

"The question of motive has been rather overshadowed by the question of method," observed Father Brown thoughtfully. "At that moment, apparently, Miss Druce was the immediate gainer by the death."

"Good God! What a cold-blooded way of talking," cried Fiennes, staring at him. "You don't really mean to hint that she——"

"Is she going to marry that Dr. Valentine?" asked the other.

"Some people are against it," answered his friend. "But he is liked and respected in the place and is a skilled and devoted surgeon."

"So devoted a surgeon," said Father Brown, "that he had surgical instruments with him when he went to call on the young lady at tea-time. For he must have used a lancet or something, and he never seems to have gone home."

Fiennes sprang to his feet and looked at him in a heat of inquiry. "You suggest he might have used the very same lancet——"

Father Brown shook his head. "All these suggestions are fancies just now," he said. "The problem is not who did it or what did it, but how it was done. We might find many men and even many tools—pins and shears and lancets. But how did a man get into the room? How did even a pin get into it?"

He was staring reflectively at the ceiling as he spoke, but as he said the last words his eye cocked

in an alert fashion as if he had suddenly seen a curious fly on the ceiling.

"Well, what would you do about it?" asked the young man. "You have a lot of experience, what would you advise now?"

"I'm afraid I'm not much use," said Father Brown with a sigh. "I can't suggest very much without having ever been near the place or the people. For the moment you can only go on with local inquiries. I gather that your friend from the Indian Police is more or less in charge of your inquiry down there. I should run down and see how he is getting on. See what he's been doing in the way of amateur detection. There may be news already."

As his guests, the biped and the quadruped, disappeared, Father Brown took up his pen and went back to his interrupted occupation of planning a course of lectures on the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. The subject was a large one and he had to re-cast it more than once, so that he was somewhat similarly employed some two days later when the big black dog again came bounding into the room and sprawled all over him with enthusiasm and excitement. The master who followed the dog shared the excitement if not the enthusiasm. He had been excited in a less pleasant fashion, for his blue eyes seemed to start from his head and his eager face was even a little pale.

"You told me," he said abruptly and without preface, "to find out what Harry Druce was doing. Do you know what he's done?"

The priest did not reply, and the young man went on in jerky tones:

"I'll tell you what he's done. He's killed himself."

Father Brown's lips moved only faintly, and there was nothing practical about what he was saying—nothing that has anything to do with this story or this world.

"You give me the creeps sometimes," said Fiennes. "Did you—did you expect this?"

"I thought it possible," said Father Brown; "that was why I asked you to go and see what he was doing. I hoped you might not be too late."

"It was I who found him," said Fiennes rather huskily. "It was the ugliest and most uncanny thing I ever knew. I went down that old garden again and I knew there was something new and unnatural about it besides the murder. The flowers still tossed about in blue masses on each side of the black entrance into the old grey summer-house; but to me the blue flowers looked like blue devils dancing before some dark cavern of the underworld. I looked all round; everything seemed to be in its ordinary place. But the queer notion grew on me that there was something wrong with the very shape of the sky. And then I saw what it was. The Rock of Fortune always rose in the background beyond the garden hedge and against the sea. And the Rock of Fortune was gone."

Father Brown had lifted his head and was listening intently.

"It was as if a mountain had walked away out of a landscape or a moon fallen from the sky; though I knew, of course, that a touch at any time would have tipped the thing over. Something possessed me and I rushed down that garden path like the wind and went crashing through that hedge as if it were a spider's web. It was a thin hedge really, though its undisturbed trimness had made it serve all the purposes of a wall. On the shore I found the loose rock fallen from its pedestal; and poor Harry Druce lay like a wreck underneath it. One arm was thrown round it in a sort of embrace as if he had pulled it down on himself; and on the broad brown sands beside it, in large crazy lettering, he had scrawled the words, "The Rock of Fortune falls on the Fool."

"It was the Colonel's will that did that," observed Father Brown. "The young man had staked everything on profiting himself by Donald's disgrace, especially when his uncle sent for him on the same day as the lawyer, and welcomed him with so much warmth. Otherwise he was done; he'd lost his police job; he was beggared at Monte Carlo. And he killed himself when he found he'd killed his kinsman for nothing."

"Here, stop a minute!" cried the staring Fiennes. "You're going too fast for me."

"Talking about the will, by the way," continued Father Brown calmly, "before I forget it, or we go on to bigger things, there was a simple explanation, I think, of all that business about the doctor's name.

I rather fancy I have heard both names before somewhere. The doctor is really a French nobleman with the title of the Marquis de Villon. But he is also an ardent Republican and has abandoned his title and fallen back on the forgotten family surname. 'With your Citizen Riquetti you have puzzled Europe for ten days.'"

"What is that?" asked the young man blankly.

"Never mind," said the priest. "Nine times out of ten it is a rascally thing to change one's name; but this was a piece of fine fanaticism. That's the point of his sarcasm about Americans having no names—that is, no titles. Now in England the Marquis of Hartington is never called Mr. Hartington; but in France the Marquis de Villon is called M. de Villon. So it might well look like a change of name. As for the talk about killing, I fancy that also was a point of French etiquette. The doctor was talking about challenging Floyd to a duel, and the girl was trying to dissuade him."

"Oh, I *see*," cried Fiennes slowly. "Now I understand what she meant."

"And what is that about?" asked his companion, smiling.

"Well," said the young man, "it was something that happened to me just before I found that poor fellow's body; only the catastrophe drove it out of my head. I suppose it's hard to remember a little romantic idyll when you've just come on top of a tragedy. But as I went down the lanes leading to

the Colonel's old place, I met his daughter walking with Dr. Valentine. She was in mourning of course, and he always wore black as if he were going to a funeral; but I can't say that their faces were very funereal. Never have I seen two people looking in their own way more respectably radiant and cheerful. They stopped and saluted me and then she told me they were married and living in a little house on the outskirts of the town, where the doctor was continuing his practice. This rather surprised me, because I knew that her old father's will had left her his property; and I hinted at it delicately by saying I was going along to her father's old place and had half expected to meet her there. But she only laughed and said, 'Oh, we've given up all that. My husband doesn't like heiresses.' And I discovered with some astonishment they really had insisted on restoring the property to poor Donald; so I hope he's had a healthy shock and will treat it sensibly. There was never much really the matter with him; he was very young and his father was not very wise. But it was in connexion with that that she said something I didn't understand at the time; but now I'm sure it must be as you say. She said with a sort of sudden and splendid arrogance that was entirely altruistic:

"I hope it'll stop that red-haired fool from fussing any more about the will. Does he think my husband, who has given up a crest and a coronet as old as the Crusades for his principles, would kill an old man in a summer-house for a legacy like

that?' Then she laughed again and said, 'My husband isn't killing anybody except in the way of business. Why, he didn't even ask his friends to call on the secretary.' Now, of course, I see what she meant."

"I see part of what she meant, of course," said Father Brown. "What did she mean exactly by the secretary fussing about the will?"

Fiennes smiled as he answered. "I wish you knew the secretary, Father Brown. It would be a joy to you to watch him make things hum, as he calls it. He made the house of mourning hum. He filled the funeral with all the snap and zip of the brightest sporting event. There was no holding him, after something had really happened. I've told you how he used to oversee the gardener as he did the garden, and how he instructed the lawyer in the law. Needless to say, he also instructed the surgeon in the practice of surgery; and as the surgeon was Dr. Valentine, you may be sure it ended in accusing him of something worse than bad surgery. The secretary got it fixed in his red head that the doctor had committed the crime; and when the police arrived he was perfectly sublime. Need I say that he became on the spot the greatest of all amateur detectives? Sherlock Holmes never towered over Scotland Yard with more Titanic intellectual pride and scorn than Colonel Druce's private secretary over the police investigating Colonel Druce's death. I tell you it was a joy to see him. He strode about with an abstracted air, tossing his scarlet crest of hair and giv-

ing curt impatient replies. Of course it was his demeanour during these days that made Druce's daughter so wild with him. Of course he had a theory. It's just the sort of theory a man would have in a book; and Floyd is the sort of man who ought to be in a book. He'd be better fun and less bother in a book."

"What was his theory?" asked the other.

"Oh, it was full of pep," replied Fiennes gloomily. "It would have been glorious copy if it could have held together for ten minutes longer. He said the Colonel was still alive when they found him in the summer-house and the doctor killed him with the surgical instrument on pretence of cutting the clothes."

"I see," said the priest. "I suppose he was lying flat on his face on the mud floor as a form of siesta."

"It's wonderful what hustle will do," continued his informant. "I believe Floyd would have got his great theory into the papers at any rate, and perhaps had the doctor arrested, when all these things were blown sky high as if by dynamite by the discovery of that dead body lying under the Rock of Fortune. And that's what we come back to after all. I suppose the suicide is almost a confession. But nobody will ever know the whole story."

There was a silence, and then the priest said modestly, "I rather think I know the whole story."

Fiennes stared. "But look here," he cried, "how do you come to know the whole story, or to be



sure it's the true story? You've been sitting here a hundred miles away writing a sermon; do you mean to tell me you really know what happened already? If you've really come to the end, where in the world do you begin? What started you off with your own story?"

Father Brown jumped up with a very unusual excitement and his first exclamation was like an explosion.

"The dog!" he cried. "The dog, of course! You had the whole story in your hands in the business of the dog on the beach, if you'd only noticed the dog properly."

Fiennes stared still more. "But you told me just now that my feelings about the dog were all nonsense, and the dog had nothing to do with it."

"The dog had everything to do with it," said Father Brown, "as you'd have found out if you'd only treated the dog as a dog and not as God Almighty judging the souls of men."

He paused in an embarrassed way for a moment, and then said, with a rather pathetic air of apology:

"The truth is, I happen to be awfully fond of dogs. And it seemed to me that in all this lurid halo of dog superstitions nobody was really thinking about the poor dog at all. To begin with a small point, about his barking at the lawyer or growling at the secretary. You asked how I could guess things a hundred miles away; but honestly it's mostly to your credit, for you described people so well

that I know the types. A man like Traill who frowns usually and smiles suddenly, a man who fiddles with things, especially at his throat, is a nervous, easily embarrassed man. I shouldn't wonder if Floyd, the efficient secretary, is nervy and jumpy too; those Yankee hustlers often are. Otherwise he wouldn't have cut his fingers on the shears and dropped them when he heard Janet Druce scream.

"Now dogs hate nervous people. I don't know whether they make the dog nervous too; or whether, being after all a brute, he is a bit of a bully; or whether his canine vanity (which is colossal) is simply offended at not being liked. But anyhow there was nothing in poor Nox protesting against those people, except that he disliked them for being afraid of him. Now I know you're awfully clever, and nobody of sense sneers at cleverness. But I sometimes fancy, for instance, that you are too clever to understand animals. Sometimes you are too clever to understand men, especially when they act almost as simply as animals. Animals are very literal; they live in a world of truisms. Take this case; a dog barks at a man and a man runs away from a dog. Now you do not seem to be quite simple enough to see the fact; that the dog barked because he disliked the man and the man fled because he was frightened of the dog. They had no other motives and they needed none. But you must read psychological mysteries into it and suppose the dog had super-normal vision, and was a mysterious

mouthpiece of doom. You must suppose the man was running away, not from the dog but from the hangman. And yet, if you come to think of it, all this deeper psychology is exceedingly improbable. If the dog really could completely and consciously realise the murderer of his master, he wouldn't stand yapping as he might at a curate at a tea-party; he's much more likely to fly at his throat. And on the other hand, do you really think a man who had hardened his heart to murder an old friend and then walk about smiling at the old friend's family, under the eyes of his old friend's daughter and post-mortem doctor—do you think a man like that would be doubled up by mere remorse because a dog barked? He might feel the tragic irony of it; it might shake his soul, like any other tragic trifle. But he wouldn't rush madly the length of a garden to escape from the only witness whom he knew to be unable to talk. People have a panic like that when they are frightened, not of tragic ironies, but of teeth. The whole thing is simpler than you can understand.

“But when we come to that business by the seashore, things are much more interesting. As you stated them, they were much more puzzling. I didn't understand that tale of the dog going in and out of the water; it didn't seem to me a doggy thing to do. If Nox had been very much upset about something else, he might possibly have refused to go after the stick at all. He'd probably go off nosing in whatever direction he suspected the mischief.

But when once a dog is actually chasing a thing, a stone or a stick or a rabbit, my experience is that he won't stop for anything but the most peremptory command, and not always for that. That he should turn round because his mood changed seems to me unthinkable."

"But he did turn round," insisted Fiennes, "and came back without the stick."

"He came back without the stick for the best reason in the world," replied the priest. "He came back because he couldn't find it. He whined because he couldn't find it. That's the sort of thing a dog really does whine about. A dog is a devil of a ritualist. He is as particular about the precise routine of a game as a child about the precise repetition of a fairy-tale. In this case something had gone wrong with the game. He came back to complain seriously of the conduct of the stick. Never had such a thing happened before. Never had an eminent and distinguished dog been so treated by a rotten old walking-stick."

"Why, what had the walking-stick done?" inquired the young man.

"It had sunk," said Father Brown.

Fiennes said nothing, but continued to stare, and it was the priest who continued:

"It had sunk because it was not really a stick, but a rod of steel with a very thin shell of cane and a sharp point. In other words, it was a sword-stick. I suppose a murderer never got rid of a

bloody weapon so oddly and yet so naturally as by throwing it into the sea for a retriever."

"I begin to see what you mean," admitted Fiennes; "but even if a sword-stick was used, I have no guess of how it was used."

"I had a sort of guess," said Father Brown, "right at the beginning when you said the word summer-house. And another when you said that Druce wore a white coat. As long as everybody was looking for a short dagger, nobody thought of it; but if we admit a rather long blade like a rapier, it's not so impossible."

He was leaning back, looking at the ceiling, and began like one going back to his own first thoughts and fundamentals.

"All that discussion about detective stories like the Yellow Room, about a man found dead in sealed chambers which no one could enter, does not apply to the present case, because it is a summer-house. When we talk of a Yellow Room, or any room, we imply walls that are really homogeneous and impenetrable. But a summer-house is not made like that; it is often made, as it was in this case, of closely interlaced but still separate boughs and strips of wood, in which there are chinks here and there. There was one of them just behind Druce's back as he sat in his chair up against the wall. But just as the room was a summer-house, so the chair was a basket-chair. That also was a lattice of loopholes. Lastly, the summer-house was close up under the hedge; and you have just told me that it was really

a thin hedge. A man standing outside it could easily see, amid a network of twigs and branches and canes, one white spot of the Colonel's coat as plain as the white of a target.

"Now, you left the geography a little vague; but it was possible to put two and two together. You said the Rock of Fortune was not really high; but you also said it could be seen dominating the garden like a mountain-peak. In other words, it was very near the end of the garden, though your walk had taken you a long way round to it. Also, it isn't likely the young lady really howled so as to be heard half a mile. She gave an ordinary involuntary cry, and yet you heard it on the shore. And among other interesting things that you told me, may I remind you that you said Harry Druce had fallen behind to light his pipe under a hedge."

Fiennes shuddered slightly. "You mean he drew his blade there and sent it through the hedge at the white spot. But surely it was a very odd chance and a very sudden choice. Besides, he couldn't be certain the old man's money had passed to him, and as a fact it hadn't."

Father Brown's face became animated.

"You misunderstand the man's character," he said, as if he himself had known the man all his life. "A curious but not unknown type of character. If he had really *known* the money would come to him, I seriously believe he wouldn't have done it. He would have seen it as the dirty thing it was."

"Isn't that rather paradoxical?" asked the other.

"This man was a gambler," said the priest, "and a man in disgrace for having taken risks and anticipated orders. It was probably for something pretty unscrupulous, for every imperial police is more like a Russian secret police than we like to think. But he had gone beyond the line and failed. Now, the temptation of that type of man is to do a mad thing precisely because the risk will be wonderful in retrospect. He wants to say, 'Nobody but I could have seized that chance or seen that it was then or never. What a wild and wonderful guess it was, when I put all those things together; Donald in disgrace; and the lawyer being sent for; and Herbert and I sent for at the same time—and then nothing more but the way the old man grinned at me and shook hands. Anybody would say I was mad to risk it; but that is how fortunes are made, by the man mad enough to have a little foresight.' In short, it is the vanity of guessing. It is the megalomania of the gambler. The more incongruous the coincidence, the more instantaneous the decision, the more likely he is to snatch the chance. The accident, the very triviality, of the white speck and the hole in the hedge intoxicated him like a vision of the world's desire. Nobody clever enough to see such a combination of accidents could be cowardly enough not to use them! That is how the devil talks to the gambler. But the devil himself would hardly have induced that unhappy man to go down

in a dull, deliberate way and kill an old uncle from whom he'd always had expectations. It would be too respectable."

He paused a moment; and then went on with a certain quiet emphasis.

"And now try to call up the scene, even as you saw it yourself. As he stood there, dizzy with his diabolical opportunity, he looked up and saw that strange outline that might have been the image of his own tottering soul; the one great crag poised perilously on the other like a pyramid on its point and remembered that it was called the Rock of Fortune. Can you guess how such a man at such a moment would read such a signal? I think it strung him up to action and even to vigilance. He who would be a tower must not fear to be a toppling tower. Anyhow, he acted; his next difficulty was to cover his tracks. To be found with a sword-stick, let alone a blood-stained sword-stick, would be fatal in the search that was certain to follow. If he left it anywhere, it would be found and probably traced. Even if he threw it into the sea the action might be noticed, and thought noticeable—unless indeed he could think of some more natural way of covering the action. As you know, he did think of one, and a very good one. Being the only one of you with a watch, he told you it was not yet time to return, strolled a little farther and started the game of throwing in sticks for the retriever. But how his eyes must have rolled darkly over all that desolate seashore before they alighted on the dog!"



Fiennes nodded, gazing thoughtfully into space. His mind seemed to have drifted back to a less practical part of the narrative.

"It's queer," he said, "that the dog really was in the story after all."

"The dog could almost have told you the story, if he could talk," said the priest. "All I complain of is that because he couldn't talk, you made up his story for him, and made him talk with the tongues of men and angels. It's part of something I've noticed more and more in the modern world, appearing in all sorts of newspaper rumours and conversational catchwords; something that's arbitrary without being authoritative. People readily swallow the untested claims of this, that, or the other. It's drowning all your old rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition." He stood up abruptly, his face heavy with a sort of frown, and went on talking almost as if he were alone. "It's the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense, and can't see things as they are. Anything that anybody talks about, and says there's a good deal in it, extends itself indefinitely like a vista in a nightmare. And a dog is an omen and a cat is a mystery and a pig is a mascot and a beetle is a scarab, calling up all the menagerie of polytheism from Egypt and old India; Dog Anubis and great green-eyed Pasht and all the holy howling Bulls of Bashan; reeling back to the bestial gods of the beginning, escaping into elephants and snakes and crocodiles;

and all because you are frightened of four words: 'He was made Man.'"

The young man got up with a little embarrassment, almost as if he had overheard a soliloquy. He called to the dog and left the room with vague but breezy farewells. But he had to call the dog twice, for the dog had remained behind quite motionless for a moment, looking up steadily at Father Brown as the wolf looked at St. Francis.

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#### IV

### THE MIRACLE OF MOON CRESCENT

MOON CRESCENT was meant in a sense to be as romantic as its name; and the things that happened there were romantic enough in their way. At least it had been an expression of that genuine element of sentiment—historic and almost heroic—which manages to remain side by side with commercialism in the elder cities on the eastern coast of America. It was originally a curve of classical architecture really recalling that eighteenth-century atmosphere in which men like Washington and Jefferson had seemed to be all the more republicans for being aristocrats. Travellers faced with the recurrent query of what they thought of our city were understood to be specially answerable for what they thought of our Moon Crescent. The very contrasts that confuse its original harmony were characteristic of its survival. At one extremity or horn of the crescent its last windows looked over an enclosure like a strip of a gentleman's park, with trees and hedges as formal as a Queen Anne garden. But immediately round the corner, the other windows, even of the same rooms, or rather "apartments," looked out on the blank, unsightly wall of a huge warehouse attached to some ugly industry. The apartments of Moon

Crescent itself were at that end remodelled on the monotonous pattern of an American hotel, and rose to a height, which, though lower than the colossal warehouse, would have been called a skyscraper in London. But the colonnade that ran round the whole frontage upon the street had a grey and weather-stained stateliness suggesting that the ghosts of the Fathers of the Republic might still be walking to and fro in it. The insides of the rooms, however, were as neat and new as the last New York fittings could make them, especially at the northern end between the neat garden and the blank warehouse wall. They were a system of very small flats, as we should say in England, each consisting of a sitting-room, bedroom, and bathroom, as identical as the hundred cells of a hive. In one of these the celebrated Warren Wynd sat at his desk sorting letters and scattering orders with wonderful rapidity and exactitude. He could only be compared to a tidy whirlwind.

Warren Wynd was a very little man with loose grey hair and a pointed beard, seemingly frail but fierily active. He had very wonderful eyes, brighter than stars and stronger than magnets, which nobody who had ever seen them could easily forget. And indeed in his work as a reformer and regulator of many good works he had shown at least that he had a pair of eyes in his head. All sorts of stories and even legends were told of the miraculous rapidity with which he could form a sound judgment, especially of human character. It was said that he

selected the wife who worked with him so long in so charitable a fashion, by picking her out of a whole regiment of women in uniform marching past at some official celebration, some said of the Girl Guides and some of the Women Police. Another story was told of how three tramps, indistinguishable from each other in their community of filth and rags, had presented themselves before him asking for charity. Without a moment's hesitation he had sent one of them to a particular hospital devoted to a certain nervous disorder, had recommended the second to an inebriates' home, and had engaged the third at a handsome salary as his own private servant, a position which he filled successfully for years afterwards. There were, of course, the inevitable anecdotes of his prompt criticisms and curt repartees when brought in contact with Roosevelt, with Henry Ford, and with Mrs. Asquith and all other persons with whom an American public man ought to have a historic interview, if only in the newspapers. Certainly he was not likely to be overawed by such personages; and at the moment here in question he continued very calmly his centrifugal whirl of papers, though the man confronting him was a personage of almost equal importance.

Silas T. Vandam, the millionaire and oil magnate, was a lean man with a long, yellow face and blue-black hair, colours which were the less conspicuous yet somehow the more sinister because his face and figure showed dark against the window and the white warehouse wall outside it; he was buttoned up

tight in an elegant overcoat with strips of astrachan. The eager face and brilliant eyes of Wynd, on the other hand, were in the full light from the other window overlooking the little garden, for his chair and desk stood facing it; and though the face was preoccupied, it did not seem unduly preoccupied about the millionaire. Wynd's valet or personal servant, a big, powerful man with flat fair hair, was standing behind his master's desk holding a sheaf of letters; and Wynd's private secretary, a neat, red-haired youth with a sharp face, had his hand already on the door handle, as if guessing some purpose or obeying some gesture of his employer. The room was not only neat but austere to the point of emptiness; for Wynd, with characteristic thoroughness, had rented the whole floor above, and turned it into a loft or storeroom, where all his other papers and possessions were stacked in boxes and corded bales.

"Give these to the floor-clerk, Wilson," said Wynd to the servant holding the letters, "and then get me the pamphlet on the Minneapolis Night Clubs; you'll find it in the bundle marked G. I shall want it in half an hour, but don't disturb me till then. Well, Mr. Vandam, I think your proposition sounds very promising; but I can't give a final answer till I've seen the report. It ought to reach me to-morrow afternoon, and I'll 'phone you at once. I'm sorry I can't say anything more definite just now."

Mr. Vandam seemed to feel that this was something like a polite dismissal; and his sallow, saturnine

face suggested that he found a certain irony in the fact.

"Well, I suppose I must be going," he said.

"Very good of you to call, Mr. Vandam," said Wynd, politely; "you will excuse my not coming out, as I've something here I must fix at once. Fenner," he added to the secretary, "show Mr. Vandam to his car, and don't come back again for half an hour. I've something here I want to work out by myself; after that I shall want you."

The three men went out into the hallway together, closing the door behind them. The big servant, Wilson, was turning down the hallway in the direction of the floor-clerk and the other two moving in the opposite direction towards the lift; for Wynd's apartment was high up on the fourteenth floor. They had hardly gone a yard from the closed door when they became conscious that the corridor was filled with a marching and even magnificent figure. The man was very tall and broad-shouldered, his bulk being the more conspicuous for being clad in white or a light grey that looked like it, with a very wide white panama hat and an almost equally wide fringe or halo of almost equally white hair. Set in this aureole his face was strong and handsome, like that of a Roman emperor, save that there was something more than boyish, something a little childish, about the brightness of his eyes and the beatitude of his smile.

"Mr. Warren Wynd in?" he asked, in hearty tones.

"Mr. Warren Wynd is engaged," said Fenner; "he must not be disturbed on any account. I may say I'm his secretary and can take any message."

"Mr. Warren Wynd is not at home to the Pope or the Crowned Heads," said Vandam, the oil magnate, with sour satire. "Mr. Warren Wynd is mighty particular. I went in there to hand him over a trifle of twenty thousand dollars on certain conditions; and he told me to call again like as if I was a call-boy."

"It's a fine thing to be a boy," said the stranger, "and a finer to have a call; and I've got a call he's just got to listen to. It's a call out of the great good country out West where the real American is being made while you're all snoring. Just tell him that Art Alboin of Oklahoma City has come to convert him."

"I tell you nobody can see him," said the red-haired secretary sharply. "He has given orders that he is not to be disturbed for half an hour."

"You folks down East are all against being disturbed," said the breezy Mr. Alboin, "but I calculate there's a big breeze getting up in the West that will have to disturb you. He's been figuring out how much money must go to this and that stuffy old religion; but I tell you any scheme that leaves out the new Great Spirit movement in Texas and Oklahoma, is leaving out the religion of the future."

"Oh, I've sized up those religions of the future," said the millionaire, contemptuously. "I've been through them with a tooth-comb; and they're as



mangy as yellow dog. There was that woman called herself Sophia; ought to have called herself Sapphira, I reckon. Just a plum fraud. Strings tied to all the tables and tambourines. Then there were the Invisible Life bunch; said they could vanish when they liked, and they did vanish, too, and a hundred thousand of my dollars vanished with them. I knew Jupiter Jesus out in Denver; saw him for weeks on end; and he was just a common crook. So was the Patagonian Prophet; you bet he's made a bolt for Patagonia. No, I'm through with all that; from now on I only believe what I see. I believe they call it being an atheist."

"I guess you got me wrong," said the man from Oklahoma, almost eagerly. "I guess I'm as much of an atheist as you are. No supernatural or superstitious stuff in our movement; just plain science. The only real right science is just health; and the only real right health is just breathing. Fill your lungs with the wide air of the prairie and you could blow all your old eastern cities into the sea. You could just puff away their biggest men like thistle-down. That's what we do in the new movement out home: we breathe. We don't pray; we breathe."

"Well, I suppose you do," said the secretary, wearily; he had a keen, intelligent face which could hardly conceal the weariness; but he had listened to the two monologues with the admirable patience and politeness (so much in contrast with the legends of impatience and insolence) with which such monologues are listened to in America.

"Nothing supernatural," continued Alboin, "just the great natural fact behind all the supernatural fancies. What did the Jews want with a God except to breathe into man's nostrils the breath of life? We do the breathing into our own nostrils out in Oklahoma. What's the meaning of the very word Spirit? It's just the Greek for breathing exercises. Life, progress, prophecy; it's all breath."

"Some would allow it's all wind," said Vandam; "but I'm glad you've got rid of the divinity stunt, anyhow."

The keen face of the secretary, rather pale against his red hair, showed a flicker of some odd feeling suggestive of a secret bitterness.

"I'm not glad," he said, "I'm just sure. You seem to like being atheists; so you may be just believing what you like to believe. But I wish to God there were a God; and there ain't. It's just my luck."

Without a sound or stir they all became almost creepily conscious at this moment that the group, halted outside Wynd's door, had silently grown from three figures to four. How long the fourth figure had stood there none of the earnest disputants could tell, but he had every appearance of waiting respectfully and even timidly for the opportunity to say something urgent. But to their nervous sensibility he seemed to have sprung up suddenly and silently like a mushroom. And indeed, he looked rather like a big, black mushroom, for he was quite short and his small, stumpy figure was eclipsed by

his big, black clerical hat; the resemblance might have been more complete if mushrooms were in the habit of carrying umbrellas, even of a shabby and shapeless sort.

Fenner, the secretary, was conscious of a curious additional surprise at recognising the figure of a priest; but when the priest turned up a round face under the round hat and innocently asked for Mr. Warren Wynd, he gave the regular negative answer rather more curtly than before. But the priest stood his ground.

"I do really want to see Mr. Wynd," he said. "It seems odd, but that's exactly what I do want to do. I don't want to speak to him. I just want to see him. I just want to see if he's there to be seen."

"Well, I tell you he's there and can't be seen," said Fenner, with increasing annoyance. "What do you mean by saying you want to see if he's there to be seen? Of course he's there. We all left him there five minutes ago and we've stood outside this door ever since."

"Well, I want to see if he's all right," said the priest.

"Why?" demanded the secretary, in exasperation.

"Because I have serious, I might say solemn reasons," said the cleric, gravely, "for doubting whether he is all right."

"Oh, Lord!" cried Vandam, in a sort of fury, "not more superstitions."

"I see I shall have to give my reasons," observed

the little cleric, gravely. "I suppose I can't expect you even to let me look through the crack of a door till I tell you the whole story."

He was silent a moment as in reflection, and then went on without noticing the wondering faces around him. "I was walking outside along the front of the colonnade when I saw a very ragged man running hard round the corner at the end of the crescent. He came pounding along the pavement towards me, revealing a great, raw-boned figure and a face I knew. It was the face of a wild Irish fellow I once helped a little; I will not tell you his name. When he saw me he staggered, calling me by mine and saying, 'Saints alive, it's Father Brown; you're the only man whose face could frighten me to-day.' I knew he meant he'd been doing some wild thing or other, and I don't think my face frightened him much, for he was soon telling me about it. And a very strange thing it was. He asked me if I knew Warren Wynd, and I said no, though I knew he lived near the top of these flats. He said, 'That's a man who thinks he's a saint of God; but if he knew what I was saying of him he should be ready to hang himself.' And he repeated hysterically more than once, 'Yes, ready to hang himself.' I asked him if he'd done any harm to Wynd and his answer was rather a queer one. He said: 'I took a pistol and I loaded it with neither shot nor slug, but only with a curse.' As far as I could make out, all he had done was to go down that little alley between this building and the big warehouse, with an old pistol loaded with a blank

charge, and merely fire it against the wall, as if that would bring down the building. 'But as I did it,' he said, 'I cursed him with the great curse, that the justice of God should take him by the hair and the vengeance of hell by the heels, and he should be torn asunder like Judas and the world know him no more.' Well, it doesn't matter now what else I said to the poor, crazy fellow; he went away quieted down a little, and I went round to the back of the building to inspect. And sure enough, in the little alley at the foot of this wall there lay a rusty antiquated pistol; I know enough about pistols to know it had been loaded only with a little powder; there were the black marks of powder and smoke on the wall, and even the mark of the muzzle, but not even a dent of any bullet. He had left no trace of destruction; he had left no trace of anything, except those black marks and that black curse he had hurled into heaven. So I came back here to ask for this Warren Wynd and find out if he's all right."

Fenner the secretary laughed. "I can soon settle that difficulty for you. I assure you he's quite all right; we left him writing at his desk only a few minutes ago. He was alone in his flat; it's a hundred feet up from the street, and so placed that no shot could have reached him, even if your friend hadn't fired blank. There's no other entrance to this place but this door, and we've been standing outside it ever since."

"All the same," said Father Brown, gravely, "I should like to look in and see."

"Well, you can't," retorted the other. "Good Lord, don't tell me you think anything of the curse."

"You forget," said the millionaire, with a slight sneer, "the reverend gentleman's whole business is blessings and cursings. Come, sir, if he's been cursed to hell, why don't you bless him back again? What's the good of your blessings if they can't beat an Irish larrykin's curse."

"Does anybody believe such things now?" protested the Westerner.

"Father Brown believes a good number of things, I take it," said Vandam, whose temper was suffering from the past snub and the present bickering. "Father Brown believes a hermit crossed a river on a crocodile conjured out of nowhere, and then he told the crocodile to die, and it sure did. Father Brown believes that some blessed saint or other died, and had his dead body turned into three dead bodies, to be served out to three parishes that were all bent on figuring as his home-town. Father Brown believes that a saint hung his cloak on a sunbeam, and another used his for a boat to cross the Atlantic. Father Brown believes the holy donkey had six legs and the house at Lorretto flew through the air. He believes in hundreds of stone virgins winking and weeping all day long. It's nothing to him to believe that a man might escape through the keyhole or vanish out of a locked room. I reckon he doesn't take much stock in the laws of nature."

"Anyhow, I have to take stock in the laws of Warren Wynd," said the secretary, wearily, "and

it's his rule that he's to be left alone when he says so. Wilson will tell you just the same," for the large servant who had been sent for the pamphlet, passed placidly down the corridor even as he spoke, carrying the pamphlet, but serenely passing the door. "He'll go and sit on the bench by the floor-clerk and twiddle his thumbs till he's wanted; but he won't go in before then; and nor will I. I reckon we both know which side our bread is buttered; and it'd take a good many of Father Brown's saints and angels to make us forget it."

"As for saints and angels——" began the priest.

"It's all nonsense," repeated Fenner. "I don't want to say anything offensive, but that sort of thing may be very well for crypts and cloisters and all sorts of moonshiny places. But ghosts can't get throgoh a closed door in an American hotel."

"But men can open a door, even in an American hotel," replied Father Brown, patiently. "And it seems to me the simplest thing would be to open it."

"It would be simple enough to lose me my job," answered the secretary, "and Warren Wynd doesn't like his secretaries so simple as that. Not simple enough to believe in the sort of fairy-tales you seem to believe in."

"Well," said the priest gravely, "it is true enough that I believe in a good many things that you probably don't. But it would take a considerable time to explain all the things I believe in, and all the reasons I have for thinking I'm right. It would

take about two seconds to open that door and prove I am wrong."

Something in the phrase seemed to please the more wild and restless spirit of the man from the West.

"I'll allow I'd love to prove you wrong," said Alboin, striding suddenly past them, "and I will."

He threw open the door of the flat and looked in. The first glimpse showed that Warren Wynd's chair was empty. The second glance showed that his room was empty also.

Fenner, electrified with energy in his turn, dashed past the other into the apartment.

"He's in his bedroom," he said curtly, "he must be."

As he disappeared into the inner chamber the other men stood in the empty outer room staring about them. The severity and simplicity of its fittings, which had already been noted, returned on them with a rigid challenge. Certainly in this room there was no question of hiding a mouse, let alone a man. There were no curtains and, what is rare in American arrangements, no cupboards. Even the desk was no more than a plain table with a shallow drawer and a tilted lid. The chairs were hard and high-backed skeletons. A moment after the secretary reappeared at the inner door, having searched the two inner rooms. A staring negation stood in his eyes, and his mouth seemed to move in a mechanical detachment from it as he said sharply: "He didn't come out through here?"



Somehow the others did not even think it necessary to answer that negation in the negative. Their minds had come up against something like the blank wall of the warehouse that stared in at the opposite window, gradually turning from white to grey as dusk slowly descended with the advancing afternoon. Vandam walked over to the window-sill against which he had leant half an hour before and looked out of the open window. There was no pipe or fire-escape, no shelf or foothold of any kind on the sheer fall to the little by-street below, there was nothing on the similar expanse of wall that rose many storeys above. There was even less variation on the other side of the street; there was nothing whatever but the wearisome expanse of whitewashed wall. He peered downwards, as if expecting to see the vanished philanthropist lying in a suicidal wreck on the path. He could see nothing but one small dark object which, though diminished by distance, might well be the pistol that the priest had found lying there. Meanwhile, Fenner had walked to the other window, which looked from a wall equally blank and inaccessible, but looking out over a small ornamental park instead of a side street. Here a clump of trees interrupted the actual view of the ground; but they reached but a little way up the huge human cliff. Both turned back into the room and faced each other in the gathering twilight, where the last silver gleams of daylight on the shiny tops of desks and tables were rapidly turning grey. As if the twilight itself irritated him, Fenner touched the switch

and the scene sprang into the startling distinctness of electric light.

"As you said just now," said Vandam grimly, "ther's no shot from down there could hit him, even if there was a shot in the gun. But even if he was hit with a bullet he wouldn't have just burst like a bubble."

The secretary, who was paler than ever, glanced irritably at the bilious visage of the millionaire.

"What's got you started on those morbid notions? Whose talking about bullets and bubbles? Why shouldn't he be alive?"

"Why not indeed?" replied Vandam smoothly. "If you'll tell me where he is, I'll tell you how he got there."

After a pause the secretary muttered, rather sulkily, "I suppose you're right. We're right up against the very thing we were talking about. It'd be a queer thing if you or I ever came to think there was anything in cursing. But who could have harmed Wynd shut up in here?"

Mr. Alboin, of Oklahoma, had been standing rather astraddle in the middle of the room, his white, hairy halo as well as his round eyes seeming to radiate astonishment. At this point he said, abstractedly, with something of the irrelevant impudence of an *enfant terrible*:

"You didn't cotton to him much, did you, Mr. Vandam?"

Mr. Vandam's long yellow face seemed to grow

longer as it grew more sinister, while he smiled and answered quietly:

"If it comes to these coincidences, it was you, I think who said that a wind from the West would blow away our big men like thistledown."

"I know I said it would," said the Westerner, with candour; "but all the same, how the devil could it?"

The silence was broken by Fenner saying with an abruptness amounting to violence:

"There's only one thing to say about this affair. It simply hasn't happened. It can't have happened."

"Oh, yes," said Father Brown out of the corner, "it has happened all right."

They all jumped; for the truth was they had all forgotten the insignificant little man who had originally induced them to open the door. And the recovery of memory went with a sharp reversal of mood; it came back to them with a rush that they had all dismissed him as a superstitious dreamer for even hinting at the very thing that had since happened before their eyes.

"Snakes!" cried the impetuous Westerner, like one speaking before he could stop himself. "Suppose there were something in it, after all!"

"I must confess," said Fenner, frowning at the table, "that his reverence's anticipations were apparently well founded. I don't know whether he has anything else to tell us."

"He might possibly tell us," said Vandam, sardonically, "what the devil we are to do now."

The little priest seemed to accept the position in a modest, but matter-of-fact manner. "The only thing I can think of," he said, "is first to tell the authorities of this place, and then to see if there were any more traces of my man who let off the pistol. He vanished round the other end of the Crescent where the little garden is. There are seats there, and it's a favourite place for tramps."

Direct consultations with the headquarters of the hotel, leading to indirect consultations with the authorities of the police, occupied them for a considerable time; and it was already nightfall when they went out under the long, classical curve of the colonnade. The crescent looked as cold and hollow as the moon after which it was named, and the moon itself was rising luminous but spectral, behind the black tree-tops when they turned the corner by the little public garden. Night veiled much of what was merely urban and artificial about the place; and as they melted into the shadows of the trees they had a strange feeling of having suddenly travelled many hundred miles from their homes. When they had walked in silence for a little, Alboin, who had something elemental about him suddenly exploded.

"I give up," he cried; "I hand in my checks. I never thought I should come to such things; but what happens when the things come to you? I beg your pardon, Father Brown; I reckon I'll just come

across, so far as you and your fairy-tales are concerned. After this, it's me for the fairy-tales. Why, you said yourself, Mr. Vandam, that you're an atheist and only believe what you see. Well, what was it you did see? Or rather, what was it you didn't see?"

"I know," said Vandam and nodded in a gloomy fashion.

"Oh, it's partly all this moon and trees that get on one's nerves," said Fenner obstinately. "Trees always look queer by moonlight, with their branches crawling about. Look at that——"

"Yes," said Father Brown, standing still and peering at the moon through a tangle of trees. "That's a very queer branch up there."

When he spoke again he only said:

"I thought it was a broken branch."

But this time there was a catch in his voice that unaccountably turned his hearers cold. Something that looked rather like a dead branch was certainly dependent in a limp fashion from the tree that showed dark against the moon; but it was not a dead branch. When they came close to it to see what it was, Fenner sprang away again with a ringing oath. Then he ran in again and loosened a rope from the neck of a dingy little body dangling with drooping plumes of grey hair. Somehow he knew that the body was a dead body before he managed to take it down from the tree. A very long coil of rope was wrapped round and round the branches, and a com-

paratively short length of it hung from the fork of the branch to the body. A large garden tub was rolled a yard or so from under the feet, like the stool kicked away from the feet of a suicide.

"Oh my God," said Alboin, so that it seemed as much a prayer as an oath. "What was it that man said about him?—'If he knew, he would be ready to hang himself.' Wasn't that what he said, Father Brown?"

"Yes," said Father Brown.

"Well," said Vandam in a hollow voice, "I never thought to see or say such a thing. But what can one say except that the curse has worked?"

Fenner was standing with hands covering his face; and the priest laid a hand on his arm and said, gently, "Were you very fond of him?"

The secretary dropped his hands and his white face was ghastly under the moon.

"I hated him like hell," he said; "and if he died by a curse it might have been mine."

The pressure of the priest's hand on his arm tightened; and the priest said, with an earnestness he had hardly yet shown:

"It wasn't your curse; pray be comforted."

The police of the district had considerable difficulty in dealing with the four witnesses who were involved in the case. All of them were reputable, and even reliable people in the ordinary sense; and one of them was a person of considerable power and importance: Silas Vandam of the Oil Trust. The

first police officer who tried to express scepticism about his story struck sparks from the steel of that magnate's mind very rapidly indeed.

"Don't you talk to me about sticking to the facts," said the millionaire with asperity. "I've stuck to a good many facts before you were born, and a few of the facts have stuck to me. I'll give you the facts all right if you've got the sense to take 'em down correctly."

The policeman in question was youthful and subordinate, and had a hazy idea that the millionaire was too political to be treated as an ordinary citizen; so he passed him and his companions on to a more stolid superior, one Inspector Collins, a grizzled man with a grimly comfortable way of talking; as one who was genial but would stand no nonsense.

"Well, well," he said, looking at the three figures before him with twinkling eyes, "this seems to be a funny sort of a tale."

Father Brown had already gone about his daily business; but Silas Vandam had suspended even the gigantic business of the markets for an hour or so to testify to his remarkable experience. Fenenr's business as secretary had ceased in a sense with his employer's life; and the great Art Alboin, having no business in New York or anywhere else, except the spreading of the Breath of Life or religion of the Great Spirit, had nothing to draw him away at the moment from the immediate affair. So they stood in a row in the inspector's office, prepared to corroborate each other.

"Now I'd better tell you to start with," said the inspector cheerfully, "that it's no good for anybody to come to me with any miraculous stuff. I'm a practical man and a policeman, and that sort of thing is all very well for priests and parsons. This priest of yours seems to have got you all worked up about some story of a dreadful death and judgment; but I'm going to leave him and his religion out of it altogether. If Wynd came out of that room, somebody let him out. And if Wynd was found hanging on that tree, somebody hung him there."

"Quite so," said Fenner; "but as our evidence is that nobody let him out, the question is how could anybody have hung him there?"

"How could anybody have a nose on his face?" asked the inspector. "He had a nose on his face and he had a noose round his neck. Those are facts; and as I say, I'm a practical man and go by the facts. It can't have been done by a miracle, so it must have been done by a man."

Alboin had been standing rather in the background; and indeed, his broad figure seemed to form a natural background to the leaner and more vivacious men in front of him. His white head was bowed with a certain abstraction; but as the inspector said the last sentence, he lifted it, shaking his hoary mane in a leonine fashion, and looking dazed but awakened. He moved forward into the centre of the group; and they had a vague feeling that he was even vaster than before. They had been only too prone to take him for a fool or a mounte-



bank; but he was not altogether wrong when he said that there was in him a certain depth of lungs and life, like a west wind stored up in its strength, which might some day puff lighter things away.

"So you're a practical man, Mr. Collins," he said, in a voice at once soft and heavy. "It must be the second or third time you've mentioned in this little conversation that you are a practical man; so I can't be mistaken about that. And a very interesting little fact it is for anybody engaged in writing your life, letters, and table-talk, with portrait at the age of five, daguerrotype of your grandmother and views of the old home-town; and I'm sure your biographer won't forget to mention it, along with the fact that you had a pug nose with a pimple on it, and were nearly too fat to walk. And as you're a practical man, perhaps you would just go on practising till you've brought Warren Wynd to life again, and found out exactly how a practical man gets through a deal door. But I think you've got it wrong. You're not a practical man. You're a practical joke; that's what you are. The Almighty was having a bit of fun with us when he thought of you."

With a characteristic sense of drama he went sailing towards the door before the astonished inspector could reply; and no after recriminations could rob him of a certain appearance of triumph.

"I think you were perfectly right," said Fenner. "If those are practical men, give me priests."

Another attempt was made to reach an official version of the event, when the authorities fully

realised who were the backers of the story, and what were the implications of it. Already it had broken out in the Press in its most sensationally and even shamelessly psychic form. Interviews with Vandam on his marvellous adventure, articles about Father Brown and his mystical intuitions, soon led those who feel responsible for guiding the public, to wish to guide it into a wiser channel. Next time the inconvenient witnesses were approached in a more indirect and tactful manner. They were told, almost in an airy fashion, that Professor Vair was very much interested in such abnormal experiences; was especially interested in their own astonishing case. Professor Vair was a psychologist of great distinction; he had been known to take a detached interest in criminology; it was only some little time afterwards that they discovered that he was in any way connected with the police.

Professor Vair was a courteous gentleman, quietly dressed in pale grey clothes, with an artistic tie and a fair, pointed beard; he looked more like a landscape painter to anyone not acquainted with a certain special type of don. He had an air not only of courtesy, but of frankness.

"Yes, yes, I know," he said smiling; "I can guess what you must have gone through. The police do not shine in inquiries of a psychic sort, do they? Of course, dear old Collins said he only wanted the facts. What an absurd blunder! In a case of this kind we emphatically do *not* only want the facts. It is even more essential to have the fancies."

"Do you mean?" asked Vandam gravely, "that all that we call the facts were merely fancies?"

"Not at all," said the professor; "I only mean that the police are stupid in thinking they can leave out the psychological element in these things. Well, of course, the psychological element is everything in everything, though it is only just beginning to be understood. To begin with, take the element called personality. Now I have heard of this priest, Father Brown, before; and he is one of the most remarkable men of our time. Men of that sort carry a sort of atmosphere with them; and nobody knows how much his nerves and even his very senses are affected by it for the time being. People are hypnotised—yes, hypnotised; for hypnotism, like everything else, is a matter of degree; it enters slightly into all daily conversation; it is not necessarily conducted by a man in evening-dress on a platform in a public hall. Father Brown's religion has always understood the psychology of atmospheres, and knows how to appeal to everything simultaneously; even, for instance, to the sense of smell. It understands those curious effects produced by music on animals and human beings; it can——"

"Hang it," protested Fenner, "you don't think he walked down the corridor carrying a church organ?"

"He knows better than to do that," said Professor Vair laughing. "He knows how to concentrate the essence of all these spiritual sounds and sights, and even smells, in a few restrained gestures;

in an art or school of manners. He could contrive so to concentrate your minds on the supernatural by his mere presence, that natural things slipped off your minds to left and right unnoticed. Now you know," he proceeded with a return to cheerful good sense, "that the more we study it the more queer the whole question of human evidence becomes. There is not one man in twenty who really observes things at all. There is not one man in a hundred who observes them with real precision; certainly not one in a hundred who can first observe, then remember and finally describe. Scientific experiments have been made again and again showing that men under a strain have thought a door was shut when it was open, or open when it was shut. Men have differed about the number of doors or windows in a wall just in front of them. They have suffered optical illusions in broad daylight. They have done this even without the hypnotic effect of personality; but here we have a very powerful and persuasive personality bent upon fixing only one picture on your minds; the picture of the wild Irish rebel shaking his pistol at the sky and firing that vain volley, whose echoes were the thunders of heaven."

"Professor," cried Fenner, "I'd swear on my deathbed that door never opened."

"Recent experiments," went on the Professor, quietly, "have suggested that our consciousness is not continuous, but is a succession of very rapid impressions like a cinema; it is possible that somebody or something may, so to speak, slip in or out

between the scenes. It acts only in the instant while the curtain is down. Probably the patter of conjurers and all forms of sleight of hand depend on what we may call these black flashes of blindness between the flashes of sight. Now this priest and preacher of transcendental notions had filled you with a transcendental imagery; the image of the Celt like a Titan shaking the tower with his curse. Probably he accompanied it with some slight but compelling gesture, pointing your eyes and minds in the direction of the unknown destroyer below. Or perhaps something else happened, or somebody else passed by."

"Wilson the servant," grunted Alboin, "went down the hallway to wait on the bench, but I guess he didn't distract us much."

"You never know how much," replied Vair; "it might have been that or more likely your eyes following some gesture of the priest as he told his tale of magic. It was in one of those black flashes that Mr. Warren Wynd slipped out of his door and went to his death. That is the most probable explanation. It is an illustration of the new discovery. The mind is not a continuous line, but rather a dotted line."

"Very dotted," said Fenner feebly. "Not to say dotty."

"You don't really believe," asked Vair, "that your employer was shut up in a room like a box?"

"It's better than believing that I ought to be shut up in a room like a padded cell," answered

Fenner. "That's what I complain of in your suggestions, professor. I'd as soon believe in a priest who believes in a miracle, as disbelieve in any man having any right to believe in a fact. The priest tells me that a man can appeal to a God I know nothing about, to avenge him by the laws of some higher justice that I know nothing about. There's nothing for me to say except that I know nothing about it. But at least if the poor Paddy's prayer and pistol could be heard in a higher world, that higher world might act in some way that seems odd to us. But you ask me to disbelieve the facts of this world as they appear to my own five wits. According to you, a whole procession of Irishmen carrying blunderbusses may have walked through this room while we were talking, so long as they took care to tread on the blind spots in our minds. Miracles of the monkish sort, like materialising a crocodile or hanging a cloak on a sunbeam, seem quite sane compared to you."

"Oh, well," said Professor Vair, rather curtly, "if you are resolved to believe in your priest and his miraculous Irishman, I can say no more. I'm afraid you have not had an opportunity of studying psychology."

"No," said Fenner drily, "but I've had an opportunity of studying psychologists."

And, bowing politely, he led his deputation out of the room and did not speak till he got into the street; then he addressed them rather explosively.

"Raving lunatics!" cried Fenner in a fume. "What the devil do they think is to happen to the world if nobody knows whether he's seen anything or not? I wish I'd blown his silly head off with a blank charge, and then explained that I did it in a blind flash. Father Brown's miracle may be miraculous or no, but he said it would happen and it did happen. All these blasted cranks can do is to see a thing happen and then say it didn't. Look here, I think we owe it to the padre to testify to his little demonstration. We're all sane, solid men who never believed in anything. We weren't drunk. We weren't devout. It simply happened, just as he said it would."

"I quite agree," said the millionaire. "It may be the beginning of mighty big things in the spiritual line; but anyhow, the man who's in the spiritual line himself, Father Brown, has certainly scored over this business."

A few days afterwards Father Brown received a very polite note signed Silas T. Vandam, and asking him if he could attend at a stated hour at the apartment which was the scene of the disappearance in order to take steps for the establishment of that marvellous occurrence. The occurrence itself had already begun to break out in the newspapers, and was being taken up everywhere by the enthusiasts of occultism. Father Brown saw the flaring posters inscribed "Suicide of Vanishing Man," and "Man's Curse Hangs Philanthropist," as he passed towards Moon Crescent and mounted the steps on the way

to the elevator. He found the little group much as he left it, Vandam, Alboin, and the secretary; but there was an entirely new respectfulness and even reverence in their tone towards himself. They were standing by Wynd's desk, on which lay a large paper and writing materials, as they turned to greet him.

"Father Brown," said the spokesman, who was the white-haired Westerner somewhat sobered with his responsibility, "we asked you here in the first place to offer our apologies and our thanks. We recognise that it was you that spotted the spiritual manifestation from the first. We were hard-shell sceptics, all of us; but we realise now that a man must break that shell to get at the great things behind the world. You stand for those things; you stand for that super-normal explanation of things; and we have to hand it to you. And in the second place, we feel that this document would not be complete without your signature. We are notifying the exact facts to the Psychical Research Society, because the newspaper accounts are not what you might call exact. We've stated how the curse was spoken out in the street; how the man was sealed up here in a room like a box; how the curse dissolved him straight into thin air, and in some unthinkable way materialised him as a suicide hoisted on a gallows. That's all we can say about it; but all that we know, and have seen with our own eyes. And as you were the first to believe in the miracle, we all feel that you ought to be the first to sign."



"No, really," said Father Brown, in embarrassment. "I don't think I should like to do that."

"You mean you'd rather not sign first?"

"I mean I'd rather not sign at all," said Father Brown, modestly. "You see, it doesn't quite do for a man in my position to joke about miracles."

"But it was you who said it was a miracle," said Alboin, staring.

"I'm so sorry," said Father Brown; "I'm afraid there's some mistake. I don't think I ever said it was a miracle. All I said was that it might happen. What you said was that it couldn't happen, because it would be a miracle if it did. And then it did. And so you said it was a miracle. But I never said a word about miracles or magic or anything of the sort from beginning to end."

"But I thought you believed in miracles," broke out the secretary.

"Yes," answered Father Brown, "I believe in miracles. I believe in man-eating tigers, but I don't see them running about everywhere. If I want any miracles, I know where to get them."

"I can't understand your taking this line, Father Brown," said Vandam, earnestly. "It seems so narrow; and you don't look narrow to me, though you are a parson. Don't you see a miracle like this will knock all materialism endways? It will just tell the whole world in big print that spiritual powers can work and do work. You'll be serving religion as no parson ever served it yet."

The priest had stiffened a little and seemed in some strange way clothed with unconscious and impersonal dignity, for all his stumpy figure. "Well," he said, "you wouldn't suggest I should serve religion by what I know to be a lie? I don't know precisely what you mean by the phrase; and, to be quite candid, I'm not sure you do. Lying may be serving religion; I'm sure it's not serving God. And since you are harping so insistently on what I believe, wouldn't it be well if you had some sort of notion of what it is?"

"I don't think I quite understand," observed the millionaire, curiously.

"I don't think you do," said Father Brown, with simplicity. "You say this thing was done by spiritual powers. What spiritual powers? You don't think the holy angels took him and hung him on a garden tree, do you? And as for the unholy angels—no, no, no. The men who did this did a wicked thing, but they went no further than their own wickedness; they weren't wicked enough to be dealing with spiritual powers. I know something about Satanism, for my sins; I've been forced to know. I know what it is, what it practically always is. It's proud and it's sly. It likes to be superior; it loves to horrify the innocent with things half understood, to make children's flesh creep. That's why it's so fond of mysteries and initiations and secret societies and all the rest of it. Its eyes are turned inwards, and however grand and grave it may look, it's always hiding a small, mad smile."

He shuddered suddenly, as if caught in an icy draught of air. "Never mind about them; they've got nothing to do with this, believe me. Do you think that poor, wild Irishman of mine, who ran raving down the street, who blurted out half of it when he first saw my face, and ran away for fear he should blurt out more, do you think Satan confides any secrets to him? I admit he joined in a plot, probably in a plot with two other men worse than himself; but for all that he was just in an everlasting rage when he rushed down the lane and let off his pistol and his curse."

"But what on earth does all this mean?" demanded Vandam. "Letting off a toy pistol and a twopenny curse wouldn't do what was done, except by a miracle. It wouldn't make Wynd disappear like a fairy. It wouldn't make him reappear a quarter of a mile away with a rope round his neck."

"No," said Father Brown, sharply, "but what would it do?"

"And still I don't follow you," said the millionaire gravely.

"I say, what would it do?" repeated the priest, showing, for the first time, a sort of animation verging on annoyance. "You keep on repeating that a blank pistol-shot wouldn't do this, and wouldn't do that; that if that was all, the murder wouldn't happen or the miracle wouldn't happen. It doesn't seem to occur to you to ask what would happen. What would happen to you, if a lunatic let off a firearm without rhyme or reason right under

your window? What's the very first thing that would happen?"

Vandam looked thoughtful. "I guess I should look out of the window," he said.

"Yes," said Father Brown, "you'd look out of the window. That's the whole story. It's a sad story, but it's finished now; and there were extenuating circumstances."

"Why should looking out of the window hurt him?" asked Alboin. "He didn't fall out, or he'd have been found in the lane."

"No," said Father Brown, in a low voice. "He didn't fall. He rose."

There was something in his voice like the groan of a gong, a note of doom, but otherwise he went on steadily:

"He rose, but not on wings; not on the wings of any holy or unholy angels. He rose at the end of a rope, exactly as you saw him in the garden; a noose dropped over the head the moment it was poked out of the window. Don't you remember Wilson, that big servant of his, a man of huge strength, while Wynd was the lightest of little shrimps? Didn't Wilson go to the floor above to get a pamphlet, to a room full of luggage corded in coils and coils of rope? Has Wilson been seen since that day? I fancy not."

"Do you mean," asked the secretary, "that Wilson whisked him clean out of his own window like a trout on a line?"

"Yes," said the other, "and let him down again

out of the other window into the park, where the third accomplice hooked him on to a tree. Remember the lane was always empty; remember the wall opposite was quite blank; remember it was all over in five minutes after the Irishman gave the signal with the pistol. There were three of them in it, of course; and I wonder whether you can all guess who they were."

They were all three staring at the plain, square window and the blank, white wall beyond; and nobody answered.

"By the way," went on Father Brown, "don't think I blame you for jumping to preternatural conclusions. The reason's very simple, really. You all swore you were hard-shelled materialists; and as a matter of fact you were all balanced on the very edge of belief—of belief in almost anything. There are thousands balanced on it to-day; but it's a sharp, uncomfortable edge to sit on. You won't rest till you believe something; that's why Mr. Vandam went through new religions with a tooth-comb and Mr. Alboin quotes Scripture for his religion of breathing exercises, and Mr. Fenner grumbles at the very God he denies. That's where you all split; it's natural to believe in the supernatural. It never feels natural to accept only natural things. But though it wanted only a touch to tip you into preternaturalism about these things, these things really were only natural things. They were not only natural, they were almost unnaturally simple. I suppose there never was quite so simple a story as this."

Fenner laughed and then looked puzzled. "I don't understand one thing," he said. "If it was Wilson, how did Wynd come to have a man like that on such intimate terms? How did he come to be killed by a man he'd seen every day for years? He was famous as being a judge of men."

Father Brown thumped his umbrella on the ground with an emphasis he rarely showed.

"Yes," he said, almost fiercely. "That was how he came to be killed. He was killed for just that. He was killed for being a judge of men."

They all stared at him, but he went on, almost as if they were not there.

"What is any man that he should be a judge of men?" he demanded. "These three were the tramps that once stood before him and were dismissed rapidly right and left to one place or another; as if for them there were no cloak of courtesy, no stages of intimacy, no free will in friendship. And twenty years has not exhausted the indignation borne of that unfathomable insult in that moment when he dared to know them at a glance."

"Yes," said the secretary, "I understand . . . and I understand how it is that you understand—all sorts of things."

"Well, I'm blamed if I understand," cried the breezy Western gentleman boisterously. "Your Wilson and your Irishman seem to be just a couple of cut-throat murderers who killed their benefactor. I've no use for a black and bloody assassin of that sort in my morality, whether it's religion or not."

"He was a black and bloody assassin, no doubt," said Fenner, quietly. "I'm not defending him; but I suppose it's Father Brown's business to pray for all men, even for a man like——"

"Yes," assented Father Brown, "it's my business to pray for all men, even for a man like Warren Wynd."

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## V

### THE CURSE OF THE GOLDEN CROSS

SIX people sat round a small table, seeming almost as incongruous and accidental as if they had been shipwrecked separately on the same small desert island. At least the sea surrounded them; for in one sense their island was enclosed in another island, a large and flying island like Laputa. For the little table was one of many little tables dotted about in the dining saloon of that monstrous ship the *Moravia*, speeding through the night and the everlasting emptiness of the Atlantic. The little company had nothing in common except that all were travelling from America to England. Two of them at least might be called celebrities; others might be called obscure, and in one or two cases even dubious.

The first was the famous Professor Smaill, an authority on certain archæological studies touching the later Byzantine Empire. His lectures, delivered in an American University, were accepted as of the first authority even in the most authoritative seats of learning in Europe. His literary works were so steeped in a mellow and imaginative sympathy with the European past, that it often gave strangers a start to hear him speak with an American accent. Yet he was in his way very American; he had long



fair hair brushed back from a big square forehead, long straight features and a curious mixture of preoccupation with a poise of potential swiftness, like a lion pondering absent-mindedly on his next leap.

There was only one lady in the group; and she was (as the journalists often said of her) a host in herself; being quite prepared to play hostess, not to say empress, at that or any other table. She was Lady Diana Wales, the celebrated lady traveller in tropical and other countries; but there was nothing rugged or masculine about her appearance at dinner. She was herself handsome in an almost tropical fashion, with a mass of hot and heavy red hair; she was dressed in what the journalists call a daring fashion, but her face was intelligent and her eyes had that bright and rather prominent appearance which belongs to the eyes of ladies who ask questions at political meetings.

The other four figures seemed at first like shadows in this shining presence; but they showed differences on a closer view. One of them was a young man entered on the ship's register as Paul T. Tarrant. He was an American type which might be more truly called an American antitype. Every nation probably has an antitype; a sort of extreme exception that proves the national rule. Americans really respect work, rather as Europeans respect war. There is a halo of heroism about it; and he who shrinks from it is less than a man. The antitype is evident through being exceedingly rare. He is the

dandy or dude; the wealthy waster who makes a weak villain for so many American novels. Paul Tarrant seemed to have nothing whatever to do but to change his clothes, which he did about six times a day; passing into paler or richer shades of his suit of exquisite light grey, like the delicate silver changes of the twilight. Unlike most Americans, he cultivated very carefully a short curly beard; and unlike most dandies, even of his own type, he seemed rather sulky than showy. Perhaps there was something almost Byronic about his silence and his gloom.

The next two travellers were naturally classed together; merely because they were both English lecturers returning from an American tour. One of them was described as Leonard Smyth, apparently a minor poet, but something of a major journalist; long-headed, light-haired, perfectly dressed and perfectly capable of looking after himself. The other was a rather comic contrast, being short and broad, with a black walrus moustache, and as taciturn as the other was talkative. But as he had been both charged with robbing and praised for rescuing a Roumanian Princess threatened by a jaguar in his travelling menagerie, and had thus figured in a fashionable case, it was naturally felt that his views on God, progress, his own early life, and the future of Anglo-American relations would be of great interest and value to the inhabitants of Minneapolis and Omaha. The sixth and most insignificant figure was that of a little English priest going by the name of

Brown. He listened to the conversation with respectful attention, and he was at that moment forming the impression that there was one rather curious thing about it.

"I suppose those Byzantine studies of yours, Professor," Leonard Smyth was saying, "would throw some light on this story of a tomb found somewhere on the south coast; near Brighton, isn't it? Brighton's a long way from Byzantium, of course. But I read something about the style of burying or embalming or something being supposed to be Byzantine."

"Byzantine studies certainly have to reach a long way," replied the Professor drily. "They talk about specialists; but I think the hardest thing on earth is to specialise. In this case, for instance: how can a man know anything about Byzantium till he knows everything about Rome before it and about Islam after it? Most Arab arts were old Byzantine arts. Why, take algebra——"

"But I won't take algebra," cried the lady decisively. "I never did and I never do. But I'm awfully interested in embalming. I was with Gatton, you know, when he opened the Babylonian tombs. Ever since then I found mummies and preserved bodies and all that perfectly thrilling. Do tell us about this one."

"Gatton was an interesting man," said the Professor. "They were an interesting family. That brother of his who went into Parliament was much more than an ordinary politician. I never under-

stood the Fascisti till he made that speech about Italy."

"Well, we're not going to Italy on this trip," said Lady Diana persistently, "and I believe you're going to that little place where they've found the tomb. In Sussex, isn't it?"

"Sussex is pretty large, as these little English sections go," replied the Professor. "One might wander about in it for a goodish time; and it's a good place to wander in. It's wonderful how large those low hills seem when you're on them."

There was an abrupt accidental silence; and then the lady said, "Oh, I'm going on deck," and rose, the men rising with her. But the Professor lingered, and the little priest was the last to leave the table, carefully folding up his napkin. And as they were thus left alone together the Professor said suddenly to his companion:

"What would you say was the point of that little talk?"

"Well," said Father Brown smiling, "since you ask me, there was something that amused me a little. I may be wrong; but it seemed to me that the company made three attempts to get you to talk about an embalmed body said to be found in Sussex. And you, on your side, very courteously offered to talk—first about algebra, and then about the Fascisti, and then about the landscape of the Downs."

"In short," replied the Professor, "you thought I was ready to talk about any subject but that one. You were quite right."

The Professor was silent for a little time, looking down at the table-cloth; then he looked up and spoke with that swift impulsiveness that suggested the lion's leap.

"See here, Father Brown," he said, "I consider you about the wisest and whitest man I ever met."

Father Brown was very English. He had all the normal national helplessness about what to do with a serious and sincere compliment suddenly handed to him to his face, in the American manner. His reply was a meaningless murmur; and it was the Professor who proceeded, with the same staccato earnestness:

"You see, up to a point it's all simple enough. A Christian tomb of the Dark Ages, apparently that of a bishop, has been found under a little church at Dulham on the Sussex coast. The Vicar happens to be a good bit of an archæologist himself and has been able to find out a good deal more than I know yet. There was a rumour of the corpse being embalmed in a way peculiar to Greeks and Egyptians but unknown in the West, especially at that date. So Mr. Walters (that is the Vicar) naturally wonders about Byzantine influences. But he also mentions something else, that is of even more personal interest to me."

His long grave face seemed to grow even longer and graver as he frowned down at the table-cloth. His long finger seemed to be tracing patterns on it like the plans of dead cities and their temples and tombs.

"So I'm going to tell you, and nobody else, why it is I have to be careful about mentioning that matter in mixed company; and why, the more eager they are to talk about it, the more cautious I have to be. It is also stated that in the coffin is a chain with a cross, common enough to look at, but with a certain secret symbol on the back found on only one other cross in the world. It is from the arcana of the very earliest Church and is supposed to indicate St. Peter setting up his See at Antioch before he came to Rome. Anyhow, I believe there is but one other like it, and it belongs to me. I hear there is some story about a curse on it; but I take no notice of that. But whether or no there is a curse, there really is in one sense a conspiracy; though the conspiracy should only consist of one man."

"Of one man?" repeated Father Brown almost mechanically.

"Of one madman, for all I know," said Professor Smaill. "It's a long story and in some ways a silly one."

He paused again, still tracing plans like architectural drawings with his finger on the cloth, and then resumed:

"Perhaps I had better tell you about it from the beginning, in case you see some little point in the story that is meaningless to me. It began years and years ago, when I was conducting some investigations on my own account in the antiquities of Crete and the Greek islands. I did a great deal of it practically single-handed; sometimes with the

most rude and temporary help from the inhabitants of the place, and sometimes literally alone. It was under the latter circumstances that I found a maze of subterranean passages which led at last to a heap of rich refuse, broken ornaments and scattered gems which I took to be the ruins of some sunken altar, and in which I found the curious gold cross. I turned it over, and on the back of it I saw the Ichthus or fish, which was an early Christian symbol, but of a shape and pattern rather different from that commonly found; and, as it seemed to me, more realistic—more as if the archaic designer had meant it to be not merely a conventional enclosure or nimbus, but to look a little more like a real fish. It seemed to me that there was a flattening towards one end of it that was not like mere mathematical decoration, but rather like a sort of rude or even savage zoology.

“In order to explain very briefly why I thought this find important, I must tell you the point of the excavation. For one thing, it had something of the nature of an excavation of an excavation. We were on the track not only of antiquities, but of the antiquarians of antiquity. We had reason to believe, or some of us thought we had reason to believe, that these underground passages, mostly of the Minoan period, like that famous one which is actually identified with the labyrinth of the Minotaur, had not really been lost and left undisturbed for all the ages between the Minotaur and the modern explorer. We believed that these underground places, I might

almost say these underground towns and villages, had already been penetrated during the intervening period by some persons prompted by some motive. About the motive there were different schools of thought: some holding that the Emperors had ordered an official exploration out of mere scientific curiosity; others that the furious fashion in the later Roman Empire for all sorts of lurid Asiatic superstitions had started some nameless Manichæan sect or other rioting in the caverns in orgies that had to be hidden from the face of the sun. I belong to the group which believed that these caverns had been used in the same way as the catacombs. That is, we believed that, during some of the persecutions which spread like a fire over the whole Empire, the Christians had concealed themselves in these ancient pagan labyrinths of stone. It was therefore with a thrill as sharp as a thunderclap that I found and picked up the fallen golden cross and saw the design upon it; and it was with still more of a shock of felicity that, on turning to make my way once more outwards and upwards into the light of day, I looked up at the walls of bare rock that extended endlessly along the low passages, and saw scratched in yet ruder outline, but if possible more unmistakable, the shape of the Fish.

“Something about it made it seem as if it might be a fossil fish or some rudimentary organism fixed for ever in a frozen sea. I could not analyse this analogy, otherwise unconnected with a mere drawing scratched or scrawled upon the stone, till I realised



that I was saying in my subconscious mind that the first Christians must have seemed something like fish, dumb and dwelling in a fallen world of twilight and silence, dropped far below the feet of men and moving in dark and twilight and a soundless world.

“Everyone walking along stone passages knows what it is to be followed by phantom feet. The echo follows flapping or clapping behind or in front, so that it is almost impossible for the man who is really lonely to believe in his loneliness. I had got used to the effects of this echo and had not noticed it much for some time past, when I caught sight of the symbolical shape scrawled on the wall of rock. I stopped, and at the same instant it seemed as if my heart stopped too. For my own feet had halted, but the echo went marching on.

“I ran forward, and it seemed as if the ghostly footsteps ran also, but not with that exact imitation which marks the material reverberation of a sound. I stopped again, and the steps stopped also; but I could have sworn they stopped an instant too late; I called out a question; and my cry was answered; but the voice was not my own.

“It came round the corner of a rock just in front of me; and throughout that uncanny chase I noticed that it was always at some such angle of the crooked path that it paused and spoke. The little space in front of me that could be illuminated by my small electric torch was always as empty as an empty room. Under these conditions I had a conversation with I know not whom, which lasted all the way

to the first white gleam of daylight, and even there I could not see in what fashion he vanished into the light of day. But the mouth of the labyrinth was full of many openings and cracks and chasms, and it would not have been difficult for him to have somehow darted back and disappeared again into the underworld of the caves. I only know that I came out on the lonely steps of a great mountain like a marble terrace, varied only with a green vegetation that seemed somehow more tropical than the purity of the rock, like that Oriental invasion that has spread sporadically over the fall of classic Hellas. I looked out on a sea of stainless blue, and the sun shone steadily on utter loneliness and silence; and there was not a blade of grass stirred with a whisper of flight nor the shadow of a shadow of man.

“It had been a terrible conversation; so intimate and so individual and in a sense so casual. This being, bodiless, faceless, nameless and yet calling me by my name, had talked to me in those crypts and cracks where we were buried alive with no more passion or melodrama than if we had been sitting in two armchairs at a club. But he had told me also that he would unquestionably kill me or any other man who came into the possession of the cross with the mark of the fish. He told me frankly he was not fool enough to attack me there in the labyrinth, knowing I had a loaded revolver, and that he ran as much risk as I. But he told me equally calmly that he would plan my murder with the certainty of success, with every detail developed and

every danger warded off, with the sort of artistic perfection that a Chinese craftsman or an Indian embroiderer gives to the artistic work of a lifetime. Yet he was no Oriental; I am certain he was a white man. I suspect that he was a countryman of my own.

“Since then I have received from time to time signs and symbols and queer impersonal messages that have made me certain at least that if the man is a maniac he is a monomaniac. He is always telling me, in this airy and detached way, that the preparations for my death and burial are proceeding satisfactorily; and that the only way in which I can prevent their being crowned with a comfortable success is to give up the relic in my possession—the unique cross that I found in the cavern. He does not seem to have any religious sentiment or fanaticism on the point; he seems to have no passion but the passion of a collector of curiosities. That is one of the things that makes me feel sure he is a man of the West and not of the East. But this particular curiosity seems to have driven him quite crazy.

“And then came this report, as yet unsubstantiated, about the duplicate relic found on an embalmed body in a Sussex tomb. If he had been a maniac before, this news turned him into a demoniac possessed of seven devils. That there should be one of them belonging to another man was bad enough, but that there should be two of them and neither belonging to him was a torture not to be borne. His mad messages began to come thick and

fast like showers of poisoned arrows; and each cried out more confidently than the last that my death would strike me at the moment when I stretched out my unworthy hand towards the cross in the tomb.

“‘You will never know me,’ he wrote, ‘you will never say my name; you will never see my face; you will die and never know who has killed you. I may be in any form among those about you; but I shall be in that alone at which you have forgotten to look.’

“From those threats I deduce that he is quite likely to shadow me on this expedition; and try to steal the relic or do me some mischief for possessing it. But as I never saw the man in my life, he may be almost any man I meet. Logically speaking, he may be any of the waiters who wait on me at table. He may be any of the passengers who sit with me at table.”

“He may be me,” said Father Brown, with cheerful contempt for grammar.

“He may be anybody else,” answered Smaill seriously. “That is what I meant by what I said just now. You are the only man I feel sure is not the enemy.”

Father Brown again looked embarrassed; then he smiled and said, “Well, oddly enough, I’m not. What we have to consider is any chance of finding out if he really is here before he—before he makes himself unpleasant.”

“There is one chance of finding out, I think,” remarked the Professor rather grimly. “When we

get to Southampton I shall take a car at once along the coast; I should be glad if you would come with me, but in the ordinary sense, of course, our little party will break up. If any one of them turns up again in that little churchyard on the Sussex coast, we shall know who he really is."

The Professor's programme was duly carried out, at least to the extent of the car and its cargo in the form of Father Brown. They coasted along the road with the sea on one side and the hills of Hampshire and Sussex on the other; nor was there visible to the eye any shadow of pursuit. As they approached the village of Dulham only one man crossed their path who had any connexion with the matter in hand; a journalist who had just visited the church and been courteously escorted by the vicar through the new excavated chapel; but his remarks and notes seemed to be of the ordinary newspaper sort. But Professor Smaill was perhaps a little fanciful, and could not dismiss the sense of something odd and discouraging in the attitude and appearance of the man, who was tall and shabby, hook-nosed and hollow-eyed, with moustaches that drooped with depression. He seemed anything but enlivened by his late experiment as a sightseer; indeed, he seemed to be striding as fast as possible from the sight, when they stopped him with a question.

"It's all about a curse," he said; "a curse on the place, according to the guide-book or the parson or the oldest inhabitant or whoever is the authority;

and really, it feels jolly like it. Curse or no curse, I'm glad to have got out of it."

"Do you believe in curses?" asked Smaill curiously.

"I don't believe in anything; I'm a journalist," answered the melancholy being—"Boon, of the *Daily Wire*. But there's a something creepy about that crypt; and I'll never deny I felt a chill." And he strode on towards the railway station with a further accelerated pace.

"Looks like a raven or a crow, that fellow," observed Smaill as they turned towards the churchyard. "What is it they say about a bird of ill omen?"

They entered the churchyard slowly, the eyes of the American antiquary lingering luxuriantly over the isolated roof of the lych-gate and the large unfathomable black growth of the yew looking like night itself defying the broad daylight. The path climbed up amid heaving levels of turf in which the gravestones were tilted at all angles like stone rafts tossed on a green sea, till it came to the ridge beyond which the great grey sea itself ran like an iron bar, with pale lights in it like steel. Almost at their feet the tough rank grass turned into a tuft of sea-holly and ended in grey and yellow sand; and a foot or two from the holly, and outlined darkly against the steely sea, stood a motionless figure. But for its dark grey clothing it might almost have been the statue on some sepulchral monument. But Father Brown instantly recognised something in the elegant

stoop of the shoulders and the rather sullen outward thrust of the short beard.

"Gee!" exclaimed the professor of archæology, "it's that man Tarrant, if you call him a man. Did you think, when I spoke on the boat, that I should ever get so quick an answer to my question?"

"I thought you might get too many answers to it," answered Father Brown.

"Why, how do you mean?" inquired the Professor, darting a look at him over his shoulder.

"I mean," answered the other mildly, "that I thought I heard voices behind the yew-tree. I don't think Mr. Tarrant is so solitary as he looks; I might even venture to say, so solitary as he likes to look."

Even as Tarrant turned slowly round in his moody manner, the confirmation came. Another voice, high and rather hard, but none the less feminine, was saying with experienced raillery:

"And how was I to know he would be here?"

It was borne in upon Professor Smaill that this gay observation was not addressed to him; so he was forced to conclude, in some bewilderment, that yet a third person was present. As Lady Diana Wales came out radiant and resolute as ever from the shadow of the yew, he noted grimly that she had a living shadow of her own. The lean dapper figure of Leonard Smyth, that insinuating man of letters, appeared immediately behind her own flamboyant form, smiling, his head a little on one side like a dog's.

"Snakes!" muttered Smaill. "Why, they're all here! Or all except that little showman with the walrus whiskers."

He heard Father Brown laughing softly beside him; and indeed the situation was becoming something more than laughable. It seemed to be turning topsy-turvy and tumbling about their ears like a pantomime trick; for even while the Professor had been speaking, his words had received the most comical contradiction. The round head with the grotesque black crescent of moustache had appeared suddenly and seemingly out of a hole in the ground. An instant afterwards they realised that the hole was in fact a very large hole, leading to a ladder which descended into the bowels of the earth; that it was in fact the entrance to the subterranean scene they had come to visit. The little man had been the first to find the entrance and had already descended a rung or two of the ladder before he put his head out again to address his fellow-travellers. He looked like some particularly preposterous Grave-digger in a burlesque of *Hamlet*. He only said thickly behind his thick moustaches, "It is down here." But it came to the rest of the company with a start of realisation that, though they had sat opposite him at meal-times for a week, they had hardly ever heard him speak before; and that though he was supposed to be an English lecturer, he spoke with a rather occult foreign accent.

"You see, my dear Professor," cried Lady Diana



with trenchant cheerfulness, "your Byzantine mummy was simply too exciting to be missed. I simply had to come along and see it; and I'm sure the gentlemen felt just the same. Now you must tell us all about it."

"I do not know all about it," said the Professor gravely, not to say grimly. "In some respects I don't even know what it's all about. It certainly seems odd that we should have all met again so soon; but I suppose there are no limits to the modern thirst for information. But if we are all to visit the place it must be done in a responsible way and, if you will forgive me, under responsible leadership. We must notify whoever is in charge of the excavations; we shall probably at least have to put our names in a book."

Something rather like a wrangle followed on this collision between the impatience of the lady and the suspicions of the archæologist; but the latter's insistence on the official rights of the Vicar and the local investigation ultimately prevailed; the little man with the moustaches came reluctantly out of his grave again and silently acquiesced in a less impetuous descent. Fortunately, the clergyman himself appeared at this stage, a grey-haired, good-looking gentleman with a droop accentuated by double eyeglasses; and while rapidly establishing sympathetic relations with the Professor as a fellow-antiquarian, did not seem to regard his rather motley group of companions with anything more hostile than amusement.

"I hope you are none of you superstitious,"

he said pleasantly. "I ought to tell you, to start with, that there are supposed to be all sorts of bad omens and curses hanging over our devoted heads in this business. I have just been deciphering a Latin inscription which was found over the entrance to the chapel; and it would seem that there are no less than three curses involved; a curse for entering the sealed chamber, a double curse for opening the coffin, and a triple and most terrible curse for touching the gold relic found inside it. The two first maledictions I have already incurred myself," he added with a smile, "but I fear that even you will have to incur the first and mildest of them if you are to see anything at all. According to the story, the curses descend in a rather lingering fashion, at long intervals and on later occasions. I don't know whether that is any comfort to you." And the Reverend Mr. Walters smiled once more in his drooping and benevolent manner.

"Story," repeated Professor Smail, "why, what story is that?"

"It is rather a long story and varies, like other local legends," answered the Vicar. "But it is undoubtedly contemporary with the time of the tomb; and the substance of it is embodied in the inscription and is roughly this: Guy de Gisors, a lord of the manor here early in the thirteenth century, had set his heart on a beautiful black horse in the possession of an envoy from Genoa, which that practical merchant prince would not sell except for a huge price. Guy was driven by avarice to the crime

of pillaging the shrine and, according to one story, even killing the bishop, who was then resident there. Anyhow, the bishop uttered a curse which was to fall on anybody who should continue to withhold the gold cross from its resting-place in his tomb, or should take steps to disturb it when it had returned there. The feudal lord raised the money for the horse by selling the gold relic to a goldsmith in the town; but on the first day he mounted the horse the animal reared and threw him in front of the church porch, breaking his neck. Meanwhile the goldsmith, hitherto wealthy and prosperous, was ruined by a series of inexplicable accidents, and fell into the power of a Jew money-lender living in the manor. Eventually the unfortunate goldsmith, faced with nothing but starvation, hanged himself on an apple-tree. The gold cross, with all his other goods, his house, shop, and tools, had long ago passed into the possession of the money-lender. Meanwhile the son and heir of the feudal lord, shocked by the judgment on his blasphemous sire, had become a religious devotee in the dark and stern spirit of those times, and conceived it his duty to persecute all heresy and unbelief among his vassals. Thus the Jew in his turn, who had been cynically tolerated by the father, was ruthlessly burnt by order of the son; so that he in his turn suffered for the possession of the relic; and after these three judgments, it was returned to the bishop's tomb; since when no eye has seen and no hand has touched it."

Lady Diana Wales seemed to be more impressed than might have been expected.

"It really gives one rather a shiver," she said, "to think that we are going to be the first, except the vicar."

The pioneer with the big moustaches and the broken English did not descend after all by his favourite ladder, which indeed had only been used by some of the workmen conducting the excavation; for the clergyman led them round to a larger and more convenient entrance about a hundred yards away, out of which he himself had just emerged from his investigations underground. Here the descent was by a fairly gradual slope with no difficulties save the increasing darkness; for they soon found themselves moving in single file down a tunnel as black as pitch, and it was some little time before they saw a glimmer of light ahead of them. Once during that silent march there was a sound like a catch in somebody's breath, it was impossible to say whose; and once there was an oath like a dull explosion, and it was in an unknown tongue.

They came out in a circular chamber like a basilica in a ring of round arches; for that chapel had been built before the first pointed arch of the Gothic had pierced our civilisation like a spear. A glimmer of greenish light between some of the pillars marked the place of the other opening into the world above, and gave a vague sense of being under the sea, which was intensified by one or two other incidental and perhaps fanciful resemblances.

For the dog-tooth pattern of the Norman was faintly traceable round all the arches, giving them, above the cavernous darkness, something of the look of the mouths of monstrous sharks. And in the centre the dark bulk of the tomb itself, with its lifted lid of stone, might almost have been the jaws of some such leviathan.

Whether out of a sense of fitness or from the lack of more modern appliances, the clerical antiquary had arranged for the illumination of the chapel only by four tall candles in big wooden candlesticks standing on the floor. Of these only one was alight when they entered, casting a faint glimmer over the mighty architectural forms. When they had all assembled, the clergyman proceeded to light the three others, and the appearance and contents of the great sarcophagus came more clearly into view.

All eyes went first to the face of the dead, preserved across all those ages in the lines of life by some secret Eastern process, it was said, inherited from heathen antiquity and unknown to the simple graveyards of our own island. The Professor could hardly repress an exclamation of wonder; for, though the face was as pale as a mask of wax, it looked otherwise like a sleeping man who had but that moment closed his eyes. The face was of the ascetic, perhaps even the fanatical type, with a high framework of bones; the figure was clad in a golden cope and gorgeous vestments, and high up on the breast, at the base of the throat, glittered the famous

gold cross upon a short gold chain, or rather necklace. The stone coffin had been opened by lifting the lid of it at the head and propping it aloft upon two strong wooden shafts or poles, hitched above under the edge of the upper slab and wedged below into the corners of the coffin behind the head of the corpse. Less could therefore be seen of the feet or the lower part of the figure, but the candle-light shone full on the face; and in contrast with its tones of dead ivory the cross of gold seemed to stir and sparkle like a fire.

Professor Smaill's big forehead had carried a big furrow of reflection, or possibly of worry, ever since the clergyman had told the story of the curse. But feminine intuition, not untouched by feminine hysteria, understood the meaning of his brooding immobility better than did the men around him. In the silence of that candle-lit cavern Lady Diana cried out suddenly:

"Don't touch it, I tell you!"

But the man had already made one of his swift leonine movements, leaning forward over the body. The next instant they all darted, some forward and some backward, but all with a dreadful ducking motion as if the sky were falling.

As the Professor laid a finger on the gold cross, the wooden props, that bent very slightly in supporting the lifted lid of stone, seemed to jump and straighten themselves with a jerk. The lip of the stone slab slipped from its wooden perch; and in all their souls and stomachs came a sickening sense of

down-rushing ruin, as if they had all been flung off a precipice. Smaill had withdrawn his head swiftly, but not in time; and he lay senseless beside the coffin, in a red puddle of blood from scalp or skull. And the old stone coffin was once more closed as it had been for centuries; save that one or two sticks or splinters stuck in the crevice, horribly suggestive of bones crunched by an ogre. The leviathan had snapped its jaws of stone.

Lady Diana was looking at the wreck with eyes that had an electric glare as of lunacy; her red hair looked scarlet against the pallor of her face in the greenish twilight. Smyth was looking at her, still with something dog-like in the turn of his head; but it was the expression of a dog who looks at a master whose catastrophe he can only partly understand. Tarrant and the foreigner had stiffened in their usual sullen attitudes; but their faces had turned the colour of clay. The Vicar seemed to have fainted. Father Brown was kneeling beside the fallen figure, trying to test its condition.

Rather to the general surprise, the Byronic loungee, Paul Tarrant, came forward to help him.

"He'd better be carried up into the air," he said. "I suppose there's just a chance for him."

"He isn't dead," said Father Brown in a low voice, "but I think it's pretty bad; you aren't a doctor, by any chance?"

"No, but I've had to pick up a good many things in my time," said the other. "But never mind

about me just now. My real profession would probably surprise you."

"I don't think so," replied Father Brown, with a slight smile. "I thought of it about halfway through the voyage. You are a detective shadowing somebody. Well, the cross is safe from thieves now, anyhow."

While they were speaking Tarrant had lifted the frail figure of the fallen man with easy strength and dexterity and was carefully carrying him towards the exit. He answered over his shoulder, "Yes, the cross is safe enough."

"You mean that nobody else is," replied Brown. "Are you thinking of the curse, too?"

Father Brown went about for the next hour or two under a burden of frowning perplexity that was something beyond the shock of the tragic accident. He assisted in carrying the victim to the little inn opposite the church, interviewed the doctor, who reported the injury as serious and threatening, though not certainly fatal, and carried the news to the little group of travellers who had gathered round the table in the inn parlour. But wherever he went the cloud of mystification rested on him and seemed to grow darker the more deeply he pondered. For the central mystery was growing more and more mysterious, actually in proportion as many of the minor mysteries began to clear themselves up in his mind. Exactly in proportion as the meaning of individual figures in that motley group began to explain itself, the thing that had happened grew more and more difficult to explain. Leonard Smyth had



come merely because Lady Diana had come; and Lady Diana had come merely because she chose. They were engaged in one of those floating Society flirtations that are all the more silly for being semi-intellectual. But the lady's romanticism had a superstitious side to it; and she was pretty well prostrated by the terrible end of her adventure. Paul Tarrant was a private detective, possibly watching the flirtation, for some wife or husband; possibly shadowing the foreign lecturer with the moustaches, who had much the air of an undesirable alien. But if he or anybody else had intended to steal the relic, the intention had been finally frustrated. And, to all mortal appearance, what had frustrated it was either an incredible coincidence or the intervention of the ancient curse.

As he stood in unusual perplexity in the middle of the village street, between the inn and the church, he felt a mild shock of surprise at seeing a recently familiar but rather unexpected figure advancing up the street. Mr. Boon, the journalist, looking very haggard in the sunshine, which showed up his shabby raiment like that of a scarecrow, and his dark and deep-set eyes (rather close together on either side of the long drooping nose) fixed on the priest. The latter looked twice before he realised that the heavy dark moustache hid something like a grin or at least a grim smile.

"I thought you were going away," said Father Brown a little sharply. "I thought you left by that train two hours ago."

"Well, you see I didn't," said Boon.

"Why have you come back?" asked the priest almost sternly.

"This is not the sort of little rural paradise for a journalist to leave in a hurry," replied the other. "Things happen too fast here to make it worth while to go back to a dull place like London. Besides, they can't keep me out of the affair—I mean this second affair. It was I that found the body, or at any rate the clothes. Quite suspicious conduct on my part, wasn't it? Perhaps you think I wanted to dress up in his clothes. Shouldn't I make a lovely parson?"

And the lean and long-nosed mountebank suddenly made an extravagant gesture in the middle of the market-place, stretching out his arms and spreading out his dark gloved hands in a sort of burlesque benediction and saying, "Oh, my dear brethren and sisters, for I would embrace you all . . ."

"What on earth are you talking about?" cried Father Brown, and rapped the stones slightly with his stumpy umbrella, for he was a little less patient than usual.

"Oh, you'll find out all about it if you ask that picnic party of yours at the inn," replied Boon scornfully. "That man Tarrant seems to suspect me merely because I found the clothes; though he only came up a minute too late to find them himself. But there are all sorts of mysteries in this business. The little man with the big moustaches may have

more in him than meets the eye. For that matter, I don't see why you shouldn't have killed the poor fellow yourself."

Father Brown did not seem in the least annoyed at the suggestion, but he seemed exceedingly bothered and bewildered by the remark.

"Do you mean," he asked with simplicity, "that it was I who tried to kill Professor Smaill?"

"Not at all," said the other, waving his hand with the air of one making a handsome concession. "Plenty of dead people for you to choose among. Not limited to Professor Smaill. Why, didn't you know somebody else had turned up, a good deal deader than Professor Smaill? And I don't see why you shouldn't have done him in, in a quiet way. Religious differences, you know . . . lamentable disunion of Christendom. . . . I suppose you've always wanted to get the English parishes back."

"I'm going back to the inn," said the priest quietly; "you say the people there know what you mean; and perhaps *they* may be able to say it."

In truth, just afterwards his private perplexities suffered a momentary dispersal at the news of a new calamity. The moment he entered the little parlour where the rest of the company were collected, something in their pale faces told him they were shaken by something yet more recent than the accident at the tomb. Even as he entered Leonard Smyth was saying: "Where is all this going to end?"

"It will never end, I tell you," repeated Lady

Diana, gazing into vacancy with glassy eyes; "it will never end till we all end. One after another the curse will take us; perhaps slowly, as the poor vicar said; but it will take us all as it has taken him."

"What in the world has happened now?" asked Father Brown.

There was a silence, and then Tarrant said in a voice that sounded a little hollow:

"Mr. Walters, the Vicar, has committed suicide. I suppose it was the shock unhinged him. But I fear there can be no doubt about it. We've just found his black hat and clothes on a rock jutting out from the shore. He seems to have jumped into the sea. I thought he looked as if it had knocked him half-witted, and perhaps we ought to have looked after him; but there was so much to look after."

"You could have done nothing," said the lady. "Don't you see the thing is dealing doom in a sort of dreadful order? The Professor touched the cross, and he went first; the Vicar had opened the tomb, and he went second; we only entered the chapel, and we——"

"Hold on," said Father Brown, in a sharp voice he very seldom used; "this has got to stop."

He still wore a heavy though unconscious frown, but in his eyes was no longer the cloud of mystification, but a light of almost terrible understanding.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered. "I ought to have seen it long ago. The tale of the curse ought to have told me."

"Do you mean to say," demanded Tarrant, "that we can really be killed now by something that happened in the thirteenth century?"

Father Brown shook his head and answered with quiet emphasis:

"I won't discuss whether we can be killed by something that happened in the thirteenth century. But I'm jolly certain that we can't be killed by something that *never* happened in the thirteenth century, something that never happened at all."

"Well," said Tarrant, "it's refreshing to find a priest so sceptical of the supernatural as all that."

"Not at all," replied the priest calmly; "it's not the supernatural part I doubt. It's the natural part. I'm exactly in the position of the man who said, 'I can believe the impossible, but not the improbable.'"

"That's what you call a paradox, isn't it?" asked the other.

"It's what I call common sense, properly understood," replied Father Brown. "It really is more natural to believe a preternatural story, that deals with things we don't understand, than a natural story that contradicts things we do understand. Tell me that the great Mr. Gladstone, in his last hours, was haunted by the ghost of Parnell, and I will be agnostic about it. But tell me that Mr. Gladstone, when first presented to Queen Victoria, wore his hat in her drawing-room and slapped her on the back and offered her a cigar, and I am not agnostic at all. That is not impossible; it's only incredible."

But I'm much more certain it didn't happen than that Parnell's ghost didn't appear; because it violates the laws of the world I do understand. So it is with that tale of the curse. It isn't the legend that I disbelieve—it's the history."

Lady Diana had recovered a little from her trance of Cassandra, and her perennial curiosity about new things began to peer once more out of her bright and prominent eyes.

"What a curious man you are!" she said. "Why should you disbelieve the history?"

"I disbelieve the history because it isn't history," answered Father Brown. "To anybody who happens to know a little about the Middle Ages, the whole story was about as probable as Gladstone offering Queen Victoria a cigar. But does anybody know anything about the Middle Ages? Do you know what a Guild was? Have you ever heard of *salvo wanagio suo*? Do you know what sort of people were *Servi Regis*?"

"No, of course I don't," said the lady, rather crossly. "What a lot of Latin words!"

"No, of course," said Father Brown. "If it had been Tutankhamen and a set of dried-up Africans preserved, Heaven knows why, at the other end of the world; if it had been Babylonia or China; if it had been some race as remote and mysterious as the Man in the Moon, your newspapers would have told you all about it, down to the last discovery of a tooth-brush or a collar-stud. But the men who built your own parish churches, and gave the names