

The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

Scottish works



THE AZURE HAND

S.R. CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First Published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1917

This Galloway Raiders digital edition published in 2021 is part of a decade long project (2012-2022) to bring the works of Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859-1914) together in one place. The Complete Crockett comprises 66 published works, re-edited and re-formatted by volunteer labour to the highest standard.

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INTRODUCTION

Published posthumously *The Azure Hand* is the only one of Crockett's novels set in 'Quarriers,' a barely fictional Dumfries. Straying from his more familiar Galloway landscapes, and into the 'country house' crime/detective fiction genre, it has, until now, been considered stylistically unique in Crockett's fiction. I take issue with this claim. It is not the only novel he writes which includes mystery, detective work and crime. For that we can look to *Strong Mac*, *Deep Moat Grange* and *Love in Pernickety Town*.

Sadly, with the benefit of hindsight we sometimes fall into the trap of retrofitting our critical commentary. One may dismiss something as derivative without realising it is actually experimental, offering perhaps a less developed example of a style or genre. Familiarity can breed unwarranted contempt. Crockett's later work has suffered from this, being too often dismissed as 'weak' when in fact the critics have misunderstood the genre and market for which he was writing. For me it's important to read within context and without the prejudice of hindsight and that is the approach I have taken both in reading a novel in what to me is an unfamiliar genre, and in writing about it.

Crockett's versatility in writing for the market may have caused some of the confusion among literary critics. The weird, wonderful and exotic supernaturalism is indeed present in a diverse range of his novels from *Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills* and *The Black Douglas* to *Cleg Kelly* - these elements are

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part of his storytelling stock in trade – which he adapts to suit the style of novel he is writing. He is not afraid to transfer stylistic devices from one kind of fiction to another. In the case of *The Azure Hand* we find on the surface a country-house detective story where we might easily assume The Butler Did It. Above all, it should be remembered that he *was* writing for the market even as he was holding on to what he could of his unique voice. So part of the mystery of *The Azure Hand* is – exactly what kind of fiction is it?

Genre is a notoriously difficult thing to pronounce on. Crockett writes multi-layered narrative and plays with the relationship between reader, character, editor and author. He delights in ‘*mixing those babies up*’ as he calls it, by fictionalising places and people in his stories while keeping to the grace-notes of historical accuracy.

To understand *The Azure Hand* it is important to contextualise it within both its time and genre. This in itself brings up questions which are key to me: when was it written and why was it not published in his lifetime? For me, these are mysteries every bit as interesting as the novel’s narrative. But they will keep for now while we deal with what kind of a book it might be said to be.

I suspect that, like myself, Dr. Donaldson, Crockett’s literary biographer knew little of the detective genre when she dismissed *The Azure Hand* as a comic parody. However, Martin Edwards, a crime writer and stalwart of the Crime Writers’ Association and Detection Club; though unfamiliar with Crockett, knows plenty about historical crime/detective fiction. He observes that: ‘*In one sense, this is a very modern take on fictional*

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detection' which 'shows a determination to pick up some of the then popular tropes (clues, footprints etc.) and do something relatively fresh with them.'

So now, rather than seeing Crockett as writing some weak, comic parody, we see him as being at the forefront of what eventually became The Golden Age of Crime. It's all a question of perspective. Of course, you cannot look at crime fiction before The Golden Age without the shadow of *Sherlock Holmes* looming. Everything seems to be judged on that. And *The Azure Hand* is nothing like *Sherlock Holmes*. It is not intended to be. The problem in publishing is that once someone has hit pay-dirt with a new 'genre', the machine goes into overdrive trying to find more of the same. Which we then deride as derivative from the benefit of hindsight.

I suggest that just in so far as Crockett takes the mantle of historic adventure romance from R.L. Stevenson (who in his turn took it from Walter Scott) and made it his own in the 19th century; so *The Azure Hand* is his unique take on, and response to, the emerging detective crime fiction genre. Crockett also wrote melodrama and sensationalist works. These became the bedrock of what we might now call 'women's fiction'. In this we once more see Crockett responding to the market.

In *The Azure Hand* he is not paying homage to the *Sherlock Holmes* school so much as playing around with other 'new' crime fiction styles such as Gaston Le Roux's *The Mystery of the Yellow Room*, and R. Austin Freeman's *The Red Thumb Mark*. The colour connection is probably a red herring, but Crockett would almost certainly have read both of these works. *The Red Thumb Mark*, published by Hodder &

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Stoughton in 1907, was the first in what was to become a best-selling series. It was the sort of lucrative 'franchise' that was being sought from *Sherlock Holmes* days through till Agatha Christie came along to clean up and The Golden Age was born.

Crockett had a long connection with Hodder & Stoughton. Indeed he was almost their 'poster boy' for a number of years. After some years of negotiation with Crockett's agent A.P.Watt, they bought Crockett's entire back catalogue at the height of his fame in 1904. It was a move I think they lived to regret.

Publishing is one of life's great gambling arenas and it's quite plausible that Hodder & Stoughton encouraged Crockett out of his 'comfort' zone into a potentially more lucrative one. Perhaps their reasoning was: If they could marry one of the most popular authors of the day with the 'on trend' style – pay dirt! It didn't pan out like that and *The Azure Hand* was only published in 1917 at the request of Crockett's widow. One senses its publication was more a favour to her rather than deriving from any conviction on the part of the publishers. This should not prejudice us against the novel however. It's 'different' of course, but how much less talented would people call Crockett had he written seventy works of exactly the same type?

It seems that sometimes you can't win as a writer. We shouldn't blame a dog for not being a cat. Crime writing expert Edwards notes: *'The way that the Azure Hand is integrated into the plot strikes me as the mark of an experienced and capable writer.'*

This opinion carries more weight for me than Donaldson's suggestion that Crockett was losing it

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as he aged. Writers don't tend to get worse as they develop. Yes they may get stale, but with Crockett I suggest that he was experimenting in a whole range of new genres – sometimes from his own desire for a challenge, sometimes at the will of the agent and publisher looking for new markets. We should be careful before we judge *The Azure Hand* based on our own 'interpretation' of the writer he should (or could) have been. Crockett was, above all, a man who had to earn a living from fiction. That brings its own shackles. He rose above them with his skill at drawing compelling characters.

Whatever else it may be, *The Azure Hand* is a detective novel and Edwards suggests that the choice of detective Luiz Perez Grant, of mixed race, with a Portuguese mother and with connections to 'the Orient' is significant. He notes that after *Sherlock Holmes* there was a desire: '*to create detectives with an exotic touch, but they tended to be amateurs rather than police officers. Golden Age police heroes such as Freeman Wills Crofts' Inspector French were conspicuously unexotic. Grant is interestingly different and to some extent original.*'

Throughout the novel Grant is certainly regarded as an outsider by nearly all the other characters. He is the butt of the imperialist racism of Hampden-Jones and as the narrative develops, so he struggles with his own sense of racial identity.

The character of Judge Thorald carries shades of Major-General Theophilus Ruff whom we are introduced to in *Cleg Kelly*. Some have found the latter character too bizarre for credence, but I suggest in this earlier incarnation he is Crockett lampooning if not an actual individual then certainly a type. '*Theophilus Ruff had been an Indian officer at*

the time of the Mutiny.' Judge Thorald and Colonel Hampden-Jones offer other examples of this kind of man although they are perhaps less amusing incarnations. Crockett focuses less on the bizarre and more on the real consequences of such men and their attitudes. Indeed Crockett shows the racism of imperialism very clearly, particularly in the character of Hampden-Jones. We are left in no doubt that Crockett despises this attitude as he takes pleasure in reducing Hampden-Jones to little more than a hen-pecked husband in a relationship of mutual bullying.

Donaldson sees all this as comic, but I think she's missing something. *The Azure Hand* is, as so many of Crockett's fictions are, a commentary on social class. It is all too easy to forget this if one gets lost in the strength of his natural description, but Crockett is not just a writer of nature, he writes of man in nature.

While he explores and exposes the strengths and more often the weaknesses of all classes, I find Crockett most compelling when exploring the relationships of the people who were fundamentally of his own class. In *The Azure Hand* we see this primarily in the love-relationship between maid Susan Sim and Adams the gardener. The use of dialect is not to portray them as 'rude mechanicals' but delivers a level of honesty. Crockett draws all classes 'warts and all' but I feel that his rural working class characters are those to whom we can warm best. Of course each reader brings his/her own predilections to reading a Crockett novel and there is a panoply of characters of all classes for the reader to 'get their teeth into.' You won't like them all, but they offer an interesting commentary and

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insight into Scottish society of the late nineteenth century. And as ever, you will find plenty of Crockett himself in there.

Of the tutor Marcus Hill, Donaldson notes: *'Marcus is, of course, a parody of Crockett, with his pockets full of travel souvenirs and Siberian passports and the cycling map; it is pleasant to consider that he made himself the amorous silly ass whose idiotic silence confused and held up the whole investigation.'*

Crockett's great strength was in being able to take 'real' people and situations and fictionalise them into believable characters. Crockett scholar Richard D. Jackson notes the similarities between the fictional love rivalry of the Judge and Patrick Fenwick Dent, one 'Bessie Netherholm' and Crockett's own youthful love rivalry over one Bessie Smith of Netherholm. It's Crockett all over, raiding from his romantic memory for his fiction. Versions of 'Bessie' abound in many of his novels. Jackson points out that Dr Penman's name is probably used in homage to Crockett's life-long friend Andrew Penman. Penman also features in several of Crockett's stories. Jackson suggests that these facts point to Crockett writing *The Azure Hand* as late as 1912-3 when he was far from home and dying. I don't find any evidence for this and indeed I think that *The Azure Hand* was written considerably before this date.

Based on the incomplete evidence I have, my speculation, and it is only such, is that it was written sometime between 1907 and 1911, probably around 1907-08. Within this time-frame, Edwards finds it an interesting work. He notes: *'The most*

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significant passage in the book in terms of the genre comes in the penultimate chapter, where the murderer tells the detective that he needed to focus on character rather than footprints.

“I ought never to have left you here so long. I saw you had it in you, as soon as you began to study character and take your time, instead of bothering about footprints and dropped tobacco ash.”

This shows SRC trying to get away from the preoccupation with forensics that Conan Doyle, a medico, ushered in with the Holmes stories. In some respects you could say this passage anticipates the work of post-war writers such as Ruth Rendell, whose focus was on character, even though her books were tightly plotted.’

Certainly Crockett utilises all his skills in character in the novel, and while Donaldson has reservations about the ‘quality’ of the work, she accepts that it has ‘*a complex and yet consistently accurate plot*’ and accepts that he is doing something ‘*new*’ in terms of the choice of murderer. I hope I’m not labouring the point when I suggest that it is important to note that *The Azure Hand* was written well before Agatha Christie and The Golden Age. In that context, rather than dismiss *The Azure Hand* as derivative, I think we should re-evaluate it as experimental and at times ground-breaking. But in order to evaluate it at all, one has to be able to read it. And this forces us to consider why it was not published until after Crockett’s death?

Crockett’s *modus operandi* (ably managed from 1894 by A.P.Watt) was to write for serial publication

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before the works were released as novels. He generally worked between one and three years ahead of the final publishing schedule. So, for example, *Deep Moat Grange* while published in 1908 was commissioned as early as 1906 and this was not unusual. Crockett tended to write one Scottish based novel and one European based novel each year. Often he published three works a year. He consistently sat at the top of the bestseller lists between 1894 and 1904.

So why do I consider the years 1907-1911 as the most likely? In 1907 three works were published: *Vida: The Iron Laird of Kirktown*, *Little Esson*, and *Me and Myn*, the latter at least holds clues to a possible change of direction towards the crime or detective genre through a path that includes melodrama/sensationalism and feeds the demands of the growing women's fiction market. In 1908 *Deep Moat Grange* sees Crockett firmly embedded into what is best described as a sensationalist style. Look carefully and you'll see the germ of crime fiction in it too.

Now, writing to commission up to three years in advance suggests that Crockett's publishing 'ship' was not quick or easy to turn around. He hung on to his first love, Scots historical adventure romance, but from 1907 he was drawn ever more into new genres and markets in order to earn his living. The unanswered question is whether it was market pressure or personal desire that encouraged this shift in style?

In 1906 Crockett had claimed both that it bored him to write the 'same' type of story and that he wished he could write only Galloway stories in dialect but there was no market.

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I suggest that *The Azure Hand* was written and possibly rejected by agent/publishers some time during the years 1907-1910. My evidence is incomplete. I am piecing it together from an extensive archive including contracts and letters. There is still much work to be done to chart Crockett's movements and activity especially throughout these later years - which will probably yield a clearer picture - and maybe a different conclusion. Although with Crockett definitive conclusions are hard to draw. There are other posthumous works to be dated, which may have stemmed from this same period. But more work remains to be done to solve this mystery. However, the novels and serials written in the years 1911 to 1914 are well enough documented to believe that he would not have the time or inclination to write *The Azure Hand* in those final years.

Health is another consideration. Crockett long suffered ill health and certainly from 1909 he was frequently ill. This was kept secret because his popularity was fading and publishers would be looking for any excuse not to publish him.

Whenever they were written, all Crockett's posthumously published works show him trying a range of different styles, none 'samey' and 'safe' yet none acceptable to the contemporary publishing scene. Whether they were rejected or simply not submitted to publishers is still unclear. Also unclear is whether he was 'playing' or being 'played by' changing publishing fashions. It is quite likely that he was expected to mutate to survive in the market. The gamble did not pay off for writer, agent or publisher.

1908 saw Crockett's *annus horribilis* in publishing

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terms. The attempt to adapt to changing fashion while keeping his unique identity as a writer was a commercial failure. Records show that *Deep Moat Grange* was the first of his books not to meet publishers' reserves. In the same year the serialised *Princess Penniless* also failed to break even. In 1909 Crockett returned to more familiar fare with H&S publishing *Rose of the Wilderness* and *The Dew of Their Youth*, both Galloway/Edinburgh based historical romances. But the charm was broken and these were no more successful than the previous year's fare. Crockett's output was slowing down, and missing the mark. He had no published works in 1910.

Thus my current hypothesis is that *The Azure Hand* was written after the publication of Freeman's *The Red Thumb Mark*, and after *Deep Moat Grange* was written, but perhaps before it was published. It used some of the same research material as did the 1911 *The Lady of 100 Dresses* which also has a crime sub-theme. Comparing the three works stylistically it's hard to see *The Azure Hand* being written before *Deep Moat Grange* or after *The Lady of 100 Dresses*.

We have the benefit of hindsight, but we cannot fathom all the mysteries. Whenever *The Azure Hand* was written and whatever the reasons it was not published in his lifetime, I take pride in being able to bring it back into print a century after its first publication, hoping that a new generation of readers will be able now to experience it for themselves. For years it has been 'gold-dust' to Crockett collectors, being one of the hardest of his works to find. While hardback editions of many of his earlier novels are relatively easy to find second hand (so many were

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published, after all) *The Azure Hand* came out in only one edition, and the quality of print/binding in that 1917 edition reminds us that publishing was not immune to the privations of war.

I make no apology that in this introduction I have told little of the actual story; that would seem to be a faux pas if not a crime in an introduction for a crime/detective novel. All I can say is that whatever perspective you come to this book from, I hope that it will spark a further interest in Crockett and his writing. If it is true that variety is the spice of life, Crockett's work offers more than enough spice for any modern reader prepared to take up the challenge of reading without the prejudice of hindsight.

Finally, I would like to thank Richard D. Jackson and the late Dr Islay Murray Donaldson for their published and unpublished comments which gave me much food for thought and especially Martin Edwards for his insightful comments which were most helpful in helping me fathom out a mystery of my own.

Cally Phillips
June 2022

CHAPTER ONE

THE BLUE STAIN

It was Susan who saw him first.

She was the second under-housemaid at Dent House, and her business was to light the library fire, do up the room (so far as Mr. Fenwick Dent's dislike of 'tidying' would allow), open the windows, and see that there were enough kindling spills in the blue lacquer vase which hung on the wall by Mr. Dent's armchair. For the master of Dent was old-fashioned, and, in his own library, smoked old-fashioned cut Cavendish in an old-fashioned meerchaum pipe.

When the girl opened the door the library glimmered before her a pale-ish blue-grey, misty as if some of last night's reek were still hanging about. Now Susan Sim did not like the library. 'Her mind was not in it,' she said. And she had gone so far as to declare, that 'that long room with its pictures and panels, and all the edges of them to dust every morning for fear of Miss Aymer, kind o' daunted her.'

And Susan was not sure but what it would be the death of her one of them days, that it would.

But in spite of threats of resignation familiar to all servants' halls, Susan held her place, marching bravely into the bluish fume of the dim morning library, her brush and dustpan in one hand, and the day's kindling wood clipped in the crook of the other arm.

This Tuesday morning she was, almost for the first time, not afraid. She had nodded pleasantly to

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Adams, the second gardener, out of the glazed gallery window. He had returned her greeting, looking brightly up from his geranium-bed, and she was still smiling as she opened the library door with the memory of his cheerful 'Morning, Sue! Lord, just you come your ways down here and I'll plant you!'

But the next moment she saw something which made her shut the library door hastily and let a piece of kindling wood fall noisily on the outside mat. She picked it up from force of habit, and the fear of Richard the butler whom she heard along the long brightly-lit passage to the library, with an eye on everybody's work.

Now Susan Sim was not afraid, even then. She was only "stounded out of her judgment.'

'Richard!' she cried, seeing the butler, without a glance in her direction, turn up the passage which led towards his own pantry.

'Eh, what's that - 'Mr. Hissy,' if you please, and I'll thank you!'

'Richard - Mr. Hissy - sir,' said Susan Sim, all a-brim with her remarkable intelligence, 'master's in the library already. He's setting in the big armchair where he smokes of nights. An' the windows are not drawed - the blinds, I mean drawn - and he's smiling, Mr. Hissy!'

'Come. Think what you are saying, girl! Did he smile at you?'

'No, Richard - no. He was looking down as I seen him, and holding something white to his head, like as if...'

Old Richard made but three hasty steps to the door of the library, and turned the handle which Susan had closed so carefully in her first start of bewilderment.

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Yes - no mistake - his master was certainly there.

Richard, with the freedom of an old servant, went up to Mr. Dent and without the least compunction or thought of presuming, set his hand upon his master's shoulder and shook him gently.

'Dear me, Mr. Dent, there you are, sir! And what did I tell you, when you sent me to bed early? Why, you've gone and been asleep again, and you will have got your death of cold - after all that you promised!' Here a sudden fear struck him - 'Master' he cried suddenly, still louder as he saw that the silent, down-looking figure did not move, but only continued to smile gravely and placidly at the hearth-rug.

In an instant he was down on his knees, his ear to his master's heart. A full minute he listened intently, and then rose to his feet, laid his fingers an instant on the marble-cold brow. His master was dead. To him it was the end of all things, yet he swiftly recollected himself. He was not only butler but major-domo at Dent House.

Immediately he backed to the door, and at the first window, that opened by Susan, he looked out upon the smooth lawns and trim parterres of the late Victorian garden.

'Adams - that you? Come up here! At once!' he said in a low voice just sufficient for the man to hear.

Adams started. He thought he was in for a 'doing' for talking to Sue Sim and so taking up her time, besides setting a bad example.

'But Mr Hissy, I never said any wrong - there was no harm...'

'Come up quickly, not saying anything. There - that way by the garden entrance. The door is open.

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Take off your gardening boots and come along the passage on your stocking soles. Say nothing! Quick now!

‘Anything wrong?’ said Adams wonderingly. But old Richard only summoned him the more imperiously with a jerk of the head. Adams was a clever workman at his business, but he felt himself out of place within a house – except that is, in the greenhouse, when such was his duty. He knew how to obey, however. He went up the double flight of steps, four and four in an elbow, which brought him to the door with the coloured glass panels which were commonly called the Garden Port.

Contrary to what he had been told by Richard Hissy, the door was locked. Adams thought of sitting down on the top step and removing his garden boots, but he reflected that he could be seen, not only from the garden but from half the bedroom windows in the house.

So he stood there, whistling softly with his hands in his pocket, cocking his head from side to side to give himself a countenance, as if he had mounted to that perch to survey the effect of his last planting out of geraniums, much as an artist steps back, brush in hand, to get a long view of his work.

The butler's head appeared at the window. His face was paler now - almost as pale as his master's.

‘Adams,’ he spoke in a low angry voice, ‘what do you mean by not coming in?’

‘Can't, Mr. Hissy. Door's locked!’ replied Adams in the same tone.

Then the gardener heard the fingers of the butler fumbling at the inside fastenings and muttering at the stupidity of Susan Sim. The door was at last opened.

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'Now your boots!' commanded the butler as he let Adam through the chink. 'Stand where you are, Susan. Not a word to the others.'

Richard himself was still in his old soft-soled morning shoes, with which he could at once solace his service-weary feet and move about the house silent as a shadow.

In his countryman's rig-and-furrow socks of washed-out blue Adams advanced, the butler close behind him. The gardener held up his hands at the sight of the master, who was wont to be about in the policies by this time in the morning.

'Dead!' said the butler in his ear.

Adams stood bewildered and unbelieving. He had not the adaptability of old Richard. A young man, he had still before him the trouble which brings the acceptance of Fate.

'It's just no possible!' he gasped, he's as quiet as if asleep.'

'Touch him!' commanded the butler. But Adams shrank away.

'This will be a job for the police, I'm thinking,' he murmured, as if he feared to awake some one. 'Oh, what will her leddyship say? - And Miss Dent and young Miss Aymer?'

'That's what we have to think about, Adams - who is to break it to the ladies? Then the police coming about the house and all the inquiries - I don't like that, Adams.'

'Is it natural?' suggested Adams, standing with his legs wide apart and regarding the still figure in the chair as if meditating a problem of his profession. 'Or has he - has he committed..?'

But this angered the old servant.

'Ye are an incomer,' he said severely, 'tis well

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seen that ye know little of my master. I have served him forty year, - aye forty-three year man and boy. A clearer-headed man never stepped - never a cross word between us all that time. Hear ye that? Mind that when they come to ask you, Adams. Draw up the blind, Adams!’

But before he could obey a thump and a clatter came from the passage outside. Richard Hissy started violently, and as it were skated on his felt-soled slippers noiselessly to the door.

‘It’s that silly thing, Susan Sim,’ he said disgustedly, ‘and me that bade her not to come in. She has fainted - such bairnly whimsies! See, Adams, she cannot lie there among all that clatter of ironmongery and kindling wood. Here, carry her across to my room - the still room, I mean. There’s an old red rep sofa there, and we will throw some water on her face and leave her to come to. Now then, up with her, Adams.’

And the butler led the way by the little elbow of passage to his own department. The still room was locked, but the old man rattled a bunch of keys and had the door open in a moment. A faint comfortable smell of brewing and conserves met them full in face.

‘Lay her down there,’ he ordered. Adams obeyed, but he had the feelings of a young man and a bachelor. She was a pretty girl.

‘Do you think it is quite safe, leaving her like that?’

‘Safe?’ cried the old man, with a sudden outburst of anger, ‘will we leave her? What, with Dent of Dent sitting yonder, perhaps murdered, in his own library - leave her? Aye and twenty Sue Sims. There!’

Hissy threw a liberal dash of water over the girl’s

face.

She sighed gaspingly and opened her eyes. Old Richard bent down till his face was close to hers.

'Do you hear me, Susan?' he said, very austere, 'bide where you are. See, you are in my still room. I am going to turn the key on you. For no one must hear of this till Adams and I get to the bottom of it. You are not frightened, answer me, Susan Sim!'

'No—no-o—' said Sue, 'but if Adams—'

'Certainly not!' said the butler hastily, 'Adams comes with me. I have need of Adams. I shall come back and talk to you myself. Sit still and wait, or if not, just you be taking another comfortable swoon to yourself.'

So going out, he pulled Adams after him remorselessly, and with a swift double click of the key, Sue Sim was left alone.

The two men went back in silence. There was no one in all that part of the house. The butler locked the door of the library while Adams, as carefully as he could, drew up the blinds. The morning sun streamed in on the faded carpet, light blue with gay flowers in large clusters.

In that brilliant light all was so remorselessly plain - the large table in the centre littered with books and papers, the polished granite paperweights with their ebony handles, the heavy brass-knobs of the copying press in the corner, the grey ashes of last night's fire jetted out on the fender, and past the rim of that even to the hearthrug.

'Look,' said the butler suddenly, 'the other little smoking-table has been used - the one with the chess-board. The pieces have been taken out and dropped beside it.'

He lifted a tumbler and sniffed.

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'Whiskey,' he diagnosed, and with his spectacles very close to the glass brim, 'sugar. Some one has been drinking hot whiskey toddy with my master.'

He reached across to the shelf at the dead man's right hand and lifted the other glass. It had been emptied and apparently wiped. In it there was trace neither of liquid nor of sugar.

Richard passed to the big oblong 'gardevin' which occupied the centre of a little sideboard. It was locked, but the spirit decanters glittered in row like aldermen, each with his chained silver label.

'That tells us nothing, for the key is at the master's watch-chain. I can see it now.'

A spot of sunlight had been travelling slowly over the dead man's knee - that which was outermost as he reclined in the deep club armchair.

On the clear, brush-worn, fawny white of the hearthrug, between two bunches of roses, both men saw a deep blue stain of the size and shape of a hand thrust into a fingerless mitten such as skaters use.

'That does not look right,' said Adams, 'now does it, Mr. Hissy?'

But Richard was down on his knees examining it. He had just pronounced the stain quite dry, when there came a sharp rapping at the door, and a girlish voice called clearly outside, 'Uncle, are you there. I have been looking everywhere for you. Open the door! It's only me, Aymer!'

The men looked at each other, to the full as guiltily as if they had been caught in the very act of murder itself.

'Good God, Miss Aymer!' muttered old Richard. And snatching up a black-and-white checked plaid which lay folded on a sofa, he threw it over the silent

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figure of the Master of Dent.

'Stand you there - don't move,' he whispered to Adams, 'I will go and open the door to her. She must not come in - not yet!'

And as old Richard slid away to meet Miss Aymer, Adams, with a trembling such as he had never known in his life, stood behind a screen and watched the spot of tell-tale sunlight light up the brilliant blue mitten-shaped stain on the rug at the foot of the silent plaid-swathed figure.

CHAPTER TWO

‘JUDGE THEORY’

‘Why have you the door locked, Richard?’ demanded Aymer Valentine with the quick petulance characteristic of her. ‘Where is uncle - I want him. I have been looking for him everywhere. I was up in his room, his bed is made - and the room done too. Jane and Susan Sim have been sharply at work this morning to be finished so soon. But I will not have it. The place is not half aired.’

‘Certainly not, Miss Aymer,’ said old Richard, ‘I will speak to them—’

‘You will do nothing of the kind,’ snapped Aymer, ‘that’s my business. And there’s some one crying in the still-room, Richard - crying in there with the door locked. If you were not an old fellow, Richard—’

And she laughed lightly.

Richard stood gloomy before her, making little apologetic signs with his hands to indicate that it was not his fault, and that he would explain matters later. But Miss Aymer, being of a vivid disposition, by no means liked to be put off.

‘What is the matter with you this morning, Richard? What’s the matter with everybody in this house? Why do you stand making idiot signs and wagging your head like a calf over a farm-gate at suppertime? And where is my uncle?’

‘I have not seen him about this morning, Miss,’ said Richard; ‘perhaps if you went down to the gardens, Adams might—’

‘No, not Adams,’ said Miss Aymer, ‘I’m asking you.’

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'Well, maybe gamekeeper, Miss Aymer. Of a morning Master often takes a turn round the plantation edges for a chance at a rabbit—'

'Which he never shoots,' said Miss Aymer interrupting. 'He would rather stand an hour watching the young ones playing like kittens in the dew, and then steal away on tip-toe so as not to disturb them!'

At this unexpected reminiscence of his kindly master something like a sob broke from old Richard. He tried to cover it by 'hemming' loudly. But Miss Aymer was not deceived.

'And what are you doing here, Richard?' she demanded suddenly; making a quick step towards the library door, as if to push her way past. Richard moved to prevent her and instinctively put out his hand. She had been growing surer that something was being hidden from her - using her instinct while interrogating the butler, much as a jealous woman questions a man, judging not at all by words, but by silences, reticences, changes of countenance and expression too slight for any but herself to see.

'Stand aside, Richard. I order you,' she commanded suddenly, 'you have something there you do not want me to know. What is it? I will go in.'

Old Richard spread out his arms like a shepherd stopping a gap to overleap which might jeopardize his entire flock.

'Oh, if you please, do not insist,' he pleaded, 'for the sake of old Richard. Do not - I will tell you all - yes, all in time. But not now, Miss Aymer. You know old Richie, he used to play with you. He played horses with you in the orchard. He -' and there were great sobs now in his voice.

'Richie, what is it? What has put you in this

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state?' The girl's voice was rich with sympathy and reminiscence.

'Nothing, Miss, nothing, I - I don't think I am feeling very well this morning?'

'And who is crying in the still-room, and what is the matter with the house generally? Tell me and I will help.'

The old butler saw a gleam of hope. He bent his head towards her confidentially.

'Missie Aymer,' he whispered, 'I have - there is - a woman in the still-room!'

'Oh, for shame, Richard, sweethearting at your age - and making the girls cry too! You are ever so much too old for 'Georgie-Porgie.' Besides, consider your figure...'

She was about to hum the nursery rhyme when the hopeless misery on the old man's face stopped her short. She looked at him fixedly for almost a minute, and the mirth died swiftly out of her eyes.

'Richard,' she spoke now in a tone altogether different from the bantering one she had used up to the present, 'you are lying to me again. There is something serious the matter. You think I am too young to be trusted. Try me. Perhaps you will find that I am as old as yourself in meeting trouble - perhaps a little older. Besides, I am going to know!'

And with a sudden feint to the left and a duck under the uplifted right arm, she passed the old man and was within the library.



Adams stood there pale as death, fixed at attention beside his master, for Adams was an old volunteer and knew his drill.

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But the girl's eyes rested on the figure rudely indicated under the folds of the plaid - not huddled together, but with the outlines clearly revealed from head to foot.

Aymer Valentine's hands went to her bosom with that apparently theatrical but really instinctive gesture natural to women in the presence of a great uncertainty or a terrible fear. It is in some measure a prayer. Certainty restores them to that simplicity of manner in which real tragedy comes as easy to a brave woman as any other call of duty.

'What is that?' she cried. 'Whom have you there?'

And before Adams could interfere to prevent her, she had snatched the plaid from the figure seated in the armchair. She saw the set face and fixed smile of her benefactor, the hand pressed to the temple, and the deep blue stain at his feet.

'Oh Uncle Patrick,' she cried, 'what is the matter? What have they done to you?'

She was on her knees by his side. The tears sprang to her eyes at the first touch of his chill hand, she repressed them and rose to her feet.

She looked from Richard to Adams and back again, her happy youthful face altering and, as it were, decomposing. She lifted her hand to her throat to conquer the choking sensation that seemed to throttle her.

'What - what - what?' she queried, pushing the vision away from her with nervous palms, and seeking vainly to form her anguish into sentences. Then she burst out suddenly and almost fiercely,

'Tell me, - what is it? What has happened to Uncle Patrick?'

It was old Richard who first recovered speech.

'Susan found him like this when she came into

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the library this morning,' said Richard. 'She told me and I called in Adams to see what was to be done!'

Aymer could hardly grow paler, but her lips became grey.

'Then, he is dead!'

The butler nodded.

'He had been dead a long time when I found him. We wanted a quiet moment to think before we sent for the police.'

'But a doctor?' cried Aymer in indignation. 'Surely you sent at once?'

The old butler shook his sleek grey head.

'It is useless - it had been useless these many hours.'

'But it may not be - there are trances - people have come out of them after days - I have read—'

'Miss Aymer,' said old Richard, laying his hand on the young girl's sleeve, 'Adams will send up Dr. Penman at once - but do not cherish any hope. Adams - a moment! Get the trap and drive to the office of the chief of police in Quarrier West - you know where it is - at the corner of the High Street and Market Square. But on the way call for Dr Penman, and have him up here before the police surgeon.'

Adams saluted and went out, forgetting the unusual appearance of his blue rig-and-furrow socks on the worn richness of the old library carpet - which indeed nobody noticed.

'And now Miss Aymer,' said old Richard gently, 'what I want to know is, can you help us with Miss Rachel - and (here his voice hesitated a little)— 'with Mrs. Fenwick Dent?'

'With Rachel - yes,' said the girl firmly, but with my aunt - I don't know. Perhaps some one else

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would be better.'

The old butler looked at her with the kindly understanding of a family confidant to whom nothing pertaining to the family is alien or unknown.

'Perhaps,' he suggested, 'it might be impossible for Miss Rachel—?'

'Very well - I shall try,' said Aymer quietly. But understand I am bearing all I can without giving way. He was my only friend in the house - the only...'

'Except one, Miss Aymer,' said the butler, gently and deferentially, 'an old foolish man who helped to teach you to walk.'

She put out her hand and laid it affectionately on the old man's shoulder. She was taller than he, though he never would allow it.

'You have helped me much, Richard,' she said, 'and never more than at this moment. You have made me fit to be of some use, instead of being a doll dressed up in pretty things. And now I will go and do my part.'

She bent down and kissed the cold forehead of the man to whom she owed everything. At that moment she felt no shudder of fear or distaste. This was but the outward covering, the shell of the soul that had devised all good and gracious things for her. And though she knew not where that soul was, she was sure that it was safe in the care of a God who was infinitely good and infinitely great. God could not be worse or more unkind than He had made Patrick Fenwick Dent.

Aymer had a simple faith. Her creed was brief, but these serve best in dark hours that come suddenly.

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Aymer Valentine stole on tiptoe out of the room. She did not wait to inquire further. She only knew that her uncle had been found dead. It was a terrible shock. She did not see what her future was to be in that house, now that he was gone. He had supported her against her aunt, skilfully, tactfully, silently, but with a quiet persistence of which she had only been conscious in the changed demeanour of the whole household, beginning with her aunt.

When Aymer was gone, Richard Hissy stood looking long at the table on which the extra tumbler was set - the one at the corner of the fireplace opposite to his dead master. Had it been left there on purpose to be seen?

Then after scratching his chin with his plump forefinger for a while, the butler did a curious thing. He had noticed a ring such as a wet pewter makes on an inn-table, circling the varnish. He tried the tumbler upon it. It was a long glass and the bottom was much too wide. The ring was a small one. It would not fit. Then Richard went to the press in the small sideboard beneath the 'gardevin,' and, taking one of each of all the sorts of small glasses therein, he tried them all on the clearly traced circle.

But he found not one near the size. He was not at all satisfied, so shutting away all traces of his experiment and turning the key in the silently-fitting mahogany of the cup-board door, he muttered to himself, 'This is somewhat over deep for you Richard. Better step over to the Hall and ask Mr Thorald to step over. Old Judge Theory may be able to find a clue to this - that is if he gets here before the policemen.'

Richard had the usual prejudices of his class against the Force.

CHAPTER THREE

HIS OLDEST FRIEND

Quarrier was one of the most ancient Scottish royal burghs near the border. It is the county town of Kentigernshire on the west as Longtown is of Cheviotshire on the east. A large town with well-established manufactures, it has the same growing trade in woollens and tweeds, and the immense interest in football common to all the towns of that region.

It had (and has) extensive local business as a centre of agricultural supply. Its weekly market is one of the most famous in Scotland. Auction marts, foundries, reaping machine agencies, even a factory for automobiles are to be found in this enterprising centre. Sometimes in the local papers, it even dubs itself 'The Queen City of the South,' half in jest and half in real rivalry of its episcopal neighbour — Caerketton, on the Eden levels, just across the Debatable Ground.

Many villas of the wealthier citizens cluster close together on both sides of the Laverock, a full-fed river with grass banks, which lingers about the town, and ducks under three bridges, before emptying itself with many coils and windings into the vast sand-fringed estuary of Solway.

Quarrier has a quay proudly named of the 'Admiralty,' a name dating from the time of smuggling and revenue cutters. It possesses a port

but no shipping. A Navigation Board for deepening the channel, but nothing ripples the surface of the highest tide but a ferry-boat for passengers crossing from bank to bank, or a gay cargo of youths and maidens dropping down to picnic on the sands and short turf of the Links at the Laverock Water Foot.

But on the contrary it is a great, a very great, railway centre. After dark, electric signals twinkle and fall irregularly – sometimes two red lamps with a white in the middle – green, and then a rising blaze of white announces the way is clear – while all day and night from the complicated system of rails and points into which four lines run, locomotives shriek and brilliantly lighted expresses flash thundering by, roaring on into the black and silent night of the Laverock Marshes, the sound dying away till only the dull beat of the pistons can be heard pulsating over the hollow peat of that great sea-bound wilderness.

There were a few, a very few, houses of country gentlemen in this direction, either native to the soil or belonging to men returned with fortunes made in far lands, to found a family and strike their roots as deep as might be in home-staying mould.

On the side of the great moss of Lochar and overlooking it, the two chief mansions of this description are Dent House, the seat of Mr. Fenwick Dent, which was much the larger, and a quarter of a mile nearer the town on the same rocky ridge, Laverock Hall where dwelt Mr. Wilfred Thorald, a retired Indian judge, known through all the south country as ‘Old Judge Theory.’

It was to him that Richard Hissy went when he shut so carefully behind him the door of the library and thrust the key in his pocket. He paused a

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moment at the still-room to comfort and chide Sue Sim, and on his way out said a word to Connel, the head housemaid. He informed her that on his own authority he had detailed Sue Sim for special duty. At which Connel's heart was hot within her, but she said nothing. In Dent House Mr. Richard Hissy was not to be argued with. So she only tossed her head and went on her way, air and nose alike exalted.

But she would find out - yes, if it pleased Richard to have his mysteries, he could have them - and - 'on his own authority' dear me, 'how grand!' - Well, never mind, wait till she got Sue Sim - she would soon find out all about the butler's mysteries in spite of all his major-domo airs.

But Richard went on his way thinking nothing of Connel, his heart full of his dead master and the tragedy which had come to interrupt the pendulum regularity of life at Dent House. He thought of the old master, the father of Mr. Patrick - whom he had never ceased to regard as younger than himself though in fact when Dick Hissy came as boot-boy and dog-feeder to Dent House, the young master was just finishing his college course.

Judge Thorald, Buck Thorald of the old time, was about his master's age, though a few years his junior. They had been to college together. They had shared chambers in London before his father's death brought Mr. Patrick home, and Wilfred went out to India to begin a career so distinguished that its close enabled him to look back with a contemptuously tolerant smile on the rather extravagant early career of Buck Thorald.

But somehow - whether because of certain common memories (it was said that Thorald would fain have married Bessie Netherholm, Patrick Dent's

first wife, and the mother of his only daughter and heiress) or owing to some difference in humour between the traveller and the stay-at-home - be that as it may, it is certain that though always on the easiest and most comfortable terms with one another, the intimacy of their early days was never renewed after Judge Thorald set up his bachelor establishment at Laverock Hall.

For one thing, the second Mrs. Fenwick Dent never could abide the Judge's eyes - 'cold, scrutinizing eyes' she called them, with a little grimace of disgust.

She was a youngish, blonde, fluffy-haired, petulant woman, afflicted with a chronic discontent which her husband had long since ceased to try to assuage, and a malady of the nerves which defied the faculty to treat, or even to diagnose.

Mrs. Fenwick Dent did not like old Judge Thorald. She said that his eyes made her feel cold, 'as if he were cross examining her in the divorce court.' This awkward speech, flashed out by the lady in a moment of black sullenness, was repeated to Judge Thorald, who gathered his theorizing brows together and made a strange reply.

'If my good lady of Dent is never cross-examined in another court than that she has named, she may count herself lucky.'

The Judge was an old beau in his way, who did not like to be disdained by beauty, even when a little 'ripe.' Also he was given to dark speeches of which only he knew the meaning. So this one, very justly, was set down to pique.

Buck Thorald, in spite of his wisdom, his pension, and his great and well-earned reputation for wisdom, was essentially a man of fads and fancies.

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He was indeed, though he did not know it, Buck Thorald still. Through all changes of fashion he kept, and, as it were, caressed the magnificent moustachios of the type worn by the warlike men who had won back India in '57. With his broad, deeply-dented, clear-cut features, and mane of white hair swept back he looked, on a slender scale, absolutely leonine.

For he was by no means the type of those sturdy, broad-shouldered, bayonet-charging fighters whose forward rush made pale the dark Sepoy faces. He was slender, and prided himself on keeping his ancient figure at the age of sixty-one. Always scrupulously dressed, in an age of tweeds and flannels, the Judge affected the long-waisted, mid-Victorian coats which set off the graceful youthfulness of his shape. He was very proud of this, and fond of the society of well-bred women, or indeed of any women who could appreciate him, of whom there were not a few. He had never married, he said, because he loved so many that he could never make up his mind to leave them all for one.

Judge Thorald was, of course, a justice of the peace of Kentigernshire. And though, in Scotland, that office has neither the power nor the consideration accorded to it south of the border, he had on many occasions given the police district the benefit of his experience. Also, having the long arm of influence, he had been instrumental in bringing to the county the present chief of police, an old Indian friend of his own, Colonel Hampden-Jones, late of H.M.'s 26th Gurkhas.

When Richard Hissy arrived, Bailey, the Judge's confidential servant, left in the hall among the Indian gods and Himalayan trophies of sport while

he went upstairs to tell his master. To him Richard had said nothing except that it was urgent that he should see the Judge - there was trouble over at Dent House.

‘What,’ said Bailey, ‘not a robbery sure-lie! I hope we are not to have any of that Caerketton gang in this neighbourhood - not,’ he added, with a certain sigh of confidence in the reputation of his master, ‘that they are very likely to trouble *us!*’

As Richard said nothing, Bailey retired, muttering to himself that Mr. Hissy need not be so high and mighty if he *had* been forty years at Dent House, and as everybody knew, led his master by the nose.

To Bailey's surprise the Judge came down at once. He had, in fact, almost finished his morning toilet, and had only paused to run and polish his nails with a newly acquired sort of Ongine, and to try the effect of yet one more of the old-fashioned flowered silk waistcoats be so affected.

Judge Thorald descended the stairs with his usual quiet and almost youthful grace to meet the old butler in the hall.

‘Well, Richard,’ he said cheerfully, ‘what wind blows you to Laverock so early?’

‘May I speak with your honour a moment?’ Hissy answered gravely.

The Judge, his fingers tapping the lid of a golden snuff-box in which he kept his store of fine Tunisian cigarettes, glanced lingeringly at the beautiful miniature on the lid, as he had a way of doing a thousand times a day, and motioned the butler into a small study that opened off the hall under a trophy of grinning heads of snow leopards from the Leh plateau.

Like every other part of the house frequented by

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the master of Laverock Hall, the room was lined from floor to ceiling with books.

'Sir,' said Richard, as the Judge stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece, looking benevolently at his old friend's servant, 'we need your help badly, sir. Indeed, immediately. My master has been found dead, sir - in his library - and the police will be there in an hour.'

'Dead!' exclaimed the Judge, shutting his snuff-box with a convulsive snap and sliding it mechanically into his coat pocket, 'impossible - you must be dreaming, Richard. I saw him yesterday afternoon at the County Council Meeting - never saw him look heartier in his life.'

'It is true all the same, sir,' the butler's grey head shook; 'the maid found him in the library, sitting dead.'

'You don't mean to say, Richard - ?' The Judge hushed his voice, but the butler gave him no time to complete his sentence.

'No, sir, I don't. I can't. It isn't like my master. He had no cause. But there are curious circumstances about it on which I would like your mind - that is, before the police turn the house upside down, I couldn't have rested if I didn't come over and ask you to look up. It will ease my mind. I thought I was doing my duty by coming to you, sir.'

'Thank you, Richard - the police - ah - ' the Judge meditated thoughtfully - 'they will disarrange things, of course, and go for the most obvious explanation, suspect everybody - give the ladies no end of trouble. Yes, of course, I will come. Bailey, my hat - no, the straw. Thank you Richard, I am with you.'

Old Judge Thorald had gone but a few steps when he turned about. The confidential servant was still

regarding them with a look of dull hostility. Who was Richard Hissy that he should come and carry off his master breakfastless without a word to him?

'Bailey,' said the Judge, 'go over to Colonel Jones and ask him with my compliments to meet me at Dent House as soon as possible.'

He turned towards Richard as they walked along the rocky ridge, his usually cheerful face clouded and troubled. From habit he frequently began to whistle and immediately checked himself. He felt in his waistcoat pocket for his snuff-box, which was his fetish, but though his fingers itched a sense of the fitness of things prevented him from taking it out.

'Now, Richard,' he said presently, 'we are clear of the house. Tell me it all over from the beginning - the least things - and what you thought about them - what they suggested to you - what Susan and Adams said - in fact, everything.'

'The facts as I saw them, suggested to me, sir,' said Richard sturdily, 'that my master has been most foully done to death.'

'Possibly, Richard,' said the Judge quietly, 'but first let me have the facts. Speak quickly. We have not long. Colonel Jones will be there in half an hour. I know him. He is a gentleman, and at any rate between the two of us perhaps we can make things easier for the poor ladies.'

So Richard began his tale with the outcry of Sue Sim as she shut the library door and stood pallid and gasping against the lintel. It was not long before the Judge, as he listened, was whistling that little snatch of Indian melody which rings from housetop to housetop on hot May nights, where it sounds like a false 'There is a happy land' - that indeed being pretty well its meaning, though the vernacular

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words thereto annexed are by no means suitable for any British hymnal. Soon he had his 'cogitation box' in his hand - the gold snuff-box with the miniature of La Valiere on the lid - at least he said it was La Valiere - which he always used when he was coming to a decision.

So the butler talked and the Judge whistled and tapped, till almost before either was aware they found themselves at the park entrance of Dent House.

'This way, sir,' said Richard; 'come by the shrubbery, please, I expect that the ladies know by this time, but - we can get into the library by the side door from Adams' unfinished geranium beds.'

'Ah,' said the Judge quickly, as Richard admitted him, 'I have not seen that lock before - Mr. Dent's orders, I suppose.'

Indeed it was obvious that the old lock had been removed, and another of the self-closing lever sort which shuts with a snap had been substituted, for the channels did not fit and, in fact the new lock was at least an eighth of an inch smaller every way than its predecessor.

The next moment they were in the library, and Judge Thorald was looking into the cold grey smiling face of his oldest friend.

CHAPTER FOUR

RACHEL DENT, HEIRESS

Not with a light heart had Aymer Valentine undertaken the task of informing her cousin and her aunt of the death of father and husband.

Her cousin, Rachel Dent, was a little over thirty years of age. Now a woman may be much over thirty and yet be young, but then she must have had a great deal of the happiness which comes by love to keep her so. Of this Rachel had known nothing. She was the daughter of that Bessie Netherholm about whom, in days long dim to all but the two men concerned, Patrick Fenwick Dent and Wilfred Thorald had come as near to quarrelling as two men may without cutting each others' throats.

But Bessie of the Feud had been doomed. She had not lived a month after the birth of her only child, Rachel, now sole apparent heiress of the Dent properties.

After this event Patrick Dent had lived a long while the weary life of an early widower. His daughter had been left a good deal to the care of servants. She was afterwards sent to the best schools, where in time she acquired the manners of good society, strictly according to the prospectus, with Lappo-Finnish calisthenics thereto annexed, to appease the modern spirit. But in spite of all her advantages she remained a dull, self-contained girl, and either utterly incapable or utterly indifferent to the conduct of the household.

It was a marvel, every one said, that with such a

daughter as Rachel her father did not marry again. So when the event did take place the general wonder was he had not thought of it before.

Yet, had Patrick Dent known, he might have rested contented with his daughter Rachel and the life of books and fields to which he had accustomed himself at Dent House. He had vague ideas of standing for the burgh of Quarrier. He had been approached by the Conservative party to fight the county of Kentigern, a safe seat and one of the last fortresses of the old indomitable pre-'32 Toryism in Scotland.

However, he had declined the offer, re-marrying instead. He would have slumbered and voted much more comfortably at Westminster. But for his sins he chose to wed a young girl - hardly out of the nursery, said the Quarrier gossips, a certain Viola de Wint, the daughter of a noble family of Dutch extraction settled for two centuries in London. Viola was an only child, and had been brought up by her father and mother in a vast red-plush-and-gilt-stucco house in the wilds of Bayswater, with big brick bow-windows and massive chairs symmetrically arranged round every room.

The girl had been spoiled from her infancy, and, having a fortune of her own, was not in the least grateful for being removed to a larger sphere. From the first she never liked Dent House, and went as often to London as she could. Her parents did nothing to uphold her husband's authority, being of opinion that a man of the age of Patrick Dent should be able to manage his own affairs domestic.

So, as things were, if it had not been that the second Mrs Patrick Dent had always in herb, in bud, or in blossom some promising local flirtation - or

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more than one - it is questionable whether or not she would ever have remained at Dent House at all.

Specially was this so since Patrick's pretty niece returned from school and with her bright smiles and quick scornful speeches, drew the hearts of men after her. Then Mrs. Dent the Second would demand periodically that she should be sent away. But Patrick was a just man, and upon occasion firm, so that ever and anon there would befall a great packing of trunks for my lady's exodus to London. Generally, however, the thought that 'that little vixen, Aymer Valentine' would be left to make the running, proved sufficient to cause a hasty unpacking, which duly took place with much abuse of waiting-maidens, so that a return was effected with even greater haste than the flight.

It was small wonder therefore that Aymer, with her only powerful supporter in the house sitting dead in his own library, should not love the task of breaking the intelligence to her cousin and her aunt.

She went up to Rachel's room first. It was fortunate that both Mrs. and Miss Dent breakfasted in their own rooms, so that, as they were late risers, there was no danger that she should not find them alone.

'I must come in, Rachel,' she said at her cousin's door, 'I have something to say to you.'

'Can't it wait - I am busy -' The voice came muffled from the bedclothes.

'I cannot wait - do please get up and open the door.'

There were sounds of disapproval within, and a grumbling murmur which increased as feet moved heavily over the thick carpet.

'Now wait a moment!' the voice commanded. But

Aymer did not wait and accordingly she surprised her cousin adjusting her false front before the mirror.

Miss Rachel turned round rather angrily.

'Did I not tell you,' she said with asperity, 'that you were not to come in till I called you?' And she pushed a small bottle containing a colourless fluid into a cupboard with a hand on which, though unwashed, all her available rings had been placed as if set out for sale in a jeweller's window. It was one of Rachel's peculiarities, of which she had many, to put on her jewellery before going to bed and take the pieces off in the morning.

Her voluntary isolation, her limited intelligence, a certain sullenness of disposition, very much increased since the advent of her stepmother at Dent House, prevented Rachel from doing herself justice. Moreover she was plain and eternally conscious of the fact. But she had never been ill-disposed towards Aymer, whose value in the house she recognized. Often she adopted a brusque, almost rude, manner of speaking to her cousin, but the real friendliness of their relations had never been threatened.

Much of this secret good feeling on Miss Rachel Dent's part towards her cousin was owing to the bitter antagonism which from the first had existed between her and her stepmother.

Aymer knew that Rachel could well be trusted to remain calm, so she did not hesitate to tell her, without any fallacious attempt at breaking the news, what Susan Sim had found in the library that morning.

Rachel's matt brown skin paled a little, her lips quivered, and the colour flushed up deeper on the

left side of the face than on the right - which perhaps suggested a medical reason for her habitual depression. Nevertheless she made no remark for a while, except to ask her young cousin if she was quite sure that her father was dead.

Aymer replied in the affirmative, secretly wondering that Rachel did not instantly rush down to see for herself.

'I think I will sit down,' she said instead, very quietly. And on the edge of the bed she sank down with a sigh of physical relief that made Aymer marvel yet more. She had never known her own father, but she could not help thinking that, whether or not, it was not so that she would have received the news of his death.

Rachel remained a little while wrapped in one of her gloomy silences. But when she raised her eyes to her cousin's face, they were dry and almost startlingly brilliant.

'It is that Woman,' she said in a tense emphatic whisper; 'she has murdered him! I know she has!'

'Rachel,' Aymer besought her cousin, 'you must not even think such a thing - think what people would say of us all if you suggested - but oh, no, you must not - you will not. We do not know anything except that uncle is dead.'

'I am mistress here now,' Rachel Dent continued in a heavy voice of determination, mournful and monotonous. 'I am mistress, I tell you, and she shall quit the house. I've known this would happen for a long time. I have been expecting it. I was sure from the moment he brought home that Woman. I knew that she would be the death of him. And now, as you see, my prophecy has come true.'

'But you never prophesied,' urged Aymer, sitting

down beside her cousin, and putting her arm about her waist; 'you never said a word to me, nor, I am sure, to anyone else.'

'Oh, yes, I did!'

Aymer paled. She was getting beyond her depth. She began to suspect that her cousin's mind was clouded.

'To whom did you tell it?' she asked anxiously; 'I hope to none of the servants, not even to old Richard.'

'Not even to old Richard,' said Rachel Dent, 'to herself - to the Woman - to the Supplanter - who took my father from me. Yes, I know, you did that too - afterwards - and I hated you for a while. He was always praising you. He followed you about with his eyes. Then I hated you - but not for long. For I watched - yes, I am cunning. I watched when you all thought that I was knitting or reading. I can look through my eyelashes - they are longer and thicker than yours, you know. Then I saw that you did not mean it. I knew that you cared about me too, and tried to bring me into everything. And then after you had nursed me, when I was ill - you knew that it was poison I took, and you never told, and only threw away the bottle. Then I loved you. At least, I am not sure that I know how really to love, but I stopped hating you, and was sorry. I liked to see you about me, and to hear you talk. Also because the Woman hated you so much. I love - yes, I will say it - I love the people whom she hates. And that is how I know she has killed my father!'

Rachel's voice had grown stronger and stronger, till at last, at the sound of hushed footsteps outside the door, Aymer fairly put her hand over her cousin's mouth, to stop her further utterance.

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'That must have been Sylvia Granger,' she whispered in a low voice; 'she has found out where Susan Sim is. Mrs. Dent will soon know all now.'

'She knew it before,' muttered Rachel doggedly.

'Hush!' said Aymer, 'if you must speak, come to my room.'

'I cannot leave my own,' said Rachel. 'I have reasons.'

'I fear that the presence of everyone in the house will be necessary below as soon as the police arrive to take up the case.'

'I do not want any police,' said Rachel; 'they shall not come prying into my room. I am mistress here now. They can search that Woman's and I shall help them. But not here - see the locks and bolts that I have to keep Her out!'

And Rachel Dent laughed to herself, a low chuckling mirthless laugh, as she pointed to the array of locks arranged along the edge of her door. There was, in addition to the ordinary bedroom fastening, a Chubb and a patent lever-lock each opening with a special key.

'Three keys in all, beside the bolts,' she whispered cunningly, her hand wandering over the array of knobs lovingly. 'She shall not come into my room to kill me in my sleep - no, nor steal my jewellery.'

And she held up her ring-laden fingers to the light so that half-a-dozen bangles and bracelets ran tinkling down to her elbow, while ruby, emerald, and the clean chill sparkle of diamond flashed against the sunlight that was streaming in through the window curtains.

At that moment there came a cry from above, more as it seemed a cry of anger than one of pain or sorrow.

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'Ah, that is the Woman,' said Rachel Dent with a snap of her white teeth. 'She knows that her hour has come!'

And she shook her clenched bejewelled hand in the direction of her stepmother's rooms.

CHAPTER FIVE

COLONEL JONES'S THEORY

It was indeed the cry of Mrs. Patrick Fenwick Dent that rang through the house. The servants said in whispers that she laughed when told the news of her husband's death. But Sylvia Granger, her maid, declared that she had a terrible fit of hysterics, and that she remained wholly unconscious for long afterwards.

Judge Thorald and his friend Colonel Hampden-Jones heard the cry, but, deep in their investigation, they only cocked their ears an instant in the direction from which the sound came, and so proceeded.

'I suppose your men are about the house,' said the Judge, pausing a moment to watch Dr. Penman and the police surgeon from Quarrier making their preliminary examination of Mr. Dent's body.

'I gave orders that no one should be allowed to go out or come in till we had finished,' the Colonel answered. 'I think we can exhaust the available matter before the city detectives arrive. We need not leave any more for these fellows than we can help.'

But in spite of the goodwill and scientific methods of the Colonel, assisted by his ablest inspector, little more was discovered than had revealed itself to the eyes of the earliest searchers, Judge Thorald and Richard.

One curious circumstance was that the stain on the carpet between the dead man's feet began to lose its sharp prismatic colour early in the day, and by the afternoon it had barely an outline.

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'I think,' said the Judge, 'if I may venture to suggest, Colonel, that you ought to cut out that piece of carpet. The colouring matter, whatever it is, appears to be very fugitive. It does not seem to me nearly so bright as when we began our investigations. How does it strike you?'

'By Jove, that is true,' said the Colonel, 'but it would spoil the whole piece, and perhaps the value might afterwards be reclaimed from us.'

The Colonel was a man with a limited salary and a large family, so he had need to think of such things. But the Judge only smiled slightly and nodded with a certain grimness.

'Of course,' he said, 'as you will. I only suggested that the thing might be useful later in any investigation or trial.'

'I see nothing that would necessarily lead me to suppose that we are in the presence of anything of the nature of a crime, nor indeed do I see the motive for the suggestion of either suicide or assassination.'

'No,' remarked the Judge patiently, 'there is that extra glass, you know. I presume that you have kept that carefully aside with its contents?'

'Of course, Inspector Hornung has it,' said the Colonel, looking up with dignified surprise as he prowled carefully round the room for spots and marks. Of these last he found plenty on the woodwork, because the late Mr. Dent, when he had a visitor, often smoked a cigar in his honour, and had a way of quietly crushing the end of it against the nearest wainscotting, by way of getting sooner done, so that with a sigh of happiness he could pull out the beloved pipe for which his fingers were itching.

Now Colonel Hampden-Jones was a just man,

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and he knew the value of every one of Judge Thorald's suggestions. He was grateful for his assistance because he had seen him at work in India, where he was called 'The-Man-to-Whom-it-is-not-Good-to-Lie.'

'I think, Judge,' he said presently, 'that if we cover the stained portion carefully with a piece of paper of the same size and shape - roughly, you know - that might do very well, besides saving poor Mrs. Dent's carpet. I have a greater respect for carpets ever since I paid the bill for ours at Armoury Lodge!'

Without a word the Judge, who always had what was needed, drew a little bag of tools from his hip pocket, and handed his friend a pair of scissors.

'Medical clippers,' he explained, 'come apart - thus - can be boiled!'

'Very neat and convenient,' said the Colonel, 'will you cut the shape of the mark?'

'I think,' said the Judge quietly, 'that you will be the more official witness, but I can find you a piece of paper.'

He looked into the library waste-paper basket, but found nothing there except torn fragments of letters. Then on a shelf in the corner, among tobacco tins, jars and photographic apparatus, he found a sheet of what looked like blotting-paper. This he handed at once to Colonel Jones, who instantly applied himself to the work with immense goodwill and conscientiousness limited by rather mediocre powers.

'By Jove, Judge,' he puffed presently, 'I am getting it out, but not a minute too soon. A dashed good thing you thought of it, Thorald! The thing is fading away before our eyes.'

The Judge said nothing, but watched the

operation (as he did everything) in a languid and detached manner.

'Why, we should have had these fellows from Edinburgh down on us, and caught us with our thumb in our mouths, having omitted to take the most elementary precautions.'

'I am sure,' remarked the Judge sweetly, 'that now they will find you all fixed and ready for them.'

By this time the Colonel was again on his feet, mopping his brow. He had not preserved his youthful figure so well as the slim aristocratic Judge.

The Colonel grew more and more pleased with himself as he looked around.

'I think,' he said, unconsciously beginning to pontify as he was wont to do in the bow window of the County Club, 'that we have satisfactorily proved one thing. If there has been any foul play it has come from the interior of the house, and *that* we have surrounded. I saw to that at once. All we have to do is to search, examine, reconstitute, and require from everybody within these walls a statement of how they employed their time since the period when Mr. Fenwick Dent was last seen alive to the moment he was found by the housemaid.'

He put his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets and looked about for applause.

'There is,' suggested the Judge with gentle deference, 'that little matter of this Garden Port lock. It cannot have escaped your notice that it has been changed recently. And this.' He selected half-a-dozen scraps of notepaper from the waste-paper basket and fitted them rapidly together upon the table.

The Chief of the Kentigernshire Police put up his eye-glass, bent over and read after some careful

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screwing and Focussing, 'I propose to call upon you tomorrow night...'

'By Jove,' he said with a look of admiration at the Judge, 'that's what it is to have the head and the habit. It's you who ought to have been Chief of Police. I can keep the fellows in order, and all that - drilled, buttons polished and so forth - but this sort of thing is a little too complicated for me. I haven't got - what is it - the brain-pan convolutions in here!'

And he tapped his forehead.

'Matter of habit,' said the Judge modestly; 'natural habit of observation sharpened by forty years' practice, keeps the hand in. Besides, this is mere A B C.'

'Easy for you Judge, but I'm no Sherlock Holmes,' said Colonel Jones, his honest ruddy face above his stubby white moustache beaming gratefulness and goodwill. 'I'm deuced obliged to you, old fellow, all the same, and don't mind saying so. I am indeed. Now I shall be ready for these city fellows. The murderer came from outside the house, then - so much is now clear!'

'Not so fast - go slowly,' the Judge warned his friend suavely, 'I only pointed out a couple of the more obvious elements in the problem. We must know a great deal more before we reach the stage of drawing conclusions.'

'But it must be one or the other,' the Colonel announced doggedly. 'Come now, Thorald, you are subtle, and all that sort of thing, but you can't get away from that. The murderer must have come either from *within* or from *without* the house! - And, by Jove, I have them either way!'

'At any rate,' said the Judge, laying his hand on his comrade's shoulder, 'if I were you I should say

nothing about the question. And when the detectives come, I should confine myself to pointing out to them the inferences. Right or wrong, they will do it quickly enough. Besides, I should be content with keeping a strict watch on all who are in the house, without shutting it up altogether. Keep your eyes on all who come and go, and let the hateful personal examination be left to the professionals. This may be a family affair, after all, and however gently such inquisitions are held there always remains an after-grudge when the Inquisition, however necessary, is carried through by a local man!

'Yes, by Jove,' said the Colonel with a shudder; 'fancy being asked to take down a lady to dinner whom you had been treating as a possible murderer, or having the servants moving about behind your back hating you, and saying to themselves, 'There's the fellow who suspected me of killing my master - I hope this dish of peas will choke him!''

'Well, duty is duty, of course,' said the Judge, 'and we have to do such things occasionally - put them through when they arrive. But the seldomer the better, in my view. And in this case, there is not the least reason for your doing any of that work!'

'Thank you, Thorald,' said the Colonel gratefully; 'this is what I call kindness. Of course I shall have to see any of the family who may want to make any voluntary statement - but the ladies, my dear fellow - what am I to do about them? I cannot, as a gentleman, interfere with their grief or restrict their liberty. And yet -'

'I think,' said the Judge, 'that we might, without possible offence, send for Miss Aymer - Miss Aymer Valentine - Mr. Dent's niece, you know. You have met her, a very bright girl - manages the house,

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used to manage her uncle, I am told - very clear-headed. No, Jones, I should not call her strong-minded in the ordinary sense of the word. But such a girl as would be of the utmost use in a house where the other two ladies - might be said to be - well, not exactly on the best terms.'

The Colonel started and looked long and suspiciously at his friend.

'Ah,' he said sharply, 'there is something at last. Why did not you mention it sooner? So Miss Dent was not on good terms with her stepmother, eh? Most important! You see, my dear fellow, how everything supports my theory.'

Judge Thorald lost patience suddenly and completely, perhaps also, knowing his man, intentionally.

'Jones,' he rapped out, 'don't rasp your voice at me. I'm not your orderly. *Your theory?* I did not know you had one. You have had at least three in as many minutes. All I want is, for your own sake, and a little for the sake of the family of my oldest friend, that you should not jump to conclusions. It isn't your business, and will only land you in a mess. Now just at present I'm standing all I can, my boy, and I'm doing it for the sake of old times. But don't you go trying to be clever, Jones. This isn't Maiwand or the Black Mountain. You can't charge through such delicate stuff as this like a bull at a fence.' And he pulled out his gold snuff-box and tapped it judiciously. His little outburst seemed to calm them both.

'By Jove, Thorald,' cried the penitent Colonel, 'you are right and I am a perfect hog. But the truth is I have the habit of jumping to conclusions, as you call it. I never hesitated two seconds about a sentence in

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orderly-room in my life. It works all right in the army. They positively like it there - hit or miss - when a man knows his own mind and asks nobody's opinion. But I am not sure that I was right when I took your advice and came here to this police command. I'm not fit for it, and that's the fact. Besides, I'm too old a dog to learn new tricks!

And the old fellow wagged his grey head despondently. His friend patted him on the shoulder encouragingly.

'Let me do a part of that for you,' he said gently. 'I am not a fighter, but I am used to these little problems, and you are not. I like them. They amuse me like a game of chess. Oh, yes, I play - a little - but there is nobody within fifty miles for me to play with - !'

'Neither at chess nor anything else!' said Colonel Jones, honestly admiring; 'you will beat these city fellows hands down. But indeed all I am going to tell them is only what you have told me already. And here I am going to take the credit of it. It does not seem fair - but I suppose - ah, what's this?'

Richard Hissy appeared in the doorway with a silver salver and a card. He was again the self-respecting and perfectly styled butler of a good house.

The Colonel took the card and read aloud.

'Detective-Lieutenant Luiz Grant, Edinburgh.'

'Dash my dash,' he said, slapping his thigh with his cane, 'I did not know they gave His Majesty's commissions to their Bow Street runners. They will be commissioning the police dogs next. Richard, show the gentleman up!'

CHAPTER SIX

THE COLONEL EXPLODES

A slight, supple, dark young man stood before them, with a curious soft filmy expression in his black eyes – as unlike the stalwart Highland clansman whom his name suggested as could by any possibility be imagined.

The Colonel stood with his mouth a little open, speechless, but flushing with indignation to the folds of his short neck. Why, he thought, the fellow actually ventures to look like a gentleman. A Grant and a policeman – the combination instantly suggested to his mind the famous boast of Celtic motherhood:

‘Eh, Mistress McTavish, but it is a prood wumman ye will be this day, to see your son Tonalt, stannin’ at ta corner o’ ta Chamaica Brig, a bra’ Heelant polissman!’

But of a surety this young man had never worn tacketty boots and clumped the Gorbals under a shiny waterproof cape. The man was – well, he looked so close an imitation of a gentleman that, by Jove, you know, it might have taken in any one – any one, that is, except Colonel Hampden-Jones.

Insolence the Colonel felt it to be, and the ex-commandant of the 25th Gurkhas had it on his tongue-tip to order Detective-Lieutenant Grant ten days cells on the spot – first for pretending that he held His Majesty’s commission, and secondly, being a detective, for venturing to look like a gentleman, and that too in spite of his dusky skin.

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But the impressions of the Judge were altogether different. His experience of India enabled him infallibly to pick out a man at once strong and subtle. These were his own qualities, raised to the *nth* power by the possession of imagination, intellect and executive ability. Judge Thorald recognized his peer - or rather, perhaps, what he had been when a young magistrate of Lieutenant Grant's age.

But then he thought of the three women upstairs, and the interrogatory through which this man would be certain to make them pass, the suspicions, first of this one, then of that other; all the fighting instincts seemed to stir in the bosom of Judge Thorald. From the first moment of this young man's entry into the library of Dent House, it was with something of the ancient joy in battle that Judge Thorald prepared to meet and defeat this man, in the interests of the defenceless trio of women, and to protect the memory of his dead friend.

Yet, as he looked, he was haunted by an undefinable memory - the ghost of a suspicion present but quite intangible. Where and in what strange circumstances had he seen this man before? No, it could not be. The fellow was too young. Besides he was an officer in the Force which of all others it is difficult to enter, and yet more difficult to rise - impossible, the Judge decided, for a man with a tinge of alien blood.

Yet the doubt remained, uncomfortable and assertive in spite of himself, as a thorn prickle under the skin.

Something of a similar instinct had led the newcomer's eyes to pass lightly over the ruddy countenance of Colonel Hampden-Jones and fix themselves upon the clear-cut high-bred intellectual

features of Judge Thorald.

'Colonel Jones, the chief of the county police?' he said with a slight bow, but addressing himself to Judge Thorald, with as much certainty as that with which Stanley hailed Livingstone in mid-Africa.

Whereupon the Judge, with a slight smile of appreciation, indicated the real Chief of Police. Then, no doubt thinking it best at once to make his own standing clear he said, 'Lieutenant Grant, I am Wilfred Thorald, formerly judge at Patna and Calcutta, and at present one of the legal advisers to the India Office. I act on behalf of the family, not only because I was first called in, but because I am the oldest friend of the late Mr. Patrick Fenwick Dent.'

The detective bowed with a salutation which expressed surprise and pleasure.

'I trust,' he said, 'that nothing may require to be done to render any special representation of the family necessary. But in any case, Judge Thorald, I shall be honoured to have your opinion on the points which arrive. I am well acquainted with your articles in the *Asiatic Review*, and also, in the mere technical study of my profession, I have read with interest your Dacca judgments on the Upper Bengal gangs, and especially your analysis of the evidence in the poisoning cases at Serampore and Meerut. May I say that nothing more admirable has ever been done.'

The ivory pale face of the Judge flushed for the first time.

It seemed marvellous to him that this Scottish detective should be familiar with his ancient reputation, and even be able glibly to cite cases - which may have covered him with glory indeed, but

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which he had thought unknown to all save a few old Indian 'returned-empties' like himself, dabbled sparsely here and there along South Coast health resorts from Eastbourne to Torbay.

'I had not the least idea,' he said, 'that these little affairs would have been known over here. I am all the more obliged to you and, within the limits of my powers, you can count on my best assistance.'

'In a way I too may be considered to represent the family,' continued Lieutenant Grant, 'Colonel Hampden-Jones will you be good enough to cast your eye over my credentials?'

After exhibiting his official sanctions, and giving the Chief of Police a letter addressed to him, the young man turned to Judge Thorald and put into his hand a slightly larger envelope.

'As I understand,' he said, 'that there is no near male to whom I can confide this, I shall be glad if you will take charge of it, and - reassure the ladies in the manner which best commends itself to you. The letter is from Messrs. McMath, Lindsay, and McMath of Edinburgh, lawyers to the late Mr. Fenwick Dent.'

Judge Thorald read aloud the message so delivered.

'234 Hill Street, Edinburgh,

'September 2, 19-

To the Family of (the late) Patrick Fenwick Dent, Esqr., of Dent House, Kentigernshire.

'Messrs. McMath, Lindsay, and McMath will send down a representative as soon as possible - the younger members of the firm being at present in Norway and Mr. McMath, senior, seriously indisposed.

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‘In the meantime Messrs. McMath, Lindsay, and McMath beg to introduce the bearer, Detective-Lieutenant Luiz Perez Grant of this city, in whom all confidence may be placed and to whom all hospitality may be shown.’

Underneath, in a very tremulous hand was added:-

‘I agree that this is the best course. Mr. Grant is wholly trustworthy.’

‘J. McMATH, Sr.’

But the Colonel had taken one of those inexplicable turns of sulky pride whose origin was only to be guessed at by remembering his convivial habits and the liver he had brought back with him from the Punjaub.

‘Then, Sir,’ he burst out, ‘who the devil *do* you represent - the police or the family? Are you here to find out the truth about this - this (he swallowed several adjectives and one substantive), or to make everything smooth all round for everybody? - Answer me that, Mr. Detective-Lieutenant Grant!’

But the brusque rudeness of the man of war had not the power to ruffle the assured calm of the detective. He turned his eyes for an instant with a gleam of humour in them upon the Judge, telegraphed an appreciation, and then in the calmest manner possible answered the irate Chief of Police.

‘Colonel Jones,’ he said, ‘I have shown you the qualifications which concerned you to see, and I need not remind you that I am, till further orders, in charge of the investigations. But the officials of the Crown Office have agreed with the legal

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representatives of the late Mr. Dent that it is in the interest of justice that the matter be treated with the utmost delicacy, without unnecessary annoyance to the family, and indeed without their knowledge of my quality. It has been suggested by both parties, as you will find in your instructions, Colonel, that I should be introduced to the family as a representative of the Edinburgh lawyers charged with their interests - in fact, as a gentleman.'

'Dam cheek!' snorted Colonel Jones.

'I beg your pardon - I did not catch, -' said the swarthy young man, turning his keen black eyes upon the chief of police.

'I mean, sir, that it will be difficult - for you, I mean!'

'That, Colonel, is my business. It is for you to follow your instructions. On the other hand, I put myself wholly at Judge Thorald's discretion as to ways and means, or if he does not think it advisable or possible to carry out the wishes of Messrs. McMath, Lindsay, and McMath, I shall wire the office for new instructions. I quite recognize that those on the spot are better placed for making so serious a decision.'

'I am sure,' said Judge Thorald, 'that we are seeking, with all respect to and scrupulous respect for the ends of justice, how we may best avoid giving pain to the unfortunate ladies of this house. Lieutenant, I can arrange that you shall be presented to them as a guest - one who for the time being must remain to direct affairs. My friend here, Colonel Hampden-Jones will regularize your position with the Procurator-Fiscal of the county, to whom you will show in private your instructions. Further, I venture to suggest that you shall be present at the

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taking of the necessary evidence by that official, and that you shall put what questions you may wish through me, so that it shall appear that you are present only to represent and protect the family. You will be treated in a way that could not be possible under any other circumstances.'

'I'll be dashed,' again burst out the ex-commander of Gurkhas, 'if I understand this peeping and spying inside a dead man's house - upon innocent ladies. Hang it, they can't all be guilty, you know, and I don't believe any of them are. It may be Indian and all that, but if you want my opinion, Thorald, dash it, sir, it isn't British! Why doesn't the fellow *say* he is a policeman and be done with it? I'm one and say so. Why shouldn't he?'

'Because,' said Detective-Lieutenant Grant, 'I am a duly accredited representative of the legal advisers of the Dent family - as far, that is, as I am concerned with the family. As to Colonel Hampden-Jones, he has his orders. I have, I am aware, a somewhat difficult and delicate role. But it is because of that very fact that the Department sent me here. I hope that Colonel Hampden-Jones will not think it his duty to render my position untenable.'

'Certainly not,' said the Judge with the utmost suavity. 'Shall I ask the butler to have your things up and show you to your room?'

'If I could have a little room with any kind of a couch in this wing of the house, I should be glad.' The voice of the detective was clear and definite, and at the sound of it the eyes of the two real opponents crossed with the snap and lightning sharpness of rapiers.

'What is he after?' thought the one.

'What does he think I'm after?' was the question

in the mind of the other, with his fingers gripping the gold snuff-box.

But the Judge, well seasoned to such duels, answered agreeably, 'I daresay, having respect to the privacy of the ladies, such an arrangement would be the best. I am obliged to you for thinking of it, Lieutenant Grant.'

And without a word more he rang the bell.

'Richard,' he said, 'can you clear out the little room on the right of the staircase opposite to the passage to your department, and put a camp-bed in there for this gentleman? He is from Messrs. McMath, Mr. Dent's lawyers.'

'What?' said Richard, 'your honour can never mean Miss Aymer's nursery! Why, that is where she reads and watches the sunset over the park. But if it is necessary, (he paused) I daresay I could see her about it.'

'Do,' said the Judge briskly; 'probably she will not now care to use it - not at least for the present, at any rate.'

'Very well, sir,' said Richard, and was going out when the young man from McMath's stopped him.

'Could I see the room?' he said.

'Certainly, sir! Step this way, sir!'

'Don't forget, in making arrangements for your comfort,' the Colonel broke in, 'that the Fiscal will be here in half an hour. We must go through the routine prescribed by the law, notwithstanding all amicable agreements between the Crown Office and Messrs. McMath, Thingummy, and McMath.'

'Thank you, Colonel, I shall be ready, never fear!' said the young man, and with a slight military salutation he went out.

The two seniors stood looking at each other for a

long minute in silence.

'Well?' demanded the Colonel, his brow as dark as thunder, 'what do you make of that? Why, he's a black man - a nigger. I could see the milk-opal on the finger nails of him. You can smell the tar-brush a mile off. Do you think that I have been all these years in India for nothing? And he has the - the dashed impertinence - to - ugh, Thorald for three ha'pence, I'd kick him down the stairs!'

I presume, Jones, what he gave you are genuine enough - yes? Well then, don't talk foolishly about kicking, Colonel. For if you do - remember that his credentials are good for their face, and if you interfere with Crown Office business or Crown Office ways - it is you who will be kicked downstairs. I am telling you, old friend, for your good!'

'Curse my good, sir! It sickens me, Thorald,' said the Colonel, his face darkening almost to the colour of beetroot; 'it positively sickens me to think of that - weasel lurking about the house - in Miss Aymer's room where he 'has good view of the park' - dash and double dash him, Goa half-caste, sitting at table with the ladies or walking with them...!'

'Now, look here, Jones,' said the Judge, 'keep still and don't hop from one thing to another. You have no theory, and never had. Your facts you got from me. This detective business is not really your affair, though if there is a hitch *you* will be the man to suffer. You came here on my account. I got it you because you needed the post, and I - needed a friend. I presume both our needs are as great as ever. You are a man with a large family -'

'For God's sake don't rub it in, Thorald,' cried the Colonel. 'I'm the biggest fool in a dozen counties, but I'm awfully grateful and all that. Only I don't know

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anything about this blasted business, and I'm not fit for it. But I'll do what you say, and bottle myself up if I burst for it. But (bouncing about the room) I'll - be - d—d if I can stand niggers!

And with the bang imperial he bounced himself out of the door.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WIDOW'S MOODS

The Judge remained a moment deep in thought, his delicate mouth firming itself over his perfectly preserved teeth. It was a thin-lipped, clean-cut mouth at any rate, and the droop of the slight furrows towards the angles of the square chin showed infinite decision. Today this was heightened by a certain grim gladness.

Like most men who live a great deal alone, and trained themselves to depend on themselves for society, Judge Thorald often talked to himself. Now he shook his head slightly, muttered something inaudible, looked all about the room carefully as if to assure himself that all was as it ought to be, and then, going out into the sunlit passage, he walked to the open door which led down to the lawn and Adams' geranium beds. Here he stood murmuring to himself.

'Thought I could not be mistaken - I remember Grant, of course - yes, man in the Woods and Forests who married a pretty Portugee, four-annas-in-the-rupee—the odd twelve straight white as old as Albuquerque. Their son, doubtless. All there is of most country-bred to start with, doubtless, but he must have been sent home early for his education. He has the white grit with the subtlety of the other. Well, we shall see - we shall see!'

The Judge glanced across at the window that had been Aymer's nursery when, as a child, she had first come to Dent House, then up at the window of her room, high under the eaves.

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'Which is he going to suspect, I wonder?' he murmured, caressing his gold snuff-box with the miniature set in the lid. 'I shall make sure that it shall not be you!'



The Fiscal's examination achieved itself with the maximum of fuss and the minimum of results not already attained, which is the general outcome of those functions. Maids went into hysterics when asked the simplest question. Only Susan Sim, having wept out all her tears in the morning under lock and key in Richard's still-room, and of course old Richard himself, showed themselves reasonable and indeed excellent witnesses.

Connel, the first housemaid, stood before the officials with an air of the utmost indignation, and stated that if they thought there was anything wrong with her they could hang her – or search her box. She would go and fetch it at once. She was only prevented by old Richard, who drew her wrath upon himself by telling her 'not to be a fool.' The apparatus of the law did not daunt her Northern blood, and she told the butler on the spot that she did not care whether she got her discharge or not, a good servant was always a good servant and worthy of a good wage, and furthermore, that he (the said Richard Hissy) would be hearing from her lawyer one of these days for defamation of character.

In fact all in the house were a little enervated by the events of the morning, and the suave speech of Judge Thorald (always introduced by a courteous 'Have I your permission, sir?' and a bow to the Fiscal) was frequently necessary before the requisite answers could be obtained.

The evidence of Adams in particular had fairly to be shaken out of him. He had been one of the first called into the library. He had been left alone with the body on more than one occasion, and he had in his mind that 'whatever he said might be used against him' - a formula which he had once heard applied by the local policeman to a tramp-poacher charged with assault. He began with the categoric declaration, 'I am not guilty of this crime,' pronouncing the words slow and staccato, and he could not be cured of the idea that he had to hold up his right hand all the time.

'And to this I swear!' - he added to each a well-considered and particularly non-committal reply.

Mr Grant (from the firm of McMath, Lindsay, and McMath) sent up to the Fiscal by way of the Judge a number of questions to be put to the witnesses which made that worthy official look at him over his spectacles in complete bewilderment. The information required seemed to have such a very slight bearing on the case.

'Were the tumblers found by Richard and now sealed for expert analysis the ones ordinarily used in the library? Were they kept in that room, or had Richard taken them in on a tray before leaving his master for the night?'

'What was the exact position of Adams in the geranium bed, and had he observed which of the bedroom blinds were still down?'

'I'll show ye where I was standing,' said Adams, holding up his hand, 'but to the blinds I wull not commit myself on my oath as a 'sponsible man! No, I wull not swear!'

On the whole the result was negative, but the impression left on the Procurator Fiscal evidently

was that the theory of suicide might safely be set aside, and that the choice lay between accidental poisoning and deliberate and well-considered murder. The last witness was a voluble kitchen-maid who ran messages. She had seen 'the Master' the night before on the drive. He had turned to look after her, and as she came to the parting of two roads which led to the back of Dent House, he had called out 'come away from the stables. Let the lads do their work. Keep to the right there, d'ye hear? Keep to the right!' And at this she had been indignant - indeed was so still.

'The idee,' she said 'me that would not so much as look at such trash. Me that has sore pride - to be so checked! But, eh, sirs, I maunna speak like that and him ta'en awa' sae sudden to a better worl!'

Whereupon with ready fecklessness of the foolish she burst into tears.

The Fiscal decided to see the ladies one by one in the dining-room. He expressed in his message to hold themselves in readiness the utmost sorrow at being compelled to trouble them, but he would only require their presence for a few moments.

Mrs. Fenwick Dent had made careful toilette, but of an exquisite simplicity. After having made it, however, she could do no more than pass from one fit of hysterics to another. She drove her maid, a strikingly handsome Hampshire girl named Sylvia Granger, to her wits' end.

'Keep your poor feet still - don't cry out, now - don't, there's a dear lady!' she repeated over and over. But still the dainty little heels tapped, now the lounge but more frequently the carpet, which was certainly more effective.

The tables of justice had obligingly been arranged

in the dining-room. The Fiscal and his clerk at the head, next the Judge with Mr Luiz Grant (from McMath, Lindsay, and McMath's) seated behind him. A large chair opposite had been placed for the lady's use, but the lady would not come.

'She says,' explained Sylvia, who acted as mediator, 'that she will see you one at a time in the drawing-room if I hold her smelling-bottle!'

She addressed the Fiscal's clerk because he was the biggest man, and to such Sylvia was partial. Their prevalence in Scotland almost reconciled her to the climate. Her attention was recalled to the real official by the Fiscal's turning to the Judge and saying, 'Mr. Thorald, you know the family, what are we to do? You see it would be highly irregular—'

'It be the tantrums, sir!' interrupted Sylvia with surprising clearness of enunciation, 'Nothing but!'

The Judge rose with the sigh of a Curtius who devotes himself for his country's good.

'I will go and see what I can do,' he said, smiling rather unhopefully. And so, under the conduct of Granger, he betook himself to the drawing-room. Mrs. Fenwick Dent wore a becoming dressing-gown of fleecy wool, creamy in colour and soft in texture. To underline her mourning (and her personal attractions) she had added a magnificent shawl of black Spanish lace which framed her pale face and fell over her pretty shoulders. She was holding a handkerchief to her eyes as Judge Thorald entered.

'My dear lady —' he began, but at the first tones of his voice she threw up her hands and fell back upon the cushions with a scream. This yielded to a series of clucking sounds, while signs of agitation in the daintily shod little feet fore-shadowed a crisis. The Judge, tall and graceful, contemplated the

performance with supreme indifference, calmly tapping the lid of his gold snuff-box.

He did not approach or show any signs of being extraordinarily impressed, which hard-heartedness perhaps did more to calm the patient than anything else.

'Dear lady,' he said softly, 'I understand your feelings. I pray you to give the fullest vent to them. Tears may indeed redden the eyes, but they relieve the heart. What do appearances matter when the threads of life's happiness have been severed?'

It was evident that Sylvia Granger, at her mistress' side, considered that the Judge had taken leave of his senses. For with the tail of his eye he could see her, from the covert of the sofa-screen, forming her lips into the single warning word, intended for his benefit, '*Tantrums!*'

But the Judge was wise. The Judge was wily. He did not know all women, but he knew this sort. Sylvia's 'tantrums' was only her vigorous Hampshire for what had been known by old-fashioned people in India, as 'hot-weather-vapours.'

But the lady dried her eyes, or dabbed them rather, examining her handkerchief with care. No, the colour had held - and there were no tell-tale-eyelashes.

'Sylvia, how thoughtless of you - where is my powder? Upstairs, oh, you cruel girl. And in such an emergency!'

'Permit me!' said the Judge gallantly, and opening the snuff-box he produced from the back the daintiest powder puff, while the inside cover constituted a miniature mirror. Kneeling upon one knee with a grace which few young men could have equalled, he held the glass at the proper angle for

Mrs Fenwick Dent while she rapidly and smilingly repaired the ravages of grief upon her cheeks.

‘And now,’ he said confidently, like one who takes command, ‘permit me to escort you. It is quite a necessary formality, but will be simple and easy, I promise you.’

He stood with his hand stretched out for her to take. He raised her up from the couch. Instinctively her coquetry returned to her. With one hand she swept the train of her long cream-coloured robe into becoming folds, and it was almost with a simper of gratification that she took the proffered arm of her cavalier and allowed herself to be conducted to the room where the gentlemen of the law sat waiting impatiently for her.

The Fiscal rose and bowed in silence at her entry. He had seen and admired the pretty mistress of Dent at several county balls. Like most Kentigernshire men he was very susceptible to beauty in all forms, and though he understood that this young wife was not too happy with her husband, he had, manlike, thought no more of the reasons for such reports than to hum over the line of his favourite song:

‘What can a young lassie do wi’ an auld man?’

Mrs. Dent sank into a chair with languorous delicacy, while Judge Thorald was on the point of taking his place at the table immediately in front of the envoy of McMath, Lindsay, & McMath, when an imperious gesture of the lady called him back to her.

‘Stand beside me - or I cannot bear it,’ she murmured. ‘You were my dear dead husband's friend!’

The Judge's face was a study. Too perfectly master of himself to allow his discomfiture to

appear, he could not restrain a slight grimace.

'Good God,' he muttered in the ear of the Fiscal, 'next moment she will be holding my hand!'

At this evidence of his senior's annoyance the ghost of a smile flickered on the face of Lieutenant Grant, who had drawn his chair well back into the shadow, on the pretext of letting the Judge pass, but really, as Mr. Thorald well knew, that he might be able the better to study at his ease the faces of all concerned during the interrogatory which was to follow.

'I need not do more than express to you my infinite sorrow, Mrs. Fenwick Dent,' said the Fiscal quietly, but speaking with manifest feeling, 'but it will simplify matters if you will kindly tell me when you last saw your husband, and try to recall all that passed between you. Such details help us very greatly in our inquiry. I shall make your part in it as brief as possible.'

Mrs. Dent raised her handkerchief to her eyes, but carefully refrained from touching them. It was, she knew, still damp, and she could not hope, in the present circumstances, for a repetition of the Judge's chivalric attention.

'My husband - my poor dear kind husband!' she cooed out the syllables slowly. 'I saw him on the afternoon of... (sob) the Day. (Here she allowed her feelings artful and careful way.) 'He came up to tell me that he was going out with - his daughter - to the moor, I think, he said. He would take his gun and - '

There was a long pause, broken only by the scratching of the clerk's official pen. Then the Fiscal asked a little more sharply, 'Did your husband seem in his usual spirits when he came into your bedroom?'

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'It was my dressing-room - our bone-picking place,' she said, with a slight smile; 'we always had our little quarrels there.'

'And did you quarrel on this occasion?'

'Oh, no,' said the lady, 'we never really quarrelled - only picked bones one with the other. Really he always did what I said - *except about that minx—*'. Her expression altered as she uttered the last word.

'Whom do you mean?' The voice of the Fiscal was very low.

The hand of the Judge went up unseen by all except by the watcher in the dusk of the window curtain. It rested as if by accident on Mrs. Dent's shoulder, and the fingers drove inward with a strong warning pressure.

'Oh, nobody - ' said the lady of Dent, 'only one of the servants whom I had to dismiss.'

'You refer to a dismissed servant as 'that minx?'

'Yes!' said Mrs. Dent obediently, 'a dismissed servant about whom we differed.'

But the young man from McMath's saw clearly enough that Mrs. Dent had been on the point of mentioning another person whose name the Judge desired to keep out of the inquiry.

'Ah,' said the Fiscal, 'did your husband say anything else before going out?'

'He said he was sorry that I had not been able to come down to lunch, but that he hoped I would get down by teatime as he had met Willie Bowles and Mr. Mark Hill, and they were going to look in for tea on their way from bathing in the Lake.'

'May I ask who these gentlemen are?'

'Oh, friends of ours - a young fellow home from a trip round the world and his tutor—'

'Mr. William Leslie Bowles and Mr. Mark Hill -

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gentlemen staying at the Dent Arms in Quarrier,' whispered the Judge, 'I know them.'

'Quite so,' said the Fiscal, not pressing the question, knowing that he could easily get all the information he wanted afterwards.

'And did Mr. Dent go off to the moor - with his daughter - ?'

'No, with his niece - I said that she would be better for a breath of hill air.'

'By his niece you mean Miss Aymer Valentine, I presume?'

'Aymer Valentine, yes' said Mrs. Fenwick-Dent concisely, as on her shoulder she felt the pressure of the delicately firm fingers of the friend of the family.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DENUNCIATION

It was Miss Rachel's turn. The sole daughter of the earlier mating entered posedly as if going to church. In her right hand was a handkerchief, in her left a smelling bottle of Blue John crystal which her mother had brought from Matlock on her honeymoon. She too was dressed in her best, but there was about her something of the frosted and too early autumnal. One could see that she had not flowered, yet that her springtime had passed without the savour of pleasant things having ever reached her lips.

Rachel Dent held down her head and kept her eyes on the floor, so that not a soul in that dining-room had the least idea of the anger and hatred, the dour wintry purposefulness hidden beneath that grey exterior. She had rather the mien of a first communicant approaching the altar of confirmation, demure, downcast, almost tremulous. Rachel had seen her father twice during the afternoon preceding the night of his death. In the morning he had come to the room in which she was working in search of a book he had left there the day before.

'He came over to me and put his hand on my shoulder,' she went on in her even voice. 'He called me his 'little girl' and bade me not to tire my eyes with monotonous work. I said that working was easy, and better than easy - it kept me from thinking. He laughed and said, 'Tell me Rachel, what is the terrible crime you dare not think of. Have you been playing with some good man's peace of mind?'

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That was a way of talking he had with me. It would - ah, I mean we could have been so happy together we too - had it not been for that Other!’

The Fiscal seemed about to interrupt here, but the quick glance of the Judge deterred him. The slender fingers of the old Anglo-Indian tapped a trifle more rapidly on the lid of the golden snuff-box which he carried as his talisman.

So the Fiscal contented himself with saying encouragingly,

‘Go on, Miss Dent, if you please.’

‘Yes,’ she continued, her eyes frowned in reminiscence, ‘he loved me, my father - that is, until I was supplanted. Till I was sent to a garret upstairs like a piece of old furniture - ah’ - here Miss Rachel cried out in a sudden fury, ‘I could kill—!’

But she mastered the outburst immediately. Evidently, thought the professionals, she had either schooled herself or had been schooled before she came to that place.

‘No, I must not - I promised not to —!’ she said, gripping her fingers into her palms, ‘But I was speaking of my father. Yes, he came and sat with me and talked with me for a good hour of his morning. It was like the old times. And he said, ‘Little One, you shall come with me to the moor this afternoon, as you used to. You shall carry my bag, and if I shoot at anything you can turn away your head!’

‘No,’ I said, perhaps speaking as I ought not, ‘you forget, father, I am not afraid of shooting. It is ‘the Other.’’

‘Ah, so it is,’ said he, as if taken in a fault, ‘I *did* forget. I have so often to go alone now. But all the same you will come today. I shall be ready for you at half-past two. Remember!’ And he went away with

the book he had come to seek in his hand.'

'Your father seemed quite in his usual spirits and health?' said the Fiscal.

'Yes,' said Miss Rachel, 'quite like his old self - because *she* was not there!'

'Well, then,' said the official, 'about the afternoon? Did you get ready to accompany your father?'

'I was ready - half an hour before the time. It made me glad.'

'And did your father come for you?'

'He came, but it was only to tell me that I was to stay in the house that afternoon because of some callers who were coming to tea, and that he must take someone else with him!'

The voice of Rachel Dent grew hoarse and angry as she uttered these last words. Then she spoke quicker, her voice trembling and stumbling as she talked.

I stood by the table. I was buttoning on my driving gloves. I was all ready. But when he said that I turned away and began taking off my things without answering anything.

'You do not mind, Rachel?' he said gently, and I knew he meant to be kind - to make an apology. 'You know there are many things that I cannot help!'

'But I did not answer, and he went away hanging down his head. I think he was sad.'

There was a slight pause here, and then came the voice of the official, asking, in his evenest, most matter-of-fact tone, 'And who was the Other whom Mr. Fenwick Dent took with him?'

The silent watcher in the dusk of the window curtain could observe the nervous fingers of the Judge knit close about the gold snuff-box in his

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hand. He seemed to be fixing Rachel with his eyes as if by sheer will-power to compel her to answer. She grew vaguely uneasy, turned a little from him and towards the Fiscal at the head of the table, before answering in a clear voice:

'My cousin, Aymer!'

As the name was pronounced a simultaneous sigh seemed to break from all in the room. Even the grave representative of McMath was moved. He put up his hand to his brow and from under it watched a couple of faces. But the owner of one of these, quickly conscious of the surveillance, only smiled serenely and tapped the snuff-box with his usual air of detachment.

Suddenly it seemed to dawn upon Miss Rachel Dent that she had said something which had made a profound impression on her audience, and to which they were attaching an importance that it was far from her wish to convey. She glanced from one to the other, searching, comparing. All were silent, but with a woman's instinct she noted the cloud upon the brow of Judge Thorald. What could it be? What had she said wrong?

Then came the next question.

'You had, then, as it appeared to you, reason to think harshly of your cousin Miss Aymer Valentine, owing to the change in your father's attitude towards you? You noticed this previous to his not taking you with him that afternoon according to appointment?'

Rachel Dent was not bright. Ideas penetrated slowly and with difficulty that sullen but not ungrateful intelligence. She understood at last, however, and instantly came to the rescue, partly because of her liking for her cousin, but chiefly for

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another reason which armed her soul with fierce bitterness.

'No, not Aymer,' she cried, rising suddenly from her seat, 'how could you think that I meant Aymer? I have been jealous of her - yes, a little. But she never did me any wrong - she never meant me any harm. She could not help being what she is, and having people love her, and be glad when she is with them. No, it was the Other who turned my father from me. *She* bade him keep me at home. She ordered him to take out Aymer. I heard it. I knew that was what he meant. There is little that I do not hear one way or another. She wanted Aymer to be out of the way when the gentlemen came to call in the afternoon.

'She hates Aymer as much as I hate her - the evil woman, the supplanter, the *murderess!*'

The chill, contained fury with which the last word was dashed in the face of all about the table, daunted even the Fiscal, albeit well seasoned to all manner of family hatreds and misunderstandings.

He was silent a while. Miss Rachel stood like a statue, gripping her hands together, her poor flat chest heaving jerkily, but her eyes dry and dark with excitement.

'I must presume you do not mean what you say,' said the Fiscal quietly; 'you are no doubt a little over-excited with your troubles - especially this great sudden affliction. You do not actually mean to accuse any one of the death of your father?'

'But I do - I do,' cried Miss Rachel, 'that woman whom he brought here as his wife - whom he set over me - over us all - to make us miserable - I accuse her! She never cared for him - only for his money, his position. She wants to marry - somebody else. It is for that she has killed him. I always knew

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how it would end. I told him so. I told her so. I was not afraid. She would kill me too if she could - because I am the heiress. Only she hates Aymer more, because she is young and pretty - and because - no, I will not say that - I did not mean that. I forgot - I promised not to. I have broken my promise! Aymer! Aymer! Come to me! I want you, Aymer!’

And with the appearance of a fair young girl at the door, who ran to her cousin and conveyed her out of the room, in some haste but with remarkable celerity and firmness, the precognosced evidence of the heiress, Miss Rachel Dent, naturally took end.



The Fiscal looked grave and preoccupied while the pen of his clerk scratched over the paper. The Judge reclined gracefully in his chair, and could not keep an expression of relieved contentment from his worn but still youthful features. He had thrust the gold snuff-box back into the pocket of his flowered silk waistcoat. For he was conscious that in him a still, cool, subtle brain was registering and commenting all these things. And he was satisfied that things had not gone amiss.

‘Strange,’ he was thinking to himself, ‘here in a family all goes smoothly until something happens - the bolt from the blue - whereupon the real feelings of each member to every other turn out to be wholly different from what anyone - even I, would have predicted.’

Presently the scratching of the clerk's pen ceased. The Fiscal looked at Judge Thorald, and he knew that the time was come for Aymer Valentine to face

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the array of critical eyes. Though he had watched her from a little girl, it had been with the silent hopelessness of those who feel themselves no longer young. He could not spare her this. Yet at that moment there was absolutely nothing he would not have done to save her the ordeal.

But he rose in obedience to the official's unspoken appeal. He could not refuse to find her and bring her down. He longed to say, 'Be brave, little one.' But in a rush of feeling he knew himself unworthy, and such words on his part impossible.

When he found her coming out of Rachel Dent's door he could only say.

'They are waiting for you, Miss Aymer - shall I take you down?'

And then, in his heart of hearts the Judge felt the rasp of Scott's good-bye to Lockhart: 'Be a good man, Lockhart - nothing else will serve you when you come to this!' He had come to a very terrible '*this*' - and he had not the right to speak to this young girl. No matter, he would defend her - whatever it might cost himself, or others.

That right, at least - he had - or would take.

CHAPTER NINE

THE LANTERN WAVED

A breath of fresh air entered the room with Aymer Valentine. Unconsciously the men settled themselves to watch her. She was pale. There were real tears in her eyes, and when she spoke there was a genuine choke in her voice. She was dressed in her simple morning gown, broadly and closely belted at the waist, and when moved her trembling hands sought to hide themselves into the pockets of her working apron.

But though nervous and anxious she was neither afraid nor yet dully drowned in sorrow. She would have thought such distress useless and selfish. There was much to be done - a hundred things to be seen to, and only herself to do it all.

'So far as I know,' she answered the Fiscal's opening question, 'I am the last person who saw my uncle Patrick in life.'

'You see,' she continued, without prompting, 'he had a habit of sitting up late at night with a book - oh, very late. If the book happened to be an interesting one, he would sit on turning page after page till the light began to come. No, I do not think he needed a great deal of sleep. He was, certainly, always afoot early - next after myself - summer and winter.

'No, sir, I have never known him sit up all night - nor receive any one in the library after the house was shut. But I have seen him walking up and down the gravel walk in the moonlight on fine nights. I

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saw him from my window - the window of my bedroom. No, I have not used the little playroom at night for many years, not since I was a little girl.

‘Often I have opened the window and called out to him to come in at once. Sometimes he would do it, but generally he would only laugh and bid me say my prayers and hop into bed like a good little girl.’

‘Did you ever watch him while in the rounds or see his meet any one there?’

‘Never. But I knew he always went out to walk off any trouble that was on his mind.’

‘Have you any idea what these troubles were?’

Aymer hesitated before answering.

‘Nothing very particular,’ she said at last. ‘Uncle Patrick was not a man to say much about his affairs, but I knew he had troubles, and...’

A glance and smile from the Judge invited her to go on.

‘Well?’ confirmed the Fiscal, more officially.

‘I did what I could to make him happier. He was my chief friend. And except my cousin Rachel a little, and nice old Richard, the only one I had in the house. He had brought me here, and it was for his sake I stayed.’

‘Had you any expectations of his leaving you anything in his will?’

The question had come from the representative of the Edinburgh lawyers.

Aymer looked most unhappy and surprised.

‘Certainly not,’ she said decisively; ‘it was so understood. He called me his little housekeeper, and said that he would make me worth my wages in any house.’

‘And you expected nothing - you expect nothing now?’

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The tears sprang to Aymer's eyes, and she dashed them angrily away. 'How can you ask me anything so horrid? Of course not. All I care about is that I have lost my friend.'

The Judge's face turned a little in the direction of Lieutenant Grant, as if to intimate that in his opinion he was pushing the matter a little too far. But, wholly unperturbed, the young man passed up yet another question.

'And what,' said the Fiscal, 'do you now propose to do?'

'I mean to work - if I cannot be a housekeeper - if I am too young, Richard Hissy will soon find me a place. He says I am equal to anything.'

'What do you call 'anything'?''

'Laundry - cook's place - tablemaid - housemaid - anything - I do not care.' The words were rapped out sharply, even a trifle indignantly.

'But you are well educated - you would surely never become a domestic servant?'

'Well,' retorted Aymer, with the ghost of her old bright smile. 'I know what I *can* do to deserve good wages. At other things, I am not so sure. If anyone engaged me to teach their children spelling and arithmetic, I should simply be robbing them.'

'To return to the last occasion on which you saw your uncle - will you continue your account of what occurred?'

At this moment yet another question was passed up to the Fiscal. He read it with a frown. He began to think he was being dictated to.

'One moment,' he said, 'as it seems necessary to end the former matter before continuing your evidence I must ask you if it would take you greatly by surprise if you found that your late uncle had left

you a large part of his fortune?’

Instantly Aymer's face spoke for her, before a word came from her lips.

‘I should not believe it. It is ridiculous even to suppose such a thing. It was so understood. He always said that I should be happier working for my living – till - unless...’

‘Unless what?’ said the Fiscal. ‘Ah, yes, I see, I am stupid.’

He caught the girl's blush.

And indeed all present, understood, even the young man in the dusk of the curtains, whose untimely question had provoked Aymer's demonstration of feeling.



‘I was in the little room at the corner which looks out on the park, before I went in to say goodnight to my uncle. I had forgotten a book. I often sit there in the daytime.’

‘Did you notice anything particular while in the room?’

‘Well, I found my book in the dark easily enough. It was on the window-seat. The blind was not down, and I saw through a gap in the woods something like a lantern being waved - through the open space it was, or perhaps from the top of the park wall.’

‘No, I was not frightened. I did not know at all who might be doing it. No, certainly not. It was not to reply to any signal that I went down. I knew nothing about it. Only some people are so foolish. I went into the little dark nursery almost every night to see that the fastenings were right. I do not know if the door of the Garden Port had been looked to. That

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was always uncle's work. For, as I told you, he went out that way sometimes. I could not have seen the light through the gap from my own window. That looks another way. From that, except the gravel underneath, I can only see the treetops and a hill or two in the distance.'

'And now about your uncle. Please tell us carefully - what he was doing when you went in, and all that he said to you.'

'It was about half-past ten. He was, as usual, smoking, but he laid down his pipe because the smoke made me cough, and then he talked to me. I always sat on the arm of his chair, and we 'riddled the day' together. That is what we called it - just talking over everything he and I could think of - putting it through a sieve, we meant. He was very happy, more so than usual, and laughed and chatted a long while. I bade him be sure not to go out that night, because there was a heavy dew on the grass. But he would not promise. However I did not believe that he had any intention of going out really. He was in his slippers, and had some whiskey and water in a long tumbler by his side. No, I did not see any other tumbler. The chair opposite was in its usual place. There were no papers tumbled upon it nor any second table.

'We talked about the servants and their sweethearts - he liked to hear about such things. They were good jokes to him, but he never let anyone else know, nor yet made the least difference to the maids. It was so agreed between us before I would tell him. He was very fond of our little talks together and called them his nightcaps. But I said that his real, real ones were kept in black bottles and had labels on them.

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‘Certainly - as far as I can remember - among other we talked of our tramp in the afternoon and the poor year for game, the people I had met when I walked in to do some shopping at Quarrier - that is all I can recall. Then I kissed him goodnight and went upstairs. I heard no noise. I was tired, for I had been up early, and had been a lot out of doors in the open air.’

‘When I came downstairs in the morning I went as usual to the library to see if it was aired, and Richard would not let me in at first - so I dodged him, after teasing him about keeping somebody shut in the still-room, and I found - I found - Uncle Patrick - as you know!’

‘I think,’ said the Fiscal mercifully, ‘that will do very well, Miss Aymer. We are much obliged.’

But as she went out the brow of the Judge was again darkened, though indeed, in the Fiscal's words as he rubbed his hands, all seemed to have ‘passed off excellently.’

But then the Judge knew that a busy brain was at work behind him, and also, his own point of view rendered his conclusions seldom in harmony with the official ones.

The Detective-Lieutenant tapped him on the arm. Instinctively he drew away.

‘Suppose,’ said Lieutenant Grant, ‘that we drop in casually on these two young gentlemen at the Dent Arms, Mr. William Bowles and Mr. Marcus Hill. I should like a chat with them. You know them, you say?’

‘No. I thank you,’ replied the Judge; ‘to tell the truth I’m dead tired with all this - more easily fagged than I used to be, I suppose. I don't want to see any young Jackanapes. But you can go and say I sent

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you. Here is my card (he scribbled a word). I shall be glad to hear what you have to report when you get back. You will find me in a dressing gown on a sofa over at my house. Tell my man Bailey to show you straight in.'

And Judge Thorald marched off, holding himself very erect indeed.

The young man with the deep set eyes looked after him with a curious smile on his face. Then he whistled softly, snapped the nail of his forefinger against his white teeth in a foreign fashion, and chuckled to himself.

'Holy Saint Christopher,' he muttered under his breath, 'I will bet a sovereign the old bird's jealous!'

CHAPTER TEN

IN CONSULTATION

The gold snuff-box containing (among other things) a supply of the inimitable Tunisian cigarettes, lay on the table of the Den with the miniature (also as usual) towards Judge Thorald. Lieutenant Grant of the detective force was gazing up at the ceiling and gently but efficaciously oozing smoke, as it seemed, from every pore.

Both of the smokers took their pleasure in the same way. They never blew away in reckless puffs so rare a vintage of leaves. They allowed the smoke to permeate their systems and escape as best it could. Jealously they guarded the '*pecha*' — the last long slowly drawn inhalation, and in the eyes of both was a kind of sacred rapture - the reverence of the fit accomplishment of solemn ritual.

It was enjoyment enough not to be lightly interrupted. Indeed these were not the men to do anything lightly. In fact each was waiting for the other to begin. Each dreaded a little, but hoped more - from the coming encounter. Neither was anxious to say the first word.

At last, baffled by his opponent's fine gift of silence, Lieutenant Grant made the plunge. He put a question.

'Ah,' the Judge answered, with a carelessness which he carefully guarded from being too elaborate, 'and what did you think of them?'

'Good looking young fellows enough,' said Grant, as easily; 'the pupil not troubled with a great deal of

brains, but a pleasant boy-'

'And the tutor-?' inquired the Judge, looking carefully at the cigarette from which he had just twitched the ash with a graceful motion.

Lieutenant Grant looked at him for a moment as if to divine the motive of his interest.

'The tutor, well - well Mr. Hill was - how shall I put it? Rather inclined to be aggressive.'

'Aggressive?'

'Yes, he got the idea somehow that they were being pumped!'

The Judge laughed his little silent laugh.

'And of course they were not!' he said.

'As a matter of fact, no,' said the detective. 'It was no fault of mine, however. The elder was much too cautious. That was all.'

The Judge went on calmly.

'Did they tell you they were leaving the district and that their traps were at the station?'

'Yes, but they had changed their minds - or Mr. Hill had; they had sent for them back before I got there - at the first news of what had occurred. Hill blurted out that they meant to see the outcome of the matter.'

'Innocence or bluff?'

The Lieutenant shook his head gravely.

'Impossible to say. I should judge bull-headedness more than either. But if they have anything to do with the 'occurrence' - we shall not as yet call it the 'crime' - why then, sir, I have the greatest admiration for that young man. He actually told me of his own accord that he had been in the Dent woods the same night at the hour when the — *occurrence* — probably took place.'

This time it was evident that the Lieutenant had

scored.

He had surprised the Judge - and the Judge showed it clearly.

'First blood!' said the policeman to himself, but not a muscle of his face twitched, and he reached for another cigarette with a mute smile of appreciation and a telegraphic 'By your leave' to the owner of the gold snuff-box, who, well-pleased, bowed assent.

'Did Mr Hill - I presume you refer solely to him - say for what purpose he was in the woods at that hour of the night?'

'Well,' said Lieutenant Grant, 'I do not think that either of us has yet sufficient data to decide what hour that was -'

'The doctors, Penman and the other fellow, say between midnight and three,' suggested the Judge; 'but what did the young fellow Hill give as his reason, his errand - a rendezvous?'

'*Touché!*' thought Grant. But aloud he said smilingly, 'Oh no, I should not go as far as to say that - nor certainly did he.'

'But he avowed his presence near the house quite bluntly?'

'Boldly even, and before I had asked him a single question.'

'That,' said the Judge musingly, 'may either be the rashness of innocence...'

'Or the audacity of a very strong man - quite so!' added the detective. 'He did not give me the impression of a criminal,' he continued more lightly, 'of a man who has something to hide. By the way, you know these young fellows. Will you tell me about them, if it does not fatigue you? Is there anything in the shape of a motive that you can imagine for his being in private relations with Mr. Dent or any of his

household?’

The Judge stretched himself out more comfortably in his chair, and held his feet to the grateful September fire – for already the corn was in the stook and the nights were turning frosty.

‘Now there is the first word of absolute commonplace I have heard you utter,’ said the Judge. ‘You of India, knowing the people as I do, and with years of experience of the underside of things there, to expect and even require a motive on every occasion! Europe or Asia does not matter in this case. Why, sir, you know as well as I that the greater number of the undiscovered crimes remain so because they have been committed without a motive. The really great criminal - even the man who allows himself an occasional breach of the law on a grand scale, takes to it like dram drinking - for the stimulus it gives to his system, or merely to add to the interest of life. The man with a motive for every crime drags the rope behind him which will one day hang him. And serve him right, too!’

‘Agreed,’ said Lieutenant Grant, whose professional philosophy was aroused, ‘but motiveless crimes generally argue a diseased mental condition.’

‘Another *cliché* - equally unworthy of you,’ smiled the Judge. ‘Who can tell (he tapped his brow) what is between here and the chairback on which I am leaning? We cannot be sure in our own cases, much less in that of another. *You* may be plotting to murder me. *I* may be resolved to kill you, and plant you under the ha-ha fence at the foot of my front lawn. But not a vestige of our intentions would show on our faces. We should sit and smoke and look at each other in the eye just as pleasantly and

confidently.'

'Quite so,' agreed the detective with a charming smile, 'but then, I by blood, you by long training and experience of dealing with the subtler race, have gained this power. I doubt if any Berserker youth of Mr. Marcus Hill's type could support such a situation for five minutes without betraying himself - that is, to you or me.'

'Possibly,' meditated the Judge, 'we are prone to underestimate the finesse of the undeveloped races - that is, those of the conquering, cannon-founding, Dreadnought-building Occident. For me I would not take anything for granted, not on my father's oath.'

'No,' said the detective, 'and I am not in the least likely to do so. We must certainly get to the bottom of this young man. The surface reflects, of course, (as it is easy to divine), some paltry love affair. Yet it may not be paltry after all. Let me see - there are two lodges to Dent House. There are pretty girls there - two at least at the nearer, and one at the other. I am putting the more unlikely, but not at all impossible, suppositions first. Mr. Marcus Hill is at the age when a pretty girl is a pretty girl - in cottage or castle - cook or countess.'

At this the Judge nodded and shrugged his shoulders, as it struck the Lieutenant, a little jealously. Mr. Thorald did not like age to be mentioned.

'And you?' he asked, with a sudden flash of the eye in the direction of the detective.

'I - oh, I do not count. You know the custom of our people with regard to women. It took me a long time when I came over to college only to begin to understand how the sexes stood to one another. In America, where business sometimes takes me, I do

not understand it yet.'

'I suppose not,' said the Judge, dreamily and indifferently. 'It must all seem strange - even to me when I came back from Patna - well...!'

But he did not finish the sentence.

'But continue your feminine inventory,' he said, with a trace of bitterness.

'There are a good many servants in Dent House, five or six girls - of whom at least four are passably well-looking, and within the scope of an eliminatory inquiry. I do not set any bounds to the strictness or laxity of Mr. Hill's morals, but I think we need not look further than the decidedly pretty ones - Susan Sim, Sylvia Granger, and the girl who turned so naturally in the direction of the stables.'

He glanced keenly at Judge Thorald to see how he would take what next he was going to say. But the Judge was prepared. Not twice would he be taken by surprise. He was gazing into the fire with the detached air of a man listening to an argument with which he wholly disagrees, but with the dangerous points of which he is intimately acquainted.

This piqued the detective, and he added somewhat brusquely — even a trifle brutally, 'And then there are the ladies!'

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE GOLD SNUFF-BOX

'As you say, there are the ladies,' the voice of the Judge came to the detective's ears clear and firm, but with the slightest hold-back of caution - or perhaps rather of reserve. But he would not assist the speaker by any remark or leading question.

'As to this Mr Hill - he is, I understand, a frequent caller upon Mrs. Fenwick Dent.'

'So I gathered from the evidence of Miss Aymer,' agreed the Judge suavely. 'On the latest occasion it was at Mr. Dent's own pressing request that the two young fellows came to tea.'

Both men were proceeding warily, and the lightest word, exchanged with nonchalant ease, had now the snick and risp of foils at the engage.

'You agree,' said Grant, 'that it is at least possible that the young man Hill was in the grounds that night for the purpose of holding communication with one or other of the Dent House ladies?'

The Judge threw himself sharply up, leaned forward, put down his long arms, elbow on knee, set his chin on his conjoined knuckles, and looked steadily at the detective.

'I am old enough to know that all things are possible,' he said, 'but, on the other hand, there are a good many things *improbable*. Take the matter in order. Of the three in question, Miss Rachel Dent is the oldest - by, say, five years in the case of her stepmother and fifteen in that of Miss Aymer. She is an heiress - or at least she has expectations. Possibly she might be sought for that. But of money Mr Bowles has no need and Marcus Hill, whatever

his fault, does not quite seem the sort of person...'

'No,' said the Detective, watching the Judge with extreme interest, 'I agree that we may, so far as *they*' are concerned, rule out Miss Rachel.'

'What do you mean by 'so far as *they* are concerned?'

'Well, there is the lady herself. Miss Rachel Dent may have her own ideas. Hill is a deuced strapping fellow and Bowles is a good-looking boy.'

'Ah, as to that, I am no judge,' said Mr. Thorald with a little gesture of putting the suggestion aside. 'It is hard enough to explain the actions of women without trying to read what may possibly be in their minds.'

'I agree,' said the detective, 'but I interrupted you.'

'Next,' the Judge went on, 'there is Mrs. Fenwick Dent herself. She is greatly younger than her husband, and most likely married him chiefly for position. She is a woman difficult to gauge. I do not pretend ever to have understood her. She can be charming, delicate, exquisite in manners, full of that unsatisfied longing for life of women who are compelled to live in the country after being accustomed to society. But she is selfish, nervous, everlastingly petting and cherishing the imaginary invalidism which to her is a career. Her life is certainly full of quite innocent intrigues, on which she has lavished a world of care and elaboration, without having either the will or the passion to carry them further. Eternally avid of admiration, jealous of all younger and prettier women merely because they are so, it is quite likely that Mrs. Dent may have flirted with either or both of the young men at the Dent Arms. But I do not believe, because of these traits, that she has the sincerity of character which

pushes a woman to crime.'

'Quite so,' said the detective, in a low voice, hardly daring to interrupt.

In the pause which followed the Judge calmly took out the gold snuff-box, and adjusting his eyeglass carefully, perused the face of the miniature. He sighed a little. Then he pushed it over to the detective.

'You would hardly call me a sentimental man,' he said in his most silken tones, 'but that has a value in my eye because of a certain likeness. Does it recall any one to you?'

The Lieutenant bent over the lid of the gold box deferentially.

'Since you have asked me, it has struck me for some time that the miniature resembled Miss Aymer Valentine to a remarkable extent.'

The Judge took back his box - indeed his hand had remained stretched palm-upwards upon the table as if he grudged it going out of his keeping even for a moment

'Yes,' he said, 'it is like her. But really it is the portrait of an old Aymer, dead so long ago that it seems but yesterday. For as one grows older, one's youth again approaches. Well, I might have been another man if - but no matter. It passed - and then in a very real sense, I died. Still, all this is nothing to you - can be nothing - save that it may serve to explain what I have to say, and what I have not to say, about Miss Aymer Valentine,

I have watched her grow for these fifteen or sixteen years - ever since the first time I met her with her nurse, a little chubby, ringletted thing, her hands full of flowers, her mouth of babble, and her eyes of light.'

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Hardly could the Detective-Lieutenant suppress an exclamation, nor could he believe his ears. Could this be the famous Judge Thorald - revealer of so many hidden things in the Country of Hidden Things *par excellence*. Grant felt that he had greatly mistaken this man. Certainly he would need to revise his own theories. He was more surprised still by the next words.

'I am,' continued the Judge, 'at any rate I think I am, a man without a heart. I have suffered enough, waited enough, done enough, to give me some cause to think so. My brain, my reasoning powers, have eaten up the rest. In part, at least, I have willed it to be so - that I might be a man with all his powers of judgment, criticism, and action absolutely free from bias. Men with intimate family relations - yes, the highest judges in this land, all men most powerful whether for good or evil, fail in this. Their judgement biased, their will thwarted, their reasoning powers unbalanced by their private relationships, their family interests, their place in society. And all this, mark you, without the least suspicion arising in their own minds. Earnest men, holding as best they know how the scales of justice, they yet unconsciously fling into one balance or the other their personal or inherited prejudices, affinities, preferences, and also perhaps secret hopes. I have tried to be apart - to care for no man, to regard no man, to feel with or for no man.'

'But,' he continued with a slight, self-contemptuous smile, 'I cannot say that I have succeeded - as far as man is concerned - yes, perhaps. But '*Cherchez la femme*' — you will say, and she who was but a memory, a miniature, a little girl running wild under my solitary windows, has

become a woman - and now - I see her passing away from me.'

'But, you will naturally say what relation has this to the business in hand.'

'Only this, that, as a man who desires to be absolutely fair, I desire to put you on guard against myself. I am, as you see, secretly biased in favour of Miss Aymer.

That I know her to be utterly incapable of thinking or doing evil to her greatest enemy naturally says little to you - as it would to me, were I in your place. The most out of reach of suspicion, the person most improbable, the highest in rumour of innocence - these are the persons to be suspected. That is the modern code of the good *policier*. Instead of collecting suspicions, we (that is, men like you and I) proceed rather on the lack of them. The very difficulty of forming a case incites us to the task. It is the action of the French methods. Was it not the great advocate Maitre Lachaud who said that if he were First President of the Court of Appeal and accused of stealing the Towers of Notre Dame, he would show a pair of clean heels to the ends of the earth?'

The detective, weighing all things behind narrowing eyelids, assented with a wave of his cigarette through the fine blue aromatic haze. He wished that the Master Thinker would finish with theory and get back to Miss Aymer. But he dared not hurry him. He might never again find him in the mood for confidence.

'I see - yes -,' he continued, grasping by instinct the detective's restlessness, 'the young have little sympathy with pure science. An old man's theories only make you smile. You are in too great haste -

even you, who come of the non-hurrying folk. You want a conclusion at any price. I do not say a conviction, but at least some tangible result which will aid your career. But - believe me, the best work in your business (which also was mine) is done for one's own private satisfaction.

'But I will keep you on tenterhooks no longer. To Miss Aymer, then. That she has been the light of this house for years you do not need to be told. Her uncle had his day's joy-spot when she came to chatter with him in the evening, probably discovering that then only could he count on having her to himself.

'Her cousin, a jealous woman, possibly a little mentally unhinged and, like all such capable of any jealous excess or uncontrolled action, does not resist her charm. She sulks - sometimes she quarrels, but she always ends, as she did in her evidence, by doing Miss Valentine justice. 'People cannot help loving her,' she declared. 'I could not, though she became more to my father than ever I had been.' Yet we heard what Rachel Dent was capable of in her direct accusation against her stepmother.'

'And what, sir, do you think about that?'

The Judge waved him away, like one anxious not to be interrupted in his train of thought.

'If you please, one thing at a time, sir. I am trying to concentrate all the light I can upon Miss Aymer for your benefit.'

The Detective-Lieutenant subsided hastily, feeling like a student reprov'd for interrupting his professor's lecture.

'On the other hand, there is every reason to suppose that when you go further with the lady of the house - as you will - you will find her

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communicative enough when there is less of an audience. No, sir, I state a fact - you will find it so. I have no prejudice against that lady. I have already had the honour of telling you my opinion - which is, that whatever may have been her feelings towards her husband she was wholly incapable of devising, much less of carrying out, his murder.'

'But she may - most likely will, accuse Miss Aymer. Not directly and with violence as Miss Rachel accused her, with biting hatred and overpowering bitterness, but with hinted half truths, suggested motives, the cold-drawn delicate malignity of a dainty woman. She will hate daintily. Daintily she will stab.'

'I shall be on my guard,' said the young man gravely.

'But, Judge Thorald, surely all this enmity could not be on account of a husband whom she did not love - her senior by many years?' The Judge considered a while.

'Well, no,' he answered, 'though that may account for a part. But in my view there are two stronger causes for her hatred of Miss Aymer. She interfered with my lady's amours. The men who came about the house preferred the girl to the woman. My lady had not enough of spirit to carry it off - to hold her own, I mean. See how she sent Aymer out with her husband, so that she might have the field to herself when the two young men were coming. For doubtless she counted on Rachel sulking in her room.'

The detective nodded assent.

'And the other reason?'

'The will.' The Judge's tone changed a little in spite of himself. 'My old friend Dent had a mania for

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making and altering wills. I have seen and been consulted about at least half a dozen. My lady doubtless knew of one. Naturally she would be anxious that it should be the last. But, from your questions at the examination, I doubt not but that you know more about this part of the case than I do.'

'A little,' said the young man rising. 'Good-night, Judge, and a thousand thanks. I must think very carefully over what you have said.'



The Judge returned from the door and stood tapping the snuff-box thoughtfully as he looked into the fire.

'Ouff!' he said to himself, 'that's over. I wonder what I have done. I would give a good deal to know whom he suspects now. At any rate I could wager to the half of my kingdom that he is miles off the track.'

CHAPTER TWELVE

WHAT LIEUTENANT GRANT FOUND IN THE TOBACCO JAR

Detective-Lieutenant Luiz Grant sat in the window-seat of the little room by the Garden Port of Dent House. He had been working up his notes and generally putting his thoughts in order. The promised member of the firm of McMath, Lindsay, and McMath had come and gone. He was quite a younger partner and very much upset that his holiday on a salmon river in Norway had been cut short. However, the funeral had been properly honoured before he arrived, and things had settled down to a surface quiet, which deceived no one within the House of Dent, though it might well enough impose upon outsiders.

What troubled the detective most was the question of the wills of which Judge Thorald had spoken. This will making and breaking had been a perfect mania with the late Mr. Fenwick Dent. In his later years he had certainly made at least one every three months. A few of the earlier had been properly drawn by lawyers, but these had been promptly upset by later deeds in holograph – which of course superseded them.

Indeed there was clear evidence that Mr. Dent had made drafts of many others which he had not signed. Altogether the business was a very complex one, and Mr Alexander McMath, Jr. – the gentleman in a hurry to get back to his valley off the Nord Fjord - supplied Lieutenant Grant with an able assistant

for this part of the inquiry.

Mr ex-Chief Clerk Richard Brown, commonly called Little Dickie Brown, had made a speciality of delicate family matters, and had resigned his place with the McMaths in order that he might devote himself exclusively to such affairs. He had quite a little clientele, a comfortable and confidential one, among good Edinburgh firms, but he was a grateful man, and, other things being equal, always considered that his old masters had first claim on his time and services.

He appeared to be by no means on the same social level as Lieutenant Grant, but he was referred to in the neighbourhood as that gentleman's 'secretary,' though his duties as such were somewhat of the lightest. Apparently he spent the greater part of his time smoking and watching Adams the gardener at his work. He could also upon occasion (and Dickie Brown was not above creating one if it did not occur spontaneously) preside at the Ram's Horn Inn in Quarrier Eastgate with a bevy of jolly fellows and there prove with song and story the superiority of a city education and the strength of a city head, over the mere casual drinkers and carousers of the provinces. But this was one of his privileges. It was so nominated in the bond. His employers knew of this feature in his character. Out of a failing Dickie Brown forged a weapon. It was indeed a valuable asset, and many a hint had he got from the unbuttoned confidences of servants and dependants in just such free and easy assemblies as that of the Ram's Horn.

But his main quarry, old Richard Hissy, held severely aloof. With him he had no more success than his superior Mr. Grant. With both Richard

showed himself frigidly but determinedly on his guard.

'He is a quaint old duck,' Mr. Brown had reported to the temporary chief. 'He does not know when you are open and above board, and he doesn't know when you have the trap neatly baited. He thinks everything is a trap, and will have nothing to do with you. If it's true what the play says about 'suspicion haunting the guilty mind,' we might have him taken on the spot.'

'The honour of the house, Dickie,' Mr. Grant had suggested, smiling.

But as the Detective-Lieutenant looked over his evidence and tied the threads he had been following into a bundle, he hummed a quaint monotonous tune to himself. 'After all,' he thought, 'some progress has been made. The immediate evidence was, if anything, too obvious, and satisfied neither Judge Thorald nor myself.'

Then he meditated a little on the eccentricities in the character of the old Judge, till leaving that as a side issue (and only, as it were, academically interesting) he passed to the absorbing question of the wills.

Setting aside those which had been drawn by Mr. Fenwick Dent's lawyers, and indeed all dated previous to the present year, there remained three - of which two, already produced, were known to the persons concerned. But the third he had discovered himself. He had only copies of the two first, but the original document of the third was in his pocket-book. He had not yet showed it to any one, not even to the Judge or to Dickie Brown. He wanted to consider the whole question carefully.

'The first,' he murmured to himself, as he always

did when thinking strenuously, 'the first we can call the Wife Will. It is the earliest in date, and it was produced by Mrs. Fenwick Dent in the presence of young Mr. McMath on the occasion of his first visit. He had brought down with him the properly drawn instrument from the archives of the firm - though (as he was acquainted with the eccentricities of his client), without any very great hope of being called upon to prove it.

'Accordingly as he anticipated Mrs. Fenwick Dent produced a will, which, she affirmed, had been given by her husband into her own hand.

'By this will, dated February 3 of the current year, Mr. Dent left his entire property to his wife, subject only to an annuity of £300 a year to his daughter Rachel, and one of £50 to his niece Aymer Valentine *until she should be married.*'

But as he looked at the copy of the second will, dated June 30 (five months afterwards), Lieutenant Grant recalled as one of the most dramatic moments of his life - the bitter triumphing of the daughter over the stepmother, when she drew from her jewel-case a second will in which these conditions were reversed - the third of the income of his estate only being left to Mrs. Dent (together with the Dower House of Fenwick Wester) for her lifetime, and the legacy to be paid to his dear niece Aymer Valentine had been raised to a hundred and fifty pounds. This Grant labelled the Daughter Will, since everything else went to Miss Rachel Dent.

He was little enough concerned with the feud save as it had revealed the characters of the parties concerned. But what he wanted to think out were the probabilities of motive which might lead women, so divided in interest, to crime - whether personally

or by the intervention of some person unknown.

Grant suspected nobody. He did not permit himself so to do. He merely argued the matter out as if it had been a chess-problem set in a newspaper.

Taking the Wife Will first (so in substance he reasoned), here the wife has every motive, knowing her husband's weakness, to procure his death before he has time to change his mind. But on the other hand she has allowed over seven months to elapse - with that possibility hanging over her. There is no motive at all that the daughter should desire her father's death, having in her possession the second will constituting her his universal legatee. Her whole attitude at first and all through the proceedings was that of triumphant defiance — 'I am the heiress - that Woman shall go!'

'But, again, taking that second will by itself, the daughter has now the same motive as the wife had under the first will - the changeability of her father's mind. She is of an acerbated, jealous, embittered nature, and undoubtedly in a hurry to inherit, in order to show her stepmother to the door. But she knew no one who would act as an instrument. She trusted no one. So that, if she had any hand in the crime, she did it herself.

'Poison would be a woman's natural weapon. But there again the *post-mortem* gave only a negative result. No poison was found of any sort. The supposed stain might have been an accident, an imagination, or an effect of light.

Still, this much was clear, that if the death of Mr. Dent were compassed in the interest of his wife, it was not done by her but by a third person, whereas if in order that Miss Rachel should profit, it had been done by her own hand.'

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But the whole expression of the detective's face changed as he opened his pocket-book and took out the third will - that which as yet, only his own eyes had seen, his own discovery, - possibly his triumph. Luiz Grant felt his dusky skin prickle and flush. This was the sort of thing he loved. For sensations such as this he had come across the hot Indigo Sea, shutting the past of his life behind him by denying home and race and kindred.

He spread the paper out lovingly. It was a half sheet of ordinary foolscap, lined with blue. He had found it, folded in four, at the dead man's elbow. It was at the bottom of his tobacco jar, a common enough affair in which preserved ginger had once been kept - a simple hiding-place but not one of the most obvious.

Grant took the document to the window to look at it in the full sunlight. By its provisions the Dent property - everything indeed that was in the gift of the testator, was left to Aymer Valentine, with instructions to discharge the legal claims of Mrs. Fenwick Dent, to give her immediate possession of Dower House at Fenwick Wester, and to pay the annuity of two thousand pounds a year to Rachel Dent so long as of her own accord she remained in the same house with Aymer Valentine, but only one thousand in case of any rupture.

'This is the Niece Will and the most wonderful of the three. *It was dated on the day of the murder!*'

Grant was looking at the document in the full glare of the sunlight, using a stamp-collector's magnifying 'loop,' when all at once he saw a strange thing taking place before his eyes. There was a blue flush on the paper, and by passing his 'loop' three or four times carefully over the part of the paper as if it

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had been a burning-glass, the print of a thumb came out on the lower front margin, and on repeating the process with the reverse, he found the three corresponding finger-marks - in a clear metallic colour such as is given by a 'blue print' photograph.

Grant made one grab for his camera. He kept it always ready set. He placed the document in the full sun and presently obtained a pair of photographs of the imprints before they had time to fade.

'They will be light and poor,' he said, 'for blue does not take well. However the plates are isochromatic, so there is some hope. Also I used the colour screen with a full exposure. I could do no more.'

He folded the paper reverently and put it away in his pocket-book.

Then with a smile of triumph on his face, such as had never yet lit it up, he said low to himself.

'And whoever murdered Mr. Fenwick Dent put that will at the bottom of the tobacco jar!'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

'THE BRUTE!'

The public offices and private dwelling of Colonel Hampden Jones were situated in Court House Square, and formed part of the Kentigernshire County Buildings, quite in the centre of the town of Quarrier. The chief of police had stipulated that he was to be accommodated elsewhere than in the New Gaol, in the courtyard of which had been the residence of his predecessor. But then that predecessor had been a bachelor and, on general grounds, Mrs. Hampden Jones thought of her daughters. Colonel Jones, for particular reasons, thought the same as his wife.

Yet he would have been glad, had he been unencumbered, of the additional salary which would have come to him for acting as governor of the prison. But the very thought of the clanking of chains and the creaking of locks and bars behind her each time that she sallied out with her card-case fixed the formidable soul of Mrs. Hampden Jones, once Edwitha de Rivers.

Accordingly she dictated her terms to the Colonel, who issued the ultimatum as his own to the county authorities. And the Judge, his friend, together with the most powerful man in the neighbourhood, the late Mr. Patrick Fenwick Dent, had seen to it that he got separate and satisfactory accommodation in the new County Buildings.

Here Mrs. Hampden Jones lorded it with all the dignity which a portly person, the consciousness of

having come over with the Conqueror, and the habit of using a double eye-glass on a long horn handle, infallibly tends to produce.

In a way her lordship extended also over Quarrier. She considered the burghers, and especially their wives and daughters, as immeasurably her social inferiors. Indeed she took it so much for granted, that they naturally got out of her way with singular and touching unanimity. In the town she was as much isolated as if behind the bolts and bars of the New Gaol.

She was hardly more fortunate with the county families of the neighbourhood, who, of 'good blood,' albeit living simply in hard times, and not thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think, did not see why the daughter of a bankrupt baronet had any patent right to such airs of superiority.

But on the whole the Hampden Jones family was, if not rhapsodized over, at least treated with the consideration which Kentigernshire extends to all newcomers with possible though untried qualifications. In fact, as clever Mrs. Ainslie of Benerick said, 'Enough rope was given them either to hang or attach themselves, just as they pleased.' The girls of the Court House proved to be exceedingly pleasant and accordingly attachable by Kentigernshire society. But, on the other hand, their mother had once or twice been within measurable distance of hanging herself.

It was her foible, as often as she could, to mix herself in the business of the bureau downstairs, and even to enter it unbidden when anything was going on there likely to interest her. She generally appeared on such occasions with her hair in the modern substitute for curl papers - a sort of leaden

rolling pin or pliable crimp. She came with portentous tread, and - metaphorically, with blood in her eye.

The descendant of many knights and baronets naturally resented being left in the dark. The thought that her Hector (oh, the irony of fate and godmothers!) should keep anything to himself, made her like a tigress robbed of her young, or more exactly, deprived of a nice, juicy, new-killed buck. She counted all police business as her perquisite. The supposed possession of the most piquant details on the latest scandal or crime made her welcome in quarters where, uninformed, she would only have found the severely styled domestic with his regulation 'Not at home.'

Lately she had raged like a whole menagerie for whom the feeding-time ghost has failed to walk. Hector had told her nothing about the all-absorbing Fenwick Dent case, and of course it was all pretence to say that he knew nothing. Don't tell her. She knew better. And so, uneasy lay the head that wore the nightcap of the Chief of Kentigernshire police.

'Edwitha - I assure you - have you ever known me tell an untruth?'

'Millions of times, Colonel Jones.' The question was certainly unfortunate. 'In all my life, as often as I have asked you about anything I want to know, I have never got a straight answer out of you.'

'But my duty, Edwitha? Consider my duty!'

'Bother your duty - it is your duty to consider your wife. A pretty fool I look going into houses and knowing nothing about anything except what I read in the papers - I, the wife of the Chief of Police. It looks as if you were absolutely doing nothing.'

'Well,' said the pestered victim, 'that is about

what I *am* doing.'

'But the gentleman at Dent House - I am sure he is something official. He does not accept invitations to afternoon teas. He won't talk. He shuts himself up - and then that smoking loud-voiced man who lives over at the Ram's Horn, besides all the detectives who come and go all the time, searching the house - why don't they tell all that they find out?'

The Colonel knew the reason, and itched to answer, 'Because of you, my dear!' But the most elementary prudence forbade.

'They are not under my authority,' he said submissively, 'I have nothing to do with them. They come and go, as it say, but without reporting to me.'

'And you Chief of Police in the county - a likely story! Hector, you do not suppose that I will really believe that?'

Hector was silent.

'In my opinion,' Edwitha went on, elevating her voice, 'I believe that those women at the House have done it among them! Oh, you think I cannot see through you, though you will tell me nothing but lies - think, Hector, thirty years of prevarications!' (Edwitha's forefinger rose above her head tragically.) 'Ah, you may well blush, Hector!'

Hector blushed all round his neck, specially at the back. The lady resumed, her voice shaking with a cold fury that made her very false teeth chatter chilly.

'There is no doubt whatever that they did it between them, as I said to Mrs. Ainslie at Benerick the other day-'

'You said to Mrs Ainslie - ?' The poor man clasped his hands about his head in an agony.

'What is the matter, Hector? You don't know yet

what I said.'

Hector listened in a cold sweat of anxiety.

'I said that I thought the Dent House women were capable of anything.'

'Oh,' groaned the Chief of Police, 'Mrs. Ainslie is only their aunt, you know. Go on.'

'And that I had always thought if that flirting, vaporous fool the wife, who looks down on everybody and tries to be too young for her years, and that sulky daughter Rachel Dent who runs upstairs when she hears our carriage on the gravel—'

'Our carriage - jobbed by the day and not paid for,' filled in the unfortunate Hector - naturally under his breath.

'Yes, and I said that the worst of all was that sly minx of a charity girl - Aymer Valentine, as she calls herself - there's a name out of a play for you!'

'It happens to be her own, though,' said Colonel Jones, suddenly finding his tongue.

'What's that you say? Don't contradict me, sir - though of course you would naturally take everybody's part rather than that of your wife. A sly minx, I tell you, and of course she has wiled you along with the others. She cuts the feet from your daughters, and they do not get a chance of forming an agreeable connexion whenever she is there.

But of course that is nothing to you, Colonel Jones. You'd like to see us all on the street if only you can shield your nameless kick-shank hussies!'

'Oh, hang it, woman, for God's sake hold your evil tongue!' cried the infuriated officer, at his wits' end.

Hearing which, Mrs. Hampden Jones promptly burst into tears. And that same afternoon it was known in Quarrier and all through the surrounding country that Colonel Jones had sworn at his wife.

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The Brute!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE DANCE OF THE QUADRILATERAL

But, as has been remarked before once or twice, pride goes before a fall. And the fall came when the triumphant Mrs. Hampden Jones (for she was more triumphant than ever, womanlike, in her tears) met face to face with Mr. Marcus Hill, a strenuous young man who can no longer be kept on the edge of things.

Mr. Hill was in a temper, and he met with Mrs. Jones when her own, usually a most reliable article, though no doubt at its best in domestic use, was at present a little fatigued.

It was eleven o'clock of a still forenoon, just when Mrs. Hampden Jones, having first pulverized and then drowned out her husband, scolded the maid till she gave notice, harcelled her daughters collectively and individually till they wished they were dead, was looking around for other worlds to conquer.

The chimes were still ringing from the brand new peal put, by the multiplied harassment of bazaars, into the Parish Church of Quarrier. The deeper 'Dong' of the Courthouse bell directly overhead droned the hour. He was called by the staff 'Happy Hector,' because nobody could interfere with *him*, swinging all day there by himself, and humming the refrain of his hour-old song all over again to himself. Happy Hector, indeed!

Meanwhile Edwitha, two stories below, looked out of the window. But no weak Alexandrian tears for lack of worlds yet unsubdued blinded her eyes. She had had enough of crying for one day. She saw on the other side of the Courthouse Square the

determined advance of a young man, whom she really recognized very well without her quizzing-glasses, (mounted in tortoiseshell). Indeed it was by no means easy to mistake that masterful, confident stride, the quick high glance from side to side, the word and ready jest thrown to this one or that - butcher's boy or provost, it mattered nothing.

By name Marcus Hill and only a tutor! Was it possible that one of so humble a condition should be allowed to go about Quarrier with the arrogance of the best squire in the county? Mrs. Jones asked this of herself, but she did not know that every one of her daughters (except Victoria, who affected only the military) was more or less in love with him - that Meg Jones, the youngest and prettiest had dropped a bit of white heather from the window which Marcus had picked up and put in his buttonhole. Worst of all, that favourite Ethelberta, her pride, who had been presented at court by her uncle De Rivers (and therefore ought to have known better) had repeatedly kissed her hand to the back of his head, and that once - oh happy chance and thrice fortunate sister - Marcus had turned and caught her in the act. Whereat, the place being solitary and a burn separating parties, the youth had kissed his hand back again with smiling discretion.

This was the family secret - the skeleton in the cupboard of the four maidens concerned - the Jones Quadrilateral, so to speak - for Victoria and her redcoats were things apart - the Quadrilateral having no dealings with that solitary Samaritan.

With extreme indignation Mrs. Hampden Jones saw this young man deviate, and march deliberately towards the door of her husband's offices. Hector's private room was immediately below, and if people

only spoke loud enough, by going into the drawing-room and putting her ear to a certain grill, Mrs. Hampden Jones could dispense with a telephone. She had the evidence for an immediate conviction if her husband were prevaricating when she asked him what so-and-so had been saying to him? For Mrs. Jones had discovered a use for the system of hot-air heating recently installed at considerable expense to the county, quite unforeseen by the inventor.

Now Mr. Marcus Hill did speak loudly, or at least clearly, with a ring in his voice which perhaps nature and perhaps a just indignation had placed there.

'Colonel Hampden Jones,' he began without preamble, 'my name is Marcus Hill. I am tutor to the Honourable Leslie Bowles, Lord Hubbard's nephew and heir. I am responsible to the Court of Chancery and appointed by them. Now what I want to know is what the devil (Marcus really ought not to have begun to be rude - at least not so soon) do you mean by sending your great hulking louts to spy after me? I don't mind telling all I know to real detectives - and that is not much - I have only told it fourteen times. But I am not going to be swarmed after like a hen-house thief. Why, I cannot even go out - hang it all - to - to take my morning dip without finding half-a-dozen pairs of your fellows' clod-hopping hoofs sporing all round my clothes, and still worse, pawing my pockets. My baggage has already been searched twice - that of my friend once. And as for my pockets - here you are!'

And the precipitous young man began to empty everything he had about him on the bewildered Colonel's table. Tumultuously he heaped up

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notebooks, sketches, letters, Meg Jones' veritable sprig of white heather carefully preserved (though with several others), a silver-hafted penknife, fountain pens (various), a watch slipped loosely into a ticket pocket, a cigarette case in gold with a monogram, a cycling map, a pipe and tobacco-pouch, several keys on a ring, a letter of credit with a photograph of identification in the corner, a passport for Russia and Siberia, another for the Turkish Dominions - coins (also various) and a purse - the latter very flat.

There are some dozens of photographs also - but I keep these in a trunk by themselves, and the detectives have already amused themselves for a whole evening with them!

'But—but—but--!' The Colonel made several attempts to get up steam. Alas, however, his wife had really taken it out of him. He could not even swear with any credit unless he bounced about the room a bit first to shake himself up, and somehow this appalling young man appeared to occupy the whole space. He resolved to be, for once conciliatory. Ah, what Edwitha had cost him! If he had not fired off his charge of thunder at her that morning (and felt cowed ever since) he could easily have, as it were, 'damned' his way through this. As it was he felt curiously feeble and willing to temporize.

'I really have nothing to do with the unfortunate affair,' he said, 'I obey orders, Mr - ah, - Hill. I do indeed. I am bidden to see that you don't leave the neighbourhood - and if you were to - well, hang it, you understand - *skip* - it is as much as my place is worth.'

This was rather a poor position for a soldier and a Chief of Police to take up. But then he had heard a

good deal of this fellow. Marcus was really rather overpowering, and Colonel Jones felt much in need of support.

He had it - and that at once.

For at this moment the door swung inwards majestically and Mrs. Jones entered. Or rather, like a stately three-decker of Nelson's time, she sailed in, all sails set and the admiral's pennon flying at the peak - or wherever else it ought to fly. Marcus drew back and bowed, but the severe lady, sweeping past, took not the slightest notice of him.

She moved across the floor like a Spanish Viceroy's plate ship, doubloon-laden far above the Plimsoll line, and came to anchor at the desk official. There she regarded the array of articles (roughly enumerated above) with undisguised disgust. Up rose the formidable double eyeglass, with the haughty glance of Madame de Maintenon reproving the last peccadillo of her prettiest maid-of-honour.

'What in the world is this rubbish, Hector?' The speech was not at all equal to the gesture.

'They are my property, madame,' said Mr. Marcus Hill, bowing again. 'I have come to submit them to the inspection of the Chief of Police of County Kentigern. I prefer such a course to having them mauled by his plain clothes policemen when I am bathing!'

'You are pleased to be insolent, young man,' said Mrs. Jones, turning to stare at him, 'and this is not the first of it, sir. I heard what you said to Colonel Jones.'

'Ah!' cried this bold young man with a rising inflection and an arch and expressive look at the keyhole.

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'Do you hear, Hector?' the lady broke forth, 'he insults me. Have him arrested at once!'

'My - my dear,' quavered the poor man, still conscious of his recent defeat, 'do calm yourself, I beg. I only heard the gentleman say 'Ah!''

'But he meant to insinuate that - that I listened at the keyhole. Don't pretend, Hector. You heard - and you allow me to be insulted. I am only your wife!'

'I had not the least intention of insulting you, madame,' said Marcus politely, 'nor did I do so. I have come here to arrange a matter of business with the Chief of Police, and if in the heat of the moment and the extremity of my annoyance, I expressed myself to him with improper warmth, I am sorry. But the matter is really very important to me.'

'Certainly - certainly,' said the Colonel, eager for a settlement on any terms. 'I shall represent the matter in the proper quarter. I will forward your explanations. So far as I can, I shall guarantee that there is no further annoyance.'

'You will do nothing of the kind, Hector,' pontificated his wife, camping herself on a high office chair, and then decamping when she became conscious that the shortness of her morning robe (only for housework, you know) did not sufficiently conceal the fact that her stockings had fallen in serpentine coils about a formidable pair of ankles. She changed to the solitary armchair, and from its depths glared defiance.

'It is too bad altogether that a person suspected of serious crime should be allowed to go about! You never think of your young daughters, Hector. I have to do all that. But such a person, possessing such disreputable articles - !' She glanced at the briar-root pipe which was burned at the inner edge owing

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to lighting it at the gas or with a coal held in the tongs ('Had me there!' allowed Marcus) - 'should be allowed to go about. Either he ought to be in prison, or to be made leave the country!'

'Just what I was saying to Colonel Hampden Jones,' Marcus broke in, 'but he will not let me go away, and he will not make up his mind to arrest me. No warrant, you see, Madame. But I beg your pardon. I fear I am detaining you. Colonel Jones and I have some further business to discuss, which cannot be done in the presence of a third person!'

'You hear, Colonel,' said the justly incensed lady, stamping her foot, 'he speaks of me as a third person!'

'Madame,' said Marcus, with his most engaging suavity, 'I cannot suppose that so dignified and charming a lady can fill the position of Chief of County Police. My business is with that official, and with him alone. At another time, I should be happy to be permitted to call upon Mrs. Hampden Jones, if she will deign to receive me, and I will give her every information in my power.'

'Sir!' cried the dame, tragically rising to her feet.

'Madame,' said Marcus, bowing in the manner of one who takes leave. 'If you must - *so sorry!*'

And with his best manner (and when he liked he had a very good one) he escorted the astonished lady to the door, bowed low, and shut it upon her.



'Well,' said Mrs. Jones, for once surprised into naturalness, 'I declare I could never have believed it - shown out of my own husband's business-room!'

But the saddest part of the whole affair has yet to

be told. What follows shows, more clearly than many treatises, the hardhearted ingratitude of children. For all through the interview the four Jones girls had been parked behind the door, scuffling and listening, from which place they had retreated hastily into the registry cupboard at the sound of approaching footsteps.

Here they danced and rejoiced with most unseemly joy.

'Oh, Meg, he put mother out! He showed her out. Hurray! Hurray!'

The cheers had perforce to be of the sort called in the family 'mouse hurrahs,' but the dancing was quite hearty and genuine - as was also Meg's remark to Bert Jones, 'Oh, I could just kiss him for it!'

'So could we all!' cried the Quadrilateral with great unanimity. And the reality being presently out of reach, they did the best they could and kissed each other.

But the bitterest drop in the cup of the unfortunate Mrs. Hampden Jones was intentionally mixed with her tea the same afternoon, when calling upon Mrs. Ainslie of Benerick.

'Oh, *don't* you know,' said that lady, who herself knew nothing about the matter, 'he is one of *the Hills!* Friends of - yes, the royal set, you know - ah, quite so! Very good people indeed!'

And it was only when Mrs. Jones was driving away, and the poor hack growing lamer than ever, that she had time to say to herself, 'I have done it now. Oh, those poor girls of mine! If I had only known - think of him being one of *the Hills!*'

But she need not have troubled about her girls. They were looking after their own interests with the sweetly capable self-sufficiency of youth - and

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speaking their minds to each other at the same time.

'We can't all have him, that's clear,' declared Bell sadly.

'Well,' said Ethelberta ('Bertie'). 'I have first pick. He kissed his hand to me!'

'But he was wearing my white heather when he did it - and you know what *that* means!'

They knew, but all agreed (except the giver) that as Marcus had not known who had thrown it, that did not count. So Ethelberta, besides being the eldest, won the day.

'You can toss up for the other one,' she said consolingly, 'he's richer, anyway!'

'Pooh, thank you for nothing!' Meg and Bess exclaimed in chorus, 'We don't want him - he's only a boy, not more than a year or two older than you, Bert!'

But it was the staidest of these little girls, called the Kitten, who sounded the real note of warning.

'Now, you Meg, don't be going making a forage cart of yourself all over the country, ruining your boots hunting for more white heather, and you, Bertie and Bell, keep your hands from kissing and telling. Or he will think we are only a lot of ill-brought up schoolgirls!'

And at that with one mind the other three shouted:

'Mind your own business, Kitten!'

But the Kitten was unmoved. It was just what she meant to do.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TUTORIAL RELATIONS

'William Leslie Bowles,' said a masterful voice in the upstairs sitting-room of the Dent Arms in Quarrier town, 'I shall have to lick you for using strong language - by authority of the Court of Chancery, and for the good of your immortal soul!'

Marcus Hill was bent on doing his duty by his pupil, who had just used the phrase (with reference to a remark of his tutor's) 'Oh, that be condemned for a yarn!'

The facts are these.

The two young men had been parading the wide world together for an indefinite period by order of that august tribunal which Marcus so often invoked as the source of his authority. Leslie Bowles was 'in Chancery' and he was supposed to be threatened with consumption. Marcus had been summoned in hot haste from his university to take charge of him. He had been met by Vice-Chancellor Verulam, who in extreme old age had taken to jesting.

'Young man, what do you want?' was his greeting.

'I came, my Lord, at your request to take charge of a Ward-in-Chancery.'

'Certainly, by all means, young sir,' said the old man blinking up at him under his pent-house brows, 'we have them of all sorts. They are chiefly young men and maidens. Now which sort would you prefer to have under your care for a term of years?'

'A pretty girl, my Lord,' said Marcus promptly; 'that is, provided that I have your instructions in

writing.'

Verulam the Aged laughed - more exactly he crowed.

'Just what I should have said at your age, my boy. But let me warn you, that is not the way to speak to dignities-'

'No sir!' said Marcus, falsely humble.

'Eh, what -- what's that?'

'I always follow the lead given me by my superiors,' said Marcus Hill.

'You are not a bashful young man, sir.'

'No, sir,' said Marcus.

'And what have you to offer in place of the humility so proper to ingenuous youth?'

'I will do what you want me to do, go where you bid me, and take as much responsibility as you like to lay upon me.'

'You are a bold young man,' said the Vice-Chancellor, looking Marcus over; 'do you know that if you do not bring your pupil back within the authority of the court, you are liable to be outlawed?'

With the slightest uplift of his chin and shoulders, Marcus indicated how little the prospect appalled him.

'I do not think,' said the Vice-Chancellor, 'that I have ever, since I was young myself, seen a young man quite like you. It is certain that we must not let you see any of our heiresses, else I may be obliged to lock you up for contempt of court!'

'Then I cannot have the position?' said Marcus, preparing to depart.

'On the contrary - quite. You are the very man. You are appointed, sir. I appoint you now. And as for your cub, sir, thrash him well. No cub is any

good till he is licked. Your natural history should have taught you that.'

'Yes, sir!' said Marcus promptly.

'Though in fact,' said the old man slyly, 'I am not so sure that you have been properly attended to yourself.'

So on these terms and conditions Marcus Hill became the official instructor of the Honourable William Leslie Bowles, commonly called Billy. Most faithfully he carried out Verulam's instructions. He licked his cub with a pair of medium weight boxing gloves till his pupil, longer in the reach, learned to stand up to him - and then, the best of friends, they licked each other.

They disputed about a grammatical point - and the gloves settled it. They crossed the Northern Sahara with a caravan (at the expense of the Court of Chancery) and all along the route the Arabs had free lessons in boxing, given by two active young Englishmen each simply dressed in a loincloth and boxing gloves. As they had just been rubbed down with the same damp towel, water being precious on the 'hinterland' caravan route from Cairo to Marokesch, the gloves marked well on the white skins. So that the Arabs cried in shrill delight and looked about them, each in the direction of his own squat black tent, to see if he could catch his womenfolk peeping. He did not catch them, but the harems peeped all the same, and then spent the rest of the day gossiping about the show in terms which would have made a sergeant of irregular cavalry blush.

All this brought the young men, after three years, to such a point of good feeling as is rarely seen among brothers. Marcus taught Billy the ordinary

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matters which are attended to at seats of learning. But that was the least of his teaching.

From him Billy learned manliness, self-reliance, silence, and endurance - the primitive savage as well as the derivative civilized virtues. They had been everywhere - got out of an infinite number of tight places together. They had kept mutinous camel-drivers to their work with their fists alone, had stopped (this was Marcus) the ugly rush of a Hindoo fanatic with a knife, stopped it neatly with the point of his toe in the fashion of the 'Savate.' They had backed down a Bedawin sheik on the red confines of Edom with purely supposititious revolvers - and now, all dangers past, behold them settled for an indefinite period in the dull old town of Quarrier!

The Honourable Billy had often wanted to know 'What it was all about.' However, he had recently grown more content, for reasons of his own, though occasionally (and as much as anything for the principle of the thing) he broke out and complained most bitterly.

It was at the close of one of these strikes in which he had denounced Quarrier as 'a dead-alive sink,' that his tutor answered that they were staying there for his (the Honourable Billy's) health.

To this, now gravely mutinous, Billy had replied in camp-follower's dialect, 'Oh, that be condemned for a yarn!'

Whereupon had followed the usual explanation, which terminated in the triumph of discipline and the invocation of the Court of Chancery, as above stated.

While Billy was busy patting himself with salt and water, and rubbing in Elliman's, Marcus lectured him on obedience, law, order, good government and

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the benefit to the young mind of doing what its elders told it.

'Oh, shut up,' said Billy, 'I'm licked hands down, sponge up! Well, that's all right. But may I be pudding-stoned if I'm going to be licked *and* jawed as well!'

'Correct, Billy,' said Marcus; 'your ideas are first quality. First sensible thing you've said. I apologize. I say, though - your lip's split. I've got some goldbeater. Let me patch you up! There! Once more you are a man and a brother!'

'God help the fellow who's your brother - if you treat him worse than you do me - an orphan far from home and I trusted to your brutality!' As he spoke he reached for the salt butter to rub on 'one' under the ear - that which had proved the knock-out.

'I have apologized, haven't I?' said Marcus, 'want me to offend again?'

'No, but I say, old fellow (this in the *ad misericordiam* key), why in the world *do* we keep staying on here, with all the world open to us and a thousand a year to spend? We can't get through that here, you know.'

'Economy is the mother of contentment!' said Marcus sententiously, 'Cherish her as I do!'

'Your grandmother, you mean!' said Billy rudely; 'besides in the table of affinities at the beginning of the Bible you aren't allowed - '

'Allowed what, you crow?'

'To cherish your grandm-'

'Oh, shut up, Billy. If you want to be told anything, don't try to be funny. That gift was withheld from you at your birth.'

'In mercy to mankind!' said Billy, with a glance at

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his senior. 'I wish the lack had been general.'

The gloves were near at hand and Marcus fingered them meaningly.

'You want more?' he demanded gravely; 'you won't be happy till you get it, I can see! Well, my son, plenty more where the last came from!'



It was that same evening, after having led his junior the life of a dog all day, that Marcus rewarded him by revealing why they lingered on in Quarrier. It was also their 'Hour of Peace.' Lessons were a far off dream. Work did not exist. The morrow was yet wholly invisible across wide blue gulfs of sleep. Tobacco in its final post-ignition form was in the air. Neither spoke unless he wanted to. But if he were so disposed the other must listen. What else was tobacco for? No quarrels were permitted to arise. The gloves slept on their shelves, a puffy full-fed sleep of well-merited repose. They would not be appealed to tonight. It was, in short, Equality Time.

Something besides tobacco was in the air. The very silence was pregnant. The atmosphere grew more and more charged. Billy moved to the windows and threw up the one to the right as far as it would go, from the bottom, while that to the left he pulled down from the top an equal distance.

Then moving softly he resumed his seat. Marcus was beginning to speak.

'I met her on the sands as I was coming up from the diving rock,' Marcus said in his rich, dreamy, go-on-from-now-till-midnight voice.

'Could have bet tenpence it was a petticoat - never saw such a chap!' said Billy to himself; 'better

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think up what I'm going to do to amuse myself - we're fixed for the winter, I'll bet my five skins!

But he puffed slowly, his face not affording the slightest indication of his thoughts. This also Marcus had taught him.

' - on the sands, early in the morning,' the dreamy voice continued; 'she was giving her dogs a run - two fox terriers, an Irish Pat, a deerhound and a bull. She had on a -'

'Devil of a lot of eggs in this basket!' thought Billy mournfully. But he listened, he knew that Marcus would get there by and by.

' - on a hat - no, it wasn't on. She was carrying crabs and little fishes in it, shrimps and wiggly things, so I knew she could be no common girl. She picked one off the rim and put it back - so - with her fingers - yes, my son, with her fingers. That's how I knew.

'So I look off my hat and said at a venture, 'I beg your pardon, but could I not give you something better to put those things into?''

'She looked at me like an American New York custom-house officer admiring an American citizen with nineteen trunks, who has just declared over his signature that the whole is worth ten dollars - a right-through-you-and-three feet-out-at-the-back look.

'But I stood it, for it gave me a chance to see her eyes -' (here the voice of Marcus grew more and more dreamy), 'eyes grey to hazel with the bloomy purple reflexions from way back, *and* floating specks of gold like that sweet Danzic stuff. Hu-uh! She might have looked at me like that a week, me sitting perched all the time. I would not have stirred.

'But she stopped.

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"Passed,' thought I, 'not a double first exactly, but scraped through without dishonourable mention.' And then I thanked my ancestors for that clear-eyed frank look they stuck in my blue eyes -'

'Clear eyed rotten cheek!' said Billy, aloud this time. But Marcus took no notice. He was fairly launched and insults, even the aggravated one of telling the truth, were now nothing to him.

"Thank you,' she said, 'they *are* rather messy!'"

'And then, but for my miraculous presence of mind (did you speak, Billy?) I would have landed myself in a deuce of a hole. For I hadn't the ghost of anything of the sort about me - not so much as a match-box. But luckily when feeling my pockets, I rapped my knuckles on that collecting-box you asked me to stow away - all full of beetles and shells. So I out with it in a wink, and emptied the whole lot on the sand -'

'You did what?' cried Billy in a warlike voice.

'Emptied them on the sand - what else could I do? You can go and get them if you like. Very likely the next tide would wash some of them up again pretty near the same place -'

'Oh, my blessed barnacles, and a new acorn-shell - *Cirripedia Bowlesii* -' groaned the amateur biologist.

'So I gave her that to put her stuff in, and I helped her to stow them. Then I said that I should not want the old case again-'

'So thoughtful of you.'

'—and after that I just lifted my straw and skipped gaily up the cliff.'

'Yes, that was the beginning of it,' continued Marcus, stretching himself out so lengthily that his feet threatened to pass through the back wall of the

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Dent Arms. 'And ever since then I have been scheming and planning chances to see her again!'

'Is that why we are under observation for murder, house-breaking, and other minor offences?' demanded Billy in a patient voice, mellowed by the hour of peace.

'Partly,' said Marcus cheerfully. 'You see your uncle sent us to call on Mrs. Fenwick Dent - I couldn't help that, could I? Must obey instructions.'

'Heavens,' cried Billy, springing up on his seat as various suspicious circumstances arose to his mind, 'surely you don't mean that *she* was '*her*' - no, I mean that your '*she*' was Mrs. Dent? Hang grammar anyway.'

'I do not so mean. Oh William the Honourable,' said Marcus, 'reserve your moralities for yourself - also consume your own wrathful smoke. But I did meet my lady of the wiggly things at Mrs. Dent's house. She poured out tea!'

'Whee-ooo,' fluted Billy; 'Aymer Valentine - ah, my lost love, fare thee well for ever!'

'Shut up or I will, you ass!' growled Marcus, who was occupied with keeping his pipe alight. 'I slid off after I was introduced, and begged her pardon in the window seat. Perhaps you didn't notice. I made it all right with her.'

'No doubt you did,' growled Billy; 'with *her* - but the lady of the house - you left me with her, you know. And she glared at the pair of you as if she could have eaten you without salt.'

'Ah, I did not notice at the time,' said Marcus, 'though I have since. But why didn't you make use of your chances and keep the good dame occupied? You had first call, a capital hand, and you passed. You are a coward, Billy, that's the trouble with you!'

Why, but for you the course of true love would have run smooth -'

'Why,' cried Billy, now thoroughly aroused, 'because I haven't got your infer—I mean dashed impudence. 'Tisn't your looks, but *I* can't walk up to a girl I've never seen before, and in twenty minutes be asking her to meet me by moonlight alone!'

'Ever hear of Ugly Jack Wilkes, the Riots man, *un beau laid*? Yes, well, he said that if you would give him just half an hour, he could cut out the handsomest man in England.'

'Marcus,' said his pupil, 'I would not be so rotten conceited for all the girls in three continents.'

'No, sonny, it is not conceit,' said Marcus slowly, 'say rather the frank clarity of a pair of blue eyes, indented to me by my parents and guardians, plus that childlike innocence of manner and speech, that hardihood of simplicity - in short, the unconscious audacity of an unblemished conscience!'

'Oh, bother,' snorted Billy; 'you've got us into a pretty mess anyhow - you and your innocence.'

'Possibly,' said Marcus, 'but consider how romantic, how interesting! How few young fellows at your age are having the chances I am giving you!'

'Of being strung up for murder or accessory after the fact, or whatever they call it - not many, I should hope! Lucky dogs!'

'Billy, don't let me think you beneath yourself - or worse, unworthy of *me*! I put it to you, do I complain?'

'What have you to complain about?' demanded Billy 'you have the girl to court, and confoundedly pretty she is - no, don't describe. I can't stand that. I have heard already about her eyes - I have heard about every kind of eyes before hers, and I'm full up.

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And then there is the lady-mamma, or step-mamma. You have a second string to your bow there. Only she's more likely to bowstring some of us, or her eyes belie her. And I, who would learn my lessons like a good peaceful little boy, to be harassed with a tutor not wisely but too oft in love! Ah me! Ah, my aunt Betty.'

'Sir, I represent the Court of Chancery!' Marcus announced grandly.

'Then the Court of Chancery is a bloomin' old Mahommedan, who is getting all the Paradise he'll ever see on earth, that's all!' said Billy shamelessly. 'But fire ahead and gimme the matches - don't mind me. I'm only out to get my education and improve my moral principles! The matches, please.'

'And so you are, my son, and a more complete set was never supplied. You'll be thankful to me all your days.'

'I'll begin now,' said Billy; 'thanks for the matchbox - pity you hadn't it when you chucked my acorn-shells, for it's empty!'

The lack was supplied and there ensued a slow-breathing smoky silence for a space while these two young men thought each his own thoughts.

'By George, Billy,' Marcus broke in presently, 'she is the dearest and the...'

'No—no! Oh, spare me, can't you? I know the whole litany. I've heard it so often,' cried Billy, his fingers in his ears.

'But this is different - this is serious, I tell you!'

'So were the others - all of them - for a week - oh, spare me - spare me!'

'If it wasn't Pax-time, you ass, I'd punch your ugly head,' said Marcus savagely. 'It *is* different, for all your foolery. I can't tell you how - and at any rate I

wouldn't waste words on such a wooden-head in such matters. But I've told her and she sees it too.'

'Ah, does she? Poor thing!' thought (but did not say) Mr William Leslie Bowles.

But he spoke the next words aloud, as a light dawned newly upon him.

'And so I suppose it was for that you were out doing signalling drill in the Dent shrubberies with the stable lantern the other night?'

Marcus glared at him in astonishment.

'Have you gone out of your senses?' he asked. 'If so, there is a good alienist at Quarrier Asylum - at least so I have heard.'

'No,' said Billy, 'but perhaps *you* have. At any rate one of those detective Johnnies asked me if you had been raiding over the country with a lantern, and if you could do Morse signalling?'

'You had taught me how to out at Capri,' he went on; 'we worked it from the beach up to the Castle of Tiberius - you remember. Also, I *had* seen you monkeying about the stable yard with the ostler's lantern. But I thought you were of age to tell your own lies, so, of course, I said that I knew nothing about it.'

'And why in fortune's name did you not tell me this sooner?'

'Because I heard you, in your simple childlike what-d'ye-may-call-it way, tell that same josser that you had been in the plantations the night of the murder. So I supposed you had got your own little *alibi* all fixed. I was not going to interfere with it, was I? When you want me to be your faithful witness, you tell me beforehand what I've got to say. That's all. Now I'm off to bed.'

Billy was justly indignant. Honest merit,

especially of the silent sort, is too often unappreciated.

‘Stop,’ said Marcus solemnly. ‘I am grateful, Billy. I’ll tell you what I’ll do, old fellow, to prove my gratitude. I’ll give you the straight yarn about what I was doing under her window that night. *I was composing a sonnet. I’ll read it to you!*’

‘Oh, no—No—NO!’ cried Billy, rushing from the room without stopping, as Marcus begged him, to kiss good-night. Marcus could hear his hasty feet plunging upstairs, and then the slam and screech as he triumphantly double-locked and bolted his door!

Then his face relaxed. He smiled.

‘But I saw something else,’ he murmured to himself. ‘And now, Mr. Detective-Lawyer Grant, we will see who will come out ahead on the final deal. Just wait till I get ready!’

And Mr. Marcus Hill, tutor warranted trustworthy by the Court of Chancery, tapped out the ashes of his pipe, and went sedately upstairs to bed. He paused however at his friend’s door, and there with the gravity of a religious rite, recited in a clear voice - a love sonnet, originally written by one John Keats in honour of Miss Fanny Brawne.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SUE SIM AND THE LABURNUM BUSH

'And I do call it a shame and so it is,' said Susan Sim to Adams the second gardener, at the back of the tool-house, at a retired spot where was a handy and serviceable laburnum tree, 'a shame and that I do - for the house to be shut up and forlornsome. We couldn't be worse if we had the 'colliery' - that the papers says is coming all the way from Russia.'

The muscles of Adams' manly arm made a sympathetic movement which, as translated to the consciousness of Sue Sim, so compressed her waist, that she said 'Ouff, don't now - what if old Richard were to see ye? What would he think?'

'Old Richard, indeed!' scoffed Adams; '*that* for old Richard!' And he kissed Sue Sim - which was a curious proof of disesteem for the butler and his authority.

Susan wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

'How you do go on! Aren't you shamed?' she said, her eyes dancing in her head.

Adams proved that he was not, and then Sue Sim, somewhat restored and with heightened colour, proceeded with her woeful tale. In order to have a sense of security she put her hand on the shoulder of Adams' garden coat, and now, because it was so far up, Sue felt quite proud of herself.

'We *would* look well coming down the steps of a church,' she thought, 'I should like to be married in church, but then he's so strict a Presbyterian. I

wonder if he would?’

She thought this over for some time, and then decided that, properly enticed, he might eat of this episcopal apple.

‘Besides,’ she thought, moving her hand a little farther round so that she could tickle his ear, ‘there's many of all sorts now that gets married in churches and thinks nothing of it - and why not he?’

And indeed at that moment, Adams, all a-purr like a pussy cat scientifically caressed, would have consented to be married in a cathedral, by the Holy Father in the Vatican - or over the tongs.

Perhaps a vague consciousness of this crept over Sue, for presently she withdrew her arm. It was certainly lonely behind the tool-house and laburnums are exceedingly shady trees.

‘Adams,’ she went on, ‘there hasn't been a lad in the servants' hall for a month - not that I mind (she added hastily, feeling the clasp about her waist relax); little I care what lads come or stay away! They are all welcome to go to Jericho for me (and her hand brushed its way up the lapel of his coat. Gardeners' coats need a lot of brushing). But it do seem lonely for the others - only old Richard poking about the house, staring at the carpet as if it could speak or talking about horrors fit to make you creep. Connel says she won't stand it any longer, and only think if she goes, I shall have a good chance for the first place. That is four pound more wages and that means saving -’

‘For the furniture,’ said Adams the acquisitive, and the sudden grip of his arm nearly lifted Sue off her feet.

‘How strong you are! You have made me quite out o' breath!’

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It was the first time that Adams had really committed himself in words, and a great gladness flooded little Sue Sim's heart. She thought of the joy of telling her big sister under oaths of the utmost secrecy - which she knew would not be kept.

'The furniture -' she repeated, to keep the wooer on that fascinating subject.

'Yes,' said Adams the bold. 'Tomlinson says that this blessed business is too much for his nerves, and he is thinking of a public house—'

'That will finish him!' commented Sue succinctly.

'Well he doesn't go much out, even now, and bar the boy I have had to work here pretty much on my hands for a long time. But we could just about do with the Lodge Cottage, eh Sue?'

'Oh-h-h-h!' sighed Sue with a good five-seconds intake of breath. Then she squared herself like a clever practical little woman that she was, to parcel out the proposed dwelling.

'There's a kitchen,' she began. 'I would need only a new range and the taps in the back need lookin' to. The parlour would be pretty with a shelf of fuchsias - a cream coloured paper with bunches of roses - yes, that would be best and not expensive. I could put it on myself - father learned me how last holiday I had. And upstairs two bedrooms and a nurs...'

But steps on the gravel spared Adams further prophecies, and covered Susan Sim's frank lack of blushes as she pictured the life that lay before them in the Lodge Cottage.

'If it isn't that dratted lawyer-man,' whispered Sue; 'no, he's coming the other way. Oh, we shall be caught!'

'Stand still—keep quiet!' whispered Adams.

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'Whoever it is they will pass the other side of the tool-house.'

'Ah,' he sniffed, after a pause, 'I know that tobacco. That's old Judge Thorald, for sure!'

And round the edge of the house, through the green tangle of the laburnum they peeped. Judge Thorald it was in truth. He walked on towards the house with his air of careless elegance, the last of the dandies, breathing of old-fashioned grace and courtliness and freshness. He was swinging his gold-headed cane, a Penang lawyer, and smoking the famous cigarettes - the Tunisian '*pechas*' manufactured by the Spanish settlers there for their own use and the Judge's.

'I say,' murmured Sue, 'I wonder why he never married - such a handsome man as he must have been,' she hastened to add.

'They say,' commented Adams, as they withdrew under the laburnum to resume their projects, 'that he was a starcher for the lasses in his day. And that even now - perhaps our Miss Aymer might do worse -'

Sue Sim burst out in a frank laugh, indicative of great contempt for the masculine intelligence.

'Great silly,' she said, giving Adams a pat on the cheek like an episcopal benediction, 'is that all you know? Goodnight - no, not twice. There, then. I'll think over all about the furniture of the Lodge Cottage in church tomorrow, and then the sermon won't seem a bit long!'



Judge Thorald had walked across late in the evening from Laverock Hall. He had an appointment

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with Mr. Luiz Grant, that if the night were fine he might be expected over to learn how the case was advancing and, if necessary, to give his opinion. But he never volunteered anything. He had to be asked, and that several times. He did not wish, an old fellow and rusty withal, to mix himself in what was Lieutenant Grant's life work.

After he passed the tool-house, keeping on the clean gravel road because of his evening shoes, he crossed to the right and tapped lightly on the oriel window of the ancient nursery where Aymer had so long played with her dolls. There was a light within, so that the Judge knew the detective had not yet gone to bed.

The figure within, dimly discernible as passing between the lights and the window blind, promptly vanished. The levers of the lock of the Garden Port were lifted from within without a sound, and Lieutenant Grant stood in the open doorway to welcome his visitor.

Nothing was said till the two men had passed into the lighted library, where before a snug fire of coal Richard had set out a silver tray with decanters. But both men noticed that these were placed on the table in the centre of the room, while the chair which had been the dead master's was now set in the corner at a distance from the fire, as if Richard had determined that it should not be profaned by any stranger's use.

They stood a moment looking curiously about them. Little had changed since the morning they had stood there together. The curtains were drawn - red velvet, falling heavy and straight. There was the same carpet, now wholly without stain, yet the eyes of both men instinctively sought the spot where, in

blue of the sky, had once been marked the print of a hand.

'The Chamber of Death!' said the detective. 'Luckily neither of us is either impressionable or superstitious. But all this must seem stranger to you who have seen him so often sitting in that chair which Richard has so carefully banked up in the corner. Does not like me, Richard! No, I think not - he does not in the least suspect my quality - hates lawyers, probably. Say when, sir.'

'Thank you,' said the Judge, 'I ought to have said 'when' before you asked me. Let me pour this back - about four teaspoonfuls is all I allow myself. Right now, thank you! Our business does not go with intemperance, eh, Lieutenant?'

The Lieutenant helped himself, and then settled comfortably, after placing the best chair for his visitor.

'You have come through the meadow, Judge. I am afraid your feet may be damp,' said the young man, 'let me see if I cannot discover something among my traps.'

'No - no,' laughed the Judge, waving him off. 'I only crossed a border to get a glimpse of the gap where the lantern was waved. The shoes are hardly even moist. They will dry in a moment or two. By the way, have you ever made anything of that?'

The Detective-Lieutenant shook his head and gazed cherishingly at the first cigarette out of the gold snuff-box.

'Thought I had - made sure I had, but pop - the fellow slipped through my fingers.'

'Mr Marcus Hill, I suppose?' said the Judge yawning behind his hand.

'Exactly, it ought to have worked out - the man in

the grounds, owning the fact, previously seen with a lantern in the stable-yard. But yet, as I suspected from the beginning - too much the regular thing, the Rural Policeman's Primer, in fact - footprints on the soft places of the lawn, cross in the heel of left boot, photograph of the murderer in the victim's clenched hand, cuffs with name and address left on the washstand, and finger prints in red all over the place! No, it was too simple. The stableman at the Dent Arms happened to have taken both lanterns with him that night to clean them up, he says. So our young tutorial friend walked in darkness, and most likely arrived after all was over. He came for inspiration to write a sonnet. It is not equal to some I have read. But so far as I see, the writing of it is his only crime.'

'So far, it seems all right - but can we be sure?' the Judge mused.

'Yes, I think so. Indeed I know so. In fact I have discovered the young gentleman's post-office. He is in correspondence with one of the ladies of the house. She writes to him and posts it in a neat little squirrel's hole in a tree that overlooks the Lodge lane leading to Quarrier. He has only to climb the bank, get through some bramble bushes, and put his hand round the tree-trunk to reach the letter. He writes and reposts his reply, and there you are - an arrangement as old as Eden, or at least the generation after!'

There was hardness in the Judge's voice, a certain extra rigidity in his clean-cut features as he said carelessly, 'I presume you are referring to a secret correspondence with Mrs. Fenwick Dent?'

'No,' said the Lieutenant; 'she writes to him too, that's a fact - a most popular young man sir! But

her letters go by post. It is Miss Aymer Valentine who has invented, or, at least who utilizes, the Squirrel's Nest pillar-box!

A whiteness seemed to invade the smooth ivory of the Judge's complexion.

'Miss Aymer,' he murmured to himself, and again, 'Aymer Valentine!'

Then suddenly he appeared to take heart.

'But,' he objected, 'she does not go out. I don't believe it is possible. She has been kept under observation. I have spoken to her about it. I have heard so from you, as well as my good blundering friend the Chief Constable, and unless he climbs down a rope-ladder at dead of night - I fail to see how she could---'

'Even then we should know,' said the Lieutenant. 'Not Miss Aymer, but another carries the letters, and brings back the replies.'

'And that other is?'

'Miss Rachel Dent!'

The Judge sat a long moment without smoking, gazing steadfastly at the miniature, then he shut up the box with a snap and put it back in his waistcoat pocket.

'I am an old fool,' he said; 'what else can I expect. But I wonder why Rachel does it - for love of her cousin - or simply a woman's love of an adventure? I did not think she had as much humanity.'

'Lots of humanity,' said the detective; 'she does it to spite Mrs Fenwick Dent, who is her enemy and is also interested in the young man! You remember her accusation. But I have a couple of pictures here which will interest you far more than boy-and-girl romances. I have photographs of the thumb and finger prints of the murderer of Patrick Fenwick

Dent!’

And the detective looked triumphantly at the Judge, only to see that he was still deep in his musings - bitter thoughts evidently.

‘No boy-and-girl nonsense to me,’ he muttered. ‘I had hoped - no, I will not say to induce Miss Valentine to marry me - I had more wisdom than that. But to come as my daughter and heiress to brighten my lonely house as she has brightened this. Heavens, how I envied him that last hour at evening with Aymer sitting on the arm of his chair!’

There was something so excessively unexpected in this mourning for the inevitable that out of good feeling Grant looked away, and busied himself with the arrangement of a bundle of papers.

By and by the Judge recovered his serenity.

‘Yes, I am an old fool,’ he said, ‘and as you know there are no fools like them. But I think you said something about finger-prints, Grant. Do you care to let me see them?’

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE MASTER'S EYE

Grant waited anxiously for the verdict of the Indian Judge on the couple of photographs. He had printed them on the blue 'engineering' paper which is finished by simple washing - both because the process was the easiest, and also because the colour of the prints reproduced almost exactly that of the marks upon the third will - the one he had discovered in the tobacco jar.

The Judge seemed with some difficulty to rouse himself from the apathy into which he had been thrown by the news that Aymer was corresponding by means of Miss Rachel with the young Chancery tutor. It was with an effort, quite evident to so careful an observer, that he brought back his wandering attention. He took the unmounted prints carelessly, but at the same time like a man used to handling such things. He held them up to the light, using the tips of his fine nervous aristocratic fingers, the carefully polished nails of which still kept their almost feminine beauty.

Judge Thorald had put up his eyeglass and through it he scrutinized the prints intently.

'This is a strange thing,' he said; 'now in France, where they register such things, this would have been enough to trap your man. It is almost as good as a signed confession. And yet - I don't know. Grant, have you a magnifying glass?'

'In my own room, I have,' said the Lieutenant, rising.

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'I should like to have it on these marks for a few minutes - I am not sure about them. They seem abnormal somehow. I worked a while with Bertillon at the Anthropometric Institute in Paris after I came over here and did not know what to do with the time that hung so heavy on my hands.'

Grant went out, and in his absence the old Indian Judge, smiling and eager, did some very fine measuring work on the photographs, using, like his master Bertillon, his own fingers as a standard.

But as he laid down the slender strip of sliding metal, marked in millimetres, which he had taken out of a leather sheath, he shook his head.

'I fear,' he said as the detective entered, 'that these prints are by no means normal.'

'So much the better, Judge,' said the young man cheerfully; 'my man will be the more easily spotted.'

'I wish I could think so,' said the Judge gravely, 'but- yes - let me have the 'loop' and I shall be better able to advise you.'

He took the powerful three inch diameter 'Aitchison,' which the officer handed him, and with it he carefully scrutinized the blue marks, his features growing more and more expressionless as he did so. At last he laid the 'loop' down and leaning back looked earnestly at the young man.

'Grant,' he said, 'I am sorry. But it is as well you should know. We are in face of a far cleverer criminal than either of us imagined - I at any rate. The prints are quite useless for the purposes of identification - even if we had the man in the room here with us. There is an entire lack of the characteristic whorls and finely patterned graining which the tips of the human hand always show. There is, indeed, a sort of speckling which at first

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sight favours a hope of identification. But it is only a hope. I will tell you what I think. The man who killed Mr. Fenwick Dent must have worn gloves. I go further still and say that he wore Suede gloves!’

The old man yielded up the magnifying glass to his companion, who indeed almost threw himself upon it.

He examined the prints long and earnestly, looking at them in every way and from every point of view, like one who dares not give up hope.

But it was with a very discomfited countenance that he turned to the Judge, who had been watching him with a kind of benevolent nonchalance.

‘Well?’ said Judge Thorald.

‘I fear what you say is too true,’ said the Detective-Lieutenant, ‘yet I had the glass over them before. There was that deeply marked ridge in dark colour - I took it for a scar -’

‘Ah, you should have a few months - one would suffice - with Bertillon at Paris.’

‘I will go there my first holidays. I am a bungler. I admit it.’

‘Not at all. You have found what may or may not be valuable evidence. Only for the present it does not tell us much. Suede gloves of that sort are not worn except by ladies, and indeed I may say that they are not worn by ladies over the age of thirty-five or forty as a limit. We must look -’

‘I see Suede gloves every day on the hands of-’

But he got no farther. The Judge stamped his foot and for a moment his countenance was terrible to see.

‘Lieutenant Grant,’ he said, ‘do not leap to conclusions almost certainly erroneous. Name no names. Leave that sort of thing to our friend the

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Colonel. We have both heard him at it. Suede gloves of that quality are worn by almost all young women of active outdoor habits - and who is not in these days? The field of research may be a little restricted by this discovery, but not much.'

The detective looked so very disconcerted that the Judge endeavoured to cheer him a little.

'Come,' he said, 'I will give you a little demonstration. Here is ink - of the French sticky violet sort that gives the best print. Let me take prints of my own thumb and first three fingers, and then of yours. Oh, I know this ink, a little Eau de Cologne poured on soap will take off the stain as by magic. No, side by side on this sheet of foolscap. There - now your thumb beside mine. Now the fingers. Now we are at liberty to make a comparison. Put the 'loop' on these. Now you see the diverse curvatures. There is a scar on your right thumb. But it does not print black like the ridge in the blue print. It is a blank - a depression - cut with broken glass, I should say.'

'Ragged stump of a broken knife when I was holding a man down in my first year's service,' said the Lieutenant.

'Ah, just so. Then do you see what the ridges are in the blue prints? No? The seams of the glove fingers, of course, turned a little over in gripping. Try it and see.

'Now, as to shape - compare our prints with those of the photograph. Yours are shorter and thicker. Mine are much leaner and longer in the fleshy pads - the fingers of the nervous man, the scribbling man, the man with the habit of doing this.'

And the Judge, as was his habit, put his hands together finger-tip to finger-tip, thumb-cushion

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against thumb-cushion, and bent the slender and still supple joints backwards and forwards. The detective had noticed this habit of his a hundred times.

'There,' he said, crumpling up the paper and throwing it in the fire, 'you can practise all that at your leisure. End of the demonstration, Q.E.D. And now I must be thinking of getting home. Lend me something to wrap my throat up with. Have you anything else to show me before I go?'

'If you make hay of all my poor discoveries as you have of this, I had better keep them to myself!' said the Detective with rather a wry smile.

'By no means - on the contrary,' said the Judge, in a tone which showed that he was not above being a little humanly elated. 'I keep you from losing time on false scents. Well, whenever I can be of use to you -'

They were now at the Garden Port, and the Judge, watching Grant's swift manipulation saw that the former lock had been checked back by its pin inserted so as to lift all the levers, while a new lock had been placed above.

But 'Dark as the pit' was all that he said as he felt his way down the steps, guiding himself by the top bar of the iron railings.

'Let me see you home, sir,' said Grant. 'I will put my police lantern under my cloak. We need not show it till we are out of the grounds or we shall have all these rustic MacTavishes of the Colonel's clumping after us.'

'Sure you have nothing else to tell me?' said the Judge as they touched the dry gravel of the main avenue.

'No,' said the young man, 'nothing so far.'

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Yet it had been in his mind to display the third will - that of the tobacco jar - and also some farther scraps of writing he had laboriously pieced together. His motives were mixed. He knew the Judge's strong predilection for Miss Aymer Valentine and he decided that anything which might give her a motive for wishing her uncle out of the way had better be kept from the Judge. Personally, as a man, he had no suspicion of Aymer. As a police officer he was bound to follow every clue.

Moreover, after the fiasco of the hardly won prints, which were to constitute his triumph, he was a little chary of exhibiting any further treasures to the relentless scrutiny of the master eye.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SQUIRREL'S HOLE POST OFFICE

Meantime events at Dent House were marching much too slow for the indignant soul of Miss Rachel. Her sense of triumph in her production of the will - the will had left her stepmother only the possessor of a dower-house at a distance from Dent, which would evict her from that neighbourhood, had gradually grown faint.

Her sullen temperament chafed at the delay - a delay natural enough when each week brought to light a new will concealed somewhere by her father - perhaps merely stuck like a marker into an ancient folio which he had been consulting, or had pulled out for the purpose from its untroubled repose in some cobwebby corner of the room called the 'old book closet,' the literary lumber-room of bygone Dents.

Her hated rival abode in her spacious rooms. Rachel confined herself mostly to two tiny apartments, guarding the door, and for days together only visible to Richard and her cousin Aymer.

She had periods of depression when she used to sit with the copy of the second will in her hand, doing nothing except gazing at it dully as if to get the words by heart.

Then she would murmur sentences without connexion, yet always bearing upon the same grievance.

'So hard to get, so useless! She is still there, the viper, the supplanter. Had it been Aymer I should not have cared. After all my thought, and what has

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been done – she is still Mrs. Fenwick Dent, and, if you please, the common people call her 'the Lady of Dent.'

Then Aymer would come in to sit with her, discoursing of all manner of things trivial to make her smile - of Adams and Sue Sim, of the laziness of Tomlinson the head gardener, and his plans for a public-house, of the humours of Quarrier, and the complaints of the servants' hall, of Connel's resignation staved off for the moment by the promise of an extra pound of wage.

And sometimes Miss Rachel would listen and smile, and then sink back again into melancholy musings over the will and all that she had done to possess it – useless – wasted - worse than useless. If only she could be rid of life - but no, that would leave the path clear for her adversary.

'You could never face her and fright her as I do,' she said one day to Aymer. 'I believe you would forgive her anything!'

'Not anything!' said Aymer, suddenly whitening in her turn, and with a strange cry she clasped Rachel and lay limp and sobbing on her bosom.

The eternal motherly thing which sleeps within every Eve's daughter suddenly awoke. Rachel forgot herself, let the will drop, and drew Aymer towards her. She let her cry her heart out on her shoulder, only comforting her with head-pattings and half-murmured tendernesses, the first that had ever proceeded from the lips of this old maid.

When the weeping fit was a little exhausted, but not till then, Miss Rachel spoke long and Aymer listened, as one whom her mother comforts.

'I have been a great sinner, Aymer child,' she said. 'I am not fit to advise or even to help you. But I love

you - I would I were like you. Tell me if you can. Perhaps between us, you and I together, we may find out a way to make you smile.'

'Oh, I love him, Rachel,' the girl whispered, 'I know I should not at such a time. I should not have spoken to him nor written to him.'

'To whom?' said Rachel, in spite of herself a little hardly. Was she to lose this child's love as soon as she had found it?

'Marcus!' murmured Aymer. And the single whispered word fell with infinite gentleness and delicacy from her lips.

A gleam of joy lit up the sombre countenance of Rachel Dent.

'Marcus Hill - you mean - the young man - whom She writes letters to?'

'But Marcus does not care about her,' said Aymer confidentially, 'he only (then with a gasp and an effort) *he loves me!*'

'How do you know, child?'

She lifted her head and smiled at her cousin.

'Oh, I know - many have said they did, but none like him. See!'

She took from an underpocket, the opening of which was secured old fashionably by a couple of safety pins, a little slim bundle of letters. Aymer handed them to Rachel.

But the old maid started and drew away her hands as if stung by an adder.

'No, I cannot,' she said, 'do not ask me. I am not fit. No words of love shall ever be written or spoken to me. I would pollute your letters, dear!'

'Rachel, how can you speak like that about yourself? You are the best and kindest, the most generous.' Aymer was desperately in earnest now.

'Do you know that since I lost Uncle Patrick I have been very lonely - till I knew you were going to be kind to me. I meant to go as a servant, like Connel or Sue Sim. I could have done it and I would. But now I am going to stay and look after you, dear old Ray, and nobody shall come between us - not even Marcus!'

Rachel pushed her off so that she could look into her eyes.

'You love me, child?' she queried with a sudden fierce harshness that had in it something of the appalling.

'Ray, you know I do - never so much as now. But I cannot help -'

'You love me,' said Rachel gazing into her face. 'I never was loved before. Do you think you cannot trust *me*? I will help you - against Her - against the world. You shall have your wish though I had to walk over a score of open graves to get it you!'

Her voice rose to a threatening pitch and Aymer looked with apprehension at the lifted window, remembering that underneath was the tower nursery which she had given up to the young lawyer, Mr. Grant.

'Hush, Ray,' she said. 'I know you would do anything for me, but you must not say such dreadful things, for there is no need to do them. Now (she adjusted herself in the same coaxing manner on the arm of Rachel's chair as she had been wont to do on her uncle's in the last precious hour in the library. The action and the winsome way were alike natural to her.)

'No, if you *do* want to help, and be the dearest and best old Ray in the world, you can do something for me - and for Marcus too.'

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She sank her voice, and with assumed matter-of-factness she ticked off the points of her discourse on her fingers,

'First, don't tell. Next, do you know the corner beech at the corner of the wall by the Deer Park?'

'The one that overhangs the road to the Lodge?'

'Yes, that's it. Well, Rachel, don't think I'm horrid or anything. But there's a letter waiting there for me. Yes, Ray, don't look grave. I can't go and get it, because Mr. Grant thought it best for me to stay in the house just now. He told Judge Thorald so - I don't know why - and the Judge advised me not to go out any more, even to Quarrier to see about the marketing. And ever since then I have been without my letter. Oh, we arranged it - I thought of it and he said he would - Marcus, of course - not the Judge - old silly! I mean you, Ray!

'But will you go? The hole is under a little bunch of leaves that grows out on purpose, and if you will put in this one - oh, I shall be so glad. I've had it all ready such a long time!'

And into Rachel's shaking hand was thrust, in the smallest of tiny envelopes, the first love letter that had ever rested there.

'I will go,' she said, and rose from her seat.

'Oh, not just now, Ray,' cried the girl in a flurry; 'you must not march there as to the cannon's mouth, defying everybody. Listen and be good - you must go out with a camp-stool, reading or sketching. Then after trying this place and that, you will get nearer to the big Squirrel Hole beech and then you will sit down - not too near. And after a good while, you will get tired sitting on that little stool. (Have the letter ready!) And then you will go up to the wall and look over. It is nice to look over - a fine view down

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into the lane, and while you are admiring it, up goes your arm under the leaves. Don't be afraid. Nobody can see you – hardly even the Squirrel proprietor, and you can change the letters in a second. His will be a square thing, and mine oblong, so you cannot make any mistake. And oh, if you do that, you will be the dearest old thing (though you are not really old) that ever was in this world!’

For Aymer Valentine was of those happy people, and there are a few, women mostly, who get all that they ask for - simply by their way of asking for it.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE ASSASSIN'S RENDEZVOUS

It was at least four days after his bitter disappointment in the matter of the finger prints before Lieutenant Grant could bring himself to communicate to the Judge the discovery he had made as to the message primarily found by the Colonel, and pieced together by the Judge himself.

He was hurt in his pride of profession. He ought to have seen that the Judge had remarked at once, even though he had not had the benefit of working with Bertillon at his Paris Institute.

But little by little a wiser feeling came over the young detective. He had risen high in his business by being willing to take advice - to take his good where he found it. And, after all, with all his eccentricities and cranks, this was Thorald of the Dacca trials, the expert who had brought to light the Upper Bengal poisoning cases - in the country which of all the world contains the most refined and professional poisoners. Whose judgment and advice could be of so much assistance to him, if he only humbled himself to take it, as that of Wilfred Thorald? So he decided that sulks were not good enough, especially as most undoubtedly the Judge was not only extremely friendly, but had several times saved him from making a fool of himself in the most egregious manner.

So, having watched Miss Rachel take her way home in all unconsciousness, with the letter in her pocket (which he had already read and replaced in its niche) Luiz Grant stepped quietly across the park in the direction of the entrance gate of Laverock

Lodge.

He was not in the least sentimental and he had not the smallest scruple about interfering in a business way with the love-story of Aymer Valentine and Marcus Hill. But nevertheless a certain mysticism arising from his drop of Oriental blood made him sensitive to the difference between these two houses - that which he had quitted and that to which he was proceeding.

In spite of the trim lawns and fair gardens, the long lines of wall fruit and shining greenhouse roofs, this Anglo-Eurasian of Lusitanian blood saw past them to the mystery which still surrounded the fate of the man to whom all this living beauty had so recently belonged. He thought of the bitterness, the hatred, the division sowed everywhere within the walls of that great house.

Parts of the mystery, indeed, began to emerge like a coastline from dense fog - a headland there, a lighthouse yonder, but all about him were dangerous reefs, derelict secrets, and family 'vigias' which he must avoid if the shame and destruction of a great house were not to be the end of his enquiry.

As yet he dared hardly name to himself, far less to the Judge, the terrible conclusions to which his mind was being led, as it were inevitably and in spite of itself.

Presently he was entering the parklands of Laverock Lodge. It was much smaller in size, but was beautifully kept. No gun had been fired on it since the advent of the present proprietor. Yet it was as carefully preserved as ever. Gamekeepers there were in plenty, but with orders to see that the wild things, and the refuged tame things, all manner of game that flew or swam, were to be let alone.

It was therefore the feathered City of Refuge of all that part of the county. Never had Luiz Grant heard so many singing birds. Here in these thickets the birds that sing brief autumnal songs were recouping themselves for their long summer silence. Every copse was alive, and yet in spite of the rustle and murmur of life, there was a wonderful peace on the landscape. The sky was pearly grey, the wind came very lightly from the north, yet the air was warm, and the whole harmonized with the yellow stooks of corn set out in ordered lines on the holms beneath, upon which through its wide acreage of park the windows of the Hall looked down.

Within, there was the stillness which haunts the establishment of old bachelors who have perfect servants like Bailey. It seemed the crown of all things to the young man. For in the interests of his business he had kept himself from women, and even in his dreams had lived in a land of men alone. He sympathized with the Judge's fancy about Aymer - intellectually, that is. But yet he wondered that a man who had so much should desire more.

At this point it occurred to him to wonder why Rachel Dent, letter in pocket, had gone into the little summer house, called the Belvedere, from which she could look over the Judge's lawns and away across the sparsely wooded spaces and wooded glades to the wide valley of the Auchen, now purple with heather and, lower yet, yellow with stubble. He knew that Miss Rachel sometimes rested there both going on her errands and returning therefrom. Was she reading the missive or in dread of being spied upon?

So, to avoid being recognized, he kept to a path that serpentine along the edge of the policies, almost underneath the park wall. Approaching thus

the Hall from the reverse side, he came upon the Judge sitting solitary under a great oak, a sun-hat on his head, a rug over his knees, the day's paper dropped from his fingers and the fingers themselves set together in the manner customary to him - tip to flexible tip. His eyes were shut and it might well have been that he had momentarily dropped into the swift-coming easy-going sleep of age.

He did not open them when the young man came forward, on tiptoe so as not to awake him. He merely said in quite an ordinary tone, 'Good of you to come, Grant. Bring round that chair over there. I heard you skirting along by the park-wall. Who is on the watch for you?'

The young man laughed and said, 'Miss Rachel, maybe. I saw her go into the heather-covered house they call the Belvedere. But the weasel was not asleep to hear me coming over the grass - and yet I was careful too, for I thought that you really might be resting.'

'No,' said the Judge, 'I never think more widely than so - under the trees with the wind blowing all about, and the living things going on living in myriads. For details, execution, determinate action, it is different. I must shut myself up in a little room, with the window opening on a brick wall, and not a pretty ivy-covered brick wall either, but one built on purpose. That, or my work-room - where only Bailey sets foot, and even he never tidies. That is where I do my finished thinking.'

'I have seen you do a pretty fair article without any of these advantages,' said the young man, 'I should be content with what you turn out offhand!'

The Judge laughed lightly and waved his hand as if pushing compliment aside.

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'You are bribing me,' he said; 'you want me in a good humour. Therefore you have something to put before me. I thought so when I heard your footstep. Well, let us have it. I will give you of my best advice, unpalatable or no – so long, that is, as it does not affect my little favourite Aymer.'

'At present the matter does not affect anybody,' said Grant with a smile; 'it is a conundrum, and there are a good many answers possible. One of them may, in all innocence, bring your little friend (and if I may say so, mine) into the matter. But if I were sure that *that* were the correct answer, my mind would be very much at rest, and I should take no further trouble about this particular point.'

'Well, we shall see,' said the Judge. 'I will not promise anything in advance. I will not have art or part in any scheme to entangle my little ingrate, even if she does make post office trees, and prepares to live her life in her own fashion – in spite of an excellent adopted father who has never yet dared to propose adoption to her – and who never will!'

There was a pause while Grant opened his pocket-book and selected three or four oblong pieces of paper. They had a curiously patchy first-aid appearance, the result of having been gummed together with transparent criss-crossings of paper.

The Judge in his chair followed the young man's movements with a slight smile, indicative apparently of very mild interest.

'I fear you do not believe much in my discoveries, sir,' said the detective, almost timidly.

'On the contrary I do,' the Judge answered, 'but you do not tell me the principal ones. You only come to me with this or that matter of detail.'

The Detective-Lieutenant looked his surprise, and

began to assure the Judge that he had brought all his problems to him. But Mr. Thorald merely smiled incredulously.

'And the will?' he said sharply.

'What will?' repeated the young man, staring.

'The one with the blue finger-marks upon it - !'

'But how do you know that - ?'

'Because the second photograph showed the stamped paper used by Mr. Patrick Dent for such things. I have witnessed too many of his wills not to know it when I see it - even in a blue-print photograph. Besides, I think you found a stock in that drawer, second from the bottom on the left side of the bureau!'

The detective laughed a little nervously.

'I did not think I had the right, sir. I had not even communicated the piece to my superiors - so little was I able to make up my mind about it.'

'Quite right - quite right. I entirely approve,' said the Judge, nodding his head gravely. 'But naturally, it is impossible for me, so long as I do not know the whole case, to pronounce with anything like certainty upon the fragments of it which from time to time you present to me. As you know, the strength of evidence is not in the separate links but in your ability to form a chain. At the same time, you have your official duty and your official position to consider, and you may depend upon me to do the best I can in the circumstances. Only you will forgive me if my judgments prove erroneous and consider that I had to form them on very partial data.'

'I am deeply grateful - more so than I can say!' For the first time Grant's voice was a little tremulous. 'As far as I am concerned I am quite willing that you

should see all –’

‘No, no,’ the thin aristocratic hand waved away the suggestion; let a man who possesses a conscience keep within its limits – I used to keep one too – for official purposes. But now I am on the retired list.’

He laughed with a gay scorn whose lightness became his humour well. Then he seemed to recall himself and stood up.

‘Suppose we go in. This little Eden of mine is visited by the winds, and a wicker table is no place on which to study the documents in a great case.’

So with the air of finality he assumed so readily, he led the way into his study with alert carriage and springing step. Here Mr. Thorald motioned Grant to a seat, and sitting down himself, waited for the documents upon which his opinion was to be asked. But the young man was still under the spell of the Judge's unexpected knowledge of his reserve of information. It was not now so easy to consult him. He acknowledged the mental superiority of the man in face of him, and was a little afraid. The effortless strength of the imperial race appealed to and dominated the drop of Oriental blood in his veins. It was the particular kind of force he did not possess himself, this imposition of will upon another. At the same time, a certain vague resentment, which he acknowledged as wholly unreasonable, was slowly rising within him.

He felt that, for the sake of his own prospects, he must conquer it. Whatever success he had yet met with since coming here was owing to the Judge, and certainly he had saved him from making a mistake which might have been fatal to his career.

‘I am only a learner,’ he said to the Judge,

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without however meeting his eye, but fingering the papers on the table a little nervously. 'Remember, sir, that when you were already the most famous juris-consult of all India, and had written books upon our profession, I was only a little Goanese boy running about in a banker's compound, or listening to the rattle of the dice in sailors' gambling-houses along the 'front.' I had to be cunning to get away from there. I had to bow very low to get knowledge. I had to fetch and carry to many great men before I escaped from that land of my birth. And there is something of all that about me yet - something naturally sidelong and indirect - which you, sir, do right to call me to account for, but which I shall try to conquer!'

The Judge rose and laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

'Not one in a million, sir,' he said gently, 'beginning where you began, could have placed themselves where you are today, and not one in a hundred millions could have said what you have said to me. I thank you, sir, and I respect your straightforwardness, and - yet more - your modesty!'

Never had the Judge appeared to greater advantage. There was at that moment something almost grand about him, so that the young man felt his heart warmed and his doubts dispelled.

'Now to business!' cried the Judge cheerfully; 'we are wasting time, and on such a day we did not come indoors for that.'

'You remember,' said Luiz Grant, 'the piece of paper you put into my hands when I first arrived. It contained the written message, *I propose to call upon you tonight.*' You may have been astonished that so little was made of what, apparently, was

capital evidence. The scrap had been torn rather carelessly and flung into the waste-paper basket. I agreed with you that it was strange how a matter so obvious should have escaped the notice of a criminal of the calibre of the man who slew Patrick Dent. Yet I remembered the truth of the old saying among detectives that there is always a flaw in every man's work - as you found in mine the other night. I showed the piece of paper as arranged by you to my superiors, who, naturally, not being on the spot, were inclined to consider it of too great importance.

'Well, Judge, what do you say to that?'

And Lieutenant Grant spread out on the table, in addition to the original document found by Colonel Hampden Jones and put together by the Judge, four other similar slips each with the same words, *'I propose to call upon you tonight.'* In each case, however, the handwriting was different, yet with certain most puzzling resemblances which were common to all.

It was with a sincere interest that the Judge put aside his eye-glass, and donning a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles which he only wore in his study, he made that peculiar motion of thrusting his arms out of his sleeves, with which writers and bookmen clear the decks for action.

Then he arranged the five oblongs of paper before him, the original at the top, the others in one row beneath. The look on his face was one of intent scrutiny, feverishly alert, and even a little cruel. For the first time Grant saw the ruthless look which he had noticed in the pictures of Fouché, Claude, Mace and others of the world's great '*policiers.*' With a sigh he admitted to himself that he would never, for lack of that indomitable something which comes so close

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to cruelty, reach the heights of his profession.

It was clear, however, that the Judge had no such scruples. He might and would do his best to keep all harm from one person, because of his love for her. But, with that sleuth-hound face, he would certainly spare nobody else.

The clock ticked sole in the midst of the great silence of the room while Grant waited the verdict. Clearly the Judge considered this a very different problem from all those which had gone before. He had treated these more or less cavalierly, tossing off decisions in a minute or two as a clever cook does an omelette. He asked for his 'glass' without giving precise directions where to find it, and when Grant handed him a round 'loop' like his own, he called out somewhat testily, 'The oblong one - on the mantelpiece! How, without it, can I see the whole at one time?'

It was put silently into his hand, and the intentness of his expression grew harder and more threatening. It was a face that Grant had never seen before, and he did not wonder at the fate of the Dacca men when they found such a man on their trail. The young detective watched his senior with a kind of shiver. There were certainly heights - or perhaps depths - in his profession to which he could never attain. At last the oracle spoke.

'The one pieced together by me is in one and the same hand throughout. It appears to have served as a model for the other four. This Number One has no marks of being tampered with. But look at any of the others - numbered by me 2, 3, 4, 5 - you will find that the upper half of each letter has been written by one hand and the lower finished by another. The hand which completed the lower portions of 2 and 3,

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has written in the upper parts of the 4 and 5.'

Grant looked astonished at a science which could reduce to one simple sentence so difficult a problem.

'I was certain,' he said humbly, 'that there was something strange about the affair, but I could fathom neither the method nor the intention of such a work.'

'The meaning - no, that is quite another problem. But the method is, I take it, clear enough. You see that white line - visible in No 2 even to the naked eye, less visible without the magnifier in the others, but under the glass manifest in all. That white dividing line has not been left voluntarily. It is along that line that the paper has been folded, before being laid on another sheet. The message was then written on both papers as equally as possible. Separating - thus, you have the writing clean cut into two parts, - lower and a higher. Then another hand - *and the same hand in all four* - has finished the bottom halves of Numbers 2 and 3, and the upper parts of Numbers 4 and 5. Either the first or the second writer has attempted to give an appearance of uniformity to the series by finishing the 'g's' with backward flying tails. Altogether the affair is either a game done for amusement, or variants of the first (and perhaps genuine) message executed by the criminal and an accomplice for some unknown impish purpose - perhaps of leading us astray.'

He looked the five pieces of paper carefully over again before passing them across to the detective.

Grant was in the full interest of verifying these remarkable conclusions when the Judge suddenly launched a question full at him.

'These pieces were not in the library when the

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Colonel and I searched it. Where did you find them?’

And startled, perhaps abashed, by the Judge's authoritative manner, Luiz Grant answered with eager abruptness.

‘In Miss Rachel's room!’

‘When?’

‘When she was out carrying her letter to the post-office in the squirrel's beech!’

Then the face of the Judge slowly changed from the hue of old ivory to a ghastly curdled pallor. It was not that he cared whether or no Rachel Dent was accused of her father's murder. That was perfectly immaterial to him. But the thought flashed upon him that of a certainty Aymer would be marked as the only possible accomplice.

He carried his hands to his head in a stricken way, and all his little affectations falling away from him in that moment of anguish, he murmured most like a child, ‘Oh, what have I said? What have I done?’

CHAPTER TWENTY

MISS RACHEL VANISHES

In the evening Luiz Grant argued the case out with himself after he returned to the little room in the angle of the tower overlooking the Garden Port of Dent House. Every time he looked out, remorse and apprehension seemed to stab him. There were Aymer Valentine's last toys - dolls filled the worn old cradle behind the door - some of them so fresh of raiment that it seemed as if their mistress (and foster-mother) still continued to care for them on the sly. Peeping from behind a screen was a rocking-horse, degraded as to saddle and trappings, but with all his working parts in good order. He was on sliding bars set eccentrically and galloped backwards and forwards in a manner if not equine at least workmanlike. Grant, being a feather-weight, had taken exercise upon him with success. There were dog-eared books in the cupboard - fairy-books, class-books, lesson copies, *poenas*, and innumerable boldly tinted drawings. Some of these were labelled with their names, to prevent mistakes, 'Tomlinson, garner,' 'Matty, howsemade,' and especially 'Uncle.' These latter were quite numerous, and represented a stout gentleman with tubby legs and singularly elementary feet, set at right angles, either with a gun over his shoulder or smoking a curved pipe of German appearance. In a few these two features were combined, but the distinctive 'UNCLE' in staggering capitals was never omitted.

All this special environment had begun to have an influence on the detective. At first he had been so wholly bent upon his business as to be indifferent to

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his surroundings. He might have been sleeping in a lumber attic for all that he cared. It was the nearness to the fatal library that had seduced him. A man like Detective-Lieutenant Grant, who had arrived at such a position so early, had naturally to make way against a host of prejudices. Therefore he could not afford to be moved by considerations of the sentimental sort.

Nor till quite lately did he believe that he could be.

But after he had watched Aymer Valentine for many days - days that became weeks, when he saw her daily going to and fro in the house, leaving a trail of light behind her, as does a great meteor falling horizonward in a starry night, when he saw all the little world of Dent House beginning to smile at the trip of her feet and watching her as she went, it was impossible for Luiz Grant not to transfer part of that charm which he saw her awakening everywhere to the chamber which still bore innumerable traces of her occupation.

She had indeed offered to 'clear out all her old rubbish.' But the detective had affirmed that he was in no way hampered, and indeed, that he preferred anything to a tidy room.

From that moment there grew up a kind of understanding between the two. They smiled to each other as they passed, Aymer meeting his eye with a frank friendliness which would not have been there if she had known that he not only knew of, but had read and in some instances copied her precious letters out of the beech post-pillar by the Lodge wayside.

Out of all this there was born into the spirit of Luiz Grant something new and to him most strange.

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In spite of his Oriental contempt for women, he was conscious of a curious feeling of tolerance - tolerance which became interest, interest which budded into admiration and a desire for some friendship, friendship which would enable him to gain some of that fresh delight in living which he had missed in his youth.

So it will be evident that, considered as a detective, at the post of duty, Luiz Grant was in a parlous way. As a man, on the contrary, he seemed to be at last on the point of learning the A B C of human nature, of beginning to understand what he had despised, and of changing from a machine to a man with a heart of flesh.

All the same Grant clearly understood that the process was fraught with danger to him professionally, and especially departmentally. The Crown Office did not propose that a man should gain spiritual experience at their expense.

It was for this reason that he had decided to argue the matter out clearly before he slept. The Judge had, previous to parting, added a few hints. 'Either simple amusement,' he had said, 'or the work of a mad person.' This had been his parting alternative. Luiz Grant felt the keenness of the observation, and had the writing been all by one hand, it might have stood. But he could not imagine two mad persons in the house, or out of it, setting themselves carefully to copy a message with so curious an ingenuity.

It struck him, however, that there might remain the alternative of a subordinate sane person humouring the whims of an insane principal.

He was still turning over the five papers in an undecided way when his quick ear caught the sound

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of light feet in the passage outside, and it seemed to him that they had stopped before his door.

Something warmly human moved unwontedly within him. He felt the Orient growing weak, and a fresh reverence for the young, the fresh, the unstained, forcing itself upon his unwilling notice. It must be the influence of this playroom - full of the tell-tale trinketry of childhood, every hobby-horse, drawer-handle, crayon-box, doll's house still warm from the outpouring of childish affection, the concentrated yearnings of a lonely little girl hungry for love.

This influence abode there. It was in the place - in the air. It was shut in the doll drawer. It flamed out on the coloured prints that papered the wall - an influence that appealed to this lonely and at bottom mystical boy - now become a lonely and mystical man, yet (said some) because of that the most promising officer in the Northern detective service.

He moved towards the door. Perhaps Miss Aymer wanted something out of her presses, as she had done once or twice before during his occupancy. He laid his hand upon the knob, but before he could turn it he heard a quick flutter of skirts, and was just in time to see Miss Rachel Dent disappearing in the direction of the library. As he stood in the passage a cold draught of air blowing in his face informed him that the door of the Garden Port was open.

Luiz Grant wasted no time, but followed on towards the library door. He had seen enough of Rachel Dent's mistrustful, anxious eyes to be thoroughly on his guard. He recognized now that her attitude had been strange throughout. All this passed through his mind in the few moments before

she entered the library and shut the door. He recalled also the element of madness in her accusations of her stepmother, and in her sudden devotion to the love-affairs of her cousin.

The young man made two or three steps to follow, but before he had reached the end of the passage he paused. Had the heiress of Dent, the only daughter of Patrick Fenwick Dent, not the right to enter her father's library at any hour? What business had he to interfere? Well, he *had* a right - or what was better he had an excuse for following her. Richard set out a small supper tray for him every night - especially well provided when, as tonight, he had been detained at Laverock Lodge or elsewhere.

So Luiz Grant followed and without ceremony opened the door. He had a little speech prepared with which to greet Miss Rachel, but he received one of the surprises of his life, when, on looking about, he found that the library, the door of which he had seen open and close behind the lady, was entirely empty.

Now, it is no wonder that Lieutenant Grant stood amazed. He had himself thoroughly searched the large apartment on his first coming (though he had little belief in that sort of evidence), so soon as he recognized the peculiarity of the circumstances. Also the ablest detectives of the old school had gone over it inch by inch. There was no special exit. No one in the house had ever heard of any. There was no other door, save one leading into the dark cupboard in which Patrick Dent kept the top-boots, waterproofs, and caps in which he loved to promenade on the nights when he could not sleep.

The overcoats, plaids, leggings were still there. A row of boots and overshoes filled a shelf, and indeed

everything remained as the master had left it.

As in a dream Grant opened the door and groped among the sidelong drooping invernesses and rotund ulsters, which still faintly recalled their sturdy wearer. He found nothing. There was nothing there to find. The absence of a smell of leather and a cool freshness which does not usually go with such places, gave evidence of the careful airing to which Susan Sim, under the orders of Old Richard, frequently subjected its contents.

Nothing appeared to be touched in the room itself. The windows were securely fastened, the heavy velvet curtains drawn across them and all within breathed of solid country-house comfort - large, spacious, and airy.

The very solidity of everything added an element of annoyance to the puzzle. Things seemed to be laughing at his perplexity. Luiz Grant resolved that he would get to the bottom of it. He had seen Miss Dent. Of that there could be no doubt. 'Expectant attention' would not cover a thing like that. And indeed he had not been thinking of Miss Rachel, but of Aymer Valentine.

First, however, he would think things over, as he helped himself to some supper. It stood as usual on a small table specially arranged by Richard so that he could sit in an easy chair and enjoy it with his feet to the fire without the formality of seating himself at table. It was an attention which Grant much appreciated - the dream of the man single who taketh his ease.

Luiz Grant put his hand out to lift the decanter. He had it close to the tumbler before he noticed that its cut-glass stopper was wanting. Richard could never have been so careless. It was simply

unthinkable.

He looked about, but it was nowhere to be seen. As he stooped to lift the tablecloth from the book-charged centre table, he found it had rolled underneath. He rescued it, and stood with the shining knob a long while in his hand.

Then he passed into his own room, found a small empty flask, filled it from the contents of the unstoppered decanter, marked, sealed, and packed it carefully in a cigarette box. Then, regardless of what Richard might think, he went to the open door of the Garden Port, and, finding a rain-grill handy at the foot of a water-pipe, he emptied the contents of the decanter down, returning to rinse it out with water before he was satisfied. In the morning he would tell Richard that he had used the spirit for an experiment, If the butler cocked an eye at him – why, it could not be helped. Probably he would only think better of his powers!

Returning he set the decanter in its place, topped with the recovered stopper. He was ill satisfied with himself. He had been on the track of a discovery. Instead he had made several, but all added to the list of his difficulties.

He had only three questions the more to answer:-

1. Who had opened the Garden Port door, closed by himself?

2. How did Rachel Dent get out of the library without his seeing her?

3. And lastly, why had she taken the stopper out of the decanter prepared for his supper?

One thing, however, was clear, Miss Dent had gone out of that room in some mysterious fashion. Therefore, equally easily, she could enter it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE BRIGHT EXCEPTION

Luiz Grant took a night to think over his difficulties. He slept uneasily and, as it were, with one ear on the door and the passage beyond. Yet he heard nothing except the sough of the leaves from the park and the mocking whoop of the night owls as they flitted past his window on pinions as noiselessly as a windblown feather. But he had resolved one thing - he would find out how much of all this was known to Aymer Valentine.

He had somehow an immense vague hope of learning something of the utmost importance. He would, in defiance of all the rules of his profession, confide in her. He would show her how she was endangering her own interests by keeping back anything, and dwell upon what services she would render by telling all she knew. Luiz Grant had so far altered during these last few days that there was absolutely one person in the world whom he could not suspect. That was Aymer Valentine.

He smiled when he thought that in this he was at one with Judge Thorald. Yet his lack of sympathy towards the Judge did not decrease because of this. He recognized in himself, not without alarm, a growing humanity. In spite of his past successes, he began to dislike his calling, and to pray (to what god he was not sure - at any rate to the Great God to him yet Unknown) that he might die before his heart became like that of Judge Thorald.

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Yet his own resolve to consult Aymer Valentine ought to have moved him to kindlier judgment of one who made precisely the same reservation concerning his fellow-mortals.

All were to be suspected. All were possible criminals - excepting Aymer Valentine.

Towards morning, in spite of himself, Grant sank into a dreamless sleep, from which about six o'clock he was awakened by a strange sound from the direction of the library. This again was followed by a clucking noise which ended in a cackle of laughter.

Grant had laid down in his dressing-gown that he might be ready in case of any further disturbances, but youth and fresh air, and perhaps a little the new thoughts which obsessed him, had induced a peculiarly heavy sleep.

Pesting against himself for his sluggishness, he rushed to the door, and there in the passage in a lively fit of hysterics was Susan Sim. She was pointing towards a corner of the library which could be dimly discerned through the door, laughing and crying at once.

'Miss Rachel's wraith! Oh, send for Adams! I saw it. It was sent as a warning. I saw it when I went in. Oh, I shall die! Miss Rachel! Miss Rachel!'

At this point Richard Hissy and Connel came simultaneously on the scene, and Grant left Sue to their ministrations, sympathetic on the part of Connel, brusque and authoritative on that of Richard.

He walked to the library door, and entering found, as he anticipated, nothing. The large room was empty as when he had left it the night before. One of the curtains had been pulled half-way back, which gave token of a very solid ghost indeed, and, on the

silver tray with the glasses the decanter was again standing . . . *full!*

Grant stood a moment almost paralyzed. Then he began telling himself that such things were the commonest of all phenomena - that there must be a simple reason - a reason which he would have to find out to explain the entrances and exits of Miss Rachel.

He had not now a doubt as to who had sat opposite to Patrick Fenwick Dent on that fatal night. The experiences of the night and morning had cleared that matter up wonderfully. The weird comings and goings, the tricks with messages and papers, the readiness to carry love-messages to the Squirrel Tree Lodge lane - began to fit into their places in his mind and for the first time to combine into a reasonable scheme of things.

Of course Rachel Dent was, as the Judge supposed, mad. But he foresaw that the affair, taken as he knew it now, would inevitably involve Aymer as well, in whose case there could be no suggestion of insanity.

It behoved him therefore to move cautiously and to be wary in accusation. But all the same he admitted that he had always regarded Rachel's guilt as a possibility, from the day that she had startled the Fiscal and himself with her wild tirade against her hated stepmother.

When his mind was a little calmed he returned to Susan Sim. By this time she was on her feet and proclaiming that she never could bear that library. It gave her the qualms to enter it - which she would never do again on any pretext.

'But it is your duty and you must -' quoth Richard Hissy firmly, 'I never heard such nonsense

and I won't listen to it.'

'If you are so fond of it - go and do it out yourself - you and Miss Rachel!'

Nothing can be said for this outburst save that it proved that of a certainty Sue was not yet quite herself. And so Butler Hissy took it, ignoring Sue's repeated declaration that she would go home to her mother that very minute, so she would.

'I will just go up to Miss Rachel's room and see if she is all right,' he said rather apologetically; 'nothing else will quiet these screeching poultry!'

'I will come with you,' said Grant quietly.

Richard was on the point of a refusal, but looking up, he encountered the rigorous pucker between the black eyes of Luiz Grant, and succumbed.

'Very well, sir,' he said respectfully, slipping back into the butler. And so led the way.

Richard rapped on the door of her little parlour. There was no answer. He rapped again. To this succeeded a course of low whispering. There were at least two persons within.

Grant indicated the bedroom door, which opened also upon the lobby, as well as communicating internally with Miss Rachel's parlour. Obediently Richard tapped and inclined his head after the manner of the well-trained self-respecting domestic - his attitude being, if possible, rendered more deferential by the presence of the detective at his elbow.

Instantly, as if awaiting the summons, appeared a figure, almost arrogantly erect and menacing.

'What do you want with Miss Rachel, Richard? She is not well.' It was Aymer Valentine who spoke, and the two men each halted a moment, checked in their purpose. But it was only for a moment.

Grant spoke out.

'Miss Valentine,' he said firmly, 'it is necessary that, for her own sake, we should see Miss Dent. Richard will assure you that it is absolutely requisite. We have no alternative.'

Aymer, defiant as a guardsman dressed at parade, yet with eyes not fixed but vigilant, made answer:

'Miss Dent is ill, I tell you;' the words came with determination, 'you cannot - you must not see her!'

'But, Miss Aymer,' Grant argued courteously, 'we only want to assure ourselves if Miss Rachel is really in her room. Susan Sim saw her a moment ago in the library. According to her, she saw her vanish, and she has been in a hysterical condition ever since!'

'Susan Sim is an extremely foolish girl,' said Aymer, bristling, 'I am surprised that two men like you -'

'But there are other things-' the detective continued, still very quietly.

'What other things?'

Now Luiz Grant could not mention the double disappearance of Rachel Dent nor the refilling of the decanter, without letting out more than he meant to before Hissy, or indeed before Aymer herself. He hesitated therefore, and his words sounded weak, though his purpose to see Rachel held firmly enough.

'I fear, Miss Valentine, that we must insist!' he said.

'I suppose that all this is nothing to you,' she broke out upon him suddenly, 'but to me -'

A sob checked her voice as a flooded river checks at a log-jam, halts, gathers force, and then pushes

everything aside.

'She is nothing to you - but to me - she has taken *his* place (she turned sharply). Richard Hissy, you at least ought to have known better than have allowed this man to come spying on your mistress. As for him (she glanced at Luiz Grant with contempt of which her features hardly seemed capable), it is his business - yes, his business - I suspected it before - I know it now. He is seeking to entrap us all - and sitting at table with us - dipping his sop in the dish with us to betray us. You are a Jew, Mr. Luiz Perez Grant, but perhaps you remember who did that?'

Grant felt that his confidence had somehow been betrayed, but he answered calmly, 'I am neither a Jew nor a Judas, Miss Aymer, and the day will come when you will do justice - even to my motives.'

But his mind was busy with the personal problem - who could have given him away? He could see nothing for it but that the Judge, jealous as he knew him to be, of every one who approached Miss Aymer, had been jealous also of him, and, while using his confidence to the utmost, had loaded the dice in so far as he personally was concerned. Of course, he told himself, it did not matter. But there was a wound all the same, for the human element had awakened in the young man from India, and with it the new sort of pride which is perfect manhood, the manhood which rejoices to give woman her proper place. He had bitter, and as he afterwards remembered with contrition, revengeful thoughts about the Judge.

Aymer surveyed him for a moment without the least softening quiver of her level eyelashes.

'But you shall have your wish.'

Suddenly she put back her hand and with one

large motion opened the door wide, while she herself remained near the doorway to prevent actual ingress.

The bedroom was a small one. The bed was arranged with the pillows towards the window because Miss Rachel liked to read in bed during her frequent fits of voluntary solitude.

Rachel Dent lay extended on the coverlet, clad in a white wrapper, as rigid as death. She was not dead, however. Every few seconds her whole frame was shaken with a strong nervous twitching which ended in a slight moan. Once her hand rose from the elbow and fell again.

‘And now,’ said Aymer bitterly, ‘when you are quite satisfied you can go!’

Whereupon, silently bowing with something of Oriental reverence in his gesture, Luiz Grant turned and went downstairs, and with humbled head and slow tread Richard Hissy followed him.

But the detective's eye had seen that which neither the old butler nor the indignant young guardian of the door had observed.

Clenched tightly in her left hand Rachel Dent held a key, secured to her wrist by a leathern loop and bangle of Indian workmanship.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE STRANGE NATURE OF SUE SIM

‘And they've gone and sent me this.’ Sue Sim, second but most important housemaid at Dent House, sobbed it on the shoulder of a certain stalwart gardener of the name of Adams, early introduced into this chronicle.

The Chief of Police requests that Susan Sim shall call at his office this evening between the hours of five and six.’

‘Just then when I'm needed to help about the dinner,’ said Sue; ‘not as I mind that very much, for Connel says she can manage if cook's not in one of her tantrums, and Sylvie Granger is willing to lend a hand if *her* missus is not in one of hers! But what cuts me’ (continued Sue, wiping her eyes with a very hard masculine coat-sleeve which happened to be wandering in the neighbourhood), ‘is being sent for like a robber or a murderer, and the message brought by a ‘p'leeceman.’ Though it *was* only Robin Fergie, and he did say that he would put on plain clothes and be most happy to escort me there and back.’

‘Ah, he did, did he?’ growled Adams, stiffening like a rooster challenged from some far-off middenstead. ‘He had better look out. He's liable to get his head broke one of them days!’

‘Sakes alive, Adams,’ exclaimed Sue Sim, beginning to take a renewed interest in life, ‘but he only offered as a friend - *and* in plain clothes. It was kindly meant!’

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'I'll plain clothes him,' said Adams fiercely. 'Yes, or any man that makes up to you!'

Susan Sim tossed her head meaningly. How could she help it?

'You tell Robin Fergie,' Adams went on, 'to keep himself to himself. And a good half-mile from you, or he will - always in a private capacity - be liable to get a month in hospital. I strike no policeman with his coat on. No man has a greater respect for law and justice, but - a man's lass his lass - and - it's not the first time.'

'Preserve us, Adams, and who do you mean?' said Sue, now entirely consoled and enjoying herself. 'Robin's a decent lad. He comes from the next parish but three from me, and once he put in a summer harvesting nearby before he took to the policing business.'

Adams stamped angrily and his eyes were ablaze.

'You mind out, too, Sue Sim,' he said darkly; 'I saw you standing up to him, and the two of you talking sixteen-to-the-dozen - all about crops and farms - things I kenned nought about. Aye, and he was 'speering' you, and telling you - what nobody has a right to tell you but me! And you laughed - you laughed!'

He uttered the last words with extraordinary force of anger, and Sue was in the seventh heaven. To make Adams jealous - and to have two men sparring about her - what distinction! How she would crow over Connel. She would not talk any more about her paltry apprentice drapers.

'And would you have me cry?' she demanded boldly, throwing her chest provokingly forward, so that Adams' eyes glistened and his nostrils dilated. He clenched his fists and at that moment could have

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beaten Sue Sim. He had seen the identical action of provocation used towards his enemy. But he would make the policeman (when only plain-clothes) pay for all.

She incited him still further, to see how far she could go (one of the greatest of feminine perils). She lifted her skirts daintily, holding them wide at the sides to show her black silk stockings, the gift of Sylvia Granger (who preferred decided colours), and so danced lightly away from him, singing with many side glances of false disdain:

*'Gin a body meet a body,
Comin' through the rye-
Gin a body kiss a body
Need a body cry?'*

She accented the last word, running it off into the amorous woman's deep contralto promissory laugh which swells her throat and lends a dewy softness to her eyes.

All this did Sue Sim, well knowing and of set purpose. But she was hardly prepared for the wrath of Adams She understood the male animal perfectly until he broke bounds, and then in an instant she became slavishly submissive - and was happier than ever.

Adams took her two wrists in one broad palm, gripping them so fiercely that Sue almost wept with pleasure, though she did not fail to call out that he hurt her.

'Sue Sim,' he said, 'if I ever hear of you going through ony rye or barley or oats or wheat, or just plain meadow grass wi' that blue suckin' pig on two legs that caa's himsel' Robin Fergie, I'll break his

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head. And as for you, Sue Sim, it's never you that will be seein' yoursel' from head to foot in the double ash wardrobe with a sixfoot looking-glass that I have stored at Robson's in the High Street of Quarrier!'

'Oh Adams - ye havena - ye are jokin!'

cried Sue. 'It's just no possible. A wardrobe with full-sized mirror - like my leddy's. Oh, Adams, but I love ye. There's naebody like you for takkin' a lass's hert! And, tell me, has it a drawer underneath for putting in dresses without folding them? Oh, let me at you - twa drawers! Never will I look at Robin Fergie. Never will I go with him through the Rigg fields or along the Wood Side to the Colonel's office! He may whistle for his walk - plain clothes or no plain clothes.'

'He will,' said Adams doggedly, 'for I am coming with you myself!'



The Colonel had felt for some time that he must do something on his own account. He had too long been kept in the background. Young men of high professional skill and in whom 'Headquarters' repose profound confidence were all very well. But after all, he was Chief of the Police locally, and the county looked to him to do something.

Moreover Sue Sim's experiences could not be kept secret. She had (so it was reported) seen Miss Rachel - Miss Rachel in a state of frenzy, her hair down her back, *and* a bloody dagger in her hand, reciting 'screeds of poetry' - which the Colonel, priding himself upon his shrewdness, took to be speeches of Lady Macbeth. He knew that he had been born to be a great man, but he had not the least idea before that he would prove a great

detective.

So he sent for Sue Sim, and like the wily diplomat he was, he employed as his emissary P.C. Robert Fergie, who boasted currently of his acquaintance with the young lady.

‘And if you can draw her out,’ he instructed his subordinate, ‘privately, of course, it will count to your credit on the force. She is not accused of anything, so she does not need to be cautioned according to Act of Parliament. You will find out what she really knows, Constable Fergie?’

‘Trust me!’ said the parochial neighbour of the second housemaid. But he counted without his Adams, who walked grimly by Sue’s side with his hands clenched in his jacket pockets, his face set, and his shoulders squared. He did not talk. Indeed he did not utter a word all the way. On the other hand he took such long strides that, every few yards, Sue had to break into a little trotting run to keep up with him.

But Sue did not want to talk. She only glanced now and then at the tall well-knit figure and took in rejoicingly the masculine readiness for combat that looked out boldly from his eyes. She was at once breathless with haste and speechless with happiness. It was (to date) the moment of her life, when Adams stalked past the plain-clothes man, irreproachable in grey and a new red tie which he had bought for the occasion. Adams was in his working clothes. But then he wore them like a prince or her favourite Wicked Baronet, or Robin Hood, or the Provost of Quarrier at the opening of a Jubilee Fountain, or the late Mr. Jack Sheppard, or anybody good and great known to Miss Susan Sim. He stalked past Robin (and the red necktie bought

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for *her*), with so noble an air that Sue, who had dropped a little behind the better to observe, was seized with a sudden emotion.

The tears rushed to her eyes. She fluttered forwards, and, taking the arm of her hero with a determined hook, she beamed love and admiration up into his face.

What did it matter if he shook her off roughly, and told her to behave herself? Sue Sim only loved him the more.



Colonel Hampden Jones had enthroned himself. He had a way of sitting in his office which was reminiscent of the courts-martial he had presided over. But he did not know Sue Sim. Her self-abasement in the matter of Adams made her only the more offhand and irresectuous with others of the sex of Adams - and Adam.

Besides she had renounced all policemen. And Robin Fergie was one, and this Jones man was another, only grievously married and not nearly so good-looking.

'Young woman,' said the Chief Constable of Kentigernshire, 'what is your name?'

'Susan Sim,' said the lady promptly, and what's yours?'

'You must not ask me questions - do you hear?'

'I hear,' said Sue, quite unconvinced, 'but where I come frae - turn about's fair play!'

'Silence, girl!' cried the autocrat. And the catechism proceeded.

'When did you see Miss Dent this morning, and what was she doing when you saw her?'

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Sue pinched up her mouth as if she had eaten sloes in October, and preserved the silence of the dumb.

'Do you hear me?' cried the Chief of Police with authority.

With a slight motion of the head Sue indicated that she heard.

'Then why don't you answer, girl?'

Sue shook her head.

The Colonel was in a fix. He was conscious that his two aids, Pearson and Gillespie, were sniggering behind his back. He dared not speak louder for fear of bringing his wife on the scene, when the fat would be in the fire indeed. Worst of all he knew that in a few minutes he would quite lose his temper. So he called one of the sniggering assistants.

'Here, you, Pearson, this young woman does not seem to be able to understand English - try her in your Scotch!'

So pronounced, the word is as ugly to a Scottish ear as an expectoration. Pearson was a slender young fellow, who because of his reputation as a wit, was allowed to wear his hair standing erect. He often made points and provoked laughter merely by rubbing it into different crests. His humour was illustrated by these manoeuvres.

'What's wrang wi' ye, lassie?' he asked, peering into her face. He spoke such mitigated dialect as he considered suitable for the ears of a superior and an Englishman.

Sue saw the pencil behind Pearson's ear, took it calmly out, rubbed her fingers through his hair so as to produce a wholly new and unedited topknot - at which even the Colonel smiled. Then taking the nearest piece of paper (which happened to be a

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Schedule wet from the Home Office awaiting filling up), she scrawled across it:

'He bade me be silent. I am!'

Pearson, hot with indignation, was not able to avoid Sue's deft fingers which at one swoop refitted the pencil behind his ear and flattened out his locks into a sort of rain-swirk, out of which stray bristles rose jerkily here and there.

But the Colonel took the paper and, for once, understood.

'Oh, I said 'Silence' did I? Well, now I say 'Speak.' And what I want to know is when and where you last saw your mistress, Miss Dent?'

Sue bobbed him the ghost of a curtsy, and answered, 'I saw her in her own father's library, and she was going in and shuttin' the door. Had she not a good right?'

'I am not asking or disputing her right. Answer me directly, or it will be the worse for yourself?'

'Worse for me,' cried Sue Sim, 'what would be worse for me? Tell me that - me an honest lass that never wronged nobody and never let anybody wrong her - far less a policeman. Speak ceevil and ye will be answered ceevil. Yours truly, Susan Sim!'

'I have no desire to do otherwise,' said Colonel Hampden Jones, who resolved never again to show his new spirit of energy, 'but I want to know if it is true that there was something peculiar about Miss Dent's appearance this morning?'

'There was naething ony ways peculiar,' said Sue. 'She had slippers on and walked sedate and sober like a 'sponsible person. *She* wasna a poleeceman!'

'Did she vanish when she went into the library?'

'Yes!' said Sue sternly.

'And how do you explain that? What was the

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reason that she vanished? How did you explain that to yourself?

'Och, very easy that,' said Sue Sim, 'she shut the door!'

'Take that girl away,' commanded the Colonel, who thought that he heard his wife's foot on the stair. 'I can make nothing of her. She is the stupidest girl I ever saw in my life.'

This, however, was not the opinion of Adams, to whom Sue related her experiences, with interludes, on the way home.

'Saul - Sue Sim!' he exclaimed proudly, 'but ye are a clever ane. The police boys didna get muckle oot o' you!'

And privately - his jealousy being assuaged to a gentle feeling that, after all, no man (even a policeman) could escape paying homage to Sue's charms - he added the crown to Susan Sim's night-out by the ever memorable whisper. 'I'm dooms prood o' ye, Sue, my lass, and - I didna mean to tell ye - but there's twa mirrors in the wardrobe - one a square panel, set high for putting on your hat, and the other full-length and bevelled at the edges!'

And immediately he had the breath choked out of him by the simple savage fierceness of Sue Sim's adoration.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE COWARDICE OF COLONEL JONES

Now as has been dimly adumbrated in this chronicle, Colonel Hampden Jones, Chief of the Kentigernshire Police, was not a very wise man. In especial, unwisdom presided over his relations with his wife – Edwitha of the ancient impoverished stock of the De Riverses. If their relations had been reversed, Mrs. Jones would have made an excellent Chief of Police, and the Colonel would never have caused the Daughters' Strike which paralyzed commerce within doors at 'The Armoury.' For Meg, Bertie, and the rest – even Vic of the lone hand, Thin-Red-Line Vic, who loved the military – would have come to the Colonel with their little scrapes and lesser peccadilloes.

But as to their actual mother – they would as soon have placarded the names of those who tried to kiss them in conservatories (or those whom they wished would try), upon the walls of Quarrier.

If (to suppose the impossible) the Colonel had been a very wise and subtle man instead of being actually as wise and subtle in his methods as a bull at variance with a pasture-gate, he would immediately have revealed to his wife all that had taken place at the Sue Sim - Hampden Jones interview. Nay, he would have seized Mercury by his flashing heels and forestalled him. He would have taken the lady into his confidence previously - even provided a place from which she might hear and see in comfort. But, alas for the Colonel, he did none of

these things. He said nothing. He even tried to cover up his track. And Pearson and Gillespie, his acolytes, were commanded to know nothing about the interview. In fact 'Hector' had taken all the pains in the world to make himself appear guilty.

Native wrong-headedness, a craven fear of his wife, and - what was most serious of all - an ignorance of the acoustic possibilities of hot-air pipes, had brought him to the verge of distraction.

'And so, sir,' said his wife, entering in a manner which would have been cyclonic if it had not been also threatening and austere, 'you have had a woman - a young woman, a pretty young woman - so called, here in this room, without my knowledge. I thought it was understood that in such a case I was to be present! So, Colonel Jones, I want none of your lies or your equivocations. *Who was the woman?*'

'There was no one here,' said the Colonel, rushing on his doom. 'It must have been Pearson speaking, my dear. He has, if you have remarked it, a somewhat feminine voice! Speak, Pearson. Let Mrs. Jones hear.'

'No, I have not at all remarked it - (Hold your tongue, Pearson). And I will trouble you not to my dear me,' said the lady, whose dress was of tin-plate black silk and her complexion of cramosie, as in the old ballads of Kentigernshire; 'there has been a woman here - one of those Dent House hussies, I make no doubt, and she did not come by herself, either. Oh no. She must have a guard of honour! For I saw that big blonde gardener loitering to take her back--!'

This at least was excellently observed. For the word describes the attitude of Adams exactly. He had 'loitered' for Sue Sim about the Court House

entrance and a little on either side, doing his painful hundred steps to-and-fro on the broad red Locharbriggs sandstone flags.

But Mrs Hampden Jones had not eyesight equal to her powers of hearing, or perhaps she might not have troubled about Sue Sim. She had, indeed, capital pairs of glasses for all possible emergencies, besides the pair ready to be erected on their handle of tortoise-shell. Only her daughters, for their own safety, took care that all except their mother's reading-glasses were frequently and opportunely lost. They turned up again, however, when the immediate danger was past.

So it came about that, with the best intentions in the world as to fidelity of observation, Mrs. Hampden Jones had mistaken Sue Sim for Aymer Valentine.

The huge rolling gait of the giant gardener she could not mistake. He was as unique as the Mid-Steeple.

Mrs. Hampden Jones' methods of inquisition lacked subtlety. From such a man she could have learned anything had she gone about it the right way. But her very passion blinded her. The memory of one or two incidents of long ago when, a young and light-hearted officer, Captain Hampden Jones had really skipped aside from the narrow path of an Indian officer on Simla leave, continually rankled. The poor man suffered the torments of (perhaps) a just but certainly too tardy-footed retribution. He was never believed again, and the feeblest attempts at defence were accepted as proofs of guilt. He had not the strength of mind to say, 'Go, hang, Edwithal!' as other men would have done, so he became more and more his wife's whipping-boy and *souffre-*

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douleur, upon whom she vented a temperament not now to be calmed by ways more equable.

'That woman!' was her accusation.

'Who was she?' her query.

And now for his sins the Colonel denied and persisted in his denial. Worse still, he called upon Pearson and Gillespie, his peons, to forswear themselves in his defence.

Pearson deposed that he had seen no woman that day except the lady then present. And Gillespie, determined to do the thing cleanly, took oath that, except in the presence of the Procurator Fiscal and officers of the law, no lady was ever allowed to see the Chief of Police at all. He went to find the printed regulations as to the point.

This had the effect of turning the flood of domestic wrath from the Colonel. But the relief was only temporary.

'Of course,' she said, addressing Pearson coldly, 'you have been ordered to lie. You try to protect your master, and you don't even do it well. I heard the woman - though she said but little. You, Pearson, and you, Gillespie, have forfeited my confidence, and as for my husband, it is a quarter of a century since he possessed even the least vestige of right to it. *He knows why!*'

The poor Colonel could only bow his head, while the youthful minions held their peace with determined peacefulness. For they knew well who was the head of that office and of all that concerned the administration of police in the County of Kentigern.

I shall not forget this, Mr. Pearson, and you, Mr. Gillespie. I had hoped better things of you. Now Hector, come this way - I wish to speak to you in

private!’

She sailed out, the harsh silk rasping the doorposts, and the Colonel, with no tucker in his bones, meekly followed after.

There was a pause, and then Gillespie said in solemn pulpit tones, ‘The prayers of the congregation are desired on behalf of Hector Hampden Jones, at present in mortal agony!’

‘Shut up, Gillespie - she may hear us!’

On this occasion - SHE did not, but the listening ears of the four Jones girls did, and their feelings as to the poltroonery of the clerks were expressed by the words, perfectly unjust, but wholly natural in the circumstances:

‘Oh, for one hour of Marcus!’

Marcus could put to silence their mother, and they knew no power in Heaven, on earth, or under the earth, that could do as much.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE FIRST ARREST

If Miss Rachel Dent had any enemies, always excepting herself, events certainly seemed to be serving them well.

Lieutenant Grant, who had recovered the official edge of his mind by a course of drastic self-discipline, could summarize them for himself, and the evidence, if not amounting to guilt, was at least enough to convict her of having been the means of her father's death, possibly in a fit of angry jealousy.

There was her outburst against an obviously innocent though foolish stepmother - the whole course of her conduct during the inquiry, the ill grace with which she had taken part in the search, the determined keeping to her own room except when on her way to and from the Squirrel Tree, her possession of a secret way of entrance into and departure from the library and the four mysterious slips found in her rooms. She could open the outer door or Garden Port. Some inner passage leading out of the library was also known to her. She had tampered with the contents of the decanter in the same way as had been done on the occasion of the death of Mr. Patrick Dent. She had replaced the whiskey in the empty decanter and had forthwith vanished. She had been seen, almost in the act, both by Susan Sim and himself.

There was, in all this, quite enough to justify an apprehension, but on the other hand, Grant did not see how to detach the innocent from the guilty. If

Rachel were tried for the murder of her father (and it was obvious that the motive for wishing to get rid of him was contained in the will she had so foolishly and triumphantly proclaimed), the story of Aymer and her Squirrel-Tree Post Office could hardly be kept secret.

Though Grant was growing more and more convinced that the third will was a forged one, or at any rate left behind for the purpose of misleading justice, he had no proof of this, and in the case of Miss Rachel's being brought to trial, would have no option but to produce it.

On the whole a reaction against his late weakness was setting in. Grant felt that he had gone far enough in the way of yielding to pity. Duty took a sterner form in his mind. He could not wreck his future even to please Aymer - all the more that he had nothing to hope for from her. That arrogant Chancery tutor blocked the way - as no one knew so well as himself, with half-a-score of copies of her letters to Marcus in his private file.

Still, it was with a very great bitterness in his heart that Luiz made up his mind to what was manifestly his duty. He had been a full month at Dent House. The authorities were looking impatiently for some result of these lengthy inquiries. The Fiscal grew restive. The Colonel was openly mutinous. Grant had not the smallest doubt that reports unfavourable to him were being dispatched to headquarters behind his back. And though he did not dread them much personally, yet their effect on the situation might be serious.

Any day he might find himself superseded - and the new man would not have any of his consideration for Aymer Valentine. On the whole he

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judged that it was better to take immediate action than to wait. With the Judge to back him, he thought he could ward off anything serious from Aymer, but if he delayed, and especially if he were forced to place the third will in the hands of his successor, the position of Aymer might be not a whit better than that of her cousin.

Should he lay the matter before Judge Thorald?

That was the question which agitated him gravely. On the whole he thought he had better not. In this matter Judge Thorald would certainly see only Aymer Valentine - consider her solely. And doubtless, for her sake, he would advise that no action be taken. But then again, Grant knew that action of some kind was becoming more and more inevitable every day. Otherwise any power to help which at present he possessed would be lost to him.

He walked to Quarrier and sent a coded message summoning a couple of headquarters men whom he could trust. They would be ready for him tomorrow morning. He called round at Brown's Garage and retained a closed 25 h.p. carriage. One of the men for whom he had wired was a good chauffeur and could take entire charge.

The arrest of Miss Rachel Dent, charged with the murder of her father was therefore resolved for the afternoon of Saturday. This was Friday morning, and Luiz Grant had twenty hours in which to meet the innocent eyes of Aymer Valentine and feel himself a traitor and a spy, the breaker up of household peace - all indeed that she had called him at the door of her cousin's chamber.

Tomorrow Miss Rachel, now fully restored, would take her camp stool and stroll away in the direction of the Squirrel Tree with Aymer's letter in her

pocket.

The 25 h.p. would be waiting in the green shade of the great Dent firs where the two avenues met, hidden just a little round the corner of the left hand entrance. Miss Rachel would be asked to enter and they would be within the courtyard of the County Prison before a soul was the wiser. Grant remembered with a certain relief that the head of the prison of Quarrier was a plain man bred to his business, with a vast reverence for detectives from headquarters. He gave thanks that no Mrs. Hampden Jones would have to be reckoned with there.

As it was, the matter was bitter enough - he had almost said 'degrading enough' without that. And all day he had before him, clear as an advertisement, the angry reproachful eyes of Aymer Valentine. 'Traitor!' 'Spy!' she would say - and as he acknowledged, not wholly without reason.

The headquarters men arrived the next morning and were visited by Grant at the Ram's Horn Inn. They were brothers, Howard by name, of whom the elder was a sergeant, and the younger only too young for such a distinction - two good, silent, reliable men who, though policemen and detectives, could yet look like other men. Joseph, the younger, was the certificated chauffeur. Him Grant directed to go to Brown's Garage and make himself familiar with the 25 h.p. while, as much to put in time and quiet his own nerves as anything else, he conducted the elder, Sergeant Robert Howard, over the ground, telling him as much as he deemed necessary of the circumstances.

They passed the bounds of the park, then skirted the lane wall. Yonder was the Squirrel Tree - there

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the way by which Marcus Hill either had come or would come with his letter. Not now could Grant extract and copy it.

In his own mind he had fallen too low even for that. And with a certain Oriental mysticism he repeated the words (for he knew the Bible, being the son of a declassed Scot), 'Why should a living man complain - a man for the punishment of his sins?'

In Grant's eyes today was the beginning of his real out-casting. No more would he be spoken to by Aymer. Mrs. Dent would not bow to him with that agreeable something combined of saucy defiance and the favour she extended to all personable young men. They were all mounting high above him - Richard Hissy, Sylvia Granger, Connel, Adams, and Susan Sim. They, at least, were honest defenders of the honour of their house - hirelings for the most part, but at least faithful to their salt.

But he - the sins of some past life had sunk him lower than the rascal horse-boy who put in his odd time poaching. He was, for the punishment of his sins, a 'tec,' and there was not one about Dent House, from Aymer to that same Jo McCormick, who would not heartily despise him.

But stay - there was one. And he at this moment was walking leisurely across the smooth-shaven sward to meet them. Judge Thorald had no popular prejudices, and Grant saw him come with a sudden lightening of the chest and a violent wish to confide in some one sympathetic - someone of the same *metier* as himself though immensely higher, in the social scale.

Almost for the first time Luiz Grant saw Judge Thorald approaching without jealousy of his superior intellect, his amazing power of seeing into

the heart of things. There, at least, was the one man who would appreciate all that he was trying to do, and that from a standpoint wholly professional.

The Judge advanced towards them, swaying his slim body almost as he did his gold-headed cane, lightly and delicately, his straw hat in perfect colour harmony with his complexion, and his light grey flannel suit, the button of the Legion of Honour making the sole, brilliant point of his attire. (He had gained it by unravelling a tenebrous affair at Chandernagore, the despair of French local practitioners). This Judge Thorald wore, not from any vanity, from which he was conspicuously free - so far, that is as concerned the opinion of his fellows. But it imparted to the slim youthful figure, the well-cut coat, the flowered waistcoat, and easy insolent walk, a jaunty foreign touch that pleased the wearer in the exact proportion in which it was likely to offend the prejudices of the average heather-mixtured, knickerbockered, gun-patch-on-shoulder, country gentleman - with opinions on the game laws which rendered all politics other than his own absurd and insulting.

Judge Thorald had no prejudices - about the chase either of grouse or of men. Life was a gift, and he enjoyed it. But death was no evil - because, having been so long in India where they are enlightened on this subject, he knew what he knew. His easy versatility, his offhand contempt, were an offence to the lairds about, whose ambition was limited to drawing in their rents, getting poachers three months, and setting up a motor car.

Judge Thorald knew this and rejoiced. He liked Grant better than any of his neighbours - which is not to say that he would not overreach him to his

own loss if so be that his favourite Aymer might escape any danger.

'Ah, Grant,' he said, waving an airy salute with the gold knob of his Penang lawyer, 'out on reconnaissance duty?' (he glanced towards Howard). 'One of your men - a sergeant, eh? And young at the business? Something important has been turning up, eh, Grant? You had not time to come over? An arrest - surely not? But of course you know your own business best!'

All this was spoken with the frankest and most careless air, and completely took in Sergeant Howard, but did not succeed with Luiz Grant, whose mentality was more after the Judge's own manner.

'More getting ready for eventualities than anything actually decided,' said Grant, hoping intensely that the Judge might not be tempted to prolong his ramble in the direction of Brown's Garage or come across Detective Joseph Howard in the act of testing the powers of the 25 h.p.

'Ah,' said the Judge meditatively, 'nothing surely that would hurt my little favourite - and, if I mistake not, yours?'

Grant blushed under his tan, more because he was conscious of the sidelong glance of Sergeant Howard's eye than of the Judge's persiflage.

'You may rest assured of that,' he said sharply.

'Well, that is a little easier said than done,' murmured the Judge, his eyes fixed dreamily on the distant hills. 'Poor Miss Rachel - I suppose it was bound to come. But all the same it is a pity. I understand your position, Lieutenant, and be sure that departmentally I sympathize with your view of the case. But believe me, it is somewhat hasty - yes, I should characterize it as a hasty action. But then -

if all your work were to go for nothing, and Lieutenants Ediss or Fraser were to be sent down - that would not suit your book, would it?’

‘As little as it would suit yours!’ said the detective, somewhat nettled, but the next moment ashamed.

After all, this man, with no possible personal motives, had given him the most valuable assistance, and the detective knew that his only desire was to shield one whom both of them knew to be innocent.

‘I beg your pardon!’ said Grant quickly.

‘And I yours,’ smiled the Judge. ‘We are at cross-purposes. I had no right to air my conclusions, even if I had been able to draw them. It is a species of conceit totally unworthy of men like you and me!’

And in a flash the two men, in spite of the awkwardness caused by the presence of Sergeant Howard, understood each other, and so far as this matter went, were reconciled.

‘Thank you,’ said the Judge, though there was nothing very apparent for which Grant needed to be thanked. ‘I must go home and think this over. I take it your intentions do not include - no, I thought not. You are right, only the matter will take some delicate handling. Good-bye!’

The Judge took himself off as easily and gracefully as he had come, looking upwards at the white drift of cirrus cloud athwart the blue lift, and noting with a naturalist's eye the first southerly flight of knots skimming landward from the unknown North where they nest.

He remarked the red on the hawberries and the scarlet hips.

‘It will be an early winter,’ he murmured, and set aside the problem of Aymer Valentine till he had

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freshened up his mind by the sights and sounds of the park - the sun-flecked feeding deer, the nibbling sheep, the browsing loud-breathing oxen that snuffled at him over the hedges, while all about him was the clean breath of the autumnal air that sent thrill after thrill through his blood.

And so, his mind resting, yet consciously toning itself for concentrated thinking, the Judge went airily home. At the stile he took the gold snuff-box out of his pocket, and for the first time since he had learned the secret of the Squirrel Tree, gazed long at the miniature on the lid.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE HEATHER HOUSE

It was one of those magnificently serene days characteristic of a Solway October, when summer seems to have returned with something of a sweet Sabbath charm that heightens its beauty. This year the woods about Dent had remained long green, heavy with the full-fed moisture of summer. Then suddenly they had flashed up, as in a night, into all yellows from straw to buttercup, and all reds from the far-extending scarlet glimmer of a belt of birches, to the sombre russet flecked with flame of the purple beeches girdling the park wall.

Overhead the sky abode a fine tender blue, the unseen haze rendering it infinitely remote, and trebling all terrestrial distances. And through, about, and under all this, Luiz Grant wandered, feeling vaguely debased and outcast. His reason told him he was doing right, but his conscience and that reproachful centre from which a man's feelings radiate (vulgarly named the pit of the stomach) shouted at him scornful names in three languages and several vernaculars.

Nevertheless he held to his purpose. He believed that Miss Rachel Dent was the agent of her father's death. All his investigations had at last settled down to this assurance - to which conviction, more than all, Miss Rachel's own actions had contributed. Indeed, ten times in an hour he was compelled to reconvince himself.

No, he did not set himself up to deal out responsibilities. He was there to establish facts, and whatever Miss Rachel's state of mind, the fact of her

access to the library was incontestable. Also, from the report of the analyst which he had in his pocket upon the contents of the spilled decanter, there had been an attempt to poison him by means of a swiftly acting vegetable alkaloid upon the nature of which Dr. Meiklejohn could not pronounce, but which was probably atropine in some form.

There remained nothing open to him but to proceed. At the same time that did not make the 'reproachful rat' gnaw any the less fiercely at the lower anchor-cables of his heart.

Manifestly unjust, but a fact all the same, as Lieutenant Grant reluctantly acknowledged to himself.

The House of Dent - so fairly set on its hill, with beneath it a far-extending champain and all the cossetted beauty of a perfectly kept country house - the maids busy within, the gardeners, the foresters, and the gamekeepers all about at their occupations - was like a besieged city that morning.

Grant knew well that this was the best time for his purpose, but then he wished to take Miss Rachel on one of the warrants he had obtained after the first hearing of the evidence. He had others bearing the names of Mrs. Fenwick Dent, Aymer Valentine, and Richard Hissy, which it was in his power and discretion to execute at the moment when he should judge it necessary.

But manifestly, if the shock to the household of Dent was not to be terrible - also in order to avoid an outbreak of public indignation against the supposed slayer of a father - the arrest must be done secretly, And the best time, manifestly, would be when Miss Rachel was returning from her visit to the Squirrel Tree.

THE AZURE HAND

It seemed to Grant that the morning would never wear itself away. Next, lunch was a still more terrible ordeal. He had not expected that Miss Rachel would come down. But, as Sylvia Granger had brought a message that her mistress would remain in her own rooms, Miss Rachel had dressed with the aid of Aymer, probably to be ready for her trip. She was in the room when Grant entered, and held out her hand with a quite unwonted geniality. Her face was brighter. She was younger - almost, indeed, as if she herself were going to a rendezvous with her sweetheart, instead of only carrying the love-letter of another in her pocket.

'Good-morning, Mr. Grant,' she said, 'we have seen little of you for some time. Our fault, principally. But I have not been well. I have troublesome fainting fits, and indeed if it were not for this brave little girl (at this point Aymer appeared) I do not know what I should do.'

Aymer put an arm about her cousin's gaunt frame, and reaching up a hand, affectionately corrected the direction of a stray lock, rendered rebellious by Miss Rachel's habit of nervously jerking her head.

Never had Luiz Grant suffered as he did during the progress of that meal. He was set to carve but his agitation was manifest - so much so, indeed, that Miss Rachel bade Aymer relieve him of the duty.

'Bachelors, I see, are like old maids,' she said, with unusual cheerfulness. 'They are given to reading at meals and wanting their carving done for them!'

And to this day Grant does not remember what he answered.

At any rate he was resolving that never again

would he take charge of such an investigation, though hitherto delicate family affairs had been considered his strong point in the Department. Spoil his future – well, what matter? At all events he would not again have to endure the exquisite torments of that eternal half hour.

At last it was over, and Grant, being smiled upon, nodded to and delivered, went forth, calling himself over and over the identical 'Judas' name he had denied under the accusation of Aymer Valentine. He put in the time seeing that the Howards were in their places and the back gate of the prison (which opened on a deserted lane) ready for instant entrance. The keeper asked for no explanations. Anything that Lieutenant Grant ordered he was ready to carry out.

But on his return to Dent House his troubles began afresh. Quite unexpectedly he stumbled upon the entire Hampden Jones clan in the lobby of the house and was compelled to follow them into the drawing-room.

'I have something to talk to you about, Grant,' said the Chief of Police, 'otherwise you would not have caught me here at this hour of the day, tagging after these women and chicks!'

Naturally he said this out of hearing of his wife, who marched sternly on, saying over to Connel, who was endeavouring vainly to explain, 'Such a pity that neither Mrs. Dent nor Miss Rachel are at home – so strange – I had expected – and after choosing a day which suited the Colonel – it is certainly *very* strange!'

Edwitha held her hand so far back and strode onward with such majesty that the girls massed behind her could not (and did not) restrain

themselves from unfilial tittering.

She looked at the furniture and decorations through her tortoiseshell quizzing-glass as if she would stare down the brass-faced grandfather's clock on the stairway, and cause the hunting trophies over the doors to drop their yellow teeth and mouldy antlers. And all the way as she went, she continued animadverting on the strangeness of the fact that she, Mrs. Hampden Jones, on her first visit of condolence to the family, should have to be received by Aymer Valentine, who was a minx – and what was worse, a poor relation.

Still, so far as her second escort was concerned there was no help for it. Grant fidgeted because he knew that at that moment Miss Rachel would be escaping by her private way of the library and the Garden Port, across the shrubberies into the woods – and so, camp-stool under her arm, on to the great glossy-skinned beech, where under the leaves the Squirrel's Post-box lay so snug. He had meant to watch her all the way.

But at any rate, he was certain that, in any case, Aymer would have an excellent *alibi*, and so far, would be well out of all knowledge of her cousin's misfortune.

Also he found after a while a doubtful, wistful sort of pleasure. Aymer sometimes looked his way with pleasant friendliness. In a few hours she would hate him. She would know that he was worse than the worst she had ever thought of him. And the hard young man, with the foreign blood and the curiously mystical nature, took a strange farewell pleasure in all that passed in the drawing-room at Dent, cherishing every chance word, hoarding every look, knowing well that these would be the last words and

looks Aymer would ever give him in kindness.

Even when he had withdrawn into a corner with the Colonel to satisfy that dense official as to his zeal, and to answer his stupidly persistent questions, he was more than a trifle distrait. His ear was over at the opposite window where Mrs. Hampden Jones, in her turn, was dealing out posers to Aymer as fast as a pack of cards.

It was half-past three when the bevy of Hampden Joneses said goodbye to Aymer Valentine. And even then Luiz Grant, his mind inquiet and his eyes scouring everywhere among the green boskages of the park, had to accompany them to the Lodge Gate. He was in fear of his life that they would take the left-hand path where was stationed the 25 h.p. It was slightly nearer, though not of so fine a surface as the main avenue. But he did not know Edwitha, of the race of De Rivers. She expanded like a filling balloon between the widely set avenue oaks. She grew a foot taller in honour of the cool roofing of green rustling so high overhead. Her foot trod ancestral approaches to seigneurial castles. She thrust herself forward rather than walked, balancing and becking at the landscape like a pouter pigeon before a mirror. She felt distinctly feudal, and she trod her hooves into the trembling earth with such determination that the third gardener, charged with the upkeep of the avenue, stopped in his task of raking leaves - to curse her, choicely and horticulturally.

But - she held Grant. With her glassy eye she held him, and he answering at random, his mind elsewhere, was set down as a bigger fool than Hampden - who previously had served as her superlative in that line.

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Grant knew that his men would be in their places. But he also knew that neither one nor the other of the Howards would move a step without him. So that the chance might be lost - perhaps for ever. He might be losing his future, thus exchanging inanities with Mrs. Hampden Jones, while a bevy of tittering girls giggled an ironic chorus behind.

It was not till the bitter end of a long avenue that Grant could get away. And even at the Lodge Cottage, longed for by Adams and already furnished, principally with double-mirrored wardrobes, by Sue Sims, Luiz Grant would not have escaped, save for the fact that Mrs. Hampden Jones had begun to run over in her mind the reasons for the Colonel's silence, and had decided that it must be on account of the youthful charms of Miss Aymer Valentine.

Aymer Valentine, indeed! What did the men see in her? And her husband? He so blind to the attractions of his own daughters - the best of which indeed really existed, but were very carefully hidden by the young women from the ken of their mother. The lady had an explanation (in monologue) to demand from Hampden on account of this most suspicious silence. It would have been just the same if he had showed himself full of attentions and bright witty conversation - if such things had been conceivable of the Colonel.

At any rate the rustling lady had him either way - a fact which he well recognized, and on the whole set himself to abide with fortitude as a decree of a mysterious if all wise Providence.

And as soon as their backs were turned, with a cordial and comprehensive imprecation, Grant sped round the first turning, glided into the bushes and leaped the wall of the little side lane where he had

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left Sergeant Robert Howard at his post within sight of the Squirrel Tree.

Here he found the Sergeant, obviously greatly uneasy, and to him in a whisper he explained the cause of his delay, and, in return, asked for information,

'I dare not move,' said Sergeant Howard, 'not even to warn Jo. She is very suspicious, and came to the edge of the wall three times. No, of course she did not see me. I took care of that, sir!'

'But usually she simply stands and exchanges the letters as she leans beside the tree,' said the Lieutenant.

'Not today, sir - not at all today!' Sergeant Robert Howard answered; 'something has frightened her - she is as nervous as a cat! Either she is waiting for someone, or she suspected a watch being kept!'

'That is impossible,' said Grant; 'no one knew except our three selves - not even the governor of the prison.'

'Ah,' said the Sergeant, unconvinced, 'well, it's a fact that I would have had the letter before now, but I simply dared not move. Even after she had dropped it and taken the other away in her little bag with the sketching traps under her arm, she came back and looked up and down the lane. Three separate times, sir! Yet I cannot think she suspected anything of *our* business, for she leaned her arms on the wall and, as I am telling you, looked up and down quite at ease.'

'She might have been marking time till the Hampden Joneses went,' Grant suggested doubtfully.

'More like waiting on some one, sir, if I may make so bold?'

Grant ran over in his mind all the possibilities - he seemed suddenly to have got beyond the limit of mere probabilities.

Aymer? No, he had been with her till the last moment. She was being persecuted under Edwitha Hampden Jones. He had heard. He had seen.

'Did any one pass while you waited?' he asked with a sudden thought.

'Yes,' said Howard - one - a girl, tall, with flaxen hair dressed low on her neck, a stylish hat, black trimmed with white and a plume - but all very quiet - having the air of a superior servant or companion, I should say. Miss Rachel nodded to her careless-like.'

'That,' said Grant to himself, 'must have been Sylvia Granger, Mrs. Fenwick Dent's maid.'

'A handsome wench?' he queried aloud, glancing to Sergeant Howard, whose feminine susceptibility was in inverse ratio to his own.

'Handsome as they make them, sir,' said the Sergeant enthusiastically, 'but sober, sedate, and looked as if she would have a little pile laid by. Oh, very superior person indeed, sir, so far as I could make out.'

'Did she reply to Miss Rachel's salutation, Howard?'

'I make no doubt, sir,' said the gallant detective, 'but you must understand I was too far off to see. Of course, sir, the like of her would not curtsy like a common country-woman, and you can't make out these new-fangled bows very far. Now in my mother's day, they dipped as if ducking for apples - and so all my sisters were taught.'

'Never mind your sisters just now,' said the Lieutenant, 'follow me and keep well down in the

shrubbery.'

Robert Howard gave his chief a 'leg up' the wall out of the lane, and then with a grasp of the hand in return was beside him.

'She went this way, sir!' he said, in a low voice; 'but gently. She was not in a hurry to go back, sir. I saw as much myself.'

Grant knew the daily habits of Miss Rachel. She usually made some pretence at sketching, and after sitting uneasily with a sketchbook on her knee, she went on to the little heather house which Adams had done up at her request had fitted with rustic chairs and one solitary table of zinc like those of a French *cafe*.

'Stay where you are, Howard,' said Grant, 'and I will see if your brother is at the corner with the car!'

'Oh, Jo's all right, you be sure!' said the Sergeant.

Grant knew this too, and indeed it was not Jo whom he wanted to watch, but to scan with his pocket glass the frontages of the two houses, now at about equal distances from him.

Dent House was clearly to be seen with the naked eye, and he could make out Miss Aymer on the terrace looking anxiously forth, with Adams labouring quietly below. Then, looking to the south, but this only through the glass, he discerned the wicker garden chair behind Laverock Hall and the ascending smoke of Judge Thorald's marvellous cigarettes. There was the little table, the book flat on his plaided knees, and the tumbler with the straw in it. For the Judge took advantage of the least heat to install himself in a sheltered spot in the afternoon. He called it toughening his lungs for the winter.

Grant came down, more than satisfied. Assuredly Miss Rachel had not yet gone home. The Judge had

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not betrayed him - for he had assured himself that Judge Thorald had divined his intentions.

So doubtless - beyond all question indeed, Miss Rachel was still lingering in the Heather House. For what purpose he could not divine. But that made no matter. The rubber was not yet lost. With the sergeant by his side, all the neighbours accounted for, and Miss Rachel obliged to take the lonely homeward track by the avenue forks, it would be easy to carry out the arrest.

And, he told himself, the fact that it would be dusk in half an hour rather helped than otherwise. So much the more secretly would all the arrangements be carried out.

Together they would watch the Heather House yet a little longer.



First, therefore, they worked their way nearer - as close, in fact, as the underbrush afforded them cover. It was quite at hand now, and they could see the solidly thatched peak which held down the big dressed 'turves' out of the moss, thick enough for the short heather to bloom on every year - that is, with due watering, which indeed was a thing rarely lacking in Kentigernshire.

They watched the low door over which the twisted tendrils of a hop-vine victoriously climbed. They could see little, for the door was half closed, and the pent of the heather descended in purple eyebrows over the small diamond-paned windows.

Miss Rachel was there - within that narrow octagon. Grant's heart gave a leap - whether of pain or pleasure it would have been hard to say. For

there, leaned carefully against the wooden lintel, was a small folding easel, and on the ground, lying on a waterproof, the sketchbook and box of colours he had so often seen in Miss Rachel's hand.

They waited so, in the quiet of that October close of day. There was no sound but the rooks noisily cawing their way homewards from the early ploughed fields, still fat from their vegetable feast of the harvest and now more boisterous than ever with abundant animal food out of the red-brown upturned furrows.

After they had passed, there fell a surprising quiet. The birds went to their deeper retreats. The sun began to dip, and a blue haze invaded the valleys, appearing as it seemed from nowhere. The wind fell suddenly. The hush was almost painful. Still they waited. But yet could not wait much longer. The twilight would come and after that the dark.

A look of fixed resolution - almost the look of a forlorn hope leader, came over Grant's face. It was the last call of duty and he obeyed. He touched Sergeant Howard on the arm and the two of them advanced towards the Heather House.

There was still a lingering ray of sunlight on the summit of the little knoll. Grant pushed the door open. Miss Rachel was sitting there, smiling gently. Before her was a white-spread rustic table, with two cups upon it - empty.

She was quite dead.

And on the rug upon which her feet were placed, slowly fading away - they saw the print of an azure hand.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE RISING OF QUARRIER

And then upon Quarrier fear fell. And not only upon Quarrier but on all the county - not on the county alone but upon all the lands of Solwayside. The farmers went home from the market in bands. Nor man nor woman felt safe in their own house, or seated in their garden. Death planed overhead imminent as a hawk in the blue - but what was more terrible, wholly unseen.

That night about the mansion and heather-house Grant kept watch with his men, together with all the reinforcements he could get from Colonel Jones. The rush had begun for the scene of the second and far more mysterious tragedy. Somehow the death of Mr. Patrick Dent had failed to touch the populace - the secrets of the library, Miss Rachel's passage, the blue stain, were all carefully kept from them. A hale and hearty elderly gentleman, respected in the neighbourhood, an active Justice of the Peace, and a good friend of the working man, was dead. That was all.

But that a murder, deeply planned and subtly executed, had been committed, few believed. The facts which would have stirred the public imagination were withheld. Any excitement was confined to the family and servants. And the unanimity of the latter in staying on, of itself prevented general gossip.

Aymer Valentine's influence was strong with almost all. Conditions of interest held the others. But

all the more because of this there was no holding the people now. They came in literal thousands till the lawns were black with them. They broke down the feeble guard of police, and but for the turning out of the Territorial corps of Border Light Infantry, would have carried off the Heather House piecemeal as if it had been built of picture postcards.

Luckily Grant had foreseen something of the result of the event, and had ordered up reserves from every point. His own career did not weigh with him now. He had ceased even to think of it. He had been proven in the wrong in so terrible a manner. The murderer had asserted his presence in a fashion so conclusive of the innocence of Miss Rachel that for the moment Grant could form no other theory. He could only do his duty according to the immediate necessities of the case - necessities which, at present, changed from hour to hour.

But the sudden fury of the people forced his hand and broke through all calculations. The outburst, strangely enough, was directed chiefly against the ladies of the house. Mrs. Fenwick Dent, who hitherto less than any one had been involved, became the butt of the popular anger. She was a stepmother. The injured girl her martyr. Miss Rachel had been conveniently removed so that her patrimony might become the prey of the stepmother-supplanter. Such, or somewhat in that vein, was the fairy tale which the ignorant imagined to themselves.

Strangely enough Aymer Valentine, though she underlay a share of suspicion, escaped the extremity of hatred which pursued Mrs. Dent. Her youth, her beauty, her popularity with the people of the estate and of the town to whom she was known, served her

well.

Nevertheless, when the granite-hewers of Quarrier threatened to break in the door of Dent House and execute some vague ignorant popular vengeance – it was Saturday night and the Ram's Horn brew stirred hotly in their thick noodles – Grant found himself shoulder to shoulder with a couple of athletic young men, each armed with a cudgel and the regulation Webley revolver. Immediately in front of him the Judge took short grips of his gold-headed Penang lawyer, while in his left he manipulated a small but serviceable 'Browning' with as nonchalant an air as if it had been the gold-snuffbox out of his waistcoat pocket.

These were Aymer's First Life Guards.

The police, of course, could only defend themselves with their truncheons, and even these they were slow in using. But Marcus and Billy, having no reason for any such fine official reticence, laid about them so ardently with their cudgels that the Judge, lighter in body as well as older in years, was gradually thrust behind them.

But his clear voice was uplifted as he stood on the higher step, the courage of the man not one whit abated, and the clean dull surface of the Browning only broken by the gleam of a gold ring on the Judge's right forefinger laid lightly on the trigger.

'Men, I warn you that if you persist you will be fired upon. We are here with the law on our side, defending ourselves legitimately. I am a Justice of the Peace, and I will read the Act with regard to tumultuous assemblies.'

His voice was heard no longer though he continued to read in dumb show. A howl of anger went up from the black seething mass.

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'Fetch them down. Burn the witches - not a Dent left to heir the old name. Father and daughter they have murdered! Out o' the road, ye blinkin' old he-crow - to the devil with you and your riot acts - what do Quarrier men care for you or your policemen?'

'Quarrier men would care a great deal,' said the Judge, and his voice rose so beautifully clear that it seemed to be speaking in the ear of every man there. 'But you - you are no Quarrier men, you scrapings of three good kingdoms. Let any Quarrier man, born and bred, step forward and I will talk to him!'

They pushed one forward, but he had supped too unwisely well at the Ram's Horn, and so sank at the feet of Marcus and Billy who rolled him gently away with their booted toes.

'There,' cried the Judge; 'a drunkard or two and the rest incomers who know nothing about the matter. Justice will be done, doubt it not. I myself promise it to you. But not by you. You have men to deal with - not frightened women. You have the officers of the law, and those whom they have summoned to aid them as every good citizen is bound to do. We will do our duty. We will protect this house and its inmates, and if you make another rush like the last, your blood will be on your own heads. Be sure that we shall fire.'

The alternative was one which the mob found a difficulty in accepting. They had come for blood - to avenge the wrongs of a persecuted daughter done to death, the last of the Dents of Dent. Yet they were neither so set on vengeance nor so deep in drink that they dared affront the muzzles of three revolvers, supported by the legal rights inferred by the presence of the entire brigade of County Police.

Respect for law is strong in Scotland and extends

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to the youngest and greenest constable who donned but yesterday His Majesty's uniform. The rear ranks of the rioters began to thin and ebb away - the front ones to look behind them, and presently the trampled lawn of Dent House was as bare as a man's hand.

The quarrymen disappeared silently into the woods, keeping clear of Grant's detachment stationed about the little mound where stood the dilapidated Heather House.

The body of Miss Rachel lay in the operating theatre of the Quarrier Hospital. Chauffeur Jo Howard had conveyed her thither in the very 25 h.p. which had been made ready to take her to another but hardly less tragic destination.

To Grant all that now seemed so distant and unthinkable that he might have commanded these things in a previous existence. He had however the presence of mind to warn the Howards to say nothing about the intended arrest even to his chiefs, whom he knew to be on their way. And he felt that he could depend on the sergeant and his brother.

All the while Adams had been posted with the firehose at the Garden Port, and Sue Sim, being unable to get to her lover, had been telling him from above to 'drop it and come straight inside.' Richard Hissy protected the ladies in their rooms and went anxiously from one to the other followed by the restless eyes of Sylvia Granger.

With the exception of the Judge, Mrs. Fenwick Dent's maid was by far the most self-possessed person in or about the House of Dent during these anxious minutes after the park walls had been taken by escalade, the gates smashed back from their hinges, and the house defences threatened to go too

in the fury of the first rush. But Adams had stood to his post, the full head of the Quarrier water supply behind him, taken by privilege straight from the main. Adams, rendered heroic by the presence of Sue reaching desperately towards him from the window above, let the head of the column have the full force of a forty-foot jet three inches in diameter. The discharge of three revolvers would not have surprised the men more.

‘See now, Hugh,’ Susan only used her lover’s Christian name in great emergencies; ‘see you, come up here and fire the water at them from the window beside your Sue –’

‘Safer, maybe,’ said Adams, turning a glistening stream through an arc of 60 degrees - that is, from wall to wall - ‘only, Sue, there would be no water to throw. It comes from this plug at my foot.’

The manner of speech of Adams was sometimes reminiscent of the never-to-be-forgotten fact that the Solway is only an odd piece of the North Channel and that Ireland is just one-and-twenty miles away. The harshness of his r’s, and the softness of his heart, testified that he was a man of the Wigtonshire Machars.

But after all was over and only the police guards kept watch about the house, coming and going, changing and countersigning, Adams and Sue met in the centre greenhouse. There, under the great palm, which had been brought by Patrick Dent, and in the dripping heat of the moisture-clouded glass, the two met to discuss the altered circumstances.

Adams was somewhat excited by his successful defence of the Garden Port. Mr. Grant indeed had been too preoccupied to give him a word of praise, but even he had nodded as he passed, brow-bent

upon his affairs. But the Judge, Old Judge Theory, always gracious, had told him he had deserved well of his salt, and that he should not be forgotten by the family he had served.

'Moreover,' said Adams, 'I have great news for you, Sue. Tomlinson ran at the first sound of the rioters, and he has had a van all afternoon at the door of the Lodge taking away his furniture. He is gone to stay with his niece in Quarrier. He says that with his weak heart he cannot stand such ongoing. So, Sue, the Lodge will be vacant - and who is there to put in it but you and me?'

Adams had expected to be rewarded by an outbreak of enthusiastic affection, but Sue, as usual, disappointed his previsions and remained melancholy and distraught. She did not even rest her cheek on his arm and rub it softly up and down, as was her habit and his pleasure.

'Fain would I be,' said Sue wistfully, her eyes on the ground, 'but I am not so foolish as to think any such thing. Now, Adams - consider. We have lost our master and then our mistress. If the estate goes to Mrs. Dent, it will be some lover of that sleek besom Sylvia Granger's that will get the Cottage. Has she not been looking over it three or four times already, even in Tomlinson's day. What was she doin' there, can you tell me that? And even yesterday, when poor Miss Rachel -'

'Lassie, think what you are saying?' cried Adams, horrified out of measure.

'I'm saying nothing but what all the world kens,' said Sue, her ideas clearing with opposition; 'it is true that Granger may yet rule the roost here. For she has done her mistress's errands so long that she has her under her thumb. And then, Hughie - it's

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neither you nor me that will ever sit in that Lodge. She will bring her swarm -'

'But, Sue,' Adams argued, 'she will not want to be married and leave her mistress, if so be that she is to rule here -'

'Married, no,' said Sue with utter scorn; 'I said nought about that. I said she would be the queen bee and that her followers would pack about her as thick as a hive on a branch in swarmin' time. And think you, Adams, that the Lodge will not be wanted for one of them?'

'I see nothing very far wrong with Granger,' Adams objected doubtfully, 'she has always been ceevil -'

'I dare say *you* see no wrong - ye are a man,' snapped Sue. 'For the same reason she is civil. Only another woman can tell - about Granger, I mean. Oh, I'm none jealous, lad. If I missed you the morn, I could fit myself the day after, but there's the Lodge and the bonny upstairs room and the wardrobe with mirrors of plate-glass - ye said plate, I think?'

Adams did not know whether he had said plate or not, but at any rate, plate they were. Which caused Sue to assure him of her unalterable affection in as warm a manner as the crystal sides of the palmhouse would allow.

'There will be a terrible *tirrivee* (disturbance), at any rate,' said Adams sadly, 'and us just beginning to settle and be quiet. But it will have to be finished one way or the other, and meantime there's no head gardener, and the Lodge is empty - or will be this very night—'

'Adams!' Sue clapped her hands. 'It's none safe to leave an empty house so near the road, and the quarrymen neither to haud nor bind. They might

burn it. You have a gun, Adams? And cartridges or whatever you put into it. Go and shift your bed to the Lodge, Adams. You are head gardener now, and responsible. None can say you nay. Besides it will be to your credit, whoever comes - and the lawyers will mind if the owner does not.'

'It'll be something lonesome,' said Adams, who had used his stock of courage somewhat freely in an earlier part of the day when called upon to defend the Garden Port; 'the fellows I gied a ducking to may be inclined to bear malice. Besides, THE THING that sat down with Patrick Dent in the library, and with his daughter in the Heather House, might take it into its head to gie me a call!'

This, Sue admitted, was not a cheerful prospect.

'I would like to keep the Lodge wi' ye, Hugh,' she said with more tenderness, 'but for the present it would not be douce. There's my half year to finish, and my notice, and the registrar for the lines, and last of all the minister. But I'll be wi' you in spirit, Adams, as the good book says, besides, ye hae the gun! And the policemen are near by at the Heather House!'

'It's no doubt a fine thing - to hae the police,' said Adams, 'there were a good few of them juiking about - and they did not greatly help Miss Rachel that ever I heard of!'

Sue suddenly put up her apron to her eyes and at least pretended to cry into it.

'Oh, Hughie,' she sobbed, 'you don't really love me - though you say you do.'

'I never did,' Adams vindicated himself indignantly from using the word forbidden in Kentigernshire. 'I said that I wad *dee* for ye. Yes, I micht hae said that!'

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'Well then,' cried Sue, 'here's your chance.'

'But I dinna want to dee,' insisted Adams with plaintive remonstrance. 'I want to marry you decently and-'

'Live in the Lodge - so do I, Hugh. Here's my hand on it. And the way to get me *and* the Lodge, is to go there this very night and hold possession till ye are turned out. If that woman Granger rules the roost, ye may have to flit. But in any case there will be fine testimonials - from the lawyer, and Mr. Grant, and the Judge. I'll wager ye will get anither place for the askin' - though maybe never another Lodge where the wardrobe wi' the plateglass mirrors and brass handles would be so well set off. Ye said brass handles, I think, both above and to the two under drawers?'

Adams had not so declared. As a matter of fact these were in white metal composition. Sue Sim reflected a little, and then said with a sigh, 'I had kind o' set my mind on brass, but I'm no blamin' you, Adams. And after all, maybe imitation silver will be the more chaste!'

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

LIEUTENANT GRANT'S REPRIEVE

Swiftly October's shortening days fled by. Longer and more drear set in the nights - eerier and eerier came the sough of the winds from the Quarrier woods. A short-lived misty moon, all too soon hidden, heralded the procession of Orion, of Sirius, and the noble winter stars.

The crops were well in - the potatoes dug and cleaned, the fields bare save that here and there one could catch the deep metallic green of turnip fields, twinkling with the dew that never is sucked up by the sun of the brief brisk days that pass between the brumous haze of morning and the full mist of the gloaming which it needs Scots optimism to distinguish from a drizzle. Fine seasonable weather indeed as the folk said, but most Octoberish - and brown exceedingly.

Aymer was more closely shut in than ever. Sometimes Mrs. Dent sent for her to read aloud, and then, after a few pages, found herself tired and sent her away. The unknown fate of her last letter appalled her. For upon Miss Rachel was nothing found - neither that from Marcus, nor yet her own small square envelope. She had risked the gaze of curious policemen only to find that at the Squirrel's Hole under the foliage of the great Lodge beech, the cupboard was bare. Miss Rachel had deposited her letter and taken that of Marcus - yet neither of them was found, nor indeed did any inquest, public or private, subsequently reveal their whereabouts. Nor was the real purpose of Miss Rachel Dent's visits to the Squirrel's Hole ever commented upon. On this

point there seemed to be a conspiracy of silence.

Marcus and Billy stayed on at the Dent Arms, but owing to the danger of official suspicion - from the mere absence of any working theory, in fact - Aymer was far too closely cloistered to be able to see him. His promenades in the park precincts were over. Indeed, it is small wonder that Billy grew restless and that the bleak joys of a winter sojourn in the Alps (with a line of escape down the Maloja into Italy) began to appeal to him. It needed an absolute mandate from the Court of Chancery forbidding them to leave Scotland to make him settle down to life in Quarrier - where, however, he learned more of actual examinable matter from Marcus in a couple of months than had ever been impressed upon him during the years of their wanderings.

For the first time, since he could do no better, Billy applied himself to his books - and that with a sort of despair - to make the time pass, rather than from any higher motive.

As for Grant, it was pity to see him.

After the first astounding crash of his elaborate system about his ears, he had lost himself in the detail of the moment - this thing to be done, that other to be commanded. But when his chief, Colonel Matthew Henderson and the famous detective Caffarata (formerly of Manchester, afterwards of London and now on temporary loan to the Scottish authorities), came on the scene, they found a man without a theory - a tool and not a leader.

Henderson would have ordered him home immediately, but with the sympathetic sense of the Latin, Caffarata whispered in his ear, 'Let the man alone. He will come out of this. I have seen the like before. I have indeed passed that way myself. He has

been working on a system. All his hopes were fixed upon that which had become a certainty to him. He saw it crumble into dust about his feet, and the shock left him the automaton you see. But he will cast that off. He has his hand on the strings of the affair. He is ground fine - to razor's edge, needle's point - the easier blunted therefore. Discourage him now and you will never have the same man again. His confidence in himself will be ruined. Let him remain and work it off, and - he will end by finding the criminal. I give you my word for it.'

And Henderson, the keen-witted Scot, after shaking his head, ended by taking the great man's advice. He had been accustomed to judge by results, and if a man were stupid to get rid of him immediately. But Caffarata saw that Grant was suffering from temporary paralysis, and that it was the more marked because his faculties were really of the finest, his sensibilities of a delicacy unknown among races purely Occidental.

On the other hand Caffarata chafed at the multifarious restrictions of the Scottish law, which makes so strongly for the rights of the individual and circumscribes the action of the authorities.

'It is bad enough in England,' he grumbled, 'but there, after all, one *can* always find some idiot justice or stipendiary in a hurry to sign a committal. But in this confounded country all has got to pass through the hands of the Fiscal and the Sheriff.'

And of these two Kentigernshire officials he did not fail to express his opinion.

'I am a quiet man,' said Caffarata, who indeed looked it, 'but I do not understand your slowness here - a yard in the hour and your head over your shoulder to see that anybody is looking. Silence is

golden. I am not a voluble man myself, by nature and practice, but you Scots - why, you could not say less about this double assassination if you had done it among you. Have you a good *alibi*, Mr. Procurator Fiscal? - Or Grant there, how about him?’

He turned to the Chief as he spoke.

Colonel Henderson smiled and rubbed his scrubby grey thatch.

‘Fair,’ he answered reflectively; ‘he was working with me in the office on the earlier occasion, and if I make no mistake, taking tea with the wife of the local Chief of Police and Miss Aymer Valentine, a very charming young lady. That, I think, should clear him.’

Caffarata, whose mind was continually running over possibilities, even popular ones, pricked up his ears at the name.

‘Ah, you were taking tea with Miss Valentine at the moment when the second crime was committed. How do you fix that so finely?’

‘I saw Miss Rachel go upstairs to dress a minute or two before three,’ said Grant. ‘My men were already posted at that moment, one in the copsewood behind the Lodge, unfortunately on the opposite side from the Heather House, and the other - at the fork of the avenues which any one going or coming to Dent House would have been bound to pass.’

‘Then,’ said Caffarata, ‘since they saw nothing, the approach to the Heather House must have been made abnormally and by some one who was *au courant* with your preparations -’

‘It seems like it, sir,’ Grant admitted.

‘To whom did you communicate your intentions?’

‘Only to the two Howards - good men, no better in

the force -' said Grant.

'Had they been long with you - in Quarrier, I mean? Had they made many friends?'

'They only arrived a few hours before, and had made no friends - indeed, had spoken to no one except at the motor garage. I do not believe either of them knew a soul except myself in the neighbourhood.'

'Ah, the motor garage,' said Caffarata quietly, 'then you were on the point of making a 'coup.' An arrest? Yes. And whom might it be that you were going to arrest - someone whom events have proved innocent, I wager?'

'Yes,' said Grant bitterly, 'Miss Rachel Dent!'

The great detective whistled and slapped his thigh very gently with the fingers of one hand.

Then he turned to the Chief.

'Colonel Henderson, what did I tell you about this young man?' he said with an air of victory. 'Such a thing is sufficient to kill most men, but it will be the making of this one. He will go at the work again with his energies ten times keener because he has been once befooled. Let him at the work - of course with any new light which we can give him. Then we will eclipse ourselves and leave him to the case. It was a pleasure to him before - now, if I know the man, it will be a passion.'

And at that moment something like hope broke through the dull fixity of despair in Grant's mind. He held out his hand to Caffarata who clasped it silently.

'This time I shall find and hold,' he said. 'I thank you for your judgment, and if Colonel Henderson sees fit to act upon your advice - well, you shall not repent your leniency.'

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‘Oh,’ said the Colonel gruffly, ‘any one may be mistaken - once. See that it does not happen again, Grant.’

For the official Scot may do a gracious thing, but some hard instinct of discipline in his nature forbids him to do it in a gracious way.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

FATE WAITS FOR MARCUS

This mid-October was a time of strange calms. In the daytime as the leaves fluttered down, one would have said that they fell warm on the brown earth and straw-coloured burnt-up grass, short as on a golf-links.

But at evening there were great changes, signs in the heavens which in other ages would have struck the hearts of men with terror. The sunsets flamed upwards from horizon to zenith of a furious red - the 'red of blood' the country people whispered among themselves. And the reflection of this splashed the changing crowns of the trees and the face of the waters with a scarce duller crimson.

It was not as in the year of the Krakatoa afterglows, when the heavens were filled with volcanic dust blown from the other side of the world. The scarlet and crimson remained violent and vivid to the last, dusking only with the night - never fading into those infinitely delicate and remote colorations through which one would see the larger stars come out as pinpoints of complimentary fire.

Marcus Hill, careless whether he was watched or not, left Billy with a task or a French novel, his feet on the mantelpiece and his head and shoulders deep sunk in a pillow. Marcus was restless, almost desperate, and the panelled rooms and massive sideboards of the Dent Arms - even the portraits of departed Dents, kinsmen of Aymer's - bewigged ministers of Westminster Confession times, officers who had served under Wellington, and yet more recent rotund cattle-breeders (with a prize Galloway

bull in the background) failed to cheer him. Out of sorts and intellectually idle, a rare thing with Marcus, he was driven to beat the woods and climb the winding goat tracks of the mountains.

He thought continuously of Aymer, yet since he could not be near her nor meet her, he fled her neighbourhood. The freshness of her hair, the strange softness of her lips, the warmth of her young body as she stood up beside him, the coolness of her cheek haunted him - real things, tangible things, unforgettable things. He read the few letters he had received from her. They were ever in his breast pocket in a special morocco case he had made for them. But they did not help him when in this mood.

His mind kept improvising happy and unexpected meetings. He wandered with Aymer along hidden paths where the fallen leaves made a rustling pathway, then out on the short piled velvet of the old pastures - Aymer - always Aymer with him.

He knew how she would be dressed - in a rough cloak of dark blue cloth, her hair hidden (but not quite) in a capuchin hood lined with scarlet. They would clasp hands and step aside at the distant sound of a footfall, then stand close one to the other blotted behind the thick foliage, till the enemy had passed.

'Hide and seek' they would call it, and laugh - like children. And they would really be a pair of joyous children gone to the woods for a holiday - nay, taking their own holiday in spite of school or master - truants from the worriment of life, happy just to kiss each other a little, and, for the rest, to walk silent hand in hand.

But after all this imagining he made little of it. His want indeed was hardly a spiritual one - it was a

bodily ache, an actual physical pain as love must be - for the love called Platonic has no real existence betwixt adolescence and remote age. And as for friendship - it was doubtless a great word, but Marcus had his own ideas as to the difference between that and his feeling for Aymer.

From this dream he was awakened, not wholly unpleasurably, by Sylvia Granger. She met him - sombre-eyed, ardent, direct of regard, the sunlight flecking her hair of flaxen-gold and her colourless cheek - at the turn of the lane only a hundred yards from the Lodge. The place was quiet enough, and Sylvia in any case, even on the highway, was not one to allow herself to be passed by.

Marcus, who by nature and from long habit of journeying, was polite to all women, had merely taken off his straw hat, and was about to continue on his way.

'I have a message for you,' said Sylvia, standing erect before him; can you spare me a minute?'

Marcus, aware that this tall girl came from Dent House and was maid and confidant to Mrs. Fenwick Dent, was conscious of a vague feeling of uneasiness. Yet there was a flash of hope also. Possibly - for one never knows the stratagems women use, their carefully prepared *alibis*, the influences they bring to bear one upon another, the exchanges of complaisance (women, said a Wise Man, are either enemies or complices) - Aymer might have combined some plan with Sylvia Granger.

For a moment he felt interested and even exalted. Besides, in spite of his offhandedness, Marcus was a very manlike man, sensitive to all impressions of womankind. And Sylvia Granger, framed generously, largely modelled, full of lustihood and dispensing

magnetic attraction wherever she went - charmed the eyes of men and made it natural that other women less sure of themselves should be jealous of her. Sylvia was only the handmaid of an exigent mistress, yet she understood very well in what measure she attracted all full-natured men. When she walked out with her mistress, gentlemen bowed to Mrs. Fenwick Dent, but Sylvia knew very well that it was the maid whom they turned to look after.

This when undisciplined is a dangerous gift, and discipline was a thing which Sylvia had not the least idea of applying to herself. She had not made her nature. Power had been given to her and she meant to use it.

So she gave to Marcus Hill the message of her mistress - that Mrs. Fenwick Dent would be glad to see him at Dent House any afternoon. And, though she knew his love for Aymer, or because of that knowledge, she so volleyed at him with veiled dusky eyes, great and bright, so pouted at him with full geranium lips, so drew him with the slow even heave of her breathing that she could almost have foretold his answer.

'I had rather you had spoken for yourself, Sylvia!' he said, with a smile. By this chance politeness Marcus intended no unfaith to Aymer. There was, in fact, none. Only the youth and force of the young woman spoke, and the force and youth of the young man of necessity responded. Sentimentalists and soul students do not take this sufficiently into account, and so misunderstand many things which are not problems but mere reactions.

Then a lightning flash leaped into the tall girl's eye.

'And what if I do speak for myself?' she said

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slowly, not tossing her head as Sue Sim would have done, speaking with not the least coquetry, or even lightness, but gazing steadily at him with the steady regard that had fascinated many. 'Between man and woman, it is every one for themselves. You are learned, they tell me. You have seen many lands, but I can teach you what you do not know, and (she hesitated, lowering her voice to give force to her words), 'if you and I were ... friends ... there are seas and continents which we could discover (she almost whispered the final word into his ear). 'Together,' she said - 'together!'

And the young man, supersensitive to such things (as to the scents of the earth and of the woods) was conscious of the warm healthy breath of the girl, her white teeth, the radiant health so eminently human that he could not take her for a temptress.

She stood thus, consciously and of set intention drawing him. She fulfilled the needs of one side of his nature - that complex inheritance for which in some measure we are not responsible, which wars against us in spite of ourselves, yet with consequences which we are not permitted to keep apart from the general conduct of our lives.

At that moment Marcus, tried to the highest rung as he was, did not yield. He did worse. He trimmed. He took the middle course. He prevaricated. He set it down in his mind that he could safely take a little - just a little of this proffered companionship, and then - when it pleased him, find Aymer again as at the point where he had left her.

It was a fallacy, but then Marcus was only a young, confident, highly trained animal. He was an average young man afflicted, owing to temperament

and heredity, with more than his share both of attraction and responsiveness, a man accustomed to be feared by women rather than to fear them. It was small wonder, therefore, that he made the mistake of over-confidence in the case of Sylvia Granger.

Sylvia Granger had the tact to speak with sympathy of Aymer. She depended, as all such women do, upon her personality and the potential gifts of her person. She drew Marcus with the craving of her eyes - which, though by no means a novice, he somehow took for sympathy.

Also her words were such as to touch him.

'I see your little friend every day,' she said with an air of curious equality, even with something of condescension in the 'little,' 'I see her daily and can carry any message.'

She smiled a strange, wistful, illuminating smile, the interior smile of a woman at moments of intense pleasure - or pain. 'I will deliver them faithfully - even though - even though... I would rather keep them for myself!'

It was certainly curious, though the young man did not think of it at the time, that this girl spoke so little like a waiting-maid. She looked even stately. Her meekness was clearly assumed and there was a faint smile that played like the promise of sunshine about her full lips, as she said, 'You know so much - you have seen so many before coming here to this dull place. You would not break a poor girl's heart. Let me help you!'

But somehow she let it be understood that the 'poor girl's heart' in danger of being broken was not Aymer's, but her own.

There are many ways in which a woman may make love to a man - more and infinitely more

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delicately graded and differentiated than the ways of any man with any maid - though the Wise King thought otherwise. (He was an Oriental and had only to crook his finger at a universe of women - so that his idea of them incarnated only the ancient choice between drudges and playthings.)

Marcus Hill was no King Solomon, but then the woman before him was neither submissive Shulamite nor worshipping Queen of Sheba. She was more universal. As Shakespeare is all-style, as a certain condiment is all-spice, Sylvia Granger was a universal magnet, and if there were iron in the blood of a man she drew him after her. Nay, she did more, her very presence deflected those with lodestones of their own.

Yet Sylvia was far from possessing an evil nature. She was content to dwell in a household of women, rarely going to town. She had been taught by a terrible experience not to push her power too far, so that even in backbiting Quarrier her repute was that of a proud girl, one who 'kept herself to herself.'

At the same time, all the more because of this, she was accumulating electricity, and Marcus, full of his own restraint, irritated by being shut off from Aymer, unable even to receive the letters on which he had lived, met her as the heads of two thunderstorms tack towards each other across the swirling July firmament.

Nothing is more dangerous or more seductive to vigorous, large-thewed, full-blooded men than to be made love to by a woman of their own kind, whom they know to be sought after by other men. Such a preference is a compliment which every man feels and to which he naturally responds. It renders him weak, and that for absolute, ever-present reasons of

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temperament and heredity. The man of the Stone Age and yet older men speak within him. He becomes, frankly barbaric. The scruples of laborious reason, even the fidelities of a youthful heart, are apt momentarily to go, by the board.

So much, and infinitely more, might be said to explain, if not to excuse, what happened to Marcus in his interview with Sylvia Granger in the dusky shade of the Lodge Lane beeches - the Lodge itself shining white through its roses, the top of the guarded Heather House across the way, and Judge Thorald's ancient trees looking over the wall.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

A CHAPTER FOR MEN

Conscious of her power, or perhaps so well accustomed to it as to be almost unconscious, Sylvia drew near, till the luxuriant coils of her hair were immediately underneath the eyes of Marcus. Sylvia did not appear to approach. He simply found her there, vividly appealing to his senses, evident as a rose that somehow had lifted itself to his nostrils.

Intentionally Sylvia, who never missed a point, stood a little lower than Marcus, the crown of her rich golden hair on the level of his eyes. Her head was slightly cast down, but sometimes her eyes stole up and she sighed very softly. Marcus was aware in his every fibre of those silken coils, of the rounded allurements of the shoulders, one slightly turned away, of the fine Tussore of the blouse, a little open at the neck that rose and fell somewhat more vehemently than before and gave forth a good smell of youth and health.

Every nerve and tissue of his being vibrated to the knowledge that this rich passion flower was his for the plucking. And Sylvia's repute for pride helped the impression of his good fortune. A proud girl, he thought, yet one never staid and clapperclawed by the easy loves which in such a place as Quarrier make for popularity. No one could boast that he had ever kissed Sylvia Granger.

Responsive to this unspoken thought Sylvia turned a little more squarely to him, and lifting her hand as if to touch him (yet dropping it as one too greatly daring) she said, 'You need a friend. I know

what Miss Rachel used to do for you. I have watched you, fretted and angry, and I have been sorry. I do not speak for my mistress, *now*. I know she is nothing to you - though she would like to be, to spite Miss Aymer. But I would spite no one. I only love you, as do the girls of my country.'

She paused a little and crept nearer till through the breathing stir of the thin Tussore he could divine the warmth of her young heart.

'I thank you,' said Marcus, and his voice sounded hoarse and harsh in his own ears, like the sea roaring on far-off pebbles— 'I thank you for your friendliness.'

He knew and noted the futility of the reply and cursed himself for talking like an old-fashioned copy heading, when within him all his manhood was bounding.

The girl lifted her downcast eyes, and with lips ripe as the twin halves of some fair red fruit, trembling so near his, ready to be plucked, she murmured, the tears in her voice, 'I would if I might, do so much more for you than she!'

It was not the devil, as his grandfather would have said. It was perhaps something which father and grandfather had bequeathed to him - something for which his soul was not responsible, for, while the willing part of him remained perfectly true to Aymer Valentine, somehow he found himself holding Sylvia Granger in his arms while the very anger and irritation of his loneliness was plucking passionate solace from that rich willing mouth, formed for love, which knew equally well how to receive and how to bestow.

Nor (though this no woman will believe) was Marcus aware at the moment of what he was doing.

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It seemed to be his love of Aymer he was expressing – that keen, ardent, constantly baffled necessity for her bodily presence, for her beauty and desirableness, which had slowly been gathering within him, as the electricity gathers in the belly of a thunder-cloud. So all his need, all his irritation, all his pain seemed to ebb away as he held Sylvia yielding and supple within his arms. Standing there on the open road, unashamed, she clung to him, quivering happily, content to give far more than she received, only half-hidden by the dusk of the Lodge beeches and within a hundred yards of the mysterious Heather House. It was young love and life flouting the grim shadow of Death.

Even when the heady intoxication of the first kiss had passed, even long years after when Marcus had seen all things with the saner eye of one not now tormented with desires and driven by ill-defined necessities, Marcus never denied to himself that there was a glorious satisfaction in the wrong he was doing to his own real love for Aymer.

Then, at least, in the sudden exultant glory of this surrender, Marcus forgot himself. He forgot her. He hardly remembered even Sylvia. It was not this splendid offering woman whom he embraced, but an Ideal. Throughout all the glamour of the conjunction, another was in her place. It was his love for Aymer that went forth from him - her kisses that he recklessly squandered on alien lips, and knew it not.

But Sylvia knew it. She heard, indeed, his murmurs of 'Aymer - Aymer, how I love you, Aymer!' But nothing daunted nor even disappointed she said to herself through the clouds of her own passion, in which she was consciously enveloping the young

man, 'If I know mankind, this one will love me for myself one of these days.'

And then Marcus, the weary clouds of irritation and obsession rolling away, awoke suddenly from a dream of lightnings and thunders. He seemed reborn into a great peace. He was happily weary, and - awake. With the kisses of the Other yet warm on his lips, his heart turned to Aymer and... there seemed to be a veil over her face. He could have pushed Sylvia away. But her arms clung too close. Her breathing was too happily tumultuous on his neck. He felt the beating of her heart close to his, falling from swift light hammer-strokes to slow trammelled throbbing - they also gratefully weary.

'Marcus! Marcus!' she said contentedly, as, standing thus, she settled deeper in his arms with a certainty of possession which brought him to himself, wide-awake to the strange situation, 'I love you Marcus!'

All through he had thought of Aymer. He had given free vent to his love for Aymer. In a stormy gloaming, lit by ruddy lightning flashes he had opened the pent-up ocean of his love - for Aymer. These half articulate utterances of Sylvia's were the very words he would have given worlds to have heard Aymer say. Yet he heard them now in his ear - and - the speaker who murmured them so gratefully between recognisant kisses, was not Aymer but Another! Yet, at that moment, he had thought only of Aymer.

No woman (or only one in a hundred thousand, wise beyond her kind) will believe this, but every man, within the soul of him if not openly, will acknowledge its truth.

'Oh, the clay of the potter!' groaned Marcus, after

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the years had taken the edge off the sweetness of folly. 'The clay of the potter – and the pit from which we are digged!'

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE SHADOW OF THE LODGE BEECHES

Sylvia walked silently away, breathless but immeasurably triumphant, gloriously uplifted high above all her hopes. A bold swimmer, she had taken the tide at the full. She might have waited for years and not again have surprised Marcus unaware.

For she thought of it as a triumph to have thus, even for a moment, detached him from Aymer. She thought that thenceforward she would be in his blood, and she only counted upon that, judging (it was her only mistake) men by herself.

As for Marcus, that young man turned about to meet the mocking smile, the easy grace, the flowered waistcoat, and the gold snuff-box of Judge Thorald. He was seated easily on the trunk of a tree that jutted out at right angles above the opposite wall of the lane. He was on his own property, and had the faintly amused air of one who has assisted at an edifying spectacle.

He tapped the snuff-box, which for so long he had not looked at. He tapped it delicately and smiled the while tolerantly and paternally down at Marcus.

‘So,’ he said, ‘the Court of Chancery permits its tutors upon occasion to amuse themselves! - Ah, *jeunesse, jeunesse*. I remember - I understand, *faut de mieux* - since no better may be! Yet I thought you as Caesar's wife, young man, above suspicion. Another illusion lost!’

And with even exaggerated daintiness, he selected and lit a cigarette of Tunis, gazing the while at the miniature of Aymer on the gold box, as one who

after losing a precious jewel, finds it suddenly restored to him.

It was not till then that Marcus faced the thing which he had done. He knew well enough the anxious jealousy with which the Judge regarded Aymer. Indeed, they two had made a little jest of it between them. It was 'only a fatherly feeling' said Aymer – or he might be like her uncle. Nay, he was jealous even of his best friend, Mr. Patrick Dent. But sceptical Marcus believed nothing of all that with regard to his own sex. He knew better, and he judged the proposed relationship, quasi-paternal or quasi-avuncular, of Mr. Thorald and Aymer by his own feelings and possibilities.

But now he could expect no mercy. As he had sowed, so he must expect to reap, and that withal a harvest very early ripened.

As yet Marcus had no sense of wrong-doing. He was conscious only of the Spartan sin of being caught. Then the Judge whistled his little snatch of song which sounded so like 'There is a Happy Land.' But the musician was not, on this occasion, ironical.

He had, in fact, made a signal, for the next minute Lieutenant Grant strolled down from the Heather House, and greatly to the annoyance of Marcus, putting aside the leafy branch of the Squirrel Tree where he had posted so many letters to Aymer, he hailed his friend across the sunken road. 'Good-day, anything new, Judge?'

Then, his eye falling upon Marcus standing under the shade of the Lodge Lane beeches, flushing like the trampled autumn leaves with indignation and shame, he greeted him, 'Ah, Mr. Hill, you are fond of this path, I see!'

'He has a very good and sufficient cause, Mr.

Grant,' the Judge broke in, with evident but smiling malice - the snuff-box never out of his hands now - and he repeated slowly, 'good and sufficient cause!'

Marcus would gladly have slain him there and then - with Tibetan tortures if need were. Grant was too much astonished by the Judge's tone to speak, also he asked no questions - for which, at least, Marcus was grateful. But the Judge had no intention of letting go his prey.

'You may lift your interdict, Mr. Grant,' he said. 'I have found, quite by inadvertence, though very much a propos, the secret of this young gentleman's attachment (he bore upon the words) to this neighbourhood - the explanation of his midnight strolls, his flashing lanterns. These have no connexion with the purposes of our search. We may safely give him leave to flutter his wings elsewhere, and that as soon as he chooses. Though whether he will so choose is another matter. For Mrs. Fenwick Dent is fair, and Miss Valentine fairer, but fairest of all to this young man - and I have had the proof under my eyes, a proof to 'linked sweetness long drawn out' - that to the mistress he prefers the maid!'

'I do not understand,' said Grant, who heard the tone of persiflage but missed the meaning.

'Well,' said the Judge, maliciously enjoying himself, 'I will clear another of your difficulties. You spoke of the mysterious wanderings of Sylvia Granger. They cross and interweave with those of Mr. Marcus here. There is no fault. Contrariwise, their youth pleads for them. But deny they cannot. I have been 'an unwilling witness,' I, old and frail, of the transports of youth! Mr. Hill, you made me curse my years!'

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Marcus had a retort - keen and bitter, but he was strong enough to know that for the moment he had better restrain himself. It was a matter of Aymer, and there the Judge had him utterly at his mercy.

Now strangely enough Grant had a considerable secret sympathy for the young man. He knew him to be rash and reckless. His declaration of his presence in the Dent woods on the night of the death of Patrick Dent witnessed to that. For it was volunteered information. He had not in any way been driven to such a confession.

Luiz Grant did not at first understand why the Judge should so determinedly make an open show of this young man. Jealousy in love, in one of the Judge's age, did not cross his mind as a motive. And it was not till he looked up and saw the old man's face, as it were, transfigured by malice, that he began to understand what had happened.

Those fine and even noble lines and traits which Grant had often admired had given place to an impish cruelty. The man seemed somehow older and wickeder. The ease and calm which had distinguished him through life seemed to have deserted him when it came to the retaking of Aymer Valentine from Marcus Hill.

More subtle than Marcus, Luiz Grant took warning from this change. For he understood it. He knew that the man before him would slay a rival in cold blood. There was the same pleasurable determination in his eyes which he had once seen in the features of a Chinese executioner at Canton.

Judge Thorald seemed so bent upon tormenting this young man that Grant, alert to win to the bottom of things, promised himself to rejoin Marcus and find out what it was all about. He understood

the nature of man and knew that every act is a self-revelation. Specially he desired to know why Judge Thorald was so embittered - why the man so careless, so full of excuses for all mankind, so genial and tolerant, should have his knife so sharply pointed, so keenly edged for Marcus Hill?

Grant, young and manly - though his manliness took another form from that of Marcus - sympathized with the distress of the young Chancery tutor. He wondered at his forbearance, for even when the Judge triumphed most unmercifully Marcus answered not a word. Perhaps he hoped that his enemy would exhaust himself on the spot and that Aymer would hear nothing of the affair.

Grant well knew that the hope was vain, and watched the old man seated in the flank of the great beech with something like disgust.

'The spiteful, withered old monkey,' he muttered, 'hardly human himself and yet throwing shards at younger folk below!'

Yet he knew the brilliance of the man. He respected his wondrous record, his secret ways of obtaining information which appeared little less than divination. Thus knowing the man it seemed probable to Grant that he had purposely thrown Sylvia Granger in the young man's way, that he might take him in a snare and triumph over him. Since the others were silent it was the Judge who summed up.

'But come away,' he said, 'we retard the march of true love. Far be it from us that it should not flow smoothly - though from my recent observations there is small danger of that. Good-bye; my congratulations, young conqueror. I go to publish the banns!'

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He laughed. He waved his gold-headed cane. He waved his snuff-box. He gesticulated and grimaced, even as Grant had said, like a spiteful grey monkey.

'Memory mocks desire,' murmured the detective, who knew his poets.

And he stood still, watching Marcus raging mutely in the sunken Lodge road underneath, till the Judge was lost to sight in the direction of his house.

Then Grant set his hand on the wall beside the Squirrel Tree and, with one movement, leaped lightly over into the road.

Marcus would have fled. As it was he turned his back upon the detective and with his head high walked off in the direction of the town of Quarrier. But in a moment Grant's hand was on his arm, with a warm and friendly pressure which he could not shake off.

'I, too, am a young man,' he said; 'perhaps we have misjudged each other. It may be that I can help you. I at least can guess what the trouble is and how far you are to blame—'

'I am not to blame,' blurted out Marcus vehemently, 'except that I have played the fool—'

'So have I, and far more foolishly,' said Grant, thinking of his proposed arrest of Miss Rachel. 'I played it till I nearly lost all that I care about on earth—'

Marcus looked at him suspiciously.

'Another?' he thought. 'He must of a surety mean Aymer.' But aloud he queried only, 'A woman?'

'My standing in my profession!' said the detective.

'Oh, pshaw!' cried Marcus, 'was that all?'

'All,' said Grant, 'is there any more?'

The brow of Marcus cleared. Here was neither

another rival nor yet another tell-tale.

'Yes,' he said, 'there is something more, and something better. I cannot tell you in words because it sounds foolish,' said Marcus the Scot - for travel does not uproot the prejudices of race.

'Well, what is it that the old man was holding over your head?'

Marcus deeply blushed.

'I suppose I had better tell you since you heard so much,' he said slowly. 'Well, there is a girl who is everything to me, and I allowed myself to be caught by that old grimalkin ... *making love to another.*'

For the life of him his pride would not let him say, 'being made love to *by Another!*'

Marcus would take no girl's character. Indeed he was not yet sure that he had done any wrong. A fool, yes, but a wrongdoer - no. He was so confident in his uprightness of intentions that he actually thought he could explain how it came about to Aymer, if he got her ear before the Judge.

'I partly understand you, and I thank you for the confidence,' said Grant, when Marcus hinted at his half-formed purpose, 'but though I know little of women of your race, I should advise you to do nothing of the sort. She will only think, and think rightly, that you are accusing yourself. While if anything is said against you in your absence, she is the more likely to hold you innocent, and in any case to scorn the tale-teller!'

'But I am not innocent - save in intention,' said Marcus.

'No matter,' counselled Grant, 'take the benefit of the doubt. With such as Miss Valentine, the proverb misses fire. The absent are not always in the wrong!'

And as they strolled Quarrier-wards Marcus

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opened his mind to Luiz Grant. That is, in part, for he was not yet ready to confess all he knew. Nevertheless he told the detective enough to alter his mind considerably, and the outcome of that talk between the tall hedges was of the gravest and most serious.

So serious indeed, that before he turned back, slowly retracing in his mind every word of that conversation, Grant had passed the crisis of his fate, and already doom, no bigger than a man's hand, planed in the blue above him.

For Sylvia Granger had stricken at greater game than she knew.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE JUDGE FINDS HIS WATERLOO

Mrs. Fenwick Dent was having her hair brushed. For this purpose she loved the hand of Aymer Valentine. She said that Sylvia's made her restless. Her hair absolutely crackled when her maid brushed it, but that of Aymer soothed her. So in a becoming peignoir and in the engaging suavity of her biscuit-and-pink parlour, she sometimes received a few of her intimates, as she said, 'to prevent Aymer brushing her to sleep.'

Among the privileged was Judge Thorald. He was not really so old in years, but his friendship with her late husband caused Mrs. Dent to allow him the position of a mentor, and at such times he went and came freely. What he really loved was to watch the rhythmic movements of Aymer's hands and the supple sway of her body. But he paid royally for his privileges by the gossip that he brought to cheer her imprisonment.

None with so light a hand as the Judge to touch off a caricature, dash in a likeness, sneer away a reputation, or give good the appearance of evil. Yet all so easily and deftly done, with such effortless perfection and precision of epithet, so admirable a knowledge of his audience and such a treasure of special information that, on his being announced, Mrs. Fenwick Dent drew a long breath, tossed her novel into a corner, and prepared to enjoy herself.

She clapped her hands at sight of him. He stood in the doorway smiling, a trifle more carefully dressed than usual. His pale blue silk waistcoat of the time of Louis XVIII, flowered with minute white

lilies, made him the last of the dandies, from his hair brushed carefully back from his fine unwrinkled brow to the plain solidity of the silver-buckled shoes to which he clung, because (as he averred) they had been his grandfather's. He held his gold snuff-box in his hand as he stood bowing on the threshold, and never Lazun nor Anthony Hamilton ever looked a more graceful courtier than Wilfred Thorald making his entrance to the *petit levee* of Mrs. Fenwick Dent.

And he knew it, for his first words were, 'Marquise, may I be permitted to kiss your hand?'

Then stooping most gallantly he touched her fingers with his lips. There was one thing in the world which pleased Mrs. Fenwick Dent more than another. It was to be told that she had missed her century, and that she had really been intended for a lady of honour at the court of Anne of Austria - the Anne of Dumas the Elder, who was the only one known to the lady of Dent.

'Judge,' she said smiling, 'you are the most gallant man I know! Is he not, Aymer?'

Judge Thorald looked at Aymer and smiled. She knew that it was to see her that he had come. His hand kissing was only the parade before the real fencing.

'Were I only younger!' he said mournfully. 'Ah, youth is a great thing. Keep your youth, madam, and you, Miss Aymer. To be wise does not make up for the loss of six short months of it.'

'Sit down, Judge,' said Mrs. Dent. 'I am at my wit's end for news. In this place I hear nothing - I see nothing. All on account of this sad affair - and nobody to know who may be the next to go. It sets me crying often - only I have to stop because that

ruins my complexion. But when I heard that you were coming, I clapped my hands. Did I not, Aymer?’

Aymer assented gravely. She did not trust the Judge, though he had been kinder to her than any one else, and that for a longer period. Yet she never cared to be left long with him. He shut her up within herself sometimes - and often she was ashamed of her ingratitude.

‘News,’ said the Judge, sitting down on a low tabouret where he could display his handsome face and fine figure against a heavy deep blue curtain, ‘news - you put me in a certain embarrassment. For the news that may be told are not worth the telling, and all that is interesting cannot bear repeating.’

‘Oh,’ cried Mrs. Dent, pattering her feet on the carpet with excitement, ‘tell me that - tell me something that ought not to be told. Aymer and I are all athirst to hear. Take pity on us. We don't even know how many eggs are laid every day at the home farm, so shut in are we. We might as well go to prison at once.’

‘Well,’ said the Judge, clasping his fine fingers about his knee, and smiling faintly, ‘I do not know what I might tell, but I know very well on what I ought to be silent. And first of all there is something that concerns you.’

‘Concerns me only or Aymer also?’ demanded Mrs. Dent.

‘Both,’ said the Judge. ‘It is sad for me - because for a little it will deprive a man with few privileges of this one, so precious, though he owes it only to his years and reverend locks.’

‘Tell me what it is - at once - do not keep me waiting,’ cried Mrs. Dent, as Aymer shook out her locks. ‘Go on, Aymer, go on - don't stop - it is only

that which helps me to be patient with the Judge. He is so teasingly slow!

'First, then,' said the Judge leisurely, 'a change is awaiting you in the future. There is a fair man and a dark man—'

And he pretended to cut and consult imaginary cards.

'Oh, wretch,' cried the lady of Dent, laughing; 'there, I know what you want. You may smoke. I can see you fingering at your precious box - the one with the miniature of Aymer's double on it. I know very well you come only to see her. Still you tell me the news, and for that I am willing to have my sitting-room smelling of smoke. But sit over by the window - there, your head is against the curtain all the same, and we can see the silk waistcoat better -'

The Judge made a bow and laid his hand on his heart.

'I thank you for recognizing its lineage. Revere it. It once covered the breast of a king - or would if it had fitted him, or if his valet had thought of trying it on. It was made for the brother of the martyred king, because his fair hair went with pale blue brodered with the lilies of France!'

'The secret - the secret?' cried the lady.

'There are several,' said the Judge easily, 'but since you have bribed me, I will give you first that in which all of you are interested.'

He waited till he saw that Mrs. Dent was at the limit of her patience. 'Ladies,' he said, 'there is a journey before you - (again he pretended to consult invisible cards), a journey which will end in the mansion of Fenwick Wester -'

'I shall not go,' cried Mrs. Dent. 'I hate it. It is out of the world. We shall be lonelier than ever!'

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'You will be much more free,' said the Judge, 'and if I may take credit to myself, it is for suggesting it to the authorities charged with all this trouble. There are, I understand, researches to be made at Dent which could hardly be possible with ladies in the house. Your liberty would be too circumscribed. You can take what of the servants you wish, and invite any guests -'

'Ah,' said Mrs. Dent, 'that is not so bad, if we can find any one who will consent to exile themselves at this season of the year.'

'You will find enough and to spare,' he said, and to begin with I can tell you of one young man who will not be very difficult to persuade-!'

Here Aymer blushed deeply and became engrossed in her work, stooping so low over it that her face could not be seen.

'And who is this eager exile?' asked Mrs. Dent.

'Mr. Marcus Hill,' said the Judge with significant reserve.

'And his pupil?'

'As for Leslie Bowles, I cannot say, but I *can* speak for the eagerness of the tutor.'

'You are a born gossip, Judge,' said Mrs. Dent, well pleased; 'how do you know that I had asked him to come over to tea with me one of these days? But why should Mr. Hill be so very pleased to be asked to Fenwick Wester?'

The lady was obviously flattered, for she never for a moment doubted that the Judge would hint that it was on account of another than herself.

'That's telling, as the children say,' smiled the Judge, waving his cigarette tantalizingly.

'Go on,' commanded Mrs. Dent, nervously compressing her palms and smiling strangely.

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'Aymer, your hand is as heavy as Sylvia's. Are you tired? Bid her come in, child, and relieve you.'

Aymer, with the sweet obedience which characterized her, moved to the door to call Sylvia Granger. But her absence from his anticipated triumph did not suit the intentions of the Judge, who accordingly played with Mrs. Dent's impatience till she returned. Sylvia came in with her, and the two relieved each other behind the low chair in which Mrs. Dent always sat comfortably to have her hair brushed.

'Now then, Judge,' she demanded, 'what of Marcus?'

And now it was Sylvia's turn to grow deadly pale. But she knew that the Judge was watching her keenly for any symptom of failure. So going to the adjacent dressing-room for a certain wickered bottle, she returned with her hand steady, but her heart beating wildly.

'Mr. Marcus Hill,' soliloquized the Judge, following the pale blue smoke of his Tunisian cigarette upwards till the draught caught it suddenly and sent it at right angles out of the open window, 'this gay Marcus of ours will come to Fenwick Wester when he is asked, because to the fair mistress he prefers - *the fairer maid!* This (he added with a wave of his hand) is his preference, not mine!'

'I...do...not... understand you!' said Mrs. Dent, slowly stiffening in her place, as Aymer's ministering hand fell away in spite of itself, 'do you mean that... that he makes love to Aymer?'

'Perhaps that also,' said the Judge mischievously, 'but for the moment I contrasted mistress and maid. Sylvia's face may instruct you. I fear this is a young man little to be trusted. He flits from flower to

flower. Sylvia, my girl, there is nothing to be ashamed of, if this afternoon I was witness, an involuntary witness, of one of our Master Marcus's most impassioned pleas. He did it well, too, the rascal. He made me sigh for my lost youth.'

The languid tone of the Judge wrought disarray among the three women. Mrs. Dent was furiously angry. Not a minute longer should Sylvia Granger abide in her service - she who had been so trusted, spoiled, made much of - why the very gown she was wearing — !

Aymer said nothing, but with a face as pale as death and downcast eyes she continued her soft handling of the heavy mass of tawny locks which hung over the chair back, where they were now moved in leaps and jerks by the angers of the lady of Dent.

She took the arrow in silence, as the Judge had counted upon. But in the accused maiden he was deceived and his calculations baffled. He thought that he understood women, and prided himself upon that knowledge - which is ever the pride that goes before a fall. For Sylvia, whom he thought his own creature, bought with his own money, had been gained by youth to the side of youth. Marcus was suddenly more to her than all others. Marcus should not suffer for her sake. Marcus should not be flouted. She now saw the diabolic cunning of the man who had tried to entrap and use her. And with a swift determination she drew a letter from her pocket. The envelope contained two enclosures. The letter she handed to her mistress, and the couple of ten pound notes between the leaves she tossed on the knees of the Judge, from which frail support they fluttered to the ground and lay there, patent to

the eyes of all.

Sylvia Granger could and did lie bravely, but not for the sake of her place. She knew she could get another and perhaps a better. But for the sake of Marcus. So much had the young man gained on her that she was ready to risk all for his sake. As to Aymer, they two would fight the matter out afterwards. There was always time for that. The matter now was to defeat, once and for all, the trickster and tale-bearer.

When she spoke it was with a certain dignity.

'Madam,' she said, 'this man who has spoken is a great man, and I am but a poor girl. But he would have made me the tool of his malice. Read the letter, madam. He asks me to intercept Mr. Hill, and make such advances to him as - would enable him to say - what he has said. That is the money he offered me. There is his handwriting, telling me how to proceed. He will not deny either. He cannot. A maidservant though I am.'

'And so this little interview never took place?' asked the Judge ironically.

'Never as you tell the story,' Sylvia averred stoutly. 'I met and spoke with Mr. Marcus as my mistress had bidden me. But Mr. Grant was present all the time. He can bear me witness. He will not see me wronged.'

'And where might Mr. Grant have been all the time you were - delivering the message of your mistress?'

'Leaning with his elbows on the wall by the side of the Squirrel Tree,' said Sylvia, 'and there he is, walking up the avenue now. We will hear what he has to say. I know he will not wrong me. *He* has no spite against Marcus Hill. He does not send a girl

twenty pounds in notes to make her bear false witness -'

'As false as all that?' mocked the Judge.

But his word was lost in the bustle of Mrs. Fenwick Dent retreating into her bedroom in preparation for a bout of hysterics.

'I will hear no more, Judge Thorald,' she said. 'I thought you a man of honour, and I find you attempting to bribe my servants—'

'Even succeeding—' interrupted the Judge easily as ever, but only to have his words swept away in the torrent of feminine indignation.

'Come away, Aymer - come, Sylvia. Never will I have anything to do with such a man. Often did I think that he turned my poor dear husband's mind against me.'

The door of the bedroom was shut. Judge Thorald heard it locked by a nervous double turn of Mrs. Dent's wrist.

For some unexplained reason, mysterious at least to men, Aymer and Sylvia, forgetful of their positions and of all but Marcus vindicated, had fallen weeping into each other's arms.

The Judge gazed at them with a strange smile. He let his cigarette go out in his astonishment.

'I have met my Waterloo at last,' he said, 'and at the hands of three women. What a fool to try to handle them all at one time! But who would have dreamed that the jade Sylvia would have turned upon me so? That young man will go far, if he husbands his resources. He is a man who will rise by women. They never could abide me in their hearts - though some few have pretended. Ah, Grant - (he greeted the detective carelessly), have you too come to turn your back on me forever? Poor

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castaway! Well, I may as well gather up the fragments! Twenty pounds will always serve to stuff a hole to keep the wind away!

And the Judge, airy as ever, more superb in defeat than in victory, went whistling down the stairs and out of Dent House, the mellow notes of 'There is a Happy Land' floating out serenely behind him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE SECOND EXIT

'Yes, Adams - it was Mr. Grant and no other. He made my library a regular pigstye!' It was Sue Sim who spoke, as usual, ensconced behind the toolhouse and under the laburnum. 'He came to me and he says 'Susan, I shall need to have the library all day to myself, me and two men from Edinburgh!''

"Indeed!" I says, 'and a nice mess three men will make of it. Better let me stop and do the tidying after you. I shall have to do it in any case. I know what three men are capable of!'

Then he laughed and said, quite good-natured, that I could stop if I liked and help with the carpets.

"Jemima!" says I, 'but you are surely never going to take up the carpet, and it only been down seven weeks!'

'But he took no more notice of me than if I had been a stopped clock.

"Up they come," says he, offhand, 'and you can sweep underneath!' like that - as if it was a favour!

'So I goes and tells Richard Hissy (as was my duty), and he says nothing, but goes off with a face that would turn morning's milk fresh from the cow. Nothing matters to him any more now except Miss Aymer - and indeed it's much the same with all the other men - except you, Adams. And I believe that is only because you are not in the same sphere of life -'

'Sphere of fiddlesticks,' said Adams with creditable alacrity; 'did I buy furniture fit for lords and ladies for anybody but Sue Sim? Answer me that?' But the dusk of the laburnum and the

strength of Adams' arms prevented Sue Sim from acknowledging the compliment otherwise than passively.

'Well, and what did they do, Mr. Grant and his Edinburgh men - made love to you, I'll wager?'

'Oh, how could you say so?' cried Susan Sim. 'Mr. Grant - he's not at all that sort - not enough indeed, though he does look after Miss Aymer like one o' them King Charles spaniels when you've just trod on its foot - too sad to yelp!'

And Sue's simile was no inapt description of the dumb appeal in Luiz Grant's brown eyes.

In reality Sue had flirted quite successfully with Jo Howard, detective-chauffeur, but by her artful allusion to Mr. Grant she had successfully side-tracked that issue so far as the questioning of Adams was concerned.

'Then they went all about the place as if they were spring-cleaning, tearing at everything so as to get it up the fastest they could,' said Sue Sim, hastily resuming her narrative with a glad consciousness that Adams was the best listener in the world. It was sure to prove longwinded, but though Sue Sim spared Adams not one single detail, this chronicler can at least control Sue Sim.

'They went about, peeping behind curtains and smelling at cracks. That is to say the two Edinburgh men - the bearded one was the worst - Jo was not so bad—'

'Eh?' queried Adams, a sudden jealous fury in his eye, 'and who may you be calling 'Jo,' Sue Sim? I'll 'Jo' him - aye, and you too, Miss Susan, if you make a fool of me!'

'It was like this, Adams,' said Sue amicably, not picking up the glove of challenge. 'Mr. Grant he did

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not let them talk to me, but all the time under their breath they were asking one another this and that. 'Jo,' says one. 'Bob,' says the other. And what with having to get them what they wanted, and no knowing their born names, I had to say 'Jo' and 'Bob' the same as they did and below my breath too. For Mr. Grant, fine and soft as you think him, made these big Edinburgh fellows quake every time he opened his mouth!

'Maybe he said 'Jo' and 'Bob' too?' Adams commented ironically.

'No, then, he didn't - he said 'Howard' to the bearded one his brother called 'Jo,' and he called the other 'Sergeant,' and they never answers back a word but were on the jump all the time to do what he wanted them. He wasn't more than decently civil, only somehow the two fellows did not seem to mind, but were all sugar and spice to him - funny, wasn't it? If only he had spoken to me like that - I would have showed him!

'I shouldn't if I were you,' said Adams, who saw farther than Sue into the position of affairs. 'Mr. Grant is maybe a bigger man than he lets on to be. And, at any rate, he does not go mixing himself up with maids wrongful (or even lightsome) like some others that need to be taught their place. He leaves you alone, and all you have to do is to leave him alone -!'

Sue Sim waited till she could resume her narrative. Grant was a safe subject, so she began with him.

'But Mr. Grant never did anything but mess with the cupboard - what cupboard? Oh, you know, Adams - the one I was near heartbroken with having to dust on the sly, where Mr. Dent used to keep all

his cloaks, and boots, and riding whips, and be angry enough to shout at one if he ever caught you in there. Only Miss Aymer could get it done out, and she by locking the door and giving him impudence through the keyhole. Well, Adams, proper way to speak or not – it would have been impudence from a servant and as much as one's place was worth, even if it had only been Butler Hissy!

'But of course Miss Aymer could do what she liked with master – or indeed with any one else. She always could, and it's for that I am glad you are just a gardener. Not that she would take any girl's lad from her – not she. She thinks too much of herself and cares too little about men. No, it's that Sylvia Granger that's the one for that! Oh, I know, I've seen her looking-'

'A cat may look at a king,' said Adams with mock cheerfulness, 'and besides I never noticed her!'

'You had better not, Adams,' bristled Sue; 'you are always at me for speaking to this one and that other. But it's 'As you do yourself, so you dread your neighbour,' with you, Adams, and your mother that is dead and gone always prophesied that it was the minxes that would be the ruin of you. 'Now a decent, civil lass like you, Susan Sim, that's what he wants -'

'Yes, Adams, you may mock at your mother's words (Sue Sim became tearful), and you may not know the blessing Providence has sent you till... it... is... too late. But this I will say, Adams, that you have little reason to cast up to me that I am easy to pass the time of day with, when you can't step across the lawn without that Sylvia Granger with her head out of the window telling you how finely your hair is curled, and how your complexion

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becomes you against the background of the shrubbery. Oh, I heard you - the two o' you!'

'But I could not help that!' urged Adams pitifully.

'Just the same with me, exactly,' said Sue Sim; but quit your speak-speakin' and let me get on wi' my tale!

The other two, Robert and Jo, went hither and thither in the room as if they were playing cross-tig. But with Mr. Grant, that was not his way. It was 'Susan, if you please, help me with this' - or 'Susan, give me a hand with that' till all the big hanging cupboard was as bare as my hand - not a legging, a boot, nor an overcoat to be seen. All were in heaps outside the door. Then he found, what I could have told him before, that the dark room was wainscotted and part of it shelved - that was the boot part.

'This is singularly airy, Susan,' he said, sniffing, for he is a freespoken gentleman, Mr. Grant - except, that is, to the Edinburgh lads, and at them he just fairly barked whiles.

I said that it was well aired, but that far be it from Sue Sim to take credit for what she could only get cleaned, as it were, on the sly and with Miss Aymer standing guard at the door. But that at the same time when Susan Sim did a thing, the thing was done to rights!

He nodded his head as if he were only half paying attention and went on tapping and trying all round the panels. He had something like a nest of little flags in one hand, and he told me they were for telling where the wind was coming from, and that they were made of goldleaf.

'Faith,' said I, 'goldleaf, indeed - and surely ye are made of money! Wet your finger in your mouth and hold it up, that's the Galloway way, and a deal

cheaper than goldleaf!

'But he only went on with his work watching the yellow pennants flutter as they do on a greased pole with a ham at the top of it on sports-day at Quarrier.

It was a good while before he found anything. Flutter - flutter went the little strips of goldleaf. But it was always one of the Howards disturbing something about the library - opening the glass doors of one of the book presses, or suchlike. Oh, a nothing would do it. And then Mr. Grant, would shout at them to know why they did not keep quiet. But they never answered a word - only went the more carefully on tiptoe, though he was the youngest of the three - except maybe Jo.

'And then in a kind of desperation he ordered me to light a candle and come into the closet, so that he might have no disturbance from the opening of doors. If it had been that Jo now, I don't know that you might have liked it, Adams. But being Mr. Grant I knew that you would not have minded if I had gone up in a balloon with him - let alone into a boot-cupboard with a paraffin candle. Besides, it was my duty - and you were always a great one for your duty, Adams.'

Adams looked non-committal and awaited developments. Men were men, he knew, and dark cupboards, even lit by a paraffin candle, were the devil and all.

'And so when the candle was lighted and the door shut, it was so dark that my heart went all one-sided, clip-clop like it is doing now' - and Sue Sim, feeling the need of a sop to Cerberus, placed the broad paw of Adams upon the spot where he could best auscultate the phenomenon. Adams was

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convinced of the one-sided action of Sue's heart, though naturally owing to anxiety the demonstration took some time. Finally Sue took up the burden of her tale.

'But all that Mr. Grant said was just, 'Shade the candle with your hand, Susan, so that it may cause no draught!' And then I knew that he was quite harmless, but an incomer from foreign parts where the men are not forward like some people. And take away your hand, Adams. I did not mean it to freeze there. Now be *douce*, Adams, and take example by Mr. Grant, who was like a marble monument in a dark closet with a paraffin candle.'

Adams was '*douce*,' but for the first time regretted the extreme correctness of Lieutenant Grant, knowing that of a long season it would be 'cast up to him.'

Then Sue, with a fresh adjustment of her hair and re-settling of her cap and necklace began, with manifest pleasure, her recital.

'And so he went on measuring and trying, trying and measuring, till he came to the edge of the wall where the boots had been stored - the shelves, you know. And if you will believe me all down the corner the little leaves of gold-rag blew out stiff as a tin whiskey advertisement at a station. And he said 'Ah!' - like that. There was a new look on his face, too, and I could see that he had forgotten all about me, for he began talking to himself.

'This is the way she went and came,' he said, 'and perhaps others as well.'

'And with that he ran a sharp-pointed piercer up and down both sides to see if there was anything that would lift. And there was - a little metal plate that I had never seen, shaped and stained like a

knothole. Eh, but he was pleased to find it, I could see that.

'And in a flash he had a key out of his pocket, and it was in the lock - I nearly fell over myself, for the whole of the back of the boot-cupboard, shelves and all, turned outward into a dark passage - the same shelves I had dusted a score of times with my ear on the passage to listen for master's step. And them to behave like that at the last. It gave me the creeps even then, and if it had happened when I was dusting them - I should just have given up altogether!

'And what he said then was just as funny as the rest.'

'What was that?' said Adams, who had been listening to Sue's confession with a relieved mind, but with a growing secret contempt for Mr. Grant, as one who did not know a pretty girl when he saw her, and from whom the use of dark closets and shadowy laburnums was hid.

'He said,' Susan Sim went on, 'There it is at last, the road out and in the library. But I should have divined it. I hate all this poking and nosing!'

'And then, without a word of thanks, or as much as a 'Thanks to you, bonny lass,' he bade me open the door. I'm thinking that he must be an ignorant man or brought up an awful long way from Quarrier and Solwayside!'

'And what for that?' queried Adams.

'Because,' said Sue Sim, pouting her lips and elevating a scornful chin in the air, 'he waited till we were out of the dark before he bade me blow out the candle!'

'As ye say, Sue, the man must have been ignorant!' said Adams, who knew what true good-

breeding demanded in Kentigernshire.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE VENGEING OF WATERLOO

Leaving Lieutenant Grant to continue his researches and multiply his discoveries under the biting scorn of Adams and Sue Sim, it is time to return to the Dent Arms and see how Marcus Hill is bearing up.

He had played a part upon which he had not the least desire to congratulate himself. He had been a fool. Worse, he had looked a fool. Worst of all, he had given cause to his enemy to write him down a fool, and - to inform Aymer of his folly. She, being a woman, would call it by another name.

So Billy had a bad time of it in his tutorial hours. His Latin prose was a disgrace to a Board school - his mathematics 'tosh.' He might as well, affirmed Billy's tutor, have been making bird tracks in the snow.

'And so far rather would I - I am fond of birds, I know all their different hops, and those which trail a leg and those that stride like you and me -'

'Shut up, Billy,' said his tutor; 'you are altogether abominable. There is no goodness in you. You are too mean to stand up to with the gloves. You go to the head of the stairs and to aid your descent I will give you a bit of a lifter behind -'

'Hanged if I do!' said Billy; 'the gloves if you like, but you can't invoke the Court of Chancery in favour of kicking a fellow when he can't kick back.'

'Can't I, though?' cried Marcus. 'Good for the health those sudden shocks - like facing the cold douche at a Turkish bath! Do as I tell you, Billy!'

'See here,' said Billy doggedly, 'I don't mind being

thumped. I dare say it's for a fellow's good - says so in Scripture anyway. But I'll be hanged if I am going to take it lying down, just because your temper has all gone to pigs and whistles. What's the matter with you, anyway, man?'

'Nothing that you can help,' growled Marcus.

'Oh, I don't know,' said the pupil; 'the mouse and the lion, you know.'

Marcus had scarcely time to curse all fables and those who dragged them into conversation when the door opened noiselessly and the slender figure of Judge Thorald appeared in the passage. He bowed slightly as if thanking the servant who had shown him the way up. For he never wasted money needlessly when a smile would do as well.

'Well, gentlemen,' he said, greeting them in his pleasantest manner. 'I strike you at the hour of work, I perceive - books, classics, I doubt not. Once I too passed - plucked the roses of Paestum and sported with Amaryllis in the shade, - ah youth - youth. How fast you fly! Take every flying minute. I have fallen far behind - the leaf yellow and sere - these alone are mine.'

Marcus, stunned by the assurance of the man, could not much as turn his back, but stood dourly scowling by the fireplace. But Billy rose hastily and offered the Judge the most comfortable chair.

Judge Thorald arranged himself in the deep seat with infinite grace. His highbred ease did honour even to the hotel sitting-room - mean and pervaded by a vague odour of stale beer - though the best that the Dent Arms afforded. He held his cane with its head of gold between his knee and leaned his head pensively against the worn leather of the back.

'Ah,' he said, with a sigh, 'the young understand

the true comfort. The old like me may have lands and honours, and what those poorer than themselves are pleased to call riches. But I would give all these for twenty years more of life.'

At the word Marcus had turned a little about, uncertain whether to burst upon the man with a torrent of abuse, or to leap upon him with his fists.

'Lucky for you,' he said fiercely, 'that you have not got your twenty extra years of life!'

'Ah,' said the Judge gently, 'if I had the years I would risk the rest!'

And he gazed at the delicate top of patent leather shoe which balanced itself before the fire with the serenest composure.

'Do you know, sir,' Marcus towered above him, 'that you acted today as a spy? If you were a man of my own age I should call you a mean hound and thrash you within an inch of your life.'

'No, Mr. Hill,' said the Judge musingly, without looking up, 'you would not. But have a cigarette - they are rather excellent, I give you my word. Leslie then - no? Well, if you will excuse me I will burn one myself. My Tunisians are not only perfume in themselves but they perfume others - this inn parlour, for instance. How you can put up with the stale beer smell I cannot imagine. As you say, it is no business of mine All the same, the senses that remain when sight and hearing begin to think of taking flight, grow more acute - a sort of poor compensation, I suppose.'

The Judge inhaled a minute in great content before resuming.

'But I think, Mr. Hill, that in your haste you referred to my accidental presence, near the wall of my own grounds, as an act of espionage. Well, you

are young - very young. And therefore you are pardoned -'

'I do not ask your pardon,' Marcus gulped.

'You will,' mused the Judge. 'Yes, you will - when you have had more experience. Far be it from me to interfere with the natural effervescence of youth, its pleasant vices, its wild-oat-sowing. But - there are limits, and I acted as a friend. I know the girl and, believe me, she is in no way worthy of you - not even of your most momentary attention. Had it been a fit task for an honourable man I should long ago have advised the young woman's mistress—'

'It appeared to me, Judge Thorald, that she was coming from your avenue,' said Marcus, with increased bitterness.

The Judge waved a hand easily, lightly, and then before speaking, as daintily as a lady he dusted a grain of ash from his flowered silk waistcoat.

'Ah, very likely,' he said; 'indeed a highly perspicacious observation, young man. I have gardeners and men-servants. Bailey even is a man of taste. Such are in her own sphere and I have nothing to say. But it grieved me to see you fall so readily into the snares of this Sylvia Granger.'

'All that does not excuse - ' Marcus began.

'Say no more,' the Judge broke in promptly, 'you need make no excuses. I understand. But believe me - I acted toward you as I should have done if you had been my own son. I saw that you were shutting doors against yourself which in your better moments you would have wished to remain open. Nay, it seemed to me highly probable that Mrs. Fenwick Dent, who, as I am informed (I think my man-servant told me of the fact) has been in correspondence with you, may have sent Miss Sylvia

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to play Potiphar's wife to our good Joseph (if you will excuse the allusion) in the Lodge Lane and under my eyes! She is a cunning dame and very far-sighted. If I were you, Master Cupidon, I should take a wide circuit and keep out of her way. She has more arrows in her quiver than you, and tipped with a far deadlier coorali!

And then, abruptly dismissing the subject, he went on smoking and playing with the gold snuff-box, talking all the while of adventures in Burmah and of the first mission to the court of Ava, during which he had slept in one tent with the great and good Henry Yule, historian of that strange adventure, and of doctoring wild Santal miners and hunting with wilder Canarese in Mysore country.

So that presently the two young men dropped all pretence of work, and were content to sit smoking and listening - while (in their imagination) the Indian sun rose like a ball of light and heat, shooting up suddenly into the sky or sank as into the sea trailing opal and copper twilight behind it.

'When you get done with me,' said Billy in a determined manner to Marcus, 'I shall go to India for keeps.'

'Not for keeps,' said the Judge; 'thirty-five years if a man is lucky and keeps out of the six-foot deal box. But after that when he comes home he only cares to talk about India - an old fool firing the blood of the young to do follies that, nevertheless, he would do all over again if he had the chance.'

There was fascination in every word of the Judge's talk. He told how he had traced the murderers of the Crown Prince of Sorath - halting not, sleeping in the saddle, taking a handful of rice and eating it on horseback, man after man of his

escort dropping behind never to be heard of more. Thus he licked up new riders from the police - fat and unwilling, but with arms in their hands. He sweated the fat out of them and, in spite of the arms put the fear of sudden death upon them, so that they guided him to their nearest comrades, and finally to a frontier post where real white men shivered. These took fresh quinine and aided him in the execution of his duty. The murderer of the Crown Prince was caught, confessed his guilt to the Judge and the Commander, and as the Justice of Sorath is for the living man who can pay more than for the dead who cannot, the criminal never again saw that state. He died on the road thither owing to an accident when his heel ropes were loosened and the Judge's Nepaulese driver whispered that it was a good time to escape.

There were three bullets after him before he struck the river they were crossing. What became of two of them the Judge did not know. But the third was his own. For the Nepaulese had often held wine-glasses between his finger and thumb at thirty yards for the Sahib to shoot the stems out of them. That was why the murderer floated face upwards from the first like men who have a bullet in their brain. And this, as told by the Judge, was the tale of the avenging of the Crown Prince of Sorath.

'And now,' said the Judge, 'I have kept you too long with my nonsense. Pardon me. May I leave you a cigarette or two - just fresh this morning from Kairouan the Holy. No, don't come down. As it is I have overstayed my limit. To work, brave lads! There are still men to be hunted on the Frontier. Aye, and even nearer. But I am not sure that our friend Mr. Grant knows how to set about it. With him, there

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would have been no accident at the Ford. So necessary! Yes, dear boys, even providential.'

He waved his gold-headed cane and was gone. He had redeemed his Waterloo and marched homewards with the consciousness that victory perched once more on his eagles.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE SIMPLE ANNALS OF SUE SIM

Things happened swiftly, crowding one after the other, in the lives of Adams and Sue Sim. The will of Mr. Fenwick Dent had not been proven. There was great stir thereanent in the office of McMath, Lindsay, & McMath. But however the property might go, the estate could not do without a head gardener. The Lodge must be tenanted. It was a dangerous post - according to Tomlinson, whose mind ran constantly upon the terrible Presence which had sat down with Patrick Dent in the library and with his daughter Rachel in the Heather House. Tomlinson would not stay there another night for all the lands of Dent. He had seen lights flashing up and down the Lane. Steps had gone softly past and returned as stealthily. Don't tell him that these were only policemen. He hoped that, at his time of life, he knew a policeman's step when he heard it.

Therefore Adams had the offer of the post and with the letter in his hand he went straight to find Sue Sim. To her he put the matter cunningly.

'Sue,' he said, 'can ye get off on Saturday, and come down to Quarrier to choose furniture?'

'Lord,' exclaimed Sue Sim, startled out of her 'on duty' calm, 'where did you get the money, Adams?'

'Never you mind, Sue,' said Adams proudly, 'but there ye are! You are not going to marry a poor man nor yet a thief - all honestly come by - every penny!'

He produced from his pocket-book a bundle of crumpled one pound notes. Never had Sue Sim seen the like, and in spite of Adam's assurance, she was vaguely afraid. She looked them over, fearing that

she might discover the legendary blue finger prints upon some of them.

But honest garden mould was all the stain they bore.

'No, Sue, I am no thief,' he repeated, 'but I am head gardener at Dent now. I had the letter this morning from the lawyers in Edinburgh and the Lodge is ours, Sue - that is, if ye can afford the time to come over to Quarrier to look after the furnishings.'

'Oh, aye,' said Sue thoughtfully, 'but what about my place?'

'Your place,' said Adams - 'of course your place will have to be at the Lodge - where else?'

'I ken it's mine,' said Sue, 'and that's a considerable comfort. But, ye see, we have promised to stand by the House of Dent till this business is cleared. It wouldna be fair to Connel, and though her and me go at one another like spitfires, we get on as well as ever two Scots lasses could be expected to do, with only one sink in the same back-kitchen. No, I cannot go off and leave Connel. It would not be seemly for me to be tacking up roses and polishing door knobs at the Lodge when she was going by in the cart with her boxes roped - for she would never stay in Dent House by herself—'

'We could ask her to the wedding Sue - she could be bridesmaid!' suggested the wily Adams.

'Aye, that's something,' Sue allowed, 'but though that would please her, I'll wager she would not stay on at Dent by her lonely. But, see here, Adams, I'll tell you what I have been thinking—'

'Fire away!' said Adams, who had confidence.

'It's between supper and breakfast that a man has need of company in a house like the Lodge,' said Sue

with brisk philosophy. 'Now, Adams, if I could do my work in the daytime here, and you 'batch' it out as you do the now - and then me come home and get you your supper and your breakfast. That would do till my mother had made up her mind to let my sister come, or Connel could suit herself up at the Big House. The wages would help the furnishing, and you could work just the harder so as to be brave and hungry for your supper. Then if you were passing you could I have the fire lighted for me, and maybe the kettle on, and then at the back of eight be at the kitchen door to convoy me home.'

It was not the best that Adams could have imagined, but he was glad to make Sue Sim into Sue Adams on any terms. So with a purely formal remonstrance he yielded - as indeed who would not? The thought of the walk home with Sue tucked under his arm, the crisp fall of their feet on the snowy ground, and the ruddy glinting of the warm hearth fire in the Lodge kitchen as they got within sight of it, stirred the heart of him wonderfully. He chose as many as seven different points of view that first day, and squinted at the new house through pine-branches and thick evergreen coppices till his underlings thought that he was going in fear of 'The Killer' - as the countryside called the mysterious presence which had entered unsuspected and unannounced into the Heather House across the way.

They were wrong. It was not of Heather House that Adams thought. But of the wondrous difference it would make to him to spend no more lonely nights in the Lodge camping among the debris of Tomlinson's discarded packing cases.

But now he would have to bestir himself! And at

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the thought he went and bought buckets, brooms, floorcloths so that he might have the house ready to receive the furniture he had proposed to Sue Sim to come and buy.

He knew that at any rate he would fail to satisfy that expert, and all that he could hope for was to effect an amelioration. But this he did so thoroughly and continuously that the newly promoted 'second' and the 'boys' said among each other, 'He's just going to be as bad as Tomlinson. It's having the Lodge that does it!'

But in this they were wrong. It was Sue Sim who did it. Adams was not neglecting his work, though while he 'redd up' the Lodge and made it habitable, he certainly laid a heavier share of the ordinary work on the shoulders of his subordinates. However, he meant to make it all up - and more, during the long days when Sue would be 'up at the House' and he in charge of the upkeep of the domestic hearth, lonely and deserted - albeit not extinct - till eight of the clock.

Then he would have time for a great deal of work to make the time pass the quicker. Matthew Mowatt and the 'lads' would have little to complain of these days. He would gladly put his own shoulder to the wheel and keep it there till such time as eight of the clock drew near, when he would not keep away from the kitchen door of Dent House for half a score of 'Killers' all armed to the teeth.

So was arranged the marriage of Sue Sim and Adams. Yes, in the midst of all this uncertainty their loves flowed along with wondrous smoothness. Nay, even the unfortunate events had worked for them. The ill-omened stars of the House of Dent, in their courses had fought for Adams and Sue.

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It would not have been seemly to have had rejoicing in the stricken house, but the Judge placed the hall of Laverock at their disposal for the wedding feast. He and a few guests would look in during the evening. But Adams was to be the host, and the barn would be got ready for the dance.

During the days that intervened Sue went about in a sort of daze. But Connel understood, and with a sigh that was only half envious, did the better part of Sue's work for her. The cook, who had been married before, smiled at her wistful, faraway look. *She* had her wages to herself now, was not knocked about, and knew when she was well off. But then Adams might turn out better than the man of her choice, and after all, it is always foolish for any house-servant, except a well-seasoned retired butler, to take a public-house.

But Sue was alike oblivious to sympathy and to the half-spoken warnings of experience. She went about humming to herself an old doggerel rhyme of her country:

*'It's a cozy bit biggin'
John an' me's ta'en,
Warm shine its windows
Doon the dark lane.'*

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE HOME-COMING OF SUE ADAMS

At the marriage of Sue and Adams many things happened. Let us put the most remarkable first. Aymer and Sylvia Granger came in together and neither of them would speak to Marcus Hill, though they smiled upon Billy Bowles till that young man seemed to stand surrounded by a summer sunset, warm and ruddy.

Aymer owed a great deal of her popularity to the fact that, service and housework apart, she would as soon speak to the maid as to the mistress. And if there was a press of work at the laundry, she would 'up with her sleeves and on with an apron' as the girls said. For there was nothing that she could not do - and while the thing was being done and until its triumphant accomplishment, she could be 'one of themselves.'

But woe to the unscrupulous maiden who presumed upon this temporary comradeship to ask for an extra night's leave or was late in getting down from her bedroom. In the stern disciplinarian there was small trace of the bare-elbowed, smiling, quick-working comrade of the day before.

So at the wedding of Adams and Sue it was as natural that Aymer should be one of the real guests - that is, those who stayed all the time, and did not 'look in' with the Judge, nor leave with the minister.

Before, during, and after the ceremony the behaviour of the couple was curious. Adams strutted like a bold libertine, kissed the maids-of-honour (of whom Sylvia) and only stopped short, with an air of sudden awaking from swoon, before

the wide astonishment in the eyes of Aymer Valentine. He thumped the groomsmen on the back, daring them to do as much and as well within a twelvemonth. He jogged elbows and interchanged time-dishonoured jests with fathers of families long inured to the double harness. All this to the apparent shame and scandal of Sue Sim, who with her eyes downcast and her laughing lips graver than if she had been in church on Sacrament Sabbath, watched over the fate of her white dress and the satin slippers which Miss Aymer had given her to honour the great day.

Adams was disgraceful, certainly. He even cracked a jest with the minister, and asked the Judge if he were not afraid of catching the infection - both unspeakable and almost unthinkable impertinences from a Quarrier point of view. The critical males plainly implied by their winking that such conduct could only be explained on one supposition. But they were wrong. Adams was, indeed, drunk, but not with wine.

Sue Sim - Sue - his own Sue - for ever his and within arm's length! The very thought was stimulating to Adams far beyond Long John of the Aughteen Falls or even Tallisker, Cock of the North. The red hearthfire of the little house in the woods shone in his heart. He had been in as many as twenty times that day, seeing that all the shining pans were in place over the new range, that there was a fire of logs in the parlour, whose windows looked on the main road to Quarrier, and that the furniture had not moved out of its place in the bedrooms. Adams was a triumphant conqueror. Nothing in the universe feared him, and he would have fought the world - so it seemed to him at the

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moment - with a kind of joy, if Sue Sim had been there to see him do it.

But Sue, Sue the bold and tongue-ready - what had become of her wilful mirth? She hardly spoke above a whisper, even to Aymer, and tears were ready beneath her eye-lids.

It was to Sylvia that she revealed herself the most clearly. 'What's the matter, Sue?' the lady's maid asked sympathetically, 'Are you sorry?'

'Yes,' said Sue with a gulp.

'Then run,' urged Sylvia the prompt. 'I would never marry anybody that I didn't want to marry, not if he was slipping on the ring!'

'Oh, but I do,' said Sue, with a deeper sob, 'It's not on account of Adams. There's no better than Adams.'

'Poor thing!' Sylvia murmured; 'that is a very early symptom.'

'No,' said Sue, following her own thought, 'but I wish I felt more worthy of him, Sylvia! Oh, the times I've let other lads think... that... I cared about them!'

'Fiddlesticks,' said Sylvia, to whom the confession of faults of such excessive veniality was strange and even embarrassing; 'so does every girl that is worth her salt -'

'So you think,' said Sue Sim solemnly, 'and so would I have said yestereen. But when it comes to this - when you stand where I stand - and the minister putting on his gown and bands and the Judge that's to sign the witness register pulling down his flowered waistcoat - ye will think different, Sylvia.'

'Tut,' said Sylvia, 'that's nonsense. You are not on your deathbed, Sue Sim, and if you were you would

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have something else to think about. You are getting married to an honest man that will let you clean your feet on him and -'

'I'm not worthy,' moaned Sue.

'I declare I could slap you, and I will,' said Sylvia; 'what's life worth without the lads skipping after you, and you ready to give them the back of your hand? And do you suppose that Adams does not know? If he does not, then he is a bigger fool than I take him for - you hear that, Sue Sim. And was there ever a man that cared a button for a lass that nobody fancied but himself? And besides, Sue Sim, did you ever skip a flat stone on the pond and go out the next day to look for the marks? No, you know better than that - you are a wiser lass. Well, no more does it matter when a nice lad kisses you by accident, as it were, and you return him his goods with interest. A nice lad, mind, I said. Nor is your Adams a whit the better. Besides, I'll warrant you led him on finely. He never could have the face to ask you. Honest now, Sue Sim? Yes, I thought so. A little experience, like what you are groaning about, is as indispensable to a lass as her body-linen. How else would she be able to tell the sort that mean it till death them do part from the birds of passage? You are an ungrateful brat, Sue Sim. Stand up and be married - *like a man*. Look at Adams -'

'Oh, but Adams never thought of anybody but me'

At which declaration a slightly mocking smile flickered about the full red lips of Sylvia Granger, which, if Sue had observed, might have given her food for thought.

So Adams and Sue were married and there were things hidden from one and the other which made no difference to their happiness, when, in the midst

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of one of the dances they escaped through the back door of the Judge's barn, cautiously opened on pretence of air. Then Adams with his wedding trousers turned up nearly to his knees, and Sue with her white gown kilted and an old pair of somebody's rubber overshoes (frankly stolen for her by Adams), they ran through the orchard under the last leaves of a late November. Two swiftly flitting figures they were under the lowering snow-gathering sky - Adams black in silhouette and Sue (no longer Sim) flitting airily beside him white in her wedding finery, and in their hearts the same thought - to get into the lane; so they flitted along, even the heavy-footed head gardener treading strangely light for the occasion.

They were looking for the ruddy Lodge light which had burned so long in their hearts, and the thought of which, in the midst of her dusting, had caused strange faintish qualms to pass over the heart of Sue Sim - so that (as she said) 'she could have given up.'

Singly across the orchard. Arm in arm after Adams had lifted her down off the stile into the road. A little closer as they looked their last on the Judge's lighted barn, which was filled full in their honour with music and dancing.

But they had escaped - as is the rule in Kentigernshire. 'Gone away!' And those of the young men who would otherwise have escorted them home with torches and lusty chaunts knew better than to pursue Adams in his native wilds of the Laverock and Dent plantations.

The gardener glanced from time to time over his shoulder. In case of pursuit he was ready to be over the wall and take cover with Sue in three

movements and one tick of the clock.

But no man followed on their track. The dance, the prodigal actions of Sylvia Granger (who was in the secret) and the impossibility of trapping Adams in his own domain, kept up the festival. The newly wedded neared home – their home. The word meant much. It had long been theirs in thought, even when it was only peopled by the wardrobe of the two mirrors. Now it was rich with other delights, more keen and real.

The lights of the Lodge shone out at the appointed place. Adams had looked at them many times before, so he knew just where to tell Sue to bend, that she might catch the red glow in the parlour and the lesser light in the quiet chamber above where was waiting the panelled six-foot mirror in which for the first time she would see herself from head to foot in a wedding dress.

Somehow he did not care about all that so much now. The gleaming lights only incited his feet more quickly to conquer the rest of the road. Even Sue thought not now of the glories of the wardrobe, but a choking feeling lumped itself high in her throat when she thought of Adams shooting the bolts from the inside and knew in her heart that at last both he and the Lodge were hers.

They were in the dark lane, and Adams was fumbling impatiently in his pocket for the key, traversed by a sudden fear that he had left it when he changed his clothes, when Sue clutched his arm and pointed over the wall by the Squirrel Tree.

‘See, Adams,’ she whispered, ‘there’s a light in the Heather House!’

‘Well, what of it?’ said Adams, almost rudely. For he had just found the key, and was longing to take

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Sue over the house, and show her those shining patty-pans and the cool subdued lustre of the wardrobe which his own hands had re-polished that day. So the gardener privately condemned the Heather House to a place where, as fuel, it would certainly not have lasted long, if all tales be true.

But there was undoubtedly a light over there. The snow-gloom had dusked to bluish black. On the ground the light sprinkle of crusted flakes hardly showed except where the dead weeds pierced it, and only the parallel copings of the walls showing clean and brisk within the radius of the illumination.

'I can't go in, Adams, till I know who is up there - there where *she* was found!'

'There may be some one else!' said Adams; 'come on, Sue! It's nothing to us. Don't bother.'

For Adams was not a man to be rash on his wedding night. But Sue was not built for half measures. Go they must. They must go together. She would not be left alone - no, not for a moment.

Then Adams and she went poking into a little 'leanto' where the gardener groped till he found a formidable bill-hook for 'scotching' hedges. Sue asked for another for herself, but her husband told her to keep well behind in case of any trouble. Because he did not want his legs taken off below the knee by his own just wedded wife.

So under the duskiest shadow of the Squirrel Tree and with his toecaps in the identical holes which Marcus had used for postal duty, Adams climbed the moss-grown wall from which the mortar was dropping away in moist pieces.

'Help me up, Adams,' whispered Sue, 'quick! I won't stay down here a moment longer. Some one might snatch me!'

And to be 'snatched' immediately in front of the yet unopened front door of her own future, appeared to Sue the worst of human fates.

Adams lifted her with the *'han'* of the smith who puts all his force into one stroke.

And Sue came up like a feather.

'Oh, Adams,' she whispered, 'you will be careful, won't you? And if there is anybody, slay them at once with your weapon before they have time to turn round. Don't let anything happen to you - that would be terrible - and your life policy not available before the first of next month!'

Adams gripped his hedge-knife a third way up the haft and prepared to sell Sue's life dearly. All the same he was rather angry with her for bringing him there at all. They stole up to the Heather House, Adams gripping his bill-hook and Sue his coat-tails. The faces of both were as white as Richard Hissy's tie, which Adams had donned for the occasion.

They looked within, peering and trembling, for they expected nothing less than to see pale Death hobnobbing with his victim.

But only Marcus Hill sat within, gazing dazed and stupid at a tumbler of hot liquid in a tall pint glass which steamed to the roof-tree with a pleasant odour.

Marcus had put his hand on the lower part of the tumbler and was about to raise the contents to his lips when Sue, breaking all bounds of decorum, rushed in and snatched the tumbler from his hand, spilling some of the contents about his feet.

'No, Mr. Marcus,' she cried, 'she does love you. I know she does. A house-and-table-maid sees a lot, and you shall not take your own life - at least not in the very chair where poor Miss Rachel died!'

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She flung the glass far out at the door, and from the wall the clear tinkle of broken fragments came back.

Marcus waved his hand with stupid good humour, like one drugged, but he did not answer Sue's appeal.

'Not on my wedding night - it would not be seemly,' urged Sue.

'And where is he - the villain?' cried Adams, all valorous now, with the hedge-knife brandished in his right hand.

But Marcus continued to shake his head, and the only words of low mumbling that they could make out were these: 'Thanks, butler - thanks! I was cold waiting!'

Adams, regardless now of his long-dreamed of quiet home-coming, went to the door and sounded the shrill whistle with which the gamekeepers and gardeners called for aid when the quarrymen of Crochmore and Quarrier Old Lands banded together for poaching over the Dent and Laverock estates.

And the two who first answered his appeals were Lieutenant Grant and Billy Bowles.

The first looked sharply at the table and about the Heather House, already so familiar to him. But Billy asked a question.

'What are you doing here, Marcus, and where did you pinch that lantern?'

'Came to meet her,' said Marcus smiling inanely; 'she sent me a message. Never turned up, though - must have been a sell. But the butler was kind—'

'The butler - what butler?' demanded Grant turning upon him sharply.

'The butler, *you* know,' said Marcus, 'forget his name... good fellow anyway - but where's my hot

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whiskey and water - lemon too - all the c'mforts of home? Billy has sneaked them, the beast.'

He laughed weakly and showed a tendency to settle down in his chair.

'Deuce of a good fellow - butler!' he asserted thickly.

'My God,' cried Grant suddenly, pale through his India tan, 'he is not drunk. He has been poisoned.'

'I don't think so,' said Sue pushing forward. 'I caught him just in time. And I threw the stuff - glass and all - over the wall.'

They got Marcus off as quickly as possible to Dr. Penman's. The house was luckily at the nearer end of Quarrier, and they found the doctor just getting into bed.

But Grant did not accompany them. He kept the stable lantern, however, and alone in the Heather House, stood gazing thoughtfully at the print of the foot of Marcus, cleanly outlined in the midst of the spreading azure stain, spilt by Sue when she snatched the tall steaming tumbler from the unsteady hands of the Chancery tutor.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

THE WINTER OF HIS DISCONTENT

Colonel Hampden Jones was not content. Mrs. Hampden Jones was far from content. Fenwick Wester was just across the river, in the county of Jardine. Therefore it was out of her jurisdiction. For though her husband on grand occasions might wear crosses and decorations, Mrs. Hampden Jones was robbed in the daily unobtrusive reality of authority.

She represented, therefore, to her subordinate that he was suffering himself to be befooled by Lieutenant Grant and other interested persons, the which, indeed, if he were not a complete idiot, he would see for himself. Her authority, so dearly bought by an unsleeping supervision of all his (the Colonel's) actions, public and private, official and unofficial, was contemned by two men - one, a young whelp from Edinburgh who did not accept of invitations to tea, and the other an Indian Judge whom the lady suspected, under the guise of the most exquisite politeness, of laughing at her.

So serious did this domestic opposition become that the Colonel, who always greeted the Detective-Lieutenant with a suppressed snort, was this time not at the pains of suppression.

'Lieutenant Grant,' he said, 'I may not be your superior officer except in seniority and military rank, but I am at least Chief Constable of this County, and I warn you that if you take two of the persons against whom you obtained warrants out of my jurisdiction, I shall immediately arrest them both. You hear that, sir - you can act as you like!'

Lieutenant Grant was not abashed, nor to all

appearance moved.

'The authority of the Crown is the same on both side of the Maxwell water,' he said, smiling slightly. 'All you have to do is to communicate with the Chief Constable of Jardineshire. Or if you choose I shall lay the whole matter before the Crown Office.'

'I will not permit it, sir,' puffed the Colonel, who was no hand at argument, 'mark you, I mean what I say. As soon as the ladies attempt to cross the Drumfern Bridge I shall have them arrested.'

'Indeed I would not,' said Grant suavely; 'there is such a thing as impeding the ends of justice. There is no question of the guilt of either of the ladies, any more than there is of yours or mine. But supposing that there were - they will be as well looked after in Jardineshire as here at Dent House. I have taken every precaution.'

'It is the only thing you have taken, so far,' retorted the Colonel, getting in his first shot.

The lips of the Lieutenant became a little more compressed. He was now sure of the source of the representations which had been made concerning him at headquarters, the existence of which had been revealed to him by Caffarata.

Without allowing Luiz Grant the time for a reply, the Colonel stalked off with a slight salute such as he might have vouchsafed to an officer whom he had just ordered to consider himself under arrest.

Grant stood and looked after him, grimly smiling. He was not in the least afraid of any threats against himself, but all the same the Colonel's wrong-headedness might possibly very seriously incommode the ladies.

To him, thus standing regardant, enter the Judge. He was not in the least equipped for the severe

weather and the slight crisping of snow underfoot. Perhaps the soles of the patent leather boots he wore were a little thicker, and Bailey had made him put on a pair of cream-coloured gaiters, about which as he came up to Grant, he was complaining bitterly.

'Confound the fellow,' he said ruefully, looking at his well-strapped down foot-protectors, 'in a little I shall look like a country squire or a shooting tenant. I shall be hail-fellow well met with chauffeurs and cattle of that kind. From the tender mercies of Bailey, good Lord deliver me. Why, pray, if a man lives in the country, should he look like a bumpkin?'

It had not been Grant's habit, of late, to confide much in the Judge, who on his side had not invited confession, though ready enough with excellent advice when that was needed.

Now he looked after the solid back of the Colonel vanishing consequently down the road in the direction of Quarrier Courthouse. Then he smiled in his turn.

'So you have been having the opinions of Wooden Head upon the situation, eh?' he said. 'Does not approve of you, our decorative and bemedalled Wooden Head, but it is not altogether his fault. Other things have heads of wood. You know what they are, Grant?'

'No,' said Grant.

'Puppets,' smiled the Judge, 'and they are pulled with strings and made to dance, and sometimes even speak a few words in loud mechanic voices - just like your friend's.'

He laughed aloud this time.

'I should advise you to call this afternoon, in your best clothes, on the proprietor of the Wooden Head

show - the lady who pulls the strings. You can pacify her, I feel certain. Pay great attention to her daughters, particularly to the elder ones, and if any of them strikes you as extra plain, devote yourself to her like a good young man.'

'But I am not invited?' said Grant, who had no relish for the task.

'That,' said the Judge, 'does not matter in the least. Mrs. Hampden Jones is glad to see everybody - with five hundred a year *and* unmarried - I believe that even I, but for my known baleful preferences, would be welcome. You are not handicapped in that way, and if I mistake not you have received several regular invitations to which you have sent excuses. Such conduct has not raised you in the esteem of the lady of the Court House. Now is the time to make your peace. I have not an idea what is the matter, but I can see that our friend wears his orderly room shoulders and strut - so I gather that you are not exactly popular with Wooden Head and his Wire-puller.'

'He has just told me that if Mrs. Fenwick Dent and Miss Aymer Valentine are sent to Fenwick Wester, he will feel it his duty to arrest them at the county boundaries.'

The brows of the Judge drew together. His eyes blazed, and then as quickly the light in them went out. He laughed harshly.

'You cannot expect anything of Wooden Heads,' he said, 'but generally the strings are better pulled. I think I shall call over myself at the Court House - no, not this afternoon. I won't interfere with your 'dress parade.' I will go now, and have a word with the puppet himself. I brought him here, and I fear he is forgetting a little that sometimes, though rarely,

what has been done can also be undone. I shall jog his memory a little. I shall clog the wheels of parochial justice. I shall render this Colonel of Clodpoles a singularly unhappy man.'

'I hope,' said Grant, 'that you will not bring in my name - not on my own account, as you know. But departmentally, of course, I ought not to have mentioned the matter at all.'

The Judge laughed and his fingers tapped quick and light on his snuff-box.

'Bless you, I know my Wooden Head,' he said. 'I will put a few questions merely, and within four minutes he will tell me all of his own accord. He has no excellent gift of silence, our wirepulled friend.'

And the Judge was as good as his word. He made the Colonel, that admirable and conscientious officer, dowered with all the qualities which a Chief of Police ought not to have, most lamentably miserable. Colonel Hampden Jones would in any other circumstances have fallen back upon his reserves, but he was quite aware that the Judge's arguments, which chiefly concerned pounds, shillings and pence, could no more be refuted by his wife than by himself. Indeed he was afraid of what her temper might lead her to say. He at least could be silent and pitiful - a bluff soldier led by circumstances into a false position.

'I promise you,' he said, 'that I will do nothing to hinder or annoy the ladies of Dent House. I have far too great a respect for the family - shot the covers in the father's time - dined there frequently - old fellow had a deuced good notion of port. I'm not the man - and you know it, Thorald - to make trouble. I'm indebted to you and all that. But - hang it, that Crown Office Christy Minstrel they have sent down,

puts an old fellow's monkey up!

'He is a very promising officer,' said the Judge judicially, 'and there are chiefs of the services, heads of great departments who have far more of the tar-brush than he has. Indeed, I sometimes think that I myself -'

'Don't be a fool, Thorald,' roared the Colonel, 'haven't I known you since you were a young cub of a 'Stunt, with a beak like an eagle and more languages at the tip of your tongue than are good for any man to know?'

'Well,' said the Judge smiling, 'that was because my grandmother, or great-grandmother, or some female kin of mine was countryborn. Get rid of your prejudices, my dear fellow; this isn't Simla. This is Quarrier, county town of Kentigernshire, and Lieutenant Grant, if he makes a representation to the Crown Office will end by having you put on the retired list, and you will agree that a semi-detached villa and the girls giving music lessons (supposing that they could!), would be anything like a fair exchange for a little useful toleration.'

'My God, no!' said the affrighted Colonel, growing yellow to the verge of his white moustache.

'Well, then,' said the Judge, 'if you happen to see Lieutenant Luiz Percy Grant of the Crown Office calling on your wife and daughters this afternoon, you will shake him warmly by the hand - warmly, mind - you will say that you are delighted to see him. You will ask him to forget all you said in your haste this morning. Now, you hear!'

'God,' the Colonel made the invocation not irreverently, 'and was it for this that I commanded the 26th Gurkhas at Maiwand?'

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

THE COLONEL DELIVERED TO THE
PHILISTINES

Grant could not be called a shy man. His business does not make for that. But he certainly felt a decided inclination to shirk the visit to the upper rooms of the Quarrier Court House.

But he entered the big ugly red freestone portal with an assurance he did not feel, and was immediately seized upon by the waiting Colonel, taken up to be as warmly welcomed by Mrs. Hampden Jones, and finally set down to a long and intimate talk with Bertie, who was anxious to find out the reasons for the recent indisposition of Mr. Marcus Hill.

Or rather the majority of the family was anxious, and Bertie, as the eldest, was deputed to find out. She certainly made herself very agreeable to Lieutenant Grant. In fact she had so been commanded by her mother, who had revealed to her that the Lieutenant's salary was £500 a year, with expectations of going right up to the top of the tree.

'And now, don't be a fool, Ethelberta!' her mother had concluded, with an intonation which would have carried its meaning if she had been speaking in Esperanto. Bertie and her sisters (except the Kitten who minded her own business and Victoria Jones who minded only the military), were more interested in Mr. Marcus Hill than in train-loads of dusky young men with five hundred a year.

Still, so far as information went, Mr. Grant could satisfy them, and in answer to Miss Bertie's scarcely disguised interest he said that no doubt Mr. Marcus

had had some sort of an attack on issuing from the barn where the servants had been dancing, but he could assure all his friends on the authority of Dr. Penman that he suffered from nothing worse than a headache the next morning. He was still at the Dent Arms, and he and his pupil seemed likely to spend the winter there.

At these words the interest of the Hampden Jones girls in their guest suddenly diminished. Bertie could hardly be civil till she had made an excuse to cross the floor to her sisters, who were clustered together talking in whispers naturally inaudible to their formidable mother.

'They are stopping on all the winter at the Dent Arms!' said Bertie hurriedly, 'but I must go back - what a bore!'

'Go on,' said the others, 'you may get more out of him. When is he to be out again? When shall we see him?'

'There never was much the matter with him - Dr. Penman says so -'

'Much he knows about it,' volleyed the whisper-chorus, 'go on - back with you, and butter him up till he tells you all he knows.'

Bertie made a face at them and said bitterly, 'Oh, it's very easy for you. You do nothing but sit here and chatter under your breaths, and mamma bade me be nice to him. She said that he had five hundred a year and expectations, and that I had better not be a fool! You know what that means.'

'Well, you're the eldest - you have first pick!' said the Kitten demurely, who up to this point had said nothing. 'But what I would like to know is why papa is so nice to him all of a sudden. I heard him swearing at him and abusing him as if he had done

all the murders with his own hand.'

'Well, if he has, that does not matter! Go on, Bert, and find out about Marcus!' was the command of the rest of the girls.

Bertie went with a pucker of disdain at the corners of her nose. She heaved a deep sigh, as one who has always to bear family burdens. The girls watched her attempts with careful, continuous, but unobtrusive criticism. They had nothing else to do, for except when eligible young men were there, they were not required to interfere with their mother who was several hosts in herself. They were, in fact, not encouraged to put their oars in, or in any way to make themselves remarked, on pain of being promptly snubbed. For Mrs. Hampden Jones extended her military discipline to her entire family. And the girls knew well that it would be a brave man who would place himself with open eyes under the discipline of such a family tyrant. And it was this, more than anything else, which caused every member of the household to dream day and night of running away, Gretna Green weddings, and as a first necessity of happiness complete emancipation from the yoke maternal so soon as the gold wedding ring was about her finger.

This brooding unfilial revolt would greatly have astonished their lady-mother had she known of it. For Mrs. Jones was in the habit of holding up her daughters as paragons of obedience. They had never disobeyed her in their lives, and, in addition, had never given her an hour of anxiety during the same period. This was her particular form of boredom.

It chanced that on this day Mrs. Hampden Jones had few persons to entertain, and that these few soon took their leave. Grant had discovered early

that Miss Bert Jones was interested in Marcus, and so, with ready tact, he willingly talked about that hero's career as known to him - saying nothing, of course, about Aymer Valentine and still less about the slippery lane the youth had trodden with Sylvia Granger. He had the further good sense to change the subject when the lady of the house came and planted herself down before them.

Bertie looked piteously at her mother. She considered her task accomplished, and was on tenterhooks to flutter off to her sisters with the news that the pretty (oh, they were no cats, they allowed that!) the pretty but detrimental Aymer Valentine was really and of a surety going away for a long while, and so they would have Marcus and Billy to themselves. Bert thought jubilantly that the Dent Arms was a very dull place, especially in winter, and if they could not hoodwink their mother they would be unworthy of themselves.

But a look from Mrs. Hampden Jones chained her eldest daughter to her chair.

'What is this I hear,' she demanded without preface, 'about the arrangements of the ladies at Dent House?'

Luiz Grant smiled vaguely, but felt uncomfortable. Mrs. Colonel Jones was one of the women who keep people always hanging over the precipice of what she may say next.

'I speak to you, because, living at Dent House, no doubt as confidential adviser, you must know. But there is a report that Fenwick Wester is being got ready for their reception.'

Then a sudden idea leaped up impishly in Grant's mind. It was one of the few malicious ones that the historian has to record of him. 'The Philistines be

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upon thee, Samson,' he said to himself. And without a qualm he delivered over Colonel Jones bound hand and foot. He remembered all the trouble his rancour, and, what was worse, his stupidity, had caused him, and he said with a pleasant smile, 'I fear, Mrs. Hampden Jones, that you have been misinformed. The decision has not yet been taken. That depends upon your husband.'

'Upon my husband - what do you mean?' The angry dame grew almost purple and Bertie gathered herself up as much out of the way as possible, lest the storm should burst upon her head.

Grant continued to smile his most placid smile.

'This is, of course, official business,' he said, 'and I do not know how far I am justified. But of course it depends on the Chief Constable of the County to say if the ladies can go to Fenwick Wester, which, as you know, is in Jardineshire.'

Now the wife of the above-mentioned functionary generally referred to her husband as 'Colonel' or 'the Colonel' in society. But in moments of great excitement she dropped all formality and called him, as his ancestors had called themselves, plain 'Jones!'

'Jones!' she cried. 'Jones!'

The fidgety self abnegation went out of the warrior's face. He appeared to be suddenly afflicted with paralysis.

'Jones,' cried his lady, a third time, 'don't you hear - are you deaf?'

'No, my dear - not at all, my dear!' said the medalled hero of Maiwand.

'Then why do you need to be spoken to twice? Come here. I want to know if you have any intention of preventing Mrs. Dent and that... Miss Valentine

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from going to Fenwick Wester?’

‘Certainly not, dear Edwitha - why should I?’ said the Colonel, lying bravely, and casting a beseeching glance at Grant to keep his secret.

‘I do not know why you should - you are fool enough for anything,’ said his wife with brutal frankness, ‘but have you such an idea? Have you ever had such an idea?’

‘Never - never - never!’ said the harassed soldier in crescendo, and when his wife left him alone with Grant at the entrance of another guest, he wiped a brow beaded with cold perspiration such as many campaigns had not caused to gather there.

‘I shall not forget it if you keep my secret,’ he said humbly, as Grant rose to take leave. ‘You see how it is.’

Grant saw with extreme clearness, but he only said, ‘As always, you can depend upon me!’

And so his visit to the Court House of Mrs. Hampden Jones had accomplished the purpose for which he had undertaken it. And Grant had one more proof of the perspicacity of the master of Laverock Hall.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

STUMBLING IN THE DARK

After the ladies went to Fenwick Wester an elaborate search of all the approaches of the library and Heather House was undertaken by Grant. He hated the job and placed no reliance on the outcome of this A B C work. Yet he did it to leave no stone unturned and also that he might have something to write about in his weekly reports to headquarters. But the old unfavourable local slanders had ceased. Colonel Jones wrote almost daily screeds concerning the invaluable assistance in the elucidation of these mysteries afforded by the presence of Lieutenant Grant, 'who alone knows the whole case from the beginning.'

In itself such testimony might not have done him much good, but Caffarata was now at his back, and he could put his difficulties privately to a man not bound hand and foot to the old 'clue' school of detection.

Grant went through the task automatically but with the clear conscience that nothing escaped him. It seemed to him certain - with regard to the library, that the assassin had entered by the Garden Port, perhaps admitted by Mr. Patrick Dent himself, and that he had escaped by the same way. The secret door which had enabled Miss Rachel to enter and leave it as she wished, communicated only with the back stairs and the rooms she had occupied on the second floor.

Besides, Grant knew that apparent evidence of the circumstantial kind was as often misleading as not. Indeed, generally so. He had made his great

failure in the matter of Miss Rachel, and in this new affair of the strange behaviour of Marcus, he resolved to be guided by the better and newer lights of 'character' detection - though that, he acknowledged, needed instinct far above the ordinary grovelling for mere details.

There was little evidence of any value as to the adventures of Marcus. The young man himself could throw no light on the matter. He had even forgotten having mentioned any butler 'as a good fellow.' He did not know any butler in the neighbourhood, and the landlord of the Dent Arms acted as butler there himself - but then Marcus and Billy would certainly call him either 'landlord' or by his name of 'Connachar.'

However Grant catechized him till two things were made clear - first that Marcus was concealing nothing, and secondly that he had been in the barn at the dance till a little while before the stealthy exit of Sue and Adams, her husband. Adams could not be certain when he last saw the young man, for he was anxious about the opening of the back door and engaged in watching Sue's face, while on her side Sue was wondering when Adams would be ready.

The lantern found which had lit the Heather House was the ordinary one which Billy and Marcus were wont to borrow from the stable yard of the Dent Arms. It had been brought over by Marcus himself, perhaps in the hope that he might have to escort Aymer home, but Sylvia had stuck too close to Miss Valentine to give him the least chance of proposing such a thing.

The stable lantern had been hung high on the crotch of an oak, and Marcus only remembered thinking of taking it home when he saw that it was

not of the least use trying to make his apologies to Aymer that night. Billy had gone to the door with him and could testify that he was then in his ordinary health and spirits though somewhat dashed by the steadfast unkindness of Miss Valentine. Billy had remarked to himself that he would assuredly have a warm time at work tomorrow, and had run over in his mind the weak points of a verse translation he had been making of the last ode of the third book of Horace. He thought of the rubbish that Marcus would be sure to call it if his love affairs of the night miscarried, and he looked about for the two good-natured daughters of the landlord of the Dent Arms, one of whom might serve to distract his friend.

Billy generously made up his mind to walk before with the lantern and Miss Anne, while Marcus was to follow with Bella – as, and when, he listed. This was a sacrifice, for Billy much preferred the younger of the innkeeper's daughters. But on that night, he felt that he would do anything for his friend and preceptor.

Marcus stayed out an unconscionable time, and Billy had made half a dozen journeys out of doors. He assured himself that there was no lantern hung on the crotch of the oak, nor yet any sign of his tutor. But then Sylvia and Miss Valentine had also vanished, and it began to appear to Billy that all might yet turn out for the best. He thought his translation of Horace would have a better fate on the morrow than to be trodden upon and gored by the furious ires of the Chancery tutor.

What annoyed Billy most was that from his place of observation he could keep an eye on the oak where the lantern had been hung, and he was quite

sure that Marcus had not been near it. It had, therefore, been abstracted before Marcus went out of the barn.

There was no more to be learned by Grant. The fragments of the tumbler which Sue had thrown over the wall were collected, but completely dry, they gave no results.

All this, however, though without definite result for the moment, set Luiz Grant thinking deeply. There were only two men in the neighbourhood who could by any possibility be called butler, and only one of them had any real right to the title.

That one was Richard Hissy. Bailey was only the Judge's man-servant, but his position in the household of Laverock, and especially his functions on the night of the wedding and dance, might conceivably have deceived Marcus as to his real position.

Richard Hissy? He was the trusted of his master. He had access to him at any time. He had all the keys. He was one of those most deeply vowed to the service of Miss Aymer.

He might have had a hand in the double writing. It was by no means impossible that he had been ordered by Miss Rachel to serve her tea in the Heather House. He was a butler and the only one in the immediate vicinity of Quarrier - at least on that side. He might, because of Sylvia or because of Aymer, have had a grudge against Marcus—

But here Grant laughed at himself, recognizing that he could as readily have found specious reasons for his own proper guilt as for that of Richard Hissy.

But there was one thing which intrigued and overweighted the soul of Detective-Lieutenant Grant

more and more. He determined to find out what the master of Laverock Hall did with his time when he was not walking about with the air of an eighteenth century dandy. If he, Luiz Grant, could only see all that Laverock Hall held - know all that its master knew - he felt sure that the secret would be a secret no longer.

It is no wonder that Grant was in a condition of bewilderment. He was being driven to impossible conclusions by sheer elimination. There were now very few persons whom he could even suspect of organizing such a series of crimes, and of these the two chief were Richard Hissy and Bailey the confidential servant of Judge Thorald.

But in the case of this latter, he felt that he would certainly be kept wholly in the dark. He acknowledged the influence of a superior mind, and he dared not take the first step as to an inquiry. There were indeed no grounds.

He might come and go at will to Laverock Hall. He was on terms of intimacy with the master. Judge Thorald's study was open to him - the laboratory of which he had spoken jestingly - the one that even Bailey was not allowed to tidy, was the only part of the mansion he had not repeatedly seen.

The Judge prided himself on keeping open house, a Liberty Hall on Solway Side, and indeed all were welcome who were neither bores nor stupid. A man less secret and more careless of opinion could not be found. But Grant remarked that there was something dark and secret about Bailey. The man continually watched out of the corners of his eyes. He watched his own master most of all. Under his stolidity something that told of terror of the soul played the tyrant with him.

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Yes, Richard Hissy must be the avowed object of his researches. He might then communicate his suspicions to the Judge, but in the depths of his heart he would wait for Bailey to commit himself. If only Adams and Sue had tarried a few moments less at the barn, Grant told himself that now he might have held him under lock and key.

But all the more, he must move with extreme circumspection. For the Judge in all such matters proceeded by a kind of divination to his conclusions. His methods were the same as those of Grant, but in the swift certainty of result he was obliged to acknowledge the Indian Judge his master at his own business.

Evidently this was no man to juggle with. Wilfred Thorald had no blind side - not even that which was now turned towards Aymer Valentine and Fenwick Wester.

For it was the Judge who had gone there with them. Luiz Grant would gladly have undertaken the journey himself, but the ladies gave him no chance. Both Mrs. Fenwick Dent and Miss Valentine had asked for the Judge to accompany them, and that in a way which could not be mistaken.

Sylvia could only look at Grant from under her lashes, as though pitying his expulsion from Eden. She came up close to him and in her sauciest manner whispered, 'You and Mr. Hill can have a little farewell party and comfort each other!'

And with that she elevated her chin and was gone.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

THIRLAGE

One mild misty night in February Grant was wandering through the park. It had been almost summerlike all day, so that the resident birds had begun to whistle and some had even communicated to each other ideas of pairing and nesting - ideas which the storms of March were calculated to dissipate.

Straight towards him advanced the figure of a tall girl, and his heart bounded. It was not Aymer, as for a moment he had thought, but Sylvia Granger. She had a little plain bag in her hand, and she had been crying.

'Sylvia - Miss Granger,' Grant exclaimed, 'what are you doing here?'

'Miss Aymer sent me - to look after the house and you - if you were still here. Mrs. Fenwick Dent will not have me about her any more. I did not know what to do. Some one has been telling wicked stories about me.'

'Nonsense, Sylvia,' said Grant good-naturedly; 'I am sure that Miss Aymer will look after you all right, and I shall be very glad of you in the house. It is not very gay at the mansion of Dent with only old Richard, deaf and dumb so far as I am concerned, and Connel with her eternal 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir''

Sylvia looked up at Luiz Grant with that keen weighing-and-measuring glance with which a woman of experience sums up a man. But she saw at once - no one could see quicker - that her sudden

idea was wrong. And in the drop of an eyelid she was once more the grateful and respectful lady's maid, her heart going out to Grant for the unwonted sympathy of his reception of her, to which might perhaps be added a little pity for one so blind to the richer half of human experience.

But with a quick action he eased her of her bag and waterproof, slinging them deftly over the hook of his stick with a nervous boyish air that became his slender figure.

'Oh, no, Mr. Grant,' she said, 'you must not do a thing like that for a servant!'

'For a servant,' he smiled across at her through the dusk - 'across' because she was tall, indeed as tall as he. 'Why, what am I? A servant. And what were my people - well, that you could not understand unless you went to India and found out. But we are at the far lodge and we have a good little walk before us. Then I will wait and see you installed.'

'Thank you, Mr. Grant. There will be no difficulty - I am Miss Aymer's maid now. I have a letter from her to Richard Hissy. Here it is!'

'She never does anything that is not kind,' said Grant, feeling that he was speaking as one of the foolish ones.

'Oh,' smiled Sylvia, 'don't make any mistake - she has a pretty little temper of her own when she is crossed. No girl is worth a button who hasn't!'

'You have one?' said Grant, merely for something to say. In light speech he was inexperienced, though as a carrier of bags and wraps he was equal to any occasion.

'Oh, mine,' said the girl, looking at him from under her long lashes, 'yes, I have a temper of my

own. Only mine is not 'a pretty little one!'

And somehow Grant divined that this was true. She turned on him suddenly. 'Why have you never been in love, Mr. Grant?'

Grant stopped under the leafless boughs so that the jauntily swung bag and waterproof came down with a 'whop' on his shoulder. Somehow the girl's daring did not astonish him. He had read as much and more in her face. Nor did he try to turn the question off with a jest or a personal application as an ordinary ready man would have done. Neither did he put the interpretation to the question which such a man would have put.

'Because,' he answered seriously, 'I was brought up in a land where what you call 'love' is left to foolish young men with no care for their futures. In my youth I had to lay it aside till the very thought became almost a treachery to my vocation.'

'What is your vocation?' said Sylvia unexpectedly.

'I am a lawyer - of the Calcutta bar,' said Grant; 'I do work for the Government.'

Sylvia eyed him, silent and wide-eyed, the dusky splash of her hat-brim lying upon her cheek as they came out in the open space.

'You do not love - the man who lives over there?'

She pointed with her hand to the copsewood bank at the top of which stood Laverock Hall and round which the Laverock water made a mysterious glimmering half-circle.

Grant was thoroughly taken by surprise this time. The girl seemed able to divine his inmost thoughts. But he did not think of treachery, and he answered with as much frankness as he ever used to women:

'I am not a man either to love or hate. Judge Thorald has undoubtedly been of great service to

me.'

The girl caught him impulsively by the arm.

'I can be of greater,' she whispered in his ear. So that Grant was conscious of a warm breath and a subtle odour of lily of the valley. 'I can be of far greater service. I hate him! I hate him!'

The tone in which she spoke put the Lieutenant on his guard. He knew how much was meant by the denunciations of jealous women.

'He has done you an injury?' he said gravely.

'Have I not said that I hate him?'

'In my country,' said Grant quietly, 'women mostly hate men because they will not do them an injury.'

'I have been in your country - my people wandered there,' said Sylvia Granger hastily. 'I can speak your speech - that is, if I have not forgotten. He brought me back. He educated me. He gave me a work to do. And that work was to be lady's maid to Mrs. Fenwick Dent. Yet for the last five years he has hardly given me a look or a thought. He only thinks and cares for Miss Aymer. And (here the girl laughed) she hates him too. That is my comfort. That is my revenge. But not all of it! No, nor the main part of it.'

To test the girl Grant spoke to her in Hindostanee and she replied. Then the conversation reverted to English and Grant listened intently.

'I am not a fool,' she said; 'revenge, as they say with us gipsies, is a barren plant, and even when eaten leaves a bitter aftertaste. But - nothing for nothing, as your proverb is. If I tell you that which I know, what will be of use to you in your career, will you for that give me - I do not say 'love' - you do not know the meaning of the word - but the

THE AZURE HAND

support which a man can give to a woman of his own kin and like him lonely in a far land? Oh, do not be afraid - I am white, whiter than you, but there is wild blood in me and that is always uppermost. I am terribly lonely sometimes, and then I break away and do foolish things. Will you hold me - give me the strength of a man - keep me close to you? Speak! Tell me you will.'

'But you do not love me.' Grant said the word fearlessly now.

'Love - love,' laughed the girl. 'Man of the East, I will love you till the stars dance and the sun goes out if you will help me to my desire. You and I do not want little blue forget-me-nots out of ditches, and messages dropped in the cracks of trees. We have not the English sentiment about a dropped handkerchief, but a strong man's arms are a strong man's arms and a woman's lips, her lips - till they belong to the strong man!'

Grant knew of the trap set for Marcus, but with the inborn self-sufficiency of man he did not and could not believe that this was a similar, but far more dangerous snare, baited for himself.

Nor was it. His race instinct held good. And better than any in the world the girl had divined him. She had discovered what he would do for the sake of success. He would give himself to her for that - he would support her, he would protect her with his arm. Not for what the pale folk of the Occident call love, but because she brought him success. He would supply in return that backing for which many women marry - a reserve, a counsellor, a city of refuge, steady rear-guard in the hour of defeat.

It was a bargain only possible between two young people such as Luiz Grant and Sylvia Granger -

fighters each for their own hands and with their own weapons. The little growth of Western sympathy that had been awakened in Grant's heart by Miss Aymer had not outlasted his terrible defeats. These must be retrieved - retrieved at all hazards.

But he saw at once that Sylvia Granger was his needful weapon - he adroit and subtle, she seasoned and tempered to his hand. So, when they had made their bargain and become thirled to each other - the woman to her man, it came about that Luiz Grant, slipping back into the folk of his mother, silently handed Sylvia the gipsy her own bag and waterproof, and stalked on towards the House of Dent, a good twenty yards before her. And Sylvia Granger followed meekly after, also according to the manner of her people.

Now what they had done was this. Sylvia Granger had by rule and usage offered Luiz Grant to be his thrall, his thing, his chattel. From a free woman she had become a slave, and willingly, so. For he also had his part to perform. He had agreed to give her protection, and at the end, her revenge.

Outwardly, however, nothing of their relations was changed. For there was none in Kentigernshire who would have understood such a bargain.

That is, except one. And from him, most of all, the secret must be kept.

CHAPTER FORTY

BILLY, KITTEN, AND THEIR PLAY-ROOM

With the adhesion of Sylvia a complete reaction came over the character of Luiz Grant. His western education seemed actually to peel off him. For the needs of the service, indeed, he was unchanged - as always, firm, authoritative, determined. But really he saw all things from a different angle. He had now an ally whom nothing could daunt, to whom his interests were before her own. He did not seem surprised. Nor in fact was he. He expected as much from the woman who had thirled herself to him - who of her own free will had become his thrall.

And between them they laid out their task, as master and servant grown old upon the same land, consult on equal terms about the details of hedging and ditching. So with equal confidence in each other Grant and Sylvia arranged their plan of campaign. He told her things that he would not have breathed to the Howards. And she expected as much from him, like a woman who, being trusted, knows what is the penalty of treachery.

One of their greatest difficulties was with Marcus. Ever since the night of the Heather House, the night of Sue Sim's marriage - to her now infinitely remote - he had been a man without memory, tended by Billy with a jealous and wistful tenderness. He insisted, indeed, that his pupil should do lessons with him every day, but Marcus himself was quite incapable of giving them.

So Billy went back twenty or thirty pages of each

book and, as he said, 'swotted the hide off him,' at revising. But during the lessons themselves he accepted meekly every suggestion of Marcus, all equally wrong-headed. He was punched and abused without exerting himself to hold his own.

'It would not be a fair 'do!'' said the Hon. William Leslie Bowles. 'I have to get him better, that's all there is about it. If the Chancery people get wind of it, they'd sack him.'

So Billy made Marcus copy out letters which he himself had written to the Vice-Chancellor - letters which Marcus signed. To square himself Billy embroidered upon his noble character and scholastic attainments.

'I am much pleased with the progress of my pupil during these last months,' he wrote. 'The quiet of this neighbourhood and the steady application to a definite course of study has put him well ahead of young men of his age in point of scholarship. I cannot too much praise his regularity and the instinct of obedience which actuates it. Yet he is full of spirit, and I am sure will turn out a real Empire-Builder.'

'That,' said Billy to himself, 'will fetch the old man - contund me if it doesn't! He is Vice-President of the Empire-builders' League - saw it in yesterday's *Scotsman*. That will be a score for Marcus, and our next account of 'X's' will be passed without a murmur. Ah, Marcus boy, but it's lucky you've me to look after you when the old brain-case has gone cranky for a bit!'

And indeed cranky it was. For Marcus lay most of the day on a sofa at the Dent Arms gazing idly out at the window. He noted the young men who went and came out of the tobacconist's opposite,

and his weary brain did not offer him an explanation. They simply went and came, but the mystery worried him. It was Billy who found out.

‘Oh, Miss Armitage’s,’ he said, ‘do I know her? Well, rather - she’s a fine girl. I would have had a look in there if I had not been otherwise engaged - with you, old fellow, of course. But Miss Armitage, well, she is a pretty girl and a good. She lets them come in for five minutes at a time because she says there’s safety in numbers. But at the end of five minutes she sends them tripping because she won’t have the shop blocked up. Ever seen me coming out as if I was trying to catch the last ‘bus? Well, that was one of the times. For you see the shop and business is her own, and she is good to the young - gives them the best of advice as soon as she sees that they mean all right. Been no end good to Yours Truly.

‘But you may rather believe that she knows who’s who. And she says that she knows there are scores of young men in Quarrier who would like to marry a nice well-established business two doors from a public house - with a nice girl thrown in, and do nothing for the rest of their lives, But that, so far as she is concerned, she does not mean to lend herself to the combination.

‘Good girl,’ said Marcus, ‘I seem to remember somebody who would do that.’

‘Oh, scores,’ said Billy; ‘there was that girl who gave you her aunt’s visiting-card in the waiting-room at Vervieres, and told you to say that you were her long-lost uncle just home from the Argentine.’

‘Get out, Billy!’ said Marcus, feebly. ‘You made that up just now.’

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'Well, you *are* in a bad way when even so strong a probability does not appear like a truth to you. But what am I thinking of? I'll go and get you your beef tea-'

'Go and stick your head in a bucket of cold water, Billy,' said Marcus ungratefully.

'Doctor's orders!' said Billy, and vanished in the direction of the kitchen.

'Good sort, Billy,' thought Marcus Hill, 'but quite cracked. How in the world am I ever to deliver him back to the Court of Chancery – and I shall be an outlaw if I don't.'

This was a new trouble to the stricken Chancery tutor. So in despair he put his difficulty to his pupil.

'I would not worry, if I were you,' said Billy, 'I had a jolly good-sized crack in my skull before they let you have me. That was why they put me on to you. Really they won't notice the least difference. I heard the Vice-Chancellor himself say that it was the hardest thing in the world to tell the difference between an ordinary client of the Court of Chancery and a born lunatic!'

With these comforting words, Billy propounded a new scheme.

He was sure that the stupendous and unparalleled effort which Marcus was putting forth to do his duty by his education were having a bad effect on his health. Now, there were evening classes in the town of Quarrier under the auspices of the Science and Art Department, (So it was placarded on the door.)

Billy was sure that if Marcus would let him attend some of these classes for an hour or so at nights, it would greatly ease his mind, besides contributing immensely to the improvement in general knowledge

of the Hon. W. Leslie Bowles.

Billy represented this institution, which was of purely local interest, as a sort of northern university, and spoke of the professors as men of enormous intellect, powers in the land, and capable of piling the intellectual fires of very celebrated luminaries indeed.

Marcus, who loved at this time to be left alone, lost in a kind of brooding dream, was not very hard to persuade, and so Billy found himself with three hours every evening free for the education which Marcus had worked so hard to acquire, but which he had never hitherto suspected Billy of yearning for.

It goes to the heart of the present writer, who thinks well of Billy, to relate how he actually proposed to spend these hours.

First he put the matriculation and class fees in his pocket, and then went to the Court House, in the smaller halls and annexes of which the evening classes were held. To the right there was a kind of postern-gate in the thickness of the freestone wall. It was in fact the door by which the general servant of the wife of the Chief of Kentigernshire police took down the daily 'bucket' of rubbish, and by which she returned with the beef and greens for dinner,

But this girl whom Billy met was no Sylvia Granger - nor any maiden paid by wages, though, for her soul's good, she had three rooms to 'do' every day. It was in fact Miss Catherine Hampden Jones, called the 'Kitten,' who has been noted in this chronicle for minding her own business. Curiously enough the Kitten was simultaneously and equally smitten by the desire for additional knowledge - though she had left school a good while ago, and up

to the present had not manifested any ardent desire to go outside the limits of a good smoothly-running six shilling novel.

But this winter her horizons had been immensely widened - the same as Billy's.

'No, we must not tell the others,' she said, as they stood in front of the great sheet containing the announcements of evening classes. 'That would set the whole pack off in full cry. Oh, they are right enough and would never tell the 'governess' - Mamma, that is - but they would worry and bother to be told. And we don't want that - Mr. Bowles?'

'Billy?' suggested the gentleman addressed, coaxingly; 'so much easier to say. Besides it does not sound as if I had my hat - and a cane - and a pair of gloves - and a cup of afternoon tea with cake that you must not drop on the floor, all on my knees at once - Billy, eh?'

'Well then - Billy,' said Kitten obediently.

'But which class shall it be?' said Billy, knitting his brows at the printed announcement, 'it has got to be the middle hour of my three (which means seven o'clock) - I can come to meet you a bit before the time - then I can stay with you a bit after if the gods are good to me.'

'And I willing,' said Kitten defiantly.

Billy passed from this. At the stage at which they had arrived it was not worth consideration. 'What we want is a good quiet class-room where there is something to do besides just sitting on benches and listening to lectures. Well, there's wood-carving! What do you say to that?'

'Too many girls - girls I know - eyes like spy-glasses!' pronounced the Kitten. 'Tell their mother - their mothers would tell mine. Mount Vesuvius in

full eruption, torrents of lava, and then the---

'The King and Queen on their way with sympathy and a pocketful of coppers to render first aid to the victims! said Billy. 'No, that won't do - thank you, Kitten, all the same. But - I say, how's this - Analytical Chemistry - perfectly fitted laboratories - where on payment of a small extra fee students are permitted to continue their researches at any time between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. Eh, what?— what do you say to that? No end of a great man, Billy! Say it, Kitten!'

'Divil of a great man, Billy!' said Kitten demurely, in the Dublin accent she had tried so hard to acquire when her father had a post at the Curragh.

'Kitten!' cried Billy severely.

'Mee-ou!' said Kitten; 'do you think I have done nothing but lap milk all my life? I suppose you know I have a father. A father, sir, who commanded the 26th Gurkhas, and did not tuck them in and sing 'Bless my little lambs tonight.'

'Well,' said Billy, leaving the subject to take care of itself, 'we will take it for granted, Kitten, that you desire as ardently to be instructed in Analytical Chemistry as in any other branch of needle-work?'

'I don't know what it is,' said the Kitten, coyly removing Billy's hand from her waist by turning quickly on her toes in waltz step, in the manner which all girls know but practise only when it suits them.

'Oh,' said the instructed but disappointed Billy, 'it means puddling about with little glass things called test tubes, and heating them till they turn blue and yellow - and being told what's in them. Oh, it's a fine thing for fooling away time, and I bet you can get a certificate in that as well as in anything else. At least

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Marcus says that fellows can at the universities. They are called -'

And then Billy recollected what these graduates really were called and tailed off weakly into 'Graduates in Physics and Chemistry.'

'I think it sounds horrid,' said Kitten, with a sigh, 'but I suppose there's nothing else.'

'Nothing nearly so good,' said Billy consolingly. 'You toddle off home and break your earnest desire to take evening classes to your folk. Get a little dilute hydro-chloric acid at the chemist's on the way, and pour some of it on the marble mantelpiece if they object, and say that you can do your experiments at home. It will smoke and there will be no end of a shindy, but even your mother will let you go after that -'

'Will she?' said the Kitten, 'then consider it poured.'

'And I will look up the laboratory tomorrow morning and report at five in the afternoon prompt, just inside here. Then I shall be able to tell you all about it. We have to be cautious, you know.'

'I know,' said the Kitten with a sigh; 'if ever a poor girl was in what they call a false position, this child is she. If you come down like a wolf on the fold and carry me off and marry me - it's me that must go to prison - just because you are a ward in Chancery. As if I could help that!'

'No more could I, Kit dear,' said Billy, 'but just you wait a short year, Kitten, and then:

*'I'll learn the 'Vice' a rattling song,
When I am one-and-twenty, Tam!'*

Tomorrow and its researches were satisfactory, when the Kitten came rushing down the banisters in a swish of skirts and was lifted off into the arms of

the expectant Billy.

'All new,' he said, before he had thought of letting go; 'smells of whitewash, dinkiest little furnaces, and scores of sinks placed two and two with a compartment between like horses in stalls. (All right, who's not letting you go?) You and I are down for one loosebox right at the end with a private window and all the length of the garret from the professor's private lay-out and the black-board where he sticks up his formulae. There are to be two or three other girls, all board-school teachers, who will be working like fire for their Science Certificates, and the rest mostly chemists' assistants going in for their A.P.S. or older men with shops wanting to be Members of the Pharmaceutical Society. Their thoughts will all be fixed on Bloomsbury Square and never a moment will they have to spot what we are up to.'

'Oh,' said the Kitten innocently, 'whatever *you* are going to do with your time, *I* am going to learn Analytical Chemistry. That two ounces of the stuff you told me to buy worked first rate last night. I spilt it on the mantelpiece, and we had the fire-brigade. So, as they were afraid that I would begin again, they let me come and I've got the fees-money here.'

'If you are at all bothered,' said Billy, 'pop an old lump of copper into a pennyworth of nitric acid and spill a little of the juice on the carpet. Then you'll get all the leave you want.'

'I will,' said the Kitten, as solemnly as if she had been at the altar, and so fled upstairs.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

MARCUS IN THE MARSHES

It was owing to this private and amicable arrangement that Marcus found opportunity to make his promised visit to Fenwick Wester. Grant, being taken into the secret, and of course consulting Sylvia, thought exceedingly well of the project.

Indeed it was from this quarter that the practical means had first been discovered. Yet no one had noticed the fact, so carefully had Luiz and Sylvia covered up their tracks. Sylvia called to bring him some delicacy from the kitchen of Dent, and Marcus had started and stared at her.

'It was because of you that Aymer was angry with me,' he had said.

And though Sylvia had answered nothing at the time, she had her own idea. This was, that if Marcus remembered so much about a girl he had only seen for a short time in a country lane, he might remember more if brought face to face with the girl he did love.

Billy was therefore chosen to suggest the matter to him, and as for Grant, he was of opinion that he had enough influence with the ladies to obtain him a proper invitation to Fenwick Wester. But Billy could obtain no definite answer. He did not seem to remember Aymer at all, and it took some time to receive a reply to Grant's letter - which in the first place had to be written with the utmost delicacy and discrimination.

But none of them dreamed what ideas had been

set fermenting in the poor mouldered head of the Chancery tutor. Billy, least of all, who was now full of his classes, and found laboratory work so entrancing that it took all his afternoons and even threatened to eat up the mornings as well.

Grant and Sylvia, too, had their own plans, but for the present they did not trouble any one else with them. Some of these had to do with the conveying of Marcus to Fenwick Wester. Grant, in his capacity of friend of the family, was to accompany him. But when he went to the Dent Arms to announce that all was ready for the journey he found only a very blank Billy, and no Marcus at all.

'And I was only out for an hour at a lecture on Analytical Chemistry!' said Billy, who had really absented himself three hours and a quarter.

They searched and searched but Marcus had quite definitely vanished. No one had seen him, and of his passage there was no single trace, save that the best stable lantern and three carriage candles had disappeared from the harness room of the Dent Arms.

'That's Marcus,' said the penitent Billy, 'he always did that. He said that carriage candles were the best and kept in famously.'

'He will be hanging about the gaps in the copsewood of Dent House to-night,' said Grant, 'I wish I had the Howards!'

But in his heart he knew that he had better than a score of Howards. He had Sylvia Granger.

'You had better go across to Laverock Park and see that he is not there,' counselled Sylvia; 'it will be as well if I keep on this side of the Lodge Lane.' And she enrolled Adams and Sue to patrol the lane itself

which, glad to be together in work time, they did willingly enough - though Adams thought with occasional self-reproach of his unfinished job in the hothouse.

But they had no success. It was Sylvia who found out the way.

'Luiz,' she said, 'you have got to stay here. I dare not look near Fenwick Wester. Mrs. Dent finds it necessary to hate somebody, and it is a great deal better that it should be me than Aymer. So Billy must go. I believe Marcus has gone off there helter-skelter, by train possibly, on his boot leather probably - at any rate with the stable-lantern and a spare carriage-candle. *Mad?* Yes, I know. But, just the sort of thing he would do. No, the business is coming too near a head for you to be absent, even for a day. We have got that report on the handwriting now, and the third will is beyond attack. Miss Aymer is really mistress of Dent - if suspicion can once and for all be kept away from her. But you must remember the adversaries you have to fight. Besides, though you have made peace with the Colonel, you cannot be certain a minute of that old cat, his wife, if she hears I am back again at Dent.'

So early in the morning Billy started off for Fenwick Wester in a light gig drawn by the best horse in the Dent Arms stables. But then, while these plans were being made, Marcus had twelve hours the start.

Fenwick Wester is an ancient 'peel' tower added to through half a score of generations, and kept habitable by its solitary position and the habit the Dents had of sending their wives and troublesome womenkind there when they wished to make and

settle a feud or entertain their neighbours of a riotous and deep-drinking county.

The single tall tower gave ancestral dignity. The oblong of heterogeneous architecture which extended to both sides and dwindled into stables and office-houses in rear of the flagged old court, was notable only for being exceedingly well-built, mostly sound whinstone masonry built by the Carlyles of Ecclesfechan. The house stood without a tree higher than a rowan or thorn-bush well out on the flats of the Moss of Lochar - the majestic ruins of Caerlaverock on one hand, and opposite, rosy as though built of spinelle ruby the delicately tinted towers and trellised gables of Sweetheart Abbey.

The whaup whinnied all day about it. The plover-bleat was its most familiar sound - that and the silent swishing of ten thousand wings as the rook congregations soared their ways twice a day down to the tidal Solway flats or up to the newly ploughed lands of Ruthwell and Half Morton.

Mrs. Fenwick Dent had said rightly. It was a lonely place, though excellently appointed and possessing an admirable library of what Patrick had called 'wet day books'

But she sometimes shuddered to think what would become of her if she had not made her peace with Aymer, now that Sylvia had been sent away.

By this time Mrs. Dent had been served with a copy of the third will, that by which the Dent properties went to Aymer. And to the great astonishment of every one, this had been the beginning of a better understanding. As for Aymer she, of course, would forgive anybody. There was no sin against herself that she was not ready - nay eager, to forgive. So she flew into her aunt's arms

and assured her that she was the dearest and kindest of created beings, and that she would have a half of all that she had. She knew she had no right to a penny of it. She had never expected a farthing, and indeed her uncle had always said that she was to have nothing. Why then should she not give everything to her aunt, and let things be just as they had always been?

‘Well, my dear,’ said Mrs. Fenwick Dent, petting her, ‘there are at least three reasons against that - first, the lawyers would not let you - second, neither would your husband, and thirdly I have got plenty of money of my own, and I would not take from you the least penny that Patrick meant you to have.’

‘But are you sure that he did, aunt?’ said Aymer.

‘Well, he did not mean Rachel to have the house of Dent at any rate,’ said Mrs. Dent, ‘and that is all I care about!’

‘Oh, auntie, poor Rachel is dead.’

‘Why, yes, of course she is, child - or we would not be so comfortable here, with somebody sulking upstairs and that dreadful Sylvia setting everybody by the ears.’

Aymer did not think it necessary to tell her aunt that she had installed Sylvia at Dent. That was a piece of news which would keep, and it did not hurt her aunt in the least, not to know it. Besides, Mrs. Fenwick Dent had announced her intention of going at once to London, as soon as ‘these policemen and lawyers’ had satisfied themselves that neither she nor Aymer were murderers!

‘Oh, yes, I know,’ she said repeatedly, they are suspecting us. Because there is nobody left for them to suspect. I was jealous of you, Aymer - I know I was, and it was horrid of me. And if you had been

poisoned or found dead in the Heather House, I should have gone to gaol, or if the Judge had been more severe, sent to stop with Mrs. Hampden Jones. But as it is, we have made it up, you and I, Aymer, and you are my dearest dear, and I have been happier than ever before in my life. I only wish I could persuade you to go to London with me. We could go halves in such a lovely flat - a double one, overlooking the river on the Embankment.'

She went to the window and looked out.

'Ugh, the horrid place!' she said with a shudder. And then turning abruptly, came and warmed her hands at the ruddy glow of bog-oak and peat in the fireplace.

Yet Fenwick Wester was one of the loveliest places on earth. The Laverock on one side searched a way to the sea in a thousand channelled twists and windings. The sands spread out mystically as far as the farther beaches of Cumberland, and now reflected a glowing evening sky. The birds were following the retreating tide, gulls all rosy with the low winter's sunlight, in wide dense bands that stretched far out to either side. A few whaups with curved beaks were among them. But the waders kept to themselves, showing a dainty rose grey against the shining ooze of the wet sand. A few black-coated parsonic rooks, late stayers, or within short distances of their rookeries in the Mouswald and Carnsalloch woods, squabbled and pecked in the retiring wash. One by one, however, they rose into the air with a spiral flight, and then getting the direction of their home, sped away with strong purposeful flight.

Aymer stood, admired and yearned to see more. She would have taken the field-glass that had been

her uncle's off the chimney-piece save that to use it she would have needed to lift the window and so let in the chill air off the salt flats.

Her aunt shuddered again.

'I'm all goose-flesh. Get me a shawl, child,' she said, and settled herself in the most cosy chair at the snuggest side of the fire to wait for it.

Aymer had to go up to her bedroom in the 'peel' or big square tower which had been the nucleus of Fenwick Wester. When she was so far up she bethought her that she might as well step out upon the leaden roof, and there with one hand on the flagstaff, she took in with deep sighs of contentment the great circular marvel of sea and sky - all the hills of Kentigern, all the green pastures of Jardineshire, the Cumberland fells, amethyst and palest crimson, the mother-of-pearl rose of the tide-flats, and beyond the line of the Solway itself, thin like a winding river, but heavenly blue as though fresh from that Workshop where no doubt they are busy making the new heavens and the new earth.

With a curious constriction of the heart, which she had not the courage to explain to herself, Aymer stepped inside and got the shawl.

She had not noticed on the far western bank of Laverock, a black figure that stood alone on a mound of shells and drift. There was something small and black aswing by the figure's side, which in good truth was no other than the best stable-lantern out of the Dent Arms harness-room.

'Where have you been, child?' said Mrs. Fenwick Dent querulously, for she had not ceased complaining when she made up her quarrel with Aymer. It was indeed so much a habit with her that had she spoken kindly and smilingly, those who

knew her best would at once have sent for the doctor.

It was not the custom to make much ceremony of shutting blinds at Fenwick Wester. Servants were few and old. They considered everything that had not been done 'in Master's time' to be an infringement of their liberties. And as Aymer knew that it would be almost impossible to get modern domestics to stay in a desolate place like the ancient Peel among the stretches of Lochar peat and sand it came about that she did a great deal of the work herself.

That was nothing. It kept her mind employed and she had long been accustomed to the moods of Mrs. Dent. That she was now the heiress expectant of the Dent estates made no impression at all upon her. She felt quite sure that some other will would turn up which would make hers useless. In vain it was pointed out to her that there could not be a later date than the last day of Patrick Dent's life; she persisted in taking only her regular dress-money and keeping well within the amount that had been allowed her in the first of the wills produced.

McMath, Lindsay, and McMath, of Edinburgh, remonstrated vainly with her on her folly but as men were filled with secret admiration.

'That lass is richt evendoon good Scots, and ye nicht do waur, Alec!' said McMath, Senior, to his son, the young man with the fishing in Norway.

Alec was indeed likely to do very much worse, owing to the multiplied exigencies of a young lady with golden ringlets running wild, whose legal claims upon him Master Alec had not yet thought it worth while mentioning to the head of the firm.

'From what I could see, sir, when I was down

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there,' he answered, 'Miss Valentine is already arranged for!'

'Ha,' said the old bravo of the law, 'it is surely never a small thing like that, wad stop a son o' mine! I mind me—'

But his son knew very well of what it reminded him, and so, alleging late work at the office, he escaped to James Square and the gilded ringlets of Clarisse.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

MIDNIGHT ON LOCHAR FLATS

The country folk say that there is a 'hungry cold' about the salt marshes of Lochar. There are no malarial fevers as there would be in such a place inland. The god who sent the frothy sidelong tides and the swashing turmoil of the rain, who made the spiky sea-plants and foam puff balls, sent also the winds from the firth – Atlantic-fresh, salted and ozonized to saturation point. Fevers cannot live there. But there falls a chill with the dropping of the wind and the coming of night so heavy that the forehead aches and the brain underneath appears to congeal like frozen turnips. The big blunderbuss drops from the hand of the fowler who has ventured to brave Lochar cold.

Whiskey of the true Lochar sort used internally and externally is the popular security against rheumatism. Though indeed, notwithstanding a free use of this in both kinds, the limbs of lifelong dwellers on the great Sea Moss are often twisted and their fingers clawed and stiff.

If you ask why, you get for answer – not without a certain pride – 'That's nobbut our Lochar spit of cold – not a place in all the Borders for freezin' ye up like Lochar. And all the while the water stops as 'tis, with never a needle of ice upon it, while you are froze to the bone!'

Folks with houses and fires keep carefully at home during these perilous hours of sundown. And if any went out, it was at their peril. Not that there was any difficulty about heat. Firewood is to be had for the carting all over Lochar – good peat at a

shilling the cartload, and split wreck-wood, or bog oak in the piece at ninepence. None need be cold on Lochar, for all that any have to do is to go out and help themselves. Drift-wood is always plentiful. Then there were the lumber-ships going to Barcaple Quay, and best of all the rubbish of the Cumberland pit props.

But this night of the rosy sunset and the shore-frequenting birds taking their last reluctant bite, there fell one of those savagely still Lochar chills. The windows of the old house of Fenwick Wester were steamed over with hoar-frost, so hard and fell did the outside cold lean against them.

Mrs. Dent sat huddled in her shawl and thought of going to supper after the theatre. Aymer was restless. She played with needlework till it was time for their quiet supper. This she arranged for Mrs. Dent with her own hands. The lady did not wish to move on such a night. And indeed, if Aymer had served her on her knees she would not have been astonished. She could part with the lands of Dent without a pang, but if Aymer had not been ready to hand her the salt-cellar the moment she wanted it, she would have fallen into a rage. But Aymer was always prompt.

Then came the ceremony of putting Mrs. Fenwick Dent to bed. Most adults can put themselves to bed as if racing for the Gordon Bennett cup. But not so Mrs. Dent. There were ceremonial rites to accomplish - massage, electricity, friction with the bare palm, till Aymer's tingled to be used in another fashion, rubbing with the wet glove, with the dry glove, and then finally, in the lowest of low chairs, brought specially from Dent House, the putting of Madame to sleep by the softness of Aymer's touch as

she combed and combed and combed at madame's heavy hair.

At last all was accomplished, and Mrs. Fenwick Dent comfortably ensconced in a wilderness of frills, blankets, quilts, smiled a fatigued smile at Aymer, and concluded the evening's work by the regulation words, 'I'm so tired, dear. Say my prayers for me, Aymer - I promised my poor dear husband not to forget them!'

This done, Aymer was free. If Mrs. Fenwick Dent were tired, what was she?

She went to her own room, and taking off her dress, put on a dressing-jacket. Then she went to the window to look south-west before shaking out her hair.

She was gazing over the sands, across the Big Bend of the Lochar in the direction of the sea. Something seemed to flicker. She had never heard of a will-o'-the-wisp on the seaward side of the great moss which forms the westerly boundary of the Debatable Land. Up where the water was no longer salt it is different. But here no such thing had ever been seen. Yet it could not be an exciseman's light. He would not have left the sea-edge. Besides, the quicksands of Castleton and Barnhourie barred the way to whatever might remain of the ancient smuggling traffic for which Kentigernshire was famous.

Yet evidently some one was signalling - twice across and once up and down - that was the signal. And Aymer trembled when she thought of the last night she had seen such a light shine through the gaps in the Dent House shrubberies.

Then she grew anxious. For she knew it was likely that some poor wretch had halted on the edge of the

Big Bend, very likely unconscious of the covert quicksand traps lurking on the path across.

Flicker-flicker went the light. Then as if the holder were in deadly peril it was whirled round and round as if some one waved a torch about his head.

With a thought of the bitter cold without, Aymer snatched a shawl, and hastily throwing it about her shoulders, went out of the main door of the Peel Tower, and hurried down towards the spot where, on the Big Bend, she had seen the light.

After her feet had touched the hard surface of the benty plain that lay between her and the water, Aymer saw no more of the light. It was not dark, the moon was somewhere in the low south-west, but hidden with lumpy woolly clouds with a kink in the hair of them. She could see quite well. The Lochar chill still held, and by the keen dampness that constricted her brow, Aymer judged that it might turn to real frost before the morning. The Venus Trap and Sea Holly broke with a crisp sound under her feet as she ran, like choice celery eaten with cheese.

Suddenly she came to the water-edge, dull dead now, and looking thrice its width.

A dark figure in the midst was holding aloft a dying lantern.

'Marcus!' cried Aymer, 'throw yourself flat on the water. Let the lantern go. You are in a quicksand. Spread your coat! Flat out - lie flat out on the water!'

Marcus mumbled that it was the stable lantern and that he was responsible. Aymer thought of the nearest plank or ladder. But knew well that long before she could reach him with these Marcus would be swallowed up.

She had often played about Fenwick Wester and

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the Big Bend of the Lochar when she was a child, and she remembered that there was a spit of 'good sand' within ten feet of Marcus.

She unwound the shawl from about her shoulders. It was of tough Catalan silk, rough like unbleached linen and infinitely tougher. The silkworms that wove it had been fed, not on the mulberry but on Japonica. Uncle Patrick had brought it her from one of his wanderings. She started down to the water edge, and the chill of the stream, sluggish as it was, struck through her.

The bar ran crosswise, but she had to go forward slowly, feeling for it on this side and on that. It was of clean white, untreacherous sand, just as it had been when she was a little paddling girl and forbidden to go near it. Which was the reason she knew all about it.

As she went, she kept calling cheerfully to Marcus. He had thrown himself flat on the water, but it was quite clear that the quicksands had not been vanquished. They had him fast by the feet.

'Aymer,' he cried - 'go back Aymer; you will only get yourself trapped too.'

'Not a bit of it,' Aymer responded cheerfully, 'I am on 'good' sand - a whole ridge of it. If you had not been a fool you would have come this way too. You can see where it runs into the bank at the other side. Stand ready to catch the end of my shawl.'

It was red, and floated down the stream like a broad stain of blood.

'Have you got it, Marcus?' she called out presently.

'Yes,' said Marcus faintly.

'Then take hold with both hands - with both hands, did you not hear me say?'

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Marcus rose for a moment to the surface, she could see him black and dripping against the fleecy clouds. He threw from him as far as he could the stable-lantern, which hit the bank and rolled down again with the musical jingle of pebbles.

'You have kept the lantern all the time,' she called out angrily, 'and you very nearly lost your life because of it.'

She took the two ends of the scarf-shawl over her shoulders and began to walk away from Marcus. Her feet sank so deep that she had hurriedly to draw them out of the slippers she had worn, and widening her elbows and bending forward, she gave the real 'fetch-him-awa' heave of the Lochar fishermen, so that the feet of Marcus 'fetched away' with a sudden jerk, like a tree that is dragged by the roots out of soft ground.

By this time two of the old servants came to the rescue, Peggy and her husband Dickon Dawe. Dickon was always Dickon Dawe. Peggy she was and Peggy she would remain. She had saved her money. Dickon squandered his, therefore on polling day Dickon would march to Drumfern and vote according as Peggy told him.

For Peggy had solved the Suffragette problem two score of years before the waving of the first white, green, and purple.

'What have you gotten there, Miss Aymer - eh, but ye are dripping. Ye have never catched a lad to yourself -- guid grand he's a ceevil chield!'

'Haud tha tongue, Dickon, owd fool,' said Peggy, 'do you not see that both of them are wringing wet. Up to the house with you, and Dickon will get hot toddy for the young man, and to bed with him, while I, Peggy, will see to you, my honey. Sleep will do ye

all the good in the world, and you and him can tell one another all your tales the morn's morning.'

Dickon interpreted the hot toddy with such a liberal hand that Marcus arose with a headache. His clothes were lying dried and folded beside his bed.

It was twelve by the clock when he could see from his window on the stable tower - yes, twelve hours or thereby had he slumbered, and now-

'Where's my lantern?' he cried.

'Your lantern, indeed - heard I ever the like? Sic a foo' - a girt foo', to be askin' after lanthorns when the bonniest lass in the country near lost breath-o'-life a-saving of him! But lads are not what they were. Ye were a fair sorry specimen yestreen when Miss Aymer fetched ye in, as a 'janker' brings a big bog-oak out o' the sludge.'

'Aymer - Aymer!' cried Marcus, suddenly himself again.

'Is Aymer here? Oh, that I could go down on my knees to her —'

'There now, young mon,' said old Peggy, 'let's hae no more of that. It's none decent - not at least till my back is turned, and then, gin the lass will let you, ye can kiss and cosset to your heart's content. It does not last long, but 'tis main good while it stops. If Dickon Dawe yonder were to try the like with me now, I would fetch him a lunder on the head that would gar his ears sing for a week! Aye, that would I!'

At that moment, whether she had been listening or not - whether or not the meeting had been arranged with Peggy - let that remain a woman's secret. At any rate, at that very instant Aymer came in, gentle, sweet, and smiling, and the heart of the young man melted within him with what he took for

gratitude.

'Aymer - Aymer, you drew me - out of deep waters'
'Aye, out of waters deeper than you think, my poor lad,' said Aymer - but to herself.

'Where have I been ever since the dance at the Barn?'

'Hush,' said Aymer, 'are you sure you are strong enough to talk about such things -'

'Fidgets,' quoth old Polly, 'if he cannot find something better than bygones to converse about, he is little of the lad I take him for. Even Dickon Dawe, that great 'sumph' in the heats of his youth could 'a done more and better!'

But Aymer did not allow her to go into the misdeeds of Dickon Dawe in his hot youth, which his wife, though now miscalling him hourly, evidently remembered with relish.

But there was a question hanging on the lips of Aymer - one that had caused her many a night of sleeplessness.

'Who,' she said tremulously, 'was it that served you with drink in the Heather House?'

'Why, who should it be,' said Marcus, looking astonished, 'who but the butler? I was invited to go home that way before I left the barn. And as neither you nor Sylvia Granger would say a word to me, I thought I might as well.'

'But how was your drink warm, as Sue Sim says it was - and who gave it you?'

'The butler, of course.' Marcus was still more astonished.

'It was good drink enough and rarely comforting on a cold night after such a reception as you gave me -'

'But who was it? Tell me - you must tell me.'

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And doubtless Marcus would have told, only at that moment Billy came bursting in, crying in uncertain tones, he too chilled by the cold, 'Oh, Marcus, you beast - you are not dead after all - and what the deuce do you mean by it? And I say, Marcus, why didn't you drop me a hint? I'd have come with you and never said a word to living soul. You know I would. Oh, Marcus, you beast, you beast!'

And though a man, Billy blubbered. He was glad to see his friend clothed in his right mind, and with Aymer Valentine, because he judged her a better doctor for a case like that of Marcus than twenty colleges of physicians.

He continued to wring his tutor's hand and gurgle things which doubtless would have been swearing save for the presence of a lady.

'Oh, you silly dunderheaded brute! If you were not sick, I would thump you. And I will! Hang me if I don't give you a couple of thick ears for this, you beast of a Marcus Hill!'

Which was not at all the kind of language that the Court of Chancery would have approved of a ward using to his devoted, responsible, and liable-to-be-outlawed tutor.

Thus time about Billy sobbed, and cursed, and wrung his tutor's hand, and at last was brought to the silence of exhaustion by trying to do all three at once.

Only Aymer could not get another word out of him about the adventure of the Heather House.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

A MAN'S JOB

Events happened very quick after that. First of all Marcus and Aymer had to explain various things to each other - but as Sylvia had made a confidant of Aymer (perhaps even to a scandalous diminution of the share of that young man in the affair of the Lodge Lane), there was no insuperable difficulty to their agreeing.

It was most conveniently agreed between parties that Marcus had been 'more sinned against than sinning.' This is often the case with young gentlemen of his temperament. But after marriage they need a firm hand, for then the explanation becomes of no force - which is a curious moral fact, but true.

And afterwards Aymer, following the bent of her character, was pensive. She loved reminiscence, and her imagination touched all things with a tender melancholy.

'The Squirrel Tree,' she said, 'oh - but I cannot think how we *ever* came to do it. How dared you propose such a thing to me?'

Marcus knew that in the bright lexicon of girls' youth, the most fatal words are 'I dare not.' They will forgive the seven deadly sins, but not the man 'who dares not.'

'Well, I did not think about daring or not daring,' he said, 'I just did it because I wanted you. I was not going to let that old baboon run philandering after you to the end of the chapter.'

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Aymer looked up surprised.

'Do you dare to call Judge Thorald, who has been kind to me all my life, an 'old baboon'?''

'Yes,' said Marcus, 'exactly, an old baboon! What else? He was making love to you all the time on the sly - being jealous and so forth - and yet he was never straight-forward about it as I would have been. What was he doing at the door of the Garden Port on the night... the night when your uncle was murdered— ?'

'He was not!'

'He was. I saw him. I know I had no business to be there myself, but I went straight to the police and told them that I had been there. I told them the reason too. I went to watch your window and to write a sonnet. I saw Thorald. But I thought that he had as good a right to be there as I, and that, at the least, he might do his own explaining. And then he set his rascally butler on to poison me in the Heather House - Bailey, I think his name is - after inviting me to come and meet you there.'

'*He* - who invited you?' said Aymer.

'The butler - Bailey. He said that you would be there to meet me and that I was to slip away quietly. He had had word from Sylvia, and brought it because, owing to bygones, it would not do for Sylvia to be seen speaking to me herself.'

'Yes, that sounds sensible enough,' said Aymer. 'She could not do that, of course, when we had just sworn an oath never to speak to you again! And you knew all that about Judge Thorald and never told it?'

'Well,' said Marcus, 'you see, it was like this. I was fearfully mad at first, but after you told me that you loved me - after you kissed me—'

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'The insolence, I never kissed you. I only let you kiss me.'

'All right, so be it,' said Marcus; 'the difference is not a vital one. At any rate the first touch of your lips made me forget all about Judge Thorald and my anger against him. In fact I felt sorry for the old beggar. For you see a decent fellow does that when another fellow is gone on his girl and he knows that he can't ever have her. That's the way I spelled it out about the old Indian bag-o'-tricks - him and his gold snuff-box! Forgive him? Well, I just never thought a single more think about him. And as for his servant, I knew that Sylvia had him under her thumb, and I thought it very likely that she had put him on to tell me to meet you at the Heather House. She was blessed sorry for me, good old Sylvia.'

Marcus had remembered everything. The happiness of Aymer's presence and the knowledge that she loved him and forgave him had swept away the black veil which had rested so long on his past. Perhaps, also, the Chill of Lochar had broken the spell or Marcus had learned something in the company of Death while he was sinking deeper and deeper in the Solway quicksands.

'You must go back to Dent,' Aymer cried, the moment after - for she saw the reach and meaning of these revelations. 'Billy will go with you. And you will promise me one thing?'

Marcus would have promised her a thousand.

'You will tell everything you have told me to Mr. Grant and Sylvia - no, I am not jealous of Sylvia any more. I was a great silly - I knew that directly Sylvia had explained it to me.'

Marcus did not know how Sylvia had explained 'it,' but he had enough sense to remain in ignorance,

and leave the matter of the Lodge Lane unexplained. Whatever was satisfactory to Aymer had good reason to be ten times more so to him.

Only he did not want to leave Fenwick Wester so soon, and he said as much. Whereupon Aymer instantly flashed out.

'Think of Uncle Patrick,' she cried; 'think of our poor Rachel - and yourself, and Mr. Grant! Think of all of us perhaps. We must bring this state of things to an end!'

'End?' said Marcus astonished. 'How will my leaving Fenwick Wester and going back with Billy to Dent, end anything?'

'Ask Mr. Grant that,' said Aymer mysteriously. Then seeing him a little puzzled and the shadow of the former darkness still lowering and brightening on his brow, like cloud and sunlight on far hills, she added, stretching out both her hands impulsively, 'Well, dear, let us say the beginning of the end.'



'It's deuced hard on a fellow,' said Billy as they sat in the library of Dent after his return; 'here I have been looking after this fellow. I was sick with anxiety all the way and drove like the devil. I was cold and tired, and not a soul was glad to see *me*. Marcus was spooning the heiress, who kissed him good-bye and told me to be sure to take care of him. Well, I took care of him - I delivered him This Side Up, and all the rest of it, and now - Sylvia falls on his neck and does what the old man did to the Prodigal Son - and you, Grant, stand by, looking as pleased as Punch and are not able to take your eyes off him for a moment. He is not made of any finer

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clay than I, this confounded Marcus. He earns a salary by whopping me with six ounce gloves. He is just as liable to err, and if I could add six inches to my stature I would be a better looking fellow any day. But nobody ever says thank you to me. Hanged if I think it fair!

'No more it is, Billy,' said Sylvia, rising from the buffet on which she had been sitting with one arm on the knee of Marcus, while Grant smoked and beamed approval. 'Here is your reward, Billy - a return ticket, if you like.'

And she kissed him twice, not perfunctorily but with genuine gratitude.

'Not bad,' said Billy; 'they are not to be despised if that's the way gipsy-folk kiss. But I mustn't say anything to - a certain young person who shall be nameless. She might never let me come again.'

'Billy,' said Marcus severely, 'remember that you are a Ward in Chancery and that you cannot marry without permission of the Court - or I shall be for ever an outlaw and an exile. But if you are good you can come and stop with us, and see your 'young person' every day!'

'With us!' cried Billy. 'I dare you to say with whom!'

'Dare,' said Marcus, 'why, with Aymer and me, most honourable but stupid millionaire!'

After Marcus had told all his tale and Billy had corroborated such parts as were within his ken, Grant called Adams and Richard Hissy and laid upon them the task of escorting Marcus back to the Dent Arms.

'We must take good care of you now,' he said. 'We are playing up against loaded dice. But for all that we shall win the game. Only Richard will stay with

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you in the meantime and see to your meals. We don't want any more little accidents like that which took place at the Heather House on the night of Sue Sim's wedding.'

Then after they were gone Grant and Sylvia Granger sat long discussing the situation and all the new material which had been placed in their hands by Fate and Marcus.

'And the best of it,' said Grant, 'is that he does not suspect the least thing in the world. He dropped in this afternoon to get a cup of tea and have a chat. He even invited me to come and see his laboratory, that is, if I did not mind the mess. That laboratory is all in the house that is worth seeing, Sylvia, and I would give ten years of my life to see it. I never thought the chance would come so easily.'

But Sylvia, being a woman, was by no means so sanguine.

'Yes, I suppose you must go,' she said, 'there is no other way. But I wish I could do it myself.'

'No, not again,' said Grant turning quickly upon her. 'It is a man's job this, and I must do it.'

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

THE WARD IN CHANCERY

'How's your mother?' demanded Billy of the Kitten in their loose-box up in the Laboratory. Have you told her about my prospects yet?'

'No use, dear,' said the Kitten, nestling up against him ready to purr; 'she says that the elder girls must get married first. It's the rule of the family of De Rivers!'

'I see. Has you set out in order like mantelpiece ornaments, or South Kensington exhibits, all with labels and dates on you!' said Billy. 'Well, cheer up. I'm not ready for some months yet. I don't want to see you only on prison visiting days, in the presence of a warder - all for depraving my stainless young innocence and taking advantage of my lack of experience. Think shame of yourself, you disgraceful girl - you drew me on and you know you did! You made me want to get married, which is a crime in the eyes of the Court of Chancery.'

'Don't you think that I could go and see the old fat man at the Chancery Court, and perhaps he would let us be married?' the Kitten asked.

'Oh, no,' said Billy, 'he would call it 'an attempt on the morals of a minor,' and clap you into prison directly. I know him!'

'Well,' said Kitten, 'if you only knew - I am so tired of staying at home! Let's get married on the quiet, without saying a word to anybody, and then stay with Marcus and Aymer.'

'Oh, prettiest of criminous minxes,' cried Billy, 'and pray what would happen to poor Marcus - who

never did us any harm - but (instead) killed the mice in our father's farm? He would be clapped into prison too, and never be allowed to come back any more. For that would be 'aiding and abetting' you know.'

'I see,' said Kitten regretfully; 'then you think it can't be done. Oh, I do hate home so!'

'Oh, as to anything being impossible I don't know. Let us think!' Billy pondered. 'I say, your uncle is an earl or some old thing, isn't he?'

'Mother's uncle is, if that's what you mean - but I would not worry him. He would tell mother, and I should never have another quiet moment! Or they might snatch you away for ever from me.'

'Oh, not for ever, Kitten!'

'Well, put you in some place where you would meet some girl a million million times better-looking than me, Billy. And then I should die - I love you so much, and I can't help it if you are a Ward in Chancery. Couldn't you give your money to somebody else and tell Old Chancery to let you off?'

'Don't worry,' said Billy easily, tilting up her chin to a convenient angle with the inner arch of his forefinger. 'William Leslie Bowles is not a bloomin' Mormon - like his admired and admirable tutor. Where I sits, I squats, as the poet remarks. You don't mind, do you, Kitten? No, then squat, Kitten!'

And there being nobody in the big garret laboratory he pulled her down upon a very solid and responsible pair of knees.

'I'll see that grand-uncle of yours - old De Rivers, you know,' said Billy. 'I should not be a bit surprised if he knew the Chancellor. He was something of a lawyer in his time, and even now debates dully enough to put the recording angel to sleep in the

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House of Lords. Besides, when I grow up, our place will be quite near his, and he may want to be neighbourly. See, Kitten?’

But the Kitten only saw that, having just been returned to her, Billy of his own accord was going away again. So, like a wise little woman, who knew the market value of birds in the hand, Kitten cried softly into her joined palms till the tears ran through her fingers. This had so admirable an effect on Billy that he swore if she minded so much, he would not move a step.

Whereupon Kitten dried her eyes instantly, saying how selfish she was only to think of herself, and that if he could do any good, he was to go at once. Whereupon she gave him her uncle's town address out of her little address book.

‘It would be so nice to be married before all the other girls,’ she said, ‘and have them call me Mrs. Would I be The Honourable? and could I have it printed on my cards? I suppose, though, we should be fearfully poor if they took away your allowance or did something perfectly piggish like that!’

‘I don't think they will,’ said Billy, always optimistic; ‘but anyway, I can always borrow off Marcus!’

‘But where will he get the money to lend?’ the Kitten inquired.

‘Why, from Aymer, of course - that's what such abominably rich people are for. Besides, Marcus owes me as much and more. He has had all the sugar for three or four years, and I only the bags! But he's a good sort, Marcus, only it will be rum to see him in the role of a married man. If Aymer knew as much about him as I do, she would turn him down at the very altar and chuck the Prayer-book

and wedding ring at his head.'

'Perhaps she would only love him the more if she did know!' said the Kitten, voicing a deep feminine truth.

So Billy went to see Lord De Rivers. It occurred to him on the way that the old earl was his godfather. He had not thought of it for years, but when the original 'friendly suit' was brought in the Court of Chancery, Lord De Rivers stood sponsor for that also and witnessed some deeds on his behalf.

The man-servant at the door had some difficulties as to announcing the Honourable William Bowles of Castle Leslie - for Billy's ancestral dwelling had long been let. But it chanced that, on taking counsel with an aged peering butler, his doubts were suddenly removed.

'I say, Bingham,' said Billy, 'is any more of that fine old port in the cellar you and I used to smell at, before they sent me to school?'

Bingham, taken aback, peered long underneath the fussy white bristle which served him as eyebrows.

'Master Billy it is,' he quavered, 'and the impudentest young ras—gentleman that ever came about this house. Have you come into your own yet, or are you always in the Courts?'

'I am still languishing in the dungeons of Chancery,' said Billy, 'but I shall finger all the more crown pieces when I come out. I want to see Lord De Rivers.'

'Ah, you'll know a change, Master William, a sad change,' said Bingham; 'many a day he will not threaten to throw me out of the window more than once or twice, between dawn and dark. And for weeks together he will not curse his family, nor

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swear at his relatives - at least not by name and in detail without missing any, as was his habit. Sadly failed you will find him, Master Billy, but perhaps the sight of you may do him good. He used to say that as how he never set eyes on you without wanting to break your neck - I believe you will do him a power of good, specially if you could let him come on you climbing the wall fruit trees or breaking into the hothouses after the grapes—'

'I am afraid I could not quite manage that,' said Billy, 'but never fear, the errand that I've come about will make him mad enough!'

'And that's a mercy, Master Billy, if it is not to borrow money. *That* gives him apoplexy!' said Bingham. 'But I might have guessed it... you have been getting into some mischief along o' the maids and you have come to his lordship to help get you out.'

Billy nodded.

'Then ware his stick,' said the butler; 'he's so gouty now that all the power of his body has gone into his arms, and he's cunning - will get you to fetch him something he don't want, so that he can whack you with his stick, as it were, unforeseen.'

With which instructions and warnings, Billy was ushered into the presence of his former friend and future neighbour, Lord De Rivers.

'William Leslie Bowles, of Castle Leslie!' The old man read out the names sonorously. Then, looking up, 'And who the devil may you be? What's your name?' he demanded.

'N. or M. as the case may be,' said Billy glibly.

'Eh?' cried the old man with a yelp, 'what's that you are saying?'

'My catechism,' Billy answered cheerfully, 'the

catechism which you promised to teach me, godfather!

'You young villain,' said Lord De Rivers, 'give me that slip of paper on the floor.'

Billy approached gingerly, hunched his shoulders, and stooped.

'After all, it can't be half as bad as Marcus sometimes, only I can't hit back. But anything for Kitten's sake. Here goes!'

There was a sound of carpet beating and then Billy, stepping back, presented the paper to Lord De Rivers with the tongs.

'There you are, godfather,' smiled Billy.

The old man tried in vain to push his chair nearer to his godson that he might get in one final punisher.

'I'll teach you your catechism, you young villain,' cried the peer; 'I see you are the same Billy Bowles who used to break the branches off my fruit trees. You clean ruined one 'espalier,' and when you come to Castle Leslie, I shall expect you to make it good! But what are you doing here? Where is your tutor? I shall write to the Vice-Chancellor tonight. On my soul I will. You have run away, you young vagabond.'

'One question at a time and I will reveal all my dread secrets,' said Billy. 'First, I am here, to learn my catechism from you - because Marcus (that's my tutor) insists on teaching me the Westminster one, because he says that it is better literature. Next, he can't come because he has been ill - nearly croaked, indeed. And lastly, as to writing to the Vice-Chancellor, I only hope you will, for it is with him that I want you to act as intermediary.'

'You don't mean to say—' gasped the peer, who

began to have a suspicion.

'No, I don't!' said Billy stoutly, 'and you be careful who you are talking about. Old as you are I will thrash you till the teeth drop out of your head.'

'You are a very foolish young man,' said the lawyer lord, his own anger calming at the fiercer blaze of his godson's; 'surely you have not gone and got married - and you a Ward in Chancery.'

'No, I haven't,' said Billy— 'Yet!'

'Oh, then,' said Lord De Rivers, 'there's no great harm done.'

'But I want to be married, and I want you to get me permission from old Verulam. He is about ninety and I have six months of Chancery yet to run. He might as well do one decent thing before he goes to his own place. And Kitten and I will ever pray - Tell him that!'

'Hanged if I do,' said the gouty lord; 'the heir of the Castle Leslie estates marrying a girl called Kitten - marrying, mind you!'

'Well, yes,' said Billy, 'I thought you would approve - rather good people - her mother's your niece, you know. Deuced bad for the family tree, if I didn't marry Kitten!'

Lord De Rivers forgot his gout, forgot everything except his lineage. He got up and hobbled to the door, which he locked, saying 'Young man, you will explain what you mean before you leave this room alive.'

And he got out his father's case of duelling pistols.

'With the greatest pleasure,' said Billy, beaming upon him; 'if you had only let me know, I should have locked the door myself. I want to marry Miss Catherine De Rivers Hampden Jones, daughter of

THE AZURE HAND

Colonel Hampden Jones and his wife, Edwitha (of the Dragoon Guards). When I say that I want to marry Miss Catherine, commonly called Kitten, it is only a figure of speech. We mean to marry each other and we are going to do it whether anybody like it or not. Indeed, we have been staying sometime in Scotland where (as a lawyer must know) it only needs declaration before witnesses. I am not sure that Kitten and I are not married already; Only I should not mention that to the Vice-Chancellor, if I were you. It might needlessly distress him. Certainly, you can abuse me all you want, but do tell him that Kitten is worth all the rest of her family, godfather - and that, in fact, the sooner the permission comes along, the better it will be for everybody, because Kitten and I mean to do without it, and we only ask out of courtesy.'

'You are an insolent young hound,' said Lord De Rivers, 'still, if you were not going to be a neighbour, and I don't want to stand in the way of any of Edwitha's girls - who seems to have turned out unlike her mother; I would never put any such rubbish before my old friend the Vice. But there is one thing you will have to promise—'

'And what may that be?' said Billy with apprehension.

'That you don't let Edwitha come and stop with you more than a week in the year, and that you don't bring her over here more than once during each visit.'

'Agreed,' said Billy joyously; 'she will be busy for a long time with her other daughters, and I don't think either I or the Kitten positively doat to have her stopping with us - more than is necessary for the family's sake, you know.'

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'Then I'll see about it,' said Lord De Rivers, 'though I mean to give both of you a lecture when you come by yourselves. It is all so imprudent and shortsighted and all the rest of it. Now get out, Billy Bowles, and don't let me see your face again. Leave me your address though, and get anything you may want to eat from Bingham.'

'Exactly,' said Billy, scribbling on a pad, 'I remember that old port. I hope you have not been going for it too hard. You had better let me have the lot. I'll sample it now to make sure. Better to remove temptation, you know, godpapa. Nothing worse for that sort of thing!'

And he pointed to the swathed foot on the leg rest.

A paper fluttered down, and the old man felt cautiously behind him.

'Just hand me that piece of paper, will you, Billy?' he said coaxingly as he pointed to the hearthrug and grasped his unseen cudgel.

But Billy was already out of the door and in conference with Bingham as to the amount and habitat of the '34 port.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

THE JUDGE'S LABORATORY

'Well, Grant,' said the Judge, rising with his most graceful Regency air out of the deep chair in which he had been lazily cutting the leaves of an Indian Review, 'you have found time at last to come over and visit an old fellow laid on the shelf - his work done - nothing left to him but to make his will and be gathered in peace to his fathers - though mine were rather a mixed lot, if all tales be true. Have a cigarette.'

Grant sank into the depths of the chair to which the Judge had pointed, and reached out a hand to take the gold snuff-box. He lit up, and then, struck by the beauty of the miniature and the exquisite Louis Quatorze workmanship, let it lie in his hand as the smoke of the Tunisians slowly permeated his being.

The Judge eyed him a while, and then a trifle restlessly reached out his hand for the box and shoved it into its usual place in his waistcoat pocket.

'Anything new?' he asked, lighting himself another which had been lying ready on a little golden ladder beside him. 'About the case, I mean?'

'Not very much,' responded Grant, his eyes squinted to follow the smoke as it leaked in long thin bluish-grey spirals upward from his nostrils. 'I have to send something to the Head Office, you know. So I have been turning out the library a bit - also the Heather House - looking for things that they can

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play themselves there with, and label 'Exhibit 246,' and so on. All rubbish, as you and I know. The man who did what was done didn't make A B C mistakes.'

'No,' said the Judge thoughtfully, 'somebody knew the ropes and did not mean to run his neck into one!'

'Exactly,' approved Grant; 'what puzzles me is that he (we will say 'he' simply for convenience) should have taken so much trouble to supply clues - new locks on doors, boot-cupboards with secret passages that he never used or means to use. Besides spreading his blue stain all about. Rather 'Jimmy' all that. By the way, I hear you are something of an analyst. I have brought over a little series of very interesting things for you to try your hand at - if you care - with the results got from the official Jacks. It will be interesting to see what you make of them-'

'Oh, I am only a dabbler,' said the Judge. 'I fear I shall only be wasting your time. But I need not say that if I can be of any use to you, I and my little laboratory are altogether at your service. It is all the use I can make of my little remaining time on earth, now - to lend the law a hand upon occasion.'

'But you had a good deal of experience with poisons, especially the rarer Indian varieties - the sort that is entered as 'snakebite' by the family in the returns.'

The Judge smiled.

'A little,' he said, tapping the snuff-box, without, however, taking it out of his pocket; 'they order that sort of thing better over there. But then, I was born behind the scenes.'

'And I also,' said Grant, smiling, 'but it was long

before that began to help me in this case.'

'So you are now beginning to feel the benefit of being Indian born?'

The Judge smiled with lazy tolerance. 'May I ask in what way?'

'Women, for one thing,' said the detective; 'the women of my country do not tell tales. They know the penalty. They chatter among themselves, but it is about things which do not matter.'

'Ah,' said the Judge with sympathetic gravity, 'you are right. But Sylvia Granger is not Indian - she is only gipsy, and therefore not quite to be depended on when it comes to the last pinch.'

Grant flushed deeply, but the Judge only took an easier pose than before, stretching himself out at full length and watching the quick staccato swing of the point of his dress shoe.

'I do not mean,' he continued, 'that a gipsy girl will go back on her man. Not at all. But she will explode one day and blow him into the air. That is the danger. Don't trust them too much, and keep an eye on the pressure gauge!'

He blew a cloud slowly into the air.

'Apart from that - perfect!' he added. 'I congratulate you, Grant!'

Grant compressed his lips. He was almost beside himself with anger.

'I think you are taking too much for granted,' he said, with a markedly haughty intonation.

The Judge waved his cigarette gracefully in the young man's direction.

'Old fellow's privilege,' he said, by way of apology. 'If I did not put two and two together, what would there be left for me to do?'

'It is true,' said Grant, a little stiffly, 'that Miss

Granger and I have reached a kind of understanding, but there is nothing of the romantic about it.'

'No?' said the Judge with a slightly ironic inflection, 'but there are two sides to every bargain, my dear fellow. What is her equivalent for her working along with you?'

Grant did not answer for a moment and then fell back on commonplace.

'You may think me European and priggish,' he said, 'but I have a dislike to discussing a woman who is not present.'

'Yet that is the occupation of most European clubs and meetings of men.' The Judge smiled and rose. 'But you do right to remind me. I was forgetting where we are and that what is considered proper at Patna is quite unpardonable in Kentigernshire. I am obliged for your reminder. In fact I beg your pardon. Will you care to come into the laboratory now?'

'I should be delighted,' said Grant, and all his soul quivered at the thought of seeing for the first time the mysterious room which had haunted his thoughts for weeks.

The Judge led the way with his usual grace of movement, nonchalant and sinuous. There was still not a wrinkle on his face. His clear ivory skin set off a cameo profile of such perfection that even in age sculptors stopped to regret that he was too great a man to be asked to sit as a model.

He lifted a curtain which Grant had always supposed to be a screen for the prevention of draughts. There was a door behind it fitted with a large brass handle like a double safe. The Judge took a small key that hung at his watch-chain,

clicked the handle, and the door swung back. He stood by it and waved Grant on in front of him with an air of mock ceremony.

'Rather luxurious for a regular laboratory,' he said, 'but I have a good deal of money and few hobbies. I can afford this one.' For at least five minutes Grant looked about him without speaking. He was familiar enough with the ordinary chemical laboratory. Waiting on Dr. Meiklejohn had satiated him with that.

But the laboratory of the famous Indian poison expert was of a very different sort. It was sixty feet long and heated by hot air, refreshed and ozonized at the last moment, which together with the height of the roof left not a trace of the usual oppression. A score of busy little pressing engines and distilling apparatus were at work when they entered. Grant heard the tinkle of rare elixirs falling drop by drop out of the worms.

The Judge took a rapid survey at the heat registers which hung over each, and finding all correct, threw himself down in an easy chair by the fire.

'We can take our ease. They will be all right for an hour or two,' he said. 'That fellow over there is making crystals rather too fast. Give the screw at your hand a turn. Thank you. That will shut him off.'

Then the Judge, throwing a log of wood on the open hearth which he kept going, as he said, not for warmth but for brightness, took out his gold snuff-box and laid it on the table between Grant and himself. He opened it and there in rows were the dainty Tunisians.

Involuntarily Grant reached out his hand for one,

and as soon as they were both breathing incense, the Judge, his eyes dreamily on the fire of clean flaming wood began to talk. He told of his early struggles, of the ungrateful district where he was first settled, the unwholesome malarial climate that had kept him weak in health all his life.

'It was no place to take a woman to,' he said, 'and indeed the woman who had promised to come changed her mind, and instead sent me word that she had married my best friend. However, I must not unload old griefs on you. She was our little Aymer's aunt. But there, I am tired. I must have a little whiskey and soda - do you care? Well, help yourself.'

And he wheeled the dainty table over to Grant. It was of the sort which disappears by the folding over of the two outer leaves, like many sewing-machines and some typewriters.

Grant was admiring the workmanship and cleverness of the devices, when the Judge interrupted him a little impatiently.

'Help yourself,' he said, 'and I will tell you a new story which will interest you far more, and perhaps clear away a good many of your present difficulties.'

Grant helped himself sparingly, taking care to pour from the same decanter which had been used by the Judge.

'Rather cold here,' said Grant, suddenly aware of a drop in temperature, 'this will be grateful.'

'It is the ice-and-salt freezer,' said the Judge carelessly. 'But hold on - don't fill up yet awhile. I have something that will warm you better than cold soda water. This is a 'Hermos' flask. I always keep one handy. There is nothing but hot water in it, but then it is always ready just at the right temperature.'

And before Grant could refuse he opened the

leathern case, uncapped the large quart flask, and filled up his own tumbler with the steaming liquid. Then he filled Grant's.

'Not nearly enough drunk today, sir, hot like this! And flavoured with a little orange peel - no lemon - it is delicious. Don't you find it so?'

He sipped slowly and with relish.

Grant followed his example more slowly.

As soon as he had seen Grant set down his tumbler the Judge's face altered. It grew set and implacable and his laugh was no longer gay, though he laughed.

The next moment he had mastered himself and was again the easy graceful dandy he had been from the beginning.

'The tale? Certainly, Grant, I will tell it you. But first take care, you are spilling a little of your whiskey - your tumbler is too full - so! Now it is easier to manage and we can replenish - we can replenish - twice at least.'

He tipped a wineglassful on to the rich rug of snow leopard's skins that lay before the fire.

'Go on, Grant,' he urged. 'Follow my example. It will do no harm to the carpet. I can assure you of that.'

With a jesting action he thrust his hand towards the detective and upset a little of the contents of his tumbler on the carpet.

Two rich azure stains instantly appeared, one of a round shape at the Judge's feet, and the other longer near Grant's, splashed from the containing vessel.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

A TALE THAT WAS TOLD

The young man stared in horror. The Judge laughed.

'Yes, Mr. Detective Luiz Grant. So you had found me out, and you had written - let me see - this excellently detailed letter to your friends in the Crown Office. Oh, it would have gained you great fame and honour. What a pity that you will not live to profit by it!'

Grant rose to throw himself on the Judge. But the proprietor of Laverock Hall only laughed the more easily.

'Nobody but ourselves for it!' he said. 'You could not get out, even if you had got the key. We have about an hour and three-quarters to live, you and I, Grant, and as we shall both get devilish sleepy after a bit, it will not do to count too much on the last half hour.'

'You have poisoned me?' cried Grant, 'oh, what a fool - I suspected and I might have known!'

'As you say,' said the Judge, tapping his snuff-box and squinting in his accustomed manner at the vignette of the first Mrs. Patrick Dent on the lid, 'what a fool! But then, so am I! I ought never to have left you here so long. I saw you had it in you, as soon as you began to study character and take your time, instead of bothering about footprints and dropped tobacco ash. Speaking of tobacco, have a Tunisian. There are just enough to do us for a couple of hours. That is our limit, you know, Grant.'

THE AZURE HAND

Now do let me persuade you to take it like a sportsman—*aarrh!*

Grant had grappled him, but the Judge with a touch upon the button of some hidden tube, sprayed Grant's face with something gluey that stretched him senseless on the carpet, his head between the spreading azure stains.

When he came to himself, the Judge was taking the tumbler from his lips, and smiling.

'Here we are,' said the Judge cheerfully; 'now into the easy chair. A little dizzy, eh? Naturally, but the first effects will pass. Let me place the cushions better for you. So—o!'

And the most simply in the world, Judge Thorald went back to his chair and resumed the rocking of his left foot over his right knee.

Grant's mind had grown preternaturally clear. Only he could not move, and felt as helpless as a child, his face expressing all the while the utmost astonishment.

'Like to know how it all came about, now that we are comfortable?' said the Judge. 'I am sure you will admit that I am standing up to it in a sportsmanlike manner. You (it was your duty) would have made of the rope that hanged me a step-ladder to promotion. Now I have no such thought, though in your place and in my youth I should have done the same.'

'After all, we are to die together - I perhaps a shade more quickly, because the little injection of coorali will retard the action of the bromo-cyanide of hyocin. We shall sleep. We shall dream - pleasant dreams - yours the dreams of the honoured age you are giving up - I those of the youth that has never been mine!'

'And why - why -?' Grant could find no other

words.

The astonishment, and action of the drug in his veins resulted in a sort of aphasia. But as to the nearness of death his faculties were deplorably keen. Still there was no disabling fear in the knowledge. Instead he had a growing sense of comfort and physical well-being And even as he looked at the azure stains he smiled.

'Ah,' he said in a more assured voice, 'so that *was* the bromo-cyanure after all!' It was a professional point of honour - even a consolation to him.

'You are right,' said the Judge, glancing at the letter written by Grant to his chiefs, which lay on the table; 'it was a good guess for a man who is not a specialist. But it must be served warm - I learned the trick in India. Oh, not hot, the heat of a water-pipe serves perfectly, but the Hermos flask is perhaps more convenient.'

'But why - why?' Grant reiterated feebly. 'Why to me?'

The Judge settled himself more comfortably and lit a new Tunisian. 'As to you, there is no difficulty. You had hunted with my hound. You would never have tracked me but for Sylvia Granger. I was a fool ever to let Bailey inside this room. Still, I needed some one, and I had a hold on the man which was good against anything but a woman. He would have put his own head in the hangman's noose to pleasure her - much more mine.'

He watched the pale blue spirals thoughtfully.

'Yes, I knew I was wrong as soon as I heard you had found her. I knew what a perfect tool you had, fashioned to your hand, in Sylvia Granger. Why, I had spared you the trouble. I had fashioned her myself. And now on my head be it. I pay the price -

and gladly.'

He took the letter again in his delicate fingers and glanced it over carefully.

'So you think I am mad,' he said with a kind of gentle reproach; 'that would have been a point for my advocate, supposing that I had been apprehended tomorrow by the gentlemen named Howard whom you mention - Robert and Joseph, I think. Mad? Ah, well, perhaps! But if I am mad, you will grant that there is some little method in my madness.'

He glanced round at his hissing, clicking, dripping stills, the little red-eyed glowing furnaces, and the crystallizer from which small bits of a substance like frosty rock-salt fell every minute or two with a sharp metallic tinkle, which, in spite of the Lethe in his veins, made Grant start.

'But I daresay you are right all the same. I was certainly mad to let you establish yourself on my preserves. You separated me from Aymer, and nobody can do that and live. There was Patrick Dent. He was my friend, but he took from me the first woman I ever loved. Oh, I am not afraid of the word, Grant. He remained my friend, but one does not forgive one's friend a little service like that done behind one's back. No, one waits. Well, I waited, and on a certain night I did what I had done a score of times - went quietly and tapped on Dent's window. I saw he was still up. I offered him a little warm whiskey and water. Perhaps he had taken it a little strong. At any rate he made the first azure stain by falling forward, saving himself on his hands. It was that which gave me the idea. I put on my gloves - yes, Suede gloves, you were right - and I carefully stamped the impression over and over. I lifted him

up - I found the will - Aymer's will, and left it there. You were hard on my track when you got the photographs of the prints. But I never did anything better in my life than simply telling you the truth about that.

'If you had had any suspicions, that removed them effectually.

'But since you found Sylvia and she told you all she knew it was vain to think of fighting the pair of you. Another girl brought up in an atmosphere of quiet respectability might not have mattered, but it was different with Sylvia. She is more than your equal - almost - yes, I will say it - almost mine. I wish she had been with us tonight. That would have made the thing complete. *Nirvana a trois!* There is nothing paltry about that idea. She will be wondering where you are.

'She will guess what is to happen when she knows you are here, in this room. She will be raging outside like a fury, I doubt not. But even I dare not let her in. I have too great a respect for the lady.

'And Miss Rachel? Oh, Miss Rachel was only a pawn. But she was standing in my Aymer's way. She was helping her to carry on a correspondence with that forward young man, Marcus Hill - full of sentiment and foolishness - you were obliging enough to show me some of the letters, if you remember. Good of you! Then I knew that I had lost Aymer. Pure-bred Europeans wallow in sentiment - the woman naturally and the men because they think (and generally think right), that it will please the women.'

The Judge paused and lit another cigarette. Then like a friendly man at ease with all the world he pushed the box over to Grant.

'It does me good,' he said, rubbing his hands, 'to tell all this to some one who can appreciate, if not the motive - no one can do that fully, not even myself - but the strategy and especially the tactics. You are a man after my own heart, and the real criminal is neither of us but the Government of India which retired a man like myself, in the flower of my age, with a private income and a liberal pension, in addition to the greatest knowledge of subtle poisons under the sun - a knowledge too which he may not use legitimately. If I had been allowed to remain at Patna I should have still been 'The Fox —the Judge-Whose-Eye-No-Illdoer Can Escape.' But I was sent home to vegetate, and there was that great fool Patrick Dent happy with the proceeds of his larceny, and Aymer Valentine sitting and chattering to him for a couple of hours each night. Oh, I have seen them a thousand times through the window - I out among the dripping laurels like a poacher. I had nothing - only this miniature of the woman he had robbed me of - together with some little knowledge, not generally known in this country, of poisons, their preparation, and results.'

He looked over at Grant.

'Anything I have omitted that you would like to know?' he asked. 'I have used the stuff before, but I never tried myself so high as this. I wanted to clear your mind before the drowsiness came on.'

Grant did not answer. Already his ears were singing.

'The swinging boot-cupboard? Oh, there you were right again. I had nothing to do with that. I simply knocked at the window, entered by the Garden Port and went out when I was ready. The tea at the

Heather House was a near thing, I admit, and rather foolhardy. But then I had carefully studied times and seasons. I knew where you and all your people were. You owe me your thanks for that at all events. After you are gone your record will look all the better, because it is free from such a departmental blot as the arrest of Miss Rachel. As for the Marcus Hill fiasco, that was a blunder of that fool Bailey's. He can't be trusted even to weigh out a pennyworth of Epsom Salts.

'Sleepy, Grant? No, that's a bad sign. It's the coorali that is holding the drug back. Allow me to aid the effect.'

Judge Thorald staggered to his feet, rattled among some bottles and appeared with a little silver injection needle of a special pattern.

'This will make you more comfortable,' he said, turning Grant's head on the pillow. The young man tried to lift his hands to strike him, but found himself quite incapable of movement.

Apparently, as he stood above him, smiling, tall and gracious as ever, the Judge heard a noise.

'Ah, did I not tell you?' he said, laughing a little; 'that is Sylvia - on the trail. It is a triumph. She would never have done as much for me, Grant. But even she cannot come into this room. Ah, what's that?'

He took a couple of halting steps in the direction of the door. But tripping over an invisible something he fell on his face, half under the table by which they were sitting.

Grant's brain was numbed with great gushes of sound as though he held some vast shell to his ear.

The Judge turned about and smiled up at him.

'That's Sylvia,' he said. 'Clever girl. Stick of

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dynamite in the keyhole. But unless she has a higher explosive - she will never succeed.'

To the dull roar there followed a sharper crack, and the great door fell inwards.

'She had,' the Judge murmured, 'but as you can't get out of the way and no one knows what may happen with these high explosives, there is always time for this - to make sure, you know!'

He pulled down Grant's silk sock. And the sharp point of the injection needle was pressed upon his calf.

Here Grant swooned.

But across the fallen mass of iron strode a new Sylvia, her hair in a dark mane about her shoulders, her eyes like fires in twilight. She darted at the Judge and snatched the needle from him.

He smiled at her with his last piece of airy insolence. 'Welcome to Laverock,' he said. 'How does it run? Welcome and Goodbye! *Ave atque Vale*, as they taught Grant to say at the Calcutta University. It is a pity that you don't know the antidote for our little sleeping-draught. Goodnight, Sylvia - sorry I can't wait to attend your wedding. But I am old and time presses. Bless you, my children!'

As Judge Thorald made the gesture of benediction, his hands were wet with the freely spilt liquid dripping from the table. He folded them across the rare flowered waistcoat, on the breast of which they made a double stain. But this time the Azure Hands were real, bare, and the long delicate fingers printed themselves clearly on the empty vest pocket where so long the miniature of his lost love had reposed.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

TWO VIEWS OF THE FUTURE

'By some great marvel I turned parson to-day,' said Marcus, one of the last times when Billy and he were to be alone in the beer-smelling sitting-room of the Dent Arms. 'I went to the Judge's funeral this afternoon. He was certainly cracked in the upper story. Besides he was good to Aymer - or meant to be.'

'I rather think Grant got off by the skin of his teeth,' said Billy.

'By the skin of Sylvia's,' corrected Marcus; 'she burst in the door with lyddite or something and found the old chap just ready to jab him. You see he wanted him to hear all about it - how he had tricked him and everybody. And so he gave Grant another poison to keep his brain clear. Well, the Judge's stuffs were rum. He did not quite understand them himself, and one poison neutralized the other - as you drink whiskey when you are snakebitten - or inject permanganate. At least that's the nearest to it the doctors can come. But if the old chap had been alive he could have told them a lot they don't know. They say that in those presses of his he had all sorts of deadly poisons - things that are not in any pharmacopoeia.

'Well, anyway, I went to his funeral, and there was nobody who would say a prayer - so being a Presbyterian Covenanter -'

'A pretty Covenanting Presbyterian you are!' said Billy scornfully, 'first I've heard of it!'

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'I am though,' said Marcus; 'doesn't show on me much maybe, but that's because it is so deep down!' 'Deep fiddlesticks!'

'At any rate I said as good a prayer as I could for the old sinner. I had a kind of right. He tried to poison me once, but then he was cracked, and I had got to square up somehow.'

'You mean that your prayer was such an uncommon thing that it might prejudice the Authorities!' said Billy.

'No, I don't mean anything of the kind. On the contrary I trouble the Authorities so seldom that they might very likely pay more attention to this one!'

'Well,' said Billy, 'I would not have said any prayer, except a pretty short one in three or four words, but I *did* go over to Laverock Hall. The place is just swarming with police, and I saw Sylvia Granger, like a snaky fury, is keeping every one, even the Big Chief Boss of all the policemen, away from Grant's door. She was nearly the death of Kitten's mother this morning, when she went poking her nose over there. Kitten told me. Good girl, Kitten, but will never get the medal for filial piety where her mater is concerned.'

'Aymer would love anybody,' Marcus observed, with proper pride, 'even the most undeserving!'

'Evidently!' said Billy with a hiss of concentrated malice.

When the dust of the disturbance had fallen, Billy rose from the carpet and brushed himself philosophically.

'I suppose,' said Billy, without the least reference to recent events, 'that there is no need to stay at the Dent Arms much longer, seeing that old Verulam

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has given his gracious consent to what we would have done just the same without.'

'Nice thoughtful chap,' Marcus replied, 'and left me without a pang languishing on a dungeon floor, while you were off honeymooning!'

'Exactly, never a pang,' said Billy. 'Aymer would only have loved you the more - I know her sort - not a grain of vice - brought up by hand -'

The next moment Billy lay on his back wondering if the ceiling had fallen. Marcus helped him sympathetically to his feet.

'Sorry there was no time to put on the gloves,' he said, 'but you were too quick for me. Mustn't rag Aymer, you know. That's not playing the game!'

'I know - now!' said Billy ruefully.

'I suppose,' Marcus went on, 'now that you are going to get married, this will be the end of all our friendship.'

'Not a bit of it,' said Billy, 'the beginning, you mean! If you wait till my nose stops bleeding, I shall tell you how fond I am of you.'

'Well, Aymer and I are going for a long trip - we are both sick tired of this place.'

'Right,' said Billy - 'well played, partner. So am I - and as for the Kitten, she always was.'

'What do you say to taking a good long tour together, you with Kitten, I with Aymer. I've saved some money. I could hold up my end for a year or two. We could go to all the places you and I visited -'

'Oh,' cried Billy, holding up his hands in protest; 'thank you, no! Have *you* gone loony too? It would not matter to me - of course, protected by my well-known ingenuous innocence - all would be well. But think of all *your* other girls, and the new lights that Aymer would have on your character if she saw a

regular pit-queue of other ladies waiting for you at street corners with revolvers and knuckle-dusters—'

'Get out, Billy,' said Marcus, suddenly weakening in his resolution. 'There no sense in that. But on the main question I do believe you are right and that honeymoons are better spent apart. I really couldn't stand such a giddy goat of a fool around as you, Billy!'

'Thanks! Same to you, Marcus,' replied his pupil. 'And the compliments of the season. But you will come to see us in Gloucestershire when you get back. Kitten will make a charming hostess.'

'Right!' said Marcus. 'That will suit. Aymer is going to let Dent House for a term of years to people who don't believe in ghosts, and would only write accounts of them to the *Psychical Society* if they saw any. The servants are stopping, but we shall be homeless - *homeless*, Billy!'

'Any improvements before the tenants arrive?' said Billy waving his hand in the direction of the Dent woodlands.

'Oh, the usual,' said Marcus easily, 'new carpets - paint and paper - library made into a billiard room, Garden Port blocked up, boot cupboard and passage ditto, and the Heather House burned to the ground. I saw to that myself!'

'All on your own little authority?' queried Billy.

'Certainly, why not?' Marcus demanded with some heat.

'And you not married yet! Well, you have a cheek. You will be the spoiltest cub! If you had had *my* bringing up - or Kitty to keep you in hand. Who do you propose to thump when we split company?'

'My dear Billy,' said Marcus, benevolently putting a fatherly hand on his junior's shoulders, 'I am *not*

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going to split company from you quite so soon. I am going to see that you behave like a good, decent little boy. And if you don't - if you are not very nice to Kitten, not to speak of myself, thumped you shall be - aye, if you are twenty times married and as big as a house. Billy, I am going to love you - for your good. I'll be a father to you - and an uncle of the Dutch variety, and all the other able-bodied relatives of whom fate has deprived you! Trust me and remember the past.'

'That settles it,' said Billy. 'I will take Jack Jackson on as coachman. He was world's middle-weight champion only three years ago. And after a bit we'll see, Mr. Marcus.'



This was the way the two young men talked. But Kitten and Aymer only clung to each other, weeping, and said, 'Oh, aren't they darlings - so gentle - 'perfect' is not the word for either of them!'

And it wasn't.

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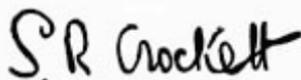
POSTHUMOUS PUBLICATIONS

- 1915 Hal o' the Ironsides
- 1917 The Azure Hand
- 1920 The White Pope
- 1926 Rogues' Island
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'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. R. Crockett". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with a prominent "S" and "R".

