right angles, and I observed with astonishment that it was pointing direct to A.

"It's either A or P," said Lilith. "I'll put them both down."

Once again the pendulum changed the direction of its swing, and Lilith noted down E or S; and so, to my growing consternation, it continued to take up quite distinct changes of direction until six variations had occurred, when the pendulum became stationary and then began to swing round in a circle.

"It has finished," said Lilith—whereupon I instantly dropped the pendulum. "It is a word of six letters: U or J, A or P, E or S, A or P, E or S, F or R. Let us see if we can make out what the word is. It is a pity the letters were opposite; it muddles it up so. They ought to be in a half-circle, but then they would be too close. But let us try a few combinations. U P E A S F; it can't be that. U P S A S F; it can't be that. We'll try it with J J A E P E F; that isn't it. J A S E S F; that can't be the word. Do the letters suggest anything to you, Sibyl? Is there any name that might be lurking in your subconscious mind, beginning with U or J? Try to think. What did you do in town yesterday?"

"Oh, various things. I went to the dealer, of course; and then I went to a private show of pottery and antiques."

"Pottery," mused Lilith, scanning the letters that she had written down. "Let me see: Upchurch? No, that won't do." She looked the letters through again and then asked eagerly: "There wasn't any Wedgwood there I suppose?"

Now it happened that while Mr. Hawkesley was talking to us I had noticed an old gentleman tenderly placing a very fine green Wedgwood cup and saucer in the show case. So I could, and did, answer truthfully.

"Yes, there was; a beautiful green Jasper-ware cup and saucer.

"There!" Lilith exclaimed triumphantly. "Jasper! That is the word! And yet I don't suppose you have given that cup and saucer a thought since you saw it."

"I had forgotten its existence until you spoke of Wedgwood."

"Exactly," said Lilith. "And that is the mysterious

peculiarity of the subconscious. You see a thing or a person perhaps only for a moment, and straightway forget it. It seems to be gone for ever. But it is not. It has sunk into the subconscious, to remain there unnoticed possibly for years until some chance association, or perhaps a dream, brings it to the surface. But all the time it has been there. And at any moment it can be brought into view by the use of some kind of autoscope such as the pendulum or the crystal."

"The crystal is an autoscope, too, is it?" I asked.

"Yes; but of quite a different kind. The pendulum acts by the effects of the subconscious mind upon the muscles; the crystal by the effects of the subconscious mind on the centres of visual perception."

"That sounds very learned; but tell me exactly what you do with the crystal."

"As to me, personally," replied Lilith, "I do very little with it. Crystal vision—or 'scrying,' to use the technical term—is a rather rare faculty. I am a very poor scryer. But in the case of a really gifted observer, the most astonishing results are obtained. The method of using the instrument is this: The scryer sits in a restful position with the crystal before her (all the best scryers, I think, are women) and gazes steadily at the bright lights in it, keeping the conscious mind in a passive state—thinking of nothing, in fact. After a time the lights in the crystal grow dim; a kind of cloud or mist seems to float before it, and in this cloud, and gradually taking its place, the picture or vision appears; sometimes dim and vague, but often quite clear and bright, like the little pictures that you see in a convex mirror or a silver ball."

"And what is this picture? I mean what is its subject?"

"That varies. It may be a scene from the past that had been forgotten by the conscious memory, or something that never happened at all—just a jumble of bits of memory like a dream. Or it may be the picture of some event that is going to take place in the near future,"

"But," I objected, "how can an event which has not yet occurred be in your subconscious mind?"

"I know," said Lilith. "The whole subject of pre-recognition is a very difficult one. But there seems to be no doubt that prophetic visions do really occur. And then

there is clairvoyance—seeing across space and through obstacles. A really gifted scryer, by concentrating her thought on a particular person or place as she looks into the crystal, can see that person or place, no matter how great the distance may be ; can see exactly what the person is doing or what is happening at the place."

" Really ! " I exclaimed. " That sounds like rather an undesirable faculty. Doesn't it strike you, Lilith, as a very great intrusion on the privacy and liberty of the subject to scry a person without his or her consent ? Supposing the scryer should happen to discover the scryed one in the act of taking her—or his—morning tub. Wouldn't it be rather a liberty ? "

Lilith laughed (but I could see that the idea was new to her) : " You are dreadfully matter-of-fact, Sibyl. But, of course, you are quite right. We shouldn't misuse our powers. As for me, I have very little power of the kind to misuse, for I have never seen anything more than a sort of vague picture of unrecognisable figures in undistinguishable surroundings. But I think you might do better, for I am still convinced that you have special gifts. Would you like to try the crystal, Sibyl ? "

" Not now, thank you, Lilith. We ought to get to work after all this gossip. And that reminds me that, before you came up, I was looking at your exquisite paintings and wondering if you are not, to some extent, wasting your great talents."

" In what way ? " she asked.

" Of course," I said, " these designs would make magnificent tapestries or wall decorations. But if you can't get a wall, you might condescend to a smaller surface. Have you ever tried designing and painting a fan ? "

" No," she replied.

" I wish you would," said I. " You would do it splendidly with your power of design and your delicate technique. And Phillibar could make the sticks and carve the guards, or I could do you a pair in silver repoussé, and a jewelled pin and loop. Will you think over the proposal ? "

Lilith picked up the crystal on its cushion and, smiling at me, said :

" I will make a bargain with you. If you will take the crystal to your room and give it a thorough trial whenever

you have time, I will get out a design for a fan. Do you agree ? "

I held out my hand for the crystal. Primarily, my desire was to introduce Lilith to Fame and Fortune through the medium of the Magpies Club ; but the startling success of the magic pendulum had aroused my curiosity in regard to the other "autoscope," though I have to confess that, when I had borne it to my room, I concealed it guiltily in a locked drawer, where it should be secure from the prying eyes of the servant-maid, and above all from the observation of the sarcastic and sceptical Titmouse.

But there were other matters than crystals and magic pendulums to be thought of. There was, for instance, the set of twelve spoons which Mr. Campbell had asked me to make and to which he had again referred in his letter. I knew now that I should be paid for them at a reasonably remunerative rate, and this, and the congenial nature of the task, encouraged me to get to work. But before I could begin there was the motive of the design to be considered ; and since the apostles were ruled out as obsolete, I had to find some other group of twelve related objects. After a whole day's anxious thought, I fixed upon the Signs of the Zodiac as furnishing a picturesque and manageable motive, and with this scheme in my mind, I fell to work in earnest, first with the pencil and then with the wax and metal.

But busy as I was, and happy in the interest of my work, I was yet aware of a change, of a something new that had come into my life. From the little workshop which had been my world, I found my thoughts straying out into the larger world, and particularly that part of it which is adjacent to Temple Bar ; and if at times I viewed this change with some misgivings, I was more often conscious of a sense of exhilaration such as one feels when embarking on some new adventure.

In due course I received notice of my election as a member of the Magpies Club, and by the same post a letter from Mr. Davenant asking me to celebrate the event by lunching with him there ; and, as I had occasion to go into town to replenish my silver and some other materials, I accepted his invitation, intending to return to Wellclose Square in the afternoon. But it appeared that a loan collection of antique silver was being exhibited at the South Kensington Museum,

and that he had hoped to have the pleasure of inspecting it under my expert guidance. Now, to a craftsman (or craftswoman) of small experience, there is no technical education to compare with the study of admitted masterpieces. I felt that strongly, and I felt that I needed that technical education; furthermore, I felt that the attempt to explain the merits of the old work to an attentive and sympathetic listener would help me to concentrate my own attention. And perhaps it did. At any rate, I spent a long and pleasant afternoon at the museum, and we subsequently discussed the exhibits (and various other matters) very companionably over the dinner table at the club.

"It has been a jolly day for me, Mrs. Otway," said Mr. Davenant, as he wished me "good-bye" at the Underground Station. "I've learned no end about silver—you are a perfect encyclopædia of knowledge in regard to goldsmith's work. And the delightful thing to think of is that we've only scratched the surface of the museum. The place is inexhaustible. Do you think I may hope for the pleasure of another visit there with you before long?"

I gave what I intended to be an ambiguous answer. But it was not ambiguous to me; and I suspect that Mr. Davenant went on his way with a feeling that a precedent had been created.

When I arrived home, I found a letter awaiting me from Mr. Otway. It was not entirely unexpected, for I had felt pretty certain that he would presently hear further from his mysterious correspondent. It now appeared that he had received one or two short letters, ostensibly of the nature of warnings, but actually threatening, though in vague, indefinite terms, and one more recently of a more explicitly menacing character. These he wished me to see and discuss with him, and he asked me to make an appointment, at my convenience, to meet him for that purpose. I replied, suggesting, as before, the Tower Wharf; and there, a couple of evenings later, I met him.

In appearance he had by no means improved. His pale face had a strained, wild expression, his eye-lids were puffy and covered with curious, minute wrinkles. His hands were markedly tremulous, and his fingers bore the deep stains that mark the inveterate cigarette smoker. His dress was noticeably less neat than it had used to be; indeed, he

presented a distinctly shabby and neglected appearance. Oddly enough, too, he seemed to have grown somewhat stouter.

I should have been less than human if these plain indications of sustained misery had awakened in me no feeling of pity. That his sufferings were the indirect result of his indifference to the happiness or misery of others, could not entirely stifle compassion, and I found myself speaking to him in a tone almost sympathetic.

"I am afraid, Mr. Otway," said I, "you are letting these nonsensical letters worry you quite unnecessarily. You are not looking at all well."

"I am not at all well, Helen," he replied, dejectedly.

"And I think you are smoking too much."

"I am. And I am drinking too much—I, who have been a temperate man all my life. And I have to take drugs to get a decent night's rest. This worry is breaking me up."

"Oh, come, Mr. Otway," I protested, "you mustn't give way in this manner. What is it all about, after all? Just a wretched blackmailer whom you know to be an imposter, whose threats you know to be mere empty vapourings."

"That is not quite true, Helen. The man is an impostor, no doubt. He doesn't really know anything. There is nothing for him to know. But he could create a great deal of trouble. He could, in fact, cause the—ah—the inquiry to be re-opened and—ah——"

"Exactly. And if it were re-opened? There would be unpleasant comment on the fact that a detail of the evidence had been withheld at the inquest. But that is the worst that could happen."

Mr. Otway looked at me with a sort of dumb gratitude that was quite pathetic, but his gloom was in nowise dispelled by my optimism.

"It is very good of you, Helen," said he, "to speak in this cheerful, confident tone. But I assure you, you minimize the danger. There is no saying what construction might be put upon the suppression of that detail; what considerations of motive might be read into it—especially as there was what they would call collusion between us to suppress it. But let me show you the last letter—the others are of no consequence."

He produced his wallet, and, after some awkward fumbling, drew out the letter, which he held out to me with a hand that shook so that the paper rattled. Like the last, it was typewritten unskilfully, and characterized by the same semi-illiterate confusion in the wording, which ran thus :

" Mr. Lewis Otway,

" The writer of this warns you once more to look out for trouble. The person that I spoke of knows that something was held back at the inquest at least they say so and that they know why your wife won't live with you and that she knows all about it too and that someone knows more than you think anybody knows. This is a friendly warning.

" FROM A WELL WISHER."

I returned the letter to Mr. Otway after reading it through twice, and I must confess that my confidence was somewhat shaken. If the writer was merely guessing, he seemed to have an uncanny aptitude for guessing right. As to his claim to possess some further knowledge, I did not see how that could be possible. When the fatal interview took place between my father and Mr. Otway, there were—to the best of my belief—only three persons in the house. Of those actually present at the interview there was only a single survivor—Mr. Otway himself—and he alone knew with certainty what occurred. The claim was therefore almost certainly false. And yet, even as I dismissed it, there crept into my mind once again a vague discomfort, a doubt whether there might not be something that I was unaware of, and that Mr. Otway knew ; some dreadful secret that I, of all persons in the world, had been instrumental in guarding from discovery. And as I glanced at Mr. Otway—haggard, wild, trembling, and terrified out of all proportion to the danger, so far as it was known to me—the horrid doubts seemed to deepen into something like suspicion.

" Of course," said he, when he had returned the letter to the wallet, " I realize that you are right ; that there is nothing to be done but to wait for this person to show his hand more plainly. It would be madness to apply to the police. They would immediately ask if there had been any

evidence withheld and why you were not living with me. And if they succeeded in getting hold of the writer of this letter, we should have more to fear from them than from the writer himself. He may be, as you believe, a mere blackmailer who is preparing to extort money, but if he were brought to bay he would try to justify his threats."

With this I could not but agree. The implied allegations in this letter were, in point of fact, true ; and any attempt to obtain help from the police would probably result in their truth being made manifest.

"Have you no idea whatever," I asked, "who might be the writer of this letter? He can hardly be a complete stranger. Have you no suspicion? Can you think of no one who might have written it?"

He looked at me furtively and cleared his throat once or twice before replying ; and when he did answer, his manner was hesitating and even evasive.

"Suspicions," he said, "are—er—not very—ah—helpful. I have no facts. The mere—ah—conjecture that this person or that might possibly be concerned—if a motive could be supplied—and—ah—if one can think of no motive——"

He left the sentence uncompleted, giving me the vague impression that he was reserving something that he did not wish to discuss.

We were silent for some time, and I was beginning to consider bringing the interview to an end when he suddenly turned to me with a gesture of appeal.

"Helen," he said earnestly, "is it not possible for me to prevail on you to—ah—to reconsider your decision and—ah—to—to—to terminate this—er—this unhappy separation. Consider my loneliness, Helen, my broken health and this trouble—which is our joint trouble—and—ah——"

"Mr. Otway," I answered, "it is not possible. I assure you it is not. I am deeply distressed to think of your unhappiness and to see you looking so ill, but I could not entertain what you suggest. You must remember that we are strangers. We have never been otherwise than separated. As we are, so we must continue."

"You don't mean that we must always remain apart?" he exclaimed. "It was only meant to be a temporary separation."

"At any rate," I rejoined, "the time has not come to consider a change. But I shall be glad to hear how things go with you and to give you any help that I can."

I rose and held out my hand, which he took reluctantly (though it was the first time that I had ever offered to shake hands with him).

"I am driving you away, Helen," he said.

"No, indeed," I replied. "I had to go. You will write to me if anything fresh happens?"

He promised readily, and we turned and walked away in opposite directions. When I had gone a little way, I paused to look back at him; and as I noted his dejected droop and his air of something approaching physical decrepitude, I felt a pang—not of remorse, but of regret that I could not in some way lighten the burden of his evident misery. It is true that his unhappiness was of his own making, and that in wrecking his own life he had wrecked mine and my father's. But vindictiveness is a character alien to the civilized and developed mind. For what he had done I still loathed him; but it pained me to think of the haunting dread, the abiding fear that was his companion night and day.

Chapter XVI *The Sweated Artist*

I HAD told Mr. Otway that I had to go; but I did not tell him why. If I had, he would probably have been conconsiderably startled. For the fact is that while we were talking I had formed a resolution which had rapidly matured—the resolution to go to Dr. Thorndyke and make a clean breast of the whole affair. He had invited me to call on him and report from time to time, especially if I should be in need of advice or help, and I had been intending to write and propose a visit. Now, however, I decided to call on the chance of his being disengaged, and if he should be unable to see me, to make an appointment.

From the Tower Wharf I made my way quickly to Mark Lane, noting as I entered the station that it was a quarter to six; and as the train rumbled westward I turned over the

situation and decided on what I should say. That some trouble was brewing I had little doubt, and though I did not share Mr. Otway's alarm, I was more than a little uneasy. For, at the best, the re-opening of the inquiry into my father's death must entail a scandal and exhibit my conduct in a decidedly questionable light; and such a scandal would be a disaster. As a discredited witness, how could I face my comrades at Wellclose Square? And how should I stand with Jasper Davenant? These were unpleasant questions to reflect on. And underneath these reflections was the uneasy feeling that perhaps there was something more in Mr. Otway's fear than was known to me; something of which I had hardly dared to think.

From the Temple Station I found my way without difficulty to Dr. Thorndyke's chambers at Number 5A, King's Bench Walk, and was relieved to find the outer oak door open and a small brass knocker on the inner one tacitly accepting the possibility of visitors. I plied it modestly, and was immediately confronted by Mr. Polton, whose countenance, at the sight of me, became covered with a network of benevolent and amicable wrinkles.

"The doctor is up in the laboratory looking over his apparatus, but I expect he has nearly finished. I'll go and tell him you are here. Have you had tea?"

I had not and admitted the fact, whereupon Mr. Polton nodded meaningly, and having offered me an arm-chair, took his departure. In a minute or two Dr. Thorndyke entered the room and greeted me with a cordiality that put me at my ease instantly.

"I have been wondering when you were coming to see me; in fact, I have seriously considered calling at Wellclose Square to see how you were getting on. Polton will bring you some tea in a moment, and then you must tell me all your news. I hope you are comfortable in your new home."

"I am very happy, indeed, Dr. Thorndyke, and very grateful to you for finding me such a congenial home. And I have made quite a promising start in my new profession, too. But I have really come to ask your advice—and to make a confession."

"A confession," said Dr. Thorndyke, looking at me gravely. "Is it necessary? and have you given it due consideration?"

"Yes, I think so. There is only one point. I should have told you this secret before, but as another person is involved in it, I felt that it would be a breach of confidence. But I now feel that my legal adviser should be told everything."

"That is so. Advice can only be based on known facts. And I may say that anything that you may tell me in my professional capacity is a privileged communication. A lawyer cannot be compelled to reveal anything that his client has told him, and is, in fact, forbidden to do so. You are, therefore, committing no breach of confidence in giving me any necessary information."

"I am glad to know that, because, when I last spoke to you about my affairs, I held back something that you may consider important."

"Something relating to the inquest?" he asked.

"Yes. Did you suspect that I had?"

"I suspected that Mr. Otway was holding something back when he gave his evidence—but here is your tea, with all the little lady-like extras, just to show you what an old bachelor can do in the way of domestic miracles. I am ashamed of you, Polton. I call that embroidered tea-cloth sheer ostentation."

Mr. Polton laid out the dainty service, beaming with satisfaction at the doctor's recognition of his efforts to maintain the credit of the establishment, and as he went out I heard him close the outer door.

"Polton evidently smells a conference," commented Dr. Thorndyke. "The infallible way in which he always does the right thing without a word of instruction almost makes me believe in telepathy—which might be awkward if he were not as secret as an oyster. Now don't hurry, but tell me quietly what you want me to know."

Thus encouraged, I gave him the suppressed facts relating to the loaded stick that I had seen in Mr. Otway's hand, and then told him about the mysterious letters. He listened very attentively, and seemed deeply interested, for he questioned me at some length about Mr. Otway's establishment at Maidstone, his mode of life and such of his antecedents as were known to me.

"Is the stick in your possession or has Mr. Otway got it?" he asked.

"I suppose he has it. At any rate, I have never seen it since that day."

"And you know nothing of any of his associates, other than the housekeeper?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Is Mrs. Gregg still with him?"

"I believe so, but I am not sure."

"And you know nothing of his present mode of life excepting that he lives in Lyon's Inn Chambers?"

"No. I really know nothing about him."

"It is very satisfactory for you," Dr. Thorndyke observed. "You are quite in the dark. These letters suggest an intention to extort money, but they may come from a personal enemy or from someone who has some design other than direct blackmail. And the question is, what cards does that person hold. Is he acting on a mere guess or has he any actual knowledge. The problem involves two questions: was there anyone in the house, that morning, besides you, your father and Mr. Otway? and did anything occur on that occasion beyond what Mr. Otway told you? The answer seems to be in the negative in both cases; but we cannot be certain on either point. Meanwhile, your position is very unpleasant, and Mr. Otway's still more so, for his apprehensions, though perhaps exaggerated, are not entirely groundless. He has behaved with consummate folly. Whether his account of the tragedy be true or false, if he had had the courage to give it in full at the inquest, it must have been accepted in the absence of contrary evidence. But that is by no means the case now. If the inquiry were re-opened, a jury would tend to regard his suppression of certain facts as evidence of the importance of those facts.

"As to advice: there is nothing that you can do but try to forget these menacing letters. I will make a few cautious enquiries—though we have very little to go on; and you must let me know at once if there are any fresh developments."

This ended the conference, but not the conversation, for Dr. Thorndyke insisted on a full account of my progress as a craftswoman, and even called down Mr. Polton to give an expert opinion on Mr. Campbell's prices; which opinion was to the effect that they were as good as could be expected.

"So," said Dr. Thorndyke, as I rose to depart, "you have justified your rather bold choice of a profession. You have already made it an economic success, and with more experience on the commercial side, you will probably earn a very satisfactory livelihood."

This was encouraging enough, backed as it was by Mr. Polton's practical experience. But with the other results of this conference I was much less satisfied. Indeed, my talk with Dr. Thorndyke, though it had relieved me of the burden of concealment, so far from setting my apprehensions at rest, had rather increased them. Not only was it evident that he regarded these mysterious letters as indications of a real danger, but he clearly entertained the possibility that Mr. Otway might have something more than I knew to conceal; in fact, I was by no means sure that he did not suspect Mr. Otway of having killed my father.

Here, then, was abundant matter for reflection, and that none of the most pleasant; and during the next few days my mind was very full of these new complications, of this dark cloud which had arisen over my brightening horizon. Again and again I recalled in detail the incidents of that terrible morning when my dear father was snatched from me, but no new light, either on the tragedy itself or on these sinister echoes of it, came to me. I even tried Lilith's crystal—having first locked my door—but either my faith was weak or I lacked those special psychical gifts with which its owner credited me. I did, indeed, get as far as the cloud, or mist, of which Lilith had spoken; which gathered before my eyes and blotted out the crystal. But that was all. When the mist cleared away, no picture emerged from it, but only the crystal ball with the diminutive image of my own head reflected on its bright surface.

But anxieties sit lightly on the young and healthy. As the days passed, the gloomy impressions faded and I became once more absorbed in my work. The Zodiac spoons were progressing apace, and were going to do me credit; and daily I became conscious of growing facility, of increasing skill, which not only lessened my labour but was itself a source of pleasure. To do a thing with ease is to do it with enjoyment; and, incidentally, added skill means added speed and greater earning power. Already I began to

speculate on what Mr. Campbell's idea of "a good price" would turn out to be.

Moreover, there were other distractions. Once or twice a week I looked in at the club, and these visits had a pleasant way of developing into impromptu jaunts—to picture galleries, exhibitions, museums, and even on one or two occasions a concert or a matinée. Of the relations which were growing up between Jasper Davenant and me I did not care to think much. Perhaps the ostrich is a wiser bird than we are apt to imagine, for it does, at least, avoid the pains of anticipation. Sooner or later, no doubt, some understanding would have to be arrived at; but meanwhile Mr. Davenant was a delightful companion—gay, cheerful, buoyant, humorous, but withal a man of earnest purpose and a serious outlook on life. In all our junkettings there was little, real frivolity; the fun and gaiety were but the condiments to season the more solid and serious interests. In so far as a friendship between a young man and a young woman, which must necessarily stop at friendship, can be, our friendship was unexceptionable. But, of course, there was the qualification. However, as I have said, I let the future take care of itself and drifted pleasantly with the stream.

About this time, I made quite a startling discovery. It happened that in one of my journeys to town I had seen in a bookseller's window a book on studio pottery, and, thinking that it might be useful to Miss Finch, I had bought it, but had forgotten to give it to her. In the middle of my morning's work I suddenly remembered the book, which I had put in a cupboard in the workshop, and got up from my bench to take it to her. Her "works" were at the bottom of the garden, in an outhouse which had once been a shipsmith's shop; but, close neighbours as we were, and close friends, too, I had only once been in her workshop, when, on an off day, she had shown me her wheel, her lathe and her small glass kiln. About her work she was extraordinarily secretive; but then, she was a reticent girl in general, so far as her own affairs were concerned, though she showed a warm interest in her friends, and was, indeed, very affectionate and lovable.

As I came round the clump of bushes that hid her premises from the house, the silence and repose of the place

gave me some qualms, and for a moment I hesitated to interrupt her work. However, I pocketed my scruples and rapped boldly on the door; whereupon the familiar voice at its highest pitch—several ledger lines above the stave—demanded who was there.

"It is I, Peggy; Helen Otway," I replied apologetically. There was a pause of nearly half a minute, and then she unlocked and opened the door, looking rather embarrassed and very pink.

"I always lock myself in when I am at work," she explained.

"Well, Peggy, don't let me disturb you. I've only brought you a book that I got for you in town."

"Oh, come in, Sibyl," said she. "Of course I don't mind you."

She took the volume from me, and quickly turning over the pages and glancing at the illustrations, exclaimed, "What a ripping book! I *shall* enjoy reading it. And how sweet of you to think of getting it for me!" She linked her arm affectionately in mine and conducted me into her domain, passing through the outer room, which was devoted to plaster work—the making of moulds and "bats"—to the clay room, where the little gas engine and the mysterious wheel stood idle and a general tidying up appeared to have taken place. Here we stood chatting rather disjointedly, she still turning over the pages of the book with approving comments, and I looking about me with a craftsman's curiosity respecting the materials and appliances of an unfamiliar craft. And here I got my first surprise; for, on a side bench I noticed a collection of what were evidently bookbinder's tools. Was it possible that the secretive Titmouse was a bookbinder as well as a potter? I determined to inquire into this, but meanwhile my attention was attracted by the bench at which she had evidently been working, as suggested by the displaced stool. On this bench stood an object of some size—about twelve inches high—enveloped in a damp cloth. By its side were a spray-diffuser, a number of little spatulas and tiny bon modelling-tools, and several little covered pots of a creamy, white earthenware delicately ornamented with floral decoration in a warm blue. Venturing to lift the cover of one, I found

it to be filled with little rolls of brightly-tinted clay that looked like coloured crayons.

"You are mighty fastidious about your apparatus," I remarked, picking up the dainty little pot and wiping some smears of clay from its surface.

"And why not?" demanded Peggy. "Why shouldn't one have pretty things to work with? The old craftsmen did. I've seen some old planes and chisel-handles beautifully carved, and I am sure they did better work for having beautiful tools to work with. I would have pretty tools myself if I could make them."

"You shall, Peggy," said I. "You shall show me what you want and I will make them for you."

As I was speaking I absently turned the little pot upside down and glanced at the bottom. And then I really did get a shock. There was only a single spot of ornament on the base, but that spot was a revelation; for it was a little blue bird.

I smothered the exclamation that rose to my lips and put the pot down on the bench. What could be the meaning of this? Had Peggy, like Mr. Hawkesley, been attracted by Mr. Goldstein's wares? Or was it possible——

"Won't you show me what you were doing, Peggy?" I asked.

She turned scarlet at the question, and looked so distressed that I felt it a cruelty to press her. But cruel or not, I meant to get to the bottom of the mystery.

"I'd rather not, Sibyl, if you don't mind," she said, shyly.

"But why? What an extraordinary little person you are."

"Well," she said, doggedly, "if you must know, I am not allowed to show my work to anyone."

"Not allowed by whom?"

"By the dealer who takes all my work. For some reason, best known to himself, he makes a secret of it; won't allow anyone to know who makes it."

"But apart from the dealer, Peggy, you wouldn't mind my seeing your work?"

"Of course I shouldn't. I should like you to see it. But a promise is a promise, you know."

"Of course," I agreed; and then I stepped quickly up to

the bench and very carefully picking up the damp cloth, lifted it clear of the object which it covered ; which turned out to be a jar standing on a small turn-table. Peggy sprang forward with a gasp of consternation ; but she was too late. The deed was done ; moreover, the murder was out ; for in the moment when my first glance fell on the jar, Mr. Hawkesley's " mystery ware " had ceased to be a mystery so far as I was concerned.

The appearance of the jar was rather curious, but perfectly unmistakable. The clay, in its " green " state—unbaked and still somewhat plastic—was of a cool, grey colour, and the surface of the squat, octagonal body and the short neck and rim was covered with rich and intricate floral ornament, very minute, sharp and delicate. In the completed part this ornament was of dull blue and finished flush with the surface ; in the unfinished part it was simply indented and had the appearance of what bookbinders call " blind tooling," but was somewhat deeper.

From the work, my eyes turned with a sort of respectful wonder to the creator, who stood by my side with an air partly embarrassed, partly defiant. To me there was something very impressive in the thought that this unassuming, little lady was actually a master craftsman (I am compelled to use the masculine form, there being no feminine equivalent) ; the creator of masterpieces which would live in the great collections of the future for the admiration of generations yet unborn. And in the first shock of surprised admiration and pride in my friend's achievement I had nearly blurted out all that I knew. But reflection suggested a better plan.

" My dear Peggy ! " I exclaimed. " I never dreamed that you did work of this quality."

" There's nothing very wonderful about it," she replied, regarding the jar with a kind of affectionate disparagement. " It is only a poor imitation of the beautiful Oiron ware. That pottery has always interested me ; partly because it is so lovely, and partly because, according to tradition, it was made by a woman—Helene de Hangest-Genlis. But my work isn't a patch of hers, and it isn't even as good as I could do."

" How is that ? "

" Well, you see, it ought to have more modelled ornament

than I put on. It ought to be more important. Her pieces were most elaborately modelled—many of them had figures in the full round. But I can't afford to carry my work as far as that. It would take too long. Besides, I have to work to order, to some extent, and my orders are to keep to moderately, simple pieces."

"Your orders! From the dealer, I suppose? Tell me about him, Peggy, and how it is that you are such a slave."

"I'm not a slave," she retorted doggedly. "But I have a contract with a dealer. He takes the whole of my work, and he makes it a condition that I shan't sell anything to any one else or let anybody know what kind of work I do. I oughtn't to have let you in, but I know that I can trust you not to breathe a word to anyone of what you have seen here."

Mr. Hawkesley was right, then; and I recalled with sympathetic vindictiveness his desire to wring the dealer's neck.

"Concerning this contract, Peggy," said I. "You say the dealer has the right to the whole of your work. Did he pay you anything for this privilege?"

"Yes. He paid five pounds when the agreement was signed; but he deducted it from the payment for the first lot of pieces."

"Then it was only payment on account, not payment for the exclusive right to all your work. And with regard to the prices, how are they fixed?"

"Oh, the dealer fixes the prices, of course. He knows more about it than I do."

"Evidently. But what sort of prices does he fix?"

"Oh, ordinary prices, I suppose. He will probably give me fifteen shillings for this jar."

"And how long will it take you to make it?"

"Let me see," she said, reflectively. "There is the throwing and turning; that doesn't take very long. Then this one had to be shaped after it was turned. Then there comes the decorating; of course that is what takes the time. Including the cover, I should say there is nearly a week's work in that jar. And then it has to be fired and glazed; but the firing and glazing are done in batches."

"And all this for fifteen shillings a week!" I exclaimed.

"Say a pound," said she. "That is about what I earn.

It isn't much, is it ? But I have a little money of my own, though I spent most of it on fitting up the workshop."

"And what period does this precious contract cover ? When does it expire ? "

"Expire ? " she repeated, a little sheepishly. "I don't know that it expires at all. No period is mentioned in it."

"Peggy," I said, solemnly ; "you should alter your potter's mark. Take out the little, blue finch and put in a little, green goose. But, seriously, we must see into this. I am a lawyer's daughter—not that I profess to have inherited a knowledge of law. But I am certain that this agreement is not binding. Will you let me show it to a friend of mine who is a lawyer ? In strict confidence, of course."

"Yes, if you like, Sibyl. But I don't see that it matters. I like doing the work and I do make a living by it. What more would you have ? "

"I thought you said you would like to do something more ambitious—the very best work of which you are capable. Wouldn't you ? "

She was silent for a while, and a far-away, wistful look stole into her face. Suddenly she said : "Sibyl, I'm going to show you something ; but you mustn't tell anyone." She led me to a large cupboard, the door of which she unlocked and threw open. On the single shelf was a model in red wax of a tall candlestick or lamp-holder of the most elaborate design, the shaft and capital-like socket enriched —though sparingly—with fine relief decoration, and the base occupied by a spirited and graceful group of figures, beautifully modelled and full of life and expression.

"That," she said, "is to be my *chef d'œuvre*, though it doesn't look much in the wax. You must think of it in ivory-white, with a rich coloured inlay and perhaps some under-glaze painting. It has taken me months, doing a bit whenever I have had time, or when I couldn't resist the temptation to go on with it. Now it is finished, as far as the modelling goes, and the next thing will be to mould it. But I shan't actually make the piece at present, because I don't mean *him* to have it—the dealer, you know. If I finished it now, it would be his, of course."

"Yes, by the contract it would. And it mustn't. This piece ought to give you a position in the front rank of

artist potters. But I mustn't waste any more of your time. You will let me have that agreement, won't you ? "

She promised that I should have it at lunch-time, and with this I went back to my workshop to consider a plan that had come into my mind for her enlightenment and emancipation. But it turned out that there was no need for scheming on my part, for chance or Providence offered me the opportunity ready-made. That very evening I received a short note from Mr. Davenant informing me that Miss Tallboy-Smith had acquired a collection of English and French soft porcelain, and that she proposed to exhibit the whole of her new acquisition for a week at the club.

" She rather wants," he said, " to make the opening day something of a function, and has asked Hawkesley and me to be there to lunch. Can you come, too ? It would please her if you could—and you know how delighted Hawkesley and I would be. Besides, I think it will really be a very interesting show.

Here was the very chance that I wanted. Forthwith, I swooped down on the unsuspecting Titmouse and secured her agreement to bear me company to a " pottery show," without giving too many particulars. Then I wrote to Mr. Davenant telling him that I was bringing a guest who was deeply interested in pottery and porcelain, and suggesting that we might form a party of four at a small table.

By the same post I sent off Peggy's agreement to Dr. Thorndyke, with the request that he would tell me whether it was or was not legally binding. And, having thus laid the train, as I hoped, for the discomfiture of Mr. Goldstein, I felt at liberty to return to my own affairs.

Chapter XVII — *The Apotheosis of the Titmouse*

THE respective merits of hard and soft porcelain have been, from time to time, warmly debated by collectors and experts, but never, perhaps, have they been more earnestly discussed than on the occasion of the opening of Miss Tallboy-Smith's exhibition. During the half-hour which preceded lunch, the central glass case and the additional show-cases which had been set up for the occasion were surrrounded by groups

of eager connoisseurs, and the contrasting virtues of the *pâte tendre* and the more durable, if less beautiful, true porcelain were once more considered and expounded.

The attendance of the members and their friends must have been highly gratifying to Miss Tallboy-Smith, though it was no greater than was warranted by the importance of the exhibition; for the collection included representative pieces, not only of Chelsea, Bow, Nantgarw, Pinxton, and other English ware; but also of the old, French soft paste porcelain, including several early examples of Sevres. The preliminary glance at the collection had furnished material for conversation, as I could see by observing the occupants of the long central table, at the head of which sat the beaming hostess, supported by Major Dewham-Brown (who talked little, but consumed his food with intense concentration of purpose); and even our own small table, tucked away inconspicuously in a corner, was not immune from the influence of soft porcelain, for Mr. Hawkesley and my guest discussed the topic with a wealth of knowledge that reduced Mr. Davenant and me to respectful and attentive silence.

Our two friends were evidently very pleased with one another; and not without reason. For Mr. Hawkesley was much more than a mere collector; he was an enthusiastic and learned student of all kinds of ceramic work; while, as to my friend Peggy, her conversation revealed a familiarity with all kinds of materials and processes that made me feel quite shy as I thought of the artless handbook with which I had presented her.

But, indeed, Miss Peggy was quite transfigured. She had met with a kindred spirit. And under the influence of contagious enthusiasm, the usually silent and secretive Titmouse blossomed out in a manner that surprised me. As I listened to the animated duet of her chirping treble with Mr. Hawkesley's robust baritone, I found it difficult to identify her with the quiet little potter who was wont to work behind locked doors in the old shipsmith's shop at Wellclose Square.

After lunch the siege of the showcases began again on a more portentous scale. Glass cases were opened for more complete inspection of their contents, and pieces were even handed out to be handled, stroked and smelled at by the more infatuated devotees. As neither Mr. Davenant nor I

could be included among the latter, we were satisfied by a comparatively brief inspection of the treasures, after which we retired to a sheltered seat to look on and talk.

"Just look at those two china-maniacs!" exclaimed Mr. Davenant. "They are as thick as thieves already. And what is Miss Finch going to do with that *bieu de roi* vase? Is she going to kiss it? No; she has given it back to the Tallboy-Smith. Well, well; enthusiasm is a fine thing. By the way, she is a nice little lady, this friend of yours; pretty and picturesque, too, and uncommonly well turned out. I'm beginning to have a new respect for Wellclose Square."

I looked at the Titmouse with a sort of motherly pride (though she was about my own age). The word picturesque described her admirably with her warm colour, her graceful hair, and the trim, *petite* figure that was so well set off by the simple, artistic dress—in which I seemed to trace the hand of Lilith. She was my importation to the Magpies, and I felt that she was doing me credit.

"I have often wondered," Mr. Davenant said, after a reflective pause, "what made you choose such an unlikely locality as Wellclose Square for a residence, and, indeed, how you came to know of its existence. Very few middle-class people do. I hope Miss Vardon will not consider me unduly inquisitive."

"Mrs. Otway will not," said I.

"Mrs. Otway is a myth—a legal fiction. I refuse to recognise her existence. She is a mere creature of documents, of church registers. The real person is Miss Helen Vardon."

"That sounds rather like nonsense," said I, "but, of course, it can't be, because the speaker is Mr. Davenant. Perhaps there is some hidden meaning in these cryptic observations."

"There isn't," he rejoined; "or, at any rate, it shan't remain hidden. I mean that I refuse to recognise your connection with this man, Otway, or to associate you with his beastly name."

"But it is my beastly name, too, according to law and custom."

"I don't care for law and custom," said he. "The name Otway is abhorrent to me, and it doesn't properly belong to you. I shall call you Miss Vardon, unless you let me call

you, Helen ; and I don't see why you shouldn't, considering that we are old and intimate friends."

"It would undoubtedly have the support of a well-established precedent. There was a certain bishop who was called Peter because that was his name. That precedent would apply to Helen, but it certainly would not to Miss Vardon."

"Then," he rejoined, "let us follow this excellent precedent. Let it be Helen. Is that agreed ? "

"I don't seem to have much choice ; for if 'Mrs. Otway' is a legal fiction, 'Miss Vardon' is an illegal one."

"Well, don't let us have any fictions at all. Let us adhere to the actual baptismal facts."

"Very well, Mr. Davenant."

"But why 'Mr. Davenant' ? My baptismal designation is 'Jasper.'"

"And a very pretty name, too," said I. "But the precedent does not apply in your case. You have not married Mr. Otway."

"No, thank Heaven ! If I had, there would be a case of petty treason. But neither have you, for that matter. You have only gone through a ridiculous ceremony which means nothing and signed a document which sets forth what is not true."

"It seems to me," I said, "that we are not adhering to our agreement to avoid fictions. My marriage, unfortunately, is perfectly real and valid in the eyes of the law."

"The law ! " he exclaimed, contemptuously. "Who cares for the law ? Have we not the pronouncement of that illustrious legal luminary, Bumble C.J., that the law is a ass and a idiot ? And, mark you, he was specially referring to matrimonial law. Now, who would base his actions and beliefs on the opinions of a ass and a idiot ? "

"And to think," said I, "that you have abandoned the law for mere architecture ! With your gift for casuistry, you ought to have been a Chancery lawyer or else a Jesuit. But here is Miss Tallboy-Smith. She thinks we are neglecting her treasures."

But our hostess had not come to utter reproaches. On the contrary, she was brimming over with pleasure and gratitude.

"My dear Mrs. Otway," she exclaimed, beaming on me

and grasping my hands affectionately, "I can't thank you enough for bringing that dear young lady, Miss Finch, to see my porcelain. She is a *sweet* girl, and she simply knows *everything* about china. It is perfectly wonderful. She might be a potter herself. And her love of the beautiful things and her enjoyment in looking at them has given me, I can't tell you how much, pleasure. You must really bring her to see my whole collection. Will you? I shall love showing it to her."

I agreed joyfully, for this would mean another nail in the coffin of Mr. Goldstein; and as Peggy and Mr. Hawkesley joined us at this moment, I was able to complete the arrangement and fix a date.

As Miss Tallboy-Smith bustled away, Mr. Hawkesley put in his claim.

"I don't see," said he, "why I should be left out in the cold. I've got a collection, too; and I think it would really interest Miss Finch, for she tells me she has seen very little modern pottery. Won't you bring her to see it, Mrs. Otway?"

Again I accepted gladly, with Peggy's consent. My scheme was working rapidly towards a successful conclusion, and I felt that I could push it forward energetically; for that very morning I had received a letter from Dr. Thorndyke returning the agreement and denouncing it as legally worthless and utterly opposed to public policy.

"As to fixing a date," said Mr. Hawkesley, "I suggest that we all adjourn to my rooms now. Come and have a cup of tea with me and then we can look over the crockery. How will that do?"

It suited Peggy and me quite well, and we said so.

"And you, Davenant?" asked Mr. Hawkesley.

"Well, I had one or two cathedrals to finish," was the reply; "but they must wait. Art is long—deuced long, in my case. Yes, let us adjourn and combine crockery and tea—which, as Pepys reminds us is a 'China drink,' and therefore appropriate to the occasion."

On this, we sallied forth and made our way to the Strand, where we chartered a couple of hansoms to convey us to Dover Street, Piccadilly, where Mr. Hawkesley had his abode in one of those fine, spacious, dignified houses that one finds in the hinterland of the West End of London. His

rooms were on the first floor, and when we arrived there by way of a staircase which would have allowed us to walk up four abreast, we were received by a sedate and impassive gentleman, whose appearance and manner suggested a Foreign Office official of superior rank.

"Would you let us have some tea, please, Taplow?" said Mr. Hawkesley, addressing the official deferentially. Mr. Taplow opened a door for us, and having signified a disposition to accede to the request, departed stealthily.

As we entered the large, lofty room, well lighted by its range of tall windows, I looked about me curiously, for I was instantly struck by the absence of pottery among its ornaments. The available wall-spaces were occupied by important pictures—all modern; the mantelpiece and other suitable surfaces supported statuettes of marble or bronze —again all modern. But of ceramic ware there was not a trace, with the single exception of a small framed cameo relief. Rather did the apartment suggest the abode of a furniture collector, for one side of the room, opposite the windows, was occupied by a range of armoires, or standing cupboards, mostly old French or Flemish.

"You don't favour the glass case, I notice, Hawkesley," said Mr. Davenant.

"No," was the reply. "They are well enough for public museums, but they are unlovely things. And one doesn't want to look at one's whole collection at once. I like to take the pieces out singly and enjoy them one at a time. You see, each piece is an individual work. It was the product of a separate creative effort, and ought to be enjoyed by a separate act of appreciation."

"You seem, Mr. Hawkesley," said I, "to have a preference for modern work. Do you think it is as good as the old?"

"I think," he replied, "that the best modern work is as good as any that was ever done. Of course, I am not speaking of commercial stuff. That is negligible in an artistic sense. I mean individual work, done under the same conditions and by the same class of men as the old craft work. That is quite good. The pity is that there is so little of it. But I am afraid the supply is equal to the demand."

"Don't you think," said Mr. Davenant, "that that is partly the fault of the modern craftsman? Of his tendency

to confine himself to fine and elaborate, and therefore costly, productions? Of course, the old work was not cheap in the modern factory sense of cheapness. The pottery and china that was made at the Etruria works or those of Bow or Chelsea was by no means given away. But the prices were practicable for every day purposes, whereas modern studio pottery is impossible for domestic use. And the same is true of other craftwork, such as book-binding, fine printing, textiles, metal work, and so on. If the modern craftsman caters only for the collector and ignores the utilitarian consumer, he can't complain at being ousted by commercial production."

Here the arrival of Mr. Taplow with the tea arrested what threatened to prove a too-interesting discussion. I should have liked to continue it—on another occasion; at present, my desire was rather to "cut the cackle and get to the hosses." Accordingly, while the tea was being consumed, I rather studiously obstructed any revival of the debate by keeping up a conversation of a general and somewhat discursive character; and as soon as we appeared to have finished I introduced the subject of Ceramics.

"Is that plaque on the wall a Wedgwood cameo?" I asked.

"Oh, no," Mr. Hawkesley replied. "That is an example of Solon's wonderful *pâte-sur-pâte* work. It is done with white porcelain slip on a dark, coloured ground. Come and look at it."

We all rose and gathered round the plaque while Mr. Hawkesley descanted on its beauties; which were, indeed, evident enough.

"It is lovely work," said he; "so free and spontaneous. The Wedgwood reliefs look quite stiff and hard compared with these of Solon's. I have some of his vases with the same kind of decoration, and we may as well look at those first."

He wheeled a travelling turn-table towards a fine Flemish armoire of carved oak, and opening the latter, displayed a range of pieces of this beautiful work, at the sight of which Peggy's eyes glistened. One after another they were carefully placed on the turn-table, viewed from all points, admired, discussed and replaced. The other contents of the armoire were less important works—mostly French—but all

received respectful attention. The next receptacle, a French armoire of carved walnut, was devoted to modern stoneware by the Martin Brothers, Wells and other individual workers, concerning which our host was specially enthusiastic.

"There," said he, placing on the turn-table a wonderful Toby jug of brown Martin ware, "Show me any old salt-glaze ware that is equal to that! Look at the modelling! Look at the beautiful surface and the quality of the actual potting! And then go and look at the stuff in the shop windows. Just good enough for the slavey to smash."

"Well," Mr. Davenant remarked, "you can't say that she doesn't appreciate its qualities and do justice to them. If former generations had been as energetic smashers as the present, collectors of old stuff would have had to seek their treasures in ancient rubbish-heaps."

"Yes, that is a fact," agreed Mr. Hawkesley, as we moved on to the next cupboard. "When domestic pottery was more valuable it got more respectful treatment. Now this cupboard is only partly filled. I keep it for the work of one artist whose name I don't know. I've shown you some of the ware, Mrs. Otway, but it may be new to Miss Finch.

As he unlocked the door my heart began to thump, and I cast an anxious eye on Peggy. For I knew what was coming, but I didn't know how she would take it. At the moment she was looking at the closed door with pleased expectancy. Then the door swung open, and in a moment she turned pale as death. For one instant I thought she was going to faint, and so, apparently, did Mr. Davenant, for he made a quick movement towards her. But the deadly pallor passed, and was succeeded as rapidly by a crimson flush; but her quick breathing and the trembling of her hand showed how great the shock had been.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hawkesley, all unconscious, was glancing over the row of vases, jars and bowls, and expatiating on the peculiar beauties of the "mystery ware." The pieces were separated into two groups; the works in pure inlay and those combining the inlay with slip decoration and embossed ornament; and one of the latter he presently lifted from its shelf and placed on the turn-table.

"Now, isn't that a lovely jar, Miss Finch?" said he.

"And doesn't it remind you of the beautiful St. Porchaire, or Oiron ware?"

Peggy gazed at the jar with an inscrutable expression as she slowly rotated the turn-table. "It is somewhat like," she agreed; "at least, the method of work is similar."

"Oh, don't give my favourites the cold shoulder, Miss Finch," said Mr. Hawkesley. "I think I prize my pieces of this ware more than anything that I have. It is so very charming and so interesting. For, you see, it is real pottery; I mean that, beautiful and precious as it is, it is quite serviceable for domestic purposes, whereas much of the studio pottery is made for the gallery or the cabinet."

"You haven't discovered yet where it is made, I suppose?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "Its origin is still a mystery and something of a romance—which may be one reason why I am so devoted to it. I often speculate about the potter, and invent all sorts of queer theories about him."

"As for instance?"

"Well, sometimes I fancy that he may be in debt to this dealer—that he may have had advances or loans and be unable to pay them off and get free. It is quite possible, you know. Then, sometimes I have thought that he may be one of those poor creatures who drink or take drugs, and that the dealer may keep him slaving in some cellar for his bare maintenance and his miserable luxuries. But I've given that idea up. This work is too sane and reasonable and painstaking for a drunkard or drug-taker. But, whoever and whatever he is, I wish I could find him out, and thank him for all the pleasure that he has given me, and help him to get a proper reward for his labour, which I am sure he does not."

"I don't know why you are so sure," said Mr. Davenant. "This ware is pretty expensive, isn't it?"

"Not if you consider that each piece is an individual work on which a great deal of time and labour has been expended. The price that I paid Goldstein for this particular piece was seven guineas, which wouldn't represent very high remuneration if the artist had the whole of it."

"Seven guineas, Mr. Hawkesley!" exclaimed Peggy, incredulously.

"Yes, Miss Finch; and I should say very cheap at the price.

I glanced at Peggy with malicious satisfaction, for her cheeks were aflame with anger and the light of battle was in her eyes.

"What a shame!" she protested. "How perfectly scandalous! The grasping, avaricious wretch! To charge seven guineas for a piece that he bought for fifteen shillings!"

For a few seconds there was an awesome silence. Peggy's exclamation had fallen like a thunderbolt, and the two men gazed at her in speechless astonishment; while she, poor Titmouse, stood, covered with blushes and confusion, looking as if she had been convicted of pocketing the spoons.

"You actually know," Mr. Hawkesley said, at length, "that Goldstein gave only fifteen shillings for that jar?"

"Yes," she stammered faintly, "I—I happen to have—to be aware—that—that was the amount paid——"

She broke off with an appealing glance at me, and I proceeded to "put in my oar."

"It's no use, Peggy. The cat is out of the bag—at least her head is, and we may as well let out the rest of her. The fact is, Mr. Hawkesley, that this ware is Miss Finch's own work."

I now thought that Mr. Hawkesley was going to faint. Never have I seen a man look so astonished. He was thunderstruck.

"Do you mean, Mrs. Otway," he exclaimed, "that Miss Finch actually makes this ware herself?"

"I do. It is her work from beginning to end. She does the potting, the decorating, the firing and the glazing. And she does it without any assistance whatever."

Mr. Hawkesley gazed at Peggy with such undissembled admiration and reverence that I was disposed to smile—though I liked him for his generous enthusiasm—and the unfortunate Titmouse was reduced to an agony of shyness.

"This is a red letter day for me, Miss Finch," said he. "It has been my dearest wish to meet the creator of that pottery that I admire so intensely; and now that wish is gratified, it is an extra pleasure to find the artist so much beyond——"

He paused to avoid the inevitable compliment, and Mr. Davenant held up a warning finger.

"Now, Hawkesley," said he; "be careful."

"I know," said Mr. Hawkesley. "It is difficult to steer clear of banal compliments and yet to say what one would like to say; but really the personality of the mysterious artist has furnished a very pleasant surprise."

"I can believe that," said Mr. Davenant. "I can imagine, for instance, that you find Miss Finch a very agreeable substitute for the intoxicated gentleman in the cellar."

At this we all laughed, which cleared the air and put us at our ease.

"But," said Mr. Davenant, "proud as we are to have made the acquaintance of a distinguished potter, we are haunted by the spectre of that fifteen shillings. We get the impression that Miss Finch's business arrangements want looking into."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Hawkesley, "they do indeed. Why do you let this fellow have your work, at such ridiculous prices, too?"

"It isn't so ridiculous as it looks," replied Peggy. "When I began, I couldn't sell any of my work at all. It was frightfully discouraging. No one would have anything to do with it. My first work was simple earthenware, and even the cheap china shops wouldn't have it. Then I chanced upon Mr. Goldstein, and he bought one or two simple, red earthenware jars and bowls for a few pence each. It didn't pay me, but still it was a start. Then I experimented on this pipe-clay body with slip decoration and coloured inlay and showed the pieces to Mr. Goldstein; and he advised me to go on and offered to take the whole of my work, if I signed an agreement. So I signed the agreement, and he has had all my work ever since."

"At his own prices?"

"Yes. I didn't know what the things were worth."

"Well," said Mr. Davenant, "my law is a trifle rusty, but I should say that that agreement would not hold water."

"It won't," said I. "We have just had counsel's opinion on it, and our adviser assures us that it is worthless, and that we can disregard it."

"Then," said Mr. Davenant, "you had better formally denounce it at once."

"Why trouble to denounce it?" demanded Mr. Hawkesley. "Much better let me call on Goldstein and make him tear up the duplicate. He has got a fine, handy warming-pan hanging up in his shop. I saw it only this morning."

"The connection is not very clear to me," said I.

"It would be clear enough to him," was the grim reply.

Mr. Davenant chuckled. "Your methods, Hawkesley, appeal to me strongly, I must admit; but they are not politic. Legal process is better than a warming-pan, even if it were filled with hot coals. Let us hand the agreement to a reputable solicitor, and let him write to Goldstein stating the position. Miss Finch won't hear any more of her benefactor after that.

After some discussion, in which I supported Mr. Hawkesley's proposal, the less picturesque method of procedure was adopted, and Mr. Davenant was commissioned to carry it out.

"And we will have a one woman show of Blue Bird Ware at the club," said Mr. Hawkesley. "I will take my whole collection there and exhibit it with a big label giving the artist's name in block capitals. The pottery collectors will just tumble over one another to get specimens of the work when the artist is known."

The rest of Mr. Hawkesley's collection received but a perfunctory consideration. Even the gorgeous De Morgan earthenware, glowing with the hues of the rainbow, came as something of an anti-climax; and we closed the last of the cabinets with almost an air of relief.

"And now," said Mr. Hawkesley, as he pocketed his keys, "I suggest that we mark this joyful occasion by a modest festival—say, a homely little dinner at the club and an evening at the play. Who seconds my proposal?"

"We shall have to go as we are then," said I, as we can't change."

"I think we can enjoy ourselves in morning dress," he rejoined; "and as we shall all be in the same shocking condition, we can keep one another in countenance."

The proposal was accordingly adopted with acclamation and carried into effect with triumphant success, and some slight disturbance of the orderly routine of the establishment in Wellclose Square; for it was on the stroke of

midnight when Miss Polton, blinking owlishly, opened the green door to admit the two roisterers who had just emerged from a handsom-cab.

"It *has* been a jolly day!" Peggy exclaimed fervently as we said "good-night" on our landing. "And it will be a jolly to-morrow, too."

"Yes; you will be able to get on with your masterpiece now; and when it is finished we can show it at the club and you will be able to sell it for a small fortune."

"I shan't wan't to sell it," she said. "If it is good enough, and if it wouldn't seem too forward or improper, I should like to give it to Mr. Hawkesley—as a sort of thank-offering, you know."

"Thank-offering for what?"

"For his appreciation of my work. I really feel very grateful to him, as well as to you, Sibyl, dear. You see, he not only liked the things, but he thought of the worker who made them. All the time that I was working alone, with the door locked, from morning to night to fill that cormorant's pockets, Mr. Hawkesley was thinking of me, the unknown worker, looking for me and wanting to help me. I don't forget that it is you who have got me out of Mr. Goldstein's clutches. But I do feel very, very grateful to Mr. Hawkesley. Don't you think it is quite natural that I should, Sibyl?"

"I think you are a little, green goose," said I, and kissed her; and so ended the day that saw the end of her servitude and the dawn of prosperity and success.

Chapter XVIII

Among the Breakers

My preoccupation with Peggy Finch's affairs had to some extent submerged my own, but now that my little friend had triumphantly emerged from the house of Bondage, I returned to my labours with a new zest. In spite of the various interruptions, the Zodiac spoons had made steady progress, and it was but a few days after our momentous visit to Mr. Hawkesley's rooms that, almost regretfully, I put the finishing touches to the Fishes spoon—the last of the set.

It had been a pleasant labour, and as I laid out the completed set, I was not dissatisfied. True, there had been difficulties; but difficulties are the salt of craftsmanship. Some of the signs, such as Aries, Taurus, Leo, Virgo and Capricornus, had been quite simple, the head of the Ram, the Bull, or other symbolic creature furnishing an obvious and appropriate knop for the spoon. But others, such as Gemini, Pisces, and especially Libra, had been less easy to manage. Indeed, the last had involved a slight evasion; for, since it seemed quite impossible to work a pair of scales into a presentable knop, I had relegated them to the shoulder of the bowl and formed the knop of a more or less appropriate head of Justice blindfolded. So all the difficulties had been met by a pleasant and interesting exercise of thought and ingenuity, and the work—my *magnum opus*, for the present—was finished. And it was rounded off by a very agreeable little addition; for Phyllis Barton, who had seen and greatly admired the set, had made a delightful little case to contain it—just a pair of walnut slab hinged together, the lower slab having twelve shaped recesses to hold the spoons and the lid ornamented with shallow carvings of a winged hour-glass and the phases of the moon.

I made up the spoons into a parcel and the case into another, so that they should not be treated together in a single transaction; and having advised Mr. Campbell by a letter on the previous day, set forth one morning for Wardour Street. The silent willing which should have preceded my entry to the shop was inadvertently omitted, for as I crossed the street I observed Mr. Campbell exchanging blandishments with a large Persian cat of the "smoky" persuasion, and, as he saw me at the same moment, I had no choice but to enter straightway.

He received me with the most encouraging affability—indeed, he even condescended to shake hands—and was evidently pleased to see me. And his reception of my work was still more encouraging. There was none of the buyer's proverbial disparagement. He was frankly enthusiastic. He held up each spoon separately at arm's length, wagging his head from side to side; he inspected it through a watchmaker's lens; he stroked it with a peculiarly flexible thumb, and finally laid it down with a grunt of satisfaction.

Then came the question of terms; and when he offered twenty-four guineas for the set, I was quite glad that the silent willing had been omitted. For I should probably have willed eighteen.

Having settled the price of my own work, I produced the wooden case. Phyllis had priced it at half a guinea, which was ridiculous. I boldly demanded a guinea for it.

"That's a long price," said Mr. Campbell, pulling a face pf proportionate length. But I watched his thumb travelling over the clean-cut carving, I saw him delicately fitting the spoons, one by one, into their little niches, and I knew that that guinea was as good as in Phillibar's pocket.

"It *is* a long price, Mrs. Otway," he repeated, cocking his head on one side at the case. "But it's a pretty bit of work; and it's the right thing—that's what I like about it. Tho thootable; it would be a sin to put those spoons unto a velvet-lined case, as if they were common, stamped, trade-goods. Very well, Mrs. Otway, I'll spring a guinea for the case; and I should like to see some more work from the same hand."

This was highly satisfactory (though it was not without a pang of bereavement that I saw the little case closed and hidden from my sight for ever in a locked drawer); and when I had received the two cheques—I asked for a separate one for Phyllis—I tripped away down Wardour Street as buoyantly as if I had not a care in he world.

The association of ideas is a phenomenon that has received a good deal of attention. It was brought to my notice on this occasion when I found myself opposite St. Anne's Church; for no sooner had my eye lighted on its quaint, warty spire than my thoughts turned to Mr. Davenant—or rather, I should say, to Jasper. Perhaps he was in my mind already; possibly in the subconscious, as Lilith would have said, and the church spire may have acted as an autoscope—it would not have had to be an exceptionally powerful one. At any rate, my thoughts turned to him and to the Magpies Club, and it was not unnatural that my steps should take a similar direction.

As I followed the well-remembered route, I reflected on the changes that a few short months had brought. In that brief space a new life had opened. The solitary, friendless orphan who had sought sanctuary in Miss Polton's house,

how changed was her condition! Happy in her work, in her home, in her friends; for had she not her Lilith, her Phyllis, her Peggy—and Jasper? And here a still, small voice asked softly but insistently a question that had of late intruded itself from time to time. Whither was I drifting? My friendship with Jasper was ripening apace. But ripening to what? There could be but one answer; and that answer only raised a further question. In normal circumstances the love of a man and a woman finds a permanent satisfaction in marriage. But where marriage is impossible love is a mere disaster; a voyage with nothing but rocks and breakers at the end.

So whispered the still, small voice into ears but half attentive; and as I neared the bottom of Essex Street it became inaudible, for approaching the club-house from the opposite direction was Jasper himself.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "this is a piece of luck! And yet I had hoped that you might be coming into town to-day. Is it business or pleasure?"

"It has been business, and now I hope it is going to be pleasure. I am taking the rest of the day off."

"Now, what a very singular coincidence! I am actually taking the rest of the day off myself."

"Your coincidences," I remarked, "somehow remind me of the misadventures of the bread-and-butter fly; they always happen."

"Quite so," he agreed. "But then, you see, if they didn't happen they wouldn't be coincidences. Do we begin by fortifying ourselves with nourishment?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'begin,' but I came here to get some lunch."

"So did I—another coincidence, by the way. Shall we take our usual little table in the corner?"

We seated ourselves at the table, and as we waited for our lunch to be brought, I ventured on a few inquiries into Jasper's professional affairs.

"You seem to take a good many days off," I remarked.

"I do. There is, so to speak, a distinctly marked 'off side' to my practice."

"And when you are away, what happens? Do you keep a clerk?"

Jasper grinned. "You over-estimate the magnitude of

my practice. No; I have a simpler and more economical arrangement. I let my little front office to a law writer, at a peppercorn rent, subject to the condition that he shall interview my clients in my absence, furnish evasive answers to their questions, and supply ambiguous and confusing information."

"But don't the clients get rather dissatisfied?"

Again Jasper smiled. "That question," said he, "involves an important philosophic principle. A famous philosopher has proved his own existence by the formula '*cogito, ergo sum*'—I think, therefore I am—implying that if he didn't exist he couldn't think. Now, that principle applies to my clients. Before they can be dissatisfied, they must exist. But they don't exist. Therefore they are not dissatisfied. Q.E.D."

"I don't believe you care whether they exist or not—but that is the worst of having an independent income."

"It is a misfortune, isn't it? But I bear up under it surprisingly. Will you have some of this stuff? It is called a *pelion*. I heard the waitress describing it as a pea-lion, apparently misled by the analogy of the pea-cock and the pea-hen. Evidently she is no zoologist."

At this moment Miss Tallboy-Smith entered the room and halted at our table to exchange greetings and remind me of my engagement.

"Tell Miss Finch not to forget," said she. "It's next Wednesday. I shall have my things back from here by then, and I understand that Mr. Hawkesley has secured the cases for a special exhibition of studio pottery. You must bring Miss Finch to that, too."

Like Jasper's proxy, I gave an evasive answer to this, for I knew that wild horses would not drag Peggy to an exhibition of her own work. But evidently Mr. Hawkesley had made no confidences so far.

"Have you ever seen the Diploma Gallery at the R.A.?" Jasper asked when Miss Tallboy-Smith had flitted away. "If you haven't, we might look in there for an hour this afternoon."

As I had never seen the diploma works, I fell in readily with the suggestion, and accordingly, when we had finished lunch, we strolled thither and spent a very pleasant hour examining and comparing the works of the different

academicians, old and new. From Burlington House we drifted into the Green Park, and presently took possession of a couple of isolated and lonely-looking chairs. For some time we gossiped about the pictures at which we had been looking in the gallery; then our talk turned on to the affairs of my friend Peggy.

"Hawkesley seems to have appointed himself Miss Finch's advertising agent," Jasper remarked. "And he'll do the job well. He is an energetic man, and he knows all the pottery connoisseurs. I met him yesterday, and had to listen to Blue Bird ware by the yard."

"I like him for his enthusiasm," said I.

"So do I," agreed Jasper. "And it is quite a little romance. His admiration of the pottery is perfectly genuine, as we know; but there is something in what he calls 'the personality of the artist.' I think he is distinctly 'taken' with your pretty little friend. How does she like him?"

"I think she is decidedly prepossessed. At any rate, she is profoundly grateful to him for discovering her work, and especially for the interest that he took in the unknown worker."

"There you are, then," said Jasper. "There are the ingredients of a life-size romance. Fervid admiration on the one side, gratitude on the other, and good looks and good nature on both. We shall see what we shall see, Helen; and I, for one, shall look on with the green eyes of envy."

"Why will you? Do you want Peggy Finch for yourself?"

"I want Hawkesley's good fortune. If he loves this little maid and thinks she cares for him, he can ask her to marry him. That is what makes me envious."

I made no reply; indeed, there was nothing to say; and already the sound of the breakers was in my ears.

"I suppose, Helen," he said, after a long pause, "you realize that I love you very dearly?"

"I know that we are the best of friends, and very deeply attached to one another."

"We are much more than friends, Helen," said he; "at least, there is much more than friendship on my side. You are my all—all that matters to me in the world. You live

in my thoughts every moment of my life. When we are apart I yearn for the sight of you—I reckon the hours that must pass before I shall see you again, and when we are together the happy minutes slip away like grains of golden sand. But I need not tell you this. You must have seen that I love you."

"I have feared it, Jasper—and that I might presently lose the dearest friend that I have in the world."

"That you will never do, Helen, dearest, if I have the happiness to be that friend. Why should you?"

"It seems that it has to be. Our friendship has been a sweet friendship to me—too sweet to last, as I feared; and if some might cavil at it, it was innocent and wronged no one. But if it has grown into—into what I had feared it might, then it has become impossible. More than friends we can never be, and yet we cannot remain friends."

We were both silent for more than a minute, and both were very grave. Then Jasper asked, with a trace of hesitation:

"Helen, if we were as those other two are—if you were free—would you be willing to marry me?"

It was a difficult question to answer, in the circumstances, and yet I felt it would be an unpardonable meanness to dissemble.

"Yes," I answered; "of course I should."

"Then," said he, "I don't see why we can never be more than friends."

"But, Jasper, how can we? I am a married woman."

"I don't admit that," said he. "Your marriage is a fiction. You are really a spinster with a technical impediment to the conventional form of marriage. Your so-called husband is a stranger to whom you have no ties. You don't like, or even respect him; and certainly you have no obligations of duty to him, seeing that he induced you by a mere fraudulent pretence to go through this form of marriage with him."

"I am not thinking of Mr. Otway," said I. "He is nothing to me. I owe him no duty or consideration, and I would not sacrifice a single hair of my head for him. But the fact remains that I am, legally, his wife; and while he lives I can contract no other marriage."

"But is that quite true, Helen?" he objected.

"Certainly it is; unless you consider a bigamous marriage as an exception, which it is not."

"Of course I do not. Bigamy is a futile and fraudulent attempt to secure the appearance of a legal sanction. No one but a fool entertains bigamy."

"Then I don't see the meaning of your objection."

"What I mean," said he, "is that a fictitious marriage does not exclude the possibility of a real marriage."

"Still I do not quite follow you. What do you mean by a real marriage?

"A real marriage is a permanent, life-long partnership between a man and a woman. Ordinarily, such a partnership receives the formal endorsement of the State for certain reasons of public policy. But it is the partnership which is the marriage. The legal endorsement is an extrinsic and inessential addition. Now, in your case the State has accepted and endorsed a marriage which does not exist—which is a pure fiction. The result is that if you contract a real marriage, the State will withhold its endorsement. That is all. It cannot hinder the marriage."

"This is all very ingenious, Jasper," said I, "and it does credit to your legal training. But it is mere sophistry. The position, as it would appear to a plain person of ordinary common sense, is that a woman who is legally married to one man and is living as the wife of another, is a married woman who is living with a man who is not her husband."

"That is the conventional view, I admit," said he. "But it is a mistaken view. It confuses the legal sanction—which is not essential—with the covenant of life-long union, which is the essence of marriage—which, in fact, *is* the marriage."

"But what is the bearing of this, Jasper?" I asked. "We seem to be discussing a rather abstract question of public morals. Has it any application to our own affairs?"

"Yes, it has. At least, I think so, though I feel a little nervous about saying just what I mean."

"I don't think you need be. At any rate, there had better be a clear understanding between us. Tell me exactly what you do mean."

He considered awhile, apparently somewhat at a loss how to begin. At length, with evident embarrassment, he put his proposal before me.

"The position, Helen, is this: You and I have become deeply attached to one another; I may say—since you admit that you would be willing to marry me—that we love one another. It is no passing fancy, based on mere superficial attractions. We are both persons of character, and our love is founded on deep-seated sympathy. We have been friends for some years. We liked one another from the first, and as time has gone on we have liked one another better. Our friendship has grown. It has become more and more precious to both of us, and at last it has grown into love—on my side, into intense and passionate love. We are not likely to change. People of our type are not given to change. We love one another and we shall go on loving one another until the end.

"If our circumstances were normal, we should marry in the normal manner. That is to say, we should enter into a contract publicly with certain formalities which would confer a definite legal status and render our contract enforceable in a court of law. But our circumstances are not normal. We are willing to comply with the formalities, but we are not allowed to. We are not in the position of persons who, for their own purposes, lightly disregard the immemorial usages of society—who dispense with the formalities because they would avoid the responsibilities of formal marriage. We wish to enter into a lifelong partnership; we desire to undertake all responsibilities; we would welcome the formalities and the secure status. But the law refuses. There is a technical disability.

"We have, therefore, two alternatives. We may give up the marriage which we both desire, or we may marry and dispense with the formalities and the legal status. Supposing we give up the marriage. Just consider, Helen, what it is that we give up. It is the happiness of a whole life-time. The abiding joy of the sweetest, the most sympathetic companionship that is possible to a man and a woman. For though we are lovers, we are still friends, and friends we shall remain until death parts us. Our tastes, our interests, our sympathies make us prefer one another as companions to all other human beings. Of how many married couples can this be said? To us has been given that perfect comradeship that makes married life an enduring delight, a state of happiness without a cloud or a

blemish. And this is what we give up if we let this disability, this technical impediment, hinder us from marrying.

"On the other hand, supposing we marry and dispense with the formalities, what do we give up? Virtually nothing. The legal security is of no value to us, for each of us is secure in the constancy of the other. If we enter into a covenant, we shall abide by it, not by compulsion, but because we shall never wish to break it. As to the legal status and the social recognition, is it conceivable that two sane persons should give up a life's happiness for such trumpery? Surely it is not. No, Helen, let us boldly take our destiny into our own hands. Let us publicly denounce this sham marriage and cancel it for ever. I ask you, dearest, to give me the woman of my heart for my mate, my friend, my wife, for ever; to take me, unworthy as I am, for your husband, who will try, as long as he draws the breath of life, to make up to you by love and worship for what you have sacrificed to make him happy."

As I listened to Jasper's appeal—delivered with quiet but impressive earnestness—I think I was half disposed to yield. It was not only that I admired the skill with which he put his case and the virile, masterful way in which he trampled down the obstructing conventions; but deep down in my heart I felt that he was right—that his separation of the things that really mattered from those that were trivial and inessential and true and just. But there was this vital difference between us; that he was a man and I was a woman. Our estimates of the value of the conventions were not the same. Without the legal sanction I might be his wife in all that was real; but the world would call me his mistress.

"Jasper, dear," I said, "it is impossible. I admit the truth of all that you have said, and I wish—Oh! Jasper, *how* I wish, that I could accept the happiness that you offer me! You need not tell me that our companionship would be a delight for ever. I know it. But it cannot be. Even if I could accept it for myself, I could not accept it for you; I could not bear to think that, through me, you had been put outside the pale of decent society. For that is what it would mean. You—a gentleman of honour and reputation—would become a social outcast, a man who was living with another man's wife; who, if he were admitted at all to the

society of his own class, would have to be introduced with explanations and excuses."

"I think you exaggerate the social consequences, Helen," said he. "I propose that we should write to Otway and formally repudiate the marriage. Then, if we were boldly and openly to state our position and the exceptional circumstances that had driven us to it, I believe that we should receive sympathy rather than condemnation. I don't believe we should lose a friend; certainly not one whose loss would afflict us. And Otway could take his remedy, if he cared to."

"You mean he could divorce me," I said, with something like a shudder.

"Yes. But I am afraid he wouldn't."

"I don't think he would. But if he did, it would be an undefended suit, and the stigma of the Divorce Court would be on us for ever."

"It would be unpleasant, I admit," he replied. "But think of the compensations. Think of the joy of being together always, of having our own home, of going abroad and seeing the world together."

"Don't, Jasper!" I entreated. "It is too tantalizing. And even all this would not compensate me for the knowledge that I had dragged you from your honourable estate to a condition of social infamy."

"You need not consider me," he rejoined. "I have thought the matter out and am satisfied that I should gain infinitely more than I should lose; for I should have you, who are much more to me than all the rest of the world."

"You haven't thought of everything, Jasper," said I. "You know of the folly I committed at the time of my father's death—in withholding facts at the inquest, I mean—and you have excused it and treated it lightly. But others would view it differently. And now there is this blackmailer of whom I have told you. At any moment, a serious scandal may arise; and in that scandal you would be implicated."

"It wouldn't matter to me," said he. "Nothing would matter to me if only I had you."

"So you think now. But, Jasper, think of the years to come. Think how it might be in those years when the social ostracism, the loss of position and reputation, had

grown more and more irksome, if we should regret what we had done, if we should blame ourselves—even, perhaps, secretly blame one another——"

"We should never do that, Helen. We should always be loyal. And there wouldn't be any social ostracism. At any rate, I am quite clear as to my own position. I want you for my wife. To get you I would make any sacrifices and count them as nothing. But that is only my position. It isn't necessarily yours—or rather, I should say your sacrifices would be greater than mine. A woman's point of view is different from a man's."

"It is, Jasper. I realise fully how essentially reasonable your proposal is, and I am proud of, and grateful for, the love that has impelled you to make it. But to me the thing is impossible. That is the only answer I can give. What it costs me to give that answer—to refuse the happiness that you offer me, and that I crave for—I cannot tell you. But even if it breaks my heart to say 'no,' still, that must be my answer."

For a long time neither of us spoke. As I glanced furtively at Jasper, the dejection, the profound sadness that was written on his face wrung my heart and filled me with self-accusation. Why had I not foreseen this? Why had I, who had nothing to give in return, allowed his friendship to grow up into love under my eyes? Had I not acted towards this my dearest friend with the basest selfishness?

Presently he turned to me, and, speaking in quiet, even tones, said:

"It would not be fair for me to make an appeal on my own behalf. I may not urge you to accept a relation which your feeling and judgment reject. But one thing I will ask. I have told you what I want; and you are to remember that I shall always want you. I will ask you to reflect upon what we have said to-day, and if perchance you should come to think differently, remember that I am still wanting you, that I am still asking you, and tell me if you can give me a different answer. Will you promise me this, Helen?"

"Yes," I replied, "I promise you, Jasper."

"Thank you, Helen. And meanwhile we remain friends as we have been?"

"We can never be again as we have been," said I.

"Friendship may turn to love, but love does not go back to friendship. That is as impossible as for the fruit to change back into blossom. No, dearest Jasper; this is the end of our friendship. When we part to-day it must be farewell."

"Must it be, Helen? Must we part for ever? Could we not go back to the old ways and try to forget to-day?"

"I shall never forget to-day, nor will you. For our own peace of mind we must remain apart and try to avoid meeting one another. It is the only way, Jasper, hard as it will be."

I think he agreed with me, for he made no further protest.

"If you say it must be, Helen, then I suppose it must," he said, dejectedly. "But it is a hard saying. I don't dare to think of what life will be without you."

"Nor I, Jasper. I know that when I say 'good-bye' to you, the sun will go out of my life and that I can look for no other dawn."

Again we fell silent for a while; and again I reproached myself for having let it come to this.

"Don't you think, Helen," he said at length, "that we might meet sometimes, say at fixed intervals—even long intervals, if it must be so—just that we might feel that we had not really lost one another completely?"

"But that is what I should wish to avoid. For we have lost one another. As to me, it has no significance. I have nothing to give and nothing to lose. I am shackled for life to Mr. Otway. But you have your life before you, and it would only be fair that I should leave you free."

"Free!" he exclaimed. "I am not free and never shall be. Nor do I wish to be free. I am yours now and for ever. And so I would wish it to be. We may not be married in any outward form, but we are married in the most real sense. Our hearts are married. We belong to one another for ever while we live, and neither of us will ever wish to change. You know it is so, dearest, don't you?"

What could I say? He had spoken my own thoughts, had expressed the wish that I had not dared to acknowledge. Weak and unjust it may have been, but the thought that in the dark days of our coming separation we should still be linked, if only by an invisible thread, came as something like a reprieve. It left just a faint spark of light to relieve the gloom of the all too sombre future. In the end we

agreed to a monthly letter and a meeting once a year. And so, having fixed the terms of our sentence, we tried to put our troubles away and make the best of the few hours that remained before the dreaded farewell.

But despite our efforts to get back to our wonted cheerful companionship, the swiftly-passing hours were filled with sadness and heart-ache. Instinctively we went and looked at things and places that recalled the pleasant jaunts that were to be no more ; but ever Black Care rode behind. It was like the journey of two lovers in a tumbril that rolled its relentless way towards the guillotine ; for at the end of the day was the parting that would leave us desolate.

And at last the parting was upon us. At the corner of Cable Street we halted and faced one another. For a few moments we stood in the gathering gloom, hand clasped in hand. I dared not speak, for my heart was bursting. Hardly did I dare to look at the man whom I loved so passionately. And Jasper could but press my hand and murmur huskily a few broken words of love. And so we parted. With a last pressure of the hand I turned away and hurried along Cable Street. I did not dare to look back, though I knew that he was gazing after me ; for the street swam before my eyes and I could barely hold back my sobs.

I did not go straight home. The tumult of emotion sent me hurrying forward—whither I have no recollection save that somewhere in Shadwell a pair of friendly policemen turned me back with the remark that it " was no place for the likes of me." At length, when the first storm of grief had passed, and I felt myself under control, I made my way to Wellclose Square, and pleading the conventional head-ache, retired at once to my room.

And there, in quiet and seclusion, with tears that no longer need be restrained, with solemn rites of grief, I buried my newborn happiness—the happiness that had died almost in the moment of its birth.

Chapter XIX — *Illusions and Disillusions*

It is a generally accepted belief that of all the remedies for an aching heart, the most effective is distraction of the

mind from the subject of its affliction. And probably the belief is well founded. But it usually happens that the sufferer is the last to recognize the virtues of the remedy, preferring to nurse in solitude a secret grief and to savour again and yet again the bitterness of the Dead Sea fruit of sorrow.

So it was with me in these unhappy days. The seclusion of the workshop gave me the opportunity for long hours of meditation, in which I would trace and retrace the growth of my love for Jasper, would think with passionate regret of what might have been, and speculate vaguely upon the future. So far from seeking distraction in these first days of my trouble, I kept aloof from my comrades, so far as I could; shut myself in the workshop, or in my room, or wandered abroad alone, following the great eastern thoroughfares where I was secure from the chance of meeting a friend.

But the distractions which I would have avoided came unsought. First, there was the visit with Peggy to Miss Tallboy-Smith. It was due but a day or two after my parting with Jasper, and I loathed the thought of it; but it had to be; for who could say how much it might mean to Peggy? And as it turned out, I should never have forgiven myself if I had failed her. I had looked for a rather dull, social call flavoured with porcelain. But it was quite otherwise. Miss Tallboy-Smith had at length heard of Peggy's genius and had invited a few specially choice connoisseurs to meet her, including Mr. Hawkesley—unless he had invited himself. At any rate, there he was, reverential and admiring, but yet with a certain air of proprietorship which I noted with interest and not without approval. It was quite a triumph for Peggy, and she took it very modestly, though with very natural satisfaction. To me, however, there was a fly in the ointment, though quite a small one; for Mr. Hawkesley proposed an exploration of the Wallace Collection, which Peggy had never seen, and which I felt bound, for her sake, to agree to. But I looked forward with prospective relief to the time—not far distant, I suspected—when these two pottery enthusiasts would be intimate enough to dispense with a chaperon.

Then there came a distraction of another kind. One

evening after tea, Lilith took me apart, and looking at me with some concern, said: "Our Sibyl has not been herself of late. I hope she is not being worried about anything."

"We all have our little troubles, Lilith," I replied, "and sometimes we don't take them so resignedly as we should."

"No," she rejoined. "Resignation is easier when the troubles are someone else's. But we are very concerned to see you looking so sad—not only Margaret and I, but all of us. We are all very fond of you, Sibyl, dear, and any of us would think it a privilege to be of help to you in any way. You know that, don't you?"

"I have good reason to. No woman could have found kinder or more helpful friends than I have in this house."

"Well," she said, "friends are for use as well as for companionship. Don't forget that, if there is any little service that any of us can render you."

I thanked her very warmly, and she then opened a fresh topic.

"Some time ago, Sibyl, we were speaking of psychical experiments, and I suggested that you might like to see some carried out by my friend, Mr. Quecks, who is an authority on these subjects. Mr. Quecks was away from home at the time, on a lecturing tour in Kent; but he is home again now. I wrote to him about you and have had one or two talks with him, and he has asked me to invite you to a little demonstration that he is giving to some friends next Friday evening. Would you care to come with me?"

I would much rather not have gone, but I knew that a refusal would disappoint Lilith, who had set her heart on converting me. Accordingly, I accepted the invitation, and we were arranging details of the expedition when Peggy joined us. As soon as she heard what was afoot she was all agog.

"Oh, what fun!" she exclaimed. "You'll let me come, too, won't you, Lilith? I did so enjoy it last time."

Lilith, however, was by no means eager for her company, for the Titmouse was a rank unbeliever, and made no secret of it.

"What is the use of your coming, Peggy?" said she. "You don't believe in the super-normal. You would only come to scoff."

"Perhaps I should remain to pray," rejoined Peggy. "It is no use preaching to people who are already convinced. And I should just love it. That Quecks man is so *frightfully* amusing. He is the funniest little guffin you ever saw, Sibyl. Won't you let me come, Lilith?"

"Of course you can come if you really want to," Lilith replied with evident reluctance. "But you shouldn't speak of Mr. Quecks as if he were a mountebank or a buffoon. He may not be handsome, but he is a very learned man and very sincere."

"I beg your pardon, Lilith," said Peggy. "I won't call him a guffin any more. And thank you ever so much for letting me come."

The arrangements being thus settled, it is only fair to Peggy to say that she endeavoured, as far as possible, to treat the demonstration quite seriously. Even in our private conversations she made no further disparaging references to Mr. Quecks, though I did gather that her anxiety to be present at the séance was not unconnected with a desire to keep an eye on him to see that he did not impose on me.

Mr. Quecks' house was situated in a quiet street off Cromwell Road, Kensington, and the "demonstration" took place in a large room intermediate in character between a library and a drawing-room, lighted by three electric bulbs, all of which were encased in silk bags, so that the illumination was of a twilight dimness. The visitors were about a dozen in all, and while we were waiting for the late arrivals Mr. Quecks made a few observations upon supernormal phenomena in general.

To me he required no disparagement from Peggy or anyone else, his own appearance doing all that was necessary in that respect. The first glance at him impressed me disagreeably; but then he was a manifestly uncomely man, with a large, bald face and long, greasy black hair, which was brushed straight back and accumulated in an untidy bush at the nape of his neck. He spoke unctuously, and his manner was confident, persuasive, didactic and authoritative, and he gave me the impression of a man who was accustomed to dealing chiefly with women—his present audience was composed of them exclusively.

"In interpreting the results of the experiments which we

are about to perform," he observed, "we have to bear in mind that psychical and super-normal phenomena, inasmuch as they are not concerned with material things, are not directly appreciable by the senses. We cannot see or touch the subliminal self, either our own or that of others. But neither can we see the electric current or the Hertzian waves. We know of their existence and properties indirectly, through their effects. Electricity can be transformed into heat, light or sound, and these can be perceived by means of the radiator, the electric lamp or the telephone, which act directly on our senses. So it is with the hidden subconscious self. Invisible itself, it can be made to produce effects which are perceptible to the conscious mind through the senses, and through those effects its own existence is revealed."

This sounds reasonable enough; but the experiments themselves were rather disappointing on the whole. Perhaps I expected too much; or perhaps the preoccupied state of my mind did not allow me to bring to them sufficient interest or attention. Moreover, Mr. Quecks had an assistant (I had almost said "confederate") whose appearance pleased me no more than his own; a wall-eyed, taciturn woman of about thirty-five, of the name of Morgan, who acted as the "percipient"—the word "medium," I noticed, was not used—and helped to prejudice me against the experiments.

We began with a demonstration of thought-transference, which I found dull, tiresome and unconvincing. Probably I was unreasonable; but the apparent triviality of the proceedings, which resembled a solemn and unspeakably dull, drawing-room game, influenced my judgment. The percipient, Miss Morgan, being seated, blindfolded, in the middle of the room, a pack of playing cards and another pack of cards, each of which bore a single capital letter, were produced. A card was drawn out at random and held up behind the percipient and in view of everyone else, including Mr. Quecks, who held the percipient's hand. Miss Morgan then guessed the card or the letter. Sometimes she guessed correctly, sometimes nearly correctly, sometimes quite incorrectly. The proportion of correct guesses, Mr. Quecks informed us, was vastly greater than could be accounted for on the law of probabilities. And I dare say

it was. But the exhibition left me cold, as did those of table-tilting and planchette writing which followed. Even the "*pendule explorateur*," which had so impressed me on a previous occasion, fell flat on this. For, since that rather startling experience, I had given some thought to the magic pendulum, and believed that I had found at least a partial explanation of its powers. Accordingly, when my turn came to try the "autoscope," I took the string in my fingers and shut my eyes; and when Mr. Quecks objected to this, I gazed fixedly at the opposite wall, seeing neither the pendulum nor the clockwise alphabet. Under these conditions the pendulum was a complete failure; it would spell nothing. But when I looked steadily at the pendulum and the letters, the swinging ball spelled out clearly the word that I chose—Lilith.

I was thus in a decidedly sceptical frame of mind when the next set of experiments began; and even these produced, at first, no effect on me other than a slight tendency to yawn. Their object was to demonstrate the existence of a "psychometric" power or faculty; that is to say, a power to detect in certain material objects a permanent impression left by contact with some particular person. Such a faculty, Mr. Quecks explained to us, was possessed by certain exceptionally sensitive persons. He had it to some extent himself, but in Miss Morgan it was developed in a really remarkable degree, as the experiments which were to follow would convince us.

Hereupon Miss Morgan was once more blindfolded, all the lights but one were switched off, so that the room was almost in darkness, and the demonstration began. One of the visitors, at Mr. Quecks' whispered request, slipped a ring from her finger and passed it to him. By him it was handed to Miss Morgan, who solemnly applied it to her forehead. Then followed an interval of expectant silence, in which I thought I heard a faint giggle from Peggy Finch, who sat in the row in front of me.

At length Miss Morgan opened her mouth and spake. It seemed that she was seeing visions, and these she described in detail. Naturally I was unable to check them, nor could I judge whether they had any relation to the ring. The owner of that article stated, at the close of the experiment, that the visions, as described, corresponded

closely to certain places and events which were known to her and to no one else. Which seemed conclusive enough; but yet it left me only with a feeling that the whole proceeding was ridiculous and trivial.

The next experiment was performed with a glove from the hand of another visitor, and when this was concluded, Mr. Quecks whispered to a lady in the front row, who whispered to Peggy, who turned to me.

"He wants your handkerchief, Sibyl," she said in a low whisper.

I took my handkerchief from my pocket and gave it to Peggy, who squeezed it up into a ball and passed it to the lady in front, who passed it to Mr. Quecks, who handed it to Miss Morgan; who, in her turn, applied it to her forehead as if it had been an ice-bag, and assumed an attitude of intense mental concentration. And again the sound of a suppressed giggle came from the neighbourhood of the Titmouse.

Then Miss Morgan began to speak.

"I seem to be passing through the country—swiftly—very swiftly; past great, wide fields and woods. They are strange-looking woods. The trees are all in lines—in straight lines . . . But wait! Are they trees? No, they can't be; they are too small. No—they are plants growing up poles—they must be vines. It is a vineyard—and yet they don't look quite like vines. No, no! Of course, I see now; they are hops. It is a hop-garden. And now I am passing another. Now I have come out on to a road on the top of a hill. There are hills all round, and in the hollow there seems to be a town . . . and I seem to see water in the town . . . yes, it is water. It is a river . . . But I don't see any ships . . . only some red things . . . Oh, yes! I see; the red things are sails—red sails. I thought sails were always white."

She paused; and in the intense silence I leaned forward, listening eagerly. All my indifference and boredom had vanished. This was quite a different affair from the card-guessing and planchette-reading. She had described Maidstone vividly, accurately—or at least so it seemed to me; Maidstone as it would appear to one approaching the bridge from the west. Of course it might be mere guessing; but——

"I seem," Miss Morgan resumed, "to be descending a hill by a broad street . . . What is that in front of me? Is it—yes, I see; it is a bridge. Yes, I see it plainly now. I am coming towards it. But what on earth is this thing on my left hand? It seems to be a mass of gold . . . and yet . . . and yet it looks like an elephant. That's ridiculous, of course. It can't be . . . But it certainly looks like gold . . . and yet it . . . it really does look like an elephant! Well, I can make nothing of it. And now it is gone and I am on the bridge."

Again she paused, and I sat gazing at her in blank astonishment. There could now be no question as to the reality of the visions, unless the whole exhibition was a fraud. The idea of skilful guessing could not be entertained for a moment. The description did not merely fit Maidstone; the detail of the golden elephant on the brewery by the bridge fixed the identity of the place beyond the possibility of doubt. It was either a genuine —and most amazing—psychical phenomenon or an outrageous imposture. But an imposture, to which Lilith must have been a party, was more incredible than the "super-normal" itself.

As these thoughts passed swiftly through my mind, Miss Morgan resumed her description.

"I am standing on the bridge, but it is beginning to grow indistinct. By the riverside I can just see a great house, an old, old house, which seems to stand by the water's edge, and beyond it trees and a church tower. Now it is gone and I can see nothing. Is this all? . . . No; I see, very, very faintly, a small crowd of people. They seem to be in a field. And I make out a number of white objects in the field. They look rather like sheep, but they are very still. Oh! they are not sheep at all; they are tombstones. And I see now that the people are all in black and that they are standing round an open grave. It must be a funeral . . . Yes; there is the clergyman in his surplice . . . But it is beginning to fade . . . Now I can only just see the dark shapes of the people . . . and now they are gone too. This must be all, I think." She paused for a few moments and then exclaimed: "No, it isn't. Something else is coming. It is very dim, but it looks like a man sitting at a table. Yes . . .

But I can't see what he is doing. He is not writing . . . He has something in his right hand, and keeps moving it up and down. Oh, I see now: it is a hammer. He seems to be hammering some bright object—a piece of metal, I think . . . Yes, it is quite clear now. But it isn't a man at all; it is a woman. I saw her distinctly for a moment, but she has grown dim again . . . Now she has gone and I can see nothing . . . I think that is all . . . Yes, that is all. Nothing else seems to come."

She removed the handkerchief from her forehead and held it out towards Mr. Quecks, who took it from her and tip-toed round to where I was sitting.

"Thank you, Mrs. Otway," he whispered. "It seemed a very successful experiment; but you can judge better than I can."

"It was, indeed, most successful," I replied, as he gave me back my handkerchief. "I am positively amazed at the detailed accuracy of the description."

"You think the correspondence is closer than could be accounted for by coincidence or chance guessing?" he asked.

"There can be no question of chance," I replied. "The descriptions were much too detailed and circumstantial."

"That is most interesting," said he. "For there can be no other explanation but that of genuine psychometric faculty. Miss Morgan is a stranger to you, and, moreover, she did not know whose handkerchief it was. The remarkable success of this experiment seems to support Miss Blake's estimate of your unusual psychic gifts. You evidently have the power of imprinting your personality on inanimate objects in an exceptional degree. I should almost think it likely that you would be a successful scryer. Have you made any experiments with the crystal?"

"Yes. But they are all complete failures. I could see nothing."

"That is not unusual in early experiments," said he. "There is a difficulty in concentrating. I wonder if you would care to make a trial now under my guidance. I think I could help you to visualize some simple scene. Will you try?"

The astonishing success of Miss Morgan's experiment had revived all my former curiosity, and I assented readily. Much to Mr. Quecks' satisfaction. The nature of the new experiment was explained to the company, and the necessary preparations made. An easy chair was placed for me in the middle of the room, and the chairs for the others arranged behind it, so that I should not have my attention distracted by seeing them. As I passed Lilith on my way to the chair, I greeted her with a smile, and was a little surprised at the lack of response on her part. I thought she would be gratified to see me taking so active a part in the proceedings; but apparently she was not; indeed, I had never seen her look so ungenial.

When I had taken my seat, Mr. Quecks directed me to lean back and adopt a position of complete physical rest. A black, velvet cushion was then placed in my lap and on the cushion was laid the crystal globe, itself almost black in the dim twilight save for a single spark where it reflected the light of the one electric lamp.

"You will look fixedly at the bright spot of light," said Mr. Quecks, who had seated himself beside me; "concentrate your attention on it and think of nothing else. Don't let your mind wander, and don't move your eyes. Think of the bright spot and look at it. Soon a mist will come before your eyes; then you will feel a sort of drowsiness. You will grow more and more drowsy, but your eyes will keep open and you will still see the mist. You are seeing it now" (this was quite correct); "it grows denser; now you are beginning to feel drowsy—just a little drowsy—but your eyes are wide open; still you are getting drowsy—rather more drowsy——"

He seemed to repeat these words over and over again like a sort of chant; and his voice, which had been at first soft and confidential, took on a peculiar sing-song quality, and at the same time began to grow more and more distant until it came to me thin and small like the voices that are borne from far-away ships on a calm day across the water of a quiet anchorage. And, meanwhile, a strange somnolence fell upon me. I felt as if I were in a dream. Yet my eyes were wide open, and before them floated the mist, out of which shone the single spark of light. And the little, thin voice went on chanting far away, but I could

no longer make out what it said. Nor was I attending to it. I was gazing into the mist at the tiny spark—gazing fixedly, unwinkingly, without effort.

Presently the mist seemed to clear a little, and the spot of light began to grow larger. Now it looked like a hole in the shutter of a dark room; and now it was as though I were looking through an opera glass or a telescope; but I could make out nothing save a confused blur of light, in the middle of which was a vague, dark shape. But still the area of light grew larger, and now I could see that there were other shapes, all dim, vague and shadowy. Then in an instant it cleared up, as a magic-lantern picture sharpens when the lens is focussed. The dark shape was Mr. Otway. He stood, stooping forward, gazing at something on the floor—something that lay by the fireplace, motionless, with upturned waxen face. It was horribly distinct. I could see my father's face settling into the rigidity of death; I could see the crimson streak on his temple; I could even see the sparkle of the silver knob on the stick that Mr. Otway grasped.

The vision lasted, as it seemed, but for a few seconds. Then it grew dim and confused and quickly faded away into blank darkness; and I found myself sitting up in the chair, wide awake, but bewildered and a little frightened. The lights were full on, and the visitors were all gathered around my chair gazing at me with a very odd intentness.

"Did you see anything in the crystal?" Mr. Quecks asked, suavely.

"Yes," I answered, not quite so suavely. "How long have I been asleep?"

Mr. Quecks looked at his watch. "Just five and twenty minutes," he replied.

I got up from the chair, and, addressing Peggy, who was looking at me a little anxiously, asked: "What has been happening, Peggy? Have I been talking nonsense?"

"No," she answered. "You've been asleep, and you've been guessing cards and doing most extraordinary sums—multiplying and dividing fractions and all sorts of things. That's all. But," she added in a lower tone, "he'd no business to hypnotize you without your permission. You didn't give him permission, did you?"

"No, I didn't," I replied.

At this moment Lilith came up to us and put the same question.

"No," I answered. "I didn't understand that I was to be hypnotised."

"I thought not," said she in a tone of evident vexation. "It doesn't happen to matter as things have turned out, but it was quite improper. I shall speak to Mr. Quecks about it when you are gone."

"Aren't you coming with us, then?" asked Peggy.

"No," replied Lilith. "I have some matters to talk over with him, so I must stay a little while; but I shall follow you in about half an hour."

Shortly after this the meeting broke up, and Peggy and I took our departure. As we sat in the train, I tried to extract from my companion some details of what had happened, but I found her curiously unwilling to pursue the topic. I gathered, however, that, as soon as the hypnotic trance was completely established, Mr. Quecks suggested to me that I should have a distinct vision of some scene that I had witnessed "in the old town that Miss Morgan had seen and shortly before the funeral that she had described." Then, after an interval, he had put a number of problems in multiplication and division of large numbers and fractions, which I had solved with extraordinary ease and rapidity. As to the nature of my vision, Peggy displayed no interest, but turned the conversation on to subjects quite unconnected with Mr, Quecks or psychical science.

When we arrived home she followed me to my room and suggested that we should wait there for Lilith, which was what I had intended to do. And here again she showed a marked tendency to avoid the subject of Mr. Quecks and his experiments. But, as she sat in my chair gossiping, I caught her eye, from time to time, travelling almost furtively towards the clock on the mantelpiece, and I wondered if she was feeling anxious about Lilith, who had to make her way alone through the rather unsavoury neighbourhood of Ratcliff. Whatever she was feeling, however, she kept up a flow of conversation—which was, itself, a rather unusual phenomenon—and presently grew quite confidential about herself—which was more unusual still. It was clear that her friendship with Mr. Hawkesley

was now quite firmly established, and they evidently saw a good deal of one another—but this I knew already. And it was clear that their sympathy in tastes was running parallel to a very strong liking of a more personal kind.

After a pause in this confidential gossip, Peggy suddenly looked down a little shyly, and, turning very pink, asked, hesitatingly:

"Sibyl, dear, you haven't quarrelled with Mr. Davenant, have you?"

"Quarrelled, Peggy!" I exclaimed; "of course I haven't. Have we ever struck you as quarrelsome people?"

"No, indeed," she replied. "But you don't seem to have seen much of one another lately."

"No; I haven't seen Mr. Davenant for quite a long time," I said.

She was silent for a while, and I noticed that her cheeks were growing more and more pink.

"What is my little chameleon turning that colour for?" I asked.

She looked up at me with a shy smile. "Sibyl," she said, "don't think me inquisitive or impertinent. I am your friend, you know, and we are fond of one another, aren't we?"

"We are the very best of friends, Peggy, dear, so you, needn't mind asking me anything that you want to know."

"Well, then, Sibyl; why don't you and Mr. Davenant marry? Anyone can see how fond he is of you, and I'm sure you care for him an awful lot, don't you, now?"

"My Titmouse is becoming an expert authority on these matters," said I, thereby converting poor Peggy to the semblance of a corn-poppy.

"Perhaps I am," she admitted, defiantly. "But why don't you marry him, Sibyl?"

"My dear Peggy," said I, "there is a very substantial reason. Its name is Mr. Otway."

"Sibyl!" gasped Peggy. "I thought you were a widow!"

I shook my head. "No, Peggy. I am a widow in effect, but a married woman by law. I have a husband who is no husband; whom I married in error, whom I have never lived with and could never think of living with, but whom I can never get rid of. That is the position."

She flung her arms around my neck, and laid her cheek to mine.

"My poor, dear Sibyl," she exclaimed. "How dreadful for you! I am so frightfully sorry, dear. And is there no end to this?"

"There is death," said I. "That is all. And that is why I am not seeing much of Mr. Davenant nowadays."

"It is an awful thing, Sibyl," said she. "You and Mr. Davenant could make one another so perfectly happy. And I don't see why you shouldn't, for that matter."

"Why, how could we, Peggy?"

Again she blushed scarlet, and with a defiant glance at me, replied:

"I wouldn't have my whole life wrecked. I should just go off with him, husband or no husband."

"You dreadful little reprobate. And what do you suppose the world would say about you?"

"It could say what it liked so long as I'd got the man I wanted. But it wouldn't really say anything. No one with any sense would think a penny the worse of me. Nor would they of you. Everyone would say that you had done the right thing, seeing that you had no choice. You couldn't be expected to be bound for life to a dummy husband."

At this moment I rose from my chair, and going over to the dressing-table, lit a candle. Then I put my hand in my pocket and drew out an unaddressed envelope and a piece of pencil. With the latter I wrote on the envelope my signature and the words "ten minutes to eleven." The whole proceeding seemed quite automatic. I did not know why I was doing it. I had not known that either the envelope or the pencil was in my pocket, for I had not put them there. But I carried out the train of action almost unconsciously and quite without surprise.

When I had written on the envelope, I opened it and drew out a piece of paper. On the paper was some writing in an unfamiliar hand. I held the paper near the candle and read as follows:

"At ten minutes to eleven you will light a candle, take this envelope and a pencil from your pocket; you will write

on the envelope your signature and the time. Then you will open the envelope and read this message."

I stood for some seconds gazing at the paper in utter amazement. Then I looked round quickly at the clock. It was ten minutes to eleven. From the clock my glance turned to Peggy, who was sitting watching me with a very uncomfortable expression.

"Do you know anything about this, Peggy?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "That Quecks man told you to do it. He wrote the message and put the envelope and pencil in your pocket when you were in a deep sleep. He spoke the message into your ear, and, after about a minute, told you to wake up, and you woke up immediately. It was like his impudence to perform his beastly experiments without getting your permission first."

"It was. But the thing is rather uncanny. I don't like it at all."

"There's nothing in it," said Peggy, though she, too, was evidently not pleasantly impressed. "It's what they call post-hypnotic suggestion. It isn't in any way supernatural. The doctors know all about it."

"Still," said I, "it is a very strange affair. There is something extremely eerie in finding oneself turned into an unthinking automaton worked by somebody else's will. And some of the other experiments were rather startling: Miss Morgan's visions for instance."

"Mightn't they have been just clever guesses?"

"No, Peggy. That is quite impossible. Her descriptions applied to my case in detail and were correct every time. You heard her describe the view from Maidstone Bridge?"

"Yes. And I recognised it from that water-colour over your mantelpiece."

"Well, don't you think it very wonderful and incomprehensible?"

"No, I don't," said Peggy. "How do you suppose she did it?"

"I can only imagine that some influence that I don't understand passed to her from my handkerchief."

"Then you imagine wrong," said the Titmouse. "Your handkerchief was in my pocket all the time. It was my

handkerchief that she was smelling at. And her descriptions didn't fit me the least little bit. I don't hammer my pottery, you know."

"But I don't understand. You passed her my handkerchief, didn't you?"

"No; I passed her mine. You see, I'd seen this handkerchief trick before and I had mine ready, rolled up into a ball in my hand. So it was quite easy to make the exchange. But we may as well change back now."

She took a handkerchief from her pocket and handed it to me; and when I had identified it as my own, I produced hers and restored it to her.

"You are a wicked little baggage, Peggy," said I, "though I must admit that the ruse was quite a fair one. But still, I don't quite see how it was done? It was evidently an imposture. But how was it worked? How did she get the information?"

"Why, she got it from Mr. Quecks, and he got it from Lilith."

"You surely don't suggest that Lilith was a party to this fraud?"

"Of course I don't," she replied, indignantly. "Lilith is a lady to the tips of her fingers. That's just where it is. She would never suspect. But we know that she wrote to Quecks about you, and she has talked to him about you, and no doubt he has pumped out all that she knows about you. Then you will remember that he has just come back from a tour in Kent—he is almost certain to have been to Maidstone—and there are such things as picture postcards. There is no mystery as to how it was done; but I do wonder that he was such a fool as to do it before Lilith. I suspect she stayed behind to tell him what she thought of him."

As we were speaking, Lilith came up the stairs, and I ran out to intercept her and bring her in.

"You needn't have waited up for me," said she, "though I am glad you have, for I want to apologise for Mr. Quecks' very improper behaviour."

"Don't think any more about it, Lilith," said I. "It didn't do any harm, and it has enabled Peggy and me to have a little private séance to ourselves."

"Did the post-hypnotic experiment work correctly?"

"Perfectly—and most uncannily."

"Then," said Lilith, "you have gained by that amount of experience. As to the rest of Mr. Quecks' experiments—well, Sibyl, I am afraid we must consider them on the plane of public entertainment rather than on that of genuine research. But it is getting late. We had better go to bed now and talk things over to-morrow."

This advice was forthwith acted on, as to its first half; and if I owed Mr. Quecks a grudge for trying to impose on me, I should have been grateful to him for giving me something to think about other than my own griefs and entanglements.

Chapter XX *Cloud and Sunshine*

REVIEWING on the morrow my experiences at Mr. Quecks' house, I was conscious of a rather definite change of outlook. Those experiences had made a very deep impression. The vision that I had seen was something outside ordinary, normal experience, and it still haunted me. And then, even more uncanny, there was that strange automatic action which I had carried out with such perfect unconsciousness and yet so exactly and punctually. It was all very well for Peggy to put it aside with the easy explanation that it was merely post-hypnotic suggestion, and that the doctors knew all about it. That explanation explained nothing. The fact remained that I had suddenly become aware that things which I had been accustomed to dismiss as delusions—as the mere superstitions of credulous people—were actual realities. And this discovery created for me a new standard of possibility and truth. Even Miss Morgan's visions, though I knew them to be a rank imposture, had left an impression that was not to be completely effaced. The shock of amazement that they had produced at the time left a vague after-effect, due, no doubt, to the more real and equally mysterious experiences.

Concerning these latter I was somewhat puzzled. It was not quite clear to me how I had come to be hypnotized at all, and I took an early opportunity of questioning Lilith on the subject.

"There is no mystery about that," she replied. "The orthodox method of producing the hypnotic trance is to cause the 'subject' to gaze steadily at some bright object—a metal button, a crystal, or even a small piece of white paper. He is told to gaze fixedly at this object, to concentrate his attention on it, and to think of nothing else. The purpose of this is to get rid, as far as possible, of the conscious self and to allow the subconscious self to act without disturbance. When this state of mental abstraction has been established, the 'subject' is ready to receive suggestions. If the operator suggests to him that he is drowsy, he becomes somnolent; and at the same time he becomes much more susceptible to suggestion. Now, if the operator suggests to him that he feels certain sensations, he feels those sensations. If it is suggested that he performs certain actions, he performs them. This is what happened to you. Mr. Quecks induced you to gaze steadily at the crystal, and when you were in the proper state of mental abstraction, he suggested the hypnotic trance. Then he suggested that you would see a vision of some scene that you had looked on shortly before the funeral, and I understand that you did see such a vision."

"Yes, I did; and most astonishingly vivid it was. But, Lilith, when I lit that candle in my room I was not in the hypnotic trance."

"No; that was a post-hypnotic phenomenon, and really a most interesting one. To understand it you must think of the two personalities, the conscious self and the subconscious, or subliminal self. Now the suggestions are made to the subconscious self, while the conscious is dormant or in abeyance. But when the conscious self returns or awakens, the subconscious mind continues to work, although unperceived by the conscious mind. If the suggestion refers, as in your case, to some action to be performed at an appointed time, the subconscious keeps account of the passing time and at the appointed moment sets the machinery in motion. The action itself is perceived by the conscious mind, but the train of subconscious thought has been unperceived, though it has really been quite continuous. It is very curious, though not particularly mysterious."

"And it is only in the hypnotic trance that these suggestions take effect ?"

"That," replied Lilith, "is not quite clear. It seems that in ordinary sleep suggestions of the kind may sometimes take effect. And for the same reason. In sleep, the conscious self is in abeyance—is out of action ; but the subconscious is active, as we see in the case of dreams and still more strikingly in the case of somnambulism. But the postponed effects of suggestions made during normal sleep need more investigation. I believe that sleep produced by drugs is much more like the hypnotic trance than natural sleep."

"Well," I said, "it is all rather weird and uncanny," and so the subject dropped. But, as I have said, the influence of these strange experiences remained. My former scepticism of the occult and mystical gave place to a state of mind in which I was prepared to admit the possibility of things that I had once regarded as wildly incredible.

Nevertheless, I was but faintly interested in the wonders of psychical research. Indeed, I was not much interested in anything connected with with my daily life. I had endeavoured to revive my enthusiam for my work by setting myself an ambitious task—a silver candlestick of a semi-ecclesiastical design, worked in repousé with enrichments in enamel. But all the pleasure in the work was gone. The various processes—skilfully enough executed, as I noticed with tepid satisfaction—which should have been a joy, were but the routine of industry ; and through them all the never-ending heartache, the sense of loss, of bereavement, the feeling that the light had gone out of my life for ever. The passing time seemed to bring no mitigation. Rather did it seem to me that every day I missed my dear companion more.

Perhaps if my loss had been more final—if, for instance, Jasper had been taken from me by Death—I might have striven more determinedly to shape my life anew. But there was a certain inconclusiveness in our separation. Not that I ever, for a moment, considered the possibility of re-opening the question. But still I think there lurked in my mind the feeling that the door was not finally closed. Jasper's words, "Remember that I am still wanting you,

that I am still asking you," would come to me unbidden, again and yet again, reminding me that the way was still open, that I could end the separation if and when I chose. And then Peggy's outspoken declaration was not without its effect. For the Titmouse was a very paragon of modesty and maidenly propriety; and when I recalled her robust contempt of conventional points of view I could not help asking myself sometimes if I had not been too prudish. All of which was very disturbing. It left me with my resolution unchanged, and yet without that sense of finality that would have set me reconstructing my scheme of life.

So the weeks dragged by till the time for the first monthly letter drew nigh; and the passionate yearning with which I looked forward to it told me that that letter was a mistake. It ought never to have been. The chapter should have been ended and the volume shut irrevocably.

As the time for the letter approached, my unrest took me abroad more than usual, and one day, forsaking the sordid east, I took the train to South Kensington and made my way to the Museum, though with no special object in my mind. I had ascended the steps to the main entrance, and was approaching the doorway, when I came face to face with Miss Tallboy-Smith, who was just emerging. At the sight of me she halted with a dramatic gesture of astonishment.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "so you are *really* alive! I thought I was never going to see you again. Where *have* you been? It's ages—centuries—since I have seen you. And dear Miss Finch, too; whatever has become of her? Were you going into the Museum? I have just been wallowing in the Salting Collection. Delightful, isn't it? The very kernel of the Museum. Don't you think so?"

"I don't think I have ever seen the Salting Collection," said I.

"Never seen the Salting Collection!" she gasped. "My *dear* Mrs. Otway! How *dreadful!* And you a connoisseur, too. Why, it's a Paradise; the collectors' Heaven. Do you believe that people come back after death and frequent their old haunts? I hope it's true. If it is, I shall come to the Salting Collection. I shall divide my ghosthood between that and the Wallace. It will

really be very jolly. Unlimited leisure, with all eternity at one's disposal. And no silly restrictions; no closing hours or students' days. So convenient, too! You just pass in through the closed door or the wall and float up the stairs. Why, you could even get inside the glass cases! I'm afraid you'll think me an awful, old heathen; but I'm not really. And how are you? And how is Miss Finch? And why haven't you been to the club for such an age. And isn't it *dreadful* about poor Mr. Davenant?"

My heart seemed to stand still, and I think I must have turned pale, for Miss Tallboy-Smith said hastily: "I'm afraid I have startled you, Mrs. Otway; but surely—surely—do you mean to tell me that you haven't even heard about it?"

"I have heard nothing," I said, faintly. "Is he—tell me what has happened."

"I haven't had very full particulars," said she, "but it seems that a cart—or was it a wagon? No, I think it was a cart—and yet I'm not quite sure that it wasn't—but there! I'm not very clear as to the difference between a cart and a wagon. What is the difference?"

"It doesn't matter," I said impatiently. "Tell me what happened.

"No," she agreed, "I suppose it doesn't matter. Well, it seems that this wagon—but I think it was really a cart ——yes, I'm sure it was—at least, I think so—but at any rate it appears that the wagon had run away—that is, of course, it was the horse that had run away, but as he was tied to the cart, it comes to the same thing. And he got on to the pavement—it was in the Strand, somewhere near that shop where they sell those absurd—now what *do* they call those things? I am getting so silly about names, and it's quite a common name, too——"

"Never mind what they are called," I entreated. "Do tell me what happened to Mr. Davenant."

"Well, what happened was this. When the wagon got on the pavement all the people scattered to get out of the way—all except a messenger boy, and he fell down right in front of the cart. Then Mr. Davenant ran out and tried to drag the boy clear of the wagon; and, in fact, he did drag him out of the way, but he wasn't quick enough to save

himself, for the horse swerved and knocked him down violently on to some stone steps."

"Was he badly hurt?" I demanded, breathlessly.

"Hurt!" she repeated. "My dear Mrs. Otway, he was battered—absolutely battered. He fell with his side on the stone steps, and I understand that his ribs were simply smashed to matchwood."

"And where is he now? Is he in a hospital?"

"He was. They took him to Charing Cross Hospital, but he wouldn't stay there. He insisted on going home directly they put on the splints or whatever the things were. And, will you believe me, Mrs. Otway, when I tell you that he has been living alone in those wretched chambers ever since! He wouldn't even have a nurse. Isn't that just like a man?"

"But who looks after him?"

"Nobody. Of course there is the charwoman, or laundress as they call them—though why they should be called laundresses I can't imagine. They look more like dustwomen—and the man from the office downstairs looks in sometimes. It's a perfectly scandalous state of affairs. I wish, Mrs. Otway, you would go and see him and make him have a nurse."

"I will certainly go and see him," said I. "I will go now," and I held out my hand to bring the interview to an end.

"How sweet of you, dear Mrs. Otway!" she explained, keeping a firm hold of my hand, which I endeavoured unobtrusively to withdraw. "I felt sure you would go to the rescue. And you will insist on his having a nurse, won't you? He will listen to you, but you will have to be firm. Promise me you will, now."

"I will see that he is properly looked after," I replied.

"Yes, but he must have a nurse, you know—a properly trained and certificated nurse. You can get excellent nurses at that place—now, what is its name? Cavendish—Cavendish something. I am getting so silly about names. Let me see, I did have a card in my purse; perhaps it is there still——" Here she released my hand to open her wrist-bag, and I took the opportunity to retreat down the steps.

"Don't trouble, please," I urged. "I shall manage quite

well. Good-bye ! " and with this I hurried away, somewhat unceremoniously, across the wide road, and, as soon as I had turned the corner, broke into a run. A couple of minutes later I arrived at the station, breathless, just in time to see a Circle train move out. I could have wept with vexation. It was but a few minutes before the next one would be due, but those minutes dragged like hours. With swift strides I paced up and down the platform in an agony of impatience, turning over and over again Miss Tallboy-Smith's confused account of the accident and trying to construct by its aid some intelligible picture of Jasper's condition.

Even when I was in the train its progress seemed intolerably slow and the succession of stations interminable. It was an agony to sit still and passively await the leisurely arrival at my destination, and an unspeakable relief when, at last, I reached the Temple Station, to spring from the train, dash up the stairs and hurry along the embankment. My progress on foot might be slower, but I had the physical sensation of speed.

At the top of Middle Temple Lane I emerged into Fleet Street, and, crossing the road, entered Clifford's Inn Passage. I had never been there before, and, though I knew the number of Jasper's house, I thought it best to enquire as to its whereabouts. As I passed through the archway I saw a somewhat clerical-looking man standing at the door of the porter's lodge, and from him learned that No. 54 was in the inner court on the east side of the garden ; with which direction I hurried on again. Clearly there came back to me the impressions that seemed so dim at the time ; a sense of quiet and repose, of aloofness from the bustle of the city, an old-world, dignified shabbiness that was yet homely and pleasant withal. I crossed a little court, passed through a second archway, and came out into a second, larger court, where the gay foliage of plane trees found a foil in the dingy, red brick of the venerable houses. A glance showed me the narrow alley by the garden, and a dozen paces along its roughly-flagged pavement brought me to the entry of No. 54, on the side of which was painted " Mr. J. Davenant, Architect," and below, in smaller lettering, " Jonathan Weeble, Law Writer."

I stepped into the entry, and tapping on a door which, by

its painted description, appeared to appertain to Mr. Weeble's premises, was bidden to "come in." Accordingly, I entered and was confronted by a somewhat unkempt, young man who was apparently engaged in engrossing a large document which was secured to a sort of evergrown lectern by means of a band of tape.

"I have called," I said, "to enquire about Mr. Davenant. Is he in a very serious condition?"

"He wasn't when I saw him about an hour ago," was the reply.

"Do you think he would be well enough to see me?"

The young man, whom I assumed to be Mr. Weeble, inspected me critically, and then replied:

"I should say most emphatically that he would. But we needn't leave it at that. I can soon find out. Won't you sit down?"

He rose briskly and hurried out of the office, and it was only when I heard him ascending the uncovered stairs, two or three at a time, that I remembered that I had given no name.

Mr. Weeble's confident manner had lifted a load of anxiety from my mind, but my agitation was little abated. My fears were relieved, indeed, for evidently Jasper's condition was not such as to occasion alarm; but, as my anxiety subsided, other emotions made themselves felt. I was actually going to see him. Within a couple of minutes we should be together. The intolerable separation would be at an end. And the ecstasy of this thought—the almost painful joy of anticipation—brought home to me the intensity of my yearning to look on him again.

The sound of Mr. Weeble's footsteps descending the stairs set my heart throbbing, and as he bustled into the office I stood up, trembling with excitement.

"It's all right," said he. "Mr. Davenant will see you, if you'll go up. First floor, right hand side of the landing; I've left the door open, and you'll see his name above it."

I did not go up the stairs at Mr. Weeble's pace, but I went as rapidly as the trembling of my knees would let me. On the first floor I saw a forbidding, iron-bound door standing ajar, and above it the well-beloved name, painted in white letters. I drew back the heavy door, disclosing a lighter one, also ajar, which I pushed open as I closed the

massive "oak" after me. For a moment I stood on the threshold looking into the quaint, old-world room, with its panelled walls and the soft green light from the plane trees shimmering through the windows. He was reclining by the fire on a low, wooden settle, and held a book in his hand; and even in that instantaneous glance I could see how changed he was—how pale and thin and weary-looking. But as I stepped out from the shadow, the worn face lighted up; the book fell to the floor, and he flung his arms out towards me.

"Helen!"

"Jasper!"

In a moment I was on my knees by his side. His arms were around me and my cheek lay against his. And so for a while we rested with never a word spoken and no sound in the room but the ticking of the clock and the soft rustle of a swaying branch on the window panes. And so I could have rested for ever; for at last my heart was at peace.

"Jasper, dear," I said, at length, "how is it with you? Are you badly hurt?"

"Not a bit," he replied. "It is just a matter of a cracked rib and a few bruises; and I've nearly recovered from those."

"But why did you never send me a word? That wasn't friendly of you, Jasper."

"How could I, dearest?" he protested. "A bargain is a bargain. The month wasn't up."

"Jasper!" I exclaimed; "how could you be so silly? Of course you ought to have sent me a message, and I would have come to you instantly."

"I am sure you would, Helen," said he, "which was an additional reason for my keeping to our covenant. It would have seemed a shabby thing to do; for, badly as I wanted you, I was never really in any danger. By the way, how did you hear of my little mishap?"

I told him of my meeting with Miss Tallboy-Smith, and he chuckled softly. "She was an old goose to frighten you with those lurid stories, but I'm very grateful to her, all the same. I *have* wanted you, Helen."

He drew me closer to him and stroked my hair fondly; and again we were silent for a while. The clock ticked on

impassively, the plane tree rustled gently on the window, and I was filled with a quiet, restful happiness that I was unwilling to interrupt even by speaking.

Presently Jasper bent down to my ear and whispered: "Helen, darling, you haven't anything to tell me, have you?"

I knew what he meant, of course; and the strange thing is that, though the question came unexpectedly, and though I had not consciously given the subject a moment's thought, I found my mind completely and finally made up.

"Yes," I replied, "I have. Jasper, dear, I am your own. I can't live without you. The world must say what it will. I can do without the world, but I can't exist without you."

He drew me yet closer to him and kissed me reverently.

"Dear heart," he said softly, "sweet wife, I would try to thank you if words could tell you what your precious gift means to me. But life is before us, and mine shall be one, long thanksgiving. You have given me my heart's desire; if love and worship and faithful service can in any degree repay you, they shall be yours as long as our lives endure."

Thus in a few moments were the long weeks of misery and despair blotted out. We were reinstated, and, indeed, much more than reinstated; we were admitted and accepted lovers. And, just as my mind had, so to speak, made itself up without conscious thought on my part, so now that I had entered into this new covenant it seemed quite inevitable and satisfying. Its nonconformity with social conventions left me completely undisturbed.

Presently Jasper made me draw up a low, rush-bottomed chair that I might sit comfortably by his side while we talked. But, in fact, we talked little; for there is a sort of telepathy born of perfect sympathy that makes speech superfluous. We were both very happy and very deeply moved; and it seemed more companionable to sit, hand clasped in hand, and let our thoughts run on undisturbed by speech, knowing that the thoughts of each were but a reflection of the other's.

Anon came Mr. Weeble, stamping slowly up the stairs like an infirm coal-porter and making such a prolonged to-do about inserting the latch-key into the outer door that

we both laughed. A very discreet man was Mr. Weeble.

"I've just come to see if I can do anything," said he, when Jasper had introduced me. "I generally make his tea and straighten out his bandages. Shall I make the tea now or are you taking charge, Mrs. Otway?"

"I will make the tea," said I, "but while you are tidying up the bandages I will run out and get some fresh cakes."

"Yes," said Mr. Weeble, "that would be a good idea. Our stock is rather low and a trifle old and fruity. And talking of cakes, that reminds me that an old rooster called a day or two ago and left one. I put it in a spare deed-box and forgot all about it. I'll go and fetch it up."

"A rooster, you say, Weeble," said Jasper. "May we assume that you are speaking figuratively?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Weeble. "Elderly party with an automatic smile and the rummiest name I ever heard. Now what was her name? Something double-barrelled—Bigboy-Jones, was it?"

"Tallboy-Smith, I expect," said Jasper.

"That was it. I sent her a letter of thanks the same day in your handwriting and signed it with your name. Are you starting now, Mrs. Otway? You'll find a very good cake-shop in Fetter Lane near the top on the left-hand side."

I took a brief bag of Jasper's and his latchkey and sallied forth into Fetter Lane by the postern gate; and as I walked up the quaint, old street I found myself looking into the homely shops and inspecting the ancient timber houses with a queer sort of proprietary air, as if I belonged to the neighbourhood. I found the cake-shop—it was really an old-fashioned baker's shop, such as one might find in a country town—and as I made a selection of the wares, based on experience of Jasper's tastes, I found myself almost unconsciously considering the merits of the establishment as a source of supply for a family of two. If the change in my mental state was sudden, it was certainly complete; as I sauntered back down Fetter Lane with my bag of provisions, care-free and filled with a delightful sense of emancipation, loitering to look into shop windows or to peer up strange courts and alleys that I might not return prematurely; I could not but contrast

my condition with that in which I had set forth in the morning, hopeless, heart-weary, despondent.

When I arrived at Jasper's chambers, Mr. Weeble had already gone; but he had filled the kettle and set it to boil on the gas-stove in the kitchen, where I found it murmuring placidly and breathing out little clouds of steam. That kitchen was a delightful absurdity. About the magnitude of a good-sized china cupboard, it suggested, with its ranges of shelves and little chemical sink, a doctor's dispensary or a chemist's laboratory. Yet it was very orderly and quite convenient, and it had the advantage that, while I was engaged in the preparations for the meal, my heart singing in unison with the kettle's song, I could look out of a tiny window on the moss-grown garden, or through the open door see Jasper watching me with a smile of ecstasy, and receive his instructions as to where the various articles were to be found. It was all very pleasant and intimate, and every little, homely detail helped to bring home to me the reality of my happiness.

During the very leisurely tea we gradually approached the subject of our future arrangements, which had evidently been very carefully thought out by Jasper.

"I'm not quite such a graven image as I look," said he. "I don't believe it's necessary for me to keep so immovable. But that is the doctor's business. I just do as I'm told. However, my bandages are coming off in a few days, and I understand that I shall be practically well in a fortnight. Until I am well, we had better let things remain as they are; and I think it would be better for you not to come and see me again in the interval."

"Do you mean that I am to leave you, a helpless invalid, all alone and no one to look after you?"

"Yes," he replied. "Of course, I shall want you dreadfully, but as to my being alone and helpless, that is merely a sentimental view of the case. You can see for yourself that I am quite comfortable and well cared-for. Weeble never forgets me for an instant. And I think it most necessary that, until we are definitely married, we should have the most scrupulous regard for the conventions. We can't get the sanction either of the Law or the Church to our marriage; therefore, it is the more necessary for us to treat it ourselves with the utmost respect and seriousness.

We are not going to enter into a casual and irresponsible relationship. We are going to contract a marriage; and I propose that we do so publicly and with proper formalities suited to the dignity and importance of the transaction."

"But," I asked, "what formalities are possible?"

"My proposal," he replied, "is this: we shall appoint a day and a time to meet here, and have two witnesses in attendance. Weeble could be one and the Inn porter, Mr. Duskin, the other. In the presence of those witnesses we shall formally agree to take one another as husband and wife. Each of us shall make a written declaration to the same effect, reciting the circumstances which render the unusual procedure necessary, and, in your case, denouncing and repudiating your marriage with Otway. These declarations we shall respectively read to the witnesses—who will also read them—and we shall each sign our declaration in the presence of the witnesses. I am not quite clear whether it would be legal for them to counter-sign as witnesses. If not, we shall add a note stating that the signatures were made in their presence. Then we shall exchange declarations and we shall notify Mr. Otway and whosoever else may be concerned, or whom we wish to inform, of what has taken place. Does that meet with your approval, Helen?"

"Entirely," I replied, "excepting the sentence of banishment. Don't you think I might just look in on you now and again to see if you want anything?"

"It is only a fortnight, dearest," said he, "and we can write as often as we please. Until we are married we can't be too careful to avoid provoking criticism."

I made no further objections, for I felt that he was right; and, moreover, I could not but perceive that this rather excessive primness, like the formalities which he had proposed, was simply an unconscious expression of chivalrous respect, a protest in advance against any unfavourable criticisms of me. And in accordance with what I felt he would consider prudent, I took leave of him comparatively early, so as to avoid a second meeting with Mr. Weeble, who, I learned, came in every night between eight and nine to help him to get to bed.

"I shall write to you every day," I said, as I drew on my gloves, "and you must promise that, if there is anything

that I can do for you, you will let me know and never mind about Mrs. Grundy. Is that agreed?"

He gave the required promise, and when I had handed him back his latch-key, I stooped and kissed him; and as I looked back at him before closing the iron-bound door, I could not but contrast this parting with the miserable farewell of less than a month ago.

Chapter XXI — *A Dreadful Inheritance*

It has always been, and still is, somewhat of a puzzle to me to account for the sudden and complete change in my point of view in regard to my union with Jasper. Lilith would doubtless have explained it as a case of subconscious reflection, and probably she would have been right. My impression is that Peggy's matter-of-fact attitude towards marriage unsanctioned by law had a more profound effect than I was aware of; that her words—which I had certainly recalled from time to time—had remained in my mind subconsciously exercising a continuous influence. Or it may be that I had found a life of separation impossible, and had realised it consciously only when I found myself once more in Jasper's presence.

But, however it may have happened, the fact remains that I accepted the new order without a qualm. The conditions that I had scouted as unthinkable now seemed entirely reasonable and acceptable. The only twinge of misgiving that I ever had, was produced by the draft of the declaration that Jasper sent for my approval and criticism. For that well-meant document, with its half-defiant, half-protesting phrases, did certainly bring home to me with uncomfortable vividness the fact that this marriage was not like any other marriage, and that I was not as other married women were. But I sent it back approved and tried to forget it, and quietly went on with my preparations for the new life.

Outwardly, however, I made no change in my habits, and even tried to suppress the gaiety and buoyancy of spirit that I felt, lest the sudden change from my recent depressed condition should attract notice. I still lived my life apart,

only too happy in my solitude, and spent most of my time in the workshop conning over Jasper's letters, or meditating on the happy days that were drawing so near. For a time the candlestick was sadly neglected, until I had the sudden inspiration of finishing it as a wedding-gift to Jasper. And then all the joy of work revived and blossomed into unsuspected skill. Tracer and punch seemed to travel along their appointed paths unguided ; the spindle-shanked chasing hammer became a familiar demon and appeared to develop a volition of its own, and the little enamel furnace roared with glee.

So the days sped by, each bringing me nearer to the golden gate of my enchanted garden, and each so filled with quiet happiness that I could not wish it shorter. About the end of the first week came a letter from Jasper saying that the bandages had been discarded, and that he had taken a walk and had appeared quite well and strong. Then, a day or two later, came another fixing the date and time of our meeting. It was to be on the following Thursday—only five days ahead—at six o'clock in the evening. The formalities were to be carried out immediately on my arrival ; we should then dine quietly at the club, spend the evening at a concert or the theatre, and take the boat train either to Flushing or Calais, whichever I preferred.

The arrival of this letter, though I had been daily expecting it, came as quite a shock, and turned my tranquil happiness into feverish excitement which I had some difficulty in concealing. The fixing of an actual date and the selection of a definite region in which to spend the honeymoon (I chose the north of France) gave a reality to this Great Adventure and brought it out of the undefined future into the present. For now I had to carry out the final preparations. Lightly as I might travel, I must take some luggage, and this would entail a conveyance ; and this in its turn involved something in the nature of a public departure, so that, if I had desired to disappear secretly—which I did not—the thing would have been impossible. Yet I was, naturally, loath to say much about my immediate intentions, preparing to make my explanations by letter after the event ; and this the prevailing good manners of the little community rendered quite easy. I notified Miss

Polton and my more intimate friends that I was going away on a visit of uncertain duration, and, whatever curiosity they may have felt, no further particulars were asked for. I went about my immediate preparations—the packing of those few things that I must needs take away with me—unnoticed, or at least uncommented on, and then began unobtrusively to arrange the rest of my possessions for the final removal.

On Wednesday—the day before that of my departure—a letter arrived from Mr. Otway. It reached me just after lunch, and I glanced at it before rising from the table. The subject was the same as that of previous ones, but it was evident that something in the nature of a crisis was approaching. The extreme agitation of the writer was shown not only in the matter and the impassioned, rather incoherent manner, but even in the handwriting; which was ill-formed and slovenly, in great contrast to Mr. Otway's usual business-like neatness.

"My dear Helen," it began, "I have not troubled you for quite a long time with my miserable affairs—which are to some extent your affairs too. But they are going from bad to worse, and now I feel that I am coming to the limits of endurance. I cannot bear this much longer. My health is shattered, my peace of mind is wrecked, and my brain threatens to give way. Death would be a boon, a relief, and I feel that it is not far off. I cannot go on like this. Those wretches leave me no peace. Hardly a week passes but I get some new menace; and now—but I can't tell you in a letter. It is too horrible. Come to me, Helen, for the love of God! I am in torment. Have pity on me, even though you have never forgiven me. I cannot come to you, for I am now unable to leave my bed. I am a wreck, a ruin. Come to me just this once, and if you cannot help me, at least give the the comfort of your sympathy. You will not be troubled by me much longer.

"Your distracted husband,

"Lewis Otway."

The emotions that this letter aroused were mixed and rather conflicting. Never had I felt a deeper loathing of Mr. Otway than now that I was being forced to accept what

I knew in my heart to be but a counterfeit of marriage. I had been robbed of my birthright, and he had robbed me. Never was I less in a mood to offer him sympathy in the troubles that he had created for himself and me by his callous selfishness. And yet I decided to go to him. Whether the decision was due to some sort of compunction for the blow that I was going to strike on the morrow; or whether to curiosity, or to a desire to verify his foreboding of approaching death, I cannot say. Certainly the last consideration entered into the mixture of motives, and probably was the determining factor. At any rate, I decided to go. Dimly, I perceived that I ought to have consulted Jasper, though I was unaware of the possible legal significance that my visit might acquire. I formed my decision at once, and early in the afternoon set forth westward with the letter in my pocket.

I did not go direct to Mr. Otway's chambers. Promptly as I had made up my mind, I felt the necessity of thinking over the circumstances and forecasting the possibilities. On my way westward I made a halt at a tea-shop, and while I awaited the leisurely service I drew out the letter and read it through again. Clearly the blackmailers were becoming more urgent and possibly more definite. It seemed as though they had adopted some new tactics. But it was not the blackmailers who interested me. I found my eye travelling again and again to those two sentences that hinted at the possibility of Mr. Otway's death.

"I feel that it is not far off." And again, "You will not be troubled by me much longer." Had he any solid grounds for these forebodings? Or were they merely the offspring of abiding terror, or perchance simply rhetorical flourishes designed to arouse my sympathy? These were questions of no small moment to me, for Mr. Otway's death would set me free and in an instant unravel the tangled skein of my relations with Jasper.

As I drank my tea with reflective deliberation I turned these questions over in my mind, not disguising from myself the cool, impassive, egoism of my attitude. My feeling in respect of Mr. Otway was devoid of any trace of sentimentalism. I viewed him as the insurance director views interested in his decease, not in his survival. I loathed him,

the generalised "proposer,"—but inversely; for I was but I did not hate him. I did not wish him ill. If I could have saved him from suffering I would have done so, even at the cost of some considerable effort. But if he had stood in the peril of instant death, and I could have averted that peril by moving a finger, I would not have moved a finger.

That was my position. As I rose from the table and returned the letter to my pocket, what was in my mind was that Mr. Otway seemed to think that he was going to die, and I hoped that he was right.

When I reached Lyon's Inn Chambers the sun was already low and the gloom of the evening was beginning to settle on the closed-in block of buildings. I ascended the ill-lit stone stairs to the second floor, where the light on the landing was so dim that I had difficulty in deciphering Mr. Otway's name above the door of his "set"; and as I did so I noted with surprise that the inscription was faded and obscure, and had the appearance of having been in existence for many years, whereas Mr. Otway had, as I believed, but recently entered on his tenancy.

The door was opened by Mrs. Gregg, who stood in the gloom of the entry confronting me without a word.

"Good evening, Mrs. Gregg," I said. "Mr. Otway has asked me to call on him——"

"Ye need make no excuses," she interrupted, "for coming to see your lawful husband."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gregg," I replied. "Is Mr. Otway disengaged?"

"No," she answered; "he is expecting a visitor."

"How very unfortunate," said I. "He wanted particularly to see me, I know."

"Perhaps you could look in some time to-morrow?" she suggested.

"No, I am afraid I can't. If Mr. Otway is unable to see me this evening I must write to him. I shall not have another opportunity to call for some considerable time."

She reflected for a few moments, and I gathered that she was unwilling to take the responsibility of cancelling the interview.

"Could you call again a little later?" she asked, at length. "He will have finished with his visitor by about

half-past seven, or say a quarter to eight. Could you look in again at eight ? "

I had not wanted to be out as late as this would make me, but if I was to see Mr. Otway at all, it would have to be to-night. Eventually I accepted the arrangement, somewhat, I think, to Mrs. Gregg's relief.

As I descended the stairs I heard the footsteps of two persons—apparently a man and a woman—ascending. On the first-floor landing I met the man, who turned out to be the lamplighter. Just as I had passed him he lit the landing lamp, and its light, which came from behind me, fell full on the woman who was coming up. It was only a momentary glimpse that I caught as she passed me on the stairs, but I recognised her instantly. She was Mrs. Campbell, the wife of the Wardour Street dealer.

It was an odd meeting, and it gave me the material for a good deal of thought and speculation. Mr. Otway's chambers were the only ones on the second floor ; from which it seemed probable that Mrs. Campbell was the visitor whom he was expecting. This was a rather queer coincidence ; but it was not the only one. That sudden recognition of the face, thrown into strong relief against the dark background by the bright lamplight, had set my memory working. I remembered how, when I had seen Mrs. Campbell in the shop and had heard her speak, her face had seemed to suggest something familiar, and her accent and the intonation of her voice had called up some accent and tone that I had heard before. It had been but a vague impression at the time ; but now, in the new setting and aided by association, the impression became quite definite. The face that hers had suggested was Mr. Otway's face ; but the really odd thing was that her voice and accent suggested not Mr. Otway's but Mrs. Gregg's. And this very queer resemblance was made yet more queer by a singular discrepancy. Mrs. Gregg spoke with a distinct Scottish accent. It was a peculiar one, different from that of any other Scots person whom I had ever heard speak ; but it was quite pronounced. Mrs. Campbell, on the other hand, had no trace whatever of a Scottish accent ; of that I was quite sure. But I was equally sure of the resemblance between the two, subtle and elusive as it was.

Here, then, was a problem the consideration of which

gave me quite a considerable amount of occupation, and helped me to while away the hour and a half that I had to wait. The almost fantastic oddity of the coincidence might have made me reject my impressions as mere delusions; but, on the one hand, there was Mrs. Campbell evidently making for Mr. Otway's chambers, and, on the other, was the fact that it was Mr. Otway who had introduced me to the shop in Wardour Street. However, I could get no farther than speculation; and, as speculation tends rapidly to exhaust its limited material, I presently dismissed the problem and returned to the consideration of Mr. Otway's health and its bearing on my own future.

The hour and a half I spent in a leisurely survey of Lincoln's Inn and the Temple. My perambulations with Jasper had brought home to me that London is an entertainment in itself; that no observant person need be dull who has access to its historic streets and picturesque backwaters. And now it was very pleasant to revisit the scenes of former rambles—to be repeated often in the future—and meanwhile to reflect on the happenings of the present and let my thoughts stray to the new life that was about to open; and the time slipped away so agreeably that when the three-quarter chime was struck in a polite undertone by the genteel clock in the Inner Temple, it came to me as quite a surprise.

On the stroke of eight I rang the bell of Mr. Otway's chambers, and was forthwith admitted by the taciturn Mrs. Gregg. In silence she conducted me along a narrow corridor that led from the entrance lobby, across a largish room furnished partly as a library, partly as a dining-room, and by a communicating door into the bedroom, when—still without uttering a word—she departed, shutting the door after her.

Mr. Otway half rose in bed as I entered, and made a vague gesture of welcome, finally extending his hand, which I shook formally.

"This is really good of you, Helen," said he, "to come and see me, and to come so promptly. I am sorry Mrs. Gregg sent you away. There was no need. My other visitor could have been put off."

"It is of no consequence," said I. "My time was my own to-night. What is the new trouble—for I infer from

your letter that there is some new development. Is there any definite threat ? "

Again he half rose in bed, and looking at me with anxious intensity said, in a low, suppressed tone : " Helen, just see that the door is properly shut."

I did so, and he then begged me to draw the chair, which had been placed for me, closer to him. This I also did, and, having seated myself, looked at him expectantly.

Still half raised in bed, he bent his head as near to me as he could, and in a whisper said, " Helen, I want to ask you a question. What became of your father's stick ? "

The question, whispered with such strange secrecy, and accompanied by a singular look compounded of eagerness, fear and suspicion, somewhat startled me ; for I remembered, even as he spoke, that the same question had been asked by Dr. Thorndyke.

" I haven't the least idea," I eplied. " Haven't you got it ? "

" No. I never had it. I have never seen it since the —ah—the occasion when—ah—you remember——"

" Of course I remember. I have good reason to."

" Ah—no doubt. Yes. But are you quite sure—thought you might have taken it away with you."

" But, Mr. Otway, you let me out of the house yourself. You saw me go, and you must have seen that I was not taking it. And you know that I never came to the house again."

He sank back on his pillow with a gesture of despair.

" Yes," he murmured, " that seems to be so. It must be so, I suppose."

" It is so," I said. " There is no question about it. When I went away that morning the stick was in your house. But why are you asking me about it ? Is it of any importance ? "

He turned towards a table that stood by the opposite side of the bed, and taking up a bunch of keys, unlocked a deed-box that was on the table, and took from it a sheet of paper.

" Read that," said he, handing me the paper.

The document was a type-written letter of a similar

character to the previous ones, and of about the same length. It ran thus:

"Mr. Lewis Otway,

"Some funny questions are being asked. What about Mr. Vardon's stick—the loaded stick with the silver knob to hide the lead loading? Where is it? Somebody says they know where it is and who's got it. And they say there is a bruise on the silver top, and they say something about a smear of blood and a grey hair sticking to it. Do you know anything about it? If you don't, you'd better find out. Because I think you'll hear from that somebody before you are many weeks older or else from the police.

"A WELL-WISHER."

As I came to the end of this document I raised my eyes and met Mr. Otway's fixed on me with a very singular expression. But he quickly averted his gaze, possibly embarrassed by the steady intensity of my own. For this letter, together with Mr. Otway's agitated questionings, had revived the old doubts in my mind. Could there be any truth in this veiled accusation? Was it possible that I had really made a hideous mistake in shielding this man? As these doubts flashed through my mind, some reflection of them may have appeared in my expression as I steadily looked Mr. Otway in the face. At any-rate, he looked away as I have said; and when I handed him back the letter, he took it in a hand that shook like a dipsomaniac's, and replaced it in the deed-box without a word.

For a space we were both silent, and I sat looking at him and his surroundings with profound distaste. The close, stuffy air of the room aroused a faint disgust; the objects on the bedside table—the cigarette box—the large spirit decanter and siphon and a bottle of veronal tablets—conveyed a disagreeable impression of drinking and drug-taking. And the man himself, with his pasty face, his baggy eyelids, creased with multitudinous wrinkles, his drooping, tremulous underlip, was distinctly repellant. The whole atmosphere of the place and its occupant was unwholesome, sordid and abnormal.

Yet, unwholesome and unhealthy as he looked, there was no striking change in Mr. Otway's appearance; nothing

new to justify, so far as I could judge, his alarming account of himself. His aspect supported the suggestions of the spirit-bottle, the cigarettes and the veronal; he looked distracted, terrified, nerve-shaken; but he did not, to my eye, look like a dying man. I inspected him critically during that interval of silence, and arrived, almost regretfully, I fear, at the conclusion that his forebodings were merely the result of a chronic state of fear—if they were real and not deliberately assumed to excite my sympathy.

I think he must have had a feeling that I was regarding him with disfavour, for presently he turned towards me with a deprecating air and sighed wearily.

"I am afraid, Helen," said he, "that you are very tired of me and my troubles. But you must try to be patient. It may not be for long."

"Why do you say that?" I asked. "Is your health really bad, apart from the worry of these letters?"

"My health gets worse from week to week," he replied. "Not that I am suffering from any definite disease. But the constant alarm and anxiety, the shocks which keep coming one on top of another, are breaking me up. I get no interval of peace in which to recover. I am in a constant state of worry and depression by day, which leads to that," and he pointed to the spirit-decanter, "and it is even worse at night unless I secure a little rest by those things," pointing to the veronal bottle; "and cigarettes, whisky and veronal don't make for a long life or robust health."

"Still," I said, "you mustn't exaggerate or alarm yourself unnecessarily. You are not in very good condition, I can see; but there is no reason to suppose that you are in a dangerous state. Couldn't you cut off these drugs and the whisky and go away for a change?"

"He shook his head. "I couldn't go away," he said. "They would find me out and follow me. And as to cutting off the stimulants and the sedatives, that is impossible. Bad as they are, they are the last bulwark against something worse."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He did not answer immediately, but seemed to be considering my question and debating whether he should make any further confidences. At length he turned to me

somewhat abruptly with an expression which I had never seen on his face before: a wild expression strangely unlike his usual, heavy stolidity, suggesting excitement and terror, with yet a curious dash of exultation.

"Helen," he said with a singular intensity of voice and manner, "there are men who are born into this world under sentence of death. The black cap hangs over their cradles. Throughout their lives they have continually to watch—to evade the execution of the sentence if they can. But the time comes when they can escape no longer. They are tired of evasion, of the struggle to escape; and then they give themselves up; and that is the end.

"I am one of those men, Helen. My mother put an end to her own life. My only brother put an end to his life. My mother's father made away with himself. It is in the blood. My mother was found hanging from a tree in an orchard. My brother disappeared and was found a month later hanging from a peg in a disused wardrobe. My grandfather hanged himself from a beam in the loft. Perhaps there were others. At any rate, there it is. The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."

He paused, and I sat looking with uneasy surprise at the unwonted animation in his face: the faint flush, the awakening light in his eyes, the suppressed eagerness of his manner. There was something weirdly unpleasant about this new phase.

"You mustn't allow these fancies to disturb you," I said feebly.

"They are not fancies," he retorted. "They are weighty realities. I thought for a long time that the inheritance had passed me by. But when the first of those letters came, I knew that the legacy had fallen in. And every new menace sets the impulse working. Whenever one of those letters come I feel it; I find myself thinking of my mother and my brother, and wondering if they felt the same. Then I take a stiff whisky, and the feeling goes off. But I don't care, nowadays, to go to bed until I have taken a dose of veronal."

"Why not?" I asked.

He drew himself to the edge of the bed, and, thrusting his head out, peered into a shadowy corner of the room with a

sort of half-terrified, half-exultant leer that seemed to stir the very marrow of my bones.

"What is it, Mr. Otway?" I asked, staring into the corner but seeing nothing.

"Do you see it, Helen?" he said, rolling his eyes at me and then looking back into the corner, which was in a line with the bed-head; "that great hook, or bent peg. I can't imagine what it was put there for; but there it is, like a great metal finger, beckoning—beckoning."

I looked at the object that he indicated—a massive curved peg or hook fixed to the wall about seven feet from the floor—and shivered slightly. Its appearance was horribly suggestive.

"When I used to lie awake," Mr. Otway continued, still gazing into the corner, "after the first letters came, I could lie on my left side, because then it was behind me and I seemed to feel it drawing me. I had to turn so that I could see it; and whenever I looked at it, it seemed to beckon. And so it does now."

"I should have it unscrewed and taken away," said I.

"Yes," he replied, reflectively, "perhaps it might be—and yet I don't know. Perhaps I might be more restless if it were not there. It is, in a way, a satisfaction to know that—ah—that I hold a trump card that I can play if—ah—if all the other cards are against me."

As he spoke, he looked at me with that same curious half-frightened, half-exultant expression that made me wonder whether perhaps his inheritance included a dash of insanity. Then he rolled back to the middle of the bed and lay staring at the ceiling; and by degrees the excitement faded out of his face and he recovered his usual stolid gravity of expression.

Presently he glanced at the little carriage clock that stood on the table, and, turning to me, said: "I usually take my veronal about this time. Would you mind giving me a glass of water and the tablets?"

I rose from my chair, and as I did so my little wrist-bag, which had been reposing, forgotten, on my lap, slipped to the floor. I picked it up and hung it on the knob of the chair-back, and then fetched the water-bottle and tumbler from the wash-stand. Having filled the tumbler and handed it to Mr. Otway, I picked up the veronal bottle,

and seeing that it was a new one, broke the seal, withdrew the cork and pulled out the cotton-wool packing.

"Three tablets, please," said Mr. Otway.

I handed him the bottle, and as he took it and shook out the three tablets he smiled grimly.

"You are the most cautious woman I have ever met," he remarked. "But you are quite right to make me responsible for my own poison."

He took the tablets one at a time, crunching each between his teeth very thoroughly before washing it down with water. Then he mixed what looked to me a very stiff allowance of whisky, with a very little soda water, and swallowed it at a draught.

"I find that the stimulant makes the veronal act more rapidly," he explained. "I shall be asleep in about half-an-hour. Do you mind staying with me until I drop off?"

I agreed to this, although it was getting late; but, conscious that it was probably the last service I should ever render him, I did not feel that I could refuse. So I sat down again in the chair and watched him, noting that already—probably as a result of the stimulant—he was quieter in manner and more peaceful in appearance. Even when he reverted to the subject that had occasioned my visit, his manner was quite calm.

"There is something very mysterious about that stick," he remarked. "Recalling the circumstances, I remember putting it down in the corner by the writing-table. I never saw it again, and never gave its whereabouts a thought. I assumed that you had taken it, but I now realise that I was mistaken. Apparently it has got into undesirable hands and we haven't heard the last of it, I fear."

"You had better not think any more about it, Mr. Otway," I said. "There is nothing to be done, and the less you worry the less harm these people will be able to do you."

"Yes," he agreed; "that is good advice, and I can follow it now. But if I should wake up in the small hours of the morning it will be very different. That is the worst time, Helen. Then this persecution seems beyond bearing. The horror of it makes me sweat with fear. I seem to hear the police on the stairs. I find myself listening for the sound of the bell. It is horrible—horrible! And then I

think of that wardrobe, unnoticed all those weeks, and the figure inside in the dark. And then——"

He made a motion of his eyes towards the shadowy corner, and involuntarily I glanced at the great peg high up on the wall.

He did not speak again for some time, and I sat silently watching him and thinking—thinking of his dreadful heritage and all that it might mean. Was it a reality, this legacy of death that he saw coming to him? Was it true that even now the black cap hung over his bed? Supposing it were? Supposing that this very night, in the chilly middle watch, he should wake with all his terrors clutching at his heart! Should creep out of his bed and—— Here my glance stole into the shadowy corner, and, as I looked, my mind seemed to picture a dim shape filling the wall space below the big, massive peg. There were no details and hardly any form; it was just a shape, vague and rather horrible. I shivered slightly, but I did not try to blot out the mental picture. It was a gruesome thing, that dim, elongated shape, but it did not disturb me much; for it set going other associated trains of thought. There was the ceremony to-morrow evening, the witnesses with their doubtful rights of attestation, protesting that all was in order—and protesting in vain. There were two Ishmaelites going forth hand-in-hand into the wilderness, ready to meet scorn with defiance—but still Ishmaelites. And at the thought, the shape upon the wall space below the peg seemed to grow less dim, to loom out more distinctly. That shape was Mr. Otway—dead. The late Mr. Otway. No longer a legal impediment, but just a fiction that had ceased to exist.

From the dark corner I turned my eyes on to the living man as he lay motionless, breathing softly with an occasional faint snore, and now and again puffing out his cheeks. He was not asleep, for I could see his eyes open and close at intervals; but he was evidently growing somnolent. I watched him with deep interest, almost with fascination, as one might look on a condemned man making his last journey in the hangman's cart. This was a condemned man, too: a potential suicide. At any moment he might set forth on his last journey; and his arrival at his destination would set the Ishmaelites free. He was

ready to go; but he awaited the determining influence that would start him on his journey. What form would that final cause take? Would it be some sudden shock of alarm? Or the cumulative effect of prolonged, abiding fear?

I leaned forward and spoke softly to him.

"Do you know, Mr. Otway, what caused your brother——"

He opened his eyes and looked at me, dully. "What did you say, Helen?" he asked.

"I was wondering if you knew—if there was anything in particular that caused your brother to take his life."

He cogitated sleepily for a while before replying. At length he answered, in a drowsy voice: "I am not very clear about it. He had had a good deal of worry of one kind and another, financial and domestic. I don't know that anything unusual had occurred; but he had been in a nervous, depressed state for some time."

Having made this reply, Mr. Otway closed his eyes and took a deep breath; and I reflected on the significance of his answer. There had apparently been no specific cause of his brother's suicide, but just the accumulating effects of nervousness and depression, which exploded when they reached a certain degree of intensity. His condition, in fact, seemed to have been almost identical with Mr. Otway's present condition.

Once more my eyes wandered away to the shadowy corner; and again the wall space below the great hook-like peg became occupied by that elongated shape. Now I seemed to visualise it more completely. It was no longer a mereshape. It had parts—recognisble members. There were the limp-dangling arms, the downward-pointing toes, the shadowy head lolling sideways. It was very horrible, yet I found myself viewing it without horror, but rather with a certain detached interest. I was getting used to it, and was disposed to consider it in terms of its significance.

It was not a person. It was a thing which had replaced a person who had ceased to exist. That person had had a wife. But the wife had ceased to exist, too. In her place was a widow—a free, unattached woman in whom were vested all the rights and liberties of spinsterhood, including the power to contract a valid and regular marriage. The

shape was an ugly and forbidding thing; but it held precious and desirable gifts.

From the shape projected by my own imagination my eyes turned to the actual man—the man who was convertible into such a shape. He was fast asleep now; lying on his back, breathing a little stertorously and blowing out his cheeks at each breath. He was an unpleasant spectacle, and the sound of his breathing was disagreeable. He ought not to be lying on his back; for sleepers who lie on their backs are apt to dream, and dreams are not good for men with a tendency to suicide. And sleepers who breathe stertorously are apt to dream ugly dreams.

This consideration set my thoughts working afresh. Supposing this man should have a dream presenting his waking terrors with all the added intensity and vividness of a nightmare; the heavy footfalls of the police upon the stairs, the hands groping in the darkness of the landing for the bell-pull! Or if his dream should show him that wardrobe with its dreadful occupant! What would happen? And even as I put the question to myself my imagination supplied with startling vividness the answering picture. I saw the affrighted sleeper suddenly awaken in uncontrollable panic, scramble from his bed and shuffle hurriedly towards the corner under the peg.

The mental construction of the scene was singularly complete and orderly. I even found myself filling in the details of the means. There, indeed, was the peg. But a man cannot hang himself without some means of suspension. And these must be immediately available or the impulse might die away before they were found. I glanced around the room to see what means were to hand; and at once my eye lighted on an old-fashioned bell-rope that hung beside the head of the bed. Its perfect suitability was evident at a glance—provided that it could be detached without ringing the bell. But the necessity for cutting it rather than pulling it down would be obvious, even to a suicide.

The means, then, were all ready to hand. And there was the man, charged with this self-destructive tendency, sleeping in the very posture calculated to start it into action.

I sat still, watching him with absorbing interest, and as these thoughts shaped themselves with more and more distinctness, an impulse of which I was barely conscious

formed itself and steadily grew in intensity. At length I leaned forward and spoke in a low voice.

"Mr. Otway, you should not lie in that position."

There was no answer, and he made no sign. The heavy breathing went on with uninterrupted regularity, the eyes remained closed. Again I spoke, this time more loudly, clearly and distinctly.

"Mr. Otway, can you hear me? If you lie as you are lying, you will probably dream. You may have bad, dangerous dreams. You may dream of your mother and your brother. You may dream that the peg on the wall is beckoning to you. And then you may wake in a panic and think that the peg is still beckoning. And then——"

I stopped suddenly. What was this that I was doing? Was it a warning to avert disaster? So the words were framed. But I knew it was nothing of the kind. It was suggestion, pure and almost undisguised. The dreadful truth struck me like a blow and seemed to turn me into stone. I sat rigid as a statue, still leaning forward with my lips parted as if to complete that awful sentence, every moment more appalled by this frightful thing that I had done. There came to me in a flash a vision of my own automatism after the séance; I heard Lilith telling me how the sleep of the drugged resembles the hypnotic trance; and again it came to me how I had been sitting looking at that terrible peg on the wall and—without conscious intention—creating by my will the awful shape beneath it.

How long I should have sat, bent forward as if frozen into rigid immobility by the horror of this hideous thing, it is impossible to say. The realization of what I had done, that had fallen on me like a thunderbolt, had petrified me in a posture of arrested action. It seemed to have deprived me of the power of movement.

The place was intensely silent. The monotonous breathing of the sleeping man—the snoring intake alternating with the soft, blowing expiration—made no impression on the profound quiet, and the rapid ticking of the little carriage clock on the table seemed only to make it more intense.

Suddenly something stirred in the outer room. I sprang to my feet with a gasp that had almost been a shriek. Probably it was only Mrs. Gregg, but in my overwrought

state the sound was vaguely alarming. I stood for a few moments, my heart thumping and my breath coming short and fast; then I stole on tip-toe across the room and softly opening the door, peered into the outer room. It was in darkness except that a bright beam of moonlight poured in at the window; but this gave enough light to show that there was nobody in the room.

Still fearful of I knew not what, I stepped softly through the doorway and looked about me suspiciously. The moonlight struck on a large cupboard or wardrobe, which instantly suggested the lurking-place of some eavesdropper and at the same time aroused horrible associations connected with Mr. Otway's brother; so that, in spite of my alarm, I was impelled to pluck at the handle to satisfy myself that no figure was hidden within. But the cupboard was locked, or, at any rate, would not open.

Then I looked under the table and peered into the darker corners of the room, growing—naturally—more and more nervous every moment, and pausing from time to time to listen, or to look back through the doorway into the bedroom, where I could see Mr. Otway lying motionless like a sepulchral effigy.

Suddenly something stirred softly quite near to me—the sound seemed to come from the cupboard. I could have screamed with terror. The last vestige of my self-possession was gone, and in sheer panic I fled across the room and down the corridor to the entrance lobby. This place was in utter darkness, and as I frantically groped for the latch, I felt my skin creep and break out into a chilly sweat. At last I found the latch, dragged the door open and darted out; and as the clang of the closing door filled the building with hollow echoes, I ran swiftly down the stairs.

Once out in the inhabited streets, my alarm subsided somewhat; but still the image of that motionless figure in the bedroom, the sinister-looking peg on the wall and the recollection of those dreadful words that I had spoken into the sleeper's ears pursued me with an abiding horror. I walked quickly out into the Strand, and I was in the act of hailing a cab when I remembered that I had left my wrist-bag hanging on the chair-back by Mr. Otway's bedside. My purse was in that bag. But if it had contained my

entire worldly possessions I could not have summoned up courage enough to go back for it.

The cab drew up by the kerb. I hesitated a moment, but reflecting that it was yet hardly ten o'clock, and that someone would be waiting up from whom I could borrow the fare, I gave the cabman the address, with the necessary explanations, entered the cab and shut the door. But as the crazy vehicle—it was an ancient four-wheeler—rattled over the uneven roadways of the side streets, the scene in that warm and stuffy bedroom was re-enacted again and again. And yet again I looked on that ill-omened cupboard in the ghostly moonlight; speculated on the mysterious sounds in the living-room; wondered uncomfortably if there had been a watcher or a listener, and if so, whether that eavesdropper knew the meaning of silent willing and suggestion.

Chapter XXII — *The Catastrophe*

VIEWED by the cheerful light of the morning sun as it streamed in through my bedroom window, the phantoms of the previous night dwindled to mere scare-crows. On the panic-stricken state in which I had fled from Mr. Otway's chambers I was now disposed to look back with faint amusement. Even the words which I had spoken into Mr. Otway's ears as he slept had no longer any terrifying significance, though I had to admit that they were not susceptible of any satisfactory interpretation. They had been spoken under the influence of an impulse which I could not account for, and did not care to examine too closely, but which I vaguely connected with my excursions into psychical research—a subject which I decided to avoid as far as possible in the future.

As to Mr. Otway, if his account of his family was correct, it seemed quite probable that, sooner or later, he would make away with himself, though, seeing that he was now well past middle life, the propensity could hardly be as strong as he had represented it. On the other hand, he was now being subjected to a very excessive nervous strain, and was undoubtedly letting his mind run on the subject

of suicide. If the blackmailers continued to keep up an increasing pressure, as they seemed inclined to do, the breaking-point might be reached quite soon. And I could not disguise from myself that the catastrophe, if and when it occurred, would not present itself to me as a personal misfortune.

With this I dismissed Mr. Otway and his affairs, and let my thoughts roam into more attractive regions. For this was the day of days. In a matter of a few hours my separation from Jasper would be at an end. We should be united, never again to part.

As I rose and dressed, this was the burden of my thoughts. The weeks of separation and loneliness were gone, and the hours that lay between the present and that final meeting were running out apace like the grains of sand in an hour-glass that is nearly spent. I hurried over breakfast that I might the sooner escape to be alone with my happiness; and most of the morning I spent in the workshop, arranging my apparatus so that it might easily be packed, in case I should not come back to superintend the removal myself. The candlestick, which was finished and successful beyond my expectations, I took upstairs to place in my trunk that I might give it to Jasper this very day. And then I paid a visit to my friend Peggy, whom I found in her workshop chirruping gaily and very busy making a complicated set of plaster moulds from the dissected wax model of her masterpiece. But I did not stay long with her, for the making of piece-moulds is an engrossing occupation and one better followed in solitude.

As I entered the house from the garden I encountered our little housemaid with a telegram in her hand.

"This has just come for you, ma'am," said she, holding it out towards me. "The boy is waiting to see if there is any answer."

I suppose that to most persons unaccustomed to receiving telegrams, the appearance of the peremptory, orange-tinted envelope is a little portentous. Especially so was it to me at that moment, with the crisis of my life so near at hand; and my heart beat tumultuously as I tore open the envelope and unfolded the flimsy paper. It bore but a brief message; but when I had read that message, the joy of life, the half-timorous happiness that had come to me with the morning

sunlight, went out in a moment, like a wind-blown taper, and left me desolate.

"Cancel appointment for to-day and do not come to the club. Letter follows. JASPER."

That was all. There was really nothing very alarming in it. But to me it came as a dreadful anti-climax, strung up, as I was, to the highest pitch of nervous tension. With a trembling hand I refolded the paper, and, having told the maid that there was no answer, ran up to my room and bolted myself in.

It was a terrible blow. Only now, by the bitterness of the disappointment, did I realise the heart-hunger that I had endured, the intense yearning for the moment in which my beloved companion would be restored to me. And then, beyond this sudden collapse of my happiness, almost in the moment of its realisation, was the mystery, the suspense, the uncertainty. What could it be that had happened? Had Jasper's condition suddenly grown worse? That could hardly be, for he was practically well—at least, he had so regarded himself—and moreover there was that cryptic reference to the club. Why must I not go to the club? There was something very mysterious in that prohibition.

The more I reflected on the matter the more puzzling did it appear. On the other hand, the very mystery in which the affair was shrouded was itself a relief. For, of course, I never for one moment had the faintest doubt of Jasper's loyalty, nor could I entertain the possibility of his having changed his views on the subject of our marriage. Something had occurred to hinder it; but Jasper was my own and I was his, and that being so, the hindrance, whatever it might be, could be but temporary.

So I comforted myself and made believe that all was well, though when by chance my eye lighted on the trunk, packed and even provided with a blank label, I could hardly keep back the tears. At lunch I let Miss Polton know that my visit was postponed, and immediately after the meal I prepared to go out and seek relief in a long, sharp walk. By the time I returned, the letter from Jasper would probably have arrived and I should know how matters stood.

I had put on my outdoor clothes and was just about to start, when, opening the drawer in which I kept my wrist-bag, I suddenly remembered my loss of the night before. The bag contained, not only my purse, but my card-case and one or two other things I could not conveniently do without. The prohibition to go to the club could hardly, I reflected, extend to Lyon's Inn Chambers, though they were in the same neighbourhood. At any rate, I wanted the bag, and in my restless state a journey with a defined purpose offered more relief than an aimless walk through the streets.

During the short journey from Mark Lane to the Temple I turned over and over again the words of the telegram without obtaining any glimmer of enlightenment. If I had been less sure of Jasper, I should have been intensely wretched; but now, as the shock subsided, my optimism revived and I found myself looking forward to Jasper's letter with a confident expectation of reassuring news.

Emerging from the Temple Station, I walked up Arundel Street, and, crossing the Strand, presently passed through Half-Moon Alley and cast a glance of friendly recognition at the old gilded sign, so pleasantly associated with the scarlet parasol that hung outside the umbrella-maker's shop in Bookseller's Row. The two signs recalled the old delightful explorations with Jasper, and put me in quite a cheerful frame of mind, which lasted until I found myself once more ascending the bare and rather sordid stone stairs of Lyon's Inn Chambers. Then there came a marked change. As I walked up the cold, gloomy staircase a feeling of depression settled on me. I passed the grimy lantern that had looked on my head-long, terror-stricken flight, and some of the forgotten qualms came back. I breathed again the close air of that unpleasant bedroom; I saw again the unwieldy figure in the bed, with its pasty face and puffy eyelids; and even the sinister-looking peg on the wall came forth with uncomfortable vividness from the recesses of memory. By the time I reached the landing, my distaste for the place had grown so strong that I was half inclined to turn back and complete the transaction by means of a letter.

This weakness, however, I overcame by an effort of will and resolutely rang the bell. There was a short interval

and then the door opened, revealing the figure of Mrs. Gregg, who, according to her custom, stood and stared stonily at me without uttering a word.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Gregg," said I. "When I went away last night I left my wrist-bag behind."

"Ye did," she answered; "and ye left the bedroom door open and the gas full on. I found it so this morning."

"I am very sorry," I said.

"'Tis no matter," she rejoined, impassively, and continued to stare at me in a most singular and embarrassing fashion.

"Could I have my bag, please, Mrs. Gregg?" I asked.

"Ye could," she replied; but still she made no move, nor any suggestion that I should enter; and still she continued to look at me with the strangest, most enigmatical expression.

"I hope," said I, by way of relieving the extraordinarily uncomfortable situation, "that Mr. Otway is better to-day."

"Do ye?" said she; and then, after a pause, "Maybe ye'd wish to see him?"

"I don't think I will disturb him, thank you," I replied.

"Ye need have no fear," said she. "Ye'll no disturb him."

"Well, I don't think I have time to see him to-day. I just called to get my bag."

"And is that all ye've come for?" she demanded, glowering at me in the most astonishing manner.

"What else should I have come for?" I asked.

She thrust her head forward and replied in a low, mysterious tone:

"I thought maybe ye'd come to ask where your husband is."

"I don't understand you, Mrs. Gregg. Is Mr. Otway not at home?"

"He is not," she replied; and as I made no comment, she asked: "Shall I tell you where he is?"

"It really isn't any business of mine, Mrs. Gregg," said I.

"Is it not?" she demanded. "Will it no interest ye if I tell ye that your husband is in St. Clement's Mortuary?"

"In the mortuary!" I gasped.

"Aye, in the mortuary." She glared at me in silence for a few moments, and then, suddenly grasping my arm,

exclaimed: "Woman! do ye ken yon peg on the bedroom wall? Aye, ye may well turn pale. Ye'd ha' turned paler if ye'd seen what I saw by the gaslight this morn hangin' from yon peg."

I gazed at her for a few moments in speechless horror, until she seemed to sway and shimmer before my eyes. Then, for the first and only time in my life, I must have fainted, for I remember no more until I found myself lying on the floor of the lobby, with Mrs. Gregg kneeling beside me slapping my face with a wet towel.

I rose with difficulty, feeling very weak and shaken. Mrs. Gregg silently handed me my bag and preceded me towards the door, where, with her hand on the latch, she turned and faced me.

"Weel, mistress," said she, "'tis a fit ending, seeing how it began. Ye've been a poor wife, but ye'll make a bonny widow, though I doubt it will stay long at that."

To this insolent and brutal speech I made no reply. I was completely broken, physically and mentally. I tottered out on to the landing and slowly descended the stairs, holding on to the iron hand-rail, my horror of the place urging me to hasten away, my trembling limbs and lingering faintness bidding me go warily. As I walked unsteadily up Holywell Street, a newspaper boy, running down the narrow thoroughfare, halted and held out a paper.

"Here y'are, Miss, sooicide in Lyon's Inn. The housekeeper's story."

I hurried past him with averted face, but out in the Strand there were others, shouting aloud the dreadful tidings or displaying posters on which the hideous fact was set forth in enormous type. And it seemed as if each and all of them were specially addressing themselves to me. I returned down Arundel Street, instinctively making for the station, but as I approached it a fresh group of newsboys made me swerve to the left and pursue my way along the Embankment on foot.

As I walked on, and the air and exercise helped me to recover physically from the shock, I began to collect my faculties. At first I had been utterly bewildered and overborne by a sense of horror and guilt. I had sent this wretched man to his death. I had ordained the means, the manner and the time of his death, and it had duly

befallen according to my directions. Morally—and perhaps even legally—it amounted to murder. I had willed, I had suggested; and that which I had willed and suggested had come to pass. That was what had flashed into my mind in the very moment in which Mrs. Gregg had made her dreadful communication.

But now, as I walked on, I began to argue the case in my own favour. In the first place, I told myself, it was not certain that the act of the dead man had any connection with the willing or the suggestion. It might have been a mere coincidence. I tried to dwell on this view; but it would not do. The coincidence was too complete to be explained away by any such casuistry. I could not in this way escape the responsibility for Mr. Otway's death.

Then I considered the question of intention. I told myself—truthfully enough—that I had not consciously willed that Mr. Otway should kill himself. I had not even been conscious of any intention to suggest to him that he should kill himself. But though I did make some sort of point in my own defence, it was extremely unconvincing. I had allowed my mind to dwell with hardly-disguised satisfaction on the possibility of his suicide (in a particular manner at a particular time), and between that and actual willing the distinction was not very obvious. And then there were those words, spoken to him in his sleep. It was not conscious, deliberate suggestion; but what was it? The impulse to speak those words was apparently evolved from the subconscious. But does no moral responsibility attach to subconscious intentions?

So I argued, back and forth, round and about; but always came back to the same conclusion. Mr. Otway was dead; and it was my act that sent him to his death. Locked up in my own breast this dreadful secret might remain; but it was my companion for life. There was no escape from it.

But would it remain locked up in my own breast? That was another question that began to loom up with a very real menace. How much did Mrs. Gregg know? She might easily have overheard our conversation and even those final, fatal words. And if she had, would she understand their significance? Now that I came to consider the circumstances, there was something rather

alarming in the manner of this inscrutable woman ; something threatening and accusatory which I had vaguely felt at the time. And as I reflected on this and the possibilities that it suggested, a fear of something more substantial than my own accusing conscience began to creep around my heart.

When I arrived home, Jasper's letter was awaiting me. But it contained nothing new. He had seen the posters, had bought an early paper and had immediately sent off the telegram. His tone was that of matter-of-fact satisfaction. The legal impediment to our marriage had now been removed. No declarations were necessary now. We could marry like other people. We were free.

That was the burden of the letter. All or troubles were at an end. Until everything was settled, we had better avoid meeting. But when the chapter was closed with all due formalities we could sing "*Nunc dimittis*," and thenceforth live only for one another.

I laid the letter down. All that it said was true. The picture that my imagination had drawn under the guidance of desire as I had sat looking into the shadowy corner of the bedroom in Lyon's Inn had become a reality. The fetters that I had forged and put on that fatal morning in the little church at Maidstone, had fallen off and given me back my freedom.

And even as I told myself this, some voice from within seemed to whisper a *caveat*, and my heart was sensible of a chill of fear.

Chapter XXIII — The Dead Hand

THE entry of Mr. Otway into my life inaugurated a long succession of disasters. The very first words that I heard him speak shattered the peace of a lifetime. Thenceforward, like the Ancient Mariner, I was haunted by a malign influence which seemed to exhale continuously from his ill-omened personality. And even now that he was dead that malignant spirit was not at rest. His very corpse, lying in the mortuary, was a centre whence radiated sinister influences that crept into my secret soul and enveloped me from without. During his life Mr. Otway had been my evil genius; and death had but transformed him into a malicious *poltergeist*.

His first, tentative appearance in this character was made on the very evening of my second visit to Lyon's Inn Chambers, when the coroner's officer called at Wellclose Square to serve the subpœna for the inquest. The announcement of his arrival caused me some qualms of vague alarm, which I knew in my heart to be nothing but the stirring of my own conscience. For the purpose of this inquest was to find an answer to the question, "How did Lewis Otway come by his death?" And that question I could have answered in four words—Silent Willing and Suggestion. But I had no intention of answering that question; and hence, as I entered the room into which the officer had been shown, I was consciously on the defensive.

I had, however, no occasion to be. The officer was a civil, fatherly man in a constable's uniform, sympathetic, deferential and not at all inquisitive.

"I have called, ma'am," he began, "on a very sad errand. I don't know whether you have heard the dreadful news——"

"Of Mr. Otway's death?" said I.

"Ah! then you have heard. That is a relief. Well, I have called to let you know that the inquest is arranged for the day after to-morrow, at 3 p.m. in the room adjoining the

mortuary." He gave me a few explcit directions as to how to find the latter and then added : " If there is any information that you could give us that would guide us in starting the inquiry, we should be glad. Or the names of any witnesses that we ought to subpœna."

I reflected. The threatening letters must necessarily be referred to at the inquest. I should have to mention them myself, even if Mrs. Gregg knew nothing of them.

" I happen to know," I replied, " that Mr. Otway had received a number of anonymous letters and that he was greatly worried about them."

" Blackmailing letters ? " he asked.

" I don't think any demands for money were made," I replied.

" Do you know what was their nature ? Were they threatening letters ? "

" Yes, indirectly. The two or three that I saw had reference to the death of my father, who died very suddenly and who was alone with Mr. Otway at the time. They suggested a suspicion that Mr. Otway was responsible for my father's death."

The officer looked at me quickly and then became deeply reflective.

" Will it be possible to produce those letters at the inquest ? " he asked, after a cogitative pause.

" They are not in my possession," I answered ; " but if the coroner will make an order for their production I will endeavour to have it carried out."

" Thank you, ma'am," said he ; and then, as an afterthought, added : " If you could make it convenient to call at the coroner's office to-morrow, say at about two o'clock, I could give you the order and perhaps help you to carry it out."

The latter suggestion appealed to me strongly and I fell in with it at once. Thereupon the officer picked up his helmet with an air of satisfaction, and, having handed me the subpœna, moved towards the door. I accompanied him along the hall and let him out ; and as I wished him good evening and launched him down the steps, another figure emerged from the darkness and passed him on the way up.

" Does Mrs. Otway live here ? " the new-comer enquired. I glanced at him with faint suspicion, for the exact

coincidence in time of his arrival with the officer's departure suggested a connection between the two events.

"I am Mrs. Otway," said I.

"Oh, indeed! Could I have a few words with you on a matter of some importance? I will not detain you more than a few minutes."

I hesitated, eyeing my new visitor dubiously. But there were no reasonable grounds for a refusal; and I eventually ushered him into the little parlour that the officer had just left, and indicated the vacant chair.

"The matter concerning which I have taken the liberty of calling on you, Mrs. Otway," said he, "is connected with—er—with the painful occurrence—er—at Lyon's Inn Chambers. A most deplorable affair. Most distressing for you—most distressing! Pray accept my sincere sympathy."

"Thank you, Mr.——"

"Hyams is my name—you may have heard your late husband speak of me. We have been acquainted a good many years."

"He has never spoken of you to me, Mr. Hyams. But what can I do for you?"

"Well, I can put my business in a nut-shell. Your husband, at the time of his death, had certain valuable property of mine in his possession. I should like to get that property back without delay."

He had certainly wasted no time. Unsentimental as was my own attitude I felt this haste to be almost indecent.

"I should think you will have no difficulty," said I, "if you apply in the proper quarter."

"That is what I am doing," he retorted. "You are his widow. His property is in your hands."

"Not at all," I replied. "Pending probate of the will, the property is vested in his executors."

He looked at me in not unnatural astonishment. I suppose the phraseology that I had acquired from my father was unusual for a woman.

"Who are the executors?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied.

"But," said he, "I suppose you have seen the will."

"No, I don't know that there is a will. I am only assuming the existence of one from my knowledge of Mr. Otway's business like habits."

"But this is very unsatisfactory," said Mr. Hyams. "There is portable property of mine worth several thousand pounds lying in his chambers for anyone to pick up, and those chambers in charge of a woman who probably has access to his keys. It really isn't business, you know."

"What is the nature of the property?" I asked.

"It is a collection of very valuable stones, the whole lot contained in a little box that anyone could carry away in his pocket."

"Then," said I, "the probability is that he has deposited the box with his bankers."

"Who are his bankers?" he asked.

"I really don't know."

"You don't know!" he exclaimed. "But you must have seen his cheques. I presume he made you an allowance?"

"I accepted no allowance from him and I have never seen one of his cheques."

Mr. Hyams looked at me with undisguised incredulity. "A most extraordinary state of affairs," he commented. "Can you give me the address of his lawyers?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Hyams, that I cannot. I don't even know if he has a lawyer. I know nothing whatever about Mr. Otway's affairs."

Mr. Hyams' countenance took on an expression that was very much the reverse of pleasant. "I suppose, Mrs. Otway," said he, "you realise that you are talking to a man of business and that you are telling a rather unlikely story."

"I realise it very clearly, Mr. Hyams," I replied, "and I realise also the difficulty of your position. What I recommend you to do is to go to Lyon's Inn and see the housekeeper, Mrs. Gregg. She has been with Mr. Otway many years and can probably tell you all that you want to know."

Mr. Hyams shut his mouth tightly, rose deliberately and picked up his hat.

"Then," said he, "the position, as I understand it, is this: You don't know whether there is or is not a will; you don't know the name of your husband's bankers; you don't know who his lawyer is; you don't know anything about his affairs; and you disclaim any responsibility in regard to property that was in his custody when he died."

"Yes," I agreed, "that is the position; a very unsatisfactory one for you, I must admit. Perhaps I may be able to help you later, when I know more about Mr. Otway's affairs. Will you leave me your address?"

He was on the point of refusing, but prudence triumphed over anger and he laid on the table a card on which I read the name, "David Hyams, Dealer in precious stones," and the address, "501, Hatton Garden."

"If I learn anything fresh I will write to you," I said; whereupon he thanked me curtly and gruffly and walked towards the door with pursed-up lips and a lowering, truculent expression and took his departure without another word.

When he was gone I reflected at some length on the significance of his visit. The interview had brought home to me very vividly my anomalous position. Mr. Otway had been a total stranger to me. Of his past, of his recent habits and mode of life, his friends, his occupation—if he had any—his family and social status, I knew nothing. My father had referred to him as a retired solicitor and as a collector of, or dealer in, precious stones. Vaguely, I had conceived him as a man of some means—perhaps a rich man. But I knew nothing of him and had given him and his affairs barely a thought. He was a stranger who had come into my life for but a moment, and had straightway gone out again, leaving a trail of desolation to show where he had been.

That was the real position. But to strangers, to the world at large, it would seem incredible. I was Mr. Otway's widow. I had been his wife—in law if not in fact. And the world would hold me to the legal relationship. The dead man, lying in the mortuary, seemed about to make good the claims that the living man had been forced to abandon. My status as a wife had been a mere fiction: my status as a widow was an undeniable reality.

The clear perception of the extent to which I was involved in the dead man's affairs gave my visit to the coroner's office a new importance. For now, while seeking information for official use at the inquest, I must gather what knowledge I could for my own guidance under cover of the coroner's order. The address of the office—in Blackmoor Street, Drury Lane—was printed on the subpœna, and

there, after a few enquiries, I made my appearance punctually on the following day.

My friend of the previous evening—whose name I discovered to be Smallwood—was in the office, looking over some documents with the aid of a pair of spectacles, which gave him a curiously unconstabulary aspect. He rose when I entered, and, opening a drawer, took out a sheet of paper.

"This is what you asked for, Mrs. Otway" said he (upon which a young man at a desk looked up quickly), "the coroner's request for the production of the letters that you told me about. Can I give you any other assistance?"

"If you could accompany me to the chambers and be present during the search for the letters, I should be glad," I replied. "You see," I added, seeing that he looked somewhat surprised, "I am almost a stranger to the housekeeper, I know nothing about the household or Mr. Otway's arrangements, and I shall be accountable to the executors, if there are any, for any interference with the papers or their removal. I should very much prefer to have a reliable witness."

He saw the position at once, and, greatly to my relief, agreed to come with me, or rather to follow me in a few minutes. Thereupon I left the office and walking at a leisurely pace into Drury Lane presently made my way into the Strand by way of May-pole Alley and turned eastward towards Lyon's Inn Chambers.

At the entrance I lingered for a minute or two and then slowly ascended the stairs to Mr. Otway's landing, growing more and more uncomfortable with every step. For the bare stone staircase set my memory working very unpleasantly, recalling again my headlong flight and the terrible episode that had preceded it—that episode that I would so gladly have sponged out of my recollection for ever.

I stood at the door with my hand on the bell, listening for Mr. Smallwood's steps on the stair, and so might have remained until he arrived; but suddenly the door opened and Mrs. Gregg confronted me. Apparently she had some means of observing a visitor from within.

"What are ye standing there for?" she demanded. "Why did ye not ring?"

"I was just about to ring when you opened the door," I replied.

She smiled sourly and looked at me in that strange, inscrutable fashion of hers that I found so disconcerting.

"And what might your business be?" she demanded.

"I have come about some letters of Mr. Otway's—some anonymous letters that he has received from time to time. Perhaps you know about them?"

"You mean, perhaps I have been in the habit of reading his letters. Weel, mistress, I have not. I know nothing about his letters."

"Perhaps you can show me where his letters were kept."

"Indeed, I'll do no such thing. What! Do you think I'll have you scratching up in his chambers and pawing over his letters and papers and him not under-ground yet?"

At this moment I caught the welcome sound of footsteps on the stairs. Mrs. Gregg listened suspiciously, and as Mr. Smallwood came into sight there was a visible change in her demeanour.

"What does he want, I wonder?" she said.

He has come to receive the letters and to be present at the search for them," I replied, producing the coroner's order. She glanced at the paper, and, as Mr. Smallwood stepped up to the door, she motioned us to enter.

"Come in," she said, gruffly. "'Tis no affair of mine, but I'll no hinder ye."

We were just about to enter when footsteps were again audible on the stairs, and we waited to see who this other visitor might be. Somewhat to my surprise it turned out to be Mr. Hyams, who certainly seemed to have a genius for coincidences.

"Now this is quite a lucky chance," said he, doing himself, as I suspected, less than justice. "I didn't expect to find you here, Mrs. Otway. I presume you are just having a look round."

"I have come to search for some documents that have to be put in evidence," said I. "The coroner has asked for them."

"Well," said Mr. Hyams, "you might, at the same time, see if you can find any trace of my property."

"What property is that?" demanded Mrs. Gregg.

"A parcel of stones—a very valuable collection—that Mr. Otway had from me on approval."

Mrs. Gregg snorted. "Man," said she, "ye're talkin'

like a fool. Do you suppose Lewis Otway would have left a valuable parcel of stones lying about in his rooms like a packet of snuff? Ye'll find no stones here."

"That may or may not be," said Mr. Hyams. "At any rate, I'll stay and see if anything turns up."

During this dialogue we had gradually moved from the lobby down the corridor and now entered the living-room. As we crossed it I looked curiously at the large cupboard and wondered idly what I could have found so alarming in its appearance on the night of my visit. But if the living-room had, by the light of day, lost its disturbing qualities, it was otherwise with the bedroom. I opened the door with trepidation, and as I did so and was confronted by the disordered bed, the horror of the place began to come back to me. Nevertheless, I entered the room with a firm step and with my eyes on the bedside table, which appeared to be in the same condition as when I had last seen it. I had just noted this when I felt my arm grasped, and turning quickly found Mrs. Gregg at my side. Her eyes were fixed on me and with her disengaged hand she was pointing towards the corner by the bed-head. Involuntarily my gaze followed the direction in which she was pointing and lighted on the fatal peg, which now bore a loop of the red bell-rope with two free ends. Of course I had known it was there, but yet the sight of it made me turn sick and faint, and I must have shown this in the sudden pallor of my face; for when, controlling myself by an intense effort, I turned to speak to her she was looking at me with a leer of triumph.

"Can we have Mr. Otway's keys?" I asked.

"Ye'll find them in the right dressing-table drawer," she answered. "I'm no party to this, but I'll no hinder ye."

Mr. Smallwood opened the drawer and produced a bunch of keys which he handed to me. I looked them over and selecting the most likely-looking ones, tried them, one after the other, on the deed-box. The fourth key fitted the lock, and when I had turned it and raised the lid of the box, the letter which Mr. Otway had shown me lay in full view. I took it out and laid it on the table and then proceeded to lift out the remaining contents of the box. There was not much to remove: a cheque-book, a pass-book, a small journal, a memorandum-book, a bundle of share-certificates,

a canvas bag containing money, and at the bottom of the box, a foolscap envelope endorsed, " Anonymous Letters."

I opened the unsealed envelope and drew out the letters which I glanced through one by one. There were seven in all, of which I had already seen three. When I had looked at them I returned them to the envelope, adding the last letter, and then began to replace the other things in the box.

" I see a cheque-book there, Mrs. Otway," said Mr. Hyams, who had followed my proceedings with intense interest. " May I make a note of the banker's address ? "

I handed him the cheque-book and continued to replace the contents of the box. When I had finished I paused with the box open, waiting for him to return the cheque-book ; and at this moment I became aware, with a start of surprise, that an addition had been made to our party.

The new-comer was a short, stout, middle-aged man, obviously a Jew of the swarthy, aquiline type, with a very large nose and rather prominent dark eyes. He stood in the open doorway of the bedroom watching us with a slightly unpleasant smile. As he noted my surprised look, his smile became broader and more unpleasant.

" Make yourselves at home, ladies and gentlemen," said he. " These are public premises—at least I assume they are, as I found the door open."

Mr. Hyams looked round with a start—as, indeed, did the others.

" May I ask who you are, sir ? " he enquired.

" You may," was the suave reply. " My name is Isaacs —of the firm of Isaacs and Cohen, solicitors. I am one of the executors of Mr. Lewis Otway's will. And having regard to my responsibilities in that capacity, I may, perhaps, venture to enquire as to the nature of these proceedings. You, sir, appear to be in possession of the testator's cheque-book. Did you happen to require the loan of a fountain pen ? "

Mr. Hyams turned very red and hastily laid down the cheque-book.

" That," he exclaimed angrily, is perfectly unwarranted. I was simply making a note of the banker's address."

" With what object ? "

" With the object of enquiring whether certain property

of mine, which was in Mr. Otway's custody, had been deposited in the bank."

"What is the nature and value of this property?" asked Mr. Isaacs.

"It is a collection of precious stones of the approximate value of four thousand pounds."

"Then," said Mr. Isaacs, "I can give you the information you want. No property, other than documents, has been deposited at the bank."

"In that case," said Mr. Hyams, "the stones must be in these rooms."

"It is quite probable," Mr. Isaacs agreed.

"Is there any objection to ascertaining, now, whether they are here?"

"Yes, there is," replied Mr. Isaacs. "The will has not been proved and no letters of administration have been issued. Pending probate of the will I propose to take possession of these premises and seal all receptacles that may contain valuable property. I shall interfere with nothing until I have letters of administration."

"And how soon will that be?" asked Mr. Hyams.

"Seven days must elapse before the will can be proved. Under the circumstances there may be some further delay. And now I should like to know what has been taking place. You, for instance, madam——"

"I am Mrs. Lewis Otway," said I, "and I have come here by the coroner's direction, to look for some letters that are to be put in evidence."

"Have you found them?"

"Yes," I answered, "they are here; and, as you are an executor, I had better hand them to you, and you can deliver them to the coroner's officer if you think fit."

I handed him the envelope and the coroner's letter, which he read, and then asked: "Did you have to make a very extensive search?"

"No, she didn't," said Mrs. Gregg. "She kenned fine where to look for them and she found them at the first cast."

On this I noticed that Mr. Hyams cast a quick, suspicious glance at me and I thought it wise to explain.

"I looked first in this box because I had seen Mr. Otway put one of these letters into it."

"Quite so," said Mr. Isaacs. "Very natural." But

obvious as the explanation was, I could see that it had left Mr. Hyams unconvinced.

I now returned the cheque-book to the deed-box, locked the latter and handed the keys to Mr. Isaacs; who delivered the anonymous letters to the coroner's officer and took his receipt for them on a slip of paper. My business being now at an end, I offered my card to Mr. Isaacs, took his in return, and departed in company with Mr. Smallwood.

"A queer business, this, ma'am," the officer remarked as we descended the stairs. "Regular mix up. Seem to be a lot of Sheenies in it."

"Sheenies?" I repeated, interrogatively. "What are Sheenies?"

"Jews, ma'am," he replied, apparently a little surprised at my ignorance. "It's just a popular name, you know."

I reflected on Mr. Smallwood's remark, which seemed hardly justified by the facts—two Jews only having appeared in the case, so far as I knew. And yet I seemed to be aware of a sort of Semitic atmosphere surrounding Mr. Otway. There were, for instance, the Campbells; and then Mrs. Gregg, although a Scotswoman, might easily, but for her strong Scottish accent, have passed for a Jewess; while Mr. Otway, himself, had been distinctly Semitic in appearance.

At the entry, where we separated, Mr. Smallwood halted to give me a final injunction.

"You had better be in good time to-morrow, ma'am," said he, "because it will be necessary for you to view the body so that you can give evidence as to the identity of the deceased."

I thanked him for the reminder, but would much rather have been without it. For the prospect filled me with a vague alarm, and now the mental picture of the sleeping man, which had haunted me by night and by day, began to be replaced by one more dreadful, and one which I felt that my visit to the mortuary would attach to me for ever.

Chapter XXIV *The Gathering Clouds*

THE distaste which I felt for my errand did not prevent me from following Mr. Smallwood's advice on the subject

of punctuality. It was some minutes short of half-past two when I turned into the mean, little street off Drury Lane in which the mortuary was situated. I had found the place without much difficulty and had still less in finding the mortuary itself, for, as I entered the street I observed a procession of about a dozen men passing in through a narrow gateway, watched attentively by a small crowd of loiterers. Assuming the former to be the jury, I walked slowly past on the opposite side and continued for the length of the short street. I had just turned to retrace my steps when the men filed out of the gateway and proceeded to enter a building a few yards up the street, and immediately afterwards Mr. Smallwood appeared at the gate. He saw me at once and waited for me to approach.

"I am glad you have come in good time, ma'am," said he. "The jury have just been in to view the body and the coroner will like to open the inquest punctually. This is the way."

He preceded me down a narrow passage, at the end of which he pushed open a door. Following him I entered the mortuary, a bare, stone-floored hall containing two large slate-topped tables, one of which was occupied by a recumbent figure covered by a sheet. Mr. Smallwood removed his helmet and together we advanced slowly towards the awesome, shrouded form, lying so still and lonely in its grim surroundings. Very quietly, the officer picked up the two upper corners of the sheet and drew it back, retiring then a couple of paces as if to avoid intruding on my meeting with the dead.

Strung up as I was, the first impression was less dreadful than I had anticipated. The face was pale and waxen, but it was placid in expression and more peaceful than I had ever seen it in life. The hunted, terrified look was gone and had given place to an air of repose, almost of dignity. For a few moments I was sensible of a feeling of relief; but then my glance fell upon a contorted length of crimson rope that lay on the slate table, and instinctively my eye turned to the uncovered throat. And as I noted the shallow groove under the chin, faintly marked with an impression of the strands of the rope, the shocking reality came home to me with overwhelming horror. Before my eyes arose that awful shape upon the bedroom wall and the hardly less

dreadful image of the sleeping man unconsciously receiving the message of his doom.

With a new horror—an incredulous horror of myself—I looked on the pale, placid face and seemed to read in it a gentle reproach. He had gone to his death at my bidding. He had stood unsteadily on the brink of the abyss, and I had pushed him over.

It seemed incredible. There had been no conscious intention; no guilty premeditation. I would have told myself that there was no connection other than mere coincidence. But there the plain, undeniable facts, were. Unconsciously—or subconsciously—my will had created that premonitory shape upon the wall; the terrible words had formed themselves and issued from my lips. And straightway the thing that my thoughts and words had foreshadowed had come to pass. This waxen-faced effigy that lay on the stone table, as its living counterpart had lain that night in the bed, was its fulfilment, its realisation.

"Better not stay too long, ma'am," said Mr. Smallwood. And as he spoke I became suddenly aware that I had reached the limits of endurance. My knees began to tremble and I breathed the tainted air with difficulty.

"Better come away now," continued Mr. Smallwood. "It's been rather too much for you. Good afternoon, Mrs. Gregg."

I looked up quickly and perceived Mrs. Gregg, who must have come in without making a sound, standing at the foot of the table watching me intently. That penetrating stare and the singular, enigmatical expression would have been disturbing at any time. But now I was conscious of actual fear. As I tottered unsteadily along the passage to the street, the menace of that watchful, inscrutable gaze followed me. How much did this woman know? What had she heard? And if she had overheard those last words of mine, how much had she understood of their import? These were weighty questions, the answers to which I should doubtless hear within an hour or two.

When I was ushered by Mr. Smallwood into the room in which the inquest was to be held, the court was already assembled and ready to begin. The jurymen sat along one side of a long table and one or two reporters occupied a part of the other, while a row of chairs accommodated the

witnesses and persons interested in the case, including Mr. Isaacs, Mr. Hyams, Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, and a youngish man of a markedly Jewish type whom I did not recognise. I took my seat at the end of the row, and Mrs. Gregg, who had followed us in, seated herself near the middle.

As I took my seat the coroner addressed one of the reporters:

"Let me see, what paper do you represent?"

"I am not a pressman, sir," was the reply. "I am commissioned to make a report for Dr. Thorndyke."

"Dr. Thorndyke! But what is his connection with the case? I know nothing about him."

"I only know that he has asked me to make a verbatim report of the evidence."

"Hm," grunted the coroner. "I'm not sure that it is quite in order for private individuals to send their reporters to an inquest."

"It is an open court, sir," the reporter observed.

"I know. But still—however, I suppose it doesn't matter. Well, gentlemen, I think we are ready to begin. The witnesses are all present and it is on the stroke of three. I need not occupy your time with any preliminary statement. It seems quite a straightforward case and you will get the facts from the evidence of the witnesses. We are here, as you know, to inquire into the circumstances of the death of Lewis Otway, whose body you have just viewed, which occurred either on the night of the 18th instant or the morning of the 19th. The body was found hanging from a peg in his bedroom by his housekeeper, Mrs. Gregg, and it will be best to take her evidence first."

Mrs. Gregg was accordingly called, and having taken a position near the head of the table, was sworn and proceeded to give her evidence.

"My name is Rachel Gregg, age 51. I was housekeeper to the deceased, Lewis Otway."

"How long," asked the coroner, "had you known the deceased?"

"Thirty-three years."

"What was deceased's occupation?"

"He was a retired solicitor; but he was a connoisseur in precious stones, and, I think, dealt in them to some extent."

"Was he in financial difficulties of any kind, so far as you know?"

"No. I believe he was quite a well-to-do man."

"Had you any reason to suspect him of an intention to take his life?"

"Yes. He used to say that he expected, if ever he had any trouble, that he would hang himself. The tendency to suicide was in the family. His only brother hanged himself, his mother hanged herself and his mother's father hanged himself.

"But that was only a tendency that might not have affected him. Had you any reason to expect that he actually might commit suicide? Was there anything in his manner, in the state of his mind or in his circumstances that led you to believe that he might take his life?"

"Not until recently. He always used to be quite cheerful in a quiet way until he got married. After that he was never the same. His marriage seemed to bring all sorts of trouble into his life."

"Tell us exactly how this change came about."

"His marriage took place about eight months ago—on the 25th of last April when he was living at Maidstone. It was quite sudden. I knew nothing of it until the day before, when he told me he was going to marry a Miss Helen Vardon, and that the marriage was to take place secretly because the lady's father had refused his consent. On the morning of the marriage I saw Mr. Otway go out, and soon afterwards I went out myself to do some shopping. When I came back I found the new Mrs. Otway in the study and her father, Mr. Vardon, lying dead on the floor. Mr. Otway had gone to fetch a doctor. It appeared that Mr. Vardon had called directly after the newly-married couple had arrived home from the church and that there had been a quarrel and Mr. Vardon had fallen down dead. I understand that Mr. Vardon was alone with Mr. Otway at the time.

"Soon after I arrived, Mrs. Otway left the house and went back to her own home, and Mr. Otway told me that she refused to live with him. At any rate, she never did live with him, and she never came near him until the night of his death."

"Do you know if the deceased agreed to this separation?"

Apparently she made him agree. But it was a great trouble to him, and I know that he tried more than once to get her to live with him."

"Do you know what was the cause of the separation?"

"No. Mr. Otway never mentioned it to me."

"You say that the separation was a great trouble to the deceased. Did it obviously affect his spirits?"

"Yes; he was very depressed after his wife went away, and he never recovered. He seemed to get more and more low-spirited."

"Do you know of any other reasons than the separation from his wife why he should have been depressed in spirits?"

"Yes. Mr. Vardon's sudden death was a great shock to him. He felt that he had been partly the cause of it, by quarrelling with Mr. Vardon. Then there was a great deal of talk in Maidstone about the affair and people blamed Mr. Otway for what had happened; and later rumours began to get about that there had been foul play—that Mr. Otway had actually killed Mr. Vardon. These rumours got on his nerves so badly that he gave up his house at Maidstone and moved to London."

"You have spoken of a quarrel between deceased and Mr. Vardon. Do you know what the quarrel was about?"

"I believe it was about the secret marriage, but I was not in the house at the time."

"Were there any other causes for the mental depression which you say the deceased suffered from?"

"I think so, but I can't say for certain. There were some letters that came about once a month which seemed to worry him a good deal. I used to see him reading them and looking very anxious and depressed; and after a time he began to get very nervous and fidgety and couldn't sleep at nights unless he took a dose of veronal. And I noticed that he was smoking much more than he used to, and taking much more whisky."

"Did you ever see any of the letters that you have spoken of?"

"I never read one, but I saw the outsides and I noticed that they all bore the post-mark of East London."

Here the coroner drew from the large envelope six of the letters which I had found in the deed-box, and handed them, in their envelopes, to Mrs. Gregg.

"Do you recognise any of these letters?"

Mrs. Gregg turned the envelopes over in her hand, looked closely at the post-marks and replied, as she returned them: "Yes; these look like the letters that I spoke of."

The coroner laid the letters on the table, and after a few moment's reflection said: "Now, Mrs. Gregg, we want you to tell us what you know of the circumstances of Mr. Otway's death. You spoke of a visit from Mrs. Otway."

"Yes. She came to Lyon's Inn Chambers on Wednesday night, about half-past six and told me that Mr. Otway had written to her asking her to come. As Mr. Otway was then expecting another visitor, I asked her to call again about eight, which she agreed to do. Mr. Otway had been rather poorly for the last few days—very nervous and despondent, and had been sleeping badly—and for three days had kept to his bed. I told him that Mrs. Otway was coming at eight o'clock and he then said that he had some private business to talk over with her and that I need not sit up. I gave him his supper at half-past seven and just after I had cleared it away Mrs. Otway came. I showed her into the bedroom and went to the kitchen to finish up my work. At half-past nine I went to bed—a little earlier than usual because I thought they would like the place quiet for their talk. At a quarter to seven on Thursday morning I got up, and as soon as I was dressed, went into the living-room to tidy it up. Then, to my great surprise, I saw that the door of the bedroom, which opens out of the living-room, was wide open and that the gas in the bedroom was full on.

"Thinking that Mr. Otway might be worse, I called out to him to ask if he wanted anything; but there was no answer. I could see the bed from where I was and could see that he was not in it; so I called to him again, and as there was still no answer, I went into the bedroom. At first I thought he was not there; but suddenly I saw him in a corner of the room that was in deep shadow. He seemed to be standing against the wall, with his arms hanging down straight and his head on one side; but when I went nearer I saw that he was hanging from a large peg and that his feet were three or four inches off the floor. He had hanged himself with a length of bell-rope that he had cut off with his razor—at least that was what it looked

like, for the razor was lying open on the bed. I picked up the razor and ran to him and cut the loop of rope, and as he fell, I let him down on the floor as gently as I could. He seemed to be quite dead and his skin felt cold, so I ran out to fetch a doctor. Just outside the buildings I met a policeman and told him what had happened, and he told me to go back to the chambers and wait, which I did. A few minutes later he arrived at the chambers with a doctor, who examined the body and said that Mr. Otway had been dead some hours."

"Did you see any means by which deceased could have raised himself to the peg from which he was hanging?"

"Yes. There was an overturned chair lying on the floor nearly underneath him. It looked as if he had stood on it to fix the loop of rope and then kicked it away. Mrs. Otway's bag was lying on the floor by the side of the chair."

"Mrs. Otway's bag! What bag was that?"

"A little wrist-bag such as ladies use to carry their purses and handkerchiefs. She called for it the same day and I gave it to her. She had not heard what had happened, and when I told her she fell down in a dead faint."

The coroner reflected for a while with wrinkled brows, and I caught the eyes of one or two of the jurymen regarding me furtively. After a somewhat lengthy pause, the coroner asked:

"Do you know what time Mrs. Otway left the chambers?"

"I heard the outer door slam about half an hour after I had gone to bed. That would be about ten o'clock."

"Did you see Mrs. Otway or deceased after you let her in?"

"No. I did not go into the bedroom again. I went into the living-room twice and could hear them talking."

"Could you hear what they were talking about?"

"I could hear a few words now and then. When I went into the living-room the first time they seemed to be talking about suicide. I heard Mr. Otway say something about a peg on the wall."

"And when you went in the second time?"

"They seemed still to be talking about suicide. I heard Mrs. Otway ask deceased what drove his brother to hang himself."

"You heard nothing suggesting a quarrel or disagreement?"

"No. They seemed to be talking in quite a friendly way."

"Do you know what kind of terms they were on?"

"No. I never saw them together before except for a few minutes on the wedding day."

"You spoke of a visitor who came to deceased earlier in the evening. Who was that visitor?"

"A Mrs. Campbell. Her husband is a jeweller and curio-dealer whom deceased had known for a good many years, and used to have business dealings with. I understand she came on business and she only stayed about ten minutes."

"Is that all you know about the case?"

"Yes, I think I have told you all I know about it."

The coroner glanced at the jury. "Do any of you, gentlemen, wish to ask the witness any questions?" he enquired.

Apparently none of them did, and when the coroner had complimented Mrs. Gregg on the clear manner in which she had given her evidence, she was dismissed.

There was a short interval in which the coroner read over his notes and the jury conferred together in low undertones. Then the coroner observed: "We had better dispose of the police and medical evidence as they are merely formal and will not take much time. We will begin with the constable."

The policeman was then called and briefly corroborated Mrs. Gregg's evidence. When he had finished, the doctor, whom he had brought to the chambers, took his place, and having been duly sworn deposed as follows:

"My name is John Shelburn. I am a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, and am acting as *locum tenens for* the police surgeon of Saint Clement Danes. At seven twenty-eight a.m., on Thursday, the 19th of October, I was summoned by the last witness to accompany him to Lyon's Inn Chambers, where a man was reported to have hanged himself. I went with the constable to a set of chambers, over the door of which was painted the name of Mr. Lewis Otway. I went into the bedroom where the gas was alight,

the blinds down and the curtains drawn. There, lying on the floor near the wall, I found the dead body of a tall, heavily built man, about fifty or fifty-five years of age, dressed in a suit of pyjamas. The surface of the body was cold and *rigor mortis* was well established. I should say the man had been dead about eight hours. Around the neck was a double loop of red bell-rope and a portion of the same was hanging from a large peg on the wall about seven feet from the floor. The rope had apparently been cut down for the purpose as a portion was still attached to the bell-wire and the severed tassel lay on the bed, on which were impressions of feet, as if someone had stood on the bed to cut it off. The length of ripe had been joined at the ends with the kind of knot known as a 'granny' and formed into what is known as a weaver's loop, which had been passed over the head and the standing part of the rope hitched over the peg. This would form a running loop, like this "—here the witness produced a piece of thick string and demonstrated the arrangement on his thumb and the knob of a chair-back.

"I released the double loop from the neck and found a shallow groove on the throat corresponding to the rope. The countenance of the deceased was calm—as it usually is in cases of hanging—and there were no signs of violence or anything remarkable about the body. A chair, on which the deceased had apparently stood to adjust the rope on the peg, was lying close by and near to it on the floor was a lady's hand-bag. The rope had been cut with some sharp instrument—probably a razor, as I was informed by the housekeeper. I looked round the room but saw nothing of any significance excepting a half-empty whisky decanter and a nearly-full bottle of veronal tablets on a table b y the bed."

"Can you tell us at what time death took place?"

"Only approximately. I have said that the man appeared to have been dead about eight hours. That would give us eleven o'clock on the night of the 18th as the time at which death occured. But I will not bind myself to that time exactly. It might have been an hour earlier or later."

"After hearing your evidence and that of the other witnesses which you have also heard, it is a mere formality to ask your opinion as to the cause of death."

"Yes. The cause of death was obviously suicidal hanging."

This concluded the surgeon's evidence, and when he had been dismissed, the coroner turned to the jury.

"We have now, gentlemen," said he, "established the fact of death and its immediate cause. Our next investigation will seek to establish the contributory circumstances—the more remote causes. We have ascertained that this unfortunate man committed suicide. The question that we now have to consider is, Why did he commit suicide? Possibly the evidence of his widow may help us to answer that question. Helen Otway."

As I rose to take my place at the table I was dimly aware of a certain ill-defined movement on the part of the jury and the spectators such as one may notice in a church at the conclusion of a sermon. But in the present case the cause was evidently a concentration rather than a relaxation of attention. Clearly, my evidence was anticipated with considerable interest.

"Your name is——?"

"Helen Otway. My age is twenty-four and I live at 69, Wellclose Square."

"Have you viewed and do you identify the body now lying in St. Clement's mortuary?"

"Yes; it is the body of Lewis Otway, my late husband."

"When did you last see the deceased alive?"

"On the night of Wednesday, the 18th of October."

"Tell us, please, what took place on that occasion."

"I went to see deceased in consequence of a letter that I had received from him asking me to do so. I arrived at about half-past six and was informed by Mrs. Gregg that deceased was expecting another visitor."

"Did you know who that other visitor was?"

"No; but as I went down the stairs I met Mrs. Campbell coming up and assumed that she was the visitor."

"You know Mrs. Campbell, then?"

"Only by sight. I have seen her in her husband's shop. Mrs. Gregg asked me to call again at eight, and I agreed to do so, and did so. I was then admitted by Mrs. Gregg, who conducted me to the bedroom and left me there, shutting the door as she went out. I did not see her again that night. Deceased was in bed and had by his side a

table on which were a spirit decanter, a siphon of soda water, a box of cigarettes, a bottle of veronal tablets and a deed-box."

"Did you notice anything peculiar in his appearance?"

"No. He was not looking well, but he seemed less ill than I had expected from his letter; which conveyed the impression that he was in a dangerous condition."

"Have you got that letter?"

"Yes," I replied, "I have it here." As I spoke, I drew the letter from my pocket and handed it to the coroner, who glanced through it and then laid it down with some other papers.

"We will consider this letter," said he, "with the others that you have handed to me, later. Will you now tell us what passed between you and the deceased?"

"At first we talked about an anonymous letter that he had received a day or two previously. He showed me the letter, and when I had read it, he locked it in the deed-box."

"We will deal with the anonymous letters presently. What else did you talk about?"

"Deceased repeated the statement that he had made in the letter, that he did not expect to live much longer. I asked him if he had any reason for saying this and he then told me that there was a strong family predisposition to suicide; that his brother, his mother and his mother's father had all hanged themselves, and that since he had received the anonymous letters he had been conscious of an impulse to make away with himself in the same manner."

"Had you not known previously of this family tendency?"

"No. He had never mentioned it before, and I knew nothing of his family."

"Did deceased speak as if he actually intended to make away with himself?"

"No, but he spoke of an impulse which he found it difficult to resist; and he mentioned that a large peg on the bedroom wall seemed to fascinate him and to make the impulse stronger. I advised him to have it taken away."

"Previous to this conversation, had you ever thought it possible that the deceased might commit suicide?"

"No; the possibility never entered my mind."

The coroner considered these replies and made a few further notes; then he proceeded to open a fresh subject.

"Now, Mrs. Otway, with regard to your relations with deceased. Were you on friendly terms with him?"

"Not particularly. We were practically strangers."

"A witness has stated that you refused to live with deceased and that you never had lived with him. Is that true?"

"Yes, it is quite true."

"Had you quarrelled with deceased?"

"No, there was no quarrel. Our marriage was a business transaction and immediately after the ceremony I discovered that my consent had been obtained, as I considered, by misrepresentation."

"We don't want to be inquisitive, Mrs. Otway, but we wish to understand the position. Could you give us a few more particulars?"

"Do you wish me to describe the circumstances of my marriage and the separation from my husband?"

"If you please."

"My marriage with Mr. Lewis Otway took place under the following circumstances: I accidentally overheard a portion of a conversation between Mr. Otway and my father from which I gathered that Mr. Otway claimed the immediate payment of five thousand pounds held by my father—who was a solicitor—in trust. It appeared from the conversation that my father was unable immediately to produce the money, and Mr. Otway threatened to take criminal proceedings for misappropriation of trust funds. To this my father made no very definite reply. Then Mr. Otway offered to abstain from any proceedings and to allow the claim to remain in abeyance on condition that a marriage should take place between him and me. This my father refused very emphatically and angrily, and Mr. Otway left our house.

"Being greatly alarmed on my father's account, I communicated with Mr. Otway and informed him that I was prepared to accept his offer on the terms stated—namely, that he should release my father from the immediate claim and secure him from any proceedings in connection with it. Mr. Otway accepted the conditions, and as it was certain

that my father would strongly object, we agreed not to inform him until after the marriage had taken place.

"In accordance with this arrangement we were married privately on the 25th April of the present year and we went together from the church to Mr. Otway's house. I had left a letter for my father informing him of what had been done, and very shortly after our return from the church he came to the house. From an upper window I saw him enter the garden and I was very much alarmed at his appearance. I had heard that he suffered from a complaint of the heart and had been warned against undue excitement and exertion, and I could see that he was extremely excited and was looking very ill. Mr. Otway let him in and, in answer to a question, admitted that the marriage had taken place. Then I heard my father ask Mr. Otway if he had told me about a letter that he—my father—had sent, and when Mr. Otway gave an evasive reply my father called him a scoundrel and accused him of having tricked and swindled me.

"I heard no more of what was said, as the two men went into the study and shut the door; but a minute or two later I heard a heavy fall, and, running down to the study, found my father lying on the floor and already dead. There was a small wound on his temple and Mr. Otway, who was stooping over the body, held my father's walking-stick—a thick Malacca cane with a loaded silver knob—in his hand. He stated that my father had threatened him with the stick and that he had taken it away from him and that during the struggle my father had fallen insensible, striking his head on the corner of the mantel-piece as he fell."

"Did you believe him?"

"I think, at the moment, I did not. But on reflection, remembering how ill my father had looked, I had no doubt he was speaking the truth."

"Was there an inquest on your father's death?"

"Yes. The jury found, in accordance with the medical evidence, that death was due to heart failure caused by excitement and anger."

"And after this you refused to live with deceased?"

"Yes. I asked him about my father's letter and he said he had not seen it. I went with him to the letter-box and

there we found it. The postmark showed that it had come by the first post and my father's address was on the outside of the envelope. There were no other letters in the box. I had no doubt that Mr. Otway had seen the letter and put it back in the box."

"Was that why you refused to live with him?"

"Partly. The letter stated that my father was able to meet his liabilities and gave a date on which payment would be made. Consequently the threatened proceedings against my father were impossible and Mr. Otway had obtained my consent by false pretences. But further, Mr. Otway's action had been the cause of my father's death, and this alone would have made it impossible for me to live with him as his wife."

"Did deceased agree to the separation?"

"Yes. He saw that the position was impossible; but he hoped that the separation might be only temporary—that we might become reconciled at some future time."

"Did you consider this possible?"

"No. I held him accountable for my father's death and could never have overcome my repugnance to him."

The coroner noted down this answer and having glanced over his notes reflectively, looked up at the jury.

"Do any of you, gentlemen, wish to put any questions on this subject?" he asked.

The jurymen looked at one another and looked at me; and one of them remarked that, "This young lady seems to have rather easy-going ideas about the responsibilities of marriage."

"That," said the Coroner, "is hardly our concern. The next matter that we have to consider is that of certain letters received by the deceased from some unknown person or persons. There are seven of them and they seem by the postmarks to have been sent at intervals of about three weeks and to have been posted somewhere in the East end of London. We will begin with the first." He handed a letter to me and asked: "Have you seen that letter before?"

"Yes," I replied. "Deceased showed it to me one day last June when I met him by appointment at his request. He seemed to be extremely worried about it."

The coroner took the letter from me and read it aloud.

"'Mr. Lewis Otway,

"'The undersigned is writing to put you on your guard because Somebody knows something about how Mr. Vardon came by his death and that somebody is not a friend, so you had better keep a sharp look-out for your enemy and see what they mean to do. I can't tell you any more at present.

"A WELL WISHER.'"

"Do you know," the coroner asked, "who wrote that letter?"

"No, I do not?"

"Have you no idea at all? Is there no one whom you suspect?"

"I have not the least idea who sent that letter."

"You say that deceased was extremely worried about it. Do you know why he was worried?"

"I understand that there had been rumours in Maidstone that Mr. Otway had killed my father. Those rumours seemed to have preyed upon his mind and made him unreasonably nervous."

The coroner nodded gravely and opened another letter: and as he read aloud the well-remembered phrases I realised that I should need all the courage and self-possession at my command.

"'The writer of this warns you once more,'" the letter ran, "'to look for trouble. The person that I spoke of knows that something was held back at the inquest at least they say so and that they know why your wife won't live with you and that she knows all about it too and that someone knows more than you think anybody knows. This is a friendly warning.

"'FROM A WELL WISHER.'"

The coroner looked keenly at me as he finished reading. "Can you explain the meaning of this letter?" he asked. "It refers to something that was held back at the inquest. Was anything held back, so far as you know?"

"I remember that there was one omission in the

evidence. Mr. Otway made no mention of my father's stick."

"Was it not mentioned at the inquest at all?"

"No."

"Did you not give evidence?"

"Yes; but I was merely asked if I confirmed Mr. Otway's evidence, which I did."

"You confirmed Mr. Otway's evidence! But that evidence was not correct. The duty of a witness is to state the whole truth; whereas Mr. Otway had withheld a highly material fact. How was it that you did not supply this very important fact?"

"It did not appear to me to be of any importance. The medical evidence showed that death was due to heart failure."

"Medical evidence!" the coroner exclaimed, testily. "There is too much of this medical evidence superstition in these courts. People speak as if doctors were infallible. It was your duty as a witness to state all that you knew, not to decide what was or was not of importance. And I cannot understand how you came to hold such an opinion. You found your father lying dead with a wound on his head and a man standing over him with a loaded stick, and you considered this fact of no consequence?"

"I see now that I ought to have mentioned it."

"What was the verdict?"

"The verdict was in accordance with the medical evidence—Death from natural causes."

"Did the medical witness or witnesses know that Mr. Otway had had a loaded stick in his hand?"

"No."

"Did anybody besides yourself and Mr. Otway know about the loaded stick?"

"Mrs. Gregg came into the room when Mr. Otway had gone for a doctor. She saw the stick in a corner and picked it up to examine it. She asked whose it was and remarked on its weight."

"Did she know it had been in Mr. Otway's hand at the time of your father's death?"

"I have no reason to suppose that she knew."

"Well," said the coroner, "it is a most extraordinary affair. You heard Mr. Otway give his evidence, you knew

that that evidence was incomplete, and yet, though the dead man was your own father and you have declared an unconquerable repugnance to Mr. Otway, you allowed this garbled evidence to pass unchallenged. It is an amazing affair. However," he continued turning to the jury, "that is not our concern. But what is our concern, for the purposes of this inquiry, is that we now begin to see daylight. We can now understand the extraordinary effect these letters seem to have had on the man whose death we are investigating. Lewis Otway, when he gave his evidence at the inquest, suppressed a most important and damaging fact, which he believed to be known only to himself and his wife. Thereby he obtained a verdict of Death from Natural Causes, which exonerated him from all blame. Had all the facts been known, the verdict might have been very different.

"Now the receipt of these letters must have destroyed his sense of security. Apparently someone else—and that someone evidently an enemy—knew of this damaging fact, and knew of the further damaging fact that it had been suppressed at the inquest. In effect, these letters held out a threat of a charge of murder, or at least, manslaughter. It is no wonder that they alarmed him. But we had better take the rest of the evidence. There is this letter of deceased to his wife, which I will read. It is dated the 17th of October, and this is what it says:

"'My dear Helen,

"'I have not troubled you for quite a long time with my miserable affairs—which are to some extent your affairs too. But they are going from bad to worse, and now I feel that I am coming to the limits of endurance. I cannot bear this much longer. My health is shattered, my peace of mind is wrecked and my brain threatens to give way. Death would be a boon, a relief, and I feel that it is not far off. I cannot go on like this. Those wretches leave me no peace. Hardly a week passes but I get some new menace; and now—but I can't tell you in a letter. It is too horrible. Come to me, Helen, for the love of God! I am in torment. Have pity on me, even though you have never forgiven me. I cannot come to you, for I am now unable to leave my bed. I am a wreck, a ruin. Come to me just this once,

and if you cannot help me, at least give me the comfort of your sympathy. You will not be troubled by me much longer.

"'Your distracted husband,

"'LEWIS OTWAY.'"

When the coroner finished reading the letter (which evidently made a deep impression on the jury) he looked at me gravely.

"Before passing to the next letter, I must ask one or two questions about this one. What did you understand from the phrases 'I feel that it (death) is not far off. I cannot go on like this. You will not be troubled by me much longer.' Did they not suggest to you an intention to commit suicide?"

"No. I understood them as referring to his state of health."

"If you had known of the family tendency to suicide, how would you have understood these passages?"

"I should have suspected that he contemplated suicide."

"But you say you were not aware of this tendency?"

"No, I was not."

"He refers to his 'miserable affairs—which are to some extent your affairs too.' What did you understand him to mean by that?"

"I understood him to refer to the fact that I was partly responsible for the omission of certain details in the evidence at the inquest."

"When you received this pitiful letter, what did you do?"

"I went to him the same day to find out what the trouble was. He then showed me an anonymous letter that he had received."

"Is this the one?" the coroner asked, handing it to me; and when I had glanced at it and identified it, he proceeded to read it to the jury.

"'Mr. Lewis Otway.

"'Some funny questions are being asked. What about Mr. Vardon's stick?—the loaded stick with the silver

knob to hide the lead loading? Where is it? Somebody says they know where it is and who's got it. And they say there is a bruise on the silver-top, and they say something about a smear of blood and a grey hair sticking to it. Do you know anything about that? If you don't you'd better find out. Because I think you will hear from that somebody before you are many weeks older or else from the police.

"'A WELL WISHER.'"

As he laid down the letter, the coroner looked at me curiously.

"There are one or two important questions, Mrs. Otway," said he, "that arise out of this letter. The first is, What has become of this stick?"

"I don't know what has become of it. I saw Mrs. Gregg replace it in the corner by the writing table and I never saw it again. The deceased asked me the same question when he showed me the letter; but I reminded him that I did not take the stick with me when I left his house, and that I never went to the house again."

"It never occurred to you to ask what had become of your father's stick?"

"No. I always assumed that it was in Mr. Otway's possession."

"You have told us that Mrs. Gregg had seen the stick in Mr. Otway's house. Had anyone else seen it there?"

"I don't know of anyone else having seen it; but, of course, it may have been seen there by other persons. I know nothing of what went on in that house. I never entered it after my father's death."

"With the exception of Mr. Otway and yourself, did anyone know that you had seen that stick in Mr. Otway's hand on the occasion of your father's death?"

"So far as I am aware, no one else knew."

"There is a statement in that letter referring to a bruise on the silver knob and a smear of blood with a grey hair sticking to it. Is it possible, so far as you know, that that statement might be true?"

"I cannot say that it is impossible."

"After your father's death, did you examine the stick?"

"No. I saw it in Mrs. Gregg's hands, but I did not look at it closely."

At this point a police superintendent who had been sitting near to the coroner's table, rose, and, approaching the table, stooped over it and spoke to the coroner in a low voice. The latter listened attentively and nodded once or twice, and when the superintendent had returned to his seat he addressed me.

"I think that will do, Mrs. Otway—for the present, at any rate. We may have to ask you one or two questions later. Do any of the jury wish to ask anything before the witness sits down?"

As none of the jury responded, I returned to my seat, and the coroner then recalled Mrs. Gregg.

"You have heard the last witness state that she saw you take up Mr. Vardon's stick. What made you examine that stick?"

"I did not examine it. I noticed it standing in the corner and saw that it was a strange stick—that it was not Mr. Otway's. I took it out of the corner to look at it and then noticed that it was heavily loaded at the top."

"Can you say whether there was or was not a bruise or a blood smear on the knob?"

"I cannot. I did not look closely at the knob. I just picked the stick up, felt its weight and put it back in the corner."

"Did you know that Mr. Otway had had that stick in his hand when Mr. Vardon fell dead?"

"No. I never heard of that until to-day."

"Could anyone other than Mrs. Otway have known, so far as you are able to say?"

"I can't say. I should think not. I did not get back to the house until it was all over. But I thought, and believe, that there was no one in the house but those three—Mrs. Otway and her husband and her father."

"Do you know what became of that stick?"

"I do not. I put it back in the corner and never saw it again. It was not in the corner when I tidied up the room the next day."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gregg. That will do."

Having dismissed the witness, the coroner turned to the jury.

"I had hoped, gentlemen," said he, "to finish the case to-day, but, as you have seen, its apparent simplicity was rather illusory. Some rather curious issues have arisen which will have to be considered in detail. Moreover, there appears to be a suspicion that property of very great value has been removed from the premises—at least, it seems to be missing. Under these circumstances, the police authorities ask for an adjournment to enable them to make some enquiries; and I am sure you will agree with me that this, and certain other matters, should be cleared up before a verdict is returned. I therefore propose to adjourn this enquiry for fourteen days."

The court rose, and I rose with it. As I stood up and turned towards the door I saw Jasper standing at the back of the hall. He made no sign, nor did I; and as soon as our eyes had met, he turned and walked out. I did not attempt to follow, for I understood at once that he did not consider it desirable that we should recognise one another in that place. Moreover, I was detained for a minute or two by the coroner, who informed me, with a curious dry civility, that he wished me to attend at the adjourned meeting of the court, as further evidence from me might be required; and after him, by Mr. Isaacs, who, as executor, was responsible for the funeral arrangements and who promised to inform me when the date had been fixed.

As I emerged from the gateway I glanced up the street with a wistfulness which I would hardly acknowledge to myself. But, of course, Jasper was already out of sight. Feeling very lonely, weary and exhausted, I walked slowly down Drury Lane considering what I should do next. And suddenly there came on me a longing for the quiet and comfort of the club. It was quite near; and once there I could wash, refresh and rest in peace, alone, or at least among civilised people. And it was even possible that Jasper might be there.

At this thought I must have unconsciously quickened my pace, for a few minutes later found me passing through the entrance hall, telling myself that, of course, Jasper would not have come there. Nevertheless as I opened the door of the large room my eye instantly sought the familiar table

in the corner ; and when I saw Jasper sitting by it with a watchful gaze fixed on the door, my weariness and loneliness seemed to drop from me like a garment.

Chapter XXV — *Suspense : and a Discovery*

"I HAD hoped," said Jasper, as we met by the table, "that you would come on here. I had to take the chance. I suppose you understood why I made myself scarce as soon as you had seen me ?"

"I assumed that you thought it better that we should not be seen together just at present."

"It is more than unadvisable," said he. "It is vitally important. We will talk about that letter—but not here. There is a lot that I have to say to you, but we had better have our talk where we cannot be seen, or possibly overheard. I propose that I run off now—nobody has seen us here yet—and wait for you at my chambers. You just have a wash to freshen you up and come along at once. Don't stop for tea ; I will have some ready for you. And you had better come by the least frequented way. Go down to the Embankment, up Middle Temple Lane, along Crown Office Row, cross King's Bench Walk to Mitre Court, come out into Fleet Street by Mitre Court Passage, cross to Fetter Lane and into Clifford's Inn by the postern gate."

"All this sounds very secret and mysterious," said I.

"It is necessary," he replied. "We mustn't be seen together if we can help it. Remember the jury and other interested parties are local men, and might easily run against us in the public thoroughfares. So I will run off now and you will come along as soon as you can."

To this arrangement I agreed, although the precautions seemed to me somewhat excessive, and he hurried away while I went in quest of hot water and the other means of ablution.

The process of purification did not take long, for the temptation to linger luxuriously over the ceremonial of the toilet was combated by curiosity and anxiety to rejoin Jasper. In a few minutes I emerged, greatly refreshed and sensible of a very healthy appetite, and set forth by the

prescribed route towards Clifford's Inn, reflecting earnestly as I went on Jasper's rather mysterious attitude. I did not have to ply the knocker, for as I reached the landing I found Jasper standing at his open door.

"Now," said he, when I had entered and he had softly closed both the massive "oak" and the inner door, "we are secure from observers and eavesdroppers, and we can pow-wow at any length we please."

"You are very secret and portentous," I remarked. "What is it all about?"

"The secrecy and portentosity," he replied, "are possibly by-products of a legal training. We will discuss that presently. Meanwhile, the need of the moment is to provide nourishment for a starving angel."

He placed an easy chair for me by the fire, and then retired to the little kitchen, from which issued a gentle clink of crockery very grateful to my ear. Presently he emerged with a tray on which were a teapot and two covers, and having deposited it on a small table, placed the latter by my chair and removed the covers with a flourish.

"There is only one cup and one plate," said I, noting that the "nourishment" had been provided on a scale of opulence appropriate to masculine conceptions of appetite.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Jasper. "How many cups and plates do you generally use?"

"Go and get another plate and cup and saucer," I commanded, severely.

When he had made the necessary addition to the table appointments, he drew up a second armchair, and, as he poured out the tea, he said, gravely: "We have had a long probation, Helen, dearest—at least, it seems so to me; and it is not over yet. But this little interlude should hearten us for what remains. To me it is a glimpse into a future of perfect happiness and comradeship. Do you realise, Helen, that we are now a normal, engaged couple, free to marry when we choose?"

Of course I had realised that we were free; but as I thought of the shrouded figure that even now reposed under its sheet in the mortuary, I doubted whether the word "normal" was fully applicable.

"It is perfect peace and happiness to be here with you,

Jasper," I replied ; " but I think I shall feel more normal when we can meet without all this secrecy. And even now I don't quite understand it. Why is it so important that we should not be seen together ? "

" That is fairly obvious, I think," he replied. " I am going to be very frank with you, Helen, because I have complete confidence in your courage and strength of character. There is no use in blinking the fact that you are in a difficult position. That coroner man thinks you wrote those anonymous letters ; and he suspects that you knew about Otway's suicidal tendencies."

" But I distinctly said I did not."

" Yes, but, you see, the person who wrote those letters is not a person whose statements would carry any weight ; and he thinks you are that person. He thinks you have tried deliberately to drive Otway to suicide, and he will be looking for a motive. There is a fairly obvious motive already, as you were encumbered with a husband whom you didn't want ; but if you add another husband whom you did and do want, the motive for getting rid of the unwanted one becomes much more definite. That is the kind of motive he will be on the look-out for. Hence the necessity for the utmost caution on our part. If a witness could be produced who could depose to having seen us together, it might be possible for him to put some inconvenient questions."

" Could he not question me on the subject apart from any such witness ? "

" I don't think it would be admissible for the coroner to suggest the existence of a lover if he had no facts. And that brings us to the point that I was going to raise. You ought to be represented either by counsel or by a solicitor ; preferably by counsel, as a barrister is more agile—more accustomed to deal with the sudden exigencies that arise in court."

" You seem to suggest that I am charged with having brought about Mr. Otway's death."

" I wouldn't use the word ' charged ' as I don't know that there is any such offence recognised by law. Morally, to cause a man to commit suicide would be much the same as to murder him, but I can't say off-hand what the legal position would be. My impression is that it would not be an offence that could be dealt with by law unless the

causation were direct, as in the case where two persons agree to commit suicide together and one of them survives."

I listened to this exposition with a sinking heart. Jasper's intention was to reassure me. But if only he had known what I knew! If only he could have looked into my heart and seen the secret guilt that was hidden there! And, after all, was it so secret? Was it so securely hidden? Was the still, small voice of my own conscience the only accusing voice that I should hear? As I asked myself the question, uncomfortable memories of the mysterious sounds that had seemed to issue from the locked cupboard arose and whispered a new menace.

"I am putting the matter bluntly," Jasper continued, "as the position has to be faced, and I am confident that you have the courage and resolution to face it The coroner holds you accountable for Otway's death. He thinks you made a deliberate plan and carried it out to the bitter end. That is his line, and we have got to show that he is wrong, if we can, and in any case prevent him from misdirecting the jury. You must certainly be represented by counsel."

"What could my counsel do?" I asked.

"His principal function would be to prevent the coroner or the jury from putting improper questions—questions that do not properly arise out of the evidence, such as the one we spoke of just now. Of course, I could represent you, but it would not be advisable under the circumstances; and besides, I have had no experience of actual practice. Do you know any barrister whom you could ask?"

"The only barrister I know is Dr. Thorndyke, but I couldn't ask him to attend a coroner's court."

"I don't know that you couldn't. Of course, he is a great man. But the case is quite in his line, and I know that he doesn't mind where he appears if the case interests him."

"You know him then, too?"

"Only by repute. All lawyers know him as the leading authority on medical evidence. His position is unique, for he is a first-class criminal lawyer and a first-class medical specialist. You couldn't have a better man for your representative. I advise you to see him or write to him without delay. Does he know anything about your affairs?"

"Yes, I consulted him a month or two ago, about these very letters and told him about my reservations at the inquest. He promised to make a few inquiries, but I have not heard from him on the subject, so I suppose his inquiries led to no result."

"You can't be sure of that," said Jasper. "At any rate, as he knows something of the case, and is by far the best counsel you could get, the obvious thing is to communicate with him at once."

Of course, Jasper was quite right—in so far as he knew the facts. For he was assuming that I had nothing to conceal excepting my bargain with Mr. Otway and my relations with himself. He knew nothing of the dreadful events that befel on the night preceding Mr. Otway's death; of the silent willing and suggestion that my own conscience called murder, and that any jury would have called murder if they had known of it. But it was vivid enough in my mind; and I had hardly spoken Dr. Thorndyke's name before I realised that I dare not ask for his help. My own experience fully endorsed my father's estimate of his powers. He missed nothing. Hidden significances that no one else guessed at were to him as the writing of an open book. With no knowledge of the facts, he had instantly perceived that Mr. Otway's evidence was false, and that I was withholding something of importance. And so I felt it would be now. If he came into the case, my hideous secret would be a secret no longer. I dare not run the risk."

"I must think it over," said I. "It seems rather a liberty to ask a man of his position to watch the evidence at an inquest."

"He can but refuse," said Jasper; "and don't think it over for too long, or you may miss your chance. He is a busy man."

I made some sort of non-committal reply and changed the subject. Full as we were of the events of the moment, there were other matters that were more pleasant to discuss. For Mr. Otway's death had made a radical change in our prospects and plans for the future, and these we talked over with interest and pleasure but little dimmed by the dark clouds that hung overhead at the moment, until the chimes of St. Dunstan's, hard by, announced that it was nine o'clock and time for me to go.

"I suppose," said Jasper, as he bade me farewell, "we had better not meet again until this affair is over. It is only a fortnight, and after that we shall be free. Meanwhile, we can write as often as we please."

I agreed to this the more readily as I saw that another meeting with Jasper would make it difficult for me to escape from his demand that I should invoke Dr. Thorndyke's help. Nevertheless, as I took my way through Clifford's Inn Passage into Fleet Street, I found myself looking forward somewhat gloomily to the lonely and anxious fortnight that lay ahead.

For several days nothing out of the ordinary occurred. My friends at Wellclose Square, who knew approximately what my position was, were quietly sympathetic, but never referred to the matter; excepting the incorrigible Titmouse, who frankly congratulated me on my newly-acquired freedom.

"It's horrid for you, Sibyl," said she, "but still it is all for the best; though he might have managed it a little more decently—level crossing, you know, or 'found drowned,' or something of that sort."

"You are a callous little wretch, Peggy," said I.

"I don't care," she replied, defiantly. "You know it's true. I am awfully sorry for you now. It must be perfectly beastly to have to answer all those impertinent questions, and have your answers printed in the newspapers. But it will soon be over, and then you can forget it and have a good time. I shall dance at your wedding before I am six months older."

I had to pretend to be shocked, but the Titmouse's optimism did me good. For there *was* a bright side to the picture, and it was just as well to gather encouragement by an occasional glance at it.

About ten days after the first sitting of the inquest I received a letter from Mr. Isaacs. He had already written to me briefly to inform me that the funeral had been postponed by the coroner's direction until after the adjourned inquest, but had then said nothing about the will. The present letter supplied the omission, and its contents surprised me very much. It appeared that the will had been proved and that I was the principal beneficiary. "The testator," said Mr. Isaacs, "has bequeathed to you

the bulk of his personalty—upwards of eight thousand pounds—and the lease of the premises in Lyon's Inn Chambers, together with the furniture and effects contained therein. You are also constituted the residuary legatee. The chambers have now been evacuated by Mrs. Gregg, and are at your disposal. They are at present locked up, and the keys are in my possession pending your instructions and advice as to whether you intend to occupy the premises, to let them or to dispose of the lease. A copy of the will can be seen at my office, and, of course, the original can be examined at Somerset House."

The provisions of this will caused me, as I have said, considerable surprise. I had regarded myself as having no pecuniary claim on Mr. Otway, and had not considered myself as concerned in his will at all. Now it was evident that, selfish as he had been during his life, he had been anxious at least to make some atonement after his death for the injury he had done me; and the fact did not tend to make my sense of guilt less acute.

Before I had replied to Mr. Isaacs, letter I received two other communications. One was from Jasper; and though it was written in a tone of quiet cheerfulness, its contents filled me with alarm. It appeared that Jasper, becoming uneasy at my continued neglect to take any measures to secure a counsel to represent me, had called on Dr. Thorndyke with the object of retaining him. "We have had rather bad luck," he continued, "though I don't suppose it will matter. Dr. Thorndyke would have been pleased to represent you, but unfortunately he has been commissioned at the last moment by the Home Office to make an independent investigation of the case. He gave me the name of a suitable counsel—a rising junior named Cawley—with whom I have made the necessary arrangements. So your interests will be looked after, and we can trust Thorndyke to clear up the obscurities of the case."

The other letter was from Dr. Thorndyke himself, and confirmed Jasper's account. "Your friend, Mr. Davenant," it said, "called on me to-day to ask me to watch the proceedings of the inquest on your behalf, which I would have done with great pleasure if I had been at liberty. But I had just received instructions from the Home Office to look into the case and give evidence at the adjourned inquest; so

I referred your friend to Mr. Cawley, who is an excellent counsel and will be able to do all that is necessary.

"Mr. Davenant expressed great disappointment that I should be, as he expressed it, 'retained by the other side.' But I pointed out to him that there is no 'other side.' I am not a 'witness advocate.' My evidence would be the same whichever side employed me. I never undertake to represent a particular interest, but merely to obtain what facts I can and give those facts impartially in my evidence; and I always make it clear to clients that they employ me at their own risk—at the risk that the facts elicited may be unfavourable to them. So, although I am not retained by you, I shall act precisely as if I were. I shall find out all I can, and tell the court all I know. This will, presumably, be entirely in your interest.

"And now I am going to ask a favour of you. I wish to examine and make a plan of the premises at Lyon's Inn Chambers, and I understand that the tenancy of the Chambers is now vested in you. Will you be so kind as to lend me the keys and authorise me to make this survey? If you will, I shall be able to make my evidence more complete."

If Jasper's letter had alarmed me, Dr. Thorndyke's positively terrified me. The cool, relentless impartiality, the unhuman indifference to everything but the actual truth that the letter conveyed appalled me; and I even seemed to read a direct menace in its tone. If I had employed him, I should have done so at my own risk; so he seemed to hint. His intention was to "find out all he could and tell the court all he knew." How much would he find out? How much did he know already? He had a verbatim report of the evidence so far. He had Mrs. Gregg's statement that "they seemed to be talking about suicide." He would know all about suggestion and silent willing. Was it possible that he already knew that I had sent that wretched man on his last journey? When I recalled all that my father had said of his amazing powers of inference; when I remembered how unerringly he had detected the reservations in Mr. Otway's evidence and mine; I could not but feel that my chance of keeping my guilty secret was infinitesimal. The probability was that it was discovered already.

As to his request, obviously I had no choice but to grant

it ; and I was on the point of writing to Mr. Isaacs to instruct him to hand the keys to Dr. Thorndyke when it occurred to me that it might be well to avoid unnecessarily taking the former gentleman into my confidence. I knew nothing about Mr. Isaacs, and was not particularly prepossessed by him ; nor did I know the object of the proposed survey of the premises ; concerning which indeed I was somewhat mystified and rather uncomfortable. Eventually I decided to call at Mr. Isaacs' office for the keys and deliver them myself to Dr. Thorndyke.

Accordingly I wrote a short note to the latter informing him of my intentions, and on the following morning betook myself to Mr. Isaacs' office, which was situate in New Inn. I could see that my visit was somewhat unexpected, and evidently aroused the solicitor's curiosity.

" You will see," said he, " that the keys are all labelled, and I have made a rough inventory of the furniture and effects. Perhaps you would like me to come with you and check it."

" Thank you," said I, " but I don't think I will check the inventory to-day. We will postpone that until I take formal possession. At present I am merely going to take a look at the premises."

When I said this, I had, of course, no intention of going to the chambers at all, but as I walked down Wych Street with the keys in my bag, I reflected that, as I had said I was going, I had better go. Moreover, it was possible that the arrangement of the place had been disturbed and that some things might need to be replaced ; for I assumed that Dr. Thorndyke would wish to see the premises as they were on the night of the tragedy. And then I was not without some curiosity concerning this place which had been the scene of events so momentous to me.

At the bottom of Wych Street I turned round by the " Rising Sun " and walked along Holywell Street to the entrance of Lyon's Inn Chambers ; and as I, once again, ascended the gloomy stone stairs, the sinister atmosphere of the place enveloped me as it had done on previous occasions, and induced a vague sensation of fear. When I reached the landing and stood at the ill-omened portal, the feeling had grown so pronounced that I hesitated for a while to enter the chambers. At length I summoned up courage to insert the

key, and as the massive door swung open I stepped into the lobby.

But my nervousness by no means wore off. Leaving the outer door ajar, I walked quickly down the corridor, peered into the kitchen and the little, empty room that had presumably been occupied by Mrs. Gregg—apparently the furniture had belonged to her—crossed the living-room and entered the bedroom. Here nothing seemed to have been changed. Even the great peg—on which, of course, my eye lit instantly—still bore the end of crimson rope; the bed had been stripped, but the bedside table stood intact even to the bottle of veronal tablets. I looked about me quickly and nervously, noting the arrangement of the furniture and comparing it with my recollections of that unforgettable night; and when I had decided that it was unaltered, I turned to go.

As I crossed the living-room, the large, wardrobe-like cupboard attracted my attention, and I recalled the mysterious sounds that had seemed to issue from it. Was it possible, I wondered, that Mrs. Gregg could have been concealed in it that night and have overheard those last incriminating words of mine. She had not referred to them in her evidence, but the inquiry was not finished yet. I resolved to settle the question whether it was physically possible for her to have been concealed in the cupboard, and having tried the door and found it locked, I turned the keys over one by one until I found one labelled "cupboard in living-room." It was a rather unusual type of key, with a solid stem instead of the more usual barrel, and when I had inserted it and opened the door, I noticed that the key-hole passed right through the lock, so that the door could be locked from the inside as well as the outside. The cupboard itself was fitted like a wardrobe with a single shelf just above my eye level, beneath which a short woman like Mrs. Gregg could have easily stood upright. Thus the construction of the cupboard and the peculiar form of the lock made it at least possible that an eavesdropper might have been concealed that night; and that was all that I could say.

Before shutting the door I stood on tip-toe to see if there was anything on the shelf. In the semi-darkness of the interior I could see some kind of metallic object, and reaching in, took hold of it. As I drew it into the light of day

I gave a gasp of astonishment. It was my father's stick.

I took it down and turned it over curiously in my hands, marvelling how it should have got into this receptacle ; and as I turned it over, there came into view a flattened dent on the silver knob covered by a thick smear of blood to which two hairs had stuck. I looked at the hairs closely, but could come to no opinion as to whether or not they were my father's. One of these was white and the other a brownish grey. My father's hair had been iron grey as a whole, but I could not judge what the appearance of individual hairs might have been. If these were really his, then the man who had gone to his account was my father's murderer. It was a dreadful thought, but yet not without a certain compensation. As I looked at this relic of that day of wrath I felt my heart hardening. If the message that it bore was a true message, then I need have no more compunction for what I had done. If I had known with certainty that Mr. Otway had killed my father, those words which had slipped from me subsconsciously would have been consciously uttered with full and deliberate intent and without a qualm.

I stood for a while with the stick in my hand considering what I should do with it. That its mysterious reappearance would create a complication I plainly foresaw, but to take it away and conceal it would be not only dishonest but very unsafe ; for it was almost certain that someone knew of its existence. It must have been seen when the inventory was taken. Eventually I replaced it on the shelf and locked the cupboard ; and having put the keys back in my bag made my way to the door, which had been standing ajar all this time.

As I walked slowly to the Temple, I turned over in my mind the significance of this strange discovery. Someone must have known of the presence of this stick in the chambers, and that someone was either Mr. Otway or Mrs. Gregg. But both had declared positively that they had never seen it ; and it was difficult to imagine why either of them should have kept it hidden away and disclaimed all knowledge of it. I could make nothing of the problem. Only one thing was clear to me. I must let Dr. Thorndyke know of my discovery ; for it did not incriminate me in any way and might give him a clue to some of the elements of

the mystery, the unravelment of which would be to my advantage.

The door of Dr. Thorndyke's chambers was opened by Mr. Polton, who greeted me with a friendly smile, all creases and wrinkles.

"I'm sorry to say that the Doctor is not at home, ma'am," said he; "and he will be sorry, too. He would have liked to see you, I am sure."

"It doesn't matter, Mr. Polton," said I. "I have only called to leave these keys. But I should like to leave a message. Will you ask him not to disturb things more than he can help, as the inventory has not been checked yet; and will you tell him that the stick is in the large cupboard in the living-room? You won't forget, will you?"

"I shan't *forget*," he replied, with a slight emphasis on the last word, "but I never trust my memory in important matters. Would you mind writing the Doctor a little note?"

He produced writing materials and placed a chair by the table, and I sat down and briefly put my message into writing. When I had given him the note—which he set in a conspicuous place on the mantel-piece—he looked at me as if he had something to say, and I waited to hear what it was.

"I've got an old verge watch to pieces upstairs," he said at length. "I don't know whether you would care to have a look at the movement. It's worth looking at. If you want to know what workmanship is, you should look at the inside of a good, old watch."

I was not, at the moment, much interested in watches or workmanship, but I could not resist his companionable enthusiasm—to say nothing of the implied compliment. So we went up together to the workshop, where he exhibited with a craftsman's delight the delicate wheels, the engraved plates and the little chased pillars, and even brought out a microscope that I might appreciate the finish bestowed on the links of a fusee-chain that was hardly thicker than a horse-hair.

As the day of the adjourned inquest drew near, my anxiety—intensified by the consciousness of my guilty secret—grew more acute. My position was, as Jasper had said, a difficult one in any case. But the really alarming element

in it was the introduction of Dr. Thorndyke into the case. The suggestion factor in the suicide would probably remain unsuspected by the coroner and the jury. But would it escape Dr. Thorndyke's almost superhuman penetration. I could not believe that it would, for the hint of it was plain in Mrs. Gregg's evidence. And if it were detected, it would be revealed. Of that I had not the shadow of a doubt. Dr. Thorndyke was a kindly, even a genial man ; but he was Justice personified. He would investigate the case with relentless accuracy and completeness ; and he would tell the truth to the last word. Of that I felt certain. If he held my fate in his hands I was lost.

Of the view of the case taken by outsiders I had an unpleasant illustration the day before the adjourned sitting. It was furnished by an article in an evening paper that I had taken up to my room to read. Glancing over its pages, my eyes was caught by the words " Lyon's Inn," and I read as follows :

" The new Lyon's Inn seems to be emulating the reputation of the old. Within that ancient precinct occurred the famous Weare murder, forgotten of the present generation, but immortalised in those rather brutal verses of Tom Hood's :

> " ' They cut his throat from ear to ear,
> His brains they battered in ;
> His name was Mr. William Weare,
> He lived in Lyon's Inn.'

" The drama of Lyon's Inn Chambers, however, is not a murder—at least we hope not. It is at present regarded as a suicide. But there are some queer features in the case. There is, for instance, a handsome young wife, who, it seems, flatly refused to live with her elderly husband from the very wedding day ; there is a series of unaccountable anonymous letters ; and there is a rumour of a hoard of precious gems spirited away from the chambers, apparently on the very night when Mr. Lewis Otway hanged himself from a peg on his bedroom wall. So the adjourned inquest, which opens at 11 a.m. to-morrow, may elicit some curious revelations."

As I laid the paper down, a cold hand seemed to settle on my heart. The writer had exaggerated nothing. He had not even stated all the accusing facts. But even so, put

quite impartially, the article exhibited me as the central figure of the tragedy, as the visible agent of the sinister events that had befallen in those ill-omened chambers. And could I say that it misstated the case? Of the anonymous letters, indeed, and the stolen gems—if stolen they were—I knew nothing. But the central fact of the case was Mr. Otway's death. For that the coroner held me accountable. And, though he misjudged the evidence as to the means, I could not but admit that the coroner was right. The coming inquiry was, in effect, the trial of Helen Otway.

Chapter XXVI — *The Adjourned Inquiry*

THE second sitting of the inquest was a much more portentous affair than the first. The large room, or hall, in which it was held was nearly full when I entered, and it was evident that a considerable proportion of the occupants were spectators, attracted hither, no doubt, by the picturesque comments of the newspapers. But besides these were a number of persons connected with the inquiry. Behind the coroner's chair sat a group of police officers. Mr. Isaacs and Mr. Hyams were again present; the witnesses now included Mr. and Mrs. Campbell and a youngish man of a pronouncedly Hebrew type, who sat next to them. The side of the long table allotted to the press was filled by reporters—among whom I noticed the gentleman employed by Dr. Thorndyke, and there was one or two men whom I judged to be lawyers representing the various parties interested.

My own counsel, Mr. Cawley, a shrewd-looking man of about thirty-five, introduced himself to me as I took the seat reserved for me, and gave me a few words of advice.

"I think," said he, "I have had all the necessary instructions from Mr. Davenant, who, I see, is here." (I had had an instantaneous glimpse of him as I entered the room.) "His impression is that the coroner is disposed to put a certain amount of blame on you for your husband's death. If that is so, you will have to be rather careful about answering questions, especially any questions that the jury may put. Don't be in a hurry to answer any doubtful

questions. Give me time to object if they seem inclined to go beyond the evidence."

I promised to bear his advice in mind, and then asked: "Do you know if Dr. Thorndyke is giving evidence to-day?"

"I presume he is," was the reply; "but I notice that he is not present and that his reporter is."

At this point the coroner laid down the papers which he had been looking over, and opened the proceedings with a short address to the jury.

"The adjournment of this inquiry, gentlemen," said he, "which was decided upon a fortnight ago, is amply justified by the mass of new facts which are now available. These new facts bear chiefly on the property which, as you heard at the last sitting, was believed to be missing; but in other directions they throw a very curious light on the case. The first witness will be Superintendent Miller, of the Criminal Investigation Department."

As his name was spoken, the officer rose and took his place by the table. He took the oath, and disposed of the preliminaries with professional facility, and then waited gravely for the coroner's next question.

"You had some knowledge of the deceased, Lewis Otway, and his affairs, I understand?" said the coroner.

"Yes. I have known of his existence for more than twenty years."

"Will you tell us what you know of him?"

"I first made his acquaintance about twenty-three years ago. He was then practising as a solicitor—chiefly as a police-court advocate—and was known by his real name, Lewis Levy, which he subsequently changed to Otway. After a time, he began to engage in business as a money-lender, and it was at this time that he took the name of Otway. Presently he began to combine with money-lending a certain amount of trafficking in precious stones, and it was then that the police began to keep a somewhat close watch on him, with the idea that he might be also acting as a receiver. We never really had anything against him, but we always had the impression that he did some business as a middleman, or disposer of stolen jewels.

"When I first knew him, he had living with him a young woman, named Rachel Goldstein. She was nominally his

housekeeper, but there were two children—a boy named Morris, and a girl named Judith—whom he admitted to be his. When he changed his name to Otway, Rachel Goldstein took the name of Gregg, and used to pass as a Scotchwoman. The children lived with their parents until they grew up, when Otway (or Levy) provided for them in a way that made the police watch still more closely. Judith married a David Samuels, who traded under the name of Campbell as a dealer in works of art, especially goldsmith's work and jewellery; and Morris Goldstein started as a dealer in antiques, with a shop in Hand Court, and some workshops in Mansell Street, Whitechapel, where most of the antiques were made.

"Now both these men were practical working jewellers. It was believed that Otway financed them both, and it was known that he was the lessee of the premises that they occupied. Moreover, as soon as they were established in business, Otway gradually abandoned the money-lending, and occupied himself almost exclusively in dealing in gem stones. He was an exceedingly good judge of stones, and was quite successful as a legitimate dealer; but the police had an impression that he did a considerable amount of business that was not legitimate. I want it to be quite clear that I am not making any accusations; I am referring merely to an impression that the police had; it may have been quite a mistaken impression, but I mention it because the matter bears directly on this enquiry.

"The idea of the police, then, was that Otway dealt to a considerable extent in stolen property. We supposed that he obtained this property—precious stones, without the mounts—not from the thieves, but from the receivers, and that he disposed of them with the aid of his son and son-in-law. Both those men did a fairly large trade in high-class jewellery. They did not touch commercial goods, but dealt exclusively in work produced individually by skilled goldsmiths and jewellers, some of whom they kept regularly employed. They also did a good deal of repairing and re-setting, and their transactions were always with private customers, not with the trade.

"Our idea of the way it was worked was this: We thought that when Otway had got a collection of stolen stones he would pass on some of them to these two men. They would

then commission their craftsmen to make some articles of jewellery, and would provide them with stones which had been bought from the regular dealers, and the purchase of which could be proved if necessary. Then, when the jewels were delivered—or even after they had been sold to a private buyer—Campbell or Goldstein would take the purchased stones out of their settings and replace them by stolen stones. And a similar method could have been employed when jewels were brought for alteration, repair or re-setting. This kind of substitution would be very difficult to trace, for it is not easy to identify particular stones and prove that they are not the ones referred to in the dealers' receipts. As a matter of fact we never did trace any stolen gems excepting on a single occasion ; and then the evidence was not good enough for us to risk a prosecution.

"And now we come to the case that concerns this enquiry. About a year ago there was a burglary at the premises of Messrs. Middleburg, of New Bond Street, the well-known jewellers, and, among other things, a collection of valuable stones, worth about five thousand pounds, was carried off. It was a small collection, but all the stones were individually of considerable value, and several of them were remarkable, either in respect of size or other peculiarities. The collection has never been traced, and none of the stones has reappeared either here or abroad ; and the police have reason to believe that the whole collection is still in this country.

"When these stones disappeared so completely, the police formed the opinion that they had passed into the possession of Otway, and that he was holding them up until an opportunity occurred to issue them one by one. At this time he was living at Maidstone—he had been there a year or two, but he had kept his old chambers at Lyon's Inn, and often stayed in them for a week or more at a time. Last May or June he left Maidstone and came back to his old chambers, and we then began to keep a closer watch on him.

"About a couple of months ago he bought—or rather took on approval—from Mr. Hyams, of Hatton Garden, a collection of stones of which I have seen the list. These stones were carefully selected by Otway, and the remarkable thing about them is that, taken as a whole, they are singularly like the stolen collection. Among the stolen

stones, for instance, there were two large tourmalines, one green and one deep blue, both table stones with step-cut backs; four emeralds, two step-cut and two cut *en cabochon;* two large chrysoberyls, one brilliant-cut, green, and one *en cabochon*, yellow; one pale-blue diamond; and one pale-pink. Now, the collection taken from Mr. Hyams' includes tourmalines, emeralds, chrysoberyls, and diamonds, of almost exactly the same size, colour and cutting; and there are many other passable duplicates of the stolen stones.

"When I became aware of this transaction I inferred that Otway was making arrangements to release the stolen stones, and I caused a still closer watch to be kept on him; but up to the present not one of the missing stones has been discovered. Now I understand that the Hyams collection has disappeared; and if that is so, it seems probable that the person who has taken it is also in possession of the stolen collection. But that, of course, is only a guess."

"Quite so!" said the coroner, "and it is a matter that is more in your province than in ours. Is there anything more that you have to tell us that is relevant to the enquiry?"

"No, I think that is all."

"You will be remaining here, in case we want to refer to you again?"

"Yes; I want to hear Dr. Thorndyke's evidence, and, of course, I want to hear the verdict."

"I am afraid you may have a long time to wait, for I have had a telegram from Dr. Thorndyke saying that he has been detained at Maidstone, and has missed his train. It is a great nuisance for us all. However, we will go on with the evidence. The next witness will be Mr. Samuel Isaacs."

As the superintendent retired to his seat and Mr. Isaacs approached the table, I reflected rapidly on what I had just heard. Dr. Thorndyke had apparently been down to Maidstone. Was his visit connected with the present enquiry? And if so, what was it that he had been investigating? The locality suggested some kind of research in which I was concerned, but at the nature of that research I could make no guess whatever. However, there was no time to speculate on the subject, for Mr. Isaacs had been sworn, and was ready to begin his evidence.

"You were solicitor to the deceased, I understand, Mr. Isaacs?"

"Yes; I am one of the executors of his will."

"In that capacity have you heard of any property said to be missing from the chambers which he occupied?"

"I have. Mr. Hyams has made a claim to have restored to him a parcel of precious stones, valued at about four thousand pounds, which, he states, was his property, and which he asserts the deceased had in his possession."

"Have you examined the premises with a view to discovering that property?"

"Yes, I have examined the premises very thoroughly, and have made a complete inventory of all the effects of the deceased. I have gone through the contents of the safe and all other receptacles, and have checked the property which he had deposited at his bank. I have made a most exhaustive search, but have failed to find any trace of the parcel referred to, or of any precious stones whatever."

"Is it possible that you may have overlooked the parcel?"

"I should say it is impossible. My opinion is that the parcel is not on the premises, and it certainly is not at the bank."

The coroner and a legal-looking gentleman at the table both noted down this reply. Then the former said: "You are, no doubt, in a position to tell us what was the state of the deceased man's affairs. Was there any kind of financial embarrassment?"

"I should say, certainly not. The gross value of the estate—which is entirely personal—is a little over seventeen thousand pounds; and the liabilities, so far as they are known to me, are quite trivial."

"Can you tell us roughly, what are the main provisions of the will, that is, if it has been proved?"

"It has been proved. The principal beneficiary is the widow, who receives eight thousand pounds, and the lease of the chambers in Lyon's Inn, with the furniture and effects, and is made residuary legatee. Rachel Gregg—or Goldstein—receives one thousand, and Morris and Judith, each, two thousand pounds, and the lease of the premises in which they respectively carry on their business. There are a few small legacies—less than a thousand pounds in the

aggregate ; so that there will probably be a residue of about three thousand pounds, which will go to the widow."

"What is the date of this will ? "

"It is dated the 10th June last."

"Do you know whether the provisions of the will were known to the widow, or the other beneficiaries ? "

"I do not know. They were not disclosed by me until probate had been granted."

"Thank you," said the coroner. "I think we need not trouble you any further, unless the jury wish to ask any questions."

The jury did not ; but the legal-looking gentleman at the table did, and springing up like a Jack-in-the-box, he addressed the coroner.

"As representing Mr. Hyams, sir," said he, "I should like to ask the witness whether, in the event of the missing gems not coming to light, their loss would be chargeable to the estate ? "

The countenance of Mr. Isaacs hereupon assumed that peculiar expression known to students of sculpture as "the archaic smile."

"You are asking me to admit liability," he replied ; "I can't do that, you know. There is a recognised procedure in these cases, with which I have no doubt you are acquainted."

The questioner sat down with a jerk, and Mr. Cawley stood up.

"May I ask the witness, sir, whether, in the event of this loss being adjudged to be chargeable to the estate, that loss would affect equally all the beneficiaries ? "

"No," replied Mr. Isaacs, "it would not. It would fall, in the first place, on the residuary legatee. It would only affect the estate as a whole in so far as the amount of the charge exceeded that of the residue."

"Thank you," said Mr. Cawley. "There is one other question that I should like to ask. The present will is dated the 10th of last June. Did the execution of that will involve the revocation of a previously-existing will ? "

"Yes, it did. After his marriage deceased re-acknowledged the existing will by a fresh signature and attestation, but he revoked this will when he made the new one."

"Could you tell us who were the beneficiaries under that will?"

Mr. Isaacs fixed a thoughtful (and somewhat beady) eye on the coroner's pewter ink-pot, and cogitated for a few moments.

"Is it necessary, sir, for me to answer that question," he asked at length, looking up at the coroner.

"Is the point material?" the latter asked, looking at Mr. Cawley.

"I submit, sir, that it may become highly important," was the reply.

The coroner reflected with his eyes fixed on Mr. Cawley. Then he nodded. "Yes," he said, "I think you are right. We must ask you to answer the question, Mr. Isaacs."

Mr. Isaacs bowed. "The beneficiaries under that will were Rachel Goldstein, Morris Goldstein, and Judith Samuels."

"In what proportions was the property devised?"

"The bulk of the personalty was divided between Morris and Judith. Rachel Goldstein—or Gregg—received two thousand pounds, but she was also the residuary legatee."

"And the value of the estate?"

"I can't tell you that. I only know what it is now."

Mr. Cawley sat down, and Mr. Isaacs retired to his seat. Then the coroner pronounced the name of Mr. Hyams, and its owner took his place by the table.

"We have heard, Mr. Hyams," said the coroner, "of certain property of yours which was in the deceased man's custody. Will you give us a few particulars of the transaction. When, for instance, did it come into the possession of the deceased?"

"Two months ago—on the tenth of August, when the deceased called at my office, and asked me to let him have a selection of stones for a special purpose. He said that he had an opportunity of disposing of a number of pieces of jewellery to a wealthy American gentleman, and that he had discovered an extremely clever artist whom he proposed to commission to make them. They were to be important pieces, chiefly pendants, brooches, and bracelets. The stones were to be exceptional in size and quality, and he wanted an assortment for Mr. Campbell—who was conducting the transaction—to show the intending purchaser. He