

CARDBOARD
CASTLE

P. C. Wren

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LONGMANS

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Title: Cardboard Castle

Date of first publication: 1938

Author: Percival Christopher Wren (1875-1941)

Date first posted: Oct. 29, 2014

Date last updated: Oct. 29, 2014

Faded Page eBook #201410N1

This ebook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

CARDBOARD CASTLE

NOVELS BY P. C. WREN

BEAU GESTE

BEAU SABREUR

BEAU IDEAL

GOOD GESTES

SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE

THE WAGES OF VIRTUE

STEPSONS OF FRANCE

THE SNAKE AND THE SWORD

FATHER GREGORY

DEW AND MILDEW

DRIFTWOOD SPARS

THE YOUNG STAGERS

THE MAMMON OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

MYSTERIOUS WAYE

VALIANT DUST

FLAWED BLADES

ACTION AND PASSION

PORT O' MISSING MEN

BEGGARS' HORSES

SPANISH MAINE

EXPLOSION

SINBAD THE SOLDIER

BUBBLE REPUTATION

FORT IN THE JUNGLE

THE MAN OF A GHOST

WORTH WILE

ROUGH SHOOTING

EDITED BY P. C. WREN

SOWING GLORY

CARDBOARD
CASTLE

BY
PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
215 VICTORIA STREET, TORONTO

First Edition . . . 1938

Made and Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London

To

DR. WILLIAM LYON PHELPS, P_{H.}D., L_{ITT.}D.,
OF Y_{ALE} U_{NIVERSITY},

I SHOULD LIKE TO OFFER THE DEDICATION OF THIS
BOOK AS A SMALL TOKEN OF REGARD AND AS A
RESPECTFUL TRIBUTE OF ESTEEM FOR THE AMERICAN
WORLD OF LETTERS IN WHICH HE HOLDS SO EMINENT
A POSITION

I

I am going to tell this story in my own way, because I hold very firmly the belief that one's own way is the best way. And if further reason were needed, there is surely an excellent one in the fact that I know of no other. From which you will gather the undeniable fact that I am not a practised writer; not a trained and experienced novelist, equipped with a classical or even a recognized technique.

But I have a story to tell, and am competent to tell it. Moreover, there is no one else in a position to tell the story as completely and accurately as I can.

§ 2

No one, not even his parents, knew and understood young Anthony Calderton better than I did, and I very much doubt if anyone understood him nearly as well.

And yet, as will be seen, this may not be saying a very great deal. I knew him because, as his tutor, I spent practically the whole of every day with him for several years. For Anthony being what he was, and I taking the view of my duties and responsibilities that I did, I was not content merely to spend lesson-time with him. In point of fact, I regarded lesson-time as perhaps the least valuable part of the day. Certainly far less important than the leisure time we spent together—talking, walking, riding, reading, pursuing our hobbies and, more particularly, young Anthony's amazing hobby of dramatization.

Doubtless you will at once think—a thing that was often actually said to me—that the boy would be only too glad to get away from his tutor as soon as lessons were over, and that if he worked with me from ten till one and again from five till six, he would see and hear as much of me as he wanted, or more, and be only too thankful to get away from me for the rest of the time.

This, however, was not the case, as it would have been with the normal boy.

But Anthony was not a normal boy.

He loathed my leaving him, as sometimes I was compelled to do, even for an hour, much less for a day or a week-end. He hated saying good night and going to bed; and he knocked at my bedroom door—a quaint little figure with tousled hair and big haunted eyes—in his pyjamas, dressing-gown and bedroom slippers, in the early morning, when the footman brought my tea.

Doubtless you will also think—a thing which, on more than one occasion, was also said to me—that I should have got sick, sorry and tired of the sight and sound of the boy, and been only too glad to leave him to his devices for the afternoon, and

again as soon as his evening lesson was completed.

But neither was that the case; for on the rare occasions when Anthony was not with me, I missed him, found myself at a loose end, and much as a dog-lover feels who has to take his usual country walk without his dog.

Not that there was that sort of relationship between the boy and myself; no throwing of metaphorical sticks or stones for him to run after; no benevolent or condescending pats upon the head; no talking down; no sitting upon stiles while the less intelligent animal gambolled about my feet. Nothing of that sort. I merely mean that when he wasn't with me, I missed him so much that the walk was a lonely grind taken conscientiously for fresh air and exercise.

Not only did I miss his company but his conversation; his unusual, remarkable and most interesting thoughts, ideas and fancies—especially fancies—expressed in that somewhat old-fashioned but charming and delightful way that was the result of years of unguided browsing in his father's library, and the reading of books that rarely come the way of boys of his age.

He had had an admirable governess, of whom more anon, whose excellent influence upon his then baby mind had given it a noticeable twist and, in one minor direction, a strange little kink. I think that is the best word, for it would give a wrong impression if I said that she had warped his mind.

And what an amazing and hugely disproportionate effect, not only upon his own life, but upon those of others, was that strange little kink to have.

What she had done, in point of fact, was to give his perfectly sound mind a "King Charles's head"—more than figuratively. To the extent that she had done this, young Anthony departed from the normal, though when he came into my hands, at the age of fourteen years or so, it was some time before I discovered this curious idiosyncrasy which was to have such dramatic and far-reaching consequences.

Now I have already, and before mentioning this peculiarity, admitted that Anthony was not normal.

How difficult it is to say exactly what one means. If there be a true word in the jest that speech is given us for the concealment of our thoughts, there is a far truer one in the statement that speech is a most inadequate vehicle for the exact conveyance of our meaning.

How shall I express the state and condition of Anthony's mentality? Sane but abnormal? Normal enough, but most unusual? A mind so unusual as to be remarkable; and therefore not a normal mind?

Anyhow, what I can say without danger of being misunderstood, is that Anthony had a beautiful, a lovely mind; that he was brilliantly clever, though I hate the word,

for any fool can be “clever”; that he had an acute perceptive brain; that he had a most charming, delightful and engaging nature; that he was infinitely attractive, amusing and intriguing; that he was, with one exception, altogether the nicest, the most lovable personality I have ever known.

Though I am slow in the matter of liking and disliking, cautious in summing up and deciding about a person, I liked him the first time I saw him; liked him very much within a month; soon became exceedingly fond of him; and within the first year of our association, freely and fully admitted that I loved him.

And that was the first time in my life I had admitted such a thing, save for one or two members of my own family.

It is a thing for which I thank God, that Anthony Calderton had wise parents; that his father, albeit a fine flower of the Public School, Sandhurst and Army system, was sufficiently intelligent, broad-minded and perceptive to realize that there are certain rare spirits for whom that system is not suitable; also that his mother had sufficient love, understanding and unselfishness to realize and accept the fact that, greatly as she desired it, Anthony could not and would not go to school.

It must have been a real grief to her, as well as to her husband, that the boy should not follow in the footsteps of his ancestors, sit literally in the seats they had occupied, and emulate their successes or failures in class-room and playing-field.

It was breaking a tradition very dear to them both.

What would have happened to Anthony had his father taken the line that so many soldiers would have taken, and shouted,

“What the Devil! Of course the boy’ll go to Eton. Never heard such damn’ rubbish in my life. They’ll soon knock the nonsense out of him,” I shudder to think, especially had such an attitude been encouraged by a high-spirited, never-heard-such-bosh type of mother, with a yelp of,

“My son? Of course he’ll go; and I shall tell his House Master to stand no nonsense. Put him through it. Make a man of him.”

Had such a line been taken with Anthony, it is much more likely that they’d have made a corpse or an idiot of him.

Anthony was fortunate; indeed, he was singularly blessed, in his parents.

Nor, I am glad to say, did he himself, ever, in later life, inveigh against the Public School system simply because it was not the right system for him. He did not proclaim to the world that his was a rotten Public School because it didn’t amend and adapt its system to his peculiar requirements; he didn’t proclaim, for example, that because he was taught French by an Englishman whose accent was not pure Parisian, the Public School system is an abominable one and stands thereby self-

condemned; he did not declare that it is a soul-destroying, character-crushing machine that casts all those unfortunates committed to its care into one uniform mould and, while they are malleable, stamps them with one uniform pattern.

Incidentally I might mention that I heard this view expressed by a visitor on learning that Anthony had been educated by a governess and then by a tutor; and that Anthony thereupon promptly observed that, so long as the mould and the pattern were excellent, admirable and serviceable to their purpose, it did not seem to matter how many people were stamped by it. In fact, the more the merrier.

Such was Anthony's considered opinion; and upon every conceivable subject mentioned by me and other ordinary people in ordinary conversation, he seemed to have a considered opinion, so widely had he read and so incorrigibly was he given to the habit of forming opinions.

At the risk of displaying myself as completely obsessed by the subject of Anthony, I wish to give you a very clear and accurate picture of him, before telling the story in which he played a part so strange, so decisive, so final.

I am describing him at such length because it is important that you should realize not only the fact but the degree, the extent, and the nature of his abnormality.

What is a lunatic, a person who is permanently so "queer" as to be described as insane?

Speaking succinctly and accurately, it is a person who is incapable of distinguishing between fact and fancy.

Personally, I think we sane people are all a little mad; or, to express it otherwise and better, there is some subject on which everyone is more or less mad, generally very much less; and the extent to which we are mad is the extent to which we are unable to differentiate between the facts and our fancies on that particular subject.

Now, how far was Anthony unable to distinguish between reality and make-believe? That was one of the first questions that I asked myself about him; for quite early, indeed by the day after my coming to Calderton, I was struck by his ability to lose himself in the part that he was playing. And Anthony, in spite of all I have said about him, was almost always playing a part and dramatizing himself or the situation.

Doubtless this tendency had been strengthened and increased by the methods followed by his excellent governess who was, very rightly, a great believer in the encouragement of self-expression, and in the use of a child's natural bent and tastes for the furtherance and encouragement of its activities and the development of its abilities. He loved charades, plays, and make-believe, and she encouraged him to act. He had more than the average child's love of dressing-up, impersonation, dramatization—acting, in short—and this had been, as I say, definitely encouraged.

One had to know Anthony well before one knew what he was up to, in what rôle he was behaving; whom he was impersonating, in fact. And one always had a sense of having failed him, of having fallen short of his high expectation and, indeed, trust, if one were stupid, missed one's cue, and responded wrongly, or not at all.

Nor am I in the slightest degree praising myself—indeed I am probably laying myself open to the accusation of being queer and abnormal myself—when I say that Anthony's luck held, at any rate to a small degree, when his parents selected me as his tutor. He would have been nearly as badly off with a bluff, blunt, bulldog-pipe-and-no-nonsense fellow who completely failed to understand him, as he would have been at a Public School with young barbarians at play, and harassed pre-occupied form-masters at work.

The ministrations of the cold-bath-every-morning, sweat-run-every-afternoon, come-off-that-imagination-tripe young man, whether Muscular Christian curate or Rugger Blue and recent graduate, would have reduced Anthony to sullenness—no, never that—but to a withdrawn aloofness and a polite, easy, yet incredibly stubborn refusal to conform.

For, though I never found him so myself, I do not deny that Anthony could be very difficult, nor that, quite frequently, he actually was extremely difficult with people who did not understand him, and whom he did not like.

This naturally led to there being two opinions about him, the opinions of those who really knew him, and of those who thought they did; and from this fact arises the implicit commendation that those who knew him best loved him most. Inevitably, the better one knew young Anthony Calderton, the more one loved him—loved his very faults.

For he was no angel-child, no adolescent saint. He had a temper; and, personally, I have no use for anybody who hasn't one somewhere concealed about him or her.

He was impish, and could be exceedingly annoying to people who were fools enough to be annoyed by his little jokes at their expense. These amusingly mischievous tricks were often very carefully thought out and most ingenious; and, in conversation, he would often lead one on to commit oneself to some untenable and indefensible statement or theory. I always found these verbal fencing-matches very diverting, and encouraged them, both for Anthony's amusement and my own. At first I was a little puzzled, but soon came to understand that a series of Socratic questions was leading up to some absurd, whimsical, or fantastic conclusion.

And undeniably Anthony was sly; sly in the way that an elf, a gnome, a fairy, is sly, partly self-protectively and partly for secret and inward amusement, the

gratification of a love of subtlety and trickery, a baffling but innocent and harmless deviousness.

And now, perhaps, I have given you a pretty fair idea of the complex character of Anthony Calderton, and equally perhaps, I have completely failed to do so; failed to give you an adequate and faithful portrait of a most delightful and charming boy, attractive, original and engaging beyond the ordinary.

I hope I have not quite failed, for I should like you to be in a position to form your own opinion as to the answer to the question concerning him that even now obsesses, intrigues and troubles me.

§ 3

I find it less easy to tell you about Lady Calderton; not because she was, like her son, a complex personality—in fact, she was a woman of great simplicity of mind and lucidity of soul—but because I cannot profess to be an unbiased chronicler where she is concerned. Difficult as I find it to speak with impartial just accuracy concerning Anthony, it seems impossible for me to do so with regard to his mother.

I loved Anthony long before I really knew his mother, for Anthony had become the absorbing interest of my life before I saw her daily and came to understand her and know her well.

As with the boy, I liked her from the first, and liked her very much before she again went abroad with her husband, leaving Anthony, and virtually Calderton as well, in my charge.

To obtrude here my purely personal and private affairs for a moment, I was, at the time of my going to Calderton, a somewhat idle, somewhat philosophical young man, blessed or cursed with a modest competence; a dilettante dabbler in the Arts, painting a little, composing a little, writing a little; and an ardent admirer of other arts, in the practice of which I had no ability and in the pursuit of which I had no desire to engage—the dramatic; the poetic; that of sculpture; and so forth.

I had done well on the scholastic side at School and College, leaving the former with a useful scholarship and the latter with a good degree. But at games I was hopeless, and could do nothing at all with a ball, large or small, save despise it heartily. I hated cricket, disliked both forms of football, intensely detested golf and tennis, and refused to learn to play hockey.

In a vain endeavour to mitigate the contempt which this confession will rightly bring upon me, I claim that a long and successful fight at Prep School, Public School,

and College, against the tyranny of the Ball, connotes a certain tenacity and stubbornness of character. In point of fact, a humorous or facetious schoolmaster, in writing one of his annual reports, stated concerning me,

“He is a boy of much character, chiefly bad; a boy of great promise—and small performance; a trying boy who never tries.”

But he was one of those excellent fellows who, doubtless rightly, judge a boy by his prowess and performance on the playing-fields, and the value of his contribution to the winning of those cups and pots that so justly are the honour and glory of his House.

Lest you get an even lower estimate of me than I deserve, I would fain add that, in spite of my congenital inability with the Ball, I take a great deal of walking exercise, and think nothing of doing my hundred and fifty miles a week when on one of my frequent walking tours. Also that I am a pretty fair performer with the foil and *épée*, a star pupil of Bertrand’s, and more than once a finalist in those interesting early morning encounters in Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

Also, I am blessed with an uncle who, on the tacit assumption that I am his heir, sees to it that I do not go to utter moral rack and ruin through my penchant for the idle and contemplative life, my preference for the library rather than the dusty arena, and my inclination to be what he sometimes calls a loafer, sometimes a wretched book-worm, and again, a worthless young man-about-town, according to the severity of his rheumatism.

I visit Uncle in the swiftly dissolving privacies and fastnesses of the Albany for the good of my soul and my pocket; and because, in spite of his insulting tirades, I am very fond of him.

To him I owe it—and for this I am more deeply in his debt than for anything else—that I came to Calderton as Anthony’s tutor. In spite of the trite banality of its truism, how endlessly intrusive and attractive is speculation on the immensity of the results that ensue from the smallest acts, events and deeds, the tremendous effects of what are apparently the tiniest causes; as though the dropping of a pin caused thunderous reverberations that echo round the world.

Had not my uncle’s man Judd mentioned that the stock of private writing-paper was running low, and had it not been a fine morning, he would not have gone shopping and done what he rarely did—lunched at his Club, the Marlborough, and there encountered General Sir Arthur Calderton, an Eton contemporary and old friend of his; and had not the General mentioned the business that brought him to town, that of visiting a scholastic agency, who might be able to recommend a suitable tutor for his son, I should never have known Anthony Calderton, nor had the

privilege and joy of knowing and perhaps helping his mother at a time of direst distress, fear and horror. So slight, so tiny, we may reflect, are the events, the accidents in fact, that change our whole lives and shape our ends.

Wiser, doubtless, is the conclusion that whatever happens was ordained, and was written in the Book of Fate since Time began. (Item, and further reflection for the weak-minded, or such as desire to become so: When *did* Time begin?)

Anyhow, it was ‘written on my forehead.’

Uncle rang me up at my tiny though extremely comfortable flat, and bade me dine in Albany with him on the morrow. At dinner he informed me that I was to proceed at my, or his, earliest convenience, by train, to a place called Calderton, where I should be met and driven to Calderton House, the residence of General Sir Arthur Calderton; and should there take up my residence as tutor to his son Anthony.

“High time you had another job, young man,” growled my uncle, “and a job in the country, too. Do you all the good in the world. Lucky to get the chance. Lovely place. Incidentally, I told Calderton that he’d be lucky too, so don’t let me down.”

I agreed at once, for I love swift unexpected ventures and adventures such as this ‘leaping-up,’ as my beloved sister and I used to call it at home, and doing something unpremeditated and, preferably, silly.

And so, some two or three days later, at four o’clock on a beautiful afternoon, I got out of the train at a little wayside station that bore the name that was to become to me the most important in the world, Calderton, and saw, standing on the tiny platform, an elegant and most attractive female figure.

A primrose by a river’s brim, a yellow primrose was to me at that moment. But soon it was something more, for as I languidly superintended the extraction of minor baggage from my compartment and major impedimenta from the luggage-van, I saw from the tail of my eye that she was taking note of me and my mild activities. Evidently she was not proceeding by this train; apparently she was waiting for someone and . . . yes . . . obviously and positively, she was waiting for me. I was almost as surprised as delighted when, approaching and extending a tiny gloved hand, she gave me a smile that immediately won my heart as the writers of books have it.

“Do say you are Mr. Waring,” she begged beseechingly, gazing at my face with eyes as clear, confiding and beautiful as human eyes have any need to be.

“I would, in any case,” I replied, raising my hat. “I will. I do.”

“You am, in fact,” she laughed.

“I are,” I agreed.

“I’m so glad,” said Lady Calderton, and somehow I was then and there, in that moment of our first meeting, more than glad.

How amazing, and how charmingly delightful, that she should have taken the trouble herself to come to the station to meet so insignificant a person as a prospective tutor of her small boy. A mere male governess—though, on the other hand, surely a person of considerable importance, if the physical, mental and moral welfare of the son and heir of an ancient house were to be placed unreservedly in his sole charge.

“I thought I would like to come down and meet you,” she said, as we made our way to the big limousine, followed by a chauffeur and a porter, the one not overburdened with my despatch-case and rug, the other bearing kit-bag and suit-case, “so that we can have a talk on the way back. Time is so short and there’s so much to tell you about Anthony. He’s the dearest boy, but he’s . . . different.”

Not having met him, I mentally admitted that I was quite certain he was the dearest boy, and that, like every other mother’s son, he was different.

And then, glancing at the charming and piquant face beside me, gentle, kindly, beautiful, I softened my heart, and realized that her son might indeed be different. He might well be very different from the average young savage who had so often been my cruel critic and harsh oppressor in my own diffident and difficult school-days.

“Not very strong?” I ventured.

“Oh, healthy enough, but what his father calls ‘over-engined for his beam.’ He’s a queer boy. Simply won’t go to school.”

“Refuses?” I asked, between admiration of such stoutness and dismay at such defiance. This must either be a young gentleman of remarkable character or else a spoiled brat with whom no one could do anything.

It began to look as though my new job might be no sinecure.

“No, he doesn’t refuse. He comes back. Gives it a fair trial and then comes home again.”

Runs away from school, in short, thought I. Character again? Or incorrigible disobedience? Or was this one of those examples of the freak education by cranky parents, which is not education at all? No repressions; no coercion; no interference; no—anything. So that, instead of the child growing as some sort of flower, plant, shrub or tree in the Garden of Life, the result is a poor and worthless weed. But obviously there was nothing of the freak, the crank, the doctrinaire fanatic about this particular parent.

“Just comes back,” she continued, “and says that it won’t do; that he simply can’t bear it, and relies on me to have sufficient understanding to refrain from trying

to make him return. I know it sounds like a weak indulgent parent, feeble and foolish, on the one hand, and the spoilt head-strong and uncontrolled child on the other; but Anthony's not that, and whatever I may be, I can assure you that his father is not weak and indulgent; neither feeble nor foolish. . . . Anyhow, you'll see."

Yes, thought I, in my wisdom, I shall see. The spoilt brat who'll give endless trouble and completely ruin my enjoyment of what should be a delightful job.

And for the rest of the drive from Calderton Station to Calderton House, Anthony's mother did her best to place me *au courant* with the unusual state of affairs, and the ways and nature of what was evidently going to prove a very unusual pupil.

I smile as I look back upon my preconceived ideas.

My first view of Calderton House, in its glorious and almost unique setting, was breath-taking.

Well, thought I, if I couldn't be happy here, were there half a dozen spoilt children to contend with, it would be a pity.

A lovely and historic house; gardens that had been tended with skilful care for centuries; the loveliest part of the most beautiful county in England; a house noted for its library and art treasures, its historical features and—to consider the more mundane things of life, which I am far from despising—its cellar, its chef, its stables, its shooting, its fishing, all highly praised by my uncle, himself a recognized connoisseur.

And as we drove through the park, with its famous chestnut avenue leading from the great gates to the house, I was distinctly conscious, even while admiring the lovely effects of the sunlight slanting through the trees upon the short fine grass and deliberately posing deer, that I was sorry that the woman sitting beside me, her face and voice so filled with a lovely animation, was going away.

Before I had set foot in Calderton House, I realized how different the place would be when she was not in it. Moreover, before I had set eyes on Anthony Calderton, I registered a determination that if my tutorship were not a success, it would be through no fault of mine—and I was not at that time a person given to enthusiasms.

So little so, in point of fact, that I mentally shook myself, took myself to task, and wondered what was happening to me.

It must be my artistic spirit demonstrating, I decided, on sight of the truly lovely scene on which I gazed—Lady Calderton being part thereof.

Arrived at the foot of the great stone steps that swept in a double flight to left

and right of the entrance, Lady Calderton remarked that, at the risk of boring me, she hoped to have a really long talk about Anthony after dinner, and meanwhile, if I would join them at tea on the terrace, I could make Anthony's acquaintance.

I was delighted with my quarters, to which the footman conducted me, a delightful sunny chintz-furnished sitting-room, looking out across the park over the lake to distant hills; and a smaller room, furnished as a bedroom, opening out of it.

Yes, this would do; would decidedly do. Most comfortable, both in summer and in winter, in fine weather and in foul; sun-bathed on fine days, with glass doors opening on to a sunny balcony; wonderfully cosy in bad weather, with curtains drawn and a blazing log-fire in the big fireplace.

Having washed, and given my keys to the rubicund young footman, I retraced my steps to the hall, the centre of the activities of the house, where Jenkins, who looked the Perfect Butler, took me through a big drawing-room to a sunny and sheltered corner of a terrace. Here, in the midst of a circle of deep and comfortable cane-chairs, an inviting tea-table was set.

A tall man, handsome and grey-haired, arose, a pleasant smile lighting up his clean-cut bronzed face. Coming towards me with extended hand, he said,

"Mr. Waring? Delighted you've come. Extraordinarily good luck that I met your uncle at the Club the other day. Known him all my life. Hope you'll be comfortable here."

I murmured my acknowledgments and, almost before I had accepted the cigarette and seated myself in the chair he indicated, I decided that I liked General Sir Arthur Calderton, and that here again my uncle was justified of his eulogy.

Inwardly I smiled to myself, and mentally I rubbed my hands, for all seemed well, and very well. This man and I talked the same language.

He fitted his setting, and went with Lady Calderton, aesthetically, as well as along the Vale of Life. Not that he had gone far down it, for he didn't look a day more than fifty, though he may have been several days more. Some fifteen years older than his wife, I thought.

If only Anthony were as amenable and attractive as his mother thought him, my lines were indeed now cast in pleasant places.

Pleasant! Could one but have foreseen. . . .

"His mother will tell you all about Anthony," continued the General. "I can sum up all I've got to say, by asking you to do the impossible. Anyway, you'll try, I'm sure. What I want is for him to get, here at home, all that he is missing by not going to School, if you see what I mean."

I murmured that I did understand, and would do my best.

“I don’t for one moment suppose he will go into the Army, and I certainly shan’t put any pressure on him, but I’d like him to go to the Varsity; and I am hoping that, by that time, he’ll be sufficiently normal and ordinary to pass in a crowd. Being what he is, he’d have a bad time at a Public School. He has, in point of fact, though a brief one. But at Oxford—at Magdalen or Christ Church, say—I don’t see why he should be very different from the average undergraduate, having been in the right kind of tutor’s hands for four or five years.”

“Nor do I,” I agreed. “Nor, moreover, do I see why he shouldn’t have an excellent good time, if he *is* a bit different. The Varsity isn’t like school, of course, and the chief difference between the two is that, whereas individuality is discouraged at school, individuality and idiosyncrasy are permitted—indeed encouraged—at College.”

“Yes, quite so. Quite so. And there again differing from Sandhurst or Woolwich.”

“Yes, a man can go his own way, do what he likes, and, indeed, be what he likes, without interference from anybody. Athlete or aesthete, party-thrower or hermit.”

“Yes,” agreed the General. “Well, I want him to go up, and I want him to lead the ordinary Varsity life among his fellows.”

“I understand,” I assured the General. “And if he comes back home in the middle of his first term, I shall decide that I have failed.”

“Failed?” said the voice of Lady Calderton behind. “Already?”

“No, Lady Calderton,” I said, rising and turning to meet her delightful smile. “I was just saying that unless Anthony stays at the Varsity for three years and asks for a fourth, I shall feel that I have failed.

“Failed in life completely,” I added, as she laughed.

The smile died from her face and a faintly anxious, deeply solicitous look took its place as, turning, she said quietly,

“Here he is.”

A tall slender boy, looking more than his fourteen years, came out on to the terrace, staring hard at me as he approached.

Yes, thought I, definitely different; very highly strung. A fine forehead and not so fine a chin; too small and pointed. Aristocrat; inbred; balanced on a very fine edge. Fine nervous hands. Very good mouth indeed; nothing petulant, greedy, weak or peevish there. Beautiful eyes; too big. Ought to have been a girl. Dressed in a girl’s clothes, nobody would use the word ‘boyish’ about her, him, it.

“This is Anthony,” said Lady Calderton, “and I do so hope he will be a credit to you . . . This is Mr. Waring, Anthony, who has so kindly come to look after you and

help you while we are away.”

The boy shook hands gravely.

“How d’you do,” said he. “Do you fence?”

“Yes,” said I. “I do.”

“Oh, good,” he observed. And leaving it at that, turned to the tea-table, and with complete self-possession, became one of the circle, an equal.

As we talked, I eyed him from time to time, always finding, when I did so, that he was watching me with a long considering look, thoughtful, judgmatic. He was not staring rudely, or in the childish manner that is rightly prohibited, but studying me; and, although his eyes left my face directly I looked towards him, I knew that they returned instantly.

I was conscious of a foolish and most unwarranted desire to be approved by this queer boy, and I pondered the problem of what was to happen if I failed to give satisfaction. He might leave school and return home when he decided so to do, but he couldn’t very well leave home and the tutor installed there. Or would he, perchance, announce one day that he proposed to join his parents in Montiga, as a tutor-infested home was no longer acceptable?

But behind these idle speculations was a growing belief and assurance that nothing of the sort would happen; that he and I would get on excellently.

Nor should it be for want of the utmost endeavour on my part if I failed to interest, to inspire, and somewhat to mould the young Anthony Calderton.

After tea I returned to my quarters, found that my things had been unpacked, the trunk and suit-cases removed, a large bowl of roses installed, and the rooms looking as though I had inhabited them for years.

What should I do? Seek out Anthony, suggest a walk, and make his better acquaintance; or, treading warily, leave him alone for the present?

There was a knock at my door, and in answer to my call, Anthony entered.

“Hullo,” said I, refraining from adding ‘old chap’ or adopting any sort of avuncular or heavy-father line.

“Hullo,” was the reply. “You didn’t bring any foils with you, I suppose?”

“No. But I’ll soon get them.”

This was excellent.

“Had any fencing lessons?” I asked.

“Only from a gym-instructor at school,” replied Anthony.

And in cool and quiet comment, added,

“A clumsy lout.”

“H’m!” thought I.

“You’ll give me lessons, won’t you?” he asked.

“Rather!” said I. “More than you’ll like, perhaps.”

“No, I don’t think you’ll do that.

“What I really want,” he continued, “is to learn to fence very well indeed, and then to have a duel, with real rapiers and sharp points. Father has one, you know. My ancestors’. Charles the First’s time. I want to use it in a fight.”

This was interesting. Blood-thirsty? Homicidal destruction-complex? No, not with that face.

“Whom do you want to kill?” I asked, and at once saw that I had said the wrong thing.

“Kill? What a horrible idea. I don’t want to kill anybody, nor hurt anybody either. I just want to have a real fencing-match; a proper fight; a duel. I shall dress up as a cavalier and we’d fence by moonlight. Full moon, you know, on a lawn, and I’d throw off my plumed hat and velvet cloak and take off my doublet. Fight in a silk shirt and slashed velvet breeches of the Stuart period. Silk hose and buckled shoes. Take the shoes off, perhaps.

“And you’d do the same, wouldn’t you? Only would you mind being a Roundhead?” he asked.

I forbore to simulate tremendous enthusiasm. Only a fool, or rather, a bigger fool than I, perhaps, would ‘act’ under the steady gaze of those large and level eyes.

I considered the matter.

“Yes, rather fun,” I admitted. “Bit dangerous, though, with sharp points.”

“Dangerous!” observed Anthony, and the fine lip curled slightly.

After staring out of the window for a few moments, he observed,

“Oh, by the way, Mother sent me to ask if you’d care to go for a stroll with her. She always walks after tea.

“If it’s not raining,” he added.

Most definitely I would care to do so. I had an idea that it would take me a very long time to see and hear more of Lady Calderton than I wanted to do.

I have never forgotten that walk across the park; the evening; the scene, and the company approaching perfection. And by the time we returned to the house, more than an hour later, I had pretty well made up my mind about her.

I summed her up then as being competent without being clever, well-read without being learned, charming without being insincere, and, as a mother, loving without being foolish.

I gathered the impression that without being weak, vacillating, and over-suggestible, she was anything but strong-minded, firm and determined; not the type

of woman of which the best martyrs are made; not the sort that would shine as a militant suffragette or in a crisis; nor one who would suffer in silence, take a strong line and ensue it to the bitter end; or die for an idea.

How far I was right in my assumption as to her probable conduct at a time of crisis, under great suffering, in imminent danger to herself and those she loved, I was to learn.

It is not for one moment to be supposed that I admired her or liked her the less for these reservations. I like a woman to be feminine, and she was, I judged, of the essence of femininity. That Anthony should, to some extent, dominate her, and to any extent get his own way against her better judgment, seemed to me, then, creditable to them both; an attribute to Anthony's clear knowledge of what he wanted, and to her wisdom in compromise.

Wisdom! Had she been a plain, unpleasant, and objectionable woman, I should probably, in the same circumstances, have preferred the phrase "weakness in compromise."

It is axiomatic that whether we realize it or not, we like, and indeed love, people far more for their little human imperfections and weaknesses than we do for their high moral virtues, strength, wisdom and persistence in well-doing.

Anyhow, even on that first evening, I liked this woman exceedingly; and where, perhaps, in the matter of her attitude to her son I might have judged, I forbore—and sympathized instead.

Well, I hope I have now given you some idea of the character and personality of Lady Calderton.

And again, perhaps, I have failed to do so; failed to do her justice; to give you anything approaching a true picture of her wonderful charm, sweetness and true kindness of nature; of her easy friendliness and the fascination of her simplicity and sincerity.

I never met anyone, whether aristocrat, *nouveau riche*, bourgeois, or of the working-class, less afflicted with conceit, self-importance, aloofness, or air and manner of that stultifying exclusiveness that spoils so many otherwise likeable people.

In short, Lady Calderton was a gentlewoman who was truly gentle, and possessed a face and form that were truly beautiful.

§ 4

Of General Sir Arthur Calderton, I need not say very much, as, although a most

important figure in the drama, he played a small part on the stage.

He was—I fear I must say the words—a great gentleman; a genuine aristocrat; and an ornament of county, military and political society; one of a vanishing race, who served his country without need, or desire, of profit; and though possessed of a magnificent home, more than ample wealth, and all the instincts of a country gentleman and sportsman, he laboured hard and successfully in alien lands and tropic climes *ad majorem patriæ gloriam*, and to the benefit of those he governed.

Able without being clever, forceful without being overbearing, proud without being conceited, strong without being harsh, he was that somewhat rare being, a man at once admirable and lovable. For he was essentially and fundamentally kindly.

It was my good fortune to see a good deal, and to know something, of that truly great man, the late Lord Curzon; and Sir Arthur Calderton reminded me of him, both by similarity and by contrast.

With all Lord Curzon's pride, high sense of duty and inborn aptitude for affairs, he had none of his arrogance of manner, his somewhat pompous aloofness, and but little of his industrious gluttony for work. An easier, more friendly, more human person, with a far greater gift of putting others at their ease, of winning their love, and evoking the best that was in them.

Not only was he lovable, as Curzon was not, but he was endowed with a great gift of loving. This side of idolatry, he undoubtedly adored his wife and son. He had a host of friends, as distinct from acquaintances; and amongst them could be included his subordinates, servants and retainers.

That he could leave behind him the son whom he almost worshipped, was, to me, final proof of his great sense of duty and of service; for as I have said, there was no other reason why he should lead any life but that of a country squire of broad acres.

That he should have left the boy in my charge after so brief an acquaintanceship—for he knew me for less than three months—is the highest compliment I have ever received.

I can only feebly return it by saying that I grew to like him more than I have ever liked any man in so short a period.

§ 5

And now to tell you about the man calling himself Captain Montague Bertie-Norton.

Wishing not only to be fair to him, as well as to the others, and to draw an

accurate picture of him, I will begin by saying that I don't think it is right to call him a villain—by which I mean a downright, unmitigated, blackguardly scoundrel.

No one is all black—nor pure white. We are of all shades of grey, from the palest pearl to the dingiest lead. And some of us again are dappled; and others are like the zebra, streaky. The man who called himself Bertie-Norton can perhaps be judged better by his actions than from my description, but inasmuch as I knew him pretty intimately, I may as well tell you something about him and give you the opinion that I, personally, formed concerning him.

His besetting sin was selfishness, and from this the other sins sprang. I should think one would probably be safe in assuming that never in the whole of his life did he take any step that was not to his own advantage; lift a finger to help anyone but himself; or make any investment of time or trouble that would not show a profit—to himself.

Although he was a “schamer,” as our Irish groom said of him, I don't, in justice, think that he spent a very great deal of his valuable time in thinking out schemes for his own advantage and advancement. He hadn't that kind of astute and active mind. Rather was it lazy, somewhat unintelligent, and with a marked preference for the policy of *laissez-faire*. He was not of the stuff of which great defaulting financiers are made, but was an opportunist, and where he saw his opportunity, he took it—at any cost to anybody. He was untruthful, dishonest and unreliable; with a low standard of honour and self-respect. He had done extremely disgraceful things, and was unashamed.

All this I know on the best authority—his own; for if it be, in such circumstances, a virtue, he had the virtue of candour concerning his own misconduct.

So, though not all black, his colour was a very dirty grey. Nevertheless, he had his own standards; and as he was wont to tell you with a serious air of reassurance, he drew the line. I wonder how many times he assured me that “there he drew the line.” A curious “there,” but static, standing like a rock in a smooth and oily sea, a very grey sea again.

For example, he said that he had never cheated, and that he never would cheat, at cards; and I believe he spoke the truth—that was in him. He wouldn't descend to the baseness of marking cards. You would never find him with an extra ace. But if I were playing cards with him, I should take note of the position of any mirror that might be in the room. I should watch his dealing with the utmost attention; and I should like his partner to be a man whom I knew.

I am sure that he had never forged, and never would forge, a cheque, under any temptation; but I happen to know that he drew his own cheque upon a non-existent

account, for I possess one such document, drawn in my favour—‘favour’ being a good word in the circumstances.

I am quite sure that he would have neither part nor lot in such turf villainy as “hocussing the favourite.” But on his own confession, he had, on more than one occasion, won what he described as a ‘pot’ of money by participating in the bribery of an amenable jockey, a good puller; he had also done well, he said, in partnership with an inevitably wealthy gentleman whose custom it was to run a hot favourite, odds-on, which was almost invariably beaten at the post by his second string, a very dark horse, odds a hundred to eight.

Finally, he had come before the Stewards, and they had said the sort of thing that such a good sportsman resents.

Staying in the house of a friend, he would undoubtedly keep his fingers from stealing—save such things as any affections that might be lying about. He had only made one marriage, but had unmade quite a few.

He had never murdered man or woman; only killed their happiness, their faith, their trust, their joy in life.

Nor do I think he had ever borne false witness, out of malice, just for the sake of doing such a thing. He was too much of a gentleman to do such a deed wantonly; but when it was necessary to his own convenience, advantage and profit—why, that was another matter.

Of course, if people got in his way, well . . . He himself told me a curious and interesting story of a fellow, even then “doing time,” who need not have been, except for . . . But no, Captain Bertie-Norton may have been boasting.

Another thing in his favour. I’m quite sure that when he was a soldier, and presumably in possession of various military secrets of greater or less interest and importance, he would never have sold his knowledge to a foreign power. I don’t think there was in the world money enough, or any other acceptable form of bribery and corruption, to have induced him to do such a thing.

No. Captain Bertie-Norton, though pretty much of a bad man, was not the complete villain, for as I have said, he had his own standards of right and wrong, and as he himself proclaimed, he drew the line.

In appearance he was strikingly handsome; in manner, charming; in bearing, urbane; in style, neat, incisive and polished—at times. I make this reservation because he had a defect of style and bearing, a mannerism: and that was a laugh which can only be described as an extremely silly one. It was a flaw in an otherwise almost perfect exterior make-up; and it was as depreciatory, nay ruinous, as a bad flaw in a big jewel. All was well until Captain Bertie-Norton laughed. One could not

but admire his face and figure, form and limb, his fine military bearing, his clipped but musical and pleasing speech, until he laughed. And that fatuous, foolish sound, so suggestive not only of silly self-satisfaction but of weakness and stupidity, spoilt everything.

How I came to loathe it. At first I hated it for his sake. Later, I loathed it for my own. Until I knew him for what, on his own showing, he was, it seemed such a dreadful pity, such a cruel shame, that so fine a *tout-ensemble* should be so disfigured.

It was almost as bad as a squint or a hare-lip.

Nevertheless, it was not very long before I recognized it for what it was—Nature's warning. For surely no one could hear that *crétin* laugh without pausing to consider whether Captain Bertie-Norton could be all that he claimed to be and appeared to be. If I obtrude this mannerism, or, rather, trait, upon your notice, it is because, more than anything else, it indicated the real man, and betrayed him.

Whenever it burst forth, incongruous and jarring, silly and fatuous, one knew that he was complacently regarding some past rascality or contemplating some future one; but, once again, not a piece of cunning and clever villainy that he had thought out for himself. Rather an opportunity that had occurred, arisen gratuitously in his path.

I wish I could make that aspect of his nature quite clear, otherwise what he did would seem too monstrous, too incredible—for a man of his birth and breeding, education and upbringing.

Perhaps I can sum up his character briefly like this.

He would not, and probably could not, hatch some artful plot whereby he could swindle you of a ten-pound note: but if he saw one fall from your pocket as you walked down the road in front of him, undoubtedly he'd 'find' it, and a good home (and a bad use) for it.

And now, is it possible for me to confess that I liked Captain Bertie-Norton fairly well at first, if very ill at last; but even to the last there was something likeable about this charming, easy-going man; this irresponsible, unreliable failure; this utterly selfish and completely callous parasite.

§ 6

Well, I have, to the best of my ability, given you some idea of the characters of the *dramatis personæ* of this play, which was enacted by real people upon this little

corner of the stage of Life. I will tell the story—but in my own way, as I have said—of the terrible drama itself.

Where I was an eye-witness of events and knew of things at first hand, I shall speak in the first person, this seeming to be the more natural and satisfactory method.

Where I only know the facts from hear-say, albeit the indisputable evidence of people concerned, who were actual eye-witnesses, I shall adopt the more usual rôle, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent, of the practised story-teller or novelist speaking in the third person. I shall begin thus; and at a date some ten years previous to my arrival at Calderton House.

II

“I didn’t know there was such a word as ‘unimpeccable,’” murmured Lady Calderton, as she put down the letter and took up her cup.

“Didn’t you, my dear?” answered the General, lowering the newspaper which at the moment obscured his handsome clear-cut face.

“No. Did you, Arthur?”

“No,” replied the General. “I didn’t.”

“Well, I don’t think we shall do better,” observed Lady Calderton, consulting Lady Jane’s letter again before looking across the breakfast-table and thoughtfully regarding the newspaper, which once more concealed her husband and hid the loving mocking smile that, as she well knew, played about the corners of his firm mouth.

“Better than ‘unimpeccable’?” came from behind the paper.

Always mocking; always smiling at her. Might the day never come when even her most innocent and earnest remark failed to amuse him. Not that her remarks were amusing, of course; nor that she was clever, thank God; but he could always make them amusing—to himself, at any rate.

“No, this Miss Stuart.”

“Which Miss Stuart?”

The General dropped the paper and left it unheeded on the glowing scarlet, blue and green of the thick Turkey carpet.

“This one, dear,” explained Lady Calderton, raising the letter. “Apparently she is absolutely everything that we want for Anthony. Everything. And is of ‘unimpeccable’ character.”

“Get her at once, my dear,” urged the General. “The sort of governess one so seldom has the pleasure of meeting. I distinctly remember that all the governesses I encountered in my mis-spent youth, were definitely impeccable . . . Never an ‘un’ . . . We must snap her up.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” mused Lady Calderton. “Good governesses are plentiful nowadays.”

“Yes, good ones,” sighed the General. “*Le bon Dieu* knows that. But how often does a prospective employer get a firm offer of a guaranteed unimpeccable one? Does Lady Jane mention whether she is also impeachable and maculate?”

“Well, I didn’t ask about her Religion,” was the reply.

The General’s smile again came out from hiding beneath his grizzled clipped

moustache.

“She simply said we should be very lucky if we got this Miss Mary Stuart. She was ten years with the Alymer de Warenes, so her religion must be all right. You know how particular Yvonne is. And she is a lady.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that of Yvonne.”

“I’m talking of Miss Mary Stuart. Lady Jane says she’s a lady.”

“She has always behaved like one to me,” admitted the General.

“What, Mary Stuart?”

“No, Lady Jane.”

Yes, this was proceeding nicely. A conversation according to plan, or at any rate, according to custom. Obviously the General was interested and amused, and all was for the best in the best of all possible *ménages*.

“Yes, dear. Well, she says that this Miss Mary Stuart is a gentlewoman, one of the *nouveaux pauvres*, you know. She says here, ‘Her family never thought that . . .’”

“She would sink so low. I know,” interrupted the General.

“Sink? . . .”

“Well, if as you say, she is young, beautiful, pure—or was it poor?—guaranteed unimpeccable, she may as well sink in here.”

“When things sink they settle down,” added the General, helping himself to marmalade, “and what we particularly want is someone to settle down with Anthony before we go away.”

“Yes, I’ll write and ask her to come and see me,” said Lady Calderton.

“Would you care to interview her too, Arthur?” she added.

“Rather,” replied the General. “In view of Lady Jane’s unusual recommendation, yes. I wonder if she’s beautiful as well as impeachable.”

“Lady Jane didn’t say that, dear. Her writing is good and it is perfectly distinct. ‘*Unimpeccable*.’”

“Good enough,” smiled the General, passing his coffee cup. “Especially if she’s at all good-looking too.”

§ 2

Miss Mary Stuart, so far as her new employers could see, was the Compleat Governess. Apparently perfect. So much so, that General Sir Arthur Calderton said she was too good to last, too good to be true. Such things and such governesses didn’t happen to people who, about to go abroad, had to leave their adored only

child in the care of a stranger. Most undoubtedly a gentlewoman of definitely pleasing exterior and address, of admirable manner and manners, and obviously of quite sufficient erudition, she proved moreover to be a genuine enthusiast, almost a fanatic, in the pursuit and exercise of her profession.

Her small charge, Anthony, aged four years, slowly and carefully summed her up, weighed her in the balance and soon found himself wanting, wanting to show her everything he possessed and to give her her choice of it; to tell her all his secrets; to show her all those hidden, and by others undiscovered, places in the park and in the remoter recesses of the house, which were inhabited by friends or by enemies of his; the lovely charming fairies; the intriguing and, on the whole, agreeable, if somewhat uncertain, gnomes; objectionable wolves who pretended to be grandmothers and proved to be neither grand nor mothers; giants whom one could, in the rôle of Jack the Giant Killer, defeat and slay with comparative ease, in broad daylight, *bien entendu*, but which were not so good when the shades of night were falling fast; homes, resorts and meeting-places, of creatures of myth and legend and lore, some completely of his own invention and imagination. Creatures so much more real than uninterested and uninteresting people like nurses, nursery-maids, butlers, footmen, gardeners, game-keepers and other such humans, dull and adult.

Yes, the new governess was a friend, an ally, a really understanding companion, ready to aid and to abet sound schemes, or to show some excellent and comprehensible reason for abandoning them.

Lady Calderton was equally enthusiastic, and thanked Heaven and Lady Jane Hammerley. Within a month of Miss Stuart's coming she told her that she trusted her fully, and that so far as Anthony was concerned, she would not only leave everything to her, but do so without the slightest anxiety.

This she proceeded to do, and with clear conscience and easy mind, accompanied her husband to the distant tropic isle of which he had been appointed Governor, the lovely spot where every prospect pleases and only the climate is vile.

It speaks well for Miss Mary Stuart that Anthony, albeit a most affectionate child, devoted to his mother and adoring his father, missed them but little, nor that little long.

Re-doubling her efforts to make life of thrilling interest, to enter into every game, scheme, plan and idea of the child, she successfully tided him over the first few days of his bereavement; and even sooner than she had expected or hoped, had him talking of his parents without the quivering lip and moistening eye which had accompanied any reference to them, for the first few days after their departure.

The question ‘Why did they leave me behind?’ was heard no more, nor the other more poignant, more difficult to answer, ‘Why did Mother go too?’

Incidentally, Lady Calderton herself would have found that question hard to answer; for when it had come to leaving her only child, she had found herself in a situation even more difficult than those which so frequently beset her innocent and simple mind.

Obviously she could not let Arthur go alone. For one reason she was quite sure she simply could not live without him; and for another, much more important, it was partly because he was married and had a suitable wife to be hostess at Government House, that he had been appointed to the Governorship.

Life without Arthur was entirely unthinkable, and it was a dreadful idea that life could be possible to Arthur without her. That this was so, and naturally so, she quite realized. Nevertheless, it was a thought to put away.

But then, on the other hand, obviously she could not let Anthony remain behind alone. For one reason, she was quite certain that she couldn’t live without him. That is to say, she could not live the life which would be expected of her. How could she give her mind to her duties as a Governor’s wife when it was at home in England with her only child? She’d be simply distraught. She would be more woolly-witted and foolish than ever, and Arthur would cease to smile at her, at what she said, or rather at what he made of what she said. It was one thing to make fun of her foolishness at Calderton House and quite another to try to do so at Government House, Montiga. What he might find very funny when they were alone together in the delightful comfort of the dining-room at Calderton, would not be at all funny at the dinner-table at Government House, with forty watchful and critical guests weighing her up. He wouldn’t be amused. Which would be dreadful, for that was precisely what he had been, from the first day they met on the ship that brought him and her home from India, five years ago.

No, she couldn’t go on amusing him if she were eating her heart out; longing for the sight of Anthony’s face, the sound of his voice, the feel of his arms about her neck, a longing which would become a yearning, a grief, an obsession.

How could she leave Anthony, in spite of the obvious excellence of this wonderful new governess? Surely a child needed its mother more than a husband needed . . .

No, that was another train of thought she would not pursue. Where would she be if she realized, even suspected, that Arthur did not need her?

And in the end, of course, she had gone; as, all along, she had known that she

must go. And some, at any rate, of the bitterness of grief and pain at leaving the child, who had scarcely been out of her sight for four years, was assuaged and ameliorated by the few quiet words her husband had said on the subject, words which showed once again what an understanding and sympathetic nature was his.

“It will be an awful wrench for you, my dear, I know. But the time will soon pass, and—it sounds selfish, I admit, but I need you more than Anthony does. See?”

Whereupon her tears had come, and she had felt better.

“Ever so much more. Couldn’t carry on at all, whereas he’ll get on fine with the impeachable one,” said Sir Arthur, and proved to be right, as usual.

§ 3

For several years, Anthony Calderton lived almost happily in the shadow and society, the nurture and admonition, of Miss Mary Stuart, kindest and most understanding of governesses, and everything that Sir Arthur and Lady Calderton believed her to be.

All and a little more.

For Miss Mary Stuart, like so many other sane people, had a delightful and savingly mad corner to her well-ordered, disciplined and regulated mind. Her madness to some degree resembled that of a certain Mr. Dick, for upon the horizon of her blameless maiden life there hovered, in rare visions by day and occasional dreams by night, the head of the Martyr King.

When, for some usually inexplicable reason, Miss Stuart was visited by nightmare, she invariably beheld, with an inexpressible cold horror, King Charles’s head, held aloft, alive, dripping, while the coarse voice of the brutal executioner boomed forth from beneath his mask,

“This is the head of a traitor.”

Whereupon Miss Stuart awoke, bathed in cold sweat, trembling, and when the nightmare was particularly vivid, screaming.

It is an interesting thought that a picture studied and pondered in her childhood by a Highland girl, and a story oft-repeated with dramatic power and force by an aged Highland nurse, should have changed the fortunes of the ancient English house of Calderton; should so have affected little Mary Stuart that, in turn and in time, she should have so affected a child, a small English boy, that his whole life should have been coloured thereby, and the destiny of his family changed.

As a twig is bent the tree will grow. This, presumably, in spite of the fact that there is nevertheless a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we will.

As an impressionable, highly strung, somewhat neurotic little girl, Miss Mary Stuart had been mere wax in the hands of the aged and dour Scots nurse who had also been her mother's nurse, and who had, in her old age, ruled that Stuart family with a rod of iron.

Herself a Stuart, the old woman was inordinately proud of the established fact that her ancestors, near and remote, had been King's men from generation to generation, and had, in their time and turn, died under Lawrence, Havelock, and Outram in India; under Moore and Wellington in the Peninsula; at Waterloo; and back even to Flodden and Falkirk; that one of them had come South with King James V of Scotland, one of whose sons and grandsons had fought for that King's son and grandson, Charles I and Charles II.

And most sweetly grim, best enjoyed tribute of all, had not her very own great-grandfather died bloodily at Culloden? Had not old Nurse Stuart, when herself a girl, made the then difficult journey from Inverness to Culloden battlefield, and sat her down upon the stone marked with the name, *Stuart*, and wept—reserving a tear to drop upon those other pregnant stones marked respectively *Mackenzie*, *Macdonald*, *Maclean*, *MacPherson*. . . .

And how frequently had she had young Mary Stuart weeping, by the time she had finished that dark tale, picturing the clansmen dying for their rightful King as their fathers had done before them, broken squares and groups of claymore-wielding Highland men dying where they stood, and being buried, by Clans, where they lay.

And the old woman would recite, in her deep musical and indeed beautiful voice,

*'The Scottish spearmen still made good
their dark impenetrable wood,
Each man stepping where his comrade stood
the instant that he fell.'*

But of all the tales so grimly told to Mary Stuart by the history-and-legend-steeped crone, the piteous death of King Charles I made the deepest impression, an impression strengthened, rendered even deeper and more indelible by a picture that hung in the hall of her father's house, of the brave King standing on a snow-covered scaffold, calmly and courageously facing death at the hands of his . . . murderers—foul, base, black-hearted, treacherous murderers, according to old Elspeth Stuart.

Thus it is not remarkable that Miss Mary Stuart grew up not only a fanatic loyalist and devoted upholder of the monarchical principle, but a Legitimist, a White Rose Leaguer, and an almost worshipping devotee of the Martyr King.

Her favourite holidays were the pilgrimages she made to places historically

interesting in connection with King Charles; visits to Carisbrooke, to Whitehall, to Windsor, to Oxford, to the battlefields of the Civil War.

She joined every Royal Stuart Society of which she heard, and annually assisted in the laying of a wreath at the base of the memorial statue of her Hero. Almost her only recreational reading—as distinct from dutiful reading for the improvement of her mind and the widening of her horizon—was historical, and concerned with the history of her hero, martyr and saint.

Not only had Miss Mary Stuart never married a man, she had never even been in love with one; but devoutly and unswervingly, from childhood, she had not only loved, but been in love with, an idealized, an apotheosized Lover, a Stuart figment of her imagination.

In this almost she resembled those nuns who, in their subconscious minds, are spiritual brides of their Lord.

Had all the facts and details of Miss Stuart's curious idiosyncrasy, her little madness, been fully known to her employers, it is doubtful whether they would have been greatly interested. Undoubtedly Sir Arthur Calderton would have experienced no more poignant emotion than a mild amusement, nor Lady Calderton have seen how her loyalty to a lost cause, her Stuart royalism, could have affected Anthony in any way. Certainly in no detrimental manner.

Recommended to them so highly, and appearing to be so obviously the type of person they wanted, Anthony's parents then quickly accepted Miss Stuart, and, as has been said, eventually left the child in her hands with every confidence.

How should they know that there was any special and particular significance in her earnest statement that it would give her particular and peculiar pleasure and gratification to have the training of young Anthony, the moulding of his infant mind and the formation of his character—and creed? The light that momentarily sparkled in her eye, as she made this profoundly truthful asseveration, was taken as a sign and token of her general professional enthusiasm. How should her employers, for one moment, imagine that Miss Stuart saw in the boy, not only a child to be taught, trained and educated as it should be, in all directions, but particularly in one special direction—History; true unbiased History, the history of the House of Stuart, the history of her Phantom Lover?

Nor, had the facts been miraculously revealed to them, was it probable that they would have been greatly concerned by the possibility of the youthful Anthony being briefly biased in favour of any such Legitimist hope as the eventual Restoration—of some descendant of the good King Rupprecht of Bavaria.

It is an interesting reflection, in the mellow light of the wisdom which follows the

event, that, had they known, had they objected and acted upon their objection, denying themselves the benefit of Miss Stuart's services, they would have opened the door of the House of Calderton for the entrance of starkest Tragedy.

§ 4

Now if King Charles's Head lent horror to Miss Stuart's nightmares, and haunted her day-dreams, affecting a mind otherwise sane and sober, sturdy and stable, it was the Wicked Man of the Calderton portrait who haunted that of her charge; a mind, especially at that age, extremely impressionable, sensitive and over-imaginative, the mind of a somewhat melancholy introvert.

Most imaginative children have a bogey, a pet terror of their own devising; a ghost, a goblin, a clutching hand, a terrible and feral beast, a witch; a wicked robber, with gleaming or blood-stained knife; or—still less fortunate—a silent shadow, almost palpable, moving, pursuing, yet unthrown by living object, ineffable, terrible, and, to the stricken childish mind, ghastly beyond description or belief.

To Anthony Calderton, hitherto reasonably unafraid, though definitely inclined to dislike the creakings, crackings and groanings of old furniture and ancient boards, and markedly averse from 'ghosties and ghoulies and long-leggity beasties and things that go wump in the night,' now came a private and personal horror to invade his sleeping-chamber.

With a small boy aged four not very much can be done in the way of biased historical teaching, any more than a great deal can be done in the matter of theology. Incidentally, this latter fact was brought home the more strongly to Miss Stuart, when she discovered that the first of the two prayers taught to Anthony by the nurse or the nursery-maid recently in charge of him, began, quite definitely and distinctly,

"Gentle Jesus, weak and wild"; and beyond per-adventure of a doubt, contained the line,

"Pity mice implicitly."

This sort of thing would want proper handling. There was a great deal of misunderstanding, misconception and rubbish to be removed, and then proper teaching must take its place. All very difficult, with so young a child.

And as far as historical teaching went, the gradual introduction of King Charles's head to the prominent place which it should permanently occupy in the child's mind, would be a real and splendid starting-point. And again, for that introduction, there already existed a real and splendid starting-point.

For, actually, over the vast marble fireplace in the big drawing-room, hung the original and famous oil-painting of the man known to history as the Great Protector, and to Miss Mary Stuart as the Great Traitor.

Excellent. Here should history begin from a concrete object, the contemporary reproduction in oils of the face and form of one of the protagonists in the greatest drama of English History.

Admittedly the concentric method of teaching history was one of the best, if not the best of all, and Anthony's history should start with this, widen to embrace the Stuart period, spread down to present times, and then begin again with Pictish and Scottish history, leading again, by way of Macbeth, William Wallace and Robert Bruce, to the Stuart Kings of Scotland who added England to their domain.

Now the great drawing-room of Calderton House was somewhat of a *terra incognita* to Anthony. His presence was not requested when it was in use by night, and tea was for him a nursery and schoolroom occasion.

Nor had he yet formed the habit of studying pictures hung upon the walls high above his head. Picture-books were the proper place for pictures, and in books he looked for them.

But no sooner had the exploring Miss Stuart beheld, with something approaching a shock, and with definite hatred, if not horror, the magnificent portrait of Oliver Cromwell, than she introduced it to Anthony's notice; impressed it upon his mind, brought it into his daily life, and made it a part thereof.

Proceeding to the nursery and receiving him washed, arrayed and anointed, fresh and vernal from the hands of the adoring nursery-maid who prepared him for his morning session with his governess, Miss Stuart led him to the room, haunted and polluted by that evil painted presence.

Seating herself in a deep armchair, straight in front of the picture, she took the child on her lap, and pointing an accusing finger, said,

"That is a Bad Man. A very, *very* Wicked Man. The worst man, but one, that ever lived."

For the sole concession that Miss Stuart was wont to make in Oliver Cromwell's favour was that he ranked second to Judas Iscariot ("second but bracketed with").

"What did he do?" enquired Anthony, eyeing the unattractive wart-infested face of the Great Protector.

"He . . . killed . . . his . . . King," whispered Miss Stuart with bated breath; and then sat silent, considering the portrait with a fierce glare of concentrated hate.

"How?" enquired Anthony, himself a killer of noisy giants, blow-lamp mouthed

dragons, deceitful wolves, ever-hungry bears and such undesirable what-nots.

“He . . . cut . . . his . . . head . . . off,” whispered Miss Stuart.

“Fighting?”

“No. Oh, no. The poor King was his prisoner. He killed the poor defenceless King, although he was so kind, so good and gentle.

“And brave,” added Miss Stuart, divining that the attributes that she had mentioned were not perhaps those that appealed first and most highly to Anthony Calderton.

“Couldn’t the King draw his sword and . . .”

“No.”

And Miss Stuart did then and there give young Anthony his first history lesson, by telling him her version of the story of the doings of the Wicked Man in the picture.

And on that subject she was eloquent, inspired. At the end of that first long lesson, the first of an endless series spread over several years, the Wicked Man in the picture was firmly established with the Giant Blunderbore, the hypocritical Wolf and the ever-hungry Bear, as a living evil; one of the Powers of Darkness that, in the darkness, grow so powerful; one of the Things to be fought with a sword in the garden by day, and to be hidden from, beneath the bed-clothes, by night. By day, indignation, hatred and vengeance; by night, quaking terror.

So impressive was Miss Stuart’s discourse on this almost daily recurrent subject, that ere long Oliver Cromwell was the child’s Private Enemy Number One, as it were; ranking before, and far ahead of, Giant Blunderbore in wickedness, malice and power; a terror that stalked by night, making night itself a terror; so that in course of time, young Anthony Calderton was as richly and completely endowed with a Cromwell-complex as was Miss Mary Stuart herself.

And Fate was thorough.

For it was Anthony’s *kismet* that he should be taught to ride by a favourite old groom, one Michael Houlihan, a warped and wizened little Irishman who, cleanly spoken and not given to blasphemy, had but one oath, an objurgation picked up from the admired master in whose stables he had first learned his trade as stable-boy, groom and jockey.

As everyone is aware who knows, and what hunting man and race-horse owner does not know, the great Patrick Murphy—whose horses were famous in every Irish hunt and in not a few English, as well as in every Irish Horse Show and on every Irish race-course, as well as in the Grand National—had but one oath, and, by its frequency, made up for its singularity:

“*The carrse of Cromwell on it*” or “*on ye*,” as the case might be.

How many times had not the stable-boy, groom and jockey, Michael Houlihan, been cursed by the great Patrick Murphy in those terms?

“Phwat? Ye worthless little spalpeen! The carrse of Cromwell on ye.”

And in humble imitation of the greatest man he had ever known, Michael Houlihan passed it on to his horses.

“Come over, ye baste. *The carrse o’ Cromwell on ye.*”

And in Michael Houlihan, Anthony had a teacher who, if he cared less than nothing for the fate of any King of England, had an inherited, a cherished, an unbelievably bitter hatred of the cruel and savage brute who had been responsible for the appalling slaughters in which Houlihan’s ancestors had perished.

Well might people speak of the Curse of Cromwell. When, in all the days of all the world, had a bigger curse been put upon an innocent people? Had not the bloody-minded villain proscribed the Roman Catholic religion? Had he not sold three million acres of Irish land to English adventurers, so that he might use the money for the raising of more troops for the further conquest and massacre of the unoffending Irish?

Had he not herded the priests of God into their own churches and there burned them alive with the weeping women and innocent children who had fled to the sanctuary of their altars?

What need of further oath or curse while human tongue could blister with the words,

“*The Curse of Cromwell . . . !*”

So that, on the subject of the wrongs of Ireland and on Oliver Cromwell, the little old man was as eloquent as was Miss Stuart on those of the Stuart Kings, and on the noble Loyalist lords and ladies persecuted and slain by the Monstrous Regicide.

Illiterate and otherwise ignorant as Houlihan was, he had a remarkably detailed knowledge of the true story of the brutish slaughter of the inhabitants of his native town of Drogheda, after Cromwell had taken it by storm; the tale of the wanton slaying of innocent defenceless men, women, and children; and of the savage martyrdom of the priests. About similar dreadful deeds in Wexford and other scenes of massacre he knew, and to him there was no more bloodstained monster in all history than Oliver Cromwell, the creature whose accursed name ranked even before that of a Pharaoh, a Herod or a Nero.

About Attila and Genghis Khan, Houlihan had never heard, but had he read of their lives and doings, the sinister light that illuminates their names would have paled

to the duller glow beside that which kept the name of Cromwell for ever burning. Burning in Hell.

Between the teachings of the highly educated and very accomplished lady, and those of the ignorant untutored groom, young Anthony Calderton received an ineradicable impression that if the Devil and Oliver Cromwell were not one and the same person, they must be sufficiently similar in evil nature and evil-doing to be indistinguishable; and if they were indeed separate and distinct, Oliver Cromwell was the worse character of the two.

“Was Oliver Cromwell the Devil in human form, do you suppose, Houlihan?” he asked one day, when the groom called down the curse of Cromwell upon his horse which had pecked and stumbled.

“He was that,” was the reply. “Indade an’ he was. An’ whoist Oliver Cromwell was trampling the green grass of Oireland and turnin’ it black beneath his cloven hooves, Hell had no master.”

And so in fear and in hatred of the coarse and cruel face that disfigured the drawing-room, the boy grew; hatred increasing, if that were possible, as fear decreased, if decrease it did. And even up to the time when the slightly unbalanced Miss Stuart took her departure, her duty done; and the savagely vindictive old groom finished his long course, galloped into the straight, and passed the winning-post where even Cromwells cease from troubling and the weary are at rest, Anthony Calderton exhibited, from time to time, signs of the kink, the complex, with which these two people so different, so mutually antagonistic, had independently and unintentionally united to afflict him.

Of this curious obsession his parents continued to know nothing, though of other results of his ten years of training and teaching by Miss Mary Stuart they could not be quite unaware. Admirable as her work in almost all directions had been, it was clear to his mother, and yet more to his father, that what the boy now wanted was masculine society and guidance.

School having proved, for a second and a third time, to be not only a failure but out of the question, Sir Arthur and Lady Calderton determined that, for the next period of their absence abroad, their boy should have a tutor; and strove to assure themselves and one another that the right sort of tutor, working on the right lines, would be, if not as good as School, at least the next best thing.

Hence the advent of Mr. Henry Waring.

III

Yes, as I have admitted, I must confess that I liked Captain Bertie-Norton fairly well at first, though I can honestly say in defence of my powers of intuition, my social instincts and my judgment, that I did not like him very much, did not quite take to him, as they say.

Nor, curiously enough, did Anthony. He wasn't, as a rule, particularly critical or censorious, and I never encouraged him when he was.

Usually, when any new visitor had departed and left us together, if neither of us could commend, we refrained from more than an exchange of a glance and a smile. Eyebrows rather than lips.

But with Captain Bertie-Norton, for some reason, we put our thoughts into words.

“Do you like that chap, Mr. Waring?”

“Do you?”

“Not very much.”

“No, nor I.”

It must have been the silly laugh that put us both off, I think, for there was nothing whatever wrong with his appearance, manner or speech.

As Anthony and I were sitting on the terrace at tea on a lovely June afternoon, Jenkins brought me a card on which was inscribed, *Captain M. Bertie-Norton*, the name of a Service Club and an address, presumably that of a West End flat.

“I told the gentleman that Her Ladyship was not at home, Sir,” began the butler, and I remember that this struck me as an interesting example of understatement, seeing that Her Ladyship was at the other side of the world. “But he particularly wanted to see somebody.”

“Do you know him by sight or name?” I asked.

“No, Sir. Never seen nor heard of the gentleman before.”

“Where is he?”

“In the drawing-room, Sir. Wouldn't take no for an answer, as you might say, although I told him that neither Her Ladyship nor Sir Arthur was at home nor likely to be. Said he'd very much like to see Master Anthony.”

“And you, Sir,” added Jenkins.

“Me? I don't know him.”

“No, Sir. But he having enquired as to whether Master Anthony was at school

or at home, and when I said at home, he having enquired whether he had a governess, I enounced No, that he was in charge of a gentleman.”

“Well, I had better see him, then. He may have some business or other.”

And pushing back my chair, I rose, asked Anthony to excuse me for a moment, and made my way along the terrace and through a french-window into the drawing-room.

On the hearth-rug stood a tall well-dressed man contemplating with interest the portrait of Oliver Cromwell, painted from life by Sir Peter Lely; a valuable and somewhat famous picture which had been in Lady Calderton’s family for generations, her grandmother having been a Miss Fairfax, descendant of one of Cromwell’s Generals and stout brother-in-arms.

It was of this portrait that poor little Anthony, as he confessed to me, had lived in abject terror, a terror that returned to him even yet, in nightmares.

As Captain Bertie-Norton turned and eyed me, I suppose I should, if this were fiction, at once have noticed that his eyes were too closely set, his lips too thin, his expression either shifty or cruel. There should have been signs of dissipation about his face, or of seediness about his apparel.

But actually, there was nothing of the sort. If I took exception to anything at all, it was to a stare which was perhaps frank rather than hard, and to a slightly supercilious manner and tone of voice, as he said,

“Good afternoon. May I ask who you are?”

I can also stare and adopt a supercilious manner.

“Good afternoon. You may. I am Henry Waring, tutor to Anthony Calderton. And you?”

“Well, that doesn’t matter much” (to you, my worthy fellow, the intonation implied). “Point of fact, I am a very old friend, indeed, of Lady Calderton.”

“Then doubtless you know that she is at Montiga with Sir Arthur.”

“Point of fact, I didn’t know. Only just got back to England myself. Don’t correspond much. Not with anybody.”

“No,” said I unhelpfully, for it seemed foolish to say, “Can I send her any message?” as presumably the gentleman was quite competent to send his own messages; and equally foolish to observe that I was sorry he had missed her, as he had done so by some thousands of miles and a few months.

There was a perceptible pause during which we eyed each other. Almost warily, I was going to say, and yet there was no need for anything of the sort. I had no earthly reason to suppose he wasn’t exactly what he professed to be, a very old friend of the family, and particularly of Lady Calderton.

And yet I had a perfectly groundless and unreasonable feeling that there was something wrong. I should like here to give credit to my fine and perceptive intuition. “Point of fact,” as Captain Bertie-Norton would say, it was probably nothing more nor less than pique at his attitude and manner of *de haut en bas*. After all, I wasn’t a servant, and he knew it.

“Dashed awkward,” observed Captain Bertie-Norton to himself.

Again I was unhelpful.

“Point of fact, I was going to propose myself for a visit here.”

“Yes?” I said, still unhelpful.

“Yes. Ought to have written, but I had somehow got the idea that they were still at home. They were when I last wrote. Let’s see. How long ago would that be?”

“Afraid I don’t know,” I replied.

“Don’t know? Don’t know when they went away?”

“Don’t know when you last wrote,” I corrected.

A slight muscular movement was perceptible in Captain Bertie-Norton’s cheek, as though a pulse beat briefly.

Good. I had annoyed him as much as he had annoyed me. A childish triumph.

Of course, it was as he said, very awkward, if he had come expecting to receive a warm welcome and an invitation to stay for as long as he liked.

Nevertheless, I was not in a position to invite him to come and stay, even had I the slightest inclination to do so.

“How’s young Anthony?” he asked.

“Anthony is very well,” I replied.

“Then I would like to see him,” announced the visitor, and there was, of course, no reason why he should not do so.

“We are just at tea. Would you care to join us?” I said, without any particular warmth of hospitality.

“Yes,” replied Bertie-Norton, without any particular warmth of gratitude.

And turning, I led the way to where Anthony awaited me.

“Hul-lo, old chap. I suppose you don’t remember me, do you?” Bertie-Norton greeted the boy as he rose from his chair.

And I can honestly say that I did feel there was a definite note of the *faux bonhomme* in his voice.

Evidently it struck thus upon Anthony’s sensitive ear for, although his manners were usually super-excellent, he replied with a cold uncompromising,

“No, I don’t,” his manner being even less cordial than his words.

“No. No. Of course you wouldn’t,” agreed Bertie-Norton as he shook hands

with Anthony. "Silly of me. Of course you were quite a nipper when I was here before."

"A nipper," murmured Anthony softly, savouring the word.

"Point of fact, I don't think you saw me."

And in a manner that would have done credit, or discredit, to a man of experience, Anthony, looking our visitor in the eye, observed,

"I'm quite sure I should have remembered you, if I had ever seen you."

And again the tone and manner added point to the words.

"No. Years ago. Years ago. Well, this is a disappointment. Quite a blow," continued Bertie-Norton a little gustily, as he seated himself in my chair.

"I'm sorry," murmured Anthony, and seemed to imply that our visitor was disappointed because Anthony did not remember him.

"I mean, missing your mother."

"And my father," said Anthony.

"Yes, I was going to propose myself for a nice long stay here. Sort of holiday I used to have here before I went abroad. Silly of me not to write."

"Yes," said Anthony. "But they'll be home next year. You must write then. I think we had better have some fresh tea."

"No, no. Not for me. Not for me. Point of fact, I seldom take tea," Captain Bertie-Norton assured us.

"A whisky-and-soda?" suggested Anthony with adult courtesy.

"Ah! Now you're talking. Just my idea of a good tea. Whisky-and-soda and an anchovy biscuit, followed by—what?" enquired the Captain, heavily avuncular.

"A headache?" enquired Anthony.

"No, a cigar. A whisky-and-soda, an anchovy biscuit and a good cigar, and then it's 'Thank God for my good tea, Amen.'"

And for the first time, we heard Captain Bertie-Norton's irritating silly laugh.

It may be supposed that I was prejudiced against the man for whom I had entertained so sudden a dislike, but had I heard that guffaw without seeing its owner—or perhaps I should say producer—I should have been struck by its blatant inanity, its fatuous silliness.

In justice, I am bound to admit that it accorded but ill with the man's appearance and general style.

I caught Anthony's eye, and our faces remained expressionless.

Robert, our fresh-faced young footman, was hovering near in anticipation of orders for the replenishment of the tea-table. To him I signalled, and as he approached, informed him without comment that a decanter of whisky, a syphon of

soda, anchovy biscuits and a box of cigars were required.

Captain Bertie-Norton amplified the order.

“Six biscuits. Butter them with salt butter, and lay three anchovies, *royans à la Bordelaise*, between each pair,” he directed.

“Yes, dashed awkward,” he observed once again as the footman departed. “Point of fact, I had made all my arrangements accordingly. My flat’s let, so without unpacking my stuff, I came straight on down here, expecting to stay.”

“Most unfortunate,” agreed Anthony. “I am sure my mother will be sorry.”

“One thing, there’s plenty of room here,” continued Bertie-Norton, running his eye along the southern façade of the house which he faced as he sat.

And again I had a, probably foolish and groundless, suspicion that he was seeing it for the first time. Why I should have thought such a thing I don’t know, unless his glance had been one rather of inspection than recognition, as it were, and that I had connected it with the look he had cast over the gardens below the terrace, before he sat down with his back to them. That look, I reflected, had surely been one of observation rather than of remembrance.

“Room!” I said. “The house is empty, of course, and Anthony and I lurk in our own corner of it.”

“Wouldn’t mind lurking with you,” said Norton promptly. And, for the second time, we heard the laugh that to me was to become one of the most unpleasant of sounds.

§ 2

For quite a considerable period Captain Bertie-Norton haunted the neighbourhood, paid us numerous visits and, from time to time, angled for an invitation to come and stay with us. In this he was somewhat shameless, and created situations with which it was a little difficult to deal. After the first visit, he refrained from calling formally, coming to the front door and sending in his name, but established himself as something of a friend of the family, who was, naturally, unknown to the tutorial underling and to the small boy. He would walk jauntily up the drive and, avoiding the steps and terrace of the façade of the house, would cross the lawns and come up through the Italian garden to the south terrace where we had tea, and spent much of our outdoor time.

Towards Anthony he was somewhat heavily avuncular; to me, at first, slightly resentful and inclined to be domineering; later, pleasanter and more friendly, not to say ingratiating.

He had established himself at the Calderton Arms, staying there for weeks at a time, during which periods we saw him almost daily. Then he would disappear for a few days when, according to his own account, business took him to London.

From the first, Anthony was inclined to dislike him, and the more he saw of him, the less disposed did he seem to change his opinion. Nor can it be said that Bertie-Norton went out of his way to cultivate him and make a good impression. That he interested Anthony was undeniable, and I was faintly amused, and faintly shocked at myself, to find that, at times, I entertained a feeling that almost approximated to jealousy. For he could a tale unfold. There was no doubt about it: and as I sat listening to him and watching Anthony's face of rapt attention, I was reminded of Othello and the maiden Desdemona. Nor was the simile far-fetched, Anthony's face being at once the window and the index of a soul as simple, innocent and virginal as that of the hapless girl—or so I thought—as, with widely opened eyes and parted lips, he listened enthralled, with rapt attention to the man's tales of "moving accidents, by flood and field; of hair-breadth 'scapes i' the imminent deadly breach; of being taken by the insolent foe, and sold to slavery."

And then, one day, suddenly realizing that we hadn't had the pleasure of a visit from Captain Bertie-Norton for quite a while, I came to the conclusion that he must have gone away altogether. He had been staying at the Calderton Arms as usual, and I wondered whether my obtuseness in taking hints that he should give up his rooms there and move into Calderton House had been the cause of his departure. I rather hoped it had. But still more I hoped that we had seen the last of him, for, any question of my foolish jealousy apart, I had a sort of feeling that the less Anthony saw of him the better.

I also felt quite sure that if Sir Arthur and Lady Calderton knew him as well as he pretended they did, they would not have been enthusiastically in favour of Anthony seeing a great deal of him. And although Anthony took a dislike to him at first, as I did myself, the boy undoubtedly found him more and more interesting, just as I did. One couldn't deny that he had a curious charm, that a halo of adventure and unusual experience dwelt about him, and that he was definitely and dangerously attractive.

I could foresee the time, if he continued to hang about Calderton House and favour us with so much of his company, when Anthony, from tolerating him would come to like him, to welcome him for his romantic adventurous tales and stories, and so to seek his society.

And that, all question of jealousy apart again, I didn't wish to happen; nor,

indeed, did I intend to allow it to happen; for although, as I later learned, the gallant Captain “knew where to draw the line,” he failed to draw it where I preferred to see it drawn. He was apt to forget, or to ignore, the fact that Anthony, though tall and older-looking than his years, was only a child, and one of peculiarly and particularly innocent mind. So innocent and ignorant of evil was he, indeed, that, where Bertie-Norton’s conversation, remarks and stories were most offensive, they gave least offence and did least harm, for they simply passed over his head. Nevertheless—if evil communications corrupt good manners, they corrupt good morals even more—and I felt that Bertie-Norton was corrupt, through and through. However, he was gone, and I was very glad that he was gone, and had no desire ever to see him again.

§ 3

The better I knew Anthony, the more I loved him.

Also the better I knew Anthony, the less I understood him.

Nor did that fact make him the less lovable. Actually it made him the more intriguing, the more attractive, the more worth while, by which I mean the more worthy of study and investigation. Life with him was one long series of little surprises, little discoveries, and an infinity of little amusing, pleasing, or puzzling incidents. And there were times, times without number, when I felt inclined to smack his young head, for subtle impudence, artful little traps, tricks intended to hoodwink me in some way, cunning little plots to bring me to a brief confusion.

How a pompous, insincere or dogmatically omniscient type of tutor would have suffered at his hands!

We had just finished work one morning when he said,

“Mr. Waring, will you tell me the meaning of some words?”

“Yes.”

“*Hagiology*. Is it the study of hags?”

“Not unless they were holy hags. *Hagiology* is the study of the history of saints.”

“Oh, thank you. And what’s *eschatology*? Nothing to do with cats, of course?”

“No, nor with chatting . . . It’s the study of final things; death; the Hereafter.”

“Oh, thank you. And what’s *etiology*?”

“Might call that the opposite. The study of beginnings; origins and causes.”

“Oh, thank you. Must be awfully nice to know everything, like you do.”

“Very nice,” I agreed. “Any more?”

“Yes, *bonnance*. What does that mean?”

“‘*Bonnanche?*’” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Sure you’ve got the word right?”

“Quite sure.”

“Well, you’ve defeated me. I don’t know the word, and therefore I don’t know its meaning. Are you certain there is such a word?”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Waring. Quite certain. I made it up.”

“Good. Now make up a meaning for it, and write the word and the meaning a hundred times.”

“Would it do if I apologized?”

“It would not.”

“But you win, Mr. Waring. And it was only—fun.”

“Oh, quite so. Quite so. You aren’t objecting to paying for your fun, are you?”

“What meaning shall I give *bonnanche*, Mr. Waring?”

“Its proper meaning. You’re the only person who knows it.”

And with a sigh Anthony settled to his task.

When he showed up the imposition, it appeared that the meaning of *bonnanche* was but brief and easily written, a word of four letters—‘Hell.’

It became one of our pass-words, and certainly none but Anthony and I knew its meaning . . .

Another thing I loved about the boy was the fact that, much as he enjoyed scoring, he equally enjoyed being scored off.

Furthermore, when I had occasion, at a much later date, to take him somewhat sharply to task for adopting an ugly and blasphemous ejaculation much favoured by Captain Bertie-Norton, he apologized, smiled impishly, and appointed the word ‘*Bonnanche!*’ as his own private and particular exclamatory oath. As he pointed out to me, I, on the one hand, could find no fault with the word itself, whilst he, on the other hand, could give it any meaning that he liked. A typically Antonian arrangement.

Looking back, it is amazing to realize how swiftly the time passed, how extraordinarily happy we were together, and what pleasure it gave me to know that Anthony was obviously very fond of me indeed. He would not have sought my company so consistently had it been otherwise, nor derived such satisfaction from pleasing me. The fact that I wanted him to do a certain thing was good and sufficient reason for doing it. And it was a fine trait in his character, one which I admired and appreciated, that he liked me not a whit the less for being a pretty strict disciplinarian. He recognized the fact that I did my utmost to be absolutely just and

entirely reasonable, understanding and sympathetic. He would have despised me had I failed in discipline as much as he would have disliked me had I been unjust, unreasonable and uncomprehending.

We worked every week-day, and we fenced and walked as regularly as we worked. Most days we rode, and except for the Sabbath, there was never a day when we failed to dress up to greater or lesser degree—sometimes *en grande tenue* and sometimes only to the extent of Cavalier hat and boots, baldrick, sash and sword—and stage a scene, either on the greensward beneath the trees or in an old oak-panelled gallery which made an admirable setting.

Anthony wrote the scenes, charades and playlets, brought them to me for opinion, and joyfully accepted suggestions for their improvement. We then learned our respective parts, forgot them or improved upon them, improvised and gagged. And when words failed us, drew our swords—a pair of buttoned foils of fine Italian make—and fell to. And always the period was Stuart, the theme Cavalier and Roundhead, and the *dénouement* the downfall and defeat of the foul Cromwellian.

Personally, so far from life being boring and monotonous, and time dragging heavily, I never found the days long enough, nor ever once regretted my acceptance of this post, or wished myself elsewhere.

§ 4

And, quite suddenly, after what seemed like several years of this happy busy life, enthralling and mildly strenuous, came a most unexpected kind of letter from Montiga, bringing mingled bad news and good. Lady Calderton, who had succumbed to the fever prevalent in those somewhat balefully beautiful islands, a rather virulent form of malaria, was coming home. Repeated attacks of the malarial fever had weakened her, and the Government House doctor had told Sir Arthur that he had no hope of her shaking it off and making a satisfactory convalescence unless she went right away from the tropics, recuperated thoroughly, and was, for at least a year, free from any further attacks. It had accordingly been decided that she should come back to England, and remain there until Sir Arthur completed his term of office in Montiga and returned.

Though we could have wished that the cause of her home-coming had been any other than what it was, the news filled us with delight. I had not realized that Anthony loved his mother so much, especially in these circumstances of long separation. And although he had talked but little about her, it was evidently not a case of ‘out of sight out of mind.’ When he read the letter announcing her return, he was transfigured with

joy and could scarcely speak for excitement.

My own reaction to the news also surprised me. Far from having any sense of chagrin or disappointment, however faint, at the thought of the inevitable lessening of my authority; far from feeling any sensation, however slight, of jealousy that I should now be taking second place with Anthony, I was delighted. It was the best news that I had had for a long time, and I looked forward with nothing but eager gladness to her arrival. As I say, the nature and strength of my feelings in the matter greatly surprised me. I had liked and admired her exceedingly in the days between my arrival at Calderton House and her departure for Montiga, but I had not realized how tremendously I liked her, how deep an impression she had made upon my mind.

Bright and cheerful as life was, it now took on even brighter hues, and I awoke each morning with the feeling of some happiness impending, some good thing about to come to pass, and throughout the day this little spring of joy bubbled up from my inmost being, and I was not only happy but consciously so. And I was conscious of the reason; of the reason why I found that so often now I lifted up my voice in reasonably tuneful song, whistled merrily, by no means a habit of mine hitherto, and found life one harmonious melody.

When she came, I was relieved and delighted to find that the long sea voyage had worked wonders. She looked perfectly healthy as well as perfectly lovely, and there were no signs of languor, lassitude and weakness. It seemed to me that, unless there were any recurrence of the malaria, brought on by a chill, for example, she ought to make a very quick and complete recovery, if she had not already done so; and I was heartily ashamed of a twinge of fear that she might go back to Montiga instead of remaining at home until Sir Arthur's return.

However, I was able to explain to myself that what I really feared was that she should go back and risk a return of the fever before she had made complete convalescence.

Now began for me a life of almost ideal happiness, even more satisfying and delightful than it had been before her return.

In the first place, she was so appreciative of the way in which I was handling Anthony, and of the improvement that she professed to be able to see in him already.

"He's a different boy," she declared, as we sat alone at dinner a few days after her return.

"In what way?" I asked.

"In every way; both mentally and physically. He holds himself better, he's more upright and alert and active. He looks so much more—normal. Almost the typical

Public School boy. He was getting such a weedy little book-worm”

“And mentally?”

“He strikes me as so much happier, brighter; more alert mentally, just as he is physically, and more—there’s no other word for it but *normal* again. I used to be so worried about him, but now he really does seem more like the Happy Christian Child, if you know what I mean, instead of the moody little maggot, fanciful and neurotic and queer. It is as though he had been transferred from a hot-house out into the sunshine. I *am* so grateful to you.”

“Well, I’m very glad indeed that you form that opinion of him. I had hoped, and indeed thought, that he had improved, but not to that extent.”

“Well, you’ve been with him the whole time, and the change and improvement must have been gradual. I see him suddenly, after all this long time, and, well, he’s not the Anthony I expected to see. A different boy altogether. Vastly improved.”

“We shall have him wanting to go to school yet,” I smiled.

Lady Calderon laughed.

“That I very much doubt, unless you could go with him and be his house-master and form-master too. If you heard how he speaks of you, you wouldn’t think there was much hope or fear of his wanting to leave you and go to school.”

“Evidently I’ve overdone it.”

“No. As a matter of fact, I’m far more reconciled to his not going to school—now that I’ve seen him. School couldn’t possibly have done him the good that you’ve done, and it might have caused him infinite harm.

“No, we shall be quite content, in fact only too thankful, for him to go on as he is, until he’s ready for Oxford. By the time he’s eighteen, if only you’ll stay with him, I believe he’ll go up to Oxford absolutely fit to take his full share of the corporate life of his College. Not only fit but ready, willing and able. And that’s a thing I hardly dared to hope. You don’t know how pleased and happy and utterly grateful I am.”

And this to me was a very great reward, the greatest reward I have ever had for anything I have ever done.

And what had I done but live a delightful life with a charming boy to whom I was deeply attached?

Life was good. And though I am not superstitious or given to unreasoning foolish beliefs, I felt it was too good; too good to last—even until the time when Anthony could go up to Oxford.

Our day began at seven when invariably he came to my room, made cautious

and dramatic entry with much giving of secret knocks, mysterious pass-words and cabalistic counter-signs. He would then have tea with me; propound some new theory; expound some new and brilliant idea for charade or play; talk whimsically of this and that; and endeavour to catch me out with his careful Socratic questioning . . .

“Do you think the earth is round, Mr. Waring?”

“Oblate spheroid, according to the learned. Like an orange that has been sat upon gently, by a lightweight; slightly flattened top and bottom. But still, roughly speaking, round; a ball. So they say.”

“Well, then, if you could drive a lift-shaft straight through from London to Sydney, and went down by the lift, do you mean to say that when the lift-gates opened, your feet would be just where the Australian peoples’ heads are?”

“It would appear so, Socrates.”

“But it’s sheer nonsense. Tell me, would you be standing on your head or would they?”

“Neither. We’d both be standing on our feet.”

“But you couldn’t both be. When you arrived in the lift, your feet would be presented upward.”

“Pointing at the Australian sun,” I agreed.

“And the lift man in Sydney would be standing on his feet with his head pointing at the Australian sun. Both he and you are standing on your feet yet with your heads pointing in opposite directions. One of you must be upside down, surely.”

“So it would appear, Socrates.”

“Well then, it’s just silly. *Reductio ad absurdum*.”

“And yet the learned men do firmly asseverate that the world is round, a ball, a sphere; and other learned men accept their statement.”

“Well, we don’t, do we? I mean to say, you don’t think that if you arrived at Australia by lift, you’d have to turn yourself upside down, stand on your hands and walk out that way, so that you wouldn’t have your head where the Australians’ feet are.”

“But you would, if you did that, Socrates.”

“Well, that proves the earth is flat, doesn’t it? Can I have a lump of sugar?”

After eight-thirty breakfast in the schoolroom, we would walk or ride for half an hour, work until eleven, and then fence, either outdoors or in; work again for an hour, and then stroll talking in the park before lunch.

Lunch was a joyous occasion, as we joined Lady Calderton in the big dining-room and ate in state, waited on by Jenkins and Robert.

After lunch we three sat on the terrace, the weather being propitious, for a while,

with coffee and cigarette, the remainder of the afternoon being Anthony's until tea-time. Usually, as I have said, it was devoted to play-acting, whether indoors or out.

Indeed, if we did nothing more than go for what the ignorant might suppose was an ordinary ride, we were always busily scouting for hostile cavalry, Roundhead pickets and patrols. Sometimes, on sighting them, we would wheel about and gallop hell-for-leather to take the news back to the main body or the about-to-be-beleaguered castle or town. Sometimes we would charge desperately and put them to flight.

This game undoubtedly gave Anthony a good eye for country and was in some sort a training for the hunting-field. A policeman of any kind on foot, bicycle, or horseback, counted as a large Roundhead force, and many a rural constable must have been sorely puzzled by the behaviour of two horsemen who undoubtedly "acted in a suspicious manner."

After tea in the schoolroom we put in another hour's work, had fencing practice and exercise with the punching bag, whereafter Anthony's time was again his own until supper and bed.

And though repeatedly in the early days I offered to leave him to his own devices and set him free to do exactly as he liked and go wherever he would, he never once availed himself of this freedom, nor seemed anything but hurt by the suggestion that I should leave him to himself.

When he had gone to bed, I changed for dinner, went down to the drawing-room, and awaited Lady Calderton's arrival. Together we dined, and together returned to the drawing-room for coffee; and during the greater part of the time that we thus spent together we talked of Anthony, I telling her of his quaint and amusing sayings and doings of the day, she telling me of his childhood and of her anxieties and fears concerning him—from all of which, by the way, she now professed to be entirely free.

In fact, to my infinite satisfaction, it seemed that the boy had turned from a disappointment to a great hope; from an anxiety to a real joy. That she loved him with a great mother-love, deep and wide, was obvious, and having him with her was a great consolation for her separation from Sir Arthur.

Being the woman she was, it was with some slight surprise, and very great pleasure, that I saw how little selfishness and blind possessiveness there was in this deep maternal love, and how wisely and carefully she refrained from indulging and spoiling the boy.

I don't think that Anthony ever went to her behind my back, or appealed to her over my head, so to speak; but had he done so, he would have received short shrift.

Whenever he suggested something that I vetoed, there was never the slightest suggestion of disapproval, much less of intervention or interference, on the part of Lady Calderton. On the contrary, she invariably consulted me before granting any request made to her, and always referred him to me if he made any suggestion when I was not present. It was her custom to visit him alone for half an hour or so when he went to bed, and it was only natural that if, when talking to her, one of his bright ideas should suddenly occur to him, he should forthwith propound it to her and ask her advice and permission.

It struck me as a most extraordinarily nice trait in her character that, far from being in the slightest degree jealous of my power and great influence over Anthony, she in every way supported it, giving the boy to understand that, so far as his doings were concerned, I was the authority.

And Anthony completely accepting, in fact welcoming, the situation, we three people were about as happy, I think, as three people could be, always excepting the fact that Lady Calderton's cup of happiness would not be completely filled until her husband's return.

It was with a sense of the deepest satisfaction, with a glowing feeling of abiding joy, that I saw her steadily improving in health and spirits, shaking off the remaining effects of the malaria, and taking daily delight in Anthony's quick growth towards normality.

IV

Lady Calderton turned her head as the butler entered with the small silver tray on which lay a card.

People calling already. Well, she wasn't going to see anyone just yet. Too tired. Going to have a thorough rest for ever so long. And she was convalescing from the fever which had pulled her down a good deal.

Without glancing at the card, mechanically she murmured,

"Not at home, Jenkins. You might have known."

"Yes, my lady. Very good, my lady. But the gentleman was very insistent, if I may say so, my lady. Said he was quite certain that you would wish to see him. Name of Barty Norton. Called several times previous, m'lady."

Languidly, Lady Calderton took the card from Jenkins's tray and glanced at it.

Her languor left her as she read the name printed on it and the nickname scribbled beneath.

"Captain M. Bertie-Norton," and in pencil, the word "Wiz" scribbled in writing that she knew.

The colour drained from her face, and the attentive astonished Jenkins thought his mistress was going to faint. He was about to suggest brandy, sal volatile, smelling-salts, when, her hands clenched on the arms of her chair, she suddenly sat erect, her mouth and eyes hardening.

Poor lady. That must have been a nasty turn, and she was looking as he had never seen her look before.

A nasty turn. More of a blow, really. A sort of knock-down blow that had prostrated her. No, she was getting her colour back. Better not to notice, perhaps.

"All right, Jenkins. Show Captain Bertie-Norton in. What's the time? Yes, bring tea at four."

That would give her something to do.

"Very good, my lady," and silently Jenkins faded away, his face impassive, his mind quite unusually active.

Good God in Heaven . . . So *he* was this Captain Bertie-Norton who had been visiting the place!

But it couldn't be. Not Wiz. Wiz was dead. Seventeen years ago. She must be dreaming. But that was exactly as he used to sign letters to her. That was his handwriting. The curious W. Never shaped like a capital, whereas the z never had a

looped tail, but was shaped like a capital Z. Somebody impersonating him? One of the very few people who knew that his private nickname had been Wiz? Somebody who knew his signature? But how many people but herself had seen that signature? He had never used it in writing to anyone else, and no one else called him by the name. He couldn't be an impostor.

But the other thought was too terrible to accept for a moment. He had been dead for seventeen years.

Lady Calderton stood up from her low chair as if endeavouring to rise above a flood that threatened to engulf her.

She'd know in a moment.

Feeling giddy, and as though her knees would give way, she sat down again, quickly. It could not possibly be he. Why had he come? What could he want? Here, of all places on earth. Wasn't the world big enough for . . . ?

But of course it could not be. He had been dead for seventeen years and this was . . .

The door opened.

"Captain Barty Norton," announced the butler, closed the drawing-room door, and left Lady Calderton face to face with . . . No! That was absurd . . .

In situations of this nature, women are apt to display a courage, self-control and endurance as high as that shown by the bravest of men in situations of gravest physical danger.

Steadfastly she eyed the man who approached her across the big room, the expression of her face a combination of horror and fear as she gazed at him, incredulous.

It was he; he, undoubtedly. Not greatly changed in all those years that she had believed him to be dead. Heavier, thicker-set, and the face older, harder, still displaying its mixture of strength and weakness, intelligence in the upper part, sensuality in the lower; the change showing most in the eyes and mouth, predatory, cunning, ruthless. The face of the type of man who will gain his ends and be not over-particular as to the methods whereby they are gained.

"Well, Katty," he said, extending his hand, and while the mouth smiled, showing gleaming teeth beneath a well-clipped moustache, the eyes remained hard, wary and watchful.

He dropped the powerful and well-kept hand as Lady Calderton made no movement to take it, hesitated for a fraction of a second, then placed the other upon her shoulder and, bending down, kissed her upon the mouth. A quite successful kiss, in spite of the fact that she swiftly drew back as far as her chair permitted, and made

a swift futile endeavour to thrust him away.

“Ah,” smiled Captain Bertie-Norton, as he straightened himself up.

“*You . . . you . . . you . . .*” whispered Lady Calderton, wiping her lips, and seeming to gasp for air.

“Well,” he smiled, “you—what, eh?”

But words failed Lady Calderton.

“Better left unsaid, eh? I quite agree. Well, well, well! Do you know, I see scarcely any change in you whatever, Katty, after all these years. Wonderful.

“Don’t seem to hear much change, either,” he added, in a different voice. “Well, well, the Return of the Native. Not that I am exactly a native of these parts. ’Point of fact, just as well, eh? Quite incognito. The Stranger’s Return. Yes, that’s better. Well, well, well! It’s nice to find . . .”

“What have you come for? What do you want?” interrupted Lady Calderton, breathing quickly, her hands clenched, her body tense and her face white. “You are dead . . .”

“Come for? Want? To see you, my dear Katty—and for anything I can get. Everything I can get. What do I want? What d’you suppose? A little money to burn, a horse to ride, friends, good company, peace and comfort. I’ve had enough of wandering, Katty, and more than enough of living from hand to mouth. I want—*security*. Sounds like my old friend MacInstein of MacInstein, Maccabee, and M’Cash. ‘No advanth without thecurity.’”

And with an almost physical shock and shudder, a blow that made her nerves cringe, Lady Calderton heard the foolish and fatuous laugh which she had not heard for seventeen years.

“But not that sort of security. I want to settle down; to retire. Retire from the business—of having no business. You know—like the poet says:

*‘Home is the hunter; home from the hill,
And the sailor home from the sea.’*

Had enough hunting—especially hunting in the gutter. Enough of the sea, too, since those swine threw me into it. I’ll tell you about that.”

Yes, this was Wiz. With her eyes shut she’d have known his voice. Without hearing his voice, had his words been in print, she’d have known they were his. That’s how he had always talked when he was nervous.

Nervous? That should be her strength . . . At least to make a pretence of strength. To feign assurance and confidence.

“And how do you propose to get those things—here—from me?”

“Well, surely, that’s your business, Katty.”

In silence she stared, still almost incredulous, and almost as though stunned by this bolt that had come so suddenly out of the blue; this thunder-bolt from so fair a sky; this lightning-flash that, in a fraction of a second, seemed to have blackened her landscape, to have laid her happy life in ruins about her.

That man standing there, grinning at her, talking, talking, talking. That could not be he. He had died seventeen years ago. She must awake from this nightmare.

The man seated himself in the nearest chair, turning it to face her.

What could she do?

Something she must do. For it was the man whom, as a girl, a fool, of seventeen, she had loved madly—for a little while.

But Arthur, the kindest and dearest of men, who believed in her as he believed in God and the King and the British Constitution?

And Anthony? Why, poor Anthony would be a . . .

Again with a great effort she rose to her feet.

“Where have you come from?” she asked, to gain time, to say something, to learn anything that might be helpful.

Anthony would be a . . .

She sank back into her chair.

“W-e-l-l-l,” smiled the man, “that’s a vague question, my dear Katty. I’ve come from the Calderton Arms; I’ve come from the Calderton Railway Station; I’ve come from London, and I’ve come from South America. And to pursue history still further back, I’ve come from the place that is sometimes described as the safe spot where the birds won’t bite you.”

“Prison?”

For if he had been in prison once, might he not be put in prison again? But if it were through her that it were done, what wreckage of at least three lives would he leave behind him, in punishment, in revenge.

“Alas!” was the reply. And the fatuous snigger followed. “Yes, I haven’t always been as lucky as you, Katty.”

“What did you do?”

If he had committed murder, there might yet be a hope that . . .

But what a terrible thought.

“What did I do? What didn’t I do?”

And again the laugh.

“Tell you one thing I didn’t do, though, Katty. I didn’t commit bigamy. But don’t let’s talk of old unhappy far-off things now, not just in the moment of my return. Let’s

speak of the bright and shining future. I have sown my wild oats and reaped a few damn wild whirlwinds, I assure you. But that's all behind me, Katty, and I have weathered the storms. I'll tell you some day. When we've got more time. Make your hair curl. Give you a permanent wave, Katty. But for the present, well, I've come into port at last. And a damn good cellar of it, too.

*'Home at last, the harbour past,
Safe in my—darling's—arms.'*”

And again the laugh.

“I say, don't stare at me like that. I'm not a ghost. No, I'm alive all right. Don't be alarmed.”

If he laughed again she'd go mad. She'd go mad in any case. Arthur . . .

Arthur was not her husband.

Anthony would be a . . .

She would scream in a minute. She would go mad. She would die.

No, she would not. She would fight like a tigress for Anthony, for Arthur. She would . . .

But what could she do? Find out how far he was safe from the prison he spoke of? . . . Could she kill him? . . . She must be going mad to think such thoughts.

Money? That would be it. That would be what he had come for. But for how long could such a situation last?

Oh, if she could only kill him. One read of such things. One saw such things in plays and films. But this was life, real life. Nevertheless, if she could kill him without being found out, she'd do it as willingly as she would kill a snake.

If only God would strike him dead, as such creatures should be stricken dead—as she had supposed him to be, these seventeen years and more.

What was he saying?

“Yes, safe in port. And meantime, you've been a long while in a pretty snug harbour of your own, eh, Katty?”

“I thought you were dead,” she whispered, half to herself.

“I'm sure you did, my dear. So, fortunately, did a good many other people. I was at some pains to give that impression. How long did you mourn me?”

And answering his own question with,

“Not as long as some people did,” he laughed loudly.

If he did that again, she'd . . . she'd . . . she'd . . . do something.

What could she do?

She could fight this man with his own weapons. Fight him somehow, for Arthur's

happiness and Anthony's happiness. For Anthony was now a . . .

"Yes, there must be quite a few people who'd be interested to know that Montague Ferring-Chevigny was alive," smiled the *soi-disant* Captain Bertie-Norton.

Yes, indeed, there must be. Could she get into touch with anyone who . . . But that was absurd. She was thinking like a ridiculous fool. How could she, Katherine Calderton, wife of General Sir Arthur Calderton, enter into conspiracy with some person or persons unknown, against this . . . this . . . against this man because she feared him, because his continued existence was dangerous to her, threatening the even tenor of her comfortable way, because in fact he was her husband.

It was lunacy, but the whole thing was madness, nightmare.

"Are the police after you?" she asked.

"Not the English police, Katty, thank you very much. I've purged my offence as far as they are concerned. Though I freely admit that there are one or two, indeed three or four, countries in which I am not free to travel, so to speak."

Three or four countries. Now, which were those? If she could find out, would it be possible to inform the Chief of Police of those countries, with the view to extradition proceedings?

But then, of course, he would not be known to them as Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny. No, nor as Montague Bertie-Norton.

No. That was no good. She'd have to know the *alias* under which he figured in their criminal records, and he was probably known by a different name in every country in which he was wanted.

Was that her husband sitting there; alive and well and grinning; and, even in this appalling moment, capable of bellowing with stupid laughter?

It couldn't be. And it was. It was the man she had loved desperately; whose kisses had set her on fire; the man whom, when he was her husband, she had despised and hated as much as she had loved him when he was her lover.

She must do something. She must escape. She must free Arthur and Anthony from this terrible threat, this incredible menace. Anthony would be a . . .

"But aren't you free to travel and to live openly under your own name in this country?"

"Er—no. No. Not quite, perhaps. But don't you worry your little head. You need have no anxiety on my behalf, Kattykins. Why, it must be seventeen years since poor Monty Ferring-Chevigny fell overboard from Alastair Cluny's yacht and his body was washed up on the Perenecque Island beach, days later. Face unrecognizable. Nasty rocky coast. Nasty crabs and cuttlefish too. But clothes and

contents of pockets established identity beyond a doubt.”

Yes, absolutely beyond any doubt in her mind, as God was her witness.

An idea. A fleeting hope. Of course there would be nothing in it again, when she was able to bring her intelligence to bear upon it and think it out. Yes, she must think. Identity established beyond a doubt. Well now, if this . . . creature . . . had been at such pains to prove his own death, the death of the somewhat notorious Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny, might he not have done his work too well? Too well for his present purposes? Clever as he was, or cunning as he was, might he not now find that it may have been easier to convince the world and the Law that he was dead than it would be to convince them that he was alive again? Especially if he called her in witness, and said she was his wife—and she declared on the contrary that he was a fraud and a swindler; that though he bore a certain likeness to the late Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny, he was an impostor, an impudent rogue who should be prosecuted for false pretences and . . .

And what would that do but postpone the catastrophe, the terrible tragedy of

. . .

Besides, it would be infinitely easier for him to prove a positive than for her to prove a negative. He'd have no difficulty. Handwriting, photographs, letters, witnesses.

Again, how could she perjure herself, knowing the whole time that he was her husband? Commit perjury? She'd commit murder if . . . But she must put such idiotic and horrible thoughts from her mind. She must be wise and sensible and courageous and . . .

“What do you call yourself now?” she asked.

“My name is Bertie-Norton,” he replied gravely, but with what, in a kindlier eye, would have been a twinkle of humour, and what in his was an impish leer.

Thank God he hadn't laughed again.

“And you are known to nobody at all? To nobody in England, except in the name of Bertie-Norton?”

“To nobody in England. To nobody anywhere.”

“But someone is bound to recognize you—to accost you in your own name. What then?”

“Depends, my dear, depends. I might just smile and say,

“*Ferring-Chevigny? Ferring-Chevigny? Who the devil is this Ferring-Chevigny? I'm always being mistaken for him. Must try and meet him some time, and see if I can see the likeness. No, no. Don't apologize, my dear chap. It's always happening.*”

“Or, on the other hand, if circumstances pointed that way, I might go on the other tack.

“*Well, well, well. Fancy your remembering me. Heard I was dead, did you? Yes, I heard it myself. Report grossly exaggerated, as they say.*”

Yes, that’s what he’d do. And perhaps he’d do both. Establish himself in some part of England as Montague Ferring-Chevigny, returned from the dead. Prove that he was Montague Ferring-Chevigny, that he might have witnesses, should he want them.

No, of course she had been foolish, as usual, in thinking that he had been too clever, and had so completely proved his death that he could never disprove it.

“But what about this part of the country?” she asked, for distasteful and horrible as it was to sit here in conversation with him, she must learn all she could. It would be sufficiently appalling to have to take any step with full knowledge. Whereas, to work in the dark, to act in ignorance, would be far worse—if anything could be far worse.

“Well, I don’t suppose there’s a soul within a hundred-mile radius of here who ever heard of Montague Ferring-Chevigny, and it’s a million to one chance against there being one who knows him by sight. That’s the beauty of it, Katty. I can settle down here, in perfect peace and comfort—and security. And if, by any impossible outside chance, I run into somebody who knew me—seventeen years ago, remember—it will be the simplest thing in the world for me to bluff it out. But I am not worrying, and you needn’t.

“No, if things go as I want them to, there won’t be the slightest danger—for either of us, Pussy. You see, if some one-idea-ed, one-way-minded old stick-in-the-mud of either sex saw me at the Hunt, or at one of the big houses about here, or at your dinner-table, or anywhere else, and if the silly geezer couldn’t take my word for it that I am not Montague Ferring-Chevigny and never was, that I never saw or heard of any such fellow, well, I’ve always got you to fall back on, haven’t I?”

“If you say to him or her, *‘My good Mr. or Mrs. Pimpleblossom or Whatnot, I’ve known Monty Bertie-Norton since I was in the cradle and he was in knickerbockers, and he has certainly been Monty Bertie-Norton all that time. So if he ever was your Mr. Ferring-Chevigny he must have done it very young.’* See?”

And Lady Calderton saw. Nevertheless, she must oppose, struggle, fight to the last ditch.

“And do you for one moment suppose I should do such a thing?”

“Not only for one moment, but for all the moments, Katty. In your own interests.

For your own sake. Presumably you don't want it established by your true and lawful husband, Montague Ferring-Chevigny, that General Sir Arthur Calderton is not your husband at all; that you have no earthly right to use his name, to live in his house, to spend his money; and that young Anthony Calderton is not Anthony Calderton at all? He's Anthony Nobody. He is, to put it bluntly, a . . .”

“Stop! How dare you! You vile . . .”

Oh! . . . She must not hear that word; must not think it; must not see it again, in print even. It must never, never be connected in her mind, or in anyone else's mind, with Anthony, her own darling Anthony, who . . .

Lady Calderton may have been weak, foolish and feather-brained. But she was brave.

Once more she rose to her feet and extended her hand in the direction of a bell.

“Well, Mr.—or Captain, is it?—Bertie-Norton, what a lot of nonsense we've been talking. At our first and last meeting, too. Are you staying long in this part of the country?”

But the man calling himself Bertie-Norton remained seated, adjusted the crease of his trousers neatly along his legs, rested his elbows on the arms of his chair, joined his fingers, and slowly shaking his head from side to side, smiled up into her face.

“No, no, that won't do, sweet Kate. ‘Captain Bertie-Norton’ undoubtedly to the rest of the world—so long as we can jog along comfortably and quietly—but to you, your very own Wiz.”

Her finger touched the button of the bell, but she forbore to press it.

“No, no. It won't do. It won't do at all, Kate. It was a bright thought. Quite bright—for you. But there are, alas, several good lads and lasses who'll believe me only too readily, recognize me only too quickly, if and when the time comes for me to declare myself, to confess my naughty trick with the poor corpse of the sailor that was washed up on Perenecque Island beach, and whom I . . .”

“You wouldn't dare,” she interrupted, turning upon him as her hand fell to her side. “It would mean prison for you.”

Would he dare do this terrible thing? Could he with impunity establish his identity? He'd hardly do it, if it meant arrest; prison perhaps, for years. Had he killed the man upon whose body were found Captain Ferring-Chevigny's clothes and other ‘proofs’ of identity?

Was he in danger of extradition for murder?

No, of course not. Pure dramatic nonsense.

No doubt he had come quite accidentally upon the body when bathing from the lonely Perenecque Island beach. Quite probably it was that of some sailor from one

of the foreign fishing or pearling or trading boats so frequently wrecked along that coast. He had come upon the dead body and it had given him the idea, the opportunity of escape, of throwing off all burdens of debt, of danger of arrest, of responsibilities; the opportunity of starting life afresh—and, incidentally, of abandoning her, utterly unprovided for, completely alone in the world.

No, in whatever country he was wanted, it would not be for murder. Not his line of rascality at all. It would be for some form of swindling, some base dishonesty, forgery, embezzlement, defalcation; some betrayal of pecuniary trust.

But what did it matter? The position was just as hopeless, whatever he had done, and however badly he might be wanted by the police, whether of this country or any other. For he could utterly wreck her life, lay it in ruins about her, without there being any publicity. He could deal what almost certainly would be a mortal blow to Arthur.

About Anthony she must not think—yet.

Without any question whatever of his past misdeeds and his danger of arrest and prosecution, why, he had only to tell Arthur, to tell her friends and neighbours, the people who made up her world, and he had told the whole world, so far as she was concerned, because one's own little world is the World.

And how could she deny it? How could she possibly do so? When she was able to think clearly, she'd be able to remember a dozen men in various regiments, clubs, hunts, and so forth, whom he could easily satisfy that he was the man whom they had known half a generation ago, the man who had lived and 'died' as Monty Ferring-Chevigny, the bad hat, the dog with a bad name, the man of whom they had said at the time that 'he was the last person whom they would have expected to commit suicide. But still, you never knew, and doubtless he had most excellent reasons.'

And the excellent reasons had transpired later.

Besides, he was the sort of man who'd have press-cuttings, photographs, passports with photographs and names. Yes, quite possibly he'd have a passport bearing her photograph and signature—in his name, Katherine Ferring-Chevigny. Quite possibly he would have their marriage certificate.

No, she was in his hands. And once again her mind was overwhelmed as the dreadful feeling of nightmare horror and numbness returned.

But once again, *no*; this was impossible.

She sank back in her chair.

This dreadful feeling of being stunned, mortally wounded. If only Arthur were here. But no, thank God, he was not.

Anthony . . . Anthony . . .

That stranger sitting there; that hard-eyed, grinning-mouthed utterly detestable creature was her husband.

But no, it was all too absurd. Such things couldn't happen. There was no Law nor Justice, no right nor elementary fairness or decency about it. She had believed him to be dead. Everybody had believed him to be dead. It was accepted as a fact. Accounts of his death had appeared in the papers; something of a scandal; a party of *déclassé* people—fly-blown aristocrats, distinguished *divorcées*, bearers of new but already dingy and damaged titles, British and foreign. And there had been talk of foul play, hints in the baser gutter-rags that he had, no doubt, been knocked overboard during a drunken orgy; or killed and thrown overboard by someone he had cheated and robbed.

Had she not suffered enough then, while that horrible business was in the public memory?

An idea. Of course it was worthless, useless, and futile. Alastair Cluny. As far as she knew, he was still alive.

“Did Alastair know the truth?” she asked.

He grinned.

“He knew just as much as anybody else, and no more. That I vanished from the *Seagull* during the night; no note on the pin-cushion, no anything. Just vanished. And that my body, in a sort of yachting-kit, reefer, white trousers, white shoes, was found in a little cove by Perenecque Island beach. Bit over-matured—not to say high; shop-soiled; but in spite of all—all the crabs and fishes, that is, as well as the rocks—still quite identifiable by the signet-ring, links and yacht-club buttons and the clothes.”

Then might not that be in her favour? Might not Alastair Cluny refuse to accept this man's . . .

What was he saying?

“But don't count on that, my dear. I could convince Alastair Cluny in half of two seconds.”

And smiling, he hummed beneath his breath,

“*‘For a strawberry mark in the middle of the back
Is all I got from Father.’*”

“Lots of little things besides that; signature, scar or two, memories.”

And again came the laugh, as he added,

“Alastair and I had more than one bit of fun together that nobody knows about, except him and me. And—I blush to mention it—what about the final proof of all?”

“What?”

“Finger-prints.”

Yes, it was quite possible that he was speaking the truth; that after he left her and before he ‘died,’ he might have been in the hands of the police sufficiently long for his finger-prints to have been recorded.

Oh, *why*, why had she been such a fool, knowing what a trickster he was. Fool—though surely that was all she had been. She had done nothing wrong. She had not intentionally committed bigamy. She had had no more reason than anybody else to imagine that he was not dead. But then, how could she ever have been such a ten-times bigger fool as to marry him? But what else is a girl of seventeen but a fool? And it had all been so hurried. He had been on the ship that she had joined at Naples, on her way to a holiday with her people in India. They had been engaged before they had reached Bombay, and married a week later.

Well, there was one thing. She had never deceived Arthur. She had told him everything; and he had accepted the position as she had done, as anybody who ever knew him had done. That he had been drowned while round-the-world yachting with Alastair Cluny and his gang.

But she should have known better. Of course she should have known better. She should never have allowed Arthur to marry her. She might have known.

And now what would happen?

It had happened. She was this man’s wife. It was useless to dream of denying it. It had happened. Calderton was not her home; Arthur was not her husband; and Anthony was not his—heir. Anthony could not inherit Calderton. He would have to go—when she went.

What was that? What was he saying?

“So you see, there is not the slightest need for all this skittishness; for there is absolutely no real need for any unpleasantness whatever. So long as you will be reasonable, do the sensible thing, and so long as I get a fair deal out of it, you can carry on in that state of life to which it has pleased you to call yourself.”

Carry on in that state of life—so long as he got a fair deal?

“*Blackmail!* A fair deal! You? Why . . .”

It was the *soi-disant* Bertie-Norton’s turn to display emotion.

Righteous indignation. A look of genuine anger hardened the face that had been grinning too amiably.

“*What?*” he asked incredulously. “*What* did you say? *Blackmail?* I was never so insulted in my life! What do you mean? What a horrible idea. You’d offer *me*

money? No. I draw the line at blackmail, thank you.”

Anger gave way to hard resentment.

“I’m surprised at you, Katty. I really am. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Have you ever known me do such a thing? Ever had reason to suppose I’d dream of anything so caddish?”

“Then what exactly did you mean—if you meant anything—by saying that so long as I would be reasonable and do the sensible thing and give you a fair deal, there need be no ‘unpleasantness’? What do you mean by a fair deal?”

“Well, come! Plain English, isn’t it? Fair deal. Live and let live.”

And Montague Ferring-Chevigny laughed.

“And live here, too,” he added, turning suddenly serious.

“*Here?* Are you mad?”

“Mad? Me? Why? Don’t sound balmy, do I? Sounds more as though it’s you who are mad. Here am I, come to offer you exactly what I called it—a fair deal—and show you a way out of what might be a damned awkward situation, and you go all melodramatic and talk about blackmail, as if I were a—I don’t know what. Why shouldn’t I live here? I’ve got to live somewhere, and preferably somewhere where I’m not known. I don’t say I want to *live* in the house. Not all the time, anyhow. But there’s no reason why I shouldn’t live here or hereabouts, is there?”

“In what capacity?”

“What d’you mean?”

“What I say. Suppose, for one moment, you could live in this county, as Captain Bertie-Norton, or whatever you call yourself. Are you suggesting that I should sponsor you, introduce you, guarantee you?”

“Yes, and a bit more. I’m your old pal; girlhood’s friend; home from the Seven Seas and the Ends of the Earth. Been sheep-farming in New Zealand, or ranching in South America, any old thing you like. And having made my pile and had enough of the great open spaces, I’ve come down here to look round for a nice snug little place, and meantime you are putting me up.”

“And do you really think . . . ?”

“Yes, and you had better do some thinking, too, Katty; because I tell you plainly it’s either that or the other thing. Point of fact, it generally is, isn’t it? In this case, it’s that—or I get my rights.”

“Your rights?”

“Yes. You are my rights. You are my wife. And either I come in with you—or you come out with me.”

What did he want? What could she offer him, and what would be the good of

offering him anything? It wouldn't affect the situation. It wouldn't change facts. And supposing he meant exactly what he said. How could she possibly live such a life? Live such a lie? She would spend every moment of her life in fear of hearing the first whisper that Montague Ferring-Chevigny was alive; was not only alive, but visiting the house of his former wife.

Former?

Which would be worse; waiting—or denunciation of this man to her husband?

Husband? Arthur wasn't her husband.

And what had she done to Arthur . . . and to poor little Anthony?

It was unthinkable. It was impossible. And it was stark staring fact. There he was, sitting grinning at her, and in a moment he'd laugh. Not laugh at her, but just laugh at nothing, or rather, at the terrible *impasse*. Laughter for him and death for her.

Death, of course. For what would life be like?

What did he want? What could she give him, to go right away to the other end of the world and stay there? Yes, and for how long would he stay? And what an existence—waiting for him to return; waiting to receive a letter with some threat or outrageous demand; waiting for the day when she should pick up the newspaper and catch sight of a paragraph telling of the discovery and arrest of the notorious Captain Ferring-Chevigny who was supposed to have died long since.

A silver-chimed clock struck four. They'd be bringing tea in a minute. Should she tell Jenkins to show her visitor out, and then give him instructions never to admit him again?

What good would that do? What could she possibly gain by antagonizing him? And surely it would be far better for her to know where he was and what he was doing and what he was proposing to do. And what would that be? She must make him state it clearly.

"Listen," she said. "Just now you said that you drew a line. You drew it at blackmail. Well, suppose I apologize to you for using that word and . . ."

"All right, all right, my dear! No offence meant; none taken," smiled the man. "Ugly word."

". . . but, at the same time, I say that I'm willing to help you, if you are in trouble. I am willing to give you the largest sum of money that I can possibly raise, in return for your going right out of my way; right out of my life, and never coming near me again; never writing to me—but being, as you've been for the last seventeen years, dead, so far as I am concerned."

As she spoke, Captain Bertie-Norton uncrossed his legs, drew his feet in,

placed his hands upon the arms of his chair as though about to rise.

“Look here, Katherine,” he said, in a low and serious voice, “will you please understand that I have my self-respect as much as you have, and as your husband . . . as Sir Arthur . . . has. I wouldn’t dream of uttering a threat under any circumstances, nor even of hinting at one, but I don’t think you are very wise to insult me. I don’t think you’ll gain anything by it.”

In silence they stared at each other for a long moment, he dignified, forbearing, reproachful; she agonized, despairing.

“You won’t take money to go away again?”

“I most certainly will not; and if you suggest such a thing again, I shall . . . well, I shall be more than offended.”

“Will you tell me exactly what you do propose?”

“I’ve told you. I propose to live here—or hereabouts. I propose to enjoy life; do myself well; and have a thoroughly good time. The Exile’s Return—to all that makes life worth living. I’m going to live . . .”

“On what?”

“Oh, well—what shall we say—on my wife’s bounty. I don’t like putting it in those words, but that’s really what it comes to. I know that the majority of men support their wives. I supported mine to the best of my ability in the old days; but there are lots of fellows who are fortunate enough to have a wealthy wife—and don’t complain. I’m a proud man. I admit it. But I really don’t see why I should be too proud to take the goods the gods provide.”

“You know perfectly well that, if such a thing were feasible, if it were thinkable, and I were fool enough and wicked enough to agree to it, you’d be living on my husband’s money.”

“I wouldn’t, Katty,” and again the dreadful silly laugh seemed to fill the big room, “that’s just what I wouldn’t be doing. Any more than I am now,” he added.

“You are a ‘proud’ man. You ‘draw the line.’ You find the sound of the word blackmail unbearable—but you propose to come and live here on Sir Arthur Calderton’s money and . . .”

“Oh, my dear girl, why must you split hairs and wrangle over straws. You have plenty of money, and you’ll always have plenty of money wherewith to be able to help me to jog along. And please don’t suggest or even imagine that I should—what shall I say—put the screw on. Damn it, I draw the line somewhere. You let us come to what I call a sensible arrangement, and give me a fair deal, and you can take my word for it, there will be no trouble from me. It would never enter my head to ask you to increase . . . improve the . . . well, you know what I mean. And I should

never ask you for lump sums, or do anything that would embarrass you financially. Put it clean out of your head. All I want is a decent . . .”

“Decent!” whispered Lady Calderton.

“Well, say reasonable, moderate amount of help from my wife. Nothing wrong with that, is there? You help me and I’ll help you, and we’ll all be happy together. Don’t you see that we are partners; married partners?”

Lady Calderton rose to her feet—and at that moment the door opened. The footman bearing a great silver tea-tray entered, shepherded by the butler.

Tea was set and the servants departed.

And once more, Mrs. Ferring-Chevigny found herself pouring out tea for her husband.

§ 2

How incredible life could be. How could she possibly be doing this, sitting here, giving tea to this man? To keep up appearances before the servants—which must be done, at any cost, until the end came—so long as this monstrous thing was a secret, she must play her part in keeping it a secret.

She remembered that on the rare occasions when he did drink tea, he took lemon, and neither sugar nor milk. What a thing to remember at such a time.

Of course it must be a dream, a dreadful nightmare from which she would wake, the very worst nightmare that she had ever had. She or anyone else in this world, surely.

She must wake up.

If only she could do so, find herself alone, say,

“I’ve been dozing. Well, how lazy I am. Disgraceful,” and thrust the memory of that horror from her mind.

And meanwhile, she passed her husband a cup of tea in which floated a thin slice of lemon.

“Thank you, my love. Quite like old times, eh? I see you remember. Well, well, isn’t this nice? Cosy, eh? When does your—when does the General come back from Montiga?”

“In December.”

And though aware of the folly of it, could not refrain from adding,

“You are in no immediate danger.”

“Nor, incidentally, are you, my lass.”

And the voice lost some of its false pleasantness.

“It’s you who are in danger, isn’t it? It is not I who’ve committed bigamy. I have no reason to fear the return of the General, have I? Does he know, by the way?”

“Know what?”

“That you were—what shall we say—*the* Mrs. Ferring-Chevigny.”

“Of course he does.”

“And how soon he’s going to know that you are still *the* Mrs. Ferring-Chevigny depends entirely on you. And as I’ve said, there is no earthly reason why he should ever know.”

“Of course he must know,” she replied, trying to make the statement sound convincing; trying to seem fearless and utterly contemptuous; trying to pour tea into her cup with a steady hand.

“Oh, well, that’s all right, then. We know where we are.”

Was there a note of disappointment in his voice, a hint of chagrin and annoyance, as though he were thwarted and angered?

Probably not. Doubtless the wish was father to the thought. Montague Ferring-Chevigny would have his opportunist plans cut and dried to meet whatever situation might arise from this interview.

“Well, that’s all right, then,” he repeated. “I’ll go and see him soon after he returns. Round about Christmas, eh? Merry Christmas. Of course he’ll want proof that I am whom I profess to be, but you’ll be able to support me there, won’t you?”

She stared at him in silence, her white face distorted.

“Yes, I shan’t want any further proof, since you’ll bear me out when I tell him that I am your husband.”

With trembling hand, she raised her cup but found herself unable to drink, unable to speak.

Helping himself to a sandwich, leaning back in his chair and crossing his legs comfortably,

“What line will the General take, do you suppose?” he asked conversationally. “You know him better than I do.”

Yes, what line would poor Arthur take? He would, of course, and as usual, do what he considered right. And there could hardly be any question as to what was right. Certainly none in the eyes of the Law.

She was this man’s wife.

Arthur would never get over it. Not only the horrible publicity and scandal, the front-sheet news, but the blow. Because he loved her. He really did love her. She was part of his life. It would be like an amputation, a terrible operation from which

he would never recover. How could they separate now, after all these years of practically perfect happiness? There might be no such thing as the perfect marriage, but no two people on this earth had ever lived together more happily than she and Arthur.

But General Sir Arthur Calderton could not and would not go on living with another man's wife. How could he, once the fact became generally known? How could he indeed, being the man he was, if he alone knew it; even if no one in the whole world except he, she, and this man knew it?

And how could she possibly carry on life without Arthur and Anthony?

There was one thing, no power on earth could make her go back to this man.

But where could she go, then? Where could she go? This was her home. Arthur was her real husband, whether she were legally married to him or not. Anthony was her son. Why should Arthur's life be ruined and Anthony's too—and her own—because this poisonous scoundrel had played this trick all those years ago, and had now returned from the dead, as it were?

Once again, what wrong had she done?

Why, because he chose to do such a thing as that, and to do it in order to escape pressing difficulties, great danger, duns, the police, scandal, should Arthur and Anthony and she receive the punishment? And such a punishment. One that would be the death of their happiness. And of more than their happiness. It would kill Arthur. It would kill her. And it would spoil Anthony's life.

People who so cleverly proved themselves to be dead should be considered dead, and not allowed to return to the life, the position, the rights that they had voluntarily forfeited. Why should this criminal come back to his place in society and drive an innocent boy out of it—resume his life and destroy Anthony's?

But wasn't she taking too tragic a view of it, if that were possible? Of course, Arthur would look after Anthony and keep him with him as long as he lived; but he couldn't legally bear Arthur's name nor inherit Calderton. Why, he'd have no legal existence at all.

And was this horrible and terrible creature speaking the truth when he said that she had committed bigamy? Had she, by committing bigamy, put herself in danger of punishment by the Law, in danger of imprisonment?

No, there was Justice as well as Law in England; and that would be too utterly unjust.

"Yes, it'll be interesting to see what line the General will take," he continued.

"*That* you'll find out for yourself in December," she replied, in the hard cold voice that scarcely seemed to be her own. "I don't think that whatever line he takes

will be a pleasant one for you.”

“You don’t, eh?”

“No, I don’t. Why should it be? Why should he and our boy and I suffer, and you go scot-free?”

“Why? For obvious reasons. I disappear. I return. No law against that, is there? I seek out my wife. Commendable, surely. Admittedly, I have been away a long time, but that’s my misfortune, not my fault; and if you and everybody else chose to think I was dead, well, I’m not responsible for the conclusions to which people jump.”

Oh, why did she sit here talking to this creature? What possible good could come of it?

She could bear it no longer.

She must bear it.

“By the way, I wonder if you’ve got such a thing as an anchovy biscuit, Katty. Delightful tea, I’m sure, and it was very nice of you to remember that I take it with lemon, but you know what I really like at this time of the day, don’t you, old girl?”

She stared at him, again incredulous. What was he? The shallowest puddle of filthiest water that was ever splashed upon unfortunate passer-by; or the deepest, darkest, most dangerous ocean in which victim was ever drowned?

How could he babble about the wretchedest trifles when the happiness, the lives almost, of three people hung in the balance; when he was about to destroy three harmless and innocent fellow-creatures who had never done him the slightest injury of any sort or kind? Was this a braying, trampling ass, or was it a dreadful monster?

Again, she could bear it no longer. She was suffocating.

She must bear it. She must fight.

Yes, that was better. She could still speak, dry as were her tongue and mouth. Drier than ever before in her life.

“What do you suppose you’ll gain by going to my . . . by going to Sir Arthur Calderton, and telling him that you are my husband?”

“Well, well, one never knows. In the troubled waters, just under the waterfall, is a good place for fishing. And there’ll be a blooming Niagara when I tell him, eh?”

And at the thought of the promised Niagara, Captain Ferring-Chevigny laughed heartily, the sound causing his wife almost to shudder with disgust and horror.

“But why talk about what I’ll *gain*? Right’s right, isn’t it, all the world over? You are my wife still; and, let me say, Katty, a damned attractive woman still. Why shouldn’t I claim my rights?”

Lady Calderton rose to her feet, making a semi-conscious and ineffectual

movement with her hand towards the bell.

No, she must hear him out. She must know the worst; know all that could be learned; she must fight. For Arthur's happiness. For Anthony's. What would be the best thing to do, that they . . .

"Do you really suppose, for one instant, that it would ever enter my head to go back to you?"

"Well, where else would you go? Can't stay here, now, can you? Can't go on living in sin with Arthur after Monty's come back. Can't stay on at Calderton if I demand restitution of conjugal rights and all that. Don't see what else you are going to do but return to me."

As she stared at him in horror, she was conscious of the cunning look that came into his eyes as he added,

"But there's one thing I ought in fairness to mention at once, so that you get it quite clear in your mind from the first. I don't want the boy. Definitely you can't bring him along, too."

Yes, she was right. She knew it intuitively. He didn't want to go to Sir Arthur. He didn't want her himself. He had been disappointed when she had said that of course her husband must know. He didn't want him to know. Probably it was the very last thing that he wanted.

Naturally, in spite of his horror and indignation, whether real or simulated, at the introduction of the word 'blackmail' (and was it real or simulated; and did he himself know which it was?), what he really wanted to do was to benefit by the situation. Literally to trade upon it, turn it to his own account, use it for his own ends.

He wouldn't face the word 'blackmail,' accept a lump sum, and go away. He drew the line. Much too honourable a gentleman. But he'd live "here or hereabouts" for the rest of his life.

Yes, Montague Ferring-Chevigny ran true to form. Opportunist. Selfishness incarnate. A man who'd stoop to most forms of rascality, but who drew the line. Drew the line at being an honest rogue. Declining to call his muddy spade a spade—but seizing the treasure he had dug up with it.

No. No blackmail for Monty Ferring-Chevigny. Only the destruction of a woman's happiness; and the certain ruin of the lives of three innocent people.

But even so—what then? Suppose she could have bought him off. Suppose he had gone to the uttermost ends of the earth and never been heard of again, it would still be for ever on her conscience. But why conscience? She had done no wrong. And if not on her conscience, it would be on her mind. For ever on her mind that Arthur was not her husband; that Anthony was not Anthony Calderton; that he was

a . . .

But now she was being selfish, surely. What did it matter if she were for ever and perpetually oppressed by that dreadful load, not of sin, not of guilt, but of knowledge—provided it could be kept from Arthur and from Anthony? Of course, she must fight. She must accept the situation, and for their sakes make the best of it. That was what she must do. She must put her husband and her son first; put everything else aside; meet this man on his own ground; stoop to his level; and fight and strive, plot and plan, for the happiness and safety of her husband and her son.

What was he saying—“Why not be reasonable?”

Yes, she must be reasonable. There was a chance, a hope, so long as it was to this man’s interest to keep the secret, that the secret could be kept. She must see that it *was* to his interest. That it was well worth keeping. For, strike whatever attitude he might, draw whatever line he might choose to draw, the fact remained that his own interest was his one criterion.

“And what exactly do you mean by reasonable?” she heard herself asking.

“Exactly what I have said. And if you can think of anything more reasonable, for Heaven’s sake say so. ‘Put it clearly once again?’ It is so simple that there’s nothing to put. Simply a matter of ‘as you were.’ Carry on precisely as usual, and nobody a penny the worse.”

“And you a penny the better. To what extent?”

“My dear Katty. I leave it to you. Don’t let’s get sordid about it. No damned haggling, please. As I said, all I want is just to live in peace and quiet, in comfort and security, instead of like a damned seagull scouting for offal—and the nearest land a million miles away. All I ask is that you treat me as a wife ought to treat a husband when he’s down on his luck. Mind you, if I struck it rich, put a packet on another Signorinetta at a hundred to one—my god, think of a thousand on Signorinetta at a hundred to one!—or got on to some really good thing in the City; you know, gold shares artificially forced down to twopence-ha’penny and kicking about the market, and you get the tip to buy all you can lay your hands on as the mine’s really a bonza—anything of that sort; I’d scorn to touch a penny of even my own wife’s money. And I shall try, of course. Keep on trying.”

Yes, he’d certainly do that on every race-course in England, and with Arthur’s money. But what of that, if it were to save Arthur’s happiness, his very life, perhaps. Arthur would crack up, age, get a stroke, die, if this thing came suddenly upon him out of the blue. The kindly proud man whose life had been so honourable, so blameless.

“Very well,” she said. “I’ll be—reasonable. Just as long as you are, and no

longer.”

Captain Monty Ferring-Chevigny sprang to his feet, beaming.

“My dear,” he said, “I knew . . .” and made a movement as though to take her in his arms.

This time, Lady Calderton’s finger reached and pressed the bell-push.

Captain Ferring-Chevigny laughed, and at the sound, Lady Calderton seemed again to shrink as the knuckles of her clenched hands shone white.

“Well, well,” he said, “plenty of time for that sort of thing. And the little financial details later, eh? We’ll . . .”

The door opened and the footman entered.

With one last call upon her reserves of strength and courage, Lady Calderton rose to her feet, smiled, extended her hand.

“Well, good-bye, Captain Bertie-Norton,” she said. “It’s so nice to have seen you again. Good-bye.”

And smiling, easy and debonair, the caller took his departure.

V

And thus, suddenly as on a sunny morning a cloud will arise, spread, cover the sun and turn a warm, bright and delightful day to a grey, cold, dull one, blighting not only the landscape but the mind of the beholder, so, with equal suddenness and equally marked and disastrous effect, a cloud of gloom descended upon Calderton.

At dinner one evening, Lady Calderton had been her usual cheerful and happy self, laughing merrily at little incidents that had occurred during the day, at quaint conceits and jests of Anthony's, and apparently without a care in the world.

At dinner the next evening, she was a different woman. It is no idle form of words, no exaggerated *façon de parler*, when I say she was like one who had received a mortal wound.

She had not come to lunch, and I had not seen her at all that day until she appeared in the drawing-room before dinner—looking like a ghost. I was so concerned, so shocked, that as I rose from my chair, I stared in amazement, probably open-mouthed.

"Why, what's the matter?" I cried. "Are you ill? Can I . . ."

"No, no. Sit down, Mr. Waring," she said, and sank into a chair. "I'm not . . . ill. I've had . . . some bad news. I don't feel very . . ."

"Let me ring for your maid, and . . ."

"No, no. Please don't fuss. I'm quite all right. I . . . I don't quite know . . ."

And then she lay back in her chair so still, so silent, with closed eyes, that I thought she had fainted; so white, so motionless, I almost thought for a moment that she might be dead. I was, I think, more horrified, more shocked, than ever I had been in my life.

As I rose to my feet to ring for her maid to bring water, ice, brandy, sal volatile, anything that might help, and with thoughts of telephoning for Stanton, the Calderton doctor, she opened her eyes.

"Don't ring," she said.

"But you are ill. I must . . ."

"I'm not ill, and no one can do anything for me—unless perhaps it is you."

"Lady Calderton, I'd do anything on earth . . ."

"Yes, I feel sure you would. Do sit down. I want to think."

And again she closed her eyes.

I suffered badly during the silence that followed, in spite of the warm, deep pleasure that her words had given me.

Suddenly she opened her eyes and sat up.

“I shall tell you everything,” she said, “because I know you will not repeat a word of it to a living soul, until I ask you to do so.”

“Thank you, Lady Calderton,” I replied.

Jenkins entered and announced dinner.

“We’ll go in to dinner,” she said, “and afterwards I’ll tell you.”

It was terrible, sitting at table with a ghost, the wraith of an almost mortally stricken woman who but a few hours before had radiated happiness, contentment and peace. It was like being at table with the corpse of a person one loved, a cold dead body that yet, in strange robot fashion, moved mechanically.

And after dinner, in the drawing-room, when we were finally alone, she told me a tale that seemed at one and the same time to turn me cold with horror and to make my blood boil with rage and indignation; a dreadful story of neglect; desertion; and then, of an incredibly heartless, wicked swindle, whereby a girl still in her teens found herself a widow, and whereby the same girl, now a woman in her thirties, found herself still the wife of the man who had married her when she was seventeen, found herself the mother of a boy who was not her husband’s child, the “wife” of a famous man and County magnate of ancient lineage and high repute, who was not her husband.

The days that followed were sheerly dreadful; life a nightmare, through which one walked aware yet incredulous; aware of a horror unspeakable, a calamity immeasurable, and yet unable to believe that such a thing could be.

How I played my part with Anthony while driven to distraction by fear of what might happen to his mother, I don’t know. For, realizing that she was in no sense of the word a strong woman, a woman of tenacious will and powerful character, I lived in hideous fear, fear that, early one morning, a hysterical maid would run shrieking through the house, screaming that her Ladyship was dead. Braver and stronger women than Lady Calderton have taken sleeping-draughts before now; draughts from which there was no waking. The fear so grew upon me that I—at the risk of putting into her mind a thought that might not yet be there—begged her to give me her promise that she would never increase the prescribed dose of the sedative that Dr. Stanton had given her; begged her to assure me that she would never, for one moment, consider the coward’s way of escape from trouble.

“But I am a coward,” she said, “and there are times when I feel I can’t, absolutely *can’t*, face this thing. Can’t sit and wait and wait for the blow to fall.”

“But Sir Arthur and Anthony?”

“Sir Arthur who is not my husband. Anthony who is not . . .”

“Anthony is your son and he worships you. Sir Arthur is your husband and he worships you, and Anthony is his son. The fact that during all those years that foul dog was not really dead . . .”

“Yes. All right. I’ll promise. Of course I’ll promise. It would be a dreadful thing to do. Poor Anthony.”

Wrung with pain, an agony of sympathy, I took her hand in both of mine and spoke to her as man to woman, equal to equal.

“Listen. I do give you my most solemn promise, my absolute assurance, that we’ll find a way out of this. If only you’ll have faith and patience and hope, I’ll help you—somehow. You and Anthony and Sir Arthur.”

She was silent for a moment as her eyes filled with tears and her lips trembled.

“I *will* have patience,” she said. “I’ll *try* to have hope. Faith in you I have already.”

§ 2

When I do get a bright idea, which is not, I’m afraid, very frequently, it is usually upon waking from a good night’s sleep.

Perhaps the brain is fresh and rested—if the brain ever rests. Perhaps it is because the subconscious mind has had its way during the sleep of the body, and has pushed a thought up into the conscious mind.

Usually when this happens, the thought is something in the nature of a solution. I suppose this again is because the unconscious mind works independently of the conscious, and is sometimes able to present it with the results of its labour. This would appear to be the explanation of the way in which certain fortunate people find poems, stories, plots, and rolling periods of rhetoric, coming into their unexpectant and otherwise empty minds.

Anyway, waking as usual to instant consideration of the appalling problem that occupied my thoughts almost exclusively, the idea suddenly occurred: Why not consult my uncle?

All too frequently when I am suddenly visited by a bright idea, its brilliance begins to dim as soon as I consider it, and grows duller in proportion to the attention it receives. But, now and again, one of these bright thoughts grows even brighter in the light of the mild beams of my intelligence. So it was with this one.

I would consult my uncle.

Had I not done this often, and with invariably satisfactory results, from comparatively early childhood? At Prep School, Public School, at College, and since leaving College, I had, when in serious trouble, or what at the time had seemed to me to be serious trouble, summoned up my courage, screwed it to the sticking-point, and taken it straight to Uncle. And never had I had cause to regret doing so. For if he could not solve the problem, smooth away the difficulty or get me straight out of the trouble, he could and did give wise advice. Moreover, he could give courage, and it is wonderful how obstacles decrease as courage grows. And whenever it had been a matter of help that was needed, help had always been forthcoming.

I don't say it had always been easy. He wasn't the sort of man whom one lightly approached, smiling more or less sheepishly, with a tale of folly, stupidity or wrongdoing. One got one's medicine; and, giving another shade of meaning to the metaphor, one had to take one's medicine too, for Uncle had a tongue like a rasp when he chose to use it as such, an instrument of infinite variety, now golden, now steel; a pointed probe, a razor-edged knife; a cross-cut file, harsh and cruel, but cruel only to be kind, for there was no real cruelty-for-cruelty's-sake in the hard-seeming cold man. One could only tell one's tale beneath the steely stare of his watchful eye, blurt it all out, make what faltering explanation one could, and then wait, with what appetite one might, for what was to come.

And whether he flayed me for my folly or grunted a word of sympathy for undeserved suffering or bad luck; whether he made no comment whatsoever, good or bad, he always *did* something about it, so to speak.

He was a very wise man. He knew his world. He had seen and heard a wonderful lot in his time, was a mine of experience and a most admirable mentor for youth; or for anyone else, man or woman, young or old, so far as that went, if they had the good sense or good fortune to go to him for advice and assistance, or the advice that often is the best of assistance.

Now, of course, I couldn't go to him with a terrible tale of his old friends, Sir Arthur and Lady Calderton and of Captain Ferring-Chevigny, whose name, incidentally, he would almost certainly remember. There was nothing of the club-gossip about him, and I should defeat my purpose if I began to blurt out the dreadful scandal. He would stop me.

He'd say he wished to hear no more, and would look at me in a manner that would make me feel, quite rightly, that I had sinned against the Code, and forfeited his good opinion.

I knew, of course, that had I done so, and he had heard me out, the secret

would have been as safe as if I had never spoken.

But the point was that he wouldn't have spoken. He'd have been angry with me. Angry with Fate too, and if I hadn't failed altogether I should have made a mess of the whole business.

I should have to walk very warily, be diplomatic, and not only lay the whole case before him without naming any names, but in such a way that he would think the better of me, and a great deal about my story.

Yes, where there seemed nothing whatever to be done, here was something to do. Where everything seemed hopeless, here was a ray of hope. I would enlist my uncle's help, ask his advice—and make a supposititious case of it. He would understand, sooner or later, and supply the names himself.

He'd understand—and I thanked God that I had just sufficient understanding to understand him.

I would ring him up at the earliest possible moment. Or to be more accurate, ring up my old friend Judd, his man-servant—for Uncle Walter would have nothing to do with the telephone. He knew that one was installed in the pantry, and was not averse from benefiting from its usefulness; but countenance it further he would not. I believe I am right in saying that never in his life had he placed a receiver to his ear or his lips to a mouth-piece.

Yes, I would ring up Judd and tell him to ask Sir Walter whether it would be convenient for me to lunch with him this very day, and if not, for him to make an appointment with me.

So, when Robert brought me tea, I bade him tell Lady Calderton's maid that Mr. Waring would be glad if he could see Lady Calderton when convenient. She would understand that I wanted to speak with her more or less urgently, and would either come along to the schoolroom where Anthony and I would be at work, or send for me to her morning-room when she came downstairs. She always breakfasted in her room, and was generally downstairs between nine and ten. If I got away by ten, that would give me time to reach the Albany by lunch-time.

While I lay thinking, I heard Anthony's secret knock at the door. Pass-words, signs and secret knocks had all recently been changed, as it was supposed that there was a Roundhead spy in the house.

A loud knock, two soft ones, a loud knock, a soft one and a loud one. Yes, I must remember. He'd be seriously annoyed with me if I used the wrong word or sign.

"Who's there?" I called, and a sepulchral voice, evidently from a mouth at the keyhole, replied,

“Confusion.”

“To his enemies,” I responded, taking my cue.

And Anthony entered, gracefully cast the end of an imaginary cloak across his shoulder, laid his left hand upon the hilt of an imaginary sword, and strode to my side.

“All is well, Sir Henry,” quoth he.

I wished I could agree with him.

Robert arriving with the tea, our conversation fell to lower levels.

I gave the man my message and, as he departed, informed Anthony that I should be going away for the day.

His face fell, the Cavalier nobleman or Stuart king promptly becoming a disappointed boy.

“Oh, I say. What, all day? Must you really?”

“Afraid so. I must go up to Town,” I said, and as the boy looked at me, I saw in his eye that curiously ‘ageing’ look again. As I said before, I cannot describe it, but the effect was as though the soul of a much older person peeped out through the child’s eyes.

And though what he actually said was merely,

“All right, I’ll look after Mother,” which meant anything or nothing, it quite definitely seemed to me to mean something. Completely unspoken between us, and almost completely *not* understood between us, was the implication that, I being away, his mother might be in need of some sort of help, assistance and protection. It was the merest nuance of expression, both of voice and of face; it was the slightest shadow of a suggestion of a hint, the merest nothing—and yet that nothing was a reality, so to speak.

And for the merest infinitesimal fraction of a second, I realized that the boy fully understood the situation. Most uncanny. Most disturbing. Had he been ‘listening’?

And then, of course, I was perfectly certain that I was imagining, and imagining the most arrant nonsense. Of course, the child knew nothing, and that old wise understanding look that came into his eyes, momentary and fleeting, was the merest meaningless phenomenon, part and parcel of what one called his ‘old-fashionedness.’

The boy knew absolutely nothing at all . . .

Or did he?

“Yes, rather. I’ll leave her in your charge, and when I return, I shall find that all is well; the drawbridge up, the portcullis down, sentinels posted and the flag flying.”

While he and I were breakfasting, a message came to the effect that Lady

Calderton would be in her morning-room at nine-thirty; and, after giving Anthony enough work to keep him employed for most of the morning, I went to see her, taking a short cut from the schoolroom along a corridor and down what had once been a secret staircase, a long steep flight of stairs completely enclosed by panelling, that led to a secret door in the panelling of a wall in the hall below . . .

Once again, I was shocked, though scarcely surprised, at the change in her. Each day seemed to me to find her more haggard, worn and weary than did the previous one.

“Good morning, Mr. Waring,” she said, giving me her hand; but there was warmth and friendliness in the words, the hand-clasp, and the expression of her face. It was a look that promoted me, made me more than employee, more than tutor to her son, however well approved in that capacity. It gave me the rank of friend, and it also gave me the feeling, inexpressibly gratifying, that she was coming to regard me as a person upon whom she relied, and from whom real help might possibly come.

“I want my ‘afternoon-off to-day, please, your ladyship,’” I said facetiously, trying to speak lightly, and as though cheerfulness were still possible.

She looked at me enquiringly.

“I want to run up to Town,” I said, and was ashamed that I was pleased at being unable to deny that her smile died away as the look of anxiety returned.

“Going to desert . . . Calderton . . . for the day?”

“Yes, if you don’t mind. I’ve left Anthony some work and shall be back this evening.”

“Be back to dinner, if you can,” she said.

And I quite understood that she did not wish to dine alone with her thoughts, her fears and agony of mind.

“Yes, I’ll be back before dinner. I want to go and have a talk with my uncle.”

“Sir Walter Waring? A talk?” she said.

“Yes. May I? No possible harm could conceivably come of it, and I should mention no names.”

She studied my face anxiously.

“I know my husband has the greatest admiration for him.”

“Yes. It’s mutual. They saw a great deal of each other when they were younger. He is the wisest person I know, and discreet and reliable as an archangel. Two archangels. And as silent as the tomb.”

“As two tombs,” she smiled courageously. “Look, Henry . . .” and I felt a surge of pleasure, nay of joy, as, for the first time, she called me by my christian name, “. . . I’ll leave it to you entirely, for I rely upon you absolutely. It seems a terrible

thing that anybody else should know, but that's an idiotic thing to say. The whole world will know soon. Do what you think best."

She 'relied upon me absolutely.' That was something worth hearing—even if it were only because I was the sole person upon whom she *could* rely.

"Thank you. I'm perfectly certain that nothing but good can come of it. I'll just find out that my uncle can see me, and I'll start at once. I'll take the small car and drive myself. If I might suggest it, refuse to see anybody to-day. Don't be at home to anyone at all."

"No, I will never see him again, if I can help it, except in your presence, until my husband . . . until Sir Arthur . . . returns."

A few minutes later, I had got Judd on the telephone and a reasonably cordial invitation to lunch at the Albany.

§ 3

"Well," said my uncle, fixing me with a stare of his piercing blue eyes, a look that always deflated me a little, made me feel younger without in any way rejuvenating me. "What is it now? Debts and duns? Wine and women? Horses and cards?"

And although no smile lit up the bleak countenance, this I understood was to be taken as jocularly.

Well, better that and a frosty stare from a man of understanding and a fundamental kindness, than horrid jocund laughter and fulsome welcome from one who would be a broken reed in time of trouble.

"Well, sir," said I, "nothing much in the way of cards. It has been *Snap* and *Beggar my Neighbour* chiefly, of late. Not much in the way of wine. The boy and I drink barley-water. Horses I have neglected, though everything I have fancied has won, unbacked by me, at good prices. Duns don't get as far as Calderton, and as to debts, well, while you are so good to me . . ."

"That leaves women," snarled Uncle, and made the noise that may be spelt *Hrrmph!*

I sat silent.

"Trouble with a woman? What do you come to me for? Godfather? Money?"

"It is trouble about a woman. One of the nicest, sweetest, finest women who ever . . ."

"She always is," snapped Uncle. "They always are. What do you want?"

"I want you to listen to a story."

"*Hmph!*" grunted Uncle, and prepared to listen with the closest attention. He

spoke no word, and never took his eyes from my face, while I told him everything—except names.

And when I had finished the supposititious story which he knew quite well to be a real one, he sat silent while I glanced about the familiar room in which I had first sat as a Prep-school boy in joyous expectation of half a crown and high hopes of half a sovereign.

“That’s damned bad,” he said at length, stretching out a well-kept hand for the cigar-box that lay on a low table beside his chair. “Shocking business. Have a cheroot. Good gad! Poor lady. And it isn’t blackmail, eh?”

“No, not clear-cut, deliberate lump-sum blackmail.”

“The man’s a ‘gentleman,’ you see,” I added.

“Yes, I’ve no doubt there’s a special corner of Hell for gentlemen of that type. He wouldn’t take a lump sum, however big?”

“Well, I suppose there’s a figure that would tempt a man like that, but there are two difficulties there. The lady in the case couldn’t find a really big sum, and the gentleman draws the line—at blackmail.”

“H’m. What does he really want, do you suppose? His wife?”

“No. Not *qua* wife, anyhow. I think he has had a very thin time, somewhere or other, and has probably got away from something very unpleasant, by the skin of his teeth. He’s gone to earth, and to mix metaphors a bit, he’s gone to earth on velvet, and wants to stay put. I should think he’s entirely without resources; been living by his wits from hand to mouth, and now wants to sit pretty for the rest of his life. I shouldn’t be surprised if he reached England two jumps ahead of some foreign police, nor, in point of fact, if he reached his wife’s part of the country three jumps ahead of the English police.”

“And apparently thrown ’em off the scent?”

“Yes. He has been unmolested, and so far as he knows, unshadowed, for some months now, so, unless he has the worst of bad luck and somebody spots him, he seems to be safe there.”

Noticeably my uncle forbore to inquire where “there” was.

“Do you actually know that the police are after him?”

“No, but one gathers that impression. He has certainly had a good deal to do with the police in some part—or several parts—of the world, but whether the English police want him, or whether he’s liable to arrest and extradition, I don’t know.”

“So all he wants really is the run of his teeth, pocket-money, and a position in society, for the sake of a good time plus such safety as respectability gives?”

“Just about that, I think.”

“But doesn’t he realize that he’s a damn sight worse than a blackmailer? That, so long as he’s within a thousand miles of his wife, the wretched woman must live in fear and trembling of discovery?”

“I don’t know what he realizes, Sir. I don’t think he gives his wife’s fear, anxiety, horror, agony indeed, a single thought. What he wants is to live like a member of County society, in good standing. And that’s that.”

“Just a hog, eh?”

“Yes. A human hog, with all the sensibility, sensitiveness, honour and chivalrous feeling of a hog. And with the swinish, insensate swinishness of a dozen hogs,” I growled.

“And what line does the unfortunate woman take, poor soul?”

“Well, she is living in a kind of waking nightmare. She’s like a person stunned. Scarcely able to realize what has happened. I suppose there is a pain so great that it defeats itself. Fear, horror, grief, so great that they only numb. So far as she can think and plan at all, her one idea is to spare her husband and son; to save them, if possible. Naturally, she doesn’t actually welcome social ruin for herself, but I believe she’d do anything, suffer anything, for the sake of the others. You might say, that her one idea is protection for her husband and child.”

“For her reputed husband and the illegitimate child,” murmured Uncle Walter.

“A boy or a girl?” he enquired, shooting a sharp glance at me.

“A boy. Only son. Heir to a wonderful old place, of which he’d have been about the fifteenth owner in the direct line.”

“So the line ends, eh? No heir. The boy is the son of the reputed husband, of course? Not of the real one?”

“Oh, yes. Born a couple of years after the supposed and accepted death of the first husband.”

“Where is the man now? I mean in relation to the family?”

“Hanging about in the neighbourhood. Stays at the village inn occasionally. Disappears and returns. Comes up to the house a good deal.”

“How does he propose that she should explain him to the reputed husband when he returns to England?”

“Leaves that to her. She can say what she likes, do what she likes, provided she keeps him on velvet.”

“Keeps the pig in clover, eh? And the problem is how to get him out of the clover before the husband returns, and keep him out. *And* shut his mouth.”

“Yes. Some problem. That’s why I came to you, Uncle.”

My revered relative blew a long, slow cloud of cigar smoke.

“What’s your interest in the matter, Henry?” he asked, examining the ash of his cigar.

“That of *any* decent person who knew the circumstances. I should like to help this most unhappy and unfortunate lady—not to mention her son and husband—and I should like to put a spoke in the wheel of a damned rogue.”

“Quite so.”

A long silence followed, and my eye again roved over the comfortable room with its valuable ancient shabby furniture, its air of quality, its atmosphere of solidity and worth, of good cigars, good wine, good leather and good service. Table and other wood surfaces like dark glass; beautifully polished silver and brass; something old-established and permanent in a changing world wherein . . .

“It seems to me,” said my uncle, withdrawing his thoughtful gaze from the cheerful fire, “that there are several solutions to the problem, all unsatisfactory; some more so than others. Personally, I’m for the straight thing, the perfectly clean potato. Always have been, and hope I always shall be. I believe in the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But that’s all right as far as one’s own private affairs are concerned. One’s own personal conduct. But it’s a different thing where another person is involved; especially a woman. Very easy to say she should tell her reputed husband everything, and take the consequences. The consequences are more to him and the boy than they are to her. So we’ll put aside the high and noble truth-at-all-costs-to-anybody line of action and try something a little more useful and practical. And practicable.

“Now the second solution is the elimination of the actual husband; and, so far as I can see, he can only be eliminated by purchase; by counter-attraction, so to speak; by arrest; or by death.

“As to purchase, you say he is not a blackmailer, and anyhow there isn’t money enough.

“As to counter-attraction, what I had in mind was something that would take him to the other side of the world. Find him a job or send him on a wild-goose chase, treasure-hunt, gold-mine, valuable concession, that sort of thing.

“As to arrest, that would be all very fine, provided he would keep his mouth shut. But suppose we set the best private detective agency to work, to find out that he is wanted, and where, and by whom, and the police ran him in—would he squeal, do you suppose?”

“I haven’t the slightest doubt he would, if he had any idea that it was through us, his wife’s friends, that he had been pinched. He’d have a good deal to say about

bigamy. Sell his life-story to the gutter-press and get a bit of his own back, as he would express it.”

“And suppose he had no reason whatever to suspect his wife, or you, of having any hand in it; suppose he thought that the police had tracked him down without any outside help?”

“Then I don’t think he’d say a word,” I replied. “I think he’d have sufficient decency and self-respect to keep his mouth shut; and I think he’d also argue that he’d be a fool to queer his own pitch. He’d look for a bright to-morrow and a sweet by-and-bye, when, having finished his time and purged his offence, he could return—to the clover and the velvet.”

“I see. Like the blackmail idea. Too much of a gentleman to do it—and the bribe not big enough. In this case, too much of a gentleman to squeal—and a silly waste of a valuable secret.”

“I think you’ve got him about right, Sir.”

“So even if we could get him arrested, and put him away, it’s only a postponement, and the poor woman would be on tenter-hooks until he came out—and one day turned up at her house, grinning.”

“Laughing, in this case, Sir. He has a laugh. I could kill him for it.”

“We’re coming to killing now,” said Uncle. “The fourth aspect of the elimination idea, and by far the best, is the death of the gentleman. If he could only die, what a happy issue out of all our afflictions.”

“By the way,” he interrupted himself. “That’s an idea. Suppose it is a hanging matter that he’s wanted for. That would suit us nicely, wouldn’t it?”

“Perfectly,” I agreed, “and unless he knew that we had any hand in the matter, he’d go to the gallows with his mouth shut.”

“Getting quite dramatic, aren’t we?” said Uncle. “Well, that’s too much to hope for, I suppose. But we’ll certainly try to find out. Meanwhile, suppose he’s not wanted on a capital charge in any country with which we have reciprocal extradition treaties, that idea is no good to us. No elimination by that method. And so we come to a third solution of the problem.

“Could he be frightened away? Is he that sort of chap?”

“I’m inclined to doubt it. It would certainly have to be something pretty terrifying that would frighten him off. He’s very pleased with himself, you know. Talks about having come into port after having weathered some pretty dangerous storms. It would take a lot to frighten him out of the port and make him put to sea again.”

“Yes, I suppose so. Is he a really stout-hearted knave, do you suppose? Some of them are. Plucky as any of the hero class.”

“Well, I’ve no actual means of knowing, one way or the other, but he certainly gives me the impression of being quite tough.”

“One of the bull-dog breed gone wrong, eh?”

“Yes, I should say that once he’s got his teeth in, it would take a lot to make him leave go, but you never know. Conscience doth indeed make cowards of us all, though I shouldn’t think he goes in much for conscience,” I said.

“Depends on what you mean by conscience. I don’t imagine that there is a department of his mind or soul or what-not that registers repentance and remorse and wakes him up in the night—that sort of thing. But the dirtiest dog and the most devious crook has got something that takes the place of conscience, if it’s only memory of misdeeds that may yet come home to roost. Something rather different from what one usually means by conscience, that attribute which is creditable, and the more highly developed and sensitized, the more creditable. Bit of a misnomer to use the word in the case of a man like that. So what shall we say—consciousness of crime, perhaps?”

I listened in silence as Uncle Walter paused in his rumination.

“Well, call it what you like. It probably exists and it might be useful,” he continued. “Yes, I think we’ll explore that avenue later on—if we don’t think of something better. Rather a pleasurable pastime, eh, frightening the fright-merchant?”

The grandfather clock ticked audibly as I thought of that threatened home; of a distraught and terrified woman; and of the boy over whom this cruel doom impended.

“Anyway,” said my uncle suddenly, “there are one or two things that we can do. What’s more, we’ll certainly do them. What’s more still, there is a chance of success. And so we’ll toy with the ideas of leading him away; of frightening him away; and of eliminating him altogether.”

And my uncle’s jaw closed with something of a snap.

Silence again in the mellow old room with its portraits of long-dead Waring generals, admirals, and of a youngster who, as a boy of seventeen, was killed at Waterloo with a sword in his hand.

“Duelling was a damn’ silly custom,” said my uncle, breaking the silence in which the only sound had been the gentle ticking of the beautiful old clock, inexorably measuring off the minutes of men’s troublous little lives.

“When it degenerated into a silly business, that is. But it had its uses, y’ know. Had its points. Good sharp rapier points sometimes—for people like our resurrected friend . . . Nice to have him out on a shady lawn at five o’clock on a June morning, eh, Henry?”

“Yes, Sir,” I agreed idly, wondering what sort of a swordsman, if any, our Mr. Bertie-Norton might be.

My uncle eyed me quizzically.

“I don’t speculate, Henry, but I’m now talking speculatively. I’m not a fool, but I am now talking foolishly; just talking nonsense to myself. Wouldn’t it be funny if this Mr. What’s-his-name was the sort of chap who would respond correctly to a smack in the face, or a nasty insult? Wounded honour. I’m quite sure he’s a man of honour—of that sort. The satisfaction of a gentleman. A gentleman. You are pretty good with the small-sword, aren’t you?”

“So-so. But it’s more probable that our friend rough-houses when annoyed. Considers the point of the jaw more than the point of honour. Besides, supposing he were a funny man who had been in foreign parts long enough to absorb the *duello* idea, there would be a frightful fuss if such a thing happened in England, wouldn’t there? . . . In all the papers . . . *Duellist in Court.*”

“Not exactly a court of honour,” smiled my dour relative. “The Old Bailey. Manslaughter. Seven years at least.”

“I could take it.”

The old man shot me a sudden penetrating glance from his hard blue eyes.

“*O-h-h-h,*” he said quietly. “H’m. Like that, is it?”

And I thought the eyes’ blue stare softened a little, and that the faintest suggestion of a smile hovered about the firm still-handsome mouth.

“Of course,” he continued, “things do happen of which the Police hear nothing. Such a thing might happen in a sequestered corner of a big estate, in parts of which no one sets foot from year’s end to year’s end. Especially to a gentleman who had been at great pains to avoid the lime-light. Almost the daylight, one might say. A gentleman known to have died seventeen years ago, a Mr. What’s-his-name who hasn’t got a genuine name that’s traceable. He’d never be missed. Sad. We all like to be missed.”

“But all this is idle speculation,” he continued, “and, as you know, I don’t speculate. Shall we have a glass of sherry?”

My uncle touched the bell and the admirable Judd entered, an obvious telepathist, for on a heavy silver tray he bore a fine old decanter and two sherry glasses. These he filled, and faded from the room.

“And then there’s ‘accidents,’” mused my uncle, sipping. “Suppose this poor friendless fellow—who really has no existence whatever outside his own suit of clothes, so to speak—suppose he met with an accident. There are hunting accidents, shooting accidents, swimming, motoring and boating accidents.”

“All sorts,” I agreed. “People fall out of trains, and even out of aeroplanes. Some fall over cliffs. Even fall out of bed. But although I would risk my precious life in a duel with him—provided it was swords—and take the consequences, I don’t think I could commit a murder.”

The astute man opened his eyes wide in grave surprise, if not in shocked astonishment.

“What a mind you have, Henry!” he said. “Dreadful. Not only given to harbouring the crudest criminal ideas, but . . . Of course you were joking. Nevertheless, there *are* accidents.”

We applied ourselves to our sherry.

“Now, you’ve certainly given me something to employ my leisure time, something to think about, and I shall think about it a lot.”

And pursing his lips, he nodded his head slowly. His look of determination, air of power and of wisdom, gave me a foolish and unwarrantable, but nevertheless comforting, feeling of hopefulness that Uncle would do something in this case in which there was nothing to be done.

“Any particular hurry?” he asked.

“No, beyond the need for shortening the period of a woman’s agony—a time of ghastly suffering and suspense.”

“Yes. Yes. Quite so. What I meant was, though, is there any particular date after which hope’s hopeless and help’s helpless?”

“No. I don’t see what can happen until the husband—the reputed husband—comes home.”

“And even then the real husband won’t tell him, provided things are going as he wants them?”

“No. But *she* might. There’s a point beyond which a woman cannot bear that sort of thing, and simply must tell somebody,” I said.

“Well, she’s told you. And directly she tells her husband, the game’s up. He’s not the sort of man, I take it, to sit down with the situation, so to speak. Actually to sit down, cheek by jowl with the real husband, at table with the innocently bigamous wife and illegitimate child.”

“No . . . no . . .” I mused. “And of course, as I said before, her one idea is to prevent harm coming to him and the boy.”

“In short, to prevent their knowing.”

“Yes. But how long could she keep it up? How long could she stand the strain of so false a position? She is not a very . . .”

“Well, anyway, there’s no immediate hurry, is there?” interrupted my uncle. “No

‘date by which,’ as I said.”

“No.”

“Good. Now don’t say a word about the business while we are at lunch. I can’t eat and think too. Not if I’m to enjoy my food and digest it. Then, after lunch, we’ll smoke a quarter of a cigar together, and then I’ll say good-bye, for I take my nap. And I wouldn’t miss it for the Prince of Wales or the Archangel Gabriel . . . And if the Death Angel calls between two and four, he’ll find me asleep, and I hope he won’t wake me.”

And we referred no more to the matter that was uppermost in my mind, and, I believe, in his.

After an admirable lunch, most deftly served by the swift and silent Judd, we returned to our armchairs, and my uncle asked how I was getting on with my job, what I thought of Anthony and whether I found life at Calderton as interesting as he had prophesied.

“It is quite as interesting as you prophesied, Uncle,” said I, meeting and holding his eye.

“Ah, that’s good,” said he, swirling his ’48 brandy round and round in the balloon glass as he warmed it between his hands. “Excellent. I shouldn’t be surprised if I were to come down and see you there, soon. Damn nuisance, Arthur being abroad so much. I don’t know where I enjoy myself better than there.

“Except here. Except here,” he added, and sipped his brandy.

After a little more desultory conversation, he put his glass down and rose to his feet.

“Well, good-bye, my boy. I’ll think that matter over.”

And as we shook hands, he held mine for a second longer than usual, and smiled his brief illuminating smile and said,

“If Katherine knows that I know, give her my kind love and deepest sympathy, and tell her I am certain, I positively am *certain*, that all will be well. Good-bye, Henry.”

And I returned to Calderton enheartened and hopeful—quite illogically, as I realized, for what hope was there?

VI

Captain Montague Bertie-Norton, almost daily a visitor at Calderton House, could not have been a gentleman of what was once termed sensibility. He must, on the contrary, have had what Mr. Henry Waring alluded to, both before his face and behind his back, as the hide of a rhinoceros. For, in lieu of other welcome he made his own, and made it a warm one. Having invited himself to lunch, to tea or to dinner, or indeed for the day, he, figuratively speaking, met himself, shook hands with himself right heartily, bade himself walk in and take not only his ease but anything else that he fancied.

His hostess firmly refusing to let him live in the house, refusing to see him when he called; the apparently all-powerful tutor regarding him with cold unsmiling dislike, patent and almost palpable; the son of the house tolerating him only for his wonderful stories—he yet came and continued to come, made himself at home, and appeared to notice nothing unpleasant in the social atmosphere. If the said atmosphere was strained, Captain Bertie-Norton was not. Not the faintest evidence of strain appeared upon his smiling countenance nor lessened the volume or frequency of his long and loud guffaw.

Having dropped in at tea-time, he would saunter to the terrace without going through the house, drop into an easy chair and mention to the attendant footman that he thought that perhaps, on the whole, he would have his—usual, the usual being whisky-and-soda, anchovy biscuits and a cigar.

Calling in the forenoon, he would, when handing hat, stick and gloves to the same young man, just mention casually that he would be in to lunch.

Arriving in the evening, in what is prettily termed immaculate evening-dress, he would whisper to Jenkins that a bottle of the '84 port would do him nicely. Yes, and talking of the '84, was there a bottle of the '48 open, the old and bold and dark brown brandy?

A gentleman with a way with him, and by no means clumsy or unhandy with his tips.

VII

I'm afraid that my influence on Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny, *alias* Bertie-Norton, was not a good one, for I encouraged him to drink and to brag. And in both pursuits, to do him justice, he needed a little encouragement, particularly with regard to the former. I think that at one period of his life he must have been a pretty useful drinker, though I shouldn't think he was ever a drunkard. Nowadays, for some reason or other, he was moderate in the use of alcohol, not to say abstemious; but, left alone with a decanter of old port, a box of cigars and a good listener, he would drink glass after glass, become loquacious, and then boastful, bragging of his great and numerous successes, all due to his own cleverness.

To be quite fair to him, he was not, when sober, a braggart. Only when wine had loosened his tongue would he boast. Nor, when he was blowing his own trumpet and loudly sounding his own praises between blasts, did he extol his courage, nerve, skill and endurance as some men do, nor tell of hair-raising adventures, terrific feats, or marvellous experiences.

It was always of his cleverness that he boasted; only of the successes due to his astuteness and cunning.

In the cold light of morning or the mellow light of afternoon and evening, he was cautious; and, doubtless with excellent reason, reticent.

One could well understand that he, with so much to hide, was well advised to think before he spoke. But *inter poculos* he was different—garrulous, self-revealing. Ale is another man. And wine is yet another. *In vino veritas*: and I think that, by the time the two-bottle decanter needed replenishing, the man was telling the truth—as he saw it. More *vinum*, more *veritas*.

§ 2

“Damn good wine,” he observed that evening, holding up his third or fourth glass to the light. “I love a glass of vintage port. One of the good things of life; one of the things I came home for. Can't get it abroad, you know. By gad, what filth one drinks when one is abroad. I don't mean France or Germany, Spain or Portugal, Austria or Hungary. (Ever taste real Hungarian Tokay, the *Essence*, as they call it, grown in the late Emperor's own vineyards?) No, I mean Asia, Africa, Australia, America. Especially South America. *Aguardiente*. Ever hear of it and *tequila* and *pulque*? They're the stuff to get you going.”

“And where did you get them? Mexico?”

“Yes. And that’s a damn good country to get into and a better one to get out of. Not so easy either, sometimes. Had some good sprees there. Great friend of old Obregon at one time. Sort of financial adviser to him. Might say I advised the whole financial system. Put through some wonderful deals too.”

Then came the horrible laugh, inane, fatuous, self-satisfied.

“Concessions. Any number of American prospectors after oil and what-not. Lots of capital behind some of them too. I came a cropper, though. Sold one concession twice. Damn nearly got out of the country with the bullion, too. But old Obregon was a downy bird. Just got away with a whole skin, and lucky to do that. Skipped to Boruela. Now, that’s a country, if you like; and it’s run by the cleverest man in the world. The very cleverest, bar none. By gad! He’s a great lad, old Gil Vicente Romez. He’s the Devil in human form. Ever hear of him?”

“No, I’m ashamed to say I never heard of him.”

“No, I didn’t suppose you ever had, and that’s part of the cleverness. Do you know that, for a quarter of a century, he’s been the most perfect Dictator the world has ever seen?”

“No, I don’t know it.”

“Well, I’m telling you. Dictators! All the others are timid little constitutionalists compared with Romez. Any one of them is like a four-year-old child playing cup-and-ball, trying to get the ball into the cup, while Romez is like Atlas with the Ball on his shoulders. The world.”

“The world?”

“Well, his world. And he has defied and defeated the rest of it. Do you know that he *owns* Boruela. And every man, woman and child, every town and village, every mountain and river, every mine, farm and estate—as much as any Englishman owns his house and dog and back garden—and a damn sight more so. An Englishman could go to prison for torturing his dog to death. Romez has never been to prison and never will, though he has tortured ten thousand men and women to death. Real torture. He *owns* the country, man. There’s nobody dare whisper a word; and if anyone did, he’d whisper his next in a gaol that he’d never come out of. And believe me, they are *some* gaols. Charnel-houses of lingering awful death. I shudder, even here and now, when I only *think* of them.

“And he’s clever, mind you. There’s more statesmanship, more knowledge of the art of government in the little finger of Gil Vicente Romez than in all your modern Napoleons and all their gangs rolled into one. And he’s ten times richer than the whole lot put together. Yes, including all the Tsarist loot in the Kremlin.

“And in spite of that, he has turned a national foreign debt of a hundred and fifty

million bolivars and an international debt of seventy million into an exchequer balance of a hundred million.”

“And how has he done it?” I inquired.

“Oh, oil, cattle, coffee, cotton, what-not—and his own system.”

“What’s that?”

“Why, rooking the foreigner and taking a private rake-off on every last Government deal. Give you a single example—and it was yours truly who put him up to it. All sorts of stuff comes from the interior, of course, down to the coast. So what does the old bird do but draw a line *inside* the country, parallel to the coast, right across Boruela between the source of supply and the ports, with a chain of Customs barrier-posts on every road crossing the line. And you’ve got to stick to the roads in that country.

“Very well. Every damn thing, every head of cattle, has got to pay a heavy duty when it crosses the line. If it is his own goods, Romez pays up like a man. Takes the money out of his left-hand trousers pocket as tax and puts it in his right-hand trousers pocket as revenue. Costs him exactly nothing. But what about the rest of the people—and especially the poor old foreigner? He leaves him just about enough to make it worth his while to carry on. And he plays that sort of game with every product of the country. Clever! He’s superhuman.”

“And you got the better of him?” I asked.

“Oh, now and again. Now and again. Overdid it, though. I got the better of him one time, and he got the best of me. Everything I *had* got. And I saw the inside of one of his lovely gaols. My oath, they are as far below the worst gaols in the world as he is far above the best Dictators. You simply wouldn’t believe me if I began to tell you some of the things I have seen in that El Libertador prison. Pretty name, isn’t it, *El Libertador*? The Liberator. By gad! Some of them were glad to be liberated . . . by death.

“Yes, a humorous lad . . . El Libertador! . . . Like his own name. What do you think that is? *El Benemerito*! I gave him that. At least, we decided it would be a nice one, and I put up a couple of good Congress men to propose and second it. Carried with acclamation. *El Benemerito*, the Well-Deserving. Lord, if he is to get what he deserves, when the time comes, the Devil will be hard put to it to think up a good one.”

“You got out of the prison, though,” I observed.

“As you brightly observe, I got out of the prison.”

“Bit of luck, eh?”

“Luck? It was more than luck. You don’t get far with luck alone, my lad. Luck

and judgment and ability. Romez was clever, but I beat him to it.”

“You wouldn’t care to go back there, then?”

Ferring-Chevigny laughed, emptied his glass, put it down with a bang.

“Go *back*? Back to Boruela?” he said. “Why, I’d sooner be . . .”

Words seemed to fail him.

And for a moment, words failed me, too. I glanced down and toyed with the walnut-shells on my plate, afraid that he might see a change of expression on my face, a light that I felt must have come into my eyes.

I never did much talking on these occasions. Only just enough to show him that he had an attentive and deeply interested audience; just a “Yes” or a “No” or a “Quite so,” or an appropriate question, to keep him going.

But at the sight of his face and the sound of his voice when he could find no words to describe his horror of the idea of returning, I’m afraid I became inattentive. Certainly I missed something of what he was saying. For it seemed to me that chance had played right into our hands—the chance of his happening to commend the port leading to a dissertation on drinks, thence to the *tequila* of Mexico, thence to Boruela—and had given me a weapon.

Uncle Walter had, among other possibilities, considered that of frightening him away. He had considered the question of the man himself being in any danger, and had spoken of frightening the frightener. There might be nothing in it, but no stone must be left unturned, no “avenue unexplored.”

Nothing on earth would induce him to go back to Boruela where, presumably, some terrible fate at the hands of this monster awaited him, eh?

I’d keep him on the subject for just as long as I could keep him awake and talking.

“. . . Yes, absolutely the very finest Dictator in the world. There’s no doubt about it. Why, it is estimated that at least three times as much is spent on his own private and personal Secret Service as is spent by any Department of State except his War Office.

“And not only inside the country, mind you. If anything, it is better organized abroad than at home, and that’s saying something. It is a colossal international spy-system covering the whole of Europe and all North and South America. Absolutely incredible, the number of Secret Service agents he has got, and the amount of money that’s spent on Secret Service.

“And mind you, although it is national in theory, and paid for out of national revenue, it is his own. It is as much his own as the domestic service of his private palaces. Every capital city in Europe and America has got a headquarters-bureau

and a splendidly organized and wonderfully efficient spy-system.

“And from the capital, they cover the ports, the other big towns and, in fact, the whole country; London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Madrid, Lisbon, Brussels, Moscow, Amsterdam, all the lot are centres for their own countries.”

“But why?” I asked, and now my question wasn’t merely mechanical, a noise to show him I was awake and listening, for I was listening with all my ears, my hands shading my eyes, as I watched his face.

“Why? Ask yourself, man. How many prominent Boruelans do you suppose have fled for their lives to all parts of Europe and America? How much money do you suppose is sent to them by their friends and well-wishers, who’d give their last *bolivar* to see a reasonably hopeful invasion of the country? Why, there’d be revolution and armed rebellion from end to end. Why, a revolutionary army would spring up from the ground in every province in the country. Everywhere. And the garrison of every town, every one of them, would be besieged. The nation would rise, almost as one man, with no other weapons but their machetes—if they got such a lead as an armed invasion would give them.”

“Then why don’t they do it without one?”

“Ask yourself, again. Romez, as I’ve told you, is the perfect Dictator, and as any good Dictator can, he rules absolutely against the will of the people. And he can do it indefinitely because, not only has he seized the machine, but he has perfected it. The Machine of Government, of which the army, the police and the spy-system are, what shall I say, the invaluable, inescapable, inexorable, incorruptible engine.

“For one thing, between seventy and eighty of his most important subordinates are his own relations, and every official in the country knows that if Romez falls, he falls. And Romez’s system sees to that. They are the first people the populace would hang if they didn’t burn them alive.

“That’s why there is no fear or chance of rebellion from within. They just can’t do it. They are crushed. Why, a whisper against not merely Romez but against any one of his officials, would cost a man his liberty; and when you lose your liberty in Boruela, you lose your life soon after. They don’t take it from you. You just lose it, unless you are amazingly tough and strong.

“No, that’s the only thing he’s got to fear, a successful military invasion by a powerful revolutionary army of exiled patriots. And, by gad, there must be enough of them, alone, to make a fair-sized army, for they bolt in thousands every year. Hence the foreign spy system.”

“And there’s actually such an organization here in England?” I asked, trying to control my voice and speak naturally. “With headquarters in London?”

“You’ve said it,” replied Ferring-Chevigny, as he hiccupped and apologized.

Was he sufficiently under the influence of Bacchus to have laid aside his guard? If I pursued this line of questioning, would he shut up like an oyster, not only refusing further information but regarding me with suspicion?

I must risk it. The opportunity was too good, the subject having been introduced, indeed pursued, if not laboured—by himself.

“Well, well,” I yawned, “one lives and learns. Fancy that. Here in peaceful England. Secret Service agents, spies, revolutionaries, wicked villains and what-not.”

“And not so what-not, either,” he answered in a slightly offended, not to say bellicose, tone. “Funny-stuff to you perhaps, but real enough to anybody they were after.”

“What, here in England? Do you mean to say that this what’s-his-name—Romez—could interfere with anybody *here*?”

“You try, my lad. Try it for yourself. Chuck up ushering and go into the gun-running business. See if you can charter a little tramp steamer and load her up with a cargo of rifles and ammunition for Boruela, either in an English port or Rotterdam or anywhere else—and see how you get on. Not that you’d get as far as Rotterdam.”

“Who’d stop me?”

“You try it and see. You’d find it a very different story from trying to get rifles into the Riff country . . . Spain . . . Ulster . . . Mexico . . . Brazil . . . anywhere that didn’t bring you up against the Romez organization.”

“Really, that’s most interesting.”

“I’ll say it is,” growled Ferring-Chevigny, and poured himself another glass of port. “You let a whisper get abroad in the market that you are out to get rifles for Boruela, and see what happens to you. But say good-bye to your best girl and wind up your other *affaires* first.”

“Really, you amaze me.”

“I could amaze you. Damme, I could curl your hair and stunt your growth, if I told you some of the things I’ve seen in that country. Incredible. And not only concerning Boruelan nationals either.”

“It’s marvellous that nothing of this is known in Europe,” I observed, endeavouring to give my tone the right shade of doubt and incredulity to lead him on to further asseveration, without offending him.

“That’s where old Romeo’s cleverness and power come in again. Complete censorship; perfect control of the Press. Why, if any editor in Boruela, with the best will in the world, published something that Romez didn’t like, he’d never publish anything again. And his home town would be without a newspaper for quite a while.

“No, not a word concerning the real state of affairs gets outside the country—except word of mouth from runaway Boruelans. And who’s going to listen to them? Not that they’d have a chance to talk for long. Who’s going to take any notice of renegade rascals who have fled from their country’s justice? No; what with owning the Press at home, and a system that looks after runaway squealers abroad, there’s not much of ‘The Truth about Boruela’ gets to Europe—or anywhere else.”

I could scarcely control my excitement, and feared that it might show in my voice, as I strove to lead him on, keep him talking.

“And his organization in England now. Would that be in connection with the Boruelan Legation?”

Ferring-Chevigny smiled.

“With what else? *Sub rosa*, of course. Legation and every Consulate in the country . . . No, there’s not much known about Boruela—outside Boruela.”

He fell silent and suddenly laughed.

“Laugh! Gad, how I laughed when His Holiness the Pope conferred an order upon the pious President El Benemerito, the Well-Deserving, and made old Romez a Cavalier of the Holy Order of Piana. Really very funny. I wonder what sort of a man His Holiness thinks Romez is. Give him a bit of a shock if someone told the Pope that Romez has only been married once but has got a hundred and seventeen children! Mothers and children doing well. Yes, a hundred and seventeen little Romezes carrying on the good work. Talk about a well-rooted oak, eh? Yes, and he has had decorations and high Orders of Merit from France, Holland and Belgium. Shouldn’t be surprised if we gave him one. You can do wonders with oil.”

“Oil?”

“Do you know, my lad, that when the Great War ended, Boruela had never produced a single barrel of oil, and that to-day she’s the second biggest oil-producing country in the world? By gad, that was a racket, and I was in on it, too. It was I who gave old Romez the National Reserve tip, as well as the survey notion.”

“What was that?”

“Well, I had seen how Mexico had muddled her oil business instead of handling it so that she’d be the richest nation in the world. Selling concessions outright and getting about a penny in the pound for herself. Penny in the hundred pounds, more likely.

“‘*Look here, Gil,*’ said I. ‘*You put the concession up to auction and when you grant it to the highest bidder, make a law that after a certain time—and you can make it a damned uncertain time, if you like—half the concession reverts to the State. See? Otherwise to Mister Gil Vicente Romez. And before*

very long, you'll have one-half of the oil in your pocket. Sounds messy, but pecunia non olet, as we used to say at school.

“And another thing, old son,” said I, “when you’ve sold the concession, keep a royalty and a damned good one. Check up at the ports on every barrel—and see what good luck will send you. You’ll be ten times as rich as the ten richest men in the world put together. And that on your oil alone.

“And another thing,” said I, “you make the blighters who are after your oil make a perfect Ordnance Survey of the whole country—at their own expense. That’ll be useful to you, too, one day. Other things than oil.”

“By gad, the amount of my own little rake-off from the oil racket would make you sit up. It doesn’t bear thinking of—what I left behind in Boruela. I should have got it out to Curaçao, to the Bank of Holland, while I could.”

“No chance of getting it now?” I asked.

“Is there a chance of getting it? Like Hell there is. Just as much chance as you’d have of recovering a five-pound note from the heart of a furnace.”

“You can’t go back; and nobody would send it to you?”

“Go back? *There?* Dangerous enough here! And as for getting any money sent out of the country . . .”

And again he laughed.

“Nor bring it, I suppose?” I said.

“Huh! Boruelans who get away with money don’t bring it to other people.”

He fell into a musing silence.

“It’s certainly a country one doesn’t hear much about,” I observed.

“Yes. I’ve told you why.”

Ferring-Chevigny sat glum and silent, and I was afraid that he might be wondering whether he had said too much in telling me why.

I must go and see Uncle to-morrow and lay this story before him. If only I could get a little more, some details as to exactly whom and what he feared in England.

“Yes, and what you say quite accounts for it. But, you know, I marvel that a man like Romez isn’t assassinated—by the son or father or husband of some victim who . . .”

Again Ferring-Chevigny laughed.

“Take a clever man to get him. When he goes out, he buzzes along in a bullet-proof car at seventy an hour, surrounded by a bodyguard of gun-men on motor-bikes. However, few people ever see him, except those who live on and by and through him; people to whom his death would be the worst sort of calamity.

“And, of course, his palaces are absolute barracks. Before he had come into full

power and quite consolidated his position, his enemies occasionally used to have a try, but they never had a chance. Romez saw to that. He used to treat 'em to the *gusana* and the *grillos*, and let it be known that henceforth anybody who annoyed him in that way—never mind whether they took a pot shot at him, plotted, disobeyed an order, or whispered a single word of disparagement—would get the same.”

“What are they?”

“*Gusana* and *grillos*? Well, the *gusana* is a fly, I believe it is an indigenous fly, pretty well confined to Boruela, as a matter of fact.”

“Poisonous sting?” said I intelligently.

“Well, no. It doesn't sting you, so much as bite; and when it has had its nibble, it lays eggs in the hole. And these eggs hatch into worms and maggots and they've got the exploring urge or itch. Itch is the word for it, by gad! They explore, inland and upcountry and so on, until the person who has been bitten by the *gusana* fly is riddled through and through with the maggots. They eat him alive, in fact. That's where the *grillos* come in. They are seventy-pound irons, and if you've got a pair on your ankles and a pair on your wrists, you can't do much about the *gusana* fly when he's buzzing round in hundreds, making provision for his young, home-building all over your back, because, of course, you haven't any clothes. You just sit in this cell, which has been occupied, and never cleaned, since the Spaniards came there—three hundred years ago. You sit in almost total darkness—just enough light to see what you look like, and enough black beans and stinking water to keep you alive. Old Romeo's pet research scientists estimated that on the whole, that is the slowest and nastiest death a human being could suffer. No, they don't assassinate Romez much.”

Ferring-Chevigny fell silent, staring into the depths of the wonderfully polished table in front of him, pondering and remembering; and, judging by the look on his face, his thoughts were not pleasant.

“Yes, I could tell you some things,” he continued, “but I won't waste my breath, for you wouldn't believe them. Even to me who saw them, it is almost incredible here, that such things are going on to-day. To-day, mark you, in these prisons, in Caibo, Boledo, Paracay, or Puerto, any of them. There are torture-chambers, real going concerns, working in full blast, and not only inflicting the tortures that the Spaniards inflicted on the Indians, but improved ones, the fine product of three centuries of progress.

“There are no atrocities nor tortures more terrible anywhere in the world, and there never were, than those that have been committed in these places, and are being carried on at this moment as we sit here. And no one knows!

“No wonder you are inclined to take it all with a grain of salt. But you needn’t. Why, his Public Works alone is a thing that would disgrace the most degraded savages. He started his Public Works when the prisons were full, when there were so many tens of thousands of rotting, slowly dying skeletons and parodies of humanity in his prisons that there was no room for any more.

“He suddenly laughed at breakfast one morning, looked round at his staff and solemnly announced his slogan,

“‘*Unity, Peace, and Work for All.*’

“By the way, poor old General Peñaloza died, walled up in a tiny cell with a hundred and sixty pounds of *grillos* and about a hundred and sixty pairs of *gusana* flies, simply for saying to a friend in a Caibo Club,

“‘*Unity, Peace, and Work. Unity in suffering, Peace in the grave, and Work on the public roads.*’

“Yes, it was the public roads that solved the problem of the prisons. He sent instructions to all his Governor-Generals, Senators, Mayors, and what-not, to supply him with a labour force—of all the people whom they didn’t like. And he set them to work to drive a magnificent wide road clean through swamp and jungle from nowhere in particular to nowhere at all; and on that road, these people whom his officials didn’t like—which meant anybody in any way connected with someone who might be suspected of being anti-Romez by reason of his wrongs and suffering—died like flies, in thousands.

“Why? Starvation. Malaria. Exposure. Dysentery. And in these chain-gangs were some of the best men in Boruela; men of gentle birth and breeding; old men; youths; foolish young students who had talked as the students always will, whether in Russia, France, Spain or—Boruela.

“Yes, they got Unity all right; Peace before long, and Work all the time, as they crawled in thousands through the jungle, leaving this road behind them. And not a tent nor a hut among the lot of them. Not the slightest protection whatsoever against tropical rain or sun, against mosquitoes, or anything else. I know. I’ve been along those roads in El Benemerito’s own car.

“And I’d be in one of those gangs, too, unless I was in one of the prison cells, if he could lay hands on me now.”

VIII

Sir Walter Waring of the Albany and the Marlborough Club, albeit known to his friends and acquaintances as a dry old stick, had, in the days when sparks and blades were fashionable, been equally well-renowned as a bright young spark and a mettlesome blade. And though in his present fifties the spark might be dulled and the blade a little rusted, the one was not quenched nor the other broken. Thus, after dinner on the day of his nephew's visit, as he sat gazing into the fire, smoking his cigar, he could not forbear to wish that he were twenty or thirty years younger.

Yet, as he asked himself, what could he have done? What could he have done that young Henry could not and would not do? It was very well to rage furiously against this infernal fellow, Ferring-Chevigny; to talk threateningly and imagine all sorts of fine plans for putting a spoke in his wheel; but what, in point of actual practical fact, could one do? He was the unfortunate lady's husband, and nothing could alter that, except his death. No, there was no getting away from it. Just as long as he was alive, he was her husband. And he was very much alive. Nor, in the twentieth century and in England, could anything be done about it. All very well to babble about duels, accidents, "liquidation," that sort of thing, but it was the sheerest nonsense.

And even supposing that, like so many men of his generation, Sir Walter Waring imagined himself to be a far finer fellow than the young men of the rising generation, how could he demonstrate it? Being a wise man and a knowledgeable, he had no illusions on the subject, and entertained not the slightest doubt that young Henry was as good a man as he had been at Henry's age.

Still, something must be done—for it was intolerable. One of the finest fellows he had ever known. One of the very nicest women. And a really charming and delightful boy. And to set against the happiness and welfare of that trio, the "rights" of this infernal runagate gaol-bird. The state of the Law was damnable that allowed a man like that to sham dead for the best part of twenty years and then turn up and wreck lives and ruin families. If ever murder was justified . . .

But murder never was.

Surely there must be some bribe that would buy the fellow off, even if he did object to the word 'blackmail' and pretend to take a high-and-mighty line when it was suggested.

Would he be able to do any good by going down to Calderton and seeing the fellow? Would it be possible to frighten him away with some sort of bogey? Would a

man like that be amenable to threats of any kind? Probably the sort of chap who'd call one's bluff, when one told him that, if he didn't clear out of England within a given time, something most devilishly unpleasant might occur. And what would be the good of it? Would he be any less her husband if he were living on the Riviera or in Timbuctoo or at the Antipodes?

It was maddening that, however much one pondered the subject, whatever line of thought one followed, one sooner or later came to absurdity, ridiculous melodrama or sheer fantasy. You cannot, at this time of day, call a man out and kill him. In the first place he wouldn't come out, and in the second place he might kill you. You cannot, at this time of day, hire bravos in the good old Borgia style, and do him in. You cannot go up to a hale and hearty Briton 'sitting pretty,' acting absolutely within his rights, and frighten him off with threats of danger and death. And when you are driven back to the old, old Danegelt idea, to bribery and blackmail, the man is still alive and still her husband, and the position unchanged. And it is you who are doing the inverted blackmail, as it were—*asking* him to be a blackmailer.

Still, something had to be done, and the first thing was to get Ferring-Chevigny away from Calderton. That would in no wise affect the facts, but it would ease the situation for the poor lady. Wherever he was, he'd be her husband, but life would presumably be a little more bearable for her if he weren't on the doorstep.

What about getting an introduction to Sir Rodney Blake, Commissioner of Police, and asking him to find out whether the English police had anything on one Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny, *alias* Captain Montague Bertie-Norton? But then, those would not be the names under which he'd be known to the police, if known he were. Of course they wouldn't.

As Ferring-Chevigny he had wiped himself out, in that yacht case at Pereneque Island, nearly twenty years ago; and as Bertie-Norton he'd have started afresh when he returned to England just recently. Besides, one had got to be most devilish careful in a case like this. Walk very warily indeed, if one weren't going to do the very thing that must not be done—give the whole show away. It would be a nice thing if, by way of being helpful, he was the cause of the news being published abroad that the late unlamented Ferring-Chevigny was anything but late and even less lamented. No, he must keep away from the police.

What about one of those private detective agencies, run by former members of the C.I.D.? There were one or two quite famous Yard men who had retired and gone into business on their own.

But there again, one would have to give names. One would have to set them on the fellow's track; and, sooner or later, they'd place him, spot him for whom he was.

And then how many people would be in the secret? So far, no living person knew but himself, young Henry and Lady Calderton; and he mustn't do anything to enlarge that circle.

Or would it be worth while going and seeing her, to get her permission to tell one other person, the renowned John Nichols, until recently one of the Big Five? . . . But there again, it wouldn't stop at John Nichols. He must have a staff who'd know what he was doing; he must employ other detectives, male and female "watchers," as they called them; a secretary and clerks. It wasn't to be expected that John Nichols could do the whole business single-handed, trace out this fellow's past, find out something actionable, tax him with it, threaten arrest, and frighten him away.

No, it wouldn't do. One was helpless, absolutely impotent, and, if the worst happened, the blame would really lie with that devilish ass, the Law. Ferring-Chevigny might be a damned scoundrel, but it was the Law that allowed him to be one; allowed him still to be her husband; allowed him to walk grinning into Calderton House and lay the House of Calderton in ruins.

But he'd do something, as sure as his name was Walter Waring. He'd do something—even though it looked as though there were nothing else for it but plain common murder . . . Murder most foul . . . Murder most righteous and commendable. Nothing else for it, if Arthur and Katherine and young Anthony were to be saved.

By gad, how true it was that evil begets evil. For here sat he, Walter Waring, plotting, or at any rate imagining, the doing of deeds of which he otherwise never would have dreamed.

He dreamed on.

There came a discreet tap at the door, and Sir Walter Waring's soldier-servant entered.

"Mr. Henry on the 'phone, sir. Will you speak to him?"

"No, I won't," was the reply.

"No, sir. He says he's coming up to see you to-morrow morning. Proposes himself for lunch. Very urgent that he should see you."

Sir Walter nodded, and Judd withdrew.

Well, that was to the good. He'd have one or two ideas to suggest to young Henry, and it looked as though Henry had got something interesting to suggest to him. Not a bad boy, Henry, for all his messing about with poems and paint-brushes, instead of playing cricket. He might pose flabby, but to do him justice, he didn't act flabby. He had got guts. Mustn't let him overdo it, in the matter of this damned

scoundrel. Perhaps it had been unwise to talk to him about duels and accidents, but he had got his head screwed on the right way, and would be no more likely to do anything really silly than to do anything dirty.

Still, one had to remember that there was a woman in the case, a devilish attractive woman, too; that young Henry was something of a romantic, and had an undeniable streak of quixotry in his make-up. No, if anybody was going to run any risk of getting into trouble over Montague Ferring-Chevigny, it must be old Walter Waring. And he was damned if he'd sit by and see this thing happen without doing the utmost that was in his power to prevent it.

And there you were, once again, back at the starting-point. Nothing but the man's death could prevent it . . . Round and round . . . Vicious circle . . . Only two facts clear, the fellow's death the only solution, and his early removal from Calderton the only relief, however temporary.

They must watch the time, too. Time was valuable. Anything that could be done must be done before Arthur came back, for the situation could not then be long hidden from him. Therefore get the man away, and hope that something might happen to him . . . *Make* something happen to him.

To think of the number of people who are killed annually on the roads of Europe. Tens of thousands of them. And the tens of thousands of people who die of influenza and other diseases. Think of the people killed in ship-wrecks, train-wrecks, aeroplane crashes, motor smashes. But this scoundrel goes on his way rejoicing, grinning, happy.

Accidents . . . An accident to Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny?

§ 2

"Yes, my boy, I think there's a gleam of hope there," said Sir Walter Waring to his nephew, after lunch next day, as they sat on either side of the fire in the cosy Albany room.

"Definitely. I don't know anybody at the Boruelan Legation, and if I did, I should have a certain delicacy about proposing to make him my bully. Couldn't very well go up to the Boruelan *chargé d'affaires*, for example, and say,

"There's a renegade Englishman who's very badly wanted by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Boruela, and who is most particularly not wanted by myself and certain of my friends. Pray pinch him. Shoot him up. Knock him down; drag him out; kidnap him; ship him off to Boruela, like we used to ship our English criminals and other unfortunates to Barbadoes and Jamaica, the Vexed Bermudas

and the Dry Tortugas.’

“Quite possibly the Secretary might say,

“‘*Si, si, Señor. Ciertamente! Seguramente! Conplacer! Congusto!*’ and get on with it. But it isn’t a thing I’d care to do—set those South American gentlemen on to an Englishman, with the view to his being done in, or most painfully done down in some way.”

Henry Waring agreed that it would be an unpleasant task, the memory of which might leave a disagreeable flavour on the palate, but . . .

“Yes,” agreed Sir Walter, “there’s the ‘but.’ Unpleasant flavour or not, it would be ten thousand times more unpleasant to look back for the rest of our lives on what we might have done and didn’t do, by reason of a scruple. We were brought up to despise—what shall I say—treachery; stabbing in the dark; though that’s putting it strongly. Say, working behind the other fellow’s back, handling anything but the clean potato. But . . . And there’s your ‘but’ again.”

And the older man fell silent.

“By gad,” he said suddenly. “I’ve got an idea . . . Cipriano! That’s it. That’s what I’ll do. Absolute *deus ex machina*.”

“Who’s he, Sir?” inquired Henry Waring.

“Why, he’s the Argentine Ambassador to Paris. He was at Oxford with me. I stayed with him in Buenos Ayres when I went round South America. I met him at the Duke of Miraflore’s place when I was in Spain; and he has undertaken to come and see me next time he’s in London. I’ll hop over to Paris. Damme, I’ll go to-morrow.”

“What will you tell him?”

“What’ll I tell him? Why, that—that—he’ll be doing me a real good turn, for which I shall be deeply indebted, if he’ll put his *cher collègue* of Boruela wise to the fact that there’s an *échappé* from Boruela making himself a nuisance to the British authorities at a place in England called Calderton. I suppose we might call General Sir Arthur Calderton a ‘British authority,’ and although he doesn’t know it, this fellow is certainly making himself a nuisance to him. We’ll palter with the truth to that extent, and I’ll make it quite clear, in a quite devious manner which will appeal to Cipriano, that if it happened that his Boruelan colleague in Paris communicated with his own *cher collègue* in London on the subject, the latter might be extremely grateful to him . . . Yes, I’ll make it quite plain to Cipriano, without mentioning a single name except that of Bertie-Norton. If the English branch of the Boruelan Secret Service people move in the matter at all, they’ll very soon find out who Bertie-Norton is. And if the fellow has been telling you half the truth about his doings in Boruela and how badly he’s wanted there, I should certainly think that they’d take

prompt action. Anyway, it's worth trying."

"By Jove, yes!" agreed Henry Waring. "I should say so. On his own showing, he's very badly wanted, and they are the sort of people of whom the saying is true, that if you want a thing badly enough, you'll get it. They want him badly and they'll get him all right."

"And what precisely might you mean by 'get him'?" inquired Sir Walter, suddenly relapsing into his more frigid and formal manner, the spark of his enthusiasm apparently expiring.

"Well, I haven't exactly visualized anything. If they assassinated him, I shouldn't go into mourning; nor if they kidnapped him and ran him out of the country. I . . ."

"Should they do that and run him as far as Boruela, I think we might safely write him off, eh?"

"Yes, but what I really had in mind, and what is the most we can hope for, I suppose, is that he'd soon find out that they were after him—and clear out of his own accord. Without the wish being father to the thought, I really do think that he's in mortal terror of the Boruelan Secret Police and Secret Service agents."

"Yes. Doubtless with good cause. There's a chance. There's a hope. What would actually happen, I imagine, is that Cipriano would go and see his friend the Boruelan Ambassador, who would certainly mention the matter to the chief agent of their Secret Service in France. He'd send a man with a code message to the Boruelan Secretary in London and he would pass the information on to his Secret Service people here, and tell them to get busy. If, once again, what Ferring-Chevigny has told you is true, it would be quite a feather in the cap of the person responsible for tracking him down and doing—whatever they do to defaulting fugitives and enemies of the Republic of Boruela.

"Supposing the worst happened, I suppose his blood would be on our hands, in a manner of speaking," mused the younger man.

"Nasty manner of speaking, too," growled the elder man.

"His blood on our hands," he mused. "Well, one can wash; one can wash."

"Yes, Sir. I wash mine daily, whether they want it or not," smiled Henry Waring.

IX

It was during this period that I lived in that condition of puzzlement, that state of wonder at myself which has ever since been a cause of puzzlement and wonder.

For at one and the same time, I so detested Montague Ferring-Chevigny that I could scarcely speak civilly to him; nay, could scarcely bear to remain in his presence. And yet, at the same time, I found myself almost liking him for brief periods. When he was talking, telling me and Anthony, or telling me alone, late at night, tales of his amazingly hectic past in North America, Mexico, Peru (where he made a determined and prolonged effort to recover the treasure buried by the Jesuits before their expulsion), in Brazil, up the Amazon, gold-seeking; in every one of the five Continents; and, most particularly, of his last adventures in Boruela, I listened as breathlessly as did Anthony himself, feared to break the spell and the flow of reminiscences by a question, greatly regretted the fact when he fell silent, and almost joined with Anthony in begging for more.

And when I use the term ‘amazing,’ I don’t for one moment mean incredible. They were amazing experiences and adventures and they were not incredible. They bore the stamp of truth, and I believed every word he said.

The local colour was so obviously accurate, the details so full and interesting, the characters and doings of the people of whom he spoke, whether they were Dictators or aboriginal savages, were so consistent and convincing.

Had he been the lawful husband of anyone but Lady Calderton; had his errand been other than the monstrous and abominable thing that it was; had his presence at Calderton not cast a shadow that was as the shadow of death, I should have liked him.

I confess that I should have liked him very much indeed, and thoroughly enjoyed his company. Admitted that he was a rogue, a scoundrel, and his life one long series of misdeeds, punctuated by periods in prison; admitted that he was an utterly unprincipled adventurer, he still was an adventurer in the better, as well as the worse, sense of the term.

To one who was not suffering—as I was, through Lady Calderton’s suffering—from his rascality, he could seem something of a laughing cavalier, a debonair swash-buckler, a soldier of fortune, whose courage and resolution were as high as his morals and principles were low. Had I met him elsewhere and known nothing about him save what he himself told me, I should have been reminded of Claude Duval, the gentleman turned highwayman; of Robin Hood, the noble-born outlaw, cut-purse

and cut-throat; possibly of D'Artagnan. Certainly of those charming, care-free Sicilian, Sardinian and other brigands, so popular with those whom they did not rob and detain. Because, apart from this present unspeakable villainy, the things he had done were no worse, and many of them a good deal better, than those that are done in what is called Big Business, things done by men who, by doing them in America, become multi-millionaires, and in England, tread that narrow path of financial glory that leads but to the House of Lords or gaol.

And, as he so often remarked, he knew where to draw the line. Undoubtedly there had been opportunities from which he had shied away in distaste for their abomination.

Nevertheless, beneath a very pleasing exterior, and behind the façade of an officer and a gentleman of great charm, he was a foul man. No, murderous as I felt towards him, I'll be honest; he wasn't a foul man. He was a man who might have been a fine one, but who did foul things; for verily I believe that he had no conception of the wickedness of what he was now doing, no appreciation at all of the unbelievable horror of the situation that he had created, no notion of the insupportable suffering that he was causing his wife.

Is a man to be tried, condemned and cast into hell, the hell upon earth or the Hell of the Hereafter, because he lacks imagination? That, I think, was the greatest lack of this man who was lacking in so many of the qualities that go to make a decent human being, not to say a gentleman. He was almost devoid of imagination, and he could not begin to understand that his presence at Calderton, his very existence in this world, was destruction and death and damnation to this happy and united family into whose midst he had thrust himself.

Inasmuch as the man from time to time interested me, charmed me, and opened windows upon a world into which I had not so much as peeped, I like to think that, had he been able completely to grasp and understand what he was doing, what agony he was causing, what ruin he was threatening, he would have "drawn the line," would have faded away with an earnest and convincing promise that nothing on earth would induce him to return; would have departed, bitterly regretting that he had done irreparable evil to at least one person, an innocent woman, even if he now went away and were heard of no more.

But no, he could not see it. And perhaps that is one of the main differences between the criminal and the non-criminal person.

Nor was it through any fault of mine that he failed to see the light; through anything being left unsaid by me; anything that he didn't understand.

“Look here,” I said one night when he sat late in my room, as he was fond of doing, before returning to the inn where he had established himself, “you said just now that you didn’t agree to the assassination of Colonel Pedro Garcia, because you draw the line at that sort of thing.”

“Yes, of course I do. Don’t you? I have killed plenty of men, but I’ve always done it face to face and man to man, gun to gun or what-not, but I’ve never shot anybody in the back or connived at it.”

“No, you ‘draw the line’ at that; and yet you are doing a far worse thing here. Personally, I should consider to be less of a reptile than you, the Spanish Indian half-breed whom Romez hired to murder a man he couldn’t ‘get’ any other way.”

“Here! Here! My good Waring. You looking for trouble?”

“No, I’m trying to prevent trouble. Incidentally, perhaps—though quite incidentally—to you.”

“Suppose you mind your own business.”

“Precisely what I am minding. Lady Calderton—having no one else to protect her—has made it my business.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Oh, you’ll see. You’ll see. But first of all, I’m going to do something simple and easy. Something that may save the most awful and ghastly trouble for everybody, including yourself. I’m going to appeal to your better nature.”

Captain Ferring-Chevigny yawned.

“Since there are things at which you draw the line, things too foul even for you, why don’t you draw the line here and now? Since you draw it at creeping up behind a man and stabbing him in the back and in the dark, why not draw it at creeping up behind a woman and stabbing her in the back?”

“What are you talking about, my good idiot?”

“I’m talking about the filthy cowardly crime of shamming dead—to save your own dirty hide—for seventeen years, and then suddenly coming to life and announcing to your wife, whose shoes you were never fit to lick—that she has committed bigamy; that she is not the wife of the man she loves and has lived with, for all those years; and that her only child is illegitimate, a bastard who cannot inherit his father’s name. If you don’t draw the line short of that, you are the rottenest cad and cur of whom I’ve ever heard or read. You haven’t the decency, self-respect or common manhood of one of your jungle savages. You are not a man, you are a louse.”

And I added, as coldly as I could, and with as steady a voice as I could

compass,

“And you are a louse on which I’ll put my heel, before you shall get away with this.”

And I gripped the arms of my chair hard, as Ferring-Chevigny’s fatuous guffaw assailed my ears.

I stared at him, livid with the rage that I strove to suppress.

“What’s biting the boy?” smiled Ferring-Chevigny, and the smile was no grimace, no deliberate sneer intended to annoy. He was genuinely amused.

“Now look here, Waring. Don’t go mad and bite me. Whenever a dog has gone mad and bitten me, ‘the dog it was that died.’ I can quite sympathize with your feeling as the butted-in-upon boy-friend, but I don’t want to queer your pitch. I’m not queering your pitch. I mean, damn it all, Waring, live and let live. I don’t take any high moral tone with you. What’s between you and my wife is your business—or perhaps Sir Arthur Calderton’s. Not that I am threatening you. God forbid. There’s nothing of the spoil-sport, much less the blackmailer, about me. You and Lady Calderton . . .”

“Listen,” I interrupted, “I’ve borne a lot from you, and for Lady Calderton’s sake I’ll bear a lot more—because I know it won’t be for long. But if you are as clever as you think you are, you won’t make that particular innuendo again. One expects a grunt from a hog, but unless you are pure hog and pure fool too, you won’t utter that particular grunt once more.”

“No?”

“No. And one can get another note out of a hog, you know. One can get a squeal. Ever heard a hog having its throat cut?”

Again Ferring-Chevigny laughed; and again it was a laughter of genuine amusement and not merely a noise signifying contempt. I did amuse him, and I felt that, in point of fact, I was, compared with him, young, inexperienced and foolish.

But I was sincere, and if there is anything that I believe, it is that sincerity counts—nay, that it is invaluable, is all-important; that the truth is great and will prevail; that right eventually must defeat wrong; and that, well, “somehow good . . .”

“I know I must seem very funny, Ferring-Chevigny,” I said, “sort of, what shall we say, melodramatic and . . . Trying to sound tough, eh? Sort of penny-dreadful melodramatic; but I’m speaking quite seriously and soberly now; and I’m going to tell you something that I want you to believe. I give you my word it’s the absolute truth. Will you believe me?”

“Why, sure, Sunny-Boy. Shoot,” smiled Ferring-Chevigny quite kindly.

“Why, just that,” I said. “I want to give you my solemn word that—but for the

fear of making bad worse—I *would* shoot you, like the dog you are, rather than let you ruin Lady Calderton's life and wreck Anthony's; not to mention Sir Arthur's."

"Spoken like a little man. I'd get up and pat you on the head, only you'd think I was going to smack you, Sunny-Boy . . . Now you've got that off your little chest, just listen to me . . . What's all this talk about wrecks and ruins, death and damnations and dirty dogs? Where do you get all that stuff? You've been reading books, you know. That's your trouble. *East Lynne*. *Maria Marten in the Red Barn*. *The Body on the Line*. Added your young brain. Now, since my wife has seen fit to put you wise on the situation, I'll take it upon me to put you a bit wiser still. And, in the first place, for God's sake drop this red-ruin, blackmail, blue-murder, pink-rats and pure-white-lily stuff. I haven't the slightest desire or intention of doing your girl-friend the very slightest harm in the world. You are barking up the wrong tree, boy; and all het-up about what hasn't happened and isn't going to happen. Damn it all, you talk as though I had come with a bloody great bomb to plant in the middle of Calderton House. Where do you get the notion? You've been listening to a hysterical woman talking tosh and tripe and twaddle. Dash it, man, I'm Eugene Aram."

"Eugene Aram? Well, thank Heaven for that. He was hanged," I said.

"Eh? Don't talk bosh. Upon my word, I begin to think I'm in a lunatic asylum. I mean the man who came home and saw his wife sitting happy on the knee of another man. I forget whether the latter was the new husband or the tutor. Anyhow, the husband took one look through the window, uttered the deepest groan he had got, and tottered on. Wasn't it Eugene Aram who took the knock?"

"No. It was Enoch Arden."

"That's the sportsman. I knew there was a knock in it somewhere. I mean I'm Enoch Arden—only I don't totter on. I just sit down. Enoch couldn't have been as tired as I am. I stop. Just sit down in the front garden. And when Mrs. Arden opens the door to put the cat out, I merely mention that I'd be awfully glad of a glass of water and a crust of bread. Where's the harm to Mrs. Arden or to the second Mr. Arden or to the tutor? All I want to do is what old Caspar did. You know, his work was done and all he wanted was, beside his cottage door, to go on sitting in the sun. And didn't give a curse that by him sported on the green somebody else's little by-blow, Wilhelmine. Why, damn it, Waring, Enoch Arden is one of the Good Men of Poetry, not to mention History. Now, this is where I want you to get not only wise but a damn sight wiser. I am Enoch Arden—practically. The only difference is that Enoch toddled on, and I'm not toddling just yet. I'm sitting pretty. Well—what's the trouble, then? Why all these wicked words like *reptile* and *louse* and *dirty dog*?

Why these awful threats about shooting-up poor old Enoch Ferring-Chevigny?"

I gazed at the man in the wonder and puzzlement of which I have spoken, for he was in earnest.

"Well, go on. What's the difference between Enoch Arden and Enoch Ferring-Chevigny?"

"I wonder if it's possible that you don't understand the difference between Enoch Arden and you? If you don't, how can I tell you? How shall I put it, except that Enoch Arden was a decently unselfish man, what is called a gentleman, in fact; whereas you are a selfish, self-seeking blackguard who doesn't begin to have the glimmering of an idea of what a gentleman is.

"As you've pointed out, Enoch Arden passed on. You didn't. Enoch Arden would have died sooner than let his wife know that he was alive. He'd have died sooner than have turned up, wrecked her happiness and ruined her life. And Enoch Arden, mind you, hadn't pretended to be dead for his own selfish ends. But when you discovered that your wife was married, what did you do? Stepped straight into the middle of her life—and killed it. And you'll kill her. And if you do, I'll kill you—and feel that I've done at least one useful and meritorious act in my life."

"Loud cheers, Sunny-Boy. I like you when you talk like this. Almost makes me feel I'm back among real men again . . . But you aren't being a bit helpful, you know. You can't think straight. Can't keep to the point. It must be this love, or something. Now, will you just try to let a little light in on my dull mind. Just tell me. So long as nobody except us three—you and I and she—knows a word about it, who's a penny the worse?"

"Nobody knows. Nobody is going to know—so far as I'm concerned, at any rate. And presumably neither you nor she is going to shout about it. Very well, then, where's the trouble? Life goes on precisely as before. Sir Arthur Calderton comes home on leave, and she is completely free to go with him to his next job or back to Montiga, or whatever it may be. I'm not demanding any conjugal rights. I've not said one word about blowing the gaff and making trouble. It's you who are doing that. You are making the fuss, not I. Damn it all, man, she is my wife, isn't she? And ninety-nine men out of a hundred would make her toe the line, too. Fairly hold her up to ransom. Yes, and the second Mr. Arden, too. And, mind you, if I were that sort of man, I've got him in a cleft-stick, pretty neatly. He's a very rich man, and I imagine he'd pay handsomely to prevent the scandal. Also to keep the boy. To keep him as his legitimate heir, I mean. Can't leave entailed estates to a little Master Wrong-side-of-the-blanket, I believe. Yes, he'd be in a bit of a hole if I was one of those blackmailing swine, wouldn't he? But I draw the line at blackmail, Waring, and

I'll thank you to get that. Get it into your fat head and keep it there . . . I don't know what you take me for, and I don't know whether you judge others by yourself, but I can assure you that nothing is further from *my* mind than blackmailing or trouble-making or wrecking peoples' lives, or any other such damn nonsense. Lot of melodramatic bilge.

"Fact is, you are jealous, Waring. That's what is the matter with you. And let me tell you, I don't think you show up at all well. If you ask me, you're a damned little dog-in-the-manger. Devil admire me! What do you think you want? You're sitting pretty. You're getting it both ways. Whereas I'm not to be allowed to exist, according to you. I ought to be shot—and you are going to shoot me! Well, shut both eyes tight, and put both your forefingers round the trigger, listen for the hell of a bang, and then see if you haven't shot the canary . . . I'll have another drink, if you'll touch the bell."

"Time you were going," I said, "in more senses than one."

"How can I go in more senses than one, Sunny-Boy?"

"I don't know. But I do know how it can be time you went, in more senses than one."

Again Ferring-Chevigny laughed.

"What they call veiled threats, eh? You'll get me all nervous if you go on like that, Waring. Now, don't do it, boy. Drop it. And try to see sense. You talk about selfishness. Drop some of your own damned selfishness and try to see somebody else's point of view, for a change. Anoint my soul! Anybody'd think you were the husband; or Sir Arthur Calderton—instead of his employee. I don't want to blow my own trumpet, but damn it all, man, can't you recognize a bit of magnanimity when you see it? I'm not bearing the slightest grudge against Katherine. Nor against Sir Arthur. Why, I'm not even bearing malice against you—and surely I might be excused if I thought,

"Well, I'll wring that bird's neck, anyhow" . . .

"I not only act magnanimously but I show every possible consideration. I might say I act with the utmost delicacy. I have taken every possible care to remain incog, to come secretly and tread warily.

"Can't you grasp that everybody in this country who ever heard my name, knows that I'm dead. Dead as a damned door-nail. And forgotten as though I had never lived. I come back as silently as a shadow—to find my wife has not only got a husband and a son, but a 'tutor' as well, and all I say is,

"Right, I make no complaint. I merely suggest that my lawful wife gives me a much-needed leg-up and helps me round a difficult corner. Tides me over

for a while. I don't want much and I may not want it for long, but I do think that in return for my complete forbearance I can expect a little help.'

“And what do I find? Here are you, with absolutely no legal status whatsoever, damning and blasting me, and insulting me for all you are worth, and talking about shooting me up! It's funny, in a way. So are you, Waring. Damn funny, really. What do you know about Miss Christabel Hardacre?”

“Very little, except that she's a hard-riding sportswoman. Hunted the hounds during the war.”

“Rich woman, isn't she?”

“I've never asked her.”

X

The gentleman known here and there, but not everywhere, as Señor Diogenes Barrios, awoke with a piercing scream from a very terrible nightmare. He had been dreaming that he was back in the Old Homeland; and that, having committed an indiscretion, he was going to be kept dangling about, as the Police Sergeant used to say, in the happy village in which Don Diogenes had had the good fortune to be born. Kept dangling about on a meat-hook; from a tree; by the dusty wayside; in the blistering sunshine. And if he were alive by evening, that was his good fortune, and showed that he was a favourite of the Saints. And if he were dead, that was just too bad. Or perhaps not so bad.

Anyhow, the nightmare had been unspeakably horrible.

Señor Diogenes Barrios raised himself from the lumpy surface of his straw-stuffed palliase and looked round his attic room wherein there was no beauty—for certainly there was none in the eye of the beholder. Very sordid, very fusty, very frowsy, wholly unworthy of occupation by a young gentleman rejoicing in the euphonious title of Don Diogenes Barrios.

And he must have been reckless last night, for his suit, his one-and-only but excellent suit, lay crumpled, undignified, where it had been thrown upon the dirty floor. The suit over which he usually spent an industrious *quart d'heure*, turning the trousers inside out; wetting the creases very carefully with his face-rag, soaping them skilfully with the edge of his long-lasting, almost immortal, cake of soap; re-turning them and folding them with the utmost care, and laying them reverently beneath the palliase that, in his very slumbers, he might do good, as his weight aided the pressure of the mattress in ever more sharply defining the creases of the admirable trousers.

The coat he would hang upon a pair of beautiful wooden shoulders that had once been the property of no less a person than a Secretary of Legation.

The waistcoat he was wont to damp and “iron” with the smooth base of a heavy water carafé.

And there lay the suit, not only having been denied this care, but having been positively maltreated. There would be balls of grey fluff upon the underside of those creased dishonoured trousers; on that of the coat which had gathered grace and shapeliness from the wooden shoulders that had once been the property of a Secretary of Legation.

He must have been mad last night. But what self-respecting *caballero* did not at

times risk, nay court, the divine madness sent by Bacchus? Still, it was damn silly to go and get drunk the night before he had to go to the Legation.

And with a groan, Señor Diogenes Barrios fell back upon his grey and greasy pillow, and stared at the sloping ceiling which, close above his aching head, presented him with the familiar map of the basin of the Amazon, a river that rose just above the door, flowed across the ceiling, receiving numerous tributaries, and debouched into the wallpaper so near that he could put a finger into its estuary. It was unwise to do so, however, as the estuary was apt to widen unduly, and become a somewhat alarming delta.

Well, anyhow, with an immaculate and well-creased suit or a creased and dishevelled one, he must be at the Legation, according to orders.

What could they be wanting? It wasn't pay-day, worse luck; and he wasn't conscious of any short-coming or wrong-doing. He had sent in his reports, faithfully and regularly, upon every one of his clients, as he termed, with pleasant humour, the innocents, the suspects, the worse than suspects, and the already condemned, whom it was his business to shadow, and whose movements it was his pleasing duty to report.

And he hadn't been faking, either. That is to say, not unduly; not more than usual. A *caballero* must have a night off sometimes; and if the infamous Señor Ramon had not been visited by, and closeted with, the yet more infamous Don Diego, there was no great harm in saying that he had, and giving chapter and verse, time and period. Lots of interesting if imaginary details.

But, *Madre de Dios*, it would be most awkward if, when he reached the Legation, he were to be confronted with his detailed and documented account of a day in the life of the infamous Señor Ramon, and informed that the gentleman had committed suicide on the *previous* day; had been picked up by the British Police on misinformation received; or indeed liquidated at the urgent request of the Dictator.

Still, he had never had any bad luck of that sort, and had never been threatened with punishment.

No, thought Don Diogenes Barrios, as he drew a venomous-looking cigarette from a somewhat battered package that lay beside the bed, lit the black Boruelan tobacco and deeply inhaled the acrid smoke; no, he wouldn't be here if he had. They only punished once.

Why should he worry? He could honestly flatter himself that he was useful; very useful. They couldn't deny it; and they'd allow so useful a man as himself a little latitude if he did make such a mistake as to report the daily activities of an already dead man. Probably it was another job—though hitherto the job had come to him,

so to speak. Orders and directions had been given him without his having to attend at the Legation in person. Sometimes in the dark corner of a cinema; sometimes at the Anarchist Club; sometimes in the little secret room behind Mother Viega's kitchen; sometimes sitting in the middle of the great stretch of nice green grass in one of the parks, where no eavesdropper could come within a quarter of a mile without being seen for what he was.

Well, he'd soon know; and, having finished his cigarette, the Señor rose from his bed, and set about the business of doing whatever his skill, loving care and remorseful solicitude could do for the evilly-entreated suit.

Having done his best, Don Barrios permitted himself to do perhaps a little less than his best in the matter of washing; but it cannot be denied that he passed the face-rag over his more salient features, and naturally got his hands wet in the process. But any lack of energy in this direction was compensated by the almost excessive labour that he lavished on his hair, anointing it with pungently scented oil and brushing it straight back from his forehead, with an almost savage industry.

And when he had finished, none could deny that this, his crowning glory, was effulgent, sleek and glossy beyond praise. Quite beyond. It was as though a close-fitting skull-cap of black satin adorned his shapely head.

Between collars he hung in doubt. There was one, immaculate as new samite, the white flower of a blameless laundress; and there was another which matched the chaste mauve shirt with its alternating plum and gooseberry stripes, but which no amount of careful licking at the edge or sponging at the back could, by the most generous standards of judgment, make into a really clean collar.

The white one it must be; and who should find fault? Did not the Secretaries of Legation themselves wear white collars? That they wore them with white shirts, black ties or black cravats, black coats and white-edged black waistcoats, was neither here nor there—unless one were being pedantic, and then of course it was there. But what South American gentleman of all the inmates of all the Embassies of South America would cavil at a white collar because it was worn with a mauve shirt of plum and gooseberry stripe, and a suit of pleasing purplish hue?

Having dressed, Señor Barrios descended the uncarpeted stairs that led from his eyrie to the *delicatessen* shop of Señor Alphonso Alvares and the Soho slum of which that shop was an amenity.

Looking up from her seat behind the counter, Señorita Concepción Alvares eyed Don Diogenes with warm approval. A most handsome young gentleman with his natty purple suit, yellowish velour hat, yellowish brown shoes and pretty socks that matched the pretty tie of palest pink, green-barred.

“Early, Don Diogenes!” she murmured, looking up through her long black eye-lashes and shaking back her long black curls. “Important business, one would say.”

“Most,” replied the Señor with an airy wave of his cane. “At the Embassy.”

“Have you had any breakfast?”

“Yes, yes, most ample, thank you,” replied Señor Barrios, who had scraped out the residuary contents of a sticky tin labelled *Coffee and Condensed Milk*, a compound sweet and bland, and which, followed by a draught of water, gave for a few minutes a pleasing illusion of *petit déjeuner* or post-prandial coffee.

“But for the love of the Most Pure and Most Illustrious Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, give me a fag, Concepción.”

Turning to the shelves behind the counter, the girl reached for a packet, the while Don Diogenes reached swiftly for a sausage-roll, slipped it into his pocket with his left hand, and, as the girl turned back, extended his right for the cigarettes—a packet of ten real American Giraffes.

“On me,” whispered the girl, to whom the *delicatessen* of New York East Side were not alien corn. . . .

Choosing a seat in the Park, Señor Diogenes Barrios sat him down and munched his sausage-roll, lit a cigarette, and kept his eye upon the time.

Having finished and rested from his labours, he arose, and strolling steadily in the direction of Queen’s Gate, arrived, by somewhat circuitous approach, before the imposing portals of a very fine house which stood back from the broad clean pavement of a street of similar mansions; a street incredibly proper and correct; the sort of thoroughfare through which none but the most respectable could be expected to pass, and only on the most reputable business.

A semi-circular drive joined the house with this road; and, from the drive, a flight of snow-white steps ascended to the great front door.

As he turned in at the first of the two gates, a man lurking in a glorified sentry-box stepped out and confronted him, a man in a green and gold livery, a livery at once dignified and impressive.

Fixing upon Don Diogenes the hard stare of a pair of cruel eyes that looked out from his face of a swarthy prize-fighter, the man raised heavy eyebrows in silent question, the effect being not a little deterrent and discouraging, not to say insulting. For though the grim mouth remained firmly shut, a mere slit in the sallow craggy face, the raised eyebrows indicated quite distinctly that here was no necessity for the effort of speech, no need for the wasting of the spoken word upon so insignificant an intruder. Had the guardian of the outer portal opened his mouth, or one small corner thereof, and said,

“Where do you think you are going, miserable little dog?” the visitor might have felt less insulted.

However, Señor Diogenes Barrios had a spirit of his own, a clear conscience, and an excellent excuse. And he, too, without the use of speech, made insulting reply. Taking from his breast pocket a card which bore nothing but a number and a signature, he held it up before the forbidding face of the dark-browed Cerberus, thrust it closer than was necessary, and then, ranging himself beside the man, pointed to the figures, to the first letter, the second letter, the third letter, and the others, one by one, until each separate letter had been touched.

Had he said,

“It’s no good my showing you this, my good fool, for of course an ignorant oaf like you can’t read,” the insult would have been no clearer.

Swinging his cane and wishing he had the courage to whistle, Señor Barrios marched past the surly official; mounted the great white steps, raised his hand to the great golden, or perhaps brazen, knocker; and was somewhat disconcerted to find it snatched from his hand as the door swung open to reveal a man arrayed in green morning-dress piped with yellow, a black and yellow striped waistcoat, and a shining dress-shirt, wing collar and white bow tie. And magnificent black side-whiskers in the Spanish fashion.

To him also, but with more respectful gesture, Don Barrios showed the card; whereupon the man glanced contemptuously at the Señor, closed the door behind him, and turning, pointed towards yet another functionary, clothed in solemn black. This man sat at a table on which were neat piles of sorted letters, a large ledger, pens, ink and paper.

Across the great flagged hall marched Señor Barrios, bowed to the major-domo, butler, hall-porter or whatever he might be, and again held out the talismanic card.

And the third, perhaps, of the insults with which he had been received by these pampered underlings was the grossest of all, for the man at the table, though looking straight before him, was evidently able to see right through the *caballero* without actually seeing either him or his extended card.

Deep in thought, and adding sums of money in a semi-audible Spanish voice, he continued to disregard the early morning visitor to the Embassy.

Well, on the fellow’s head, on his silly bald fat head, let it be, thought Don Diogenes Barrios, as he regarded the heavy-featured face before him, pompous, self-satisfied and smug, redeemed only from utter insignificance by flat and perfectly trained side-whiskers that, venturing out from the safety of his ears, made their way

across his vast cheeks, each ending courageously in an upward-pointing tip.

Noble whiskers. They had probably earned him his job, thought Diogenes. Better than the footman's. Badges of the highest rank of flunkey.

And Diogenes coughed gently, deprecatingly, presented the card a little nearer to the face of the thinker, and awaited results.

Uncomfortable as he felt, he had no real fear of these underlings. What could they do? They had not the ear of such people as the *Chancelier d'Ambassade*. They had nobody's ears, save their own ugly cabbage-leaves. They could give themselves airs, but nobody else gave them any.

"Señor," he murmured softly. "Doubtless the instructions of the Privy Councillor, Señor Rafael José Albarado, are not worthy of your consideration, but the fact remains that I . . ."

The man at the table, with the appearance of seeing even better and further through the body of Diogenes, counted with a slightly increased rapidity, and stroked one of the beautiful flat and forward-pointing whiskers that seemed painted upon his sallow cheek—and a soft voice at the *caballero's* ear bade him step this way.

Turning, and seeing a fourth man rapidly departing in the direction of a closed door, Diogenes followed him, feeling that on the whole, the thinker had won, for certainly there was no conceivable evidence that he had been for one moment aware of his visitor's existence.

The bastard must have pressed a bell-push underneath his desk, Diogenes thought resentfully, and promised himself that, in the extremely unlikely event of the opportunity ever presenting itself, he'd press something into *him*.

Opening the door, and waiting for Señor Diogenes Barrios to pass through into the corridor, the man led the way up a flight of service stairs to the floor above, and along another corridor to a door on which was painted in gold letters upon a little black oblong, the words *State Councillor Albarado*.

Knocking and listening intently for answer, the man who, as Don Diogenes now noticed, was arrayed in a complete morning-suit of dark green with brass buttons, whispered,

"Stay there, you," opened the door, entered, and closed it behind him.

Outside this door, in the dingy ill-lit corridor, Señor Diogenes Barrios waited, with sinking courage and mounting apprehension.

What did they think he was? And what was this place? A prison, or only a huge trap? That made four men who had had to handle him before he had even reached this grandee's door, if one counted the fat slob at the table. Not that he had handled him much, but undoubtedly there were four of them between him and the street, and

doubtless four more as well. And added to the *caballero's* apprehensions was an unpleasant feeling of claustrophobia.

Which way should one run? There were more stairs leading up at the far end of the corridor. If one sprinted . . .

The door opened. The messenger reappeared, and, with curt gesture of his thumb, bade him enter. As Diogenes obeyed, the man closed the door behind him, and left him alone in a vast sunny room with Don Rafael José Albarado, *Chancelier d'Ambassade*.

This gentleman, a person of undoubtedly different type from those whom Diogenes had hitherto encountered, looked up from the letter that he was writing, favoured the *caballero* with a flashing smile that displayed perfect little teeth beneath a perfect little moustache, clipped, trimmed and curled, and studied him with cold relentless eyes.

"So you are D.B.6, are you?" he said, and the *caballero* bowed gracefully in answer.

"And the author of these interesting reports," continued the Councillor, drawing a wire basket towards him and taking from it a blue cardboard file containing papers.

"H'm," he observed non-committally, flicking them over with some contempt. "And pray, my good Señor D.B.6, do you imagine that any one of these alleged reports is of the very faintest interest or value whatsoever?"

And as Diogenes maintained a respectful silence, the Councillor shot a sudden look at him, and with a sound suggestive of the cracking of a whip-lash, added,

"Answer."

"To be honest I do, Your Excellency," admitted Diogenes. "They give an exact and faithful account of the movements of the men whom I have been instructed to watch; and some of them have been obtained at the risk of . . ."

"The cost of half a bottle of bad *vin ordinaire* or half a pint of filthy British beer, eh? Not much other risk than the loss of those, I imagine."

And he eyed his visitor with a look of slightly wondering contempt. This was his speciality, and he had acquired it in Boledo, cultivated it at Madrid, practised it in Berlin and perfected it in London. There was probably no one in the whole personnel of his country's Diplomatic Service who was his equal at the production and use of that stare which, without the use of language, expressed complete unbelief, utter distaste, and the profoundest contempt, just faintly tinged with pity.

"What do you suppose we pay you for, my good creature?" he asked.

And again as with the hiss of a whip, the ensuing silence was broken by the word,

“Answer.”

“For . . . for work, Your Excellency. For taking serious risks, running into great danger; keeping a constant and watchful eye upon the movements of the suspects.”

“Yes. That is what we pay you for; and unless you want a free trip Home and free quarters (free is a rather amusing word in that connection, isn’t it?), free quarters, I say, in one of the lower cells—they contain a foot of slime, you know, and you have to sit in it—at San Carlos, you are going to earn your pay.”

The smile died away from the pleasant mouth of the *Chancelier d’Ambassade* as, with a sudden frowning stare of his cold and calculating eyes, he shot at the uncomfortable Diogenes the sudden question,

“Where is Mr. Sherry?”

“Excellency, my information is that Señor Xeres has not yet . . .”

“Your *information!*” growled the Councillor with a contemptuous sneer. “Like the rest of this ‘information’ here, you twittering twerp.”

He flicked the file that lay before him as though it were a noxious insect.

“Now, my friend, I’ll give *you* some information, and I’ll give you some instructions; and if you value your job, not to say your freedom, I recommend you to pay careful attention. Listen.

“Mr. Sherry, as he used to call himself—Señor Xeres, as you call him—is in England; and the Boruelan Government doesn’t want him in England. Understand? Where it does want him is in Boledo, somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Rotunda. Now, if you could get him there, or anywhere else in Boruela, you might come here grinning and with your tail up as though you expected a bone. And you’d get a bone, too—or a bonus. A gold one. But there’s not much hope of your being clever enough to get him *there* . . . Anyway, you’ve got to get him away from where he is, and as far away as you can. And to do that, you’ll have to frighten him—badly. Can you manage that much?”

Señor Diogenes Barrios smiled brightly.

“I’ll undertake to promise that he will start travelling, quite soon after I get in touch with him . . . If he does not, he’ll meet with an accident and . . .”

But there was no answering smile upon the lips of the *Chancelier d’Ambassade*. On the contrary, his heavy black brows drew together over his reptilian glittering eyes.

“Listen, once again, *hombre*. The man who was known in Boruela as Sherry is to be frightened away from the place where he is at present hiding. Just repeat that to yourself until it penetrates your brain and effects a lodgment, will you? I said nothing of ‘accidents.’ What will happen to *you* will not be an accident, if you

exceed your instructions, or if you fail to carry them out. Mind, if you were clever enough to help him to meet with a genuine accident, well, that would be just too bad—for him. And very nice for you. But don't forget what country you are in. And remember what happens in the case of 'accidents' here.

"You go and commit a murder, and leave a trail that leads straight to the front door of this house, and you'll have most excellent cause to wish you had never been born. Very well, there's your information.

"Sherry's in England, in hiding. And he has got to be frightened out of England. If he met with a genuine accident on the way, well, the worse for him and the better for you, as I say. But if you bring one shadow of suspicion on you, and so on us, you'll be badly in need of a hiding-place yourself. So go and frighten him—to death if you can—but out of England, anyhow . . .

"Very well, there are your instructions.

"Now you will go and see the First Secretary, Señor Ignatio Cedeno, and he will give you fuller details and further instructions. *Adios*, my dear Señor—er—what-is-it? Yes, Diogenes Barrios."

And with a charming smile of the mouth and a cold forbidding stare of the eyes, the *Chancelier d'Ambassade* sped his parting visitor.

As the door opened in answer to the bell that Diogenes had not seen him ring, he added,

"And do take care of yourself. I should be so sorry to hear that you had got into any sort of difficulty."

Without instructions from the *Chancelier*, the messenger, having closed the door of the room, led the puzzled and uncomfortable Diogenes along the same corridor, up the flight of stairs that he had seen at the end of it, along another corridor, and again halted at a big door on which also was painted in black letters on a gilt oblong, the name and official title of the occupant.

This gentleman proved to be more urbane, better informed, and altogether more agreeable than the *Chancelier*.

"Ah, yes," said he, looking up from his desk as the messenger approached, followed by Diogenes. "Thank you," and as the man retired, seemed to hover on the brink of inviting his visitor to sit down. But on the brink he halted, resumed his writing, and apparently forgot all about the matter.

After standing for several minutes admiring the magnificent marble fire-place, and wondering how and why it was that one man should sit in a padded armchair at a beautiful desk while another stood humbly beside it, Diogenes was suddenly recalled from abstract and idle speculation to immediate realities, as in a pleasant, quiet voice,

the First Secretary suddenly began to speak.

“Go to-morrow to Euston Station and take a single ticket to Calderton. I’ll write it down. There, from the station, to the village inn *not* called the Calderton Arms. Find a humbler one, a pot-house, a little wayside *posada*, a *pulqueria*; take a room and tell what story you like. Play whatever rôle suits you best and in which you find yourself most at home; a hungry artist; a cheap professional photographer making picture-post-cards; a publisher’s agent’s hack doing that part of the country for the illustrations of the guide-book of their famous series. If you prefer it, you can be an—er—what do they call it—hiker; or a fisherman, though I don’t suppose you know the jargon and technique of the sport.

“Perhaps you had better be a seedy and needy commercial traveller, in what, shall we say, barber’s-shop hair-oil, perfumes and scented soap—whether on holiday or on business.

“Anyhow, keep there, stay there, continue to stay there, and be as inconspicuous as possible. It won’t matter in the least if you are inconspicuous to the point of furtiveness, so that you give the impression that the furtive inconspicuousness is intentional; and that you have some good reason for wishing to attract notice.

“If the gossips in the bar regard you as a bit of a mystery and speculate as to whether you are lying low for a bit, if not actually in hiding, that would be all to the good.

“Now then, having done that, discover a man calling himself Bertie-Norton. He visits the mansion, Calderton House. He’s your man. None other than our friend Mr. Sherry, late of Boledo and Paracay, Bolivar, Caibo—and Boruela generally.

“Now, Mr. Sherry seems to think he can settle down in peace and quiet in his peaceful quiet country. In spite of what he did, and what he tried to do, to our country. Well, it’s going to be your job to disabuse him of the idea altogether. He’s certainly going to realize that he’s not as far from South America as he thinks he is. And that even if he were, he wouldn’t be safe. He has been kept on the run, all over the two Americas as well as over Europe, and you’ve got to start him on the run again.

“But, mind, there’s to be no rough stuff of any sort. We don’t want the British Police in this; and although they are the most unobtrusive police in the world, they are on the spot quicker than any others, when there’s trouble.

“So there’s to be *no* trouble; no arrest; no inquest—either on you or on him.

“What you have to do, is to get him away from there; and the further you get him, the better, especially if it’s out of England. And if at the furthest point, anything happened to him, well, so much the better again.

“But there must be no sort or kind of bother in this country, for if there were and you survived it, you wouldn’t do so for long. In any case, as you know, we repudiate you, of course; but if there were trouble, we should do more than that. It is you who would be endeavouring to get as far away as possible—and you’d fail.

“However, don’t let’s talk of such unpleasant things.”

And the First Secretary sighed deeply in ready if anticipatory sympathy.

“Well,” he continued more brightly, “I shall hope to see you again, Señor D.B.6, to hear your report from your own lips. And I shall expect you to be able to tell me that Mr. Sherry has departed, in haste, for what he fondly imagines to be an unknown destination. When he reaches it, someone else shall look after him. Unless, of course, he meets with an accident there or *en route*, and departs not only for an unknown destination but for a better or, at any rate, another, world . . . Now as to expenses . . .”

XI

“What’s to be the end of it? And when will it come? If this goes on much longer, I begin to think I shall almost welcome the—end,” said Lady Calderton, as we sat in the drawing-room awaiting the arrival of our Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny, who had telephoned to say that he would have the pleasure of dining with us this evening. He had been away on his own urgent private affairs for a few days, and had given us a breathing-space—an unspeakably anxious and miserable time of suspense and fear, but a breathing-space, a rest from his eternal guffaw, smiles and small-talk.

There we sat and there we waited, absolutely impotent, defenceless, entirely in this man’s hands; entirely at his beck and call, save in one or two minor matters on which he had given way before Lady Calderton’s absolutely final refusal to do as he wished.

She would not, for example, consent to his coming to live in the house. Nor would she agree to seeing him alone again. Nor would she fall in with his suggestion that she should invite various people whom he named and whom he wished to meet at her table. If people dropped in at tea-time when he was there, we had no choice but to introduce him; or if people were lunching and he suddenly arrived just in time for the meal, as quite frequently he did, again he had to be introduced.

And this sort of thing was far from being the least of Lady Calderton’s troubles and daily trials at this time, for it had to be done naturally and easily, so that there might be nothing in the slightest degree unusual, much less suspicious, about the manner of his introduction. At the same time, she was most anxious to avoid any appearance of vouching for the new-comer, of sponsoring him in the least degree, or of endeavouring to launch him in County society. And this was the occasion of bitter complaint on the part of Ferring-Chevigny, and of acrimonious accusation.

Inasmuch as Lady Calderton invariably rose and left us when he began this sort of complaint, whether we were at table or not, he soon learned to make me his lightning-conductor, to make his complaints to me, and to bid me see to it that Lady Calderton ‘came to heel,’ as he was pleased to describe it.

So there we sat and waited for him, and Lady Calderton wondered aloud how much longer she could bear it.

“I don’t know how much longer it’s going on,” I said, “but I’m perfectly certain that it won’t be for very long, and that there is every reason to hope.”

“Hope? For what? So long as he’s alive . . .”

Yes. So long as he was alive. That was the thought that was for ever at the back of my mind, and for ever striving to push its way to the front.

“Well, he won’t live for ever, and I feel perfectly certain that he won’t live in this part of the world much longer. As I told you, my uncle has a plan, and something will come of it.”

“Grateful as I am, both to you and Sir Walter, I don’t see what good can come of any plan. I can’t see a gleam of hope. The very fact that the man is alive, wherever he may be, makes any plan useless. Suppose he went to the absolute ends of the earth and remained there for the remainder of his life, the facts are the same.”

“Yes, but the position isn’t.”

“So long as he’s alive . . .” whispered Lady Calderton.

And I realized with a little cold pang of horror that she too had the same thought at the back of her mind. It was inevitable. Also that the thought at the back of her mind, as in my own, was for ever striving to push its way to the front.

So long as he was alive . . .

Nothing on earth but his death could alter the position. His death now would put the hands of the clock back seventeen years, to the time of his supposed death.

“It would alter the position,” I said again, “very materially—completely, in fact—if he were at the other side of the world and were never heard of again. Life would go on as before, and everything be again as it was.”

“While I knew he was alive? While I feared, every time that a door opened . . .”

The door opened and Ferring-Chevigny entered.

“So sorry if I’m late,” he smiled, flashing his excellent teeth. “Who said a glass of Amontillado?”

A footman entered with a large silver tray on which were decanter and glasses. Lady Calderton declined the offered wine.

“Sherry, sir?” said Robert, taking the tray to Ferring-Chevigny.

“For God’s sake, don’t call it that,” he said abruptly, pouring himself a glass.

“No, sir,” replied the stolid Robert.

“Why not call sherry what it is?” I asked, for the sake of making conversation, my usual and somewhat difficult task when we three were together.

“Because I hate the word,” was the curious reply.

“Damn fine wine, though,” he added, smacking his lips. “One good thing that comes out of that accursed country.”

“Accursed country? What’s wrong with Spain?” I asked.

“Spaniards,” was the reply, and Jenkins announcing dinner, we made our way

into the dining-room, as curious a procession of three as went in to dinner in England that evening.

It was terribly difficult to keep up appearances before the servants, or rather, it was an anxious and nerve-racking business to remember that this must be done. I don't know whether Jenkins had any suspicion that anything was wrong, but it was impossible to tell. Not that it mattered very greatly, for he was absolutely devoted to Lady Calderton, had the greatest admiration and respect for Sir Arthur, and would, I think, have lain down his life for Anthony.

He had been at Calderton House for some forty years, from the days when he was an apple-cheeked page or pantry-boy, and had been taught his work by his own father, who had himself been butler to the late Sir Arthur Calderton. In point of fact, there had been Jenkinsons in Calderton village for as long as there had been Caldertons in Calderton House. And that was going back somewhere in the direction of Doomsday Book.

Although Lady Calderton had firmly refused to introduce Ferring-Chevigny as her brother, a course which he had suggested, I rather fancy that Jenkins suspected him to be a relation of hers; a brother or a cousin, possibly a bit of a detrimental, not to say a ne'er-do-well; and perhaps the black sheep of the Fairfax family.

However, I always did my best, when servants were present, to keep the conversation light and natural, easy and flowing. For my, more or less, successful efforts in this direction, poor Lady Calderton was deeply grateful, since she herself, not unnaturally, found it practically impossible to behave as though nothing whatever was wrong, as though she were as light-hearted, happy and care-free as she had been before he came, and as though no cruel weight of misery crushed her spirit. She found it all-but-impossible to address a remark to this incredible death's-head "guest," well-nigh impossible so much as to eat in his presence . . .

A pause in the conversation, a miserable hiatus, one of those dreadful gaps which it seems impossible to fill; Lady Calderton looking like a ghost toying with the food upon her plate; Ferring-Chevigny enjoying his food and wine, taking his ease as though at his inn; I racking my brains for something more to say, and finding nothing. It had all been said, every topic exhausted, every last word uttered, silence growing longer and deeper, Jenkins and Robert standing like graven images.

I must say something. What was I saying? What had I said?

"So you've been having some good sport, eh?"

Just as though anything had been said about sport. Just as though Ferring-Chevigny would appreciate kind inquiries as to what he had been doing during his recent absence from Calderton.

Putting down his glass, he shot a quick look at me.

“Sport?” he said, and laughed his smug guffaw. “Might call it that, too. Yes. Good hunting.”

“Had some good hunting, eh?”

“Oh, you might put it like that,” he smiled.

“Which pack?”

“Well now, I wouldn’t really say I was hunting with a pack. Doin’ a little lone-wolf huntin’. All on my own.”

This wouldn’t do. This would sound queer to Jenkins and Robert, if they were listening, which probably they were not. Doubtless Jenkins was sufficiently occupied in watching plates and glasses, and Robert in watching Jenkins, as a well-trained sheep-dog does its shepherd.

Another awkward silence.

Ferring-Chevigny emptied his glass.

“Met a friend of yours, Kathie,” he said as he put it down.

“Yes?”

“Sent her love to you. Coming to see you one of these days. Something about the Annual Charity Ball, or some such doings. Christabel Hardacre.”

“Yes, she runs a charity ball every year. For the County Hospital.”

“Wants you to have it here, this year.”

“Yes. It’s always held here when we are at home.”

“So Christabel said. She’ll be descending on you one day soon. I told her I should be staying here.”

Lady Calderton gave him a cold questioning look, with faintly raised eyebrows.

“Here or hereabouts,” he smiled. “I told her I should be seeing her when she came over. You’ll let me know when she comes, won’t you?”

“Why?”

“Oh, we are great old pals, Christabel and I. I like her. Damn fine woman.”

“She’s certainly a very fine horsewoman.”

“You know her, Waring?” he asked.

“I’ve met Miss Hardacre,” I said, and, turning to Lady Calderton, added,

“She dropped in once or twice at tea-time, to ask about you, and to see Anthony.”

“Yes, she always looks in when she’s over on the Calderton side of the county. Comes and stays with us sometimes.”

“You know her well?” said Ferring-Chevigny.

“I’ve known her for a good many years.”

“Like her?”

“Yes. We haven’t very much in common, as I don’t hunt; but no one could help liking her for her honesty, good nature and cheeriness.”

“Wonder she has never married,” mused Ferring-Chevigny. “Unhappy love-affair or something?”

“I have heard her say that the more she sees of men the better she likes hounds and horses,” replied Lady Calderton coldly.

And this seemed to amuse Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny, for not only did he laugh his famous laugh, but from time to time chuckled irrepressibly thereafter.

XII

Captain Ferring-Chevigny emerged from the door of his inn, snuffed the lovely morning air, and gazed around upon the peaceful and beautiful rural scene with the deepest satisfaction.

How utterly and perfectly English. England might be a good country to get out of, but it was a damned good country to return to, say what you will. No country in the world like it. In fine weather, *bien entendu*. On a day like this. But as for the winter, or worse still, the spring—as the poet says—‘Oh to be out of England now that Spring is here.’

Well, thank God that Montague Ferring-Chevigny was under no compulsion to get out of England. Never again.

And as he was wont to do, quite frequently these days, the Captain burst into tuneful song:

*“Safe at last, the harbour past,
Safe in my f-a-a-a-ther’s home . . .”*

Not exactly ‘father’s’ though, he mused, nor precisely brother-in-law’s—though that might be a good line for Katty to take. Monty the long-lost black-sheep brother whom the family never mentioned. Arthur’s new brother-in-law. But perhaps she wouldn’t like to produce an unknown brother all sudden-like. However, that was her affair, not his. Queer relationship and situation altogether. But a very nice one. Very nice. Yes, this would do for Uncle Monty quite beautifully.

And Uncle Monty strode forth across the road and the stile, and took the field-path that led in the direction of Calderton House.

Do very nicely indeed, British climate included. He’d hunt in the winter with two or three packs, and be very snug on non-hunting days, whether at Calderton House or the Calderton Arms; and February and March he could spend down the Riviera way, having a flutter at the tables on brother Arthur’s money. Monty at Monte, what? Pity it would have to be Arthur’s money, but there it was. Since his own was for ever lost in Boruela, he couldn’t help himself. A gentleman can’t live without pocket-money, even with the run of his teeth, and all found.

Then in the summer, England would be good enough; and perhaps a run up to Scotland in the autumn. Grouse and salmon in due season.

Yes, that would do beautifully. Well, well, he had seen a peck of trouble. Pots of it. And now it would be a case of pots of money. Flesh-pots; potting the red;

plucking the pigeons; dealing the cards—from the bottom of the pack; and . . .

Hullo! What was that?

The sense of smell is the one most immediately connected with the faculty of memory. Neither sights nor sounds, flavours nor the sense of touch, call up a mental vision as quickly as does an odour, whether it be wood-smoke, bringing instantly a vision of African and other camp-fires; a whiff of jasmine, recalling an Eastern jungle glade, heavy with the scent of flowering trees; the scent of hay bringing to mind a June day in England's pleasant countryside. And what Captain Ferring-Chevigny smelt brought him to a sudden stop, and the happy look of pleasure and contentment, even as he halted in his stride, was replaced by one of anxiety, not to say alarm; his smile by a quick, deep frown.

For, from the other side of the hedge by which he walked, came a faint but unmistakable odour that he knew too well—a mixture of the smell of a Boruelan cigarette and of a perfume, happily unknown in England. How many hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands, of times had he smelt that beastly scent, whether used as a body-perfume for the dominance of even less agreeable odours, or as hair-oil. And mingled, too, with that peculiar acrid smell of a *pitillo* of black tobacco, wrapped, not in rice-paper but in straw-husk.

It cannot be said that Ferring-Chevigny's face paled nor that his hand trembled; but it was obvious to the man watching through the hedge, that if the big Englishman were not actually frightened, he was most certainly perturbed.

And that would do for the present.

Stepping quietly back into the long grass that grew up close to the hedge on his side, Señor Diogenes Barrios turned and walked quickly away, unseen, in the direction opposite to that in which his quarry was proceeding.

Yes, he flattered himself, that was a very good start. Undoubtedly Señor Xeres had got a whiff of the *pitillo*. And of the good strong perfume.

He had got it all right, and it had given him a bit of a jar; and mentally the *caballero* made out his report, stating how, having observed that Mr. X was in the habit of taking the field-path opposite the inn, he had discovered a suitable spot in the high hedge bordering that path, had secreted himself there, and that the breeze, being in the right direction, had allowed the perfume of black Boruelan tobacco and of strong scent to be wafted to the nostrils of the man who was passing within a yard of where he crouched concealed; of how the man had stopped, sniffed, looked as though he had seen a ghost, and had undoubtedly got his first intimation of the fact that—he wasn't as far from South America as he thought he was.

And in the main, the *caballero's* report would be accurate, for Captain Ferring-

Chevigny had undoubtedly received a shock. As the over-familiar whiff reached his nostrils (and, in fact, the spot fairly reeked with the scent from the sodden handkerchief, the oiled hair and the smouldering cigarette) he saw a lightning-swift procession of South American scenes—railway-carriages and stations, cinemas, hotels, shops, cafés, streets, market-places, bars, and an army innumerable of swarthy men, each of whom wore a ‘gent’s straw boater,’ a black suit or a white cotton one, a cummerbund, pointed shoes, anointed locks and a perfume-drenched handkerchief, and smoked a Boruelan cigarette.

And he saw swarthy faces that he hated, and one that he feared beyond telling.

Turning sharply towards the hedge, he peered into it, endeavoured to see through it, thrust at it with his stick in a vain attempt to make a hole, found it was impossible, and became more and more conscious of the distinctive odour, as familiar and unmistakable to him as that of a slum in the Chinese native quarter is to the missionary who dwells among the Celestials; as that of a fried-fish shop is to an East End costermonger; or as is that of the tap-room of his village pot-house to the yokel.

He must be imagining things . . . But, thrusting closer to the hedge and sniffing industriously, he realized, quite correctly, that the perfume, the odour, the *stench*, was unmistakable.

Yes, that was a cigarette from Capadare, and its smoker was a Damned Dirty Dago—for thus, mentally, did Captain Ferring-Chevigny allude to all the millions of the Spanish-Indian inhabitants of South America.

Returning to the path, he ran to a gate some two or three hundred yards distant, vaulted lightly over it, and hurried back along the other side of the hedge. Having arrived in the neighbourhood of the place opposite to where he had encountered the disturbing smell, he stopped and sought carefully forward, with eye and nose, like a questing hound.

Yes, yes, there it was—definitely. An alien and pungent offence to the glorious morning with its almost-imperceptible delicate odours appropriate to the sweet and wholesome countryside.

Yes, and there was the actual spot; there where the long grass was disturbed. There where it was flattened. A man had sat there; had crouched in under the hedge; had smoked a cigarette, and exhaled the filthy perfume of his hair and handkerchief.

Suddenly, with such feelings as those that disturbed the breast of Robinson Crusoe on beholding the strange footmark, Ferring-Chevigny saw two cigarette-stubs lying on a broad dock-leaf, affronting the day with their chewed ugliness and their beastly smell.

Now then, had all this been premeditated, cut-and-dried? Had he been intended to smell those familiar odours? To do exactly what he had done, even to the finding of the cigarette-butts?

He was inclined to think so, for those cigarette-ends had not been flung idly down, just anywhere. They had been laid on that dock-leaf, laid there for him to find—as he had done.

Or was he imagining things? Was that too far-fetched? Might not some seaman, with foreign cigarettes in his pocket, have sat there, smoked a couple and passed on? And might he not have laid them on the big broad leaf with some idea of avoiding a fire? He might have had bad luck at some former time; had unintentionally set light to the dry undergrowth in some wood where he was resting; might even have set fire to a hay-rick, and got into bad trouble.

But what seaman, foreign or other, passed through Calderton? And more conclusive still, what way-faring seaman, tramping between ports or to his home from a port, anointed himself with that stinking stuff?

No, it wouldn't do. *They were after him.*

And gripping his stick, Ferring-Chevigny gazed about him.

The fellow must have been here quite recently. The cigarette-butts were cold, but a man had been smoking there a few minutes before. Which way had he gone? Back towards the inn or on in the direction of Calderton? He couldn't have gone across the field, or he'd still be in sight.

Perhaps the best thing would be to stand and watch for a while. He might come into view on the far side of the opposite hedge, across the field there, as he went up the green hill that rose about half a mile distant, its sides scarred with clumps of gorse, rabbit-holes and little winding sheep-paths. Yes, he'd watch a while.

And as he did so, Captain Ferring-Chevigny was aware that the glory of the morning had departed, its beauty dimmed, as though a slight cloud had obscured the sun, throwing a thin blighting shadow on the lovely scene.

Was it one of those clouds no bigger than a man's hand that—how did the quotation go? Anyhow, he was being a fool. This England, this Calderton, this haven-under-the-hill, this great compensating stroke of luck, this success-at-last, were not the insubstantial fabric of a dream to be dissipated and dissolved by an odour, the mere smell of a Damned Dirty Dago.

Yes, it was indeed time he retired from all dangerous business. His nerve was going, if he could be frightened by a smell. And with a short and angry laugh, Captain Ferring-Chevigny turned on his heel and in leisurely manner resumed his walk in the direction of Calderton.

But his day was spoilt.

XIII

Without troubling to knock at the door, ask permission to enter, or in any way announce himself, the admirable Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny walked into my sitting-room that night, as I sat, smoking the last pipe of the day, deep in thought before the delightful but really unnecessary fire.

Without greeting, I steadfastly regarded the gentleman in a way that quite failed to make him feel uncomfortable.

“Hullo! Got such a thing as a whisky-and-soda about? Or a brandy-and-soda. And a cigar,” he asked, unabashed.

“I’ve no whisky; I’ve no brandy; and I don’t smoke cigars.”

“And don’t swear, don’t gamble, and never cock an eye at a lass, eh? Well, well, well! . . . What about taking steps to get some liquor?” he added.

“It’s just on eleven. I’m not going to start ringing bells and . . .”

“I should, if I were you. Wiser. Much wiser.”

And giving me a pleasant smile, he pressed the bell-push, turned the other arm-chair round to face the fire, seated himself and grinned ingratiatingly.

“Don’t feel like bed yet,” he said, and fell silent.

Robert knocked and entered.

“D’you want whisky or brandy?” I asked, addressing the uninvited guest.

“Brandy. Bring a bottle and a balloon glass. And a box of cigars.”

“Soda-water, sir?” inquired Robert.

“Good Lord, man, no. Liqueur brandy. The old and bold. Did you ever see anybody put soda-water in old brandy, in a balloon glass?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Robert.

“My condolences,” growled Ferring-Chevigny, and Robert departed.

“No, don’t feel a bit like bed,” he continued, “and I don’t mind telling you, my lad, that I’m uneasy.”

“You amaze me,” I said.

“Yes, I amaze myself a bit. The fact remains, though.”

“What’s making you feel uneasy?”

“Oh, shadows o’er life’s pathway cast. Coming events casting shadows before them, too. I get these hunches, nowadays. I’m not superstitious, you know, but I’ve got a sort of a premonition.”

“Of what?”

“Coming events,” he grinned. “If they do come, it’ll be ‘draw stumps’ for yours

truly. Stir stumps, too.”

This was extremely interesting. For surely the sooner and the further he went away, the better. He’d be just as much of a menace, but not as much of a nuisance, or rather, a curse, an incubus.

“Feel as though someone were walking over my grave,” he said. “Walking over it! Running round and round it in circles; dancing on it; damn well digging it.”

“An unpleasant feeling,” I observed.

“Yes. Silly expression, if you come to think of it. ‘Walking over your grave’—before you’ve got one. I suppose it means walking over the place where your grave is going to be. More sense in the expression ‘somebody digging your grave.’ Well, that’s how I feel to-night . . . Perhaps because I’ve seen so many poor devils digging their own graves.”

“Digging their own graves?”

“Yes. That was one of El Benemerito’s little jokes. What he called a labour-saving device. Make a chap dig his own grave. Then stand with his back to it. If he fell neatly into it when the firing-squad shot him, that was good joss, sign of luck. For El Benemerito, of course. If he was particularly annoyed with the about-to-be-deceased, he’d pot him himself with his revolver, at ten paces; and if he had potted him straight into the grave, he was frightfully pleased. Like a good shot at billiards.”

“Would he do that with you if you fell into his hands?” I asked.

I think Ferring-Chevigny shivered or shuddered slightly.

“No. If he were going to kill me, it wouldn’t be until I was more than ready to be killed. And I’ve no doubt that, when he had finished with me, I should have to dig my grave and then get into it.”

“Alive?”

“Yes. Alive. It’s one of my nightmares. Seen it done more than once. On the last occasion, El Benemerito gave me a nasty look, as much as to say, ‘I’ve got my eye on you too, my lad.’ I found he had, and stood not upon the order of my going. I’m still going, in a manner of speaking.”

Robert entered with the brandy and cigars, opened the ancient bottle, and Ferring-Chevigny half filled the balloon glass with the ’48 brandy.

Before Robert had closed the door behind him the glass was empty and replenished.

“Ah! That’s better. Like milk. I’ll say Arthur keeps a cellar. Sure you won’t have some?”

“Quite sure, thank you.”

“Good. Going to bring your Anthony up a non-smoking teetotaler, who’ll neither

swear, gamble, nor cock his eye at a lass, too, eh?"

"Well, I shan't urge him to smoke, nor ply him with drink."

"Nor swear in front of him, eh?"

"Nor behind him."

"What's wrong with swearing?"

"Nothing, that I know of."

"Why not, then?"

"Matter of habit, I suppose."

"Wonder how one forms the non-swearing habit."

"A distaste for ugliness might have something to do with it," I observed. "Ugly words, ugly noises, ugly loss of temper, and so on."

"I see. And how did you acquire the non-smoking habit?"

"I haven't."

"Why not a cigar, then?"

"Prefer a pipe."

"And the non-drinking habit?"

"Don't like alcohol; and like still less its effects on me."

"But you'd cock an eye at a lass if not at a glass, eh? And we could give the lass a name, couldn't we?"

I looked him in the face and contrived to hold his gaze, and without any change of countenance, I believe.

He looked away while I still stared at him, and he gave vent to his fatuous laugh.

"Well, well. Joke's-a-joke. No offence. I come to praise Cæsar, not to bury him. So don't burrow into yourself. Come to the surface again."

Another draught of brandy. And this time he filled the big glass completely.

"Yes, I've come to talk to Cæsar, not to annoy him. You are doing fine, and the boy is a credit to you. Damn nice boy and a little gentleman."

"He's a gentleman," I agreed.

"Mind you, he's a queer youngster. Not everybody's cup of tea. If I had a boy of my own, I don't know that I'd want him to be exactly to Anthony's pattern."

"No, I imagine not," I said.

"No."

Leaning back in the chair, his legs stretched straight in front of him, face upturned to the ceiling, he inhaled deeply, and slowly and luxuriously breathed forth the blue fragrant smoke.

"Gad, it must be very nice to have a nipper of your own. Your very own boy, to bring up and teach and train, like you do a dog."

“Just like that,” I murmured.

“Yes, I’d like a boy of my own. Handed over to me when he was old enough to be some good, y’ know. Blow his own nose and do up his own buttons and that. Take him rattin’, blood him, teach him to shoot and to ride. Make a good scrapper of him.”

Silence.

“I’d have made a good father, y’ know.”

And turning his head, he looked me in the eyes, and if ever a man were sincere and speaking what he believed to be the truth, it was Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny at that moment.

Another silence which I forbore to break.

“But they’re queer cusses, you know. Talk about women being kittle cattle! Children have got ’em skinned a mile. God knows women are unaccountable enough, but they are nothing to children.”

Another silence.

“I met the nicest boy I ever knew, on a ship. I’ll tell you about him. And what’s a damn curious thing is, that Anthony reminds me of him, although he’d got what I’d call more guts to the square yard than Anthony has. More of a character; more to say for himself; and not so hoighty-toighty. No damned Little Lord Fauntleroy stuff about this other boy. More like a human kid, if you know what I mean . . . I’ll tell you.

“I got jolly fond of the little beggar. I’d have liked to adopt him, only they weren’t that sort of people. And if they had been, I had nowhere to stow him when I landed. Could have left him at school, I suppose, but there’s the holidays; and suppose his fees didn’t roll up one term . . . Anyhow, that’s idle speculation, for the parents were wealthy people, and the boy was the apple of their eye. Not that he was spoilt, mind you. Not a bit of it. The mother was very kind but firm, and the father was very firm but kind.

“There was a girl, too. Nice little kid, and though they treated them both absolutely alike, the boy was number one. There was no doubt about it. Not that the girl realized it; for, if anything, they were more indulgent—no, indulgent is not the word really—more demonstrative, shall I say, with her than with the boy.

“Well, they were the only kids on the ship, and great favourites with everybody. If I remember rightly, they came on board at Havana, Cuba. No, it wasn’t. It was Hamilton, Bermuda, where the parents had been visiting. Governor, or O.C. Troops, or somebody like that. Very good-class people. So, you see, the kids weren’t tropical born and bred. They had been taken for this voyage and visit to Bermuda,

for a trip, for the good of their health. What I mean to say is, it wasn't a case of temperamental spoilt brats brought up by black servants; kids with livers; given to ungovernable rages; lacking in discipline and self-control and so on. One has seen that sort of brat, American, from Panama and Philippines way; and English, coming home from India. No, these were absolutely normal, healthy, hearty English kids, well bred, well educated, and damn well brought up.

"Well, now, I developed a regular soft spot for the boy. I liked the little girl enormously, but it was the boy who filled my eye. Gad, if he had been for sale I'd have paid a good price for him. For a nicer, more attractive boy I never saw. And your young Anthony reminds me of him. Now then, what price this?"

"One afternoon, lovely day, pretty hot, everybody lying about in deck-chairs and those long Madeira cane things, whole ship quiet, I woke up from an afternoon snooze, mouth like the bottom of a parrot's cage, and thought I'd better go and have a drink. I got up, walked along the boat-deck, down the companion and on to the promenade-deck. That was quite empty. On the sunny side. Everybody was round in the shade on the port side—except for the two kids. The little girl was standing at the top of the companion that led from that deck down to the main-deck, a very steep, narrow flight of steel-plated steps. The ship was steady as a rock, and the girl was looking at something—I couldn't see what—down below.

"Just as I got sufficiently far down my companion-ladder to see her, the boy came out from the smoking-room, and then, with his back to me, he crept on tiptoe, in his rubber-soled shoes, towards the girl.

"I supposed he was going to shout 'Bo!' in her ear, or something of that sort, and I was just beginning to think it might be a dangerous thing to do—to startle her suddenly, as she was standing at the top of the steps—when he stretched his hands out in front of him at arms' length, fingers upward, then crouched, drew them back, and shot them forward with all his strength, taking the girl square in the small of the back and knocking her, head over heels, headlong down that steep flight of iron stairs.

"It was the most deliberate thing I ever saw in my life.

"And it was deliberate, cold-blooded *murder*. Yes; the poor little kid landed on her head and fractured her skull and broke her neck as well."

"Good God!" I whispered.

"Yes . . . That's what I said," continued Ferring-Chevigny. "It all happened in a flash. I suppose that between the time I saw her on the promenade-deck and the time she landed on her head, there couldn't have been more than five seconds. I had only just stepped off my ladder on to the deck, as the boy did it; and as they were

twenty or thirty yards away, I couldn't do anything. Hadn't time even to shout. I was too astounded. It wasn't until he had thrust, that I realized what he was doing. Never dreamed of such a thing, up to the very moment that she shot headlong off the deck.

"Now what do you make of that?"

"Well, if it was deliberate . . ." I began.

"My dear chap, take it from me. I've just told you I've never seen anything more deliberate in the whole of my life. The boy walked out of the smoking-room door, happened to look to the left instead of the right—in which case he'd have seen my feet coming down the companion—saw the girl, and immediately his demeanour changed. His action changed. Instead of walking, he crept on tiptoe. He crouched as he crept. Then, as I've told you, he stuck his hands out as though to measure his distance, drew them back to his shoulders, and shot them forward, as though he were going to burst a door open or knock a wall down. No sort or kind of suggestion or possibility of *accident*. And it wasn't as though he were playing one of those damnable practical jokes that boys get up to. Wasn't as though he had intended to give her a little shove forward with one hand and quickly grab her back with both. One has seen fools do that at the edge of a quay or a precipice. You know, grab hold of somebody and pretend to push them forward, and then pull them back. No, he simply took his time, judged his distance, and used all his strength and skill to knock his sister flying headlong from one deck to another . . . 'Was it *deliberate*?' Huh!"

"Well," mused I, "since it was deliberate, I should think it was a sudden surge of homicidal mania."

"Homicidal, all right," growled Ferring-Chevigny. "But you never in all your life saw a boy with less signs of mania of any sort. Absolutely bright, happy, normal boy. Normal as I am."

"And he had always appeared fond of the girl, had he?" I asked.

"Oh, absolutely. They played around together all day long. Never apart. Never a sign nor a sound of a quarrel of any sort. He was the leader in their games, of course. But he didn't want to play at anything, or do anything, without her. It was always 'we' when he told his mother what he was going to do, or wanted to do. Can 'we' go up on the bridge? Can 'we' have a line and fish over the side? Can 'we' have my soldiers out? . . . No, they were the best of pals."

"Something in the subconscious mind, then, I suppose," said I. "Jealousy, of which the conscious mind was utterly unaware. When he did it, he was what the latest jargon calls 'in the grip of the unconscious,' and didn't know what he was doing."

“Didn’t know, me foot!” jeered Ferring-Chevigny with less than his usual courtesy. “Of course he knew what he was doing. If ever a murderer in this world knew what he was doing, that one did.”

“What a ghastly thing!” I said, turning the conversation from the psychological aspects of the tragedy and the workings of the unconscious mind. “More especially for the boy himself. Worse for him than for the poor parents.”

“Shockin’! Shockin’!” he agreed. “Poor devils. Daughter killed. Son a killer—though they never knew that, unless he has confessed it, since. But anyway, daughter dead, and son homicidal. Shockin’ tragedy.”

And indeed it seemed to me that I could think of nothing more terrible that could happen to a devoted father and mother than that their only son should kill their only daughter. Better far if the children had fallen overboard together and both been drowned.

And then I thought of another tragedy, close at hand; the equally dreadful, possibly more dreadful, tragedy for which this man was wholly, solely and entirely responsible.

With difficulty I controlled myself and bit back the words that came to my lips as I watched him sitting there, half drunk, pitying these strangers and this other boy, while my Anthony . . .

“What did you do?” I asked, for the sake of saying something—and to keep myself from saying something else.

“I ran down to where the child lay, picked her up, rushed to the Surgery and handed her over to the ship’s doctor. He sent for the parents and broke it to them that she was dead.”

“You told the parents how it happened?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Why not?”

“Well. Bad enough for them as it was. Bad enough when they only thought it was an accident.”

Surprising. A piece of consideration and decency that somehow one hardly expected from this man. One would have supposed that he’d have blurted out full details. He went up in my estimation, a thing which, as I have admitted, he was annoyingly wont to do, from time to time.

“And the boy?”

“He didn’t say anything, either.”

“Did you say anything to him?”

“Not a word. Why should I? If he knew what he had done—well, he knew. If

he didn't know, why tell him? Why rub it in?"

"Exactly. It would have been a most cruel thing to do, if he didn't know."

"Yes. And whatever I may be, I am not a cruel man," quoth Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny, with complete sincerity.

Quite so. So long as his private and personal interests were not involved, he was not a cruel man. Not wantonly cruel, like his friend Gil Vicente Romez. But Self was his god, Selfishness his religion. And in his religion, he was a fanatic.

"No. So far as I was concerned, nobody ever knew that the death of the child was deliberate murder."

"And that boy reminds you of Anthony, does he?" I asked.

"No. T'other way about. Anthony reminds me of that boy."

"Did you ever talk to him about the—er—death of his sister?"

"Yes. Frequently. I didn't bring up the subject, of course, but the poor kid could never keep off it."

"Did he seem terribly grieved by the loss of his sister—who, incidentally, was his inseparable companion and playmate?"

"No. That's the queer thing. He didn't blubber, from first to last, so far as I know; and he certainly didn't seem depressed, much less bereft and broken-hearted. The parents fairly went to pieces, but the boy seemed—what shall I say—more interested than, well, shocked or dazed, or overcome with grief. In fact, there was nothing of that sort at all."

"You say he couldn't keep off the subject of the girl's death. What sort of line did he take?"

"Well, two or three. He was undoubtedly deeply interested in the subject of death itself. Death simply *as* death. Then he got on to the question of the survival of personality. Not in those terms, of course, but in childish language. Would she go to Heaven? Would he see her there? Would she change at all? Suppose he lived to be an old man, would she remain a girl of twelve? Then he'd fairly tie me up with questions about predestination, fate, kismet, that sort of thing. Not in that kind of language again, of course, but—

"Why does God allow accidents? Could anything have saved her? Why did it happen to her and not to me? Did God know, from the moment that she was born, that she'd die at the age of twelve by breaking her neck?" That sort of question."

"But nothing about the actual event itself?" I asked.

"Yes, I was coming to that, for however the conversation about her started, and whatever line he followed, he always came to that point, invariably. *How could it have happened?* And I can tell you, Waring, it was one of the strangest experiences

of my life, and that's saying something. Real psychology and all that. To sit in a deck-chair and have that kid stand beside you, his great innocent eyes looking straight into yours, and saying, as bold as brass, *or* as innocent as milk,

“*How did it happen?*”

“And you got the impression, in fact conviction, that the boy was absolutely honest, in earnest, genuine—in fact, innocent as milk, and not bold as brass?” I asked.

Ferring-Chevigny took another drink of brandy and refilled the big glass, incidentally emptying the bottle. By the time he had done the same for his balloon glass, he'd have drunk the whole bottle of old brandy. But he hadn't turned a hair. He was now, to all appearances, as sober as when he came into the room. If the brandy had had any effect at all, it had made him a little more eloquent and fluent, stimulating his mind and his memory. Doubtless other and different effects would follow.

“Well,” he said, pursing his lips and taking another cigar, “sometimes most certainly yes, and sometimes just possibly no. When he leant up against me, chattering about her, not light-heartedly but, as I say, rather with great interest than with deep concern, I felt he must be innocent. When he asked such a question as whether I didn't think that burial at sea wasn't very much nicer than burial in the clay of a churchyard, and that sort of thing, I'd wonder. And when he turned to me to say,

“‘What *could* she have been doing? Do you think she was running, and perhaps looking behind her, and simply ran right into the opening of the companion?’; and as he looked me in the eyes and I looked into his, just as though I was trying to read something, read his mind, his very soul, as in point of fact I was, I'd just answer, ‘I wonder. I greatly wonder.’”

“And, by gad, it was the truth. I did wonder. Hardly left off wondering—whether the boy was a monumental liar and a homicidal lunatic, or whether, when he did it, he had been completely unconscious of what he was doing.”

“There have undoubtedly been such cases,” I said. “Men have escaped the gallows and been set free through the defending counsel taking that line and persuading the jury that the murderer simply did not know what he was doing at the time; had no recollection of having done it, and was not responsible for his actions.”

“Yes. Quite so,” agreed Ferring-Chevigny, “but did he get off because of his ignorance of what he was doing, or because of the ignorance of the jury? Get off through the cleverness of his counsel, or the helplessness of the judge to go against the jury's verdict?”

“Of course, there’s somnambulism,” I mused aloud, “and there’s delirium, temporary insanity, that sort of thing.”

“Yes, and a dozen other doodahs,” observed Ferring-Chevigny, “but the lad wasn’t exactly sleep-walking when he sauntered out of the smoking-room, looked along the deck, saw his sister, and fairly stalked her like a cat stalking a sparrow, was he? And he was about as delirious as you are now. He was in perfect health. And as for temporary insanity, the same applies. He was just about as insane as you or I . . . No, it was murder. Conscious or unconscious, that is to say. What I mean is, he went up to the girl and killed her as intentionally as I pick up this glass and drink.”

And Ferring-Chevigny suited the action to the word. He had finished the bottle and reached the top of his form, the apex of his intelligence, clarity of memory, and lucidity of argument.

“And generally you decided in favour of innocence? What about when you had faint doubts?”

“Why, I got that sort of uneasy feeling when he stared at me a second too long, when he opened his eyes a fraction too wide, when he looked too damned good to be true—as he sometimes seemed to do.

“And then again, he came it too often. Harped on it too much, because, as I have said, he never brought up the subject without that eternal ‘What happened? What caused the accident?’ and some fresh suggestion such as, ‘Perhaps she tripped at the top of the steps and fell down them.’

“One day he actually took me to the spot to show me how there was not only a grooved steel plate on each wooden step, but one at the top, on the deck itself, and as it was about three-eighths of an inch thick, the edge of it did offer at least a tiny stumbling-block—conceivably just high enough to catch the toe of a little shoe.”

“A case of ‘methinks he doth protest too much,’ eh?” I mused.

“Yes. At times I was inclined to feel that he rather over-did it. And when I thought that, I wondered whether he was reassuring himself that it was all-right; that no one suspected anything; that he had got away with it all right; and that I and everybody else took the view that it was an accident.”

Ferring-Chevigny fell silent, picked up the empty bottle, and looked at me. For a moment I thought he was going to suggest ringing for another bottle, but he put it down, yawned widely, and threw the butt of his cigar into the fire-place.

“Yes, by gad,” he said, “interesting is the word. Amazing to listen to that lad, watch the changing look of his eyes and the play of expression on his face, and speculate as to whether he was a cunning and callous young murderer or an innocent

little chap who was merely—queer. Like young Anthony.”

I let this last remark pass in silence, realizing that it might only have been uttered to annoy, or at any rate to draw me, and get a rise.

“I should like to have been present when he was told what had happened,” I said, “to see how he carried it off, then. That must have been the real test, I should think, as to whether he was innocent and ignorant of what he had done, or cognizant and guilty.”

“Yes, you’d think so, wouldn’t you? But it wasn’t,” said Ferring-Chevigny. “Point of fact, I was there. After the surgeon had sent for the parents and they had realized that the child was dead, the mother’s one idea, when she came round from her fainting-fit or collapse, was that the boy shouldn’t see the girl as she was; that he shouldn’t get a shock; that he should be told carefully and properly. Someone must break it to him gently.

“And I offered to do it. I was in the Surgery, of course, when they came, and I stayed in case I could be of any sort of help, for it looked at first as though the mother would have to be carried to her cabin. The husband wasn’t much good, and the doctor was—well—occupied.

“But they declined my offer and said they’d rather tell him themselves.

“And here’s an interesting point. At that very moment, the Surgery curtain was pulled aside and in walked the boy. I got between him and the surgeon’s bench on which the girl’s body was lying, and said,

“Hullo! What d’you want here?” And it must have been a trick of light, for sunshine was reflected from the water through the porthole on to the white ceiling, moving and flickering, you know. But I seemed to see a look come into the boy’s eyes, and disappear again, if you know what I mean.

“And that sudden look of guilt or fear or knowledge or whatever it was, that came and went like a flash, coupled with the fact that he had come to the Surgery then, gave me the wrong idea. Until he spoke, I thought he had come to give himself up; come to confess; come to tell the whole truth about how it happened. But as he looked me straight in the face with his clear innocent gaze, and said,

“*What’s up? Is anything the matter?*” I twigged at once that I was wrong. He was going to brazen it out—and if that were so, I wasn’t going to give him away. Or conversely, he knew nothing whatever of what he had done—and I wasn’t going to tell him or anybody else.

“So you see, he had his line from the very first, whether premeditated or not. And his line was that he knew nothing whatever. But I made a mental note to ask him when we were alone, why—since he knew nothing whatever—he had come to

the Surgery! A queer place for a kid to go to in the middle of the afternoon.

“And as we stood grouped there, the surgeon bending over the little girl, the father supporting the mother, and I getting between the boy and the bench, the mother broke down and burst into the most awful flood of tears and sobbing, and calling to the dead child. Probably saved her life that she could cry. Then,

“‘*What’s up?*’ said the boy again. ‘*What’s happened? What’s the matter?*’

“And I thought the best thing I could do was to clear him out of it. So I said,

“‘Here, come along with me, son,’ and took him by the hand and more or less dragged him out of it and up on deck.

“Then in spite of what the mother had said, I did tell him. It seemed to me that, having come into the Surgery and seen for himself that there was some hell of a bad business on, it would be perfectly idiotic to pretend that there was nothing whatever wrong.

“And do you know, it was only when I began to tell him, that I realized that there was no need; remembered that he knew more about it than anybody; that it was he who had *done* it.

“So there I was, breaking it to him gently, just as though it was ghastly news that must be given to him with as little shock as possible. And, by gad, that kid could act—or else it was a marvellous case of one of your psychological flap-doodles.”

The speaker paused and took a third cigar, lit it and settled back again in his chair.

“Mind you,” he resumed, “in spite of the fact that he had turned up at the Surgery so *à propos*; in spite of that look of knowledge, of cunning, and of guilt that I may or may not have seen on his face; and in spite of the fact that I had seen him deliberately knock that poor kid down the stairs, I decided that, on the whole, he was innocent! Innocent of intention, that is to say, and that his ‘*How on earth could it have happened?*’ was genuine.”

“By the way,” I asked, “how did he account for visiting the Surgery in the middle of a hot afternoon, visiting an out-of-the-way place presumably three or four decks down below where he usually played with his sister?”

“Oh, he had an answer pat enough. He had heard the steward, the surgeon’s dispenser, in point of fact, tell his father and mother that the doctor wanted to speak to them at once, in the Surgery. He had thought that something must be wrong and that he would go too. He had never seen inside the Surgery.

“And he confessed—or with damnable cunning invented—that he thought perhaps there might be sweets in the Surgery like there are in the chemists’ shops.

“‘You know,’ he said, ‘black-currant jujubes, cough-drops, barley-sugar, acid-

drops, lemon-drops, that sort of thing.’

“And as he said it, it all sounded perfectly plausible. Just the sort of thing a kid would do. Often wanted to go into the Surgery; hadn’t had the nerve; but here was a first-class opportunity, mother and father going down there.”

Silence.

“No, there was nothing to that idea of yours of how important it might have been to note the way in which he took the news when he was told what had happened. For he took it perfectly. Absolutely naturally. Though I admit that some kids might have been more distressed than he was. But there, you never know. One kid’ll be broken-hearted when its father or mother dies, and another will promptly ask if it’ll have nice new black clothes for the funeral. Something of that sort.

“Yes, it was a queer business, and I don’t know to this day whether that kid was a callous little murderer or a blameless and pitiable innocent.”

Again my visitor yawned cavernously. The brandy was taking effect.

“Wha’ ’bout a spot o’ bed?” he mumbled. “Yarning for hours. What started me tellin’ you ’bout that boy? Oh, I know. Young Anthony reminds me of him.”

And closing his eyes, he began to breathe heavily.

A minute or two later, he was asleep and snoring.

So Anthony reminded him of the wretched child who had killed his sister.

Why?

Or was it simply untrue; and had he merely remembered the young murderer, simply because he had happened to be speaking of another boy; of Anthony?

How had the subject arisen?

Thinking back, I remembered that he had said something to the effect that Anthony, though a nice boy and a little gentleman, was a queer youngster, and not everybody’s cup of tea. Then, that he would like to have a boy of his own, though they were kittle cattle and unaccountable. And then he had begun to tell me about a particularly unaccountable sample of the kittle cattle; one who had been all that a boy should be; one who had pleased and attracted him enormously—and had suddenly committed a murder. Why should Anthony remind him of such a boy?

Probably because, in spite of what he had said, Anthony really appealed to him as much as the other boy had done. Yes, that was what had reminded him of the young fiend—or poor unfortunate—whichever he might be.

Or had he told me the story of this other boy simply to annoy me, to prick the bubble of my ‘fatuous satisfaction with what I had made of Anthony’—as he would call my pride in him.

The devil of doubt and incipient anxiety gnawed at my mind. Could it really be

that he saw something in Anthony that reminded him of a peculiarity, an abnormality, in the other boy; something of which he had not told me?

But why shouldn't he tell me, especially if he thought it would hurt and annoy. Possibly because he didn't wish to admit that his young friend fell short of perfection: for would the committing of a mere murder, *en passant*, by an admired young friend, constitute a flaw in his character as judged by the approving and lenient eye of Captain Ferring-Chevigny?

But wasn't this very definitely a case of Much Ado About Nothing? Why should I worry because the man professed to be reminded of a homicide by some kind of resemblance between this boy and Anthony? I was being fanciful and foolish.

Realizing this, I was nevertheless annoyed and perturbed, as I stared at the snoring sleeper opposite to me, his empty bottle beside him, two of his cigar-butts stinking in the ash-tray between us, another adorning the hearth, their ash liberally besprinkled over his clothes and the carpet.

I wondered if he would be surprised into speaking the truth if I roused him suddenly and shot a question at him as he awoke. I had either heard or read somewhere that that was one way of getting at the truth that was in a person's mind. Probably he'd be too annoyed to answer at all. However, I'd try.

Leaning forward towards him, I suddenly bawled at the top of my voice,

"Hi! You!" and succeeded beyond my expectations. For he jumped as though he had been shot. He had certainly spoken the truth when he had said that he was uneasy and apprehensive. Definitely he was nervy. And as he shot up in his chair, I continued almost without a pause after my shout,

"Why does Anthony remind you of that boy on the ship?"

And instantly he replied,

"The queer look that comes into his eyes. As though he peeped out at you from ambush, if you know what I mean. A look of wisdom, as though he knows a damn sight more than he says. So he does, too. As though he always has something up his sleeve. So he has too. Deep young beggar . . . Got *me* taped, I do believe."

And leaning back he yawned again and said it was time he went to bed, as he thought he could sleep now. I don't think he had any idea that he had just been asleep, and imagined that my question had followed immediately upon his last remark, his last words, "Young Anthony reminds me of him."

I rose to my feet, as I did not propose to discuss Anthony. I had learned what I wanted to know, and was none the happier for the knowledge. For I felt that in the moment of waking, Ferring-Chevigny had spoken the simple truth, and had not been talking to annoy me.

Anthony had reminded him of the boy on the ship—and for the reason that he gave.

What made me the more unhappy, resentful and angry, was the fact that I could not contradict him about that aspect of Anthony. I had, of course, noticed it myself, from the first; had observed it very frequently; and had given it a very great deal of thought.

It was remarkable and discomfiting that this man should have described it so accurately—the look the boy sometimes had of knowing more than he admitted, meaning more than he said; what, indeed, I have referred to already as the ‘ageing’ sort of look that came into his eyes, as though the brain of an adult, endowed with wisdom, knowledge and understanding, were behind the face of a child. It was indeed, in Ferring-Chevigny’s own words, as though Anthony peeped out at you from ambush; from where he hid behind his own boyish façade.

And though my mind was at the moment obsessed with Anthony, I could not help realizing, once more, how complex a character Ferring-Chevigny had; how intricate was the network of his thoughts and fancies; how various and contradictory the aspects of his mind.

How could a man be so observant and so blind; so intelligent and so stupid; so sensitive in some ways, so callous in others; so acute and yet so blunted? From the way in which he spoke, he undoubtedly had felt a very genuine disinterested affection for this boy on the ship; and yet, up to that moment, I would have sworn that he was utterly incapable of loving anyone but himself, of considering anything but his own interests.

Quite obviously, again, he had noticed this peculiarity of Anthony’s; yet, up to that moment, I had felt certain that no one, no one whomsoever, had remarked it.

I studied his face. He was wide awake enough now.

“And the boy on the ship had that sort of look, had he?” I asked, without admitting or denying that Anthony had any such idiosyncrasy.

“After the murder, he had,” was the prompt reply. “And no doubt about it. It was one of the things that made me say just now that, although most of the time I thought he was innocent and ignorant of what he had done, a small part of the time I doubted it; what made me—just now and again—wonder whether he was a callous and cunning young killer or a poor little chap who was absolutely innocent of evil intention; and only queer, like young Anthony.”

He stared, unseeing, at the fire.

“I couldn’t swear, of course, that there was nothing of the sort before the murder, but I rather think I should have noticed it if there had been. It may have been

there. It may have been—without my seeing it. Of course, I wasn't what you might call *studying* him before he killed his sister. I was only enjoying him, so to speak. He took me out of myself and I loved playing with him; listening to him chattering with the little girl; giving him rides on my shoulder all over the place; and telling him yarns. He loved a good tale . . .

“But after I had seen him deliberately kill the little girl, I naturally sat up and took notice. I couldn't have liked him more—well—loved him more, I might say; but I noticed him more, studied him, so to speak. Watched his face when he was discussing the accident. And then it was that I saw in him what I see in Anthony; that oldish *knowledgeable* sort of look, if you know what I mean.”

I did—only too well. And I had had enough.

“I'm going to bed,” I said.

“About time too,” agreed Ferring-Chevigny. “I can't sit here all night listening to *you*.”

XIV

Next evening, Captain Ferring-Chevigny, with a pleasant good night to the footman who opened the big double front doors and let him out, stood on the wide flagged balustraded space from which the great flights of steps curved, left and right, down to the drive below.

A most lovely evening for a stroll. No moon yet, but the stars were glorious. Almost like the sort of night one got in the tropics. Perhaps it would be as well to go back to the inn by way of the main avenue, as the moon wasn't up. Couldn't miss one's way in the dark, with gravel underfoot; and there would be someone at the lodge to let him out if the gates were locked.

Lovely place. Lovely evening. Lovely life . . . One of Arthur's cigars before he set off. And taking out his cigar-case, he bit the end from a cigar with one nip of his sharp front teeth—something characteristic in that action—lit the cigar, exhaled luxuriously, descended the steps and started on his way.

Yes, it was a bit dark, here in the drive, but you couldn't have a magnificent chestnut avenue like this without a certain tunnel-like effect.

However, darkness by night was delightful shade by day; and if it were suggestive of a tunnel, it had its compensating advantages. One couldn't lose one's way in a tunnel.

And whistling softly to himself, he confidently made his way along the avenue, glancing up between the trees, from time to time, at the starry sky.

Well, things were going very nicely. He had just about got Katherine where he wanted her; and by the time Arthur came home, she'd be much more than willing to meet her Monty much more than half-way. Like all other women, she knew on which side her bread was buttered. Naturally, she wasn't going to be such a fool as to spill the beans when his and hers were inextricably mixed in the same pot—which they most undoubtedly were. But even if she did get an attack of high-and-mighty conscience—or, what was likelier, a *crise de nerfs* and got the wind up—she'd still realize that she couldn't do him any harm without harming herself still more.

No, she'd be held back at the last moment, whatever sort of panic or religious throes she might get into—by the realization that there were four of them, all in the same boat. *Of course* she wouldn't scuttle the boat in which were her precious Anthony, her Arthur, and what is more, herself, even for the pleasure of drowning her own lawful husband.

Naturally it was all right, and he wouldn't have been thinking such foolish

thoughts but for that queer little experience. Like the title of a short-story thriller by Robert Louis Stevenson—*The Incident of the Scented Dago and the Capadare Cigarette*. But that came of having things on one's conscience, or in the hole where one's conscience used to be, or ought to be. Some local yokel—good rhyme that, local yokel—had bought him half a pint of the ghastliest hair-oil, to impress his girl; or had knocked off a bottle of civet-cat scent in the ring-game at the Fair, and drenched himself with the muck.

And as luck would have it, the same bold lad, on a cheap return trip to some mighty city, had seen a packet of unfamiliar cigarettes in a tobacconist's window, and had bought them, to impress the other corner-boys. *Stinkadores colorados*, marked *Brazilian Cigarettes as smoked by the South American Millionaires*. That's what it was.

Yes, but what should such a lad be doing crouching under, and into, a hedge on a lovely spring morning?

On the other hand, why shouldn't he? Besides, it might not have been a local sheikh at all; it might very well have been a tramp, who had also been to the Fair; and, among the loot he had pinched when he crawled in under the back of a tent, might have been a bottle of the scent they sell at Fairs, and a packet of the cheapest foreign cigarettes, proper god-awful *cigarillos estrangeros* some gypsies had got hold of. And he might have been under that hedge all night, wakened up in the morning, and smoked some of the filthy fags for breakfast.

Yes, and, by gad, he might very well have drunk the scent that he had pinched.

These people thought nothing of drinking methylated spirit and furniture-polish; yes, and cheap commercial eau-de-Cologne if they could get it. What was that Red Biddy stuff they sell in the port slums but coloured eau-de-Cologne, methylated spirit and crude alcohol?

Why, there were a dozen explanations for the smell that had brought Boruelan scenes so vividly to his mind. He had been a fool to . . .

"*Buenas tardes! Como le va, Señor Xeres?*" suddenly and softly called a voice, apparently from the depths of the big rhododendron shrubbery in which the chestnut avenue ended.

Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny was a brave man and, in many a tight place and dangerous crisis, had displayed physical courage of a high order—but, as he admitted, his nerves were not quite what they had been, for the period spent in the Rotunda Gaol had done them no good at all—and undeniably he jumped.

And as he realized that the voice spoke in Spanish, he had that extremely unpleasant sensation caused by the apparent complete turning-over and stopping of

the heart. That *Como le va* was definitely South American. A Spaniard would have said *Como esta usted* or *Y como lo pasa usted*. Yes, this was a message from the other side of the world. From Boruela . . . And now what?

“With *El Brujo*’s compliments and hopes that you will enjoy life in Hell as much as you did in the *El Libertador* prison,” continued the voice.

A short ugly laugh.

A quiet “*Que divertido, eh?*” and a terrific

Bang . . . !

Shot, by gad!

No, he wasn’t. And with a swift and mighty bound, he leapt for the blacker darkness of the shrubbery on the opposite side of the drive.

“I see you, Señor Xeres,” cried the mocking voice, in Spanish, as he crashed into the bushes.

And instantly there followed another tremendous

Bang . . . !

He could see him, could he? Well, he’d have damned good sight if he saw him now.

Captain Ferring-Chevigny flung himself upon the ground in the pitch-black darkness behind and beneath the friendly cover of one of the great and thick old rhododendron bushes which formed the long continuous bank that was one of the June beauties of Calderton. Here he lay, recovering breath and swiftly considering his next move.

And that had better be no move at all, until the would-be assassin compelled one.

What would the swine do? He could see well enough to shoot, and he must have seen, as well as heard, him dive into the rhododendrons. Perhaps he’d wait a while and come in after him. If so, the Dago would get him. Let him come within reach of Señor Xeres’s long arms, and he’d find his ankles seized and himself on the flat of his back and Señor Xeres on top of him, with his hands at his throat, almost before he knew what had got him. And before he could use his gun, too.

The damned murdering swine must be able to see in the dark. They could, those half-Indian fellows, like cats. And what was more likely was that he had been lying flat on the ground at the edge of the gravel under a rhododendron bush; and, looking upwards, he would clearly see a passer-by, silhouetted against the sky. Well, two could play at that game. He himself, after a while, would edge forward until his head was out from under the bush, and he’d see what he could see. If he kept as still and quiet as a dead mouse, he’d see the Dirty Dago against the sky as he crossed the

road. He'd almost certainly hear him on that gravel, too, unless he was wearing sneakers.

And, supposing he didn't come straight across the drive to the right spot, one might be able to stand up in the shadow and fairly spring on him as he stepped on to the grass.

He'd go armed after this—if there were an 'after this'—and he had been a fool not to do so always. But one didn't expect this sort of thing in England. Certainly not away down in a rural back-of-beyond like Calderton. Disgusting. A damned shame and a disgrace to the police. He'd make a row about it. Write to the papers and complain . . .

Well—there was no doubt about it; they were after him. And a wave of despair, of weakness, almost of nausea passed over him as he realized that the game was up, and that he was no safer in the depths of the country than he had been in the heart of London; perhaps less so.

'*The compliments of El Brujo*,' eh? The high-souled, self-sacrificing, devoted Liberator; the second and even greater Bolivar, father of his country; the good and noble El Benemerito, *alias* Old Brujo, the Witch-doctor. *El Benemerito* in his privately owned Press, which was the sole press of Boruela; and *El Brujo* in every town and village of his privately owned country. Officially the Well-deserving; privately and secretly the Witch-doctor; the smeller-out of enemies; the relentless wholesale slayer, who, by the help of his Secret Service, was the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent punisher, the least of whose punishments was death.

'*The compliments of El Brujo*' here, in rural England, in the very park of an English county magnate, himself a ruler, the Governor of a British Crown Colony.

Yes, El Brujo's arm was long.

Well, it hadn't quite reached him yet.

Or had it?

Only the darkness had saved his life. It was a marvel that that first shot hadn't got him. Probably missed his head by the fraction of an inch.

El Benemerito's killers didn't usually miss. And of course, the second shot had been literally a shot in the dark. Simply fired at a noise, the sound of his bursting into the rhododendron clump.

Captain Ferring-Chevigny rested his head upon his hands and was amazed, indeed shocked, to find that he was almost on the point of tears. Positively, given a little self-encouragement, a little self-pity, he would have broken down, sobbed, burst into tears and blubbed like a child. It was too bad, too damned bad, after all

he had done and suffered; to have come into port like this, into safe anchorage in the beautiful little haven-under-the-hill—only to find that it was a goddam death-trap.

However, that line of country was no good to any rider. Self-pity is the bottomless pit-y, and the beginning of self-pity the end of self-help, the beginning of self-destruction.

But oh, the true pity of it. The cruel pity of it. Enough to drive a man mad. In clover, on velvet, and then—shot up. Shot clean out of the clover and off the velvet.

For he must go, and go while the going was—well—while there was any going at all.

Anyhow, he had had a lovely rest; and this time he'd set off on his travels with a full pocket, and what's more, Katty would have to keep it well lined. It was no more than a wife's duty to help her husband when he was in trouble.

Duty? It was her privilege. And the only help unfortunately that she could give him now would be financial—and that wasn't his fault. He'd have been content—'point of fact, only too thankful—to settle down in peace and quiet, with the run of his teeth and a horse and a bottle and a cigar; and beyond that, he would have accepted only a little pocket-money, mere chicken-food.

But now it would have to be cash instead of kind; instead of kindness too, if he had to put the screw on. But it wouldn't come to that. She'd be only too damned glad to see him go, and only too damned anxious to help him get away and provide him with the means of staying away. But the cruel pity of it. To have to 'take to the heather' again; to be on the run again; to 'take to the mountains' like a damned peon turning bandit in Mexico.

Where had he better go? Other side of the world, perhaps. Australia or New Zealand. Probably be safer still if he got well into the middle of Africa.

Yes, go there to escape El Brujo's killers—and die of malaria or dysentery; be eaten by a lion, taken by a crocodile, trampled by a rhinoceros, gored by a buffalo, or some damned thing!

That sort of life was all right when you felt like it. All right when you were young, but he had had enough of roughing it. More than enough of the jungle and God's great wide open spaces. Great wide open green Hell, more likely!

No, something civilized would be better. Australia perhaps. One could have quite a good time at Sydney. Or, of course, there were some pretty good spots in the South Sea Islands where one could do oneself uncommon well. Honolulu and Waikiki Beach, Hawaii and Samoa, Tahiti, places like that; and he'd like to see Pereneque Island again. No, perhaps that might be a bit risky, although it was seventeen years since his body was found there.

Perhaps Papeete would be best, Tahiti being French. Better than the Hawaiian Islands as they were American; or the Fijis which were British.

Yes, one could hide best in a great crowded town like Sydney, or on a tiny island. Surely he'd be safe enough in such a place, even from El Benemerito. Granted they cast what must be pretty well the biggest net in the world and the finest-meshed, even so they'd never spot him under an assumed name in a place like Papeete. Yes, that would be the best. The French know how to live, and there would be all sorts of fun there. And with what Katherine could easily allow him, he could do himself proud.

Meanwhile, how to get there? There'd be two great dangers; one—that he'd be killed between Calderton and Southampton or wherever he sailed from; the other that he'd be traced to the ship or seen going on board. El Benemerito had his men at every European port from which ships sailed, and they kept close watch on all who entered and left the country.

Yes, if he were seen boarding a ship for the Panama Canal, they'd be on the look-out for him at Colon and Panama. They'd get him for a certainty when he changed ships for the South Sea Islands. Of course, he might hop across to France and get a French boat direct to Papeete—if they didn't see him at Dover or Calais, Southampton or Cherbourg, and put a spoke in his wheel—or a knife in his gizzard.

Anyhow, he had got to go, and he might as well have a run for his money, as sit here and 'take it.'

But what a nerve, shooting him up, actually here in Calderton! What an organization; what an Intelligence Service. If he hadn't thought he was safe anywhere else in England, he might have supposed he was safe in the depths of this particular county. And if he weren't safe in a rural inn and a country lane at the back of beyond, he might reasonably have thought he was safe in Sir Arthur Calderton's own back garden.

And he could have sworn that he had shaken them off, that he hadn't been followed down here. Why, coming down from London, he had walked for hours, he had cycled for hours, he had made four different railway journeys of it, he had been the first out of the train at Calderton and had sat on that seat on the platform until there hadn't been a soul in the place except himself and the ticket collector.

It was amazing. And what was more, it was terrifying.

Yes, Papeete next stop. And meanwhile, what? It would be madness to try to get to the Calderton Arms to-night. This damned gunman had only got to wait somewhere in sight of the inn where his quarry would be bound to pass close to him.

The best thing to do would be to get back to the house. That would be it. Lie up

at Calderton House for a bit, and then get away in broad daylight, and in company too. Even one of El Brujo's killers would hardly assassinate him deliberately and openly, with people looking on. You can't do that sort of thing in England and get away with it. No, they didn't stand for that sort of thing here; and the foreign killers know it. He'd make the tutor fellow come to the station with him and see him off. Bring young Anthony, too. And there'd be the chauffeur. And he'd travel third class in a compartment with several other people. Damn it, he'd make the tutor come to London with him.

By gad, why not go the whole hog and make the tutor see him safe on board the ship? And he needn't go by train at all, so far as that went. Go by car, straight from door to door. Get in at Calderton House and get out at the foot of the gangway. And remain indoors at Calderton House until he had booked his passage, got his ticket, and made all arrangements.

Of course, he could point out to the tutor and Katherine that it was entirely up to them; that since they were so anxious to get rid of him, they could damn well *get* rid of him; see him safe out of the country. It would be the simplest thing to make it perfectly clear that his safety was their own. Yes, and he'd give Katty a fair deal. Provided she did her best to help him with cash and the loan of her boy-friend, he'd do his best to make things easy for her; make everything all right for her, in point of fact. He'd fade away as quietly as he had arrived, and no one a penny the worse—except Arthur, in the matter of his pocket, and he'd never know it. Katty would take damn good care of that. . . .

Meanwhile, how to get back to the house? He couldn't lie here till daylight. On the other hand, he could. Perhaps it would be the best thing to do—though it would look a bit queer if he knocked-in at dawn; came home with the milk. Start the servants talking, and there was no need to do that. The less he was talked about the better, here, there, or anywhere else.

Besides, who was he that he should lie on his belly under a bush all night long because one of that damned witch-doctor's killers was out to get him?

No, he'd wait another half-hour or so, then wriggle forward, stick his head out and watch for the gunman to cross the drive and come looking for him, and if he got half a chance, he'd jump on the swine's back, gun or no gun, and strangle the life out of him.

Who would it be? The voice sounded unpleasantly like that of El Benemerito's own private thug, Juan Torillo, his bodyguard, body-servant and right-hand man, or devil.

But it would hardly be he, for Romez would scarcely pay even his old friend

Señor Xeres the compliment of sending Torillo all the way to England to get him. Besides, Torillo was a full-blooded Carib Indian and would be unable to get along in England or in any other European country, except Spain.

What was more likely was, that the Well-deserving had sent for half a dozen of his brightest young men and said,

“Get you down to Caibo, take the next ship to Colon, and pick up the first mail-boat to England. Stay there till you’ve got the good Señor Xeres, and don’t come back till you have.”

But how on earth, once again, had they traced him to Calderton?

After lying motionless and silent for what seemed to him to be the better part of an hour, Ferring-Chevigny edged gently and slowly forward, inch by inch, on his hands and toes, until, his head protruding from beneath the leaves of the great rhododendron bush, he could see the stars, the tree-tops silhouetted against them, and the gravel road a faintly outlined blur amidst the greater darkness.

Here again he waited, half fearing, half hoping, to see a black figure between him and the starry sky. For it needs cold courage to attack, unarmed, a man who, concentrating every sense and nerve and faculty, advances with his finger upon the trigger of an automatic pistol.

Nevertheless, such was Ferring-Chevigny’s disappointment and grief, chagrin and rage, that had his enemy come within his reach, he would have seized his ankles to jerk him from his feet, or flung himself at him, low, in a flying rugger tackle.

But nothing moved.

There was no sound, and, having buttoned his coat, turned up its collar and tucked his cuffs inside his sleeves, that no gleam of white linen might betray him, he rose, with infinite precaution, to his feet, and crouching low, crept softly along the grassy verge of the drive in the black shadow of the shrubs.

Arrived at the beginning of the chestnut avenue, he turned aside from the edge of the gravel road, on to the wide turf of the park, and, his nerves overcoming his discretion and self-control, ran for his life in the direction of the house.

In his own hiding-place opposite to that of his quarry, Señor Diogenes Barrios heaved a sigh of relief, as he pocketed his automatic, rose to his feet and brushed himself down.

That had been a little too exciting. Distinctly unpleasant, not to say nerve-racking, lying there armed with nothing better than an automatic loaded with blank cartridge. A nice thing if that damned great Englishman had caught him. Like all the rest of his beefy tribe, the English brute would have a knowledge of *pugilato*, *le*

boxe, yes, boxing, and would have given Señor Barrios a frightful hiding if he had been able to lay hands on him.

Carramba! They didn't want much for their money, up at the Embassy!

XV

Things took a turn for the worse, if that were possible, when our Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny announced that henceforth he proposed to live at Calderton altogether.

What prevented the situation from becoming absolutely unbearable was his assurance that it might not continue for very long. Had we been able to place any real reliance upon his word, the assurance would have made his visit almost welcome. As it was, we could only hope, hope for the best, and do, from hour to hour and day to day, what seemed to be for that best.

I had, as usual, sat in the drawing-room for a while that evening, talking with Lady Calderton on the subject that obsessed our minds, the only subject of which we could possibly talk or think; and, having succeeded in making her take a little more hopeful view of the situation, had persuaded her to go early to bed. I had then gone up to my room and thrown myself down in my armchair to have a last pipe before turning in. I had just got my pipe alight and going well when there came a tap at my door and Jenkins entered, a little hurried and perturbed.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said, speaking somewhat more quickly than usual, “but the gentleman has come back. Had a sort of heart-attack or fainting fit. Just managed to get back to the house, and had time to ring, before he collapsed. When Robert opened the door, he was lying against it. Very bad, he seems.”

No such luck, thought I, but, putting on a hypocritical look of concern, sprang to my feet and said,

“That’s bad. I’ll come at once. Perhaps we ought to ring up Dr. Stanton.

“Or have you done so?” I added, praying that he had done nothing of the sort. For I felt in my bones that this was another of Ferring-Chevigny’s tricks. He had been well enough when he had left the house an hour or two ago. Besides, if he had had a seizure, a stroke, or a heart-attack, all that time ago, it would have been at the inn or close to it. Surely he hadn’t been lying at the bottom of our main entrance all this time?

Thus thinking, I followed Jenkins by the short cut down the formerly-secret staircase into the hall.

On a huge oak chest lay Ferring-Chevigny, a cushion beneath his head, his eyes half closed, the eyeballs rolled back so that only the whites showed. His lips were parted and distended in a kind of fixed grin, displaying his even teeth. His colour was

bad, and beads of moisture stood upon his forehead. Apparently breathing had ceased. He certainly appeared to be in a bad way, and I wondered whether the cold sweat could be that of death. Frankly I hoped it was.

Did I commit murder in my heart, not only in hoping this, but in deciding that I would not tell Jenkins to ring up Dr. Stanton and ask him to come as quickly as he could? The moralist might so argue—and he is quite welcome to do it.

“Brandy, I think, Jenkins,” I said, “and if you’ve got any ice, we’ll put some on his forehead and wrists. If there’s any strong ammonia, that might be useful, too.”

“Her Ladyship has some smelling-salts, sir, but . . .”

“Plain strong ammonia would be better, I think,” I said grimly. “There’s some in my bathroom.”

I’d be damned if I allowed him to get anything of Lady Calderton’s for the fellow’s benefit.

Directing the gaping Robert to fetch the bath ammonia, Jenkins departed in search of brandy. As his footsteps died away along the flagged corridor that led to the servants’ quarters, Ferring-Chevigny’s eye-balls returned to their normal position, the eye-lids opened widely, the mouth relaxed, and he raised his head.

“Good Lord!” he whispered.

“What?” I asked sharply.

“He’s gone for the *cooking*-brandy!”

“And some ammonia,” I added.

“Well, you can drink that, Waring. Listen—with both ears. You’ve got to get me to bed. Right here. I’ve come to stay for a bit. I have just been shot up. Here in the drive. I must stay in the house—in hiding—or they’ll get me.”

“What d’you mean?”

“Just what I say. Have a room got ready, and I’ll go to bed at once. I’ll stay in bed all day to-morrow, too—perhaps the next day as well—and I’ll be too ill to leave the house for some time. How long I don’t know, but it will be as long as I think fit. Let my wife know, and she can tell the servants what she likes. Got to keep up appearances, I suppose—and I’ve done my part. It’s up to her now. I’m going to lie doggo here until . . .”

Suddenly he fell back and resumed his cataleptic trance; nor, when Jenkins handed it to me, could I force any of the cooking-brandy between his clenched teeth. Nevertheless, the ammonia worked wonders, if only by suggestion; for, uncorking the bottle, I bade Jenkins take the unfortunate gentleman’s handkerchief, press it firmly across his mouth, while I raised his head, closed one of his nostrils, and pressed the bottle hard against the other.

It proved unnecessary. Again the eyes became normal, the mouth relaxed, a deep sigh was audible and the patient spoke.

“Where am I?” he whispered.

“Not where you ought to be,” replied I promptly.

Ferring-Chevigny eyed me straitly.

“Not at the inn? . . . Good Lord, no. Calderton . . . What’s happened? Oh, I remember. I say, old chap, I’m afraid I shall have to ask for a bed. I’m in for one of my bad goes . . . Always begin like this. Heart-attack . . . Rigor . . . Malaria . . . If you and Jenkins would give me a shoulder each, I think I could get upstairs. I’ll lie down on your bed if I may, while they get one ready, eh?”

And so Captain Ferring-Chevigny came into residence at Calderton.

§ 2

To do him justice, I must say that on the whole he behaved well, though whether this was due to the fact that he was badly frightened and very anxious as to his future, I don’t know.

When I visited him in bed the next morning, ostensibly to see whether he had everything he required, but actually to try to discover his plans, I found him definitely subdued and inclined to self-pity.

“What did I tell you?” he said. “Thought I was drawing the long bow, didn’t you, when I told you about El Benemerito’s intelligence-organization—how it was the best in the world, and even better in foreign countries than at home? I told you he could strike equally surely, if not equally quickly, in London or in Boledo. Well, what price striking in Calderton? Right here, in Calderton Park. How’s that for a long arm?”

And he proceeded to tell me how someone had emptied an automatic at him at a few feet range; how by skilful ducking and dodging, turning and twisting and zig-zagging, he had escaped being shot, by drawing his assailant’s fire until the pistol was empty and then rushing at the spot whence the flashes had come, and put the cowardly ruffian to flight. Then without waiting for the assassin to reload his pistol, he had run back to the house.

“I told you they were after me, didn’t I?” he said. “Well, they all but got me tonight. I marvel there are no bullet-holes in my hat or clothes.”

“The sooner you get away from here the better,” I observed, “now that it is obvious that they know where you are.”

“You’ve said it, brother. If I stay here, they’ll get me. I can’t spend the rest of my life inside the house, and if I could, our Arthur might object.”

“He might think it strange,” I agreed with somewhat heavy sarcasm.

“Yes, I’m not going to do anything in a hurry, though. I’ll go as soon as the coast is clear, if ever it is—and I’ll take you with me.”

“What d’you mean?” I asked, making little effort to hide the unbounded satisfaction that his words gave me. For come what might, surely the first thing was to get rid of the man, get him as far away as possible, get a rest, a breathing-space, and then hope for the best.

“What do I mean? What I say. When the going seems good, we’ll go together, you and I and the chauffeur and anybody else we can think of, and you will see me safe on board the ship. I’m not going to set foot outside this house after dark, and I’m not going out in daylight until I go for good; and I’m not going until two or three hours before my ship sails. And you are going to take care of me; stick closer to me than a brother sticketh, and get me safe out of the country. See? . . . They won’t shoot me up in broad daylight and in good company, because they don’t want to hang in England for killing me, any more than they want to do so in Boruela for not killing me. So you are going to chaperone me, my lad.”

“Why should I?”

“Don’t ask silly questions. You get me safe out of the country, and you and the girl-friend will be safe here *in* the country. Arthur too. And our beloved young Anthony.”

I eyed the man without comment.

“For I shan’t squeal,” he continued, his spirits visibly rising as he planned his escape. “Don’t you be afraid. I’m no spoil-sport. You both do your best for me, and you won’t find me ungrateful.”

“Do you mean that Lady Calderton will absolutely never see or hear anything of you again—provided we get you safe out of England now?”

“Absolutely,” he replied. “Obviously I can’t come back here, can I? This place is no good any more as a hide-up. God’s curse on the swine—they’ve queered this pitch for me.”

“Yes,” I agreed heartily. “Your life won’t be worth a minute’s purchase if you show yourself outside . . . They must be determined beggars to come right into the park here.”

“Yes, by gad, what did I tell you? They stick at absolutely nothing. El Brujo is one of those who say to a man ‘go’ and he goeth, ‘come’ and he cometh. And he doesn’t cometh back until he hath done what he was told to do. Wonder how many

of them there are.”

“Well, there’s one thing,” I assured him. “If three or four of us start out together in a fast car in broad daylight, and go straight to the ship, you’ll get on board safe enough. They can’t do anything. And once you are on board, you’ll be all right.”

“You’d think so, wouldn’t you? But I rather fancy I’ll book two passages on two ships, say one from Liverpool and one from Southampton, and I’ll start out towards Bristol. And if we are followed by another fast car, which we can’t shake off, we’ll go through some town like Winchester, and as we suddenly turn a corner, I’ll jump out and nip into a shop, almost without stopping our car. Then you buzz on, and they’ll follow you, and the laugh will be on them. I’ll lie low for a time in Winchester, or wherever it is, then get a taxi or a hired car or something, to Southampton. Oh, we’ll fool them all right.”

And again his spirits obviously rose.

“And where will you go?”

“Haven’t decided, but probably . . .”

He paused and eyed me speculatively.

“Probably where you won’t know that I’ve gone,” he continued, and uttered his irritating silly laugh. “If you don’t know you can’t tell, can you? All you and Katty need know is a bank address, and the only address of mine that bank will have will be a branch of the Singapore and Sydney Bank, Shanghai way or Bangkok; and the only address that branch bank’ll ever have will be—the one I give them.”

“Excellent,” I agreed. “I assure you I haven’t the very slightest desire to know where you’ll be.”

“That’s all right then, because you wouldn’t if you did, if you know what I mean. Now I’ll tell you what you can do. You go for a walk. Take young Anthony with you, and tell that bright-eyed boy to see if he can spot the winner, in this case something foreign-looking—in the ice-cream merchant or organ-grinder line. He’ll probably be small, stocky and swarthy. Black moustache and eyebrows, black hair: that sort of brute. As I say, the kind of thing you used to see pushing an ice-cream barrow or with a smaller edition of himself on his shoulder, or on his barrel-organ. Might be two or three of them, of course; and they might be got up as gentlemen—save the mark!—South American tourists doing England. But I doubt it. More likely something in the tramp and pedlar line. And what I want you to do—though you mustn’t take the holy boy in with you, of course—is to go into the pubs and make kind inquiries.

“This assassin certainly wasn’t staying at the Calderton Arms, but he might have gone there now. He may be at the Red Lion. And there’s a stinking little beer-shop

just outside the village. I don't think it has even got a name. He may be there. Don't march in and say,

“Have you got a bloody-minded, yellow-bellied Dago who brandishes a thundering great automatic pistol staying here?”

“No?” I inquired, with the heavy sarcasm that always seemed to pass him by.

“No. You can look at the registration book at the Calderton Arms before trying the Red Lion, for they are bound to make him sign it if he goes there, and you needn't expect to find something like Señor Cascara Sagrada y Oompara Tarrara, because he won't use his own name, or anything like it.”

“No?” I inquired again.

“No. He won't use his own or any other foreign-sounding name. You look out for ‘Mr. John Thomas’ or some such name as that, written in a foreign hand—pointed, spidery, and with something funny about the loops and curves. They can't disguise it. You can have a Dago, clever as the devil at disguises, but can he disguise his handwriting so that the fact that it is foreign doesn't stick out a mile? No, he can't. Well, having spotted some foreign-looking handwriting, you say you've come to call on Mr. John Thomas. And if they say he's out, you say you'll wait for him, or make an appointment. Anyway, you get face to face with him and see whether he's a sallow, greasy-faced Dago-looking bastard.”

“And if he is?”

“That's all I want to know. You simply say that he is not the John Thomas you are looking for, the old pal who was at Oxford-and-Cambridge College with you. Something of that sort.”

“Quite,” I observed, in a manner that should have annoyed him.

“Well, 'point of fact, I don't suppose he's there. When you are sure he isn't, go to the Red Lion. Before you go in, tie a coloured handkerchief round your neck, turn up your coat-collar, pull your cap down over one eye, drop your Oxford accent and, in as Cockney a voice as you can manage, ask the blowzy woman behind the bar, or the dirty-shirted pot-man, whether there's a vacant doss for the night. If they say no, ask them if they are full, and so find out if they've got anybody staying there. If they say yes, ask to see the room, and then inquire whether they haven't got something better, and find out, that way, whether there's anyone staying there. If somebody is, then it's up to you to get a sight of him.

“Same sort of game, or more so, at the anonymous pot-house. If you draw a blank at all three, then go from door to door in the village and say you are a Census Officer, and particularly want to know if they've got any lodgers, and that anything they say will be twisted into evidence against them, so they'd better speak the truth

because it is a Government job and a hanging matter if they tell lies. In fact, go through that cursed village with a fine tooth-comb and find out where my free-shooting friend (or friends) is staying.”

“What then—if, and when, I’ve located him and . . . ?”

“Why, then it’s up to you,” he interrupted, “to find out ‘if and when’ he goes away for the day, or for good, so that I can make a bolt for it, while the coast is clear. That’s where the power of the purse and the beauty of bribery and corruption come in. You promise the old woman, or whoever it may be, a quid, if she lets you know. If she has got the intelligence to go to the Post Office and use the telephone, to send a message like ‘The cuckoo has left the nest,’ or ‘Pratztank and Widdelrat have boned the baby,’ then she can ring you up here. Or if it’s just some plain B.F., that couldn’t use a telephone, say you’ll pass the house at ten every morning and if there’s a card in the window or a jerry hanging on the knocker, that’s a sign and a token that the foreigner has gone . . . I’ll leave it to you.”

“Thank you,” I replied gratefully.

“Anyhow, you find out if there’s a Dago staying at Calderton; how many of him there is or are; and lay water-tight plans for finding out when they are going away, either temporarily or for good.”

“I’ll do that—and will take the liberty of doing it in my own way. Anything else?”

“Yes. You can tell our girl friend I want to see her.”

“If you wish to speak to Lady Calderton, you can get up and dress; and I’ve no doubt she will see you in the drawing-room, this afternoon.”

“Is that so now? Well, it doesn’t suit me to get up and dress and wait till this afternoon. So you can hop it, my lad, and bring my wife here. At the double.”

“Look here, Ferring-Chevigny, do you want me to help you?”

“Do you want me to go? What’s more, do you want me to keep my mouth shut?”

Yes, he still held the whip hand. And with sinking heart I realized that as long as he lived he’d hold the whip hand.

As long as he lived . . .

Need that be very long?

Why shouldn’t I kill him? He’d never be missed, for, legally, he didn’t exist. He had ‘died’ seventeen years ago.

For a man who could laugh that awful laugh of his; a man who could be such an utter fool as to be a criminal; a man who could be so smugly self-satisfied, and do and say such stupid things, Ferring-Chevigny could be, as perhaps I have indicated, acutely observant, and could exercise his undeniable powers of intuition pretty

accurately.

Sitting up suddenly, and pointing a finger straight at my face,

“I say, Waring,” he said, “I’m putting all my cards on the table, in front of you. I’m trusting you absolutely. I’m relying on your sense of honour, your honesty, your decency, and the fact that you are a gentleman. I trust you implicitly . . . You wouldn’t give me away to these Dagos? Get me done in, so that you and the girl—so that you and Lady Calderton—I mean . . . so that Sir Arthur and Lady Calderton—could live happy ever after?”

To this I made no reply whatsoever.

“I rely on you, Waring, and I trust you to do nothing against me—behind my back.”

To this also I made no reply.

“I know when I’m dealing with an honourable man. I am in your hands, Waring—and you can play either the gentleman or the Judas Iscariot.”

To this also I made no reply.

If he were absolutely safe so far as I was concerned, there was no reason why he should know it. It was no business of mine to give him any sense of comfort and security. And there was another thing. Who had the first claim on my ‘decency’? Lady Calderton or this blackguardly schemer?

And inasmuch as his death would be her salvation, why should I lift a finger to prevent it?

And from that it was but a short step to the question—Why should not I encompass his death? If one of the two had to die—and I was perfectly certain it would mean death to Lady Calderton—why should it not be he? Why should it be the innocent woman rather than the scoundrelly man? In principle, I am against murder, but there are worse things than murder. And this man threatened a worse thing. His very existence implied it.

And I thought of a famous phrase, a title of some Tudor pamphlet, “Killing no Murder.” Was it a murderous act to kill this reptile that had crept into this house?

And his talk of my being an honest man, an honourable man, a decent man, a gentleman; his talk of trusting me implicitly, relying on me absolutely—what was that but trickery and cunning, a base appeal to my vanity, on the presumption that I was vain and proud of my alleged honour and impeccability? It wasn’t as though he had trusted me with a simple child-like and genuine faith—as Anthony did. It was Anthony who trusted me, trusted me to do the right thing as surely as he trusted the sun and the moon and the stars to shine. This man trusted nobody, me perhaps least of all. And his putting me on my honour was but one of the tricks of his trade.

Again he seemed almost to read my thoughts, or perhaps he took my silence for dissent.

“But it is also a little bit of the ‘Trust-in-Heaven-but-keep-your-powder-dry’ wisdom, too, you know, Waring. I do trust you. I know you are incapable of a dirty trick; but I’ll put just a little bit of reliance on the fact that no one does the dirty on me and gets away with it. If I’m shot here, or anywhere else in England for that matter, or if I am kidnapped—and they are quite competent to kidnap the strongest man alive, and take him wherever they want him—if, I say, I am shot or kidnapped here, I shall blow the gaff all right.”

I eyed him in silence.

“And don’t you think,” he added, “that if I am shot in the back of the neck and haven’t any breath for blowing the gaff, it therefore won’t be blown. If anything happens to me so that I am not heard of for a given period, a letter goes automatically from my bank to General Sir Arthur Calderton. See? I should be awfully sorry for that to happen, and as you are rightly thinking, it won’t do me any good—but it’ll do you and the girl friend a hell of a lot of harm, and their beloved Anthony too, not to mention Sir Arthur. And that’s why I’ve so rigged it up that my life will be very precious to you, Waring. Therefore you’ll keep me alive and healthy and happy and free to come and go. Especially *go*. See?”

Was he speaking the truth? Somehow I didn’t believe it; but it was an uncomfortable thought. As I’ve said before, I want to be just to the man—though I’ve never in my life hated anybody as I hated him; and, in fact, I’ve never hated anybody but him—and to be quite fair, I don’t think he had done anything of the sort. Selfish he was, selfish beyond belief, cruel, heartless, and base in many ways; but, as he himself so often said, he drew the line, and I don’t think he was meanly vindictive. Not to the extent of deliberately planning a posthumous vengeance like that. Certainly he would have sacrificed any of us and all of us, to further his own interests, but I believe he wronged himself in pretending that he had planted any epistolary bomb-shell, fused and ready to be hurled in ignorance by his bank, in the event of his death or disappearance. As a matter of fact, I doubted whether he had a bank.

“Well, now we know where we are,” continued Ferring-Chevigny. “You get down to it and locate the Dagos, and I’ll have a talk with Katty. Send her up.”

And as I was about angrily to refuse, he added,

“And don’t forget, my good ass, that we must keep up appearances. Bear in mind that I’m damned ill, and that I can’t fall into the house half dead at midnight and prance about the drawing-room next afternoon in rude health, can I? She can come

here, secretly, a damned sight better than I can go there. Anyway, send her.”

And in completest agreement with what I was miserably thinking, he grinned and made the motion of one who cracks a whip.

XVI

Lady Calderton entered the room in which her husband lay in bed, and, closing the door behind her, said,

“Mr. Waring brought me your message, and I’ve come to hear anything you may have to say.

“And I pray God it may be the last time I see your face or hear your voice,” she added.

Captain Ferring-Chevigny laid down his newspaper, laughed, and extended the hand of friendship.

“Now, Katty, my dear, don’t be hard. Don’t be bitter. Let’s part friends, since part we must.”

“What did you wish to say to me? If there’s nothing new, I’ll go.”

“Well, there’s a lot new. Come and sit down here. Come along, I say. Quite like old times, isn’t it? Do you remember when you used to bring me my breakfast in bed? Always would take the tray from the maid at the door, wouldn’t you, Katty?”

“If you’ve anything to say, will you please say it at once?”

“Well, since you won’t be pally—and in point of fact, it’s unwise of you, as well as unnecessary, to take this sort of line—I’ll make the position clear. No doubt the boy friend has put you wise to the fact that I’ve got to clear out. Got to go while the going’s bad; and you and he have got to help me—especially he. As you can’t do much except lend him to me and spur him on, you make it quite clear to him that it’s his job in life to get me safely out of England with a whole skin—and a shut mouth.”

“Naturally I shall do everything I can to help you to get out of England.”

“Devil doubt you, my love. And as you might have known, I’m going to do the right thing by you. Can’t make an honest woman of you, Katty, or I would. But you can take my word for it, I’m not going to make trouble. I draw the line at that sort of thing. Point of fact, it looks as though you are going to have your kind wish, and never see my not unhandsome face again, nor hear my not unpleasant voice.”

“Where are you going?”

“W-e-l-l-l, least said soonest mended, and fewest questions fewest lies, and all that. In other words, if you don’t know, you can’t tell, can you? At any rate, I’m going where you won’t be troubled by me. As I say, you won’t see me nor hear me, nor get any letters. Provided you do your wifely part, and I get letters, that is. All I want is a letter from you once a quarter; and that only a few figures and a signature. On a cheque. Unless, of course, you’d like to write and tell me all the news . . . Oh,

for the Lord's sake come and sit down. Don't stand there staring. Come and sit on the side of the bed. For old times' sake, Katty. The good old times."

"How much do you want me to send you? How can I possibly do it without it becoming known?"

"That's your trouble, my dear. No, don't let's say trouble. Let us say it's your pigeon . . . And surely that's where the boy friend will come in useful. Anyway, you've got to get me the wherewithal, and I'll leave the means to you. You get it safe into the Singapore and Sydney Bank. And honestly, Katty, I don't want to put you to any inconvenience. Arthur's a rich man; and some husbands would insist on making a real good touch in the circumstances, a real good killing, but I'm not that sort of man. As you know, I draw the line at . . . at . . ."

"At what?" inquired Lady Calderton.

"Well, at anything—what shall we say—wrong, improper, unreasonable. Blackmail, as you are good enough to call it, for example."

"What do you call it?"

"Well, if you will have it defined in words of one syllable, I call it right and proper assistance given by a wife to her husband. What do you call it? You are my lawful wife. I'm your lawful husband. And it is your right and duty, and should be your privilege, to help your husband when he's in trouble. Any objections?"

"How much do you want?"

"Katty, you really are a bit—er—businesslike, not to say harsh and sordid. Damn it all, you needn't make things unpleasant for me than they are. You don't suppose I like having to depend on my wife for a little while, do you? I can assure you that when I am on my feet again, I shan't trouble you. You can keep your money and be damned to it."

"How much do you want?"

"Well, within limits I am willing to leave that to you. Within reason, I say. Do get it into your head that I don't want to inconvenience you, though in the circumstances an unprincipled man would bleed you white . . . What about a thousand a year until I'm straight? That's reasonable enough, surely."

"So that, every three months, I am somehow to scrape together two hundred and fifty pounds, and pay it into this bank, am I? And how do you suppose that I'm going to do that without my husband knowing?"

"Your *husband* will know, duckie," and a loud guffaw seemed to envelop and drown her in a surging sea of sound. "Your husband will know all right, and believe me, he'll know if you don't send it . . . What you mean is, how are you to do it without the good Sir Arthur Calderton knowing. Once again, that's your affair, *if* it is

in any way difficult. But, once again—the boy friend—I’ve got an idea that he’s a lad with Great Expectations as well as great present enjoyments. Hasn’t he got a Rich Uncle? Doubtless the boy friend’ll be able to help, any time when you couldn’t lay your hands on the right amount just at the moment . . . And as to my getting away, could you manage a hundred?”

“Yes, I can give you a hundred pounds to help you to get away.

“I’d give a million if I had it,” she added.

“Oh come, come! Drop it, Katty. Don’t be so bitter. Do you know what ‘bitter’ is the comparative of? Bitch. Don’t you be one. You be a good girl. Come on. Drop it and be matey. Kiss and be friends. Yes, literally. I mean it. Come here. Come on.”

“Listen,” said Lady Calderton, retreating towards the door. “I understand that you are in danger; that an attempt was made on your life last night.”

“Right again, my love, right as usual. It was.”

“And that you’ve taken refuge here because you daren’t show your face outside in daylight, and still less dare to go out in darkness.”

“That’s the situation. Nice state of affairs, isn’t it, in Merrie England?”

“Then hadn’t you better bear it in mind, and remember that your safety, your life, are in my hands, just as much as my happiness and social safety are in yours?”

“Exactly. Quite. We are quits. What are you driving at?”

“I’m suggesting that you behave and talk as though you realized that you are here on sufferance, that if I were to let anger and indignation and resentment get the better of me, I could . . .”

“Yes, my lass, and so could I. You try anything of that sort, and see where you’ll be! . . . Really, Katty, I’m ashamed of you. I wonder you aren’t ashamed of yourself. A nice way to talk, after what I’ve just said to you—that the last thing in the world I want to do is to make any trouble. All I want to do is to go . . .”

“Now that your life is in danger!”

“. . . go away quietly, I was going to say, without causing any trouble to you or to anyone else. Yes, and showing you every consideration, instead of trying to wring the last penny out of you that I could get.”

Captain Ferring-Chevigny folded his arms upon his broad chest, and regarded his wife steadily, as much in sorrow as in anger.

“I really feel hurt,” he said.

The woman stared at him, almost in wonderment, almost incredulous, amazed that such a man as he could exist; yet more than half convinced that he was in earnest, that the point of view that he expressed was genuine.

For some seconds they eyed each other in silence, her look of contemptuous

wonderment met by his glare of irritation, annoyance and disappointment.

Why couldn't the silly woman meet him half-way, let by-gones be by-gones, and accept the situation?

Why couldn't she join forces with him for their mutual safety?

Suddenly his brow cleared. He sat up and held forth appealing open hands.

"Come on, Kathy, let's be friends. Let's work together. Surely our interests are identical. Surely to God it would be wiser to help each other, than to hinder. Smoothness is always better than friction—and especially at a time like this. Let's get together. Kiss and be friends. Come on. After all, you are my wife, and I've got my conjugal rights, haven't I? Even if I've waived them out of consideration for the situation you've brought about. Come on, old girl . . . Partners . . . A man wants a little love in his life, doesn't he? And you are . . ."

"Listen. If there's anything you wish to say that must be absolutely private between us, say it now, and I'll undertake not to repeat it. For I'll never speak to you again alone. I'll never be in the same room with you again, except in the presence of a third person."

"The boy friend, eh?"

"Yes. Mr. Waring. Or the butler. Or a groom—with a dog-whip in his hand and . . ."

"And that'll be enough, I think. You're a fool, as you always were . . ."

"I was, indeed."

". . . a fool, as you always were, as well as a bigamist. You want me for an enemy, do you?"

"Infinitely rather than as a friend. And please remember that I could, at any moment, turn you out of this house and that I'm sorely tempted to do so."

"And queer your own pitch! And your husband's. And your son's."

"No, it's for the sake of my husband and my son that I'm standing here talking to you alone, now—for the last time. I'll do my best to help you to get away, and I'll do my best to pay you a thousand a year to keep away. And to keep silent . . . And although I'm a fool, I have sense enough to realize that you've no wish to lose the income that you'll get from me—for the time being. How long it will go on, I don't know. There are limits to what I can bear, and it's quite possible I may break down under the strain—and tell my husband everything. And you'll be dealing with a man then. Not with a foolish woman."

Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny sat up straight and suddenly.

"I say, Katty! You'd never ruin yourself by . . ."

"Ruin myself, or *you*, do you mean? Think over what I've just said, keep it well

in mind—and get out of this house as soon as you can. Meantime, say to Mr. Waring anything you have to say; make with him any arrangement you have to make. I'll never see you again.”

“No need, so long as I see your signature on a cheque,” replied the Captain as the door closed.

“There's a bitch for you!” said he to himself as he took up his newspaper, and turned to the Financial columns.

§ 2

That same afternoon, Anthony Calderton had a bright idea.

He would go riding with his beloved friend and tutor, but with a difference. Instead of being Captain of the King's Bodyguard, and scouting with a Troop of Horse in search of the Roundhead picket-post that was said to have been established during the night within a few miles of Calderton House, he would be a lone scout, and Mr. Waring, instead of being the King's Troop of Horse, should be an Ironside patrol.

He would give him a quarter of an hour's start, and then ride out in search of him. When he saw him, he would blow a blast on his bugle, but if, on the other hand, Mr. Waring saw him first, the latter would blow his whistle. That would be a splendid idea and quite a new game. It would be frightfully thrilling to ride along behind high hedges, peeping through or over them; to hide in spinneys and coppices; to reconnoitre farm-yards and buildings and hay-stacks; to stand up in his stirrups and peep over sky-lines; the whole time feeling that he was in great danger himself, because the enemy was doing exactly the same thing.

Having fully explained the idea to the receptive Mr. Waring as they sat on the terrace after lunch, fixed general direction and the boundaries beyond which he must not ride, and asked him to be sure to remember to take the big police whistle, he went in search of his bugle, a somewhat tarnished and battered instrument from which he could produce one long and piercing note, plaintive and mournful but far-carrying.

“Sir Anthony wound his horn,” he said aloud, and tucking his lips into the mouthpiece, distending his cheeks and blowing with all the strength of his lungs, he ‘wound.’

“He blew a blast right woundily,” he remarked. “Now would that be ‘woundily’ like a wound, or ‘woundily’ like wounding (no, winding) up a watch?”

“Anyway, he'll hear that, if I catch sight of him; and it will be his death-knell . . .

Golly! That's an idea . . . If he hears the sound of my silver-tongued clarion, no, brazen-voiced trumpet—I'll have my trumpeter riding at my sword-hand—then he's to fall off his horse, dead. In other words, dismount. Likewise, if I hear the shrill menacing—or is it menacing—shriek of his fatal whistle, then I fall from my horse, dead . . . Yes, that'll be splendid.”

A few minutes later, Henry Waring, with a word of comfort and assurance to Lady Calderton, went and took the whistle from where it lay with dog-collars, leashes, whips and odds-and-ends in a drawer in an old bureau in the hall, and departed to the stables . . .

“Now, it's a quarter to three, Sir. I'll start at three o'clock and the general direction will be eastward, won't it? Then as the sun comes round to the west, I shall have it behind me.”

“Shouldn't be surprised, my son.”

“Then I shall be able to spot you better, with the sun on you, and you'll be able to see me silhouetted against the skyline.”

“Dismounting allowed?” inquired Waring.

“What d'you think?”

“Make it much more difficult. I could tie my horse up, in a coppice somewhere, and climb up a tree and spot you miles away.”

“Yes. So you could. Right. No dismounting in the game, until I hear your whistle or you hear my bugle, eh? And the one that hears is defeated, and falls dead.”

“Yes.” And trotting across the gravel square before the stables, on to the springy turf, Henry Waring cantered across the park and out of sight.

A quarter of an hour later, Anthony Calderton rode down the drive, through the great gates and out on to the road, along the grassy margin of which he would be able to get a good gallop.

As he turned on to the wayside grass, a man rose from a stile on which he had been sitting, raised his hat of yellow velvet velour, bowed from the hips, smiled with a flash of bright white teeth beneath bright red lips and a little black moustache, and held out a letter towards the boy.

“Egg-scuza me, sair,” he said with an exaggerated foreign accent, “but would you pliz be so ver' kindly as to give this letter to the *caballero*, *gentilhomme*, who stay at Calderton House?”

“What, Mr. Waring?” replied Anthony Calderton, eyeing the brilliant mauve envelope.

“No, sair. Ze other *caballero* who stay there leetle while. *El Capitan*—er——”

“Captain Bertie-Norton? All right. But why not post it? Or take it up to the

house yourself?"

"Sair, pliz. It is ver' important it reach him, and I am not writing English post-address so good. And sure, if I go up to the *casa—ze castillo*—perhaps the majordomo say, '*You getta der Hell outa dis.*' Sair, pliz."

"Oh, all right. Give it here," said Anthony, bending towards the man as his horse reared and sidled away. "I'll see he gets it."

"Sair, I t'ank you."

"Pooh! How it stinks," thought the boy as, with a kindly nod to the man, he put the letter in his pocket and gave his impatient hunter its head.

And it came to pass that Anthony Calderton's bright idea did his mother invaluable service, and very promptly rid Calderton House of a loathed and detested presence. For, that night, undressing and emptying, as was his wont, the contents of his pockets on to his dressing-table, he found the sealed mauve envelope which, in the absorbing interest of his scouting for the Roundhead patrol, he had quite forgotten.

Smiling his side-way secret smile, he put the letter under a book that lay on his bedside table, completed his preparations for the night, and got into bed. . . .

"What do I smell, darling?" asked Lady Calderton a little later, when she paid her usual bed-time visit.

"Smell, Mother?" asked the boy innocently. "Is it like sulphur? Because just now the lights in the chamber burned blue and with a stamp of cloven hooves and a fierce waggle of a barbed but prehensile tail, the fiend . . ."

"No, darling, not a bit like sulphur. More like . . ."

"I know. Mice. Exactly like three blind mice. Smell how they run. I saw three pink-eyed . . ."

"More like some sort of barber's hair-oil or cheap scent. You haven't been having your hair cut?"

And Lady Calderton sniffed the boy's hair, rumpling it fondly.

"I think you must have brought the smell in with you, darling. Don't muck my hair about. I've just brushed it. Tell me a tale about Montiga. You know, Voodoo and papaias or papalois; or how the son of a white planter defended the old colonial house near the sugar-cane plantation, the planter's house in which lay his aged mother; defended it from the attack of ten thousand rum-maddened negroes armed with machetes and—what-not."

"Afraid I wasn't there, just at the time, my son."

"No, darling. But you can imagine it."

"I'm sure you can imagine it a great deal better. I'll tell you about the crabs that

get the great green coco-nuts down from the tops of the palm-trees.”

“Or what about the great black-bearded pirates that get the doubloons up from the holds of the merchant-ships?”

“You tell me.”

“Right. Would you like Captain Teach, Blackbeard, Sir Henry Morgan, or . . .”

And artfully spinning out his story, he detained his mother as long as possible.

“Ask Mr. Waring just to look in, last thing before he goes to bed, to see if I’m asleep, won’t you, Mother?” he said, as Lady Calderton departed.

That would establish the fact that he was sound asleep, whether he were or not, and would wake him up if asleep he were . . .

Opening the door, some hours later, and letting in a shaft of light from the corridor, Henry Waring glanced at the humped figure in the bed, whispered ‘Good night, Anthony,’ in case the boy were lying awake, softly closed the door and went along to his bedroom.

As the door shut, the boy sat up in bed, turned on the light of the shaded lamp that stood on the small table beside him, and looked at his watch.

Half-past eleven. Give Mr. Waring a quarter of an hour or so, and it would be all right. Better make it twelve o’clock, perhaps. Yes, he’d have a read till then. Twelve o’clock was a fine time for dark nocturnal deeds when church-yards yawn and graves give up their . . . No, that was an unpleasant thought.

There was a story—that had been carefully kept from his ears by parents, governess and tutor, and carefully poured into them by nurse-maids, grooms and footmen—a story about a ghost that walked in Calderton House. A lover, or some such silly thing. He had been flung down the secret staircase and had broken his neck.

What a pity that the secret staircase had been brought to light and uncovered, and was now merely a short cut from the hall to this landing. If only he had discovered it, as he had one or two other secrets, he would have said nothing about it at all. He’d have kept to himself the door in the panelling down in the hall, and the one in the panelling on the landing too. As it was, some silly ass had taken away the door this end, at the top, and as often as not, the one at the bottom was left open. Nothing secret about it whatever.

Did the ghost walk on some particular night, the anniversary of the man’s death; or at full moon; or just when it thought it would, or what? Probably it was all bosh; but it would be frightfully interesting to see it ‘walk,’ especially if it were dressed in the Stuart style. Some people said it was dressed in helmet, breast-plate, jerkin, sword and high riding-boots. A parlour-maid had told an under-nurse, whom he had

heard telling the head-nurse, that she had distinctly seen it walk along the corridor towards the head of the steep narrow staircase, where it turned about, glared at her, and vanished backward down the steps; and then she heard a crash and a cry.

True, old Nannie's comment had been, "The little liar!" but it made a good story. He'd write it all out one day.

Golly, what a crash a man in armour would make if he went headlong from the top of those stairs to the bottom. Stairs nearly as steep as a ladder against a wall. He'd crash on the stone floor and up against the panel-door, almost without touching the steps. Most satisfying. Probably burst the door open and roll right out into the hall. It would be rather fun to see the ghost do it. Provided it *did* do it, that is to say. Did its stuff properly, without any nonsense. It would be too awful for words if, instead of turning round and falling backwards headlong down the stairs, it turned round and just came for you instead. One would simply scream one's head off.

Probably the girl was, as Nanny said, a little liar; but on the other hand, it didn't sound like the sort of story that a Calderton village girl would make up—especially the turning round and looking towards her before falling backward down the stairs. There was one thing that didn't ring true though, and that was the ring of the armour, so to speak. How could the ghostly armour of a ghost crash on the little stone square at the bottom of the steps? A ghost hadn't weight and solidity. If you struck a ghost with a sword, you wouldn't hear your sword clash on its helmet or breast-plate, surely? On the other hand, one was always hearing tales about 'ghostly footsteps.' There was the ghost at Mardingley Castle, that tramped up and down the picture-gallery that used to be a banqueting-hall. Any number of people had heard it. Then there were ghostly sighs and groans, and stairs that creaked under the weight of a ghost. So if you could hear a ghost walk, or sigh, presumably you could hear it fall?

...

There was twelve o'clock striking from the clock-tower over the stables.

Anthony Calderton got out of bed, put on his felt-soled bedroom slippers and his dressing-gown, slipped the strongly scented, highly coloured letter into his pocket, took a small flat pocket-torch from a drawer in his dressing-table, switched off the bedside light, opened his door with the utmost care, and crept along the dark corridor, from time to time switching on the light in the tiny bulb of his pocket-torch.

Near the head of the once-secret stair he stopped by a door in a deep recess. The handle of this he turned with the utmost caution, tried the door and found, as he expected, that it was locked.

Smiling to himself, he then shone the light of his torch upon the right-hand panelling of the deep recess, reached up and, placing the fingers of his right hand

upon the protruding ledge of a panel, pulled hard. The panel, with a faint click, moved downward half an inch, and had he not raised the other hand that held the torch, to support it, would have fallen forward. Placing the panel on the floor, the boy reached inside the aperture thus disclosed, pulled back a stout brass bolt and pushed upon the door of which the small removable panel formed a part. This door, or hinged panel, some six feet high by two feet wide, opened inward, and disclosed a passage which was the space between the thick heavy panelling of the room itself and that of the corridor.

Creeping along this, with his light throwing a small wavering beam before him, the boy stopped where a small wooden peg stuck out from the rough wood-work on his left, withdrew from its setting an imitation knot in the wood, applied his eye to the hole, and peeped into the room.

All was well. The room was in darkness save where, through the high narrow mullioned windows, the pale weak light of a setting moon shone into the room.

The foul traitor Roundhead spy slept.

Now to place the terrifying missive where he would see it when he woke. See it, pick it up, and discover that he was unmasked, his real character known, and that this chance of escape was given to him by the son of his Cavalier host and intended victim; given him because he loved him, or rather, had loved him until he had accidentally discovered who and what he was. Between love and duty his heart was torn. Duty cried that he should denounce him, have him seized and cast into a dungeon, and there lie in chains until his father returned. But love forbade. How could he deliver to shameful death this man whom he had adored? David and Jonathan . . . But when he found this letter and read the stinging words that he had written, how he would burn with shame; how he would slink away and . . .

Hullo, what was that? Only a snore or a snort or something, as the villain Roundhead spy tossed and turned, his evil mind haunted by terrible dreams.

Now for it.

But suppose Captain Bertie-Norton woke up and caught him. What an ass he would look. No, he'd just say,

'Oh, I say, a fellow gave me this to give to you to-day. Awfully sorry I didn't bring it along before.'

Captain Bertie-Norton might think it a bit funny that he should bring it in the middle of the night, like this, but he couldn't do anything about it, could he?

And drawing back two more brass bolts, one at the top of a panel and one at the bottom, he slowly and gently opened the second panel-door and stepped into the room.

He knew his way about this particular bachelor guest-chamber pretty well, as he had often used it for his own private diversions, plays and games, his private stronghold, ever since he had been shown the secret entrance by Miss Stuart. She had read about it in the old book *A Historie of Calderton Castle*, hunted about until she had discovered it, and then shown him the trick of it. Jolly decent of her, and great fun they had had, playing Cavaliers and Roundheads with this as the secret room.

The beauty of it was that the bedroom door, of heavy solid oak, was self-locking, and unless he knew the trick and moved the catch back, a person entering and closing the door behind him was locked in, whereas anyone inside, hearing somebody coming, could go through the panel into the narrow passage, out by the panel in the recessed doorway, and so down the secret stairs to the hall and freedom.

Having tiptoed into the room, the boy stood still and silent, looking round and making sure that no chair, stool, or other obstacle stood between him and the dressing-table where he proposed to place the letter.

As he did so, another of his bright ideas entered his ever-active mind. What a joke to put it on the vile Roundhead spy's pillow, actually beside his head.

Yes, his breathing was regular and heavy enough, and if the man did wake up it would be all right. He could say his little piece and apologize.

Yes, and then slip away in the darkness and disappear through the panel! Golly, that would puzzle him.

Tiptoeing towards the bed, the boy placed his torch behind him, switched it on and, by the dim diffused light, saw an excellent spot for the placing of the letter. A few seconds later, he was out of the room, the panel closed behind him, the deed accomplished.

Returning to his bedroom, he lay awake a while, elaborating a magnificent story of how the daughter of a great Cavalier house warned her vile false lover of her discovery of his shame, and, while bitterly ashamed also—of herself and her too-merciful deed—allowed him to escape.

Splendid. He'd tell Mr. Waring all about it, some day, and show him the trick of the room, too. It would be a bit of a wrench to part with the secret, share it with somebody else, but he'd do it. Yes, it would be rather a jolly thing to do, and Mr. Waring would understand, and perhaps like him all the better for it.

Captain Ferring-Chevigny awoke next morning at his usual hour of seven, yawned heavily, gazed round the lovely room, into which the sunlight streamed, making it bright and cheerful, in spite of the dark panelling and low and heavily-beamed ceiling.

Suddenly he sniffed audibly, turned his head in the direction whence came the penetrating scent, saw the mauve missive, and realized suddenly the import of its odour, its cheap foreign paper and spidery foreign handwriting. He shot up in bed, recoiling from the letter, as though it had been the deadliest of serpents waiting upon his pillow.

God in Heaven! How had it come there? The self-locking door was bolted, as he had left it last night. The casement windows were shut and fastened on the inside. Only the small upper panes, too narrow to admit anything much bigger than a cat, were open. No human being could reach down from the ventilation panes to the fastening at the bottom of the tall windows. No, they could not possibly have been opened from without.

The ancient fireplace was small, and there again nothing much larger than a cat could have made its way from the chimney into the grate, nor was there the slightest mark or indication of any disturbance.

As he glanced about the room like a trapped animal, his face paled, his eyes distended more wildly, his hand shook as he took the letter . . . They had been in the room while he slept! One or more of them had stood over him. They had had him absolutely at their mercy. Why was his throat not slashed from ear to ear? Why had not a Spanish knife been driven through his heart?

Endeavouring to moisten dry lips, he opened the letter with trembling fingers.

Yes, a letter from El Brujo, or purporting to be from him. A letter saying that the Dictator of Boruela was delighted to learn that his dear lost son-in-law had been found, assuring him that he would never be lost again, and bidding him wait peacefully and patiently for that which would soon and surely come to him. A terrible letter in that vein of sinister playfulness which signified the most terrible mood of that superhuman man, who ruled as a god a population of three million helpless and defenceless souls.

Why had they not killed him in the night? Obviously because their instructions were to torture him for a while, make his life a living death of suspense and fear, play cat-and-mouse with him, until almost he would welcome death; the death they had in store for him.

Or was it—dreadful thought—that they had instructions to bring him back alive; to kidnap him; drug him by way of his food and drink, or by forcible injections, as

they had done with thousands of hapless girls? Better death, any death, than be taken back and be delivered to the mercy of El Brujo.

One of those two things it must be. Either cat-and-mouse torture till they killed him here in England; or surveillance and relentless pursuit until opportunity arose for his being knocked on the head, kidnapped, and taken in some Spanish or Boruelan ship and, in the rôle of a sick man, back to Boruela.

But how in the name of miracles had they got into, and out of, that room with its locked and bolted door, its fastened windows, forty feet above the ground, and its narrow chimney down which quite obviously not so much as a sparrow had come that night?

That was almost as unnerving as the dreadful fact that there, there on his pillow, lay a letter from El Brujo. Not written by him, of course, but written for and on behalf of him by the chief of his secret police, that organization from which no enemy was safe in Europe or the whole continent of America.

It had been placed there, doubtless, by the same man or men who had shot at him the other night. Had they deliberately aimed to miss, obeying their instructions to put him to the torture of fear, suspense and terror, before killing him?

Yes, undoubtedly. Otherwise why had they not murdered him last night when they could have done so with the utmost ease and impunity? But that was not their way. Not El Brujo's way. What satisfaction would he get from knowing that the man who had swindled, robbed and unforgettably injured him, had died without knowing what had killed him and who had killed him?

That was not El Brujo's way. His idea of punishment was a period of the utmost horror and suffering that his devilish ingenuity could inflict, a period prolonged to the limit of human endurance. And then, when come it must, the slowest death that he could make his victim die.

And he had thought he was safe here, hidden in Calderton House. Perfectly safe, so long as he had the wisdom and patience to remain within its four walls.

Well, he knew better now, and his one chance was to escape at once, escape so suddenly, swiftly, and secretly, that they would be thrown off the scent. It must be done in such a way that they would suppose him to be still here in Calderton House. The longer they thought that, the better his chance of getting away, far away to some place where El Brujo's secret writ did not run, if such a place there were.

If only he could get out of the country without their knowing it; get on board a ship while they thought he was still here, here in Calderton House, he might win out yet. Surely somewhere he could find some refuge, once he had thrown them off his trail, broken the scent, as a fox might do by swimming a river.

Rising from his bed, thrusting his feet into slippers and throwing on his borrowed dressing-gown, he unfastened the bedroom door, set back the self-locking catch and went along to the bedroom occupied by Henry Waring.

“Look here,” he said, bursting into the room. “Do you know anything about this? . . . Send the kid away. I want to speak to you. Look sharp, I say. Matter of life and death.”

Anthony Calderton, glancing at the mauve envelope, and eyeing the haggard face of the obviously excited and troubled man, smiled secretly.

“Will you excuse us a moment, Anthony?” said Henry Waring, his raised eyebrows and almost shrugged shoulders seeming to apologize to the boy for the crude and peremptory manners of the visitor.

And with a cold, “Certainly, Sir,” the boy departed to his bedroom where, in an ecstasy of secret glee, he rolled upon his bed.

“Look here,” gabbled Ferring-Chevigny, as the door closed. “You are one of these damned ‘men of honour,’ aren’t you?”

“It’s a phrase I don’t much like, and never use,” replied Waring.

“Well, you call yourself a gentleman, don’t you?”

“No. If other people ever do, I raise no objection.”

“Look here, Waring. I’m in earnest. For God’s sake don’t be funny. Matter of life or death. Now then. Cards on the table; straight dealing and plain truth. Do you know anything about this?”

“I have never, to my knowledge, seen it before.”

“Look here, man. Plain yes or no. This is a letter written in Spanish. It’s from—them. I found it on my pillow when I woke this morning. Now, do you know anything whatsoever about it? Anything at all?”

“I know nothing whatsoever about it,” replied Waring. “Nothing at all.”

“You don’t know how it got there?”

“Listen, Ferring-Chevigny. I’ll see if I can make it plain. I’ve never seen—or smelt—the thing before. I’ve never heard any sort or kind of reference to it. I know nothing whatsoever about it. I haven’t the faintest notion of how it got into your room. I tell you, man, I know *nothing whatsoever* about it. Is that clear?”

“Right, Waring. Thank you. I’ll take your word for it. Now then, look. You know that trick door to the room I am in. Well, I’m one of those people who like their bedroom door fastened; and as trick doors may have more than one trick, I bolted it when I went to bed, and I had to unbolt it when I let myself out this morning

—as well as fastening back the self-locking latch. No one came in by that door during the night. That's that . . . You know those tall narrow windows between the stone mullions.”

“Well?”

“I particularly carefully fastened those before I went to bed last night, and they were securely fastened this morning. The only ventilation was through the little hinged panes at the tops of the windows. Three of them. And there's no cat alive that could walk up those windows and get through them, let alone a human being. The chimney is nothing more than a pipe that joins the big main shaft that goes up from the great hall fire-place. If a cat could come down that narrow bedroom chimney, it's as much as it could do; and there wasn't the faintest sign of any disturbance; no fallen soot, no mark of any kind. Not so much as a bird came down it . . . Now then, how did a man get into that room during the night and put that letter on my pillow? And mark you, Waring, I'm by nature and habit and training, as light a sleeper as there is in this world. The slightest noise would have wakened me. Now then, how was it done?”

“I haven't the very vaguest idea,” replied Henry Waring. “And at the moment, I cannot think of anything; any possible solution.

“Supposing I had been going to play a trick upon you,” he continued. “How could I have got in, since you had bolted the door; and the window and the chimney being out of the question?”

“Damn it, man, it's impossible. It's impossible,” chattered Ferring-Chevigny. “It's absurd. Damn it, there isn't a trap-door in the floor or in the ceiling! And if there were, how the hell could the people break into the house? How could they break into the house and use the trap-doors, if there were any? How should they know what room I'm in? It's impossible; and yet if there's one thing on this earth that is certain, it is that that letter wasn't in that room when I went to bed—much less lying beside my head, on the pillow.”

“It's utterly amazing,” agreed Henry Waring. “It's fantastic. It is impossible.”

“It's a damned miracle! My God, you'd think that they had got the sort of powers those Indian Yogis are supposed to have; and could levitate things. No, 'project' things, don't they call it? Make 'em materialize just where they want 'em to. It's utterly incredible. It's . . . I tell you, Waring, I'm frightened. And I've got the guts to admit it. I'm terrified. Not so much because of what they can do to me, as because of what they've already done. It's miracle-mongering. Damn it all, it makes being shot-up, the other night, just nothing at all. I mean, anybody can be shot-up, and anybody who can get hold of a pistol can do some shooting-up. Not that you'd expect it in a quiet corner of Merrie England. But these . . .”

“We’ll go down and have a look at the windows from below,” said Waring. “Just to see whether there are any footmarks, or whether a ladder was planted under your window.”

“You can go. I’m not going out of the house until I go for good—and that’ll be damn soon. But you won’t find any marks there. Suppose they could have brought a forty-foot ladder, what then? The windows were fastened. They couldn’t have opened ’em, and still less could they have got out again and fastened them on the inside after they had done their job!

“No,” agreed Waring. “Same thing, I suppose, applies to the roof. Still, I’ll get up there, through an attic skylight, and just see whether there are any sort of marks on the coping or leads above your window. If they had got up there and lowered a man down by a rope, which of course is absurd, there are bound to be marks in the dirt and dust, scratches on the lead, and the evidence of where a rope had rubbed on the more-or-less mossy or weathered stone at the edge.”

“Thanks. But of course that’s quite absurd. Suppose a man had been lowered down, he’s not coming through a little hinged pane eight inches square, is he? Nor going out through it again, leaving the windows securely fastened on the inside. It’s absolutely——”

“By the way, here’s an idea,” interrupted Waring. “I don’t see how it could possibly be done, but just suppose a man got into the house, say while we were at dinner, found his way upstairs and—again incredibly—knew or discovered the one room, out of dozens of rooms, that is your bedroom. Suppose he hid himself in a wardrobe or under the bed and stayed there until . . .”

“Oh, my good ass,” groaned Ferring-Chevigny, “I was never out of the room the whole of yesterday, not for five minutes. Don’t you realize that I was in the room myself, lying there in bed, the whole day? Of course, a man couldn’t march into the house, and of course he couldn’t come up to this floor, and of course he couldn’t know which was my bedroom. And suppose he did, there was I lying in bed waiting for him. No, that won’t do.

“And I’ll tell you what’s a damned disturbing thought, too,” he continued. “They’ve got an accomplice in the house, planted here. Must have.”

“Oh, but that’s absurd. You don’t imagine that Jenkins or Robert are people of that sort, do you? You don’t suppose that the housekeeper is, or the cook. Typical old ‘faithful retainers.’”

“What about some Calderton wench that they’ve got hold of?”

“Rubbish. The head parlour-maid has been with the family for donkey’s years, and comes from London, I believe. The second parlour-maid is her sister; and the

house-maids and kitchen-maids are simple and decent local girls, who'd as soon think of being criminal accomplices of strangers as of cutting their throats."

"But damn it, man, there's got to be some explanation and——"

"I'll tell you what there has got to be," interrupted Waring, "and the sooner the better. Departure, flight, escape. I've no cause to wish you anything but ill, but I assure you I don't want you murdered here. Not in the house. You are trouble enough alive, Ferring-Chevigny. You'd be even more trouble dead. Disposal of your body, for one thing . . . You must go."

"Yes, you're saying something, for once. I'm off, and I'm going to-night, and you've got to help. Tell you what. You and that damned kid are for ever playing your dressing-up games, and mucking about with wigs and whiskers and what-not. Suppose you rig me up with a beard and moustache, some sort of wig, and a hat and overcoat that I've never worn, and you drive me to . . ."

"Southampton?" suggested Waring.

"Southampton! South Hell! We'll start for Tilbury. We'll turn off for Hull; we'll double back in the direction of Bristol; we'll break north and go to earth in some God-forsaken hole, until we are certain we're not followed—some place like Broadway in Gloucester, where these foreigners would be as conspicuous as black-beetles on a table-cloth; and when we are sure we've shaken them off, we'll nip up to Glasgow, and there I'll get a ship for—wherever I decide to go. Now then, which would be better—to go in broad daylight at eleven o'clock in the morning, trusting to disguise, or to slip out at three o'clock at night, in darkness?"

"What about going in daylight, dressed up as a woman?" suggested Waring. "Golden wig; sporting hat with a feather, and a long coat with a skirt under it."

"And bloody great boots," growled Ferring-Chevigny. "And what about the servants?"

"Well, then, what about going in the middle of the night, or rather the small hours of the morning, dressed as a woman?"

"No. I'll trust to a beard, moustache and that light cap and overcoat of yours. That's it. And, by gad, if they are on to us, we'll give them a run for their money. Stop the car in a lonely place, if necessary, and wait for 'em and shoot it out. Nothing I'd like better. What I can't stand is this letter-on-the-pillow miracle stuff. It has got me beat. Let's go to-night."

"To-night it is," replied Henry Waring, getting out of bed.

XVII

How can I attempt to describe the effect on our minds, resultant upon Ferring-Chevigny's departure? To say that a cloud lifted does not begin to describe it. It was like the glorious dawn of a bright and peaceful day after a long black night of storm and danger and terror. It was as though the ship of our fortunes emerged from a dense enveloping fog—after days of gloom and horror throughout which the siren wailed its note of disaster and despair—into glorious sunshine, with an azure sky above and a smooth blue sea around us, a sea whose little white-topped waves were playful, and upon which glittered the happy smile of a benignant sun. It was like waking to peace, comfort and security from a shattering nightmare. It was like the condemned man's reprieve.

Yes; but unfortunately, it was only reprieve, not pardon; not like the pardon that sets him free for ever, free to walk out from the death-cell and the shades of the prison house, into God's good sunshine and sweet air. Only a reprieve for poor Lady Calderton; for while he was alive he was a danger. Nay more, his life was her death; his existence the ruin and destruction of her peace, welfare and happiness, and of those whom she loved far more than she loved herself.

Nevertheless, he was gone. We had a breathing-space, and—he might never be heard of again. That, perhaps, was too much to hope; but the blow had not fallen, and there was a chance that it might not fall. Nay—there was a chance that it might fall on him, instead of upon her.

And at times, when I came to that point repeatedly reached in my unceasing reflections, I had something like a sense of shame that I had not caused the blow to fall on him. I, in a more gallant age, or had I been a more gallant man in this age, would have taken it upon myself to set her free; would have found it not only a source of pleasure and of pride, but a plain and simple duty. And then the cold breath of common sense would whisper that two wrongs never made a right; that noble aims and ends do not justify violent and evil means; that nothing, nothing in Heaven or on earth or in hell, excuses *murder*.

And having so decided, chivalry promptly would contradict conscience.

The effect upon Lady Calderton of his departure was marked. Not only did her health and spirits visibly improve; not only was it obvious that she breathed more freely and experienced a great relief and lightening of her insupportable load of misery and fear; but at times, and for brief periods, she was almost her old self. She

was less tense and tragic, less crushed and crippled in spirit, as the immediate danger receded to form the background of her thoughts, instead of filling and holding her mental stage completely.

He had gone; and though it was anything but a case of ‘out of sight, out of mind,’ it tended greatly to become one of ‘out of sight, not permanently and perpetually in mind.’ Nevertheless, there was no day on which she did not spend a part, sometimes longer and sometimes shorter, in talking the position over with me.

One gleam in the darkness, and a cause for some thankfulness, was that he had gone before Sir Arthur’s return from Montiga. If the strain of actually seeing the man, added to that of the knowledge of his existence, was almost greater than she could bear, and had brought her very near to breaking-point, what would it have been if he had remained permanently in the neighbourhood, and had continued to visit the house when Sir Arthur was at Calderton?

That dreadful situation had not arisen, and immeasurably bad as things were, she had been spared from suffering something even worse.

§ 2

“That I could not have borne,” she said as we walked in the park, one day. “It would have been unthinkable, impossible. There can hardly be another man alive who’d dream of such a thing, much less suggest it—and fully intend to carry it out.”

“It’s incredible,” I agreed, “and perhaps the most incredible thing of all is the fact that it really didn’t seem to strike him as anything out-of-the-way. When I used to try to give him some idea of the poisonous foulness and utter villainy of such an idea; or, another time, of the ludicrous impossibility and farcical tragedy of such a position, he only uttered that awful laugh and asked what there was to make a fuss about. . . .”

(And I forbore to add that on one memorable occasion he had informed me that he considered that I had a definitely dirty mind. And he had talked as though I accused him of proposing that Lady Calderton should live there in sin—with two husbands and a lover!)

“When it seemed that he could and would settle down here,” said Lady Calderton, “living in the neighbourhood and in our circle, introduced, guaranteed and sponsored by Sir Arthur and me, I used to feel that it was not only an impossible thing for me to allow, but a thing I would not do, even if I could. Night after night, and every night of my life, I thrashed it out, again and again, till I thought I should go mad: and always I came to the same conclusion—that it was a thing I could *not* do, a state of affairs I *could* not dream of permitting.

“And then I was faced with the alternative. And that was worse, far worse. It was the end of everything for my husband, my boy, and myself. And then, at that thought, in a worse panic, if possible, I would decide that I must go through with it, for their sake; must play my part to the end.

“But how could I? How *could* I?” she turned to me with piteous appeal.

“You couldn’t. And you haven’t got to. He’s gone. It’s another of those cases of the calamities from which we suffer most being those that never happen to us. He’s gone, and you’ll never see him again. All we’ve got to do is to send the money regularly; and not only will you never see him again, but you’ll never hear from him; never have any reminder of the fact that he’s alive, beyond sending the money four times a year.

“And what’s more,” I added, “it needn’t be four times a year. And you need have nothing whatsoever to do with him or his money. I’ll send it. And you can settle up with me just whenever convenient. . . . What I mean is this. I’ll see the man is paid promptly and regularly, and in such a way that no one could possibly ever connect the payment with you. You don’t come into it at all.”

“Henry . . . my dear . . . I . . .”

“Not in any way at all. Just when it’s convenient to you to settle up with me, we can adjust things. It might be extremely difficult at one moment for you to find a considerable sum of money, and at another time it might be perfectly simple. Now, if you’ll just let me . . .”

“I wish I could even begin to thank you. I . . .” She took my arm and a warm glow of happiness and pride suffused me from head to foot.

“I wish you wouldn’t try to thank me. You don’t thank people because you are giving them tremendous pleasure.”

“You are a *friend*, Henry, and I shall always . . .”

“That’s all I want to be, and if reward were needed . . .”

“And when I think of all you’ve done for Anthony, and now you . . . How can I . . . ?”

“Well, I don’t want to talk like a lunatic and suggest the impossible, or I’d say, ‘Now forget him. Leave all the rest of this business to me and put it right out of your mind.’ . . . You can’t do that, of course. It’s wholly impossible: but you can get it further and further to the back of your mind, and gradually come to realize that, not only is the immediate danger past, but that it may never arise again.”

“But he’s alive, and while he’s alive . . .”

“Yes, I know. But have you looked at it like this? He has been alive the whole time! During all those seventeen years of peace and happiness he was alive. He’s no

more alive now than he was then.”

Lady Calderton smiled sadly.

“Yes, my dear boy, but I didn’t know it.”

“No, but it ought to be some sort of a help if you think of it like that. You neither saw nor heard anything of him for seventeen years, and you may neither see nor hear anything of him for another seventeen years. And in that case, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t be as happy in the future as you were in the past. . . .

“Nearly as happy,” I added lamely.

“Waiting for him to come back; wondering when he’ll walk in again, grinning, and . . .”

“But he won’t!” I assured her. “If ever a man in this world had a fright, Ferring-Chevigny had one. He’d as soon go to Boledo itself as come here—where he thought he was absolutely safe. That was the real blow, you know—that they should have traced him to Calderton. Found him out. And so quickly. When he thought he had put them off the scent, once and for all; escaped for good; and was going to live happy ever after in this distant and secluded spot. Why, after this shock, he’d feel infinitely safer in London than he would here—and he’d go in terror of his life even there. He’ll never set foot in England again. When you must think of him—and I know you must, of course—think of him as a figure in a nightmare from which you’ve awakened; think of the whole thing as the horror of a dream that is past. Forgive me for waxing eloquent, but I feel as . . . as . . . as joyous as a bubble in a glass of champagne. And I want you to feel the same. The cork’s blown out and the bubbles can rush out to the surface and . . .”

I forced a merry laugh.

“And burst,” said Lady Calderton.

§ 3

The months passed; and our sense of safety, peace, and hope grew steadily.

Until . . .

Among many memorable Calderton mornings, the one of which I am about to tell stands out more clearly in my memory than any other. It should have been a Friday, the thirteenth of the month, a grey and gloomy morning, infinitely depressing, or perhaps one of those red-sky mornings that are shepherds’ warnings, oppressive, stifling, electrical, with portent of thunder and storm.

On the contrary, it was a lovely day, one of the ten fine days of the English year, fresh and exhilarating, the sort of day on which it is a joy to be alive.

It was Anthony's birthday, and therefore a holiday. The boy was bubbling over with happiness and excitement, delighted beyond measure with his presents, of which mine had apparently taken his fancy most. Having discussed the matter with his mother, and found that she had no objection, I had given him a genuine seventeenth-century rapier, one which might well have been used by one of Rupert's cavaliers in the great charge at Naseby. It had a Toledo blade, made by the famous Andrea Ferrara, which was much older than the hilt to which it had been fitted somewhere about 1625. A light, delicate, and lovely thing. To handle it was a pleasure to a sword-lover; and to a boy like Anthony it was a joy merely to contemplate it and to consider its historical associations.

So, on that fair morning, he was happy; joyous, as only the young can be; and I was happy with him—and determined to shake off, if only for that one day, the gloomy and apprehensive thoughts from which my mind was never wholly free.

At dawn he burst into my room incoherent with gratitude and joy, holding the sheathed rapier (I had had a new velvet silver-tipped scabbard made for the beautiful blade that had outworn so many sheaths) as though he could scarcely believe that it was real.

"I *say*," he said, time after time—and had nothing to say, adequate words failing him.

"What shall we do to-day?" I asked as I sipped my tea, and he sat on the side of my bed gazing at the sword with shining eyes, as might a young Galahad at a visionary Grail, a young mother at her first-born. A wonderful thing, imagination, and the gift of romantic idealization! A piece of old iron—and a boy transfigured.

"I'll tell you what I want to do, first of all," he answered, smiling at me shyly, "because it's my birthday and we have known each other for a long time. I'm going to call you Henry, if I may."

"Why, of course," I agreed, inwardly delighted, and feeling strangely proud and complimented.

"'Mr. Waring' is rather formal, isn't it, between such—friends—if I may call us that?"

"Yes. And I'm glad you've waited well, before suggesting it."

"Oh, rather! I hate people who rush anything of that sort, don't you . . . Henry? Bad as people who paw you."

"What else would you like to do to-day?"

"Well, for a start, let's go for a jolly long walk, shall we—Henry?"

But the walk was not jolly and was not long.

For, as we left the main gates of the park and turned on to the country road that led through Calderton up on to the hills, we rounded a corner and suddenly came almost face to face with the last person in the world I expected to see, and most certainly the last person in the world whom I wanted to see—Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny!

Perched on a stile, eupeptic, gay and debonair, he sat and viewed the smiling country-side with the eye of kind indulgent favour. Also ourselves.

As we turned the corner past a great leaning and projecting tree-trunk and came full upon him, he gave us, after one swift, sharp glance, a bright, kind smile, and with upraised hand that held a cigarette, waved us an airy benediction.

“*Buenos dias, Señores,*” he laughed. “*Como esta usted? A donde va usted?*”

I stared in utter amazement, open-eyed if not open-mouthed, scarcely able to believe the evidence of my senses.

Ferring-Chevigny here! Sitting on a stile in broad daylight, close to Calderton village! It *couldn't* be. And yet it was.

I felt physically sick with chagrin, disappointment and fear; and the fear was as real as though I were in danger of my life, so identified were my feelings, my hope and anxiety, my faith and my dread, with those of Lady Calderton. My sympathy was so strong in the matter of this terrible danger, that my mind was one with hers; and this renewed threat, this revived danger, frightened and horrified me as it would have done her, had she, instead of I, come face to face with the man—a thing she might well have done had he entered the park a little earlier.

“Struck dumb with admiration, eh?” he jeered. “Both of you. Hearts too full for words. Never mind—the shock of joy never kills. Cheer up.”

“*You!*” I gasped stupidly.

“You’ve guessed it, first time.”

“But . . . but . . .”

“Quite so. ‘But where are the hordes of assassins, peeping from behind every tree,’ eh? . . . Don’t you read the papers?”

“No,” I replied truthfully, and in point of fact, we scarcely saw a newspaper at Calderton. And had I studied several papers daily with the utmost care, it was hardly probable that I should have seen the announcement of the return to these shores of Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny, under that name or any other.

“Well, well, well! Then I can tell you a piece of news, and you can join in my rejoicing.”

Had he gone mad and, in his madness, somehow found his way back to Calderton?

No, he was sane enough. As sane as he was spruce and debonair, merry and bright and self-satisfied and complacent.

Leaning forward, he placed the ferrule of his smart cane against my breast and, marking emphasis with gentle thrusts, cried jovially,

“He’s *dead!* . . . He’s *dead!* . . . He’s *dead!*”

For one dreadful second I could think only of Sir Arthur Calderton.

Sir Arthur dead—and this man his illegal heir, by reason of his being Lady Calderton’s husband?

“Who’s dead?” I said stupidly.

“Who, you fool? Who but His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Boruela; El Benemerito, the Well Deserving: El Brujo, the damned old witch-doctor! Dead, I tell you. Dead as a door-nail. By this time he’s probably President of his newly founded Republic of Hell.”

“President Romez dead?”

“The bright lad has grasped it. Yes, *dead*. Dead and damned—and I’m a free man. Understand? Free to come and go. Especially to come, eh, Sunny-Boy?”

I stared in horror, still mentally half stunned, and only beginning to realize the implications of what he was telling me. And suddenly I grasped the awful connotation. He was free and safe—free to live in England.

“*Dead,*” he babbled, “and Boruela is one vast living howl of joy, from end to end. Delirious with joy and the delight of hanging, drawing, and quartering every Romezite in the country. There isn’t an official of the Romez *régime* left alive by now, except the few who are praying for death. There isn’t a prisoner in a gaol or a flunkey in a palace. The mob has sacked and looted and burned the lot. In every town and village, the Romezite mayor or policeman and what-not, is hanging on a lamp-post or a tree—where he hasn’t been burned alive in his own house. By gad, I’d like to know what they did to those of the Romez Royal Family that they laid their hands on. But I’m afraid the majority of them must have skipped when they realized the old man was for it. Skipped out on his ocean-going yacht—that lay perpetually ready, with steam up, in Caibo harbour. They’ll all be off to Curaçao and the two million pounds they’ve got in the Bank of Holland. Gad, I hope the Boruelan navy had its little fire alight, its steam up, and its little keel off the mud. I’d give half what’s coming to me to hear that it had got between the yacht and Curaçao, found a shell that would fit its gun, steamed up close enough to hit the yacht and blow it out of the water, with all the hundred and eighteen sons and daughters of El Benemerito. And their husbands and wives and children, all his brothers and sisters and their sons and daughters *and* their sons’ and daughters’ husbands and wives and children; all

his cousins and uncles—in short, the whole damned lot that ruled Boruela for him. Gad, that'd be a piece of news that'd make me believe in a just God. To think of that lot all struggling for dear life among the sharks would make me laugh for a week."

And Ferring-Chevigny laughed merrily in happy and hopeful anticipation.

Suddenly a light flickered across the black despair of my mind.

"Why, then," said I, "if he's dead as well as all his family and officials, down to the last village policeman, you can go back. You can go back and get your money!"

The laugh stopped short and the smile died instantly on Ferring-Chevigny's face, his thin mouth hardened, and his eyes narrowed as they stared into mine.

"Go *back*? Back to Boruela? I? My good fool, the mob want me worse than any of them. Why, up to the time that Romez got wise to my game and rounded on me, I was One of the Boys; Romez' right-hand man, and about as popular out there as a tax-collector—or as St. Michael in Hell."

And Captain Ferring-Chevigny laughed again.

"Back to Boruela! *I*? Why, I shouldn't even have time to be hanged comfortably on a street lamp-post. They'd hang me on the landing-stage. Unless—what is more probable—they'd give me a taste of the *gusanas* and the *grillos* first. Like I did so many of them, when I was top dog . . . Yes, it's their turn now."

I understood. And the glimmer that had lightened my gloom died down. While Romez was alive, he had not dared to return for fear of punishment, dreadful vengeance, for some unforgettable and unforgivable offence against the Romez Government. Now that Romez was dead, he dared not return, for fear of the possibly more awful vengeance of the men whom he had oppressed and injured when himself a servant of that Government.

No, he could not return to Boruela—but he could live here in England without a care in the world.

With Romez would fall every official and office-holder of the Romez Government. Every man appointed by Romez would have to leave his post and return home, or what was more probable, become an exile for the rest of his life. Every chief of police, uniformed or secret, every spy and agent, every official of his Secret Service, would, by the death of Romez, become an execrated fugitive, a price on his head, and his life not worth a minute's purchase. To have had any official connection whatsoever with the late Romez Government, that vilest, biggest and most powerful tyranny of all time, would be a death-warrant. Returning, such men would be torn to pieces by the infuriated mob; by the people who, from the highest to the lowest, had suffered and trembled, ground down and terrorized, for a

generation.

Thus, Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny would not have a Boruelan enemy left in England.

Nor would the new ambassador and his staff be concerned with him. They would know nothing about an English refugee from Boruela, who had fled from the wrath of that foul villain, the late Dictator. The name Bertie-Norton would convey absolutely nothing to them; and in his chosen corner of the green and pleasant land of England, "Captain Bertie-Norton" could live in peace, take his ease, and fear nothing from the successors of a *régime* that had vanished as completely as a loathsome nightmare—the dread nightmare that it was.

"So here we are again, Sunny-Boy," grinned Ferring-Chevigny, "all set fair and sitting pretty. This time it's a real case of 'Home is the sailor, home from the sea, and the hunter home from the hill.'"

I felt a very definite pain through my heart, as well as a dreadful sinking of the stomach. All our work undone; our hopes wrecked; the cup dashed from our lips—and even if that cup had not exactly contained the healing waters of life, its draught had been as the Waters of Lethe, calming, soothing, giving a measure of forgetfulness.

This was defeat.

I stared at him stupidly, feeling hopeless and helpless.

Anthony, who hitherto had stood by in silent and polite patience, yawned a trifle ostentatiously.

Yes, the boy had heard quite enough, and the sooner we moved on, the better. In his present mood, Ferring-Chevigny might say something that I should not like Anthony to hear; something that might require a good deal of explanation.

"Well," said I lamely, "I shall be seeing you again later, I suppose."

"By gad, you will," replied Ferring-Chevigny with a kind of grim jocularly. "I'll look in at about tea-time. How's Katherine?"

"Lady Calderton is very well, thank you," I replied. "Her health has improved a good deal recently," I added with meaning.

"Good. Let's hope it will be maintained," was the callous reply.

And Anthony and I walked on.

"I don't like that man," he said, as we got out of ear-shot.

"No, nor do I."

"I don't want to be censorious," continued the boy, using one of the long words of which he was rather fond, and which made his conversation quaint and amusing, if elderly-sounding for so young-looking a boy, "but I think he's rather what they call a

bounder, don't you, Henry?"

"Yes," I agreed. "Undoubtedly he bounds."

"Why does he refer to mother as Katherine, and come back here again? I thought he had gone for good."

"Well, I think he presumes on having known her when she was a child, and when they called each other Katherine and Monty. And as for coming back here again, I suppose this is his favourite part of England. He evidently likes the hunting, shooting and fishing. And the society, of course—beginning with your parents' circle."

"Y-e-s-s," replied Anthony thoughtfully, and, I fancied, a shade doubtfully.

"Some people come back to the Quorn country when they retire from active life abroad, some to the Pytchley, others to the Whaddon Chase, the Fernie, the Beaufort. I know a chap who, because he hunted with the Bicester when he was an undergraduate at Oxford, went and lived in the Bicester country when he came back from India and left the Army."

"Yes," said Anthony again, and I felt, as so frequently I did, that he had left something unsaid.

That was one of the many ways in which he was so different from other young people of his age. He didn't often chatter; didn't say everything that came into his mind, without stopping to think. He gave you the feeling that, though he might be as innocent of duplicity and *arrière pensée* as a baby, he yet had unchildish reservations; and that, although he certainly thought what he said, he by no means always said what he thought.

"Does Mother like him?" he asked.

"Not much, I fancy," I replied, as casually as I could. "No, I don't think she has very much use for him, really."

"No. No. I should imagine not. He must have changed a good deal since she knew him as a boy."

"We all change, you know," I observed sententiously.

"Yes," agreed Anthony, and, looking up at me with his puckish smile, quoted,

" *Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me* "

. . . meaning you."

"Indulging in a little mild blasphemy?" I asked, endeavouring to strike a happy medium between flippancy and heavy tutorism.

"Not at all. He is a bit of a changed and decayed gentleman, isn't he?"

"I thought he looked pretty fit physically, and definitely prosperous."

“Sartorially,” added Anthony, savouring the word.

“Well, where does the decay come in, then?”

“Morals and manners.”

“What do you know about his morals?”

“Nothing. And not much about his manners, except that I don’t admire them. What I meant was, he must have changed since Mother knew him as a boy, and I think it has been in the direction of decay, don’t you?”

“Perhaps.”

“But what I’m driving at, Henry,” he said, slipping his arm through mine, “is that I don’t want you ever to change. Not the least little bit. Especially towards me. And I want you to abide with me. Always.”

“I shan’t change towards you, Anthony,” I assured him, and permitted my arm to give his hand a slight pressure against my side. “And I shall abide with you until you go to Oxford.”

“You’ll go up with me; and come and see me every term, won’t you?”

“I will. That’s a promise.”

“And you’ll spend all the hols with me, especially the summer?”

“They call them vacs, as a matter of fact; and the summer one, the Long. And I’ve no doubt we shall meet.”

“Meet! But I want you to be here; and I want us to go away together for the Long. Travel.”

“Well, we’ll see about that. Your father and mother may have other views.”

“Other . . . elephants!” he scoffed. “You know perfectly well that they wouldn’t be happy unless I were with you.”

“And suppose I had other views for my own vacations, and wanted to . . .”

The boy’s face fell visibly—almost audibly, so great and sudden was the change from smiling happiness to blank disappointment, distress. I had almost said horror.

Obviously my careless words had given him quite a shock, and I hastened to reassure him.

What a sensitive soul it was. How unarmed and unprotected.

“I was only joking,” I laughed. “Of course, I’ll come down here every vac, and if you still want to do it, we’ll travel in the Long. See the world. Do a bit of yachting—*not* at Cowes. Go to Scotland and have some good fishing. Do a bit of stalking.”

He brightened up again.

“That’s a promise, Henry?”

“It’s a promise. And no doubt you’ll make friends of your own age at Oxford; and if so, we’ll take them too, eh? Make up reading-parties; go for tramps in the

Black Forest; go to Switzerland for the winter sports; all sorts of doings.”

And talking so, I kept him off the subject of Ferring-Chevigny with whom, the whole time, one half of my mind was most painfully concerned.

Pretending to be troubled by an extrusive nail in my shoe, I curtailed our walk. I must see Lady Calderton before Ferring-Chevigny visited the house, and prepare her for the shock of his coming.

I'm afraid Anthony found me dull and abstracted and sadly lacking in the proper care-free holiday and birthday spirit, though I did my best, and endeavoured to receive with rapturous approval his suggestion that we should respectively dress up in full war-paint as Cavalier and Roundhead, and fight a desperate duel.

In fact it was I, I believe, who improved upon the idea, to the extent of suggesting that not only should we be Cavalier and Roundhead, but actually King Charles the First and Oliver Cromwell in their proper persons, and *en grande tenue*.

Fortunately for the furtherance of this admirable scheme, Anthony now had a pretty complete Cavalier outfit of plumed hat, slashed doublet, wide lace collar, baggy velvet breeches, high soft boots and big round Mexican spurs; and there was in the house an ancient but well-preserved pair of vast and heavy square-toed Cromwellian boots and a coat of the period, for me.

These were believed actually to have belonged to Oliver Cromwell himself. Hanging in a corridor there was, moreover, a trophy of arms consisting of a lobster-tail helmet, distinctively Ironside; a breast-plate; and a pair of heavy, ugly, basket-hilted cavalry swords that might well have been worn by Cromwellian troopers.

Yes, with genuine Cromwell stuff and with appropriate armour and weapons, I could put up a passable Great Protector impersonation, worthy to compete with Anthony's more finished representation of the Martyr King.

And of this I talked while of Ferring-Chevigny I thought.

On reaching home, I went to Lady Calderton's morning-room, and did my best to break the ghastly news to her as gently as possible. It was not a pleasant task, but it was one that had to be done; and I was the person to do it. I should have been guilty of cruelty and cowardice if I had left her to meet Ferring-Chevigny, unwarned and unprepared. After what she had gone through, and especially after the dawn of hope, the hope that she might never see or hear from him again, the shock would have been positively dangerous.

“Well, Henry,” she said, turning from her writing-desk as I entered the room, “why so solemn?”

“A little bad news,” I said, “and I hate being the bearer of bad news—to you.”

“Anthony . . . ?”

“No, no. He’s absolutely all right. We’ve just had a walk, and he’s now unearthing the Cromwellian kit to make me a foeman worthy of his steel in the great duel that . . .”

“What’s wrong, Henry? Tell me, quickly. Something about—that man? Is he . . . ?”

I nodded without replying.

“Threatening to write the sort of letter that would cause . . .”

“No.”

She rose to her feet.

“Don’t say he’s coming . . .”

I nodded again.

“Yes. I’m afraid that’s it.”

“Coming back here?”

She sat down suddenly.

“Don’t imagine that things are worse than they are. There’s nothing new, really.”

Her face went white, her eyes seemed to grow larger, and suddenly she looked ill, haggard, almost old, as intuition told her the truth.

“He has come back,” she whispered.

“Well, we’ll get rid of him again,” I replied with a false heartiness and forced cheerfulness. “We did it once and we’ll do it again. Don’t take it to heart too much. Believe me, I . . .”

She dismissed this with a quiet,

“I know you’ll do your best, Henry,” and added, “Is he coming to the house?”

“He’s sure to do that.”

“To live here? I won’t . . .”

“No, no. That’s out of the question. He shan’t do that. But he’ll want to see you, and . . .”

“Why has he come? I thought he was afraid of another attempt on his life. He was frightened.”

“Yes. But he isn’t afraid any more. His enemy is dead, and the organization that threatened him is broken and scattered. His enemy’s worst enemies are in power now, so he is perfectly safe.”

“Then he’ll stay here. Live here. Be here when Arthur comes home.”

“Somewhere in this part of the world, I suppose,” I admitted.

“But no. I don’t believe it,” I contradicted myself stoutly. “We’ll get rid of him.

I'll go and see my uncle again and he'll think of something else."

She buried her face in her hands.

My heart sank. What could one say? Words were so futile. What *could* I say? I must say something.

"Look. Please, please don't despair. Don't give way. We've got to fight; defeat him; get the better of him; and I'm perfectly sure we can."

She looked up at me.

"Thank God you are here, Henry. You're such a tower of strength. How *can* we get rid of him?"

"I won't pretend that I have a plan yet, but do believe me when I say that my uncle and I will think of something. We'll *do* something. We'll get rid of him—and before Sir Arthur comes."

And then in my misery, anxiety, pity; my yearning to say something, do something, I blurted out incoherently,

"Do something! I'll *kill* him, if . . ."

She looked up.

"Don't talk like that, Henry. It's too . . . too . . . awful. It's playing with fire. It's hypocritical of me, I know, but, oh, please, please don't put anything like that into words—for I've had that kind of thought myself. A man like that ought to be killed, but to think about it *is* playing with fire. It'll turn from preposterous nonsense into a possibility, a temptation, and in time, a reality . . . I cannot express myself properly . . . an obsession. Don't . . . don't *say* it . . ."

"No," I said. "I won't. I was talking wildly. But a poisonous scoundrel like that who, for his own ends, pretended for so long to be dead, ought to be dead. Why should he, again for his own ends, come to life to kill the happiness of people whose shoes he is not fit to clean. I'd kill him with my bare hands if . . ."

"Yes, *if*, Henry. If it weren't murder, and if no one in the whole world but you and I could know. I'd kill him myself to save Anthony and Arthur if . . ."

I tried to smile.

"If it weren't murder, and if no one in the world could know—and the other 'ifs,'" she went on wildly.

"It wouldn't be on one's conscience in the least," I said.

"It would be a righteous act. In the circumstances, he *ought* to die. He ought to be killed, and a just God would . . ."

"Well, we'll have to leave him to a just God," I interrupted, somewhat horror-stricken at the turn the conversation had taken, and the trend that fear and terror had given to her thoughts.

It was all very well for me to talk airily about wringing the fellow's neck, but it was a very different thing to hear this gentle, sweet, and kindly woman talk in such a strain. And once again my blood boiled and my mind seethed with impotent rage, as I thought of that callous and selfish hound, completely self-satisfied, greedily grinning and stupidly guffawing.

If ever there were a case of 'killing no murder,' surely this was one. And when one compared Montague Ferring-Chevigny with Anthony Calderton: with Sir Arthur Calderton, and with this woman; his killing seemed something more than 'no murder,' a righteous and excusable act, an act that needed no excuse. A necessary deed, and rather than that this unthinkable thing should happen to these three people—to this dear and blameless woman, to my Anthony—I would do it myself. And I would . . .

Amazing how one's thoughts run away with one when one gives them rein, like horses that must be for ever ridden on the curb, lest they bolt, and galloping headlong, carry their rider to destruction.

Well, mine should not. Neither should those of Lady Calderton. But what if hers were more unmanageable than mine; her hands too weak upon the curb-rein. Suppose that she, in her ungovernable fear for her child and husband . . .

And there went my thoughts again.

Nevertheless, if this man Ferring-Chevigny drove us too far . . .

Oh, stop thinking, cried I to myself. Stop being a fool, and remember who you are and where you are.

I must see my uncle again.

"That's what I'll do," I said aloud. "I'll run up to Town and have a talk with my uncle."

"Yes, but don't go now. Not to-day. I don't feel I can . . . Wait till I've seen him again. I want you to be present. Did he say what time he would come here?"

"At tea-time."

"Well, we'll see him, and find out what he proposes to do."

"And tell him what we propose to do," I said.

"What can we do but accept his terms? But I'll never willingly see him alone again."

"No, I wouldn't. I'd make him say anything he has got to say in front of . . ."

"In front of you, Henry. There's no one else, and there's no one whom I'd prefer—while Arthur's away. And Arthur is the last person in the world before whom . . . I mean, when he says it to Arthur, that's the end of everything. What should I have done if you hadn't been here, or if you had been a different sort of person! To give

you all this worry and . . .”

“If you only knew the joy it gives me to be able to help you. I thank God, too, that I am here: and there’s nothing I wouldn’t do, nothing I won’t do . . . And about his coming this afternoon. There’s one thing I’d like to suggest. Let’s put up a pretence of—how shall I express it—having something up our sleeves, so to speak. A man like him must have all sorts of uneasinesses and anxieties. I feel quite sure, from the things he has let drop in unguarded moments, that the late Romez was not his only enemy. I shouldn’t be at all surprised if he weren’t just as badly wanted in one or two other countries. Mexico, for example. I don’t suggest that the Mexicans are going to be of use to us in the way that the Boruelans were, but there may be others who want him, beginning with the English Police. We don’t want to put up a bluff that he’s going to call, but at the same time, I think it would be a mistake to take meekly what’s coming to us, so to speak; to let him ride rough-shod over us, as though we are completely at his mercy.”

“As we are,” said Lady Calderton.

“Yes, but he’s not to know it. We’ll be a bit stiff-necked and also mysterious. Try and puzzle him a little and have him guessing, and if you agree, I’ll go and lunch at the Albany again to-morrow.”

§ 4

That afternoon, I got another surprise from the incalculable Anthony who had given me so many.

On returning from our walk, he had spent the rest of the morning in dressing up, arraying himself in his really rather beautiful Cavalier garb, combing and brushing out the wig, arranging its long curls to his satisfaction, and manufacturing, with *crêpe* hair and spirit gum, a magnificent moustache and Vandyck beard.

I imagine that, when he had finished, hung his new sword in the slings of his baldrick, and clapped his great plumed Cavalier hat upon his head, he was a completely accurate impersonation of a young gentleman of quality, of the days of Charles the First.

After lunch, faithful to my promise, though inwardly cursing the uncomfortable things the while, I put on the equally accurate Cromwellian outfit that he had assembled from wall and old oak chest; the lobster-tailed helmet, thick heavy breast-plate, sword and spurs from the trophy that hung on the corridor panelling, the impossible jack-boots, buff jerkin, heavy horseman’s coat, gauntlets and knee-breeches from one of the attic trunks in which the dress-up kit was kept.

By special request, indeed definite directions (this being his birthday and he Master of all Ceremonies and Lord of Misrule), I was to descend the secret staircase that led down into the hall, leave the house by the “postern gate,” an inconspicuous iron-sheathed, nail-studded door that gave on to a shrubbery, make a detour, and approach the house, by way of the main drive, at the head of an imaginary troop of dismounted Ironsides.

By the main entrance, at the top of the left-hand flight of steps leading from the drive to the pillared porch, Sir Anthony Calderton, Captain of the King’s Own Bodyguard, was to confront me, and declare that the King was not hiding in Calderton House. When I refused to take his word, ordered him to stand aside and permit me and my men to enter, he was to bid defiance to us all, draw his sword, and prepare to sell his life dearly while the King made his escape by another postern gate at the rear of the house.

Hot and heavy work after luncheon, especially to one who, his mind preoccupied with tragic realities, must play his part satisfactorily and wholeheartedly, make impassioned though extempore speeches, take his cues correctly, and bear himself like a man and an Ironside, albeit a crop-eared boor. Yes, that was the phrase, I believed:

“A curse on the crop-eared boor who sent me and my standard on foot from Marston Moor.”

I must have played my part well, for undeniably Anthony played his too well.

The unrehearsed encounter opened excellently, and we mouthed our impromptu lines, and with complete satisfaction established each the other respectively as crop-eared boor and Man of Blood with long essencéd hair, the latter phrase coming happily to my mind from school-days, as I ground my teeth and muttered beneath my breath,

“And the Man of Blood was there with his long essencéd hair.”

And after due prolongation of the desirable preliminaries and a shout of “In the name of the Parliament, stand aside, Sir Anthony,” answered by a high-pitched cry of “Back, dog. Advance at your peril,” we drew and fell to.

So far, so good. But what I had not realized was that the loyal and faithful defender of his King was still wearing the very real rapier that I had given him that morning. Whether Anthony actually realized it, I didn’t know. I don’t know now, and I am not sure whether Anthony himself knows. Anyhow, he drew the keen-edged, sharp-pointed sword and attacked me with the utmost fury.

He wasn’t playing. He *was* Sir Anthony Calderton, selling his life against hopeless odds, dying that his King might live.

I was but one of a troop and the staircase must be held at all costs while the King got to horse. No matter that the “staircase” was a great flight of steps a dozen feet in width. No matter that half the troop had but to run round to the other flight of steps, go up and take him in the rear; no matter anything at all, save that, here before him, was a Roundhead soldier, a Cromwellian rebel, nay, Cromwell himself—even as no doubt Sir Anthony Calderton became, while he fought, the spirit of loyalty to the Stuarts and then the Stuart King himself; Charles the King fighting Cromwell the Traitor.

I have said he attacked me with the utmost fury. It is a form of words that here is not an exaggeration. He became a fury, and as I parried and riposted, guarded and cautiously thrust, he went mad before my eyes.

Ira furor brevis est; he was temporarily insane, and my growing discomfort quickly changed to anxiety and alarm. My weapon, apart from any question of my extreme carefulness in its use, was not dangerous, a heavy basket-hilted thing, genuine of the period, but of the poorest quality, fortunately blunt, and square-pointed.

There was no fear of my scratching the boy, and I saw to it that my point never rose to the level of his face, or went anywhere near it. What I did fear was that he'd give me an incapacitating wound, or accidentally do me an injury about which he would be heart-broken when he came to his senses.

And yet accident was hardly the word, for he was doing his utmost to run me through, straining every nerve and sinew to kill the enemy of his King. Whether I am a good teacher of fencing or not, Anthony was certainly a most apt pupil, with a natural gift for that magnificent art and exercise, and he was now fencing with real skill. Luckily I knew all his tricks—as I had taught them to him—and contrived to parry them as they came, but it was an extraordinarily difficult thing to fight entirely on the defensive—attack being always the best defence.

What worried me as much as the fear that a wild thrust or cut might reach my face and do damage that Anthony would regret as long as he lived, was the realization that he was, for the time being, insane.

That word again. How I hate it: because it is as misleading as it is inevitable. Perhaps it is better to say that he was mad, and qualify it by the words “with rage.” Surely the sanest person can be mad with rage upon occasion? He was beside himself. Perhaps that is the best expression I can use.

A curious phrase, but apt, inasmuch as Sir Anthony Calderton, the Cavalier Captain of the King's Guard, stood beside the boy Anthony Calderton. And for the moment, the spirit with which they were both infused, the spirit that enfilled and

informed them both, was concentrated in the one, the desperate hero, desperately dying in the royal cause.

Anyway, the boy had gone *berserk*, and no actual cavalier in actual battle at Marston Moor or Naseby ever attacked real Roundhead with a more desperate ferocity.

For a little longer, I defended myself and then began to retreat backwards down the steps, still desperately assailed and sore beset by the Cavalier captain. Anxious as I was to put an end to it before anything untoward happened, I was also loth to be a spoil-sport, stop the play, and, by throwing off pretence and disguise, exert my authority in my proper person and rôle of tutor.

Arrived at the bottom of the steps, Anthony's rapier ringing on mine and occasionally on my helmet and breast-plate, I suddenly bethought me of a way of escape and of playing 'possum as well as Roundhead. With a cry of anguish followed by a deep groan, I sagged at the knees, collapsed, dropped my sword and fell at Anthony's feet.

"So perish all the King's enemies," panted the boy, wiped the, happily imaginary, blood from his sword upon the sleeve of my jerkin, raised it till the hilt was against his lips, sheathed it—and that particular play was finished.

As I sat up and smiled at the now perfectly normal Anthony, someone crossed the gravel towards us from the shade of the trees. Glancing round and seeing who it was, Anthony went up the steps and into the house without further speech.

"By gad," said the voice of Captain Ferring-Chevigny, as I rose to my feet. "Is that a boy or a wild beast? Upon my soul, I thought he had done you in."

§ 5

There is little need to dwell upon the misery of the days that followed. Ferring-Chevigny again established himself at the Calderton Arms, or, at any rate, with that inn as his headquarters, as he came and went a good deal, disappearing for days at a time, returning suddenly and remaining for longer or shorter periods.

When staying at the Calderton Arms, he spent most of his time at the house, made himself one of the family, and behaved as though he were not only a relative of Lady Calderton, but a most welcome and privileged guest.

To the butler, the footman, the head groom and the head chauffeur, he made, in pleasant but authoritative manner, such requests as he saw fit to make, and these they accepted as orders.

Although I, of course, refrained from doing so, I should very much have liked to talk about him to the faithful Jenkins, and to hear what he and the staff thought about our visitor. I expect I should have found the general opinion to be that he was undoubtedly a “one”; that Lady Calderton never knew what he would do next, and that she was quite as glad to see him go as she was to see him come; that, albeit a perfect gentleman, he was a bit of a lad, a gay spark, must have been an anxiety to his mother, and no doubt was a bit of an anxiety to poor Lady Calderton. Had these worthy folk been in the habit of using such expressions, they’d probably have called him an *enfant terrible*, if not a *mauvais sujet*. Doubtless in the servants’ hall they discussed him, but I don’t think that for one moment there was the slightest suspicion of there being anything wrong, of there being anything to conceal, much less that ghastly tragedy impended.

More and more people called as it became known that Lady Calderton was better and was seen about in her car and on horseback; and there was a certain amount of entertaining.

To do Ferring-Chevigny justice, he behaved circumspectly, his manner, when we were alone, being unprovocative, and, when we had guests, that of a very old friend of the family who had returned, after many years abroad, to take up life again in England, and probably in this county and this particular part of it.

On the surface all was well, and beneath the surface life was tragic horror, a long-drawn agony of suspense as we miserably awaited the day when someone should recognize him; something should happen, such as the arrival of detectives from Scotland Yard; some breath of scandal should suddenly arise and poison the air; and awaited what was worst of all, because inevitable, the return of Sir Arthur Calderton, when the blow must surely fall.

“I couldn’t possibly do it, Henry,” said Lady Calderton. “How could I? How could I let that man cross the threshold when Sir Arthur is in the house? How could I possibly remain silent, even if he did?”

“He’ll remain silent all right,” I said. “Why should he spoil his own game? As a matter of fact, that’s the last thing in the world that he wants. He’s perfectly happy, and his idea is for things to go on exactly as they are.”

“But how can they? How can they? How could I introduce him to Sir Arthur? How could I let him sit at table with him? Such appalling deceit and . . .”

“It’s that or the crash,” I said. “I don’t see how you can possibly allow it, as you say; but it means the end of everything, directly you tell your husband.”

“Oh, if only I were one of those strong women with perfect self-control . . . But

how could any self-respecting woman do such a thing? I feel I cannot possibly bear the . . . And then I think of Arthur and of Anthony and . . . Oh, what can I do? What *can* I do? Give me your advice, Henry. Help me.”

“My advice is this,” I said. “Wait. Bear it as long as you possibly can. Certainly until Sir Arthur comes. One never knows what might happen. I might even yet be able to shame him into . . .”

“But he’d still be alive. And while he’s alive, the position . . .”

“Yes, I know. But I say *wait*. Easy to advise, I know; but be patient and be brave, and wait till the last possible minute. Wait and hope. Remember we got rid of him once. My uncle’s plan worked and, but for the death of that man Romez, we should never have seen him again. And Romez wasn’t the only enemy. His were not the only police that Ferring-Chevigny is hiding from, I’m quite sure. Likely as not our own police want him. Wait till the last moment. Wait at least until Sir Arthur comes. It would be the greatest folly to despair yet, and give in. I have tremendous faith in my uncle, and still more in the eternal justice of things. My advice is—wait.”

“I’ll go on as long as I can, Henry,” she said.

“After all, he might die,” she added.

“Yes,” I agreed, meeting her gaze. “He might die.”

§ 6

Meanwhile, what was an undoubted help, by reason of its being a distraction and a piece of work into which she could plunge, was the organization of the annual Charity Ball. This was a big County affair which every year brought in a very considerable sum of money for the local hospital, inasmuch as there were no expenses at all, the County magnates taking it in turn to be host, to give the ball in their own houses and to bear all costs. To limit the numbers within reasonable bounds, the tickets were extremely expensive. Everybody who was anybody went, and the affair was one of the big County social-occasions of the year.

XVIII

“Fancy dress again this year, I suppose,” said Lady Jane Thyrlby, as the Ladies’ Committee of the Hospital Charity Ball sat in session at a table in the library at Calderton House.

“Oh, yes, rather,” agreed Miss Christabel Hardacre. “Much more fun.”

“More of a draw, too,” observed the Dowager Lady Bramlingham, in her deep contralto.

“Yes, I think so,” said Lady Calderton, from the chair. “It’s more of a draw, as you say, and it also helps to keep it a little on the exclusive side. We don’t want more people than we can possibly accommodate.”

“Oh, we shan’t have that, my dear,” said Lady Jane Thyrlby. “We have never yet been really overcrowded, and this is by far the biggest house in the County. If we had a full band in the musicians’ gallery above the hall, and things did get a bit crowded in the ballroom, the band would be perfectly audible in the drawing-room as well as in the hall.”

“Oh, yes,” agreed Lady Calderton. “You hear it all over the house. Anyway, it’s what we’ve done before, isn’t it?”

“Yes, darling, but we have never been quite so ambitious, have we? Five hundred tickets seem an awful lot.”

“No, I think not,” mused Lady Bramlingham. “There wouldn’t be more than three hundred people dancing at once, and the ballroom and the drawing-room would take a hundred couples each, not to mention the hall.”

“Right, then,” said Christabel Hardacre. “Let’s settle on that. Five hundred tickets, fancy dress, and a full band. If Lady Calderton approves.”

“What’ll you do about supper, dear?” asked Lady Jane.

“Oh, I’ll leave all that to Holroyds. I thought they did everything splendidly when it was at your house.”

After the conclusion of the business, the Committee adjourned to the drawing-room for tea, and departing one by one, as Jenkins announced their cars, left Miss Christabel Hardacre alone with Lady Calderton.

“I told my man not to come round till five o’clock unless he were sent for, Katherine,” she said. “I wanted to out-stay the others and have a talk with you.”

“Very nice of you, dear. I was hoping for a word with you alone. How is everything?”

“Katherine, I want your advice.”

Lady Calderton smiled.

“What do they say about advice, Christabel? It’s the only thing we give too freely, and the one thing we ask for and never take.”

“Perhaps it isn’t advice I want. Perhaps it’s . . . shall I say, encouragement. I think I want a push in the direction in which I want to go.”

“Why, Christabel! Good news?”

Heavens above, the poor woman was blushing. Surely Christabel Hardacre wasn’t going to . . . Surely not *Christabel!* What did Arthur say the men called her? ‘The Hard-boiled Virgin.’ Poor Christabel, with her too-golden hair, weather-beaten horse face, mannish ways, and general utter lack of desirability, from the masculine point of view.

In spite of her wealth, in spite of her forth-right out-spoken honesty and good-heartedness, in spite of her fine sportsmanship and general popularity, there had never been a suggestion, never the faintest whisper of anything of the sort. Who could it be?

Well, if he were the right man, he’d be a lucky man. If he were some hard-riding bluff and jolly squire who lived for horses and hunting, it might turn out splendidly. Mannish and *gauche* she might be, with much of the speech and manners of her own grooms; hot-tempered and sharp-spoken she might be; narrow, limited and bucolic; with hardly an idea beyond sport; the stables her spiritual home; she nevertheless had a heart of gold. She was kind, charitable in every sense of the word, and loyal; a friend dependable and true as steel. What if she were a joke—’Ard-faced Aggie; Leathery Lou; Horsey Hannah and a hard-boiled virgin to the haw-bucks and the half-sirs. She might be a joke, but she was a good joke, a good woman and a good sportsman.

And as she sat blushing and twiddling her fingers, she said,

“That’s what I want to consult you about, Katherine. There’s no one whose opinion I value more. Nobody alive whom I admire more . . . Would you think I was an old fool?”

“Don’t be silly, Christabel. You know you are not old, and I know you are not a fool. Who is it, my child? Anyone I know?”

“My dear, I met him here.”

“Here? Not Mr. . . .” No, it couldn’t be. It couldn’t possibly be. Why, Henry Waring was ten years younger than Christabel Hardacre.

“Yes. I met him here. Long ago. I was passing the lodge gates and I thought I’d just look in and see how Anthony was, and drop you a line about him. And riding up

the drive I met him.”

“Anthony?”

“No.”

“Mr. Waring?”

“No. Captain Bertie-Norton. He raised his hat and I asked him if he knew whether Anthony was in, and he stopped and talked to me. He stroked my horse’s neck and smiled up into my eyes and . . . and . . . now he . . . I believe he is going to ask me to marry him!”

If Lady Calderton lay back in her chair and for a moment closed her eyes, Christabel Hardacre did not notice it.

Lady Calderton sat up.

“Has he actually *proposed* to you?”

“*Actually?*” Miss Hardacre sat up very straight. “And why not? Do you consider that I am too old for a man to . . .”

“When I said ‘actually,’ I meant . . . I meant . . . ‘definitely,’ Christabel. Please don’t misunderstand me. Let me say it again, dear. Has Captain Bertie-Norton in so many words asked you to marry him, or do you mean he’s showing signs of . . . ?”

“Katherine dear, Captain Bertie-Norton is going to ask me to marry him. He has told me he is going to *ask me something* at the Ball; and that if my answer is what he *prays* it may be, he is going to tell everybody, ‘tell the world,’ as he said—announce it, in fact.”

Lady Calderton stared incredulous, white-faced. Christabel Hardacre rose to her feet.

“Well!” she cried. “Is that all you’ve got to say . . . ? What’s the matter?”

Lady Calderton still stared in silence, in horrified incredulity, apparently stricken dumb.

“What the devil . . . ?” began the offended spinster. “Well . . . !”

And she was at a loss for words.

The two women stared at each other in silence, the one white-faced, shocked beyond speech; the other, red-faced, glowering, too angry for words.

Miss Hardacre recovered first.

“Oh, so *that’s* it, is it?” she said. “Well, well, well! I’d never have believed it. *You* of all people. With an excellent husband, not to mention an admirable tutor!” . . .

And the incensed and insulted Miss Hardacre marched from the room and out of the house.

XIX

Before dinner on that day of the ladies' Ball-Committee meeting, while Captain Ferring-Chevigny and I sat in the drawing-room, moodily sipping sherry, and eyeing each other with mutual disapproval and distaste, Jenkins came with a message that Lady Calderton would not be dining downstairs.

"No, sir," he replied to my question. "Her maid did not say that her Ladyship was ill. Merely that she was tired after the committee-meeting and had retired, and that a tray was to be sent upstairs . . . Dinner is served, sir."

It was an awkward and unpleasant meal, for I was hating Ferring-Chevigny fiercely. Not only for what he was, for what he had done and was doing, and for what his very existence foreboded, but especially for his manner. So small an addition to wrongs and villainies so colossal, but it was almost the last straw, threatening to break down my endurance, and my self-restraint.

"Huh! Shirking it, is she? Well, she can't run away much longer. There's got to be a show-down," he sneered as we drank our soup.

"And I wonder how *you*'ll come out of a show-down," I growled.

"Might be a show-up, you mean," he laughed.

"Precisely. And you aren't hiding here because you are particularly anxious for lime-light."

"Don't you worry about me, Sunny-Boy," was the reply. "I appreciate it, you know; but you are over-solicitous."

And the servants entering with the next course, we stopped our snarling.

Dinner finished, Ferring-Chevigny took it upon himself to tell Jenkins that we would have coffee served at table.

"We'll go up to your den afterwards," he said to me, as the servants left the room. "I want a talk with you, since her delicate-minded Ladyship funks it.

"Perhaps it's as well, too," he continued. "I'll get the idea into your head clearly enough, and I haven't the slightest doubt you'll get it into hers. She'll enjoy listening to you, Sunny-Boy."

After three glasses of port and a cup of coffee, Ferring-Chevigny picked up the brandy decanter and one of the balloon glasses that Robert had left on the table.

"Come on," said he, "let's get up to your room where we can be private . . . Bring the cigars."

"Now, my lad," said Ferring-Chevigny when he had half filled the big glass, lit a

cigar and made himself comfortable in my armchair, “I want you to listen to what I’ve got to say. Listen carefully, for you’ve got to put it fully and accurately before my wife. And I hope that she’ll give me credit for the consideration and forbearance that I’m showing.”

I sat and watched the man, without comment.

“First of all, it is not pretended that she’s desperately fond of me, is it? No, and I think I can quite truthfully say that, having got along without her for seventeen years, I can hold on for another seventeen . . . Now then, we parted, and parted for good, when Captain Montague Ferring-Chevigny died. We parted still more, and parted for even better, when she married Sir Arthur Calderton. So, on the whole, you might say that now, seventeen years later, we are, on the whole, pretty damn well parted, eh?

“Good. That’s point one.

“Lady Calderton, wife of Sir Arthur Calderton, mother of Anthony Calderton, the heir, châtelaine of this noble castle, is, well—just that.

“Captain Montague Bertie-Norton is nothing in her young life. And doesn’t want to be. She had never even heard his name until she came back from Montiga. What does it matter to her or to him or to you or to anybody on God’s earth, if he happens to be a reincarnation? Nothing at all. It doesn’t matter if, in his previous life, he was Peter the Great, or Sam Small, or the King of the Cannibal Islands, or a silly soldier-man who was drowned off Perenecque Island beach, does it? Not a bit.

“Well now, why should these two utterly unconnected, independent, unentangled people interfere with each other in any way at all?”

“Precisely,” I agreed, as he not only paused for an answer but sat awaiting one, his curious light eyes staring compellingly into mine. “Precisely what I’ve asked you. What on earth do you want to come here for at all, since you realize that? Why come here, after seventeen years, and interfere?”

“You know perfectly well why I came here; and we don’t want to go into all that again. Needs must when the devil drives. The devil drove me here, and he damn well drove me out again. Well, the devil’s dead. What’s that tag young Anthony was spouting the other day out of *The Closet and the Hearth* or what-not—the bloke with the cross-bow: ‘*Courage, mon ami, le diable est mort.*’ Gerard was his name, wasn’t it? Anyway, *my* devil’s dead, and here I am again.”

“Yes, here you are again, and pointing out how utterly unnecessary it is for your life and Lady Calderton’s to . . .” I began.

“Now, don’t interrupt, Sunny-Boy. You listen to me. Here I am again, I was going to say, *but*—and the Hell of a fine ‘but’ it is—*but* the situation is absolutely

changed. Man cannot live by bread alone, as you may have heard in the course of your learned researches; and all I wanted was just a modest pat of butter with my bread. You know, 'A jug of wine, a loaf of bread, a pat of butter' and I can make my own 'Paradise enow,' even in this little wilderness. I was going to say, even in this bloody hole, but I think the original is 'wilderness,' isn't it?

"That was all I asked. Modest enough, surely, and nobody a penny the worse. Careful, kindly, considerate I was, making no sort or kind of upset or disturbance, never a thought of blackmail—and now here comes the reward of virtue. Some reward too, Sunny-Boy! As far as I can make out, about twenty-five thousand a year. Think of it!"

"I could think of it better if I knew what you were talking about," I said, as Ferring-Chevigny again interrupted his monologue and beamed upon me.

"Twenty-five thousand jimmy-o-goblins, *per*. A very neat lump sum for a lad who has been up against life in the rough, and seen hard times. A very neat lump sum indeed, but this is *per annum*, Sunny-Boy. How's that for the reward of virtue?"

"You've inherited twenty-five thousand a year?"

"Going to, in a manner of speaking."

"Then you'll be leaving here?"

"Leaving this immediate neighbourhood. Not going to tear myself away altogether, but I'm certainly 'going away,' in a manner of speaking—with your kind help, Sunny-Boy. You put it neatly and concisely and clearly to the girl friend, and show her the all-round beauty of the scheme, the perfect solution of everybody's problems and difficulties and troubles, and you'll be doing your bit. Helpful ever—especially to the girl friend. Your favourite rôle in life, Sunny-Boy.

"And *my* rôle? I shall *roll* in money," continued Ferring-Chevigny, as he emptied his glass and took another cigar.

"And you won't find me ungrateful," he added. "The day it comes off, I shall write you a nice little cheque.

"Why, bless my soul," he grinned, pausing in the lighting of his cigar, "I'll guarantee you the job of tutor to all the little Ferring-Chevignys. I mean Bertie-Nortons. One down, t'other come on. I mean, one gone on to school and t'other come up to the school-room. Job for life for you, Sunny-Boy. If we haven't left it too late!

"Now then, be serious a minute. Brass tacks. You've just agreed with me that there's no earthly reason why Lady Calderton and Captain Montague Bertie-Norton should be anything to each other whatsoever, except good friends. They knew each other as youngsters, and the friendship has been revived. Nothing more to it than

that. Nothing whatsoever. Very well. Captain Bertie-Norton, thinking of settling down in this part of the world where he has got friends and someone to introduce him to the County, has met a woman after his own heart, a fine open-air, hard-riding, sporting lass, and he has fallen in love with her! Ack over tock, which is Boruelan-Spanish for head over heels. ‘*And the lady?*’ you ask. Well, she’s what you might call distinctly on-coming. I haven’t definitely proposed and demanded a definite answer, yet, but she knows. *She* knows! And she’s all of a doodah. All het-up and girlish. And you can take it from me that it’s not going to be a case of ‘decline and fall.’ No—she’ll fall without a thought of declining.”

“Fall?” I said, still uncomprehending. “Who?”

“Be your bright self, Sunny-Boy. Be your age. I’m going to marry Miss Christabel Hardacre—and nobody on this little round earth is going to stop me.”

Once again I stared at this amazing man, incredulous.

“*Marry* Miss Hardacre?” I said stupidly.

“Yes, and put an end to what you must admit is a somewhat galling situation.”

“Galling?”

“Yes. To my pride. You may not be able to understand such feelings, but I assure you I don’t like having to live on my wife’s bounty. (Which reminds me that quarter-day falls on Wednesday. Make a note of it.) Although it is perfectly right and proper that a man and his wife should share and share alike, it being quite immaterial whether the source of income is actually his or hers, the present circumstances are a bit unusual. Lady Calderton lives, of course, upon Sir Arthur Calderton’s money, and feels no more discomfort in doing so than Sir Arthur Calderton would feel in living on his wife’s money if she were a rich woman. But it isn’t quite the same thing with me, is it? Because, in a manner of speaking, the help that she gives me comes out of Sir Arthur’s pocket. I mean, you could argue that way if you liked. No need to, of course, because by the time she has got it, it is hers; absolutely hers. And whatever share of it her lawful husband gets is *his* fair share of *her* own money. Still, I don’t like it, Waring. And, as I say, this marriage, admirable from every point of view, is all the more so by reason of its putting an end to what I have just called a galling situation.”

“But . . .”

“But me no buts, Sunny-Boy. Unless it’s a butt of malmsey for a wedding-present. Just keep quiet, and I’ll tell you what you’ve got to do, and that’s easily told. You see the girl friend as soon as possible, and put it to her that here’s the solution. It lets us both out. She rests assured that there never can nor will be a word out of me to upset the seventeen-year-old applegart; and I escape from the present

humiliating situation of being her pensioner or whatever you like to call it.

“And be particularly careful to point out to her that from now, henceforth and for evermore, I’m just as much in her power as she is in mine. I could no more threaten her with exposure—not that I ever have or ever would do such a thing—than she can threaten me. I should be queering my own pitch, just as much as hers, if ever I said a word about—auld lang syne.”

I eyed him in silence, feeling that nothing that I could say could adequately express my feelings; that nothing that I could say would penetrate the shell of his conscienceless egotism; that no words would have any result whatever. Comment, expostulation, would have as much effect upon this man as would the throwing of water on a stone.

Ferring-Chevigny poured out more brandy, drank and lay back in his chair.

“Neat, eh?” he smiled. “Pretty. The ideal solution . . . ‘And they all lived happy ever after.’

“Naturally Katherine will jump at it when she grasps the full beauty of it; gets all the implications. She’s fully and finally rid of a spare husband; and I am fully and finally settled in life. She has no need to send any more cheques; and I’ve no need to accept any, either. Sir Arthur Calderton and our beloved Anthony stay put; and Miss Christabel Hardacre knows joy at last, her life a path-way of roses without a thorn. And Sunny-Boy Waring remains sitting pretty.”

Ferring-Chevigny fell silent.

“We’ll announce it at the Ball, I think,” he said. “Create quite a sensation.”

He yawned loudly.

“Well,” he said, rising to his feet. “Tell the girl friend just as soon as you like. Only fair to let her know that all’s well now, and she need not worry any more . . .”

§ 2

I shall be believed when I say that I didn’t sleep that night. When Anthony came to my room in the morning, I told him to go along and see his mother, and say that Mr. Waring would like to speak to her when she came downstairs.

Soon after breakfast, Robert came to the school-room with a message—Lady Calderton’s compliments, and she’d be glad if I could spare a minute to speak to her in her morning-room.

Thus, with the dreadful final and fatal avalanche impending, did we keep up appearances.

She looked like a ghost, and my heart bled for her. That's a silly expression, perhaps, but I can truthfully say that literally it ached.

"You are not looking too well, Henry," she said, smiling as I entered. "I believe you feel the strain almost as much as I do."

"Had a bad night," I said ungraciously, "and I've got some bad news."

I was too savagely angry, too desperate, in my sense of impotent futility, to be careful and diplomatic.

"He now proposes to end the situation—which is galling to his manly pride—by deliberately committing bigamy, you and I being accessories before the fact. We are not only to connive but to congratulate."

"Christabel Hardacre," whispered Lady Calderton.

"You knew?" I said in surprise.

"She told me herself, yesterday evening."

"That he has proposed to her?"

"That he's going to. She wanted my advice, poor soul. And then changed that to 'a push in the direction in which she wished to go.' Dear God! Is the man sane?"

"No," I replied. "He's not. It's diseased egotism. He . . ."

"Henry, this is the end. I must tell her. I must tell her at once."

"You said nothing when she spoke to you yesterday?"

"I . . . No, I told her nothing. I made no confession, I mean. But I was . . . stunned. All I could say was, '*Has he actually proposed to you?*' And poor Miss Hardacre thought I meant, '*Does that fine handsome man want to marry a middle-aged spinster like you?*' Or something of that sort. I must have merely gaped at her. And she, poor dear, immediately jumped to the conclusion that I simply could not believe such utterly incredible news. She was perfectly right, of course. I could not believe—that he was serious . . . I can't, now."

"He is, though," said I. "Absolutely serious; and he honestly cannot see any objection. Thinks it's a splendid way out of the *impasse*."

"But it makes things just twice as bad as they were before."

"Not in his opinion. Not from his point of view. He requested me to point out to you that, after marrying her, he would be as much in your power as you in his; that you could rest assured that you were safe for the rest of your life; and that Sir Arthur and Anthony would be safe too. Also, that you would henceforth be entirely free from the awkward, distasteful, and possibly risky task of keeping him supplied with money."

Lady Calderton buried her face in her hands.

"Well, this is the end, Henry," she said, in a quiet, dull voice, resigned and dry.

I would have preferred that she had burst into tears and sobbed without restraint. As well she didn't, perhaps, or I should have been unable to refrain from comforting her in the way in which any human-hearted man must comfort a woman in such circumstances. And where Lady Calderton was concerned, I was all too human.

"Don't say it," I begged. "It isn't the end. It isn't."

"What can we do? I've thought all night long."

"So have I," I replied, "and there are two things; two ways, courses, possibilities. Suppose I, or you, go to Miss Hardacre and tell her that Captain Bertie-Norton is not what he appears to be; that that is not even his right name, and that he's a married man."

Lady Calderton looked up.

"Wouldn't she at once tax him with it? Being the downright, straight-riding, outspoken woman that she is, I think she'd immediately do that. And wouldn't that be the end?" said Lady Calderton.

"No. I don't think it would. He'd simply deny it."

"And then?"

"Then it's up to us to convince her. And there again, I believe both I and my uncle could help. We could go to her independently, and tell her that we know that the man calling himself Bertie-Norton is an adventurer, living under an *alias*, and a married man.

"You see, directly you tell her that you know him to be a married man, she'll want some sort of proof," I continued. "Supposing I then go and see her, and assure her that not only do I know this man's real name, which is not Bertie-Norton; but that I *know* him to be married, and that his wife is alive. Then, when torn between indignation on behalf of her *fiancé* (who is still stoutly denying it) and fear that there may be something in it, she wants further proof, I'll take her up to see my uncle at the Albany. That'll be better than bringing him down here. If there's anybody on this earth who could convince her, it's Sir Walter Waring—the more so because he'll be speaking the absolute truth, though not the whole truth. By the time he has told her that he *knows* that the man calling himself Bertie-Norton has a wife living, and moreover that he'll intervene— forbid the banns, don't they call it—she'll be convinced."

"And the second course?" asked Lady Calderton, her face unanimated by any gleam of hope.

"Why! Call his bluff! Tell him that if he really proposes to marry Miss Hardacre and she accepts him, you'll tell her the truth."

“Do you suppose that that would stop him?”

“I do.”

“And don’t you suppose he’d be vindictive, vengeful and . . .”

“No, I don’t. He’s far too wily to lose both the substance and the shadow. He’s not the man to say, *‘Well, you’ve done me out of the chance of twenty-five thousand a year; now I’ll do myself out of the thousand I have got.’* Don’t you see, he’s what he calls ‘sitting pretty,’ as it is, and he sees a chance to sit prettier still. But if he can’t have the ‘prettier,’ he’s not also going to lose the ‘pretty’ surely! No, I firmly believe that he’ll drop the idea.”

“I don’t. You don’t know him. Not as well as I do, Henry,” she smiled sadly. “When he’s in pursuit of something he wants, he’s like a steam-roller. There’s no stopping him. There’s no holding him. And nothing matters. Nor do I for one moment believe that he will suppose we are in earnest. I don’t think he could imagine anybody doing the right thing simply *because* it is the right thing to do. He just simply couldn’t visualize anyone doing what he’d call ‘queering their own pitch.’ If you assure him with all the vehemence and force of which you are capable, that I’ll tell my . . . tell Sir Arthur . . . the truth, wreck his life, ruin Anthony’s life, ruin myself, rather than let him marry Miss Hardacre, he simply won’t believe it. If I see him myself and say that the moment I know that they are going to be married I will tell her he is my husband, he’ll merely laugh that ghastly laugh of his, and ask me whether I really am such a fool as to suppose he’s such a fool as to believe it.”

We sat and eyed each other in silent misery.

“It’s the end, Henry,” she said, “and whatever happens, and however long I survive it, I shall always be grateful to you . . . Far, far more than grateful and . . .”

“Then will you do me a favour?” I begged.

“I will.”

“Will you promise me not to tell your husband, nor Miss Hardacre, nor anybody else, without consulting me first.”

“I will, Henry. I promise you faithfully that I’ll confess nothing without telling you first. But you do understand, don’t you, that I must and I will do whatever may be necessary to prevent this unforgivable crime . . . That poor woman . . .”

“Of course I do. Of course. It has got to be prevented at any cost. But I do thank God that you didn’t tell Miss Hardacre why you were so utterly incredulous. Up to this moment, nobody on this earth knows except my uncle and I, and—there’s always hope. While there’s life there’s hope, and while nobody knows but ourselves, there is no need to despair.”

“Henry, what hope is there? This unspeakably wicked idea of . . .”

"I don't know what hope there is. But I do know that I've still got it. Hope—and faith too. And what's more, a plan. And I'm not talking idly, in a feeble attempt to comfort you."

"You really have a plan? Something possible?"

"Believe me I have."

"What is it?"

"I don't want to tell you."

Lady Calderton rose to her feet.

"Henry! *No. No.* Not that! I won't have it. It was easy enough to talk. But now . . . I won't hear of it."

"You haven't heard of it," said I brusquely. "I'm only asking you not to despair. I'm only saying that I have not only hope, not only faith, but a belief. So long as you keep your promise to me . . ."

"I'll do that, my dear."

" . . . and admit nothing, confess nothing, without telling me, we shall defeat him—and save Anthony, not to mention yourself and your husband."

Lady Calderton sank back into her chair.

"Words fail me to tell you how grateful I . . . How I thank God that you . . . that you . . ."

"By the way," I interrupted, "you know Miss Hardacre pretty well. Suppose the worst came to the worst, and other things failed, could she be trusted? With a secret like that?"

"If I went to her and told her that he was my husband? I don't know . . . I don't know. Anyhow, I should have a terrible feeling that . . . How can I put it? That an avalanche was growing and growing and slipping and . . ."

"I know. I know. It's as though the stone he had flung into the placid pool of your life was making ever more and ever-widening circles."

"Yes, I should feel that all the world knew, that everyone was whispering, was looking at me . . . You see, I had to tell you. I don't mind your knowing a bit. I wanted you to know. Then, as your uncle is practically a recluse at the Albany, and we hardly ever see him, it didn't seem to matter that he knew. Of course, I realize, too, that he's as solid and silent as a rock. But it would be awful for her to know as well. Here, in our own corner of the county, in our own circle."

"I understand," I said. "It would be most painful for you to meet her, and terribly difficult to be natural, knowing that she knew. You'd never be able to forget it."

"*To forget it!*" whispered Lady Calderton.

"As a matter of actual fact, and if the worst came to the worst—not that it will—"

do you think she'd keep the secret?"

"I don't know. And that's the dreadful part of it. If she gave me her solemn promise to tell no one, I believe she'd keep her promise. But how do we know what her attitude would be if I went to her and said, '*You can't marry this man; he's my husband.*' She might even refuse to believe it. Do you know that her last words to me, as she marched out of the room yesterday, were to the effect that it was a pity that I, with a perfectly good husband and a perfectly good 'friend'—*you*, Henry!—couldn't bear to see my other 'friend,' Captain Bertie-Norton, carried off by another woman!"

I forced a smile, and indeed there was an element of comedy in this ghastly tragedy, as there so often is—just as tragedy lurks beneath the surface of so many human comedies.

Lady Calderton, jealous that her *friend*, Bertie-Norton, should be carried off by Christabel Hardacre!

"She might completely refuse to keep anything secret," she continued. "She's a good-hearted woman but . . . she *is* a woman. And I believe she's really in love with him. And when a woman of her age falls in love, it's apt to be serious. She may behave like a tigress and blame me for the whole thing."

"But surely it would be hardly reasonable."

"*Reasonable?* As I've just remarked, she's a woman, Henry."

"But wouldn't her anger be against him?"

"Quite probably not. She'd be literally mad with rage, with thwarted love, with a kind of jealousy, and, a long time before she'd see in him the scoundrelly bigamist who has tried to marry her for her money, she'd see in me the woman who has intervened and wrecked the romance of her life! I may be wronging her, but . . ."

"Anyway, it won't come to that," I replied with an assurance that I was far from feeling. "No, we are making too much of it. We thought at first that he had done the impossible, and made matters worse than they were before; but he hasn't really. He'll understand that we simply won't for one moment contemplate the bare idea of permitting, much less being accessories to, a foul crime like this, and he'll abandon the idea."

"He won't, Henry. He won't. Apart from what you call his diseased egotism, he's mentally lacking. Lacking in a sense of right and wrong. For him, there *are* no such things. There's only what is expedient and what is not. My fear—and indeed, my belief—is that he'll go on with it until we simply have to intervene and prove to her that he's already married. And then the truth will come out."

Again she buried her face in her hands.

“It must come out, Henry. And I’ve nearly got to the point where I shall say, *‘The sooner the better.’* If it weren’t for Anthony and Arthur, I wouldn’t bear it another day. I’d shout the truth from the housetops, to put an end to this . . . this . . .”

“But it *is* for Anthony and Sir Arthur,” I interrupted. “And you won’t give way. You’ll fight to the very last. And you’ll keep your promise to me.”

“I’ll keep my promise to you, my dear,” she said.

I turned away and hurried from the room.

I too was rapidly coming to the point where I could bear it no longer—could bear Ferring-Chevigny no longer; could bear the fact of his existence no longer. And before this awful thing happened to the woman whom I loved infinitely better than I loved my life, something should happen to the good Montague Ferring-Chevigny.

I returned to the schoolroom. With one half of my mind, I carried on my work with Anthony; and with the other half, I planned and schemed and plotted—ways of killing Ferring-Chevigny.

It was the only way out. It must be done—and it must be done in such a manner that there should be no scandal at Calderton. He had staged his own death once, as Ferring-Chevigny. I would now stage his death as Bertie-Norton. As Bertie-Norton he had come here out of the blue, and as Bertie-Norton he should go away again—into the darkness. I had once told him that he was a foul insect on which I would set my heel, and the time had come now for me to do it. I would do it with as little compunction as I would crush a scorpion or kill a snake.

Murder?

Killing no murder. The killing of a creature unfit to live, to save three innocent people, one hair of the head of each of whom was ten thousand times worth his vile carcass.

Freely and, indeed, unashamedly, I set it down in black and white, that I had already killed Ferring-Chevigny in my heart, and was a murderer in intent and purpose.

Thou shalt not kill? No, thou, Ferring-Chevigny, shalt not kill these innocent people from whom you have received no harm; and from one of whom you have received the ultimate kindness.

Clever man, you die! I’ll plot and I’ll plan, I’ll scheme and I’ll intrigue and contrive, till I get you where I can kill you without danger of discovery; and, a thousand times more important, without danger of there being the least shadow of connection between the dead Bertie-Norton and Lady Calderton.

So amazing are the workings of the human mind that I actually found myself whistling, under my breath, a line from an idiotic popular song which I had not heard, and of which I had not thought, from my childhood. What was it I was whistling? Why should it have come into my mind?

An extraordinary psychological phenomenon of association of ideas. ‘*After the Ball.*’

Yes, let him do as he threatened, let him force our hands by proposing matrimony to Christabel Hardacre and announcing it at the Charity Ball—and he would have signed his own death-warrant.

§ 3

Yes, he would have signed his own death-warrant. My mind was made up, and I felt the better for the fact. I was almost gay. I was fey. And that afternoon, Anthony must have found me grimly jocular.

As usual he responded. He was mildly facetious; and then he waxed confidential.

“I say, Henry, I’ve been thinking over that quotation,” said he. “We read it wrongly. Shakespeare didn’t mean,

*‘There is a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them as we will.’”*

“Oh?” said I. “Expound.”

“Why, obviously, what Shakespeare meant was,

*‘There is a divinity that shapes our ends rough,
Hew them as we will.’”*

“Shapes them rough, eh?” I smiled.

Poor little chap. Providence was shaping his ends ‘rough,’ with a vengeance. To-day, heir to an ancient house and a great estate; to-morrow, a nameless bastard, heir to nothing, not even to a name.

No, it should not be. I would prevent it. I would myself have the courage to shape a better end for him than that.

And again I told myself that Ferring-Chevigny should die before he committed this vile crime. I would kill him myself, without compunction and without pity.

What was that? What was the boy saying?

“Why does my mother fear Captain Bertie-Norton?” he said, repeating the

question that I had only subconsciously heard.

“*Fear* Captain Bertie-Norton?” said I in feigned astonishment.

“Yes, she’s afraid of him; and she hates him.”

“What *are* you talking about?”

Anthony put his hand through my arm.

“I say, Henry,” he said, “the foul Roundhead spy has some hold upon the brave wife of the Cavalier nobleman who is away at the wars.”

“Yes, that’s all right for play-acting, old chap, but what nonsense were you talking about Lady Calderton and Bertie-Norton?”

“*Ah!* . . . I know something.”

“What maggot have you got in your brain now?”

“*I know* . . . I overheard.”

“Good Heavens! You don’t mean to tell me you’ve been eavesdropping on your own mother, when she was talking to a guest?”

“Eavesdropping? Oh, no. I was spying. I’m the King’s own special Secret Agent. He has sent me to Calderton Castle to watch a Roundhead spy who has got into the house in the guise of a—guest . . . Well, I once went to spy on him in his room. I had an idea for giving him an awful fright. A ghostly voice behind the panel. But when I looked through my spy-hole, I saw that mother was in the room, and she and the Roundhead spy were quarrelling. I don’t mean that exactly, but I heard her say,

“*I pray God it may be the last time I see your face or hear your voice.*”

“And the spy laughed rudely and said something.”

“And you stayed and listened, eh?”

“Well . . . no. I came away as soon as I felt sure about the Roundhead spy . . . And I’m quite certain that my mother hates him.”

I suppose that at any other time this would have been a staggering blow; but now it was not. It scarcely troubled me, for mentally I deflected it from myself to fall upon the coffin of Montague Ferring-Chevigny. It should drive in the last nail. Had my resolution needed strengthening, which it did not, this would have strengthened it, made me yet the more determined that I would do what I now conceived to be my simple duty.

No. Enough blows had fallen. Only one more should fall. And on him, this time. It should be the last; final and fatal; and the sooner it fell, the better; before the boy learned anything else.

Had Anthony heard more than he admitted?

Did he know more than he professed to know?

It was possible, if not probable. I knew he would never for his own ends tell me a direct lie; but he loved reservations, perfectly harmless deceptions, and a sort of unchildlike, though innocent, diplomacy. It is difficult to explain, as I have already said; but though you loved and admired the boy and knew that he loved and admired you, you always felt that you would never quite understand him, never quite get to the bottom of his mind. For not only did he remain unpredictable and a little enigmatic; but his mind, albeit wayward, whimsical and amusing, had an inner citadel, an impenetrable fastness into which he would, at times, retire and be alone.

Whenever that happened, he was baffling, elusive, and difficult—but nevertheless still delightful, intriguing, and charming.

How much did he know?

Well, it would be my fault if he ever knew any more.

“Well, old chap,” said I to Anthony. “A game is a game, but eavesdropping is a very dirty one.”

And,

“Ferring-Chevigny,” said I to myself, “you’ve lived long enough. I only hope you haven’t lived too long.”

§ 4

It was from this moment that I set to work, seriously, carefully, and methodically, to plan the best means of killing Montague Ferring-Chevigny, with the minimum risk of causing scandal at Calderton and danger to Lady Calderton’s secret.

I must kill him in such a way that I should not be suspected; and in such a way that if I were actually caught and convicted, no motive should be even imaginable.

EPILOGUE

“Mr. Waring,” announced Judd, soldier-servant and invaluable factotum to Sir Walter Waring, as he opened the door of that gentleman’s Albany sitting-room.

Sir Walter Waring permitted himself sufficient display of pleasure and interest, not to say emotion, to rise, take his nephew’s extended hand, press it warmly, and hold it for a few seconds longer than usual.

“By Jove, I’m glad to see you, my boy!” he said, “and that’s a thing I say to very few people nowadays.”

“Glad to see me, Sir, or to hear my tale?” smiled Henry Waring.

“Well, since you ask, to hear your tale, which I can’t very well do without seeing you, can I? . . . So you broke his neck, eh? . . . Good . . . Did you snap it across your knee, and then hide the body behind the panelling at the bottom of the secret

staircase, or what? How did you do it? . . . No. Don't tell me. Don't tell me a word till we've had lunch and are settled for the afternoon. Then tell me all about it. By the way, *are* you going to tell me the truth, or would you rather not?"

"I'll tell you the truth, Sir, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Good. After all, you trusted me with Katherine's secret, so I'm sure you feel you can trust me with your own. Shan't blackmail you, Henry. On the contrary, I'm going to write you a cheque for a thousand pounds, before you go. Can you find a good home for it?"

"The very place, Uncle Walter. It's awfully kind of you; but why?"

"Little token of—er—what shall we say, esteem, not to say admiration and approval."

Sir Walter Waring sat down again in his armchair.

"I suppose you are safe enough? Once there has been an inquest and a verdict of Misadventure, it would never be re-opened?"

"Oh, I'm safe enough," smiled Henry Waring.

"And no possibility of blackmail by anybody?"

"No. None whatever."

"Neat. Very neat. Very nicely done. And just in the nick of time, too. You did him in before he could announce his engagement, eh?"

"There was no announcement, Sir. The poor fellow was cut off in the midst of his bridal schemes and other sins."

"How did you . . . ? No, don't tell me till we've got the place to ourselves and, as we used to say at Whist, 'a clean hearth and the rigour of the game.' And we'll have those. We'll treat this story worthily, Henry. Give me something to think about for the rest of my life, as I sit here alone . . . I'm proud of you, my boy. I don't mind saying I envy you. Wish I had done it myself. So I would, at your age."

"Uncle, you do me too much honour. Wait till you've heard the story and you'll withdraw the compliments. Probably call me a fraud and tell me I'm not worthy," expostulated Henry Waring.

"How's Katherine?" interrupted Sir Walter.

"Like a person who's making a splendid recovery from an almost fatal illness. She's reviving. Coming back to life. She's going to be happy again. And married again, of course, very privately, when Sir Arthur returns. But she can hardly believe it all yet."

"No, she must be like a condemned man reprieved and let out of his cell, the night before the hanging . . . Poor soul, what an experience! Still, she'll value peace and security and happiness at their real worth after this, eh?"

“She will. Every time she looks at Anthony, I can see her thanking God.”

“And not a breath, not a whisper, not the faintest shadow of a suspicion! The fellow called Ferring-Chevigny killed himself pretty effectually seventeen years ago, and Bertie-Norton was killed pretty effectually a month ago. And all that Arthur at present knows is that some poor fellow of whom he has never heard, had the bad taste to go and break his neck at the Charity Ball at Calderton House!

“Death by Misadventure, eh?” he continued with a chuckle. “That Coroner, Dr. Stanton, seems to have been—er—what you might call helpful, wasn’t he?”

“Yes. Yes. Certainly he did his duty, like an honest official, but he has a terrific admiration for Sir Arthur and Lady Calderton, and he was out to spare them all he could,” replied Henry Waring.

“Devilish lucky he was at the Ball and on the spot,” observed Sir Walter.

“Yes, Dr. Stanton as good as told the jury that he knew all about it because he was there when it happened; that, as a doctor, he could tell them the *cause* of death; and as an Officer of the Crown he could tell the police the *method* of it. Nothing for it but ‘Death by Misadventure.’”

“Do you think he had any inkling of the truth?”

“What truth, Sir?” inquired Henry Waring, regarding his uncle quizzically, with raised eyebrows.

“Of how he met his death. I mean, met his—er—misadventure.”

“He was perfectly certain of the truth.”

“*Oh, yeah?*—as they say elsewhere. And had he any inkling of the previous truth that led up to that truth?”

“Who shall say, Sir?”

“Well, you might, for example. Putting it bluntly, do you suspect that he suspects?”

“Suspects what, Uncle?”

Sir Walter smiled frostily.

“I shall have to wait for the story, I see,” he said. “Still, I think I might let you tell me that much.”

“Ease my mind, you know, my boy,” he added, with his thin-lipped sardonic smile. “Does he, or does he not, suspect *you*?”

“He does not. Most emphatically and most certainly he does not.”

“Does he suspect anybody else?”

“If so, he hides it well.”

“So that there is not the slightest danger that you might have to come forward, some time, and make a confession—because somebody else was in danger?”

“No. There is not the slightest fear that I shall ever have to do anything of the sort,” replied Henry Waring.

“Then everything is absolutely straight; absolutely squared up; finished, wiped out and settled.”

“Yes, the whole thing is over and done with. It was a nine-days’ wonder and talk, of course, about the sad affair; largely because the unfortunate man was in fancy dress, and met his death at a ball. But it is past and forgotten now, and the incident closed.”

“Thank God,” said Sir Walter Waring earnestly. “I’ve some faint notion of what you and Katherine must have been through, for I haven’t had too good a time, myself. It has hardly been out of my mind for a minute since the day you came and told me about it. It has affected my sleep. Worse still, it affected my palate; and neither my wine, my old brandy nor my cigars, were the same. When we had managed to have him frightened off, I began to get better, though he was still at the back of my mind; and when he returned, it was a real shock. It made me ill, Henry. And now I know that he’s dead, and you are not in the slightest danger, well, as I say, I thank God. And . . .”

“Lunch is served, Sir,” announced Judd.

“Now, my boy,” said Sir Walter Waring, heaving a sigh of relief as Judd retired with the coffee-tray, leaving the two men in armchairs on either side of the sitting-room fire-place, a low table, furnished with liqueur brandy and cigars, between them. “Now let’s have it. The whole story.”

Henry Waring smiled at his uncle.

“Right, Sir.

“As I told you when I was up here just before the ball, things were looking about as bad as they possibly could. He simply would not, and probably could not, believe that if he proposed marriage to this Miss Christabel Hardacre, and announced their engagement, we should throw in our hand: that Lady Calderton would write to Sir Arthur telling him the truth; that she would show the letter to Miss Hardacre, and put an end to the whole dreadful situation.

“He simply laughed. (Incidentally, thank God I shall never hear that laugh again.) Simply laughed, and asked me what I took him for, that I should try such a childish bluff. He then disappeared from the neighbourhood for a time, and returned to the Calderton Arms just before the ball. He invited himself to dinner the night before it, and told me that he was coming to the ball. I did my best to dissuade him, and painted him a pretty good word-picture of himself as I saw him. One might as well

try to stick a pin in the back-side of a rhinoceros. He didn't take me as seriously as he would have done a mosquito. I had told him that if he came to the ball, he'd regret it, and . . .”

“No one heard you threaten him, I suppose?” interrupted Sir Walter Waring.

“No, we were alone in my room, late at night. He was in a queer mood. I had never seen him quite as—what shall I say—self-satisfied, insolent, uplifted, and domineering. And now I haven't found the *mot juste*. He was absolutely triumphant. He saw himself successful at last, victorious over all difficulties; and he was utterly beastly, far worse than he had ever been. Sober enough, but drunk with success; proud and conceited and overbearing. He was ὕβρις personified.

“Well, I didn't see him again, after he swaggered out of my room that evening, until late on the night of the ball.

“Jenkins came and said that Captain Bertie-Norton wanted to speak to me: that he was up in my room, and it was urgent.

“Of course, not knowing what devilry the swine might be up to, or contemplating, I left the ballroom and went up to see what he wanted.

“What he did want was some sort of a fancy-dress. He knew we had got plenty of stuff up in Anthony's play-room, and he wanted me to rig him up, so that he could join the other guests. I thought it best to humour him, and was wondering what to suggest, when suddenly he said,

“*I know. Give me that Roundhead trooper's kit you were wearing the other day. We are about of a size.*”

“Well, that was simple enough. And one's whole attitude to the man, in those days, was one of ‘anything to keep him quiet.’

“So it didn't take me long to run upstairs and bring down the lobster-tail helmet, buff jerkin, breast-plate, velvet breeches, high boots, sash, baldrick and sword, that he had recently seen me wearing when I was play-acting with Anthony.

“*That's the stuff to give the troops,*” said he, and quickly dressed himself as an Ironside soldier. The kit fitted him well, suited him admirably, and made an excellent fancy-dress.

“Having duly admired himself in the mirror, he clattered off downstairs, and joined in the fun.

“What happened next I didn't know, till Lady Calderton told me some time afterwards.

“One assumes he went to the buffet and over-quenched his thirst. No doubt he was pretty hot in his buff jerkin and breast-plate. Anyway, he sought Lady Calderton out, and began to pester her. I didn't think that that man could really add one more

grain to the mountain of his offences. But he did. For he actually began talking—though in plain English—of his *droits du seigneur*, his *droits du mari*, rather; in fact, his conjugal rights. Can you believe it? He must have been more-or-less drunk, of course. Anyhow, he was more-than-less amorous, and Lady Calderton simply had to—well, escape. Luckily there was no scene. It happened during an interval between dances; most people were making for the sitting-out places or the buffet; and he spoke quietly—as well he might. She walked across to the main staircase, he following her, and when she turned on to the second flight, out of sight of the hall, she ran as fast as she could to her bedroom and locked the door.

“Our gentleman, finding it shut in his face, banged on it with the hilt of the heavy sword he was wearing.

“There was the stage set. A dimly lit corridor, a man in fancy-dress hammering at a locked door with a sword.

“This I had from Lady Calderton, as I said.

“Now to go back a little while.

“Young Anthony, as a great treat—and his mother could refuse him nothing in those days, of course—had been allowed to come to the Ball and stay up till midnight, with special extension if I thought he wasn’t over-tired.

“Now see the hand of Fate, Sir.”

“At twelve o’clock Anthony said he wasn’t really tired, but that he had had nearly enough, and what about another half-hour. Right, said I, and at half-past twelve I gathered him in and went up to his room with him. He was dressed as Charles the First, by the way, and a wonderful young Cavalier he looked.

“I helped him off with his kit, saw him into bed, and stayed and had a chat with him, as of course he was a bit excited; (and it was *then*, just as I came out of his room, that Jenkins came to me with the message of which I told you, that Captain Bertie-Norton wanted to speak to me).

“Well, an hour or so later, at about two o’clock, I went upstairs, and I went for two or three reasons. I thought I would have a look in on Anthony and see if he had settled down all right. As you know, he’s of a nervous temperament and very excitable. I wanted to get my cigarette-case—and this may, of course, be fanciful, but I honestly think Fate had got the business thoroughly in hand, and that I had a kind of *prompting* to go upstairs. Anyway, I went.

“As I got to the top of the stairs, I was suddenly aware that Bertie-Norton was there, that he delivered a terrific bang on Lady Calderton’s door with the heavy hilt

of the old sword that he was wearing, that he stepped back, shook his fist at the door and was going to take a run at it as though to burst it in.

“In stepping back three or four paces, he came to the head of what used to be a ‘secret’ staircase that leads down at right-angles, and from the top of which the panelled door has been removed.

“Also, I was aware of the fact that as he struck the blow and stepped back, Anthony’s door opened; that Anthony came flying along the short corridor and uttered a loud cry; that as he did so, Ferring-Chevigny turned towards him with his back to the staircase; that, like a young tiger, Anthony leapt, thrust with both hands, and sent Ferring-Chevigny flying headlong down the steep narrow staircase, and that he fell with a crash on the flagstone at the bottom.

“The impact stopped Anthony’s rush, and without a glance downward, he turned about, walked back to his room and shut the door.

“The whole thing hadn’t taken longer than the time required for me to go up the last half-dozen steps of the staircase.

“As I stepped on to the landing, there was nobody. There was nothing. Lady Calderton’s door was shut; Anthony’s door was shut; and I was alone in the now silent corridor.”

“Silent?”

“Yes, not a sound came from the secret stair. No sound of a man getting to his feet and coming up again. Complete silence. I hurried down the steep, narrow, panelling-enclosed stairs and struck a match. There lay Ferring-Chevigny—dead. He had landed on his head and broken his neck.”

Sir Walter Waring sat erect in his chair, his cigar cold between his fingers, an amazing sign of his rapt and enthralled interest.

“Good Heavens!” he whispered. “So the *boy* killed him?”

“The boy killed him,” said Henry Waring.

“Intentionally?”

“That I don’t know, and probably never shall know. I don’t imagine he’ll tell me; and I most certainly shall not ask him.

“Uncle, you and I are the only two people in this world who know how Ferring-Chevigny died.”

“Unless young Anthony does,” said Sir Walter.

“Let’s assume that he doesn’t,” said Henry Waring. “For Heaven’s sake, let’s pretend that he doesn’t, anyway.”

“Sleep-walking, perhaps,” suggested Sir Walter Waring.

"I told you I'd tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," replied Henry Waring. "I told you the boy uttered a cry as he rushed along the landing. What he shouted was '*Bonnance!*'"

"'*Bonnance,*' did you say?"

"Yes. It was a word he had invented, a kind of oath, kept for special occasions. Now, does a sleep-walker select a word and shout it aloud . . . ?"

"Recognizing a special occasion?" said Sir Walter. "I don't know, Henry. I'm not an alienist, not even a psychologist. I don't know whether a sleep-walker would do such a thing. I don't know whether a sleep-walker recognizes a special occasion, selects the appropriate word and shouts it aloud. I don't know whether a sleep-walker runs swiftly, makes a violent effort, thrusts a big heavy man down a flight of stairs, saves himself from falling, and then turns about and walks back to his bedroom and gets into bed, still sound asleep and unconscious of what he has done."

"I suppose you went along to his room pretty soon?" he asked.

"Yes. As soon as I had assured myself that Ferring-Chevigny was dead, I went to Anthony's bedroom."

"Well?"

"He was in bed and asleep."

"Sure he was asleep?"

"No. I'm not sure; but I'll tell you what I tell myself, and what I'm going to tell myself—until Anthony tells me something different, which he never will do. It's this.

"Anthony Calderton, excited by the Ball, his fancy-dress as Charles the First, late hours and perhaps a glass of champagne, fell into a troubled sleep, and dreamed. He awoke and got out of bed, or else he got out of bed without waking. He opened the door, and there he saw before him, in the flesh, his lifelong *bête noir*, bogey, monster of horror and terror incarnate—Oliver Cromwell himself. (I've told you about the Oliver Cromwell neurosis that Miss Stuart contrived to give him.)

"He saw Oliver Cromwell, not only standing there in the flesh, but beating down his mother's door. So, in somnambulistic trance, or if you like, in a waking dream, he rushed at his enemy, and, as Fate would have it, *as Fate had willed it and arranged it*, his enemy was standing at the top of those stairs. He flung him down them, and, as the dream faded, Anthony walked back to his bed; or again, still walking in his sleep, he returned to his room, lay down and dreamed on.

"That's how I intend to see it, Uncle Walter."

"I understand, Henry . . . And you'll never say a word about it to the boy?"

"Never a word. I'll never mention the name Bertie-Norton to him as long as I

live.”

“And of course Lady Calderton knows nothing of this?”

“Absolutely nothing. All she knows is that Bertie-Norton was found dead at the bottom of those stairs, and that Dr. Stanton came to the conclusion that he had tripped over the great spurs he was wearing, and fallen headlong from top to bottom . . . If anybody thought that the poor gentleman had had just a drop more champagne than he could comfortably carry down the steep flight of stairs, they were too well-bred, well-mannered, or good-natured, to say so. No, said they, he must have wandered up the main staircase and started to come down by the secret one, which was a short cut to the hall. He knew his way, of course, as he had stayed in the house once, when he was taken ill after dinner there . . .”

“Anthony wasn’t at the inquest, I suppose?” asked Sir Walter.

“Oh, no. No, there was no earthly reason to call him.”

“And has he made no reference to the matter?”

“Not one single word. It’s just as though he had heard nothing whatever about it.”

“H’m,” mused Sir Walter Waring. “That’s a little strange, isn’t it?”

“No, Uncle. No, *please*. Anthony was walking in his sleep or actually living a nightmare.”

Sir Walter Waring rose to his feet, stared at his nephew a while, and then laid his hand upon his shoulder.

“Undoubtedly, Henry,” he said, and patted his nephew’s shoulder gently ere he withdrew his hand.

“Anyhow,” he said brusquely as he turned away, “he killed Montague Ferring-Chevigny. And that, my boy, is a very strange and wonderful thing, when you come to think of it.”

NOTE

Anthony Calderton became my closest and most intimate friend. Never once did he say a word to me concerning the events of that amazing night.

Nor did I to him.

Incidentally, it is an interesting fact that neither did he ever again mention Oliver Cromwell to me—nor dress up as King Charles, nor take part in any play, charade or enactment concerning Stuart times and the days of Cavalier and Roundhead.

Never once.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Cardboard Castle* by Percival Christopher Wren]