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THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

I.

It was a woodland slope behind St. Pierre-les-Bains. Basil Hume was walking alone on the edge of the hillside. Everybody knows St. Pierre, that dream of peace among the Vosges mountains—a nestling town, high perched in a nook above a deep blue lake, amid a shadowy land of spreading pine forest, grey granite hills, and great ice-worn boulders. Basil had finished his day's work among the dappled lights of the upland, and was strolling along now, with his sketch-book hanging idly in one hand by his side, taking mental notes as he went of evening effects between the branches of the forest. His head, as he strolled on, was crammed full of Marcella. He called her "Marcella" to himself, in his happy day dreams, though to her face, of course, like all the rest of the world, he spoke of her always as "Mrs. Griswold." She had filled a large place in the painter's mind those last six weeks: the Vosges was to Basil one long idyll of Marcella.

Suddenly—unexpectedly—at a sharp turn in the footpath, he heard, close by, the delicate rustling of a woman's gown against the hard glittering rock, into which a way had been worn deep for future traffic by countless naked or *sabot*-clad feet of mountain peasants. He started at the sound. His heart beat quicker. Next moment he looked up: Marcella stood before him.

She was dressed as usual in her simple English morning costume; tailor-made, all neatness. In her left hand she held carelessly a little sketch-book; her right grasped a freshly gathered spray of pale white butterfly orchid. Its ghostly thin flowers, with their long pale streamers and their faint tinge of green, seemed to suit most strangely with her soft childlike beauty. To cover the embarrassment of the sudden meeting, she held up the pallid witch-blossoms before Basil's eyes.

"What do you say to *that*, Mr. Hume?" she asked the admiring painter, with one of her sunny smiles. "Now, aren't they just beautiful?"

Basil took the spray, trembling, from her gloveless fingers. "They *are* beautiful," he answered, looking timidly into her eyes and then back again at the flowers. "I know them well of old. They seem just the fit flowers for such country as this, with their transparent whitey-green, and their floating pennons of petals. And how strangely thin! Their colour reminds one, somehow, almost of the mistletoe berry."

He ceased, and looked hard at her. There was a moment's pause. Marcella was accustomed to having men look hard at her. Yet this was one of those pauses that seem to call for language. Basil gazed at the sky. Then, after a minute's delay, he recovered himself with a start, and brought his eyes back with a bound once more from infinity to Marcella.

"I'm lucky to find you alone," he said. "I—I wanted to speak with you."

"I'm generally alone," Marcella said simply, leaning for a moment as she spoke against a great granite boulder.

Basil looked at her with keen eyes. "Your husband's still in Paris?" he asked.

Marcella nodded assent. "Yes, as usual, in Paris," she answered. "He cares for nothing else on earth but that—and Vichy, and Monte Carlo, and Trouville, and Homburg."

"And you stop here still?" the young man ventured to put in.

Marcella gazed up at him. Never before in his life, he thought, had he seen that baby-face so bewitchingly, so provokingly, so enticingly beautiful. Her rich red lips looked for all the world like a pressing invitation to break outright the most brittle of the commandments.

"Yes, I stay here still," she answered, with a half-muttered sigh. "I shall stay here all summer now, I suppose, till Alvan is graciously pleased to take me to the Riviera. It's a very good place to shelve a person in, when you want to get rid of them. And indeed," she added, letting her eyelids drop and her eyes fall gracefully on the glimpses of blue lake and white town far below them, "a prettier place, or a sweeter, one would hardly want to be shelved in."

Basil hardly knew how to answer her. It was an open secret, to be sure, with all the world of St. Pierre, on what terms she lived with Alvan Griswold; everybody knew it, and everybody talked of it. But Basil had never before heard Marcella herself allude so plainly to her relations with her husband. He was sorry to hear her now. Her frankness gave

him an uneasy feeling of boyish awkwardness. To break the silence, he glanced down at the little sketch-book she held idly in her hand.

“You’ve been drawing, I see,” he said ingenuously. “May I look at what you’ve been doing?”

Marcella held the book out half-apologetically towards him, with one finger between the leaves. “But you’ll think nothing of it,” she murmured, with a faint blush on that peach-like cheek. “I can’t bear to show my work to professional artists. One does one’s little best, and then they who know think such very small things of it.”

Basil took the sketch-book shyly from her half-resisting fingers. “I’m sure,” he said, in a serious tone, “I could never think small things of anything on earth *you* did, Mrs. Griswold.”

And indeed he spoke the truth. Had they been the veriest daubs ever splashed upon paper, he would have found them beautiful—for Marcella had painted them.

He opened the sketch-book at random and turned over a page or two. He had no need for indulgence. The sketches, though amateurish of course, betrayed in every touch a native eye for form and colour.

“But these are the real stuff,” he said, looking into them carefully. “Nothing could be more graceful, now, than the branches of that pine; and then the spots of light on the russet patches of moss—how true, how natural!”

“You really like them?” Marcella cried, leaning eagerly forward. She was a child in her eagerness. “You think they’re not quite hopeless—not quite silly for a beginner?”

Basil held the book in front of him, a little on one side, and eyed the sketches askance, with the searching gaze of a critic. “On the contrary,” he answered slowly, with transparent truth in the very ring of his honest voice, “I should say they display unusual native bent; the light and shade in particular are very neatly handled, and your sense of colour—well, is far above the average. You ought to take lessons.” Then he added, after a short pause, “If some artist friend, now, could give you a hint or two—myself, for example—would you mind my coming round to help you finish off occasionally?”

“Oh, how good of you!” Marcella cried, and looked up at him with that timidly confiding glance which was one of the chief charms of her almost child-like beauty. “It would be so awfully kind of you. I can’t say how grateful your help would make me.”

Basil struck while the iron was hot. “There’s nothing like working at a sketch while it’s fresh in your mind,” he said eagerly. “You’ve been engaged on these pine trees, with the flowers in the foreground, this afternoon, I see. May I come round to your hotel to-night, and volunteer just a hint or two as to technical points in your management of your tree forms?”

Marcella shrank back, a little alarmed and abashed. “Oh no! not to-night,” she said quickly. “I—I have an engagement this evening. Some friends from the Belle-Vue are coming round to see me. But any other night when you happen to be free, I should be so awfully obliged to you. It must be the evening, I suppose? daylight at present is too precious to encroach upon.”

“We’ll make it Wednesday, then,” Basil cried, overjoyed, and hardly able to contain himself. It was a great thing for him to be permitted so to call upon Marcella.

He was just going to move on in the direction of the town, from the moss-clad boulder against which they had been leaning their backs during this brief little colloquy, when, round the same corner where Marcella had surprised him, a handsome man, in knickerbockers, with a soft slouch hat, broke in unexpectedly upon their *tête-à-tête* with a sudden short whistle. Basil had seen him in the town more than once before, and taken a hand at *écarté* with him in the rural Casino. He was a handsome young Frenchman, Guy de Marigny by name, and a soldier by profession.

“Ah, *te voilà*, Marcella!” the new-comer cried in French, blurting out her Christian name before he perceived the stranger. “I’ve been looking for you up and down for the last twenty minutes.” Then he gave a hasty start, and turned more stiffly to Basil, raising his big slouch hat as he spoke. “*Monsieur*, *je vous salue*,” he said. “I did not at first

perceive that madame was accompanied.”

“So it seems,” Basil replied drily, half sorry that he should have caught the unguarded word, and still more unguarded *tutoiement*. “I was returning from my day’s work, high up among the hills, and at a bend of the path here I came suddenly upon madame.”

De Marigny smiled and nodded, trying to look unconcerned. Like a well-bred Frenchman, he put the best face upon it.

Marcella turned to him with one of her bewitching smiles. “Mr. Hume has been so kind,” she said; “oh, mais si aimable! mais si aimable! He has promised to come round and help me with my sketches. He’s going to give me lessons in the evening, do you know, beginning immediately.”

“Not to-night?” De Marigny interposed, with an anxious air.

“Oh no, not to-night!” Marcella answered, darting a quick glance at him from under her hat. “I was just explaining that to him.”

“For to-night,” De Marigny went on, turning once more to Basil, “madame is engaged to come to my sister-in-law’s, who holds a reception.”

Basil noted the discrepancy, but was too polite, of course, to call attention to it overtly. Two’s company; three’s none. He had seen enough now to tell him very plainly that Marcella and De Marigny were on those terms of intimacy where a third person is wholly superfluous to the conversation. With some slight excuse for taking a short cut down the hillside, he raised his hat and left them abruptly. But he went down the hill somewhat heavy in heart. Your husband in Paris he accepted, of course, as a necessary element of the situation—all married women have a husband somewhere—but De Marigny, he saw at once, was a far more dangerous rival.

II.

All next day, to relieve his soul, Basil worked hard at his picture, high up on the hillside. He started betimes in the early morning, and didn't return to his hotel in the town till dinner-time. Even then, as is the wont of artists, he was late for *table d'hôte*. He came down, hastily dressed, at the end of the fish course, to find his neighbours on either side busily discussing the latest new sensation in the form of a *crime passionnel*. He paid little heed to them. His head was equally divided now between Marcella and his painting; so he took small note of the gossip and twaddle which interests the *table d'hôte* order of intellect. He merely gathered vaguely from side hints which the others let drop, that somebody somewhere—an American, as he judged—had come home unexpectedly, from the sky or elsewhere, to find his wife and her lover in *flagrante delicto*, and had shot his rival dead before the very eyes of the unhappy woman. For some minutes Basil said nothing as to how such an appalling act impressed him; but the general truculent satisfaction of the good moral folk at the table by his side, over this vindication, as they considered it, of the ethical proprieties, roused him at last, by pure force of iteration, to something very like indignant horror. He turned to the British matron who sat close at his left.

“What an atrocious crime!” he exclaimed, bristling up. “For my part, I hope the French jury won't go in, after its kind, for extenuating circumstances.”

Mrs. Paul—that was his neighbour's name—stared back at him blankly. “As far as I'm concerned,” she answered, in a sharp little treble, “I only wish, myself, he'd shot the woman also.”

Basil started back, aghast. Such bloodthirsty frankness appalled him. He was a clergyman's son, and had been brought up in the seemingly effete idea that human life possesses a special sanctity. “You can't surely mean that!” he cried, all trembling with sudden horror. “You can't mean to say you approve of deliberate murder?”

“I don't call that *murder*,” the lady answered quietly. “I think, under the circumstances, the husband had a perfect right to shoot both of them.”

“Everybody thinks so, of course,” a bland, bald-headed old gentleman on the other side of the table interposed with a genial smile. “Most general sympathy has been expressed ... for the husband.”

“For the husband?” Basil exclaimed, taken aback. “Oh no! You can't mean that! For the murderer, not for the victim!”

“What *very* hard words you use!” the bland old gentleman retorted mildly.

“I call a murder a murder,” Basil answered, growing hot.

“But every man must surely defend his honour,” Mrs. Paul put in, with a tart little smile of truly Britannic virtue.

Basil looked back at her, astonished. He couldn't even fathom these people's point of view. It was far too barbaric, too primitive, too fierce for him. “That may be public opinion,” he said slowly, with genuine earnestness, endeavouring to take it in; “but it's *not* Christianity, and it's *not* civilization.”

Mrs. Paul sidled away from him with an offended air. It was clear she didn't even like to sit too close to a man who professed such shockingly humane sentiments.

Basil's interest in the murder was now fully aroused. “But tell me,” he said eagerly, “who *are* these people? Where did it all happen? Of course, in Paris?”

“In Paris? Oh dear no,” the bald-headed old gentleman responded with a pitying smile, “Here, here in St. Pierre! Last night, as ever was! The whole town's ringing with it!”

Basil's head swam round. He clutched his fork convulsively. “In St. Pierre?” he cried, appalled. “Who—who was the murderer?”

“The *gentleman* who did it,” Mrs. Paul said sharply, with a very marked emphasis on the corrective phrase, “was Mr. Alvan Griswold, the husband of that pretty little doll who was always at the Casino; and the man he shot was Monsieur

Guy de Marigny.”

The *salle-à-manger* swam round in a tumultuous whirl about Basil as a pivot. His heart rose into his mouth; he could hardly realize it. Then the man who had done this wicked thing was—Marcella’s husband; and the man he had shot was—Marcella’s friend of last night’s adventure!

He paused and let it sink in. He could only grasp it slowly. It was Marcella herself, then, Mrs. Paul so wished Alvan Griswold had shot! Cruel and wicked as he had thought her words before, their cruelty and wickedness came back to him now with ten thousand-fold more force. That wretched gambler, who neglected his wife for the houris of Monte Carlo and the painted Jezebels of Paris, to take vengeance like this upon Marcella and her lover! The bare idea of it appalled him. And what added point to it all in Basil Hume’s mind was that deeper thought he couldn’t conceal from himself even in the first shock of discovery—mere circumstance had prevented him from being himself in De Marigny’s position. They would as easily have condoned the murder of the one man as the murder of the other. Basil raised his eyes from the table. In letters of blood across the blank white wall of the *salle-à-manger* he seemed to see those five words staring him hard in the face, “Thou shalt do no murder.” He rose from the table abruptly. He could stop there no longer. In some mechanical way he bowed to right and left. His soul was filled with that one absorbing thought.

“For myself,” he said stiffly, as he rose from his chair, “I believe in God’s law. I can neither commit nor condone a murder.”

III.

For the next four or five days nothing was talked of at St. Pierre but the Griswold tragedy. Wherever he went, Basil heard it discussed from every point of view; and, what struck him as odd, while there was plenty of sympathy everywhere for the murderer and his crime, there seemed to be little or none for the victim and his family, or for poor Marcella. Everybody spoke of Alvan Griswold, caught red-handed in his vulgar revenge, as they might speak of a hero. The newspapers chronicled his smallest doings; telegrams carried news of his state of health and of his last remark every day of the week to every corner of Europe. It was sickening—sickening! At first, to be sure, Basil talked much of the matter to all and sundry; but he got so cold a reception for his simple view as to the wrongfulness of bloodshed, that he learnt at last to hold his tongue about it. Every one to whom he spoke seemed to hold the same opinion, that Griswold had done the one thing possible for “a man of honour,” under the circumstances. By slow degrees Basil worked himself up to a state of fiery indignation against this unchristian and uncivilized idea of honour. He could hardly believe that the whole community regarded the crime as St. Pierre regarded it. “It’s infamous,” he said once, “simply cruel and infamous! From the way you all talk, one would think a wife was a man’s absolute chattel, and a chattel so personal, so sacred, so much his own, that the least encroachment upon it justified the possessor in taking without trial the life of his assailant.”

The world shrugged its shoulders and answered nothing. The man was an enthusiast. Basil ceased to reason with it. When he did, it talked much to him of the necessity for a man defending his honour—words which answered to no possible idea or reality in Basil’s scheme of the universe. To say the truth, he was a civilized man, and he was only just beginning to discover the great gulf fixed between his own moral ideas and those of the semi-barbaric, semi-feudal world by which he was surrounded.

Marcella herself he never saw. Immediately after the murder she had hurried away in shame and disgrace from St. Pierre, and taken refuge at La Roche, the *chef-lieu* of the department, where she underwent the interrogatories of the *Juge d’Instruction*. As for Alvan Griswold, whom Basil had never yet seen, he brazened it all out with true American bravado. A Californian born, with the rough-and-ready ideas of the Pacific coast for his sole known code of morals and honour, he regarded the whole affair as a passing episode, and awaited his trial with stolid indifference. The weeks wore on slowly. Basil learnt from the papers how day by day Marcella was tortured and cross-questioned for details. French procedure, which in some respects received a faint modern tinge from the Revolution and the *Code Napoléon*, remains yet in other respects even crueller and more dilatory than that mass of barbaric, mediæval, or half-savage survivals, the law of England.

It was nearly six weeks before Griswold was tried. All that time Marcella waited in despair at her hotel at La Roche, and all that time Basil stayed on at St. Pierre in breathless expectation. He couldn’t paint. He couldn’t read or write. He couldn’t even think. He could do nothing but revolve in his own mind that terrible crime, and the callous insensibility of those around him with regard to it. At last the day fixed for the trial arrived. Basil went up to La Roche, and with trembling heart and quivering footsteps ascended the great staircase of the Palais de Justice.

He never before seen a French court in action. All was new and strange to him—the judge in his curious, old-world costume; the barristers in their quaintly-shaped caps and gowns; the *huissier* in his place; the officials of the court in their unfamiliar uniform. Not less so the procedure. Alvan Griswold was brought into court between two military-looking gendarmes. For the first time in his life Basil set eyes upon the man whose act for so many days had monopolized and concentrated his whole brain and attention. Griswold was tall and thick-set—a very powerful man; low-browed, dark-haired, with a bull-dog look of iron determination on his unamiable features. Even the scrupulous dress of a gentleman and the cultivated accent he had acquired unawares in European society, didn’t entirely disguise in him the original element of western ruffianism. That large hard chin, those cold black eyes, that square bullet head, marked him out at once as the true descendant of the men who first scrambled in a desperate struggle for life over the possession of the goldfields. He was just the sort of man one would shrink instinctively from meeting on a dark night in the country. Rich, well-groomed, well-barbered, with a dainty flower in his buttonhole and a big gem on his middle finger, he still looked and moved every inch a prize-fighter. Basil could understand better now the view such a man would almost necessarily take of his wife and his honour, and the means he would hold to be lawful and just for defending and upholding his proprietary rights in her.

From the very first start the young Englishman was surprised at the evident want of reality and earnestness that

characterized the proceedings. The Judge, the counsel, the very *Procureur de la République* himself, seemed to go through their task with pure perfunctory diligence. Nobody, he noticed, appeared to regard the matter as in any way serious. It was a formal trial. The official prosecutor, to begin with, in a very mild speech set forth in brief the main facts of the case—how the prisoner, an American citizen, had married on such a date an English lady, Miss Marcella Pocock; how, during his absence in Paris, his wife had formed an attachment of the usual sort in these cases for Monsieur Guy de Marigny, a well-known visitor at St. Pierre-les-Bains, on leave from his regiment; how, returning unexpectedly on such and such a day from the capital to the hotel, where he had left his wife during the summer season, the accused discovered her closeted in her room with a supposed lover; how, by the aid of the hotel servants, he had broken in the door, and shot his victim dead then and there with his revolver. The weapon itself—with a little nod towards the table in front—was offered the court as one of the material evidences. The *Procureur de la République* made it all quite clear as far as he went; yet he spoke, Basil observed, with a certain strange hesitation. There was none of the denunciatory eloquence, the fiery zeal so common in French official treatment of a prisoner; none of those violent apostrophes, those rhetorical questions, those sudden point-blank descents upon the accused with an inconvenient dilemma or an awkward alternative. When the *Procureur* sat down, a little hum of relief went round the court. Everybody looked at his neighbour, and everybody seemed to say, “There, you see; I told you so.”

What it all could mean Basil hardly imagined, he only saw that, for some strange reason, the court didn't intend to convict Alvan Griswold. The evidence of the witnesses was taken in the selfsame listless and perfunctory fashion. The hotel waiters swore positively to this and that; the guardian of the peace, called in to observe the disposition of the room, was just equally explicit. Monsieur le Président opined that we need not in this matter take the evidence of madame. Her deposition, as obtained before the *Juge d'Instruction*, and now read over to the court, would amply suffice, he thought, for her share in the incident. Basil was glad of that. He turned one glance towards Marcella, who, deeply veiled and in profound mourning, sat aside in the court at a place assigned to her. She lifted her eyes through her veil for a moment and met his. Her look was full of mute gratitude for his unspoken sympathy.

The case for the prosecution closed. The court and the spectators gave a sigh of relief. Alvan Griswold, glancing around him defiantly on all sides, took stock of the judge, the bar, the spectators. Then his counsel rose. It was Maître Legrange, the silver-tongued, the irresistible. In a few short words the great barrister met the purely formal case, as he said, which *M. le Procureur de la République* had brought against his client. Their plea was, of course, a plea of justification. After the evidence tendered on the prosecuting side, it would hardly be necessary for him to show at further length the nature of the relations which unhappily subsisted between Madame Griswold and *feu* Monsieur de Marigny. Those relations, the prosecution itself, he remarked, had amply, and more than amply, already admitted. For justification, he need hardly say, he relied entirely on Article 324 of the Penal Code, which reads as follows:—

“Dans le cas d'adultère prévu par l'article 336, le meurtre commis par l'époux sur son épouse ainsi que sur le complice, à l'instant où il les surprend en flagrant délit dans la maison conjugale, est excusable.”

Maître Legrange paused long with forensic skill before he began his reading of that exculpatory article. Basil Hume felt in his heart that something quite important, quite unexpected, was coming. The great barrister adjusted the *pince-nez* on his nose as he held up the heavy volume of the Penal Code with great dignity in front of him. Then, in his ringing, sonorous voice, and with his impressive manner, he uttered the terrible words of that terrible provision. Deep silence reigned in the court. All the Frenchmen present were of course well aware of the nature of their own law; but this trial had attracted many English and Americans, to whom that atrocious provision—the most barbaric, surely, in any civilized code—came home with all the force of a surprising and startling novelty. To none of them, however, did it appear so startling, so surprising, so utterly confounding, as to Basil Hume. It burst upon him like a thunderbolt. Then, not only in the opinions of irresponsible men and women at hotel dining-tables, but by the deliberate law of the French Republic, such a murder as that was no murder at all, not even a crime, but an excusable outburst of natural feeling!

Basil felt his cheeks at once grow fiery red with shame and indignation. The inner fire that consumed him burnt brighter than ever within his marrow now. His mouth was hot and dry; his head was swimming. He looked across at Marcella with infinite compassion. Then he looked at Alvan Griswold with a mingled look of horror, dismay, and infinite loathing.

As for the Californian, he stood there still in the dock unmoved, his arms crossed boldly across his burly breast, and a faint smile playing lightly around that cruel mouth and those jaws of iron.

Maître Legrange, hardly pausing, went on with effect to argue in detail that the drama of the Hotel des Vosges, as everybody now called it, fell under the case so distinctly provided for by Article 324 in its second paragraph. The only question, he said, was as to the doubtful point whether the phrase “*dans la maison conjugale*” could be construed so as to include the rooms in the hotel where Madame Griswold, at the time of the occurrence, was lodging. Maître Legrange maintained learnedly that they might be so construed; for “*la maison conjugale*” means not necessarily an entire house, but a domestic residence. For example, no husband could be deprived of the benefit of this humane exception on the purely accidental and casual ground that he happened to occupy, let us say, a flat in a house in Paris. By the words “*maison conjugale*,” the law clearly intended to designate the home or habitual *logis* of the family. Now, M. Griswold had taken these rooms in the spring for himself and madame; he had resided in them together with her before his departure from St. Pierre for Paris; and he returned to them unexpectedly on the evening in question with the obvious intention of once more taking up his abode with his wife in them. Clearly, then, under such circumstances, the apartments must be regarded as the family residence. And Maître Legrange confidently expected that the jury, directed to that effect (as he hoped) by Monsieur le Président, would take this more lenient and reasonable view of the circumstances under consideration, and would acquit the accused of the very serious charge now brought against him.

To Basil it all sounded just horrible, horrible. But Monsieur le Président, after some further formal evidence had been taken, as to tenancy of apartments, previous occupation, and so forth, summed up with judicial clearness in the prisoner’s favour. He ruled on the point of law that the jury must regard the rooms in the hotel as the family residence. If, therefore, they were convinced that Monsieur Griswold shot the betrayer of his wife and of his domestic happiness at the moment when he surprised her *en flagrant délit* with her accomplice, the law was plain—it left them no option but to return at once a verdict of acquittal.

The jury retired in form to consider their finding. They were absent but for a moment. Next minute they trooped back again, with their answer ready.

“What verdict do you find?” Monsieur le Président inquired languidly.

And the foreman answered, clearing his throat, “We find, in accordance with Article 324 of the Penal Code, that M. Alvan Griswold shot the deceased, Guy de Marigny, at the moment when he surprised him in open adultery with madame his wife, in the apartment at the Hotel des Vosges, which was then and there the conjugal residence; and therefore we return a verdict of Not Guilty.”

Alvan Griswold unwound his arms. He bowed politely to the jury. “Je vous remercie, messieurs,” he said with a smile, in very perfect French. Then he bowed to the Judge. “Et vous aussi, Monsieur le Président,” he added, in a tone of most utter indifference.

But Basil Hume looked up. Across the white wall of the Palais de Justice, behind the President’s chair, he saw once more with his mind’s eye, in great letters of blood, those five damning words, “Thou shalt do no murder.”

IV.

On the Escalier d'Honneur of the Palais de Justice a busy little throng of sympathizing Americans crowded close round Alvan Griswold, shaking his hand and congratulating him. By a side door at the other end of the court, deeply veiled as before, and in her profound mourning, Marcella slipped stealthily out and drove off to the station to take the train to Paris, and home to her mother's in England. But Basil Hume remained behind, and followed his man at a speaking distance. He saw him walk down the street and up to the door of the principal hotel in La Roche, where rooms had been retained for him. Alvan Griswold was rich, and could afford to buy whatever this world offered. So friends crowded round him. But to Basil Hume's eyes, as he walked, footprints of blood marked the man's steps on the flagstones behind him. And the front of the hotel, as he passed beneath its portal, bore in blood-red letters, still in his mental vision, that accusing law, "Thou shalt do no murder."

The more he thought of it all, the more wicked and preposterous did the sentence seem to him. The French jury, set to try this man, had tried him neither according to the laws of God nor the moral sense of civilized man, but according to the dictates of their own barbaric jurisprudence, the national outcome of a false and dying system. Hour after hour, as he pondered it in his own soul, their conduct seemed to him to grow worse and worse. These citizens who were placed there on purpose to speak with the united and embodied voice of humanity the verdict of even justice, had failed, to a man, of their duty in the hour of need, and had condoned a crime which to Basil's moral sense seemed absolutely revolting. A woman was not, he felt sure, any man's chattel and property that he might taboo her to himself, and make her his own without hope of appeal, and defend with sword or revolver every attempt against his mastery. All night long he lay awake, growing more and more fiercely indignant. The crime itself had seemed terrible enough to him, in all conscience, but this its public justification was ten times more terrible. That a man should do murder for private revenge was a very awful thing; but that a civilized community, in its corporate capacity, and by the organized voice of its legal exponents, should give him the right to do it, and should let him go scot-free afterwards, seemed to Basil, in his fervour of moral horror and his fever of moral eagerness, an unspeakable calamity.

He lay awake and thought it out. Early next morning, Alvan Griswold took the train to St. Pierre-les-Bains. Marcella had slipped off, it is true, to Paris and Warwickshire, but the family effects were still in the *maison conjugale* at the Hotel des Vosges; and after his long confinement, Griswold needed the country air and change and quiet before returning once more to the feverish dissipations of his beloved capital. For the next few days, accordingly, Basil met him frequently; but they never spoke. They didn't know one another. Basil preferred it should be so. He was anxious even to hold his tongue now on the moral point, lest Griswold should suspect himself in presence of an enemy. To say the truth, he seemed to be the only one. Society at St. Pierre swallowed Griswold entire. He was *fêted* like one who has performed, for all the world, some public-spirited action. Yet all these days and nights Basil brooded still on this miscarriage of justice and the events that had led to it. The more he looked at it, the plainer did that central principle of all come out to him. The man was a murderer, and deserving of punishment. He had had a trial before an unjust law, an unjust judge, and a misdirected jury. The law, indeed, had absolved him, but the crime remained as great and as unexpiated as ever. Slowly in Basil's mind a terrible idea, an infatuated idea, arose and shaped itself. If twelve men could be found so to shirk their duty, one man must be found to take it upon him in their stead, and perform it fearlessly. If the laws of man refused to convict this red-handed homicide, then surely the laws of God should try him and punish him.

At a shop in the Grand Rue he bought a revolver. For a day or two he walked aimlessly through the town and among the paths on the hills, meeting Griswold now and again, but always in company. He might have shot him then and there, to be sure, for it wasn't detection he shirked; he went to work with his eyes open, taking his life in his hands, and regarding himself merely as a chosen minister of divine vengeance. But he wanted not merely to punish his man in the dark; he must explain to him first the good ground and reasons of his justly-inflicted punishment. To do that as it ought to be done, he must see Griswold alone; and to see Griswold alone now was no easy matter. The murderer, haunted perhaps by the ghosts of his own accusing conscience, seldom appeared in public without a posse of friends. He walked about in a crowd; he was boisterous and excited. He seemed to keep himself from the gnawing pangs of remorse by living in a constant whirl of feverish dissipation. Day after day Basil waited and watched, but his chance never came; the man always eluded him. His fiery indignation couldn't cool for a moment; but the opportunity for carrying out the desperate plan he had at heart grew more and more remote with every day he remained there.

At last, one afternoon, as the weeks wore on, Basil went up again into the hills behind the gay little town. It was a beautiful autumn day, calm, clear, and sunny. The trees were now beginning to drape themselves in their later livery of

crimson and gold. An air, as of deep peace, pervaded the whole world. It reacted upon Basil. He felt more calm and resigned than he had felt for many weeks. The very aspect of nature seemed to cool his fevered brain. He even took out his sketch book and began to draw. He must do something; he was tired of waiting; he would return for a while at last to his accustomed vocations.

As he sat there and sketched, by some strange chance of the crowned Caprice that governs this universe, Alvan Griswold came suddenly upon him round the selfsame corner where he had seen first Marcella and then De Marigny emerge, on the very evening of the murder. The Californian was alone, walking fast through the woods, and deeply preoccupied. Quick as lightning Basil perceived that his opportunity had come. Without one tremor of his hand, without one word of warning, he drew the revolver in haste from the breast-pocket of his coat, and, pointing it low at the man's legs, discharged two chambers rapidly.

At sound of the sudden shots, Alvan Griswold started, surprised. Next moment a pang of pain shot fiercely through and through him. He sat down on the bank in an utter collapse. Strong man as he was, he almost fainted at once with pain and loss of blood from the two wounds, for both bullets had taken effect. Basil saw at a glance that he was seriously injured. Blood flowed from either leg; in point of fact, one ball had buried itself in his left shin bone, the other had passed clean through his right calf, which now bled profusely.

The American was too much accustomed to the use of firearms to be entirely surprised by this unexpected attack under such seemingly unprovoked circumstances. After a moment's delay he looked up at his assailant, and burst forth with all the coolness and *sangfroid* of his western countrymen.

“Well, say now, I want to know: what the devil did you shoot for?”

Basil had meant to disable him. He saw his man was disabled. He wouldn't shoot him outright, indeed, because he felt he had first a message from God and man to deliver to him.

With a stern face of retributive justice he held the revolver still pointed, without a quiver, full at the man's heart. “Alvan Griswold,” he said calmly, with the supernatural calm of one who holds his own life as dust in the balance, by comparison with the work he has set upon him to accomplish, “I am going to shoot you. I shot low at first, because I wanted to maim you and to make you listen to me. When I have delivered my judgment I will shoot you dead, for the murder of De Marigny. I hardly knew him; I only saw him once or twice. It is not *him* I desire to avenge, but offended justice. I learnt as a child one great law, ‘Thou shalt do no murder.’ When I heard of this man you killed in cold blood, in a private quarrel at the Hotel des Vosges, I fully expected that even this world's law would rise up and punish you. Deliberately, and of set purpose, you laid a trap for that man and that woman. Deliberately, and of set purpose, you returned that night from Paris to surprise and discover them. Deliberately, and of set purpose, you took your savage vengeance—the vengeance of the red Indian—upon the man who, as you no doubt would choose to put it, had attacked your honour. The law of France and a jury of Frenchmen were entrusted by God and man with the task of appraising and punishing your crime. They failed in their duty. An odious exception in their Penal Code gave you the seeming right to exercise, unpunished, the barbaric revenge which you chose to wreak upon your defenceless enemy. But I fail to see in their uncivilized statute-book any provision which says that if your wife had surprised you at some hell in Paris with one of the women of your choice, the law would have justified her in executing a like vengeance upon you and your paramour. So unequal and unfair a law as that deserves no respect at all from any human being. But the law of God, which tells me, in plain words, ‘Thou shalt do no murder,’ still remains to be vindicated, if not by the constituted authority of the land, then by the private act of every well-disposed citizen. It is nothing to me that if I shoot you here to-day, I shall pay in the end myself with my own useless life for it. I have come here simply and solely to perform the duty which the French court left unperformed at La Roche that morning.... Alvan Griswold, in the name of God and humanity, I try you; I find you guilty; I condemn you to death. And in accordance with that verdict I shall proceed to shoot you. Have you anything to say that may show just cause why the sentence of this court should not at once, here and now, be executed upon you?”

While he spoke, the man Griswold, pale as a ghost with pain and loss of blood and terror, gazed up at him vacantly. His heavy lower jaw dropped by degrees on his breast. Those keen dark eyes stared in front of him glassily. He heard every word Basil Hume had to say. In a vague kind of fashion he took it all in, and thoroughly understood it; but he was stunned by the suddenness and unexpectedness of the attack. He cowered before the actual face of death as though he himself had

never been a successful bully. While Basil still spoke, he sat still, chained to the bank, as it were, by his wounded legs. When Basil finished, he staggered up, flung his arms wildly in the air, and raised one loud mad shriek, “Help! help! Murder! murder!”

Basil held the revolver point-blank at him.

“No, *not* murder,” he said quietly: “execution—justice. If you have nothing else to say against the sentence of the court, and can only call out like a coward for aid against the just fate imposed by divine law upon you—then I shall wait no longer. Alvan Griswold, I shoot you!”

The revolver rang out clear, once, twice, and thrice. Griswold clapped one white hand to his breast in horror, and fell back with a low moan. Basil Hume dropped the pistol on the path by his side and gazed at his man listlessly. Not a motion of his body; not a tremor of his limbs. Surely justice had been done on him! Then he sat down in a careless attitude on the granite rock by the dead man’s feet, and waited till the gendarmes, aroused by the firing, should come up from St. Pierre to the hills to arrest him.



Transcriber's Note

This text has been preserved as in the original, including archaic and inconsistent spelling, punctuation and grammar, except that obvious printer's errors have been silently corrected.

[The end of *The Sixth Commandment* by Grant Allen]