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GHOST STORIES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LONDON VENTURE
THE ROMANTIC LADY
"PIRACY"
THESE CHARMING PEOPLE
THE GREEN HAT
MAY FAIR

GHOST STORIES

by

MICHAEL ARLEN

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The Prince of the Jews

I

THIS is the tale of the late Rear-Admiral Sir Charles Fasset-Faith, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. This distinguished torpedo officer was advanced to flag rank only last June, having previously been for two years Commodore of the First Class commanding the —— Fleet. Throughout the war he was attached to the submarine service; and for the vigilance and fearlessness of his command his name came to be much on men's lips. His early death, at the age of forty-five, will be regretted by all who knew him. He never married. This is also the tale of Julian Raphael, the Jew, and of Manana Cohen, his paramour.

One summer evening a gentleman emerged from the Celibates Club in Hamilton Place; and, not instantly descending the few broad steps to the pavement, stood a while between the two ancient brown columns of the portico. The half of a cigar was restlessly screwed into the corner of his mouth in a manner that consorted quite oddly with his uneager English eye; and that, with the gentleman's high carriage, might have reminded a romantic observer of the President of the Suicide Club. His silk hat, however (for he was habited for the evening) was situated on his head with an exact sobriety which would seem to rebuke the more familiar relations customary between desperate gentlemen and their hats; and he appeared, at his idle station at the head of the broad steps, to be lost in peaceful contemplation.

The Admiral made thus a notable mark for any passing stranger with a nice eye for distinction: he stood so definitely for *something*, a very column of significance, of conduct. Unusually tall for a sailor, and of powerful build, his complexion was as though forged—it is the exact word—in the very smithy of vengeful suns and violent winds: his pale, dry eyes, which would, even in a maelstrom, always remain decidedly the driest of created things, in their leisure assumed that kindly, absent look which is the pleasant mark of Englishmen who walk in iron upon the sea: while short brown side-whiskers mightily became the authority of Sir Charles's looks.

The hour was about ten o'clock, and the traffic by the corner of Hamilton Place and Piccadilly marched by without hindrance. The din of horns and wheels and engines, as though charmed by the unusual gentleness of the night, swept by inattentive ears as easily as the echoes of falling water in a distant cavern. The omnibuses to Victoria and to the Marble Arch trumpeted proudly round the corner where by day they must pant for passage in a heavy block. Limousines and landaulettes shone and passed silently. The very taxis, in the exaltation of moderate speed, seemed almost to be forgetting their humble places in the hierarchy of the road. Every now and then figures scuttled across the road with anxious jerking movements. "A fine night!" sighed the commissioner of the Celibates Club. His face was very lined and his old eyes clouded with the stress of countless days of London fog and London rain.

"A taxi, Sir Charles?"

The Admiral cleared his throat and aimed the remnant of his cigar into the gutter. "Thanks, Hunt, I think I'll walk. Yes, a fine night."

Omnibus after omnibus tore down the short broad slope from Park Lane and galloped gaily across the sweep of Hyde Park Corner. There was half a moon over St. George's Hospital, and the open place looked like a park with the lamps for flowers.

"The buses *do* speed up at night!" sighed the commissioner.

"Don't they! But see there, Hunt!" Sir Charles, suddenly and sharply, was waving his cane towards the opposite side of the road, towards the corner by the massive Argentine Club. "See that man?"

The commissioner with the lined face followed the direction of the cane.

"That constable, Sir Charles?"

"No, no! That Jew!"

The commissioner, mistrustful of his ancient eyes, peered through the clear night. He sighed: "God knows, Sir Charles, there's Jews enough in Mayfair, but I can't see one just there."

The Admiral thoughtfully took another cigar from his case. His eyes were of iron, but his voice had lost all its sudden sharpness as he said: "Never mind, Hunt. Just give me a light, will you?"

But, as he made to walk down Piccadilly, to join in a rubber at his other club in St. James's Street, Sir Charles did not let the dark lean man on the other side of the road pass out of the corner of his eye. The young Jew crossed the road. That did not surprise our gentleman. He walked on, and, once on Piccadilly, walked at a good pace.

The Piccadilly scene was seldom crowded between ten and eleven: cinema-theatres, music-halls, and play-houses held the world's attention, while the night was not yet deep enough for the dim parade of the world's wreckage. Sir Charles would always, at about this hour, take a little exercise between his clubs in Hamilton Place and St. James's.

He had passed the opening of Half Moon Street before the young Jew caught up with his shoulder. Sir Charles walked on without concerning himself to look round at the dark, handsome face. Handsome as a black archangel was Julian Raphael the Jew. Sir Charles vaguely supposed that the archangels had originally been Jewish, and it was as a black archangel that the looks of Julian Raphael had first impressed him. It was altogether a too fanciful business for the Admiral's taste; but he had no one to blame for it but himself, since he had originally let the thing, he'd had to admit often, run away with him.

"Well?" he suddenly smiled over his shoulder. There was, after all, a good deal to smile about, if you took the thing properly. And it had needed more than a handsome Jew to prevent Sir Charles taking a thing properly. But Julian Raphael did not smile. He said gravely:—

"When I first saw you, Sir Charles, I thought you were only a fool. But I am not sure now. You show a resignation towards fate unusual in your sceptical countrymen. It is scepticism that makes men dull, resignation that makes men interesting. It is a dull mind that believes in nothing: it is an interesting mind that expects nothing and awaits the worst. Your waiting shall be rewarded, Sir Charles."

The Admiral walked on with a grim smile. He was growing used to this—even to this! They passed beneath the bitter walls of what was once Devonshire House. The beautiful Jew said softly:—

"You have a broad back, Sir Charles. It is a fine mark for a well-thrown knife. Have I not always said so!"

Our gentleman swung round on the lean young Jew. A few yards from them a policeman was having a few words with the commissionaire of the Berkeley Restaurant about a car that had been left standing too long by the curb. It was Julian Raphael who was smiling now. Sir Charles said sternly:—

"Am I to understand that you are trying to frighten me with this ridiculous persecution? And what, Mr. Raphael, is to prevent me from giving you in charge to that policeman? You are, I think, wanted for murder!"

Julian Raphael's black eyes seemed to shine with mockery. "There's nothing in the world to prevent you, Sir Charles, except that any policeman would think you mad for asking him to arrest air. Not, as you suggest, that he wouldn't, in the ordinary way, be pleased to catch the Prince of the Jews. May I offer you a light for that cigar?"

And as Sir Charles lit his cigar from the match held out to him he was not surprised to find himself looking into the ancient eyes of Hunt, the commissionaire outside his club in Hamilton Place. His walk up Piccadilly, his talk with the young Jew, had taken no longer than it takes to light a cigar. This was the third time within a fortnight that the Admiral had been privileged to see his old enemy, to walk with him and talk with him; and his awakening had each time been to find that not more than a couple of seconds had passed and that he had never moved from his station.

Sir Charles abruptly re-entered the club and, in the smoking-room, addressed himself to his old friend Hilary Townshend.

"Hilary," said he, "I have a tale to tell you. It is very fanciful, and you will dislike it. I dislike it for the same reason. But I want you, my oldest friend, to know certain facts in case anything happens to me in the course of the next few days—or nights. In my life, as you know, I have not had many dealings with the grotesque. But the grotesque seems lately to be desiring the very closest connection with me. It began two years ago when I officiously tried to be of some service to a young Jewess called Manana Cohen. God help me, I thought I was acting for the best."

There follows the tale told by Admiral Sir Charles Fasset-Faith to Mr. Townshend.

THE ADMIRAL'S TALE

About two years ago (said Sir Charles), during one of my leaves in London, young Mrs. Harpenden persuaded me to go down with her to a club of some sort she was helping to run down in the East End.

There were then, and for all I know there are now, a number of pretty and sound young women doing their best to placate God for the sins of their Victorian fathers by making life in the East End as tolerable as possible. Of course, only once a week. Venice's idea in landing me was that I should give the young devils down there a rough lecture on the Navy in general, and the Jutland fight in particular—that kind of thing.

So there I stood yapping away, surrounded by a crowd of amiable and attentive young men and women. In a room nearby poor Napier Harpenden was trying to get away with only one black eye from a hefty young navy to whom he was supposed to be teaching boxing. Across a counter in a far corner Venice was handing out cups of perfectly revolting coffee. She had all the bloods at her call that night, had Venice. In one corner Tarlyon was teaching a crowd Ju-jitsu, and in another Hugo Cypress was playing draughts with a Boy Scout—it did one good to see him. And there, in the middle of all that, was the old mug roaring away about the silent Navy.

I was just getting settled down and raising laughs with the usual Jack Tar stuff when—well, there they were, a pair of them, quite plainly laughing at me. Not *with* me, mark you. You'll understand that it put me off my stroke. However, I did my level best to go on without looking at them, but that wasn't so easy, as they were bang in front of me, three or four rows back. I had spotted the young man first. He was the one making the jokes and leading the laugh, while the girl only followed suit. Both Jews, obviously, and as handsome as a couple of new coins. Smart, too—the young man too smart by half.

You could tell at a glance that they had no right in the place, which was for very poor folk, and that they had come in just to guy. At least, that devilish young man had. He had a thin, dead-white face, a nose that wouldn't have looked amiss on a prince of old Babylon, black eyes the size of walnuts, and a smile—I'll tell you about that smile. Hilary, I've never in my life so wanted to do anything as to put my foot squarely down on that boy's smile. Call me a Dutchman if they don't hate it even down in hell.

The girl wasn't any less beautiful, with her white face, black hair, black eyes, fine slim Hebrew nose. Proud she looked too, and a proud Jewess can—and does—look any two English beauties in the face. But she was better, gentler, *nicer*. They were of the same stuff, those two young Jews, the same ancient sensitive clever stuff, but one had gone rotten and the other hadn't. You could easily see that from the way, when she did meet my eyes, she did her level best to look serious and not to hear what her companion was whispering into her ear. She didn't particularly want to hurt my feelings, not she, no matter how much her man might want to. Of course I could have stopped the lecture then and there and chucked the young man out, but I didn't want to go and have a roughhouse the first time I was asked down to young Venice's potty old club.

It will puzzle me all my life (or what's left of it, let's say) to know why that diabolically handsome, young Jew took such an instant dislike to me; and why I took such a dislike to him! For that was really at the bottom of all that followed—just good old black hatred, Hilary, from the first moment our eyes met. But I want to give you all the facts. Maybe the girl had something to do with it even then—the girl and his own shocking smile. You simply couldn't help fancying that those gentle eyes were in for a very bad time from that smile. Decidedly not my business, of course. Nothing that interests one ever is, is it? But, on the other hand, the young man went on whispering and laughing so all through my confounded lecture that by the time I had finished there was just one small spot of red floating about my mind. I don't think I've ever before been so angry. There's one particular thing about people who sneer that I can't bear, Hilary. They simply insist on your disliking them, and I hate having to dislike people more than I can tell you.

They began to clear out as soon as I had finished. The young Jew's behaviour hadn't, naturally, made my effort go any better. He needed a lesson, that bright young man. I collared him in the passage outside. Of course he and his young lady were much too smart to hurry themselves, and the rest of the lecturees had almost gone. Inside, Venice had given up poisoning her club with coffee and was trying to bring it round with shocking noises from a wireless-set.

I can see that passage now. A narrow stairway leading up to God knows where. Just one gas-jet, yellow as a Chinaman. The front-door wide open to a narrow street like a canal of mud, for it was pelting with rain, you could see sheets of it falling between us and the lamp on the opposite side of the road. A man outside somewhere whistling, "Horsey, keep

your tail up," and whistling it well. Radio inside.

Our young Jew-boy was tall. I simply didn't feel I was old enough to be his father, although he couldn't have been more than three or four-and-twenty. And he liked colours, that boy. He had on a nice bright brown suit, a silk-shirt to match, and not a tartan in the Highlands had anything on his tie. His young lady's eyes, in that sick light, shone like black onyx. It struck me she was terrified, the way she was staring at me. I was sorry for that, it wasn't her terror I wanted. And where I did want it, not a sign. Then I realised she wasn't terrified for him, but for me. Cheek.

I had the fancy youth by the shoulder. Tight. He was still laughing at me. "This lout!" that laugh said. I can hear that laugh now. And, confound it, there was a quite extraordinary authority to that boy's eyes. He wasn't used to following any one, not he.

I said: "Young man, your manners are very bad. What are you going to do about it?"

I was calm enough. But he was too calm by half. He didn't answer, but he had given up smiling. He was looking sideways down at my hand on his shoulder. I've never had a pretty hand, but it has been quite useful to me one way and another and I've grown attached to it. I can't attempt to describe the disgust and contempt in that boy's look. It sort of said: "By the bosom of Abraham, what *is* that filthy thing on my shoulder?"

I said sharply: "I'm waiting."

The girl sighed: "Don't! Don't, Julian!"

As though, you know, he might hit me! Me!

Well, he might! I said: "Careful, young man!"

The girl whispered almost frantically: "Let him go, sir! Please! You don't know——"

I comforted her. I said I could take care of myself. She wasn't, I fancy, convinced. The way she looked at a man, with those scared black eyes!

But our young friend wasn't taking any notice of either of us. He was busy. All this, of course, happened in a few seconds. The Jew had raised his hand, slowly, very slowly, and had caught the wrist of my hand on his shoulder. I felt his fingers round my wrist. Tight.

"Steady, boy!" I said. I'd have to hit him, and I didn't want to do that. At least, I told myself I didn't want to. That young Jew had strong fingers. He simply hadn't spoken one word yet. His conversation was limited to trying to break my wrist. *My* wrist! Then he spoke. He said: "You swine!" The girl suddenly pulled at my arm, hard. His back was to the open doorway, the rain, the gutter. I caught him one on the chin so that he was in it flat on his back. His tie looked fancier than ever in the mud, too. The girl sort of screamed.

"All right," I said. "All right." Trying, you know, to comfort the poor kid. She was rushing after her man, but I had my arm like a bar across the door. She stared at me.

I said: "Listen to me, my child. You're in bad company."

"She is now," a voice said. The young Jew had picked himself up. He looked a mess, fine clothes and all. I thought he would try to rush me, but not he! He just smiled and said quite calmly: "I'll make a note of that, Sir Charles Fasset-Faith. Come on, Manana."

But I wasn't letting "Manana" go just yet. The poor kid.

"What's his name?" I asked her.

She stared at me. I never knew what "white" really meant until I saw that child's teeth.

"His name?" I repeated. Gently, you know.

She whispered: "Julian Raphael."

That young Jew's voice hit me on the back of the neck like a knife. "You'll pay for that, Manana! See if you don't!"

By the way, it isn't just rhetoric about the knife. It was like a knife. But I'll tell you more about knives later.

"Oh!" she sobbed.

"Look here," I said to the devilish boy, "if you so much as——"

He laughed. The girl bolted under my arm and joined him. He just laughed. I said: "Good-night, Manana. Don't let him hurt you." She didn't seem to dare look at me.

They went, up that muddy lane. He had her by the arm, and you could see he had her tight. There aren't many lamps in that *beau quartier*, and a few steps took them out of my sight. I heard a scream, and then a sob.

That settled Julian Raphael so far as I was concerned. Then another sob—from the back of that nasty darkness. I couldn't, of course, go after them then. It would look too much as though I was bidding for possession of the young Jew's love-lady. But at that moment I made up my mind I'd land that pretty boy sometime soon. That scream had made me feel just a trifle sick. That was personal. Then I was against Julian Raphael impersonally because I've always been for law and order. You have too, Hilary. I shouldn't wonder if that's not another reason why women find men like us dull. But some of us must be, God knows, in this world. And it was against all law and order that young Mr. Julian Raphael—imagine any man actually *using* a name like that!—should be loose in the world. Crook was too simple a word for Mr. Raphael. And he was worse for being so devilish handsome. One imagined him with women—with this poor soul of a Manana. Of course, Venice and Napier and the other people at their potty old club knew nothing about either of them. They must have just drifted in, they said. They had, into my life.

The very next morning I rang up our friend H—— at Scotland Yard and asked him if he knew anything about a Julian Raphael. Oh, didn't he! Had a *dossier* of him as long as my arm. H—— said: "The Prince of the Jews, that's Julian Raphael's pet name. Profession: counterfeiter. But we've never yet caught him or his gang."

Oh, the cinema wasn't in it with our fancy young friend. The police had been after him for about five years. Once they had almost got him for knifing a Lascar. Murder right enough, but they'd had to release him for lack of evidence. The Lascar, H—— said, had probably threatened to give away a cocaine plant, and Julian Raphael had slit his throat. Suspected of cocaine-smuggling, living on immoral earnings of women, and known to be the finest existing counterfeiter of Bank of England £5 notes. Charming man, Mr. Julian Raphael.

"I want to land him," I told H——.

"Thanks very much," said he. "So do we."

"Well, how about that girl of his—Manana something?"

"Manana Cohen? Catch her giving him away! She adores the beast, and so do they all, those who aren't terrified of him."

I said: "Well, we'll see. I want to get that boy. I don't like him."

H——'s last words to me were: "Now look here, Charles, don't go playing the fool down there. I know the East End is nowadays supposed to be as respectable as Kensington and that the cinema has got it beat hollow for pools of blood, but believe me a chap is still liable to be punctured in the ribs by a clever boy like Julian Raphael. So be a good fellow and go back to your nice old Navy and write a book, saying which of your brother Admirals didn't win Jutland just to show you're an Admiral as well."

H—— was right. I was a fool, certainly. But God drops the folly into the world as well as the wisdom, and surely it's our job to pick up bits of it. Besides, I've never been one for dinner-parties or the artless prattle of young ladies, and so, thought I, could a man spend his leave more profitably than in landing a snake like Julian Raphael?

I took myself off down to the East End with my oldest tweeds, a toothbrush, and a growth on my chin. George Tarlyon came with me. He had scented a row that night, and not the devil himself can keep George from putting both his feet into the inside of a row. Besides, he wanted to have a look at Miss Manana Cohen, saying he was a connoisseur of Cohens and liked nothing so much as to watch them turning into Curzons or Colquhouns. I wasn't sorry, for you can't have a better man in a row than George Tarlyon, and with his damfool remarks he'd make a miser forget he was at the Ritz. We took

two rooms in Canning Town, E., and very nice rooms they were, over a ham-and-beef shop, and walked from pub to pub watching each other's beards grow and listening for Julian Raphael. At least, I listened and George talked.

You would naturally have thought that the likely place to find that smart young man would be round about what journalists call the "exclusive hotels and night-clubs of the West End." Not a bit of it. We soon heard something of Julian Raphael's ways from one tough or another. Tarlyon's idea of getting information delicately about a man was to threaten to fight any one who wouldn't give it to him, and we soon collected quite a bit that way.

Mr. Raphael was a Socialist, it appeared—remember, I'd guessed he was clever?—and hated the rich. He hated the rich so bitterly that, though he had a pretty fat bank-account of his own, he still clung to his old quarters in the East End. But no one knew, or cared to give, the address of his "old quarters," which were probably various. Tarlyon threatened to fight any number of toughs who didn't "know" Mr. Raphael's address, but they preferred to fight, and in the end George got tired.

Oh, yes, Julian Raphael was certainly watched by the police, but he was generally somewhere else while the police were watching him. And Miss Manana Cohen was certainly his young lady-love, and she loved him and lived with him, but he wouldn't marry her because of another principle he had, that it was wrong for a man of independent spirit to have a wife of his own. Nice boy, Mr. Julian Raphael. But it appeared that he loved Miss Manana very decidedly and discouraged competition. It also appeared that before he had taken to the downward path he had been a juggler with knives on the music-halls. Knives again. Tarlyon thought that a pretty good joke at the time, but he didn't enjoy it nearly so much later on.

We had been pottering about down there several days and George was just beginning to think of a nice shave and a bath, when we hit on our first clue. The clue was walking up a grimy side-street by the East India Docks.

"Oh, pretty!" says George. And she certainly was. She hadn't seen us. She was in a hurry.

"We follow," I said.

"Naturally," says George. "A nice girl like that! What do you take me for, a Y.M.C.A.?"

We followed. She walked fast, did Miss Manana. And it was queer, how she lit up that grimy Godforsaken street. The way she was walking, you might have taken her for a young gentlewoman "doing" the East End in a hurry. Tall, lithe, quietly dressed—Julian Raphael's property! And he'd made her scream with pain.

"Now what?" snapped George.

She had been about twenty yards ahead of us. Street darkish, deserted, lined with warehouses, and all closed because it was a Saturday afternoon. Suddenly, no Manana Cohen. We slipped after her quick as you like. She had dived down a narrow passage between the warehouses. We were just in time to see the tail of her skirt whisking through a door in the wall a few yards up—and just in time to cut in after her.

"Oh!" she gasped. We must have looked a couple of cutthroats. And it was dark in there. I was panting—nothing like a sailor's life for keeping you thoroughly out of training, unless it's a soldier's. But George was all there, being a good dancer.

"Miss Cohen, I believe?" he asks. All in whispers. She just stared at us. George didn't want to scare her any more than I did. He was gay, in that mood of his when he seems to be laughing more at himself than at any one else. But she just stared at us. She was tall, as women go, but we simply towered over the poor child. Then she recognised me and went as red as a carnation. I couldn't think why. Tarlyon said comfortingly: "There, there!"

Then she panted all in a jumble: "I'm sorry I was rude to you the other night. Really I am. Please go away now, please!"

"I'm afraid we can't do that," I whispered. "We want——"

George, with his foot, gently shut the door behind us. We were in the passage of the house or whatever it was. It was pitch-dark. I lit another match.

"But what is it, what do you want?" the girl moaned.

"We just want to have a word with your young man," said George, the idiot, in his ordinary voice.

"Oh!" she caught her breath. That gave the show away all right. Julian Raphael was at home, whatever home was. Then the match went out. And the lights went on, snap! Julian Raphael stood at the end of the passage, pointing a revolver.

George said: "Don't be an ass!"

"Come here!" says Mr. Raphael to the girl.

"No, you don't!" said George, hauling her to him by the arm.

Julian Raphael smiled in that way he had. "If you don't let her go at once," he says, "I shoot."

"You what!" I said.

Tarlyon laughed. You can hear him. He said: "Now don't be a fool all your life, but stand at attention when you speak to my friend here, because he's a knight. And put that comic gun away else I'll come and hit you."

I couldn't help laughing. The young Jew looked so surprised. He'd never been talked to just in that way, and it bothered him, he was used to doing the laughing and being taken seriously. But I had laughed too soon. There was a whizz by my ear, a thud on the door behind me, and a knife an inch deep in the panel. The surprise had given Manana a chance to slip away. She was by Mr. Raphael now at the end of the passage. There wasn't light enough to make out what was behind them, a stairway up or a stairway down. Down, I guessed, into the bowels of the earth. Julian Raphael was smiling. I'll say it was well thrown, that knife.

Tarlyon was livid. "By God," he whispered, "threw a knife at us! We *are* having a nice week-end!"

I held him back. What was the use? A little child could have led us at knife-throwing. Julian Raphael said, with that infernal sneer of his:—

"Gentlemen, I merely wanted to show you what to expect if you were to advance another step. I wouldn't kill you—not yet. One of you, yes. But it would cause comment, the disappearance of two fools. However I might slice bits off your ears. Further, this is my house. Are you not intruding? Gentlemen, you may go."

And, you know, we did. What the deuce else was there to do? If Tarlyon with his infernal chuckling hadn't roused the man out of his lair we might have taken him by surprise and learnt something of the whereabouts of that counterfeiting business. But as it was, "go" was us while the going was good. And the way Tarlyon swore when we were outside made me glad it was a Saturday afternoon and the warehouses were closed, else he might have corrupted the poor workmen.

"What do we do now?" he asked at last. "Lump it?"

"Well, at any rate, we know his address now."

"Address be blowed! That's not an address, Charles, but an exit. I'll bet our smart friend doesn't press his trousers in that hole—and, by Heaven, there you are!"

He made me jump. I hadn't, didn't, see anything. I thought it was another knife.

"Never mind," snapped George. "Too late now. Come on, man, come on!"

He made me walk on. After reaching daylight from that passage between the warehouses we had turned to the left, walked on a hundred yards or so by the front of the warehouses, then to the left again. This, running parallel to the passage, was a row of quite respectable-looking houses all stuck together, as quite respectable-looking houses should do in these times. There are streets and streets of them down there, and I'm told white women sometimes marry Chinamen just for the pleasure of living in them. But, as some one has said, white women will do anything. We had come to the end of a block when Tarlyon set up that howl and then shut me up.

"What the deuce!" I said again.

George said, walking on: "Jewboy has made one mistake. Naughty Jewboy. Now have a look at that house we passed. Don't stare as though you were an American looking at the Prince of Wales. Casually. The corner one."

I turned and looked, casually. It was a house like another, and I said so. George asked me how far I thought it was from the passage in which I had nearly fielded Raphael's knife with my ear. I said it must be a good way. Two hundred yards at least. There was a whole block of warehouses and a row of houses in between.

"Quite," said George. We walked on. "Then how did Mr. Raphael get there so quick? Not by the road. I just saw a piece of his delightful face round the curtain of one of the windows. His one mistake, to have let me see him. There must be an underground passage about two hundred yards long between his warehouse address and his residence. You'll bet the police have never spotted it yet, and I only spotted it because he was so eager to see us well away. I don't think he likes us, Charles. But I'd be pleased to know who is supposed to be living in that house. And I'd take a bet that there's a nice counterfeiting *matinée* going on this very moment somewhere between that house and that warehouse-passage. Now you say something."

"The point is, George, do you think he saw you spot him?"

Tarlyon smiled. "There's always a catch. Trust the God of the Jews to lay a snag for poor Gentiles. But I don't know. He mayn't have seen I got him. But we will have to act as if he had. Get him quick, else he'll be in the air. What's the time now? Nearly eight. We'll get back to civilisation, try to catch H—— at his home address, come down here to-night and surround the place. Fun. Hurray!"

I said: "Look here, George——"

He looked at me sharply. "I know what you are going to say, Charles. Don't say it. You're old enough to know better."

But I stuck to my point. We must let H—— know at once, yes. Post men at the warehouse entrance and the house entrance, certainly. Catch Julian Raphael and his friend, decidedly. But we must give Manana Cohen another chance. She was only a child—twenty-one or two at most.

George said: "Charles, don't be a silly old man. She is probably as bad as any of them. You can't tell. Girls don't live a life like that unless they want to."

I knew he was wrong. I just knew it. So I didn't argue, but stuck to my point. The girl must be got out of the way before the place was raided. If the police found her there, she would be jailed—perhaps for years. I simply wouldn't have it. The girl was at the beginning of her life. To jail her now would be to ruin her for all her life.

Tarlyon, of course, didn't need to be convinced. He was only leading me on. Tarlyon wouldn't have put the police on a girl for trying to boil him in oil. But I was right about Manana Cohen. Good God, don't I know I was right! This had been her life, was her life, these dreary streets, these foul alleys. Julian Raphael had found her, dazzled her, seduced her, bullied her, broken her. What chance had the girl, ever? She was timorous, you could see. A timid girl. No matter how kindly you talked to her, she stared at you like a rabbit at a stoat. Life was the stoat to Manana Cohen. Who knows what the girl hadn't already suffered in her small life, what hell? Maybe she had loved Julian Raphael, maybe she loved him now. That wasn't against her. Saints love cads. It's the only way you can know a saint, mostly. Some of the nicest women you and I know, Hilary, have been divorced for the love of blackguards. Well, if Manana loved Raphael she would be punished enough by seeing him go to prison for a long stretch. One might find her a job on the stage, with her looks and figure. Good Lord, the way that girl looked at you when you so much as opened your mouth, her black eyes shivering as though her heart was hurt.

We found a taxi in the Whitechapel Road. To civilisation. Tarlyon was quiet. I wondered if he thought I was in love with the girl. Me, at my age! As we rattled through Cheapside—deserted on a Saturday afternoon—Tarlyon said: "We will have to think of a way of getting the girl out of the place beforehand. But how? If we warn her she will naturally pass the glad news on to her man. Naturally."

Naturally, I agreed. She wouldn't be herself if she went back on her man. I said I would think of a way as I bathed and dressed for dinner. As George dropped me at my flat he said:—

"Let's say dinner in an hour's time at White's. Meanwhile I'll ring up H——. Maybe he will dine with us. I suppose it will be about midnight before we get down there with his men. I'll tell you one thing, I'm not going to have knives chucked at me on an empty stomach—for I'll not be left out of this, not for all the knives in Christendom and Jewry. This is a real treasure-hunt as compared to chasing poppycock with children round Regent's Park and chickenfood with

flappers up Piccadilly. I said midnight, Charles, to give you a chance of getting Miss Manana Colquhoun clear away. Wish you luck!"

But fate wouldn't be bullied by George Almeric St. George Tarlyon. Fate had ideas of her own. Or is fate a he? No, it would be a woman, for she hates slim women. I've noticed that in the East, where no slim woman ever comes to any good. I hadn't finished glancing at my letters, while my bath was running, when my man announced a young lady.

"A young what?" I said.

He was surprised too. I went into the sitting-room. Manana Cohen was by the open door, as though she was afraid to come right in.

I said: "Thank Heaven you've come!" Extraordinary thing to say, but I said it.

She tried to smile. All scared eyes. I thought she was going to faint, tried to make her sit down, fussed about. Hilary, I'm trying to tell you I was shy.

"I'm frightened," she said, as though that would be news for me. Then it all came out in that jumbled way of hers. She had given Raphael the slip, had found my address in the telephone-book, had come to me to warn me.

"To warn me!" I gasped. The cheek of these young people! Here were we and all Scotland Yard after them—and she had come to warn me!

"Yes. Listen." Then she stopped. Suddenly, she blushed crimson.

I said: "Now, Manana, what is it? What on earth is there to blush about?"

She tried not to stammer as she said: "I can't help it. Julian's after you. He's out to kill. He hates you once and he hates you twice because he thinks I'm in love with you. I don't know why. He's just mad jealous. I know Julian. And they'll never catch him. Never. The fool police! I just thought I'd warn you. Go away, please go away—out of London. I feel if you die it will be my fault. He'll throw you if you don't go away. I know Julian. You'll be walking up Piccadilly one evening, this evening, perhaps. Suddenly, swish, knife in your back. No one will know who threw it in the crowd. He could throw it from the top of a 'bus and no one notice. He never misses."

I said: "So, Manana, he thinks you love me. Why does he think that?"

She wasn't blushing now. She was quite calm now. She had never moved from the open door. Her eyes wouldn't meet mine. They shone like anything in that white face. She just said: "Now I've warned you, I must go back. He will miss me. I'm glad I warned you. I think you must be a good man. Good-bye. But go away, please go away at once! Good-bye."

I couldn't stop her by touching her, else she would have got scared. I just told her not to go back East. We were going to raid Julian Raphael's place that night.

"You came to warn me," I said, "but I was just coming to warn you. My friend and I don't want you to go to prison, Manana. You had better stay away from there for the present. I can find you somewhere to stay to-night, if you like. You can trust me."

She opened her eyes very wide, but all she said was: "I must go back at once."

I began to protest, but she went on tonelessly: "You don't understand. I came to warn you because you are a good man. You are, aren't you? I'm sorry I was led into laughing at you that night. He pinched my arm when I didn't laugh. But I must stand by Julian. He is my man, good or bad. You see? He has been kind to me in his way. He loves me. I must go back to him at once. If you make me promise not to tell him about the police, I won't. I won't tell him anyway, I think. He must go to prison. It is time, because he will do more murders. I hate murders. But I will go with him to prison. And that will make it all right between Julian and me. Good-bye."

It was good-bye. I knew it was no use arguing. With some women one doesn't know when it's any good or not, with a few one does. They're the ones who count. I could hold her by force, of course—for her own good. Dear God, the lies we can tell ourselves! If I held her by force from going back to Julian Raphael it would not have been so much for her own good as for mine. I hated her going, I wanted her. But she must do as she thought right. Every one must always, in

spite of everything. I'm glad I've never married, Hilary, I would have made a mess of it just by always seeing my wife's point of view.

I saw Manana downstairs to the door. It was raining the deuce, and the difference between twilight and night was about the same as that between a man of colour and a nigger. Manana and I stood close together in the open doorway. It was good-bye. I said: "Perhaps they will let you off. I will do my best. Come to me for help later on. Good-bye, Manana. Thank you."

She smiled. The first and last smile I ever saw light that face. "I must never see you again," she said, and then the laughter of Julian Raphael tore the smile from her face.

My rooms, as you know, are in Curzon Street: at the rather grubby end where Curzon Street, as though finally realising that it is deprived of the residential support of the noble family of that name, slopes helplessly down to a slit in a grey wall called Lansdowne Passage. I don't know if you ever have occasion to go through there. When it is dark in London it is darker in Lansdowne Passage. It leads, between Lansdowne House and the wreck of Devonshire House, to Berkeley Street. There is a vertical iron bar up the middle of each opening, which I'm told were originally put there to prevent highwaymen making a dash through the Passage to the open country round Knightsbridge. Against that vertical iron bar leant Julian Raphael. I remember he had a pink shirt on. Our young dandy always showed a stretch of cuff. Between us and him there was one of those very tall silver-grey lamp-posts. You could see him round the edge of it, a black, lean, lounging shape. And that pink shirt.

"Manana, I followed you!" he cried. And he laughed.

The girl whispered frantically to me: "Get in, get in, get in!"

I said "What?" like a fool. She tried to push me inside the doorway. I was looking at her, not at Julian Raphael. I didn't understand. There was a scream from the twilight: "Mind out, Manana!" Manana jumped in front of me. That's all.

I held her as she fell backward. She just sighed.

"Manana!" the voice screamed again. Oh, in terror! The knife was up to the hilt in her throat.

I think I lost my head completely for the first time in my life. I made a dash towards the figure in the opening of Lansdowne Passage. He didn't move, didn't even see me coming. He was sobbing like a baby. Then I changed my mind and rushed back to Manana. Lay a flower on a pavement in the rain, and you have Manana as I last saw her. Her eyelids fluttered once or twice. The rain was washing the blood from her throat into the gutter. My man had come down and was doing his best. I looked through the twilight at the crumpled black figure against the iron bar.

"She's dead, Raphael!" I called, whispering to my man: "Go, get him!"

He did his best, poor devil. Raphael yelled: "Yes, for you! And I'll never throw but one more knife—but I'll do that if I have to come back from hell to do it!" He was gone, through Lansdowne Passage. My wretched man hadn't a chance. That night and for days there wasn't a port in England that H—— left unwatched for Julian Raphael. But, as in the storybooks, he has never been seen or heard of again. H—— has an idea he is somewhere in the Americas.

But it's not quite true (the Admiral added) that Julian Raphael has never been seen or heard of again. I have seen him and heard him, quite lately—in a sort of way. Of course it can be no more than a trick of the imagination. He has probably been more on my mind recently than I had realised. But the illusion is quite definitely vivid and unpleasant. And I can tell you it gets rather on a man's nerves, this comic talk of knives on Piccadilly. Imagination, Hilary, can play us queer, dark tricks sometimes. And it's no good trying to explain them with spirit talk. The mind is a dark place and we don't know what's in the sky, and that's all there is to it.

Mr. Townshend had listened gravely. A grey man, of the type conscientiously staid, Mr. Townshend found no aspect of this our life on earth which was not a proper occasion for the exercise of gravity, command of temper, and forbearance. He therefore forbore to make any comment on his friend's tale, but merely remarked:

"You ought not to stay in London, Charles. An unhealthy place, at best. Why not come down to Magralt with me to-morrow? Guy de Travest is coming. There's some fishing. Not much, and that little is poor, but you can always smoke in peace."

Sir Charles laughed. "You talk like Manana! But, anyhow, I am due at Portsmouth the day after to-morrow. No, no, I'll see my time out in London. I've been in most corners of the world, Hilary, and never found romance but in London."

"Hm!" said Mr. Townshend thoughtfully. "You have an odd idea of romance, Charles. Romance! And I don't, as a general rule, believe in apparitions. Hm! Have you rung up H—— to tell him of the reappearance of this remarkably unpleasant youth?"

"And he laughed me to scorn! Was ready, in fact, to lay a pony against Raphael's being within a thousand miles of London or England."

"You never know," said Mr. Townshend thoughtfully.

"Never know what, Hilary?"

"Where you are," said Mr. Townshend thoughtfully. "With Jews."

It was on the night following this conversation that the Admiral, on emerging from the Celibates Club, made an astonishing suggestion to Hunt the commissioner.

"Hunt," says Sir Charles, "do you mind walking with me down to the Piccadilly corner? I will know then that I am actually moving and not just standing here and thinking I'm moving. You see my point, Hunt?"

"Certainly, Sir Charles. I quite understand."

"I'm glad some one does!" sighed our gentleman.

The commissioner with the lined face, whose own antipathy to wine in his youth had not been insuperable, could sympathise with the Admiral's probable condition, while admiring the correct address with which, as became a gentleman of the sea, he bore his suffering.

"See any Jews about, Hunt?" the Admiral asked, as they came to the Piccadilly corner.

"Not definitely, Sir Charles. But a couple of Rolls-Royces have just passed. Good-night, Sir Charles."

"Good-night, Hunt."

Those were the last words the ancient commissioner was ever to hear from his good friend the Admiral. For as Sir Charles made to cross Piccadilly from Albemarle Street to St. James's Street he heard that "whizz" behind him. He had been expecting it, but it startled him. He half-turned and jumped sideways, colliding with the bonnet of a fast-moving car.

There was a terrific din about him as he raised himself to his hands and knees. It deafened him, the din of engines and voices. Many voices seemed to be arguing. Then, as he rose to his feet, the din happily receded. There was silence, but the silence of a pleasant voice. He walked on to St. James's Street, glad things had been no worse. Then he saw the face of Julian Raphael. It was just in front of him, smiling. He was holding out his hand to Sir Charles, smiling. He was beautiful. Behind his shoulder was Manana. She was laughing at Sir Charles's bewilderment. Then, as he stared at them, they pointed over his shoulder. They were still laughing. Behind him, in the middle of Piccadilly, there was a great crowd around a large motor-car and a prostrate figure that looked oddly like a dingy travesty of himself. That is how it was, but still he did not understand. Julian Raphael and Manana laughed at him and each took him by an arm and walked with him down the slope of St. James's Street. There was a valley at the foot of St. James's Street, and over the valley a golden cloud as large as a continent. Many people were walking about, looking calm and clean and happy. Manana was still laughing happily.

"Julian died last night in Paris," she told Sir Charles. "He was just coming over to London to kill you. Isn't it idiotic? I don't say he loves you now, but he's willing to consider an intelligent friendship. Aren't you, Julian? Death isn't at all what the Salvation Army thinks, Charles. You'll be surprised. You're just yourself, that's all. Funny you have to die

before you're allowed to be yourself. Oh, look! Look, Charles! Isn't it beautiful! Charles, let's walk and walk and walk!"

"Just look at those asses behind!" cried Julian Raphael, shouting with laughter. But now the people at the head of St. James's Street were very faint, the clear golden air of the sun triumphant was falling between Sir Charles's eyes and the people grouped round the prostrate figure that looked oddly like a dingy travesty of himself.

"If they only knew," said Manana gravely, "that living is worth while just because one has to die! Come on, Charles, let's walk!"

"Here, and me!" cried Julian Raphael.

"Young man," said the Admiral severely, "you just stay where you are. I have been waiting a long time for this walk with Manana."

"I'll follow you. Where are you going to walk to?"

"You can't follow us, Julian," laughed Manana. "They won't let you, yet. Naturally, dear, considering how awful you've been. You can have a drink while we're gone."

"A drink?" said Sir Charles. "But, good Lord, he can't have a drink here, can he?"

"But why not?" Manana laughed. "There's only one hell, dear, and that's on earth. Come on, come on! We'll walk towards that golden cloud and back!"

The Gentleman from America

I

T is told by a decayed gentleman at the sign of *The Leather Butler*, which is in Shepherd's Market, which is in Mayfair, how one night three men behaved in a most peculiar way; and one of them was left for dead.

Towards twelve o'clock on a night in the month of November some years ago, three men were ascending the noble stairway of a mansion in Grosvenor Square. The mansion, although appointed in every detail—to suit, however, a severe taste—had yet a sour atmosphere, as of a house long untenanted but by caretakers.

The first of the men, for they ascended in single file, held aloft a kitchen candlestick, whilst his companions made the best progress they could among the deep shadows that the faulty light cast on the oaken stairway. He who went last, the youngest of the three, said gaily:—

"Mean old bird, my aunt! Cutting off the electric-light just because she is away."

"Fur goodness' sake!" said the other.

The leader, whose face the candlelight revealed as thin almost to asceticism, a face white and tired, finely moulded but soiled in texture by the dissipations of a man of the world, contented himself with a curt request to his young friend not to speak so loud.

It was, however, the gentleman in between the two whom it will advantage the reader to consider. This was an unusually tall and strongly-built man. Yet it was not his giant stature, but rather the assurance of his bearing, which was remarkable. His very clothes sat on his huge frame with an air of firmness, of finality, that, as even a glance at his two companions would show, is deprecated by English tailors, whose inflexible formula it is that the elegance of the casual is the only possible elegance for gentlemen of the mode. While his face had that weathered, yet untired and eager look which is the enviable possession of many Americans, and is commonly considered to denote, for reasons not very clearly defined, the quality known as Poise. Not, however, that this untired and eager look is, as some have supposed, the outward sign of a lack of interest in dissipation, but rather of an enthusiastic and naïve curiosity as to the varieties of the same. The gentleman from America looked, in fine, to be a proper man; and one who, in his early thirties, had established a philosophy of which his comfort and his assurance of retaining it were the two poles, his easy perception of humbug the pivot, and his fearlessness the latitude and longitude.

It was on the second landing that the leader, whose name was Quillier, and on whom the dignity of an ancient baronetcy seemed to have an almost intolerably tiring effect, flung open a door. He did not pass into the room, but held the candlestick towards the gentleman from America. And his manner was so impersonal as to be almost rude, which is a fault of breeding when it is bored.

"The terms of the bet," said Quillier, "are that this candle must suffice you for the night. That is understood?"

"Sure, why not?" smiled the gentleman from America. "It's a bum bet, and it looks to me like a bum candle. But do I care? No, sir!"

"Further," continued the impersonal, pleasant voice, "that you are allowed no matches, and therefore cannot relight the candle when it has gone out. That if you can pass the night in that room, Kerr-Anderson and I pay you five hundred pounds. And *vice versa*."

"That's all right, Quillier. We've got all that." The gentleman from America took the candle from Quillier's hand and looked into the room, but with no more than faint interest. In that faulty light little could be seen but the oak-panelling, the heavy hangings about the great bed, and a steel engraving of a Meissonier duellist lunging at them from a wall nearby.

"Seldom," said he, "have I seen a room look less haunted——"

"Ah," vaguely said Sir Cyril Quillier.

"But," said the gentleman from America, "since you and Kerr-Anderson insist on presenting me with five hundred pounds

for passing the night in it, do I complain? No, sir!"

"Got your revolver?" queried young Kerr-Anderson, a chubby youth whose profession was dining out.

"That is so," said the gentleman from America.

Quillier said: "Well, Puce, I don't mind telling you that I had just as soon this silly business was over. I have been betting all my life, but I have always had a preference for those bets which did not turn on a man's life or death——"

"Say, listen, Quillier, you can't frighten me with that junk!" snapped Mr. Puce.

"My aunt," said young Kerr-Anderson, "will be very annoyed if anything happens and she gets to hear of it. She hates a corpse in her house more than any one I know. You're sure you are going on with it, Puce?"

"Boy, if Abraham Lincoln was to come up this moment and tell me Queen Anne was dead, I'd be as sure he was speaking the truth as that I'm going to spend this night in this old haunted room of your aunt's. Yes, sir! And now I'll give you good-night, boys. Warn your mothers to be ready to give you five hundred pounds to hand on to Howard Cornelius Puce."

"I like Americans," said Quillier vaguely. "They are so enthusiastic. Good-night, Puce, and God bless you. I hope you have better luck than the last man who spent a night in that room. He was strangled. Good-night, my friend."

"Aw, have a heart!" growled Mr. Puce. "You get a guy so low with your talk that I feel I could put on a tall-hat and crawl under a snake."

II

The gentleman from America, alone in the haunted room, lost none of his composure. Indeed, if anything disturbed him at all, it was that, irritated by Quillier's manner at a dinner-party a few nights before, and knowing Quillier to be a bankrupt wastrel, he had allowed himself to be dared into this silly adventure and had thus deprived himself for one night of the amenities of his suite at Claridge's Hotel. Five hundred pounds more or less did not matter very much to Mr. Puce: although, to be sure, it was some consolation to know that five hundred pounds more or less must matter quite a deal to *Sir Cyril Quillier*, for all his swank. Mr. Puce, like a good American, following the Gospel according to Mr. Sinclair Lewis, always stressed the titles of any of his acquaintance.

Now, he contented himself with a very cursory examination of the dim, large room; he rapped, in an amateurish way, on the oak panels here and there for any sign of any "secret passage junk," but succeeded only in soiling his knuckles, and it was only when, fully clothed, he had thrown himself on the great bed that it occurred to him that five hundred pounds sterling was quite a pretty sum to have staked about a damfool haunted room.

The conclusion that naturally leapt to one's mind, thought Mr. Puce, was that the room must have something the matter with it, else would a hawk like Quillier have bet money on its qualities of terror? Mr. Puce had, indeed, suggested, when first the bet was put forward, that five hundred pounds was perhaps an unnecessary sum to stake on so idiotic a fancy; but Quillier had said in a very tired way that he never bet less than five hundred on anything, but that if Mr. Puce preferred to bet with poppycock and chickenfood, he, Quillier, would be pleased to introduce him to some very jolly children of his acquaintance.

Such thoughts persuaded Mr. Puce to rise and examine more carefully the walls and appointments of the room. But as the furniture was limited to the barest necessities, and as the oak-panelled walls appeared in the faint light to be much the same as any other walls, the gentleman from America swore vaguely and again reclined on the bed. It was a very comfortable bed.

He had made up his mind, however, that he would not sleep. He would watch out, thought Mr. Puce, for any sign of this old ghost, and he would listen with the ears of a coyote, thought Mr. Puce, for any hint of those rapping noises, rude winds, musty odours, clanking of chains, and the like, with which, so Mr. Puce had always understood, the family ghosts of Britishers invariably heralded their foul appearance.

Mr. Puce, you can see, did not believe in ghosts. He could not but think, however, that some low trick might be played on him, since on the honour of *Sir Cyril Quillier*, peer though he was—for Mr. Puce, like a good American, could never get the cold dope on all this fancy title stuff—he had not the smallest reliance. But as to the supernatural, Mr. Puce's attitude

was always a wholesome scepticism—and a rather aggressive scepticism at that, as Quillier had remarked with amusement when he had spoken of the ghost in, as he had put it, the house of Kerr-Anderson's aunt. Quillier had said:—

"There are two sorts of men on whom ghosts have an effect: those who are silly enough to believe in them, and those who are silly enough not to believe in them."

Mr. Puce had been annoyed at that. He detested clever back-chat. "I'll tell the world," Mr. Puce had said, "that a plain American has to go to a drug-store after a conversation with you."

Mr. Puce, lying on the great bed, whose hangings depressed him, examined his automatic and found it good. He had every intention of standing no nonsense, and an automatic nine-shooter is, as Mr. Puce remembered having read somewhere, an Argument. Indeed, Mr. Puce was full of those dour witticisms about the effect of a "gun" on everyday life which go to make the less pretentious "movies" so entertaining; although, to be sure, he did not know more than a very little about guns. Travellers have remarked, however, that the exciting traditions behind a hundred-per-cent. American nationality have given birth in even the most gentle citizens of that great republic to a feeling of familiarity with "guns," as such homely phrases as "slick with the steel mit," "doggone son of a gun," and the like, go to prove.

Mr. Puce placed the sleek little automatic on a small table by the bed, on which stood the candle and, as he realised for the first time, a book. One glance at the paper-jacket of the book was enough to convince the gentleman from America that its presence there must be due to one of Quillier's tired ideas. It showed a woman of striking, if conventional, beauty, fighting for her life with a shape which might or might not be the wraith of a bloodhound but was certainly something quite outside a lovely woman's daily experience. Mr. Puce laughed. The book was called, *Tales of Terror for Tiny Tots*, by *Ivor Pelham Marlay*.

The gentleman from America was a healthy man, and needed his sleep; and it was therefore with relief that he turned to Mr. Marlay's absurd-looking book as a means of keeping himself awake. The tale at which the book came open was called *The Phantom Footsteps*; and Mr. Puce prepared himself to be entertained, for he was not of those who read for instruction. He read:—

THE PHANTOM FOOTSTEPS

The tale of *The Phantom Footsteps* is still whispered with awe and loathing among the people of that decayed but genteel district of London known to those who live in it as Belgravia and to others as Pimlico.

Julia and Geraldine Biggot-Baggot were twin sisters who lived with their father, a widower, in a town in Lancashire called Wigan, or it may have been called Bolton. The tale finds Julia and Geraldine in their nineteenth year, and it also finds them in a very bad temper, for they were yearning for a more spacious life than can be found in Wigan, or it might be, Bolton. This yearning their neighbours found all the more inexplicable since the parents of the girls were of Lancashire stock, their mother having been a Biggot from Wigan and their father a Baggot from Bolton.

The reader can imagine with what excess of gaiety Julia and Geraldine heard one day from their father that he had inherited a considerable property from a distant relation; and the reader can go on imagining the exaltation of the girls when they heard that the property included a mansion in Belgravia, since that for which they had always yearned most was to enjoy, from a central situation, the glittering life of the metropolis.

Their father preceded them from Wigan, or was it Bolton? He was a man of a tidy disposition, and wished to see that everything in the Belgravia house was ready against his daughters' arrival. When Julia and Geraldine did arrive, however, they were admitted by a genial old person of repellent aspect and disagreeable odour, who informed them that she was doing a bit of charring about the house but would be gone by the evening. Their father, she added, had gone into the country to engage servants, but would be back the next day; and he had instructed her to tell Julia and Geraldine not to be nervous of sleeping alone in a strange house, that there was nothing to be afraid of, and that he would, anyhow, be with them first thing in the morning.

Now Julia and Geraldine, though twins, were of vastly different temperaments; for whereas Julia was a girl of gay and indomitable spirit who knew not fear, Geraldine suffered from agonies of timidity and knew nothing else. When, for instance, night fell and found them alone in the house, Julia could scarcely contain her delight at the adventure; while it was with difficulty that Geraldine could support the tremors that shook her girlish frame.

Imagine, then, how differently they were affected when, as they lay in bed in their room towards the top of the house, they distinctly heard from far below a noise, as of some one moving. Julia sat up in bed, intent, unafraid, curious. Geraldine swooned.

"It's only a cat," Julia whispered. "I'm going down to see."

"Don't!" sighed Geraldine. "For pity's *sake* don't leave me, Julia!"

"Oh, don't be so childish!" snapped Julia. "Whenever there's the chance of the least bit of fun you get shivers down your spine. But as you are so frightened I will lock the door from the outside and take the key with me, so that no one can get in when I am not looking. Oh, I hope it's a burglar! I'll give him the fright of his life, see if I don't."

And the indomitable girl went, feeling her way to the door in darkness, for to have switched on the light would have been to warn the intruder, if there was one, that the house was inhabited; whereas it was the plucky girl's conceit to turn the tables on the burglar, if there was one, by suddenly appearing to him as an avenging phantom; for having done not a little district-visiting in Wigan, or, possibly, Bolton, no one knew better than Julia of the depths of base superstition among the vulgar.

A little calmed by her sister's nonchalance, Geraldine lay still as a mouse in the darkness, with her pretty head beneath the bedclothes. From without came not a sound, and the very stillness of the house had impelled Geraldine to a new access of terror had she not concentrated on the works of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, which tell of the grit of the English people.

Then, as though to test the grit of the English people in the most abominable way, came a dull noise from below. Geraldine restrained a scream, lay breathless in the darkness. The dull noise, however, was not repeated, and presently Geraldine grew a little calmer, thinking that maybe her sister had dropped a slipper or something of the sort. But the reader can imagine into what terror the poor girl had been plunged had she been a student of the detective novels of the day, for then she must instantly have recognised the dull noise as a dull thud, and what can a dull thud mean but one thing?

It was as she was praying a prayer to Our Lady that her ears grew aware of footsteps ascending the stairs. Her first feeling was one of infinite relief. Of course Julia had been right, and there had been nothing downstairs but a cat or, perhaps, a dog. And now Julia was returning, and in a second they would have a good laugh together. Indeed, it was all Geraldine could do to restrain herself from jumping out of bed to meet her sister, when she was assailed by a terrible doubt; and on the instant her mind grew so charged with fear that she could no longer hold back her sobs. Suppose it was not Julia ascending! Suppose ... "Oh, God!" sobbed Geraldine.

Transfixed with terror, yet hopeful of the best, the poor girl could not even command herself to re-insert her head beneath the sheets. And always the ascending steps came nearer. As they approached the door, she thought she would die of uncertainty. But as the key was fitted into the lock she drew a deep breath of relief—to be at once shaken by the most acute agony of doubt, so that she had given anything in the world to be back again in Wigan, or, even better, Bolton.

"Julia!" she sobbed. "Julia!"

For the door had opened, the footsteps were in the room, and Geraldine thought she recognised her sister's maidenly tread. But why did Julia not speak, why this intolerable silence? Geraldine, peer as hard as she might, could make out nothing in the darkness. The footsteps seemed to fumble in their direction, but came always nearer to the bed, in which poor Geraldine lay more dead than alive. Oh, why did Julia not speak, just to reassure her?

"Julia!" sobbed Geraldine. "Julia!"

The footsteps seemed to fumble about the floor with an indecision maddening to Geraldine's distraught nerves. But at last they came beside the bed—and there they stood! In the awful silence Geraldine could hear her heart beating like a hammer on a bell.

"Oh!" the poor girl screamed. "What is it, Julia? Why don't you speak?"

But never a sound nor a word gave back the livid silence, never a sigh nor a breath, though Julia must be standing within a yard of the bed.

"Oh, she is only trying to frighten me, the beast!" poor Geraldine thought; and, unable for another second to bear the cruel silence, she timidly stretched out a hand to touch her sister—when, to her infinite relief, her fingers touched the white rabbit-fur with which Julia's dressing-gown was delicately trimmed.

"You beast, Julia!" she sobbed and laughed. Never a word, however, came from the still shape. Geraldine, impatient of the continuation of a joke which seemed to her in the worst of taste, raised her hand from the fur, that she might touch her sister's face; but her fingers had risen no farther than Julia's throat when they touched something wet and warm, and with a scream of indistinguishable terror Geraldine fainted away.

When Mr. Biggot-Baggot admitted himself into the house early the next morning, his eyes were assailed by a dreadful sight. At the foot of the stairs was a pool of blood, from which, in a loathsome trail, drops of blood wound up the stairway.

Mr. Biggot-Baggot, fearful lest something out of the way had happened to his beloved daughters, rushed frantically up the stairs. The trail of blood led to his daughters' room; and there, in the doorway, the poor gentleman stood appalled, so foul was the sight that met his eyes. His beloved Geraldine lay on the bed, her hair snow-white, her lips raving with the shrill fancies of a maniac. While on the floor beside the bed lay stretched, in a pool of blood, his beloved Julia, her head half-severed from her trunk.

The tragic story unfolded only when the police arrived. It then became clear that Julia, her head half-severed from her body, and therefore a corpse, had yet, with indomitable purpose, come upstairs to warn her timid sister against the homicidal lunatic who, just escaped from an asylum near by, had penetrated into the house. However, the police consoled the distracted father not a little by pointing out that the escape of the homicidal lunatic from the asylum had done some good, inasmuch as there would now be room in an asylum near her home for Geraldine.

III

When the gentleman from America had read the last line of *The Phantom Footsteps* he closed the book with a slam, and, in his bitter impatience with the impossible work, was making to hurl it across the room, when, unfortunately, his circling arm overturned the candle. The candle, of course, went out.

"Aw, hell!" said Mr. Puce bitterly, and he thought: "Another good mark to *Sir Cyril Quillier*! Won't I Sir him one some day! For only a lousy guy with a face like a drummer's overdraft would have bought a damfool book like that."

The tale of *The Phantom Footsteps* had annoyed him very much; but what annoyed him even more was the candle's extinction, for the gentleman from America knew himself too well to bet a nickel on his chances of remaining awake in a dark room.

He did, however, manage to keep awake for some time merely by concentrating on wicked words: on Quillier's face, and how its tired, mocking expression would change for the better were his, Puce's, foot to be firmly pressed down on its surface, and on Julia and Geraldine. For the luckless twins, by the almost criminal idiocy with which they were presented, kept walking about Mr. Puce's mind; and as he began to nod to the demands of a healthy and tired body he could not resist wondering if their home-town had been Wigan or Bolton and if Julia's head had been severed from ear to ear or only half-way....

When he awoke, it was the stillness of the room that impressed his sharply-awakened senses. The room was very still.

"Who's there!" snapped Mr. Puce. Then, really awake, laughed at himself. "Say, what would plucky little Julia have done?" he thought, chuckling. "Why, got up and looked!"

But the gentleman from America discovered in himself a reluctance to move from the bed. He was very comfortable on the bed. Besides, he had no light and could see nothing if he did move. Besides, he had heard nothing at all, not the faintest noise. He had merely awoken rather more sharply than usual....

Suddenly, he sat up on the bed, his back against the oak head. Something had moved in the room. He was certain something had moved. Somewhere by the foot of the bed.

"Aw, drop that!" laughed Mr. Puce.

His eyes peering into the darkness, Mr. Puce stretched his right hand to the table on which stood the automatic. The gesture reminded him of Geraldine's when she had touched the white rabbit-fur. Aw, Geraldine nothing! These idiotic twins kept chasing about a man's mind. The gentleman from America grasped the automatic firmly in his hand. His hand felt as though it had been born grasping an automatic.

"I want to tell you," said Mr. Puce into the darkness, "that some one is now going to have something coming to him, her, or it."

It was quite delicious, the feeling that he was not frightened. He had always known he was a helluva fellow. But he had never been quite certain. Now he was certain. He was the regular.

But, if anything had moved, it moved no more. Maybe, though, nothing had moved at all, ever. Maybe it was only his half-awakened senses that had played him a trick. He was rather sorry, if that was so. He was just beginning to enjoy the evening.

The room was very still. The gentleman from America could only hear himself breathing.

Something moved again, distinctly.

"What the hell!" snapped Mr. Puce.

He levelled the automatic towards the foot of the bed.

"I will now," said Mr. Puce grimly, "shoot."

The room was very still. The gentleman from America wished, forcibly, that he had a light. It was no good leaving the bed without a light. He'd only fall over the infernal thing, whatever it was. What would plucky little Julia have done? Aw, Julia nothing! He strained his ears to catch another movement, but he could only hear himself breathing—in short, sharp gasps! The gentleman from America pulled himself together.

"Say, listen!" he snapped into the darkness. "I am going to count ten. I am then going to shoot. In the meanwhile you can make up your mind whether or not you are going to stay right here to watch the explosion. One. Two. Three. Four ..."

Then Mr. Puce interrupted himself. He had to. It was so funny. He laughed. He heard himself laugh, and again it was quite delicious, the feeling that he was not frightened. And wouldn't they laugh, the boys at the Booster Club back home, when he sprung this yarn on them! He could hear them. Oh, Boy! Say, listen, trying to scare him, Howard Cornelius Puce, with a ghost like that! Aw, it was like shooting craps with a guy that couldn't count. Poor old Quillier! Never bet less than five hundred on anything, didn't he, the poor boob! Well, there wasn't a ghost made, with or without a head on him, that could put the wind up Howard Puce. No, sir!

For, as his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, and helped by the mockery of light that the clouded, moonless night just managed to thrust through the distant window, the gentleman from America had been able to make out a form at the foot of the bed. He could only see its upper half, and that appeared to end above the throat. The phantom had no head. Whereas, Julia's head had been only half-severed from—aw, what the hell!

"A family like the Kerr-Andersons," began Mr. Puce, chuckling—but suddenly found, to his astonishment, that he was shouting at the top of his voice; anyhow, it sounded so. However, he began again, much lower, but still chuckling:—

"Say, listen, Mr. Ghost, a family like the Kerr-Andersons might have afforded a head and a suit of clothes for their family ghost. Sir, you are one big bum phantom!" Again, unaccountably, Mr. Puce found himself shouting at the top of his voice. "I am going on counting," he added grimly.

And, his automatic levelled at the thing's heart, the gentleman from America went on counting. His voice was steady.

"Five ... six ..."

He sat crouched at the head of the bed, his eyes never off the thing's breast. Phantom nothing! He didn't believe in that no-head bunk. What the hell! He thought of getting a little nearer the foot of the bed and catching the thing a whack on that invisible head of his, but decided to stay where he was.

"Seven ... eight ..."

He hadn't seen the hands before. Gee, some hands! And arms! Holy Moses, he'd got long arms to him, he had....

"Nine!" said the gentleman from America.

Christopher and Columbus, but this would make some tale back home! Yes, sir! Not a bad idea of Quillier's, that, though! Those arms. Long as old glory ... long as the bed! Not bad for *Sir* Cyril Quillier, that idea....

"Ten, you swine!" yelled the gentleman from America, and fired.

Some one laughed. Mr. Puce quite distinctly heard himself laughing, and that made him laugh again. Fur goodness' sake, what a shot! Missed from that distance!

His eyes, as he made to take aim again, were bothered by the drops of sweat from his forehead. "Aw, what the hell!" said Mr. Puce, and fired again.

The silence after the second shot was like a black cloud on the darkness. Mr. Puce thought out the wickedest word he knew, and said it. Well, he wasn't going to miss again. No, sir! His hand was steady as iron, too. Iron was his second name. And again the gentleman from America found it quite delicious, the feeling that he was not frightened. Attaboy! The drops of sweat from his forehead bothered him, though. Aw, what the hell, that was only excitement.

He raised his arm for the third shot. Jupiter and Jane, but he'd learn that ghost to stop ghosting! He was certainly sorry for that ghost. He wished, though, that he could concentrate more on the actual body of the headless thing. There it was, darn it, at the foot of the bed, staring at him—well, it would have been staring at him if it had a head. Aw, of course it had a head! It was only Quillier with his lousy face in a black wrap. *Sir* Cyril Quillier'd get one piece of lead in him this time, though. His own fault, the bastard.

"Say, listen, Quillier," said the gentleman from America, "I want to tell you that unless you quit, you are a corpse. Now I mean it, sure as my name is Howard Cornelius Puce. I have been shooting to miss so far. Yes, sir. But I am now *annoyed*."

If only, though, he could concentrate more on the body of the thing, His eyes kept wandering to the hands and arms. Gee, but they sure were long, those arms! As long as the bed, no less. Just long enough for the hands to get at him from the foot of the bed. And that's what they were at, what's more! Coming nearer. What the hell! They were moving, those doggone arms, nearer and nearer....

Mr. Puce fired again.

That was no miss. He knew that was no miss. Right through the heart, that little boy must have gone. In that darkness he couldn't see more than just the shape of the thing. But it was still now. The arms were still. They weren't moving any more. The gentleman from America chuckled. That one had shown him that it's a wise little ghost that stops ghosting. Yes, sir! It would fall in a moment, dead as Argentine mutton.

Mr. Puce then swore. Those arms were moving again. The hands weren't a yard from him now. What the hell! They were for his throat, God-dammit.

"You swine!" sobbed the gentleman from America, and fired again. But he wouldn't wait this time. No, sir! He'd let that ghost have a ton of lead. Mr. Puce fired again. Those hands weren't half a yard from his throat now. No good shooting at the hands though. Thing was to get the Thing through the heart. Mr. Puce fired the sixth bullet. Right into the thing's chest. The sweat bothered his eyes. "Aw, hell!" said Mr. Puce. He wished the bed was a bit longer. He couldn't get back any more. Those arms ... Holy Moses, long as hell, weren't they! Mr. Puce fired the seventh, eighth ... ninth. Right into the thing. The revolver fell from Mr. Puce's shaking fingers. Mr. Puce heard himself screaming.

IV

Towards noon on a summer's day several years later two men were sitting before an inn some miles from the ancient town of Lincoln. Drawn up in the shade of a towering ash was a large grey touring-car, covered with dust. On the worn table stood two tankards of ale. The travellers rested in silence and content, smoking.

The road by which the inn stood was really no more than a lane, and the peace of the motorists was not disturbed by the traffic of a main road. Indeed, the only human being visible was a distant speck on the dust, coming towards them. He seemed, however, to be making a good pace, for he soon drew near.

"If," said the elder of the two men, in a low, tired voice, "if we take the short cut through Carmion Wood, we will be at Malmanor for lunch."

"Then you'll go short-cutting alone," said the other firmly. "I've heard enough tales about Carmion Wood to last me a life-time without my adding one more to them. And as for spooks, one is enough for this child in one lifetime, thanks very much."

The two men, for lack of any other distraction, watched the pedestrian draw near. He turned out to be a giant of a man; and had, apparently, no intention of resting at the inn. The very air of the tall pedestrian was a challenge to the lazy content of the sunlit noon. He was walking at a great pace, his felt hat swinging from his hand. A giant he was: his hair greying, his massive face set with assurance.

"By all that's holy!" gasped the elder of the two observers. A little lean gentleman that was, with a lined face which had been handsome in a striking way but for the haggard marks of the dissipations of a man of the world. He had only one arm, and that added a curiously flippant air of devilry to his little, lean, sardonic person.

"Puce!" yelled the other, a young man with a chubby, good-humoured face. "Puce, you silly old ass! Come here at once!"

The giant swung round at the good-natured cry, stared at the two smiling men. Then the massive face broke into the old, genial smile by which his friends had always known and loved the gentleman from America, and he came towards them with hand outstretched.

"Well, boys!" laughed Mr. Puce. "This is one big surprise. But it's good to see you again, I'll say that."

"The years have rolled on, Puce, the years have rolled on," sighed Quillier in his tired way, but warmly enough he shook the gentleman from America with his one hand.

"They certainly have!" said Mr. Puce, mopping his brow and smiling down on the two. "And by the look of that arm, Quillier, I'll say you're no stranger to war."

"Sit down, old Puce, and have a drink," laughed Kerr-Anderson. Always gay, was Kerr-Anderson.

But the gentleman from America seemed, as he stood there, uncertain. He glanced down the way he had come. Quillier, watching him, saw that he was fagged out. Eleven years had made a great difference to Mr. Puce. He looked old, worn, a wreck of the hearty giant who was once Howard Cornelius Puce.

"Come, sit down, Puce," he said kindly, and quite briskly, for him. "Do you realise, man, that it's eleven years since that idiotic night? What are you doing? Taking a walking-tour?"

Mr. Puce sat down on the stained bench beside them. His massive presence, his massive smile, seemed to fill the whole air about the two men.

"Walking-tour? That is so, more or less," smiled Mr. Puce; and, with a flash of his old humour: "I want to tell you boys that I am the daughter of the King of Egypt, but I am dressed as a man because I am travelling *incognita*. Eleven years is it, since we met? A whale of a time, eleven years!"

"Why, there's been quite a war since then," chuckled Kerr-Anderson. "But still that night seems like last night. I *am* glad to see you again, old Puce! But, by Heaven, we owe you one for giving us the scare of our lives! Don't we, Quillier?"

"That's right, Puce," smiled Quillier. "We owe you one all right. But I am heartily glad that it was only a shock you had, and that you were quite yourself after all. And so here we are gathered together again by blind chance, eleven years older, eleven years wiser. Have a drink, Puce?"

The gentleman from America was looking from one to the other of the two. The smile on the massive face seemed one of utter bewilderment. Quillier was shocked at the ravages of a mere eleven years on the man's face.

"I gave you two a scare!" echoed Mr. Puce. "Aw, put it to music, boys! What the hell! How the blazes did I give you two a scare?"

Kerr-Anderson was quite delighted to explain. The scare of eleven years ago was part of the fun of to-day. Many a time he had told the tale to while away the boredom of Flanders and Mesopotamia, and had often wanted to let old Puce in on it to enjoy the joke on Quillier and himself, but had never had the chance to get hold of him.

They had thought, that night, that Puce was dead. Quillier, naked from the waist up, had rushed down to Kerr-Anderson, waiting in the dark porch, and had told him that Puce had kicked the bucket. Quillier had sworn like nothing on earth as he dashed on his clothes. Awkward, Puce's corpse, for Quillier and Kerr-Anderson. Quillier, thank Heaven, had had the sense not to leave the empty revolver on the bed. They shoved back all the ghost properties into a bag. And as, of course, the house wasn't Kerr-Anderson's aunt's house at all, but Johnny Paramour's, who was away, they couldn't so easily be traced. Still, awkward for them, very. They cleared the country that night. Quillier swearing all the way about the weak hearts of giants. And it wasn't until the Orient Express had pitched them out at Vienna that they saw in the *Continental Daily Mail* that an American of the name of Puce had been found by the caretaker in the bedroom of a house in Grosvenor Square, suffering from shock and nervous breakdown. Poor old Puce! Good old Puce! But he'd had the laugh on them all right....

And heartily enough the gentleman from America appeared to enjoy the joke on Quillier and Kerr-Anderson.

"That's good!" he laughed. "That's very good!"

"Of course," said Quillier in his tired, deprecating way, "we took the stake, this boy and I. For if you hadn't collapsed you would certainly have run out of that room like a Mussulman from a ham-sandwich."

"That's all right," laughed Mr. Puce. "But what I want to know, Quillier, is how you got me so scared?"

Kerr-Anderson says now that Puce was looking at Quillier quite amiably. Full in the face, and very close to him, but quite amiably. Quillier smiled, in his deprecating way.

"Oh, an old trick, Puce! A black rag over the head, a couple of yards of stuffed cloth for arms——"

"Aw, steady!" said Mr. Puce. But quite amiably. "Say, listen, I shot at you! Nine times. How about that?"

"Dear, oh dear!" laughed Kerr-Anderson. But that was the last time he laughed that day.

"My dear Puce," said Quillier gently, slightly waving his one arm. "That is the oldest trick of all. I was in a panic all the time that you would think of it and chuck the gun at my head. Those bullets in your automatic were blanks."

Kerr-Anderson isn't at all sure what exactly happened then. All he remembers is that Puce's huge face had suddenly gone crimson, which made his hair stand out shockingly white; and that Puce had Quillier's fragile throat between his hands; and that Puce was roaring and spitting into Quillier's blackening face.

"Say, listen, you Quillier! You'd scare me like that, would you! You'd scare me with a chicken's trick like that, would you! And you'd strangle me, eh? You swine, you *Sir* Cyril Quillier, you, right here's where the strangling comes in, and it's me that's going to do it——"

Kerr-Anderson hit out and yelled. Quillier was helpless with his one arm, the giant's grip on his throat. The woman who kept the inn had hysterics. Puce roared blasphemies. Quillier was doubled back over the small table, Puce on top of him, tightening his death-hold. Kerr-Anderson hit, kicked, bit, yelled.

Suddenly there were shouts from all around.

"For God's sake, quick!" sobbed Kerr-Anderson. "He's almost killed him."

"Aw, what the hell!" roared Puce.

The men in dark uniforms had all they could do to drag him away from that little, lean, blackened, unconscious thing. Then they manacled Puce. Puce looked sheepish, and grinned at Kerr-Anderson.

Two of the six men in dark uniforms helped to revive Quillier.

"Drinks," gasped Kerr-Anderson to the woman who kept the inn.

"Say, give me one," begged the gentleman from America. Huge, helpless, manacled, he stood sheepishly among his uniformed captors. Kerr-Anderson stared at them. Quillier was reviving.


"Get's like that," said the head-warder indifferently. "Gave us the slip this morning. Certain death for some one. Homicidal maniac, that's 'im. And he's the devil to hold. Been like that eleven years. Got a shock, I fancy. Keeps on talking about a sister of his called Julia who was murdered and how he'll be revenged for it..."

Kerr-Anderson had turned away. Quillier suddenly sobbed: "God have mercy on us!" The gentleman from America suddenly roared with laughter.

"Can't be helped," said the head-warder. "Sorry you were put to trouble, sir. Good-day, gentlemen. Glad it was no worse."

To Lamoir

I

 LAS, it is a pity I know so little of trees and flowers, and how I shall tell this tale without their help I cannot imagine, for it is a tale that demands a profound knowledge of still, gentle things. But I dare say it will get itself written somehow, and saying that leads us to quite another question, for serious men will have it that that is the pity of nearly all the writing of our time, it just gets itself written somehow.

Now it is difficult not to think a little of my own life in telling of Hugh and Lamoir, for they helped me when I was very young, for a long time they were my only friends in London, and ever since they have remained the dearest. But it was only the other day that Hugh told me about the tree. I suppose he must have had a sort of idea of what might happen and wanted to tell some one about it while he could. But it's odd that I had known him all those years, him and Lamoir, and he had never so much as mentioned the tree—when out he suddenly comes with it!

Of course there will be those to say that he hadn't concealed anything worth concealing, that it's an impossible story anyhow, and who could believe it? But I do believe it decidedly, for how could Hugh have made it up? Hugh wasn't an imaginative man, not a bit. That, in point of fact, is what the story is about. Of course, he had a passion for fine things, a passion for touching fine things, but your collector or your connoisseur isn't generally anything of an imaginative man. Lamoir, now, she was quite different, and she might easily have thought of the garden and the tree and the whole business, but so far as I can make out Hugh and Lamoir never once breathed a word to each other about it.

I have never been able to think of Lamoir quite steadily, I liked her too much. I know a writer is supposed to be impersonal, but that can't be helped. She knew the very hearts of trees and flowers, Lamoir did, and she was always so still and quiet, like a flower herself, that you never knew what she was thinking of. And that is more or less how the trouble between them began, so Hugh told me the other day. He never knew what she was thinking of, but he hoped for the best, and then one day he found that she had been thinking away from him all the time. That is what Hugh said. But I feel that the truth of it was that he never thought Lamoir was thinking of anything at all, except maybe about what a good husband he was, and then one day he got a shock. Many men seem to be like that, they have happy natures, for when their wives are quiet and thoughtful they never dream that those thoughts might be out of accord with their own, and when they do at last realise that something has been wrong all the time they are surprised and hurt and want to know why they were not told sooner. As though, you know, some things can be told sooner, as though some things *can* be told until it is too late!

Now Hugh and Lamoir was a difficult pair to know, together or singly. Hugh wasn't at all your democratic sort, there was nothing at all easy-going about him. I remember once seeing him in a crowded room and thinking he was like an island of nerves in an ocean of grins. Lamoir said he was proud. He simply didn't seem to concern himself at all with other people's opinions, it was as though he just hadn't the time to go about dealing in the slack forms of geniality which pass for manners in this century. That is Hugh's phrase, not mine. Lamoir left him about nine years ago.

They say that people made a great fuss over Lamoir when she first came from India, because she was so lovely. That must have been about twenty-five years ago, and about nine years ago she packed up a lot of trunks and went to Algeria. People were very surprised at that, for Lamoir was beloved of every one, and she seemed to be liking her life in England—as much, anyhow, as any one ever does seem to like his or her life in England, for there seems to be a feeling in people that one shouldn't like living in England. I like it very much myself, but then I am not English. People said vaguely that she was going away because her heart was weak, quite all right but weak, and that she must have quiet. She never came back.

I went to see her in Algeria two winters ago. I wanted very much just to see how she was in that solitary new life. Naturally I didn't tell Hugh the main reason why I was going to Algeria, and I think he had an idea I was going there to try to write a book about it, one of those marvellous books about Sheiks and sand and suburban Englishwomen with love flaming in their eyes to such a degree that none of their friends at home would ever recognise them. As Hugh never used to speak of his wife one had nothing to go on as to what his feelings about her were, and so, of course, one said nothing about her either.

Just the same, that is how I found Lamoir. She had the grace of silence, of reflection, to a rare degree. Some people

found her frightfully dull, but then imagine what "some people" are, it can be said that their disapproval is a distinction that no fairly admirable person should ever be without. The house she was living in had been the palace of the last of the Admirals of the Dey's fleet, Lamoir said, and one could well believe it. There were dungeons below, deep, dark, crooked, with chains and iron clamps on the walls where the poor devils of Christian slaves used to be kept, and on the morning Lamoir was showing me round there was a vampire-bat hanging asleep from the black broken walls. From the dungeons there was a secret passage, Lamoir said, down to the bay two miles away at the foot of the hill, and through this passage the old Admiral scoundrel had tried to escape when the French stormed the town about eighty years ago—or maybe it was more or less than eighty years ago, I don't know when it was, and Lamoir didn't know either.

One morning we were walking about on the pink tiles of the flat, uneven roof, not talking much, while below the sea slept. Lamoir asked after Hugh, just how he was, and I said he was quite well. "Lonely," I added.

We sat on the parapet of the roof, looking down the hill at the white, untidy town. There was an American liner in the bay, like a smudge. At last Lamoir said: "Yes, he was always lonely. Lonely and proud. Hugh is very proud. Don't you think so?"

I said: "And you, Lamoir, aren't you proud too?"

You see, I knew nothing of the difficulty between Hugh and Lamoir. All I knew was that two dear friends of mine had parted from each other nine years before. Lamoir was looking towards the sea, she was smiling. Then she shook her head suddenly. Her hair was quite grey, and short, and curly—you can see how attractive Lamoir was, an autumnal flower.

"Oh, no!" she said. "*I'm* not proud, not a bit. And I don't like proud people."

"I do!" I said.

She said gravely: "*You* do, of course. But you are young, and it's quite right that you should like proud people and should try to be proud yourself, though I should think your sense of humour would bother you a little while you were trying. I think young people should be proud, because if they are not they will put up with makeshifts and get dirty; but elderly people and old people should not be proud, because it prevents them from understanding anything."

"But elderly people," I said, "don't they get dirty too, if they're not proud?"

She laughed at me, and all she said was: "I was talking about nice elderly people." And there the conversation ended, just nowhere. I think it very silly in a man to go generalising about women, but if I were to start generalising I might say that most abstract conversations between men end nowhere, but you have a feeling that at least something interesting has passed, while with a woman an abstract conversation ends nowhere and you have a feeling that she has only been talking about whatever it was just out of politeness.

I remember that what struck me most about Lamoir at that time was how happy she was, happy and feeling safe in her happiness. That puzzled me then, for I knew she loved Hugh.

II

I would see a good deal of Hugh, sometimes going to stay with him at Langton Weaver, and often, in London, dining with him at his house in Charles Street, just he and I alone. It was very pleasant to know of a quiet house in which I might now and then pass an evening talking, as one always did with Hugh if one talked at all, of books and tapestries and fine things. I never knew a man who had such a passion for the touch of fine things as Hugh, and seeing him thoughtfully holding a little old ivory figure in his hand one might almost think his skin was in love with it.

But a few weeks ago, the last time I was over to dine with my friend, it instantly struck me that he was in quite a different mood. And presently he told me about the garden and the tree. He didn't preface it with anything in particular, he was thoughtfully twisting the stem of his port-glass when he said: "Nearly nine years since I have seen Lamoir...."

I said vaguely: "Yes...." Never once, you see, in all those nine years, had he so much as mentioned the name of Lamoir, and so I felt rather stunned at first.

Hugh went on thoughtfully, not particularly to me: "And the first time I saw her I was nine years old. She must have been

seven."

I said: "But I always understood that Lamoir passed her childhood in India and never came to England until she was twenty or so! I'd no idea you too were in India when you were little."

"I wasn't," he said, and he smiled, I think out of shyness just because he was talking about himself. "I wasn't. That's why, you see, it was so funny...."

I was trying to imagine Lamoir seven years old. It was easy, of course, as it always is easy with people one likes. Her curly grey hair would be golden then, and maybe her grey eyes would be more blue than grey, and they would look enormous in a tiny face. And she would be walking, very still, making no noise at all, with two thin brown sticks for legs and two blue pools for eyes, very thoughtful indeed, and all this would be happening in a garden of red and yellow flowers with a long, low, white house nearby. That was how Hugh first saw Lamoir, in a garden, and nearby a long, low, white house with a broad flight of steps up to the open doorway and tall, shining windows.

Dazzling white the house seemed to him, Hugh said, but that must have been because there was a very brilliant sun that afternoon. There was no noise, except just summer noises, and although he didn't remember actually seeing any birds there must have been a lot of birds about, because he heard them. And simply masses of flowers there were in that garden, red and yellow flowers, and over a grey wall somewhere there was hung a thick curtain of flowers that may have been blue roses. And they may very well have been blue roses, Hugh said. And bang in the middle of all those flowers was Lamoir, staring at him as he came into the garden. Hugh was so surprised, he said, that he didn't know what to say or do.

He hadn't, you see, intended coming into that garden at all. He hadn't, a moment before, known anything at all about that garden or whose garden it was or even that there was a garden there at all. That is the funny part about the whole thing, the way it just sprung out at him, garden, Lamoir, blue roses and all, out of the summer afternoon. But there it was, and there Lamoir was, staring at Hugh. Not that she looked a bit surprised, Hugh said, although she was such a kid. She just stuck her finger into her mouth and came towards him.

Hugh's father's place, Langton Weaver, lay on the slope of a low hill not far from Hungerford, looking over the plain towards where the old red Elizabethan pile of Littlecote lies embowered in trees. Hugh, that bright afternoon, was kicking his heels about in the lane outside his father's gates, which was, of course, against all rules. But Hugh was lonely that afternoon, he never had any brothers or sisters, and he was wondering what he would do next, and he was hoping that some one would come along to do something with—when, bang, there he was in that garden and a little kid advancing on him with a finger stuck in her mouth. It was very odd, Hugh said.

"Hallo!" she said. All eyes, that's what she was.

"Hallo!" Hugh said. She was only a kid, after all. Hugh was nine.

"You're a boy," she said.

"Of course I'm a boy," Hugh said, and he was going to add, "just as you're a girl," but a fellow couldn't stand there arguing all day with a slip of a thing like that. Then he suddenly remembered he didn't know where he was.

"I say," he said, "I don't know how I got here. What's this place?"

She twisted her finger out of her mouth and stared at the wet thing. Hugh remembered that it shone in the sun. And her hair shone in the sun, too. Hugh said her hair shone even when they were in the shade. But of course he didn't attach any importance to that kind of thing.

"I say, where am I?" Hugh asked again. He must have sounded pathetic, in spite of himself.

"You're here," she said. "What's your name?"

"Hugh," he said. "But, I say, where's here? I've never seen that house before. My father's got the biggest house round here, Langton Weaver. My father's Lord of the Manor, and when he's dead I'm Lord of the Manor."

"Oo!" she said, staring.

Hugh said he felt frightfully let down. Any other kid would have exalted the merits of her own house, but she just swallowed everything and stared at you. Hugh said he felt as though he had been boasting.

"Our house doesn't look so jolly clean as this," he said. "Rather live here, any day."

And he suddenly realised he was speaking the truth. That was the amazing part of it, Hugh said, suddenly to feel that he would much rather live here than in his father's house. With this kid. And from that moment, somehow, he forgot every particle of his surprise at being in that garden.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Not got a name," the kid said. "No name." All legs and eyes, that's what she was.

"But you must have a name?" Hugh cried. "Every one's got names, even dogs and cats. We've got seven dogs and they're all called after every day in the week except one, because you can't call a dog Sunday, father says."

"No name," she said breathlessly. "I'm me."

"But look here, how do they call you when they want you?" He thought he'd got her there all right, Hugh said.

She giggled. "I just come," she giggled. "I don't need to be called. Oo! Just come when I'm wanted. Did you want me? You did, didn't you?"

He stared at her, he was so dumbfounded. Jiminy, hadn't he wanted her! Anyhow, hadn't he wanted something to happen! But how had this kid known that?

"Look here, no rotting!" he warned her.

"Not rotting," she said, sucking her finger. "What's rotting?"

"But what's this place?" he asked almost frantically. "Hasn't it got a name either?"

"Oo, yes! Playmate Place."

"It's not!" Hugh cried. "Not Playmate Place! *You're* rotting now."

Hugh says she took her finger out of her mouth, stamped her foot and screamed at one and the same time: "It *is* called Playmate Place and Playmate Place and Playmate Place! So there!"

"Oh, all right!" Hugh said, and he didn't let on any further about his opinion of a house called Playmate Place. Hugh says a boy of nine would rather die than live in a house called Playmate Place. It sounded so soft. But she was only a kid, after all, and she couldn't *know* anything.

"I'm going to run now" the kid said, standing on one leg and staring at the other.

That was too much, Hugh said. She was going to run! As though she *could* run! "Beat you blindfolded" he just said.

"Oo, you try!" she giggled, and she turned, and she flew. She just flew, Hugh said. All brown legs and golden hair. He hadn't a chance. But he must have been quite a nice boy really, Hugh said, because he began laughing at himself. He beat this kid!

She stopped, miles away, just under a tree. Hugh panted on. And they must have run some distance, for the house and the blue roses were no longer visible. Hugh couldn't remember any of the particulars of where they were now. There was a sense of flowers, he said, clean flowers, a lot of flowers. And that tree, under which Lamoir was waiting for him. Of course he didn't know she was Lamoir then. That tree seemed to him a big tree. Hugh said that when you touched it it smelt like a sort of echo of all the good smells you had ever smelt.

But he hadn't come quite up to her when she turned and, before you could say "knife," shinned up that tree!

"I say!" cried Hugh.

"Can't catch me!" panted a little voice from among the leaves.

"Can if I want to," said Hugh, looking up. All he could see between the leaves was something white.

"Like you to want to," piped the something white, and Hugh fell in love for the first and last time in his life.

When he caught up with her, on a branch high up, she said "Oo!" and gave him a damp kiss on his cheek. She didn't giggle or anything, she was as serious as a man playing cricket. Hugh felt rather ashamed.

"Look here," he said, to say something, "what's this tree called? Never seen a tree like this before."

"It's a lovely tree," she said, staring. "It's called Playmate Tree, of course."

"That's a soft word, playmate," Hugh rashly said.

She stared at him with those big grey eyes, Hugh said, so that he began to feel weak, just weak with meanness. And then she said "Yow!" and wept. Well! She wept. Hugh didn't know what to do, stuck up there on a branch of a tree and this kid crying fit to break her kid's heart. He kept muttering, "I say, I'm sorry," and things like that, and then he found she was somehow in his arms, and he kissing her and kissing her hair. Her hair smelt like the tree, Hugh said, so it must have been a funny sort of tree.

"Kiss the tree now," the small voice said. "You've hurt it."

"Oh, I say!" said Hugh, but he did as he was told, and then they climbed down the magic tree in silence, he trying to help her and almost breaking his neck. They walked slowly back, hand in hand, towards where the house was, through the sweet lush grass. There was music somewhere, Hugh said. Or maybe there wasn't and he only thought there was. And Hugh said that he was happier at that moment than he had ever been since in his whole life.

"Mustn't laugh at words like playmate," said the wise kid. "You'll get hurt if you do."

"I say, I'd like to see you again," Hugh said shyly, and he found himself walking on the dusty lane towards Nasyngton! He was almost in Nasyngton, he could see, down the slope, the thick old bridge over the Kennet. He must have walked two miles or more while he thought he was in that garden. Playmate Place. He stopped to wipe his face, wondering passionately. He was simply streaming with perspiration. But what had happened to that old garden, that's what puzzled him. And that kid! That jolly little kid. He rubbed his cheek, but he couldn't be certain if there still was a damp patch where she had kissed him. Anyhow, it would have dried by then, and, anyhow again, he'd got so hot since.

When he got home Hugh told Hugh's father the outline of his adventure, and Hugh's father told Hugh he had broken rules by being outside the gates at all, and that he must have been dreaming, but Hugh said passionately that he was sorry he had broken rules, but he hadn't been anything like dreaming, and Hugh's father told Hugh not to be an ass, and two years later Hugh's father died.

Hugh did not see the garden of the white house again. Playmate Place. Hugh, as he grew up, blushed to think of Playmate Place. He had blushed at the time, and later on he blushed at the very thought of it. He wouldn't have dared let any of his friends at school even dream of his ever having swallowed such a soft yarn as the Playmate Place one. But, despite himself, the face of the kid whose name was to be Lamoir stayed with him, and her silver voice, and her enormous eyes. And now and then in his dreams, Hugh said, he would seem to hear the faint echo of an "Oo!"

III

It was almost twenty years to a day after the adventure of Playmate Place that Hugh met Lamoir at a party at Mace, Guy de Travest's place. Miss Cavell her name was. He recognised her, he said, at once, at very first sight. She had been seven then, and she was twenty-seven now, but he knew her on sight. And when she spoke, he was quite certain. Of course she didn't suck her finger and say "Oo!" any longer, but without a doubt Lamoir Cavell was the grown-up of the kid of Playmate Place. And he actually found himself wondering, as he talked to her that first time at Mace, if she recognised him—and then he almost laughed aloud at his childishness, for of course the whole thing had been a boy's dream. But it was very odd, his dreaming about some one he was actually to meet twenty years later. And once he fancied, as he turned to her suddenly, that she was looking at him a little strangely, in a puzzled sort of way maybe, with that small slanting smile of hers as though she was smiling at something she just hadn't said. Oh, Lamoir must have been very beautiful then!

She was born in India, where old man Cavell was something in the Civil Service, and she had lived in India until recently, when her father died. Hugh, that first time, asked her if she had ever been in England as a child, and she said, staring at him in a way that seemed so familiar to him that his heart gave a throb: "Only in dreams." But he didn't tell her about the Playmate Place then. Then was the time to tell her, then or never. He never told her.

They walked in enchantment, those two, for the next few days. Guy de Travest has told me since that the whole house-party went about on tiptoe, so as not to disturb Hugh and Lamoir in their exquisite contemplation of their triumph over the law of life, which is, of course, unknowable, but must be pretty depressing, seeing what life is.

They were married in the little village church at Mace, and Hilary Townshend was Hugh's best man, and Hilary has told me since that he almost wept to see them going away—knowing as he did so certainly, Hilary said, that Hugh and Lamoir had taken the one step in life which will wake any couple up from any dream.

Hugh continually pulled at the stiff grey affair on his upper-lip as he told me of his marriage. "It's Playmate Place," he said, "that is important in the story: much more important than my married life. Lamoir and I never quite reached Playmate Place in actual life. We were in sight of it sometimes—when I let Lamoir have her head. But I only see that now, I didn't realise it then."

He said that about the importance of Playmate Place quite seriously. And, you know, I took it quite as seriously. A dream or vision or whatever it was, that has lasted fresh in a man's mind from the age of nine to the age of forty-nine is, after all, a thing to be taken seriously. I haven't, as a rule, much patience with dreams; and there's a deal too much talk of dreams in the novels of the day, for it's so easy to write "dream," but Hugh's, as they say, rather "got" me.

He never spoke about it to Lamoir. "I began to, several times," he said, "but somehow I never went on. You see, there was such a difference between our life together and the way we had been together in that garden. I mean, such a tremendous difference in spirit. She was the same, but I—well, I was the same too, but only that 'same' which had jeered at the word 'playmate.' It's difficult to explain. I knew, you see, as I said things that might hurt her, that I was in the wrong—and I didn't want to say them, either—but somehow it was in me to say them, and so I said them. It's somehow the impulses you can't put into words that are the strongest."

The marriage of Hugh and Lamoir appeared to have gone much the same way as most marriages. At first they were very happy, and they were quite certain that they were going to be even happier. Then they thought that perhaps they were not so happy as they had been, and then they were quite certain that they were not so happy as they had been. Hugh said it was more or less like that.

Hugh, at the time, had thought privately that this was because Lamoir did not take very much interest in his collections of fine things. Not that he wasn't quite contented with his marriage. Good Lord, contented! I wonder what Lamoir thought about that. Contented! But she never confided, that quiet Lamoir.

It was a great unhappiness to her, Hugh said, that there were no children. A very great unhappiness. He hadn't, he admitted, minded so much, because year by year he was growing more absorbed in his collections. Throughout his married life he would go off searching Europe for pieces. Italy, Greece, Spain. At first he used to take Lamoir with him, but later on she would stay at home. She preferred that, Hugh said. She wouldn't stay in the London house, but at Langton Weaver, the house which was larger but not so clean-looking as Playmate Place. Lamoir lived in the garden and the park. I met Hugh and Lamoir in the last years of their life together, and whenever I went to stay at Langton Weaver I would find Lamoir in the park. She would generally be standing just off a path, quite still, wearing gardening-gloves, and looking thoughtfully down at the flowers. Then she would touch one here and there. She was gardening.

So, Hugh said, ten years passed; and he, when he thought of it at all, would think theirs a happy enough marriage, as marriages go. Reality, after all, couldn't be so good as dreams, ever. That is what he thought. And he loved Lamoir. He was a collector of fine things, and so it was bred in his bone to love Lamoir. She loved him, too. Sometimes in quite a strange, abandoned way, for a woman who had been married so long. In quite an un-English way, when you came to think of it—although it can't be in the least "un-English" to be passionate, but one gets into the habit of saying the idiotic things that English novelists say. Lamoir would say things unmentionable and beautiful, in the rare moments. But, somehow, those rarest moments, would never be of Hugh's contriving, not after the first year or so. They would come suddenly, out of the night of ordinary marriage, they would come like angels with silent wings. And Lamoir would be the voice of the angel with silent wings, and Lamoir in those rarest moments would be the very body and soul of love. But

Hugh couldn't woo those moments. Perhaps no man ever can. It may be, Hugh said, that there's a frontier to any woman's love for any man, and beyond that frontier is the unknowable darkness and unknowable light, and from that secret place can leap a passion that no man in the world is worthy to woo. It just comes or it doesn't come.

These moments did not come when he thought they would, when he expected them. She would somehow be passive then, somehow there yet not there. Then suddenly, when he had got used to the hurt of her "coldness," out of the night of ordinary marriage would sweep the angel with the silent wings in the body and the voice of Lamoir. Hugh said that sometimes the song of the sirens was in Lamoir's voice, but if Hugh was right about that Ulysses must have been just a silly old man and the sirens darlings.

IV

For Hugh, his pleasure in travelling was given an exquisite point by returning to Lamoir. That was when he seemed to love her most, as he returned to her. One gets out of the habit of being desirous if one stays in the home all the time. And Lamoir would be waiting for him, sweet and still. He thought of her all the time, as he returned towards her.

Once, nine years ago, he returned to her by night. He had been away from England for four or five months, and, arriving that evening in London, he had dined quickly and taken the first train down to Langton Weaver. It was a cool July night, loaded with stars. He had walked the two miles from the railway station.

Hugh was happy as he walked. He was conscious of his happiness, of his health, of his strength. Hugh was forty then, a dry, taut forty. And the idea of Lamoir, white and supple, was like a temptation that exalted and ennobled. The sky was almost Italian, Hugh said, the stars were so unusually clear and bright. He walked, not up the drive towards the door, but across the lawn towards the three french-windows of the drawing-room. They showed a faint bronze light. Lamoir was there. She was sitting in a Dorothy chair of old blue velvet, reading. A lamp in a bowl of yellow amber lit the book, but her face was only a frail whiteness, and her hair was as though veiled. He pushed open a window which was unlatched. He called: "Lamoir!"

She made that gesture he knew so well, loved so well. Lamoir would not be Lamoir without that gesture. Always, at first sight of him returning to her, she would make that gesture. It was delicious with a lure which he never could explain. It was as though she was afraid of her love for him. Towards her heart, the gesture was; but faint, not definite—a hand, like a white bird fluttering, fluttering vainly, fluttering out of stillness, fluttering back into stillness—all in a second. Lamoir, you see, had a weak heart, and that was why, maybe, she was born so still, to balance the weakness of her heart.

And it was always the same with him when he saw her after an absence. The world stood still, no living thing moved but Lamoir's hand and his infinite desire. The pleasure of seeing her was exquisite, like a pain. In all his life Hugh had known no woman but Lamoir. Seeing her now, the earth and sky held only himself and her and the thing that was between them. That vivid thing with eyes of fire which can be beautiful or beastly. She troubled him and exalted him, and somehow his love for her would be stabbed by a queer sense of terror, which he never could explain. And she was so still, so passive, unknowable. But her eyes, as he made to touch her, adored him.

She lay beside him a long time in the delicious silence of love before she spoke and said: "Good-bye, Hugh."

He thought she must have gone mad. He stared at her, through the darkness. "Good-bye?" he echoed.

"Yes," she said, and that was all she said.

He had put out the light in the bowl of yellow amber. He lay in the darkness, understanding nothing. Then his mind grew darker than the room, and he just managed to say:—

"But, Lamoir, are you mad? Good-bye! What do you mean?"

She did not answer for what seemed a long time. She was a soft darkness in the dark room, beside him. The night was a blue curtain over the windows hung with stars like toys. He touched her, as though to prove to himself that he was not dreaming. He must be dreaming. But she was there, beside him, soft, warm: Lamoir, his wife. And the stars on the windows were as though at his finger-tips, but Lamoir was untouchable. She was untouchable, suddenly. She was most untouchable when he touched her. It seemed wrong to touch her. That made him angry. He laughed.

"I'm damned," he said, "if I understand what all this is about! I come home after months away, and you say good-bye!"

"I don't think," she said, "that I can explain. Not now...."

He laughed. She was going away, and she didn't trouble to explain why!

He wanted her to say: "Don't be bitter, please!" But she was silent. She was beside him, yet her breath came from across the universe. And what on earth was it all about?

"But do you mean you want to leave me?" he asked, astounded, angry.

She said: "Yes."

"Lamoir!"

She said: "I can't bear it any longer, Hugh. I love you too much."

He repeated idiotically: "You love me too much?"

Now she was standing, a shadow in the darkness, away from him, a million miles away from him. He was silent. All the inside of him went silent. Suddenly there were no words, no need for words, no Lamoir, no Hugh. Nothing but the primal nothingness before Adam. He would not hold her for a moment if she wished to leave him.

"You will understand," she said. "You see, I want to be free to love you, and you won't let me. You will understand that, too. God has given me no children, Hugh. He has given me only my love for you. That is all I have, and I have been sacrificing it to you for ten years; but now I am growing afraid for it, it's become such a poor, beaten, wretched bit of a thing, and so I must leave you. I owe that to myself, dear—and to the you inside you."

And he said, despite himself, that he loved her. What was so strange was that, suddenly, he had ceased to feel like her husband, suddenly it seemed to him inconceivable that he had possessed her countless times. Inconceivable that he and she had been one, when now they were so apart! It had seemed so easy then to touch her—now, not a lifetime would surmount the barriers she had raised between them. He suddenly thought: "Good Lord, how lucky I've been in the past—and I never knew it!"

He was going to touch her, when like a blow on the face he realised that to touch her would be indecent. She was not his wife. Suddenly, absurdly, he thought of Soames Forsyte, of John Galsworthy. Hugh had always disliked Galsworthy for his creation of Forsyte, a man who could rape his wife.

Lamoir said suddenly: "There will be another chance later on——"

He leapt at that. "Later on? Lamoir, you mean you will come back?"

"No," she said. "I didn't mean that. I shall never come back."

"You will," he said between his teeth, and with a great effort of will he took her in his arms.

But afterwards she went away, and she never came back.

V

We were silent for a long time after Hugh had spoken of the way Lamoir had left him. And then he said: "Of course she was right. I did understand, later on. That is why I have made no attempt to see her these last nine years. Love, you see, has many masks. We slip on one or other of them, and we say, 'This is love,' but really it's only a fraction of love. And a fraction of love can be the negation of love. Love is enormous and difficult. We must learn how to love, as we must learn how to play music. I did not know how. But I shall see Lamoir soon. I am going to Algeria next week. I have been wanting to go for a long time, but I must just wait another few days——"

"But, Hugh, why do you wait even one day?" I protested. "Lamoir is longing to see you; I know she is."

"Yes. But I must wait four or five days or so. For a sort of anniversary. My idea, if you won't laugh at me too much, is to see Playmate Place again, and then that will give me a clue as to how to deal with Lamoir when I see her in the flesh. I'm

sure it will give me a clue. And I'm sure I shall see it again, in three or four days from to-day. I'd like to, immensely. Of course it won't have changed one bit, but I wonder if Lamoir and I will have grown up. If we have, it will be rather a feat to climb that tree, won't it? Or maybe the tree will have grown too, though it seemed huge enough at the time. You see, the thing seems to go in cycles of twenty years, more or less. I saw the garden for the first time on a June day in my ninth year. I met Lamoir for the first time on a June day, perhaps the same one, in my twenty-ninth year. And now I'm forty-nine, and the day falls in three or four or five days' time. Either, I'm quite sure, I see that garden again on that day, or I see Lamoir herself, or——"

"Or?" I said. "Or what?"

"Well, God knows!" Hugh smiled, pulling at that stiff grey thing on his upper lip, and on the dawn of the fourth day from that night Hugh was found by one of the keepers of Hyde Park lying at the foot of a great tree near the Albert Gate, dead of a broken neck. At the inquest there was read out a letter from his wife's lawyers, which had been delivered at Hugh's house on the morning after his death and which he couldn't, therefore, have read, saying that they had heard by wire from Algeria that his wife had died of heart-failure the day before.

The Ghoul of Golders Green

I

T is fortunate that the affair should have happened to Mr. Ralph Wyndham Trevor and be told by him, for Mr. Trevor is a scholar of some authority. It is in a spirit of almost ominous premonition that he begins the tale, telling how he was walking slowly up Davies Street one night when he caught a cab. It need scarcely be said that Davies Street owes its name to that Mary Davies, the heiress, who married into the noble house of Grosvenor. That was years and years ago, of course, and is of no importance whatsoever now, but it may be of interest to students.

It was very late on a winter's night, and Mr. Trevor was depressed, for he had that evening lost a great deal more than he could afford at the card-game of auction-bridge. Davies Street was deserted; and the moon and Mr. Trevor walked alone towards Berkeley Square. It was not the sort of moon that Mr. Trevor remembered having seen before. It was, indeed, the sort of moon one usually meets only in books or wine. Mr. Trevor was sober.

Nothing happened, Mr. Trevor affirms, for quite a while; he just walked, and, at that corner where Davies Street and Mount Street join together the better to become Berkeley Square, stayed his walking, with the idea that he would soothe his depression with the fumes of a cigarette. His cigarette-case, however, was empty. All London, says Mr. Trevor, appeared to be empty that night. Berkeley Square lay pallid and desolate: looking clear, not as though with moonlight, but with dead daylight; and never a voice to put life into the still streets, never a breeze to play with the bits of paper in the gutters or to sing among the dry boughs of the trees. Berkeley Square looked like nothing so much as an old stage-property that no one had any use for. Mr. Trevor had no use at all for it; and became definitely antagonistic to it when a taxi-cab crawled wretchedly across the waste white expanse, and the driver, a man in a Homburg hat of green plush, looked into his face with a beseeching look.

"Taxi, sir?" he said.

Mr. Trevor says that, not wanting to hurt the man's feelings he just looked another way.

"Nice night, sir," said the driver miserably, "for a drive in an 'ackney-carriage."

"I live," said Mr. Trevor with restraint, "only a few doors off. So hackney-carriage to you."

"No luck!" sighed the driver and accelerated madly away even as Mr. Trevor changed his mind, for would it not be an idea to drive to the nearest coffee-stall and buy some cigarettes? This, however, he was not to do, for there was no other reply to his repeated calls of "Taxi!" but certain heavy blows on the silence of Davies Street behind him.

"Wanting a taxi, sir?" said a voice which could only belong to a policeman.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Trevor bitterly. "I never want a taxi. But now and then a taxi-driver thrusts himself on me and pays me to be seen in his cab, just to give it a tone. Next question."

"Ho!" said the policeman thoughtfully.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Trevor.

"Ho!" said the policeman thoughtfully.

"The extent of your vocabulary," said Mr. Trevor gloomily, "leads me to conclude that you must have been born a gentleman. Have you, in that case, a cigarette you could spare?"

"Gaspers," said the policeman.

"Thank you," said Mr. Trevor, rejecting them. "I am no stranger to ptomaine-poisoning."

"That's funny," said the policeman, "your saying that. I was just thinking of death."

"Death?" said Mr. Trevor.

"You've said it," said the policeman.

"I've said what?" said Mr. Trevor.

"Death," said the policeman.

"Oh, death!" said Mr. Trevor. "I always say 'death,' constable. It's my favourite word."

"Ghoulish, I calls it, sir. Ghoulish, no less."

"That entirely depends," said Mr. Trevor, "on what you are talking about. In some things, ghoulish is as ghoulish does. In others, no."

"You've said it," said the policeman. "But ghoulish goes, in this 'ere affair. One after the other lying in their own blood, and not a sign as to who's done it, not a sign!"

"Oh, come, constable! Tut-tut! Not even a thumb-mark in the blood?"

"I'm telling you," said the policeman severely. "Corpses slit to ribbons all the way from 'Ampstead 'Eath to this 'ere Burkley Square. And why? That's what I asks myself. And why?"

"Of course," said Mr. Trevor gaily, "there certainly have been a lot of murders lately. Ha-ha! But not, surely, as many as all that!"

"I'm coming to that," said the policeman severely. "We don't allow of the Press reporting more'n a quarter of them. No, sir. That's wot it 'as come to, these larst few days. A more painful situation 'as rarely arisen in the hannals of British crime. The un'eard-of bestiality of the criminal may well baffle ordinary minds like yours and mine."

"I don't believe a word of it!" snapped Mr. Trevor.

"Ho, *you* don't!" said the policeman. "*You* don't!"

"That's right," said Mr. Trevor, "I don't. Do you mean to stand there and tell me that I wouldn't 'ave 'eard—I mean, have heard of this criminal if he had really existed?"

"You're a gent," said the policeman.

"You've said it," said Mr. Trevor.

"And gents," said the policeman, "know nothing. And what they do know is mouldy. Ever 'eard of Jack the Ripper?"

"Yes, I 'ave," said Mr. Trevor bitterly.

"*Have* is right, sir, if you'll excuse me. Well, Jack's death was never rightly proved, not it! So it might well be 'im at 'is old tricks again, even though 'e has been retired, in a manner of speaking, these forty years. Remorseless and hindiscriminate murder, swift and sure, was Jack's line, if you remember, sir."

"Before my time," said Mr. Trevor gloomily.

"Well, Jack's method was just to slit 'em up with a razor, frontwise and from south to north, and not a blessed word spoken. No one's touched 'im yet, not for efficiency, but this new chap, 'e looks like catching Jack up. *And* at Jack's own game, razor and all. Makes a man fair sick, sir, to see the completed work. Just slits 'em up as clean as you or me might slit up a vealanam-pie. We was laying bets on 'im over at Vine Street only to-night, curious like to see whether 'e'd beat Jack's record. But it'll take some beating, I give you my word. Up to date this chap 'as only done in twelve in three weeks—not that that's 'alf bad, seeing as how 'e's new to the game, more or less."

"Oh rather, more or less!" said Mr. Trevor faintly. "Twelve! Good God—only twelve! But why—why don't you catch the ghastly man?"

"Ho, why don't we!" said the policeman. "Becos we don't know 'ow, that's why. Not us! It's the little one-corpse men we're good for, not these 'ere big artists. Look at Jack the Ripper—did we catch 'im? Did we? And look at Julian Raphael—did we catch 'im? I'm asking you."

"I know you are," said Mr. Trevor gratefully. "Thank you."

"I don't want your thanks," said the policeman. "I'm just warning you."

Mr. Trevor gasped: "Warning *me!*"

"You've said it," said the policeman. "You don't ought to be out alone at this time of night, an 'earty young chap like you. These twelve 'e's already done in were all 'earty young chaps. 'E's partial to 'em 'earty, I do believe. And social gents some of 'em was, too, with top-'ats to hand, just like you might be now, sir, coming 'ome from a smoking-concert. Jack the Ripper all over again, that's wot I say. Except that this 'ere new corpse-fancier, 'e don't seem to fancy women at all.

"A chaps' murderer, what!" said Mr. Trevor faintly. "Ha-ha! What!"

"You've said it," said the policeman. "But you never know your luck, sir. And maybe as 'ow thirteen's your lucky number."

Mr. Trevor lays emphasis on the fact that throughout he treated the constable with the courtesy due from a gentleman to the law. He merely said: "Constable, I am now going home. I do not like you very much. You are an alarmist. And I hope that when you go to sleep to-night your ears swell so that when you wake up in the morning you will be able to fly straight to Heaven and never be seen or heard of again. You and your razors and your thirteens!"

"Ho, they ain't mine, far from it!" said the policeman, and even as he spoke a voice crashed upon the silence from the direction of Mount Street. The voice belonged to a tall figure in black and white, and on his head was a top-hat that shone under the pallid moon like a monstrous black jewel.

"That there," said the policeman, "is a Noise."

"He's singing," said Mr. Trevor.

"I'll teach 'im singing!" said the policeman.

Sang the voice:—

*"With an host of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear
And a horse of air
To the wilderness I wander."*

"You will," said the policeman. "Oh, you will!"

*"By a knight of ghosts and shadows
I summoned am to tourney
Ten leagues beyond
The wide world's end—
Methinks it is no journey!"*

"Not to Vine Street, it isn't," said the policeman.

"Ho there!" cried the approaching voice. "Who dares interrupt my song!"

"Beau Maturin!" cried Mr. Trevor gladly. "It's not you! Bravo, Beau Maturin! Sing, bless you, sing! For I am depressed."

*"From Heaven's Gate to Hampstead Heath
Young Bacchus and his crew
Came tumbling down, and o'er the town
Their bursting trumpets blew."*

"Fine big gent, your friend," said the policeman thoughtfully.

*"And when they heard that happy word
Policemen leapt and ambled:
The busmen pranced, the maidens danced,
The men in bowlers gambolled."*

"Big!" said Mr. Trevor. "Big? Let me tell you, constable, that the last time Mr. Maturin hit Jack Dempsey, Dempsey bounced back from the floor so quick that he knocked Mr. Maturin out on the rebound."

Mr. Trevor says that Beau Maturin came on through the night like an avenger through a wilderness, so little did he reck of cruel moons and rude policemen. Said he: "Good-evening, Ralph. Good-evening, constable. Lo, I am in wine!"

"You've said it," said the policeman.

"Gently, my dear! Or," said Mr. Maturin cordially, "I will dot you one, and look at it which way you like it is a far far better thing to be in wine than in a hospital. Now, are there any good murders going to-night?"

"Going?" said the constable. "I'm 'ere to see there ain't any coming. But I've just been telling this gent about some recent crises. Corpses slit to ribbons just as you or me might slit up a vealanam——"

"Don't say that again!" snapped Mr. Trevor.

"By Heaven, what's that?" sighed Mr. Maturin; and, following his intent eyes, they saw, a yard or so behind them on the pavement, a something that glittered in the moonlight. Mr. Trevor says that, without a thought for his own safety, he instantly took a step towards the thing, but that the policeman restrained him. It was Mr. Maturin who picked the thing up. The policeman whistled thoughtfully.

"A razor, let's face it!" whispered Beau Maturin.

"*And sharp!*" said the policeman, thoughtfully testing the glittering blade with the ball of his thumb.

Mr. Trevor says that he was never in his life less conscious of any feeling of excitement. He merely pointed out that he could swear there had been no razor there when he had come round the corner, and that, while he had stood there, no one had passed behind him.

"The chap that owns this razor," said the policeman, emphasising each word with a gesture of the blade, "must 'ave slunk behind you and me as we stood 'ere talking and dropped it, maybe not finding it sharp enough for 'is purpose. What do you think, Mr. Maturin?"

But Mr. Maturin begged to be excused from thinking, protesting that men are in the hands of God, and God is in the hands of women and so what the devil is there to think about?

Mr. Trevor says that the motive behind his remark at that moment, which was to the effect that he simply must have a drink, was merely that he was thirsty. A clock struck two.

"After hours," said the policeman; and he seemed, Mr. Trevor thought, to grin evilly.

"What do they know of hours," sighed Mr. Maturin, "who only *Ciro's* know? Come, Ralph. My love, she jilted me but the other night. Therefore I will swim in wine, and thrice will I call upon her name when I am drowning. Constable, good-night to you."

"Now I've warned you!" the policeman called after them. "Don't go into any alleys or passages like *Lansdowne Passage*, else you'll be finding yourselves slit up like *vealanam-pies*."

Maybe it was only the treacherous light of the moon, but Mr. Trevor fancied as he looked back that the policeman, where he stood thoughtfully fingering the shining blade, seemed to be grinning evilly at them.

They walked in silence, their steps ringing sharp on the bitter-chill air. The night in the sky was pale at the white disdain of the moon. It was Mr. Maturin who spoke at last, saying: "There's too much talk of murder to-night. A man cannot go to bed on such crude talk. You know me, kid. Shall we go to *The Garden of My Grandmother*?"

At that moment a taxi-cab crawled across the moonlight; and the driver, a man in a Homburg hat of green plush, did not attempt to hide his pleasure at being able to satisfy the gentlemen's request to take them to *The Garden of My Grandmother*.

Mr. Trevor says that he has rarely chanced upon a more unsatisfactory taxi-cab than that driven by the man in the Homburg hat of green plush. By closing one's eyes one might perhaps have created an illusion of movement by reason of certain internal shrieks and commotions, but when one saw the slow procession of shops by the windows and the lamp-posts loitering by the curb, one was, as Beau Maturin pointed out, justified in believing that the hackney-cab in question was not going fast enough to outstrip a retired Czecho-Slovakian Admiral in an egg-and-spoon race. Nor were they altogether surprised when the taxi-cab died on them in Conduit Street. The man in the Homburg hat of green plush jumped out and tried to re-start the engine. He failed. The gentlemen within awaited the issue in silence. The silence, says Mr. Trevor, grew terrible. But the taxi-cab moved not, and the man in the Homburg hat of green plush began, in his agitation, thumping the carburettor with his clenched fist.

"No petrol," he pleaded. "No petrol."

Said Mr. Trevor to Mr. Maturin: "Let us go. Let us leave this man."

"Ere, my fare!" said the fellow.

"Your fare?" said Mr. Maturin, with contracted brows. "What do you mean, 'your fare'?"

"Bob on the meter," said the wretch.

"My friend will pay," said Mr. Maturin, and stalked away. Mr. Trevor says that, while retaining throughout the course of that miserable night his undoubted *flair* for generosity, he could not but hold Beau Maturin's high-handed disavowal of his responsibilities against him; and he was hurrying after him up Conduit Street, turning over such phrases as might best point the occasion and make Mr. Maturin ashamed of himself, when that pretty gentleman swung round sharply and said: "Ssh!"

But Mr. Trevor was disinclined to Ssh, maintaining that Mr. Maturin owed him ninepence.

"Ssh, you fool!" snapped Mr. Maturin; and Mr. Trevor had not obliged him for long before he discerned in the quietness of Conduit Street a small discordant noise, or rather, says Mr. Trevor, a series of small discordant noises.

"She's crying, let's face it," whispered Mr. Maturin.

"She! Who?"

"Ssh!" snapped Mr. Maturin.

They were at that point in Conduit Street where a turn to the right will bring one into a fat little street which looks blind but isn't, insomuch as close by the entrance to the Alpine Club Galleries there is a narrow passage or alley leading into Savile Row. Mr. Trevor says that the repugnance with which he at that moment looked towards the darkness of that passage or alley had less than nothing to do with the blood-thirsty policeman's last words, but was due merely to an antipathy he had entertained towards all passages or alleys ever since George Tarlyon had seen a ghost in one. Mr. Maturin and he stood for some minutes in the full light of the moon while, as though from the very heart of the opposite darkness, the lacerating tremors of weeping echoed about their ears.

"I can't bear it!" said Beau Maturin. "Come along." And he advanced towards the darkness, but Mr. Trevor said he would not, pleading foot-trouble.

"Come," said Beau Maturin, but Mr. Trevor said: "To-morrow, yes. But not to-night."

Then did Beau Maturin advance alone into the darkness towards the passage or alley, and with one pounce the darkness stole his top-hat from the moon. Beau Maturin was invisible. The noise of weeping abated.

"Oi!" called Mr. Trevor. "Come back, you fool!"

"Ssh!" whispered the voice of Mr. Maturin.

Mr. Trevor said bitterly: "You're swanking, that's all!"

"It's a girl!" whispered the voice of Mr. Maturin, whereupon Mr. Trevor, who yielded to no man in the chivalry of his address towards women, at once advanced, caught up Mr. Maturin, and, without a thought for his own safety, was about to pass ahead of him, when Beau Maturin had the bad taste to whisper, "'Ware razors!" and thus again held the lead.

She who wept, now almost inaudibly, was a dark shape just within the passage. Her face, says Mr. Trevor, was not visible, yet her shadow had not those rather surprising contours which one generally associates with women who weep in the night.

"Madam," began Mr. Maturin.

"Oh!" sobbed the gentle voice. "He is insulting me!"

Mr. Trevor lays some emphasis on the fact that throughout the course of that miserable night his manners were a pattern of courtliness. Thinking, however, that a young lady in a situation so lachrymose would react more favourably to a fatherly tone, he said:—

"My child, we hope——"

"Ah," sobbed the gentle voice. "Please go away, please! I am *not* that sort!"

"Come, come!" said Mr. Maturin. "It is us whom you insult with a suspicion so disagreeable. My friend and I are not of the sort to commit ourselves to so low a process as that which is called, I believe, 'picking up.'"

"We have, as a matter of fact, friends of our own," said Mr. Trevor haughtily.

"Speaking generally," said Mr. Maturin, "women like us. Time over again I have had to sacrifice my friendship with a man in order to retain his wife's respect."

"Ah, you are a man of honour!" sobbed the young lady.

"We are two men of honour," said Mr. Trevor.

"And far," said Mr. Maturin warmly, "from intending you any mischief, we merely thought, on hearing you weeping——"

"You *heard* me, sir!"

"From Conduit Street," said Mr. Trevor severely, whereupon Mr. Maturin lifted up his voice and sang:—

*"From Conduit Street, from Conduit Street,
The street of ties and tailors:
From Conduit Street, from Conduit Street,
A shocking street for trousers."*

"Oh!" sobbed the young lady. "Is this chivalry?"

"Trousers," said Mr. Maturin, "are closely connected with chivalry, insomuch as he who commits chivalry without them is to be considered a rude fellow. But, child," Mr. Maturin protested sincerely, "we addressed you only in the hope that we might be of some service in the extremity of your grief. I assure you that you can trust us, for since we are no longer soldiers, rape and crime have ceased to attract us. However, you do not need us. We were wrong. We will go."

"It was I who was wrong!" came the low voice; and Mr. Trevor says that only then did the young lady raise her face, when it was instantly as though the beauty of that small face sent the surrounding darkness scurrying away. Not, however, that Mr. Trevor was impressed altogether in the young lady's favour. Her eyes, which were large, dark, and charming, appeared to rest on handsome Beau Maturin with an intentness which Mr. Trevor can only describe as bold; while her

disregard of his own presence might have hurt him had he, says Mr. Trevor, cared two pins for that kind of thing.

"You see, I have not eaten to-day," the young lady told Beau Maturin, who cried: "But, then, we *can* help you!"

"Ah, how do I know! Please," the young lady began weeping again, and Mr. Trevor says that had he not hardened his heart he could not say what he might not have done. "Please, sirs, I simply do not know what to do! I am so unhappy, so alone—oh, but you cannot imagine! You are gentlemen?"

"Speaking for my friend," said Mr. Maturin warmly, "he has been asked to resign from Buck's Club only after repeated bankruptcies."

"Mr. Maturin," said Mr. Trevor, "has in his time been cashiered from no less a regiment than the Coldstream Guards."

The young lady did not, however, favour Mr. Trevor with so much as a glance, never once taking her beautiful eyes from the handsome face of Beau Maturin. Indeed, throughout the course of that miserable night she admirably controlled any interest Mr. Trevor might have aroused in her, which Mr. Trevor can only account for by the supposition that she must have been warned against him. Beau Maturin, meanwhile, had taken the young lady's arm, a familiarity with which Mr. Trevor cannot too strongly dissociate himself, and was saying:—

"Child, you may come with us, if not with honour, at least with safety. And while you refresh yourself with food and drink you can tell us, if you please, the tale of your troubles. Can't she, Ralph?"

"I don't see," said Mr. Trevor, "what good we can do."

"Your friend," said the young lady sadly to Beau Maturin, "does not like me. Perhaps you had better leave me alone to my misery."

"My friend," said Beau Maturin, guiding her steps down the fat little street towards Conduit Street, "likes you only too well, but is restraining himself for fear of your displeasure. Moreover, he cannot quickly adapt himself to the company of ingenuous young ladies, for he goes a good deal into society, where somewhat cruder methods obtain."

"But oh, where are you taking me to?" suddenly cried the young lady.

"To *The Garden of My Grandmother*," said Mr. Trevor bitterly, and presently they found a taxi-cab on Regent Street which quickly delivered them at the place in Leicester Square. Mr. Trevor cannot help priding himself on the agility with which he leapt out of that taxi-cab, saying to the driver: "My friend will pay."

But Mr. Maturin, engrossed in paying those little attentions to the young lady which really attractive men, says Mr. Trevor, can afford to neglect, told the driver to wait, and when the driver said he did not want to wait, to go and boil his head.

III

Mr. Trevor describes *The Garden of My Grandmother* in some detail, but that would be of interest only to the specialist. The place was lately raided, and is now closed; and remained open so long as it did only with the help of such devices as commend themselves to those aliens who know the laws of the land only to circumvent them. For some time, indeed, the police did not even know of its existence as a night-club, for the entrance to the place was through two mean-looking doors several yards apart, on one of which was boldly inscribed the word "Gentlemen" and on the other "Ladies."

Within, all was gaiety and *chic*. From the respectable night-clubs and restaurants, all closed by this hour, would come the *jeunesse* of England; and an appetising smell of kippers brought new life to the jaded senses of young ladies, while young gentlemen cleverly contrived to give the appearance of drinking ginger-ale by taking their champagne through straws. Mr. Trevor says, however, that there was not the smallest chance of the place being raided on the night in question, for among the company was a Prince of the Blood; and it is an unwritten law in the Metropolitan Police Force that no night-club shall be raided while a Prince of the Blood is pulling a party therein.

The young lady and our two gentlemen were presently refreshing themselves at a table in a secluded corner; and when at last only the wine was left before them Mr. Maturin assumed his courtliest manner to beg the young lady to tell her tale,

and in detail, if she thought its relation would relieve her at all. She thought, with all the pensive beauty of her dark eyes, that it would, and immediately began on the following tale:—

THE TALE OF THE BULGARIAN GIRL

I am (she said) twenty-three years old, and although I once spent two years in England at a boarding-school in Croydon, my life hitherto has been lived entirely in Bulgaria. My father was a Bulgar of the name of Samson Samsonovitch Samsonoff, my mother an Englishwoman of the Lancashire branch of the race of Jones, and for her tragic death in a railway accident just over a year ago I shall grieve all my life: which, I cannot help praying, may be a short one, for I weary of the insensate cruelties that every new day opens out for me.

I must tell you that my mother was an unusual woman, of rigid principles, lofty ideals, and a profound feeling for the grace and dignity of the English tongue, in which, in spite of my father's opposition, for the Samsonoffs are a bitter proud race, she made me proficient at an early age. Never had this admirable woman a thought in her life that was not directed towards furthering her husband's welfare and to obtaining the happiness of her only child; and I am convinced that my father had not met his cruel death two months ago had she been spared to counsel him.

My father came of an ancient Macedonian house. For hundreds of years a bearer of the name of Samson Samsonovitch Samsonoff has trod the stark hillsides of the Balkans and raided the sweet, rich valleys about Philippopolis. As brigands, the Samsonoffs had never a rival; as *comitadjis*, in war or peace, their name was a name for heroism and of terror; while as assassins—for the domestic economy of Bulgaria has ever demanded the occasional services of a hawk's eye and a ruthless hand—a Samsonoff has been honourably associated with some of the most memorable *coups* in Balkan history. I am well aware that pride of family has exercised a base dominion over the minds of many good men and women; yet I do not hesitate to confess that it is with almost unbearable regret that I look upon the fact that I, a wretched girl, am the last and only remnant of our once proud house.

Such a man it was whom my mother, while accompanying her father, a civil engineer, through Bulgaria, married. Nor did it need anything less than the ardour of her love and the strength of her character to seduce a Samson Samsonovitch from the dour dominion of the hills to the conventional life of the valleys. I loved my father, but cannot be blind to the grave flaws in his character. A tall, hairy man, with a beard such as would have appalled your English description of Beaver, he was subject to ungovernable tempers and, occasionally, to regrettable lapses from that moral code which is such an attractive feature of English domestic life. Ah, you who live in the content and plenty of so civilised a land, how can you even imagine the horrors of lawlessness that obtain among primitive peoples! Had not that good woman my mother always willed him to loving-kindness, Samsonovitch Samsonoff had more than once spilled the blood of his dearest friends in the heat of some petty tavern brawl.

We lived in a farmhouse in what is surely the loveliest valley in the world, that which is called the Valley of the Roses, and whence is given to the world that exquisite essence known as *attar* of roses. Our little household in that valley was a happy and united one; more and more infrequent became my father's demoniac tempers; and, but for his intolerance of fools and cravens, you had taken the last of the Samsonoffs to be a part of the life of the valley-men, of whose industry, the cultivation of roses, he rapidly became a master.

Thus we come to the time which I now think of as two months before my mother's death. My father had attained to a certain degree of wealth, and was ever enticing my mother with dreams of a prolonged visit to her beloved birthplace, Southport, which is, I believe, a pretty town on the seaboard of Lancashire, and which I look forward with delight to visiting. While enticing her, however, with such visions, he did not hesitate to warn her that she must wait on the issue of his fanciful hobby, which daily grew on him; for the last of the Samsonoffs had become an inventor of flowers!

You may well look bewildered. But had you known my father you would in some measure have understood how a man, of an extreme audacity of temperament, might be driven into any fanciful pursuit that might lend a spice to a life of intolerable gentility. Nor was that pursuit so fanciful as might at first appear to those of conventionally studious minds: my father had a profound knowledge of the anatomy of flowers; and was in the habit of saying that he could not but think that the mind of man had hitherto neglected the invention and cultivation of the most agreeable variations. In fine, the tempestuous but simple mind of Samsonovitch Samsonoff had been captivated by the possibility of growing green carnations.

My mother and I were, naturally enough, not at all averse from his practising so gentle a hobby as the invention and cultivation of improbable flowers. And it was long before we even dreamt of the evil consequences that might attend so inoffensive an ambition. But my poor mother was soon to be rid of the anxieties of this life.

One day she and I were sitting in the garden discussing the English fashion-journals, when, silently as a cloud, my father came out of the house and looked towards us in the half-frowning, half-smiling way of his best mood. Tall and patriarchal, he came towards us—and in his hand we saw a flower with a long slender stem, and we stared at it as though we could not believe our eyes, for it was a green carnation!

"You have painted it!" we cried, my mother and I, for his success had seemed to us as remote as the stars.

"I have *made* it!" said my father, and he smiled into his beard, which was ever his one confidential friend. "Women, I have made it in my laboratory. And as I have made this I can make thousands, millions, and thousands of millions!"

He waved a closely-covered piece of paper towards me. "My daughter," he said, "here is your dower, your heritage. I am too old to burden myself with the cares of great riches, but by the help of this paper, you, my beloved child, will become an heiress who may condescend to an Emperor or an American. We will not lose a minute before going to England, the land of honest men, to put the matter of the patent in train. For on this paper is written the formula by which green carnations, as well as all previously known varieties of carnations, can be *made* instead of grown. *Made*, I say, instead of grown! Women, do you understand what it is that I have achieved? I have stolen something of the secret of the sun!"

"Samson, boast not!" cried my mother, but he laughed at her and fondled me, while I stared in great wonder at the slip of paper that fluttered in his hand and dreamed the fair dreams of wealth and happiness in a civilised country. Ah, me, ah me, the ill-fated excellence of dreams! For here I am in the most civilised country in the world, a pauper, and more wretched than a pauper!

Our preparations for removal to England were not far advanced before that happened which brought the first cruel turn to our fortunes. On an evil day my mother set out to Varna to buy some trivial thing, and—but I cannot speak of that, how she was returned to us a mangled corpse, her dear features mutilated beyond recognition by the fury of the railway accident.

My father took his sudden loss strangely: it was as though he was deprived at one blow of all the balance, the restraint, with which so many years of my mother's influence had softened the dangerous temper of the Samsonoff; and the brooding silence he put upon his surroundings clamoured with black thoughts. Worst of all, he began again to frequent the taverns in the valley, wherein he seemed to find solace in goading to fury the craven-hearted lowlanders among whom he had lived in peace for so long. The Samsonoff, in short, seemed rapidly to be reverting to type; and I, his daughter, must stand by and do nothing, for my influence over him was never but of the pettiest sort.

The weeks passed, and our preparations for departure to England proceeded at the soberest pace. In England we were going to stay with my mother's brother, a saintly man of some little property who lived a retired life in London, and whose heir I would in due course be, since he was himself without wife or children.

My father, never notable for the agreeable qualities of discretion and reticence, soon spread about the report of his discovery of the green carnation. He could not resist boasting of it in his cups, of the formula with which he could always make them, of the fortune he must inevitably make. Nor did he hesitate to taunt the men of the valley, they who came of generations of flower-growers, with his own success in an occupation which, he said, he had never undertaken but at a woman's persuasion, since it could be regarded as manly only by those who would describe as manly the painted face of a Circassian eunuch. Thus he would taunt them, laughing me to scorn when I ventured to point out that even worms will turn and cravens conspire. Woe and woe to the dour and high-handed in a world of polity, for their fate shall surely find them out!

One day, having been to the village to procure some yeast for the making of a *yaourt* or *yawort*, which is that same Bulgarian "sour milk" so strongly recommended to Anglo-Saxon digestions, I was startled, as I walked up the path to the door, by the bruit of loud, rough voices. Only too soon was my fear turned to horror. One of the voices was my father's, arrogant and harsh as only his could be, with a sneer like a snake running through it. The other I could not recognise, but could hear only too well that it had not the soft accents of the men of the valley; and when, afraid to enter, I peered in through the window, I saw my father in violent altercation with a man his equal in stature and demeanour—another

bearded giant, as fair as my father was dark, and with the livid eyes of a wolf.

What was my horror on recognising him as Michaelis the *comitadji*, the notorious and brutal Michaelis of the hills. The Michaelis and the Samsonovitch Samsonoffs had always been the equal kings of the *banditti*, and, in many a fight between Christian and Turk, the equal champions of the Cross against the Crescent. And now, as I could hear through the window, the last of the Michaelis was asking of the last of the Samsonoffs some of his great wealth, that he might arm and munition his troop to the latest mode.

My father threw back his head and laughed. But his laugh had cost him dear had I not screamed a warning, for the Michaelis with the wolfish eyes had raised a broad knife. My father leapt to one side, and taking up the first thing that came to hand, a heavy bottle of *mastic*, crashed it down like an axe on the fair giant's head; and then, without so much as a glance at the unconscious man, and massive though the Michaelis was, slung him over his shoulder, strode out of the house and garden, and flung him into the middle of the roadway, where he lay for long moaning savagely with the pain of his broken head. I had gone to the aid of the wretch, but my father would not let me, saying that no Michaelis ever yet died of a slap on the crown and that a little blood-letting would clear the man's mind of his boyish fancies. Ah, if it had!

It was at a late hour of the very next night—for since my mother's death my father would loiter in the taverns until all hours—that his hoarse voice roused me from my sleep; and on descending I found him raging about the kitchen like a wounded tiger, his clothes in disorder and showing grim dark stains that, as I clung to him, foully wetted my hands. I prayed him, in an access of terror, to tell me he was not hurt, for what other protection than him had I in that murderous land?

"I am not hurt, child," he growled impatiently. "But I have been driven to hurt some so that they can never again feel pain."

They had ambushed him, the cowards, as he came home through the wood—as though a hundred of those maggots of the valley could slay a Samsonovitch Samsonoff! My father had caught the last of them by the throat, and the trembling coward had saved himself by confessing the plot. It appeared that it was they who had persuaded the Michaelis to visit us the day before, inflaming his fancy with tales of the discovery of the carnation and of the great riches the Samsonoff had concealed about the house. And the Michaelis had come to our house not for part of my father's wealth but for all he could find, as also for the secret of the carnation, which he might sell at a great price to some Jew in Sofia—he had come to kill my father!

"And I, like a fool," cried my father, "only broke the skin of his wolfish head! Girl, we must be off at once! I have not lived in unwilling peace all these years to die like a rat; and now that these weak idiots have failed to kill me Michaelis and his troop will surround the house, and who shall escape the wolves of the hills? Now linger not for your clothes and fineries. Grigory Eshekovitch has horses for us at the edge of the wood, and we can make Philippopolis by the morning. Here is all our money in notes. Take them, so that you will be provided for should these scum get me. And the formula—take care of the formula, child, for that is your fortune! Should I have to stay behind, your mother's brother in England is a good man and will probably not rob you of more than half the profits of it."

And so we came to leave our beloved home, stealing like thieves through the darkness of a moonless night. How shall I ever forget those desperate moments! Our farm lay far from any other habitation, and a long sloping lane joined our pastures to the extensive Karaloff Wood, a wood always evoked by Bulgarian poets of past centuries as the home of vampires and the kennel of the hounds of hell.

There, at its borders, Grigory Eshekovitch, a homely man devoted to our interests, awaited us with two horses; and, although I could not see his face in the darkness, I could imagine by the tremor of his never very assured voice how pallid, indeed green, it must have been; for poor Grigory Eshekovitch suffered from some internal affection, which had the effect of establishing his complexion very uncertainly.

"Have you seen any one in the wood?" my father asked him.

"No, but I have heard noises," Grigory Eshekovitch trembled.

"Bah!" growled my father. "That was the chattering of your own miserable teeth."

I wonder what has happened to poor Grigory Eshekovitch, whether he survived that hideous night. We left him there, a

trembling figure on the borders of the wood, while we put our horses into the heart of that darkness; and I tried to find solace in our desperate situation by looking forward to the safety and comfort of our approaching life in England. Little I knew that I was to suffer such agonies of fear in this huge city that I would wish myself back in the land of wolves!

My dreams were shattered by a low growl from my father, and we pulled up our horses, listening intently. By this time we were about half-way through the wood; and had we not known the place by heart we had long since lost our way, for the curtain of leaves between us and the faint light of the stars made the place so black that we could not even see the faintest glimmer of each other. At last my father whispered that it was all right, and we were in the act of spurring our tired horses for the last dash through the wood when torches flamed on all sides, and we stood as in the tortured light of a crypt in moonlight.

"Samson Samsonovitch," cried a hoarse voice, and like a stab at my heart I knew it for the voice of the Michaelis, "we hope your sins are not too heavy, for your time has come."

It ill becomes a girl to boast of her parent; but shall I neglect to mention the stern fortitude, the patriarchal resignation, the monumental bravery, of my father, how he sat his horse still as a rock in a tempest and only his lips moved in a gentle whisper to me. "Child, save yourself," said he, and that was his farewell. "I command you to go—to save yourself and my secret from these hounds. Maybe I too will get through. God is as good to us as we deserve. Head right through them. Their aim, between you and me, will be so unsure that we might both escape. Go, and God go with you!"

Can you ask me to remember the details of the awful moment? The darkness, the flaming torches, the hoarse cries of the bandits as they rode in on us, my father's great courage—all these combined to produce in me a state for which the word "terror" seems altogether too homely. Perhaps I should not have left my father. Perhaps I should have died with him. I did not know what I was doing. Blindly as in a nightmare I spurred my horse midway between two moving torches. The horse, startled already, flew madly as the wind. Cries, curses, shots seemed to sweep about me, envelop me, but terror lent wings to my horse, and the shots and shouts faded behind me as phantoms might fade in a furious wind. Last of all came a fearful fusillade of shots, then a silence broken only by the harsh rustle of the bracken under my horse, which with the livid intelligence of fear, did not stop before we reached Philippopolis in the dawn.

I was never to see my father again. Until noon of the next day I sat anxiously in the only decent inn of the ancient town, praying that some act of Providence had come to his aid and that he might at any moment appear; when, from a loquacious person, who did not know my name, I heard that the last of the Samsonoffs had that morning been found in Karaloff Wood nailed to a tree-trunk with eighteen bullet wounds in his body.

I will spare you my reflections on the pass in which I then found myself. No young girl was ever so completely alone as she who sat the day through in the parlour of the Bulgarian inn, trying to summon the energy with which to arrange for her long journey on the Orient Express to England.

Arrived in London, I at once set out to my uncle's house in Golgotha Road, Golders Green. I was a little surprised that he had not met me at the station, for I had warned him of my arrival by telegram; but, knowing he was a gentleman of particular though agreeable habits, it was with a sufficiently good heart that I rang the bell of his tall, gloomy house, which stood at the end of a genteel street of exactly similar houses.

Allow me, if you please, to hurry over the relation of my further misfortunes. My uncle had died of a clot of blood on the heart a week before my arrival. His property he had, of course, left to me; and I could instantly take possession of his house in Golgotha Road. I was utterly alone.

That was four weeks ago. Though entirely without friends or acquaintance—for my uncle's lawyer, Mr. Tarbold, was a man who bore his own lack of easy conversation and human sympathy with a resigned fortitude worthy of more wretched sorrows—I passed the first two weeks pleasantly enough in arranging the house to my taste, in engaging a housekeeper and training her to my ways, and in wondering how I must proceed as regards the patenting and exploiting of the carnation, the formula for which I kept locked in a secret drawer of my toilet-table.

At the end of three weeks—one week ago—my housekeeper gave me notice of her instant departure, saying that no consideration would persuade her to spend another night in the house. She was, it seemed, psychic, and the atmosphere of the house, which was certainly oppressive, weighed heavily on her mind. She had heard noises in the night, she affirmed, and also spoke indignantly of an unpleasant smell in the basement of the house, a musty smell which she for one made no bones of recognising as of a graveyard consistency; and if she did not know a graveyard smell, she asked, from

one of decent origins, who did, for she had buried three husbands?

Of course I laughed at her tremors, for I am not naturally of a nervous temper, and when she insisted on leaving that very day I was not at all disturbed. Nor did I instantly make inquiries for another woman, for I could very well manage by myself, and the work of the house, I thought, must help to fill in the awful spaces made by the utter lack of companionship. As to any nervousness at being left entirely alone in a house, surrounded as it was by the amenities of Golders Green, I never gave a thought to it, for I had been inured to a reasonable solitude all my life. And, putting up a notice of "Apartments to Let," in one of the ground-floor windows, I set about the business of the house in something of a spirit of adventure natural, if I may say so, to one of my years.

That, as I have said, was one week ago; and the very next day but one after my housekeeper had left me was to see my hardly-won peace shattered at one blow. I do not know if you gentlemen are aware of the mode of life that obtains in Golders Green; but I must tell you that the natives of that quarter do not discourage the activities of barrel-organs—a somewhat surprising exercise of restraint to one who has been accustomed to the dolorous and beautiful songs of the Balkan *cziganes*. It is true, however, that these barrel-organs are played mostly by foreigners, and I have been given to understand that foreigners are one of the most sacred institutions of this great country.

The very next morning after my housekeeper had left me I was distracted from my work by a particularly disagreeable combination of sounds, which, I had no doubt, could come only from a barrel-organ not of the first order and the untrained voice of its owner. A little amused, I looked out of the window—and with a heart how still leapt back into the room, for the face of the organ-grinder was the face of the Michaelis!

I spent an hour of agony in wondering if he had seen me for how could I doubt but that he had followed me to England in quest of the formula of the carnation? At last, however, I decided that he could not have seen me, and I was in some degree calmed by the decreasing noise of the barrel-organ as it inflicted itself on more distant streets. London, I told myself, was a very large city; it was not possible that the Michaelis could have the faintest idea in what part of it I lodged; and it could only have been by the most unfortunate combination of chances that he had brought his wretched organ into Golgotha Road. Nevertheless I took the precaution to withdraw the notice of Apartments to Let from the window, lest yet another unfortunate combination of chances should lead him or his minions to search for lodging in my house.

The next day passed quietly enough. I went out shopping with a veil over my face, for reasons you can well understand. And little did I dream that the approaching terror was to come from a quarter which would only be known to the Michaelis when he was dead.

That evening in my bedroom, in a curious moment of forgetfulness, I chanced to pull the bell-rope. I wanted some hot water, had for the moment forgotten that the silly woman had left me, and only remembered it with a smile when, far down in the basement, I heard the thin clatter of the bell. The bathroom was some way down the passage, and I had reached the door, empty jug in hand, when I was arrested by the sound of approaching steps! They were very faint, they seemed to be coming up from the basement, as though in answer to the bell! I pressed my hand to my forehead in a frantic attempt to collect my wits, and I have no hesitation in saying that for those few moments I was near insane. The accumulation of terrors in my recent life had, I thought, unhinged my mind; and I must that day have engaged a servant and forgotten it.

Meantime the steps ascended, slowly, steadily, exactly as an elderly servant might ascend in answer to the bell; and as they ascended I was driven, I cannot tell you how, somehow past fear. Maybe it was the blood of the Samsonoffs at last raging in me: I was not afraid, and, without locking the door, I withdrew to a far corner of the room, awaiting the moment when the steps must reach the door. I must not forget to add that the empty jug was still in my hand.

Steadily, but with a shuffling as of carpet-slippers, the steps came up the passage: slowly the door was opened, and a gaunt, grey-haired woman in musty black stood there, eyeing me with strange contempt. Fear returned, enveloped me, shook me, and I sobbed, I screamed. The woman did not move, did not speak, but stood there, gaunt and grey and dry, eyeing me with a strange contempt; and on her lined face there was such an undreamt-of expression of evil. Yet I recognised her.

I must tell you that my mother had often, in telling me of her brother, spoken of his confidential housekeeper. My mother was a plain-spoken woman, and I had gathered from her that the woman had exercised some vulgar art to enthrall my

poor uncle and had dominated him, to his hurt, in all things. At the news of this woman's death just before my mother's tragic end, she had been unable to resist an expression of relief; and I, on having taken possession of the house a few weeks before, had examined with great interest, as girls will, the various photographs of her that stood about the rooms.

It was from these that I recognised the woman who stood in the doorway. But she was dead, surely she had died more than a year ago! Yet there she now stood, eyeing me with that strange contempt—with such contempt, indeed, that I, reacting from fear to anger, sternly demanded of her what she did there and what she wanted.

She was silent. That was perhaps the most awful moment of all—but no, no, there was worse to come! For, sobbing with terror, I hurled the empty jug at her vile face with a precision of aim which now astonishes me: but she did not waver so much as the fraction of an inch as the jug came straight at her—and, passing through her head, smashed into pieces against the wall of the passage outside. I must have swooned where I stood, for when I was again conscious of my surroundings she was gone: I was alone; but, far down in the house, I could hear the shuffling steps, retreating, descending, to the foul shades whence she had come.

Now I am one who cannot bear any imposition; and unable, despite the witness of my own eyes, to believe in the psychic character of the intruder, I ran out of the room and in hot pursuit down the stairs. The gaunt woman must have descended with a swiftness surprising in one of her years, for I could only see her shadow far below, on the last flight of stairs that would take her to the basement. Into that lower darkness, I must confess, I had not the courage to follow her; and still less so when, on peering down the pitch-dark stairs into the kitchen, I was assailed by that musty smell which my housekeeper had spoken of with such indignant conviction as of a graveyard consistency.

I locked the door of my room and slept, I need scarcely say, but ill that night. However, in the cheerful light of the following morning, I was inclined, as who would not, to pooh-pooh the incredible events of the previous night; and again pulled the bell-rope, just to see the event, if any. There was; and, unable to await the ascent of the shuffling steps, I crammed on a hat and ran down the stairs.

The woman was coming upstairs, steadily, inevitably. As she heard me descending she stopped and looked up, and I cannot describe the effect that the diabolical wickedness of her face had on me in the clear daylight. I stopped, was rooted there, could not move. To get to the front door I must pass the foul thing, and that I could not summon the courage to do. And then she raised an arm, as though to show me something, and I saw the blade of a razor shining in her hand. You may well shudder, gentlemen!

When I came to, it was to find myself lying at the foot of the stairs, whither I must have fallen, and the foul thing gone. Why she did not kill me, I do not know. God will pardon me for saying that maybe it had been better if she had, for what miseries are not still in store for me! Trembling and weak, I reached the door and impelled myself into the clear air of morning. Nor could the fact that I had forgotten my veil, and the consequent fear of the Michaelis, persuade me to re-enter that house until I had regained some degree of calmness.

All day long I wandered about, knowing neither what to do nor where to go. I am not without some worldly sense, and I knew what little assistance the police could give me in such a dilemma, even had they believed me; while as for the lawyer, Mr. Tarbold, how could I face a man of so little sympathy in ordinary things with such an extraordinary tale?

Towards ten o'clock that night, I determined to return and risk another night in that house; I was desperate with weariness and hunger; and could not buy food nor lodging for the night, for in my flight I had forgotten my purse; while I argued to myself that if, after all, she had intended to murder me, she could without any difficulty have done so that morning when I lay unconscious on the stairs.

My bravery, however, did not help me to ascend the stairs to my bedroom with any resolution. I stole upstairs, myself verily like a phantom. But, hearing no sound in the house, I plucked up the courage to switch on the light on my bedroom landing. My bedroom-door stood open, but I could not remember whether or not I had left it so that morning. It was probable, in my hasty descent. I tiptoed to it and peered in—and I take the liberty to wonder whether any man, was he never such a lion-heart, had been less disturbed than I at the sight which the light of the moon revealed to my eyes.

The Michaelis lay full length on the floor, his great fair beard darkened with his blood, which came, I saw, from a great gash behind his ear. Across him, with her back to me, sat straddled the gaunt, foul thing, as silent as the grave. Yet even my terror could not overcome my curiosity as to her actions, for she kept on lowering and raising her left hand to and from the Michaelis's beard, while with her right, in which shone the bloody razor, she sawed the air from side to side. I

could not realise what that vile shape was doing—I could, and could not admit the realisation. For with her left hand she was plucking out one by one the long hairs of the Michaelis's beard, while with the razor in her right she was slicing them to the floor!

I must have gasped, made some noise, for she heard me; and, turning on me and brandishing the dripping razor, she snarled like an animal and leapt towards me. But I am young and quick, and managed just in time to reach the street door and slam it against her enraged pursuit.

That was last night. Since then, gentlemen, I have wandered about the streets of London, resting a little among the poor people in the parks. I have had no food, for what money I have is in that house, together with the formula for the green carnation; but nothing, not death by exposure nor death by starvation, would induce me to return to the house in Golders Green while it is haunted by that foul presence. Is she a homicidal lunatic or a phantom from hell? I do not know, I am too tired to care. I have told you two gentlemen my story because you seem kind and capable, and I can only pray that I have not wearied you overmuch. But I do beg you to believe that nothing is further from my mind than to ask, and indeed nothing would induce me to accept anything from you but the generous sympathy of your understanding and the advice of your chivalrous intelligence. My tale is finished, gentlemen. And, alas, am not I?

IV

Mr. Trevor is somewhat confused in his relation of the course of events immediately subsequent to Miss Samsonoff's narrative. During its course he had time, he says, to study the young lady's beauty, which, though of a very superior order, was a little too innocent and insipid for his taste. His judgment, however, cannot be entirely fair, for such was the direction of the young lady's eyes that Mr. Trevor could judge her by her features only. As to the story itself, Mr. Trevor says that, while yielding to no one in his liking for a good story, he could not see his way to considering Miss Samsonoff's notable either for interest, entertainment, or that human note of stark realism which makes for conviction; and while, in the ordinary way, a murderer was to him like a magnet, he could not rouse himself to feel irresistibly attracted towards the ghoul of Golders Green. It was therefore with surprise not unmixed with pain that he heard Mr. Maturin saying:—

"Ralph, we are in luck!"

"To what," Mr. Trevor could not entirely cleanse his voice from the impurity of sarcasm, "to what do you refer?" But it was not without some compunction that he heard the young lady sigh miserably to Beau Maturin:—

"I am afraid I have wearied your friend. Forgive me."

"My friend," said Beau Maturin gently, "is an ass. In point of fact, Miss Samsonoff, far from wearying us, you have put us under a great obligation——"

"Ah, you are kind!" the young lady was moved to sob.

"On the contrary," Mr. Maturin warmly protested, "I am selfish. I gather you have not been reading the newspapers lately? Had you done so, you would have read of a murderer who has recently been loose in London and has so far evaded not only capture but even identification. So far as the public know through the newspapers, this criminal has been responsible for only two or three murders; but this very night my friend and I have had private information to the effect that within the last few weeks twelve mutilated corpses have been found in various parts of London; to which we must now, no doubt, add a thirteenth, the remains of your late enemy, Mr. Michaelis. But where *your* information," said Mr. Maturin gallantly, "is especially valuable, is that the police do not dream that the criminal is of your sex. To my friend and me it is this original point that invests the pursuit——"

"Pursuit?" Mr. Trevor could not help starting.

"——with," said Mr. Maturin coldly, "an added charm. And now with your permission, Miss Samsonoff, we will not only return to you your formula, as to the financial worth of which I cannot entirely share your late parent's optimism, but also——"

"Also," Mr. Trevor said with restraint, "we will first of all call at Vine Street and borrow a few policemen."

"Oh, yes!" the young lady said eagerly. "We will be sure to need some policemen. Please get some policemen. They will listen to you."

"I do not find an audience so difficult to find as all that," said Mr. Maturin coldly. "The London police, Miss Samsonoff, are delightful, but rather on the dull side. They are much given to standing in the middle of crowded roads and dreaming, and in even your short stay in London you must have observed what a serious, nay intolerable, obstruction they are to the traffic. No, no, my friend and I will get this murderer ourselves. Come, Miss Samsonoff."

"But I dare not come with you!" cried the young lady. "I simply dare not approach that house again! May I not await your return here?"

"The attacks of ten murderers," said Mr. Maturin indignantly, "cannot disfigure your person more violently than being left alone in a night-club will disfigure your reputation. Bulgarians may be violent, Miss Samsonoff. But lounge-lizards are low dogs."

Mr. Trevor says that he was so plunged in thought that he did not arise from the table with his usual agility; and the first notice he had that Mr. Maturin had risen and was nearly at the door was on hearing him waive aside a pursuing waiter with the damnable words: "My friend will pay."

Without, the taxi-cab was still waiting. Its driver, says Mr. Trevor, was one of those stout men of little speech and impatient demeanour: on which at this moment was plainly written the fact that he had been disagreeably affected by waiting in the cold for nearly two hours; and on Mr. Maturin's sternly giving him a Golders Green direction he just looked at our two gentlemen and appeared to struggle with an impediment in his throat.

Golgotha Road was, as the young lady had described it, a genteel street of tall, gloomy houses. Mr. Trevor says that he cannot remember when he liked the look of a street less. The taxi-cab had not penetrated far therein when Miss Samsonoff timidly begged Mr. Maturin to stop its further progress, pointing out that she could not bear to wait immediately opposite the house and would indeed have preferred to await her brave cavaliers in an altogether different part of London. Mr. Maturin, however, soothed her fears; and, gay as a schoolboy, took the key of the house from her reluctant fingers and was jumping from the cab when Miss Samsonoff cried:—

"But surely you have weapons!"

Mr. Trevor says that, while yielding to no one in deploring the use of weapons in daily life, in this particular instance the young lady's words struck him as full of a practical grasp of the situation.

"Of course," said Mr. Trevor nonchalantly, "we must have weapons. How stupid of us to have forgotten! I will go back to my flat and get some. I won't be gone a moment."

"That's right," Mr. Maturin agreed, "because you won't be gone at all. My dear Miss Samsonoff, my friend and I do not need weapons. We put our trust in God and St. George. Come along, Ralph. Miss Samsonoff, we will be back in a few moments."

"And wot do I do?" asked the taxi-driver.

"Nothing," cried Mr. Maturin gaily. "Nothing at all. Aren't you lucky!"

The house which the young lady had pointed out to them had an air of even gloomier gentility than the others, and Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he liked the look of a house less, particularly when the ancient brown door gave to Beau Maturin's hand before he had put the key into the lock. Mr. Trevor could not resist a natural exclamation of surprise. Mr. Maturin begged him not to shout. Mr. Trevor said that he was not shouting, and, without a thought for his own safety, was rushing headlong into the house to meet the terror single-handed when he found that his shoe-lace was untied.

He found Beau Maturin in what, he supposed, would be called a hall when it was not a pit of darkness. A stealthily lit match revealed that it was a hall, a narrow one, and it also revealed a closed door to the right, by Mr. Trevor's elbow, which he removed. The match went out.

"Quietly," said Mr. Maturin quite unnecessarily, for Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he felt less noisy. He

heard the door to his right open, softly, softly.

"Is it you opening that door?" he asked, merely from curiosity.

"Ssh!" snapped Beau Maturin. "Hang on to my shoulder-blades."

Mr. Trevor thought it better to calm Beau Maturin's fears by acceding to his whim, and clung close behind him as they entered the room. The moon, which Mr. Trevor already had reason to dislike, was hanging at a moderate elevation over Golders Green as though on purpose to reveal the darkness of that room. Mr. Trevor's foot then struck a shape on the floor. The shape was soft and long. Mr. Trevor was surprised. Mr. Maturin whispered:—

"Found anything?"

Mr. Trevor said briefly that his foot had.

"So's mine," said Beau Maturin. "What's yours like? Mine's rather soft to the touch."

"And mine," said Mr. Trevor.

"They're corpses, let's face it," sighed Mr. Maturin. "Making fifteen in all. With us, seventeen. Just give yours a kick, Ralph, to see if it's alive. I've kicked mine."

"I don't kick corpses," Mr. Trevor was muttering when he felt a hard round thing shoved into the small of his back.

"Ow!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Found anything?" said Mr. Maturin.

Mr. Trevor said briefly that there was something against his back.

"And mine," sighed Mr. Maturin. "What's yours like? Mine's rather hard on the back."

"So is mine," said Mr. Trevor.

"They're revolvers, let's face it," sighed Beau Maturin.

"They are," said a harsh voice behind them. "So don't move."

"I've got some sense, thank you," snapped Beau Maturin.

"Sir," said the harsh voice, and it was a woman's voice, "I want none of your lip. I have you each covered with a revolver——"

"Waste," said Beau Maturin. "One revolver would have been quite enough. Besides, my friend and I were distinctly given to understand that you were partial to a razor. Or do you use that for shaving?"

"I use a razor," said the harsh voice, "only when I want to kill. But I have a use for you two."

The light was suddenly switched on, a light so venomous, says Mr. Trevor, that they had to blink furiously. And that must have been a very large room, for they could not see into its far corners. The light came from what must have been a very high-powered lamp directly above a table in the middle of the room; and it was concentrated by a shade in such a way as to fall, like a searchlight, exactly on the two helpless gentlemen. Mr. Trevor says that Beau Maturin's handsome face looked white and ghastly, so the Lord knows what Mr. Trevor's must have looked like. Meanwhile their captor leapt from her station behind them, and they were privileged to see her for the first time. She was, says Mr. Trevor, exactly as Miss Samsonoff had described her, grey and gaunt and dry, and her expression was strangely contemptuous and evil as sin. And never for a moment did she change the direction of her revolvers, which was towards our gentlemen's hearts. Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he saw a woman look less afraid that a revolver might go off in her hand.

"Look down," she commanded.

"It's all right," said Beau Maturin peaceably; "we've already guessed what they are. Corpses. Nice cold night for them, too. Keep for days in weather like this."

Mr. Trevor could not resist looking down to his feet. The corpses were of two youngish men in dress-clothes.

"They're cut badly," said Mr. Maturin.

"They're not cut at all," said the woman harshly. "I shot these two for a change."

"I meant their clothes," Mr. Maturin explained. "Death was too good for them with dress-clothes like that."

"Well, I can't stop here all night talking about clothes," snapped the woman. "Now then, to business. These bodies have to be buried in the back-garden. You will each take one. There are spades just behind you. I shall not have the slightest hesitation in killing you as I have killed these two, but it will be more convenient for me if you do as you are told. I may kill you later, and I may not. Now be quick!"

"Lord, what's that!" cried Mr. Trevor sharply. He had that moment realised a strange muffled, ticking noise which must, he thought, come either from somewhere in the room or from a room nearby. And, while he was never in his life less conscious of feeling fear he could not help but be startled by that ticking noise for he had heard it before, when timing a dynamite-bomb.

"That is why," the woman explained with what, Mr. Trevor supposed, was meant to be a smile, "you will be safer in the garden. Women are but weak creatures, and so I take the precaution of having a rather large size in dynamite-bombs so timed that I have but to press a button to send us all to blazes. It will not be comfortable for the police when, if ever, they catch me. But pick up those spades and get busy."

"Now don't be rude," begged Beau Maturin. "I can stand anything from plain women but discourtesy. Ralph, you take the bigger corpse, as you are smaller than I am, while I take this little fellow on my shoulder—which will probably be the nearest he will ever get to Heaven, with clothes cut as badly as that."

"You can come back for the bodies when you've dug the graves," snapped the woman. "Take the spades and go along that passage. No tricks! I am just behind you."

There was a lot of rubbish in that garden. It had never been treated as a garden, it did not look like a garden, it looked even less like a garden than did The Garden of My Grandmother. High walls enclosed it. And over it that deplorable moon threw a sheet of dead daylight.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

"Do you mind if we take our coats off?" asked Beau Maturin. Mr. Trevor says that he was being sarcastic.

"I don't mind what you take off," snapped the woman.

"Now don't say naughty things!" said Mr. Maturin. "Nothing is more revolting than the naughtiness of plain women."

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

They dug, says Mr. Trevor, for a long time, for a very long time. Not, however, that it was difficult digging once one had got into the swing of it, for that garden was mostly dug-up soil. Suddenly Beau Maturin said:—

"Bet you a fiver I dig a grave for my fellow before you."

"Right!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

"*And*," said the woman, "I don't allow any betting in this house. So call that bet off."

"What?" said Mr. Maturin.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.

Mr. Maturin threw down his spade.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.

Mr. Trevor dug.

Mr. Maturin said: "Dig yourself!"

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.

Mr. Trevor brandished his spade from a distance. He noticed for the first time that they had been digging in the light of the dawn and not of the moon.

"And who the deuce," said Mr. Maturin dangerously, "do you think you are, not to allow any betting? I have stood a lot from you, but I won't stand that."

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, but Mr. Maturin advanced upon the revolvers like a punitive expedition. Mr. Trevor brandished his spade.

"Another step, and I fire!" cried the woman harshly.

"Go ahead," said Mr. Maturin. "I'll teach you to stop me betting! And I hate your face."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" the woman suddenly cried with a face of fear, and, lowering her revolvers, fled into the house.

Mr. Trevor was so surprised that he could scarcely speak. Mr. Maturin laughed so much that he could not speak.

"What's there to laugh about?" Mr. Trevor asked at last.

"It's funny. They've had us, let's face it. Come on, let's follow her in."

"She may shoot," Mr. Trevor cautioned.

"Shoot my eye!" sighed Beau Maturin.

Once in the house, Mr. Trevor stopped spellbound. There were voices, there was laughter—from the room of the two corpses!

"They're laughing at us!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Who wouldn't!" laughed Beau Maturin, and, opening the door said: "Good-morning."

"You've said it," said the policeman. "Haw-haw!"

"You'll have some breakfast?" asked the woman with the revolvers.

"Please do!" said Miss Samsonoff.

"You *ought* to be hungry," said the taxi-driver with the Homburg hat of green plush.

"Look here!" gasped Mr. Trevor. "What the blazes——"

"Haw-haw!" laughed the policeman. "'Ave a bit of vealanam-pie?"

"Now, Ted, don't be rude to the gentlemen!" said the woman with the revolvers.

"Quite right, mother," said Miss Samsonoff. "We owe these gentlemen an explanation and an apology——"

"And if they don't take it we *are* in the soup!" miserably said the man in the Homburg hat of green plush.

"Now, you two, go and get cups and plates for the two gentlemen," said the woman with the revolvers to the two corpses in dress-clothes.

"Listen, please," Miss Samsonoff gravely addressed Mr. Maturin, "my name isn't Samsonoff at all but Kettlewell, and that's my mother and these are my four brothers——"

"How do you do?" said Mr. Maturin, absently drinking the policeman's coffee, but Mr. Trevor is glad that no one heard what he said.

"You see," said Miss Kettlewell, and she was shy and beautiful, "we are The Kettlewell Film Company, just us, but of course we haven't got a lot of money——"

"A 'lot' is good!" said the policeman.

"My brother there," and Miss Kettlewell pointed to the wretched man with the Homburg hat of green plush, "was the director of an American company in Los Angeles, but he got the sack lately and so we thought we would make some films on our own. You see, we are such a large family! And the recent murders gave us a really brilliant idea for a film called 'The Ghoul of Golders Green,'^[1] which, thanks to you two gentlemen, we have completed to-night. Oh, I do hope it will be a success, especially as you have been kind enough to help us in our predicament, for we hadn't any money to engage actors—and we did so need two gentlemen, just like you, who really looked the part, didn't we, mother?"

"But, my dear child," cried Beau Maturin, "I'm afraid your film can't have come out very well. Trevor and I will look perfectly ghastly, as we neither of us had any make-up on."

"But it's that kind of film!" smiled Miss Kettlewell. "You see, you and your friend are supposed to be corpses who, by some powerful psychic agency are digging your own graves—Heavens, what's that?"

There, at the open door, stood an apparition with a dreadful face. He appeared, says Mr. Trevor, to have some difficulty in choosing among the words that his state of mind was suggesting to him.

"And me?" gasped the taxi-driver hoarsely. "Wot abaht me? 'Angingabahtallnight! 'Oo's going to pay me, that's wot I want to know? There' four quid and more on that clock——"

Mr. Maturin swept his empty coffee-cup round to indicate the family Kettlewell.

"My friends will pay," sighed Mr. Maturin.

When the film was released by the Kettlewell Film Corporation, evidences of public favour were so notably lacking that it was offered to the Society for Presenting Nature Films to the blind.

Surely, after the above exposure of the methods adopted, no further reasons should be sought for the so much deplored inferiority of British films.

The Ancient Sin

I

GEORGE TARLYON and I were engaged to stay the week-end with Aubrey Carlyle at Malmanor Hall, which is four hours by car from Hyde Park Corner, though that, of course, rather depends on the kind of car. George Tarlyon's—as that Armenian fellow had noticed—was a good car, long and low, a chaps' car, and we had run four-fifths of our distance very well: we had flashed through a town, whose name is of no interest, and had plunged into the peculiar wood of Carmion, which shrouds the southern border of the domain of Malmanor. We were therefore on the last lap, and the fact that this lay through Carmion Wood lent a certain interest to it; for although Tarlyon and I had very often stayed with Aubrey Carlyle at Malmanor, we had never, somehow, really penetrated into Carmion. I don't know why, but it just hadn't happened; and George Tarlyon was now running his car along the broad sweep of its central and only road because of a vague idea that it was a short cut as compared to the main road. It was a rotten idea, that of George Tarlyon's.

One of the many silly legends about Carmion Wood is that only foreigners may hear the singing of the birds therein, while for Englishmen there is no sound but the rustling of the leaves and the sighing of the boughs. How that sort of nonsense ever gets hold of a countryside, I don't know. And the fact that, as George Tarlyon rushed the car along the twilight road—for although it was a bright summer's day, the leaves are very thick on Carmion trees—we could hear no birds singing was, without a doubt, simply because they were singing somewhere else that afternoon. "Obviously," I said to Tarlyon, who had suggested that had I had a Spanish mother I could now be enjoying the sweet trilling of rooks and the back-chat of blackbirds, "obviously they can't always be singing in one place."

"Listen," said George Tarlyon, and when you listened it really was rather curious, the silence of Carmion Wood. "Quiet we call silence, the merest word of all," some one has written, Poe, I think; but that word applied very fully to Carmion, it was so silent! If only there had been a wind, just to give the leaves a little fun! But there wasn't a breath, it was a close day in August, and the wood was a crypt, that's what it was. I said so to Tarlyon, but all he said was that he was hungry. Later on he grunted: "You and your crypts!"

"It's a pity," I said reasonably, "that the sun doesn't get a bit further into this place...."

"Dolorous is the word for it," murmured Tarlyon; and he was quite right, amazingly right. "Dolorous" was certainly the word for it.

"Open your cut-out, man!" I said at last, for that car was really too well-bred. And with a twist of his foot he opened the cut-out. What a cut-out! But it did make things seem more homely.

II

The car rushed on.... The straight road under the thick tapestry of leaves would take us directly to the parkland of Malmanor; through the opening at the end, for Carmion Wood ends sharply, we could see in the far distance, lying in the hollow of the county like an ancient pink jewel in a green bowl, the vast Elizabethan pile of Malmanor Hall.

The car rushed on ...

"Bang!" said the car, but Tarlyon said worse than that as he pulled up.

"This," I said, as we looked at the flattened back tyre, "this comes of taking short cuts."

The matter with Tarlyon was that he had no luncheon and was hungry. Now George Tarlyon is my greatest friend, but this I had against him, that he swore too much. Like many other men, decent men, he swore too much and too often. I can say "damn" with any man, I have said "bloody," and will again when it is organic to the occasion, but what humorous writers in the magazines call scientific swearing does not amuse me. I do not wish to seem superior, but it just does not amuse me. In the Middle Ages men swore mightily on the names of the Trinity and the Saints, but then they believed mightily in the Trinity and the Saints. Now men swear and curse on the names of everything and believe in nothing. It is the habit of the modern world; it is the habit of being in a hurry; it is the habit of unholiness. And it had grown on my friend, George Almeric St. George Tarlyon, who was otherwise a reasonable sort of man.

To put on the spare tyre was only the work of a few minutes; and again the car rushed on ... and from behind us came a cry. I looked back, and there, twenty yards behind us, stood and screamed a woman by the roadway.

Tarlyon was really remarkably fluent as he reversed. He was hungry, you see.

"We must have dropped something," I suggested.

We drew abreast of the gesticulating woman on the coarse grass by the road. She was just a slip of an aged woman, and her hair was made of bits of gray string, and her eyes leapt hysterically out of a little, lined face. "Come, come!" she was screaming. "Come, come quick!" She smelt old, that woman.

The car had scarcely stopped abreast of her when she turned and scampered away along a little lane between the tall, still trees. It was extraordinary, the way she ran, that little old woman! "Come, come quick!"

Well, there was nothing to do but to follow.

"The girl's mad," snarled Tarlyon, as he strode after the little old woman. But striding was no use, it was a running job, and it was a hot day.

It was an untidy, tangled path up which she was leading us—and how quickly she ran, that little old woman, stumbling over her uncertain feet and frantic gestures, while we ploughed on behind her through the lush of the wood in July. It was an amazingly hot day; the Press for the last week or so had been full of surprise and congratulation as to the amazingly hot days we were having, and we had now an unrivalled opportunity of testing the veracity of the Press, but we would much rather have forgone it. At that moment, following that little old woman up that tangled path in Carmion Wood, George Tarlyon and I were probably the wettest men in England outside of a swimming-bath.

"What the devil is it all about?" muttered Tarlyon, and was not soothed by my suggesting that I thought it was all part of his idea of a short cut to Malmanor—while the little old woman still screamed at us to come quick, quick.

"Quick, quick ..." And at her heels we burst out on to a clearing in the wood. The sun lay on that clearing like a carpet of gold.

III

Tarlyon and I stopped dead, and stared. We stared hard. But the little old woman, still screaming to us to follow, ran on ahead to the house. Yes, there was a house in that clearing, a little farmhouse. And the sun lay on it all like a carpet of gold: that is how I saw it....

"Not our business," muttered Tarlyon, and I heartily agreed that it wasn't. We stood where we were, with our eyes glued on what we saw; and George Tarlyon dug his hands deep in his pockets. George Tarlyon always dug his hands deep in his pockets when he wanted frightfully to take them out.

A man was thrashing his son. I cannot explain why, but we were somehow quite certain that the thing the man was thrashing was flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood. He was a huge man, with a mane of gray hair and a long gray beard, and he had on a bright red shirt. If I close my eyes now I can see the blood-red of that huge bearded man's shirt, I can see the curve of his great shoulders and the muscles that stood out like lumps of rubber on his half-bare arm as he beat his son with a stout stick. And I can see his little old wife trying to stay his hand, begging, praying, moaning. We heard her moaning, like an old, old bird in pain. And at that Tarlyon started forward a step....

"Steady there!" cried Tarlyon sharply. "Steady, Beaver!" The cry cut across the sunlit place, the clear cry that has lit for England the darkest corners of the world, and the huge man in the red shirt stayed his cudgel and looked at us. But the little old woman still moaned, and it was quite dreadful to hear that in the summer silence. Ten yards separated us from that domestic scene, but they were yards of bright sunlight, and we could see every line on that patriarch's face. For he was a patriarch. He was the most magnificent man I have ever seen; and Tarlyon and I, not small men, felt withered under his straight look. We stood rooted.

"Friends," said the old man, and his was the voice of authority, "you must leave me in peace to drive the sin out of this my son. His mother is a woman, and will pardon everything in those she loves, but you are men and know the one sin that

is unpardonable by all men. Go your ways in peace, and fear not to put your own houses in order...."

And still he looked at us, that remarkable old lecturer, his cudgel stayed in the air, his son at his feet; and his voice was the voice of a man who has drunk the vinegar of life, and his eyes were the eyes of a man who has seen Christ crucified. That is why we knew for certain, Tarlyon and I, that whatever that ancient man said was true, and whatever he did was right. "Come away," I whispered "You are right. It is your business," cried Tarlyon across the sunlight—and, dear God, it was! For the thing happened then. We hadn't noticed that the son had crawled from his father's feet. And what we saw was a spade raised high in the sunlight, a spade crashing down and cleaving the patriarch's head like an axe, so that the blood came out of it like the sap of a tight orange. Without a cry the old man fell, and red as his shirt were the stones of the yard beneath his head. The little old woman screamed. The son and his spade lay where Tarlyon's right hand felled him, and Tarlyon knelt by the slaughtered old man. I couldn't move. I took up the gored spade and held it, a silly gesture. My heart beat like a bell in my ears, and I remember there rose to my lips prayers that I thought I had forgotten.

"Quiet, for one moment," I heard Tarlyon's voice to the screaming old woman. I stared and wondered at my friend, kneeling there on the dyed stones and listening to the heart under the red shirt. I could not have done that. I hate a lot of blood.

Then he rose and came towards me. I hated the dark damp patches on his trouser-knees.

"Quite dead," he said. "We must fetch the police."

Of course, I thought. And together we looked down at the son on the ground. He was gibbering. He had gone mad. "Drat the boy!" said Tarlyon thoughtfully.

"I wonder," I heard myself whisper, "what was the one sin the old man said was unpardonable?"

Tarlyon looked from the prostrate thing to me, and I saw that those slightly frozen blue eyes of his were as miserable as the eyes of a hurt girl. You see, that old man was a very remarkable old man, and he was dead....

"I don't know," he whispered back. "You and I, Ralph, and our friends, have become so civilised that we don't know what the unpardonable sins are. We simply don't *know*, old man! We are the world's soft people, Ralph. We are so civilised that we pardon too much—both in ourselves and other people; and we call that being broad minded, but it's really being flabby. But that old man, I'm sure, was not 'broad-minded,' he was as little 'broad-minded' as Jehovah, and there was one sin he simply would not pardon. And we, who are civilised people, do not even know what it was...."

We stared silently at the poor gibbering thing at our feet.

"Better tie him up before leaving," I suggested.

"Don't you think," said Tarlyon, "that one of us should stay here while——"

"I won't stay here alone," I said abruptly—and I meant it. Nothing would have induced me to stay alone in that ghastly sunlit spot, alone with that lunatic boy and the little old woman and the butchered patriarch. How she moaned, that little old woman kneeling on the blooded stones....

With a silk handkerchief for his ankles and one for his wrists, we trussed the poor boy against the kitchen door. He could not have been more than seventeen or so, and his young face was hideous with fear.

We left the place quickly; but I looked back just once at the scene, for it seemed to me very strange of the sun still to lie on it all like a carpet of gold. That is how I felt about it.

IV

Swiftly Tarlyon put the bonnet of his car to the direction from which we had come, where lay the town whose name is of no interest.

"How far is it, d'you think, Ralph?"

"About four miles," I ventured; and Tarlyon proceeded to eat up those four miles as a conjuror eats up yards of ribbon. It perished beneath us, that road, and the roaring cut-out tore the silence of Carnion Wood into a million bits, and may it

never have found them again! Neither of us spoke. I was feeling sick.

We reached the outskirts of the town, and a piece of luck saved us from inquiring for the police station; for, approaching us on a bicycle, we saw a blue, helmeted figure, and by the stripes on his arm we knew him for a sergeant of police. Tarlyon pulled up.

"Better leave the bicycle and come with us to Carmion Wood," he said. "Explain as we go. Urgent."

The sergeant looked closely into Tarlyon's face.

"Right, sir," said he, and quickly gave the custody of his bicycle to a gnarled-looking woman in the open doorway of a labourer's dwelling.

"What's oop over ut Carmion?" asked she.

"You may well ask," said Tarlyon.

No laggard was that sergeant of police. A grizzled man, with a reticent face. I sat behind and heard Tarlyon explain. The sergeant said nothing, listening intently, until the end.

"Where did you say the house was, sir?" he asked then.

"I've just been telling you, man! In a little clearing in the wood."

"Very good, sir," said the sergeant of police.

Silently we sped into Carmion Wood.

"You see, sir," said the sergeant, "it's a powerful long time since I've been here. Folk roundabout mislike the wood."

"Don't feel very attached to it myself," grunted Tarlyon. "Ah, here we are!"

But it was not going to be as easy as that. For when we left the car, at the identical spot where, we were certain, the little old woman had stopped us, we somehow lost our way. We wandered about for some time, up little twisting lanes, down tangled untidy lanes, up no lanes at all: we ploughed through the growth and lush of the wood, like angry flies beating about a crypt to which the sun filtered in tortured patches of light. We perspired enormously—and Tarlyon lost his temper. He had had no luncheon, you understand, and it was now past five; and so he was fluent in the forbidden language. But the sergeant of police was a tough and silent man, he neither sweated nor spoke.

"Where did you say the house was, sir?" asked the sergeant at last: and very amiably, I thought, considering...

"Oh," says Tarlyon. "So you've heard me mention a house, have you!"

We stood very still, the three of us, and Tarlyon glared.

"Look here, sergeant," he snarled, "if you ask me again where that house is I shall get cross ... I've told you, man! Body of God, if——"

"*Please*, sir!" said the sergeant quickly.

"What d'you mean by 'Please, sir?'" Tarlyon was well away. It was a very warm day, you understand.

"I mean, sir," said the sergeant of police, "please don't swear on the name or the body of God."

V

Well, we went on ... and, at last, unmistakably hit the path up which we had followed the little old woman. We followed the path, Tarlyon first, then me, then the sergeant. And then we came upon the clearing, and the sun lay on it like a carpet of gold. We stared. Like idiots, we stared. For, except the sun, there was nothing in that clearing but the rust and bones of a long-ruined house.

You had, of course, suspected as much. You had known that all along. You know all about those silent woods and

slaughtered men. You have been let in before, by better men. But it was curious, all the same....

"Is this where you said the house was, sir?" the sergeant's voice came gently.

We turned and looked at him.

"Because," he went on, "there's been no house here for more than thirty year...."

"Ah!" said Tarlyon; that was about as much as any one *could* say. And our eyes wandered over the clearing, and we saw, bright against the mouldy stones of the ruin, two silk handkerchiefs....

Even the law was at last affected by the heat, for he raised his helmet and passed a hand over his almost bald head.

"Yes," said the sergeant of police. "There was a house here thirty year ago, but it was burnt down by the men of the neighbourhood because of a great crime that was done there. Parricide it was, but the boy was pardoned, being judged mad, and mad he must have been to kill the best and most God-fearing man in the county. Good-day, sirs. I'll walk my way back. Yours was just an illusion, I make no doubt. The sun, maybe. But it's always had a bad name, has Carmion ... Good-day, sirs." And the sergeant of police went his way.

"Did you see him, did you see his face?" I gasped frantically. For the face of the sergeant of police was the grown face of the lunatic boy we had trussed up an hour before with our two silk handkerchiefs, and they lying where we must have dropped them, drooping over the ruins...

"And he has learnt his lesson," said Tarlyon, and his face was as still as the gray water of a rock-pool. "He has learnt his lesson, Ralph—and has taught me one. For the one sin that the old man said was unpardonable by all men is blasphemy...."

The Loquacious Lady of Lansdowne Passage

THIS is a story about my friend George Tarlyon, who is a brave man and no bigger liar than most. Of course, George Tarlyon ought to know better than to be afraid of walking through Lansdowne Passage at night. But you can tell him that until you are blue in the face and he will smile at you and agree with you, but still he will not walk through Lansdowne Passage at night, saying that he is afraid. And when you ask him of what he is afraid, he will smile a shameless smile and reply that he gives Lansdowne Passage a miss because he is afraid of meeting a woman in it. At that you will at once express impatience, disbelief, and disgust, for on no female occasion whatsoever will you have noticed upon George Tarlyon's brow that cold sweat which denotes a decent bashfulness in a man. And then, maybe, you will jeer at George Tarlyon, forgetting for a moment that he is a head taller than any quick-tempered man should be, and thinking to goad him into revelation of the reason or reasons why he, a noted warrior on many fields from Ranelagh to Vimy Ridge, should be afraid of meeting a woman in Lansdowne Passage. And maybe George Tarlyon will tell you, and maybe he will not.

In these days of easy travelling and tourist facilities it need scarcely be explained that Lansdowne Passage is a narrow path between two high walls; and that this path is carved between the princely domains of Devonshire House and Lansdowne House. Men speak of a time when, midway through the passage, they had every now and then to pass under a light wooden bridge which had overnight been thrown from the top of one high wall to the other, and how it seemed to them pleasant to think that perhaps the Marquess of Lansdowne was going to step across to visit the Duke of Devonshire that day. But nothing like that happens nowadays, for Devonshire House emptily awaits its destiny and Lansdowne House is held in fief by a distinguished stranger. But there is still something feudal about Lansdowne Passage, for it is a private right-of-way, and on one day every year Lord Lansdowne sends his men to lock and bolt the doors at each end of the passage, as it is his right to do, for the only way a man has of showing that a passage is his passage is by keeping every one else out of it for one day every year, the date to be left to his discretion. Through Lansdowne Passage, on 364 days of the year, the pedestrian (or two pedestrians abreast, but not more than two, for you can't have everything) can walk direct from Curzon Street to Berkeley Street, and thus save himself an endless amount of walking round by Piccadilly or Berkeley Square. Mention must also be made of an old man who, on 364 days of the year, wanders about the passage with a broom, or sometimes leans the broom against the wall and sits down on the upturned end of a narrow wooden box, which he brings with him every morning for that purpose; but he doesn't really have very much time for sitting on his box, for all autumn he sweeps away at the leaves, happily without effect, and for the rest of the year you cannot drop a piece of paper, orange-peel, or cigarette-end without having it swept away at once; and all the year round he gives you greeting as you pass, in a friendly way.

Now, one night in May, a year after the world was said to be at peace, George Tarlyon had reason to be walking in a westerly direction from Dover Street; down Hay Hill he went, and down the covered stairway from Berkeley Street into Lansdowne Passage. The hour was very late, the night pleasantly dark and cool, and the stillness of a sleeping city broken only by the cameo noises of the narrow hours. His steps rang gaily between the high walls of the passage, echoes carelessly tossing themselves from one wall to the other, round and about and every way, and he was almost half-way through before he realised that he was sharing the passage with another: a woman just ahead of him, walking slowly in his direction, but scarcely walking, loitering against the wall, a self-effacing woman of the night. George Tarlyon passed her, and about her face he was not at all curious. A word followed him, a shy word, but he strode on, two steps, three steps—and then another word followed him, louder, and he swung round, not very amiably.

Now the words which women of the night cast into the night as a lure for passing men are few, and their expression limited; and many had been cast to George Tarlyon in passing but never had he chosen one, for that kind of thing did not amuse him, and he was quite popular enough in his own circle. But "My dear!" this woman had cried at his back, softly, not at all insinuatingly: a ladylike voice, without glitter or suggestion, just appealing; and it somehow caught the drum of George Tarlyon's ear, the gentle "my dear," and he swung round to it.

"Well?" asked George Tarlyon, not very amiably. But he made a gesture towards his hat, which is more than most men do on the casual occasion.

She softly came towards him, and stood a long way below him, for she was a short, slight woman: of about middle years, and of the middle sort, plain featured and dressed unnoticeably: very quiet and ladylike she was. From one hand hung a bag, just a little larger than those called hand-bags, and full-looking, as might be that of a sempstress or governess who is absent from her home all day. The little lady smiled, without lure....

"Well?" asked George Tarlyon again, not very amiably.

"It's only," said the little lady, "that I am afraid to walk alone through this passage, and would be very grateful if you would allow me to walk with you as far as the Curzon Street end." Very quiet and ladylike she was.

"Why, of course," said George Tarlyon, politely enough, and more or less dismissed the thing with a swing round. But the little lady walked as slowly with him as she had without him, and he had to accommodate his step to hers.

"But if you're afraid," George Tarlyon just thought to ask, "aren't you even more afraid of addressing a stranger, who might do a little lady some harm in a lonely place like this?"

The little lady smiled gently.

"I saw your face as you passed," she said. "You might be dangerous to a lady in a drawing-room but not in Lansdowne Passage. Unlike some men I know...."

They were walking very slowly, and still had almost half of the passage to go, but George Tarlyon did not say "Hurry up, little lady," thinking she was a pathetic little thing, more than usually pathetic of her kind. But he was not interested in her, and it was only out of politeness that he asked.

"Have you had trouble with one or two, then?"

"With one," she told him softly. She was so small, and he so tall, that her voice seemed to float up to him from somewhere about his knees. He scarcely listened to it. To tell the truth, he was rather tired. "With one," she repeated. "That is why I am afraid of walking through here by myself at night. It happened many years ago, but every detail is still very clear to me."

"He must have frightened you a good deal," said George Tarlyon. Not that he was interested.

"I wouldn't say that," said the little lady gently. "But it was certainly the most important thing that has ever happened in my life. You see, sir, I had to get three pounds that night. I had already made two pounds, for that is all I have ever dared to ask, though sometimes the kinder gentlemen have given me more, but that night I had to make three pounds more, for five pounds a week was the rent of my rooms and already overdue sometime...." The gentle voice ran on, floating up to him from somewhere about his knee, and he scarcely listened. They were quite near the Curzon Street end now, and the words floated upwards quicker....

"Just about where you passed me, I spoke to him—in the passage here. He was a short man, and not a gentleman, but I needed three pounds badly and nowadays you never know who has money and who hasn't, do you? But as soon as he answered and looked at me I knew I had made a mistake, but there's no use being rude, and so I walked on with him. He said something about the coolness of the weather, but although I kept my eyes in front of me, not liking the look of him, you see, I knew very well that he was taking me in sideways. There's no use being silly, I told myself, but I did wish I hadn't got my two pounds in my bag or that some one else would come into the passage, though there's generally little chance of that at this hour of night, unless it's a policeman to smoke a cigarette. And so I hurried on as quick as I could to get to Curzon Street, and we weren't more than half-way through this passage then, but he got hold of my arm and stopped me quick enough. I didn't look at his eyes, for I'd seen them once, you see, but I heard him asking for money, as I knew he would. And then he got hold of my bag by the strap, but I held on tight, saying there was naught in it but powder and a handkerchief, but still not looking at his eyes for I knew their kind well enough. But he held on, and said he would give me some cocaine, 'snow' he called it, if I let him have money, and with his other hand he fumbled in his pocket. 'I'll scream,' I said, and at that he let go of my bag quick enough, so I could hurry on to Curzon Street. He dropped back then, but I was in such a state to get to Curzon Street that I couldn't hear him behind me for the beating of my heart. But behind me he must have been, for I'd just got to within a yard—why, we're at the spot now, I *have* been slow in telling!—when from behind his hand clapped me over the mouth, and I heard his breathing very hoarse at my neck, and then a sharp funny pain in the shoulder-blade took me. As sharp as a knife, they say, but this was a knife, and ever so sharp in the shoulder-blade it was—but it didn't hurt so much as feel funny, if you understand, and everything was so mixed up—his breathing, and the funny feeling in the shoulder-blade, and somewhere a clock striking once, but I went off before it struck again, for it must have been on three o'clock. I never thought death would be like that."

And George Tarlyon looked for the little lady and he saw only the wall, and George Tarlyon ran headlong out of

Lansdowne Passage, and as he ran he heard a clock strike the last two notes of three o'clock.

The Smell in the Library

I

ONE night we were at a party, George Tarlyon and I, and there were also present some other people. It was not, however, a good party, and we left it before eleven o'clock. I cannot remember now how it was that one had gone there so early, but anyway it is of no significance. As we passed out, a misguided fellow said it would get better later on, but I extracted him from Tarlyon's teeth, and so out into the street. A long string of cars stretched from the door towards Park Lane, and here and there chauffeurs stood in sombre groups, and we wondered if they thought they were missing anything. The heat of the crowded rooms had put us in a fever, the night air penetrated our flimsy evening-coats, and we shivered and murmured. From the open windows of the house we had left there followed us down the length of Green Street that asinine blare which is the punishment of England for having lost America; and George Tarlyon muttered that there ought to be a law to prevent people from giving fat-headed parties full of crashing bores and plain women, the joints of whose knees cracked in trying any dance which their mothers had not danced before them. I tried to soothe him and myself by saying that parties were not what they were and there it was; but he would not be soothed, for he had been given a glass of cider-cup in mistake for champagne, and he who touches cider-cup in the watches of the night may neither forget nor forgive.

We walked up Park Lane aimlessly, for we knew not what to do nor whither to go. We were further elated by the fact that we could sum up only one cigarette between us.

I suggested that one might do worse than go to bed, but Tarlyon said it was too early for that. "It is never too early," I said morosely, "to go to bed."

"Pah!" said Tarlyon, and so we walked down Park Lane.

Now it is frequently said that Park Lane is full of Jews, but very few met our eyes, and they might quite well have been Gentiles. There are many illusions prevalent in the provinces about life in the great metropolis of London: such as (*a*) that it is gay: (*b*) that it is wicked: (*c*) that boys will be boys: (*d*) that there is plenty to do when it rains: (*e*) that you have only to go for a walk to see many "well-dressed women in costly furs"; but the one which has even less foundation in fact than any of these is that, life in a great city being what it is, there is never an hour of the twenty-four when the great streets are not, to a student of life, full of matter for observation. But, as George Tarlyon said, you might be a student of life until you burst and still find no matter for observation—though here we were in Park Lane and the hour not yet eleven!

"The whole thing is a ramp," we said. "Now take this matter about the Jews. We have been distinctly given to understand that this Lane is full of Jews—but what do we see? Two 'buses and a policeman. But that leads us to an interesting speculation: can a policeman be a Jew? Has such a thing as a Jewish policeman ever been seen or heard of? And if not, what is it that prevents a policeman from being a Jew? Is the religious feeling among policemen stronger than that among Privy Councillors?"

"Let's ask him," I suggested. The policeman was decorating the corner of Upper Brook Street. Tarlyon asked him, and the policeman said that Vine Street was not so far off as all that, while as for Marlborough Street, it was even nearer. He wasn't there to be accosted, he wasn't, said the policeman wickedly.

"Ho!" said Tarlyon. "And have you been arresting any more respectable old clergymen in Hyde Park for talking to women without an introduction from a bishop? Blast me but I wouldn't dream of entering Hyde Park nowadays, not at night anyway, without a battalion of chaps fringed with torpedo-netting."

"Good-night, constable," I said hurriedly.

"Good-night, sir," said he—a discreet man.

"Pah!" said Tarlyon.

We walked up Park Lane.

And suddenly Tarlyon gripped my arm, and waved his stick and whispered—

"Look at that! Ralph, just look at that!"

Ten yards or so ahead of us loomed the back of a giant. He was striding on with huge steps, a black cloak was flung about him, and he wore no hat. Maybe it was the cloak, swaying this way and that, and one end flapping over a shoulder, that made the man seem taller than he really was—but it was a colossal back.

"It's reminiscent," Tarlyon murmured. "I can't help a feeling about that back—it's reminiscent."

"It's reminiscent," I whispered, "of a back I once lent money to. One hundred pounds it was...."

We quickened our pace. The huge figure passed under the light of a lamp, and the light fell on his bare head, and his hair flamed up like fire.

The huge figure, the arrogant walk, the flaming ginger hair....

"Red Antony!" I murmured.

"And we thought he was dead!" muttered Tarlyon—as though Red Antony could have died without the noise of his death-rattle confounding the thunder of the guns that killed many better men! Could a man who lived so noisily die as other men? And yet, because the lean years of peace had passed without sight or sign of him, we had believed the rumour that had had it that Sir Antony Poole had risen to be sergeant in a Canadian storm battalion and had then died; which had seemed natural in a kind of way, for the worst German shot couldn't, one thought, have consistently missed six-foot-four under a crown of flaming hair.

If there was a man who did not know, or know of, Antony Poole in the careless years before the war, then there must have been something the matter with his eyes or ears. For Red Antony was a famous sight in every crowded place in London, and achieved considerable notentity as the noisiest and worst-tempered rascal since Fighting Fitzgerald of the Regency. He crashed, did Antony, in furious idiocy from row to row and roguery to roguery, so that the day inevitably came when no decent man or woman would be seen speaking to the man. Oh, a calamitous pair, the brothers Poole! For one night his brother, the great Sir Roger, brilliant and sardonic Roger, dark and successful Roger, good sportsman and lovable fellow—one night our Roger put a bullet through his head, and at the inquest the amazed world heard that he had done this unbelievable thing because the police were hammering at the door with a warrant for his arrest on a charge of fraud. This we, his friends, did not believe. The police may have been hammering at the door, we said, but the police are notoriously promiscuous about the doors they hammer at. "Fraud be damned in connection with Roger Poole!"—that is what we said. Why, he was fine, that Roger—*fine!* Thus we mourned him, once the wealthiest and wittiest of our company, and we defended his memory against the few who dared impugn it. But the disappearance of the red giant who was now Sir Antony Poole we did not mourn, for from the day of the inquest, at which he broke down and wept like a stricken child, he had not been seen in London until this night in Park Lane.

II

"Go quietly," Tarlyon restrained me. "We'll learn Red Antony to walk up Park Lane without a hat."

Gently we approached, one on each side of the colossal back.

"Oi!" we cried.

A wrench, and he faced us. We are tall, but we were as children beneath him.

"Oi to you!" snarled Antony. "Who the blazes are you, anyway?" And the great red expanse which was given to Antony for a face surveyed us intolerantly. Never what you might call an easy-tempered man, Red Antony.

"We be friends," said Tarlyon sombrely.

"That's uncommonly original of you," drawled Antony. "I didn't know I had any." And he pretended not to recognise us—for Antony must always act, always play cussed.

"You haven't," Tarlyon grinned. "But mine was just a manner of speaking." He knew his man; and there passed over Red Antony's face that earthquake and tornado which was given him for a smile and a laugh.

"Hell! Always the same Tarlyon! How are you, George?"

"Monstrous," says George.

"But there is no sensation in matter," boomed Red Antony, crushing his hand.

"And this," said Tarlyon, waving his other towards me, "and this, Sir Antony, is your old friend Ralph Wyndham Trevor, whom you may quite well have forgotten, since you owe him a hundred pounds."

Another earthquake across that vast red expanse, so that I feared for the sleep of those mythical Jews....

"Dear old Trevor—fancy having kept you waiting all this time! Here you are, man, here you are." And from somewhere inside his cloak he jerked a pocket-book into my hand and crushed it against my palm. "You can keep the change, old boy, as you're younger than I am and look as though you need it. Always take vegetables with your meat, Trevor."

"I hate to take money from an impoverished baronet," I got in, just to goad him.

"Impoverished nothing!" he boomed, and swung on Tarlyon, who backed a step. "D'you remember, George, that Roger always said I had a *flair* for making money——"

"But he added," Tarlyon said, "that you hadn't got the brain of a louse to back that *flair* up with."

Boomed Antony: "I have studied the ways of lice for five years on end and must inform you, George, that my brain, though moth-eaten, is certainly superior. I have made mints of money. I am fat with money. I roll in money...." He was working himself up into that state of chronic excitement in which he might twist the lamp-post. Breakable or twistable things had always a fascination for Red Antony.

"There, there!" I soothed him. "And we thought the little man was dead!"

"There, there!" said George. "Did he make money, now! And we thought he was lying in some forgotten foreign field with a German bullet in his heart."

Bother the man! He simply had to make a noise each time he opened his mouth. The policeman who had talked Vine Street to us approached.

"Dead! Me dead!" And the sweep of his arm flung wide his cloak, and indeed he looked a mighty man of wrath. "As though a Prooshian bullet could kill me!"

"You are no doubt reserved for a more terrible end," said Tarlyon.

Blessed if the man didn't wilt! That roaring red giant—he wilted.

"Don't say that, George," he begged hoarsely. "It's a fool remark to make, that. You didn't mean it, did you?" And he put the question seriously! We gaped at him.

"He was only being funny," I explained. "He tries his best...."

"I wish you well, Antony," said Tarlyon, out of his surprise.

"God, I need it!" Antony growled surprisingly.

And then I laughed—remembering Red Antony's old way of acting cussed, just to surprise and annoy. He'd do anything to make a fool of some one, that man, even if he had to make a fool of himself in doing it. But as I laughed, Antony looked at me with furious, haggard eyes, and I stopped laughing.

I saw Tarlyon looking at him queerly. He knew Antony much better than I did, for many and many a year ago he was a junior subaltern in the mess when Antony threw a bottle at the head of an extremely superior officer. The bottle was full, the aim was true, and Antony was cashiered with all due pomp and dishonour. But, through all his subsequent follies, Tarlyon had liked him. One couldn't, of course, defend Antony; but the very few who had once liked Red Antony always, somehow, went on liking him. There was something about the man, a sort of tremendous gallantry, an air of shameless bravado, a thunder of individuality, which might have made him a simple and lovable giant—but for a grain of rotten

subtlety somewhere in him. Fine timber worm-eaten, Tarlyon said. Not, of course, said Tarlyon, that himself was anything to write home about.

"What's the matter, old Antony?" Tarlyon asked kindly. "You've changed enormously...."

Now I had noticed no particular change, except, perhaps, that handsome Antony looked his forty years and more; but Tarlyon knew him better.

"How have I changed?" snapped Antony. He hated kindness; he thought he was being pitied.

"You look a bit worn, old boy, that's all," said George lightly.

"If it comes to that, you aren't the man you were, what with war, wine, and women!"

"Talking of wine," I thought to say, "one always understood that you'd die of drink, Antony. That's probably what George meant when he said you looked worn."

I wished I had kept my mouth shut. His eyes blazed over me.... but he restrained himself; and Antony's "restraint" was a portentous business—it made a noise like a fast car with the brakes jammed on.

"Drink!" he said sharply. "I drink nothing to speak of nowadays. There's an end to all things...." Now the lion's bedside manner is a significant thing, and even more significant is it when the lion in the fullness of his strength sways a little, just a little; and what would make Red Antony sway just a little would be enough to put another man under the table, and no dishonour to the strength of his head, either.

"I do not wish," said Antony reasonably, "that you should think me irresponsible through excess of stimulant. The things that are happening to me are not happening through drink, and you must bear that in mind. I am saner than a sane man, though I can hear and see and smell things that a sane man would die of...."

Tarlyon looked at me meaningly. Antony seemed to have forgotten us. Tarlyon took his arm.

"We can't stay here all night," he said. "Let us now leave Park Lane in a body and go to my house...."

Antony woke up; he threw back his head and howled: "Taxi!"

"All right, sir, all right," said the policeman gently. "You don't need to shout like that." That was a brave policeman.

"I insist on shouting," boomed Antony. "Taxi!"

And, thankfully, a taxi appeared from Mount Street, for Red Antony and the police never did mix well. He once arrested two policemen for loitering and took them to Vine Street....

Antony flung open the door. A clock began the lengthy job of striking eleven o'clock.

"We will go to *my* house," said Antony. "I have a charming house, and an appointment to keep in it. Jump in." We jumped in, and we heard him give the driver the address of a house in Regent's Park. How often had we not directed taxis to that house! Tarlyon whistled.

"So you've got Roger's old house!" he murmured.

Antony did not answer. The taxi staggered northwards as best it could.

"I don't see," snapped Antony at last, "why you should gape about it. Getting back to England four months ago, I found the house empty, and took it. It seems natural enough."

"I never said it wasn't," Tarlyon murmured. But he thought it wasn't, and so did I. A brother, on coming back to civilisation after many years' absence, does not immediately leap into the house in which his elder brother blew his brains out—anyway, I wouldn't.

The taxi twisted through the gates, round the little drive, and to the great door. An odd feeling it was, to stand again in front of that door after nine years—but now we faced a house black and still where once had been a house of shining windows, gay with music and the laughter of the most brilliant company in London. Oh, the Georgians, the magnificent

young Georgians—mostly dead!

We told the driver to wait, and followed Antony in. We stood still in the pitch-black hall until he should switch on the light, and in the blaze of light in which the cloaked figure faced us I instantly understood what Tarlyon had meant when he said that Antony had "changed." I can only describe the change by saying that the structure of his face seemed to have fallen into disrepair; its brick-red complexion of old had dwindled to a faint pink, so that one had an idea that any ordinary face would have been a ghastly white; and he looked worn with more than the usual wear of passing years. But the wild eyes were still wild, and uncommonly fine he looked as he faced us in the sombre hall, the huge dandy in the black cloak with the head of flaming hair brushed immaculately back.

He smiled at us with that sudden charm for which women had forgiven him much—too much; he flung out an arm in the grand manner.

"Welcome to the old house," he said. "And for heaven's sake try to look as though you didn't miss Roger."

But the magic of Roger Poole was not, I thought, in the place; the house was now but a shell for a noisy man.

III

"Champagne is indicated," said Antony; and that indication led us to the dining-room—a long, oak-panelled room at the back of the house. The curtains were not drawn across the two French windows, which gave out to a lawn sloping carelessly down to the water of Regent's Park; and in the second in which Antony fumbled for the electric switch the dark shapes of the trees looked like the van of an impenetrable forest. But dark shapes of trees always look more or less like that.

"Didn't you say something about an appointment?" Tarlyon asked vaguely, as Antony ravished the wire off a bottle.

"Did I?" He looked up at us from his business, very thoughtfully. "Oh, did I?"

"Pop!" said the champagne cork.

We drank, and Antony looked at his wrist-watch.

"Damn!" he said. "It's stopped."

"The time being just 11.25," I helped him.

"Thanks," said Antony, very mild, very thoughtful. "Excuse me a moment, will you?" And he strode across the room to the folding doors which led to Roger's old library and card-room. He closed the door behind him, but it did not catch, swung open a few inches. No light filled the dark vertical space.

"Never known him so polite before," I muttered.

"He's absent-minded," said Tarlyon, looking thoughtfully at the dark space.

"What I want to know," he whispered, "is what he's doing in there in the dark?"

"Keeping his appointment," I suggested facetiously.

Tarlyon looked from the door to me.

"Poor devil!" he said softly. I thought he was pitying me for my wit, of which I was never very proud.

He put down his empty glass, dug his hands into his pockets, and lounged to the folding-doors. I never knew a man who could walk so casually as Tarlyon; you never expected him to get anywhere, but he always got there before you expected him to.

He kicked the slightly open door a little wider with the tip of his shoe. I was just behind his shoulder.

"Antony!" he called softly.

From the light in which we stood the library was a pit of darkness. Nothing moved in the pit. There was no sound.

"He's not there," I whispered; and I wondered why I whispered.

"Can you smell anything?" a hoarse voice suddenly asked from the darkness.

Tarlyon lounged into the black room. But, somehow, I did not feel called upon to follow. I leant against the door.

Deeply set in the darkness I could at last make out the faintly white patch which must be Antony's shirt-front; and I wondered what tomfoolery he was up to now, asking stupid questions in a startling voice out of a poisonously dark room. I could smell nothing at all, and didn't expect to.

"What kind of a smell?" Tarlyon asked—in a reasonable tone! He stood just within the door, his back to me.

"Can you smell *nothing* at all?" the hoarse, subdued voice asked again. "But, of course, it's very faint now."

Tarlyon put up his nose and sniffed. I sniffed. More than faint it was, I thought.

"Been smoking?" Tarlyon asked, and he sniffed again.

"No," came a whisper.

"Oh," said Tarlyon. This was lunatic talk, and I was just about to say so when Antony asked sharply:

"Why did you ask?"

"I thought I smelt smoke," said Tarlyon. "Might be cigarette smoke."

"It is," I snapped, for I was smoking a Turkish cigarette just behind his ear.

"You blasted fool!" said Antony—and with such contempt behind it that from being bored I got annoyed. I stretched out my hand on the inside of the library door and switched on the light.

"Turn that out, you fool!" came a frantic roar, and I had a vision of a red giant murdering the distance between us. I've never thanked God for anything so much as for having directed the body of George Tarlyon to be standing between Red Antony and myself. I turned off the light quick enough.

"Steady, Antony, steady!" said Tarlyon.

"Oh, go to hell!" growled Antony.

I thought to myself that we couldn't be very far from it at the moment. But the spell, or smell, it seemed, was broken. I was thankful for that, anyway.

Back in the lighted dining-room Antony emptied his glass; and grinned at me rather shamefacedly.

"Sorry, old boy," he said. I grinned back, as though I had enjoyed it.

Tarlyon asked suddenly!

"Have you got a spare bedroom for me, Antony?"

I stared, Antony stared. Then Antony smiled, and never before had I seen him smile quite like that.

"Thank you, George," he said, almost softly. "Now that's really a friendly action. But I'll be all right—you needn't worry."

Then he addressed me as well; I had never seen Antony so reasonable.

"Come to dinner here to-morrow night," he begged. "Both of you. I can give you quite a good dinner." He seemed very earnest, looking from one to the other of us. I was going to say I was engaged, but Tarlyon answered quickly:

"Right, Antony." And because he looked at me in a certain way, I let it be.

IV

In the taxi, at last, Tarlyon said:

"Ralph, you risked your life by turning on that light, but you did a great service."

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you see anything?"

I then lost my temper.

"No," I shouted. "I neither smelt anything in the dark nor saw anything in the light, except that red lunatic charging at me."

"He was only preserving his illusion," Tarlyon said mildly. "Didn't you see, in that second of light, the open desk just by us, beside the door?"

"I saw nothing but Antony, but quite enough of him."

"Pity. If you had seen the desk, you would have seen a telephone overturned on it, the receiver hanging down, and a revolver on the floor."

This was getting serious. I struck a match and examined Tarlyon's face. He was not smiling.

"Fact," he assured me. "You would have seen the desk just as it was after Roger Poole had shot himself at it."

"You don't mean——"

"I mean, old boy, that Antony has gone and put everything back exactly as he last saw it in Roger's library. Roger, Roger's wife, Antony and another fellow were in the dining-room. The telephone-bell rang in the library and Roger went to answer it, telling Antony to come with him. He didn't turn on the light in the library. The telephone told Roger that the police were after him. And the two in the dining-room heard Roger telling Antony what he thought of him as a man and brother, then they heard a shot; and when they got to the door and switched on the light, they saw Roger dead at the desk and Antony standing where he was standing to-night. Antony went out by the window into the garden—and he has reconstructed the scene exactly as he last saw it, even to a dummy telephone and a revolver! In fact, everything is there except Roger. Silly, isn't it?"

Silly was not the word. "But why, why?"

"That's what I want to find out," said Tarlyon. "Antony is playing some sort of a game with himself, and he's frightening himself to death in doing it. He always was a superstitious ass. Giants usually are, somehow—perhaps because, having nothing physical to fear, they fear the psychic. I'll bet he goes into that library every night at the same time—Roger shot himself at about twenty-five past eleven, by the way. Poor old Antony!"

"But what was all that nonsense about the smell?" I asked.

Tarlyon did not answer. At last he said:

"Did you ever hear, Ralph, the theory that if Judas Iscariot had not come after Jesus he might have done all that Jesus did? But as he found he could not because he was too late, he was doomed to crime. In a sort of far-fetched way it was the same with Roger and Antony. The tragedy of those two brothers has something absurdly, fantastically reasonable about it. You see, Roger was a year older and did all that Antony wanted to do, the fine and brilliant things, while poor Antony could do nothing but make a fool of himself, which he did only too well. Antony would have been a man of many accomplishments, for he's no fool, but for the fact that Roger was before him—so Antony thought. And Roger loved Antony, while Antony hated and admired and feared Roger. And at last, somehow or another, he managed to betray Roger. No one knows what that last moment held for those two—no one knows what lay behind the insults that Roger heaped on Antony at that final moment. For they were overheard, you know, by Roger's wife and the man who was dining there. But something seems to have stuck in Antony's mind and grown very big with years. I'm rather concerned for the poor devil, Ralph. He's still afraid of his elder brother. Or perhaps he feels that Roger left something unsaid which he must hear, and so he wants to recreate him."

It was as the taxi stopped at my door that Tarlyon cried out as though he had made a discovery: "Good God, of course!"

"Of course what?"

"Smoke, you fool! It *was* smoke!"

V

What was our surprise, on entering the dining-room some minutes after nine o'clock the next evening—for Antony dined late—to see the table laid for four! And then a lady came in—a tall, dark young lady, a strange and unusual lady with a flash of very white teeth for a smile and a gardenia alight on the wing of her sleek black hair! I am afraid Tarlyon and I must have seemed very rude, for we were so surprised that we stared. The white teeth flashed at us. We bowed.

"My wife," said Antony. We bowed again. She was the sort of woman one bowed to. Antony's wife!

"Diavalen," said Antony abruptly, "this is Lord Tarlyon and Mr. Trevor."

Diavalen—Lady Poole!—said nothing. With that wonderful trick of flashing those wonderful teeth she didn't need to say anything.

"She's a Creole," said Antony, as we sat at the table. He said it as he might have said that she was an orange. Those white teeth flashed at me, and I smiled back, feeling an ass. There didn't seem much to say about her being a Creole....

I don't know how Tarlyon felt about it, but it took me some time to get my wind. "My wife," says Antony! Never a word nor a sign about being married—to that glorious, dark, alien creature with the flashing teeth and sleek black hair! Diavalen the Creole! Just like Red Antony to marry a Creole called Diavalen and then spring her on to you with a "my wife." I remembered Antony once saying, years and years ago: "Never give away gratuitous information, old boy." But there are limits. And one of them is to have a wife with flashing teeth, a gardenia in her hair, and a name like Diavalen, and then throw her in with the soup.

Red Antony was never what you might call a good host: not, particularly, at the beginning of dinner. To-night he was morose. But Tarlyon talked—to Lady Poole. It would take more than a lovely Creole to baffle Tarlyon. He seemed to have inside information as to what were the subjects best calculated to excite interest in a Creole married to a morose English baronet with ginger hair. Diavalen did not talk. But one did not realise that she wasn't talking, for she was wonderfully expressive with her smiling, flashing, teeth. She seemed to have discovered the art of using teeth for something besides eating.

As Tarlyon talked to her she turned her face towards him, and of this I took advantage to stare at her face bit by bit. The perfection of that face was a challenge to a right-thinking man. "It is too small," I thought. But it was not too small. "It is too white," I thought. But it was not too white. For quite a long time I could not wrench my eyes away from those flashing teeth and scarlet curling lips—they fascinated me. Her face was white, the gardenia in her hair looked almost yellow beside the whiteness of Diavalen's face; and I thought to myself that that white complexion was a considerable achievement, for I was sure her skin underneath was faintly, deliriously brown. It was a small face. It was a decoration, enchanting and unreal. And in the decoration were painted in luminous paint two large black eyes; the eyelashes swept over them, often she half closed them—they were very lazy black eyes; and deep in them there was a sheen, as of a reflection of distant fire. I did not like the lady's eyes very much, I don't know why. But as to that sleek black hair in which lay a gardenia like a light in silken darkness—you felt that you simply must run your hand over that hair to see if it was as beautifully sleek and silky as it looked, and you wouldn't have minded betting that it was. She was the most strangely lovely woman I have ever seen. And she was the most silent.

Even Tarlyon was at last baffled by the silence of Diavalen. A silence fell. The teeth flashed at me, and I was just about to say something to her when Antony's voice hit the drum of my ear and I dropped my fork.

"I shouldn't trouble," said Antony. "She's dumb."

That is why I dropped my fork. The servant picked it up and gave me another. I made a considerable business of it, and then I ate furiously. Red Antony, vile Antony! I didn't look at Tarlyon. He was furious, I knew. He was a man who did not take a very liberal view of jokes like that. But the worst of Antony was that he didn't care what view any one took; he

just said the first thing that came into his great red head.

If the dinner (which was excellent as to food and wine) had been a frost before, it was, naturally, not a howling success after that. The only thing to do was to pretend that Antony had not spoken. It seemed too silly to say to the lovely Creole: "Oh, I'm *so* sorry!" Poor Diavalen! But I couldn't pretend, I simply could not find anything to say which didn't need an answer. Just try being suddenly planted with a dumb woman and see if conversation flows naturally from you.

Tarlyon and Antony talked about English heavyweight boxers. Antony was himself a super-heavyweight, and seemed to have a poor opinion of English heavyweights. He wanted to know whether their weight was calculated by the noise they made on being smitten to the ground in the first round. He said that he was tired of opening a newspaper only to read of the domestic history of Famous British Boxers and of seeing photographs of the wives, mothers and children of Famous British Boxers. He said that the whole idea of the press was to impress on the public how gentle, amiable and loving Famous British Boxers were in the home. He pointed out that the whole trouble lay in the fact that Famous British Boxers were too damned gentle, amiable, and loving in the ring. In fact, Antony, having put the lid on his wife, had woken up.

Then, at last, Diavalen rose, and we rose. I rushed to the door and held it open. Her teeth flashed at Tarlyon, and he bowed like a courtier. As she passed Antony, he said, "Good-night, Diavalen," but he said it as though he didn't care whether her night was good or bad. As she passed Antony she gave him a look out of her large, black eyes. I was glad I did not know what that look said, but I was sure that Antony deserved it. "Good-night, Lady Poole," I said; teeth flashed at me, a touch of pleasant scent hovered faintly, and Diavalen was gone.

"Heavens, she's lovely!" I whispered, as I joined them at the table.

Tarlyon's fingers played with the stem of his port-glass.

"Would you mind explaining, Antony," he asked dangerously, "why you chose that infamous way of telling us that your wife was—well, not quite like the rest of us?" There was, I agreed, something blasphemous about the ghastly word "dumb" in relation to that lovely creature.

Red Antony leant back in his chair and dug his hands deep in his pockets, so that his white shirt-front stuck out like the breast-plate of a warrior. He looked bored.

"Favourite trick of hers," he explained morosely. "Always tries to act as though she wasn't dumb. If you had to live with that silly pretence it would get on your nerves, I can tell you. She does it very well, I admit. Takes a pride in it—making a fool of other people, I call it. On board ship from New York she put it over quite a number of people for a day or two. Lord, it would have got on any one's nerves, the way she grinned and grinned and showed her teeth! Why not be honest and say one's dumb and be done with it? Or let me say it! There's no crime in being dumb, especially with a beautiful face like that. But she won't see it, she must smile and flash her teeth—she's got a repertoire of grins that would astonish a movie star; and she's so proud of them that even if she could speak she wouldn't. And sometimes all that grinning and toothwork gets me so raw that I could put back my head and howl—and she knows it. Sorry I offended you, George. But I'm nervy these days. I'm raw—*raw!*" He shouted that last word at us with a thump on the table; and raw he looked, with the eyes blazing out of him, and his once huge, once red, once jolly face shrunk to a mockery of itself, with the skin drawn tight across his jaws and hollow in the cheeks.

Tarlyon picked up a liqueur-glass which the thump had upset. "Sorry about your unhappy marriage, Antony," he said, "But, you know, it takes a Napoleon to marry a beautiful Creole. How did it happen?"

"How?" And Antony laughed; at least he made a noise which was perhaps intended to sound like laughter. "How? Because she made it happen—how else? D'you think because she's dumb that she hasn't got more fascination than a thousand women rolled together? Those eyes? Met eyes like that before, George? If hell has a face its eyes will be like that. I *had* to marry her ... In Mexico where I went to after the Armistice. I suppose you fellows remember that I went to Mexico three years before the war. I was in love with the girl who became Roger's wife—inevitable, wasn't it, that the only woman I ever loved should fall to Roger? He didn't do it on purpose, of course—it just happened. So I went to Mexico, to try to do something which Roger could not do before me. Last chance kind of thing, you know—" The rain of words faded out of him. He had moved considerably from the subject of Diavalen, but who could hold a haunted face like that to a subject? I wished I could, for I didn't want him to run amok about Roger. There was something—well, indecent, in talking about a man dead nine years or more as though he were alive and still wanting to "put it across" Antony at every turn. I wished Tarlyon would say something, but he was silent, his fingers fiddling with the stem of his

port-glass. Antony was drinking next to nothing; round about his coffee-cup were at least six quarter-smoked cigarettes, and now he began to maul a cigar. I never saw him smoke that cigar.

"In Mexico," Antony said softly, "I found oil. It was very good oil, as Roger said later, but there wasn't much of it. My luck again! But I made Roger share it this time. You remember how I reappeared in England? Through that window over there, while Roger was giving a big dinner-party, sitting where I'm sitting now. You were here, George. Roger and I made it up before the lot of you—after a silence of years. Entirely on my side, the quarrel—Roger always loved me. We made it up, you remember, George? I wanted, you see, to plant Roger with that oil. Cascan Oil—it sounded like a big thing at the time. That was the last big dinner-party Roger ever gave. He was unhappy at home—some love misunderstanding—and he took to me, Roger did. He went head over heels into that bucket-shop. Of course he soon saw through me and my oil—the man wasn't born who could take Roger in—but he let the company go on. He wanted to see how far I'd go. Giving me my head, you know. He had packets of money in reserve, and thought he could put the thing right any moment. But he got reckless—watching me and wondering how far I'd go. Roger had always loved me ever since we were children—he never thought of me but as a naughty baby with a bee in my red head about him. I could see all the time he was wondering how far I *dared* go. And he was unhappy at home, poor Roger; he and his wife somehow couldn't get their particular ways of loving each other to work well together. So he had nothing to do but get reckless and chuckle over the naughty baby. I went the limit. The bucket-shop crashed on Roger's head. He tried to pull up, chucked his money in, and other people's, but it wouldn't save it. Clear case of dirty work. A greasy bubble, Cascan Oil. Left a nasty mess when it burst. And all the papers signed in Roger's name. Telephone rang in the next room while we were in here. I was sitting where you are, Trevor. Roger looks at me with a kind of crooked smile. 'Come with me,' he says, and I went. Into that room, the library. Roger didn't trouble to switch on the light; the telephone was on the desk beside the door. The police were after him, said the man on the telephone—the police after Sir Roger Poole, Bart., M.P., and all the rest of it! 'Listen,' says Roger. And I listened while he told me a few things about myself. 'A poor husk of a man,' he called me. 'A graveyard of a brother you are,' he said. 'And the epitaph on your grave will be *Dolor Ira*,' he said, for Roger was a great Latin scholar and could lash out bits of Tacitus as easily as a parson might give you the Bible. I thought he was going to shoot me, I was ready for it—but he'd shot himself. Roger loved me, you know——"

"Then why the hell," Tarlyon blazed out, "did you take this cursed house?"

Antony mauled his cigar.

"Because," he said with a grin, "it just happened that way. It was fate to find it empty—a fine, large house like this at a low rent while all England was yelling for houses. But I might not have taken it if Diavalen had been against it——"

"Oh," said Tarlyon to that.

Antony looked at his wrist-watch, and jumped up in a mighty hurry. "God, the time's gone! Excuse me a moment."

"We will not!" cried Tarlyon, and had his back against the library door almost before you saw him leave the table.

But Antony walked his way to the library door without a word.

"Don't, old Antony, don't!" Tarlyon begged.

"Out of my way!" said Antony. He said it as though he was thinking of something else, which was Antony's most dangerous way of saying anything.

Now Red Antony was a giant, and irresponsible at that. The two of us couldn't have held him from that library door. Tarlyon let him pass with a wicked word, and has regretted it ever since. Antony slammed the door behind him, and we heard the twist of the key.

Without a word to me Tarlyon was at the French window; opened it, and disappeared. I stayed. I was extremely uncomfortable in that mad-house, you understand. Perhaps two minutes passed, perhaps ten. Where the devil was Tarlyon? And then I heard through the library door the thud of something falling. And then in there a window smashed, a sharp smash. I measured my distance from that door and crashed my shoulder at it, and fell into the library on top of the panel.

"Light," said Tarlyon's voice. I switched it on. On the floor between us was a heap of a man face downwards, with the back of a red head half-screwed under an outstretched arm. And there was red on the back of Tarlyon's hand where he

had put it through the window.

We knelt each side of Red Antony, and turned him over.

"Dead," I said.

"Not he!" said Tarlyon. "He's fainted—from fright." But he knew as well as I did that Antony was dead—from fright. The huge bulk was as limp as a half-filled sack as we lifted it a little. Antony's eyes were wide open, and they were like the eyes of a child that has just been thrashed.

"He's been shot," I said suddenly.

"There was no noise," said Tarlyon, but he looked at me. There had been no noise, but there was the faint, acrid taste of pistol-smoke in the air. It's unmistakable, that faint, acrid smell of a revolver just spent. But Antony had not been shot.

"It wasn't an illusion, then!" Tarlyon whispered softly. "That smell ... of Roger's revolver! And it's killed Antony in the end!"

I stared down at the poor haunted face. And then I heard Tarlyon whisper: "My God!" And again: "My God—look at that!" But I did not look. I knew he was staring over my shoulder, and I was afraid to look. I was afraid of what I would see. And then I twisted my head over my shoulder, towards the far end of the room, where there was a little door from the hall. And I saw the thing sitting squat in the corner, the black thing with white teeth flashing in a white face and a gardenia in her hair. In the palm of one hand was a little golden bowl, and from this bowl floated up a wisp of smoke, just a wisp of smoke against the blackness of her dress, and this was the faint, acrid smell of a spent bullet. And Diavalen was laughing—the dumb woman was laughing with all the glory of ivory teeth and scarlet lips.... We left the thing to its joke. We went out by the window, and did not remember our hats and sticks.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Archaic and inconsistent spelling retained.

Minor punctuation errors corrected without notice.