Victorian Short Stories
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To begin at the beginning, I must take you back to the time after my mother’s death, when my only brother had gone to sea, when my sister was out at service, and when I lived alone with my father in the midst of a moor in the west of England.

The moor was covered with great limestone rocks, and intersected here and there by streamlets. The nearest habitation to ours was situated about a mile and a half off, where a strip of the fertile land stretched out into the waste like a tongue. Here the outbuildings of the great Moor Farm, then in the possession of my husband’s father, began. The farm-lands stretched down gently into a beautiful rich valley, lying nicely sheltered by the high platform of the moor. When the ground began to rise again, miles and miles away, it led up to a country house called Holme Manor, belonging to a gentleman named Knifton. Mr. Knifton had lately married a young lady whom my mother had nursed, and whose kindness and friendship for me, her foster-sister, I shall remember gratefully to the last day of my life. These and other slight particulars it is necessary to my story that I should tell you, and it is also necessary that you should be especially careful to bear them well in mind.

My father was by trade a stone-mason. His cottage stood a mile and a half from the nearest habitation. In all other directions we were four or five times that distance from neighbors. Being very poor people, this lonely situation had one great attraction for us— we lived rent free on it. In addition to that advantage, the stones, by shaping which my father gained his livelihood, lay all about him at his very door, so that he thought his position, solitary as it was, quite an enviable one. I can hardly say that I agreed with him, though I never complained. I was very fond of my father, and managed to make the best of my loneliness with the thought of being useful to him. Mrs. Knifton wished to take me into her service when she married, but I declined, unwillingly enough, for my father’s sake. If I had gone away, he would have had nobody to live with him; and my mother made me promise on her death-bed that he should never be left to pine away alone in the midst of the bleak moor.

Our cottage, small as it was, was stoutly and snugly built, with stone from the moor as a matter of course. The walls were lined inside and fenced outside with wood, the gift of Mr. Knifton’s father to my father. This double covering of cracks and crevices, which would have been superfluous in a sheltered position, was absolutely necessary, in our exposed situation, to keep out the cold winds which, excepting just the summer months, swept over us continually all the year round. The outside boards, covering our roughly-built stone walls, my father protected against the wet with pitch and tar. This gave to our little abode a curiously dark, dingy look, especially when it was seen from a distance; and so it had come to be called in the neighborhood, even before I was born, The Black Cottage.

I have now related the preliminary particulars which it is desirable that you should know, and may proceed at once to the pleasanter task of telling you my story.

One cloudy autumn day, when I was rather more than eighteen years old, a herdsman walked over from Moor Farm with a letter which had been left there for my father. It came from a builder living at our county town, half a day’s journey off, and it invited my father to come to him and give his judgment about an estimate for some stone work on a very large scale. My father’s expenses for loss of time were to be paid, and he was to have his share of employment afterwards in preparing the stone. He was only too glad, therefore, to obey the directions which the letter contained, and to prepare at once for his long walk to the county town.

Considering the time at which he received the letter, and the necessity of resting before he attempted to return, it was impossible for him to avoid being away from home for one night, at least. He proposed to me, in case I disliked being left alone in the Black Cottage, to lock the door and to
take me to Moor Farm to sleep with any one of the milkmaids who would give me a share of her bed. I by no means liked the notion of sleeping with a girl whom I did not know, and I saw no reason to feel afraid of being left alone for only one night; so I declined. No thieves had ever come near us; our poverty was sufficient protection against them; and of other dangers there were none that even the most timid person could apprehend. Accordingly, I got my father’s dinner, laughing at the notion of my taking refuge under the protection of a milkmaid at Moor Farm. He started for his walk as soon as he had done, saying he should try and be back by dinner-time the next day, and leaving me and my cat Polly to take care of the house.

I had cleared the table and brightened up the fire, and had sat down to my work with the cat dozing at my feet, when I heard the trampling of horses, and, running to the door, saw Mr. and Mrs. Knifton, with their groom behind them, riding up to the Black Cottage. It was part of the young lady’s kindness never to neglect an opportunity of coming to pay me a friendly visit, and her husband was generally willing to accompany her for his wife’s sake. I made my best courtesy, therefore, with a great deal of pleasure, but with no particular surprise at seeing them. They dismounted and entered the cottage, laughing and talking in great spirits. I soon heard that they were riding to the same county town for which my father was bound and that they intended to stay with some friends there for a few days, and to return home on horseback, as they went out.

I heard this, and I also discovered that they had been having an argument, in jest, about money-matters, as they rode along to our cottage. Mrs. Knifton had accused her husband of inveterate extravagance, and of never being able to go out with money in his pocket without spending it all, if he possibly could, before he got home again. Mr. Knifton had laughingly defended himself by declaring that all his pocket-money went in presents for his wife, and that, if he spent it lavishly, it was under her sole influence and superintendence.

“We are going to Cliverton now,” he said to Mrs. Knifton, naming the county town, and warming himself at our poor fire just as pleasantly as if he had been standing on his own grand hearth. “You will stop to admire every pretty thing in every one of the Cliverton shop-windows; I shall hand you the purse, and you will go in and buy. When we have reached home again, and you have had time to get tired of your purchases, you will clasp your hands in amazement, and declare that you are quite shocked at my habits of inveterate extravagance. I am only the banker who keeps the money; you, my love, are the spendthrift who throws it all away!”

“Am I, sir?” said Mrs. Knifton, with a look of mock indignation. “We will see if I am to be misrepresented in this way with impunity. Bessie, my dear” (turning to me), “you shall judge how far I deserve the character which that unscrupulous man has just given to me. I am the spendthrift, am I? And you are only the banker? Very well. Banker, give me my money at once, if you please!”

Mr. Knifton laughed, and took some gold and silver from his waistcoat pocket.

“No, no,” said Mrs. Knifton, “you may want what you have got there for necessary expenses. Is that all the money you have about you? What do I feel here?” and she tapped her husband on the chest, just over the breast-pocket of his coat.

Mr. Knifton laughed again, and produced his pocketbook. His wife snatched it out of his hand, opened it, and drew out some bank-notes, put them back again immediately, and, closing the pocketbook, stepped across the room to my poor mother’s little walnut-wood book-case, the only bit of valuable furniture we had in the house.

“What are you going to do there?” asked Mr. Knifton, following his wife.

Mrs. Knifton opened the glass door of the book-case, put the pocketbook in a vacant place on one of the lower shelves, closed and locked the door again, and gave me the key.

“You called me a spendthrift just now,” she said. “There is my answer. Not one farthing of that money shall you spend at Cliverton on me. Keep the key in your pocket, Bessie, and, whatever Mr. Knifton may say, on no account let him have it until we call again on our way back. No, sir, I won’t trust you with that money in your pocket in the town of Cliverton. I will make sure of your taking it all home again, by leaving it here in more trustworthy hands than yours until we ride back. Bessie, my dear, what do you say to that as a lesson in economy inflicted on a prudent husband by a spendthrift wife?”
She took Mr. Knifton’s arm while she spoke, and drew him away to the door. He protested and made some resistance, but she easily carried her point, for he was far too fond of her to have a will of his own in any trifling matter between them. Whatever the men might say, Mr. Knifton was a model husband in the estimation of all the women who knew him.

“You will see us as we come back, Bessie. Till then, you are our banker, and the pocketbook is yours,” cried Mrs. Knifton, gayly, at the door. Her husband lifted her into the saddle, mounted himself, and away they both galloped over the moor as wild and happy as a couple of children.

Although my being trusted with money by Mrs. Knifton was no novelty (in her maiden days she always employed me to pay her dress-maker’s bills), I did not feel quite easy at having a pocketbook full of bank-notes left by her in my charge. I had no positive apprehensions about the safety of the deposit placed in my hands, but it was one of the odd points in my character then (and I think it is still) to feel an unreasonably strong objection to charging myself with money responsibilities of any kind, even to suit the convenience of my dearest friends. As soon as I was left alone, the very sight of the pocketbook behind the glass door of the book-case began to worry me, and instead of returning to my work, I puzzled my brains about finding a place to lock it up in, where it would not be exposed to the view of any chance passers-by who might stray into the Black Cottage.

This was not an easy matter to compass in a poor house like ours, where we had nothing valuable to put under lock and key. After running over various hiding-places in my mind, I thought of my tea-caddy, a present from Mrs. Knifton, which I always kept out of harm’s way in my own bedroom. Most unluckily—as it afterward turned out—instead of taking the pocketbook to the tea-caddy, I went into my room first to take the tea-caddy to the pocketbook. I only acted in this roundabout way from sheer thoughtlessness, and severely enough I was punished for it, as you will acknowledge yourself when you have read a page or two more of my story.

I was just getting the unlucky tea-caddy out of my cupboard, when I heard footsteps in the passage, and, running out immediately, saw two men walk into the kitchen—the room in which I had received Mr. and Mrs. Knifton. I inquired what they wanted sharply enough, and one of them answered immediately that they wanted my father. He turned toward me, of course, as he spoke, and I recognized him as a stone-mason, going among his comrades by the name of Shifty Dick. He bore a very bad character for everything but wrestling, a sport for which the working men of our parts were famous all through the county. Shifty Dick was champion, and he had got his name from some tricks of wrestling, for which he was celebrated. He was a tall, heavy man, with a lowering, scarred face, and huge hairy hands—the last visitor in the whole world that I should have been glad to see under any circumstances. His companion was a stranger, whom he addressed by the name of Jerry—a quick, dapper, wicked-looking man, who took off his cap to me with mock politeness, and showed, in so doing, a very bald head, with some very ugly-looking knobs on it. I distrusted him worse than I did Shifty Dick, and managed to get between his leering eyes and the book-case, as I told the two that my father was gone out, and that I did not expect him back till the next day.

The words were hardly out of my mouth before I repented that my anxiety to get rid of my unwelcome visitors had made me incautious enough to acknowledge that my father would be away from home for the whole night.

Shifty Dick and his companion looked at each other when I unwisely let out the truth, but made no remark except to ask me if I would give them a drop of cider. I answered sharply that I had no cider in the house, having no fear of the consequences of refusing them drink, because I knew that plenty of men were at work within hail, in a neighboring quarry. The two looked at each other again when I denied having any cider to give them; and Jerry (as I am obliged to call him, knowing no other name by which to distinguish the fellow) took off his cap to me once more, and, with a kind of blackguard gentility upon him, said they would have the pleasure of calling the next day, when my father was at home. I said good-afternoon as ungraciously as possible, and, to my great relief, they both left the cottage immediately afterward.

As soon as they were well away, I watched them from the door. They trudged off in the direction of Moor Farm; and, as it was beginning to get dusk, I soon lost sight of them.
Half an hour afterward I looked out again.

The wind had lulled with the sunset, but the mist was rising, and a heavy rain was beginning to fall. Never did the lonely prospect of the moor look so dreary as it looked to my eyes that evening. Never did I regret any slight thing more sincerely than I then regretted the leaving of Mr. Knifton’s pocketbook in my charge. I cannot say that I suffered under any actual alarm, for I felt next to certain that neither Shifty Dick nor Jerry had got a chance of setting eyes on so small a thing as the pocketbook while they were in the kitchen; but there was a kind of vague distrust troubling me—-a suspicion of the night—-a dislike of being left by myself, which I never remember having experienced before. This feeling so increased after I had closed the door and gone back to the kitchen, that, when I heard the voices of the quarrymen as they passed our cottage on their way home to the village in the valley below Moor Farm, I stepped out into the passage with a momentary notion of telling them how I was situated, and asking them for advice and protection.

I had hardly formed this idea, however, before I dismissed it. None of the quarrymen were intimate friends of mine. I had a nodding acquaintance with them, and believed them to be honest men, as times went. But my own common sense told me that what little knowledge of their characters I had was by no means sufficient to warrant me in admitting them into my confidence in the matter of the pocketbook. I had seen enough of poverty and poor men to know what a terrible temptation a large sum of money is to those whose whole lives are passed in scraping up sixpences by weary hard work. It is one thing to write fine sentiments in books about incorruptible honesty, and another thing to put those sentiments in practice when one day’s work is all that a man has to set up in the way of an obstacle between starvation and his own fireside.

The only resource that remained was to carry the pocketbook with me to Moor Farm, and ask permission to pass the night there. But I could not persuade myself that there was any real necessity for taking such a course as this; and, if the truth must be told, my pride revolted at the idea of presenting myself in the character of a coward before the people at the farm. Timidity is thought rather a graceful attraction among ladies, but among poor women it is something to be laughed at. A woman with less spirit of her own than I had, and always shall have, would have considered twice in my situation before she made up her mind to encounter the jokes of plowmen and the jeers of milkmaids. As for me, I had hardly considered about going to the farm before I despised myself for entertaining any such notion. “No, no,” thought I, “I am not the woman to walk a mile and a half through rain, and mist, and darkness to tell a whole kitchenful of people that I am afraid. Come what may, here I stop till father gets back.”

Having arrived at that valiant resolution, the first thing I did was to lock and bolt the back and front doors, and see to the security of every shutter in the house.

That duty performed, I made a blazing fire, lighted my candle, and sat down to tea, as snug and comfortable as possible. I could hardly believe now, with the light in the room, and the sense of security inspired by the closed doors and shutters, that I had ever felt even the slightest apprehension earlier in the day. I sang as I washed up the tea-things; and even the cat seemed to catch the infection of my good spirits. I never knew the pretty creature so playful as she was that evening.

The tea-things put by, I took up my knitting, and worked away at it so long that I began at last to get drowsy. The fire was so bright and comforting that I could not muster resolution enough to leave it and go to bed. I sat staring lazily into the blaze, with my knitting on my lap—-sat till the splashing of the rain outside and the fitful, sullen sobbing of the wind grew fainter and fainter on my ear. The last sounds I heard before I fairly dozed off to sleep were the cheerful crackling of the fire and the steady purring of the cat, as she basked luxuriously in the warm light on the hearth. Those were the last sounds before I fell asleep. The sound that woke me was one loud bang at the front door.

I started up, with my heart (as the saying is) in my mouth, with a frightful momentary shuddering at the roots of my hair—-I started up breathless, cold and motionless, waiting in the silence I hardly knew for what, doubtful at first whether I had dreamed about the bang at the door, or whether the blow had really been struck on it.
In a minute or less there came a second bang, louder than the first. I ran out into the passage.

“Who’s there?”

“Let us in,” answered a voice, which I recognised immediately as the voice of Shifty Dick.

“Wait a bit, my dear, and let me explain,” said a second voice, in the low, oily, jeering tones of Dick’s companion—the wickedly clever little man whom he called Jerry. “You are alone in the house, my pretty little dear. You may crack your sweet voice with screeching, and there’s nobody near to hear you. Listen to reason, my love, and let us in. We don’t want cider this time—we only want a very neat-looking pocketbook which you happen to have, and your late excellent mother’s four silver teaspoons, which you keep so nice and clean on the chimney-piece. If you let us in we won’t hurt a hair of your head, my cherub, and we promise to go away the moment we have got what we want, unless you particularly wish us to stop to tea. If you keep us out, we shall be obliged to break into the house and then—”

“And then,” burst in Shifty Dick, “we’ll mash you!”

“Yes,” said Jerry, “we’ll mash you, my beauty. But you won’t drive us to doing that, will you? You will let us in?”

This long parley gave me time to recover from the effect which the first bang at the door had produced on my nerves. The threats of the two villains would have terrified some women out of their senses, but the only result they produced on me was violent indignation. I had, thank God, a strong spirit of my own, and the cool, contemptuous insolence of the man Jerry effectually roused it.

“You cowardly villains!” I screamed at them through the door. “You think you can frighten me because I am only a poor girl left alone in the house. You ragamuffin thieves, I defy you both! Our bolts are strong, our shutters are thick. I am here to keep my father’s house safe, and keep it I will against an army of you!”

You may imagine what a passion I was in when I vaporied and blustered in that way. I heard Jerry laugh and Shifty Dick swear a whole mouthful of oaths. Then there was a dead silence for a minute or two, and then the two ruffians attacked the door.

I rushed into the kitchen and seized the poker, and then heaped wood on the fire, and lighted all the candles I could find; for I felt as though I could keep up my courage better if I had plenty of light. Strange and improbable as it may appear, the next thing that attracted my attention was my poor pussy, crouched up, panic-stricken, in a corner. I was so fond of the little creature that I took her up in my arms and carried her into my bedroom and put her inside my bed. A comical thing to do in a situation of deadly peril, was it not? But it seemed quite natural and proper at the time.

All this while the blows were falling faster and faster on the door. They were dealt, as I conjectured, with heavy stones picked up from the ground outside. Jerry sang at his wicked work, and Shifty Dick swore. As I left the bedroom after putting the cat under cover, I heard the lower panel of the door begin to crack.

I ran into the kitchen and huddled our four silver spoons into my pocket; then took the unlucky book with the bank-notes and put it in the bosom of my dress. I was determined to defend the property confided to my care with my life. Just as I had secured the pocketbook I heard the door splintering, and rushed into the passage again with my heavy kitchen poker lifted in both hands.

I was in time to see the bald head of Jerry, with the ugly-looking knobs on it, pushed into the passage through a great rent in one of the lower panels of the door.

“Get out, you villain, or I’ll brain you on the spot!” I screeched, threatening him with the poker.

Mr. Jerry took his head out again much faster than he put it in.

The next thing that came through the rent was a long pitchfork, which they darted at me from the outside, to move me from the door. I struck it with all my might, and the blow must have jarred the hand of Shifty Dick up to his very shoulder, for I heard him give a roar of rage and pain. Before he could catch at the fork with his other hand I had drawn it inside. By this time even Jerry lost his temper and swore more awfully than Dick himself.

Then there came another minute of respite. I suspected they had gone to get bigger stones, and I dreaded the giving way of the whole door.
Running into the bedroom as this fear beset me, I laid hold of my chest of drawers, dragged it into the passage, and threw it down against the door. On the top of that I heaped my father’s big tool chest, three chairs, and a scuttleful of coals; and last, I dragged out the kitchen table and rammed it as hard as I could against the whole barricade. They heard me as they were coming up to the door with fresh stones. Jerry said: “Stop a bit!” and then the two consulted together in whispers. I listened eagerly, and just caught these words:

“Let’s try it the other way.”
Nothing more was said, but I heard their footsteps retreating from the door.
Were they going to besiege the back door now?

I had hardly asked myself that question when I heard their voices at the other side of the house. The back door was smaller than the front, but it had this advantage in the way of strength—it was made of two solid oak boards joined lengthwise, and strengthened inside by heavy cross pieces. It had no bolts like the front door, but was fastened by a bar of iron running across it in a slanting direction, and fitting at either end into the wall.

“They must have the whole cottage down before they can break in at that door!” I thought to myself. And they soon found out as much for themselves. After five minutes of banging at the back door they gave up any further attack in that direction and cast their heavy stones down with curses of fury awful to hear.

I went into the kitchen and dropped on the window-seat to rest for a moment. Suspense and excitement together were beginning to tell upon me. The perspiration broke out thick on my forehead, and I began to feel the bruises I had inflicted on my hands in making the barricade against the front door. I had not lost a particle of my resolution, but I was beginning to lose strength. There was a bottle of rum in the cupboard, which my brother the sailor had left with us the last time he was ashore. I drank a drop of it. Never before or since have I put anything down my throat that did me half so much good as that precious mouthful of rum!

I was still sitting in the window-seat drying my face, when I suddenly heard their voices close behind me.

They were feeling the outside of the window against which I was sitting. It was protected, like all the other windows in the cottage, by iron bars. I listened in dreadful suspense for the sound of filing, but nothing of the sort was audible. They had evidently reckoned on frightening me easily into letting them in, and had come unprovided with house-breaking tools of any kind. A fresh burst of oaths informed me that they had recognized the obstacle of the iron bars. I listened breathlessly for some warning of what they were going to do next, but their voices seemed to die away in the distance. They were retreating from the window. Were they also retreating from the house altogether? Had they given up the idea of effecting an entrance in despair?

A long silence followed—a silence which tried my courage even more severely than the tumult of their first attack on the cottage.

Dreadful suspicions now beset me of their being able to accomplish by treachery what they had failed to effect by force. Well as I knew the cottage, I began to doubt whether there might not be ways of cunningly and silently entering it against which I was not provided. The ticking of the clock annoyed me; the crackling of the fire startled me. I looked out twenty times in a minute into the dark corners of the passage, straining my eyes, holding my breath, anticipating the most unlikely events, the most impossible dangers. Had they really gone, or were they still prowling about the house? Oh, what a sum of money I would have given only to have known what they were about in that interval of silence!

I was startled at last out of my suspense in the most awful manner. A shout from one of them reached my ears on a sudden down the kitchen chimney. It was so unexpected and so horrible in the stillness that I screamed for the first time since the attack on the house. My worst forebodings had never suggested to me that the two villains might mount upon the roof.

“Let us in, you she-devil!” roared a voice down the chimney.

There was another pause. The smoke from the wood fire, thin and light as it was in the red state of the embers at that moment, had evidently obliged the man to take his face from the mouth
of the chimney. I counted the seconds while he was, as I conjectured, getting his breath again. In less than half a minute there came another shout:

“Let us in, or we’ll burn the place down over your head!”

Burn it? Burn what? There was nothing easily combustible but the thatch on the roof; and that had been well soaked by the heavy rain which had now fallen incessantly for more than six hours. Burn the place over my head? How?

While I was still casting about wildly in my mind to discover what possible danger there could be of fire, one of the heavy stones placed on the thatch to keep it from being torn up by high winds came thundering down the chimney. It scattered the live embers on the hearth all over the room. A richly-furnished place, with knickknacks and fine muslin about it, would have been set on fire immediately. Even our bare floor and rough furniture gave out a smell of burning at the first shower of embers which the first stone scattered.

For an instant I stood quite horror-struck before this new proof of the devilish ingenuity of the villains outside. But the dreadful danger I was now in recalled me to my senses immediately. There was a large canful of water in my bedroom, and I ran in at once to fetch it. Before I could get back to the kitchen a second stone had been thrown down the chimney, and the floor was smoldering in several places.

I had wit enough to let the smoldering go on for a moment or two more, and to pour the whole of my canful of water over the fire before the third stone came down the chimney. The live embers on the floor I easily disposed of after that. The man on the roof must have heard the hissing of the fire as I put it out, and have felt the change produced in the air at the mouth of the chimney, for after the third stone had descended no more followed it. As for either of the ruffians themselves dropping down by the same road along which the stones had come, that was not to be dreaded. The chimney, as I well knew by our experience in cleaning it, was too narrow to give passage to any one above the size of a small boy.

I looked upward as that comforting reflection crossed my mind--I looked up, and saw, as plainly as I see the paper I am now writing on, the point of a knife coming through the inside of the roof just over my head. Our cottage had no upper story, and our rooms had no ceilings. Slowly and wickedly the knife wriggled its way through the dry inside thatch between the rafters. It stopped for a while, and there came a sound of tearing. That, in its turn, stopped too; there was a great fall of dry thatch on the floor; and I saw the heavy, hairy hand of Shifty Dick, armed with the knife, come through after the fallen fragments. He tapped at the rafters with the back of the knife, as if to test their strength. Thank God, they were substantial and close together! Nothing lighter than a hatchet would have sufficed to remove any part of them.

The murderous hand was still tapping with the knife when I heard a shout from the man Jerry, coming from the neighborhood of my father’s stone-shed in the back yard. The hand and knife disappeared instantly. I went to the back door and put my ear to it, and listened.

Both men were now in the shed. I made the most desperate efforts to call to mind what tools and other things were left in it which might be used against me. But my agitation confused me. I could remember nothing except my father’s big stone-saw, which was far too heavy and unwieldy to be used on the roof of the cottage. I was still puzzling my brains, and making my head swim to no purpose, when I heard the men dragging something out of the shed. At the same instant that the noise caught my ear, the remembrance flashed across me like lightning of some beams of wood which had lain in the shed for years past. I had hardly time to feel certain that they were removing one of these beams before I heard Shifty Dick say to Jerry.

“Which door?”

“The front,” was the answer. “We’ve cracked it already; we’ll have it down now in no time.”

Senses less sharpened by danger than mine would have understood but too easily, from these words, that they were about to use the beam as a battering-ram against the door. When that conviction overcame me, I lost courage at last. I felt that the door must come down. No such barricade as I had constructed could support it for more than a few minutes against such shocks as it was now to receive.
“I can do no more to keep the house against them,” I said to myself, with my knees knocking together, and the tears at last beginning to wet my cheeks. “I must trust to the night and the thick darkness, and save my life by running for it while there is yet time.”

I huddled on my cloak and hood, and had my hand on the bar of the back door, when a piteous mew from the bedroom reminded me of the existence of poor Pussy. I ran in, and huddled the creature up in my apron. Before I was out in the passage again, the first shock from the beam fell on the door.

The upper hinge gave way. The chairs and coal-scuttle, forming the top of my barricade, were hurled, rattling, on to the floor, but the lower hinge of the door, and the chest of drawers and the tool-chest still kept their places.

“One more!” I heard the villains cry--”one more run with the beam, and down it comes!”

Just as they must have been starting for that “one more run,” I opened the back door and fled into the night, with the bookful of banknotes in my bosom, the silver spoons in my pocket, and the cat in my arms. I threaded my way easily enough through the familiar obstacles in the backyard, and was out in the pitch darkness of the moor before I heard the second shock, and the crash which told me that the whole door had given way.

In a few minutes they must have discovered the fact of my flight with the pocketbook, for I heard shouts in the distance as if they were running out to pursue me. I kept on at the top of my speed, and the noise soon died away. It was so dark that twenty thieves instead of two would have found it useless to follow me.

How long it was before I reached the farmhouse--the nearest place to which I could fly for refuge--I cannot tell you. I remember that I had just sense enough to keep the wind at my back (having observed in the beginning of the evening that it blew toward Moor Farm), and to go on resolutely through the darkness. In all other respects I was by this time half crazed by what I had gone through. If it had so happened that the wind had changed after I had observed its direction early in the evening, I should have gone astray, and have probably perished of fatigue and exposure on the moor. Providentially, it still blew steadily as it had blown for hours past, and I reached the farmhouse with my clothes wet through, and my brain in a high fever. When I made my alarm at the door, they had all gone to bed but the farmer’s eldest son, who was sitting up late over his pipe and newspaper. I just mustered strength enough to gasp out a few words, telling him what was the matter, and then fell down at his feet, for the first time in my life in a dead swoon.

That swoon was followed by a severe illness. When I got strong enough to look about me again, I found myself in one of the farmhouse beds--my father, Mrs. Knifton, and the doctor were all in the room--my cat was asleep at my feet, and the pocketbook that I had saved lay on the table by my side.

There was plenty of news for me to hear as soon as I was fit to listen to it. Shifty Dick and the other rascal had been caught, and were in prison, waiting their trial at the next assizes. Mr. and Mrs. Knifton had been so shocked at the danger I had run--for which they blamed their own want of thoughtfulness in leaving the pocketbook in my care--that they had insisted on my father’s removing from our lonely home to a cottage on their land, which we were to inhabit rent free. The bank-notes that I had saved were given to me to buy furniture with, in place of the things that the thieves had broken. These pleasant tidings assisted so greatly in promoting my recovery, that I was soon able to relate to my friends at the farmhouse the particulars that I have written here. They were all surprised and interested, but no one, as I thought, listened to me with such breathless attention as the farmer’s eldest son. Mrs. Knifton noticed this too, and began to make jokes about it, in her light-hearted way, as soon as we were alone. I thought little of her jesting at the time; but when I got well, and we went to live at our new home, “the young farmer,” as he was called in our parts, constantly came to see us, and constantly managed to meet me out of doors. I had my share of vanity, like other young women, and I began to think of Mrs. Knifton’s jokes with some attention. To be brief, the young farmer managed one Sunday--I never could tell how--to lose his way with me in returning from church, and before we found out the right road home again he had asked me to be his wife.
His relations did all they could to keep us asunder and break off the match, thinking a poor stonemason’s daughter no fit wife for a prosperous yeoman. But the farmer was too obstinate for them. He had one form of answer to all their objections. “A man, if he is worth the name, marries according to his own notions, and to please himself,” he used to say. “My notion is, that when I take a wife I am placing my character and my happiness—the most precious things I have to trust—in one woman’s care. The woman I mean to marry had a small charge confided to her care, and showed herself worthy of it at the risk of her life. That is proof enough for me that she is worthy of the greatest charge I can put into her hands. Rank and riches are fine things, but the certainty of getting a good wife is something better still. I’m of age, I know my own mind, and I mean to marry the stone-mason’s daughter.”

And he did marry me. Whether I proved myself worthy or not of his good opinion is a question which I must leave you to ask my husband. All that I had to relate about myself and my doings is now told. Whatever interest my perilous adventure may excite, ends, I am well aware, with my escape to the farmhouse. I have only ventured on writing these few additional sentences because my marriage is the moral of my story. It has brought me the choicest blessings of happiness and prosperity, and I owe them all to my night-adventure in The Black Cottage.
Not many years after the beginning of this century, a worthy couple of the name of Huntroyd occupied a small farm in the North Riding of Yorkshire. They had married late in life, although they were very young when they first began to ‘keep company’ with each other. Nathan Huntroyd had been farm-servant to Hester Rose’s father, and had made up to her at a time when her parents thought she might do better; and so, without much consultation of her feelings, they had dismissed Nathan in somewhat cavalier fashion. He had drifted far away from his former connections, when an uncle of his died, leaving Nathan -- by this time upwards of forty years of age -- enough money to stock a small farm, and yet have something over, to put in the bank against bad times. One of the consequences of this bequest was, that Nathan was looking out for a wife and housekeeper, in a kind of discreet and leisurely way, when one day he heard that his old love, Hester, was not married and flourishing, as he had always supposed her to be, but a poor maid-of-all-work, in the town of Ripon. For her father had had a succession of misfortunes, which had brought him in his old age to the workhouse; her mother was dead; her only brother struggling to bring up a large family; and Hester herself a hard-working, homely-looking (at thirty-seven) servant. Nathan had a kind of growling satisfaction (which only lasted a minute or two, however) in hearing of these turns of fortune’s wheel. He did not make many intelligible remarks to his informant, and to no one else did he say a word. But, a few days afterwards, he presented himself, dressed in his Sunday best, at Mrs Thompson’s back-door in Ripon.

Hester stood there, in answer to the good sound knock his good sound oak-stick made: she, with the light full upon her, he in shadow. For a moment there was silence. He was scanning the face and figure of his old love, for twenty years unseen. The comely beauty of youth had faded away entirely; she was, as I have said, homely-looking, plain-featured, but with a clean skin, and pleasant frank eyes. Her figure was no longer round, but tidily draped in a blue and white bed-gown, tied round her waist by her white apron-strings, and her short red linsey petticoat showed her tidy feet and ankles. Her former lover fell into no ecstasies. He simply said to himself, ‘She’ll do!’ and forthwith began upon his business.

‘Hester, thou dost not mind me. I am Nathan, as thy father turned off at a minute’s notice, for thinking of thee for a wife, twenty year come Michaelmas next. I have not thought much upon matrimony since. But Uncle Ben has died leaving me a small matter in the bank; and I have taken Nab-End Farm, and put in a bit of stock, and shall want a missus to see after it. Wilt like to come? I’ll not mislead thee. It’s dairy, and it might have been arable. But arable takes more horses nor it suited me to buy, and I’d the offer of a tidy lot of kine. That’s all. If thou’lI have me, I’ll come for thee as soon as the hay is gotten in’.

Hester only said, ‘Come in, and sit thee down’.

He came in, and sat down. For a time, she took no more notice of him than of his stick, bustling about to get dinner ready for the family whom she served. He meanwhile watched her brisk sharp movements, and repeated to himself, ‘She’ll do!’ After about twenty minutes of silence thus employed, he got up, saying --

‘Well, Hester, I’m going. When shall I come back again?’

‘Please thysel’, and thou’ll please me,’ said Hester, in a tone that she tried to make light and indifferent; but he saw that her colour came and went, and that she trembled while she moved about. In another moment Hester was soundly kissed; but, when she looked round to scold the middle-aged farmer, he appeared so entirely composed that she hesitated. He said -
'I have pleased mysel’, and thee too, I hope. Is it a month’s wage, and a month’s warning? To-day is the eighth. July eighth is our wedding-day. I have no time to spend a-wooing before then, and wedding must na take long. Two days is enough to throw away, at our time o’ life.’

It was like a dream; but Hester resolved not to think more about it till her work was done. And when all was cleaned up for the evening, she went and gave her mistress warning, telling her all the history of her life in a very few words. That day month she was married from Mrs Thompson’s house.

The issue of the marriage was one boy, Benjamin. A few years after his birth, Hester’s brother died at Leeds, leaving ten or twelve children. Hester sorrowed bitterly over this loss; and Nathan showed her much quiet sympathy, although he could not but remember that Jack Rose had added insult to the bitterness of his youth. He helped his wife to make ready to go by the waggon to Leeds. He made light of the household difficulties, which came thro'gning into her mind after all was fixed for her departure. He filled her purse, that she might have wherewithal to alleviate the immediate wants of her brother’s family. And, as she was leaving, he ran after the waggon. ‘Stop, stop!’ he cried. ‘Hetty, if thou wilt -- if it wunnot be too much for thee -- bring back one of Jack’s wenches for company, like. We’ve enough and to spare; and a lass will make the house winsome, as a man may say.’

The waggon moved on; while Hester had such a silent swelling of gratitude in her heart, as was both thanks to her husband and thanksgiving to God.

And that was the way that little Bessy Rose came to be an inmate of the Nab’s End Farm. Virtue met with its own reward in this instance, and in a clear and tangible shape, too; which need not delude people in general into thinking that such is the usual nature of virtue’s rewards! Bessy grew up a bright affectionate, active girl; a daily comfort to her uncle and aunt. She was so much a darling in the household that they even thought her worthy of their only son Benjamin, who was perfection in their eyes. It is not often the case that two plain, homely people have a child of uncommon beauty; but it is so sometimes, and Benjamin Huntroyd was one of these exceptional cases. The hard-working, labour-and-care-marked farmer, and the mother, who could never have been more than tolerably comely in her best days, produced a boy who might have been an earl’s son for grace and beauty. Even the hunting squires of the neighbourhood reined up their horses to admire him, as he opened the gates for them. He had no shyness, he was so accustomed from his earliest years to admiration from strangers and adoration from his parents. As for Bessy Rose, he ruled imperiously over her heart from the time she first set eyes on him. And, as she grew older, she grew on in loving, persuading herself that what her uncle and aunt loved so dearly it was her duty to love dearest of all. At every unconscious symptom of the young girl’s love for her cousin, his parents smiled and winked: all was going on as they wished; no need to go far a-field for Benjamin’s wife. The household could go on as it was now; Nathan and Hester sinking into the rest of years, and relinquishing care and authority to those dear ones, who, in the process of time, might bring other dear ones to share their love.

But Benjamin took it all very coolly. He had been sent to a day-school in the neighbouring town -- a grammar-school in the high state of neglect in which the majority of such schools were thirty years ago. Neither his father nor his mother knew much of learning. All they knew (and that directed their choice of a school) was that they could not, by any possibility, part with their darling to a boarding-school; that some schooling he must have, and that Squire Pollard’s son went to Highminster Grammar School. Squire Pollard’s son, and many another son destined to make his parents’ hearts ache, went to this school. If it had not been so utterly a bad place of education, the simple farmer and his wife might have found it out sooner. But not only did the pupils there learn vice, they also learnt deceit. Benjamin was naturally too clever to remain a dunce; or else, if he had chosen so to be, there was nothing in Highminster Grammar School to hinder his being a dunce of the first water. But, to all appearance, he grew clever and gentleman-like. His father and mother were even proud of his airs and graces, when he came home for the holidays; taking them for proofs of his refinement, although the practical effect of such refinement was to make him express his contempt for his parents’ homely ways and simple ignorance. By the time he was eighteen, an
articled clerk in an attorney’s office at Highminster, -- for he had quite declined becoming a ‘mere
clo-d-hopper,’ that is to say, a hard-working, honest farmer like his father -- Bessy Rose was the
only person who was dissatisfied with him. The little girl of fourteen instinctively felt there was
something wrong about him. Alas! two years more, and the girl of sixteen worshipped his very
shadow, and would not see that aught could be wrong with one so soft-spoken, so handsome, so
kind as Cousin Benjamin. For Benjamin had discovered that the way to cajole his parents out of
money for every indulgence he fancied, was to pretend to forward their innocent scheme, and make
love to his pretty cousin, Bessy Rose. He cared just enough for her to make this work of necessity
not disagreeable at the time he was performing it. But he found it tiresome to remember her little
claims upon him, when she was no longer present. The letters he had promised her during his
weekly absence at Highminster, the trifling commissions she had asked him to do for her, were all
considered in the light of troubles; and, even when he was with her, he resented the inquiries she
made as to his mode of passing his time, or what female acquaintances he had in Highminster.

When his apprenticeship was ended, nothing would serve him but that he must go up to
London for a year or two. Poor Farmer Huntroyd was beginning to repent of his ambition of making
his son Benjamin a gentleman. But it was too late to repine now. Both father and mother felt this;
and, however sorrowful they might be, they were silent, neither demurring nor assenting to
Benjamin’s proposition when first he made it. But Bessy, through her tears, noticed that both her
uncle and aunt seemed unusually tired that night, and sat hand-in-hand on the fireside settle, idly
gazing into the bright flame, as if they saw in it pictures of what they had once hoped their lives
would have been. Bessy rattled about among the supper-things, as she put them away after
Benjamin’s departure, making more noise than usual -- as if noise and bustle was what she needed
to keep her from bursting out crying -- and, having at one keen glance taken in the position and
looks of Nathan and Hester, she avoided looking in that direction again, for fear the sight of their
wistful faces should make her own tears overflow.

‘Sit thee down, lass -- sit thee down! Bring the creemie-stool to the fireside, and let’s have a
bit of talk over the lad’s plans,’ said Nathan, at last rousing himself to speak. Bessy came and sat
down in front of the fire, and threw her apron over her face, as she rested her head on both hands.
Nathan felt as if it was a chance which of the two women burst out crying first. So he thought he
would speak, in hopes of keeping off the infection of tears.

‘Didst ever hear of this mad plan afore, Bessy?’

‘No, never!’ Her voice came muffled and changed from under her apron. Hester felt as if the
tone, both of question and answer, implied blame; and this she could not bear.

‘We should ha’ looked to it when we bound him; for of necessity it would ha’ come to this.
There’s examins, and catechizes, and I dunno what all for him to be put through in London. It’s not
his fault.’

‘Which on us said it were?’ asked Nathan, rather put out. ‘Tho’, for that matter, a few weeks
would carry him over the mire, and make him as good a lawyer as any judge among ’em. Oud
Lawson the attorney told me that, in a talk I had wi’ him a bit sin. Na, na! it’s the lad’s own
hankering after London that makes him want for to stay there for a year, let alone two.’

Nathan shook his head.

‘And if it be his own hankering,’ said Bessy, putting down her apron, her face all flame, and
her eyes swollen up, ‘I dunnot see harm in it. Lads aren’t like lasses, to be teed to their own fireside
like th’ crook yonder. It’s fitting for a young man to go abroad and see the world, afore he settles
down.’

Hester’s hand sought Bessy’s; and the two women sat in sympathetic defiance of any blame
that should be thrown on the beloved absent. Nathan only said --

‘Nay, wench, dunnot wax up so; whatten’s done’s done; and worse, it’s my doing. I mun
needs make my bairn a gentleman; and we mun pay for it.’

‘Dear Uncle! he wunna spend much, I’ll answer for it; and I’ll scrimp and save i’ the house,
to make it good.’
'Wench!' said Nathan solemnly, 'it were not paying in cash I were speaking on: it were paying in heart’s care, and heaviness of soul. Lunnon is a place where the devil keeps court as well as King George; and my poor chap has more nor once welly fallen into his clutches here. I dunno what he’ll do, when he gets close within sniff of him.’

‘Don’t let him go, father!’ said Hester, for the first time taking this view. Hitherto she had only thought of her own grief at parting with him. ‘Father, if you think so, keep him here, safe under your own eye!’

‘Nay!’ said Nathan, ‘he’s past time o’ life for that. Why, there’s not one on us knows where he is at this present time, and he not gone out of our sight an hour. He’s too big to be put back in’ th’ go-cart, mother, or to keep within doors, with the chair turned bottom-upwards.’

‘I wish he were a wee bairn lying in my arms again! It were a sore day when I weaned him; and I think life’s been gettin’ sorer and sorer at every turn he’s ta’en towards manhood.’

‘Coom, lass; that’s noan the way to be talking. Be thankful to Marcy that thou’st getten a man for thy son as stands five foot eleven in’s stockings, and ne’er a sick piece about him. We wunnot grudge him his fling, will we, Bess, my wench? He’ll be coming back in a year, or, may be, a bit more, and be a’ for settling in a quiet town like, wi’ a wife that’s noan so fur fra’ me at this very minute. An’ we oud folk, as we get into years, must gi’ up farm, and tak a bit on a house near Lawyer Benjami’n.’

And so the good Nathan, his own heart heavy enough, tried to soothe his women-kind. But, of the three, his eyes were longest in closing, his apprehensions the deepest founded.

‘I misdoubt me I hanna done well by th’ lad. I misdoubt me sore,’ was the thought that kept him awake till day began to dawn. ‘Summat’s wrong about him, or folk would na look me wi’ such piteous-like een, when they speak on him. I can see th’ meaning of it, tho’ I’m too proud to let on. And Lawson, too, he holds his tongue more nor he should do, when I ax him how my lad’s getting on, and whatten sort of a lawyer he’ll mak. God be marciful to Hester an’ me, if th’ lad’s gone away! God be marciful! But, may be, it’s this lying waking a’ the night through, that mak’s me so fearfu’. Why, when I were his age, I daur be bound I should ha’ spent money fast enoof, i’ I could ha’ come by iy. But I had to arn it; that mak’s a great differ’. Well! It were hard to thwart th’ child of our old age, and we waitin’ so long for to have ‘un!’ Next morning, Nathan rode Moggy, the cart-horse, into Highminster to see Mr Lawson. Anybody who saw him ride out of his own yard would have been struck with the change in him which was visible when he returned: a change greater than a day’s unusual exercise shoul’d have been struck with the change in him which was visible when he returned: a change greater than a day’s unusual exercise should have made in a man of his years. He scarcely held the reins at all. One jerk of Moggy’s head would have plucked them out of his hands. His head was bent forward, his eyes looking on some unseen thing, with long, unwinking gaze. But, as he drew near home on his return, he made an effort to recover himself.

‘No need fretting them,’ he said; ‘lads will be lads. But I didna think he had it in him to be so thowtless, young as he is. Well, well! he’ll, may be, get more wisdom i’ Lunnon. Anyways, it’s best to cut him off fra such evil lads as Will Hawker, and such-like. It’s they as have led my boy astray. He were a good chap till he knowed them -- a good chap till he knowed them.’ But he put all his cares in the background, when he came into the house-place, where both Bessy and his wife met him at the door, and both would fain lend a hand to take off his great-coat.

‘Theer, wenchies, theer! ye might let a man alone for to get out on’s clothes! Why, I might ha’ struck thee, lass.’ And he went on talking, trying to keep them off for a time from the subject that all had at heart. But there was no putting them off for ever; and, by dint of repeated questioning on his wife’s part, more was got out than he had ever meant to tell -- enough to grieve both his hearers sorely; and yet the brave old man still kept the worst in his own breast.

The next day, Benjamin came home for a week or two, before making his great start to London. His father kept him at a distance, and was solemn and quiet in his manner to the young man. Bessy, who had shown anger enough at first, and had uttered many a sharp speech, began to relent, and then to feel hurt and displeased that her uncle should persevere so long in his cold, reserved manner -- and Benjamin just going to leave them! Her aunt went, tremblingly busy, about the clothes-presses and drawers, as if afraid of letting herself think either of the past or the future;
only once or twice, coming behind her son, she suddenly stopped over his sitting figure, and kissed his cheek, and stroked his hair. Bessy remembered afterwards -- long years afterwards -- how he had tossed his head away with nervous irritability on one of these occasions, and had muttered -- her aunt did not hear it, but Bessy did --

‘Can’t you leave a man alone?’

Towards Bessy herself he was pretty gracious. No other words express his manner; it was not warm, nor tender, nor cousinly, but there was an assumption of underbred politeness towards her as a young, pretty woman; which politeness was neglected in his authoritative or grumbling manner towards his father, or his sullen silence before his father. He once or twice ventured on a compliment to Bessy on her personal appearance. She stood still, and looked at him with astonishment.

‘Have my eyes changed sin’ last thou saw’st them,’ she asked, ‘that thou must be telling me about ’em i’ that fashion? I’d rayther by a deal see thee helping thy mother, when she’s dropped her knitting-needle and canna see i’ th’ dusk for to pick it up.’

But Bessy thought of his pretty speech about her eyes, long after he had forgotten making it, and when he would have been puzzled to tell the colour of them. Many a day, after he was gone, did she look earnestly in the little oblong looking-glass, which hung up against the wall of her little sleeping-chamber, but which she used to take down in order to examine the eyes he had praised, murmuring to herself, ‘Pretty, soft grey eyes! Pretty, soft grey eyes!’ until she would hang up the glass again, with a sudden laugh and a rosy blush.

In the days when he had gone away to the vague distance and vaguer place -- the city called London -- Bessy tried to forget all that had gone against her feeling of the affection and duty that a son owed to his parents; and she had many things to forget of this kind that would keep surging up into her mind. For instance, she wished that he had not objected to the home-spun, home-made shirts which his mother and she had had such pleasure in getting ready for him. He might not know, it was true -- and so her love urged -- how carefully and evenly the thread had been spun: how, not content with bleaching the yarn in the sunniest meadow, the linen, on its return from the weaver’s, had been spread out afresh on the sweet summer grass, and watered carefully, night after night, when there was no dew to perform the kindly office. He did not know -- for no one but Bessy herself did -- how many false or large stitches, made large and false by her aunt’s failing eyes (who yet liked to do the choicest part of the stitching all by herself), Bessy had unpicked at night in her own room, and with dainty fingers had re-stitched; sewing eagerly in the dead of night. All this he did not know; or he could never have complained of the coarse texture, the old-fashioned make of these shirts, and urged on his mother to give him part of her little store of egg- and butter-money, in order to buy newer-fashioned linen in Highminster.

When once that little precious store of his mother’s was discovered, it was well for Bessy’s peace of mind that she did not know how loosely her aunt counted up the coins, mistaking guineas for shillings, or just the other way, so that the amount was seldom the same in the old black spoutless teapot. Yet this son, this hope, this love, had still a strange power of fascination over the household. The evening before he left, he sat between his parents, a hand in theirs on either side, and Bessy on the old creepie-stool, her head lying on her aunt’s knee, and looking up at him from time to time, as if to learn his face off by heart; till his glances, meeting hers, made her drop her eyes, and only sigh.

He stopped up late that night with his father, long after the women had gone to bed. But not to sleep; for I will answer for it the grey-haired mother never slept a wink till the late dawn of the autumn day; and Bessy heard her uncle come upstairs with heavy, deliberate footsteps, and go to the old stocking which served him for bank, and count out the golden guineas; once he stopped, but again he went on afresh, as if resolved to crown his gift with liberality. Another long pause -- in which she could but indistinctly hear continued words, it might have been advice, it might be a prayer, for it was in her uncle’s voice -- and then father and son came up to bed. Bessy’s room was but parted from her cousin’s by a thin wooden partition; and the last sound she distinctly heard, before her eyes, tired out with crying, closed themselves in sleep, was the guineas clinking down
upon each other at regular intervals, as if Benjamin were playing at pitch and toss with his father’s present.

After he was gone, Bessy wished he had asked her to walk part of the way with him into Highminster. She was all ready, her things laid out on the bed; but she could not accompany him without invitation.

The little household tried to close over the gap as best they might. They seemed to set themselves to their daily work with unusual vigour; but somehow, when evening came there had been little done. Heavy hearts never make light work, and there was no telling how much care and anxiety each had to bear in secret in the field, at the wheel, or in the dairy. Formerly, he was looked for every Saturday -- looked for, though he might not come; or, if he came, there were things to be spoken about that made his visit anything but a pleasure: still, he might come, and all things might go right; and then what sunshine, what gladness to those humble people! But now he was away, and dreary winter was come on; old folks’ sight fails, and the evenings were long and sad, in spite of all Bessy could do or say. And he did not write so often as he might -- so each one thought; though each one would have been ready to defend him from either of the others who had expressed such a thought aloud. ‘Surely,’ said Bessy to herself, when the first primroses peeped out in a sheltered and sunny hedge-bank, and she gathered them as she passed home from afternoon church -- surely, there never will be such a dreary, miserable winter again as this has been.’ There had been a great change in Nathan and Hester Huntroyd during this last year. The spring before, when Benjamin was yet the subject of more hopes than fears, his father and mother looked what I may call an elderly middle-aged couple: people who had a good deal of hearty work in them yet. Now -- it was not his absence alone that caused the change -- they looked frail and old, as if each day’s natural trouble was a burden more than they could bear. For Nathan had heard sad reports about his only child, and had told them solemnly to his wife -- as things too bad to be believed, and yet, ‘God help us if he is indeed such a lad as this!’ Their eyes were become too dry and hollow for many tears; they sat together, hand in hand; and shivered, and sighed, and did not speak many words, or dare to look at each other: and then Hester had said --

‘We mauna tell th’ lass. Young folks’ hearts break wi’ a little, and she’d be apt to fancy it were true.’ Here the old woman’s voice broke into a kind of piping cry; but she struggled, and her next words were all right. ‘We mauna tell her: he’s bound to be fond on her, and, may be, if she thinks well on him, and loves him, it will bring him straight!’

‘God grant it!’ said Nathan.

‘God shall grant it!’ said Hester, passionately moaning out her words; and then repeating them, alas! with a vain repetition.

‘It’s a bad place for lying, is Highminster,’ said she at length, as if impatient of the silence. ‘I never knewed such a place for getting up stories. But Bessy knows nought on ‘em and nother you nor me belie’es ’em, that’s one blessing.’

But, if they did not in their hearts believe them, how came they to look so sad and worn, beyond what mere age could make them?

Then came round another year, another winter, yet more miserable than the last. This year, with the primroses, came Benjamin; a bad, hard, flippant young man, with yet enough of specious manners and handsome countenance to make his appearance striking at first to those to whom the aspect of a London fast young man of the lowest order is strange and new. Just at first, as he sauntered in with a swagger and an air of indifference, which was partly assumed, partly real, his old parents felt a simple kind of awe of him, as if he were not their son, but a real gentleman; but they had too much fine instinct in their homely natures not to know, after a very few minutes had passed, that this was not a true prince.

‘Whatten ever does he mean,’ said Hester to her niece, as soon as they were alone, ‘by a’ them maks and wear-locks? And he minces his words, as if his tongue were clipped short, or split like a magpie’s. Hech! London is as bad as a hot day i’ August for spoiling good flesh; for he were a good-looking lad when he went up; and now, look at him, with his skin gone into lines and flourishes, just like the first page on a copybook.’
'I think he looks a good deal better, aunt, for them new-fashioned whiskers!' said Bessy, blushing still at the remembrance of the kiss he had given her on first seeing her -- a pledge, she thought, poor girl, that, in spite of his long silence in letter-writing, he still looked upon her as his troth-plight wife. There were things about him which none of them liked, although they never spoke of them; yet there was also something to gratify them in the way in which he remained quiet at Nab-End, instead of seeking variety, as he had formerly done, by constantly stealing off to the neighbouring town. His father had paid all the debts that he knew of, soon after Benjamin had gone up to London; so there were no duns that his parents knew of to alarm him, and keep him at home. And he went out in the morning with the old man, his father, and lounged by his side, as Nathan went round his fields, with busy yet infirm gait; having heart, as he would have expressed it, in all that was going on, because at length his son seemed to take an interest in the farming affairs, and stood patiently by his side, while he compared his own small galloways with the great shorthorns looming over his neighbour's hedge.

'It's a slovenly way, thou seest, that of selling th' milk; folk don't care whether its good or not, so that they get their pint-measure of stuff that's watered afore it leaves th' beast, instead o' honest cheating by the help o' th' pump. But look at Bessy's butter, what skill it shows! part her own manner o' making, and part good choice o' cattle. It's a pleasure to see her basket, a' packed ready to go to market; and it's noan o' a pleasure for to see the buckets fu' of their blue starch-water as yon beasts give. I'm thinking they crossed th' breed wi' a pump not long sin'. Hech! but our Bessy's a clever canny wench! I sometimes think thou'lt be for gie'ing up th' law, and taking to th' oud trade, when thou wedst wi' her!' This was intended to be a skilful way of ascertaining whether there was any ground for the old farmer's wish and prayer, that Benjamin might give up the law and return to the primitive occupation of his father. Nathan dared to hope it now, since his son had never made much by his profession, owing, as he had said, to his want of a connection; and the farm, and the stock, and the clean wife, too, were ready to his hand; and Nathan could safely rely on himself never, in his most unguarded moments, to reproach his son with the hardly-earned hundreds that had been spent on his education. So the old man listened with painful interest to the answer which his son was evidently struggling to make, coughing a little and blowing his nose before he spoke.

'Well, you see, father, law is a precarious livelihood; a man, as I may express myself, has no chance in the profession unless he is known -- known to the judges, and tip-top barristers, and that sort of thing. Now, you see, my mother and you have no acquaintance that you may call exactly in that line. But luckily I have met with a man, a friend, as I may say, who is really a first-rate fellow, knowing everybody, from the Lord Chancellor downwards; and he has offered me a share in his business -- a partnership, in short' -- He hesitated a little.

'I'm sure that's uncommon kind of the gentleman,' said Nathan. I should like for to thank him mysen; for it's not many as would pick up a young chap out o' th' dirt, as it were, and say "Here's hauf my good fortune for you, sir, and your very good health!" Most on 'em when they're gettin' a bit o' luck, run off wi' it to keep it a' to themselves, and gobble it down in a corner. What may be his name? for I should like to know it.'

'You don't quite apprehend me, father. A great deal of what you've said is true to the letter. People don't like to share their good luck, as you say.'

'The more credit to them as does,' broke in Nathan. 'Ay, but, you see, even such a fine fellow as my friend Cavendish does not like to give away half his good practice for nothing. He expects an equivalent.'

"An equivalent?"' said Nathan; his voice had dropped down an octave.' And what may that be? There's always some meaning in grand words, I take it; though I am not book-larned enough to find it out.'

'Why, in this case, the equivalent he demands for taking me into partnership, and afterwards relinquishing the whole business to me, is three hundred pounds down.'

Benjamin looked sideways from under his eyes, to see how his father took the proposition. His father struck his stick deep down in the ground; and, leaning one hand upon it, faced round at him.
‘Then thy fine friend may go and be hanged. Three hunder pounds! I’ll be darned an’
danged too, if I know where to get ’em, if I’d be making a fool o’ thee an’ mysen too.’

He was out of breath by this time. His son took his father’s first words in dogged silence; it
was but the burst of surprise he had led himself to expect, and did not daunt him for long.

‘I should think, sir’ --

‘“Sir” -- whatten for dost thou “sir” me? Is them your manners? I’m plain Nathan Huntroyd,
who never took on to be a gentleman; but I have paid my way up to this time, which I shannot do
much longer, if I’m to have a son coming an’ asking me for three hundred pound, just meet same as
if I were a cow, and had nothing to do but let down my milk to the first person as strokes me.’

‘Well, father,’ said Benjamin, with an affectation of frankness; ‘then there’s nothing for me
but to do as I have often planned before -- go and emigrate.’

‘And what?’ said his father, looking sharply and steadily at him.

‘Emigrate. Go to America, or India, or some colony where there would be an opening for a
young man of spirit.’

Benjamin had reserved this proposition for his trump card, expecting by means of it to carry
all before him. But, to his surprise, his father plucked his stick out of the hole he had made when he
so vehemently thrust it into the ground, and walked on four or five steps in advance; there he stood
still again, and there was a dead silence for a few minutes.

‘It ’ud, may be, be the best thing thou couldst do,’ the father began. Benjamin set his teeth
hard to keep in curses. It was well for poor Nathan he did not look round then, and see the look his
son gave him. ‘But it would come hard like upon us, upon Hester and me; for, whether thou’rt a
good ’un or not, thou’rt our flesh and blood, our only bairn; and, if thou’rt not all as a man could
wish, it’s, may be, been the fault on our pride i’ the -- It ’ud kill the missus, if he went off to
Amerikay, and Bess, too, the lass as thinks so much on him!’ The speech, originally addressed to
his son, had wandered off into a monologue -- as keenly listened to by Benjamin, however, as if it
had all been spoken to him. After a pause of consideration, his father turned round:

‘Yon man -- I wunnot call him a friend o’ yourn, to think of asking you for such a mint o’
money -- is not th’ only one, I’ll be bound, as could give ye a start i’ the law? Other folks ’ud, may
be, do it for less?’

‘Not one of ’em; to give me equal advantages,’ said Benjamin, thinking he perceived signs
of relenting.

‘Well, then, thou may’st tell him that it’s nither he nor thee as ‘ll see th’ sight o’ three
hundred pound o’ my money. I’ll not deny as I’ve a bit laid up again’ a rainy day; it’s not so much
as thatten, though; and a part on it is for Bessy, as has been like a daughter to us.’

‘But Bessy is to be your real daughter some day, when I’ve a home to take her to,’ said
Benjamin; for he played very fast and loose, even in his own mind, with his engagement with Bessy.
Present with her, when she was looking her brightest and best, he behaved to her as if they were
engaged lovers; absent from her, he looked upon her rather as a good wedge, to be driven into his
parents’ favour on his behalf. Now, however, he was not exactly untrue in speaking as if he meant
to make her his wife; for the thought was in his mind, though he made use of it to work upon his
father.

‘It will be a dree day for us, then,’ said the old man. ‘But God’ll have us in His keeping,
and’ll, may-happen, be taking more care on us i’ heaven by that time than Bess, good lass as she is,
has had on us at Nab-End. Her heart is set on thee, too. But, lad, I hanna gotten the three hunder; I
keeps my cash i’ th’ stocking, thou know’st, till it reaches fifty pound, and then I takes it to Ripon
Bank. Now the last scratch they’n gi’en me made it just two-hunder, and I hanna but on to fifteen
pound yet i’ the stockin’, and I meant one hunder an’ the red cow’s calf to be for Bess, she’s ta’en
such pleasure like i’ rearing it’.

Benjamin gave a sharp glance at his father, to see if he was telling the truth; and, that a
suspicion of the old man, his father, had entered into the son’s head, tells enough of his own
character.
'I canna do it, I canna do it, for sure; although I shall like to think as I had helped on the wedding. There’s the black heifer to be sold yet, and she’ll fetch a matter of ten pound; but a deal on’t will be needed for seed-corn, for the arable did but bad last year, and I thought I would try -- I’ll tell thee what, lad! I’ll make it as though Bess lent thee her hunder, only thou must give her a writ of hand for it; and thou shalt have a’ the money i’ Ripon Bank, and see if the lawyer wunnot let thee have a share of what he offered thee at three hunder for two. I dunnot mean for to wrong him; but thou must get a fair share for the money. At times, I think thou’rt done by folk; now I wadna have you cheat a bairn of a brass farthing; same time, I wadna have thee so soft as to be cheated.’

To explain this, it should be told that some of the bills, which Benjamin had received money from his father to pay, had been altered so as to cover other and less creditable expenses which the young man had incurred; and the simple old farmer, who had still much faith left in him for his boy, was acute enough to perceive that he had paid above the usual price for the articles he had purchased.

After some hesitation, Benjamin agreed to receive the two hundred, and promised to employ it to the best advantage in setting himself up in business. He had, nevertheless, a strange hankering after the additional fifteen pounds that was left to accumulate in the stocking. It was his, he thought, as heir to his father; and he soon lost some of his usual complaisance for Bessy that evening, as he dwelt on the idea that there was money being laid by for her, and gruded it to her even in imagination. He thought more of this fifteen pounds that he was not to have than of all the hardly-earned and humbly-saved two hundred that he was to come into possession of. Meanwhile, Nathan was in unusual spirits that evening. He was so generous and affectionate at heart, that he had an unconscious satisfaction in having helped two people on the road to happiness by the sacrifice of the greater part of his property. The very fact of having trusted his son so largely seemed to make Benjamin more worthy of trust in his father’s estimation. The sole idea he tried to banish was, that, if all came to pass as he hoped, both Benjamin and Bessy would be settled far away from Nab-End; but then he had a child-like reliance that ‘God would take care of him and his missus, somehow or anodder. It wur o’ no use looking too far ahead.’

Bessy had to hear many unintelligible jokes from her uncle that night, for he made no doubt that Benjamin had told her all that had passed, whereas the truth was, his son had said never a word to his cousin on the subject.

When the old couple were in bed, Nathan told his wife of the promise he had made to his son, and the plan in life which the advance of the two hundred was to promote. Poor Hester was a little startled at the sudden change in the destination of the sum, which she had long thought of with secret pride as money i’ th’ bank. But she was willing enough to part with it, if necessary, for Benjamin. Only, how such a sum could be necessary, was the puzzle. But even the perplexity was jostled out of her mind by the overwhelming idea, not only of ‘our Ben’ settling in London, but of Bessy going there too as his wife. This great trouble swallowed up all care about money, and Hester shivered and sighed all the night through with distress. In the morning, as Bessy was kneading the bread, her aunt, who had been sitting by the fire in an unusual manner, for one of her active habits, said --

‘I reckon we maun go to th’ shop for our bread; an’ that’s a thing I never thought to come to so long as I lived.’

Bessy looked up from her kneading, surprised.

‘I’m sure, I’m noan going to eat their nasty stuff. What for do ye want to get baker’s bread, aunt? This dough will rise as high as a kite in a south wind.’

‘I’m not up to kneading as I could do once; it welly breaks my back; and, when tou’rt off in London, I reckon we maun buy our bread, first time in my life.’

‘I’m not a-goin to London,’ said Bessy, kneading away with fresh resolution, and growing very red, either with the idea or the exertion.

‘But our Ben is going partner wi’ a great London lawyer; and thou know’st he’ll not tarry long but what he’ll fetch thee.’
‘Now, aunt,’ said Bessy, stripping her arms of the dough, but still not looking up, ‘if that’s all, don’t fret yourself Ben will have twenty minds in his head, afore he settles, eyther in business or in wedlock. I sometimes wonder,’ she said, with increasing vehemence, ‘why I go on thinking on him; for I dunnot think he thinks on me, when I’m out o’ sight. I’ve a month’s mind to try and forget him this time, when he leaves us -- that I have!’

‘For shame, wench! and he to be planning and purposing, all for thy sake! It wur only yesterday as he wur talking to thy uncle, and mapping it out so clever; only, thou seest, wench, it’ll be dree work for us when both thee and him is gone.’

The old woman began to cry the kind of tearless cry of the aged. Bessy hastened to comfort her; and the two talked, and grieved, and hoped, and planned for the days that now were to be, till they ended, the one in being consoled, the other in being secretly happy.

Nathan and his son came back from Highminster that evening, with their business transacted in the round-about way which was most satisfactory to the old man. If he had thought it necessary to take half as much pains in ascertaining the truth of the plausible details by which his son bore out the story of the offered partnership, as he did in trying to get his money conveyed to London in the most secure manner, it would have been well for him. But he knew nothing of all this, and acted in the way which satisfied his anxiety best. He came home tired, but content; not in such high spirits as on the night before, but as easy in his mind as he could be on the eve of his son’s departure. Bessy, pleasantly agitated by her aunt’s tale of the morning of her cousin’s true love for her (‘what ardently we wish we long believe’) and the plan which was to end in their marriage -- end to her, the woman, at least -- looked almost pretty in her bright, blushing comeliness, and more than once, as she moved about from kitchen to dairy, Benjamin pulled her towards him, and gave her a kiss. To all such proceedings the old couple were wilfully blind; and, as night drew on, every one became sadder and quieter, thinking of the parting that was to be on the morrow. As the hours slipped away, Bessy too became subdued; and, by and by, her simple cunning was exerted to get Benjamin to sit down next his mother, whose very heart was yearning after him, as Bessy saw. When once her child was placed by her side, and she had got possession of his hand, the old woman kept stroking it, and murmuring long unused words of endearment, such as she had spoken to him while he was yet a little child. But all this was wearisome to him. As long as he might play with, and plague, and caress Bessy, he had not been sleepy; but now he yawned loudly. Bessy could have boxed his cars for not curbing this gaping; at any rate, he need not have done it so openly -- so almost ostentatiously. His mother was more pitiful.

‘Thou’rt tired, my lad!’ said she, putting her hand fondly on his shoulder; but it fell off, as he stood up suddenly, and said --

‘Yes, deuced tired! I’m off to bed.’ And with a rough, careless kiss all round, even to Bessy, as if he was ‘deuced tired’ of playing the lover, he was gone; leaving the three to gather up their thoughts slowly, and follow him upstairs.

He seemed almost impatient at them for rising betimes to see him off the next morning, and made no more of a good-bye than some such speech as this: ‘Well, good folk, when next I see you, I hope you’ll have merrier faces than you have to-day. Why, you might be going to a funeral; it’s enough to scare a man from the place; you look quite ugly to what you did last night, Bess.’

He was gone; and they turned into the house, and settled to the long day’s work without many words about their loss. They had no time for unnecessary talking, indeed; for much had been left undone, during his short visit, that ought to have been done, and they had now to work double tides. Hard work was their comfort for many a long day.

For some time Benjamin’s letters, if not frequent, were full of exultant accounts of his well-doing. It is true that the details of his prosperity were somewhat vague; but the fact was broadly and unmistakably stated. Then came longer pauses; shorter letters, altered in tone. About a year after he had left them, Nathan received a letter which bewildered and irritated him exceedingly. Something had gone wrong -- what. Benjamin did not say -- but the letter ended with a request that was almost a demand, for the remainder of his father’s savings, whether in the stocking or in the bank. Now, the year had not been prosperous with Nathan; there had been an epidemic among cattle, and he had
suffered along with his neighbours; and, moreover, the price of cows, when he had bought some to repair his wasted stock, was higher than he had ever remembered it before. The fifteen pounds in the stocking, which Benjamin left, had diminished to little more than three; and to have that required of him in so peremptory a manner! Before Nathan imparted the contents of this letter to anyone (Bessy and her aunt had gone to market in a neighbour’s cart that day), he got pen and ink and paper, and wrote back an ill-spelt, but very explicit and stem negative. Benjamin had had his portion; and if he could not make it do, so much the worse for him; his father had no more to give him. That was the substance of the letter.

The letter was written, directed, and sealed, and given to the country postman, returning to Highminster after his day’s distribution and collection of letters, before Hester and Bessy came back from market. It had been a pleasant day of neighbourly meeting and sociable gossip; prices had been high, and they were in good spirits -- only agreeably tired, and full of small pieces of news. It was some time before they found out how flatly all their talk fell on the ears of the stay-at-home listener. But, when they saw that his depression was caused by something beyond their powers of accounting for by any little every-day cause, they urged him to tell them what was the matter. His anger had not gone off. It had rather increased by dwelling upon it, and he spoke it out in good, resolute terms; and, long ere he had ended, the two women were as sad, if not as angry, as himself. Indeed, it was many days before either feeling wore away in the minds of those who entertained them. Bessy was the soonest comforted, because she found a vent for her sorrow in action: action that was half as a kind of compensation for many a sharp word that she had spoken, when her cousin had done anything to displease her on his last visit, and half because she believed that he never could have written such a letter to his father, unless his want of money had been very pressing and real; though how he could ever have wanted money so soon, after such a heap of it had been given to him, was more than she could justly say. Bessy got out all her savings of little presents of sixpences and shillings, ever since she had been a child -- of all the money she had gained for the eggs of two hens, called her own; she put the whole together, and it was above two pounds -- two pounds five and seven-pence, to speak accurately -- and, leaving out the penny as a nest-egg for her future savings, she made up the rest in a little parcel, and sent it, with a note, to Benjamin’s address in London:

‘From a well-wisher.
‘Dr BENJAMIN, -- Unkle has lost 2 cows and a vast of monney. He is a good deal Angored, but more Troubled. So no more at present. Hopeing this will finding you well As it leaves us. Tho’ lost to Site, To Memory Dear. Repayment not kneeded. -- Your effectonet cousin,
‘ELIZABETH ROSE’

When this packet was once fairly sent off, Bessy began to sing again over her work. She never expected the mere form of acknowledgement; indeed, she had such faith in the carrier (who took parcels to York, whence they were forwarded to London by coach), that she felt sure he would go on purpose to London to deliver anything intrusted to him, if he had not full confidence in the person, persons, coach and horses, to whom he committed it. Therefore she was not anxious that she did not hear of its arrival. ‘Giving a thing to a man as one knows,’ said she to herself, ‘is a vast different to poking a thing through a hole into a box, th’ inside of which one has never clapp’d eyes on; and yet letters get safe, some ways or another.’ (The belief in the infallibility of the post was destined to a shock before long.) But she had a secret yearning for Benjamin’s thanks, and some of the old words of love that she had been without so long. Nay, she even thought -- when, day after day, week after week, passed by without a line -- that he might be winding up his affairs in that weary, wasteful London, and coming back to Nab-End to thank her in person.

One day -- her aunt was upstairs, inspecting the summer’s make of cheeses, her uncle out in the fields -- the postman brought a letter into the kitchen to Bessy. A country postman, even now, is not much pressed for time; and in those days there were but few letters to distribute, and they were only sent out from Highminster once a week into the district in which Nab-End was situated; and,
on those occasions, the letter-carrier usually paid morning calls on the various people for whom he had letters. So, half-standing by the dresser, half-sitting on it, he began to rummage out his bag.

‘It’s a queer-like thing I’ve got for Nathan this time. I am afraid it will bear ill news in it; for there’s ‘Dead Letter Office’ stamped on the top of it.’

‘Lord save us!’ said Bessy, and sat down on the nearest chair, as white as a sheet. In an instant, however, she was up; and, snatching the ominous letter out of the man’s hands, she pushed him before her out of the house, and said, ‘Be off wi’ thee, afore aunt comes down’; and ran past him as hard as she could, till she reached the field where she expected to find her uncle.

‘Uncle,’ said she, breathless, ‘what is it? Oh, uncle, speak! Is he dead?’

Nathan’s hands trembled, and his eyes dazzled, ‘Take it,’ he said, ‘and tell me what it is.’

‘It’s a letter -- it’s from you to Benjamin, it is -- and there’s words written on it, ‘Not known at the address given;’ so they’ve sent it back to the writer -- that’s you, uncle. Oh, it gave me such a start, with them nasty words written outside!’

Nathan had taken the letter back into his own hands, and was turning it over, while he strove to understand what the quick-witted Bessy had picked up at a glance. But he arrived at a different conclusion.

‘He’s dead!’ said he. ‘The lad is dead, and he never knewed how as I were sorry I wrote to ‘un so sharp. My lad! my lad!’ Nathan sat down on the ground where he stood, and covered his face with his old, withered hands. The letter returned to him was one which he had written, with infinite pains and at various times, to tell his child, in kinder words and at greater length than he had done before, the reasons why he could not send him the money demanded. And now Benjamin was dead; nay, the old man immediately jumped to the conclusion that his child had been starved to death, without money, in a wild, wide, strange place. All he could say at first was --

‘My heart, Bess -- my heart is broken!’ And he put his hand to his side, still keeping his shut eyes covered with the other, as though he never wished to see the light of day again. Bessy was down by his side in an instant, holding him in her arms, chafing and kissing him.

‘It’s noan so bad, uncle; he’s not dead; the letter does not say that, dunnot think it. He’s flitted from that lodging, and the lazy tykes dunna know where to find him; and so they just send y’ back th’ letter, instead of trying fra’ house to house, as Mark Benson would. I’ve alwayds heerd tell on south-country folk for laziness. He’s noan dead, uncle; he’s just flitted; and he’ll let us know afore long where he’s gotten to. May be, it’s a cheaper place; for that lawyer has cheated him, ye reck’lect, and he’ll be trying to live for as little as he can, that’s all, uncle. Dunnot take on so; for it doesna say he’s dead.’

By this time Bessy was crying with agitation, although she firmly believed in her own view of the case, and had felt the opening of the ill-favoured letter as a great relief. Presently she began to urge, both with word and action, upon her uncle, that he should sit no longer on the damp grass. She pulled him up; for he was very stiff, and, as he said, ‘all shaken to dithers.’ She made him walk about, repeating over and over again her solution of the case, always in the same words, beginning again and again, ‘He’s noan dead; it’s just been a flitting,’ and so on. Nathan shook his head, and tried to be convinced; but it was a steady belief in his own heart for all that. He looked so deathly ill on his return home with Bessy (for she would not let him go on with his day’s work), that his wife made sure he had taken cold; and he, weary and indifferent to life, was glad to subside into bed and the rest from exertion which his real bodily illness gave him. Neither Bessy nor he spoke of the letter again, even to each other, for many days; and she found means to stop Mark Benson’s tongue and satisfy his kindly curiosity, by giving him the rosy side of her own view of the case.

Nathan got up again, an older man in looks and constitution by ten years for that week of bed. His wife gave him many a scolding on his imprudence for sitting down in the wet field, if ever so tired. But now she, too, was beginning to be uneasy at Benjamin’s long-continued silence. She could not write herself; but she urged her husband many a time to send a letter to ask for news of her lad. He said nothing in reply for some time; at length, he told her he would write next Sunday afternoon. Sunday was his general day for writing, and this Sunday he meant to go to church for the first time since his illness. On Saturday he was very persistent, against his wife’s wishes (backed by
Bessy as hard as she could), in resolving to go into Highminster to market. The change would do him good, he said. But he came home tired, and a little mysterious in his ways. When he went to the shippon the last thing at night, he asked Bessy to go with him, and hold the lantern, while he looked at an ailing cow; and, when they were fairly out of the ear-shot of the house, he pulled a little shop-parcel from his pocket and said—

‘Thou’lt put that on ma Sunday hat, wilt ‘on, lass? It’ll be a bit on a comfort to me; for I know my lad’s dead and gone, though I dunna speak on it, for fear o’ grieving th’ old woman and ye.’

‘I’ll put it on, uncle, if -- But he’s noan dead.’ (Bessy was sobbing.)

‘I know -- I know, lass. I dunnot wish other folk to hold my opinion; but I’d like to wear a bit o’ crape out o’ respect to my boy. It ’ud have done me good for to have ordered a black coat; but she’d see if I had na’ on my wedding-coat, Sundays, for a’ she’s losing her eyesight, poor old wench! But she’ll ne’er take notice o’ a bit o’ crape. Thou’lt put it on all canny and tidy.’

So Nathan went to church with a strip of crape, as narrow as Bessy durst venture to make it, round his hat. Such is the contradictoriness of human nature that, though he was most anxious his wife should not hear of his conviction that their son was dead, he was half-hurt that none of his neighbours noticed his sign of mourning so far as to ask him for whom he wore it.

But after a while, when they never heard a word from or about Benjamin, the household wonder as to what had become of him grew so painful and strong, that Nathan no longer kept the idea to himself. Poor Hester, however, rejected it with her whole will, heart, and soul. She could and would not believe -- nothing should make her believe -- that her only child Benjamin had died without some sign of love or farewell to her. No arguments could shake her in this. She believed that, if all natural means of communication between her and him had been cut off at the last supreme moment -- if death had come upon him in an instant, sudden and unexpected -- her intense love would have been supernaturally made conscious of the blank. Nathan at times tried to feel glad that she should still hope to see the lad again; but at other moments he wanted her sympathy in his grief, his self-reproach, his weary wonder as to how and what they had done wrong in the treatment of their son, that he had been such a care and sorrow to his parents. Bessy was convinced, first by her aunt, and then by her uncle -- honestly convinced -- on both sides of the argument, and so, for the time, able to sympathise with each. But she lost her youth in a very few months; she looked set and middle-aged, long before she ought to have done, and rarely smiled and never sang again.

All sorts of new arrangements were required by the blow which told so miserably upon the energies of all the household at Nab-End. Nathan could no longer go about and direct his two men, taking a good turn of work himself at busy times. Hester lost her interest in the dairy; for which, indeed, her increasing loss of sight unfitted her. Bessy would either do field-work, or attend to the cows and the shippon, or churn, or make cheese; she did all well, no longer merrily, but with something of stem cleverness. But she was not sorry when her uncle, one evening, told her aunt and her that a neighbouring farmer, job Kirkby, had made him an offer to take so much of his land off his hands as would leave him only pasture enough for two cows, and no arable to attend to; while Farmer Kirkby did not wish to interfere with anything in the house, only would be glad to use some of the out-building for his Battening cattle.

‘We can do wi’ Hawky and Daisy; it’ll leave us eight or ten pound o’ butter to take to market i’ summer time, and keep us fra’ thinking too much, which is what I’m dreading on as I get into years.’

‘Ay,’ said his wife. ‘Thou’l not have to go so far a-field, if it’s only the Aster-Toft as is on thy hands. And Bess will have to gie up her pride i’ cheese, and tak’ to making cream-butter. I’d allays a fancy for trying at cream-butter; but th’ whey had to be used; else, where I come fra’, they’d never ha’ looked near whey-butter.’

When Hester was left alone with Bessy, she said, in allusion to this change of plan --

‘I’m thankful to the Lord that it is as it is; for I were allays afeared Nathan would have to gie up the house and farm altogether, and then the lad would na know where to find us when he came back fra’ Merikay. He’s gone there for to make his fortune, I’ll be bound. Keep up thy heart, lass,
he’ll be home some day; and have sown his wild oats. Eh! but thatten’s a pretty story i’ the Gospel
about the Prodigal, who’d to eat the pigs’ vittle at one time, but ended i’ clover in his father’s house. And I’m sure our Nathan ‘ll be ready to forgive him, and love him, and make much of him -- may
be, a deal more nor me, who never gave in to ’s death. It’ll be liken to a resurrection to our Nathan.’

Farmer Kirkby, then, took by far the greater part of the land belonging to Nab-End Farm; and the work about the rest, and about the two remaining cows, was easily done by three pairs of willing hands, with a little occasional assistance. The Kirkby family were pleasant enough to have to
deal with. There was a son, a stiff, grave bachelor, who was very particular and methodical about his work, and rarely spoke to any one. But Nathan took it into his head that John Kirkby was looking after Bessy, and was a good deal troubled in his mind in consequence; for it was the first
time he had to face the effects of his belief in his son’s death; and he discovered, to his own surprise, that he had not that implicit faith which would make it easy for him to look upon Bessy as the wife of another man than the one to whom she had been betrothed in her youth. As, however, John
Kirkby seemed in no hurry to make his intentions (if indeed he had any) clear to Bessy, it was only
now and then that his jealousy on behalf of his lost son seized upon Nathan.

But people, old, and in deep hopeless sorrow, grow irritable at times, however they may repent and struggle against their irritability. There were days when Bessy had to bear a good deal from her uncle; but she loved him so dearly and respected him so much, that, high as her temper was to all other people, she never returned him a rough or impatient word. And she had a reward in the conviction of his deep, true affection for her, and her aunt’s entire and most sweet dependence upon her.

One day, however -- it was near the end of November -- Bessy had had a good deal to bear, that seemed more than usually unreasonable, on the part of her uncle. The truth was, that one of Kirkby's cows was ill, and John Kirkby was a good deal about in the farmyard; Bessy was interested about the animal, and had helped in preparing a mash over their own fire, that had to be
given warm to the sick creature. If John had been out of the way, there would have been no one more anxious about the affair than Nathan: both because he was naturally kind-hearted and
neighbourly, and also because he was rather proud of his reputation for knowledge in the diseases of cattle. But because John was about, and Bessy helping a little in what had to be done, Nathan would do nothing, and chose to assume that ‘nothing to think on ailed th’ beast; but lads and lasses were allays fain to be feared on something.’ Now John was upwards of forty, and Bessy nearly eight-and-twenty; so the terms lads and lasses did not exactly apply to their case.

When Bessy brought the milk in from their own cows, towards half-past five o’clock, Nathan bade her make the doors, and not be running out i’ the dark and cold about other folks’ business; and, though Bessy was a little surprised and a good deal annoyed at his tone, she sat down to her supper without making a remonstrance. It had long been Nathan’s custom to look out the last thing at night, to see ‘what mak’ o’ weather it wur’; and when, towards half-past eight, he got his stick and went out -- two or three steps from the door, which opened into the house-place where they were sitting -- Hester put her hand on her niece's shoulder and said --

‘He’s gotten a touch o’ rheumatics, as twinges him and makes him speak so sharp. I didna like to ask thee afore him, but how’s yon poor beast?’

‘Very ailing, belike. John Kirkby wur off for th’ cow-doctor when I cam in. I reckon they’ll have to stop up wi’t a’ night.’

Since their sorrows, her uncle had taken to reading a chapter in the Bible aloud, the last thing at night. He could not read fluently, and often hesitated long over a word, which he miscalled at length; but the very fact of opening the book seemed to soothe those old bereaved parents; for it made them feel quiet and safe in the presence of God, and took them out of the cares and troubles of this world into that futurity which, however dim and vague, was to their faithful hearts as a sure and certain rest. This little quiet time -- Nathan sitting with his horn spectacles, the tallow candle between him and the Bible throwing a strong light on his reverent, earnest face; Hester sitting on the other side of the fire, her head bowed in attentive listening; now and then shaking it, and moaning a little, but when a promise came, or any good tidings of great joy, saying ‘Amen’ with fervour;
Bessy by her aunt, perhaps her mind a little wandering to some household cares, or it might be on thoughts of those who were absent -- this little quiet pause, I say, was grateful and soothing to this household, as a lullaby to a tired child. But this night, Bessy, sitting opposite to the long, low window, only shaded by a few geraniums that grew in the sill, and to the door alongside that window through which her uncle had passed not a quarter of an hour before, saw the wooden latch of the door gently and almost noiselessly lifted up, as if some one were trying it from the outside.

She was startled, and watched again, intently; but it was perfectly still now. She thought it must have been that it had not fallen into its proper place, when her uncle had come in and locked the door. It was just enough to make her uncomfortable, no more; and she almost persuaded herself it must have been fancy. Before going upstairs, however, she went to the window, to look out into the darkness; but all was still. Nothing to be seen; nothing to be heard. So the three went quietly upstairs to bed.

The house was little better than a cottage. The front door opened on a house-place, over which was the old couple’s bed-room. To the left, as you entered this pleasant house-place, and at close right angles with the entrance, was a door that led into the small parlour, which was Hester’s and Bessy’s pride, although not half as comfortable as the house-place, and never on any occasion used as a sitting-room. There were shells and bunches of honesty in the fireplace; the best chest of drawers, and a company set of gaudy-coloured china, and a bright common carpet on the floor; but all failed to give it the aspect of the homely comfort and delicate cleanliness of the house-place.

Over this parlour was the bedroom which Benjamin had slept in when a boy, when at home. It was kept, still, in a kind of readiness for him. The bed was yet there, in which none had slept since he had last done, eight or nine years ago; and every now and then a warming-pan was taken quietly and silently up by his old mother, and the bed thoroughly aired. But this she did in her husband’s absence, and without saying a word to anyone; nor did Bessy offer to help her, though her eyes often filled with tears, as she saw her aunt still going through the hopeless service. But the room had become a receptacle for all unused things; and there was always a corner of it appropriated to the winter’s store of apples. To the left of the house-place, as you stood facing the fire, on the side opposite to the window and outer door, were two other doors; the one on the right led into a kind of back kitchen, and had a lean-to roof, and a door opening on to the farm-yard and back-premises; the left-hand door gave on the stairs, underneath which was a closet, in which various house-hold treasures were kept; and beyond that was the dairy, over which Bessy slept, her little chamber window opening just above the sloping roof of the back-kitchen. There were neither blinds nor shutters to any of the windows, either upstairs or down; the house was built of stone; and there was heavy framework of the same material around the little casement windows, and the long, low window of the house-place was divided by what, in grander dwellings, would be called mullions.

By nine o’clock this night of which I am speaking, all had gone upstairs to bed; it was even later than usual, for the burning of candles was regarded so much in the light of an extravagance, that the household kept early hours even for country-folk. But, somehow, this evening, Bessy could not sleep; although in general she was in deep slumber five minutes after her head touched the pillow. Her thoughts ran on the chances for John Kirkby’s cow, and a little fear lest the disorder might be epidemic and spread to their own cattle. Across all these homely cares came a vivid, uncomfortable recollection of the way in which the door-latch went up and down, without any sufficient agency to account for it. She felt more sure now than she had done downstairs, that it was a real movement, and no effect of her imagination. She wished that it had not happened just when her uncle was reading, that she might at once have gone quick to the darkness; but all was still. Nothing to be seen; nothing to be heard. So the three went quietly upstairs to bed.
beaten, middle-aged face and figure with the face and figure she remembered well, but never more expected to see in this life. So thinking, she became very restless, and weary of bed, and, after long tossing and turning, ending in a belief that she should never get to sleep at all that night, she went off soundly and suddenly.

As suddenly she was wide awake, sitting up in bed, listening to some noise that must have awakened her, but which was not repeated for some time. Surely it was in her uncle’s room -- her uncle was up; but, for a minute or two, there was no further sound. Then she heard him open his door, and go downstairs, with hurried, stumbling steps. She now thought that her aunt must be ill, and hastily sprang out of bed, and was putting on her petticoat with hurried, trembling hands, and had just opened her chamber door, when she heard the front door undone, and a scuffle, as of the feet of several people, and many rude, passionate words, spoken hoarsely below the breath. Quick as thought she understood it all -- the house was lonely -- her uncle had the reputation of being well-to-do -- they had pretended to be belated, and had asked their way or something. What a blessing that John Kirkby’s cow was sick, for there were several men watching with him! She went back, opened her window, squeezed herself out, slid down the lean-to roof, and ran barefoot and breathless to the shippon --

‘John, John, for the love of God, come quick; there’s robbers in the house, and uncle and aunt ’ll be murdered!’ she whispered, in terrified accents, through the closed and barred shippon door. In a moment it was undone, and John and the cow-doctor stood there, ready to act, if they but understood her rightly. Again she repeated her words, with broken, half-unintelligible explanations of what she as yet did not rightly understand.

‘Front door is open, say’st thou?’ said John, arming himself with a pitchfork, while the cow-doctor took some other implement. ‘Then I reckon we’d best make for that way o’ getting into th’ house, and catch ’em all in a trap.’

‘Run! run!’ was all Bessy could say, taking hold of John Kirkby’s arm, and pulling him along with her. Swiftly did the three run to the house round the corner, and in at the open front-door. The men carried the hem lantern they had been using in the shippon; and, by the sudden oblong light that it threw, Bessy saw the principal object of her anxiety, her uncle, lying stunned and helpless on the kitchen-floor. Her first thought was for him; for she had no idea that her aunt was in any immediate danger, although she heard the noise of feet, and fierce, subdued voices upstairs.

‘Make th’ door behind us, lass. We’ll not let ’em escape!’ said brave John Kirkby, dauntless in a good cause, though he knew not how many there might be above. The cow-doctor fastened and locked the door, saying, ‘There!’ in a defiant tone, as he put the key in his pocket. It was to be a struggle for life or death, or, at any rate, for effectual capture or desperate escape. Bessy kneeled down by her uncle, who did not speak or give any sign of consciousness. Bessy raised his head by drawing a pillow off the settle, and putting it under him; she longed to go for water into the back kitchen, but the sound of a violent struggle, and of heavy blows, and of low, hard curses spoken through closed teeth, and muttered passion, as though breath were too much needed for action to be wasted in speech, kept her still and quiet by her uncle’s side in the kitchen, where the darkness might almost be felt, so thick and deep was it. Once -- in a pause of her own heart’s beating -- a sudden terror came over her; she perceived, in that strange way in which the presence of a living creature forces itself on our consciousness in the darkest room, that someone was near her, keeping as still as she. It was not the poor old man’s breathing that she heard, nor the radiation of his presence that she felt; someone else was in the kitchen; another robber, perhaps, left to guard the old man, with murderous intent if his consciousness returned. Now Bessy was fully aware that self-preservation would keep her terrible companion quiet, as there was no motive for his betraying himself stronger than the desire of escape; any effort for which he, the unseen witness, must know would be rendered abortive by the fact of the door being locked.

Yet, with the knowledge that he was there, close to her still, silent as the grave -- with fearful, unspoken thoughts in his heart -- possibly even with keener and stronger sight than hers, as longer accustomed to the darkness, able to discern her figure and posture, and glaring at her like some wild beast -- Bessy could not fail to shrink from the vision that her fancy
presented! And still the struggle went on upstairs; feet slipping, blows sounding, and the wrench of intentioned aims, the strong gasps for breath, as the wrestlers paused for an instant. In one of these pauses, Bessy felt conscious of a creeping movement close to her, which ceased when the noise of the strife above died away, and was resumed when it again began. She was aware of it by some subtle vibration of the air, rather than by touch or sound. She was sure that he who had been close to her one minute as she knelt, was, the next, passing stealthily towards the inner door which led to the staircase. She thought he was going to join and strengthen his accomplices, and, with a great cry, she sprang after him; but just as she came to the doorway, through which some dim portion of light from the upper chambers came, she saw one man thrown downstairs, with such violence that he fell almost at her very feet, while the dark, creeping figure glided suddenly away to the left, and as suddenly entered the closet beneath the stairs. Bessy had no time to wonder as to his purpose in so doing, whether he had at first designed to aid his accomplices in their desperate fight or not. He was an enemy, a robber, that was all she knew, and she sprang to the door of the closet, and in a trice had locked it on the outside. And then she stood frightened, panting in that dark corner, sick with terror lest the man who lay before her was either John Kirkby or the cow-doctor. If it were either of those friendly two, what would become of the other -- of her uncle, her aunt, herself? But, in a very few minutes, this wonder was ended; her two defenders came slowly and heavily down the stairs, dragging with them a man, fierce, sullen, despairing -- disabled with terrible blows, which had made his face one bloody, swollen mass. As for that, neither John nor the cow-doctor was much more presentable. One of them bore the lantern in his teeth; for all their strength was taken up by the weight of the fellow they were bearing.

‘Take care,’ said Bessy, from her corner; ‘there’s a chap just beneath your feet. I dunno know if he’s dead or alive; and uncle lies on the floor just beyond.’

They stood still on the stairs for a moment. just then the robber they had thrown downstairs stirred and moaned.

‘Bessy,’ said John, ‘run off to th’ stable and fetch ropes and gearing for us to bind ’em; and we’ll rid the house on ’em, and thou can’st go see after th’ oud folks, who need it sadly.’

Bessy was back in a very few minutes. When she came in, there was more light in the house-place, for someone had stirred up the raked fire.

‘That felly makes as though his leg were broken,’ said John, nodding towards the man still lying on the ground. Bessy felt almost sorry for him as they handled him -- not over-gently -- and bound him, only half-conscious, as hardly and tightly as they had done his fierce, surly companion. She even felt sorry for his evident agony, as they turned him over and over, that she ran to get him a cup of water to moisten his lips.

‘I’m loth to leave yo’ with him alone,’ said John, ‘though I’m thinking his leg is broken for sartin, and he can’t stir, even if he comes to hissel, to do yo’ any harm. But we’ll just take off this chap, and mak sure of him, and then one on us ‘ll come back to yo’, and we can, may be, find a gate or so for yo’ to get shut on him o’ th’ house. This felly’s made safe enough, I’ll be bound,’ said he, looking at the burglar, who stood, bloody and black, with fell hatred on his sullen face. His eye caught Bessy’s, as hers fell on him with dread so evident that it made him smile; and the look and the smile prevented the words from being spoken which were on Bessy’s lips.

She dared not tell, before him, that an able-bodied accomplice still remained in the house; lest, somehow, the door which kept him a prisoner should be broken open and the fight renewed. So she only said to John, as he was leaving the house --

‘Thou’ll not be long away, for I’m afeared of being left wi’ this man.’

‘He’ll noan do thee harm,’ said John.

‘No! but I’m feared lest he should die. And there’s uncle and aunt. Come back soon, John!’

‘Ay, ay!’ said he, half-pleased; ‘I’ll be back, never fear me.’

So Bessy shut the door after them, but did not lock it, for fear of mischances in the house, and went once more to her uncle, whose breathing, by this time, was easier than when she had first returned into the house-place with John and the doctor. By the light of the fire, too, she could now see that he had received a blow on the head, which was probably the occasion of his stupor. Round
this wound, which was bleeding pretty freely, Bessy put cloths dipped in cold water; and then, leaving him for a time, she lighted a candle, and was about to go upstairs to her aunt, when, just as she was passing the bound and disabled robber, she heard her name softly, urgently called --

‘Bessy, Bessy!’ At first the voice sounded so close that she thought it must be the unconscious wretch at her feet. But, once again, that voice thrilled through her --

‘Bessy, Bessy! for God’s sake, let me out!’

She went to the stair-closet door, and tried to speak, but could not, her heart beat so terribly. Again, close to her ear -

‘Bessy, Bessy! they’ll be back directly; let me out, I say! For God’s sake, let me out!’ And he began to kick violently against the panels.

‘Hush! hush!’ she said, sick with a terrible dread, yet with a will strongly resisting her conviction. ‘Who are you?’ But she knew -- knew quite well.

‘Benjamin.’ An oath. ‘Let me out, I say, and I’ll be off, and out of England by to-morrow night, never to come back, and you’ll have all my father’s money.’

‘D’ye think I care for that?’ said Bessy vehemently, feeling with trembling hands for the lock; ‘I wish there was noan such a thing as money i’ the world, afore yo’d come to this. There, yo’re free, and I charge yo’ never to let me see your face again. I’d ne’er ha’ let yo’ loose but for fear o’ breaking their hearts, if yo’ hanna killed him already.’ But, before she had ended her speech, he was gone -- off into the black darkness, leaving the door open wide. With a new terror in her mind, Bessy shut it afresh -- shut it and bolted it this time. Then she sat down on the first chair, and took a drink of cold water. To her surprise, she heard her uncle’s voice saying feebly --

‘Carry me up, and lay me by her.’

But Bessy could not carry him; she could only help his faint exertions to walk upstairs; and, by the time he was there, sitting panting on the first chair she could find, John Kirkby and Atkinson returned. John came up now to her aid. Her aunt lay across the bed in a fainting-fit, and her uncle sat in so utterly broken-down a state that Bessy feared immediate death for both. But John cheered her up, and lifted the old man into his bed again; and, while Bessy tried to compose poor Hester’s limbs into a position of rest, John went down to hunt about for the little store of gin which was always kept in a corner cupboard against emergencies.

‘They’ve had a sore fright,’ said he, shaking his head, as he poured a little gin and hot water into their mouths with a tea-spoon, while Bessy chafed their cold feet; ‘and it and the cold have been welly too much for ’em, poor old folk!’

He looked tenderly at them, and Bessy blessed him in her heart for that look.

‘I maun be off. I sent Atkinson up to th’ farm for to bring down Bob, and Jack came wi’ him back to th’ shippon, for to look after t’other man. He began blackguarding us all round, so Bob and Jack were gagging him wi’ bridles when I left.’

‘Ne’er give heed to what he says,’ cried poor Bessy, a new panic besetting her. ‘Folks o’ his sort are allays for dragging other folk into their mischief. I’m right glad he were well gagged.’

‘Well! but what I were saying were thi --’

‘Well! but what I were saying were this: Atkinson and me will take t’other chap, who seems quiet enough, to th’ shippon, and it’ll be one piece o’ work for to mind them and the cow; and I’ll saddle t’ old bay mare and ride for constables and doctor fra’ Highminster. I’ll bring Dr Preston up to see Nathan and Hester first; and then, I reckon, th’ broken-legged chap down below must have his turn for all as he’s met wi’ his misfortunes in a wrong line o’ life.’

‘Ay!’ said Bessy. ‘We maun ha’ the doctor sure enough, for look at them how they lie -- like two stone statues on a church monument, so sad and solemn!’

‘There’s a look o’ sense come back into their faces though, sin’ they supped that gin-and-water. I’d keep on a-bathing his head and giving them a sup on’t fra’ time to time, if I was you, Bessy.’
Bessy followed him downstairs, and lighted the men out of the house. She dared not light them carrying their burden even, until they passed round the corner of the house; so strong was her fearful conviction that Benjamin was lurking near, seeking again to enter. She rushed back into the kitchen, bolted and barred the door, and pushed the end of the dresser against it, shutting her eyes as she passed the uncurtained window, for fear of catching a glimpse of a white face pressed against the glass, and gazing at her. The poor old couple lay quiet and speechless, although Hester’s position had slightly altered: she had turned a little on her side towards her husband, and had laid one shrivelled arm around his neck. But he was just as Bessy had left him, with the wet cloths around his head, his eyes not wanting in a certain intelligence, but solemn, and unconscious to all that was passing around as the eyes of death.

His wife spoke a little from time to time -- said a word of thanks, perhaps, or so; but he, never. All the rest of that terrible night, Bessy tended the poor old couple with constant care, her own heart so stunned and bruised in its feelings that she went about her pious duties almost like one in a dream. The November morning was long in coming; nor did she perceive any change, either for the worse or the better, before the doctor came, about eight o’clock. John Kirkby brought him; and was full of the capture of the two burglars.

As far as Bessy could make out, the participation of that unnatural Third was unknown. It was a relief, almost sickening in the revulsion it gave her from her terrible fear, which now she felt had haunted and held possession of her all night long, and had, in fact, paralysed her from thinking. Now she felt and thought with acute and feverish vividness, owing, no doubt, in part, to the sleepless night she had passed. She felt almost sure that her uncle (possibly her aunt, too) had recognised Benjamin; but there was a faint chance that they had not done so, and wild horses should never tear the secret from her, nor should any inadvertent word betray the fact that there had been a third person concerned. As to Nathan, he had never uttered a word. It was her aunt’s silence that made Bessy fear lest Hester knew, somehow, that her son was concerned.

The doctor examined them both closely; looked hard at the wound on Nathan’s head; asked questions which Hester answered shortly and unwillingly, and Nathan not at all -- shutting his eyes, as if even the sight of a stranger was pain to him. Bessy replied, in their stead, to all that she could answer respecting their state, and followed the doctor downstairs with a beating heart. When they came into the house-place, they found John had opened the outer door to let in some fresh air, had brushed the hearth and made up the fire, and put the chairs and table in their right places. He reddened a little, as Bessy’s eye fell upon his swollen and battered face, but tried to smile it off in a dry kind of way --

‘Yo’ see, I’m an ould bachelor, and I just thought as I’d redd up things a bit. How dun yo’ find ‘em, doctor?’

‘Well, the poor old couple have had a terrible shock. I shall send them some soothing medicine to bring down the pulse, and a lotion for the old man’s head. It is very well it bled so much; there might have been a good deal of inflammation.’ And so he went on, giving directions to Bessy for keeping them quietly in bed through the day. From these directions she gathered that they were not, as she had feared all night long, near to death. The doctor expected them to recover, though they would require care. She almost wished it had been otherwise, and that they, and she too, might have just lain down to their rest in the churchyard -- so cruel did life seem to her; so dreadful the recollection of that subdued voice of the hidden robber smiting her with recognition.

All this time, John was getting things ready for breakfast, with something of the handiness of a woman. Bessy half-resented his officiousness in pressing Dr Preston to have a cup of tea, she did so want him to be gone and leave her alone with her thoughts. She did not know that all was done for love of her; that the hard-featured, short-spoken John was thinking all the time how ill and miserable she looked, and trying with tender artifices to make it incumbent upon her sense of hospitality to share Dr Preston’s meal.

‘I’ve seen as the cows is milked,’ said he, ‘yourn and all; and Atkinson’s brought ours round fine. Whatten a marcy it were as she were sick this very night! Yon two chaps ’ud ha’ made short
work on’t, if yo’ hadna fetched us in; and, as it were, we had a sore tussle. One on ’em ’ll bear the marks on’t to his dying day, wunnot he, doctor?’

‘He’ll barely have his leg well enough to stand his trial at York Assizes; they’re coming off in a fortnight from now.’

‘Ay, and that reminds me, Bessy, yo’ll have to go witness before Justice Royds. Constables bade me tell yo’ and gie yo’ this summons. Dunnot be feared: it will not be a long job, though I’m not saying as it’ll be a pleasant one. Yo’ll have to answer questions as to how, and all about it; and Jane’ (his sister) ‘will come and stop wi’ th’ oud folks; and I’ll drive yo’ in the shandry.’

No one knew why Bessy’s colour blenched, and her eye clouded. No one knew how she apprehended lest she should have to say that Benjamin had been of the gang; if indeed, in some way, the law had not followed on his heels quick enough to catch him.

But that trial was spared her; she was warned by John to answer questions, and say no more than was necessary, for fear of making her story less clear; and, as she was known, by character at least, to justice Royds and his clerk, they made the examination as little formidable as possible.

When all was over, and John was driving her back again, he expressed his rejoicing that there would be evidence enough to convict the men, without summoning Nathan and Hester to identify them. Bessy was so tired that she hardly understood what an escape it was; how far greater than even her companion understood.

Jane Kirkby stayed with her for a week or more, and was an unspeakable comfort. Otherwise she sometimes thought she should have gone mad, with the face of her uncle always reminding her, in its stony expression of agony, of that fearful night. Her aunt was softer in her sorrow, as became one of her faithful and pious nature; but it was easy to see how her heart bled inwardly. She recovered her strength sooner than her husband; but, as she recovered, the doctor perceived the rapid approach of total blindness. Every day, nay, every hour of the day, that Bessy dared, without fear of exciting their suspicions of her knowledge, she told them, as she had anxiously told them at first, that only two men, and those perfect strangers, had been discovered as being concerned in the burglary. Her uncle would never have asked a question about it, even if she had withheld all information respecting the affair; but she noticed the quick, watching, waiting glance of his eye, whenever she returned from any person or place where she might have been supposed to gain intelligence if Benjamin were suspected or caught: and she hastened to relieve the old man’s anxiety, by always telling all that she had heard; thankful that, as the days passed on, the danger she sickened to think of grew less and less.

Day by day, Bessy had ground for thinking that her aunt knew more than she had apprehended at first. There was something so very humble and touching in Hester’s blind way of feeling about for her husband -- stern, woe-begone Nathan -- and mutely striving to console him in the deep agony of which Bessy learnt, from this loving, piteous manner, that her aunt was conscious. Her aunt’s face looked blankly up into his, tears slowly running down from her sightless eyes; while from time to time, when she thought herself unheard by any save him, she would repeat such texts as she had heard at church in happier days, and which she thought, in her true, simple piety, might tend to console him. Yet, day by day, her aunt grew more and more sad.

Three or four days before assize-time, two summonses to attend the trial at York were sent to the old people. Neither Bessy, nor John, nor Jane, could understand this: for their own notices had come long before, and they had been told that their evidence would be enough to convict.

But, alas! the fact was, that the lawyer employed to defend the prisoners had heard from them that there was a third person engaged, and had heard who that third person was; and it was this advocate’s business to diminish, if possible, the guilt of his clients, by proving that they were but tools in the hands of one who had, from his superior knowledge of the premises and the daily customs of the inhabitants, been the originator and planner of the whole affair. To do this, it was necessary to have the evidence of the parents, who, as the prisoners had said, must have recognised the voice of the young man, their son. For no one knew that Bessy, too, could have borne witness to his having been present; and, as it was supposed that Benjamin had escaped out of England, there was no exact betrayal of him on the part of his accomplices.
Wondering, bewildered, and weary, the old couple reached York, in company with John and Bessy, on the eve of the day of the trial. Nathan was still so self-contained that Bessy could never guess what had been passing in his mind. He was almost passive under his old wife’s trembling caresses. He seemed hardly conscious of them, so rigid was his demeanour.

She, Bessy feared at times, was becoming childish; for she had evidently so great and anxious a love for her husband, that her memory seemed going in her endeavours to melt the stoniness of his aspect and manners; she appeared occasionally to have forgotten why he was so changed, in her piteous little attempts to bring him back to his former self.

‘They’ll, for sure, never torture them, when they see what old folks they are!’ cried Bessy, on the morning of the trial, a dim fear looming over her mind. ‘They’ll never be so cruel, for sure?’

But ‘for sure’ it was so. The barrister looked up at the judge, almost apologetically, as he saw how hoary-headed and woeful an old man was put into the witness-box, when the defence came on, and Nathan Huntroyd was called on for his evidence.

‘It is necessary, on behalf of my clients, my lord, that I should pursue a course which, for all other reasons, I deplore.’

‘Go on!’ said the judge. ‘What is right and legal must be done.’ But, an old man himself, he covered his quivering mouth with his hand as Nathan, with grey, unmoved face, and solemn, hollow eyes, placing his two hands on each side of the witness-box, prepared to give his answers to questions, the nature of which he was beginning to foresee, but would not shrink from replying to truthfully; ‘the very stones’ (as he said to himself, with a kind of dulled sense of the Eternal justice) ‘rise up against such a sinner.’

‘Your name is Nathan Huntroyd, I believe?’

‘It is.’

‘You live at Nab-End Farm?’

‘I do.’

‘Do you remember the night of November the twelfth?’

‘Yes.’

‘You were awakened that night by some noise, I believe. What was it?’

The old man’s eyes fixed themselves upon his questioner with the look of a creature brought to bay. That look the barrister never forgets. It will haunt him till his dying day.

‘It was a throwing-up of stones against our window.’

‘Did you hear it at first?’

‘No.’

‘What awakened you, then?’

‘She did.’

‘And then you both heard the stones. Did you hear anything else?’

A long pause. Then a low, clear ‘Yes.’

‘What?’

‘Our Benjamin asking us for to let him in. She said as it were him, leastways.’

‘And you thought it was him, did you not?’

‘I told her’ (this time in a louder voice) ‘for to get to sleep, and not be thinking that every drunken chap as passed by were our Benjamin, for that he were dead and gone.’

‘And she?’

‘She said as though she’d heerd our Benjamin, afore she were welly awake, axing for to be let in. But I bade her ne’er heed her dreams, but turn on her other side and get to sleep again.’

‘And did she?’

A long pause -- judge, jury, bar, audience, all held their breath. At length Nathan said -- ‘No!’

‘What did you do then? (My lord, I am compelled to ask these painful questions.)’

‘I saw she wadna be quiet: she had allays thought he would come back to us, like the Prodigal i’ th’ Gospels.’ (His voice choked a little; but he tried to make it steady, succeeded, and went on.) ‘She said, if I wadna get up, she would; and just then I heerd a voice. I’m not quite mysel’,
gentlemen -- I’ve been ill and i’ bed, an’ it makes me trembling-like. Someone said, “Father, mother, I’m here, starving i’ the cold -- wunnot yo’ get up and let me in?”

‘And that voice was -- ?’

‘It were like our Benjamin’s. I see whatten yo’re driving at, sir, and I’ll tell yo’ truth, though it kills me to speak it. I dunnot say it were our Benjamin as spoke, mind yo’ -- I only say it were like -- ”

‘That’s all I want, my good fellow. And on the strength of that entreaty, spoken in your son’s voice, you went down and opened the door to these two prisoners at the bar, and to a third man?’

Nathan nodded assent, and even that counsel was too merciful to force him to put more into words.

‘Call Hester Huntroyd.’

An old woman, with a face of which the eyes were evidently blind, with a sweet, gentle, careworn face, came into the witness-box, and meekly curtseyed to the presence of those whom she had been taught to respect -- a presence she could not see.

There was something in her humble, blind aspect, as she stood waiting to have something done to her -- what her poor troubled mind hardly knew -- that touched all who saw her, inexpressibly. Again the counsel apologised, but the judge could not reply in words; his face was quivering all over, and the jury looked uneasily at the prisoner’s counsel. That gentleman saw that he might go too far, and send their sympathies off on the other side; but one or two questions he must ask. So, hastily recapitulating much that he had learned from Nathan, he said, ‘You believed it was your son’s voice asking to be let in?’

‘Ay! Our Benjamin came home, I’m sure; choose where he is gone.’

She turned her head about, as if listening for the voice of her child, in the hushed silence of the court.

‘Yes; he came home that night -- and your husband went down to let him in?’

‘Well! I believe he did. There was a great noise of folk downstairs.’

‘And you heard your son Benjamin’s voice among the others?’

‘Is it to do him harm, sir?’ asked she, her face growing more intelligent and intent on the business in hand.

‘That is not my object in questioning you. I believe he has left England; so nothing you can say will do him any harm. You heard your son’s voice, I say?’

‘Yes, sir. For sure I did.’

‘And some men came upstairs into your room? What did they say?’

‘They axed where Nathan kept his stocking.’

‘And you -- did you tell them?’

‘No, sir, for I knew Nathan would not like me to.’

‘What did you do then?’

A shade of reluctance came over her face, as if she began to perceive causes and consequences.

‘I just screamed on Bessy -- that’s my niece, sir.’

‘And you heard someone shout out from the bottom of the stairs?’

She looked piteously at him, but did not answer.

‘Gentlemen of the jury, I wish to call your particular attention to this fact; she acknowledges she heard someone shout -- some third person, you observe -- shout out to the two above. What did he say? That is the last question I shall trouble you with. What did the third person, left behind, downstairs, say?’

Her face worked -- her mouth opened two or three times as if to speak -- she stretched out her arms imploringly; but no word came, and she fell back into the arms of those nearest to her.

Nathan forced himself forward into the witness-box --

‘My Lord judge, a woman bore ye, as I reckon; it’s a cruel shame to serve a mother so. It wur my son, my only child, as called out for us t’ open door, and who shouted out for to hold th’
oud woman’s throat if she did na stop her noise, when hoo’d fain ha’ cried for her niece to help. And now yo’ve truth, and a’ th’ truth, and I’ll leave yo’ to th’ judgement o’ God for th’ way yo’ve getten at it.’

Before night the mother was stricken with paralysis, and lay on her death-bed. But the broken-hearted go Home, to be comforted of God.
Of all the spots on the world’s surface that I, George Walker, of Friday Street, London, have ever visited, Suez in Egypt, at the head of the Red Sea, is by far the vilest, the most unpleasant, and the least interesting. There are no women there, no water, and no vegetation. It is surrounded, and indeed often filled, by a world of sand. A scorching sun is always overhead; and one is domiciled in a huge cavernous hotel, which seems to have been made purposely destitute of all the comforts of civilised life. Nevertheless, in looking back upon the week of my life which I spent there I always enjoy a certain sort of triumph;--or rather, upon one day of that week, which lends a sort of halo not only to my sojourn at Suez, but to the whole period of my residence in Egypt.

I am free to confess that I am not a great man, and that, at any rate in the earlier part of my career, I had a hankering after the homage which is paid to greatness. I would fain have been a popular orator, feeding myself on the incense tendered to me by thousands; or failing that, a man born to power, whom those around him were compelled to respect, and perhaps to fear. I am not ashamed to acknowledge this, and I believe that most of my neighbours in Friday Street would own as much were they as candid and open-hearted as myself.

It is now some time since I was recommended to pass the first four months of the year in Cairo because I had a sore-throat. The doctor may have been right, but I shall never divest myself of the idea that my partners wished to be rid of me while they made certain changes in the management of the firm. They would not otherwise have shown such interest every time I blew my nose or relieved my huskiness by a slight cough;--they would not have been so intimate with that surgeon from St. Bartholomew’s who dined with them twice at the Albion; nor would they have gone to work directly that my back was turned, and have done those very things which they could not have done had I remained at home. Be that as it may, I was frightened and went to Cairo, and while there I made a trip to Suez for a week.

I was not happy at Cairo, for I knew nobody there, and the people at the hotel were, as I thought, uncivil. It seemed to me as though I were allowed to go in and out merely by sufferance; and yet I paid my bill regularly every week. The house was full of company, but the company was made up of parties of twos and threes, and they all seemed to have their own friends. I did make attempts to overcome that terrible British exclusiveness, that noni me tangere with which an Englishman arms himself; and in which he thinks it necessary to envelop his wife; but it was in vain, and I found myself sitting down to breakfast and dinner, day after day, as much alone as I should do if I called for a chop at a separate table in the Cathedral Coffee-house. And yet at breakfast and dinner I made one of an assemblage of thirty or forty people. That I thought dull.

But as I stood one morning on the steps before the hotel, bethinking myself that my throat was as well as ever I remembered it to be, I was suddenly slapped on the back. Never in my life did I feel a more pleasant sensation, or turn round with more unaffected delight to return a friend’s greeting. It was as though a cup of water had been handed to me in the desert. I knew that a cargo of passengers for Australia had reached Cairo that morning, and were to be passed on to Suez as soon as the railway would take them, and did not therefore expect that the greeting had come from any sojourner in Egypt. I should perhaps have explained that the even tenor of our life at the hotel was disturbed some four times a month by a flight through Cairo of a flock of travellers, who like locusts eat up all that there was eatable at the Inn for the day. They sat down at the same tables with us, never mixing with us, having their separate interests and hopes, and being often, as I thought, somewhat loud and almost selfish in the expression of them. These flocks consisted of passengers passing and repassing by the overland route to and from India and Australia; and had I nothing else to tell, I should delight to describe all that I watched of their habits and manners--the outward bound being so different in their traits from their brethren on their return. But I have to tell of my own triumph at Suez, and must therefore hasten on to say that on turning round quickly with my
outstretched hand, I found it clasped by John Robinson.

“Well, Robinson, is this you?” “Holloa, Walker, what are you doing here?” That of course was the style of greeting. Elsewhere I should not have cared much to meet John Robinson, for he was a man who had never done well in the world. He had been in business and connected with a fairly good house in Sise Lane, but he had married early, and things had not exactly gone well with him. I don’t think the house broke, but he did; and so he was driven to take himself and five children off to Australia. Elsewhere I should not have cared to come across him, but I was positively glad to be slapped on the back by anybody on that landing-place in front of Shepheard’s Hotel at Cairo.

I soon learned that Robinson with his wife and children, and indeed with all the rest of the Australian cargo, were to be passed on to Suez that afternoon, and after a while I agreed to accompany their party. I had made up my mind, on coming out from England, that I would see all the wonders of Egypt, and hitherto I had seen nothing. I did ride on one day some fifteen miles on a donkey to see the petrified forest; but the guide, who called himself a dragoman, took me wrong or cheated me in some way. We rode half the day over a stony, sandy plain, seeing nothing, with a terrible wind that filled my mouth with grit, and at last the dragoman got off. “Dere,” said he, picking up a small bit of stone, “Dis is de forest made of stone. Carry that home.” Then we turned round and rode back to Cairo. My chief observation as to the country was this--that whichever way we went, the wind blew into our teeth. The day’s work cost me five-and-twenty shillings, and since that I had not as yet made any other expedition. I was therefore glad of an opportunity of going to Suez, and of making the journey in company with an acquaintance.

At that time the railway was open, as far as I remember, nearly half the way from Cairo to Suez. It did not run four or five times a day, as railways do in other countries, but four or five times a month. In fact, it only carried passengers on the arrival of these flocks passing between England and her Eastern possessions. There were trains passing backwards and forwards constantly, as I perceived in walking to and from the station; but, as I learned, they carried nothing but the labourers working on the line, and the water sent into the Desert for their use. It struck me forcibly at the time that I should not have liked to have money in that investment.

Well; I went with Robinson to Suez. The journey, like everything else in Egypt, was sandy, hot, and unpleasant. The railway carriages were pretty fair, and we had room enough; but even in them the dust was a great nuisance. We travelled about ten miles an hour, and stopped about an hour at every ten miles. This was tedious, but we had cigars with us and a trifle of brandy and water; and in this manner the railway journey wore itself away. In the middle of the night, however, we were moved from the railway carriages into omnibuses, as they were called, and then I was not comfortable. These omnibuses were wooden boxes, placed each upon a pair of wheels, and supposed to be capable of carrying six passengers. I was thrust into one with Robinson, his wife and five children, and immediately began to repent of my good-nature in accompanying them. To each vehicle were attached four horses or mules, and I must acknowledge that as on the railway they went as slow as possible, so now in these conveyances, dragged through the sand, they went as fast as the beasts could be made to gallop. I remember the Fox Tally-ho coach on the Birmingham road when Boyce drove it, but as regards pace the Fox Tally-ho was nothing to these machines in Egypt. On the first going off I was jolted right on to Mrs. R. and her infant; and for a long time that lady thought that the child had been squeezed out of its proper shape; but at last we arrived at Suez, and the baby seemed to me to be all right when it was handed down into the boat at Suez.

The Robinsons were allowed time to breakfast at that cavernous hotel--which looked to me like a scheme to save the expense of the passengers’ meal on board the ship--and then they were off. I shook hands with him heartily as I parted with him at the quay, and wished him well through all his troubles. A man who takes a wife and five young children out into a colony, and that with his pockets but indifferently lined, certainly has his troubles before him. So he has at home, no doubt; but, judging for myself, I should always prefer sticking to the old ship as long as there is a bag of biscuits in the locker. Poor Robinson! I have never heard a word of him or his since that day, and sincerely trust that the baby was none the worse for the little accident in the box.
And now I had the prospect of a week before me at Suez, and the Robinsons had not been gone half an hour before I began to feel that I should have been better off even at Cairo. I secured a bedroom at the hotel--I might have secured sixty bedrooms had I wanted them--and then went out and stood at the front door, or gate. It is a large house, built round a quadrangle, looking with one front towards the head of the Red Sea, and with the other into and on a sandy, dead-looking, open square. There I stood for ten minutes, and finding that it was too hot to go forth, returned to the long cavernous room in which we had breakfasted. In that long cavernous room I was destined to eat all my meals for the next six days. Now at Cairo I could, at any rate, see my fellow-creatures at their food. So I lit a cigar, and began to wonder whether I could survive the week. It was now clear to me that I had done a very rash thing in coming to Suez with the Robinsons.

Somebody about the place had asked me my name, and I had told it plainly--George Walker. I never was ashamed of my name yet, and never had cause to be. I believe at this day it will go as far in Friday Street as any other. A man may be popular, or he may not. That depends mostly on circumstances which are in themselves trifling. But the value of his name depends on the way in which he is known at his bank. I have never dealt in tea spoons or gravy spoons, but my name will go as far as another name. "George Walker," I answered, therefore, in a tone of some little authority, to the man who asked me, and who sat inside the gate of the hotel in an old dressing-gown and slippers.

That was a melancholy day with me, and twenty times before dinner did I wish myself back at Cairo. I had been travelling all night, and therefore hoped that I might get through some little time in sleeping, but the mosquitoes attacked me the moment I laid myself down. In other places mosquitoes torment you only at night, but at Suez they buzz around you, without ceasing, at all hours. A scorching sun was blazing overhead, and absolutely forbade me to leave the house. I stood for a while in the verandah, looking down at the few small vessels which were moored to the quay, but there was no life in them; not a sail was set, not a boatman or a sailor was to be seen, and the very water looked as though it were hot. I could fancy the glare of the sun was cracking the paint on the gunwales of the boats. I was the only visitor in the house, and during all the long hours of the morning it seemed as though the servants had deserted it.

I dined at four; not that I chose that hour, but because no choice was given to me. At the hotels in Egypt one has to dine at an hour fixed by the landlord, and no entreaties will suffice to obtain a meal at any other. So at four I dined, and after dinner was again reduced to despair.

I was sitting in the cavernous chamber almost mad at the prospect of the week before me, when I heard a noise as of various feet in the passage leading from the quadrangle. Was it possible that other human beings were coming into the hotel--Christian human beings at whom I could look, whose voices I could hear, whose words I could understand, and with whom I might possibly associate? I did not move, however, for I was still hot, and I knew that my chances might be better if I did not show myself over eager for companionship at the first moment. The door, however, was soon opened, and I saw that at least in one respect I was destined to be disappointed. The strangers who were entering the room were not Christians--if I might judge by the nature of the garments in which they were clothed.

The door had been opened by the man in an old dressing-gown and slippers, whom I had seen sitting inside the gate. He was the Arab porter of the hotel, and as he marshalled the new visitors into the room, I heard him pronounce some sound similar to my own name, and perceived that he pointed me out to the most prominent person of those who then entered the apartment. This was a stout, portly man, dressed from head to foot in Eastern costume of the brightest colours. He wore, not only the red fez cap which everybody wear--even I had accustomed myself to a fez cap--but a turban round it, of which the voluminous folds were snowy white. His face was fat, but not the less grave, and the lower part of it was enveloped in a magnificent beard, which projected round it on all sides, and touched his breast as he walked. It was a grand grizzled beard, and I acknowledged at a moment that it added a singular dignity to the appearance of the stranger. His flowing robe was of bright colours, and the under garment which fitted close round his breast, and then descended, becoming beneath his sash a pair of the loosest pantaloons--I might, perhaps, better describe them.
as bags—was a rich tawny silk. These loose pantaloons were tied close round his legs, above the ankle, and over a pair of scrupulously white stockings, and on his feet he wore a pair of yellow slippers. It was manifest to me at a glance that the Arab gentleman was got up in his best raiment, and that no expense had been spared on his suit.

And here I cannot but make a remark on the personal bearing of these Arabs. Whether they be Arabs or Turks, or Copts, it is always the same. They are a mean, false, cowardly race, I believe. They will bear blows, and respect the man who gives them. Fear goes further with them than love, and between man and man they understand nothing of forbearance. He who does not exact from them all that he can exact is simply a fool in their estimation, to the extent of that which he loses. In all this, they are immeasurably inferior to us who have had Christian teaching. But in one thing they beat us. They always know how to maintain their personal dignity.

Look at my friend and partner Judkins, as he stands with his hands in his trousers pockets at the door of our house in Friday Street. What can be meaner than his appearance? He is a stumpy, short, podgy man; but then so also was my Arab friend at Suez. Judkins is always dressed from head to foot in a decent black cloth suit; his coat is ever a dress coat, and is neither old nor shabby. On his head he carries a shining new silk hat, such as fashion in our metropolis demands. Judkins is rather a dandy than otherwise, piquing himself somewhat on his apparel. And yet how mean is his appearance, as compared with the appearance of that Arab;—how mean also is his gait, how ignoble his step! Judkins could buy that Arab out four times over, and hardly feel the loss; and yet were they to enter a room together, Judkins would know and acknowledge by his look that he was the inferior personage. Not the less, should a personal quarrel arise between them, would Judkins punch the Arab’s head; ay, and reduce him to utter ignominy at his feet.

Judkins would break his heart in despair rather than not return a blow; whereas the Arab would put up with any indignity of that sort. Nevertheless Judkins is altogether deficient in personal dignity. I often thought, as the hours hung in Egypt, whether it might not be practicable to introduce an oriental costume in Friday Street.

At this moment, as the Arab gentleman entered the cavernous coffee-room, I felt that I was greatly the inferior personage. He was followed by four or five others, dressed somewhat as himself; though by no means in such magnificent colours, and by one gentleman in a coat and trousers. The gentleman in the coat and trousers came last, and I could see that he was one of the least of the number. As for myself, I felt almost overawed by the dignity of the stout party in the turban, and seeing that he came directly across the room to the place where I was seated, I got upon my legs and made him some sign of Christian obeisance.

I am a little man, and not podgy, as is Judkins, and I flatter myself that I showed more deportment, at any rate, than he would have exhibited.

I made, as I have said, some Christian obeisance. I bobbed my head, that is, rubbing my hands together the while, and expressed an opinion that it was a fine day. But if I was civil, as I hope I was, the Arab was much more so. He advanced till he was about six paces from me, then placed his right hand open upon his silken breast, and inclining forward with his whole body, made to me a bow which Judkins never could accomplish. The turban and the flowing robe might be possible in Friday Street, but of what avail would be the outer garments and mere symbols, if the inner sentiment of personal dignity were wanting? I have often since tried it when alone, but I could never accomplish anything like that bow. The Arab with the flowing robe bowed, and the other Arabs all bowed also; and after that the Christian gentleman with the coat and trousers made a leg. I made a leg also, rubbing my hands again, and added to my former remarks that it was rather hot.

“Dat berry true,” said the porter in the dirty dressing-gown, who stood by. I could see at a glance that the manner of that porter towards me was greatly altered, and I began to feel comforted in my wretchedness. Perhaps a Christian from Friday Street, with plenty of money in his pockets, would stand in higher esteem at Suez than at Cairo. If so, that alone would go far to atone for the apparent wretchedness of the place. At Cairo I had not received that attention which had certainly been due to me as the second partner in the flourishing Manchester house of Grimes, Walker, and Judkins.
But now, as my friend with the beard again bowed to me, I felt that this deficiency was to be made up. It was clear, however, that this new acquaintance, though I liked the manner of it, would be attended with considerable inconvenience, for the Arab gentleman commenced an address to me in French. It has always been to me a source of sorrow that my parents did not teach me the French language, and this deficiency on my part has given rise to an incredible amount of supercilious overbearing pretension on the part of Judkins—who after all can hardly do more than translate a correspondent’s letter. I do not believe that he could have understood that Arab’s oration, but at any rate I did not. He went on to the end, however, speaking for some three or four minutes, and then again he bowed. If I could only have learned that bow, I might still have been greater than Judkins with all his French.

“I am very sorry,” said I, “but I don’t exactly follow the French language when it is spoken.”

“Oh! no French!” said the Arab in very broken English, “dat is one sorrow.” How is it that these fellows learn all languages under the sun? I afterwards found that this man could talk Italian, and Turkish, and Armenian fluently, and say a few words in German, as he could also in English. I could not ask for my dinner in any other language than English, if it were to save me from starvation. Then he called to the Christian gentleman in the pantaloons, and, as far as I could understand, made over to him the duty of interpreting between us. There seemed, however, to be one difficulty in the way of this being carried on with efficiency. The Christian gentleman could not speak English himself. He knew of it perhaps something more than did the Arab, but by no means enough to enable us to have a fluent conversation.

And had the interpreter—who turned out to be an Italian from Trieste, attached to the Austrian Consulate at Alexandria—had the interpreter spoken English with the greatest ease, I should have had considerable difficulty in understanding and digesting in all its bearings, the proposition made to me. But before I proceed to the proposition, I must describe a ceremony which took place previous to its discussion. I had hardly observed, when first the procession entered the room, that one of my friend’s followers—my friend’s name, as I learned afterwards, was Mahmoud al Ackbar, and I will therefore call him Mahmoud—that one of Mahmoud’s followers bore in his arms a bundle of long sticks, and that another carried an iron pot and a tray. Such was the case, and these two followers came forward to perform their services, while I, having been literally pressed down on to the sofa by Mahmoud, watched them in their progress. Mahmoud also sat down, and not a word was spoken while the ceremony went on. The man with the sticks first placed on the ground two little pans—one at my feet, and then one at the feet of his master. After that he loosed an ornamented bag which he carried round his neck, and producing from it tobacco, proceeded to fill two pipes. This he did with the utmost gravity, and apparently with very peculiar care. The pipes had been already fixed at one end of the stick, and to the other end the man had fastened two large yellow balls. These, as I afterwards perceived, were mouth-pieces made of amber. Then he lit the pipes, drawing up the difficult smoke by long painful suckings at the mouthpiece, and then, when the work had become apparently easy, he handed one pipe to me, and the other to his master. The bowls he had first placed in the little pans on the ground.

During all this time no word was spoken, and I was left altogether in the dark as to the cause which had produced this extraordinary courtesy. There was a stationary sofa—they called it there a divan—which was fixed into the corner of the room, and on one side of the angle sat Mahmoud al Ackbar, with his feet tucked under him, while I sat on the other. The remainder of the party stood around, and I felt so little master of the occasion, that I did not know whether it would become me to bid them be seated. I was not master of the entertainment. They were not my pipes. Nor was it my coffee, which I saw one of the followers preparing in a distant part of the room. And, indeed, I was much confused as to the management of the stick and amber mouth-piece with which I had been presented. With a cigar I am as much at home as any man in the City. I can nibble off the end of it, and smoke it to the last ash, when I am three parts asleep. But I had never before been invited to regale myself with such an instrument as this. What was I to do with that huge yellow ball? So I watched my new friend closely.

It had manifestly been a part of his urbanity not to commence till I had done so, but seeing
My difficulty he at last raised the ball to his mouth and sucked at it. I looked at him and envied the gravity of his countenance, and the dignity of his demeanour. I sucked also, but I made a sputtering noise, and must confess that I did not enjoy it. The smoke curled gracefully from his mouth and nostrils as he sat there in mute composure. I was mute as regarded speech, but I coughed as the smoke came from me in convulsive puffs. And then the attendant brought us coffee in little tin cups—black coffee, without sugar and full of grit, of which the berries had been only bruised, not ground. I took the cup and swallowed the mixture, for I could not refuse, but I wish that I might have asked for some milk and sugar. Nevertheless there was something very pleasing in the whole ceremony, and at last I began to find myself more at home with my pipe.

When Mahmoud had exhausted his tobacco, and perceived that I also had ceased to puff forth smoke, he spoke in Italian to the interpreter, and the interpreter forthwith proceeded to explain to me the purport of this visit. This was done with much difficulty, for the interpreter’s stock of English was very scanty—but after awhile I understood, or thought I understood, as follows:- At some previous period of my existence I had done some deed which had given infinite satisfaction to Mahmoud al Ackbar. Whether, however, I had done it myself, or whether my father had done it, was not quite clear to me. My father, then some time deceased, had been a wharfinger at Liverpool, and it was quite possible that Mahmoud might have found himself at that port. Mahmoud had heard of my arrival in Egypt, and had been given to understand that I was coming to Suez—to carry myself away in the ship, as the interpreter phrased it. This I could not understand, but I let it pass. Having heard these agreeable tidings—and Mahmoud, sitting in the corner, bowed low to me as this was said—he had prepared for my acceptance a slight refection for the morrow, hoping that I would not carry myself away in the ship till this had been eaten. On this subject I soon made him quite at ease, and he then proceeded to explain that as there was a point of interest at Suez, Mahmoud was anxious that I should partake of the refection somewhat in the guise of a picnic, at the Well of Moses, over in Asia, on the other side of the head of the Red Sea. Mahmoud would provide a boat to take across the party in the morning, and camels on which we would return after sunset. Or else we would go and return on camels, or go on camels and return in the boat. Indeed any arrangement would be made that I preferred. If I was afraid of the heat, and disliked the open boat, I could be carried round in a litter. The provisions had already been sent over to the Well of Moses in the anticipation that I would not refuse this little request.

I did not refuse it. Nothing could have been more agreeable to me than this plan of seeing something of the sights and wonders of this land,—and of this seeing them in good company. I had not heard of the Well of Moses before, but now that I learned that it was in Asia,—in another quarter of the globe, to be reached by a transit of the Red Sea, to be returned from by a journey on camels’ backs,—I burned with anxiety to visit its waters. What a story would this be for Judkins! This was, no doubt, the point at which the Israelites had passed. Of those waters had they drunk. I almost felt that I had already found one of Pharaoh’s chariot wheels. I readily gave my assent, and then, with much ceremony and many low salaams, Mahmoud and his attendant left me. “I am very glad that I came to Suez,” said I to myself.

I did not sleep much that night, for the mosquitoes of Suez are very persevering; but I was saved from the agonising despair which these animals so frequently produce, by my agreeable thoughts as to Mahmoud al Ackbar. I will put it to any of my readers who have travelled, whether it is not a painful thing to find one’s-self regarded among strangers without any kindness or ceremonious courtesy. I had on this account been wretched at Cairo, but all this was to be made up to me at Suez. Nothing could be more pleasant than the whole conduct of Mahmoud al Ackbar, and I determined to take full advantage of it, not caring overmuch what might be the nature of those previous favours to which he had alluded. That was his look-out, and if he was satisfied, why should not I be so also?

On the following morning I was dressed at six, and, looking out of my bed-room, I saw the boat in which we were to be wafted into Asia being brought up to the quay close under my window. It had been arranged that we should start early, so as to avoid the mid-day sun, breakfast in the boat,—Mahmoud in this way engaged to provide me with two refections,—take our rest at noon in a
pavilion which had been built close upon the well of the patriarch, and then eat our dinner, and
return riding upon camels in the cool of the evening. Nothing could sound more pleasant than such
a plan; and knowing as I did that the hampers of provisions had already been sent over, I did not
doubt that the table arrangements would be excellent. Even now, standing at my window, I could
see a basket laden with long-necked bottles going into the boat, and became aware that we should
not depend altogether for our morning repast on that gritty coffee which my friend Mahmoud’s
followers prepared.

I had promised to be ready at six, and having carefully completed my toilet, and put a clean
collar and comb into my pocket ready for dinner, I descended to the great gateway and walked
slowly round to the quay. As I passed out, the porter greeted me with a low obeisance, and walking
on, I felt that I stepped the ground with a sort of dignity of which I had before been ignorant. It is
not, as a rule, the man who gives grace and honour to the position, but the position which confers
the grace and honour upon the man. I have often envied the solemn gravity and grand demeanour of
the Lord Chancellor, as I have seen him on the bench; but I almost think that even Judkins would
look grave and dignified under such a wig. Mahmoud al Ackbar had called upon me and done me
honour, and I felt myself personally capable of sustaining before the people of Suez the honour
which he had done me.

As I walked forth with a proud step from beneath the portal, I perceived, looking down from
the square along the street, that there was already some commotion in the town. I saw the flowing
robes of many Arabs, with their backs turned towards me, and I thought that I observed the identical
gown and turban of my friend Mahmoud on the back and head of a stout short man, who was
hurrying round a corner in the distance. I felt sure that it was Mahmoud. Some of his servants had
failed in their preparations, I said to myself, as I made my way round to the water’s edge. This was
only another testimony how anxious he was to do me honour.

I stood for a while on the edge of the quay looking into the boat, and admiring the
comfortable cushions which were luxuriously arranged around the seats. The men who were at
work did not know me, and I was unnoticed, but I should soon take my place upon the softest of
those cushions. I walked slowly backwards and forwards on the quay, listening to a hum of voices
that came to me from a distance. There was clearly something stirring in the town, and I felt certain
that all the movement and all those distant voices were connected in some way with my expedition
to the Well of Moses. At last there came a lad upon the walk dressed in Frank costume, and I asked
him what was in the wind. He was a clerk attached to an English warehouse, and he told me that
there had been an arrival from Cairo.

He knew no more than that, but he had heard that the omnibuses had just come in. Could it
be possible that Mahmoud al Ackbar had heard of another old acquaintance, and had gone to
welcome him also?

At first my ideas on the subject were altogether pleasant. I by no means wished to
monopolise the delights of all those cushions, nor would it be to me a cause of sorrow that there
should be some one to share with me the conversational powers of that interpreter. Should another
guest be found, he might also be an Englishman, and I might thus form an acquaintance which
would be desirable. Thinking of these things, I walked the quay for some minutes in a happy state
of mind; but by degrees I became impatient, and by degrees also disturbed in my spirit. I observed
that one of the Arab boatmen walked round from the vessel to the front of the hotel, and that on his
return he looked at me—as I thought, not with courteous eyes. Then also I saw, or rather heard, some
one in the verandah of the hotel above me, and was conscious that I was being viewed from thence.
I walked and walked, and nobody came to me, and I perceived by my watch that it was seven
o’clock. The noise, too, had come nearer and nearer, and I was now aware that wheels had been
drawn up before the front door of the hotel, and that many voices were speaking there. It might be
that Mahmoud should wait for some other friend, but why did he not send some one to inform me?
And then, as I made a sudden turn at the end of the quay, I caught sight of the retreating legs of the
Austrian interpreter, and I became aware that he had been sent down, and had gone away, afraid to
speak to me. “What can I do?” said I to myself, “I can but keep my ground.” I owned that I feared
to go round to the front of the hotel. So I still walked slowly up and down the length of the quay, and began to whistle to show that I was not uneasy. The Arab sailors looked at me uncomfortably, and from time to time some one peered at me round the corner. It was now fully half-past seven, and the sun was becoming hot in the heavens. Why did we not hasten to place ourselves beneath the awning in that boat.

I had just made up my mind that I would go round to the front and penetrate this mystery, when, on turning, I saw approaching to me a man dressed at any rate like an English gentleman. As he came near to me, he raised his hat, and accosted me in our own language. “Mr. George Walker, I believe?” said he.

“Yes,” said I, with some little attempt at a high demeanour, “of the firm of Grimes, Walker, and Judkins, Friday Street, London.”

“A most respectable house, I am sure,” said he. “I am afraid there has been a little mistake here.”

“No mistake as to the respectability of that house,” said I. I felt that I was again alone in the world, and that it was necessary that I should support myself. Mahmoud al Ackbar had separated himself from me for ever. Of that I had no longer a doubt.

“Oh, none at all,” said he. “But about this little expedition over the water;” and he pointed contemptuously to the boat. “There has been a mistake about that, Mr. Walker; I happen to be the English Vice-Consul here.”

I took off my hat and bowed. It was the first time I had ever been addressed civilly by any English consular authority.

“And they have made me get out of bed to come down here and explain all this to you.”

“All what?” said I.

“You are a man of the world, I know, and I’ll just tell it you plainly. My old friend, Mahmoud al Ackbar, has mistaken you for Sir George Walker, the new Lieutenant-Governor of Pegu. Sir George Walker is here now; he has come this morning; and Mahmoud is ashamed to face you after what has occurred. If you won’t object to withdraw with me into the hotel, I’ll explain it all.”

I felt as though a thunderbolt had fallen; and I must say, that even up to this day I think that the Consul might have been a little less abrupt. “We can get in here,” said he, evidently in a hurry, and pointing to a small door which opened out from one corner of the house to the quay. What could I do but follow him? I did follow him, and in a few words learned the remainder of the story. When he had once withdrawn me from the public walk he seemed but little anxious about the rest, and soon left me again alone. The facts, as far as I could learn them, were simply these.

Sir George Walker, who was now going out to Pegu as Governor, had been in India before, commanding an army there. I had never heard of him before, and had made no attempt to pass myself off as his relative. Nobody could have been more innocent than I was—or have received worse usage. I have as much right to the name as he has. Well; when he was in India before, he had taken the city of Begum after a terrible siege—Begum, I think the Consul called it; and Mahmoud had been there, having been, it seems, a great man at Begum, and Sir George had spared him and his money; and in this way the whole thing had come to pass. There was no further explanation than that. The rest of it was all transparent. Mahmoud, having heard my name from the porter, had hurried down to invite me to his party. So far so good. But why had he been afraid to face me in the morning? And, seeing that the fault had all been his, why had he not asked me to join the expedition? Sir George and I may, after all, be cousins. But, coward as he was, he had been afraid of me. When they found that I was on the quay, they had been afraid of me, not knowing how to get rid of me. I wish that I had kept the quay all day, and stared them down one by one as they entered the boat. But I was down in the mouth, and when the Consul left me, I crept wearily back to my bedroom.

And the Consul did leave me almost immediately. A faint hope had, at one time, come upon me that he would have asked me to breakfast. Had he done so, I should have felt it as a full compensation for all that I had suffered. I am not an exacting man, but I own that I like civility.

In
Friday Street I can command it, and in Friday Street for the rest of my life will I remain. From this Consul I received no civility. As soon as he had got me out of the way and spoken the few words which he had to say, he again raised his hat and left me. I also again raised mine, and then crept up to my bedroom.

From my window, standing a little behind the white curtain, I could see the whole embarkation. There was Mahmoud al Ackbar, looking indeed a little hot, but still going through his work with all that excellence of deportment which had graced him on the preceding evening. Had his foot slipped, and had he fallen backwards into that shallow water, my spirit would, I confess, have been relieved. But, on the contrary, everything went well with him. There was the real Sir George, my namesake and perhaps my cousin, as fresh as paint, cool from the bath which he had been taking while I had been walking on that terrace. How is it that these governors and commanders-in-chief go through such a deal of work without fagging? It was not yet two hours since he was jolting about in that omnibus-box, and there he had been all night. I could not have gone off to the Well of Moses immediately on my arrival. It’s the dignity of the position that does it. I have long known that the head of a firm must never count on a mere clerk to get through as much work as he could do himself. It’s the interest in the matter that supports the man.

They went, and Sir George, as I was well assured, had never heard a word about me. Had he done so, is it probable that he would have requested my attendance? But Mahmoud and his followers no doubt kept their own counsel as to that little mistake. There they went, and the gentle rippling breeze filled their sail pleasantly, as the boat moved away into the bay. I felt no spite against any of them but Mahmoud. Why had he avoided me with such cowardice? I could still see them when the morning tchibouk was handed to Sir George; and, though I wished him no harm, I did envy him as he lay there reclining luxuriously upon the cushions.

A more wretched day than that I never spent in my life. As I went in and out, the porter at the gate absolutely scoffed at me. Once I made up my mind to complain within the house. But what could I have said of the dirty Arab? They would have told me that it was his religion, or a national observance, or meant for a courtesy. What can a man do, in a strange country, when he is told that a native spits in his face by way of civility? I bore it, I bore it--like a man; and sighed for the comforts of Friday Street.

As to one matter, I made up my mind on that day, and I fully carried out my purpose on the next: I would go across to the Well of Moses in a boat. I would visit the coasts of Asia. And I would ride back into Africa on a camel. Though I did it alone, I would have my day’s pleasuring. I had money in my pocket, and, though it might cost me 20 pounds, I would see all that my namesake had seen. It did cost me the best part of 20 pounds; and as for the pleasuring, I cannot say much for it.

I went to bed early that night, having concluded my bargain for the morrow with a rapacious Arab who spoke English. I went to bed early in order to escape the returning party, and was again on the quay at six the next morning. On this occasion, I stepped boldly into the boat the very moment that I came along the shore. There is nothing in the world like paying for what you use. I saw myself to the bottle of brandy and the cold meat, and acknowledged that a cigar out of my own case would suit me better than that long stick. The long stick might do very well for a Governor of Pegu, but would be highly inconvenient in Friday Street.

Well, I am not going to give an account of my day’s journey here, though perhaps I may do so some day. I did go to the Well of Moses--if a small dirty pool of salt water, lying high above the sands, can be called a well; I did eat my dinner in the miserable ruined cottage which they graced by the name of a pavilion; and, alas for my poor bones! I did ride home upon a camel. If Sir George did so early, and started for Pegu the next morning--and I was informed such was the fact--he must have been made of iron. I laid in bed the whole day suffering greviously; but I was told that on such a journey I should have slakened my throat with oranges, and not with brandy.

I survived those four terrible days which remained to me at Suez, and after another month was once again in Friday Street. I suffered greatly on the occasion; but it is some consolation to me to reflect that I smoked a pipe of peace with Mahmoud al Ackbar; that I saw the hero of Begum while journeying out to new triumphs at Pegu; that I sailed into Asia in my own yacht--hired for the occasion; and that I rode back into Africa on a camel. Nor can Judkins, with all his ill-nature, rob me of these remembrances.
Chapter 1

Among the many fatalities attending the bloom of young desire, that of blindly taking to the confectionery line has not, perhaps, been sufficiently considered. How is the son of a British yeoman, who has been fed principally on salt pork and yeast dumplings, to know that there is satiety for the human stomach even in a paradise of glass jars full of sugared almonds and pink lozenges, and that the tedium of life can reach a pitch where plum-buns at discretion cease to offer the slightest enticement? Or how, at the tender age when a confectioner seems to him a very prince whom all the world must envy, -- who breakfasts on macaroons, dines on marengs, sups on twelfth-cake, and fills up the intermediate hours with sugar-candy or peppermint, -- how is he to foresee the day of sad wisdom, when he will discern that the confectioner’s calling is not socially influential, or favourable to a soaring ambition? I have known a man who turned out to have a metaphysical genius, incautiously, in the period of youthful buoyancy, commence his career as a dancing-master; and you may imagine the use that was made of this initial mistake by opponents who felt themselves bound to warn the public against his doctrine of the Inconceivable. He could not give up his dancing-lessons, because he made his bread by them, and metaphysics would not have found him in so much as salt to his bread.

It was really the same with Mr David Faux and the confectionery business. His uncle, the butler at the great house close by Brigford, had made a pet of him in his early boyhood, and it was on a visit to this uncle that the confectioners’ shops in that brilliant town had, on a single day, fired his tender imagination. He carried home the pleasing illusion that a confectioner must be at once the happiest and the foremost of men, since the things he made were not only the most beautiful to behold, but the very best eating, and such as the Lord Mayor must always order largely for his private recreation; so that when his father declared he must be put to a trade, David chose his line without a moment’s hesitation; and, with a rashness inspired by a sweet tooth, wedded himself irrevocably to confectionery. Soon, however, the tooth lost its relish and fell into blank indifference; and all the while, his mind expanded, his ambition took new shapes, which could hardly be satisfied within the sphere his youthful ardour had chosen. But what was he to do? He was a young man of much mental activity, and, above all, gifted with a spirit of contrivance; but then, his faculties would not tell with great effect in any other medium than that of candied sugars, conserves, and pastry. Say what you will about the identity of the reasoning process in all branches of thought, or about the advantage of coming to subjects with a fresh mind, the adjustment of butter to flour, and of heat to pastry, is not the best preparation for the office of prime minister; besides, in the present imperfectly organised state of society, there are social barriers. David could invent delightful things in the way of drop-cakes, and he had the widest views of the sugar department; but in other directions he certainly felt hampered by the want of knowledge and practical skill; and the world is so inconveniently constituted, that the vague consciousness of being a fine fellow is no guarantee of success in any line of business.

This difficulty pressed with some severity on Mr David Faux, even before his apprenticeship was ended. His soul swelled with an impatient sense that he ought to become something very remarkable -- that it was quite out of the question for him to put up with a narrow lot as other men did: he scorned the idea that he could accept an average. He was sure there was nothing average about him: even such a person as Mrs Tibbits, the washerwoman, perceived it, and probably had a preference for his linen. At that particular period he was weighing out gingerbreadnuts; but such an anomaly could not continue. No position could be suited to Mr David Faux that was not in the highest degree easy to the flesh and flattering to the spirit. If he had fallen on the present times, and enjoyed the advantages of a Mechanics’ Institute, he would certainly have taken to literature and
have written reviews; but his education had not been liberal. He had read some novels from the adjoining circulating library, and had even bought the story of ‘Inkle and Yarico,’ which had made him feel very sorry for poor Mr Inkle; so that his ideas might not have been below a certain mark of the literary calling; but his spelling and diction were too unconventional.

When a man is not adequately appreciated or comfortably placed in his own country, his thoughts naturally turn towards foreign climes; and David’s imagination circled round and round the utmost limits of his geographical knowledge, in search of a country where a young gentleman of pasty visage, lipless mouth, and stumpy hair, would be likely to be received with the hospitable enthusiasm which he had a right to expect. Having a general idea of America as a country where the population was chiefly black, it appeared to him the most propitious destination for an emigrant who, to begin with, had the broad and easily recognisable merit of whiteness; and this idea gradually took such strong possession of him that Satan seized the opportunity of suggesting to him that he might emigrate under easier circumstances, if he supplied himself with a little money from his master’s till. But that evil spirit, whose understanding, I am convinced, has been much overrated, quite wasted his time on this occasion. David would certainly have liked well to have some of his master’s money in his pocket, if he had been sure his master would have been the only man to suffer for it; but he was a cautious youth, and quite determined to run no risks on his own account. So he stayed out his apprenticeship, and committed no act of dishonesty that was at all likely to be discovered, reserving his plan of emigration for a future opportunity. And the circumstances under which he carried it out were in this wise. Having been at home a week or two partaking of the family beans, he had used his leisure in ascertaining a fact which was of considerable importance to him, namely, that his mother had a small sum in guineas painfully saved from her maiden perquisites, and kept in the corner of a drawer where her baby-linen had reposed for the last twenty years -- ever since her son David had taken to his feet, with a slight promise of bow-legs which had not been altogether unfulfilled. Mr Faux, senior, had told his son very frankly, that he must not look to being set-up in business by him: with seven sons, and one of them a very healthy and well-developed idiot, who consumed a dumpling about eight inches in diameter every day, it was pretty well if they got a hundred apiece at his death. Under these circumstances, what was David to do? It was certainly hard that he should take his mother’s money; but he saw no other ready means of getting any, and it was not to be expected that a young man of his merit should put up with inconveniences that could be avoided. Besides, it is not robbery to take property belonging to your mother: she doesn’t prosecute you. And David was very well behaved to his mother; he comforted her by speaking highly of himself to her, and assuring her that he never fell into the vices he saw practised by other youths of his own age, and that he was particularly fond of honesty. If his mother would have given him her twenty guineas as a reward of this noble disposition, he really would not have stolen them from her, and it would have been more agreeable to his feelings. Nevertheless, to an active mind like David’s, ingenuity is not without its pleasures: it was rather an interesting occupation to become stealthily acquainted with the wards of his mother’s simple key (not in the least like Chubb’s patent), and to get one that would do its work equally well; and also to arrange a little drama by which he would escape suspicion, and run no risk of forfeiting the prospective hundred at his father’s death, which would be convenient in the improbable case of his not making a large fortune in the ‘Indies.’

First, he spoke freely of his intention to start shortly for Liverpool and take ship for America; a resolution which cost his good mother some pain, for, after Jacob the idiot, there was not one of her sons to whom her heart clung more than to her youngest-born, David. Next, it appeared to him that Sunday afternoon, when everybody was gone to church except Jacob and the cow-boy, was so singularly favourable an opportunity for sons who wanted to appropriate their mothers’ guineas, that he half thought it must have been kindly intended by Providence for such purposes. Especially the third Sunday in Lent; because Jacob had been out on one of his occasional wanderings for the last two days; and David, being a timid young man, had a considerable dread and hatred of Jacob, as of a large personage who went about habitually with a pitchfork in his hand.

Nothing could be easier, then, than for David on this Sunday afternoon to decline going to
church, on the ground that he was going to tea at Mr Lunn’s, whose pretty daughter Sally had been
an early flame of his, and, when the church-goers were at a safe distance, to abstract the guineas
from their wooden box and slip them into a small canvas bag -- nothing easier than to call to the
cowboy that he was going, and tell him to keep an eye on the house for fear of Sunday tramps.
David thought it would be easy, too, to get to a small thicket and bury his bag in a hole he had
already made and covered up under the roots of an old hollow ash, and he had, in fact, found the
hole without a moment’s difficulty, had uncovered it, and was about gently to drop the bag into it,
when the sound of a large body rustling towards him with something like a bellow was such a
surprise to David, who, as a gentleman gifted with much contrivance, was naturally only prepared
for what he expected, that instead of dropping the bag gently he let it fall so as to make it untwist
and vomit forth the shining guineas. In the same moment he looked up and saw his dear brother
Jacob close upon him, holding the pitchfork so that the bright smooth prongs were a yard in
advance of his own body, and about a foot off David’s. (A learned friend, to whom I once narrated
this history, observed that it was David’s guilt which made these prongs formidable, and that the
mens nil conscia sibi strips pitchfork of all terrors. I thought this idea so valuable, that I obtained his
leave to use it on condition of suppressing his name.) Nevertheless, David did not entirely lose his
presence of mind; for in that case he would have sunk on the earth or started backward; whereas he
kept his ground and smiled at Jacob, who nodded his head up and down, and said, ‘Hoich, Zavy!’ in
a painfully equivocal manner. David’s heart was beating audibly, and if he had had any lips they
would have been pale; but his mental activity, instead of being paralysed, was stimulated. While he
was inwardly praying (he always prayed when he was much frightened),

‘Oh, save me this once,
and I’ll never get into danger again!’ -- he was thrusting his hand into his pocket in search of a box
of yellow lozenges, which he had brought with him from Brigford among other delicacies of the
same portable kind, as a means of conciliating proud beauty, and more particularly the beauty of
Miss Sarah Lunn. Not one of these delicacies had he ever offered to poor Jacob, for David was not a
young man to waste his jujubes and barley-sugar in giving pleasure to people from whom he
expected nothing. But an idiot with equivocal intentions and a pitchfork is as well worth flattering
and cajoling as if he were Louis Napoleon. So David, with a promptitude equal to the occasion,
drew out his box of yellow lozenges, lifted the lid, and performed a pantomime with his mouth and
fingers, which was meant to imply that he was delighted to see his dear brother Jacob, and seized
the opportunity of making him a small present, which he would find particularly agreeable to the
taste. Jacob, you understand, was not an intense idiot, but within a certain limited range knew how
to choose the good and reject the evil: he took one lozenge, by way of test, and sucked it as if he
had been a philosopher; then, in as great an ecstasy at its new and complex savour as Caliban at the
taste of Trinculo’s wine, chuckled

and stroked this suddenly beneficent brother, and held out his
hand for more; for, except in fits of anger, Jacob was not ferocious or needlessly predatory. David’s
courage half returned, and he left off praying; pouring a dozen lozenges into Jacob’s palm, and
trying to look very fond of him. He congratulated himself that he had formed the plan of going to
see Miss Sally Lunn this afternoon, and that, as a consequence, he had brought with him these
propitiatory delicacies: he was certainly a lucky fellow; indeed, it was always likely Providence
should be fonder of him than of other apprentices, and since he was to be interrupted, why, an idiot
was preferable to any other sort of witness. For the first time in his life, David thought he saw the
advantage of idiots.

As for Jacob, he had thrust his pitchfork into the ground, and had thrown himself down
beside it, in thorough abandonmment to the unprecedented pleasure of having five lozenges in his
mouth at once, blinking meanwhile, and making inarticulate sounds of gustative content. He had not
yet given any sign of noticing the guineas, but in seating himself he had laid his broad right hand on
them, and unconsciously kept it in that position, absorbed in the sensations of his palate. If he could
only be kept so occupied with the lozenges as not to see the guineas before David could manage to
cover them! That was David’s best hope of safety; for Jacob knew his mother’s guineas; it had been
part of their common experience as boys to be allowed to look at these handsome coins, and rattle
them in their box on high days and holidays, and among all Jacob’s narrow experiences as to money,
this was likely to be the most memorable.

‘Here, Jacob,’ said David, in an insinuating tone, handing the box to him, ‘I’ll give ’em all to you. Run! -- make haste! -- else somebody’ll come and take em.

David, not having studied the psychology of idiots, was not aware that they are not to be wrought upon by imaginative fears. Jacob took the box with his left hand, but saw no necessity for running away. Was ever a promising young man wishing to lay the foundation of his fortune by appropriating his mother’s guineas obstructed by such a day-mare as this? But the moment must come when Jacob would move his right hand to draw off the lid of the tin box, and then David would sweep the guineas into the hole with the utmost address and swiftness, and immediately seat himself upon them. Ah, no! It’s of no use to have foresight when you are dealing with an idiot: he is not to be calculated upon. Jacob’s right hand was given to vague clutching and throwing; it suddenly clutched the guineas as if they had been so many pebbles, and was raised in an attitude which promised to scatter them like seed over a distant bramble, when, from some prompting or other -- probably of an unwonted sensation -- it paused, descended to Jacob’s knee, and opened slowly under the inspection of Jacob’s dull eyes. David began to pray again, but immediately desisted -- another resource having occurred to him.

‘Mother! zinnies!’ exclaimed the innocent Jacob. Then, looking at David, he said, interrogatively, ‘Box?’ ‘Hush! hush!’ said David, summoning all his ingenuity in this severe strait. ‘See, Jacob!’ He took the tin box from his brother’s hand, and emptied it of the lozenges, returning half of them to Jacob, but secretly keeping the rest in his own hand. Then he held out the empty box, and said, ‘Here’s the box, Jacob! The box for the guineas!’ gently sweeping them from Jacob’s palm into the box.

This procedure was not objectionable to Jacob; on the contrary, the guineas clinked so pleasantly as they fell, that he wished for a repetition of the sound, and seizing the box, began to rattle it very gleefully. David, seizing the opportunity, deposited his reserve of lozenges in the ground and hastily swept some earth over them. ‘Look, Jacob!’ he said, at last. Jacob paused from his clinking, and looked into the hole, while David began to scratch away the earth, as if in doubtful expectation. When the lozenges were laid bare, he took them out one by one, and gave them to Jacob.

‘Hush!’ he said, in a loud whisper, ‘Tell nobody -- all for Jacob -- hush -- sh -- sh! Put guineas in the hole they’ll come out like this!’ To make the lesson more complete, he took a guinea, and lowering it into the hole, said ‘Put in so.’ Then, as he took the last lozenge out, he said, ‘Come out so,’ and put the lozenge into Jacob’s hospitable mouth.

Jacob turned his head on one side, looked first at his brother and then at the hole, like a reflective monkey, and, finally, laid the box of guineas in the hole with much decision. David made haste to add every one of the stray coins, put on the lid, and covered it well with earth, saying in his most coaxing tone --

‘Take ‘m out to-morrow, Jacob; all for Jacob! Hushsh -- sh!’

Jacob, to whom this once indifferent brother had all at once become a sort of sweet-tasted fetish, stroked David’s best coat with his adhesive fingers, and then hugged him with an accompaniment of that mingled chuckling and gurgling by which he was accustomed to express the milder passions. But if he had chosen to bite a small morsel out of his beneficent brother’s cheek, David would have been obliged to bear it.

And here I must pause, to point out to you the shortsightedness of human contrivance. This ingenious young man, Mr David Faux, thought he had achieved a triumph of cunning when he had associated himself in his brother’s rudimentary mind with the flavour of yellow lozenges. But he had yet to learn that it is a dreadful thing to make an idiot fond of you, when you yourself are not of an affectionate disposition: especially an idiot with a pitchfork -- obviously a difficult friend to shake off by rough usage.

It may seem to you rather a blundering contrivance for a clever young man to bury the guineas. But, if everything had turned out as David had calculated, you would have seen that his plan was worthy of his talents. The guineas would have lain safely in the earth while the theft was
discovered, and David, with the calm of conscious innocence, would have lingered at home, reluctant to say good-bye to his dear mother while she was in grief about her guineas; till at length, on the eve of his departure, he would have disinterred them in the strictest privacy, and carried them on his own person without inconvenience. But David, you perceive, had reckoned without his host, or, to speak more precisely, without his idiot brother -- an item of so uncertain and fluctuating a character, that I doubt whether he would not have puzzled the astute heroes of M. de Balzac, whose foresight is so remarkably at home in the future.

It was clear to David now that he had only one alternative before him: he must either renounce the guineas, by quietly putting them back in his mother’s drawer (a course not unattended with difficulty); or he must leave more than a suspicion behind him, by departing early the next morning without giving notice, and with the guineas in his pocket. For if he gave notice that he was going, his mother, he knew, would insist on fetching from her box of guineas the three she had always promised him as his share; indeed, in his original plan, he had counted on this as a means by which the theft would be discovered under circumstances that would themselves speak for his innocence; but now, as I need hardly explain, that well-combined plan was completely frustrated. Even if David could have bribed Jacob with perpetual lozenges, an idiot’s secrecy is itself betrayal. He dared not even go to tea at Mr Lunn’s, for in that case he would have lost sight of Jacob, who, in his impatience for the crop of lozenges, might scratch up the box again while he was absent, and carry it home -- depriving him at once of reputation and guineas. No! he must think of nothing all the rest of this day, but of coaxing Jacob and keeping him out of mischief.

It was a fatiguing and anxious evening to David; nevertheless, he dared not go to sleep without tying a piece of string to his thumb and great toe, to secure his frequent waking; for he meant to be up with the first peep of dawn, and be far out of reach before breakfast-time. His father, he thought, would certainly cut him off with a shilling; but what then? Such a striking young man as he would be sure to be well received in the West Indies: in foreign countries there are always openings -- even for cats. It was probable that some Princess Yarico would want him to marry her, and make him presents of very large jewels beforehand; after which, he needn’t marry her unless he liked. David had made up his mind not to steal any more, even from people who were fond of him: it was an unpleasant way of making your fortune in a world where you were likely to be surprised in the act by brothers. Such alarms did not agree with David’s constitution, and he had felt so much nausea this evening that no doubt his liver was affected. Besides, he would have been greatly hurt not to be thought well of in the world: he always meant to make a figure, and be thought worthy of the best seats and the best morsels.

Ruminating to this effect on the brilliant future in reserve for him, David by the help of his check-string kept himself on the alert to seize the time of earliest dawn for his rising and departure. His brothers, of course, were early risers, but he should anticipate them by at least an hour and a half, and the little room which he had to himself as only an occasional visitor, had its window over the horse-block, so that he could slip out through the window without the least difficulty. Jacob, the horrible Jacob, had an awkward trick of getting up before everybody else, to stem his hunger by emptying the milk-bowl that was ‘duly set’ for him; but of late he had taken to sleeping in the hay-loft, and if he came into the house, it would be on the opposite side to that from which David was making his exit. There was no need to think of Jacob; yet David was liberal enough to bestow a curse on him -- it was the only thing he ever did bestow gratuitously. His small bundle of clothes was ready packed, and he was soon treading lightly on the steps of the horse-block, soon walking at a smart pace across the fields towards the thicket. It would take him no more than two minutes to get out the box; he could make out the tree it was under by the pale strip where the bark was off, although the dawning light was rather dimmer in the thicket. But what, in the name of -- burnt pastry -- was that large body with a staff planted beside it, close at the foot of the ash-tree? David paused, not to make up his mind as to the nature of the apparition -- he had not the happiness of doubting for a moment that the staff was Jacob’s pitchfork -- but to gather the self-command necessary for addressing his brother with a sufficiently honeyed accent. Jacob was absorbed in scratching up the earth, and had not heard David’s approach.
‘I say, Jacob,’ said David in a loud whisper, just as the tin box was lifted out of the hole. Jacob looked up, and discerning his sweet-flavoured brother, nodded and grinned in the dim light in a way that made him seem to David like a triumphant demon. If he had been of an impetuous disposition, he would have snatched the pitchfork from the ground and impaled this fraternal demon. But David was by no means impetuous; he was a young man greatly given to calculate consequences, a habit which has been held to be the foundation of virtue. But somehow it had not precisely that effect in David: he calculated whether an action would harm himself, or whether it would only harm other people. In the former case he was very timid about satisfying his immediate desires, but in the latter he would risk the result with much courage.

‘Give it me, Jacob,’ he said, stooping down and patting his brother. ‘Let us see.’ Jacob, finding the lid rather tight, gave the box to his brother in perfect faith. David raised the lid, and shook his head, while Jacob put his finger in and took out a guinea to taste whether the metamorphosis into lozenges was complete and satisfactory.

‘No, Jacob; too soon, too soon,’ said David, when the guinea had been tasted. ‘Give it me; we’ll go and bury it somewhere else; we’ll put it in yonder,’ he added, pointing vaguely toward the distance.

David screwed on the lid, while Jacob, looking grave, rose and grasped his pitchfork. Then, seeing David’s bundle, he snatched it, like a too officious Newfoundland, stuck his pitchfork into it and carried it over his shoulder in triumph as he accompanied David and the box out of the thicket.

What on earth was David to do? It would have been easy to frown at Jacob, and kick him, and order him to get away; but David dared as soon have kicked the bull. Jacob was quiet as long as he was treated indulgently; but on the slightest show of anger, he became unmanageable, and was liable to fits of fury which would have made him formidable even without his pitchfork. There was no mastery to be obtained over him except by kindness or guile. David tried guile.

‘Go, Jacob,’ he said, when they were out of the thicket -- pointing towards the house as he spoke; ‘go and fetch me a spade -- a spade. But give me the bundle,’ he added, trying to reach it from the fork, where it hung high above Jacob’s tall shoulder.

But Jacob showed as much alacrity in obeying as a wasp shows in leaving a sugar-basin. Near David, he felt himself in the vicinity of lozenges: he chuckled and rubbed his brother’s back, brandishing the bundle higher out of reach. David, with an inward groan, changed his tactics, and walked on as fast as he could. It was not safe to linger. Jacob would get tired of following him, or, at all events, could be eluded. If they could once get to the distant highroad, a coach would overtake them, David would mount it, having previously by some ingenious means secured his bundle, and then Jacob might howl and flourish his pitchfork as much as he liked. Meanwhile he was under the fatal necessity of being very kind to this ogre, and of providing a large breakfast for him when they stopped at a roadside inn. It was already three hours since they had started, and David was tired. Would no coach be coming up soon? he inquired. No coach for the next two hours. But there was a carrier’s cart to come immediately, on its way to the next town. If he could slip out, even leaving his bundle behind, and get into the cart without Jacob! But there was a new obstacle. Jacob had recently discovered a remnant of sugar-candy in one of his brother’s tail-pockets; and, since then, had cautiously kept his hold on that limb of the garment, perhaps with an expectation that there would be a further development of sugar-candy after a longer or shorter interval. Now every one who has worn a coat will understand the sensibility that must keep a man from starting away in a hurry when there is a grasp on his coat-tail. David looked forward to being well received among strangers, but it might make a difference if he had only one tail to his coat.

He felt himself in a cold perspiration. He could walk no more: he must get into the cart and let Jacob get in with him. Presently a cheering idea occurred to him: after so large a breakfast, Jacob would be sure to go to sleep in the cart; you see at once that David meant to seize his bundle, jump out, and be free. His expectation was partly fulfilled: Jacob did go to sleep in the cart, but it was in a peculiar attitude -- it was with his arms tightly fastened round his dear brother’s body; and if ever David attempted to move, the grasp tightened with the force of an affectionate boa-constrictor.

‘Th’innicent’s fond on you,’ observed the carrier, thinking that David was probably an
amiable brother, and wishing to pay him a compliment.

David groaned. The ways of thieving were not ways of pleasantness. Oh, why had he an idiot brother? Or why, in general, was the world so constituted that a man could not take his mother’s guineas comfortably? David became grimly speculative.

Copious dinner at noon for Jacob; but little dinner, because little appetite, for David. Instead of eating, he plied Jacob with beer; for through this liberality he descried a hope. Jacob fell into a dead sleep, at last, without having his arms round David, who paid the reckoning, took his bundle, and walked off. In another half-hour he was on the coach on his way to Liverpool, smiling the smile of the triumphant wicked. He was rid of Jacob -- he was bound for the Indies, where a gullible princess awaited him. He would never steal any more, but there would be no need; he would show himself so deserving, that people would make him presents freely. He must give up the notion of his father’s legacy; but it was not likely he would ever want that trifle; and even if he did-why, it was a compensation to think that in being for ever divided from his family he was divided from Jacob, more terrible than Gorgon or Demogorgon to David’s timid green eyes. Thank heaven, he should never see Jacob any more!

Chapter 2

It was nearly six years after the departure of Mr David Faux for the West Indies, that the vacant shop in the marketplace at Grimworth was understood to have been let to the stranger with a sallow complexion and a buff cravat, whose first appearance had caused some excitement in the bar of the Woolpack, where he had called to wait for the coach.

Grimworth, to a discerning eye, was a good place to set up shopkeeping in. There was no competition in it at present; the Church-people had their own grocer and draper; the Dissenters had theirs; and the two or three butchers found a ready market for their joints without strict reference to religious persuasion -- except that the rector’s wife had given a general order for the veal sweet-breads and the mutton kidneys, while Mr Rodd, the Baptist minister, had requested that, so far as was compatible with the fair accommodation of other customers, the sheep’s trotters might be reserved for him. And it was likely to be a growing place, for the trustees of Mr Zephaniah Crypt’s Charity, under the stimulus of a late visitation by commissioners, were beginning to apply long-accumulating funds to the rebuilding of the Yellow Coat School, which was henceforth to be carried forward on a greatly-extended scale, the testator having left no restrictions concerning the curriculum, but only concerning the coat. The shopkeepers at Grimworth were by no means unanimous as to the advantages promised by this prospect of increased population and trading, being substantial men, who liked doing a quiet business in which they were sure of their customers, and could calculate their returns to a nicety. Hitherto, it had been held a point of honour by the families in Grimworth parish, to buy their sugar and their flannel at the shops where their fathers and mothers had bought before them; but, if newcomers were to bring in the system of neck-and-neck trading, and solicit feminine eyes by gown-pieces laid in fan-like folds, and surmounted by artificial flowers, giving them a factitious charm (for on what human figure would a gown sit like a fan, or what female head was like a bunch of China-asters?), or, if new grocers were to fill their windows with mountains of currants and sugar, made seductive by contrast and tickets, -- what security was there for Grimworth, that a vagrant spirit in shopping, once introduced, would in the end carry the most important families to the larger market town of Cattleton, where, business being done on a system of small profits and quick returns, the fashions were of the freshest, and goods of all kinds might be bought at an advantage?

With this view of the times predominant among the tradespeople at Grimworth, their uncertainty concerning the nature of the business which the sallow-complexioned stranger was about to set up in the vacant shop, naturally gave some additional strength to the fears of the less sanguine. If he was going to sell drapery, it was probable that a pale-faced fellow like that would deal in showy and inferior articles -- printed cottons and muslins which would leave their dye in the wash-tube, jobbed linen full of knots, and flannel that would soon look like gauze. If grocery, then it was to be hoped that no mother of a family would trust the teas of an untried grocer. Such things
had been known in some parishes as tradesmen going about canvassing for custom with cards in their pockets: when people came from nobody knew where, there was no knowing what they might do. It was a thousand pities that Mr Moffat, the auctioneer and broker, had died without leaving anybody to follow him in the business, and Mrs Cleve’s trustee ought to have known better than to let a shop to a stranger. Even the discovery that ovens were being put up for a confectioner and pastry-cook’s business, hitherto unknown in Grimworth, did not quite suffice to turn the scale in the new-comer’s favour, though the landlady at the Woolpack defended him warmly, said he seemed to be a very clever young man, and from what she could make out, came of a very good family; indeed, was most likely a good many people’s betters.

It certainly made a blaze of light and colour, almost as if a rainbow had suddenly descended into the marketplace, when, one fine morning, the shutters were taken down from the new shop, and the two windows displayed their decorations. On one side, there were the variegated tints of collared and marbled meats, set off by bright green leaves, the pale brown of glazed pies, the rich tones of sauces and bottled fruits enclosed in their veil of glass -- altogether a sight to bring tears into the eyes of a Dutch painter; and on the other, there was a predominance of the more delicate hues of pink, and white, and yellow, and buff, in the abundant lozenges, candies, sweet biscuits and icings, which to the eyes of a bilious person might easily have been blended into a faery landscape in Turner’s latest style. What a sight to dawn upon the eyes of Grimworth children! They almost forgot to go to their dinner that day, their appetites being preoccupied with imaginary sugar-plums; and I think even Punch, setting up his tabernacle in the market-place, would not have succeeded in drawing them away from those shop-windows, where they stood according to gradations of size and strength, the biggest and strongest being nearest the window, and the little ones in the outermost rows lifting wide-open eyes and mouths towards the upper tier of jars, like small birds at meal-time.

The elder inhabitants pished and pshawed a little at the folly of the new shopkeeper in venturing on such an outlay in goods that would not keep; to be sure, Christmas was coming, but what housewife in Grimworth would not think shame to furnish forth her table with articles that were not home-cooked? No, no. Mr Edward Freely, as he called himself, was deceived, if he thought Grimworth money was to flow into his pockets on such terms. Edward Freely was the name that shone in gilt letters on a mazarine ground over the doorway of the new shop -- a generous-sounding name, that might have belonged to the open-hearted, improvident hero of an old comedy, who would have delighted in raining sugared almonds, like a new manna-gift, among that small generation outside the windows. But Mr Edward Freely was a man whose impulses were kept in due subordination: he held that the desire for sweets and pastry must only be satisfied in a direct ratio with the power of paying for them. If the smallest child in Grimworth would go to him with a halfpenny in its tiny fist, he would, after ringing the halfpenny, deliver a just equivalent in ‘rock’.

He was not a man to cheat even the smallest child -- he often said so, observing at the same time that he loved honesty, and also that he was very tender-hearted, though he didn’t show his feelings as some people did.’

Either in reward of such virtue, or according to some more hidden law of sequence, Mr Freely’s business, in spite of prejudice, started under favourable auspices. For Mrs Chaloner, the rector’s wife, was among the earliest customers at the shop, thinking it only right to encourage a new parishioner who had made a decorous appearance at church; and she found Mr Freely a most civil, obliging young man, and intelligent to a surprising degree for a confectioner; well-principled, too, for in giving her useful hints about choosing sugars he had thrown much light on the dishonesty of other tradesmen. Moreover, he had been in the West Indies, and had seen the very estate which had been her poor grandfather’s property; and he said the missionaries were the only cause of the negro’s discontent -- an observing young man, evidently. Mrs Chaloner ordered wine-biscuits and olives, and gave Mr Freely to understand that she should find his shop a great convenience. So did the doctor’s wife, and so did Mrs Gate, at the large carding-mill, who, having high connections frequently visiting her, might be expected to have a large consumption of ratafias and macaroons. The less aristocratic matrons of Grimworth seemed likely at first to justify their husbands’
confidence that they would never pay a percentage of profits on dropcakes, instead of making their own, or get up a hollow show of liberal housekeeping by purchasing slices of collared meat when a neighbour came in for supper. But it is my task to narrate the gradual corruption of Grimworth manners from their primitive simplicity—a melancholy task, if it were not cheered by the prospect of the fine peripateia or downfall by which the progress of the corruption was ultimately checked.

It was young Mrs Steene, the veterinary surgeon’s wife, who first gave way to temptation. I fear she had been rather over-educated for her station in life, for she knew by heart many passages in ‘Lalla Rookh,’ the ‘Corsair,’ and the ‘Siege of Corinth,’ which had given her a distaste for domestic occupations, and caused her a withering disappointment at the discovery that Mr Steene, since his marriage, had lost all interest in the ‘bulbul,’ openly preferred discussing the nature of spavin with a coarse neighbour, and was angry if the pudding turned out watery—indeed, was simply a top-booted ‘vet.,’ who came in hungry at dinner-time; and not in the least like a nobleman turned Corsair out of pure scorn for his race, or like a renegade with a turban and crescent, unless it were in the irritability of his temper. And scorn is such a very different thing in top-boots! This brutal man had invited a supper-party for Christmas eve, when he would expect to see mince-pies on the table. Mrs Steene had prepared her mince-meat, and had devoted much butter, fine flour, and labour, to the making of a batch of pies in the morning; but they proved to be so very heavy when they came out of the oven, that she could only think with trembling of the moment when her husband should catch sight of the moment when her husband should catch sight of them on the supper-table. He would storm at her, she was certain; and before all the company; and then she should never help crying: it was so dreadful to think she had come to that, after the bulbul and everything! Suddenly the thought darted through her mind that this once she might send for a dish of mince-pies from Freely’s: she knew he had some. But what was to become of the eighteen heavy mince-pies? Oh, it was of no use thinking about that; it was very expensive—indeed, making mince-pies at all was a great expense, when they were not sure to turn out well: it would be much better to buy them ready-made. You paid a little more for them, but there was no risk of waste.

Such was the sophistry with which this misguided young woman—enough. Mrs Steene sent for the mince-pies, and, I am grieved to add, garbled her household accounts in order to conceal the fact from her husband. This was the second step in a downward course, all owing to a young woman’s being out of harmony with her circumstances, yearning after renegades and bulbuls, and being subject to claims from a veterinary surgeon fond of mince-pies. The third step was to harden herself by telling the fact of the bought mince-pies to her intimate friend Mrs Mole, who had already guessed it, and who subsequently encouraged herself in buying a mould of jelly, instead of exerting her own skill, by the reflection that ‘other people’ did the same sort of thing. The infection spread; soon there was a party or clique in Grimworth on the side of ‘buying at Freely’s;’ and many husbands, kept for some time in the dark on this point, innocently swallowed at two mouthfuls a tart on which they were paying a profit of a hundred per cent, and as innocently encouraged a fatal disingenuousness in the partners of their bosoms by praising the pastry. Others, more keen-sighted, winked at the too frequent presentation on washing-days, and at impromptu suppers, of superior spiced-beef, which flattered their palates more than the cold remnants they had formerly been contented with. Every housewife who had once ‘bought at Freely’s’ felt a secret joy when she detected a similar perversion in her neighbour’s practice, and soon only two or three old-fashioned mistresses of families held out in the protest against the growing demoralisation, saying to their neighbours who came to sup with them, ‘I can’t offer you Freely’s beef, or Freely’s cheese-cakes; everything in our house is home-made; I’m afraid you’ll hardly have any appetite for our plain pastry.’ The doctor, whose cook was not satisfactory, the curate, who kept no cook, and the mining agent, who was a great bon vivant, even began to rely on Freely for the greater part of their dinner, when they wished to give an entertainment of some brilliancy. In short, the business of manufacturing the more fanciful viands was fast passing out of the hands of maids and matrons in private families, and was becoming the work of a special commercial organ.

I am not ignorant that this sort of thing is called the inevitable course of civilisation, division of labour, and so forth, and that the maids and matrons may be said to have had their hands set free
from cookery to add to the wealth of society in some other way. Only it happened at Grimworth, which, to be sure, was a low place, that the maids and matrons could do nothing with their hands at all better than cooking; not even those who had always made heavy cakes and leathery pastry. And so it came to pass, that the progress of civilisation at Grimworth was not otherwise apparent than in the impoverishment of men, the gossiping idleness of women, and the heightening prosperity of Mr Edward Freely. The Yellow Coat School was a double source of profit to the calculating confectioner; for he opened an eatingroom for the superior workmen employed on the new school, and he accommodated the pupils at the old school by giving great attention to the fancy-sugar department. When I think of the sweet-tasted swans and other ingenious white shapes crunched by the small teeth of that rising generation, I am glad to remember that a certain amount of calcareous food has been held good for young creatures whose bones are not quite formed; for I have observed these delicacies to have an inorganic flavour which would have recommended them greatly to that young lady of the ‘Spectator’s’ acquaintance who habitually made her dessert on the stems of tobbacopipes.

As for the confectioner himself, he made his way gradually into Grimworth homes, as his commodities did, in spite of some initial repugnance. Somehow or other, his reception as a guest seemed a thing that required justifying, like the purchasing of his pastry. In the first place, he was a stranger, and therefore open to suspicion; secondly, the confectionery business was so entirely new at Grimworth, that its place in the scale of rank had not been distinctly ascertained. There was no doubt about drapers and grocers, when they came of good old Grimworth families, like Mr Luff and Mr Prettyman: they visited with the Palfreys, who farmed their own land, played many a game at whist with the doctor, and condescended a little towards the timber-merchant, who had lately taken to the coal-trade also, and had got new furniture; but whether a confectioner should be admitted to this higher level of respectability, or should be understood to find his associates among butchers and bakers, was a new question on which tradition threw no light. His being a bachelor was in his favour, and would perhaps have been enough to turn the scale, even if Mr Edward Freely’s other personal pretensions had been of an entirely insignificant cast. But so far from this, it very soon appeared that he was a remarkable young man, who had been in the West Indies, and had seen many wonders by sea and land, so that he could charm the ears of Grimworth Desdemonas with stories of strange fishes, especially sharks, which he had stabbed in the nick of time by bravely plunging overboard just as the monster was turning on his side to devour the cook’s mate; of terrible fevers which he had undergone in a land where the wind blows from all quarters at once; of rounds of toast cut straight from the bread-fruit trees; of toes bitten off by land-crabs; of large honours that had been offered to him as a man who knew what was what, and was therefore particularly needed in a tropical climate; and of a Creole heiress who had wept bitterly at his departure. Such conversational talents as these, we know, will over-come disadvantages of complexion; and young Towers, whose cheeks were of the finest pink, set off by a fringe of dark whisker, was quite eclipsed by the presence of the sallow Mr Freely. So exceptional a confectioner elevated his business, and might well begin to make disengaged hearts flutter a little.

Fathers and mothers were naturally more slow and cautious in their recognition of the newcomer’s merits. ‘He’s an amusing fellow,’ said Mr Prettyman, the highly respectable grocer. (Mrs Prettyman was a Miss Fothergill, and her sister had married a London mercer.) ‘He’s an amusing fellow; and I’ve no objection to his making one at the Oyster Club; but he’s a bit too fond of riding the high horse. He’s uncommonly knowing, I’ll allow; but how came he to go to the Indies? I should like that answered. It’s unnatural in a confectioner. I’m not fond of people that have been beyond seas, if they can’t give a good account how they happened to go. When folks go so far off, it’s because they’ve got little credit nearer home -- that’s my opinion. However, he’s got some good rum; but I don’t want to be hand and glove with him, for all that.’

It was this kind of dim suspicion which clouded the view of Mr Freely’s qualities in the maturer minds of Grimworth through the early months of his residence there. But when the confectioner ceased to be a novelty, the suspicions also ceased to be novel, and people got tired of
hinting at them, especially as they seemed to be refuted by his advancing prosperity and importance. Mr Freely was becoming a person of influence in the parish; he was found useful as an overseer of the poor, having great firmness in enduring other people’s pain, which firmness, he said, was due to his great benevolence; he always did what was good for people in the end. Mr Chaloner had even selected him as clergyman’s churchwarden, for he was a very handy man, and much more of Mr Chaloner’s opinion in everything about church business than the older parishioners. Mr Freely was a very regular churchman, but at the Oyster Club he was sometimes a little free in his conversation, more than hinting at a life of Sultanic self-indulgence which he had passed in the West Indies, shaking his head now and then and smiling rather bitterly, as men are wont to do when they intimate that they have become a little too wise to be instructed about a world which has long been flat and stale to them. For some time he was quite general in his attentions to the fair sex, combining the gallantries of a lady’s man with a severity of criticism on the person and manners of absent belles, which tended rather to stimulate in the feminine breast the desire to conquer the approval of so fastidious a judge. Nothing short of the very best in the department of female charms and virtues could suffice to kindle the ardour of Mr Edward Freely, who had become familiar with the most luxuriant and dazzling beauty in the West Indies. It may seem incredible that a confectioner should have ideas and conversation so much resembling those to be met with in a higher walk of life, but it must be remembered that he had not merely travelled, he had also bow-legs and a sallow, small-featured visage, so that nature herself had stamped him for a fastidious connoisseur of the fair sex.

At last, however, it seemed clear that Cupid had found a sharper arrow than usual, and that Mr Freely’s heart was pierced. It was the general talk among the young people at Grimworth. But was it really love? and not rather ambition? Miss Fullilove, the timber-merchant’s daughter, was quite sure that if she were Miss Penny Palfrey, she would be cautious; it was not a good sign when men looked so much above themselves for a wife. For it was no less a person than Miss Penelope Palfrey, second daughter of the Mr Palfrey who farmed his own land, that had attracted Mr Freely’s peculiar regard, and conquered his fastidiousness; and no wonder; for the Ideal, as exhibited in the finest waxwork, was perhaps never so closely approached by the Real as in the person of the pretty Penelope. Her yellowish flaxen hair did not curl naturally, I admit, but its bright crisp ringlets were such smooth, perfect miniature tubes, that you would have longed to pass your little finger through them, and feel their soft elasticity. She wore them in a crop, for in those days, when society was in a healthier state, young ladies wore crops long after they were twenty, and Penelope was not yet nineteen. Like the waxen ideal, she had round blue eyes, and round nostrils in her little nose, and teeth such as the ideal would be seen to have, if it ever showed them. Altogether, she was a small, round thing, as neat as a pink and white double daisy, and as guileless; for I hope it does not argue guile in a pretty damsel of nineteen, to think that she should like to have a beau and be ‘engaged,’ when her elder sister had already been in that position a year and a half. To be sure, there was young Towers always coming to the house; but Penny felt convinced he only came to see her brother, for he never had anything to say to her, and never offered her his arm, and was as awkward and silent as possible.

It is not unlikely that Mr Freely had early been smitten by Penny’s charms, as brought under his observation at church, but he had to make his way in society a little before he could come into nearer contact with them; and even after he was well received in Grimworth families, it was a long while before he could converse with Penny otherwise than in an incidental meeting at Mr Luff’s. It was not so easy to get invited to Long Meadows, the residence of the Palfreys; for though Mr Palfrey had been losing money of late years, not being able quite to recover his feet after the terrible murrain which forced him to borrow, his family were far from considering themselves on the same level even as the old-established tradespeople with whom they visited. The greatest people, even kings and queens, must visit with somebody, and the equals of the great are scarce. They were especially scarce at Grimworth, which, as I have before observed, was a low parish, mentioned with the most scornful brevity in gazetteers. Even the great people there were far behind those of their own standing in other parts of this realm. Mr Palfrey’s farmyard doors had the paint all worn off them, and the front garden walks had long been merged in a general weediness. Still, his father had
been called Squire Palfrey, and had been respected by the last Grimworth generation as a man who could afford to drink too much in his own house.

Pretty Penny was not blind to the fact that Mr Freely admired her, and she felt sure that it was he who had sent her a beautiful valentine; but her sister seemed to think so lightly of him (all young ladies think lightly of the gentlemen to whom they are not engaged), that Penny never dared mention him, and trembled and blushed whenever they met him, thinking of the valentine, which was very strong in its expressions, and which she felt guilty of knowing by heart. A man who had been to the Indies, and knew the sea so well, seemed to her a sort of public character, almost like Robinson Crusoe or Captain Cook; and Penny had always wished her husband to be a remarkable personage, likely to be put in Mangnall's Questions, with which register of the immortals she had become acquainted during her one year at a boarding-school. Only it seemed strange that a remarkable man should be a confectioner and pastry-cook, and this anomaly quite disturbed Penny's dreams. Her brothers, she knew, laughed at men who couldn't sit on horseback well, and called them tailors; but her brothers were very rough, and were quite without that power of anecdote which made Mr Freely such a delightful companion. He was a very good man, she thought, for one day, he always wished to do his duty in whatever state of life he might be placed; and he knew a great deal of poetry, for one day he had repeated a verse of a song. She wondered if he had made the words of the valentine! -- it ended in this way: -- 'Without thee, it is pain to live, But with thee, it were sweet to die.' Poor Mr Freely! her father would very likely object -- she felt sure he would, for he always called Mr Freely 'that sugar-plum fellow.' Oh, it was very cruel, when true love was crossed in that way, and all because Mr Freely was a confectioner: well, Penny would be true to him, for all that, and since his being a confectioner gave her an opportunity of showing her faithfulness, she was glad of it. Edward Freely was a pretty name, much better than John Towers. Young Towers had offered her a rose out of his button-hole the other day, blushing very much; but she refused it, and thought with delight how much Mr Freely would be comforted if he knew her firmness of mind. Poor little Penny! the days were so very long among the daisies on a grazing farm, and thought is so active -- how was it possible that the inward drama should not get the start of the outward? I have known young ladies, much better educated, and with an outward world diversified by instructive lectures, to say nothing of literature and highly-developed fancy-work, who have spun a cocoon of visionary joys and sorrows for themselves, just as Penny did. Her elder sister Letitia, who had a prouder style of beauty, and a more worldly ambition, was engaged to a wool-factor, who came all the way from Cattelton to see her; and everybody knows that a wool-factor takes a very high rank, sometimes driving a double-bodied gig. Letty's notions got higher every day, and Penny never dared to speak of her cherished griefs to her lofty sister -- never dared to propose that they should call at Mr Freely's to buy liquorice, though she had prepared for such an incident by mentioning a slight sore throat. So she had to pass the shop on the other side of the marketplace, and reflect, with a suppressed sigh, that behind those pink and white jars somebody was thinking of her tenderly, unconscious of the small space that divided her from him.

And it was quite true that, when business permitted, Mr Freely thought a great deal of Penny. He thought her prettiness comparable to the loveliest things in confectionery; he judged her to be of submissive temper likely to wait upon him as well as if she had been a negress, and to be silently terrified when his liver made him irritable; and he considered the Palfrey family quite the best in the parish, possessing marriageable daughters. On the whole, he thought her worthy to become Mrs Edward Freely, and all the more so, because it would probably require some ingenuity to win her. Mr Palfrey was capable of horse-whipping a too rash pretender to his daughter's hand; and, moreover, he had three tall sons: it was clear that a suitor would be at a disadvantage with such a family, unless travel and natural acumen had given him a countervailing power of contrivance. And the first idea that occurred to him in the matter was, that Mr Palfrey would object less if he knew that the Freelys were a much higher family than his own. It had been foolish modesty in him hitherto to conceal the fact that a branch of the Freelys held a manor in Yorkshire, and to shut up the portrait of his great uncle the admiral, instead of hanging it up where a family portrait should be
hung -- over the mantelpiece in the parlour. Admiral Freely, K.C.B., once placed in this conspicuous position, was seen to have had one arm only, and one eye, -- in these points resembling the heroic Nelson, -- while a certain pallid insignificance of feature confirmed the relationship between himself and his grand-nephew.

Next, Mr Freely was seized with an irrepressible ambition to possess Mrs Palfrey’s receipt for brawn, hers being pronounced on all hands to be superior to his own -- as he informed her in a very flattering letter carried by his errand-boy. Now Mrs Palfrey, like other geniuses, wrought by instinct rather than by rule, and possessed no receipts, -- indeed, despised all people who used them, observing that people who pickled by book, must pickle by weights and measures, and such nonsense; as for herself, her weights and measures were the tip of her finger and the tip of her tongue, and if you went nearer, why, of course, for dry goods like flour and spice, you went by handfuls and pinches, and for wet, there was a middlesized jug -- quite the best thing whether for much or little, because you might know how much a teacupful was if you’d got any use of your senses, and you might be sure it would take five middlesized jugs to make a gallon. Knowledge of this kind is like Titian’s colouring, difficult to communicate; and as Mrs Palfrey, once remarkably handsome, had now become rather stout and asthamatical, and scarcely ever left home, her oral teaching could hardly be given anywhere except at Long Meadows. Even a matron is not insusceptible to flattery, and the prospect of a visitor whose great object would be to listen to her conversation, was not without its charms to Mrs Palfrey. Since there was no receipt to be sent in reply to Mr Freely’s humble request, she called on her more docile daughter, Penny, to write a note, telling him that her mother would be glad to see him and talk with him on brawn, any day that he could call at Long Meadows. Penny obeyed with a trembling hand, thinking how wonderfully things came about in this world.

In this way, Mr Freely got himself introduced into the home of the Palfreys, and notwithstanding a tendency in the male part of the family to jeer at him a little as ‘peaky’ and bow-legged, he presently established his position as an accepted and frequent guest. Young Towers looked at him with increasing disgust when they met at the house on a Sunday, and secretly longed to try his ferret upon him, as a piece of vermin which that valuable animal would be likely to tackle with unhesitating vigour. But -- so blind sometimes are parents -- neither Mr nor Mrs Palfrey suspected that Penny would have anything to say to a tradesman of questionable rank whose youthful bloom was much withered. Young Towers, they thought, had an eye to her, and that was likely enough to be a match some day; but Penny was a child at present. And all the while Penny was imagining the circumstances under which Mr Freely would make her an offer: perhaps down by the row of damson-trees, when they were in the garden before tea; perhaps by letter -- in which case, how would the letter begin? ‘Dearest Penelope?’ or ‘Mr dear Miss Penelope?’ or straight off, without dear anything, as seemed the most natural when people were embarrassed? But, however he might make the offer, she would not accept it without her father’s consent; she would always be true to Mr Freely, but she would not disobey her father. For Penny was a good girl, though some of her female friends were afterwards of opinion that it spoke ill for her not to have felt an instinctive repugnance to Mr Freely.

But he was cautious, and wished to be quite sure of the ground he trod on. His views in marriage were not entirely sentimental, but were as duly mingled with considerations of what would be advantageous to a man in his position, as if he had had a very large amount of money spent on his education. He was not a man to fall in love in the wrong place; and so, he applied himself quite as much to conciliate the favour of the parents, as to secure the attachment of Penny. Mrs Palfrey had not been inaccessible to flattery, and her husband, being also of mortal mould, would not, it might be hoped, be proof against rum -- that very fine Jamaica rum of which Mr Freely expected always to have a supply sent him from Jamaica. It was not easy to get Mr Palfrey into the parlour behind the shop, where a mild back-street light fell on the features of the heroic admiral; but by getting hold of him rather late one evening as he was about to return home from Grimworth, the aspiring lover succeeded in persuading him to sup on some collared beef which, after Mrs Palfrey’s brawn, he would find the very best of cold eating. From that hour Mr Freely felt sure of success:
being in privacy with an estimable man old enough to be his father, and being rather lonely in the world, it was natural he should unbosom himself a little on subjects which he could not speak of in a mixed circle -- especially concerning his expectations from his uncle in Jamaica, who had no children, and loved his nephew Edward better than any one else in the world, though he had been so hurt at his leaving Jamaica, that he had threatened to cut him off with a shilling. However, he had since written to state his full forgiveness, and though he was an eccentric old gentleman and could not bear to give away money during his life, Mr Edward Freely could show Mr Palfrey the letter which declared, plainly enough, who would be the affectionate uncle’s heir. Mr Palfrey actually saw the letter, and could not help admiring the spirit of the nephew who declared that such brilliant hopes as these made no difference to his conduct; he should work at his humble business and make his modest fortune at it all the same. If the Jamaica estate was to come to him -- well and good. It was nothing very surprising for one of the Freely family to have an estate left him, considering the lands that family had possessed in time gone by, -- nay possessed in the Northumberland branch. Would not Mr Palfrey take another glass of rum? and also look at the last year’s balance of the accounts? Mr Freely was a man who cared to possess personal virtues, and did not pique himself on his family, though some men would.

We know how easily the great Leviathan may be led, when once there is a hook in his nose or a bridle in his jaws. Mr Palfrey was a large man, but, like Leviathan’s, his bulk went against him when once he had taken a turning. He was not a mercurial man, who easily changed his point of view. Enough. Before two months were over, he had given his consent to Mr Freely’s marriage with his daughter Penny, and having hit on a formula by which he could justify it, fenced off all doubts and objections, his own included. The formula was this: ‘I’m not a man to put my head up an entry before I know where it leads.’ Little Penny was very proud and fluttering, but hardly so happy as she expected to be in an engagement. She wondered if young Towers cared much about it, for he had not been to the house lately, and her sister and brothers were rather inclined to sneer than to sympathise. Grimworth rang with the news. All men extolled Mr Freely’s good fortune; while the women, with the tender solicitude characteristic of the sex, wished the marriage might turn out well.

While affairs were at this triumphant juncture, Mr Freely one morning observed that a stone-carver who had been breakfasting in the eating-room had left a newspaper behind. It was the ‘X shire Gazette,’ and X shire being a county not unknown to Mr Freely, he felt some curiosity to glance over it, and especially over the advertisements. A slight flush came over his face as he read. It was produced by the following announcement: ‘If David Faux, son of Jonathan Faux, late of Gilsbrook, will apply at the office of Mr Strutt, attorney, of Rodham, he will hear of something to his advantage.

‘Father’s dead!’ exclaimed Mr Freely, involuntarily. ‘Can he have left me a legacy?’

Chapter 3

Perhaps it was a result quite different from your expectations, that Mr David Faux should have returned from the West Indies only a few years after his arrival there, and have set up in his old business, like any plain man who had never travelled. But these cases do occur in life. Since, as we know, men change their skies and see new constellations without changing their souls, it will follow sometimes that they don’t change their business under those novel circumstances.

Certainly, this result was contrary to David’s own expectations. He had looked forward, you are aware, to a brilliant career among ‘the blacks;’ but, either because they had already seen too many white men, or for some other reason, they did not at once recognise him as a superior order of human being; besides, there were no princesses among them. Nobody in Jamaica was anxious to maintain David for the mere pleasure of his society; and those hidden merits of a man which are so well known to himself were as little recognised there as they notoriously are in the effete society of the Old World. So that in the dark hints that David threw out at the Oyster Club about that life of Sultanic self-indulgence spent by him in the luxurious Indies, I really think he was doing himself a wrong; I believe he worked for his bread, and, in fact, took to cooking again, as, after all, the only department in which he could offer skilled labour. He had formed several ingenious plans by which he meant to circumvent people of large fortune and small faculty; but then he never met with
exactly the right people under exactly the right circumstances. David’s devices for getting rich without work had apparently no direct relation with the world outside him as his confectionery receipts had. It is possible to pass a great many bad half-pennies and bad halfcrowns, but I believe there has no instance been known of passing a halfpenny or a halfcrown as a sovereign. A sharper can drive a brisk trade in this world: it is undeniable that there may be a fine career for him, if he will dare consequences; but David was too timid to be a sharper, or venture in any way among the man-traps of the law. He dared rob nobody but his mother. And so he had to fall back on the genuine value there was in him -- to be content to pass as a good half-penny, or, to speak more accurately, as a good confectioner. For in spite of some additional reading and observation, there was nothing else he could make so much money by; nay, he found in himself even a capability of extending his skill in this direction, and embracing all forms of cookery; while, in other branches of human labour, he began to see that it was not possible for him to shine. Fate was too strong for him; he had thought to master her inclination and had fled over the seas to that end; but she caught him, tied an apron round him, and snatching him from all other devices, made him devise cakes and patties in a kitchen at Kingstown. He was getting submissive to her, since she paid him with tolerable gains; but fevers and prickly heat, and other evils incidental to cooks in ardent climates, made him long for his native land; so he took ship once more, carrying his six years’ savings, and seeing distinctly, this time, what were Fate’s intentions as to his career. If you question me closely as to whether all the money with which he set up at Grimworth consisted of pure and simple earnings, I am obliged to confess that he got a sum or two for charitably abstaining from mentioning some other people’s misdemeanours. Altogether, since no prospects were attached to his family name, and since a new christening seemed a suitable commencement of a new life, Mr David Faux thought it as well to call himself Mr Edward Freely.

But lo! now, in opposition to all calculable probability, some benefit appeared to be attached to the name of David Faux. Should he neglect it, as beneath the attention of a prosperous tradesman? It might bring him into contact with his family again, and he felt no yearnings in that direction: moreover, he had small belief that the ‘something to his advantage’ could be anything considerable. On the other hand, even a small gain is pleasant, and the promise of it in this instance was so surprising, that David felt his curiosity awakened. The scale dipped at last on the side of writing to the lawyer, and, to be brief, the correspondence ended in an appointment for a meeting between David and his eldest brother at Mr Strutt’s, the vague ‘something’ having been defined as a legacy from his father of eighty-two pounds three shillings. David, you know, had expected to be disinherited; and so he would have been, if he had not, like some other indifferent sons, come of excellent parents, whose conscience made them scrupulous where much more highly instructed people often feel themselves warranted in following the bent of their indignation. Good Mrs Faux could never forget that she had brought this ill-conditioned son into the world when he was in that entirely helpless state which excluded the smallest choice on his part; and, somehow or other, she felt that his going wrong would be his father’s and mother’s fault, if they failed in one tittle of their parental duty. Her notion of parental duty was not of a high and subtle kind, but it included giving him his due share of the family property; for when a man had got a little honest money of his own, was he so likely to steal? To cut the delinquent son off with a shilling, was like delivering him over to his evil propensities. No; let the sum of twenty guineas which he had stolen be deducted from his share, and then let the sum of three guineas be put back from it, seeing that his mother had always considered three of the twenty guineas as his; and, though he had run away, and was, perhaps, gone across the sea, let the money be left to him all the same, and be kept in reserve for his possible return. Mr Faux agreed to his wife’s views, and made a codicil to his will accordingly, in time to die with a clear conscience. But for some time his family thought it likely that David would never reappear; and the eldest son, who had the charge of Jacob on his hands, often thought it a little hard that David might perhaps be dead, and yet, for want of certitude on that point, his legacy could not fall to his legal heir. But in this state of things the opposite certitude -- namely, that David was still alive and in England -- seemed to be brought by the testimony of a neighbour, who, having been on a journey to Cattelton, was pretty sure he had seen David in a gig, with a stout man driving by his
side. He could ‘swear it was David,’ though he could ‘give no account why, for he had no marks on
him; but no more had a white dog, and that didn’t hinder folks from knowing a white dog.’ It was
this incident which had led to the advertisement.

The legacy was paid, of course, after a few preliminary disclosures as to Mr David’s actual
position. He begged to send his love to his mother, and to say that he hoped to pay her a dutiful visit
by-and-by; but, at present, his business and near prospect of marriage made it difficult for him to
leave home. His brother replied with much frankness. ‘My mother may do as she likes about having
you to see her, but, for my part, I don’t want to catch sight of you on the premises again. When
folks have taken a new name, they’d better keep to their new ‘quinetance.’ David pocketed the
insult along with the eighty-two pounds three, and travelled home again in some triumph at the ease
of a transaction which had enriched him to this extent. He had no intention of offending his brother
by further claims on his fraternal recognition, and relapsed with full contentment into the character
of Mr Edward Freely, the orphan, scion of a great but reduced family, with an eccentric uncle in the
West Indies. (I have already hinted that he had some acquaintance with imaginative literature; and
being of a practical turn, he had, you perceive, applied even this form of knowledge to practical
purposes.) It was little more than a week after the return from his fruitful journey, that the day of his
marriage with Penny having been fixed, it was agreed that Mrs Palfrey should overcome her
reluctance to move from home, and that she and her husband should bring their two daughters to
inspect little Penny’s future abode and decide on the new arrangements to be made for the reception
of the bride. Mr Freely meant her to have a house so pretty and comfortable that she need not envy
even a wool-factor’s wife. Of course, the upper room over the shop was to be the best sitting-room;
but also the parlour behind the shop was to be made a suitable bower for the lovely Penny, who
would naturally wish to be near her husband, though Mr Freely declared his resolution never to
allow his wife to wait in the shop. The decisions about the parlour furniture were left till last,
because the party was to take tea there; and, above five o’clock, they were all seated there with the
best muffins and buttered buns before them, little Penny blushing and smiling, with her ‘crop’ in the
best order, and a blue frock showing her little white shoulders, while her opinion was being always
asked and never given. She secretly wished to have a particular sort of chimney ornaments, but she
could not have brought herself to mention it. Seated by the side of her yellow and rather withered
lover, who, though he had not reached his thirtieth year, had already crow’s-feet about his eyes, she
was quite tremulous at the greatness of her lot in being married to a man who had travelled so much
-- and before her sister Letty! The handsome Letitia looked rather proud and contemptuous, thought
her future brother-in-law an odious person, and was vexed with her father and mother for letting
Penny marry him. Dear little Penny! She certainly did look like a fresh white-heart cherry going to
be bitten off the stem by that lipless mouth. Would no deliverer come to make a slip between that
cherry and that mouth without a lip?

‘Quite a family likeness between the admiral and you, Mr Freely,’ observed Mrs Palfrey,
who was looking at the family portrait for the first time. ‘It’s wonderful! and only a grand-uncle. Do
you feature the rest of your family, as you know of?’

‘I can’t say,’ said Mr Freely, with a sigh. ‘My family have mostly thought themselves too
high to take any notice of me.’ At this moment an extraordinary disturbance was heard in the shop,
as of a heavy animal stamping about and making angry noises, and then of a glass vessel falling in
shivers, while the voice of the apprentice was heard calling ‘Master’ in great alarm. Mr Freely rose
in anxious astonishment, and hastened into the shop, followed by the four Palfreys, who made a
group at the parlour-door, transfixed with wonder at seeing a large man in a smock-frock, with a
pitchfork in his hand, rush up to Mr Freely and hug him, crying out, -- ‘Zavy, Zavy, b’other Zavy!’
It was Jacob, and for some moments David lost all presence of mind. He felt arrested for having
stolen his mother’s guineas. He turned cold, and trembled in his brother’s grasp. ‘Why, how’s this?’
said Mr Palfrey, advancing from the door. ‘Who is he?’ Jacob supplied the answer by saying over
and over again, -- ‘I’se Zacob, b’other Zacob. Come o zee Zavy’ -- till hunger prompted him to
relax his grasp, and to seize a large raised pie, which he lifted to his mouth. By this time David’s
power of device had begun to return, but it was a very hard task for his prudence to master his rage
and hatred towards poor Jacob. ‘I don’t know who he is; he must be drunk,’ he said, in a low tone to Mr Palfrey. ‘But he’s dangerous with that pitchfork. He’ll never let it go.’ Then checking himself on the point of betraying too great an intimacy with Jacob’s habits, he added, ‘You watch him, while I run for the constable.’ And he hurried out of the shop.

‘Why, where do you come from, my man?’ said Mr Palfrey, speaking to Jacob in a conciliatory tone. Jacob was eating his pie by large mouthfuls, and looking round at the other good things in the shop, while he embraced his pitchfork with his left arm and laid his left hand on some Bath buns. He was in the rare position of a person who recovers a long absent friend and finds him richer than ever in the characteristics that won his heart. ‘I’s Zacob -- b’other Zacob -- ’t home. I love Zavy -- b’other Zavy,’ he said, as soon as Mr Palfrey had drawn his attention. ‘Zavy come back from z’ Indies -- got mother’s zinnies. Where’s Zavy?’ he added, looking round and then turning to the others with a questioning air, puzzled by David’s disappearance. ‘It’s very odd,’ observed Mr Palfrey to his wife and daughters. ‘He seems to say Freely’s his brother come back from th’ Indies.’

‘What a pleasant relation for us!’ said Letitia, sarcastically. ‘I think he’s a good deal like Mr Freely. He’s got just the same sort of nose, and his eyes are the same colour.’ Poor Penny was ready to cry. But now Mr Freely re-entered the shop without the constable. During his walk of a few yards he had had time and calmness enough to widen his view of consequences, and he saw that to get Jacob taken to the workhouse or to the lock-up house as an offensive stranger, might have awkward effects if his family took the trouble of inquiring after him. He must resign himself to more patient measures.

‘On second thoughts,’ he said, beckoning to Mr Palfrey and whispering to him while Jacob’s back was turned, ‘he’s a poor half-witted fellow. Perhaps his friends will come after him. I don’t mind giving him something to eat, and letting him lie down for the night. He’s got it into his head that he knows me -- they do get these fancies, idiots do. He’ll perhaps go away again in an hour or two, and make no more ado. I’m a kindhearted man myself -- I shouldn’t like to have the poor fellow ill-used.’ ‘Why, he’ll eat a sovereign’s worth in no time,’ said Mr Palfrey, thinking Mr Freely a little too magnificent in his generosity.

‘Eh, Zavy, come back?’ exclaimed Jacob, giving his dear brother another hug, which crushed Mr Freely’s features inconveniently against the stale of the pitchfork. ‘Ay, ay,’ said Mr Freely, smiling, with every capability of murder in his mind, except the courage to commit it. He wished the Bath buns might by chance have arsenic in them. ‘Mother’s zinnies?’ said Jacob, pointing to a glass jar of yellow lozenges that stood in the window. ‘Zive ’em me!’

David dared not do otherwise than reach down the glass jar and give Jacob a handful. He received them in his smock-frock, which he held out for more. ‘They’ll keep him quiet a bit, at any rate,’ thought David, and emptied the jar. Jacob grinned and mowed with delight. ‘You’re very good to this stranger, Mr Freely,’ said Letitia; and then spitefully, as David joined the party at the parlour-door, ‘I think you could hardly treat him better, if he was really your brother.’

‘I’ve always thought it a duty to be good to idiots,’ said Mr Freely, striving after the most moral view of the subject. ‘We might have been idiots ourselves -- everybody might have been born idiots, instead of having their right senses.’ ‘I don’t know where there’d ha’ been virtuall for us all then,’ observed Mrs Palfrey, regarding the matter in a housewifely light. ‘But let us sit down again and finish our tea,’ said Mr Freely. ‘Let us leave the poor creature to himself.’ They walked into the parlour again; but Jacob, not apparently appreciating the kindness of leaving him to himself, immediately followed his brother, and seated himself, pitchfork grounded, at the table. ‘Well,’ said Miss Letitia, rising, ‘I don’t know whether you mean to stay, mother; but I shall go home.’ ‘Oh, me too,’ said Penny, frightened to death at Jacob, who had begun to nod and grin at her. ‘Well, I think we had better be going, Mr Palfrey,’ said the mother, rising more slowly. Mr Freely, whose complexion had become decidedly yellower during the last half-hour, did not resist this proposition. He hoped they should meet again ‘under happier circumstances.’ ‘It’s my belief the man is his brother,’ said Letitia, when they were all on their way home. ‘Letty, it’s very ill-natured of you,’ said Penny, beginning to cry. ‘Nonsense!’ said Mr Palfrey. ‘Freely’s got no brother he’s said so many and many a time; he’s an orphan; he’s got nothing but uncles -- leastwise, one. What’s it matter what an
idiot says? What call had Freely to tell lies?’ Letitia tossed her head and was silent.

Mr Freely, left alone with his affectionate brother Jacob, brooded over the possibility of luring him out of the town early the next morning, and getting him conveyed to Gilsbrook without further betrayals. But the thing was difficult. He saw clearly that if he took Jacob away himself, his absence, conjoined with the disappearance of the stranger, would either cause the conviction that he was really a relative, or would oblige him to the dangerous course of inventing a story to account for his disappearance, and his own absence at the same time. David groaned. There come occasions when falsehood is felt to be inconvenient. It would, perhaps, have been a longer-headed device, if he had never told any of those clever fibs about his uncles, grand and otherwise; for the Palfreys were simple people, and shared the popular prejudice against lying. Even if he could get Jacob away this time, what security was there that he would not come again, having once found the way? O guineas! O lozenges! what enviable people those were who had never robbed their mothers, and had never told fibs! David spent a sleepless night, while Jacob was snoring close by. Was this the upshot of travelling to the Indies, and acquiring experience combined with anecdote? He rose at break of day, as he had once before done when he was in fear of Jacob, and took all gentle means to rouse this fatal brother from his deep sleep; he dared not be loud, because his apprentice was in the house, and would report everything. But Jacob was not to be roused. He fought out with his fist at the unknown cause of disturbance, turned over, and snored again. He must be left to wake as he would. David, with a cold perspiration on his brow, confessed to himself that Jacob could not be got away that day.

Mr Palfrey came over to Grimworth before noon, with a natural curiosity to see how his future son-in-law got on with the stranger to whom he was so benevolently inclined. He found a crowd round the shop. All Grimworth by this time had heard how Freely had been fastened on by an idiot, who called him ‘Brother Zavy;’ and the younger population seemed to find the singular stranger an unwearying source of fascination, while the householders dropped in one by one to inquire into the incident. ‘Why don’t you send him to the workhouse?’ said Mr Prettyman. ‘You’ll have a row with him and the children presently, and he’ll eat you up. The workhouse is the proper place for him; let his kin claim him, if he’s got any. ‘ ‘Those may be your feelings, Mr Prettyman,’ said David, his mind quite enfeebled by the torture of his position.

‘What! is he your brother, then?’ said Mr Prettyman, looking at his neighbour Freely rather sharply. ‘All men are our brothers, and idiots particular so,’ said Mr Freely, who, like many other travelled men, was not master of the English language. ‘Come, come, if he’s your brother, tell the truth, man,’ said Mr Prettyman, with growing suspicion. ‘Don’t be ashamed of your own flesh and blood.’ Mr Palfrey was present, and also had his eye on Freely. It is difficult for a man to believe in the advantage of a truth which will disclose him to have been a liar. In this critical moment, David shrank from this immediate disgrace in the eyes of his future father-in-law.

‘Mr Prettyman,’ he said, ‘I take your observations as an insult. I’ve no reason to be otherwise than proud of my own flesh and blood. If this poor man was my brother more than all men are, I should say so.’ A tall figure darkened the door, and David, lifting his eyes in that direction, saw his eldest brother, Jonathan, on the door-sill. ‘I’ll stay wi’ Zavy,’ shouted Jacob, as he, too, caught sight of his eldest brother; and, running behind the counter, he clutched David hard. ‘What, he is here?’ said Jonathan Faux, coming forward. ‘My mother would have no nay, as he’d been away so long, but I must see after him. And it struck me he was very like come after you, because we’d been talking of you o’ late, and where you lived.’ David saw there was no escape; he smiled a ghastly smile. ‘What! is this a relation of yours, sir?’ said Mr Prettyman to Jonathan. ‘Ay, it’s my innicent of a brother, sure enough,’ said honest Jonathan. ‘A fine trouble and cost he is to us, in th’ eating and other things, but we must bear what’s laid on us.’ ‘And your name’s Freely, is it?’ said Mr Prettyman. ‘Nay, nay, my name’s Faux, I know nothing o’ Freelys,’ said Jonathan, curtly. ‘Come,’ he added, turning to David, ‘I must take some news to mother about Jacob. Shall I take him with me, or will you undertake to send him back?’ ‘Take him, if you can make him loose his hold of me,’ said David, feebly. ‘Is this gentleman here in the confectionery line your brother, then, sir?’ said Mr Prettyman, feeling that it was an occasion on which formal language must be used.
‘I don’t want to own him,’ said Jonathan, unable to resist a movement of indignation that had never been allowed to satisfy itself. ‘He run away from home with good reasons in his pocket years ago: he didn’t want to be owned again, I reckon.’ Mr Palfrey left the shop; he felt his own pride too severely wounded by the sense that he had let himself be fooled, to feel curiosity for further details. The most pressing business was to go home and tell his daughter that Freely was a poor sneak, probably a rascal, and that her engagement was broken off. Mr Prettyman stayed, with some internal self-gratulation that he had never given in to Freely, and that Mr Chaloner would see now what sort of fellow it was that he had put over the heads of older parishioners. He considered it due from him (Mr Prettyman) that, for the interests of the parish, he should know all that was to be known about this ‘interloper.’ Grimworth would have people coming from Botany Bay to settle in it, if things went on in this way. It soon appeared that Jacob could not be made to quit his dear brother David except by force. He understood, with a clearness equal to that of the most intelligent mind, that Jonathan would take him back to skimmed milk, apple-dumpling, broad-beans, and pork. And he had found a paradise in his brother’s shop. It was a difficult matter to use force with Jacob, for he wore heavy nailed boots; and if his pitchfork had been mastered, he would have resorted without hesitation to kicks. Nothing short of using guile to bind him hand and foot would have made all parties safe. ‘Let him stay,’ said David, with desperate resignation, frightened above all things at the idea of further disturbances in his shop, which would make his exposure all the more conspicuous. ‘You go away again, and tomorrow I can, perhaps, get him to go to Gilsbrook with me. He’ll follow me fast enough, I daresay,’ he added, with a half-groan.

‘Very well,’ said Jonathan, gruffly. ‘I don’t see why you shouldn’t have some trouble and expense with him as well as the rest of us. But mind you bring him back safe and soon, else mother’ll never rest.’ On this arrangement being concluded, Mr Prettyman begged Mr Jonathan Faux to go and take a snack with him, an invitation which was quite acceptable; and as honest Jonathan had nothing to be ashamed of, it is probable that he was very frank in his communications to the civil draper, who, pursuing the benefit of the parish, hastened to make all the information he could gather about Freely common parochial property. You may imagine that the meeting of the Club at the Woolpack that evening was unusually lively. Every member was anxious to prove that he had never liked Freely, as he called himself. Faux was his name, was it? Fox would have been more suitable. The majority expressed a desire to see him hooted out of the town. Mr Freely did not venture over his doorstep that day, for he knew Jacob would keep at his side, and there was every probability that they would have a train of juvenile followers. He sent to engage the Woolpack gig for an early hour the next morning; but this order was not kept religiously a secret by the landlord. Mr Freely was informed that he could not have the gig till seven; and the Grimworth people were early risers. Perhaps they were more alert than usual on this particular morning; for when Jacob, with a bag of sweets in his hand, was induced to mount the gig with his brother David, the inhabitants of the market-place were looking out of their doors and windows, and at the turning of the street there was even a muster of apprentices and schoolboys, who shouted as they passed in what Jacob took to be a very merry and friendly way, nodding and grinning in return. ‘Huzzay, David Faux! how’s your uncle?’ was their morning’s greeting. Like other pointed things, it was not altogether impromptu.

Even this public derision was not so crushing to David as the horrible thought that though he might succeed now in getting Jacob home again there would never be any security against his coming back, like a wasp to the honey-pot. As long as David lived at Grimworth, Jacob’s return would be hanging over him. But could he go on living at Grimworth -- an object of ridicule, discarded by the Palfreys, after having revelled in the consciousness that he was an envied and prosperous confectioner? David liked to be envied; he minded less about being loved. His doubts on this point were soon settled. The mind of Grimworth became obstinately set against him and his viands, and the new school being finished, the eatingroom was closed. If there had been no other reason, sympathy with the Palfreys, that respectable family who had lived in the parish time out of mind, would have determined all well-to-do people to decline Freely’s goods. Besides, he had absconded with his mother’s guineas: who knew what else he had done, in Jamaica or elsewhere,
before he came to Grimworth, worming himself into families under false pretences? Females shuddered. Dreadful suspicions gathered round him: his green eyes, his bow-legs, had a criminal aspect. The rector disliked the sight of a man who had imposed upon him; and all boys who could not afford to purchase, hooted ‘David Faux’ as they passed his shop. Certainly no man now would pay anything for the ‘goodwill’ of Mr Freely’s business, and he would be obliged to quit it without a peculium so desirable towards defraying the expense of moving.

In a few months the shop in the market-place was again to let, and Mr David Faux, alias Mr Edward Freely, had gone -- nobody at Grimworth knew whither. In this way the demoralisation of Grimworth women was checked. Young Mrs Steene renewed her efforts to make light mince-pies, and having at last made a batch so excellent that Mr Steene looked at her with complacency as he ate them, and said they were the best he had ever eaten in his life, she thought less of bulbuls and renegades ever after. The secrets of the finer cookery were revived in the breasts of matronly housewives, and daughters were again anxious to be initiated in them.

You will further, I hope, be glad to hear, that some purchases of drapery made by pretty Penny, in preparation for her marriage with Mr Freely, came in quite as well for her wedding with young Towers as if they had been made expressly for the latter occasion. For Penny’s complexion had not altered, and blue always became it best.

Here ends the story of Mr David Faux, confectioner and his brother Jacob. And we see in it, I think, an admirable instance of the unexpected forms in which the great Nemesis hides herself.
It was at a masked ball at the Palais Royal that my fatal quarrel with my first cousin André de Brissac began. The quarrel was about a woman. The women who followed the footsteps of Philip of Orleans were the causes of many such disputes; and there was scarcely one fair head in all that glittering throng which, to a man versed in social histories and mysteries, might not have seemed bedabbled with blood.

I shall not record the name of her for love of whom André de Brissac and I crossed one of the bridges, in the dim August dawn on our way to the waste ground beyond the church of Saint-Germain des Prés.

There were many beautiful vipers in those days, and she was one of them. I can feel the chill breath of that August morning blowing in my face, as I sit in my dismal chamber at my château of Puy Verdun to-night, alone in the stillness, writing the strange story of my life. I can see the white mist rising from the river, the grim outline of the Châtelet, and the square towers of Notre Dame black against the pale-grey sky. Even more vividly can I recall André's fair young face, as he stood opposite to me with his two friends -- scoundrels both, and alike eager for that unnatural fray. We were a strange group to be seen in a summer sunrise, all of us fresh from the heat and clamour of the Regent’s saloons -- André in a quaint hunting-dress copied from a family portrait at Puy Verdun, I costumed as one of Law’s Mississippi Indians; the other men in like garish frippery, adorned with broderies and jewels that looked wan in the pale light of dawn.

Our quarrel had been a fierce one -- a quarrel which could have but one result, and that the direst. I had struck him; and the welt raised by my open hand was crimson upon his fair womanish face as he stood opposite to me. The eastern sun shone on the face presently, and dyed the cruel mark with a deeper red; but the sting of my own wrongs was fresh, and I had not yet learned to despise myself for that brutal outrage.

To André de Brissac such an insult was most terrible. He was the favourite of Fortune, the favourite of women; and I was nothing, -- a rough soldier who had done my country good service, but in the boudoir of a Parabère a mannerless boor.

We fought, and I wounded him mortally. Life had been very sweet for him; and I think that a frenzy of despair took possession of him when he felt the life-blood ebbing away. He beckoned me to him as he lay on the ground. I went, and knelt at his side.

"Forgive me, André!" I murmured.

He took no more heed of my words than if that piteous entreaty had been the idle ripple of the river near at hand.

"Listen to me, Hector de Brissac," he said. "I am not one who believes that a man has done with earth because his eyes glaze and his jaw stiffens. They will bury me in the old vault at Puy Verdun; and you will be master of the château. Ah, I know how lightly they take things in these days, and how Dubois will laugh when he hears that Ca has been killed in a duel. They will bury me, and sing masses for my soul; but you and I have not finished our affair yet, my cousin. I will be with you when you least look to see me, -- I, with this ugly scar upon the face that women have praised and loved. I will come to you when your life seems brightest. I will come between you and all that you hold fairest and dearest. My ghostly hand shall drop a poison in your cup of joy. My shadowy form shall shut the sunlight from your life. Men with such iron will as mine can do what they please, Hector de Brissac. It is my will to haunt you when I am dead."

All this in short broken sentences he whispered into my ear. I had need to bend my ear close to his dying lips; but the iron will of André de Brissac was strong enough to do battle with Death, and I believe he said all he wished to say before his head fell back upon the velvet cloak they had spread beneath him, never to be lifted again.
As he lay there, you would have fancied him a fragile stripling, too fair and frail for the struggle called life; but there are those who remember the brief manhood of André de Brissac, and who can bear witness to the terrible force of that proud nature.

I stood looking down at the young face with that foul mark upon it, and God knows I was sorry for what I had done.

Of those blasphemous threats which he had whispered in my ear I took no heed. I was a soldier, and a believer. There was nothing absolutely dreadful to me in the thought that I had killed this man. I had killed many men on the battlefield; and this one had done me cruel wrong.

My friends would have had me cross the frontier to escape the consequences of my act; but I was ready to face those consequences, and I remained in France. I kept aloof from the court, and received a hint that I had best confine myself to my own province. Many masses were chanted in the little chapel of Puy Verdun, for the soul of my dead cousin, and his coffin filled a niche in the vault of our ancestors.

His death had made me a rich man; and the thought that it was so made my newly-acquired wealth very hateful to me. I lived a lonely existence in the old château, where I rarely held converse with any but the servants of the household, all of whom had served my cousin, and none of whom liked me.

It was a hard and bitter life. It galled me, when I rode through the village, to see the peasant-children shrink away from me. I have seen old women cross themselves stealthily as I passed them by. Strange reports had gone forth about me; and there were those who whispered that I had given my soul to the Evil One as the price of my cousin’s heritage. From my boyhood I had been dark of visage and stern of manner; and hence, perhaps, no woman’s love had ever been mine. I remembered my mother’s face in all its changes of expression; but I can remember no look of affection that ever shone on me. That other woman, beneath whose feet I laid my heart, was pleased to accept my homage, but she never loved me; and the end was treachery.

I had grown hateful to myself, and had well-nigh begun to hate my fellow-creatures, when a feverish desire seized upon me, and I pined to be back in the press and throng of the busy world once again. I went back to Paris, where I kept myself aloof from the court, and where an angel took compassion upon me.

She was the daughter of an old comrade, a man whose merits had been neglected, whose achievements had been ignored, and who sulked in his shabby lodging like a rat in a hole, while all Paris went mad with the Scotch Financier, and gentlemen and lacqueys were trampling one another to death in the Rue Quin-campoix. The only child of this little cross-grained old captain of dragoons was an incarnate sunbeam, whose mortal name was Eveline Duchalet.

She loved me. The richest blessings of our lives are often those which cost us least. I wasted the best years of my youth in the worship of a wicked woman, who jilted and cheated me at last.

I gave this meek angel but a few courteous words—a little fraternal tenderness—and lo, she loved me. The life which had been so dark and desolate grew bright beneath her influence; and I went back to Puy Verdun with a fair young bride for my companion.

Ah, how sweet a change there was in my life and in my home! The village children no longer shrank appalled as the dark horseman rode by, the village crones no longer crossed themselves; for a woman rode by his side—a woman whose charities had won the love of all those ignorant creatures, and whose companionship had transformed the gloomy lord of the chateau into a loving husband and a gentle master. The old retainers forgot the untimely fate of my cousin, and served me with cordial willingness, for love of their young mistress.

There are no words which can tell the pure and perfect happiness of that time. I felt like a traveller who had traversed the frozen seas of an arctic region, remote from human love or human companionship, to find himself on a sudden in the bosom of a verdant valley, in the sweet atmosphere of home. The change seemed too bright to be real; and I strove in vain to put away from my mind the vague suspicion that my new life was but some fantastic dream.

So brief were those halcyon hours, that, looking back on them now, it is scarcely strange if I am still half inclined to fancy the first days of my married life could have been no more than a
Neither in my days of gloom nor in my days of happiness had I been troubled by the recollection of André’s blasphemous oath.

The words which with his last breath he had whispered in my ear were vain and meaningless to me. He had vented his rage in those idle threats, as he might have vented it in idle execrations.

That he will haunt the footsteps of his enemy after death is the one revenge which a dying man can promise himself; and if men had power thus to avenge themselves, the earth would be peopled with phantoms.

I had lived for three years at Puy Verdun; sitting alone in the solemn midnight by the hearth where he had sat, pacing the corridors that had echoed his footfall; and in all that time my fancy had never so played me false as to shape the shadow of the dead. Is it strange, then, if I had forgotten André’s horrible promise? There was no portrait of my cousin at Puy Verdun. It was the age of boudoir art, and a miniature set in the lid of a gold bonbonnière, or hidden artfully in a massive bracelet, was more fashionable than a clumsy life-size image, fit only to hang on the gloomy walls of a provincial chateau rarely visited by its owner. My cousin’s fair face had adorned more than one bonbonnière, and had been concealed in more than one bracelet; but it was not among the faces that looked down from the panelled walls of Puy Verdun.

In the library I found a picture which awoke painful associations. It was the portrait of a De Brissac, who had flourished in the time of Francis the First; and it was from this picture that my cousin André had copied the quaint hunting-dress he wore at the Regent’s ball. The library was a room in which I spent a good deal of my life; and I ordered a curtain to be hung before this picture.

We had been married three months, when Eveline one day asked, “Who is the lord of the château nearest to this?”

I looked with her in astonishment.

“My dearest,” I answered, “do you not know that there is no other château within forty miles of Puy Verdun?”

“Indeed!” she said; “that is strange.”

I asked her why the fact seemed strange to her; and after much entreaty I obtained from her the reason of her surprise.

In her walks about the park and woods during the last month, she had met a man who, by his dress and bearing, was obviously of noble rank. She had imagined that he occupied some château near at hand, and that his estate adjoined ours. I was at a loss to imagine who this stranger could be; for my estate of Puy Verdun lay in the heart of a desolate region, and unless when some traveller’s coach went lumbering and jingling through the village, one had little more chance of encountering a gentleman than of meeting a demigod.

“Have you seen this man often, Eveline?” I asked.

She answered, in a tone which had a touch of sadness, “I see him every day.”

“Where, dearest?”

“Sometimes in the park, sometimes in the wood. You know the little cascade, Hector, where there is some old neglected rock-work that forms a kind of cavern. I have taken a fancy to that spot, and have spent many mornings there reading. Of late I have seen the stranger there every morning.”

“He has never dared to address you?”

“Never. I have looked up from my book, and have seen him standing at a little distance, watching me silently. I have continued reading; and when I have raised my eyes again I have found him gone. He must approach and depart with a stealthy tread, for I never hear his footfall. Sometimes I have almost wished that he would speak to me. It is so terrible to see him standing silently there.”

“He is some insolent peasant who seeks to frighten you.”

My wife shook her head.

“He is no peasant,” she answered. “It is not by his dress alone I judge, for that is strange to me. He has an air of nobility which it is impossible to mistake.”

“Is he young or old?”
“He is young and handsome.”

I was much disturbed by the idea of this stranger’s intrusion on my wife’s solitude; and I went straight to the village to inquire if any stranger had been seen there. I could hear of no one. I questioned the servants closely, but without result. Then I determined to accompany my wife in her walks, and to judge for myself of the rank of the stranger.

For a week I devoted all my mornings to rustic rambles with Eveline in the park and woods; and in all that week we saw no one but an occasional peasant in sabots, or one of our own household returning from a neighbouring farm.

I was a man of studious habits, and those summer rambles disturbed the even current of my life. My wife perceived this, and entreated me to trouble myself no further.

“I will spend my mornings in the pleasaunce, Hector,” she said; “the stranger cannot intrude upon me there.”

“I begin to think the stranger is only a phantasm of your own romantic brain,” I replied, smiling at the earnest face lifted to mine. “A châtelaine who is always reading romances may well meet handsome cavaliers in the woodlands. I daresay I have Mdlle. Scudéri to thank for this noble stranger, and that he is only the great Cyrus in modern costume.”

“Ah, that is the point which mystifies me, Hector,” she said. “The stranger’s costume is not modern. He looks as an old picture might look if it could descend from its frame.”

Her words pained me, for they reminded me of that hidden picture in the library, and the quaint hunting costume of orange and purple, which André de Brissac wore at the Regent’s ball.

After this my wife confined her walks to the pleasaunce; and for many weeks I heard no more of the nameless stranger. I dismissed all thought of him from my mind, for a graver and heavier care had come upon me. My wife’s health began to droop. The change in her was so gradual as to be almost imperceptible to those who watched her day by day. It was only when she put on a rich gala dress which she had not worn for months that I saw how wasted the form must be on which the embroidered bodice hung so loosely, and how wan and dim were the eyes which had once been brilliant as the jewels she wore in her hair.

I sent a messenger to Paris to summon one of the court physicians; but I knew that many days must needs elapse before he could arrive at Puy Verdun.

In the interval I watched my wife with unutterable fear.

It was not her health only that had declined. The change was more painful to behold than any physical alteration. The bright and sunny spirit had vanished, and in the place of my joyous young bride I beheld a woman weighed down by rooted melancholy. In vain I sought to fathom the cause of my darling’s sadness. She assured me that she had no reason for sorrow or discontent, and that if she seemed sad without a motive, I must forgive her sadness, and consider it as a misfortune rather than a fault.

I told her that the court physician would speedily find some cure for her despondency, which must needs arise from physical causes, since she had no real ground for sorrow. But although she said nothing, I could see she had no hope or belief in the healing powers of medicine.

One day, when I wished to beguile her from that pensive silence in which she was wont to sit an hour at a time, I told her, laughing, that she appeared to have forgotten her mysterious cavalier of the wood, and it seemed also as if he had forgotten her.

To my wonderment, her pale face became of a sudden crimson; and from crimson changed to pale again in a breath.

“You have never seen him since you deserted your woodland grotto?” I said.

She turned to me with a heart-rending look.

“Hector,” she cried, “I see him every day; and it is that which is killing me.”

She burst into a passion of tears when she had said this. I took her in my arms as if she had been a frightened child, and tried to comfort her.

“My darling, this is madness,” I said. “You know that no stranger can come to you in the pleasaunce. The moat is ten feet wide and always full of water, and the gates are kept locked day and night by old Massou. The châtelaine of a mediæval fortress need fear no intruder in her antique
garden.’

My wife shook her head sadly.

“I see him every day,” she said.

On this I believed that my wife was mad. I shrank from questioning her more closely concerning her mysterious visitant. It would be ill, I thought, to give a form and substance to the shadow that tormented her by too close inquiry about its look and manner, its coming and going. I took care to assure myself that no stranger to the household could by any possibility penetrate to the pleasaunce. Having done this, I was fain to await the coming of the physician.

He came at last. I revealed to him the conviction which was my misery. I told him that I believed my wife to be mad. He saw her -- spent an hour alone with her, and then came to me. To my unspeakable relief he assured me of her sanity.

“It is just possible that she may be affected by one delusion,” he said; “but she is so reasonable upon all other points, that I can scarcely bring myself to believe her the subject of a monomania. I am rather inclined to think that she really sees the person of whom she speaks. She described him to me with a perfect minuteness. The descriptions of scenes or individuals given by patients afflicted with monomania are always more or less disjointed; but your wife spoke to me as clearly and calmly as I am now speaking to you. Are you sure there is no one who can approach her in that garden where she walks?”

“I am quite sure.”

“Is there any kinsman of your steward, or hanger-on of your household, -- a young man with a fair womanish face, very pale and rendered remarkable by a crimson scar, which looks like the mark of a blow?”

“My God!” I cried, as the light broke in upon me all at once. “And the dress -- the strange old-fashioned dress?”

“The man wears a hunting costume of purple and orange,” answered the doctor.

I knew then that André de Brissac had kept his word, and that in the hour when my life was brightest his shadow had come between me and happiness.

I showed my wife the picture in the library, for I would fain assure myself that there was some error in my fancy about my cousin. She shook like a leaf when she beheld it, and clung to me convulsively.

“This is witchcraft, Hector,” she said. “The dress in that picture is the dress of the man I see in the pleasaunce; but the face is not his.”

Then she described to me the face of the stranger; and it was my cousin’s face line for line -- André de Brissac, whom she had never seen in the flesh. Most vividly of all did she describe the cruel mark upon his face, the trace of a fierce blow from an open hand.

After this I carried my wife away from Puy Verdun. We wandered far -- through the southern provinces, and into the very heart of Switzerland. I thought to distance the ghastly phantom, and I fondly hoped that change of scene would bring peace to my wife.

It was not so. Go where we would, the ghost of André de Brissac followed us. To my eyes that fatal shadow never revealed itself. That would have been too poor a vengeance. It was my wife’s innocent heart which André made the instrument of his revenge. The unholy presence destroyed her life. My constant companionship could not shield her from the horrible intruder. In vain did I watch her; in vain did I strive to comfort her.

“He will not let me be at peace,” she said; “he comes between us, Hector. He is standing between us now. I can see his face with the red mark upon it plainer that I see yours.”

One fair moonlight night, when we were together in a mountain village in the Tyrol, my wife cast herself at my feet, and told me she was the worst and vilest of women. “I have confessed all to my director,” she said; “from the first I have not hidden my sin from Heaven. But I feel that death is near me; and before I die I would fain reveal my sin to you.”

“What sin, my sweet one?”

“When first the stranger came to me in the forest, his presence bewildered and distressed me, and I shrank from him as from something strange and terrible. He came again and again; by and by
I found myself thinking of him, and watching for his coming. His image haunted me perpetually; I strove in vain to shut his face out of my mind. Then followed an interval in which I did not see him; and, to my shame and anguish, I found that life seemed dreary and desolate without him. After that came the time in which he haunted the plasaunce; and -- O, Hector, kill me if you will, for I deserve no mercy at your hands! -- I grew in those days to count the hours that must elapse before his coming, to take no pleasure save in the sight of that pale face with the red brand upon it. He plucked all old familiar joys out of my heart, and left in it but one weird unholy pleasure -- the delight of his presence. For a year I have lived but to see him. And now curse me, Hector; for this is my sin. Whether it comes of the baseness of my own heart, or is the work of witchcraft, I know not; but I know that I have striven against this wickedness in vain."

I took my wife to my breast, and forgave her. In sooth, what had I to forgive? Was the fatality that overshadowed us any work of hers? On the next night she died, with her hand in mine; and at the very last she told me, sobbing and affrighted, that he was by her side.
FIRST CHAPTER

IT happened in this wise -

But, sitting with my pen in my hand looking at those words again, without descrying any hint in them of the words that should follow, it comes into my mind that they have an abrupt appearance. They may serve, however, if I let them remain, to suggest how very difficult I find it to begin to explain my explanation. An uncouth phrase: and yet I do not see my way to a better.

SECOND CHAPTER

IT happened in THIS wise -

But, looking at those words, and comparing them with my former opening, I find they are the self-same words repeated. This is the more surprising to me, because I employ them in quite a new connection. For indeed I declare that my intention was to discard the commencement I first had in my thoughts, and to give the preference to another of an entirely different nature, dating my explanation from an anterior period of my life. I will make a third trial, without erasing this second failure, protesting that it is not my design to conceal any of my infirmities, whether they be of head or heart.

THIRD CHAPTER

NOT as yet directly aiming at how it came to pass, I will come upon it by degrees. The natural manner, after all, for God knows that is how it came upon me.

My parents were in a miserable condition of life, and my infant home was a cellar in Preston. I recollect the sound of father’s Lancashire clogs on the street pavement above, as being different in my young hearing from the sound of all other clogs; and I recollect, that, when mother came down the cellar-steps, I used tremblingly to speculate on her feet having a good or an ill-tempered look, -- on her knees, -- on her waist, -- until finally her face came into view, and settled the question. From this it will be seen that I was timid, and that the cellar-steps were steep, and that the doorway was very low.

Mother had the gripe and clutch of poverty upon her face, upon her figure, and not least of all upon her voice. Her sharp and high-pitched words were squeezed out of her, as by the compression of bony fingers on a leathern bag; and she had a way of rolling her eyes about and about the cellar, as she scolded, that was gaunt and hungry. Father, with his shoulders rounded, would sit quiet on a three-legged stool, looking at the empty grate, until she would pluck the stool from under him, and bid him go bring some money home. Then he would dismally ascend the steps; and I, holding my ragged shirt and trousers together with a hand (my only braces), would feint and dodge from mother’s pursuing grasp at my hair.

A worldly little devil was mother’s usual name for me. Whether I cried for that I was in the dark, or for that it was cold, or for that I was hungry, or whether I squeezed myself into a warm corner when there was a fire, or ate voraciously when there was food, she would still say, ‘O, you worldly little devil!’ And the sting of it was, that I quite well knew myself to be a worldly little devil. Worldly as to wanting to be housed and warmed, worldly as to wanting to be fed, worldly as to the greed with which I inwardly compared how much I got of those good things with how much father and mother got, when, rarely, those good things were going.

Sometimes they both went away seeking work; and then I would be locked up in the cellar for a day or two at a time. I was at my worldliest then. Left alone, I yielded myself up to a worldly yearning for enough of anything (except misery), and for the death of mother’s father, who was a
machine-maker at Birmingham, and on whose decease, I had heard mother say, she would come into a whole courtful of houses ‘if she had her rights.’ Worldly little devil, I would stand about, musingly fitting my cold bare feet into cracked bricks and crevices of the damp cellar-floor, -- walking over my grandfather’s body, so to speak, into the courtful of houses, and selling them for meat and drink, and clothes to wear.

At last a change came down into our cellar. The universal change came down even as low as that, -- so will it mount to any height on which a human creature can perch, -- and brought other changes with it.

We had a heap of I don’t know what foul litter in the darkest corner, which we called ‘the bed.’ For three days mother lay upon it without getting up, and then began at times to laugh. If I had ever heard her laugh before, it had been so seldom that the strange sound frightened me. It frightened father too; and we took it by turns to give her water. Then she began to move her head from side to side, and sing. After that, she getting no better, father fell a-laughing and a-singing; and then there was only I to give them both water, and they both died.

FOURTH CHAPTER

WHEN I was lifted out of the cellar by two men, of whom one came peeping down alone first, and ran away and brought the other, I could hardly bear the light of the street. I was sitting in the road-way, blinking at it, and at a ring of people collected around me, but not close to me, when, true to my character of worldly little devil, I broke silence by saying, ‘I am hungry and thirsty!’

‘Does he know they are dead?’ asked one of another.

‘Do you know your father and mother are both dead of fever?’ asked a third of me severely.

‘I don’t know what it is to be dead. I supposed it meant that, when the cup rattled against their teeth, and the water spilt over them. I am hungry and thirsty.’ That was all I had to say about it.

The ring of people widened outward from the inner side as I looked around me; and I smelt vinegar, and what I know to be camphor, thrown in towards where I sat. Presently some one put a great vessel of smoking vinegar on the ground near me; and then they all looked at me in silent horror as I ate and drank of what was brought for me. I knew at the time they had a horror of me, but I couldn’t help it.

I was still eating and drinking, and a murmur of discussion had begun to arise respecting what was to be done with me next, when I heard a cracked voice somewhere in the ring say, ‘My name is Hawkyard, Mr. Verity Hawkyard, of West Bromwich.’ Then the ring split in one place; and a yellow-faced, peak-nosed gentleman, clad all in iron-gray to his gaiters, pressed forward with a policeman and another official of some sort. He came forward close to the vessel of smoking vinegar; from which he sprinkled himself carefully, and me copiously.

‘He had a grandfather at Birmingham, this young boy, who is just dead too,’ said Mr. Hawkyard.

I turned my eyes upon the speaker, and said in a ravening manner, ‘Where’s his houses?’

‘Hah! Horrible worldliness on the edge of the grave,’ said Mr. Hawkyard, casting more of the vinegar over me, as if to get my devil out of me. ‘I have undertaken a slight -- a very slight -- trust in behalf of this boy; quite a voluntary trust: a matter of mere honour, if not of mere sentiment: still I have taken it upon myself, and it shall be (O, yes, it shall be!) discharged.’

The bystanders seemed to form an opinion of this gentleman much more favourable than their opinion of me.

‘He shall be taught,’ said Mr. Hawkyard, ‘(O, yes, he shall be taught!) but what is to be done with him for the present? He may be infected. He may disseminate infection.’ The ring widened considerably. ‘What is to be done with him?’

He held some talk with the two officials. I could distinguish no word save ‘Farm-house.’ There was another sound several times repeated, which was wholly meaningless in my ears then, but which I knew afterwards to be ‘Hoghton Towers.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Hawkyard. ‘I think that sounds promising; I think that sounds hopeful. And
he can be put by himself in a ward, for a night or two, you say?"

It seemed to be the police-officer who had said so; for it was he who replied, Yes! It was he, too, who finally took me by the arm, and walked me before him through the streets, into a whitewashed room in a bare building, where I had a chair to sit in, a table to sit at, an iron bedstead and good mattress to lie upon, and a rug and blanket to cover me. Where I had enough to eat too, and was shown how to clean the tin porringer in which it was conveyed to me, until it was as good as a looking-glass. Here, likewise, I was put in a bath, and had new clothes brought to me; and my old rags were burnt, and I was camphored and vinegared and disinfected in a variety of ways.

When all this was done, -- I don't know in how many days or how few, but it matters not, -- Mr. Hawkyard stepped in at the door, remaining close to it, and said, 'Go and stand against the opposite wall, George Silverman. As far off as you can. That'll do. How do you feel?'

I told him that I didn't feel cold, and didn't feel hungry, and didn't feel thirsty. That was the whole round of human feelings, as far as I knew, except the pain of being beaten.

'Well,' said he, 'you are going, George, to a healthy farm-house to be purified. Keep in the air there as much as you can. Live an out-of-door life there, until you are fetched away. You had better not say much -- in fact, you had better be very careful not to say anything -- about what your parents died of, or they might not like to take you in. Behave well, and I'll put you to school; O, yes! I'll put you to school, though I'm not obligated to do it. I am a servant of the Lord, George; and I have been a good servant to him, I have, these five-and-thirty years. The Lord has had a good servant in me, and he knows it.'

What I then supposed him to mean by this, I cannot imagine. As little do I know when I began to comprehend that he was a prominent member of some obscure denomination or congregation, every member of which held forth to the rest when so inclined, and among whom he was called Brother Hawkyard. It was enough for me to know, on that day in the ward, that the farmer's cart was waiting for me at the street corner. I was not slow to get into it; for it was the first ride I ever had in my life.

It made me sleepy, and I slept. First, I stared at Preston streets as long as they lasted; and, meanwhile, I may have had some small dumb wondering within me whereabouts our cellar was; but I doubt it. Such a worldly little devil was I, that I took no thought who would bury father and mother, or where they would be buried, or when. The question whether the eating and drinking by day, and the covering by night, would be as good at the farm-house as at the ward superseded those questions.

The jolting of the cart on a loose stony road awoke me; and I found that we were mounting a steep hill, where the road was a rutty by-road through a field. And so, by fragments of an ancient terrace, and by some rugged outbuildings that had once been fortified, and passing under a ruined gateway we came to the old farm-house in the thick stone wall outside the old quadrangle of Hoghton Towers: which I looked at like a stupid savage, seeing no special why, seeing no antiquity in; assuming all farm-houses to resemble it; assigning the decay I noticed to the one potent cause of all ruin that I knew, -- poverty; eyeing the pigeons in their flights, the cattle in their stalls, the ducks in the pond, and the fowls pecking about the yard, with a hungry hope that plenty of them might be killed for dinner while I stayed there; wondering whether the scrubbed dairy vessels, drying in the sunlight, could be goodly porringers out of which the master ate his belly-filling food, and which he polished when he had done, according to my ward experience; shrinkingly doubtful whether the shadows, passing over that airy height on the bright spring day, were not something in the nature of frowns, -- sordid, afraid, unadmiring, -- a small brute to shudder at.

To that time I had never had the faintest impression of duty. I had had no knowledge whatever that there was anything lovely in this life. When I had occasionally slunk up the cellar-steps into the street, and gazed in at shop-windows, I had done so with no higher feelings than we may suppose to animate a mangy young dog or wolf-cub. It is equally the fact that I had never been alone, in the sense of holding unselfish converse with myself. I had been solitary often enough, but nothing better.

Such was my condition when I sat down to my dinner that day, in the kitchen of the old
farm-house. Such was my condition when I lay on my bed in the old farm-house that night, stretched out opposite the narrow mullioned window, in the cold light of the moon, like a young vampire.

FIFTH CHAPTER

WHAT do I know of Hoghton Towers? Very little; for I have been gratefully unwilling to disturb my first impressions. A house, centuries old, on high ground a mile or so removed from the road between Preston and Blackburn, where the first James of England, in his hurry to make money by making baronets, perhaps made some of those remunerative dignitaries. A house, centuries old, deserted and falling to pieces, its woods and gardens long since grass-land or ploughed up, the Rivers Ribble and Darwen glancing below it, and a vague haze of smoke, against which not even the supernatural prescience of the first Stuart could foresee a counter-blast, hinting at steam-power, powerful in two distances.

What did I know then of Hoghton Towers? When I first peeped in at the gate of the lifeless quadrangle, and started from the mouldering statue becoming visible to me like its guardian ghost; when I stole round by the back of the farm-house, and got in among the ancient rooms, many of them with their floors and ceilings falling, the beams and rafters hanging dangerously down, the plaster dropping as I trod, the oaken panels stripped away, the windows half walled up, half broken; when I discovered a gallery commanding the old kitchen, and looked down between balustrades upon a massive old table and benches, fearing to see I know not what dead-alive creatures come in and seat themselves, and look up with I know not what dreadful eyes, or lack of eyes, at me; when all over the house I was awed by gaps and chinks where the sky stared sorrowfully at me, where the birds passed, and the ivy rustled, and the stains of winter weather blotched the rotten floors; when down at the bottom of dark pits of staircase, into which the stairs had sunk, green leaves trembled, butterflies fluttered, and bees hummed in and out through the broken door-ways; when encircling the whole ruin were sweet scents, and sights of fresh green growth, and ever-renewing life, that I had never dreamed of, -- I say, when I passed into such clouded perception of these things as my dark soul could compass, what did I know then of Hoghton Towers?

I have written that the sky stared sorrowfully at me. Therein have I anticipated the answer. I knew that all these things looked sorrowfully at me; that they seemed to sigh or whisper, not without pity for me, 'Alas! poor worldly little devil!' There were two or three rats at the bottom of one of the smaller pits of broken staircase when I craned over and looked in. They were scuffling for some prey that was there; and, when they started and hid themselves close together in the dark, I thought of the old life (it had grown old already) in the cellar.

How not to be this worldly little devil? how not to have a repugnance towards myself as I had towards the rats? I hid in a corner of one of the smaller chambers, frightened at myself, and crying (it was the first time I had ever cried for any cause not purely physical), and I tried to think about it. One of the farm-ploughs came into my range of view just then; and it seemed to help me as it went on with its two horses up and down the field so peacefully and quietly.

There was a girl of about my own age in the farm-house family, and she sat opposite to me at the narrow table at meal-times. It had come into my mind, at our first dinner, that she might take the fever from me. The thought had not disquieted me then. I had only speculated how she would look under the altered circumstances, and whether she would die. But it came into my mind now, that I might try to prevent her taking the fever by keeping away from her. I knew I should have but scrambling board if I did; so much the less worldly and less devilish the deed would be, I thought.

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From that hour, I withdrew myself at early morning into secret corners of the ruined house, and remained hidden there until she went to bed. At first, when meals were ready, I used to hear them calling me; and then my resolution weakened. But I strengthened it again by going farther off into the ruin, and getting out of hearing. I often watched for her at the dim windows; and, when I saw that she was fresh and rosy, felt much happier.

Out of this holding her in my thoughts, to the humanising of myself, I suppose some
childish love arose within me. I felt, in some sort, dignified by the pride of protecting her, -- by the pride of making the sacrifice for her. As my heart swelled with that new feeling, it insensibly softened about mother and father. It seemed to have been frozen before, and now to be thawed. The old ruin and all the lovely things that haunted it were not sorrowful for me only, but sorrowful for mother and father as well. Therefore did I cry again, and often too.

The farm-house family conceived me to be of a morose temper, and were very short with me; though they never stinted me in such broken fare as was to be got out of regular hours. One night when I lifted the kitchen latch at my usual time, Sylvia (that was her pretty name) had but just gone out of the room. Seeing her ascending the opposite stairs, I stood still at the door. She had heard the clink of the latch, and looked round.

‘George,’ she called to me in a pleased voice, ‘to-morrow is my birthday; and we are to have a fiddler, and there’s a party of boys and girls coming in a cart, and we shall dance. I invite you. Be sociable for once, George.’

‘I am very sorry, miss,’ I answered; ‘but I -- but, no; I can’t come.’

‘You are a disagreeable, ill-humoured lad,’ she returned disdainfully; ‘and I ought not to have asked you. I shall never speak to you again.’

As I stood with my eyes fixed on the fire, after she was gone, I felt that the farmer bent his brows upon me.

‘Eh, lad!’ said he; ‘Sylvy’s right. You’re as moody and broody a lad as never I set eyes on yet.’

I tried to assure him that I meant no harm; but he only said coldly, ‘Maybe not, maybe not! There, get thy supper, get thy supper; and then thou canst sulk to thy heart’s content again.’

Ah! if they could have seen me next day, in the ruin, watching for the arrival of the cart full of merry young guests; if they could have seen me at night, gliding out from behind the ghostly statue, listening to the music and the fall of dancing feet, and watching the lighted farm-house windows from the quadrangle when all the ruin was dark; if they could have read my heart, as I crept up to bed by the back way, comforting myself with the reflection, ‘They will take no hurt from me,’ -- they would not have thought mine a morose or an unsocial nature.

It was in these ways that I began to form a shy disposition; to be of a timidly silent character under misconstruction; to have an inexpressible, perhaps a morbid, dread of ever being sordid or worldly. It was in these ways that my nature came to shape itself to such a mould, even before it was affected by the influences of the studious and retired life of a poor scholar.

SIXTH CHAPTER

BROTHER HAWKYARD (as he insisted on my calling him) put me to school, and told me to work my way. ‘You are all right, George,’ he said. ‘I have been the best servant the Lord has had in his service for this five-and-thirty year (O, I have!); and he knows the value of such a servant as I have been to him (O, yes, he does!); and he’ll prosper your schooling as a part of my reward. That’s what HE’ll do, George. He’ll do it for me.’

From the first I could not like this familiar knowledge of the ways of the sublime, inscrutable Almighty, on Brother Hawkyard’s part. As I grew a little wiser, and still a little wiser, I liked it less and less. His manner, too, of confirming himself in a parenthesis, -- as if, knowing himself, he doubted his own word, -- I found distasteful. I cannot tell how much these dislikes cost me; for I had a dread that they were worldly.

As time went on, I became a Foundation-boy on a good foundation, and I cost Brother Hawkyard nothing. When I had worked my way so far, I worked yet harder, in the hope of ultimately getting a presentation to college and a fellowship. My health has never been strong (some vapour from the Preston cellar cleaves to me, I think); and what with much work and some weakness, I came again to be regarded -- that is, by my fellow-students -- as unsocial.

All through my time as a foundation-boy, I was within a few miles of Brother Hawkyard’s congregation; and whenever I was what we called a leave-boy on a Sunday, I went over there at his desire. Before the knowledge became forced upon me that outside their place of meeting these
brothers and sisters were no better than the rest of the human family, but on the whole were, to put the case mildly, as bad as most, in respect of giving short weight in their shops, and not speaking the truth. -- I say, before this knowledge became forced upon me, their prolix addresses, their inordinate conceit, their daring ignorance, their investment of the Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth with their own miserable meannesses and littlenesses, greatly shocked me. Still, as their term for the frame of mind that could not perceive them to be in an exalted state of grace was the ‘worldly’ state, I did for a time suffer tortures under my inquiries of myself whether that young worldly-devilish spirit of mine could secretly be lingering at the bottom of my non-appreciation.

Brother Hawkyard was the popular expounder in this assembly, and generally occupied the platform (there was a little platform with a table on it, in lieu of a pulpit) first, on a Sunday afternoon. He was by trade a drysalter. Brother Gimblet, an elderly man with a crabbed face, a large dog’s-eared shirt-collar, and a spotted blue neckerchief reaching up behind to the crown of his head, was also a drysalter and an expounder. Brother Gimblet professed the greatest admiration for Brother Hawkyard, but (I had thought more than once) bore him a jealous grudge.

Let whosoever may peruse these lines kindly take the pains here to read twice my solemn pledge, that what I write of the language and customs of the congregation in question I write scrupulously, literally, exactly, from the life and the truth.

On the first Sunday after I had won what I had so long tried for, and when it was certain that I was going up to college, Brother Hawkyard concluded a long exhortation thus:

‘Well, my friends and fellow-sinners, now I told you when I began, that I didn’t know a word of what I was going to say to you (and no, I did not!), but that it was all one to me, because I knew the Lord would put into my mouth the words I wanted.’

(‘That’s it!’ from Brother Gimblet.)

‘And he did put into my mouth the words I wanted.’

(‘So he did!’ from Brother Gimblet.)

‘And why?’

(‘Ah, let’s have that!’ from Brother Gimblet.)

‘Because I have been his faithful servant for five-and-thirty years, and because he knows it. For five-and-thirty years! And he knows it, mind you! I got those words that I wanted on account of my wages. I got ’em from the Lord, my fellow-sinners. Down! I said, “Here’s a heap of wages due; let us have something down, on account.” And I got it down, and I paid it over to you; and you won’t wrap it up in a napkin, nor yet in a towel, nor yet pocketankercher, but you’ll put it out at good interest. Very well. Now, my brothers and sisters and fellow-sinners, I am going to conclude with a question, and I’ll make it so plain (with the help of the Lord, after five-and-thirty years, I should rather hope!) as that the Devil shall not be able to confuse it in your heads, -- which he would be overjoyed to do.’

(‘Just his way. Crafty old blackguard!’ from Brother Gimblet.)

‘And the question is this, Are the angels learned?’

(‘Not they. Not a bit on it!’ from Brother Gimblet, with the greatest confidence.)

‘Not they. And where’s the proof? sent ready-made by the hand of the Lord. Why, there’s one among us here now, that has got all the learning that can be crammed into him. I got him all the learning that could be crammed into him. His grandfather (this I had never heard before) ‘was a brother of ours. He was Brother Parksop. That’s what he was. Parksop; Brother Parksop. His worldly name was Parksop, and he was a brother of this brotherhood. Then wasn’t he Brother Parksop?’

(‘Must be. Couldn’t help hisself!’ from Brother Gimblet.)

‘Well, he left that one now here present among us to the care of a brother-sinner of his (and that brother-sinner, mind you, was a sinner of a bigger size in his time than any of you; praise the Lord!), Brother Hawkyard. Me. I got him without fee or reward, -- without a morsel of myrrh, or frankincense, nor yet amber, letting alone the honeycomb, -- all the learning that could be crammed into him. Has it brought him into our temple, in the spirit? No. Have we had any ignorant brothers and sisters that didn’t know round O from crooked S, come in among us meanwhile? Many. Then
the angels are NOT learned; then they don’t so much as know their alphabet. And now, my friends
and fellow-sinners, having brought it to that, perhaps some brother present -- perhaps you, Brother
Gimblet -- will pray a bit for us?"

Brother Gimblet undertook the sacred function, after having drawn his sleeve across his
mouth, and muttered, ‘Well! I don’t know as I see my way to hitting any of you quite in the right
place neither.’ He said this with a dark smile, and then began to bellow. What we were specially to
be preserved from, according to his solicitations, was, despoilment of the orphan, suppression of
testamentary intentions on the part of a father or (say) grandfather, appropriation of the orphan’s
house-property, feigning to give in charity to the wronged one from whom we withheld his due; and
that class of sins. He ended with the petition, ‘Give us peace!’ which, speaking for myself, was
very much needed after twenty minutes of his bellowing.

Even though I had not seen him when he rose from his knees, steaming with perspiration,
glance at Brother Hawkyard, and even though I had not heard Brother Hawkyard’s tone of
congratulating him on the vigour with which he had roared, I should have detected a malicious
application in this prayer. Unformed suspicions to a similar effect had sometimes passed through
my mind in my earlier school-days, and had always caused me great distress; for they were worldly
in their nature, and wide, very wide, of the spirit that had drawn me from Sylvia. They were sordid
suspicions, without a shadow of proof. They were worthy to have originated in the unworthy cellars.
They were not only without proof, but against proof; for was I not myself a living proof of
what Brother Hawkyard had done? and without him, how should I ever have seen the sky look
sorrowfully down upon that wretched boy at Hoghton Towers?

Although the dread of a relapse into a stage of savage selfishness was less strong upon me as
I approached manhood, and could act in an increased degree for myself, yet I was always on my
guard against any tendency to such relapse. After getting these suspicions under my feet, I had been
troubled by not being able to like Brother Hawkyard’s manner, or his professed religion. So it came
about, that, as I walked back that Sunday evening, I thought it would be an act of reparation for any
such injury my struggling thoughts had unwillingly done him, if I wrote, and placed in his hands,
before going to college, a full acknowledgment of his goodness to me, and an ample tribute of
thanks. It might serve as an implied vindication of him against any dark scandal from a rival
brother and expounder, or from any other quarter.

Accordingly, I wrote the document with much care. I may add with much feeling too; for it
affected me as I went on. Having no set studies to pursue, in the brief interval between leaving the
Foundation and going to Cambridge, I determined to walk out to his place of business, and give it
into his own hands.

It was a winter afternoon, when I tapped at the door of his little counting-house, which was
at the farther end of his long, low shop. As I did so (having entered by the back yard, where casks
and boxes were taken in, and where there was the inscription, ‘Private way to the counting-
house’), a shopman called to me from the counter that he was engaged.

‘Brother Gimblet’ (said the shopman, who was one of the brotherhood) ‘is with him.’

‘Who is it?’ asked Brother Hawkyard, sharply.

‘George Silverman,’ I answered, holding the door open. ‘May I come in?’

Both brothers seemed so astounded to see me that I felt shyer than usual. But they looked
quite cadaverous in the early gaslight, and perhaps that accidental circumstance exaggerated the
expression of their faces.

‘What is the matter?’ asked Brother Hawkyard.

‘Ay! what is the matter?’ asked Brother Gimblet.

‘Nothing at all,’ I said, diffidently producing my document: ‘I am only the bearer of a letter
from myself.’

‘From yourself, George?’ cried Brother Hawkyard.

‘And to you,’ said I.
'And to me, George?'

He turned paler, and opened it hurriedly; but looking over it, and seeing generally what it was, became less hurried, recovered his colour, and said, ‘Praise the Lord!’

‘That’s it!’ cried Brother Gimblet. ‘Well put! Amen.’

Brother Hawkyard then said, in a livelier strain, ‘You must know, George, that Brother Gimblet and I are going to make our two businesses one. We are going into partnership. We are settling it now. Brother Gimblet is to take one clear half of the profits (O, yes! he shall have it; he shall have it to the last farthing).’

‘D.V.!’ said Brother Gimblet, with his right fist firmly clinched on his right leg.

‘There is no objection,’ pursued Brother Hawkyard, ‘to my reading this aloud, George?’

As it was what I expressly desired should be done, after yesterday’s prayer, I more than readily begged him to read it aloud. He did so; and Brother Gimblet listened with a crabbed smile.

‘It was in a good hour that I came here,’ he said, wrinkling up his eyes. ‘It was in a good hour, likewise, that I was moved yesterday to depict for the terror of evil-doers a character the direct opposite of Brother Hawkyard’s. But it was the Lord that done it: I felt him at it while I was perspiring.’

After that it was proposed by both of them that I should attend the congregation once more before my final departure. What my shy reserve would undergo, from being expressly preached at and prayed at, I knew beforehand. But I reflected that it would be for the last time, and that it might add to the weight of my letter. It was well known to the brothers and sisters that there was no place taken for me in THEIR paradise; and if I showed this last token of deference to Brother Hawkyard, notoriously in despite of my own sinful inclinations, it might go some little way in aid of my statement that he had been good to me, and that I was grateful to him. Merely stipulating, therefore, that no express endeavour should be made for my conversion, -- which would involve the rolling of several brothers and sisters on the floor, declaring that they felt all their sins in a heap on their left side, weighing so many pounds avoirdupois, as I knew from what I had seen of those repulsive mysteries, -- I promised.

Since the reading of my letter, Brother Gimblet had been at intervals wiping one eye with an end of his spotted blue neckerchief, and grinning to himself. It was, however, a habit that brother had, to grin in an ugly manner even when expounding. I call to mind a delighted snarl with which he used to detail from the platform the torments reserved for the wicked (meaning all human creation except the brotherhood), as being remarkably hideous.

I left the two to settle their articles of partnership, and count money; and I never saw them again but on the following Sunday. Brother Hawkyard died within two or three years, leaving all he possessed to Brother Gimblet, in virtue of a will dated (as I have been told) that very day.

Now I was so far at rest with myself, when Sunday came, knowing that I had conquered my own mistrust, and righted Brother Hawkyard in the jaundiced vision of a rival, that I went, even to that coarse chapel, in a less sensitive state than usual. How could I foresee that the delicate, perhaps the diseased, corner of my mind, where I winced and shrunk when it was touched, or was even approached, would be handled as the theme of the whole proceedings?

On this occasion it was assigned to Brother Hawkyard to pray, and to Brother Gimblet to preach. The prayer was to open the ceremonies; the discourse was to come next. Brothers Hawkyard and Gimblet were both on the platform; Brother Hawkyard on his knees at the table, unmusically ready to pray; Brother Gimblet sitting against the wall, grinningly ready to preach.

‘Let us offer up the sacrifice of prayer, my brothers and sisters and fellow-sinners.’ Yes; but it was I who was the sacrifice. It was our poor, sinful, worldly-minded brother here present who was wrestled for. The now-opening career of this our unawakened brother might lead to his becoming a minister of what was called ‘the church.’ That was what HE looked to. The church. Not the chapel, Lord. The church. No rectors, no vicars, no archdeacons, no bishops, no archbishops, in the chapel, but, O Lord! many such in the church. Protect our sinful brother from his love of lucre. Cleanse from our unawakened brother’s breast his sin of worldly-mindedness. The prayer said infinitely more in words, but nothing more to any intelligible effect.
Then Brother Gimblet came forward, and took (as I knew he would) the text, ‘My kingdom is not of this world.’ Ah! but whose was, my fellow-sinners? Whose? Why, our brother’s here present was. The only kingdom he had an idea of was of this world. (‘That’s it!’ from several of the congregation.) What did the woman do when she lost the piece of money? Went and looked for it. What should our brother do when he lost his way? (‘Go and look for it,’ from a sister.) Go and look for it, true. But must he look for it in the right direction, or in the wrong? (‘In the right,’ from a brother.) There spake the prophets! He must look for it in the right direction, or he couldn’t find it. But he had turned his back upon the right direction, and he wouldn’t find it. Now, my fellow-sinners, to show you the difference betwixt worldly-mindedness and unworldly-mindedness, betwixt kingdoms not of this world and kingdoms OF this world, here was a letter wrote by even our worldly-minded brother unto Brother Hawkyard. Judge, from hearing of it read, whether Brother Hawkyard was the faithful steward that the Lord had in his mind only t’other day, when, in this very place, he drew you the picter of the unfaithful one; for it was him that done it, not me. Don’t doubt that!

Brother Gimblet then groaned and bellowed his way through my composition, and subsequently through an hour. The service closed with a hymn, in which the brothers unanimously roared, and the sisters unanimously shrieked at me, That I by wiles of worldly gain was mocked, and they on waters of sweet love were rocked; that I with mammon struggled in the dark, while they were floating in a second ark.

I went out from all this with an aching heart and a weary spirit: not because I was quite so weak as to consider these narrow creatures interpreters of the Divine Majesty and Wisdom, but because I was weak enough to feel as though it were my hard fortune to be misrepresented and misunderstood, when I most tried to subdue any risings of mere worldliness within me, and when I most hoped that, by dint of trying earnestly, I had succeeded.

SEVENTH CHAPTER

MY timidity and my obscurity occasioned me to live a secluded life at college, and to be little known. No relative ever came to visit me, for I had no relative. No intimate friends broke in upon my studies, for I made no intimate friends. I supported myself on my scholarship, and read much. My college time was otherwise not so very different from my time at Hoghton Towers.

Knowing myself to be unfit for the noisier stir of social existence, but believing myself qualified to do my duty in a moderate, though earnest way, if I could obtain some small preferment in the Church, I applied my mind to the clerical profession. In due sequence I took orders, was ordained, and began to look about me for employment. I must observe that I had taken a good degree, that I had succeeded in winning a good fellowship, and that my means were ample for my retired way of life. By this time I had read with several young men; and the occupation increased my income, while it was highly interesting to me. I once accidentally overheard our greatest don say, to my boundless joy, ‘That he heard it reported of Silverman that his gift of quiet explanation, his patience, his amiable temper, and his conscientiousness made him the best of coaches.’ May my ‘gift of quiet explanation’ come more seasonably and powerfully to my aid in this present explanation than I think it will!

It may be in a certain degree owing to the situation of my college-rooms (in a corner where the daylight was sobered), but it is in a much larger degree referable to the state of my own mind, that I seem to myself, on looking back to this time of my life, to have been always in the peaceful shade. I can see others in the sunlight; I can see our boat’s crew and our athletic young men on the glistening water, or speckled with the moving lights of sunlit leaves; but I myself am always in the shadow looking on. Not unsympathetically, -- God forbid! -- but looking on alone, much as I looked at Sylvia from the shadows of the ruined house, or looked at the red gleam shining through the farmer’s windows, and listened to the fall of dancing feet, when all the ruin was dark that night in the quadrangle.

I now come to the reason of my quoting that laudation of myself above given. Without such reason, to repeat it would have been mere boastfulness.
Among those who had read with me was Mr. Fareway, second son of Lady Fareway, widow of Sir Gaston Fareway, baronet. This young gentleman’s abilities were much above the average; but he came of a rich family, and was idle and luxurious. He presented himself to me too late, and afterwards came to me too irregularly, to admit of my being of much service to him. In the end, I considered it my duty to dissuade him from going up for an examination which he could never pass; and he left college without a degree. After his departure, Lady Fareway wrote to me, representing the justice of my returning half my fee, as I had been of so little use to her son. Within my knowledge a similar demand had not been made in any other case; and I most freely admit that the justice of it had not occurred to me until it was pointed out. But I at once perceived it, yielded to it, and returned the money -

Mr. Fareway had been gone two years or more, and I had forgotten him, when he one day walked into my rooms as I was sitting at my books.

Said he, after the usual salutations had passed, ‘Mr. Silverman, my mother is in town here, at the hotel, and wishes me to present you to her.’

I was not comfortable with strangers, and I dare say I betrayed that I was a little nervous or unwilling. ‘For,’ said he, without my having spoken, ‘I think the interview may tend to the advancement of your prospects.’

It put me to the blush to think that I should be tempted by a worldly reason, and I rose immediately.

Said Mr. Fareway, as we went along, ‘Are you a good hand at business?’

‘I think not,’ said I.

Said Mr. Fareway then, ‘My mother is.’

‘Truly?’ said I.

‘Yes: my mother is what is usually called a managing woman. Doesn’t make a bad thing, for instance, even out of the spendthrift habits of my eldest brother abroad. In short, a managing woman. This is in confidence.’

He had never spoken to me in confidence, and I was surprised by his doing so. I said I should respect his confidence, of course, and said no more on the delicate subject. We had but a little way to walk, and I was soon in his mother’s company. He presented me, shook hands with me, and left us two (as he said) to business.

I saw in my Lady Fareway a handsome, well-preserved lady of somewhat large stature, with a steady glare in her great round dark eyes that embarrassed me.

Said my lady, ‘I have heard from my son, Mr. Silverman, that you would be glad of some preferment in the church.’ I gave my lady to understand that was so.

‘I don’t know whether you are aware,’ my lady proceeded, ‘that we have a presentation to a living? I say WE have; but, in point of fact, I have.

I gave my lady to understand that I had not been aware of this.

Said my lady, ‘So it is: indeed I have two presentations, -- one to two hundred a year, one to six. Both livings are in our county, -- North Devonshire, -- as you probably know. The first is vacant. Would you like it?’

What with my lady’s eyes, and what with the suddenness of this proposed gift, I was much confused.

‘I am sorry it is not the larger presentation,’ said my lady, rather coldly; ‘though I will not, Mr. Silverman, pay you the bad compliment of supposing that YOU are, because that would be mercenary, -- and mercenary I am persuaded you are not.’

Said I, with my utmost earnestness, ‘Thank you, Lady Fareway, thank you, thank you! I should be deeply hurt if I thought I bore the character.’

‘Naturally,’ said my lady. ‘Always detestable, but particularly in a clergyman. You have not said whether you will like the living?’

With apologies for my remissness or indistinctness, I assured my lady that I accepted it most readily and gratefully. I added that I hoped she would not estimate my appreciation of the generosity of her choice by my flow of words; for I was not a ready man in that respect when taken
by surprise or touched at heart.

‘The affair is concluded,’ said my lady; ‘concluded. You will find the duties very light, Mr. Silverman. Charming house; charming little garden, orchard, and all that. You will be able to take pupils. By the bye! No: I will return to the word afterwards. What was I going to mention, when it put me out?’

My lady stared at me, as if I knew. And I didn’t know. And that perplexed me afresh.

Said my lady, after some consideration, ‘O, of course, how very dull of me! The last incumbent, -- least mercenary man I ever saw, -- in consideration of the duties being so light and the house so delicious, couldn’t rest, he said, unless I permitted him to help me with my correspondence, accounts, and various little things of that kind; nothing in themselves, but which it worries a lady to cope with. Would Mr. Silverman also like to -? Or shall I -?’ I hastened to say that my poor help would be always at her ladyship’s service.

‘I am absolutely blessed,’ said my lady, casting up her eyes (and so taking them off me for one moment), ‘in having to do with gentlemen who cannot endure an approach to the idea of being mercenary!’ She shivered at the word. ‘And now as to the pupil.’

‘The -?’ I was quite at a loss.

‘Mr. Silverman, you have no idea what she is. She is,’ said my lady, laying her touch upon my coat-sleeve, ‘I do verily believe, the most extraordinary girl in this world. Already knows more Greek and Latin than Lady Jane Grey. And taught herself! Has not yet, remember, derived a moment’s advantage from Mr. Silverman’s classical acquirements. To say nothing of mathematics, which she is bent upon becoming versed in, and in which (as I hear from my son and others) Mr. Silverman’s reputation is so deservedly high!’

Under my lady’s eyes I must have lost the clue, I felt persuaded; and yet I did not know where I could have dropped it.

‘Adelina,’ said my lady, ‘is my only daughter. If I did not feel quite convinced that I am not blinded by a mother’s partiality; unless I was absolutely sure that when you know her, Mr. Silverman, you will esteem it a high and unusual privilege to direct her studies, -- I should introduce a mercenary element into this conversation, and ask you on what terms –’

I entreated my lady to go no further. My lady saw that I was troubled, and did me the honour to comply with my request.

EIGHTH CHAPTER

EVERYTHING in mental acquisition that her brother might have been, if he would, and everything in all gracious charms and admirable qualities that no one but herself could be, -- this was Adelina.

I will not expatiate upon her beauty; I will not expatiate upon her intelligence, her quickness of perception, her powers of memory, her sweet consideration, from the first moment, for the slow-paced tutor who ministered to her wonderful gifts. I was thirty then; I am over sixty now: she is ever present to me in these hours as she was in those, bright and beautiful and young, wise and fanciful and good.

When I discovered that I loved her, how can I say? In the first day? in the first week? in the first month? Impossible to trace. If I be (as I am) unable to represent to myself any previous period of my life as quite separable from her attracting power, how can I answer for this one detail?

Whensoever I made the discovery, it laid a heavy burden on me. And yet, comparing it with the far heavier burden that I afterwards took up, it does not seem to me now to have been very hard to bear. In the knowledge that I did love her, and that I should love her while my life lasted, and that I was ever to hide my secret deep in my own breast, and she was never to find it, there was a kind of sustaining joy or pride, or comfort, mingled with my pain.

But later on, -- say, a year later on, -- when I made another discovery, then indeed my suffering and my struggle were strong. That other discovery was -

These words will never see the light, if ever, until my heart is dust; until her bright spirit has returned to the regions of which, when imprisoned here, it surely retained some unusual glimpse of
remembrance; until all the pulses that ever beat around us shall have long been quiet; until all the fruit of all the tiny victories and defeats achieved in our little breasts shall have withered away. That discovery was that she loved me.

She may have enhanced my knowledge, and loved me for that; she may have over-valued my discharge of duty to her, and loved me for that; she may have refined upon a playful compassion which she would sometimes show for what she called my want of wisdom, according to the light of the world’s dark lanterns, and loved me for that; she may -- she must -- have confused the borrowed light of what I had only learned, with its brightness in its pure, original rays; but she loved me at that time, and she made me know it.

Pride of family and pride of wealth put me as far off from her in my lady’s eyes as if I had been some domesticated creature of another kind. But they could not put me farther from her than I put myself when I set my merits against hers. More than that. They could not put me, by millions of fathoms, half so low beneath her as I put myself when in imagination I took advantage of her noble trustfulness, took the fortune that I knew she must possess in her own right, and left her to find herself, in the zenith of her beauty and genius, bound to poor rusty, plodding me.

No! Worldliness should not enter here at any cost. If I had tried to keep it out of other ground, how much harder was I bound to try to keep it out from this sacred place!

But there was something daring in her broad, generous character, that demanded at so delicate a crisis to be delicately and patiently addressed. And many and many a bitter night (O, I found I could cry for reasons not purely physical, at this pass of my life!) I took my course.

My lady had, in our first interview, unconsciously overstated the accommodation of my pretty house. There was room in it for only one pupil. He was a young gentleman near coming of age, very well connected, but what is called a poor relation. His parents were dead. The charges of his living and reading with me were defrayed by an uncle; and he and I were to do our utmost together for three years towards qualifying him to make his way. At this time he had entered into his second year with me. He was well-looking, clever, energetic, enthusiastic; bold; in the best sense of the term, a thorough young Anglo-Saxon.

I resolved to bring these two together.

NINTH CHAPTER

SAID I, one night, when I had conquered myself, ‘Mr. Granville,’ -- Mr. Granville Wharton his name was, -- ‘I doubt if you have ever yet so much as seen Miss Fareway.’

‘Well, sir,’ returned he, laughing, ‘you see her so much yourself, that you hardly leave another fellow a chance of seeing her.’

‘I am her tutor, you know,’ said I.

And there the subject dropped for that time. But I so contrived as that they should come together shortly afterwards. I had previously so contrived as to keep them asunder; for while I loved her, -- I mean before I had determined on my sacrifice, -- a lurking jealousy of Mr. Granville lay within my unworthy breast.

It was quite an ordinary interview in the Fareway Park but they talked easily together for some time: like takes to like, and they had many points of resemblance. Said Mr. Granville to me, when he and I sat at our supper that night, ‘Miss Fareway is remarkably beautiful, sir, remarkably engaging. Don’t you think so?’ ‘I think so,’ said I. And I stole a glance at him, and saw that he had reddened and was thoughtful. I remember it most vividly, because the mixed feeling of grave pleasure and acute pain that the slight circumstance caused me was the first of a long, long series of such mixed impressions under which my hair turned slowly gray.

I had not much need to feign to be subdued; but I counterfeited to be older than I was in all respects (Heaven knows! my heart being all too young the while), and feigned to be more of a recluse and bookworm than I had really become, and gradually set up more and more of a fatherly manner towards Adelina. Likewise I made my tuition less imaginative than before; separated myself from my poets and philosophers; was careful to present them in their own light, and me, their lowly servant, in my own shade. Moreover, in the matter of apparel I was equally mindful; not
that I had ever been dapper that way; but that I was slovenly now. As I depressed myself with one hand, so did I labour to raise Mr. Granville with the other; directing his attention to such subjects as I too well knew interested her, and fashioning him (do not deride or misconstrue the expression, unknown reader of this writing; for I have suffered!) into a greater resemblance to myself in my solitary one strong aspect. And gradually, gradually, as I saw him take more and more to these thrown-out lures of mine, then did I come to know better and better that love was drawing him on, and was drawing her from me. So passed more than another year; every day a year in its number of my mixed impressions of grave pleasure and acute pain; and then these two, being of age and free to act legally for themselves, came before me hand in hand (my hair being now quite white), and entreated me that I would unite them together. ‘And indeed, dear tutor,’ said Adelina, ‘it is but consistent in you that you should do this thing for us, seeing that we should never have spoken together that first time but for you, and that but for you we could never have met so often afterwards.’ The whole of which was literally true; for I had availed myself of my many business attendances on, and conferences with, my lady, to take Mr. Granville to the house, and leave him in the outer room with Adelina. I knew that my lady would object to such a marriage for her daughter, or to any marriage that was other than an exchange of her for stipulated lands, goods, and moneys. But looking on the two, and seeing with full eyes that they were both young and beautiful; and knowing that they were alike in the tastes and acquirements that will outlive youth and beauty; and considering that Adelina had a fortune now, in her own keeping; and considering further that Mr. Granville, though for the present poor, was of a good family that had never lived in a cellar in Preston; and believing that their love would endure, neither having any great discrepancy to find out in the other, -- I told them of my readiness to do this thing which Adelina asked of her dear tutor, and to send them forth, husband and wife, into the shining world with golden gates that awaited them. It was on a summer morning that I rose before the sun to compose myself for the crowning of my work with this end; and my dwelling being near to the sea, I walked down to the rocks on the shore, in order that I might behold the sun in his majesty. The tranquillity upon the deep, and on the firmament, the orderly withdrawal of the stars, the calm promise of coming day, the rosy suffusion of the sky and waters, the ineffable splendour that then burst forth, attuned my mind afresh after the discords of the night. Methought that all I looked on said to me, and that all I heard in the sea and in the air said to me, ‘Be comforted, mortal, that thy life is so short. Our preparation for what is to follow has endured, and shall endure, for unimaginable ages.’ I married them. I knew that my hand was cold when I placed it on their hands clasped together; but the words with which I had to accompany the action I could say without faltering, and I was at peace. They being well away from my house and from the place after our simple breakfast, the time was come when I must do what I had pledged myself to them that I would do, -- break the intelligence to my lady. I went up to the house, and found my lady in her ordinary business-room. She happened to have an unusual amount of commissions to intrust to me that day; and she had filled my hands with papers before I could originate a word. ‘My lady,’ I then began, as I stood beside her table. ‘Why, what’s the matter?’ she said quickly, looking up. ‘Not much, I would fain hope, after you shall have prepared yourself, and considered a little.’ ‘Prepared myself; and considered a little! You appear to have prepared YOURSELF but indifferently, anyhow, Mr. Silverman.’ This mighty scornfully, as I experienced my usual embarrassment under her stare. Said I, in self-extenuation once for all, ‘Lady Fareway, I have but to say for myself that I have tried to do my duty.’ ‘For yourself?’ repeated my lady. ‘Then there are others concerned, I see. Who are they?’ I was about to answer, when she made towards the bell with a dart that stopped me, and said,
‘Why, where is Adelina?’

‘Forbear! be calm, my lady. I married her this morning to Mr. Granville Wharton.’

She set her lips, looked more intently at me than ever, raised her right hand, and smote me hard upon the cheek.

‘Give me back those papers! give me back those papers!’ She tore them out of my hands, and tossed them on her table. Then seating herself defiantly in her great chair, and folding her arms, she stabbed me to the heart with the unlooked-for reproach, ‘You worldly wretch!’

‘Worldly?’ I cried. ‘Worldly?’

‘This, if you please,’ she went on with supreme scorn, pointing me out as if there were some one there to see, ‘this, if you please, is the disinterested scholar, with not a design beyond his books! This, if you please, is the simple creature whom any one could overreach in a bargain! This, if you please, is Mr. Silverman! Not of this world; not he! He has too much simplicity for this world’s cunning. He has too much singleness of purpose to be a match for this world’s double-dealing. What did he give you for it?’

‘For what? And who?’

‘How much,’ she asked, bending forward in her great chair, and insultingly tapping the fingers of her right hand on the palm of her left, ‘how much does Mr. Granville Wharton pay you for getting him Adelina’s money? What is the amount of your percentage upon Adelina’s fortune? What were the terms of the agreement that you proposed to this boy when you, the Rev. George Silverman, licensed to marry, engaged to put him in possession of this girl? You made good terms for yourself, whatever they were. He would stand a poor chance against your keenness.’

Bewildered, horrified, stunned by this cruel perversion, I could not speak. But I trust that I looked innocent, being so.

‘Listen to me, shrewd hypocrite,’ said my lady, whose anger increased as she gave it utterance; ‘attend to my words, you cunning schemer, who have carried this plot through with such a practised double face that I have never suspected you. I had my projects for my daughter; projects for family connection; projects for fortune. You have thwarted them, and overreached me; but I am not one to be thwarted and overreached without retaliation. Do you mean to hold this living another month?’

‘Do you deem it possible, Lady Fareway, that I can hold it another hour, under your injurious words?’

‘Is it resigned, then?’

‘It was mentally resigned, my lady, some minutes ago.’

Don’t equivocate, sir. IS it resigned?’

‘Unconditionally and entirely; and I would that I had never, never come near it!’

‘A cordial response from me to THAT wish, Mr. Silverman! But take this with you, sir. If you had not resigned it, I would have had you deprived of it. And though you have resigned it, you will not get quit of me as easily as you think for. I will pursue you with this story. I will make this nefarious conspiracy of yours, for money, known. You have made money by it, but you have at the same time made an enemy by it. YOU will take good care that the money sticks to you; I will take good care that the enemy sticks to you.’

Then said I finally, ‘Lady Fareway, I think my heart is broken. Until I came into this room just now, the possibility of such mean wickedness as you have imputed to me never dawned upon my thoughts. Your suspicions –’

‘Suspicious! Pah!’ said she indignantly. ‘Certainties.’

‘Your certainties, my lady, as you call them, your suspicions as I call them, are cruel, unjust, wholly devoid of foundation in fact. I can declare no more; except that I have not acted for my own profit or my own pleasure. I have not in this proceeding considered myself. Once again, I think my heart is broken. If I have unwittingly done any wrong with a righteous motive, that is some penalty to pay.’

She received this with another and more indignant ‘Pah!’ and I made my way out of her room (I think I felt my way out with my hands, although my eyes were open), almost suspecting
that my voice had a repulsive sound, and that I was a repulsive object.

There was a great stir made, the bishop was appealed to, I received a severe reprimand, and narrowly escaped suspension. For years a cloud hung over me, and my name was tarnished.

But my heart did not break, if a broken heart involves death; for I lived through it.

They stood by me, Adelina and her husband, through it all. Those who had known me at college, and even most of those who had only known me there by reputation, stood by me too. Little by little, the belief widened that I was not capable of what was laid to my charge. At length I was presented to a college-living in a sequestered place, and there I now pen my explanation. I pen it at my open window in the summer-time, before me, lying in the churchyard, equal resting-place for sound hearts, wounded hearts, and broken hearts. I pen it for the relief of my own mind, not foreseeing whether or no it will ever have a reader.
PROLOGUE: Martin Hesselius, the German Physician

Through carefully educated in medicine and surgery, I have never practiced either. The study of each continues, nevertheless, to interest me profoundly. Neither idleness nor caprice caused my secession from the honorable calling which I had just entered. The cause was a very trifling scratch inflicted by a dissecting knife. This trifle cost me the loss of two fingers, amputated promptly, and the more painful loss of my health, for I have never been quite well since, and have seldom been twelve months together in the same place.

In my wanderings, I became acquainted with Dr. Martin Hesselius, a wanderer like myself, like me a physician, and like me an enthusiast in his profession. Unlike me in this, that his wanderings were voluntary, and he a man, if not of fortune, as we estimate fortune in England, at least in what our forefathers used to term “easy circumstances.” He was an old man when I first saw him; nearly five and thirty years my senior.

In Dr. Martin Hesselius, I found my master. His knowledge was immense, his grasp of a case was an intuition. He was the very man to inspire a young enthusiast, like me, with awe and delight. My admiration has stood the test of time and survived the separation of death. I am sure it was well-founded.

For nearly twenty years I acted as his medical secretary. His immense collection of papers he has left in my care, to be arranged, indexed and bound. His treatment of some of these cases is curious. He writes in two distinct characters. He describes what he saw and heard as an intelligent layman might, and when in this style of narrative he had seen the patient either through his own hall door, to the light of day, or through the gates of darkness to the caverns of the dead, he returns upon the narrative, and in the terms of his art and with all the force and originality of genius, proceeds to the work of analysis, diagnosis and illustration.

Here and there a case strikes me as of a kind to amuse or horrify a lay reader with an interest quite different from the peculiar one which it may possess for an expert. With slight modifications, chiefly of language, and of course a change of names, I copy the following. The narrator is Dr. Martin Hesselius. I find it among the voluminous notes of cases which he made during a tour in England about sixty-four years ago.

It is related in series of letters to his friend Professor Van Loo of Leyden. The professor was not a physician, but a chemist, and a man who read history and metaphysics and medicine, and had, in his day, written a play.

The narrative is therefore, if somewhat less valuable as a medical record, necessarily written in a manner more likely to interest an unlearned reader.

These letters, from a memorandum attached, appear to have been returned on the death of the professor, in 1819, to Dr. Hesselius. They are written, some in English, some in French, but the greater part in German. I am a faithful, though I am conscious, by no means a graceful translator, and although here and there I omit some passages, and shorten others, and disguise names, I have interpolated nothing.

CHAPTER I: Dr. Hesselius Relates How He Met the Rev. Mr. Jennings

The Rev. Mr. Jennings is tall and thin. He is middle-aged, and dresses with a natty, old-fashioned, high-church precision. He is naturally a little stately, but not at all stiff. His features, without being handsome, are well formed, and their expression extremely kind, but also shy.

I met him one evening at Lady Mary Haddock’s. The modesty and benevolence of his countenance are extremely prepossessing.

We were but a small party, and he joined agreeably enough in the conversation. He seems to
enjoy listening very much more than contributing to the talk; but what he says is always to the purpose and well said. He is a great favourite of Lady Mary's, who it seems, consults him upon many things, and thinks him the most happy and blessed person on earth. Little knows she about him.

The Rev. Mr. Jennings is a bachelor, and has, they say, sixty thousand pounds in the funds. He is a charitable man. He is most anxious to be actively employed in his sacred profession, and yet though always tolerably well elsewhere, when he goes down to his vicarage in Warwickshire, to engage in the actual duties of his sacred calling, his health soon fails him, and in a very strange way. So says Lady Mary.

There is no doubt that Mr. Jennings' health does break down in, generally, a sudden and mysterious way, sometimes in the very act of officiating in his old and pretty church at Kenlis. It may be his heart, it may be his brain. But so it has happened three or four times, or oftener, that after proceeding a certain way in the service, he has on a sudden stopped short, and after a silence, apparently quite unable to resume, he has fallen into solitary, inaudible prayer, his hands and his eyes uplifted, and then pale as death, and in the agitation of a strange shame and horror, descended trembling, and got into the vestry-room, leaving his congregation, without explanation, to themselves. This occurred when his curate was absent. When he goes down to Kenlis now, he always takes care to provide a clergyman to share his duty, and to supply his place on the instant should he become thus suddenly incapacitated.

When Mr. Jennings breaks down quite, and beats a retreat from the vicarage, and returns to London, where, in a dark street off Piccadilly, he inhabits a very narrow house, Lady Mary says that he is always perfectly well. I have my own opinion about that. There are degrees of course. We shall see.

Mr. Jennings is a perfectly gentlemanlike man. People, however, remark something odd. There is an impression a little ambiguous. One thing which certainly contributes to it, people I think don't remember; or, perhaps, distinctly remark. But I did, almost immediately. Mr. Jennings has a way of looking sidelong upon the carpet, as if his eye followed the movements of something there. This, of course, is not always. It occurs now and then. But often enough to give a certain oddity, as I have said, to his manner, and in this glance traveling along the floor there is something both shy and anxious.

A medical philosopher, as you are good enough to call me, elaborating theories by the aid of cases sought out by himself, and by him watched and scrutinized with more time at command, and consequently infinitely more minuteness than the ordinary practitioner can afford, falls insensibly into habits of observation, which accompany him everywhere, and are exercised, as some people would say, impertinently, upon every subject that presents itself with the least likelihood of rewarding inquiry.

There was a promise of this kind in the slight, timid, kindly, but reserved gentleman, whom I met for the first time at this agreeable little evening gathering. I observed, of course, more than I here set down; but I reserve all that borders on the technical for a strictly scientific paper.

I may remark, that when I here speak of medical science, I do so, as I hope some day to see it more generally understood, in a much more comprehensive sense than its generally material treatment would warrant. I believe the entire natural world is but the ultimate expression of that spiritual world from which, and in which alone, it has its life. I believe that the essential man is a spirit, that the spirit is an organized substance, but as different in point of material from what we ordinarily understand by matter, as light or electricity is; that the material body is, in the most literal sense, a vesture, and death consequently no interruption of the living man's existence, but simply his extrication from the natural body—a process which commences at the moment of what we term death, and the completion of which, at furthest a few days later, is the resurrection "in power."

The person who weighs the consequences of these positions will probably see their practical bearing upon medical science. This is, however, by no means the proper place for displaying the proofs and discussing the consequences of this too generally unrecognized state of facts.

In pursuance of my habit, I was covertly observing Mr. Jennings, with all my caution—
think he perceived it—and I saw plainly that he was as cautiously observing me. Lady Mary happening to address me by my name, as Dr. Hesselius, I saw that he glanced at me more sharply, and then became thoughtful for a few minutes.

After this, as I conversed with a gentleman at the other end of the room, I saw him look at me more steadily, and with an interest which I thought I understood. I then saw him take an opportunity of chatting with Lady Mary, and was, as one always is, perfectly aware of being the subject of a distant inquiry and answer.

This tall clergyman approached me by-and-by; and in a little time we had got into conversation. When two people, who like reading, and know books and places, having traveled, wish to discourse, it is very strange if they can’t find topics. It was not accident that brought him near me, and led him into conversation. He knew German and had read my Essays on Metaphysical Medicine which suggest more than they actually say.

This courteous man, gentle, shy, plainly a man of thought and reading, who, moving and talking among us, was not altogether of us, and whom I already suspected of leading a life whose transactions and alarms were carefully concealed, with an impenetrable reserve from, not only the world, but his best beloved friends, was cautiously weighing in his own mind the idea of taking a certain step with regard to me.

I penetrated his thoughts without his being aware of it, and was careful to say nothing which could betray to his sensitive vigilance my suspicions respecting his position, or my surmises about his plans respecting myself.

We chatted upon indifferent subjects for a time but at last he said:

“I was very much interested by some papers of yours, Dr. Hesselius, upon what you term Metaphysical Medicine—I read them in German, ten or twelve years ago—have they been translated?”

“No, I’m sure they have not—I should have heard. They would have asked my leave, I think.”

“I asked the publishers here, a few months ago, to get the book for me in the original German; but they tell me it is out of print.”

“So it is, and has been for some years; but it flatters me as an author to find that you have not forgotten my little book, although.” I added, laughing, “ten or twelve years is a considerable time to have managed without it; but I suppose you have been turning the subject over again in your mind, or something has happened lately to revive your interest in it.”

At this remark, accompanied by a glance of inquiry, a sudden embarrassment disturbed Mr. Jennings, analogous to that which makes a young lady blush and look foolish. He dropped his eyes, and folded his hands together uneasily, and looked oddly, and you would have said, guiltily, for a moment.

I helped him out of his awkwardness in the best way, by appearing not to observe it, and going straight on, I said: “Those revivals of interest in a subject happen to me often; one book suggests another, and often sends me back a wild-goose chase over an interval of twenty years. But if you still care to possess a copy, I shall be only too happy to provide you; I have still got two or three by me—and if you allow me to present one I shall be very much honoured.”

“You are very good indeed,” he said, quite at his ease again, in a moment: “I almost despaired—I don’t know how to thank you.”

“Pray don’t say a word; the thing is really so little worth that I am only ashamed of having offered it, and if you thank me any more I shall throw it into the fire in a fit of modesty.”

Mr. Jennings laughed. He inquired where I was staying in London, and after a little more conversation on a variety of subjects, he took his departure.

CHAPTER II: The Doctor Questions Lady Mary and She Answers

“I like your vicar so much, Lady Mary,” said I, as soon as he was gone. “He has read, traveled, and thought, and having also suffered, he ought to be an accomplished companion.”

“So he is, and, better still, he is a really good man,” said she. “His advice is invaluable about
my schools, and all my little undertakings at Dawlbridge, and he’s so painstaking, he takes so much trouble—you have no idea wherever he thinks he can be of use: he’s so good-natured and so sensible."

“It is pleasant to hear so good an account of his neighbourly virtues. I can only testify to his being an agreeable and gentle companion, and in addition to what you have told me, I think I can tell you two or three things about him,” said I.

“Really!”

“Yes, to begin with, he’s unmarried.”

“Yes, that’s right—go on.”

“He has been writing, that is he was, but for two or three years perhaps, he has not gone on with his work, and the book was upon some rather abstract subject—perhaps theology.”

“Well, he was writing a book, as you say: I’m not quite sure what it was about, but only that it was nothing that I cared for: very likely you are right, and he certainly did stop, yes.”

“And although he only drank a little coffee here tonight, he likes tea, at least, did like it extravagantly.”

“Yes, that’s quite true.”

“He drank green tea, a good deal, didn’t he?” I pursued.

“Well, that’s very odd! Green tea was a subject on which we used almost to quarrel.”

“But he has quite given that up,” said I.

“So he has.”

“And, now, one more fact. His mother or his father, did you know them?”

“Yes, both: his father is only ten years dead, and their place is near Dawlbridge. We knew them very well,” she answered.

“And now, having established my character as a conjurer, I think I must say good-night!” said I.

“But how did you find it out?”

“By the planets, of course, as the gypsies do,” I answered, and so, gaily we said good-night.

Next morning I sent the little book he had been inquiring after, and a note to Mr. Jennings, and on returning late that evening, I found that he had called at my lodgings, and left his card. He asked whether I was at home, and asked at what hour he would be most likely to find me.

Does he intend opening his case, and consulting me “professionally,” as they say? I hope so. I have already conceived a theory about him. It is supported by Lady Mary’s answers to my parting questions. I should like much to ascertain from his own lips. But what can I do consistently with good breeding to invite a confession? Nothing. I rather think he meditates one. At all events, my dear Van L., I shan’t make myself difficult of access; I mean to return his visit tomorrow. It will be only civil in return for his politeness, to ask to see him. Perhaps something may come of it. Whether much, little, or nothing, my dear Van L., you shall hear.

CHAPTER III: Dr. Hesselius Picks Up Something in Latin Books

Well, I have called at Blank Street.

On inquiring at the door, the servant told me that Mr. Jennings was engaged—very particularly with a gentleman, a clergyman from Kenlis, his parish in the country. Intending to
reserve my privilege, and to call again, I merely intimated that I should try another time, and had
turned to go, when the servant begged my pardon, and asked me, looking at me a little more
attentively than well bred persons of his order usually do, whether I was Dr. Hesselius; and, on
learning that I was, he said, “Perhaps then, sir, you would allow me to mention it to Mr. Jennings,
for I am sure he wishes to see you.”

The servant returned in a moment, with a message from Mr. Jennings, asking me to go into
his study, which was in effect his back drawing-room, promising to be with me in a very few
minutes.

This was really a study -- almost a library. The room was lofty, with two tall slender
windows, and rich dark curtains. It was much larger than I had expected, and stored with books on
every side, from the floor to the ceiling. The upper carpet -- for to my tread it felt that there were
two or three — was a Turkey carpet. My steps fell noiselessly. The bookcases standing out, placed
the windows, particularly narrow ones, in deep recesses. The effect of the room was, although
extremely comfortable, and even luxurious, decidedly gloomy, and aided by the silence, almost
oppressive. Perhaps, however, I ought to have allowed something for association. My mind had
connected peculiar ideas with Mr. Jennings. I stepped into this perfectly silent room, of a very silent
house, with a peculiar foreboding; and its darkness, and solemn clothing of books, for except where
two narrow looking-glasses were set in the wall, they were everywhere, helped this sombre feeling.

While awaiting Mr. Jennings’ arrival, I amused myself by looking into some of the books
with which his shelves were laden. Not among these, but immediately under them, with their backs
upward, on the floor, I lighted upon a complete set of Swedenborg’s “Arcana Cælestia,” in the
original Latin, a very fine folio set, bound in the natty livery which theology affects, pure vellum,
namely, gold letters, and carmine edges. There were paper markers in several of these volumes, I
raised and placed them, one after the other, upon the table, and opening where these papers were
placed, I read in the solemn Latin phraseology, a series of sentences indicated by a penciled line at
the margin. Of these I copy here a few, translating them into English.

“When man’s interior sight is opened, which is that of his spirit, then there appear the things
of another life, which cannot possibly be made visible to the bodily sight.”

“By the internal sight it has been granted me to see the things that are in the other life, more
clearly than I see those that are in the world. From these considerations, it is evident that external
vision exists from interior vision, and this from a vision still more interior, and so on.”

“There are with every man at least two evil spirits.”

“With wicked genii there is also a fluent speech, but harsh and grating. There is also among
them a speech which is not fluent, wherein the dissent of the thoughts is perceived as something
secretly creeping along within it.”

“The evil spirits associated with man are, indeed from the hells, but when with man they are
not then in hell, but are taken out thence. The place where they then are, is in the midst between
heaven and hell, and is called the world of spirits -- when the evil spirits who are with man, are in
that world, they are not in any infernal torment, but in every thought and affection of man, and so,
in all that the man himself enjoys. But when they are remitted into their hell, they return to their
former state.”

“If evil spirits could perceive that they were associated with man, and yet that they were
spirits separate from him, and if they could flow in into the things of his body, they would attempt
by a thousand means to destroy him; for they hate man with a deadly hatred.”

“Knowing, therefore, that I was a man in the body, they were continually striving to destroy
me, not as to the body only, but especially as to the soul; for to destroy any man or spirit is the very
delight of the life of all who are in hell; but I have been continually protected by the Lord. Hence it
appears how dangerous it is for man to be in a living consort with spirits, unless he be in the good of
faith.”

“Nothing is more carefully guarded from the knowledge of associate spirits than their being
thus conjoint with a man, for if they knew it they would speak to him, with the intention to destroy
“The delight of hell is to do evil to man, and to hasten his eternal ruin.”

A long note, written with a very sharp and fine pencil, in Mr. Jennings’ neat hand, at the foot of the page, caught my eye. Expecting his criticism upon the text, I read a word or two, and stopped, for it was something quite different, and began with these words, Deus misereatur mei. “May God compassionate me.” Thus warned of its private nature, I averted my eyes, and shut the book, replacing all the volumes as I had found them, except one which interested me, and in which, as men studious and solitary in their habits will do, I grew so absorbed as to take no cognisance of the outer world, nor to remember where I was.

I was reading some pages which refer to “representatives” and “correspondents,” in the technical language of Swedenborg, and had arrived at a passage, the substance of which is, that evil spirits, when seen by other eyes than those of their infernal associates, present themselves, by “correspondence,” in the shape of the beast (fera) which represents their particular lust and life, in aspect direful and atrocious. This is a long passage, and particularises a number of those bestial forms.

CHAPTER IV: Four Eyes Were Reading the Passage

I was running the head of my pencil-case along the line as I read it, and something caused me to raise my eyes.

Directly before me was one of the mirrors I have mentioned, in which I saw reflected the tall shape of my friend, Mr. Jennings, leaning over my shoulder, and reading the page at which I was busy, and with a face so dark and wild that I should hardly have known him.

I turned and rose. He stood erect also, and with an effort laughed a little, saying:

“I came in and asked you how you did, but without succeeding in awaking you from your book; so I could not restrain my curiosity, and very impertinently, I’m afraid, peeped over your shoulder. This is not your first time of looking into those pages. You have looked into Swedenborg, no doubt, long ago?”

“Oh dear, yes! I owe Swedenborg a great deal; you will discover traces of him in the little book on Metaphysical Medicine, which you were so good as to remember.”

Although my friend affected a gaiety of manner, there was a slight flush in his face, and I could perceive that he was inwardly much perturbed.

“I’m scarcely yet qualified, I know so little of Swedenborg. I’ve only had them a fortnight,” he answered, “and I think they are rather likely to make a solitary man nervous — that is, judging from the very little I have read — I don’t say that they have made me so,” he laughed; “and I’m so very much obliged for the book. I hope you got my note?”

I made all proper acknowledgments and modest disclaimers.

“I never read a book that I go with, so entirely, as that of yours,” he continued. “I saw at once there is more in it than is quite unfolded. Do you know Dr. Harley?” he asked, rather abruptly.

In passing, the editor remarks that the physician here named was one of the most eminent who had ever practiced in England.

I did, having had letters to him, and had experienced from him great courtesy and considerable assistance during my visit to England.

“I think that man one of the very greatest fools I ever met in my life,” said Mr. Jennings.

This was the first time I had ever heard him say a sharp thing of anybody, and such a term applied to so high a name a little startled me.

“Really! and in what way?” I asked.

“In his profession,” he answered.

I smiled.

“I mean this,” he said: “he seems to me, one half, blind — I mean one half of all he looks at is dark — preternaturally bright and vivid all the rest; and the worst of it is, it seems wilful. I can’t get him — I mean he won’t — I’ve had some experience of him as a physician, but I look on him as,
in that sense, no better than a paralytic mind, an intellect half dead. I'll tell you — I know I shall some time — all about it,” he said, with a little agitation. “You stay some months longer in England. If I should be out of town during your stay for a little time, would you allow me to trouble you with a letter?”

“I should be only too happy,” I assured him.

“Very good of you. I am so utterly dissatisfied with Harley.”

“A little leaning to the materialistic school,” I said.

“A mere materialist,” he corrected me; “you can’t think how that sort of thing worries one who knows better. You won’t tell any one — any of my friends you know — that I am hippish; now, for instance, no one knows — not even Lady Mary — that I have seen Dr. Harley, or any other doctor. So pray don’t mention it; and, if I should have any threatening of an attack, you’ll kindly let me write, or, should I be in town, have a little talk with you.”

I was full of conjecture, and unconsciously I found I had fixed my eyes gravely on him, for he lowered his for a moment, and he said:

“I see you think I might as well tell you now, or else you are forming a conjecture; but you may as well give it up. If you were guessing all the rest of your life, you will never hit on it.”

He shook his head smiling, and over that wintry sunshine a black cloud suddenly came down, and he drew his breath in, through his teeth as men do in pain:

“Sorry, of course, to learn that you apprehend occasion to consult any of us; but, command me when and how you like, and I need not assure you that your confidence is sacred.”

He then talked of quite other things, and in a comparatively cheerful way and after a little time, I took my leave.

CHAPTER V: Dr. Hesselius is Summoned to Richmond

We parted cheerfully, but he was not cheerful, nor was I. There are certain expressions of that powerful organ of spirit — the human face — which, although I have seen them often, and possess a doctor’s nerve, yet disturb me profoundly. One look of Mr. Jennings haunted me. It had seized my imagination with so dismal a power that I changed my plans for the evening, and went to the opera, feeling that I wanted a change of ideas.

I heard nothing of or from him for two or three days, when a note in his hand reached me. It was cheerful, and full of hope. He said that he had been for some little time so much better — quite well, in fact — that he was going to make a little experiment, and run down for a month or so to his parish, to try whether a little work might not quite set him up. There was in it a fervent religious expression of gratitude for his restoration, as he now almost hoped he might call it.

A day or two later I saw Lady Mary, who repeated what his note had announced, and told me that he was actually in Warwickshire, having resumed his clerical duties at Kenlis; and she added, “I begin to think that he is really perfectly well, and that there never was anything the matter, more than nerves and fancy; we are all nervous, but I fancy there is nothing like a little hard work for that kind of weakness, and he has made up his mind to try it. I should not be surprised if he did not come back for a year.”

Notwithstanding all this confidence, only two days later I had this note, dated from his house off Piccadilly:

DEAR SIR, — I have returned disappointed. If I should feel at all able to see you, I shall write to ask you kindly to call. At present, I am too low, and, in fact, simply unable to say all I wish to say. Pray don’t mention my name to my friends. I can see no one. By—and—by, please God, you shall hear from me. I mean to take a run into Shropshire, where some of my people are. God bless you! May we, on my return, meet more happily than I can now write.

About a week after this I saw Lady Mary at her own house, the last person, she said, left in town, and just on the wing for Brighton, for the London season was quite over. She told me that she had heard from Mr. Jenning’s niece, Martha, in Shropshire. There was nothing to be gathered from
her letter, more than that he was low and nervous. In those words, of which healthy people think so lightly, what a world of suffering is sometimes hidden!

Nearly five weeks had passed without any further news of Mr. Jennings. At the end of that time I received a note from him. He wrote:

“I have been in the country, and have had change of air, change of scene, change of faces, change of everything -- and in everything -- but myself. I have made up my mind, so far as the most irresolute creature on earth can do it, to tell my case fully to you. If your engagements will permit, pray come to me to-day, to-morrow, or the next day; but, pray defer as little as possible. You know not how much I need help. I have a quiet house at Richmond, where I now am. Perhaps you can manage to come to dinner, or to luncheon, or even to tea. You shall have no trouble in finding me out. The servant at Blank Street, who takes this note, will have a carriage at your door at any hour you please; and I am always to be found. You will say that I ought not to be alone. I have tried everything. Come and see.”

I called up the servant, and decided on going out the same evening, which accordingly I did.

He would have been much better in a lodging-house, or hotel, I thought, as I drove up through a short double row of sombre elms to a very old-fashioned brick house, darkened by the foliage of these trees, which overtopped, and nearly surrounded it. It was a perverse choice, for nothing could be imagined more triste and silent. The house, I found, belonged to him. He had stayed for a day or two in town, and, finding it for some cause insupportable, had come out here, probably because being furnished and his own, he was relieved of the thought and delay of selection, by coming here.

The sun had already set, and the red reflected light of the western sky illuminated the scene with the peculiar effect with which we are all familiar. The hall seemed very dark, but, getting to the back drawing-room, whose windows command the west, I was again in the same dusky light. I sat down, looking out upon the richly wooded landscape that glowed in the grand and melancholy light which was every moment fading. The corners of the room were already dark; all was growing dim, and the gloom was insensibly toning my mind, already prepared for what was sinister. I was waiting alone for his arrival, which soon took place. The door communicating with the front room opened, and the tall figure of Mr. Jennings, faintly seen in the ruddy twilight, came, with quiet stealthy steps, into the room.

We shook hands, and, taking a chair to the window, where there was still light enough to enable us to see each other’s faces, he sat down beside me, and, placing his hand upon my arm, with scarcely a word of preface began his narrative.

CHAPTER VI: How Mr. Jennings Met His Companion

The faint glow of the west, the pomp of the then lonely woods of Richmond, were before us, behind and about us the darkening room, and on the stony face of the sufferer for the character of his face, though still gentle and sweet, was changed rested that dim, odd glow which seems to descend and produce, where it touches, lights, sudden though faint, which are lost, almost without gradation, in darkness. The silence, too, was utter: not a distant wheel, or bark, or whistle from without; and within the depressing stillness of an invalid bachelor’s house.

I guessed well the nature, though not even vaguely the particulars of the revelations I was about to receive, from that fixed face of suffering that so oddly flushed stood out, like a portrait of Schalken’s, before its background of darkness.

“It began,” he said, “on the 15th of October, three years and eleven weeks ago, and two days -- I keep very accurate count, for every day is torment. If I leave anywhere a chasm in my narrative tell me.

“About four years ago I began a work, which had cost me very much thought and reading. It was upon the religious metaphysics of the ancients.”

“I know,” said I, “the actual religion of educated and thinking paganism, quite apart from
symbolic worship. A wide and very interesting field.”

“Yes, but not good for the mind -- the Christian mind, I mean. Paganism is all bound together in essential unity, and, with evil sympathy, their religion involves their art, and both their manners, and the subject is a degrading fascination and the Nemesis sure. God forgive me!

“I wrote a great deal; I wrote late at night. I was always thinking on the subject, walking about, wherever I was, everywhere. It thoroughly infected me. You are to remember that all the material ideas connected with it were more or less of the beautiful, the subject itself delightfully interesting, and I, then, without a care.”

He sighed heavily.

“I believe, that every one who sets about writing in earnest does his work, as a friend of mine phrased it, on something -- tea, or coffee, or tobacco. I suppose there is a material waste that must be hourly supplied in such occupations, or that we should grow too abstracted, and the mind, as it were, pass out of the body, unless it were reminded often enough of the connection by actual sensation. At all events, I felt the want, and I supplied it. Tea was my companion -- at first the ordinary black tea, made in the usual way, not too strong; but I drank a good deal, and increased its strength as I went on. I never, experienced an uncomfortable symptom from it. I began to take a little green tea. I found the effect pleasanter, it cleared and intensified the power of thought so, I had come to take it frequently, but not stronger than one might take it for pleasure. I wrote a great deal out here, it was so quiet, and in this room. I used to sit up very late, and it became a habit with me to sip my tea -- green tea -- every now and then as my work proceeded. I had a little kettle on my table, that swung over a lamp, and made tea two or three times between eleven o’clock and two or three in the morning, my hours of going to bed. I used to go into town every day. I was not a monk, and, although I spent an hour or two in a library, hunting up authorities and looking out lights upon my theme, I was in no morbid state as far as I can judge. I met my friends pretty much as usual and enjoyed their society, and, on the whole, existence had never been, I think, so pleasant before.

“I had met with a man who had some odd old books, German editions in mediaeval Latin, and I was only too happy to be permitted access to them. This obliging person’s books were in the City, a very out of the way part of it. I had rather out-stayed my intended hour, and, on coming out, seeing no cab near, I was tempted to get into the omnibus which used to drive past this house. It was darker than this by the time the bus had reached an old house, you may have remarked, with four poplars at each side of the door, and there the last passenger but myself got out. We drove along rather faster. It was twilight now. I leaned back in my corner next the door ruminating pleasantly.

The interior of the omnibus was nearly dark. I had observed in the corner opposite to me at the other side, and at the end next the horses, two small circular reflections, as it seemed to me of a reddish light. They were about two inches apart, and about the size of those small brass buttons that yachting men used to put upon their jackets. I began to speculate, as listless men will, upon this trifle, as it seemed. From what center did that faint but deep red light come, and from what -- glass beads, buttons, toy decorations -- was it reflected? We were lumbering along gently, having nearly a mile still to go. I had not solved the puzzle, and it became in another minute more odd, for these two luminous points, with a sudden jerk, descended nearer and nearer the floor, keeping still their relative distance and horizontal position, and then, as suddenly, they rose to the level of the seat on which I was sitting and I saw them no more.

My curiosity was now really excited, and, before I had time to think, I saw again these two dull lamps, again together near the floor; again they disappeared, and again in their old corner I saw them.

So, keeping my eyes upon them, I edged quietly up my own side, towards the end at which I still saw these tiny discs of red.

There was very little light in the bus. It was nearly dark. I leaned forward to aid my endeavor to discover what these little circles really were. They shifted position a little as I did so. I began now to perceive an outline of something black, and I soon saw, with tolerable distinctness, the outline of a small black monkey, pushing its face forward in mimicry to meet mine; those were its eyes, and I now dimly saw its teeth grinning at me.
“I drew back, not knowing whether it might not meditate a spring. I fancied that one of the passengers had forgot this ugly pet, and wishing to ascertain something of its temper, though not earing to trust my fingers to it, I poked my umbrella softly towards it. It remained immovable—up to it—through it. For-through it, and back and forward it passed, without the slightest resistance.

“I can’t, in the least, convey to you the kind of horror that I felt. When I had ascertained that the thing was an illusion, as I then supposed, there came a misgiving about myself and a terror that fascinated me in impotence to remove my gaze from the eyes of the brute for some moments. As I looked, it made a little skip back, quite into the corner, and I, in a panic, found myself at the door, having put my head out, drawing deep breaths of the outer air, and staring at the lights and tress we were passing, too glad to reassure myself of reality.

“I stopped the ‘bus and got out. I perceived the man look oddly at me as I paid him. I dare say there was something unusual in my looks and manner, for I had never felt so strangely before.”

CHAPTER VII: The Journey: First Stage

“When the omnibus drove on, and I was alone upon the road, I looked carefully round to ascertain whether the monkey had followed me. To my indescribable relief I saw it nowhere. I can’t describe easily what a shock I had received, and my sense of genuine gratitude on finding myself, as I supposed, quite rid of it.

“I had got out a little before we reached this house, two or three hundred steps. A brick wall runs along the footpath, and inside the wall is a hedge of yew, or some dark evergreen of that kind, and within that again the row of fine trees which you may have remarked as you came.

“This brick wall is about as high as my shoulder, and happening to raise my eyes I saw the monkey, with that stooping gait, on all fours, walking or creeping, close beside me, on top of the wall. I stopped, looking at it with a feeling of loathing and horror. As I stopped so did it. It sat up on the wall with its long hands on its knees looking at me. There was not light enough to see it much more than in outline, nor was it dark enough to bring the peculiar light of its eyes into strong relief. I still saw, however, that red foggy light plainly enough. It did not show its teeth, nor exhibit any sign of irritation, but seemed jaded and sulky, and was observing me steadily.

“I drew back into the middle of the road. It was an unconscious recoil, and there I stood, still looking at it. It did not move.

“With an instinctive determination to try something—any thing, I turned about and walked briskly towards town with askance look, all the time, watching the movements of the beast. It crept swiftly along the wall, at exactly my pace.

“Where the wall ends, near the turn of the road, it came down, and with a wiry spring or two brought itself close to my feet, and continued to keep up with me, as I quickened my pace. It was at my left side, so close to my leg that I felt every moment as if I should tread upon it.

“The road was quite deserted and silent, and it was darker every moment. I stopped dismayed and bewildered, turning as I did so, the other way—I mean, towards this house, away from which I had been walking. When I stood still, the monkey drew back to a distance of, I suppose, about five or six yards, and remained stationary, watching me.

“I had been more agitated than I have said. I had read, of course, as everyone has, something about “spectral illusions,” as you physicians term the phenomena of such cases. I considered my situation, and looked my misfortune in the face.

“These affections, I had read, are sometimes transitory and sometimes obstinate. I had read of cases in which the appearance, at first harmless, had, step by step, degenerated into something direful and insupportable, and ended by wearing its victim out. Still as I stood there, but for my bestial companion, quite alone, I tried to comfort myself by repeating again and again the assurance, “the thing is purely disease, a well-known physical affection, as distinctly as small-pox or neuralgia. Doctors are all agreed on that, philosophy demonstrates it. I must not be a fool. I’ve been sitting up too late, and I daresay my digestion is quite wrong, and, with God’s help, I shall be all right, and this is but a symptom of nervous dyspepsia.” Did I believe all this? Not one word of it, no more than any other miserable being ever did who is once seized and riveted in this satanic captivity.
Against my convictions, I might say my knowledge, I was simply bullying myself into a false courage.

"I now walked homeward. I had only a few hundred yards to go. I had forced myself into a sort of resignation, but I had not got over the sickening shock and the flurry of the first certainty of my misfortune.

"I made up my mind to pass the night at home. The brute moved close beside me, and I fancied there was the sort of anxious drawing toward the house, which one sees in tired horses or dogs, sometimes as they come toward home.

"I was afraid to go into town, I was afraid of any one’s seeing and recognizing me. I was conscious of an irrepressible agitation in my manner. Also, I was afraid of any violent change in my habits, such as going to a place of amusement, or walking from home in order to fatigue myself. At the hall door it waited till I mounted the steps, and when the door was opened entered with me.

"I drank no tea that night. I got cigars and some brandy and water. My idea was that I should act upon my material system, and by living for a while in sensation apart from thought, send myself forcibly, as it were, into a new groove. I came up here to this drawing-room. I sat just here. The monkey then got upon a small table that then stood there. It looked dazed and languid. An irrepressible uneasiness as to its movements kept my eyes always upon it. Its eyes were half closed, but I could see them glow. It was looking steadily at me. In all situations, at all hours, it is awake and looking at me. That never changes.

"I shall not continue in detail my narrative of this particular night. I shall describe, rather, the phenomena of the first year, which never varied, essentially. I shall describe the monkey as it appeared in daylight. In the dark, as you shall presently hear, there are peculiarities. It is a small monkey, perfectly black. It had only one peculiarity—a character of malignity—unfathomable malignity. During the first year it looked sullen and sick. But this character of intense malignity and vigilance was always underlying that sour languor. During all that time it acted as if on a plan of giving me as little trouble as was consistent with watching me. Its eyes were never off me. I have never lost sight of it, except in my sleep, light or dark, day or night, since it came here, excepting when it withdraws for some weeks at a time, unaccountably.

"In total dark it is visible as in daylight. I do not mean merely its eyes. It is all visible distinctly in a halo that resembles a glow of red embers, and which accompanies it in all its movements.

"When it leaves me for a time, it is always at night, in the dark, and in the same way. It grows at first uneasy, and then furious, and then advances towards me, grinning and shaking, its paws clenched, and, at the same time, there comes the appearance of fire in the grate. I never have any fire. I can’t sleep in the room where there is any, and it draws nearer and nearer to the chimney, quivering, it seems, with rage, and when its fury rises to the highest pitch, it springs into the grate, and up the chimney, and I see it no more.

"When first this happened, I thought I was released. I was now a new man. A day passed—a night—and no return, and a blessed week—a week—another week. I was always on my knees, Dr. Hesselius, always, thanking God and praying. A whole month passed of liberty, but on a sudden, it was with me again.”

CHAPTER VIII: The Second Stage

"It was with me, and the malignity which before was torpid under a sullen exterior, was now active. It was perfectly unchanged in every other respect. This new energy was apparent in its activity and its looks, and soon in other ways.

"For a time, you will understand, the change was shown only in an increased vivacity, and an air of menace, as if it were always brooding over some atrocious plan. Its eyes, as before, were never off me.”

"Is it here now?” I asked.

"No,” he replied, “it has been absent exactly a fortnight and a day—fifteen days. It has sometimes been away so long as nearly two months, once for three. Its absence always exceeds a
fortnight, although it may be but by a single day. Fifteen days having past since I saw it last, it may return now at any moment.”

“Is its return,” I asked, “accompanied by any peculiar manifestation?”

“Nothing—no,” he said. “It is simply with me again. On lifting my eyes from a book, or turning my head, I see it, as usual, looking at me, and then it remains, as before, for its appointed time. I have never told so much and so minutely before to any one.”

I perceived that he was agitated, and looking like death, and he repeatedly applied his handkerchief to his forehead; I suggested that he might be cured, and told him that I would call, with pleasure, in the morning, but he said:

“No, if you don’t mind hearing it all now. I have got so far, and I should prefer making one effort of it. When I spoke to Dr. Harley, I had nothing like so much to tell. You are a philosophic physician. You give spirit its proper rank. If the thing is real . . .”

He paused looking at me with agitated inquiry.

“We can discuss it by and by, and very fully. I will give you all I think,” I answered after an interval.

“Well--very well. If it is anything real, I say, it is prevailing, little by little, and drawing me more interiorly into hell. Optic nerves, he talked of. Ah! well--there are other nerves of communication. May God Almighty help me! You shall hear.

“Its power of action, I tell you, had increased. Its malice became, in a way, aggressive. About two years ago, some questions that were pending between me and the bishop having been settled, I went down to my parish in Warwickshire, anxious to find occupation in my profession. I was not prepared for what happened, although I have since thought I might have apprehended something like it. The reason of my saying so is this—”

He was beginning to speak with a great deal more effort and reluctance, and sighed often, and seemed at times nearly overcome. But at this time his manner was not agitated. It was more like that of a sinking patient, who has given himself up.

“Yes, but I will first tell you about Kenlis my parish.

“It was with me when I left this place for Dawlbridge. It was my silent traveling companion, and it remained with me at the vicarage. When I entered on the discharge of my duties, another change took place. The thing exhibited an atrocious determination to thwart me. It was with me in the church—in the reading desk—in the pulpit—within the communion rails. At last, it reached this extremity, that while I was reading to the congregation, it would spring upon the book and squat there, so that I was unable to see the page. This happened more than once.

“I left Dawlbridge for a time. I placed myself in Dr. Harley’s hands. I did everything he told me. he gave my case a great deal of thought. It interested him, I think. He seemed successful. For nearly three months I was perfectly free from a return. I began to think I was safe. With his full assent I returned to Dawlbridge.

“I traveled in a chaise. I was in good spirits. I was more--I was happy and grateful. I was returning—as I thought, delivered from a dreadful hallucination, to the scene of duties which I longed to enter upon. It was a beautiful sunny evening, everything looked serene and cheerful, and I was delighted. I remember looking out of the window to see the spire of my church at Kenlis among the trees, at the point where one has the earliest view of it. It is exactly where the little stream that bounds the parish passes under the road by a culvert, and where it emerges at the roadside, a stone with an old inscription is placed. As we passed this point, I drew my head in and sat down, and in the corner of the chaise was the monkey.

“For a moment I felt faint, and then quite wild with despair and horror, I called to the driver, and got out, and sat down at the road-side, and prayed to God silently for mercy. A despairing resignation supervened. My companion was with me as I reentered the vicarage. The same persecution followed. After a short struggle I submitted, and soon I left the place.

“I told you,” he said, “that all the beast has before this become in certain ways aggressive. I will explain a little. It seemed to be actuated by intense and increasing fury, whenever I said my prayers, or even meditated prayer. It amounted at last to a dreadful interruption. You will ask, how
could a silent immaterial phantom effect that? It was thus, whenever I meditated praying. It was always before me, and nearer and nearer.

"It used to spring on the table, on the back of the chair, on the chimney piece, and slowly swing itself from side to side, looking at me all the time. There is in its motion an indefinable power to dissipate thought, and to contract one's attention to that monotonity, till the ideas shrink, as it were, to a point, and at last to nothing—and unless I had started up, and shook off the catalepsy I have felt as if my mind were to a point of losing itself. There are no other ways," he sighed heavily; "thus, for instance, while I pray with my eyes closed, it comes closer and closer and closer, and I see it. I know it is not to be accounted for physically, but I do actually see it, though my lids are closed, and so it rocks my mind, as it were, and overpowers me, and I am obliged to rise from my knees. If you had ever yourself known this, you would be acquainted with desperation."

CHAPTER IX: The Third Stage

"I see, Dr. Hesselius, that you don't lose one word of my statement. I need not ask you to listen specially to what I am now going to tell you. They talk of the optic nerves, and of spectral illusions, as if the organ of sight was the only point assailable by the influences that have fastened upon me—I know better. For two years in my direful case that limitation prevailed. But as food is taken in softly at the lips, and then brought under the teeth, as the tip of the little finger caught in a mill crank will draw in the hand, and the arm, and the whole body, so the miserable mortal who has been once caught firmly by the end of the finest fibre of his nerve, is drawn in and in, by the enormous machinery of hell, until he is as I am. Yes, Doctor, as I am, for a while I talk to you, and implore relief, I feel that my prayer is for the impossible, and my pleading with the inexorable."

I endeavoured to calm his visibly increasing agitation, and told him that he must not despair. While we talked the night had overtaken us. The filmy moonlight was wide over the scene which the window commanded, and I said:

"Perhaps you would prefer having candles. This light, you know, is odd. I should wish you, as much as possible, under your usual conditions while I make my diagnosis, shall I call it?—otherwise I don't care."

"All lights are the same to me," he said; "except when I read or write, I care not if night were perpetual. I am going to tell you what happened about a year ago. The thing began to speak to me."

"Speak! How do you mean—speak as a man does, do you mean?"

"Yes; speak in words and consecutive sentences, with perfect coherence and articulation; but there is a peculiarity. It is not like the tone of a human voice. It is not by my ears it reaches me—no, it comes like a singing through my head.

"This faculty, the power of speaking to me, will be my undoing. It won't let me pray, it interrupts me with dreadful blasphemies. I dare not go on, I could not. Oh! Doctor, can the skill, and thought, and prayers of man avail me nothing!"

"You must promise me, my dear sir, not to trouble yourself with unnecessarily exciting thoughts; confine yourself strictly to the narrative of facts; and recollect, above all, that even if the thing that infests you be, you seem to suppose a reality with an actual in dependent life and will, yet it can have no power to hurt you, unless it be given from above: its access to your senses depends mainly upon your physical condition—this is, under God, your comfort and reliance: we are all alike environed. It is only that in your case, the 'paries,' the veil of the flesh, the screen, is a little out of repair, and sights and sounds are transmitted. We must enter on a new course, sir, be encouraged. I'll give to-night to the careful consideration of the whole case."

"You are very good, sir; you think it worth trying, you don't give me quite up; but, sir, you don't know, it is gaining such an influence over me: it orders me about, it is such a tyrant, and I'm growing so helpless. May God deliver me!"

"It orders you about—of course you mean by speech?"

"Yes, yes; it is always urging me to crimes, to injure others, or myself. You see, Doctor, the situation is urgent, it is indeed. When I was in Shropshire, a few weeks ago" (Mr. Jennings was
speaking rapidly and trembling now, holding my arm with one hand, and looking in my face), "I went out one day with a party of friends for a walk: my persecutor, I tell you, was with me at the time. I lagged behind the rest: the country near the Dee, you know, is beautiful. Our path happened to lie near a coal mine, and at the verge of the wood is a perpendicular shaft, they say, a hundred and fifty feet deep. My niece had remained behind with me — she knows, of course nothing of the nature of my sufferings. She knew, however, that I had been ill, and was low, and she remained to prevent my being quite alone. As we loitered slowly on together, the brute that accompanied me was urging me to throw myself down the shaft. I tell you now — oh, sir, think of it! — the one consideration that saved me from that hideous death was the fear lest the shock of witnessing the occurrence should be too much for the poor girl. I asked her to go on and walk with her friends, saying that I could go no further. She made excuses, and the more I urged her the firmer she became. She looked doubtful and frightened. I suppose there was something in my looks or manner that alarmed her; but she would not go, and that literally saved me. You had no idea, sir, that a living man could be made so abject a slave of Satan," he said, with a ghastly groan and a shudder.

There was a pause here, and I said, "You were preserved nevertheless. It was the act of God. You are in His hands and in the power of no other being: be therefore confident for the future."

CHAPTER X: Home

I made him have candles lighted, and saw the room looking cheery and inhabited before I left him. I told him that he must regard his illness strictly as one dependent on physical, though subtle physical causes. I told him that he had evidence of God's care and love in the deliverance which he had just described, and that I had perceived with pain that he seemed to regard its peculiar features as indicating that he had been delivered over to spiritual reprobation. Than such a conclusion nothing could be, I insisted, less warranted; and not only so, but more contrary to facts, as disclosed in his mysterious deliverance from that murderous influence during his Shropshire excursion. First, his niece had been retained by his side without his intending to keep her near him; and, secondly, there had been infused into his mind an irresistible repugnance to execute the dreadful suggestion in her presence.

As I reasoned this point with him, Mr. Jennings wept. He seemed comforted. One promise I exacted, which was that should the monkey at any time return, I should be sent for immediately; and, repeating my assurance that I would give neither time nor thought to any other subject until I had thoroughly investigated his case, and that to-morrow he should hear the result, I took my leave.

Before getting into the carriage I told the servant that his master was far from well, and that he should make a point of frequently looking into his room.

My own arrangements I made with a view to being quite secure from interruption.

I merely called at my lodgings, and with a traveling desk and carpet bag, set off in a hackney carriage for an inn about two miles out of town, called "The Horns," a very quiet and comfortable house, with good thick walls. And there I resolved, without the possibility of intrusion or distraction, to devote some hours of the night, in my comfortable sitting-room, to Mr. Jennings' ease, and so much of the morning as it might require.

(There occurs here a careful note of Dr. Hesselius' opinion on the case, and of the habits, dietary, and medicines which he prescribed. It is curious — some persons would say mystical. But, on the whole, I doubt whether it would sufficiently interest a reader of the kind I am likely to meet with, to warrant its being here reprinted. The whole letter was plainly written at the inn where he had hid himself for the occasion. The next letter is dated from his town lodgings.)

I left town for the inn where I slept last night at half-past nine, and did not arrive at my room in town until one o'clock this afternoon. I found a letter in Mr. Jennings' hand upon my table. It had not come by post, and, on inquiry, I learned that Mr. Jennings' servant had brought it, and on learning that I was not to return until to day, and that no one could tell him my address, he seemed very uncomfortable, and said his orders from his master were that he was not to return without an answer.

I opened the letter and read:
DEAR DR. HESSELIUS.—It is here. You had not been an hour gone when it returned. It is speaking. It knows all that has happened. It knows everything—it knows you, and is frantic and atrocious. It reviles. I send you this. It knows every word I have written—I write. This I promised; and I therefore write, but I fear very confused, very incoherently. I am so interrupted, disturbed.

Ever yours, sincerely yours,

ROBERT LYNDER JENNINGS.

“When did this come?” I asked.

“About eleven last night: the man was here again, and has been here three times to-day. The last time is about an hour since.”

Thus answered, and with the notes I had made upon his case in my pocket, I was in a few minutes driving towards Richmond, to see Mr. Jennings.

I by no means, as you perceive, despaired of Mr. Jennings’ case. He had himself remembered and applied, though quite in a mistaken way, the principle which I lay down in my Metaphysical Medicine, and which governs all such cases. I was about to apply it in earnest. I was profoundly interested, and very anxious to see and examine him while the “enemy” was actually present.

I drove up to the sombre house, and ran up the steps, and knocked. The door, in a little time, was opened by a tall woman in black silk. She looked ill, and as if she had been crying. She curtseyed, and heard my question, but she did not answer. She turned her face away, extending her hand towards two men who were coming down stairs; and thus having, as it were, tacitly made me over to them, she passed through a side door hastily and shut it.

The man who was nearest the hall, I at once accosted, but being now close to him, I was shocked to see that both his hands were covered with blood.

I drew back a little, and the man, passing downstairs, merely said in a low tone, “Here’s the servant, sir.”

The servant had stopped on the stairs, confounded and dumb at seeing me. He was rubbing his hands in a handkerchief, and it was steeped in blood.

“Jones, what is it? what has happened?” I asked, while a sickening suspicion overpowered me.

The man asked me to come up to the lobby. I was beside him in a moment, and, frowning and pallid, with contracted eyes, he told me the horror which I already half guessed.

His master had made away with himself.

I went upstairs with him to the room—I saw there I won’t tell you. He had cut his throat with his razor. It was a frightful gash. The two men had laid him on the bed, and composed his limbs. It had happened, as the immense pool of blood on the floor declared, at some distance between the bed and the window. There was carpet round his bed, and a carpet under his dressing table, but none on the rest of the floor, for the man said he did not like a carpet on his bedroom. In this sombre and now terrible room, one of the great elms that darkened the house was slowly moving the shadow of one of its great boughs upon this dreadful floor.

I beckoned to the servant, and we went downstairs together. I turned off the hall into an old-fashioned paneled room, and there standing, I heard all the servant had to tell. It was not a great deal.

“I concluded, sir, from your words, and looks, sir, as you left last night, that you thought my master was seriously ill. I thought it might be that you were afraid of a fit, or something. So I attended very close to your directions. He sat up late, till past three o’clock. He was not writing or reading. He was talking a great deal to himself, but that was nothing unusual. At about that hour I assisted him to undress, and left him in his slippers and dressing-gown. I went back softly in about half an hour. He was in his bed, quite undressed, and a pair of candles lighted on the table beside his bed. He was leaning on his elbow, and looking out at the other side of the bed when I came in. I asked him if he wanted anything, and he said No.

“I don’t know whether it was what you said to me, sir, or some thing a little unusual about
him, but I was uneasy, uncommon uneasy about him last night.

"In another half hour, or it might be a little more, I went up again. I did not hear him talking as before. I opened the door a little. The candles were both out, which was not usual. I had a bedroom candle, and I let the light in, a little bit, looking softly round. I saw him sitting in that chair beside the dressing-table with his clothes on again. He turned round and looked at me. I thought it strange he should get up and dress, and put out the candles to sit in the dark, that way.

But I only asked him again if I could do anything for him. He said, No, rather sharp, I thought. He said, "Tell me truth, Jones; why did you come again—you did not hear anyone cursing?" "No, sir," I said, wondering what he could mean.

"No," said he, after me, "of course, no," and I said to him, "Wouldn't it be well, sir, you went to bed? It's just five o'clock;" and he said nothing, but, "Very likely; good-night, Jones." so I went, sir, but in less than an hour I came again. The door was fast, and he heard me, and called as I thought from the bed to know what I wanted, and he desired me not to disturb him again. I lay down and slept for a little. It must have been between six and seven when I went up again. The door was still fast, and he made no answer, so I did not like to disturb him, and thinking he was asleep. I left him till nine. It was his custom to ring when he wished me to come, and I had no particular hour for calling him. I tapped very gently, and getting no answer, I stayed away a good while, supposing he was getting some rest then. It was not till eleven o'clock I grew really uncomfortable about him—for at the latest he was never, that I could remember, later than half past ten. I got no answer. I knocked and called, and still no answer. So not being able to force the door, I called Thomas from the stables, and together we forced it, and found him in the shocking way you saw."

Jones had no more to tell. Poor Mr. Jennings was very gentle, and very kind. All his people were fond of him. I could see that the servant was very much moved.

So, dejected and agitated, I passed from that terrible house, and its dark canopy of elms, and I hope I shall never see it more. While I write to you I feel like a man who has but half waked from a frightful and monotonous dream. My memory rejects the picture with incredulity and horror. Yet I know it is true. It is the story of the process of a poison, a poison which excites the reciprocal action of spirit and nerve, and paralyses the tissue that separates those cognate functions of the senses, the external and the interior. Thus we find strange bedfellows, and the mortal and immortal prematurely make acquaintance.

**CONCLUSION: A Word for Those Who Suffer**

My dear Van L—, you have suffered from an affection similar to that which I have just described. You twice complained of a return of it.

Who, under God, cured you? Your humble servant, Martin Hesselius. Let me rather adopt the more emphasized piety of a certain good old French surgeon of three hundred years ago: "I treated, and God cured you."

Come, my friend, you are not to be hippish. Let me tell you a fact.

I have met with, and treated, as my book shows, fifty-seven cases of this kind of vision, which I term indifferently "sublimated," "precocious," and "interior."

There is another class of affections which are truly termed—though commonly confused with those which I describe—spectral illusions. These latter I look upon as being no less simply curable than a cold in the head or a trifling dyspepsia.

It is those which rank in the first category that test our promptitude of thought. Fifty-seven such cases have I encountered, neither more nor less. And in how many of these have I failed? In no one single instance.

There is no one affliction of mortality more easily and certainly reducible, with a little patience, and a rational confidence in the physician. With these simple conditions, I look upon the cure as absolutely certain.

You are to remember that I had not even commenced to treat Mr. Jennings' case. I have not any doubt that I should have cured him perfectly in eighteen months, or possibly it might have extended to two years. Some cases are very rapidly curable, others extremely tedious. Every
intelligent physician who will give thought and diligence to the task, will effect a cure. You know
my tract on "The Cardinal Functions of the Brain." I there, by the evidence of innumerable facts,
prove, as I think, the high probability of a circulation arterial and venous in its mechanism, through
the nerves. Of this system, thus considered, the brain is the heart. The fluid, which is propagated
hence through one class of nerves, returns in an altered state through another, and the nature of that
fluid is spiritual, though not immaterial, any more than, as I before remarked, light or electricity are
so.

By various abuses, among which the habitual use of such agents as green tea is one, this
fluid may be affected as to its quality, but it is more frequently disturbed as to equilibrium. This
fluid being that which we have in common with spirits, a congestion found on the masses of brain
or nerve, connected with the interior sense, forms a surface unduly exposed, on which disembodied
spirits may operate: communication is thus more or less effectually established. Between this brain
circulation and the heart circulation there is an intimate sympathy. The seat, or rather the instrument
of exterior vision, is the eye. The seat of interior vision is the nervous tissue and brain, immediately
about and above the eyebrow. You remember how effectually I dissipated your pictures by the
simple application of iced eau-de-cologne. Few cases, however, can be treated exactly alike with
anything like rapid success. Cold acts powerfully as a repellant of the nervous fluid. Long enough
continued it will even produce that permanent insensibility which we call numbness, and a little
longer, muscular as well as sensational paralysis.

I have not, I repeat, the slightest doubt that I should have first dimmed and ultimately sealed
that inner eye which Mr. Jennings had inadvertently opened. The same senses are opened in
delirium tremens, and entirely shut up again when the overaction of the cerebral heart, and the
prodigious nervous congestions that attend it, are terminated by a decided change in the state of the
body. It is by acting steadily upon the body, by a simple process, that this result is produced — and
inevitably produced — I have never yet failed.

Poor Mr. Jennings made away with himself. But that catastrophe was the result of a totally
different malady, which, as it were, projected itself upon the disease which was established. His
case was, in the distinctive manner a complication, and the complaint under which he really
succumbed, was hereditary suicidal mania. Poor Mr. Jennings I cannot call a patient of mine, for I
had not even begun to treat his case, and he had not yet given me, I am convinced, his full and
unreserved confidence. If the patient do not array himself on the side of the disease, his cure is
certain.
CHAPTER I

The north road from Casterbridge is tedious and lonely, especially in winter-time. Along a part of its course it connects with Long-Ash Lane, a monotonous track without a village or hamlet for many miles, and with very seldom a turning. Unapprized wayfarers who are too old, or too young, or in other respects too weak for the distance to be traversed, but who, nevertheless, have to walk it, say, as they look wistfully ahead, ‘Once at the top of that hill, and I must surely see the end of Long-Ash Lane!’ But they reach the hilltop, and Long-Ash Lane stretches in front as mercilessly as before.

Some few years ago a certain farmer was riding through this lane in the gloom of a winter evening. The farmer’s friend, a dairyman, was riding beside him. A few paces in the rear rode the farmer’s man. All three were well horsed on strong, round-barrelled cobs; and to be well horsed was to be in better spirits about Long-Ash Lane than poor pedestrians could attain to during its passage.

But the farmer did not talk much to his friend as he rode along. The enterprise which had brought him there filled his mind; for in truth it was important. Not altogether so important was it, perhaps, when estimated by its value to society at large; but if the true measure of a deed be proportionate to the space it occupies in the heart of him who undertakes it, Farmer Charles Darton’s business to-night could hold its own with the business of kings.

He was a large farmer. His turnover, as it is called, was probably thirty thousand pounds a year. He had a great many draught horses, a great many milch cows, and of sheep a multitude. This comfortable position was, however, none of his own making. It had been created by his father, a man of a very different stamp from the present representative of the line.

Darton, the father, had been a one-idea’d character, with a buttoned-up pocket and a chink-like eye brimming with commercial subtlety. In Darton the son, this trade subtlety had become transmuted into emotional, and the harshness had disappeared; he would have been called a sad man but for his constant care not to divide himself from lively friends by piping notes out of harmony with theirs. Contemplative, he allowed his mind to be a quiet meeting-place for memories and hopes. So that, naturally enough, since succeeding to the agricultural calling, and up to his present age of thirty-two, he had neither advanced nor receded as a capitalist—a stationary result which did not agitate one of his unambitious, unstrategic nature, since he had all that he desired. The motive of his expedition to-night showed the same absence of anxious regard for Number One.

The party rode on in the slow, safe trot proper to night-time and bad roads, Farmer Darton’s head jigging rather unromantically up and down against the sky, and his motions being repeated with bolder emphasis by his friend Japheth Johns; while those of the latter were travestied in jerks still less softened by art in the person of the lad who attended them. A pair of whitish objects hung one on each side of the latter, bumping against him at each step, and still further spoiling the grace of his seat. On close inspection they might have been perceived to be open rush baskets—one containing a turkey, and the other some bottles of wine.

‘D’ye feel ye can meet your fate like a man, neighbour Darton?’ asked Johns, breaking a silence which had lasted while five-and-twenty hedgerow trees had glided by.

Mr. Darton with a half-laugh murmured, ‘Ay—call it my fate! Hanging and wiving go by destiny.’ And then they were silent again.

The darkness thickened rapidly, at intervals shutting down on the land in a perceptible flap, like the wave of a wing. The customary close of day was accelerated by a simultaneous blurring of the air. With the fall of night had come a mist just damp enough to incommode, but not sufficient to saturate them. Countrymen as they were—born, as may be said, with only an open door between them and the four seasons—they regarded the mist but as an added obscuration, and ignored its
humid quality. They were travelling in a direction that was enlivened by no modern current of traffic, the place of Darton’s pilgrimage being an old-fashioned village—one of the Hintocks (several villages of that name, with a distinctive prefix or affix, lying thereabout)—where the people make the best cider and cider-wine in all Wessex, and where the dunghills smell of pomace instead of stable refuse as elsewhere. The lane was sometimes so narrow that the brambles of the hedge, which hung forward like anglers’ rods over a stream, scratched their hats and curry-combed their whiskers as they passed. Yet this neglected lane had been a highway to Queen Elizabeth’s subjects and the cavalcades of the past. Its day was over now, and its history as a national artery done for ever.

‘Why I have decided to marry her,’ resumed Darton (in a measured musical voice of confidence which revealed a good deal of his composition), as he glanced round to see that the lad was not too near, ‘is not only that I like her, but that I can do no better, even from a fairly practical point of view. That I might ha’ looked higher is possibly true, though it is really all nonsense. I have had experience enough in looking above me. “No more superior women for me,” said I—yes, you know when. Sally is a comely, independent, simple character, with no make-up about her, who’ll think me as much a superior to her as I used to think—yes, you know who I mean—was to me.’

‘Ay,’ said Johns. ‘However, I shouldn’t call Sally Hall simple. Primary, because no Sally is; secondary, because if some could be, this one wouldn’t. ‘Tis a wrong denomination to apply to a woman, Charles, and affects me, as your best man, like cold water. ‘Tis like recommending a stage play by saying there’s neither murder, villainy, nor harm of any sort in it, when that’s what you’ve paid your half-crown to see.’

‘Well; may your opinion do you good. Mine’s a different one.’ And turning the conversation from the philosophical to the practical, Darton expressed a hope that the said Sally had received what he’d sent on by the carrier that day.

Johns wanted to know what that was.

‘It is a dress,’ said Darton. ‘Not exactly a wedding-dress; though she may use it as one if she likes. It is rather serviceable than showy—suitable for the winter weather.’

‘Good,’ said Johns. ‘Serviceable is a wise word in a bridegroom. I commend ye, Charles.’

‘For,’ said Darton, ‘why should a woman dress up like a rope-dancer because she’s going to do the most solemn deed of her life except dying?’

‘Faith, why? But she will, because she will, I suppose,’ said Dairyman Johns.

‘H’m,’ said Darton.

The lane they followed had been nearly straight for several miles, but it now took a turn, and winding uncertainly for some distance forked into two. By night country roads are apt to reveal ungainly qualities which pass without observation during day; and though Darton had travelled this way before, he had not done so frequently, Sally having been wooed at the house of a relative near his own. He never remembered seeing at this spot a pair of alternative ways looking so equally probable as these two did now. Johns rode on a few steps.

‘Don’t be out of heart, sonny,’ he cried. ‘Here’s a handpost. Enoch—come and climm this post, and tell us the way.’

The lad dismounted, and jumped into the hedge where the post stood under a tree.

‘Unstrap the baskets, or you’ll smash up that wine!’ cried Darton, as the young man began spasmodically to climb the post, baskets and all.

‘Was there ever less head in a brainless world?’ said Johns. ‘Here, simple Nocky, I’ll do it.’

He leapt off, and with much puffing climbed the post, striking a match when he reached the top, and moving the light along the arm, the lad standing and gazing at the spectacle.

‘I have faced tantalization these twenty years with a temper as mild as milk!’ said Japheth; ‘but such things as this don’t come short of devilry!’ And flinging the match away, he slipped down to the ground.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked Darton.

‘Not a letter, sacred or heathen—not so much as would tell us the way to the great fireplace—ever I should sin to say it! Either the moss and mildew have eat away the words, or we have arrived
in a land where the natyves have lost the art o’ writing, and should ha’ brought our compass like Christopher Columbus.’

‘Let us take the straightest road,’ said Darton placidly; ‘I shan’t be sorry to get there--’tis a tiresome ride. I would have driven if I had known.’

‘Nor I neither, sir,’ said Enoch. ‘These straps plough my shoulder like a zull. If ‘tis much further to your lady’s home, Maister Darton, I shall ask to be let carry half of these good things in my innerds--hee, hee!’

‘Don’t you be such a reforming radical, Enoch,’ said Johns sternly. ‘Here, I’ll take the turkey.’

This being done, they went forward by the right-hand lane, which ascended a hill, the left winding away under a plantation. The pit-a-pat of their horses’ hoofs lessened up the slope; and the ironical directing-post stood in solitude as before, holding out its blank arms to the raw breeze, which brought a snore from the wood as if Skrymir the Giant were sleeping there.

CHAPTER II

Three miles to the left of the travellers, along the road they had not followed, rose an old house with mullioned windows of Ham-hill stone, and chimneys of lavish solidity. It stood at the top of a slope beside King’s-Hintock village-street; and immediately in front of it grew a large sycamore-tree, whose bared roots formed a convenient staircase from the road below to the front door of the dwelling. Its situation gave the house what little distinctive name it possessed, namely, ‘The Knap.’ Some forty yards off a brook dribbled past, which, for its size, made a great deal of noise. At the back was a dairy barton, accessible for vehicles and live-stock by a side ‘drong.’ Thus much only of the character of the homestead could be divined out of doors at this shady evening-time.

But within there was plenty of light to see by, as plenty was construed at Hintock. Beside a Tudor fireplace, whose moulded four-centred arch was nearly hidden by a figured blue-cloth blower, were seated two women--mother and daughter--Mrs. Hall, and Sarah, or Sally; for this was a part of the world where the latter modification had not as yet been effaced as a vulgarity by the march of intellect. The owner of the name was the young woman by whose means Mr. Darton proposed to put an end to his bachelor condition on the approaching day.

The mother’s bereavement had been so long ago as not to leave much mark of its occurrence upon her now, either in face or clothes. She had resumed the mob-cap of her early married life, enlivening its whiteness by a few rose-du-Barry ribbons. Sally required no such aids to pinkness. Roseate good-nature lit up her gaze; her features showed curves of decision and judgment; and she might have been regarded without much mistake as a warm-hearted, quick-spirited, handsome girl.

She did most of the talking, her mother listening with a half-absent air, as she picked up fragments of red-hot wood ember with the tongs, and piled them upon the brands. But the number of speeches that passed was very small in proportion to the meanings exchanged. Long experience together often enabled them to see the course of thought in each other’s minds without a word being spoken. Behind them, in the centre of the room, the table was spread for supper, certain whiffs of air laden with fat vapours, which ever and anon entered from the kitchen, denoting its preparation there.

‘The new gown he was going to send you stays about on the way like himself,’ Sally’s mother was saying.

‘Yes, not finished, I daresay,’ cried Sally independently. ‘Lord, I shouldn’t be amazed if it didn’t come at all! Young men make such kind promises when they are near you, and forget ‘em when they go away. But he doesn’t intend it as a wedding-gown--he gives it to me merely as a gown to wear when I like--a travelling-dress is what it would be called by some. Come rathe or come late it don’t much matter, as I have a dress of my own to fall back upon. But what time is it?’

She went to the family clock and opened the glass, for the hour was not otherwise discernible by night, and indeed at all times was rather a thing to be investigated than beheld, so much more wall than window was there in the apartment. ‘It is nearly eight,’ said she.

‘Eight o’clock, and neither dress nor man,’ said Mrs. Hall.
'Mother, if you think to tantalize me by talking like that, you are much mistaken! Let him be as late as he will—or stay away altogether—I don’t care,’ said Sally. But a tender, minute quaver in the negation showed that there was something forced in that statement.

Mrs. Hall perceived it, and drily observed that she was not so sure about Sally not caring. ‘But perhaps you don’t care so much as I do, after all,’ she said. ‘For I see what you don’t, that it is a good and flourishing match for you; a very honourable offer in Mr. Darton. And I think I see a kind husband in him. So pray God ‘twill go smooth, and wind up well.’

Sally would not listen to misgivings. Of course it would go smoothly, she asserted. ‘How you are up and down, mother!’ she went on. ‘At this moment, whatever hinders him, we are not so anxious to see him as he is to be here, and his thought runs on before him, and settles down upon us like the star in the east. Hark!’ she exclaimed, with a breath of relief, her eyes sparkling. ‘I heard something. Yes—here they are!’

The next moment her mother’s slower ear also distinguished the familiar reverberation occasioned by footsteps clambering up the roots of the sycamore.

‘Yes it sounds like them at last,’ she said. ‘Well, it is not so very late after all, considering the distance.’

The footfall ceased, and they arose, expecting a knock. They began to think it might have been, after all, some neighbouring villager under Bacchic influence, giving the centre of the road a wide berth, when their doubts were dispelled by the new-comer’s entry into the passage. The door of the room was gently opened, and there appeared, not the pair of travellers with whom we have already made acquaintance, but a pale-faced man in the garb of extreme poverty—almost in rags.

‘O, it’s a tramp—gracious me!’ said Sally, starting back.

His cheeks and eye-orbits were deep concaves—rather, it might be, from natural weakness of constitution than irregular living, though there were indications that he had led no careful life. He gazed at the two women fixedly for a moment: then with an abashed, humiliated demeanour, dropped his glance to the floor, and sank into a chair without uttering a word.

Sally was in advance of her mother, who had remained standing by the fire. She now tried to discern the visitor across the candles.

‘Why—mother,’ said Sally faintly, turning back to Mrs. Hall. ‘It is Phil, from Australia!’

Mrs. Hall started, and grew pale, and a fit of coughing seized the man with the ragged clothes. ‘To come home like this!’ she said. ‘O, Philip—are you ill?’

‘No, no, mother,’ replied he impatiently, as soon as he could speak. ‘But for God’s sake how do you come here—and just now too?’

‘Well, I am here,’ said the man. ‘How it is I hardly know. I’ve come home, mother, because I was driven to it. Things were against me out there, and went from bad to worse.’

‘Then why didn’t you let us know?—you’ve not writ a line for the last two or three years.’

The son admitted sadly that he had not. He said that he had hoped and thought he might fetch up again, and be able to send good news. Then he had been obliged to abandon that hope, and had finally come home from sheer necessity—previously to making a new start. ‘Yes, things are very bad with me,’ he repeated, perceiving their commiserating glances at his clothes.

They brought him nearer the fire, took his hat from his thin hand, which was so small and smooth as to show that his attempts to fetch up again had not been in a manual direction. His mother resumed her inquiries, and dubiously asked if he had chosen to come that particular night for any special reason.

For no reason, he told her. His arrival had been quite at random. Then Philip Hall looked round the room, and saw for the first time that the table was laid somewhat luxuriously, and for a larger number than themselves; and that an air of festivity pervaded their dress. He asked quickly what was going on.

‘Sally is going to be married in a day or two,’ replied the mother; and she explained how Mr. Darton, Sally’s intended husband, was coming there that night with the groomsman, Mr. Johns, and other details. ‘We thought it must be their step when we heard you,’ said Mrs. Hall.

The needy wanderer looked again on the floor. ‘I see—I see,’ he murmured. ‘Why, indeed,
should I have come to-night? Such folk as I are not wanted here at these times, naturally. And I have no business here—spoil other people’s happiness.’

‘Phil,’ said his mother, with a tear in her eye, but with a thinness of lip and severity of manner which were presumably not more than past events justified; ‘since you speak like that to me, I’ll speak honestly to you. For these three years you have taken no thought for us. You left home with a good supply of money, and strength and education, and you ought to have made good use of it all. But you come back like a beggar; and that you come in a very awkward time for us cannot be denied. Your return to-night may do us much harm. But mind—you are welcome to this home as long as it is mine. I don’t wish to turn you adrift. We will make the best of a bad job; and I hope you are not seriously ill?’

‘O no. I have only this infernal cough.’

She looked at him anxiously. ‘I think you had better go to bed at once,’ she said.

‘Well—I shall be out of the way there,’ said the son wearily. ‘Having ruined myself, don’t let me ruin you by being seen in these togs, for Heaven’s sake. Who do you say Sally is going to be married to—a Farmer Darton?’

‘Yes—a gentleman-farmer—quite a wealthy man. Far better in station than she could have expected. It is a good thing, altogether.’

‘Well done, little Sal!’ said her brother, brightening and looking up at her with a smile. ‘I ought to have written; but perhaps I have thought of you all the more. But let me get out of sight. I would rather go and jump into the river than be seen here. But have you anything I can drink? I am confoundedly thirsty with my long tramp.’

‘Yes, yes, we will bring something upstairs to you,’ said Sally, with grief in her face.

‘Ay, that will do nicely. But, Sally and mother—’ He stopped, and they waited. ‘Mother, I have not told you all,’ he resumed slowly, still looking on the floor between his knees. ‘Sad as what you see of me is, there’s worse behind.’

His mother gazed upon him in grieved suspense, and Sally went and leant upon the bureau, listening for every sound, and sighing. Suddenly she turned round, saying, ‘Let them come, I don’t care! Philip, tell the worst, and take your time.’

‘Well, then,’ said the unhappy Phil, ‘I am not the only one in this mess. Would to Heaven I were! But—’

‘O, Phil!’

‘I have a wife as destitute as I.’

‘A wife?’ said his mother.

‘Unhappily!’

‘A wife! Yes, that is the way with sons!’

‘And besides—’ said he.

‘Besides! O, Philip, surely—’

‘I have two little children.’

‘Wife and children!’ whispered Mrs. Hall, sinking down confounded.

‘Poor little things!’ said Sally involuntarily.

His mother turned again to him. ‘I suppose these helpless beings are left in Australia?’

‘No. They are in England.’

‘Well, I can only hope you’ve left them in a respectable place.’

‘I have not left them at all. They are here—within a few yards of us. In short, they are in the stable.’

‘Where?’

‘In the stable. I did not like to bring them indoors till I had seen you, mother, and broken the bad news a bit to you. They were very tired, and are resting out there on some straw.’

Mrs. Hall’s fortitude visibly broke down. She had been brought up not without refinement, and was even more moved by such a collapse of genteel aims as this than a substantial dairyman’s widow would in ordinary have been moved. ‘Well, it must be borne,’ she said, in a low voice, with her hands tightly joined. ‘A starving son, a starving wife, starving children! Let it be. But why is
this come to us now, to-day, to-night? Could no other misfortune happen to helpless women than this, which will quite upset my poor girl’s chance of a happy life? Why have you done us this wrong, Philip? What respectable man will come here, and marry open-eyed into a family of vagabonds?"

‘Nonsense, mother!’ said Sally vehemently, while her face flushed. ‘Charley isn’t the man to desert me. But if he should be, and won’t marry me because Phil’s come, let him go and marry elsewhere. I won’t be ashamed of my own flesh and blood for any man in England--not I!’ And then Sally turned away and burst into tears.

‘Wait till you are twenty years older and you will tell a different tale,’ replied her mother.

The son stood up. ‘Mother,’ he said bitterly, ‘as I have come, so I will go. All I ask of you is that you will allow me and mine to lie in your stable to-morning. I give you my word that we’ll be gone by break of day, and trouble you no further!’

Mrs. Hall, the mother, changed at that. ‘O no,’ she answered hastily; ‘never shall it be said that I sent any of my own family from my door. Bring ‘em in, Philip, or take me out to them.’

‘We will put ‘em all into the large bedroom,’ said Sally, brightening, ‘and make up a large fire. Let’s go and help them in, and call Rebekah.’ (Rebekah was the woman who assisted at the dairy and housework; she lived in a cottage hard by with her husband, who attended to the cows.)

Sally went to fetch a lantern from the back-kitchen, but her brother said, ‘You won’t want a light. I lit the lantern that was hanging there.’

‘What must we call your wife?’ asked Mrs. Hall.

‘Helena,’ said Philip.

With shawls over their heads they proceeded towards the back door.

‘One minute before you go,’ interrupted Philip. ‘I--I haven’t confessed all.’

‘Then Heaven help us!’ said Mrs. Hall, pushing to the door and clasping her hands in calm despair.

‘We passed through Evershead as we came,’ he continued, ‘and I just looked in at the “Sow-and-Acorn” to see if old Mike still kept on there as usual. The carrier had come in from Sherton Abbas at that moment, and guessing that I was bound for this place--for I think he knew me--he asked me to bring on a dressmaker’s parcel for Sally that was marked “immediate.” My wife had walked on with the children. ‘Twas a flimsy parcel, and the paper was torn, and I found on looking at it that it was a thick warm gown. I didn’t wish you to see poor Helena in a shabby state. I was ashamed that you should--’twas not what she was born to. I untied the parcel in the road, took it on to her where she was waiting in the Lower Barn, and told her I had managed to get it for her, and that she was to ask no question. She, poor thing, must have supposed I obtained it on trust, through having reached a place where I was known, for she put it on gladly enough. She has it on now. Sally has other gowns, I daresay.’

Sally looked at her mother, speechless.

‘You have others, I daresay!’ repeated Phil, with a sick man’s impatience. ‘I thought to myself, “Better Sally cry than Helena freeze.” Well, is the dress of great consequence? ‘Twas nothing very ornamental, as far as I could see.’

‘No--no; not of consequence,’ returned Sally sadly, adding in a gentle voice, ‘You will not mind if I lend her another instead of that one, will you?’

Philip’s agitation at the confession had brought on another attack of the cough, which seemed to shake him to pieces. He was so obviously unfit to sit in a chair that they helped him upstairs at once; and having hastily given him a cordial and kindled the bedroom fire, they descended to fetch their unhappy new relations.

CHAPTER III

It was with strange feelings that the girl and her mother, lately so cheerful, passed out of the back door into the open air of the barton, laden with hay scents and the herby breath of cows. A fine sleet had begun to fall, and they trotted across the yard quickly. The stable-door was open; a light shone from it--from the lantern which always hung there, and which Philip had lighted, as he said. Softly nearing the door, Mrs. Hall pronounced the name ‘Helena!’
There was no answer for the moment. Looking in she was taken by surprise. Two people appeared before her. For one, instead of the drabch woman she had expected, Mrs. Hall saw a pale, dark-eyed, ladylike creature, whose personality ruled her attire rather than was ruled by it. She was in a new and handsome gown, of course, and an old bonnet. She was standing up, agitated; her hand was held by her companion--none else than Sally’s affianced, Farmer Charles Darton, upon whose fine figure the pale stranger’s eyes were fixed, as his were fixed upon her. His other hand held the rein of his horse, which was standing saddled as if just led in.

At sight of Mrs. Hall they both turned, looking at her in a way neither quite conscious nor unconscious, and without seeming to recollect that words were necessary as a solution to the scene. In another moment Sally entered also, when Mr. Darton dropped his companion’s hand, led the horse aside, and came to greet his betrothed and Mrs. Hall.

‘Ah!’ he said, smiling--with something like forced composure--‘this is a roundabout way of arriving, you will say, my dear Mrs. Hall. But we lost our way, which made us late. I saw a light here, and led in my horse at once--my friend Johns and my man have gone back to the little inn with theirs, not to crowd you too much. No sooner had I entered than I saw that this lady had taken temporary shelter here--and found I was intruding.’

‘She is my daughter-in-law,’ said Mrs. Hall calmly. ‘My son, too, is in the house, but he has gone to bed unwell.’

Sally had stood staring wonderingly at the scene until this moment, hardly recognizing Darton’s shake of the hand. The spell that bound her was broken by her perceiving the two little children seated on a heap of hay. She suddenly went forward, spoke to them, and took one on her arm and the other in her hand.

‘And two children?’ said Mr. Darton, showing thus that he had not been there long enough as yet to understand the situation.

‘My grandchildren,’ said Mrs. Hall, with as much affected ease as before.

Philip Hall’s wife, in spite of this interruption to her first rencontre, seemed scarcely so much affected by it as to feel any one’s presence in addition to Mr. Darton’s. However, arousing herself by a quick reflection, she threw a sudden critical glance of her sad eyes upon Mrs. Hall; and, apparently finding her satisfactory, advanced to her in a meek initiative. Then Sally and the stranger spoke some friendly words to each other, and Sally went on with the children into the house. Mrs. Hall and Helena followed, and Mr. Darton followed these, looking at Helena’s dress and outline, and listening to her voice like a man in a dream.

By the time the others reached the house Sally had already gone upstairs with the tired children. She rapped against the wall for Rebekah to come in and help to attend to them, Rebekah’s house being a little ‘spit-and-dab’ cabin leaning against the substantial stone-work of Mrs. Hall’s taller erection. When she came a bed was made up for the little ones, and some supper given to them. On descending the stairs after seeing this done Sally went to the sitting-room. Young Mrs. Hall entered it just in advance of her, having in the interim retired with her mother-in-law to take off her bonnet, and otherwise make herself presentable. Hence it was evident that no further communication could have passed between her and Mr. Darton since their brief interview in the stable.

Mr. Japheth Johns now opportunely arrived, and broke up the restraint of the company, after a few orthodox meteorological commentaries had passed between him and Mrs. Hall by way of introduction. They at once sat down to supper, the present of wine and turkey not being produced for consumption to-night, lest the premature display of those gifts should seem to throw doubt on Mrs. Hall’s capacities as a provider.

‘Drink hearty, Mr. Johns--drink hearty,’ said that matron magnanimously. ‘Such as it is there’s plenty of. But perhaps cider-wine is not to your taste?--though there’s body in it.’

‘Quite the contrary, ma’am--quite the contrary,’ said the dairyman. ‘For though I inherit the malt-liquor principle from my father, I am a cider-drinker on my mother’s side. She came from these parts, you know. And there’s this to be said for t’-tis a more peaceful liquor, and don’t lie about a man like your hotter drinks. With care, one may live on it a twelvemonth without knocking
down a neighbour, or getting a black eye from an old acquaintance.’

The general conversation thus begun was continued briskly, though it was in the main restricted to Mrs. Hall and Japheth, who in truth required but little help from anybody. There being slight call upon Sally’s tongue, she had ample leisure to do what her heart most desired, namely, watch her intended husband and her sister-in-law with a view of elucidating the strange momentary scene in which her mother and herself had surprised them in the stable. If that scene meant anything, it meant, at least, that they had met before. That there had been no time for explanations Sally could see, for their manner was still one of suppressed amazement at each other’s presence there. Darton’s eyes, too, fell continually on the gown worn by Helena as if this were an added riddle to his perplexity; though to Sally it was the one feature in the case which was no mystery. He seemed to feel that fate had impishly changed his vis-a-vis in the lover’s jig he was about to foot; that while the gown had been expected to enclose a Sally, a Helena’s face looked out from the bodice; that some long-lost hand met his own from the sleeves.

Sally could see that whatever Helena might know of Darton, she knew nothing of how the dress entered into his embarrassment. And at moments the young girl would have persuaded herself that Darton’s looks at her sister-in-law were entirely the fruit of the clothes query. But surely at other times a more extensive range of speculation and sentiment was expressed by her lover’s eye than that which the changed dress would account for.

Sally’s independence made her one of the least jealous of women. But there was something in the relations of these two visitors which ought to be explained.

Japheth Johns continued to converse in his well-known style, interspersing his talk with some private reflections on the position of Darton and Sally, which, though the sparkle in his eye showed them to be highly entertaining to himself, were apparently not quite communicable to the company. At last he withdrew for the night, going off to the roadside inn half-a-mile back, whither Darton promised to follow him in a few minutes.

Half-an-hour passed, and then Mr. Darton also rose to leave, Sally and her sister-in-law simultaneously wishing him good-night as they retired upstairs to their rooms. But on his arriving at the front door with Mrs. Hall a sharp shower of rain began to come down, when the widow suggested that he should return to the fireside till the storm ceased.

Darton accepted her proposal, but insisted that, as it was getting late, and she was obviously tired, she should not sit up on his account, since he could let himself out of the house, and would quite enjoy smoking a pipe by the hearth alone. Mrs. Hall assented; and Darton was left by himself. He spread his knees to the brands, lit up his tobacco as he had said, and sat gazing into the fire, and at the notches of the chimney-crook which hung above.

An occasional drop of rain rolled down the chimney with a hiss, and still he smoked on; but not like a man whose mind was at rest. In the long run, however, despite his meditations, early hours afiel and a long ride in the open air produced their natural result. He began to doze.

How long he remained in this half-unconscious state he did not know. He suddenly opened his eyes. The back-brand had burnt itself in two, and ceased to flame; the light which he had placed on the mantelpiece had nearly gone out. But in spite of these deficiencies there was a light in the apartment, and it came from elsewhere. Turning his head he saw Philip Hall’s wife standing at the entrance of the room with a bed-candle in one hand, a small brass tea-kettle in the other, and his gown, as it certainly seemed, still upon her.

‘Helena!’ said Darton, starting up.

Her countenance expressed dismay, and her first words were an apology. ‘I—did not know you were here, Mr. Darton,’ she said, while a blush flashed to her cheek. ‘I thought every one had retired—I was coming to make a little water boil; my husband seems to be worse. But perhaps the kitchen fire can be lighted up again.’

‘Don’t go on my account. By all means put it on here as you intended,’ said Darton. ‘Allow me to help you.’ He went forward to take the kettle from her hand, but she did not allow him, and placed it on the fire herself.

They stood some way apart, one on each side of the fireplace, waiting till the water should
boil, the candle on the mantel between them, and Helena with her eyes on the kettle. Darton was the first to break the silence. ‘Shall I call Sally?’ he said.

‘O no,’ she quickly returned. ‘We have given trouble enough already. We have no right here. But we are the sport of fate, and were obliged to come.’

‘No right here!’ said he in surprise.

‘None. I can’t explain it now,’ answered Helena. ‘This kettle is very slow.’

There was another pause; the proverbial dilatoriness of watched pots was never more clearly exemplified.

Helena’s face was of that sort which seems to ask for assistance without the owner’s knowledge—the very antipodes of Sally’s, which was self-reliance expressed. Darton’s eyes travelled from the kettle to Helena’s face, then back to the kettle, then to the face for rather a longer time. ‘So I am not to know anything of the mystery that has distracted me all the evening?’ he said.

‘How is it that a woman, who refused me because (as I supposed) my position was not good enough for her taste, is found to be the wife of a man who certainly seems to be worse off than I?’

‘He had the prior claim,’ said she.

‘What! you knew him at that time?’

‘Yes, yes! Please say no more,’ she implored.

‘Whatever my errors, I have paid for them during the last five years!’

The heart of Darton was subject to sudden overflowings. He was kind to a fault. ‘I am sorry from my soul,’ he said, involuntarily approaching her. Helena withdrew a step or two, at which he became conscious of his movement, and quickly took his former place. Here he stood without speaking, and the little kettle began to sing.

‘Well, you might have been my wife if you had chosen,’ he said at last. ‘But that’s all past and gone. However, if you are in any trouble or poverty I shall be glad to be of service, and as your relation by marriage I shall have a right to be. Does your uncle know of your distress?’

‘My uncle is dead. He left me without a farthing. And now we have two children to maintain.’

‘What, left you nothing? How could he be so cruel as that?’

‘I disgraced myself in his eyes.’

‘Now,’ said Darton earnestly, ‘let me take care of the children, at least while you are so unsettled. You belong to another, so I cannot take care of you.’

‘Yes you can,’ said a voice; and suddenly a third figure stood beside them. It was Sally. ‘You can, since you seem to wish to?’ she repeated. ‘She no longer belongs to another . . . My poor brother is dead!’

Her face was red, her eyes sparkled, and all the woman came to the front. ‘I have heard it!’ she went on to him passionately. ‘You can protect her now as well as the children!’ She turned then to her agitated sister-in-law. ‘I heard something,’ said Sally (in a gentle murmur, differing much from her previous passionate words), ‘and I went into his room. It must have been the moment you left. He went off so quickly, and weakly, and it was so unexpected, that I couldn’t leave even to call you.’

Darton was just able to gather from the confused discourse which followed that, during his sleep by the fire, this brother whom he had never seen had become worse; and that during Helena’s absence for water the end had unexpectedly come. The two young women hastened upstairs, and he was again left alone.

* * * * *

After standing there a short time he went to the front door and looked out; till, softly closing it behind him, he advanced and stood under the large sycamore-tree. The stars were flickering coldly, and the dampness which had just descended upon the earth in rain now sent up a chill from it. Darton was in a strange position, and he felt it. The unexpected appearance, in deep poverty, of Helena—a young lady, daughter of a deceased naval officer, who had been brought up by her uncle, a solicitor, and had refused Darton in marriage years ago—the passionate, almost angry demeanour of Sally at discovering them, the abrupt announcement that Helena was a widow; all this coming
together was a conjuncture difficult to cope with in a moment, and made him question whether he ought to leave the house or offer assistance. But for Sally’s manner he would unhesitatingly have done the latter.

He was still standing under the tree when the door in front of him opened, and Mrs. Hall came out. She went round to the garden-gate at the side without seeing him. Darton followed her, intending to speak.

Pausing outside, as if in thought, she proceeded to a spot where the sun came earliest in spring-time, and where the north wind never blew; it was where the row of beehives stood under the wall. Discerning her object, he waited till she had accomplished it.

It was the universal custom thereabout to wake the bees by tapping at their hives whenever a death occurred in the household, under the belief that if this were not done the bees themselves would pine away and perish during the ensuing year. As soon as an interior buzzing responded to her tap at the first hive Mrs. Hall went on to the second, and thus passed down the row. As soon as she came back he met her.

‘What can I do in this trouble, Mrs. Hall?’ he said.

‘O--nothing, thank you, nothing,’ she said in a tearful voice, now just perceiving him. ‘We have called Rebekah and her husband, and they will do everything necessary.’ She told him in a few words the particulars of her son’s arrival, broken in health--indeed, at death’s very door, though they did not suspect it--and suggested, as the result of a conversation between her and her daughter, that the wedding should be postponed.

‘Yes, of course,’ said Darton. ‘I think now to go straight to the inn and tell Johns what has happened.’ It was not till after he had shaken hands with her that he turned hesitatingly and added, ‘Will you tell the mother of his children that, as they are now left fatherless, I shall be glad to take the eldest of them, if it would be any convenience to her and to you?’

Mrs. Hall promised that her son’s widow should he told of the offer, and they parted. He retired down the rooty slope and disappeared in the direction of the inn, where he informed Johns of the circumstances. Meanwhile Mrs. Hall had entered the house, Sally was downstairs in the sitting-room alone, and her mother explained to her that Darton had readily assented to the postponement.

‘No doubt he has,’ said Sally, with sad emphasis. ‘It is not put off for a week, or a month, or a year. I shall never marry him, and she will!’

CHAPTER IV

Time passed, and the household on the Knap became again serene under the composing influences of daily routine. A desultory, very desultory correspondence, dragged on between Sally Hall and Darton, who, not quite knowing how to take her petulant words on the night of her brother’s death, had continued passive thus long. Helena and her children remained at the dairy-house, almost of necessity, and Darton therefore deemed it advisable to stay away.

One day, seven months later on, when Mr. Darton was as usual at his farm, twenty miles from Hintock, a note reached him from Helena. She thanked him for his kind offer about her children, which her mother-in-law had duly communicated, and stated that she would be glad to accept it as regarded the eldest, the boy. Helena had, in truth, good need to do so, for her uncle had left her penniless, and all application to some relatives in the north had failed. There was, besides, as she said, no good school near Hintock to which she could send the child.

On a fine summer day the boy came. He was accompanied half-way by Sally and his mother--to the ‘White Horse,’ at Chalk Newton--where he was handed over to Darton’s bailiff in a shining spring-cart, who met them there.

He was entered as a day-scholar at a popular school at Casterbridge, three or four miles from Darton’s, having first been taught by Darton to ride a forest-pony, on which he cantered to and from the aforesaid fount of knowledge, and (as Darton hoped) brought away a promising headful of the same at each diurnal expedition. The thoughtful taciturnity into which Darton had latterly fallen was quite dissipated by the presence of this boy.

When the Christmas holidays came it was arranged that he should spend them with his
mother. The journey was, for some reason or other, performed in two stages, as at his coming, except that Darton in person took the place of the bailiff, and that the boy and himself rode on horseback.

Reaching the renowned ‘White Horse,’ Darton inquired if Miss and young Mrs. Hall were there to meet little Philip (as they had agreed to be). He was answered by the appearance of Helena alone at the door.

‘At the last moment Sally would not come,’ she faltered.

That meeting practically settled the point towards which these long-severed persons were converging. But nothing was broached about it for some time yet. Sally Hall had, in fact, imparted the first decisive motion to events by refusing to accompany Helena. She soon gave them a second move by writing the following note:

‘[Private.]

DEAR CHARLES,—Living here so long and intimately with Helena, I have naturally learnt her history, especially that of it which refers to you. I am sure she would accept you as a husband at the proper time, and I think you ought to give her the opportunity. You inquire in an old note if I am sorry that I showed temper (which it wasn’t) that night when I heard you talking to her. No, Charles, I am not sorry at all for what I said then.—Yours sincerely, SALLY HALL.’

Thus set in train, the transfer of Darton’s heart back to its original quarters proceeded by mere lapse of time. In the following July, Darton went to his friend Japheth to ask him at last to fulfil the bridal office which had been in abeyance since the previous January twelvemonths.

‘With all my heart, man o’ constancy!’ said Dairyman Johns warmly. ‘I’ve lost most of my genteel fair complexion haymaking this hot weather, ‘tis true, but I’ll do your business as well as them that look better. There be scents and good hair-oil in the world yet, thank God, and they’ll take off the roughest o’ my edge. I’ll compliment her. “Better late than never, Sally Hall,” I’ll say.’

‘It is not Sally,’ said Darton hurriedly. ‘It is young Mrs. Hall.’

Japheth’s face, as soon as he really comprehended, became a picture of reproachful dismay. ‘Not Sally?’ he said. ‘Why not Sally? I can’t believe it! Young Mrs. Hall! Well, well—where’s your wisdom?’

Darton shortly explained particulars; but Johns would not be reconciled. ‘She was a woman worth having if ever woman was,’ he cried. ‘And now to let her go!’

‘But I suppose I can marry where I like,’ said Darton.

‘If m,’ replied the dairymen, lifting his eyebrows expressively. ‘This don’t become you, Charles—it really do not. If I had done such a thing you would have sworn I was a curst no’thern fool to be drawn off the scent by such a red-herring doll-oll-oll.’

Farmer Darton responded in such sharp terms to this laconic opinion that the two friends finally parted in a way they had never parted before. Johns was to be no groomsman to Darton after all. He had flatly declined. Darton went off sorry, and even unhappy, particularly as Japheth was about to leave that side of the county, so that the words which had divided them were not likely to be explained away or softened down.

A short time after the interview Darton was united to Helena at a simple matter-of-fact wedding; and she and her little girl joined the boy who had already grown to look on Darton’s house as home.

For some months the farmer experienced an unprecedented happiness and satisfaction. There had been a flaw in his life, and it was as neatly mended as was humanly possible. But after a season the stream of events followed less clearly, and there were shades in his reveries. Helena was a fragile woman, of little staying power, physically or morally, and since the time that he had originally known her—eight or ten years before—she had been severely tried. She had loved herself out, in short, and was now occasionally given to moping. Sometimes she spoke regretfully of the gentilities of her early life, and instead of comparing her present state with her condition as the wife of the unlucky Hall, she mused rather on what it had been before she took the first fatal step of
clandestinely marrying him. She did not care to please such people as those with whom she was
thrown as a thriving farmer’s wife. She allowed the pretty trifles of agricultural domesticity to glide
by her as sorry details, and had it not been for the children Darton’s house would have seemed but
little brighter than it had been before.

This led to occasional unpleasantness, until Darton sometimes declared to himself that such
endeavours as his to rectify early deviations of the heart by harking back to the old point mostly
failed of success. ‘Perhaps Johns was right,’ he would say. ‘I should have gone on with Sally. Better
go with the tide and make the best of its course than stem it at the risk of a capsize.’ But he kept
these unmelodious thoughts to himself, and was outwardly considerate and kind.

This somewhat barren tract of his life had extended to less than a year and a half when his
ponderings were cut short by the loss of the woman they concerned. When she was in her grave he
thought better of her than when she had been alive; the farm was a worse place without her than
with her, after all. No woman short of divine could have gone through such an experience as hers
with her first husband without becoming a little soured. Her stagnant sympathies, her sometimes
unreasonable manner, had covered a heart frank and well meaning, and originally hopeful and warm.
She left him a tiny red infant in white wrappings. To make life as easy as possible to this touching
object became at once his care.

As this child learnt to walk and talk Darton learnt to see feasibility in a scheme which
pleased him. Revolving the experiment which he had hitherto made upon life, he fancied he had
gained wisdom from his mistakes and caution from his miscarriages.

What the scheme was needs no penetration to discover. Once more he had opportunity to
recast and rectify his ill-wrought situations by returning to Sally Hall, who still lived quietly on
under her mother’s roof at Hintock. Helena had been a woman to lend pathos and refinement to a
home; Sally was the woman to brighten it. She would not, as Helena did, despise the rural
simplicities of a farmer’s fireside. Moreover, she had a pre-eminent qualification for Darton’s
household; no other woman could make so desirable a mother to her brother’s two children and
Darton’s one as Sally—while Darton, now that Helena had gone, was a more promising husband for
Sally than he had ever been when liable to reminders from an uncured sentimental wound.

Darton was not a man to act rapidly, and the working out of his reparative designs might
have been delayed for some time. But there came a winter evening precisely like the one which
had darkened over that former ride to Hintock, and he asked himself why he should postpone longer,
when the very landscape called for a repetition of that attempt.

He told his man to saddle the mare, booted and spurred himself with a younger horseman’s
necity, kissed the two youngest children, and rode off. To make the journey a complete parallel to
the first, he would fain have had his old acquaintance Japheth Johns with him. But Johns, alas! was
missing. His removal to the other side of the county had left unrepaired the breach which had arisen
between him and Darton; and though Darton had forgiven him a hundred times, as Johns had
probably forgiven Darton, the effort of reunion in present circumstances was one not likely to be
made.

He screwed himself up to as cheerful a pitch as he could without his former crony, and
became content with his own thoughts as he rode, instead of the words of a companion. The sun
gone down; the boughs appeared scratched in like an etching against the sky; old crooked men with
faggots at their backs said ‘Good-night, sir,’ and Darton replied ‘Good-night’ right heartily.

By the time he reached the forking roads it was getting as dark as it had been on the
occasion when Johns climbed the directing-post. Darton made no mistake this time. ‘Nor shall I be
able to mistake, thank Heaven, when I arrive,’ he murmured. It gave him peculiar satisfaction to
think that the proposed marriage, like his first, was of the nature of setting in order things long awry,
and not a momentary freak of fancy.

Nothing hindered the smoothness of his journey, which seemed not half its former length.
Though dark, it was only between five and six o’clock when the bulky chimneys of Mrs. Hall’s
residence appeared in view behind the sycamore-tree. On second thoughts he retreated and put up at
the ale-house as in former time; and when he had plumed himself before the inn mirror, called for
something to drink, and smoothed out the incipient wrinkles of care, he walked on to the Knap with a quick step.

CHAPTER V

That evening Sally was making ‘pinners’ for the milkers, who were now increased by two, for her mother and herself no longer joined in milking the cows themselves. But upon the whole there was little change in the household economy, and not much in its appearance, beyond such minor particulars as that the crack over the window, which had been a hundred years coming, was a trifle wider; that the beams were a shade blacker; that the influence of modernism had supplanted the open chimney corner by a grate; that Rebekah, who had worn a cap when she had plenty of hair, had left it off now she had scarce any, because it was reported that caps were not fashionable; and that Sally’s face had naturally assumed a more womanly and experienced cast.

Mrs. Hall was actually lifting coals with the tongs, as she had used to do.

‘Five years ago this very night, if I am not mistaken—’ she said, laying on an ember.

‘Not this very night—though ‘twas one night this week,’ said the correct Sally.

‘Well, ‘tis near enough. Five years ago Mr. Darton came to marry you, and my poor boy Phil came home to die.’ She sighed. ‘Ah, Sally,’ she presently said, ‘if you had managed well Mr. Darton would have had you, Helena or none.’

‘Don’t be sentimental about that, mother,’ begged Sally. ‘I didn’t care to manage well in such a case. Though I liked him, I wasn’t so anxious. I would never have married the man in the midst of such a hitch as that was,’ she added with decision; ‘and I don’t think I would if he were to ask me now.’

‘I am not sure about that, unless you have another in your eye.’

‘I wouldn’t; and I’ll tell you why. I could hardly marry him for love at this time o’ day. And as we’ve quite enough to live on if we give up the dairy to-morrow, I should have no need to marry for any meaner reason . . . I am quite happy enough as I am, and there’s an end of it.’

Now it was not long after this dialogue that there came a mild rap at the door, and in a moment there entered Rebekah, looking as though a ghost had arrived. The fact was that that accomplished skimmer and churner (now a resident in the house) had overheard the desultory observations between mother and daughter, and on opening the door to Mr. Darton thought the coincidence must have a grisly meaning in it. Mrs. Hall welcomed the farmer with warm surprise, as did Sally, and for a moment they rather wanted words.

‘Can you push up the chimney-crook for me, Mr Darton? the notches hitch,’ said the matron. He did it, and the homely little act bridged over the awkward consciousness that he had been a stranger for four years.

Mrs. Hall soon saw what he had come for, and left the principals together while she went to prepare him a late tea, smiling at Sally’s recent hasty assertions of indifference, when she saw how civil Sally was. When tea was ready she joined them. She fancied that Darton did not look so confident as when he had arrived; but Sally was quite light-hearted, and the meal passed pleasantly.

About seven he took his leave of them. Mrs. Hall went as far as the door to light him down the slope. On the doorstep he said frankly—‘I came to ask your daughter to marry me; chose the night and everything, with an eye to a favourable answer. But she won’t.’

‘Then she’s a very ungrateful girl!’ emphatically said Mrs. Hall.

Darton paused to shape his sentence, and asked, ‘I--I suppose there’s nobody else more favoured?’

‘I can’t say that there is, or that there isn’t,’ answered Mrs. Hall. ‘She’s private in some things. I’m on your side, however, Mr. Darton, and I’ll talk to her.’

‘Thank ‘ee, thank ‘ee!’ said the farmer in a gayer accent; and with this assurance the not very satisfactory visit came to an end. Darton descended the roots of the sycamore, the light was withdrawn, and the door closed. At the bottom of the slope he nearly ran against a man about to ascend.

‘Can a jack-o’-lent believe his few senses on such a dark night, or can’t he?’ exclaimed one
whose utterance Darton recognized in a moment, despite its unexpectedness. ‘I dare not swear he can, though I fain would!’ The speaker was Johns.

Darton said he was glad of this opportunity, bad as it was, of putting an end to the silence of years, and asked the dairyman what he was travelling that way for.

Japheth showed the old jovial confidence in a moment. ‘I’m going to see your--relations--as they always seem to me,’ he said--‘Mrs. Hall and Sally. Well, Charles, the fact is I find the natural barbarousness of man is much increased by a bachelor life, and, as your leavings were always good enough for me, I’m trying civilization here.’ He nodded towards the house.

‘Not with Sally--to marry her?’ said Darton, feeling something like a rill of ice water between his shoulders.

‘Yes, by the help of Providence and my personal charms. And I think I shall get her. I am this road every week--my present dairy is only four miles off, you know, and I see her through the window. ‘Tis rather odd that I was going to speak practical to-night to her for the first time. You’ve just called?’

‘Yes, for a short while. But she didn’t say a word about you.’

‘A good sign, a good sign. Now that decides me. I’ll swing the mallet and get her answer this very night as I planned.’

A few more remarks, and Darton, wishing his friend joy of Sally in a slightly hollow tone of jocularity, bade him good-bye. Johns promised to write particulars, and ascended, and was lost in the shade of the house and tree. A rectangle of light appeared when Johns was admitted, and all was dark again.

‘Happy Japheth!’ said Darton. ‘This then is the explanation!’

He determined to return home that night. In a quarter of an hour he passed out of the village, and the next day went about his swede-lifting and storing as if nothing had occurred.

He waited and waited to hear from Johns whether the wedding-day was fixed: but no letter came. He learnt not a single particular till, meeting Johns one day at a horse-auction, Darton exclaimed genially--rather more genially than he felt--‘When is the joyful day to be?'

To his great surprise a reciprocity of gladness was not conspicuous in Johns. ‘Not at all,’ he said, in a very subdued tone. ‘’Tis a bad job; she won’t have me.’

Darton held his breath till he said with treacherous solicitude, ‘Try again--’tis coyness.’

‘O no,’ said Johns decisively. ‘There’s been none of that. We talked it over dozens of times in the most fair and square way. She tells me plainly, I don’t suit her. ‘Twould be simply annoying her to ask her again. Ah, Charles, you threw a prize away when you let her slip five years ago.’

‘I did--I did,’ said Darton.

He returned from that auction with a new set of feelings in play. He had certainly made a surprising mistake in thinking Johns his successful rival. It really seemed as if he might hope for Sally after all.

This time, being rather pressed by business, Darton had recourse to pen-and-ink, and wrote her as manly and straightforward a proposal as any woman could wish to receive. The reply came promptly:-

‘DEAR MR. DARTON,--I am as sensible as any woman can be of the goodness that leads you to make me this offer a second time. Better women than I would be proud of the honour, for when I read your nice long speeches on mangold-wurzel, and such like topics, at the Casterbridge Farmers’ Club, I do feel it an honour, I assure you. But my answer is just the same as before. I will not try to explain what, in truth, I cannot explain--my reasons; I will simply say that I must decline to be married to you. With good wishes as in former times, I am, your faithful friend,

‘SALLY HALL.’

Darton dropped the letter hopelessly. Beyond the negative, there was just a possibility of sarcasm in it -- ‘nice long speeches on mangold-wurzel’ had a suspicious sound. However, sarcasm or none, there was the answer, and he had to be content.
He proceeded to seek relief in a business which at this time engrossed much of his attention—that of clearing up a curious mistake just current in the county, that he had been nearly ruined by the recent failure of a local bank. A farmer named Darton had lost heavily, and the similarity of name had probably led to the error. Belief in it was so persistent that it demanded several days of letter-writing to set matters straight, and persuade the world that he was as solvent as ever he had been in his life. He had hardly concluded this worrying task when, to his delight, another letter arrived in the handwriting of Sally.

Darton tore it open; it was very short.

‘DEAR MR. DARTON,—We have been so alarmed these last few days by the report that you were ruined by the stoppage of --’s Bank, that, now it is contradicted I hasten, by my mother’s wish, to say how truly glad we are to find there is no foundation for the report. After your kindness to my poor brother’s children, I can do no less than write at such a moment. We had a letter from each of them a few days ago.—Your faithful friend,

‘SALLY HALL.’

‘Mercenary little woman!’ said Darton to himself with a smile. ‘Then that was the secret of her refusal this time—she thought I was ruined.’

Now, such was Darton, that as hours went on he could not help feeling too generously towards Sally to condemn her in this. What did he want in a wife? he asked himself. Love and integrity. What next? Worldly wisdom. And was there really more than worldly wisdom in her refusal to go aboard a sinking ship? She now knew it was otherwise. ‘Begad,’ he said, ‘I’ll try her again.’

The fact was he had so set his heart upon Sally, and Sally alone, that nothing was to be allowed to baulk him; and his reasoning was purely formal.

Anniversaries having been unpropitious, he waited on till a bright day late in May—a day when all animate nature was fancying, in its trusting, foolish way, that it was going to bask out of doors for evermore. As he rode through Long-Ash Lane it was scarce recognizable as the track of his two winter journeys. No mistake could be made now, even with his eyes shut. The cuckoo’s note was at its best, between April tentativeness and midsummer decrepitude, and the reptiles in the sun behaved as winningly as kittens on a hearth. Though afternoon, and about the same time as on the last occasion, it was broad day and sunshine when he entered Hintock, and the details of the Knap dairy-house were visible far up the road. He saw Sally in the garden, and was set vibrating. He had first intended to go on to the inn; but ‘No,’ he said; ‘I’ll tie my horse to the garden-gate. If all goes well it can soon be taken round: if not, I mount and ride away’

The tall shade of the horseman darkened the room in which Mrs. Hall sat, and made her start, for he had ridden by a side path to the top of the slope, where riders seldom came. In a few seconds he was in the garden with Sally.

Five—ay, three minutes—did the business at the back of that row of bees. Though spring had come, and heavenly blue consecrated the scene, Darton succeeded not. ‘No,’ said Sally firmly. ‘I will never, never marry you, Mr. Darton. I would have done it once; but now I never can.’

‘But!’—implored Mr. Darton. And with a burst of real eloquence he went on to declare all sorts of things that he would do for her. He would drive her to see her mother every week—take her to London—settle so much money upon her—Heaven knows what he did not promise, suggest, and tempt her with. But it availed nothing. She interposed with a stout negative, which closed the course of his argument like an iron gate across a highway. Darton paused.

‘Then,’ said he simply, ‘you hadn’t heard of my supposed failure when you declined last time?’

‘I had not,’ she said. ‘But if I had ‘twould have been all the same.’

‘And ’tis not because of any soreness from my slighting you years ago?’

‘No. That soreness is long past.’

‘Ah—then you despise me, Sally?’
‘No,’ she slowly answered. ‘I don’t altogether despise you. I don’t think you quite such a hero as I once did--that’s all. The truth is, I am happy enough as I am; and I don’t mean to marry at all. Now, may I ask a favour, sir?’ She spoke with an ineffable charm, which, whenever he thought of it, made him curse his loss of her as long as he lived.

‘To any extent.’

‘Please do not put this question to me any more. Friends as long as you like, but lovers and married never.’

‘I never will,’ said Darton. ‘Not if I live a hundred years.’

And he never did. That he had worn out his welcome in her heart was only too plain.

When his step-children had grown up, and were placed out in life, all communication between Darton and the Hall family ceased. It was only by chance that, years after, he learnt that Sally, notwithstanding the solicitations her attractions drew down upon her, had refused several offers of marriage, and steadily adhered to her purpose of leading a single life.
“Yes,” said the dealer, “our windfalls are of various kinds. Some customers are ignorant, and then I touch a dividend on my superior knowledge. Some are dishonest,” and here he held up the candle, so that the light fell strongly on his visitor, “and in that case,” he continued, “I profit by my virtue.”

Markheim had but just entered from the daylight streets, and his eyes had not yet grown familiar with the mingled shine and darkness in the shop. At these pointed words, and before the near presence of the flame, he blinked painfully and looked aside.

The dealer chuckled. “You come to me on Christmas Day,” he resumed, “when you know that I am alone in my house, put up my shutters, and make a point of refusing business. Well, you will have to pay for that; you will have to pay for my loss of time, when I should be balancing my books; you will have to pay, besides, for a kind of manner that I remark in you to-day very strongly. I am the essence of discretion, and ask no awkward questions; but when a customer cannot look me in the eye, he has to pay for it.” The dealer once more chuckled; and then, changing to his usual business voice, though still with a note of irony, “You can give, as usual, a clear account of how you came into the possession of the object?” he continued. “Still your uncle’s cabinet? A remarkable collector, sir!”

And the little pale, round-shouldered dealer stood almost on tip-toe, looking over the top of his gold spectacles, and nodding his head with every mark of disbelief. Markheim returned his gaze with one of infinite pity, and a touch of horror.

“This time,” said he, “you are in error. I have not come to sell, but to buy. I have no curios to dispose of; my uncle’s cabinet is bare to the wainscot; even were it still intact, I have done well on the Stock Exchange, and should more likely add to it than otherwise, and my errand to-day is simplicity itself. I seek a Christmas present for a lady,” he continued, waxing more fluent as he struck into the speech he had prepared; “and certainly I owe you every excuse for thus disturbing you upon so small a matter. But the thing was neglected yesterday; I must produce my little compliment at dinner; and, as you very well know, a rich marriage is not a thing to be neglected.”

There followed a pause, during which the dealer seemed to weigh this statement incredulously. The ticking of many clocks among the curious lumber of the shop, and the faint rushing of the cabs in a near thoroughfare, filled up the interval of silence.

“Well, sir,” said the dealer, “be it so. You are an old customer after all; and if, as you say, you have the chance of a good marriage, far be it from me to be an obstacle. Here is a nice thing for a lady now,” he went on, “this hand-glass--fifteenth century, warranted; comes from a good collection, too; but I reserve the name, in the interests of my customer, who was just like yourself, my dear sir, the nephew and sole heir of a remarkable collector.”

The dealer, while he thus ran on in his dry and biting voice, had stooped to take the object from its place; and, as he had done so, a shock had passed through Markheim, a start both of hand and foot, a sudden leap of many tumultuous passions to the face. It passed as swiftly as it came, and left no trace beyond a certain trembling of the hand that now received the glass.

“A glass,” he said hoarsely, and then paused, and repeated it more clearly. “A glass? For Christmas? Surely not?”

“And why not?” cried the dealer. “Why not a glass?”

Markheim was looking upon him with an indefinable expression. “You ask me why not?” he said. “Why, look here--look in it--look at yourself! Do you like to see it? No! nor I--nor any man.”

The little man had jumped back when Markheim had so suddenly confronted him with the mirror; but now, perceiving there was nothing worse on hand, he chuckled. “Your future lady, sir, must be pretty hard favoured,” said he.
“I ask you,” said Markheim, “for a Christmas present, and you give me this--this damned reminder of years, and sins and follies--this hand-conscience! Did you mean it? Had you a thought in your mind? Tell me. It will be better for you if you do. Come, tell me about yourself. I hazard a guess now, that you are in secret a very charitable man.”

The dealer looked closely at his companion. It was very odd, Markheim did not appear to be laughing; there was something in his face like an eager sparkle of hope, but nothing of mirth.

“What are you driving at?” the dealer asked.

“Not charitable?” returned the other, gloomily. “Not charitable; not pious; not scrupulous; unloving, unbeloved; a hand to get money, a safe to keep it. Is that all? Dear God, man, is that all?”

“I will tell you what it is,” began the dealer, with some sharpness, and then broke off again into a chuckle. “But I see this is a love match of yours, and you have been drinking the lady’s health.”

“Ah!” cried Markheim, with a strange curiosity. “Ah, have you been in love? Tell me about that.”

“I,” cried the dealer. “I in love! I never had the time, nor have I the time to-day for all this nonsense. Will you take the glass?”

“Where is the hurry?” returned Markheim. “It is very pleasant to stand here talking; and life is so short and insecure that I would not hurry away from any pleasure--no, not even from so mild a one as this. We should rather cling, cling to what little we can get, like a man at a cliff’s edge. Every second is a cliff, if you think upon it--a cliff a mile high--high enough, if we fall, to dash us out of every feature of humanity. Hence it is best to talk pleasantly. Let us talk of each other; why should we wear this mask? Let us be confidential. Who knows? we might become friends.”

“I have just one word to say to you,” said the dealer. “Either make your purchase, or walk out of my shop.”


The dealer stooped once more, this time to replace the glass upon the shelf, his thin blond hair falling over his eyes as he did so. Markheim moved a little nearer, with one hand in the pocket of his greatcoat; he drew himself up and filled his lungs; at the same time many different emotions were depicted together on his face--terror, horror, and resolve, fascination and a physical repulsion; and through a haggard lift of his upper lip, his teeth looked out.

“This, perhaps, may suit,” observed the dealer. And then, as he began to rearise, Markheim bounded from behind upon his victim. The long, skewer-like dagger flashed and fell. The dealer struggled like a hen, striking his temple on the shelf, and then tumbled on the floor in a heap.

Time had some score of small voices in that shop--some stately and slow as was becoming to their great age; others garrulous and hurried. All these told out the seconds in an intricate chorus of tickings. Then the passage of a lad’s feet, heavily running on the pavement, broke in upon these smaller voices and startled Markheim into the consciousness of his surroundings. He looked about him awfully. The candle stood on the counter, its flame solemnly wagging in a draught; and by that inconsiderable movement the whole room was filled with noiseless bustle and kept heaving like a sea: the tall shadows nodding, the gross blots of darkness swelling and dwindling as with respiration, the faces of the portraits and the china gods changing and wavering like images in water. The inner door stood ajar, and peered into that leaguer of shadows with a long slit of daylight like a pointing finger.

From these fear-stricken rovings, Markheim’s eyes returned to the body of his victim, where it lay, both humped and sprawling, incredibly small and strangely meaner than in life. In these poor, miserly clothes, in that ungainly attitude, the dealer lay like so much sawdust. Markheim had feared to see it, and, lo! it was nothing. And yet, as he gazed, this bundle of old clothes and pool of blood began to find eloquent voices. There it must lie; there was none to work the cunning hinges or direct the miracle of locomotion; there it must lie till it was found. Found! ay, and then? Then would this dead flesh lift up a cry that would ring over England, and fill the world with the echoes of pursuit. Ay, dead or not, this was still the enemy. “Time was that when the brains were out,” he thought; and the first word struck into his mind. Time, now that the deed was accomplished--time, which had
closed for the victim, had become instant and momentous for the slayer.

The thought was yet in his mind, when, first one and then another, with every variety of pace and voice--one deep as the bell from a cathedral turret, another ringing on its treble notes the prelude of a waltz.--the clocks began to strike the hour of three in the afternoon.

The sudden outbreak of so many tongues in that dumb chamber staggered him. He began to bestir himself, going to and fro with the candle, beleaguered by moving shadows, and startled to the soul by chance reflections. In many rich mirrors, some of home design, some from Venice or Amsterdam, he saw his face repeated and repeated, as it were an army of spies; his own eyes met and detected him; and the sound of his own steps, lightly as they fell, vexed the surrounding quiet. And still, as he continued to fill his pockets, his mind accused him with a sickening iteration, of the thousand faults of his design. He should have chosen a more quiet hour; he should have prepared an alibi; he should not have used a knife; he should have been more cautious, and only bound and gagged the dealer, and not killed him; he should have been more bold, and killed the servant also; he should have done all things otherwise. Poignant regrets, weary, incessant toiling of the mind to change what was unchangeable, to plan what was now useless, to be the architect of the irrevocable past. Meanwhile, and behind all this activity, brute terrors, like the scurrying of rats in a deserted attic, filled the more remote chambers of his brain with riot; the hand of the constable would fall heavy on his shoulder, and his nerves would jerk like a hooked fish; or he beheld, in galloping defile, the dock, the prison, the gallows, and the black coffin.

Terror of the people in the street sat down before his mind like a besieging army. It was impossible, he thought, but that some rumour of the struggle must have reached their ears and set on edge their curiosity; and now, in all the neighbouring houses, he divined them sitting motionless and with uplifted ear--solitary people, condemned to spend Christmas dwelling alone on memories of the past, and now startingly recalled from that tender exercise; happy family parties struck into silence round the table, the mother still with raised finger--every degree and age and humour, but all, by their own hearths, prying and hearkening and weaving the rope that was to hang him. Sometimes it seemed to him he could not move too softly; the clink of the tall Bohemian goblets rang out loudly like a bell; and alarmed by the bigness of the ticking, he was tempted to stop the clocks. And then, again, with a swift transition of his terrors, the very silence of the place appeared a source of peril, and a thing to strike and freeze the passer-by; and he would step more boldly, and bustle aloud among the contents of the shop, and imitate, with elaborate bravado, the movements of a busy man at ease in his own house.

But he was now so pulled about by different alarms that, while one portion of his mind was still alert and cunning, another trembled on the brink of lunacy. One hallucination in particular took a strong hold on his credulity. The neighbour hearkening with white face beside his window, the passer-by arrested by a horrible surmise on the pavement--these could at worst suspect, they could not know; through the brick walls and shuttered windows only sounds could penetrate. But here, within the house, was he alone? He knew he was; he had watched the servant set forth sweet-hearted, in her poor best, "out for the day" written in every ribbon and smile. Yes, he was alone, of course; and yet, in the bulk of empty house above him, he could surely hear a stir of delicate footing; he was surely conscious, inexplicably conscious of some presence. Ay, surely; to every room and corner of the house his imagination followed it; and now it was a faceless thing; and yet again behold the image of the dead dealer, reinspired with cunning and hatred.

At times, with a strong effort, he would glance at the open door which still seemed to repel his eyes. The house was tall, the skylight small and dirty, the day blind with fog; and the light that filtered down to the ground story was exceedingly faint, and showed dimly on the threshold of the shop. And yet, in that strip of doubtful brightness, did there not hang wavering a shadow?

Suddenly, from the street outside, a very jovial gentleman began to beat with a staff on the shop door, accompanying his blows with shouts and raileries in which the dealer was continually called upon by name. Markheim, smitten into ice, glanced at the dead man. But no! he lay quite still; he was fled away far beyond earshot of these blows and shoutings; he was sunk beneath seas
of silence; and his name, which would once have caught his notice above the howling of a storm, had become an empty sound. And presently the jovial gentleman desisted from his knocking and departed.

Here was a broad hint to hurry what remained to be done, to get forth from this accusing neighbourhood, to plunge into a bath of London multitudes, and to reach, on the other side of day, that haven of safety and apparent innocence--his bed. One visitor had come; at any moment another might follow and be more obstinate. To have done the deed, and yet not to reap the profit, would be too abhorrent a failure. The money--that was now Markheim’s concern; and as a means to that, the keys.

He glanced over his shoulder at the open door, where the shadow was still lingering and shivering; and with no conscious repugnance of the mind, yet with a tremor of the belly, he drew near the body of his victim. The human character had quite departed. Like a suit half-stuffed with bran, the limbs lay scattered, the trunk doubled, on the floor; and yet the thing repelled him. Although so dingy and inconsiderable to the eye, he feared it might have more significance to the touch. He took the body by the shoulders, and turned it on its back. It was strangely light and supple, and the limbs, as if they had been broken, fell into the oddest postures. The face was robbed of all expression; but it was as pale as wax, and shockingly smeared with blood about one temple. That was, for Markheim, the one displeasing circumstance. It carried him back, upon the instant, to a certain fair-day in a fishers’ village: a gray day, a piping wind, a crowd upon the street, the blare of brasses, the booming of drums, the nasal voice of a ballad singer; and a boy going to and fro, buried overhead in the crowd and divided between interest and fear, until, coming out upon the chief place of concourse, he beheld a booth and a great screen with pictures, dimly designed, garishly coloured--Brownrigg with her apprentice, the Mannings with their murdered guest, Weare in the death-grip of Thurtell, and a score besides of famous crimes. The thing was as clear as an illusion. He was once again that little boy; he was looking once again, and with the same sense of physical revolt, at these vile pictures; he was still stunned by the thumping of the drums. A bar of that day’s music returned upon his memory; and at that, for the first time, a qualm came over him, a breath of nausea, a sudden weakness of the joints, which he must instantly resist and conquer.

He judged it more prudent to confront than to flee from these considerations, looking the more hardily in the dead face, bending his mind to realise the nature and greatness of his crime. So little a while ago that face had moved with every change of sentiment, that pale mouth had spoken, that body had been all on fire with governable energies; and now, and by his act, that piece of life had been arrested, as the horologist, with interjected finger, arrests the beating of the clock. So he reasoned in vain; he could rise to no more remorseful consciousness; the same heart which had shuddered before the painted effigies of crime, looked on its reality unmoved. At best, he felt a gleam of pity for one who had been endowed in vain with all those faculties that can make the world a garden of enchantment, one who had never lived and who was now dead. But of penitence, no, not a tremor.

With that, shaking himself clear of these considerations, he found the keys and advanced toward the open door of the shop. Outside, it had begun to rain smartly, and the sound of the shower upon the roof had banished silence. Like some dripping cavern, the chambers of the house were haunted by an incessant echoing, which filled the ear and mingled with the ticking of the clocks. And, as Markheim approached the door, he seemed to hear, in answer to his own cautious tread, the steps of another foot withdrawing up the stair. The shadow still palpitated loosely on the threshold. He threw a ton’s weight of resolve upon his muscles, and drew back the door.

The faint, foggy daylight glimmered dimly on the bare floor and stairs; on the bright suit of armour posted, halbert in hand, upon the landing; and on the dark wood-carvings, and framed pictures that hung against the yellow panels of the wainscot. So loud was the beating of the rain through all the house that, in Markheim’s ears, it began to be distinguished into many different sounds. Footsteps and sighs, the tread of regiments marching in the distance, the chink of money in the counting, and the creaking of doors held stealthily ajar, appeared to mingle with the patter of the drops upon the cupola and the gushing of the water in the pipes. The sense that he was not alone
grew upon him to the verge of madness. On every side he was haunted and begirt by presences. He heard them moving in the upper chambers; from the shop, he heard the dead man getting to his legs; and as he began with a great effort to mount the stairs, feet fled quietly before him and followed stealthily behind. If he were but deaf, he thought, how tranquilly he would possess his soul! And then again, and hearkening with ever fresh attention, he blessed himself for that unresting sense which held the outposts and stood a trusty sentinel upon his life. His head turned continually on his neck; his eyes, which seemed starting from their orbits, scouted on every side, and on every side were half rewarded as with the tail of something nameless vanishing. The four and twenty steps to the first floor were four and twenty agonies.

On that first story, the doors stood ajar--three of them, like three ambushes, shaking his nerves like the throats of cannon. He could never again, he felt, be sufficiently immured and fortified from men’s observing eyes; he longed to be home, girt in by walls, buried among bedclothes, and invisible to all but God. And at that thought he wondered a little, recollecting tales of other murderers and the fear they were said to entertain of heavenly avengers. It was not so, at least, with him. He feared the laws of nature, lest, in their callous and immutable procedure, they should preserve some damning evidence of his crime. He feared tenfold more, with a slavish, superstitious terror, some scission in the continuity of man’s experience, some wilful illegality of nature. He played a game of skill, depending on the rules, calculating consequence from cause; and what if nature, as the defeated tyrant overthrew the chess-board, should break the mould of their succession? The like had befallen Napoleon (so writers said) when the winter changed the time of its appearance. The like might befall Markheim: the solid walls might become transparent and reveal his doings like those of bees in a glass hive; the stout planks might yield under his foot like quicksands and detain him in their clutch. Ay, and there were soberer accidents that might destroy him; if, for instance, the house should fall and imprison him beside the body of his victim, or the house next door should fly on fire, and the firemen invade him from all sides. These things he feared; and, in a sense, these things might be called the hands of God reached forth against sin. But about God himself he was at ease; his act was doubtless exceptional, but so were his excuses, which God knew; it was there, and not among men, that he felt sure of justice.

When he had got safe into the drawing-room, and shut the door behind him, he was aware of a respite from alarms. The room was quite dismantled, uncarpeted besides, and strewn with packing-cases and incongruous furniture; several great pier-glasses, in which he beheld himself at various angles, like an actor on a stage; many pictures, framed and unframed, standing, with their faces to the wall; a fine Sheraton sideboard, a cabinet of marquetry, and a great old bed, with tapestry hangings. The windows opened to the floor; but by great good fortune the lower part of the shutters had been closed, and this concealed him from the neighbours. Here, then, Markheim drew in a packing-case before the cabinet, and began to search among the keys. It was a long business, for there were many; and it was irksome, besides; for, after all, there might be nothing in the cabinet, and time was on the wing. But the closeness of the occupation sobered him. With the tail of his eye he saw the door--even glanced at it from time to time directly, like a besieged commander pleased to verify the good estate of his defences. But in truth he was at peace. The rain falling in the street sounded natural and pleasant. Presently, on the other side, the notes of a piano were wakened to the music of a hymn, and the voices of many children took up the air and words. How stately, how comfortable was the melody! How fresh the youthful voices! Markheim gave ear to it smilingly, as he sorted out the keys; and his mind was thronged with answerable ideas and images: church-going children, and the pealing of the high organ; children afield, bathers by the brookside, ramblers on the brambly common, kite-flyers in the windy and cloud-navigated sky; and then, at another cadence of the hymn, back again to church, and the somnolence of summer Sundays, and the high genteel voice of the parson (which he smiled a little to recall) and the painted Jacobean tombs, and the dim lettering of the Ten Commandments in the chancel.

And as he sat thus, at once busy and absent, he was startled to his feet. A flash of ice, a flash of fire, a bursting gush of blood, went over him, and then he stood transfixed and thrilling. A step mounted the stair slowly and steadily, and presently a hand was laid upon the knob, and the lock
clicked, and the door opened.

Fear held Markheim in a vice. What to expect he knew not—whether the dead man walking, or the official ministers of human justice, or some chance witness blindly stumbling in to consign him to the gallows. But when a face was thrust into the aperture, glanced round the room, looked at him, nodded and smiled as if in friendly recognition, and then withdrew again, and the door closed behind it, his fear broke loose from his control in a hoarse cry. At the sound of this the visitant returned.

“Did you call me?” he asked, pleasantly, and with that he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

Markheim stood and gazed at him with all his eyes. Perhaps there was a film upon his sight, but the outlines of the new comer seemed to change and waver like those of the idols in the wavering candle-light of the shop; and at times he thought he knew him; and at times he thought he bore a likeness to himself; and always, like a lump of living terror, there lay in his bosom the conviction that this thing was not of the earth and not of God.

And yet the creature had a strange air of the commonplace, as he stood looking on Markheim with a smile; and when he added, “You are looking for the money, I believe?” it was in the tones of everyday politeness.

Markheim made no answer.

“I should warn you,” resumed the other, “that the maid has left her sweetheart earlier than usual and will soon be here. If Mr. Markheim be found in this house, I need not describe to him the consequences.”

“You know me?” cried the murderer.

The visitor smiled. “You have long been a favourite of mine,” he said; “and I have long observed and often sought to help you.”

“What are you?” cried Markheim; “the devil?”

“What I may be,” returned the other, “cannot affect the service I propose to render you.”

“It can,” cried Markheim; “it does! Be helped by you? No, never; not by you! You do not know me yet; thank God, you do not know me!”

“I know you,” replied the visitant, with a sort of kind severity or rather firmness. “I know you to the soul.”

“To me?” inquired the visitant.

“To you before all,” returned the murderer. “I supposed you were intelligent. I thought—since you exist— you would prove a reader of the heart. And yet you would propose to judge me by my acts! Think of it—my acts! I was born and I have lived in a land of giants; giants have dragged me by the wrists since I was born out of my mother—the giants of circumstance. And you would judge me by my acts! But can you not look within? Can you not understand that evil is hateful to me? Can you not see within me the clear writing of conscience, never blurred by any wilful sophistry, although too often disregarded? Can you not read me for a thing that surely must be common as humanity—the unwilling sinner?”

“All this is very feelingly expressed,” was the reply, “but it regards me not. These points of consistency are beyond my province, and I care not in the least by what compulsion you may have been dragged away, so as you are but carried in the right direction. But time flies; the servant delays, looking in the faces of the crowd and at the pictures on the hoardings, but still she keeps moving nearer; and remember, it is as if the gallows itself was striding towards you through the Christmas streets! Shall I help you—I, who know all? Shall I tell you where to find the money?”

“For what price?” asked Markheim.
“I offer you the service for a Christmas gift,” returned the other.

Markheim could not refrain from smiling with a kind of bitter triumph. “No,” said he, “I will take nothing at your hands; if I were dying of thirst, and it was your hand that put the pitcher to my lips, I should find the courage to refuse. It may be credulous, but I will do nothing to commit myself to evil.”

“I have no objection to a death-bed repentance,” observed the visitant.

“Because you disbelieve their efficacy!” Markheim cried.

“I do not say so,” returned the other; “but I look on these things from a different side, and when the life is done my interest falls. The man has lived to serve me, to spread black looks under colour of religion, or to sow tares in the wheat-field, as you do, in a course of weak compliance with desire. Now that he draws so near to his deliverance, he can add but one act of service: to repent, to die smiling, and thus to build up in confidence and hope the more timorous of my surviving followers. I am not so hard a master. Try me; accept my help. Please yourself in life as you have done hitherto; please yourself more amply, spread your elbows at the board; and when the night begins to fall and the curtains to be drawn, I tell you, for your greater comfort, that you will find it even easy to compound your quarrel with your conscience, and to make a truckling peace with God. I came but now from such a death-bed, and the room was full of sincere mourners, listening to the man’s last words; and when I looked into that face, which had been set as a flint against mercy, I found it smiling with hope.”

“And do you, then, suppose me such a creature?” asked Markheim. “Do you think I have no more generous aspirations than to sin and sin and sin and at last sneak into heaven? My heart rises at the thought. Is this, then, your experience of mankind? or is it because you find me with red hands that you presume such baseness? And is this crime of murder indeed so impious as to dry up the very springs of good?”

“Murder is to me no special category,” replied the other. “All sins are murder, even as all life is war. I behold your race, like starving mariners on a raft, plucking crusts out of the hands of famine and feeding on each other’s lives. I follow sins beyond the moment of their acting; I find in all that the last consequence is death, and to my eyes, the pretty maid who thwarts her mother with such taking graces on a question of a ball, drips no less visibly with human gore than such a murderer as yourself. Do I say that I follow sins? I follow virtues also. They differ not by the thickness of a nail; they are both scythes for the reaping angel of Death. Evil, for which I live, consists not in action but in character. The bad man is dear to me, not the bad act, whose fruits, if we could follow them far enough down the hurtling cataract of the ages, might yet be found more blessed than those of the rarest virtues. And it is not because you have killed a dealer, but because you are Markheim, that I offer to forward your escape.”

“I will lay my heart open to you,” answered Markheim. “This crime on which you find me is my last. On my way to it I have learned many lessons; itself is a lesson—a momentous lesson. Hitherto I have been driven with revolt to what I would not; I was a bondslave to poverty, driven and scourged. There are robust virtues that can stand in these temptations; mine was not so; I had a thirst of pleasure. But to-day, and out of this deed, I pluck both warning and riches—both the power and a fresh resolve to be myself. I become in all things a free actor in the world; I begin to see myself all changed, these hands the agents of good, this heart at peace. Something comes over me out of the past—something of what I have dreamed on Sabbath evenings to the sound of the church organ, of what I forecast when I shed tears over noble books, or talked, an innocent child, with my mother. There lies my life; I have wandered a few years, but now I see once more my city of destination.”

“You are to use this money on the Stock Exchange, I think?” remarked the visitor; “and there, if I mistake not, you have already lost some thousands?”

“Ah,” said Markheim, “but this time I have a sure thing.”

“This time, again, you will lose,” replied the visitor quietly.

“Ah, but I keep back the half!” cried Markheim.

“That also you will lose,” said the other.
The sweat started upon Markheim’s brow. “Well then, what matter?” he exclaimed. “Say it be lost, say I am plunged again in poverty, shall one part of me, and that the worse, continue until the end to override the better? Evil and good run strong in me, hailing me both ways. I do not love the one thing; I love all. I can conceive great deeds, renunciations, martyrdoms; and though I be fallen to such a crime as murder, pity is no stranger to my thoughts. I pity the poor; who knows their trials better than myself? I pity and help them. I prize love; I love honest laughter; there is no good thing nor true thing on earth but I love it from my heart. And are my vices only to direct my life, and my virtues to lie without effect, like some passive lumber of the mind? Not so; good, also, is a spring of acts.”

But the visitant raised his finger. “For six and thirty years that you have been in this world,” said he, “through many changes of fortune and varieties of humour, I have watched you steadily fall. Fifteen years ago you would have started at a theft. Three years back you would have blenched at the name of murder. Is there any crime, is there any cruelty or meanness, from which you still recoil? Five years from now I shall detect you in the fact! Downward, downward, lies your way; nor can anything but death avail to stop you.”

“It is true,” Markheim said huskily, “I have in some degree complied with evil. But it is so with all; the very saints, in the mere exercise of living, grow less dainty, and take on the tone of their surroundings.”

“I will propound to you one simple question,” said the other; “and as you answer I shall read to you your moral horoscope. You have grown in many things more lax; possibly you do right to be so; and at any account, it is the same with all men. But granting that, are you in any one particular, however trifling, more difficult to please with your own conduct, or do you go in all things with a looser rein?”

“In any one?” repeated Markheim, with an anguish of consideration. “No,” he added, with despair; “in none! I have gone down in all.”

“Then,” said the visitor, “content yourself with what you are, for you will never change; and the words of your part on this stage are irrevocably written down.”

Markheim stood for a long while silent, and, indeed, it was the visitor who first broke the silence. “That being so,” he said, “shall I show you the money?”

“And grace?” cried Markheim. “Have you not tried it?” returned the other. “Two or three years ago did I not see you on the platform of revival meetings, and was not your voice the loudest in the hymn?”

“It is true,” said Markheim; “and I see clearly what remains for me by way of duty. I thank you for these lessons from my soul; my eyes are opened, and I behold myself at last for what I am.”

At this moment, the sharp note of the door-bell rang through the house; and the visitant, as though this were some concerted signal for which he had been waiting, changed at once in his demeanour.

“The maid!” he cried. “She has returned, as I forewarned you, and there is now before you one more difficult passage. Her master, you must say, is ill; you must let her in, with an assured but rather serious countenance; no smiles, no overacting, and I promise you success! Once the girl within, and the door closed, the same dexterity that has already rid you of the dealer will relieve you of this last danger in your path. Thenceforward you have the whole evening—the whole night, if needful—to ransack the treasures of the house and to make good your safety. This is help that comes to you with the mask of danger. Up!” he cried; “up, friend. Your life hangs trembling in the scales; up, and act!”

Markheim steadily regarded his counsellor. “If I be condemned to evil acts,” he said, “there is still one door of freedom open: I can cease from action. If my life be an ill thing, I can lay it down. Though I be, as you say truly, at the beck of every small temptation, I can yet, by one decisive gesture, place myself beyond the reach of all. My love of good is damned to barrenness; it may, and let it be! But I have still my hatred of evil; and from that, to your galling disappointment, you shall see that I can draw both energy and courage.”

The features of the visitor began to undergo a wonderful and lovely change: they brightened
and softened with a tender triumph, and, even as they brightened, faded and dislimned. But Markheim did not pause to watch or understand the transformation. He opened the door and went downstairs very slowly, thinking to himself. His past went soberly before him; he beheld it as it was, ugly and strenuous like a dream, random as chance medley—a scene of defeat. Life, as he thus reviewed it, tempted him no longer; but on the further side he perceived a quiet haven for his bark. He paused in the passage, and looked into the shop, where the candle still burned by the dead body. It was strangely silent. Thoughts of the dealer swarmed into his mind, as he stood gazing. And then the bell once more broke out into impatient clamour.

He confronted the maid upon the threshold with something like a smile.

“You had better go for the police,” said he; “I have killed your master.”
Oscar Wilde, LORD ARTHUR SAVILE’S CRIME (1887)

[Oscar Wilde, “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime,” The Court and Society Review (May 11, 18, 25, 1887)]


I

It was Lady Windermere’s last reception before Easter, and Bentinck House was even more crowded than usual. Six Cabinet Ministers had come on from the Speaker’s Levee in their stars and ribands, all the pretty women wore their smartest dresses, and at the end of the picture-gallery stood the Princess Sophia of Carlsruhe, a heavy Tartar-looking lady, with tiny black eyes and wonderful emeralds, talking bad French at the top of her voice, and laughing immoderately at everything that was said to her. It was certainly a wonderful medley of people. Gorgeous peeresses chatted affably to violent Radicals, popular preachers brushed coat-tails with eminent sceptics, a perfect bevy of bishops kept following a stout prima-donna from room to room, on the staircase stood several Royal Academicians, disguised as artists, and it was said that at one time the supper-room was absolutely crammed with geniuses. In fact, it was one of Lady Windermere’s best nights, and the Princess stayed till nearly half-past eleven.

As soon as she had gone, Lady Windermere returned to the picture-gallery, where a celebrated political economist was solemnly explaining the scientific theory of music to an indignant virtuoso from Hungary, and began to talk to the Duchess of Paisley. She looked wonderfully beautiful with her grand ivory throat, her large blue forget-me-not eyes, and her heavy coils of golden hair. Or pur they were -- not that pale straw colour that nowadays usurps the gracious name of gold, but such gold as is woven into sunbeams or hidden in strange amber; and gave to her face something of the frame of a saint, with not a little of the fascination of a sinner. She was a curious psychological study. Early in life she had discovered the important truth that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion; and by a series of reckless escapades, half of them quite harmless, she had acquired all the privileges of a personality. She had more than once changed her husband; indeed, Debrett credits her with three marriages; but as she had never changed her lover, the world had long ago ceased to talk scandal about her. She was now forty years of age, childless, and with that inordinate passion for pleasure which is the secret of remaining young.

Suddenly she looked eagerly round the room, and said, in her clear contralto voice, ‘Where is my cheiromantist?’

‘Your what, Gladys?’ exclaimed the Duchess, giving an involuntary start.

‘My cheiromantist, Duchess; I can’t live without him at present.

‘Dear Gladys! you are always so original,’ murmured the Duchess, trying to remember what a cheiromantist really was, and hoping it was not the same as a cheiropodist.

‘He comes to see my hand twice a week regularly,’ continued Lady Windermere, ‘and is most interesting about it.’

‘Good heavens!’ said the Duchess to herself ‘he is a sort of cheiropodist after all. How very dreadful. I hope he is a foreigner at any rate. It wouldn’t be quite so bad then.’

‘I must certainly introduce him to you.’

‘Introduce him!’ cried the Duchess; ‘you don’t mean to say he is here?’ and she began looking about for a small tortoise-shell fan and a very tattered lace shawl, so as to be ready to go at a moment’s notice.

‘Of course he is here, I would not dream of giving a party without him. He tells me I have a pure psychic hand, and that if my thumb had been the least little bit shorter, I should have been a confirmed pessimist, and gone into a convent.’

‘Oh, I see! said the Duchess, feeling very much relieved; ‘he tells fortunes, I suppose?’
And misfortunes, too,' answered Lady Windermere, 'any amount of them. Next year, for instance, I am in great danger, both by land and sea, so I am going to live in a balloon, and draw up my dinner in a basket every evening. It is all written down on my little finger, or on the palm of my hand, I forget which.'

'But surely that is tempting Providence, Gladys.'

'My dear Duchess, surely Providence can resist temptation by this time. I think every one should have their hands told once a month, so as to know what not to do. Of course, one does it all the same, but it is so pleasant to be warned. Now, if some one doesn’t go and fetch Mr. Podgers at once, I shall have to go myself.'

'Let me go, Lady Windermere,' said a tall handsome young man, who was standing by, listening to the conversation with an amused smile.

'Thanks so much, Lord Arthur; but I am afraid you wouldn’t recognise him.'

'If he is as wonderful as you say, Lady Windermere, I couldn’t well miss him. Tell me what he is like, and I’ll bring him to you at once.'

'Well, he is not a bit like a cheiromantist. I mean he is not mysterious, or esoteric, or romantic-looking. He is a little, stout man, with a funny, bald head, and great gold-rimmed spectacles; something between a family doctor and a country attorney. I’m really very sorry, but it is not my fault. People are so annoying. All my pianists look exactly like poets, and all my poets look exactly like pianists; and I remember last season asking a most dreadful conspirator to dinner, a man who had blown up ever so many people, and always wore a coat of mail, and carried a dagger up his shirt-sleeve; and do you know that when he came he looked just like a nice old clergyman, and cracked jokes all the evening? Of course, he was very amusing, and all that, but I was awfully disappointed; and when I asked him about the coat of mail, he only laughed, and said it was far too cold to wear in England. Ah, here is Mr. Podgers! Now, Mr. Podgers, I want you to tell the Duchess of Paisley’s hand. Duchess, you must take your glove off. No, not the left hand, the other.'

'Dear Gladys, I really don’t think it is quite right,' said the Duchess, feebly unbuttoning a rather soiled kid glove.

'Nothing interesting ever is,' said Lady Windermere: ‘on a fait le monde ainsi. But I must introduce you. Duchess, this is Mr. Podgers, my pet cheiromantist. Mr. Podgers, this is the Duchess of Paisley, and if you say that she has a larger mountain of the moon than I have, I will never believe in you again.'

'I am sure, Gladys, there is nothing of the kind in my hand,' said the Duchess gravely.

'Your Grace is quite right,' said Mr. Podgers, glancing at the little fat hand with its short square fingers, ‘the mountain of the moon is not developed. The line of life, however, is excellent. Kindly bend the wrist. Thank you. Three distinct lines on the racette! You will live to a great age, Duchess, and be extremely happy. Ambition -- very moderate, line of intellect not exaggerated, line of heart--'

'Now, do be indiscreet, Mr. Podgers,' cried Lady Windermere.

'Nothing would give me greater pleasure,' said Mr. Podgers, bowing, ‘if the Duchess ever had been, but I am sorry to say that I see great permanence of affection, combined with a strong sense of duty.'

'Pray go on, Mr. Podgers,’ said the Duchess, looking quite pleased.

'Economy is not the least of your Grace’s virtues,’ continued Mr. Podgers, and Lady Windermere went off into fits of laughter.

'Economy is a very good thing,’ remarked the Duchess complacently; ‘when I married Paisley he had eleven castles, and not a single house fit to live in.'

'And now he has twelve houses, and not a single castle,’ cried Lady Windermere.

'Well, my dear,’ said the Duchess, ‘I like--’

'Comfort,’ said Mr. Podgers, ‘and modern improvements, and hot water laid on in every bedroom. Your Grace is quite right. Comfort is the only thing our civilisation can give us.’

'You have told the Duchess’s character admirably, Mr. Podgers, and now you must tell Lady Flora’s;’ and in answer to a nod from the smiling hostess, a tall girl, with sandy Scotch hair, and high shoulder-blades, stepped awkwardly from behind the sofa, and held out a long, bony hand with
spatulate fingers.

‘Ah, a pianist! I see,’ said Mr. Podgers, ‘an excellent pianist, but perhaps hardly a musician. Very reserved, very honest, and with a great love of animals.’

‘Quite true!’ exclaimed the Duchess, turning to Lady Windermere, ‘absolutely true! Flora keeps two dozen collie dogs at Macloskie, and would turn our town house into a menagerie if her father would let her.’

‘Well, that is just what I do with my house every Thursday evening,’ cried Lady Windermere, laughing, ‘only I like lions better than collie dogs.’

‘Your one mistake, Lady Windermere,’ said Mr. Podgers, with a pompous bow.

‘If a woman can’t make her mistakes charming, she is only a female,’ was the answer. ‘But you must read some more hands for us. Come, Sir Thomas, show Mr. Podgers yours;’ and a genial-looking old gentleman, in a white waistcoat, came forward, and held out a thick rugged hand, with a very long third finger.

‘An adventurous nature; four long voyages in the past, and one to come. Been shipwrecked three times. No, only twice, but in danger of a shipwreck your next journey. A strong Conservative, very punctual, and with a passion for collecting curiosities. Had a severe illness between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Was left a fortune when about thirty. Great aversion to cats and Radicals.’

‘Extraordinary!’ exclaimed Sir Thomas; ‘you must really tell my wife’s hand, too.’

‘Your second wife’s,’ said Mr. Podgers quietly, still keeping Sir Thomas’s hand in his. ‘Your second wife’s. I shall be charmed;’ but Lady Marvel, a melancholy-looking woman, with brown hair and sentimental eyelashes, entirely declined to have her past or her future exposed; and nothing that Lady Windermere could do would induce Monsieur de Koloff the Russian Ambassador, even to take his gloves off. In fact, many people seemed afraid to face the odd little man with his stereotyped smile, his gold spectacles, and his bright, beady eyes; and when he told poor Lady Fermor, right out before everyone, that she did not care a bit for music, but was extremely fond of musicians, it was generally felt that cheiromancy was a most dangerous science, and one that ought not to be encouraged, except in a tête-à-tête.

Lord Arthur Savile, however, who did not know anything about Lady Fermor’s unfortunate story, and who had been watching Mr. Podgers with a great deal of interest, was filled with an immense curiosity to have his own hand read, and feeling somewhat shy about putting himself forward, crossed over the room to where Lady Windermere was sitting, and, with a charming blush, asked her if she thought Mr. Podgers would mind.

‘Of course, he won’t mind,’ said Lady Windermere ‘that is what he is here for. All my lions, Lord Arthur, are performing lions, and jump through hoops whenever I ask them. But I must warn you beforehand that I shall tell Sybil everything. She is coming to lunch with me to-morrow, to talk about bonnets, and if Mr. Podgers finds out that you have a bad temper, or a tendency to gout, or a wife living in Bayswater, I shall certainly let her know all about it.’

Lord Arthur smiled, and shook his head. ‘I am not afraid,’ he answered. ‘Sybil knows me as well as I know her.’

‘Ah! I am a little sorry to hear you say that. The proper basis for marriage is a mutual misunderstanding. No, I am not at all cynical, I have merely got experience, which, however, is very much the same thing. Mr. Podgers, Lord Arthur Savile is dying to have his hand read. Don’t tell him that he is engaged to one of the most beautiful girls in London, because that appeared in the Morning Post a month ago.’

‘Dear Lady Windermere,’ cried the Marchioness of Jedburgh, ‘do let Mr. Podgers stay here a little longer. He has just told me I should go on the stage, and I am so interested.’

‘If he has told you that, Lady Jedburgh, I shall certainly take him away. Come over at once, Mr. Podgers, and read Lord Arthur’s hand.’

‘Well,’ said Lady Jedburgh, making a little moue as she rose from the sofa, ‘if I am not to be allowed to go on the stage, I must be allowed to be part of the audience at any rate.’

‘Of course; we are all going to be part of the audience,’ said Lady Windermere; ‘and now, Mr. Podgers, be sure and tell us something nice. Lord Arthur is one of my special favourites.’
But when Mr. Podgers saw Lord Arthur’s hand he grew curiously pale, and said nothing. A shudder seemed to pass through him, and his great bushy eyebrows twitched convulsively, in an odd, irritating way they had when he was puzzled. Then some huge beads of perspiration broke out on his yellow forehead, like a poisonous dew, and his fat fingers grew cold and clammy.

Lord Arthur did not fail to notice these strange signs of agitation, and, for the first time in his life, he himself felt fear. His impulse was to rush from the room, but he restrained himself. It was better to know the worst, whatever it was, than to be left in this hideous uncertainty.

‘I am waiting, Mr. Podgers,’ he said.

‘We are all waiting,’ cried Lady Windermere, in her quick, impatient manner, but the cheiromantist made no reply.

‘I believe Arthur is going on the stage,’ said Lady Jedburgh, ‘and that, after your scolding, Mr. Podgers is afraid to tell him so.’

Suddenly Mr. Podgers dropped Lord Arthur’s right hand, and seized hold of his left, bending down so low to examine it that the gold rims of his spectacles seemed almost to touch the palm. For a moment his face became a white mask of horror, but he soon recovered his sang-froid, and looking up at Lady Windermere, said with a forced smile, ‘It is the hand of a charming young man.’

‘Of course it is!’ answered Lady Windermere, ‘but will he be a charming husband? That is what I want to know.’

‘All charming young men are,’ said Mr. Podgers.

‘I don’t think a husband should be too fascinating, murmured Lady Jedburgh pensively, ‘it is so dangerous.’

‘My dear child, they never are too fascinating,’ cried Lady Windermere. ‘But what I want are details. Details are the only things that interest. What is going to happen to Lord Arthur?’

‘Well, within the next few months Lord Arthur will go a voyage--’

‘Oh yes, his honeymoon, of course!’

‘And lose a relative.’

‘Not his sister, I hope?’ said Lady Jedburgh, in a piteous tone of voice.

‘Certainly not his sister,’ answered Mr. Podgers, with a deprecating wave of the hand, ‘a distant relative merely.’

‘Well, I am dreadfully disappointed,’ said Lady Windermere. ‘I have absolutely nothing to tell Sybil to-morrow. No one cares about distant relatives nowadays. They went out of fashion years ago. However, I suppose she had better have a black silk by her; it always does for church, you know. And now let us go to supper. They are sure to have eaten everything up, but we may find some hot soup. Francois used to make excellent soup once, but he is so agitated about politics at present, that I never feel quite certain about him. I do wish General Boulanger would keep quiet. Duchess, I am sure you are tired?’

‘Not at all, dear Gladys,’ answered the Duchess, waddling towards the door. ‘I have enjoyed myself immensely, and the cheiropodist, I mean the cheiromantist, is most interesting. Flora, where can my tortoise-shell fan be? Oh, thank you, Sir Thomas, so much. And my lace shawl, Flora? Oh, thank you, Sir Thomas, very kind, I’m sure; and the worthy creature finally managed to get downstairs without dropping her scent-bottle more than twice.

All this time Lord Arthur Savile had remained standing by the fireplace, with the same feeling of dread over him, the same sickening sense of coming evil. He smiled sadly at his sister, as she swept past him on Lord Plymdale’s arm, looking lovely in her pink brocade and pearls, and he hardly heard Lady Windermere when she called to him to follow her. He thought of Sybil Merton, and the idea that anything could come between them made his eyes dim with tears.

Looking at him, one would have said that Nemesis had stolen the shield of Pallas, and shown him the Gorgon’s head. He seemed turned to stone, and his face was like marble in its melancholy. He had lived the delicate and luxurious life of a young man of birth and fortune, a life exquisite in its freedom from sordid care, its beautiful boyish insouciance; and now for the first time he became conscious of the terrible mystery of Destiny, of the awful meaning of Doom.

How mad and monstrous it all seemed! Could it be that written on his hand, in characters that he
could not read himself, but that another could decipher, was some fearful secret of sin, some bloodred sign of crime? Was there no escape possible? Were we no better than chessmen, moved by an unseen power, vessels the potter fashions at his fancy, for honour or for shame? His reason revolted against it, and yet he felt that some tragedy was hanging over him, and that he had been suddenly called upon to bear an intolerable burden. Actors are so fortunate. They can choose whether they will appear in tragedy or in comedy, whether they will suffer or make merry, laugh or shed tears. But in real life it is different. Most men and women are forced to perform parts for which they have no qualifications. Our Guildensterns play Hamlet for us, and our Hamlets have to jest like Prince Hal. The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast.

Suddenly Mr. Podgers entered the room. When he saw Lord Arthur he started, and his coarse, fat face became a sort of greenish-yellow colour. The two men’s eyes met, and for a moment there was silence.

‘The Duchess has left one of her gloves here, Lord Arthur, and has asked me to bring it to her,’ said Mr. Podgers finally. ‘Ah, I see it on the sofa! Good evening.’

‘Mr. Podgers, I must insist on your giving me a straightforward answer to a question I am going to put to you.’

‘Another time, Lord Arthur, but the Duchess is anxious. I am afraid I must go.’

‘You shall not go. The Duchess is in no hurry.’

‘Ladies should not be kept waiting, Lord Arthur,’ said Mr. Podgers, with his sickly smile. ‘The fair sex is apt to be impatient.’

Lord Arthur’s finely-chiselled lips curled in petulant disdain. The poor Duchess seemed to him of very little importance at that moment. He walked across the room to where Mr. Podgers was standing, and held his hand out.

‘Tell me what you saw there,’ he said. ‘Tell me the truth. I must know it. I am not a child.’

Mr Podgers’s eyes blinked behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, and he moved uneasily from one foot to the other, while his fingers played nervously with a flash watch-chain.

‘What makes you think that I saw anything in your hand, Lord Arthur, more than I told you?’

‘I know you did, and I insist on your telling me what it was. I will pay you. I will give you a cheque for a hundred pounds.’

The green eyes flashed for a moment, and then became dull again.

‘Guineas?’ said Mr. Podgers at last, in a low voice.

‘Certainly. I will send you a cheque to-morrow. What is your club?’

‘I have no club. That is to say, not just at present. My address is -- but allow me to give you my card;’ and producing a bit of gilt-edged pasteboard from his waistcoat pocket, Mr. Podgers handed it, with a low bow, to Lord Arthur, who read on it,

MR. SEPTIMUS R. PODGERS
Professional Cheiromantist
103a West Moon Street

‘My hours are from ten to four,’ murmured Mr. Podgers mechanically, ‘and I make a reduction for families.’

‘Be quick,’ cried Lord Arthur, looking very pale, and holding his hand out.

Mr. Podgers glanced nervously round, and drew the heavy portiere across the door.

‘It will take a little time, Lord Arthur, you had better sit down,’

‘Be quick, sir,’ cried Lord Arthur again, stamping his foot angrily on the polished floor.

Mr. Podgers smiled, drew from his breast-pocket a small magnifying ‘glass, and wiped it carefully with his handkerchief.

‘I am quite ready,’ he said.

II

Ten minutes later, with face blanched by terror, and eyes wild with grief Lord Arthur Savile rushed
from Bentinck House, crushing his way through the crowd of fur-coated footmen that stood round the large striped awning, and seeming not to see or hear anything. The night was bitter cold, and the gas-lamps round the square flared and flickered in the keen wind; but his hands were hot with fever, and his forehead burned like fire. On and on he went, almost with the gait of a drunken man. A policeman looked curiously at him as he passed, and a beggar, who slouched from an archway to ask for alms, grew frightened, seeing misery greater than his own. Once he stopped under a lamp, and looked at his hands. He thought he could detect the stain of blood already upon them, and a faint cry broke from his trembling lips.

Murder! that is what the cheiromantist had seen there. Murder! The very night seemed to know it, and the desolate wind to howl it in his ear. The dark corners of the streets were full of it. It grinned at him from the roofs of the houses.

First he came to the Park, whose sombre woodland seemed to fascinate him. He leaned wearily up against the railings, cooling his brow against the wet metal, and listening to the tremulous silence of the trees. ‘Murder! murder!’ he kept repeating, as though iteration could dim the horror of the word. The sound of his own voice made him shudder, yet he almost hoped that Echo might hear him, and wake the slumbering city from its dreams. He felt a mad desire to stop the casual passer-by, and tell him everything.

Then he wandered across Oxford Street into narrow, shameful alleys. Two women with painted faces mocked at him as he went by. From a dark courtyard came a sound of oaths and blows, followed by shrill screams, and, huddled upon a damp doorstep, he saw the crook-backed forms of poverty and eld. A strange pity came over him. Were these children of sin and misery predestined to their end, as he to his? Were they, like him, merely the puppets of a monstrous show?

And yet it was not the mystery, but the comedy of suffering that struck him; its absolute uselessness, its grotesque want of meaning. How incoherent everything seemed! How lacking in all harmony! He was amazed at the discord between the shallow optimism of the day, and the real facts of existence. He was still very young.

After a time he found himself in front of Marylebone Church. The silent roadway looked like a long riband of polished silver, flecked here and there by the dark arabesques of waving shadows. Far into the distance curved the line of flickering gas-lamps, and outside a little walled-in house stood a solitary hansom, the driver asleep inside. He walked hastily in the direction of Portland Place, now and then looking round, as though he feared that he was being followed. At the corner of Rich Street stood two men, reading a small bill upon a hoarding. An odd feeling of curiosity stirred him, and he crossed over. As he came near, the word ‘Murder,’ printed in black letters, met his eye. He started, and a deep flush came into his cheek. It was an advertisement offering a reward for any information leading to the arrest of a man of medium height, between thirty and forty years of age, wearing a billy-cock hat, a black coat, and check trousers, and with a scar upon his right cheek. He read it over and over again, and wondered if the wretched man would be caught, and how he had been scarred. Perhaps, some day, his own name might be placarded on the walls of London. Some day, perhaps, a price would be set on his head also.

The thought made him sick with horror. He turned on his heel, and hurried on into the night.

Where he went he hardly knew. He had a dim memory of wandering through a labyrinth of sordid houses, of being lost in a giant web of sombre streets, and it was bright dawn when he found himself at last in Piccadilly Circus. As he strolled home towards Belgrave Square, he met the great waggons on their way to Covent Garden. The white-smocked carters, with their pleasant sunburnt faces and coarse curly hair, strode sturdily on, cracking their whips, and calling out now and then to each other; on the back of a huge grey horse, the leader of a jangling team, sat a chubby boy, with a bunch of primroses in his battered hat, keeping tight hold of the mane with his little hands, and laughing; and the great piles of vegetables looked like masses of jade against the morning sky, like masses of green jade against the pink petals of some marvellous rose. Lord Arthur felt curiously affected, he could not tell why. There was something in the dawn’s delicate loveliness that seemed to him inexpressibly pathetic, and he thought of all the days that break in beauty, and that set in storm. These rustics, too, with their rough, good-humoured voices, and their nonchalant ways, what
a strange London they saw! A London free from the sin of night and the smoke of day, a pallid, ghost-like city, a desolate town of tombs! He wondered what they thought of it, and whether they knew anything of its splendour and its shame, of its fierce, fiery-coloured joys, and its horrible hunger, of all it makes and mars from morn to eve. Probably it was to them merely a mart where they brought their fruits to sell, and where they tarried for a few hours at most, leaving the streets still silent, the houses still asleep. It gave him pleasure to watch them as they went by. Rude as they were, with their heavy, hobnailed shoes, and their awkward gait, they brought a little of Arcady with them. He felt that they had lived with Nature, and that she had taught them peace. He envied them all that they did not know.

By the time he had reached Belgrave Square the sky was a faint blue, and the birds were beginning to twitter in the gardens.

III

When Lord Arthur woke it was twelve o’clock, and the mid-day sun was streaming through the ivory-silk curtains of his room. He got up and looked out of the window. A dim haze of heat was hanging over the great city, and the roofs of the houses were like dull silver. In the flickering green of the square below some children were flitting about like white butterflies, and the pavement was crowded with people on their way to the Park. Never had life seemed lovelier to him, never had the things of evil seemed more remote.

Then his valet brought him a cup of chocolate on a tray. After he had drunk it, he drew aside a heavy portiere of peach coloured plush, and passed into the bathroom. The light stole softly from above, through thin slabs of transparent onyx, and the water in the marble tank glimmered like a moonstone. He plunged hastily in, till the cool ripples touched throat and hair, and then dipped his head right under, as though he would have wiped away the stain of some shameful memory. When he stepped out he felt almost at peace. The exquisite physical conditions of the moment had dominated him, as indeed often happens in the case of very finely-wrought natures, for the senses, like fire, can purify as well as destroy.

After breakfast, he flung himself down on a divan, and lit a cigarette. On the mantel-shelf, framed in dainty old brocade, stood a large photograph of Sybil Merton, as he had seen her first at Lady Noel’s ball. The small, exquisitely-shaped head drooped slightly to one side, as though the thin, reed-like throat could hardly bear the burden of so much beauty; the lips were slightly parted, and seemed made for sweet music; and all the tender purity of girlhood looked out in wonder from the dreaming eyes. With her soft, clinging dress of crepe-de-chine, and her large leaf-shaped fan, she looked like one of those delicate little figures men find in the olive-woods near Tanagra; and there was a touch of Greek grace in her pose and attitude. Yet she was not petite. She was simply perfectly proportioned -- a rare thing in an age when so many women are either over life-size or insignificant.

Now as Lord Arthur looked at her, he was filled with the terrible pity that is born of love. He felt that to marry her, with the doom of murder hanging over his head, would be a betrayal like that of Judas, a sin worse than any the Borgia had ever dreamed of. What happiness could there be for them, when at any moment he might be called upon to carry out the awful prophecy written in his hand? What manner of life would be theirs while Fate still held this fearful fortune in the scales? The marriage must be postponed, at all costs. Of this he was quite resolved. Ardently though he loved the girl, and the mere touch of her fingers, when they sat together, made each nerve of his body thrill with exquisite joy, he recognised none the less clearly where his duty lay, and was fully conscious of the fact that he had no right to marry until he had committed the murder. This done, he could stand before the altar with Sybil Merton, and give his life into her hands without terror of wrongdoing. This done, he could take her to his arms, knowing that she would never have to blush for him, never have to hang her head in shame. But done it must be first; and the sooner the better for both.

Many men in his position would have preferred the primrose path of dalliance to the steep heights of duty; but Lord Arthur was too conscientious to set pleasure above principle. There was
more than mere passion in his love; and Sybil was to him a symbol of all that is good and noble. For
a moment he had a natural repugnance against what he was asked to do, but it soon passed away.
His heart told him that it was not a sin, but a sacrifice; his reason reminded him that there was no
other course open. He had to choose between living for himself and living for others, and terrible
though the task laid upon him undoubtedly was, yet he knew that he must not suffer selfishness to
triumph over love. Sooner or later we are all called upon to decide on the same issue -- of us all, the
same question is asked. To Lord Arthur it came early in life -- before his nature had been spoiled by
the calculating cynicism of middle-age, or his heart corroded by the shallow, fashionable egotism
of our day, and he felt no hesitation about doing his duty. Fortunately also, for him, he was no mere
dreamer, or idle dilettante. Had he been so, he would have hesitated, like Hamlet, and let
irresolution mar his purpose. But he was essentially practical. Life to him meant action, rather than
thought. He had that rarest of all things, common sense.

The wild, turbid feelings of the previous night had by this time completely passed away, and it
was almost with a sense of shame that he looked back upon his mad wanderings from street to street,
his fierce emotional agony. The very sincerity of his sufferings made them seem unreal to him now.
He wondered how he could have been so foolish as to rant and rave about the inevitable. The only
question that seemed to trouble him was, whom to make away with; for he was not blind to the fact
that murder, like the religions of the Pagan world, requires a victim as well as a priest. Not being a
genius, he had no enemies, and indeed he felt that this was not the time for the gratification of any
personal pique or dislike, the mission in which he was engaged being one of great and grave
solemnity. He accordingly made out a list of his friends and relatives on a sheet of notepaper, and
after careful consideration, decided in favour of Lady Clementina Beauchamp, a dear old lady who
lived in Curzon Street, and was his own second cousin by his mother’s side. He had always been
very fond of Lady Clem, as every one called her, and as he was very wealthy himself, having come
into all Lord Rugby’s property when he came of age, there was no possibility of his deriving any
vulgar monetary advantage by her death. In fact, the more he thought over the matter, the more she
seemed to him to be just the right person, and, feeling that any delay would be unfair to Sybil, he
determined to make his arrangements at once.

The first thing to be done was, of course, to settle with the chiromantist; so he sat down at a
small Sheraton writing-table that stood near the window, drew a cheque for £105, payable to the
order of Mr. Septimus Podgers, and, enclosing it in an envelope, told his valet to take it to West
Moon Street. He then telephoned to the stables for his hansom, and dressed to go out. As he was
leaving the room, he looked back at Sybil Merton’s photograph, and swore that, come what may, he
would never let her know what he was doing for her sake, but would keep the secret of his self-
sacrifice hidden always in his heart.

On his way to the Buckingham, he stopped at a florist’s, and sent Sybil a beautiful basket of
narcissi, with lovely white petals and staring pheasants’ eyes, and on arriving at the club, went
straight to the library, rang the bell, and ordered the waiter to bring him a lemon-and-soda, and a
book on Toxicology. He had fully decided that poison was the best means to adopt in this
troublesome business. Anything like personal violence was extremely distasteful to him, and
besides, he was very anxious not to murder Lady Clementina in any way that might attract public
attention, as he hated the idea of being lionised at Lady Windermere’s, or seeing his name figuring
in the paragraphs of vulgar society-newspapers. He had also to think of Sybil’s father and mother,
who were rather old-fashioned people, and might possibly object to the marriage if there was
anything like a scandal, though he felt certain that if he told them the whole facts of the case they
would be the very first to appreciate the motives that had actuated him. He had every reason, then,
to decide in favour of poison. It was safe, sure, and quiet, and did away with any necessity for
painful scenes, to which, like most Englishmen, he had a rooted objection.

Of the science of poisons, however, he knew absolutely nothing, and as the waiter seemed quite
unable to find anything in the library but Ruff’s Guide and Bailey’s Magazine, he examined the
bookshelves himself, and finally came across a handsomely-bound edition of the Pharmacopeia, and
a copy of Erskine’s Toxicology, edited by Sir Mathew Reid, the President of the Royal College of
Physicians, and one of the oldest members of the Buckingham, having been elected in mistake for somebody else; a contretemps that so enraged the Committee, that when the real man came up they black-balled him unanimously. Lord Arthur was a good deal puzzled at the technical terms used in both books, and had begun to regret that he had not paid more attention to his classics at Oxford, when in the second volume of Erskine, he found a very complete account of the properties ofaconitine, written in fairly clear English. It seemed to him to be exactly the poison he wanted. It was swift -- indeed, almost immediate, in its effect -- perfectly painless, and when taken in the form of a gelatine capsule, the mode recommended by Sir Mathew, not by any means unpalatable. He accordingly made a note, upon his shirt-cuff of the amount necessary for a fatal dose, put the books back in their places, and strolled up St. James's Street, to Pestle and Humby's, the great chemists. Mr. Pestle, who always attended personally on the aristocracy, was a good deal surprised at the order, and in a very deferential manner murmured something about a medical certificate being necessary. However, as soon as Lord Arthur explained to him that it was for a large Norwegian mastiff that he was obliged to get rid of, as it showed signs of incipient rabies, and had already bitten the coachman twice in the calf of the leg, he expressed himself as being perfectly satisfied, complimented Lord Arthur on his wonderful knowledge of Toxicology, and had the prescription made up immediately.

Lord Arthur put the capsule into a pretty little silver bonbonniere that he saw in a shop-window in Bond Street, threw away Pestle and Humby's ugly pill-box, and drove off at once to Lady Clementina's.

‘Well, monsieur le mauvais sujet,’ cried the old lady, as he entered the room, ‘why haven’t you been to see me all this time?’

‘My dear Lady Clem, I never have a moment to myself,’ said Lord Arthur, smiling.

‘I suppose you mean that you go about all day long with Miss Sybil Merton, buying chiffons and talking nonsense? I cannot understand why people make such a fuss about being married. In my day we never dreamed of billing and cooing in public, or in private for that matter.

‘I assure you I have not seen Sybil for twenty-four hours, Lady Clem. As far as I can make out, she belongs entirely to her milliners.’

‘Of course; that is the only reason you come to see an ugly old woman like myself. I wonder you men don’t take warning. On a fait des folies pour moi, and here I am, a poor, rheumatic creature, with a false front and a bad temper. Why, if it were not for dear Lady Jansen, who sends me all the worst French novels she can find, I don’t think I could get through the day. Doctors are no use at all, except to get fees out of one. They can’t even cure my heartburn.’

‘I have brought you a cure for that, Lady Clem,’ said Lord Arthur gravely. ‘It is a wonderful thing, invented by an American.’

‘I don’t think I like American inventions, Arthur. I am quite sure I don’t. I read some American novels lately, and they were quite nonsensical.’

‘Oh, but there is no nonsense at all about this, Lady Clem! I assure you it is a perfect cure. You must promise to try it;’ and Lord Arthur brought the little box out of his pocket, and handed it to her.

‘Well, the box is charming, Arthur. Is it really a present? That is very sweet of you. And is this the wonderful medicine? It looks like a bonbon. I’l take it at once.’

‘Good heavens! Lady Clem,’ cried Lord Arthur, catching hold of her hand, ‘you mustn’t do anything of the kind. It is a homoeopathic medicine, and if you take it without having heartburn, it might do you no end of harm. Wait till you have an attack, and take it then. You will be astonished at the result.’

‘I should like to take it now,’ said Lady Clementina, holding up to the light the little transparent capsule, with its floating bubble of liquidaconitine. ‘I am sure it is delicious. The fact is that, though I hate doctors, I love medicines. However, I’ll keep it till my next attack.’

‘And when will that be?’ asked Lord Arthur eagerly. ‘Will it be soon?’

‘I hope not for a week. I had a very bad time yesterday morning with it. But one never knows.’

‘You are sure to have one before the end of the month then, Lady Clem?’

‘I am afraid so. But how sympathetic you are to-day, Arthur! Really, Sybil has done you a great
deal of good. And now you must run away, for I am dining with some very dull people, who won’t
talk scandal, and I know that if I don’t get my sleep now I shall never be able to keep awake during
dinner. Good-bye, Arthur, give my love to Sybil, and thank you so much for the American medicine.’

‘You won’t forget to take it, Lady Clem, will you?’ said Lord Arthur, rising from his seat.

‘Of course I won’t, you silly boy. I think it is most kind of you to think of me, and I shall write
and tell you if I want any more.’

Lord Arthur left the house in high spirits, and with a feeling of immense relief.

That night he had an interview with Sybil Merton. He told her how he had been suddenly placed
in a position of terrible difficulty, from which neither honour nor duty would allow him to recede.
He told her that the marriage must be put off for the present, as until he had got rid of his fearful
entanglements, he was not a free man. He implored her to trust him, and not to have any doubts
about the future. Everything would come right, but patience was necessary.

The scene took place in the conservatory of Mr. Merton’s house, in Park Lane, where Lord
Arthur had dined as usual. Sybil had never seemed more happy, and for a moment Lord Arthur had
been tempted to play the coward’s part, to write to Lady Clementina for the pill, and to let the
marriage go on as if there was no such person as Mr. Podgers in the world. His better nature,
however, soon asserted itself, and even when Sybil flung herself weeping into his arms, he did not
falter. The beauty that stirred his senses had touched his conscience also. He felt that to wreck so
fair a life for the sake of a few months’ pleasure would be a wrong thing to do.

He stayed with Sybil till nearly midnight, comforting her and being comforted in turn, and early
the next morning he left for Venice, after writing a manly, firm letter to Mr. Merton about the
necessary postponement of the marriage.

IV

In Venice he met his brother, Lord Surbiton, who happened to have come over from Corfu in his
yacht. The two young men spent a delightful fortnight together. In the morning they rode on the
Lido, or glided up and down the green canals in their long black gondola; in the afternoon they
usually entertained visitors on the yacht; and in the evening they dined at Florian’s, and smoked
innumerable cigarettes on the Piazza. Yet somehow Lord Arthur was not happy. Every day he
studied the obituary column in the Times, expecting to see a notice of Lady Clementina’s death, but
every day he was disappointed. He began to be afraid that some accident had happened to her, and
often regretted that he had prevented her taking the aconitine when she had been so anxious to try
its effect. Sybil’s letters, too, though full of love, and trust, and tenderness, were often very sad in
their tone, and sometimes he used to think that he was parted from her for ever.

After a fortnight Lord Surbiton got bored with Venice, and determined to run down the coast to
Ravenna, as he heard that there was some capital cock-shooting in the Pinetum. Lord Arthur, at first,
refused absolutely to come, but Surbiton, of whom he was extremely fond, finally persuaded him
that if he stayed at Danielli’s by himself he would be moped to death, and on the morning of the
15th they started, with a strong nor’-east wind blowing, and a rather sloppy sea. The sport was
excellent, and the free, open-air life brought the colour back to Lord Arthur’s cheeks, but about the
22nd he became anxious about Lady Clementina, and, in spite of Surbiton’s remonstrances, came
back to Venice by train.

As he stepped out of his gondola on to the hotel steps, the proprietor came forward to meet him
with a sheaf of telegrams. Lord Arthur snatched them out of his hand, and tore them open.
Everythin
g had been successful. Lady Clementina had died quite suddenly on the night of the 17th!

His first thought was for Sybil, and he sent her off a telegram announcing his immediate return
to London. He then ordered his valet to pack his things for the night mail, sent his gondoliers about
five times their proper fare, and ran up to his sitting-room with a light step and a buoyant heart.
There he found three letters waiting for him. One was from Sybil herself, full of sympathy and
condolence. The others were from his mother, and from Lady Clementina’s solicitor. It seemed that
the old lady had dined with the Duchess that very night, had delighted every one by her wit and
esprit, but had gone home somewhat early, complaining of heartburn. In the morning she was found
dead in her bed, having apparently suffered no pain. Sir Mathew Reid had been sent for at once, but, of course, there was nothing to be done, and she was to be buried on the 22nd at Beauchamp Chalcote. A few days before she died she had made her will, and left Lord Arthur her little house in Curzon Street, and all her furniture, personal effects, and pictures, with the exception of her collection of miniatures, which was to go to her sister, Lady Margaret Rufford and her amethyst necklace, which Sybil Merton was to have. The property was not of much value; but Mr. Mansfield the solicitor was extremely anxious for Lord Arthur to return at once, if possible, as there were a great many bills to be paid, and Lady Clementina had never kept any regular accounts.

Lord Arthur was very much touched by Lady Clementina’s kind remembrance of him, and felt that Mr. Podgers had a great deal to answer for. His love of Sybil, however, dominated every other emotion, and the consciousness that he had done his duty gave him peace and comfort. When he arrived at Charing Cross, he felt perfectly happy.

The Mertons received him very kindly, Sybil made him promise that he would never again allow anything to come between them, and the marriage was fixed for the 7th June. Life seemed to him once more bright and beautiful, and all his old gladness came back to him again.

One day, however, as he was going over the house in Curzon Street, in company with Lady Clementina’s solicitor and Sybil herself, burning packages of faded letters, and turning out drawers of odd rubbish, the young girl suddenly gave a little cry of delight.

‘What have you found, Sybil?’ said Lord Arthur, looking up from his work, and smiling.

‘This lovely little silver bonbonniere, Arthur. Isn’t it quaint and Dutch? Do give it to me! I know amethysts won’t become me till I am over eighty.’

It was the box that had held the aconitine.

Lord Arthur started, and a faint blush came into his cheek. He had almost entirely forgotten what he had done, and it seemed to him a curious coincidence that Sybil, for whose sake he had gone through all that terrible anxiety, should have been the first to remind him of it.

‘Of course you can have it, Sybil. I gave it to poor Lady Clem myself.’

‘Oh! thank you, Arthur; and may I have the bonbon too? I had no notion that Lady Clementina liked sweets. I thought she was far too intellectual.’

Lard Arthur grew deadly pale, and a horrible idea crossed his mind.

‘Bonbon, Sybil? What do you mean?’ he said in a slow, hoarse voice.

‘There is one in it, that is all. It looks quite old and dusty, and I have not the slightest intention of eating it. What is the matter, Arthur? How white you look!’

Lord Arthur rushed across the room, and seized the box. Inside it was the amber-coloured capsule, with its poison-bubble. Lady Clementina had died a natural death after all!

The shock of the discovery was almost too much for him. He flung the capsule into the fire, and sank on the sofa with a cry of despair.

Mr. Merton was a good deal distressed at the second postponement of the marriage, and Lady Julia, who had already ordered her dress for the wedding, did all in her power to make Sybil break off the match. Dearly, however, as Sybil loved her mother, she had given her whole life into Lord Arthur’s hands, and nothing that Lady Julia could say could make her waver in her faith. As for Lord Arthur himself, it took him days to get over his terrible disappointment, and for a time his nerves were completely unstrung. His excellent common sense, however, soon asserted itself and his sound, practical mind did not leave him long in doubt about what to do. Poison having proved a complete failure, dynamite, or some other form of explosive, was obviously the proper thing to try.

He accordingly looked again over the list of his friends and relatives, and, after careful consideration, determined to blow up his uncle, the Dean of Chichester. The Dean, who was a man of great culture and learning, was extremely fond of clocks, and had a wonderful collection of timepieces, ranging from the fifteenth century to the present day, and it seemed to Lord Arthur that this hobby of the good Dean’s offered him an excellent opportunity for carrying out his scheme. Where to procure an explosive machine was, of course, quite another matter. The London Directory
gave him no information on the point, and he felt that there was very little use in going to Scotland Yard about it, as they never seemed to know anything about the movements of the dynamite faction till after an explosion had taken place, and not much even then.

Suddenly he thought of his friend Rouvaloff, a young Russian of very revolutionary tendencies, whom he had met at Lady Windermere’s in the winter. Count Rouvaloff was supposed to be writing a life of Peter the Great, and to have come over to England for the purpose of studying the documents relating to that Tsar’s residence in this country as a ship carpenter; but it was generally suspected that he was a Nihilist agent, and there was no doubt that the Russian Embassy did not look with any favour upon his presence in London. Lord Arthur felt that he was just the man for his purpose, and drove down one morning to his lodgings in Bloomsbury, to ask his advice and assistance.

‘So you are taking up politics seriously?’ said Count Rouvaloff, when Lord Arthur had told him the object of his mission; but Lord Arthur, who hated swagger of any kind, felt bound to admit to him that he had not the slightest interest in social questions, and simply wanted the explosive machine for a purely family matter, in which no one was concerned but himself

Count Rouvaloff looked at him for some moments in amazement, and then seeing that he was quite serious, wrote an address on a piece of paper, initialled it, and handed it to him across the table.

‘Scotland Yard would give a good deal to know this address, my dear fellow.’

‘They shan’t have it,’ cried Lord Arthur, laughing; and after shaking the young Russian warmly by the hand he ran downstairs, examined the paper, and told the coachman to drive to Soho Square.

There he dismissed him, and strolled down Greek Street, till he came to a place called Bayle’s Court. He passed under the archway, and found himself in a curious cul-de-sac, that was apparently occupied by a French Laundry, as a perfect network of clothes-lines was stretched across from house to house, and there was a flutter of white linen in the morning air. He walked to the end, and knocked at a little green house. After some delay, during which every window in the court became a blurred mass of peering faces, the door was opened by a rather rough-looking foreigner, who asked him in very bad English what his business was. Lord Arthur handed him the paper Count Rouvaloff had given him. When the man saw it he bowed, and invited Lord Arthur into a very shabby front parlour on the ground-floor, and in a few moments Herr Winckelkopf, as he was called in England, bustled into the room, with a very wine-stained napkin round his neck, and a fork in his left hand.

‘Count Rouvaloff has given me an introduction to you,’ said Lord Arthur, bowing, ‘and I am anxious to have a short interview with you on a matter of business. My name is Smith, Mr. Robert Smith, and I want you to supply me with an explosive clock.’

‘Charmed to meet you, Lord Arthur,’ said the genial little German laughing. ‘Don’t look so alarmed, it is my duty to know everybody, and I remember seeing you one evening at Lady Windermere’s. I hope her ladyship is quite well. Do you mind sitting with me while I finish my breakfast? There is an excellent pate, and my friends are kind enough to say that my Rhine wine is better than any they get at the German Embassy,’ and before Lord Arthur had got over his surprise at being recognised, he found himself seated in the back-room, sipping the most delicious Marcobrunner out of a pale yellow hock-glass marked with the Imperial monogram, and chatting in the friendliest manner possible to the famous conspirator.

‘Explosive clocks,’ said Herr Winckelkopf, ‘are not very good things for foreign exportation, as, even if they succeed in passing the Custom House, the train service is so irregular, that they usually go off before they have reached their proper destination. If, however, you want one for home use, I can supply you with an excellent article, and guarantee that you will be satisfied with the result. May I ask for whom it is intended? If it is for the police, or for any one connected with Scotland Yard, I am afraid I cannot do anything for you. The English detectives are really our best friends, and I have always found that by relying on their stupidity, we can do exactly what we like. I could not spare one of them.’

‘I assure you,’ said Lord Arthur, ‘that it has nothing to do with the police at all. In fact, the clock is intended for the Dean of Chichester.’

‘Dear me! I had no idea that you felt so strongly about religion, Lord Arthur. Few young men do
nowadays.’

‘I am afraid you overrate me, Herr Winckelkopf,’ said Lord Arthur, blushing. ‘The fact is, I really know nothing about theology.’

‘It is a purely private matter then?’

‘Purely private.’

Herr Winckelkopf shrugged his shoulders, and left the room, returning in a few minutes with a round cake of dynamite about the size of a penny, and a pretty little French clock, surmounted by an ormolu figure of Liberty trampling on the hydra of Despotism.

Lord Arthur’s face brightened up when he saw it. ‘That is just what I want,’ he cried, ‘and now tell me how it goes off.’

‘Ah! there is my secret,’ answered Herr Winckelkopf, contemplating his invention with a justifiable look of pride; ‘let me know when you wish it to explode, and I will set the machine to the moment.’

‘Well, to-day is Tuesday, and if you could send it off at once—’

‘That is impossible; I have a great deal of important work on hand for some friends of mine in Moscow. Still, I might send it off to-morrow.’

‘Oh, it will be quite time enough!’ said Lord Arthur politely, ‘if it is delivered to-morrow night or Thursday morning. For the moment of the explosion, say Friday at noon exactly. The Dean is always at home at that hour.’

‘Friday, at noon,’ repeated Herr Winckelkopf, and he made a note to that effect in a large ledger that was lying on a bureau near the fireplace.

‘And now,’ said Lord Arthur, rising from his seat, ‘pray let me know how much I am in your debt.’

‘It is such a small matter, Lord Arthur, that I do not care to make any charge. The dynamite comes to seven and sixpence, the clock will be three pounds ten, and the carriage about five shillings. I am only too pleased to oblige any friend of Count Rouvaloff’s.’

‘But your trouble, Herr Winckelkopf?’

‘Oh, that is nothing! It is a pleasure to me. I do not work for money; I live entirely for my art.’

Lord Arthur laid down £4 2s 6d on the table, thanked the little German for his kindness, and, having succeeded in declining an invitation to meet some Anarchists at a meat-tea on the following Saturday, left the house and went off to the Park.

For the next two days he was in a state of the greatest excitement, and on Friday at twelve o’clock he drove down to the Buckingham to wait for news. All the afternoon the stolid hall-porter kept posting up telegrams from various parts of the country giving the results of horse-races, the verdicts in divorce suits, the state of the weather, and the like, while the tape ticked out wearisome details about an all-night sitting in the House of Commons, and a small panic on the Stock Exchange. At four o’clock the evening papers came in, and Lord Arthur disappeared into the library with the Pall Mall, the St James’s, the Globe, and the Echo, to the immense indignation of Colonel Goodchild, who wanted to read the reports of a speech he had delivered that morning at the Mansion House, on the subject of South African Missions, and the advisability of having black Bishops in every province, and for some reason or other had a strong prejudice against the Evening News. None of the papers, however, contained even the slightest allusion to Chichester, and Lord Arthur felt that the attempt must have failed. It was a terrible blow to him, and for a time he was quite unnerved. Herr Winckelkopf, whom he went to see the next day, was full of elaborate apologies, and offered to supply him with another clock free of charge, or with a case of nitro-glycerine bombs at cost price. But he had lost all faith in explosives, and Herr Winckelkopf himself acknowledged that everything is so adulterated nowadays, that even dynamite can hardly be got in a pure condition. The little German, however, while admitting that something must have gone wrong with the machinery, was not without hope that the clock might still go off and instanced the case of a barometer that he had once sent to the military Governor at Odessa, which, though timed to explode in ten days, had not done so for something like three months. It was quite true that when it did go off, it merely succeeded in blowing a housemaid to atoms, the Governor having gone out of
town six weeks before, but at least it showed that dynamite, as a destructive force, was, when under the control of machinery, a powerful, though a somewhat unpunctual agent. Lord Arthur was a little consoled by this reflection, but even here he was destined to disappointment, for two days afterwards, as he was going upstairs, the Duchess called him into her boudoir, and showed him a letter she had just received from the Deanery.

‘Jane writes charming letters,’ said the Duchess; ‘you must really read her last. It is quite as good as the novels Mudie sends us.’

Lord Arthur seized the letter from her hand. It ran as follows:--

‘The Deanery, Chichester,

‘27th May.

‘My Dearest Aunt

‘Thank you so much for the flannel for the Dorcas Society and also for the gingham. I quite agree with you that it is nonsense their wanting to wear pretty things, but everybody is so Radical and irreligious nowadays, that it is difficult to make them see that they should not try and dress like the upper classes. I am sure I don’t know what we are coming to. As papa has often said in his sermons, we live in an age of unbelief.

‘We have had great fun over a clock that an unknown admirer sent papa last Thursday. It arrived in a wooden box from London, carriage paid; and papa feels it must have been sent by some one who had read his remarkable sermon, ‘Is License Liberty?’ for on the top of the clock was a figure of a woman, with what papa said was the cap of Liberty on her head. I didn’t think it very becoming myself, but papa said it was historical, so I suppose it is all right. Parker unpacked it, and papa put it on the mantelpiece in the library, and we were all sitting there on Friday morning, when just as the clock struck twelve, we heard a whirring noise, a little puff of smoke came from the pedestal of the figure, and the goddess of Liberty fell off and broke her nose on the fender! Maria was quite alarmed, but it looked so ridiculous, that James and I went off into fits of laughter, and even papa was amused. When we examined it, we found it was a sort of alarum clock, and that, if you set it to a particular hour, and put some gunpowder and a cap under a little hammer, it went off whenever you wanted. Papa said it must not remain in the library, as it made a noise, so Reggie carried it away to the schoolroom, and does nothing but have small explosions all day long. Do you think Arthur would like one for a wedding present? I suppose they are quite fashionable in London. Papa says they should do a great deal of good, as they show that Liberty can’t last, but must fall down. Papa says Liberty was Invented at the time of the French Revolution. How awful it seems!

‘I have now to go to the Dorcas, where I will read them your most instructive letter. How true, dear aunt, your idea is, that in their rank of life they should wear what is unbecoming. I must say it is absurd, their anxiety about dress, when there are so many more important things in this world, and in the next. I am so glad your flowered poplin turned out so well, and that your lace was not torn. I am wearing my yellow satin, that you so kindly gave me, at the Bishop’s on Wednesday, and think it will look all right. Would you have bows or not? Jennings says that every one wears bows now, and that the underskirt should be frilled. Reggie has just had another explosion, and papa has ordered the clock to be sent to the stables. I don’t think papa likes it so much as he did at first, though he is very flattered at being sent such a pretty and ingenious toy. It shows that people read his sermons, and profit by them.

‘Papa sends his love, in which James, and Reggie, and Maria all unite, and, hoping that Uncle Cecil’s gout is better, believe me, dear aunt, ever your affectionate niece,

Jane Percy

‘P.S. -- Do tell me about the bows. Jennings insists they are the fashion.’

Lord Arthur looked so serious and unhappy over the letter, that the Duchess went into fits of laughter.

‘My dear Arthur,’ she cried, ‘I shall never show you a young lady’s letter again! But what shall I say about the clock? I think it is a capital invention, and I should like to have one myself.’
‘I don’t think much of them,’ said Lord Arthur, with a sad smile, and, after kissing his mother, he left the room.

When he got upstairs, he flung himself on a sofa, and his eyes filled with tears. He had done his best to commit this murder, but on both occasions he had failed, and through no fault of his own. He had tried to do his duty, but it seemed as if Destiny herself had turned traitor. He was oppressed with the sense of the barrenness of good intentions, of the futility of trying to be fine. Perhaps, it would be better to break off the marriage altogether. Sybil would suffer, it is true, but suffering could not really mar a nature so noble as hers. As for himself, what did it matter? There is always some war in which a man can die, some cause to which a man can give his life, and as life had no pleasure for him, so death had no terror. Let Destiny work out his doom. He would not stir to help her.

At half-past seven he dressed, and went down to the club. Surbiton was there with a party of young men, and he was obliged to dine with them. Their trivial conversation and idle jests did not interest him, and as soon as coffee was brought he left them, inventing some engagement in order to get away. As he was going out of the club, the hall-porter handed him a letter. It was from Herr Winckelkopf, asking him to call down the next evening, and look at an explosive umbrella, that went off as soon as it was opened. It was the very latest invention, and had just arrived from Geneva. He tore the letter up into fragments. He had made up his mind not to try any more experiments. Then he wandered down to the Thames Embankment, and sat for hours by the river. The moon peered through a mane of tawny clouds, as if it were a lion’s eye, and innumerable stars spangled the hollow vault, like gold dust powdered on a purple dome. Now and then a barge swung out into the turbid stream, and floated away with the tide, and the railway signals changed from green to scarlet as the trains ran shrieking across the bridge. After some time, twelve o’clock boomed from the tall tower at Westminster and at each stroke of the sonorous bell the night seemed to tremble. Then the railway lights went out, one solitary lamp left gleaming like a large ruby on a giant mast, and the roar of the city became fainter.

At two o’clock he got up, and strolled towards Blackfriars. How unreal everything looked! How like a strange dream! The houses on the other side of the river seemed built out of darkness. One would have said that silver and shadow had fashioned the world anew. The huge dome of St. Paul’s loomed like a bubble through the dusky air.

As he approached Cleopatra’s Needle he saw a man leaning over the parapet, and as he came nearer the man looked up, the gas-light falling full upon his face.

It was Mr. Podgers, the cheiromantist! No one could mistake the fat, flabby face, the gold-rimmed spectacles, the sickly feeble smile, the sensual mouth.

Lord Arthur stopped. A brilliant idea flashed across him, and he stole softly up behind. In a moment he had seized Mr. Podgers by the legs, and flung him into the Thames. There was a coarse oath, a heavy splash, and all was still. Lord Arthur looked anxiously over, but could see nothing of the cheiromantist but a tall hat, pirouetting in an eddy of moonlit water. After a time it also sank, and no trace of Mr. Podgers was visible. Once he thought that he caught sight of the bulky misshapen figure striking out for the staircase by the bridge, and a horrible feeling of failure came over him, but it turned out to be merely a reflection, and when the moon shone out from behind a cloud it passed away. At last he seemed to have realised the decree of destiny. He heaved a deep sigh of relief, and Sybil’s name came to his lips.

‘Have you dropped anything, sir?’ said a voice behind him suddenly.

He turned round, and saw a policeman with a bulls-eye lantern.

‘Nothing of importance, sergeant,’ he answered, smiling, and hailing a passing hansom, he jumped in, and told the man to drive to Belgrave Square.

For the next few days he alternated between hope and fear. There were moments when he almost expected Mr. Podgers to walk into the room, and yet at other times he felt that Fate could not be so unjust to him. Twice he went to the cheiromantist’s address in West Moon Street, but he could not bring himself to ring the bell. He longed for certainty, and was afraid of it.

Finally it came. He was sitting in the smoking-room of the club having tea, and listening rather
wearily to Surbiton’s account of the last comic song at the Gaiety, when the waiter came in with the evening papers. He took up the St. James’s, and was listlessly turning over its pages, when this strange heading caught his eye:

**SUICIDE OF A CHEIROMANTIST**

He turned pale with excitement, and began to read. The paragraph ran as follows:

Yesterday morning, at seven o’clock, the body of Mr. Septimus R. Podgers, the eminent cheiromantist, was washed on shore at Greenwich, just in front of the Ship Hotel. The unfortunate gentleman had been missing for some days, and considerable anxiety for his safety had been felt in cheiromantic circles. It is supposed that he committed suicide under the influence of a temporary mental derangement, caused by overwork, and a verdict to that effect was returned this afternoon by the coroner’s jury. Mr Podgers had just completed an elaborate treatise on the subject of the Human Hand, that will shortly be published when it will no doubt attract much attention. The deceased was sixty-five years of age, and does not seem to have left any relations.

Lord Arthur rushed out of the club with the paper still in his hand, to the immense amazement of the hall-porter, who tried in vain to stop him, and drove at once to Park Lane. Sybil saw him from the window, and something told her that he was the bearer of good news. She ran down to meet him, and, when she saw his face, she knew that all was well.

‘My dear Sybil,’ cried Lord Arthur, ‘let us be married to-morrow!’

‘You foolish boy! Why the cake is not even ordered!’ said Sybil, laughing through her tears.

**VI**

When the wedding took place, some three weeks later, St. Peter’s was crowded with a perfect mob of smart people. The service was read in a most impressive manner by the Dean of Chichester, and everybody agreed that they had never seen a handsomer couple than the bride and groom. They were more than handsome, however -- they were happy. Never for a single moment did Lord Arthur regret all that he had suffered for Sybil’s sake, while she, on her side, gave him the best things a woman can give to any man -- worship, tenderness, and love. For them romance was not killed by reality. They always felt young.

Some years afterwards, when two beautiful children had been born to them, Lady Windermere came down on a visit to Alton Priory, a lovely old place, that had been the Duke’s wedding present to his son; and one afternoon as she was sitting with Lady Arthur under a lime-tree in the garden, watching the little boy and girl as they played up and down the rose-walk, like fitful sunbeams, she suddenly took her hostess’s hand in hers, and said, ‘Are you happy, Sybil?’

‘Dear Lady Windermere, of course I am happy. Aren’t you?’

‘I have no time to be happy, Sybil. I always like the last person who is introduced to me; but, as a rule, as soon as I know people I get tired of them.’

‘Don’t your lions satisfy you, Lady Windermere?’

‘Oh dear, no! lions are only good for one season. As soon as their manes are cut, they are the dullest creatures going. Besides, they behave very badly, if you are really nice to them. Do you remember that horrid Mr. Podgers? He was a dreadful impostor. Of course, I didn’t mind that at all, and even when he wanted to borrow money I forgave him, but I could not stand his making love to me. He has really made me hate cheiromancy. I go in for telepathy now. It is much more amusing.’

‘You mustn’t say anything against cheiromancy here, Lady Windermere; it is the only subject that Arthur does not like people to chaff about. I assure you he is quite serious over it.’

‘You don’t mean to say that he believes in it, Sybil?’

‘Ask him, Lady Windermere, here he is;’ and Lord Arthur came up the garden with a large bunch of yellow roses in his hand, and his two children dancing round him.
'Lord Arthur?'
'Yes, Lady Windermere.'
'You don’t mean to say that you believe in chiromancy?'
'Of course I do,' said the young man, smiling.
'But why?'
'Because I owe to it all the happiness of my life,' he murmured, throwing himself into a wicker chair.
'My dear Lord Arthur, what do you owe to it?'
'Sybil,' he answered, handing his wife the roses, and looking into her violet eyes.
'What nonsense!' cried Lady Windermere. 'I never heard such nonsense in all my life.'
Rudyard Kipling, WEE WILLIE WINKIE (1888)

His full name was Percival William Williams, but he picked up the other name in a nursery-book, and that was the end of the christened titles. His mother’s ayah called him Willie-Baba, but as he never paid the faintest attention to anything that the ayah said, her wisdom did not help matters.

His father was the Colonel of the 195th, and as soon as Wee Willie Winkie was old enough to understand what Military Discipline meant, Colonel Williams put him under it. There was no other way of managing the child. When he was good for a week, he drew good-conduct pay; and when he was bad, he was deprived of his good-conduct stripe. Generally he was bad, for India offers so many chances to little six-year-olds of going wrong.

Children resent familiarity from strangers, and Wee Willie Winkie was a very particular child. Once he accepted an acquaintance, he was graciously pleased to thaw. He accepted Brandis, a subaltern of the 195th, on sight. Brandis was having tea at the Colonel’s, and Wee Willie Winkie entered strong in the possession of a good-conduct badge won for not chasing the hens round the compound. He regarded Brandis with gravity for at least ten minutes, and then delivered himself of his opinion.

“I like you,” said he, slowly, getting off his chair and coming over to Brandis. “I like you. I shall call you Coppy, because of your hair. Do you mind being called Coppy? it is because of ve hair, you know.”

Here was one of the most embarrassing of Wee Willie Winkie’s peculiarities. He would look at a stranger for some time, and then, without warning or explanation, would give him a name. And the name stuck. No regimental penalties could break Wee Willie Winkie of this habit. He lost his good-conduct badge for christening the Commissioner’s wife “Pobs”; but nothing that the Colonel could do made the Station forego the nickname, and Mrs. Collen remained Mrs. “Pobs” till the end of her stay. So Brandis was christened “Coppy,” and rose, therefore, in the estimation of the regiment.

If Wee Willie Winkie took an interest in any one, the fortunate man was envied alike by the mess and the rank and file. And in their envy lay no suspicion of self-interest. “The Colonel’s son” was idolized on his own merits entirely. Yet Wee Willie Winkie was not lovely. His face was permanently freckled, as his legs were permanently scratched, and in spite of his mother’s almost tearful remonstrances he had insisted upon having his long yellow locks cut short in the military fashion. “I want my hair like Sergeant Tummil’s,” said Wee Willie Winkie, and, his father abetting, the sacrifice was accomplished.

Three weeks after the bestowal of his youthful affections on Lieutenant Brandis—henceforward to be called “Coppy” for the sake of brevity—Wee Willie Winkie was destined to behold strange things and far beyond his comprehension.

Coppy returned his liking with interest. Coppy had let him wear for five rapturous minutes his own big sword—just as tall as Wee Willie Winkie. Coppy had promised him a terrier puppy; and Coppy had permitted him to witness the miraculous operation of shaving. Nay, more—Coppy had said that even he, Wee Willie Winkie, would rise in time to the ownership of a box of shiny knives, a silver soap-box and a silver-handled “sputter-brush,” as Wee Willie Winkie called it. Decidedly, there was no one except his father, who could give or take away good-conduct badges at pleasure, half so wise, strong, and valiant as Coppy with the Afghan and Egyptian medals on his breast. Why, then, should Coppy be guilty of the unmanly weakness of kissing—vehemently kissing—a “big girl,”
Miss Allardyce to wit? In the course of a morning ride, Wee Willie Winkie had seen Coppy so doing, and, like the gentleman he was, had promptly wheeled round and cantered back to his groom, lest the groom should also see.

Under ordinary circumstances he would have spoken to his father, but he felt instinctively that this was a matter on which Coppy ought first to be consulted.

“Coppy,” shouted Wee Willie Winkie, reining up outside that subaltern’s bungalow early one morning—“I want to see you, Coppy!”

“Come in, young ‘un,” returned Coppy, who was at early breakfast in the midst of his dogs.

“What mischief have you been getting into now?”

Wee Willie Winkie had done nothing notoriously bad for three days, and so stood on a pinnacle of virtue.

“I’ve been doing nothing bad,” said he, curling himself into a long chair with a studious affectation of the Colonel’s languor after a hot parade. He buried his freckled nose in a teacup and, with eyes staring roundly over the rim, asked: “I say, Coppy, is it proper to kiss big girls?”

“By Jove! You’re beginning early. Who do you want to kiss?”

“No one. My mudder’s always kissing me if I don’t stop her. If it isn’t proper, how was you kissing Major Allardyce’s big girl last morning, by ve canal?”

Coppy’s brow wrinkled. He and Miss Allardyce had with great craft managed to keep their engagement secret for a fortnight. There were urgent and imperative reasons why Major Allardyce should not know how matters stood for at least another month, and this small marplot had discovered a great deal too much.

“I saw you,” said Wee Willie Winkie, calmly. “But ve groom didn’t see. I said, ‘Hut jao.’”

“Oh, you had that much sense, you young Rip,” groaned poor Coppy, half amused and half angry. “And how many people may you have told about it?”

“Only me myself. You didn’t tell when I twied to wide ve buffalo ven my pony was lame; and I fought you wouldn’t like.”

“Winkie,” said Coppy, enthusiastically, shaking the small hand, “you’re the best of good fellows. Look here, you can’t understand all these things. One of these days—hang it, how can I make you see it!—I’m going to marry Miss Allardyce, and then she’ll be Mrs. Coppy, as you say. If your young mind is so scandalized at the idea of kissing big girls, go and tell your father.”

“What will happen?” said Wee Willie Winkie, who firmly believed that his father was omnipotent.

“I shall get into trouble,” said Coppy, playing his trump card with an appealing look at the holder of the ace.

“Ven I won’t,” said Wee Willie Winkie, briefly. “But my faver says it’s un-man-ly to be always kissing, and I didn’t fink you’d do vat, Coppy.”

“I’m not always kissing, old chap. It’s only now and then, and when you’re bigger you’ll do it too. Your father meant it’s not good for little boys.”

“Ah!” said Wee Willie Winkie, now fully enlightened. “It’s like ve sputter-brush?”

“Exactly,” said Coppy, gravely.

“But I don’t fink I’ll ever want to kiss big girls, nor no one, ‘cept my mudder. And I must vat, you know.”

There was a long pause, broken by Wee Willie Winkie.

“Are you fond of vis big girl, Coppy?”

“Awfully!” said Coppy.

“Fonder van you are of Bell or ve Butcha—or me?”

“It’s in a different way,” said Coppy. “You see, one of these days Miss Allardyce will belong to me, but you’ll grow up and command the Regiment and—all sorts of things. It’s quite different, you see.”

“Very well,” said Wee Willie Winkie, rising. “If you’re fond of ve big girl, I won’t tell any one. I must go now.”

Coppy rose and escorted his small guest to the door, adding: “You’re the best of little
fellows, Winkie. I tell you what. In thirty days from now you can tell if you like—tell any one you like.”

Thus the secret of the Brandis-Allardyce engagement was dependent on a little child’s word. Coppy, who knew Wee Willie Winkie’s idea of truth, was at ease, for he felt that he would not break promises. Wee Willie Winkie betrayed a special and unusual interest in Miss Allardyce, and, slowly revolving round that embarrassed young lady, was used to regard her gravely with unwinking eye. He was trying to discover why Coppy should have kissed her. She was not half so nice as his own mother. On the other hand, she was Coppy’s property, and would in time belong to him. Therefore it behooved him to treat her with as much respect as Coppy’s big sword or shiny pistol.

The idea that he shared a great secret in common with Coppy kept Wee Willie Winkie unusually virtuous for three weeks. Then the Old Adam broke out, and he made what he called a “campfire” at the bottom of the garden. How could he have foreseen that the flying sparks would have lighted the Colonel’s little hayrick and consumed a week’s store for the horses? Sudden and swift was the punishment—deprivation of the good-conduct badge and, most sorrowful of all, two days’ confinement to barracks—the house and veranda—coupled with the withdrawal of the light of his father’s countenance.

He took the sentence like the man he strove to be, drew himself up with a quivering underlip, saluted, and, once clear of the room, ran to weep bitterly in his nursery—called by him “my quarters.” Coppy came in the afternoon and attempted to console the culprit.

“I’m under awwest,” said Wee Willie Winkie, mournfully, “and I didn’t ought to speak to you.”

Very early the next morning he climbed on to the roof of the house—that was not forbidden—and beheld Miss Allardyce going for a ride.

“Where are you going?” cried Wee Willie Winkie.

“Across the river,” she answered, and trotted forward.

Now the cantonment in which the 195th lay was bounded on the north by a river—dry in the winter. From his earliest years, Wee Willie Winkie had been forbidden to go across the river, and had noted that even Coppy—the almost almighty Coppy—had never set foot beyond it. Wee Willie Winkie had once been read to, out of a big blue book, the history of the Princess and the Goblins—a most wonderful tale of a land where the Goblins were always warring with the children of men until they were defeated by one Curdie. Ever since that date it seemed to him that the bare black and purple hills across the river were inhabited by Goblins, and, in truth, every one had said that there lived the Bad Men. Even in his own house the lower halves of the windows were covered with green paper on account of the Bad Men who might, if allowed clear view, fire into peaceful drawing-rooms and comfortable bedrooms. Certainly, beyond the river, which was the end of all the Earth, lived the Bad Men. And here was Major Allardyce’s big girl, Coppy’s property, preparing to venture into their borders! What would Coppy say if anything happened to her? If the Goblins ran off with her as they did with Curdie’s Princess? She must at all hazards be turned back.

The house was still. Wee Willie Winkie reflected for a moment on the very terrible wrath of his father; and then—broke his arrest! It was a crime unspeakable. The low sun threw his shadow, very large and very black, on the trim garden-paths, as he went down to the stables and ordered his pony. It seemed to him in the hush of the dawn that all the big world had been bidden to stand still and look at Wee Willie Winkie guilty of mutiny. The drowsy groom handed him his mount, and, since the one great sin made all others insignificant, Wee Willie Winkie said that he was going to ride over to Coppy Sahib, and went out at a foot-pace, stepping on the soft mould of the flower-borders.

The devastating track of the pony’s feet was the last misdeed that cut him off from all sympathy of Humanity. He turned into the road, leaned forward, and rode as fast as the pony could put foot to the ground in the direction of the river.

But the liveliest of twelve-two ponies can do little against the long canter of a Waler. Miss Allardyce was far ahead, had passed through the crops, beyond the Police-post, when all the guards were asleep, and her mount was scattering the pebbles of the river bed as Wee Willie Winkie left the
cantonment and British India behind him. Bowled forward and still flogging, Wee Willie Winkie shot into Afghan territory, and could just see Miss Allardyce a black speck, flickering across the stony plain. The reason of her wandering was simple enough. Coppy, in a tone of too-hastily-assumed authority, had told her overnight that she must not ride out by the river. And she had gone to prove her own spirit and teach Coppy a lesson.

Almost at the foot of the inhospitable hills, Wee Willie Winkie saw the Waler blunder and come down heavily. Miss Allardyce struggled clear, but her ankle had been severely twisted, and she could not stand. Having thus demonstrated her spirit, she wept copiously, and was surprised by the apparition of a white, wide-eyed child in khaki, on a nearly spent pony.

“Are you badly, badly hurted?” shouted Wee Willie Winkie, as soon as he was within range.

“You didn’t ought to be here.”

“I don’t know,” said Miss Allardyce, ruefully, ignoring the reproof. “Good gracious, child, what are you doing here?”

“You said you was going acwoss ve wiver,” panted Wee Willie Winkie, throwing himself off his pony. “And nobody--not even Coppy--must go acwoss ve wiver, and I came after you ever so hard, but you wouldn’t stop, and now you’ve hurted yourself, and Coppy will be angwy wiv me, and--I’ve bwoken my awwest! I’ve bwoken my awwest!”

The future Colonel of the 195th sat down and sobbed. In spite of the pain in her ankle the girl was moved.

“Have you ridden all the way from cantonments, little man? What for?”

“You belonged to Coppy. Coppy told me so!” wailed Wee Willie Winkie, disconsolately. “I saw him kissing you, and he said he was fonder of you van Bell or ve Butcha or me. And so I came. You must get up and come back. You didn’t ought to be here. Vis is a bad place, and I’ve bwoken my awwest.”

“I can’t move, Winkie,” said Miss Allardyce, with a groan. “I’ve hurt my foot. What shall I do?”

She showed a readiness to weep afresh, which steadied Wee Willie Winkie, who had been brought up to believe that tears were the depth of unmanliness. Still, when one is as great a sinner as Wee Willie Winkie, even a man may be permitted to break down.

“Winkie,” said Miss Allardyce, “when you’ve rested a little, ride back and tell them to send out something to carry me back in. It hurts fearfully.”

The child sat still for a little time and Miss Allardyce closed her eyes; the pain was nearly making her faint. She was roused by Wee Willie Winkie tying up the reins on his pony’s neck and setting it free with a vicious cut of his whip that made it whicker. The little animal headed toward the cantonments.

“Oh, Winkie! What are you doing?”

“Hush!” said Wee Willie Winkie. “Vere’s a man coming--one of ve Bad Men. I must stay wiv you. My faver says a man must always look after a girl. Jack will go home, and ven vey’ll come and look for us. Vat’s why I let him go.”

Not one man but two or three had appeared from behind the rocks of the hills, and the heart of Wee Willie Winkie sank within him, for just in this manner were the Goblins wont to steal out and vex Curdie’s soul. Thus had they played in Curdie’s garden, he had seen the picture, and thus had they frightened the Princess’s nurse. He heard them talking to each other, and recognized with joy the bastard Pushto that he had picked up from one of his father’s grooms lately dismissed. People who spoke that tongue could not be the Bad Men. They were only natives after all.

They came up to the boulders on which Miss Allardyce’s horse had blundered. Not one man but two or three had appeared from behind the rocks of the hills, and the heart of Wee Willie Winkie sank within him, for just in this manner were the Goblins wont to steal out and vex Curdie’s soul. Thus had they played in Curdie’s garden, he had seen the picture, and thus had they frightened the Princess’s nurse. He heard them talking to each other, and recognized with joy the bastard Pushto that he had picked up from one of his father’s grooms lately dismissed. People who spoke that tongue could not be the Bad Men. They were only natives after all.

They came up to the boulders on which Miss Allardyce’s horse had blundered. Then rose from the rock Wee Willie Winkie, child of the Dominant Race, aged six and three-quarters, and said briefly and emphatically “Jao!” The pony had crossed the river-bed.

The men laughed, and laughter from natives was the one thing Wee Willie Winkie could not tolerate. He asked them what they wanted and why they did not depart. Other men with most evil faces and crooked-stockled guns crept out of the shadows of the hills, till, soon, Wee Willie Winkie was face to face with an audience some twenty strong. Miss Allardyce screamed.
“Who are you?” said one of the men.

“I am the Colonel Sahib’s son, and my order is that you go at once. You black men are frightening the Miss Sahib. One of you must run into cantonments and take the news that Miss Sahib has hurt herself, and that the Colonel’s son is here with her.”

“Put our feet into the trap?” was the laughing reply. “Hear this boy’s speech!”

“Say that I sent you--I, the Colonel’s son. They will give you money.”

“What is the use of this talk? Take up the child and the girl, and we can at least ask for the ransom. Ours are the villages on the heights,” said a voice in the background.

These were the Bad Men--worse than Goblins--and it needed all Wee Willie Winkie’s training to prevent him from bursting into tears. But he felt that to cry before a native, excepting only his mother’s ayah, would be an infamy greater than any mutiny. Moreover, he as future Colonel of the 195th, had that grim regiment at his back.

“Are you going to carry us away?” said Wee Willie Winkie, very blanched and uncomfortable.

“Yes, my little Sahib Bahadur,” said the tallest of the men, “and eat you afterward.”

“That is child’s talk,” said Wee Willie Winkie. “Men do not eat men.”

A yell of laughter interrupted him, but he went on firmly,--

“Speech in any vernacular--and Wee Willie Winkie had a colloquial acquaintance with three--was easy to the boy who could not yet manage his ‘r’s’ and ‘th’s’ aright.

Another man joined the conference, crying: ‘O foolish men! What this babe says is true. He is the heart’s heart of those white troops. For the sake of peace let them go both, for if he be taken, the regiment will break loose and gut the valley. Our villages are in the valley, and we shall not escape. Better to send a man back to take the message and get a reward. I say that this child is their God, and that they will spare none of us, nor our women, if we harm him.”

It was Din Mahommed, the dismissed groom of the Colonel, who made the diversion, and an angry and heated discussion followed. Wee Willie Winkie standing over Miss Allardyce, waited the upshot. Surely his “wegiment,” his own “wegiment,” would not desert him if they knew of his extremity.

* * * * *

The riderless pony brought the news to the 195th, though there had been consternation in the Colonel’s household for an hour before. The little beast came in through the parade ground in front of the main barracks, where the men were settling down to play Spoil-five till the afternoon. Devlin, the Color Sergeant of E Company, glanced at the empty saddle and tumbled through the barrack-rooms, kicking up each Room Corporal as he passed. “Up, ye beggars! There’s something happened to the Colonel’s son,” he shouted.

“He couldn’t fall off! S’elp me, ’e couldn’t fall off,” blubbered a drummer-boy. “Go an’ hunt acrost the river. He’s over there if he’s anywhere, an’ maybe those Pathans have got ‘im. For the love o’ Gawd don’t look for ‘im in the nullahs! Let’s go over the river.”

“There’s sense in Mott yet,” said Devlin. “E Company, double out to the river--sharp!”

So E Company, in its shirt-sleeves mainly, doubled for the dear life, and in the rear toiled the perspiring Sergeant, adjuring it to double yet faster. The cantonment was alive with the men of the 195th hunting for Wee Willie Winkie, and the Colonel finally overtook E Company, far too exhausted to swear, struggling in the pebbles of the river-bed.

Up the hill under which Wee Willie Winkie’s Bad Men were discussing the wisdom of carrying off the child and the girl, a look-out fired two shots.

“What have I said?” shouted Din Mahommed. “There is the warning! The pultron are out already and are coming across the plain! Get away! Let us not be seen with the boy!”

The men waited for an instant, and then, as another shot was fired, withdrew into the hills,
silently as they had appeared.

“The wegiment is coming,” said Wee Willie Winkie, confidently, to Miss Allardyce, “and it’s all wight. Don’t cwy!”

He needed the advice himself, for ten minutes later, when his father came up, he was weeping bitterly with his head in Miss Allardyce’s lap.

And the men of the 195th carried him home with shouts and rejoicings; and Coppy, who had ridden a horse into a lather, met him, and, to his intense disgust, kissed him openly in the presence of the men.

But there was balm for his dignity. His father assured him that not only would the breaking of arrest be condoned, but that the good-conduct badge would be restored as soon as his mother could sew it on his blouse-sleeve. Miss Allardyce had told the Colonel a story that made him proud of his son.

“She belonged to you, Coppy,” said Wee Willie Winkie, indicating Miss Allardyce with a grimy forefinger. “I knew she didn’t ought to go acwoss ve wiver, and I knew ve wegiment would come to me if I sent Jack home.”

“You’re a hero, Winkie,” said Coppy—“a pukka hero!”

“I don’t know what vat means,” said Wee Willie Winkie, “but you mustn’t call me Winkie any no more. I’m Percival Will’am Will’ams.”

And in this manner did Wee Willie Winkie enter into his manhood.
To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. They were admirable things for the observer -- excellent for drawing the veil from men’s motives and actions. But for the trainedreasoner to admit such intrusions into his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which might throw a doubt upon all his mental results. Grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his own high-power lenses, would not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his. And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory.

I had seen little of Holmes lately. My marriage had drifted us away from each other. My own complete happiness, and the home-centred interests which rise up around the man who first finds himself master of his own establishment, were sufficient to absorb all my attention, while Holmes, who loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul, remained in our lodgings in Baker Street, buried among his old books, and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature. He was still, as ever, deeply attracted by the study of crime, and occupied his immense faculties and extraordinary powers of observation in following out those clews, and clearing up those mysteries which had been abandoned as hopeless by the official police. From time to time I heard some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder, of his clearing up of the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee, and finally of the mission which he had accomplished so delicately and successfully for the reigning family of Holland. Beyond these signs of his activity, however, which I merely shared with all the readers of the daily press, I knew little of my former friend and companion.

One night -- it was on the twentieth of March, 1888 -- I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice), when my way led me through Baker Street. As I passed the well-remembered door, which must always be associated in my mind with my wooing, and with the dark incidents of the Study in Scarlet, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers. His rooms were brilliantly lit, and, even as I looked up, I saw his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him. To me, who knew his every mood and habit, his attitude and manner told their own story. He was at work again. He had risen out of his drug-created dreams and was hot upon the scent of some new problem. I rang the bell and was shown up to the chamber which had formerly been in part my own.

His manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad, I think, to see me. With hardly a word spoken, but with a kindly eye, he waved me to an armchair, threw across his case of cigars, and indicated a spirit case and a gasogene in the corner. Then he stood before the fire and looked me over in his singular introspective fashion.

"Wedlock suits you," he remarked. "I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you."

"Seven!" I answered.

"Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. And in practice
again, I observe. You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness.”

“Then, how do you know?”

“I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl?”

“My dear Holmes,” said I, “this is too much. You would certainly have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago. It is true that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a dreadful mess, but as I have changed my clothes I can’t imagine how you deduce it. As to Mary Jane, she is incorrigible, and my wife has given her notice, but there, again, I fail to see how you work it out.”

He chuckled to himself and rubbed his long, nervous hands together.

“It is simplicity itself,” said he; “my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-slitting specimen of the London slavey. As to your practice, if a gentleman walks into my rooms smelling of iodoform, with a black mark of nitrate of silver upon his right forefinger, and a bulge on the right side of his top-hat to show where he has secreted his stethoscope, I must be dull, indeed, if I do not pronounce him to be an active member of the medical profession.”

I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his process of deduction. “When I hear you give your reasons,” I remarked, “the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours.”

“Quite so,” he answered, lighting a cigarette, and throwing himself down into an armchair. “You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.”

“Frequently.”

“How often?”

“Well, some hundreds of times.”

“Then how many are there?”

“How many? I don’t know.”

“Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed. By-the-way, since you are interested in these little problems, and since you are good enough to chronicle one or two of my trifling experiences, you may be interested in this.” He threw over a sheet of thick, pink-tinted note-paper which had been lying open upon the table. “It came by the last post,” said he. “Read it aloud.”

The note was undated, and without either signature or address.

“There will call upon you to-night, at a quarter to eight o’clock,” it said, “a gentleman who desires to consult you upon a matter of the very deepest moment. Your recent services to one of the royal houses of Europe have shown that you are one who may safely be trusted with matters which are of an importance which can hardly be exaggerated. This account of you we have from all quarters received. Be in your chamber then at that hour, and do not take it amiss if your visitor wear a mask.”

“This is indeed a mystery,” I remarked. “What do you imagine that it means?”

“I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts. But the note itself. What do you deduce from it?”

I carefully examined the writing, and the paper upon which it was written.

“The man who wrote it was presumably well to do,” I remarked, endeavoring to imitate my companion’s processes. “Such paper could not be bought under half a crown a packet. It is peculiarly strong and stiff.”

“Peculiar -- that is the very word,” said Holmes. “It is not an English paper at all. Hold it up to
the light.”

I did so, and saw a large “E” with a small “g,” a “P,” and a large “G” with a small “t” woven into the texture of the paper.

“What do you make of that?” asked Holmes.

“The name of the maker, no doubt; or his monogram, rather.”

“Not at all. The ‘G’ with the small ‘t’ stands for ‘Gesellschaft,’ which is the German for ‘Company.’ It is a customary contraction like our ‘Co.’ ‘P,’ of course, stands for ‘Papier.’ Now for the ‘Eg.’ Let us glance at our Continental Gazetteer.” He took down a heavy brown volume from his shelves. “Eglow, Eglonitz — here we are, Egria. It is in a German-speaking country — in Bohemia, not far from Carlsbad. ‘Remarkable as being the scene of the death of Wallenstein, and for its numerous glass-factories and paper-mills.’ Ha, ha, my boy, what do you make of that?” His eyes sparkled, and he sent up a great blue triumphant cloud from his cigarette.

“The paper was made in Bohemia,” I said.

“Precisely. And the man who wrote the note is a German. Do you note the peculiar construction of the sentence — ‘This account of you we have from all quarters received.’ A Frenchman or Russian could not have written that. It is the German who is so un courteous to his verbs. It only remains, therefore, to discover what is wanted by this German who writes upon Bohemian paper and prefers wearing a mask to showing his face. And here he comes, if I am not mistaken, to resolve all our doubts.”

As he spoke there was the sharp sound of horses’ hoofs and grating wheels against the curb, followed by a sharp pull at the bell. Holmes whistled.

“A pair, by the sound,” said he. “Yes,” he continued, glancing out of the window. “A nice little brougham and a pair of beauties. A hundred and fifty guineas apiece. There’s money in this case, Watson, if there is nothing else.”

“I think that I had better go, Holmes.”

“Not a bit, Doctor. Stay where you are. I am lost without my Boswell. And this promises to be interesting. It would be a pity to miss it.”

“But your client —”

“Never mind him. I may want your help, and so may he. Here he comes. Sit down in that armchair, Doctor, and give us your best attention.”

A slow and heavy step, which had been heard upon the stairs and in the passage, paused immediately outside the door. Then there was a loud and authoritative tap.

“Come in!” said Holmes.

A man entered who could hardly have been less than six feet six inches in height, with the chest and limbs of a Hercules. His dress was rich with a richness which would, in England, be looked upon as akin to bad taste. Heavy bands of astrakhan were slashed across the sleeves and fronts of his double-breasted coat, while the deep blue cloak which was thrown over his shoulders was lined with flame-colored silk and secured at the neck with a brooch which consisted of a single flaming beryl. Boots which extended halfway up his calves, and which were trimmed at the tops with rich brown fur, completed the impression of barbaric opulence which was suggested by his whole appearance. He carried a broad-brimmed hat in his hand, while he wore across the upper part of his face, extending down past the cheekbones, a black vizard mask, which he had apparently adjusted that very moment, for his hand was still raised to it as he entered. From the lower part of the face he appeared to be a man of strong character, with a thick, hanging lip, and a long, straight chin suggestive of resolution pushed to the length of obstinacy.

“You had my note?” he asked with a deep harsh voice and a strongly marked German accent. “I told you that I would call.” He looked from one to the other of us, as if uncertain which to address.

“Pray take a seat,” said Holmes. “This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson, who is occasionally good enough to help me in my cases. Whom have I the honor to address?”

“You may address me as the Count Von Kramm, a Bohemian nobleman. I understand that this gentleman, your friend, is a man of honor and discretion, whom I may trust with a matter of the most extreme importance. If not, I should much prefer to communicate with you alone.”
I rose to go, but Holmes caught me by the wrist and pushed me back into my chair. “It is both, or none,” said he. “You may say before this gentleman anything which you may say to me.”

The Count shrugged his broad shoulders. “Then I must begin,” said he, “by binding you both to absolute secrecy for two years; at the end of that time the matter will be of no importance. At present it is not too much to say that it is of such weight it may have an influence upon European history.”

“I promise,” said Holmes.

“And I.”

“You will excuse this mask,” continued our strange visitor. “The august person who employs me wishes his agent to be unknown to you, and I may confess at once that the title by which I have just called myself is not exactly my own.”

“I was aware of it,” said Holmes drily.

“The circumstances are of great delicacy, and every precaution has to be taken to quench what might grow to be an immense scandal and seriously compromise one of the reigning families of Europe. To speak plainly, the matter implicates the great House of Ormstein, hereditary kings of Bohemia.”

“I was also aware of that,” murmured Holmes, settling himself down in his armchair and closing his eyes.

Our visitor glanced with some apparent surprise at the languid, lounging figure of the man who had been no doubt depicted to him as the most incisive reasoner and most energetic agent in Europe. Holmes slowly reopened his eyes and looked impatiently at his gigantic client.

“If your Majesty would condescend to state your case,” he remarked, “I should be better able to advise you.”

The man sprang from his chair and paced up and down the room in uncontrollable agitation. Then, with a gesture of desperation, he tore the mask from his face and hurled it upon the ground.

“You are right,” he cried; “I am the King. Why should I attempt to conceal it?”

“Why, indeed?” murmured Holmes. “Your Majesty had not spoken before I was aware that I was addressing Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, and hereditary King of Bohemia.”

“But you can understand,” said our strange visitor, sitting down once more and passing his hand over his high white forehead, “you can understand that I am not accustomed to doing such business in my own person. Yet the matter was so delicate that I could not confide it to an agent without putting myself in his power. I have come incognito from Prague for the purpose of consulting you.”

“Then, pray consult,” said Holmes, shutting his eyes once more.

“The facts are briefly these: Some five years ago, during a lengthy visit to Warsaw, I made the acquaintance of the well-known adventuress, Irene Adler. The name is no doubt familiar to you.”

“Let me see!” said Holmes. “Hum! Born in New Jersey in the year 1858. Contralto -- hum! La Scala, hum! Prima donna Imperial Opera of Warsaw -- yes! Retired from operatic stage -- ha! Living in London -- quite so! Your Majesty, as I understand, became entangled with this young person, wrote her some compromising letters, and is now desirous of getting those letters back.”

“Precisely so. But how --”

“Was there a secret marriage?”

“None.”

“No legal papers or certificates?”

“None.”

“Then I fail to follow your Majesty. If this young person should produce her letters for blackmailing or other purposes, how is she to prove their authenticity?”
“There is the writing.”
“Pooh, pooh! Forgery.”
“My private note-paper.”
“Stolen.”
“My own seal.”
“Imitated.”
“My photograph.”
“Bought.”
“We were both in the photograph.”
“Oh, dear! That is very bad! Your Majesty has indeed committed an indiscretion.”
“I was mad -- insane.”
“You have compromised yourself seriously.”
“I was only Crown Prince then. I was young. I am but thirty now.”
“It must be recovered.”
“We have tried and failed.”
“Your Majesty must pay. It must be bought.”
“She will not sell.”
“Stolen, then.”
“Five attempts have been made. Twice burglars in my pay ransacked her house. Once we diverted her luggage when she travelled. Twice she has been waylaid. There has been no result.”
“No sign of it?”
“Absolutely none.”
Holmes laughed. “It is quite a pretty little problem,” said he.
“But a very serious one to me,” returned the King reproachfully.
“Very, indeed. And what does she propose to do with the photograph?”
“To ruin me.”
“But how?”
“I am about to be married.”
“So I have heard.”
“To Clotilde Lothman von Saxe-Meningen, second daughter of the King of Scandinavia. You may know the stnct principles of her family. She is herself the very soul of delicacy. A shadow of a doubt as to my conduct would bring the matter to an end.”
“And Irene Adler?”
“Threatens to send them the photograph. And she will do it. I know that she will do it. You do not know her, but she has a soul of steel. She has the face of the most beautiful of women, and the mind of the most resolute of men. Rather than I should marry another woman, there are no lengths to which she would not go -- none.”
“You are sure that she has not sent it yet?”
“I am sure.”
“And why?”
“Because she has said that she would send it on the day when the betrothal was publicly proclaimed. That will be next Monday.”
“Oh, then we have three days yet,” said Holmes with a yawn. “That is very fortunate, as I have one or two matters of importance to look into just at present. Your Majesty will, of course, stay in London for the present?”
“Certainly. You will find me at the Langham under the name of the Count Von Kramm.”
“Then I shall drop you a line to let you know how we progress.”
“Pray do so. I shall be all anxiety.”
“Then, as to money?”
“You have carte blanche.”
“Absolutely?”
“I tell you that I would give one of the provinces of my kingdom to have that photograph.”
“And for present expenses?”
The King took a heavy chamois leather bag from under his cloak and laid it on the table.
“There are three hundred pounds in gold and seven hundred in notes,” he said.
Holmes scribbled a receipt upon a sheet of his note-book and handed it to him.
“And Mademoiselle’s address?” he asked.
“Is Briony Lodge, Serpentine Avenue, St. John’s Wood.”
Holmes took a note of it. “One other question,” said he. “Was the photograph a cabinet?”
“It was.”
“Then, good-night, your Majesty, and I trust that we shall soon have some good news for you. And good-night, Watson,” he added, as the wheels of the royal brougham rolled down the street. “If you will be good enough to call to-morrow afternoon at three o’clock I should like to chat this little matter over with you.”

II
At three o’clock precisely I was at Baker Street, but Holmes had not yet returned. The landlady informed me that he had left the house shortly after eight o’clock in the morning. I sat down beside the fire, however, with the intention of awaiting him, however long he might be. I was already deeply interested in his inquiry, for, though it was surrounded by none of the grim and strange features which were associated with the two crimes which I have already recorded, still, the nature of the case and the exalted station of his client gave it a character of its own. Indeed, apart from the nature of the investigation which my friend had on hand, there was something in his masterly grasp of a situation, and his keen, incisive reasoning, which made it a pleasure to me to study his system of work, and to follow the quick, subtle methods by which he disentangled the most inextricable mysteries. So accustomed was I to his invariable success that the very possibility of his failing had ceased to enter into my head.

It was close upon four before the door opened, and a drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side-whiskered, with an inflamed face and disreputable clothes, walked into the room. Accustomed as I was to my friend’s amazing powers in the use of disguises, I had to look three times before I was certain that it was indeed he. With a nod he vanished into the bedroom, whence he emerged in five minutes tweed-suited and respectable, as of old. Putting his hands into his pockets, he stretched out his legs in front of the fire and laughed heartily for some minutes.

“Well, really!” he cried, and then he choked and laughed again until he was obliged to lie back, limp and helpless, in the chair.

“What is it?”

“It’s quite too funny. I am sure you could never guess how I employed my morning, or what I ended by doing.”

“I can’t imagine. I suppose that you have been watching the habits, and perhaps the house, of Miss Irene Adler.”

“Quite so; but the sequel was rather unusual. I will tell you, however. I left the house a little after eight o’clock this morning in the character of a groom out of work. There is a wonderful sympathy and freemasonry among horsy men. Be one of them, and you will know all that there is to know. I soon found Briony Lodge. It is a bijou villa, with a garden at the back, but built out in front right up to the road, two stories. Chubb lock to the door. Large sitting-room on the right side, well furnished, with long windows almost to the floor, and those preposterous English window fasteners which a child could open. Behind there was nothing remarkable, save that the passage window could be reached from the top of the coach-house. I walked round it and examined it closely from every point of view, but without noting anything else of interest.

“I then lounged down the street and found, as I expected, that there was a mews in a lane which runs down by one wall of the garden. I lent the ostlers a hand in rubbing down their horses, and received in exchange twopence, a glass of half and half, two fills of shag tobacco, and as much information as I could desire about Miss Adler, to say nothing of half a dozen other people in the neighborhood in whom I was not in the least interested, but whose biographies I was compelled to
“And what of Irene Adler?” I asked.

“Oh, she has turned all the men’s heads down in that part. She is the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet. So say the Serpentine-mews, to a man. She lives quietly, sings at concerts, drives out at five every day, and returns at seven sharp for dinner. Seldom goes out at other times, except when she sings. Has only one male visitor, but a good deal of him. He is dark, handsome, and dashing, never calls less than once a day, and often twice. He is a Mr. Godfrey Norton, of the Inner Temple. See the advantages of a cabman as a confidant. They had driven him home a dozen times from Serpentine-mews, and knew all about him. When I had listened to all they had to tell, I began to walk up and down near Briony Lodge once more, and to think over my plan of campaign.

“This Godfrey Norton was evidently an important factor in the matter. He was a lawyer. That sounded ominous. What was the relation between them, and what the object of his repeated visits? Was she his client, his friend, or his mistress? If the former, she had probably transferred the photograph to his keeping. If the latter, it was less likely. On the issue of this question depended whether I should continue my work at Briony Lodge, or turn my attention to the gentleman’s chambers in the Temple. It was a delicate point. and it widened the field of my inquiry. I fear that I bore you with these details, but I have to let you see my little difficulties, if you are to understand the situation.”

“I am following you closely,” I answered.

“I was still balancing the matter in my mind when a hansom cab drove up to Briony Lodge, and a gentleman sprang out. He was a remarkably handsome man, dark, aquiline, and moustached—evidently the man of whom I had heard. He appeared to be in a great hurry, shouted to the cabman to wait, and brushed past the maid who opened the door with the air of a man who was thoroughly at home.

“He was in the house about half an hour, and I could catch glimpses of him in the windows of the sitting-room, pacing up and down, talking excitedly, and waving his arms. Of her I could see nothing. Presently he emerged, looking even more flurried than before. As he stepped up to the cab, he pulled a gold watch from his pocket and looked at it earnestly, ‘Drive like the devil,’ he shouted, ‘first to Gross & Hankey’s in Regent Street, and then to the Church of St. Monica in the Edgeware Road. Half a guinea if you do it in twenty minutes!’

“Away they went, and I was just wondering whether I should not do well to follow them when up the lane came a neat little landau, the coachman with his coat only half-buttoned, and his tie under his ear, while all the tags of his harness were sticking out of the buckles. It hadn’t pulled up before she shot out of the hall door and into it. I only caught a glimpse of her at the moment, but she was a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for.

‘The Church of St. Monica, John,’ she cried, ‘and half a sovereign if you reach it in twenty minutes.’

“This was quite too good to lose, Watson. I was just balancing whether I should run for it, or whether I should perch behind her landau when a cab came through the street. The driver looked twice at such a shabby fare, but I jumped in before he could object. ‘The Church of St. Monica,’ said I, ‘and half a sovereign if you reach it in twenty minutes.’ It was twenty-five minutes to twelve, and of course it was clear enough what was in the wind.

“My cabby drove fast. I don’t think I ever drove faster, but the others were there before us. The cab and the landau with their steaming horses were in front of the door when I arrived. I paid the man and hurried into the church. There was not a soul there save the two whom I had followed and a surpliced clergyman, who seemed to be expostulating with them. They were all three standing in a knot in front of the altar. I lounged up the side aisle like any other idler who has dropped into a church. Suddenly, to my surprise, the three at the altar faced round to me, and Godfrey Norton came running as hard as he could towards me.

“Thank God,” he cried. “You’ll do. Come! Come!”

“What then?” I asked.

“Come, man, come, only three minutes, or it won’t be legal.”
I was half-dragged up to the altar, and before I knew where I was I found myself mumbling responses which were whispered in my ear, and vouching for things of which I knew nothing, and generally assisting in the secure tying up of Irene Adler, spinster, to Godfrey Norton, bachelor. It was all done in an instant, and there was the gentleman thanking me on one side and the lady on the other, while the clergyman beamed on me in front. It was the most preposterous position in which I ever found myself in my life, and it was the thought of it that started me laughing just now. It seems that there had been some informality about their license, that the clergyman absolutely refused to marry them without a witness of some sort, and that my lucky appearance saved the bridegroom from having to sally out into the streets in search of a best man. The bride gave me a sovereign, and I mean to wear it on my watch-chain in memory of the occasion."

"This is a very unexpected turn of affairs," said I; "and what then?"

"Well, I found my plans very seriously menaced. It looked as if the pair might take an immediate departure, and so necessitate very prompt and energetic measures on my part. At the church door, however, they separated, he driving back to the Temple, and she to her own house. ‘I shall drive out in the park at five as usual,’ she said as she left him. I heard no more. They drove away in different directions, and I went off to make my own arrangements."

"Which are?"

"Some cold beef and a glass of beer," he answered, ringing the bell. "I have been too busy to think of food, and I am likely to be busier still this evening. By the way, Doctor, I shall want your cooperation."

"I shall be delighted."

"You don’t mind breaking the law?"

"Not in the least."

"Nor running a chance of arrest?"

"Not in a good cause."

"Oh, the cause is excellent!"

"Then I am your man."

"I was sure that I might rely on you."

"But what is it you wish?"

"When Mrs. Turner has brought in the tray I will make it clear to you. Now," he said as he turned hungrily on the simple fare that our landlady had provided, "I must discuss it while I eat, for I have not much time. It is nearly five now. In two hours we must be on the scene of action. Miss Irene, or Madame, rather, returns from her drive at seven. We must be at Briony Lodge to meet her."

"And what then?"

"You must leave that to me. I have already arranged what is to occur. There is only one point on which I must insist. You must not interfere, come what may. You understand?"

"I am to be neutral?"

"To do nothing whatever. There will probably be some small unpleasantness. Do not join in it. It will end in my being conveyed into the house. Four or five minutes afterwards the sitting-room window will open. You are to station yourself close to that open window."

"Yes."

"You are to watch me, for I will be visible to you."

"Yes."

"And when I raise my hand -- so -- you will throw into the room what I give you to throw, and will, at the same time, raise the cry of fire. You quite follow me?"

"Entirely."

"It is nothing very formidable," he said, taking a long cigarshaped roll from his pocket. "It is an ordinary plumber’s smokercocket, fitted with a cap at either end to make it self-lighting. Your task is confined to that. When you raise your cry of fire, it will be taken up by quite a number of people. You may then walk to the end of the street, and I will rejoin you in ten minutes. I hope that I have made myself clear?"

"I am to remain neutral, to get near the window, to watch you, and at the signal to throw in this
object, then to raise the cry of fire, and to wait you at the corner of the street.”
“Precisely.”
“Then you may entirely rely on me.”
“That is excellent. I think, perhaps, it is almost time that I prepare for the new role I have to play.”
He disappeared into his bedroom and returned in a few minutes in the character of an amiable and simple-minded Nonconformist clergyman. His broad black hat, his baggy trousers, his white tie, his sympathetic smile, and general look of peering and benevolent curiosity were such as Mr. John Hare alone could have equalled. It was not merely that Holmes changed his costume. His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh part that he assumed. The stage lost a fine actor, even as science lost an acute reasoner, when he became a specialist in crime.

It was a quarter past six when we left Baker Street, and it still wanted ten minutes to the hour when we found ourselves in Serpentine Avenue. It was already dusk, and the lamps were just being lighted as we paced up and down in front of Briony Lodge, waiting for the coming of its occupant. The house was just such as I had pictured it from Sherlock Holmes’s succinct description, but the locality appeared to be less private than I expected. On the contrary, for a small street in a quiet neighborhood, it was remarkably animated. There was a group of shabbily dressed men smoking and laughing in a corner, a scissors-grinder with his wheel, two guardsmen who were flirting with a nurse-girl, and several well-dressed young men who were lounging up and down with cigars in their mouths.

“You see,” remarked Holmes, as we paced to and fro in front of the house, “this marriage rather simplifies matters. The photograph becomes a double-edged weapon now. The chances are that she would be as averse to its being seen by Mr. Godfrey Norton, as our client is to its coming to the eyes of his princess. Now the question is, Where are we to find the photograph?”

“Where, indeed?”

“It is most unlikely that she carries it about with her. It is cabinet size. Too large for easy concealment about a woman’s dress. She knows that the King is capable of having her waylaid and searched. Two attempts of the sort have already been made. We may take it, then, that she does not carry it about with her.”

“Where, then?”

“Her banker or her lawyer. There is that double possibility. But I am inclined to think neither. Women are naturally secretive, and they like to do their own secreting. Why should she hand it over to anyone else? She could trust her own guardianship, but she could not tell what indirect or political influence might be brought to bear upon a business man. Besides, remember that she had resolved to use it within a few days. It must be where she can lay her hands upon it. It must be in her own house.”

“But it has twice been burgled.”

“Pshaw! They did not know how to look.”

“But how will you look?”

“I will not look.”

“What then?”

“I will get her to show me.”

“But she will refuse.”

“She will not be able to. But I hear the rumble of wheels. It is her carriage. Now carry out my orders to the letter.”

As he spoke the gleam of the side-lights of a carriage came round the curve of the avenue. It was a smart little landau which rattled up to the door of Briony Lodge. As it pulled up, one of the loafing men at the corner dashed forward to open the door in the hope of earning a copper, but was elbowed away by another loafer, who had rushed up with the same intention. A fierce quarrel broke out, which was increased by the two guardsmen, who took sides with one of the loungers, and by the scissors-grinder, who was equally hot upon the other side. A blow was struck, and in an instant the lady, who had stepped from her carriage, was the centre of a little knot of flushed and struggling men, who struck savagely at each other with their fists and sticks. Holmes dashed into the crowd to
protect the lady; but just as he reached her he gave a cry and dropped to the ground, with the blood running freely down his face. At his fall the guardsmen took to their heels in one direction and the loungers in the other, while a number of better-dressed people, who had watched the scuffle without taking part in it, crowded in to help the lady and to attend to the injured man. Irene Adler, as I will still call her, had hurried up the steps; but she stood at the top with her superb figure outlined against the lights of the hall, looking back into the street.

"Is the poor gentleman much hurt?" she asked.

"He is dead," cried several voices.

"No, no, there's life in him!" shouted another. "But he'll be gone before you can get him to hospital."

"He's a brave fellow," said a woman. "They would have had the lady's purse and watch if it hadn't been for him. They were a gang, and a rough one, too. Ah, he's breathing now."

"He can't lie in the street. May we bring him in, marm?"

"Surely. Bring him into the sitting-room. There is a comfortable sofa. This way, please!"

Slowly and solemnly he was borne into Briony Lodge and laid out in the principal room, while I still observed the proceedings from my post by the window. The lamps had been lit, but the blinds had not been drawn, so that I could see Holmes as he lay upon the couch. I do not know whether he was seized with compunction at that moment for the part he was playing, but I know that I never felt more heartily ashamed of myself in my life than when I saw the beautiful creature against whom I was conspiring, or the grace and kindliness with which she waited upon the injured man. And yet it would be the blackest treachery to Holmes to draw back now from the part which he had intrusted to me. I hardened my heart, and took the smoke-rocket from under my ulster. After all, I thought, we are not injuring her. We are but preventing her from injuring another.

Holmes had sat up upon the couch, and I saw him motion like a man who is in need of air. A maid rushed across and threw open the window. At the same instant I saw him raise his hand and at the signal I tossed my rocket into the room with a cry of "Fire!" The word was no sooner out of my mouth than the whole crowd of spectators, well dressed and ill -- gentlemen, ostlers, and servant-maids -- joined in a general shriek of "Fire!" Thick clouds of smoke curled through the room and out at the open window. I caught a glimpse of rushing figures, and a moment later the voice of Holmes from within assuring them that it was a false alarm. Slipping through the shouting crowd I made my way to the corner of the street, and in ten minutes was rejoiced to find my friend's arm in mine, and to get away from the scene of uproar. He walked swiftly and in silence for some few minutes until we had turned down one of the quiet streets which lead towards the Edgeware Road.

"You did it very nicely, Doctor," he remarked. "Nothing could have been better. It is all right."

"You have the photograph?"

"I know where it is."

"And how did you find out?"

"She showed me, as I told you she would."

"I am still in the dark."

"I do not wish to make a mystery," said he, laughing. "The matter was perfectly simple. You, of course, saw that everyone in the street was an accomplice. They were all engaged for the evening."

"I guessed as much."

"Then, when the row broke out, I had a little moist red paint in the palm of my hand. I rushed forward, fell down, clapped my hand to my face, and became a piteous spectacle. It is an old trick."

"That also I could fathom."

"Then they carried me in. She was bound to have me in. What else could she do? And into her sitting-room, which was the very room which I suspected. It lay between that and her bedroom, and I was determined to see which. They laid me on a couch, I motioned for air, they were compelled to open the window. and you had your chance."

"How did that help you?"

"It was all-important. When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have more
than once taken advantage of it. In the case of the Darlington substitution scandal it was of use to me, and also in the Arnsworth Castle business. A married woman grabs at her baby; an unmarried one reaches for her jewel-box. Now it was clear to me that our lady of to-day had nothing in the house more precious to her than what we are in quest of. She would rush to secure it. The alarm of fire was admirably done. The smoke and shouting were enough to shake nerves of steel. She responded beautifully. The photograph is in a recess behind a sliding panel just above the right bell-pull. She was there in an instant, and I caught a glimpse of it as she half-drew it out. When I cried out that it was a false alarm, she replaced it, glanced at the rocket, rushed from the room, and I have not seen her since. I rose, and, making my excuses, escaped from the house. I hesitated whether to attempt to secure the photograph at once; but the coachman had come in, and as he was watching me narrowly it seemed safer to wait. A little over-precipitance may ruin all.”

“And now?” I asked.

“Our quest is practically finished. I shall call with the King to-morrow, and with you, if you care to come with us. We will be shown into the sitting-room to wait for the lady; but it is probable that when she comes she may find neither us nor the photograph. It might be a satisfaction to his Majesty to regain it with his own hands.”

“And when will you call?”

“At eight in the morning. She will not be up, so that we shall have a clear field. Besides, we must be prompt, for this marriage may mean a complete change in her life and habits. I must wire to the King without delay.”

We had reached Baker Street and had stopped at the door. He was searching his pockets for the key when someone passing said:

“Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes.”

There were several people on the pavement at the time, but the greeting appeared to come from a slim youth in an ulster who had hurried by.

“I’ve heard that voice before,” said Holmes, staring down the dimly lit street. “Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have been.”

III

I slept at Baker Street that night, and we were engaged upon our toast and coffee in the morning when the King of Bohemia rushed into the room.

“You have really got it!” he cried, grasping Sherlock Holmes by either shoulder and looking eagerly into his face.

“Not yet.”

“But you have hopes?”

“I have hopes.”

“Then, come. I am all impatience to be gone.”

“We must have a cab.”

“No, my brougham is waiting.”

“Then that will simplify matters.” We descended and started off once more for Briony Lodge.

“Irene Adler is married,” remarked Holmes.

“Married! When?”

“Yesterday.”

“But to whom?”

“To an English lawyer named Norton.”

“But she could not love him.”

“I am in hopes that she does.”

“And why in hopes?”

“Because it would spare your Majesty all fear of future annoyance. If the lady loves her husband, she does not love your Majesty. If she does not love your Majesty, there is no reason why she should interfere with your Majesty’s plan.”

“It is true. And yet -- Well! I wish she had been of my own station! What a queen she would
have made!” He relapsed into a moody silence, which was not broken until we drew up in Serpentine Avenue.

The door of Briony Lodge was open, and an elderly woman stood upon the steps. She watched us with a sardonic eye as we stepped from the brougham.

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I believe?” said she.

“I am Mr. Holmes,” answered my companion, looking at her with a questioning and rather startled gaze.

“Indeed! My mistress told me that you were likely to call. She left this morning with her husband by the 5:15 train from Charing Cross for the Continent.”

“What!” Sherlock Holmes staggered back, white with chagrin and surprise. “Do you mean that she has left England?”

“Never to return.”

“And the papers?” asked the King hoarsely. “All is lost.”

“We shall see.” He pushed past the servant and rushed into the drawing-room, followed by the King and myself. The furniture was scattered about in every direction, with dismantled shelves and open drawers, as if the lady had hurriedly ransacked them before her flight. Holmes rushed at the bell-pull, tore back a small sliding shutter, and, plunging in his hand, pulled out a photograph and a letter. The photograph was of Irene Adler herself in evening dress, the letter was superscribed to “Sherlock Holmes, Esq. To be left till called for.” My friend tore it open and we all three read it together. It was dated at midnight of the preceding night and ran in this way:

MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES,
You really did it very well. You took me in completely. Until after the alarm of fire, I had not a suspicion. But then, when I found how I had betrayed myself, I began to think. I had been warned against you months ago. I had been told that if the King employed an agent it would certainly be you. And your address had been given me. Yet, with all this, you made me reveal what you wanted to know. Even after I became suspicious, I found it hard to think evil of such a dear, kind old clergyman. But, you know, I have been trained as an actress myself. Male costume is nothing new to me. I often take advantage of the freedom which it gives. I sent John, the coachman, to watch you, ran up stairs, got into my walking-clothes, as I call them, and came down just as you departed. Well, I followed you to your door, and so made sure that I was really an object of interest to the celebrated Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Then I, rather imprudently, wished you good-night, and started for the Temple to see my husband. We both thought the best resource was flight, when pursued by so formidable an antagonist; so you will find the nest empty when you call to-morrow. As to the photograph, your client may rest in peace. I love and am loved by a better man than he. The King may do what he will without hindrance from one whom he has cruelly wronged. I keep it only to safeguard myself, and to preserve a weapon which will always secure me from any steps which he might take in the future. I leave a photograph which he might care to possess; and I remain, dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes,

Very truly yours,
IRENE NORTON, née ADLER.

“What a woman -- oh, what a woman!” cried the King of Bohemia, when we had all three read this epistle. “Did I not tell you how quick and resolute she was? Would she not have made an admirable queen? Is it not a pity that she was not on my level?”

“From what I have seen of the lady she seems indeed to be on a very different level to your Majesty,” said Holmes coldly. “I am sorry that I have not been able to bring your Majesty’s business to a more successful conclusion.”

“On the contrary, my dear sir,” cried the King; “nothing could be more successful. I know that her word is inviolate. The photograph is now as safe as if it were in the fire.”

“I am glad to hear your Majesty say so.”

“I am immensely indebted to you. Pray tell me in what way I can reward you. This ring --” He
slipped an emerald snake ring from his finger and held it out upon the palm of his hand.

“Your Majesty has something which I should value even more highly,” said Holmes.

“You have but to name it.”

“This photograph!”

The King stared at him in amazement.

“Irene’s photograph!” he cried. “Certainly, if you wish it.”

“I thank your Majesty. Then there is no more to be done in the matter. I have the honor to wish you a very good-morning.” He bowed, and, turning away without observing the hand which the King had stretched out to him, he set off in my company for his chambers.

And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr. Sherlock Holmes were beaten by a woman’s wit. He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late. And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honorable title of the woman.
You knew the man at once by his likeness to a thousand others. His clothes were always in good condition; the gloss of his linen declared a daily renewal; he was scrupulously shaven, and blew his nose with a silk handkerchief. Yet the impression he made was sordid. The very flower in his buttonhole took a taint of vulgarity, and became suggestive of cheap promenade concerts, or of the public dancing-saloon. He had a fresh colour, proof of time spent chiefly out of doors; his features were blunt, trivial, not to be remembered; in his yellowish eyes lurked a speculative cunning, a cold self-conceit which tuned with the frequent simper upon his loose lips.

At his present age of nine-and-twenty Mr. Jupp represented a South London firm of wholesale haberdashers, a house struggling hard against early difficulties -- he was their town traveller, and they thought a good deal of him. He had the use of a pony-trap and attendant boy; to observe him as he drove about the highways and byways was to enter into the spirit of commercial democracy. Proud of his personal appearance and of his turn-out, proud of his skill in cutting the corners, he rattled from shop to shop with zealous absorption in the business of the day, with an eye for nothing but what concerned his immediate interests. Out of business hours Jupp became a gentleman of untroubled leisure, visited the theatre or music-hall several times in the week, looked in at the Criterion bar about eleven, was home at Kennington not later than half-past twelve.

He lived with his mother and sister, in a very small house, in a squalid little street. His address mattered nothing to him, for he would never have dreamt of asking any one to come and see him at home. For board and lodging he paid Mrs. Jupp ten-and-sixpence a week, out of which sum he expected her to provide him with succulent breakfasts, with savoury suppers when he chose to return early, with a substantial dinner on Sundays, and with bitter ale to his heart's content. The mother grumbled privately, but stinted nothing. Miss Jupp, on the other hand, made frequent protest, and quarrelled with her brother every Sunday. She, a girl of twenty-two, worked very hard at the making of baby linen; of necessity nearly all her earnings went to the support of the house, and every year her temper grew more acrid.

One other person there was who had a decided opinion as to John Jupp's domestic behaviour. Martha Pimm knew the family through having lodged in the same house with them some years ago; she kept up an acquaintance with Ada Jupp, and learnt from her all about the brother's gross selfishness. 'I wish I was his sister, that's all!' she often remarked, and her eyes twinkled with scorn. The truth was that, in days gone by, Jupp had allowed Miss Pimm to suspect that he regarded her with a certain interest; she gave him neither encouragement nor the reverse, and presently, as his position improved, John began to spend his leisure elsewhere; nowadays they very seldom saw each other.

His income fluctuated, but for the last three years he had averaged an annual three hundred pounds, and of this he spent every penny upon himself. Whatever the difficulties and hardships at home, it never occurred to him to supplement his weekly ten-and-sixpence. In all sincerity he believed that he had barely sufficient for his wants. He groaned over the laundry bill, and thought it a hard thing that his mother would not discharge this out of what he gave her. If the cooking were not to his taste he piped querulously, and threatened to take rooms in a lodging house, where his modest wants could be decently attended to. He wrangled with his sister about halfpence charged by her for the mending of his socks. With the cares of the house he would have nothing whatever to do; on one occasion he gently refused a loan to make up the rent, and Mrs. Jupp had to visit the pawnbroker.

He did not care to encounter Martha Pimm, for she always looked and spoke in a way that made him feel uneasy. After such meeting he continued to think of her in spite of himself. She was rather a comely girl, and very sprightly; had a good-natured 'cheekiness' of tone that sat well on
her; altogether, the kind of young woman that a fellow might get to think too much of. Jupp had not
the slightest intention of marrying until he could find a wife with money: he wanted capital to start a
business for himself. But he was by no means insensible to female charm, and he thought it just as
well to keep out of Martha’s way.

But one evening, when he had come home early to have a cheap supper, he found Miss
Pimm in the dingy little sitting-room. She was high-coloured and in a state of joyous animation.
‘Hallo!’ he exclaimed at the door. ‘That you?’
‘Used to be,’ Martha replied, perkily.
‘What’s up? Come in for a fortune?’
Martha gave a ringing laugh, which was moderately joined in by Mrs. Jupp and her daughter.
‘There’s many a true word said in joke,’ she observed, with a little toss of the head.

It came out that Miss Pimm had actually inherited possessions. Her stepfather, a rag
merchant in Bermondsey, a snuffy, grimy, miserly old fellow, had died at Guy’s Hospital after a
long illness. Martha had been to visit him now and then, though she hardly counted him a relative;
she pitied the poor old curmudgeon, and made him a promise that he should not be buried by the
parish. To her, by formal testament, the dying man bequeathed all he had, which, on inquiry in a
certain indicated quarter, proved to be a matter of two or three thousand pounds, shrewdly invested.

John Jupp listened with wide eyes.
‘And what are you going to do with it?’ he asked.
‘Spend it all on myself, of course -- like other people that has lots o’ money.’
Jupp laughed -- the allusion was not dark to him; but it left his withers unwrung. Long ago
he had learnt to despise such rebukes.

But that night he lay awake for an unusual time. Two thousand pounds was a sum of money;
he could see his way to making use of it. And it was wonderful how Martha Pimm had improved
since he last met her. Had the money brought that fine colour to her cheeks? She was rather off-
hand with him, but that meant pique at his neglect If he chose to alter his tone, to approach the girl
flatteringly -- why, a man of his advantages, personal and other, was not likely to condescend in
vain.

He took the resolve; he began to seek Martha’s society.

She lived with a widowed aunt of hers, who kept a small tobacco-shop in a street off
Kennington Road. The girl performed a multiplicity of services waiting upon a female lodger,
helping in the general domestic work (her aunt had four young children), and frequently attending
to customers. This life was not altogether to her taste, and she could have earned more money by
resuming her former occupation of dressmaking; but it would have been difficult for Mrs. Pimm to
find any one else able and willing to give such thorough assistance: Martha’s goodness of heart
found compensation for the things she relinquished.

When the children were abed Mrs. Pimm and her niece took turns at sitting behind the
counter, evening by evening. And presently Mr. Jupp began to patronise the little place for his
cigars, tobacco, and other trifles: he would pass along the street about nine o’clock, and peep in just to see
whether Martha was there. If so he took a chair, and talked genially, sometimes for an hour or more.

‘Don’t you want a commission?’ Martha asked one evening, when he at length bought a box
of vestas and prepared to depart.

‘Commission?’
‘You’re a sort of advertisement for the shop, you know. It brings custom when people see a
swell like you sitting here.’
Jupp laughed; he was flattered.

“One must think about it. Suppose we have a walk together one of these evenings, and talk it
over?”

There was a sly smile on Martha’s lips. She behaved as though the young man’s advances
were not at all disagreeable. It seemed to John that she had no suspicion of the motive which truly
actuated him. All the same, he would be prudent; there must be no direct love-making yet awhile.
Enough that he ingratiated himself by frequent exhibition of his spotless hats, his diverse neckties,
the flower in his buttonhole. He studied a manner of suave politeness -- and Jupp believed that, like Samuel Johnson, he was well-bred to a degree of needless scrupulosity.

Martha consented to take a walk with him. Not to shame his gentility, she donned her best attire, and in the summer evening they sauntered as far as Westminster. In the fulness of his heart John proposed that they should enter a confectioner’s. Martha gaily assented, and merrily made choice of the most expensive delicacies; she ate with such a hearty appetite that her companion, who had calculated on an expenditure of sixpence, found that he had two or three shillings to pay. It made him tremble with wrath; but he commanded his countenance, and thought on the ragman’s legacy.

Before they parted he asked if he might take her to the theatre next Saturday. There was a good piece at the Adelphi.

‘I should like it awfully!’ exclaimed the girl. ‘But you must take your sister as well.’

‘Oh, nonsense! It’ll spoil all the fun.’

Martha insisted. She would not go unless Ada Jupp were of the company.

‘I shall come and see her to-morrow, and tell her you’re going to take us,’ she said with childlike exultation. ‘You’re very nice, you know; much nicer than I thought.’

Jupp grinned in torment. Never mind; if this was the way to win her, all right. A rapid computation, and he had decided that he would risk the bait.

He reached home the next evening about eight o’clock, and had not been in the house many minutes -- just time enough to exhibit unusual surliness -- when Martha came.

‘What do you think, Ada!’ she cried, on entering the kitchen, where Mrs. Jupp and her daughter were ironing linen, ‘your brother’s going to take us to the Adelphi on Saturday, you and me -- to the upper circle!’

The listeners stood amazed. John, in the background, grinned horribly. He had intended seats in the pit.

‘How can I go?’ said Ada, pettishly. ‘I haven’t a decent thing to put on.’

‘Then you’ll have to get ’em. Your brother will pay for ’em, I’m sure.’

‘Hollo! Who said so?’ cried a choking voice.

But it was overwhelmed by Martha’s laughing protest. What! he wouldn’t buy a hat and jacket for his own sister -- a man rolling in money as he was! Of course that was only his fun. And in five minutes the whole thing was arranged. Martha suggested the shop where Ada’s new trappings should be purchased. She herself would go with the girl, and assist her choice.

‘I can’t stay any longer, now. I only just looked in for a minute. I suppose you ain’t walking my way, Mr. Jupp?’

John was led off gnashing his teeth, and secretly vowing a future vengeance, but supported by the reflection that already Martha could not keep away from him.

‘You don’t mean to go on working for your aunt, do you?’ he asked, as they walked away, venturing for the first time upon delicate ground.

‘It wouldn’t be kind to leave her all at once, you know.’

‘And where are you going when you do leave here?’

Martha seemed embarrassed.

‘I don’t know. I haven’t thought about it. Time enough when I get my money. I’m going to see the lawyer again next week.’

He made inquiries, in a jesting tone, and the girl informed him of all he desired to know. The money was absolutely for her own use; she had learnt the nature of the investments, and what they produced. John expressed an anxious hope that her lawyer was an honest man; he offered his services as a man of business. But Martha had an air of complete confidence; she smiled her sweetest, and John felt an unwonted flutter in his breast.

That evening at the theatre was the beginning of a round of delights. When Jupp proposed another entertainment, Martha insisted that he should take his mother this time; she knew it was so long since poor Mrs. Jupp had been anywhere at all. But the widow was even worse provided in the matter of costume than her daughter, and Martha, having purposely led the conversation to this
point, one evening at the Jupps’, took upon herself to promise that John, like the excellent son he
was, would buy his mother a whole new outfit. And she gained her point. By this time, John,
whether conqueror or not, was undoubtedly himself subdued; he could not let an evening pass
without seeing Martha. He offered her presents, but, to his surprise and relief, Martha would have
none of them; he might pay for entertainments, and for little feasts as much as he liked, but of gifts
from hand to hand she would not hear. Never had Mrs. Jupp and Ada known such a season of gaiety.
Wherever Martha went with her cavalier, one or other of them, and sometimes both, went also.
Theatres, music-halls, Kensington Exhibitions, shows at Westminster, the Crystal Palace,
Rosherville Gardens -- all were visited in turn, and invariably with a maximum of expense to Mr
Jupp. He groaned after each expedition like a man with colic; in the privacy of his home he had fits
of frenzied wrath; but still the expenditure ceased not, for Martha ruled him with her laughing eye
and her ‘cheeky’ words, and he always reminded himself that the ragman’s legacy would make
abundant reparation. Miss Pimm spent a great deal of time at the Jupps’ house, and never went
away without suggesting -- that is to say, commanding -- some outlay or trouble for the comfort of
Mrs. Jupp and Ada. Their rooms were in a disgraceful state; John had to call in the services of
paper-hanger and upholsterer. The roof leaked; John had to badger the landlord until it was seen to.
All sorts of things were wanted for the kitchen; John had to buy them. Finally, one evening of
autumn, as he and Martha walked idly in Kennington Road, the girl said to him:
‘I tell you what it is: you don’t pay half enough for your board and lodging, you know.’
He checked his steps.
‘What! after all I’ve done for them! Why, I’ve spent pounds, pounds!’
‘Well; it’s no more than you ought to have done. Fancy, only ten-and-sixpence a week.
Make it a pound.’
‘A pound! Do you suppose I’m made of money?’
The discussion brought him to a point already several times approached. When was Martha
going to marry him? Come, now, he had waited a long time. She knew that he was nothing but a
downright slave to her. If he could only say all he felt ----
‘When did it begin?’ asked Martha, slyly.
‘Begin? Why, years ago. I’ve been fond of you ever since I first saw you ----’
The girl laughed noisily. She would not allow him to be sentimental, would not discuss the
question of marriage. As on each previous occasion, she put him off with the vaguest references to a
future time. And John had to go home thus unsatisfied. He had a bad taste in his mouth; he felt
bilious. What if Martha had only played with him? And the money he had spent in pursuit of her, of
the legacy! That night he raged at his mother and his sister. They were in a plot to rob him. He
would sell all the new furniture he had bought them, and go off to lodgings in another house. Mrs.
Jupp, seriously concerned, talked of Martha, and tried to assure him that the girl was ready to be his
wife, only he must let her take her own time. Ada answered wrath with wrath, and said it served him
right, whatever happened; he was a sneak and a skinflint; he had only made up to Martha when she
came in for money, and did he suppose a girl couldn’t see that?
There was a terrific uproar in the house. After the women, worn out with disputation, had
gone to bed, John sat up for an hour drinking bitter ale, accompaniment to bitter thoughts.
The next day he had an unpleasant interview with the partners of his firm. ‘Our Mr. Jupp’ no
longer stood in such high favour with these gentlemen as a year ago, partly because of a falling-off
in their business, partly as a result of John’s personal demeanour lately. It had always been John’s
weakness to pose as indispensable; as long as they thought him so, his employers gladly bore with
this trait, but when it appeared to them that he was no longer so skilful as of old in the hunt for
orders, they grew disposed to resent his loftiness as mere impudence The business, they remarked,
stood in need of a decided impulse, and Mr. Jupp, it seemed to them, had begun to exhibit laxity.
One of them suspected underhand dealing; somebody had been whispering that Jupp had in view an
enterprise of his own, and that he might already be estranging the connections of the house in his
own interests. Briefly, there was what is called a ‘rumpus,’ and when it ended in Jupp’s announcing
that their engagement might terminate whenever his employers chose, that confirmed them in their
suspicion. John had notice to take himself elsewhere at an early date.

Very well. It was now his business to arrive at an understanding with Martha Pimm. This very night he would have it out with her, and he doubted not of success.

The little shop put up its shutters at ten. Just as the boy employed for this purpose had finished his work, Jupp pushed open the door. Martha was behind the counter, putting things in order for the night. She looked up and smiled, but not at all in her wonted way; rather as she might have greeted any strange customer.

‘What can I do for you, Mr. Jupp?’

‘Hallo! What’s the matter?’

‘Matter? Nothing that I know of.’

She was friendly, but distant. After a few minutes’ idle talk, she again asked him what he had come for.

‘Aunt has gone to bed, and I want to get the place locked up.’

Speaking, she turned off one jet of gas, and lowered another, so that they stood in a dim light. Jupp leaned to her across the counter, and began to plead. It was singular love-making; the man’s voice, and even his words, strongly suggested the insistence of a commercial traveller who is representing the merits of some new ‘line.’ Martha interrupted him.

‘Are you going to give your mother a pound a week?’ she asked, in a tone of good-humoured interest.

‘I will! I promise you, Martha, Only let’s settle the time of our marriage, there’s a dear girl.’

‘Oh, there’s plenty of time to think of that.’

He interrupted her with a thump on the counter, and began to speak in a thick, angry voice. He wouldn’t be played with; she had as good as promised to marry him long ago; did she think he was to be fooled in this way? From Martha came a sharp reply: she had never hinted in word or look that she meant to marry him; who was he to talk to her like this? Let him go and behave decently to his mother and sister, and show that he wasn’t such a selfish cur as he used to be, and then it would be time enough to ask a girl to marry him. As he listened, Jupp’s face became livid.

‘Look ’ere!’ he exclaimed, again thumping the counter. ‘You’ve gone too far to draw back. You’ve got to marry me!’

‘Who? Me?’ cried Martha. ‘Marry you? A man as comes making up to me just when he hears I’ve had money left, and before that thought too much of himself to look at me! Not me indeed!’

Thwarted passion and baffled interest made such a whirl in the man’s brain that he lost all control of himself When Martha had ceased speaking, he stood for a moment staring her in the face with round, idiotic eyes; then he raised his right hand and dealt her a ringing box on the ear. Martha tottered aside, and gave a cry, but of astonishment rather than of pain or fright. It brought Jupp to his senses terrified at what he had done, he turned on his heels and bolted into the street. The door stood wide open behind him.

On the morrow he carried out his oft-repeated threat, and took lodgings in another part of London. From that day Mrs. Jupp and Ada saw nothing of him for many months, and of course received no more of his bounty. After waiting in vain for a visit from Martha Pimm, Ada went to see the girl. Martha was quite herself, but professed that she knew nothing whatever of Mr. Jupp. She came no more to her friend’s house, and before very long her aunt removed from the little shop to one much larger in Brixton Road, where Martha took the tobacconist business seriously in hand, and to all appearances it thrrove.

When something like a year had passed Martha Pimm and Ada Jupp met by chance on a Bank holiday at the Crystal Palace. Martha was accompanied by two of her little cousins, and had a look of frank enjoyment; Ada was walking about alone, looked rather cheerless, and wore the dress which her brother had so reluctantly purchased for her more than twelve months ago. They approached each other, and talked. Martha was just going to get seats for the afternoon concert; she made the lonely girl join her. Subsequently she took her and the children to have tea, not a ‘ninepenny,’ but a really festive meal at the exclusive tables. And here, bending forward, she asked
with a smile what had become of John.

‘He’s been married about three months,’ Ada replied.

‘Who to?’ the other inquired, with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

‘A publican’s widow. She had money--of course. And he’s gone into the public line with her. The ’ouse is at ’Ammersmith.’

Martha relieved her feelings in a laugh of the most undeniable mirthfulness.

‘Is he ’appy?’

‘I don’t know. We never see nothing of him.’

But in due time Martha had an answer to her inquiry; she came upon it in a newspaper, of date some half a year subsequent to that Bank holiday. Here she read of one John Jupp, publican, who had answered a summons to the police-court, where he was charged with certain irregularities in the conduct of this business, chiefly the permission of gambling on the premises. The case was amusing; it gave scope to the reporter’s humour. Mr. Jupp appeared before the magistrates with a very black black-eye, interrogated as to which, he made known that it was bestowed upon him by his wife, with whom he lived in anything but ideal felicity. Mrs. Jupp, he asserted, was no better than a ‘she demon;’ to her he attributed all the ill report which had gathered about his house. Whereupon from another part of the court there sounded a fierce shout, or rather yell; it came from the lady in question; she shrieked menaces at her husband, and quietness could only be restored by her forcible removal. In the end, Mr. John Jupp found himself mulcted in a heavy fine, and retired disconsolate.

Having read this bit of drama, Martha Pimm laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

Two months later, on a dreary November morning, she received at her shop in Brixton a letter of which the signature greatly surprised her. John Jupp wrote to ask if she would grant him an interview. He wished particularly to see her and as soon as possible, and he remained hers very faithfully. The address he appended was other than that of the house at Hammersmith. Martha at once wrote a reply, inviting him to come that very evening.

And he came about eight o’clock. Martha received him in a sitting-room above the shop. Seedily habited, and with a face which made suggestion of fresh assaults from his vigorous spouse, John moved humbly forward.

‘Miss Pimm,’ he began, stopping at a few paces from her, ‘I am leaving London, and I wish before I go to ask your pardon for -- for something I did a long time ago.’

‘Oh, you do, Mr. Jupp, do you?’ Martha replied, checking herself from laughter.

‘Yes. In earnest I do. I ought to have come long ago, but I was ashamed, and that’s the truth. I’m leaving London -- I’ve got a little place in the Midlands, in fact, though I don’t care to mention where it is, not even to you. And I want to hear as you’ve forgiven me.’

‘And what good’ll it do you, Mr. Jupp?’

Standing, he entered upon a narrative of his matrimonial experiences. It lasted a quarter of an hour, and the listener enjoyed herself as at a play; but she did not laugh. When he was silent she said that he hadn’t behaved to her exactly like a gentleman, but that she too had something with which to reproach herself; she pardoned him freely, and wished him better luck.

But John still kept his position.

‘Anything else you want to say, Mr. Jupp?’

‘Only this, Miss Pimm. At my age of one-and-thirty I am a broken and a penniless man. I’m going away to ‘ide my ‘ead. You’ve been doing well, and I’m glad to see it. What I want to ask is -- could you find it in your ‘art to offer me a little help?’

Martha looked at him for full a minute, during which he kept his eyes down. Then she felt in her pocket and produced a purse.

‘How much did you think of asking?’ she inquired gravely, but with a curious hint of mirth about her twitching mouth.

‘Oh!’ his note was joyful. ‘I leave that to you, Miss Pimm. I never thought I should come to this ----.’

‘Would ten pounds be any use?’
‘T -- ten?’ He had not hoped for so much, and consequently felt aggrieved that it was not more. ‘Oh, thank you! I think ten pounds would give me a nice little start. You see, Miss Pimm, I haven’t a penny of my own. The house is my wife’s -- all the money is hers. I’ve had to save myself from her with just what I stand up in ----’

‘All right. Wait a minute while I go downstairs.’

Martha had been examining the contents of her purse; she now hurriedly put back the coins, and in doing so allowed half a sovereign to fall to the floor. It fell noiselessly upon the carpet, but not unobserved by Mr. Jupp’s eye. His head was perked forward; he seemed about to draw attention to the accident; but as Martha walked away in seeming unconsciousness of what had happened, he stood still and spoke not a word.

She was absent five minutes, then reappeared with a ten-pound note in her hand. Advancing to her former place she looked on the ground, but not in a way to excite Jupp’s attention. He, meanwhile, stood just where she had left him.

‘Well, here’s ten pounds,’ she said, eyeing him strangely, severely.

‘I thank you with all my ’art, dear Miss Pimm!’

‘With that,’ she continued, her voice hardening, ‘and the ten shillings you’ve just stolen, you ought to make a nice start, don’t you think?’

He staggered and turned deadly pale.

‘Stolen -- ten shillings -- what d’you mean?’

Martha pointed to the floor.

‘I saw it drop, and I thought I’d try you. I wanted to see what sort of a man you really were -- understand? I shall give you the ten pounds all the same. I wouldn’t have given a penny, only I’ve felt that I made rather a fool of you once -- you remember? I never felt sorry for you, and now I see I was right. Just take yourself off; Mr. Jupp, before I pay you back something you once gave me, though I hadn’t asked for it!’

And he turned and slunk away, in his fingers the squeezed banknote, in his pocket the half-sovereign.
H.G. Wells, THE STAR (1897)

It was on the first day of the New Year that the announcement was made, almost simultaneously from three observatories, that the motion of the planet Neptune, the outermost of all the planets that wheel about the sun, had become very erratic. Ogilvy had already called attention to a suspected retardation in its velocity in December. Such a piece of news was scarcely calculated to interest a world the greater portion of whose inhabitants were unaware of the existence of the planet Neptune, nor outside the astronomical profession did the subsequent discovery of a faint remote speck of light in the region of the perturbed planet cause any very great excitement. Scientific people, however, found the intelligence remarkable enough, even before it became known that the new body was rapidly growing larger and brighter, that its motion was quite different from the orderly progress of the planets, and that the deflection of Neptune and its satellite was becoming now of an unprecedented kind.

Few people without a training in science can realise the huge isolation of the solar system. The sun with its specks of planets, its dust of planetoids, and its impalpable comets, swims in a vacant immensity that almost defeats the imagination. Beyond the orbit of Neptune there is space, vacant so far as human observation has penetrated, without warmth or light or sound, blank emptiness, for twenty million times a million miles. That is the smallest estimate of the distance to be traversed before the very nearest of the stars is attained. And, saving a few comets more unsubstantial than the thinnest flame, no matter had ever to human knowledge crossed this gulf of space, until early in the twentieth century this strange wanderer appeared. A vast mass of matter it was, bulky, heavy, rushing without warning out of the black mystery of the sky into the radiance of the sun. By the second day it was clearly visible to any decent instrument, as a speck with a barely sensible diameter, in the constellation Leo near Regulus. In a little while an opera glass could attain it.

On the third day of the new year the newspaper readers of two hemispheres were made aware for the first time of the real importance of this unusual apparition in the heavens. “A Planetary Collision,” one London paper headed the news, and proclaimed Duchaine’s opinion that this strange new planet would probably collide with Neptune. The leader writers enlarged upon the topic; so that in most of the capitals of the world, on January 3rd, there was an expectation, however vague of some imminent phenomenon in the sky; and as the night followed the sunset round the globe, thousands of men turned their eyes skyward to see—the old familiar stars just as they had always been.

Until it was dawn in London and Pollux setting and the stars overhead grown pale. The Winter’s dawn it was, a sickly-filtering accumulation of daylight, and the light of gas and candles shone yellow in the windows to show where people were astir. But the yawning policeman saw the thing, the busy crowds in the markets stopped agape, workmen going to their work betimes, milkmen, the drivers of news-carts, dissipation going home jaded and pale, homeless wanderers, sentinels on their beats, and in the country, labourers trudging afield, poachers slinking home, all over the dusky quickening country it could be seen—and out at sea by seamen watching for the day—a great white star, come suddenly into the westward sky!

Brighter it was than any star in our skies; brighter than the evening star at its brightest. It still glowed out white and large, no mere twinkling spot of light, but a small round clear shining disc, an hour after the day had come. And where science has not reached, men stared and feared, telling one another of the wars and pestilences that are foreshadowed by these fiery signs in the Heavens. Sturdy Boers, dusky Hottentots, Gold Coast Negroes, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Portuguese, stood in the warmth of the sunrise watching the setting of this strange new star.

And in a hundred observatories there had been suppressed excitement, rising almost to shouting pitch, as the two remote bodies had rushed together, and a hurrying to and fro, to gather
photographic apparatus and spectroscope, and this appliance and that, to record this novel astonishing sight, the destruction of a world. For it was a world, a sister planet of our earth, far greater than our earth indeed, that had so suddenly flashed into flaming death. Neptune it was, had been struck, fairly and squarely, by the strange planet from outer space and the heat of the concussion had incontinent turned two solid globes into one vast mass of incandescence. Round the world that day, two hours before the dawn, went the pallid great white star, fading only as it sank westward and the sun mounted above it. Everywhere men marvelled at it, but of all those who saw it none could have marvelled more than those sailors, habitual watchers of the stars, who far away at sea had heard nothing of its advent and saw it now rise like a pigmy moon and climb zenithward and hang overhead and sink westward with the passing of the night.

And when next it rose over Europe everywhere were crowds of watchers on hilly slopes, on house roofs, in open spaces, staring eastward for the rising of the great new star. It rose with a white glow in front of it, like the glare of a white fire, and those who had seen it come into existence the night before cried out at the sight of it. “It is larger,” they cried. “It is brighter!” And, indeed the moon a quarter full and sinking in the west was in its apparent size beyond comparison, but scarcely in all its breadth had it as much brightness now as the little circle of the strange new star.

“It is brighter!” cried the people clustering in the streets. But in the dim observatories the watchers held their breath and peered at one another—“it is nearer,” they said. “Nearer!”

And voice after voice repeated, “It is nearer,” and the clicking telegraph took that up, and it trembled along telephone wires, and in a thousand cities grimy compositors fingered the type. “It is nearer.” Men writing in offices, struck with a strange realisation, flung down their pens, men talking in a thousand places—suddenly came upon a grotesque possibility in those words, “It is nearer.” It hurried along waking streets, it was shouted down the frost-stilled ways of quiet villages; men who had read these things from the throbbing tape stood in yellow-lit doorways shouting the news to the passersby. “It is nearer.” Pretty women, flushed and glittering, heard the news told jestingly between the dances, and feigned an intelligent interest they did not feel. “Nearer! Indeed. How curious! How very, very clever people must be to find out things like that!”

Lonely tramps faring through the wintry night murmured those words to comfort themselves—looking skyward. “It has need to be nearer, for the night’s as cold as charity. Don’t seem much warmth from it if it is nearer, all the same.”

“What is a new star to me?” cried the weeping woman kneeling beside her dead.

The schoolboy, rising early for his examination work, puzzled it out for himself—with the great white star shining broad and bright through the frost-flowers of his window. “Centrifugal, centripetal,” he said, with his chin on his fist. “Stop a planet in its flight, rob it of its centrifugal force, what then? Centripetal has it, and down it falls into the sun!”

“Do we come in the way? I wonder…”

The light of that day went the way of its brethren, and with the later watches of the frosty darkness rose the strange star again. And it was now so bright that the waxing moon seemed but a pale yellow ghost of its brilliance. And when next it rose over Europe the people cried again, “Nearer!”

And voice after voice repeated, “It is nearer,” and the clicking telegraph took that up, and it trembled along telephone wires, and in a thousand cities grimy compositors fingered the type. “It is nearer.” Men writing in offices, struck with a strange realisation, flung down their pens, men talking in a thousand places—suddenly came upon a grotesque possibility in those words, “It is nearer.” It hurried along waking streets, it was shouted down the frost-stilled ways of quiet villages; men who had read these things from the throbbing tape stood in yellow-lit doorways shouting the news to the passersby. “It is nearer.” Pretty women, flushed and glittering, heard the news told jestingly between the dances, and feigned an intelligent interest they did not feel. “Nearer! Indeed. How curious! How very, very clever people must be to find out things like that!”

The master mathematician sat in his private room and pushed the papers from him. His calculations were already finished. In a small white phial there still remained a little of the drug that had kept him awake and active for four long nights. Each day, serene, explicit, patient as ever, he had given his lecture to his students, and then had come back at once to this momentous calculation. His face was grave, a little drawn and hectic from his drugged activity. For some time he seemed lost in thought. Then he went to the window, and the blind went up with a click. Half way up the sky, over the clustering roofs, chimneys and steeples of the city, hung the star.

He looked at it as one might look into the eyes of a brave enemy. “You may kill me,” he said after a silence. “But I can hold you—and all the universe for that matter—in the grip of this little
brain. I would not change. Even now."

He looked at the little phial. "There will be no need of sleep again," he said. The next day at noon—punctual to the minute, he entered his lecture theatre, put his hat on the end of the table as his habit was, and carefully selected a large piece of chalk. It was a joke among his students that he could not lecture without that piece of chalk to fumble in his fingers, and once he had been stricken to impotence by their hiding his supply. He came and looked under his grey eyebrows at the rising tiers of young fresh faces, and spoke with his accustomed studied commonness of phrasing. "Circumstances have arisen—circumstances beyond my control," he said and paused, "which will debar me from completing the course I had designed. It would seem, gentlemen, if I may put the thing clearly and briefly, that—Man has lived in vain."

The students glanced at one another. Had they heard aright? Mad? Raised eyebrows and grinning lips there were, but one or two faces remained intent upon his calm grey-fringed face. "It will be interesting," he was saying, "to devote this morning to an exposition, so far as I can make it clear to you, of the calculations that have led me to this conclusion. Let us assume—"

He turned towards the blackboard, meditating a diagram in the way that was usual to him. "What was that about 'lived in vain?'" whispered one student to another. "Listen," said the other, nodding towards the lecturer. And presently they began to understand:

That night the star rose later, for its proper eastward motion had carried it some way across Leo towards Virgo, and its brightness was so great that the sky became a luminous blue as it rose, and every star was hidden in its turn, save only Jupiter near the zenith, Capella, Aldebaran, Sirius and the pointers of the Bear. It was very white and beautiful. In many parts of the world that night a pallid halo encircled it about. It was perceptibly larger; in the clear refractive sky of the tropics it seemed as if it were nearly a quarter the size of the moon. The frost was still on the ground in England, but the world was as brightly lit as if it were midsummer moonlight. One could see to read quite ordinary print by that cold clear light, and in the cities the lamps burnt yellow and wan.

And everywhere the world was awake that night, and throughout Christendom a sombre murmur hung in the keen air over the country side like the belling of bees in the heather, and this murmurous tumult grew to a clangour in the cities. It was the tolling of the bells in a million belfry towers and steeples, summoning the people to sleep no more, to sin no more, but to gather in their churches and pray. And overhead, growing larger and brighter as the earth rolled on its way and the night passed, rose the dazzling star.

And the streets and houses were alight in all the cities, the shipyards glared, and whatever roads led to high country were lit and crowded all night long. And in all the seas about the civilised lands, ships with throbbing engines, and ships with bellying sails, crowded with men and living creatures, were standing out to ocean and the north. For already the warning of the master mathematician had been telegraphed all over the world, and translated into a hundred tongues. The new planet and Neptune, locked in a fiery embrace, were whirling headlong, ever faster and faster towards the sun. Already every second this blazing mass flew a hundred miles, and every second its terrific velocity increased. As it flew now, indeed, it must pass a hundred million of miles wide of the earth and scarcely affect it. But near its destined path, as yet only slightly perturbed, spun the mighty planet Jupiter and his moons sweeping splendidly round the sun. Every moment now the attraction between the fiery star and the greatest of the planets grew stronger. And the result of that attraction? Inevitably Jupiter would be deflected from its orbit into an elliptical path, and the burning star, swung by his attraction wide of its sunward rush, would "describe a curved path" and perhaps collide with, and certainly pass very close to, our earth. "Earthquakes, volcanic outbreaks, cyclones, sea waves, floods, and a steady rise in temperature to I know not what limit"—so prophesied the master mathematician.

And overhead, to carry out his words, lonely and cold and livid, blazed the star of the coming doom.
Europe and France and England softened towards a thaw.

But you must not imagine because I have spoken of people praying through the night and people going aboard ships and people fleeing toward mountainous country that the whole world was already in a terror because of the star. As a matter of fact, use and wont still ruled the world, and save for the talk of idle moments and the splendour of the night, nine human beings out of ten were still busy at their common occupations. In all the cities the shops, save one here and there, opened and closed at their proper hours, the doctor and the undertaker plied their trades, the workers gathered in the factories, soldiers drilled, scholars studied, lovers sought one another, thieves lurked and fled, politicians planned their schemes. The presses of the newspapers roared through the night, and many a priest of this church and that would not open his holy building to further what he considered a foolish panic. The newspapers insisted on the lesson of the year 1000—for then, too, people had anticipated the end. The star was no star—mere gas—a comet; and were it a star it could not possibly strike the earth. There was no precedent for such a thing. Common sense was sturdy everywhere, scornful, jesting, a little inclined to persecute the obdurate fearful. That night, at seven-fifteen by Greenwich time, the star would be at its nearest to Jupiter. Then the world would see the turn things would take. The master mathematician's grim warnings were treated by many as so much mere elaborate self-advertisement. Common sense at last, a little heated by argument, signified its unalterable convictions by going to bed. So, too, barbarism and savagery, already tired of the novelty, went about their nightly business, and save for a howling dog here and there, the beast world left the star unheeded.

And yet, when at last the watchers in the European States saw the star rise, an hour later it is true, but no larger than it had been the night before, there were still plenty awake to laugh at the master mathematician—to take the danger as if it had passed.

But hereafter the laughter ceased. The star grew—it grew with a terrible steadiness hour after hour, a little larger each hour, a little nearer the midnight zenith, and brighter and brighter, until it had turned night into a second day. Had it come straight to the earth instead of in a curved path, had it lost no velocity to Jupiter, it must have leapt the intervening gulf in a day, but as it was it took five days altogether to come by our planet. The next night it had become a third the size of the moon before it set to English eyes, and the thaw was assured. It rose over America near the size of the moon, but blinding white to look at, and hot; and a breath of hot wind blew now with its rising and gathering strength, and in Virginia, and Brazil, and down the St. Lawrence valley, it shone intermittently through a driving reek of thunder-clouds, flickering violet lightning, and hail unprecedented. In Manitoba was a thaw and devastating floods. And upon all the mountains of the earth the snow and ice began to melt that night, and all the rivers coming out of high country flowed thick and turbid, and soon—in their upper reaches—with swirling trees and the bodies of beasts and men. They rose steadily, steadily in the ghostly brilliance, and came trickling over their banks at last, behind the flying population of their valleys.

And along the coast of Argentina and up the South Atlantic the tides were higher than had ever been in the memory of man, and the storms drove the waters in many cases scores of miles inland, drowning whole cities. And so great grew the heat during the night that the rising of the sun was like the coming of a shadow. The earthquakes began and grew until all down America from the Arctic Circle to Cape Horn, hillsides were sliding, fissures were opening, and houses and walls crumbling to destruction. The whole side of Cotopaxi slipped out in one vast convulsion, and a tumult of lava poured out so high and broad and swift and liquid that in one day it reached the sea.

So the star, with the wan moon in its wake, marched across the Pacific, trailed the thunderstorms like the hem of a robe, and the growing tidal wave that toiled behind it, frothing and eager, poured over island and island and swept them clear of men. Until that wave came at last—in a blinding light and with the breath of a furnace, swift and terrible it came—a wall of water, fifty feet high, roaring hungrily, upon the long coasts of Asia, and swept inland across the plains of China. For a space the star, hotter now and larger and brighter than the sun in its strength, showed with pitiless brilliance the wide and populous country; towns and villages with their pagodas and trees, roads, wide cultivated fields, millions of sleepless people staring in helpless terror at the
incandescent sky; and then, low and growing, came the murmur of the flood. And thus it was with millions of men that night—a flight nowhither, with limbs heavy with heat and breath fierce and scant, and the flood like a wall swift and white behind. And then death.

China was lit glowing white, but over Japan and Java and all the islands of Eastern Asia the great star was a ball of dull red fire because of the steam and smoke and ashes the volcanoes were spouting forth to salute its coming. Above was the lava, hot gases and ash, and below the seething floods, and the whole earth wavyed and rumbled with the earthquake shocks. Soon the immemorial snows of Thibet and the Himalayas were melting and pouring down by ten million deepening converging channels upon the plains of Burmah and Hindostan. The tangled summits of the Indian jungles were aflame in a thousand places, and below the hurrying waters around the stems were dark objects that still struggled feebly and reflected the blood-red tongues of fire. And in a rudderless confusion a multitude of men and women fled down the broad river-ways to that one last hope of men—the open sea.

Larger grew the star, and larger, hotter, and brighter with a terrible swiftness now. The tropical ocean had lost its phosphorescence, and the whirling steam rose in ghostly wreaths from the black waves that plunged incessantly, speckled with storm-tossed ships.

And then came a wonder. It seemed to those who in Europe watched for the rising of the star that the world must have ceased its rotation. In a thousand open spaces of down and upland the people who had fled thither from the floods and the falling houses and sliding slopes of hill watched for that rising in vain. Hour followed hour through a terrible suspense, and the star rose not. Once again men set their eyes upon the old constellations they had counted lost to them forever. In England it was hot and clear overhead, though the ground quivered perpetually, but in the tropics, Sirius and Capella and Aldebaran showed through a veil of steam. And when at last the great star rose near ten hours late, the sun rose close upon it, and in the centre of its white heart was a disc of black.

Over Asia it was the star had begun to fall behind the movement of the sky, and then suddenly, as it hung over India, its light had been veiled. All the plain of India from the mouth of the Indus to the mouths of the Ganges was a shallow waste of shining water that night, out of which rose temples and palaces, mounds and hills, black with people. Every minaret was a clustering mass of people, who fell one by one into the turbid waters, as heat and terror overcame them. The whole land seemed a wailing and suddenly there swept a shadow across that furnace of despair, and a breath of cold wind, and a gathering of clouds, out of the cooling air. Men looking up, near blinded, at the star, saw that a black disc was creeping across the light. It was the moon, coming between the star and the earth. And even as men cried to God at this respite, out of the East with a strange inexplicable swiftness sprang the sun. And then star, sun and moon rushed together across the heavens.

So it was that presently, to the European watchers, star and sun rose close upon each other, drove headlong for a space and then slower, and at last came to rest, star and sun merged into one glare of flame at the zenith of the sky. The moon no longer eclipsed the star but was lost to sight in the brilliance of the sky. And though those who were still alive regarded it for the most part with that dull stupidity that hunger, fatigue, heat and despair engender, there were still men who could perceive the meaning of these signs. Star and earth had been at their nearest, had swung about one another, and the star had passed. Already it was receding, swifter and swifter, in the last stage of its headlong journey downward into the sun.

And then the clouds gathered, blotting out the vision of the sky, the thunder and lightning wove a garment round the world, all over the earth was such a downpour of rain as men had never before seen, and where the volcanoes flared red against the cloud canopy there descended torrents of mud. Everywhere the waters were pouring off the land, leaving mud-silted ruins, and the earth littered like a storm-worn beech with all that had floated, and the dead bodies of the men and brutes, its children. For days the water streamed off the land, sweeping away soil and trees and houses in the way, and piling huge dykes and scooping out Titanic gullies over the country-side. Those were the days of darkness that followed the star and the heat. All through them, and for many weeks and
months, the earthquakes continued.

But the star had passed, and men, hunger-driven and gathering courage only slowly, might creep back to their ruined cities, buried granaries, and sodden fields. Such few ships as had escaped the storms of that time came stunned and shattered and sounding their way cautiously through the new marks and shoals of once familiar ports. And as the storms subsided men perceived that everywhere the days were hotter than of yore, and the sun larger, and the moon, shrunk to a third of its former size, took now fourscore days between its new and new.

But of the new brotherhood that grew presently among men, of the saving of laws and books and machines, of the strange change that had come over Iceland and Greenland and the shores of Baffin’s Bay, so that the sailors coming there presently found them green and gracious, and could scarce believe their eyes, this story does not tell. Nor of the movement of mankind now that the earth was hotter, northward and southward towards the poles of the earth. It concerns itself only with the coming and the passing of the Star.

The Martian astronomers—for there are astronomers on Mars, although they are very different beings from men—were naturally profoundly interested by these things. They saw them from their own standpoint of course. “Considering the mass and temperature of the missile that was flung through our solar system into the sun,” one wrote, “it is astonishing what a little damage the earth, which it missed so narrowly, has sustained. All the familiar continental markings and the masses of the seas remain intact, and indeed the only difference seems to be a shrinkage of the white discoloration (supposed to be frozen water) round either pole.” Which only shows how small the vastest of human catastrophes may seem, at a distance of a few million miles.