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# TWELVE TALES

WITH A HEADPIECE, A TAILPIECE, AND AN INTERMEZZO:

BEING SELECT STORIES

**BY GRANT ALLEN**

*Chosen and Arranged by the Author*

LONDON  
GRANT RICHARDS  
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1900

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## INTRODUCTION

*The existence of this volume is due, not to my own initiative, but to that of my enterprising kinsman and publisher, **Mr. Grant Richards**. He it was who first suggested to me the idea that it might be worth while to collect in one volume such of my scattered short stories as I judged to possess most permanent value. In order for us to carry out his plan, however, it became necessary to obtain the friendly co-operation of **Messrs. Chatto and Windus**, to whom belong the copyrights of my three previous volumes of *Collected Tales*, published respectively under the titles of **Strange Stories**, **The Beckoning Hand**, and **Ivan Greet's Masterpiece**, some pieces from each of which series I desired to include in the present selection. Fortunately, **Messrs. Chatto and Windus** fell in with our scheme with that kindness which I have learned to expect from them in all their dealings; and an arrangement was thus effected by which I am enabled to present here certain stories from their three volumes. Together with these I have arranged an equal number of tales from other sources—most of which have hitherto appeared in periodicals only, while one is entirely new, never having been before printed.*

*I may perhaps be permitted, without blame, to seize the occasion of this selected edition in order to offer a few **bibliographical remarks** on the origin and inception of my short stories. For many years after I took to the trade of author, I confined my writings to scientific or quasi-scientific subjects, having indeed little or no idea that I possessed in the germ the faculty of story-telling. But on one occasion, about the year 1880 (if I recollect aright), wishing to contribute an article to **Belgravia** on the improbability of a man's being able to recognise a ghost as such, even if he saw one, and the impossibility of his being able to apply any test of credibility to an apparition's statements, I ventured for the better development of my subject to throw the argument into the form of a narrative. I did not regard this narrative as a story: I looked upon it merely as a convenient method of displaying a scientific truth. However, the gods and **Mr. Chatto** thought otherwise. For, a month or two later, **Mr. Chatto** wrote to ask me if I could supply **Belgravia** with 'another story.' Not a little surprised at this request, I sat down, like an obedient workman, and tried to write one at my employer's bidding. I distrusted my own ability to do so, it is true: but **Mr. Chatto**, I thought, being a dealer in the article, must know better than I; and I was far too poor a craftsman at that time to refuse any reasonable offer of employment. So I did my best, **crassa Minerva**. To my great astonishment, my second story was accepted and printed like my first: the curious in such matters (if there be any) will find them both in the volume entitled **Strange Stories** (published by **Messrs. Chatto and Windus**) under the headings of 'Our Scientific Observations on a Ghost,' and 'My New Year's Eve among the Mummies.'*

*From that day forward for some years I continued at **Mr. Chatto's** request to supply short stories from time to time to **Belgravia**, a magazine which he then edited. But I did not regard these my tentative tales in any serious light: and, fearing that they might stand in the way of such little scientific reputation as I possessed, I published them all under the prudent pseudonym of **J. Arbuthnot Wilson**. I do not know that I should have got much further on the downward path which leads to fiction, had it not been for the intervention of my good friend the late **Mr. James Payn**. When he undertook the editorship of the **Cornhill**, he determined at first to turn it into a magazine of stories only, and began to look about him for fresh blood to press into the service. Among the writers he then secured (I seem to recollect) were **Dr. Conan Doyle** and **Mr. Stanley Weyman**. Now, under **Mr. Leslie Stephen's** editorship, I had been accustomed to contribute to the **Cornhill** occasional papers on scientific subjects: and one morning, by an odd coincidence, I received two notes simultaneously from the new editor. The first of them was addressed to me by my real name; in it, **Mr. Payn** courteously but briefly informed me that he returned one such scientific article which I had sent for his consideration, as he had determined in future to exclude everything but fiction from the magazine—a decision which he afterwards saw reason to rescind. The second letter, forwarded through **Messrs. Chatto and Windus**, was addressed to me under my assumed name of **J. Arbuthnot Wilson**, and begged that unknown person to submit to **Mr. Payn** a few stories 'like your admirable **Mr. Chung**.' Now, this **Mr. Chung** was a tale of a Chinese *attaché* in England, who fell in love with an English girl: I had first printed it, like the others of that date, in the pages of **Belgravia**. (Later on, it was included in the volume of **Strange Stories**, where any hypothetical explorer may still find it.) Till that moment, I had never regarded my excursions into fiction in any serious light, setting down **Mr. Chatto's** liking for them to that gentleman's amiability, or else to his well-known scientific **penchant**. But when a novelist like **Mr. James Payn** spoke well of my work—nay, more; desired to secure it for his practically new magazine—I began to think there might really be something in my stories worth following up by a more serious effort.*

Thus encouraged, I launched out upon what I venture to think was the first voyage ever made in our time into the Romance of the Clash of Races—since so much exploited. I wrote two short stories, 'The Reverend John Creedy' and 'The Curate of Churnside,' both of which I sent to **Mr. Payn**, in response to his invitation. He was kind enough to like them, and they were duly published in the **Cornhill**. At the time, their reception was disappointing: but gradually, since then, I have learned from incidental remarks that many people read them and remembered them; indeed, I have reason to think that these first serious efforts of mine at telling a story were among my most successful attempts at the art of fiction. Once launched as a professional story-teller by this fortuitous combination of circumstances, I continued at the trade, and wrote a number of tales for the **Cornhill** and other magazines, up till the year 1884, when I collected a few of them into a volume of **Strange Stories**, under my own name, for the first time casting off the veil of anonymity or the cloak of a pseudonym. In the same year I also began my career as a novelist properly so called, by producing my first long novel, **Philistia**.

From that date forward, I have gone on writing a great many stories, long and short, whose name is Legion. Out of the whole number of shorter ones, I now select the present set, as illustrating best in different keys the various types of tale to which I have devoted myself.

Four of these pieces have already appeared as reprints in the volume entitled **Strange Stories**—namely, 'The Reverend John Creedy,' from the **Cornhill**; 'The Child of the Phalanstery,' from **Belgravia**; and 'The Curate of Churnside' and 'The Backslider,' both from the **Cornhill**. One, 'John Cann's Treasure,' also from the **Cornhill**, has been reprinted in the volume called **The Beckoning Hand**. Two more have been included in the collection entitled **Ivan Greet's Masterpiece**: namely, 'Ivan Greet's Masterpiece' itself, originally issued as a Christmas number of the **Graphic**; and 'The Abbé's Repentance,' which first saw the light in the **Contemporary Review**. The remainder have never appeared before, except in periodicals. The Headpiece, 'A Confidential Communication,' came out in the **Sketch**. So did 'Frasine's First Communion.' 'Wolverden Tower' formed a Christmas number of the **Illustrated London News**. 'Janet's Nemesis' was contributed to the **Pall Mall Magazine**. The Intermezzo, 'Langalula,' is from the **Speaker**, as is also the Tailpiece, 'A Matter of Standpoint.' 'Cecca's Lover' made his original bow in **Longman's Magazine**. Finally, 'The Churchwarden's Brother' is entirely new, never having appeared in public before on this or any other stage. I have to thank the editors and proprietors of the various periodicals above enumerated for their courteous permission to present afresh the contributions to their respective pages.

I set forth this little Collection of Tales in all humility, and with no small diffidence. In an age so prolific in high genius as our own, I know how hard it is for mere modest industry to catch the ear of a too pampered public. I shall be amply content if our masters permit me to pick up the crumbs that fall from the table of the Hardys, the Kiplings, the Merediths, and the Wellses.

G. A.

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# HEADPIECE

## A CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION

Ah, he *was* a mean-spirited beggar, that fellow Sibthorpe! As mean-spirited a beggar as ever *I* come across. Yes, that's who I mean; that's him; the fellow as was murdered. I s'pose you'd call it murdered, now I come to think of it. But, Lord, he was such a mean-spirited chap, he wouldn't be enough to 'ang a dog for!

'Charitable,' eh? 'A distinguished philanthropist!' Well, I can't say as *I* ever thought much of his philanthropy. He was always down on them as tries to earn a honest livin' tramping about the country. Know how he was murdered? Well, yes, I should think I did! I'm just about the fust livin' authority in England on that there subjeck.

Well, come to that, I don't mind if I do tell you. You're a straight sort of chap, you are. You're one of these 'ere politicals. I ain't afraid o' trustin' you. You're not one of them as 'ud peach on a pal to 'andle a reward o' fifty guineas. And it's a rum story too. But mind, I tell you what I tell you in confidence. There's not another chap in all this prison I'd tell as much to.

I'd always knowed 'im, since I was no bigger nor that. Old fool he was too; down on public-'ouses an' races an' such, an' always ready to subscribe to anything for the elevation of the people. People don't want to be elevated, says I; silly pack o' modern new-fangled rubbish. I sticks to the public-'ouses.

Well, we was dead-beat that day. Liz an' me had tramped along all the way from Aldershot. Last we come to the black lane by the pine-trees after you've crossed the heath. Loneliest spot just there that I know in England. The Gibbet 'Ill's to the right, where the men was hung in chains; and the copse is to the left, where we 'ad that little brush one time with the keepers. Liz sat down on the heather—she was dead-beat, she was—behind a clump o' fuzz. An' I lay down beside 'er.

She was a good 'un, Liz. She followed me down through thick and thin like a good 'un. No bloomin' nonsense about Liz, I can tell you. I always liked 'er. And though I *did* get into a row with her that mornin' afore she died, and kick 'er about the ribs a bit—but, there, I'm a-digressin', as the parson put it; and the jury brought it in 'Death by misadventure.' That was a narrow squeak that time. I didn't think I'd swing for 'er, 'cause she 'it me fust; but I did think they'd 'a' brought it in somethin' like manslaughter.

However, as I say, I'm a-digressin' from the story. It was like this with old Sibthorpe. We was a-lyin' under the gorse bushes, wonderin' to ourselves 'ow we'd raise the wind for a drink—for we was both of us just about as dry as they make 'em—when suddenly round the corner, with his 'at in his 'and, and his white 'air a-blowin' round his 'ead, like an old fool as he was, who should come but the doctor. Liz looks at me, and I looks at Liz.

'It's that bloomin' old idjit, Dr. Sibthorpe,' says she. 'He give me a week once.'

I 'ad my knife in my 'and. I looks at it, like this: then I looks up at Liz. She laughs and nods at me. 'E couldn't see neither of us behind the bush of fuzz. 'Arst 'im fust,' says Liz, low; 'an' then, if he don't fork out——' She drawed her finger so, right across her throat, an' smiles. Oh, the *was* a good 'un!

Well, up I goes an' begins, reglar asker's style. 'You ain't got a copper about you, sir,' says I, whinin' like, 'as you could give a pore man as has tramped, without a bit or a sup, all the way from Aldershot?'

'E looks at me an' smiles—the mean old hypocrite! 'I never give to tramps,' says 'e. Then 'e looks at me agin. 'I know you,' says 'e. 'You've been up afore me often.'

'An' I knows *you*,' says I, drawin' the knife; 'an' I knows where you keeps your money. An' I ain't a-goin' to be up afore you agin, not if *I* knows it.' An', with that, I rushes up, an' just goes at him blind with it.

Well, he fought like a good 'un for his life, that he did. You wouldn't 'a' thought the old fool had so much fight left in him. But Liz stuck to me like a brick, an' we got him down at last, an' I gave him one or two about the 'ead as quieted him. It was mostly kickin'—no blood to speak of. Then we dragged him aside among the heather, and covered him up a little bit, an' made all tidy on the road where we'd stuck him.

'Take his watch, Liz,' says I.

Well, would you believe it? He was a magistrate for the county, and lived in the 'All, an' was 'eld the richest gentleman for ten mile about; but when Liz fished out his watch, what sort do you think it was? I give you my word for it, a common Waterbury!

'You put that back, Liz,' says I. 'Put that back in the old fool's pocket. Don't go carryin' it about to incriminate yourself, free, gratis, for nothin',' says I; 'it ain't worth sixpence.'

"Ave you his purse?" says she.

'Yes, I 'ave,' says I. 'An' when we gets round the corner, we'll see what's in it.'

Well, so we did; an', would you believe it, agin, when we come to look, there was two ha'penny stamps and a lock of a child's 'air; and, s'elp me taters, that's all that was in it!

'It ain't right,' says I, 'for people to go about takin' in other people with regard to their wealth,' says I. "Ere's this bloomin' old fool 'as misled us into s'posing he was the richest man in all the county, and not a penny in his purse! It's downright dishonest.'

Liz snatches it from me, an' turns it inside out. But it worn't no good. Not another thing in it!

Well, she looks at me, an' I looks at her. 'You fool,' says she, 'to get us both into a blindfold scrape like this, without knowin' whether or not he'd got the money about him! I guess we'll both swing for it.'

'You told me to,' says I.

'That's a lie,' says she. Liz was always free-spoken.

I took her by the throat. 'Young woman,' says I, 'you keep a civil tongue in your 'ead,' says I, 'or, by George, you'll follow him!'

Then we looks at one another agin; and the humour of it comes over us—I was always one as 'ad a sense of humour—an' we busts out laughin'.

'Sold!' says I.

'Sold!' says Liz, half cryin'.

An' we both sat down, an' looked agin at one another like a pair of born idjits.

Then it come over us gradjally what a pack o' fools that there man had made of us. The longer I thought of it, the angrier it made me. The mean-spirited old blackguard! To be walking around the roads without a penny upon him!

'You go back, Liz,' says I, 'an' put that purse where we found it, in his weskit pocket.'

Liz looked at me an' crouched. 'I daren't,' says she, cowerin'. She was beginning to get frightened.

I took her by the 'air. 'By George!' says I, 'if you don't——' An' she saw I meant it.

Well, back she crawled, rather than walked, all shiverin'; an', as for me, I set there on the heather an' watched her. By an' by, she crawled round again. 'Done it?' says I. An' Liz, lookin' white as a sheet, says, 'Yes, I done it.'

'I wasn't goin' to carry that about with me,' says I, 'for the coppers to cop me. Now they'll put it in the papers: "Deceased's watch and purse were found on him untouched, so that robbery was clearly not the motive of the crime." Git up, Liz, you fool, an' come along on with me.'

Up she got, an' come along. We crept down the valley, all tired as we was, without a sup to drink; an' we reached the high-road, all in among the bracken, an' we walked together as far as Godalming. That was all. The p'lice set it down to revenge, an' suspected the farmers. But, ever since then, every time I remember it, it makes me 'ot with rage to think a man o' property like him should go walking the roads, takin' other people in, without a farden in his pocket. It was the biggest disappointment ever I had in my life. To think I might 'a' swung for an old fool like that! A great philanthropist, indeed! Why, he'd ought to 'a' been ashamed o' himself. Not one blessed farden! I tell you, it always makes me 'ot to think

o' it.



# I

## THE REVEREND JOHN CREEDY

# I

'On Sunday next, the 14th inst., the Reverend John Creedy, B.A., of Magdalen College, Oxford, will preach in Walton Magna Church on behalf of the Gold Coast Mission.' Not a very startling announcement that; and yet, simple as it looks, it stirred Ethel Berry's soul to its inmost depths. For Ethel had been brought up by her Aunt Emily to look upon foreign missions as the one thing on earth worth living for and thinking about; and the Reverend John Creedy, B.A., had a missionary history of his own, strange enough even in these strange days of queer juxtapositions between utter savagery and advanced civilisation.

'Only think,' she said to her aunt, as they read the placard on the schoolhouse board, 'he's a real African negro, the vicar says, taken from a slaver on the Gold Coast when he was a child, and brought to England to be educated. He's been to Oxford and got a degree; and now he's going out again to Africa to convert his own people. And he's coming down to the vicar's to stay on Wednesday.'

'It's my belief,' said old Uncle James, Aunt Emily's brother, the superannuated skipper, 'that he'd much better stop in England for ever. I've been a good bit on the Coast myself in my time, after palm oil and such, and my opinion is that a nigger's a nigger anywhere, but he's a sight less of a nigger in England than out yonder in Africa. Take him to England, and you make a gentleman of him: send him home again, and the nigger comes out at once in spite of you.'

'Oh, James,' Aunt Emily put in, 'how can you talk such unchristianlike talk, setting yourself up against missions, when we know that all the nations of the earth are made of one blood?'

'I've always lived a Christian life myself, Emily,' answered Uncle James, 'though I have cruised a good bit on the Coast, too, which is against it, certainly; but I take it a nigger's a nigger whatever you do with him. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, the Scripture says, nor the leopard his spots, and a nigger he'll be to the end of his days; you mark my words, Emily.'

On Wednesday, in due course, the Reverend John Creedy arrived at the vicarage, and much curiosity there was throughout the village of Walton Magna that week to see this curious new thing—a coal-black parson. Next day, Thursday, an almost equally unusual event occurred to Ethel Berry; for, to her great surprise, she got a little note in the morning inviting her up to a tennis-party at the vicarage the same afternoon. Now, though the vicar called on Aunt Emily often enough, and accepted her help readily for school feasts and other village festivities of the milder sort, the Berrys were hardly up to that level of society which is commonly invited to the parson's lawn tennis parties. And the reason why Ethel was asked on this particular Thursday must be traced to a certain pious conspiracy between the vicar and the secretary of the Gold Coast Evangelistic Society. When those two eminent missionary advocates had met a fortnight before at Exeter Hall, the secretary had represented to the vicar the desirability of young John Creedy's taking to himself an English wife before his departure. 'It will steady him, and keep him right on the Coast,' he said, 'and it will give him importance in the eyes of the natives as well.' Whereto the vicar responded that he knew exactly the right girl to suit the place in his own parish, and that by a providential conjunction she already took a deep interest in foreign missions. So these two good men conspired in all innocence of heart to sell poor Ethel into African slavery; and the vicar had asked John Creedy down to Walton Magna on purpose to meet her.

That afternoon Ethel put on her pretty sateen and her witching little white hat, with two natural dog-roses pinned on one side, and went pleased and proud up to the vicarage. The Reverend John Creedy was there, not in full clerical costume, but arrayed in tennis flannels, with only a loose white tie beneath his flap collar to mark his newly acquired spiritual dignity. He was a comely-looking negro enough, full-blooded, but not too broad-faced nor painfully African in type; and when he was playing tennis his athletic quick limbs and his really handsome build took away greatly from the general impression of an inferior race. His voice was of the ordinary Oxford type, open, pleasant, and refined, with a certain easy-going air of natural gentility, hardly marred by just the faintest tinge of the thick negro blur in the broad vowels. When he talked to Ethel—and the vicar's wife took good care that they should talk together a great deal—his conversation was of a sort that she seldom heard at Walton Magna. It was full of London and Oxford; of boat-races at

Iffley and cricket matches at Lord's; of people and books whose very names Ethel had never heard—one of them was a Mr. Mill, she thought, and another a Mr. Aristotle,—but which she felt vaguely to be one step higher in the intellectual scale than her own level. Then his friends, to whom he alluded casually, not like one who airs his grand acquaintances, were such very distinguished people. There was a real live lord, apparently, at the same college with him, and he spoke of a young baronet whose estate lay close by as plain 'Harrington of Christchurch,' without any 'Sir Arthur'—a thing which even the vicar himself would hardly have ventured to do. She knew that he was learned too; as a matter of fact, he had taken a fair second class in Greats at Oxford; and he could talk delightfully of poetry and novels. To say the truth, John Creedy, in spite of his black face, dazzled poor Ethel, for he was more of a scholar and a gentleman than anybody with whom she had ever before had the chance of conversing on equal terms.

When Ethel turned the course of talk to Africa, the young parson was equally eloquent and fascinating. He didn't care about leaving England for many reasons, but he would be glad to do something for his poor brethren. He was enthusiastic about missions; that was a common interest; and he was so anxious to raise and improve the condition of his fellow-negroes, that Ethel couldn't help feeling what a noble thing it was of him thus to sacrifice himself, cultivated gentleman as he was, in an African jungle, for his heathen countrymen. Altogether, she went home from the tennis-court that afternoon thoroughly overcome by John Creedy's personality. She didn't for a moment think of falling in love with him—a certain indescribable race-instinct set up an impassable barrier against that—but she admired him and was interested in him in a way that she had never yet felt with any other man.

As for John Creedy, he was naturally charmed with Ethel. In the first place, he would have been charmed with any English girl who took so much interest in himself and his plans; for, like all negroes, he was frankly egotistical, and delighted to find a white lady who seemed to treat him as a superior being. But, in the second place, Ethel was really a charming, simple English village lassie, with sweet little manners and a delicious blush, who might have impressed a far less susceptible man than the young negro parson. So, whatever Ethel felt, John Creedy felt himself truly in love. And, after all, John Creedy was in all essentials an educated English gentleman, with the same chivalrous feelings towards a pretty and attractive girl that every English gentleman ought to have.

On Sunday morning Aunt Emily and Ethel went to the parish church, and the Reverend John Creedy preached the expected sermon. It was almost his first—sounded like a trial trip, Uncle James muttered,—but it was undoubtedly what connoisseurs describe as an admirable discourse. John Creedy was free from any tinge of nervousness—negroes never know what that word means,—and he spoke fervently, eloquently, and with much power of manner about the necessity for a Gold Coast Mission. Perhaps there was really nothing very original or striking in what he said, but his way of saying it was impressive and vigorous. The negro, like many other lower races, has the faculty of speech largely developed, and John Creedy had been noted as one of the readiest and most fluent talkers at the Oxford Union debates. When he enlarged upon the need for workers, the need for help, the need for succour and sympathy in the great task of evangelisation, Aunt Emily and Ethel forgot his black hands, stretched out open-palmed towards the people, and felt only their hearts stirred within them by the eloquence and enthusiasm of that appealing gesture.

The end of it all was, that instead of a week John Creedy stopped for two months at Walton Magna, and during all that time he saw a great deal of Ethel. Before the end of the first fortnight he walked out one afternoon along the river-bank with her, and talked earnestly of his expected mission.

'Miss Berry,' he said, as they sat to rest awhile on the parapet of the little bridge by the weeping willows, 'I don't mind going to Africa, but I can't bear going all alone. I am to have a station entirely by myself up the Ancobra river, where I shall see no other Christian face from year's end to year's end. I wish I could have had some one to accompany me.'

'You will be very lonely,' Ethel answered. 'I wish indeed you could have some companionship.'

'Do you really?' John Creedy went on. 'It is not good for man to live alone; he wants a helpmate. Oh, Miss Ethel, may I venture to hope that perhaps, if I can try to deserve you, you will be mine?'

Ethel started in dismay. Mr. Creedy had been very attentive, very kind, and she had liked to hear him talk, and had encouraged his coming, but she was hardly prepared for this. The nameless something in our blood recoiled at it. The proposal stunned her, and she said nothing but 'Oh, Mr. Creedy, how *can* you say such a thing?'

John Creedy saw the shadow on her face, the unintentional dilatation of her delicate nostrils, the faint puckering at the corner of her lips, and knew with a negro's quick instinct of face-reading what it all meant. 'Oh, Miss Ethel,' he said,

with a touch of genuine bitterness in his tone, 'don't you, too, despise us. I won't ask you for any answer now; I don't want an answer. But I want you to think it over. Do think it over, and consider whether you can ever love me. I won't press the matter on you; I won't insult you by importunity; but I will tell you just this once, and once for all, what I feel. I love you, and I shall always love you, whatever you answer me now. I know it would cost you a wrench to take me, a greater wrench than to take the least and the unworthiest of your own people. But if you can only get over that first wrench, I can promise earnestly and faithfully to love you as well as ever woman yet was loved. Don't say anything now,' he went on, as he saw she was going to open her mouth again: 'wait and think it over; pray it over; and if you can't see your way straight before you when I ask you this day fortnight "Yes or No," answer me "No," and I give you my word of honour as a gentleman I will never speak to you of the matter again. But I shall carry your picture written on my heart to my grave.'

And Ethel knew that he was speaking from his very soul.

When she went home, she took Aunt Emily up into her little bedroom, over the porch where the dog-roses grew, and told her all about it. Aunt Emily cried and sobbed as if her heart would break, but she saw only one answer from the first. 'It is a gate opened to you, my darling,' she said: 'I shall break my heart over it, Ethel, but it is a gate opened.' And though she felt that all the light would be gone out of her life if Ethel went, she worked with her might from that moment forth to induce Ethel to marry John Creedy and go to Africa. Poor soul! she acted faithfully up to her lights.

As for Uncle James, he looked at the matter very differently. 'Her instinct is against it,' he said stoutly, 'and our instincts wasn't put in our hearts for nothing. They're meant to be a guide and a light to us in these dark questions. No white girl ought to marry a black man, even if he is a parson. It ain't natural: our instinct is against it. A white man may marry a black woman if he likes: I don't say anything against him, though I don't say I'd do it myself, not for any money. But a white woman to marry a black man, why, it makes our blood rise, you know, 'specially if you've happened to have cruised worth speaking of along the Coast.'

But the vicar and the vicar's wife were charmed with the prospect of success, and spoke seriously to Ethel about it. It was a call, they thought, and Ethel oughtn't to disregard it. They had argued themselves out of those wholesome race instincts that Uncle James so rightly valued, and they were eager to argue Ethel out of them too. What could the poor girl do? Her aunt and the vicar on the one hand, and John Creedy on the other, were too much between them for her native feelings. At the end of the fortnight John Creedy asked her his simple question 'Yes or No,' and half against her will she answered 'Yes.' John Creedy took her hand delicately in his and fervidly kissed the very tips of her fingers; something within him told him he must not kiss her lips. She started at the kiss, but she said nothing. John Creedy noticed the start, and said within himself, 'I shall so love and cherish her that I will make her love me in spite of my black skin.' For with all the faults of his negro nature, John Creedy was at heart an earnest and affectionate man after his kind.

And Ethel really did, to some extent, love him already. It was such a strange mixture of feeling. From one point of view he was a gentleman by position, a clergyman, a man of learning and of piety; and from this point of view Ethel was not only satisfied, but even proud of him. For the rest, she took him as some good Catholics take the veil—from a sense of the call. And so, before the two months were out, Ethel Berry had married John Creedy, and both started together at once for Southampton, on their way to Axim. Aunt Emily cried, and hoped they might be blessed in their new work, but Uncle James never lost his misgivings about the effect of Africa upon a born African. 'Instincts is a great thing,' he said, with a shake of his head, as he saw the West Coast mail steam slowly down Southampton Water, 'and when he gets among his own people his instincts will surely get the better of him, as safe as my name is James Berry.'

## II

The little mission bungalow at Butabué, a wooden shed neatly thatched with fan palms, had been built and garnished by the native catechist from Axim and his wife before the arrival of the missionaries, so that Ethel found a habitable dwelling ready for her at the end of her long boat journey up the rapid stream of the Ancobra. There the strangely matched pair settled down quietly enough to their work of teaching and catechising, for the mission had already been started by the native evangelist, and many of the people were fairly ready to hear and accept the new religion. For the first ten or twelve months Ethel's letters home were full of praise and love for dear John. Now that she had come to know him well, she wondered she had ever feared to marry him. No husband was ever so tender, so gentle, so considerate. He nursed her in all her little ailments like a woman; she leaned on him as a wife leans on the strong arm of her husband. And then he was so clever, so wise, so learned. Her only grief was that she feared she was not and would never be good enough for him. Yet it was well for her that they were living so entirely away from all white society at

Butabué, for there she had nobody with whom to contrast John but the half-clad savages around them. Judged by the light of that startling contrast, good John Creedy, with his cultivated ways and gentle manners, seemed like an Englishman indeed.

John Creedy, for his part, thought no less well of his Ethel. He was tenderly respectful to her; more distant, perhaps, than is usual between husband and wife, even in the first months of marriage, but that was due to his innate delicacy of feeling, which made him half unconsciously recognise the depth of the gulf that still divided them. He cherished her like some saintly thing, too sacred for the common world. Yet Ethel was his helper in all his work, so cheerful under the necessary privations of their life, so ready to put up with bananas and cassava balls, so apt at kneading plantain paste, so willing to learn from the negro women all the mysteries of mixing agadey, cankey, and koko pudding. No tropical heat seemed to put her out of temper; even the horrible country fever itself she bore with such gentle resignation, John Creedy felt in his heart of hearts that he would willingly give up his life for her, and that it would be but a small sacrifice for so sweet a creature.

One day, shortly after their arrival at Butabué, John Creedy began talking in English to the catechist about the best way of setting to work to learn the native language. He had left the country when he was nine years old, he said, and had forgotten all about it. The catechist answered him quickly in a Fantee phrase. John Creedy looked amazed and started.

'What does he say?' asked Ethel.

'He says that I shall soon learn if only I listen; but the curious thing is, Ethie, that I understand him.'

'It has come back to you, John, that's all. You are so quick at languages, and now you hear it again you remember it.'

'Perhaps so,' said the missionary slowly, 'but I have never recalled a word of it for all these years. I wonder if it will all come back to me.'

'Of course it will, dear,' said Ethel; 'you know, things come to you so easily in that way. You almost learned Portuguese while we were coming out from hearing those Benguela people.'

And so it did come back, sure enough. Before John Creedy had been six weeks at Butabué, he could talk Fantee as fluently as any of the natives around him. After all, he was nine years old when he was taken to England, and it was no great wonder that he should recollect the language he had heard in his childhood till that age. Still, he himself noticed rather uneasily that every phrase and word, down to the very heathen charms and prayers of his infancy, came back to him now with startling vividness and without an effort.

Four months after their arrival John saw one day a tall and ugly negro woman, in the scanty native dress, standing near the rude market-place, where the Butabué butchers killed and sold their reeking goat-meat. Ethel saw him start again; and with a terrible foreboding in her heart, she could not help asking him why he started. 'I can't tell you, Ethie,' he said piteously; 'for heaven's sake, don't press me. I want to spare you.' But Ethel would hear. 'Is it your mother, John?' she asked hoarsely.

'No, thank Heaven, not my mother, Ethie,' he answered her, with something like pallor on his dark cheek, 'not my mother; but I remember the woman.'

'A relative?'

'Oh, Ethie, don't press me. Yes, my mother's sister. I remember her years ago. Let us say no more about it.' And Ethel, looking at that gaunt and squalid savage woman, shuddered in her heart and said no more.

Slowly, as time went on, however, Ethel began to notice a strange shade of change coming over John's ideas and remarks about the negroes. At first he had been shocked and distressed at their heathendom and savagery; but the more he saw of it, the more he seemed to find it natural enough in their position, and even in a sort of way to sympathise with it or apologise for it. One morning, a month or two later, he spoke to her voluntarily of his father. He had never done so in England. 'I can remember,' he said, 'he was a chief, a great chief. He had many wives, and my mother was one. He was beaten in war by Kola, and I was taken prisoner. But he had a fine palace at Kwantah, and many fan-bearers.' Ethel observed with a faint terror that he seemed to speak with pride and complacency of his father's chieftaincy. She shuddered again and wondered. Was the West African instinct getting the upper hand in him over the Christian gentleman?

When the dries were over, and the koko-harvest gathered, the negroes held a grand feast. John had preached in the open air to some of the market-people in the morning, and in the evening he was sitting in the hut with Ethel, waiting till the catechist and his wife should come in to prayers, for they carried out their accustomed ceremony decorously, even there, every night and morning. Suddenly they heard the din of savage music out of doors, and the noise of a great crowd laughing and shouting down the street. John listened, and listened with deepening attention. 'Don't you hear it, Ethie?' he cried. 'It's the tom-toms. I know what it means. It's the harvest battle-feast!'

'How hideous!' said Ethel, shrinking back.

'Don't be afraid, dearest,' John said, smiling at her. 'It means no harm. It's only the people amusing themselves.' And he began to keep time to the tom-toms rapidly with the palms of his hands.

The din drew nearer, and John grew more evidently excited at every step. 'Don't you hear, Ethie?' he said again. 'It's the Salonga. What inspiring music! It's like a drum and fife band; it's like the bagpipes; it's like a military march. By Jove, it compels one to dance!' And he got up as he spoke, in English clerical dress (for he wore clerical dress even at Butabué), and began capering in a sort of hornpipe round the tiny room.

'Oh, John, don't!' cried Ethel. 'Suppose the catechist were to come in!'

But John's blood was up. 'Look here,' he said excitedly, 'it goes like this. Here you hold your matchlock out; here you fire; here you charge with cutlasses; here you hack them down before you; here you hold up your enemy's head in your hands, and here you kick it off among the women. Oh, it's grand!' There was a terrible light in his black eyes as he spoke, and a terrible trembling in his clenched black hands.

'John,' cried Ethel, in an agony of horror, 'it isn't Christian, it isn't human, it isn't worthy of you. I can never, never love you if you do such a thing again.'

In a moment John's face changed and his hand fell as if she had stabbed him. 'Ethie,' he said in a low voice, creeping back to her like a whipped spaniel,—'Ethie, my darling, my own soul, my beloved; what *have* I done? Oh, heavens, I will never listen to the accursed thing again! Oh, Ethie, for heaven's sake, for mercy's sake, forgive me!'

Ethel laid her hand, trembling, on his head. John sank upon his knees before her, and bowed himself down with his head between his arms, like one staggered and penitent. Ethel lifted him gently, and at that moment the catechist and his wife came in. John stood up firmly, took down his Bible and Prayer Book, and read through evening prayer at once in his usual impressive tone. In one moment he had changed back again from the Fantee savage to the decorous Oxford clergyman.

It was only a week later that Ethel, hunting about in the little storeroom, happened to notice a stout wooden box carefully covered up. She opened the lid with some difficulty, for it was fastened down with a native lock, and to her horror she found inside it a surreptitious keg of raw negro rum. She took the keg out, put it conspicuously in the midst of the storeroom, and said nothing. That night she heard John in the jungle behind the yard, and looking out, she saw dimly that he was hacking the keg to pieces vehemently with an axe. After that he was even kinder and tenderer to her than usual for the next week; but Ethel vaguely remembered that once or twice before he had seemed a little odd in his manner, and that it was on those days that she had seen gleams of the savage nature peeping through. Perhaps, she thought, with a shiver, his civilisation was only a veneer, and a glass of raw rum or so was enough to wash it off.

Twelve months after their first arrival, Ethel came home very feverish one evening from her girls' school, and found John gone from the hut. Searching about in the room for the quinine bottle, she came once more upon a rum-keg, and this time it was empty. A nameless terror drove her into the little bedroom. There, on the bed, torn into a hundred shreds, lay John Creedy's black coat and European clothing. The room whirled around her; and though she had never heard of such a thing before, the terrible truth flashed across her bewildered mind like a hideous dream. She went out, alone, at night, as she had never done before since she came to Africa, into the broad lane between the huts which constituted the chief street of Butabué. So far away from home, so utterly solitary among all those black faces, so sick at heart with that burning and devouring horror! She reeled and staggered down the street, not knowing how or where she went, till at the end, beneath the two tall date-palms, she saw lights flashing and heard the noise of shouts and laughter. A group of natives, men and women together, were dancing and howling round a dancing and howling negro. The central figure was dressed in the native fashion, with arms and legs bare, and he was shouting a loud song at the top of his voice in the Fantee language, while he shook a tom-tom. There was a huskiness as of drink in his throat, and his steps were unsteady and doubtful.

Great heavens! could that reeling, shrieking black savage be John Creedy?

Yes, instinct had gained the day over civilisation; the savage in John Creedy had broken out; he had torn up his English clothes and, in West African parlance, 'had gone Fantee.' Ethel gazed at him, white with horror—stood still and gazed, and never cried nor fainted, nor said a word. The crowd of negroes divided to right and left, and John Creedy saw his wife standing there like a marble figure. With one awful cry he came to himself again, and rushed to her side. She did not repel him, as he expected; she did not speak; she was mute and cold like a corpse, not like a living woman. He took her up in his strong arms, laid her head on his shoulder, and carried her home through the long line of thatched huts, erect and steady as when he first walked up the aisle of Walton Magna church. Then he laid her down gently on the bed, and called the wife of the catechist. 'She has the fever,' he said in Fantee. 'Sit by her.'

The catechist's wife looked at her, and said, 'Yes; the yellow fever.'

And so she had. Even before she saw John the fever had been upon her, and that awful revelation had brought it out suddenly in full force. She lay unconscious upon the bed, her eyes open, staring ghastly, but not a trace of colour in her cheek nor a sign of life upon her face.

John Creedy wrote a few words upon a piece of paper, which he folded in his hand, gave a few directions in Fantee to the woman at the bedside, and then hurried out like one on fire into the darkness outside.

### III

It was thirty miles through the jungle by a native trackway to the nearest mission station at Effuenta. There were two Methodist missionaries stationed there, John Creedy knew, for he had gone round by boat more than once to see them. When he first came to Africa he could no more have found his way across the neck of the river fork by that tangled jungle track than he could have flown bodily over the top of the cocoa palms; but now, half naked, barefooted, and inspired with an overpowering emotion, he threaded his path through the darkness among the creepers and lianas of the forest in true African fashion. Stooping here, creeping on all fours there, running in the open at full speed anon, he never once stopped to draw breath till he had covered the whole thirty miles, and knocked in the early dawn at the door of the mission hut at Effuenta.

One of the missionaries opened the barred door cautiously. 'What do you want?' he asked in Fantee of the bare-legged savage, who stood crouching by the threshold.

'I bring a message from Missionary John Creedy,' the bare-legged savage answered, also in Fantee. 'He wants European clothes.'

'Has he sent a letter?' asked the missionary.

John Creedy took the folded piece of paper from his palm. The missionary read it. It told him in a few words how the Butabué people had pillaged John's hut at night and stolen his clothing, and how he could not go outside his door till he got some European dress again.

'This is strange,' said the missionary. 'Brother Felton died three days ago of the fever. You can take his clothes to Brother Creedy, if you will.'

The bare-limbed savage nodded acquiescence. The missionary looked hard at him, and fancied he had seen his face before, but he never even for a moment suspected that he was speaking to John Creedy himself.

A bundle was soon made of dead Brother Felton's clothes, and the bare-limbed man took it in his arms and prepared to run back again the whole way to Butabué.

'You have had nothing to eat,' said the lonely missionary. 'Won't you take something to help you on your way?'

'Give me some plantain paste,' answered John Creedy. 'I can eat it as I go.' And when they gave it him he forgot himself for the moment, and answered 'Thank you' in English. The missionary stared, but thought it was only a single phrase that he had picked up at Butabué, and that he was anxious, negro-fashion, to air his knowledge.

Back through the jungle, with the bundle in his arms, John Creedy wormed his way once more, like a snake or a tiger,

never pausing or halting on the road till he found himself again in the open space outside the village of Butabué. There he stayed a while, and behind a clump of wild ginger he opened the bundle and arrayed himself once more from head to foot in English clerical dress. That done, too proud to slink, he walked bold and erect down the main alley, and quietly entered his own hut. It was high noon, the baking high noon of Africa, as he did so.

Ethel lay unconscious still upon the bed. The negro woman crouched, half asleep after her night's watching, at the foot. John Creedy looked at his watch, which stood hard by on the little wooden table. 'Sixty miles in fourteen hours,' he said aloud. 'Better time by a great deal than when we walked from Oxford to the White Horse eighteen months since.' And then he sat down silently by Ethel's bedside.

'Has she moved her eyes?' he asked the negress.

'Never, John Creedy,' answered the woman. Till last night she had always called him 'Master.'

He watched the lifeless face for an hour or two. There was no change in it till about four o'clock; then Ethel's eyes began to alter their expression. He saw the dilated pupils contract a little, and knew that consciousness was gradually returning.

In a moment more she looked round at him and gave a little cry. 'John,' she exclaimed, with a sort of awakening hopefulness in her voice, 'where on earth did you get those clothes?'

'These clothes?' he answered softly. 'Why, you must be wandering in your mind, Ethie dearest, to ask such a question now. At Standen's, in the High at Oxford, my darling.' And he passed his black hand gently across her loose hair.

Ethel gave a great cry of joy. 'Then it was a dream, a horrid dream, John, or a terrible mistake? Oh, John, say it was a dream!'

John drew his hand across his forehead slowly. 'Ethie darling,' he said, 'you are wandering, I'm afraid. You have a bad fever. I don't know what you mean.'

'Then you didn't tear them up, and wear a Fantee dress, and dance with a tom-tom down the street? Oh, John!'

'Oh, Ethel! No. What a terrible delirium you must have had!'

'It is all well,' she said. 'I don't mind if I die now.' And she sank back exhausted into a sort of feverish sleep.

'John Creedy,' said the black catechist's wife solemnly, in Fantee, 'you will have to answer for that lie to a dying woman with your soul!'

'*My soul!*' cried John Creedy passionately, smiting both breasts with his clenched fists. '*My soul!* Do you think, you negro wench, I wouldn't give *my* poor, miserable, black soul to eternal torments a thousand times over, if only I could give her little white heart one moment's forgetfulness before she dies?'

For five days longer Ethel lingered in the burning fever, sometimes conscious for a minute or two, but for the most part delirious or drowsy all the time. She never said another word to John about her terrible dream, and John never said another word to her. But he sat by her side and tended her like a woman, doing everything that was possible for her in the bare little hut, and devouring his full heart with a horrible gnawing remorse too deep for pen or tongue to probe and fathom. For civilisation with John Creedy was really at bottom far more than a mere veneer; though the savage instincts might break out with him now and again, such outbursts no more affected his adult and acquired nature than a single bump-supper or wine-party at college affects the nature of many a gentle-minded English lad. The truest John Creedy of all was the gentle, tender, English clergyman.

As he sat by her bedside sleepless and agonised, night and day, for five days together, one prayer only rose to his lips time after time, 'Heaven grant she may die!' He had depth enough in the civilised side of his soul to feel that that was the only way to save her from a lifelong shame. 'If she gets well,' he said to himself, trembling, 'I will leave this accursed Africa at once. I will work my way back to England as a common sailor, and send her home by the mail with my remaining money. I will never inflict my presence upon her again, for she cannot be persuaded, if once she recovers, that she did not see me, as she did see me, a bare-limbed heathen Fantee brandishing a devilish tom-tom. But I shall get work in England—not a parson's; that I can never be again—but clerk's work, labourer's work, navy's work, anything! Look

at my arms: I rowed five in the Magdalen eight: I could hold a spade as well as any man. I will toil, and slave, and save, and keep her still like a lady, if I starve for it myself: but she shall never see my face again if once she recovers. Even then it will be a living death for her, poor angel! There is only one hope—Heaven grant she may die!

On the fifth day she opened her eyes once. John saw that his prayer was about to be fulfilled. 'John,' she said feebly—'John, tell me, on your honour, it was only my delirium.'

And John, raising his hand to heaven, *splendide mendax*, answered in a firm voice, 'I swear it.'

Ethel smiled and shut her eyes. It was for the last time.

Next morning, John Creedy—tearless, but parched and dry in the mouth, like one stunned and unmanned—took a pick-axe and hewed out a rude grave in the loose soil near the river. Then he fashioned a rough coffin from twisted canes with his own hands, and in it he reverently placed the sacred body. He allowed no one to help him or come near him—not even his fellow-Christians, the catechist and his wife: Ethel was too holy a thing for their African hands to touch. Next he put on his white surplice, and for the first and only time in his life he read, without a quaver in his voice, the Church of England Burial Service over the open grave. And when he had finished he went back to his desolate hut, and cried with a loud voice of utter despair, 'The one thing that bound me to civilisation is gone. Henceforth I shall never speak another word of English. I go to my own people.' So saying, he solemnly tore up his European clothes once more, bound a cotton loin-cloth round his waist, covered his head with dirt, and sat fasting and wailing piteously, like a broken-hearted child, in his cabin.

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Nowadays, the old half-caste Portuguese rum-dealer at Butabué can point out to any English pioneer who comes up the river which one, among a crowd of dilapidated negroes who lie basking in the soft dust outside his hut was once the Reverend John Creedy, B.A., of Magdalen College, Oxford.

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## II

### FRASINE'S FIRST COMMUNION

Zélie was our cook. She came back to us each winter when we returned to the Riviera, and went away again in spring to Aix-les-Bains, where she always made her summer season with a German family. A thorough-going Provençale was Zélie, olive-skinned, black-haired, thick-lipped, pleasant-featured, with flashing dark eyes and a merry mouth, well shaped to make a mock at you. Nobody would have called Zélie exactly pretty: but she was comely and buxom, and good-humoured withal; while, as for *pot-au-feu*, she had not her equal in the whole Department. She said *çoux* for *choux*, and *çapeau* for *chapeau*; but her smile was infectious, and her kindness of heart was as undoubted as her omelettes.

One April afternoon, Ruth went out into the kitchen. She didn't often penetrate into such regions at the villa; for Zélie, on that point, was strictly conservative. 'If Madame desires to see me,' she used to say, 'I receive at half-past nine in the morning, when I come home from marketing. At all other hours, I am happy to return Madame's call in the *salon*.' Zélie was too good a servant to make it worth while for us to risk her displeasure; and the consequence was that Ruth seldom ventured into Zélie's keep except at the hour of her cook's reception.

On this particular day, however, Ruth was surprised to see Zélie seated at the table, stitching away at what appeared to be a bridal garment. Such white muslin and white tulle gave her a turn for a moment. 'Why, Zélie!' she cried, putting one hand to her heart, 'you're not going to be married?' For cooks like Zélie are rare on the Littoral.

'*Ma foi!* no, Madame,' Zélie answered, laughing. 'I confection a robe for Frasine, who makes her first Communion.'

'Frasine!' Ruth exclaimed. 'And who may Frasine be? Your sister, I suppose, Zélie?'

Zélie smoothed out a flounce with one capable brown hand. 'No, Madame,' she said demurely; 'Frasine is my daughter.'

'Your daughter!' Ruth cried, staring at her. 'But, Zélie, I never even knew you were married!'

Zélie smoothed still more vigorously at the edge of the flounce. '*Mais non*, Madame,' she continued, in her most matter-of-fact voice. 'It arrived so, you see. Hector's family were against it, and thus it never happened.'

Ruth gazed at her, much shaken. 'But, Zélie,' she murmured, seizing her hand in dismay, 'do you mean to tell me——?'

Zélie nodded her head sagely. 'Yes, yes, Madame,' she answered. 'These things come so to us other poor people. It is not like that, I know, *chez vous*. But here in France, let us allow, the law is so difficult.'

'Tell me all about it,' Ruth cried, sinking down on to one of the kitchen chairs, and looking up at her appealingly. 'What age has your daughter?'

'Frasine is twelve years old,' Zélie answered, still going on with her work, 'and a pretty girl, too, though 'tis the word of a mother. You see, Madame, it came about like this. The good Hector was in love with me; but he was in a better position than my parents for his part, for his father was proprietor, while mine was workman. They owned a beautiful property up in our hills near Vence—oh, a beautiful property! They harvested I could not tell you how many hectolitres of olives. Their little blue wine was renowned in the country. Well, Hector loved me, and I loved Hector. *Que voulez-vous?* We were thrown, in our work, very much together.' She paused, and glanced shyly askance at Ruth with those expressive eyes of hers.

'And he didn't marry you?' Ruth asked, faltering.

'He meant to, Madame: I assure you, he meant to,' Zélie answered hastily. 'He was a kind soul, Hector; he began it all at first for the good motive. But, meanwhile, you understand, in waiting for the priest——' Zélie lifted her flounce close up to her face and stitched away at it nervously.

'And that was all?' Ruth put in, with her scared white face—I could hear and see it all through the door from my study.

'That was all, Madame,' Zélie answered, very low. 'I m'a dit, "Veux-tu?" Je lui ai dit, "Je veux bien." Et tout d'un coup, nous voilà père et mère presque sans le savoir.'

There was a pause for a moment, during which you could hear Zélie's needle go stitch, stitch, stitch, through the stiff starched muslin. Then Ruth spoke again: 'And, after that, he left you?'

Zélie's stoicism began to give way a little. There were tears in her eyes, but still she stitched on, to hide her confusion. 'He never meant any harm, my poor boy!' she answered, bending over. 'He really loved me, and he always hoped, in the end, to marry me. So, when he knew Frasine was beginning to be, he said to me, one fine day, "Zélie, I will go up to Vence, and arrange your affair with my father and the curé." And he went up to Vence, and asked his father's consent to our marriage; for, *chez nous*, you know, one is not permitted to marry without the consent of one's family. But Hector's father was very angry at the news, and refused his consent, because he was proprietor, and I was but a servant. And about that time it was Hector's year to serve, and they put him into a regiment that was stationed a long way off—oh! a very long way off—quite far from my country, in the direction of Orleans. And without his father's consent, of course, he could never marry me, for that's our law here in France, to us others. So he served his time, and at the end of it all—well, he married another woman, and settled in Paris.'

'He married another woman,' Ruth repeated slowly, 'and left you with Frasine.'

'*Parfaitement*, Madame,' Zélie answered with a gulp. Then, all at once, her stoicism broke down completely; she laid aside her sewing, and burst into tears with perfect frankness.

Ruth bent over her tenderly and stroked her brown hand. 'Dear Zélie!' she said; 'he treated you cruelly.'

'No, no, Madame!' Zélie answered through her tears, still loyal to her lover. 'You do not understand. He could not help it. He was a brave boy, Hector. He meant to do well, it was all for the good motive; but his family opposed; and with us, when your family oppose, *mon Dieu!* it is finished. But still, he was good; he did what he could for me. He acknowledged his child, and entered it at the Mairie as his own and mine, which alters, of course, its *état civil*—Frasine has right, at his death, to a share of his property. My poor, good Hector! it was all he could do for me.'

Ruth burst away at once, and came in to me, crying. This was all so new to her, and we were both of us so genuinely attached to Zélie. 'Oh, Hugh!' she began, 'Zélie's been telling me such a dreadful, dreadful story. Do you know she has \_\_\_\_\_'

'My child,' I said, 'you may save yourself the trouble of repeating it all to me; I've heard through the door every blessed word you two have been saying.'

Ruth stood by my side, all tearful. 'But isn't it sad, Hugh?' she said; 'and she seemed so resigned to it.'

'Very sad, dear,' I answered. 'But, do you know, little Ruthie, I'm afraid such stories are by no means uncommon—abroad, I mean, dear.'

'Hugh,' Ruth cried, seizing my arm, 'we must see this little girl of hers.' She rushed out into the kitchen again. 'Zélie,' she said, 'where is Frasine?'

Zélie had taken up her sewing once more by this time, and answered with a little sob, 'In our mountains, Madame, near Vence; in effect, she lives with my parents.'

'And do you see her often? Ruth asked.

'Once in fifteen days she comes to Mass in the town,' Zélie answered with a sigh; 'and then, when Madame's convenience permits, I usually see her. And when I have made my winter season, I go up for eight days with her, to stop with my people, before I leave for Aix-les-Bains; and when I return again in autumn, before Madame arrives, I have eight days more. *Ce sont là mes vacances.*'

'And where will she make her first Communion?' Ruth asked.

'Why, naturally, in the town,' Zélie answered, 'with the other young people. The Bishop of Fréjus comes over, from here a fortnight.'

'Bring her down here,' Ruth said in her imperious little way. 'Let her stop with us till the time. Monsieur and I desire to see her.'

So Frasine came down, and very proud indeed Zélie was of her daughter. Barring the irregularity of her first appearance in this wicked world, Zélie had cause to be proud of her. She was tall and well grown and as modest as a *rosière*. She had dove-like eyes and peach bloom on her cheeks; and when Ruth and Zélie had arranged her, all blushing, in her pretty white dress and her long tulle veil, she looked a perfect model for Jules Breton's young Christians. Zélie kissed her as she stood there with a mother's fervour; and Ruth kissed her, I declare, just as fervently as Zélie. They couldn't have made more fuss about that slip of a girl if Frasine's father had kept his promise and the child had been born in lawful wedlock.

After a day or two Ruth began to talk about something that was troubling her. It was a very serious thing, she said, this first Communion. It was an epoch in a girl's life, a family occasion. Every member of the family ought to be apprised of it beforehand. Hector might be married to another horrid woman in Paris, but, after all, Frasine was his daughter, acknowledged as such in due form at the Mairie. I'm bound to say that, though Ruth is a stickler for the strictest morality on *our* side of the Channel, she didn't take much account of that woman in Paris. I ventured to suggest that to invite the good Hector to the first Communion might be to endanger the peace of a deserving family. Madame Hector *de jure* might be unaware of the existence of her predecessor *de facto*, and might regard little Frasine, as an unauthorised interloper, with no friendly feeling. But Ruth was inexorable. You know her imperious, delicious little way when she once gets a fixed idea into that dear glossy head of hers. She insisted on maintaining the untenable position that a man is somehow really and truly related to his own children, no matter who may be their mother. As an English barrister, I humbly endeavoured to point out to her the fact that recognition of this pernicious principle would involve the downfall of law and order. Still, Ruth was impervious to my sound argument on the subject, and refused to listen to the voice of Blackstone. So the end of it all was that she persuaded Zélie to write to Hector, informing him of this important forthcoming epoch in their daughter's history.

Of course, I had a week of it. To search for Hector in Paris, after nine years' silence, would be to search for a needle in a bottle of hay, as I pointed out at once to those two fatuous women. My own opinion was that Hector was to be found (as we say facetiously) in the twenty-first *arrondissement*—the point of which is that there are but twenty. But I rushed up to Vence all the same, to prosecute inquiries as to what had become of the former owner of that *belle propriété* which loomed so large in Zélie's imagination. With infinite difficulty, and after many trials, I had reason to believe, at last, that the *nommé* Hector Canivet, ancient proprietor, was to be found at a certain number in a certain street in the Montmartre Quartier. Hither, therefore, we despatched our letter of invitation, dexterously concocted in our very best French by Ruth, Zélie, and myself in council assembled. It informed Monsieur Hector Canivet, without note or comment, that Mdlle. Euphrasyné Canivet, now aged twelve years, would make her first Communion in our parish church on Wednesday the 22nd, and that Mdlle. Zélie Duhamel invited his presence on this auspicious occasion. As an English barrister, I insisted upon the point that consideration for the feelings of Madame Canivet in Paris should make us leave it open for M. Hector Canivet to treat Mdlle. Euphrasyné, if he were so minded, as a distant cousin. So much of masculine guile have I still left in me. Ruth was disposed to protest; but Zélie, more French, acquiesced in my view of the case, and over-persuaded her.

Three days later I was sitting in my study, intent on the twenty-fourth chapter of my 'History of the Rise of the Republic of San Marino,' when suddenly the door opened, and Ruth burst in upon me with the most radiant expression of perfect happiness I ever saw even on that dimpled face of hers. She held a letter in her hand, which she thrust forward to me eagerly.

'What's up?' I asked. 'Has that brute of a husband of Amelia's been kind enough to drink himself to death at last?'

'No; read it, read it!' Ruth exclaimed, brimming over. 'Zélie and Frasine are dissolved in tears in the kitchen over the news. I knew I was doing right! I was sure we ought to tell him!'

I took the letter up in a maze. It was involved and long-winded, full of the usual inflated rhetoric of the Provençal peasant. But there was no doubt at all about the human feeling of it. Monsieur Hector Canivet wrote with the profoundest emotion. He had always loved and remembered his dear Zélie. She was still his dream to him. He had married and settled because his parents wished it; but now, his parents were dead, and he had sold his property, and was doing very well at his *métier* in Paris. The late Madame Canivet—on whose soul might the blessed saints have mercy!—had died two years ago. Ever since that event he had had it in his mind to return to his country, and look up Zélie and his dear daughter; but pride, and uncertainty as to her feelings, had prevented him. It was so long ago, and he knew not her feelings. He took this intimation, however, as a proof that Zélie had not yet entirely forgotten him; and if the devotion of

a lifetime, and a comfortable fortune (for a *bourgeois*) in Paris, would atone to Zélie for his neglect in the past, he proposed not only to be present at Frasine's first Communion, but also to superadd to it another Sacrament of the Church which he was only too conscious should have preceded her baptism. In short, if Zélie was still of the same mind as of old, he desired to return, in order to marry her.

'That's well,' I said. 'He will legitimatise his daughter.'

'You don't mean to say,' Ruth cried, 'he can make it just the same as if he'd married Zélie all right to begin with?'

'Why, certainly!' I answered; 'in France, the law is sometimes quite human.'

Ruth rushed into my arms. And the brave Hector was as good as his word.

But we shall never get another cook like Zélie!

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### III

## THE CHILD OF THE PHALANSTERY

*'Poor little thing,' said my strong-minded friend compassionately. 'Just look at her! Clubfooted. What a misery to herself and others! In a well-organised state of society, you know, such poor wee cripples as that would be quietly put out of their misery while they were still babies.'*

*'Let me think,' said I, 'how that would work out in actual practice. I'm not so sure, after all, that we should be altogether the better or the happier for it.'*

### I

They sat together in a corner of the beautiful phalanstery garden, Olive and Clarence, on the marble seat that overhung the mossy dell where the streamlet danced and bickered among its pebbly stickles; they sat there, hand in hand, in lovers' guise, and felt their two bosoms beating and thrilling in some strange, sweet fashion, just like two foolish unregenerate young people of the old antisocial prephalanstERIC days. Perhaps it was the leaven of their unenlightened ancestors still leavening by heredity the whole lump; perhaps it was the inspiration of the calm soft August evening and the delicate afterglow of the setting sun; perhaps it was the deep heart of man and woman vibrating still as of yore in human sympathy, and stirred to its innermost recesses by the unutterable breath of human emotion. But at any rate there they sat, the beautiful strong man in his shapely chiton, and the dainty fair girl in her long white robe with the dark green embroidered border, looking far into the fathomless depths of one another's eyes, in silence sweeter and more eloquent than many words. It was Olive's tenth day holiday from her share in the maidens' household duty of the community; and Clarence, by arrangement with his friend Germain, had made exchange from his own decade (which fell on Plato) to this quiet Milton evening, that he might wander through the park and gardens with his chosen love, and speak his full mind to her now without reserve.

'If only the phalanstery will give its consent, Clarence,' Olive said at last with a little sigh, releasing her hand from his, and gathering up the folds of her stole from the marble flooring of the seat;—'if only the phalanstery will give its consent! but I have my doubts about it. Is it quite right? Have we chosen quite wisely? Will the hierarch and the elder brothers think I am strong enough and fit enough for the duties of the task? It is no light matter, we know, to enter into bonds with one another for the responsibilities of fatherhood and motherhood. I sometimes feel—forgive me, Clarence—but I sometimes feel as if I were allowing my own heart and my own wishes to guide me too exclusively in this solemn question: thinking too much about you and me, about ourselves (which is only an enlarged form of selfishness, after all), and too little about the future good of the community and—and—' blushing a little, for women will be women even in a phalanstery—'and of the precious lives we may be the means of adding to it. You remember, Clarence, what the hierarch said, that we ought to think least and last of our own feelings, first and foremost of the progressive evolution of universal humanity.'

'I remember, darling,' Clarence answered, leaning over towards her tenderly; 'I remember well, and in my own way, so far as a man can (for we men haven't the moral earnestness of you women, I'm afraid, Olive), I try to act up to it. But, dearest, I think your fears are greater than they need be: you must recollect that humanity requires for its higher development tenderness, and truth, and love, and all the softer qualities, as well as strength and manliness; and if you are a trifle less strong than most of our sisters here, you seem to me at least (and I really believe to the hierarch and to the elder brothers too) to make up for it, and more than make up for it, in your sweet and lovable inner nature. The men of the future mustn't all be cast in one unvarying stereotyped mould; we must have a little of all good types combined, in order to make a perfect phalanstery.'

Olive sighed again. 'I don't know,' she said pensively. 'I don't feel sure. I hope I am doing right. In my aspirations every evening I have desired light on this matter, and have earnestly hoped that I was not being misled by my own feelings; for, oh, Clarence, I do love you so dearly, so truly, so absorbingly, that I half fear my love may be taking me unwittingly astray. I try to curb it; I try to think of it all as the hierarch tells us we ought to; but in my own heart I sometimes almost fear that I may be lapsing into the idolatrous love of the old days, when people married and were given in marriage, and thought only of the gratification of their own personal emotions and affections, and nothing of the ultimate good of humanity. Oh, Clarence, don't hate me and despise me for it; don't turn upon me and scold me; but I love you, I love you, I

love you; oh, I'm afraid I love you almost idolatrously!

Clarence lifted her small white hand slowly to his lips, with that natural air of chivalrous respect which came so easily to the young men of the phalanstery, and kissed it twice over fervidly with quiet reverence. 'Let us go into the music-room, Olive dearest,' he said as he rose; 'you are too sad to-night. You shall play me that sweet piece of Marian's that you love so much; and that will quiet you, darling, from thinking too earnestly about this serious matter.'

## II

Next day, when Clarence had finished his daily spell of work in the fruit-garden (he was third under-gardener to the community), he went up to his own study, and wrote out a little notice in due form to be posted at dinner-time on the refectory door: 'Clarence and Olive ask leave of the phalanstery to enter with one another into free contract of holy matrimony.' His pen trembled a little in his hand as he framed that familiar set form of words (strange that he had read it so often with so little emotion, and wrote it now with so much: we men are so selfish!); but he fixed it boldly with four small brass nails on the regulation notice-board, and waited, not without a certain quiet confidence, for the final result of the communal council.

'Aha!' said the hierarch to himself with a kindly smile, as he passed into the refectory at dinner-time that day, 'has it come to that, then? Well, well, I thought as much; I felt sure it would. A good girl, Olive: a true, earnest, lovable girl: and she has chosen wisely, too; for Clarence is the very man to balance her own character as man's and wife's should do. Whether Clarence has done well in selecting her is another matter. For my own part, I had rather hoped she would have joined the celibate sisters, and have taken nurse-duty for the sick and the children. It's her natural function in life, the work she's best fitted for; and I should have liked to see her take to it. But, after all, the business of the phalanstery is not to decide vicariously for its individual members—not to thwart their natural harmless inclinations and wishes; on the contrary, we ought to allow every man and girl the fullest liberty to follow their own personal taste and judgment in every possible matter. Our power of interference as a community, I've always felt and said, should only extend to the prevention of obviously wrong and immoral acts, such as marriage with a person in ill-health, or of inferior mental power, or with a distinctly bad or insubordinate temper. Things of that sort, of course, are as clearly wicked as idling in work-hours, or marriage with a first cousin. Olive's health, however, isn't really bad, nothing more than a very slight feebleness of constitution, as constitutions go with us; and Eustace, who has attended her medically from her babyhood (what a dear crowing little thing she used to be in the nursery, to be sure!), tells me she's perfectly fitted for the duties of her proposed situation. Ah well, ah well; I've no doubt they'll be perfectly happy; and the wishes of the whole phalanstery will go with them in any case, that's certain.'

Everybody knew that whatever the hierarch said or thought was pretty sure to be approved by the unanimous voice of the entire community. Not that he was at all a dictatorial or dogmatic old man; quite the contrary; but his gentle kindly way had its full weight with the brothers; and his intimate acquaintance, through the exercise of his spiritual functions, with the inmost thoughts and ideas of every individual member, man or woman, made him a safe guide in all difficult or delicate questions, as to what the decision of the council ought to be. So when, on the first Cosmos, the elder brothers assembled to transact phalanstERIC business, and the hierarch put in Clarence's request with the simple phrase, 'In my opinion, there is no reasonable objection,' the community at once gave in its adhesion, and formal notice was posted an hour later on the refectory door, 'The phalanstery approves the proposition of Clarence and Olive, and wishes all happiness to them and to humanity from the sacred union they now contemplate.' 'You see, dearest,' Clarence said, kissing her lips for the first time (as unwritten law demanded), now that the seal of the community had been placed upon their choice, 'you see, there can't be any harm in our contract, for the elder brothers all approve it.'

Olive smiled and sighed from the very bottom of her full heart, and clung to her lover as the ivy clings to a strong supporting oak-tree. 'Darling,' she murmured in his ear, 'if I have you to comfort me, I shall not be afraid, and we will try our best to work together for the advancement and the good of divine humanity.'

Four decades later, on a bright Cosmos morning in September, those two stood up beside one another before the altar of humanity, and heard with a thrill the voice of the hierarch uttering that solemn declaration, 'In the name of the Past, and of the Present, and of the Future, I hereby admit you, Clarence and Olive, into the holy society of Fathers and Mothers, of the United Avondale Phalanstery, in trust for humanity, whose stewards you are. May you so use and enhance the good gifts you have received from your ancestors that you may hand them on, untarnished and increased, to the bodies and minds of your furthest descendants.' And Clarence and Olive answered humbly and reverently, 'If grace be given us, we

will.'

### III

Brother Eustace, physiologist to the phalanstery, looked very grave and sad indeed as he passed from the Mothers' Room into the *Conversazione* in search of the hierarch. 'A child is born into the phalanstery,' he said gloomily; but his face conveyed at once a far deeper and more pregnant meaning than his mere words could carry to the ear.

The hierarch rose hastily and glanced into his dark keen eyes with an inquiring look. 'Not something amiss?' he said eagerly, with an infinite tenderness in his fatherly voice. 'Don't tell me that, Eustace. Not ... oh, not a child that the phalanstery must not for its own sake permit to live! Oh, Eustace, not, I hope, idiotic! And I gave my consent too; I gave my consent for pretty gentle little Olive's sake! Heaven grant I was not too much moved by her prettiness and her delicacy; for I love her, Eustace, I love her like a daughter.'

'So we all love the children of the phalanstery, Cyriac, we who are elder brothers,' said the physiologist gravely, half smiling to himself nevertheless at this quaint expression of old-world feeling on the part even of the very hierarch, whose bounden duty it was to advise and persuade a higher rule of conduct and thought than such antique phraseology implied. 'No, not idiotic; not quite so bad as that, Cyriac; not absolutely a hopeless case, but still, very serious and distressing for all that. The dear little baby has its feet turned inward. She'll be a cripple for life, I fear, and no help for it.'

Tears rose unchecked into the hierarch's soft grey eyes. 'Its feet turned inward,' he muttered sadly, half to himself. 'Feet turned inward! Oh, how terrible! This will be a frightful blow to Clarence and to Olive. Poor young things! their first-born, too. Oh, Eustace, what an awful thought that, with all the care and precaution we take to keep all causes of misery away from the precincts of the phalanstery, such trials as this must needs come upon us by the blind workings of the unconscious Cosmos! It is terrible, too terrible!'

'And yet it isn't all loss,' the physiologist answered earnestly. 'It isn't all loss, Cyriac, heart-rending as the necessity seems to us. I sometimes think that if we hadn't these occasional distressful objects on which to expend our sympathy and our sorrow, we in our happy little communities might grow too smug, and comfortable, and material, and earthly. But things like this bring tears into our eyes, and we are the better for them in the end, depend upon it, we are the better for them. They try our fortitude, our devotion to principle, our obedience to the highest and the hardest law. Every time some poor little waif like this is born into our midst, we feel the strain of old prephalanstERIC emotions and fallacies of feeling dragging us steadily and cruelly down. Our first impulse is to pity the poor mother, to pity the poor child, and in our mistaken kindness to let an unhappy life go on indefinitely to its own misery and the preventible distress of all around it. We have to make an effort, a struggle, before the higher and more abstract pity conquers the lower and more concrete one. But in the end we are all the better for it: and each such struggle and each such victory, Cyriac, paves the way for that final and truest morality when we shall do right instinctively and naturally, without any impulse on any side to do wrong in any way at all.'

'You speak wisely, Eustace,' the hierarch answered with a sad shake of his head, 'and I wish I could feel like you. I ought to, but I can't. Your functions make you able to look more dispassionately upon these things than I can. I'm afraid there's a great deal of the old Adam lingering wrongfully in me yet. And I'm still more afraid there's a great deal of the old Eve lingering even more strongly in all our mothers. It'll be a long time, I doubt me, before they'll ever consent without a struggle to the painless extinction of necessarily unhappy and imperfect lives. A long time: a very long time. Does Clarence know of this yet?'

'Yes, I have told him. His grief is terrible. You had better go and console him as best you can.'

'I will, I will. And poor Olive! Poor Olive! It wrings my heart to think of her. Of course she won't be told of it, if you can help, for the probationary four decades?'

'No, not if we can help it: but I don't know how it can ever be kept from her. She *will* see Clarence, and Clarence will certainly tell her.'

The hierarch whistled gently to himself. 'It's a sad case,' he said ruefully, 'a very sad case; and yet I don't see how we can possibly prevent it.'

He walked slowly and deliberately into the anteroom where Clarence was seated on a sofa, his head between his hands, rocking himself to and fro in his mute misery, or stopping to groan now and then in a faint feeble inarticulate fashion. Rhoda, one of the elder sisters, held the unconscious baby sleeping in her arms, and the hierarch took it from her like a man accustomed to infants, and looked ruefully at the poor distorted little feet. Yes, Eustace was evidently quite right. There could be no hope of ever putting those wee twisted ankles back straight and firm into their proper place again like other people's.

He sat down beside Clarence on the sofa, and with a commiserating gesture removed the young man's hands from his pale white face. 'My dear, dear friend,' he said softly, 'what comfort or consolation can we try to give you that is not a cruel mockery? None, none, none. We can only sympathise with you and Olive: and perhaps, after all, the truest sympathy is silence.'

Clarence answered nothing for a moment, but buried his face once more in his hands and burst into tears. The men of the phalanstery were less careful to conceal their emotions than we old-time folks in these early centuries. 'Oh, dear hierarch,' he said, after a long sob, 'it is too hard a sacrifice, too hard, too terrible! I don't feel it for the baby's sake: for her 'tis better so: she will be freed from a life of misery and dependence; but for my own sake, and oh, above all, for dear Olive's! It will kill her, hierarch; I feel sure it will kill her!'

The elder brother passed his hand with a troubled gesture across his forehead. 'But what else can we do, dear Clarence?' he asked pathetically. 'What else can we do? Would you have us bring up the dear child to lead a lingering life of misfortune, to distress the eyes of all around her, to feel herself a useless incumbrance in the midst of so many mutually helpful and serviceable and happy people? How keenly she would realise her own isolation in the joyous, busy, labouring community of our phalansteries! How terribly she would brood over her own misfortune when surrounded by such a world of hearty, healthy, sound-limbed, useful persons! Would it not be a wicked and a cruel act to bring her up to an old age of unhappiness and imperfection? You have been in Australia, my boy, when we sent you on that plant-hunting expedition, and you have seen cripples with your own eyes, no doubt, which I have never done—thank Heaven!—I who have never gone beyond the limits of the most highly civilised Euramerican countries. You have seen cripples, in those semi-civilised old colonial societies, which have lagged after us so slowly in the path of progress; and would you like your own daughter to grow up to such a life as that, Clarence? would you like her, I ask you, to grow up to such a life as that?'

Clarence clenched his right hand tightly over his left arm, and answered with a groan, 'No, hierarch; not even for Olive's sake could I wish for such an act of irrational injustice. You have trained us up to know the good from the evil, and for no personal gratification of our deepest emotions, I hope and trust, shall we ever betray your teaching or depart from your principles. I know what it is: I saw just such a cripple once, at a great town in the heart of Central Australia—a child of eight years old, limping along lamely on her heels by her mother's side; a sickening sight: to think of it even now turns the blood in one's arteries; and I could never wish Olive's baby to live and grow up to be a thing like that. But, oh, I wish to heaven it might have been otherwise: I wish to heaven this trial might have been spared us both. Oh, hierarch, dear hierarch, the sacrifice is one that no good man or woman would wish selfishly to forgo; yet for all that, our hearts, our hearts are human still; and though we may reason and may act up to our reasoning, the human feeling in us—relic of the idolatrous days, or whatever you like to call it—it will not choose to be so put down and stifled: it will out, hierarch, it will out for all that, in real hot, human tears. Oh, dear, dear kind father and brother, it will kill Olive: I know it will kill her!'

'Olive is a good girl,' the hierarch answered slowly. 'A good girl, well brought up, and with sound principles. She will not flinch from doing her duty, I know, Clarence; but her emotional nature is a very delicate one, and we have reason indeed to fear the shock to her nervous system. That she will do right bravely, I don't doubt: the only danger is lest the effort to do right should cost her too dear. Whatever can be done to spare her shall be done, Clarence. It is a sad misfortune for the whole phalanstery, such a child being born to us as this: and we all sympathise with you: we sympathise with you more deeply than words can say.'

The young man only rocked up and down drearily as before, and murmured to himself, 'It will kill her, it will kill her! My Olive, my Olive, I know it will kill her.'

They didn't keep the secret of the baby's crippled condition from Olive till the four decades were over, nor anything like it. The moment she saw Clarence, she guessed at once with a woman's instinct that something serious had happened; and she didn't rest till she had found out from him all about it. Rhoda brought her the poor wee mite, carefully wrapped, after the phalansthetic fashion, in a long strip of fine flannel, and Olive unrolled the piece until she came at last upon the small crippled feet, that looked so soft and tender and dainty and waxen in their very deformity. The young mother leant over the child a moment in speechless misery. 'Spirit of Humanity,' she whispered at length feebly, 'oh, give me strength to bear this terrible, unutterable trial! It will break my heart. But I will try to bear it.'

There was something so touching in her attempted resignation that Rhoda, for the first time in her life, felt almost tempted to wish she had been born in the old wicked prephalansthetic days, when they would have let the poor baby grow up to womanhood as a matter of course, and bear its own burden through life as best it might. Presently, Olive raised her head again from the crimson silken pillow. 'Clarence,' she said, in a trembling voice, pressing the sleeping baby hard against her breast, 'when will it be? How long? Is there no hope, no chance of respite?'

'Not for a long time yet, dearest Olive,' Clarence answered through his tears. 'The phalanstery will be very gentle and patient with us, we know; and brother Eustace will do everything that lies in his power, though he's afraid he can give us very little hope indeed. In any case, Olive darling, the community waits for four decades before deciding anything: it waits to see whether there is any chance for physiological or surgical relief: it decides nothing hastily or thoughtlessly: it waits for every possible improvement, hoping against hope till hope itself is hopeless. And then, if at the end of the quartet, as I fear will be the case—for we must face the worst, darling, we must face the worst—if at the end of the quartet it seems clear to brother Eustace, and the three assessor physiologists from the neighbouring phalansteries, that the dear child would be a cripple for life, we're still allowed four decades more to prepare ourselves in: four whole decades more, Olive, to take our leave of the darling baby. You'll have your baby with you for eighty days. And we must wean ourselves from her in that time, darling. We must try to wean ourselves. But oh Olive, oh Rhoda, it's very hard: very, very, very hard.'

Olive answered not a word, but lay silently weeping and pressing the baby against her breast, with her large brown eyes fixed vacantly upon the fretted woodwork of the panelled ceiling.

'You mustn't do like that, Olive dear,' sister Rhoda said in a half-frightened voice. 'You must cry right out, and sob, and not restrain yourself, darling, or else you'll break your heart with silence and repression. Do cry aloud, there's a dear girl: do cry aloud and relieve yourself. A good cry would be the best thing on earth for you. And think, dear, how much happier it will really be for the sweet baby to sink asleep so peacefully than to live a long life of conscious inferiority and felt imperfection! What a blessing it is to think you were born in a phalansthetic land, where the dear child will be happily and painlessly rid of its poor little unconscious existence, before it has reached the age when it might begin to know its own incurable and inevitable misfortune! Oh, Olive, what a blessing that is, and how thankful we ought all to be that we live in a world where the sweet pet will be saved so much humiliation, and mortification, and misery!'

At that moment, Olive, looking within into her own wicked, rebellious heart, was conscious, with a mingled glow, half shame, half indignation, that so far from appreciating the priceless blessings of her own situation, she would gladly have changed places then and there with any barbaric woman of the old semi-civilised prephalansthetic days. We can so little appreciate our own mercies. It was very wrong and anti-cosmic, she knew; very wrong indeed, and the hierarch would have told her so at once; but in her own woman's soul she felt she would rather be a miserable naked savage in a wattled hut, like those one saw in old books about Africa before the illumination, if only she could keep that one little angel of a crippled baby, than dwell among all the enlightenment, and knowledge, and art, and perfected social arrangements of phalansthetic England without her child—her dear, helpless, beautiful baby. How truly the Founder himself had said, 'Think you there will be no more tragedies and dramas in the world when we have reformed it, nothing but one dreary dead level of monotonous content? Ay, indeed, there will; for that, fear not; while the heart of man remains, there will be tragedy enough on earth and to spare for a hundred poets to take for their saddest epics.'

Olive looked up at Rhoda wistfully. 'Sister Rhoda,' she said in a timid tone, 'it may be very wicked—I feel sure it is—but do you know, I've read somewhere in old stories of the unenlightened days that a mother always loved the most afflicted of her children the best. And I can understand it now, sister Rhoda; I can feel it here,' and she put her hand upon her poor still heart. 'If only I could keep this one dear crippled baby, I could give up all the world beside—except you, Clarence.'

'Oh, hush, darling!' Rhoda cried in an awed voice, stooping down half alarmed to kiss her pale forehead. 'You mustn't

talk like that, Olive dearest. It's wicked; it's undutiful. I know how hard it is not to repine and to rebel; but you mustn't, Olive, you mustn't. We must each strive to bear our own burdens (with the help of the community), and not to put any of them off upon a poor, helpless, crippled little baby.'

'But our natures,' Clarence said, wiping his eyes dreamily; 'our natures are only half attuned as yet to the necessities of the higher social existence. Of course it's very wrong and very sad, but we can't help feeling it, sister Rhoda, though we try our hardest. Remember, it's not so many generations since our fathers would have reared the child without a thought that they were doing anything wicked—nay, rather, would even have held (so powerful is custom) that it was positively wrong to save it by preventive means from a certain life of predestined misery. Our conscience in this matter isn't yet fully formed. We feel that it's right, of course; oh yes, we know the phalanstery has ordered everything for the best; but we can't help grieving over it; the human heart within us is too unregenerate still to acquiesce without a struggle in the dictates of right and reason.'

Olive again said nothing, but fixed her eyes silently upon the grave, earnest portrait of the Founder over the carved oak mantelpiece, and let the hot tears stream their own way over her cold, white, pallid, bloodless cheek without reproof for many minutes. Her heart was too full for either speech or comfort.

## V

Eight decades passed away slowly in the Avondale Phalanstery; and day after day seemed more and more terrible to poor, weak, disconsolate Olive. The quiet refinement and delicate surroundings of their placid life seemed to make her poignant misery and long anxious term of waiting only the more intense in its sorrow and its awesomeness. Every day the younger sisters turned as of old to their allotted round of pleasant housework; every day the elder sisters, who had earned their leisure, brought in their dainty embroidery, or their drawing materials, or their other occupations, and tried to console her, or rather to condole with her, in her great sorrow. She couldn't complain of any unkindness; on the contrary, all the brothers and sisters were sympathy itself; while Clarence, though he tried hard not to be *too* idolatrous to her (which is wrong and antisocial, of course), was still overflowing with tenderness and consideration for her in their common grief. But all that seemed merely to make things worse. If only somebody would have been cruel to her; if only the hierarch would have scolded her, or the elder sisters have shown any distant coldness, or the other girls have been wanting in sisterly sympathy, she might have got angry or brooded over her wrongs; whereas, now, she could do nothing save cry passively with a vain attempt at resignation. It was nobody's fault; there was nobody to be angry with, there was nothing to blame except the great impersonal laws and circumstances of the Cosmos, which it would be rank impiety and wickedness to question or to gainsay. So she endured in silence, loving only to sit with Clarence's hand in hers, and the dear doomed baby lying peacefully upon the stole in her lap. It was inevitable, and there was no use repining; for so profoundly had the phalanstery schooled the minds and natures of those two unhappy young parents (and all their compeers), that grieve as they might, they never for one moment dreamt of attempting to relax or set aside the fundamental principles of phalansteric society in these matters.

By the kindly rule of the phalanstery, every mother had complete freedom from household duties for two years after the birth of her child; and Clarence, though he would not willingly have given up his own particular work in the grounds and garden, spent all the time he could spare from his short daily task (every one worked five hours every lawful day, and few worked longer, save on special emergencies) by Olive's side. At last, the eight decades passed slowly away, and the fatal day for the removal of little Rosebud arrived. Olive called her Rosebud because, she said, she was a sweet bud that could never be opened into a full-blown rose. All the community felt the solemnity of the painful occasion; and by common consent the day (Darwin, December 20) was held as an intra-phalansteric fast by the whole body of brothers and sisters.

On that terrible morning Olive rose early, and dressed herself carefully in a long white stole with a broad black border of Greek key pattern. But she had not the heart to put any black upon dear little Rosebud; and so she put on her fine flannel wrapper, and decorated it instead with the pretty coloured things that Veronica and Philomela had worked for her, to make her baby as beautiful as possible on this its last day in a world of happiness. The other girls helped her and tried to sustain her, crying all together at the sad event. 'She's a sweet little thing,' they said to one another as they held her up to see how she looked. 'If only it could have been her reception to-day instead of her removal!' But Olive moved through them all with stoical resignation—dry-eyed and parched in the throat, yet saying not a word save for necessary instructions and directions to the nursing sisters. The iron of her creed had entered into her very soul.

After breakfast, brother Eustace and the hierarch came sadly in their official robes into the lesser infirmary. Olive was there already, pale and trembling, with little Rosebud sleeping peacefully in the hollow of her lap. What a picture she looked, the wee dear thing, with the hothouse flowers from the conservatory that Clarence had brought to adorn her fastened neatly on to her fine flannel robe! The physiologist took out a little phial from his pocket, and began to open a sort of inhaler of white muslin. At the same moment, the grave, kind old hierarch stretched out his hands to take the sleeping baby from its mother's arms. Olive shrank back in terror, and clasped the child softly to her heart. 'No, no, let me hold her myself, dear hierarch,' she said, without flinching. 'Grant me this one last favour. Let me hold her myself.' It was contrary to all fixed rules; but neither the hierarch nor any one else there present had the heart to refuse that beseeching voice on so supreme and spirit-rending an occasion.

Brother Eustace poured the chloroform solemnly and quietly on to the muslin inhaler. 'By resolution of the phalanstery,' he said, in a voice husky with emotion, 'I release you, Rosebud, from a life for which you are naturally unfitted. In pity for your hard fate, we save you from the misfortune you have never known, and will never now experience.' As he spoke he held the inhaler to the baby's face, and watched its breathing grow fainter and fainter, till at last, after a few minutes, it faded gradually and entirely away. The little one had slept from life into death, painlessly and happily, even as they looked.

Clarence, tearful but silent, felt the baby's pulse for a moment, and then, with a burst of tears, shook his head bitterly. 'It is all over,' he cried with a loud cry. 'It is all over; and we hope and trust it is better so.'

But Olive still said nothing.

The physiologist turned to her with an anxious gaze. Her eyes were open, but they looked blank and staring into vacant space. He took her hand, and it felt limp and powerless. 'Great heaven!' he cried, in evident alarm, 'what is this? Olive, Olive, our dear Olive, why don't you speak?'

Clarence sprang up from the ground, where he had knelt to try the dead baby's pulse, and took her unresisting wrist anxiously in his. 'Oh, brother Eustace,' he cried passionately, 'help us, save us; what's the matter with Olive? she's fainting, she's fainting! I can't feel her heart beat, no, not ever so little.'

Brother Eustace let the pale white hand drop listlessly from his grasp upon the pale white stole beneath, and answered slowly and distinctly: 'She isn't fainting, Clarence; not fainting, my dear brother. The shock and the fumes of chloroform together have been too much for the action of the heart. She's dead too, Clarence; our dear, dear sister; she's dead too.'

Clarence flung his arms wildly round Olive's neck, and listened eagerly with his ear against her bosom to hear her heart beat. But no sound came from the folds of the simple black-bordered stole; no sound from anywhere save the suppressed sobs of the frightened women who huddled closely together in the corner, and gazed horror-stricken upon the two warm fresh corpses.

'She was a brave girl,' brother Eustace said at last, wiping his eyes and composing her hands reverently. 'Olive was a brave girl, and she died doing her duty, without one murmur against the sad necessity that fate had unhappily placed upon her. No sister on earth could wish to die more nobly than by thus sacrificing her own life and her own weak human affections on the altar of humanity for the sake of her child and of the world at large.'

'And yet, I sometimes almost fancy,' the hierarch murmured, with a violent effort to control his emotions, 'when I see a scene like this, that even the unenlightened practices of the old era may not have been quite so bad as we usually think them, for all that. Surely an end such as Olive's is a sad and a terrible end to have forced upon us as the final outcome and natural close of all our modern phalansthetic civilisation.'

'The ways of the Cosmos are wonderful,' said brother Eustace solemnly; 'and we, who are no more than atoms and mites upon the surface of its meanest satellite, cannot hope so to order all things after our own fashion that all its minutest turns and chances may approve themselves to us as right in our own eyes.'

The sisters all made instinctively the reverential genuflection. 'The Cosmos is infinite,' they said together, in the fixed formula of their cherished religion. 'The Cosmos is infinite, and man is but a parasite upon the face of the least among its satellite members. May we so act as to further all that is best within us, and to fulfil our own small place in the system of the Cosmos with all becoming reverence and humility! In the name of universal Humanity. So be it.'



## IV

### THE ABBÉ'S REPENTANCE

Ivy Stanbury had never been in the South before. So everything burst full upon her with all the charm of novelty. As they reached Antibes Station, the sun was setting. A pink glow from his blood-red orb lit up the snowy ridge of the Maritime Alps with fairy splendour. It was a dream of delight to those eager young eyes, fresh from the fog and frost and brooding gloom of London. In front, the deep blue port, the long white mole, the picturesque lighthouse, the arcaded breakwater, the sea just flecked with russet lateen sails, the coasting craft that lay idle by the quays in the harbour. Further on, the mouldering grey town, enclosed in its mediæval walls, and topped by its two tall towers: the square bastions and angles of Vauban's great fort: the laughing coast towards Nice, dotted over with white villages perched high among dark hills: and beyond all, soaring up into the cloudless sky, the phantom peaks of those sun-smitten mountains. No lovelier sight can eye behold round the enchanted Mediterranean: what wonder Ivy Stanbury gazed at it that first night of her sojourn in the South with unfeigned admiration?

'It's beautiful,' she broke forth, drawing a deep breath as she spoke, and gazing up at the clear-cut outlines of the Cime de Mercantourn. 'More beautiful than anything I could have imagined, almost.'

But Aunt Emma was busy looking after the luggage, registered through from London. '*Quatre colis*, all told, and then the rugs and the hold-all! Maria should have fastened those straps more securely. And where's the black bag? And the thing with the etna? And mind you take care of my canary, Ivy.'

Ivy stood still and gazed. So like a vision did those dainty pink summits, all pencilled with dark glens, hang mystic in the air. To think about luggage at such a moment as this was, to her, sheer desecration. And how wine-coloured was the dark sea in the evening light: and how antique the grey Greek town: and how delicious the sunset! The snowiest peaks of all stood out now in the very hue of the pinky nacre that lines a shell: the shadows of the gorges that scored their smooth sides showed up in delicate tints of pale green and dark purple. Ivy drew a deep breath again, and clutched the bird-cage silently.

The long drive to the hotel across the olive-clad promontory, between bay and bay, was one continuous joy to her. Here and there rocky inlets opened out for a moment to right or left, hemmed in by tiny crags, where the blue sea broke in milky foam upon weather-beaten skerries. Coquettish white villas gleamed rosy in the setting sun among tangled gardens of strange shrubs, whose very names Ivy knew not—date-palms, and fan-palms, and eucalyptus, and mimosa, and green Mediterranean pine, and tall flowering agavé. At last, the tired horses broke into a final canter, and drew up before the broad stairs of the hotel on the headland. A vista through the avenue revealed to Ivy's eyes a wide strip of sea, and beyond it again the jagged outline of the Estérel, most exquisitely shaped of earthly mountains, silhouetted in deep blue against the fiery red of a sky just fading from the afterglow into profound darkness.

She could hardly dress for dinner, for looking out of the window. Even in that dim evening light, the view across the bay was too exquisite to be neglected.

However, by dint of frequent admonitions from Aunt Emma, through the partition door, she managed at last to rummage out her little white evening dress—a soft nun's-cloth, made full in the bodice—and scrambled through in the nick of time, as the dinner-bell was ringing.

*Table d'hôte* was fairly full. Most of the guests were ladies. But to Ivy's surprise, and perhaps even dismay, she found herself seated next a tall young man in the long black cassock of a Catholic priest, with a delicate pale face, very austere and clear-cut. This was disconcerting to Ivy, for, in the English way, she had a vague feeling in her mind that priests, after all, were not quite human.

The tall young man, however, turned to her after a minute's pause with a frank and pleasant smile, which seemed all at once to bespeak her sympathy. He had an even row of white teeth, Ivy observed, and thin, thoughtful lips, and a cultivated air, and the mien of a gentleman. Cardinal Manning must surely have looked like that when he was an Anglican curate. So austere was the young man's face, yet so gentle, so engaging.

'Mademoiselle has just arrived to-day?' he said interrogatively, in the pure, sweet French of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Ivy could see at a glance he felt she was shy of him, and was trying to reassure her. 'What a beautiful sunset

we've had! What light! What colour!"

His voice rang so soft that Ivy plucked up heart of grace to answer him boldly in her own pretty variation of the Ollendorffian dialect, 'Yes, it was splendid, splendid. This is the first time I visit the Mediterranean, and coming from the cold North, its beauty takes my breath away.'

'Mademoiselle is French, then?' the young priest asked, with the courtly flattery that sits so naturally on his countrymen. 'No, English? Really! And nevertheless you speak with a charming accent. But all English ladies speak French to-day. Yes, this place is lovely: nothing lovelier on the coast. I went up this evening to the hill that forms the centre of our little promontory——'

'The hill with the lighthouse that we passed on our way?' Ivy asked, proud at heart that she could remember the word *phare* off-hand, without reference to the dictionary.

The Abbé bowed. 'Yes, the hill with the lighthouse,' he answered, hardly venturing to correct her by making *phare* masculine.' There is there a sanctuary of Our Lady—Notre-Dame de la Garoupe,—and I mounted up to it by the Chemin de la Croix, to make my devotions. And after spending a little half-hour all alone in the oratory, I went out upon the platform, and sat at the foot of the cross, and looked before me upon the view. Oh, mademoiselle, how shall I say? it was divine! it was beautiful! The light from the setting sun touched up those spotless temples of the eternal snow with the rosy radiance of an angel's wing. It was a prayer in marble. One would think the white and common daylight, streaming through some dim cathedral window, made rich with figures, was falling in crimson palpitations on the clasped hands of some alabaster saint—so glorious was it, so beautiful!"

Ivy smiled at his enthusiasm: it was so like her own—and yet, oh, so different! But she admired the young Abbé, all the same, for not being ashamed of his faith. What English curate would have dared to board a stranger like that—with such a winning confidence that the stranger would share his own point of view of things? And then the touch of poetry that he threw into it all was so delicately mediæval. Ivy looked at him and smiled again. The priest had certainly begun by creating a favourable impression.

All through dinner, her new acquaintance talked to her uninterruptedly. Ivy was quite charmed to see how far her meagre French would carry her. And her neighbour was so polite, so grave, so attentive. He never seemed to notice her mistakes of gender, her little errors of tense or mood or syntax; he caught rapidly at what she meant when she paused for a word: he finished her sentences for her better than she could have done them herself: he never suggested, he never corrected, he never faltered, but he helped her out, as it were, unconsciously, without ever seeming to help her. In a word, he had the manners of a born gentleman, with the polish and the grace of good French society. And then, whatever he said was so interesting and so well put. A tinge of Celtic imagination lighted up all his talk. He was well read in his own literature, and in English and German too. Nothing could have been more unlike Ivy's preconceived idea of the French Catholic priest—the rotund and rubicund village curé. The man was tall, slim, pathetic, poetical-looking, with piercing black eyes, and features of striking and statuesque beauty. But above all, Ivy felt now that he was earnest, and human—intensely human.

Once only, when conversation rose loud across the table, the Abbé ventured to ask, with bated breath, in a candid tone of inquiry, 'Mademoiselle is Catholic?'

Ivy looked down at her plate as she answered in a timid voice, 'No, monsieur, Anglican.' Then she added, half apologetically, with a deprecating smile, 'Tis the religion of my country, you know.' For she feared she shocked him.

'Perfectly,' the Abbé answered, with a sweet smile of resigned regret; and he murmured something half to himself in the Latin tongue, which Ivy didn't understand. It was a verse from the Vulgate, 'Other sheep have I which are not of this fold: them also will I bring in.' For he was a tolerant man, though devout, that Abbé, and Mademoiselle was charming. Had not even the Church itself held that Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, I know not how many more—and then, Mademoiselle no doubt erred through ignorance of the Faith, and the teaching of her parents!

After dinner they strolled out into the great entrance-hall. The Abbé, with a courtly bow, went off, half reluctant, in another direction. On a table close by, the letters that came by the evening post lay displayed in long rows for visitors to claim their own. With true feminine curiosity, Ivy glanced over the names of her fellow-guests. One struck her at once—'M. l'Abbé de Kermadec.' 'That must be our priest, Aunt Emma,' she said, looking close at it. And the English barrister with the loud voice, who sat opposite her at table, made answer, somewhat bluffly, 'Yes, that's the priest, M. Guy de

Kermadec. You can see with half an eye he's above the common ruck of 'em. Belongs to a very distinguished Breton family, so I'm told. Of late years, you know, there's been a reaction in France in favour of piety. It's the mode to be *dévo*t. The Royalists think religion goes hand in hand with legitimacy. So several noble families send a younger son into the Church now again, as before the Revolution—make a decorative Abbé of him. It's quite the thing, as times go. The eldest son of the Kermadecs is a marquis, I believe—one of their trumpery marquee's—has a château in Morbihan—the second son's in a cavalry regiment, and serves La France; the third's in the Church, and saves the souls of the family. That's the way they do now. Division of labour, don't you see! Number one plays, number two fights, number three prays. Land, army, piety.'

'Oh, indeed,' Ivy answered, shrinking into her shell at once. She didn't know why, but it jarred upon her somehow to hear the English barrister with the loud bluff voice speak like that about her neighbour. M. Guy de Kermadec was of gentler mould, she felt sure, than the barrister's coarse red hands should handle.

They stayed there some weeks. Aunt Emma's lungs were endowed with a cavity. So Aunt Emma did little but sun herself on the terrace, and chirp to the canary, and look across at the Estérel. But Ivy was strong, her limbs were a tomboy's, and she wandered about by herself to her heart's content over that rocky peninsula. On her first morning at the Cape, indeed, she strolled out alone, following a footpath that led through a green strip of pine-wood, fragrant on either side with lentisk scrub and rosemary. It brought her out upon the sea, near the very end of the promontory, at a spot where white rocks, deeply honeycombed by the ceaseless spray of centuries, lay tossed in wild confusion, stack upon stack, rent and fissured. Low bushes, planed level by the wind, sloped gradually upward. A *douanier's* trail threaded the rugged maze. Ivy turned to the left and followed it on, well pleased, past huge tors and deep gullies. Here and there, taking advantage of the tilt of the strata, the sea had worn itself great caves and blow-holes. A slight breeze was rolling breakers up these miniature gorges. Ivy stood and watched them tumble in, the deep peacock blue of the outer sea changing at once into white foam as they curled over and shattered themselves on the green slimy reefs that blocked their progress.

By and by she reached a spot where a clump of tall aloes, with prickly points, grew close to the edge of the rocks in true African luxuriance. Just beyond them, on the brink, a man sat bare-headed, his legs dangling over a steep undermined cliff. The limestone was tilted up there at such an acute angle that the crag overhung the sea by a yard or two, and waves dashed themselves below into a thick rain of spray without wetting the top. Ivy had clambered half out to the edge before she saw who the man was. Then he turned his head at the sound of her footfall, and sprang to his feet hastily.

'Take care, mademoiselle,' he said, holding his round hat in his left hand, and stretching out his right to steady her. 'Such spots as these are hardly meant for skirts like yours—or mine. One false step, and over you go. I'm a pretty strong swimmer myself—our Breton sea did so much for me; but no swimmer on earth could live against the force of those crushing breakers. They'd catch a man on their crests, and pound him to a jelly on the jagged needles of rock. They'd hurl him on to the crumbling pinnacles, and then drag him back with their undertow, and crush him at last, as in a gigantic mortar, till every trait, every feature, was indistinguishable.'

'Thank you,' Ivy answered, taking his proffered hand as innocently as she would have taken her father's curate's. 'It's just beautiful out here, isn't it?' She seated herself on the ledge near the spot where he had been sitting. 'How grandly the waves roll in!' she cried, eyeing them with girlish delight. 'Do you come here often, M. l'Abbé?'

The Abbé gazed at her, astonished. How strange are the ways of these English! He was a priest, to be sure, a celibate by profession; but he was young, he was handsome—he knew he was good-looking; and mademoiselle was unmarried! This chance meeting embarrassed him, to say the truth, far more than it did Ivy—though Ivy too was shy, and a little conscious blush that just tinged her soft cheek, made her look, the Abbé noted, even prettier than ever. But still, if he was a priest, he was also a gentleman. So, after a moment's demur, he sat down, a little way off—further off, indeed, than the curate would have thought it necessary to sit from her—and answered very gravely in that soft low voice of his, 'Yes, I come here often, very often. It's my favourite seat. On these rocks one seems to lose sight of the world and the work of man's hand, and to stand face to face with the eternal and the infinite.' He waved his arm, as he spoke, towards the horizon, vaguely.

'I like it for its wildness,' Ivy said simply. 'These crags are so beautiful.'

'Yes,' the young priest answered, looking across at them pensively, 'I like to think, for my part, that for thousands of years the waves have been dashing against them, day and night, night and day, in a ceaseless rhythm, since the morning of the creation. I like to think that before ever a Phocæan galley steered its virgin trip into the harbour of Antipolis, this

honeycombing had begun; that when the Holy Maries of the Sea passed by our Cape on their miraculous voyage to the mouths of the Rhone, they saw this headland, precisely as we see it to-day, on their starboard bow, all weather-eaten and weather-beaten.'

Ivy lounged with her feet dangling over the edge, as the Abbé had done before. The Abbé sat and looked at her in fear and trembling. If mademoiselle were to slip, now. His heart came up in his mouth at the thought. He was a priest, to be sure; but at seven-and-twenty, mark you well, even priests are human. They, too, have hearts. Anatomically they resemble the rest of their kind; it is only the cassock that makes the outer difference.

But Ivy sat talking in her imperfect French, with very little sense of how much trouble she was causing him. She didn't know that the Abbé, too, trembled on the very brink of a precipice. But his was a moral one. By and by she rose. The Abbé stretched out his hand, and lent it to her politely. He could do no less; yet the touch of her ungloved fingers thrilled him. What a pity so fair a lamb should stray so far from the true fold! Had Our Lady brought him this chance? Was it his duty to lead her, to guide her, to save her?

'Which is the way to the lighthouse hill?' Ivy asked him carelessly.

The words seemed to his full heart like a sacred omen. For on the lighthouse hill, as on all high places in Provence, stood also a lighthouse of the soul, a sanctuary of Our Lady, that Notre-Dame de la Garoupe whereof he had told her yesterday. And of her own accord she had asked the way now to Our Lady's shrine. He would guide her like a beacon. This was the finger of Providence. Sure, Our Lady herself had put the thought into the heart of her.

'I go that way myself,' he said, rejoicing. 'If mademoiselle will allow me, I will show her the path. Every day I go up there to make my devotions.'

As they walked by the seaward trail, and climbed the craggy little hill, the Abbé discoursed very pleasantly about many things. Not religion alone; he was a priest, but no bigot. An enthusiast for the sea, as becomes a Morbihan man, he loved it from every point of view, as swimmer, yachtsman, rower, landscape artist. His talk was of dangers confronted on stormy nights along the Ligurian coast; of voyages to Corsica, to the Channel Islands, to Bilbao; of great swims about Sark; of climbs among the bare summits over yonder by Turbia. And he was wide-minded too; for he spoke with real affection of a certain neighbour of theirs in Morbihan; he was proud of the great writer's pure Breton blood, though he deprecated his opinions—'But he's so kind and good after all, that dear big Rénan!' Ivy started with surprise; not so had she heard the noblest living master of French prose discussed and described in their Warwickshire rectory. But every moment she saw yet clearer that anything more unlike her preconceived idea of a Catholic priest than this ardent young Celt could hardly be imagined. Fervent and fervid, he led the conversation like one who spoke with tongues. For herself she said little by the way; her French halted sadly; but she listened with real pleasure to the full flowing stream of the young man's discourse. After all, she knew now, he was a young man at least—not human alone, but vivid and virile as well, in spite of his petticoats.

People forget too often that putting on a *soutane* doesn't necessarily make a strong nature feminine.

At the top of the lighthouse hill Ivy paused, delighted. Worlds opened before her. To right and left, in rival beauty, spread a glorious panorama. She stood and gazed at it entranced. She had plenty of time indeed to drink in to the full those two blue bays, with their contrasted mountain barriers—snowy Alps to the east, purple Estérel to westward—for the Abbé had gone into the rustic chapel to make his devotions. When he came out again, curiosity tempted Ivy for a moment into that bare little whitewashed barn. It was a Provençal fisher shrine of the rudest antique type; its gaudy Madonna, tricked out with paper flowers, stood under a crude blue canopy, set with tinsel-gilt stars; the rough walls hung thick with ex-voto's of coarse and naïve execution. Here, sailors in peril emerged from a watery grave by the visible appearance of Our Lady issuing in palpable wood from a very solid cloud of golden glory; there, a gig going down hill was stopped forcibly from above with hands laid on the reins by Our Lady in person; and yonder, again, a bursting gun did nobody any harm, for had not Our Lady caught the fragments in her own stiff fingers? Ivy gazed with a certain hushed awe at these nascent efforts of art; such a gulf seemed to yawn between that tawdry little oratory and the Abbé's own rich and cultivated nature. Yet he went to pray there!

For the next three weeks Ivy saw much of M. Guy de Kermadec. She taught him lawn-tennis, which he learned, indeed, with ease. At first, to be sure, the English in the hotel rather derided the idea of lawn-tennis in a cassock. But the Abbé was an adept at the *jeu de paume*, which had already educated his hand and eye, and he dropped into the new game so

quickly, in spite of the *soutane*, which sadly impeded his running, that even the Cambridge undergraduate with the budding moustache was forced to acknowledge 'the Frenchy' a formidable competitor. And then Ivy met him often in his strolls round the coast. He used to sit and sketch among the rocks, perched high on the most inaccessible pinnacles; and Ivy, it must be admitted, though she hardly knew why herself—so innocent is youth, so too dangerously innocent—went oftenest by the paths where she was likeliest to meet him. There she would watch the progress of his sketch, and criticise and admire; and in the end, when she rose to go, native politeness made it impossible for the Abbé to let her walk home unprotected, so he accompanied her back by the coast path to the hotel garden. Ivy hardly noticed that as he reached it he almost invariably lifted his round hat at once and dismissed her, unofficially as it were, to the society of her compatriots. But the Abbé, more used to the ways of the world and of France, knew well how unwise it was of him—a man of the Church—to walk with a young girl alone so often in the country. A priest should be circumspect.

Day after day, slowly, very slowly, the truth began to dawn by degrees upon the Abbé de Kermadec that he was in love with Ivy. At first, he fought the idea tooth and nail, like an evil vision. He belonged to the Church, the Bride of Heaven: what had such as he to do with mere carnal desires and earthly longings? But day by day, as Ivy met him, and talked with him more confidingly, her French growing more fluent by leaps and bounds under that able tutor Love, whose face as yet she recognised not—nature began to prove too strong for the Abbé's resolution. He found her company sweet. The position was so strange, and to him so incomprehensible. If Ivy had been a French girl, of course he could never have seen so much of her: her mother or her maid would have mounted guard over her night and day. Only with a married woman could he have involved himself so deeply in France: and then, the sinfulness of their intercourse would have been clear from the very outset to both alike of them. But what charmed and attracted him most in Ivy was just her English innocence. She was so gentle, so guileless. This pure creature of God's never seemed to be aware she was doing grievously wrong. The man who had voluntarily resigned all hope or chance of chaste love was now irresistibly led on by the very force of the spell he had renounced for ever.

And yet—how hard it is for us to throw ourselves completely into somebody else's attitude! So French was he, so Catholic, that he couldn't quite understand the full depth of Ivy's innocence. This girl who could walk and talk so freely with a priest—surely she must be aware of what thing she was doing. She must know she was leading him and herself into a dangerous love, a love that could end in none but a guilty conclusion.

So thinking, and praying, and fighting against it, and despising himself, the young Abbé yet persisted half unawares on the path of destruction. His hot Celtic imagination proved too much for his self-control. All night long he lay awake, tossing and turning on his bed, alternately muttering fervent prayers to Our Lady, and building up for himself warm visions of his next meeting with Ivy. In the morning, he would rise up early, and go afoot to the shrine of Notre-Dame de la Garoupe, and cry aloud with fiery zeal for help, that he might be delivered from temptation:—and then he would turn along the coast, towards his accustomed seat, looking out eagerly for the rustle of Ivy's dress among the cistus-bushes. When at last he met her, a great wave passed over him like a blush. He thrilled from head to foot. He grew cold. He trembled inwardly.

Not for nothing had he lived near the monastery of St. Gildas de Rhuys. For such a Heloise as that, what priest would not gladly become a second Abelard?

One morning, he met her by his overhanging ledge. The sea was rough. The waves broke grandly.

Ivy came up to him, with that conscious blush of hers just mantling her fair cheek. She liked him very much. But she was only eighteen. At eighteen a girl hardly knows when she's in love. But she vaguely suspects it.

The Abbé held out his hand. Ivy took it with a frank smile. 'Bonjour, M. de Kermadec!' she said lightly. She always addressed him so—not as M. l'Abbé, now. Was that intentional, he wondered? He took it to mean that she tried to forget his ecclesiastical position. 'La tante Emma' should guard her treasure in an earthen vessel more carefully. Why do these Protestants tempt us priests with their innocent girls? He led her to a seat, and gazed at her like a lover, his heart beating hard, and his knees trembling violently. He *must* speak to her to-day. Though *what*, he knew not.

He meant her no harm. He was too passionate, too pure, too earnest for that. But he meant her no good either. He meant nothing, nothing. Before her face he was a bark driven rudderless by the breeze. He only knew he loved her: she *must* be his. His passion hallowed his act. And she too, she loved him.

Leaning one hand on the rock, he talked to her for a while, he hardly knew what. He saw she was tremulous. She looked

down and blushed often. That intangible, incomprehensible, invisible something that makes lovers subtly conscious of one another's mood had told her how he felt towards her. She tingled to the finger-tips. It was sweet to be there—oh, how sweet, yet how hopeless!

Romance to her: to him, sin, death, infamy.

At last he leaned across to her. She had answered him back once more about some trifle, 'Mais, oui, M. de Kermadec.' 'Why this "monsieur"?' the priest asked boldly, gazing deep into her startled eyes. 'Je m'appelle Guy, mademoiselle. Why not Guy then—Ivy?'

At the word her heart gave a bound. He had said it! He had said it! He loved her; oh, how delicious! She could have cried for joy at that implied avowal.

But she drew herself up for all that, like a pure-minded English girl that she was, and answered with a red flush, 'Because—it would be wrong, monsieur. You know very well, as things are, I cannot.'

What a flush! what a halo! Madonna and vows were all forgotten now. The Abbé flung himself forward in one wild burst of passion. He gazed in her eyes, and all was lost. His hot Celtic soul poured itself forth in full flood. He loved her: he adored her: she should be his and his only. He had fought against it. But love—love had conquered. 'Oh, Ivy,' he cried passionately, 'you will not refuse me! You will be mine and mine only. You will love me as I love you!'

Ivy's heart broke forth too. She looked at him and melted. 'Guy,' she answered, first framing the truth to herself in that frank confession, 'I love you in return. I have loved you since the very first moment I saw you.'

The Abbé seized her hand, and raised it rapturously to his lips. 'My beloved,' he cried, rosy red, 'you are mine, you are mine—and I am yours for ever.'

Ivy drew back a little, somewhat abashed and alarmed by his evident ardour. 'I wonder if I'm doing wrong?' she cried, with the piteous uncertainty of early youth. 'Your vows, you know! your vows! How will you ever get rid of them?'

The Abbé gazed at her astonished. What could this angel mean? She wondered if she was doing wrong! Get rid of his vows! He, a priest, to make love! What *naïveté*! What innocence!

But he was too hot to repent. 'My vows!' he cried, flinging them from him with both hands into the sea. 'Ivy, let them go! Let the waves bear them off! What are they to me now? I renounce them! I have done with them!'

Ivy looked at him, breathing deep. Why, he loved her indeed. For she knew how devoted he was, how earnest, how Catholic. 'Then you'll join our Church,' she said simply, 'and give up your orders and marry me!'

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the young priest's feet, its effect could not have been more crushing, more instantaneous, more extraordinary. In a moment, he had come to himself again, cooled, astonished, horrified. Oh, what had he said? What had he done? What vile sin had he committed? Not against Heaven, now, or the saints, for of that and his own soul he thought just then but little: but against that pure young girl whom he loved, that sweet creature of innocence! And how could he ever explain to her? How retract? How excuse himself? Even to attempt an explanation would be sheer treason to her purity. The thought in his mind was too unholy for her to hear. To tell her what he meant would be a crime, a sin, a *bassesse*!

He saw it in an instant, how the matter would envisage itself to her un-Catholic mind. She could never understand that to him, a single fall, a temporary backsliding, was but a subject for repentance, confession, absolution, pardon: while to renounce his orders, renounce his Church, contract a marriage that in his eyes would be no marriage at all, but a living lie, was to continue in open sin, to degrade and dishonour her. For her own sake, even, if saints and Madonna were not, Guy de Kermadec could never consent so to taint and to sully her. That pure soul was too dear to him. He had dreamed for a moment, indeed, of foul wrong, in the white heat of passion: all men may be misled for a moment of impulse by the strong demon within them: but to persevere in such wrong, to go on sinning openly, flagrantly, shamelessly—Guy de Kermadec drew back from the bare idea with disdain. As priest and as gentleman alike, he looked down upon it and contemned it.

The reaction was profound. For a minute or two he gazed into Ivy's face like one spellbound. He paused and hesitated. What way out of this maze? How on earth could he undeceive her? Then suddenly, with a loud cry, he sprang to his feet

like one shot, and stood up by the edge of the rocks in his long black *soutane*. He held out his hands to raise her. 'Mademoiselle,' he groaned aloud from his heart, in a very broken tone, 'I have done wrong—grievous wrong: I have sinned—against Heaven and against you, and am no more worthy to be called a priest.' He raised his voice solemnly. It was the voice of a bruised and wounded creature. 'Go back!' he cried once more, waving her away from him as from one polluted. 'You can never forgive me. But at least, go back. I should have cut out my tongue rather than have spoken so to you. I am a leper—a wild beast. Ten thousand times over, I crave your pardon.'

Ivy gazed at him, thunderstruck. In her innocence, she hardly knew what the man even meant. But she saw her romance had toppled over to its base, and shattered itself to nothing. Slowly she rose, and took his hand across the rocks to steady her. They reached the track in silence. As they gained it, the Abbé raised his hat for the last time, and turned away bitterly. He took the path to the right. Obedient to his gesture, Ivy went to the left. Back to the hotel she went, lingering, with a heart like a stone, locked herself up in her own room, and cried long and silently.

But as for Guy de Kermadec, all on fire with his remorse, he walked fast along the sea-shore, over the jagged rock path, toward the town of Antibes.

Through the narrow streets of the old city he made his way, like a blind man, to the house of a priest whom he knew. His heart was seething now with regret and shame and horror. What vile thing was this wherewith he, a priest of God, had ventured to affront the pure innocence of a maiden? What unchastity had he forced on the chaste eyes of girlhood? Ivy had struck him dumb by her very freedom from all guile. And it was she, the heretic, for whose soul he had wrestled in prayer with Our Lady, who had brought him back with a bound to the consciousness of sin, and the knowledge of purity, from the very brink of a precipice.

He knocked at the door of his friend's house like a moral leper.

His brother-priest received him kindly. Guy de Kermadec was pale, but his manner was wild, like one mad with frenzy. 'Mon père,' he said straight out, 'I have come to confess, *in articulo mortis*. I feel I shall die to-night. I have a warning from Our Lady. I ask you for absolution, a blessing, the holy sacrament, extreme unction. If you refuse them, I die. Give me God at your peril.'

The elder priest hesitated. How could he give the host otherwise than to a person fasting? How administer extreme unction save to a dying man? But Guy de Kermadec, in his fiery haste, overbore all scrupulous ecclesiastical objections. He *was* a dying man, he cried: Our Lady's own warning was surely more certain than the guess or conjecture of a mere earthly doctor. The viaticum he demanded, and the viaticum he must have. He was to die that night. He knew it. He was sure of it.

He knelt down and confessed. He would brook no refusal. The country priest, all amazed, sat and listened to him, breathless. Once or twice he drew his sleek hand over his full fat face doubtfully. The strange things this hot Breton said to him were beyond his comprehension. They spoke different languages. How could he, good easy soul, with his cut-and-dried theology, fathom the fiery depths of that volcanic bosom? He nursed his chin in suspense, and marvelled. Other priests had gone astray. Why this wild fever of repentance? Other women had been tempted. Why this passionate tenderness for the sensibilities of a mere English heretic? Other girls had sinned outright. Why this horror at the harm done to her in intention only?

But to Guy de Kermadec himself it was a crime of *lèse-majesté* against a young girl's purity. A crime whose very nature it would be criminal to explain to her. A crime that he could only atone with his life. Apology was impossible. Explanation was treason. Nothing remained for it now but the one resource of silence.

In an orgy of penitence, the young priest confessed, and received absolution: he took the viaticum, trembling; he obtained extreme unction. Then, with a terrible light in his eyes, he went into a stationer's shop, and in tremulous lines wrote a note, which he posted to Ivy.

'Très chère dame,' it said simply, 'you will see me no more. This morning, I offered, half unawares, a very great wrong to you. Your own words, and Our Lady's intervention, brought me back to myself. Thank Heaven, it was in time. I might have wronged you more. My last prayers are for your pure soul. Pray for mine and forgive me.'

Adieu! GUY DE KERMADEC.'

After that, he strode out to the Cape once more. It was growing dark by that time, for he was long at Antibes. He walked with fiery eagerness to the edge of the cliff, where he had sat with joy that morning—where he had sat before so often. The brink of the rocks was wet with salt spray, very smooth and slippery. The Abbé stood up, and looked over at the black water. The Church makes suicide a sin, and he would obey the Church. But no canon prevents one from leaning over the edge of a cliff, to admire the dark waves. They rolled in with a thud, and broke in sheets of white spray against the honeycombed base of the rock, invisible beneath him.

'Si dextra tua tibi offenderit,' they said, in their long slow chant—'si dextra tua tibi offenderit.' If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. And Ivy was dearer to him than his own right hand. Yet not for that, oh Mary, Star of the Sea, not for that; nor yet for his own salvation;—let him burn, if need were, in nethermost hell, to atone this error—but for that pure maid's sake, and for the cruel wrong he had put upon her. 'Oh, Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows,' he cried, wringing his hands in his agony, 'who wert a Virgin thyself, help and succour this virgin in her own great sorrow. Thou knowest her innocence, her guilelessness, her simplicity, and the harm beyond healing that I wrought her unawares. Oh, blot it out of her pure white soul and bless her. Thou knowest that for her sake alone, and to undo this sin to her, I stand here to-night, on the brink of the precipice. Queen of the Waves, Our Lady of the Look-out, if the sacrifice please thee, take me thus to thine own bosom. Let thy billows rise up and blot out my black sin. Oh, Mary, hear me! *Stella maris adesto!*'

He stood there for hours, growing colder and stiffer. It was quite dark now, and the sea was rising. Yet still he prayed on, and still the spray dashed upward. At last, as he prayed in the dim night, erect, with bare head, a great wave broke higher than ever over the rocks below him. With a fierce joy, Guy de Kermadec felt it thrill through the thickness of the cliff: then it rose in a head, and burst upon him with a roar like the noise of thunder. He lost his footing, and fell, clutching at the jagged pinnacles for support, into the deep trough below. There, the billows caught him up, and pounded him on the sharp crags. Thank Heaven for that mercy! Our Lady had heard his last prayer. Mary, full of grace, had been pleased to succour him. With a penance of blood, from torn hands and feet, was he expiating his sin against Heaven and against Ivy.

Next morning, the *douanier*, pacing the shore alone, saw a dead body entangled among the sharp rocks by the precipice. Climbing down on hands and knees, he fished it out with difficulty, and ran to fetch a gendarme. The face was beaten to a jelly, past all recognition, and the body was mangled in a hideous fashion. But it wore a rent *soutane*, all in ribbons on the rocks; and the left third finger bore a signet-ring with a coat of arms and the motto, 'Foy d'un Kermadec.'

Ivy is still unwed. No eye but hers has ever seen Guy de Kermadec's last letter.

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## V

### WOLVERDEN TOWER

#### I

Maisie Llewelyn had never been asked to Wolverden before; therefore, she was not a little elated at Mrs. West's invitation. For Wolverden Hall, one of the loveliest Elizabethan manor-houses in the Weald of Kent, had been bought and fitted up in appropriate style (the phrase is the upholsterer's) by Colonel West, the famous millionaire from South Australia. The Colonel had lavished upon it untold wealth, fleeced from the backs of ten thousand sheep and an equal number of his fellow-countrymen; and Wolverden was now, if not the most beautiful, at least the most opulent country-house within easy reach of London.

Mrs. West was waiting at the station to meet Maisie. The house was full of Christmas guests already, it is true; but Mrs. West was a model of stately, old-fashioned courtesy: she would not have omitted meeting one among the number on any less excuse than a royal command to appear at Windsor. She kissed Maisie on both cheeks—she had always been fond of Maisie—and, leaving two haughty young aristocrats (in powdered hair and blue-and-gold livery) to hunt up her luggage by the light of nature, sailed forth with her through the door to the obsequious carriage.

The drive up the avenue to Wolverden Hall Maisie found quite delicious. Even in their leafless winter condition the great limes looked so noble; and the ivy-covered hall at the end, with its mullioned windows, its Inigo Jones porch, and its creeper-clad gables, was as picturesque a building as the ideals one sees in Mr. Abbey's sketches. If only Arthur Hume had been one of the party now, Maisie's joy would have been complete. But what was the use of thinking so much about Arthur Hume, when she didn't even know whether Arthur Hume cared for her?

A tall, slim girl, Maisie Llewelyn, with rich black hair, and ethereal features, as became a descendant of Llewelyn ap Iorwerth—the sort of girl we none of us would have called anything more than 'interesting' till Rossetti and Burne-Jones found eyes for us to see that the type is beautiful with a deeper beauty than that of your obvious pink-and-white prettiness. Her eyes, in particular, had a lustrous depth that was almost superhuman, and her fingers and nails were strangely transparent in their waxen softness.

'You won't mind my having put you in a ground-floor room in the new wing, my dear, will you?' Mrs. West inquired, as she led Maisie personally to the quarters chosen for her. 'You see, we're so unusually full, because of these tableaux!'

Maisie gazed round the ground-floor room in the new wing with eyes of mute wonder. If *this* was the kind of lodging for which Mrs. West thought it necessary to apologise, Maisie wondered of what sort were those better rooms which she gave to the guests she delighted to honour. It was a large and exquisitely decorated chamber, with the softest and deepest Oriental carpet Maisie's feet had ever felt, and the daintiest curtains her eyes had ever lighted upon. True, it opened by French windows on to what was nominally the ground in front; but as the Italian terrace, with its formal balustrade and its great stone balls, was raised several feet above the level of the sloping garden below, the room was really on the first floor for all practical purposes. Indeed, Maisie rather liked the unwonted sense of space and freedom which was given by this easy access to the world without; and, as the windows were secured by great shutters and fasteners, she had no counterbalancing fear lest a nightly burglar should attempt to carry off her little pearl necklet or her amethyst brooch, instead of directing his whole attention to Mrs. West's famous diamond tiara.

She moved naturally to the window. She was fond of nature. The view it disclosed over the Weald at her feet was wide and varied. Misty range lay behind misty range, in a faint December haze, receding and receding, till away to the south, half hidden by vapour, the Sussex downs loomed vague in the distance. The village church, as happens so often in the case of old lordly manors, stood within the grounds of the Hall, and close by the house. It had been built, her hostess said, in the days of the Edwards, but had portions of an older Saxon edifice still enclosed in the chancel. The one eyesore in the view was its new white tower, recently restored (or rather, rebuilt), which contrasted most painfully with the mellow grey stone and mouldering corbels of the nave and transept.

'What a pity it's been so spoiled!' Maisie exclaimed, looking across at the tower. Coming straight as she did from a Merioneth rectory, she took an ancestral interest in all that concerned churches.

'Oh, my dear!' Mrs. West cried, '*please* don't say that, I beg of you, to the Colonel. If you were to murmur "spoiled" to him you'd wreck his digestion. He's spent ever so much money over securing the foundations and reproducing the sculpture on the old tower we took down, and it breaks his dear heart when anybody disapproves of it. For *some* people, you know, are so absurdly opposed to reasonable restoration.

'Oh, but this isn't even restoration, you know,' Maisie said, with the frankness of twenty, and the specialist interest of an antiquary's daughter. 'This is pure reconstruction.'

'Perhaps so,' Mrs. West answered. 'But if you think so, my dear, don't breathe it at Wolverden.'

A fire, of ostentatiously wealthy dimensions, and of the best glowing coal, burned bright on the hearth; but the day was mild, and hardly more than autumnal. Maisie found the room quite unpleasantly hot. She opened the windows and stepped out on the terrace. Mrs. West followed her. They paced up and down the broad gravelled platform for a while—Maisie had not yet taken off her travelling-cloak and hat—and then strolled half unconsciously towards the gate of the church. The churchyard, to hide the tombstones of which the parapet had been erected, was full of quaint old monuments, with broken-nosed cherubs, some of them dating from a comparatively early period. The porch, with its sculptured niches deprived of their saints by puritan hands, was still rich and beautiful in its carved detail. On the seat inside an old woman was sitting. She did not rise as the lady of the manor approached, but went on mumbling and muttering inarticulately to herself in a sulky undertone. Still, Maisie was aware, none the less, that the moment she came near a strange light gleamed suddenly in the old woman's eyes, and that her glance was fixed upon her. A faint thrill of recognition seemed to pass like a flash through her palsied body. Maisie knew not why, but she was dimly afraid of the old woman's gaze upon her.

'It's a lovely old church!' Maisie said, looking up at the trefoil finials on the porch—'all, except the tower.'

'We *had* to reconstruct it,' Mrs. West answered apologetically—Mrs. West's general attitude in life was apologetic, as though she felt she had no right to so much more money than her fellow-creatures. 'It would have fallen if we hadn't done something to buttress it up. It was really in a most dangerous and critical condition.'

'Lies! lies! lies!' the old woman burst out suddenly, though in a strange, low tone, as if speaking to herself. 'It would *not* have fallen—they knew it would not. It could not have fallen. It would never have fallen if they had not destroyed it. And even then—I was there when they pulled it down—each stone clung to each, with arms and legs and hands and claws, till they burst them asunder by main force with their new-fangled stuff—I don't know what they call it—dynamite, or something. It was all of it done for one man's vainglory!'

'Come away, dear,' Mrs. West whispered. But Maisie loitered.

'Wolverden Tower was fasted thrice,' the old woman continued, in a sing-song quaver. 'It was fasted thrice with souls of maids against every assault of man or devil. It was fasted at the foundation against earthquake and ruin. It was fasted at the top against thunder and lightning. It was fasted in the middle against storm and battle. And there it would have stood for a thousand years if a wicked man had not raised a vainglorious hand against it. For that's what the rhyme says—

'Fasted thrice with souls of men,  
Stands the tower of Wolverden;  
Fasted thrice with maidens' blood,  
A thousand years of fire and flood  
Shall see it stand as erst it stood.'

She paused a moment, then, raising one skinny hand towards the brand-new stone, she went on in the same voice, but with malignant fervour—

'A thousand years the tower shall stand  
Till ill assailed by evil hand;  
By evil hand in evil hour,  
Fasted thrice with warlock's power,  
Shall fall the stanes of Wulfhere's tower.'

She tottered off as she ended, and took her seat on the edge of a depressed vault in the churchyard close by, still eyeing Maisie Llewelyn with a weird and curious glance, almost like the look which a famishing man casts upon the food in a shop-window.

'Who is she?' Maisie asked, shrinking away in undefined terror.

'Oh, old Bessie,' Mrs. West answered, looking more apologetic (for the parish) than ever. 'She's always hanging about here. She has nothing else to do, and she's an outdoor pauper. You see, that's the worst of having the church in one's grounds, which is otherwise picturesque and romantic and baronial; the road to it's public; you must admit all the world; and old Bessie *will* come here. The servants are afraid of her. They say she's a witch. She has the evil eye, and she drives girls to suicide. But they cross her hand with silver all the same, and she tells them their fortunes—gives them each a butler. She's full of dreadful stories about Wolverden Church—stories to make your blood run cold, my dear, compact with old superstitions and murders, and so forth. And they're true, too, that's the worst of them. She's quite a character. Mr. Blaydes, the antiquary, is really attached to her; he says she's now the sole living repository of the traditional folk-lore and history of the parish. But I don't care for it myself. It "gars one greet," as we say in Scotland. Too much burying alive in it, don't you know, my dear, to quite suit *my* fancy.'

They turned back as she spoke towards the carved wooden lych-gate, one of the oldest and most exquisite of its class in England. When they reached the vault by whose doors old Bessie was seated, Maisie turned once more to gaze at the pointed lancet windows of the Early English choir, and the still more ancient dog-tooth ornament of the ruined Norman Lady Chapel.

'How solidly it's built!' she exclaimed, looking up at the arches which alone survived the fury of the Puritan. 'It really looks as if it would last for ever.'

Old Bessie had bent her head, and seemed to be whispering something at the door of the vault. But at the sound she raised her eyes, and, turning her wizened face towards the lady of the manor, mumbled through her few remaining fang-like teeth an old local saying, 'Bradbury for length, Wolverden for strength, and Church Hatton for beauty!

'Three brothers builded churches three;  
And fasted thrice each church shall be:  
Fasted thrice with maidens' blood,  
To make them safe from fire and flood;  
Fasted thrice with souls of men,  
Hatton, Bradbury, Wolverden!'

'Come away,' Maisie said, shuddering. 'I'm afraid of that woman. Why was she whispering at the doors of the vault down there? I don't like the look of her.'

'My dear,' Mrs. West answered, in no less terrified a tone, 'I will confess I don't like the look of her myself. I wish she'd leave the place. I've tried to make her. The Colonel offered her fifty pounds down and a nice cottage in Surrey if only she'd go—she frightens me so much; but she wouldn't hear of it. She said she must stop by the bodies of her dead—that's her style, don't you see: a sort of modern ghou, a degenerate vampire—and from the bodies of her dead in Wolverden Church no living soul should ever move her.'

## II

For dinner Maisie wore her white satin Empire dress, high-waisted, low-necked, and cut in the bodice with a certain baby-like simplicity of style which exactly suited her strange and uncanny type of beauty. She was very much admired. She felt it, and it pleased her. The young man who took her in, a subaltern of engineers, had no eyes for any one else; while old Admiral Wade, who sat opposite her with a plain and skinny dowager, made her positively uncomfortable by the persistent way in which he stared at her simple pearl necklet.

After dinner, the tableaux. They had been designed and managed by a famous Royal Academician, and were mostly got up by the members of the house-party. But two or three actresses from London had been specially invited to help in a few of the more mythological scenes; for, indeed, Mrs. West had prepared the entire entertainment with that topsy-turvy conscientiousness and scrupulous sense of responsibility to society which pervaded her view of millionaire morality.

Having once decided to offer the county a set of tableaux, she felt that millionaire morality absolutely demanded of her the sacrifice of three weeks' time and several hundred pounds money in order to discharge her obligations to the county with becoming magnificence.

The first tableau, Maisie learned from the gorgeous programme, was 'Jephthah's Daughter.' The subject was represented at the pathetic moment when the doomed virgin goes forth from her father's house with her attendant maidens to bewail her virginity for two months upon the mountains, before the fulfilment of the awful vow which bound her father to offer her up for a burnt offering. Maisie thought it too solemn and tragic a scene for a festive occasion. But the famous R.A. had a taste for such themes, and his grouping was certainly most effectively dramatic.

'A perfect symphony in white and grey,' said Mr. Wills, the art critic.

'How awfully affecting!' said most of the young girls.

'Reminds me a little too much, my dear, of old Bessie's stories,' Mrs. West whispered low, leaning from her seat across two rows to Maisie.

A piano stood a little on one side of the platform, just in front of the curtain. The intervals between the pieces were filled up with songs, which, however, had been evidently arranged in keeping with the solemn and half-mystical tone of the tableaux. It is the habit of amateurs to take a long time in getting their scenes in order, so the interposition of the music was a happy thought as far as its prime intention went. But Maisie wondered they could not have chosen some livelier song for Christmas Eve than 'Oh, Mary, go and call the cattle home, and call the cattle home, and call the cattle home, across the sands of Dee.' Her own name was Mary when she signed it officially, and the sad lilt of the last line, 'But never home came she,' rang unpleasantly in her ear through the rest of the evening.

The second tableau was the 'Sacrifice of Iphigenia.' It was admirably rendered. The cold and dignified father, standing, apparently unmoved, by the pyre; the cruel faces of the attendant priests; the shrinking form of the immolated princess; the mere blank curiosity and inquiring interest of the helmeted heroes looking on, to whom this slaughter of a virgin victim was but an ordinary incident of the Achæan religion—all these had been arranged by the Academical director with consummate skill and pictorial cleverness. But the group that attracted Maisie most among the components of the scene was that of the attendant maidens, more conspicuous here in their flowing white chitons than even they had been when posed as companions of the beautiful and ill-fated Hebrew victim. Two in particular excited her close attention—two very graceful and spiritual-looking girls, in long white robes of no particular age or country, who stood at the very end near the right edge of the picture. 'How lovely they are, the two last on the right!' Maisie whispered to her neighbour—an Oxford undergraduate with a budding moustache. 'I do so admire them!'

'Do you?' he answered, fondling the moustache with one dubious finger. 'Well, now, do you know, I don't think I do. They're rather coarse-looking. And besides, I don't quite like the way they've got their hair done up in bunches; too fashionable, isn't it?—too much of the present day? I don't care to see a girl in a Greek costume, with her coiffure so evidently turned out by Truefitt's!'

'Oh, I don't mean those two,' Maisie answered, a little shocked he should think she had picked out such meretricious faces; 'I mean the two beyond them again—the two with their hair so simply and sweetly done—the ethereal-looking dark girls.'

The undergraduate opened his mouth, and stared at her in blank amazement for a moment. 'Well, I don't see——' he began, and broke off suddenly. Something in Maisie's eye seemed to give him pause. He fondled his moustache, hesitated, and was silent.

'How nice to have read the Greek and know what it all means!' Maisie went on, after a minute. 'It's a human sacrifice, of course; but, please, what is the story?'

The undergraduate hummed and hawed. 'Well, it's in Euripides, you know,' he said, trying to look impressive, 'and——and I haven't taken up Euripides for my next examination. But I *think* it's like this. Iphigenia was a daughter of Agamemnon's, don't you know, and he had offended Artemis or somebody—some other goddess; and he vowed to offer up to her the most beautiful thing that should be born that year, by way of reparation—just like Jephthah. Well, Iphigenia was considered the most beautiful product of the particular twelvemonth—don't look at me like that, please! you—you make me nervous—and so, when the young woman grew up—well, I don't quite recollect the ins and outs of the details,

but it's a human sacrifice business, don't you see; and they're just going to kill her, though I *believe* a hind was finally substituted for the girl, like the ram for Isaac; but I must confess I've a very vague recollection of it.' He rose from his seat uneasily. 'I'm afraid,' he went on, shuffling about for an excuse to move, 'these chairs are too close. I seem to be incommoding you.'

He moved away with a furtive air. At the end of the tableau one or two of the characters who were not needed in succeeding pieces came down from the stage and joined the body of spectators, as they often do, in their character-dresses—a good opportunity, in point of fact, for retaining through the evening the advantages conferred by theatrical costume, rouge, and pearl-powder. Among them the two girls Maisie had admired so much glided quietly toward her and took the two vacant seats on either side, one of which had just been quitted by the awkward undergraduate. They were not only beautiful in face and figure, on a closer view, but Maisie found them from the first extremely sympathetic. They burst into talk with her, frankly and at once, with charming ease and grace of manner. They were ladies in the grain, in instinct and breeding. The taller of the two, whom the other addressed as Yolande, seemed particularly pleasing. The very name charmed Maisie. She was friends with them at once. They both possessed a certain nameless attraction that constitutes in itself the best possible introduction. Maisie hesitated to ask them whence they came, but it was clear from their talk they knew Wolverden intimately.

After a minute the piano struck up once more. A famous Scotch vocalist, in a diamond necklet and a dress to match, took her place on the stage, just in front of the footlights. As chance would have it, she began singing the song Maisie most of all hated. It was Scott's ballad of 'Proud Maisie,' set to music by Carlo Ludovici—

'Proud Maisie is in the wood,  
Walking so early;  
Sweet Robin sits on the bush,  
Singing so rarely.

"Tell me, thou bonny bird,  
When shall I marry me?"  
"When six braw gentlemen  
Kirkward shall carry ye."

"Who makes the bridal bed,  
Birdie, say truly?"  
"The grey-headed sexton  
That delves the grave duly.

"The glow-worm o'er grave and stone  
Shall light thee steady;  
The owl from the steeple sing,  
'Welcome, proud lady.'"

Maisie listened to the song with grave discomfort. She had never liked it, and to-night it appalled her. She did not know that just at that moment Mrs. West was whispering in a perfect fever of apology to a lady by her side, 'Oh dear! oh dear! what a dreadful thing of me ever to have permitted that song to be sung here to-night! It was horribly thoughtless! Why, now I remember, Miss Llewelyn's name, you know, is Maisie!—and there she is listening to it with a face like a sheet! I shall never forgive myself!'

The tall, dark girl by Maisie's side, whom the other called Yolande, leaned across to her sympathetically. 'You don't like that song?' she said, with just a tinge of reproach in her voice as she said it.

'I hate it!' Maisie answered, trying hard to compose herself.

'Why so?' the tall, dark girl asked, in a tone of calm and singular sweetness. 'It is sad, perhaps; but it's lovely—and natural!'

'My own name is Maisie,' her new friend replied, with an ill-repressed shudder. 'And somehow that song pursues me through life. I seem always to hear the horrid ring of the words, "When six braw gentlemen kirkward shall carry ye." I

wish to Heaven my people had never called me Maisie!

'And yet *why*?' the tall, dark girl asked again, with a sad, mysterious air. Why this clinging to life—this terror of death—this inexplicable attachment to a world of misery? And with such eyes as yours, too! Your eyes are like mine'—which was a compliment, certainly, for the dark girl's own pair were strangely deep and lustrous. 'People with eyes such as those, that can look into futurity, ought not surely to shrink from a mere gate like death! For death is but a gate—the gate of life in its fullest beauty. It is written over the door, "Mors janua vitæ."'

'What door?' Maisie asked—for she remembered having read those selfsame words, and tried in vain to translate them, that very day, though the meaning was now clear to her.

The answer electrified her: 'The gate of the vault in Wolverden churchyard.'

She said it very low, but with pregnant expression.

'Oh, how dreadful!' Maisie exclaimed, drawing back. The tall, dark girl half frightened her.

'Not at all,' the girl answered. 'This life is so short, so vain, so transitory! And beyond it is peace—eternal peace—the calm of rest—the joy of the spirit.'

'You come to anchor at last,' her companion added.

'But if—one has somebody one would not wish to leave behind?' Maisie suggested timidly.

'He will follow before long,' the dark girl replied with quiet decision, interpreting rightly the sex of the indefinite substantive. 'Time passes so quickly. And if time passes quickly in time, how much more, then, in eternity!'

'Hush, Yolande,' the other dark girl put in, with a warning glance; 'there's a new tableau coming. Let me see, is this "The Death of Ophelia"? No, that's number four; this is number three, "The Martyrdom of St. Agnes."'

### III

'My dear,' Mrs. West said, positively oozing apology, when she met Maisie in the supper-room, 'I'm afraid you've been left in a corner by yourself almost all the evening!'

'Oh dear, no,' Maisie answered with a quiet smile. 'I had that Oxford undergraduate at my elbow at first; and afterwards those two nice girls, with the flowing white dresses and the beautiful eyes, came and sat beside me. What's their name, I wonder?'

'Which girls?' Mrs. West asked, with a little surprise in her tone, for her impression was rather that Maisie had been sitting between two empty chairs for the greater part of the evening, muttering at times to herself in the most uncanny way, but not talking to anybody.

Maisie glanced round the room in search of her new friends, and for some time could not see them. At last, she observed them in a remote alcove, drinking red wine by themselves out of Venetian-glass beakers. 'Those two,' she said, pointing towards them. 'They're such charming girls! Can you tell me who they are? I've quite taken a fancy to them.'

Mrs. West gazed at them for a second—or rather, at the recess towards which Maisie pointed—and then turned to Maisie with much the same oddly embarrassed look and manner as the undergraduate's. 'Oh, *those*!' she said slowly, peering through and through her, Maisie thought. 'Those—must be some of the professionals from London. At any rate—I'm not sure which you mean—over there by the curtain, in the Moorish nook, you say—well, I can't tell you their names! So they *must* be professionals.'

She went off with a singularly frightened manner. Maisie noticed it and wondered at it. But it made no great or lasting impression.

When the party broke up, about midnight or a little later, Maisie went along the corridor to her own bedroom. At the end, by the door, the two other girls happened to be standing, apparently gossiping.

'Oh, you've not gone home yet?' Maisie said, as she passed, to Yolande.

'No, we're stopping here,' the dark girl with the speaking eyes answered.

Maisie paused for a second. Then an impulse burst over her. 'Will you come and see my room?' she asked, a little timidly.

'Shall we go, Hedda?' Yolande said, with an inquiring glance at her companion.

Her friend nodded assent. Maisie opened the door, and ushered them into her bedroom.

The ostentatiously opulent fire was still burning brightly, the electric light flooded the room with its brilliancy, the curtains were drawn, and the shutters fastened. For a while the three girls sat together by the hearth and gossiped quietly. Maisie liked her new friends—their voices were so gentle, soft, and sympathetic, while for face and figure they might have sat as models to Burne-Jones or Botticelli. Their dresses, too, took her delicate Welsh fancy; they were so dainty, yet so simple. The soft silk fell in natural folds and dimples. The only ornaments they wore were two curious brooches of very antique workmanship—as Maisie supposed—somewhat Celtic in design, and enamelled in blood-red on a gold background. Each carried a flower laid loosely in her bosom. Yolande's was an orchid with long, floating streamers, in colour and shape recalling some Southern lizard; dark purple spots dappled its lip and petals. Hedda's was a flower of a sort Maisie had never before seen—the stem spotted like a viper's skin, green flecked with russet-brown, and uncanny to look upon; on either side, great twisted spirals of red-and-blue blossoms, each curled after the fashion of a scorpion's tail, very strange and lurid. Something weird and witch-like about flowers and dresses rather attracted Maisie; they affected her with the half-repellent fascination of a snake for a bird; she felt such blossoms were fit for incantations and sorceries. But a lily-of-the-valley in Yolande's dark hair gave a sense of purity which assorted better with the girl's exquisitely calm and nun-like beauty.

After a while Hedda rose. 'This air is close,' she said. 'It ought to be warm outside to-night, if one may judge by the sunset. May I open the window?'

'Oh, certainly, if you like,' Maisie answered, a vague foreboding now struggling within her against innate politeness.

Hedda drew back the curtains and unfastened the shutters. It was a moonlit evening. The breeze hardly stirred the bare boughs of the silver birches. A sprinkling of soft snow on the terrace and the hills just whitened the ground. The moon lighted it up, falling full upon the Hall; the church and tower below stood silhouetted in dark against a cloudless expanse of starry sky in the background. Hedda opened the window. Cool, fresh air blew in, very soft and genial, in spite of the snow and the lateness of the season. 'What a glorious night!' she said, looking up at Orion overhead. 'Shall we stroll out for a while in it?'

If the suggestion had not thus been thrust upon her from outside, it would never have occurred to Maisie to walk abroad in a strange place, in evening dress, on a winter's night, with snow whitening the ground; but Hedda's voice sounded so sweetly persuasive, and the idea itself seemed so natural now she had once proposed it, that Maisie followed her two new friends on to the moonlit terrace without a moment's hesitation.

They paced once or twice up and down the gravelled walks. Strange to say, though a sprinkling of dry snow powdered the ground under foot, the air itself was soft and balmy. Stranger still, Maisie noticed, almost without noticing it, that though they walked three abreast, only one pair of footprints—her own—lay impressed on the snow in a long trail when they turned at either end and re-paced the platform. Yolande and Hedda must step lightly indeed; or perhaps her own feet might be warmer or thinner shod, so as to melt the light layer of snow more readily.

The girls slipped their arms through hers. A little thrill coursed through her. Then, after three or four turns up and down the terrace, Yolande led the way quietly down the broad flight of steps in the direction of the church on the lower level. In that bright, broad moonlight Maisie went with them undeterred; the Hall was still alive with the glare of electric lights in bedroom windows; and the presence of the other girls, both wholly free from any signs of fear, took off all sense of terror or loneliness. They strolled on into the churchyard. Maisie's eyes were now fixed on the new white tower, which merged in the silhouette against the starry sky into much the same grey and indefinite hue as the older parts of the building. Before she quite knew where she was, she found herself at the head of the worn stone steps which led into the vault by whose doors she had seen old Bessie sitting. In the pallid moonlight, with the aid of the greenish reflection from the snow, she could just read the words inscribed over the portal, the words that Yolande had repeated in the drawing-room, 'Mors janua vitæ.'

Yolande moved down one step. Maisie drew back for the first time with a faint access of alarm. 'You're—you're not *going down* there!' she exclaimed, catching her breath for a second.

'Yes, I am,' her new friend answered in a calmly quiet voice. 'Why not? We live here.'

'You live here?' Maisie echoed, freeing her arms by a sudden movement and standing away from her mysterious friends with a tremulous shudder.

'Yes, we live here,' Hedda broke in, without the slightest emotion. She said it in a voice of perfect calm, as one might say it of any house in a street in London.

Maisie was far less terrified than she might have imagined beforehand would be the case under such unexpected conditions. The two girls were so simple, so natural, so strangely like herself, that she could not say she was really afraid of them. She shrank, it is true, from the nature of the door at which they stood, but she received the unearthly announcement that they lived there with scarcely more than a slight tremor of surprise and astonishment.

'You will come in with us?' Hedda said in a gently enticing tone. 'We went into your bedroom.'

Maisie hardly liked to say no. They seemed so anxious to show her their home. With trembling feet she moved down the first step, and then the second. Yolande kept ever one pace in front of her. As Maisie reached the third step, the two girls, as if moved by one design, took her wrists in their hands, not unkindly, but coaxingly. They reached the actual doors of the vault itself—two heavy bronze valves, meeting in the centre. Each bore a ring for a handle, pierced through a Gorgon's head embossed upon the surface. Yolande pushed them with her hand. They yielded instantly to her light touch, and opened *inward*. Yolande, still in front, passed from the glow of the moon to the gloom of the vault, which a ray of moonlight just descended obliquely. As she passed, for a second, a weird sight met Maisie's eyes. Her face and hands and dress became momentarily self-luminous; but through them, as they glowed, she could descry within every bone and joint of her living skeleton, dimly shadowed in dark through the luminous haze that marked her body.

Maisie drew back once more, terrified. Yet her terror was not quite what one could describe as fear: it was rather a vague sense of the profoundly mystical. 'I can't! I can't!' she cried, with an appealing glance. 'Hedda! Yolande! I cannot go with you.'

Hedda held her hand tight, and almost seemed to force her. But Yolande, in front, like a mother with her child, turned round with a grave smile. 'No, no,' she said reprovingly. 'Let her come if she will, Hedda, of her own accord, not otherwise. The tower demands a willing victim.'

Her hand on Maisie's wrist was strong but persuasive. It drew her without exercising the faintest compulsion. 'Will you come with us, dear?' she said, in that winning silvery tone which had captivated Maisie's fancy from the very first moment they spoke together. Maisie gazed into her eyes. They were deep and tender. A strange resolution seemed to nerve her for the effort. 'Yes, yes—I—will—come—with you,' she answered slowly.

Hedda on one side, Yolande on the other, now went before her, holding her wrists in their grasp, but rather enticing than drawing her. As each reached the gloom, the same luminous appearance which Maisie had noticed before spread over their bodies, and the same weird skeleton shape showed faintly through their limbs in darker shadow. Maisie crossed the threshold with a convulsive gasp. As she crossed it she looked down at her own dress and body. They were semi-transparent, like the others', though not quite so self-luminous; the framework of her limbs appeared within in less certain outline, yet quite dark and distinguishable.

The doors swung to of themselves behind her. Those three stood alone in the vault of Wolverden.

Alone, for a minute or two; and then, as her eyes grew accustomed to the grey dusk of the interior, Maisie began to perceive that the vault opened out into a large and beautiful hall or crypt, dimly lighted at first, but becoming each moment more vaguely clear and more dreamily definite. Gradually she could make out great rock-hewn pillars, Romanesque in their outline or dimly Oriental, like the sculptured columns in the caves of Ellora, supporting a roof of vague and uncertain dimensions, more or less strangely dome-shaped. The effect on the whole was like that of the second impression produced by some dim cathedral, such as Chartres or Milan, after the eyes have grown accustomed to the mellow light from the stained-glass windows, and have recovered from the blinding glare of the outer sunlight. But the architecture, if one may call it so, was more mosque-like and magical. She turned to her companions. Yolande and

Hedda stood still by her side; their bodies were now self-luminous to a greater degree than even at the threshold; but the terrible transparency had disappeared altogether; they were once more but beautiful though strangely transfigured and more than mortal women.

Then Maisie understood in her own soul, dimly, the meaning of those mystic words written over the portal—'Mors janua vitæ'—Death is the gate of life; and also the interpretation of that awful vision of death dwelling within them as they crossed the threshold; for through that gate they had passed to this underground palace.

Her two guides still held her hands, one on either side. But they seemed rather to lead her on now, seductively and resistlessly, than to draw or compel her. As she moved in through the hall, with its endless vistas of shadowy pillars, seen now behind, now in dim perspective, she was gradually aware that many other people crowded its aisles and corridors. Slowly they took shape as forms more or less clad, mysterious, varied, and of many ages. Some of them wore flowing robes, half mediæval in shape, like the two friends who had brought her there. They looked like the saints on a stained-glass window. Others were girt merely with a light and floating Coan sash; while some stood dimly nude in the darker recesses of the temple or palace. All leaned eagerly forward with one mind as she approached, and regarded her with deep and sympathetic interest. A few of them murmured words—mere cabalistic sounds which at first she could not understand; but as she moved further into the hall, and saw at each step more clearly into the gloom, they began to have a meaning for her. Before long, she was aware that she understood the mute tumult of voices at once by some internal instinct. The Shades addressed her; she answered them. She knew by intuition what tongue they spoke; it was the Language of the Dead; and, by passing that portal with her two companions, she had herself become enabled both to speak and understand it.

A soft and flowing tongue, this speech of the Nether World—all vowels it seemed, without distinguishable consonants; yet dimly recalling every other tongue, and compounded, as it were, of what was common to all of them. It flowed from those shadowy lips as clouds issue inchoate from a mountain valley; it was formless, uncertain, vague, but yet beautiful. She hardly knew, indeed, as it fell upon her senses, if it were sound or perfume.

Through this tenuous world Maisie moved as in a dream, her two companions still cheering and guiding her. When they reached an inner shrine or chantry of the temple she was dimly conscious of more terrible forms pervading the background than any of those that had yet appeared to her. This was a more austere and antique apartment than the rest; a shadowy cloister, prehistoric in its severity; it recalled to her mind something indefinitely intermediate between the huge unwrought trilithons of Stonehenge and the massive granite pillars of Philæ and Luxor. At the further end of the sanctuary a sort of Sphinx looked down on her, smiling mysteriously. At its base, on a rude megalithic throne, in solitary state, a High Priest was seated. He bore in his hand a wand or sceptre. All round, a strange court of half-unseen acolytes and shadowy hierophants stood attentive. They were girt, as she fancied, in what looked like leopards' skins, or in the fells of some earlier prehistoric lion. These wore sabre-shaped teeth suspended by a string round their dusky necks; others had ornaments of uncut amber, or hatchets of jade threaded as collars on a cord of sinew. A few, more barbaric than savage in type, flaunted torques of gold as armlets and necklets.

The High Priest rose slowly and held out his two hands, just level with his head, the palms turned outward. 'You have brought a willing victim as Guardian of the Tower?' he asked, in that mystic tongue, of Yolande and Hedda.

'We have brought a willing victim,' the two girls answered.

The High Priest gazed at her. His glance was piercing. Maisie trembled less with fear than with a sense of strangeness, such as a neophyte might feel on being first presented at some courtly pageant. 'You come of your own accord?' the Priest inquired of her in solemn accents.

'I come of my own accord,' Maisie answered, with an inner consciousness that she was bearing her part in some immemorial ritual. Ancestral memories seemed to stir within her.

'It is well,' the Priest murmured. Then he turned to her guides. 'She is of royal lineage?' he inquired, taking his wand in his hand again.

'She is a Llewelyn,' Yolande answered, 'of royal lineage, and of the race that, after your own, earliest bore sway in this land of Britain. She has in her veins the blood of Arthur, of Ambrosius, and of Vortigern.'

'It is well,' the Priest said again. 'I know these princes.' Then he turned to Maisie. 'This is the ritual of those who build,'

he said, in a very deep voice. 'It has been the ritual of those who build from the days of the builders of Lokmariaker and Avebury. Every building man makes shall have its human soul, the soul of a virgin to guard and protect it. Three souls it requires as a living talisman against chance and change. One soul is the soul of the human victim slain beneath the foundation-stone; she is the guardian spirit against earthquake and ruin. One soul is the soul of the human victim slain when the building is half built up; she is the guardian spirit against battle and tempest. One soul is the soul of the human victim who flings herself of her own free will off tower or gable when the building is complete; she is the guardian spirit against thunder and lightning. Unless a building be duly fasted with these three, how can it hope to stand against the hostile powers of fire and flood and storm and earthquake?'

An assessor at his side, unnoticed till then, took up the parable. He had a stern Roman face, and bore a shadowy suit of Roman armour. 'In times of old,' he said, with iron austerity, 'all men knew well these rules of building. They built in solid stone to endure for ever: the works they erected have lasted to this day, in this land and others. So built we the amphitheatres of Rome and Verona; so built we the walls of Lincoln, York, and London. In the blood of a king's son laid we the foundation-stone: in the blood of a king's son laid we the coping-stone: in the blood of a maiden of royal line fasted we the bastions against fire and lightning. But in these latter days, since faith grows dim, men build with burnt brick and rubble of plaster; no foundation spirit or guardian soul do they give to their bridges, their walls, or their towers: so bridges break, and walls fall in, and towers crumble, and the art and mystery of building aright have perished from among you.'

He ceased. The High Priest held out his wand and spoke again. 'We are the Assembly of Dead Builders and Dead Victims,' he said, 'for this mark of Wolverden; all of whom have built or been built upon in this holy site of immemorial sanctity. We are the stones of a living fabric. Before this place was a Christian church, it was a temple of Woden. And before it was a temple of Woden, it was a shrine of Hercules. And before it was a shrine of Hercules, it was a grove of Nodens. And before it was a grove of Nodens, it was a Stone Circle of the Host of Heaven. And before it was a Stone Circle of the Host of Heaven, it was the grave and tumulus and underground palace of Me, who am the earliest builder of all in this place; and my name in my ancient tongue is Wolf, and I laid and hallowed it. And after me, Wolf, and my namesake Wulfhere, was this barrow called Ad Lupum and Wolverden. And all these that are here with me have built and been built upon in this holy site for all generations. And *you* are the last who come to join us.'

Maisie felt a cold thrill course down her spine as he spoke these words; but courage did not fail her. She was dimly aware that those who offer themselves as victims for service must offer themselves willingly; for the gods demand a voluntary victim; no beast can be slain unless it nod assent; and none can be made a guardian spirit who takes not the post upon him of his own free will. She turned meekly to Hedda. 'Who are you?' she asked, trembling.

'I am Hedda,' the girl answered, in the same soft sweet voice and winning tone as before; 'Hedda, the daughter of Gorm, the chief of the Northmen who settled in East Anglia. And I was a worshipper of Thor and Odin. And when my father, Gorm, fought against Alfred, King of Wessex, was I taken prisoner. And Wulfhere, the Kenting, was then building the first church and tower of Wolverden. And they baptized me, and shrived me, and I consented of my own free will to be built under the foundation-stone. And there my body lies built up to this day; and *I* am the guardian spirit against earthquake and ruin.'

'And who are you?' Maisie asked, turning again to Yolande.

'I am Yolande Fitz-Aylwin,' the tall dark girl answered; 'a royal maiden too, sprung from the blood of Henry Plantagenet. And when Roland Fitz-Stephen was building anew the choir and chancel of Wulfhere's minster, I chose to be immured in the fabric of the wall, for love of the Church and all holy saints; and there my body lies built up to this day; and *I* am the guardian against battle and tempest.'

Maisie held her friend's hand tight. Her voice hardly trembled. 'And I?' she asked once more. 'What fate for me? Tell me!'

'Your task is easier far,' Yolande answered gently. 'For *you* shall be the guardian of the new tower against thunder and lightning. Now, those who guard against earthquake and battle are buried alive under the foundation-stone or in the wall of the building; there they die a slow death of starvation and choking. But those who guard against thunder and lightning cast themselves alive of their own free will from the battlements of the tower, and die in the air before they reach the ground; so their fate is the easiest and the lightest of all who would serve mankind; and thenceforth they live with us here in our palace.'

Maisie clung to her hand still tighter. 'Must I do it?' she asked, pleading.

'It is not *must*,' Yolande replied in the same caressing tone, yet with a calmness as of one in whom earthly desires and earthly passions are quenched for ever. 'It is as you choose yourself. None but a willing victim may be a guardian spirit. This glorious privilege comes but to the purest and best amongst us. Yet what better end can you ask for your soul than to dwell here in our midst as our comrade for ever, where all is peace, and to preserve the tower whose guardian you are from evil assaults of lightning and thunderbolt?'

Maisie flung her arms round her friend's neck. 'But—I am afraid,' she murmured. Why she should even wish to consent she knew not, yet the strange serene peace in these strange girls' eyes made her mysteriously in love with them and with the fate they offered her. They seemed to move like the stars in their orbits. 'How shall I leap from the top?' she cried. 'How shall I have courage to mount the stairs alone, and fling myself off from the lonely battlement?'

Yolande unwound her arms with a gentle forbearance. She coaxed her as one coaxes an unwilling child. 'You will *not* be alone,' she said, with a tender pressure. 'We will all go with you. We will help you and encourage you. We will sing our sweet songs of life-in-death to you. Why should you draw back? All we have faced it in ten thousand ages, and we tell you with one voice, you need not fear it. 'Tis life you should fear—life, with its dangers, its toils, its heartbreakings. Here we dwell for ever in unbroken peace. Come, come, and join us!'

She held out her arms with an enticing gesture. Maisie sprang into them, sobbing. 'Yes, I will come,' she cried in an access of hysterical fervour. 'These are the arms of Death—I embrace them. These are the lips of Death—I kiss them. Yolande, Yolande, I will do as you ask me!'

The tall dark girl in the luminous white robe stooped down and kissed her twice on the forehead in return. Then she looked at the High Priest. 'We are ready,' she murmured in a low, grave voice. 'The Victim consents. The Virgin will die. Lead on to the tower. We are ready! We are ready!'

#### IV

From the recesses of the temple—if temple it were—from the inmost shrines of the shrouded cavern, unearthly music began to sound of itself, with wild modulation, on strange reeds and tabors. It swept through the aisles like a rushing wind on an Æolian harp; at times it wailed with a voice like a woman's; at times it rose loud in an organ-note of triumph; at times it sank low into a pensive and melancholy flute-like symphony. It waxed and waned; it swelled and died away again; but no man saw how or whence it proceeded. Wizard echoes issued from the crannies and vents in the invisible walls; they sighed from the ghostly inter-spaces of the pillars; they keened and moaned from the vast overhanging dome of the palace. Gradually the song shaped itself by weird stages into a processional measure. At its sound the High Priest rose slowly from his immemorial seat on the mighty cromlech which formed his throne. The Shades in leopards' skins ranged themselves in bodiless rows on either hand; the ghostly wearers of the sabre-toothed lions' fangs followed like ministrants in the footsteps of their hierarch.

Hedda and Yolande took their places in the procession. Maisie stood between the two, with hair floating on the air; she looked like a novice who goes up to take the veil, accompanied and cheered by two elder sisters.

The ghostly pageant began to move. Unseen music followed it with fitful gusts of melody. They passed down the main corridor, between shadowy Doric or Ionic pillars which grew dimmer and ever dimmer again in the distance as they approached, with slow steps, the earthward portal.

At the gate, the High Priest pushed against the valves with his hand. They opened *outward*.

He passed into the moonlight. The attendants thronged after him. As each wild figure crossed the threshold the same strange sight as before met Maisie's eyes. For a second of time each ghostly body became self-luminous, as with some curious phosphorescence; and through each, at the moment of passing the portal, the dim outline of a skeleton loomed briefly visible. Next instant it had clothed itself as with earthly members.

Maisie reached the outer air. As she did so, she gasped. For a second, its chilliness and freshness almost choked her. She was conscious now that the atmosphere of the vault, though pleasant in its way, and warm and dry, had been loaded with fumes as of burning incense, and with somnolent vapours of poppy and mandragora. Its drowsy ether had cast her

into a lethargy. But after the first minute in the outer world, the keen night air revived her. Snow lay still on the ground a little deeper than when she first came out, and the moon rode lower; otherwise, all was as before, save that only one or two lights still burned here and there in the great house on the terrace. Among them she could recognise her own room, on the ground floor in the new wing, by its open window.

The procession made its way across the churchyard towards the tower. As it wound among the graves an owl hooted. All at once Maisie remembered the lines that had so chilled her a few short hours before in the drawing-room—

'The glow-worm o'er grave and stone  
Shall light thee steady;  
The owl from the steeple sing,  
"Welcome, proud lady!"'

But, marvellous to relate, they no longer alarmed her. She felt rather that a friend was welcoming her home; she clung to Yolande's hand with a gentle pressure.

As they passed in front of the porch, with its ancient yew-tree, a stealthy figure glided out like a ghost from the darkling shadow. It was a woman, bent and bowed, with quivering limbs that shook half palsied. Maisie recognised old Bessie. 'I knew she would come!' the old hag muttered between her toothless jaws. 'I knew Wolverden Tower would yet be duly fasted!'

She put herself, as of right, at the head of the procession. They moved on to the tower, rather gliding than walking. Old Bessie drew a rusty key from her pocket, and fitted it with a twist into the brand-new lock. 'What turned the old will turn the new,' she murmured, looking round and grinning. Maisie shrank from her as she shrank from not one of the Dead; but she followed on still into the ringers' room at the base of the tower.

Thence a staircase in the corner led up to the summit. The High Priest mounted the stair, chanting a mystic refrain, whose runic sounds were no longer intelligible to Maisie. As she reached the outer air, the Tongue of the Dead seemed to have become a mere blank of mingled odours and murmurs to her. It was like a summer breeze, sighing through warm and resinous pinewoods. But Yolande and Hedda spoke to her yet, to cheer her, in the language of the living. She recognised that as *revenants* they were still in touch with the upper air and the world of the embodied.

They tempted her up the stair with encouraging fingers. Maisie followed them like a child, in implicit confidence. The steps wound round and round, spirally, and the staircase was dim; but a supernatural light seemed to fill the tower, diffused from the bodies or souls of its occupants. At the head of all, the High Priest still chanted as he went his unearthly litany; magic sounds of chimes seemed to swim in unison with his tune as they mounted. Were those floating notes material or spiritual? They passed the belfry; no tongue of metal wagged; but the rims of the great bells resounded and reverberated to the ghostly symphony with sympathetic music. Still they passed on and on, upward and upward. They reached the ladder that alone gave access to the final story. Dust and cobwebs already clung to it. Once more Maisie drew back. It was dark overhead, and the luminous haze began to fail them. Her friends held her hands with the same kindly persuasive touch as ever. 'I cannot!' she cried, shrinking away from the tall, steep ladder. 'Oh, Yolande, I cannot!'

'Yes, dear,' Yolande whispered in a soothing voice. 'You can. It is but ten steps, and I will hold your hand tight. Be brave and mount them!'

The sweet voice encouraged her. It was like heavenly music. She knew not why she should submit, or, rather, consent; but none the less she consented. Some spell seemed cast over her. With tremulous feet, scarcely realising what she did, she mounted the ladder and went up four steps of it.

Then she turned and looked down again. Old Bessie's wrinkled face met her frightened eyes. It was smiling horribly. She shrank back once more, terrified. 'I can't do it,' she cried, 'if that woman comes up! I'm not afraid of *you*, dear'—she pressed Yolande's hand—'but she, she is too terrible!'

Hedda looked back and raised a warning finger. 'Let the woman stop below,' she said; 'she savours too much of the evil world. We must do nothing to frighten the willing victim.'

The High Priest by this time, with his ghostly fingers, had opened the trap-door that gave access to the summit. A ray of moonlight slanted through the aperture. The breeze blew down with it. Once more Maisie felt the stimulating and

reviving effect of the open air. Vivified by its freshness, she struggled up to the top, passed out through the trap, and found herself standing on the open platform at the summit of the tower.

The moon had not yet quite set. The light on the snow shone pale green and mysterious. For miles and miles around she could just make out, by its aid, the dim contour of the downs, with their thin white mantle, in the solemn silence. Range behind range rose faintly shimmering. The chant had now ceased; the High Priest and his acolytes were mingling strange herbs in a mazar-bowl or chalice. Stray perfumes of myrrh and of cardamoms were wafted towards her. The men in leopards' skins burnt smouldering sticks of spikenard. Then Yolande led the postulant forward again, and placed her close up to the new white parapet. Stone heads of virgins smiled on her from the angles. 'She must front the east,' Hedda said in a tone of authority: and Yolande turned her face towards the rising sun accordingly. Then she opened her lips and spoke in a very solemn voice. 'From this new-built tower you fling yourself,' she said, or rather intoned, 'that you may serve mankind, and all the powers that be, as its guardian spirit against thunder and lightning. Judged a virgin, pure and unsullied in deed and word and thought, of royal race and ancient lineage—a Cymry of the Cymry—you are found worthy to be intrusted with this charge and this honour. Take care that never shall dart or thunderbolt assault this tower, as She that is below you takes care to preserve it from earthquake and ruin, and She that is midway takes care to preserve it from battle and tempest. This is your charge. See well that you keep it.'

She took her by both hands. 'Mary Llewelyn,' she said, 'you willing victim, step on to the battlement.'

Maisie knew not why, but with very little shrinking she stepped as she was told, by the aid of a wooden footstool, on to the eastward-looking parapet. There, in her loose white robe, with her arms spread abroad, and her hair flying free, she poised herself for a second, as if about to shake out some unseen wings and throw herself on the air like a swift or a swallow.

'Mary Llewelyn,' Yolande said once more, in a still deeper tone, with ineffable earnestness, 'cast yourself down, a willing sacrifice, for the service of man, and the security of this tower against thunderbolt and lightning.'

Maisie stretched her arms wider, and leaned forward in act to leap, from the edge of the parapet, on to the snow-clad churchyard.

## V

One second more and the sacrifice would have been complete. But before she could launch herself from the tower, she felt suddenly a hand laid upon her shoulder from behind to restrain her. Even in her existing state of nervous exaltation she was aware at once that it was the hand of a living and solid mortal, not that of a soul or guardian spirit. It lay heavier upon her than Hedda's or Yolande's. It seemed to clog and burden her. With a violent effort she strove to shake herself free, and carry out her now fixed intention of self-immolation, for the safety of the tower. But the hand was too strong for her. She could not shake it off. It gripped and held her.

She yielded, and, reeling, fell back with a gasp on to the platform of the tower. At the selfsame moment a strange terror and commotion seemed to seize all at once on the assembled spirits. A weird cry rang voiceless through the shadowy company. Maisie heard it as in a dream, very dim and distant. It was thin as a bat's note; almost inaudible to the ear, yet perceived by the brain or at least by the spirit. It was a cry of alarm, of fright, of warning. With one accord, all the host of phantoms rushed hurriedly forward to the battlements and pinnacles. The ghostly High Priest went first, with his wand held downward; the men in leopards' skins and other assistants followed in confusion. Theirs was a reckless rout. They flung themselves from the top, like fugitives from a cliff, and floated fast through the air on invisible pinions. Hedda and Yolande, ambassadors and intermediaries with the upper air, were the last to fly from the living presence. They clasped her hand silently, and looked deep into her eyes. There was something in that calm yet regretful look that seemed to say, 'Farewell! We have tried in vain to save you, sister, from the terrors of living.'

The horde of spirits floated away on the air, as in a witches' Sabbath, to the vault whence it issued. The doors swung on their rusty hinges, and closed behind them. Maisie stood alone with the hand that grasped her on the tower.

The shock of the grasp, and the sudden departure of the ghostly band in such wild dismay, threw Maisie for a while into a state of semi-unconsciousness. Her head reeled round; her brain swam faintly. She clutched for support at the parapet of the tower. But the hand that held her sustained her still. She felt herself gently drawn down with quiet mastery, and laid on the stone floor close by the trap-door that led to the ladder.

The next thing of which she could feel sure was the voice of the Oxford undergraduate. He was distinctly frightened and not a little tremulous. 'I think,' he said very softly, laying her head on his lap, 'you had better rest a while, Miss Llewelyn, before you try to get down again. I hope I didn't catch you and disturb you too hastily. But one step more, and you would have been over the edge. I really couldn't help it.'

'Let me go,' Maisie moaned, trying to raise herself again, but feeling too faint and ill to make the necessary effort to recover the power of motion. 'I *want* to go with them! I *want* to join them!'

'Some of the others will be up before long,' the undergraduate said, supporting her head in his hands; 'and they'll help me to get you down again. Mr. Yates is in the belfry. Meanwhile, if I were you, I'd lie quite still, and take a drop or two of this brandy.'

He held it to her lips. Maisie drank a mouthful, hardly knowing what she did. Then she lay quiet where he placed her for some minutes. How they lifted her down and conveyed her to her bed she scarcely knew. She was dazed and terrified. She could only remember afterward that three or four gentlemen in roughly huddled clothes had carried or handed her down the ladder between them. The spiral stair and all the rest were a blank to her.

## VI

When she next awoke she was lying in her bed in the same room at the Hall, with Mrs. West by her side, leaning over her tenderly.

Maisie looked up through her closed eyes and just saw the motherly face and grey hair bending above her. Then voices came to her from the mist, vaguely: 'Yesterday was so hot for the time of year, you see!' 'Very unusual weather, of course, for Christmas.' 'But a thunderstorm! So strange! I put it down to that. The electrical disturbance must have affected the poor child's head.' Then it dawned upon her that the conversation she heard was passing between Mrs. West and a doctor.

She raised herself suddenly and wildly on her arms. The bed faced the windows. She looked out and beheld—the tower of Wolverden church, rent from top to bottom with a mighty rent, while half its height lay tossed in fragments on the ground in the churchyard.

'What is it?' she cried wildly, with a flush as of shame.

'Hush, hush!' the doctor said. 'Don't trouble! Don't look at it!'

'Was it—after I came down?' Maisie moaned in vague terror.

The doctor nodded. 'An hour after you were brought down,' he said, 'a thunderstorm broke over it. The lightning struck and shattered the tower. They had not yet put up the lightning-conductor. It was to have been done on Boxing Day.'

A weird remorse possessed Maisie's soul. 'My fault!' she cried, starting up. 'My fault, my fault! I have neglected my duty!'

'Don't talk,' the doctor answered, looking hard at her. 'It is always dangerous to be too suddenly aroused from these curious overwrought sleeps and trances.'

'And old Bessie?' Maisie exclaimed, trembling with an eerie presentiment.

The doctor glanced at Mrs. West. 'How did she know?' he whispered. Then he turned to Maisie. 'You may as well be told the truth as suspect it,' he said slowly. 'Old Bessie must have been watching there. She was crushed and half buried beneath the falling tower.'

'One more question, Mrs. West,' Maisie murmured, growing faint with an access of supernatural fear. 'Those two nice girls who sat on the chairs at each side of me through the tableaux—are they hurt? Were they in it?'

Mrs. West soothed her hand. 'My dear child,' she said gravely, with quiet emphasis, 'there were *no* other girls. This is mere hallucination. You sat alone by yourself through the whole of the evening.'



## VI

### JANET'S NEMESIS

*[You will say at first, 'A very old story!' Nay, not so. A psychological study of what would really happen, if a familiar incident of early fiction were to occur in our century.]*

'Under no circumstances,' said the surgeon, in a very decided voice, 'will it be possible for Lady Remenham to take charge of her own infant.'

'In that case,' the Earl answered, somewhat downcast, 'I suppose we shall have to look out for a wet-nurse.'

'Of course,' the surgeon replied. 'You can't expect the baby to live upon nothing, can you?'

Lord Remenham was annoyed. In the first place, he did not like to hear his son and heir—then two hours old—cavalierly described in quite ordinary language as 'the baby.' To be sure, the infant viscount exactly resembled most other babies of those tender years—or rather minutes. He was red and mottled and extremely pulpy-looking; and his appearance in no way suggested his exalted station. On the contrary, his face was marked by that comparative absence of any particular nose and that unnecessary prominence of two watery big eyes, which suggest our consanguinity with the negro and the monkey. But more than that, Lord Remenham was annoyed at this failure, on Gwendoline's part, to perform the full duties of complete maternity which her husband expected of her. Remenham was only thirty, but he was austere and *doctrinaire* to a degree that would not have done dishonour to half a century. He had taken a first class in law and modern history. He was strong on the necessity for keeping up the physical standard of the race in general, and our old nobility in particular, through the medium of its mothers. With this laudable end in view, being a Balliol man himself, he had married a lawn-tennis-playing, cross-country-riding, good-looking young woman, Gwendoline Blake by name, the daughter of a neighbouring squire; and he looked to her to raise him up a family of sons and daughters of fine and sturdy old English vigour. That Gwendoline should thus break down at the first demand made upon her annoyed and surprised him. The race must be going to the dogs indeed, if even girls like Gwendoline couldn't be relied upon for the performance of the simplest and most obvious maternal functions.

'Have you anybody you could suggest as a nurse for Lord Hurley?' Remenham inquired, in his chilliest voice. He wished to let the local doctor see he resented the imputation that the new viscount was a mere baby.

'Most fortunate coincidence!' the doctor answered. 'I had a case last night. The very thing. She didn't contemplate it; but I believe the poor girl would be glad of the extra money. Very destitute indeed, with nothing to depend upon.'

'Married, I hope?' Remenham observed, raising his eyebrows slightly.

The doctor pursed his lips. 'We can't have everything in this world,' he answered, after a brief pause. 'Wet-nurses, as your unaided perspicacity must have observed, spring chiefly from the class who become mothers before they become wives.'

Remenham gazed at him doubtfully. He had always a suspicion that the doctor was chaffing him. 'Can she come here at once?' he asked, with increased stiffness of manner.

'Come here at once?' the doctor echoed. 'Why, it was only last night she was confined, my lord. You don't expect Englishwomen to rival North American squaws, do you? No, no, she can't come. The baby must go to her.'

'For how long?' Remenham faltered.

'A month, I suppose. We are most of us human. At the end of that time the young woman, no doubt, can take up her abode here.'

'What sort of cottage?' Remenham asked. He disliked this arrangement.

'Very clean and nice. The child could be brought round at frequent intervals to see Lady Remenham. There is no time to be lost. We had better see her and arrange with her immediately.'

Remenham gave way. He gave way under protest; but still he gave way. Thingumbob's food and Swiss milk seemed to

him greater evils than this proposed arrangement. Gwendoline *ought* to have been able to take care of the child herself; but seeing she wasn't—well, he must needs fall back upon an efficient substitute.

He accompanied the doctor to the young woman's cottage. He was an honest man, who acted up to his convictions; and where anybody so important as Viscount Hurley was concerned, he would not trust to the services of any intermediary. He saw the young woman himself—Janet Wells by name; a very good-looking young person, strong, tall, and vigorous; just the sort of girl whom, on any but moral grounds, one would desire to intrust with the keeping of one's children. He asked her a question or two, with *doctrinaire* stiffness, and was astonished to find she resented some of them. However, though she was at first most averse to giving up her own baby, to which she attached an enormous importance—and very properly too,' Remenham thought, 'for the instinct of maternity lies at the root of race preservation'—she was at last bribed over by promises of money into accepting the charge of the infant viscount. It was further arranged that the noble baby should be brought to her, well wrapped up, at once, and that her own plebeian infant, for better security of the high-born child, should be conveyed away forthwith, to be brought up by hand at a married sister's, lest the mother should be tempted to share with it the natural sustenance duly bought and paid for on account of Lord Hurley.

As soon as they were gone, however, Janet turned to her mother. 'Mother,' she said firmly, 'I *won't* send my baby away—no, not for any one's.'

'What will you do, then?' her mother asked. 'They're sure to ax what's become o' it.'

Janet reflected a minute or two. Then she said in a tentative way, 'We could borrow Sarah Marlowe's baby, and keep it in the house till they fetch the lady's. Then we could send it away by their men to Lucy's, and tell them to watch, if they liked, whether any other baby ever came back again. Sarah Marlowe could fetch her own from Lucy's to-morrow.'

'If I was you,' the mother said, 'I wouldn't cast no doubts upon it.'

'That's true,' Janet answered feebly. 'Just send Sarah's baby away to Lucy's without saying nothing about it.' And she dropped back on her pillow in a listless way, adding nothing further.

So it came to pass that when little Lord Hurley arrived, squat nose, mottled arms, red face, and all, there were three babies in the cottage instead of two; and when the third, which was Sarah Marlowe's, was sent away under charge of Lord Remenham himself to the married sister's, Janet's and the lordling remained in possession, to fight it out between themselves as best they might as to their natural sustenance.

That evening, Janet submitted to have her own baby fed upon Somebody's food, while she nursed the interloper as if it were her own. But all the time she felt like a murderess. How dare she deprive that child she had borne of its divinely-sent nourishment! Her heart—a mother's heart—turned sick within her. Come what might, she would nurse her own baby, she vowed internally, not the Countess's. She revolted against this unnatural and cruel diversion.

In the dead of night, therefore, when all in the house were asleep, she arose tottering from her bed, and approached the two cradles. Babies are much alike; her own and the lordling looked so precisely similar that even she herself, but for the clothes, could hardly have discriminated them. Hastily and with trembling fingers she tore off the sleeping young aristocrat's finery—he wore a trifle less of it at night than by day—and also undressed her own red little bantling. In two minutes' time the momentous transformation was fully complete. The Countess herself could not have told her own child, as it lay there and slept, from the cottager's infant.

Once done, the substitution cost no trouble of any sort. Next morning Janet saw the baby—her baby, in its borrowed finery—washed and dressed and duly taken care of; while she took little heed of the lordly changeling in its poorer garb, as her mother fed it in a perfunctory way out of the bottle. Somewhat later in the day, indeed, she looked at her mother queerly. 'After all, mother,' she said, blinking, 'there's something in blood. I think the little lord looks more of a baby nor mine does somehow.' And she smiled at her own child, in his stolen plumes, contentedly.

'He's a proper baby, that he is,' her mother admitted, not suspecting the substitution.

'I was thinking,' Janet put in, 'that perhaps it isn't safe to keep my baby in the house now at all. They might make a fuss if they were to find it out. Since this one's come, and I've begun nursing him, he seems to belong to me, almost. Suppose we was to send my own to Lucy's, to be brought up by hand. It 'ud be kind of safer like.'

The mother acquiesced, not sorry to see that unwelcome intruder, as she thought it, stowed safely out of the way. So that

very night, the real little Lord Hurley was ignominiously despatched by private messenger to the married sister's; while the false Lord Hurley, just as red and as mottled, stopped on with his mother in his appropriated feathers.

For ten months, at home and at the castle, Janet nursed her own baby honestly and sedulously. She wasted upon it the whole of a mother's affection. Gradually, when she began to realise what she had done, it occurred to her that perhaps she had not acted for herself with the supremest wisdom. At first, her one idea had been the purely instinctive and natural one that she wanted to nurse and tend her own baby—not another woman's. But, joined with this prime instinct, there had also been present more or less to her mind another feeling—the feeling that her baby had as good a right in the nature of things to wealth and honour, and uncomfortably belaced and beflounced baby-linen, as any other woman's baby. The pressure of these two ideas, acting unequally together, had led her in a moment of hysterical impulse to exchange the two children. Now the exchange was once made it satisfied her very well—while she could keep her own baby. The question was, How would things stand when the time came for her to part with it?

In due course it came about that the two infants were christened. Lord and Lady Remenham had Janet's child admitted into the fold of the Church with the aid of a bishop, and a considerable admixture of those pomps and vanities of this wicked world which they simultaneously and verbally abjured for it. Janet herself, as by office entitled, brought the baby to the font, where a Countess held it, while a Marchioness assisted her in promising on its behalf a large number of things, which nobody very seriously intended to perform for it. The child was enrolled as an infantile Christian under the sonorous names of Hugh Seymour Plantagenet, which in themselves might be regarded as slight guarantees that the pomps and vanities aforesaid would be duly avoided. As to the Countess's son, he was baptized at the parish church of the village by the curate. Sister Lucy held him at the font, and abjured for him, with far greater sincerity and probability, all participation in the sins of the great world, from which Janet's action had effectually cut him off. As for a name, Plantagenets being out of the question, he was cheaply and economically baptized as William.

Thus those two began their way through the world: the cottager's unwelcome baby as the heir of an Earl; and the Countess's son as the illegitimate child of a discredited housemaid.

While the ten months lasted Janet was happy enough. She had her child with her, and she had assured its future. But as the period of wet-nursing drew towards a close, and there was talk of weaning, a terrible longing began to come over her. Must she send away her baby, her own dear baby, now she was just getting to love it far better than ever?—now it 'took notice' so sweetly, and returned her smile, and looked up into her eyes with those big, black eyes, that recalled its father? It was too, too cruel. The neighbours had noted that, while Janet was nursing the little lord, as they thought, she had taken small note of her own neglected baby, sent away to be brought up by hand at her sister Lucy's. 'Tis that way always with love-children,' they said; 'partic'larly when the mother hires herself out a-wetnursing. She don't want none of her own. Her heart is all set on the baby she's suckling.' Janet heard them as in a dream, and smiled to herself with a strange, sad smile, half superior knowledge, half regret and remorse; not indeed for her act, but for its coming consequence. 'She knows the baby's a lord,' the neighbours said, 'and she don't want none of her own love-child after it.' Not want none of her own, indeed! It was *because* it was her own that she couldn't bear to part with it, though she knew it was for the child's best: she had secured its future. But what was its future to her—if it must be taken away from her and made into a lord, never to know its own mother?

Nevertheless, fight against it and shrink from it as she might, the time came at last when her baby must needs be taken from her; or rather, when she must leave it, for from the end of the first month she had lived at the castle, well cared for and waited upon, and treated in everything as such an important person as Lord Hurley's wet-nurse deserves to be treated. But now Lady Remenham's orders were absolute—that woman who was stealing her baby from her, under pretence of its being her own: the child must be weaned within a fortnight, and Janet must leave the castle for ever.

The dark day came. With a horrible sinking Janet prepared to go. The baby clung to her, as if it knew what was happening. She tore herself away, more dead than alive. Lady Remenham admitted she was very fond of the child. 'Fond of the child, Gwendoline!' Lord Remenham exclaimed, with greater truth: 'her conduct has been most exemplary. We owe her a debt of the deepest gratitude. My only feeling is that I've sometimes had qualms of conscience, when I saw how completely we had perverted—or shall I say diverted?—her natural instincts. I've felt at moments she was centring upon Hugh affections which should have been centred upon her own poor wronged and neglected baby.'

'You're always so absurdly conscientious,' Lady Remenham replied, with her flippant air. 'We've paid the girl well for it.'

'Her? Yes, her. But *not* her child,' Remenham answered, with his deeper sense of equity. 'Her child, from whom we've bribed her against her will by our offer of money. And the more she has grown to love our baby—which she has undoubtedly done, Gwen—the more have I felt my indebtedness to her infant. I shall provide for that child.' And Remenham, who was a man with a conscience, did provide for him decently. The Countess laughed at him. She did not know she was laughing at him for making due provision for their own baby.

Remenham had his way, however. He was a quiet, forcible man. He provided Janet with a lump sum down, in ready money, which he placed at a bank for her; and he took a lodging-house for her in a Thames valley town, neither too near nor too remote—near enough for her to keep touch with her parents ('Which is essential,' he said, 'to keeping straight with women of her class'); yet far enough away for her to call herself 'Mrs. Wells,' without much fear of contradiction by her neighbours. 'You have now a chance, my girl,' he said, with his superior and condescending kindness, 'of retrieving your position. Behave well, and some good young man of your own class may still make honourable love to you.'

But Janet was so overwhelmed with distress at leaving her child—the child for whose future she had provided so fatally—that she cared little just at present for the good young man, or the honourable love he was still to offer her. Her whole being for the moment was summed up in wounded affection for the child of the worthless creature who had got her into this trouble, and then basely enlisted in order to desert her. And the sense that she had brought this second bereavement upon herself by her foolish action only made her grief more poignant. She felt no particular remorse for her betrayal of Lord Remenham and his countess—most young women of her class are not built for such remorse,—but she suffered agonies of distress at the loss of her baby.

'You'll have your own little one back again now,' her mother said to her, the first evening, while preparations for the move were being made in the cottage.

*Her own* little one! Janet's heart gave a start. She had hardly even thought of that other baby—the Countess's baby—the baby at Lucy's. She supposed she must have him back.

'Oh, I'll get him in a day or two,' she answered listlessly. 'But he'll never be the same to me as—as the dear little thing I've been nursing for my lady.'

Her mother gazed hard at her.

"Tis strange,' she said; 'tis always so with foster-mothers. It seems as if love went out of one with the mother's milk. If you nurse another woman's baby you get fonder of it, they say, nor you would of your own. 'Tis no use denying it. The good Lord has made us so.'

Janet rose from her chair and took refuge in her own bedroom. There, sobbing low to herself, as one must do in a cottage, lest one's sobs should be heard through the thin partitions, she rolled and cried, hugging herself wildly at the deadly irony of it. Love any other child better than her own dear baby! Why, she hated the very thought of having that other one back. How could she endure to bring it up? And, then, to think of the long years through which she must go on pretending to love it!

However, for fear's sake and the neighbours', there was nothing for her to do but to take back the child that had been christened William, and to make believe to her mother that she took some care of it. So she brought it away from Lucy's, and carried it home to the cottage, while preparations still went on for the move to the lodging-house. Her first thoughts of it were almost murderous. Bring up that brat—that puling child of Lady Remenham's—that boy that had dispossessed her of her own dear pet!—no, no, she *could* not do it. For a week or two she would pretend to take care of it, for form's sake; 'but there's plenty of ways,' she thought, 'you can get rid of babies a long way short of strangling them. There always comes turns when you can hardly nurse 'em through, with the best care you can give 'em. Neglect 'em then, and you're soon enough free from 'em.'

However, the first night baby Willie came home, she undressed him and tended him as she had tended Hugh Seymour Plantagenet, her own lordly babe—tended that Countess's brat who had hitherto been accustomed to the tender mercies of Lucy's bringing up by hand, in the precarious intervals of her dairy work and her charge of her own five half-starved little ones. Baby Willie took to the new nurse instantly. In her heart Janet despised the unclassed little lordling. Accustomed as she was to her own noble Hugh, with his exquisite baby-linen, his beautiful cradle, and his embroidered coronet, she thought small things indeed of the poor wee changeling, who had been brought up by hand in a labourer's cottage and swathed in such clothes as she had provided beforehand for her own unwelcome, unclassed infant.

Nevertheless, she had acquired at the castle a certain fastidious way of taking care of a baby; and, mechanically at first, by the mere routine habits of the English housemaid, she went on taking care of the Countess's brat with the same solicitude she had been accustomed to lavish upon Hugh Seymour Plantagenet.

Little by little a curious feeling began to come over her. Every night and every morning she looked after baby Willie, and did for him all the things she had been accustomed to do in the night-nursery at the Earl's, for the reputed Lord Hurley. And even as she did them she was dimly aware that they afforded her a certain curious consolation and comfort in her bereavement. Having lost her own baby, for all practical purposes (by her own act, yet unwillingly), it pleased her at least to have some other child upon whom she might continue to expend those motherly cares which were at first an instinct, and had now come to be a habit with her. Even so, people who have lost a child of their own often wish to adopt one of corresponding age, not to break continuity in the current of their feelings. When Janet first had to give up her own baby, it is true, she hated the very thought of being compelled to tend that child of the Countess's. But after a week or two of the other woman's baby, she found the comfort of having still a child to think about so great and so consoling, that not for worlds would she have relinquished the pleasure of tending it.

Meanwhile, the move to the neighbouring town had been made, and Janet had taken up her new position in life as mistress of a lodging-house. Before her baby was born she would have thought that position a very 'grand' one, and would have felt afraid of actually ordering about a servant of her own; but ten months at the castle had wrought a vast difference in her point of view: she was accustomed there to be petted and waited upon; a footman in silk stockings had brought up her meals to the day-nursery, for she had received in every way the amount of consideration that should naturally be paid to Lord Hurley's foster-mother. So she found it 'rather a come-down in life,' as she said, than otherwise, to go straight from being waited upon by lordly flunkeys to receiving orders for dinner from casual lodgers. However, being a tall young woman of some grace and dignity, she gave a certain importance to her new position, and was treated as a rule with considerable respect by the better class of her visitors. Her plain black dress, her slight affectation of widowhood, and her undeniable care and attention for her baby, impressed them with the idea that Mrs. Wells, as they called her, was 'a most superior young woman for her station.' And in point of fact Janet had been well grounded in fundamentals at the village school, and made 'a lodging-house lady' as good as the best of them.

Her rooms, for the most part, were full in summer with waterside visitors, though half empty in winter, when the season was dull; but with what she made by them, and what Lord Remenham allowed her, she managed to live in a style which her new class considered extremely comfortable. Meanwhile Willie grew on, and, to her own great surprise at first, Janet found herself constantly more and more attached to him. The child was with her all day; she taught it to walk, to talk, to dress itself; if it had been her very own, it could hardly have been much nearer to her. Gradually she felt it was filling the place in her heart that her own dear baby had once better filled; and though she shrank from the recognition of that fact, far more than she had shrunk from the first substitution, it forced itself upon her, whether she would or not, from month to month, with increasing distinctness.

Three times a year 'Mrs. Wells' returned by permission to the castle, to visit once more her own lost darling. Lord Remenham was touched by her constant attachment to 'Hughie,' and even the Countess admitted in her cold way that 'Wells had behaved throughout in the most exemplary manner'; there was no denying the reality of her attachment to her foster-son. But as little Lord Hurley reached seven and eight, Janet was aware of a painful element, which grew more and more marked in these occasional visits. It was clear each time that Hugh cared less and less to see her. To say the truth, these four-monthly outbursts of spasmodic affection on the part of a stranger distinctly bored the child. He didn't care twopence himself about Mrs. Wells, whom he was told by his father he ought to love 'because she was his foster-mother'—a phrase which conveyed to him about as much information as if he had been told that Janet was his residuary legatee or his feudal suzerain. At first he merely felt the stated visits a vague nuisance; they interfered with his playing; but as time went on, he learned to hate them, and to shrink from being 'slobbered over,' as he expressed it, by a woman for whom he had not any feeling on earth save one of mild though growing aversion. At last, he flatly refused to see Mrs. Wells at all; and when Lord Remenham interfered, and insisted, in his honest, stiff-necked way, that Hugh must 'show some gratitude to the woman who had saved his life,' the boy showed it by receiving her with marked ungraciousness, and audibly exclaiming, in a voice of relief, 'Well, thank goodness, that's over!' as she left his presence.

Had this happened when he was two years old, or even three, it would have broken Janet's heart by its cruel irony. But happening when he was ten, it affected her far less poignantly than she could herself have anticipated. She had grown meanwhile to be fonder and fonder of Willie—'My own dear boy,' as she now called him to herself; she took less and less notice, thought less and less meanwhile, of the arrogant young aristocrat whom she had brought into the world to be

the Countess's plaything. Willie was so sweet and good, and so deeply attached to her; while Hugh had rapidly developed what she could not but consider the haughtiness of his class, and seemed to think his real mother 'like the dirt beneath his feet,' as she said to herself bitterly. Moreover, she had another cause of grievance against the sturdy little viscount. He was strong and vigorous, with the robust constitution inherited from a peasant father and mother; while Willie, her own dear Willie, was weak and ailing, and often required her most tender nursing. When he was only two years old, indeed, he had a terrible attack of croup, which nearly carried him off; and as Janet sat up all night, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, watching by the couch of the other woman's son, it came home to her all at once that to lose Willie now would be ten thousand times worse for her than to lose her own boy, the false Lord Hurley.

So things went on for several years: though after the little episode of 'Thank goodness, that's over!' Janet went back no more on her formal visits to the castle. She wrote Lord Remenham a most dignified and sensible letter upon the subject—just a trifle marred by her housemaidly handwriting. 'I could not help seeing, my lord,' she said, with simple eloquence, 'on my last visit to the castle, that my dear foster-child no longer regards me with any affection. As that is so, much as it grieves me, I think I had better discontinue my visits. I love him as deeply and as dearly as ever; but I love him too well to desire to hurt him, by inflicting myself upon him when he doesn't want me.'

Remenham read the letter aloud as a penance to Hugh; who responded with effusion, 'Well, that's one good thing, anyhow!' He was deaf to his father's expressions of regret that he should have so alienated the feelings of a good woman, who loved him. 'What right had she to call me "my Hughie"?' he asked, with warmth. 'Why, Charlie says she's nothing at all but a common lodging-house woman.' Charlie was Hugh's friend, a boy-groom at the stables.

Remenham felt this conduct on Hurley's part so bitterly, that he actually went across to the neighbouring town to call upon Janet, and apologise to her for his son's coldness. But he chanced on a day when Willie was ill and kept home from school. The boy's delicacy struck him. 'Is he often so?' he asked, with a heart-pang.

'Well, he's never been strong, my lord,' Janet answered truthfully; 'having been brought up by hand, you know—it never does suit them.' And as she spoke a sudden dagger went through her heart all at once, to think she should have starved that dear boy of the nourishment his father the Earl had bought and paid for—in order to feed that strong and healthy and ungrateful young aristocrat, her boy, Hugh Seymour Plantagenet, Viscount Hurley.

The Earl recounted it all at length to his wife that night. 'Gwen,' he said seriously, 'we had no right to do it. I must provide better for that boy. I shall allow his mother a hundred a year for his education. He's a most intelligent child, with excellent faculties; and I'm sure he'd do credit to any pains bestowed upon him.'

'My dear,' the Countess answered, 'you shall do nothing so quixotic.'

The natural result of which was that the Earl did it, and said no more about it.

This princely allowance for her boy's education stirred up in Janet's mind a fresh ambition. Like all dwellers in the Thames valley, she knew well the name and the fame of Oxford. It loomed large in her eyes, as the metropolis of the river. 'Twas not so much as a great university, however, that Oxford appealed to her, but as a place where men lived and learned to be gentlemen—real waterside gentlemen, in white sweaters and red blazers and straw hats with banded ribbons. Oxford men came often to her lodgings in the summer—with the cardinal's hat or the red cross embroidered on their jerseys,—and she recognised the fact that there was a Something about them. Why should not her boy, her own dear Willie, be sent to Oxford, and there manufactured into a real gentleman? Manufactured? Why, he was a gentleman born—and a nobleman too, if it came to that, and the real Lord Hurley! If she sent him to Oxford, she might undo some part of the terrible wrong she had done him long since in depriving him of his birthright—a wrong which, brought home to her now she loved him, was beginning to weigh upon her soul not a little; for with our peasant class, incapable of any broad abstract ideas, you must have a personal substratum of emotional feeling to work upon in every case, before there can be any real recognition of right and wrong in their wider aspects. It was a wild ambition, perhaps, for a lodging-house keeper to entertain; but there was a good grammar-school in the town, where the boys wore square college caps; and with Lord Remenham's hundred a year, a great deal was possible. She would begin saving it up, for it was to be paid to her quarterly at once; and by the time her boy was of an age to go to Oxford, she would have enough to send him there—and to live herself in such a way as not to disgrace him.

Thenceforth she saved with the petty, penurious, argus-eyed saving of the lesser *bourgeoisie*. Not so far as Willie was concerned, however. For him, she spent all she could afford, to keep him neat and well dressed, and to let him associate

with other boys who were fit companions for a destined Oxford man. Nay, more: hard as it was for her to refuse them, she took no more big schoolboys or Oxford men as lodgers in summer: no undergraduate henceforth should ever be able to say, 'I know that man—I lodged with his mother a couple of years ago.' Year after year she saved up, and sent Willie to the grammar-school, and dressed him well, and took every fond care of him. And year after year she loved him more and more, with the ardent love one lavishes on those for whom one has worked and endured and suffered. Yet ever amidst it all came the gnawing thought, 'All I can do for him is as nothing now, compared to what I have taken from him. I deprived him of an earldom; and I can educate him, perhaps, to be a curate or a schoolmaster.'

As for Willie, he loved and admired his mother—as he naturally called her. He was fond of her and proud of her; for she was tall and handsome; she 'held her head up'; and he could see how hard she worked to keep the family 'respectable.' He honoured her for that wish; for he had inherited the Earl's conscientious, conventional, honest, *doctrinaire* nature. He was prouder of her by far than he would have been of the Countess. When he was getting to be seventeen, it began to strike Janet that her occasional lapses in grammar, though more and more infrequent as she got on in the world, were a source of pain or humiliation to her boy; and she said to him frankly, 'Correct me, Willie, and explain *why* to me.' He corrected and explained; and Janet, who was naturally clear-headed, sensible, and logical, understood and grasped the principles he expounded to her. She took pains with her English. As he got on at school—he was head of his class always, and took all the prizes, especially in classics—she felt still more of a desire not to shame her boy when he should go to Oxford; and with this intent she made him read her books, and read them herself—Tennyson, Dickens, Thackeray, the current novelists—so that she might at least avoid putting her foot in it when she heard them talked of. And being a woman of remarkable mother-wit and quickness, she found very soon, to her immense surprise, that she could talk of many such things a great deal better than some silly 'real ladies.'

It was a glorious day when, soon after Willie was nineteen, her boy returned from a week's visit to that marvellous Oxford one day, with the incredibly great news that he had won a junior studentship at Christ Church. (That is the name at 'the House' for what anywhere else would be called a scholarship.) It was worth eighty pounds a year, and, with Lord Remenham's allowance, it would enable him to live like a gentleman at Oxford. Janet made a rapid calculation in her own mind. Yes, yes; she could allow him seventy pounds more herself, which would give him an income of £250; and yet, by expending all her little savings in one wild burst, she would be able to live at Oxford herself, in quiet lodgings, for three years, like a lady, so as not to disgrace him!

One thing alone poisoned her happiness in this hour of triumph. Willie added at last, with a touch of not unnatural pleasure, 'And I beat some fellows from the biggest schools—from Eton and Harrow; amongst others, Lord Hurley.'

A stab went straight through the mother's heart, or rather, the foster-mother's—for it was not Hugh she was thinking of. 'Will he go to Christ Church with you?' she asked, trembling.

'Yes, mother dear, but without a studentship.'

Strange thoughts coursed quickly through Janet's head. That young aristocrat, her own son, might be rude to her dear boy. How much did he know? How much did he remember? It was fortunate she had left off going to see him at the castle when he was ten years old. Perhaps the whole episode might have faded from his memory. But the Earl would know. And the Earl might tell him.

At that moment, if she didn't hate Hugh, at least she feared him. And such fear as hers was not far from hatred.

October term came. It was the hour of freshmen. And when Lord Hurley set out from the castle, his father (or rather his reputed father) said to him as his last word, 'You know your foster-mother's boy, young Wells, gained that junior studentship that you missed, Hurley. Be sure, my boy, for our sake, that you are kind to him.'

'All right, father,' Hurley answered, as he jumped into the dogcart which was to take him to the station. But he added to himself, with a smile, 'Just like my father! Wants to make me polite to every deserving young cad who happens to interest him.'

Three days later Janet was walking down the High, with her boy in cap and gown, proud and delighted as she had never been before in that strange varied life of hers. It was a moment of pure triumph. All at once, from a window overhead, she heard a murmur of voices. They came from a first-floor window of a club of undergraduates, which was gay even then with flowers in boxes.

'Why, that's the woman we lodged with three or four years ago when we stopped by the river!'—one voice exclaimed—the voice of an Oriel commoner. 'How awfully odd! And she's walking with a 'Varsity man!'

'Yes,' a second voice drawled. 'Devilish odd, isn't it? That's my old foster-mother, Mrs. Wells; and she's walking with her son. He's a *protégé* of my father's; and he's got a junior studentship at the House. Rum combination, ain't it?'

Janet glanced at Willie. He had not a mother's ears, like hers; and he had not heard them. He walked on smiling, unaware of this calamity.

Janet Wells went home to her lodgings that night in an agony of misery. The Nemesis of her wrong-doing had come home to her indeed. She was paying her penalty. To think there was a day when she fancied she would like to strangle her Willie, because he had taken Hugh from her! Why, she hated Hugh now! Hated him even more profoundly and fiercely, by far, than she had ever loved him. That baseborn son of a drunken soldier to scorn her own boy—her good, gentle Willie!

The drunken soldier's son had deprived her Willie of his birthright and his earldom! And, worse than all, *she* had helped him to do it!

She did not undress that night. She lay upon her bed in her clothes, and tossed and turned, and moaned and suffered. It was irrevocable now—quite, quite irrevocable. If she went to Lord Remenham and told him her tale to-morrow, how *could* he believe her? it was all too stale, too strange, too romantic—and hackneyed romantic at that—for any one to accept it. People would say she had been reading the *Family Herald* tales; or that her head was full of Lady Clare and Lord Ronald. What on earth could be more improbable, at our own time of day, than a tale of a changeling? and who on earth would swallow it on her unaided evidence?

She had dispossessed her boy, and, more terrible than all, she had laid him open to Lord Hurley's cruel condescensions—the cruel condescensions of the soldier's bastard.

Early next morning she rose, dressed her tumbled hair carefully, made herself as neat as she could with a flower in her bodice, and despatched a hurried note to Willie at Christ Church. 'Come at once,' it said, 'to your heartbroken mother.'

Willie rushed round, wondering. Then, pale of face and haggard of eye, Janet began to confess to him. She did not even sob: it was far beyond sobbing. She told him first what she had heard Lord Hurley say at the window the night before. Then she made a dramatic pause: 'And that boy,' she added, 'is my own son, Willie.'

For a second Willie thought she was mad. Then he looked in her face, her white, bloodless face, and saw she was speaking the truth under strong emotion.

'How do you mean, mother?' he gasped.

Janet told him the whole tale, simply, in a few strong words, with peasant brevity and peasant absence of self-justification. She had done it, that was all—for ample reason at the time; and now she was paying for it.

When she had finished she looked him in the face.

'You don't believe it?' she cried defiantly.

He took her hands in his.

'Dear mother,' he said, 'I believe it. I believe you always. You never deceived me. I believe it; and I am sorry—for one thing only. If I am not *your* son, you take from me a thing I valued most of all—for I was proud to be the son of such a mother.'

Those words repaid her for years of anguish. She strained him to her bosom. 'My boy, my boy,' she cried, 'I have robbed you of your inheritance!'

'The inheritance of your blood,' Willie answered, 'yes. The other, I don't care about.'

She clasped him again. At least she would die happy.

'What can we do?' she cried. 'Can I confess to Lord Remenham?'

He shook his head.

'Oh no,' he answered. 'It would do no good. We should both be regarded as absurd impostors. Nobody would believe it—except myself. All the rest would think it was a foolish lie—and I had egged you on to tell it.'

She held him tight against her breast.

'Don't be afraid,' she said. 'I will hold my tongue. I will not again destroy your prospects.'

They sat together in her rooms all that day, for the most part in silence, holding one another's hands in mute sympathy. On the stroke of midnight he left her, as he must, to return to college.

'Good-night, dearest!' he said, with a strange foreboding. 'Remember, I do not blame you in anything. I understand all; and a French proverb says, "To understand all is to pardon all."'

She kissed him hysterically and let him go at once, without one word of leave-taking.

By the first post next morning he received two notes from her. One was formal, and intended only for the inspection of the coroner. It spoke of nothing but sleeplessness, depression, narcotics. The other ran thus:—

'MY OWN, OWN DARLING,

'I do not wish to murder the son I bore. But if I remain alive I feel I must rush upon Hurley, wherever I meet him, and stab him. I am not even sure it is because he is my own child that I want to spare him—is it not rather because I do not wish people to say your mother was a murderess? So, good-bye for ever. Willie, my Willie, I have wronged you deeply; I will wrong you no more. They will think it was merely an overdose of morphia.

'Your loving

'MOTHER.'

The jury returned it 'Death by Misadventure.'

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# INTERMEZZO

## LANGALULA

Langalula was a great chief. The people he ruled were numerous and warlike: his assegais were ten thousand: his tribe had many cattle. So the Missionary at his kraal was glad indeed when he felt he had touched Langalula's heart; for it meant the conversion of a whole heathen nation.

When the king goes over, the people soon follow him.

Langalula said, 'I am convinced; baptize me.'

But the ways of white men, are they not incomprehensible? Though the Missionary had been preaching that very thing for months, yet when Langalula gave in he answered, 'Conviction alone is not enough. You must wait a while till I feel that your life shows forth works meet for repentance.' Langalula grumbled. He was little accustomed to such contradiction. But he knew it was hard arguing with these priestly white men, who will baptize a starving slave every bit as soon as a great chief; so he held his peace, and, though he chafed at it, waited the Missionary's pleasure.

By and by, one day, the Missionary came to him. 'Langalula,' he said condescendingly, 'I have watched you close for many weeks now, and I think I can baptize you.'

'Then all my sins will be forgiven?' asked Langalula.

'All your sins will be forgiven,' the Missionary answered.

'But I must put away my wives?' Langalula asked once more.

'All save one,' answered the Missionary. It was a point of doctrine, or at least of discipline.

'Then I think,' Langalula said, 'I will wait for a week—so as to make up my mind which one of them is dearest to me.'

But he said this deceitfully, knowing in his own heart that all his sins were going to be forgiven, and determining in the interval to marry another wife, whom he would keep as his companion when he put away the others. For there was a young girl coming on, black but comely, the daughter of Khamsua, a neighbouring chief, whom Langalula had seen, and whom he wished to purchase. And since the last love is always (for the moment) the greatest, the chief cared very little whether he must put away all his other wives or not, if only he could keep Malali. She had driven out the rest of them. He had watched the girl growing up at Khamsua's for years, and had said to himself always, 'Whenever Malali is of marriageable age, see if I do not buy her and marry her.'

In pursuance of this plan, as soon as the Missionary was gone, Langalula rose up, and took the fighting men of his tribe with him (that there might be no dispute), and marched into the country of Malali's father, whose name, as I said, was Khamsua. When Khamsua heard Langalula was on his way to his land with five thousand assegais, not to speak of Winchester rifles, he went out to meet him with a great retinue.

Khamsua cringed. Langalula said to him, 'I am come to ask for Malali.'

The moment Khamsua heard that saying, he was unspeakably terrified, and flung himself down on his face, and clasped Langalula's knees. For Khamsua was only a small chief in the country compared with Langalula.

'O my king,' Khamsua said, 'O lion of the people, how could I know so great a monarch as you had set his eyes on Malali? and before you asked—woe, woe!—Montelo's people came, and offered oxen on Montelo's behalf for Malali. And I sold her to them, because I was afraid of Montelo, and could not have believed so great a chief as you had ever looked upon her.'

Langalula smiled at that. 'Oh, as for Montelo,' he said, 'I can easily take her from him; and then I can get the Missionary to marry us.'

Khamsua, however, answered like a fool. 'It cannot be. The Christians are so strait-laced. Montelo is a Christian now; he was baptized a week ago; and Malali was married to him in Christian fashion. Even if you were to kill Montelo and

take her to your kraal, I don't believe the Missionary would marry you.'

Langalula turned to his men. 'Kill him,' he said simply. And they killed him with an assegai.

As soon as that was finished, Langalula marched on into Montelo's country. When he arrived there, Montelo crept out to meet him and tried to parley with him. But Langalula would not parley with the man who had deprived him of Malali. 'We will fight for it,' he said angrily. And they fought for it, then and there. The upshot of it all was that Langalula's men conquered in the battle, and drove Montelo's men (who had no Winchesters) back to their king's kraal; and then they killed Montelo himself, and carried his head on an assegai.

By the very same evening they occupied the kraal that had once been Montelo's, and Langalula's men brought out Malali to their own leader. Langalula looked hard at her. She was a glossy-black girl, very smooth-skinned and lithe, and clean of limb. The great chief stared long at her. Malali hung her head and drooped her arms before him. 'Why did you go with Montelo,' he asked at last, 'when Langalula would have taken you?'

The girl trembled with fear. 'Twas no fault of hers. How could she help it? A woman, there, is no free agent. 'My father sold me,' she answered, whimpering; 'Montelo paid him a great many oxen. I had no choice but to go. O King, O mighty lion, I did not know you wanted me.'

With that she flung herself at his feet in terror, and held his knees, imploring him.

'Take her to the hut that was once Montelo's,' said the great chief, smiling; 'I will follow her there.'

They seized her arms and dragged her to the hut, crying and shrieking as she went. They dragged her roughly. Langalula remained behind, superintending the slaughter of Montelo's warriors. As soon as he was tired he returned to the hut that had once been Montelo's; for he wished to see Malali, whether she was really as beautiful as he believed, even though the Missionary would never marry him to her.

Malali, when she saw him, outside the hut, thought all was well, and that Langalula loved her. So she left off crying, and tried every art a woman knows to please and charm him. But Langalula was a very great king, and his anger was aroused. A king's anger is terrible. He smiled to himself to see with what simple tricks the woman thought she could appease a mighty warrior.

'Go into my hut!' he said. And he followed her.

The next morning came, and the great king cried to himself with annoyance and vexation that Montelo and Khamsua—and the Missionary as well—should have done him, between them, out of so beautiful a woman. If the Missionary had been a black man, Langalula would have compelled him to baptize him outright, and then to marry him properly to Malali, with book and ring, in the Christian fashion. But he knew by experience it is no use threatening these white men with tortures; for, threaten how you may, they will not obey you; and, besides, the Governor would send up troops from Cape Town; and 'tis ill fighting with the men of the Governor. So he arose from his bed in the morning in a white heat of passion. 'Malali,' he said, gazing at her with an ugly smile, 'I like you better than any woman I ever yet saw. You please me in everything. But you went off with Montelo, and the Missionary will not marry me to you now I have speared him. I have also speared your father, Khamsua, because he sold you for oxen to Montelo. I want a real queen, who shall be married to me white-fashion. I am becoming a Christian now, and can have only one wife. But it must not be you, because you were sold to Montelo, whom I have slain in the battle, and they will not marry us. So I will keep my own first wife, the earliest married, though she is old and lean, and discard the other ones. Come out of the hut, Malali, and stand in front of my warriors.'

Malali was afraid at that, and would have skulked in the corner if she dared; but she dared not, because she was frightened of Langalula. So out she came as he bid her, trembling in all her limbs, and crouching with terror; her knees hardly bore her. Langalula turned to his men; he looked at her with regret. She was sleek and beautiful.

'Pin her through the body to the ground with an assegai,' he said, pointing at her.

And they pinned her through with an assegai.

'Pin her arms and her legs,' said the great chief.

And his followers pinned them. The woman fainted.

'Now leave her to die in the sun,' said Langanula.

So they left her to die there.

After that, Langanula marched back grimly with his men to his own country. As soon as he reached his kraal he went to see the Missionary. He was very submissive.

'I repent of all my sins,' he said. 'I have come to be baptized. Teacher, I will put away all my wives save one; and even for that one I will retain the earliest.'

And *that* is how Langanula became a Christian.

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## VII

### THE CURATE OF CHURNSIDE

Walter Dene, deacon, in his faultless Oxford clerical coat and broad felt hat, strolled along slowly, sunning himself as he went, after his wont, down the pretty central lane of West Churnside. It was just the idyllic village best suited to the taste of such an idyllic young curate as Walter Dene. There were cottages with low-thatched roofs, thickly overgrown with yellow stonecrop and pink house-leek; there were trellis-work porches up which the scented dog-rose and the fainter honeysuckle clambered together in sisterly rivalry; there were paraged gable-ends of Elizabethan farmhouses, quaintly varied with black oak joists and moulded plaster panels. At the end of all, between an avenue of ancient elm-trees, the heavy square tower of the old church closed in the little vista—a church with a round Norman doorway and dog-tooth arches, melting into Early English lancets in the aisle, and finishing up with a great decorated east window by the broken cross and yew-tree. Not a trace of Perpendicularity about it anywhere, thank goodness: 'for if it were Perpendicular,' said Walter Dene to himself often, 'I really think, in spite of my uncle, I should have to look out for another curacy.'

Yes, it was a charming village, and a charming country; but, above all, it was rendered habitable and pleasurable for a man of taste by the informing presence of Christina Eliot. 'I don't think I shall propose to Christina this week after all,' thought Walter Dene as he strolled along lazily. 'The most delightful part of love-making is certainly its first beginning. The little tremor of hope and expectation; the half-needless doubt you feel as to whether she really loves you; the pains you take to pierce the thin veil of maidenly reserve; the triumph of detecting her at a blush or a flutter when she sees you coming—all these are delicate little morsels to be rolled daintily on the critical palate, and not to be swallowed down coarsely at one vulgar gulp. Poor child, she is on tenter-hooks of hesitation and expectancy all the time, I know; for I'm sure she loves me now, I'm sure she loves me; but I must wait a week yet: she will be grateful to me for it hereafter. We mustn't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs; we mustn't eat up all our capital at one extravagant feast, and then lament the want of our interest ever afterward. Let us live another week in our first fool's paradise before we enter on the safer but less tremulous pleasures of sure possession. We can enjoy first love but once in a lifetime; let us enjoy it now while we can, and not fling away the chance prematurely by mere childish haste and girlish precipitancy.' Thinking which thing, Walter Dene halted a moment by the churchyard wall, picked a long spray of scented wild thyme from a mossy cranny, and gazed into the blue sky above at the graceful swifts who nested in the old tower, as they curved and circled through the yielding air on their evenly poised and powerful pinions.

Just at that moment old Mary Long came out of her cottage to speak with the young parson. 'If ye plaze, Maister Dene,' she said in her native west-country dialect, 'our Nully would like to zee 'ee. She's main ill to-day, zur, and she be like to die a'most, I'm thinking.'

'Poor child, poor child,' said Walter Dene tenderly. 'She's a dear little thing, Mrs. Long, is your Nellie, and I hope she may yet be spared to you. I'll come and see her at once, and try if I can do anything to ease her.'

He crossed the road compassionately with the tottering old grandmother, giving her his helping hand over the kerbstone, and following her with bated breath into the close little sickroom. Then he flung open the tiny casement with its diamond-leaded panes, so as to let in the fresh summer air, and picked a few sprigs of sweetbriar from the porch, which he joined with the geranium from his own button-hole to make a tiny nosegay for the bare bedside. After that, he sat and talked awhile gently in an undertone to pale, pretty little Nellie herself, and went away at last promising to send her some jelly and some soup immediately from the vicarage kitchen.

'She's a sweet little child,' he said to himself musingly, 'though I'm afraid she's not long for this world now; and the poor like these small attentions dearly. They get them seldom, and value them for the sake of the thoughtfulness they imply, rather than for the sake of the mere things themselves. I can order a bottle of calf's-foot at the grocer's, and Carter can set it in a mould without any trouble; while as for the soup, some tinned mock turtle and a little fresh stock makes a really capital mixture for this sort of thing. It costs so little to give these poor souls pleasure, and it is a great luxury to oneself undeniably. But, after all, what a funny trade it is to set an educated man to do! They send us up to Oxford or Cambridge, give us a distinct taste for Æschylus and Catullus, Dante and Milton, Mendelssohn and Chopin, good claret and *olives farcies*, and then bring us down to a country village, to look after the bodily and spiritual ailments of rheumatic old washer-women! If it were not for poetry, flowers, and Christina, I really think I should succumb entirely under the infliction.'

'He's a dear, good man, that he is, is young passon,' murmured old Mary Long as Walter disappeared between the elm-trees; 'and he do love the poor and the zick, the same as if he was their own brother. God bless his zoul, the dear, good vulla, vor all his kindness to our Nully.'

Halfway down the main lane Walter came across Christina Eliot. As she saw him she smiled and coloured a little, and held out her small gloved hand prettily. Walter took it with a certain courtly and graceful chivalry. 'An exquisite day, Miss Eliot,' he said; 'such a depth of sapphire in the sky, such a faint undertone of green on the clouds by the horizon, such a lovely humming of bees over the flickering hot meadows! On days like this, one feels that Schopenhauer is wrong after all, and that life is sometimes really worth living.'

'It seems to me often worth living,' Christina answered; 'if not for oneself, at least for others. But you pretend to be more of a pessimist than you really are, I fancy, Mr. Dene. Any one who finds so much beauty in the world as you do can hardly think life poor or meagre. You seem to catch the loveliest points in everything you look at, and to throw a little literary or artistic reflection over them which makes them even lovelier than they are in themselves.'

'Well, no doubt one can increase one's possibilities of enjoyment by carefully cultivating one's own faculties of admiration and appreciation,' said the curate thoughtfully; 'but, after all, life has only a few chapters that are thoroughly interesting and enthralling in all its history. We oughtn't to hurry over them too lightly, Miss Eliot; we ought to linger on them lovingly, and make the most of their potentialities; we ought to dwell upon them like "linkèd sweetness long drawn out." It is the mistake of the world at large to hurry too rapidly over the pleasantest episodes, just as children pick all the plums at once out of the pudding. I often think that, from the purely selfish and temporal point of view, the real value of a life to its subject may be measured by the space of time over which he has managed to spread the enjoyment of its greatest pleasures. Look, for example, at poetry, now.'

A faint shade of disappointment passed across Christina's face as he turned from what seemed another groove into that indifferent subject; but she answered at once, 'Yes, of course one feels that with the higher pleasures at least; but there are others in which the interest of plot is greater, and then one looks naturally rather to the end. When you begin a good novel, you can't help hurrying through it in order to find out what becomes of everybody at last.'

'Ah, but the highest artistic interest goes beyond mere plot interest. I like rather to read for the pleasure of reading, and to loiter over the passages that please me, quite irrespective of what goes before or what comes after; just as you, for your part, like to sketch a beautiful scene for its own worth to you, irrespective of what may happen to the leaves in autumn, or to the cottage roof in twenty years from this. By the way, have you finished that little water-colour of the mill yet? It's the prettiest thing of yours I've ever seen, and I want to look how you've managed the light on your foreground.'

'Come in and see it,' said Christina. 'It's finished now, and, to tell you the truth, I'm very well pleased with it myself.'

'Then I know it must be good,' the curate answered; 'for you are always your own harshest critic.' And he turned in at the little gate with her, and entered the village doctor's tiny drawing-room.

Christina placed the sketch on an easel near the window—a low window opening to the ground, with long lithe festoons of faint-scented jasmine encroaching on it from outside—and let the light fall on it aslant in the right direction. It was a pretty and a clever sketch certainly, with more than a mere amateur's sense of form and colour; and Walter Dene, who had a true eye for pictures, could conscientiously praise it for its artistic depth and fulness. Indeed, on that head at least, Walter Dene's veracity was unimpeachable, however lax in other matters; nothing on earth would have induced him to praise as good a picture or a sculpture in which he saw no real merit. He sat a little while criticising and discussing it, suggesting an improvement here or an alteration there, and then he rose hurriedly, remembering all at once his forgotten promise to little Nellie. 'Dear me,' he said, 'your daughter's picture has almost made me overlook my proper duties, Mrs. Eliot. I promised to send some jelly and things at once to poor little Nellie Long at her grandmother's. How very wrong of me to let my natural inclinations keep me loitering here, when I ought to have been thinking of the poor of my parish!' And he went out with just a gentle pressure on Christina's hand, and a look from his eyes that her heart knew how to read aright at the first glance of it.

'Do you know, Christie,' said her father, 'I sometimes fancy when I hear that new parson fellow talk about his artistic feelings, and so on, that he's just a trifle selfish, or at least self-centred. He always dwells so much on his own enjoyment of things, you know.'

'Oh no, papa,' cried Christina warmly. 'He's anything but selfish, I'm sure. Look how kind he is to all the poor in the

village, and how much he thinks about their comfort and welfare. And whenever he's talking with one, he seems so anxious to make you feel happy and contented with yourself. He has a sort of little subtle flattery of manner about him that's all pure kindness; and he's always thinking what he can say or do to please you, and to help you onward. What you say about his dwelling on enjoyment so much is really only his artistic sensibility. He feels things so keenly, and enjoys beauty so deeply, that he can't help talking enthusiastically about it even a little out of season. He has more feelings to display than most men, and I'm sure that's the reason why he displays them so much. A ploughboy could only talk enthusiastically about roast beef and dumplings; Mr. Dene can talk about everything that's beautiful and sublime on earth or in heaven.'

Meanwhile, Walter Dene was walking quickly with his measured tread—the even, regular tread of a cultivated gentleman—down the lane toward the village grocer's, saying to himself as he went, 'There was never such a girl in all the world as my Christina. She may be only a country surgeon's daughter—a rosebud on a hedgerow bush—but she has the soul and the eye of a queen among women for all that. Every lover has deceived himself with the same sweet dream, to be sure—how over-analytic we have become nowadays, when I must needs half argue myself out of the sweets of first love!—but then they hadn't so much to go upon as I have. She has a wonderful touch in music, she has an exquisite eye in painting, she has an Italian charm in manner and conversation. I'm something of a connoisseur, after all, and no more likely to be deceived in a woman than I am in a wine or a picture. And next week I shall really propose formally to Christina, though I know by this time it will be nothing more than the merest formality. Her eyes are too eloquent not to have told me that long ago. It will be a delightful pleasure to live for her, and in order to make her happy. I frankly recognise that I am naturally a little selfish—not coarsely and vulgarly selfish; from that disgusting and piggish vice I may conscientiously congratulate myself that I'm fairly free; but still selfish in a refined and cultivated manner. Now, living with Christina and for Christina will correct this defect in my nature, will tend to bring me nearer to a true standard of perfection. When I am by her side, and then only, I feel that I am thinking entirely of her, and not at all of myself. To her I show my best side; with her, that best side would be always uppermost. The companionship of such a woman makes life something purer, and higher, and better worth having. The one thing that stands in our way is this horrid practical question of what to live upon. I don't suppose Uncle Arthur will be inclined to allow me anything, and I can't marry on my own paltry income and my curacy only. Yet I can't bear to keep Christina waiting indefinitely till some thick-headed squire or other chooses to take it into his opaque brain to give me a decent living.'

From the grocer's the curate walked on, carrying the two tins in his hand, as far as the vicarage. He went into the library, sat down by his own desk, and rang the bell. 'Will you be kind enough to give those things to Carter, John?' he said in his bland voice; 'and tell her to put the jelly in a mould, and let it set. The soup must be warmed with a little fresh stock, and seasoned. Then take them both, with my compliments, to old Mary Long the washerwoman, for her grandchild. Is my uncle in?'

'No, Master Walter,' answered the man—he was always 'Master Walter' to the old servants at his uncle's—'the vicar have gone over by train to Churminster. He told me to tell you he wouldn't be back till evening, after dinner.'

'Did you see him off, John?'

'Yes, Master Walter. I took his portmantew to the station.'

'This will be a good chance, then,' thought Walter Dene to himself. 'Very well, John,' he went on aloud: 'I shall write my sermon now. Don't let anybody come to disturb me.'

John nodded and withdrew. Walter Dene locked the door after him carefully, as he often did when writing sermons, and then lit a cigar, which was also a not infrequent concomitant of his exegetical labours. After that he walked once or twice up and down the room, paused a moment to look at his parchment-covered Rabelais and Villon on the bookshelf, peered out of the dulled glass windows with the crest in their centre, and finally drew a curious bent iron instrument out of his waistcoat pocket. With it in his hands, he went up quietly to his uncle's desk, and began fumbling at the lock in an experienced manner. As a matter of fact, it was not his first trial of skill in lockpicking; for Walter Dene was a painstaking and methodical man, and having made up his mind that he would get at and read his uncle's will, he took good care to begin by fastening all the drawers in his own bedroom, and trying his prentice hand at unfastening them again in the solitude of his chamber.

After half a minute's twisting and turning, the wards gave way gently to his dexterous pressure, and the lid of the desk lay open before him. Walter Dene took out the different papers one by one—there was no need for hurry, and he was not a

nervous person—till he came to a roll of parchment, which he recognised at once as the expected will. He unrolled it carefully and quietly, without any womanish trembling or excitement—"Thank Heaven," he said to himself, 'I'm above such nonsense as that'—and sat down leisurely to read it in the big, low, velvet-covered study chair. As he did so, he did not forget to lay a notched foot-rest for his feet, and to put the little Japanese dish on the tiny table by his side to hold his cigar ash. 'And now,' he said, 'for the important question whether Uncle Arthur has left his money to me, or to Arthur, or to both of us equally. He ought, of course, to leave at least half to me, seeing I have become a curate on purpose to please him, instead of following my natural vocation to the Bar; but I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he had left it all to Arthur. He's a pig-headed and illogical old man, the vicar; and he can never forgive me, I believe, because, being the eldest son, I wasn't called after him by my father and mother. As if that was my fault! Some people's ideas of personal responsibility are so ridiculously muddled.'

He composed himself quietly in the armchair, and glanced rapidly at the will through the meaningless preliminaries till he came to the significant clauses. These he read more carefully. 'All my estate in the county of Dorset, and the messuage or tenement known as Redlands, in the parish of Lode, in the county of Devon, to my dear nephew, Arthur Dene,' he said to himself slowly: 'Oh, this will never do.' 'And I give and bequeath to my said nephew, Arthur Dene, the sum of ten thousand pounds, three per cent. consolidated annuities, now standing in my name'—'Oh, this is atrocious, quite atrocious! What's this?' 'And I give and bequeath to my dear nephew, Walter Dene, the residue of my personal estate'—'and so forth. Oh no. That's quite sufficient. This must be rectified. The residuary legatee would only come in for a few hundreds or so. It's quite preposterous. The vicar was always an ill-tempered, cantankerous, unaccountable person, but I wonder he has the face to sit opposite me at dinner after that.'

He hummed an air from Schubert, and sat a moment looking thoughtfully at the will. Then he said to himself quietly, 'The simplest thing to do would be merely to scrape out or take out with chemicals the name Arthur, substituting the name Walter, and *vice versa*. That's a very small matter; a man who draws as well as I do ought to be able easily to imitate a copying clerk's engrossing hand. But it would be madness to attempt it now and here; I want a little practice first. At the same time, I mustn't keep the will out a moment longer than is necessary; my uncle may return by some accident before I expect him; and the true philosophy of life consists in invariably minimising the adverse chances. This will was evidently drawn up by Watson and Blenkiron, of Chancery Lane. I'll write to-morrow and get them to draw up a will for me, leaving all I possess to Arthur. The same clerk is pretty sure to engross it, and that'll give me a model for the two names on which I can do a little preliminary practice. Besides, I can try the stuff Wharton told me about, for making ink fade, on the same parchment. That will be killing two birds with one stone, certainly. And now if I don't make haste I shan't have time to write my sermon.'

He replaced the will calmly in the desk, fastened the lock again with a delicate twirl of the pick, and sat down in his armchair to compose his discourse for to-morrow's evensong. 'It's not a bad bit of rhetoric,' he said to himself as he read it over for correction, 'but I'm not sure that I haven't plagiarised a little too freely from Montaigne and dear old Burton. What a pity it must be thrown away upon a Churnside congregation! Not a soul in the whole place will appreciate a word of it, except Christina. Well, well, that alone is enough reward for any man.' And he knocked off his ash pensively into the Japanese ashpan.

During the course of the next week Walter practised diligently the art of imitating handwriting. He got his will drawn up and engrossed at Watson and Blenkiron's (without signing it, *bien entendu*); and he spent many solitary hours in writing the two names 'Walter' and 'Arthur' on the spare end of parchment, after the manner of the engrossing clerk. He also tested the stuff for making the ink fade to his own perfect satisfaction. And on the next occasion when his uncle was safely off the premises for three hours, he took the will once more deliberately from the desk, removed the obnoxious letters with scrupulous care, and wrote in his own name in place of Arthur's, so that even the engrossing clerk himself would hardly have known the difference. 'There,' he said to himself approvingly, as he took down quiet old George Herbert from the shelf and sat down to enjoy an hour's smoke after the business was over, 'that's one good deed well done, anyhow. I have the calm satisfaction of a clear conscience. The vicar's proposed arrangement was really most unfair; I have substituted for it what Aristotle would rightly have called true distributive justice. For though I've left all the property to myself, by the unfortunate necessity of the case, of course I won't take it all. I'll be juster than the vicar. Arthur shall have his fair share, which is more, I believe, than he'd have done for me; but I hate squalid money-grubbing. If brothers can't be generous and brotherly to one another, what a wretched, sordid little life this of ours would really be!'

Next Sunday morning the vicar preached, and Walter sat looking up at him reflectively from his place in the chancel. A

beautiful clear-cut face, the curate's, and seen to great advantage from the doctor's pew, set off by the white surplice, and upturned in quiet meditation towards the elder priest in the pulpit. Walter was revolving many things in his mind, and most of all one adverse chance which he could not just then see his way to minimise. Any day his uncle might take it into his head to read over the will and discover the—ah, well, the rectification. Walter was a man of too much delicacy of feeling even to think of it to himself as a fraud or a forgery. Then, again, the vicar was not a very old man after all; he might live for an indefinite period, and Christina and himself might lose all the best years of their life waiting for a useless person's natural removal. What a pity that threescore was not the utmost limit of human life! For his own part, like the Psalmist, Walter had no desire to outlive his own highest tastes and powers of enjoyment. Ah, well, well, man's prerogative is to better and improve upon nature. If people do not die when they ought, then it becomes clearly necessary for philosophically-minded juniors to help them on their way artificially.

It was an ugly necessity, certainly; Walter frankly recognised that fact from the very beginning, and he shrank even from contemplating it; but there was no other way out of the difficulty. The old man had always been a selfish bachelor, with no love for anybody or anything on earth except his books, his coins, his garden, and his dinner; he was growing tired of all except the last; would it not be better for the world at large, on strict utilitarian principles, that he should go at once? True, such steps are usually to be deprecated; but the wise man is a law unto himself, and instead of laying down the wooden, hard-and-fast lines that make conventional morality so much a rule of thumb, he judges every individual case on its own particular merits. Here was Christina's happiness and his own on the one hand, with many collateral advantages to other people, set in the scale against the feeble remnant of a selfish old man's days on the other. Walter Dean had a constitutional horror of taking life in any form, and especially of shedding blood; but he flattered himself that if anything of the sort became clearly necessary, he was not the man to shrink from taking the needful measures to ensure it, at any sacrifice of personal comfort.

All through the next week Walter turned over the subject in his own mind; and the more he thought about it, the more the plan gained in definiteness and consistency as detail after detail suggested itself to him. First he thought of poison. That was the cleanest and neatest way of managing the thing, he considered; and it involved the least unpleasant consequences. To stick a knife or shoot a bullet into any sentient creature was a horrid and revolting act; to put a little tasteless powder into a cup of coffee and let a man sleep off his life quietly was really nothing more than helping him involuntarily to a delightful euthanasia. 'I wish any one would do as much for me at his age, without telling me about it,' Walter said to himself seriously. But then the chances of detection would be much increased by using poison, and Walter felt it an imperative duty to do nothing which would expose Christina to the shock of a discovery. She would not see the matter in the same practical light as he did; women never do; their morality is purely conventional, and a wise man will do nothing on earth to shake it. You cannot buy poison without the risk of exciting question. There remained, then, only shooting or stabbing. But shooting makes an awkward noise, and attracts attention at the moment; so the one thing possible was a knife, unpleasant as that conclusion seemed to all his more delicate feelings.

Having thus decided, Walter Dene proceeded to lay his plans with deliberate caution. He had no intention whatsoever of being detected, though his method of action was simplicity itself. It was only bunglers and clumsy fools who got caught; he knew that a man of his intelligence and ability would not make such an idiot of himself as—well, as common ruffians always do. He took his old American bowie-knife, bought years ago as a curiosity, out of the drawer where it had lain so long. It was very rusty, but it would be safer to sharpen it privately on his own hone and strop than to go asking for a new knife at a shop for the express purpose of enabling the shopman afterwards to identify him. He sharpened it for safety's sake during sermon-hour in the library, with the door locked as usual. It took a long time to get off all the rust, and his arm got quickly tired. One morning as he was polishing away at it, he was stopped for a moment by a butterfly which flapped and fluttered against the dulled window-panes. 'Poor thing!' he said to himself, 'it will beat its feathery wings to pieces in its struggles'; and he put a vase of Venetian glass on top of it, lifted the sash carefully, and let the creature fly away outside in the broad sunshine. At the same moment the vicar, who was strolling with his King Charlie on the lawn, came up and looked in at the window. He could not have seen in before, because of the dulled and painted diamonds.

'That's a murderous-looking weapon, Wally,' he said, with a smile, as his glance fell upon the bowie and hone. 'What do you use it for?'

'Oh, it's an American bowie,' Walter answered carelessly. 'I bought it long ago for a curiosity, and now I'm sharpening it up to help me in carving that block of walnut wood.' And he ran his finger lightly along the edge of the blade to test its keenness. What a lucky thing that it was the vicar himself, and not the gardener! If he had been caught by anybody else the fact would have been fatal evidence after all was over. 'Méfiez-vous des papillons,' he hummed to himself, after

Béranger, as he shut down the window. 'One more butterfly, and I must give up the game as useless.'

Meanwhile, as Walter meant to make a clean job of it—hacking and hewing clumsily was repulsive to all his finer feelings—he began also to study carefully the anatomy of the human back. He took down all the books on the subject in the library, and by their aid discovered exactly under which ribs the heart lay. A little observation of the vicar, compared with the plates in Quain's *Anatomy*, showed him precisely at what point in his clerical coat the most vulnerable interstice was situated. 'It's a horrid thing to have to do,' he thought over and over again as he planned it, 'but it's the only way to secure Christina's happiness.' And so, by a certain bright Friday evening in August, Walter Dene had fully completed all his preparations.

That afternoon, as on all bright afternoons in summer, the vicar went for a walk in the grounds, attended only by little King Charlie. He was squire and parson at once in Churnside, and he loved to make the round of his own estate. At a certain gate by Selbury Copse the vicar always halted to rest awhile, leaning on the bar and looking at the view across the valley. It was a safe and lonely spot. Walter remained at home (he was to take the regular Friday evensong) and went into the study by himself. After a while he took his hat, not without trembling, strolled across the garden, and then made the short cut through the copse, so as to meet the vicar by the gate. On his way he heard the noise of the Dennings in the farm opposite, out rabbit-shooting with their guns and ferrets in the warren. His very soul shrank within him at the sound of that brutal sport. 'Great heavens!' he said to himself, with a shudder; 'to think how I loathe and shrink from the necessity of almost painlessly killing this one selfish old man for an obviously good reason, and those creatures there will go out massacring innocent animals with the aid of a hideous beast of prey, not only without remorse, but actually by way of amusement! I thank Heaven I am not even as they are.' Near the gate he came upon his uncle quietly and naturally, though it would be absurd to deny that at that supreme moment even Walter Dene's equable heart throbbed hard, and his breath went and came tremulously. 'Alone,' he thought to himself, 'and nobody near; this is quite providential,' using even then, in thought, the familiar phraseology of his profession.

'A lovely afternoon, Uncle Arthur,' he said as composedly as he could, accurately measuring the spot on the vicar's coat with his eye meanwhile. 'The valley looks beautiful in this light.'

'Yes, a lovely afternoon, Wally, my boy, and an exquisite glimpse down yonder into the churchyard.'

As he spoke, Walter half leaned upon the gate beside him, and adjusted the knife behind the vicar's back scientifically. Then, without a word more, in spite of a natural shrinking, he drove it home up to the haft, with a terrible effort of will, at the exact spot on the back that the books had pointed out to him. It was a painful thing to do, but he did it carefully and well. The effect of Walter Dene's scientific provision was even more instantaneous than he had anticipated. Without a single cry, without a sob or a contortion, the vicar's lifeless body fell over heavily by the side of the gate. It rolled down like a log into the dry ditch beneath. Walter knelt trembling on the ground close by, felt the pulse for a moment to assure himself that his uncle was really dead, and having fully satisfied himself on this all-important point, proceeded to draw the knife neatly out of the wound. He had let it fall in the body, in order to extricate it more easily afterward, and not risk pulling it out carelessly so as to get himself covered needlessly by tell-tale drops of blood, like ordinary clumsy assassins. But he had forgotten to reckon with little King Charlie. The dog jumped piteously upon the body of his master, licked the wound with his tongue, and refused to allow Walter to withdraw the knife. It would be unsafe to leave it there, for it might be recognised. 'Minimise the adverse chances,' he muttered still; but there was no inducing King Charlie to move. A struggle might result in getting drops of blood upon his coat, and then, great heavens, what a terrible awakening for Christina! 'Oh, Christina, Christina, Christina,' he said to himself piteously, 'it is for you only that I could ever have ventured to do this hideous thing.' The blood was still oozing out of the narrow slit, and saturating the black coat, and Walter Dene with his delicate nerves could hardly bear to look upon it.

At last he summoned up resolution to draw out the knife from the ugly wound, in spite of King Charlie; and as he did so, oh, horror! the little dog jumped at it, and cut his left fore-leg against the sharp edge deep to the bone. Here was a pretty accident indeed! If Walter Dene had been a common heartless murderer he would have snatched up the knife immediately, left the poor lame dog to watch and bleed beside his dead master, and skulked off hurriedly from the mute witness to his accomplished crime. But Walter was made of very different mould from that; he could not find it in his heart to leave a poor dumb animal wounded and bleeding for hours together, alone and untended. Just at first, indeed, he tried sophistically to persuade himself his duty to Christina demanded that he should go away at once, and never mind the sufferings of a mere spaniel; but his better nature told him the next moment that such sophisms were indefensible, and his humane instincts overcame even the profound instinct of self-preservation. He sat down quietly beside the warm

corpse. 'Thank goodness,' he said, with a slight shiver of disgust, 'I'm not one of those weak-minded people who are troubled by remorse. They would be so overcome by terror at what they had done that they would want to run away from the body immediately, at any price. But I don't think I *could* feel remorse. It is an incident of lower natures—natures that are capable of doing actions under one set of impulses, which they regret when another set comes uppermost in turn. That implies a want of balance, an imperfect co-ordination of parts and passions. The perfect character is consistent with itself; shame and repentance are confessions of weakness. For my part, I never do anything without having first deliberately decided that it is the best or the only thing to do; and having so done it, I do not draw back like a girl from the necessary consequences of my own act. No fluttering or running away for me. Still, I must admit that all that blood does look very ghastly. Poor old gentleman! I believe he really died almost without knowing it, and that is certainly a great comfort to one under the circumstances.'

He took King Charlie tenderly in his hands, without touching the wounded leg, and drew his pocket handkerchief softly from his pocket. 'Poor beastie,' he said aloud, holding out the cut limb before him, 'you are badly hurt, I'm afraid; but it wasn't my fault. We must see what we can do for you.' Then he wrapped the handkerchief deftly around it, without letting any blood show through, pressed the dog close against his breast, and picked up the knife gingerly by the reeking handle. 'A fool of a fellow would throw it into the river,' he thought, with a curl of his graceful lip. 'They always dredge the river after these incidents. I shall just stick it down a hole in the hedge a hundred yards off. The police have no invention, dull donkeys; they never dredge the hedges.' And he thrust it well down a disused rabbit burrow, filling in the top neatly with loose mould.

Walter Dene meant to have gone home quietly and said evensong, leaving the discovery of the body to be made at haphazard by others, but this unfortunate accident to King Charlie compelled him against his will to give the first alarm. It was absolutely necessary to take the dog to the veterinary at once, or the poor little fellow might bleed to death incontinently. 'One's best efforts,' he thought, 'are always liable to these unfortunate *contretemps*. I meant merely to remove a superfluous person from an uncongenial environment; yet I can't manage it without at the same time seriously injuring a harmless little creature that I really love.' And with one last glance at the lifeless thing behind him, he took his way regretfully along the ordinary path back towards the peaceful village of Churnside.

Halfway down the lane, at the entrance to the village, he met one of his parishioners. 'Tom,' he said boldly, 'have you seen anything of the vicar? I'm afraid he's got hurt somehow. Here's poor little King Charlie come limping back with his leg cut.'

'He went down the road, zur, 'arf an hour zince, and I arn't zeen him afterwards.'

'Tell the servants at the vicarage to look around the grounds, then; I'm afraid he has fallen and hurt himself. I must take the dog at once to Perkins's, or else I shall be late for evensong.'

The man went off straight towards the vicarage, and Walter Dene turned immediately with the dog in his arms into the village veterinary's.

## II

The servants from the vicarage were not the first persons to hit upon the dead body of the vicar. Joe Harley, the poacher, was out reconnoitring that afternoon in the vicar's preserves; and five minutes after Walter Dene had passed down the far side of the hedge, Joe Harley skulked noiselessly from the orchard up to the gate of the covert by Selbury Copse. He crept through the open end by the post (for it was against Joe's principles under any circumstances to climb over an obstacle of any sort, and so needlessly expose himself), and he was just going to slink off along the other hedge, having wires and traps in his pocket, when his boot struck violently against a soft object in the ditch underfoot. It struck so violently that it crushed in the object with the force of the impact; and when Joe came to look at what the object might be, he found to his horror that it was the bruised and livid face of the old parson. Joe had had a brush with keepers more than once, and had spent several months of seclusion in Dorchester Gaol; but, in spite of his familiarity with minor forms of lawlessness, he was moved enough in all conscience by this awful and unexpected discovery. He turned the body over clumsily with his hands, and saw that it had been stabbed in the back once only. In doing so he trod in a little blood, and got a drop or two on his sleeve and trousers; for the pool was bigger now, and Joe was not so handy or dainty with his fingers as the idyllic curate.

It was an awful dilemma, indeed, for a confirmed and convicted poacher. Should he give the alarm then and there, boldly, trusting to his innocence for vindication, and helping the police to discover the murderer? Why, that would be sheer suicide, no doubt; 'for who but would believe,' he thought, 'twas me as done it?' Or should he slink away quietly and say nothing, leaving others to find the body as best they might? That was dangerous enough in its way if anybody saw him, but not so dangerous as the other course. In an evil hour for his own chances Joe Harley chose that worse counsel, and slank off in his familiar crouching fashion towards the opposite corner of the copse.

On the way he heard John's voice holloaing for his master, and kept close to the hedge till he had quite turned the corner. But John had caught a glimpse of him too, and John did not forget it when, a few minutes later, he came upon the horrid sight beside the gate of Selbury Copse.

Meanwhile Walter had taken King Charlie to the veterinary's, and had his leg bound and bandaged securely. He had also gone down to the church, got out his surplice, and begun to put it on in the vestry for evensong, when a messenger came at hot haste from the vicarage, with news that Master Walter must come up at once, for the vicar was murdered.

'Murdered!' Walter Dene said to himself slowly half aloud; 'murdered! how horrible! Murdered!' It was an ugly word, and he turned it over with a genuine thrill of horror. That was what they would say of him if ever the thing came to be discovered! What an inappropriate classification!

He threw aside the surplice, and rushed up hurriedly to the vicarage. Already the servants had brought in the body, and laid it out in the clothes it wore, on the vicar's own bed. Walter Dene went in, shuddering, to look at it. To his utter amazement, the face was battered in horribly and almost unrecognisably by a blow or kick! What could that hideous mutilation mean? He could not imagine. It was an awful mystery. Great heavens! just fancy if any one were to take it into his head that he, Walter Dene, had done *that*—had kicked a defenceless old gentleman brutally about the face like a common London ruffian! The idea was too horrible to be borne for a moment. It unmanned him utterly, and he hid his face between his two hands and sobbed aloud like one broken-hearted. 'This day's work has been too much for my nerves,' he thought to himself between the sobs; 'but perhaps it is just as well I should give way now completely.'

That night was mainly taken up with the formalities of all such cases; and when at last Walter Dene went off, tired and nerve-worn, to bed, about midnight, he could not sleep much for thinking of the mystery. The murder itself didn't trouble him greatly; that was over and past now, and he felt sure his precautions had been amply sufficient to protect him even from the barest suspicion; but he couldn't fathom the mystery of that battered and mutilated face! Somebody must have seen the corpse between the time of the murder and the discovery! Who could that somebody have been? and what possible motive could he have had for such a horrible piece of purposeless brutality?

As for the servants, in solemn conclave in the hall, they had unanimously but one theory to account for all the facts: some poacher or other, for choice Joe Harley, had come across the vicar in the copse, with gun and traps in hand. The wretch had seen he was discovered, had felled the poor old vicar by a blow in the face with the butt-end of his rifle, and after he fell, fainting, had stabbed him for greater security in the back. That was such an obvious solution of the difficulty, that nobody in the servants' hall had a moment's hesitation in accepting it.

When Walter heard next morning early that Joe Harley had been arrested overnight, on John's information, his horror and surprise at the news were wholly unaffected. Here was another new difficulty, indeed. 'When I did the thing,' he said to himself, 'I never thought of that possibility. I took it for granted it would be a mystery, a problem for the local police (who, of course, could no more solve it than they could solve the *pons asinorum*), but it never struck me they would arrest an innocent person on the charge instead of me. This is horrible. It's so easy to make out a case against a poacher, and hang him for it, on suspicion. One's whole sense of justice revolts against the thing. After all, there's a great deal to be said in favour of the ordinary commonplace morality: it prevents complications. A man of delicate sensibilities oughtn't to kill anybody; he lets himself in for all kinds of unexpected contingencies, without knowing it.'

At the coroner's inquest things looked very black indeed for Joe Harley. Walter gave his evidence first, showing how he had found King Charlie wounded in the lane; and then the others gave theirs, as to the search for and finding of the body. John in particular swore to having seen a man's back and head slinking away by the hedge while they were looking for the vicar; and that back and head he felt sure were Joe Harley's. To Walter's infinite horror and disgust, the coroner's jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against the poor poacher. What other verdict could they possibly have given in accordance with such evidence?

The trial of Joe Harley for the wilful murder of the Reverend Arthur Dene was fixed for the next Dorchester Assizes. In the interval, Walter Dene, for the first time in his placid life, knew what it was to undergo a mental struggle. Whatever happened, he could not let Joe Harley be hanged for this murder. His whole soul rose up within him in loathing for such an act of hideous injustice. For though Walter Dene's code of morality was certainly not the conventional one, as he so often boasted to himself, he was not by any means without a code of morals of any sort. He could commit a murder where he thought it necessary, but he could not let an innocent man suffer in his stead. His ethical judgment on that point was just as clear and categorical as the judgment which told him he was in duty bound to murder his uncle. For Walter did not argue with himself on moral questions: he perceived the right and necessary thing intuitively; he was a law to himself, and he obeyed his own law implicitly, for good or for evil. Such men are capable of horrible and diabolically deliberate crimes; but they are capable of great and genuine self-sacrifices also.

Walter made no secret in the village of his disinclination to believe in Joe Harley's guilt. Joe was a rough fellow, he said, certainly, and he had no objection to taking a pheasant or two, and even to having a free fight with the keepers; but, after all, our game-laws were an outrageous piece of class legislation, and he could easily understand how the poor, whose sense of justice they outraged, should be so set against them. He could not think Joe Harley was capable of a detestable crime. Besides, he had seen him himself within a few minutes before and after the murder. Everybody thought it such a proof of the young parson's generous and kindly disposition; he had certainly the charity which thinketh no evil. Even though his own uncle had been brutally murdered on his own estate, he checked his natural feelings of resentment, and refused to believe that one of his own parishioners could have been guilty of the crime. Nay, more, so anxious was he that substantial justice should be done the accused, and so confident was he of his innocence, that he promised to provide counsel for him at his own expense; and he provided two of the ablest barristers on the Western circuit.

Before the trial, Walter Dene had come, after a terrible internal struggle, to an awful resolution. He would do everything he could for Joe Harley; but if the verdict went against him, he was resolved, then and there, in open court, to confess, before judge and jury, the whole truth. It would be a horrible thing for Christina; he knew that: but he could not love Christina so much, 'loved he not honour more'; and honour, after his own fashion, he certainly loved dearly. Though he might be false to all that all the world thought right, it was ingrained in the very fibre of his soul to be true to his own inner nature at least. Night after night he lay awake, tossing on his bed, and picturing to his mind's-eye every detail of that terrible disclosure. The jury would bring in a verdict of guilty: then, before the judge put on his black cap, he, Walter, would stand up, and tell them that he could not let another man hang for his crime; he would have the whole truth out before them; and then he would die, for he would have taken a little bottle of poison at the first sound of the verdict. As for Christina—oh, Christina!—Walter Dene could not dare to let himself think upon that. It was horrible; it was unendurable; it was torture a thousand times worse than dying: but still, he must and would face it. For in certain phases, Walter Dene, forger and murderer as he was, could be positively heroic.

The day of the trial came, and Walter Dene, pale and haggard with much vigil, walked in a dream and faintly from his hotel to the court-house. Everybody present noticed what a deep effect the shock of his uncle's death had had upon him. He was thinner and more bloodless than usual, and his dulled eyes looked black and sunken in their sockets. Indeed, he seemed to have suffered far more intensely than the prisoner himself, who walked in firmer and more erect, and took his seat doggedly in the familiar dock. He had been there more than once before, to say the truth, though never before on such an errand. Yet mere habit, when he got there, made him at once assume the hang-dog look of the consciously guilty.

Walter sat and watched and listened, still in a dream, but without once betraying in his face the real depth of his innermost feelings. In the body of the court he saw Joe's wife, weeping profusely and ostentatiously, after the fashion considered to be correct by her class; and though he pitied her from the bottom of his heart, he could only think by contrast of Christina. What were that good woman's fears and sorrows by the side of the grief and shame and unspeakable horror he might have to bring upon his Christina? Pray Heaven the shock, if it came, might kill her outright; that would at least be better than that she should live long years to remember. More than judge, or jury, or prisoner, Walter Dene saw everywhere, behind the visible shadows that thronged the court, that one persistent prospective picture of heartbroken Christina.

The evidence for the prosecution told with damning force against the prisoner. He was a notorious poacher; the vicar was a game-preserved. He had poached more than once on the ground of the vicarage. He was shown by numerous witnesses to have had an animus against the vicar. He had been seen, not in the face, to be sure, but still seen and recognised, slinking away, immediately after the fact, from the scene of the murder. And the prosecution had found stains of blood, believed by scientific experts to be human, on the clothing he had worn when he was arrested. Walter Dene

listened now with terrible, unabated earnestness, for he knew that in reality it was he himself who was upon his trial. He himself, and Christina's happiness; for if the poacher were found guilty, he was firmly resolved, beyond hope of respite, to tell all, and face the unspeakable.

The defence seemed indeed a weak and feeble theory. Somebody unknown had committed the murder, and this somebody, seen from behind, had been mistaken by John for Joe Harley. The blood-stains need not be human, as the cross-examination went to show, but were only known by counter-experts to be mammalian—perhaps a rabbit's. Every poacher—and it was admitted that Joe was a poacher—was liable to get his clothes blood-stained. Grant they were human, Joe, it appeared, had himself once shot off his little finger. All these points came out from the examination of the earlier witnesses. At last, counsel put the curate himself into the box, and proceeded to examine him briefly as a witness for the defence.

Walter Dene stepped, pale and haggard still, into the witness-box. He had made up his mind to make one final effort 'for Christina's happiness.' He fumbled nervously all the time at a small glass phial in his pocket, but he answered all questions without a moment's hesitation, and he kept down his emotions with a wonderful composure which excited the admiration of everybody present. There was a general hush to hear him. Did he see the prisoner, Joseph Harley, on the day of the murder? Yes, three times. When was the first occasion? From the library window, just before the vicar left the house. What was Joseph Harley then doing? Walking in the opposite direction from the copse. Did Joseph Harley recognise him? Yes, he touched his hat to him. When was the second occasion? About ten minutes later, when he, Walter, was leaving the vicarage for a stroll. Did Joseph Harley then recognise him? Yes, he touched his hat again, and the curate said, 'Good morning, Joe; a fine day for walking.' When was the third time? Ten minutes later again, when he was returning from the lane, carrying wounded little King Charlie. Would it have been physically possible for the prisoner to go from the vicarage to the spot where the murder was committed, and back again, in the interval between the first two occasions? It would not. Would it have been physically possible for the prisoner to do so in the interval between the second and third occasions? It would not.

'Then in your opinion, Mr. Dene, it is physically impossible that Joseph Harley can have committed this murder?'

'In my opinion, it is physically impossible.'

While Walter Dene solemnly swore amid dead silence to this treble lie, he did not dare to look Joe Harley once in the face; and while Joe Harley listened in amazement to this unexpected assistance to his case—for counsel, suspecting a mistaken identity, had not questioned him too closely on the subject—he had presence of mind enough not to let his astonishment show upon his stolid features. But when Walter had finished his evidence in chief, he stole a glance at Joe; and for a moment their eyes met. Then Walter's fell in utter self-humiliation; and he said to himself fiercely, 'I would not so have debased and degraded myself before any man to save my own life—what is my life worth to me, after all?—but to save Christina, to save Christina, to save Christina! I have brought all this upon myself for Christina's sake.'

Meanwhile, Joe Harley was asking himself curiously what could be the meaning of this new move on parson's part. It was deliberate perjury, Joe felt sure, for parson could not have mistaken another person for him three times over; but what good end for himself could parson hope to gain by it? If it was he who had murdered the vicar (as Joe strongly suspected), why did he not try to press the charge home against the first person who happened to be accused, instead of committing a distinct perjury on purpose to compass his acquittal? Joe Harley, with his simple everyday criminal mind, could not be expected to unravel the intricacies of so complex a personality as Walter Dene's. But even there, on trial for his life, he could not help wondering what on earth young parson could be driving at in this business.

The judge summed up with the usual luminously obvious alternate platitudes. If the jury thought that John had really seen Joe Harley, and that the curate was mistaken in the person whom he thrice saw, or was mistaken once only out of the thrice, or had miscalculated the time between each occurrence, or the time necessary to cover the ground to the gate, then they would find the prisoner guilty of wilful murder. If, on the other hand, they believed John had judged hastily, and that the curate had really seen the prisoner three separate times, and that he had rightly calculated all the intervals, then they would find the prisoner not guilty. The prisoner's case rested entirely upon the *alibi*. Supposing they thought there was a doubt in the matter, they should give the prisoner the benefit of the doubt. Walter noticed that the judge said in every other case, 'If you believe the witness So-and-so,' but that in his case he made no such discourteous reservation. As a matter of fact, the one person whose conduct nobody for a moment dreamt of calling in question was the real murderer.

The jury retired for more than an hour. During all that time two men stood there in mortal suspense, intent and haggard,

both upon their trial, but not both equally. The prisoner in the dock fixed his arms in a dogged and sullen attitude, the colour half gone from his brown cheek, and his eyes straining with excitement, but showing no outward sign of any emotion except the craven fear of death. Walter Dene stood almost fainting in the body of the court, his bloodless fingers still fumbling nervously at the little phial, and his face deadly pale with the awful pallor of a devouring horror. His heart scarcely beat at all, but at each long slow pulsation he could feel it throb distinctly within his bosom. He saw or heard nothing before him, but kept his aching eyes fixed steadily on the door by which the jury were to enter. Junior counsel nudged one another to notice his agitation, and whispered that that poor young curate had evidently never seen a man tried for his life before.

At last the jury entered. Joe and Walter waited, each in his own manner, breathless for the verdict. 'Do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty of wilful murder?' Walter took the little phial from his pocket, and held it carefully between his finger and thumb. The awful moment had come; the next word would decide the fate of himself and Christina. The foreman of the jury looked up solemnly, and answered with slow distinctness, 'Not guilty.' The prisoner leaned back vacantly, and wiped his forehead; but there was an awful cry of relief from one mouth in the body of the court, and Walter Dene sank back into the arms of the bystanders, exhausted with suspense and overcome by the reaction. The crowd remarked among themselves that young Parson Dene was too tender-hearted a man to come into court at a criminal trial. He would break his heart to see even a dog hanged, let alone his fellow-Christians. As for Joe Harley, it was universally admitted that he had had a narrow squeak of it, and that he had got off better than he deserved. The jury gave him the benefit of the doubt.

As soon as all the persons concerned had returned to Churnside, Walter sent at once for Joe Harley. The poacher came to see him in the vicarage library. He was elated and coarsely exultant with his victory, as a relief from the strain he had suffered, after the manner of all vulgar natures.

'Joe,' said the clergyman slowly, motioning him into a chair at the other side of the desk, 'I know that after this trial Churnside will not be a pleasant place to hold you. All your neighbours believe, in spite of the verdict, that you killed the vicar. I feel sure, however, that you did not commit this murder. Therefore, as some compensation for the suffering of mind to which you have been put, I think it well to send you and your wife and family to Australia or Canada, whichever you like best. I propose also to make you a present of a hundred pounds, to set you up in your new home.'

'Make it five hundred, passon,' Joe said, looking at him significantly.

Walter smiled quietly, and did not flinch in any way. 'I said a hundred,' he continued calmly, 'and I will make it only a hundred. I should have had no objection to making it five, except for the manner in which you ask it. But you evidently mistake the motive of my gift. I give it out of pure compassion for you, and not out of any other feeling whatsoever.'

'Very well, passon,' said Joe sullenly, 'I accept it.'

'You mistake again,' Walter went on blandly, for he was himself again now. 'You are not to accept it as terms; you are to thank me for it as a pure present. I see we two partially understand each other; but it is important you should understand me exactly as I mean it. Joe Harley, listen to me seriously. I have saved your life. If I had been a man of a coarse and vulgar nature, if I had been like you in a similar predicament, I would have pressed the case against you for obvious personal reasons, and you would have been hanged for it. But I did not press it, because I felt convinced of your innocence, and my sense of justice rose irresistibly against it. I did the best I could to save you; I risked my own reputation to save you; and I have no hesitation now in telling you that to the best of my belief, if the verdict had gone against you, the person who really killed the vicar, accidentally or intentionally, meant to have given himself up to the police, rather than let an innocent man suffer.'

'Passon,' said Joe Harley, looking at him intently, 'I believe as you're tellin' me the truth. I zeen as much in that person's face afore the verdict.'

There was a solemn pause for a moment; and then Walter Dene said slowly, 'Now that you have withdrawn your claim as a claim, I will stretch a point and make it five hundred. It is little enough for what you have suffered. But I, too, have suffered terribly, terribly.'

'Thank you, passon,' Joe answered. 'I zeen as you were turble anxious.'

There was again a moment's pause. Then Walter Dene asked quietly, 'How did the vicar's face come to be so bruised

and battered?'

'I stumbled up agin 'im accidental like, and didn't know I'd kicked 'un till I'd done it. Must 'a been just a few minutes after you'd 'a left 'un.'

'Joe,' said the curate in his calmest tone, 'you had better go; the money will be sent to you shortly. But if you ever see my face again, or speak or write a word of this to me, you shall not have a penny of it, but shall be prosecuted for intimidation. A hundred before you leave, four hundred in Australia. Now go.'

'Very well, passon,' Joe answered; and he went.

'Pah!' said the curate with a face of disgust, shutting the door after him, and lighting a perfumed pastille in his little Chinese porcelain incense-burner, as if to fumigate the room from the poacher's offensive presence. 'Pah! to think that these affairs should compel one to humiliate and abase oneself before a vulgar clod like that! To think that all his life long that fellow will virtually know—and misinterpret—my secret. He is incapable of understanding that I did it as a duty to Christina. Well, he will never dare to tell it, that's certain, for nobody would believe him if he did; and he may congratulate himself heartily that he's got well out of this difficulty. It will be the luckiest thing in the end that ever happened to him. And now I hope this little episode is finally over.'

When the Churnside public learned that Walter Dene meant to carry his belief in Joe Harley's innocence so far as to send him and his family at his own expense out to Australia, they held that the young parson's charity and guilelessness was really, as the doctor said, almost Quixotic. And when, in his anxiety to detect and punish the real murderer, he offered a reward of five hundred pounds from his own pocket for any information leading to the arrest and conviction of the criminal, the Churnside people laughed quietly at his extraordinary childlike simplicity of heart. The real murderer had been caught and tried at Dorchester Assizes, they said, and had only got off by the skin of his teeth because Walter himself had come forward and sworn to a quite improbable and inconclusive *alibi*. There was plenty of time for Joe to have got to the gate by the short cut, and that he did so everybody at Churnside felt morally certain. Indeed, a few years later a blood-stained bowie-knife was found in the hedge not far from the scene of the murder, and the gamekeeper 'could almost 'a took his Bible oath he'd zeen just such a knife along o' Joe Harley.'

That was not the end of Walter Dene's Quixotisms, however. When the will was read, it turned out that almost everything was left to the young parson; and who could deserve it better, or spend it more charitably? But Walter, though he would not for the world seem to cast any slight or disrespect upon his dear uncle's memory, did not approve of customs of primogeniture, and felt bound to share the estate equally with his brother Arthur. 'Strange,' said the head of the firm of Watson and Blenkiron to himself, when he read the little paragraph about this generous conduct in the paper; 'I thought the instructions were to leave it to his nephew Arthur, not to his nephew Walter; but there, one forgets and confuses names of people that one does not know so easily.' 'Gracious goodness!' thought the engrossing clerk; 'surely it was the other way on. I wonder if I can have gone and copied the wrong names in the wrong places?' But in a big London business, nobody notes these things as they would have been noted in Churnside; the vicar was always a changeable, pernickety, huffy old fellow, and very likely he had had a reverse will drawn up afterwards by his country lawyer. All the world only thought that Walter Dene's generosity was really almost ridiculous, even in a parson. When he was married to Christina, six months afterwards, everybody said so charming a girl was well mated with so excellent and admirable a husband.

And he really did make a very tender and loving husband and father. Christina believed in him always, for he did his best to foster and keep alive her faith. He would have given up active clerical duty if he could, never having liked it (for he was above hypocrisy), but Christina was against the project, and his bishop would not hear of it. The Church could ill afford to lose such a man as Mr. Dene, the bishop said, in these troubled times; and he begged him as a personal favour to accept the living of Churnside, which was in his gift. But Walter did not like the place, and asked for another living instead, which, being of less value—'so like Mr. Dene to think nothing of the temporalities,'—the bishop even more graciously granted. He has since published a small volume of dainty little poems on uncut paper, considered by some critics as rather pagan in tone for a clergyman, but universally allowed to be extremely graceful, the perfection of poetical form with much delicate mastery of poetical matter. And everybody knows that the author is almost certain to be offered the first vacant canonry in his own cathedral. As for the little episode, he himself has almost forgotten all about it; for those who think a murderer must feel remorse his whole life long, are trying to read their own emotional nature into the wholly dispassionate character of Walter Dene.



## VIII

### CECCA'S LOVER

They're a queer lot, these Italians. After twenty years spent among them I don't yet understand them. Italy itself I love—every artist must. I love the very dirt. I love the squalid towns. I love the crumbling walls; I love every stone of them. When I came to the country first, I dropped into it like one to the manner born. I said on the mere threshold, by the slope of the Alps, stretching out my hands to the soil of Italy, 'Ecco la mia patria!' But the Italians!—ah, there!—that's quite another question. I like them, understand well; I don't say a word against them; but comprehend them?—no, no; they're at once too simple and too complex, by far, for our Northern intelligence.

There was Cecca's case, for example; what a very queer history! You must have noticed Cecca—that black-haired, flashing-eyed Neapolitan maid of ours, who goes out with my little ones. Have I never told you the story about Cecca's strange courtship? Well, well; sit down here under the shade of the stone-pine, and light your cigarette while I tell you all about it. Be careful of your match, though; don't throw it away lighted in the midst of the rosemary bushes; the myrtles and lentisks on these dry hillsides flare up like tinder; the white heath crackles and fizzes in a second; before you know where you are, the flame runs up the junipers and pine-trees, corkscrew-wise; and *hi, presto!* in rather less time than it takes to say so, the forest's ablaze from Santa Croce to the Roya.

It was before we settled down here at Bordighera that the thing began; indeed, it was Cecca, indirectly speaking, that brought us to the coast here. We were living at Naples then, or, rather, near Castellamare. Cecca was our housemaid. Her full name's Francesca. She's handsome still, but she was beautiful then; the prettiest fisher-girl from Sorrento to Pozzuoli. Fanny took her from her parents when she was twelve years old, and trained her up in the house like an English servant. But the hot Neapolitan nature burnt strong in her, all the same; nobody could ever tame Cecca.

Well, she had a lover, of course; every girl has a lover—especially in Italy. He was a fisherman, like her own people; for the fishermen are a caste, and no well-bred fisher-girl ever dreams of marrying any man outside it. The fellow's name was Giuseppe. Our children loved him. He used to bring them dried sea-horses with long curled tails, and queer shells with wings to them, and creepy great octopuses with staring goggle eyes, that they loved to see and yet shrank from in terror. He was a mighty hunter of sea-eggs and cuttle-fish. Cecca pretended not to care for him, Neapolitan fashion—for they are a crooked folk; but we could see very well she was madly in love with him for all that. If we sent her on the hills to take the children for a walk, we always found, in the end, she'd gone on the beach instead, if Giuseppe was hauling the seine, or mending his nets, or tarring and towing the gaping chinks in the hull of the *Sant' Elmo*.

One morning I was sitting under the shadow of a boat, on the shingle by the sea, doing a little water-colour; the children were close by, playing with stranded jelly-fish; and Cecca was there to look after them, basking in the sun like a lizard. Presently, on the shore, Giuseppe's boat drove in, and he hauled her up close by, with the aid of his brown-legged mates, never noticing us so near him. Cecca noted him stealthily, glancing askance at me to keep silence. The young man began sorting his fish—you know the kind of thing—strange *frutti di mare* that they make *frittura* of. All's fish that comes to their net—mussels, squids, or sea-spiders. As he was doing it, another pretty fisher-girl strolled up that way, brown-skinned like himself, and with a bright red handkerchief twisted carelessly round that glossy black head of hers. Cecca crept closer, under shelter of the boat, her eyes like coals of fire, and listened to the talk of them. I heard it all, too; frank fisher-folk chaff, with frank fisher-folk words, in the frank fisher-folk dialect. A good part of it, don't you see, would be totally unfit for publication in English.

'Hey, my Lady, what a catch!' says the girl, holding her head on one side, and looking down at the boat-load. 'Crabs, sardines, and sea-wolf! You've fifty lire's worth there if you've got ten soldi. You'll be making your fortune soon, Giuseppe!'

Giuseppe glanced up at her as she stood there so saucy, with one hand on her hip, and one, coquettish, by the corner of her rich red mouth, and he shrugged his shoulders.

'Pretty well,' he says, opening his hands, just so, in front of him—you know their way. 'A fair catch for the season!'

The girl sidled nearer. Her name was Bianca (though she was brown as a berry), and I knew her well by sight.

'You'll be marrying Cecca before long,' she said. 'You'll need it all—then! *She'll* want red shoes and silk stockings, your

Cecca will.'

'Who said I was going to marry Cecca?' Giuseppe answers, quite short, out of pure contrariety. That's the Neapolitan way. Talking to one pretty girl, in the heat of the moment, he couldn't bear she should think he cared for another one. Your Neapolitan would like to make love to them all at once, or rather each in turn, and pretend to every one of them he didn't care a pin for any of the others.

Well, there they fell straight into an Italian chaffing-match, half fun, half earnest; Bianca pretending Giuseppe was head over ears in love with Cecca, to her certain knowledge; while Giuseppe pretended he never cared for the mincing thing at all, and was immensely devoted to no one but Bianca. It was pure Neapolitan devilry on his part, of course; he couldn't help saying sweet things to whatever pretty girl with a pair of black eyes was nearest him at the moment, and depreciating by comparison every other she spoke of.

But Cecca sat hard by, her hand curved round her ear, shell-wise, so, to listen, and her brow like thunder. I dared not say a word lest she should rise and rush at him.

'And you've chosen so well, too!' says Bianca, half satirically, don't you see? 'She's so sweet! so pretty! Such lips for a kiss! Such fine eyes to flirt with! Not a girl on the beach with eyes like Cecca's!'

'Eyes!' Giuseppe answers, coming closer and ogling her. 'You call her eyes *fine*? Why, *I* say she squints with them.'

'Not squints,' says Bianca condescendingly. 'Just a very slight cast.'

And indeed, as you may have noticed, though Cecca's so handsome, they're *not* quite straight in her head, when you come to look hard at them.

'*You* may call it a cast,' Giuseppe continues, counting over his dories; 'but *I* call it squinting. Whereas *your* eyes, Bianca \_\_\_\_\_'

Bianca pouted her lips at him.

'That's the way of you men,' she says, mighty pleased all the same. 'Always flattering us to our faces; while behind our backs——'

'And then, her temper!' says Giuseppe.

'Well, she *has* a temper, I admit,' Bianca goes on with angelic candour. And so for twenty minutes such a game between them, pulling poor Cecca to pieces, turn about, till, morally and physically, she hadn't the ghost of a leg left to stand upon.

But Cecca! you should have seen her meanwhile. There she sat, under the boat, drinking in every word, herself unseen, with the eye and the face of a tigress just ready to spring, straining forward to listen. It was awful to look at her; she seemed one whirlwind of suppressed passion. Little fists clenched hard, neck stretched out to the utmost, frowning brow, puckered eyes, nostrils wide and quivering. I'd have given anything to paint her as she sat there that minute. I tried it from memory afterwards—you remember the piece, my 'Italian Idyll,' in the '84 Academy.

By and by she rose and faced them. Then came the tug of war. If it was tragedy to see Cecca with her heart on fire, like the pinewoods in summer, it was comedy to see those two disappear into their shoes when Cecca fronted them. The Three Furies were nothing to it. Bianca dodged and vanished. Giuseppe stood sheepish, jaw dropped and eye staring, anxious at first to find out whether she'd heard them or not; then pretending he'd known all the time she was there, and just did it to tease her; lastly, throwing himself on her mercy, and setting it all down, as was really the case, to the time-pleasing, fickle Neapolitan temperament that was common to both of them. 'You'd have done it yourself, Cecca,' he said, 'with any other man, you know, if he'd begun to chaff you about your fellow, Giuseppe.'

Cecca knew she would in her heart, I dare say, but she wouldn't acknowledge it; having *heard* it all, you see, made all the difference. It's the way of men, Giuseppe told her, craning eagerly forward, to disparage even the girl they love best, when they want to make themselves momentarily agreeable to another one. It's the way of men, all the world over, I'm afraid; but, as far as I've observed, the woman they love never lets them off one penny the easier on account of its universality.

Well, they parted bad friends; Giuseppe went off in a huff, and Cecca, proud and cold, with the mien of a duchess, stalked home by the children's side in silence. For a day or two we heard nothing more at all about the matter. Giuseppe didn't come round in the evenings, as usual, to the villa gate; and Cecca's eyes in the morning were red with crying. Not that she minded a bit, she told Fanny, with a toss of her pretty head; for her own part, indeed, she was rather glad than otherwise it was off altogether, for Giuseppe, she always knew, wasn't half good enough for her. In a moment of weakness she had encouraged his suit—a mere common fisherman's, when the head waiter at the Victoria, that distinguished-looking gentleman in a swallow-tail coat and a spotless white tie, was dying of love for her. For Cecca had been raised one degree in the social scale by taking service in a foreign family, and, whenever she wanted to give herself airs, used to pretend that nowadays she looked down upon mere fishermen.

Towards the end of the week, however, old Catarina, our cook, brought in evil tidings. She had no business to tell it, of course, but, being a Neapolitan, she told it on purpose, in order to stir up a little domestic tragedy between Cecca and her lover. Giuseppe was paying his court to Bianca! They had been seen walking out in the evening together! He had given her a lace scarf, and it was even said—and so forth, and so forth! Well, *we* knew very well, Fanny and I, what Giuseppe was driving at. He only wanted to make Cecca as jealous as an owl, and so bring her back to him. I don't pretend to understand Italians, as I told you; but this much I know, that they always go to work the crooked way, if they can, to attain their ends, by a sort of racial instinct. So I wasn't astonished when Catarina told us this. But Cecca—she was furious. She went straight out of the house like a wild cat on the prowl, and crept along the shore in the direction of Naples.

At ten o'clock she came back. I never saw her look so proud or so beautiful before. There was a disdainful smile upon her thin curled lips. Her eyes were terrible. She had a knife in her hand. 'Well, I've done it!' she cried to Fanny, flinging the knife on the ground, so that it stuck by its point in the floor and quivered. 'I've done it at last! I've finished the thing! I've stabbed him!'

Fanny was so aghast she hardly knew what to do. 'Not Giuseppe!' she cried, all horror-struck. 'Oh, Cecca, don't say so.'

'Yes, I do say so,' says Cecca, flinging herself down in a chair. And with that, what does she do but bury her face in her hands, and rock herself up and down, like a creature distraught, and burst into floods of tears, and moan through her sobs, 'Oh, I loved him so! I loved him!'

Queer sort of way of showing you love a man, to go sticking a knife into him! but that's the manner of these Italians. Fanny and I had got used to them, you see, so we didn't make much of it. Fanny tried to comfort the poor child, for we were really fond of her. 'Perhaps he won't die,' she said, bending over her; 'you mayn't have stabbed him badly.'

'Oh yes, he will,' Cecca sobbed out, her eyes flashing fire. 'He'll die, I'm sure of it. I drove the knife home well, so that he shouldn't recover and let that nasty Bianca have him.'

'Go out and see about it, Tom,' says my wife, turning round to me, quite frightened; 'for if Giuseppe dies of it, then, of course, it'll be murder.'

Well, out I went, and soon heard all the news from the people at the corner. Giuseppe had been found, lying stabbed upon the road, and been carried at once to the civic hospital. Nobody seemed to think very much of the stabbing; some woman, no doubt, or else a quarrel about a woman with some fisherman of his acquaintance. But they considered it very probable Giuseppe would die. He was stabbed twice badly in two dangerous places.

There was no time to be lost. Fanny and I made up our minds at once. We were Italianate enough ourselves to think a great deal less of the crime than of poor Cecca's danger. You know the proverb, *Inglese Italianato è diavolo incarnato*. I hope it's not *quite* true, but, at any rate, Fanny's Italianate, and she was determined poor Cecca's head shouldn't fall off her neck if *she* could prevent it. Fanny had always a conscientious objection to the guillotine. So we saw at a glance Cecca must disappear—disappear mysteriously. Before she began to be suspected she must be smuggled out of the way, of course without our seeming to know anything about it.

No sooner thought than done. 'Twas the moment for action. We called up Cecca, and held a council of war over her. Just at first the poor child absolutely refused to leave Naples on any account while Giuseppe was in such danger; why, he might die, she said, any moment—crying over him, you must know, as if it was somebody else, not herself, who had stabbed him. That dear man might die—the blessed Madonna save him!—and she not there to comfort him in his last hour, or to burn a candle for the repose of his soul after he'd gone to purgatory. No, not till Giuseppe was healed or

dead: she should stop at Castellamare!

But after a time Fanny talked her over. Fanny's so rational. Everything would be done at the hospital for Giuseppe, she said; and, supposing he died, why, we'd promise to waste our substance riotously in hiring a reckless profusion of priests to sing masses for his soul, if only Cecca'd take our advice and save herself. The end of it all was, Cecca consented at last. She even volunteered a suggestion on her own account. There was a Bordighera coasting-vessel in the port that night, she said, whose skipper, Paolo Bolognini, was a very good man and a friend of her father's. The vessel was bound out to-morrow morning for Bordighera direct, with a cargo of white Capri and country figs. If Cecca could only go on board to-night, disguised as a boy, she might get clear away beyond sea undetected. She seemed to think, poor soul, that if that once happened there could be no more question of arresting her at all; she was too childish to be aware that the law of Italy runs even as far from her native Naples as this unknown coast here.

Well, it's no use being seriously angry and taking the high moral standpoint with a naughty girl like that. You might as well preach the Decalogue at a three-year-old baby. So we cut all Cecca's hair short—she cried over its loss quite as bitterly at the time as she had cried over Giuseppe—and we dressed her up in a suit of her brother's clothes; and a very pretty fisher-boy she made, after all, with a red cap on her head and a crimson sash round her waist for girdle. She laughed for three good minutes when she saw herself in the glass. Then we started her off, alone, for the Bordighera sloop, along the dim, dark shore, while Fanny and I stole after, at a discreet distance, to observe what happened.

At the very last moment, to be sure, Fanny had qualms of conscience about letting a pretty girl like Cecca go alone on board a ship among all those noisy Italian sailors. The British matron within her still wondered whether the girl ought to be allowed to go off without a chaperon. But I soon put a stopper on all that—revolutions and rosewater—you can't stick at trifles when you're escaping from an impending charge of murder; and besides, Cecca could take care of herself (*with* a knife, if necessary) among a hundred sailors. A boatman of our acquaintance rowed her out to the sloop, which was anchored in the bay. She went on board at once, and signified to us, by a preconcerted signal with a light, that she was well received and would be taken to Bordighera.

As soon as she was gone we expected every hour the police would come up and make full inquiries. If they did come (having lost all moral sense by this time), I was prepared to aid them in searching the house through, with the most innocent face, for that missing Cecca. But they never came at all. We learned why afterwards. Giuseppe had been staunch; true as steel to the girl. In his bed at the hospital, half dead with the wound, he never said for a moment it was Cecca who had done it. That was partly his pride, I believe; he didn't like to confess he'd been stabbed by a woman; and partly his desire to avenge himself personally. He even concocted a cock-and-bull story about a mysterious-looking fellow in a brigand-like cloak and a slouch hat who attacked him unawares on the high road, without the slightest provocation. The police didn't believe *that*, of course, but they never suspected Cecca. They set it down to a quarrel with some other man over a girl, and thought he refused out of motives of honour to betray his opponent.

For a week the poor fellow hovered between life and death. We waited eagerly for news of him, which old Catarina brought us. Of course we were afraid to inquire ourselves, lest suspicion should fall upon us; but Fanny had promised Cecca that a letter should be awaiting her when she reached Bordighera with a full, true, and particular account of how the patient was progressing. The letter contained a couple of hundred francs as well; for Fanny was wild about that girl, and really talked as if stabbing one's lover was the most natural thing in the world—an accident that might happen to any lady any day. That's the sort of feeling that comes of living too long at a stretch in Italy.

By and by, to everybody's immense astonishment, in spite of his wounds, Giuseppe began to mend. It was really quite a miracle. If you doubt it you can look at the *ex voto* in the chapel on the hill over yonder, where you may see Giuseppe with a dagger through his heart, and a very wooden Madonna with a simpering smile descending in a halo of golden light, from most material clouds, to pluck the thing out for him. He prayed hard that he might live—to stick a knife into Cecca—and our Lady heard him. At any rate, miracle or no miracle, the man recovered. Meanwhile, we had heard from Cecca of her safe arrival at Bordighera. But that was not all; the girl was foolish enough to write to her people as well; who confided the fact to their dearest friend; who told it under the utmost pledge of secrecy to a dozen of her cronies; who retailed it to the marketwomen; who noised it abroad with similar precautions to all Castellamare. In a week it was known to all and sundry (except the police) that Giuseppe had really been stabbed by Cecca, who had fled for her life to a place beyond sea called Bordighera.

Presently old Catarina brought us worse news still. Giuseppe was up and out, breathing forth fire and slaughter against the girl who stabbed him. He meant to follow her to the world's end, he said, and return blow for blow, exact vengeance

for vengeance. The next thing we heard was that he had sailed in a ship bound for Genoa direct, and we doubted not he knew now Cecca was at Bordighera.

Well, nothing would satisfy poor Fanny after that but off we must all pack, bag and baggage, to the north, to look after Cecca. Not that she put it on that ground, of course; British matronhood forbid! It was getting too hot for the neighbourhood of Naples, she said, and time for our annual *villeggiatura* in the mountains. We could take Bordighera on the way to the Lakes, and carry Cecca with us to Lugano or Cadenabbia. For now that Giuseppe hadn't died after all, there was no murder in the case, and we might proceed more openly.

So off we started, children, nursemaid, and all, and came round here by rail, post haste to Bordighera. We settled in for a few days at the Belvedere while we looked about us. Fanny hunted up Cecca at once in her lodgings in the town, and took her back as head nurse. 'How do you know,' I said, 'she won't stick a knife one day into one of the children?' But Fanny treated my remark with deserved contempt, and observed with asperity that we men had no feeling. Italianate, you see! completely Italianate!

We hadn't been in Bordighera but a week and day, as the old song says, and I was walking along the Strada Romana one morning, looking out on the blue sea through the branches of the olives, when who should I perceive coming gaily towards me but my friend Giuseppe. He had a red sash round his waist, with a knife stuck in it ostentatiously. He was fingering the haft as he went. When he saw me he smiled and showed all his white teeth. But 'twas an ugly smile; I didn't like the look of it.

'Buon giorno, Giuseppe,' says I, trying to look unconcerned, as if I'd expected to meet him. 'Glad to see you so well again.'

'Buon giorno, signore,' he answered in his politest tone. Then he tapped his knife gaily: 'I've come to look for Cecca!'

I hurried home in hot haste, as fast as my legs would carry me. At the Belvedere I saw Fanny sitting out sunning herself near the stunted palm-tree in the front garden.

'Fanny, Fanny,' I cried, 'where's Cecca? Keep her out of the way, for Heaven's sake! Here's Giuseppe at Bordighera, with a knife at his side, going about like a roaring lion to devour her.'

Fanny clapped her hands to her ears.

'Oh, Tom,' she cried, 'what shall we do? She's down on the beach somewhere, playing with the children.'

Of course this was serious. If Giuseppe came upon her unwarned, I didn't doubt for a moment he'd carry out in real earnest his threat of stabbing her. So off I sent the porter to find her, if possible, and set her on her guard, telling him to bring her home, if he could, by the back way over the hillside. Then Fanny and I sat out, under the Japanese medlar on the terrace, where we could command a good view of the road either way, and watch if the girl was coming. Meanwhile, Giuseppe kept prowling under the olives on the plain, and bandying chaff now and again with the Bordighera cabmen.

Presently, to our horror, Cecca hove suddenly in sight, round the corner by the Angst, with the children beside her. She was carrying a great bunch of anemones and asphodel. Evidently the porter had failed to warn and find her. My heart stood still within me with suspense. I rushed to the edge of the terrace. But quicker than I could rush, Cecca had seen Giuseppe, and Giuseppe Cecca. With a wild cry of joy, she flung down the flowers and darted upon him like a maniac. She threw her arms around him in a transport of delight. She covered him with kisses. I never saw a woman give any man such a welcome. One would think they were lovers on the eve of marriage. And not three weeks before, mind you, she had tried her level best with a knife in his breast to murder him at Naples!

'Giuseppe!' she cried, 'Giuseppe! Oh, carissimo! How I love you!'

Giuseppe shook her off and glared at her angrily. He drew the dagger from his belt, and held it, irresolute, in his hand for a moment.

But Cecca laughed when she saw it. She laughed a merry laugh of amusement and astonishment. 'No, no, caro mio,' she cried, seizing his arm, quite unconcerned, with her pretty fingers. 'Not now, when I rejoice to see you again, my own, are you going to stab me!' She wrenched the knife from his grasp and flung it, all glittering, far away among the olive groves. It gleamed in the air and fell. Giuseppe watched her do it, and followed its flight with his eyes. Then he stood there,

sheepish. He didn't know what to do next. He just stared and looked glum, in spite of all her endearments.

Cecca was more than a match for him, however. It was a picture to see her. She began with her blandishments, making such heartfelt love to him that no man in England, let alone in Italy, could possibly have resisted her. In just about two minutes by the watch he gave way. 'But what did you stab me for, little one?' he asked rather sullenly.

Cecca stood back a pace and looked at him in amazement. She surveyed him from head to foot like some strange wild animal. 'What did I stab you for!' she repeated. 'And he asks me that! Oh, Giuseppe, because I loved you! I loved you! I loved you! I loved you so much I couldn't bear you out of my sight. And you to go and walk with that Thing Bianca!'

'I won't do it again,' Giuseppe answered, all penitence.

Cecca fell upon him once more, kisses, tears, and tenderness. 'Oh, Giuseppe,' she cried, 'you can't think what I've suffered all these days without you! I was longing for you to come. I was praying to our Lady every hour of the night; and, now you're here, that horrid Bianca shall never again get hold of you.'

We left them alone for half an hour, with half a flask of Chianti to compose their minds upon. At the end of that time Cecca came back to us smiling, and Giuseppe, looking more sheepish than ever, beside her.

'Well, signora,' she said, overjoyed, 'it's all arranged now. As soon as we can get the announcement published, Giuseppe and I are going to get married.'

That settled our fate. Willy-nilly, we were tied to Bordighera. Cecca declared she would never go back to Naples again, to let that horrid Bianca practise her wiles and her evil eye on Giuseppe. Fanny declared she could never get on without Cecca for the children. Giuseppe declared he would never leave us. I shrugged my shoulders. The upshot of it all was that we took our present villa, on the slope of the Cima, and Giuseppe forswore the sea, turned gardener on the spot, and married Cecca. Married her, fair and square, at church, and before the Sindaco. He lives in our cottage. That's him you see down yonder there, uncovering the artichokes. And now I daresay you'll perceive what I mean when I say I never *can* understand these Italians.

But the worst of it is, they make us in the end almost as bad as they are. Have another cigarette? And be careful with your match, please.

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## IX

### THE BACKSLIDER

There was much stir and commotion on the night of Thursday, January the 14th, 1874, in the Gideonite Apostolic Church, number 47, Walworth Lane, Peckham, S.E. Anybody could see at a glance that some important business was under consideration; for the Apostle was there himself, in his chair of presidency, and the twelve Episcops were there, and the forty-eight Presbyters, and a large and earnest gathering of the Gideonite laity. It was only a small bare schoolroom, fitted with wooden benches, was that headquarters station of the young Church; but you could not look around it once without seeing that its occupants were of the sort by whom great religious revolutions may be made or marred. For the Gideonites were one of those strange enthusiastic hole-and-corner sects that spring up naturally in the outlying suburbs of great thinking centres. They gather around the marked personality of some one ardent, vigorous, half-educated visionary; and they consist for the most part of intelligent, half-reasoning people, who are bold enough to cast overboard the dogmatic beliefs of their fathers, but not so bold as to exercise their logical faculty upon the fundamental basis on which the dogmas originally rested. The Gideonites had thus collected around the fixed centre of their Apostle, a retired attorney, Murgess by name, whose teaching commended itself to their groping reason as the pure outcome of faithful Biblical research; and they had chosen their name because, though they were but three hundred in number, they had full confidence that when the time came they would blow their trumpets, and all the host of Midian would be scattered before them. In fact, they divided the world generally into Gideonite and Midianite, for they knew that he that was not with them was against them. And no wonder, for the people of Peckham did not love the struggling Church. Its chief doctrine was one of absolute celibacy, like the Shakers of America; and to this doctrine the Church had testified in the Old Kent Road and elsewhere after a vigorous practical fashion that roused the spirit of South-eastern London into the fiercest opposition. The young men and maidens, said the Apostle, must no longer marry or be given in marriage; the wives and husbands must dwell asunder; and the earth must be made as an image of heaven. These were heterodox opinions, indeed, which South-eastern London could only receive with a strenuous counterblast of orthodox brickbats and sound Anglican road metal.

The fleece of wool was duly laid upon the floor; the trumpet and the lamp were placed upon the bare wooden reading-desk; and the Apostle, rising slowly from his seat, began to address the assembled Gideonites.

'Friends,' he said, in a low, clear, impressive voice, with a musical ring tempering its slow distinctness, 'we have met together to-night to take counsel with one another upon a high matter. It is plain to all of us that the work of the Church in the world does not prosper as it might prosper were the charge of it in worthier hands. We have to contend against great difficulties. We are not among the rich or the mighty of the earth; and the poor whom we have always with us do not listen to us. It is expedient, therefore, that we should set some one among us aside to be instructed thoroughly in those things that are most commonly taught among the Midianites at Oxford or Cambridge. To some of you it may seem, as it seemed at first to me, that such a course would involve going back upon the very principles of our constitution. We are not to overcome Midian by our own hand, nor by the strength of two and thirty thousand, but by the trumpet, and the pitcher, and the cake of barley bread. Yet, when I searched and inquired after this matter, it seemed to me that we might also err by overmuch confidence on the other side. For Moses, who led the people out of Egypt, was made ready for the task by being learned in all the learning of the Egyptians. Daniel, who testified in the captivity, was cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and instructed in the wisdom and tongue of the Chaldeans. Paul, who was the apostle of the Gentiles, had not only sat at the feet of Gamaliel, but was also able from their own poets and philosophers to confute the sophisms and subtleties of the Grecians themselves. These things show us that we should not too lightly despise even worldly learning and worldly science. Perhaps we have gone wrong in thinking too little of such dross, and being puffed up with spiritual pride. The world might listen to us more readily if we had one who could speak the word for us in the tongues understood of the world.'

As he paused, a hum of acquiescence went round the room.

'It has seemed to me, then,' the Apostle went on, 'that we ought to choose some one among our younger brethren, upon whose shoulders the cares and duties of the Apostolate might hereafter fall. We are a poor people, but by subscription among ourselves we might raise a sufficient sum to send the chosen person first to a good school here in London, and afterwards to the University of Oxford. It may seem a doubtful and a hazardous thing thus to stake our future upon any one young man; but then we must remember that the choice will not be wholly or even mainly ours; we will be guided and

directed as we ever are in the laying on of hands. To me, considering this matter thus, it has seemed that there is one youth in our body who is specially pointed out for this work. Only one child has ever been born into the Church: he, as you know, is the son of brother John Owen and sister Margaret Owen, who were received into the fold just six days before his birth. Paul Owen's very name seems to many of us, who take nothing for chance but all things for divinely ordered, to mark him out at once as a foreordained Apostle. Is it your wish, then, Presbyter John Owen, to dedicate your only son to this ministry?'

Presbyter John Owen rose from the row of seats assigned to the forty-eight, and moved hesitatingly towards the platform. He was an intelligent-looking, honest-faced, sunburnt working man, a mason by trade, who had come into the Church from the Baptist society; and he was awkwardly dressed in his Sunday clothes, with the scrupulous clumsy neatness of a respectable artisan who expects to take part in an important ceremony. He spoke nervously and with hesitation, but with all the transparent earnestness of a simple, enthusiastic nature.

'Apostle and friends,' he said, 'it ain't very easy for me to disentangle my feelins on this subjec' from one another. I hope I ain't moved by any worldly feelin', an' yet I hardly know how to keep such considerations out, for there's no denyin' that it would be a great pleasure to me and to his mother to see our Paul becomin' a teacher in Israel, and receivin' an education such as you, Apostle, has pinte out. But we hope, too, we ain't insensible to the good of the Church and the advantage that it might derive from our Paul's support and preachin'. We can't help seein' ourselves that the lad has got abilities; and we've tried to train him up from his youth upward, like Timothy, for the furtherance of the right doctrine. If the Church thinks he's fit for the work laid upon him, his mother and me'll be glad to dedicate him to the service.'

He sat down awkwardly, and the Church again hummed its approbation in a suppressed murmur. The Apostle rose once more, and briefly called on Paul Owen to stand forward.

In answer to the call, a tall, handsome, earnest-eyed boy advanced timidly to the platform. It was no wonder that those enthusiastic Gideonite visionaries should have seen in his face the visible stamp of the Apostleship. Paul Owen had a rich crop of dark-brown glossy and curly hair, cut something after the Florentine Cinque-cento fashion—not because his parents wished him to look artistic, but because that was the way in which they had seen the hair dressed in all the sacred pictures that they knew; and Margaret Owen, the daughter of some Wesleyan Spitalfields weaver folk, with the imaginative Huguenot blood still strong in her veins, had made up her mind ever since she became Convinced of the Truth (as their phrase ran) that her Paul was called from his cradle to a great work. His features were delicately chiselled, and showed rather natural culture, like his mother's, than rough honesty, like John Owen's, or strong individuality, like the masterful Apostle's. His eyes were peculiarly deep and luminous, with a far-away look which might have reminded an artist of the central boyish figure in Holman Hunt's picture of the Doctors in the Temple. And yet Paul Owen had a healthy colour in his cheek and a general sturdiness of limb and muscle which showed that he was none of your nervous, bloodless, sickly idealists, but a wholesome English peasant-boy of native refinement and delicate sensibilities. He moved forward with some natural hesitation before the eyes of so many people—ay, and what was more terrible, of the entire Church upon earth; but he was not awkward and constrained in his action like his father. One could see that he was sustained in the prominent part he took that morning by the consciousness of a duty he had to perform and a mission laid upon him which he must not reject.

'Are you willing, my son Paul,' asked the Apostle, gravely, 'to take upon yourself the task that the Church proposes?'

'I am willing,' answered the boy in a low voice, 'grace preventing me.'

'Does all the Church unanimously approve the election of our brother Paul to this office?' the Apostle asked formally; for it was a rule with the Gideonites that nothing should be done except by the unanimous and spontaneous action of the whole body, acting under direct and immediate inspiration; and all important matters were accordingly arranged beforehand by the Apostle in private interviews with every member of the Church individually, so that everything that took place in public assembly had the appearance of being wholly unquestioned. They took counsel first with one another, and consulted the Scripture together; and when all private doubts were satisfied, they met as a Church to ratify in solemn conclave their separate conclusions. It was not often that the Apostle did not have his own way. Not only had he the most marked personality and the strongest will, but he alone also had Greek and Hebrew enough to appeal always to the original word; and that mysterious amount of learning, slight as it really was, sufficed almost invariably to settle the scruples of his wholly ignorant and pliant disciples. Reverence for the literal Scripture in its primitive language was the corner-stone of the Gideonite Church; and for all practical purposes, its one depositary and exponent for them was the Apostle himself. Even the Rev. Albert Barnes's Commentary was held to possess an inferior authority.

'The Church approves,' was the unanimous answer.

'Then, Episcops, Presbyters, and brethren,' said the Apostle, taking up a roll of names, 'I have to ask that you will each mark down on this paper opposite your own names how much a year you can spare of your substance for six years to come, as a guarantee fund for this great work. You must remember that the ministry of this Church has cost you nothing; freely I have received and freely given; do you now bear your part in equipping a new aspirant for the succession to the Apostolate.'

The two senior Episcops took two rolls from his hand, and went round the benches with a stylographic pen (so strangely do the ages mingle—Apostles and stylographs) silently asking each to put down his voluntary subscription. Meanwhile the Apostle read slowly and reverently a few appropriate sentences of Scripture. Some of the richer members—well-to-do small tradesmen of Peckham—put down a pound or even two pounds apiece; the poorer brethren wrote themselves down for ten shillings or even five. In the end the guarantee list amounted to £195 a year. The Apostle reckoned it up rapidly to himself, and then announced the result to the assembly, with a gentle smile relaxing his austere countenance. He was well pleased, for the sum was quite sufficient to keep Paul Owen two years at school in London, and then send him comfortably if not splendidly to Oxford. The boy had already had a fair education in Latin and some Greek, at the Birkbeck Schools; and with two years' further study he might even gain a scholarship (for he was a bright lad), which would materially lessen the expense to the young Church. Unlike many prophets and enthusiasts, the Apostle was a good man of business; and he had taken pains to learn all about these favourable chances before embarking his people on so doubtful a speculation.

The Assembly was just about to close, when one of the Presbyters rose unexpectedly to put a question which, contrary to the usual practice, had not already been submitted for approbation to the Apostle. He was a hard-headed, thickset, vulgar-looking man, a greengrocer at Denmark Hill, and the Apostle always looked upon him as a thorn in his side, promoted by inscrutable wisdom to the Presbytery for the special purpose of keeping down the Apostle's spiritual pride.

'One more pint, Apostle,' he said abruptly, 'afore we close. It seems to me that even in the Church's work we'd ought to be business-like. Now, it ain't business-like to let this young man, Brother Paul, get his eddication out of us, if I may so speak afore the Church, on spec. It's all very well our sayin' he's to be eddicated and take on the Apostleship, but how do we know but what when he's had his eddication he may fall away and become a backslider, like Demas, and like others among ourselves that we could mention? He may go to Oxford among a lot of Midianites, and them of the great an' mighty of the earth too, and how do we know but what he may round upon the Church, and go back upon us after we've paid for his eddication? So what I want to ask is just this, can't we bind him down in a bond that if he don't take the Apostleship with the consent of the Church when it falls vacant, he'll pay us back our money, so as we can eddicate up another as'll be more worthy?'

The Apostle moved uneasily in his chair; but before he could speak, Paul Owen's indignation found voice, and he said out his say boldly before the whole assembly, blushing crimson with mingled shame and excitement as he did so. 'If Brother Grimshaw and all the brethren think so ill of me that they cannot trust my honesty and honour,' he said, 'they need not be at the pains of educating me. I will sign no bond and enter into no compact. But if you suppose that I will be a backslider, you do not know me, and I will confer no more with you upon the subject.'

'My son Paul is right,' the Apostle said, flushing up in turn at the boy's audacity; 'we will not make the affairs of the Spirit a matter for bonds and earthly arrangements. If the Church thinks as I do, you will all rise up.'

All rose except Presbyter Grimshaw. For a moment there was some hesitation, for the rule of the Church in favour of unanimity was absolute; but the Apostle fixed his piercing eyes on Job Grimshaw, and after a minute or so Job Grimshaw too rose slowly, like one compelled by an unseen power, and cast in his vote grudgingly with the rest. There was nothing more said about signing an agreement.

## II

Meenie Bolton had counted a great deal upon her visit to Oxford, and she found it quite as delightful as she had anticipated. Her brother knew such a nice set of men, especially Mr. Owen, of Christ Church. Meenie had never been so near falling in love with anybody in her life as she was with Paul Owen. He was so handsome and so clever, and then there was something so romantic about this strange Church they said he belonged to. Meenie's father was a country

parson, and the way in which Paul shrank from talking about the Rector, as if his office were something wicked or uncanny, piqued and amused her. There was a heretical tinge about him which made him doubly interesting to the Rector's daughter. The afternoon water party that eventful Thursday, down to Nuneham, she looked forward to with the deepest interest. For her aunt, the Professor's wife, who was to take charge of them, was certainly the most delightful and most sensible of chaperons.

'Is it really true, Mr. Owen,' she said, as they sat together for ten minutes alone after their picnic luncheon, by the side of the weir under the shadow of the Nuneham beeches—'is it really true that this Church of yours doesn't allow people to marry?'

Paul coloured up to his eyes as he answered, 'Well, Miss Bolton, I don't know that you should identify me too absolutely with my Church. I was very young when they selected me to go to Oxford, and my opinions have decidedly wavered a good deal lately. But the Church certainly does forbid marriage. I have always been brought up to look upon it as sinful.'

Meenie laughed aloud; and Paul, to whom the question was no laughing matter, but a serious point of conscientious scruple, could hardly help laughing with her, so infectious was that pleasant ripple. He checked himself with an effort, and tried to look serious. 'Do you know,' he said, 'when I first came to Christ Church, I doubted even whether I ought to make your brother's acquaintance because he was a clergyman's son. I was taught to describe clergymen always as priests of Midian.' He never talked about his Church to anybody at Oxford, and it was a sort of relief to him to speak on the subject to Meenie, in spite of her laughing eyes and undisguised amusement. The other men would have laughed at him too, but their laughter would have been less sympathetic.

'And do you think them priests of Midian still?' asked Meenie.

'Miss Bolton,' said Paul suddenly, as one who relieves his overburdened mind by a great effort, 'I am almost moved to make a confidante of you.'

'There is nothing I love better than confidences,' Meenie answered; and she might truthfully have added, 'particularly from you.'

'Well, I have been passing lately through a great many doubts and difficulties. I was brought up by my Church to become its next Apostle, and I have been educated at their expense both in London and here. You know,' Paul added with his innate love of telling out the whole truth, 'I am not a gentleman; I am the son of poor working people in London.'

'Tom told me who your parents were,' Meenie answered simply; 'but he told me, too, you were none the less a true gentleman born for that; and I see myself he told me right.'

Paul flushed again—he had a most unmanly trick of flushing up—and bowed a little timid bow 'Thank you,' he said quietly. 'Well, while I was in London I lived entirely among my own people, and never heard anything talked about except our own doctrines. I thought our Apostle the most learned, the wisest, and the greatest of men. I had not a doubt about the absolute infallibility of our own opinions. But ever since I came to Oxford I have slowly begun to hesitate and to falter. When I came up first, the men laughed at me a good deal in a good-humoured way, because I wouldn't do as they did. Then I thought myself persecuted for the truth's sake, and was glad. But the men were really very kind and forbearing to me; they never argued with me or bullied me; they respected my scruples, and said nothing more about it as soon as they found out what they really were. That was my first stumbling-block. If they had fought me and debated with me, I might have stuck to my own opinions by force of opposition. But they turned me in upon myself completely by their silence, and mastered me by their kindly forbearance. Point by point I began to give in, till now I hardly know where I am standing.'

'You wouldn't join the cricket club at first, Tom says.'

'No, I wouldn't. I thought it wrong to walk in the ways of Midian. But gradually I began to argue myself out of my scruples, and now I positively pull six in the boat, and wear a Christ Church ribbon on my hat. I have given up protesting against having my letters addressed to me as Esquire (though I have really no right to the title), and I nearly went the other day to have some cards engraved with my name as "Mr. Paul Owen." I am afraid I'm backsliding terribly.'

Meenie laughed again. 'If that is all you have to burden your conscience with,' she said, 'I don't think you need spend many sleepless nights.'

'Quite so,' Paul answered, smiling; 'I think so myself. But that is not all. I have begun to have serious doubts about the Apostle himself and the whole Church altogether. I have been three years at Oxford now; and while I was reading for Mods, I don't think I was so unsettled in my mind. But since I have begun reading philosophy for my Greats, I have had to go into all sorts of deep books—Mill, and Spencer, and Bain, and all kinds of fellows who really think about things, you know, down to the very bottom—and an awful truth begins to dawn upon me, that our Apostle is after all only a very third-rate type of thinker. Now that, you know, is really terrible.'

'I don't see why,' Meenie answered demurely. She was beginning to get genuinely interested.

'That is because you have never had to call in question a cherished and almost ingrown faith. You have never realised any similar circumstances. Here am I, brought up by these good, honest, earnest people, with their own hard-earned money, as a pillar of their belief. I have been taught to look upon myself as the chosen advocate of their creed, and on the Apostle as an almost divinely inspired man. My whole life has been bound up in it; I have worked and read night and day in order to pass high and do honour to the Church; and now what do I begin to find the Church really is? A petty group of poor, devoted, enthusiastic, ignorant people, led blindly by a decently instructed but narrow-minded teacher, who has mixed up his own headstrong self-conceit and self-importance with his own peculiar ideas of abstract religion.' Paul paused, half surprised at himself, for, though he had doubted before, he had never ventured till that day to formulate his doubts, even to himself, in such plain and straightforward language.

'I see,' said Meenie gravely; 'you have come into a wider world; you have mixed with wider ideas; and the wider world has converted you instead of your converting the world. Well, that is only natural. Others beside you have had to change their opinions.'

'Yes, yes; but for me it is harder—oh! so much harder.'

'Because you have looked forward to being an Apostle?'

'Miss Bolton, you do me injustice—not in what you say, but in the tone you say it in. No, it is not the giving up of the Apostleship that troubles me, though I did hope that I might help in my way to make the world a new earth; but it is the shock and downfall of their hopes to all those good earnest people, and especially—oh! especially, Miss Bolton, to my own dear father and mother.' His eyes filled with tears as he spoke.

'I can understand,' said Meenie, sympathetically, her eyes dimming a little in response. 'They have set their hearts all their lives long on your accomplishing this work, and it will be to them the disappointment of a cherished romance.'

They looked at one another a few minutes in silence.

'How long have you begun to have your doubts?' Meenie asked after the pause.

'A long time, but most of all since I saw you. It has made me—it has made me hesitate more about the fundamental article of our faith. Even now, I am not sure whether it is not wrong of me to be talking so with you about such matters.'

'I see,' said Meenie, a little more archly; 'it comes perilously near——' and she broke off, for she felt she had gone a step too far.

'Perilously near falling in love,' Paul continued boldly, turning his big eyes full upon her. 'Yes, perilously near.'

Their eyes met; Meenie's fell; and they said no more. But they both felt they understood one another. Just at that moment the Professor's wife came up to interrupt the *tête-à-tête*; 'for that young Owen,' she said to herself, 'is really getting quite too confidential with dear Meenie.'

That same evening Paul paced up and down his rooms in Peckwater with all his soul strangely upheaved within him and tossed and racked by a dozen conflicting doubts and passions. Had he gone too far? Had he yielded like Adam to the woman who beguiled him? Had he given way like Samson to the snares of Delilah? For the old Scripture phraseology and imagery, so long burned into his very nature, clung to him still in spite of all his faltering changes of opinion. Had he said more than he thought and felt about the Apostle? Even if he was going to revise his views, was it right, was it candid, was it loyal to the truth, that he should revise them under the biassing influence of Meenie's eyes? If only he could have separated the two questions—the Apostle's mission, and the something which he felt growing up within him! But he could not—and, as he suspected, for a most excellent reason, because the two were intimately bound up in the

very warp and woof of his existence. Nature was asserting herself against the religious asceticism of the Apostle; it could not be so wrong for him to feel those feelings that had thrilled every heart in all his ancestors for innumerable generations.

He was in love with Meenie: he knew that clearly now. And this love was after all not such a wicked and terrible feeling; on the contrary, he felt all the better and the purer for it already. But then that might merely be the horrible seductiveness of the thing. Was it not always typified by the cup of Circe, by the song of the Sirens, by all that was alluring and beautiful and hollow? He paced up and down for half an hour, and then (he had sported his oak long ago) he lit his little reading-lamp and sat down in the big chair by the bay window. Running his eyes over his bookshelf, he took out, half by chance, Spencer's *Sociology*. Then, from sheer weariness, he read on for a while, hardly heeding what he read. At last he got interested, and finished a chapter. When he had finished it, he put the book down, and felt that the struggle was over. Strange that side by side in the same world, in the same London, there should exist two such utterly different types of man as Herbert Spencer and the Gideonite Apostle. The last seemed to belong to the sixteenth century, the first to some new and hitherto uncreated social world. In an age which produced thinkers like that, how could he ever have mistaken the poor, bigoted, narrow, half-instructed Apostle for a divinely inspired teacher! So far as Paul Owen was concerned, the Gideonite Church and all that belonged to it had melted utterly into thin air.

Three days later, after the Eights in the early evening, Paul found an opportunity of speaking again alone with Meenie. He had taken their party on to the Christ Church barge to see the race, and he was strolling with them afterwards round the meadow walk by the bank of the Cherwell. Paul managed to get a little in front with Meenie, and entered at once upon the subject of his late embarrassments.

'I have thought it all over since, Miss Bolton,' he said—he half hesitated whether he should say 'Meenie' or not, and she was half disappointed that he didn't, for they were both very young, and very young people fall in love so unaffectedly—'I have thought it all over, and I have come to the conclusion that there is no help for it: I must break openly with the Church.'

'Of course,' said Meenie, simply. 'That I understood.'

He smiled at her ingenuousness. Such a very forward young person! And yet he liked it. 'Well, the next thing is, what to do about it. You see, I have really been obtaining my education, so to speak, under false pretences. I can't continue taking these good people's money after I have ceased to believe in their doctrines. I ought to have faced the question sooner. It was wrong of me to wait until—until it was forced upon me by other considerations.'

This time it was Meenie who blushed. 'But you don't mean to leave Oxford without taking your degree?' she asked quickly.

'No, I think it will be better not. To stop here and try for a fellowship is my best chance of repaying these poor people the money which I have taken from them for no purpose.'

'I never thought of that,' said Meenie. 'You are bound in honour to pay them back, of course.'

Paul liked the instantaneous honesty of that 'of course.' It marked the naturally honourable character; for, 'of course,' too, they must wait to marry (young people jump so) till all that money was paid off. 'Fortunately,' he said, 'I have lived economically, and have not spent nearly as much as they guaranteed. I got scholarships up to a hundred a year of my own, and I only took a hundred a year of theirs. They offered me two hundred. But there's five years at a hundred, that makes five hundred pounds—a big debt to begin life with.'

'Never mind,' said Meenie. 'You will get a fellowship, and in a few years you can pay it off.'

'Yes,' said Paul, 'I can pay it off. But I can never pay off the hopes and aspirations I have blighted. I must become a schoolmaster, or a barrister, or something of that sort, and never repay them for their self-sacrifice and devotion in making me whatever I shall become. They may get back their money, but they will have lost their cherished Apostle for ever.'

'Mr. Owen,' Meenie answered solemnly, 'the seal of the Apostolate lies far deeper than that. It was born in you, and no act of yours can shake it off.'

'Meenie,' he said, looking at her gently, with a changed expression—'Meenie, we shall have to wait many years.'

'Never mind, Paul,' she replied, as naturally as if he had been Paul to her all her life long, 'I can wait if you can. But what will you do for the immediate present?'

'I have my scholarship,' he said; 'I can get on partly upon that; and then I can take pupils; and I have only one year more of it.'

So before they parted that night it was all well understood between them that Paul was to declare his defection from the Church at the earliest opportunity; that he was to live as best he might till he could take his degree; that he was then to pay off all the back debt; and that after all these things he and Meenie might get comfortably married whenever they were able. As to the Rector and his wife, or any other parental authorities, they both left them out in the cold as wholly as young people always do leave their elders out on all similar occasions.

'Maria's a born fool!' said the Rector to his wife a week after Meenie's return; 'I always knew she was a fool, but I never knew she was quite such a fool as to permit a thing like this. So far as I can get it out of Edie, and so far as Edie can get it out of Meenie, I understand that she has allowed Meenie to go and get herself engaged to some Dissenter fellow, a Shaker, or a Mormon, or a Communist, or something of the sort, who is the son of a common labourer, and has been sent up to Oxford, Tom tells me, by his own sect, to be made into a gentleman, so as to give some sort or colour of respectability to their absurd doctrines. I shall send the girl to town at once to Emily's, and she shall stop there all next season, to see if she can't manage to get engaged to some young man in decent society at any rate.'

### III

When Paul Owen returned to Peckham for the long vacation, it was with a heavy heart that he ventured back slowly to his father's cottage. Margaret Owen had put everything straight and neat in the little living room, as she always did, to welcome home her son who had grown into a gentleman; and honest John stood at the threshold beaming with pleasure to wring Paul's hand in his firm grip, just back unwashed from his day's labour. After the first kissings and greetings were over, John Owen said rather solemnly, 'I have bad news for you, Paul. The Apostle is sick, even unto death.'

When Paul heard that, he was sorely tempted to put off the disclosure for the present; but he felt he must not. So that same night, as they sat together in the dusk near the window where the geraniums stood, he began to unburden his whole mind, gently and tentatively, so as to spare their feelings as much as possible, to his father and mother. He told them how, since he went to Oxford, he had learned to think somewhat differently about many things; how his ideas had gradually deepened and broadened; how he had begun to inquire into fundamentals for himself; how he had feared that the Gideonites took too much for granted, and reposed too implicitly on the supposed critical learning of their Apostle. As he spoke his mother listened in tearful silence; but his father murmured from time to time, 'I was afeard of this already, Paul; I seen it coming, now and again, long ago.' There was pity and regret in his tone, but not a shade of reproachfulness.

At last, however, Paul came to speak, timidly and reservedly, of Meenie. Then his father's eye began to flash a little, and his breath came deeper and harder. When Paul told him briefly that he was engaged to her, the strong man could stand it no longer. He rose up in righteous wrath, and thrust his son at arm's-length from him. 'What!' he cried fiercely, 'you don't mean to tell me you have fallen into sin and looked upon the daughters of Midian! It was no Scriptural doubts that druv you on, then, but the desire of the flesh and the lust of the eyes that has lost you! You dare to stand up there, Paul Owen, and tell me that you throw over the Church and the Apostle for the sake of a girl, like a poor miserable Samson! You are no son of mine, and I have nothin' more to say to you.'

But Margaret Owen put her hand on his shoulder and said softly, 'John, let us hear him out.' And John, recalled by that gentle touch, listened once more. Then Paul pleaded his case powerfully again. He quoted Scripture to them; he argued with them, after their own fashion, and down to their own comprehension, text by text; he pitted his own critical and exegetical faculty against the Apostle's. Last of all, he turned to his mother, who, tearful still and heartbroken with disappointment, yet looked admiringly upon her learned, eloquent boy, and said to her tenderly, 'Remember, mother, you yourself were once in love. You yourself once stood, night after night, leaning on the gate, waiting with your heart beating for a footstep that you knew so well. You yourself once counted the days and the hours and the minutes till the next meeting came.' And Margaret Owen, touched to the heart by that simple appeal, kissed him fervently a dozen times over, the hot tears dropping on his cheek meanwhile; and then, contrary to all the rules of their austere Church, she flung her arms round her husband too, and kissed him passionately the first time for twenty years, with all the fervour of a

floodgate loosed. Paul Owen's apostolate had surely borne its first fruit.

The father stood for a moment in doubt and terror, like one stunned or dazed, and then, in a moment of sudden remembrance, stepped forward and returned the kiss. The spell was broken, and the Apostle's power was no more. What else passed in the cottage that night, when John Owen fell upon his knees and wrestled in spirit, was too wholly internal to the man's own soul for telling here. Next day John and Margaret Owen felt the dream of their lives was gone; but the mother in her heart rejoiced to think her boy might know the depths of love, and might bring home a real lady for his wife.

On Sunday it was rumoured that the Apostle's ailment was very serious; but young Brother Paul Owen would address the Church. He did so, though not exactly in the way the Church expected. He told them simply and plainly how he had changed his views about certain matters; how he thanked them from his heart for the loan of their money (he was careful to emphasise the word *loan*), which had helped him to carry on his education at Oxford; and how he would repay them the principal and interest, though he could never repay them the kindness, at the earliest possible opportunity. He was so grave, so earnest, so transparently true, that, in spite of the downfall of their dearest hopes, he carried the whole meeting with him, all save one man. That man was Job Grimshaw. Job rose from his place with a look of undisguised triumph as soon as Paul had finished, and, mounting the platform quietly, said his say.

'I knew, Episcops, Presbyters, and Brethren,' he began, 'how this 'ere young man would finish. I saw it the day he was appointed. He's flushing up now the same as he flushed up then when I spoke to him; and it ain't sperritual, it's worldly pride and headstrongness, that's what it is. He's had our money, and he's had his eddication, and now he's going to round on us, just as I said he would. It's all very well talking about paying us back: how's a young man like him to get five hunderd pounds, I should like to know. And if he did even, what sort o' repayment would that be to many of the brethren, who've saved and scraped for five year to let him live like a gentleman among the great and the mighty o' Midian? He's got his eddication out of us, and he can keep that whatever happens, and make a living out of it, too; and now he's going back on us, same as I said he would, and, having got all he can out of the Church, he's going to chuck it away like a sucked orange. I detest such backsliding and such ungratefulness.'

Paul's cup of humiliation was full, but he bit his lip till the blood almost came, and made no answer.

'He boasted in his own strength,' Job went on mercilessly, 'that he wasn't going to be a backslider, and he wasn't going to sign no bond, and he wasn't going to confer with us, but we must trust his honour and honesty, and such like. I've got his very words written down in my notebook 'ere; for I made a note of 'em, foreseeing this. If we'd 'a' bound him down, as I proposed, he wouldn't 'a' dared to go backsliding and rounding on us, and making up to the daughters of Midian, as I don't doubt but what he's been doing.' Paul's tell-tale face showed him at once that he had struck by accident on the right chord. 'But if he ever goes bringing a daughter of Midian here to Peckham,' Job continued, 'we'll show her these very notes, and ask her what she thinks of such dishonourable conduct. The Apostle's dying, that's clear; and before he dies I warrant he shall know this treachery.'

Paul could not stand that last threat. Though he had lost faith in the Apostle as an Apostle, he could never forget the allegiance he had once borne him as a father, or the spell which his powerful individuality had once thrown around him as a teacher. To have embittered that man's dying bed with the shadow of a terrible disappointment would be to Paul a lifelong subject of deep remorse. 'I did not intend to open my mouth in answer to you, Mr. Grimshaw,' he said (for the first time breaking through the customary address of Brother), 'but I pray you, I entreat you, I beseech you, not to harass the Apostle in his last moments with such a subject.'

'Oh yes, I suppose so,' Job Grimshaw answered maliciously, all the ingrained coarseness of the man breaking out in the wrinkles of his face. 'No wonder you don't want him enlightened about your goings on with the daughters of Midian, when you must know as well as I do that his life ain't worth a day's purchase, and that he's a man of independent means, and has left you every penny he's got in his will, because he believes you're a fit successor to the Apostolate. I know it, for I signed as a witness, and I read it through, being a short one, while the other witness was signing. And you must know it as well as I do. I suppose you don't think he'll make another will now; but there's time enough to burn that one anyhow.'

Paul Owen stood aghast at the vulgar baseness of which this lewd fellow supposed him capable. He had never thought of it before; and yet it flashed across his mind in a moment how obvious it was now. Of course the Apostle would leave him his money. He was being educated for the Apostolate, and the Apostolate could not be carried on without the sinews

of war. But that Job Grimshaw should think him guilty of angling for the Apostle's money, and then throwing the Church overboard—the bare notion of it was so horrible to him that he could not even hold up his head to answer the taunt. He sat down and buried his crimson face in his hands; and Job Grimshaw, taking up his hat sturdily, with the air of a man who has to perform an unpleasant duty, left the meeting-room abruptly without another word.

There was a gloomy Sunday dinner that morning in the mason's cottage, and nobody seemed much inclined to speak in any way. But as they were in the midst of their solemn meal, a neighbour who was also a Gideonite came in hurriedly. 'It's all over,' he said, breathless—'all over with us and with the Church. The Apostle is dead. He died this morning.'

Margaret Owen found voice to ask, 'Before Job Grimshaw saw him?'

The neighbour nodded, 'Yes.'

'Thank Heaven for that!' cried Paul. 'Then he did not die misunderstanding me!'

'And you'll get his money,' added the neighbour, 'for I was the other witness.'

Paul drew a long breath. 'I wish Meenie was here' he said. 'I must see her about this.'

#### IV

A few days later the Apostle was buried, and his will was read over before the assembled Church. By earnest persuasion of his father, Paul consented to be present, though he feared another humiliation from Job Grimshaw. But two days before he had taken the law into his own hands, by writing to Meenie, at her aunt's in Eaton Place; and that very indiscreet young lady, in response, had actually consented to meet him in Kensington Gardens alone the next afternoon. There he sat with her on one of the benches by the Serpentine, and talked the whole matter over with her to his heart's content.

'If the money is really left to me,' he said, 'I must in honour refuse it. It was left to me to carry on the Apostolate, and I can't take it on any other ground. But what ought I to do with it? I can't give it over to the Church, for in three days there will be no Church left to give it to. What shall I do with it?'

'Why,' said Meenie, thoughtfully, 'if I were you, I should do this. First, pay back everybody who contributed towards your support in full, principal and interest; then borrow from the remainder as much as you require to complete your Oxford course; and finally, pay back all that and the other money to the fund when you are able, and hand it over for the purpose of doing some good work in Peckham itself, where your Church was originally founded. If the ideal can't be fulfilled, let the money do something good for the actual.'

'You are quite right, Meenie,' said Paul, 'except in one particular. I will not borrow from the fund for my own support. I will not touch a penny of it, temporarily or permanently, for myself in any way. If it comes to me, I shall make it over to trustees at once for some good object, as you suggest, and shall borrow from them five hundred pounds to repay my own poor people, giving the trustees my bond to repay the fund hereafter. I shall fight my own battle henceforth unaided.'

'You will do as you ought to do, Paul, and I am proud of it.'

So next morning, when the meeting took place, Paul felt somewhat happier in his own mind as to the course he should pursue with reference to Job Grimshaw.

The Senior Episcop opened and read the last will and testament of Arthur Murgess, attorney-at-law. It provided, in a few words, that all his estate, real and personal, should pass unreservedly to his friend, Paul Owen, of Christ Church, Oxford. It was whispered about that, besides the house and grounds, the personalty might be sworn at eight thousand pounds, a vast sum to those simple people.

When the reading was finished, Paul rose and addressed the assembly. He told them briefly the plan he had formed, and insisted on his determination that not a penny of the money should be put to his own uses. He would face the world for himself, and thanks to their kindness he could face it easily enough. He would still earn and pay back all that he owed them. He would use the fund, first for the good of those who had been members of the Church, and afterwards for the good of the people of Peckham generally. And he thanked them from the bottom of his heart for the kindness they had shown him.

Even Job Grimshaw could only mutter to himself that this was not spiritual grace, but mere worldly pride and stubbornness, lest the lad should betray his evil designs, which had thus availed him nothing. 'He has lost his own soul and wrecked the Church for the sake of the money,' Job said, 'and now he doesn't touch a farden of it.'

Next John Owen rose and said slowly, 'Friends, it seems to me we may as well all confess that this Church has gone to pieces. I can't stop in it myself any longer, for I see it's clear against nature, and what's against nature can't be true.' And though the assembly said nothing, it was plain that there were many waverers in the little body whom the affairs of the last week had shaken sadly in their simple faith. Indeed, as a matter of fact, before the end of the month the Gideonite Church had melted away, member by member, till nobody at all was left of the whole assembly but Job Grimshaw.

'My dear,' said the Rector to his wife a few weeks later, laying down his *Illustrated*, 'this is really a very curious thing. That young fellow Owen, of Christ Church, that Meenie fancied herself engaged to, has just come into a little landed property and eight or nine thousand pounds on his own account. He must be better connected than Tom imagines. Perhaps we might make inquiries about him after all.'

The Rector did make inquiries in the course of the week, and with such results that he returned to the rectory in blank amazement. 'That fellow's mad, Amelia,' he said, 'stark mad, if ever anybody was. The leader of his Little Bethel, or Ebenezer, or whatever it may be, has left him all his property absolutely, without conditions; and the idiot of a boy declares he won't touch a penny of it, because he's ceased to believe in their particular shibboleth, and he thinks the leader wanted him to succeed him. Very right and proper of him, of course, to leave the sect if he can't reconcile it with his conscience, but perfectly Quixotic of him to give up the money and beggar himself outright. Even if his connection was otherwise desirable (which it is far from being), it would be absurd to think of letting Meenie marry such a ridiculous hare-brained fellow.'

Paul and Meenie, however, went their own way, as young people often will, in spite of the Rector. Paul returned next term to Oxford, penniless, but full of resolution, and by dint of taking pupils managed to eke out his scholarship for the next year. At the end of that time he took his first in Greats, and shortly after gained a fellowship. From the very first day he began saving money to pay off that dead weight of five hundred pounds. The kindly ex-Gideonites had mostly protested against his repaying them at all, but in vain: Paul would not make his entry into life, he said, under false pretences. It was a hard pull, but he did it. He took pupils, he lectured, he wrote well and vigorously for the press, he worked late and early with volcanic energy; and by the end of three years he had not only saved the whole of the sum advanced by the Gideonites, but had also begun to put away a little nest-egg against his marriage with Meenie. And when the editor of a great morning paper in London offered him a permanent place upon the staff, at a large salary, he actually went down to Worcestershire, saw the formidable Rector himself in his own parish, and demanded Meenie outright in marriage. And the Rector observed to his wife that this young Owen seemed a well-behaved and amiable young man; that after all one needn't know anything about his relations if one didn't like; and that as Meenie had quite made up her mind, and was as headstrong as a mule, there was no use trying to oppose her any longer.

Down in Peckham, where Paul Owen lives, and is loved by half the poor of the district, no one has forgotten who was the real founder of the Murgess Institute, which does so much good in encouraging thrift, and is so admirably managed by the founder and his wife. He would take a house nowhere but at Peckham, he said. To the Peckham people he owed his education, and for the Peckham people he would watch the working of his little Institute. There is no better work being done anywhere in that great squalid desert, the east and south-east of London; there is no influence more magnetic than the founder's. John and Margaret Owen have recovered their hopes for their boy, only they run now in another and more feasible direction; and those who witness the good that is being done by the Institute among the poor of Peckham, or who have read that remarkable and brilliant economical work lately published on 'The Future of Co-operation in the East End, by P. O.,' venture to believe that Meenie was right after all, and that even the great social world itself has not yet heard the last of young Paul Owen's lay apostolate.

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## JOHN CANN'S TREASURE

Cecil Mitford sat at a desk in the Record Office with a stained and tattered sheet of dark dirty-brown antique paper spread before him in triumph, and with an eager air of anxious inquiry speaking forth from every line in his white face and every convulsive twitch at the irrepressible corners of his firm pallid mouth. Yes, there was no doubt at all about it; the piece of torn and greasy paper which he had at last discovered was nothing more or less than John Cann's missing letter. For two years Cecil Mitford had given up all his spare time, day and night, to the search for that lost fragment of crabbed seventeenth-century handwriting; and now at length, after so many disappointments and so much fruitless anxious hunting, the clue to the secret of John Cann's treasure was lying there positively before him. The young man's hand trembled violently as he held the paper fast, unopened in his feverish grasp, and read upon its back the autograph endorsement of Charles the Second's Secretary of State—'Letter in cypher from Io. Cann, the noted Buccaneer, to his brother Will<sup>m</sup>., intercepted at Port Royal by his Ma<sup>tie</sup>'s command, and despatched by General Ed. D'Oyley, his Ma<sup>tie</sup>'s Captain-Gen<sup>l</sup> and Governor-in-Chief of the Island of Jamaica, to me, H. NICHOLAS.' That was it, beyond the shadow of a doubt; and though Cecil Mitford had still to apply to the cypher John Cann's own written key, and to find out the precise import of the directions it contained, he felt at that moment that the secret was now at last virtually discovered, and that John Cann's untold thousands of buried wealth were potentially his very own already.

He was only a clerk in the Colonial Office, was Cecil Mitford, on a beggarly income of a hundred and eighty a year—how small it seemed now, when John Cann's money was actually floating before his mind's-eye; but he had brains and industry and enterprise after a fitful adventurous fashion of his own; and he had made up his mind years before that he would find out the secret of John Cann's buried treasure, if he had to spend half a lifetime on the almost hopeless quest. As a boy, Cecil Mitford had been brought up at his father's rectory on the slopes of Dartmoor, and there he had played from his babyhood upward among the rugged granite boulders of John Cann's rocks, and had heard from the farm labourers and the other children around the romantic but perfectly historical legend of John Cann's treasure. Unknown and incredible sums in Mexican doubloons and Spanish dollars lay guarded by a strong oaken chest in a cavern on the hilltop, long since filled up with flints and mould from the neighbouring summits. To that secure hiding-place the great buccaneer had committed the hoard gathered in his numberless piratical expeditions, burying all together under the shadow of a petty porphyritic tor that overhangs the green valley of Bovey Tracy. Beside the bare rocks that mark the site, a perfectly distinct pathway is worn by footsteps into the granite platform underfoot; and that path, little Cecil Mitford had heard with childish awe and wonder, was cut out by the pacing up and down of old John Cann himself, mounting guard in the darkness and solitude over the countless treasure that he had hidden away in the recesses of the pixies' hole beneath.

As young Mitford grew up to man's estate, this story of John Cann's treasure haunted his quick imagination for many years with wonderful vividness. When he first came up to London, after his father's death, and took his paltry clerkship in the Colonial Office—how he hated the place, with its monotonous drudgery, while John Cann's wealth was only waiting for him to take it and floating visibly before his prophetic eyes!—the story began for a while to fade out under the disillusioning realities of respectable poverty and a petty Government post. But before he had been many months in the West India department (he had a small room on the third floor, overlooking Downing Street) a casual discovery made in overhauling the archives of the office suddenly revived the boyish dream with all the added realism and cool intensity of maturer years. He came across a letter from John Cann himself to the Protector Oliver, detailing the particulars of a fierce irregular engagement with a Spanish privateer, in which the Spaniard had been captured with much booty, and his vessel duly sold to the highest bidder in Port Royal harbour. This curious coincidence gave a great shock of surprise to young Mitford. John Cann, then, was no mythical prehistoric hero, no fairy-king or pixy or barrow-haunter of the popular fancy, but an actual genuine historical figure, who corresponded about his daring exploits with no less a personage than Oliver himself! From that moment forth, Cecil Mitford gave himself up almost entirely to tracing out the forgotten history of the old buccaneer. He allowed no peace to the learned person who took care of the State Papers of the Commonwealth at the Record Office, and he established private relations, by letter, with two or three clerks in the Colonial Secretary's Office at Kingston, Jamaica, whom he induced to help him in reconstructing the lost story of John Cann's life.

Bit by bit Cecil Mitford had slowly pieced together a wonderful mass of information, buried under piles of ragged

manuscript and weary reams of dusty documents, about the days and doings of that ancient terror of the Spanish Main. John Cann was a Devonshire lad, of the rollicking, roving seventeenth century, born and bred at Bovey Tracy, on the flanks of Dartmoor, the last survivor of those sea-dogs of Devon who had sallied forth to conquer and explore a new Continent under the guidance of Drake, and Raleigh, and Frobisher, and Hawkins. As a boy, he had sailed with his father in a ship that bore the Queen's letters of marque and reprisal against the Spanish galleons; in his middle life, he had lived a strange roaming existence—half pirate and half privateer, intent upon securing the Protestant religion and punishing the King's enemies by robbing wealthy Spanish skippers and cutting off the recusant noses of vile Papistical Cuban slave-traders; in his latter days, the fierce, half-savage old mariner had relapsed into sheer robbery, and had been hunted down as a public enemy by the Lord Protector's servants, or later still by the Captains-General and Governors-in-Chief of his Most Sacred Majesty's Dominions in the West Indies. For what was legitimate warfare in the spacious days of great Elizabeth, had come to be regarded in the degenerate reign of Charles II. as rank piracy.

One other thing Cecil Mitford had discovered, with absolute certainty; and that was that in the summer of 1660, the year of his Ma<sup>ties</sup> most happy restoration,' as John Cann himself phrased it, the persecuted and much misunderstood old buccaneer had paid a secret visit to England, and had brought with him the whole hoard which he had accumulated during sixty years of lawful or unlawful piracy in the West Indies and the Spanish Main. Concerning this hoard, which he had concealed somewhere in Devonshire, he kept up a brisk vernacular correspondence in cypher with his brother William, at Tavistock; and the key to that cypher, marked outside 'A clew to my Bro. Iohn's secret writing,' Cecil Mitford had been fortunate enough to unearth among the undigested masses of the Record Office. But one letter, the last and most important of the whole series, containing as he believed the actual statement of the hiding-place, had long evaded all his research: and that was the letter which, now at last, after months and months of patient inquiry, lay unfolded before his dazzled eyes on the little desk in his accustomed corner. It had somehow been folded up by mistake in the papers relating to the charge against Cyriack Skinner, of complicity in the Rye House Plot. How it got there nobody knows, and probably nobody but Cecil Mitford himself could ever have succeeded in solving the mystery.

As he gazed, trembling, at the precious piece of dusty much-creased paper, scribbled over in the unlettered schoolboy hand of the wild old sea-dog, Cecil Mitford could hardly restrain himself for a moment from uttering a cry. Untold wealth swam before his eyes: he could marry Ethel now, and let her drive in her own carriage! Ah, what he would give if he might only shout in his triumph. He couldn't even read the words, he was so excited. But after a minute or two, he recovered his composure sufficiently to begin deciphering the crabbed writing, which constant practice and familiarity with the system enabled him to do immediately, without even referring to the key. And this was what, with a few minutes' inspection, Cecil Mitford slowly spelled out of the dirty manuscript:—

*'From Jamaica. This 23rd day of Jan<sup>y</sup>.  
in the Yeare of our Lord 1663.*

'My deare Bro.,—I did not think to have written you againe, after the scurvie Trick you have played me in disclosing my Affairs to that meddlesome Knight that calls himself the King's Secretary: but in truth your last Letter hath so moved me by your Vileness that I must needs reply thereto with all Expedition. These are to assure you, then, that let you pray how you may, or gloze over your base treatment with fine cozening Words and fair Promises, you shall have neither lot nor scot in my Threasure, which is indeed as you surmise hidden away in England, but the Secret whereof I shall impart neither to you nor to no man. I have give commands, therefore, that the Paper whereunto I have committed the place of its hiding shall be buried with my own Body (when God please) in the grave-yarde at Port Royal in this Island: so that you shall never be bettered one Penny by your most Damnable Treachery and Double-facedness. For I know you, my deare Bro., in very truth for a prating Coxcomb, a scurvie cowardlie Knave, and a lying Thief of other Men's Reputations. Therefore, no more herewith from your very humble Ser<sup>vt</sup>. and Loving Bro.,

JOHN CANN, Capt<sup>n</sup>.'

Cecil Mitford laid the paper down as he finished reading it with a face even whiter and paler than before, and with the muscles of his mouth trembling violently with suppressed emotion. At the exact second when he felt sure he had discovered the momentous secret, it had slipped mysteriously through his very fingers, and seemed now to float away into the remote distance, almost as far from his eager grasp as ever. Even there, in the musty Record Office, before all the clerks and scholars who were sitting about working carelessly at their desks at mere dilettante historical problems—

the stupid prigs, how he hated them!—he could hardly restrain the expression of his pent-up feelings at that bitter disappointment in the very hour of his fancied triumph. Jamaica! How absolutely distant and unapproachable it sounded! How hopeless the attempt to follow up the clue! How utterly his day-dream had been dashed to the ground in those three minutes of silent deciphering! He felt as if the solid earth was reeling beneath him, and he would have given the whole world if he could have put his face between his two hands on the desk and cried like a woman before the whole Record Office.

For half an hour by the clock he sat there dazed and motionless, gazing in a blank disappointed fashion at the sheet of coffee-coloured paper in front of him. It was late, and workers were dropping away one after another from the scantily peopled desks. But Cecil Mitford took no notice of them: he merely sat with his arms folded, and gazed abstractedly at that disappointing, disheartening, irretrievable piece of crabbed writing. At last an assistant came up and gently touched his arm. 'We're going to close now, sir,' he said in his unfeeling official tone—just as if it were a mere bit of historical inquiry he was after—'and I shall be obliged if you'll put back the manuscripts you've been consulting into F. 27' Cecil Mitford rose mechanically and sorted out the Cyriack Skinner papers into their proper places. Then he laid them quietly on the shelf, and walked out into the streets of London, for the moment a broken-hearted man.

But as he walked home alone that clear warm summer evening, and felt the cool breeze blowing against his forehead, he began to reflect to himself that, after all, all was not lost; that in fact things really stood better with him now than they had stood that very morning, before he lighted upon John Cann's last letter. He had not discovered the actual hiding-place of the hoard, to be sure, but he now knew on John Cann's own indisputable authority, first, that there really was a hidden treasure; second, that the hiding-place was really in England; and third, that full particulars as to the spot where it was buried might be found in John Cann's own coffin at Port Royal, Jamaica. It was a risky and difficult thing to open a coffin, no doubt; but it was not impossible. No, not impossible. On the whole, putting one thing with another, in spite of his terrible galling disappointment, he was really nearer to the recovery of the treasure now than he had ever been in his life before. Till to-day, the final clue was missing; to-day, it had been found. It was a difficult and dangerous clue to follow, but still it had been found.

And yet, setting aside the question of desecrating a grave, how all but impossible it was for him to get to Jamaica! His small funds had long ago been exhausted in prosecuting the research, and he had nothing on earth to live upon now but his wretched salary. Even if he could get three or six months' leave from the Colonial Office, which was highly improbable, how could he ever raise the necessary money for his passage out and home, as well as for the delicate and doubtful operation of searching for documents in John Cann's coffin? It was tantalising, it was horrible, it was unendurable; but here, with the secret actually luring him on to discover it, he was to be foiled and baffled at the last moment by a mere paltry, petty, foolish consideration of two hundred pounds! Two hundred pounds! How utterly ludicrous! Why, John Cann's treasure would make him a man of fabulous wealth for a whole lifetime, and he was to be prevented from realising it by a wretched matter of two hundred pounds! He would do anything to get it—for a loan, a mere loan; to be repaid with cent. per cent. interest; but where in the world, where in the world, was he ever to get it from?

And then, quick as lightning, the true solution of the whole difficulty flashed at once across his excited brain. He could borrow all the money if he chose from Ethel! Poor little Ethel; she hadn't much of her own; but she had just enough to live very quietly upon with her Aunt Emily; and, thank Heaven, it wasn't tied up with any of those bothering, meddling three-per-cent.-loving trustees! She had her little all at her own disposal, and he could surely get two or three hundred pounds from her to secure for them both the boundless buried wealth of John Cann's treasure.

Should he make her a confidante outright, and tell her what it was that he wanted the money for? No, that would be impossible; for though she had heard all about John Cann over and over again, she had not faith enough in the treasure—women are so unpractical—to hazard her little scrap of money on it; of that he felt certain. She would go and ask old Mr. Cartwright's opinion; and old Mr. Cartwright was one of those penny-wise, purblind, unimaginative old gentlemen who will never believe in anything until they've seen it. Yet here was John Cann's money going a-begging, so to speak, and only waiting for him and Ethel to come and enjoy it. Cecil had no patience with those stupid, stick-in-the-mud, timid people who can see no further than their own noses. For Ethel's own sake he would borrow two or three hundred pounds from her, one way or another, and she would easily forgive him the harmless little deception when he paid her back a hundredfold out of John Cann's boundless treasure.

That very evening, without a minute's delay, Cecil determined to go round and have a talk with Ethel Sutherland. 'Strike while the iron's hot,' he said to himself. 'There isn't a minute to be lost; for who knows but somebody else may find John Cann's treasure before I do?'

Ethel opened the door to him herself; theirs was an old engagement of long standing, after the usual Government clerk's fashion; and Aunt Emily didn't stand out so stiffly as many old maids do for the regular proprieties. Very pretty Ethel looked with her pale face and the red ribbon in her hair; very pretty, but Cecil feared, as he looked into her dark hazel eyes, a little wearied and worn-out, for it was her music-lesson day, as he well remembered. Her music-lesson day! Ethel Sutherland to give music-lessons to some wretched squealing children at the West-End, when all John Cann's wealth was lying there, uncounted, only waiting for him and her to take it and enjoy it! The bare thought was a perfect purgatory to him. He must get that two hundred pounds to-night, or give up the enterprise altogether.

'Well, Ethel darling,' he said tenderly, taking her pretty little hand in his; 'you look tired, dearest. Those horrid children have been bothering you again. How I wish we were married, and you were well out of it!'

Ethel smiled a quiet smile of resignation. 'They *are* rather trying, Cecil,' she said gently, 'especially on days when one has got a headache; but, after all, I'm very glad to have the work to do; it helps such a lot to eke out our little income. We have so *very* little, you know, even for two lonely women to live upon in simple little lodgings like these, that I'm thankful I can do something to help dear Aunt Emily, who's really goodness itself. You see, after all, I get very well paid indeed for the lessons.'

'Ethel,' Cecil Mitford said suddenly, thinking it better to dash at once into the midst of business; 'I've come round this evening to talk with you about a means by which you can add a great deal with perfect safety to your little income. Not by lessons, Ethel darling; not by lessons. I can't bear to see you working away the pretty tips off those dear little fingers of yours with strumming scales on the piano for a lot of stupid, gawky schoolgirls; it's by a much simpler way than that; I know of a perfectly safe investment for that three hundred that you've got in New Zealand Four per Cents. Can you not have heard that New Zealand securities are in a very shaky way just at present?'

'Very shaky, Cecil?' Ethel answered in surprise. 'Why, Mr. Cartwright told me only a week ago they were as safe as the Bank of England!'

'Mr. Cartwright's an ignorant old martinet,' Cecil replied vigorously. 'He thinks because the stock's inscribed and the dividends are payable in Threadneedle Street, that the colony of New Zealand's perfectly solvent. Now, I'm in the Colonial Office, and I know a great deal better than that. New Zealand has over-borrowed, I assure you, quite over-borrowed; and a serious fall is certain to come sooner or later. Mark my words, Ethel darling; if you don't sell out those New Zealand Fours, you'll find your three hundred has sunk to a hundred and fifty in rather less than half no time!'

Ethel hesitated, and looked at him in astonishment. 'That's very queer,' she said, 'for Mr. Cartwright wants me to sell out my little bit of Midland and put it all into the same New Zealands. He says they're so safe and pay so well.'

'Mr. Cartwright indeed!' Cecil cried contemptuously. 'What means on earth has he of knowing? Didn't he advise you to buy nothing but three per cents., and then let you get some Portuguese Threes at fifty, which are really sixes, and exceedingly doubtful securities? What's the use of trusting a man like that, I should like to know? No, Ethel, if you'll be guided by me—and I have special opportunities of knowing about these things at the Colonial Office—you'll sell out your New Zealands, and put them into a much better investment that I can tell you about. And if I were you, I'd say nothing about it to Mr. Cartwright.'

'But, Cecil, I never did anything in business before without consulting him! I should be afraid of going quite wrong.'

Cecil took her hand in his with real tenderness. Though he was trying to deceive her—for her own good—he loved her dearly in his heart of hearts, and hated himself for the deception he was remorsefully practising upon her. Yet, for her sake, he would go through with it. 'You must get accustomed to trusting *me* instead of him, darling,' he said softly. 'When you are mine for ever, as I hope you will be soon, you will take my advice, of course, in all such matters, won't you? And you may as well begin by taking it now. I have great hopes, Ethel, that before very long my circumstances will be so much improved that I shall be able to marry you—I hardly know how quickly; perhaps even before next Christmas. But meanwhile, darling, I have something to break to you that I dare say will grieve you a little for the moment, though it's for your ultimate good, birdie—for your ultimate good. The Colonial Office people have selected me to go to Jamaica on some confidential Government business, which may keep me there for three months or so. It's a dreadful thing to be away

from you so long, Ethel; but if I manage the business successfully—and I shall, I know—I shall get promoted when I come back, well promoted, perhaps to the chief clerkship in the Department; and then we could marry comfortably almost at once.'

'To Jamaica! Oh, Cecil! How awfully far! And suppose you were to get yellow fever or something.'

'But I won't, Ethel; I promise you I won't, and I'll guarantee it with a kiss, birdie; so now, that's settled. And then, consider the promotion! Only three months, probably, and when I come back, we can be actually married. It's a wonderful stroke of luck, and I only heard of it this morning. I couldn't rest till I came and told you.'

Ethel wiped a tear away silently, and only answered 'If you're glad, Cecil dearest, I'm glad too.'

'Well now, Ethel,' Cecil Mitford went on as gaily as he could, 'that brings me up to the second point. I want you to sell out these wretched New Zealands, so as to take the money with me to invest on good mortgages in Jamaica. My experience in West Indian matters—after three years in the Department—will enable me to lay it out for you at nine per cent.—nine per cent., observe, Ethel—on absolute security of landed property. Planters want money to improve their estates, and can't get it at less than that rate. Your three hundred would bring you in twenty-seven pounds, Ethel; twenty-seven pounds is a lot of money!'

What could poor Ethel do? In his plausible, affectionate manner—and all for her own good, too—Cecil talked her over quickly between love and business experience, coaxing kisses and nine per cent. interest, endearing names and knowledge of West Indian affairs, till helpless little Ethel willingly promised to give up her poor little three hundred, and even arranged to meet Cecil secretly on Thursday at the Bank of England, about Colonial Office dinner-hour, to effect the transfer on her own account, without saying a single word about it to Aunt Emily or Mr. Cartwright. Cecil's conscience—for he *had* a conscience, though he did his best to stifle it—gave him a bitter twinge every now and then, as one question after another drove him time after time into a fresh bit of deceit; but he tried to smile and smile and be a villain as unconcernedly and lightly as possible. Once only towards the end of the evening, when everything was settled, and Cecil had talked about his passage, and the important business with which he was intrusted, at full length, a gleam of suspicion seemed to flash for a single second across poor Ethel's deluded little brains. Jamaica—promotion—three hundred pounds—it was all so sudden and so connected; could Cecil himself be trying to deceive her, and using her money for his wild treasure hunt? The doubt was horrible, degrading, unworthy of her or him; and yet somehow for a single moment she could not help half-unconsciously entertaining it.

'Cecil,' she said, hesitating, and looking into the very depths of his truthful blue eyes; 'you're not concealing anything from me, are you? It's not some journey connected with John Cann?'

Cecil coughed and cleared his throat uneasily, but by a great effort he kept his truthful blue eyes still fixed steadily on hers. (He would have given the world if he might have turned them away, but that would have been to throw up the game incontinently.) 'My darling Ethel,' he said evasively, 'how on earth could the Colonial Office have anything to do with John Cann?'

'Answer me Yes or No, Cecil. Do please answer me Yes or No.'

Cecil kept his eyes still fixed immovably on hers, and without a moment's hesitation answered quickly 'No.' It was an awful wrench, and his lips could hardly frame the horrid falsehood, but for Ethel's sake he answered 'No.'

'Then I know I can trust you, Cecil,' she said, laying her head for forgiveness on his shoulder. 'Oh, how wrong it was of me to doubt you for a second!'

Cecil sighed uneasily, and kissed her white forehead without a single word.

'After all,' he thought to himself, as he walked back to his lonely lodgings late that evening, 'I need never tell her anything about it. I can pretend, when I've actually got John Cann's treasure, that I came across the clue accidentally while I was in Jamaica; and I can lay out three hundred of it there in mortgages: and she need never know a single word about my innocent little deception. But indeed in the pride and delight of so much money, all our own, she'll probably never think at all of her poor little paltry three hundred.'

It was an awfully long time, that eighteen days at sea, on the Royal Mail Steamship *Don*, bound for Kingston, Jamaica, with John Cann's secret for ever on one's mind, and nothing to do all day, by way of outlet for one's burning energy, but to look, hour after hour, at the monotonous face of the seething water. But at last the journey was over; and before Cecil Mitford had been twenty-four hours at Date Tree Hall, the chief hotel in Kingston, he had already hired a boat and sailed across the baking hot harbour to Port Royal, to look in the dreary, sandy cemetery for any sign or token of John Cann's grave.

An old grey-haired negro, digging at a fresh grave, had charge of the cemetery, and to him Cecil Mitford at once addressed himself, to find out whether any tombstone about the place bore the name of John Cann. The old man turned the name over carefully in his stolid brains, and then shook his heavy grey head with a decided negative. 'Massa John Cann, sah,' he said dubiously, 'Massa John Cann; it don't nobody buried here by de name ob Massa John Cann. I sartin, sah, because I's sexton in dis here cemetry dese fifty year, an' I know de grabe ob ebbery buckra gentleman dat ebber buried here since I fuss came.'

Cecil Mitford tossed his head angrily. 'Since *you* first came, my good man,' he said with deep contempt. 'Since you first came! Why, John Cann was buried here ages and ages before you yourself were ever born or thought of.'

The old negro looked up at him inquiringly. There is nothing a negro hates like contempt; and he answered back with a disdainful tone, 'Den I can find out if him ebber was buried here at all, as well as you, sah. We has register here; we don't ignorant heathen. I has register in de church ob every pusson dat ebber buried in dis cemetry from de berry beginnin—from de year ob de great earthquake itself. What year dis Massa John Cann him die, now? What year him die?'

Cecil pricked up his ears at the mention of the register, and answered eagerly, 'In the year 1669.'

The old negro sat down quietly on a flat tomb, and answered with a smile of malicious triumph, 'Den you is ignorant know-nuffin pusson for a buckra gentleman, for true, sah, if you tink you will find him grabe in dis here cemetry. Don't you nebber read your history book, dat all Port Royal drowned in de great earthquake ob de year 1692? We has register here for ebbery year, from de year 1692 downward; but de graves, and de cemetery, and de register, from de year 1692 upward, him all swallowed up entirely in de great earthquake, bress de Lord!'

Cecil Mitford felt the earth shivering beneath him at that moment, as verily as the Port Royal folk had felt it shiver in 1692. He clutched at the headstone to keep him from falling, and sat down hazily on the flat tomb, beside the grey-headed old negro, like one unmanned and utterly disheartened. It was all only too true. With his intimate knowledge of John Cann's life, and of West Indian affairs generally, how on earth could he ever have overlooked it? John Cann's grave lay buried five fathoms deep, no doubt, under the blue waters of the Caribbean. And it was for this that he had madly thrown up his Colonial Office appointment, for this that he had wasted Ethel's money, for this that he had burdened his conscience with a world of lies; all to find in the end that John Cann's secret was hidden under five fathoms of tropical lagoon, among the scattered and water-logged ruins of Old Port Royal. His fortitude forsook him for a single moment, and burying his face in his two hands, there, under the sweltering mid-day heat of that deadly sandbank, he broke down utterly, and sobbed like a child before the very eyes of the now softened old negro sexton.

#### IV

It was not for long, however. Cecil Mitford had at least one strong quality—indomitable energy and perseverance. All was not yet lost: if need were, he would hunt for John Cann's tomb in the very submerged ruins of Old Port Royal. He looked up once more at the puzzled negro, and tried to bear this bitter downfall of all his hopes with manful resignation.

At that very moment, a tall and commanding-looking man, of about sixty, with white hair but erect figure, walked slowly from the cocoa-nut grove on the sand-spit into the dense and tangled precincts of the cemetery. He was a brown man, a mulatto apparently, but his look and bearing showed him at once to be a person of education and distinction in his own fashion. The old sexton rose up respectfully as the stranger approached, and said to him in a very different tone from that in which he had addressed Cecil Mitford, 'Marnin, sah; marnin, Mr. Barclay. Dis here buckra gentleman from Englan', him come 'quiring in de cemetry after de grabe of pusson dat dead before de great earthquake. What for him come here like-a-dat on fool's errand, eh, sah? What for him not larn before him come dat Port Royal all gone drowned in de year 1692?'

The new-comer raised his hat slightly to Cecil Mitford, and spoke at once in the grave gentle voice of an educated and

cultivated mulatto. 'You wanted some antiquarian information about the island, sir; some facts about some one who died before the Port Royal earthquake? You have luckily stumbled across the right man to help you; for I think if anything can be recovered about anybody in Jamaica, I can aid you in recovering it. Whose grave did you want to see?'

Cecil hardly waited to thank the polite stranger, but blurted out at once, 'The grave of John Cann, who died in 1669.'

The stranger smiled quietly. 'What! John Cann, the famous buccaneer?' he said, with evident delight. 'Are you interested in John Cann?'

'I am,' Cecil answered hastily. 'Do you know anything about him?'

'I know all about him,' the tall mulatto replied. 'All about him in every way. He was not buried at Port Royal at all. He intended to be, and gave orders to that effect; but his servants had him buried quietly elsewhere, on account of some dispute with the Governor of the time being, about some paper which he desired to have placed in his coffin.'

'Where, where?' Cecil Mitford gasped out eagerly, clutching at this fresh straw with all the anxiety of a drowning man.

'At Spanish Town,' the stranger answered calmly. 'I know his grave there well to the present day. If you are interested in Jamaican antiquities, and would like to come over and see it, I shall be happy to show you the tomb. That is my name.' And he handed Cecil Mitford his card, with all the courteous dignity of a born gentleman.

Cecil took the card and read the name on it: 'The Hon. Charles Barclay, Leigh Caymanas, Spanish Town.' How his heart bounded again that minute! Proof was accumulating on proof, and luck on luck! After all, he had tracked down John Cann's grave; and the paper was really there, buried in his coffin. He took the handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his damp brow with a feeling of unspeakable relief. Ethel was saved, and they might still enjoy John Cann's treasure.

Mr. Barclay sat down beside him on the stone slab, and began talking over all he knew about John Cann's life and actions. Cecil affected to be interested in all he said, though really he could think of one thing only: the treasure, the treasure, the treasure. But he managed also to let Mr. Barclay see how much he too knew about the old buccaneer; and Mr. Barclay, who was a simple-minded learned enthusiast for all that concerned the antiquities of his native island, was so won over by this display of local knowledge on the part of a stranger and an Englishman, that he ended by inviting Cecil over to his house at Spanish Town, to stop as long as he was able. Cecil gladly accepted the invitation, and that very afternoon, with a beating heart, he took his place in the lumbering train that carried him over to the final goal of his Jamaican expedition.

## V

In a corner of the Cathedral graveyard at Spanish Town, overhung by a big spreading mango tree, and thickly covered by prickly scrub of agavé and cactus, the white-haired old mulatto gentleman led Cecil Mitford up to a water-worn and weathered stone, on which a few crumbling letters alone were still visible. Cecil kneeled down on the bare ground, regardless of the sharp cactus spines that stung and tore his flesh, and began clearing the moss and lichen away from the neglected monument. Yes, his host was right! right, right, right, indubitably. The first two letters were *Io*, then a blank where others were obliterated, and then came *ANN*. That stood clearly for *IOHN CANN*. And below he could slowly make out the words, 'Born at ... vey Tra ... Devon ...' with an illegible date, 'Died at P ... Royal, May 12, 1669.' Oh, great heavens, yes. John Cann's grave! John Cann's grave! John Cann's grave! Beyond any shadow or suspicion of mistake, John Cann and his precious secret lay buried below that mouldering tombstone.

That very evening Cecil Mitford sought out and found the Spanish Town gravedigger. He was a solemn-looking middle-aged black man, with a keen smart face, not the wrong sort of man, Cecil Mitford felt sure, for such a job as the one he contemplated. Cecil didn't beat about the bush or temporise with him in any way. He went straight to the point, and asked the man outright whether he would undertake to open John Cann's grave, and find a paper that was hidden in the coffin. The gravedigger stared at him, and answered slowly, 'I don't like de job, sah; I don't like de job. Perhaps Massa John Cann's ghost, him come and trouble me for dat: I don't going to do it. What you gib me, sah; how much you gib me?'

Cecil opened his purse and took out of it ten gold sovereigns. 'I will give you that,' he said, 'if you can get me the paper out of John Cann's coffin.'

The negro's eyes glistened, but he answered carelessly, 'I don't tink I can do it. I don't want to open grabe by night, and if

I open him by day, de magistrates dem will hab me up for desecration ob interment. But I can do dis for you, sah. If you like to wait till some buckra gentleman die—John Cann grabe among de white man side in de grabeyard—I will dig grabe alongside ob John Cann one day, so let you come yourself in de night and take what you like out ob him coffin. I don't go meddle with coffin myself, to make de John Cann duppy trouble me, and magistrate send me off about me business.'

It was a risky thing to do, certainly, but Cecil Mitford closed with it, and promised the man ten pounds if ever he could recover John Cann's paper. And then he settled down quietly at Leigh Caymanas with his friendly host, waiting with eager, anxious expectation—till some white person should die at Spanish Town.

What an endless aimless time it seemed to wait before anybody could be comfortably buried! Black people died by the score, of course: there was a smallpox epidemic on, and they went to wakes over one another's dead bodies in wretched hovels among the back alleys, and caught the infection and sickened and died as fast as the wildest imagination could wish them; but then, they were buried apart by themselves in the pauper part of the Cathedral cemetery. Still, no white man caught the smallpox, and few mulattoes: they had all been vaccinated, and nobody got ill except the poorest negroes. Cecil Mitford waited with almost fiendish eagerness to hear that some prominent white man was dead or dying.

A month, six weeks, two months, went slowly past, and still nobody of consequence in all Spanish Town fell ill or sickened. Talk about tropical diseases! why, the place was abominably, atrociously, outrageously healthy. Cecil Mitford fretted and fumed and worried by himself, wondering whether he would be kept there for ever and ever, waiting till some useless nobody chose to die. The worst of it all was, he could tell nobody his troubles: he had to pretend to look unconcerned and interested, and listen to all old Mr. Barclay's stories about Maroons and buccaneers as if he really enjoyed them.

At last, after Cecil had been two full months at Spanish Town, he heard one morning with grim satisfaction that yellow fever had broken out at Port Antonio. Now, yellow fever, as he knew full well, attacks only white men, or men of white blood: and Cecil felt sure that before long there would be somebody white dead in Spanish Town. Not that he was really wicked or malevolent or even unfeeling at heart; but his wild desire to discover John Cann's treasure had now overridden every better instinct of his nature, and had enslaved him, body and soul, till he could think of nothing in any light save that of its bearing on his one mad imagination. So he waited a little longer, still more eagerly than before, till yellow fever should come to Spanish Town.

Sure enough the fever did come in good time, and the very first person who sickened with it was Cecil Mitford. That was a contingency he had never dreamt of, and for the time being it drove John Cann's treasure almost out of his fevered memory. Yet not entirely, even so, for in his delirium he raved of John Cann and his doubloons till good old Mr. Barclay, nursing at his bedside like a woman, as a tender-hearted mulatto always will nurse any casual young white man, shook his head to himself and muttered gloomily that poor Mr. Mitford had overworked his brain sadly in his minute historical investigations.

For ten days Cecil Mitford hovered fitfully between life and death, and for ten days good old Mr. Barclay waited on him, morning, noon, and night, as devotedly as any mother could wait upon her first-born. At the end of that time he began to mend slowly; and as soon as the crisis was over he forgot forthwith all about his illness, and thought once more of nothing on earth save only John Cann's treasure. Was anybody else ill of the fever in Spanish Town? Yes, two, but not dangerously. Cecil's face fell at that saving clause, and in his heart he almost ventured to wish it had been otherwise. He was no murderer, even in thought; but John Cann's treasure! John Cann's treasure! John Cann's treasure! What would not a man venture to do or pray, in order that he might become the possessor of John Cann's treasure?

As Cecil began to mend, a curious thing happened at Leigh Caymanas, contrary to almost all the previous medical experience of the whole Island. Mr. Barclay, though a full mulatto, of half-black blood, suddenly sickened with the yellow fever. He had worn himself out with nursing Cecil, and the virus seemed to have got into his blood in a way that it would never have done under other circumstances. And when the doctor came to see him, he declared at once that the symptoms were very serious. Cecil hated and loathed himself for the thought; and yet, in a horrid, indefinite way he gloated over the possibility of his kind and hospitable friend's dying. Mr. Barclay had tended him so carefully that he almost loved him; and yet, with John Cann's treasure before his very eyes, in a dim, uncertain, awful fashion, he almost looked forward to his dying. But where would he be buried? that was the question. Not, surely, among the poor black people in the pauper corner. A man of his host's distinction and position would certainly deserve a place among the most exalted white graves—near the body of Governor Modyford, and not far from the tomb of John Cann himself.

Day after day Mr. Barclay sank slowly but surely, and Cecil, weak and hardly convalescent himself, sat watching by his bedside, and nursing him as tenderly as the good brown man had nursed Cecil himself in his turn a week earlier. The young clerk was no hard-hearted wretch who could see a kind entertainer die without a single passing pang; he felt for the grey old mulatto as deeply as he could have felt for his own brother, if he had had one. Every time there was a sign of suffering or feebleness, it went to Cecil's heart like a knife—the very knowledge that on one side of his nature he wished the man to die made him all the more anxious and careful on the other side to do everything he could to save him, if possible, or at least to alleviate his sufferings. Poor old man! it was horrible to see him lying there, parched with fever and dying by inches; but then—John Cann's treasure! John Cann's treasure! John Cann's treasure! every shade that passed over the good mulatto's face brought Cecil Mitford a single step nearer to the final enjoyment of John Cann's treasure.

## VI

On the evening when the Hon. Charles Barclay died, Cecil Mitford went out, for the first time after his terrible illness, to speak a few words in private with the negro sexton. He found the man lounging in the soft dust outside his hut, and ready enough to find a place for the corpse (which would be buried next morning, with the ordinary tropical haste) close beside the spot actually occupied by John Cann's coffin. All the rest, the sexton said with a horrid grin, he would leave to Cecil.

At twelve o'clock of a dark moonless night, Cecil Mitford, still weak and ill, but trembling only from the remains of his fever, set out stealthily from the dead man's low bungalow in the outskirts of Spanish Town, and walked on alone through the unlighted, unpaved streets of the sleeping city to the Cathedral precinct. Not a soul met or passed him on the way through the lonely alleys; not a solitary candle burned anywhere in a single window. He carried only a little dark lantern in his hand, and a very small pick that he had borrowed that same afternoon from the negro sexton. Stumbling along through the unfamiliar lanes, he saw at last the great black mass of the gaunt ungainly Cathedral, standing out dimly against the hardly less black abyss of night that formed the solemn background. But Cecil Mitford was not awed by place or season; he could think only of one subject, John Cann's treasure. He groped his way easily through scrub and monuments to the far corner of the churchyard; and there, close by a fresh and open grave, he saw the well-remembered, half-effaced letters that marked the mouldering upright slab as John Cann's gravestone. Without a moment's delay, without a touch of hesitation, without a single tinge of womanish weakness, he jumped down boldly into the open grave and turned the light side of his little lantern in the direction of John Cann's undesecrated coffin.

A few strokes of the pick soon loosened the intervening earth sufficiently to let him get at a wooden plank on the nearer side of the coffin. It had mouldered away with damp and age till it was all quite soft and pliable; and he broke through it with his hand alone, and saw lying within a heap of huddled bones, which he knew at once for John Cann's skeleton. Under any other circumstances, such a sight, seen in the dead of night, with all the awesome accessories of time and place, would have chilled and appalled Cecil Mitford's nervous blood; but he thought nothing of it all now; his whole soul was entirely concentrated on a single idea—the search for the missing paper. Leaning over toward the breach he had made into John Cann's grave, he began groping about with his right hand on the floor of the coffin. After a moment's search his fingers came across a small rusty metal object, clasped, apparently, in the bony hand of the skeleton. He drew it eagerly out; it was a steel snuff-box. Prising open the corroded hinge with his pocket-knife, he found inside a small scrap of dry paper. His fingers trembled as he held it to the dark lantern; oh heavens, success! success! it was, it was—the missing document!

He knew it in a moment by the handwriting and the cypher! He couldn't wait to read it till he went home to the dead man's house; so he curled himself up cautiously in Charles Barclay's open grave, and proceeded to decipher the crabbed manuscript as well as he was able by the lurid light of the lantern. Yes, yes, it was all right: it told him with minute and unmistakable detail the exact spot in the valley of the Bovey where John Cann's treasure lay securely hidden. Not at John Cann's rocks on the hilltop, as the local legend untruly affirmed—John Cann had not been such an unguarded fool as to whisper to the idle gossips of Bovey the spot where he had really buried his precious doubloons—but down in the valley by a bend of the river, at a point that Cecil Mitford had known well from his childhood upward. Hurrah! hurrah! the secret was unearthed at last, and he had nothing more to do than to go home to England and proceed to dig up John Cann's treasure!

So he cautiously replaced the loose earth on the side of the grave, and walked back, this time bold and erect, with his dark lantern openly displayed (for it mattered little now who watched or followed him), to dead Charles Barclay's

lonely bungalow. The black servants were crooning and wailing over their master's body, and nobody took much notice of the white visitor. If they had, Cecil Mitford would have cared but little, so long as he carried John Cann's last dying directions safely folded in his leather pocket-book.

Next day, Cecil Mitford stood once more as a chief mourner beside the grave he had sat in that night so strangely by himself: and before the week was over, he had taken his passage for England in the Royal Mail Steamer *Tagus*, and was leaving the cocoa-nut groves of Port Royal well behind him on the port side. Before him lay the open sea, and beyond it, England, Ethel, and John Cann's treasure.

## VII

It had been a long job after all to arrange fully the needful preliminaries for the actual search after John Cann's buried doubloons. First of all, there was Ethel's interest to pay, and a horrid story for Cecil to concoct—all false, of course, worse luck to it—about how he had managed to invest her poor three hundred to the best advantage. Then there was another story to make good about three months' extra leave from the Colonial Office. Next came the question of buying the land where John Cann's treasure lay hidden, and this was really a matter of very exceptional and peculiar difficulty. The owner—pig-headed fellow!—didn't want to sell, no matter how much he was offered, because the corner contained a clump of trees that made a specially pretty element in the view from his dining-room windows. His dining-room windows, forsooth! What on earth could it matter, when John Cann's treasure was at stake, whether anything at all was visible or otherwise from his miserable dining-room windows? Cecil was positively appalled at the obstinacy and narrow-mindedness of the poor squireen, who could think of nothing at all in the whole world but his own ridiculous antiquated windows. However, in the end, by making his bid high enough, he was able to induce this obstructive old curmudgeon to part with his triangular little corner of land in the bend of the river. Even so, there was the question of payment: absurd as it seemed, with all John Cann's money almost in his hands, Cecil was obliged to worry and bother and lie and intrigue for weeks together in order to get that paltry little sum in hard cash for the matter of payment. Still, he raised it in the end; raised it by inducing Ethel to sell out the remainder of her poor small fortune, and cajoling Aunt Emily into putting her name to a bill of sale for her few worthless bits of old-fashioned furniture. At last, after many delays and vexatious troubles, Cecil found himself the actual possessor of the corner of land wherein lay buried John Cann's treasure.

The very first day that Cecil Mitford could call that coveted piece of ground his own, he could not restrain his eagerness (though he knew it was imprudent in a land where the unjust law of treasure-trove prevails), but he must then and there begin covertly digging under the shadow of the three big willow trees in the bend of the river. He had eyed and measured the bearings so carefully already that he knew the very spot to a nail's-breadth where John Cann's treasure was actually hidden. He set to work digging with a little pick as confidently as if he had already seen the doubloons lying there in the strong box that he knew enclosed them. Four feet deep he dug, as John Cann's instructions told him; and then, true to the inch, his pick struck against a solid oaken box, well secured with clamps of iron. Cecil cleared all the dirt away from the top, carefully, not hurriedly, and tried with all his might to lift the box out, but all in vain. It was far too heavy, of course, for one man's arms to raise: all that weight of gold and silver must be ever so much more than a single pair of hands could possibly manage. He must try to open the lid alone, so as to take the gold out, a bit at a time, and carry it away with him now and again, as he was able, covering the place up carefully in between, for fear of the Treasury and the Lord of the Manor. How abominably unjust it seemed to him at that moment—the legal claim of those two indolent hostile powers! to think that after he, Cecil Mitford, had borne the brunt of the labour in adventurously hunting up the whole trail of John Cann's secret, two idle irresponsible participators should come in at the end, if they could, to profit entirely by *his* ingenuity and *his* exertions!

At last, by a great effort, he forced the rusty lock open, and looked eagerly into the strong oak chest. How his heart beat with slow, deep throbs at that supreme moment, not with suspense, for he *knew* he should find the money, but with the final realisation of a great hope long deferred! Yes, there it lay, in very truth, all before him—great shining coins of old Spanish gold—gold, gold, gold, arranged in long rows, one coin after another, over the whole surface of the broad oak box. He had found it, he had found it, he had really found it! After so much toilsome hunting, after so much vain endeavour, after so many heart-breaking disappointments, John Cann's treasure in very truth lay open there actually before him!

For a few minutes, eager and frightened as he was, Cecil Mitford did not dare even to touch the precious pieces. In the

greatness of his joy, in the fierce rush of his overpowering emotions, he had no time to think of mere base everyday gold and silver. It was the future and the ideal that he beheld, not the piled-up heaps of filthy lucre. Ethel was his, wealth was his, honour was his! He would be a rich man and a great man now and henceforth for ever! Oh, how he hugged himself in his heart on the wise successful fraud by which he had induced Ethel to advance him the few wretched hundreds he needed for his ever-memorable Jamaican journey! How he praised to himself his own courage, and ingenuity, and determination, and inexhaustible patience! How he laughed down that foolish conscience of his that would fain have dissuaded him from his master-stroke of genius. He deserved it all, he deserved it all! Other men would have flinched before the risk and expense of the voyage to Jamaica, would have given up the scent for a fool's errand in the cemetery at Port Royal, would have shrunk from ransacking John Cann's grave at dead of night in the Cathedral precincts at Spanish Town, would have feared to buy the high-priced corner of land at Bovey Tracy on a pure imaginative speculation. But he, Cecil Mitford, had had the boldness and the cleverness to do it every bit, and now, wisdom was justified of all her children. He sat for five minutes in profound meditation on the edge of the little pit he had dug, gloating dreamily over the broad gold pieces, and inwardly admiring his own bravery and foresight and indomitable resolution. What a magnificent man he really was—a worthy successor of those great freebooting, buccaneering, filibustering Devonians of the grand Elizabethan era! To think that the worky-day modern world should ever have tried to doom him, Cecil Mitford, with his splendid enterprise and glorious potentialities, to a hundred and eighty a year and a routine clerkship at the Colonial Office!

After a while, however, mere numerical cupidity began to get the better of this heroic mood, and Cecil Mitford turned somewhat languidly to the vulgar task of counting the rows of doubloons. He counted up the foremost row carefully, and then for the first time perceived, to his intense surprise, that the row behind was not gold, but mere silver Mexican pistoles. He rubbed his eyes and looked again, but the fact was unmistakable; there was only one row of yellow gold in the top layer, and all the rest was merely bright and glittering silver. Strange that John Cann should have put coins of such small value near the top of his box: the rest of the gold must certainly be in successive layers down further. He lifted up the big gold doubloons in the first row, and then, to his blank horror and amazement, came to—not more gold, not more silver, but—but—but—ay, incredible as it seemed, appalling, horrifying—a wooden bottom!

Had John Cann, in his care and anxiety, put a layer of solid oak between each layer of gold and silver? Hardly that, the oak was too thick. In a moment Cecil Mitford had taken out all the coins of the first tier, and laid bare the oaken bottom. A few blows of the pick loosened the earth around, and then, oh horror, oh ghastly disappointment, oh unspeakable heart-sickening revelation, the whole box came out entire. It was only two inches deep altogether, including the cover—it was, in fact, a mere shallow tray or saucer, something like the sort of thin wooden boxes in which sets of dessert-knives or fish-knives are usually sold for wedding presents!

For the space of three seconds Cecil Mitford could not believe his eyes, and then, with a sudden flash of awful vividness, the whole terrible truth flashed at once across his staggering brain. He had found John Cann's treasure indeed—the John Cann's treasure of base actual reality; but the John Cann's treasure of his fervid imagination, the John Cann's treasure he had dreamt of from his boyhood upward, the John Cann's treasure he had risked all to find and to win, did not exist, could not exist, and never had existed at all anywhere! It was all a horrible, incredible, unthinkable delusion! The hideous fictions he had told would every one be now discovered; Ethel would be ruined; Aunt Emily would be ruined; and they would both know him, not only for a fool, a dreamer, and a visionary, but also for a gambler, a thief, and a liar.

In his black despair he jumped down into the shallow hole once more, and began a second time to count slowly over the accursed dollars. The whole miserable sum—the untold wealth of John Cann's treasure—would amount altogether to about two hundred and twenty pounds of modern sterling English money. Cecil Mitford tore his hair as he counted it in impotent self-punishment; two hundred and twenty pounds, and he had expected at least as many thousands! He saw it all in a moment. His wild fancy had mistaken the poor outcast hunted-down pirate for a sort of ideal criminal millionaire; he had erected the ignorant, persecuted John Cann of real life, who fled from the king's justice to a nest of chartered outlaws in Jamaica, into a great successful naval commander, like the Drake or Hawkins of actual history. The whole truth about the wretched solitary old robber burst in upon him now with startling vividness; he saw him hugging his paltry two hundred pounds to his miserly old bosom, crossing the sea with it stealthily from Jamaica, burying it secretly in a hole in the ground at Bovey, quarrelling about it with his peasant relations in England, as the poor will often quarrel about mere trifles of money, and dying at last with the secret of that wretched sum hidden in the snuff-box that he clutched with fierce energy even in his lifeless skeleton fingers. It was all clear, horribly, irretrievably, unmistakably clear to him now; and the John Cann that he had once followed through so many chances and changes had faded away at once into absolute

nothingness, now and for ever!

If Cecil Mitford had known a little less about John Cann's life and exploits, he might still perhaps have buoyed himself up with the vain hope that all the treasure was not yet unearthed—that there were more boxes still buried in the ground, more doubloons still hidden further down in the unexplored bosom of the little three-cornered field. But the words of John Cann's own dying directions were too explicit and clear to admit of any such gloss or false interpretation. 'In a strong oaken chest, bound round with iron, and buried at four feet of depth in the south-western angle of the Home Croft, at Bovey,' said the document, plainly: there was no possibility of making two out of it in any way. Indeed, in that single minute, Cecil Mitford's mind had undergone a total revolution, and he saw the John Cann myth for the first time in his life now in its true colours. The bubble had burst, the halo had vanished, the phantom had faded away, and the miserable squalid miserly reality stood before him with all its vulgar nakedness in their place. The whole panorama of John Cann's life, as he knew it intimately in all its details, passed before his mind's-eye like a vivid picture, no longer in the brilliant hues of boyish romance, but in the dingy sordid tones of sober fact. He had given up all that was worth having in this world for the sake of a poor gipsy pirate's penny-saving hoard.

A weaker man would have swallowed the disappointment or kept the delusion still to his dying day. Cecil Mitford was made of stronger mould. The ideal John Cann's treasure had taken possession of him, body and soul; and now that John Cann's treasure had faded into utter nonentity—a paltry two hundred pounds—the whole solid earth had failed beneath his feet, and nothing was left before him but a mighty blank. A mighty blank. Blank, blank, blank. Cecil Mitford sat there on the edge of the pit, with his legs dangling over into the hollow where John Cann's treasure had never been, gazing blankly out into a blank sky, with staring blank eyeballs that looked straight ahead into infinite space and saw utterly nothing.

How long he sat there no one knows; but late at night, when the people at the Red Lion began to miss their guest, and turned out in a body to hunt for him in the corner field, they found him sitting still on the edge of the pit he had dug for the grave of his own hopes, and gazing still with listless eyes into blank vacancy. A box of loose coin lay idly scattered on the ground beside him. The poor gentleman had been struck crazy, they whispered to one another; and so indeed he had: not raving mad with acute insanity, but blankly, hopelessly, and helplessly imbecile. With the loss of John Cann's treasure the whole universe had faded out for him into abject nihilism. They carried him home to the inn between them on their arms, and put him to bed carefully in the old bedroom, as one might put a new-born baby.

The Lord of the Manor, when he came to hear the whole pitiful story, would have nothing to do with the wretched doubloons; the curse of blood was upon them, he said, and worse than that; so the Treasury, which has no sentiments and no conscience, came in at the end for what little there was of John Cann's unholy treasure.

## VIII

In the County Pauper Lunatic Asylum for Devon there was one quiet impassive patient, who was always pointed out to horror-loving visitors, because he had once been a gentleman, and had a strange romance hanging to him still, even in that dreary refuge of the destitute insane. The lady whom he had loved and robbed—all for her own good—had followed him down from London to Devonshire; and she and her aunt kept a small school, after some struggling fashion, in the town close by, where many kind-hearted squires of the neighbourhood sent their little girls, while they were still very little, for the sake of charity, and for pity of the sad, sad story. One day a week there was a whole holiday—Wednesday it was—for that was visiting-day at the County Asylum; and then Ethel Sutherland, dressed in deep mourning, walked round with her aunt to the gloomy gateway at ten o'clock, and sat as long as she was allowed with the faded image of Cecil Mitford, holding his listless hand clasped hard in her pale white fingers, and looking with sad, eager anxious eyes for any gleam of passing recognition in his. Alas! the gleam never came (perhaps it was better so); Cecil Mitford looked always straight before him at the blank whitewashed walls, and saw nothing, heard nothing, thought of nothing, from week's end to week's end.

Ethel had forgiven him all; what will not a loving woman forgive? Nay, more, had found excuses and palliations for him which quite glossed over his crime and his folly. He must have been losing his reason long before he ever went to Jamaica, she said; for in his right mind he would never have tried to deceive her or himself in the way he had done. Did he not fancy he was sent out by the Colonial Office, when he had really gone without leave or mission? And did he not persuade her to give up her money to him for investment, and after all never invest it? What greater proofs of insanity could you have than those? And then that dreadful fever at Spanish Town, and the shock of losing his kind entertainer,

worn out with nursing him, had quite completed the downfall of his reason. So Ethel Sutherland, in her pure beautiful woman's soul, went on believing, as steadfastly as ever, in the faith and the goodness of that Cecil Mitford that had never been. *His* ideal had faded out before the first touch of disillusioning fact; *hers* persisted still, in spite of all the rudest assaults that the plainest facts could make upon it. Thank Heaven for that wonderful idealising power of a good woman, which enables her to walk unsullied through this sordid world, unknowing and unseeing.

At last one night, one terrible windy night in December, Ethel Sutherland was wakened from her sleep in the quiet little schoolhouse by a fearful glare falling fiercely upon her bedroom window. She jumped up hastily and rushed to the little casement to look out towards the place whence the glare came. One thought alone rose instinctively in her white little mind—Could it be at Cecil's Asylum? Oh, horror, yes; the whole building was in flames, and if Cecil were taken—even poor mad imbecile Cecil—what, what on earth would then be left her?

Huddling on a few things hastily, anyhow, Ethel rushed out wildly into the street, and ran with incredible speed where all the crowd of the town was running together, towards the blazing Asylum. The mob knew her at once, and recognised her sad claim; they made a little lane down the surging mass for her to pass through, till she stood beside the very firemen at the base of the gateway. It was an awful sight—poor mad wretches raving and imploring at the windows, while the firemen plied their hose and brought their escapes to bear as best they were able on one menaced tier after another. But Ethel saw or heard nothing, save in one third-floor window of the right wing, where Cecil Mitford stood, no longer speechless and imbecile, but calling loudly for help, and flinging his eager arms wildly about him. The shock had brought him back his reason, for the moment at least: oh, thank God, thank God, he saw her, he saw her!

With a sudden wild cry Ethel burst from the firemen who tried to hold her back, leaped into the burning building and tore up the blazing stairs, blinded and scorched, but by some miracle not quite suffocated, till she reached the stone landing on the third story. Turning along the well-known corridor, now filled with black wreaths of stifling smoke, she reached at last Cecil's ward, and flung herself madly, wildly into his circling arms. For a moment they both forgot the awful death that girt them round on every side, and Cecil, rising one second superior to himself, cried only, 'Ethel, Ethel, Ethel, I love you; forgive me!' Ethel pressed his hand in hers gently, and answered in an agony of joy, 'There is nothing to forgive, Cecil; I can die happy now, now that I have once more heard you say you love me, you love me.'

Hand in hand they turned back towards the blazing staircase, and reached the window at the end where the firemen were now bringing their escape-ladder to bear on the third story. The men below beckoned them to come near and climb out on to the ladder, but just at that moment something behind seemed incomprehensibly to fascinate and delay Cecil, so that he would not move a step nearer, though Ethel led him on with all her might. She looked back to see what could be the reason, and beheld the floor behind them rent by the flames, and a great gap spreading downward to the treasurer's room. On the tiled floor a few dozen pence and shillings and other coins lay, white with heat, among the glowing rubbish; and the whole mass, glittering like gold in the fierce glare, seemed some fiery cave filled to the brim with fabulous wealth. Cecil's eye was riveted upon the yawning gap, and the corners of his mouth twitched horribly as he gazed with intense interest upon the red cinders and white-hot coin beneath him. Instinctively Ethel felt at once that all was lost, and that the old mania was once more upon him. Claspng her arm tight round his waist, while the firemen below shouted to her to leave him and come down as she valued her life, she made one desperate effort to drag him by main force to the head of the ladder. But Cecil, strong man that he was, threw her weak little arm impetuously away, as he might have thrown a two-year-old baby's, and cried to her in a voice trembling with excitement, 'See, see, Ethel, at last, at last; there it is, there it is in good earnest. JOHN CANN'S TREASURE!'

Ethel seized his arm imploringly once more. 'This way, darling,' she cried, in a voice choked by sobs and half stifled with the smoke. 'This way to the ladder.'

But Cecil broke from her fiercely, with a wild light in his big blue eyes, and shouting aloud, 'The treasure, the treasure!' leaped with awful energy into the very centre of the seething fiery abyss. Ethel fell, fainting with terror and choked by the flames, on to the burning floor of the third story. The firemen, watching from below, declared next day that that crazy madman must have died stifled before he touched the heap of white-hot ruins in the central shell, and the poor lady was insensible or dead with asphyxia full ten minutes before the flames swept past the spot where her lifeless body was lying immovable.

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# XI

## IVAN GREET'S MASTERPIECE

### I

'Twas at supper at Charlie Powell's; every one there admitted Charlie was in splendid form. His audacity broke the record. He romanced away with even more than his usual brilliant recklessness. Truth and fiction blended well in his animated account of his day's adventures. He had lunched that morning with the newly-appointed editor of a high-class journal for the home circle—circulation exceeding half a million,—and had returned all agog with the glorious prospect of untold wealth opening fresh before him. So he discounted his success by inviting a dozen friends to champagne and lobster-salad at his rooms in St. James's, and held forth to them, after his wont, in a rambling monologue.

'When I got to the house,' he said airily, poisoning a champagne-glass halfway up in his hand, 'with the modest expectation of a chop and a pint of porter in the domestic ring—imagine my surprise at finding myself forthwith standing before the gates of an Oriental palace—small, undeniably small, a bijou in its way, but still, without doubt, a veritable palace. I touched the electric bell. Hi, presto! at my touch the door flew open as if by magic, and disclosed—a Circassian slave, in a becoming costume *à la* Liberty in Regent Street, and smiling like the advertisement of a patent dentifrice! I gasped out——'

'But how did ye know she was a Circassian?' Paddy O'Connor inquired, interrupting him brusquely. (His name was really Francis Xavier O'Connor, but they called him 'Paddy' for short, just to mark his Celtic origin.)

Charlie Powell smiled a contemptuously condescending smile. He was then on the boom, as chief literary lion. 'How do I know ye're an Oirishman, Paddy?' he answered, hardly heeding the interruption. 'By her accent, my dear boy; her pure, unadulterated Circassian accent! "Is Mr. Morrison at home?" I gasped out to the Vision of Beauty. The Vision of Beauty smiled and nodded—her English being chiefly confined to smiles, with a Circassian flavour; and led me on by degrees into the great man's presence. I mounted a stair, with a stained-glass window all yellows and browns, very fine and Burne-Jonesey; I passed through a drawing-room in the Stamboul style—couches, rugs, and draperies; and after various corridors—Byzantine, Persian, Moorish—I reached at last a sort of arcaded alcove at the further end, where two men lay reclining on an Eastern divan—one, a fez on his head, pulling hard at a chibouque; the other, bare-headed, burbling smoke through a hookah. The bare-headed one rose: "Mr. Powell," says he, waving his hand to present me, "My friend, Macpherson Pasha!" I bowed, and looked unconcerned. I wanted them to think I'd lived all my life hobnobbing with Pashas. Well, we talked for a while about the weather and the crops, and the murder at Mile End, and the state of Islam; when, presently, of a sudden, Morrison claps his hands—so—and another Circassian slave, still more beautiful, enters.

"Lunch, houri," says Morrison.

"The effendi is served," says the Circassian.

'And down we went to the dining-room. Bombay black-wood, every inch of it, inlaid with ivory. Venetian glass on the table; solid silver on the sideboard. Only us three, if you please, to lunch; but everything as spick and span as if the Prince was of the company. The three Circassian slaves, in Liberty caps, stood behind our chairs—one goddess apiece—and looked after us royally. Chops and porter, indeed! It was a banquet for a poet; Ivan Greet should have been there; he'd have mugged up an ode about it. Clear turtle and Chablis—the very best brand; then smelts and sweetbreads; next lamb and mint sauce; ortolans on toast; ice-pudding; fresh strawberries. A guinea each, strawberries, I give you my word, just now at Covent Garden. Oh, mamma! what a lunch, boys! The Hebes poured champagne from a golden flagon; that is to say, at any rate—for Paddy's eye was upon him—the neck of the bottle was wrapped in gilt tinfoil. And all the time Morrison talked—great guns, how he talked! I never heard anything in my life to equal it. The man's been everywhere, from Peru to Siberia. The man's been everything, from a cowboy to a communard. My hair stood on end with half the things he said to me; and I haven't got hair so easily raised as some people's. Was I prepared to sell my soul for Saxon gold at the magnificent rate of five guineas a column? Was I prepared to jump out of my skin! I choked with delight. Hadn't I sold it all along to the enemies of Wales for a miserable pittance of thirty shillings? What did he want me to do? Why, contribute third leaders—you know the kind of thing—tootles on the penny-trumpet about irrelevant items of non-political news—the wit and humour of the fair, best domestic style, informed throughout with wide general

culture. An allusion to Aristophanes; a passing hint at Rabelais; what Lucian would have said to his friends on this theme; how the row at the School Board would have affected Sam Johnson.

"But you must remember, Mr. Powell," says Morrison, with an unctuous smile, "the greater part of our readers are—well, not to put it too fine—country squires and conservative Dissenters. Your articles mustn't hurt their feelings or prejudices. Go warily, warily! You must stick to the general policy of the paper, and be tenderly respectful to John Wesley's memory."

"Sir," said I, smacking his hand, "for five guineas a column I'd be tenderly respectful to King Ahab himself, if you cared to insist upon it. You may count on my writing whatever rubbish you desire for the nursery mind." And I passed from his dining-room into the enchanted alcove.

'But before I left, my dear Ivan, I'd heard such things as I never heard before, and been promised such pay as seemed to me this morning beyond the dreams of avarice. And oh, what a character! "When I was a slave at Khartoum," the man said; or "When I was a schoolmaster in Texas"; "When I lived as a student up five floors at Heidelberg"; or "When I ran away with Félix Pyat from the Versaillais"; till I began to think 'twas the Wandering Jew himself come to life again in Knightsbridge. At last, after coffee and cigarettes on a Cairo tray—with reminiscences of Paraguay—I emerged on the street, and saw erect before my eyes a great round Colosseum. I seemed somehow to recognise it. "This is *not* Bagdad, then," I said to myself, rubbing my eyes very hard—for I thought I must have been wafted some centuries off, on an enchanted carpet. Then I looked once more. Yes, sure enough, it *was* the Albert Hall. And *there* was the Memorial with its golden image. I rubbed my eyes a second time, and hailed a hansom—for there were hansom about, and policemen, and babies. "Thank Heaven!" I cried aloud; "after all, this *is* London!"

## II

'It's a most regrettable incident!' Ivan Greet said solemnly.

The rest turned and looked. Ivan Greet was their poet. He was tall and thin, with strange, wistful eyes, somewhat furtive in tone, and a keen, sharp face, and lank, long hair that fell loose on his shoulders. It was a point with this hair to be always abnormally damp and moist, with a sort of unnatural and impalpable moisture. The little coterie, of authors and artists to which Ivan belonged regarded him indeed with no small respect, as a great man *manqué*. Nature, they knew, had designed him for an immortal bard; circumstances had turned him into an occasional journalist. But to them, he represented Art for Art's sake. So when Ivan said solemnly, 'It's a most regrettable incident,' every eye in the room turned and stared at him in concert.

'Why so, me dear fellow?' Paddy O'Connor asked, open-eyed. 'I call it magnificent!'

But Ivan Greet answered warmly, 'Because it'll take him still further away than ever from his work in life, which you and I know is science and philosophy.'

'And yer own grand epic?' Paddy suggested, with a smart smile, pouncing down like a hawk upon him.

Ivan Greet coloured—positively coloured—'blushed visibly to the naked eye,' as Paddy observed afterwards, in recounting the incident to his familiar friend at the United Bohemians. But he stood his ground like a man and a poet for all that. 'My own epic isn't written yet—probably never *will* be written,' he answered, after a pause, with quiet firmness. 'I give up to the *Daily Telephone* what was meant for mankind: I acknowledge it freely. Still, I'm sorry when I see any other good man—and most of all Charlie Powell—compelled to lose his own soul the same way I myself have done.' He paused and looked round. 'Boys,' he said, addressing the table, 'in these days, if any man has anything out of the common to say, he must be rich and his own master, or he won't be allowed to say it. If he's poor, he has first to earn his living; and to earn his living he's compelled to do work he doesn't want to do—work that stifles the things which burn and struggle for utterance within him. The editor is the man who rules the situation; and what the editor asks is good paying matter. Good paying matter Charlie can give him, of course: Charlie can give him, thank Heaven, whatever he asks for. But this hack-work will draw him further and further afield from the work in life for which God made him—the philosophical reconstitution of the world and the universe for the twentieth century. And that's why I say—and I say it again—a most regrettable incident!'

Charlie Powell set down his glass of champagne untasted. Ivan Greet was regarded by his narrow little circle of

journalistic associates as something of a prophet; and his words, solemnly uttered, sobered Charlie for a while—recalled him with a bound to his better personality. 'Ivan's right,' he said slowly, nodding his head once or twice. 'He's right, *as usual*. We're all of us wasting on weekly middles the talents God gave us for a higher purpose. We know it, every man Jack of us. But Heaven help us, I say, Ivan: for how can we help ourselves? We live by bread. We must eat bread first, or how can we write epics or philosophies afterwards? This age demands of us the sacrifice of our individualities. It will be better some day, perhaps, when Bellamy and William Morris have remodelled the world: life will be simpler, and bare living easier. For the present I resign myself to inevitable fate. I'll write middles for Morrison, and eat and drink; and I'll wait for my philosophy till I'm rich and bald, and have leisure to write it in my own hired house in Fitzjohn's Avenue.'

Ivan Greet gazed across at him with a serious look in those furtive eyes. 'That's all very well for *you!*' he cried half angrily, in a sudden flaring forth of long-suppressed emotion. 'Philosophy can wait till a man's rich and bald; it gains by waiting; it's the better for maturity. But poetry!—ah, there, I hate to talk about it! Who can begin to set about his divine work when he's turned sixty and worn out by forty years of uncongenial leaders? The thing's preposterous. A poet must write when he's young and passionate, or not at all. He may go on writing in age, of course, as his blood grows cool, if he's kept up the habit, like Wordsworth and Tennyson: he may even let it lie by or rust for a time, like Milton or Goethe, and resume it later, if he throws himself meanwhile, heart and soul, into some other occupation that carries him away with it resistlessly for the moment; but spend half his life in degrading his style and debasing his genius by working for hire at the beck and call of an editor—lose his birthright like that, and then turn at last with the bald head you speak about to pour forth at sixty his frigid lyrics—I tell you, Charlie, the thing's impossible! The poet must work, the poet must acquire his habits of thought and style and expression in the volcanic period; if he waits till he's crusted over and encysted with age, he may hammer out rhetoric, he may string fresh rhymes, but he'll never, never give us one line of real poetry.'

### III

He spoke with fiery zeal. It was seldom Ivan Greet had an outbreak like this. For the most part he acquiesced, like all the rest of us, in the supreme dictatorship of Supply and Demand—those economic gods of the modern book-market. But now and again rebellious fits came over him, and he kicked against the pricks with all the angry impetuosity of a born poet. For the rest of that night he sat moody and silent. Black bile consumed him. Paddy O'Connor rose and sang with his usual verve the last new Irish comic song from the music-halls; Fred Mowbray, from Jamaica, told good stories in negro dialect with his wonted exuberance; Charlie Powell bubbled over with spirits and epigrams. But Ivan Greet sat a little apart, with scarcely a smile on his wistful face; he sat and ruminated. He was angry at heart; the poetic temperament is a temperament of moods; and each mood, once roused, takes possession for the time of a man's whole nature. So Ivan remained angry, with a remorseful anger; he was ashamed of his own life, ashamed of falling short of his own cherished ideals. Yet how could he help himself? Man, as he truly said, must live by bread, though not by bread alone; a sufficiency of food is still a condition-precendent of artistic creation. You can't earn your livelihood nowadays by stringing together rhymes, string you never so deftly; and Ivan had nothing but his pen to earn it with. He had prostituted that pen to write harmless little essays on social subjects in the monthly magazines; his better nature recoiled with horror to-night from the thought of that hateful, that wicked profanation.

'Twas a noisy party. They broke up late. Fred Mowbray walked home along Piccadilly with Ivan. It was one of those dull, wet nights in the streets of London when everything glistens with a dreary reflection from the pallid gas-lamps. Pah! what weather! To Fred, West-Indian born, it was utterly hideous. He talked as they went along of the warmth, the sunshine, the breadth of space, the ease of living, in his native islands. What a contrast between those sloppy pavements, thick with yellow mud, and the sun-smitten hillsides, clad in changeless green, where the happy nigger lay basking and sprawling all day long on his back in the midst of his plantain-patches, while the bountiful sun did the hard work of life for him by ripening his coconuts and mellowing his bananas, unasked and untended!

Ivan Greet drank it in. As Fred spoke, an idea rose up vague and formless in the poet's soul. There were countries, then, where earth was still kindly, and human wants still few; where Nature, as in the Georgics, supplied even now the primary needs of man's life unbidden! Surely, in such a land as that a poet yet might live; tilling his own small plot and eating the fruits of his own slight toil, he might find leisure to mould without let or hindrance the thought that was in him into exquisite melody. The bare fancy fired him. A year or two spent in those delicious climates might enable a man to turn out what was truest and best in him. He might drink of the spring and be fed from the plantain-patch, like those wiser

negroes, but he would carry with him still all the inherited wealth of European culture, and speak like a Greek god under the tropic shade of Jamaican cotton-trees.

To the average ratepayer such a scheme would appear the veriest midsummer madness. But Ivan Greet was a poet. Now, a poet is a man who acts on impulse. And to Ivan the impulse itself was absolutely sacred. He paused on the slippery pavement, and faced his companion suddenly. 'How much land does it take there for a man to live upon?' he asked, with hurried energy.

Fred Mowbray reflected. 'Well, two acres at most, I should say, down in plantain and yam,' he answered, 'would support a family.'

'And you can buy it?' Ivan went on, with surprising eagerness. 'I mean, there's lots to be had—it's always in the market?'

'Lots to be had? Why, yes! No difficulty there! Half Jamaica's for sale, on the mountains especially. The island's under-peopled; our pop's half a million; it'd hold quite three. Land goes for a mere song; you can buy where you will, quite easily.'

Ivan Greet's lip trembled with intense excitement. A vision of freedom floated dimly before him. Palms, tree-ferns, bamboos, waving clumps of tropic foliage; a hillside hut; dusky faces, red handkerchiefs; and leisure, leisure, leisure to do the work he liked in! Oh soul, what a dream! You shall say what you will there! To Ivan that was religion—all the religion he had perhaps; for his was, above all things, an artistic nature.

'How much would it cost, do you think?' he inquired, all tremulous.

And Fred answered airily, 'Well, I fancy not more than a pound or two an acre.'

A pound or two an acre! Just a column in the *Globe*. The gates of Paradise stood open before him!

They walked on a hundred yards or so again in silence. Ivan Greet was turning over in his seething soul a strange scheme to free himself from Egyptian bondage. At last he asked once more, 'How much would it cost me to go out by the steerage, if there is such a thing on the steamers to Jamaica?'

Fred Mowbray paused a moment. 'Well, I should think,' he said at last, pursing his lips to look wise, 'you ought to do it for about a tenner.'

Ivan's mind was made up. Those words decided him. While his mother lived he had felt bound to support her; and the necessity for doing so had 'kept him straight,' his friends said—or, as he himself would have phrased it, had tied him firmly down to unwilling servitude. But now he had nobody on earth save himself to consult, for Ethel had married well, and Stephen, dull lad, was comfortably ensconced in a City office. He went home all on fire with his new idea. That night he hardly slept; coconuts waved their long leaves in the breeze before him; dusky hands beckoned him with strange signs and enticements to come over to a land of sunlight and freedom. But he was practical too; he worked it all out in his head arithmetically. So much coming in from this or that magazine; so much cash in hand; so much *per contra* for petty debts at home; so much for outfit, passage-money, purchase. With two acres of his own he could live like a lord on his yams and plantains. What sort of food-stuff, indeed, your yam might be he hadn't, to say the truth, the very faintest conception. But who cares for such detail? It was freedom he wanted, not the fleshpots of Egypt. And freedom he would have to work out his own nature.

#### IV

There was commotion on the hillside at St. Thomas-in-the-Vale one brilliant blazing noontide a few weeks later. Clemmy burst upon the group that sat lounging on the ground outside the hut-door with most unwonted tidings. 'You hear dem sell dat piece o' land nex' bit to Tammas?' she cried, all agog with excitement; 'you hear dem sell it?'

Old Rachel looked up, yawning. 'What de gal a-talking about?' she answered testily, for old Rachel was toothless. 'Folk all know dat—him hear tell long ago. Sell dem two acre las' week, Peter say, to 'tranger down a' Kingston.'

'Yes, an' de 'tranger come up,' Clemmy burst out, hardly able to contain herself at so astounding an incident, 'an' what you tink him is? Him doan't nagur at all! Him reel buckra gentleman!'

A shrill whistle of surprise and subdued unbelief ran sharply round the little cluster of squatting negroes. 'Him buckra?' Peter Foddergill repeated to himself, half incredulous. Peter was Clemmy's stepfather; for Clemmy was a brown girl, and old Rachel, her mother, was a full-blooded negress. Her paternity was lost in the dim past of the island.

'Yes, him buckra,' Clemmy repeated in a very firm voice. 'Him reel white buckra. Him come up to take de land, an' him gwine to lib dere.'

'It doan't can true!' old Rachel cried, rousing herself. 'It doan't can possible. Buckra gentleman doan't can come an' lib on two-acre plot alongside o' black nagur. Him gwine to sell it again; dat what it is; or else him gwine to gib it to some nagur leady. White buckra doan't can lib all alone in St. Tammas.'

But Clemmy was positive. 'No, no,' she cried, unmoved, shaking her comely brown head, with its crimson bandanna—for she was a pretty girl of her sort was Clemmy. 'Him gwine to lib dere. Him tell me so himself. Him gwine to build hut on it, an' plant it down in plantain. Him berry pretty gentleman, wit' long hair on him shoulder; him hab eyes quick and sharp all same like weasel; and when him smile, him look kinder nor anyting. But him say him come out from England for good becos him lub better to lib in Jamaica; an' him gwine to build him hut here, and lib same like nagur.'

In a moment the little cluster of negro hovels was all a-buzz with conjecture, and hubbub, and wonderment. Only the small black babies were left sprawling in the dust, with the small black pigs, beside their mothers' doors, so that you could hardly tell at a glance which was which, as they basked there; all the rest of the population, men, women, and children, with that trifling exception, made a general stampede with one accord for the plot next to Tammas's. A buckra come to live on the hillside in their midst! A buckra going to build a little hut like their own! A buckra going to cultivate a two-acre plot with yam and plantain! They were aghast with surprise. It was wonderful, wonderful! For Jamaica negroes don't keep abreast of the Movement, and they didn't yet know the ways of our latter-day prophets.

As for Ivan Greet himself, he was fairly surprised in turn, as he stood there in his shirt-sleeves surveying his estate, at this sudden eruption of good-humoured barbarians. How they grinned and chattered! What teeth! what animation! He had bought his two acres with the eye of faith at Kingston from their lawful proprietor, knowing nothing but their place on the plan set before him. That morning he had come over by train to Spanish Town, and tramped through the wondrous defile of the Bog Walk to Linstead, and asked his way thence by devious bridle-paths to his own new property on the hillside at St. Thomas. Conveyancing in Jamaica is but an artless art; having acquired his plot by cash payment on the nail, Ivan was left to his own devices to identify and demarcate it. But Tammas's acre was marked on the map in conspicuous blue, and defined in real life by a most warlike boundary fence of prickly aloes; while a dozen friendly negroes, all amazement at the sight, were ready to assist him at once in finding and measuring off the adjacent piece duly outlined in red on the duplicate plan he had got with his title-deed.

It was a very nice plot, with a very fine view, in a very sweet site, on a very green hillside. But Ivan Greet, though young and strong with the wiry strength of the tall thin Cornishman, was weary and hot after a long morning's tramp under a tropical sun, and somewhat taken aback (as well he might be, indeed) at the strangeness and squalor of his new surroundings. He had pulled off his coat and laid it down upon the ground; and now he sat on it in his shirt-sleeves for airiness and coolness. His heart sank for a moment as he gazed in dismay at the thick and spiky jungle of tropical scrub he would have to stub up before he could begin to plant his first yam or banana. That was a point, to say the truth, which had hardly entered into his calculations beforehand in England. He had figured to himself the pine-apples and plantains as a going concern; the coconuts dropping down their ready-made crops; the bread-fruits eternally ripe at all times and seasons. It was a shock to him to find mother-earth so encumbered with an alien growth; he must tickle her with a hoe ere she smiled with a harvest. Tickle her with a hoe indeed! It was a cutlass he would need to hack down that matted mass of bristling underbrush.

And how was he to live meanwhile? That was now the question. His money was all spent save a couple of pounds, for his estimates had erred, as is the way of estimates, rather on the side of deficiency than of excess; and he was now left half stranded. But his doubts on this subject were quickly dispelled by the unexpected good-nature of his negro neighbours. As soon as those simple folk began to realise, by dint of question and answer, that the buckra meant actually to settle down in their midst, and live his life as they did, their kindness and their offers of help knew no stint or moderation. The novelty of the idea fairly took them by storm. They chuckled and guffawed at it. A buckra from England—a gentleman in dress and accent and manner (for negroes know what's what, and can judge these things as well as you or I can) come of his own free-will to build a hut like their own, and live on the tilth of two acres of plantain! It was splendid! it was wonderful! They entered into the spirit of the thing with true negro zest. 'Hey, massy, dat good now!'

They would have done anything for Ivan—anything, that is to say, that involved no more than the average amount of negro exertion.

As for the buckra himself, thus finding himself suddenly in the midst of new friends, all eager to hear of his plans and intentions, he came out in his best colours under stress of their welcome, and showed himself for what he was—a great-hearted gentleman. Sympathy always begets sympathy. Ivan accepted their proffered services with a kindly smile of recognition and gratitude, which to those good-natured folk seemed most condescending and generous in a real live white man. The news spread like wildfire. A buckra had come who loved the nagur. Before three hours were over every man in the hamlet had formed a high opinion of Mistah Greet's moral qualities. 'Doan't nebber see buckra like a' dis one afore,' old Peter murmured musingly to his cronies on the hillside. 'Him doan't got no pride, 'cep de pride ob a gentleman. Him talk to you and me same as if he tink us buckra like him. Hey, massy, massa, him good man fe' true! Wonder what make him want to come lib at St. Tamma's?'

## V

That very first day, before the green and gold of tropical sunset had faded into the solemn grey of twilight, Ivan Greet had decided on the site of his new hut, and begun to lay the foundations of a rude wooden shanty with the willing aid of his new black associates. Half the men of the community buckled to at the work, and all the women: for the women felt at once a novel glow of sympathy and unspoken compassion towards the unknown white man with the wistful eyes, who had come across the great sea to cast in his lot with theirs under the waving palm-trees. Now, your average negress can do as much hard labour as an English navvy; and as the men found the timber and the posts for the corners without money or price, it came to pass that by evening that day a fair framework for a wattled hut of true African pattern stood already four-square to all the airts of heaven in the middle frontage of Ivan Greet's two acres. But it was roofless, of course, and its walls were still unbuilt: nothing existed so far but the bare square outline. It had yet to receive its wattled sides, and to be covered in on top with a picturesque waterproof thatch of fan-palm. Still, it was a noble hut as huts went on the hillside. Ivan and his fellow-workers stood and gazed at it that evening as they struck work for the day with profound admiration for their own cunning handicraft.

And now came the question where Ivan was to sleep, and what to do for his supper. He had doubts in his own mind how all this could be managed. But Clemmy had none; Clemmy was the only brown girl in the little community, and as such, of course, she claimed and received an acknowledged precedence. 'I shall have to sleep *somewhere*,' Ivan murmured, somewhat ruefully, gazing round him at the little cluster of half-barbarous cottages. 'But how—Heaven help me!'

And Clemmy, nodding her head with a wise little smile, made answer naturally—

'You gwine sleep at me fader, sah; we got berry nice room. You doan't can go an' sleep wit' all dem common nagur dah.'

'I'm not very rich, you know,' Ivan interposed hastily, with something very like a half-conscious blush—though, to be sure, he was red enough already with his unwonted exertion in that sweltering atmosphere. 'I am not very rich, but I've a little still left, and I can afford to pay—well, whatever you think would be proper—for bed and board till I can get my own house up.'

Clemmy waved him aside, morally speaking, with true negro dignity.

'We *invite* you, sah,' she said proudly, like a lady in the land (which she was at St. Thomas). 'When we ax gentleman to stop, we doan't want nuffin paid for him board and lodgin'. We offer you de hospitality of our house an' home till your own house finish. Christen people doan't can do no less dan dat, I hope, for de homeless 'tranger.'

She spoke with such grave politeness, such unconsciousness of the underlying humour of the situation, that Ivan, with his quickly sympathetic poet's heart, raised his hat in return, as he answered with equal gravity, in the tone he might have used to a great lady in England—

'It's awfully kind of you. I appreciate your goodness. I shall accept with pleasure the hospitality you offer me.'

Old Peter grinned delight from ear to ear. It was a feather in his cap thus to entertain in his hut the nobility and gentry. Though, to be sure, 'twas his right, as the acknowledged stepfather of the only undeniable brown girl in the whole community. For a brown girl, mark you, serves, to a certain extent, as a patent of gentility in the household she adorns;

she is a living proof of the fact that the family to which she belongs has been in the habit of mixing with white society.

'You come along in, sah!' old Peter cried cheerily. 'You tired wit' dat work. You doan't accustom' to it. White gentleman from England find de sun berry hot out heah in Jamaica. You take drop 'o rum, sah, or you like coconut water?'

Ivan modestly preferred the less spirituous liquor to the wine of the country; so Clemmy, much flattered, and not a little fluttered, brought out a fresh green coconut, and sliced its top off before his eyes with one slash of the knife, and poured the limpid juice (which came forth clear as crystal, not thick and milky) into a bowl-shaped calabash, which she offered with a graceful bow for their visitor's acceptance. Ivan seated himself on the ground just outside the hut as he saw the negroes do (for the air inside was hot, and close, and stifling), and took with real pleasure his first long pull at that delicious beverage. 'Why, it's glorious!' he exclaimed, with unfeigned enthusiasm (for he was hot and thirsty), turning the empty calabash upside down before his entertainers' eyes, to let them see he fully appreciated their rustic attentions. 'Quite different from the coconuts one gets in London! So fresh, and pure, and cool! It's almost worth coming out to Jamaica to taste it.'

Clemmy smiled her delight. Was ever buckra so affable! Then she brought out a spoon—common pewter, or the like—which she wiped on her short skirt with unaffected simplicity, and handed it to him gravely. After that she gave him the coconut itself, with the soft jelly inside, which Ivan proceeded to scoop out, and eat before her eyes with evident relish. A semicircle of admiring negroes and negresses stood round and looked on—'Hey, massy, massa! him da eat de coconut!'—as though the sight of a white man taking jelly with a spoon were some startling novelty. Now, Ivan was modest, as becomes a poet; but he managed to eat on, as little disconcerted by their attentions as possible; for he saw, if he was to live for some time among these people, how necessary it was from the very beginning to conciliate and please them.

The coconut finished, Clemmy produced boiled yam and a little salt fish; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish, and sat down by Ivan's side to their frugal supper. Being a brown girl, of course she could venture on such a liberty with an invited guest; old Peter and her mother, as two pure-blooded blacks, sat a little apart from their new friend and their daughter, not to seem too presumptuous. And still, as Ivan ate, the admiring chorus ran round the semicircle, 'Hey, massy, but dat fine! hey, massy, but him no proud! My king! you see him eat! You ebber know buckra do de same like a' dat afore?'

That night—his first night in the Jamaican mountains—Ivan slept in old Peter's hut. It was narrow and close, but he opened the wooden window as wide as possible to let in the fresh air, and lay with his head to it; he was young and strong, and had a fancy for roughing it. Next morning, early, he was up with his hosts, and afoot, for his work, while still the Southern sun hung low in the heavens. Fresh plantains and bread-fruit, with a draught from a coconut, made up the bill of fare for his simple breakfast; Ivan thought them not bad, though a trifle unsatisfying. That day, and several days after, he passed on his plot; the men—great hulking blacks—gave him a helping hand by fits and starts at his job, though less eagerly than at first; the women, more faithful to their waif from oversea, worked on with a will at the wattling and thatching. As for Clemmy, she took a personal interest in the building from beginning to end; she regarded it with a vague sort of proprietary pride; she spoke of it as 'de house' in the very phrase we all of us use ourselves about the place we're engaged in building or furnishing.

At last, after a fortnight, the hut was finished. The entire hillside turned out with great joy to celebrate its inauguration. They lighted a bonfire of the brushwood and scrub they had cleared off the little blank platform in front of the door; each man brought his own rum; Ivan spent some five of his hoarded shillings in supplying refreshments for his assembled neighbours. Such a house-warming had never before been known in St. Thomas. Till late that evening little groups sat round the embers and baked yam and sweet potatoes in the hot wood-ashes. It was after midnight when the crowd, well drunken, began to disperse. Then they all went away, one by one—except Clemmy.

Ivan looked at her inquiringly. She hung her head and hesitated.

'You tink buckra gentleman can lib alone in house widout serbant?' she asked, at last, in a very timid tone. 'You doan't want housekeeper? Buckra must hab some one to cook for him an care for him. You no' want me to go. I tink I make good housekeeper.'

'Of course,' Ivan answered, with a gleam of comprehension, 'I never thought about that. Why, just the right thing. How very kind of you! I can't cook for myself. I suppose I must have somebody to manage about boiling the yams and

plantains.'

## VI

So, for eight or ten months, Ivan Greet lived on in his wattled hut on that Jamaican hillside. He was dead to the world, and the world to him; he neither wrote to nor heard from any friend in England. In the local planters' phrase, he simply 'went nigger.' What little luggage he possessed he had left at Spanish Town station while he built his hut; as soon as he was fully installed in his own freehold house, and had got his supplies into working order, he and Clemmy started off for Spanish Town together, and brought it back, with much laughter, turn about, between them. Clemmy bore the big box on her head, whenever her turn came, as she was accustomed to carry a pail of water. It contained the small wardrobe he brought out from England, and, more important still, the pen, ink, and paper with which he was to write—his immortal masterpiece.

Not that Ivan was in any hurry to begin his great task. Freedom and leisure were the keynotes of the situation. He would only set to work when the impulse came upon him. And just at first neither freedom nor leisure nor impulse was his. He had his ground to prepare, his yams and bananas to plant, his daily bread, or daily bread-fruit, to procure, quite as truly as in England. Though, to be sure, Clemmy's friends were most generous of their store, with that unconscious communism of all primitive societies. They offered what they had, and offered it freely. And Ivan, being a poet, accepted their gifts more frankly by far than most others could have done: he would repay them all, he said, with a grateful glance in those furtive eyes of his, when his crop was ready. The negroes in turn liked him all the better for that; they were proud to be able to lend or give to the buckra from England. It raised them no little in their own esteem to find the white man so willing to chum with them.

Five or six weeks passed away after Ivan had taken possession of his hut before he attempted to turn his hand to any literary work. Meanwhile, he was busily occupied in stubbing and planting, with occasional help from his negro allies, and the constant aid of those ever-faithful negresses. Even after he had settled down to a quiet life under his own vine and fig-tree, some time went past before the spirit moved him to undertake composition. To say the truth, this *dolce far niente* world exactly suited him. Poets are lazy by nature—or, shall we put it, contemplative? When Ivan in England first dreamt of this strange scheme, he looked forward to it as a noble stroke for faith and freedom, a sacrifice of his own personal worldly comfort to the work in life that was set before him. And so, indeed, it was, from the point of view of the fleshpots of Egypt. But fleshpots, after all, don't fill so large a place in human existence as civilisation fancies. When he found himself at last at ease on his hillside, he was surprised to discover how delightful, how poetical, how elevated is savagery. He sat all day long on the ground under the plantains, in shirt and trousers, with Clemmy by his side, or took a turn for exercise now and again in the cool of the evening through his sprouting yam plot. Palm-leaves whispered in the wind, mangoes glowed on the branches, pomegranates cracked and reddened, humming-birds darted swift in invisible flight from flower to flower of the crimson hibiscus. What need to hurry in such a land as this, where all the world at once eats its lotus in harmony?

After a while, however, inspiration came upon him. It came unsought. It hunted him up and constrained him. He brought forth pen and paper to the door of the hut, and, sitting there in the broad shade (Clemmy still at his side), began from time to time to jot down a sentence, a thought, a phrase, a single word, exactly as they came to him. He didn't work hard. To work hard, indeed, or, in other words, to spur his Pegasus beyond its natural pace, was to Ivan nothing short of sheer worldly infidelity. Literature is the realisation of one's inmost personality in external form. He wanted freedom for that very purpose—that he might write the thing he would in the way that occurred to him. But slowly, none the less, a delicate picture grew up by degrees on the canvas before him. It wasn't a poem: the Muse didn't move him just so to verse, and he would be true to the core to her. It was a little romance, a vignette of tropical life, a *Paul et Virginie* picture of the folk he saw then and there on the hillside. And, indeed, the subject exactly suited him. A Bohemian in the grain, the easy, Bohemian life of these children of nature in their wattled huts appealed to him vividly. For a month or so now he had lived in their midst as one of themselves; he had caught their very tone: he had learned to understand them, to know them, to sympathise with them. 'I'll tell you what it is, sir,' a dissipated young planter had said to him at Kingston during the few days he spent there, 'people may say what they like about this blessed island; but what I say's this, it's a jolly good place to live in, all the same, where rum is cheap and morals is lax!' Not so did the poet's eye envisage that black Arcadia.

To Ivan it was an Eden of the Caribbean Seas; he loved it for its simplicity, its naturalness, its utter absence of guile or

wile or self-consciousness. 'Twas a land indeed where the Queen's writ ran not; where the moral law bore but feeble sway; where men and women, as free as the wind, lived and loved in their own capricious, ancestral fashion. Its ethics were certainly not the ethics of that hateful Mayfair from which he had fled in search of freedom. But life was real, if life was not earnest; no sham was there, no veiled code of pretence; what all the world did all the world frankly and openly acknowledged. Censors and censoriousness were alike unknown. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes, and no man hindered him. In such an environment what space for idylls! Never, since Theocritus, had poet's eye beheld anything like it. In the midst of this *naïf* world he so thoroughly understood and so deeply appreciated Ivan Greet couldn't help but burst into song, or at least into romance of Arcadian pattern. Day by day he sat at the door of his hut, or strolled through the hamlet, with a nod and a smile for black Rose or black Robert, noting as he went their little words and ways, jotting mentally down on the tablets of his brain each striking phrase or tone or native pose or incident. So his idyll took shape of itself, he hardly knew how. It was he that held the pen; it was Nature herself that dictated the plot, the dialogue, the episodes.

In the evenings, whenever the fancy seized him, he would sit and read aloud what he had written during the day to his companion Clemmy. There, in the balmy glow of tropical dusk, with the sunset lighting up in pink or purple the page as he read it, and the breeze rustling soft through the golden leaves of the star-apple, that simple tale of a simple life was uttered and heard in its native world, to the fullest advantage. But Clemmy! As for Clemmy, she sat entranced; was there ever so grand a man on earth as Ivan? Never before had that brown girl known there was anything other in the way of books than the Bible, the hymn-book, and the A B C in which she learned to read at the negro village-school down yonder at Linstead. And now, Ivan's tale awoke a new interest, a fresh delight within her. She understood it all the better in that it was a truthful tale of her own land and her own people. Time, place, surroundings, all were wholly familiar to her. It made her laugh a low laugh of surprise and pleasure to see how Ivan hit off with one striking phrase, one deft touch, one neat epithet, the people and things she had known and mixed with from her earliest childhood. In a word, it was Clemmy's first glimpse into literature. Now, Clemmy was a brown girl, and clever at that. European blood of no mean strain flowed in her veins—the blood of an able English naval family. Till Ivan came, indeed, she had lived the life and thought the thoughts of the people around her. But her new companion wakened higher chords, unsuspected by herself, in her inner nature. She revelled in his idyll. Oh, how sweet they were, those evenings on the hillside, when Ivan took her into his confidence, as it were, and poured forth into her ear that dainty tale that would have fallen so flat on the dull ears of her companions! For Clemmy knew now she was better than the rest. She had always prided herself, of course, like every brown girl, on her ennobling mixture of European blood; though she never knew quite why. This book revealed it to her. She realised now how inheritance had given her something that was wanting to the black girls, her playmates, in the village. She and Ivan were one in one-half their natures.

## VII

Ten months passed away. Working by fits and starts, as the mood came upon him, Ivan Greet completed and repolished his masterpiece. It was but a little thing, yet he knew it was a masterpiece. Every word and line in it pleased and satisfied him. And when *he* was satisfied, he knew he had reckoned with his hardest critic. He had only to send it home to England now, and get it published. For the rest, he cared little. Let men read it or not, let them praise or blame, he had done a piece of work at last that was worthy of him.

And Clemmy admired it more than words could fathom. Though she spoke her own uncouth dialect only, she could understand and appreciate all that Ivan had written—for Ivan had written it. Those ten months of daily intercourse with her poet in all moods had been to Clemmy a liberal education. Even her English improved, though that was a small matter; but her point of view widened and expanded unspeakably. It was the first time she had ever been brought into contact with a higher nature. And Ivan was so kind, so generous, so sympathetic. In one word, he treated her as he would treat a lady. Accustomed as she was only to the coarsely good-natured blacks of her hamlet, Clemmy found an English gentleman a wonderfully lovable and delightful companion. She knew, of course, he didn't *love* her—that would be asking too much; but he was tender and gentle to her, as his poet's heart would have made him be to any other woman under like conditions. Sometimes the girls in the village would ask her in confidence, 'You tink him lub you, Clemmy? You tink de buckra lub you?'

And Clemmy, looking coy, and holding her head on one side, would answer, in the peculiar Jamaican sing-song, 'Him mind on him book. Him doan't tink ob dem ting. Him mind too full. Him doan't tink to lub me.'

But Clemmy loved *him*—deeply, devotedly. When a woman of the lower races loves a man of the higher, she clings to him with the fidelity of a dog to its master. Clemmy would have died for Ivan Greet; her whole life was now bound up in her Englishman. His masterpiece was to her something even more divine than to Ivan himself; she knew by heart whole pages and passages of it.

In this delicious idyllic dream—a dream of young love satisfied (for Clemmy didn't ask such impossibilities from fate as that Ivan should love her as she loved him)—those happy months sped away all too fast, till Ivan's work was finished. On the morning of the day before he meant to take it in to the post at Spanish Town, and send it off, registered, to his friends in England, he walked out carelessly barefooted—so negro-like had he become—among the deep dew on the grass in front of his shanty. Clemmy caught sight of him from the door, and shook her head gravely.

'If you was my pickney, Ivan,' she said, with true African freedom, 'I tell you what I do: I smack you for dat. You gwine to take de fever!'

Ivan laughed, and waved his hand.

'Oh, no fear,' he cried lightly. 'I'm a Jamaican born by now. I've taken to the life as a duck takes to the water. Besides, it's quite warm, Clemmy. This dew won't hurt me.'

Clemmy thought no more of it at the time, though she went in at once, and brought out his shoes and socks, and made him put them on with much womanly chiding. But that night, after supper, when she took his hand in hers, as was her wont of an evening, she drew back in surprise.

'Why, Ivan,' she cried, all cold with terror, 'your hand too hot! You done got de fever!'

'Well, I don't feel quite the thing,' Ivan admitted grudgingly. 'I've chills down my back and throbbing pain in my head. I think I'll turn in and try some quinine, Clemmy.'

Clemmy's heart sank at once. She put him to bed on the rough sack in the hut that served for a mattress, and sent Peter post haste down to Linstead for the doctor. It was hours before he came; he was dining with a friend at a 'penn' on the mountains; he wouldn't hurry himself for the 'white trash' who had 'gone nigger' on the hillside. Meanwhile Clemmy sat watching, all inward horror, by Ivan's bedside. Long before the doctor arrived her Englishman was delirious. Tropical diseases run their course with appalling rapidity. By the time the doctor came he looked at the patient with a careless eye. All the world round about had heard of the white man who 'lived with the niggers,' and despised him accordingly.

'Yellow fever,' he said calmly, in a very cold voice. 'He can't be moved, and he can't be nursed here. A pretty piggery this for a white man to die in!'

Clemmy clasped her hands hard.

'To die in!' she echoed aloud. 'To die in! To die in!'

'Well, he's not likely to *live*, is he?' the doctor answered, with a sharp little laugh. 'But we'll do what we can. He must be nursed day and night, and kept cool and well-aired, and have arrowroot and brandy every half-hour, awake or asleep—a couple of teaspoonfuls. I suppose you can get some other girl to help you sit up with him?'

To help her sit up with him! Clemmy shuddered at the thought. She would have sat up with him herself every night for a century. What was sleep or rest to her when Ivan was in danger! For the next three days she never moved from his side except to make fresh arrowroot by the fire outside the hut, or to bring back a calabash of clear water from the rivulet. But how could nursing avail? The white man's constitution was already broken down by the hardships and bad food, nay, even by the very idleness of the past ten months; and that hut was, indeed, no fit place to tend him in. The disease ran its course with all its fatal swiftness. From the very first night Ivan never for a moment recovered consciousness. On the second he was worse. On the third, with the suddenness of that treacherous climate, a tropical thunderstorm burst over them unawares. It chilled the air fast. Before it had rained itself out with peal upon peal and flash upon flash, in quick succession, Ivan Greet had turned on his side and died, and Clemmy sat alone in the hut with a corpse, and her unborn baby.

For a week or two the world was a blank to Clemmy. She knew only one thing—that Ivan had left her two sacred legacies. To print his book, to bring up his child—those were now the tasks in life set before her. From the very first moment she regarded the manuscript of his masterpiece with the profoundest reverence. Even before six stalwart negroes in their Sunday clothes came to bury her dead poet on the slope of the hillside under a murmuring clump of feathery bamboos, she had taken out that precious bundle of papers from Ivan's box in the corner, which served as sofa in the bare little shanty, and had wrapped it up tenderly in his big silk handkerchief, and replaced it with care, and locked up the box again, and put the key, tied by a string, round her neck on her own brown bosom. And when Ivan was gone for ever, and her tears were dry enough, she went to that box every night and morning, and unrolled the handkerchief reverently, and took out the unprinted book, and read it here and there—with pride and joy and sorrow—and folded it up again and replaced it in its ark till another evening. She knew nothing of books—till this one; it had never even struck her they were the outcome of human brains and hands: but she knew it was her business in life now to publish it. Ivan Greet was gone, and, but for those two legacies he left behind him, she would have wished to die—she would have died, as negroes can, by merely wishing it. But now she couldn't. She must live for his child; she must live for his idyll. It was a duty laid upon her. She knew not how—but somehow, some time, she must get that book printed.

Six weeks later, her baby was born. As it lay on her lap, a dear, little, soft, round, creamy-brown girl—hardly brown at all, indeed, but a delicate quadroon, with deep chestnut hair and European features—she loved it in her heart for its father's sake chiefly. It was Ivan's child, made in Ivan's likeness. They christened it Vanna; 'twas the nearest feminine form she could devise to Ivan. But even the baby—her baby, his baby—seemed hardly more alive to Clemmy herself than the manuscript that lay wrapped with scented herbs and leaves in the box in the corner. For that was all Ivan's, and it spoke to her still with his authentic voice—his own very words, his tone, his utterance. Many a time she took it out, as baby lay asleep, with tender eyelids closed, on the bed where Ivan had died (for sanitary science and knowledge of the germ theory haven't spread much as yet to St. Thomas-in-the-Vale) and read it aloud in her own sing-song way, and laughed and cried over it, and thought to herself, time and again, '*He* wrote all that! How wonderful! How beautiful!'

As soon as ever she was well enough, after baby came, Clemmy took that sacred manuscript, reverently folded still in its soft silk handkerchief, among its fragrant herbs, and with baby at her breast, trudged by herself along the dusty road, some twenty-five miles, all the way into Kingston. It was a long, hot walk, and she was weak and ill; but Ivan's book must be printed, let it cost her what it might; she would work herself to death, but she must manage to print it. She knew nothing of his family, his friends in England; she knew nothing of publishing, or of the utter futility of getting the type set at a Kingston printing-office; she only knew this—that Ivan wrote that book, and that, before he died, he meant to get it printed. After a weary trudge, buoyed only by vague hopes of fulfilling Ivan's last wish, she reached the baking streets of the grim white city. To her that squalid seaport seemed a very big and bustling town. Wandering there by herself, alone and afraid, down its unwonted thoroughfares, full of black men and white, all hurrying on their own errands, and all equally strange to her, she came at last to Henderson's, the printer's. With a very timid air, she mustered up courage to enter the shop, and unfolded with trembling fingers her sacred burden. The printer stared hard at her. 'Not your own, I suppose?' he said, turning it over with a curious eye, like any common manuscript, and evidently amused at the bare idea of a book by an up-country brown girl.

And Clemmy, half aghast that any man should touch that holy relic so lightly, made answer very low, 'No, not me own. Me fren's. Him dead, and I want to know how much you ax to print him.'

The man ran his eye through it, and calculated roughly. 'On paper like this,' he said, after jotting down a few figures, 'five hundred copies would stand you in something like five-and-thirty pounds, exclusive of binding.'

Five-and-thirty pounds! Clemmy drew a long breath. It was appalling, impossible. 'You haven't got so much about you, I suppose!' the printer went on, with a laugh. Clemmy's eyes filled with tears. Five-and-thirty pounds! And a brown girl! Was it likely?

'I doan't want it print jes' yet,' she answered, with an effort, hardly keeping back her tears. 'I only come to ax—walk in all de way from St. Tammis-in-de-Vale, so make me tired. Bime-by, p'raps, I print him—when I done got de money. I doan't got it jes' yet—but I'm gwine home to get it.'

And home she went, heavy-hearted; home she went to get it. Five-and-thirty pounds, but she meant to earn it. Tramp, tramp, tramp, she trudged along to St. Thomas. Between the pestilential lagoons on the road to Spanish Town she thought it all out. Before she reached the outskirts, with her baby at her breast, she had already matured her plan of campaign for the future. Come what might, she must make enough money to print Ivan Greet's masterpiece. She was only a brown girl,

but she was still in possession of the two-acre plot; and possession is always nine points of the law, in Jamaica as in England. Indeed, with her simple West Indian notions of proprietorship and inheritance, Clemmy never doubted for a moment they were really her own, as much as if she were Ivan's lawful widow. Nobody had yet come to disturb or evict her; nobody had the right, in Jamaica at least: for Ivan Greet's heirs, executors, and assigns slumbered at peace, five thousand miles away, oversea in England. So, as Clemmy tramped on, along the dusty high-road, and between the malarious swamps, and through the grey streets of dismantled Spanish Town, and up the grateful coolness of the Rio Cobre ravine to her home in St. Thomas, she said to herself and to his baby at her breast a thousand times over how she would toil and moil, and save and scrape, and earn money to print his last work at last as he meant it to be printed.

## IX

And she worked with a will. She didn't know it was a heroic resolve on her part; she only knew she had got to do it. She planted yam and coffee and tobacco. Coffee and tobacco need higher cultivation than the more thrifless class of negroes usually care to bestow upon them; but Clemmy was a brown girl, and she worked as became the descendant of so many strenuous white ancestors. She could live herself on the yams and bread-fruit; when her crop was ripe she could sell the bananas and coffee and tobacco, and hoard up the money she got in a belt round her waist, for she never could trust all that precious coin away from her own person.

From the day of her return, she worked hard with a will; and on market-days she trudged down with her basket on her head and her baby in her arms to sell her surplus produce in Linstead market. Every quattie she earned she tied up tight in the girdle round her waist. When the quatties reached eight she exchanged them for a shilling—one shilling more towards the thirty-five pounds it would cost her to print Ivan Greet's last idyll! The people in St. Thomas were kind to Clemmy. 'Him doan't nebber get ober de buckra deat', they said. 'Him take it berry to heart. Him lub him fe' true, dat gal wit' de buckra!' So they helped her still, as they had helped Ivan in his lifetime. Many a one gave her an hour's work at her plot when the drought threatened badly, or aided her to get in her yams and sweet potatoes before the rainy season.

Clemmy was an Old Connexion Baptist. They all belonged to the Old Connexion in the Linstead district. Your negro is strong on doctrinal theology, and he likes the practical sense of sins visibly washed away by total immersion. It gives him a comfortable feeling of efficient regeneration which no mere infant sprinkling could possibly emulate. One morning, on the hillside, as Clemmy stood in her plot by a graceful clump of waving bamboos, hacking down with her cutlass the weeds that encumbered her precious coffee-bushes—the bushes that were to print Ivan Greet's last manuscript—of a sudden the minister rode by on his mountain pony—sleek, smooth-faced, oleaginous, the very picture and embodiment of the well-fed, negro-paid, up-country missionary. He halted on the path—a mere ledge of bridle-track—as he passed where she stood bending down at her labour.

'Hey, Clemmy,' the minister cried in his half-negro tone—for, though an Englishman born, he had lived among his flock on the mountains so long that he had caught at last its very voice and accent—'they tell me this good-for-nothing white man's dead who lived in the hut here. Perhaps it was better so! Instead of trying to raise and improve your people, he had sunk himself to their lowest level. So you've got his hut now! And what are you doing, child, with the coffee and tobacco?'

Clemmy's face burned hot; this was sheer desecration! The flush almost showed through her dusky brown skin, so intense was her indignant wrath at hearing her dead Ivan described by that sleek fat creature as a 'good-for-nothing white man.' But she answered back bravely, 'Him good friend to me fe' true, sah. I doan't know nuffin 'bout what make him came heah, but I nebber see buckra treat nagur anywhere same way like he treat dem. An' I lubbed him true. And I growin' dem crop dah to prin' de book him gone left behind him.'

The minister reflected. This was sheer contumacy. 'But the land's not yours,' he said testily. 'It belongs to the man's relations—his heirs or his creditors. Unless of course,' he added, after a pause, just to make things sure, 'he left it by will to you.'

'No, sah, him doant make no will,' Clemmy answered, trembling, 'an' him doan't leave it to anybody. But I lib on de land while Ivan lib, an' I doan't gwine to quit it for no one on eart' now him dead and buried.'

'You were his housekeeper, I think,' the minister went on, musing.

And Clemmy, adopting that usual euphemism of the country where such relations are habitual, made answer, hanging her

head, 'Yes, sah, I was him housekeeper.'

'What was his name?' the minister asked, taking out a small notebook.

'Dem call him Ivan Greet,' Clemmy answered incautiously.

'Ivan Greet,' the minister repeated, stroking his smooth double chin and reflecting inwardly. 'Ivan Greet! Ivan Greet! No doubt a Russian!... Well, Clemmy, you must remember, this land's not yours; and if only we can find out where Ivan Greet belonged, and write to his relations—which is, of course, our plain duty—you'll have to give it up and go back to your father.' He shook his pony's reins. 'Get up, Duchess!' he cried calmly. 'Good morning, Clemmy; good morning.'

'Marnin', sah,' Clemmy answered, with a vague foreboding, her heart standing still with chilly fear within her.

But, as soon as the minister's ample back was turned, she laid down her cutlass, took up little Vanna from the ground beside her, pressed the child to her breast, and rushed with passionate tears to the box in the hut that contained, in many folds, *his* precious manuscript. She took the key from her neck, and unlocked it eagerly. Then she brought forth the handkerchief, unwound it with care, and stared hard through her tears at that sacred title-page. His relations indeed! Who was nearer him than herself? Who had ever so much right to till that plot of land as she who was the guardian of his two dying legacies? She would use it to feed his child, and to print his last book. She could kill his own folk if they came there to take it from her!

## X

For weeks and weeks after that, Clemmy worked on in fear and trembling. Would Ivan's friends come out to claim that precious plot from her—the plot that was to publish his immortal masterpiece? For she knew it was immortal; had not Ivan himself, while he read it, explained so much to her? But slowly she plucked up heart, as week after week passed away undisturbed, and no interloper come to destroy her happiness. She began to believe the minister had said rather more than he meant; he never had written at all to Ivan's folk in England. Month after month slipped away; and the mango season came, and the tobacco leaves were picked in good condition and sold, and the coffee-berries ripened. Negro friends passed her hut, nodding kindly salute. 'You makin' plenty money, Clemmy? You sell de leaf dear? Hey, but de pickney look well? Him farder proud now if him can see de pickney.'

At last the rainy season was over, and the rivers were full. Mosquito larvæ swarmed and wriggled by thousands in the shallow lagoons; and when they got their wings, the sea-breeze drove them up in countless numbers to the deep basin of St. Thomas, a lake-like expanse in the central range ringed round by a continuous amphitheatre of very high mountains. They were a terrible plague, those mosquitoes; they drove poor little Vanna half wild with pain and terror. A dozen times in the night the tender little creature woke crying from their bites. Clemmy stretched a veil over her face, but that made little difference. Those wretched mosquitoes bit right through the veil. Clemmy didn't know where to turn to protect her baby.

'Him buckra baby; dat what de matter,' old Rachel suggested gravely. 'Nagur baby doan't feel de 'skeeter bite same like o' buckra. Nagur folk and 'skeeter belong all o' same country. But buckra doan't hab no 'skeeter in England. Missy Queen doan't 'low dem. Now dis 'ere chile buckra—tree part buckra an' one part nagur. Dat what for make him so much feel de 'skeeter.'

'But what can I do for 'top him, marra?' Clemmy inquired despondently.

'It only one way,' old Rachel answered, with a very sage face, 'burn smudge before de door. Dat drive away 'skeeter.'

Now a smudge is a fresh-cut turf of aromatic peaty marsh vegetation; you light it before the hut, where it smoulders slowly during the day and evening, and the smoke keeps the mosquitoes from entering the place while the door stands open. Clemmy tried the smudge next day, and found it most efficacious. For two or three nights little Vanna slept peacefully. Old Rachel nodded her head.

'Keep him burning,' she advised, 'till de water dry up, an' de worm, dem kill, and it doan't no more 'skeeter.'

Clemmy followed her mother's advice to the letter in this matter. Each morning when she went out to work on her plot, with little Vanna laid tenderly in her one shawl on the ground close by, she lighted the smudge and kept it smouldering

all day, renewing it now and again as it burnt out through the evening. On Thursday, as was her wont, she went down with her goods to Linstead to market. On her head she carried her basket of 'bread-kind'—that is to say, yam, and the other farinaceous roots or fruits which are to the negro what wheaten bread is to the European peasant. She walked along erect, with the free, swinging gait peculiar to her countrywomen, untrammelled by stays and the other abominations of civilised costume; little Vanna on her arm crowed and gurgled merrily. 'Twas a broiling hot day, but Clemmy's heart was lighter. Was there ever such a treasure as that fair little Vanna, whitest of quadroons?—and she was saving up fast for the second of those thirty-five precious pounds towards printing Ivan's manuscript!

In the market-place at Linstead she sat all day among the chattering negresses, who chaffered for quatties, with white teeth displayed, or higgled over the price of bread-fruit and plantain. 'Tis a pretty scene, one of these tropical markets, with its short-kirtled black girls, bare-legged and barefooted, in their bright cotton gowns and their crimson bandannas. Before them stand baskets of golden mangoes and purple star-apples; oranges lie piled in little pyramids on the ground; green shaddocks and great slices of pink-fleshed water-melon tempt the thirsty passer-by with their juicy lusciousness. Over all rises the constant din of shrill African voices; 'tis a perfect saturnalia of hubbub and noise, instinct with bright colour and alive with merry faces.

So Clemmy sat there all day, enjoying herself after her fashion, in this weekly gathering of all the society known to her. For the market-place is the popular negro substitute for the At Homes and Assembly Rooms of more civilised communities. Vanna crowed with delight to see the little black babies in their mother's arms, and the pretty red tomatoes scattered around loose among the gleaming oranges. It was late when Clemmy rose to go home to her hamlet. She trudged along, gaily enough, with her laughing companions; more than a year had passed now since Ivan's death, and at times, in the joy of more money earned for him, she could half forget her great grief for Ivan. The sun was setting as she reached her own plot. For a moment her heart came up into her mouth. Then she started with a cry. She gazed before her in blank horror. The hut had disappeared! In its place stood a mass of still smouldering ashes.

In one second she understood the full magnitude of her loss, and how it had all happened. With a woman's quickness she pictured it to herself by pure instinct. The smudge had set fire to the clumps of dry grass by the door of the hut; the grass had lighted up the thin wattle and palm thatch; and once set afire, on that sweltering day, her home had burnt down to the ground like tinder.

Two or three big negroes stood gazing in blank silence at the little heap of ruins—or rather of ash, for all was now consumed to a fine white powder. Clemmy rushed at them headlong with a wild cry of suspense. 'You save de box?' she faltered out in her agony. 'You save de box? You here when it burning?'

'Nobody doan't see till him all in a blaze,' one young negro replied in a surly voice, as negroes use in a moment of disaster; 'an' den, when we see, we doan't able to do nuffin.'

Clemmy laid down her child. 'De box, de box!' she cried in a frenzied voice, digging down with tremulous hands into the smoking ashes. The square form of the hut was still rudely preserved by the pile of white powder, and she knew in a moment in which corner to look for it. But she dug like a mad creature. Soon all was uncovered. The calcined remains of Ivan's clothes were there, and a few charred fragments of what seemed like paper. And that was all. The precious manuscript itself was utterly destroyed. Ivan Greet's one Masterpiece was lost for ever.

## XI

Clemmy crouched on the ground with her arms round her knees. She sat there cowering. She was too appalled for tears; her eyes were dry, but her heart was breaking.

For a minute or two she crouched motionless in deathly silence. Even the negroes held their peace. Instinctively they divined the full depth of her misery.

After a while she rose again, and took Vanna on her lap. The child cried for food, and Clemmy opened her bosom. Then she sat there long beside the ruins of her hut. Negresses crowded round and tried in vain to comfort her. How could they understand her loss? They didn't know what it meant: for in that moment of anguish Clemmy felt herself a white woman. They spoke to her of the hut. The hut! What to her were ten thousand palaces! If you had given her the King's House at Spanish Town that night it would have been all the same. Not the roof over her head, but Ivan Greet's manuscript.

She rocked herself up and down as she cowered on the ground, and moaned inarticulately. The rocking and moaning lulled Vanna to sleep. His child was now all she had left to live for. For hours she crouched on the bare ground, never uttering a word: the negresses sat round, and watched her intently. Now and again old Rachel begged her to come home to her stepfather's hut; but Clemmy couldn't stir a step from those sacred ashes. It grew dark and chilly, for Ivan Greet's plot stood high on the mountain. One by one the negresses dropped off to their huts; Clemmy sat there still, with her naked feet buried deep in the hot ash, and Ivan Greet's baby clasped close to her bosom.

At last with tropical unexpectedness, a great flash of lightning blazed forth, all at once, and showed the wide basin and the mountains round as distinct as daylight. Instantly and simultaneously a terrible clap of thunder bellowed aloud in their ears. Then the rain-cloud burst. It came down in a single sheet with equatorial violence.

Old Rachel and the few remaining negresses fled home. They seized Clemmy's arm, and tried to drag her; but Clemmy sat dogged, and refused to accompany them. Then they started and left her. All night long the storm raged, and the thunder roared awesomely. Great flashes lighted up swaying stems of coconuts and bent clumps of bamboo; huge palms snapped short like reeds before the wind; loud peals rent the sky with their ceaseless artillery. And all night long, in spite of storm and wind, the rain pelted down in one unending flood, as though it poured by great leaks from some heavenly reservoir.

Torrents tore down the hills; many huts were swept away; streams roared and raved; devastation marked their track; 'twas a carnival of ruin, a memorable hurricane. Hail rattled at times; all was black as pitch, save when the lightning showed everything more vivid than daylight. But Clemmy sat on, hot at heart with her agony.

When morning dawned, the terrified negroes, creeping forth from their shanties, found her still on her plot, crouching close over *his* child, but stiff and stark and cold and lifeless. Her bare feet had dug deep in the ashes of Ivan's hut, now washed by the rain to a sodden remnant. Little Vanna just breathed in her dead mother's arms. Old Rachel took her.

And that's why the world has never heard more of Ivan Greet's Masterpiece.

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## XII

### THE CHURCHWARDEN'S BROTHER

When I was curate at Redleigh, before my cousin presented me to the very comfortable vicarage where I am now installed—only four hundred souls, and no dissenters!—I lodged for a while in the house of a most respectable country grocer of the name of Vernon. He was an excellent person, this Edward Vernon, a staunch pillar of the Church, ample of girth, like a Norman column, and a prosperous man of business. Providence had favoured him. He owned a considerable amount of house-property in the Redleigh neighbourhood, after the fashion of the well-to-do rural tradesman; for I have noticed on my way through the world in England that the smaller capitalist never cares to invest in anything on earth save the tangible and the visible. He'd rather get his two per cent sure out of cottages in his own parish than five or six out of unknown and uncertain colonial ventures. Australia is a name to him: the Argentine a phantom. But a cottage is a reality. He believes in house-property, and he pins his faith on it. 'As safe as houses,' is to him no mere phrase, but the simple statement of a fundamental principle.

Vernon was one of our churchwardens, and a most estimable man. His clean-shaven face invited moral confidence. Though he was close, very close, in his personal expenditure, and I'm afraid a hard landlord to his poorer tenants, he always subscribed liberally to all church undertakings, and took care to keep on excellent terms with our worthy vicar. (I call poor old Wilkins 'worthy' because I think that achromatic conventional epithet exactly suits my late ecclesiastical superior's character: he was one of those negatively good and colourless men for whose special behoof that amiable non-committing adjective must have been expressly invented by the wisdom of our ancestors.) People even wondered at times that Vernon, who had a substantial private house of his own, apart from his business, should care to receive a lodger into the bosom of his family; and indeed, I must admit, he never let his rooms to any one save the passing curate of the moment. Ill-natured critics used to say he did it on purpose 'to keep in with the parsons'; and, to say the truth, a becoming respect for the persons of the clergy was a marked peculiarity in Vernon's well-balanced mind. I always considered him in every respect a model of discreet behaviour for the laity in his own rank and class of society.

He had his faults, of course; we are none of us perfect—not even bishops, as I always remark after every visitation. His relations with Mrs. Vernon, for example, were a trifle strained, though naturally I can't say whether the blame lay rather with him or with her; and he behaved at times with undue severity to his children. I couldn't help noticing, too, that very late at nights the good man seemed occasionally less clear and articulate in his pronunciation than in the middle of the day; but I ought in justice to add that if this vocal indecision were really due to incautious indulgence in an extra glass of wine with a friend over his pipe, Vernon had at least the grace and good taste to conceal his failing as far as possible. For I observed at all such times that he talked but sparingly, and in a very low voice; that he avoided my presence with considerable ingenuity; and that he seemed thoroughly ashamed of himself for his momentary lapse into an undignified condition. I am an Oxford man myself, and I can allow for such lapses, having rowed bow in my eight when I was an undergraduate at Oriel, and enjoyed in my time, as an Englishman may, the noisy fun of a good bump-supper.

Apart from this slight failing, however, which was never conspicuous, and which I could hardly have observed had I not been admitted into the privacy of Vernon's family, I found my landlord in every way a true exponent of what I may venture to describe as lower-middle-class Christian virtues. He had raised himself by his industry and providence to a respectable position; he had saved and invested till he was quite a rich man, as riches went in Redleigh; and though I had occasion more than once to remonstrate with him (officially) about the unsavoury condition of the Dingle End cottages (popularly known as 'Vernon's Piggeries'), I must allow there was a good deal of truth in his apt reply that the cottages were quite good enough for the creatures who lived in them. 'When you can never get in your rent,' he said, 'without going before the court for it, it ain't in human nature, sir, to do much for your tenants.' Having the misfortune to be an owner of West Indian property myself, I must say in my heart I largely sympathised with him.

I lodged at Vernon's for about two years in very great comfort. The Banksia roses looked in at my window-sill. Mrs. Vernon was an excellent manager, and had brought her husband a considerable fortune. (She was the daughter of a notorious Wesleyan miller who worshipped at a galvanised iron chapel in an adjoining parish; but, of course, she had conformed as soon as she married the vicar's churchwarden.) Though she and Vernon were on visibly bad terms with one another, which they didn't attempt to conceal even before the children, they were both of one mind wherever business was concerned, being indeed most excellent and cautious stewards of the ample means which Providence had vouchsafed them. And the cookery was perfect. My modest chop was always grilled to a turn, thick, brown, and juicy: I

had no fault to find in any way with the domestic arrangements. I fancy Mrs. Vernon, though Methodist bred, must have been quite as much alive as her husband to the commercial value of a clerical connection; certainly she was quite as anxious to increase to the utmost the fortune they had acquired by their joint exertions.

At the end of two years, however, a very unpleasant event occurred, which made me feel with deep force the slightness of the tie by which we all cling on to respectability and well-being. Vernon came up to me one morning with a newspaper in his hand, looking deadly pale, and half inarticulate with emotion. 'I beg your pardon, sir,' he gasped out with a visible effort, as he pointed with one finger to a paragraph of news, 'but have you read *this* in the *Standard*?'

'Yes, I've read it, Vernon,' I answered, glancing hastily at the lines to which his forefinger referred me; 'it's a very shocking thing; very shocking indeed: but I make it a rule never to take much interest in these sensational police cases.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' he said again (he was always most respectful in his mode of address); 'but did you happen to notice, the man's name in this horrid report is Vernon?'

'Bless my soul, so it is,' I cried, glancing down at it once more. I had never thought of connecting it with my respectable landlord. 'You can't mean to tell me such a disreputable person as the murderer seems to be is in any way related to you.'

The churchwarden winced. 'Well, it's no use concealing it from you, sir,' he answered, looking down. 'Before half an hour's out, all the parish will know it. I'd rather you heard it first of all from me, who can explain the affair, than from some unfriendly outsider.' And, indeed, it was true that Vernon, having got on in the world, hadn't too many friends to speak up for him in Redleigh. 'You see the name alone's quite enough to fix it. There aren't likely to be many Norcott Vernons in England. They'd know him by that ... Well, yes, sir; I'll admit it; the man's my own twin brother.'

'Your own twin brother!' I cried, taken aback, 'And in a case like this! All the details so unpleasant! You don't mean to say you think he really and truly murdered this woman?'

Vernon's face was very grave. 'Yes, I do, sir,' he answered. 'I'm afraid I must admit it. Norcott was always a very bad lot indeed; an idle, improvident, careless fellow as ever existed; right enough if only just he could have kept sober for a week; but when the drink was in him, there was no saying what folly on earth it would drive him to.'

'And the antecedents too!' I cried, scanning the paper once more. 'Such a disgraceful life! His unfortunate relations with the murdered woman! If I hadn't heard the facts from your own lips, Vernon, I could never have believed he was a member of your family!'

'Well, that's just where it is, sir,' the grocer answered, his lips quivering a little. 'He had a wife of his own once—a very decent woman, too, though he married improvidently. But he killed her with his drinking; and then he got remorse very bad for her death, which is always a foolish kind of feeling to give way to; and that drove him to drink again, a deal worse than ever; and after that, he picked up with some wretched creature; and quarrelling with her, I suppose, this affair was the end of it.'

'A knife!' I said, reading it over. 'The worst kind of murder. Stabbing always seems to go with the most lawless habits.'

'That's it, sir,' my friend answered. 'I always told him he was lawless. But it's a terrible thing, sir, and no mistake, when one's own flesh and blood is had up like that on a charge of murder.'

'It is indeed, Vernon,' I answered, 'and I sympathise with you most profoundly. But I'm going out now to see about that choir practice. I'll talk with you again later on about this matter. Will you tell Mrs. Vernon I'll want my beef-tea as usual, if you please, at eleven punctually?'

For the next day or two, very little was heard in the parish except gossip about Norcott Vernon and his early enormities. He monopolised Redleigh. I had never even heard of the man's existence before; but now that he was the hero of a first-class local domestic tragedy, every old labourer in the village had some story to tell of 'young Norcott Vernon's' juvenile delinquencies. I improved the occasion, indeed, with my boys in the Sunday school by pointing out to them how fatal might be the final results of the lawless habits engendered (as in this sad case) by the practice of tickling trout and playing truant on Saturdays. I found it absolutely necessary to do something of the sort, as the episode simply filled the minds of my entire Confirmation class. They read the local paper before my very eyes, and discussed the chances of the verdict in loud whispers, which led me to suppose they had been privately betting upon it.

When the day of the trial at Dorchester arrived, Vernon begged me with the utmost eagerness to accompany him to the assizes. He had always been so useful to me that, though the request was made at an inconvenient moment, I determined to go with him; besides, if it came to that, the trial itself promised to be in most ways a sufficiently curious one. I did my best, however, to keep the lads in the parish from attending the assizes: a morbid interest in such sights, I hold, is most injurious to young people. On the morning fixed for the trial, I went off myself with Vernon, taking my seat, as was then my wont, owing to straitened means, in a third-class carriage. It was one of those commodious little horse-boxes, still in use on the Great Western, open at the top between the different compartments; and as we got in, we happened to catch the end of a conversation carried on between two of my poorer parishioners. 'Wull, what I says, Tom,' one of them was remarking to his neighbour, 'is just like this; Ted were always a long zight the worst of they two Vernons, for all he's so thick with the passons and such-like. Norcott, he were open, that's where it is, don't 'ee zee?—but Ted, he's a sneak, and always were one. He'd zell his own mother for money, he 'ould. Whereas Norcott, wy, he'd give 'ee the coat off his back, if on'y a decent zart o' chap was to ask him vor it.'

'That's so, Clem,' the other man answered him confidently. 'You've just about hit upon it. And the reason Ted Vernon's takin' passon along of him to 'sizes to-day, why, it's just 'cause he do think it do look more decent-like, when he's goin' to zee his own twin brother found guilty and zentenced off vor wilful murder.'

I considered it would be indecorous on our part to overhear any more of so personal a conversation (especially as there were two of us), so I coughed rather loudly to check their chatter, and, I'm pleased to say, put a stop at once to that lively colloquy. A moment later, I felt rather than saw a cautious head peep slowly over the partition; then a low voice whispered in very awestruck tones, 'Law, Tom, if that ain't passon hisself a-zittin' along o' Ted in next compartment!'

When we reached the court, the murder case was the first on the day's list for trial. Accused was already in the dock when we entered. I looked hard at the prisoner. As often happens in the case of twins, he remarkably resembled his brother the churchwarden. To be sure, his swollen face bore evident marks of drink and dissipation, while Edward Vernon's was smooth and smug and respectable-looking; but in spite of this mere difference of acquired detail, their features, and even their expressions, remained absurdly alike, though I fancied the prisoner must have possessed in youth a somewhat franker and more open countenance, with handsomer traits in it than the Redleigh grocer's. He sat through the trial, which was short and hasty, with an air of fierce bravado on his bloated features, very different indeed from the respectful deference which his brother would have displayed to judge, jury, and counsel. The story of his crime was a vulgar and sordid one. The verdict, of course, was a foregone conclusion. The man's very face would have sufficed to condemn him, even without the assiduous bungling of his lawyer, who didn't try to do more than plead mitigating circumstances, which might possibly have reduced the verdict from the capital charge to one of manslaughter. The jury found the prisoner guilty without leaving their box; and the judge, with what seemed to me almost precipitate haste, assumed the black cap, and in a few short words passed sentence of death upon him for the wilful murder of the wretched creature with whom, as he rightly said, the man shared his infamy.

I went back to Redleigh in the same carriage with Vernon, who seemed very much upset by this distressing circumstance. But what surprised me most was the strange and so to speak sneaking way in which he appeared more than once to disclaim any connection with his brother's crime. He was so respectable a man himself, and so excellent a churchman, that I'm sure if he hadn't mooted the subject of his own accord nobody would ever for one moment have thought of confusing his moral character in any way with his brother's. But he said to me more than once as we returned, in an argumentative voice, 'Look here, Mr. Ogilvie; people talk a lot of nonsense, you know, about twins and their likeness. They'll tell you down our way that what one twin'll do, the other'll do as well as him. But that's all plain rubbish. Twins are born just as different as other people. Now my brother and me were always quite different. Not one thing alike in us. From the very beginning, Norcott was always a proper bad lot. Do what I would, I never could teach him prudence or saving. He was always breaking out, and had no self-restraint; and self-restraint, I say, is the principle at the bottom of all the virtues. It's the principle at the bottom of all the virtues. And Norcott could never be kept from the drink either: when a man drinks like him, it just makes a fiend of him. Especially in *our* family. Unless he has self-restraint—self-restraint; self-restraint—he drew himself up proudly—and then, of course, that's quite another matter.'

Three days after he came up to me again. 'Would you do me a great kindness, sir?' he asked. 'You know you've always been a very good friend to me.'

'What is it, Vernon?' I inquired, not being given to promise anything in the dark in that way.

'Well, it's this, sir,' he answered, hesitating a little. 'I want to go and see poor Norcott in Dorchester jail before he's

turned off, if I may venture to call it so; and I don't exactly like to go near him by myself—it's a delicate business: so I thought, as you were a clergyman, and a proper person (as I may say) to accompany me, perhaps you wouldn't mind just running across with me.'

I had an errand or two in Dorchester, as it happened, that day; and I felt besides a certain natural curiosity to see how the fellow took the prospect of hanging, now the bravado of the trial had cooled off him a little; so I said, 'It's not exactly convenient for me to go to-day, Vernon' (not to make myself too cheap); 'but still, if you think it would be a comfort to you to have a clergyman by your side, why, to oblige a parishioner, and as a matter of duty, I don't mind accompanying you.'

'Thank you, sir,' he replied, looking at me rather curiously; 'I'm sure I'm very much obliged indeed to you.' He said it, as he always said everything, respectfully and deferentially; yet I thought I somehow noticed a queer undercurrent of contempt in the tone of his voice which I had never before observed in it. And I certainly detected a strange gleam of devilry in the corner of his eye as he bowed and withdrew, which reminded me at once of his brother the murderer.

However, I thought no more about it at the time, and we went across to Dorchester next day very amicably, Vernon thanking me profusely more than once on the way for my goodness in accompanying him. We had a pass from the authorities to see the prisoner; and the moment we entered the fellow's cell I could perceive at a glance he was as unrepentant as ever. His eyes were sullen. In fact, though of course he couldn't possibly have had access to brandy in prison, he wore the exact air of a man who has been drinking heavily. I suppose he had acquired by dint of long practice a permanently drunken aspect and habit, which followed him even into the enforced teetotalism of the condemned cell. His manner was offensive, and extremely hectoring. As soon as his brother spoke to him, he burst out at once into a long, loud peal of discordant laughter. His hilarity shocked me. 'Hullo, Ted,' he cried, seizing his brother's hand. 'So you've come to preach to me! And you've brought along a parson! Well, well, that's characteristic! You couldn't drop in without a devil-dodger, couldn't you? I know why you've done that. It's half of it hypocrisy; but it's more than half that you didn't dare to face me—here, alone, in my cell—without a parson by your side to keep you in countenance!'

I felt grieved to see a man so near his last end in such an unbecoming frame of mind for one in his position; so I ventured to encroach so far upon the province of the prison chaplain as to offer him a little spiritual advice and exhortation. His brother, too, spoke to him most nicely and well, reminding him of their innocent childhood together, and of the many opportunities of leading a better life which had often been afforded him by the kindness of relations. But the condemned man seemed to wallow in a condition of hopeless rebellion; he had been delivered over, I judged, to a reprobate mind, which rendered him unwilling to listen to advice or consolation of any kind. His manner remained insolent and defiant to the very end; nothing that my companion could say to encourage him would bring him to a proper sense of his awful position.

At last, towards the close of our interview, when Vernon was endeavouring to utter a few appropriate words of affectionate farewell, the prisoner burst forth of a sudden with a fierce outbreak of language, the very words of which are engraved to this day on my memory. 'Why, Ted, you shallow sneak,' he cried, with every outer appearance of profound indignation, 'what humbug this all is—your pretending to preach to me! You know from your childhood up you've always been a sight a worse fellow than I have! You know it, and I know it! Bone of my bone, and blood of my blood, I know every thought, every feeling, every fibre of you. I know the false bent of you. Why, you and I are the selfsame man—except only that I was never a sneak and a hypocrite as you are. When we were boys at school, we got into the same scrapes; but *you* sneaked out, and *I* got flogged for them. When we stole apples together, it was I who climbed the hedge, and you who kept the biggest half of the apples for yourself, and ate them secretly. Every instinct and impulse that has led me into this scrape, *you* have it as well as *I* have. Only, you have in addition that confounded self-restraint of yours, which *I* call covetousness and worldly wisdom.'

Edward Vernon seemed to wince as the criminal went on; but he bowed his head low and answered nothing. His brother still continued in a more excited voice: 'Oh yes, I know you; every trick and every trait of you. You mean-spirited hypocrite! The family vices, you've got them as bad as I have, and one of them worse than me. There never was a Vernon yet, I know, but loved the drink and loved the money. I love them myself; *you* love them as well or better than I do. But *I* loved drink best; and *you* loved money. That was meaner and worse than me. *I* married for love a woman I doted on; and then, I led her a wretched life with the drink, and repented time and again, as we Vernons *will* repent—you know the way of us—and after that, fell back again. *You* married for money a woman you despised, and lived your wretched life at loggerheads with her for ever, being only at one for a time in your miserable money-grubbing. I loved the money, too; but

I had grace enough left to hate myself for loving it; and it drove me into drink, worse, worse than ever; for whenever I tried to lead what *you* would call "a decent life," I found in a week or two I was saving and scraping and carneying like you, and degenerating into a confounded respectable hypocrite. I despised and disliked myself so much for that—never being able to sink quite as low as you do—that I turned back to my drink, and respected myself the more for it. Then poor Lucy died—I hurried her to her grave, I know; no fear of *that* with you; your Martha won't be hurried to the grave by any one; she'll stroll down in her own good time, fat and sleek and respectable. I repented for that again—and drank worse than ever over it. *You* drink too, but late at night, in your own house—quietly, decently, soberly—like a respectable tradesman and a solvent churchwarden. You keep a parson in the house with you to prevent your breaking out some evening unawares into a Vernon fandango. Oh yes; I understand you! Then I picked up with poor Moll. I'm built like that. I *must* have a woman about, to care for and sympathise with—and to bully when I'm not sober. But I wasn't going to inflict my poor drunken self upon a pure, good woman, whom I'd have driven to her grave the same as I did Lucy; so I picked up with poor Moll there. She could drink with me herself; and in her way I loved her. Don't pull a shocked mug: you know how that was just as well as I do; for you're the same build as me, and, you see, you're a drunkard. I've always that consolation in talking to you, Ted, that at least I feel sure you can quite understand me. Two of a mind don't need an interpreter. Well, we quarrelled one night, Moll and I, both as drunk as owls—quarrelled about another man; and in my heat, I struck her. She up and had at me. It was knives after that; her first, me after; and—here I am now, awaiting execution. But, Ted, you know it's only because you're a meaner sneak than I am that *I'm* sitting here, a condemned murderer to-day, while *you're* a respectable and respected tradesman.'

To my great surprise, Edward Vernon seemed immensely impressed by this unseemly harangue, and, covering his face with his hands, cowered visibly before the man. For my own dignity's sake, I felt it was high time this unfortunate interview should come to a conclusion. 'Vernon,' I said, touching the grocer's arm, 'let's go now, I beg of you. Our presence is superfluous. It's clear we can do your unhappy brother no good. He's not in a fitting frame of mind just now to receive with advantage our advice or condolence. Suppose we leave him to the kindly ministrations of the prison chaplain?'

'You're right, sir,' the grocer answered, taking his handkerchief from his face (and, contrary to all belief, I saw he had been crying). 'I'm afraid my presence rather aggravates than consoles him.'

The murderer rose from his seat. His face was hateful. 'Ted, Ted,' he cried out, 'you infernal hypocrite; will you keep up your hypocrisy even at a moment like this before your condemned brother? Oh, Ted, I'm ashamed of you. Go home, sir, go home; take your bottle from your box, and repent a good honest Vernon repentance! Get decently drunk before the eyes of the world, and confess your sneakishness. It's money-grubbing, not virtue, that's kept *you* straight so long. If you've any conscience left, boy, go home and repent of it. Go home and get drunk; and let all the world know which man of us two was really the worst devil!'

I seized the grocer's arm and hurried him by main force out of the condemned cell. I felt this scene was growing unseemly. But all the way back to Redleigh he sat and crouched in the train, looking as if he had been whipped, and white as a ghost with terror.

Three days after, Norcott Vernon was to be executed at Dorchester. In the morning his brother Edward disappeared from Redleigh, and didn't turn up again till late in the evening. About eleven o'clock, I was sitting in my own rooms, in my long lounge chair, engaged in reading the excellent literary supplement to the *Guardian*; and, having mislaid my paper-knife, no doubt through the culpable negligence of Mrs. Vernon's housemaid, I had just taken from its sheath the little Norwegian dirk or dagger which I brought back the year before from my trip to the Hardanger Fiord. I had cut the pages open with it, and laid the knife down carelessly on the table by my side (which ought to be a lesson to one in habits of tidiness), when a loud and disgraceful noise upon the stairs aroused my attention—a noise as of quarrel and drunken scuffling. Next instant, with a rude burst, my door was pushed open, and my landlord entered, all red and blustering, without even so much as a knock to announce his arrival.

He had been drinking, that was evident; for his face was flushed: and I noticed, almost without consciously recognising the fact, that his features and expression now resembled more closely than ever the condemned man whom I had seen a few days before in his cell at Dorchester. He advanced towards me with an insolent hectoring air which exactly recalled his unfortunate brother's. 'Hullo, parson,' he cried, laughing loud: 'so there you are at your studies—looking over the list of next presentations! Ha, ha, ha! that's a good joke! You're counting the loaves and fishes. How much the advowson? Present incumbent, I suppose, over eighty, and failing!'

I had never before seen the man in such a state as this; so I rose severely and fronted him. 'Vernon,' I observed in my most chilling voice, 'you've been drinking, sir, drinking!'

He drew back a pace, and throwing his head on one side, looked long at me and sniggered. 'Yes, I have, you image,' he answered. 'You fool, I've been drinking. Honestly, openly, manfully drinking. And I've got it on me now—the Vernon repentance. I've been over to Dorchester—oh yes, I've been over: to see the black flag hoisted over the jail when my brother Norcott was turned off—for the murder I myself as good as committed.'

'What do you mean, man?' I cried, taken aback. 'You're drunk, sir: dead drunk! Go at once from my presence!'

'Drunk?' he answered. 'Yes, drunk! But precious sober for all that. I've come to myself at last. I won't endure it any longer.... Why, do you think, you great goggle-eyed owl, I *like* all this flummery? Do you think I *like* your parsonical cant? I'm a Vernon, and I hate it; though for the money's sake, the vile money, the hateful money that was always our stumbling-block, I've endured it and put up with it. But I'm done with it now; I've slaved and saved enough: I've come to myself, as Norcott advised, and I tell you, I'm done with it. You thought I had no conscience, you blue-faced baboon; but I had, and I've awaked it. Good gin's awaked it. It's wide awake now, and it's driving me to this, for poor Norcott's murder. *I* did it as well as he; I did it, and I'll pay for it. I could have done the same thing any day if I'd only had the courage, and if it hadn't been for this cursed respectability's sake that I endured for the money. I just kept it down, because I wasn't half the man my brother Norcott was. They've hanged him for being more of a man than I was. *He* loved his wife, and *I* hate mine. But I'm a man too; and I can murder with the best of them.'

I began to be alarmed. 'Go to bed, you wretched sot!' I exclaimed severely.

But he burst into a loud laugh. 'No, no; I won't go to bed,' he answered, '—till I've had your blood. I'll have your blood, or some one's. Then I'll go up sober for once, and sleep the sleep of a baby.'

As he spoke, his eye chanced to fall upon the Norwegian dagger which I had incautiously laid down beside the *Guardian* upon the table. He snatched it up and brandished it. I turned pale, I suppose; at any rate, I'm sure I retired with some haste to the far side of the sitting-room. He followed me like a demon. 'Why, you white-livered cur,' he cried, in a voice like a madman's, 'you're afraid of dying! Ha, ha, ha! that's good! A parson, and afraid! Afraid of going home! Where's the point of your religion?'

I dodged him about the table; but he flew after me, round and round. He brandished the knife as he did so.

'I've got a conscience,' he shrieked aloud, 'and it's wide awake now. I'm done with hypocrisy. No more money-grubbing for me. I shall have somebody's blood. It ain't fair poor Norcott should be hanged by the neck till dead, and worse men than he alive and respected! I shall come out just for once in my life to-night. I shall show my real character. Let's be honest and straightforward.—I'll drive it up to the haft in you.'

He poked the knife out. Then he flung back his head and roared with laughter. 'How the devil-dodger runs!' he cried, lunging at me. 'It does one good to see him. But I'll have his blood, all the same. I shall swing for it, like Norcott.'

With a desperate effort, I rushed forward and seized the deadly weapon from the fellow's hands. In doing so, I cut myself with the blade rather seriously. But I wrenched it away, all the same. He let me wrench it. But he stood there and laughed at me. Then he retreated towards the door, and pulled out—a new pistol. 'I bought this at Dorchester,' he said calmly, cocking it. 'I bought it this morning, for conscience' sake, to do a murder with.'

I faced him in silence. He pointed it at me and laughed again. 'What a precious funk they're in!' he cried, seeming to burst with amusement. 'What a lot they all think of their tuppenny-ha'penny lives! It's enough to make one laugh. But I don't think I'll shoot him. He ain't worth a good cartridge. He's such a contemptible jackass!'

The words were rude; but I confess, at the moment, I heard them with pleasure.

Then, to my immense surprise, he opened the door once more, with a cunning look on his face, and walked quietly upstairs. I fell, unmanned, into my easy-chair, quivering all over with nervous agitation. There was a minute's pause. At the end of that time, a loud report shook the room I sat in. It was followed at ten seconds' interval by another. Next instant, the housemaid rushed down with a face of terror. 'Oh, come up, sir,' she cried. 'There's terrible things happening! Mr. Vernon's shot himself, and he's killed the missus!'

I went up to the bedroom. The wife was on the hearth-rug, shot lightly through the body. The wretched man himself lay moaning on the bed, blood streaming from his breast, and his eyes half open. As he saw me, he smiled through his pain and flung up one hand. 'Norcott was right,' he said slowly. 'I was always a deal a worse fellow than he was. But I've come to myself now, and I hope I've killed her.'

He was wrong in that hope. His wife recovered. The jury very rightly returned it as temporary insanity. Indeed, Vernon's strange and unbecoming language to myself just before his death clearly showed the fact that reason had been deposed from her seat for the time being. I have always felt that his brother's terrible end must have preyed upon a once estimable parishioner's mind so much that he was scarcely responsible at the time for his dreadful actions, which providentially had no such evil results for my own life and limbs as I feared at the moment of his worst delirium. His estate was proved at seventy odd thousand pounds, and his widow has since married a most respectable solicitor.

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# TAILPIECE

## A MATTER OF STANDPOINT

'Anything going to-day, comrade?' hungry-looking Jules asked of hungry-looking Hector, just outside the grounds of the Hotel Beau-Rivage.

'*Pas de chance,*' hungry-looking Hector responded, with a shake of his shaggy head. 'No work since a fortnight. It is, look you, these *bourgeois!*'

But the word *bourgeois* did not mean to those unkempt and starveling Provençaux at all the same thing that the English journalist has made it mean to the English reader. To you, dear gentlemen, it implies practically an underbred person, whose tastes are less noble and exalted than your own; to Jules and Hector, it connoted rather a man in a black coat—good, bad, or indifferent: a person not a workman, a *riche*, an eat-all, a member of the capitalist or idle classes. Sons of the southern proletariat themselves, born to a slender and precarious diet of garlic and olives, with a substratum of sour bread, and an occasional rinsing of *petit vin bleu*, they made no petty discrimination of trade or profession, no invidious distinction of banker or brewer, merchant or manufacturer, doctor or advocate, poet or painter. If you wore a blue blouse or a coarse grey shirt with a crimson sash, you were an *ouvrier* and a brother; if you wore a black coat and a starched white collar, you were a *sacré bourgeois*, and an enemy of humanity. 'Tis a simple creed, with much to recommend it. It may occasionally go wrong—all creeds are fallible—but in the main it answers to a genuine distinction of life and function—from the point of view of starveling Jules and starveling Hector, *bien entendu!*

'What hast thou eaten to-day?' hungry Jules inquired, with a keen glance from under his black penthouse eyebrows. His sharp beady eyes were naturally deep-set, but a long course of starvation had made them still further recede into dim recesses of darkling shadow.

Hungry Hector shrugged his shoulders—or rather his shoulder-bones. 'What would you have?' he answered, with the philosophy of hunger. 'Like this, like that! Here a crust, there a cabbage-stalk! As the unemployed live. 'Tis not a banquet, *convenons!*'

Hungry Jules seized him energetically by the ulna—only anatomical language can fairly describe the various salient portions of those two thinly-draped skeletons. 'Look in *there!*' he cried hoarsely, pointing through the window. 'They feast, those *bourgeois!* They have eaten already soup, and fish, and calves' feet in *béchamel*; and now the men in the white chokers are offering them roast lamb. *C'est trop fort, n'est-ce pas, camarade?*'

Hungry Hector leaned forward and inspected the diners with glistening eyes that half started from his head. Some of the pampered children of luxury actually turned up their noses at hot roast lamb! '*Décidément, c'est trop fort,*' he answered, horrified. His righteous indignation was fast rising to boiling-point.

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Inside, at the table, young Doctor Hughes, of London, that amiable consumptive, who had worn himself to death in the underpaid service of the poor of Whitechapel, was sitting with his wife, toying idly with the food on the plate before him. Minna's eyes were fixed upon him. 'Don't you think, dear,' she whispered, 'you could eat just a mouthful or two of this nice roast lamb? Do try! It's *so* good for you.'

Trevor Hughes turned it over with a listless fork, and inspected it. 'I never can eat the Riviera lamb,' he answered, stifling a sigh. 'It's killed too young; and it's so lean and skinny.'

'But you ate no soup, and you ate no fish,' Minna murmured, with tears in her eyes. She saw only too plainly that his appetite was failing.

'The soup was cold and greasy,' Trevor explained, not peevishly, but in an apologetic voice; 'and the fish was *loup*. I cannot eat *loup*. You know it disagrees with me.'

Minna knew it did—and trembled. For day by day more and more things disagreed with him. She began to wonder with

a tremulous fear what she could give him to live upon.

'If only we could get away to Algiers,' she murmured low, 'you might recover your appetite. But here, on the Riviera, none of the food seems to suit you.'

'I'm afraid not,' Trevor answered. And he knew too well why. He had seen more than enough of such cases in Whitechapel.

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Jules seized Hector's arm again. 'And see,' he cried. 'See! Those lackeys bring in something else to offer them! Sacred name of a dog, I swear to you, it is chicken!'

'Do these people eat chicken every day?' Hector asked, half beside himself with astonishment, his lantern jaws dropping rapidly as his hungry mouth watered.

'Do they eat chicken every day? *Ma foi*, yes, they do: unless in its place they eat duck or partridge. Figure to yourself, partridge! I have watched them here for a week, and you will not believe such shameful luxury—the *luxe effréné des bourgeois*! Every evening that goes they sit down to the same feast—soup, fish, an *entrée*, a joint, a *rôti*—and sweets—and dessert. *Mon dieu, c'est effrayant!*'

Hector grasped his short knife. Poverty had not been able to deprive him of *that*. '*C'est pas mal*,' he exclaimed again. 'But they shall pay for it, those mouths there! Bloodsuckers that drink up the life-blood of the people. And *me* dine on cabbage-stalks! I swear to you, they shall pay for it!'

'What do you mean?' hungry Jules exclaimed, seizing his ulna once more with a certain greedy and convulsive eagerness.

Hector opened the knife stealthily, a strange gleam in his eye. 'The first *bourgeois* who leaves the room!' he whispered between his set teeth, holding it up, blade downward, and striking the air with a vicious thrust. 'They are all of them equally culpable. *Le premier venu, c'est compris?*'

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Minna looked at her husband tenderly. 'A little bit of chicken, darling?' she murmured low. 'I'm sure you can eat just a mouthful off the wing. Such nice white meat! Do let me give you some.'

Trevor shook his head with a sad smile. 'No, no, dear,' he answered with a weary, dreary look. 'I couldn't touch a mouthful. You know I detest the *table d'hôte poulet*.'

'You're not going?' she cried, seeing him rise with the weary, dreary look still deepening on his face.

'Yes,' he answered. 'The room's so hot. I shall stroll out into the garden. It's nice and cool there, and the air seems to do me more good than anything.'

'Then I shall go with you,' Minna cried, and rose from the table to accompany her husband.

'*Tiens, Hector*,' Jules whispered, as husband and wife emerged from the hotel door. '*Vois-tu? un bourgeois!*'

A sudden blind rush. A knife gleaming in the air. A scream of horror from Minna. A gurgle of blood; a red stream; a sigh. And the tragedy was complete. There was one *bourgeois* the less alive on earth; and one friend of humanity stood back, with gnashed teeth, awaiting arrest by the guests and the *concierge*.

'A horrible crime!' you say. Yes, no doubt, a horrible crime—from the ethical side, a crime of the first magnitude. But from the psychological side, which is how human actions rather strike me, a regrettable result of incompatibility in the matter of standpoint. Those two saw things differently—no more than that. If each could have seen with the other's eyes—well, most crimes are so, and most blunders also.

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