at myself. Bardolph Just, for his part, stood like a man slowly making up his mind to something; I saw, besides, that he was raging within himself with pain, and mortification, and chagrin, and could with difficulty control his feelings. When at last he looked up he repeated that question he had asked before.

"Why did you shoot me?"

"I preferred to shoot you rather than see murder done; I meant to kill you, if I could, because I counted your life more worthless than that of Miss Debora Matchwick."

"I was not going to kill her," he said sullenly.

"No," I answered him, "there was to be an accident, and no one would have been more sorry than her dear, devoted guardian at the deplorable result of that accident! You need not lie to me, Dr. Just; your accomplice has already given the game away."

He glanced quickly at Harvey Scoffold, and that gentleman merely shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands protestingly; but I saw that the doctor believed that Scoffold had been made

to speak. The doctor walked across to the window, and stood there looking out for some time. He spoke at last, without turning his head.

"You constitute yourself judge and executioner both," he said. "If you had killed me I think it must have proved a hanging matter for you, Mr. Jail-bird."

"But I should have saved the girl," I answered. "What is my life worth, that I should weigh it in the balance when there is a question of her safety?"

"What are you going to do?" he asked, turning his head a little.

"I am going to see Miss Matchwick, and I am going to put the case fairly before her," I replied steadily. "I intend to tell her of the three attempts you have made upon her life; I intend to let her understand that your game, Dr. Just, is murder."

"Very fine, and very brave," he remarked; then he suddenly swung round on me, and barked out a question. "If you are so certain of your facts, why not go to the police—why not stop this game of murder, as you call it?"

"You know I can't do that," I said. "In the first place I cannot even declare who I am, nor why I'm in your house; and in the second, as you know, I have no proof."

He walked across to where Harvey Scoffold was standing, and nudged him with his free arm in the ribs. "Hark to him, Harvey—hark to this fine talker! He has no proof—and he dare not show himself as other men might. This thing without a name is going to do doughty deeds for the sake of a young girl; he claims already to have saved her three times from death. What is anybody to make of it, if he chooses to tell his story?"

"I make this of it," I broke in hotly. "I am here to see Miss Matchwick; I will put the thing fairly before her. If I can do nothing else, I can at least show her where her danger lies, so that she may not walk into it without her eyes open."

I never understood the man until long afterwards—at least, I never understood him fully; perhaps if I had I should have been prepared for the desperate chances he took, and for the sheer recklessness with which he carried matters through. He turned now to Scoffold, and said quickly —

"That's a good notion, Harvey; that's a fair and just thing to say. We've had enough of this fellow, who brags and boasts, and shoots men from behind bushes. The young lady shall judge for us, and shall give him his dismissal. It's a good idea, and one that we will see carried out. Fetch Debora here."

"Stop!" I cried, as Harvey Scoffold was moving towards the door. "We'll have no underhand tricks, and no warnings. Ring the bell, and send a servant for Miss Matchwick."

Scoffold stopped and looked at the doctor; the latter slowly nodded his head. So it came about that Scoffold rang the bell, and on the coming of the servant requested that Miss Debora should be asked to step that way. After the man had retired, and while we waited in a grim silence for the coming of Debora, I felt my cheeks begin to flame; almost it seemed as though I felt again the sharp tingling pain where she had lashed me across the face.

When the door opened at last the girl came in quickly. She walked straight towards where the doctor stood, and spoke at once impulsively.

"Oh, I am so sorry—so very sorry!" she said. "How did it happen? Have you found out who did it?"

Bardolph Just did not speak; he simply looked at me. Following the direction of his eyes, she turned also and looked at me. I saw her draw herself up with that quick little lift of her chin; I saw a dawning smile in the doctor's eyes.

"What is that man doing here?" she asked.

"He came, my dear Debora, with a purpose—a purpose which he has partly accomplished. My broken wrist tells its own tale; had he had his way, I should probably not be speaking to you now."

"Had he had his way, Miss Debora," I blurted out, "you would be lying dead somewhere in this house—as the result of an accident!"

I saw her face blanch; she turned furtive, frightened eyes for a moment on the doctor. He shook his head, with a lifting of the eyebrows which seemed to suggest that he left such a mad accusation to be judged properly by her; and she flashed round on me.

"I don't believe it—I don't believe a word of it!" she said.

"Thank you, my dear child," said Bardolph Just. "I might have known what your answer would be."

"Very satisfactory—quite what might have been expected," murmured Scoffold.

The girl had turned her head, and was looking at me steadily. What was in her mind I could not tell, for her face told me nothing. Scorn of me I could read, and contempt; I felt my heart sink, even while I nerved myself for the task before me.

"Is that why I am sent for?" she said. "Is it to hear such an accusation as this? Is this what you had to say to me?"

Still her eyes looked contemptuously into mine, where I stood half abashed before her; still I felt that the doctor was growing momentarily more sure of his victory.

"I asked that you might be sent for," I said, beginning my reply steadily, "in order that you might understand what is being done, and that you might guard yourself against it. If you think me so poor a thing that I may not help you, then for God's sake set me aside out of the matter; get someone else more worthy to assist you. But wake up—open your eyes—face this Death that is waiting for you at every turn!"

She might have been a figure of stone, so little movement did she make. And now I saw that both Harvey Scoffold and the doctor were watching her, and not me.

"I have pleaded with you before; I have told you what I know is being done against you and against your life," I went on, speaking more eagerly with every word. "That man has tried to kill you three several times. He tried to make you walk out of that door at dead of night; he tried to poison you—of those things I have already told you. I was able to save you on those two occasions, but after that he sent me away from you, and I had to leave you to the mercy of these men. Only by the merest chance did I find out that you had come down here, and were going on this apparently innocent expedition this morning. Will you not believe me when I tell you that I heard the whole thing plotted between them last night?"

She gave me no answer, although I waited for one. After a pause I went on—

"There was to be an accident this morning; gun accidents have happened frequently. Mr. Scoffold there received his instructions——"

"I protest against this madman!" broke in Harvey Scoffold. "I assure you——"

"Hold your tongue!" snapped the doctor unexpectedly. "Let him say what he has to say."

"So I got a gun from the house," I went on; "for I meant to kill Dr. Just, if by chance I was quick enough to prevent him carrying out his scheme. I lay in the woods over there, and I waited; then I saw Harvey Scoffold walk in front with you, and I saw the doctor step back. As God is my witness I saw the man raise his gun and point it direct at you; then I raised my own and fired."

Very slowly she turned her head, and stole a look at the doctor's face. I saw him repeat his former gesture, as though it were not worth while for him to deny the matter; the thing was so absurd. I saw Debora also glance at Harvey Scoffold, who smiled gaily and shook his head; then she looked back towards me. I did not understand her; I could not read into that mind that was behind her unfathomable eyes. If, while I waited for her judgment, I looked at her with any look of pleading, it was only that she might, for her own sake, judge me fairly, and judge me to be honest.

"I won't trouble to remember the absurd name you bear, a name which is not your own," she began very quietly. "I will only remember that you are nobody, and that you forced your way into Dr. Just's house while you were a criminal flying from the law. Do you think it likely that I should take your word in such a matter as this?"

I saw Bardolph Just exchange a quick look with Harvey Scoffold, a look compounded of gratification as well as amazement. Scoffold, for his part, was openly grinning.

"Your zeal for me and for my welfare is quite misplaced, and quite unnecessary," went on Debora. "I'm sorry you should have thought it necessary to try and kill my guardian; it is a merciful thing that you have only injured him. That is all I have to say to you."

"Debora," I said, looking at her earnestly, "I entreat you to believe that what I have said is true. I know these men; I know what their purpose is; I know what must inevitably happen if you will not realise your own danger."

"Come—we've had enough of this!" broke in Bardolph Just. "It's quite time we told this fellow that he'd best get away from the place, and be seen here no more. He's had his answer, and I hope he's pleased with it."

"Debora," I went on, ignoring the man altogether, "I will take you away from this place, and will put you with friends who will be good to you. Debora, won't you listen to me?"

"I have given you my answer, and it is a final one," she said. "Had the warning come from anyone else I might have been troubled by it—mystified by it; coming from a man with your record it is worthless. When I listened to you first I did not understand who you were; now I know. That is the end of it."

"It is not the end of it!" I cried fiercely, as she turned away from me. "I will save you in spite of yourself; I will make you understand your danger, even if you do not see it now. I shall ask no thanks and seek no reward. I shall have done it for another reason." I turned to the doctor, and pointed a finger at him. "As for you, sir, such a retribution is preparing for you as shall not be long delayed. You think you have seen the last of me—you have not done that by any means. Don't forget that I am a desperate man, with nothing to lose in this world save my liberty; and I shall not count that, if it becomes necessary for me to declare who I am, and to come forward

into the light of day to protect this girl. That's my last word on the matter."

"I'm glad to hear it!" retorted the doctor. "Open the door, Harvey, please."

Mr. Harvey Scoffold obeyed with alacrity, and, thus dismissed, I went out of the house, and made my way towards the village. I was sent upon my way more quickly, perhaps, from hearing a peal of laughter from the room I had left. I went away with rage and bitterness in my heart.

I went back to my lodging at the little inn, more perplexed than ever as to what I should do. I knew that this was a new danger which threatened the girl, because she would prove an easier victim in any new scheme which might be maturing, by reason of her belief in the man who meant to kill her; her trust in him would make her utterly unsuspecting. The thought of that drove me almost frantic, and I raged up and down my little room in the inn, tormented by doubts and fears, and seeing my own helplessness loom more largely before me with every moment. Late in the afternoon I went out into the village of Comerford, undecided whether to go back to London, or whether to remain in that place. I wandered aimlessly about the streets, and finally seated myself on a gate a little way out, and propped my chin in my hands and gave myself up to the gloomiest thoughts.

I became aware, in a curious, detached fashion, of a small country boy, with a very freckled face and very light hair, who had walked past me twice, and had observed me narrowly; now I came to think of it, I had seen him loitering along on the other side of the street some half-hour previously. I looked at him with a frown now, and asked him what he wanted.

To my surprise he asked me if I was Mr. John New. I sat up and looked at him, and said that I was. From one of his pockets the boy drew out a twisted piece of paper, flattened it with one grubby hand upon the other, and spelled out the name. Then to my amazement, he handed the note to me.

"Where did you get this from?" I demanded.

He told me that a lady had given it to him, and had given him also a shilling to find me. She had told him what I was like, and that I was a stranger in the village; my aimlessly wandering about the streets had done the rest, and had shown me to him. I added another shilling to the boy's new wealth on the spot, and he went away happy. Then I untwisted the note, and read what was written on it.

"I want to see you, and I must see you to-day. There is a place at the other side of the wood where you lay this morning—an old chalk-pit, half filled with water. At one side of that is a little ruined hut. I shall be there this evening at a little after six. I beg, that you will not fail me.

"DEBORA."

So much had I been tricked, and so little faith had I in man or woman then, that for a moment I believed that this was another trap set, into which my feet should stumble. But the next moment, I told myself that surely this village boy would not have lied to me over the matter. A woman had sent the note, and it could be but one woman. I thrust the precious paper into my pocket, and set off then and there, with my heart singing within me, to the place appointed.

I came to it well before the time, and found it to be just as the note described. I had kept well away from the wood, and I came easily to the old disused chalk-pit, which had in it a small pond of stagnant water, formed by the rains of many seasons. Half-way up one side of it was the little hut to which Debora had referred. I made my way to it at once. Sitting down on an old bench, I looked through the open door, and so could command the way by which she would come.

The time drew on, and still I saw nothing of her. I was beginning to think that some one had discovered that she had communicated with me, or else that, after all, this might be a trap set for me. I blamed myself that I was here in this lonely place without a weapon. And then suddenly, far off, I saw what it was that had delayed her.

The evening was very still and very fine; I could see a long way. Presently, in the distance, I made out a figure walking backwards and forwards on the edge of the wood; after quite a long time I made it out to be the doctor. I knew in a moment that the man stood as a barrier between the girl in the house and me in the hut, and that while he kept unconscious guard there it was impossible for us to meet. Yet I was as helpless as she must be, and I could only wait until it pleased the man to go back to the house.

He must have walked there backwards and forwards for more than half an hour before I suddenly saw him in the clear light stop, and snap the fingers of his uninjured hand together, with the action of a man coming to a sudden quick resolution; then he turned, and went off with long strides in the direction of the house. I wondered what he was going to do.

I endured another period of waiting that seemed interminable; and then I saw her coming quickly through the wood and down towards the chalk-pit. She skirted the edge of it, and came on quickly towards where I stood in the doorway of the hut waiting for her. After her declaration in the house, in the presence of the two men, I could not know in what mood she came, and I was puzzled how I should greet her. About that, however, I need not have thought at all, for the miracle of it was that she came straight towards me, with her eyes shining, and her hands stretched out towards me, so that in the most wonderful way, and yet in a way most natural, I

took her suddenly in my arms. And she broke at once into a torrent of prayers and excuses.

"Oh, my dear! my dear! I was so afraid you would not meet me. I have not deserved that you should; it might have happened that you would not understand, and would believe that all the hateful things I said were meant by me. You didn't believe that, did you?"

"Well—yes, I did," I stammered. "What else could I believe?"

"Don't you understand that I should have had no chance at all with those men, unless I had thrown them off their guard? I hated myself afterwards, when they laughed and joked about you; I could have killed them. Then I made up my mind that I must send and find you."

"It was wonderful that the boy should know me so easily," I answered. "How did you describe me?"

She hung her head, and I saw the colour mount from neck to brow. "I told the boy to look for a man with the mark of a blow across his face," she whispered; and then, before I could prevent her, even had I wished, she had put her arms about my neck and had drawn my head down, and was kissing me passionately on the mark itself. "That's to heal it—and that—and that—and that!" she whispered.

We were both more composed presently, and were seated side by side on the old bench inside the hut. We had no fear of being surprised by anyone; the side of the chalk-pit went up sheer behind the hut, and from the edge of it all was open country. Before us, as I have said, stretched the chalk-pit itself, and the wood, and beyond that the grounds of the house. So we sat contentedly, and looked into each other's eyes, and said what we wanted to say.

"It came upon me suddenly," began Debora, "this morning when I turned and saw Dr. Just on his knees, holding his wrist. I seemed to know instinctively that you had shot him. I knew, dear, that you would not run away, and I had time before they sent for me to make up my mind what to do. I had not quite realised what he had meant to do. I did not think he would be daring enough to shoot me in that fashion. But I am glad, for your sake, that you did not kill him."

"So am I—now," I replied. "And you do believe, my dearest girl, that he has really tried on these three occasions to take your life?"

"I know it," she answered, with a little shiver. "But it is for the last time. See"—she placed her hands in mine, and looked fearlessly into my eyes—"for the future you shall look after me—you shall take care of me. Is that too bold a thing to say?"

I drew her close to me. "No, Debora mine," I whispered, "because I love you. I am what you called me—a thing without a name, but in my heart I am honest; in my heart I love the name that has been given me, because by that you first knew me."

I told her of my plans: that we should go away then and there, and that for that night I would give her the room I had taken at the inn, and would find a lodging in another place. Then, quite early, before anyone we need fear was awake, we would start off into the world, on some impossible mission of making a fortune, and living happily for ever afterwards.

"But you forget, John dear—I have a fortune already," she reminded me. "That belongs to me—that we must get."

I was troubled at the thought of that, troubled lest she might believe, even for one fleeting moment, that I set that fortune as of greater value than herself. I was about to speak of it when she suddenly turned to me, and began to speak with the deepest earnestness of quite another matter.

"There is something I must say to you—now, before we leave this place," she said. "I want first of all to tell you that I never loved Gregory Pennington; he was only my dear friend—my brother."

"I am glad," I answered simply.

"And I want to tell you now that I am absolutely certain in my own mind that the boy never killed himself."

I was so startled that for a moment I could not answer her. She glanced out of the door of the hut, as though fearing that even in that place she might be overheard, and then went on speaking at a great rate:

"It was the last thing he would have done; there was no reason for it at all. He was happy, because he had always the mistaken hope that he might persuade me to love him. On the very night of his death—the night when you came there—he, too, had tried to persuade me to leave the house, and go away with him; like yourself, he believed that I was not safe with Dr. Just. Do you believe for a moment that, having said that to me, he would walk into the house and put a rope about his neck? No, I won't believe it!"

"But, my darling, how else could he have died?" I asked.

She answered me quite solemnly, and with the same deep earnestness I had heard in her tones before. "He was killed—murdered—by Dr. Just!"

"But why?" I asked stupidly.

"For the same reason that would prompt the man to seek your death, if he could," she said. "Bardolph Just knew that Gregory Pennington wanted to get me to go away; Gregory probably told him so that night. If I went away and married anyone, my fortune went with me, and it is my horrible fortune that has come near to losing me my life. I know, as surely as if I had seen it done, that the doctor killed Gregory Pennington. That he hanged him afterwards, to give colour to the idea of suicide, I quite believe; that would account for his anxiety to let you change places with the dead man."

"Another thought occurs to me," I said, after a pause. "Poor Gregory Pennington's servant—the man Capper—must have seen what happened; the shock of it has left his mind a blank."

"I wonder," said Debora slowly, "I wonder if Capper will ever speak!"

That thought had been in my mind too, but I had been too startled at what I had heard to speak of it. We left the matter where it was, and as the twilight was now coming on, came out of the hut and took our way by a circuitous route back towards the village. I took the girl to the inn, and left her in charge of the kindly landlady, giving the woman instructions that under no circumstances was she to let anyone know that the girl was there. I think the landlady scented a runaway match, for she smiled and nodded, and put a finger on her lips in token of silence.

Nothing happened, however, during that night; and in the morning quite early Debora stepped out of the little inn into the village street, and we went off happily together to the railway station. There, by an early market train, we got to London, coming to it just as all the people were pouring into the busy city for the day. I took Debora to a little, old-fashioned hotel that I had heard of near the Charterhouse, and left her there while I set off on a mission of my own. I had determined that, before ever I saw my uncle, or availed myself of his promise to look after the girl, I would go again to that solitary house in which Gregory Pennington had died, and would find the man Capper. For now I had the threads of the thing strongly in my fingers; I knew from what point to start, and I could put certain questions to Capper that he might be able to answer.

I came to the house soon after mid-day, and opened the gate in the fence and went in. Lest I should be refused admission for any reason, I determined that I would, if possible, slip into the house by the back way; and I made my way cautiously round there. So it happened that I came in sight of that open window, on the window-seat of which I had left Mr. George Rabbit reclining while he kept guard over the little grey-headed man called Capper. And I was in time to see a curious scene enacted before my eyes at that very window, just as though it had been a scene in some play. I was hidden among the trees, so that no one saw me, but I could both see and hear distinctly.

Standing with his back to the window, and with his arms folded, was George Rabbit, and his attitude was evidently one of defiance. Leaning against the side of the window-frame, watching him, and glancing also at someone else within the room, stood Capper, with nervous fingers plucking at his lips, and with that vacant smile upon his face. The man Rabbit was speaking.

"I know too much to be turned aht, or to be told to do this or to do that. I'm much too fly for that, guv'nor, an' so I tell yer. Money's my game, 'an money I mean to 'ave."

The voice that replied, to my very great surprise, was the voice of Bardolph Just. "We'll see about that, you dog!" he shouted. And with that I ran round at once through the back door, into the house, and made for the room.

I darted in, in time to see the doctor with a heavy stick raised in his right hand; he was in the very act of bringing it down with all his force, in a very passion of rage, on the head of George Rabbit. The man put up his arm in time to save his head, and drew back with a cry of pain, and stopped dead on seeing me. The doctor swung round, too, and lowered the stick.

But the strangest thing of all was the sight of the man Capper. As that blow had fallen, his eyes had been fixed upon the doctor; and I had seen a great change come suddenly over his face. It was as if the man had been turned into another being, so strangely had the face lighted up. He gave what was nothing more nor less than a scream, and leapt straight for the doctor. As the doctor swung about at the sound, the man Capper caught him by the throat, and held on, and swayed about with him, and seemed to be striving to choke him.

"Murder!" he shrieked, and again yet louder, "Murder!"

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE ZABDIEL IN PIOUS MOOD.

Dr. Bardolph Just, big, powerful man though he was, seemed practically helpless in the grasp of William Capper, who hung on to him, and worried him as some small terrier might worry a dog of larger size. Moreover, the doctor was hampered with his broken wrist; while George Rabbit and myself, for the matter of that, were so thunderstruck by the sudden onslaught of that mild, quiet, little creature, who had hitherto seemed so harmless, that we stood staring and doing nothing. And the doctor battled with his one free arm, and shouted to us for help.

"Pull him off, can't you?" he shouted. "Devil take the man! what is he at? Let go, I say; do you want to kill me?"

By that time I had recovered my senses so far as to fling myself upon Capper, and to drag him off by main force. So soon as I had got hold of him, he seemed to collapse in the strangest way—dropped into my arms, and shuddered, and stared from one to the other of us, as though awakening from some terrible nightmare. His teeth were chattering, and he looked wildly round, as though wondering what had been happening.

The doctor was arranging his collar and tie, and looking amazedly at Capper. "What's the matter with the fellow?" he panted. "What set him off like that?" He stamped his foot, and looked at the trembling man. "Answer me—you! What roused you like that?"

Capper shook his head in a dull way; then pressed the palms of his hands to his forehead. "I—I don't know," he answered, in something of the same fashion in which I had always heard him answer questions; "I didn't mean—"

His voice trailed off, and he stood there, a drooping, pathetic figure, staring at the floor. For my part, I could not take my eyes from the man. I found myself wondering whether that outburst had been the mere frenzy of a moment, or whether behind it lay something I did not then understand. In the silence that had fallen upon us the doctor looked at the man in a queer, puzzled way; I thought he seemed to be asking himself the same questions that were in my own mind. After a moment or two he turned his glance resentfully on me, seeming to become aware, for the first time, of my presence.

"And what brings *you* here?" he demanded. I was at a loss how to answer him. I had had a vague hope that I might be able to see Capper alone, or, at all events, only in the company of George Rabbit; I could not now declare my intention of questioning the man. I resorted to subterfuge; I shrugged my shoulders and made what reply I could.

"What is a poor wretch to do who has no home, no money, and no prospects? You turn me out of one place, so I come to the other."

"Well, you can leave this one, too," he replied sourly. "How did you get back from Essex? Did you tramp?"

I saw at once that he must have left the place and come to London on the previous day; it was obvious that he knew nothing of Debora's disappearance. Nor had he yet discovered the theft of that old-fashioned watch. He could have no suspicion that I had money in my pockets. I answered as carelessly as I could.

"Yes," I said, "I tramped most of the way. I should not have come in now, but that I saw some trouble going on with Rabbit here, and thought I might be of use."

"I can look after meself, thank you for nothink," retorted Mr. Rabbit politely. "Seems to me that I'm given all the dirty work to do, an' I don't git nuffink but thumps for it. If it 'adn't bin fer that plucky little chap there, I shouldn't 'ave stood much charnce," he added, scowling at the doctor. "He went for you a fair treat, guv'nor."

"You must have made him precious fond of you, to take your part like that," said the doctor, with a glance at Capper. "Did he think I was going to kill you?"

I saw that Capper was standing in the old attitude, with his hands hanging beside him, and his eyes cast to the floor; then I had a curious feeling that he was listening. So still was he, and so meek and broken, that it seemed incredible that but a minute or two before he had been tearing like a demon at the throat of the doctor. Now, while he stood there, he suddenly began to speak, in a quiet, level voice, but little raised above a whisper.

"I hope, sir, that you won't send me away," he said. "I forgot myself; I wouldn't harm you for the world, sir. If you will let me stay—if you will let me keep near you—if I might even be your servant? I don't want to be sent away from you, sir."

All this without raising his head, and with the air of a shamed boy pleading for forgiveness. It was the more pitiful because of the meekness of the figure, and of the thin grey hair that covered the man's head. To do him justice, the doctor behaved magnanimously.

"Well, we'll say no more about it, Capper," he replied. "Perhaps you're not quite yourself. We'll overlook it. For the rest, you shall remain here, if you behave yourself. You seem a good, faithful sort of fellow, but you mustn't fly into passions because rogues like this get what they deserve." He pointed sternly to George Rabbit.

"Rogues!" Mr. Rabbit looked properly indignant, and lurched forward from the window towards the doctor. "I ain't so sure as you've put that boot on the right leg, guv'nor," he said. "I've 'ad enough of this 'ere—this keepin' me mouf shut, an' not gettin' anyfink for it. Wot's the good of five quid—you can on'y dream abaht it w'en it's gorn. I'm goin' to take wot I know w'ere I shall git summink for it—w'ere I shall be paid 'andsome, an' patted on the back, an' told I'm a good boy. I'm a honest man—that's wot I am; an' I've 'ad enough of seem' jail-birds walking about in good clobber, an' 'ighly respectable gents givin' 'em shelter, an' payin' me not 'alf enough not to blab. Yus, Mr. Norton 'Yde, it's you what I'm talkin' about—an' 'ere goes to make an endin' of it!"

Before anyone could stop him he had made a run for the window, and had vaulted over the sill,

and was gone. I made a step to go after him, but the doctor detained me with a gesture.

"It's no use; if he has made up his mind to speak you can't stop him. Take my advice, and keep away from here, and away from Green Barn, too. There's a chance, of course, that the man will say nothing; he may come whining back here, to try and get money out of me. In any case, Mr. Norton Hyde, I've had enough of the business; you can shift for yourself. It may interest you to know that I am winding up my affairs, and I'm going abroad. And in this instance I shall not go alone."

I could afford not to notice that sneer, because I knew that I held the winning hand, and that Debora was mine. So I made no answer; I knew that there were cards I could play when the time came—cards of which he knew nothing. My only doubt was as to the man Capper; because, if Debora's suspicions were true, it was vitally necessary that we should get hold of the man, and should question him. More than that, I knew that Debora had in her the spirit to move heaven and earth over the matter of her dead friend, Gregory Pennington, to discover the manner of his death.

Yet here was William Capper, for some strange reason, swearing devotion to the doctor, and begging to be allowed to remain with him. Even if I could get hold of the man, I knew that in his present state of mind I could do no good with him; he might in all innocence go to the doctor, and tell him what my questions had been. There was nothing for it but to leave the matter alone, and to return to Debora. Accordingly I took my leave, if such a phrase can be used to describe my going.

"I shan't trouble you again," I said to Bardolph Just. "For your own sake, I think you will do your best to ensure that the secret of Gregory Pennington's death is kept." I glanced quickly at the man Capper as I spoke; but my words seemed to have no effect upon him, save that once again I thought he seemed to be listening, and that, too, with some intentness. But I felt, even in that, that I might be wrong.

"What do you mean by that?" snapped the doctor, turning upon me in answer to my remark.

"You told me once that you were anxious to keep the matter a secret, in order to avoid giving pain, and to prevent any scandal touching your house," I answered steadily. "What other meaning should I have?"

"None, of course," he answered, and looked at me broodingly for a moment, as though striving to see behind my words. "However, in that matter you are right; I don't want that business all raked over again. For both our sakes, you'd better keep out of the way of Mr. George Rabbit."

There was nothing else to be done, and without any formal words I turned and walked out of the house by the way I had come. I felt that I had finished with Dr. Bardolph Just; I could afford to laugh at him, and could leave him to settle matters with George Rabbit.

I went back to that hotel near the Charterhouse in which I had left Debora; there were many things about which I must talk to her. In the first place, we had to consider the great question of ways and means; above all, we had to remember—or perhaps I should say that *I* had to remember, for she was utterly trustful of me—that she was in my hands, and that I had to be careful of her until such time as I could make her my wife. I had a sort of feeling that I could not go on in this indefinite way, leaving her in hotels and such-like places. Besides, I felt absolutely certain that the one person to whom in my dilemma I must apply was my Uncle Zabdiel, for had I not already prepared him for her coming?

While I had no great faith in Uncle Zabdiel, I yet felt that, from sheer dread of me, he would hesitate before playing tricks. In his eyes I was a most abandoned villain, capable of anything; he had hanging over him that threat of mine to kill him—a threat which would remain a threat only, but a very powerful deterrent if he had any hopes of betraying me.

This scheme I now laid before Debora, telling her the pros and cons of it all, and trying to induce her to see it as I saw it. There was but one flaw in it, and that was that Martha Leach had been to my uncle, and would therefore know where he was to be found. Yet, on the other hand, I felt that that made for safety, because the very daring of the scheme gave it the greatest chance of success. No one would dream that I should go back to the house that had seen the beginning of all my misfortunes, still less would anyone dream of looking for Debora Matchwick there.

"You see, my dearest girl," I pointed out to Debora, "my money won't last for ever; already it is dwindling alarmingly. I see no prospect of getting any more at present, unless I hold horses, or sell matches in the street. More than that, I believe that I have my uncle so much under control, and so much in dread of me, that he will do nothing against me; and that great house of his is a very warren of old rooms, in which you can safely hide. More than that, I think there is a prospect that Uncle Zabdiel will help me; he seemed to regard me in quite another light when I saw him recently."

In all this it will be seen, I fear, that my original simplicity had not entirely been knocked out of me by rough contact with the world; it will also be seen that I had a colossal belief in my own powers of persuasion, moral and otherwise. Perhaps also it is scarcely necessary for me to say that Debora very willingly believed in me, and seemed to regard my uncle as a man who might be won round to a better belief in the goodness of human nature. I did not contradict that suggestion, but I had my doubts.

I thought it best, however, to let Uncle Zabdiel know of his intended visitor; it would never do to take him by surprise. With many promises of speedy return I set off then and there for that house near Barnet, wherein so many years of my own life had been passed. I was feeling more cheerful than I had done for many a long day; I began to realise that perhaps, after all, my troubles were coming to an end, and some small measure of happiness was to be mine. Moreover, despite all my difficulties, it has to be remembered that I was young and in love; and, I suppose, under those circumstances mere outside troubles sit lightly on one's shoulders.

I rang at the bell for a long time before anyone answered, and then it was the grim old woman who came in by the day to look after my uncle who answered it. I feared for a moment that she might recognise me, but she was evidently one of those people to whom the mere duties of the day are everything; it is probable that had I been the Archbishop of Canterbury in full rig she would have taken no notice of my appearance. I asked for Mr. Blowfield, and was left in the dark hall while she went in search of him. I gave my name as John New.

In a minute or two she came back, and beckoned to me in a spiritless way, and without speaking. I went at once by the way I knew so well into my uncle's room—that room that was half sitting-room and half office, and there discovered him standing before the empty fireplace waiting for me. He was not alone in the room; that unfortunate youth, Andrew Ferkoe, was seated in my old place, at my old desk, scribbling away as if for dear life. Even before my uncle spoke I intercepted a furtive look out of the tail of the youth's eye; I strove to give him a warning glance in response.

"Good morning, Mr. New," said my uncle, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone. "Glad to see you, I'm sure. Do you object to the presence of my clerk?"

"It is a matter of indifference to me, Mr. Blowfield," I replied. "Of course I should have preferred to have had a private interview with you, but if any words of mine on a previous occasion have made you cautious, by all means let him remain."

I saw that the old man was absolutely afraid of me; I guessed that he meant to keep Andrew Ferkoe there, to save even a threat of violence. At the same time I was relieved to see what I thought was a new and more kindly light in his eyes. I felt that he might, after all, prove to have a heart of flesh and blood, and that Debora might move it.

"Then you can go on with your work, Ferkoe," snapped my uncle; and the boy, whose pen had been straying, started violently, and went on writing again.

It was curious to note during our interview how frequently Andrew Ferkoe's pen stopped, and how his eyes slowly turned round to feast on me, and how, at a movement from his master, he brought the pen back to its proper place and started writing again. I became quite fascinated with watching him.

"Sit down, my dear New, sit down," said my uncle smoothly. "Tell me what I can do for you; I've been expecting to see you."

I sat down, and asked permission to smoke. My uncle grunted in response, and frowned; but I took the grunt for permission, and lighted a cigar. The old man gave a plaintive cough, as though suggesting that this was a martyrdom to which he must submit, and subsided into his own chair. I answered his question.

"I want you to do what you promised to do, Mr. Blowfield," I said.

"I promised under threats," he broke in grudgingly. "And a promise extorted under threats isn't binding."

"This one's got to be," I intimated sharply. "I want the young lady of whom I spoke to come here, and to find a refuge in this house; I want her to come to-day. I have not the means to keep her, and she is in danger of being traced by those who are her enemies. I have chosen you," I added, with a touch of sarcasm I could not avoid, "because I know your kindness of heart, and I know how eager you are to do me a service."

He grinned a little maliciously, then chuckled softly, and rubbed his bony hands together. "Very well, call it a bargain," he said. "After all, I'm quite pleased, my dear boy, to be able to help you; if I seem to have a gruff exterior, it's only because I find so many people trying to get the better of me."

I saw Andrew Ferkoe slowly raise his head, and stare at my uncle with a dropping jaw, as though he had suddenly discovered a ghost. My uncle, happening to catch him at it, brought his fist down with a bang upon the desk that caused the youth to spring an inch or two from his stool, and to resume his writing in such a scared fashion that I am convinced he must have written anything that first came into his mind.

"And what the devil is it to do with you?" roared my uncle, quite in his old fashion. "What do you think I pay you for, and feed you for, and give you comfortable lodging for? One of these days, Ferkoe, I'll turn you out into the world, and let you starve. Or I'll have you locked up, as I once had a graceless nephew of mine locked up," he added, with a contortion of his face in my direction that I imagine to have been intended for a wink.

The boy stole a look at me, and essayed a grin on his own account; evidently he congratulated

himself on his secret knowledge of who I really was. Uncle Zabdiel, having relieved himself with his outburst, now turned to me again, still keeping up that pretty fiction of my being but a casual acquaintance, knowing nothing of any graceless nephew who had been very properly punished in the past.

"He's a thankless dog, this clerk of mine," he growled, with a vicious look at the boy. "He must have starved but for me, and see what thanks I get. Well, as I was saying, I shall be very pleased—delighted, in fact—to welcome the young lady here. I've got a soft corner in my heart for everybody, Mr. New, if I'm only treated fairly. I don't like girls as a rule; I've no place for 'em in my life; but I've made up my mind to make the best of it. You see, I haven't very long to live—not as long as I should like; and I understand you've got to be so very particular in doing the right sort of thing towards the end. Not that I've done anything particularly to be ashamed of," he added hastily, "but a great many people have made it their business to speak ill of me."

"It's a censorious world," I reminded him.

"It is, my dear boy, it is," he replied. "Besides," he went on, lowering his voice a little, "I've dreamt three nights running that I went up into my old room, and saw myself lying dead—not dead as you described—but all broken and bloody." He shuddered, and sucked in his breath hard for a moment, and glanced behind him.

I did not mind encouraging that thought, because it was all to my advantage; I knew that unless he remained properly frightened there would be small chance of his keeping faith with me in the matter of Debora. Therefore I said nothing now. But once again I saw the youth at the desk raise his head, and stare at the old man in that startled fashion, and then drop his eyes suddenly to his work.

"Not a pleasant dream—not a pleasant dream, by any means," muttered my uncle, getting up and striding about. "I lay on the floor, with the bed clothes pulled across me, as if to hide me. And I was all broken and bloody!"

"And you've dreamed that three times?" I asked mercilessly. "That's unlucky."

"Why, what do you mean?" he whispered in a panic, as he stopped and looked round at me.

"Oh! they say if you dream a thing three times, it's bound to come true," I said.

"Stuff and nonsense!" he ejaculated. "Dreams go always by contraries; everybody knows that. I shouldn't have mentioned the thing, only I can't somehow get it out of my head. It was just as though I were another person; I stood there looking down at myself. There, there, let's forget it. In all probability, if I do this thing for you, out of pure kindness of heart, I shall live quite a long time, and die naturally a good many years hence. Now, when is the young lady coming?"

He seemed so perturbed by the recollection of his dream that he listened only in a dazed fashion while I told him that I intended to bring her there that day; he might expect her some time that evening. Andrew Ferkoe seemed interested at the news that anyone was coming to that dreary house; he kept on glancing up at me while I spoke. And it was necessary, too, for me to say all over again, because my uncle had evidently not been listening.

"Yes, yes, yes, I understand!" he said, rousing himself at last. "Besides, it'll be better to have someone else in the house—safer for me, you understand. Nobody will dare come to the place if they know that I'm not a lonely old man, with only a fool of a boy in the house with him—a boy that you can't wake for love or money."

I suppressed a grin. My experience of Andrew Ferkoe had been that he woke rather too easily. I rose to take my leave, and Uncle Zabdiel, in his anxiety to please me, came out into the hall with me, and seemed inclined to detain me even longer.

"I'll be very good to her," he said; then, suddenly breaking off, he gripped my arm, and pointed up the dark, uncarpeted stairs behind us. "You remember my old room," he whispered. "Well, I saw the room, and everything in it, quite clearly, three separate times, and I lying there——"

"You're thinking too much about it," I broke in hastily. For his face was ghastly. "You be kind to Debora, and you'll find she'll soon laugh some of your fears out of you. Good-bye for the present; you'll see us both later in the day."

He shook my hand quite earnestly, and let me out of the house. I saw him, as I had seen him before, standing in the doorway, peering out at me; in that moment I felt a little sorry for him. So much he had missed—so much he had lost or never known; and now, towards the end of his days, he was racked by fears of that death that he knew must be approaching rapidly.

I started back for London, meaning to fetch Debora to my uncle's house that night. I was fortunate enough not to have to wait long at the station for a train, and I presently found myself in an empty compartment. I was tired out, and excited with the events of the day. I settled myself in a corner, and closed my eyes, as the train sped on its way. And presently, while I sat there, I became aware of a most extraordinary commotion going on in the compartment on the other side of the partition against which I leaned. There was a noise as of the stamping of feet, and shouts and cries—altogether a hideous uproar.

I thought at first that it must be some drunken men, uproarious after a debauch; but I presently came to the conclusion that some severe struggle was going on in the next compartment; I

distinctly heard cries for help. I leaned out of the window, in the hope that I might be able to see into the next carriage; then, on an impulse, I opened the door, and got out on to the footboard. It was not a difficult matter, because the train was travelling comparatively slow. I closed the door of the compartment I had been in, and stepped along the footboard to the next. Clinging on there, I looked in, and beheld an extraordinary sight.

Two men were battling fiercely in the carriage; and I saw that the further door of the carriage was open. As the men wrenched and tugged at each other, I could not for a moment or two see their faces; but I could make out clearly that the smaller man of the two was working strenuously to force the other man out on to the line through the open door. I saw, too, that the bigger man appeared to be using only one arm to defend himself; and it was suddenly borne in upon me that I knew with certainty who the two men were. I tore open the door on my side, and slipped into the carriage, and shut the door again. Then I flung myself upon the smaller man, who was no other than William Capper.

As it happened, I was only just in time. The other man had been driven to the open door, until he was absolutely half in and half out; he had dug his nails into the cushions on one side, in a desperate effort to save himself from falling. And as I pulled Capper off, and flung him to the other end of the carriage, I naturally pulled his intended victim with him—and that intended victim was Dr. Bardolph Just!

How narrow his escape had been was brought home to me the next moment, when, as I leaned out to close the door, another train tore past on the next track, going in the opposite direction. I banged the door, and stood against it, and looked at the two men.

The doctor had sunk down into a corner, and was nursing his wounded arm, and staring in a frightened way at Capper. Capper, I noticed, had suddenly lost all his frenzy, precisely in the same fashion as he had lost it on that other occasion when he had attacked the same man. He now sat in the corner into which I had flung him, with his head bowed, and his hands plucking at his lips, exactly in the attitude of a naughty boy who had been caught in some wickedness and stopped. He glanced at me furtively, but said nothing.

"He—he tried—tried to kill me!" panted the doctor. "He tried—tried to throw me out of the train! You saw for yourself!"

"But why?" I asked. "What had you done?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing!" he stammered, striving to rearrange his dress and to smooth his hair. "He suddenly said something—and then opened the door—and sprang at me."

"But what did he say?" I insisted. And it was curious that we both spoke of the man at the other end of the carriage as someone not responsible for what he had done.

"Never mind what he said!" exclaimed the doctor pettishly. "You just came in time. He'd have had me out in another moment."

In the surprise of his escape, the doctor did not seem astonished at finding me there so opportunely he merely looked at the dejected Capper in that frightened way, and kept the greatest possible distance from him.

"Why do you take the man about with you, if he's liable to these fits?" I asked.

"I don't take him about!" he exclaimed. "He follows me. I can't get rid of him. He sticks to my heels like a dog. I don't like it; one of these days it may happen that there's no one there in time—and that'll be the end of the matter." All this in a whisper, as he leaned forward towards where I sat.

"Give him the slip," I suggested; and now I watched the doctor's face intently.

"Don't I tell you I can't," he snapped at me. "Besides, I don't want to lose sight of him; I'm sorry for the poor old fellow. He'd only drift into some madhouse or workhouse infirmary. I don't know what to do."

The doctor was dabbling nervously at his forehead with a handkerchief; he was in a very sweat of terror. And at the further end of the carriage—huddled up there, listening—sat the little grey-haired man, like some grim Fate that must dog the steps of the other man to an end which no one could see. A sudden ghastly theory had entered into my mind; I determined to probe the matter a little further.

"You suggest," I said in a whisper, "that he has twice tried to kill you; surely it is an easy matter to give him into the hands of the police? If he's insane, he'll be properly looked after; if he is not, he will be properly punished. And you will be safe."

Bardolph Just looked out of the window, and slowly shook his head. "You don't understand; I can't do that," he replied. "I can't explain; there's a reason."

We left the matter at that, and presently, when the train drew into the London station, we all got out. The doctor and I walked away side by side, and I knew that Capper was following. I knew something else, too—that I must get away as quickly as possible, back to Debora. For I realised that as yet the doctor had not been informed that Debora was missing from Green Barn.

"Well, you don't want me any more," I said to him, stopping and turning about. "I'll take my

leave."

"Look here!" he exclaimed, suddenly seizing me with his uninjured hand, and giving a sideways glance at Capper, "I'll forget everything and forgive everything if you'll only stick to me. I don't want to be left alone with this man."

"I have work of my own to do," I answered him, "and my way is not your way. Pull yourself together, man; you're in London, among crowds. What harm can a feeble old creature like that do to you?"

"You've seen for yourself—twice," he whispered. "I'll do anything you like—pay you anything you like!"

I shook myself free. "It's impossible," I said; and a moment later I was walking rapidly away; I had no desire that the doctor should follow me.

Looking back, I saw the man with his arm in a sling going at a great rate across the station, and as he went he glanced back over his shoulder. And always behind him, going at a little trot to keep up with him, went William Capper, not to be shaken off.

I found Debora awaiting me, but I said nothing to her of my startling encounter in the train. I only told her that all was ready for her reception at the house of Uncle Zabdiel, and we set off at once, after settling the score at the hotel. Our journey was without incident, and in due course I rang the bell at my uncle's gate, and saw the door open presently to receive the girl. I went in with her for the necessary introductions.

To my delight I found Uncle Zabdiel rubbing his hands, and evidently pleased to have her there. He went so far as to imprint a cold salute on her cheek, and even to touch her under her soft rounded chin with his bony finger.

"It's a pretty bird you've captured," he said, grimacing at me. "I'll take care of her, never fear."

I thanked him, and then told him of my intention to seek a lodging elsewhere. He seemed surprised, as did Debora. I merely told him that I had business to attend to, and that I could not very well be so far from London for the next few days at least. My real reason was, however, a very different one.

I had made up my mind to pursue this matter of Capper to the very end; the thing fascinated me, and I could not let it alone. So that, after I had seen the dark house swallow up my darling, I went off, designing to find a lodging for myself between that house and the one in which Bardolph Just lived. It was very late, but I was not over particular as to where I slept, and I knew that I could easily find a room.

But I was restless, and had many things to think about; so that it ended finally in my walking that long distance back to the doctor's house, and finding myself, something to my surprise, outside its gates at a little after two o'clock in the morning. All the house was silent, and the windows darkened. I was turning away, when I almost stumbled over someone sitting on the high bank at the side of the road opposite the gate. As I drew back with a muttered apology the man looked up, and I knew him.

It was William Capper. In the very instant of his raising his head I had seen a quick bright look of intelligence come over his face, but now the mask he habitually wore seemed to be drawn down over his features, and he smiled in that vacuous way I had before noted.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

"He's turned me out," he said, in the old feeble voice. "I don't know why." I saw his plucking fingers go up to his lips again, as he feebly shook his head.

"Yes, you do," I said sternly. "Come, Capper, you've nothing to fear from me; why don't you speak the truth? You've twice tried to kill the man. What is your reason?"

He shook his head, and smiled at me in the same vacant fashion. "I don't know—I don't understand," he said. "So much that I've forgotten—so much that I can't remember, and never shall remember. Something snapped—here."

He touched his forehead, and shook his head in that forlorn way; and presently sank down on the bank again, and put his head in his hands, and seemed to go to sleep.

When I came away at last, in despair of finding out anything from him, he was sitting in the same attitude, and might have appeared, to any casual observer, as a poor, feeble old creature with a clouded mind. Yet I knew with certainty that something had happened to the man, and that he was alive and alert; I knew, too, that grimly enough, and for some reason unknown to me, he had set out to kill Dr. Bardolph Just. And I knew that he would succeed.

CHAPTER XII.

AN APPOINTMENT WITH DEATH.

It will readily be understood that, by the movements of the various players in the game in which, in a sense, I was merely a pawn, I had been placed in such a position that I was to an extent no longer master of my own actions. I had been compelled, by the turn of events, to place Debora in the hands of my uncle, and I knew that at any moment now news might come from Green Barn that the girl was gone. I marvelled that that news had not arrived ere this.

Upon that latter point the only conjecture I could arrive at was that the woman Martha Leach had not yet dared to send her news to Bardolph Just, and in that act of cowardice she would probably be supported by Harvey Scoffold. Moreover, I knew that the doctor was too fully occupied with his own fears concerning the man Capper to give much attention to anything else.

Nor, on the other hand, did I feel that I had advanced matters as rapidly as I could have wished. True, I had got Debora out of the hands of the doctor and Harvey Scoffold; true again, I had hidden her in the house of Uncle Zabdiel. But there the matter stood, and I was relying, in a sense, solely on the help of one whom every instinct taught me to distrust: I mean, of course, Zabdiel Blowfield. Moreover, I was no further advanced in regard to any future status on my own account. I had no prospect of making my way in the world, or of doing anything to help the girl I loved. It seemed as though I stood in the midst of a great tangle, twisting this way and that in my efforts to free myself, and getting more hopelessly involved with each movement.

In my doubts and perplexities I turned naturally to Debora; I may be said to have haunted that house wherein she lived. Uncle Zabdiel appeared to be very friendly, and for two days I came and went as I liked, seeing Debora often. And even in that short time I came to see that the deadly old house was having its effect upon the girl, just as it had upon every one that came within its walls; she began to droop, and to wear a frightened look, and not all my reassurances would bring any brightness into her eyes.

"I'm afraid of the place," she whispered the second day, clinging to me. "That tall boy creeps about like a ghost—"

"And looks like one," I broke in with a laugh. "He's the best fellow in the world, is Andrew Ferkoe; you've nothing to fear from him."

"And Mr. Blowfield: he looks at me so strangely, and is altogether so queer," went on Debora. "Last night he begged me to sit up with him in his study until quite late—kept on asking me if I didn't hear this noise and that, and was I sure that nothing stirred in the shadows in the corner? I felt at last as if I should go mad if I wasn't allowed to scream."

"My darling girl, it won't be very long now before I'm able to take you away," I said, more hopefully than I felt. "My uncle's a good fellow, in his way, but he has lived a lonely life so long that he's not like other men. Have a little more patience, Debora dear; the sun will shine upon us both before long, and we shall come out of the shadows."

"But there is something else," she said. "I was in my room last night, at the top of the house here, sitting in the dark, thinking. Everything was very silent; it was as if all the world lay asleep. And then I saw a curious thing—something that frightened me."

"What was it?" I asked quickly.

"On the other side of the road facing the house is a long wall," she began in a whisper, "and just outside the gate, as you know, is a lamp-post. From where I sat in my window I could see that the wall was lit up, and across it again and again, while I watched for more than an hour, went two shadows."

"What sort of shadows?" I asked, as lightly as I could; yet I'll own I was startled.

"Shadows of men," she replied. "It was evident that they were walking up and down in the road, watching the house. The shadows were curious, because one was a very big one, walking stiffly, while the other was small, and seemed to creep along behind the first. And I know whose the shadows were—at least, I know one of them."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I know the one man was Dr. Just," she answered me confidently, with a little quick nod.

"My dearest girl, how could you possibly know that?" I asked.

"Because the man walked with an easy stride, and yet his shadow showed only one arm swinging," she said. "Don't you see what I mean? The other arm was fastened to him in some way, held close against him."

I whistled softly, and looked into her eyes. "I see," I said; "that would be the sling. Now, what in the world has brought him here?"

"He's come to find you," said Debora quickly. "He will have heard from Green Barn that I am gone, and that you are gone; he will guess that if he finds you he may find me. The reason for his waiting outside would be that he might intercept you going in or coming out."

"There's something in that," I admitted. "However, of one thing I am certain in my own mind. Uncle Zabdiel won't give you up, nor will he admit the man into the house if he can avoid it. I'm not taking any stand by Uncle Zabdiel's integrity," I added. "I am only certain that he has a wholesome dread of me, and will not offend me. Rest easy; nothing will happen to you, my

darling."

Just before my departure I was met by my uncle at the door of his study. He mysteriously beckoned me in, and closed the door. Then, something to my surprise, he buttonholed me, and pulled me further into the room, and stared up into my face with a pathetic expression of entreaty in his eyes.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"My dear boy—my only nephew—I want you to believe that I'm being honest with you as far as I can; I don't want you to judge me hastily," he began. "People get such wrong notions in their heads, and you might hear something that would bring you rushing back here, and would leave me no time for explanation. Will you believe what I'm going to tell you?"

He was fumbling me all over. I saw that he had been troubled by something, and that his dread of me had been strongly revived. I was playing for too great a stake then to make the blunder of being smooth with him. I frowned and folded my arms, and looked down at him sternly.

"Come, out with it!" I said.

"There, now you're beginning to lose your temper before ever I've begun to say a word," he said, backing away from me. "Do be reasonable!"

"I don't know what the word is yet," I answered him. "Let's hear it."

"Well, to put it briefly, that woman Leach has been here." He blurted out the words, and stood looking at me as though wondering how I should take the news.

"Well, what then?" I asked him gravely. "What did you do?"

"Everything you would have wished me to do," he replied quickly. "I told her nothing; I sent her away again."

"Did she enquire about me, or about Debora?" I asked.

"About you first, and then about Debora," he whispered. "But, oh, I put her off the scent. I was sharp with her. I asked what sort of man she took me to be, to admit any minx to my house. And she went away, knowing nothing."

"That's good, and I'm very grateful to you," I assured him, now feeling that I could give him all my confidence. "They'll leave no stone unturned to get hold of the girl."

"They?" He looked at me questioningly.

"Yes, the woman as well as her master. I have just heard that Dr. Just has been seen hanging about outside the house late last night, with another man."

I saw his face blanch, I saw him moisten his lips with his tongue and clutch with one feeble hand at the back of his chair. I took no particular notice of that, although long after I wished I had done; I knew how easily startled he was.

"You say that two men—two men watched this house last night, very late?" he muttered.

"Yes," I answered carelessly. "And one of them at least—this Bardolph Just—will stick at nothing to get what he wants. He's of the sort that snaps his fingers at a small matter of death."

My Uncle Zabdiel twisted the chair round with a nervous movement, and sank into it. I saw that he was trembling from head to foot. He seemed to be brooding heavily upon something. Looking at him, I caught his eyes more than once wandering covertly in my direction.

"And you think that he would do anything to get hold of this girl?" he asked.

"There is not only the girl to be considered by him, but the very large fortune which belongs to her, and which he also wishes to get hold of. I tell you he will stick at nothing," I assured him earnestly.

"He will stick at nothing!" he echoed, drawing a deep breath.

"By the way, Uncle Zabdiel, have you been troubled with that dream of yours again?" I asked carelessly.

To my surprise he started to his feet with what was almost a cry. "No, no! why should I dream that again?" he stammered, staring at me. "Haven't I tried to forget it—haven't I persuaded myself that I had forgotten it. Oh, dear God! that these things should be sent to trouble a poor old man who has done his best always for everybody!" he moaned. "There, there—go away; leave me alone! I want time to think—or rather time not to think."

I went away and left him, closing the door after me. Just as I reached the hall door I came upon that tall youth, Andrew Ferkoe. He grinned amiably. A sudden thought occurring to me, I drew him aside, and whispered to him—

"Look here," I said, "I believe you're a friend of mine, aren't you?"

"Rather!" he said. "You're so wonderful; you've seen such things, and done such things."

"Never mind about that," I said hastily. "I want you to promise to come to me, if you think Miss Matchwick is in any danger, or if you think anyone is plotting against her. See, here is my address"—I scribbled it on a scrap of paper and thrust it into his hands—"and I shall rely upon you to be faithful, to her as well as to me. Will you?"

He seemed quite elated at his commission. "Do you really trust me?" he asked gleefully. "I'd do anything for you, and for her. I feel somehow that I'm getting braver and stronger. I shan't put up much longer with old Blowfield's bullying. I feel sometimes when I look at him that I could do murder!"

I laughed as I went out of the house. The idea of this weak-kneed, lanky youth, of all others, "doing murder" seemed too ridiculous. I went on my way feeling pretty well satisfied with the turn of events, and firmly convinced that the very fears under which Uncle Zabdiel laboured were the greatest safeguard Debora and I could have. Moreover, I had gained one other friend in that strange house, and that was Andrew Ferkoe.

My lodging was in a little house not very far, as you may have guessed, from that house belonging to Uncle Zabdiel in which Debora had so opportunely found shelter. On this particular evening I was in no hurry to retire to the one little room I had rented. On a sudden impulse I made up my mind that I would linger a little while in the neighbourhood, and would see, if possible, for myself whether or not those two shadows on the wall really belonged to the doctor and to William Capper. So I took up my station not very far from the house, but in a position from which I could observe it easily; and there I waited.

I will not describe my long wait, nor the shadows I saw, which might have been the shadows of the doctor and Capper, but which were not. I was disappointed fifty times at least, felt my heart jump as many times when two men, or even one man, came anywhere in my direction, or happened by the merest chance to glance towards that house. I had not fully made up my mind what to do should either man put in an appearance, and indeed I was saved the trouble of putting into execution any plan I might have evolved, by reason of the fact that no one I knew came near the house.

Once, it is true, from where I watched, I saw an upper window open, and the head of Uncle Zabdiel, like some extremely ugly gargoyle, obtrude itself into the night. I guessed, with an inward chuckle, that he might be looking for those shadows for which I also was on the watch. But soon afterwards that window was closed, and the house was wrapped in silence and darkness. I kept my vigil until something towards three in the morning, and then went off to my lodging. In five minutes I was undressed and in bed; the rest was a dreamless sleep.

Lest I should be watched, I determined that I would not go near Zabdiel Blowfield's house in daylight, or without taking due precautions. I thought it possible that the woman Martha Leach might make a further attempt, for the sake of her master, to discover something about me or about Debora. I determined that I would not play into their hands. I remembered what Bardolph Just had said about going abroad; I had great hopes that he might carry that into effect, and so rid us all of his presence. Perhaps in a saner moment I reflected that he was scarcely the type of man to give up the game so lightly; but then when one is in love one is usually optimistic. However, there was nothing for it but to wait, and to possess my soul in patience.

I was taking things very easily indeed that evening, lounging in the window of my room, and smoking, and looking at the early stars that were peeping out above me, when I became aware of a strange-looking figure coming slowly up the deserted little street. Without troubling very much about it, I became interested in the figure, which was that of a tall, ungainly young man, whose face and head, from my elevated position, were hidden by a hat which appeared to be many sizes too large for him. He was craning his neck this way and that, apparently looking for some particular house; every now and then he referred to a scrap of paper which he held in his fingers. I was watching him idly, when all at once I woke from my half-dream and started to my feet; with my hands leaning on the window-sill I stared down at him intently.

At that same moment he happened to look up towards me and I recognised him. It was Andrew Ferkoe. I waved my hand, and nodded to him, and with every extravagant sign of precaution he looked to right and to left, and then came to the door of the house. I ran down and admitted him myself; then I took him up to my room before permitting him to say a word. Once in the room, with the door shut, I saw to my horror that he was shaking from head to foot, and was alternately slapping his breast, and striving to get some words out.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Take your time about it; there's nothing to get excited about."

He gasped again in that inarticulate fashion once or twice; then he blurted out his message.

"She—she's gone!"

I pushed him into a chair and stood over him, with my hands on my hips, striving by my own steadiness to put some steadiness into him. For a time he only moaned, and shook his head and gaped at me, but at last, by dint of threats and even some coaxing, I got his story out of him.

"Early this morning old Blowfield sent me with a telegram addressed to a Dr. Just; it was written out on a piece of paper, and I had to copy it at the post-office. It was addressed to Dr. Just at a house in Highgate.

"Well, well, what did it say?" I asked impatiently.

"I'm coming to it as fast as I can," said Andrew Ferkoe resentfully. "You forget I ain't used to this sort of thing. It simply said, 'Come at once; can give you news of the runaway,' and it was signed 'Z. Blowfield,' with the address."

I strangled an oath in my throat; I vowed that Uncle Zabdiel should pay dearly for his treachery. "And what happened after that?" I demanded.

"About mid-day a tall, dark man drove up in a great hurry and asked for old Blowfield—at least, he asked for Mr. Blowfield," went on Ferkoe. "I was turned out of the room, but they talked together for a long time. Then the bell was rung, and I was told to go and find the young lady, and tell her she was wanted. After she'd gone into the room I did what I'd never done before," he added with a chuckle. "I listened outside."

"Good lad!" I murmured.

He went on again, seemingly elated at my praise of him. "They kept on talking, all three of them, and I heard the young lady say over and over again, 'I won't! I won't!' and the dark man kept on threatening, and saying what he would do, and old Blowfield kept on telling her that it was for the best, and that she'd better go back, though I don't know in the least where he meant her to go. The door was open just the least little bit, and I saw and heard everything, because old Blowfield would never dream that I should dare to do a thing like that."

"You're very slow!" I cried impatiently. "Tell me what happened then; what did the young lady do? Did she refuse to leave the house?"

"Yes, she kept on saying she wouldn't. And I'm being as fast as I can, only there's such a lot to tell. I should get on faster if you weren't so impatient."

I subdued my wrath as best I could. I decided to let him go on in his own fashion.

"And then the funniest thing happened," he said, sitting upright in his chair in his excitement, and staring at me round-eyed. "The dark man—Dr. Just, I suppose—began to spread out his hands—like this—he made a curious fluttering movement with his hands before my face, so grotesque a movement that I should have laughed under any other circumstances—"and began to talk in a very low, smooth voice to the young lady. At first she cried out to him to keep away from her, and covered up her face with her hands, but after a time she dropped the hands and stared at him. I saw her drop down into a chair and shut her eyes. He never left off talking; he seemed to be telling her something she was to do. He spoke so softly that I couldn't catch everything, but he said something about a carriage, and about four o'clock in the afternoon. Then suddenly he clapped his hands, and she jumped up, and looked at him as if she was frightened."

"You dolt!" I shouted, shaking him. "This devilish business happened at mid-day, and here's night, and you've only just arrived to tell the tale."

"It wasn't my fault," he whimpered. "You ought to know what that house is like; I'm watched every minute. I tried over and over again to slip out, and couldn't; I only managed it, as it was, after it got dark. I've done my best."

"I beg your pardon," I said penitently. "I'm quite sure you have. Now tell me what else happened."

"Dr. Just went away, and the young lady went off to her room. I went back to work, and old Blowfield kept on walking up and down the room, and muttering to himself. Once he stopped, in order to ask me about you. He wanted to know if I'd seen you."

"Yes, I should think he would want to know that!" I muttered between my teeth.

"He said if you came near the house I wasn't to let you in; I was to go for the police, or do something else to keep you away. Above all, I was to give him warning, so that he could lock himself in somewhere."

I laughed grimly. I knew that I had already secured the allegiance of this poor warder, and could get at my man when I wanted to do so. I urged him to go on with his tale.

"Then, just as four o'clock was striking, and I was working, old Blowfield gave me an awful fright; he suddenly put his hand on my shoulder and whispered in my ear. 'Do you hear that?' he said; and I wondered what he meant. And then I heard someone coming downstairs, singing as they came."

I could scarcely contain myself, but I determined I would wait for the end. In his excitement Andrew Ferkoe had risen to his feet, and was staring at me in the wildest fashion.

"Old Blowfield went to the door and opened it, and I had a look out, too. And there was the young lady," he went on, lowering his voice, "going along the hall, and taking not the slightest notice of anybody. She opened the door, and left it open; she walked across the garden; she opened the gate, and left that open. Old Blowfield and me walked after her, never so much as saying a word. There was a carriage waiting at the gate, and she got into it and shut the door; then the carriage drove away. And all the time she had never said a word. Old Blowfield laughed, and shut the door, and went back to his room, and I went back too. And that's the end of it."

I sank down into a chair, and hid my face in my hands, and gave myself up to my own bitter thoughts. What power had I against such arts as these? What could I do, when a man could so

steal the very soul out of a woman and make her do his bidding in this fashion? What might not have happened in all these hours during which I, drugged into a false security, had stayed in this place, doing nothing but dream dreams? I sprang to my feet at last, for I felt that this was no time for idle dreaming. The time had come for action, and I would step now into the matter, with no thought for myself, or for what might happen to me. It must be Debora first, and Debora always; I would save her, if I dipped my hands in blood to do it.

"What are you going to do?" asked Andrew, staring at me.

"I don't know yet," I answered him. "It depends on whether I can get what I want by peaceful means; I'm going to try that first. After that, I'm going to surprise certain friends of ours—give them such a shaking-up as they'll remember to the end of their days."

"And what are you going to do to old Blowfield?" he asked; and I thought I saw in his face that he would relish anything that might happen to his master.

"What I'm going to do to old Blowfield, as you call him, won't bear thinking about," I said. "Now, I don't want you to get into trouble; you'd better cut off. I'm very grateful to you; I'm sorry if I seemed impatient. Good-night!"

He gripped my hand, and went downstairs. I followed him and let him out into the silent street; saw him flutter off round the corner like a long, awkward ghost. Then I closed the door and went upstairs again.

I own I was puzzled what to do. My own crude methods had failed hitherto; I must, if possible, meet subtlety with subtlety. Of what use was it for me to induce Debora to come willingly to me, if all my plans could be upset in a moment by Dr. Just, as they had been this day? Yet I knew that I must first go to that house in which she was imprisoned; my business with Zabdiel Blowfield could wait, I told myself fiercely.

I got a tram down to Highgate, cursing its slowness all the way; and so at last stood outside the house, not having yet made up my mind what to do. I opened the gate cautiously, and went into the grounds. I saw that the house, so far as the front, at least, was concerned, was in darkness. I knew that it would be madness to attempt to obtain admittance in the usual fashion; I determined to break into the house, as I had done once before.

I was on the very point of selecting my window, when I heard a rustling among the leaves close to me; I drew back and waited. There came into sight out of the shadows William Capper; but not the William Capper I seemed to have known. For this man stood alert and ready, and the face I saw in the light of the stars was the keen, watchful face I had surprised before. He seemed to be waiting for something; he, too, was watching the house. Determined to put the matter to the test, I stepped out quickly from my hiding-place and confronted him.

The instant change in the man was surprising; but this time it did not deceive me. I gripped the now drooping figure by the shoulder and shook him. He looked up at me with that vacant smile on his face, but said nothing.

"What's the game, Capper?" I asked quickly in a whisper. "Why are you pretending you don't understand things, and can't remember things? I hate this man Just, quite as much as you do; why won't you confide in me?"

For a moment I thought he was going to do so; he kept very still under my grip, and I knew that he was thinking the matter over carefully. It was almost as though I could see into his mind. But a moment later he seemed to come to some resolution; he looked up quickly, and shook his head, with that lost look again in his eyes.

"I don't understand," he whispered. "I don't remember."

"Yes, you do," I retorted roughly. "You're as sane as I am; and you've got some purpose in your mind—and I can guess what it is."

"You frighten me, sir," he said in a whisper. "I am old and feeble, and I have forgotten so many things. Please let me alone."

He did it so well, that for a moment I believed that I had not seen that change in him; at all events, I saw that I could do nothing with him, and I watched him as he drifted away among the trees and was lost to my sight. Then I turned my attention to the house.

But I found that every door and every window was strongly fastened and shuttered; evidently they had been expecting a visit from me. I had nothing with which I could effect an entrance, so that I merely raged round the place, in a futile fashion, in the darkness, wondering what I should do. Every now and then I thought I caught sight of the man Capper, dodging about in the shadows; but even of that I could not be sure. At last, in desperation, I went to the big hall-door and boldly rang the bell.

I waited for a long time, while I heard slight movements within the house; then there was a whispering behind the closed door. I had made up my mind that the moment that door was opened I would force my way in, at whatever risk. I prepared to rush the citadel now, by drawing back a little, where no light could reach me as the door was opened, so that I could force anyone who had answered my ringing to peer out. While I waited, I was certain that I saw Capper waiting, too, a few yards away.

My ruse succeeded. The door was opened a little way, and the voice of Martha Leach demanded to know who was there; then there was more whispering, and the door was opened a little further, and Martha Leach stepped out under the porch. I made one leap at her, and caught her in my arms; and before she quite knew what was happening, had literally rolled with her into the hall, keeping a tight clutch of her. In the confusion someone slammed the door, and I put my back against it.

I saw that it would be a matter of three to one, at the least, even though one of the three was partly disabled. The doctor had backed away as he saw us come flying in, and I think it must have been Harvey Scoffold who shut the door. I blurted out at once what I had to say.

"There's a young lady here—Miss Matchwick—detained against her will. Where is she?"

"Turn that fellow out!" shouted the doctor. "Two of you ought to be able to manage him, I should think. Turn him out!"

Now, it is a most undignified thing to be tackled by a woman; yet I am bound to confess that in the rough and tumble that ensued, Martha Leach did more than her full share. Bardolph Just had run back into the house, and had set a bell ringing; a couple of men-servants came rushing up. I did not want to hit the woman; but I longed for one blow at Harvey Scoffold, and as a matter of fact I contrived to get one or two really serviceable ones in on his rotund person. But by this time, while we were all scrambling about together, and while I was raising my voice in repeated shouts of "Debora," in the hope that I might attract her attention, the woman had literally wound herself about me, so that I was powerless. The door was pulled open, and this time we tumbled out instead of in. And as Martha dexterously released me only when I was outside, and contrived to trip me up very neatly down the steps, she was inside again, and the door closed, before I could get to my feet. Then I heard the bolts shooting into place, and knew that the victory was with them.

I had a mind to set the bell ringing again, in the hope to force them to open the door. But I had the good sense to understand that I should serve no good purpose in that way; I should, in all probability, bring some night policeman down upon me, when explanations would be difficult. For after all, on the face of it, you cannot very well demand that a young lady shall be fetched out at night from the house of a highly-respectable guardian by a stranger who can give no really good account of himself. And that, as you will acknowledge, was exactly the position of affairs.

Baffled, I went away again, and was fortunate enough to be able to get back to Barnet in the same fashion as before. You may imagine my frame of mind by the time I got to Uncle Zabdiel's house; I was in a state of ungovernable fury. I marched into the garden, and rang the bell violently, and waited. After a minute or two, during which I had repeated the summons, I heard a window raised above me, and, looking up, saw Uncle Zabdiel's wicked old head looking out. All about me was very quiet, for the house stood somewhat retired from an unfrequented road, and I could hear his voice distinctly.

"Who is it? What do you want?" he demanded.

"I want to come in," I said, stepping back a little from the door so that he could see me. "You know me, Uncle Zabdiel."

"I should think I do," he sneered. "Do you think I should be fool enough to let you in—you wild beast!—you bully!—I've too great a care for my own safety for that."

"You'd better let me in quietly," I warned him.

"I won't—I won't!" he almost shouted. "I mean to protect myself. And I'll tell you something else, my young friend," he went on, leaning further out of the window, and shaking a fist at me. "I've made up my mind to see you comfortably put away again."

"Indeed?" I retorted, "and how are you going to manage that?"

"I've written to the authorities, telling them that if they come here to-morrow night I can give them a full and true account of a certain convict called Norton Hyde, supposed to be buried in Penthouse Prison, but really very much alive. Put that in your pipe and smoke it! I've cooked your goose, my boy, and I shall sleep peaceful o' nights in future."

He slammed down the window, leaving me standing in the darkness, thinking long thoughts. I saw that it was as hopeless for me to get in here as it had proved to be at the house of Bardolph Just; I went sorrowfully out of the gate, realising that all was over. As I turned into the road, I almost cannoned against a man who seemed to be lounging there. He turned away his face quickly, and although for a moment I had a feeling that it was a face that was familiar to me, the thought merely flitted through my mind for a moment, and was gone as the man lurched away. I saw that he was dressed roughly, like a labouring man.

You may be sure that I did not sleep that night. I paced my room, wondering what I should do; I varied that only by seating myself at the window, and staring out at the sky, telling myself over and over again that all I had striven to do had come to naught. To-morrow the true story would be told to the world; to-morrow Norton Hyde would be a hunted man again, with three or four people interested in his capture, who would know all his movements, and could supply a dozen clues towards finding him. It was impossible for me to do anything to help Debora, because Bardolph Just's house would be one of the first places to be watched, if it came to a hunt for me. I

was done.

And then it was that I came to a desperate resolution. I was homeless and hopeless, and I had failed; I determined that I would keep the appointment that night, and would meet those who were to see my uncle. I would give myself up to the authorities, and so end the miserable business by going back to my prison. There was nothing else for it; I felt that it was far better to close the matter once and for all time.

I got to Uncle Zabdiel's house after darkness had set in. Just as I turned into the road leading to it, I saw two men, respectably dressed in dark clothing, and with bowler hats, going along in front of me; my heart gave a little jump, for I thought I knew their errand. They came to the gate in the wall and opened it. I had determined by this time that I would waste no time, and so I came up with them as they passed into the garden. One of them turned and looked at me.

"What do you want, sir?" he asked.

"I've come to see Mr. Blowfield," I replied; for I had made up my mind to see the matter out in my uncle's presence.

The man said nothing, but joined his companion, who was standing before the door of the house, and who had just rung the bell. There was no answer to the summons, and after a time he tugged at the bell-pull again. In moving to do this he made a discovery.

"Why, the door's open," he murmured; then he pushed it, and stepped into the dark hall.

"Hadn't you better call out?" said the other man.

The first man lifted his voice, and called out sharply, "Mr. Blowfield! Mr. Blowfield!"

His voice echoed in a dreary fashion through the house, and seemed to come back at us. The first man had by this time touched a shelf which stood in the hall, and on which was a lamp. Looking about him sharply while he did so, he dexterously got a light and lit the lamp; then, with a glance at his companion, he stepped into the room which was the dining-room. It was empty.

I followed them from that room into the study, which again was empty. Then the first man, still carrying the lamp, after muttering something to his companion which I did not hear, began to ascend the stairs. I was the last of the trio, and I suddenly heard the first man cry out in an excited voice.

"Here, catch hold of this!" he exclaimed, passing the lamp down to the other man. "There's been an accident!"

I pressed forward then, and looked. Lying prone upon the staircase, with his head and shoulders hanging down over the top stairs, lay Uncle Zabdiel. Beside him was a heavy stick—that stick with which he had once threatened me—and his head and face were cruelly beaten in. Whoever had killed him had not been able to bear the sight of him afterwards, for the clothes from his bed had been dragged out of the room and pulled across him.

Uncle Zabdiel's dream had come true.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THAT'S THE MAN!"

Half-a-dozen surmises seemed to rush through my mind at that first sight of Uncle Zabdiel lying dead. The first—that he had tried to drive too hard a bargain with Bardolph Just, and had been caught in his own net; the next, that that badly-used youth, Andrew Ferkoe, had turned at last and killed his oppressor. I thought, too, that perhaps some poor creature he had driven to desperation, and ground hard in his money mill, had chosen this way to pay his debts.

One of the men ran off in what I thought was an absurd search for a doctor; the other stood waiting, and keeping, as I thought, a watchful eye upon me. In truth, I was not altogether comfortable, for although Uncle Zabdiel's lips were for ever sealed, I thought it possible that he might have made the bare statement that his supposedly-dead nephew was alive, in writing to the authorities. In which case, it might go hard with me that I should be seen in the neighbourhood of the house in which he had been so recently killed, and that house, too, with its front door open. The man had set down the lamp upon the landing, where it lighted up the dead man horribly; he now began to put a few questions to me.

"Had you an appointment with this gentleman?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes, I had," I answered. "An appointment on a matter of business. I was coming to the house, when I saw you and the other man on your way here. May I ask who you are?" For I thought it better to pretend ignorance, although I knew well that these must be the men for whom Uncle Zabdiel had sent.

"We are police officers," said the man, "and we had an appointment with Mr. Blowfield for this evening. It seems a pity that we were not a little earlier," he added.

"You might have been useful," I added drily. "What should Mr. Blowfield want with you?"

The man looked at me suspiciously, but did not answer. He turned to look at the dead man with a thoughtful frown on his face. "This is the sort of case that absolutely invites murder, in a manner of speaking," he said. "A lonely old man—probably without a soul in the house—pretty well off, I expect; that sort of thing soon gets spread about among the sort of people to whom it's of interest. Of course, I couldn't say off-hand; but I should judge that robbery was the business here, and that whoever did it has had to make a mighty quick exit, or they would scarcely have left the door as we found it. It's been a touch-and-go business, and, as I say, if we had been a little earlier the old gentleman might have been alive to tell us what he wanted to tell us."

Now, although I had been resolute in my determination to end the matter, and to go back to my prison, I found myself thanking my stars that the old gentleman had not been alive to say what he had to say. Not that I should ever have found it in my heart to do him an injury on my own account, and, indeed, I was a little horrified to find him done to death in this fashion; but you must understand how great a relief it was for me.

By this time the second man had come back, bringing with him a young doctor. The latter glanced quickly from one to the other of us, and then knelt down on the stairs to make his examination. The first police officer stood near to him, holding the lamp; I, with the other man, stood below. In a moment or two the doctor looked up, with pursed lips, and nodded quickly to the man with the lamp.

"Nothing for me to do here," he said quietly. "He's been dead about half an hour—scarcely more, I should think. A weak old man like this wouldn't stand much chance when he came face to face with a strong man armed with that stick. He's had two blows—one clean in front, and the other at the side. He must have died almost on the instant. Anyone suspected?"

The man with the lamp shook his head. "We've only arrived here a matter of minutes ago," he replied, "having been asked by the old gentleman to call here to-night."

"What for?" The doctor, who had risen to his feet, asked the question sharply.

"This Mr. Blowfield," answered the man in a perplexed tone, "has written to Scotland Yard, saying that if someone would call to see him he could give them information concerning a nephew of his—a man called Norton Hyde. This nephew robbed him some time ago, and was sentenced to penal servitude. He escaped, and committed suicide rather than be captured; so that I don't see what the old gentleman could have had to tell us."

I determined that I would strike in boldly for myself; it would seem less suspicious than keeping silence. "Oh, yes!" I exclaimed, a little scornfully, "he's had that idea for a long time—he was always talking about it."

"What idea?" asked the doctor.

"The idea that his nephew was alive," I said. "I daresay you may remember the case of the young man?" I added.

"Perfectly," said the doctor. "I wonder where the old chap got that notion from?"

"We'd better go through the house, and see what has been disturbed," said the first man, moving forward with the lamp. Then suddenly, after a whispered word to his companion, he turned again to me. "Were you a friend of Mr. Blowfield?" he asked, and this time I saw the doctor also looking at me curiously.

"Oh, yes! I knew him well," I answered readily. "Believe me," I said, with a little laugh, "I am quite willing to give you every information in my power concerning myself. My name is John New, and I am lodging quite near here. I have been in the habit of coming backwards and forwards on various occasions; as you know, I came in just behind you to-night."

"That's true enough, sir," said the other man.

Now all this time I had quite forgotten the boy Andrew Ferkoe; and suddenly it leapt into my mind that instead of being in the house, as he should properly have been, we had seen nothing of him. My heart sank at that remembrance, for I liked the boy, and had been sorry to think how badly he was treated. I could sympathise with him more than anyone else could well do, for had I not suffered just as he had suffered, and had not I made shipwreck of my life because of this old man who had gone to his account? I felt certain now in my own mind what had happened; Andrew Ferkoe had turned at last upon his master, and had beaten him to death, and then had fled out of the house.

The man with the lamp turned at the door of a room, and looked back at me over his shoulder. "Did you know anything about his habits, sir?" he asked. "Did he live alone?"

I determined to lie. After all, they might not discover anything about the wretched boy if I held my peace. "Quite alone, I believe," I said. "There was an old woman used to come in to clean house for him, and cook his meals; but only for an hour or two a day."

"Just as I thought: this sort of party absolutely asks to be murdered!" he exclaimed.

We found the place in great disorder. Drawers had been wrenched open, and the contents scattered in all directions; desks forced, and cupboards burst open. So far as we could judge, my

Uncle Zabdiel must have been in his bedroom at the time of the attack, and must have heard a noise, and come out, armed with that heavy stick of his. There could not have been any struggle, save in the wrenching away of the stick from his grasp; after that it had been a mere matter of the two blows, as the doctor had suggested. The robbery afterwards had been a hurried business, bunglingly done. The great safe in the corner of the study—that room in which I had toiled so many years—was untouched; and, from what I knew of my uncle and his ideas regarding property, I judged that the murderer had got but little for that risking of his neck. That he had tried to cover up the body from his own sight was obvious, from the fact that he must have gone back into the bedroom, and so have dragged out the bed-clothing to put over his victim.

"We'll go through the rest of the house," said the man; and I suddenly leapt to the remembrance that they must discover Andrew Ferkoe's room, and his bed, and must begin to put awkward questions to me. I was on the point of suggesting that I believed the other rooms to be empty; but, on second thoughts, I felt it best to hold my tongue, and to trust that the boy might yet escape.

So the four of us came to the door of the room, and the man with the lamp unsuspectingly opened it, and went in. He stopped with a gasp, and looked back at us.

"There's someone here!" he whispered. "In bed—and asleep!"

Wonderingly we went forward into the room. The man with the lamp bent over the bed and turned back the clothes. Andrew Ferkoe seemed to rouse himself from sleep, and to stretch his arms; he sat up and yawned at us. For my part, I felt that he rather overdid the thing. His face was white and drawn; but then, it was always that. I confess I was a little contemptuous of the cunning he displayed; I was not quite so sorry for him as I had been. There we stood, grouped about his bed, while he sat up and looked round from one to the other of us.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

The doctor gave a short laugh. "Matter enough!" he ejaculated. "Do you mean to say you've been asleep?"

"Of course," said Andrew Ferkoe. "What else should I go to bed for?"

"Do you mean to tell us that you've heard nothing to-night?" asked the man with the lamp sharply. "No struggling—no crying out?"

Andrew Ferkoe slowly shook his head. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "Who are you? I know that gentleman," he added, pointing to me. "What do they want, Mr. New?"

I began to have a sneaking admiration for the boy, even though I shuddered at him; I thought how wonderfully he played the game. I answered as calmly as I could.

"Your master has been murdered, Andrew," I said—"brutally done to death. Have you really been asleep?—have you heard nothing?"

"Nothing at all, sir," he said, scrambling out of bed, and standing ghostlike amongst us in his long night-shirt, and with his thin, bare feet and ankles showing. "I don't know anything about it."

He began to whimper, looking from one to the other of us in a terrified way; I began to have my doubts whether, after all, he was not sincere, and had not really slept through the horrible business.

"I thought you said that the old gentleman lived alone?" asked the police officer, turning to me.

"When I said that I'd clean forgotten the boy," I answered easily. "You see, I've never been here except by daylight; how should I know that anyone else slept in the house?"

That explanation seemed simple enough, and, in a fashion, satisfactory. I suggested to the man that Andrew Ferkoe should be allowed to dress; I pledged my word to look after him.

"You see, you can hardly leave the boy in the house alone, after what has occurred," I urged. "You have my address, and you can verify it if you like. Let me take the boy with me, and I will undertake to produce him for any enquiry at any time."

I saw that they hesitated; it was the doctor who put in the final word on Andrew Ferkoe's behalf. He had been looking at the youth curiously, had even put a hand on his shoulder, and had twisted him about to look into his eyes.

"I shouldn't think much suspicion would attach to our young friend here," he said. "A bit of a weakling, I should imagine, not very likely to do any harm to anyone. Certainly it won't do to leave him in this place. Get dressed, my lad," he added to Andrew.

As he turned away I heard him whisper to the man with the lamp, "He's been asleep fast enough. I doubt if the old man even cried out. The whole attack would be too sudden."

I waited with Andrew Ferkoe while he got dressed; the others went downstairs to move the body of Uncle Zabdiel. Once or twice I noticed that the boy looked at me in a furtive way. I began to think that if he had been innocent he would in all probability have said something, or have asked some question. He got into his clothes rapidly, fumbling a great deal with the buttons, as though his fingers trembled. Once he looked up, and opened his mouth as if to speak. I shook my head at

him. "Better not say anything, Andrew," I said in a whisper.

He looked at me in a startled way, but finished his dressing without a word. We went out of the room together, and on the stairs I met the doctor and the two men, who were waiting for us. It seemed that one man was to remain in charge of the house, while the other walked with me to my lodging to see that the address I had given was a correct one. In a few minutes Andrew Ferkoe and I were walking along in silence, side by side, with the police officer a little in the rear.

In due course we came to my lodgings, and there the man left us. I roused up the landlady, something to her surprise, and told her that I must have another bed put into my room. I did not mean to lose sight of the youth until I had decided what to do with him.

The woman very obligingly got out a little camp bedstead that was stowed away in an attic, and I assisted her to rig it up in a corner of my room. Then she bade us "Good-night," and Andrew Ferkoe and I were left alone. And for a time there was silence, while I sat on the side of my bed and smoked, and looked at him.

"Why do you look at me in that queer way?" he asked at last, in a trembling voice.

"Look here, Andrew," I said solemnly, "let me say quite reverently that at the present moment there's just God and you and me in this room, and God understands a great deal better even than I do what you have had to put up with. Don't speak until I've finished," I exclaimed sternly, "because I want to give you a word of warning. If you want to tell me anything, let's hear it; if you don't want to tell me anything, go to bed, and try to sleep. But if you do speak—speak the truth."

He looked at me round-eyed, and with his mouth wide open, for nearly a minute; then he gasped out a question. "Do you—do you really think I did it?" he asked.

"I don't think about it at all," I answered. "I'm waiting for you to tell me—if you feel you want to."

"I didn't do it—I never touched him. I should never have had the strength or the courage," he began, in a shaking whisper.

"But you were shamming sleep," I reminded him.

"Of course I was," was his surprising answer. "What else could I do? I didn't know who you were, or who was coming into the place, and I'd seen enough in the way of horrors for one night to last me all my life." He shuddered, and covered his face with his hands, and dropped down on to his bed.

"Seen enough horrors!" I echoed. "What had you seen?"

He looked up at me, and began his extraordinary story. "I went to bed a long time before old Blowfield," he said. "I think I went to sleep almost at once; I generally do, you know. At all events I didn't hear the old man come up to his room. When I first woke up I heard a noise down below in the house, just like somebody wrenching open a shutter. I got horribly frightened, and I put my head under the bedclothes, and kept very still; it was just like that night when you broke in and came to my room. After a time the noise stopped, and I began to wonder whether someone had tried to get in and couldn't, or whether they had really got into the house. It must have been about a quarter of an hour after that—only it seemed ever so much longer—that I first heard old Blowfield cry out."

I felt certain now that he was speaking the truth. Watching him narrowly, I saw the terror grow in his eyes at the recollection of what he had heard and seen in that grim old house. I nodded to him to go on.

"I heard old Blowfield shout out, 'Who's there?'" went on the youth. "He shouted that twice, and I got so excited that I crept out of my room in the dark, and leaned over the rail at the top of the staircase. I saw old Blowfield standing there, and just below him was a man, and the man was crouching as if he was going to spring. Old Blowfield struck at him with the stick—he was holding a candle in his left hand, so that he could see what he was doing—and the man dodged, and caught the stick, and pulled it out of his hand. The man struck old Blowfield once, and he went down and lay still; and then he struck him again."

"Why didn't you raise an alarm?" I asked, somewhat needlessly.

"What good would that have been?" murmured Andrew Ferkoe resentfully. "I could see that the man didn't think there was anyone else in the house. What chance should I have had if he'd caught sight of me? I don't know whether I made any noise, but while he stood there with the stick in his hands he looked up towards where I was, but he didn't see me. Then he went back into the bedroom and came out, dragging the bedclothes; he threw them on top of the old man. When he went down into the house I slipped back into my room and got into bed; I simply dared not move or make a sound."

"How long did you stop like that?" I asked.

"I don't rightly know," was his reply, as he shook his head. "It seemed a long time, and at first I could hear him moving about the house here and there, and then there was a silence. I had just got out of bed, meaning to go down, when I heard another movement in the house, and then voices. And I lay there, trembling so that I could feel the bed shaking under me, until at last, after what seemed hours, I heard people coming up the stairs, and coming into my room. And then I

gave myself up for lost, and tried hard to pray. I thought if I pretended to be asleep they wouldn't kill me, and so I pretended. You may imagine how relieved I felt when I opened my eyes and saw you."

"That's all very well, my young friend," I said, "but why in the world didn't you tell the truth at once, and say what you'd seen? Why did you lie, and say that you had been asleep and had heard nothing?"

He looked at me with an expression of cunning on his lean face.

"Who was going to believe me?" he asked. "Even you had heard me say how badly the old man had treated me, and how I wished I had the courage to kill him; even you believed to-night, first of all, that I had done it. If I had told any story about a man coming into the place and killing old Blowfield, and going again, they would have laughed at me. I was in a tight corner, and the only thing I could do was to pretend that I had slept through it all."

I saw the reasonableness of that argument; it might have gone hard with the boy if for a moment suspicion had fallen upon him. "Did you see the face of the man clearly?" I asked, after a pause. "What was he like?"

"He was a small man, stooping a little," said Andrew Ferkoe. "I should think he would be about forty-five or fifty years of age. He was dressed like a labourer."

Instantly I remembered the man I had seen on the previous evening lurking outside the house; I wished now that I had taken more note of him. I began to wonder who it could be, and whether it was only some chance loafer who had selected that house as one likely to suit his purpose for burglary. It could scarcely have been anyone who knew Uncle Zabdiel's habits well, or he would not have been surprised on the stairs as he had been; for the fact that he had to snatch a weapon from the hand of the old man proved, I thought, that he had not gone there meaning to kill. For the matter of that, few men enter a place with that deliberate intention; it is only done in the passion of the moment, when they must strike and silence another, or suffer the penalty for what they have done.

Long after the boy was in bed and asleep I sat there watching him. Even now my mind was not clear of doubts concerning Andrew Ferkoe, smooth though his tale was. I wondered if all he had told me was true, or if, after all, he had seized that occasion to strike down the old man, and so pay off old scores. I knew that for the present I must leave the matter, and must wait for time or chance to elucidate the mystery.

It must have been about the middle of the night when I found myself sitting up in bed, very wide awake, with one name seeming to din itself into my ears. I wondered why I had not thought of it before.

"William Capper!"

It had been a little man, who walked with drooping shoulders, a man who might be forty-five or fifty years of age. Well, Capper was older than that, but then Andrew Ferkoe had only seen the man in the dim light of a candle.

And the motive? That was more difficult to arrive at, although even I thought there I saw my way. Capper I knew was determined to kill Bardolph Just if he could, and he would know that Bardolph Just had gone to the house of Zabdiel Blowfield. What more natural than that he should have seen him arrive, but should have missed him when he went away; that would explain the man in labouring clothes I had seen hanging about near the house. Capper would know that he must put on some sort of disguise in order to bring himself into the presence of the doctor, and in order to lull the other's dread of him. I was convinced now that it was Capper who had forced his way into the house late at night, and, finding himself suddenly confronted by a man who demanded his business, had aimed a blow at him at the same time, and killed Zabdiel Blowfield on the impulse of the moment. I lay down again, firmly convinced that I had arrived at a proper solution of the matter.

I further questioned Ferkoe in the morning, and all that he told me served the more to settle the thing in my mind. I wondered if by any chance Capper would be discovered; I wondered also whether, after all, I had been mistaken in my estimate of him, and whether the sudden gusts of passion that had swept over him on the two occasions in regard to Bardolph Just might not have been real madness, and might, in this last case, have found their victim in a man with whom Capper had nothing to do. In that case he was merely a harmful lunatic, dangerous to anyone when those gusts of passion swept him.

I found that during the next day or two I was pretty closely watched and interrogated by one and another, and more than once I trembled for my liberty, and even for my life. For you will understand that I was surrounded now, more than ever, by dangers of every sort; if it could once have been proved or even suggested that I was that convict nephew of the dead man, it would have gone hard with me. For here was I, masquerading under another name, and actually walking up to the house on the night of the murder. And had not Zabdiel Blowfield actually stated in writing that he could tell the authorities something concerning his nephew, Norton Hyde? The motive was clear; it had been vitally necessary that I should silence Uncle Zabdiel at all costs.

So I argued the matter, and I remembered uneasily enough that that weakling, Andrew Ferkoe, knew who I really was, and might, in case of extremity, give my secret away. On the other hand it

turned out that the police had found a scrap of writing in the house, which gave the name and address of Dr. Bardolph Just, so that that gentleman was brought into the business, in order that questions might be asked of him. I had gone down to the house, and there we came face to face.

There was no necessity for me to ask him what he thought about the matter; I read in his face that he was certain in his own mind that I was the man. I should not have spoken to him at all, because when next I fought him I meant to fight with other weapons than my tongue, but he came up to me, and looked at me with that evil grin of his.

"This is a bad business," he said. "I understand that you were here almost immediately after the thing was done, eh?"

"Yes, and not before," I replied in a whisper. "You're on the wrong track, I assure you. I've had nothing to do with the matter."

I saw that he had something more to say to me. When presently I left the house he strolled along by my side. His first words were startling enough, in all conscience.

"Well, so for the moment you have succeeded," he said quietly.

I turned and stared at him; I did not understand in the least what he meant. "In what have I succeeded?" I asked. "Don't I tell you that I'm not responsible for the business we've just been talking about."

"You know what I'm referring to," he said, harshly. "I'm speaking of the girl."

I had learnt wisdom, and I controlled myself with an effort. "What of her?" I asked carelessly.

I saw his eyes flash, and noticed that his teeth were clenched hard as he strode along beside me. "You've got her!" he burst out at last, "but you shan't keep her. You've been wise enough, too, to hide her away somewhere where you don't go yourself. I've had you watched, and I know that. But I'll find her, and if I don't find her within a certain time, determined on by myself, I'll tell my story, and you shall hang!"

I was on the point of blurting out that I knew nothing about the matter, but on second thoughts I held my tongue. I guessed in a moment that Debora must have made her escape from the house, and must be somewhere in hiding, and, of course, she would not know where to communicate with me. My heart leapt at the thought that she was free; it sank again at the thought that she might be penniless and unprotected amongst strangers. At the same time I decided that I would not give him any undue advantage over me, by letting him understand that I did not know where the girl was. I merely shrugged my shoulders and laughed.

"You can take my warning, and make the most of it," he said abruptly. "If Debora does not return to me within the time I have mapped out—and I shall not even tell you what that time is—I tell what I know to the right people."

I remembered what Debora had said to me about her certainty that this man had caused the death of Gregory Pennington; I had a shot at that matter now. "And some explanation will be needed regarding the man you allowed to be shut away in a grave in Penthouse Prison," I said quietly.

He turned his head sharply, and looked at me. I regarded him steadily. "That's a matter you'll have to explain," he said, with a grin.

"I?" It was my turn to look amazed.

"Yes—you," he said. "I've got my story ready when the time comes, I assure you. All I've had to do with it has been the covering up of your traces; that was only pity for a forlorn wretch, hunted almost to death. The changing of the clothes was your business. I don't see how it affects me."

We had come to a point where he was turning off in one direction and I going in another. I gave him my final shot at parting. "Not if Gregory Pennington really committed suicide," I said.

I looked back when I had gone a little way, and saw Bardolph Just in the same attitude in which I had left him, looking after me. It was as though I had stricken him dumb and motionless with what I had said, and I was now more than ever convinced that Debora had been right in her conjecture. I had done one good thing, at least; he would scarcely dare to carry out his threat of exposing me; he might think that I had some inside knowledge of which he was ignorant.

Meanwhile I was seriously troubled about Debora. It was impossible for me to know what had become of her, or where she was; my only hope was that there might be an accidental meeting between us. The various places known to us both were known also to our enemies; if Debora had gone to the house of Uncle Zabdiel she would in all probability have been seen there by Bardolph Just, or by some one in his pay. Similarly, she would, of course, keep as far away as possible from his house and from the cottage where once I had left her with Harvey Scoffold. I roamed the streets, looking into every face that passed me, yet never seeing the face for which I longed.

An inquest on Uncle Zabdiel took place in the ordinary course, and a certain John New gave evidence of his slight acquaintance with the murdered gentleman, and of what he had seen on the night of the murder. The astounding fact that Andrew Ferkoe had slept through the whole business came out in court, and was the immediate cause of some extraordinary newspaper headlines, in which more than one reporter developed a hitherto undiscovered talent for wit at

Andrew's expense. It may be wondered at, perhaps, that I should have persuaded the boy to stick to his original story, but, apart from anything else, I had strong reasons for preventing any suspicion falling upon the man Capper, and, above all, I did not for a moment believe that Andrew Ferkoe's real story would be believed. I had grown to believe it myself, but I thought that for many reasons it might be well if Ferkoe left it to be imagined that he had really slept, and had seen nothing.

So the matter remained a mystery, with only one curious element in it, for me at least, and that was a little point that came out in the evidence. It seemed that no finger prints had been discovered anywhere, although many things in the house had been handled. It was obvious that the murderer had worn gloves. That seemed to point to a more professional hand than that of poor Capper, and served a little to upset my theory, but on the whole I believed it still.

I was to be undeceived, nevertheless, and that within a little time. On the very day of the inquest, when Andrew Ferkoe and myself were walking away, we turned, with almost a natural impulse, towards the house which had been the scene of the tragedy—perhaps you may call that a morbid impulse. It was a place that would always have a curious attraction for me, by reason of the fact that the greater part of my life had been spent there, and that I had seen many curious things occur there, and that once poor Debora had taken refuge in it. It was all ended now with the death of the man who had worked so much harm to me; I was thinking about it all as I stood outside the place, when I felt my arm clutched convulsively, and looked round, to see that Andrew Ferkoe, with a dropping jaw, was staring at a man who was standing at a little distance from us, also watching the house—a man dressed as a labourer.

"What's the matter?" I whispered. I could not see the man's face from where I stood; his cap was drawn down at one side, so as partially to conceal it.

"That's the man!" whispered Andrew, in a shaking voice. "I know the clothes, and I saw his face for a moment when he turned this way."

"Pull yourself together, and don't look as if you'd seen a ghost," I whispered sharply. "We'll follow the man, and see where he goes. As he hasn't seen you, go on ahead a bit, and then turn so that you can see his face; then come back to me."

The youth hurried away; walked past the man with his long stride; then came back. I saw the man glance at him for a moment sharply as he came past; then Andrew came up to me, his face white with excitement.

"That's the man! I'm certain of it," he said.

We walked for a long way after the man, until at last he seemed to have some suspicion concerning us. Once or twice he stopped, and, of course, we stopped also; then at last he turned about, and came straight back towards where we waited.

He carried his head low, but I thought I knew the bend of his shoulders; I was convinced that in a moment he would look up, and I should see William Capper looking at me.

But I was wrong. For when he looked up, with a sullen glance of defiance, I saw that it was George Rabbit!

CHAPTER XIV.

WILLIAM CAPPER COMES TO LIFE.

Mr. George Rabbit looked me up and down with a new expression of countenance. I noticed, too, that some of his alertness was gone, and that his narrow, shifty eyes avoided mine. He had no reason to think that I should suspect him of the murder of my Uncle Zabdiel; nevertheless, he looked at me resentfully, as though, before even I had spoken, he knew I was going to accuse him of it.

"Wotjer mean by follerin' a honest man about like this 'ere?" he demanded savagely. "If I 'ad my rights, I ought to be follerin' you, Mr. Jail-bird—seein' wot I know abaht yer." Then, as I said nothing, but looked at him steadily, he broke out more fiercely: "W'y don't yer speak? Wot 'ave yer got against me, eh?"

I took him by the arm, and suddenly wrenched his hand round, so that I could look at the palm of it; then I bent forward, and whispered to him swiftly: "There's blood on your hands!"

He struggled faintly for a moment to get free; his face had gone to a sickly green colour. "You're mad—stark, starin', ravin' mad!" he exclaimed. "Don't you say sich things against me, or I'll blab—sure as death!"

"Death's the word," I retorted. "Now, George Rabbit, we've got to talk over this thing, and we may as well do it quietly. Take me to some place where I can say what I have to say."

He hesitated for a moment, undecided whether to treat the matter with defiance, or to accede to my demands; at last he shrugged his shoulders, spat emphatically on the ground, and turned to

lead the way. He turned back again a moment later, and looked at Andrew Ferkoe with a new resentment.

"Wot's this chap got to do wiv it?" he asked. "'Ave you bin blabbin' to 'im abaht it?"

"There was no necessity to do that," I replied quietly. "He saw you do it. Now, don't stand talking here; it might be dangerous."

He stood in an amazed silence for a moment, and then turned and walked away. We followed him rapidly, noticing that every now and then he turned to look back over his shoulder, as if undecided whether, after all, he would not turn back altogether, and refuse to go further. But he went on, nevertheless, and at last brought us to a little public house in a side street. Thrusting open a door with his shoulder, he went in, leaving us to follow; and we presently found ourselves in a little room with a sanded floor—a species of bar parlour. There the three of us sat down round a little beer-stained table, and after I had ordered refreshments (with a double quantity for George Rabbit, because he took the first at a gulp), I began to say what was in my mind.

"When I saw you first to-day you were looking at a house where an old man was murdered a few days back," I began.

"Wot of it?" he demanded. "A lot of people 'ave bin lookin' at that 'ouse; they always does w'en anythink like that's 'appened."

"You were obliged to go back to it—the man who commits a murder always must, you know. You wanted to see if any one had suspected you."

The man glanced nervously round the room, and then thrust his face towards mine across the table. "Wot's this 'ere talk abaht a murder?" he whispered. "Wot's this 'ere talk abaht this chap 'aving seen me do it? Wot's this business abaht takin' away a honest man's character?"

"When you broke into the house the other night, and came face to face with Zabdiel Blowfield, and got the stick out of his hand and killed him, someone was watching you," I answered steadily.

"Watchin' me! W'y, the ole chap lived alone!" he exclaimed incautiously. Then, seeing the smile on my face, he went on hurriedly, "Leastways, so I've bin told, on'y I don't know nothink abaht it."

"You were sent there first by Martha Leach. My uncle wanted to see you, because he thought your evidence might be useful in getting me back to my prison," I went on remorselessly. "That gave you the idea of robbing the old man; you didn't stick at murder when you were pushed to it. This lad here"—I indicated Andrew Ferkoe as I spoke—"was asleep in the house at the time, as you would have heard, if you had been at the inquest. He got out of bed and saw you. How else do you suppose he was able to point you out to-day as the man he saw in the house?"

George Rabbit looked from one to the other of us narrowly; then he began to speak almost as if to himself. "Now I comes to think of it, I did 'ear a noise up above in the 'ouse. So it was you, was it?" he said, turning wrathfully on Andrew Ferkoe. "My God! it's a lucky thing for you I didn't find you; I'd 'ave put your light out!"

"I know that," answered Andrew quietly. "That was why I didn't make a noise."

"Well, an' wot's the little game now?" asked Rabbit impudently, as he leaned back in his chair and folded his arms. "Mr. Jail-bird, let's 'ear wot you've got to say. You can't bring a charge like this against a honest man without some proof. I 'ave 'eard that no finger prints 'ave bin discovered, so that you won't git much that way."

"I can find a dozen ways of running you to earth," I replied. "On the other hand, it may not pay me to do so."

"Yus, that's the trouble, ain't it?" he said with a sneer. "They might ask you awkward questions, or I might 'ave a word to say abaht the gent wot's takin' my character away. Then again, wot's 'is nibs 'ere bin sayin' at the inquest?"

I was bound to confess that Andrew had stated that he had slept soundly on the night of the murder, and had heard nothing and seen nothing. George Rabbit, growing more confident with every moment, grinned and kissed his grimy finger-tips in the direction of Andrew.

"An' now 'e'll 'ave to tell anuvver tale!" he exclaimed. "If it comes to that, 'oo's to say 'e didn't do the job 'imself; 'e was in the 'ouse."

It was not my purpose to bring the man to justice; it would go hard with me, as well, perhaps, with Andrew Ferkoe, if I made any attempt to slip a noose about the fellow's neck. Yet, much as I loathed the man, I realised that the killing of my Uncle Zabdiel had not been any premeditated affair; it had been a blow struck, brutally enough, for his own liberty by this man who now sat before me. My purpose was to use him, if possible, as an instrument for myself, to trade upon my knowledge of what he had done, and so bind him first to silence about myself and who I was, and next to assist me in the finding of Debora and the destruction of Bardolph Just's plans. I set about that now without more ado.

"As I have said, it would be easy enough to prove the matter," I answered, "and I should have the satisfaction of seeing you hang; but that's not my plan. We are the only people who know the truth, and we shall not speak."

I saw Andrew Ferkoe glance at me swiftly for a moment; as for Rabbit, he sat gaping at me as though he had not heard aright. "You mean it?" he gasped.

"Of course I do; I'm a man of my word," I answered him. "But there is a condition attaching to it, and that condition must be respected. I'm not the man to be played with, and I've got you in a tighter place than you think. Play with me, and you'll play with fire; of that I warn you."

"Now, look 'ere, guv'nor," answered the man in an altered tone, "am I likely to play any tricks, seein' 'ow I'm placed? Gents both, I give yer my solemn word I never meant to put the old gent's light out. I jist meant to git wot I could quietly. I 'ad a sort of idea that 'e might keep money on the premises. As it was, I got next to nuffink, an' wot I did git I don't dare part wiv, for fear I should be nabbed. I never thought 'e'd wake up, but w'en 'e come out there, an' tried to 'it me wiv the stick, I jist jerked it out of 'is 'and, an' gave 'im one for 'imself to keep 'im quiet. I ain't excusin' meself; I know I done it, an' that's all there is to it."

"In the first place, you will know me, if you know me at all, always as John New; the other man, once a fellow-prisoner of yours, lies buried in that prison. Am I right?" I asked the question sternly.

"I'll take my oath of it," he asserted solemnly. "W'y, now I come to look at yer," he added, with a grin, "you ain't no more like Norton 'Yde than wot I am."

"Don't overdo it," I suggested. "Now, in the second place, you remember a young lady—a ward of Dr. Just?"

"Yus, I know 'er; wot of it?" he asked.

"She has left the doctor's house—has run away," I answered. "She doesn't know where to find me, and I don't know where to find her. She may be wandering about London friendless and without money. Can you help me to find her?"

"Do yer mean it?" he asked incredulously.

I nodded. "Under ordinary circumstances you are the last man in the world that I would select for such work, but I must use the tools ready to my hand," I said. "If you play tricks with me, you'll know what to expect, because our friend here"—I indicated Andrew—"will be only too ready to speak and to tell what he knows, without bringing me into the matter at all. But I think, for your own sake, you'll play the game fairly."

In his eagerness he began to take all manner of strange oaths as to what he meant to do, and as to the absolute dependence that was to be placed upon his word. I interrupted him sharply by telling him that I looked for deeds, and not words, and quite humbly and gratefully he promised to do all in his power. I gave him an address at which I could be found, and presently saw him go lurching away, with his head turned every now and then to look back at me. I seemed to picture him going through life like that, remembering always the dead thing he had left lying on certain stairs in a dismal old house.

And now I come to that point in my story when my own helplessness was, for a time at least, borne in upon me more strongly than ever. I had no very great hopes that where I had failed George Rabbit would succeed, and I blamed myself for having placed any reliance on him. I wandered about London restlessly for a day or two, as I had done before, hoping always that any slight girlish figure going on before me might in a moment turn its head and show me the face of Debora; but that never happened. What did happen was that I had an unexpected meeting with Bardolph Just.

The newspapers had, of course, given my address, as an important witness at the inquest on Uncle Zabdriel, so that I was not altogether surprised to find, one evening when I went back to my little lodging, tired out, and weary, and dispirited, that Bardolph Just was waiting for me. I was aware of his presence in my room before ever I got to the house, for as I came up the street I happened to raise my eyes to the window, and there he was, lounging half out of it, smoking a cigar and surveying me. I wondered what his visit might portend. I hoped that he might have discovered something about Debora, and that I might get the information from him.

On opening the door of the room and going in I saw that he was not alone; Harvey Scoffold sat there, quite as though he had come, in a sense, as a protector for his patron. I put my back against the closed door, and looked from one man to the other, and waited for what they had to say. Harvey Scoffold smiled a little weakly, and waved a hand to me; Bardolph Just said nothing, but looked me up and down with a fine air of contempt. I judged that he had news for me, and that, for the moment at least, he felt that he had triumphed. Almost I seemed to read into his mind, and to know what that news was. But though I thought I knew the man well, I was not prepared for the vindictiveness he now displayed.

"You must excuse this intrusion," he said quietly, "but I felt sure that you would be anxious concerning my ward, and I thought it best to let you know at once that she is quite safe. I did you an injustice in suggesting that she was with you; for that I apologise most humbly."

"Where is she?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Is it likely that I shall tell you?" he asked. "I won't tell you where she is; for your satisfaction, however, you may understand that you have been the cause of her

passing several miserable nights and days penniless in London——"

"You were the cause of that!" I broke in hotly.

"Pardon me; had you never appeared upon the scene she would have been quite content to remain under my care," he retorted.

"Had I never appeared upon the scene, she would before this have been in her grave," I said.

He showed his teeth for a moment in a grin, but said nothing to that. "She was discovered in almost a dying condition. I was communicated with and went to her at once," he proceeded. "She is now in a private nursing home, and so soon as she has recovered I intend to take her abroad. I need not assure you that she is receiving, and will receive, every possible attention and luxury that money can command."

"And you came to tell me this?" I enquired bitterly.

"Out of pure kindness," he answered with a grin. "I knew you would be anxious, and I knew that you took a deep interest in the young lady." He rose to his feet, and carefully polished his hat upon his sleeve, holding the hat in his right hand, and turning it dexterously round and round against the arm he still carried in a sling. "But I came also to say," he went on in a sterner tone, "that with this ends your connection with her and with me. I am not to be trifled with again; keep out of my way."

"One moment, Dr. Just," I interposed, keeping my place before the door. "As you have been so frank with me, it is fair that I should be as frank with you. I warn you that I shall take not the faintest notice of your request, and that I shall, if possible, discover the lady. My power is a greater one than yours, because my power is from the heart. I shall beat you yet; I shall save her yet!"

He laughed and raised his eyebrows, and turned towards Harvey Scofield. "Did you ever see such a fellow?" he asked. "He is as full of words as ever, although he knows that he can do nothing."

I opened the door, and saw the two men pass out and go down the street. I watched them gloomily for a moment or two from the open window. I was almost in a mood to follow them, but I realised that they were scarcely likely to lead me to Debora. I must be patient; I must hope for a miracle to happen to show me the way to Debora.

After all, it was no miracle that happened, for one could scarcely connect a miracle with the prosaic figure of Andrew Ferkoe. As I looked from my window I saw Andrew coming down the street, reading a newspaper, and reading it so intently that he was continually knocking against people on the same pavement, and continually, as I could see, muttering apologies, and then resuming his reading. I was not best pleased to see him at that time; for although he still lodged with me until such time as I could decide what to do with him, he spent a great part of the day abroad in the streets. Now, however, after knocking at the door and being admitted, he came upstairs at a great rate, and burst into my room with the newspaper in his hand.

"I've found her!" he exclaimed, excitedly waving the paper. "I've found her!"

I snatched the paper from him, and began to read it eagerly at the place where his trembling finger had pointed. The paragraph was headed, "Strange Loss of Memory," and referred to a young lady bearing the name of Debora Matchwick, who had been found in an almost unconscious condition from privation, on a seat in a public park, and had been conveyed to the Great Southern Hospital. For a time it had been impossible to discover who she was, as she appeared to have entirely forgotten any of the past events of her life, or even her own name; but at last she had given the name, and enquiries had elicited the fact that she had a guardian living in the neighbourhood of Highgate. This gentleman—the famous scientist and retired physician, Dr. Bardolph Just—had been communicated with, and had at once visited the young lady. So soon as she had recovered she would go abroad for rest and change. There seemed to be no doubt that she would ultimately recover completely.

I almost hugged Andrew Ferkoe in my delight. I laughed to think how easily the discovery had been made. I laughed also at the remembrance of how Dr. Just had spoken of the "private nursing home," and how now I was, after all, to take the wind out of his sails. I rushed off at once to the Great Southern Hospital.

Every sort of difficulty was placed in my way. It was not an ordinary visiting day, and I could not be admitted. The young lady had been placed in a private ward, it was true, but the regulations were very strict. More than that, it was imperative that she should not be excited in any way.

"I will not excite her; I am her greatest friend, and I know that she has been longing to see me," I pleaded.

"But she has a visitor with her now," the young doctor urged. "That visitor is her guardian."

I was now more than ever determined that I would see Debora; I pleaded again that one extra visitor, under the circumstances, could surely make no difference. "Besides," I added, "I know Dr. Just very well."

So at last I had my way, and I followed the young doctor through the quiet place until I came to the little private room where Debora lay—a room formed by raising walls nearly to the ceiling in

a great ward, leaving a corridor down the centre. I went in, with my heart beating heavily; and the first person I faced was Dr. Just.

I never saw a man so astonished in all my life; I was afraid he was going to lose his presence of mind, and have me bundled out then and there, after making something of a scene. But I will do him the justice to say that his conduct was admirable; he accepted the inevitable, and bowed slightly in my direction as the doctor left me inside the little room and closed the door.

Then, for the first time, I saw Debora, lying white-faced among her pillows. I noted with gratitude how her eyes lighted up as she turned slightly in my direction, and held out a white hand towards me. I could not help it; I fell on my knees beside the bed, and put the hand to my lips as the tears sprang to my eyes.

"Thank God!" I said, "thank God!"

"So you don't heed warnings," said the doctor, in a sarcastic tone. "It is only for the sake of this dear girl that I have not had you turned out of the place; I can't understand how in the world you found out where she was."

I took no notice of him. I turned to the girl, and, still holding her hands, began to speak earnestly.

"Debora," I said, "my sweet Debora, I want you to listen to me, and not to this man. I have found you, and I do not mean to lose sight of you again. You will soon be well and strong, and then you will go away from this place—with me."

"Yes, with you," she answered, with her eyes turned to mine, and her hands gripping mine convulsively. "With you!"

I knew that the time was short, and that at any moment the young doctor or a nurse might appear, and might cut short our interview. I saw, too, that Debora was getting excited, and I judged that Bardolph Just might take it upon himself to act the part of doctor as well as guardian, and have me turned away. Therefore I said what I had to say quickly.

"You will wait for me here, Debora; you will not let anyone take you away without letting me know. See, I am writing my address here, and that I will give to the doctor I saw just now—he can send for me if necessary. You are not to go away with anyone else."

"I promise," she said, weakly.

"And now listen to me," broke in the harsh voice of Bardolph Just. "This is a crisis in the lives of the three of us, and I am not to be set aside. When the time comes that you can be removed, Debora, you are going away with me!"

"I am not! I am not!" she cried, still clinging to my hand.

"You are going away with me, or else your friend there goes back to his prison. Choose!" He stood looking at her, and I saw as well as she did that now his mind was made up.

"You wouldn't do that?" she said breathlessly.

"I would," he said. "You go away with me, or I follow this man when he leaves this place, and I give him in charge to the first constable I meet, as the escaped convict, Norton Hyde. And I follow that charge up until I see him back within his prison walls, with something more than nine years of servitude before him. If you want him to keep his liberty, send him away now."

She began to weep despairingly, while I, on the horns of this new dilemma, did my best to comfort her. And suddenly, with all her heart set on my welfare, she announced her decision.

"I promise that I will go with you," she said to Bardolph Just in a whisper.

"No—no! you must not promise that!" I urged, springing to my feet, and facing the other man. "You shall not!"

"I must, I must, for your sake!" she answered. "My dear, it will all come right in time, if you will be patient. We shall meet when all this is over and done with. Good-bye!"

I would have said more then, but at that moment the door opened, and the young doctor came in. One glance at the girl was sufficient; with an impatient gesture he ordered Bardolph Just and myself to go, and hastily summoned the nurse. So we marched out, side by side, without a word until we reached the street.

"Understand me," said Bardolph Just quietly, "I shall keep my word."

"And I shall keep mine," I retorted, as I turned on my heel and left him.

Brave words, as you will doubtless think; yet even as I said them I realised how helpless I was. Debora, for my sake, would go back to that horrible house, there to live, perhaps, in safety for a time, until the doctor could devise some cunning death for her. And I supposed that in due course I should hear of that; and should know the truth, and yet should be able to say nothing. Almost I was resolved to risk my own neck in saving her; almost I determined to put that old threat into execution, and kill the man. But I had no stomach for murder when I came to think of the matter: I could only beat my brains in a foolish attempt to find some way out of the tangle.

Thus nearly a week went by—a miserable week, during which I haunted the neighbourhood of the hospital and wandered the streets aimlessly, turning over scheme after scheme, only to reject each one as useless. Then, at last, one day I went to the hospital, and enquired for Miss Debora Matchwick, and asked if I might see her.

I was told that she was gone. Her guardian had called on the previous day with a carriage, and had taken her home; he had made a generous donation to the funds of the hospital, in recognition of his gratitude for the kindness the young lady had received. So I understood that he had succeeded, and that I had failed.

The man had succeeded, too, in putting the strongest possible barrier between the girl and myself, in invoking that bogey of my safety. I knew that he could hold her more strongly with that than with anything else; I felt that she would refuse, for my sake, to have anything to do with me. Nevertheless, I came to the conclusion that I must make one last desperate effort to see her, or to see Bardolph Just. In a sense, I was safe, because I knew I was always a standing menace to the man, and that he feared me.

I went straight from the hospital to the house at Highgate. I had no definite plan in my mind; I determined to act just as circumstances should suggest. I rang the bell boldly, and a servant whom I knew appeared at the door. He was in the very act of slamming it again in my face, when I thrust my way in and closed the door behind me.

"Don't try that game again," I said sternly, "or you'll repent it. Where's your master?"

"I have my orders, sir," he began, "and I dare not——"

"I'll see you don't get into trouble," I broke in. "I want to see Dr. Just."

"But he's not here, sir," said the man, and I saw that he was speaking the truth. "Dr. Just and the young lady have gone away, sir."

"Do you know where they've gone?" I asked; but the man only shook his head.

I stood there debating what to do, and wondering if by chance the doctor might have carried out his original intention of going abroad. Then a door opened at the end of the hall, and Martha Leach came out and advanced towards me. She stopped on seeing who the intruder was; then with a gesture dismissed the servant, and silently motioned to me to follow her into another room. It was the dining-room, and when I had gone in she shut the door, and stood waiting for me to speak. I noticed that she seemed thinner than of old, and that there were streaks of grey in her black hair. She stood twisting her white fingers over and over while she watched me.

"I came to see the doctor," I said abruptly. "Where is he?"

"Why do you want to know?" she demanded. "You've been turned out of this place; you ought not to have been admitted now."

"I do not forget the assistance you rendered in turning me out," I said. "Nevertheless I am here now, and I want an answer to my question. I want to find the girl Debora Matchwick."

She stood for a long time, as it seemed to me, in a rigid attitude, with her fingers twining and twisting, and with her eyes bent to the floor. Then suddenly she looked up, and her manner was changed and eager.

"I wonder if you would help me?" was her astonishing remark.

"Try me," I said quietly.

"I suppose you love this slip of a girl—in a fashion *you* call love," she flashed out at me. "I can't understand it myself—but then, my nature's a different one. You would no more understand what rages here within me"—she smote herself ruthlessly on the breast with both hands—"than I can understand how any man can be attracted by a bread-and-butter child like that. But, perhaps, you can grasp a little what I suffer when I know that that man and that girl are together—miles away from here—and that I am here, tied here by his orders."

"I think I can understand," I said quietly, determined in my own mind to play upon that mad jealousy for my own ends. "And I am sorry for you."

"I don't want your sorrow, and I don't want your pity!" she exclaimed, fiercely brushing away tears that had gathered in her eyes. "Only I shall go mad if this goes on much longer; I can't bear it. He insulted me to my face before her on the day they left for Green Barn together—yesterday that was."

"And yet you love him—you would get this girl out of his hands if you could?"

"I would kill her if I could," she snarled. "I would tear her limb from limb; I would mark her prettiness in such a fashion that no man would look at her again. That's what I'd do."

"You want me to help you," I reminded her.

"Why don't you have some pluck?" she demanded fiercely. "Why don't you tear her out of his hands, and take her away?"

"There are reasons why I cannot act as I would," I said. "But I'll do this; I'll go down to Green

Barn, and I'll try to persuade her to go away with me. You've fought against that all the time, or I might have succeeded before."

"I know—I know!" she said. "I hoped to please him by doing that; I hoped that some day he might get tired of her, and might look at me again as he looked at me in the old days. But now I'm hopeless; I can do nothing while she is with him. I'm sorry—sorry I fought against you," she added, in a lower tone.

"I'll do my best to help you—and the girl," I said. "It may happen that you may get your wish sooner than you anticipated; I believe that Bardolph Just means to kill her."

"If he doesn't, I shall!" she snapped at me as I left the house.

So far I had done no good, save in discovering where Bardolph Just and Debora had gone. It was a relief to me to know that they had not gone abroad; for then I should have been helpless indeed. I determined that I would go at once down into Essex; it would be some satisfaction at least to be near her.

I was walking rapidly away from the house when I heard someone following me; I turned suspiciously, and saw that it was the man Capper. He came up to me with that foolish smile hovering over his face, and spoke in that strange, querulous whisper I had heard so often.

"Forgive an old man speaking to you, sir," he said—"an old man all alone in the world, and with no friends. I saw you come from Dr. Just's house—good, kind Dr. Just!"

I felt my suspicions of him beginning to rise in my mind again, despite the fact that the face he turned to me was that of a simpleton. I recalled Debora's words to me when she had wondered if this man would ever speak.

"What do you want?" I asked him, not ungently.

"I want to find Dr. Just—good, kind Dr. Just," he whispered. "I have followed him a long time, but have been so unfortunate as to miss him. I missed him in a crowd in a street; now I find that he is not at his house."

"You are very devoted to Dr. Just," I observed. "What do you hope to gain by it?"

"To gain?" He stared at me with that curious smile on his face. "What should I gain?"

"I don't know," I answered him, "but it seems to me that you may some day gain what you want."

"God grant I may!" The answer was given in an entirely different voice, and I looked at him in a startled way as I realised at last the truth that for some time at least he had been shamming. I dropped my hand on his shoulder, and spoke sternly enough.

"Come now, let this pretence be ended," I said. "You're as sane as I am—you have all your wits about you. Your brain is clear; you remember everything."

We were in a quiet lane near the house, and there was no one in sight. He clasped his hands, and raised his face—a changed face, stern-set, grim and relentless—to the sky. "Dear God!" he exclaimed passionately, "I do remember! I do remember!"

"What?" I asked.

He looked at me for a moment intently, as if debating within himself whether to trust me; then at last he laid a hand tremulously on my arm, and stared up into my face.

"I have shammed, sir," he said. "I have lied; I have plotted. I shall not fail now; I have come out of the darkness into the light. I have come to life!"

His excitement, now that he had once let himself go, was tremendous; he seemed a bigger and a stronger man than I had imagined. He stood there, shaking his clenched fists above his head, and crying out that he was alive, and almost weeping with excitement.

"What are you going to do?" I asked him, breathlessly.

"I am going to kill Bardolph Just, as he killed my young master, Mr. Gregory Pennington! I have tried twice; the third time I shall succeed!" he replied.

CHAPTER XV.

I BID THE DOCTOR FAREWELL.

I did my best to calm the man Capper. I feared that in his excitement he might betray his purpose to someone else, and someone not so well disposed towards him. I soothed him as well as I could, and presently got him by the arm and walked him away. For a long way we went in silence, until at last, having climbed to Hampstead Heath, I led him into a by-path there, and presently sat beside him on a seat, prepared to listen to his story. He was calmer by this time; the only evidence of the passions, so long suppressed and now working in him, was shown when, every

now and then, he ground his right fist into the palm of his other hand, as though in that action he ground the face of his enemy.

"I want you to tell me, if you will, sir," he said at last, "where the man has gone. I was a fool when I lost him; I have not done my work well."

"I will tell you presently, when I have heard your story," I said. "You have made a threat of murder. I don't think it would be quite wise on my part to let you loose on anyone in your present frame of mind."

"Then hear me, and judge for yourself, sir," he answered solemnly.

"What I know is this," I said. "I know that Mr. Gregory Pennington went to the doctor's house on one particular night, and that he hanged himself in a room there. I, who found him hanging, found you in the room, apparently dazed."

"I have to think back a long way," said Capper, leaning forward on the seat, and resting his elbows on his knees, and his head in his hands. "It's all so much like a dream, and yet all so clear. Let me try to tell you, sir, what happened that night."

He sat for a long time in that attitude, as though striving to piece together all his recollections of that time; as though even yet he feared that his memory might play him false.

"I don't need to say anything about myself, sir, except just this: that Mr. Pennington picked me out of the gutter, and made a man of me. If ever one man worshipped another on this earth, I worshipped him; I would have died for him. He made me his servant, and yet his friend. He knew that I had been something better in the days before he found me; he made me something better again. He was quite alone in the world, and his income was administered by a trustee, a lawyer. That's all you need know about it. We wandered about all over the world. He thought nothing of starting off for the other side of the world, taking me with him always, at a moment's notice—which, perhaps, accounts for the fact that no one has made any enquiries about him."

I did not answer that; perhaps the time was coming when I should have to tell him the sequel to what he was now telling me.

"Then he met the young lady—Miss Debora Matchwick—and he used often to go and see her. One night he came home raging, and told me that Dr. Just had turned him out of the house, and had told him he was not to go there again. He was very much in love with the young lady, and the affair upset him a lot. But he told me that he had made up his mind to go there as often as he thought fit; he meant to defy the doctor."

He paused so long again that I was almost minded to speak to him; he seemed to be brooding. All at once he sat upright, and folded his arms, and went on again. His voice had taken on a new sternness.

"I took to going with him—or rather following him without his knowledge," he said slowly. "I didn't like the look of the doctor; I knew that he meant mischief. Night after night, when Mr. Pennington went to the house, I hid myself in the grounds, and waited and watched; then I followed him home again. You see, sir, he was everything to me, all I had in the world; it drove me mad almost to think that anything might happen to him. So the time went on, until at last that night arrived when, as it seemed, I fell asleep and forgot everything. But I remember that night now perfectly."

In his rising excitement he got up, and began to pace about, stopping every now and then to clap his hands together softly, and to nod his head as some point in the story recurred to his memory. At last he came back to me, and sat down, and faced me.

"He had told me before he went out that he intended to see the doctor that night. 'I'll have a turn-up with him,' he said to me, and laughed. I dreaded that; I made up my mind that I would be very near to him, indeed, that night. It was difficult, because if once he had discovered that I was following him, and watching him like that, he might have been angry, and might have ordered me to remain at home. So, you see, I had to be discreet. I went ahead of him on that occasion, and I concealed myself in the grounds quite near to the house. There I waited, and waited so long that I came almost to think that he had changed his mind, and would not come at all."

"Did you see no one else in the grounds?" I asked, thinking of my own unceremonious coming on that wonderful night.

He stared at me, and shook his head. "No one," he said. "Presently Mr. Pennington arrived, and the young lady crept out of the house to meet him; I saw them talking together for a long time. Then I saw Mr. Pennington go towards the house, and enter it."

I remembered how I had lain in the grass that night, and had seen the same scene he now described, although from a different point of view. I knew that Capper must have been between them and the house, whilst I, for my part, had been on the other side of them, so that they were between me and this man.

"Now, I will tell you, as well as I can recollect, exactly what happened," he said, speaking slowly, and ticking off his points one by one on his fingers. "I was so nervous that night—nervous for him, I mean—that I thought, sir, I would go into the house, so as to see that all was well with him. Everything was very silent, except that I could hear the murmur of voices—of men talking. You

will understand, sir, that I did not know what the house was like, nor my way about it; but I found a door unfastened at the back, and I went in. I went towards where the voices were sounding, and I recognised Mr. Pennington's voice, and then the doctor's. Both the voices were loud and angry; I guessed that they were quarrelling."

"And what did you do then?" I asked him quickly.

"God help me!" he cried, wringing his hands. "I could not find the room. The place was in darkness, and I was afraid to make a noise, lest I should disturb some of the servants, and perhaps be turned out. I groped my way about among the passages, opening first one door and then another, and hearing the voices now near to me, and now further away; it was as though I had been in a maze. And then the voices ceased suddenly, and I heard the sound of a blow."

"What sort of blow?" I asked him breathlessly.

"It was like the sound of a weapon striking a man's head. It was followed by a sort of quick cry; and then there was silence. In my agitation I must have turned away from the spot; and I had now nothing to guide me, as the voices had guided me before. I could only stand there, waiting, and hoping to hear something. It was all so horrible, and I so helpless, that I wonder I did not go mad then. I was near to it when presently I heard a sound as though someone were dragging a heavy body across a room. I began again to move in the direction of that sound, and presently came to a door, and after listening to another sound I did not understand, opened it, and went in. I must be quick now to tell you what I saw, for it is at this point that the darkness falls upon me, and I seem to sink down and down into the depths that swallowed me up for so long a time."

I was really afraid that he might, indeed, forget before he could tell me; I watched him eagerly. After but a little pause he went on again, and now the horror was growing in his face, and stamping it, so that I could not take my eyes from him.

"As I opened the door of the room the doctor had his back to me, and he was hauling on something. I did not understand at first, until I saw that he was pulling on a rope that ran over a hook in the ceiling. That which he pulled was hidden from me by himself; I could not see what it was. It all happened in a second, because as I opened the door he swung away from me, still clinging to the rope—and then, dear God!—I saw what it was. Only for a flash did I see up there before me the dead face of my master—the master I loved, and for whom I would have given my life; then, as I put up my hand to hide the sight, everything went from me; and I seemed to fall, as I have said, into some great blackness, with all my life blotted out! That," he said, with a little, quick, helpless gesture of the hands—"that is all."

I felt my blood run cold at the horror of his tale; the whole scene seemed to be enacted before me, as though I had myself been present. "And did you really forget everything until a little time ago?" I asked.

"Everything, sir," he assured me solemnly. "I was like one groping in the dark. People I had known I knew again—as with Miss Debora; but I could not remember anything else. I had a vague idea that I had lost my master somewhere about that house; that made me cling to it. The rest was a blank. And then one day, when I saw the doctor raise his stick to strike a man down, it was as though something had been passed across my brain, and I remembered. If I can make myself clear, sir," went on Capper eagerly, "it was as though I had gone back to that night; that was why I sprang at the doctor, and wanted to kill him."

"And you tried again in the train," I reminded him. "But why on each occasion did you sham madness?—why did you pretend you were still the simple creature everyone supposed you to be?"

"Because I knew that if once Dr. Just guessed that I remembered the events of that night, he would take means to have me shut up; I might have been taken for a lunatic, and disposed of for the rest of my life. I knew that if I could once deceive him into believing that my mind was gone, he would not be suspicious of me. Unfortunately for my plan, I gave the game away when I tried to throw him out of that train."

"How was that?" I asked.

"I had managed things very well up to that point," he said. "I knew pretty well how the trains ran, and I knew that if I could throw him out on the line at a certain spot between the stations it would look like an accident, and the train on the other line would cut him to pieces. I was so sure of success that I threw off that disguise I had worn so long, and I cried out to him that I remembered he had killed my master, and that I meant to kill him. I dare say you remember, sir, that you asked him what I had said, and he would not tell you."

I remembered it distinctly, and I remembered how the doctor had watched that little drooping figure in the corner of the railway carriage, and how he had refused to tell me what the man had said before attacking him.

"After that, you see, there was no more chance of doing the thing secretly," went on Capper, speaking of the appalling business in the most easy and natural fashion. "He shut me out of the house; he would not let me come near him. Twice I followed him, and the second time I lost him. Now, sir,"—he clasped his hands, and looked at me with an agony of entreaty in his eyes—"now, sir, will you let me know where I can find him?"

"Answer me one question first," I said, looking into his eager eyes. "If you kill this man, what will

become of you?"

He spread out his hands, and smiled the strangest smile I have ever seen. "What does that matter?" he asked simply. "If I am found out they may say that I am a madman; they may shut me away for life. They may even hang me. It will not matter—my life finished when the man who saved me from myself died."

I did not hesitate any further; I told Capper that Dr. Bardolph Just was living down at a place called Green Barn, near Comerford, in Essex. He thanked me in the strangest fashion, with the tears in his eyes; he asked if he might shake hands with me. I had a weird feeling that he felt he might be going to his own death as I gripped his hand and let him go. I watched him for a long time while he went across the heath; he walked quickly, and without once looking to right or left, or even looking back at me. And I wondered what manner of death was preparing for Dr. Just.

Let it be understood clearly that I was so amazed by the whole business that for some time I could not decide what to do. There was no thought in my mind of saving Bardolph Just, or of warning him; I felt that in this grim business I had no right to interfere. The man who had meted out death to another man, and had striven so hard to kill an innocent girl, was no subject for pity. If I had desired to do anything to stop the business, it would have been on account of the man Capper; and so far as he was concerned, I knew that I might as well try to turn some strong river from its course as hold him back.

But I thought now of Debora. Strange as it may appear, in my own mind I regarded the death of Dr. Just as something inevitable—something arranged and settled. Capper had given away his secret to me; I knew that in some fashion Dr. Just would meet his death at Green Barn, unless by a miracle it happened that he had already gone away. And even then Capper was capable of following him, in that deadly hunt, to the other side of the world. I determined that I must go to Green Barn—not with any intention of standing between Capper and his intended victim, but in the hope to be of service to Debora. Debora would be alone with Bardolph Just, and Bardolph Just was marked for death!

I hurried back to my lodging, in the hope to find Andrew Ferkoe, and to let him know what I was doing; but I found that he had not yet returned to the house, and the landlady had no knowledge of his movements. There was nothing for it but for me to leave a message, saying that I was called away into the country, and hoped to be back within a day or so. I said nothing more definite than that.

I got out at Comerford Station in a heavy fall of summer rain. I had no knowledge of whether Capper was in front of me, or behind me in London; whether he had yet come face to face with the doctor, or whether that was still to happen. I was passing rapidly through the little booking-hall when I saw a big man lounging on a seat there, with his arms folded and his legs stretched out before him. It was Harvey Scoffold, and half involuntarily I stopped.

He looked up at me with a scowl, which changed the next moment to a grin. "Hullo!" he said, with an attempt at joviality, "what brings you down here?"

"You should be able to guess," I reminded him.

"There's no welcome for you—nor for anyone else," he said sourly. "Look at me, my boy; I'm turned out. Simply given my marching orders, if you please, and sent packing."

"Have you been to Green Barn?" I asked him.

He nodded. "Went down in the friendliest fashion, to see a man I've been devilish useful to—and what do I get? A meal, of course; then I'm calmly told that the doctor is in retirement, and is not receiving guests. More than that, I'll tell you something else that may not be to your liking."

He leaned forward, thrusting his heavy face towards me, and dropping a hand on each knee. I had always disliked the man; I could have struck him full in his smiling face now for the look it wore.

"I don't suppose it'll be a bit to your liking, Mr. John New, or whatever your confounded name is," he said. "But the doctor has sent everyone away—servants and all—sent 'em packing to-day. He's a bit mad, I think, over that girl—or else he really means to kill her. But there they are—just the pair of 'em—alone together in that house. If you ask me," he added with a leer, "I wouldn't mind changing places with him, and I should say——"

I waited for no more; I left the man, and almost ran out of the station in my excitement. I heard him call after me, but could not know what the words were; nor did I greatly care. One picture, and one only, possessed my mind, to the exclusion of everything else. The figure of Capper was blotted out by that more tragic figure of Debora, at the mercy of Bardolph Just, in that lonely Essex house. More than all else, I realised that my hands would be in a sense tied by Debora, because she would believe that my liberty would be endangered if she left the doctor.

I found that to be true enough. So confident was the man of his power over her that he had given her a certain amount of liberty; so that, to my surprise and my delight, I suddenly came face to face with her within an hour of my reaching Green Barn—and that, too, near to the little hut at the edge of the abandoned chalk pit.

The meeting was so surprising to both of us that for a time we could only hold hands, and talk

incoherently, each in a great relief at finding the other safe and well. But at last we came down to more prosaic things, and she told me something of what was happening.

Bardolph Just had sworn to carry his threat into execution if she saw me again, or had anything further to do with me; he had determined to risk everything, and to give me up to the authorities. I tried to show her that the man would never dare proceed to that extremity, because of the danger in which he would place himself by so doing. And then I told her about Capper, and about Capper's threat.

"Capper is here!" she exclaimed, startlingly enough.

"Have you seen him?" I demanded.

She nodded quickly. "I was walking in the grounds a little while ago, and I saw him. He came up to me, and said how glad he was to see me, and asked about the doctor—all quite innocently and simply, I thought."

"There is no innocence and no simplicity about him," I said. "He means murder. I don't think anything will turn him from it. That's why I want you to leave all this behind and to go away."

"With you?" she asked.

"No, not with me," I said, reluctantly enough. I could not tell her then all that was in my mind; I might have broken down in the telling. "I must remain here until I know what Capper means to do. I must, if possible, dissuade him from that, if only for his own sake. Tell me, my dear girl," I went on earnestly, "is there no one to whom you could go, and who would befriend you? Set the doctor out of your mind altogether; I have a presentiment that, whatever happens, he will not trouble you again. Is there no one to whom you could turn?"

"No one but you in all the world," she said, looking at me curiously.

"Your father must have had some lawyer—some friend," I suggested.

"The same lawyer that Dr. Just employs," she said. "He looks after my money, as well as that of the doctor."

"I want you to promise, Debora, that if anything happens to me you will go to that man, and will see to it that he makes proper provision for you out of your money, and provides you with a settled home. He will do that for his own sake."

"But what should happen to you?" she whispered, clinging to me. "And in any case how will anyone help me if the doctor is here to interfere?"

"I am only asking you to promise something, in case something else—something quite impossible, if you like—should happen," I assured her lightly.

"Very well then, I promise," she answered.

It was a more difficult matter to persuade her to run away, and especially to run away and leave me in that place. For I could not tell her my reasons, and I saw that she did not think it possible that that weak little creature Capper could carry out his threat against the stronger man Bardolph Just; the thing was a sheer impossibility. Nevertheless, I so worked upon her terrors of the house, and of the man who had her prisoner there, that at last she consented to go. I pressed what money I had upon her, and arranged that she should go back to London that night, and should make her way to the little quiet hotel near the Charterhouse where she was known; there she could await a letter from me. I was to keep out of the way until she was gone, that I might not seem to be connected with her flight. The rest was a matter on my part of vague promises as to the future.

And then it was that I held her in my arms as I had never held her before, and as though I could never let her go. For I had made up my mind that I would not see her again; it was my purpose to keep away from her, and to take myself out of her life from that hour. It seemed to me then as though all the strange business that had brought us together was closing, and I felt now, as I had not clearly felt before, that mine was no life to link with hers. She was rich, and she was young, and she was fair; any love she might have felt for me was more a matter of gratitude than anything else. I had been able to stand her friend when no other friend was near, but I was that creature without a name, who might some day by chance be sent back to his prison. I must not link my name with hers.

However, I would not let her suspect that this was the parting of the ways. I made her repeat her promise to me to go to this lawyer, an elderly man, as I understood, and one who had dealt honestly with her father; and with that we parted. I knew that she would slip out of the house, and would go off to London. From some other place I would write to her, and would tell her of my decision. I felt also that I might have news to tell of Dr. Bardolph Just.

And now I come to that strangest happening of all—the death of that celebrated physician and scientist, Dr. Bardolph Just. Of all that was written about it at the time, and the many eulogies that were printed concerning the man, you will doubtless have heard; but the true story of it is given here for the first time, and it is only given now because the man who killed him is dead also, and is beyond the reach of everyone.

The thing is presented to me in a series of scenes, so strange and weird in their character that it

is almost as though I had dreamt them, when now, after years, I strive to recollect them. The gaunt old house, standing surrounded by its grounds; the solitary man shut up alone in it, not dreaming that Debora had gone, and that I was so near at hand; and above all and before all, that strange figure of William Capper. I find myself shuddering now when I remember all the elements of the story, and how that story ended.

I was a mere spectator of the business—something outside it—and I looked on helplessly through the amazing scenes, with always that feeling that I was in a dream. Long after Debora had stolen away from the house that night, I wandered restlessly about the place, wondering a little at the silence, and remembering always that somewhere among the shadows lurked Capper, watching this man he had come to kill. I remembered also that in the strangest fashion Bardolph Just had prepared the way for him by actually sending everyone who might have protected him out of the house.

Exactly how Capper got into the place I was never able to discover. Whether Bardolph Just had grown careless, and did not think it likely that the man would discover where he was, or whether Capper, with cunning, forced an entrance somewhere, I never knew. But it was after midnight when I heard a cry in the house, and knew that what I dreaded had begun to happen. A minute or two afterwards the door opened, and Bardolph Just came out, staggering down the steps, and looking back into the lighted house. He seemed frightened, and I guessed what had frightened him.

He stopped still at a little distance from the house, and then turned slowly, and retraced his steps. Capper stood framed in the lighted doorway, looking out at him, but I saw that he appeared to have no weapon. In the dead silence all about us I heard Bardolph Just's words clearly.

"Where the devil did you come from?" he asked in a shrill voice.

"From my dead master!" came Capper's answer, clear and strong.

"Get out of my house, you madman!" exclaimed the doctor, taking a step towards him; but the other did not move. "What do you want with me?"

"I want to remain near you; I never mean to leave you again on this side of the grave," said Capper.

"Are you going to kill me?" asked the other. "Do you mean murder?"

"I don't mean to kill you—yet," replied the other. In the strangest fashion he seated himself on the top step, and folded his arms and waited.

Bardolph Just walked away a little, and then came back. I could see that, apart from his dread of the other man, he did not know what to do, nor how to meet this amazing situation. He took out a cigar from his case and lighted it, and strolled up and down there, alternately watching the little man seated above him, and studying the ground as though seeking for a solution of the difficulty. At last he decided to drop threatening, and to try if he might not win the man over.

"Look here, my good Capper," he said, "I've no reason to love you, but I think you're merely a poor, half-witted creature, who should be more pitied than blamed. I don't want to have any trouble with you, but most decidedly I don't want to be subjected to your violence. I want to come into my house."

"Come in by all means," said the little man, getting to his feet; "and I will not use violence."

Seeing that the doctor still hesitated, I thought I might at least show myself. I was, above all things, anxious to see the end of the business. My concern was with Capper chiefly. I could not see for the life of me what he would do in trying conclusions with a man of the physique of Bardolph Just. Above all things, I did not want it to happen that the doctor should gain a victory.

"You're not afraid of the man?" was my somewhat contemptuous greeting of him.

"What are *you* doing here?" he demanded. "Are you in the plot?"

"I've done with plots," I said. "I am merely a spectator."

He said nothing about Debora, and I rightly guessed that he had not yet discovered her absence, but had merely concluded that she had retired for the night. After looking at me for a moment or two doubtfully, he took a step or two in my direction, and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Look here," he said, with a nervous glance towards the man in the doorway, "I'm all alone in this house except for a weak girl, and I'm afraid of this fellow. What shall I do?"

"He's smaller than you are," I reminded him. "Turn him out!"

"I'm half afraid to go near him," he said. "You've seen him fly at me on two occasions; he can be like a wild beast when he likes."

"He has said that he will offer you no violence," I replied. "I don't know what he's got in his mind, but it seems to me, if you're afraid to turn him out, you've got to put up with him. He seems very fond of you," I added caustically.

He shot a glance at me, as though wondering what I meant; then turned and walked towards the

house. I saw Capper retreat before him, so as to give him free entry to the place. On the doorstep he turned, and called out into the darkness to me.

"You, at any rate, can stop outside; one madman is bad enough." Then the door was shut, and I was left to wonder what was going on inside.

I was not to be left long in doubt. In something less than half an hour, while I was hesitating whether to go, or whether to stay, the door was pulled open again, and a voice so querulous and nervous that I scarcely recognised it for that of the doctor called out into the darkness,

"John New! John New, are you there?"

I showed myself at once, and he ran down the steps to me. I saw that he was shaking from head to foot; the hand with which he gripped me, while he stared over his shoulder back into the house, was a hand of ice.

"For the love of God," he whispered, "come into the house with me! I shall go mad if this goes on. I can't shake him off."

"Lock yourself in your room, and go to bed," I said disdainfully.

"I can't; he's taken every key of every lock in the house and hidden them. I can't shut a door against him anywhere; upstairs and downstairs, wherever I go he is there, just behind me. Will you come in?"

I went in; the sheer fascination of the thing was growing on me. Capper took not the faintest notice of me; he was waiting just inside the door, and he followed us into a room. There he seated himself, with his hands on his knees, and waited. The doctor made a pretence of drinking, and even of lighting a cigar, but he set the glass down almost untasted, and allowed the cigar to go out. No words were exchanged between us, and still Capper kept up that relentless watch.

At last Bardolph Just sank down into a chair, and closed his eyes. "If he won't let me go to bed, I'll sleep here," he murmured.

But in a moment Capper had sprung up, and had gone to the man and shaken him roughly by the shoulder. "Wake up!" he ordered. "You'll sleep no more until you sleep at the last until the Judgment Day."

I saw then with horror what his purpose was. I knew not what the end was to be, but I saw that his immediate purpose was to wear the other man down until he could do what he liked with him. I thought he was a fool not to understand that in striving to break down the strength of the other he was breaking himself down too; but that never seemed to occur to him. For the whole of that night he kept Bardolph Just awake, followed him from room to room in that house where no door would lock, and where he gave his victim no time to barricade himself in; he never left him for a moment. More than once Bardolph Just turned on him, and then the eyes of Capper flashed, and he drew back as if about to spring; and the doctor waited. He threw himself on his bed once, in sheer exhaustion, and Capper made such a din in the room by overturning tables and smashing things that the wretched man got up and fled downstairs, and out into the grounds. But Capper fled with him.

For my part, I slept at intervals, dropping on to a couch, or into a deep chair, and closing my eyes from sheer weariness. I found myself murmuring in my sleep sometimes, incoherently begging Capper to give the game up, and to let the man alone; but he took no notice of me, and I might indeed have been a shadow in the house, so little did he seem to be aware of my presence. When I could, after waking from a fitful sleep, I would stumble about the house in a search for them, and even out into the grounds; and always there was the man striving for rest, and the other man keeping him awake.

Once Bardolph Just armed himself with a stick, and ran out of the house; Capper snatched up another, and ran after him. I thought that this was the end; I ran out too, crying to Capper to beware what he did. When I got to them—and this was the noon of the following day—Bardolph Just had flung aside his stick, and stood there in a dejected attitude, looking at his persecutor.

"It's no good," he said hoarsely, "I give in. Do what you will with me; ask what you will; this is the end."

"Not yet," said Capper, leaning upon the stick and watching him. "Not yet."

That strange hunt went on for the whole of that day, and during the next night. I only saw part of it all, because, of course, I fell asleep, and slept longer than I had done at first. But I saw once the wretched man fall upon his knees before Capper, and beg for mercy; saw him struggle with Capper with his uninjured arm, so that the two of them swayed about, dazed with want of sleep; saw him fall to the ground, and try to sleep, and the other kick him viciously into a wakeful state again. And at last came the end, when the doctor went swaying and stumbling up the stairs towards his bedroom, muttering that the other man could do his worst, but that he must sleep. So utterly worn out was he that he got no further than the landing; there he fell, and lay as one dead.

The sun was streaming in through a high window; it fell upon the exhausted man, and upon Capper standing beside him. Capper was swaying a little, but otherwise seemed alert enough.

"This will serve," he muttered as if to himself. "This is the end."

He went away, and after a little time came back with a rope and a hatchet. In my horror at what he might be going to do, I would have taken the hatchet from him; but now he threatened me with it, with a snarl like that of a wild beast; and I drew away from him, and watched. He proceeded to hack away the rails of the landing, leaving only the broad balustrade; he cut away six rails, and tossed them aside. Then he made a running noose in the rope, and fastened the other end of it securely to the balustrade. There was thus left a space under where the rope was fastened, and sheer down from that a drop into the hall below. He knelt down beside the unconscious man, and lifted his head, and put the noose about his neck. He tightened it viciously, but the sleeping man never even murmured.

Then I saw him begin to push the sleeping man slowly and with effort towards the gap he had made in the staircase rail.

When I could look (and it was a long time before I could make up my mind to do so), the body of Bardolph Just swung high above me, suspended by the neck. On the landing, prone upon the floor, lay William Capper, sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BOY WITH THE LONG CURLS.

The suicide of that brilliant and cultured man, Dr. Bardolph Just, caused, as you will remember, a very great sensation at the time, and there was much wonder expressed as to why the man had hanged himself at all. But there was no doubt about the question of suicide, because the whole thing had been so deliberately and carefully planned.

He had taken care to send everyone away from him—even an old and trusted friend like Mr. Harvey Scoffold—and had left himself absolutely alone in that great house. Various theories were put forward as to how he had managed to tie the knot so successfully, in making that running noose for his neck; but it was universally agreed that that had been a matter of teeth and his one uninjured hand. Shuddering accounts, wholly imaginary, were given of what the man's last hours must have been, and in what determined fashion he must have hacked away the rails, in order to make a space through which he could push his way. Everyone seemed to be perfectly agreed on that matter, and there it ended.

For the rest, let me say that I waited in that house until, in due course, William Capper woke up. He went about what he had to do after that in the most methodical way, restoring all the keys to the doors, and putting in order such things as had been disturbed during those long, weary hours when he had followed the other man round the house. He said but little to me, and at last we came out of the place, and stood together, with the doors of the house closed upon us. Only when we had gone through the grounds, and had come out upon the high road did he speak again, and then without looking at me.

"This is where we part, sir," he said quietly. "You will be making for London, and I——"

"Where will you go?" I asked him as he hesitated.

"I don't know, and it doesn't matter," he replied, looking out over the landscape that stretched before him. "I'm an old man, and there may not be many years for me. It does not matter much where or how I spend them. If," he added whimsically, "I could be sure that they would send me to that prison from which you came"—for I had told him that part of the story—"I would do something that would cause me to be sent there; but it might be another prison, and that wouldn't do. I should like to be near him."

I stretched out my hand to him, on an impulse, in farewell, but he shook his head. "You might not like to think afterwards that you took my hand, after what I have done," he said quietly. Then, with a quick nod, this singular creature turned away and walked off down the road. I lost him at a turn of it, and I saw him no more.

I went back to London that night, and at my old lodging found Andrew Ferkoe awaiting me. I had the task before me of writing to Debora, and that task, as you may suppose, was not an easy one. Nevertheless I contrived to put my case before her clearly and without brutality.

I told her that I should love her all my life; I blessed her for all she had unconsciously done for me; I told her I was grateful for the sweet memory of herself that she had left with me. But I reminded her that I had no name, and no position, and no hopes, and if by any unfortunate chance my real name was thrust upon me in the future, it would only be to bring shame and degradation upon me and upon any one with whom I was associated. And I added that she would have news very soon concerning the doctor, and I thought it improbable that he would ever trouble her again.

I sealed the letter and directed it, and gave it to Andrew Ferkoe. "Run out and post that," I said. "And never speak to me about the matter again. You and I are alone together in the world, Andrew, and we shall have to be sufficient for each other."

The lad weighed the letter in his hand, studying the address, and looking from it to me and back again. "I know what you've done," he said; "you've had a row with the young lady—that's what you've done."

"You simpleton!" I laughed; "what do you know about such matters? I've had no row with the young lady, as you express it. I'm only trying to do the right thing."

"Isn't she fond of you?" he asked wistfully.

"I believe she's very fond of me," I replied. "Only there are such things in this world as honour, and justice, and truth, and it is written among the laws that men should obey, but do not, that you mustn't take advantage of a woman's fondness for you. In other words, Andrew, you must play the game. So that it happens that, as I'm a rank outsider and a bad lot, and as I have the stain of the prison on me, I've got to steer clear of a young girl who is as high above me as the stars. In a little time she will come to think of me with friendly feelings, but no more than that. So off with you, my boy, and post that important letter."

Andrew hesitated a moment or two longer, and shook his head, but at last he sallied forth on his errand. I had lighted a cigar, and was on the point of sitting down to enjoy it, and to ruminate luxuriously over my miseries, when there came a knock at the door, and my landlady put her head in to announce that a gentleman had come to see me. I was rapidly running over the names of the extremely few people who even knew of my whereabouts as the man entered, and disclosed himself as an utter stranger. He was a little man, dressed in black, and of a precise manner of speech and action. The landlady withdrew, and the visitor stood looking at me, as though taking stock of me generally, while he removed his gloves.

"Haven't you made a mistake, sir?" I asked.

"I think not," he replied. "You are Mr. John New, are you not?"

I told him that I was, and I began to have an unpleasant sensation that he must be connected with the police in some way. However, he smiled with satisfaction at this proof that he was right, and took from his breast pocket a little bundle of papers.

"You were, I believe, a friend of the late Mr. Zabdiel Blowfield, who was brutally murdered a short time ago?" he asked, looking up at me.

"Yes," I said, in some amazement. "I knew him slightly."

"As you are doubtless aware, Mr. New, the old gentleman was very eccentric, and took very sudden likes and dislikes. He had no one in the world belonging to him, his one nephew, after a somewhat disgraceful career, having died shamefully. It seems, however, that, slight as your acquaintance with him was, he took a decided liking for you."

"He never displayed it in life," I said grimly.

"Then he has made up for any lack in that respect now," said the man. "Perhaps I should introduce myself, Mr. New. My name is Tipping—James Tipping—and I was Mr. Blowfield's solicitor for many years. I should like, Mr. New, to congratulate you; your poor old friend has left you everything he possessed in the world."

For a moment or two I gaped at him, not understanding. I tried to frame words in which to answer, tried to get some grasp of his meaning. While I stood there, staring stupidly, he smiled indulgently, and went on speaking.

"The will in which he left everything to you, and which was duly witnessed at my office, was prepared only a few days—a few hours almost—before his death. It was prepared under curious circumstances. He seemed to have an idea that he had not treated his dead nephew very well, and he wanted to make amends in some way. He told me that was the reason that he wanted to leave the money to you, a young man, with his way to make in the world."

I own I felt bitterly ashamed. I seemed to see this strange old man doing what he thought was some tardy act of justice at the very end, and doing it in such a fashion that my identity should not be revealed. True, I remembered that in sheer panic he had tried to destroy me afterwards, but he had not revoked the will.

"How much is it?" I contrived to ask.

"Considerably over eighty thousand pounds," said Mr. Tipping unctuously. "Mr. Blowfield lived very simply, as you are aware, and was extremely successful in his investments generally. I congratulate you, Mr. New, with all my heart; I regret if I have been somewhat abrupt, and so have startled you."

"It is a little staggering, certainly," I said weakly.

The man made an appointment for me to see him at his office on the following day, but meanwhile left a substantial sum in my hands. When Andrew Ferkoe came back, as he did presently, I told him the great news.

"Now, look here, Andrew," I said solemnly, "I regard this money as belonging almost as much to you as it does to me. There's not the slightest doubt that my Uncle Zabdiel made your father poor, and you know well enough that he ground you pretty hard afterwards. You toiled, just as I toiled before you; and now we've got our great reward. You shall join forces with me; we'll start life together, in a better fashion than any we have yet enjoyed. Come down with me to see the lawyer to-morrow, and I'll settle a certain amount on you, and tie it up tight, so that you can get at it only in instalments; because money's a dreadful temptation. After that we'll decide what we shall do with our lives."

"I wish my poor father had been alive to know you," said the boy tearfully.

I slept but little that night; my brain was awl with many thoughts. Now, more than ever, there entered into me the temptation to remember only that I was a rich man, and by that right, at least, I might approach Debora. I weighed that aspect of the case carefully through the long hours of the night—almost making up my mind at times that I would throw everything else to the winds, and would go to the girl and beg her now to start life with me in a newer and a better fashion than any she or I had known. But with the cold light of the dawn hard facts asserted themselves; and I knew that the brand of my prison was on me, and could not well be washed out. I rose from my bed, determined that for the future love or thoughts of love was not for me.

In due course we called upon Mr. James Tipping, and I listened with what patience I might to a lecture from that gentleman on the sin of mistaken generosity. In the end, of course, I had my way, and Andrew Ferkoe found himself with an income, and with Mr. James Tipping as his legal guardian. I will not tell you the amount, lest you should regard me either as too generous or not generous enough; suffice it that Andrew could look forward to the prospect of passing his days in comfort, no matter what might happen to me.

A few days of splendid idleness supervened on that, and I saw London under a new aspect, and with a heart almost at peace—almost, because it was utterly impossible for me to shut out of my mind what might have been and what never could be. So difficult was it, indeed, that at last my resolution broke down; and one evening I drove straight to the little hotel near the Charterhouse where I had left Debora. I rehearsed speeches as I went along, telling myself that she should understand clearly what the position was, and what she risked, and all the rest of it; I was very full of the matter by the time the cab stopped outside the hotel.

But she was gone. So little had I expected that, that I stared in blank amazement at the porter, and asked him if he was quite sure. Yes, he was quite sure; the lady had left two days before, and had not stated where she was going.

That was a knock-down blow, and one from which I found it difficult to recover. My pride was hurt, inconsistently enough; I had never expected that she would take the matter like that, and so readily adopt the very forcible arguments I had brought to bear upon the situation in my letter to her. I had pictured her as resenting the idea fiercely; I had pictured her broken down, and longing to see me, and to put her own very different view of the matter before me. This calm acceptance of my ideas was not what in my heart I had really anticipated.

Foolishly enough, I went back again and again to the hotel; but there was no news of her. I did not even know the name of the lawyer to whom I had recommended her to go, in the event of anything happening to me or to the doctor. I began to see with bitterness that this young lady regarded me merely as an episode—merely as a highly undesirable escaped convict, who had forced his way into her life, and who was now done with.

For my part, I had done with London, and I had done with England. I made up my mind that I would go abroad, and would start again in a new country, and would endeavour to make something of my miserable existence. So set was I upon the idea that in a matter of days I had decided everything, and was buying my outfit. I put the matter before Andrew Ferkoe; I expected that he would raise objections to our parting.

He seemed a little upset, but said nothing that bore greatly on the question. He had great hopes, he told me, of being a doctor, and was already making arrangements to enter himself at a hospital, with a view to training. I applauded the idea, for I had not liked to think that the lad might settle down to doing nothing save the spending of his income.

Judge of my surprise, therefore, when on the very next day he walked into my sitting-room in the comfortable hotel in which we had taken up our quarters, and announced quite another decision. He announced it firmly, too, and with more daring than I should have given him credit for.

"I'm coming with you," he said.

"You're making a great mistake if you think of doing that," I assured him. "Here in London you can settle down, and become a great and clever man; with me you'll probably lead a useless, wandering sort of existence, and accomplish nothing. Be wise, and stay where you are."

"I'm coming with you," said Andrew obstinately. "You've been awfully good to me, and I should be a beast to let you go on alone, to knock about the world. I've been selfish even to think of it."

Nor could I shake his determination. I had booked my passage, and I now had to take another for him. He was nervous of going, he told me, and would greatly prefer to have a cabin to himself, if that could be secured. As there were not many passengers by that particular boat, I was able to arrange that he should be alone in a small cabin. I settled the matter then and there, and paid his

passage money. And so we came to the last night we were to spend in England.

"I want to have a run round to-morrow," he said, as we were about to retire to our rooms. "It'll be the last time I shall see London, I expect, and I want to make the most of every hour. The vessel doesn't sail until quite late, and I shall go on board and turn in at once. I'm dreadfully afraid I shall be ill, and I don't want to wake up until I'm miles away from the shore; then perhaps I can face it better."

Having settled that point, the boy prepared to go to bed. When he got to the door of the room, however, he turned back, and slowly retraced his steps to where I stood. He seemed bashful and nervous; he did not look into my eyes.

"There's never been anyone in the world that's behaved as well to me as you have," he said. "I shall never be able to thank you enough."

"Shut up, Andrew, and go to bed!" I broke in.

"I don't intend to speak about it again, but I must, just this last time. God bless you, Jack"—I had taught him to call me that—"and may you be the happiest man in the world, wherever you are."

Before I could prevent him he had caught my hand in both of his, and had kissed it passionately; then, with a sound suspiciously like a sob, he turned and bolted from the room. I had known him always for an odd, strange creature, but I confess I was moved more strongly than perhaps I had ever been moved before.

Evidently he had made up his mind to make the most of the day; he was gone from the hotel when I came down in the morning. I took my last look at London on my own account, feeling not too cheerful at the prospect of going so far away. Then, towards the hour for sailing, I started for the ship. My luggage had gone on, and I had nothing to do but to put myself on board.

"The young gentleman came on board, and turned in about half an hour ago, sir," the steward told me. "Dreadful afraid of being seasick, sir; said he wasn't to be disturbed on any account."

"Let him alone by all means," I said laughing. I felt relieved to know that Andrew had got safely out of his adventures of the day. I turned in, and slept until the morning, by which time we were well out to sea.

Andrew did not put in an appearance all that day. He sent messages to me by the steward, to say that he was very ill, and did not want to see anyone; a little later, that he was getting better. It was quite late in the evening when I put the steward aside and insisted on seeing the boy. I was anxious about him.

The cabin was not particularly well lighted as I stumbled into it. I saw the boy sitting on the side of his bunk, with his face partly turned from me. Curiously enough, he was wearing his hat, a soft felt I had noticed him with the day before we left London.

"Well, Andrew," I said cheerily, "I'm sorry to see you like this. Much better for you to put a good face on it, and come on deck."

"Won't this face do?"

I started, and stared at the figure of the boy.

In a moment the boy rose to his feet and tossed aside the felt hat; a great mass of curls came tumbling down on to his shoulders. I uttered a cry of amazement.

It was Debora!

"Andrew knew all about it all the time," she whispered to me, when presently we were coherent, and when she had blushingly apologised for her boy's dress. "He came to me after he had posted the letter you sent me; then, when I knew that you were going to sail, I made up my mind to come with you. You foolish fellow! you would only have run away from me again if I had tried to meet you in any other way; and I wanted to follow you all over the world."

"All my world is here!" I whispered, as I kissed her.

THE END.

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