steps. Father Brown was mounting the first step to follow him when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to behold the dark, thin figure of the doctor, his face darker yet with suspicion.

"Sir," said the physician harshly, "you appear to know some secrets in this black business. May I ask if you are going to keep them to yourself?"

"Why, doctor," answered the priest, smiling quite pleasantly, "there is one very good reason why a man of my trade should keep things to himself when he is not sure of them, and that is that it is so constantly his duty to keep them to himself when he is sure of them. But if you think I have been discourteously reticent with you or anyone, I will go to the extreme limit of my custom. I will give you two very large hints."

"Well, sir?" said the doctor gloomily.

"First," said Father Brown quietly, "the thing is quite in your own province. It is a matter of physical science. The blacksmith is mistaken, not perhaps in saying that the blow was divine, but certainly in saying that it came by a miracle. It was no miracle, doctor, except in so far as man is himself a miracle, with his strange and wicked and yet half-heroic heart. The force that smashed that skull was a force well known to scientists—one of the most frequently debated of the laws of nature."

The doctor, who was looking at him with frowning intentness, only said: "And the other hint?"

"The other hint is this," said the priest. "Do you remember the blacksmith, though he believes in miracles, talking scornfully of the impossible fairy tale that his hammer had wings and flew half a mile across country?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "I remember that."

"Well," added Father Brown, with a broad smile, "that fairy tale was the nearest thing to the real truth that has been said today." And with that he turned his back and stumped up the steps after the curate.

The Reverend Wilfred, who had been waiting for him, pale and impatient, as if this little delay were the last straw for his nerves, led him immediately to his favourite corner of the church, that part of the gallery closest to the carved roof and lit by the wonderful window with the angel. The little Latin priest explored and admired everything exhaustively, talking cheerfully but in a low voice all the time. When in the course of his investigation he found the side exit and the winding stair down which Wilfred had rushed

to find his brother dead, Father Brown ran not down but up, with the agility of a monkey, and his clear voice came from an outer platform above.

"Come up here, Mr. Bohun," he called. "The air will do you good."

Bohun followed him, and came out on a kind of stone gallery or balcony outside the building, from which one could see the illimitable plain in which their small hill stood, wooded away to the purple horizon and dotted with villages and farms. Clear and square, but quite small beneath them, was the blacksmith's yard, where the inspector still stood taking notes and the corpse still lay like a smashed fly.

"Might be the map of the world, mightn't it?" said Father Brown.

"Yes," said Bohun very gravely, and nodded his head.

Immediately beneath and about them the lines of the Gothic building plunged outwards into the void with a sickening swiftness akin to suicide. There is that element of Titan energy in the architecture of the Middle Ages that, from whatever aspect it be seen, it always seems to be rushing away, like the strong back of some maddened horse. This church was hewn out of ancient and silent stone, bearded with old fungoids and stained with the nests of birds. And yet, when they saw it from below, it sprang like a fountain at the stars; and when they saw it, as now, from above, it poured like a cataract into a voiceless pit. For these two men on the tower were left alone with the most terrible aspect of the Gothic; the monstrous foreshortening and disproportion, the dizzy perspectives, the glimpses of great things small and small things great; a topsy-turvydom of stone in the mid-air. Details of stone, enormous by their proximity, were relieved against a pattern of fields and farms, pygmy in their distance. A carved bird or beast at a corner seemed like some vast walking or flying dragon wasting the pastures and villages below. The whole atmosphere was dizzy and dangerous, as if men were upheld in air amid the gyrating wings of colossal genii; and the whole of that old church, as tall and rich as a cathedral, seemed to sit upon the sunlit country like a cloud-burst.

"I think there is something rather dangerous about standing on these high places even to pray," said Father Brown. "Heights were made to be looked at, not to be looked from."

"Do you mean that one may fall over," asked Wilfred

"I mean that one's soul may fall if one's body doesn't," said the other priest.

"I scarcely understand you," remarked Bohun indistinctly.

"Look at that blacksmith, for instance," went on Father Brown calmly; "a good man, but not a Christian—hard, imperious, unforgiving. Well, his Scotch religion was made up by men who prayed on hills and high crags, and learnt to look down on the world more than to look up at heaven. Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak."

"But he—he didn't do it," said Bohun tremulously.

"No," said the other in a odd voice; "we know he didn't do it."

After a moment he resumed, looking tranquilly out over the plain with his pale grey eyes. "I knew a man," he said, "who began by worshipping with others before the altar, but who grew fond of high and lonely places to pray from, corners or niches in the belfry or the spire. And once in one of those dizzy places, where the whole world seemed to turn under him like a wheel, his brain turned also, and he fancied he was God. So that though he was a good man, he committed a great crime."

Wilfred's face was turned away, but his bony hands turned blue and white as they tightened on the parapet of stone.

"He thought it was given to *him* to judge the world and strike down the sinner. He would never have had such a thought if he had been kneeling with other men upon a floor. But he saw all men walking about like insects. He saw one especially strutting just below him, insolent and evident by a bright green hat—a poisonous insect."

Rooks cawed round the corners of the belfry; but there was no other sound till Father Brown went on.

"This also tempted him, that he had in his hand one of the most awful engines of nature; I mean gravitation, that mad and quickening rush by which all earth's creatures fly back to her heart when released. See, the inspector is strutting just below us in the smithy. If I were to toss a pebble over this parapet it would be something like a bullet by the time it struck him. If I were to drop a hammer—even a small hammer——"

Wilfred Bohun threw one leg over the parapet, and Father Brown had him in a minute by the collar.

"Not by that door," he said quite gently; "that door leads to hell."

Bohun staggered back against the wall, and stared at him with frightful eyes.

"How do you know all this?" he cried. "Are you a devil?"

"I am a man," answered Father Brown gravely; "and therefore have all devils in my heart. Listen to me," he said after a short pause. "I know what you did—at least, I can guess the great part of it. When you left your brother you were racked with no unrighteous rage to the extent even that you snatched up a small hammer, half inclined to kill him with his foulness on his mouth. Recoiling, you thrust it under your buttoned coat instead, and rushed into the church. You pray wildly in many places, under the angel window, upon the platform above, and on a higher platform still, from which you could see the colonel's Eastern hat like the back of a green beetle crawling about. Then something snapped in your soul, and you let God's thunderbolt fall."

Wilfred put a weak hand to his head, and asked in a low voice: "How did you know that his hat looked like a green beetle?"

"Oh, that," said the other with the shadow of a smile, "that was common sense. But hear me further. I say I know all this; but no one else shall know it. The next step is for you; I shall take no more steps; I will seal this with the seal of confession. If you ask me why, there are many reasons, and only one that concerns you. I leave things to you because you have not yet gone very far wrong, as assassins go. You did not help to fix the crime on the smith when it was easy; or on his wife, when that was easy. You tried to fix it on the imbecile because you knew that he could not suffer. That was one of the gleams that it is my business to find in assassins. And now come down into the village, and go your own way as free as the wind; for I have said my last word."

They went down the winding stairs in utter silence, and came out into the sunlight by the smithy. Wilfred Bohun carefully unlatched the wooden gate of the yard, and going up to the inspector, said: "I wish to give myself up; I have killed my brother."

H. C. Bailey

THE LONG BARROW

from Mr. Fortune's Trials

Methuen, 1925

Mr. Fortune came back from the Zoo pensive. He had been called to the inquest on Zuleika the lemur—a strange, sad case.

He rang for tea, and was given a lady's card. Miss Isabel Woodall, who had no address, wished to consult Mr. Fortune : she had been waiting half an hour. Mr. Fortune sighed and went into the ante-room.

Miss Isabel Woodall stood up, a woman who had been younger, still demurely handsome. She was large and fair, but so plainly and darkly dressed that she made little of herself. " Mr. Fortune ? " she said with a pleasant shy smile.

" Yes. I'm afraid you didn't know that I'm not in practice now."

" But I didn't come to see you—er—medically. I'm not a patient, Mr. Fortune. I'm not ill. At least I don't think so. I wanted to consult you about a mystery."

" Oh ! I never go into a mystery except with the police, Miss Woodall."

" The police won't do anything. They laugh at us." She twisted her handkerchief in her hands. " I'm frightfully worried, Mr. Fortune. And I don't know what to do." She looked at him with large, anxious eyes. " Do you mind hearing about it ? "

Reggie Fortune decided that he did not mind. She was good to look at. He opened the door of his consulting-room.

" I'm Mr. Larkin's secretary," she explained. " Mr. Joseph Larkin : do you know him ? "

" The antiquary ? " Reggie Fortune murmured.

" Archæologist." Miss Woodall corrected him sharply. " He's the greatest authority on the Stone Age in England, Mr. Fortune. He has a house down in Dorsetshire, just on the border of the New Forest country, Restharrow, Stoke Abbas." As she seemed to expect it, Reggie made a note. " I've been working with him down there. But lately it's been horrible, Mr. Fortune." Her voice went up. " As if somebody wanted to drive me away."

" Yes. Now suppose we begin at the beginning. How long have you been Mr. Larkin's secretary ? "

" Oh, more than six months now."

"And nobody was ever horrible to you before?"

She stared at him. "Of course not. Nothing ever happened to me before. What do you mean, Mr. Fortune? You don't think it's Mr. Larkin, do you?"

"I haven't begun to think," said Reggie. "Well, you lived a peaceful life till you became Mr. Larkin's secretary. And then?"

"Oh, yes, and long after that. It was all quite peaceful while we were in London. But in the spring Mr. Larkin took this house at Stoke Abbas. It's a very lovely place, where the moors meet the downs. Mr. Larkin wanted to study the prehistoric remains about there. There's lots of them, ancient earthworks and burial places."

"Yes. Several long barrows on the hills."

She leaned forward clasping her hands. "That's it, Mr. Fortune," she said in a low, eager voice. "Mr. Larkin has been making plans to excavate the long barrow above Stoke Abbas. Did you know about it?"

Reggie smiled. "No. No. I'm afraid Mr. Larkin hadn't attracted my attention."

She flung herself back in her chair. She gave a little cry of irritation. "Do please be serious! That's just like the stupid police down there. They only make fun of it all as if I was a nervous fool. But it's horrible, Mr. Fortune."

"Why not tell me what it is?" Reggie suggested.

"That is what is so difficult." She looked down at herself, arranged the blouse at her bosom. "You see, there isn't anything definite. It's as if some one was working against me; as if some one wanted to hurt me. I'm being followed, Mr. Fortune. Whenever I go out alone I'm followed."

Reggie sighed. Many people have made that complaint to patient doctors, and incredulous policemen. "Who follows you?" he said wearily.

"But I don't know! Only I'm sure there is somebody. I'm being watched."

"Why should anybody watch you, Miss Woodall?"

"That's what I want to know," she cried. "But somebody does, Mr. Fortune. I've heard him. I've seen his shadow."

"Oh, you are sure it's a man," Reggie smiled.

"You don't believe me, do you?" Miss Woodall was growing angry with him. "That isn't all. When I go out alone I find dead animals."

Reggie sat up. " Do you though ? "

She thought he was still satirical. " Yes, I do, Mr. Fortune. Real ones. I've found two crows and another bird—a jay, I think it was—and a weasel. Horrible." She shuddered.

" Extraordinary mortality among the animals of Stoke Abbas," Reggie murmured. " How did they die, Miss Woodall ? "

" Good gracious, I don't know. They were very dead. Just on the path where I was walking."

" Yes, that's very interesting," said Reggie.

" It frightens me, Mr. Fortune. What does it mean ? "

" I should rather like to know," Reggie admitted. " Yes, I'll look into it, Miss Woodall."

" You yourself ? Oh, thank you so much. If you would ! I do so want it cleared up." She was effusively grateful. She fumbled in her bag. " I really don't know what your fee is, Mr. Fortune."

" There isn't one, Miss Woodall." He got rid of her. He consulted a book of reference upon Mr. Joseph Larkin. " I wonder," he said, and rang again for tea.

On the next day, he sat down to lunch in that one of his clubs where they understand the virtues of the herring. The chief of the Criminal Investigation Department saw him, and tripped across to his table. Both men love the simple life. They engaged upon a profound discussion whether the herring when pickled is the better for cloves. " In the delights of your conversation, Reginald," the Hon. Sidney Lomas protested at last, " I'm forgetting that I wanted to speak to you. A quaint old bird came to me this morning, one Joseph Larkin, an archæologist. He said——"

" He said," Reggie interrupted, " that he wanted to excavate a long barrow at Stoke Abbas and somebody was interferin' with the progress of science and nobody loved him, and what are the police for, anyway ? Is that right, sir ? "

" How do you do it, Reginald ? Messages from the spirit-world, or just thought-reading ? "

Reggie smiled. " Satan's Invisible World Displayed : by R. Fortune. No, Lomas, old thing. No magic. The fair Isabel told me her sorrow."

" That's Miss Woodall, the secretary ? She came to you, did she ? The old boy didn't tell me that."

" Well, the fair Isabel didn't tell me Joseph was going to you."

The two men looked at each other. " Curious lack of confidence about them," said Lomas.

"Yes. Several curious points. Well, what's Joseph's story? Is he followed when he goes out alone? Find dead animals in the path?"

"No carcasses for him. They're kept for Miss Woodall. He's followed. He hears strange noises at night. They come from outside the house. He's quite clear about that."

"Isabel didn't mention noises," Reggie murmured.

"No. The old boy said she hadn't heard them, and he didn't want to worry her, she was worried quite enough. That's his chief trouble. He seems rather gone on his fair secretary. What did you make of her, Reginald?"

"She's got the wind up all right. And she wasn't born yesterday. Queer case."

"Simple enough," Lomas shrugged. "The old boy goes down to this lonely place and wants to dig up an old grave, and the country people don't like it, and put up practical jokes to scare him off. That's what the local police think. I've been talking to them on the 'phone this morning."

"And the local police don't want to have a fuss with the local people over a couple of strangers."

"I sympathise," Lomas smiled. "Anyway, there's nothing for us."

"I wonder," Reggie said. "Why did one come to me and the other to you?"

"Oh, my dear fellow! They're both scared, and each of them wants to hide it from the other. Each of 'em thinks something horrid may happen to the other, and wants protection without making the other more scared."

"Yes. All very natural. Do you know anything about 'em?"

"Joseph is a man of means. Isabel came to him six months ago. Very highly qualified, he says. Classical scholar. Woman in a thousand for his job."

Reggie smiled. "His job! My dear fellow, he hasn't got a job. He's only a crank. He's always fussing round here, there, and everywhere. Why is he so mighty keen on this particular long barrow? Why is Isabel so mighty nervous about being followed? She's no chicken and no fool."

"I don't know what you're getting to, Reginald," Lomas frowned.

"Nor do I. That's what worries me. I want to go and look at Stoke Abbas. Let me have Underwood."

"But what are you thinking of?" Lomas objected.

"I think it isn't as natural as it looks," said Mr. Fortune.

In the morning his car picked up Sergeant Underwood and bore that officer away on the Southampton road. Sergeant Underwood, who looks like a nice, innocent undergraduate, lay back luxuriously enjoying the big car's purring speed. Reggie was studying an ordnance map of large scale. They were rushing the hill to Bagshot before he put it away and smiled at Underwood. "Well, my child, do you think you'll like it?"

"I like working under you, Mr. Fortune. But I don't know what I have to do."

"You have to catch butterflies. You're a promisin' young entomologist lookin' for rare species round the New Forest." He proceeded to give a lecture on English butterflies and moths. "Entomology in one lesson: by R. Fortune. Got that?"

Sergeant Underwood gasped a little. The labours of his intellect were betrayed on his comely face. "Yes, sir. Some of it. But Mr. Lomas said something about a long barrow. I don't rightly know what a long barrow is. But how does that come into butterflies?"

"It doesn't. A long barrow is the mound over an old grave. Thousands of years old." He opened the ordnance map. "This is our long barrow. Mr. Larkin and Miss Woodall—who live in that house—want to dig it up. And funny things have been happening. You're going to find a room in a nice pub somewhere near, but not too near, and watch the barrow and watch them and watch everybody—while catching butterflies."

In Southampton he bought Sergeant Underwood the complete equipment of a butterfly hunter, and put him on the train to find his own way to Stoke Abbas. The car bore Mr. Fortune on through the green glades of the New Forest to the bare heath country.

It was a day of cloud, and the very air over the moors was grey, and the long waves of heather were dark as the black earth, the distant woodland had no colour, the form of the chalk hills to northward was vague and dim. Mr. Fortune stopped the car and looked about him. Some grey smoke hung in a hollow from unseen houses. As far as he could see there was no man nor any of the works of man. The moor carried no cattle. There was no sign of life but the hum of bees, and the chirp of grasshoppers, and the flies and butterflies in the heavy air.

"Empty, isn't it, Sam?" said Mr. Fortune, and got out of the car.

"Brighter London!" said Sam the chauffeur.

Mr. Fortune took a track across the heather. It was heavy going, rather like a ditch than a path, an old track long disused and overgrown, but its depth showed that many feet must have passed that way once. It passed by a grey hovel lurking in a dip of the moor where a shaggy donkey was tethered, and some fowls of the old game-cock breed scratched in the sand. The thatch of heather was ragged, the mud walls crumbling here and there showed the wattle framework, the little windows were uncurtained.

The track led on to a bluff hill. Mr. Fortune groaned (he does not love walking) and set himself to climb. The hill-side was seared by a long scar. When he came to it he found the double ditch and bank of an old fort. He scrambled in and out and reached the flat hill-top. There rose the mound of the long barrow of Stoke Abbas.

Mr. Joseph Larkin had done no digging yet. Nor anyone else. The mound was clothed in heather and old gnarled gorse. The black sods beneath had not been turned for many a year.

Reggie looked over miles of bare moor and saw no one between him and the horizon. But on one side the hill was scooped out like a bowl, and down in the depths a rabbit scuttered to its burrow. Mr. Fortune went down that way. A man was squatting in the heather, binding bunches of it into little brooms, far too busy to look at him. "Oh, good day," said Mr. Fortune, and stopped. "What's the name of that thing up there?"

The man lifted his bent shoulders and showed a dark, beardless face, wide across the cheekbones, a big head for his small size. He stared like a startled animal.

"Do you know the name of that thing up there?" Reggie said again.

"Dragon Hill, 'tis Dragon Hill," the man cried, gathered up brooms and slid away through the heather. His legs were short, he was broad in the beam, his speed was surprising.

Mr. Fortune trudged back to his car and was driven to the house of Mr. Joseph Larkin. It stood beyond the village in a shrubbery of rhododendrons, a plain red-brick box. Mr. Larkin was out. Miss Woodall was out too.

The conventional furniture of the drawing-room was dismal. It seemed to contain no book but *Paradise Lost*, illustrated by Gustave Doré. Mr. Fortune shuddered and wandered drearily to and fro till he found on the writing-table the catalogue of a second-hand bookseller.

Mr. Larkin seemed to have an odd taste in books. Those which he had chosen to mark were a mixed lot—somebody's sermons, a child's picture book, Mr. Smiles on Thrift, a history of aviation, Izaak Walton. He marked them in a queer way. A line was drawn under one letter. Reggie Fortune pondered. The letters underlined were S K U T H A I : probably more farther on in the catalogue. But some one was talking outside. Reggie put the catalogue back.

A chubby old fellow came in smiling. " Mr. Reginald Fortune? I don't think I have the pleasure——"

" You called on Scotland Yard, Mr. Larkin."

" Oh, you've come from Mr. Lomas ! That's very good of you, very good indeed." He smiled all over his rosy face. " Now let's just go into the study and I'll tell you all about it."

He did. He told at great length, but he did not say anything new, and in the midst of it Miss Woodall arrived in a hurry. " Mr. Fortune ! You've come down yourself ! But how very kind." While she took Reggie's hand she smiled on Joseph Larkin.

He needed it. He had been much disconcerted. " Oh, do you know Mr. Fortune, my dear ? " he said, frowning.

" I didn't. But he is the great expert, you know. I went to him to ask his advice about this horrible business."

" But, my dear child, you didn't tell me."

" I couldn't bear you to be so worried, Mr. Larkin," she laid her hand on his arm.

" There, there. But you shouldn't, you know. You really shouldn't my dear. Leave everything to me."

" You are kind," she murmured.

" I have arranged it all," Mr. Larkin chirped. " I went to the fountain head, Mr. Sidney Lomas. And here is our expert." He beamed on Reggie. " Now—now I think I've told you everything, Mr. Fortune."

" Well, not quite," Reggie murmured. " Why are you specially keen on this long barrow, Mr. Larkin ? "

Mr. Larkin began to explain. It took a long time. It was something about Phœnicians. The Phœnicians, Reggie gathered, had been everywhere, and done everything before the dawn of time. Mr. Larkin had given his life to prove it. He had found evidence in many prehistoric remains in many countries. When he came down to Stoke Abbas to complete his great book on *The Origins of Our World* he found this fine barrow at his very door. Miss Woodall very properly suggested to him that——

"Oh, Mr. Larkin, I'm afraid it wasn't me." Miss Woodall smiled. "I'm not expert enough to advise."

"Well, well, my dear, you're a very capable assistant. We decided that when we'd finished the book we must excavate the barrow on Dragon Hill, Mr. Fortune."

"And that's how the trouble began," Reggie murmured. "Yes. Any particular reason why you came to Stoke Abbas?"

Mr. Larkin looked at Miss Woodall. "I—I really don't know. I think this house was the most suitable of any that you saw, my dear."

"Oh, much the most suitable. Mr. Larkin must have quiet, you see, Mr. Fortune."

"And this is charmingly quiet, my dear." They purred at each other, and Reggie felt embarrassed. "Charming—if only Mr. Fortune can stop this annoyance. I hope you'll stay with us, Mr. Fortune."

They went to bed early at Restharrow. About midnight Mr. Fortune, just dropping off to sleep, was roused by an odd whistling roaring noise, such a noise as a gale might make. But there was no gale. He went to the window and peered out. The moon was rising behind clouds, and he could see nothing but the dark mass of rhododendrons. There was a tap at the door and Mr. Larkin came in with a candle showing his pale face. "That's the noise, Mr. Fortune," he said. "What is it?"

"I wonder. Miss Woodall sleeps on the other side of the house?"

"Yes. I don't think she has ever heard it. It only comes and goes, you know. There! It's stopped. It'll come again. Off and on for half an hour or so. Most distressing. What can it be, Mr. Fortune?"

"I should rather like to know," Reggie murmured. They stood and listened and shivered, and when all was quiet at last he had some difficulty in getting Mr. Larkin to bed.

Reggie rose early. He saw the post come in, but Mr. Larkin and Miss Woodall were both down to take their letters. There was some mild fun about it. Mr. Larkin took the whole post by playful force, and sorted it with little jokes about "censoring your correspondence, my dear." It appeared to Reggie that the old gentleman was jealous in the matter of his fair secretary. But the only thing for her was a bookseller's catalogue.

After breakfast the two shut themselves into the study to work. Mr. Fortune went walking, and upon the moor found Sergeant

Underwood in pursuit of a cabbage butterfly. His style with the net was truculent. "Game and set," Mr. Fortune smiled. "Fierce fellow. Don't be brutal, my child. No wanton shedding of blood."

Sergeant Underwood retrieved his net from a bramble. "I never hit the perishing things," he said, and mopped his brow.

"Never mind. You look zealous. Keep an eye on the hut over there in the hollow. I want to know who comes out and what he does."

After lunch Mr. Larkin and Miss Woodall rested from their labours. The old gentleman withdrew to his bedroom. The lady sat in the garden. Reggie went out. To the west of the grounds of Restharrow a clump of lime and elm rose to shelter the house from the wind. Reggie went up into one of the elms and climbed till he was hidden and high. He saw Miss Woodall leave the garden alone. She turned off the road by a footpath which led across the moor. Reggie took binoculars from his pocket. She went some way, looked about her and sat down in the heather. Her back was towards him, but he could see that she bent over a paper. Ahead of her a little dark shape moved in the heather, came near the path, and turned away and was lost in the folds of the moor. Miss Woodall rose and walked on. She stopped, she drew aside, looked all about her, and went on more quickly. Reggie steadied his binoculars on the bough. She was going into the village, and among the houses he lost sight of her.

He slid to the ground and met her on her way back. "Alone, Miss Woodall? That's very brave."

"Isn't it?" She was flushed. "Do you know what I found on the path?"

"Yes. I've seen it. A dead stoat."

"Oh, horrible! What does it mean, Mr. Fortune?"

"I shouldn't worry about that," said Reggie. He went on. He saw a butterfly net waving.

"This is a rum business, sir," Sergeant Underwood protested. "A little fellow came out of that hut, kind of gipsy look, and he mooched about over the heath. Seemed to be looking at snares he had set. He found a beast over that way, and sat down there making brooms. Then a woman came down from the house, and he scuttled along and chucked the beast on to the path and cut off. Very rum game."

"Nothing in it," said Reggie sadly. "Well, we'd better deal

with him. Go to your pub, my child, and have some food and a nap. I want you outside that hut after dark."

Soon after dinner that night, Mr. Fortune professed himself sleepy and went to his room. He smoked a cigar there, heard the household go to bed, changed into flannels and rubber shoes, and dropped unostentatiously out of the window. Among the rhododendrons he waited. It was a calm, grey night ; he could see far, he could hear the faintest sound. Yet he had seen and heard nothing, when from behind the hedge which marked off the kitchen garden came that whistling, roaring noise. Mr. Fortune made for it, stealthily, as it seemed to him, silently. But he only caught sight of a little man whirling something at the end of a string when the noise ended in a whiz and the fellow ran off. Mr. Fortune followed, but running is not what he does best. The little man was leaving him from the start, and soon vanished into the moor. Mr. Fortune at a sober trot made for the hovel under the hill, and as he drew near whistled.

He arrived to find Sergeant Underwood sitting on a little man who wriggled. " I'm a police officer, that's what I am," Underwood was saying. " Now don't you be nasty, or I'll have to be harsh with you."

Reggie flashed a torch in the wide, dark face of the broom-maker and signed to Underwood to let him sit up. " You've given me a lot of trouble," he said sadly. " Why do you worry the lady ? She don't like dead stoats."

" Her don't belong on the moor," said the little man sulkily. " Her should bide in her own place."

" The old gentleman, too. You've worried him with your nasty noises. It won't do."

" He should leave the land quiet. 'Tis none of hisn."

" They are quiet. Quite quiet. They've never done any harm."

" Fie, fie ! That they have surely, master. They do devise to dig up old Dragon's grave. 'Tis a wicked, harmful thing."

" It don't hurt you if they see what's inside the old mound."

" Nay, it don't hurt Giles. Giles was here before they come, me an mine, ten thousand year and all. Giles will be here when they be gone their way. But 'tis evil to pry into old Dragon's grave. There's death in it, master."

" Whoever died there in your time ? " Reggie said quickly.

" Nay, none to my time. But there's death in it, for sure. Bid 'em go their ways, master, and leave the moor quiet."

"They'll do you no harm, my lad. And you musn't bother them. No more of these tricks of yours, Giles, or we'll have to put you in gaol."

The little man squeaked and took hold of his knees and stroked them. "Ah, you wouldn't be so hard. I do belong on the moor, me and mine. I don't break no laws."

"Oh, yes, you do, hunting these folks. You ought to be in gaol now, my lad. You've made a lot of trouble. If there's any more of it you'll be shut up in a little close cell, not walking in the wind on the moor."

"Nay, master, you wouldn't do it to a poor man."

"You be good, then. I know all about you, you know. If the Restharrow folks have any more trouble it's gaol for Giles."

The little man breathed deep. "The old Dragon can have them for Giles."

"Don't forget. By the way, where's the thing you made the noise with?"

The little man grinned, and pulled out of his coat a bent piece of wood at the end of a cord. When he whirled it round his head it made the whistling roar of a gale.

Mr. Fortune came back to his bedroom by the window, and slept the sleep of the just. He did not reach the breakfast table till Joseph and Isabel were nearly finished. "All my apologies. I had rather a busy night." Miss Woodall hoped he had not been disturbed. "No, not disturbed. Interested." Mr. Larkin quivered with curiosity. He thought Mr. Fortune had gone out.

"Out on the moor at night?" Miss Woodall shuddered. "I wouldn't do that for anything."

Mr. Fortune tapped his third egg. "Why should you? But no one will meddle with you, Miss Woodall. The fellow that made the trouble won't bother you any more."

"Who was it?" she said eagerly.

"Well, I shouldn't worry. One of the local people suffering from superstition. He thought it was dangerous to dig up the old barrow. He wanted to scare you off. But I've scared him, and he's seen the evil of his ways. I think we'll give him a free pardon. He wouldn't have hurt you. You can rule him out and get on with the excavation."

"But that's magnificent, perfectly magnificent," Mr. Larkin chirped. "How quick too! You've really done wonderfully well." He twittered thanks.

"You're quite sure about it, Mr. Fortune?" said Miss Woodall.

"Nothing more to be afraid of, Miss Woodall."

"How splendid!" She smiled at him. "Oh, you don't know what a relief it is."

Mr. Larkin plunged into plans for the excavation. Old White at the Priors had promised to let him have men at any time before harvest. No time to lose. Better see the old man at once. Why not that morning? He did hope Mr. Fortune would stay and watch the excavation. Most interesting. Mr. Fortune shook his head. Perhaps he might be allowed to come down and see the result.

"That's a promise, sir. An engagement," Mr. Larkin cried. "We shall hold you to that, shan't we, my dear?"

"Of course," said Miss Woodall.

They went off together to see old White—it seemed impossible for Mr. Larkin to make any arrangements by himself. Reggie was left in the house waiting for his car. He wandered into the study. Everything had been tidied away. Everything but the books was locked up. "Careful souls," Reggie murmured, and paused by a waste-paper basket. It had some crumpled stuff in it. He smoothed out the catalogue of a draper's sale. Some articles had been marked by a line under a letter. He ran his eye over the pages. T A P H O N O I G E I N he read, and heard the horn of his car. He dropped the catalogue back in the basket, and slid out of the study as the door bell rang. The maid coming to tell him his car was at the door, found him in his bedroom writing a letter.

The big car purred over the heath, passed a man pursuing butterflies, slowed and stopped. The chauffeur went to examine his back tyres. The passenger leaned out and watched. When the car rolled on again there was something white by the roadside. The butterfly hunter crossed the road and picked up a letter. The passenger glanced back. "Now let her out, Sam," he said.

In the late afternoon, the Hon. Sidney Lomas, making an end of his day's work in Scotland Yard, was surprised by the arrival of Mr. Fortune. "Oh, Reginald, this is so sudden," he complained. "Finished already? Has Isabel no charms?"

"Some of your weaker tea would do me no harm," said Mr. Fortune. "Isabel's a very interestin' woman, Lomas. Joseph also has points of interest. They're both happy now."

"Cleared it up, have you? What was it?"

"It was a son of the soil. Very attractive person. Bushman type. Probably a descendant of some prehistoric race. You do find 'em

about in odd corners. Family lurking on that moor for centuries. He had a notion if anybody opened the old Dragon barrow, death came out of it. Probably a primeval belief. So he set himself to scare off Joseph and Isabel—tokens of death for 'em—the bull-roarer at nights."

"What in wonder is a bull-roarer?"

"Oh, a bit of wood rather like a boomerang. You twirl it round on the end of a string and it makes the deuce of a row. Lots of savages use them to scare off outsiders and evil spirits. Very curious survival is Giles. Well, we caught him at it and bade him desist. He's in a holy funk of prison, and he's going to be good. And Joseph and Isabel are getting on with the excavation."

Lomas smiled. "So it was just the local rustic playing the fool. Reginald, my friend, I enjoy the rare and exquisite pleasure of saying I told you so."

"Yes." Reggie drank his tea. "Yes. Tell me some more, Lomas. Why did Joseph and Isabel go down to this place off the map and get keen on excavating its barrow? Lots of other nice barrows."

"Do you think there's something special in this one?"

"No. I think there's something special in Joseph and Isabel. I found in the house a second-hand bookseller's catalogue. Some letters in it were underlined: S K U T H A I. Probably more. I hadn't time to go on. Joseph came in, and afterwards the catalogue vanished."

"Lots of people mark catalogues," Lomas shrugged.

"Yes. But not so that the marks make a word."

"Word?"

"Lomas, my dear old thing, I thought you had a classical education. S K U T H A I is Greek for Scythians, and in Athens the policemen were Scythians."

"Oh, this is fantastic."

"Well, to-day I found a draper's catalogue in a waste-paper basket. Letters marked as before. T A P H O N O I G E I N. Probably more, again. But that's two words. Taphon oigein. To open the tomb. Either Joseph or Isabel is making very secret communications with somebody about excavating that barrow. Why?"

"You do run on," Lomas protested. "But what are you starting from? These people have been doing their damnedest to get the police to look into their affairs. If either of them was up to anything shady, that's the last thing they'd want."

"There's about a dozen answers to that," said Reggie wearily.

"Have some. Suppose something suspicious happens later. Mr. Lomas will say 'Oh, nothing in it, these people must be all right, they came and asked us to look into their affairs.' Why, you're saying that already. In the second place, both of them may not be in it; perhaps one of them knew the other was going to the police and played for safety by going too. Thirdly, they were both rattled, one of them may have thought somebody knew more than was convenient, and wanted to make sure. Fourthly and lastly, my brethren, whatever the job is, it has something to do with opening this barrow. They're both dead keen on that. They wanted to make sure they could do it without bother."

"Very ingenious, Reginald. And partially convincing," Lomas frowned. "If you'll tell me what they can get by excavating a barrow, I might begin to believe you."

"Nothing," said Reggie, "nothing. That's why it's interesting."

"My dear fellow! You have too much imagination."

"Oh lord, no. None. I'm the natural man. I get nerves when things aren't nice and normal. Hence my modest fame. But imaginative! Oh, Mr. Lomas, sir, how can you?"

"Well, well. Time will show," Lomas rose. "If any corpses lie out on the shining sand, I'll let you know."

"That'll be alright," said Reggie cheerfully. He did not move. "I left Underwood down there."

"The deuce you did!" Lomas stared and sat down again. "And what's he doing?"

"He's catching butterflies. He's also finding out whether Joseph or Isabel posts any catalogues and where they go to."

"Confound you, he musn't do that on his own. If you want postal correspondence examined we must apply to the Postmaster-General. You ought to know that, Fortune."

"My dear old thing, I do. I also know country post offices. Don't be so beastly official."

"This is a serious matter."

"Yes. Yes, that's what I've been trying to indicate," Mr. Fortune smiled. "Look here. These beauties go down to a place off the map for no decent reason but that it's off the map. Joseph could write his silly books anywhere. Did Isabel take Joseph, or Joseph take Isabel? Their stories don't agree. Joseph is affectionate and Isabel coy. Joseph watches her jealously and Isabel is meek. When they've been there some time they get mighty keen

on digging up a barrow. Lots of barrows in lots of places, but they must have the lonely one at Stoke Abbas. Then we find them dealing in messages too secret for a letter in plain English. One message something about police, another about opening the barrow. Well there's going to be dirty work at the cross roads, old thing."

"But it's all fanciful, Fortune. Why the deuce shouldn't they write letters? What's the use of putting a message in Greek?"

"They're all alone. Each of 'em can see all the letters the other gets, perhaps all the letters the other posts. But a catalogue wouldn't be noticed. If one of 'em don't know Greek the marked letters would be absolutely secret. S K U T H A I didn't suggest anything to the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department."

"But what do you suppose the game is?"

"No, dear"; Mr. Fortune smiled. "I have no imagination. You've got all the facts. Oh, not quite. I did a little distant snapshot of Joseph and Isabel." He laid a roll of film on the table. "Get the faces enlarged big. Some of your fellows might know 'em. Good-bye. I've got to dine with my young niece—the one that married a gunner. Always merry and bright. Very exhausting."

After which nothing happened for a couple of weeks. Lomas when he met Mr. Fortune in their clubs made sarcastic remarks about the Greek language and the use of the imagination. Then Joseph Larkin wrote to Mr. Fortune that the excavation was nearly complete, urging him to come and see the result. Mr. Fortune told Lomas over the telephone and Lomas made scornful noises. "I'm going," said Mr. Fortune.

"You've got a lot of time to waste," said the telephone.

But three days afterwards, while the car stood at his door to take him to Stoke Abbas, the telephone spoke again, "Hallo, Fortune. Are you up? Marvellous. Just come round here."

Lomas was in an early morning temper. "Some more crazy stuff about that Stoke Abbas case." He stared at Reggie with a bilious eye. "I put the post office people on to it, more fool me. Here's a report. A bookseller's catalogue was posted on Monday with a number of letters from Restharrow. It was addressed to Miss George, 715 Sand Street, Bournemouth. In it a number of letters were marked, a, b, four e's, g, h, two i's, l, m, n, p, r, two s's, t and u."

"As you say," Reggie groaned.

"What do you mean?"

"You said more fool you. Quite so. Why didn't you leave it to

Underwood ? He'd have got it all right. And I told him to give us the letters in order."

"Confound you, we can't tamper with the mail."

"My dear old thing, you're too good for this world." Reggie took pen and paper. "Say it again. A, b——" He wrote down ABEEEEGHIILMNPRSSTU, lit a cigar and pondered. "You moral men give me a lot of trouble. Here you are. PRESBUS GAMEIN THELEI. And very interesting too. That clears up several points."

"What the deuce does it mean ?"

"What did you learn at school, Lomas ? I've often wondered. It means 'The old man desires to marry.' Yes, I thought so. I told you you had all the facts. You remember Joseph said Isabel had had a classical education. Not like you, Lomas. She's sending the messages. She's caught Joseph. It's opening out. Now tell your priceless post office folks to report the order of the letters in future. I don't want to work cryptograms because you've got a conscience. And send somebody to look into Miss George, of 715 Sand Street, good and quick. I'm going down to Stoke Abbas. They've opened the barrow. Oh, by the way, what about the snapshots ?"

"They enlarged well enough. Nobody here knows the people."

"Not known to the police ? Well, well. Get a snap of Miss George. Good-bye."

That evening Mr. Fortune stood on Dragon Hill with Joseph and Isabel. Half a dozen labourers rested on their spades and grinned. The long mound of the barrow was gone. It lay in scattered heaps of grey sand around the cromlech which it had covered, three upright stones supporting one flat. Under that flat stone, as a man might lie under a table, lay a skeleton. Reggie knelt down and took up the skull. "Ah, genuine antique," he gave a sigh of relief.

Miss Woodall shuddered. "He looks like a monkey."

"No, I wouldn't say that," said Reggie gently, still intent on the bones.

"I am convinced he was a Phœnician," Mr. Larkin announced.

"Oh, lord, no," said Reggie. He was not interested in Mr. Larkin's theory that everything old was Phœnician. He was thinking that this man of the barrow with his long head and his big cheekbones and his short wide body must have been much like Giles of the hovel on the moor. An ancestor perhaps ; five thousand years ago the family of Giles the broom-maker were

kings on the sandhills. But Mr. Larkin went on talking about Phœnicians. . . . "Yes, very interesting," said Reggie wearily, and stood up.

"Poor dead man," Miss Woodall sighed. "He looks so lonely."

"My dear," said Mr. Larkin affectionately. "What pretty thoughts you have." They walked back to Restharrow, and he proved again that the skeleton was Phœnician, and it was most gratifying, and he was going to give it to the British Museum, and Reggie was bored.

In that condition he remained for the duration of his visit to Restharrow. When Mr. Larkin was not talking about Phœnicians, or (worse still) reading extracts from his new book on *The Origins of Our World*, he was (worst of all) being affectionate with Miss Woodall. A mawkish little man. But there was no mystery about them. The great book was published, the barrow was opened. Mr. Larkin was going to write a pamphlet about it, close it down again, marry Miss Woodall, and take her off to South Africa, where he meant to find many more traces of the Phœnicians. Reggie wished them joy, and as soon as he decently could, went back to London.

Two days afterwards Lomas found him having breakfast in his bedroom, a rare thing, a sure sign of depression. "My dear fellow, are you ill?"

"Yes, very ill. Go away. I don't like you. You look distressin'ly cheerful, and it's very bad for me."

"There's been another message. TUCHEAPELTHE."

"Don't gargle, spell it," said Mr. Fortune peevishly. "Yes TUCHE APELTHE. Two words. 'Fortune has gone away.' Very kind of her to notice it."

Lomas smiled. "So Isabel wanted Miss George to know Mr. Fortune had gone away. That's interesting. And we've got something about Miss George, Reginald. She isn't a woman. Oh no. She's a middle-aged man, who calls himself George Raymond. He don't live at 715 Sand Street. That's a little shop where they take in letters to be called for. George Raymond has lodgings the other end of the town, and lives very quiet. My fellows have a notion he's American."

"Fortune has gone away," Reggie murmured. "I wonder if Fortune ought to have stayed. No. Nothing would happen with me in the house. I wonder if anything will happen."

"What, are you giving up the case?" Lomas laughed.

"No. There's a case all right. But I don't know whether we'll ever get it. Joseph and Isabel are going to marry, and be off to South Africa."

Lomas was much amused. "And that's the end of it all! My poor Reginald! What a climax! Mr. Fortune's own particular mystery. All orange blossom and wedding cake."

"Yes. With Miss George as best man. I hope your fellows are looking sharp after Miss George."

"He's giving no trouble. They won't miss him. We've got a photograph too. Nobody knows him, but we'll have it enlarged."

"Well, watch him."

"Oh, certainly; anything to oblige. Have they asked you to the wedding, Reginald? You really ought to send them a present."

Lomas says that Reggie then snarled.

Two weeks passed. Reggie received an angry letter from Mr. Larkin stating that the British Museum had refused the skeleton, and he was replacing it in the barrow, and publishing the full facts to inform the public of the blind prejudice of the official world against his work. He was leaving immediately for South Africa, where he had no doubt of obtaining conclusive proof of the theory of the Phœnician origin of all civilisation. Mrs. Larkin sent Mr. Fortune kind thoughts and best wishes.

Mr. Fortune moved uneasily in his chair. "And they lived happily ever after," said Mr. Fortune. "Kind thoughts and best wishes. Dear Isabel." He rang up Lomas to ask how Miss George was getting on.

"Many thanks for kind enquiries," said the voice of Lomas. "Nothing doing. Not by George. He lives the life of a maiden lady. What did you say?"

"I said damn," said Mr. Fortune.

That evening came a letter from Sergeant Underwood. He was plaintive. He thought Mr. Fortune ought to know there seemed nothing more to do at Stoke Abbas. The barrow was being covered up. The servants were leaving Restharrow. Mr. Larkin and Miss Woodall were going to be married at the registry office to-morrow, and the next day sailing from Southampton. Mr. Fortune spent a restless night.

He was fretting in the library of his dreariest club next morning, when the telephone called him to Scotland Yard. Lomas was in conference with Superintendent Bell. Lomas was brisk and brusque. "They've lost George Raymond, Fortune. He left

Bournemouth this morning with a suit-case. He went to Southampton, put it in the cloakroom, went into one of the big shops, and hasn't been seen since. When they found they had lost him they went back to the station. His suit-case was gone."

"Well, well," said Mr. Fortune. "You have been and gone and done it, Lomas." But he smiled.

"What do you want us to do now?"

"Oh, you might watch the Cape boat. Make sure G. Raymond isn't on the Cape boat when she sails. If you can."

"I've arranged for all that. Anything else?"

"You might give me a time-table," said Mr. Fortune. "I'm going down to the long barrow."

"Good gad!" said Lomas.

As darkness fell on the moors that night, Mr. Fortune and Superintendent Bell stopped a hired car a mile away from Stoke Abbas, and walked on through the shadows. When they came near the shrubberies of Restharrow, a voice spoke softly from behind a clump of gorse. "Got your wire, sir. All clear here. They were married this morning. Both in the house now. Servants all gone. No one else been here."

Reggie sat down beside Sergeant Underwood. "Seen anyone strange about?"

"I did fancy I saw some one going up towards the barrow a while ago."

"Work up that way quietly. Don't show yourself."

Sergeant Underwood vanished into the night. Bell and Reggie sat waiting while the stars grew dim in a black sky. The door of Restharrow opened; and a bar of light shot out. They heard voices. "A beautiful night," said Mr. Larkin. "The most beautiful night that ever happened," said Mrs. Larkin. They came out. "Let us go up to the dear old barrow," she said. "I shall always love it, you know. It brought us together, my dearest."

"My dear child," Mr. Larkin chirped. "You are full of pretty thoughts."

They walked on arm in arm.

A long way behind, Reggie and Superintendent Bell followed.

When they came to the crest of the hill, where the turned sand was white in the gloom, "Dear place," said Mrs. Larkin. "How sweet it is here. I think that old Phœnician was lucky, don't you, Joseph dearest?"

A man rose up behind Joseph dearest and grasped his head.

There was no struggle, no noise, a little swaying, a little scuffle of feet in the sand, and Joseph was laid on his back and Isabel knelt beside him. The other man turned aside. There was the sound of a spade. Then Sergeant Underwood arrived on his back. They went down together. Bell charged up the hill to catch Mrs. Larkin as she rushed to help. But Underwood already had his man handcuffed and jerked him on to his feet.

Reggie came at his leisure and took a pad of cottonwool from Mr. Larkin's face. " Who is your friend with the chloroform, Mrs. Larkin ? " he said gently.

" You devil," she panted. " Don't say a word, George."

" Oh, yes, I know he's George," said Reggie, and flashed a torch on the man.

Sergeant Underwood gasped. Sergeant Underwood stared from the man in handcuffs to the man on the ground. " Good Lord ! Which have I got, sir ? " For the man who stood was of the same small plump size as Mr. Larkin, grey-haired, clean-shaven too, dressed in the like dark clothes.

" Yes, a good make up. That was necessary, wasn't it, Mrs. Larkin ? Well, we'd better get the real Mr. Larkin to hospital." He whistled across the night and flashed his torch and the hired car surged up to the foot of the hill. Mr. Larkin was carried to it, it bore him and Reggie away and behind them Mrs. Larkin and George, handcuffed wrist to wrist, tramped long miles to a police station.

A little man lying in the heather on the hill watched them go. " Old Dragon hath taken her," he chuckled. " Giles knew he would have her," and he capered home to his hut on the moor.

Superintendent Bell coming into the coffee-room of an inn at Wimborne next morning, saw Mr. Fortune dealing heartily with grilled salmon. " You had a bad night, sir," he said with sympathy.

" Yes. Poor Joseph was very upset. Spiritually and physically. Can you wonder ? It's disheartening to a husband when his wife attempts murder on the wedding night. Destroys confidence."

" Confidence ! They're a pair of beauties, the woman and this chap George. I suppose they were going to bury poor Larkin alive."

" Yes. Yes. He wouldn't have been very lively, of course."

" I should say not. What do you think that fellow had on him, sir ? "

"Well, chloroform, of course. A pistol, I suppose. Probably some vitriol."

"That's it." Superintendent Bell gazed at him with reverent admiration. "It's wonderful how you know men, Mr. Fortune."

Mr. Fortune smiled and passed Bell his plate of nectarines. "I knew they'd think of everything. That's their weakness. Just a little too careful. But it's a beautiful plan. Grave all ready, nice light soil, spades handy, chloroform the old man, pour vitriol over him, bury him. Not likely anyone would open that barrow again in a century. If they did, only an unknown corpse inside. Nobody missing. No chance anybody would think the corpse was Mr. Larkin who sailed for South Africa alive and kicking. And George and Isabel are Mr. and Mrs. Larkin and live happy ever after on the Larkin fortune. If only she hadn't taken such pains about a grave, if only she hadn't bothered about Giles, if only they hadn't been so clever with their secret messages, they'd have brought it off. Poor old Joseph, though. He's very cut up. He fears Isabel never really loved him. But he don't want to give evidence against her, poor old thing."

"I don't wonder," said Bell. "He'll look a proper fool in the witness-box."

"Yes. Yes. Not a wise old boy. But human, Bell, quite human."

There was a sprightly noise without. Lomas came tripping in, and on the heels of Lomas a solid man with the face of a Roman emperor. "Reginald, my dear fellow, all my congratulations," Lomas chuckled. "You told me so. You really did. Splendid case. This is Mr. Bingham Jackson of the American service."

"I want to know you, sir," said Mr. Bingham Jackson magisterially. "This is right good work. We wanted those two and we wanted 'em bad."

"When Mr. Jackson saw your photographs of George and Isabel he called for champagne," Lomas chuckled.

"Yes. I thought somebody ought to know them," said Mr. Fortune. "I thought they weren't new to the business."

"No, sir." Mr. Jackson nodded impressively. "Not new. Isabel and George Stultz are American citizens of some reputation. We shall be right glad to have them back. They eliminated Mrs. Stanton Johnson of Philadelphia and got off with her collection of antique jewels. They used morphia and a cellar then. One of our best crimes."

"This is going to hush up Joseph's trouble," said Mr. Fortune

with satisfaction. "You'll claim their extradition for murder?"

"Sure thing. We didn't get in on our case early like you. They brought the murder off our side. You always had 'em on a string. But I want to say, Mr. Fortune, I do admire your work. You have flair."

"Not nice people, you know," said Reggie dreamily. "I get nerves when people aren't nice and ordinary."

"Some nerves," said Mr. Jackson.

Sir Basil Thomson

THE HANOVER COURT MURDER

from Mr. Pepper, Investigator

John Castle, 1925

A whole week had passed since Mr. Pepper—and the small boy—had spoilt Mr. Cohen's scheme; and no one had come near the office. My Chief spent the time in perfecting his scientific apparatus which had not been called into use since my short association with him. It was therefore with immense satisfaction that an opportunity for exercising Mr. Pepper's higher art was thrown into my way.

An acquaintance at my club, finding me in the smoking-room when other people were working, took the chair opposite to mine and said, "By the way, Jones, I hear that you dabble in detective work; that you have discovered a wonderful Yankee who wipes the eye of Scotland Yard. Why don't you make your name by solving this Hanover Court case?"

"I've never heard of it."

"No; it hasn't got into the papers yet, but it will."

He had himself heard of it only that morning. His landlord had a sister who let lodgings in Hanover Court. She had opened the luggage of a tenant who had gone abroad owing rent and had been horrified by finding in one of the trunks what appeared to be the remains of a dismembered human body. She had run at once to her brother, who consulted my friend as to what she ought to do.

He took the usual course of advising that she should report the matter to the police, but, as far as he knew, she had not yet done so because she had made the discovery only that morning at breakfast-time. He gave me her address.

I seized my hat and took a taxi to Hanover Court. I found the poor landlady wringing her hands. "You heard of the case through my brother, sir? Well, I am glad that you've come in time. I was just going off to the police, but it will ruin my business to have the police messing about the house, asking me a lot of questions and calling in the Coroner. They would make me appear as a witness at the inquest and the papers would publish the address. Then what chance would there be of the best class of people taking rooms where there's been a murder? It is not respectable. Now if you'll take away the trunk and take all responsibility I shall breathe freely. Of course, if there *has* been a murder I must stand by it, but you will ferret it all out and I hope that I shall hear no more about it."

I agreed to everything on the condition that she gave me all the information she possessed. She showed me the trunk which stood on the landing of the second floor. I opened it with trembling fingers. It contained a number of packages wrapped in dirty newspaper and enveloped in part of what appeared to be an old army blanket. I satisfied myself that they contained bones, probably human bones, and with her assistance carried the trunk downstairs for removal to our office. In the meantime she told me the story of her lodger.

"He was what they call an eccentric, sir—always going off without notice and writing letters asking me to reserve his room and take care of his luggage. He always sent me money for the rent while he was away. He would write from all sorts of places—Naples, Egypt, Athens, and one letter I had came from Peru. I never knew him pack anything for his journeys. All he said was that he was called away on business and would I be sure and feed his cat?"

"You haven't told me his name, Mrs. Auger."

"To tell you the truth, I had almost forgotten it. We always called him 'The Doctor' because when he came to me five years ago he said something about being in the medical profession. But his real name was Allen—Henry Allen."

"That sounds English enough."

"Oh, there was nothing foreign about him except his hair. He

never seemed to get it cut—his hair and his eccentricity—for foreigners *are* eccentric, don't you think so, Mr. Meddlesome-Jones? His age? Well, that would be hard to say—something between thirty-five and fifty, I should say."

"Had he no friends, no visitors?"

"That's the peculiar thing. He had none. No, I am wrong there. About three years ago a lady did call and ask for Dr. Allen. I asked her what name I should give. She said, 'Don't trouble; just tell me what floor he's on, and I'll find him myself.' And up she walked, but of course he must have heard her voice. She soon came down again and said he wasn't there. Then I went up myself, and of course there he was, hiding under the bed. He said nothing to me, but I can't help thinking that that lady was his wife. She never came again, not to my knowledge."

"Did he get no letters?"

"Yes, once a month, always on the 2nd unless it was a Sunday, there would be a fat registered letter addressed 'Henry Allen, Esq.'—no doctor on the envelope. I think it was from a bank, but I don't remember which. He always paid his bill that morning for the whole month. He never had a meal in the house, not even his breakfast, but he used to bring back a little meat for his cat. Where did he go all day? Well, sir, that's more than I can tell you. On weekdays I would hear him coming downstairs regular at nine—I could have set my clock by him. If he passed me he would say 'Good morning,' but nothing else. On Sundays he would lie in bed all the morning, and go out punctually at twelve. Oh, he was eccentric, but not the sort to commit a cold-blooded murder; for it is cold-blooded, Mr. Meddlesome-Jones, whatever you may say, to cut up a person into little bits like that, now isn't it? He had no books in his room and he didn't leave a scrap of writing behind him. What he did all day is a mystery to me."

"When did you see him last?"

"It would be back in April. Yes, it is just three months. He just walked out of the house as usual and when I went up to do his room I found that he had packed everything away in his trunks. 'Off again, I suppose,' I said to myself, and I was right—only this time I had no letter and he hadn't paid me for the room. I didn't think very much of that—he had been behind with the rent before. I thought that the money would come. But then as the weeks went by and I had no letter I began to get anxious and I thought I had better see what he had left behind him. There wasn't a scrap of

writing in any of the trunks—only old clothes and—and what you saw."

"But the letters from the bank?"

"That's the peculiar thing. Whenever he went off those letters stopped coming. There hasn't been a letter since he left. Do you think he can have committed suicide after the murder?"

"We have got to find out first if there has been a murder, Mrs. Auger. I suppose there has been no one missing in the neighbourhood?"

She thought for some moments and then shook her head. "But I'm sure that lady who came to see him was his wife," she said.

"Why?"

"Well, she had a masterful, disagreeable way with her and he got under the bed to hide from her. A man would never do that with anybody except his wife." I forebore to evoke any confidences of Mrs. Auger's own experience of the married state.

"And if she was his wife, what then?"

"Why, it might be her that's in the trunk."

The taxi driver knew nothing of what his burden contained. For an extra shilling he helped me upstairs with it into the office where my Chief's face became a mark of interrogation until the man was gone. Then I told him the story and opened the trunk. I never saw him so much moved before. He laid the bones out on the table as if they were jewels, I noticed that desiccated flesh was adhering to some of them; it was quite inoffensive. At the bottom of the trunk was the skull carefully wrapped in newspaper by itself. We carried them into the laboratory and cleared a table for them. While he was arranging them in order I committed to paper what Mrs. Auger had told me.

Now, if my Chief had a fault it was that he tried to do too much himself rather than call in the expert. My instinct would have been to call in a surgeon or an anatomist and let him express his opinion on the bones, but when I ventured to suggest this my Chief flew up in the air. "What does your surgeon know of plastic reconstruction?" he said, and not knowing what plastic reconstruction was I said that I didn't know. "Well," he said, "I am going to show you."

It was a great opportunity for me. When I was admitted to the laboratory the bones were disposed on the table like a complete skeleton. My Chief's first words were disconcerting. "Some of the bones are missing," he said, "but the curious thing is that the

body was deformed. That ought to make our work easier, but it is a very remarkable case. This woman had the left leg three inches shorter than the right and the right arm two inches shorter than the left. She must have had a very odd appearance.

"We'll soon see what she looked like," said my Chief, confidently, as he manipulated wax in a pan of warm water. The skull was secured in a wooden vice clamped to the table. With extraordinary dexterity he pinched off little cones from the lump of wax in the pan, warmed them over a spirit lamp, and stuck them all over the skull. Very gradually he began to build up a face; and after an hour's work it became under his skilled manipulation a human face certainly, but a face that one could only see in a nightmare. With her bodily deformities in addition she might have made a good living at a show.

"There," he said, "is the murdered woman as she was in life." I had it on the tip of my tongue to say, "Then she deserved to die," but I restrained myself in time, and I suggested that Mrs. Auger should be called to the office to identify her with Mrs. Allen. But my Chief thought that the time had not come for that. "Let us find the murderer and confront him with his victim," he said. "In nine cases out of ten he is so startled that he makes a full confession."

"And if he does, what then? Surely we should have to hand him over to the police."

"Yes," he mused, "but in a case of felony it is the duty of any citizen to arrest the felon. You will make the arrest; I will call in the reporters, and then we will ring up your wonderful Scotland Yard." There was the most subtle irony in his tone. He covered the remains with a sheet, and we sat down to consider the best way of finding Henry Allen. I was for advertising in the Agony Columns of *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*. "Henry Allen. Come back and all will be forgiven."

"He would plead at his trial that he had been promised a free pardon."

"Then why not something like this? 'If Henry Allen, late of 17 Hanover Court, will communicate with Pepper and Jones, Adelphi, London, he will hear of something to his advantage.'" My Chief snorted with contempt; I feared that it might be because for the first time I had dared to couple our two names.

"Do you really suppose that a man who goes in daily fear that his crime will be discovered would reply to an advertisement?"

"Well, you see them in the newspapers every day when lawyers want to get hold of a man. Someone must reply to them or they wouldn't put them in."

"No, Mr. Meddleston-Jones; if we use the newspapers we will proceed in quite a different way. I have there (he pointed to his card index cabinet) the names and addresses of the principal newspapers of every country in the world—daily and weekly. We would prepare a little news paragraph, a snappy little thing of how an Englishman named Henry Allen, had been named as residuary legatee to an eccentric lady who died leaving a million and a half, and that when the sole executor, Mr. Pepper (there was no mention of 'Meddleston-Jones' in the proposed paragraph) wrote to the happy legatee he found that he had gone abroad leaving no address and the letter was returned by the Post Office. Under the provisions of the will, if Henry Allen fails to claim his legacy within six months, the whole of the money goes to found a Home for Starving Cats in London. We would have this translated into every language and sent out through one of the press agencies. Everyone likes to read about unclaimed money."

"Wouldn't you be inundated with false claimants?"

"All the better. We would confront them all with the corpse first, then with Mrs. Auger, and they would be glad to get away alive."

It seemed to me to be a very dilatory method of procedure, but my Chief must have adopted it because a week or so later reporters connected with the press agency began to hang about the office and stop me in the street. This annoyed my Chief very much. It appeared that he had made a confidential arrangement with the head of the Agency, that the paragraph should not be released to any newspaper in the United Kingdom, because he would have to confess that there was no eccentric millionaire lady in the case at all. But the paragraph must have appeared in foreign newspapers because later we received begging letters from abroad. An Englishwoman wrote from Leghorn to say that if Henry Allen failed to appear, there were more starving cats in Leghorn than there could possibly be in London, that they kept her awake at night by their me-owing, and that she would be glad to establish a home for them if she might have part of the money. A man signing himself 'Henry Allen' wrote from Cooktown in Queensland, asking for the expenses necessary for him to come to England to establish his claim. Another wrote from Salt Lake City to say that

though he was known locally as Richard Doherty, he was satisfied that as his mother's name was Allen he was the person named in the will, and he would be thankful if a payment could be made on account ; and a lady, writing from Buenos Ayres in the name of Mary Allen, claimed the legacy on the ground that when she was a girl her schoolfellows always called her ' Henry.' But of the real Henry Allen not a word.

My Chief was becoming impatient. He was engaged on several cases at the time and the remains of the murdered woman, taking up nearly half the laboratory, were in his way. He had added chestnut hair to his reconstruction of the head, and colour to the cheeks ; in her reconstructed state she must certainly have been very trying to live with, even when covered with a sheet. One morning he said to me, " Mr. Meddleston-Jones, we are not getting on with this Allen case. Why don't you bring the landlady down to identify the victim ? Then we might get on."

Mrs. Auger did not take at all kindly to my suggestion. She reminded me that our agreement was that she should not be troubled with the case any more, and I had some difficulty in getting her to the office. When I drew back the sheet she uttered a piercing scream and fell into a chair. " Oh ! My heart ! " she sobbed. " My poor heart ! " and she tried to clutch that organ in her anatomy.

" You recognise her, Mrs. Auger ? Is she like the wife ? "

" She is like nothing on earth," she gasped, " and after seeing her I shall be ill for a week." It was a great disappointment.

I persuaded my Chief at last to take a photograph of the head, and give it to an illustrated daily paper for circulation as a missing person about whom information was desired. He took the photograph, but ten minutes before I started with it for the newspaper office in Fleet Street, an event occurred which entirely changed the course of our enquiry. Mrs. Auger reappeared.

She produced a picture postcard, bearing the Genoa postmark, from Henry Allen himself, saying that he would be in London within the week. " And now," she said, " what am I to say to him when he asks for his trunk ? I can't say that the police have taken it, can I ? You had better pack up all those bones in the newspapers just as he left them and bring back the trunk." To this proposition, of course, my Chief would not agree. He pointed out that, according to the law, Mrs. Auger herself was bound to arrest him as soon as he set foot in her house.

"Arrest him?" she exclaimed aghast. "How can a woman arrest a man?"

"The law knows no difference between men and women, Mrs. Auger," I said. "Women serve on juries; there are women police. All you have to do is to lay your hand on his shoulder and say, 'Henry Allen, I arrest you for the wilful murder of a woman unknown, and I must caution you that anything you say will be taken down in writing, and will be used against you at your trial.' Then write down what he says, lock him up in his room, and telephone to Mr. Pepper, Central 1202."

"I could never do such a thing, Mr. Meddlesome-Jones, were he a murderer three times over. You'll have to do this yourself."

I looked at Mr. Pepper and Mr. Pepper looked at me. It seemed to me that this was the moment for calling in the regular police who are paid for doing these things, but I did not dare to say so. I had an uncomfortable feeling that I had read somewhere about a man being charged as an accessory after the fact, and I had a horrible presentiment that Pepper and I would find ourselves standing in the dock at the Old Bailey. We dismissed Mrs. Auger with some difficulty on the plea that we had to consider our position. There were still four days before us. Mr. Pepper was equally perturbed. The only solution which he could suggest was that I should wait at Mrs. Auger's door day after day and as soon as Allen appeared accost him, and induce him to come to the office to be confronted with his victim. We would then be guided by events. If he displayed signs of guilt we might go so far as to telephone to the police. It was the first time I had ever known him to contemplate lowering his dignity as a scientific detective, and I honoured him for it though I cannot say that I liked the rôle he had assigned to me. An extraordinary coincidence saved me. I owed my rescue to the same club acquaintance who had first introduced me to the man whom I shall continue to regard as the greatest detective of the age.

My friend was lunching at a table for two. As I passed him he sprang up and introduced me to his guest, a middle-aged man with a beard turning grey, and asked me to join them. In the course of conversation it appeared that his guest was the head of a well-known medical school in London, and that he was at the moment of my appearance relating an unpleasant incident at the school. My friend asked him to begin the story again. "Mr. Meddleston-Jones," he was good enough to say, "is the very man

to advise you. He is associated with the best detective brains in London, besides being himself a man of very wide experience in crime." It was rather oddly expressed, but my friend meant well.

"But I don't want to call in the police—at any rate until we know more."

"Bless you, Mr. Meddleston-Jones has no connection with Scotland Yard. He is an 'amateur'—if I may say so—a brilliant amateur."

Thus reassured, the doctor told his story. A young man, an assistant to the custodian of the anatomical school, had disappeared two days before. His character was exemplary; he handled no money; as far as the custodian knew, he had no private worries. He had put away the 'subjects' on the Monday evening and had remarked to the custodian that he thought it looked like rain. At eight next morning he should have returned to work for he was always punctual. It was a busy day and when the students arrived at ten everything was late; some of them complained to him, the doctor, that if their 'subjects' were not arranged for them, they could not expect to do well in the approaching examination. He sent for the custodian, and it was thus for the first time that he learned that John was missing. They sent to his home to enquire the cause; he had not been home. The whole day passed without news of him. The obvious course was to report his disappearance to the police, but, as we could easily understand, it would be very disturbing to the young minds of the students then in the throes of preparing for examination, and destructive to the morale of the establishment to have detectives practically in charge of the place, questioning everybody and poking their noses into every part of the building. He wished to avoid it if possible. But there was one solution that had occurred to him—he scarcely liked to breathe it—which would make the intervention of the police inevitable—if the poor lad had been the victim of foul play, in the building itself—then——

"But why should you suspect that?"

"Well, I don't quite know. Perhaps it was that when I was going my rounds a few evenings ago I heard loud words coming from the laboratory. All the students had left for the day. I went to the door and I heard the custodian speaking very sharply to the boy, and he was answering much in the same tone. It was one of those quarrels about the details of duty in which a principal had better not interfere, and I went away. But I confess that it left a

disagreeable impression on my mind. The custodian always seemed to me an excellent servant—been with us for years—but he is short-tempered and I confess that his language on that occasion was rather a shock to me. Perhaps his duties tend to make a man callous."

"But there is a wide gap between bad language and murder."

"I know, I know. Only it occurred to me—I may be unduly imaginative—that for a man in his position—alone in the building with this boy till a late hour, there are so many facilities for disposing of a body—the furnace and so forth—it is nothing more than a vague suspicion."

We were silent for some time, leaving our food untasted. Then my friend said, "Why don't you ask Jones to go back with you? He could look over the place and tackle the porter in a way you could not. Let him represent himself as employed to find the missing boy."

"Will you?" said the doctor, turning to me. "It would take a great load off my mind, but I scarcely liked to suggest it."

We wasted no further time over luncheon. The doctor had his car waiting and drove me to the school. "If you don't mind," I said, "I should like you to introduce me to the custodian and leave him to show me round. I can put the necessary questions to him as we go. It will seem less formal and official." This being precisely what the doctor wanted, he took me straight to the laboratory, where a middle-aged man was moving about in his shirt sleeves. "Stokes," he said, "this is Mr. Meddleston-Jones, who is enquiring into the disappearance of young Sopwith. He would like you to show him round the premises. I'll leave him with you." He shook hands with me and disappeared.

Stokes seemed quite glad to see me. "We had better not disturb the students in the operating-room, sir. They'll all be gone at five and in the meantime we can go over the basement. Queer business, this of young Sopwith. A better lad never stepped, but I had noticed lately that things had been going wrong with him. He had lost interest in his work."

"Had he anything on his mind?"

"That's just what I think. From things he let drop I think he was gone on some young woman who wouldn't have him. One day he said, 'What's the least that a young couple could live on in London, Mr. Stokes?' And when I named two pound a week, he just fell to pieces, as if I'd crushed him. He's never been the

same lad since they refused him for the Army. This is where they bring them in, sir."

"Bring what in?"

"The subjects," he said, in some surprise. We were in a vaulted tunnel in the basement. "And this is the boiler house." A furnace was glowing behind a red hot door.

"Whose duty is it to stoke the boiler?"

"That's just it, sir. It was young Sopwith's duty, but latterly he neglected it and it fell upon me. The same with the packing."

"The packing?"

"Yes, packing the subjects into the coffins. Here is the packing room." We were in a vaulted cellar. On one side was a pile of rough deal coffins stained black, on the other trays of bones and skulls with dried flesh adhering to them. "They come down here from the operating-room like that, sir, and it was young Sopwith's duty to sort them out into some sort of body for each coffin; that is to say, he was supposed to be careful that, as far as he could, there should be only one head, two arms and two legs in each coffin before it was nailed up and taken to the cemetery, but he was very careless latterly and I've had to see to it myself."

"You mean he mixed up the bodies?"

"Oh, no one could help doing that, sir. You can't keep them distinct, but we keep a register of the names and each coffin has the name of one of the subjects tacked on to it for funeral purposes. But of course it may not be their remains. Probably there is something belonging to ten or a dozen in each coffin."

While we were holding this cheerful conversation I was leaning on an enormous wooden box in the outer cellar. I ventured on a question.

"When they bring in the—the subjects, what is done with them?"

"If you will stand over there, sir, I'll show you. You are leaning on them." I must have startled him by the speed of my movements. "Oh, they won't bite, sir," he said, smiling, as he lifted the heavy lid. I peeped over his shoulder. There on racks lay ten human bodies, old and young, stiff, nude and white, the debris of humanity, the homeless, and friendless, who lead their lives in the London workhouses and probably are sorry to leave them in spite of the misery they have known. In their death they do more for humanity than they have ever done in life, by furnishing material for each fresh generation of surgeons to work upon. "We keep

them fresh by injecting formalin," he said, pointing to a wound in the neck of one of the corpses. He shut down the lid and looked at his watch. " The students will be gone now, sir," he said. " I'll take you to the dissecting-room." He led the way upstairs to a large room with high windows that ran the length of the building. A dozen tables, each covered with a sheet, held the subjects that were in the hands of students. One attracted my attention on account of its great bulk in comparison with the rest. The sheet scarcely sufficed to cover it. " Oh that. That's a young elephant that died in the Zoo. One of the students who is sure of his final had a fancy for it."

At the end of the room were a number of iron doors labelled " Head," " Arm," " Leg," " Pelvis," and so on. I asked Stokes what was in them, for they were a possible hiding-place for the body of the missing youth. He threw open one of the iron doors disclosing iron racks, on which human remains were disposed in various stages of dissection.

" It's these that make our job of ' assembling ' so difficult downstairs. There's perhaps the arms of twenty people in there and there'll be twenty heads in the next cupboard but one. But it has to be like this so that a student can take up his work just where he left off."

Something had caught my attention and I was scarcely listening. These human arms with desiccated flesh adhering to the bones. Where had I seen them ? Then it came upon me with a flash—the remains of the murdered woman in our office. I turned to Stokes.

" Do you ever lose any of these bodies ? "

" Oh, now and again a student will take away a hand or a foot in his bag to work on at home, but if he did such a thing without reporting it to me there'd be trouble, sir. You see, they can't get past my system of booking in and out. I make 'em all sign for what they have. You, for instance, sir, suppose you were a new student. You come to me and you say, ' Stokes, have you got a knee for me to-day ? ' ' Yes,' I says, ' but you'll have to sign for a whole leg.' And then you slip it into your bag and walk away with it. Then, the next morning you says, ' Stokes, I think I'll work at the wrist and hand to-day. Have you got a nice fore-arm ? ' I look at my book and I say, ' Mr. Meddleston-Jones, not another bit do you get until I see that leg you had yesterday.' " He became silent and thoughtful. " Mind you, I don't say that I've never had them

get by me. There was that Allen, for instance—I'll have something to say to *him* when he comes back, if he ever does."

"Tell me about Allen," I said, trying hard to keep my voice even and steady.

"Oh, you should ask the Principal about him. He'd have plenty to tell you. He got away with a whole body from me last year—more than a body—and I didn't find it out till I was going over my books afterwards. Cunning ? I never knew a man to beat him. I'll tell you how he did it. On a Monday he'd ask for a head, and just before five I'd see him go to that locker with the head in his hand. Of course, I thought he'd put it back. On Tuesday I'd get a note from him to say he'd been called away. Would I keep the same head for him ? He'd be away perhaps a week, and then he'd ask for an arm and so it went on. It wasn't for weeks that I found out what he'd been doing, and then it was too late : he'd gone abroad. He was always doing that—playing fast and loose with the institution. I can't understand why the Principal lets him come back time after time. Well, if he comes back after this he'll have some questions to answer. I've got them all booked up and I'd know them anywhere. Look here, sir, a page all to himself."

He turned over the leaves of his ledger and there, under the name of Henry Allen, were the entries, "June 20th. Head No. 128, male. July 2nd. Forearm No. 43, female," and so on.

"Would you know your—your specimens again if you saw them ?"

"Know them ? Yes, and could swear to every one of them. When Allen had a subject I put my private mark on it, so there should be no mistake. It's a theft, that's what it is, to say nothing of the trouble it meant for me if I couldn't make up the number of the funerals."

I asked him whether the Principal was still in the building. If so I must see him before he left. He looked at his watch.

"You'll just catch him if you are quick, sir. He leaves sharp at six. It's the second door on the left as you go down the passage."

I was just in time ; the Doctor was brushing his hat. "Well," he said, "any daylight ?"

"I think I have cleared up one thing : young Sopwith has not been murdered on the premises."

"And you think ?"

"I think that you should report him to Scotland Yard as missing, giving his home address. It may be a case of suicide." (I was

justified next morning when Sopwith's body was found in the Thames, with a letter in the pocket addressed to the object of his affections.) "But I came to ask you about another matter altogether. You had a student named Henry Allen!"

He threw down his hat and lifted his hands to Heaven. "Henry Allen! Has that fellow turned up again? I never met such a man in my life before. The most charitable view that one can take of Allen is to say that he was mad. Why, that man has been on our books for six years. He passed all his intermediate tests brilliantly, and I used to think that he would carry all before him in his final. Then, on the very eve of the examination I would get a note from him saying that he was called abroad on business and we might see nothing of him for six months. I don't know whether it was stage fright or simply a love of roving; perhaps a little of both. He was a good deal older than the ordinary run of pupils, and was an interesting person if one got him to talk. But he made no friends here. He paid his fees regularly and worked hard. You should get Stokes to tell you about him. He accuses him of stealing some of his subjects."

"And I think he is right about that. But I can get them back for you if you think it worth while. I know where they are."

"Is there anything in London that you don't know? Of course, we'd like them back."

"Can Stokes come and identify them?"

"Of course he can. Arrange it with him—any time you like. And now I must be off—one of these horrible early public dinners. I cannot thank you enough for coming."

I found Stokes in the laboratory just sitting down to his tea. "Let me get you a cup, sir. A drop of tea helps one through the evening." He pushed back a plate containing a human eye to make room for my cup, and I found my appetite had left me. I declined the tea, but we talked while he ate and drank, It was a creepy sort of place, this laboratory: bottles from ceiling to floor all alike and all containing the intimate machinery of the human machine—the watch-springs of the human body—bleached and half-floating in yellowish liquid. They did not disturb Stokes' appetite in the least.

"You said just now that you could identify the—er—specimens that Allen took away."

"Try me, sir."

"That's exactly what I want to do if you'll come with me now."

"You know where they are!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "I'll go whenever you like."

It was past seven when we reached the office, but a light showing beneath the door proved that my Chief was still there. I asked Stokes to wait on the landing till I called him.

"I've been thinking over that Henry Allen case, Mr. Meddleston-Jones," said my Chief before I could speak. "I've been waiting for you all the afternoon. I am now satisfied that in Allen we have got Jack the Ripper. That woman in there is one of his victims." I was so much taken aback that I forgot all about Stokes. "Yes," my Chief continued, "everything points to it—the man's personal habits—his secretiveness—his sudden disappearances. When you arrest him bear in mind that he has a knife about him."

"Don't say any more, Mr. Pepper, till you've heard what I've got to tell you. I have a man here who says he can identify the bones. They are surgical specimens which Allen stole from him." I have never seen a face so transfigured with noble indignation. After all, I was belittling one of the most important cases in his experience.

"Bring him in," he said faintly, and he lighted up the laboratory, into which I led Stokes. My Chief threw back the sheet while I watched Stokes. His was not usually an expressive face. First his eyes grew very round: then his whole frame was shaken with some strong emotion. He seemed quite unable to speak. When at last he found his voice it came harsh and loud. He picked up a thigh bone and said, "You are right, sir; they're ours right enough. Here's my private mark," and he showed me "128" scratched in minute figures on the bone. He looked hard at the face, and again his sturdy frame was shaken by a convulsive movement that began quite low down in his body and seemed to deprive him of speech. If his face had not been so impassive I should have said that his emotion was suppressed laughter. When at last he had recovered command of his voice he said, "You've made a fine woman of No. 48, but what about his beard? He had a long grey beard when he was with us." I did not dare to look at my Chief.

"I think," I said very gently, "that Mr. Stokes had better take the bones away with him. They belong to his medical school, where Henry Allen was a student. They were, in fact, stolen, and the authorities may wish to prosecute." My Chief made no sign, and Stokes began to pack up the specimens in the trunk.

"When Mr. Henry Allen comes home," he said, "and asks for

his trunk, you might refer him to the Principal, if you don't mind." He took one long look at the head before he wrapped it up. "I wouldn't damage this wax-work for the world : we'll put it in our Museum." As I was helping him down the stairs with the trunk, he said, "Your friend must have been puzzled by the different sizes of the bones. One arm and one leg belonged to women."

"He was a little puzzled. He thought that the murdered woman was deformed."

"I suppose he didn't happen to notice that she had three hands. I see that he had put one of them where a foot was missing."

When I reached Mrs. Auger's door a man was ringing the bell. He was a thin, hunted-looking creature of about thirty, with three days' growth of beard. The door opened as I came up and Mrs. Auger said, "Oh, Mr. Allen, where *have* you been ?"

"I've been in Lisbon," he said in a weak voice.

I laid my hand firmly on his shoulder and said, "Henry Allen, you are wanted at the Medical School to explain why you are unlawfully in possession of certain anatomical specimens which are their property and I must caution you that anything you say will be taken down in writing and used against you at your trial." He turned very white and Mrs. Auger collapsed on her own doorstep.

But the Principal declined to prosecute.

Aldous Huxley

THE GIOCONDA SMILE

from MORTAL COILS

Chatto & Windus, 1922

I

"Miss Spence will be down directly, sir."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hutton, without turning round. Janet Spence's parlourmaid was so ugly—ugly on purpose, it always seemed to him, malignantly, criminally ugly—that he could not bear to look at her more than was necessary. The door closed. Left to himself, Mr. Hutton got up and began to wander round the room, looking with meditative eyes at the familiar objects it contained.

Photographs of Greek statuary, photographs of the Roman Forum, coloured prints of Italian masterpieces, all very safe and well known. Poor, dear Janet, what a prig—what an intellectual snob ! Her real taste was illustrated in that water-colour by the pavement artist, the one she had paid half a crown for (and thirty-five shillings for the frame). How often he had heard her tell the story, how often expatiate on the beauties of that skilful imitation of an oleograph ! " A real Artist in the streets," and you could hear the capital A in Artist as she spoke the words. She made you feel that part of his glory had entered into Janet Spence when she tendered him that half-crown for the copy of the oleograph. She was implying a compliment to her own taste and penetration. A genuine Old Master for half a crown. Poor, dear Janet !

Mr. Hutton came to a pause in front of a small oblong mirror. Stooping a little to get a full view of his face, he passed a white, well-manicured finger over his moustache. It was as curly, as freshly auburn as it had been twenty years ago. His hair still retained its colour, and there was no sign of baldness yet—only a certain elevation of the brow. " Shakespearean," thought Mr. Hutton, with a smile, as he surveyed the smooth and polished expanse of his forehead.

Others abide our question, thou art free. . . . Footsteps in the sea . . . Majesty. . . . Shakespeare, thou shouldst be living at this hour. No, that was Milton, wasn't it ? Milton, the Lady of Christ's. There was no lady about him. He was what the women would call a manly man. That was why they liked him—for the curly auburn moustache and the discreet redolence of tobacco. Mr. Hutton smiled again ; he enjoyed making fun of himself. Lady of Christ's ? No, no. He was the Christ of Ladies. Very pretty, very pretty. The Christ of Ladies. Mr. Hutton wished there were somebody he could tell the joke to. Poor, dear Janet wouldn't appreciate it, alas !

He straightened himself up, patted his hair, and resumed his peregrination. Damn the Roman Forum ; he hated those dreary photographs.

Suddenly he became aware that Janet Spence was in the room, standing near the door. Mr. Hutton started, as though he had been taken in some felonious act. To make these silent and spectral appearances was one of Janet Spence's peculiar talents. Perhaps she had been there all the time, and seen him looking at himself in the mirror. Impossible ! But, still, it was disquieting.

"Oh, you gave me such a surprise," said Mr. Hutton, recovering his smile and advancing with outstretched hand to meet her.

Miss Spence was smiling too : her Gioconda smile, he had once called it in a moment of half-ironical flattery. Miss Spence had taken the compliment seriously, and always tried to live up to the Leonardo standard. She smiled on in silence while Mr. Hutton shook hands ; that was part of the Gioconda business.

"I hope you're well," said Mr. Hutton. "You look it."

What a queer face she had ! That small mouth pursed forward by the Gioconda expression into a little snout with a round hole in the middle as though for whistling—it was like a penholder seen from the front. Above the mouth a well-shaped nose, finely aquiline. Eyes large, lustrous, and dark, with the largeness, lustre, and darkness that seems to invite sties and an occasional bloodshot suffusion. They were fine eyes, but unchangingly grave. The penholder might do its Gioconda trick, but the eyes never altered in their earnestness. Above them, a pair of boldly arched, heavily pencilled black eyebrows lent a surprising air of power, as of a Roman matron, to the upper portion of the face. Her hair was dark and equally Roman ; Agrippina from the brows upward.

"I thought I'd just look in on my way home," Mr. Hutton went on. "Ah, it's good to be back here"—he indicated with a wave of his hand the flowers in the vases, the sunshine and greenery beyond the windows—"it's good to be back in the country after a stuffy day of business in town."

Miss Spence, who had sat down, pointed to a chair at her side.

"No, really, I can't sit down," Mr. Hutton protested. "I must get back to see how poor Emily is. She was rather seedy this morning." He sat down, nevertheless. "It's these wretched liver chills. She's always getting them. Women——" He broke off and coughed, so as to hide the fact that he had uttered. He was about to say that women with weak digestions ought not to marry ; but the remark was too cruel, and he didn't really believe it. Janet Spence, moreover, was a believer in eternal flames and spiritual attachments. "She hopes to be well enough," he added, "to see you at luncheon to-morrow. Can you come ? Do !" He smiled persuasively. "It's my invitation too, you know."

She dropped her eyes, and Mr. Hutton almost thought that he detected a certain reddening of the cheek. It was a tribute ; he stroked his moustache.

"I should like to come if you think Emily's really well enough to have a visitor."

"Of course. You'll do her good. You'll do us both good. In married life three is often better company than two."

"Oh, you're cynical."

Mr. Hutton always had a desire to say "Bow-wow-wow" whenever that last word was spoken. It irritated him more than any other word in the language. But instead of barking he made haste to protest.

"No, no. I'm only speaking a melancholy truth. Reality doesn't always come up to the ideal, you know. But that doesn't make me believe any the less in the ideal. Indeed, I believe in it passionately —the ideal of a matrimony between two people in perfect accord. I think it's realisable. I'm sure it is."

He paused significantly and looked at her with an arch expression. A virgin of thirty-six, but still unwithered; she had her charms. And there was something really rather enigmatic about her. Miss Spence made no reply, but continued to smile. There were times when Mr. Hutton got rather bored with the Gioconda. He stood up.

"I must really be going now. Farewell, mysterious Gioconda." The smile grew intenser, focused itself, as it were, in a narrower snout. Mr. Hutton made a Cinquecento gesture, and kissed her extended hand. It was the first time he had done such a thing; the action seemed not to be resented. "I look forward to tomorrow."

"Do you?"

For answer Mr. Hutton once more kissed her hand, then turned to go. Miss Spence accompanied him to the porch.

"Where's your car?" she asked.

"I left it at the gate of the drive."

"I'll come and see you off."

"No, no." Mr. Hutton was playful, but determined. "You must do no such thing. I simply forbid you."

"But I should like to come," Miss Spence protested, throwing a rapid Gioconda at him.

Mr. Hutton held up his hand. "No," he repeated, and then, with a gesture that was almost the blowing of a kiss, he started to run down the drive, lightly, on his toes, with long, bounding strides like a boy's. He was proud of that run; it was quite marvellously youthful. Still, he was glad the drive was no longer. At the last

bend, before passing out of sight of the house, he halted and turned round. Miss Spence was still standing on the steps, smiling her smile. He waved his hand, and this time quite definitely and overtly wafted a kiss in her direction. Then, breaking once more into his magnificent canter, he rounded the last dark promontory of trees. Once out of sight of the house he let his high paces decline to a trot, and finally to a walk. He took out his handkerchief and began wiping his neck inside his collar. What fools, what fools! Had there ever been such an ass as poor, dear Janet Spence? Never, unless it was himself. Decidedly he was the more malignant fool, since he, at least, was aware of his folly and still persisted in it. Why did he persist? Ah, the problem that was himself, the problem that was other people . . .

He had reached the gate. A large, prosperous-looking motor was standing at the side of the road.

" Home, M'Nab." The chauffeur touched his cap. " And stop at the cross-roads on the way, as usual," Mr. Hutton added, as he opened the door of the car. " Well ? " he said, speaking into the obscurity that lurked within.

" Oh, Teddy Bear, what an age you've been ! " It was a fresh and childish voice that spoke the words. There was the faintest hint of Cockney impurity about the vowel sounds.

Mr. Hutton bent his large form and darted into the car with the agility of an animal regaining his burrow.

" Have I ? " he said, as he shut the door. The machine began to move. " You must have missed me a lot if you found the time so long." He sat back in the low seat ; a cherishing warmth enveloped him.

" Teddy Bear . . ." and with a sigh of contentment a charming little head declined on to Mr. Hutton's shoulder. Ravished, he looked down sideways at the round, babyish face.

" Do you know, Doris, you look like the pictures of Louise de Kerouaille." He passed his fingers through a mass of curly hair.

" Who's Louise de Kera-whatever-it-is ? " Doris spoke from remote distances.

" She was, alas ! *Fuit*. We shall all be ' was ' one of these days. Meanwhile . . ."

Mr. Hutton covered the babyish face with kisses. The car rushed smoothly along. M'Nab's back, through the front window, was stonily impassive, the back of a statue.

"Your hands," Doris whispered. "Oh, you mustn't touch me. They give me electric shocks."

Mr. Hutton adored her for the virgin imbecility of the words. How late in one's existence one makes the discovery of one's body!

"The electricity isn't in me, it's in you." He kissed her again, whispering her name several times: Doris, Doris, Doris. The scientific appellation of the sea-mouse, he was thinking as he kissed the throat she offered him, white and extended like the throat of a victim awaiting the sacrificial knife. The sea-mouse was a sausage with iridescent fur: very peculiar. Or was Doris the sea-cucumber, which turns itself inside out in moments of alarm? He would really have to go to Naples again, just to see the aquarium. These sea creatures were fabulous, unbelievably fantastic.

"Oh, Teddy Bear!" (More zoology; but he was only a land animal. His poor little jokes!) "Teddy Bear, I'm so happy."

"So am I," said Mr. Hutton. Was it true?

"But I wish I knew if it were right. Tell me, Teddy Bear, is it right or wrong?"

"Ah, my dear, that's just what I've been wondering for the last thirty years."

"Be serious, Teddy Bear. I want to know if this is right; if it's right that I should be here with you and that we should love one another, and that it should give me electric shocks when you touch me."

"Right? Well, it's certainly good that you should have electric shocks rather than sexual repressions. Read Freud; repressions are the devil."

"Oh, you don't help me. Why aren't you ever serious? If only you knew how miserable I am sometimes, thinking it's not right. Perhaps, you know, there is a hell, and all that. I don't know what to do. Sometimes I think I ought to stop loving you."

"But could you?" asked Mr. Hutton, confident in the powers of his seduction and his moustache.

"No, Teddy Bear, you know I couldn't. But I could run away, I could hide from you, I could lock myself up and force myself not to come to you."

"Silly little thing!" He tightened his embrace.

"Oh, dear. I hope it isn't wrong. And there are times when I don't care if it is."

Mr. Hutton was touched. He had a certain protective affection for this little creature. He laid his cheek against her hair and so,

interlaced, they sat in silence, while the car, swaying and pitching a little as it hastened along, seemed to draw in the white road and the dusty hedges towards it devouringly.

"Good-bye, good-bye."

The car moved on, gathered speed, vanished round a curve, and Doris was left standing by the sign-post at the cross-roads, still dizzy and weak with the languor born of those kisses and the electrical touch of those gentle hands. She had to take a deep breath, to draw herself up deliberately, before she was strong enough to start her homeward walk. She had half a mile in which to invent the necessary lies.

Alone, Mr. Hutton suddenly found himself the prey of an appalling boredom.

II

Mrs. Hutton was lying on the sofa in her boudoir, playing Patience. In spite of the warmth of the July evening a wood fire was burning on the hearth. A black Pomeranian, extenuated by the heat and the fatigues of digestion, slept before the blaze.

"Phew! Isn't it rather hot in here?" Mr. Hutton asked as he entered the room.

"You know I have to keep warm, dear." The voice seemed breaking on the verge of tears. "I get so shivery."

"I hope you're better this evening."

"Not much, I'm afraid."

The conversation stagnated. Mr. Hutton stood leaning his back against the mantelpiece. He looked down at the Pomeranian lying at his feet, and with the toe of his right boot he rolled the little dog over and rubbed its white-flecked chest and belly. The creature lay in an inert ecstasy. Mrs. Hutton continued to play Patience. Arrived at an *impasse*, she altered the position of one card, took back another, and went on playing. Her Patiences always came out.

"Dr. Libbard thinks I ought to go to Llandrindod Wells this summer."

"Well, go, my dear—go, most certainly."

Mr. Hutton was thinking of the events of the afternoon: how they had driven, Doris and he, up to the hanging wood, had left the car to wait for them under the shade of the trees, and walked together out into the windless sunshine of the chalk down.

"I'm to drink the waters for my liver, and he thinks I ought to have massage and electric treatment, too."

Hat in hand, Doris had stalked four blue butterflies that were dancing together round a scabious flower with a motion that was like the flickering of blue fire. The blue fire burst and scattered into whirling sparks ; she had given chase, laughing and shouting like a child.

"I'm sure it will do you good, my dear."

"I was wondering if you'd come with me, dear."

"But you know I'm going to Scotland at the end of the month."

Mrs. Hutton looked up at him entreatingly. "It's the journey," she said. "The thought of it is such a nightmare. I don't know if I can manage it. And you know I can't sleep in hotels. And then there's the luggage and all the worries. I can't go alone."

"But you won't be alone. You'll have your maid with you." He spoke impatiently. The sick woman was usurping the place of the healthy one. He was being dragged back from the memory of the sunlit down and the quick, laughing girl, back to this unhealthy, overheated room and its complaining occupant.

"I don't think I shall be able to go."

"But you must, my dear, if the doctor tells you to. And, besides, a change will do you good."

"I don't think so."

"But Libbard thinks so, and he knows what he's talking about."

"No, I can't face it. I'm too weak. I can't go alone." Mrs. Hutton pulled a handkerchief out of her black silk bag, and put it to her eyes.

"Nonsense, my dear, you must make the effort."

"I had rather be left in peace to die here." She was crying in earnest now.

"O Lord ! Now do be reasonable. Listen now, please." Mrs. Hutton only sobbed more violently. "Oh, what is one to do ?" He shrugged his shoulders and walked out of the room.

Mr. Hutton was aware that he had not behaved with proper patience ; but he could not help it. Very early in his manhood he had discovered that not only did he not feel sympathy for the poor, the weak, the diseased, and deformed ; he actually hated them. Once, as an undergraduate, he spent three days at a mission in the East End. He had returned, filled with a profound and ineradicable disgust. Instead of pitying, he loathed the unfortunate. It was not, he knew, a very comely emotion, and he had been ashamed

of it at first. In the end he had decided that it was temperamental, inevitable, and had felt no further qualms. Emily had been healthy and beautiful when he married her. He had loved her then. But now—was it his fault that she was like this ?

Mr. Hutton dined alone. Food and drink left him more benevolent than he had been before dinner. To make amends for his show of exasperation he went up to his wife's room and offered to read to her. She was touched, gratefully accepted the offer, and Mr. Hutton, who was particularly proud of his accent, suggested a little light reading in French.

" French ? I am so fond of French." Mrs. Hutton spoke of the language of Racine as though it were a dish of green peas.

Mr. Hutton ran down to the library and returned with a yellow volume. He began reading. The effort of pronouncing perfectly absorbed his whole attention. But how good his accent was ! The fact of its goodness seemed to improve the quality of the novel he was reading.

At the end of fifteen pages an unmistakable sound aroused him. He looked up ; Mrs. Hutton had gone to sleep. He sat still for a little while, looking with a dispassionate curiosity at the sleeping face. Once it had been beautiful ; once, long ago, the sight of it, the recollection of it, had moved him with an emotion profounder, perhaps, than any he had felt before or since. Now it was lined and cadaverous. The skin was stretched tightly over the cheek-bones, across the bridge of the sharp, bird-like nose. The closed eyes were set in profound bone-rimmed sockets. The lamplight striking on the face from the side emphasised with light and shade its cavities and projections. It was the face of a dead Christ by Morales.

Le squelette était invisible
Au temps heureux de l'art païen.

He shivered a little, and tiptoed out of the room.

On the following day Mrs. Hutton came down to luncheon. She had had some unpleasant palpitations during the night, but she was feeling better now. Besides, she wanted to do honour to her guest. Miss Spence listened to her complaints about Llandrindod Wells, and was loud in sympathy, lavish with advice. Whatever she said was always said with intensity. She leaned forward, aimed, so to speak, like a gun, and fired her words. Bang ! the charge in her soul was ignited, the words whizzed forth at the

narrow barrel of her mouth. She was a machine-gun riddling her hostess with sympathy. Mr. Hutton had undergone similar bombardments, mostly of a literary or philosophic character—bombardments of Maeterlinck, of Mrs. Besant, of Bergson, of William James. To-day the missiles were medical. She talked about insomnia, she expatiated on the virtues of harmless drugs and beneficent specialists. Under the bombardment Mrs. Hutton opened out, like a flower in the sun.

Mr. Hutton looked on in silence. The spectacle of Janet Spence evoked in him an unfailing curiosity. He was not romantic enough to imagine that every face masked an interior physiognomy of beauty or strangeness, that every woman's small talk was like a vapour hanging over mysterious gulfs. His wife, for example, and Doris ; they were nothing more than what they seemed to be. But with Janet Spence it was somehow different. Here one could be sure that there was some kind of a queer face behind the Gioconda smile and the Roman eyebrows. The only question was : What exactly was there ? Mr. Hutton could never quite make out.

"But perhaps you won't have to go to Llandrindod after all," Miss Spence was saying. "If you get well quickly Dr. Libbard will let you off."

"I only hope so. Indeed, I do really feel rather better to-day."

Mr. Hutton felt ashamed. How much was it his own lack of sympathy that prevented her from feeling well every day ? But he comforted himself by reflecting that it was only a case of feeling, not of being better. Sympathy does not mend a diseased liver or a weak heart.

"My dear, I wouldn't eat those red currants if I were you," he said, suddenly solicitous. "You know that Libbard has banned everything with skins and pips."

"But I am so fond of them," Mrs. Hutton protested, "and I feel so well to-day."

"Don't be a tyrant," said Miss Spence, looking first at him and then at his wife. "Let the poor invalid have what she fancies ; it will do her good." She laid her hand on Mrs. Hutton's arm and patted it affectionately two or three times.

"Thank you, my dear." Mrs. Hutton helped herself to the stewed currants.

"Well, don't blame me if they make you ill again."

"Do I ever blame you, dear ?"

"You have nothing to blame me for," Mr. Hutton answered playfully. "I am the perfect husband."

They sat in the garden after luncheon. From the island of shade under the old cypress tree they looked out across a flat expanse of lawn, in which the parterres of flowers shone with a metallic brilliance.

Mr. Hutton took a deep breath of the warm and fragrant air. "It's good to be alive," he said.

"Just to be alive," his wife echoed, stretching one pale, knot-jointed hand into the sunlight.

A maid brought the coffee; the silver pots and the little blue cups were set on a folding table near the group of chairs.

"Oh, my medicine!" exclaimed Mrs. Hutton. "Run in and fetch it, Clara, will you? The white bottle on the sideboard."

"I'll go," said Mr. Hutton. "I've got to go and fetch a cigar in any case."

He ran in towards the house. On the threshold he turned round for an instant. The maid was walking back across the lawn. His wife was sitting up in her deck-chair, engaged in opening her white parasol. Miss Spence was bending over the table, pouring out the coffee. He passed into the cool obscurity of the house.

"Do you like sugar in your coffee?" Miss Spence inquired.

"Yes, please. Give me rather a lot. I'll drink it after my medicine to take the taste away."

Mrs. Hutton leaned back in her chair, lowering the sunshade over her eyes, so as to shut out from her vision the burning sky.

Behind her, Miss Spence was making a delicate clinking among the coffee-cups.

"I've given you three large spoonfuls. That ought to take the taste away. And here comes the medicine."

Mr. Hutton had reappeared, carrying a wine-glass, half full of a pale liquid.

"It smells delicious," he said, as he handed it to his wife.

"That's only the flavouring." She drank it off at a gulp, shuddered, and made a grimace. "Ugh, it's so nasty. Give me my coffee."

Miss Spence gave her the cup; she sipped at it. "You've made it like syrup. But it's very nice, after that atrocious medicine."

At half-past three Mrs. Hutton complained that she did not feel as well as she had done, and went indoors to lie down. Her husband would have said something about the red currants, but

checked himself; the triumph of an "I told you so" was too cheaply won. Instead, he was sympathetic, and gave her his arm to the house.

"A rest will do you good," he said. "By the way, I shan't be back till after dinner."

"But why? Where are you going?"

"I promised to go to Johnson's this evening. We have to discuss the war memorial, you know."

"Oh, I wish you weren't going." Mrs. Hutton was almost in tears. "Can't you stay? I don't like being alone in the house."

"But, my dear, I promised—weeks ago." It was a bother having to lie like this. "And now I must get back and look after Miss Spence."

He kissed her on the forehead and went out again into the garden. Miss Spence received him aimed and intense.

"Your wife is dreadfully ill," she fired off at him.

"I thought she cheered up so much when you came."

"That was purely nervous, purely nervous. I was watching her closely. With a heart in that condition and her digestion wrecked—yes, wrecked—anything might happen."

"Libbard doesn't take so gloomy a view of poor Emily's health." Mr. Hutton held open the gate that led from the garden into the drive; Miss Spence's car was standing by the front door.

"Libbard is only a country doctor. You ought to see a specialist."

He could not refrain from laughing. "You have a macabre passion for specialists."

Miss Spence held up her hand in protest. "I am serious. I think poor Emily is in a very bad state. Anything might happen—at any moment."

He handed her into the car and shut the door. The chauffeur started the engine and climbed into his place, ready to drive off.

"Shall I tell him to start?" He had no desire to continue the conversation.

Miss Spence leaned forward and shot a Gioconda in his direction. "Remember, I expect you to come and see me again soon."

Mechanically he grinned, made a polite noise, and, as the car moved forward, waved his hand. He was happy to be alone.

A few minutes afterwards Mr. Hutton himself drove away. Doris was waiting at the cross-roads. They dined together twenty miles from home, at a roadside hotel. It was one of those bad, expensive

meals which are only cooked in country hotels frequented by motorists. It revolted Mr. Hutton, but Doris enjoyed it. She always enjoyed things. Mr. Hutton ordered a not very good brand of champagne. He was wishing he had spent the evening in his library.

When they started homewards Doris was a little tipsy and extremely affectionate. It was very dark inside the car, but looking forward, past the motionless form of M'Nab, they could see a bright and narrow universe of forms and colours scooped out of the night by the electric head-lamps.

It was after eleven when Mr. Hutton reached home. Dr. Libbard met him in the hall. He was a small man with delicate hands and well-formed features that were almost feminine. His brown eyes were large and melancholy. He used to waste a great deal of time sitting at the bedside of his patients, looking sadness through those eyes and talking in a sad, low voice about nothing in particular. His person exhaled a pleasing odour, decidedly antiseptic but at the same time suave and discreetly delicious.

" Libbard ? " said Mr. Hutton in surprise. " You here ? Is my wife ill ? "

" We tried to fetch you earlier," the soft, melancholy voice replied. " It was thought you were at Mr. Johnson's, but they had no news of you there."

" No, I was detained. I had a breakdown," Mr. Hutton answered irritably. It was tiresome to be caught out in a lie.

" Your wife wanted to see you urgently."

" Well, I can go now." Mr. Hutton moved towards the stairs. Dr. Libbard laid a hand on his arm. " I am afraid it's too late."

" Too late ? " He began fumbling with his watch ; it wouldn't come out of the pocket.

" Mrs. Hutton passed away half an hour ago."

The voice remained even in its softness, the melancholy of the eyes did not deepen. Dr. Libbard spoke of death as he would speak of a local cricket match. All things were equally vain and equally deplorable.

Mr. Hutton found himself thinking of Janet Spence's words. At any moment—at any moment. She had been extraordinarily right.

" What happened ? " he asked. " What was the cause ? "

Dr. Libbard explained. It was heart failure brought on by a violent attack of nausea, caused in its turn by the eating of something of an irritant nature. Red currants ? Mr. Hutton suggested.

Very likely. It had been too much for the heart. There was chronic valvular disease : something had collapsed under the strain. It was all over ; she could not have suffered much.

III

"It's a pity they should have chosen the day of the Eton and Harrow match for the funeral," old General Grego was saying as he stood, his top hat in his hand, under the shadow of the lych gate, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

Mr. Hutton overheard the remark and with difficulty restrained a desire to inflict grievous bodily pain on the General. He would have liked to hit the old brute in the middle of his big red face. Monstrous great mulberry, spotted with meal ! Was there no respect for the dead ? Did nobody care ? In theory he didn't much care ; let the dead bury their dead. But here, at the graveside, he had found himself actually sobbing. Poor Emily, they had been pretty happy once. Now she was lying at the bottom of a seven-foot hole. And here was Grego complaining that he couldn't go to the Eton and Harrow match.

Mr. Hutton looked round at the groups of black figures that were drifting slowly out of the churchyard towards the fleet of cabs and motors assembled in the road outside. Against the brilliant background of the July grass and flowers and foliage, they had a horribly alien and unnatural appearance. It pleased him to think that all these people would soon be dead too.

That evening Mr. Hutton sat up late in his library reading the life of Milton. There was no particular reason why he should have chosen Milton ; it was the book that first came to hand, that was all. It was after midnight when he had finished. He got up from his armchair, unbolted the French windows, and stepped out on to the little paved terrace. The night was quiet and clear. Mr. Hutton looked at the stars and at the holes between them, dropped his eyes to the dim lawns and hueless flowers of the garden, and let them wander over the farther landscape, black and grey under the moon.

He began to think with a kind of confused violence. There were the stars, there was Milton. A man can be somehow the peer of stars and night. Greatness, nobility. But is there seriously a difference between the noble and the ignoble ? Milton, the stars, death, and himself—himself. The soul, the body ; the higher and the

lower nature. Perhaps there was something in it, after all. Milton had a god on his side and righteousness. What had he? Nothing, nothing whatever. There were only Doris's little breasts. What was the point of it all? Milton, the stars, death, and Emily in her grave, Doris and himself—always himself . . .

Oh, he was a futile and disgusting being. Everything convinced him of it. It was a solemn moment. He spoke aloud: "I will, I will." The sound of his own voice in the darkness was appalling; it seemed to him that he had sworn that infernal oath which binds even the gods: "I will, I will." There had been New Year's days and solemn anniversaries in the past, when he had felt the same contritions and recorded similar resolutions. They had all thinned away, these resolutions, like smoke, into nothingness. But this was a greater moment and he had pronounced a more fearful oath. In the future it was to be different. Yes, he would live by reason, he would be industrious, he would curb his appetites, he would devote his life to some good purpose. It was resolved and it would be so.

In practice he saw himself spending his mornings in agricultural pursuits, riding round with the bailiff, seeing that his land was farmed in the best modern way—silos and artificial manures and continuous cropping, and all that. The remainder of the day should be devoted to serious study. There was that book he had been intending to write for so long—*The Effect of Diseases on Civilisation.*

Mr. Hutton went to bed humble and contrite, but with a sense that grace had entered into him. He slept for seven and a half hours, and woke to find the sun brilliantly shining. The emotions of the evening before had been transformed by a good night's rest into his customary cheerfulness. It was not until a good many seconds after his return to conscious life that he remembered his resolution, his Stygian oath. Milton and death seemed somehow different in the sunlight. As for the stars, they were not there. But the resolutions were good; even in the daytime he could see that. He had his horse saddled after breakfast, and rode round the farm with the bailiff. After luncheon he read Thucydides on the plague at Athens. In the evening he made a few notes on malaria in Southern Italy. While he was undressing he remembered that there was a good anecdote in Skelton's jest-book about the Sweating Sickness. He would have made a note of it if only he could have found a pencil.

On the sixth morning of his new life Mr. Hutton found among his correspondence an envelope addressed in that peculiarly vulgar handwriting which he knew to be Doris's. He opened it, and began to read. She didn't know what to say ; words were so inadequate. His wife dying like that, and so suddenly—it was too terrible. Mr. Hutton sighed, but his interest revived somewhat as he read on :

" Death is so frightening, I never think of it when I can help it. But when something like this happens, or when I am feeling ill or depressed, then I can't help remembering it is there so close, and I think about all the wicked things I have done and about you and me, and I wonder what will happen, and I am so frightened. I am so lonely, Teddy Bear, and so unhappy, and I don't know what to do. I can't get rid of the idea of dying, I am so wretched and helpless without you. I didn't mean to write to you ; I meant to wait till you were out of mourning and could come and see me again, but I was so lonely and miserable, Teddy Bear, I had to write. I couldn't help it. Forgive me, I want you so much ; I have nobody in the world but you. You are so good and gentle and understanding ; there is nobody like you. I shall never forget how good and kind you have been to me, and you are so clever and know so much, I can't understand how you ever came to pay any attention to me, I am so dull and stupid, much less like me and love me, because you do love me a little, don't you, Teddy Bear ? "

Mr. Hutton was touched with shame and remorse. To be thanked like this, worshipped for having seduced the girl—it was too much. It had just been a piece of imbecile wantonness. Imbecile, idiotic : there was no other way to describe it. For, when all was said, he had derived very little pleasure from it. Taking all things together, he had probably been more bored than amused. Once upon a time he had believed himself to be a hedonist. But to be a hedonist implies a certain process of reasoning, a deliberate choice of known pleasures, a rejection of known pains. This had been done without reason, against it. For he knew beforehand—so well, so well—that there was no interest or pleasure to be derived from these wretched affairs. And yet each time the vague itch came upon him he succumbed, involving himself once more in the old stupidity. There had been Maggie, his wife's maid, and Edith, the girl on the farm, and Mrs. Pringle, and the waitress in London, and others—there seemed to be dozens of them. It had

all been so stale and boring. He knew it would be ; he always knew. And yet, and yet . . . Experience doesn't teach.

Poor little Doris ! He would write to her kindly, comfortingly, but he wouldn't see her again. A servant came to tell him that his horse was saddled and waiting. He mounted and rode off. That morning the old bailiff was more irritating than usual.

Five days later Doris and Mr. Hutton were sitting together on the pier at Southend ; Doris, in white muslin with pink garnishings, radiated happiness ; Mr. Hutton, legs outstretched and chair tilted, had pushed the panama back from his forehead, and was trying to feel like a tripper. That night, when Doris was asleep, breathing and warm by his side, he recaptured, in this moment of darkness and physical fatigue, the rather cosmic emotion which had possessed him that evening, not a fortnight ago, when he had made his great resolution. And so his solemn oath had already gone the way of so many other resolutions. Unreason had triumphed ; at the first itch of desire he had given way. He was hopeless, hopeless.

For a long time he lay with closed eyes, ruminating his humiliation. The girl stirred in her sleep. Mr. Hutton turned over and looked in her direction. Enough faint light crept in between the half-drawn curtains to show her bare arm and shoulder, her neck, and the dark tangle of hair on the pillow. She was beautiful, desirable. Why did he lie there moaning over his sins ? What did it matter ? If he were hopeless, then so be it ; he would make the best of his hopelessness. A glorious sense of irresponsibility suddenly filled him. He was free, magnificently free. In a kind of exaltation he drew the girl towards him. She woke, bewildered, almost frightened under his rough kisses.

The storm of his desire subsided into a kind of serene merriment. The whole atmosphere seemed to be quivering with enormous silent laughter.

" Could anyone love you as much as I do, Teddy Bear ? " The question came faintly from distant worlds of love.

" I think I know somebody who does," Mr. Hutton replied. The submarine laughter was swelling, rising, ready to break the surface of silence and resound.

" Who ? Tell me. What do you mean ? " The voice had come very close ; charged with suspicion, anguish, indignation, it belonged to this immediate world.

" A—ah ! "

"Who?"

"You'll never guess." Mr. Hutton kept up the joke until it began to grow tedious, and then pronounced the name: "Janet Spence."

Doris was incredulous. "Miss Spence of the Manor? That old woman?" It was too ridiculous. Mr. Hutton laughed too.

"But it's quite true," he said. "She adores me." Oh, the vast joke! He would go and see her as soon as he returned—see and conquer. "I believe she wants to marry me," he added.

"But you wouldn't . . . you don't intend . . ."

The air was fairly crepitating with humour. Mr. Hutton laughed aloud. "I intend to marry you," he said. It seemed to him the best joke he had ever made in his life.

When Mr. Hutton left Southend he was once more a married man. It was agreed that, for the time being, the fact should be kept secret. In the autumn they would go abroad together, and the world should be informed. Meanwhile he was to go back to his own house and Doris to hers.

The day after his return he walked over in the afternoon to see Miss Spence. She received him with the old Gioconda.

"I was expecting you to come."

"I couldn't keep away," Mr. Hutton gallantly replied.

They sat in the summer-house. It was a pleasant place—a little old stucco temple bowered among dense bushes of evergreen. Miss Spence had left her mark on it by hanging up over the seat a blue-and-white Della Robbia plaque.

"I am thinking of going to Italy this autumn," said Mr. Hutton. He felt like a ginger-beer bottle, ready to pop with bubbling humorous excitement.

"Italy. . . ." Miss Spence closed her eyes ecstatically. "I feel drawn there too."

"Why not let yourself be drawn?"

"I don't know. One somehow hasn't the energy and initiative to set out alone."

"Alone. . . ." Ah, sound of guitars and throaty singing! "Yes, travelling alone isn't much fun."

Miss Spence lay back in her chair without speaking. Her eyes were still closed. Mr. Hutton stroked his moustache. The silence prolonged itself for what seemed a very long time.

Pressed to stay to dinner, Mr. Hutton did not refuse. The fun had hardly started. The table was laid in the loggia. Through its

arches they looked out on to the sloping garden, to the valley below and the farther hills. Light ebbed away ; the heat and silence were oppressive. A huge cloud was mounting up the sky, and there were distant breathings of thunder. The thunder drew nearer, a wind began to blow, and the first drops of rain fell. The table was cleared. Miss Spence and Mr. Hutton sat on in the growing darkness.

Miss Spence broke a long silence by saying meditatively :

" I think everyone has a right to a certain amount of happiness, don't you ? "

" Most certainly." But what was she leading up to ? Nobody makes generalisations about life unless they mean to talk about themselves. Happiness : he looked back on his own life, and saw a cheerful, placid existence disturbed by no great griefs or discomforts or alarms. He had always had money and freedom ; he had been able to do very much as he wanted. Yes, he supposed he had been happy—happier than most men. And now he was not merely happy ; he had discovered in irresponsibility the secret of gaiety. He was about to say something about his happiness when Miss Spence went on speaking.

" People like you and me have a right to be happy some time in our lives."

" Me ? " said Mr. Hutton, surprised.

" Poor Henry ! Fate hasn't treated either of us very well."

" Oh, well, it might have treated me worse."

" You're being cheerful. That's brave of you. But don't think I can't see behind the mask."

Miss Spence spoke louder and louder as the rain came down more and more heavily. Periodically the thunder cut across her utterances. She talked on, shouting against the noise.

" I have understood you so well and for so long."

A flash revealed her, aimed and intent, leaning towards him. Her eyes were two profound and menacing gun-barrels. The darkness re-engulfed her.

" You were a lonely soul seeking a companion soul. I could sympathise with you in your solitude. Your marriage . . ."

The thunder cut short the sentence. Miss Spence's voice became audible once more with the words :

" . . . could offer no companionship to a man of your stamp. You needed a soul mate."

A soul mate—he ! a soul mate. It was incredibly fantastic.

"Georgette Leblanc, the ex-soul mate of Maurice Maeterlinck." He had seen that in the paper a few days ago. So it was thus that Janet Spence had painted him in her imagination—as a soul-mater. And for Doris he was a picture of goodness and the cleverest man in the world. And actually, really, he was what?—Who knows?

"My heart went out to you. I could understand; I was lonely, too." Miss Spence laid her hand on his knee. "You were so patient." Another flash. She was still aimed, dangerously. "You never complained. But I could guess—I could guess."

"How wonderful of you!" So he was an *âme incomprise*. "Only a woman's intuition . . ."

The thunder crashed and rumbled, died away, and only the sound of the rain was left. The thunder was his laughter, magnified, externalised. Flash and crash, there it was again, right on top of them.

"Don't you feel that you have within you something that is akin to this storm?" He could imagine her leaning forward as she uttered the words. "Passion makes one the equal of the elements."

What was his gambit now? Why, obviously, he should have said, "Yes," and ventured on some unequivocal gesture. But Mr. Hutton suddenly took fright. The ginger beer in him had gone flat. The woman was serious—terribly serious. He was appalled.

Passion? "No," he desperately answered. "I am without passion."

But his remark was either unheard or unheeded, for Miss Spence went on with a growing exaltation, speaking so rapidly, however, and in such a burningly intimate whisper that Mr. Hutton found it very difficult to distinguish what she was saying. She was telling him, as far as he could make out, the story of her life. The lightning was less frequent now, and there were long intervals of darkness. But at each flash he saw her still aiming towards him, still yearning forward with a terrifying intensity. Darkness, the rain, and then flash! her face was there, close at hand. A pale mask, greenish white; the large eyes, the narrow barrel of the mouth, the heavy eyebrows. Agrippina, or wasn't it rather—yes, wasn't it rather George Robey?"

He began devising absurd plans for escaping. He might suddenly jump up, pretending he had seen a burglar—Stop thief! stop thief!—and dash off into the night in pursuit. Or should he say

that he felt faint, a heart attack? or that he had seen a ghost—Emily's ghost—in the garden? Absorbed in his childish plotting, he had ceased to pay any attention to Miss Spence's words. The spasmodic clutching of her hand recalled his thoughts.

"I honoured you for that, Henry," she was saying.

Honoured him for what?

"Marriage is a sacred tie, and your respect for it, even when the marriage was, as it was in your case, an unhappy one, made me respect you and admire you, and—shall I dare say the word?——"

Oh, the burglar, the ghost in the garden! But it was too late.

". . . yes, love you, Henry, all the more. But we're free now, Henry."

Free? There was a movement in the dark, and she was kneeling on the floor by his chair.

"Oh, Henry, Henry, I have been unhappy too."

Her arms embraced him, and by the shaking of her body he could feel that she was sobbing. She might have been a suppliant crying for mercy.

"You mustn't, Janet," he protested. Those tears were terrible, terrible. "Not now, not now! You must be calm; you must go to bed." He patted her shoulder, then got up, disengaging himself from her embrace. He left her still crouching on the floor beside the chair on which he had been sitting.

Groping his way into the hall, and without waiting to look for his hat, he went out of the house, taking infinite pains to close the front door noiselessly behind him. The clouds had blown over, and the moon was shining from a clear sky. There were puddles all along the road, and a noise of running water rose from the gutters and ditches. Mr. Hutton splashed along, not caring if he got wet.

How heartrendingly she had sobbed! With the emotions of pity and remorse that the recollection evoked in him there was a certain resentment: why couldn't she have played the game that he was playing—the heartless, amusing game? Yes, but he had known all the time that she wouldn't, she couldn't, play that game; he had known and persisted.

What had she said about passion and the elements? Something absurdly stale, but true, true. There she was, a cloud black-bosomed and charged with thunder, and he, like some absurd little Benjamin Franklin, had sent up a kite into the heart of the menace. Now he was complaining that his toy had drawn the lightning.

She was probably still kneeling by that chair in the loggia, crying.

But why hadn't he been able to keep up the game? Why had his irresponsibility deserted him, leaving him suddenly sober in a cold world? There were no answers to any of his questions. One idea burned steady and luminous in his mind—the idea of flight. He must get away at once.

IV

"What are you thinking about, Teddy Bear?"

"Nothing."

There was a silence. Mr. Hutton remained motionless, his elbows on the parapet of the terrace, his chin in his hands, looking down over Florence. He had taken a villa on one of the hilltops to the south of the city. From a little raised terrace at the end of the garden one looked down a long fertile valley on to the town and beyond it to the bleak mass of Monte Morello and, eastward of it, to the peopled hill of Fiesole, dotted with white houses. Everything was clear and luminous in the September sunshine.

"Are you worried about anything?"

"No, thank you."

"Tell me, Teddy Bear."

"But, my dear, there's nothing to tell." Mr. Hutton turned round, smiled, and patted the girl's hand. "I think you'd better go in and have your siesta. It's too hot for you here."

"Very well, Teddy Bear. Are you coming too?"

"When I've finished my cigar."

"All right. But do hurry up and finish it, Teddy Bear." Slowly, reluctantly, she descended the steps of the terrace and walked towards the house.

Mr. Hutton continued his contemplation of Florence. He had need to be alone. It was good sometimes to escape from Doris and the restless solicitude of her passion. He had never known the pains of loving hopelessly, but he was experiencing now the pains of being loved. These last weeks had been a period of growing discomfort. Doris was always with him, like an obsession, like a guilty conscience. Yes, it was good to be alone.

He pulled an envelope out of his pocket and opened it, not without reluctance. He hated letters; they always contained something unpleasant—nowadays, since his second marriage. This was from his sister. He began skimming through the insulting home-truths

of which it was composed. The words " indecent haste," " social suicide," " scarcely cold in her grave," " person of the lower classes," all occurred. They were inevitable now in any communication from a well-meaning and right-thinking relative. Impatient, he was about to tear the stupid letter to pieces when his eye fell on on a sentence at the bottom of the third page. His heart beat with uncomfortable violence as he read it. It was too monstrous ! Janet Spence was going about telling everyone that he had poisoned his wife in order to marry Doris. What damnable malice ! Ordinarily a man of the suavest temper, Mr. Hutton found himself trembling with rage. He took the childish satisfaction of calling names—he cursed the woman.

Then suddenly he saw the ridiculous side of the situation. The notion that he should have murdered anyone in order to marry Doris ! If they only knew how miserably bored he was. Poor, dear Janet ! She had tried to be malicious ; she had only succeeded in being stupid.

A sound of footsteps aroused him ; he looked round. In the garden below the little terrace the servant girl of the house was picking fruit. A Neapolitan, strayed somehow as far north as Florence, she was a specimen of the classical type—a little debased. Her profile might have been taken from a Sicilian coin of a bad period. Her features, carved floridly in the grand tradition, expressed an almost perfect stupidity. Her mouth was the most beautiful thing about her ; the calligraphic hand of nature had richly curved it into an expression of mulish bad temper. . . . Under her hideous black clothes, Mr. Hutton divined a powerful body, firm and massive. He had looked at her before with a vague interest and curiosity. To-day the curiosity defined and focused itself into a desire. An idyll of Theocritus. Here was the woman ; he, alas, was not precisely like a goatherd on the volcanic hills. He called to her.

" Armida ! "

The smile with which she answered him was so provocative, attested so easy a virtue, that Mr. Hutton took fright. He was on the brink once more—on the brink. He must draw back, oh ! quickly, quickly, before it was too late. The girl continued to look up at him.

" *Ha chiamato ?* " she asked at last.

Stupidity or reason ? Oh, there was no choice now. It was imbecility every time.

"*Scendo*," he called back to her. Twelve steps led from the garden to the terrace. Mr. Hutton counted them. Down, down, down, down. . . . He saw a vision of himself descending from one circle of the inferno to the next—from a darkness full of wind and hail to an abyss of stinking mud.

V

For a good many days the Hutton case had a place on the front page of every newspaper. There had been no more popular murder trial since George Smith had temporarily eclipsed the European War by drowning in a warm bath his seventh bride. The public imagination was stirred by this tale of a murder brought to light months after the date of the crime. Here, it was felt, was one of those incidents in human life, so notable because they are so rare, which do definitely justify the ways of God to man. A wicked man had been moved by an illicit passion to kill his wife. For months he had lived in sin and fancied security—only to be dashed at last more horribly into the pit he had prepared for himself. "Murder will out," and here was a case of it. The readers of the newspapers were in a position to follow every movement of the hand of God. There had been vague, but persistent, rumours in the neighbourhood; the police had taken action at last. Then came the exhumation order, the post-mortem examination, the inquest, the evidence of the experts, the verdict of the coroner's jury, the trial, the condemnation. For once Providence had done its duty, obviously, grossly, didactically, as in a melodrama. The newspapers were right in making of the case the staple intellectual food of a whole season.

Mr. Hutton's first emotion when he was summoned from Italy to give evidence at the inquest was one of indignation. It was a monstrous, a scandalous thing that the police should take such idle, malicious gossip seriously. When the inquest was over he would bring an action for malicious prosecution against the Chief Constable; he would sue the Spence woman for slander.

The inquest was opened; the astonishing evidence unrolled itself. The experts had examined the body, and had found traces of arsenic; they were of opinion that the late Mrs. Hutton had died of arsenic poisoning.

Arsenic poisoning. . . . Emily had died of arsenic poisoning? After that, Mr. Hutton learned with surprise that there was enough arsenicated insecticide in his greenhouses to poison an army.

It was now, quite suddenly, that he saw it : there was a case against him. Fascinated, he watched it growing, growing, like some monstrous tropical plant. It was enveloping him, surrounding him ; he was lost in a tangled forest.

When was the poison administered ? The experts agreed that it must have been swallowed eight or nine hours before death. About lunch-time ? Yes, about lunch-time. Clara, the parlour-maid, was called. Mrs. Hutton, she remembered, had asked her to go and fetch her medicine. Mr. Hutton had volunteered to go instead ; he had gone alone. Miss Spence—ah, the memory of the storm, the white aimed face ! the horror of it all !—Miss Spence confirmed Clara's statement, and added that Mr. Hutton had come back with the medicine already poured out in a wineglass, not in the bottle.

Mr. Hutton's indignation evaporated. He was dismayed, frightened. It was all too fantastic to be taken seriously, and yet this nightmare was a fact—it was actually happening.

M'Nab had seen them kissing, often. He had taken them for a drive on the day of Mrs. Hutton's death. He could see them reflected in the wind-screen, sometimes out of the tail of his eye.

The inquest was adjourned. That evening Doris went to bed with a headache. When he went to her room after dinner, Mr. Hutton found her crying.

" What's the matter ? " He sat down on the edge of her bed and began to stroke her hair. For a long time she did not answer, and he went on stroking her hair mechanically, almost unconsciously ; sometimes, even, he bent down and kissed her bare shoulder. He had his own affairs, however, to think about. What had happened ? How was it that the stupid gossip had actually come true ? Emily had died of arsenic poisoning. It was absurd, impossible. The order of things had been broken, and he was at the mercy of an irresponsibility. What had happened, what was going to happen ? He was interrupted in the midst of his thoughts.

" It's my fault—it's my fault ! " Doris suddenly sobbed out. " I shouldn't have loved you ; I oughtn't to have let you love me. Why was I ever born ? "

Mr. Hutton didn't say anything, but looked down in silence at the abject figure of misery lying on the bed.

" If they do anything to you I shall kill myself."

She sat up, held him for a moment at arm's length, and looked

at him with a kind of violence, as though she were never to see him again.

"I love you, I love you, I love you." She drew him, inert and passive, towards her, clasped him, pressed herself against him. "I didn't know you loved me as much as that, Teddy Bear. But why did you do it—why did you do it?"

Mr. Hutton undid her clasping arms and got up. His face became very red. "You seem to take it for granted that I murdered my wife," he said. "It's really too grotesque. What do you all take me for? A cinema hero?" He had begun to lose his temper. All the exasperation, all the fear and bewilderment of the day, was transformed into a violent anger against her. "It's all such damned stupidity. Haven't you any conception of a civilised man's mentality? Do I look the sort of man who'd go about slaughtering people? I suppose you imagined I was so insanely in love with you that I could commit any folly. When will you women understand that one isn't insanely in love? All one asks for is a quiet life, which you won't allow one to have. I don't know what the devil ever induced me to marry you. It was all a damned stupid, practical joke. And now you go about saying I'm a murderer. I won't stand it."

Mr. Hutton stamped towards the door. He had said horrible things, he knew—odious things that he ought speedily to unsay. But he wouldn't. He closed the door behind him.

"Teddy Bear!" He turned the handle; the latch clicked into place. "Teddy Bear!" The voice that came to him through the closed door was agonised. Should he go back? He ought to go back. He touched the handle, then withdrew his fingers and quickly walked away. When he was half-way down the stairs he halted. She might try to do something silly—throw herself out of the window or God knows what! He listened attentively; there was no sound. But he pictured her very clearly, tiptoeing across the room, lifting the sash as high as it would go, leaning out into the cold night air. It was raining a little. Under the window lay the paved terrace. How far below? Twenty-five or thirty feet? Once, when he was walking along Piccadilly, a dog had jumped out of a third-storey window of the Ritz. He had seen it fall; he had heard it strike the pavement. Should he go back? He was damned if he would; he hated her.

He sat for a long time in the library. What had happened? What was happening? He turned the question over and over in

his mind and could find no answer. Suppose the nightmare dreamed itself out to its horrible conclusion. Death was waiting for him. His eyes filled with tears ; he wanted so passionately to live. " Just to be alive." Poor Emily had wished it too, he remembered : " Just to be alive." There were still so many places in this astonishing world unvisited, so many queer delightful people still unknown, so many lovely women never so much as seen. The huge white oxen would still be dragging their wains along the Tuscan roads, the cypresses would still go up, straight as pillars, to the blue heaven ; but he would not be there to see them. And the sweet southern wines—Tear of Christ and Blood of Judas—others would drink them, not he. Others would walk down the obscure and narrow lanes between the bookshelves in the London Library, sniffing the dusty perfume of good literature, peering at strange titles, discovering unknown names, exploring the fringes of vast domains of knowledge. He would be lying in a hole in the ground. And why, why ? Confusedly he felt that some extraordinary kind of justice was being done. In the past he had been wanton and imbecile and irresponsible. Now Fate was playing as wantonly, as irresponsibly, with him. It was tit for tat, and God existed after all.

He felt that he would like to pray. Forty years ago he used to kneel by his bed every evening. The nightly formula of his childhood came to him almost unsought from some long unopened chamber of the memory. " God bless Father and Mother, Tom and Cissie and the Baby, Mademoiselle and Nurse, and everyone that I love, and make me a good boy. Amen." They were all dead now—all except Cissie.

His mind seemed to soften and dissolve ; a great calm descended upon his spirit. He went upstairs to ask Doris's forgiveness. He found her lying on the couch at the foot of the bed. On the floor beside her stood a blue bottle of liniment, marked " Not to be taken " ; she seemed to have drunk about half of it.

" You didn't love me," was all she said when she opened her eyes to find him bending over her.

Dr. Libbard arrived in time to prevent any very serious consequences. " You mustn't do this again," he said while Mr. Hutton was out of the room.

" What's to prevent me ? " she asked defiantly.

Dr. Libbard looked at her with his large, sad eyes. " There's nothing to prevent you," he said. " Only yourself and your baby.

Isn't it rather bad luck on your baby, not allowing it to come into the world because you want to go out of it?"

Doris was silent for a time. "All right," she whispered. "I won't."

Mr. Hutton sat by her bedside for the rest of the night. He felt himself now to be indeed a murderer. For a time he persuaded himself that he loved this pitiable child. Dozing in his chair, he woke up, stiff and cold, to find himself drained dry, as it were, of every emotion. He had become nothing but a tired and suffering carcase. At six o'clock he undressed and went to bed for a couple of hours' sleep. In the course of the same afternoon the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of "Wilful Murder," and Mr. Hutton was committed for trial.

VI

Miss Spence was not at all well. She had found her public appearances in the witness-box very trying, and when it was all over she had something that was very nearly a breakdown. She slept badly, and suffered from nervous indigestion. Dr. Libbard used to call every other day. She talked to him a great deal—mostly about the Hutton case. . . . Her moral indignation was always on the boil. Wasn't it appalling to think that one had had a murderer in one's house? Wasn't it extraordinary that one could have been for so long mistaken about the man's character? (But she had had an inkling from the first.) And then the girl he had gone off with —so low class, so little better than a prostitute. The news that the second Mrs. Hutton was expecting a baby—the posthumous child of a condemned and executed criminal—revolted her; the thing was shocking—an obscenity. Dr. Libbard answered her gently and vaguely, and prescribed bromide.

One morning he interrupted her in the midst of her customary tirade. "By the way," he said in his soft, melancholy voice, "I suppose it was really you who poisoned Mrs. Hutton."

Miss Spence stared at him for two or three seconds with enormous eyes, and then quietly said, "Yes." After that she started to cry.

"In the coffee, I suppose."

She seemed to nod assent. Dr. Libbard took out his fountain-pen, and in his neat, meticulous calligraphy wrote out a prescription for a sleeping-draught.

Marie Belloc Lowndes

HER LAST ADVENTURE

1924

I

The railway carriage door was flung open, a man sprang up the steps, and his porter began putting two Gladstone bags in the rack.

Eva Bude rose from her seat, words of protest forming themselves on her lips ; for this railway carriage on the boat train had been reserved in order that she, and the junior partner of the firm who employed her as their Paris buyer, might have an important business talk on the way to London. But he had not turned up after all, and—she had seen the face of the stranger light up, as his glance had first rested on her singularly attractive-looking self.

" Will you forgive my intrusion ? " he asked, in a full, caressing voice. " The train is absolutely full ! "

There hovered on her lips the words : " I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to leave the carriage, if the person I am expecting arrives at the last moment."

But the words were never uttered, for the train was already in motion. A moment later the tall, dark stranger had come over to her side of the carriage and, sitting down opposite to her, he had said something which had at once amused, thrilled, and yes, allured her.

There came a time when Eva Bude made a serious attempt to reconstitute, in her own mind, everything that had happened on what became retrospectively a memorable journey. Why had she, in the first place, allowed an unknown man to share her solitude ? And, above all, why had she so soon " made friends " with him ?

Was it because she had just spent a week among foreigners, who, though they showed her every courtesy, and even a considerable measure of admiration, yet regarded her, as Frenchmen are apt to regard a woman who works, in an entirely impersonal fashion ? That, no doubt, had been one reason, the other—she knew it well enough—lay deep in the roots of her peculiar temperament and nature. The long level glance which her fellow-traveller, as he leapt up into the railway carriage, had cast at her, had held in it that mysterious, beckoning appeal, for which she

was half consciously always watching, and to which she was almost always prepared to grant a measure of response.

As to the first words he had uttered after the train had started, they were words which she had heard many times uttered in her life of thirty-six years, and which she never wearied of hearing. Those words were : " I hope you will forgive me for saying that I think you the most beautiful woman I have ever seen ! "

As for the man—his name was James Malton—he had just gone through a terrible experience which had shaken his nerve, and which, in spite of his determined effort to obliterate it from his mind, kept leaping back to his memory. He was shortly going to leave England, he believed for ever, and he was thirsting for some form of romantic adventure which would make the immediate past seem remote, and give him something delightful to remember during what he believed would be a dull, if pleasant and cloudless, future.

Given the mood of each of those fellow-travellers, it was perhaps not so very strange, after all, that long before they reached their journey's end each knew as much concerning the other as was necessary for their good understanding. But whereas the woman believed she knew everything that was worth knowing concerning her exceedingly attractive companion, all the man had learnt about his new friend was that she was a childless widow.

Neither of them had touched on the sordid question of money. That the lady was well off had become at once apparent to Malton, for she was admirably dressed in the sort of clothes that he knew too much about women not to know meant wealth of a sort. Then, if her string of real pearls was unobtrusive, the pearls were perfectly matched ; and the only other jewel worn by her was a valuable emerald ring.

Though Malton was both a clever man, and a shrewd man, he came to several quite wrong conclusions during their long and apparently intimate talk.

Whereas he had told her that he had just sold his share in a house-agent's business, and that he owned an attractive little property not far from Dover, she, on her side, had refrained from giving him any hint as to her circumstances, and it was only with reluctance and hesitation that she had admitted to the Christian name of Eva, and the curious surname of Bude.

Yet such friends did they become that, by the time their train

was nearing Victoria Station, Mrs. Bude had agreed to dine with Malton at the Trocadero on the following Tuesday.

She had, however, impressed upon him the fact that she must leave before midnight. He had felt it something of a triumph when she had at last consented, somewhat timorously, to give him her telegraphic address of "Bonako, Frampton-on-Thames," while making him give his word of honour that he would not try to find out her address. He had eagerly given that assurance, and it was somewhat surprising, considering what sort of man he was, that he meant to keep his word. But he had no particular wish to know where Mrs. Bude lived. All he wished was to be so far in touch with her as to be able to communicate with her by telegram when it suited him.

As the train slowed down, she held out her hand, "I shall be really grateful, Mr. Malton," she gave him a roguish smile, "if you will go straight away, and not give yourself any trouble over me, or over my luggage!"

Malton realised that she meant what she said, and though he muttered a word of protest, he was glad to get away quickly from the station.

As he hailed a taxi, and threw the driver the address of an acquaintance who was always willing to take him as a paying guest, he told himself that his luck was indeed in! Nothing could have made him believe this morning that anything could happen that day which, for over two hours, would completely distract his mind from a terrible secret ordeal he had been through the night before.

Even so, it seemed a long time to Tuesday, but though he had made an effort to persuade Mrs. Bude to say that she would dine with him to-night, she had been adamant in her refusal.

Most of the women whom Malton attracted—and being a natural Don Juan, he had attracted a great many women on his road through life—had been gentle, malleable women. But this, his latest conquest, was evidently made of stronger metal.

There are more respectable people in the world than people who are not respectable suppose. On the other hand there are infinitely more lawless men and women in the world than law-abiding folk believe. Eva Bude was only ashamed of certain hidden phases of her life because of a public opinion she at once feared and despised; as for her new friend, he had very early in his life joined the herd of human rogue elephants.

II

"I should feel myself such a hypocrite, Eva!"

The words were said in a low, troubled voice, and the woman who uttered them was Mrs. Bude's one real friend of her own sex. They had known each other from childhood, they had been schoolmates, and though circumstances had parted them comparatively early in life, they had always kept in touch.

Now they were both widowed, but Agnes Harsham was poor, and she had four children, so she was compelled to live with her mother-in-law in the Channel Islands.

Mrs. Harsham was in London, for the first time for years, and she was spending one of her few precious days with her old friend Eva Bude, in Eva's delightful, luxuriously furnished cottage, at Frampton-on-Thames.

After a delicious little dinner, they were sitting in the rose-scented garden, and both in the mood for confidences; so Eva had told her friend what the other had thought to be an astounding fact about herself and her way of life.

"A hypocrite! Why that? I do a man's work; I make a man's income; and I choose to lead a man's life. It's a rotten convention which forces women to be what is called 'good,' while giving every kind of licence to men!"

"And does no one ever suspect, Eva?"

The woman who asked that question was small, fragile, worn-looking. As a girl she had been very attractive, but now she appeared middle-aged, though she was only thirty-four. Her thin, pale face wore an eager, excited, and yes, rather a shamed expression, as she waited for the other's answer.

"No one has ever suspected, and no one ever will suspect."

Eva Bude put out her lovely, exquisitely kept hand, and touched the trunk of the tree under which they were sitting. "Though perhaps I ought to touch wood! You see, I don't lead a double life, Agnes. I lead a triple life. First comes my working life, and I allow nothing to interfere with *that*. I see Mr. Milman once or twice a week, and then, as you know, I go four or five times a year to Paris."

A look flashed into the other's face. "Oh, Paris?"

Her friend shook her head impatiently. "Certainly not!" she rapped out. "When I'm in Paris I'm much too busy to think of anything but my work. Besides, it's a great mistake to suppose that because one's in France, one can do anything one likes. French

people, as a matter of fact, are awfully prudish. Why I very seldom even lunch or dine out with a man when I'm there ! Yet I'm known in every one of the big luxury trades in France as '*la Belle Madame Bude*,' " and she laughed gaily.

" I don't wonder at that," said Mrs. Harsham sincerely. " But, Eva ? Tell me about your other two lives."

" Well, there's my life here, at Frampton. Though I'm a good deal away, I've kept up my tennis, and I've become quite keen on golf ; also, I'm on two local women's committees. They simply *made* me come on—one of them concerns child welfare," and there was a note of triumph in her voice.

" I suppose you have very few real friends ? " said the other slowly.

Eva Bude leant forward. " I wonder if you'll believe me, Agnes, when I tell you that I've never had any woman friend but you ? "

Agnes Harsham put out her thin, worn hand. " Of course I've always known that, in a way——"

" You're the only person in the world to whom I could speak as I am speaking now, for all you're so prim and respectable."

" You haven't told me anything yet about your third life," Eva's one friend said in a low voice. She had felt touched, and strangely moved, by the other's words.

" There isn't much to tell, my dear ! As you know, my work takes me about a good deal, and now and again, off and on "—she hesitated a moment, then exclaimed lightly—" I meet a man in whom I feel, oh—it's so difficult to explain—a sort of romantic interest."

Her voice dropped, as she went on : " Of course, I'm careful. I seldom make a mistake ; also, of course, there's plenty of choice."

The other gazed at her bewildered. " D'you mean that there are a lot of men always going about looking for an adventure ? " she asked incredulously.

Eva Bude laughed aloud—a ringing laugh of amusement and kindly contempt. " What sort of life can you have led, my poor dear, not to have found *that* out ? But still, I confess "—she hesitated again, while the other looked at her in the now deepening twilight with keen curiosity. " I confess," Eva repeated, " that I do like a touch of real romance. I mean I should hate anything sordid."

Agnes Harsham said slowly : " You're a brave woman, Eva. I should be so horribly afraid of the possible consequences."

Then, when she saw a grin zig-zag across the other's face she cried: "You don't understand what I mean! What I should be afraid of, were I you, would be that when the affair is over, the man wouldn't give me up."

"My dear Agnes! Surely you don't think I let my temporary hero know anything about me? It doesn't often happen that I even let him know my name. Also, I always play fair. My partner in the game is told, very early in our friendship, that he will soon have to draw his wickets."

She waited a moment, then went on: "Don't misunderstand me, Agnes. I'm not always doing that sort of thing. Sometimes months go by—once it was nearly two years."

The other said, under her breath, "I see," but she was more bewildered than ever.

"And I'll tell you something else which may surprise you, my dear. I've now made up my mind to give up—well, Romance with a big R."

"You have?"

"One more little adventure, and then I settle down to absolute respectability."

"Does that mean that you are thinking of marrying again?"

"Clever girl! Perhaps it does. But if I do marry again, I'll marry a good man—the sort of man who doesn't even know the sort of thing exists which we've been talking about."

"Eva! You *are* a queer woman."

She said mockingly: "Am I? Don't reformed rakes always try and marry good, simple girls?"

"Do tell me about him; I know you've someone in your mind."

"I have, in a way. He's a friend of the Milmans, and though he's rich and good-looking too, what I like about him, my dear, is that he's a man of character without being *too* 'pi.' If I do marry him, I'll make him a thoroughly good wife. However, it's almost indecent to talk about that, as I'm on the eve of my last little fling."

III

Eva Bude stood up in the big, open motor, and gazed over the great expanse of shimmering blue sea to her right. Far away, some miles down the coast, lay Dover. But here, on the white road cut through a ledge of the downs, they might have been a hundred miles from a town.

"This is absolutely perfect," she cried delightedly, and the