*Sir* Arthur Conan Doyle

# THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL
# & Other Stories

English man of letters Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) is known as the creator of the immortal Sherlock Holmes and as one of the founders of the detective genre. He is far less remembered as the author of historical, science fiction and adventure stories.

Sir A.Conan Doyle says: "This volume is made up of a series of pictures of the past which may be regarded as trial flights towards a larger ideal which I have long had in my mind. It has seemed to me that there is a region between actual story and actual history which has never been adequately exploited. These short sketches, portraying variuos crises in the story of the human race, are to be judged as experiments in that direction."

This collection throws a light on the hitherto not very well-known aspects of his *oeuvre*, and the reader will certainly enjoy these superb stories and appreciate their skilfully woven intrigue.

*THE UNKNOWN AND LITTLE KNOWN*
*CONAN DOYLE*

# THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL

## and Other Stories

## by

## Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

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**А.Конан-Дойль. Потерпевшие кораблекрушение на «Архангеле».** Повести и рассказы. Сборник. На англ. яз. – Подготовка текста и комментарии П.А. Гелева.

**Английский писатель Артур Конан-Дойль известен как создатель Шерлока Холмса и один из основателей и творцов детективного жанра. Несколько менее известен он как автор исторических, фантастических и приключенческих романов, повестей и рассказов. И почти совсем не известен как ссчинитель увлекательных историй, в которых сильны элементы загадки, мистики и необъяснимо таинственного.**

**Читатель сможет познакомиться с этими малоизвестными сторонами творчества писателя в рассказах и повестях, представленных в настоящем сборнике, и вновь насладиться талантом мастера детективного жанра, искусно вычерченной интригой.**

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# THE SPECTRE HAND

Do the dead ever revisit this earth?

On this subject even the ponderous and unsentimental Dr.Johnson was of opinion that to maintain they did not, was to oppose the concurrent and unvarying testimony of all ages and nations, as there was no people so barbarous, and none so civilized, but among whom apparitions of the dead were related and believed in. “That which is doubted by single cavillers,” he adds, “can very little weaken the general evidence, and some who deny it with their tongues confess it by their *fears*.”

In the August of last year I found myself with three friends, when on a northern tour, at the Hotel de Scandinavie, in the long and handsome Carl John Gade of Christiania. A single day, or little more, had sufficed us to “do” all the lions of the little Norwegian capital – the royal palace, a stately white building, guarded by slouching Norski riflemen in long coats, with wideawakes and green plumes; the great brick edifice wherein the Storthing is held, and where the red lion appears on everything, from the king’s throne to the hall-porter’s coal-scuttle; the castle of Aggerhuis and its petty armory, with a single suit of mail, and the long muskets of the Scots who fell at Rhomsdhal; after which there is nothing more to be seen; and when the little Tivoli gardens close at ten, all Christiania goes to sleep till dawn next morning.

English carriages being perfectly useless in Norway, we ordered four of the native carrioles for our departure, as we were resolved to start for the wild mountainous district named the Dovrefeld, when a delay in the arrival of certain letters compelled me to remain two days behind my companions, who promised to await me at Rodnaes, near the head of the magnificent Rans-fiord; and this partial separation with the subsequent circumstance of having to travel alone through districts that were totally strange to me, with but a very slight knowledge of the language, were the means of bringing to my knowledge the story I am about to relate.

The table-d’hote is over by two o’clock in the fashionable hotels of Christiania, so about four in the afternoon I quitted the city, the streets and architecture of which resemble portions of Tottenham Court Road, with stray bits of old Chester. In my carriole, a comfortable kind of gig, were my portmanteau and gun-case; these, with my whole person, and indeed the body of the vehicle itself, being covered by one of those huge tarpaulin cloaks furnished by the carriole company in the Store Standgade.

Though the rain was beginning to fall with a force and density peculiarly Norse when I left behind me the red-tiled city with all its green-coppered spires, I could not but be struck by the bold beauty of the

scenery, as the strong little horse at a rasping pace tore the light carriole along the rough mountain road, which was bordered by natural forests of dark and solemn-looking pines, interpersed with graceful silver birches, the greenness of the foliage contrasting powerfully with the blue of the narrow fiords that opened on every hand, and with the colours in which the toy-like country houses were painted, their timber walls being always snowy white, and their shingle roofs a flaming red. Even some of the village spires wore the same sanguinary hue, presenting thus a singular feature in the landscape.

The rain increased to an unpleasant degree; the afternoon seemed to darken into evening, and the evening into night sooner than usual, while dense masses of vapour came rolling down the steep sides of the wooded hills, over which the sombre firs spread everywhere and up every vista that opened like a sea of cones; and as the houses became fewer and further apart, and not a single wanderer was abroad, and I had but the pocket-map of my "John Murray" to guide me, I soon became convinced that instead of pursuing the route to Rodnaes I was somewhere on the banks of the Tyri-fiord, at least three Norwegian miles (*i.e.*, twenty-one English) in the opposite direction, my little horse worn out, the rain still falling in a continual torrent, night already at hand, and mountain scenery of the most tremendous character everywhere around me. I was in an almost circular valley (encompassed by a chain of hills), which opened before me, after leaving a deep chasm that the road enters, near a place which I afterwards learned bears the name of Krogkleven.

Owing to the steepness of the road, and some decay in the harness of my hired carriole, the traces parted, and then I found myself, with the now useless horse and vehicle, far from any house, homestead, or village where I could have the damage repaired or procure shelter, the rain still pouring like a sheet of water, the thick, shaggy, and impenetrable woods of Norwegian pine towering all about me, their shadows rendered all the darker by the unusual gloom of the night.

To remain quietly in the carriole was unsuitable to a temperament so impatient as mine; I drew it aside from the road, spread the tarpaulin over my small stock of baggage and the gun-case, haltered the pony to it, and set forth on foot, stiff, sore, and weary, in search of succour; and, though armed only with a Norwegian tolknife, having no fear of thieves or of molestation.

Following the road on foot in the face of the blinding rain, a Scotch plaid and oilskin my sole protection now, I perceived ere long a side gate and little avenue, which indicated my vicinity to some place of abode. After proceeding about three hundred yards or so, the wood became more open, a light appeared before me, and I found it to proceed from a window

on the ground floor of a little two-storeyed mansion, built entirely of wood. The sash, which was divided in the middle, was unbolted, and stood partially and most invitingly open; and knowing how hospitable the Norwegians are, without troubling myself to look for the entrance door, I stepped over the low sill into the room (which was tenantless) and looked about for a bell-pull, forgetting that in that country, where there are no mantelpieces, it is generally to be found behind the door.

The floor was, of course, bare, and painted brown; a high German stove, like a black iron pillar, stood in one corner on a stone block; the door, which evidently communicated with some other apartment, was constructed to open in the middle, with one of the quaint lever handles peculiar to the country. The furniture was all of plain Norwegian pine, highly varnished; a reindeer skin spread on the floor, and another over an easy-chair, were the only luxuries; and on the table lay the *Illustret Tidende*, the *Aftonblat* and other papers of that morning, with a meerschaum and pouch of tobacco, all serving to show that some one had recently quitted the room.

I had just taken in all these details by a glance, when there entered a tall thin man of gentlemanly appearance, clad in a rough tweed suit, with a scarlet shirt, open at the throat, a simple but degage style of costume, which he seemed to wear with a natural grace, for it is not every man who can dress thus and still retain an air of distinction. Pausing, he looked at me with some surprise and inquiringly, as I began my apologies and explanation in German.

"Taler de Dansk-Norsk," said he, curtly.

"I cannot speak either with fluency, but —"

"You are welcome, however, and I shall assist you in the prosecution of your journey. Meantime, here is cognac. I am an old soldier, and know the comforts of a full canteen, and of the Indian weed, too, in a wet bivouac. There is a pipe at your service."

I thanked him, and (while he gave directions to his servants to go after the carriole and horse) proceeded to observe him more closely, for something in his voice and eye interested me deeply.

There was much of broken-hearted melancholy – something that indicated a hidden sorrow – in his features, which were handsome, and very slightly aquiline. His face was pale and careworn; his hair and moustache, though plentiful, were perfectly white-blanched, yet he did not seem over forty years of age. His eyes were blue, but without softness, being strangely keen and sad in expression, and times there were when a startled look, that savoured of fright, or pain, or insanity, or of all mingled, came suddenly into them. This unpleasant expression tended greatly to neutralize the symmetry of a face that otherwise was evidently a fine one.

Suddenly a light seemed to spread over it, as I threw off some of my sodden mufflings, and he exclaimed:

"You speak Danskija, and English too, I know! Have you quite forgotten me, Herr Kaptain?" he added, grasping my hand with kindly energy. "Don't you remember Carl Holberg of the Danish Guards?"

The voice was the same as that of the once happy, lively, and jolly young Danish officer, whose gaiety of temper and exuberance of spirit made him seem a species of madcap, who was wont to give champagne suppers at the Klampenborg Gardens to great ladies of the court and to ballet girls of the Hof Theatre with equal liberality; to whom many a fair Danish girl had lost her heart, and who, it was said, had once the effrontery to commence a flirtation with one of the royal princesses when he was on guard at the Amalienborg Palace. But how was I to reconcile this change, the appearance of many years of premature age, that had come upon him?

"I remember you perfectly, Carl," said I, while we shook hands; "yet it is so long since we met; moreover – excuse me – but I knew not whether you were in the land of the living."

The strange expression, which I cannot define, came over his face as he said, with a low, sad tone:

"Times there are when I know not whether I am of the living or the dead. It is twenty years since our happy days – twenty years since I was wounded at the battle of Idstedt – and it seems as if 'twere twenty ages."

"Old friend, I am indeed glad to meet you again."

"Yes, *old* you may call me with truth," said he, with a sad, weary smile as he passed his hand tremulously over his whitened locks, which I could remember being a rich auburn.

All reserve was at an end now, and we speedily recalled a score and more of past scenes of merriment and pleasure, enjoyed together – prior to the campaign of Holstein – in Copenhagen, that most delightful and gay of all the northern cities; and, under the influence of memory, his now withered face seemed to brighten, and some of its former expression stole back again.

"Is this your fishing or shooting quarters, Carl?" I asked.

"Neither. It is my permanent abode."

"In this place, so rural – so solitary? Ah, you have become a Benedick – taken to love in a cottage, and so forth – yet I don't see any signs of—"

"Hush! for Godsake! You know not *who* hears us," he exclaimed, as terror came over his face; and he withdrew his hand from the table on which it was resting, with a nervous suddenness of action that was unaccountable, or as if hot iron had touched it

"Why? – Can we not talk of such things?" I asked.

"Scarcely here – or anywhere to me," he said, incoherently. Then fortifying himself with a stiff glass of cognac and foaming seltzer, he added: "You know that my engagement with my cousin Marie Louise Viborg was broken off – beautiful though she was, perhaps is still, for even twenty years could not destroy her loveliness of feature and brilliance expression – but you never knew *why*?"

"I thought you behaved ill to her – were mad, in fact."

A spasm came over his face. Again he twitched his hand away as if a wasp had stung, or something unseen had touched it, as he said:

"She was very proud, imperious, and jealous."

"She resented, of course, your openly wearing the opal ring which was thrown to you from the palace window by the princess —"

"The ring-– the ring! Oh, do not speak of *that*!" said he, in a hollow tone. "Mad? – Yes, I was mad – and yet I am not, though I have undergone, and even *now* am undergoing, that which would break the heart of a Holger Danske! But you shall hear, if I can tell it with coherence and without interruption, the reason why I fled from society, and the world-– and for all these twenty miserable years have buried myself in this mountains solitude, where the forest overhangs the fiord, and where no woman's face shall ever smile on mine!"

In short, after some reflection and many involuntary sighs – and being urged, when the determination to unbosom himself wavered – Carl Holberg related to me a little narrative so singular and wild, that but for the sad gravity – or intense solemnity of his manner – and the air of perfect conviction that his manner bore with it, I should have deemed him utterly – mad!

"Marie Louise and I were to be mairried, as you remember, to cure me of all my frolics and expensive habits – the very day was fixed; you were to be the groomsman, and had selected a suite of jewels for the bride in the Kongens Nytorre; but the war that broke out in Schleswig-Holstein drew my battalion of the guards to the field, whither I went without much regret so far as my *fiancée* was concerned; for, sooth to say, both of us were somewhat weary of our engagement, and were unsuited to each other: so we had not been without piques, coldnesses, and even quarrels, till keeping up appearances partook of boredom.

"I was with General Krogh when that decisive battle was fought at Idstedt between our troops and the Germanizing Holsteiners under General Willisen. My battalion of the guards was detached from the right wing with orders to advance from Salbro on the Holstein rear, while the centre was to be attacked, pierced, and the batteries beyond it carried at the point of the bayonet, all of which was brilliantly done. But prior to that I was

sent, with directions to extend my company in skirmishing order, among some thickets that covered a knoll which is crowned by a ruined edifice, part of an old monastery with a secluded burial-ground.

"Just prior to our opening fire the funeral of a lady of rank, apparently, passed us, and I drew my men aside to make way for the open catafalque, on which lay the coffin covered with white flowers and silver coronets, while behind it were her female attendants, clad in black cloaks in the usual fashion, and carrying wreaths of white flowers and immortelles to lay upon the grave. Desiring these mourners to make all speed lest they might find themselves under a fire of cannon and musketry, my company opened, at six hundred yards, on the Holsteiners, who were coming on with great spirit. We skirmished with them for more than an hour, in the long clear twilight of the July evening, and gradually, but with considerable loss, were driving them through the thicket and over the knoll on which the ruins stand, when a half-spent bullet whistled through an opening in the mouldering wall and struck me on the back part of the head, just below my bearskin cap. A thousand stars seemed to flash around me, then darkness succeeded. I staggered and fell, believing myself mortally wounded; a pious invocation trembled on my lips, the roar of the red and distant battle passed away, and I became completely insensible.

"How long I lay thus I know not, but when I imagined myself coming back to life and to the world I was in a handsome, but rather old-fashioned apartment, hung, one portion of it with tapestry and the other with rich drapery. A subdued light that came, I could not discover from where, filled it. On a buffet lay my sword and my brown bearskin cap of the Danish Guards. I had been borne from the field evidently, but when and to where? I was extended on a soft fauteuil or couch, and my uniform coat was open. Some one was kindly supporting my head – a woman dressed in white, like a bride; young and so lovely, that to attempt any description of her seems futile!

"She was like the fancy portraits one occasionally sees of beautiful girls, for she was divine, perfectly so, as some enthusiast's dream, or painter's happiest conception. A long respiration, induced by admiration, delight, and the pain of my wound, escaped me. She was so exquisitely fair, delicate and pale, middle-sized and slight, yet charmingly round, with hands that were perfect, and marvellous golden hair that curled in rippling masses about her forehead and shoulders, and from amid which her *piquante* little face peeped forth as from a silken nest. Never have I forgotten that face, nor shall I be *permitted* to do so, while life lasts at least," he added, with a strange contortion of feature, expressive of terror rather than ardor; "it is ever before my eyes, sleeping or waking, photographed in my heart and on my brain! I strove to rise, but she stilled,

or stayed me, by a caressing gesture, as a mother would her child, while softly her bright beaming eyes smiled into mine, with more of tenderness, perhaps, than love; while in her whole air there was much of dignity and self-reliance.

" 'Where am I?' was my first question.

" 'With me,' she answered naively; 'is it not enough?'

"I kissed her hand, and said:

" 'The bullet, I remember, struck me down in a place of burial on the Salbro Road – strange!'

" 'Why strange?'

" 'As I am fond of rambling among graves when in my thoughtful moods.'

" 'Among graves – why?' she asked.

" 'They look so peaceful and quiet.'

"Was she laughing at my unwonted gravity, that so strange a light seemed to glitter in her eyes, on her teeth, and over all her lovely face? I kissed her hands again, and she left them in mine. Adoration began to fill my heart and eyes, and be faintly murmured on my lips: for the great beauty of the girl bewildered and intoxicated me; and, perhaps, I was emboldened by past success in more than one love affair. She sought to withdraw her hand, saying:

" 'Look not thus; I know how lightly you hold the love of one elsewhere.'

" 'Of my cousin Marie Louise? Oh! what of that! I never, never loved till now!' and, drawing a ring from her finger, I slipped my beautiful opal in its place.

" 'And you love me?' she whispered.

" 'Yes, a thousand times, yes!'

" 'But you are a soldier-– wounded, too. Ah! if you should die before we meet again!'

" 'Or, if you should die ere then?' said I, laughingly.

" 'Die – I am already dead to the world – in loving you; but, living or dead, our souls are as one, and —'

" 'Neither heaven nor the powers beneath shall separate us now!' I exclaimed, as something of melodrama began to mingle with the genuineness of the sudden passion with which she had inspired me. She was so impulsive, so full of brightness and ardour, as compared to the cold, proud, and calm Marie Louise. I boldly encircled her with my arms; then her glorious eyes seemed to fill with the subtle light of love, while there was a strange magnetic thrill in her touch and, more than all, in her kiss.

" 'Carl, Carl!' she sighed.

" 'What! You know my name? – And yours?'

" 'Thyra. But ask no more.'

"There are but three words to express the emotion that possessed me – bewilderment, intoxication, madness. I showered kisses on her beautiful eyes, on her soft tresses, on her lips that met mine half-way; but this excess of joy, together with the pain of my wound, began to overpower me; a sleep, a growing and drowsy torpor, against which I struggled in vain, stole over one. I remember clasping her firm little hand in mine, as if to save myself from sinking into oblivion, and then-– no more-– no more!

"On again coming back to consciousness, I was alone. The sun was rising, but had not yet risen. The scenery, the thickets through which we had skirmished, rose dark as the deepest indigo against the amber-tinted eastern sky; and the last light of the waning moon yet silvered the pools and marshes around the borders of the Langso Lake, where now eight thousand men, the slain of yesterday's battle, were lying stark and stiff. Moist with dew and blood, I propped myself on one elbow and looked around me, with such wonder that a sickness came over my heart. I was *again* in the cemetery where the bullet had struck me down; a little gray owl was whooping and blinking in a recess of the crumbling wall. Was the drapery of the chamber but the ivy that rustled thereon? – for where the lighted buffet stood there was an old square tomb, whereon lay my sword and bearskin cap!

"The last rays of the waning moonlight stole through the ruins on a new-made grave – the fancied fauteuil on which I lay – strewn with the flowers of yesterday, and at its head stood a temporary cross, hung with white garlands and wreaths of immortelles. Another ring was on my finger now; but where was she, the donor? Oh, what opium-dream, or what insanity was this?

"For a time I remained utterly bewildered by the vividness of my recent dream, for such I believed it to be. But if a dream, how came this strange ring, with a square emerald tone, upon my finger? And *where* was mine? Perplexed by these thoughts, and filled with wonder and regret that the beauty I had seen had no reality, I picked my way over the ghostly debris of the battle-field, faint, feverish, and thirsty, till at the end of a long avenue of lindens I found shelter in a stately brick mansion, which I learned belonged to the Count of Idstedt, a noble, on whose hospitality – as he favoured the Holsteiners – I meant to intrude as little as possible.

"He received me, however, courteously and kindly. I found him in deep mourning; and on discovering, by chance, that I was the officer who had halted the line of skirmishers when the funeral *cortege* passed on the

previous day, he thanked me with earnestness, adding, with a deep sigh, that it was the burial of his only daughter.

" 'Half my life seems to have gone with her – my lost darling! She was so sweet, Herr Kaptain – so gentle, and so surpassingly beautiful – my poor Thyra!'

" '*Who* did you say?' I exclaimed, in a voice that sounded strange and unnatural, while half-starting from the sofa on which I cast myself, sick at heart and faint from loss of blood.

" 'Thyra, my daughter, Herr Kaptain,' replied the Count, too full of sorrow to remark my excitement, for this had been the quaint old Danish name uttered in my dream. 'See, what a child I have lost!' he added, as he drew back a curtain which covered a full-length portrait, and, to my growing horror and astonishment, I beheld, arrayed in white even as I had seen her in my vision, the fair girl with the masses of golden hair, the beautiful eyes, and the *piquante* smile lighting up her features even on the canvas, and I was rooted to the spot.

" 'This ring, Herr Count?' I gasped.

"He let the curtain fall from his hand, and now a terrible emotion seized him, as he almost tore the jewel from my finger.

" 'My daughter's ring!' he exclaimed. 'It was buried with her yesterday – her grave has been violated – violated by your infamous troops.'

"As he spoke, a mist seemed to come over my sight; a giddiness made my senses reel, then a hand – the soft little hand of last night, with my opal ring on its third finger – came stealing into mine, unseen! More than that, a kiss from tremulous lips I could not see was pressed on mine, as I sank backward and fainted! The remainder of my story must be briefly told.

"My soldiering was over; my nervous system was too much shattered for further military service. On my homeward way to join and be wedded to Marie Louise – a union with whom was intensely repugnant to me now – I pondered deeply over the strange subversion of the laws of nature presented by my adventure; or the madness, it might be, that had come upon me.

"On the day I presented myself to my intended bride, and approached to salute her, I felt a hand – *the same hand* – laid softly on mine. Starting, and trembling, I looked around me; but saw nothing. The grasp was firm. I passed my other hand over it, and felt the slender fingers and the shapely wrist; yet still I saw nothing, and Marie Louise gazed at my motions, my pallor, doubt and terror, with calm, but cool indignation.

"I was about to speak – to explain – to say I know not what, when a kiss from lips I could not see sealed mine, and with a cry like a scream I broke away from my friends and fled.

"All deemed me mad, and spoke with commiseration of my wounded head; and when I went abroad in the streets men eyed me with curiosity, as one over whom some evil destiny hung – as one to whom something terrible had happened, and gloomy thoughts were wasting me to a shadow. My narrative may seem incredible; but this attendant, unseen yet palpable, is ever by my side, and if under any impulse, such even as sudden pleasure in meeting you, I for a moment forget it, the soft and gentle touch of a female hand reminds me of the past, and haunts one, for a guardian demon – if I may use such a term – rules my destiny: one lovely, perhaps, as an angel.

"Life has no pleasures, but only terrors for me now. Sorrow, doubt, horror, and perpetual dread have sapped the roots of existence; for a wild and clamorous fear of what the next moment may bring forth is ever in my heart, and when the touch comes my soul seems to die within me.

"You know what haunts me now – God help me! God help me! You do not understand all this, you would say. Still less do I; but in all the idle or extravagant stories I have read of ghosts – stories once my sport and ridicule, as the result of vulgar superstition or ignorance – the so-called supernatural visitor was visible to the eye, or heard by the ear; but the ghost, the fiend, the invisible Thing that is ever by the side of Carl Holberg, is only sensible to the touch – it is the unseen but tangible substance of an apparition!"

He had got thus far when he gasped, grew livid, and, passing his right hand over the left, about an inch above it, with trembling fingers, he said:

"It is here – here now – even with you present, I feel her hand on mine; the clasp is tight and tender, and she will never leave me, but with life!"

And then this once gay, strong, and gallant fellow, now the wreck of himself in body and in spirit, sank forward with his head between his knees, sobbing and faint.

Four months afterwards, when with my friends, I was shooting bears at Hammerfest, I read in the Norwegian *Aftenposten*, that Carl Holberg had shot himself in bed, on Christmas Eve.

*1895*

# A PHYSIOLOGIST'S WIFE

Professor Ainsley Grey had not come down to breakfast at the usual hour. The presentation chiming-clock which stood between the terra-cotta busts of Claude Bernard and of John Hunter upon the dining-room mantelpiece had rung out the half-hour and the three-quarters. Now its golden hand was verging upon the nine, and yet there were no signs of the master of the house.

It was an unprecedented occurrence. During the twelve years that she had kept house for him, his younger sister had never known him a second behind his time. She sat now in front of the high silver coffee-pot, uncertain whether to order the gong to be resounded or to wait on in silence. Either course might be a mistake. Her brother was not a man who permitted mistakes.

Miss Ainslie Grey was rather above the middle height, thin, with peering, puckered eyes, and the rounded shoulders which mark the bookish woman. Her face was long and spare, flecked with colour above the cheekbones, with a reasonable, thoughtful forehead, and a dash of absolute obstinacy in her thin lips and prominent chin. Snow-white cuffs and collar, with a plain dark dress, cut with almost Quaker-like simplicity, bespoke the primness of her taste. An ebony cross hung over her flattened chest. She sat very upright in her chair, listening with raised eyebrows, and swinging her eye-glasses backwards and forwards with a nervous gesture which was peculiar to her.

Suddenly she gave a sharp, satisfied jerk of the head, and began to pour out the coffee. From outside there came the dull thudding sound of heavy feet upon thick carpet. The door swung open, and the Professor entered with a quick, nervous step. He nodded to his sister, and seating himself at the other side of the table, began to open the small pile of letters which lay beside his plate.

Professor Ainslie Grey was at that time forty-three years of age – nearly twelve years older than his sister. His career had been a brilliant one. At Edinburgh, at Cambridge, and at Vienna he had laid the foundations of his great reputation, both in physiology and in zoology.

His pamphlet, *On the Mesoblastic Origin of Excitomotor Nerve Roots*, had won him his fellowship of the Royal Society; and his researches, *Upon the Nature of Bathybius, with some Remarks upon Lithococci*, had been translated into at least three European languages. He had been referred to by one of the greatest living authorities as being the very type and embodiment of all that was best in modern science. No wonder, then, that when the commercial city of Birchespool decided to

create a medical school, they were only too glad to confer the chair of physiology upon Mr.Ainslie Grey. They valued him the more from the conviction that their class was only one step in his upward journey, and that the first vacancy would remove him to some more illustrious seat of learning.

In person he was not unlike his sister. The same eyes, the same contour, the same intellectual forehead. His lips, however, were firmer, and his long, thin lower jaw was sharper and more decided. He ran his finger and thumb down it from time to time, as he glanced over his letters.

"Those maids are very noisy," he remarked, as a clack of tongues sounded in the distance.

"It is Sarah," said his sister; "I shall speak about it."

She had handed over his coffee-cup and was sipping at her own, glancing furtively through her narrowed lids at the austere face of her brother.

"The first great advance of the human race," said the Professor, "was when, by the development of their left frontal convolutions, they attained the power of speech. Their second advance was when they learned to control that power. Woman has not yet attained the second stage."

He half closed his eyes as he spoke, and thrust his chin forward, but as he ceased he had a trick of suddenly opening both eyes very wide and staring sternly at his interlocutor.

"I am not garrulous, John," said his sister.

"No, Ada; in many respects you approach the superior or male type."

The Professor bowed over his egg with the manner of one who utters a courtly compliment; but the lady pouted, and gave an impatient little shrug of her shoulders.

"You were late this morning, John," she remarked, after a pause.

"Yes, Ada; I slept badly. Some little cerebral congestion, no doubt due to overstimulation of the centres of thought. I have been a little disturbed in my mind."

His sister stared across at him in astonishment. The Professor's mental processes had hitherto been as regular as his habits. Twelve years' continual intercourse had taught her that he lived in a serene and rarefied atmosphere of scientific calm, high above the petty emotions which affect humbler minds.

"You are surprised, Ada," he remarked. "Well, I cannot wonder at it. I should have been surprised myself if I had been told that I was so sensitive to vascular influences. For, after all, all disturbances are vascular if you probe them deep enough. I am thinking of getting married."

"Not Mrs.O'James?" cried Ada Grey, laying down her egg-spoon.

"My dear, you have the feminine quality of receptivity very remarkably developed. Mrs.O'James is the lady in question."

"But you know so little of her. The Esdailes themselves know so little. She is really only an acquaintance, although she is staying at The Lindens. Would it not be wise to speak to Mrs.Esdaile first, John?"

"I do not think, Ada, that Mrs.Esdaile is at all likely to say anything which would materially affect my course of action. I have given the matter due consideration. The scientific mind is slow at arriving at conclusions, but having once formed them, it is not prone to change. Matrimony is the natural condition of the human race. I have, as you know, been so engaged in academical and other work, that I have had no time to devote to merely personal questions. It is different now, and I see no valid reason why I should forgo this opportunity of seeking a suitable helpmate."

"And you are engaged?"

"Hardly that, Ada. I ventured yesterday to indicate to the lady that I was prepared to submit to the common lot of humanity. I shall wait upon her after my morning lecture, and learn how far my proposals meet with her acquiescence. But you frown, Ada!"

His sister started, and made an effort to conceal her expression of annoyance. She even stammered out some few words of congratulation, but a vacant look had come into her brother's eyes, and he was evidently not listening to her.

"I am sure, John," she said, "that I wish you the happiness which you deserve. If I hesitated at all, it is because I know how much is at stake, and because the thing is so sudden, so unexpected." Her thin, white hand stole up to the black cross upon her bosom. "These are moments when we need guidance, John. If I could persuade you to turn to spiritual —"

The Professor waved the suggestion away with a deprecating hand.

"It is useless to reopen that question," he said. "We cannot argue upon it. You assume more than I can grant. I am forced to dispute your premises. We have no common basis."

His sister sighed.

"You have no faith," she said.

"I have faith in those great evolutionary forces which are leading the human race to some unknown but elevated goal."

"You believe in nothing."

"On the contrary, my dear Ada, I believe in the differentiation of protoplasm."

She shook her head sadly. It was the one subject upon which she ventured to dispute her brother's infallibility.

"This is rather beside the question," remarked the Professor, folding up his napkin. "If I am not mistaken, there is some possibility of another matrimonial event occurring in the family. Eh, Ada? What!"

His small eyes glittered with sly facetiousness as he shot a twinkle at his sister. She sat very stiff, and traced patterns upon the cloth with the sugar-tongs.

"Dr.James McMurdo O'Brien —" said the Professor sonorously.

"Don't, John, don't!" cried Miss Ainslie Grey.

"Dr.James McMurdo O'Brien," continued her brother inexorably, "is a man who has already made his mark upon the science of the day. He is my first and my most distinguished pupil. I assure you, Ada, that his *Remarks upon the Bile-Pigments, with special reference to Urobilin*, is likely to live as a classic. It is not too much to say that he has revolutionized our view about urobilin."

He paused, but his sister sat silent, with bent head and flushed cheeks. The little ebony cross rose and fell with her hurried breathings.

"Dr.James McMurdo O'Brien has, as you know, the offer of the physiological chair at Melbourne. He has been in Australia five years, and has a brilliant future before him. Today he leaves us for Edinburgh, and in two months' time he goes out to take over his new duties. You know his feeling towards you. It rests with you as to whether he goes out alone. Speaking for myself, I cannot imagine any higher mission for a woman of culture than to go through life in the company of a man who is capable of such a research as that which Dr.James McMurdo O'Brien has brought to a successful conclusion."

"He has not spoken to me," murmured the lady.

"Ah, there are signs which are more subtle than speech," said her brother, wagging his head. "You are pale. Your vasomotor system is excited. Your arterioles have contracted. Let me entreat you to compose yourself. I think I hear the carriage. I fancy that you may have a visitor this morning, Ada. You will excuse me now."

With a quick glance at the clock he strode off into the hall, and within a few minutes he was rattling in his quiet, well-appointed brougham through the bricklined streets of Birchespool.

His lecture over, Professor Ainslie Grey paid a visit to his laboratory, where he adjusted several scientific instruments, made a note as to the progress of three separate infusions of bacteria, cut half a dozen sections with a microtome, and finally resolved the difficulties of seven different gentlemen, who were pursuing researches in as many separate lines of inquiry. Having thus conscientiously and methodically completed the routine of his duties, he returned to his carriage and ordered the coachman to drive him to The Lindens. His face as he drove was cold and

impassive, but he drew his fingers from time to time down his prominent chin with a jerky, twitchy movement.

The Lindens was an old-fashioned, ivy-clad house which had once been in the country, but was now caught in the long, red-brick feelers of the growing city. It still stood back from the road in the privacy of its own grounds. A winding path, lined with laurel bushes, led to the arched and porticoed entrance. To the right was a lawn, and at the far side, under the shadow of a hawthorn, a lady sat in a garden-chair with a book in her hands. At the click of the gate she started, and the Professor, catching sight of her, turned away from the door, and strode in her direction.

"What! won't you go in and see Mrs.Esdaile?" she asked, sweeping out from under the shadow of the hawthorn.

She was a small woman, strongly feminine, from the rich coils of her light-coloured hair to the dainty garden-slipper which peeped from under her cream-tinted dress. One tiny, well-gloved hand was outstretched in greeting, while the other pressed a thick, green-covered volume against her side. Her decision and quick, tactful manner bespoke the mature woman of the world; but her upraised face had preserved a girlish and even infantile expression of innocence in its large, fearless grey eyes, and sensitive, humorous mouth. Mrs.O'James was a widow, and she was two-and-thirty years of age; but neither fact could have been deduced from her appearance.

"You will surely go in and see Mrs.Esdaile," she repeated, glancing up at him with eyes which had in them something between a challenge and a caress.

"I did not come to see Mrs.Esdaile," he answered, with no relaxation of his cold and grave manner; "I came to see you."

"I am sure I should be highly honoured," she said, with just the slightest little touch of brogue in her accent. "What are the students to do without their Professor?"

"I have already completed my academic duties. Take my arm, and we shall walk in the sunshine. Surely we cannot wonder that Eastern people should have made a deity of the sun. It is the great, beneficent force of Nature – man's ally against cold, sterility, and all that is abhorrent to him. What were you reading?"

"Hale's *Matter and Life*."

The Professor raised his thick eyebrows.

"Hale!" he said, and then again in a kind of whisper, "Hale!"

"You differ from him?" she asked.

"It is not I who differ from him. I am only a monad – a thing of no moment. The whole tendency of the highest plane of modern thought differs from him. He defends the indefensible. He is an excellent observer,

but a feeble reasoner. I should not recommend you to found your conclusions upon 'Hale.'"

"I must read *Nature's Chronicle* to counteract his pernicious influence," said Mrs.O'James, with a soft, cooing laugh.

*Nature's Chronicle* was one of the many books in which Professor Ainslie Grey had enforced the negative doctrines of scientific agnosticism.

"It is a faulty work," said he; "I cannot recommend it. I would rather refer you to the standard writings of some of my older and more eloquent colleagues."

There was a pause in their talk as they paced up and down on the green, velvet-like lawn in the genial sunshine.

"Have you thought at all," he asked at last, "of the matter upon which I spoke to you last night?"

She said nothing, but walked by his side with her eyes averted and her face aslant.

"I would not hurry you unduly," he continued. "I know that it is a matter which can scarcely be decided off-hand. In my own case, it cost me some thought before I ventured to make the suggestion. I am not an emotional man, but I am conscious in your presence of the great evolutionary instinct which makes either sex the complement of the other."

"You believe in love, then?" she asked, with a twinkling, upward glance.

"I am forced to."

"And yet you can deny the soul?"

"How far these questions are psychic and how far material is still *sub judice*," said the Professor, with an air of toleration. "Protoplasm may prove to be the physical basis of love as well as of life."

"How inflexible you are!" she exclaimed; "you would draw love down to the level of physics."

"Or draw physics up to the level of love."

"Come, that is much better," she cried, with her sympathetic laugh. "That is really very pretty, and puts science in quite a delightful light."

Her eyes sparkled, and she tossed her chin with a pretty, wilful air of a woman who is mistress of the situation.

"I have reason to believe," said the Professor, "that my position here will prove to be only a stepping-stone to some wider scene of scientific activity. Yet, even here, my chair brings me in some fifteen hundred pounds a year, which is supplemented by a few hundreds from my books. I should therefore be in a position to provide you with those comforts to which you are accustomed. So much for my pecuniary position. As to my constitution, it has always been sound. I have never

suffered from any illness in my life, save fleeting attacks of cephalalgia, the result of too prolonged a stimulation of the centres of cerebration. My father and mother had no sign of any morbid diathesis, but I will not conceal from you that my grandfather was afflicted with podagra."

Mrs.O'James looked startled.

"Is that very serious?" she asked.

"It is gout," said the Professor.

" Oh, is that all? It sounded much worse than that."

"It is a grave taint, but I trust that I shall not be a victim to atavism. I have laid these facts before you because they are factors which cannot be overlooked in forming your decision. May I ask now whether you see your way to accepting my proposal?"

He paused in his walk, and looked earnestly and expectantly down at her.

A struggle was evidently going on in her mind. Her eyes were cast down, her little slipper tapped the lawn, and her fingers played nervously with her chatelaine. Suddenly, with a sharp, quick gesture which had in it something of *abandon* and recklessness, she held out her hand to her companion.

"I accept," she said.

They were standing under the shadow of the hawthorn. He stooped gravely down, and kissed her glove-covered fingers.

"I trust that *you* may never have cause to regret your decision," he said.

"I trust that you never may," she cried, with a heaving breast.

There were tears in her eyes, and her lips twitched with some strong emotion.

"Come into the sunshine again," said he. "It is the great restorative. Your nerves are shaken. Some little congestion of the medulla and pons. It is always instructive to reduce psychic or emotional conditions to their physical equivalents. You feel that your anchor is still firm in a bottom of ascertained fact."

"But it is so dreadfully unromantic," said Mrs.O'James, with her old twinkle.

"Romance is the offspring of imagination and of ignorance. Where science throws her calm, clear light there is happily no room for romance."

"But is not love romance?" she asked.

"Not at all. Love has been taken away from the poets, and has been brought within the domain of true science. It may prove to be one of the great cosmic elementary forces. When the atom of hydrogen draws the atom of chlorine towards it to form the perfected molecule of hydrochloric acid, the force which it exerts may be intrinsically similar to that which

draws me to you. Attraction and repulsion appear to be the primary forces. This is attraction."

"And here is repulsion," said Mrs.O'James, as a stout, florid lady came sweeping across the lawn in their direction. "So glad you have come out, Mrs.Esdaile! Here is Professor Grey."

"How do you do, Professor?" said the lady, with some little pomposity of manner. "You were very wise to stay out here on so lovely a day. Is it not heavenly?"

"It is certainly very fine weather," the Professor answered.

"Listen to the wind sighing in the trees!" cried Mrs. Esdaile, holding up one finger. "It is Nature's lullaby. Could you not imagine it, Professor Grey, to be the whisperings of angels!"

"The idea had not occurred to me, madam."

"Ah, Professor, I have always the same complaint against you. A want of *rapport* with the deeper meanings of Nature. Shall I say a want of imagination? You do not feel an emotional thrill at the singing of that thrush?"

"I confess that I am not conscious of one, Mrs.Esdaile."

"Or at the delicate tint of that background of leaves? See the rich greens!"

"Chlorophyll," murmured the Professor.

"Science is so hopelessly prosaic. It dissects and labels, and loses sight of the great things in its attention to the little ones. You have a poor opinion of woman's intellect, Professor Grey. I think that I have heard you say so."

"It is a question of avoirdupois," said the Professor, closing his eyes and shrugging his shoulders. "The female cerebrum averages two ounces less in weight than the male. No doubt there are exceptions. Nature is always elastic."

"But the heaviest thing is not always the strongest," said Mrs.O'James, laughing. "Isn't there a law of compensation in science? May we not hope to make up in quality what we lack in quantity?"

"I think not," remarked the Professor gravely. "But there is your luncheon-gong. No, thank you, Mrs.Esdaile, I cannot stay. My carriage is waiting. Good-bye. Good-bye, Mrs.O'James."

He raised his hat and stalked slowly away among the laurel bushes.

"He has no taste," said Mrs.Esdaile – "no eye for beauty."

"On the contrary," Mrs.O'James answered, with a saucy little jerk of the chin. "He has just asked me to be his wife."

* * *

As Professor Ainslie Grey ascended the steps of his house, the hall-door opened and a dapper gentleman stepped briskly out. He was somewhat sallow in the face, with dark, beady eyes, and a short, black beard with an aggressive bristle. Thought and work had left their traces upon his face, but he moved with the brisk activity of a man who had not yet bade good-bye to his youth.

"I'm in luck's way," he cried. "I wanted to see you."

"Then come back into the library," said the Professor; "you must stay and have lunch with us."

The two men entered the hall, and the Professor led the way into his private sanctum. He motioned his companion into an arm-chair.

"I trust that you have been successful, O'Brien," said he. "I should be loath to exercise any undue pressure upon my sister Ada; but I have given her to understand that there is no one whom I should prefer for a brother-in-law to my most brilliant scholar, the author of *Some Remarks upon the Bile-Pigments, with special reference to Urobilin*."

"You are very kind, Professor Grey – you have always been very kind," said the other. "I approached Miss Grey upon the subject; she did not say No."

"She said Yes, then?"

"No; she proposed to leave the matter open until my return from Edinburgh. I go today, as you know, and I hope to commence my research tomorrow."

"On the comparative anatomy of the vermiform appendix, by James McMurdo O'Brien," said the Professor sonorously. "It is a glorious subject – a subject which lies at the very root of evolutionary philosophy."

"Ah, she is the dearest girl," cried O'Brien, with a sudden little spurt of Celtic enthusiasm -"she is the soul of truth and of honour."

"The vermiform appendix —" began the Professor.

"She is an angel from heaven," interrupted the other. "I fear that it is my advocacy of scientific freedom in religious thought which stands in my way with her."

"You must not truckle upon that point. You must be true to your convictions; let there be no compromise there."

"My reason is true to agnosticism, and yet I am conscious of a void – a vacuum. I had feelings at the old church at home between the scent of the incense and the roll of the organ, such as I have never experienced in the laboratory or the lecture-room."

"Sensuous – purely sensuous," said the Professor, rubbing his chin. "Vague hereditary tendencies stirred into life by the stimulation of the nasal and auditory nerves."

"Maybe so, maybe so," the younger man answered thoughtfully. "But this was not what I wished to speak to you about. Before I enter your family, your sister and you have a claim to know all that I can tell you about my career. Of my worldly prospects I have already spoken to you. There is only one point which I have omitted to mention. I am a widower."

The Professor raised his eyebrows.

"This is news indeed," said he.

"I married shortly after my arrival in Australia. Miss Thurston was her name. I met her in society. It was a most unhappy match."

Some painful emotion possessed him. His quick, expressive features quivered, and his white hands tightened upon the arms of the chair. The Professor turned away towards the window.

"You are the best judge," he remarked; "but I should not think that it was necessary to go into details."

"You have a right to know everything – you and Miss Grey. It is not a matter on which I can well speak to her direct. Poor Jinny was the best of women, but she was open to flattery, and liable to be misled by designing persons. She was untrue to me, Grey. It is a hard thing to say of the dead, but she was untrue to me. She fled back to Auckland with a man whom she had known before her marriage. The brig which carried them foundered, and not a soul was saved."

"This is very painful, O'Brien," said the Professor, with a deprecatory motion of his hand. "I cannot see, however, how it affects your relation to my sister."

"I have eased my conscience," said O'Brien, rising from his chair; "I have told you all that there is to tell. I should not like the story to reach you through any lips but my own."

"You are right, O'Brien. Your action has been most honourable and considerate. But you are not to blame in the matter, save that perhaps you showed a little precipitancy in choosing a life-partner without due care and inquiry."

O'Brien drew his hand across his eyes.

"Poor girl!" he cried. "God help me, I love her still! But I must go."

"You will lunch with us?"

"No, Professor; I have my packing still to do. I have already bade Miss Grey adieu. In two months I shall see you again."

"You will probably find me a married man."

"Married!"

"Yes, I have been thinking of it."

"My dear Professor, let me congratulate you with all my heart, I had no idea. Who is the lady?"

"Mrs.O'James is her name – a widow of the same nationality as yourself. But to return to matters of importance, I should be very happy to see the proofs of your paper upon the vermiform appendix. I may be able to furnish you with material for a footnote or two."

"Your assistance will be invaluable to me," said O'Brien, with enthusiasm, and the two men parted in the hall. The Professor walked back into the dining-room, where his sister was already seated at the luncheon-table.

"I shall be married at the registrar's," he remarked; "I should strongly recommend you to do the same."

Professor Ainslie Grey was as good as his word. A fortnight's cessation of his classes gave him an opportunity which was too good to let pass. Mrs.O'James was an orphan, without relations and almost without friends in the country. There was no obstacle in the way of a speedy wedding. They were married, accordingly, in the quietest manner possible, and went off to Cambridge together, where the Professor and his charming wife were present at several academic observances, and varied the routine of their honeymoon by incursions into biological laboratories and medical libraries. Scientific friends were loud in their congratulations, not only upon Mrs.Grey's beauty, but upon the unusual quickness and intelligence she displayed in discussing physiological questions. The professor was himself astonished at the accuracy of her information.

"You have a remarkable range of knowledge for a woman, Jeannette," he remarked upon more than one occasion. He was even prepared to admit that her cerebrum might be of the normal weight.

One foggy, drizzling morning they returned to Birchespool, for the next day would reopen the session, and Professor Ainslie Grey prided himself upon having never once in his life failed to appear in his lecture-room at the very stroke of the hour. Miss Ada Grey welcomed them with a constrained cordiality and handed over the keys of office to the new mistress. Mrs.Grey pressed her warmly to remain, but she explained that she had already accepted an invitation which would engage her for some months. The same evening she departed for the south of England.

A couple of days later the maid carried a card, just after breakfast, into the library where the Professor sat revising his morning lecture. It announced the re-arrival of Dr.James McMurdo O'Brien. Their meeting was effusively genial on the part of the younger man, and coldly precise on that of his former teacher.

"You see there have been changes," said the Professor.

"So I heard. Miss Grey told me in her letters, and I read the notice in the *British Medical Journal*. So it's really married you are. How quickly and quietly you have managed it all!"

"I am constitutionally averse to anything in the nature of show or ceremony. My wife is a sensible woman – I may even go the length of saying that, for a woman, she is abnormally sensible. She quite agreed with me in the course which I have adopted."

"And your research on Vallisneria?"

"This matrimonial incident has interrupted it, but I have resumed my classes, and we shall soon be quite in harness again."

"I must see Miss Grey before I leave England. We have corresponded, and I think that all will be well. She must come out with me. I don't think I could go without her."

The Professor shook his head.

"Your nature is not so weak as you pretend," he said. "Questions of this sort are, after all, quite subordinate to the great duties of life."

O'Brien smiled.

"You would have me take out my Celtic soul and put in a Saxon one," he said. "Either my brain is too small or my heart is too big. But when may I call and pay my respects to Mrs.Grey? Will she be at home this afternoon?"

"She is at home now. Come into the morning-room. She will be glad to make your acquaintance."

They walked across the linoleum-paved hall. The Professor opened the door of the room, and walked in, followed by his friend. Mrs.Grey was sitting in a basket-chair by the window, light and fairy-like in a loose-flowing, pink morning-gown. Seeing a visitor, she rose and swept towards them. The Professor heard a dull thud behind him. O'Brien had fallen back into a chair, with his hand pressed tight to his side.

"Jinny!" he gasped – "Jinny!"

Mrs.Grey stopped dead in her advance, and stared at him with a face from which every expression had been struck out, save one of astonishment and horror. Then with a sharp intaking of the breath she reeled, and would have fallen had the Professor not thrown his long, nervous arm round her.

"Try this sofa," said he.

She sank back among the cushions with the same white, cold, dead look upon her face. The Professor stood with his back to the empty fireplace and glanced from the one to the other.

"So, O'Brien," he said at last, "you have already made the acquaintance of my wife!"

"Your wife," cried his friend hoarsely. "She is no wife of yours. God help me, she is *my* wife."

The Professor stood rigidly upon the hearth-rug. His long, thin fingers were intertwined, and his head had sunk a little forward. His two companions had eyes only for each other.

"Jinny!" said he.

"James!"

"How could you leave me so, Jinny? How could you have the heart to do it? I thought you were dead. I mourned for your death – ay, and you have made me mourn for you living. You have withered my life."

She made no answer, but lay back among the cushions with her eyes still fixed upon him.

"Why do you not speak?"

"Because you are right, James. I have treated you cruelly—shamefully. But it is not as bad as you think."

"You fled with de Horta."

"No, I did not. At the last moment my better nature prevailed. He went alone. But I was ashamed to come back after what I had written to you. I could not face you. I took passage alone to England under a new name, and here I have lived ever since. It seemed to me that I was beginning life again. I knew that you thought I was drowned. Who could have dreamed that Fate would throw us together again! When the Professor asked me —"

She stopped and gave a gasp for breath.

"You are faint," said the Professor – "keep the head low; it aids the cerebral circulation." He flattened down the cushion. "I am sorry to leave you, O'Brien; but I have my class duties to look to. Possibly I may find you here when I return."

With a grim and rigid face he strode out of the room. Not one of the three hundred students who listened to his lecture saw any change in his manner and appearance, or could have guessed that the austere gentleman in front of them had found out at last how hard it is to rise above one's humanity. The lecture over, he performed his routine duties in the laboratory, and then drove back to his own house. He did not enter by the front door, but passed through the garden to the folding glass casement which led out of the morning-room. As he approached he heard his wife's voice and O'Brien's in loud and animated talk. He paused among the rose-bushes, uncertain whether to interrupt them or no. Nothing was further from his nature than to play the eavesdropper; but as he stood, still hesitating, words fell upon his ear which struck him rigid and motionless.

"You are still my wife, Jinny," said O'Brien; "I forgive you from the bottom of my heart. I love you, and I have never ceased to love you, though you had forgotten me."

"No, James, my heart was always in Melbourne. I have always been yours. I thought that it was better for you that I should seem to be dead."

"You must choose between us now, Jinny. If you determine to remain here, I shall not open my lips. There shall be no scandal. If, on the other hand, you come with me, it's little I care about the world's opinion. Perhaps I am as much to blame as you are. I thought too much of my work and too little of my wife."

The Professor heard the cooing, caressing laugh which he knew so well.

"I shall go with you, James," she said.

"And the Professor —?

"The poor Professor! But he will not mind much, James; he has no heart."

"We must tell him our resolution."

"There is no need," said Professor Ainslie Grey, stepping in through the open casement. "I have overheard the latter part of your conversation. I hesitated to interrupt you before you came to a conclusion."

O'Brien stretched out his hand and took that of the woman. They stood together with the sunshine on their faces. The Professor paused at the casement with his hands behind his back and his long, black shadow fell between them.

"You have come to a wise decision," said he. "Go back to Australia together, and let what has passed be blotted out of your lives."

"But you-– you–" stammered O'Brien.

The Professor waved his hand.

"Never trouble about me," he said.

The woman gave a gasping cry.

"What can I do or say?" she wailed. "How could I have foreseen this? I thought my old life was dead. But it has come back again, with all its hopes and its desires. What can I say to you, Ainslie? I have brought shame and disgrace upon a worthy man. I have blasted your life. How you must hate and loathe me! I wish to God that I had never been born!"

"I neither hate nor loathe you, Jeannette," said the Professor quietly. "You are wrong in regretting your birth, for you have a worthy mission before you in aiding the life-work of a man who has shown himself capable of the highest order of scientific research. I cannot with justice blame you personally for what has occurred. How far the individual monad is to be held responsible for hereditary and engrained tendencies, is a question upon which science has not yet said her last word."

He stood with his finger-tips touching, and his body inclined as one who is gravely expounding a difficult and impersonal subject. O'Brien had stepped forward to say something, but the other's attitude and manner froze the words upon his lips. Condolence or sympathy would be an impertinence to one who could so easily merge his private griefs in broad questions of abstract philosophy.

"It is needless to prolong the situation," the Professor continued, in the same measured tones. "My brougham stands at the door. I beg that you will use it as your own. Perhaps it would be as well that you should leave the town without unnecessary delay. Your things, Jeannette, shall be forwarded."

O'Brien hesitated with a hanging head.

"I hardly dare offer you my hand," he said.

"On the contrary. I think that of the three of us you come best out of the affair. You have nothing to be ashamed of."

"Your sister —"

"I shall see that the matter is put to her in its true light. Good-bye! Let me have a copy of your recent research. Good-bye, Jeannette!"

"Good-bye!"

Their hands met, and for one short moment their eyes also. It was only a glance, but for the first and last time the woman's intuition cast a light for itself into the dark places of a strong man's soul. She gave a little gasp, and her other hand rested for an instant, as white and as light as thistle-down, upon his shoulder.

"James, James!" she cried. "Don't you see that he is stricken to the heart?"

He turned her quietly away from him.

"I am not an emotional man," he said. "I have my duties – my research on Vallisneria. The brougham is there. Your cloak is in the hall. Tell John where you wish to be driven. He will bring you anything you need. Now go."

His last two words were so sudden, so volcanic, in such contrast to his measured voice and mask-like face, that they swept the two away from him. He closed the door behind them and paced slowly up and down the room. Then he passed into the library and looked out over the wire blind. The carriage was rolling away. He caught a last glimpse of the woman who had been his wife. He saw the feminine droop of her head, and the curve of her beautiful throat.

Under some foolish, aimless impulse, he took a few quick steps towards the door. Then he turned, and, throwing himself into his study chair, he plunged back into his work.

* * *

There was little scandal about this singular, domestic incident. The Professor had few personal friends, and seldom went into society. His marriage had been so quiet that most of his colleagues had never ceased to regard him as a bachelor. Mrs.Esdaile and a few others might talk, but their field for gossip was limited, for they could only guess vaguely at the cause of this sudden separation.

The Professor was as punctual as ever at his classes, and as zealous in directing the laboratory work of those who studied under him. His own private researches were pushed on with feverish energy. It was no uncommon thing for his servants, when they came down of a morning, to hear the shrill scratchings of his tireless pen, or to meet him on the staircase as he ascended, grey and silent, to his room. In vain his friends assured him that such a life must undermine his health. He lengthened his hours until day and night were one long, ceaseless task.

Gradually under this discipline a change came over his appearance. His features, always inclined to gauntness, became even sharper and more pronounced. There were deep lines about his temples and across his brow. His cheek was sunken and his complexion bloodless. His knees gave under him when he walked; and once when passing out of his lecture-room he fell and had to be assisted to his carriage.

This was just before the end of the session; and soon after the holidays commenced, the professors who still remained in Birchespool were shocked to hear that their brother of the chair of physiology had sunk so low that no hopes could be entertained of his recovery. Two eminent physicians had consulted over his case without being able to give a name to the affection from which he suffered. A steadily decreasing vitality appeared to be the only symptom – a bodily weakness which left the mind unclouded. He was much interested himself in his own case, and made notes of his subjective sensations as an aid to diagnosis. Of his approaching end he spoke in his usual unemotional and somewhat pedantic fashion.

“It is the assertion,” he said, “of the liberty of the individual cell as apposed to the cell-commune. It is the dissolution of a co-operative society. The process is one of great interest.”

And so one grey morning his co-operative society dissolved. Very quietly and softly he sank into his eternal sleep. His two physicians felt some slight embarrassment when called upon to fill in his certificate.

“It is difficult to give it a name,” said one.

“Very,” said the other.

"If he were not such an unemotional man, I should have said that he had died from some sudden nervous shock – from, in fact, what the vulgar would call a broken heart."

"I don't think poor Grey was that sort of a man at all."

"Let us call it cardiac, anyhow," said the other physician.

So they did so.

*1885*

# THE JAPANNED BOX

It *was* a curious thing, said the private tutor; one of those grotesque and whimsical incidents which occur to one as one goes through life. I lost the best situation which I am ever likely to have through it. But I am glad that I went to Thorpe Place, for I gained – well, as I tell you the story you will learn what I gained.

I don't know whether you are familiar with that part of the Midlands which is drained by the Avon. It is the most English part of England. Shakespeare, the flower of the whole race, was born right in the middle of it. It is a land of rolling pastures, rising in higher folds to the westward, until they swell into the Malvern Hills. There are no towns, but numerous villages, each with its grey Norman church. You have left the brick of the southern and eastern counties behind you, and everything is stone – stone for the walls, and lichened slabs of stone for the roofs. It is all grim and solid and massive, as befits the heart of a great nation.

It was in the middle of this country, not very far from Evesham, that Sir John Bollamore lived in the old ancestral home of Thorpe Place, and thither it was that I came to teach his two little sons. Sir John was a widower – his wife had died three years before – and he had been left with these two lads aged eight and ten, and one dear little girl of seven. Miss Witherton, who is now my wife, was governess to this little girl. I was tutor to the two boys. Could there be a more obvious prelude to an engagement? She governs me now, and I tutor two little boys of our own. But, there – I have already revealed what it was which I gained in Thorpe Place !

It was a very, very old house, incredibly old – pre-Norman, some of it – and the Bollamores claimed to have lived in that situation since long before the Conquest. It struck a chill to my heart when first I came there, those enormously thick grey walls, the rude crumbling stones, the smell as from a sick animal which exhaled from the rotting plaster of the aged building. But the modern wing was bright and the garden was well kept. No house could be dismal which had a pretty girl inside it and such a show of roses in front.

Apart from a very complete staff of servants there were only four of us in the household. These were Miss Witherton, who was at that time four-and-twenty and as pretty – well, as pretty as Mrs.Colmore is now – myself, Frank Colmore, aged thirty, Mrs.Stevens, the housekeeper, a dry, silent woman, and Mr.Richards, a tall military-looking man, who acted as steward to the Bollamore estates. We four always had our meals together,

but Sir John had his usually alone in the library. Sometimes he joined us at dinner, but on the whole we were just as glad when he did not.

For he was a very formidable person. Imagine a man six feet three inches in height, majestically built, with a high-nosed, aristocratic face, brindled hair, shaggy eyebrows, a small, pointed Mephistophelian beard, and lines upon his brow and round his eyes as deep as if they had been carved with a penknife. He had grey eyes, weary, hopeless-looking eyes, proud and yet pathetic, eyes which claimed your pity and yet dared you to show it. His back was rounded with study, but otherwise he was as fine a looking man of his age – five-and-fifty perhaps – as any woman would wish to look upon.

But his presence was not a cheerful one. He was always courteous, always refined, but singularly silent and retiring. I have never lived so long with any man and known so little of him. If he were indoors he spent his time either in his own small study in the Eastern Tower, or in the library in the modern wing. So regular was his routine that one could always say at any hour exactly where he would be. Twice in the day he would visit his study, once after breakfast, and once about ten at night. You might set your watch by the slam of the heavy door. For the rest of the day he would be in his library – save that for an hour or two in the afternoon – he would take a walk or a ride, which was solitary like the rest of his existence. He loved his children, and was keenly interested in the progress of their studies, but they were a little awed by the silent, shaggy-browed figure, and they avoided him as much as they could. Indeed, we all did that.

It was some time before I came to know anything about the circumstances of Sir John Bollamore's life, for Mrs.Stevens, the housekeeper, and Mr.Richards, the land-steward, were too loyal to talk easily of their employer's affairs. As to the governess, she knew no more than I did, and our common interest was one of the causes which drew us together. At last, however, an incident occurred which led to a closer acquaintance with Mr.Richards and a fuller knowledge of the life of the man whom I served.

The immediate cause of this was no less than the falling of Master Percy, the youngest of my pupils, into the mill-race, with imminent danger both to his life and to mine, since I had to risk myself in order to save him. Dripping and exhausted – for I was far more spent than the child – I was making for my room when Sir John, who had heard the hubbub, opened the door of his little study and asked me what was the matter. I told him of the accident, but assured him that his child was in no danger, while he listened with a rugged, immobile face, which expressed in its intense eyes and tightened lips all the emotion which he tried to conceal.

"One moment! Step in here! Let me have the details!" said he, turning back through the open door.

And so I found myself within that little sanctum, inside which, as I afterwards learned, no other foot had for three years been set save that of the old servant who cleaned it out. It was a round room, conforming to the shape of the tower in which it was situated, with a low ceiling, a single narrow, ivy-wreathed window, and the simplest of furniture. An old carpet, a single chair, a deal table, and a small shelf of books made up the whole contents. On the table stood a full-length photograph of a woman – I took no particular notice of the features, but I remember that a certain gracious gentleness was the prevailing impression. Beside it were a large black japanned box and one or two bundles of letters or papers fastened together with elastic bands.

Our interview was a short one, for Sir John Bollamore perceived that I was soaked, and that I should change without delay. The incident led, however, to an instructive talk with Richards, the agent, who had never penetrated into the chamber which chance had opened to me. That very afternoon he came to me, all curiosity, and walked up and down the garden path with me, while my two charges played tennis upon the lawn beside us.

"You hardly realize the exception which has been made in your favour," said he. "That room has been kept such a mystery, and Sir John's visits to it have been so regular and consistent, that an almost superstitious feeling has arisen about it in the household. I assure you that if I were to repeat to you the tales which are flying about, tales of mysterious visitors there, and of voices overheard by the servants, you might suspect that Sir John had relapsed into his old ways."

"Why do you say relapsed?" I asked.

He looked at me in surprise.

"Is it possible," said he, "that Sir John Bollamore's previous history is unknown to you?"

"Absolutely."

"You astound me. I thought that every man in England knew something of his antecedents. I should not mention the matter if it were not that you are now one of ourselves, and that the facts might come to your ears in some harsher form if I were silent upon them. I always took it for granted that you knew that you were in the service of 'Devil' Bollamore."

"But why 'Devil'?" I asked.

"Ah, you are young and the world moves fast, but twenty years ago the name of 'Devil' Bollamore was one of the best known in London. He

was the leader of the fastest set, bruiser, driver, gambler, drunkard – a survival of the old type, and as bad as the worst of them."

I stared at him in amazement.

"What!" I cried, "that quiet, studious, sad-faced man?"

"The greatest rip and debauchee in England! All between ourselves, Colmore. But you understand now what I mean when I say that a woman's voice in his room might even now give rise to suspicions."

"But what can have changed him so?"

"Little Beryl Clare, when she took the risk of becoming his wife. That was the turning point. He had got so far that his own fast set had thrown him over. There is a world of difference, you know, between a man who drinks and a drunkard. They all drink, but they taboo a drunkard. He had become a slave to it – hopeless and helpless. Then she stepped in, saw the possibilities of a fine man in the wreck, took her chance in marrying him, though she might have had the pick of a dozen, and, by devoting her life to it, brought him back to manhood and decency. You have observed that no liquor is ever kept in the house. There never has been any since her foot crossed its threshold. A drop of it would be like blood to a tiger even now."

"Then her influence still holds him?"

"That is the wonder of it. When she died three years ago, we all expected and feared that he would fall back into his old ways. She feared it herself, and the thought gave a terror to death, for she was like a guardian angel to that man, and lived only for the one purpose. By the way, did you see a black japanned box in his room?"

"Yes."

"I fancy it contains her letters. If ever he has occasion to be away, if only for a single night, he invariably takes his black japanned box with him. Well, well, Colmore, perhaps I have told you rather more than I should, but I shall expect you to reciprocate if anything of interest should come to your knowledge." I could see that the worthy man was consumed with curiosity and just a little piqued that I, the newcomer, should have been the first to penetrate into the untrodden chamber. But the fact raised me in his esteem, and from that time onwards I found myself upon more confidential terms with him.

And now the silent and majestic figure of my employer became an object of greater interest to me. I began to understand that strangely human look in his eyes, those deep lines upon his careworn face. He was a man who was fighting a ceaseless battle, holding at arm's length, from morning till night, a horrible adversary, who was for ever trying to close with him – an adversary which would destroy him body and soul could it but fix its claws once more upon him. As I watched the grim, round-backed figure

pacing the corridor or walking in the garden, this imminent danger seemed to take bodily shape, and I could almost fancy that I saw this most loathsome and dangerous of all the fiends crouching closely in his very shadow, like a half-cowed beast which slinks beside its keeper, ready at any unguarded moment to spring at his throat. And the dead woman, the woman who had spent her life in warding off this danger, took shape also to my imagination, and I saw her as a shadowy but beautiful presence which intervened for ever with arms uplifted to screen the man whom she loved.

In some subtle way he divined the sympathy which I had for him, and he showed in his own silent fashion that he appreciated it. He even invited me once to share his afternoon walk, and although no word passed between us on this occasion, it was a mark of confidence which he had never shown to anyone before. He asked me also to index his library (it was one of the best private libraries in England), and I spent many hours in the evening in his presence, if not in his society, he reading at his desk and I sitting in a recess by the window reducing to order the chaos which existed among his books. In spite of these close relations I was never again asked to enter the chamber in the turret.

And then came my revulsion of feeling. A single incident changed all my sympathy to loathing, and made me realize that my employer still remained all that he had ever been, with the additional vice of hypocrisy. What happened was as follows.

One evening Miss Witherton had gone down to Broadway, the neighbouring village, to sing at a concert for some charity, and I, according to my promise, had walked over to escort her back. The drive sweeps round under the eastern turret, and I observed as I passed that the light was lit in the circular room. It was a summer evening, and the window, which was a little higher than our heads, was open. We were, as it happened, engrossed in our own conversation at the moment, and we had paused upon the lawn which skirts the old turret, when suddenly something broke in upon our talk and turned our thoughts away from our own affairs.

It was a voice – the voice undoubtedly of a woman. It was low – so low that it was only in that still night air that we could have heard it, but, hushed as it was, there was no mistaking its feminine timbre. It spoke hurriedly, gaspingly for a few sentences, and then was silent – a piteous, breathless, imploring sort of voice. Miss Witherton and I stood for an instant staring at each other. Then we walked quickly in the direction of the hall-door.

“It came through the window,” I said.

"We must not play the part of eavesdroppers," she answered. "We must forget that we have ever heard it."

There was an absence of surprise in her manner which suggested a new idea to me.

"You have heard it before," I cried.

"I could not help it. My own room is higher up on the same turret. It has happened frequently."

"Who can the woman be?"

"I have no idea. I had rather not discuss it."

Her voice was enough to show me what she thought. But granting that our employer led a double and dubious life, who could she be, this mysterious woman who kept him company in the old tower? I knew from my own inspection how bleak and bare a room it was. She certainly did not live there. But in that case where did she come from? It could not be anyone of the household. They were all under the vigilant eyes of Mrs.Stevens. The visitor must come from without. But how?

And then suddenly I remembered how ancient this building was, and how probable that some mediaeval passage existed in it. There is hardly an old castle without one. The mysterious room was the basement of the turret, so that if there were anything of the sort it would open through the floor. There were numerous cottages in the immediate vicinity. The other end of the secret passage might lie among some tangle of bramble in the neighbouring copse. I said nothing to anyone, but I felt that the secret of my employer lay within my power.

And the more convinced I was of this the more I marvelled at the manner in which he concealed his true nature. Often as I watched his austere figure, I asked myself if it were indeed possible that such a man should be living this double life, and I tried to persuade myself that my suspicions might after all prove to be ill-founded. But there was the female voice, there was the secret nightly rendezvous in the turret-chamber – how could such facts admit of an innocent interpretation? I conceived a horror of the man. I was filled with loathing at his deep, consistent hypocrisy.

Only once during all those months did I ever see him without that sad but impassive mask which he usually presented towards his fellow-man. For an instant I caught a glimpse of those volcanic fires which he had damped down so long. The occasion was an unworthy one, for the object of his wrath was none other than the aged charwoman whom I have already mentioned as being the one person who was allowed within his mysterious chamber. I was passing the corridor which led to the turret – for my own room lay in that direction – when I heard a sudden, startled scream, and merged in it the husky, growling note of a man who is inarticulate with passion. It was the snarl of a furious wild beast. Then I

heard his voice thrilling with anger. “You would dare! “ he cried. “You would dare to disobey my directions!” An instant later the charwoman passed me, flying down the passage, white-faced and tremulous, while the terrible voice thundered behind her. “Go to Mrs.Stevens for your money! Never set foot in Thorpe Place again!” Consumed with curiosity, I could not help following the woman, and found her round the corner leaning against the wall and palpitating like a frightened rabbit.

“What is the matter, Mrs.Brown?” I asked.

“It’s master!” she gasped. “Oh, ‘ow ‘e frightened me! If you had seen ‘is eyes, Mr.Colmore, sir. I thought ‘e would ‘ave been the death of me.”

“But what had you done?”

“Done, sir! Nothing. At least nothing to make so much of. Just laid my ‘and on that black box of ‘is – ‘adn’t even opened it, when in ‘e came and you ‘eard the way ‘e went on. I’ve lost my place, and glad I am of it, for I would never trust myself within reach of ‘im again.”

So it was the japanned box which was the cause of this outburst – the box from which he would never permit himself to be separated. What was the connection, or was there any connection between this and the secret visits of the lady whose voice I had overheard? Sir John Bollamore’s wrath was enduring as well as fiery, for from that day Mrs.Brown, the charwoman, vanished from our ken, and Thorpe Place knew her no more.

And now I wish to tell you the singular chance which solved all these strange questions and put my employer’s secret in my possession. The story may leave you with some lingering doubt as to whether my curiosity did not get the better of my honour, and whether I did not condescend to play the spy. If you choose to think so I cannot help it, but can only assure you that, improbable as it may appear, the matter came about exactly as I describe it.

The first stage in this *dénouement* was that the small room in the turret became uninhabitable. This occurred through the fall of the worm-eaten oaken beam which supported the ceiling. Rotten with age, it snapped in the middle one morning, and brought down a quantity of plaster with it. Fortunately Sir John was not in the room at the time. His precious box was rescued from amongst the debris and brought into the library, where, henceforward, it was locked within his bureau. Sir John took no steps to repair the damage, and I never had an opportunity of searching for that secret passage, the existence of which I had surmised. As to the lady, I had thought that this would have brought her visits to an end, had I not one evening heard Mr.Richards asking Mrs.Stevens who the woman was whom he had overheard talking to Sir John in the library. I could not catch

her reply, but I saw from her manner that it was not the first time that she had had to answer or avoid the same question.

"You've heard the voice, Colmore?" said the agent.

I confessed that I had.

"And what do *you* think of it?"

I shrugged my shoulders, and remarked that it was no business of mine.

"Come, come, you are just as curious as any of us. Is it a woman or not?"

"It is certainly a woman."

"Which room did you hear it from?"

"From the turret-room, before the ceiling fell."

"But I heard it from the library only last night. I passed the doors as I was going to bed, and I heard something waiting and praying just as plainly as I hear you. It may be a woman —"

"Why, what else *could* it be?"

He looked at me hard.

"There are more things in heaven and earth," said he. "If it is a woman, how does she get there?"

"I don't know."

"No, nor I. But if it is the other thing – but there, for a practical business man at the end of the nineteenth century this is rather a ridiculous line of conversation." He turned away, but I saw that he felt even more than he had said. To all the old ghost stories of Thorpe Place a new one was being added before our very eyes. It may by this time have taken its permanent place, for though an explanation came to me, it never reached the others.

And my explanation came in this way. I had suffered a sleepless night from neuralgia, and about midday I had taken a heavy dose of chlorodyne to alleviate the pain. At that time I was finishing the indexing of Sir John Bollamore's library, and it was my custom to work there from five till seven. On this particular day I struggled against the double effect of my bad night and the narcotic. I have already mentioned that there was a recess in the library, and in this it was my habit to work. I settled down steadily to my task, but my weariness overcame me and, falling back upon the settee, I dropped into a heavy sleep.

How long I slept I do not know, but it was quite dark when I awoke. Confused by the chlorodyne which I had taken, I lay motionless in a semi-conscious state. The great room with its high walls covered with books loomed darkly all round me. A dim radiance from the moonlight came through the farther window, and against this lighter background I saw that Sir John Bollamore was sitting at his study table. His well-set

head and clearly cut profile were sharply outlined against the glimmering square behind him. He bent as I watched him, and I heard the sharp turning of a key and the rasping of metal upon metal. As if in a dream I was vaguely conscious that this was the japanned box which stood in front of him, and that he had drawn something out of it, something squat and uncouth, which now lay before him upon the table. I never realized – it never occurred to my bemuddled and torpid brain that I was intruding upon his privacy, that he imagined himself to be alone in the room. And then, just as it rushed upon my horrified perceptions, and I had half risen to announce my presence, I heard a strange, crisp, metallic clicking, and then the voice.

Yes, it was a woman's voice; there could not be a doubt of it. But a voice so charged with entreaty and with yearning love, that it will ring for ever in my ears. It came with a curious far-away tinkle, but every word was clear, though faint – very faint, for they were the last words of a dying woman.

"I am not really gone, John," said the thin, gasping voice. "I am here at your very elbow, and shall be until we meet once more. I die happy to think that morning and night you will hear my voice. Oh, John, be strong, be strong, until we meet again."

I say that I had risen in order to announce my presence, but I could not do so while the voice was sounding. I could only remain half lying, half sitting, paralyzed, astounded, listening to those yearning distant musical words. And he – he was so absorbed that even if I had spoken he might not have heard me. But with the silence of the voice came my half articulated apologies and explanations. He sprang across the room, switched on the electric light, and in its white glare I saw him, his eyes gleaming with anger, his face twisted with passion, as the hapless charwoman may have seen him weeks before.

"Mr.Colmore! " he cried. "You here! What is the meaning of this, sir?"

With halting words I explained it all, my neuralgia, the narcotic, my luckless sleep and singular awakening. As he listened the glow of anger faded from his face, and the sad, impassive mask closed once more over his features.

"My secret is yours, Mr.Colmore," said he. "I have only myself to blame for relaxing my precautions. Half confidences are worse than no confidences, and so you may know all since you know so much. The story may go where you will when I have passed away, but until then I rely upon your sense of honour that no human soul shall hear it from your lips. I am proud still – God help me! – or, at least, I am proud enough to resent

that pity which this story would draw upon me. I have smiled at envy, and disregarded hatred, but pity is more than I can tolerate.

"You have heard the source from which the voice comes – that voice which has, as I understand, excited so much curiosity in my household. I am aware of the rumours to which it has given rise. These speculations, whether scandalous or superstitious, are such as I can disregard and forgive. What I should never forgive would be a disloyal spying and eavesdropping in order to satisfy an illicit curiosity. But of that, Mr.Colmore, I acquit you.

"When I was a young man, sir, many years younger than you are now, I was launched upon town without a friend or adviser, and with a purse which brought only too many false friends and false advisers to my side. I drank deeply of the wine of life – if there is a man living who has drunk more deeply he is not a man whom I envy. My purse suffered, my character suffered, my constitution suffered, stimulants became a necessity to me, I was a creature from whom my memory recoils. And it was at that time, the time of my blackest degradation, that God sent into my life the gentlest, sweetest spirit that ever descended as a ministering angel from above. She loved me, broken as I was, loved me, and spent her life in making a man once more of that which had degraded itself to the level of the beasts.

"But a fell disease struck her, and she withered away before my eyes. In the hour of her agony it was never of herself, of her own sufferings and her own death that she thought. It was all of me. The one pang which her fate brought to her was the fear that when her influence was removed I should revert to that which I had been. It was in vain that I made oath to her that no drop of wine would ever cross my lips. She knew only too well the hold that the devil had upon me – she who had striven so to loosen it – and it haunted her night and day the thought that my soul might again be within his grip.

"It was from some friend's gossip of the sick room that she heard of this invention – this phonograph – and with the quick insight of a loving woman she saw how she might use it for her ends. She sent me to London to procure the best which money could buy. With her dying breath she gasped into it the words which have held me straight ever since. Lonely and broken, what else have I in all the world to uphold me? But it is enough. Please God, I shall face her without shame when He is pleased to reunite us! That is my secret, Mr.Colmore, and whilst I live I leave it in your keeping."

*1899*

# THE SERF OF POBEREZE

The materials for the following tale were furnished to the writer while travelling last years near the spot on which the events it narrates took place. It is intended to convey a notion of some of the phases of Polish, or rather Russian serfdom (for, as truly explained by one of the characters in a succeeding page, it *is* Russian), and of the catastrophes it has occasioned, not only in Catherine's time, but occasionally at the present. The Polish nobles – themselves in slavery – earnestly desire the emancipation of their serfs, which Russian domination forbids.

The small town of Pobereze stands at the foot of a stony mountain, watered by numerous springs in the district of Podolia, in Poland. It consists of a mass of miserable cabins, with a Catholic chapel and two Greek churches in the midst, the latter distinguished by their gilded towers. On one side of the market-place stands the only inn, and on the opposite side are several shops, from whose doors and windows look out several dirtily-dressed Jews. At a little distance, on a hill covered with vines and fruit-trees, stands the Palace, which does not, perhaps, exactly merit such an appellation, but who would dare to call otherwise the dwelling of the lord of the domain?

On the morning when our tale opens, there had had issued from this palace the common enough command to the superintendent of the estate, to furnish the master with a couple of strong boys, for service in the stables, and a young girl, to be employed in the wardrobe. Accordingly, a number of the best-looking young peasants of Olgogrod assembled in the broad avenue leading to the palace. Some were accompanied by their sorrowful and weeping parents, in all of whose hearts, however, rose the faint and whispered hope, "Perhaps it will not be *my* child they will choose!"

Being brought into the courtyard of the palace, the Count Roszynski, with the several members of his family, had come out to pass in review his growing subjects. He was a small and insignificant-looking man, about fifty years of age, with deep-set eyes aud overhanging brows. His wife, who was nearly of the same age, was immensely stout, with a vulgar face and a loud disagreeable voice. She made herself ridiculous in endeavouring to imitate the manners and bearing of the aristocracy, into whose sphere she and her husband were determined to force themselves, in spite of the humbleness of their origin. The father of the "Right Honorable" Count Roszynski was a valet, who, having been a great favorite with his master, amassed sufficient money to enable his son, who inherited it, to purchase the extensive estate of Olgogrod, and with it the

sole proprietorship of 1,600 human beings. Over them he had complete control; and, when maddened by oppression, if they dared resent, woe unto them! They could be thrust into a noisome dungeon, and chained by one hand from the light of day for years, until their very existence was forgotten by all except the jailer who brought daily their pitcher of water and morsel of dry bread.

Some of the old peasants say that Sava, father of the young peasant girl, who stands by the side of an old woman, at the head of her companions in the courtyard, is immured in one of these subterranean jails. Sava was always about the Count, who, it was said, had brought him from some distant land, with his little motherless child. Sava placed her under the care of an old man and woman, who had the charge of the bees in a forest near the palace, where he came occasionally to visit her. But once, six long months passed, and he did not come! In vain Anielka wept, in vain she cried, "Where is my father?" – No father appeared. At last it was said that Sava had been sent to a long distance with a large sum of money, and had been killed by robbers. In the ninth year of one's life the most poignant grief is quickly effaced, and after six months Anielka ceased to grieve. The old people were very kind to her and loved her as if she were their own child. That Anielka might be chosen to serve in the palace never entered their head, for who would be so barbarous as to take the child away from an old woman of seventy and her aged husband?

Today was the first time in her life that she had been so far from home. She looked curiously on all she saw, – particularly on a young lady about her own age, beautifully dressed, and a youth of eighteen, who had apparently just returned from a ride on horseback, as he held a whip in his hand, whilst walking up and down and examining the boys who were placed in a row before him. He chose two amongst them, and the boys were led away to the stables.

"And I choose this young girl," said Constantia Roszynski, indicating Anielka; "she is the prettiest of them all. I do not like ugly faces about me."

When Constantia returned to the drawing-room, she gave orders for Anielka to be taken to her apartments, and placed under the tutelage of Mademoiselle Dufour, a French maid, recently arrived from the first milliner's shop in Odessa. Poor girl! when they separated her from her adopted mother, and began leading her towards the palace, she rushed, with a shriek of agony, from them, and grasped her old protectress tightly in her arms! They were torn violently asunder, and the Count Roszynski quietly asked:

"Is it her daughter, or her grand-daughter?"

"Neither, my lord, – only an adopted child."

"But who will lead the old woman home, as she is blind?"

"I will, my lord," replied one of his servants, bowing to the ground; "I will let her walk by the side of my horse, and when she is in her cabin she will have her old husband, – they must take care of each other."

So saying, he moved away with the rest of the peasants and domestics. But the poor old woman had to be dragged along by two men; for in the midst of her shrieks and tears she had fallen in the ground, almost without life.

And Anielka? They did not allow her to weep long. She had now to sit all day in the corner of a room to sew. She was expected to do everything well from the first; and if she did not, she was kept without food or cruelly punished. Morning and evening she had to help Mdlle.Dufour to dress and undress her mistress. But Constantia, although she looked with hauteur on everybody beneath her, and expected to be slavishly obeyed, was tolerably kind to her poor orphan. Her true torment began, when, on leaving her young lady's room, she had to assist Mdlle.Dufour. Notwithstanding that she tried sincerely to do her best, she was never able to satisfy her, or draw from her aught but harsh reproaches.

Thus two months passed.

One day Mdlle.Dufour went very early to confession, and Anielka was seized with an eager longing to gaze once more in peace and freedom on the beautiful blue sky and green trees, as she used to do when the first rays of the rising sun streamed in at the window of the little forest cabin. She ran into the garden. Enchanted by the sight of so many beautiful flowers, she went farther and farther along the smooth and winding walks, till she entered the forest. She who had been so long away from her beloved trees, roamed where they were thickest. Here she gazes boldly around. She sees no one! She is alone! A little further on she meets with a rivulet which flows through the forest. Here she remembers that she has not yet prayed. She kneels down, and with hands clasped and eyes upturned she begins to sing, in a sweet voice, the Hymn to the Virgin.

As she went on, she sang louder and with increased fervour. Her breast heaved with emotion, her eyes shone with unusual brilliancy; but when the hymn was finished she lowered her head, tears began to fall over her cheeks, until at last she sobbed aloud. She might have remained long in this condition, had not someone come behind her, saying:

"Do not cry, my poor girl; it is better to sing than to weep." The intruder raised her head, wiped her eyes with her handkerchief, and kissed her on the forehead.

It was the Count's son, Leon!

"You must not cry," he continued; "be calm, and when the filipony (pedlars) come, buy yourself a pretty handkerchief." He then gave her a

rouble and walked away. Anielka, after concealing the coin in her corset, ran quickly back to the palace.

Fortunately, Mdlle.Dufour had not yet returned, and Anielka seated herself in her accustomed corner. She often took out the rouble to gaze fondly upon it, and set to work to make a little purse, which, having fastened to a ribbon, she hung round her neck. She did not dream of spending it, for it would have deeply grieved her to part with the gift of the only person in the whole house who had looked kindly on her.

From that time Anielka remained always in her young mistress's room; she was better dressed, and Mdlle.Dufour ceased to persecute her. To what did she owe this sudden change? Perhaps to a remonstrance from Leon. Constantia ordered Anielka to sit beside her while taking her lessons from her music-masters, and on her going to the drawing-room, she was left in her apartments alone. Being thus more kindly treated, Anielka lost by degrees her timidity; and when her young mistress, whilst occupied over some embroidery, would tell her to sing, she did so boldly and with a steady voice. A greater favour awaited her. Constantia, when unoccupied, began teaching Anielka to read in Polish; and Mdlle.Dufour thought it politic to follow the example of her mistress, and began to teach her French.

Meanwhile, a new kind of torment commenced. Having easily learnt the two languages, Anielka acquired an irresistible passion for reading. Books had for her the charm of the forbidden fruit, for she could only read by stealth at night, or when her mistress went visiting in the neighbourhood. The kindness hitherto shown her, for s time, began to relax. Leon had set off on a tour, accompanied by his old tutor, and a bosom friend as young, as gay, and as thoughtless as himself.

So passed the two years of Leon's absence. When he returned, Anielka was seventeen, and had become tall and handsome. No one who had not seen her during the time, would have recognized her. Of this number was Leon. In the midst of perpetual gaiety and change it was not possible he could have remembered a poor peasant girl; but in Anielka's memory he had remained as a superior being, as her benefactor, as the only one who had spoken kindly to her, when poor, neglected, forlorn! When in some French romance she met with a young man of twenty, of a noble character and handsome appearance, she bestowed on him the name of Leon. The recollection of the kiss he had given her, ever brought a burning blush to her cheek, and made her sigh deeply.

One day Leon came to his sister's room. Anielka was there, seated in a corner at work. Leon himself had considerably changed; from a boy he had grown into a man.

"I suppose Constantia," he said, "you have been told what a good boy I am, and with what docility I shall submit myself to the matrimonial yoke, which the Count and Countess have provided for me?" and he began whistling and danced some steps of the Mazurka.

"Perhaps you will be refused," said Constantia, coldly.

"Refused! Oh, no. The old Prince has already given his consent, and as for his daughter she is desperately in love with me. Look at these moustachios, could anything be more irresistible?" and he glanced in the glass and twirled them round his fingers; then continuing in a graver tone, he said, "To tell the sober truth, I cannot say that I reciprocate. My intended is not at all to my taste. She is nearly thirty, and so thin that whenever I look at her, I am reminded of my old tutor's anatomical sketches. But thanks to her Parisian dressmaker, she makes up a tolerably good figure; and looks well in a Cachemere. Of all things, you know, I wished for a wife of an imposing appearance, and I don't care about love. I find it's not fashionable, and only exists in the exalted imagination of poets."

"Surely people are in love with one another sometimes," said the sister.

"Sometimes," repeated Anielka, inaudibly. The dialogue had painfully affected her, and she knew not why. Her heart beat quickly, and her face was flushed, and made her look more lovely than ever.

"Perhaps. Of course we profess to adore every pretty woman," Leon added abruptly. "But, my dear sister, what a charming ladies' maid you have!" He approached the corner where Anielka sat, and bent on her a coarse familiar smile. Anielka, although a serf, was displeased, and returned it with a glance full of dignity. But when her eyes rested on the youth's handsome face, a feeling, which had been gradually and silently growing in her young and inexperienced heart, predominate over her pride and displeasure. She wished ardently to recall herself to Leon's memory, and half unconsciously raised her hand to the little purse which always hung round her neck. She took from it the rouble he had given her.

"See!" shouted Leon, "what a droll girl; how proud she is of her riches! Why, girl, you are a woman of fortune, mistress of a whole rouble!"

"I hope she came by it honestly," said the old Countess, who at this moment entered.

At this insinuation, shame and indignation kept Anielka, for a time, silent. She replaced the money quickly in its purse, with the bitter thought that the few happy moments which had been so indelibly stamped upon her memory, had been utterly forgotten by Leon. To clear herself, she at last stammered out, seeing they all looked at her inquiringly:

"Do you not remember, M.Leon, that you gave me this coin two years ago in the garden?"

"How odd?" exclaimed Leon, laughing, "do you expect me to remember all the pretty girls to whom I have given money? But I suppose you are right, or you would not have treasured up this unfortunate rouble as if it were a holy relic. You should not be a miser, child; money is made to be spent."

"Pray, put an end to these jokes," said Constantia impatiently; "I like this girl, and I will not have her teased. She understands my ways better than anyone, and often puts me in good humour with her beautiful voice."

"Sing something for me, pretty damsel," said Leon, "and I will give you another rouble, a new and shining one."

"Sing instantly," said Constantia imperiously.

At this command Anielka could no longer stifle her grief; she covered her face with her hands and wept violently.

"Why do you cry?" asked her mistress impatiently; "I cannot bear it; I desire you to do as you are bid."

It might have been from the constant habit of slavish obedience, or a strong feeling of pride, but Anielka instantly ceased weeping. There was a moment's pause, during which the old Countess went grumbling out of the room. Anielka chose the Hymn to the Virgin she had warbled in the garden, and as she sung, she prayed fervently; – she prayed for peace, for deliverance from the acute emotions which had been aroused within her. Her earnestness gave an intensity of expression to the melody, which affected her listeners. They were silent for some moments after its conclusion. Leon walked up and down with his arms folded on his breast. Was it agitated with pity for the accomplished young slave? or by any other tender emotion? What followed will show.

"My dear Constantia," he said, suddenly stopping before his sister and kissing her hand, "will you do me a favour?"

Constantia looked inquiringly in her brother's face without speaking.

"Give me this girl."

"Impossible!"

"I am quite in earnest," continued Leon, "I wish to offer her to my future wife. In the Prince her father's private chapel they are much in want of a solo soprano."

"I shall not give her to you," said Constantia.

"Not as a free gift, but in exchange. I will give you instead a charming young negro – so black. The women in St.Petersburgh and in

Paris raved about him: but I was inexorable; I half-refused him to my princess."

"No, no," replied Constantia; "I shall be lonely without this girl, I am so used to her."

"Nonsense! you can get peasant girls by the dozen; but a black page, with teeth whiter than ivory, and purer than pearls; a perfect original in his way; you surely cannot withstand. You will kill half the province with envy. A negro servant is the most fashionable thing going, and yours will be the first imported into the province."

This argument was irresistible.

"Well," replied Constantia, "when do you think of taking her?"

"Immediately; today at five o'clock," said Leon; and he went merrily out of the room. This then was the result of his cogitation – of Anielka's Hymn to the Virgin. Constantia ordered Anielka to prepare herself for the journey, with as little emotion as if she had exchanged away a lap-dog, or parted with a parrot.

She obeyed in silence. Her heart was full. She went into the garden that she might relieve herself by weeping unseen. With one hand supporting her burning head, and the other pressed tightly against her heart, to stifle her sobs, she wandered on mechanically till she found herself by the side of the river. She felt quickly for her purse, intending to throw the rouble into the water, but as quickly thrust it back again, for she could not bear to part with the treasure. She felt as if without it she would be still more an orphan. Weeping bitterly, she leaned against the tree which had once before witnessed her tears.

By degrees the stormy passion within her gave place to calm reflection. This day she was to go away; she was to dwell beneath another roof, to serve another mistress. Humiliation! always humiliation! But at least it would be some change in her life. As she thought of this, she returned hastily to the palace that she might not, on the last day of her servitude, incur the anger of her young mistress.

Scarcely was Anielka attired in her prettiest dress, when Constantia came to her with a little box, from which she took several gay-colored ribbons, and decked her in them herself, that the serf might do her credit in the new family. And when Anielka, bending down to her feet thanked her, Constantia, with marvellous condescension, kissed her on her forehead. Even Leon cast an admiring glance upon her. His servant soon after came to conduct her to the carriage, and showing her where to seat herself, they rolled off quickly towards Radapol.

For the first time in her life Anielka rode in a carriage. Her head turned quite giddy, she could not look at the trees and fields as they flew past her; but by degrees she became more accustomed to it, and the fresh

air enlivening her spirits, she performed the rest of the journey in a tolerably happy state of mind. At last they arrived in the spacious courtyard before the Palace of Radapol, the dwelling of a once rich and powerful Polish family, now partly in ruin. It was evident, even to Anielka, that the marriage was one for money on the one side, and for rank on the other.

Among other renovations at the castle, occasioned by the approaching marriage, the owner of it, Prince Pelazia, had obtained singers for the chapel, and had engaged Signor Giustiniani, an Italian, as chapel-master. Immediately on Leon's arrival, Anielka was presented to him. He made her sing a scale, and pronounced her voice to be excellent.

Anielka found that, in Radapol, she was treated with a little more consideration than at Olgogrod, although she had often to submit to the caprices of her new mistress, and she found less time to read. But to console herself she gave all her attention to singing, which she practiced several hours a day. Her naturally great capacity, under the guidance of the Italian, began to develop itself steadily. Besides sacred, he taught her operatic music. On one occasion Anielka sung an aria in so impassioned and masterly a style, that the enraptured Giustiniani clapped his hands for joy, skipped about the room, and not finding words enough to praise her, exclaimed several times:

"Prima Donna! Prima Donna!"

But the lessons were interrupted. The Princess's wedding-day was fixed upon, after which event she and Leon were to go to Florence, and Anielka was to accompany them. Alas! feelings which gave her poignant misery still clung to her. She despised herself for her weakness; but she loved Leon. The sentiment was too deeply implanted in her bosom to be eradicated; too strong to be resisted. It was the first love of a young and guileless heart, and had grown in silence and despair.

Anielka was most anxious to know something of her adopted parents. Once, after the old prince had heard her singing, he asked her with great kindness about her home. She replied, that she was an orphan, and had been taken by force from those who had so kindly supplied the place of parents. Her apparent attachment to the old bee-keeper and his wife so pleased the prince, that he said:

"You are a good child, Anielka, and tomorrow I will send you to visit them. You shall take them some presents."

Anielka, overpowered with gratitude, threw herself at the feet of the prince. She dreamed all night of the happiness that was in store for her, and the joy of the poor, forsaken, old people; and when the next morning she set off, she could scarcely restrain her impatience. At last they approached the cabin; she saw the forest, with its tall trees, and the

meadows covered with flowers. She leaped from the carriage, that she might be nearer these trees and flowers, everyone of which she seemed to recognize. The weather was beautiful. She breathed with avidity the pure air which, in imagination, brought to her the kisses and caresses of her poor father! Her foster-father was, doubtless, occupied with his bees; but his wife?

Anielka opened the door of the cabin; all was silent and deserted. The arm-chair on which the poor old woman used to sit, was overturned in a corner. Anielka was chilled by a fearful presentiment. She went with a slow step towards the bee-hives; there she saw a little boy tending the bees, whilst the old man was stretched on the ground beside him. The rays of the sun, falling on his pale and sickly face, showed that he was very ill. Anielka stooped down over him, and said:

"It is I, it is Anielka, your own Anielka, who always loves you."

The old man raised his head, gazed upon her with a ghastly smile and took off his cap.

"And my good old mother, where is she?" Anielka asked.

"She is dead!" answered the old man, and falling back he began laughing idiotically. Anielka wept. She gazed earnestly on the worn frame, the pale and wrinkled cheeks, in which scarcely a sign of life could be perceived; it seemed to her that he had suddenly fallen asleep, and not wishing to disturb him, she went to the carriage for the presents. When she returned, she took his hand. It was cold. The poor old bee-keeper had breathed his last!

Anielka was carried, almost senseless back to the carriage, which quickly returned with her to the castle. There she revived a little; but the recollection that she was now quite alone in the world, almost drove her to despair.

Her master's wedding and the journey to Florence were a dream to her. Though the strange sights of a strange city slowly restored her perceptions, they did not her cheerfulness. She felt as if she could no longer endure the misery of her life; she prayed to die.

"Why are you so unhappy?" said the Count Leon kindly to her, one day.

To have explained the cause of her wretchedness would have been death indeed.

"I am going to give you a treat," continued Leon. "A celebrated singer is to appear tonight in the theatre. I will send you to hear her, and afterwards you shall sing to me what you remember of her performance."

Anielka went. It was a new era in her existence. Herself, by this time, an artist, she could forget her griefs, and enter with her whole soul into the beauties of the art she now heard practised in perfection for the

first time. To music a chord responded in her breast which vibrated powerfully. During the performances she was at one moment pale and trembling, tears rushing into her eyes, at another, she was ready to throw herself at the feet of the cantatrice, in an ecstasy of admiration. “Prima donna,” – by that name the public called on her to receive their applause, and it was the same, thought Anielka, that Giustiniani had be stowed upon her. Could *she* also be a prima donna? What a glorious destiny! To be able to communicate one’s own emotions to masses of entranced listeners; to awaken in them, by the power of the voice, grief, love, terror.

Strange thoughts continued to haunt her on her return home. She was unable to sleep. She formed desperate plans. At last she resolved to throw off the yoke of servitude, and the still more painful slavery of feelings which her pride disdained. Having learnt the address of the prima donna, she went early one morning to her house.

On entering she said, in French, almost incoherently, so great was her agitation:

“Madam, I am a poor serf belonging to a Polish family who have lately arrived in Florence. I have escaped from them; protect, shelter me. They say I can sing.”

The Signora Teresina, a warm-hearted, passionate Italian, was interested by her artless earnestness. She said:

“Poor child! you must have suffered much,” – she took Anielka’s hand in hers. “You say you can sing; let me hear you.”

Anielka seated herself on an ottoman. She clasped her hands over knees, and tears fell into her lap. With plaintive pathos, and perfect truth of intonation, she prayed in song. The Hymn to the Virgin seemed to Teresina to be offered up by inspiration.

The Signora was astonished.

“Where,” she asked, in wonder, “were you taught?”

Anielka narrated her history, and when she had finished, the prima donna spoke so kindly to her that she felt as if she had known her for years. Anielka was Teresina’s guest that day and the next. After the opera, on the third day, the prima donna made her sit beside her, and said:

“I think you are a very good girl, and you shall stay with me always.”

The girl was almost beside herself with joy.

“We will never part. Do you consent, Anielka?”

“Do not call me Anielka. Give me instead some Italian name.”

“Well, then, be Giovanna. The dearest friend I ever had – but whom I have lost was named Giovanna,” said the prima donna.

“Then, I will be another Giovanna to you.”

Teresina then said:

"I hesitated to receive you at first, for your sake as well as mine; but you are safe now. I learn that your master and mistress, after searching vainly for you, have returned to Poland."

From this time Anielka commenced an entirely new life. She took lessons in singing every day from the Signora, and got an engagement to appear in inferior characters at the theatre. She had now her own income, and her own servant – she, who had till then been obliged to serve herself. She acquired the Italian language rapidly, and soon passed for a native of the country.

So passed three years. New and varied impressions failed, however, to blot out the old ones. Anielka arrived at great perfection in her singing, and even began to surpass the prima donna, who was losing her voice from weakness of the chest. This sad discovery changed the cheerful temper of Teresina. She ceased to sing in public: for she could not endure to excite pity where she had formerly commanded admiration. She determined to retire.

"You," she said to Anielka, "shall now assert your claim to the first rank in the vocal art. You will maintain it. You surpass me. Often, on hearing you sing, I have scarcely been able to stifle a feeling of jealousy."

Anielka placed her hand on Teresina's shoulder, and kissed her.

"Yes," continued Teresina, regardless of everything but the bright future she was shaping for her friend. "We will go to Vienna – there you will be understood and appreciated. You shall sing at the Italian Opera, and I will be by your side – unknown, no longer sought, worshipped – but will glory in your triumphs. They will be a repetition of my own; for have I not taught you? Will they not be the result of my work?"

Though Anielka's ambition was fired, her heart was softened, and she wept violently.

Five months had scarcely elapsed when a *furore* was created in Vienna by the first appearance, at the Italian Opera, of the Signora Giovanna. Her enormous salary at once afforded her the means of even extravagant expenditure. Her haughty treatment of male admirers only attracted new ones; but in the midst of her triumphs, she thought often of the time when the poor orphan of Pobereze was cared for by nobody. This remembrance made her receive the flatteries of the crowd with an ironical smile; their fine speeches fell coldly on her ear, their eloquent looks made no impression on her heart: *that*, no change could alter, no temptation win.

In the flood of unexpected success a new misfortune overwhelmed her. Since their arrival at Vienna, Teresina's health rapidly declined, and in the sixth month of Anielka's operatic reign she expired, leaving all her wealth, which was considerable, to her friend.

Once more Anielka was alone in the world. Despite all the honours and blandishments of her position, the old feeling of desolateness came upon her. The new shock destroyed her health. She was unable to appear on the stage. To sing was a painful effort; she grew indifferent to what passed around her. Her greatest consolation was in succoring the poor and friendless, and her generosity was most conspicuous to all young orphan girls without fortune. She had never ceased to love her native land, and seldom appeared in society, unless it was to meet her countrymen. If ever she sang, it was in Polish.

A year had elapsed since the death of Signora Teresina when the Count Selka, a rich noble of Volkynia, at that time in Vienna, solicited her presence at a party. It was impossible to refuse the Count and his lady, from whom she had received great kindness. She went. When in their saloons, filled with all the fashion and aristocracy in Vienna, the name of Giovanna was announced, a general murmur was heard. She entered, pale and languid, and proceeded between the two rows made for her by the admiring assembly, to the seat of honour, beside the mistress of the house.

Shortly after, the Count Selka led her to the piano. She sat down before it, and thinking what she should sing, glanced round upon the assembly. She could not help feeling that the admiration which beamed from the faces around her was the work of her own merit, for had she neglected the great gift of nature, her voice, she could not have excited it. With a blushing cheek, and eyes sparkling with honest pride, she struck the piano with a firm hand, and from her seemingly weak and delicate chest poured forth a touching Polish melody, with a voice pure, sonorous, and plaintive. Tears were in many eyes, and the beating of every heart was quickened.

The song was finished, but the wondering silence was unbroken. Giovanna leaned exhausted on the arm of the chair, and cast down her eyes. On again raising them, she perceived a gentleman who gazed fixedly at her, as if he still listened to echoes which had not yet died within him. The master of the house, to dissipate his thoughtlessness, led him towards Giovanna.

“Let me present to you, Signora,” he said, “a countryman, the Count Leon Roszynski.”

The lady trembled; she silently bowed, fixed her eyes on the ground, and dared not raise them. Pleading indisposition, which was fully justified by her pallid features, she soon after withdrew.

When, on the following day, Giovanna’s servant announced the Counts Selka and Roszynski, a peculiar smile played on her lips; and when they entered, she received the latter with the cold and formal politeness of a stranger. Controlling the feelings of her heart, she schooled her features

to an expression of indifference. It was manifest from Leon's manner, that without the remotest recognition, an indefinable presentiment regarding her possessed him. The Counts had called to know if Giovanna had recovered from her indisposition. Leon begged to be permitted to call again.

Where was his wife? why did he never mention her? Giovanna continually asked herself these questions when they had departed.

A few nights after, the Count Leon arrived, sad and thoughtful. He prevailed on Giovanna to sing one of her Polish melodies, which she told him she had been taught, when a child, by her nurse. Roszynski, unable to restrain the expression of an intense admiration he had long felt, frantically seized her hand, and exclaimed:

"I love you!"

She withdrew it from his grasp, remained silent for a few minutes, and then said slowly, distinctly, and ironically:

"But I do not love *you*, Count Roszynski."

Leon rose from his seat. He pressed his hands to his brow, and was silent. Giovanna remained calm and tranquil.

"It is a penalty from Heaven," continued Leon, as if speaking to himself, "for not having fulfilled my duty as a husband towards one whom I chose voluntarily, but without reflection. I wronged her, and am punished."

Giovanna turned her eyes upon him. Leon continued:

"Young, and with a heart untouched, I married a princess about ten years older than myself, of eccentric habits and bad temper. She treated me as an inferior. She dissipated the fortune hoarded up with so much care by my parents, and yet was ashamed, on account of my origin, to be called by my name. Happily for me, she was fond of visiting and amusements. Otherwise, to escape from her, I might have become a gambler, or worse; but to avoid meeting her, I remained at home – for there she seldom was. At first from ennui, but afterwards from real delight in the occupation, I gave myself up to study. Reading formed my mind and heart. I became a changed being. Some months ago my father died, my sister went to Lithuania, whilst my mother, in her old age, and with her ideas, was quite incapable of understanding my sorrow. So when my wife went to the baths for the benefit of her ruined health, I came here in the hope of meeting with some of my former friends – I saw you —"

Giovanna blushed like one detected; but speedily recovering herself, asked, with calm pleasantry:

"Surely you do not number me among your former friends?"

"I know not. I have been bewildered. It is strange; but from the moment I saw you at Count Selka's, a powerful instinct of love overcame

me; not a new feeling; but as if some latent, long-hid, undeveloped sentiment had suddenly burst forth into an uncontrollable passion. I love, I adore you. I —"

The Prima Donna interrupted him – not with speech, but with a look which awed, which chilled him. Pride, scorn, irony sat in her smile. Satire darted from her eyes. After a pause she repeated slowly and pointedly:

"Love *me*, Count Roszynski?"

"Such is my destiny," he replied. "Nor, despite your scorn, will I struggle against it. I feel it is my fate ever to love you; I fear it is my fate never to be loved by you. It is dreadful."

Giovanna witnessed the Count's emotion with sadness.

"To have," she said mournfully, "one's first, pure, ardent, passionate affection unrequited, scorned, made a jest of, is indeed a bitterness, almost equal to that of death."

She made a strong effort to conceal her emotion. Indeed she controlled it so well as to speak the rest with a sort of gaiety.

"You have at least been candid, Count Roszynski; I will imitate you by telling a little history that occurred in your country. There was a poor girl born and bred a serf to her wealthy lord and master. When scarcely fifteen years old, she was torn from a state of happy rustic freedom – the freedom of humility and content – to be one of the courtly slaves of the Palace. Those who did not laugh at her, scolded her. One kind word was vouchsafed to her, and that came from the lord's son. She nursed it and treasured it; till, from long concealing and restraining her feelings, she at last found that gratitude had changed into a sincere affection. But what does a man of the world care for the love of a serf? It does not even flatter his vanity. The young nobleman did not understand the source of her tears and her grief and he made a present of her, as he would have done of some animal, to his betrothed."

Leon, agitated and somewhat enlightened, would have interrupted her; but Giovanna said:

"Allow me to finish my tale. Providence did not abandon this poor orphan, but permitted her to rise to distinction by the talent with which she was endowed by nature. The wretched serf of Pobereze became a celebrated Italian cantatrice. *Then* her former lord meeting her in society, and seeing her admired and courted by all the world, without knowing who she really was, was afflicted, as if by the dictates of Heaven, with a love for this same girl, – with a guilty love —"

And Giovanna rose, as she said this, to remove herself further from her admirer.

"No, no!" he replied earnestly; "with a pure and holy passion."

"Impossible!" returned Giovanna. "Are you not married?"

Roszynski vehemently bore a letter from his vest, and handed it to Giovanna. It was sealed with black, for it announced the death of his wife at the baths. It had only arrived that morning.

"You have lost no time," said the cantatrice, endeavouring to conceal her feelings under an iron mask of reproach.

There was a pause. Each dared not speak. The Count knew – but without actually and practically believing what seemed incredible – that Anielka and Giovanna were the same person – *his slave*. That terrible relationship checked him. Anielka, too, had played her part to the end of endurance. The long-cherished tenderness – the faithful love of her life, could not longer be wholly mastered. Hitherto they had spoken in Italian. She now said in Polish:

"You have a right, my Lord Roszynski, to that poor Anielka who escaped from the service of your wife in Florence; you can force her back to your palace, to its meanest work, but —"

"Have mercy on me!" cried Leon.

"But," continued the serf of Pobereze, firmly, "you cannot force me to love you."

"Do not mock – do not torture me more; you are sufficiently revenged. I will not offend you by importunity. You must indeed hate me! But remember that we Poles wished to give freedom to our serfs; and for that very reason our country was invaded and dismembered by despotic powers. We must therefore continue to suffer slavery as it exists in Russia; but, soul and body, we are averse to it; and when our country once more becomes free, be assured no shadow of slavery will remain in the land. Curse then our enemies, and pity us that we stand in such a desperate position between Russian bayonets and Siberia, and the hatred of our serfs."

So saying, and without waiting for a reply, Leon rushed from the room. The door was closed. Giovanna listened to the sounds of his rapid footsteps till they died in the street. She would have followed, but dared not. She ran to the window. Roszynski's carriage was rolling rapidly away, and she exclaimed vainly:

"I love you, Leon; I loved you always!"

Her tortures were unendurable. To relieve them she hastened to her desk, and wrote these words:

"*Dearest Leon, forgive me; let the past be forever forgotten. Return to your Anielka. She always has been, ever will be yours.*"

She despatched the missive. Was it too late? or would it bring him back? In the latter hope she retired to her chamber, to execute a little project.

Leon was in despair. He saw he had been premature in so soon declaring his passion after the news of his wife's death, and vowed he would not see Anielka again for several months. To calm his agitation, he had ridden some miles into the country. When he returned to his home after some hours, he found her note. With the wild delight it had darted into his soul, he flew back to her.

On regaining her saloon a new and terrible vicissitude seemed to sport with his passion: – she was nowhere to be seen. Had the Italian cantatrice fled? Again he was in despair; stupefied with disappointment. As he stood uncertain how to act in the midst of the floor, he heard, as from a distance, an *Ave Maria* poured forth in tones he half-recognized. The sounds brought back to him a host of recollections; a weeping serf, the garden of his own palace. In a state of new rapture he followed the voice. He traced it to an inner chamber, and he there beheld the lovely singer kneeling in the costume of a Polish serf. She rose, greeted Leon with a touching smile; and stepped forward with serious bashfulness. Leon extended his arms; she sank into them; and in that fond embrace all past wrongs and sorrows were forgotten! Anielka drew from her bosom a little purse, and took from it a piece of silver. It was the rouble. *Now*, Leon did not smile at it. He comprehended the sacredness of this little gift; and some tears of repentance fell upon Anielka's hand.

A few months after, Leon wrote to the steward of Olgogrod to prepare everything splendidly for the reception of his second wife. He concluded his letter with these words: – "*I understand that in the dungeon beneath my palace there are some unfortunate men, who were imprisoned during my father's lifetime. Let them be instantly liberated. This is my first act of gratitude to God, who has so infinitely blessed me!*"

Anielka longed ardently to behold her native land. They left Vienna immediately after the wedding, although it was in the middle of January.

It was already quite dark when the carriage, with its four horses, stopped in front of the portico of the palace of Olgogrod. Whilst the footman was opening the door on one side, a beggar soliciting alms appeared at the other, where Anielka was seated. Happy to perform a good action, as she crossed the threshold of her new home, she gave him some money; but the man, instead of thanking her, returned her bounty with a savage laugh, at the same time scowling at her in the fiercest manner from beneath his thick and shaggy brows. The strangeness of this circumstance sensibly affected Anielka, and clouded her happiness. Leon soothed and reassured her. In the arms of her beloved husband, she forgot all but the happiness of being the idol of his affections.

Fatigue and excitement made the night most welcome. All was dark and silent around the palace, and some hours of the night had passed,

when suddenly flames burst forth from several parts of the building at once. The palace was enveloped in fire; it raged furiously. The flames mounted higher and higher; the windows cracked with a fearful sound, and the smoke penetrated into the most remote apartments.

A single figure of a man was seen stealing over the snow, which lay like a winding-sheet on the solitary waste; his cautious steps were heard on the frozen snow as it crisped beneath his tread. It was the beggar who had accosted Anielka. On a rising ground, be turned to gaze on the terrible scene.

"No more unfortunate wretches will now be doomed to pass their lives in your dungeons," he exclaimed. "What was *my* crime? Reminding my master of the lowness of his birth. For this they tore me from my only child – my darling little Anielka; they had no pity even for her orphan state; let them perish all!"

Suddenly a young and beautiful creature rushes wildly to one of the principal windows: she makes a violent effort to escape. For a moment her lovely form, clothed in white, shines in terrible relief against the background of blazing curtains and walls of fire, and as instantly sinks back into the blazing element. Behind her is another figure, vainly endeavouring to aid her, – he perishes also; neither are ever seen again!

This appalling tragedy horrified even the perpetrator of the crime. He rushed from the place; and as he heard the crash of the falling walls, he closed his ears with his hands, and darted on faster and faster.

The next day some peasants discovered the body of a man frozen to death, lying on a heap of snow, – it was that of the wretched incendiary. Providence, mindful of his long, of his cruel imprisonment and sufferings, spared him the anguish of knowing that the mistress of the palace he had destroyed, and who perished in the flames, was his own beloved daughter – the Serf of Pobereze!

*1892*

# OUT OF THE RUNNING

It was on the North Side of Butser on the long swell of the Hampshire Downs. Beneath, some two miles away, the grey roofs and red houses of Petersfield peeped out from amid the trees which surrounded it. From the crest of the low hills downwards the country ran in low, sweeping curves, as though some green primeval sea had congealed in the midst of a ground swell and set for ever into long verdant rollers. At the bottom, just where the slope borders upon the plain, there stood a comfortable square brick farmhouse, with a grey plume of smoke floating up from the chimney. Two cowhouses, a cluster of hayricks, and a broad strech of fields, yellow with the ripening wheat, formed a fitting setting to the dwelling of a prosperous farmer.

The green slopes were dotted every here and there with dark clumps of gorse bushes, all alight with the flaming yellow blossoms. To the left lay the broad Portsmouth Road curving over the hill, with a line of gaunt telegraph-posts marking its course. Beyond a huge white chasm opened in the grass, where the great Butser chalk quarry had been sunk. From its depths rose the distant murmur of voices, and the clinking of hammers. Just above it, between two curves of green hill, might be seen a little triangle of leaden-coloured sea, flecked with a single white sail.

Down the Portsmouth Road two women were walking, one elderly, florid and stout, with a yellow-brown Paisley shawl and a coarse serge dress, the other young and fair, with large grey eyes, and a face which was freckled like a plover's egg. Her neat white blouse with its trim black belt, and plain, close-cut skirt, gave her an air of refinement which was wanting in her companion, but there was sufficient resemblance between them to show that they were mother and daughter. The one was gnarled and hardened and wrinkled by rough country work, the other fresh and pliant from the benign influence of the Board School; but their step, the slope of their shoulders, and the movement of their hips as they walked, all marked them as of one blood.

"Mother, I can see father in the five-acre field," cried the younger, pointing in the direction of the farm.

The older woman screwed up her eyes, and shaded them with her hand.

"Who's that with him?" she asked.

"There's Bill."

"Oh, he's nobody. He's a-talkin' to someone."

"I don't know, mother. It's someone in a straw hat. Adam Wilson of the Quarry wears a straw hat."

"Aye, of course, it's Adam sure enough. Well, I'm glad we're back home time enough to see him. He'd have been disappointed if he had come over and you'd been away. Drat this dust! It makes one not fit to be seen."

The same idea seemed to have occurred to her daughter, for she had taken out her handkerchief, and was flicking her sleeves and the front of her dress.

"That's right, Dolly. There's some on your flounces. But, Lor' bless you, Dolly, it don't matter to him. It's not your dress he looks at, but your face. Now I shouldn't be very surprised if he hadn't come over to ask you from father."

"I think he'd best begin by asking me from myself," remarked the girl.

"Ah, but you'll have him, Dolly, when he does."

"I'm not so sure of that, mother."

The older woman threw up her hands:

"There! I don't know what the gals are coming to. I don't indeed. It's the Board Schools as does it. When I was a gal, if a decent young man came a-courtin', we gave him a 'Yes' or a 'No.' We didn't keep him hanging on like a half-clipped sheep. Now, here are you with two of them at your beck, and you can't give an answer to either of them."

"Why, mother, that's it," cried the daughter, with something between a laugh and a sob. "Maybe if they came one at a time I'd know what to say."

"What have you agin Adam Wilson?"

"Nothing. But I have nothing against Elias Mason."

"Nor I, either. But I know which is the most proper-looking young man."

"Looks isn't everything, mother. You should hear Elias Mason talk. You should hear him repeat poetry."

"Well, then, have Elias."

"Ah, but I haven't the heart to turn against Adam."

"There, now! I never saw such a gal. You're like a calf betwixt two hayricks; you have a nibble at the one and a nibble at the other. There's not one in a hundred as lucky as you. Here's Adam with three pound ten a week, foreman already at the Chalk Works, and likely enough to be manager if he's spared. And there's Elias, head telegraph clerk at the Post Office, and earning good money too. You can't keep 'em both on. You've got to take one or t'other, and it's my belief you'll get neither if you don't stop this shilly-shally."

"I don't care. I don't want them. What do they want to come bothering for?"

"It's human natur', gal. They must do it. If they didn't, you'd be the first to cry out maybe. It's in the Scriptures. 'Man is born for woman, as the sparks fly upwards.'" She looked up out of the corner of her eyes as if not very sure of her quotation. "Why, here be that dratted Bill. The good book says as we are all made of clay, but Bill does show it more than any lad I ever saw."

They had turned from the road into a narrow, deeply rutted lane, which led towards the farm. A youth was running towards them, loose-jointed and long limbed, with a boyish, lumbering haste, clumping fearlessly with his great yellow clogs through pool and mire. He wore brown corduroys, a dingy shirt, and a red handkerchief tied loosely round his neck. A tattered old straw hat was tilted back upon his shock of coarse, matted, brown hair. His sleeves were turned up to the elbows, and his arms and face were both tanned and roughened until his skin looked like the bark of some young sapling. As he looked up at the sound of the steps, his face with its blue eyes, brown skin, and first slight down of a tawny moustache, was not an uncomely one, were it not marred by the heavy, stolid, somewhat sulky expression of the country yokel.

"Please, mum," said he, touching the brim of his wreck of a hat, "measter seed ye coming. He sent to say as 'ow 'e were in the fire-acre lot."

"Run back, Bill, and say that we are coming," answered the farmer's wife, and the awkward figure sped away upon its return journey.

"I say, mother, what is Bill's other name?" asked girl, with languid curiosity.

"He's not got one."

"No name?"

"No, Dolly, he's a found child, and never had no father or mother that ever was heard of. We had him from the work'us when he was seven, to chop mangel wurzel, and here he's been ever since, nigh twelve year. He was Bill there, and he's Bill here."

"What fun! Fancy having only one name. I wonder what they'll call his wife?"

"I don't know. Time to talk of that when he can keep one. But now, Dolly dear, here's your father and Adam Wilson comin' across the field. I want to see you settled, Dolly. He's a steady young man. He's blue ribbon, and has money in the Post Oflice."

"I wish I knew which liked me best," said her daughter, glancing from under her hat-brim at the approaching figures. "That's the one I should like. But it's all right, mother, and I know how to find out, so don't you fret yourself any more."

The suitor was a well-grown young fellow in a grey suit, with a straw hat jauntily ribboned in red and black. He was smoking, but as he approached he thrust his pipe into his breast-pocket, and came forward with one hand outstretched, and the other gripping nervously at his watch-chain.

"Your servant, Mrs.Foster. And how are you, Miss Dolly? Another fortnight of this and you will be starting on your harvest, I suppose."

"It's bad to say beforehand what you will do in this country," said Farmer Foster, with an apprehensive glance round the heavens.

"It's all God's doing," remarked his wife piously.

"And He does the best for us, of course. Yet He does seem these last seasons to have kind of lost His grip over the weather. Well, maybe it will be made up to us this year. And what did you do at Horndean, mother?"

The old couple walked in front, and the other dropped behind, the young man lingering, and taking short steps to increase the distance.

"I say, Dolly," he murmured at last, flushing slightly as he glanced at her, "I've been speaking to your father about – you know what."

But Dolly didn't know what. She hadn't the slightest idea what. She turned her pretty little freckled face up to him and was full of curiosity upon the point.

Adam Wilson's face flushed to a deeper red.

"You know very well," said he, impatiently, "I spoke to him about marriage."

"Oh, then it's him you want."

"There, that's the way you always go on. It's easy to make fun, but I tell you that I am in earnest, Dolly. Your father says that he would have no objection to me in the family. You know that I love you true."

"How do I know that then?"

"I tell you so. What more can I do?"

"Did you ever do anything to prove it?"

"Set me something and see if I don't do it."

"Then you haven't done anything yet?"

"I don't know. I've done what I could."

"How about this?" She pulled a little crumpled sprig of dog-rose, such as grows wild in the wayside hedges, out of her bosom. "Do you know anything of that?"

He smiled, and was about to answer, when his brows suddenly contracted, his mouth set, and his eyes flashed angrily as they focussed some distant object. Following his gaze, she saw a slim, dark figure, some three fields off, walking swiftly in their direction.

"It's my friend, Mr.Elias Mason," said she.

"Your friend!" He had lost his diffidence in his anger. "I know all about that. What does he want here every second evening?"

"Perhaps he wonders what you want."

"Does he? I wish he'd come and ask me. I'd let him see what I wanted. Quick too."

"He can see it now. He has taken off his hat to me," Dolly said, laughing.

Her laughter was the finishing touch. He had meant to be impressive, and it seemed that he had only been ridiculous. He swung round upon his heel.

"Very well, Miss Foster," said he, in a choking voice, "that's all right. We know where we are now. I didn't come here to be made a fool of, so good day to you." He plucked at his hat, and walked furiously off in the direction from which they had come. She looked after him, half frightened, in the hope of seeing some sign that he had relented, but he strode onwards with a rigid neck, and vanished at a turn of the lane.

When she turned again her other visitor was close upon her – a thin, wiry, sharp-featured man with a sallow face, and a quick, nervous manner.

"Good evening, Miss Foster. I thought that I would walk over as the weather was so beautiful, but I did not expect to have the good fortune to meet you in the fields."

"I am sure that father will be very glad to see you, Mr.Mason. You must come in and have a glass of milk."

"No, thank you, Miss Foster, I should very much prefer to stay out here with you. But I am afraid that I have interrupted you in a chat. Was not that Mr.Adam Wilson who left you this moment?" His manner was subdued, but his questioning eyes and compressed lips told of a deeper and more furious jealousy than that of his rival.

"Yes. It was Mr.Adam Wilson." There was something about Mason, a certain concentration of manner, which made it impossible for the girl to treat him lightly as she had done the other.

"I have noticed him here several times lately."

"Yes. He is head foreman, you know, at the big quarry."

"Oh, indeed. He is fond of your society, Miss Foster. I can't blame him for that, can I, since I am equally so myself. But I should like to come to some understanding with you. You cannot have misunderstood what my feelings are to you? I am in a position to offer you a comfortable home. Will you be my wife, Miss Foster?"

Dolly would have liked to make some jesting reply, but it was hard to be funny with those two eager, fiery eyes fixed so intently upon her own. She began to walk slowly towards the house, while he paced along beside her, still waiting for his answer.

"You must give me a little time, Mr.Mason," she said at last. "'Marry in haste,' they say, 'and repent at leisure.'"

"But you shall never have cause to repent."

"I don't know. One hears such things."

"You shall be the happiest woman in England."

"That sounds very nice. You are a poet, Mr.Mason, are you not?"

"I am a lover of poetry."

"And poets are fond of flowers?"

"I am very fond of flowers."

"Then perhaps you know something of these?" She took out the humble little sprig, and held it out to him with an arch questioning glance. He took it and pressed it to his lips.

"I know that it has been near you, where I should wish to be," said he.

"Good evening, Mr.Mason!" It was Mr.Foster who had come out to meet them. "Where's Mr. —? Oh – ah! Yes, of course. The tea-pot's on the table, and you'd best come in afore it's over-drawn."

When Elias Mason left the farmhouse that evening, he drew Dolly aside at the door.

"I won't be able to come before Saturday," said he.

"We shall be glad to see you, Mr.Mason."

"I shall want my answer then."

"Oh, I cannot give any promise, you know."

"But I shall live in hope."

"Well, no one can prevent you from doing that." As she came to realize her power over him she had lost something of her fear, and could answer him now nearly as freely as if he were simple Adam Wilson.

She stood at the door, leaning against the wooden porch, with the long trailers of the honeysuckle framing her tall, slight figure. The great red sun was low in the west, its upper rim peeping over the low hills, shooting long, dark shadows from the beech-tree in the field, from the little group of tawny cows, and from the man who walked away from her. She smiled to see how immense the legs were, and how tiny the body in the great flat giant which kept pace beside him. In front of her in the little garden the bees droned, a belated butterfly or an early moth fluttered slowly over the flower-beds, a thousand little creatures buzzed and hummed, all busy working out their tiny destinies, as she, too, was working out hers, and each doubtless looking upon their own as the central point of the universe. A few months for the gnat, a few years for the girl, but each was happy now in the heavy summer air. A beetle scuttled out upon the gravel path and bored onwards, its six legs all working hard, butting up against stones, upsetting itself on ridges, but still gathering

itself up and rushing onwards to some all-important appointment somewhere in the grass plot. A bat fluttered up from behind the beech-tree. A breath of night air sighed softly over the hillside with a little tinge of the chill sea spray in its coolness. Dolly Foster shivered, and had turned to go in when her mother came out from the passage.

"Whatever is that Bill doing there?" she cried.

Dolly looked, and saw for the first time that the nameless farm-labourer was crouching under the beech, his browns and yellows blending with the bark behind him.

"You go out o' that, Bill!" screamed the farmer's wife.

"What be I to do?" he asked humbly, slouching forward.

"Go, cut chaff in the barn." He nodded and strolled away, a comical figure in his mud-crusted boots, his strap-tied corduroys and his almond-coloured skin.

"Well, then, you've taken Elias," said the mother, passing her hand round her daughter's waist. "I seed him a-kissing your flower. Well, I'm sorry for Adam, for he is a well-grown young man, a proper young man, blue ribbon, with money in the Post Office. Still someone must suffer, else how could we be purified. If the milk's left alone it won't ever turn into butter. It wants troubling and stirring and churning. That's what we want, too, before we can turn angels. It's just the same as butter."

Dolly laughed.

"I have not taken Elias yet," said she.

"No? What about Adam then?"

"Nor him either."

"Oh, Dolly girl, can you not take advice from them that is older. I tell you again that you'll lose them both."

"No, no, mother. Don't you fret yourself. It's all right. But you can see how hard it is. I like Elias, for he can speak so well, and is so sure and masterful. And I like Adam because – well, because I know very well that Adam loves me."

"Well, bless my heart, you can't marry them both. You'd like all the pears in the basket."

"No, mother, but I know how to choose. You see this bit of a flower, dear."

"It's a common dog-rose."

"Well, where d'you think I found it?"

"In the hedge likely."

"No, but on my window-ledge."

"Oh, but when?"

"This morning. It was six when I got up, and there it lay fresh and sweet, and new-plucked. 'Twas the same yesterday and the day before.

Every morning there it lies. It's a common flower, as you say, mother, but it is not so common to find a man who'll break short his sleep day after day just to show a girl that the thought of her is in his heart."

"And which was it?"

"Ah, if I knew! I think it's Elias. He's a poet, you know, and poets do nice things like that."

"And how will you be sure?"

"I'll know before morning. He will come again, whichever it is. And whichever it is he's the man for me. Did father ever do that for you before you married?"

"I can't say he did, dear. But father was always a powerful heavy sleeper."

"Well then, mother, you needn't fret any more about me, for as sure as I stand here, I'll tell you tomorrow which of them it is to be."

That evening the farmer's daughter set herself to clearing off all those odd jobs which accumulate in a large household. She polished the dark, old-fashioned furniture in the sitting-room. She cleared out the cellar, re-arranged the bins, counted up the cider, made a great cauldron full of raspberry jam, potted, papered, and labelled it. Long after the whole household was in bed she pushed on with her self-imposed tasks until the night was far gone and she very spent and weary. Then she stirred up the smouldering kitchen fire and made herself a cup of tea, and, carrying it up to her own room, she sat sipping it and glancing over an old bound volume of the *Leisure Hour*. Her seat was behind the little dimity window curtains, whence she could see without being seen.

The morning had broken, and a brisk wind had sprung up with the dawn. The sky was of the lightest, palest blue, with a scud of flying white clouds shredded out over the face of it, dividing, coalescing, overtaking one another, but sweeping ever from the pink of the east to the still shadowy west. The high, eager voice of the wind whistled and sang outside, rising from moan to shriek, and then sinking again to a dull mutter and grumble. Dolly rose to wrap her shawl around her, and as she sat down again in an instant her doubts were resolved, and she had seen that for which she had waited.

Her window faced the inner yard, and was some eight feet from the ground. A man standing beneath it could not be seen from above. But she saw enough to tell her all that she wished to know. Silently, suddenly, a hand had appeared from below, had laid a sprig of flower upon her ledge, and had disappeared. It did not take two seconds; she had seen the hand and she wanted nothing more. With a smile she threw herself upon the bed, drew a rug over her, and dropped into a heavy slumber.

She was awakened by her mother plucking at her shoulder.

"It's breakfast-time, Dolly, but I thought you would be weary, so I brought you up some bread and coffee. Sit up, like a dearie, and take it."

"All right, mother. Thank you. I'm all dressed, so I'll be ready to come down soon."

"Bless the gal, she's never had her things off! And, dearie me, here's the flower outside the window, sure enough! Well, and did you see who put it there?"

"Yes, I did."

"Who was it then?"

"It was Adam."

"Was it now? Well, I shouldn't have thought that he had it in him. Then Adam it's to be. Well, he's steady, and that's better than being clever, yea, seven-and-seventy-fold. Did he come across the yard?"

"No, along by the wall."

"How did you see him then?"

"I didn't see him."

"Then how can you tell?"

"I saw his hand."

"But d'you tell me you know Adam's hand?"

"It would be a blind man that couldn't tell it from Elias' hand. Why, the one is as brown as that coffee, and the other as white as the cup, with great blue veins all over it."

"Well now, I shouldn't have thought of it, but so it is. Well, it'll be a busy day, Dolly. Just hark to the rind!"

It had, indeed, increased during the few hours since dawn to a very violent tempest. The panes of the window rattled and shook. Glancing out, Dolly saw cabbage leaves and straw whirling up past the casement.

"The great hayrick is giving. They're all out trying to prop it up. My, but it do blow!"

It did indeed! When Dolly came downstairs it was all that she could do to push her way through the porch. All along the horizon the sky was brassy-yellow, but above the wind screamed and stormed, and the torn, hurrying clouds were now huddled together, and now frayed off into countless tattered streamers. In the field near the house her father and three or four labourers were working with poles and ropes, hatless, their hair and beards flying, staving up a great bulging hayrick. Dolly watched them for a moment, and then, stooping her head and rounding her shoulders, with one hand up to her little black straw hat, she staggered off across the fields.

Adam Wilson was at work always on a particular part of the hillside, and hither it was that she bent her steps. He saw the trim, dapper figure, with its flying skirts and hat-ribbons, and he came forward to meet

her with a great white crowbar in his hand. He walked slowly, however, and his eyes were downcast, with the air of a man who still treasures a grievance.

"Good mornin', Miss Foster."

"Good morning, Mr.Wilson. Oh, if you are going to be cross with me, I'd best go home again."

"I'm not cross, Miss Foster. I take it very kind that you should come out this way on such a day."

"I wanted to say to you – I wanted to say that I was sorry if I made you angry yesterday. I didn't mean to make fun. I didn't, indeed. It is only my way of talking. It was so good of you, so noble of you, to let it make no difference."

"None at all, Dolly." He was quite radiant again. "If I didn't love you so, I wouldn't mind what that other chap said or did. And if I could only think that you cared more for me than for him —"

"I do, Adam."

"God bless you for saying so! You've lightened my heart, Dolly. I have to go to Portsmouth for the firm today. Tomorrow night I'll come and see you."

"Very well, Adam, I — Oh, my God, what's that!"

A rending breaking noise in the distance, a dull rumble, and a burst of shouts and cries.

"The rick's down! There's been an accident!" They both started running down the hill.

"Father!" papted the girl, "father!"

"He's all right!" shouted her companion, "I can see him. But there's someone down. They're lifting him now. And here's one running like mad for the doctor."

A farm-labourer came rushing wildly up the lane.

"Don't you go, Missey," he cried. "A man's hurt."

"Who?"

"It's Bill. The rick came down and the ridge-pole caught him across the back. He's dead, I think. Leastwise, there's not much life in him. I'm off for Doctor Strong!" He bent his shoulder to the wind, and lumbered off down the road.

"Poor Bill! Thank God it wasn't father!" They were at the edge of the field now in which the accident had taken place. The rick lay, a shapeless mound upon the earth, with a long thick pole protruding from it, which had formerly supported the tarpaulin drawn across it in case of rain. Four men were walking slowly away, one shoulder humped, one hanging, and betwixt them they bore a formless clay-coloured bundle. He might have been a clod of the earth that he tilled, so passive, so silent, still

brown, for death itself could not have taken the burn from his skin, but with patient bovine eyes, looking out heavily from under half-closed lids. He breathed jerkily, but he neither cried out nor groaned. There was something almost brutal and inhuman in his absolute stolidity. He asked no sympathy, for his life had been without it. It was a broken tool rather than an injured man.

"Can I do anything, father?"

"No, lass, no. This is no place for you. I've sent for the doctor. He'll be here soon."

"But where are they taking him?"

"To the loft where he sleeps."

"I'm sure he's welcome to my room, father."

"No, no, lass. Better leave it alone."

But the little group were passing as they spoke, and the injured lad had heard the girl's words.

"Thank ye kindly, Missey," he murmured, with a little flicker of life, and then sank back again into his stolidity and his silence.

* * *

Well, a farm hand is a useful thing, but what is a man to do with one who has an injured spine and half his ribs smashed. Farmer Foster shook his head and scratched his chin as he listened to the doctor's report.

"He can't get better?"

"No."

"Then we had better move him."

"Where to?"

"To the work'us hospital. He came from there just this time eleven years. It'll be like going home to him."

"I fear that he is going home," said the doctor gravely. "But it's out of the question to move him now. He must lie where he is for better or for worse."

And it certanly looked for worse rather than for better. In a little loft above the stable he was stretched upon a tiny blue pallet which lay upon the planks. Above were the gaunt rafters, hung with saddles, harness, old scythe blades – the hundred things which droop, like bats, from inside such buildings. Beneath them upon two pegs hung his own pitiable wardrobe, the blue shirt and the grey, the stained trousers, and the muddy coat. A gaunt chaff-cutting machine stood at his head, and a great bin of the chaff behind it. He lay very quiet, still dumb, still uncomplaining, his eyes fixed upon the small square window looking out at the drifting sky,

and at this strange world which God has made so queerly – so very queerly.

An old woman, the wife of a labourer, had been set to nurse him, for the doctor had said that he was not to be left. She moved about the room, arranging and ordering, grumbling to herself from time to time at this lonely task which had been assigned to her. There were some flowers in broken jars upon a cross-beam, and these, with a touch of tenderness, she carried over and arranged upon a deal packing-case beside the patient's head. He lay motionless, and as he breathed there came a gritty rubbing sound from somewhere in his side, but he followed his companion about with his eyes and even smiled once as she grouped the flowers round him.

He smiled again when he heard that Mrs.Foster and her daughter had been to ask after him that evening. They had been down to the Post Office together, where Dolly had sent off a letter which she had very carefully drawn up, addressed to Elias Mason, Esq., and explaining to that gentleman that she had formed her plans for life, and that he need spare himself the pain of coming for his answer on the Saturday. As they came back they stopped in the stable, and enquired through the loft door as to the sufferer. From where they stood they could hear that horrible grating sound in his breathing. Dolly hurried away with her face quite pale under her freckles. She was too young to face the horrid details of suffering, and yet she was a year older than this poor waif, who lay in silence, facing death itself.

All night he lay very quiet – so quiet that were it not for that one sinister sound his nurse might have doubted whether life was still in him. She had watched him and tended him as well as she might, but she was herself feeble and old, and just as the morning light began to steal palely through the small loft window, she sank back in her chair in a dreamless sleep. Two hours passed, and the first voices of the men as they gathered for their work aroused her. She sprang to her feet. Great heaven! the pallet was empty. She rushed down into the stables, distracted, wringing her hands. There was no sign of him. But the stable-door was open. He must have walked – but how could he walk? he must have crawled – have writhed that way. Out she rushed, and as they heard her tale, the newly-risen labourers ran with her, until the farmer with his wife and daughter were called from their breakfast by the bustle, and joined also in this strange chase. A whoop, a cry, and they were drawn round to the corner of the yard on which Miss Dolly's window opened. There he lay within a few yards of the window, his face upon the stones, his feet thrusting out from his tattered night-gown, and his track marked by the blood from his

wounded knees. One hand was thrown out before him, and in it he held a little sprig of the pink dog-rose.

They carried him back, cold and stiff, to the pallet in the loft, and the old nurse drew the sheet over him and left him, for there was no need to watch him now. The girl had gone to her room, and her mother followed her thither, all unnerved by this glimpse of death.

"And to think," said she, "that it was only him, after all."

But Dolly sat at the side of her bed, and sobbed bitterly in her apron.

*1911*

# SWEETHEARTS

It is hard for the general practitioner who sits among his patients both morning and evening, and sees them in their homes between, to steal time for one little daily breath of cleanly air. To win it he must slip early from his bed and walk out between shuttered shops when it is chill but very clear, and all things are sharply outlined, as in a frost. It is an hour that has a charm of its own, when, but for a postman or a milkman, one has the pavement to oneself, and even the most common thing takes an ever-recurring freshness; as though causeway, and lamp, and signboard had all wakened to the new day. Then even an inland city may seem beautiful, and bear virtue in its smoke-tainted air.

But it was by the sea that I lived, in a town that was unlovely enough were it not for its glorious neighbour. And who cares for the town when one can sit on the bench at the headland, and look out over the huge blue bay, and the yellow scimitar that curves before it. I loved it when its great face was freckled with the fishing boats, and I loved it when the big ships went past, far out, a little hillock of white and no hull, with topsails curved like a bodice, so stately and demure. But most of all I loved it when no trace of man marred the majesty of Nature, and when the sun-bursts slanted down on it from between the drifting rain-clouds. Then I have seen the further edge draped in the gauze of the driving rain, with its thin grey shading under the slow clouds, while my headland was golden, and the sun gleamed upon the breakers and struck deep through the green waves beyond, showing up the purple patches where the beds of seaweed are lying. Such a morning as that, with the wind in his hair, and the spray on his lips, and the cry of the eddying gulls in his ear, may send a man back braced afresh to the reek of a sick-room, and the dead, drab weariness of practice.

It was on such another day that I first saw my old man. He came to my bench just as I was leaving it. My eye must have picked him out even in a crowded street, for he was a man of large frame and fine presence, with something of distinction in the set of his lip and the poise of his head. He limped up the winding path leaning heavily upon his stick, as though those great shoulders had become too much at last for the failing limbs that bore them. As he approached, my eyes caught Nature's danger signal, that faint bluish tinge in nose and lip which tells of a labouring heart.

"The brae is a little trying, sir," said I. "Speaking as a physician, I should say that you would do well to rest here before you go further."

He inclined his head in a stately, old-world fashion, and seated himself upon the bench. Seeing that he had no wish to speak I was silent

also, but I could not help watching him out of the corners of my eyes, for he was such a wonderful survival of the early half of the century, with his low-crowned, curly-brimmed hat, his black satin tie which fastened with a buckle at the back, and, above all, his large, fleshy, clean-shaven face shot with its mesh of wrinkles. Those eyes, ere they had grown dim, had looked out from the box-seat of mail coaches, and had seen the knots of navvies as they toiled on the brown embankments. Those lips had smiled over the first numbers of "Pickwick," and had gossiped of the promising young man who wrote them. The face itself was a seventy-year almanack, and every seam an entry upon it where public as well as private sorrow left its trace. That pucker on the forehead stood for the Mutiny, perhaps; that line of care for the Crimean winter, it may be; and that last little sheaf of wrinkles, as my fancy hoped, for the death of Gordon. And so, as I dreamed in my foolish way, the old gentleman with the shining stock was gone, and it was seventy years of a great nation's life that took shape before me on the headland in the morning.

But he soon brought me back to earth again. As he recovered his breath he took a letter out of his pocket, and, putting on a pair of horn-rimmed eye-glasses, he read it through very carefully. Without any design of playing the spy I could not help observing that it was in a woman's hand. When he had finished it he read it again, and then sat with the corners of his mouth drawn down and his eyes staring vacantly out over the bay, the most forlorn-looking old gentleman that ever I have seen. All that is kindly within me was set stirring by that wistful face, but I knew that he was in no humour for talk, and so, at last, with my breakfast and my patients calling me, I left him on the bench and started for home.

I never gave him another thought until the next morning, when, at the same hour, he turned up upon the headland, and shared the bench which I had been accustomed to look upon as my own. He bowed again before sitting down, but was no more inclined than formerly to enter into conversation. There had been a change in him during the last twenty-four hours, and all for the worse. The face seemed more heavy and more wrinkled, while that ominous venous tinge was more pronounced as he panted up the hill. The clean lines of his cheek and chin were marred by a day's growth of grey stubble, and his large, shapely head had lost something of the brave carriage which had struck me when first I glanced at him. He had a letter there, the same, or another, but still in a woman's hand, and over this he was moping and mumbling in his senile fashion, with his brow puckered, and the corners of his mouth drawn down like those of a fretting child. So I left him, with a vague wonder as to who he might be, and why a single spring day should have wrought such a change upon him.

So interested was I that next morning I was on the look out for him. Sure enough, at the same hour, I saw him coming up the hill; but very slowly, with a bent back and a heavy head. It was shocking to me to see the change in him as he approached.

"I am afraid that our air does not agree with you, sir," I ventured to remark.

But it was as though he had no heart for talk. He tried, as I thought, to make some fitting reply, but it slurred off into a mumble and silence. How bent and weak and old he seemed – ten years older at the least than when first I had seen him! It went to my heart to see this fine old fellow wasting away before my eyes. There was the eternal letter which he unfolded with his shaking fingers. Who was this woman whose words moved him so? Some daughter, perhaps, or grand-daughter, who should have been the light of his home instead of – I smiled to find how bitter I was growing, and how swiftly I was weaving a romance round an unshaven old man and his correspondence. Yet all day he lingered in my mind, and I had fitful glimpses of those two trembling, blue-veined, knuckly hands with the paper rustling between them.

I had hardly hoped to see him again. Another day's decline must, I thought, hold him to his room, if not to his bed. Great, then, was my surprise when, as I approached my bench, I saw that he was already there. But as I came up to him I could scarce be sure that it was indeed the same man. There were the curly-brimmed hat, and the shining stock, and the horn glasses, but where were the stoop and the grey-stubbled, pitiable face? He was clean-shaven and firm lipped, with a bright eye and a head that poised itself upon his great shoulders like an eagle on a rock. His back was as straight and square as a grenadier's, and he switched at the pebbles with his stick in his exuberant vitality. In the button-hole of his well-brushed black coat there glinted a golden blossom, and the corner of a dainty red silk handkerchief lapped over from his breast-pocket. He might have been the eldest son of the weary creature who had sat there the morning before.

"Good morning, sir, good morning!" he cried with a merry waggle of his cane.

"Good morning!" I answered; "how beautiful the bay is looking."

"Yes, sir, but you should have seen it just before the sun rose."

"What, have you been here since then?"

"I was here when there was scarce light to see the path."

"You are a very early riser."

"On occasion, sir; on occasion!" He cocked his eye at me as if to gauge whether I were worthy of his confidence. "The fact is, sir, that my wife is coming back to me today."

I suppose that my face showed that I did not quite see the force of the explanation. My eyes, too, may have given him assurance of sympathy, for he moved quite close to me and began speaking in a low, confidential voice, as if the matter were of such weight that even the sea-gulls must be kept out of our councils.

"Are you a married man, sir?"

"No, I am not."

"Ah, then you cannot quite understand it. My wife and I have been married for nearly fifty years, and we have never been parted, never at all, until now."

"Was it for long?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. This is the fourth day. She had to go to Scotland. A matter of duty, you understand, and the doctors would not let me go. Not that I would have allowed them to stop me, but she was on their side. Now, thank God! it is over, and she may be here at any moment."

"Here!"

"Yes, here. This headland and bench were old friends of ours thirty years ago. The people with whom we stay are not, to tell the truth, very congenial, and we have little privacy among them. That is why we prefer to meet here. I could not be sure which train would bring her, but if she had come by the very earliest she would have found me waiting."

"In that case —" said I, rising.

"No, sir, no," he entreated, "I beg that you will stay. It does not weary you, this domestic talk of mine?"

"On the contrary."

"I have been so driven inwards during these few last days! Ah, what a nightmare it has been! Perhaps it may seem strange to you that an old fellow like me should feel like this."

"It is charming."

"No credit to me, sir! There's not a man on this planet but would feel the same if he had the good fortune to be married to such a woman. Perhaps, because you see me like this, and hear me speak of our long life together, you conceive that she is old, too."

He laughed heartily, and his eyes twinkled at the humour of the idea.

"She's one of those women, you know, who have youth in their hearts, and so it can never be very far from their faces. To me she's just as she was when she first took my hand in hers in '45. A wee little bit stouter, perhaps, but then, if she had a fault as a girl, it was that she was a shade too slender. She was above me in station, you know – I a clerk, and she the daughter of my employer. Oh! it was quite a romance, I give you my word, and I won her; and, somehow, I have never got over the freshness

and the wonder of it. To think that that sweet, lovely girl has walked by my side all through life, and that I have been able —"

He stopped suddenly, and I glanced round at him in surprise. He was shaking all over, in every fibre of his great body. His hands were clawing at the woodwork, and his feet shuffling on the gravel. I saw what it was. He was trying to rise, but was so excited that he could not. I half extended my hand, but a higher courtesy constrained me to draw it back again and turn my face to the sea. An instant afterwards he was up and hurrying down the path.

A woman was coming towards us. She was quite close before he had seen her – thirty yards at the utmost. I know not if she had ever been as he described her, or whether it was but some ideal which he carried in his brain. The person upon whom I looked was tall, it is true, but she was thick and shapeless, with a ruddy, full-blown face, and a skirt grotesquely gathered up. There was a green ribbon in her hat, which jarred upon my eyes, and her blouse-like bodice was full and clumsy. And this was the lovely girl, the ever youthful! My heart sank as I thought how little such a woman might appreciate him, how unworthy she might be of his love.

She came up the path in her solid way, while he staggered along to meet her. Then, as they came together, looking discreetly out of the furthest corner of my eye, I saw that he put out both his hands, while she, shrinking from a public caress, took one of them in hers and shook it. As she did so I saw her face, and I was easy in my mind for my old man. God grant that when this hand is shaking, and when this back is bowed, a woman's eyes may look so into mine.

*1894*

# A QUESTION OF DIPLOMACY

The Foreign Minister was down with the gout. For a week he had been confined to the house, and he had missed two Cabinet Councils at a time when the pressure upon his department was severe. It is true that he had an excellent under-secretary and an admirable staff, but the Minister was a man of such ripe experience and of such proven sagacity that things halted in his absence. When his firm hand was at the wheel the great ship of State rode easily and smoothly upon her way; when it was removed she yawed and staggered until twelve British editors rose up in their omniscience and traced out twelve several courses, each of which was the sole and only path to safety. Then it was that the Opposition said vain things, and that the harassed Prime Minister prayed for his absent colleague.

The Foreign Minister sat in his dressing-room in the great house in Cavendish Square. It was May, and the square garden shot up like a veil of green in front of his window, but, in spite of the sunshine, a fire crackled and sputtered in the grate of the sick-room. In a deep-red plush arm-chair sat the great statesman, his head leaning back upon a silken pillow, one foot stretched forward and supported upon a padded rest. His deeply-lined, finely-chiselled face and slow-moving, heavily-pouched eyes were turned upwards towards the carved and painted ceiling, with that inscrutable expression which had been the despair and the admiration of his Continental colleagues upon the occasion of the famous Congress when he had made his first appearance in the arena of European diplomacy. Yet at the present moment his capacity for hiding his emotions had for the instant failed him, for about the lines of his strong, straight mouth and the puckers of his broad, overhanging forehead, there were sufficient indications of the restlessness and impatience which consumed him.

And indeed there was enough to make a man chafe, far he had much to think of, and yet was bereft of the power of thought. There was, for example, that question of the Dobrutscha and the navigation of the mouths of the Danube which was ripe for settlement. The Russian Chancellor had sent a masterly statement upon the subject, and it was the pet ambition of our Minister to answer it in a worthy fashion. Then there was the blockade of Crete, and the British fleet lying off Cape Matapan, waiting for instructions which might change the course of European history. And there were those three unfortunate Macedonian tourists, whose friends were momentarily expecting to receive their ears or their fingers in default of the exorbitant ransom which had been demanded. They must be plucked out of those mountains, by force or by diplomacy,

or an outraged public would vent its wrath upon Downing Street. All these questions pressed for a solution; and yet here was the Foreign Minister of England, planted in an arm-chair, with his whole thoughts and attention riveted upon the ball of his right toe! It was humiliating – horribly humiliating! His reason revolted at it. He had been a respecter of himself, a respecter of his own will; but what sort of a machine was it which could be utterly thrown out of gear by a little piece of inflamed gristle? He groaned and writhed among his cushions.

But, after all, was it quite impossible that he should go down to the House? Perhaps the doctor was exaggerating the situation. There was a Cabinet Council that day. He glanced at his watch. It must be nearly over by now. But at least he might perhaps venture to drive down as far as Westminster. He pushed back the little round table with its bristle of medicine-bottles, and levering himself up with a hand upon either arm of the chair, he clutched a thick, oak stick and hobbled slowly across the room. For a moment as he moved, his energy of mind and body seemed to return to him. The British fleet should sail from Matapan. Pressure should be brought to bear upon the Turks. The Greeks should be shown – Ow! In an instant the Mediterranean was blotted out, and nothing remained but that huge, undeniable, intrusive, red-hot toe. He staggered to the window and rested his left hand upon the ledge, while he propped himself upon his stick with his right. Outside lay the bright, cool, square garden, a few well-dressed passers-by, and a single, neatly-appointed carriage, which was driving away from his own door. His quick eye caught the coat-of-arms on the panel, and his lips set for a moment and his bushy eyebrows gathered ominously with a deep furrow between them. He hobbled back to his seat, and struck the gong which stood upon the table.

"Your mistress!" said he as the serving-man entered.

It was clear that it was impossible to think of going to the House. The shooting up his leg warned him that his doctor had not overestimated the situation. But he had a little mental worry now which had for the moment eclipsed his physical ailments. He tapped the ground impatiently with his stick until the door of the dressing-room swung open, and a tall, elegant lady of rather more than middle age swept into the chamber. Her hair was touched with grey, but her calm, sweet face had all the freshness of youth, and her gown of green shot plush, with a sparkle of gold passementerie at her bosom and shoulders, showed off the lines of her fine figure to their best advantage.

"You sent for me, Charles?"

"Whose carriage was that which drove away just now?"

"Oh, you've been up!" she cried, shaking an admonitory forefinger. "What an old dear it is! How can you be so rash? What am I to say to Sir

William when he comes? You know that he gives up his cases when they are insubordinate."

"In this instance the case may give him up," said the Minister, peevishly; "but I must beg, Clara, that you will answer my question."

"Oh! the carriage! It must have been Lord Arthur Sibthorpe's."

"I saw the three chevrons upon the panel," muttered the invalid.

His lady had pulled herself a little straighter and opened her large blue eyes.

"Then why ask?" she said. "One might almost think, Charles, that you were laying a trap! Did you expect that I should deceive you? You have not had your lithia powder."

"For Heaven's sake, leave it alone! I asked because I was surprised that Lord Arthur should call here. I should have fancied, Clara, that I had made myself sufficiently clear on that point. Who received him?"

"I did. That is, I and Ida."

"I will not have him brought into contact with Ida. I do not approve of it. The matter has gone too far already."

The lady seated herself on a velvet-topped foot-stool, and bent her stately figure over the Minister's hand, which she patted softly between her own.

"Now you have said it, Charles," said she. "It has gone too far – I give you my word, dear, that I never suspected it until it was past all mending. I may be to blame – no doubt I am; but it was all so sudden. The tail end of the season and a week at Lord Donnythorne's. That was all. But oh! Charlie, she loves him so, and she is our only one! How can we make her miserable?"

"Tut, tut!" cried the Minister impatiently, slapping on the plush arm of his chair. "This is too much. I tell you, Clara, I give you my word, that all my official duties, all the affairs of this great empire, do not give me the trouble that Ida does."

"But she is our only one, Charles."

"The more reason that she should not make a *mésalliance*."

"*Mésalliance*, Charles! Lord Arthur Sibthorpe, son of the Duke of Tavistock, with a pedigree from the Heptarchy. Debrett takes them right back to Morcar, Earl of Northumberland."

The Minister shrugged his shoulders.

"Lord Arthur is the fourth son of the poorest duke in England," said he. "He has neither prospects nor profession."

"But, oh! Charlie, you could find him both."

"I do not like him. I do not care for the connection."

"But consider Ida! You know how frail her health is. Her whole soul is set upon him. You would not have the heart, Charles, to separate them?"

There was a tap at the door. The Lady swept towards it and threw it open.

"Yes, Thomas?"

"If you please, my lady, the Prime Minister is below."

"Show him up, Thomas."

"Now, Charlie, you must not excite yourself over public matters. Be very good and cool and reasonable, like a darling. I am sure that I may trust you."

She threw her light shawl round the invalid's shoulders, and slipped away into the bedroom as the great man was ushered in at the door of the dressing-room.

"My dear Charles," said he cordially, stepping into the room with all the boyish briskness for which he was famous, "I trust that you find yourself a little better. Almost ready for harness, eh? We miss you sadly, both in the House and in the Council. Quite a storm brewing over this Grecian business. The *Times* took a nasty line this morning."

"So I saw," said the invalid, smiling up at his chief. "Well, well, we must let them see that the country is not entirely ruled from Printing House Square yet. We must keep our own course without faltering."

"Certainly, Charles, most undoubtedly," assented the Prime Minister, with his hands in his pockets.

"It was so kind of you to call. I am all impatience to know what was done in the Council."

"Pure formalities, nothing more. By the way, the Macedonian prisoners are all right."

"Thank goodness for that!"

"We adjourned all other business until we should have you with us next week. The question of a dissolution begins to press. The reports from the provinces are excellent."

The Foreign Minister moved impatiently and groaned.

"We must really straighten up our foreign business a little," said he. "I must get Novikoff's Note answered. It is clever, but the fallacies are obvious. I wish, too, we could clear up the Afghan frontier. This illness is most exasperating. There is so much to be done, but my brain is clouded. Sometimes I think it is the gout, and sometimes I put it down to the colchicum."

"What will our medical autocrat say?" laughed the Prime Minister. "You are so irreverent, Charles. With a bishop one may feel at one's ease. They are not beyond the reach of argument. But a doctor with his

stethoscope and thermometer is a thing apart. Your reading does not impinge upon him. He is serenely above you. And then, of course, he takes you at a disadvantage. With health and strength one might cope with him. Have you read Hahnemann? What are your views upon Hahnemann?"

The invalid knew his illustrious colleague too well to follow him down any of those by-paths of knowledge in which he delighted to wander. To his intensely shrewd and practical mind there was something repellent in the waste of energy involved in a discussion upon the Early Church or the twenty-seven principles of Mesmer. It was his custom to slip past such conversational openings with a quick step and an averted face.

"I have hardly glanced at his writings," said he. "By the way, I suppose that there was no special departmental news?"

"Ah! I had almost forgotten. Yes, it was one of the things which I had called to tell you. Sir Algernon Jones has resigned at Tangier. There is a vacancy there."

"It had better be filled at once. The longer delay the more applicants."

"Ah, patronage, patronage!" sighed the Prime Minister. "Every vacancy makes one doubtful friend and a dozen very positive enemies. Who so bitter as the disappointed place-seekers? But you are right, Charles. Better fill it at once, especially as there is some little trouble in Morocco. I understand that the Duke of Tavistock would like the place for his fourth son, Lord Arthur Sibthorpe. We are under some obligation to the Duke."

The Foreign Minister sat up eagerly.

"My dear friend," he said, "it is the very appointment which I should have suggested. Lord Arthur would be very much better in Tangier at present than in-– in–"

"Cavendish Square?" hazarded his chief, with a little arch query of his eyebrows.

"Well, let us say London. He has manner and tact. He was at Constantinople in Norton's time."

"Then he talks Arabic?"

"A smattering. But his French is good."

"Speaking of Arabic, Charles, have you dipped into Averroes?"

"No, I have not. But the appointment would be an excellent one in every way. Would you have the great goodness to arrange the matter in my absence?"

"Certainly, Charles, certainly. Is there anything else that I can do?"

"No. I hope to be in the house by Monday."

"I trust so. We miss you at every turn. The *Times* will try to make mischief over that Grecian business. A leader-writer is a terribly irresponsible thing, Charles. There is no method by which he may be confuted, however preposterous his assertions. Good-bye! Read Porson! Good-bye!"

He shook the invalid's hand, gave a jaunty wave of his broad-brimmed hat, and darted out of the room with the same elasticity and energy with which he had entered it.

The footman had already opened the great folding door to usher the illustrious visitor to his carriage, when a lady stepped from the drawing-room and touched him on the sleeve. From behind the half-closed portiere of stamped velvet a little pale face peeped out, half-curious, half-frightened.

"May I have one word?"

"Surely, Lady Charles."

"I hope it is not intrusive. I would not for the world overstep the limits —"

"My dear Lady Charles!" interrupted the Prime Minister, with a youthful bow and wave.

"Pray do not answer me if I go too far. But I know that Lord Arthur Sibthorpe has applied for Tangier. Would it be a liberty if I asked you what chance he has?"

"The post is filled up."

"Oh!"

In the foreground and background there was a disappointed face.

"And Lord Arthur has it."

The Prime Minister chuckled over his little piece of roguery.

"We have just decided it," he continued. "Lord Arthur must go in a week. I am delighted to perceive, Lady Charles, that the appointment has your approval. Tangier is a place of extraordinary interest. Catherine of Braganza and Colonel Kirke will occur to your memory. Burton has written well upon Northern Africa. I dine at Windsor, so I am sure that you will excuse my leaving you. I trust that Lord Charles will be better. He can hardly fail to be so with such a nurse."

He bowed, waved, and was off down the steps to his brougham. As he drove away, Lady Charles could see that he was already deeply absorbed in a paper-covered novel.

She pushed back the velvet curtains, and returned into the drawing-room. Her daughter stood in the sunlight by the window, tall, fragile, and exquisite, her features and outline not unlike her mother's, but frailer, softer, more delicate. The golden light struck one-half of her high-bred, sensitive face, and glimmered upon her thickly-coiled flaxen hair, striking

a pinkish tint from her closely-cut costume of fawn-coloured cloth with its dainty cinnamon ruchings. One little soft frill of chiffon nestled round her throat, from which the white, graceful neck and well-poised head shot up like a lily amid moss. Her thin white hands were pressed together, and her blue eyes turned beseechingly upon her mother.

"Silly girl! Silly girl!" said the matron, answering that imploring look. She put her hands upon her daughter's sloping shoulders and drew her towards her. "It is a very nice place for a short time. It will be a stepping stone."

"But oh! mamma, in a week! Poor Arthur!"

"He will be happy."

"What! happy to part?"

"He need not part. You shall go with him."

"Oh! mamma!"

"Yes, I say it."

"Oh! mamma, in a week?"

"Yes, indeed. A great deal may be done in a week. I shall order your *trousseau* today."

"Oh! you dear, sweet angel! But I am so frightened! And papa? Oh! dear, I am so frightened!"

"Your papa is a diplomatist, dear."

"Yes, ma."

"But, between ourselves, he married a diplomatist too. If he can manage the British Empire, I think that I can manage him, Ida. How long have you been engaged, child?"

"Ten weeks, mamma."

"Then it is quite time it came to a head. Lord Arthur cannot leave England without you. You must go to Tangier as the Minister's wife. Now, you will sit there on the settee, dear, and let me manage entirely. There is Sir William's carriage! I do think that I know how to manage Sir William James, just ask the doctor to step in this way!"

A heavy, two-horsed carriage had drawn up at the door, and there came a single stately thud upon the knocker. An instant afterwards the drawing-room door flew open and the footman ushered in the famous physician. He was a small man, clean-shaven, with the old-fashioned black dress and white cravat with high-standing collar. He swung his golden *pince-nez* in his right hand as he walked, and bent forward with a peering, blinking expression, which was somehow suggestive of the dark and complex cases through which he had seen.

"Ah!" said he, as he entered. "My young patient! I am glad of the opportunity."

"Yes, I wish to speak to you about her, Sir William. Pray take this arm-chair."

"Thank you, I will sit beside her," said he, taking his place upon the settee. "She is looking better, less anaemic unquestionably, and a fuller pulse. Quite a little tinge of colour, and yet not hectic."

"I feel stronger, Sir William."

"But she still has the pain in the side."

"Ah, that pain!" He tapped lightly under the collar-bones, and then bent forward with his biaural stethoscope in either ear. "Still a trace of dulness – still a slight crepitation," he murmured.

"You spoke of a change, doctor."

"Yes, certainly a judicious change might be advisable."

"You said a dry climate. I wish to do to the letter what you recommend."

"You have always been model patients."

"We wish to be. You said a dry climate."

"Did I? I rather forget the particulars of our conversation. But a dry climate is certainly indicated."

"Which one?"

"Well, I think really that a patient should be allowed some latitude. I must not exact too rigid discipline. There is room for individual choice – the Engadine, Central Europe, Egypt, Algiers, which you like."

"I hear that Tangier is also recommended."

"Oh, yes, certainly; it is very dry."

"You hear, Ida? Sir William says that you are to go to Tangier."

"Or any —"

"No, no, Sir William! We feel safest when we are most obedient. You have said Tangier, and we shall certainly try Tangier."

"Really, lady Charles, your implicit faith is most flattering. It is not everyone who would sacrifice their own plans and inclinations so readily."

"We know your skill and your experience, Sir William. Ida shall try Tangier, I am convinced that she will be benefited."

"I have no doubt of it."

"But you know Lord Charles. He is just a little inclined to decide medical matters as he would an affair of State. I hope that you will be firm with him."

"As long as Lord Charles honours me so far as to ask my advice I am sure that he would not place me in the false position of having that advice disregarded."

The medical baronet whirled round the cord of his *pince-nez* and pushed out a protesting hand.

"No, no, but you must be firm on the point of Tangier."

"Having deliberately formed the opinion that Tangier is the best place for our young patient, I do not think that I shall readily change my conviction."

"Of course not."

"I shall speak to Lord Charles upon the subject now when I go upstairs."

"Pray do."

"And meanwhile she will continue her present course of treatment. I trust that the warm African air may send her back in a few months with all her energy restored."

He bowed in the courteous, sweeping, old-world fashion which had done so much to build up his ten thousand a year, and, with the stealthy gait of a man whose life is spent in sick-rooms, he followed the footman upstairs.

As the red velvet curtains swept back into position, the Lady Ida threw her arms round her mother's neck and sank her face on to her bosom.

"Oh! mamma, you *are* a diplomatist!" she cried.

But her mother's expression was rather that of the general who looked upon the first smoke of the guns than of one who had won the victory.

"All will be right, dear," said she, glancing down at the fluffy yellow curls and tiny ear. "There is still much to be done, but I think we may venture to order the *trousseau*."

"Oh! how brave you are!"

"Of course, it will in any case be a very quiet affair. Arthur must get the license. I do not approve of hole-and-corner marriages, but where the gentleman has to take up an official position some allowance must be made. We can have Lady Hilda Edgecombe, and the Trevors, and the Grevilles, and I am sure that the Prime Minister would run down if he could."

"And papa?"

"Oh, yes; he will come too, if he is well enough. We must wait until Sir William goes, and, meanwhile, I shall write to Lord Arthur."

Half an hour had passed, and quite a number of notes had been dashed off in the fine, bold, park-paling handwriting of Lady Charles, when the door clashed, and the wheels of the doctor's carriage were heard grating outside against the kerb. Lady Charles laid down her pen, kissed her daughter, and started off for the sick-room. The Foreign Minister was lying back in his chair, with a red silk handkerchief over his forehead, and his bulbous, cotton-wadded foot still protruding upon its rest.

"I think it is almost liniment time," said the Lady, shaking a blue crinkled bottle. "Shall I put on a little?"

"Oh! this pestilent toe!" groaned the sufferer. "Sir William won't hear of my moving yet. I do think he is the most completely obstinate and pig-headed man that I have ever met. I tell him that he has mistaken his profession, and that I could find him a post at Constantinople. We need a mule out there."

"Poor Sir William!" laughed Lady Charles. "But how has he roused your wrath?"

"He is so persistent – so dogmatic."

"Upon what point?"

"Well, he has been laying down the law about Ida. He has decreed, it seems, that she is to go to Tangier."

"He said something to that effect before he went up to you."

"Oh, he did, did he?"

The slow-moving, inscrutable eye came sliding round to her.

The Lady's face had assumed an expression of transparent obvious innocence, an intrusive candour which is never seen in nature save when a woman is bent upon deception.

"He examined her lungs, Charles. He did not say much, but his expression was very grave."

"Not to say owlish," interrupted the Minister.

"No, no, Charles; it is no laughing matter. He said that she must have a change. I am sure that he thought more than he said. He spoke of dulness and crepitation, and the effects of the African air. Then the talk turned upon dry, bracing health resorts, and he agreed that Tangier was the place. He said that even a few months there would work a change."

"And that was all?"

"Yes, that was all."

Lord Charles shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who is but half convinced.

"But, of course," said the Lady, serenely, "if you think it better that Ida should not go she shall not. The only thing is that if she should get worse we might feel a little uncomfortable afterwards. In a weakness of that sort a very short time may make a difference. Sir William evidently thought the matter critical. Still, there is no reason why he should influence you. It is a little responsibility, however. If you take it all upon yourself and free me from any of it, so that afterwards —"

"My dear Clara, how you do croak!"

"Oh! I don't wish to do that, Charles. But you remember what happened to Lord Bellamy's child. She was just Ida's age. That was another case in which Sir William's advice was disregarded."

Lord Charles groaned impatiently.

"I have not disregarded it," said he.

"No, no, of course not. I know your strong sense, and your good heart too well, dear. You were very wisely looking at both sides of the question. That is what we poor women cannot do. It is emotion against reason, as I have often heard you say. We are swayed this way and that, but you men are persistent, and so you gain your way with us. But I am so pleased that you have decided for Tangier."

"Have I?"

"Well, dear, you said that you would not disregard Sir William."

"Well, Clara, admitting that Ida is to go to Tangier, you will allow that it is impossible for me to escort her?"

"Utterly."

"And for you?"

"While you are ill my place is by your side."

"There is your sister?"

"She is going to Florida."

"Lady Dumbarton, then?"

"She is nursing her father. It is out of the question."

"Well, then, whom can we possibly ask? Especially just as the season is commencing. You see, Clara, the fates fight against Sir William."

His wife rested her elbows against the back of the great red chair, and passed her fingers through the statesman's grizzled curls, stooping down as she did so until her lips were close to his ear.

"There is Lord Arthur Sibthorpe," said she softly.

Lord Charles bounded in his chair, and muttered a word or two such as were more frequently heard from Cabinet Ministers in Lord Melbourne's time than now.

"Are you mad, Clara!" he cried. "What can have put such a thought into your head?"

"The Prime Minister."

"Who? The Prime Minister?"

"Yes, dear. Now do, do be good! Or perhaps I had better not speak to you about it any more."

"Well, I really think that you have gone rather too far to retreat."

"It was the Prime Minister, then, who told me that Lord Arthur was going to Tangier."

"It is a fact, though it had escaped my memory for the instant."

"And then came Sir William with his advice about Ida. Oh! Charlie, it is surely more than a coincidence!"

"I am convinced," said Lord Charles, with his shrewd, questioning gaze, "that it is very much more than a coincidence. You are a very clever woman, my dear. A born manager and organizer."

The lady brushed past the compliment.

"Think of our own young days, Charlie," she whispered, with her fingers still toying with his hair. "What were you then? A poor man, not even Ambassador at Tangier. But I loved you, and believed in you, and have I ever regretted it? Ida loves and believes in Lord Arthur, and why should she ever regret it either?"

Lord Charles was silent. His eyes were fixed upon the green branches which waved outside the window; but his mind had flashed back to a Devonshire country-house of thirty years ago, and to the one fateful evening when, between old yew hedges, he paced along beside a slender girl, and poured out to her his hopes, his fears, and his ambitions. He took the white, thin hand and pressed it to his lips.

"You have been a good wife to me, Clara," said he.

She said nothing. She did not attempt to improve upon her advantage. A less consummate general might have tried to do so, and ruined all. She stood silent and submissive, noting the quick play of thought which peeped from his eyes and lip. There was a sparkle in the one and a twitch of amusement in the other, as he at last glanced up at her.

"Clara," said he, "deny it if you can! You have ordered the *trousseau*."

She gave his ear a little pinch.

"Subject to your approval," said she.

"You have written to the Archbishop."

"It is not posted yet."

"You have sent a note to Lord Arthur."

"How could you tell that?"

"He is downstairs now."

"No; but I think that is his brougham."

Lord Charles sank back with a look of half-comical despair.

"Who is to fight against such a woman?" he cried. "Oh! if I could send you to Novikoff! He is too much for any of my men. But, Clara, I cannot have them up here."

"Not for your blessing?"

"No, no!"

"It would make them so happy."

"I cannot stand scenes."

"Then I shall convey it to them."

"And pray say no more about it – today, at any rate. I have been weak over the matter."

"Oh! Charlie, you who are so strong!"

"You have outflanked me, Clara. It was very well done. I must congratulate you."

"Well," she murmured, as she kissed him, "you know I have been studying a very clever diplomatist for thirty years."

*1894*

# THROUGH THE VEIL

He was a great shock-headed, freckle-faced Borderer, the lineal descendant of a cattle-thieving clan in Liddesdale. In spite of his ancestry he was as solid and sober a citizen as one would wish to see, a town councillor of Melrose, an elder of the Church, and the chairman of the local branch of the Young Men's Christian Association. Brown was his name – and you saw it printed up as "Brown and Handiside" over the great grocery stores in the High Street. His wife, Maggie Brown, was an Armstrong before her marriage, and came from an old farming stock in the wilds of Teviothead. She was small, swarthy, and dark-eyed, with a strangely nervous temperament for a Scotch woman. No greater contrast could be found than the big, tawny man and the dark little woman, but both were of the soil as far back as any memory could extend.

One day – it was the first anniversary of their wedding – they had driven over together to see the excavations of the Roman Fort at Newstead. It was not a particularly picturesque spot. From the northern bank of the Tweed, just where the river forms a loop, there extends a gentle slope of arable land. Across it run the trenches of the excavators, with here and there an exposure of old stonework to show the foundations of the ancient walls. It had been a huge place, for the camp was fifty acres in extent, and the fort fifteen. However, it was all made easy for them since Mr.Brown knew the farmer to whom the land belonged. Under his guidance they spent a long summer evening inspecting the trenches, the pits, the ramparts and all the strange variety of objects which were waiting to be transported to the Edinburgh Museum of Antiquities. The buckle of a woman's belt had been dug up that very day, and the farmer was discoursing upon it when his eyes fell upon Mrs.Brown's face.

"Your good leddy's tired," said he. "Maybe you'd best rest a wee before we gang further."

Brown looked at his wife. She was certainly very pale, and her dark eyes were bright and wild.

"What is it, Maggie? I've wearied you. I'm thinkin' it's time we went back."

"No, no, John, let us go on. It's wonderful! It's like a dreamland place. It all seems so close and so near to me. How long were the Romans here, Mr.Cunningham?"

"A fair time, mam. If you saw the kitchen midden-pits you would guess it took a long time to fill them."

"And why did they leave?"

"Well, mam, by all accounts they left because they had to. The folk round could thole them no longer so they just up and burned the fort aboot their lugs. You can see the fire marks on the stanes."

The woman gave a quick little shudder.

"A wild night – a fearsome night," said she. "The sky must have been red that night – and these grey stones, they may have been red also."

"Aye, I think they were red," said her husband. "It's a queer thing, Maggie, and it may be your words that have done it; but I seem to see that business aboot as clear as ever I saw anything in my life. The light shone on the water."

"Aye, the light shone on the water. And the smoke gripped you by the throat. And all the savages were yelling."

The old farmer began to laugh.

"The leddy will be writin' a story aboot the old fort," said he. "I've shown many a one ower it, but I never heard it put so clear afore. Some folk have the gift."

They had strolled along the edge of the foss, and a pit yawned upon the right of them.

"That pit was fourteen foot deep," said the farmer. "What d'ye think we dug oot from the bottom o't? Weel, it was just the skeleton of a man wi' a spear by his side. I'm thinkin' he was grippin' it when he died. Now, how cam' a man wi' a spear doon a hole fourteen foot deep. He wasna' buried there, for they aye burned their dead. What make ye o' that, mam?"

"He sprang doon to get clear of the savages," said the woman.

"Weel, it's likely enough, and a' the professors from Edinburgh couldna gie a better reason. I wish you were aye here, mam, to answer a' oor deeficulties sae readily. Now, here's the altar that we foond last week. There's an inscreeption. They tell me it's Latin, and it means that the men o' this fort give thanks to God for their safety."

They examined the old worn stone. There was a large, deeply cut "VV" upon the top of it.

"What does "VV" stand for?" asked Brown.

"Naebody kens," the guide answered.

"*Valeria Victrix*," said the lady softly. Her face was paler than ever, her eyes far away, as one who peers down the dim aisles of over-arching centuries.

"What's that?" asked her husband sharply.

She started as one who wakes from sleep.

"What were we talking about?" she asked.

"About this 'VV' upon the stone."

"No doubt it was just the name of the Legion which put the altar up."

"Aye, but you gave some special name."

"Did I? How absurd! How should I ken what the name was?"

"You said something – 'Victrix,' I think."

"I suppose I was guessing. It gives me the queerest feeling, this place, as if I were not myself, but someone else."

"Aye, it's an uncanny place," said her husband, looking round with an expression almost of fear in his bold grey eyes. "I feel it mysel'. I think we'll just be wishin' you good evenin', Mr.Cunningham, and get back to Melrose before the dark sets in."

Neither of them could shake off the strange impression which had been left upon them by their visit to the excavations. It was as if some miasma had risen from those damp trenches and passed into their blood. All the evening they were silent and thoughtful, but such remarks as they did make showed that the same subject was in the mind of each. Brown had a restless night, in which he dreamed a strange, connected dream, so vivid that he woke sweating and shivering like a frightened horse. He tried to convey it all to his wife as they sat together at breakfast in the morning.

"It was the clearest thing, Maggie," said he. "Nothing that has ever come to me in my waking life has been more clear than that. I feel as if these hands were sticky with blood."

"Tell me of it – tell me slow," said she.

"When it began, I was oot on a braeside. I was laying flat on the ground. It was rough and there were clumps of heather. All round me was just darkness, but I could hear the rustle and the breathin' of men. There seemed a great multitude on every side of me, but I could see no one. There was a low chink of steel sometimes, and then a number of voices would whisper, 'Hush!' I had a ragged club in my hand, and it had spikes o' iron near the end of it. My heart was beatin' quickly, and I felt that a moment of great danger and excitement was at hand. Once I dropped my club, and again from all round me the voices in the darkness cried, 'Hush!' I put oot my hand, and it touched the foot of another man lying in front of me. There was someone at my very elbow on either side. But they said nothin'.

"Then we all began to move. The whole braeside seemed to be crawlin' downwards. There was a river at the bottom and a high-arched wooden bridge. Beyond the bridge were many lights – torches on a wall. The creepin' men all flowed towards the bridge. There had been no sound of any kind, just a velvet stillness. And then there was a cry in the darkness, the cry of a man who had been stabbed suddenly to the hairt. That one cry swelled out for a moment, and then the roar of a thoosand

furious voices. I was runnin'. Everyone was runnin'. A bright red light shone out, and the river was a scarlet streak. I could see my companions now. They were more like devils than men, wild figures clad in skins, with their hair and beards streamin'. They were all mad with rage, jumpin' as they ran, their mouths open, their arms wavin', the red light beatin' on their faces. I ran, too, and yelled out curses like the rest. Then I heard a great cracklin' of wood, and I knew that the palisades were doon. There was a loud whistlin' in my ears, and I was aware that arrows were flying past me. I got to the bottom of a dyke, and I saw a hand stretched doon from above. I took it, and was dragged to the top. We looked doon, and there were silver men beneath us holdin' up their spears. Some of our folk sprang on to the spears. Then we others followed, and we killed the soldiers before they could draw the spears oot again. They shouted loud in some foreign tongue, but no mercy was shown them. We went ower them like a wave, and trampled them doon into the mud, for they were few, and there was no end to our numbers.

"I found myself among buildings, and one of them was on fire. I saw the flames spoutin' through the roof. I ran on, and then I was alone among the buildings. Someone ran across in front o' me. It was a woman. I caught her by the arm, and I took her chin and turned her face so as the light of the fire would strike it. Whom think you that it was, Maggie? "

His wife moistened her dry lips.

"It was I," she said.

He looked at her in surprise.

"That's a good guess," said he. "Yes, it was just you. Not merely like you, you understand. It was you – you yourself. I saw the same soul in your frightened eyes. You looked white and bonnie and wonderful in the firelight. I had just one thought in my head – to get you awa' with me; to keep you all to mysel' in my own home somewhere beyond the hills. You clawed at my face with your nails. I heaved you over my shoulder, and I tried to find a way oot of the light of the burning hoose and back into the darkness.

"Then came the thing that I mind best of all. You're ill, Maggie. Shall I stop? My God! you have the very look on your face that you had last night in my dream —

"You screamed. He came runnin' in the firelight. His head was bare; his hair was black and curled; he had a naked sword in his hand, short and broad, little more than a dagger. He stabbed at me, but he tripped and fell. I held you with one hand, and with the other —"

His wife had sprung to her feet with writhing features.

"Marcus!" she cried. "My beautiful Marcus! Oh, you brute! you brute! you brute!" There was a clatter of tea-cups as she fell forward senseless upon the table.

* * *

They never talk about that strange, isolated incident in their married life. For an instant the curtain of the past had swung aside, and some strange glimpse of a forgotten life had come to them. But it closed down, never to open again. They live their narrow round – he in his shop, she in her household – and yet new and wider horizons have vaguely formed themselves around them since that summer evening by the crumbling Roman fort.

*1911*

# A COACHFUL OF GHOSTS

*The Story of a Noble House in the Reign of Terror*

## I

"Monsieur le Vicompte de Maury." This announcement made one evening in January, 1792, at the outer drawing-room door of the Chateau de Grou, had rather a singular effect on six well-bred people who were sitting there.

The old Marquise, enthroned in a high arm-chair beside the yawning chimney with its wood-fire, made an exclamation, and threw a half-fierce, half-laughing glance at her son the Marquis, who started up from the table where he was playing backgammon with his wife's cousin, the Chevalier de Mazan. The younger Marquise, a thin, precise-looking woman of five-and-forty, pinched her mouth up into its most forbidding expression, and raised her eyes with a frown from the tapestry-frame over which she and her daughter-in-law, the Comtesse de Grou, were bending and blinding themselves. The Comte, seeing his father's hasty movement, got up too from his chair in the background, and came forward one or two steps with a dignified slowness which was in itself a reproof to his perturbed relations.

There was no time to say or do anything. The visitor, welcome or not, walked forward into the room and met these six pairs of eyes, curious, angry, contemptuous, cold, astonished, haughty. Not one friendly look, not one sign of welcome. The visitor's cheeks, already ruddy from the cold air outside, took a deeper shade as he exchanged formal bows with the inmates of this inhospitable salon. His appearance at least did not deserve such a reception. A handsome, spirited-looking young man, a head and shoulders taller than the other gentlemen present, with one of those expressive faces that give unprejudiced people an instant feeling of liking and confidence. At the Chateau de Grou, however, M.de Maury was regarded as an enemy, for several reasons, and it was not without hesitation that the old Marquise brought herself to treat him as an equal, and politely motioned him to a chair.

"Sit down, monsieur, I beg of you," said she. "You are out late this evening, but perhaps it is the fashion. It is long since I lived in Paris, and I do not know what they do there now."

"Pardon me, madame, for appearing at such a strange hour," said M.de Maury. "But, as you may imagine, it is only an affair of the greatest importance that has brought me here at all."

"Indeed! And to what do we owe this unusual honour?" said the Marquise blandly.

"Madame, it is-– it may be-– a matter of life and death."

"Is it possible? Before we come to anything so serious, may one ask for the last news from Paris? I should not care to leave the world in a state of ignorance. What are your good friends the patriots doing now, monsieur?"

"There is no special news this week, madame. It is still disturbed, of course, but the people will calm down in time. If the Constitution we have made is allowed to work, we shall have peace and prosperity, in which all our past confusion will be forgotten."

"Then, monsieur, we shall all have to pray for bad memories," said the Chevalier.

"What is your saint, your hero, doing? M.de Lafayette – what do you call him – Motier?" said the Marquis, laughing. "By-the-bye, let me apologize for my ill-trained servants, who gave you your title at the door. The fact is, monsieur, I forget who you are. Citoyen —"

"Bernard Lavigne," said the young man, smiling a little. "One must be willing to sacrifice empty distinctions at the wish of the nation. But, monsieur – let me ask you – was anything great and sublime ever done without a touch of absurdity in the doing it?"

"Perhaps not; but one wants the sublimity to excuse the absurdity," said the Marquis. "And to speak candidly, I have seen absurdities enough, and horrors enough, in these last two years; but my very strongest spectacles have not availed to detect the sublimity."

"There is something sublime on the tapis now, however," said the old Marquise. "A matter of life and death. Will Monsieur de Maury break it to us before he enters on the subject of Monsieur de Lafayette?"

"Madame," began Bernard, with a little hesitation.

His eyes wandered once or twice round the room, as if to reassure themselves of something.

"Do not disturb yourself," said Madame de Grou. "All our hearts are strong enough to bear bad news. At least, I can promise that you will see no weakness."

The Vicomte bowed.

"A report has reached us, madame," he said, "that you are thinking of emigration. It has spread itself in the town and in the neighbouring villages. People say that you mean to drive away in state in your large coach with all your household, without any attempt at concealment. Mesdames et messieurs," he went on, rising from his chair, and looking earnestly round on all the dimly-lit faces, "believe what I say, and do not distrust me. In the present state of people's minds, you cannot attempt

anything more dangerous. Your carriage will not be allowed to pass. Seeking liberty, you will find yourselves in prison. I warn you honestly, and as a friend."

There was a moment's pause after the young man had spoken.

"And as a friend, what would you advise us to do?" said the Marquis.

"Ah, cher monsieur, thank you a thousand times! Will you indeed trust me, and take my advice? Then let me implore you to stay here, and not to think of emigration. You are comparatively safe here. There are still some who respect you. And my father's influence will do a great deal for your protection. Ah, let me hear that you have given up all thoughts of this mad and dangerous scheme."

The Chevalier glanced at the Comte and laughed a little sneeringly, as he leaned over the backgammon board. The Marquis smiled too.

"And this is your new French liberty!" he said. "A man cannot drive away from his house in his own carriage without being stopped and imprisoned. Curious, truly!"

"One has not far to seek for an explanation in this case, my dear Marquis," said the Chevalier de Mazan, nodding his head with a side glance at M.de Maury. "In fact, you may take it as a general rule that, where the people rise unexpectedly, they are egged on to it by some person superior in birth to themselves – some person with a motive. But such persons are too apt to spoil their own game by a lurking wish to stand well with all parties."

Monsieur de Mazan was generally considered the genius, the wit, and the wise man of the family. Everybody hung upon his words, smiled, and looked to see how they were taken by the object of them.

"I am glad to think," said Bernard, "that Monsieur de Grou does not share in the vile suspicions of monsieur his cousin. He has known me too long —"

"And have I had any reason to increase my esteem with my knowledge?" said the Marquis, with a little bow.

The young man was about to answer, when an appearance at the door which separated the salon from another room beyond checked the words upon his lips.

A girl, dressed in white, very slim and graceful, with a small fair face and large frightened blue eyes, stood still in the tapestry-framed doorway, and gazed at him. His low bow seemed to bring her back to herself. She answered it with as weeping courtesy, and glided round with light steps on the polished floor, behind the two younger Mesdames de Grou and their frame, to a corner behind the old Marquise's chair.

"Have you brought me my fan, Leonore?" said the old woman.

"Here it is, madame," said the girl, in a low voice, putting it into her hand.

But while she spoke and moved she never took her eyes away from the Vicomte de Maury, who stood opposite to her with his face to the whole circle. Her entrance seemed to silence them all for a moment. The Chevalier still smiled, with a snake-like contentment, keeping his black eyes fixed on Bernard; but the Marquis looked a little disturbed, and his face twitched angrily.

The young Comtesse de Grou, a weak, impatient-looking little person, glanced up at her husband, who was standing near her, with an expression which said, "Finish this scene, for pity's sake!" And the Comte, stepping forward with a Louis-Quatorze air, ventured to ask M.de Maury whether they might expect any further information.

"I have warned your family of their danger, monsieur," replied Bernard quietly, "and I still hope, not without avail. I must endure your suspicions, which I might have expected. I am happy to know that there is one person, at least, who will not share in them."

"Never, never!" came a quick half-whisper from behind the Marquise's chair.

Bernard bowed gratefully.

"Allons, this is too much!" said the Chevalier, in a low tone, to M.de Grou. "Will you complete this business, or must I?"

But the old Marquise was doing it for them.

"Adieu, then, monsieur," she said, rising. "We beg to offer you our thanks. If your warning is founded on fact, we probably shall never meet again. I would only ask you to use your influence and that of monsieur votre pere to make our stay in prison as short as possible."

M.de Maury bowed low, and walked out of the room. The Marquis waved his son back, and followed him himself.

"Listen to me a moment, mon cher," he said, drawing him aside in the ante-room. "I believe myself that you are honest in your way. But you see you are in bad odour with de Mazan and the ladies. He is jealous of you, and they are *all* on his side."

"Pardon, monsieur – not *all*, or where would be his jealousy?"

"Ah! I did not count the demoiselle herself. But listen: I will give you a chance, on my own responsibility. Emigrate with us. Trust yourself to that same dangerous coach. When we are safe over the frontier, you can quarrel with de Mazan – shoot him, if you like – and then you have your chance."

"You are very good, monsieur, but my lot is cast in with France. As to that coach – if you would but believe the danger! – ah, let me at least save mademoiselle your niece!"

"It is impossible," said the Marquis, turning away. "I have given my word to de Mazan. I cannot break it if I would."

"What horror! what barbarity! To sacrifice such a life —"

"Let us say no more. Some one is coming. I thank you for your good intentions. Adieu, adieu!"

The Marquis de Grou tripped back into the salon, looking quite old and grave, and the Vicomte de Maury left the *château*.

## II

Mdlle.Leonore de Grou d'Isambert was an important person in her family. Her father had married – an unusual step for a younger son, and, what was more extraordinary still, had made a love-match with – the heiress of the Isamberts, thus possessing himself of a fine chateau and a large estate, and becoming quite independent of his own people. But he did not long enjoy his good fortune. He and his wife both died young, and their one child was taken charge of by her grandmother, the old Marquise de Grou.

Leonore was a quiet timid girl, and her submissson to the stately, severe, domineering old lady was unusually complete and unquestioning, even for that country and that time. She was to marry M.de Mazan, a cold-hearted man of the world, more than twenty years older than herself. Clever, well-bred, aristocratic, an altogether delightful person, said the de Grou chorus whenever he was mentioned. Only the little Marquis sometimes held his peace; there were one or two points on which he differed with his wife's brilliant cousin. Nothing that signified, of course; only slight doubts whether it was really possible to be cruel, grasping, ungenerous, and yet hold the front rank among gentlemen.

No regular contract had yet been made between M.de Mazan and Mdlle.d'Isambert, but every one understood that the match was to be, and approved of it. Those fine estates could not be in better hands than the Chevalier's. His connection with the family was also an advantage. Leonore was already eighteen, and the marriage might have taken place before this had it not been for the great disturbances in France, which had a restraining effort on the Chevalier's eagerness.

Her chateau was near Paris, in the thick of the Revolution; and he thought it might be as well to wait for quieter times, and not to hamper himself just now with a young unwilling bride. Her family would take care that she did not escape him.

And this emigration scheme would take her away from the influence of young Bernard de Maury. His father, the Comte de Maury, the de Grou's nearest neighbour, had never been very friendly with them, having a way of considering his humanity before his nobility, quite against all their traditions. But till within the last year or two Bernard had been a frequent guest at the Chateau de Grou; the Marquis liked him, and an old childish friendship between him and Leonore had advanced into something not the less sweet because it was hopeless, and because in its language there were few spoken words.

Even now Bernard was not without his allies in the chateau, though perhaps they were not very powerful ones. There was an old woman, Pernette Flicquet by name, who had been nurse to Mdlle.d'Isambert, Leonore's mother, and to Leonore herself. It was in her charge that Leonore had come from Isambert to Grou, after her mother's death.

Pernette's daughter Jeanneton had also come in the suite of the little demoiselle, and not long after had received permission from the Marquis to marry Luc Bienbon, a garde-chasse of M.de Maury's. Pernette had at once established herself in antagonism to the old Marquise, who often threatened to turn her off, but always ended by granting a contemptuous forgiveness, knowing that the sharp, plain-spoken, republican old woman was almost indispensable to Leonore.

"Allez!" said Madame de Grou, "Pernette talks all the nonsense you can imagine, but she is good at heart. Who cares for her and her tongue? Let her stay."

If Pernette and her daughter could have poisoned M.de Mazan, and given their young lady to Bernard de Maury, they would have been troubled with few scruples. But the great Grou household was too much for them, and till now they had only grumbled.

The preparations for driving off in the family coach went on quite openly. The ladies superintended the packing of their wardrobes, and Pernette, with sour acquiescence, received the Marquise's order to get ready Mdlle.d'Isambert's best gowns and jewelry.

"He!" said Pernette, "a fine present for the nation! Madame is determined it shall have everything. Now if I had my will, we should bury a few chests in the courtyard."

"For you to dig up when we are gone, my good Pernette?" said Madame de Grou.

"As madame pleases. But where mademoiselle goes, certainly I go," answered Pernette coolly.

"What! You mean to venture yourself in this dangerous coach? Seriously, have you heard any of these reports – that we shall drive

ourselves straight to the guillotine? Or is it all in Monsieur le Vicomte de Maury's imagination?"

At that moment Pernette's heart was softened towards the old lady, who seemed to appeal to her as a friend, looking at her with eyes full of human anxiety, but not a touch of fear.

"Madame la Marquise knows what those dogs of villagers are" said she. "I have only heard from my daughter that her husband says – that it is a great danger. M.le Vicomte has more sense than most of these gentlemen. He knows what he is talking about."

"But we do not trust him," said the Marquise, shaking her head. "He and his father are false and dishonourable. Go, Pernette, do as I tell you, and send mademoiselle to me."

"Ah, these poor nobles!" said Pernette, as she trotted off to do her duty. "I have but half a heart for the patriots. But if we can save the sweetest of them all, the others must go their own way."

Certainly the household had no lack of warnings. During the next day or two, the dogs of the chateau howled almost unceasingly; the Grou ghost, a white flying figure, who used sometimes to sweep with a rustle of wings and garments over the head of any one who found himself benighted outside the walls, was suddenly endued with a voice, and screamed and sobbed at night round the towers like an Irish Banshee: so the story goes.

Mdlle.d'Isambert had a strange and rather terrible dream, which she told to Pernette, and also to her grandmother. They both laughed; but the dream left its impression, and had its consequence.

"Madame," said Leonore to the Marquise, "I dreamed that the large coach with the six brown horses was drawn up yonder, under our windows, on the green beyond the moat."

"And why not at the door?" said Madame de Grou.

"Indeed I do not know. It stood there, and you were all getting in. *I saw you, one by one, as I looked out of my window – you, my aunt, my uncle, my cousins, and Monsieur le Chevalier.*"

"And not yourself? That was droll enough."

"I was in my room – the door was locked and the window was barred, so that I could not get out. Ah, how terrified I was! I called to you, but you did not hear. I ran up and down the room; I shook the door; I tried to squeeze myself through the bars of the window. I thought I was left alone in the chateau – you had all forgotten me. The coach moved off round the grass – it was night, you know, and there were lanterns burning, and I saw frost sparkling on the ground. Then I tried again and pushed myself through the bars, and clambered down the wall through the ivy – I do not know how. Then I ran through the cold wet grass and overtook the

coach just as it turned to go down the hill. I sprang to the door and held on with both hands, and cried out to you to take me in. Ah, now comes the frightful part of the dream! The people in the coach – they were not you – it was full of *ghosts – strange luminous forms, through which I saw their skeletons*. Heavens! what a terrible sight! I fell backwards into the grass; and then I awoke."

For once Leonore forgot her awe of her grandmother, crouched down by her side, and hid her face against her stiff satin gown. Madame de Grou looked down at her with a smile of mixed affection and contempt.

"A wonderful dream, truly!" said she. "But it has not been the custom of our family to dream terrors any more than to feel them. However, my dear Leonore, console yourself. Your safety is very important; and when we emigrate, you certainly will not be forgotten or left behind. Foolish girl, have a little more courage, and learn to laugh at your dreams. Stand up: there is some one coming."

"Shall you tell the others, madame?" asked Leonore, rising to her feet.

"I certainly shall not repeat such absurdities," answered Madame de Grou. "And if you must have your terrors, pray keep them to yourself."

The young Comtesse came tripping into the room, to ask some question of her grandmother; and Leonore, who was not fond of her cousin, withdrew into a window, and looked out across the wintry landscape. The chateau stood high perched on a hill, with woods behind, and a broad slope of park-land, crossed by avenues, dividing it from the little town of Grou, which crept and established itself up the sides of the valley. Behind the long blue ridge opposite was the village of Maury and its chateau, smaller and less important than Grou, but held for many centuries by a race without any stain upon their name, foremost always in the wars and councils of the province. But now they were traitors to their order; and if a lady of Grou let her eyes wander across the faint smoke and dark roofs in the valley to those heights beyond, which always caught the last western sun, it would have been an insult to suppose that her well-trained thoughts could stray as far as the Chateau de Maury.

## III

It had never been the custom of the lords of Grou to shut their gates against anybody; they were far too proud to be suspicious. Thus there were peasants going in and out of the courtyard at all hours, and thus Luc and

Jeanneton were able to pay as many visits as they pleased to their good mother Pernette.

On one of those days of suspense, before any attempt was made to carry out the emigration plan, at about five in the evening, Leonore was sitting in the window of her own room. She had escaped from the salon half an hour before, and had been trying to strengthen and console herself by reading the *Imitation*, but now the fast-fading light obliged her to lay the book down. Her long white fingers were folded over its brown cover, and her face was turned towards the window.

The sky was very clear, but the landscape was already shrouded in twilight: nothing was plainly to be seen but the ridge of distant hills, which could only bring sad thoughts to her mind. In the pale, unconscious, immovable face there was a desolate resignation; at eighteen Leonore had nothing to hope for; her fate was fixed; even a wish was wrong and forbidden.

She would hardly have confessed what it was that she wanted; after all, her life was like the lives of all other French young ladies. And if it was not arranged quite to please her, why, was it not right to give up one's own will? was this world ever a happy place? Certain high precepts of the book she had been reading were in her mind as she sat, and made her ashamed of her discontent, but a little more despairing too; how could she ever reach such heights of willing self-denial?

"My pretty one will be perished, sitting here," said the voice of old Pernette. "And she will lose all her senses if she dreams too much over that book of madame's."

"It is a very beautiful good book, Pernette," said Leonore, slowly rousing herself, and turning her blue eyes from the window to her old nurse's anxious withered face.

"That may be," said Pernette. "I can't read, as mademoiselle knows, and I am quite contented. I never saw anything but sighs and frowns come from reading those books. Madame la Marquise is always in a demon of a temper after she has done her reading. Mademoiselle has the temper of an angel, on the contrary, but she will make herself sad and dismal, and that is all the worse for her poor servants. Now she is not in a good-humour, and I came to beg her to do something for me."

"What is it, then, Pernette? My humours make no difference to you," said Leonore, smiling very sweetly.

"Mademoiselle, my daughter Jeanneton is in the garden at the foot of the turret-stairs. She has a special message which she will give to no one but our little princess herself. Will she be wrapped up in this great cloak, and go down to speak to poor Jeanneton?"

"Why could not she come here?" asked Leonore. But she got up, and Pernette hastily put the cloak round her shoulders.

"Dame, she was in a hurry. She had a reason of her own, ma petite."

Mademoiselle d'Isambert, accustomed to trust her old nurse implicitly, followed her out of the room and down a winding staircase, which opened by a little turret-door into a corner of the garden between the walls and the moat. A few evergreens made a shelter, and close by there was a bridge of planks laid over the moat for the convenience of the servants, who were thus able to take the shortest way to the village.

Jeanneton, in her high starched cap, jacket and short petticoats, was standing on the grass outside the turret-door.

"What have you to say to me, Jeanneton?" said Leonore's low sweet voice in the doorway.

"Would mademoiselle step outside? There was a person who – wished to speak to her," stammered the femme Bienbon – la Bienbonne, as her neighbours called her.

"Quick, petite!" whispered Pernette. "Yonder – in the shadow of those bushes! It is an affair of life and death!"

Though Leonore was timid, she was by no means a coward, and she stepped down from the doorway and glided across the grass, like a slender ghost in the twilight, till she reached the bushes that Pernette pointed out to her. A man was standing there, withdrawn in the shadow. He started forward and kissed her hand.

"Ah, monsieur, is it you?" exclaimed Leonore, under her breath.

"Do not be angry with your poor friend, mademoiselle Leonore, you know me very well. You trust me, do you not?"

"You need not ask that."

She raised her pale face, looking at him wistfully. Her own strong feelings had suddenly driven out all thought of the proprieties, of her stern grandmother, of the Chevalier, of the stiff and horrified circle at the chateau. Her ruling thoughts now were of pride in her lover and joy in his presence. He was so different from all the other gentlemen she knew, with his frank manners and generous instincts. To compare him with M.de Mazan, it was indeed 'Hyperion to a satyr'; but Leonore's devout comparison was of the Archangel Michael to his great adversary.

One need hardly say that, for anything either of them knew, it might have been a warm summer evening when they stood there under the bush. But after a minute or two a little of the girl's anxious timidity came back to her.

"Is it safe for you to be here?" she whispered. "Why did you come?"

"Leonore, first, will you do as I ask you? Promise me that."

"Ah, if I could, mon ami; but I dare not! It is very wicked of me to be here now. But you know those women cheated me. And I am not really sorry, for I longed to thank you for coming that night to warn us, like a good true friend."

"Then they have not changed their plans? It is still to be that *terrible coach*?"

"O yes; and I think it will end in our all dying. I dreamt of it" and she shivered – "I won't tell you my dream, though you would not laugh at it as my grandmother did. But are you angry, Bernard, that I cannot make you that promise? What did you want me to do? I will do it if I can."

"Let me take you away with me, now, into safety. You must consent. If you care for me in the least, you will."

"And leave the others to their fate?" she said, after a moment's pause.

"It is the fate they have chosen for themselves," he answered passionately. "Why should these people, in their obstinate running on death, be allowed to drag you with them? It is a horror – an unheard-of tyranny! If you can refuse me now, you never loved me! Come, my angel."

"How is it that you can save me, and not them?" said Leonore, holding back from him.

"Because you will be safe at Maury. My father will welcome you as his daughter. And the people have no rage against you – how could they have? But in such times the innocent go with the guilty. You will come with me?"

"Do not ask me – I cannot!"

"Ah, then, pardon my mistake! I had a foolish notion that you cared for me, mademoiselle," said Bernard, setting his teeth, and beginning to walk away.

"Bernard, stay! If my life would save yours, you would soon see-– What am I saying? Be patient, and listen to me. I am very miserable; but one's duty must come first – you always used to think so. How could I leave my grandmother to go through this danger alone? I have belonged to her all my life – how could I steal away and desert her now like a coward? I always was stupid and cowardly; I know it very well. But this thing I will not do, it is too dishonourable. I am bound to my family, and I must stay with them. Ah, let us both try and bear it bravely. Go away and forget me: that is the best thing you can do. "

"Then you will stay here and forget me?" said de Maury. Leonore shook her head, while her tears ran fast.

"Well, my queen, my fairy, my crowned saint," he said, suddenly falling on one knee, "this I swear to you! If you will not save yourself, you shall be saved! You are not angry with me for that? But as to your anger, I see I must risk it."

"If you run yourself into danger for my sake, I shall indeed be angry. Ah, Jeanneton, what is it?"

"Mademoiselle, Madame la Marquise is coming upstairs!"

"Heavens! Adieu, Bernard! If she knew of this, she would kill me!"

M.de Maury watched the white flying figure cross the grass and dart in at the tower-door. Then he pulled his slouched hat over his face, and slowly and carefully left the precincts of the chateau. He almost forgot his disappointment, on his way down the hill, in the necessity of making fresh plans. And whatever future dangers and difficulties might be, it was inspiriting to find how thoroughly worthy she was – this gentle timid maiden of Grou – of a brave man's devotion.

## IV

The next afternoon a family council was held in the salon. Leonore, who had not been called to it, was sitting by the wood-fire in her grandmother's large room, busy with some embroidery, when her cousin, the young Comtesse, came in and joined her. She walked up to the fire and stood there shivering.

Leonore had never had much sympathy with this youngest of the Mesdames de Grou, whose ways were often those of a child without its attractiveness; but now, lifting her eyes to her face, she saw there something quite new. The Comtesse was flushed and agitated, and was looking down at her cousin with a tearful, trembling nervousness.

"What is it, ma cousine?" said Leonore. "Have you been in the salon? What have they decided?"

"Something dreadful!" said the Comtesse. "I declare to you, if I live through this night, it will be only to die of terror afterwards. Yes, I know I ought to be ashamed of myself. You may well look surprised; you thought you were the only coward in the house – at least, our grandmother always says so. But here is another to keep you company."

"What is it all about?" said Leonore.

"We start tonight, child – imagine! Figure to yourself what a terrible scene it will be! And the coach is not to come to the door, but to be drawn up on the green younder; and we shall drive away by the cart-road

into the country, so as to avoid the town altogether. Madame Grandmother and Xavier de Mazan have arranged it all. What do you think of it? To me it seems a detestable plan; but what is my little voice? M.de Grou, of course, obeys his mother, and Madame de Grou has no opinion at all; and Francois never will disagree with Xavier; so there we are. But if you chose to speak to Xavier, it might make some difference."

"My dear, you are quite mistaken. I am nobody."

Leonore had laid her needle down, and was gazing at the red logs. The short afternoon would soon die away into twilight; then would come the evening, *and then life or death*! The Comtesse stood beside her cousin, a strange contrast to Leonore's dreamy grace, with her stiff little figure, high heels, and mountain of thickly-powdered hair.

"But why do you dislike this plan so much?" said Leonore, without looking up.

"O, because I hate the dark," said the Comtesse petulantly. "I am afraid of it, I tell you, and all the horrid flashing lights; I think it is much more dangerous than day-light. So cold too. I wish we could stay here. I don't believe any one would hurt us. They would be a set of ungrateful monsters if they did. Tell me the truth now, Leonore: do you think we shall be allowed to pass?"

"I don't know – no, I think not."

"Then it will be the fault of those odious de Maurys."

The little Comtesse quailed before the angry flash of her cousin's eyes, generally so soft and timid.

"You have no right to say a word against them! If they could save us, we should be safe, though certainly we have not deserved anything from them. De Maury – if nobility went by worth, theirs would be the noblest name in France."

The Comtesse shrugged her shoulders, threw up her hands and laughed.

"Well, Leonore, this is very fine, my dear clild. You are quite enthusiastic. But if one may venture to advise you, don't let Xavier de Mazan hear anything like that."

"I do not care what he hears; it makes no difference to me," said Leonore. "If one must die, must give up all, it is at least a blessing to have known something good and noble on earth."

"Mon Dieu, my cousin," said the Comtesse more seriously, "is it right for a demoiselle to talk in this way? I assure you one might almost imagine that you were in love with that young de Maury. But I will not be so unkind as to repeat what you say. Only pray take care, and control yourself a little."

"Why should I hide it, especially now?" said Leonore, looking up into her cousin's face with shining eyes, but without any change of colour or variation of voice. "If you have found it out for yourself, so be it. I love him with all my heart! And I would rather die tonight than escape safely out of the country and be married-– ah!"

Her voice suddenly failed, and she hid her face in her hands, with something between a groan and a cry.

"Leonore, you freeze me with horror!" said her cousin. "Heavens! is it possible that I should have lived to hear such words from a relation – from a demoiselle de Grou? You feel shame, do you not? You well may. Unwomanly, degraded! I cannot believe my ears! The girl must be mad!"

"No," said Leonore. "But I have told the truth, perhaps for the first time in my life, and I am glad of it."

"And I am sorry," said the Comtesse, with dignity, "to find you so unworthy of your name. I will try to forget what you have said, unfortunate girl. A year hence, if we live, you will be thankful to me for not reminding you of it."

A rustle, and a few measured taps upon the boards, told Leonore that her cousin was leaving the room. She sat still, with her face hidden, cold and stiff with a misery too great for tears. After some time she heard a distant bustle in the chateau, and sounds of her grandmother returning. In her present state of mind, feeling unable to meet her, she left her frame there by the fire, and went through her own room and up some steps into a little room in the turret, where there was no furniture but a table, a prie-dieu chair and a crucifix on the wall.

Here, in summer, Leonore was accustomed to spend a good deal of her time; no heat could penetrate those old, white walls, and only at a certain time in the morning did the sun force his way through the ivy veil of the single loophole-window, and throw a tender garland of leafy shadows round the crucifix. But now the little room was very cold, and already in twilight. Leonore knelt down, hoping presently to feel stronger and calmer. Then she would go to her grandmother, and once more entreat her to take Bernard's advice, and give up this wild scheme. Perhaps she might listen; if not, by tomorrow at this time where might they not be?

## V

Leonore knelt on, her forehead bowed upon the chair, her clasped hands stretched out and drooping forward. The sun was gone down, the

hills of Maury had lost their last rosy tints, and the stars were beginning to come out; but it was quite dark in the little oratory, and her prayers had passed insensibly into dreams. At first they were peaceful and pleasant ones, but after a time they changed, and her terrible dream of a few nights before came back to her with more than its first horror: *the coach drawn up in that strange place* – an idea which Madame de Grou had, indeed, boldly utilized – her own agony and terror at being left behind; her escape down the wall; her overtaking the coach and seeing the ghosts, who now seemed to stretch out their long rattling hands to seize her and drag her in among them – it was all too terrible, and Leonore awoke screaming, and found herself cold, weary, faint, and trembling on her knees in the turret-room.

She had no means of knowing the time, but felt sure that she had slept there for hours, it was so very dark and cold. Getting up with difficulty, she moved to the door and tried to open it, but could not succeed; it seemed to be fastened on the outside. Then she knocked, and called "Pernette" in a voice that seemed to refuse to be heard, feeling all the time as if she was dreaming on still; and then, as there was no answer, she sat down where she had been kneeling before, and leaning her chin on her hands, gazed up at the narrow window. Through its thick greenish glass she could just discern one star, large and bright, looking in upon her in her loneliness, and suddenly bringing to her mind what Bernard had said the evening before, "If you will not save yourself, you shall be saved." She had not thought much about that; it seemed so impossible: she must submit to the same fate as her relations, and no one could save her from it. Still the words roused an instinct of life in her weary mind; she no longer thought she was dreaming, and began to wonder what they were all doing, how she was to get out, whether they had all gone away hours ago, and left her behind. No, that could not be.

Then she noticed some strange shadows and flashes of light which were falling now and then on the arched stone sides of that window, and glimmering on the glass. Sounds began to reach her ears – a rattle of harness, a creaking of wheels, a buzz of many voices. Leonore sprang to her feet, full of a new waking terror of being left behind. Could her grandmother have forgotten her, after all, and Pernette too? Might the door have been locked by mistake, and would she be left here to starve? – for there was no scrambling out of that window, as in her dream! That would be more dreadful than the guillotine. Again she knocked on the door, called, listened, but could hear nothing, and felt sure that the door at the foot of the stairs must be fastened as well as this. The reality was more dreadful than any dream. Locked up and forgotten! The peasants would perhaps burn the chateau, and there would be no escape for her, unless by

any chance Bernard knew that she was still there, and came to look for her. Ah, it was too terrible!

She stood shivering in the dark, and did not know what to think or what to do. After watching the lights and shadows on the window as they flashed and fell, an idea occurred to her: she might at least see what they meant. She dragged and pushed the heavy table underneath the window, lifted the chair upon it, and so managed to climb up on the deep sloping window-sill. Clasping the bar with one hand, she opened the window with the other, and plunged it among the frosted ivy-leaves, tearing them from their stalks and scattering them. Then, bending her head forward, she could see the green beyond the moat, and on it a dark mass under a sky of stars, with torches flickering and men crowding about it. It was the Marquis's great coach! The harness-chains rattled, as the horses stamped and tossed their heads, but feet of horses and men were silent on the grass, and Leonore, looking down at them, shivered with cold, for the scene was like a wild unearthly dream. The people seemed to be in great haste, running backwards and forwards between the coach and the side-door of the chateau. Presently the servants stood aside, two advancing with flaring torches in their hands, and six people, two-and-two, came stepping carefully across the grass to the coach-door.

Leonore could not see their faces, but she knew each one well. First, the old Marquise and her son; then the younger Marquise and her son the Comte; then the Comtesse and Chevalier de Mazan.

Leonore leaned forward as far as she could, and waved her hand into the frosty darkness, crying out in a voice that trembled and failed.

"Madame, are you going away without me? I am locked up here: you are leaving me behind!"

Perhaps the voice was hardly strong enough to reach her grandmother's ear; yet the old Marquise stopped suddenly and turned back from the coach-door as she was about to get in. There was a pause, a little hurried talk among the group of Leonore's relations. But their momentary hesitation was soon over; to the girl's amazement they got into the coach one after another, the servants drew back, the postilions crucked their whips, and with many a groan and rumble the great vehicle moved off round the grass in the direction of a rough cart-road into the country, by which they hoped to escape any pursuit.

It was Leonore's dream, *repeated for the third time*, only she was a prisoner, and reality, fortunately for her, would not let her even try to overtake them. She still clung to her window till the last sound of the coach was lost in the distance, and even afterwards; for, tiring as her cramped posture was, it at least gave her a sight of the stars, and of the dim world on which they were shining. She clung there till another sound

rose slowly on her ears – the angry roar of a crowd coming up from the village. They came nearer and nearer, crowding up the hill, till she could see the flare of the torches they carried, and hear their voices, which seemed to die away into a low resolute growl as they approached the chateau. But a few words were carried to her by a light cold wind which swept over their heads, and then rustled the leaves beside her window:

"*Fire, fire! Burn the wild beasts in their den!"*

Leonore felt her brain reeling, and her senses failing suddenly. She let herself slip from the window-sill to the table, and then to the floor, where she fell down heavily and lay still.

## VI

Mademoiselle d'Isambert woke from her fainting fit to find herself outside the chateau, on the edge of the moat, in the dark shadow of those same trees and bushes under which she had met her lover the evening before. He was beside her now, supporting her head on his arm, and her hair and face were wet with the cold water that he had been splashing over her. Cold it was indeed, for the moat was partly frozen, but perhaps it answered his purpose all the better.

"Leonore," he whispered, "keep yourself perfectly still. We are in great danger, but I shall save you. Can you stand up? I am afraid to let you lie on this grass."

With the instinct of obedience that seldom failed her, she rose at once, and stood leaning on his arm. But the things she had seen were not to be forgotten, even in the peace and safety of his presence.

"They all went away in the coach," she whispered, "and left me behind. Did my grandmother forget me? O, what could it mean?"

"Patience! You will know all some day; and your grandmother will be glad too," said Bernard, his voice trembling a little as if he was deeply moved.

"Are they safe, do you think? I wonder why she went without me. I wish I knew. What are all those people doing out there? They have not burnt the chateau yet?"

"No. When they are gone, I will take you away to a safe place."

Bernard stood quite still, holding her fast, and listening intently to all the strange noises that broke upon the beautiful night, the hoarse voices, the tramping feet, the wild laughter and cries of triumph, inside and outside of the whole building. Lights were flashing in the windows,

and many of the mob were busy destroying and pulling to pieces the stately rooms; but many, too, were waiting outside for something, and presently a horrid yell announced that it was coming. The Vicomte de Maury knew very well what it was, and drew his rescued treasure a little closer. To her it was still like a dream; only now, under all the terror, there was a vague sense of happiness.

Slowly rumbling along the uneven road, heavy wheels were approaching the chateau. The horses' feet could not be distinguished from the tramp of many men that accompanied them. It was with a certain frightful solemnity, worthy of the Great Revolution, that the Marquis de Grou's coach was escorted back to his own door. From their hiding-place Bernard and Leonore saw it come slowly up, saw the crowd part to receive it, saw it stop where it had stopped before, and, by the lights that were glaring and flickering all about, saw the door opened, and those six people made to descend. Not that any force was necessary, for each one of them, even the little Comtesse de Grou, stepped out with as calm and proud a grace as if he or she were arriving at Versailles, instead of drawing nearer to the guillotine. Only the old Marquise, as her son gravely offered her his hand to walk into the house, waved him back and turned towards the mob with an air of fearless command.

"Where is that old traitress, Pernette Flicquet? Can any of you tell me? What has she done with my granddaughter, Mdlle.d'Isambert?"

She waited a moment, but met with no answer, and the Marquis, taking her hand, led her once more across their old threshold.

"Ah, let me go to her! I must, I must!" exclaimed Leonore.

"No, Leonore, you shall not," said Bernard de Maury.

She was half fainting again, and the strong young man lifted her in his arms like a child, and carried her across the moat by the plank-bridge, down the hill and across the valley to his father's house, while all the good patriots of the neighbourhood were occupied in sacking the Chateau de Grou, before escorting its owners away to prison and the guillotine!

*The one that was saved of that doomed family* found herself a prisoner too, but her jailers were the Vicomte de Maury, and Pernette, and Jeanneton. It was not till many days after that terrible night that she was calm and well enough to listen to the history of how it all happened.

Of course she had been locked in the oratory by friendly hands. The departure of the coach had been hurried on by a rumour which came up that evening from the village, that the people of Grou, led on by a patriot from the nearest large town, would be at the chateau in an hour's time. The coach was ordered round at once, the last arrangements were hurried through, and only just before starting did the Marquise discover that her

granddaughter was missing. The turret-door was locked, and the key had disappeared. Pernette too was nowhere to be found.

The Marquise declared at first that nothing would induce her to start without Leonore; but all the rest of her family were of a different opinion, and even the Chevalier could not see any reason for sacrificing six valuable lives.

Then the little Comtesse had stepped forward, and had said in the hearing of them all: "I do not think you need disturb yourself, madame. Leonore has probably escaped to Maury. It was only this evening that she confessed to me her love for M.le Vicomte." After this the Marquise seemed half stunned, and made no further resistance to going with the rest.

When the coach had driven off, Pernette came out of the cupboard hidden with tapestry, where she had sat and listened, admitted M.de Maury at the turret-door, and guided him to the room where they found Leonore insensible: thus she was saved in spite of herself.

* * *

The grandchildren of Madame la Comtesse de Maury, *née* de Grou d'Isambert, tell this story to their friends as they show them the old chateau, still grand, though defaced and half ruined by its experiences of revolution. And then, as we stand looking out on the green parterre beyond the moat, which is now drained and planted as a garden, a fair young Leonore de Maury, with the large frightened blue eyes of her grandmother, looks at us and says, in suddenly lowered tones:

"And – will you believe me? – To this day, on frosty mornings in January, one sees the traces of a coach and six upon the grass out there."

It seems impossible to doubt her word, but English love of evidence makes us ask the young lady if she has seen these spectral impressions herself. Up go her pretty hands, shoulders, and eyebrows, in despair at our incredulity.

"Mais oui! certainement!"

And after that, what is one to say?

*1895*

# THE DOCTORS OF HOYLAND

Doctor James Ripley was always looked upon as an exceedingly lucky dog by all of the profession who knew him. His father had preceded him in a practice in the village of Hoyland, in the north of Hampshire, and all was ready for him on the very first day that the law allowed him to put his name at the foot of a prescription. In a few years the old gentleman retired, and settled on the South Coast, leaving his son in undisputed possession of the whole country-side. Save for Doctor Horton, near Basingstoke, the young surgeon had a clear run of six miles in every direction, and took his fifteen hundred pounds a year, though, as is usual in country practices, the stable swallowed up most of what the consulting-room earned.

Doctor James Ripley was two-and-thirty years of age, reserved, learned, unmarried, with set, rather stern features, and a thinning of the dark hair upon the top of his head, which was worth quite a hundred a year to him. He was particularly happy in his management of ladies. He had caught the tone of bland sternness and decisive suavity which dominates without offending. Ladies, however, were not equally happy in their management of him. Professionally, he was always at their service. Socially, he was a drop of quicksilver. In vain the country mammas spread out their simple lures in front of him. Dances and picnics were not to his taste, and he preferred during his scanty leisure to shut himself up in his study, and to bury himself in *Virchow's Archives* and the professional journals.

Study was a passion with him, and he would have none of the rust which often gathers round a country practitioner. It was his ambition to keep his knowledge as fresh and bright as at the moment when he had stepped out of the examination hall. He prided himself on being able at a moment's notice to rattle off the seven ramifications of some obscure artery, or to give the exact percentage of any physiological compound. After a long day's work he would sit up half the night performing iridectomies and extractions upon the sheep's eyes sent in by the village butcher, to the horror of his housekeeper, who had to remove the debris next morning. His love for his work was the one fanaticism which found a place in his dry, precise nature.

It was the more to his credit that he should keep up to date in his knowledge, since he had no competition to force him to exertion. In the seven years during which he had practised in Hoyland three rivals had pitted themselves against him, two in the village itself and one in the neighbouring hamlet of Lower Hoyland. Of these one had sickened and

wasted, being, as it was said, himself the only patient whom he had treated during his eighteen months of ruralizing. A second had bought a fourth share of a Basingstoke practice, and had departed honourably, while a third had vanished one September night, leaving a gutted house and an unpaid drug bill behind him. Since then the district had become a monopoly, and no one had dared to measure himself against the established fame of the Hoyland doctor.

It was, then, with a feeling of some surprise and considerable curiosity that on driving through Lower Hoyland one morning he perceived that the new house at the end of the village was occupied, and that a virgin brass plate glistened upon the swinging gate which faced the high road. He pulled up his fifty-guinea chestnut mare and took a good look at it. "Verrinder Smith, M.D.," was printed across it in very neat, small lettering. The last man had had letters half a foot long, with a lamp like a fire-station. Doctor James Ripley noted the difference, and deduced from it that the new-comer might possibly prove a more formidable opponent. He was convinced of it that evening when he came to consult the current medical directory. By it he learned that Doctor Verrinder Smith was the holder of superb degrees, that he had studied with distinction at Edinburgh, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, and finally that he had been awarded a gold medal and the Lee Hopkins scholarship for original research, in recognition of an exhaustive inquiry into the functions of the anterior spinal nerve roots. Doctor Ripley passed his fingers through his thin hair in bewilderment as he read his rival's record. What an earth could so brilliant a man mean by putting up his plate in a little Hampshire hamlet?

But Doctor Ripley furnished himself with an explanation to the riddle. No doubt Dr.Verrinder Smith had simply come down there in order to pursue some scientific research in peace and quiet. The plate was up as an address rather than as an invitation to patients. Of course, that must be the true explanation. In that case the presence of this brilliant neighbour would be a splendid thing for his own studies. He had often longed for same kindred mind, some steel on which he might strike his flint. Chance had brought it to him, and he rejoiced exceedingly.

And this joy it was which led him to take a step which was quite at variance with his usual habits. It is the custom for a new-comer among medical men to call first upon the older, and the etiquette upon the subject is strict. Doctor Ripley was pedantically exact on such points, and yet he deliberately drove over next day and called upon Doctor Verrinder Smith. Such a waiving of ceremony was, he felt, a gracious act upon his part, and a fit prelude to the intimate relations which he hoped to establish with his neighbour.

The house was neat and well appointed, and Doctor Ripley was shown by a smart maid into a dapper little consulting-room. As he passed in he noticed two or three parasols and a lady's sun-bonnet hanging in the hall. It was a pity that his colleague should be a married man. It would put them upon a different footing, and interfere with those long evenings of high scientific talk which he had pictured to himself. On the other hand, there was much in the consulting-room to please him. Elaborate instruments, seen more often in hospitals than in the houses of private practitioners, were scattered about. A sphygmograph stood upon the table and a gasometer-like engine, which was new to Doctor Ripley, in the corner. A book-case full of ponderous volumes in French and German, paper-covered for the most part, and varying in tint from the shell to the yolk of a duck's egg, caught his wandering eyes, and he was deeply absorbed in their titles when the door opened suddenly behind him. Turning round, he found himself facing a little woman, whose plain, palish face was remarkable only for a pair of shrewd, humorous eyes of a blue which had two shades too much green in it. She held a *pince-nez* in her left hand, and the doctor's card in her right.

"How do you do, Doctor Ripley?" said she.

"How do you do, madam?" returned the visitor. "Your husband is perhaps out?"

"I am not married," said she simply.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I meant the doctor – Dr.Verrinder Smith."

"I am Doctor Verrinder Smith."

Doctor Ripley was so surprised that he dropped his hat and forgot to pick it up again.

"What!" he gasped, "the Lee Hopkins prizeman! You!"

He had never seen a woman doctor before, and his whole conservative soul rose up in revolt at the idea. He could not recall any Biblical injunction that the man should remain ever the doctor and the woman the nurse, and yet he felt as if a blasphemy had been committed. His face betrayed his feelings only too clearly.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said the lady drily.

"You certainly have surprised me," he answered, picking up his hat.

"You are not among our champions, then?"

"I cannot say that the movement has my approval."

"And why?"

"I should much prefer not to discuss it."

"But I am sure you will answer a lady's question."

"Ladies are in danger of losing their privileges when they usurp the place of the other sex. They cannot claim both."

"Why should a woman not earn her bread by her brains?"

Doctor Ripley felt irritated by the quiet manner in which the lady cross-questioned him.

"I should much prefer not to be led into a discussion, Miss Smith."

"Doctor Smith," she interrupted.

"Well, Doctor Smith! But if you insist upon an answer, I must say that I do not think medicine a suitable profession for women and that I have a personal objection to masculine ladies."

It was an exceedingly rude speech, and he was ashamed of it the instant after he had made it. The lady, however, simply raised her eyebrows and smiled.

"It seems to me that you are begging the question," said she. "Of course, if it makes women masculine that *would* be a considerable deterioration."

It was a neat little counter, and Doctor Ripley, like a pinked fencer, bowed his acknowledgment.

"I must go," said he.

"I am sorry that we cannot come to some more friendly conclusion since we are to be neighbours," she remarked.

He bowed again, and took a step towards the door.

"It was a singular coincidence," she continued, "that at the instant that you called I was reading your paper on 'Locomotor Ataxia,' in the *Lancet*."

"Indeed," said he drily.

"I thought it was a very able monograph."

"You are very good."

"But the views which you attribute to Professor Pitres, of Bordeaux, have been repudiated by him."

"I have his pamphlet of 1890,". said Doctor Ripley angrily.

"Here is his pamphlet of 1891." She picked it from among a litter of periodicals. "If you have time to glance your eye down this passage —"

Doctor Ripley took it from her and shot rapidly through the paragraph which she indicated. There was no denying that it completely knocked the bottom out of his own article. He threw it down, and with another frigid bow he made for the door. As he took the reins from the groom he glanced round and saw that the lady was standing at her window, and it seemed to him that she was laughing heartily.

All day the memory of this interview haunted him. He felt that he had come very badly out of it. She had showed herself to be his superior on his own pet subject. She had been courteous while he had been rude, self-possessed when he had been angry. And then, above all, there was her presence, her monstrous intrusion to rankle in his mind. A woman doctor

had been an abstract thing before, repugnant but distant. Now she was there in actual practice, with a brass plate up just like his own, competing for the same patients. Not that he feared competition, but he objected to this lowering of his ideal of womanhood. She could not be more than thirty, and had a bright, mobile face, too. He thought of her humorous eyes, and of her strong, well-turned chin. It revolted him the more to recall the details of her education. A man, of course, could come through such an ordeal with all his purity, but it was nothing short of shameless in a woman.

But it was not long before he learned that even her competition was a thing to be feared. The novelty of her presence had brought a few curious invalids into her consulting-rooms, and, once there, they had been so impressed by the firmness of her manner and by the singular, new-fashioned instruments with which she tapped, and peered, and sounded, that it formed the core of their conversation for weeks afterwards. And soon there were tangible proofs of her powers upon the country-side. Farmer Eyton, whose callous ulcer had been quietly spreading over his shin for years back under a gentle regime of zinc ointment, was painted round with blistering fluid, and found, after three blasphemous nights, that his sore was stimulated into healing. Mrs.Crowder, who had always regarded the birthmark upon her second daughter Eliza as a sign of the indignation of the Creator at a third helping of raspberry tart which she had partaken of during a critical period, learned that, with the help of two galvanic needles, the mischief was not irreparable. In a month Doctor Verrinder Smith was known, and in two she was famous.

Occasionally, Doctor Ripley met her as he drove upon his rounds. She had started a high dog-cart, taking the reins herself, with a little tiger behind. When they met he invariably raised his hat with punctilious politeness, but the grim severity of his face showed how formal was the courtesy. In fact, his dislike was rapidly deepening into absolute detestation. “The unsexed woman,” was the description of her which he permitted himself to give to those of his patients who still remained staunch. But, indeed, they were a rapidly-decreasing body, and every day his pride was galled by the news of some fresh defection. The lady had somehow impressed the country-folk with almost superstitious belief in her power, and from far and near they flocked to her consulting-room.

But what galled him most of all was, when she did something which he had pronounced to be impracticable. For all his knowledge he lacked nerve as an operator, and usually sent his worst cases up to London. The lady, however, had no weakness of the sort, and took everything that came in her way. It was agony to him to hear that she was about to straighten little Alec Turner’s club-foot, and right at the fringe of the

rumour came a note from his mother, the rector's wife, asking him if he would be so good as to act as chloroformist. It would be inhumanity to refuse, as there was no other who could take the place, but it was gall and wormwood to his sensitive nature. Yet, in spite of his vexation, he could not but admire the dexterity with which the thing was done. She handled the little wax-like foot so gently, and held the tiny tenotomy knife as an artist holds his pencil. One straight insertion, one snick of a tendon, and it was all over without a stain upon the white towel which lay beneath. He had never seen anything more masterly, and he had the honesty to say so, though her skill increased his dislike of her. The operation spread her fame still further at his expense, and self-preservation was added to his other grounds for detesting her. And this very detestation it was which brought matters to a curious climax.

One winter's night, just as he was rising from his lonely dinner, a groom came riding down from Squire Faircastle's, the richest man in the district, to say that his daughter had scalded her hand, and that medical help was needed on the instant. The coachman had ridden for the lady doctor, for it mattered nothing to the Squire who came as long as it were speedily. Doctor Ripley rushed from his surgery with the determination that she should not effect an entrance into this stronghold of his if hard driving on his part could prevent it. He did not even wait to light his lamps, but sprang into his gig and flew off as fast as hoof could rattle. He lived rather nearer to the Squire's than she did, and was convinced that he could get there well before her.

And so he would but for that whimsical element of chance, which will for ever muddle up the affairs of this world and dumbfound the prophets. Whether it came from the want of his lights, or from his mind being full of the thoughts of his rival, he allowed too little by half a foot in taking the sharp turn upon the Basingstoke road. The empty trap and the frightened horse clattered away into the darkness, while the Squire's groom crawled out of the ditch into which he had been shot. He struck a match, looked down at his groaning companion, and then, after the fashion of rough, strong men when they see what they have not seen before, he was very sick.

The doctor raised himself a little on his elbow in the glint of the match. He caught a glimpse of something white and sharp bristling through his trouser-leg half-way down the shin.

"Compound!" he groaned. "A three months' job," and fainted.

When he came to himself the groom was gone, for he had scudded off to the Squire's house for help, but a small page was holding a gig-lamp in front of his injured leg, and a woman, with an open case of polished

instruments gleaming in the yellow light, was deftly slitting up his trouser with a crooked pair of scissors.

"It's all right; doctor," said she soothingly. "I am so sorry about it. You can have Doctor Horton tomorrow, but I am sure you will allow me to help you tonight. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you by the roadside."

"The groom has gone for help," groaned the sufferer.

"When it comes we can move you into the gig. A little more light, John! So! Ah, dear, dear, we shall have laceration unless we reduce this before we move you. Allow me to give you a whiff of chloroform, and I have no doubt that I can secure it sufficiently to —"

Doctor Ripley never heard the end of that sentence. He tried to raise a hand and to murmur something in protest, but a sweet smell was in his nostrils, and a sense of rich peace and lethargy stole over his jangled nerves. Down he sank, through clear, cool water, ever down and down into the green shadows beneath, gently, without effort, while the pleasant chiming of a great belfry rose and fell in his ears. Then he rose again, up and up, and ever up, with a terrible tightness about his temples, until at last he shot out of those green shadows and was in the light once more. Two bright, shining, golden spots gleamed before his dazed eyes. He blinked and blinked before he could give a name to them. They were only the two brass balls at the end posts of his bed, and he was lying in his own little room, with a head like a cannon ball, and a leg like an iron bar. Turning his eyes, he saw the calm face of Doctor Verrinder Smith looking down at him.

"Ah, at last!" said she. "I kept you under all the way home, for I knew how painful the jolting would be. It is in good position now with a strong side splint. I leave ordered a morphia draught for you. Shall I tell your groom to ride for Doctor Horton in the morning?"

"I should prefer that you should continue the case," said Doctor Ripley feebly, and then, with a half-hysterical laugh – "You have all the rest of the parish as patients, you know, so you may as well make the thing complete by having me also."

It was not a very gracious speech, but it was a look of pity and not of anger which shone in her eyes as she turned away from his bedside.

Doctor Ripley had a brother, William, who was assistant surgeon at a London hospital, and who was down in Hampshire within a few hours of his hearing of the accident. He raised his brows when he heard the details.

"What! You are pestered with one of those!" he cried.

"I don't know what I should have done without her."

"I've no doubt she's an excellent nurse."

"She knows her work as well as you or I."

"Speak for yourself, James," said the London man with a sniff. "But apart from that, you know that the principle of the thing is all wrong."

"You think there is nothing to be said on the other side?"

"Good heavens! do you?"

"Well, I don't know. It struck me during the night that we may have been a little narrow in our views."

"Nonsense, James. It's all very fine for women to win prizes in the lecture-room, but you know as well as I do that they are no use in an emergency. Now I warrant that this woman was all nerves when she was setting your leg. That reminds me that I had better just take a look at it and see that it is all right."

"I would rather that you did not undo it," said the patient. "I have her assurance that it is all right."

Brother William was deeply shocked.

"Of course, if a woman's assurance is of more value than the opinion of the assistant surgeon of a London hospital, there is nothing more to be said," he remarked.

"I should prefer that you did not touch it," said the patient firmly, and Doctor William went back to London that evening in a huff.

The lady, who had heard of his coming, was much surprised on learning his departure.

"We had a difference upon a point of professional etiquette," said Doctor James, and it was all the explanation he would vouchsafe.

For two long months Doctor Ripley was brought in contact with his rival every day, and he learned many things which he had not known before. She was a charming companion, as well as a most assiduous doctor. Her short presence during the long, weary day was like a flower in a sand waste. What interested him was precisely what interested her, and she could meet him at every point upon equal terms. And yet under all her learning and her firmness ran a sweet, womanly nature, peeping out in her talk, shining in her greenish eyes, showing itself in a thousand subtle ways which the dullest of men could read. And he, though a bit of a prig and a pedant, was by no means dull, and had honesty enough to confess when he was in the wrong.

"I don't know how to apologize to you," he said in his shamefaced fashion one day, when he had progressed so far as to be able to sit in an arm-chair with his leg upon another one; "I feel that I have been quite in the wrong."

"Why, then?"

"Over this woman question. I used to think that a woman must inevitably lose something of her charm if she took up such studies."

"Oh, you don't think they are necessarily unsexed, then?" she cried, with a mischievous smile.

"Please don't recall my idiotic expression."

"I feel so pleased that I should have helped in changing your views. I think that it is the most sincere compliment that I have ever had paid me."

"At any rate, it is the truth," said he, and was happy all night at the remembrance of the flush of pleasure which made her pale face look quite comely for the instant.

For, indeed, he was already far past the stage when he would acknowledge her as the equal of any other woman. Already he could not disguise from himself that she had become the one woman. Her dainty skill, her gentle touch, her sweet presence, the community of their tastes, had all united to hopelessly upset his previous opinions. It was a dark day for him now when his convalescence allowed her to miss a visit, and darker still that other one which he saw approaching when all occasion for her visits would be at an end. It came round at last, however, and he felt that his whole life's fortune would hang upon the issue of that final interview. He was a direct man by nature, so he laid his hand upon hers as it felt for his pulse, and he asked her if she would be his wife.

"What, and unite the practices?" said she.

He started in pain and anger.

"Surely you do not attribute any such base motive to me!" he cried. "I love you as unselfishly as ever a woman was loved."

"No, I was wrong. It was a foolish speech," said she, moving her chair a little back, and tapping her stethoscope upon her knee. "Forget that I ever said it. I am so sorry to cause you any disappointment, and I appreciate most highly the honour which you do me, but what you ask is quite impossible."

With another woman he might have urged the point, but his instincts told him that it was quite useless with this one. Her tone of voice was conclusive. He said nothing, but leaned back in his chair a stricken man.

"I am so sorry," she said again. "If I had known what was passing in your mind I should have told you earlier that I intend to devote my life entirely to science. There are many women with a capacity for marriage, but few with a taste for biology. I will remain true to my own line, then. I came down here while waiting for an opening in the Paris Physiological Laboratory. I have just heard that there is a vacancy for me there, and so you will be troubled no more by my intrusion upon your practice. I have done you an injustice just as you did me one. I thought you narrow and pedantic, with no good quality. I have learned during your illness to

appreciate you better, and the recollection of our friendship will always be a very pleasant one to me."

And so it came about that in a very few weeks there was only one doctor in Hoyland. But folks noticed that the one had aged many years in a few months, that a weary sadness lurked always in the depths of his blue eyes, and that he was less concerned than ever with the eligible young ladies whom chance, or their careful country mammas, placed in his way.

*1894*

# JOHN HUXFORD'S HIATUS

Strange it is and wonderful to mark how upon this planet of ours the smallest and most insignificant of events set a train of consequences in motion which act and react until their final results are portentous and incalculable. Set a force rolling, however small, and who can say where it shall end, or what it may lead to! Trifles develop into tragedies, and the bagatelle of one day ripens into the catastrophe of the next. An oyster throws out a secretion to surround a grain of sand, and so a pearl comes into being; a pearl diver fishes it up, a merchant buys it and sells it to a jeweller, who disposes of it to a customer. The customer is robbed of it by two scoundrels who quarrel over the booty. One slays the other, and perishes himself upon the scaffold. Here is a direct chain of events with a sick mollusc for its first link, and a gallows for its last one. Had that grain of sand not chanced to wash in between the shells of the bivalve, two living breathing beings with all their potentialities for good and for evil would not have been blotted out from among their fellows. Who shall undertake to judge what is really small and what is great?

Thus when in the year 1821 Don Diego Salvador bethought him that if it paid the heretics in England to import the bark of his cork oaks, it would pay him also to found a factory by which the corks might be cut and sent out ready made, surely at first sight no very vital human interests would appear to be affected. Yet there were poor folk who would suffer, and suffer acutely – women who would weep, and men who would become sallow and hungry-looking and dangerous in places of which the Don had never heard, and all on account of that one idea which had flashed across him as he strutted, cigarettiferous, beneath the graceful shadow of his limes. So crowded is this old globe of ours, and so interlaced our interests, that one cannot think a new thought without some poor devil being the better or the worse for it.

Don Diego Salvador was a capitalist, and the abstract thought soon took the concrete form of a great square plastered building wherein a couple of hundred of his swarthy countrymen worked with deft nimble fingers at a rate of pay which no English artisan could have accepted. Within a few months the result of this new competition was an abrupt fall of prices in the trade, which was serious for the largest firms and disastrous for the smaller ones. A few old-established houses held on as they were, others reduced their establishments and cut down their expenses, while one or two put up their shutters and confessed themselves beaten. In this last unfortunate category was the ancient and respected firm of Fairbairn Brothers of Brisport.

Several causes had led up to this disaster, though Don Diego's *début* as a corkcutter had brought matters to a head. When a couple of generations back the original Fairbairn had founded the business, Brisport was a little fishing town with no outlet or occupation for her superfluous population. Men were glad to have safe and continuous work upon any terms. All this was altered now, for the town was expanding into the centre of a large district in the west, and the demand for labour and its remuneration had proportionately increased. Again, in the old days, when carriage was ruinous and communication slow, the vintners of Exeter and of Barnstaple were glad to buy their corks from their neighbour of Brisport; but now the large London houses sent down their travellers, who competed with each other to gain the local custom, until profits were cut down to the vanishing point. For a long time the firm had been in a precarious position, but this further drop in prices settled the matter, and compelled Mr.Charles Fairbairn, the acting manager, to close establishment.

It was a murky, foggy Saturday afternoon in November when the hands were paid for the last time, and the old building was to be finally abandoned. Mr.Fairbairn, an anxious-faced, sorrow-worn man, stood on a raised dais by the cashier while he handed the little pile of hardly-earned shillings and coppers to each successive workman as the long procession filed past his table. It was usual with the employes to clatter away the instant that they had been paid, like so many children let out of school; but today they waited, forming little groups over the great dreary room, and discussing in subdued voices the misfortune which had come upon their employers, and the future which awaited themselves. When the last pile of coins had been handed across the table, and the last name checked by the cashier, the whole throng faced silently round to the man who had been their master, and waited expectantly for any words which he might have to say to them.

Mr.Charles Fairbairn had not expected this, and it embarrassed him. He had waited as a matter of routine duty until the wages were paid, but he was a taciturn, slow-witted man, and he had not foreseen this sudden call upon his oratorical powers. He stroked his thin cheek nervously with his long white fingers, and looked down with weak watery eyes at the mosaic of upturned serious faces.

"I am sorry that we have to part, my men," he said at last in a crackling voice. "It's a bad day for all of us, and for Brisport too. For three years we have been losing money over the works. We held on in the hope of a change coming, but matters are going from bad to worse. There's nothing for it but to give it up before the balance of our fortune is

swallowed up. I hope you may all be able to get work of some sort before very long. Good-bye, and God bless you!"

"God bless you, sir! God bless you!" cried a chorus of rough voices. "Three cheers for Mr.Charles Fairbairn!" shouted a bright-eyed, smart young fellow, springing up upon a bench and waving his peaked cap in the air. The crowd responded to the call, but their huzzas wanted the true ring which only a joyous heart can give. Then they began to flock out into the sunlight, looking back as they went at the long deal tables and the cork-strewn floor – above all at the sad-faced, solitary man, whose cheeks were flecked with colour at the rough cordiality of their farewell.

"Huxford," said the cashier, touching on the shoulder the young fellow who had led the cheering; "the governor wants to speak to you."

The workman turned back and stood swinging his cap awkwardly in front of his ex-employer, while the crowd pushed on until the doorway was clear, and the heavy fog-wreaths rolled unchecked into the deserted factory.

"Ah, John!" said Mr.Fairbairn, coming suddenly out of his reverie and taking up a letter from the table. "You have been in my service since you were a boy, and you have shown that you merited the trust which I have placed in you. From what I have heard I think I am right in saying that this sudden want of work will affect your plans more than it will many of my other hands."

"I was to be married at Shrovetide," the man answered, tracing a pattern upon the table with his horny forefinger. "I'll have to find work first."

"And work, my poor fellow, is by no means easy to find. You see you have been in this groove all your life, and are unfit for anything else. It's true you've been my foreman, but even that won't help you, for the factories all over England are discharging hands, and there's not a vacancy to be had. It's a bad outlook for you and such as you."

"What would you advise, sir?" asked John Huxford.

"That's what I was coming to. I have a letter here from Sheridan and Moore, of Montreal, asking for a good hand to take charge of a workroom. If you think it will suit you, you can go out by the next boat. The wages are far in excess of anything which I have been able to give you."

"Why, sir, this is real kind of you," the young workman said earnestly. "She – my girl – Mary, will be as grateful to you as I am. I know what you say is right, and that if I had to look for work I should be likely to spend the little that I have laid by towards housekeeping before I found it. But, sir, with your leave I'd like to speak to her about it before I made up my mind. Could you leave it open for a few hours?"

"The mail goes out tomorrow," Mr.Fairbairn answered. "If you decide to accept you can write tonight. Here is their letter, which will give you their address."

John Huxford took the precious paper with a grateful heart. An hour ago his future had been all black, but now this rift of light had broken in the west, giving promise of better things. He would have liked to have said something expressive of his feelings to his employer, but the English nature is not effusive, and he could not get beyond a few choking awkward words which were as awkwardly received by his benefactor. With a scrape and a bow, he turned on his heel, and plunged out into the foggy street.

So thick was the vapour that the houses over the way were only a vague loom, but the foreman hurried on with springy steps through side streets and winding lanes, past walls where the fishermen's nets were drying, and over cobble-stoned alleys redolent of herring, until he reached a modest line of whitewashed cottages fronting the sea. At the door of one of these the young man tapped, and then without waiting for a response, pressed down the latch and walked in.

An old silvery-haired woman and a young girl hardly out of her teens were sitting on either side of the fire, and the latter sprang to her feet as he entered.

"You've got some good news, John," she cried, putting her hands upon his shoulders, and looking into his eyes. "I can tell it from your step. Mr.Fairbairn is going to carry on after all."

"No, dear, not so good as that," John Huxford answered, smoothing back her rich brown hair; "but I have an offer of a place in Canada, with good money, and if you think as I do, I shall go out to it, and you can follow with the granny whenever I have made all straight for you at the other side. What say you to that, my lass?"

"Why, surely, John, what you think is right must be for the best," said the girl quietly, with trust and confidence in her pale plain face and loving hazel eyes. "But poor granny, how is she to cross the seas?"

"Oh, never mind about me," the old woman broke in cheerfully. "I'll be no drag on you. If you want granny, granny's not too old to travel; and if you don't want her, why she can look after the cottage, and have an English home ready for you whenever you turn back to the old country."

"Of course we shall need you, granny," John Huxford said, with a cheery laugh. "Fancy leaving granny behind! That would never do, Mary! But if you both come out, and if we are married all snug and proper at Montreal, we'll look through the whole city until we find a house something like this one, and we'll have creepers on the outside just the same, and when the doors are shut and we sit round the fire on the winter's

nights, I'm hanged if we'll be able to tell that we're not at home. Besides, Mary, it's the same speech out there, and the same king and the same flag; it's not like a foreign country."

"No, of course not," Mary answered with conviction. She was an orphan with no living relation save her old grandmother, and no thought in life but to make a helpful and worthy wife to the man she loved. Where these two were she could not fail to find happiness. If John went to Canada, then Canada became home to her, for what had Brisport to offer when he was gone?

"I'm to write tonight then and accept?" the young man asked. "I knew you would both be of the same mind as myself, but of course I couldn't close with the offer until we had talked it over. I can get started in a week or two, and then in a couple of months I'll have all ready for you on the other side."

"It will be a weary, weary time until we hear from you, dear John," said Mary, clasping his hand; "but it's God's will, and we must be patient. Here's pen and ink. You can sit at the table and write the letter which is to take the three of us across the Atlantic." Strange how Don Diego's thoughts were moulding human lives in the little Devon village.

The acceptance was duly despatched, and John Huxford began immediately to prepare for his departure, for the Montreal firm had intimated that the vacancy was a certainty, and that the chosen man might come out without delay to take over his duties. In a very few days his scanty outfit was completed, and he started off in a coasting vessel for Liverpool, where he was to catch the passenger ship for Quebec.

"Remember, John," Mary whispered, as he pressed her to his heart upon the Brisport quay, "the cottage is our own, and come what may, we have always that to fall back upon. If things should chance to turn out badly over there, we have always a roof to cover us. There you will find me until you send word to us to come."

"And that will be very soon, my lass," he answered cheerfully, with a last embrace. "Good-bye, granny, good-bye." The ship was a mile and more from the land before he lost sight of the figures of the straight slim girl and her old companion, who stood watching and waving to him from the end of the grey stone quay. It was with a sinking heart and a vague feeling of impending disaster that he saw them at last as minute specks in the distance, walking townward and disappearing amid the crowd who lined the beach.

From Liverpool the old woman and her granddaughter received a letter from John announcing that he was just starting in the barque *St.Lawrence*, and six weeks afterwards a second longer epistle informed them of his safe arrival at Quebec, and gave them his first impressions of

the country. After that a long unbroken silence set in. Week after week and month after month passed by, and never a word came from across the seas. A year went over their heads, and yet another, but no news of the absentee. Sheridan and Moore were written to, and replied that though John Huxford's letter had reached them, he had never presented himself, and they had been forced to fill up the vacancy as best they could. Still Mary and her grandmother hoped against hope, and looked out for the letter-carrier every morning with such eagerness, that the kind-hearted man would often make a detour rather than pass the two pale anxious faces which peered at him from the cottage window. At last, three years after the young foreman's disappearance, old granny died, and Mary was left alone, a broken sorrowful woman, living as best she might on a small annuity which had descended to her, and eating her heart out as she brooded over the mystery which hung over the fate of her lover.

Among the shrewd west-country neighbours there had long, however, ceased to be any mystery in the matter. Huxford arrived safely in Canada – so much was proved by his letter. Had he met with his end in any sudden way during the journey between Quebec and Montreal, there must have been some official inquiry, and his luggage would have sufficed to have established his identity. Yet the Canadian police had been communicated with, and had returned a positive answer that no inquest had been held, or any body found, which could by any possibility be that of the young Englishman. The only alternative appeared to be that he had taken the first opportunity to break all the old ties, and had slipped away to the backwoods or to the States to commence life anew under an altered name. Why he should do this no one professed to know, but that he had done it appeared only too probable from the facts. Hence many a deep growl righteous anger rose from the brawny smacksmen when Mary with her pale face and sorrow-sunken head passed along the quays on her way to her daily marketing; and it is more than likely that if the missing man had turned up in Brisport he might have met with some rough words or rougher usage, unless he could give some very good reason for his strange conduct. This popular view of the case never, however, occurred to the simple trusting heart of the lonely girl, and as the years rolled by her grief and her suspense were never for an instant tinged with a doubt as to the good faith of the missing man. From youth she grew into middle age, and from that into the autumn of her life, patient, long-suffering, and faithful, doing good as far as lay in her power, and waiting humbly until fate should restore either in this world or the next that which it had so mysteriously deprived her of.

In the meantime neither the opinion held by the minority that John Huxford was dead, nor that of the majority, which pronounced him to be

faithless, represented the true state of the case. Still alive, and of stainless honour, he had yet been singled out by fortune as her victim in one of those strange freaks which are of such rare occurrence, and so beyond the general experience, that they might be put by as incredible, had we not the most trustworthy evidence of their occasional possibility.

Landing at Quebec, with his heart full of hope and courage, John selected a dingy room in a back street, where the terms were less exorbitant than elsewhere, and conveyed thither the two boxes which contained his worldly goods. After taking up his quarters there he had half a mind to change again, for the landlady and the fellow-lodgers were by no means to his taste; but the Montreal coach started within a day or two, and he consoled himself by the thought that the discomfort would only last for that short time. Having written home to Mary to announce his safe arrival, he employed himself in seeing as much of the town as was possible, walking about all day, and only returning to his room at night.

It happened, however, that the house on which the unfortunate youth had pitched was one which was notorious for the character of its inmates. He had been directed to it by a pimp, who found regular employment in hanging about the docks and decoying new-comers to this den. The fellow's specious manner and proffered civility had led the simple-hearted west-countryman into the toils, and though his instinct told him that he was in unsafe company, he refrained, unfortunately, from at once making his escape. He contented himself with staying out all day, and associating as little as possible with the other inmates. From the few words which he did let drop, however, the landlady gathered that he was a stranger without a single friend in the country to inquire after him should misfortune overtake him.

The house had an evil reputation for the hocussing of sailors, which was done not only for the purpose of plundering them, but also to supply outgoing ships with crews, the men being carried on board insensible, and not coming to until the ship was well down the St.Lawrence. This trade caused the wretches who followed it to be experts in the use of stupefying drugs, and they determined to practise their arts upon their friendless lodger, so as to have an opportunity of ransacking his effects, and of seeing what it might be worth their while to purloin. During the day he invariably locked his door and carried off the key in his pocket, but if they could render him insensible for the night they could examine his boxes at their leisure, and deny afterwards that he had ever brought with him the articles which he missed. It happened, therefore, upon the eve of Huxford's departure from Quebec, that he found, upon returning to his lodgings, that his landlady and her two ill-favoured sons, who assisted her in her trade, were waiting up for him over a bowl of punch, which they

cordially invited him to share. It was a bitterly cold night, and the fragrant steam overpowered any suspicions which the young Englishman may have entertained, so he drained off a bumper, and then, retiring to his bedroom, threw himself upon his bed without undressing, and fell straight into a dreamless slumber, in which he still lay when the three conspirators crept into his chamber, and, having opened his boxes, began to investigate his effects.

It may have been that the speedy action of the drug caused its effect to be evanescent, or, perhaps, that the strong constitution of the victim threw it off with unusual rapidity. Whatever the cause, it is certain that John Huxford suddenly came to himself, and found the foul trio squatted round their booty, which they were dividing into the two categories of what was of value and should be taken, and what was valueless and might therefore be left. With a bound he sprang out of bed, and seizing the fellow nearest him by the collar, he slung him through the open doorway. His brother rushed at him, but the young Devonshire man met him with such a facer that he dropped in a heap upon the ground. Unfortunately, the violence of the blow caused him to overbalance himself, and, tripping over his prostrate antagonist, he came down heavily upon his face. Before he could rise, the old hag sprang upon his back and clung to him, shrieking to her son to bring the poker. John managed to shake himself clear of them both, but before he could stand on his guard he was felled from behind by a crashing blow from an iron bar, which stretched him senseless upon the floor.

"You've hit too hard, Joe," said the old woman, looking down at the prostrate figure. "I heard the bone go."

"If I hadn't fetched him down he'd ha' been too many for us," said the young villain sulkily.

"Still, you might ha' done it without killing him, clumsy," said his mother. She had had a large experience of such scenes, and knew the difference between a stunning blow and a fatal one.

"He's still breathing," the other said, examining him; "the back o' his head's like a bag o' dice though. The skull's all splintered. He can't last. What are we to do?"

"He'll never come to himself again," the other brother remarked. "Sarve him right. Look at my face! Let's see, mother; who's in the house?"

"Only four drunk sailors."

"They wouldn't turn out for any noise. It's all quiet in the street. Let's carry him down a bit, Joe, and leave him there. He can die there, and no one think the worse of us."

"Take all the papers out of his pocket, then," the mother suggested; "they might help the police to trace him. His watch, too, and his money – L 3 odd; better than nothing. Now carry him softly and don't slip."

Kicking off their shoes, the two brothers carried the dying man down stairs and along the deserted street for a couple of hundred yards. There they laid him among the snow, where he was found by the night patrol, who carried him on a shutter to the hospital. He was duly examined by the resident surgeon, who bound up the wounded head, but gave it as his opinion that the man could not possibly live for more than twelve hours.

Twelve hours passed, however, and yet another twelve, but John Huxford still struggled hard for his life. When at the end of three days he was found to be still breathing, the interest of the doctors became aroused at his extraordinary vitality, and they bled him, as the fashion was in those days, and surrounded his shattered head with icebags. It may have been on account of these measures, or it may have been in spite of them, but at the end of a week's deep trance the nurse in charge was astonished to hear a gabbling noise, and to find the stranger sitting up upon the couch and staring about him with wistful, wondering eyes. The surgeons were summoned to behold the phenomenon, and warmly congratulated each other upon the success of their treatment.

"You have been on the brink of the grave, my man," said one of them, pressing the bandaged head back on to the pillow; "you must not excite yourself. What is your name?"

No answer, save a wild stare.

"Where do you come from?"

Again no answer.

"He is mad," one suggested.

"Or a foreigner," said another. "There were no papers on him when he came in. His linen is marked 'J. H.' Let us try him in French and German."

They tested him with as many tongues as they could muster among them, but were compelled at last to give the matter over and to leave their silent patient, still staring up wild-eyed at the whitewashed hospital ceiling.

For many weeks John lay in the hospital, and for many weeks efforts were made to gain some clue as to his antecedents, but in vain. He showed, as the time rolled by, not only by his demeanour, but also by the intelligence with which he began to pick up fragments of sentences, like a clever child learning to talk, that his mind was strong enough in the present, though it was a complete blank as to the past. The man's memory of his whole life before the fatal blow was entirely and absolutely erased.

He neither knew his name, his language, his home, his business, nor anything else. The doctors held learned consultations upon him, and discoursed upon the centre of memory and depressed tables, deranged nerve-cells and cerebral congestions, but all their polysyllables began and ended at the fact that the man's memory was gone, and that it was beyond the power of science to restore it. During the weary months of his convalescence he picked up reading and writing, but with the return of his strength came no return of his former life. England, Devonshire, Brisport, Mary, Granny – the words brought no recollection to his mind. All was absolute darkness. At last he was discharged, a friendless, tradeless, penniless man, without a past, and with very little to look to in the future. His very name was altered, for it had been necessary to invent one. John Huxford had passed away, and John Hardy took his place among mankind. Here was a strange outcome of a Spanish gentleman's tobacco-inspired meditations.

John's case had aroused some discussion and curiosity in Quebec, so that he was not suffered to drift into utter helplessness upon emerging from the hospital. A Scotch manufacturer named McKinlay found him a post as porter in his establishment, and for a long time he worked at seven dollars a week at the loading and unloading of vans. In the course of years it was noticed, however, that his memory, however defective as to the past, was extremely reliable and accurate when concerned with anything which had occurred since his accident. From the factory he was promoted into the counting-house, and the year 1835 found him a junior clerk at a salary of L 120 a year. Steadily and surely John Hardy fought his way upward from post to post, with his whole heart and mind devoted to the business. In 1840 he was third clerk, in 1845 he was second, and in 1852 he became manager of the whole vast establishment, and second only to Mr.McKinlay himself.

There were few who grudged John this rapid advancement, for it was obviously due to neither chance nor favouritism, but entirely to his marvellous powers of application and industry. From early morning until late in the night he laboured hard in the service of his employer, checking, overlooking, superintending, setting an example to all of cheerful devotion to duty. As he rose from one post to another his salary increased, but it caused no alteration in his mode of living, save that it enabled him to be more open-handed to the poor. He signalised his promotion to the managership by a donation of L 1000 to the hospital in which he had been treated a quarter of a century before. The remainder of his earnings he allowed to accumulate in the business, drawing a small sum quarterly for his sustenance, and still residing in the humble dwelling which he had occupied when he was a warehouse porter. In spite of his success he was a

sad, silent, morose man, solitary in his habits, and possessed always of a vague undefined yearning, a dull feeling of dissatisfaction and of craving which never abandoned him. Often he would strive with his poor crippled brain to pierce the curtain which divided him from the past, and to solve the enigma of his youthful existence, but though he sat many a time by the fire until his head throbbed with his efforts, John Hardy could never recall the least glimpse of John Huxford's history.

On one occasion he had, in the interests of the firm, to journey to Quebec, and to visit the very cork factory which had tempted him to leave England. Strolling through the workroom with the foreman, John automatically, and without knowing what he was doing, picked up a square piece of the bark, and fashioned it with two or three deft cuts of his penknife into a smooth tapering cork. His companion picked it out of his hand and examined it with the eye of an expert.

"This is not the first cork which you have cut by many a hundred, Mr.Hardy," he remarked.

"Indeed you are wrong," John answered, smiling; "I never cut one before in my life."

"Impossible!" cried the foreman. "Here's another bit of cork. Try again."

John did his best to repeat the performance, but the brains of the manager interfered with the trained muscles of the corkcutter. The latter had not forgotten their cunning, but they needed to be left to themselves, and not directed by a mind which knew nothing of the matter. Instead of the smooth graceful shape, he could produce nothing but rough-hewn clumsy cylinders.

"It must have been chance," said the foreman, "but I could have sworn that it was the work of an old hand!"

As the years passed John's smooth English skin had warped and crinkled until he was as brown and as seamed as a walnut. His hair, too, after many years of iron-grey, had finally become as white as the winters of his adopted country. Yet he was a hale and upright old man, and when he at last retired from the managership of the firm with which he had been so long connected, he bore the weight of his seventy years lightly and bravely. He was in the peculiar position himself of not knowing his own age, as it was impossible for him to do more than guess at how old he was at the time of his accident.

The Franco-German War came round, and while the two great rivals were destroying each other, their more peaceful neighbours were quietly ousting them out of their markets and their commerce. Many English ports benefited by this condition of things, but none more than Brisport. It had long ceased to be a fishing village, but was now a large

and prosperous town, with a great breakwater in place of the quay on which Mary had stood, and a frontage of terraces and grand hotels where all the grandees of the west country came when they were in need of a change. All these extensions had made Brisport the centre of a busy trade, and her ships found their way into every harbour in the world. Hence it was no wonder, especially in that very busy year of 1870, that several Brisport vessels were lying in the river and alongside the wharves of Quebec.

One day John Hardy, who found time hang a little on his hands since his retirement from business, strolled along by the water's edge listening to the clanking of the steam winches, and watching the great barrels and cases as they were swung ashore and piled upon the wharf. He had observed the coming in of a great ocean steamer, and having waited until she was safely moored, he was turning away, when a few words fell upon his ear uttered by some one on board a little weather-beaten barque close by him. It was only some commonplace order that was bawled out, but the sound fell upon the old man's ears with a strange mixture of disuse and familiarity. He stood by the vessel and heard the seamen at their work, all speaking with the same broad, pleasant jingling accent. Why did it send such a thrill through his nerves to listen to it? He sat down upon a coil of rope and pressed his hands to his temples, drinking in the long-forgotten dialect, and trying to piece together in his mind the thousand half-formed nebulous recollections which were surging up in it. Then he rose, and walking along to the stern he read the name of the ship, *The Sunlight*, Brisport. Brisport! Again that flush and tingle through every nerve. Why was that word and the men's speech so familiar to him? He walked moodily home, and all night he lay tossing and sleepless, pursuing a shadowy something which was ever within his reach, and yet which ever evaded him.

Early next morning he was up and down on the wharf listening to the talk of the west-country sailors. Every word they spoke seemed to him to revive his memory and bring him nearer to the light. From time to time they paused in their work, and seeing the white-haired stranger sitting so silently and attentively, they laughed at him and broke little jests upon him. And even these jests had a familiar sound to the exile, as they very well might, seeing that they were the same which he had heard in his youth, for no one ever makes a new joke in England. So he sat through the long day, bathing himself in the west-country speech, and waiting for the light to break.

And it happened that when the sailors broke off for their midday meal, one of them, either out of curiosity or good nature, came over to the old watcher and greeted him. So John asked him to be seated on a log by

his side, and began to put many questions to him about the country from which he came, and the town. All which the man answered glibly enough, for there is nothing in the world that a sailor loves to talk of so much as of his native place, for it pleases him to show that he is no mere wanderer, but that he has a home to receive him whenever he shall choose to settle down to a quiet life. So the seaman prattled away about the Town Hall and the Martello Tower, and the Esplanade, and Pitt Street and the High Street, until his companion suddenly shot out a long eager arm and caught him by the wrist.

"Look here, man," he said, in a low quick whisper. "Answer me truly as you hope for mercy. Are not the streets that run out of the High Street, Fox Street, Caroline Street, and George Street, in the order named?"

"They are," the sailor answered, shrinking away from the wild flashing eyes.

And at that moment John's memory came back to him, and he saw clear and distinct his life as it had been and as it should have been, with every minutest detail traced as in letters of fire. Too stricken to cry out, too stricken to weep, he could only hurry away homewards wildly and aimlessly; hurry as fast as his aged limbs would carry him, as if, poor soul! there were some chance yet of catching up the fifty years which had gone by. Staggering and tremulous he hastened on until a film seemed to gather over his eyes, and throwing his arms into the air with a great cry, "Oh, Mary, Mary! Oh, my lost, lost life!" he fell senseless upon the pavement.

The storm of emotion which had passed through him, and the mental shock which he had undergone, would have sent many a man into a raging fever, but John was too strong-willed and too practical to allow his strength to be wasted at the very time when he needed it most. Within a few days he realized a portion of his property, and starting for New York, caught the first mail steamer to England. Day and night, night and day, he trod the quarter-deck, until the hardy sailors watched the old man with astonishment, and marvelled how any human being could do so much upon so little sleep. It was only by this unceasing exercise, by wearing down his vitality until fatigue brought lethargy, that he could prevent himself from falling into a very frenzy of despair. He hardly dared ask himself what was the object of this wild journey? What did he expect? Would Mary be still alive? She must be a very old woman. If he could but see her and mingle his tears with hers he would be content. Let her only know that it had been no fault of his, and that they had both been victims to the same cruel fate. The cottage was her own, and she had said that she would wait for him there until she heard from him. Poor lass, she had never reckoned on such a wait as this.

At last the Irish lights were sighted and passed, Land's End lay like a blue fog upon the water, and the great steamer ploughed its way along the bold Cornish coast until it dropped its anchor in Plymouth Bay. John hurried to the railway station, and within a few hours he found himself back once more in his native town, which he had quitted a poor corkcutter, half a century before.

But was it the same town? Were it not for the name engraved all over the station and on the hotels, John might have found a difficulty in believing it. The broad, well-paved streets, with the tram lines laid down the centre, were very different from the narrow winding lanes which he could remember. The spot upon which the station had been built was now the very centre of the town, but in the old days it would have been far out in the fields. In every direction, lines of luxurious villas branched away in streets and crescents bearing names which were new to the exile. Great warehouses, and long rows of shops with glittering fronts, showed him how enormously Brisport had increased in wealth as well as in dimensions. It was only when he came upon the old High Street that John began to feel at home. It was much altered, but still it was recognisable, and some few of the buildings were just as he had left them. There was the place where Fairbairns's cork works had been. It was now occupied by a great brand-new hotel. And there was the old grey Town Hall. The wanderer turned down beside it, and made his way with eager steps but a sinking heart in the direction of the line of cottages which he used to know so well.

It was not difficult for him to find where they had been. The sea at least was as of old, and from it he could tell where the cottages had stood. But alas, where were they now! In their place an imposing crescent of high stone houses reared their tall front to the beach. John walked wearily down past their palatial entrances, feeling heart-sore and despairing, when suddenly a thrill shot through him, followed by a warm glow of excitement and of hope, for, standing a little back from the line, and looking as much out of place as a bumpkin in a ballroom, was an old whitewashed cottage, with wooden porch and walls bright with creeping plants. He rubbed his eyes and stared again, but there it stood with its diamond-paned windows and white muslin curtains, the very same down to the smallest details, as it had been on the day when he last saw it. Brown hair had become white, and fishing hamlets had changed into cities, but busy hands and a faithful heart had kept granny's cottage unchanged and ready for the wanderer.

And now, when he had reached his very haven of rest, John Huxford's mind became more filled with apprehension than ever, and he came over so deadly sick, that he had to sit down upon one of the beach

benches which faced the cottage. An old fisherman was perched at one end of it, smoking his black clay pipe, and he remarked upon the wan face and sad eyes of the stranger.

"You have overtired yourself," he said. "It doesn't do for old chaps like you and me to forget our years."

"I'm better now, thank you," John answered. "Can you tell me, friend, how that one cottage came among all those fine houses?"

"Why," said the old fellow, thumping his crutch energetically upon the ground, "that cottage belongs to the most obstinate woman in all England. That woman, if you'll believe me, has been offered the price of the cottage ten times over, and yet she won't part with it. They have even promised to remove it stone by stone, and put it up on some more convenient place, and pay her a good round sum into the bargain, but, God bless you! she wouldn't so much as hear of it."

"And why was that?" asked John.

"Well, that's just the funny part of it. It's all on account of a mistake. You see her spark went away when I was a youngster, and she's got it into her head that he may come back some day, and that he won't know where to go unless the cottage is there. Why, if the fellow were alive he would be as old as you, but I've no doubt he's dead long ago. She's well quit of him, for he must have been a scamp to abandon her as he did."

"Oh, he abandoned her, did he?"

"Yes – went off to the States, and never so much as sent a word to bid her good-bye. It was a cruel shame, it was, for the girl has been a-waiting and a-pining for him ever since. It's my belief that it's fifty years' weeping that blinded her."

"She is blind!" cried John, half rising to his feet.

"Worse than that," said the fisherman. "She's mortal ill, and not expected to live. Why, look ye, there's the doctor's carriage a-waiting at her door."

At this evil tidings old John sprang up and hurried over to the cottage, where he met the physician returning to his brougham.

"How is your patient, doctor?" he asked in a trembling voice.

"Very bad, very bad," said the man of medicine pompously. "If she continues to sink she will be in great danger; but if, on the other hand, she takes a turn, it is possible that she may recover," with which oracular answer he drove away in a cloud of dust.

John Huxford was still hesitating at the doorway, not knowing how to announce himself, or how far a shock might be dangerous to the sufferer, when a gentleman in black came bustling up.

"Can you tell me, my man, if this is where the sick woman is?" he asked.

John nodded, and the clergyman passed in, leaving the door half open. The wanderer waited until he had gone into the inner room, and then slipped into the front parlour, where he had spent so many happy hours. All was the same as ever, down to the smallest ornaments, for Mary had been in the habit whenever anything was broken of replacing it with a duplicate, so that there might be no change in the room. He stood irresolute, looking about him, until he heard a woman's voice from the inner chamber, and stealing to the door he peeped in.

The invalid was reclining upon a couch, propped up with pillows, and her face was turned full towards John as he looked round the door. He could have cried out as his eyes rested upon it, for there were Mary's pale, plain, sweet homely features as smooth and as unchanged as though she were still the half child, half woman, whom he had pressed to his heart on the Brisport quay. Her calm, eventless, unselfish life had left none of those rude traces upon her countenance which are the outward emblems of internal conflict and an unquiet soul. A chaste melancholy had refined and softened her expression, and her loss of sight had been compensated for by that placidity which comes upon the faces of the blind. With her silvery hair peeping out beneath her snow-white cap, and a bright smile upon her sympathetic face, she was the old Mary improved and developed, with something ethereal and angelic superadded.

"You will keep a tenant in the cottage," she was saying to the clergyman, who sat with his back turned to the observer. "Choose some poor deserving folk in the parish who will be glad of a home free. And when *he* comes you will tell him that I have waited for him until I have been forced to go on, but that he will find me on the other side still faithful and true. There's a little money too – only a few pounds – but I should like him to have it when he comes, for he may need it, and then you will tell the folk you put in to be kind to him, for he will be grieved, poor lad, and to tell him that I was cheerful and happy up to the end. Don't let him know that I ever fretted, or he may fret too."

Now John listened quietly to all this from behind the door, and more than once he had to put his hand to his throat, but when she had finished, and when he thought of her long, blameless, innocent life, and saw the dear face looking straight at him, and yet unable to see him, it became too much for his manhood, and he burst out into an irrepressible choking sob which shook his very frame. And then occurred a strange thing, for though he had spoken no word, the old woman stretched out her arms to him, and cried:

"Oh, Johnny, Johnny! Oh dear, dear Johnny, you have come back to me again," and before the parson could at all understand what had happened, those two faithful lovers were in each other's arms, weeping

over each other, and patting each other's silvery heads, with their hearts so full of joy that it almost compensated for all that weary fifty years of waiting.

It is hard to say how long they rejoiced together. It seemed a very short time to them and a very long to the reverend gentleman, who was thinking at last of stealing away, when Mary recollected his presence and the courtesy which was due to him.

"My heart is full of joy, sir," she said; "it is God's will that I should not see my Johnny, but I can call his image up as clear as if I had my eyes. Now stand up, John, and I will let the gentleman see how well I remember you. He is as tall, sir, as the second shelf, as straight as an arrow, his face brown, and his eyes bright and clear. His hair is well-nigh black, and his moustache the same – I shouldn't wonder if he had whiskers as well by this time. Now, sir, don't you think I can do without my sight?" The clergyman listened to her description, and looking at the battered, white-haired man before him, he hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry.

But it all proved to be a laughing matter in the end, for, whether it was that her illness had taken some natural turn, or that John's return had startled it away, it is certain that from that day Mary steadily improved until she was as well as ever.

"No special license for me," John had said sturdily, "It looks as if we were ashamed of what we are doing, as though we hadn't the best right to be married of any two folk in the parish."

So the banns were put up accordingly, and three times it was announced that John Huxford, bachelor, was going to be united to Mary Howden, spinster, after which, no one objecting, they were duly married accordingly.

"We may not have very long in this world," said old John, "but at least we shall start fair and square in the next."

John's share in the Quebec business was sold out, and gave rise to a very interesting legal question as to whether, knowing that his name was Huxford, he could still sign that of Hardy, as was necessary for the completion of the business. It was decided, however, that on his producing two trustworthy witnesses to his identity all would be right, so the property was duly realized and produced a very handsome fortune. Part of this John devoted to building a pretty villa just outside Brisport, and the heart of the proprietor of Beach Terrace leaped within him when he learned that the cottage was at last to be abandoned, and that it would no longer break the symmetry and impair the effect of his row of aristocratic mansions.

And there in their snug new home, sitting out on the lawn in the summer-time, and on either side of the fire in the winter, that worthy old

couple continued for many years to live as innocently and as happily as two children. Those who knew them well say that there was never a shadow between them, and that the love which burned in their aged hearts was as high and as holy as that of any young couple who ever went to the altar. And through all the country round, if ever man or woman were in distress and fighting against hard times, they had only to go up to the villa to receive help, and that sympathy which is more precious than help. So when at last John and Mary fell asleep in their ripe old age, within a few hours of each other, they had all the poor and the needy and the friendless of the parish among their mourners, and in talking over the troubles which these two had faced so bravely, they learned that their own miseries also were but passing things, and that faith and truth can never miscarry, either in this existence or the next.

*1888*

# THE VEILED PORTRAIT

It has been asserted that one cannot hold intercourse with that which is generally called the Unseen World, or behold anything supernatural, and live; but these ideas, from my own experience, I am inclined to doubt.

In the year subsequent to the great Bengal mutiny, I found myself at home on sick leave. My health had been injured by service in India, and by our sufferings consequent on the revolt; while my nervous system had been so seriously shaken by a grape-shot wound received at Lucknow, that it was completely changed, and I became cognizant of many things so utterly new to me, and so bewildering, that until I read Baron Reichenbach's work on magnetism and crystalism, I feared that I was becoming insane. I was sensible of the power of a magnet over me, though it might be three rooms distant, and twice, in darkness which seemed perfect to others, my room became filled with light; but the Baron holds that darkness is full of light, and that to increase the sensitiveness of the visual organs is to render that rare and dissipated light susceptible, with all that it may *contain*.

I was now compelled to acknowledge the existence of that new power in nature which the Baron calls the Odic Light, and of many other phenomena that are described in "Der Geist in der Natur," of Christian Oersted – the understanding that pervades all things.

But to my story.

Nearly a year had elapsed since the mutiny. The massacres at Delhi, Lucknow, Cawnpore, and elsewhere had been fearfully avenged by that army of retribution which marched from Umballah, and I found myself in London, enfeebled, enervated, and, as the saying is, "weak as a child." The bustle of the great capital stunned and bewildered me; thus I gladly accepted a hearty invitation which I received from Sidney Warren, one of "ours," but latterly of the Staff Corps, to spend a few weeks – months if I chose – at his place in Herts; a fine old house of the Tudor times, approached from the London road by an avenue that was a grand triumphal arch of nature's own creation, with lofty interlacing boughs and hanging foliage.

Who, thought I, that was lord of such a place could dream of broiling in India – of sweltering in the white-washed barrack at Dumdum, or the thatched cantonments of Delhi or Meerut!

My friend came hurrying forth to meet me.

"How goes it, old fellow? Welcome to my new quarters," he exclaimed.

"Well, Sidney, old man, how are you?"

Then we grasped each other's hands as only brother soldiers do.

I found Warren, whom I had not seen since the commencement of the revolt, nearly as much changed and shattered in constitution as myself; but I knew that he had lost those whom he loved most in the world amid the massacre at Meerut. He received me, however, with all the warmth of an old comrade, for we had a thousand topics in common to con over; while the regiment, which neither of us might ever see again – he certainly not, as he had sold out – would prove an endless source of conversation.

Sidney Warren was in his fortieth year, but looked considerably older. His once dark hair and coal-black moustache were quite grizzled now. The expression of his face was one of intense sadness, as if some secret grief consumed him; while there was a weird and far-seeing expression that led me to fear he was not fated to be long in this world. Yet he had gone through the storm of the Indian war without receiving even a scratch! Why was this?

Before I had spent two days with Sidney, he had shown me all the objects of interest around the Warren and in it – the portrait gallery, with its courtiers in high ruffs, and dames in the long stomachers of one period and décolleté dresses of another; his collection of Indian antiquities, amassed at the plundering of Delhi; and those which were more interesting to me, ponderous suits of mail which had been hacked and battered in the wars of the Roses, and a torn pennon unfurled by Warren's troop of horse, "for God and the King," at Naseby.

But there was one object which he would neither show nor permit me to look upon, and which seemed to make him shiver or shudder whenever it caught his eye, and this was a picture of some kind in the library – a room he very rarely entered. It was the size of a life portrait, but covered closely by a green-baize hanging. Good taste compelled me to desist from talking to him on the subject, but I resolved to gratify my curiosity on the first convenient occasion; so one day when he was absent at the stable court I drew back the hanging of this mysterious picture.

It proved to be the full-length portrait of a very beautiful girl – a proud and stately one, too – bordering on blooming womanhood. Her features were clearly cut and classic; she had an olive-coloured complexion, that seemed to tell of another land than England, yet the type of her rare beauty was purely English. Her forehead was broad and low; her dark eyes, that seemed to haunt and follow me, were deeply set, with black brows well defined; her chin was rather massive, as if indicating resolution of character, yet the soft, ripe lips were full of sweetness; while the gorgeous coils of her dark hair were crisp and wavy. Her attire was a

green riding-habit, the skirt of which was gathered in her left hand, while the right grasped the bridle of her horse.

It was *not* a portrait of his wife, whom I remember to have been a fair-haired little woman; so *who* was this mysterious lady? I cannot describe the emotion this portrait excited within me; but I started and let fall the curtain, with a distinct sensation of some one, or *something* I could not see, being close beside me; so I hurried from the shady library into the sunshine. Lovely though the face – I can see it yet in all its details – it haunted me with an unpleasant pertinacity, impossible either to analyze or portray. But I was a creature of fancies then.

"Herein," thought I, "lurks some mystery, which may never be cleared up to me." But in this surmise I was wrong, for one night – the night of Sunday, the 10th May, *the first anniversary* of the outbreak at Meerut, after we had discussed an excellent dinner, with a bottle or two of Moselle, and betaken us to iced brandy *pawnee* (for so we still loved to call it), and to the "soothing weed," on the sofas of the smoking-room, Warren became suddenly seized by one of those confidential fits which many men unaccountably have at such times, and, while he unsparingly and bitterly reproached himself for the part he had acted in it, I drew from him, little by little, the secret story of his life.

Some ten years before those days of which I write, when in the Guards, and deeply dipped in debt by extravagance, he had, unknown to his family, married secretly a beautiful girl who was penniless, at the very time his friends were seeking to retrieve his fortune by a wealthy alliance. An exchange into the Line – "the sliding scale" – became necessary, thus he was gazetted to our regiment in India, at a period when his young wife was in extremely delicate health; so much so that the idea of her voyaging round the Cape – there were no P. and O. Liners then – was not to be thought of, as it was expressly forbidden by the medical men; so they were to be separated for a time; and that time of parting, so dreaded by Constance, came inexorably.

The last fatal evening came – the last Sidney was to spend with her. His strapped overlands and bullock-trunks, his sword and cap, both cased, were already in the entrance hall; the morrow's morning would see him off by the train for Southampton, and his place would be vacant; and she should see his fond hazel eyes no more.

"Tears again!" said he, almost impatiently, while tenderly caressing the dark and glossy hair of his girl-wife; "why on earth are you so sad, Conny, about this temporary separation?"

"Would that I could be certain it is only such!" she exclaimed. "Sad; oh, can you ask me, Sidney, darling? The presentiment of a great sorrow to come is hanging over me."

"A presentiment, Constance! Do not indulge in this folly."

"If I did not love you dearly, Sidney, would such a painful emotion rack my heart?"

"It is the merest superstition, darling, and you will get over it when I am fairly away."

Her tender eyes regarded him wistfully for a moment, and then her tears fell faster at the contemplation of the coming loneliness.

After a pause, she asked:

"Are there many passengers going out with you?"

"A few – in the cuddy," he replied, carelessly.

"Do you know any of them?"

"Yes; one or two fellows on the staff."

"And the ladies?" she asked, after another pause.

"I don't know, Conny dear; what do they matter to me?"

"I heard incidentally that – that Miss Dashwood was going out in your vessel."

"Indeed; I believe she will."

Constance shivered, for with the name of this finished flirt that of her husband had been more than once linked, and his change of colour was unseen by her as he turned to manipulate a cigar. So for four, perhaps six months, these two would be together upon the sea.

Constance knew too well the irritable nature of her husband's temper to say more on the subject of her secret thoughts; and deeply loth was she that such ideas should embitter the few brief hours they were to be together now; so a silence ensued, which, after a time, she broke, while taking between her slender fingers a hand of Sidney, who was leaning half moodily, half listlessly, against the mantelpiece, twisting his moustache with a somewhat mingled expression of face.

"Sidney, darling," said she entreatingly, "do forgive me if I am dull and sad – so *triste* – this evening."

"I do forgive you, little one."

"You know, Sidney, that I would die for you!"

"Yes; but don't, Conny – for I hate scenes," said he, playfully kissing her sweetly sad upturned face; and the poor girl was forced to be contented with this matter-of-fact kind of tenderness.

So the dreaded morrow came with its sad moment of parting.

To muffle the sound of the departing wheels she buried her head, with all its wealth of dark, dishevelled hair, among the pillows of her bed, and some weeks – weeks of the most utter loneliness – elapsed, ere she left it, with the keen and ardent desire to recover health and strength, to the end that she might follow her husband over the world of waters and rejoin

him; but the strength and health, so necessary for the journey, were long of coming back to her.

She had hoped he would write to her before sailing from Southampton – a single line would have satisfied the hungry cravings of her heart; but, as he did not do so, she supposed there was not time; yet the transport lay three days in the docks after the troops were on board. He would write by some passing ship, he had said, and one letter, dated from Ascension, reached her; but its cold and careless tone struck a mortal chill to the sensitive heart of Constance, and one or two terms of endearment it contained were manifestly forced and ill-expressed.

"He writes me thus," she muttered, with her hand pressed upon her heaving bosom; "thus – and with that woman, perhaps, by his side!"

She consulted the map, and saw how far, far away on the lonely ocean was that island speck. Months had elapsed since he had been there; so she knew that he must be in India now, and she had the regular mails to look to with confidence – a confidence, alas! that soon faded away. Long, tender, and passionate was the letter she wrote in reply; she fondly fixed the time when she proposed to leave England and rejoin him, if he sent her the necessary remittances; but mail after mail came in without any tidings from Sidney, and she felt all the unspeakable misery of watching the postman for letters that never, never came!

Yet she never ceased to write, entreating him for answers and assuring him of unswerving affection.

Slowly, heavily, and imperceptibly a year passed away – a whole year – to her now a black eternity of time!

"Could Sidney be dead?" she asked herself with terror; but she knew that his family (who were all unaware of her existence) had never been in mourning, as they must infallibly have been in the event of such a calamity; and in her simplicity she never thought of applying to the Horse Guards for information concerning him – more information than she might quite have cared to learn.

Her old thoughts concerning Miss Dashwood took a strange hold of her imagination now; a hundred "trifles light as air" came back most gallingly to memory and took coherent and tangible shapes; but a stray number of the "India Mail" informed her of the marriage of Miss Dashwood – her *bête noire* – to a Major Milton; and also that the regiment to which Sidney belonged "was moving up country," a phrase to her perplexing and vague.

Her funds were gone – her friends were few and poor. Her jewels – his treasured presents – were first turned into cash; then the furniture of her pretty villa, and next the villa itself, with its sweet rose-garden, had to be exchanged for humbler apartments in a meaner street; and, ere long,

Constance Warren found, that if she was to live, it must be by her own unaided efforts; and for five years she maintained a desperate struggle for existence – five years!

A lady going to India "wanted a young person as a governess and companion."

To India – *to India*! On her knees Constance prayed that her application might prove successful; and her prayer was heard, for out of some hundred letters – from a few which were selected – the tenor of hers suited best the taste of the lady in question. She said nothing of her marriage or of her apparent desertion; but asher wedding-ring, which, with a fond superstition of the heart, she never drew from her finger, told a tale, she had to pass for a widow.

So in the fullness of time she found herself far away from England, and duly installed with an Anglo-Indian family in one of the stately villas of the European quarter of Calcutta – a veritable palace in the city of palaces overlooking the esplanade before Fort William – in charge of one sickly, but gentle little pale-faced girl.

She had been a month there when her employer's family proposed to visit some relatives at Meerut, where she heard that Sidney's regiment was cantoned! To her it seemed as if the hand of Fate was in all this. Oh the joy of such tidings! Some one there must be able to unravel the horrible mystery involving his fate; for by this time she had ascertained that his name was out of the corps; but her heart suggested that he might have exchanged into another.

"If alive, is he worth caring for?" She often asked this of herself, but thrust aside the idea, and pursued with joy the long journey up country by river steamers, dawk-boats, and otherwise, on the Ganges to Jehangeerabad, from whence they were to travel by carriages to the place of their destination, some fifty miles distant.

On the way Constance had an addition to her charge in the person of a little boy, who, with his *ayah*, was going to join his parents at Meerut. This little boy was more than usually beautiful, with round and dimpled cheeks, dark hazel eyes, curly golden hair, and a sweet and winning smile. Something in the child's face or its expression attracted deeply the attention of Constance, and seemed to stir some memory in her heart. Where had she seen those eyes before?

She drew the boy caressingly towards her, and when kissing his fair and open forehead, her eyes fell involuntarily on a ring that secured his necktie, a mere blue ribbon. It was of gold, and on it were graven the initials C. and S. with a lover's knot between. These were those of herself and her husband, and the ring was one she had seen him wear daily. Constance trembled in every limb; she felt a deadly paleness overspread

her face, and the room in which she sat swam round her; but on recovering her self-possession, she said:

"Child, let me look at this ring."

The wondering boy placed in her hand the trinket, which she had not the slightest doubt of having seen years before in London.

"Who gave you this, my child?" she asked.

"My papa."

"Your papa? – what is your name?"

"Sidney."

"What else?" she asked impetuously.

"Sidney Warren Milton."

"Thank God! But how came you to be named so? There is some mystery in this – a mystery that must soon be solved now. Where were you born, dear little Sidney?"

"In Calcutta."

"What is your age, child?"

"Next year, I shall be seven years old."

"Seven – how strange it is that you have the name you bear!"

"It is my papa's," said the boy, with a little proud irritability of manner.

"Where did your papa live before he came to Calcutta?"

"I don't know – in many places – soldiers always do."

"He is a soldier?"

"My papa is Major Milton, and lives in the cantonments at Meerut."

"A little time, and I shall know all," replied poor Constance, caressing the boy with great tenderness.

On arriving at Meerut, however, she found herself ill – faint and feverish, so that for days she was confined to her bed, where she lay wakeful by night, watching the red fireflies flashing about the green jalousies, and full of strange, wild dreams by day. She had but one keen and burning desire – to see Major Milton, and to learn from his lips the fate of her husband. On the evening of the fifth day – the evening of the 10th of May – she was lying on her pillow, watching the red sunshine fading on the ruined mosques, and Abu's stately tomb, when just as the sunset gun pealed over the cantonments, the *ayah* brought her a card, inscribed "Major Milton – Staff Corps."

"Desire the Major to come to me!" said Constance in a broken voice, and terribly convulsed by emotion; for now she was on the eve of knowing all.

"Here to the *mehm sahib*'s bedside?" asked the astonished *ayah*.

"Here instantly – go – go!"

Endued with new strength, as the woman withdrew, she sprang from her bed, put on her slippers, threw round her an ample cashmere dressing robe, and seated herself in a bamboo chair, trembling in every fibre. In a mirror opposite she could see that her face was as white as snow. The door was opened.

"Major Milton," said a voice that made her tremble, and attired in undress uniform, pith helmet in hand, her husband, looking scarcely a day older, stood gazing at her in utter bewilderment. He gave one convulsive start, and then stood rooted to the spot; but no expression or glance of tenderness escaped him. His whole aspect bore the impress of terror.

Years had elapsed as a dream, and they were again face to face, those two, whom no man might put asunder. Softness, sorrow, and reproach faded from the face of Constance. Her broad, low forehead became stern; her deep-set, dark eyes sparkled perilously; her full lips became set, and her chin seemed to express more than ever resolution.

"Oh, Constance – Constance," he faltered, "I know not what to say!"

"It may well be so, Sidney" (and at the utterance of his name her lips quivered). "So *you* are Major Milton, and the supposed husband of Miss Dashwood?"

There was a long pause, after which she said:

"I ask not the cause of your most cruel desertion; but whence this name of Milton?"

"A property was left me-– and-– but, of course, you have long since ceased to love me, Constance?"

"*You* actually dare to take an upbraiding tone to me!" she exclaimed, her dark eyes flashing fire. Then looking upward appealingly, she wailed, "Oh, my God! my God! and *this* is the man for whom, during these bitter years, I have been eating my own heart!"

"Pardon me, Constance; you may now learn that there is no gauge to measure the treachery of which the human heart in its weakness is capable. Yet there has been a worm in mine that has never died."

She wrung her hands, and then said, with something of her old softness of manner:

"You surely loved me once, Sidney?"

"I did." He drew nearer, but she recoiled from him.

"Then whence this cruel change?"

"Does not someone write, that we love, and think we love truly, and yet find another to whom one will cling as if it required these two hearts to make a perfect whole?"

"Most accursed sophistry! But if you have no pity, have you not fear?"

"I have great fear," said he in a broken voice; "thus, Constance, by the love you once bore me, I beseech you to have pity, not on me, but on my little boy, and his poor mother-– preserve their happiness —"

"And sacrifice my own?" said she in a hollow voice.

"Spare, and do not expose me-– my commission-– my position here —"

"Neither shall be lost through me," she replied, in a voice that grew more and more weak; "but leave me-– leave me-– the air is suffocating-– the light has left my eyes. Farewell, Sidney-– kiss your child, for my sake —"

He drew near to take her hand, but she repulsed him with the wild gesture of despair, and throwing up her arms, fell back in her seat, with a gurgle in her throat, her head on one side and her jaw fallen.

"Dead-– quite dead!" was his first exclamation, and with his terror was blended a certain selfish emotion of satisfaction and relief at his escape. The blood again flowed freely in his veins, and he was roused by the cantonment *ghurries* clanging the hour of *nine*.

"Help-– help!" cried he; but no help came, and as he hurried away, the sudden din of musket-shots, of shrieks and yells, announced that the great revolt had begun at Meerut, and that the expected massacre of the Europeans had commenced. In that butchery, those he loved most on earth perished, and midnight saw him wifeless and childless, lurking in misery and alone in a mangotope, on the road to Kurnaul.

* * *

While listening to the narrative of my friend Sidney, whom I had always known as Warren, rather than Milton, the look on the mantelpiece struck *nine*, and he said in a broken voice:

"It was at this very hour, twelve months ago, that my boy and his mother were murdered by the 3d Cavalry, at the moment that Constance was dying!"

As he spoke, a strange white light suddenly filled one end of the smoking-room, and amid it there came gradually, but distinctly to view, two figures; one was a little boy with golden hair, the other a woman whose left arm was around him – a beautiful woman, with clearly-cut features, masses of dark hair curling over a low, broad forehead, lips full and handsome, with a massive chin and classic throat – the woman of the veiled picture, line for line, but to all appearance living and breathing, with a beautiful smile in her eyes, and wearing, not the riding-habit, but a floating crape-like white garment, impossible to describe. There was a

strange weird brightness in her face – the transfigured brightness of great joy and greater love.

"Constance-– Constance and my child!" cried Sidney, in a voice that rose to a shriek; and like a dissolving view, the light, and all we looked on with eyes transfixed, faded away!

I was aware of an excess of sensitiveness, and that my heart was beating with painful rapidity. I did not become insensible, but some time elapsed before I became aware that lights were in the room, and that several servants, whom my friend's cry had summoned in haste and alarm, were endeavouring to rouse him to consciousness from a fit that had seized him; but from that fit he never recovered. His heavy, stertorous breathing gradually grew less and less, and ere a doctor came, he had ceased to respire.

His death – sudden as hers on that eventful night, but a retributive one – was declared to be apoplexy; but I knew otherwise. Since then, though the effect of the grape-shot wound on my nervous system has quite passed away, I feel myself compelled to agree with the hackneyed remark of Hamlet, that "there are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

*1895*

# THE MAN FROM ARCHANGEL

On the fourth day of March, in the year 1867, I being at that time in my five-and-twentieth year, I wrote down the following words in my note-book – the result of much mental perturbation and conflict:

*"The solar system, amidst a countless number of other systems as large as itself, rolls ever silently through space in the direction of the constellation of Hercules. The great spheres of which it is composed spin and spin through the eternal void ceaselessly and noiselessly. Of these one of the smallest and most insignificant is that conglomeration of solid and of liquid particles which we have named the earth. It whirls onwards now as it has done before my birth, and will do after my death – a revolving mystery, coming none know whence, and going none know whither. Upon the outer crust of this moving mass crawl many mites, of whom I, John McVittie, am one, helpless, impotent, being dragged aimlessly through space. Yet such is the state of things amongst us that the little energy and glimmering of reason which I possess is entirely taken up with the labours which are necessary in order to procure certain metallic discs, wherewith I may purchase the chemical elements necessary to build up my ever-wasting tissues, and keep a roof over me to shelter me from the inclemency of the weather. I thus have no thought to expend upon the vital questions which surround me on every side. Yet, miserable entity as I am, I can still at times feel some degree of happiness, and am even – save the mark! – puffed up occasionally with a sense of my own importance."*

These words, as I have said, I wrote down in my note-book, and they reflected accurately the thoughts which I found rooted far down in my soul, ever present and unaffected by the passing emotions of the hour. At last, however, came a time when my uncle, McVittie of Glencairn, died – the same who was at one time chairman of committees of the House of Commons. He divided his great wealth among his many nephews, and I found myself with sufficient to provide amply for my wants during the remainder of my life, and became at the same time the owner of a bleak tract of land upon the coast of Caithness, which I think the old man must have bestowed upon me in derision, for it was sandy and valueless, and he had ever a grim sense of humour. Up to this time I had been an attorney in a midland town in England. Now I saw that I could put my thoughts into effect, and, leaving all petty and sordid aims, could elevate my mind by the study of the secrets of nature. My departure from my English home was somewhat accelerated by the fact that I had nearly slain a man in a

quarrel, for my temper was fiery, and I was apt to forget my own strength when enraged. There was no legal action taken in the matter, but the papers yelped at me, and folk looked askance when I met them. It ended by my cursing them and their vile, smoke-polluted town, and hurrying to my northern possession, where I might at last find peace and an opportunity for solitary study and contemplation. I borrowed from my capital before I went, and so was able to take with me a choice collection of the most modern philosophical instruments and books, together with chemicals and such other things as I might need in my retirement.

The land which I had inherited was a narrow strip, consisting mostly of sand, and extending for rather over two miles round the cost of Mansie Bay, in Caithness. Upon this strip there had been a rambling, greystone building – when erected or wherefore none could tell me and this I had repaired, so that it made a dwelling quite good enough for one of my simple tastes. One room was my laboratory, another my sitting-room, and in a third, just under the sloping roof, I slung the hammock in which I always slept. There were three other rooms, but I left them vacant, except one which was given over to the old crone who kept house for me. Save the Youngs and the McLeods, who were fisherfolk living round at the other side of Fergus Ness, there were no other people for many miles in each direction. In front of the house was the great bay, behind it were two long barren hills, capped by other loftier ones beyond. There was a glen between the hills, and when the wind was from the land it used to sweep down this with a melancholy sough and whisper among the branches of the fir-trees beneath my attic window.

I dislike my fellow-mortals. Justice compels me to add that they appear for the most part to dislike me. I hate their little crawling ways, their conventionalities, their deceits, their narrow rights and wrongs. They take offence at my brusque outspokenness, my disregard for their social laws, my impatience of all constraint. Among my books and my drugs in my lonely den at Mansie I could let the great drove of the human race pass onwards with their politics and inventions and tittle-tattle, and I remained behind stagnant and happy. Not stagnant either, for I was working in my own little groove, and making progress. I have reason to believe that Dalton's atomic theory is founded upon error, and I know that mercury is not an element.

During the day I was busy with my distillations and analyses. Often I forgot my meals, and when old Madge summoned me to my tea I found my dinner lying untouched upon the table. At night I read Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant – all those who have pried into what is unknowable. They are all fruitless and empty, barren of result, but prodigal of polysyllables, reminding me of men who, while digging for

gold, have turned up many worms, and then exhibit them exultantly as being what they sought. At times a restless spirit would come upon me, and I would walk thirty and forty miles without rest or breaking fast. On these occasions, when I used to stalk through the country villages, gaunt, unshaven, and dishevelled, the mothers would rush into the road and drag their children indoors, and the rustics would swarm out of their pot-houses to gaze at me. I believe that I was known far and wide as the "mad laird o' Mansie." It was rarely, however, that I made these raids into the country, for I usually took my exercise upon my own beach, where I soothed my spirit with strong black tobacco, and made the ocean my friend and my confidant.

What companion is there like the great restless, throbbing sea? What human mood is there which it does not match and sympathize with? There are none so gay but that they may feel gayer when they listen to its merry turmoil, and see the long green surges racing in,"with the glint of the sunbeams in their sparkling crests. But when the grey waves toss their heads in anger, and the wind screams above them, goading them on to madder and more tumultuous efforts, then the darkest-minded of men feels that there is a melancholy principle in Nature which is as gloomy as his own thoughts. When it was calm in the Bay of Mansie the surface would be as clear and bright as a sheet of silver, broken only at one spot some little way from the shore, where a long black line projected out of the water looking like the jawed back of some sleeping monster. This was the top of the dangerous ridge of rocks known to the fishermen as the "ragged reef o' Mansie". When the wind blew from the east the waves would break upon it like thunder, and the spray would be tossed far over my house and up to the hills behind. The bay itself was a bold and noble one, but too much exposed to the northern and eastern gales, and too much dreaded for its reef, to be much used by mariners. There was something of romance about this lonely spot. I have lain in my boat upon a calm day, and peering over the edge I have seen far down the flickering, ghostly forms of great fish – fish, as it seemed to me, such as naturalist never knew, and which my imagination transformed into the genii of that desolate bay. Once, as I stood by the brink of the waters upon a quiet night, a great cry, as of a woman in hopeless grief, rose from the bosom of the deep, and swelled out upon the still air, now sinking and now rising, for a space of thirty seconds. This I heard with my own ears.

In this strange spot, with the eternal hills behind me and the eternal sea in front, I worked and brooded for more than two years unpestered by my fellow men. By degrees I had trained my old servant into habits of silence, so that she now rarely opened her lips, though I doubt not that when twice a year she visited her relations in Wick, her tongue during

those few days made up for its enforced rest. I had come almost to forget that I was a member of the human family, and to live entirely with the dead whose books I pored over, when a sudden incident occurred which threw all my thoughts into a new channel.

Three rough days in June had been succeeded by one calm and peaceful one. There was not a breath of air that evening. The sun sank down in the west behind a line of purple clouds, and the smooth surface of the bay was gashed with scarlet streaks. Along the beach the pools left by the tide showed up like gouts of blood against the yellow sand, as if some wounded giant had toilfully passed that way, and had left these red traces of his grievous hurt behind him. As the darkness closed in, certain ragged clouds which had lain low on the eastern horizon coalesced and formed a great irregular cumulus. The glass was still low, and I knew that there was mischief brewing. About nine o'clock a dull moaning sound came up from the sea, as from a creature who, much harassed, learns that the hour of suffering has come round again. At ten a sharp breeze sprang up from the eastward. At eleven it had increased to a gale, and by midnight the most furious storm was raging which I ever remember upon that weather-beaten coast.

As I went to bed the shingle and seaweed were pattering up against my attic window, and the wind was screaming as though every gust were a lost soul. By that time the sounds of the tempest had become a lullaby to me. I knew that the grey walls of the old house would buffet it out, and for what occurred in the world outside I had small concern. Old Madge was usually as callous to such things as I was myself. It was a surprise to me when, about three in the morning, I was awoke by the sound of a great knocking at my door and excited cries in the wheezy voice of my housekeeper. I sprang out of my hammock, and roughly demanded of her what was the matter.

"Eh, maister, maister!" she screamed in her hatefull dialect. "Come doun, mun; come doun! There's a muckle ship gaun ashore on the reef, and the puir folks are a' yammerin' and ca'in' for help – and I doobt they'll a' be drooned. Oh, Maister McVittie, come doun!"

"Hold your tongue, you hag!" I shouted back in a passion. "What is it to you whether they are drowned or not? Get back to your bed and leave me alone." I turned in again and drew the blankets over me. "Those men out there," I said to myself, "have already gone through half the horrors of death. If they be saved they will but have to go through the same once more in the space of a few brief years. It is best therefore that they should pass away now, since they have suffered that anticipation which is more than the pain of dissolution." With this thought in my mind I endeavoured to compose myself to sleep once more, for that philosophy which had

taught me to consider death as a small and trivial incident in man's eternal and everchanging career, had also broken me of much curiosity concerning worldly matters. On this occasion I found, however, that the old leaven still fermented strongly in my soul. I tossed from side to side for some minutes endeavouring to beat down the impulses of the moment by the rules of conduct which I had framed during months of thought. Then I heard a dull roar amid the wild shriek of the gale, and I knew that it was the sound of a signal-gun. Driven by an uncontrallable impulse, I rose, dressed, and having lit my pipe, walked out on to the beach.

It was pitch dark when I came outside, and the wind blew with such violence that I had to put my shoulder against it and push my way along the shingle. My face pringled and smarted with the sting of the gravel which was blown against it, and the red ashes of my pipe streamed away behind me, dancing fantastically through the darkness. I went down to where the great waves were thundering in, and shading my eyes with my hands to keep off the salt spray, I peered out to sea. I could distinguish nothing, and yet it seemed to me that shouts and great inarticulate cries were borne to me by the blasts. Suddenly as I gazed I made out the glint of a light, and then the whole bay and the beach were lit up in a moment by a vivid blue glare. They were burning a coloured signal-light on board of the vessel. There she lay on her beam ends right in the centre of the jagged reef, hurled over to such an angle that I could see all the planking of her deck. She was a large two-masted schooner, of foreign rig, and lay perhaps a hundred and eighty or two hundred yards from the shore. Every spar and rope and writhing piece of cordage showed up hard and clear under the livid light which sputtered and flickered from the highest portion of the forecastle. Beyond the doomed ship out of the great darkness came the long rolling lines of black waves, never ending, never tiring, with a petulant tuft of foam here and there upon their crests. Each as it reached the broad circle of unnatural light appeared to gather strength and volume, and to hurry on more impetuously until, with a roar and a jarring crash, it sprang upon its victim. Clinging to the weather shrouds I could distinctly see some ten or twelve frightened seamen, who, when their light revealed my presence, turned their white faces towards me and waved their hands imploringly. I felt my gorge rise against these poor cowering worms. Why should they presume to shirk the narrow pathway along which all that is great and noble among mankind has travelled? There was one there who interested me more than they. He was a tall man, who stood apart from the others, balancing himself upon the swaying wreck as though he disdained to cling to rope or bulwark. His hands were clasped behind his back and his head was sunk upon his breast, but even in that despondent attitude there was a litheness and decision in his pose and in every motion which

marked him as a man little likely to yield to despair. Indeed, I could see by his occasional rapid glances up and down and all around him that he was weighing every chance of safety, but though he often gazed across the raging surf to where be could see my dark figure upon the beach, his selfrespect or some other reason forbade him from imploring my help in any way. He stood, dark, silent, and inscrutable, looking down on the black sea, and waiting for whatever fortune Fate might send him.

It seemed to me that that problem would very soon be settled. As I looked, an enormous billow, topping all the others, and coming after them, like a driver following a flock, swept over the vessel. Her foremast snapped short off, and the men who clung to the shrouds were brushed away like a swarm of flies. With a rending, riving sound the ship began to split in two, where the sharp back of the Mansie reef was sawing into her keel. The solitary man upon the forecastle ran rapidly across the deck and seized hold of a white bundle which I had already observed but failed to make out. As he lifted it up the light fell upon it, and I saw that the object was a woman, with a spar lashed across her body and under her arms in such a way that her head should always rise above water. He bore her tenderly to the side and seemed to speak for a minute or so to her, as though explaining the impossibility of remaining upon the ship. Her answer was a singular one. I saw her deliberately raise her hand and strike him across the face with it. He appeared to be silenced for a moment or so by this, but he addressed her again, directing her, as far as I could gather from his motions, how she should behave when in the water. She shrank away from him, but he caught her in his arms. He stooped over her for a moment and seemed to press his lips against her forehead. Then a great wave came welling up against the side of the breaking vessel, and leaning over he placed her upon the summit of it as gently as a child might be committed to its cradle. I saw her white dress flickering among the foam on the crest of the dark billow, and then the light sank gradually lower, and the riven ship and its lonely occupant were hidden from my eyes.

As I watched those things my manhood overcame my philosophy, and I felt a frantic impulse to be up and doing. I threw my cynicism to one side as a garment which I might don again at leisure, and I rushed wildly to my boat and my sculls. She was a leaky tub, but what then? Was I, who had cast many a wistful, doubtful glance at my opium bottle, to begin now to weigh chances and to cavil at danger? I dragged her down to the sea with the strength of a maniac and sprang in. For a moment or two it was a question whether she could live among the boiling surge, but a dozen frantic strokes took me through it, half full of water but still afloat. I was out on the unbroken waves now, at one time climbing, climbing up the broad black breast of one, then sinking down, down on the other side, until

looking up I could see the gleam of the foam all around me against the dark heavens. Far behind me I could hear the wild wailings of old Madge, who, seeing me start, thought no doubt that my madnees had come to a climax. As I rowed I peered over my shoulder, until at last on the belly of a great wave which was sweeping towards me I distinguished the vague white outline of the woman. Stooping over, I seized her as she swept by me, and with an effort lifted her, all sodden with water, into the boat. There was no need to row back, for the next billow carried us in and threw us upon the beach. I dragged the boat out of danger, and then lifting up the woman I carried her to the house, followed by my housekeeper, loud with congratulation and praise.

Now that I had done this thing a reaction set in upon me. I felt that my burden lived, for I heard the faint beat of her heart as I pressed my ear against her side in carrying her. Knowing this, I threw her down beside the fire which Madge had lit, with as little sympathy as though she had been a bundle of fagots. I never glanced at her to see if she were fair or no. For many years I had cared little for the face of a woman. As I lay in my hammock upstairs, however, I heard the old woman as she chafed the warmth back into her, crooning a chorus of, "Eh, the puir lassie! Eh, the bonnie lassie!" from which I gathered that this piece of jetsam was both young and comely.

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The morning after the gale was peaceful and sunny. As I walked along the long sweep of sand I could hear the panting of the sea. It was heaving and swirling about the reef, but along the shore it rippled in gently enough. There was no sign of the schooner, nor was there any wreckage upon the beach, which did not surprise me, as I knew there was a great undertow in those waters. A couple of broad-winged gulls were hovering and skimming over the scene of the shipwreck, as though many strange things were visible to them beneath the waves. At times I could hear their raucous voices as they spoke to one another of what they saw.

When I came back from my walk the woman was waiting at the door for me. I began to wish when I saw her that I had never saved her, for here was an end of my privacy. She was very young – at the most nineteen, with a pale somewhat refined face, yellow hair, merry blue eyes, and shining teeth. Her beauty was of an ethereal type. She looked so white and light and fragile that she might have been the spirit of that storm-foam from out of which I plucked her. She had wreathed some of Madge's garments round her in a way which was quaint and not unbecoming. As I

strode heavily up the pathway, she put out her hands with a pretty child-like gesture, and ran down towards me, meaning, as I surmise, to thank me for having saved her, but I put her aside with a wave of my hand and passed her. At this she seemed somewhat hurt, and the tears sprang into her eyes, but she followed me into the sitting-room and watched me wistfully.

"What country do you come from?" I asked her suddenly.

She smiled when I spoke, but shook her head.

"Francais?" I asked. "Deutsch?" "Espanol?" – each time she shook her head, and then she rippled off into a long statement in some tongue of which I could not understand one word.

After breakfast was over, however, I got a clue to her nationality. Passing along the beach once more, I saw that in a cleft of the ridge a piece of wood had been jammed. I rowed out to it in my boat, and brought it ashore. It was part of the sternpost of a boat, and on it, or rather on the piece of wood attached to it, was the word *Archangel* painted in strange, quaint lettering. "So," I thought, as I paddled slowly back, "this pale damsel is a Russian. A fit subject for the White Czar and a proper dweller on the shores of the White Sea!" It seemed to me strange that one of her apparent refinement should perform so long a journey in so frail a craft. When I came back into the house, I pronounced the word *Archangel* several times in different intonations, but she did not appear to recognize it.

I shut myself up in the laboratory all the morning, continuing a research which I was making upon the nature of the allotropic forms of carbon and of sulphur. When I came out at midday for some food she was sitting by the table with a needle and thread, mending some rents in her clothes, which were now dry. I resented her continued presence, but I could not turn her out on the beach to shift for herself. Presently she presented a new phase of her character. Pointing to herself and then to the scene of the shipwreck, she held up one finger, by which I understood her to be asking whether she was the only one saved. I nodded my head to indicate that she was. On this she sprang out of her chair with a cry of great joy, and holding the garment which she was mending over her head, and swaying it from side to side with the motion of her body, she danced as lightly as a feather all round the room, and then out through the open door into the sunshine. As she whirled round she sang in a plaintive shrill voice some uncouth barbarous chant, expressive of exultation. I called out to her, "Come in, you young fiend, come in and be silent!" but she went on with her dance. Then she suddenly ran towards me, and catching my hand before I could pluck it away, she kissed it. While we were at dinner she spied one of my pencils, and taking it up she wrote the two words

"Sophie Ramusine" upon a piece of paper, and then pointed to herself as a sign that that was her name. She handed the pencil to me, evidently expecting that I would be equally communicative, but I put it in my pocket as a sign that I wished to hold no intercourse with her.

Every moment of my life now I regretted the unguarded precipitancy with which I had saved this woman. What was it to me whether she had lived or died? I was no young, hot-headed youth to do such things. It was bad enough to be compelled to have Madge in the house, but she was old and ugly, and could be ignored. This one was young and lively, and so fashioned as to divert attention from graver things. Where could I send her, and what could I do with her? If I sent infomation to Wick it would mean that officials and others would come to me and pry, and peep, and chatter – a hateful thought. It was better to endure her presence than that.

I soon found that there were fresh troubles in store for me. There is no place safe from the swarming, restless race of which I am a member. In the evening, when the sun was dipping down behind the hills, casting them into dark shadow, but gilding the sands and casting a great glory over the sea, I went, as is my custom, for a stroll along the beach. Sometimes on these occasions I took my book with me. I did so on this night, and stretching myself upon a sand-dune I composed myself to read. As I lay there I suddenly became aware of a shadow which interposed itself between the sun and myself. Looking round, I saw to my great surprise a very tall, powerful man, who was standing a few yards off, and who, instead of looking at me, was ignoring my existence completely, and was gazing over my head with a stern set face at the bay and the black line of the Mansie reef. His complexion was dark, with black hair, and short, curling beard, a hawk-like nose, and golden ear-rings in his ears – the general effect being wild and somewhat noble. He wore a faded velveteen jacket, a red-flannel shirt, and high sea boots, coming half-way up his thighs. I recognized him at a glance as being the same man who had been left on the wreck the night before.

"Hullo!" I said, in an aggrieved voice. "You got ashore all right, then?"

"Yes," he answered, in good English. "It was no doing of mine. The waves threw me up. I wish to God I had been allowed to drown!" There was a slight foreign lisp in his accent which was rather pleasing. "Two good fishermen, who live round yonder point, pulled me out and cared for me; yet I could not honestly thank them for it."

"Ho! ho!" thought I, "here is a man of my own kidney. Why do you wish to be drowned?" I asked.

"Because," he cried, throwing out his long arms with a passionate, despairing gesture, "there – there in that blue smiling bay, lies my soul, my treasure – everything that I loved and lived for."

"Well, well," I said. "People are ruined every day, but there's no use making a fuss about it. Let me inform you that this ground on which you walk is my ground, and that the sooner you take yourself off it the better pleased I shall be. One of you is quite trouble enough."

"One of us?" he gasped.

"Yes – if you could take her off with you I should be still more grateful."

He gazed at me for a moment as if hardly able to realize what I said, and then with a wild cry he ran away from me with prodigious speed and raced along the sands towards my house. Never before or since have I seen a human being run so fast. I followed as rapidly as I could, furious at this threatened invasion, but long before I reached the house he had disappeared through the open door. I heard a great scream from the inside, and as I came nearer the sound of a man's bass voice speaking rapidly and loudly. When I looked in the girl, Sophie Ramusine, was crouching in a corner, cowering away, with fear and loathing expressed on her averted face and in every line of her shrinking form. The other, with his dark eyes flashing, and his outstretched hands quivering with emotion, was pouring forth a torrent of passionate pleading words. He made a step foward to her as I entered, but she writhed still farther away, and uttered a sharp cry like that of a rabbit when the weasel has him by the throat.

"Here!" I said, pulling him back from her. "This is a pretty to-do! What do you mean? Do you think this is a wayside inn or place of public accommodation?"

"Oh, sir," he said, "excuse me. This woman is my wife, and I feared that she was drowned. You have brought me back to life."

"Who are you?" I asked roughly.

"I am a man from *Archangel*," he said simply; "a Russian man."

"What is your name?"

"Ourganeff."

"Ourganeff – and hers is Sophie Ramusine. She is no wife of yours. She has no ring."

"We are man and wife in the sight of Heaven," he said solemnly, looking upwards. "We are bound by higher laws than those of earth." As he spoke the girl slipped behind me and caught me by the other hand, pressing it as though beseeching my protection. "Give me up my wife, sir," he went on. "Let me take her away from here."

"Look here, you – whatever your name is," I said sternly; "I don't want this wench here. I wish I had never seen her. If she died it would be

no grief to me. But as to handing her over to you, when it is clear she fears and hates you, I won't do it. So now just clear your great body out of this, and leave me to my books. I hope I may never look upon your face again."

"You won't give her up to me?" he said hoarsely.

"I'll see you damned first!" I answered.

"Suppose I take her," he cried, his dark face growing darker.

All my tigerish blood flashed up in a moment. I picked up a billet of wood from beside the fireplace. "Go," I said, in a low voice; "go quick, or I may do you an injury." He looked at me irresolutely for a moment, and then he left the house. He came back again in a moment, however, and stood in the doorway looking in at us.

"Have a heed what you do," he said. "The woman is mine, and I shall have her. When it comes to blows, a Russian is as good a man as a Scotchman."

"We shall see that," I cried, springing forward, but he was already gone, and I could see his tall form moving away through the gathering darkness.

For a month or more after this things went smoothly with us. I never spoke to the Russian girl, nor did she ever address me. Sometimes when I was at work in my laboratory she would slip inside the door and sit silently there watching me with her great eyes. At first this intrusion annoyed me, but by degrees, finding that she made no attempt to distract my attention, I suffered her to remain. Encouraged by this concession, she gradually came to move the stool on which she sat nearer and nearer to my table, until after gaining a little every day during some weeks, she at last worked her way right up to me, and used to perch herself beside me whenever I worked. In this position she used, still without ever obtruding her presence in any way, to make herself very useful by holding my pens, test-tubes, or bottles and handing me whatever I wanted, with never-failing sagacity. By ignoring the fact of her being a human being, and looking upon her as a useful automatic machine I accustomed myself to her presence so far as to miss her on the few occasions when she was not at her post. I have a habit of talking aloud to myself at times when I work, so as to fix my results better in my mind. The girl must have had a surprising memory for sounds, for she could always repeat the words which I let fall in this way, without, of course, understanding in the least what they meant. I have often been amused at hearing her discharge a volley of chemical equations and algebraic symbols at old Madge, and then burst into a ringing laugh when the crone would shake her head, under the impression, no doubt, that she was being addressed in Russian.

She never went more than a few yards from the house, and indeed never put her foot over the threshold without looking carefully out of each

window in order to be sure that there was nobody about. By this I knew that she suspected that her fellow-countryman was still in the neighbourhood, and feared that he might attempt to carry her off. She did something else which was significant. I had an old revolver with some cartridges, which had been thrown away among the rubbish. She found this one day, and at once proceeded to clean it and oil it. She hung it up near the door, with the cartridges in a little bag beside it, and whenever I went for a walk, she would take it down and insist upon my carrying it with me. In my absence she would always bolt the door. Apart from her apprehensions she seemed fairly happy, busying herself in helping Madge when she was not attending upon me. She was wonderfully nimble-fingered and natty in all domestic duties.

It was not long before I discovered that her suspicions were well founded, and that this man from *Archangel* was still lurking in the vicinity. Being restless one night I rose and peered out of the window. The weather was somewhat cloudy, and I could barely make out the line of the sea, and the loom of my boat upon the beach. As I gazed, however, and my eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, I became aware that there was some other dark blur upon the sands, and that in front of my very door, where certainly there had been nothing of the sort the preceding night. As I stood at my diamond-paned lattice, still peering and peeping to make out what this might be, a great bank of clouds rolled slowly away from the face of the moon, and a flood of cold, clear light was poured down upon the silent bay and the long sweep of its desolate shores. Then I saw what this was which haunted my doorstep. It was he, the Russian. He squattered there like a gigantic toad, with his legs doubled under him in strange Mongolian fashion, and his eyes fixed apparently upon the window of the room in which the young girl and the housekeeper slept. The light fell upon his upturned face, and I saw once more the hawk-like grace of his countenance, with the single deeply-indented line of care upon his brow, and the protruding beard which marks the passionate nature. My first impulse was to shoot him as a trespasser, but, as I gazed, my resentment changed into pity and contempt. “Poor fool,” I said to myself, “is it then possible that you, whom I have seen looking open-eyed at present death, should have your whole thoughts and ambition centred upon this wretched slip of a girl – a girl, too, who flies from you and hates you? Most women would love you – were it but for that dark face and great handsome body of your – and yet you must needs hanker after the one in a thousand who will have no traffic with you.” As I returned to my bed I chuckled much to myself over this thought. I knew that my bars were strong and my bolts thick. It mattered little to me whether this strange man spent his night at my door or a hundred leagues off, so 1ong as he was gone by the morning.

As I expected, when I rose and went out there was no sign of him, nor had he left any trace of his midnight vigil.

It was not long, however, before I saw him again. I had been out for a row one morning, for my head was aching, partly from prolonged stooping, and partly from the effects of a noxious drug which I had inhaled the night before. I pulled along the coast some miles, and then, feeling thirsty I landed at a place where I knew that a fresh-water stream trickled down into the sea. This rivulet passed through my land, but the mouth of it, where I found myself that day, was beyond my boundary line. I felt somewhat taken aback when rising from the stream at which I had slaked my thirst I found myself face to face with the Russian. I was as much a trespasser now as he was, and I could see at a glance that he knew it.

"I wish to speak a few words to you," he said gravely.

"Hurry up, then!" I answered, glancing at my watch. "I have no time to listen to chatter."

"Chatter!" he repeated angrily. "Ah, but there. You Scotch people are strange men. Your face is hard and your words rough, but so are those of the good fishermen with whom I stay, yet I find that beneath it all there lie kind honest natures. No doubt you are kind and good, too, in spite of your roughness."

"In the name of the devil," I said, "say your say, and go your way. I am weary of the sight of you."

"Can I not soften you in any way?" he cried. – "Ah, see – see here" he produced a small Grecian cross from inside his velvet jacket. "Look at this. Our religions may differ in form, but at least we have some common thoughts and feelings when we see this emblem."

"I am not so sure of that," I answered.

He looked at me thoughtfully.

"You are a very strange man", he said at last. "I cannot understand you. You still stand between me and Sophie. It is a dangerous position to take, sir. Oh, believe me, before it is too late. If you did but know what I have done to gain that woman – how I have risked my body, how I have lost my soul! You are a small obstacle to some which I have surmounted – you, whom a rip with a knife, or a blow from a stone, would put out of my way for ever. But God preserve me from that," he cried wildly. "I am deep – too deep – already. Anything rather than that."

"You would do better to go back to your country," I said, "than to skulk about these sand-hills and disturb my leisure. When I have proof that you have gone away I shall hand this woman over to the protection of the Russian Consul at Edinburgh. Until then, I shall guard her myself, and not you, nor any Muscovite that ever breathed, shall take her from me."

"And what is your object in keeping me from Sophie?" he asked. "Do you imagine that I would injure her? Why, man, I would give my life freely to save her from the slightest harm. Why do you do this thing?"

"I do it because it is my good pleasure to act so," I answered. "I give no man reasons for my conduct."

"Look here!" he cried, suddenly blazing into fury, and advancing towards me with his shaggy mane bristling and his brown hands clenched. "If I thought you had one dishonest thought towards this girl – if for a moment I had reason to believe that you had any base motive for detaining her – as sure as there is a God in Heaven I should drag the heart out of your bosom with my hands." The very idea seemed to have put the man in a frenzy, for his face was all distorted and his hands opened and shut convulsively. I thought that he was about to spring at my throat.

"Stand off," I said, putting my hand on my pistol. "If you lay a finger on me I shall kill you."

He put his hand into his pocket, and for a moment I thought he was about to produce a weapon too, but instead of that he whipped out a cigarette and lit it, breathing the smoke rapidly into his lungs. No doubt he had found by experience that this was the most effectual way of curbing his passions.

"I told you," he said in a quieter voice, "that my name is Ourganeff – Alexis Ourganeff. I am a Finn by birth, but I have spent my life in every part of the world. I was one who could never be still, nor settle down to a quiet existence. After I came to own my own ship there is hardly a port from *Archangel* to Australia which I have not entered. I was rough and wild and free, but there was one at home, sir, who was prim and white-handed and soft-tongued, skilful in little fancies and conceits which women love. This youth by his wiles and tricks stole from me the love of the girl whom I had ever marked as my own, and who up to that time had seemed in some sort inclined to return my passion. I had been on a voyage to Hammerfest for ivory, and coming back unexpectedly I learned that my pride and treasure was to be married to this soft-skinned boy, and that the party had actually gone to the church. In such moments, sir, something gives way in my head, and I hardly know what I do. I landed with a boat's crew – all men who had sailed with me for years, and who were as true as steel. We went up to the church. They were standing, she and he, before the priest, but the thing had not been done. I dashed between them and caught her round the waist. My men beat back the frightened bridegroom and the lookers on. We bore her down to the boat and aboard our vessel, and then getting up anchor we sailed away across the White Sea until the spires of *Archangel* sank down behind the horizon. She had my cabin, my room, every comfort. I slept among the men in the forecastle. I hoped that

in time her aversion to me would wear away, and that she would consent to marry me in England or in France. For days and days we sailed. We saw the North Cape die away behind us, and we skirted the grey Norwegian coast, but still, in spite of every attention, she would not forgive me for tearing her from that pale-faced lover of hers. Then came this cursed storm which shattered both my ship and my hopes, and has deprived me even of the sight of the woman for whom I have risked so much. Perhaps she may learn to love me yet. You, sir," he said wistfully, "look like one who has seen much of the world. Do you not think that she may come to forget this man and to love me?"

"I am tired of your story," I said, turning away. "For my part, I think you are a great fool. If you imagine that this love of yours will pass away you had best amuse yourself as best you can until it does. If, on the other hand, it is a fixed thing, you cannot do better than cut your throat, for that is the shortest way out of it. I have no more time to waste on the matter." With this I hurried away and walked down to the boat. I never looked round, but I heard the dull sound of his feet upon the sands as he followed me.

"I have told you the beginning of my story," he said, "and you shall know the end some day. You would do well to let the girl go."

I never answered him, but pushed the boat off. When I had rowed some distance out I looked back and saw his tall figure upon the yellow sand as he stood gazing thoughtfully after me. When I looked again some minutes later he had disappeared.

For a long time after this my life was as regular and as monotonous as it had been before the shipwreck. At times I hoped that the man from *Archangel* had gone away altogether, but certain footsteps which I saw upon the sand, and more particularly a little pile of cigarette ash which I found one day behind a hillock from which a view of the house might be obtained, warned me that, though invisible, he was still in the vicinity. My relations with the Russian girl remained the same as before. Old Madge had been somewhat jealous of her presence at first, and seemed to fear that what little authority she had would be taken away from her. By degrees, however, as she came to realize my utter indifference, she became reconciled to the situation, and, as I have said before, profited by it, as our visitor performed much of the domestic work.

And now I am coming near the end of this narrative of mine, which I have written a great deal more for my own amusement than for that of anyone else. The termination of the strange episode in which these two Russians had played a part was as wild and as sudden as the commencement. The events of one single night freed me from all my troubles, and left me once more alone with my books and my studies, as I

had been before their intrusion. Let me endeavour to describe how this came about.

I had had a long day of heavy and wearying work, so that in the evening I determined upon taking a long walk. When I emerged from the house my attention was attracted by the appearance of the sea. It lay like a sheet of glass, so that never a ripple disturbed its surface. Yet the air was filled with that indescribable moaning sound which I have alluded to before – a sound as though the spirits of all those who lay beneath those treacherous water were sending a sad warning of coming troubles to their brethren in the flesh. The fishermen's wives along that coast know the eerie sound, and look anxiously across the water for the brown sails making for the land. When I heard it I stepped back into the house and looked at the glass. It was down below 29°. Then I knew that a wild night was coming upon us.

Underneath the hills where I walked that evening it was dull and chill, but their summits were rosy-red, and the sea was brightened by the sinking sun. There were no clouds of importance in the sky, yet the dull groaning of the sea grew louder and stronger. I saw, far to the eastward, a brig beating up for Wick, with a reef in her topsails. It was evident that her captain had read the signs of nature as I had done. Behind her a long, lurid haze lay low upon the water, concealing the horizon. "I had better push on," I thought to myself, "Or the wind may rise before I can get back."

I suppose I must have been at least half a mile from the house when I suddenly stopped and listened breathlessly. My ears were so accustomed to the noises of nature, the sighing of the breeze and the sob of the waves, that any other sound made itself heard at a great distance. I waited, listening with all my ears. Yes, there it was again – a long-drawn, shrill cry of despair, ringing over the sands and echoed back from the hill behind me – a piteous appeal for aid. It came from the direction of my house. I turned and ran back homewards at the top of my speed, ploughing through the sand, racing over the shingle. In my mind there was a great dim perception of what had occurred.

About a quarter of a mile from the house there is a high sand-hill, from which the whole country round is visible. When I reached the top of this I paused for a moment. There was the old grey building – there the boat. Everything seemed to be as I had left it. Even as I gazed, however, the shrill scream was repeated, louder than before, and the next moment a tall figure emerged from my door, the figure of the Russian sailor. Over his shoulder was the white form of the young girl, and even in his haste he seemed to bear her tenderly and with gentle reverence. I could hear her wild cries and see her desperate struggles to break away from him. Behind the couple came my old housekeeper, staunch and true, as the aged dog,

who can no longer bite, still snarls with toothless gums at the intruder. She staggered feebly along at the heels of the ravisher, waving her long, thin arms, and hurling, no doubt, volleys of Scotch curses and imprecations at his head. I saw at a glance that he was making for the boat. A sudden hope sprang up in my soul that I might be in time to intercept him. I ran for the beach at the top of my speed. As I ran I slipped a cartridge into my revolver. This I determined should be the last of these invasions.

I was too late. By the time I reached the water's edge he was a hundred yards away, making the boat spring with every stroke of his powerful arms. I uttered a wild cry of impotent anger, and stamped up and down the sands like a maniac. He turned and saw me. Rising from his seat he made me a graceful bow, and waved his hand to me. It was not a triumphant or a derisive gesture. Even my furious and distempered mind recognized it as being a solemn and courteous leave-taking. Then he settled down to his oars once more, and the little skiff shot away out over the bay. The sun had gone down now, leaving a single dull, red streak upon the water, which stretched away until it blended with the purple haze on the horizon. Gradually the skiff grew smaller and smaller as it sped across this lurid band, until the shades of night gathered round it and it became a mere blur upon the lonely sea. Then this vague loom died away also and darkness settled over it – a darkness which should never be raised.

And why did I pace the solitary shore, hot and wrathful as a wolf whose whelp has been torn from it? Was it that I loved this Muscovite girl? No – a thousand times no. I am not one who, for the sake of a white skin or a blue eye, would belie my own life, and change the whole tenor of my thoughts and existence. My heart was untouched. But my pride – ah, there I had been cruelly wounded. To think that I had been unable to afford protection to the helpless one who craved it of me, and who relied on me! It was that which made my heart sick and sent the blood buzzing through my ears.

That night a great wind rose up from the sea, and the wild waves shrieked upon the shore as though they would tear it back with them into the ocean. The turmoil and the uproar were congenial to my vexed spirit. All night I wandered up and down, wet with spray and rain, watching the gleam of the white breakers and listening to the outcry of the storm. My heart was bitter against the Russian. I joined my feeble pipe to the screaming of the gale. "If he would but come back again!" I cried, with clenched hands; "if he would but come back!"

He came back. When the grey light of morning spread over the eastern sky, and lit up the great waste of yellow, tossing waters, with the brown clouds drifting swiftly over them, then I saw him once again. A few

hundred yards off along the sand there lay a long dark object, cast up by the fury of the waves. It was my boat, much shattered and splintered. A little farther on, a vague, shapeless something was washing to and fro in the shallow water, all mixed with shingle and with seaweed. I saw at a glance that it was the Russian, face downwards and dead. I rushed into the water and dragged him up on to the beach. It was only when I turned him over that I discovered that she was beneath him, his dead arms encircling her, his mangled body still intervening between her and the fury of the storm. It seemed that the fierce German Sea might beat the life from him, but with all its strength it was unable to tear this one-idea'd man from the woman whom he loved. There were signs which led me to believe that during that awful night the woman's fickle mind had come at last to learn the worth of the true heart and strong arm which struggled for her and guarded her so tenderly. Why else should her little head be nestling so lovingly on his broad breast, while her yellow hair entwined itself with his flowing beard? Why too should there be that bright smile of ineffable happiness and triumph, which death itself had not had power to banish from his dusky face? I fancy that death had been brighter to him than life had ever been.

Madge and I buried them there on the shores of the desolate northern sea. They lie in one grave deep down beneath the yellow sand. Strange things may happen in the world around them. Empires may rise and may fall, dynasties may perish, great wars may come and go, but, heedless of it all, those two shall embrace each other for ever and aye, in their lonely shrine by the side of the sounding ocean. I sometimes have thought that their spirits flit like shadowy sea-mews over the wild waters of the bay. No cross or symbol marks their resting-place, but old Madge puts wild flowers upon it at times, and when I pass on my daily walk and see the fresh blossoms scattered over the sand, I think of the strange couple who came from afar, and broke for a little space the dull tenor of my sombre life.

*1889*

(текст на задней стороне обложки
белым курсивом на фиолетовом фоне)

***There is hardly anyone who has not read at least one story by Conan Doyle, but no one can claim to have read all his works, not even in Britain, for no really complete works of his have ever been published.***

***English man of letters Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) is known as the creator of the immortal Sherlock Holmes and as one of the founders of the detective genre. He is far less remembered as the author of historical, science fiction and adventure stories, and still less, if ever, as the author of fascinating stories infused with mystery and mysticism.***

***Conan Doyle could have spoken about himself the following words of his hero: "My versatile mind is open to the eerie and the fantastic." He always took a keen interest in unknown, mysterious and supernatural phenomena and the powers of the human mind. No wonder, therefore, he spent nearly fifty years studying and successfully practising Spiritualism – the most amazing phenomenon of our reality. The mystery of Life and Death, the puzzles of the human mind unfathomable for run-of-the-mill rationalists always appealed to Conan Doyle, just as nowadays they still appeal to us. This collection throws a light on the hitherto not very well-known aspects of his oeuvre, and the reader will certainly enjoy these superb stories and appreciate their skilfully woven intrigue.***

**Paul Guéléva**