The Last Bouquet

Marjorie Bowen

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Florence Flannery

She who had been Florence Flannery noted with a careless eye the stains of wet on the dusty stairs, and with a glance ill used to observance of domesticities looked up for damp or dripping ceilings. The dim-walled staircase revealed nothing but more dust, yet this would serve as a peg for ill-humor to hang on, so Florence pouted. "An ill, muddy place," said she, who loved gilding and gimcracks and mirrors reflecting velvet chairs, and flounced away to the upper chamber, lifting frilled skirts contemptuously high. Her husband followed; they had been married a week and there had never been any happiness in their wilful passion. Daniel Shute did not now look for any; in the disgust of this draggled homecoming he wondered what had induced him to marry the woman and how soon he would come to hate her.

As she stood in the big bedroom he watched her with dislike; her

tawdry charms of vulgar prettiness had once been delightful to his dazed senses and muddled wits, but here, in his old home, washed by the fine Devon air, his sight was clearer and she appeared coarse as a poppy at the far end of August.

"Of course you hate it," he said cynically, lounging with his big shoulders against one of the bedposts, his big hands in the pockets of his tight nankeen trousers, and his fair hair, tousled from the journey, hanging over his mottled face.

"It is not the place you boasted to have," replied Florence, but idly, for she stood by the window and looked at the tiny leaded panes; the autumn sun gleaming sideways on this glass, picked out a name scratched there:

FLORENCE FLANNERY. BORNE 1500.

"Look here," cried the woman, excited, "this should be my ancestress!"

She slipped off a huge diamond ring she wore and scratched underneath the writing the present year, "1800." Daniel Shute came and looked over her shoulder.

"That reads strange--'Born 1500'--as if you would say died 1800," he remarked. "Well, I don't suppose she had anything to do with you, my charmer, yet she brought you luck, for it was remembering this name here made me notice you when I heard what you were called."

He spoke uncivilly, and she responded in the same tone. "Undervalue what is your own, Mr. Shute. There was enough for me to choose from, I can swear!"

"Enough likely gallants," he grinned, "not so many likely husbands, eh?"

He slouched away, for, fallen as he was, it stung him that he had married a corybante of the opera, an unplaced, homeless, nameless creature for all he knew, for he could never quite believe that "Florence Flannery" was her real name.

Yet that name had always attracted; it was so queer that he should meet a real woman called Florence Flannery when one of the earliest of his recollections was tracing that name over with a curious finger in the old diamond pane.

"You have never told me who she was," said Mrs. Shute.

"Who knows? Three hundred years ago, m'dear. There are some old wives' tales, of course."

He left the great bedroom and she followed him doggedly downstairs.

"Is this your fine manor, Mr. Shute? And these your noble grounds? And how am Ito live here, Mr. Shute, who left the gaieties of London for you?"

Her voice, shrill and edged, followed him down the stairs and into the vast dismantled drawing-room where they paused, facing each other like things caught in a trap, which is what they were.

For he had married her because he was a ruined man, driven from London by duns, and a drunken man who dreaded lonely hours and needed a boon companion to pledge him glass for glass, and a man of coarse desires who had bought with marriage what he was not rich enough to buy with money, and she had married him because she was past her meridian and saw no more conquests ahead and also was in love with the idea of being a gentlewoman and ruling in

the great grand house by the sea--which was how she had thought of Shute Manor.

And a great grand house it had been, but for twenty years it had been abandoned by Daniel Shute, and stripped and mortgaged to pay for his vices, so that now it stood barren and desolate, empty and tarnished, and only a woman with love in her heart could have made a home of it; never had there been love in Florence Flannery's heart, only greed and meanness.

Thus these two faced each other in the gaunt room with the monstrous chandelier hanging above them wrapped in a dusty brown holland bag, the walls festooned with cobwebs, the pale wintry sunshine showing the thick dust on the unpolished boards.

"I can never live here!" cried Mrs. Shute. There was a touch of panic in her voice and she lifted her hands to her heart with a womanly gesture of grief.

The man was touched by a throb of pity; he did not himself expect the place to be so dilapidated. Some kind of a rascally agent had been looking after it for him, and he supposed some effort would have been made for his reception.

Florence saw his look of half-sullen shame and urged her point.

"We can go back, cannot we?" she said, with the rich drop in her voice, so useful for coaxing; "back to London and the house in Baker Street? All the old friends and old pleasures, Mr. Shute, and a dashing little cabriolet to go round the park?"

"Curse it!" he answered, chagrined. "I haven't the money. Flo; I haven't the damned money!" She heard the ring of bitter truth in his voice and the atrocious nature of the deception he had practiced on

her overwhelmed her shallow understanding.

"You mean you've got no money, Mr. Shute?" she screamed. "Not enough for London, m'dear."

"And I've to live in this filthy barn?"

"It has been good enough for my people, Mrs. Shute," he answered grimly. "For all the women of my family, gentlewomen, all of 'em with quarterings, and it will be good enough for you, m'dear, so none of your Bartholomew Fair airs and graces."

She was cornered, and a little afraid of him; he had been drinking at the last place where they stopped to water the horses and she knew how he could be when he was drunk; she remembered that she was alone with him and what a huge man he was.

So she crept away and went down into the vast kitchens where an old woman and a girl were preparing a meal.

The sight of this a little heartened Mrs. Shute; in her frilled taffetas and long ringlets she sat down by the great open hearth, moving her hands to show the firelight flashing in her rings and shifting her petticoats so that the girl might admire her kid shoes.

"I'll take a cordial to stay my strength," she said, "for I've come a long way and find a sour welcome at the end of it, and that'll turn any woman's blood."

The old dame smiled, knowing her type well enough; for even in a village you may find women like this.

So she brought Mrs. Shute some damson wine and a plate of biscuits, and the two women became friendly enough and gossiped in the dim candle-lit kitchen while Daniel Shute wandered about his

old home, even his corrupt heart feeling many a pang to see the places of his childhood desolate, the walks overgrown, the trees felled, the arbors closed, the fountains dried, and all the spreading fields about fenced by strangers.

The November moon was high in a misted space of open heaven by the time he reached the old carp pond.

Dead weeds tangled over the crumbling, moss-grown stone, trumpery and slime coated the dark waters.

"I suppose the carp are all dead?" said Mr. Shute.

He had not been aware that he spoke aloud, and was surprised to hear himself answered.

"I believe there are some left, esquire."

Mr. Shute turned sharply and could faintly discern the figure of a man sitting on the edge of the pond so that it seemed as if his legs half dangled in the black water.

"Who are you?" asked Daniel Shute quickly.

"I'm Paley, sir, who looks after the grounds."

"You do your work damned badly," replied the other, irritated. "It is a big place, esquire, for one man to work."

He seemed to stoop lower and lower as if at any moment he would slip into the pond; indeed, in the half dark, it seemed to Mr. Shute as if he was already half in the water; yet, on this speech, he moved and showed that he was but bending over the sombre depths of the carp pond.

The moonlight displayed him as a drab man of middling proportions with slow movements and a large languid eye which glittered feebly in the pale light; Mr. Shute had an impression that this eye looked at him sideways as if it was set at the side of the man's head, but soon saw that this was an illusion.

"Who engaged you?" he asked acidly, hating the creature.

"Mr. Tregaskis, the agent," replied the man in what appeared to be a thick foreign accent or with some defect of speech, and walked away into the wintry undergrowth.

Mr. Shute returned home grumbling; in the grim parlor Mr. Tregaskis was waiting for him--a red Cornishman, who grinned at his employer's railings. He knew the vices of Mr. Shute, and the difficulties of Mr. Shute, and he had seen Mrs. Shute in the kitchen deep in maudlin gossip with old Dame Chase and the idiot-faced girl, drinking the alcoholic country wine till it spilled from her shaking fingers on to her taffeta skirt.

So he assumed a tone of noisy familiarity that Mr. Shute was too sunken to resent; the last of the old squire's Oporto was sent for and the men drank themselves on to terms of easy good-fellowship.

At the last, when the candles were guttering, the bottles empty, and the last log's ashes on the hearth, Mr. Shute asked who was the creature Paley he had found hanging over the carp pond.

Mr. Tregaskis told him, but the next morning Mr. Shute could not recollect what he had said; the whole evening had, in his recollection, an atmosphere of phantasmagoria; but he thought that the agent had said that Paley was a deserted sailor who had wandered up from Plymouth and taken the work without pay, a peculiar individual who lived in a wattled hut that he had made himself, and on food he

caught with his own hands.

His sole explanation of himself was that he had waited for something a long time and was still waiting for it; useful he was, Mr. Tregaskis had said, and it was better to leave him alone.

All this Mr. Shute remembered vaguely, lying in the great bed staring at the pale sun glittering on the name "Florence Flannery" scratched on the window with the two dates.

It was late in the autumnal morning, but his wife still lay beside him, heavily asleep, with her thick heavy chestnut hair tossed over the pillow and her full bosom panting, the carnation of her rounded face flushed and stained, the coarse diamonds glowing on her plump hands, the false pearls slipping round her curved throat.

Daniel Shute sat up in bed and looked down at her prone sleep. "Who is she? And where does she come from?" he wondered. He had never cared to find out, but now his ignorance of all appertaining to his wife annoyed him.

He shook her bare shoulder till she yawned out of her heavy sleep. "Who are you, Flo?" he asked. "You must know something about yourself."

The woman blinked up at him, drawing her satin bedgown round her breast.

"I was in the opera, wasn't I?" she answered lazily. "I never knew my people."

"Came out of an orphanage or the gutter, I suppose?" he returned bitterly.

"Maybe."

"But your name?" he insisted. "That is never your name, 'Florence Flannery'?"

"I've never known another," she responded indifferently. "You're not Irish."

"I don't know, Mr. Shute. I've been in many countries and seen many strange things."

He laughed; he had heard some of her experiences.

"You've seen so much and been in so many places I don't know how you've ever got it all into one life."

"I don't know myself. It's all rather like a dream and the most dreamlike of all is to be lying here looking at my own name written three hundred years ago."

She moved restlessly and slipped from the bed, a handsome woman with troubled eyes.

"'Tis the drink brings the dreams, m'dear," said Mr. Shute. "I had some dreams last night of a fellow named Paley I met by the carp pond."

"You were drinking in the parlor," she retorted scornfully. "And you in the kitchen, m'dear."

Mrs. Shute flung a fringed silk shawl, the gift of an Indian nabob, round her warm body and dropped, shivering and yawning, into one of the warm tapestry chairs.

"Who was this Florence Flannery?" she asked idly.

"I told you no one knows. An Irish girl born in Florence, they said, when I was a child and listened to beldam's gossip. Her mother a Medici, m'dear, and he a groom! And she carne here, the trollop, with some young Shute who had been travelling in Italy--picked her up and brought her home, like I've brought you!"

"He didn't marry her?" asked Mrs. Shute indifferently.

"More sense," said her husband coarsely. "I'm the first fool of me family. She was a proper vixen. John Shute took her on his voyages; he'd a ship and went discovering. They talk yet at Plymouth of how she would sit among the parrots and the spices and the silks when the ship came into Plymouth Hoe."

"Ah, the good times!" sighed Mrs. Shute, "when men were men and paid a good price for their pleasures!"

"You've fetched your full market value, Mrs. Shute," he answered, yawning in the big bed.

"I'd rather be John Shute's woman than your wife," she returned. "What do you know of him?"

"I saw his portrait on the back stairs last night. Goody Chase showed me. A noble man with a clear eye and great arms to fight and love with."

"He used 'em to push Florence Flannery out with," grinned Mr. Shute, "if half the tales are true. On one of their voyages they picked up a young Portuguese who took the lady's fancy and she brought him back to Shute Court."

"And what was the end of it?"

"I know no more, save that she was flung out, as I'd like to fling you

out, my beauty!" foamed Mr. Shute with gusty violence. His wife laughed and got up discordantly.

"I'll tell the rest of the tale. She got tired of her new love, and he wasn't a Portuguese, but an Indian, or partly, and his name was D'Ailey, Daly the people called it here. On one voyage she told John Shute about him, and he was marooned on a lonely island in the South Seas--tied up to a great, great stone image of a god, burning hot in the tropic sun. He must have been a god of fishes for there was nothing else near that island but monstrous fish."

"Who told you this?" demanded Mr. Shute. "Old Dame Chase, with her lies? I never heard of this before."

"'Tis the story," resumed his wife. "The last she saw of him was his bound figure tied tight, tight, to the gaping, grinning idol while she sat on the poop as the ship--the *Phoenix*--sailed away. He cursed her and called on the idol to let her live till he was avenged on her--he was of the breed, or partly of the breed, that these gods love, and Florence Flannery was afraid, afraid, as she sailed away--"

"Goody Chase in her cups!" sneered Mr. Shute. "And what's the end of your story?"

"There's no end," said the woman sullenly. "John Shute cast her off, for the bad luck that dogged him, and what became of her I don't know."

"It's an ugly tale and a stupid tale," grumbled Daniel Shute with a groan as he surveyed the bleak chill weather beyond the lattice panes. "Get down and see what's to eat in the house and what's to drink in the cellar, and if that rogue Tregaskis is there send him up to me."

Mrs. Shute rose and pulled fiercely at the long wool-embroidered bell-rope so that the rusty bell jangled violently.

"What'll you do when the wine is all drunk and the boon companions have cleared out your pockets?" she asked wildly. "Do your own errands, Mr. Shute."

He flung out of bed with a pretty London oath, and she remained huddled in the chair while he dressed and after he had left her, wringing her hands now and then and wailing under her breath, till Dame Chase came up with a posset and helped her to dress. The sight of her dishevelled trunks restored some of Mrs. Shute's spirits; she pulled out with relish her furbelows and flounces, displaying to Goody Chase's amazed admiration the last fashions of Paris and London, mingling her display with fond reminiscences of gilded triumphs.

"Maybe you'd be surprised to learn that Mr. Shute isn't my first husband," she said, tossing her head.

The fat old woman winked.

"I'd be more surprised, m'lady, to learn he was your last."

Mrs. Shute laughed grossly, but her spirits soon fell; kneeling on the floor with her tumbled finery in her lap, she stared out through the window on which her name was written at the tossing bare boughs, the chill sky, the dry flutter of the last leaves.

"I'll never get away," she said mournfully, "the place bodes me no good. I've had the malaria in me time, Mrs. Chase, in one of those cursed Italian swamps and it affected me memory; there's much I can't place together and much I recall brokenly--dreams and fevers, Mrs. Chase."

"The drink, m'ady."

"No," returned the kneeling woman fiercely. "Wasn't the drink taken to drown those dreams and fevers? I wish I could tell you half I know--there's many a fine tale in me head, but when I begin to speak it goes!"

She began to rock to and fro, lamenting.

"To think of the fine times I've had with likely young men drinking me health in me slipper and the little cabriolet in Paris and the walks in the Prater outside Vienna. So pleasant you would hardly believe!"

"You'll settle down, m'lady, like women do."

Indeed, Mrs. Shute seemed to make some attempt at "settling down"; there was something piteous in the despairing energy with which she set to work to make her life tolerable; there was a suite of rooms lined with faded watered green silk that she took for her own and had cleaned and furnished with what she could gather from the rest of the house--old gilt commodes and rococo chairs and threadbare panels of tapestries and chipped vases of Saxe or Lunéville, one or two pastel portraits that the damp had stained, together with some tawdry trifles she had brought in her own baggage.

She employed Mr. Tregaskis to sell her big diamond in Plymouth and bought pale blue satin hangings for her bedroom and spotted muslin for her bed, a carpet wreathed with roses, a gaudy dressing-table and phials of perfume, opopanax, frangipane, musk, potent, searing, to dissipate, she said, the odors of must and mildew.

Arranging these crude splendors was her sole occupation. There were no neighbors in the lonely valley and Mr. Shute fell into

melancholy and solitary drinking; he hung on to his existence as just more tolerable than a debtor's prison, but the fury with which he met his fate expressed itself in curses awful to hear. Such part of the estate as still belonged to him he treated with complex contempt; Mr. Tregaskis continued to supervise some rough farming and the man Paley worked in the garden; taciturn, solitary and sullen, he made an ill impression on Mr. Shute, yet he cost nothing and did some labor, as carrying up the firewood to the house and clearing away some of the thickets and dying weeds and vast clumps of nettles and docks.

Mrs. Shute met him for the first time by the carp pond; she was tricked out in a white satin pelisse edged with fur and a big bonnet, and wandered forlornly in the neglected paths. Paley was sitting on the edge of the carp pond, looking intently into the murky depths.

"I'm the new mistress," said Mrs. Shute, "and I'll thank you to keep better order in the place."

Paley looked up at her with his pale eyes.

"Shute Court isn't what it was," he said, "there is a lot of work to do."

"You seem to spend a power of time by the pond," she replied. "What are you here for?"

"I'm waiting for something," he said. "I'm putting in time, Mrs. Shute."

"A sailor, I hear?" she said curiously, for the draggled nondescript man in his greenish-black clothes was difficult to place; he had a peculiar look of being boneless, without shoulders or hips, one slope slipping into another as if there was no framework under his flabby flesh.

"I've been at sea," he answered, "like yourself, Mrs. Shute." She laughed coarsely.

"I would I were at sea again," she replied; "this is horror to me."

"Why do you stay?"

"I'm wondering. It seems that I can't get away, the same as I couldn't help coming," a wail came into her voice. "Must I wait till Mr. Shute has drunk himself to death?"

The wind blew sharp across the pond, cutting little waves in the placid surface, and she who had been Florence Flannery shuddered in the bite of it and turned away and went muttering up the path to the desolate house.

Her husband was in the dirty parlor playing at bezique with Mr. Tregaskis and she flared in upon them.

"Why don't you get rid of that man Paley? I hate him. He does no work--Mrs. Chase told me that he always sits by the carp pond and today I saw him--ugh!"

"Paley's all right, Mrs. Shute," replied Tregaskis, "he does more work than you think."

"Why does he stay?"

"He's waiting for a ship that's soon due in Plymouth."

"Send him off," insisted Mrs. Shute. "Isn't the place melancholic enough without you having that sitting about?"

Her distaste and disgust of the man seemed to amount to a panic, and her husband, whose courage was snapped by the drink, was infected by her fear.

"When did this fellow come?" he demanded.

"About a week before you did. He'd tramped up from Plymouth."

"We've only his word for that," replied Mr. Shute with drunken cunning; "maybe he's a Bow Street runner sent by one of those damned creditors! You're right, Flo, I don't like the wretch--he's watching me, split him! I'll send him off."

Mr. Tregaskis shrugged as Daniel Shute staggered from his chair.

"The man's harmless, sir; half-witted if you like, but useful."

Still Mr. Shute dragged on his greatcoat with the capes and followed his wife out into the grey garden.

The carp pond was not near the house, and by the time that they had reached it a dull twilight had fallen in the cold and heavy air.

The great trees were quite bare now and flung a black tracing of forlorn branches against the bleak evening sky; patches and clumps of dead weeds obstructed every path and alley; by the carp pond showed the faint outline of a blind statue crumbling beneath the weight of dead mosses.

Paley was not there.

"He'll be in his hut," said Mr. Shute, "sleeping or spying--the ugly old devil. I'll send him off."

The dead oyster white of Mrs. Shute's pelisse gleamed oddly as she followed her husband through the crackling undergrowth.

There, in the thickening twilight, they found the hut, a queer arrangement of wattles cunningly interwoven in which there was no

furniture whatever, nothing but a bare protection from the wind and weather.

Paley was not there.

"I'll find him," muttered Mr. Shute, "if I have to stay out all night."

For his half-intoxicated mind had fixed on this stranger as the symbol of all his misfortunes and perhaps the avenger of all his vices.

His wife turned back, for her pelisse was being caught on the undergrowth; she went moodily towards the carp pond.

A moment later a sharp shriek from her brought Mr. Shute plunging back to her side. She was standing in a queer bent attitude, pointing with a shaking plump hand to the murky depths of the pond.

"The wretch! He's drowned himself!" she screamed.

Mr. Shute's worn-out nerves reacted to her ignoble panic; he clutched her arm as he gazed in the direction of her finger; there was something dark in the shallower side of the pond, something large and dark, with pale flat eyes that glittered malevolently.

"Paley!" gasped Mr. Shute.

He bent closer in amazed horror, then broke into tremulous laughter.

"'Tis a fish," he declared; "one of the old carp."

Mrs. Shute indeed now perceived that the monstrous creature in the water was a fish; she could make out the wide gaping jaw, tall spines shadowing in the murk, and a mottled skin of deadly yellow and dingy white.

"It's looking at me," she gasped. "Kill it, kill it, the loathsome wretch!"

"It's--it's--too big," stammered Mr. Shute, but he picked up a stone to hurl; the huge fish, as if aware of his intentions, slipped away into the murky depths of the pond, leaving a sluggish ripple on the surface.

Daniel Shute now found his courage.

"Nothing but an old carp," he repeated. "I'll have the thing caught."

Mrs. Shute began to weep and wring her hands. Her husband dragged her roughly towards the house, left her there, took a lantern, and accompanied now by Mr. Tregaskis returned in search of Paley.

This time they found him sitting in his usual place by the side of the pond. Mr. Shute had now changed his mind about sending him away; he had a muddled idea that he would like the pond watched, and who was to do this if not Paley?

"Look here, my man," he said, "there's a great carp in this pond--a very big, black old carp."

"They live for hundreds of years," said Paley. "But this isn't a carp."

"You know about it, then?" demanded Mr. Shute.

"I know about it."

"Well, I want you to catch it--kill it. Watch till you do. I loathe it--ugh!"

"Watch the pond?" protested Mr. Tregaskis, who held the lantern and was chilled and irritable. "Damme, esquire, what can the thing do? It can't leave the water."

"I wouldn't," muttered Mr. Shute, "promise you that."

"You're drunk," said the other coarsely.

But Mr. Shute insisted on his point.

"Watch the pond, Paley, watch it day and night till you get that fish."

"I'll watch," answered Paley, never moving from his huddled position.

The two men went back to the desolate house. When Mr. Shute at last staggered upstairs he found his wife with half a dozen candles lit, crouching under the tawdry muslin curtains with which she had disfigured the big bed.

She clutched a rosary that she was constantly raising to her lips as she muttered ejaculations.

Mr. Shute lurched to the bedside.

"I didn't know that you were a Papist, Flo," he sneered. She looked up at him.

"That story's got me," she whispered, "the man tied up to the fish god--the curse--and he following her--tracking her down for *three hundred years*, till she was hounded back to the old place where they'd loved."

Daniel Shute perceived that she had been drinking, and sank into a chair.

"Goody Chase's gossip," he answered, yawning, "and that damned ugly fish. I've set Paley to catch him--to watch the pond till he does."

She looked at him sharply, and appeared relieved.

"Anyhow, what's it to do with you?" he continued. "You ain't the jade

who left the man on the island!" He laughed crudely. Mrs. Shute sank down on her pillows.

"As long as the pond is watched," she murmured, "I don't mind."

But during the night she tossed and panted in a delirium, talking of great ships with strange merchandise, of lonely islands amid blazing seas, of mighty stone gods rearing up to the heavens, of a man in torture and a curse following a woman who sailed away, till her husband shook her and left her alone, sleeping on a couch in the dreary parlor.

The next day he spoke to Mrs. Chase.

"Between your news and your lies you've turned your mistress's head. Good God! she is like a maniac with your parcel of follies!"

But Goody Chase protested that she had told her nothing.

"*She* told *me* that story, esquire, and said she had found it in an old book. What did I know of Florence Flannery? Many a time you've asked me about her when you were a child and I've had no answer to give you--what did I know save she was a hussy who disgraced Shute Court?"

At this Daniel Shute vehemently demanded of his wife where she had got the tales which she babbled about, but the woman was sullen and heavy and would tell him nothing; all the day she remained thus, but when the few hours of wintry light were over she fell again into unbridled terror, gibbering like a creature deprived of reason, beating her breast, kissing the rosary, and muttering, "*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!*"

Mr. Shute was not himself in any state to endure this; he left his wife

to herself and made Tregaskis sleep with him for company in another room.

Winter froze the bleak countryside; Paley kept guard by the pond and the Shutes somehow dragged on an intolerable existence in the deserted house.

In the daytime Mrs. Shute revived a little and would even prink herself out in her finery and gossip with Mrs. Chase over the vast log fire, but the nights always found her smitten with terror, shivering with cowardly apprehension; and the object of all her nightmare dread was the fish she had seen in the pond.

"It can't leave the water," they told her, and she always answered: "The first night I was here I saw wet on the stairs."

"My God, my God!" Daniel Shute would say, "this is like living with someone sentenced to death."

"Get a doctor over from Plymouth," suggested Mr. Tregaskis.

But Mr. Shute would not, for fear of being betrayed to his creditors.

"Better rot here than in the Fleet," he swore.

"Then take her away--and keep her from the bottle."

The wretched husband could do neither of these things; he had no money and no influence over Mrs. Shute. He was indeed indifferent to her sufferings save in so far as they reacted on him and ever accustomed him to the spectacle of her breakdown; he knew it was not really strange that a woman such as she was should collapse under conditions such as these, and his life was already so wretched that he cared little for added horrors.

He began to find a strange comfort in the man Paley, who, taciturn, slow and queer, yet did his work and watched the pond with an admirable diligence.

One night in the blackest time of the year, the bitter dark nights before Christmas, the shrieks of Mrs. Shute brought her husband cursing up the stairs.

Her door was unbolted and she sat up in bed, displaying, in the light of his snatched-up taper, some red marks on her arm. "Let him kill me and done with it," she jabbered.

Mr. Tregaskis came pushing in and caught rudely hold of her arm. "She's done it herself," he cried; "those are the marks of her own teeth."

But Mrs. Shute cried piteously:

"He came flopping up the stairs, he broke the bolts; he jumped on the bed! Oh! oh! oh! Isn't this the bed, the very bed I slept in then--and didn't he used to creep into this room when John Shute was away?"

"Still thinking of that damned fish," said Mr. Tregaskis, "and it's my belief you neither of you saw it at all, esquire--that man Paley has been watching, and he's seen nothing."

Mr. Shute bit his fingernails, looking down on the writhing figure of his wife.

"Light all the candles, can't you?" he said. "I'll stay with the poor fool tonight."

While Mr. Tregaskis obeyed he went to the door and looked out, holding his taper high.

There were pools of wet and a long trail of slime down the dusty, neglected stairs.

He called Mr. Tregaskis.

"Ugh!" cried the Cornishman, then, "It's from Goody Chase's water crock."

On the following windy morning Mr. Shute went out, shivering in the nipping air, to the carp pond.

"I don't want another night like last," he said.

"You'll sleep across my wife's door--she thinks that cursed carp is after her--"

Then, at the gross absurdity of what he said, he laughed miserably. "This is a pretty pantomime I'm playing," he muttered. A horrid curiosity drove him up to look at his wife.

She sat between the draggled muslin curtains hugging her knees in the tumbled bed; a wretched fire flickered wanly in the chill depths of the vast room; a wind blew swift and remote round the window on which was scratched the name of Florence Flannery. Mr. Shute shivered.

"I must get you away," he said, stirred above his fears for himself; "this is a damned place--the Fleet would be better, after all." She turned lustreless eyes on him.

"I can't get away," she said dully. "I've come here to die--don't you see it on that window--'Died 1800'?"

He crossed the floor and peered at the scratching on the glass.

Someone had indeed added the word "died" before the last date.

"These are the tricks of a Bedlamite," he said nervously. "Do you think there was only *one* Florence Flannery?"

"And do you think," she returned harshly, "that there were two?"

She looked so awful crouched up in bed with her hanging hair, her once plump face fallen in the cheeks, her soiled satin gown open over her laboring breast, her whole air and expression so agonized, so malevolent, so dreadful, that Daniel Shute passed his hand over his eyes as if to brush away a vision of unsubstantial horror.

He was shaken by an hallucination of light-headedness; he appeared to enter another world, in which many queer things were possible.

"What are you?" he asked uneasily. "He's been after you for nearly three hundred years? Aren't you punished enough?"

"Oh, oh!" moaned the woman. "Keep him out! Keep him out!"

"I'll put Paley at the door tonight," muttered Mr. Shute.

He crept out of the horrible chamber; he now detested his wife beyond all reason, yet somehow he felt impelled to save her from the invincible furies who were pursuing her in so gruesome a fashion.

"She's a lunatic," said Mr. Tregaskis brusquely. "You'll have to keep her shut in that room--it's not difficult to account for--with the life she's led and this place and the coincidence of the names." The first snow of the year began to fall that night, sullen flakes struggling in the coils of the leaping wind that circled round Shute Court.

In the last glimmer of daylight Paley came to take up his post. Drab,

silent, with his sloping shoulders and nondescript clothes, he went slowly upstairs and sat down outside Mrs. Shute's door. "He seems to know the way," remarked Daniel Shute.

"Don't you know he works in the house?" retorted Mr. Tregaskis.

The two men slept, as usual, in the parlor, on stiff horsehair couches bundled up with pillows and blankets; the litter of their supper was left on the table and they piled the fire up with logs before going to sleep. Mr. Shute's nerves were in no state to permit him to risk waking up in the dark.

The wind dropped and the steady downdrift of the soft snow filled the blackness of the bitter night.

As the grandfather clock struck three Daniel Shute sat up and called to his companion.

"I've been thinking in my dreams," he said, with chattering teeth. "Is it Paley, or Daley? You know the name was D'Ailey."

"Shut up, you fool," returned the agent fiercely; but he then raised himself on his elbow, for a hoarse, bitter scream, followed by some yelled words in a foreign language tore through the stillness.

"The mad woman," said Mr. Tregaskis; but Daniel Shute dragged the clothes up to his chattering teeth.

"I'm not going up," he muttered. "I'm not going up!"

Mr. Tregaskis dragged on his trousers and flung a blanket over his shoulders and so, lighting a taper at the big fire, went up the gaunt stairs to Mrs. Shute's room. The glimmering beams of the rushlight showed him tracks of wet again on the dirty boards.

"Goody Chase with her crocks and possets," he murmured; then louder, "Paley! Paley!"

There was no one outside Mrs. Shute's door, which hung open. Mr. Tregaskis entered.

She who had been Florence Flannery lay prone on her tawdry couch; the deep wounds that had slain her appeared to have been torn by savage teeth; she looked infinitely old, shrivelled and detestable.

Mr. Tregaskis backed on to the stairs, the light lurching round him from the shaking of his taper, when Mr. Shute came bustling up out of the darkness.

"Paley's gone," whispered Mr. Tregaskis dully.

"I saw him go," gibbered Mr. Shute, "as I ventured to the door--by the firelight; a great fish slithering away with blood on his jaws."

Kecksies

Two young esquires were riding from Canterbury, jolly and drunk, they shouted and trolled and rolled in their saddles as they followed the winding road across the downs.

A dim sky was overhead and shut in the wide expanse of open country that one side stretched to the sea and the other to the Kentish Weald.

The primroses grew in thick posies in the ditches, the hedges were full of fresh hawthorn green, and the new grey leaves of eglantine and honeysuckle, the long boughs of ash with the hard black buds, and the wand-like shoots of sallow willow hung with catkins and the smaller red tassels of the nut and birch; little the two young men

heeded of any of these things, for they were in their own country that was thrice familiar; but Nick Bateup blinked across to the distant purple hills, and cursed the gathering rain. "Ten miles more of the open," he muttered, "and a great storm blackening upon us."

Young Crediton who was more full of wine, laughed drowsily. "We'll lie at a cottage on the way, Nick--think you I've never a tenant who'll let me share board and bed?"

He maundered into singing,

"There's a light in the old mill,

Where the witch weaves her charms;

But dark is the chamber,

Where you sleep in my arms.

Now came you by magic, by trick or by spell,

I have you and hold you,

And love you right well!"

The clouds overtook them like an advancing army; the wayside green looked livid under the purplish threat of the heavens, and the birds were all still and silent.

"Split me if I'll be soaked," muttered young Bateup. "Knock up one of these boors of thine, Ned--but damn me if I see as much as hut or barn!"

"We come to Banells farm soon, or have we passed it?" answered the other confusedly. "What's the pother? A bold bird as thou art, and

scared of a drop of rain?"

"My lungs are not as lusty as thine," replied Bateup, who was indeed of a delicate build and more carefully dressed in greatcoat and muffler.

"But thy throat is as wide!" laughed Crediton, "and God help you, you are muffled like an old woman--and as drunk as a shorn parrot."

"Tra la la, my sweeting,

Tra la la, my May,

If now I miss the meeting

I'll come some other day."

His companion took no notice of this nonsense, but with as much keenness as his muddled faculties would allow, was looking out for some shelter, for he retained sufficient perception to enable him to mark the violence of the approaching storm and the loneliness of the vast stretch of country where the only human habitations appeared to be some few poor cottages, far distant in the fields.

He lost his good-humor, and as the first drops of stinging cold rain began to fall, he cursed freely, using the terms common to the pot-houses where he had intoxicated himself on the way from Canterbury.

Urging their tired horses, they came on to the top of the little hill they ascended; immediately before them was the silver ashen skeleton of a blasted oak, polished like worn bone standing over a small pool of stagnant water (for there had been little rain and much east wind), where a few shivering ewes crouched together from the oncoming storm.

Just beyond this, rising out of the bare field, was a humble cottage of black timber and white plaster with a deep thatched roof. For the rest, the crest of the hill was covered by a hazel copse and then dipped lonely again to the clouded lower levels that now began to slope into the marsh.

"This will shelter us, Nick," cried Crediton.

"'Tis a foul place and the boors have a foul reputation," objected the lord of the manor. "There are those who swear to seeing the Devil's own phiz leer from Goody Boyle's windows--but anything to please thee and thy weak chest."

They staggered from their horses, knocked open the rotting gate and leading the beasts across the hard dry grazing field, knocked with their whips at the small door of the cottage.

The grey sheep under the grey tree looked at them and bleated faintly; the rain began to fall, like straight yet broken darts out of the sombre clouds.

The door was opened by a woman very neatly dressed, with large scrubbed hands, who looked at them with fear and displeasure; for if her reputation was bad, theirs was no better; the lord of the manor was a known roysterer and wild liver, and spent his idleness in rakish expeditions with Sir Nicholas Bateup from Bodiam, who was easily squandering a fine property.

Neither was believed to be free of bloodshed, and as for honor, they were as stripped of that as the blasted tree by the lonely pool was stripped of leaves.

Besides, they were both, now, as usual, drunk.

"We want shelter, Goody Boyle," cried Crediton, pushing his way in as he threw her his reins. "Get the horses into the barn."

The woman could not deny the man who could make her homeless in a second; she shouted hoarsely an inarticulate name, and a loutish boy came and took the horses, while the two young men stumbled into the cottage which they filled and dwarfed with their splendor.

Edward Crediton had been a fine young man, and though he was marred with insolence and excess, he still made a magnificent appearance, with his full blunt features, his warm coloring, the fair hair rolled and curled and all his bravery of blue broadcloth, buckskin breeches, foreign lace, top boots, French sword and gold rings and watch chains.

Sir Nicholas Bateup was darker and more effeminate, having a cast of weakness in his constitution that betrayed itself in his face; but his dress was splendid to the point of foppishness and his manners even more arrogant and imposing.

Of the two he had the more evil repute; he was unwed and therefore there was no check upon his mischief, whereas Crediton had a young wife whom he loved after his fashion, who checked some of his doings, softened others, and stayed very faithful to him and adored him still, after five years of a wretched marriage, as is the manner of some women.

The rain came down with slashing severity; the little cottage panes were blotted with water.

Goody Boyle put logs on the fire and urged them with the bellows. It was a gaunt white room with nothing in it but a few wooden stools, a table and an eel-catcher's prong.

On the table were two large fair wax candles.

"What are these for, Goody?" asked Crediton.

"For the dead, sir."

"You've dead in the house?" cried Sir Nicholas, who was leaning by the fireplace and warming his hands. "What do you want with dead men in the house, you trollop?"

"It is no dead of mine, my lord," answered the woman with evil civility, "but one who took shelter here and died."

"A curst witch!" roared Crediton. "You hear that, Nick! Came here--died--and now you'll put spells on us, you ugly slut--"

"No spells of mine," answered the woman quietly, rubbing her large clean hands together. "He had been long ailing and died here of an ague."

"And who sent the ague?" asked Crediton with drunken gravity. "And who sent him here?"

"Perhaps the same hand that sent us," laughed Sir Nicholas. "Where is your corpse, Goody?"

"In the next room--I have but two."

"And two too many--you need but a bundle of faggots and a tuft of tow to light it--an arrant witch, a contest witch," muttered Crediton; he staggered up from the stool. "Where is your corpse? I've a mind to see if he looks as if he died a natural death."

"Will you not ask first who it is?" asked the woman, unlatching the inner door.

"Why should I care?"

"Who is it?" asked Sir Nicholas, who had the clearer wits, drunk or sober.

"Richard Horne," said Goody Boyle.

Ned Crediton looked at her with the eyes of a sober man.

"Richard Horne," said Sir Nicholas. "So he is dead at last--your wife will be glad of that, Ned."

Crediton gave a sullen laugh.

"I'd broken him--she wasn't afraid any longer of a lost wretch, cast out to die of ague on the marsh."

But Sir Nicholas had heard differently; he had been told, even by Ned himself, how Anne Crediton shivered before the terror of Richard Horne's pursuit, and would wake up in the dark crying out for fear of him, like a lost child; for he had wooed her before her marriage, and persisted in loving her afterwards with mad boldness and insolent confidence, so that justice had been set on him and he had been banished to the marsh, a ruined man.

"Well, sirs," said Goody Boyle, in her thin voice that had the pinched accent of other parts, "my lady can sleep o' nights now--for Robert Horne will never disturb her again."

"Do you think he ever troubled us?" asked Crediton with a coarse oath. "I flung him out like an adder that had writhed across the threshold--"

"A wonder he did not put a murrain on thee, Ned. He had fearful

ways and a deep knowledge of unholy things."

"A warlock. God help us," added the woman.

"The Devil's proved an ill master then," laughed Crediton. "He could not help Richard Horne into Anne's favor--nor prevent him lying in a cold bed in the flower of his age."

"The Devil," smiled Sir Nicholas, "was over busy, Ned, helping you to the lady's favor and a warm bed. You were the dearer disciple."

"Oh, good lords, will you talk less wildly with a lost man's corpse in the house, and his soul riding the storm without?" begged Goody Boyle; and she latched again the inner door.

Murk filled the cottage now; waves of shadow flowed over the landscape without the rain-blotted window, and drowned the valley. In the bitter field, the melancholy ewes huddled beneath the blasted oak beside the bare pool, the stagnant surface of which was now broken by the quick raindrops; a low thunder grumbled from the horizon and all the young greenery looked livid in the ghastly light of heaven.

"*I'll see him*," said Ned Crediton, swaggering. "I'll look at this gay gallant in his last smock!--so that I can swear to Anne he has taken his amorous smile to the earthworms--surely."

"Look as you like," answered Sir Nicholas, "glut your eyes with looking--"

"But you'll remember, sirs, that *he was a queer man and died queerly*, and there was no parson or priest to take the edge off his going, or challenge the fiends who stood at his head and feet."

"Saw *you* the fiends?" asked Ned curiously.

"Question not what I saw," muttered the woman. "You'll have your own familiars, Esquire Crediton."

She unlatched the inner door again and Ned passed in, bowing low on the threshold.

"Good day, Robert Horne," he jeered. "We parted in anger, but my debts are paid now and I greet you well."

The dead man lay on a pallet bed with a coarse white sheet over him that showed his shape but roughly; the window was by his head and looked blankly on to the rain-bitten fields and dismal sky; the light was cold and colorless on the white sheet and the miserable room.

Sir Nicholas lounged in the doorway; he feared no death but his own, and that he set so far away it was but a dim dread.

"Look and see if it is Robert Horne," he urged, "or if the beldam lies."

And Crediton turned down the sheet.

"'Tis Robert Horne," he said.

The dead man had his chin uptilted, his features sharp and horrible in the setting of the spilled fair hair, on the coarse pillow. Ned Crediton triumphed over him, making lewd jests of love and death, and sneering at this great gallant, who had been crazed for love and driven by desire, and who now lay impotent.

And Sir Nicholas in the doorway listened and laughed and had his own wicked jeers to add; for both of them had hated Robert Horne as a man who had defied them.

But Goody Boyle stole away with her fingers in her ears.

When these two were weary of their insults they returned the flap of the sheet over the dead face and returned to the outer room. And Ned asked for drink, declaring that Goody Boyle was a known smuggler and had cellars of rare stuff.

So the lout brought up glasses of cognac and a bottle of French wine, and these two drank grossly, sitting over the fire; and Goody Boyle made excuse for the drink, by saying that Robert Horne had given her two gold pieces before he died (not thin pared coins but thick and heavy) for his funeral, and the entertainment of those who should come to his burying.

"What mourners could he hope for?" laughed Ned Crediton. "The crow and the beetle and the death-watch spider!"

But Goody Boyle told him that Robert Horne had made friends while he had lived an outcast on the marshes; they were, no doubt, queer and even monstrous people, but they were coming tonight to sit with Robert Horne before he was put in the ground.

"And who, Goody, have warned this Devil's congregation of the death of Robert Horne?" asked Sir Nicholas.

She answered him--that Robert Horne was not ill an hour or a day but for a long space struggled with fits of the marsh fever, and in between these bouts of the ague, he went abroad like a well man, and his friends would come up and see him and the messenger who came up to enquire after him was Tora, the Egyptian girl who walked with her bosom full of violets.

The storm was in full fury now, muttering low and sullen round the cottage with great power of beating rain.

"Robert Horne was slow in dying," said Sir Nicholas. "Of what did he speak in those days?"

"Of a woman, good sir."

"Of my wife!" cried Ned.

Goody Boyle shook her head with a look of stupidity.

"I know nothing of that. Though for certain he called her Anne, sweet Anne, and swore he would possess her yet--in so many words and very roundly."

"But he died balked," said Ned, swaying on his stool, "and he'll rot outside holy ground."

"They'll lay him in Deadman's Field, which is full of old bones none can plough and no sheep will graze," answered the woman, "and I must set out to see lame Jonas who promised to have the grave ready--but maybe the rain has hindered him."

She looked at them shrewdly as she added,

"That is, gentles, if you care to remain alone with the body of Robert Horne."

"I think of him as a dead dog," replied Ned Crediton.

And when the woman had gone, he, being loosened with the French brandy, suggested a gross jest.

"Why should Robert Horne have all this honor, even from rogues and Egyptians? Let us fool them--throwing his corpse out into the byre, and I will lie under the sheet and presently sit up and fright them all, with the thought it is the Devil!"

Sir Nicholas warmly cheered this proposal and they lurched into the inner chamber which was dark enough now by reason of a great northern cloud that blocked the light from the window.

They pulled the sheet off Robert Horne and found him wrapped in another that was furled up under his chin, and so they carried him to the back door and peered through the storm for some secret place where they might throw him.

And Ned Crediton saw a dark bed of rank hemlock and cried, "Cast him into the kecksies," that being the rustic name for the weed.

So they flung the dead man into the hemlocks which were scarce high enough to cover him, and to hide the whiteness of the sheet, broke off boughs from the hazel copse and put over him, and went back laughing to the cottage, and there kept a watch out from the front window and when they saw Goody Boyle toiling along through the rain, Ned took off his hat and coat and sword and folded them away under the bed, then Sir Nicholas wrapped him in the under sheet, so that he was shrouded to the chin, and he lay on the pillow, and drew the other sheet over him.

"If thou sleepst do not snore," said Sir Nicholas, and went back to the fire and lit his long clay full of Virginian tobacco.

When Goody Boyle entered with her wet shawl over her head, she had two ragged creatures behind her who stared malevolently at the fine gentleman with his bright clothes and dark curls, lolling by the fire and watching the smoke rings rise from his pipe.

"Esquire Crediton has ridden for home," he said, "but I am not minded to risk the ague."

And he sipped more brandy and laughed at them, and they

muttering, for they knew his fame, went into the death-chamber and crouched round the couch where Sir Nicholas had just laid Ned Crediton under the sheet.

And presently others came up, Egyptians, eel-catchers and the like, outcasts and vagrants who crept in to watch by the corpse. Sir Nicholas presently rolled after them to see the horror and shriekings for grace there would be, when the dead man threw aside his shroud and sat up.

But the vigil went on till the night closed in and the two wax candles were lit, and still Ned Crediton gave no sign, nor did he snore or heave beneath the sheet, and Sir Nicholas became impatient, for the rain was over and he was weary of the foul air and the grotesque company.

"The fool," he thought (for he kept his wits well even in his cups), "has gone into a drunken sleep and forgot the joke."

So he pushed his way to the bed and turned down the sheet, whispering,

"This jest will grow stale with keeping."

But the words withered on his lips, for he looked into the face of a dead man. At the cry he gave they all came babbling about him and he told them of the trick that had been put upon them.

"But there's Devil's work here," he added. "For here is the body back again--or Ned Crediton dead and frozen into a likeness of the other"--and he flung the sheet end quickly over the pinched face and fair hair.

"And what did ye do with Robert Horne, outrageous dare fiend that ye be?" demanded an old vagrant; and the young lord passed the ill

words and answered with whitened lips.

"We cast him into yon bed of kecksies."

And they all beat out into the night, the lout with a lantern. And there was nothing at all in the bed of kecksies...and Ned Crediton's horse was gone from the stable.

"He was drunk," said Sir Nicholas, "and forgot his part--and fled that moment I was in the outer room."

"And in that minute did he carry Robert Horne in alone and wrap him up so neatly?" queried Goody Boyle.

"Well go in," said another hag, "and strip the body and see which man it be--"

But Sir Nicholas was in the saddle.

"Let be," he cried wildly, "there's been gruesome work enough for tonight--it's Robert Horne you have there--let be--Ill back to Crediton Manor--"

And he rode his horse out of the field, then more quickly down the darkling road, for the fumes of the brandy were out of his brain and he saw clearly and dreaded many things.

At the cross-roads when the ghastly moon had suddenly struck free of the retreating clouds he saw Ned Crediton ahead of him riding sharply, and he called out:

"Eh, Ned, what have you made of this jest? This way it is but a mangled folly."

"What matter now for jest or earnest?" answered the other. "I ride

home at last."

Sir Nicholas kept pace with him; he was hatless and wore a shabby cloak that was twisted about him with the wind of his riding.

"Why did not you take your own garments?" asked Sir Nicholas. "Belike that rag you've snatched up belonged to Robert Horne--"

"If Crediton could steal his shroud he can steal his cloak," replied Ned, and his companion said no more, thinking him wrought into a frenzy with the brandy and the evil nature of the joke.

The moon shone clear and cold with a faint stain like old blood in the halo, and the trees, bending in a seaward wind, cast the recent rain that loaded them heavily to the ground, as the two rode into the gates of Crediton Manor.

The hour was later than even Sir Nicholas knew (time had been blurred for him since the coming of the storm) and there was no light save a dim lamp in an upper window.

Ned Crediton dropped out of the saddle, not waiting for the mounting block, and rang the iron bell till it clattered through the house like a madman's fury.

"Why, Ned, why this panic homecoming?" asked Sir Nicholas; but the other answered him not, but rang again.

There were footsteps within and the rattle of chains, and a voice asked from the side window:

"Who goes there?"

And Crediton dragged at the bell and screamed:

"I! The Master!"

The door was opened and an old servant stood there, pale in his bedgown.

Ned Crediton passed him and stood by the newel post, like a man spent, yet alert.

"Send some one for the horses," said Nick Bateup, "for your master is crazy drunk--I tell you, Mathews, he has seen Robert Horne dead tonight--"

Crediton laughed; the long rays of the lamp light showed him pale, haggard, distorted with tumbled fair hair and a torn shirt under the mantle, and at his waist a ragged bunch of hemlock thrust into his sash.

"A posy of kecksies for Anne," he said; and the sleepy servants now up, began to come into the hall, looked at him with dismay. "I'll lie here tonight," said Sir Nicholas; "bring me lights into the parlor. I've no mind to sleep."

He took off his hat and fingered his sword and glanced uneasily at the figure by the newel post with the posy of kecksies.

Another figure appeared at the head of the stairs, Anne Crediton holding her candle, wearing a grey lutestring robe and a lace cap with long ribbons that hung on to her bosom; she peered over the baluster and some of the hot wax from her taper fell on to the oak treads.

"I've a beau pot for you, Anne," said Crediton, looking up and holding out the hemlocks. "I've long been dispossessed, Anne, but I've come home at last."

She drew back without a word and her light flickered away across the landing; Crediton went up after her and they heard a door shut.

In the parlor the embers had been blown to flames and fresh logs put on and Sir Nicholas warmed his cold hands and told old Mathews (in a sober manner for him) the story of the jest they had striven to put on Goody Boyle and the queer, monstrous people from the marsh, and the monstrous ending of it, and the strangeness of Ned Crediton; it was not his usual humor to discourse with servants or to discuss his vagrant debaucheries with any, but tonight he seemed to need company and endeavored to retain the old man, who was not reluctant to stay though usually he hated to see the dark face and bright clothes of Nick Bateup before the hearth of Crediton Manor.

And as these two talked, disconnectedly, as if they would fill the gap of any silence that might fall in the quiet house, there came the wail of a woman, desperate yet sunken.

"It is Mistress Crediton," said Mathews with a downcast look. "He ill-uses her?"

"God help us, he will use buckles and straps to her, Sir Nicholas." A quivering shriek came brokenly down the stairs and seemed to form the word "mercy."

Sir Nicholas was an evil man who died unrepentant; but he was not of a temper to relish raw cruelty or crude brutalities to women; he would break their souls but never their bodies.

So he went to the door and listened, and old Mathews had never liked him so well as now when he saw the look on the thin dark face. For the third time she shrieked and they marvelled that any human being could hold her breath so long; yet it was muffled as if some one held a hand over her mouth.

The sweat stood out on the old man's forehead.

"I've never before known her complain sir," he whispered. "She is a very dog to her lord and takes her whip mutely--"

"I know, I know--she adores his hand when it caresses or when it strikes--but tonight--if I know anything of a woman's accents, that is a note of abhorrence--"

He ran up the stairs, the old man panting after him with the snatched-up lantern.

"Where is her chamber?"

"Here, Sir Nicholas."

The young man struck on the heavy oak panels with the hilt of his sword.

"Madam, Madam Crediton, why are you so ill at ease?" She moaned from within.

"Open to me, Ill call some of your women--come out--" Their blood curdled to hear her wails.

"Damn you to Hell," cried Sir Nicholas in a fury. "Come out, Ned Crediton, or I'll have the door down and run you through." The answer was a little break of maniac laughter.

"She has run mad or he," cried Mathews, backing from the room. "And surely there is another clamor at the door--"

Again the bell clanged and there were voices and tumult at the door; Mathews went and opened, and Sir Nicholas looking down the stairs saw in the moonlight a dirty farm cart, a sweating horse and some of

the patched and rusty crew who had been keeping vigil in Goody Boyle's cottage.

"We've brought Esquire Crediton home," said one; and the others lifted a body from the cart and carried it through the murky moonlight.

Sir Nicholas came downstairs, for old Mathews could do nothing but cry for mercy.

"It was Edward Crediton," repeated the eel-catcher, shuffling into the hall, "clothed all but his coat and hat and that was under the bed--there be his watches and chains, his seals and the papers in his pockets--and for his visage now there is no mistakening it."

They had laid the body on the table where it had so often sat and larked and ate and drunk and cursed; Sir Nicholas gazed, holding up the lantern.

Edward Crediton--never any doubt of that now, though his face was distorted as by the anguish of a sudden and ugly death. "We never found Robert Horne," muttered one of the mourners, trailing his foul muddy rags nearer the fire, and thrusting his crooked hands to the blaze.

And Mathews fell on his knees and tried to pray, but could think of no words.

"Who is upstairs?" demanded Sir Nicholas in a terrible voice. "Who is with that wretched woman?"

And he stared at the body of her husband.

Mathews, who had loved her as a little child, began gibbering and moaning.

"Did he not say he'd have her? And did not yon fool change places with him? Oh God, oh God, and has he not come to take his place--"

"But Robert Horne was *dead*. I saw him dead," stammered Sir Nicholas, and set the lantern down, for his hand shook so the flame waved in the gusts.

"Eh," shrieked old Mathews, grovelling on his hands and knees in his bedgown. "Might not the Devil have lent him his body back for his own pitchy purposes?"

They looked at him a little, seeing he was suddenly crazed; then Sir Nicholas ran up the stairs with the others at his heels and thundered with his sword, and kicked and shouted outside Anne Crediton's chamber door.

All the foul, muddy, earthy crew cowered on the stairs and chittered together, and in the parlor before the embers old Mathews crouched huddled, and whimpered.

The bedroom door opened and Robert Horne came out and stood and smiled at them, and the young man in his fury fell back and his sword rattled from his hand to the floor.

Robert Horne was a white death, nude to the waist and from there swathed in grave clothes; under the tattered dark cloak he had ridden in, was his shroud knotted round his neck; his naked chest gleamed with ghastly dews and under the waxen polish of his sunken face the decayed blood showed in discolored patches; he went down the stairs and they hid their faces while his foul whiteness passed.

Sir Nicholas stumbled into the bedchamber. The moonlight showed Anne Crediton tumbled on the bed, dead, and staring with the posy

of kecksies on her bare breast, and her mouth hung open and her hands clutching at the curtains.

The mourners rode back and picked up Robert Horne's body whence it had returned from the kecksie patch and buried it in unholy ground with great respect, as one to whom the Devil had given his great desire.

Raw Material

Linley was fond of collecting what he called "raw material" and, as a fairly successful barrister, he had good opportunity for doing so. He despised novelists and romancists, yet one day he hoped to become one of these gentry himself, hence his collection of the raw material...however, after some years he became disgusted and overwhelmed by the amount of "stuff" (as he termed it) which he had gathered together--scenes, episodes, characters, dialogues, descriptions and decorations for all or any possible type of tale; he remained, he declared, surprised at the poverty of invention of the professional story-tellers who gave so little for the public's money in the way of good, strong, rousing drama, such as he, Robert Linley, had come across, well, more times than he cared to count...

"There isn't anything," he declared with some vehemence, "of which I haven't had experience."

"Ghosts?" I asked, and he smiled contemptuously.

"Yes, of course, I've had any amount of experiences with ghosts, with people who've seen 'em, and people who think they've seen 'em, and with the ghosts themselves..."

"Well," I asked, "have you come across a real Christmas ghost story--what we used to call the old-fashioned kind? They're getting a bit

threadbare now, you know; they've been told over and over again, year after year; have you got a novelty in that direction?" Linley, after a moment's pause, said that he had.

"There's some raw material for you," he cried, waxing enthusiastic, "the story of the Catchpoles and Aunt Ursula Beane, there's some raw material--why, there's everything in it--comedy, tragedy, drama, satire, farce--"

"Hold on!" I cried, "and just tell us as briefly as possible what your 'raw material' consists of. I'm out for a Christmas ghost story, you know, and I shall be disappointed if you don't give us something of that kind."

Linley made himself extremely comfortable and, with a lawyer's relish of the right phrase and the correct turn of sentence, gave us the history of Aunt Ursula Beane, with the usual proviso, of course, that the names and places had been altered. Before he began his narration Linley insisted on the novelty of the story, and before he had finished we all of us (those select few who were privileged to hear him hold forth) agreed that it was very novel indeed.

The case of Aunt Ursula Beane, as he called her, had come under his notice in a professional way and in the following manner, commonplace enough from a lawyer's point of view, although the subsequent case was one which the papers endeavored to work up into what is described by that overworked word "sensational." As far as the lawyers and the public were concerned it began with an inquest on Mrs. Ursula Beane. In Linley's carefully selected phrases the case was this:

"Mrs. Ursula Beane had died suddenly at the age of seventy-five. The doctor who had been intermittently attending her--she was an extremely robust and healthy old woman--had not been altogether

satisfied with her symptoms. He had refused a death certificate, there had been an autopsy, and it was discovered that Mrs. Ursula Beane had died from arsenical poisoning. The fact established, an enquiry followed, eliciting the following circumstances. Mrs. Ursula Beane had lived for forty years in a small house at Peckham Rye which had belonged to her father and his father before him. The house had been built in the days when Peckham Rye--well, was not quite like it is now. She resided with a nephew and niece--James and Louisa Catchpole. Neither of them had ever married, neither of them had ever left Peckham Rye for more than a few weeks at a time, and the most minute investigation did not discover that either of them had had the least adventure or out-of-the-way event in their lives. They enjoyed a small annuity from a father who had been a worthy and fairly prosperous tradesman. James was, at the time of the inquest, a man over sixty and had been for many years a clerk--'confidential clerk' as he emphasized it--with a large firm of tea merchants. He received a sufficient, if not a substantial salary and was within a year or two of a pension. His sister, Miss Louisa Catchpole, was younger--fifty or so; she also had a substantial, if not a brilliant, position as a journalist on one of those few surviving monthlies which rather shun publicity and cater for the secluded and the virtuous. She wrote occasional short stories in which the hero was always a clergyman and the heroine *sans peur et sans reproche*. She also wrote little weekly causeries--as I believe they are called--'Meditations in a Garden'; they were headed and adorned with a little cut of an invalid in a basket-chair gazing at a robin. In these same *causeries* Miss Louisa Catchpole affected month after month, year after year, with unfaltering fortitude, a vein of Christian cheerfulness, and encouraged her readers with such maxims as 'Character is stronger than Destiny,' 'A man is only as strong as his faith in himself,' and chirpings about the recurring miracle of spring, together with quotations from the more minor poets--you know the type of thing.

"It is irrelevant to our story to go into why Aunt Ursula Beane lived with those two; they seemed to be the only surviving members of their very unimportant family, and they had lived together in the house at Peckham Rye for forty years, ever since Louisa was quite a small child and had gone there to live with Aunt Ursula who, on her husband's death, had retired to this paternal abode. Nobody could think of them as apart one from the other. During those forty years James had gone to and fro his work, Louisa had written her articles and stories, and at first had been looked after by, and afterwards had looked after, Aunt Ursula Beane. Their joint earnings kept the tiny establishment going; they were considerably helped by the fact that there was no rent to pay and they lived in modest comfort, almost with (what James would have called) 'every luxury.' Besides giving them the house to live in, Mrs. Beane paid them at first thirty shillings, then, as the cost of living went up, two pounds a week for what she called 'her keep.' What, you will say, could have been more deadly commonplace than this? But there was just one touch of mystery and romance. Aunt Ursula was reputed to be of vast wealth and a miser--this was one of those family traditions that swell and grow on human credulity from one generation to another. The late Mr. Beane was spoken of with vague awe as a very wealthy man, and it appeared that the Catchpoles believed that he had left his widow a considerable fortune which she, a true miser, had concealed all those years, but which they might reasonably hope to inherit on her death, as a reward for all their faithful kindness. Investigation proved that what had seemed rather a fantastic delusion had some startling foundation. Mrs. Ursula Beane employed a lawyer and his evidence was that her late husband, who had been a tobacconist, had left her a tidy sum of money when he had died forty years ago, amounting to fifteen thousand pounds, which had been safely invested and not touched till about five years before. What Mrs. Beane lived on came from another source--a small capital left by her father that brought her in about a hundred and fifty pounds a year; therefore this main sum

had been, as I have said, untouched and had accrued during those thirty-five years into a handsome sum of nearly fifty thousand pounds. The lawyer agreed that the old lady was a miser, nothing would induce her to draw out any of this money, to mention its existence to a soul, or to make a will as to its final disposal. The lawyer, of course, was pledged to secrecy. He knew that the Catchpoles guessed at the existence of the hoard, he also knew that they were not sure about it and that they had no idea as to its magnitude. Five years before her death the old lady had drawn out all her capital--forty-eight thousand pounds--without any explanation whatever to the lawyer, and had taken it away in a black bag, going off in a taxicab from the lawyer's office in Lincoln's Inn. It might have been the Nibelung hoard flung into the Rhine for all the mystery that was attached to it, for nobody saw or heard of it again. Both the Catchpoles swore that they had no knowledge whatever of the old woman realizing her capital; she had certainly not banked it anywhere, she must have taken that very large sum of money in notes and, I believe, a few bonds, to that small house at Peckham Rye and in some way disposed of it. A most exhaustive search revealed not so much as a five-pound note. In the bank was just the last quarterly instalment of her annuity--barely enough, as Louisa Catchpole remarked with some passion, 'to pay the doctor and the funeral expenses.'

"There you have the situation. This old woman dead in what was almost poverty, the disappearance of this large sum of money she had realized five years previously, and the fact that she had died from arsenical poisoning. To explain this there were the usual symptoms, or excuses, whatever you like to call them; she had been having medicine with arsenic in it, and she might have taken an overdose. There had been arsenic in the house in the shape of powders for an overgrown and aged dog, and in the shape of packets of weed-killer, James had always taken an industrious interest in the patch of garden that sloped to the Common. The old

lady might have committed suicide, she might have taken some of the stuff in mistake, or the Catchpoles might have been murderers. The only possible reason for suspecting foul play would have been that the Catchpoles knew of her hoard and wished to get hold of it. But this it was impossible to prove. I was briefed to watch the case for the Catchpoles. There was, of course, a certain sensation and excitement over the fact of the large sum of money, the only startling and brilliant fact about the whole commonplace, drab and rather depressing story. I myself thought it rather absurd that any question of suspicion should attach to the Catchpoles. After forty years of placid uninspired devotion to Aunt Ursula Beane, why should they suddenly decide to put her out of the way when, in the nature of things, she could not have had more than a few years to live? Their demeanor, too, impressed me very favorably. There was none of the flaunting vanity, posing or vehement talk of the real criminal, they seemed slightly bewildered, not very much disturbed, and to trust wholly in their undeniable innocence, they almost found the whole thing grotesque and I could understand their point of view. The verdict, however, was rather surprising. It was confidently expected that it would be Death from misadventure,' but instead, the verdict was 'Death from arsenical poisoning not self-administered.' This is really about as near as we can get in England to the Scottish verdict 'Not proven,' and I was rather indignant, for it seemed to me to attach a great deal of wholly unmerited suspicion to the two Catchpoles. Still, of course, they were quite free and no direct blame was laid on them. In fact, the coroner had remarked on their devoted care of an old lady who must have been, from the various facts proved by the doctors, 'very trying and difficult,' as the saying goes. They conducted themselves very well after the inquest, still with that slightly bewildered patient air of resignation. It seemed to me that they did not realize the ghastly position in which they stood and, as I knew when I heard the verdict, the very narrow escape they had had from being arrested on a charge of murder. They paid all the expenses

connected with the inquest at once and without any trouble. They had, as James explained with a certain mild pride, 'savings.' I was interested in them, they were so meek and drab, so ordinary and repressed; there was something kindly and amiable about them and they were very attached to each other. I questioned them about this mysterious hoard, the existence of which would have been difficult to believe but for the evidence of the lawyer. They did not seem very concerned, they had always known that Aunt Ursula Beane had money and, said Louisa without passion, they had always guessed that she had tried to do them out of it--she had been an extraordinarily malicious old woman, they complained, and it was quite likely that the money was buried somewhere, or had been destroyed. She was capable of feeding the fire with it, of sticking it in a hole in the ground, of throwing it into the water in a bag weighed down with stones, in fact of doing anything in the world with it except putting it to some profitable use. She was undoubtedly not right in her head.

"'She ought to have been certified years ago,' I declared.

"James Catchpole shook his head. 'She was never bad enough for that,' he announced with resignation.

"They had really been slaving and 'bearing' things for forty years for that money, and they took the loss of it, I thought, with extreme gallantry.

"They returned to the little house in Peckham Rye which came to them as next-of-kin. The little annuity, which was all that Aunt Ursula had left of her worldly goods after she had disposed of her main fortune, perished with her. James and Louisa would have to live on his clerkship and her journalism."

At this point Linley stopped to ask me if we did not perceive a real

strong drama in what he had told us--"A whole novel, in fact," he added triumphantly.

"Well," I replied, "one might make it into a whole novel by inserting incidents and imagining this and that and the other. As you have given it, it seems a dreary stretch of nothingness with a rather damp squib at the end. After all, there was no murder, I suppose the old woman took an overdose of medicine by mistake. Where," asked, "does the Christmas ghost story come in?"

"I will tell you if you will have just a little more patience. Well, I have said that I was interested in the Catchpoles, I even went to see them once or twice. They seemed to me to be what used to be called 'human documents'--the very fact that they had such blank faces made me want to study them. I know there must be some repression somewhere, some desire, some hope, something beside what there appeared on the surface--this blank negation. They did not betray themselves. Louisa said she missed the old lady and that she was having quite a handsome headstone put on her grave in the vast London cemetery where she had been laid to rest. James spoke of the old lady with a certain deference, as if the fact of her being dead had made a saint of Aunt Ursula Beane.

"I continually asked them if they had had any news of the money. They shook their heads with a compassionate smile at my hopefulness. They were convinced that during those five years Aunt Ursula Beane had completely destroyed the forty-eight thousand pounds--easily destroyed, for most of it had been in hundred- and thousand-pound notes. Of course the garden had been dug over and every brick and plank in the house disturbed, with no result.

"'And if she never left the house and garden?' I asked.

"They told me she had. She was a robust old woman, as I said

before, and she used to take long walks and every year during those five years she went away for a fortnight--sometimes with Louisa, sometimes with James, sometimes to the seaside and sometimes to lodgings in a farmhouse, and on all these different occasions she had had plenty of opportunity of getting rid of her money. Of course these five several lodgings had been searched and the country round about them, but always with no result.

"'You see, sir,' said James, with his meek and placid smile, his pale faded eyes gleaming at me behind the glasses, 'she was far too cunning for all of us.'

"One winter evening about a year after the inquest the mood took me to go and visit these two curious specimens. I found them with a planchette, their eyes goggling at the sprawling writing that appeared on the piece of paper beneath. James informed me without excitement that they had 'taken up' spiritualism, and Miss Louisa chirped in that they were getting 'the most wonderful results.'

"Aunt Ursula Beane had 'come through,' as they put it, almost at once, and was now in constant communication with them. "'Well, I hope she can tell you what she did with the money.' "They answered me quite seriously that that was what they were trying to find out, but that the old lady was just as tricky and malicious on the other side, as they termed it, as she had been on this, luring them on with false scents and wayward suggestions. At the same time, they declared, placidly but with intense conviction, they believed that sooner or later she would disclose to them her secret.

"I soon began to lose interest in them after this. When people of the type of the Catchpoles get mixed up with this spiritualistic business they cease to be--well, almost cease to be 'human documents.' I thought I'd leave 'em to it, when I received a rather urgent invitation from Miss Louisa Catchpole, begging me to be present at a

'demonstration' at which Aunt Ursula Beane would undoubtedly appear in person.

"I went to the little house in Peckham where the furniture, the wallpaper, even the atmosphere did not appear to have been changed all those monotonous forty years--forty-one now to be exact. There was a medium present and no one else save myself and the brother and sister. We sat round the table. The medium who beamed with a rather fussy kindness went off with surprising celerity into a trance, and soon the 'demonstration' took place.

"At first I was cynical, secondly I was disgusted, and thirdly, I was rather disturbed, finding myself first in the midst of farce, low charlatanry and chicanery, then suddenly in the presence of something which I could not understand. The 'demonstration' began by groans and squeaks issuing from the lips of the medium, greetings to Louisa and James (presumably in the voice of the defunct Aunt Ursula), various jovial references to a bottle containing poison, a few other crude remarks of that nature, and then several knocks from different parts of the room--rappings loud and quick, and then beating time, as if to a piece of music, then a sudden clatter on the table in the middle of us as if the old lady were dancing there with heavy boots on. James and Louisa sat side by side, their hands clasped, listening to all this without a shade of expression on their blank faded faces. The hideous little room was the last resort of the antimacassar, and presently these began to fly about, scraps of the horrible white crocheted tatting gliding through the air in a way which would have been very funny if it hadn't been rather dreadful. Of course I knew that many mediums have these powers and there is nothing much in them--I mean, it can all be explained in a perfectly practical and satisfactory fashion. At the same time I did not greatly care about the exposition, and I begged the Catchpoles to bring it to an end, particularly as the old lady had nothing definite to say. James whispered that the medium must not be disturbed while she was in

trance. Aunt Ursula Beane then began to sing a hymn, but with a very unpleasant inflection, worse than any outspoken mockery. While the hymn was being sung I gained the impression far more vividly than I had ever received before that Aunt Ursula Beane had been a rather terrible person. When she had finished the hymn she began in an old half-broken voice softly to curse them all in a language that was not at all agreeable to listen to, coming as it did in those querulous, ancient feminine tones. This was rather too much for me, and I shook the medium violently. She came out of her trance. Louisa and James did not seem in the least affected, drank tea, ate biscuits, and discussed in banal terms the doings of those on 'the other side.'

"I received no more invitations from the Catchpoles and did not go near them for a considerable time. In fact, I think I had rather forgotten about them, as I had had a great many other interesting cases and a good many other interesting specimens had come my way. I had heard a vast number of stories as good as the story of Aunt Ursula Beane, but it did happen one day that I had to pass through Peckham and could not resist the passing impulse of curiosity that urged me to go and look at the house on the Common. It was 'To Let' or 'To be Sold,' according to two or three estate agents' blatant boards on the front railing. I called next door and was received with the inevitable suspicion with which the stranger is usually regarded in small places. I did, however, discover what I had set out to discover, namely, that the Catchpoles had left the neighborhood about six months ago, and no one knew where they were. I took the trouble to go to one of the estate agents whose address was given on the board, to make further enquiries. The house was to be let or sold, it did not seem to have been considered a great prize, and it certainly had not gone off very quickly, though it was cheap enough; the neighborhood, even the estate agent admitted, 'was not what it had been.' Then, of course, one couldn't deny that the Ursula Beane case and the fact that the old lady had

died there, and of poison, had given a slightly sinister air to the modest stucco building. As to the Catch-poles, the estate agent did not know where they had gone; all he had was the address of a bank, nor was it any of my business, so I decided to dismiss the whole thing from my mind.

"Good raw material, no doubt, but none of it worked up sufficiently to be of much interest."

Linley glanced round at us all triumphantly as he said this.

"But it was all rounded off as neatly as any novelist could do it. Let me tell you," he added with unction.

"Five years afterwards I ran over to Venice for Christmas--I don't know why, except just the perverse desire to see the wrong place at the wrong time, instead of forever the right place at the right time. I like Venice in the winter fogs, with a thin coat of ice on the canals, and if you can get a snowstorm--well, so much the better--St. Marco, to me, looks preferable with the snowflakes in front of the blue and the bronze instead of that eternal sunshine...Well, there I was in Venice, and I'm not going to bore you with any more local color or picturesque details. I was in Venice, very well satisfied with myself, very comfortable and alone. I was tolerably familiar with the city and I always stay at the same hotel. One of the first things I noticed was that a large and very pretentious palace near by had recently been handsomely and expensively 'done up'; I soon elicited the fact that the place which I had always envied had been bought by the usual rich American who had spent a great deal of money in restoring and furnishing it, but who did not very often live there, he only came and went after the fashion of all Americans, and was supposed to travel considerably in great luxury. Once or twice I saw this American going past in a gondola, wrapped in a foreign, rather theatrical-looking cloak, lounging with a sort of ostentation of ease on the cushions. He

was an elderly man with a full grey beard, and wore, even now in the winter, blue sunglasses. On two separate occasions when I was sitting on the hotel balcony in the mild winter sunlight and he was being rowed past underneath I had the impression that he was looking at me sharply and keenly behind those colored spectacles, and also the impression, which was likely enough to be correct, that I had seen him before. I meet, of course, a great many people, but even with a memory on which I rather pride myself, cannot immediately place everyone. The hotel at which I was staying--and this was one of the reasons I always selected it--did not have any of those ghastly organized gaieties at Christmas; we were left to ourselves in a poetic gloom best suited to the season and the city. I was seated by myself enjoying a delicious kind of mournful repose, piquantly in contrast with my usual life, when I received a message and a very odd one: the gentleman, Signor Hayden, the American from next door, would very much like to see me. He had observed me on the balcony, knew my name and my profession, and requested the honor of my company. Attracted by anything queer or the least out of the way, I at once accepted, and in ten minutes or so found myself in the newly-restored palace which I had so often admired and envied. The place was furnished with a good deal of taste, but rather, I suspected, the orthodox taste of the professional decorator. Mr. Hayden was not immediately visible, but, I understood, in bed ill; I expressed my willingness to go to his bedside and was shortly conducted there. The room was very handsome, the servants very well trained, and I was impressed by the fact that this rich American must be very rich indeed. One knows, of course, what these out-of-the-way little caprices of newly-restored palaces in Venice cost. The owner of this up-to-date luxury was in bed, propped up with pillows and shaded by old-fashioned mauve velvet curtains. He still wore the colored glasses, and I concluded that he had some defect in his sight. He appeared to see me perfectly well, however, and beckoned to me to approach his

bedside. As I did so he removed his glasses; there was an electric standard lamp on an antique table by the bedside and the light of it was turned full on to the sick man's face, which I immediately recognized. I was looking down into the faded, mild, light-blue eyes of James Catchpole.

"'Very odd that you should be here,' he smiled at me, 'very odd indeed. You've always been interested in us and I thought perhaps you'd like to hear the end of the story, that is, if any story ever does end; there's a pause in ours at this point, anyway.'

"I expressed due surprise and gratification at seeing him. In truth, I was considerably amazed. I was startled, too, to see how ill he was. He asked me to help him up in bed. He declared, without emotion, that he knew himself to be dying.

"'Where's Miss Louisa?' I asked; 'where is your sister?'

"'She died last year,' he answered placidly. 'She had a thoroughly good time for four years and I suppose it killed her, you know; but, of course, it was worth it, she always said so.'

"The inevitable conclusion had jumped to my mind.

"'You found Miss Ursula Beane's hoard?' I suggested.

"James Catchpole, passing his hand over the full grey beard which had so changed his face, replied simply:

"'We never lost it--we had it all the time.'

"'You mean *you*?' I asked dubiously, and he nodded and replied:

"'Exactly!'

"'That you--?' I suggested, and this time he nodded and said:

"'Precisely!'

"'Louisa persuaded her to realize her capital,' he continued with childish calm. 'She was a proper miser and she rather fretted not having the actual stuff in her hands. It wasn't difficult to make her get it--she liked a real hoard, a thing you can put under the hearthstone or in the mattress, you know. We thought we should get hold of it easier that way when she came to die. You never knew with anyone like that what she might do in the way of a will, she was keen on lost cats and Christians. We thought she would enjoy herself playing with it, and then we'd get it if we were patient enough.'

"He blinked up at me and added, with the faintest of ironic smiles--We'd been patient for forty years, don't you suppose we spent some part of that time planning what we would do with the money? We were both engaged, to start with, but her young man and my young woman couldn't wait all those years...We read a good deal, we made lists of things we wanted, and places we wanted to go to...We had quite a little library of guide-books, you may have noticed them on the bookshelf--one of them was a guide to Venice. Louisa, writing her piffling articles, and I at my piffling job, to and fro--well, you don't suppose we didn't have our ideas?'

"'I see,' I said doubtfully, 'and then, when there was that little misfortune about the arsenic, I suppose you didn't care to mention the hoard?'

"'It wouldn't have been altogether wise, sir, would it?' smiled James Catchpole simply. It would have thrown a lot of suspicion on us, and we'd been very careful. There wasn't any proof, not a shred. We had to wait until the case had blown over a bit, and then we--well, we did the best we could with the time that was left us. We lived at the rate

of ten thousand a year. We had the best of everything...Of course it was the pace--don't you call it?--that killed. We were neither of us young, and we knew we couldn't stand it for long, so we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly, believe me, sir, *thoroughly*.'

"He paused and added reflectively:

"'But it's a good thing we made a move when we did, we shouldn't have been able to get about at seventy; *she*--she might have gone on to a hundred and ten.'

"'Do you mean that you--?' I suggested quietly.

"'It was the easiest thing in the world,' he smiled, 'to drop a couple of those dog powders into her milk...'

"I'd always been intensely interested in murderers. I tried to question James Catchpole as to his motives, his sensations, his possible remorse; he appeared to have had none of any of these...

"'You didn't regret it afterwards, you haven't felt the Furies behind you, or anything of that sort?'

"He replied, as far as his feeble strength would permit:

"'I have enjoyed myself thoroughly. I wish we hadn't waited so long.'

"I was puzzled. They had always seemed such very nice people.

"'I am dying now,' said James Catchpole, 'and it's about time, for I've spent all the money. The doctor said my next heart attack would be fatal, and I've done my best to bring one on. I couldn't go back to lack of money.'

"'Who are you going to leave all this to?' I asked with professional

interest. I glanced round the handsome room.

"He smiled at me with what I thought was compassion.

"'I haven't been so silly as all that,' he replied. 'Everything that I possess wouldn't pay half of my debts. I have had full value, I can assure you. After all, I had a right to it, hadn't I? I'd waited long enough.'

"'What about the planchette and the demonstrations?' I asked. 'I suppose all that was a fake to throw us off the scent?'

"'Not at all,' he declared, in what seemed to be hurt surprise, 'that was perfectly genuine. We made up our minds to get in touch with Aunt Ursula Beane, to find out what she thought about it all.'

"'And what did she think?' I asked, startled.

"'She said we were a couple of fools not to have done it sooner.' "'Come, come, Mr. Catchpole,' I cried, something shocked, 'this is unseemly jesting.'

"'No jesting at all,' he assured me. 'Aren't I dying myself? I shall be in the old girl's company in a few minutes, I daresay. You heard her yourself, sir, dancing on the table that evening. She said she'd been a perfect fool herself, and now that she'd "got over" she realized it. She said if we didn't have a good time, or someone didn't have a good time with that damn money, she'd never forgive us. You see, sir, at first we began to have that miserly feeling too and didn't want to spend it. We thought we'd go on hoarding it, living just the same and knowing it was there. She used to scribble out on the planchette saying what idiots we were. That's why she used all that strong language. "You've got it--now use it!" That was what she always said. "I'll go with you and share in your good time"--and so she has, sir,

believe me. We've often seen her sitting at the table with us, nodding over the champagne; she'd have been fond of champagne if she'd allowed herself...We've seen her dancing in some of those jazz-halls, we've seen her in boxes listening to opera, we've seen her sitting in the Rolls-Royce revelling in the cushions and the speed...Remorse? Why, I tell you we've given the old girl the good time she ought to have had years ago.'

"'Come, come, James Catchpole,' I said, 'you're delirious. I'd better fetch the doctor.'

"He smiled at me with compassion and some contempt.

"'You're a clever lawyer,' he said, 'but there are a lot of things you don't understand.'

"Even as he spoke he seemed to fall into a peaceful sleep and I thought it was my responsibility to fetch a doctor. Of course I believed hardly anything he said--I thought it was quite likely that he hadn't poisoned Aunt Ursula Beane, but that he had invented the story. At the same time there was the hard concrete evidence of the palace, the servants, the furniture--he had got money from somewhere.

"'Good raw material, eh? Think what you could make of it if you wrote it up!'

"I went downstairs, telephoned on my own responsibility to the address of one of the English doctors. It was Christmas Eve and I could not find him at home. I was quite uncertain what to do. I stood hesitant at the foot of the wide magnificent staircase, when I observed a dreadful old woman creeping up the stairs with a look of intense enjoyment on her face--Mrs. Ursula Beane--not a doubt of it--Aunt Ursula Beane! I saw her so clearly that I could have counted the

stitches in the darns at the elbows of her black sleeves. I ran up after her, but of course she was there before I was. When I carne up to the bedside James Catchpole was dead, with an extremely self-satisfied smug smile on his face.

"There's my Christmas Eve ghost! An hallucination, of course, but you can give it all the usual explanation. There's the story, you can put it together as you will. There's plenty of stuff in it--good raw material, eh, take it how you will?"

We all agreed with Linley.

The Avenging Of Ann Leete

This is a queer story, the more queer for the interpretation of passions of strong human heat that have been put upon it, and for glimpses of other motives and doings, not, it would seem, human at all.

The whole thing is seen vaguely, brokenly, a snatch here and there; one tells the tale, strangely another exclaims amaze, a third points out a scene, a fourth has a dim memory of a circumstance, a nine-days' (or less) wonder, an old print helps, the name on a mural tablet in a deserted church pinches the heart with a sense of confirmation, and so you have your story. When all is said it remains a queer tale.

It is seventy years odd ago, so dating back from this present year of 1845 you come to nearly midway in the last century when conditions were vastly different from what they are now.

The scene is in Glasgow, and there are three points from which we start, all leading us to the heart of our tale.

The first is the portrait of a woman that hangs in the parlor of a

respectable banker. He believes it to be the likeness of some connection of his wife's, dead this many a year, but he does not know much about it. Some while ago it was discovered in a lumber-room, and he keeps it for the pallid beauty of the canvas, which is much faded and rubbed.

Since, as a young man, I first had the privilege of my Worthy friend's acquaintance, I have always felt a strange interest in this picture; and, in that peculiar way that the imagination will seize on trifles, I was always fascinated by the dress of the lady. This is of dark-green very fine silk, an uncommon color to use in a portrait, and, perhaps, in a lady's dress. It is very plain, with a little scarf of a striped Roman pattern, and her hair is drawn up over a pillow in the antique mode. Her face is expressionless, yet strange, the upper lip very thin, the lower very full, the light brown eyes set under brows that slant. I cannot tell why this picture was always to me full of such a great attraction, but I used to think of it a vast deal, and often to note, secretly, that never had I chanced to meet in real life, or in any other painting, a lady in a dark-green silk dress.

In the corner of the canvas is a little device, put in a diamond, as a gentlewoman might bear arms, yet with no pretensions to heraldry, just three little birds, the topmost with a flower in its beak.

It was not so long ago that I came upon the second clue that leads into the story, and that was a mural tablet in an old church near the Rutherglen Road, a church that has lately fallen into disrepute or neglect, for it was deserted and impoverished. But I was assured that a generation ago it had been a most famous place of worship, fashionable and well frequented by the better sort.

The mural tablet was to one "Ann Leete," and there was just the date (seventy-odd years old) given with what seemed a sinister brevity. And underneath the lettering, lightly cut on the time-stained marble,

was the same device as that on the portrait of the lady in the green silk dress.

I was curious enough to make enquiries, but no one seemed to know anything of, or wished to talk about, Ann Leete.

It was all so long ago, I was told, and there was no one now in the parish of the name of Leete.

And all who had been acquainted with the family of Leete seemed to be dead or gone away. The parish register (my curiosity went so far as an inspection of this) yielded me no more information than the mural tablet.

I spoke to my friend the banker, and he said he thought that his wife had had some cousins by the name of Leete, and that there was some tale of a scandal or great misfortune attached to them which was the reason of a sort of ban on their name so that it had never been mentioned.

When I told him I thought the portrait of the lady in the dark-green silk might picture a certain Ann Leete he appeared uneasy and even desirous of having the likeness removed, which roused in me the suspicion that he knew something of the name, and that not pleasant. But it seemed to me indelicate and perhaps useless to question him. It was a year or so after this incident that my business, which was that of silversmith and jeweller, put into my hands a third clue. One of my apprentices came to me with a rare piece of work which had been left at the shop for repair.

It was a thin medal of the purest gold, on which was set in fresh-water pearls, rubies and cairngorms the device of the three birds, the plumage being most skilfully wrought in the bright jewels and the flower held by the topmost creature accurately designed in pearls.

It was one of these pearls that was missing, and I had some difficulty in matching its soft lustre.

An elderly lady called for the ornament, the same person who had left it. I saw her myself, and ventured to admire and praise the workmanship of the medal.

"Oh," she said, "it was worked by a very famous jeweller, my great-uncle, and he has a peculiar regard for it--indeed I believe it has never before been out of his possession, but he was so greatly grieved by the loss of the pearl that he would not rest until I offered to take it to be repaired. He is, you will understand," she added, with a smile, "a very old man. He must have made that jewellery--why--seventy-odd years ago."

Seventy-odd years ago--that would bring one back to the date on the tablet to Ann Leete, to the period of the portrait.

"I have seen this device before," I remarked, "on the likeness of a lady and on the mural inscription in memory of a certain Ann Leete." Again this name appeared to make an unpleasant impression.

My customer took her packet hastily.

"It is associated with something dreadful," she said quickly. "We do not speak of it--a very old story. I did not know anyone had heard of it--"

"I certainly have not," I assured her. "I came to Glasgow not so long ago, as apprentice to this business of my uncle's which now I own."

"But you have seen a portrait?" she asked.

"Yes, in the house of a friend of mine."

"This is queer. We did not know that any existed. Yet my great-uncle does speak of one--in a green silk dress."

"In a green silk dress," I confirmed.

The lady appeared amazed.

"But it is better to let the matter rest," she decided. "My relative, you will realize, is very old--nearly, sir, a hundred years old, and his wits wander and he tells queer tales. It was all very strange and horrible, but one cannot tell how much my old uncle dreams."

"I should not think to disturb him," I replied.

But my customer hesitated.

"If you know of this portrait--perhaps he should be told; he laments after it so much, and we have always believed it an hallucination--"

She returned the packet containing the medal.

"Perhaps," she added dubiously, "you are interested enough to take this back to my relative yourself and judge what you shall or shall not tell him?"

I eagerly accepted the offer, and the lady gave me the name and residence of the old man who, although possessed of considerable means, had lived for the past fifty years in the greatest seclusion in that lonely part of the town beyond the Rutherglen Road and near to the Green, the once pretty and fashionable resort for youth and pleasure, but now a deserted and desolate region. Here, on the first opportunity, I took my way, and found myself well out into the country, nearly at the river, before I reached the lonely mansion of Eneas Bretton, as the ancient jeweller was called.

A ferocious dog troubled my entrance in the dark overgrown garden where the black glossy laurels and bays strangled the few flowers, and a grim woman, in an old-fashioned mutch or cap, at length answered my repeated peals at the rusty chain bell.

It was not without considerable trouble that I was admitted into the presence of Mr. Bretton, and only, I think, by the display of the jewel and the refusal to give it into any hands but those of its owner.

The ancient jeweller was seated on a southern terrace that received the faint and fitful rays of the September sun. He was wrapped in shawls that disguised his natural form, and a fur and leather cap was fastened under his chin.

I had the impression that he had been a fine man, of a vigorous and handsome appearance; even now, in the extreme of decay, he showed a certain grandeur of line and carriage, a certain majestic power in his personality. Though extremely feeble, I did not take him to be imbecile nor greatly wanting in his faculties.

He received me courteously, though obviously ill-used to strangers.

I had, he said, a claim on him as a fellow-craftsman, and he was good enough to commend the fashion in which I had repaired his medal.

This, as soon as he had unwrapped, he fastened to a fine gold chain he drew from his breast, and slipped inside his heavy clothing. "A pretty trinket," I said, "and of an unusual design."

"I fashioned it myself," he answered, "over seventy years ago. The year before, sir, she died."

"Ann Leete?" I ventured.

The ancient man was not in the least surprised at the use of this name.

"It is a long time since I heard those words with any but my inner ear," he murmured; "to be sure, I grow very old. You'll not remember Ann Leete?" he added wistfully.

"I take it she died before I was born," I answered.

He peered at me.

"Ah, yes, you are still a young man, though your hair is grey." I noticed now that he wore a small tartan scarf inside his coat and shawl: this fact gave me a peculiar, almost unpleasant shudder. "I know this about Ann Leete--she had a dark-green silk dress. And a Roman or tartan scarf."

He touched the wisp of bright-colored silk across his chest. "That is it. She had her likeness taken so--but it was lost."

"It is preserved," I answered. "And I know where it is. I might, if you desired, bring you to a sight of it."

He turned his grand old face to me with a civil inclination of his massive head.

"That would be very courteous of you, sir, and a pleasure to me. You must not think," he added with dignity, "that the lady has forsaken me or that I do not often see her. Indeed, she comes to me more frequently than before. But it would delight me to have the painting of her to console the hours of her absence."

I reflected what his relative had said about the weakness of his wits, and recalled his great age, which one was apt to forget in face of his composure and reasonableness.

He appeared now to doze and to take no further notice of my presence, so I left him.

He had a strange look of lifelessness as he slumbered there in the faintest rays of the cloudy autumn sun.

I reflected how lightly the spirit must dwell in this ancient frame, how easily it must take flight into the past, how soon into eternity. It did not cost me much persuasion to induce my friend, the banker, to lend me the portrait of Ann Leete, particularly as the canvas had been again sent up to the attics.

"Do you know the story?" I asked him.

He replied that he had heard something; that the case had made a great stir at the time; that it was all very confused and amazing, and that he did not desire to discuss the matter.

I hired a carriage and took the canvas to the house of Eneas Bretton.

He was again on the terrace, enjoying with a sort of calm eagerness the last warmth of the failing sun.

His two servants brought in the picture and placed it on a chair at his side.

He gazed at the painted face with the greatest serenity.

"That is she," he said, "but I am glad to think that she looks happier now, sir. She still wears that dark-green silk. I never see her in any other garment."

"A beautiful woman," I remarked quietly, not wishing to agitate or disturb his reflections, which were clearly detached from any

considerations of time and space.

"I have always thought so," he answered gently, "but I, sir, have peculiar faculties. I saw her, and see her still as a spirit. I loved her as a spirit. Yet our bodily union was necessary for our complete happiness. And in that my darling and I were balked."

"By death?" I suggested, for I knew that the word had no terrors for him.

"By death," he agreed, "who will soon be forced to unite us again."

"But not in the body," I said.

"How, sir, do you know that?" he smiled. "We have but finite minds. I think we have but little conception of the marvellous future."

"Tell me," I urged, "how you lost Ann Leete."

His dim, heavy-lidded, many-wrinkled eyes flickered a glance over me.

"She was murdered," he said.

I could not forbear a shudder.

"That fragile girl!" I exclaimed. My blood had always run cool and thin, and I detested deeds of violence; my even mind could not grasp the idea of the murder of women save as a monstrous enormity. I looked at the portrait, and it seemed to me that I had always known that it was the likeness of a creature doomed.

"Seventy years ago and more," continued Eneas Bretton, "since when she has wandered lonely betwixt time and eternity, waiting for me. But very soon I shall join her, and then, sir, we shall go where

there is no recollection of the evil things of this earth."

By degrees he told me the story, not in any clear sequence, nor at any one time, nor without intervals of sleep and pauses of dreaming, nor without assistance from his servants and his great-niece and her husband, who were his frequent visitors.

Yet it was from his own lips and when we were alone together that I learned all that was really vital in the tale.

He required very frequent attendance; although all human passion was at the utmost ebb with him, he had, he said, a kind of regard for me in that I had brought him his lady's portrait, and he told me things of which he had never spoken to any human being before. I say human on purpose because of his intense belief that he was, and always had been, in communication with powers not of this earth. In these words I put together his tale.

As a young man, said Eneas Bretton, I was healthy, prosperous and happy.

My family had been goldsmiths as long as there was any record of their existence, and I was an enthusiast in this craft, grave, withal, and studious, over-fond of books and meditation. I do not know how or when I first met Ann Leete.

To me she was always there like the sun; I think I have known her all my life, but perhaps my memory fails.

Her father was a lawyer and she an only child, and though her social station was considered superior to mine, I had far more in the way of worldly goods, so there was no earthly obstacle to our union.

The powers of evil, however, fought against us; I had feared this from the first, as our happiness was the complete circle ever hateful to

fiends and devils who try to break the mystic symbol.

The mistress of my soul attracted the lustful attention of a young doctor, Rob Patterson, who had a certain false charm of person, not real comeliness, but a trick of color, of carriage and a fine taste in clothes.

His admiration was whetted by her coldness and his intense dislike of me.

We came to scenes in which he derided me as no gentleman, but a beggarly tradesman, and I scorned him as an idle voluptuary designing a woman's min for the crude pleasure of the gratification of fleeting passions.

For the fellow made not even any pretence of being able to support a wife, and was of that rake-helly temperament that made an open mock of matrimony.

Although he was but a medical student, he was of what they call noble birth, and his family, though decayed, possessed considerable social power, so that his bold pursuit of Ann Leete and his insolent flaunting of me had some licence, the more so that he did not lack tact and address in his manner and conduct.

Our marriage could have stopped this persecution, or given the right to publicly resent it, but my darling would not leave her father, who was of a melancholy and querulous disposition.

It was shortly before her twenty-first birthday, for which I had made her the jewel I now wear (the device being the crest of her mother's family and one for which she had a great affection), that her father died suddenly. His last thoughts were of her, for he had this very picture painted for her birthday gift. Finding herself thus unprotected

and her affairs in some confusion, she declared her intention of retiring to some distant relative in the Highlands until decorum permitted of our marriage.

And upon my opposing myself to this scheme of separation and delay she was pleased to fall out with me, declaring that I was as importunate as Dr. Patterson, and that I, as well as he, should be kept in ignorance of her retreat.

I had, however, great hopes of inducing her to change this resolution, and, it being then fair spring weather, engaged her to walk with me on the Green, beyond the city, to discuss our future. I was an orphan like herself, and we had now no common meeting-place suitable to her reputation and my respect.

By reason of a pressure of work, to which by temperament and training I was ever attentive, I was a few moments late at the tryst on the Green, which I found, as usual, empty; but it was a lovely afternoon of May, very still and serene, like the smile of satisfied love. I paced about, looking for my darling.

Although she was in mourning, she had promised me to wear the dark-green silk I so admired under her black cloak, and I looked for this color among the brighter greens of the trees and bushes. She did not appear, and my heart was chilled with the fear that she was offended with me and therefore would not come, and an even deeper dread that she might, in vexation, have fled to her unknown retreat.

This thought was sending me hot-foot to seek her at her house, when I saw Rob Patterson coming across the close-shaven grass of the Green.

I remembered that the cheerful sun seemed to me to be at this moment darkened, not by any natural clouds or mists, but as it is

during an eclipse, and that the fresh trees and innocent flowers took on a ghastly and withered look.

It may appear a trivial detail, but I recall so clearly his habit, which was of a luxury beyond his means--fine grey broadcloth with a deep edging of embroidery in gold thread, little suited to his profession.

As he saw me he cocked his hat over his eyes, but took no other notice of my appearance, and I turned away, not being wishful of any encounter with this gentleman while my spirit was in a tumult.

I went at once to my darling's house, and learnt from her maid that she had left home two hours previously.

I do not wish to dwell on this part of my tale--indeed, I could not, it becomes very confused to me.

The salient facts are these--that no one saw Ann Leete in bodily form again.

And no one could account for her disappearance; yet no great comment was aroused by this, because there was no one to take much interest in her, and it was commonly believed that she had disappeared from the importunity of her lovers, the more so as Rob Patterson swore that the day of her disappearance he had had an interview with her in which she had avowed her intention of going where no one could discover her. This, in a fashion, was confirmed by what she had told me, and I was the more inclined to believe it, as my inner senses told me that she was not dead.

Six months of bitter search, of sad uneasiness, that remain in my memory blurred to one pain, and then, one autumn evening, as I came home late and dispirited, I saw her before me in the gloaming, tripping up the street, wearing her dark-green silk dress and tartan or

Roman scarf.

I did not see her face as she disappeared before I could gain on her, but she held to her side one hand, and between the long fingers I saw the haft of a surgeon's knife.

I knew then that she was dead.

And I knew that Rob Patterson had killed her.

Although it was well known that my family were all ghost-seers, to speak in this case was to be laughed at and reprimanded.

I had no single shred of evidence against Dr. Patterson.

But I resolved that I would use what powers I possessed to make him disclose his crime.

And this is how it befell.

In those days, in Glasgow, it was compulsory to attend some place of worship on the Sabbath, the observation of the holy day being enforced with peculiar strictness, and none being allowed to show themselves in any public place during the hours of the church services, and to this end inspectors and overseers were employed to patrol the streets on a Sabbath and take down the names of those who might be found loitering there.

But few were the defaulters, Glasgow on a Sunday being as bare as the Arabian desert.

Rob Patterson and I both attended the church in Rutherglen Road, towards the Green and the river.

And the Sunday after I had seen the phantom of Ann Leete, I

changed my usual place and seated myself behind this young man. My intention was to so work on his spirit as to cause him to make public confession of his crime. And I crouched there behind him with a concentration of hate and fury, forcing my will on his during the whole of the long service.

I noticed he was pale, and that he glanced several times behind him, but he did not change his place or open his lips; but presently his head fell forward on his arms as if he was praying, and I took him to be in a kind of swoon brought on by the resistance of his spirit against mine.

I did not for this cease to pursue him. I was, indeed, as if in an exaltation, and I thought my soul had his soul by the throat, somewhere above our heads, and was shouting out: "Confess! Confess!"

One o'clock struck and he rose with the rest of the congregation, but in a dazed kind of fashion. It was almost side by side that we issued from the church door.

As the stream of people came into the street they were stopped by a little procession that came down the road.

All immediately recognized two of the inspectors employed to search the Sunday streets for defaulters from church attendance, followed by several citizens who appeared to have left their homes in haste and confusion.

These people carried between them a rude bundle which some compassionate hand had covered with a white linen cloth. Below this fell a swathe of dark-green silk and the end of a Roman scarf. I stepped up to the rough bier.

"You have found Ann Leete," I said.

"It is a dead woman," one answered me. "We know not her name."

I did not need to raise the cloth. The congregation was gathering round us, amongst them was Rob Patterson.

"Tell me, who was her promised husband, how you found her," I said.

And one of the inspectors answered:

"Near here, on the Green, where the wall bounds the grass, we saw, just now, the young surgeon, Rob Patterson, lying on the sward, and put his name in our books, besides approaching him to enquire the reason of his absence from church. But he, without excuse for his offence, rose from the ground, exclaiming: 'I am a miserable man! Look in the water!'

"With that he crossed a stile that leads to the river and disappeared, and we, going down to the water, found the dead woman, deep tangled between the willows and the weeds--"

"And," added the other inspector gravely, "tangled in her clothes is a surgeon's knife."

"Which," said the former speaker, "perhaps Dr. Patterson can explain, since I perceive he is among this congregation--he must have found some quick way round to have got here before us."

Upon this all eyes turned on the surgeon, but more with amaze than reproach.

And he, with a confident air, said:

"It is known to all these good people that I have been in the church

the whole of the morning, especially to Eneas Bretton, who sat behind me, and, I dare swear, never took his eyes from me during the whole of the service."

"Ay, your body was there," I said.

With that he laughed angrily, and mingling with the crowd passed on his way.

You may believe there was a great stir; the theory put abroad was that Ann Leete had been kept a prisoner in a solitary, mined hut there was by the river, and then, fury or fear, slain by her jailer and cast into the river.

To me all this is black. I only know that she was murdered by Rob Patterson.

He was arrested and tried on the circuit.

He there proved, beyond all cavil, that he had been in the church from the beginning of the service to the end of it; his alibi was perfect. But the two inspectors never wavered in their tale of seeing him on the Green, of his self-accusation in his exclamation; he was very well known to them; and they showed his name written in their books.

He was acquitted by the tribunal of man, but a higher power condemned him.

Shortly after he died by his own hand, which God armed and turned against him.

This mystery, as it was called, was never solved to the public satisfaction, but I know that I sent Rob Patterson's soul out of his body to betray his guilt, and to procure my darling Christian burial.

This was the tale Eneas Bretton, that ancient man, told me, on the old terrace, as he sat opposite the picture of Ann Leete.

"You must think what you will," he concluded. "They will tell you that the shock unsettled my wits, or even that I was always crazed. As they would tell you that I dream when I say that I see Ann Leete now, and babble when I talk of my happiness with her for fifty years."

He smiled faintly; a deeper glory than that of the autumn sunshine seemed to rest on him.

"Explain it yourself, sir. What was it those inspectors saw on the Green?"

He slightly raised himself in his chair and peered over my shoulder.

"And what is this," he asked triumphantly, in the voice of a young man, "coming towards us now?"

I rose; I looked over my shoulder.

Through the gloom I saw a dark-green silk gown, a woman's form, a pale hand beckoning.

My impulse was to fly from the spot, but a happy sigh from my companion reproved my cowardice. I looked at the ancient man whose whole figure appeared lapped in warm light, and as the apparition of the woman moved into this glow, which seemed too glorious for the fading sunshine, I heard his last breath flow from his body with a glad cry. I had not answered his questions; I never can.

The Crown Derby Plate

Martha Pym said that she had never seen a ghost and that she would

very much like to do so, "particularly at Christmas, for you can laugh as you like, that is the correct time to see a ghost."

"I don't suppose you ever will," replied her cousin Mabel comfortably, while her cousin Clara shuddered and said that she hoped they would change the subject for she disliked even to think of such things.

The three elderly, cheerful women sat round a big fire, cosy and content after a day of pleasant activities; Martha was the guest of the other two, who owned the handsome, convenient country house; she always came to spend her Christmas with the Wyntons and found the leisurely country life delightful after the bustling round of London, for Martha managed an antique shop of the better sort and worked extremely hard. She was, however, still full of zest for work or pleasure, though sixty years old, and looked backwards and forwards to a succession of delightful days.

The other two, Mabel and Clara, led quieter but none the less agreeable lives; they had more money and fewer interests, but nevertheless enjoyed themselves very well.

"Talking of ghosts," said Mabel, "I wonder how that old woman at 'Hartleys' is getting on, for 'Hartleys,' you know, is supposed to be haunted."

"Yes, I know," smiled Miss Pym, "but all the years that we have known of the place we have never heard anything definite, have we?"

"No," put in Clara; "but there *is* that persistent rumour that the House is uncanny, and for myself, *nothing* would induce me to live there!"

"It is certainly very lonely and dreary down there on the marshes," conceded Mabel. "But as for the ghost--you never hear *what* it is

supposed to be even."

"Who has taken it?" asked Miss Pym, remembering "Hartleys" as very desolate indeed, and long shut up.

"A Miss Lefain, an eccentric old creature--I think you met her here once, two years ago--"

"I believe that I did, but I don't recall her at all."

"We have not seen her since, 'Hartleys' is so un-get-at-able and she didn't seem to want visitors. She collects china, Martha, so really you ought to go and see her and talk 'shop.'"

With the word "china" some curious associations came into the mind of Martha Pym; she was silent while she strove to put them together, and after a second or two they all fitted together into a very clear picture.

She remembered that thirty years ago--yes, it must be thirty years ago, when, as a young woman, she had put all her capital into the antique business, and had been staying with her cousins (her aunt had then been alive) that she had driven across the marsh to "Hartleys," where there was an auction sale; all the details of this she had completely forgotten, but she could recall quite clearly purchasing a set of gorgeous china which was still one of her proud delights, a perfect set of Crown Derby save that one plate was missing.

"How odd," she remarked, "that this Miss Lefain should collect china too, for it was at 'Hartleys' that I purchased my dear old Derby service--I've never been able to match that plate--"

"A plate was missing? I seem to remember," said Clara. "Didn't they say that it must be in the house somewhere and that it should be

looked for?"

"I believe they did, but of course I never heard any more and that missing plate has annoyed me ever since. Who had 'Hartleys'?"

"An old connoisseur, Sir James Sewell; I believe he was some relation to this Miss Lefain, but I don't know--"

"I wonder if she has found the plate," mused Miss Pym. "I expect she has turned out and ransacked the whole place--"

"Why not trot over and ask?" suggested Mabel. "It's not much use to her, if she has found it, one odd plate."

"Don't be silly," said Clara. "Fancy going over the marshes, this weather, to ask about a plate missed all those years ago. I'm sure Martha wouldn't think of it--"

But Martha did think of it; she was rather fascinated by the idea; how queer and pleasant it would be if, after all these years, nearly a lifetime, she should find the Crown Derby plate, the loss of which had always irked her! And this hope did not seem so altogether fantastical, it was quite likely that old Miss Lefain, poking about in the ancient house, had found the missing piece.

And, of course, if she had, being a fellow-collector, she would be quite willing to part with it to complete the set.

Her cousin endeavoured to dissuade her; Miss Lefain, she declared, was a recluse, an odd creature who might greatly resent such a visit and such a request.

"Well, if she does I can but come away again," smiled Miss Pym. "I suppose she can't bite my head off, and I rather like meeting these curious types--we've got a love for old china in common, anyhow."

"It seems so silly to think of it--after all these years--a plate!"

"A Crown Derby plate," corrected Miss Pym. "It is certainly strange that I didn't think of it before, but now that I have got it into my head I can't get it out. Besides," she added hopefully, "I might see the ghost."

So full, however, were the days with pleasant local engagements that Miss Pym had no immediate chance of putting her scheme into practice; but she did not relinquish it, and she asked several different people what they knew about "Hartleys" and Miss Lefain.

And no one knew anything save that the house was supposed to be haunted and the owner "cracky."

"Is there a story?" asked Miss Pym, who associated ghosts with neat tales into which they fitted as exactly as nuts into shells.

But she was always told: "Oh, no, there isn't a story, no one knows anything about the place, don't know how the idea got about; old Sewell was half-crazy, I believe, he was buried in the garden and that gives a house a nasty name--"

"Very unpleasant," said Martha Pym, undisturbed.

This ghost seemed too elusive for her to track down; she would have to be content if she could recover the Crown Derby plate; for that at least she was determined to make a try and also to satisfy that faint tingling of curiosity roused in her by this talk about "Hartleys" and the remembrance of that day, so long ago, when she had gone to the auction sale at the lonely old house.

So the first free afternoon, while Mabel and Clara were comfortably taking their afternoon repose, Martha Pym, who was of a more lively

habit, got out her little governess cart and dashed away across the Essex flats.

She had taken minute directions with her, but she had soon lost her way.

Under the wintry sky, which looked as grey and hard as metal, the marshes stretched bleakly to the horizon, the olive-brown broken reeds were harsh as scars on the saffron-tinted bogs, where the sluggish waters that rose so high in winter were filmed over with the first stillness of a frost; the air was cold but not keen, everything was damp; faintest of mists blurred the black outlines of trees that rose stark from the ridges above the stagnant dykes; the flooded fields were haunted by black birds and white birds, gulls and crows, whining above the long ditch grass and wintry wastes.

Miss Pym stopped the little horse and surveyed this spectral scene, which had a certain relish about it to one sure to return to a homely village, a cheerful house and good company.

A withered and bleached old man, in colour like the dun landscape, came along the road between the sparse alders.

Miss Pym, buttoning up her coat, asked the way to "Hartley" as he passed her; he told her, straight on, and she proceeded, straight indeed across the road that went with undeviating length across the marshes.

"Of course," thought Miss Pym, "if you live in a place like this, you are bound to invent ghosts."

The house sprang up suddenly on a knoll ringed with rotting trees, encompassed by an old brick wall that the perpetual damp had overrun with lichen, blue, green, white colours of decay.

"Hartleys," no doubt, there was no other residence of human being in sight in all the wide expanse; besides, she could remember it, surely, after all this time, the sharp rising out of the marsh, the colony of tall trees, but then fields and trees had been green and bright--there had been no water on the flats, it had been summer-time.

"She certainly," thought Miss Pym, "must be crazy to live here. And I rather doubt if I shall get my plate."

She fastened up the good little horse by the garden gate which stood negligently ajar and entered; the garden itself was so neglected that it was quite surprising to see a trim appearance in the house, curtains at the window and a polish on the brass door knocker, which must have been recently rubbed there, considering the taint in the sea damp which rusted and rotted everything.

It was a square-built, substantial house with "nothing wrong with it but the situation," Miss Pym decided, though it was not very attractive, being built of that drab plastered stone so popular a hundred years ago, with flat windows and door, while one side was gloomily shaded by a large evergreen tree of the cypress variety which gave a blackish tinge to that portion of the garden.

There was no pretence at flower-beds nor any manner of cultivation in this garden where a few rank weeds and straggling bushes matted together above the dead grass; on the enclosing wall which appeared to have been built high as protection against the ceaseless winds that swung along the flats were the remains of fruit trees; their crucified branches, rotting under the great nails that held them up, looked like the skeletons of those who had died in torment.

Miss Pym took in these noxious details as she knocked firmly at the door; they did not depress her; she merely felt extremely sorry for anyone who could live in such a place.

She noticed, at the far end of the garden, in the corner of the wall, a headstone showing above the sodden colourless grass, and remembered what she had been told about the old antiquary being buried there, in the grounds of "Hartleys."

As the knock had no effect she stepped back and looked at the house; it was certainly inhabited--with those neat windows, white curtains and drab blinds all pulled to precisely the same level.

And when she brought her glance back to the door she saw that it had been opened and that someone, considerably obscured by the darkness of the passage, was looking at her intently.

"Good afternoon," said Miss Pym cheerfully. "I just thought that I would call to see Miss Lefain--it is Miss Lefain, isn't it?"

"It's my house," was the querulous reply.

Martha Pym had hardly expected to find any servants here, though the old lady must, she thought, work pretty hard to keep the house so clean and tidy as it appeared to be.

"Of course," she replied. "May I come in? I'm Martha Pym, staying with the Wyntons, I met you there--"

"Do come in," was the faint reply. "I get so few people to visit me, I'm really very lonely."

"I don't wonder," thought Miss Pym; but she had resolved to take no notice of any eccentricity on the part of her hostess, and so she entered the house with her usual agreeable candour and courtesy.

The passage was badly lit, but she was able to get a fair idea of Miss Lefain; her first impression was that this poor creature was

most dreadfully old, older than any human being had the right to be, why, she felt young in comparison--so faded, feeble, and pallid was Miss Lefain.

She was also monstrously fat; her gross, flaccid figure was shapeless and she wore a badly cut, full dress of no colour at all, but stained with earth and damp where Miss Pym supposed she had been doing futile gardening; this gown was doubtless designed to disguise her stoutness, but had been so carelessly pulled about that it only added to it, being rucked and rolled "all over the place" as Miss Pym put it to herself.

Another ridiculous touch about the appearance of the poor old lady was her short hair; decrepit as she was, and lonely as she lived she had actually had her scanty relics of white hair cropped round her shaking head.

"Dear me, dear me," she said in her thin treble voice. "How very kind of you to come. I suppose you prefer the parlour? I generally sit in the garden."

"The garden? But not in this weather?"

"I get used to the weather. You've no idea how used one gets to the weather."

"I suppose so," conceded Miss Pym doubtfully. "You don't live here quite alone, do you?"

"Quite alone, lately. I had a little company, but she was taken away, I'm sure I don't know where. I haven't been able to find a trace of her anywhere," replied the old lady peevishly.

"Some wretched companion that couldn't stick it, I suppose," thought Miss Pym. "Well, I don't wonder--but someone ought to be here to

look after her."

They went into the parlour, which, the visitor was dismayed to see, was without a fire but otherwise well kept.

And there, on dozens of shelves was a choice array of china at which Martha Pym's eyes glistened.

"Aha!" cried Miss Lefain. "I see you've noticed my treasures! Don't you envy me? Don't you wish that you had some of those pieces?"

Martha Pym certainly did and she looked eagerly and greedily round the walls, tables, and cabinets while the old woman followed her with little thin squeals of pleasure.

It was a beautiful little collection, most choicely and elegantly arranged, and Martha thought it marvellous that this feeble ancient creature should be able to keep it in such precise order as well as doing her own housework.

"Do you really do everything yourself here and live quite alone?" she asked, and she shivered even in her thick coat and wished that Miss Lefain's energy had risen to a fire, but then probably she lived in the kitchen, as these lonely eccentrics often did.

"There was someone," answered Miss Lefain cunningly, "but I had to send her away. I told you she's gone, I can't find her, and I am so glad. Of course," she added wistfully, "it leaves me very lonely, but then I couldn't stand her impertinence any longer. She used to say that it was *her* house and her collection of china! Would you believe it? She used to try to chase me away from looking at my own things!"

"How very disagreeable," said Miss Pym, wondering which of the two women had been crazy. "But hadn't you better get someone

else."

"Oh, no," was the jealous answer. "I would rather be alone with my things, I daren't leave the house for fear someone takes them away--there was a dreadful time once when an auction sale was held here--"

"Were you here then?" asked Miss Pym; but indeed she looked old enough to have been anywhere.

"Yes, of course," Miss Lefain replied rather peevishly and Miss Pym decided that she must be a relation of old Sir James Sewell. Clara and Mabel had been very foggy about it all. "I was very busy hiding all the china--but one set they got--a Crown Derby tea service--"

"With one plate missing!" cried Martha Pym. "I bought it, and do you know, I was wondering if you'd found it--"

"I hid it," piped Miss Lefain.

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, that's rather funny behaviour. Why did you hide the stuff away instead of buying it?"

"How could I buy what was mine?"

"Old Sir James left it to you, then?" asked Martha Pym, feeling very muddled.

"*She* bought a lot more," squeaked Miss Lefain, but Martha Pym tried to keep her to the point.

"If you've got the plate," she insisted, "you might let me have it--I'll pay quite handsomely, it would be so pleasant to have it after all these years."

"Money is no use to me," said Miss Lefain mournfully. "Not a bit of use. I can't leave the house or the garden."

"Well, you have to live, I suppose," replied Martha Pym cheerfully. "And, do you know, I'm afraid you are getting rather morbid and dull, living here all alone--you really ought to have a fire--why, it's just on Christmas and very damp."

"I haven't felt the cold for a long time," replied the other; she seated herself with a sigh on one of the horsehair chairs and Miss Pym noticed with a start that her feet were covered only by a pair of white stockings; "one of those nasty health fiends," thought Miss Pym, "but she doesn't look too well for all that."

"So you don't think that you could let me have the plate?" she asked briskly, walking up and down, for the dark, neat, clean parlour was very cold indeed, and she thought that she couldn't stand this much longer; as there seemed no sign of tea or anything pleasant and comfortable she had really better go.

"I might let you have it," sighed Miss Lefain, "since you've been so kind as to pay me a visit. After all, one plate isn't much use, is it?"

"Of course not, I wonder you troubled to hide it--"

"I couldn't *bear*," wailed the other, "to see the things going out of the house!"

Martha Pym couldn't stop to go into all this; it was quite clear that the old lady was very eccentric indeed and that nothing very much could be done with her; no wonder that she had "dropped out" of everything and that no one ever saw her or knew anything about her, though Miss Pym felt that some effort ought really to be made to save her from herself.

"Wouldn't you like a run in my little governess cart?" she suggested. "We might go to tea with the Wyntons on the way back, they'd be delighted to see you, and I really think that you do want taking out of yourself."

"I was taken out of myself some time ago," replied Miss Lefain. "I really was, and I couldn't leave my things--though," she added with pathetic gratitude, "it is very, very kind of you--"

"Your things would be quite safe, I'm sure," said Martha Pym, humouring her. "Who ever would come up here, this hour of a winter's day?"

"They do, oh, they do! And *she* might come back, prying and nosing and saying that it was all hers, all my beautiful china, hers!"

Miss Lefain squealed in her agitation and rising up, ran round the wall fingering with flaccid yellow hands the brilliant glossy pieces on the shelves.

"Well, then, I'm afraid that I must go, they'll be expecting me, and it's quite a long ride; perhaps some other time you'll come and see us?

"Oh, must you go?" quavered Miss Lefain dolefully. "I do like a little company now and then and I trusted you from the first--the others, when they do come, are always after my things and I have to frighten them away!"

"Frighten them away!" replied Martha Pym. "However do you do that?"

"It doesn't seem difficult, people are so easily frightened, aren't they?"

Miss Pym suddenly remembered that "Hartleys" had the reputation of being haunted--perhaps the queer old thing played on that; the lonely house with the grave in the garden was dreary enough around which to create a legend.

"I suppose you've never seen a ghost?" she asked pleasantly. "I'd rather like to see one, you know--"

"There is no one here but myself," said Miss Lefain.

"So you've never seen anything? I thought it must be all nonsense. Still, I do think it rather melancholy for you to live here all alone--"

Miss Lefain sighed:

"Yes, it's very lonely. Do stay and talk to me a little longer." Her whistling voice dropped cunningly. "And I'll give you the Crown Derby plate!"

"Are you sure you've really got it?" Miss Pym asked.

"I'll show you."

Fat and waddling as she was, she seemed to move very lightly as she slipped in front of Miss Pym and conducted her from the room, going slowly up the stairs--such a gross odd figure in that clumsy dress with the fringe of white hair hanging on to her shoulders.

The upstairs of the house was as neat as the parlour, everything well in its place; but there was no sign of occupancy; the beds were covered with dust sheets, there were no lamps or fires set ready. "I suppose," said Miss Pym to herself, "she doesn't care to show me where she really lives."

But as they passed from one room to another, she could not help

saying:

"Where *do* you live, Miss Lefain?"

"Mostly in the garden," said the other.

Miss Pym thought of those horrible health huts that some people indulged in.

"Well, sooner you than I," she replied cheerfully.

In the most distant room of all, a dark, tiny closet, Miss Lefain opened a deep cupboard and brought out a Crown Derby plate which her guest received with a spasm of joy, for it was actually that missing from her cherished set.

"It's very good of you," she said in delight. "Won't you take something for it, or let me do something for you?"

"You might come and see me again," replied Miss Lefain wistfully.

"Oh, yes, of course I should like to come and see you again."

But now that she had got what she had really come for, the plate, Martha Pym wanted to be gone; it was really very dismal and depressing in the house and she began to notice a fearful smell--the place had been shut up too long, there was something damp rotting somewhere, in this horrid little dark closet no doubt.

"I really must be going," she said hurriedly.

Miss Lefain turned as if to cling to her, but Martha Pym moved quickly away.

"Dear me," wailed the old lady. "Why are you in such haste?"

"There's--a smell," murmured Miss Pym rather faintly.

She found herself hastening down the stairs, with Miss Lefain complaining behind her.

"How peculiar people are--*she* used to talk of a smell--"

"Well, you must notice it yourself."

Miss Pym was in the hall; the old woman had not followed her, but stood in the semi-darkness at the head of the stairs, a pale shapeless figure.

Martha Pym hated to be rude and ungrateful but she could not stay another moment; she hurried away and was in her cart in a moment--really--that smell--

"Good-bye!" she called out with false cheerfulness, "and thank you *so* much!"

There was no answer from the house.

Miss Pym drove on; she was rather upset and took another way than that by which she had come, a way that led past a little house raised above the marsh; she was glad to think that the poor old creature at "Hartleys" had such near neighbours, and she reined up the horse, dubious as to whether she should call someone and tell them that poor old Miss Lefain really wanted a little looking after, alone in a house like that, and plainly not quite right in her head.

A young woman, attracted by the sound of the governess cart, came to the door of the house and seeing Miss Pym called out, asking if she wanted the keys of the house?

"What house?" asked Miss Pym.

"'Hartleys,' mum, they don't put a board out, as no one is likely to pass, but it's to be sold. Miss Lefain wants to sell or let it--"

"I've just been up to see her--"

"Oh, no, mum--she's been away a year, abroad somewhere, couldn't stand the place, it's been empty since then, I just run in every day and keep things tidy--"

Loquacious and curious the young woman had come to the fence; Miss Pym had stopped her horse.

"Miss Lefain is there now," she said. "She must have just come back--"

"She wasn't there this morning, mum, 'tisn't likely she'd come, either--fair scared she was, mum, fair chased away, didn't dare move her china. Can't say I've noticed anything myself, but I never stay long--and there's a smell--"

"Yes," murmured Martha Pym faintly, "there's a smell. What--what--chased her away?"

The young woman, even in that lonely place, lowered her voice.

"Well, as you aren't thinking of taking the place, she got an idea in her head that old Sir James--well, he couldn't bear to leave 'Hartleys,' mum, he's buried in the garden, and she thought he was after her, chasing round them bits of china--"

"Oh!" cried Miss Pym.

"Some of it used to be his, she found a lot stuffed away, he said they

were to be left in 'Hartleys,' but Miss Lefain would have the things sold, I believe--that's years ago--"

"Yes, yes," said Miss Pym with a sick look. "You don't know what he was like, do you?"

"No, mum--but I've heard tell he was very stout and very old--I wonder who it was you saw up at 'Hartleys'?"

Miss Pym took a Crown Derby plate from her bag.

"You might take that back when you go," she whispered. "I shan't want it, after all--"

Before the astonished young woman could answer Miss Pym had darted off across the marsh; that short hair, that earth-stained robe, the white socks, "I generally live in the garden--"

Miss Pym drove away, breakneck speed, frantically resolving to mention to no one that she had paid a visit to "Hartleys," nor lightly again to bring up the subject of ghosts.

She shook and shuddered in the damp, trying to get out of her clothes and her nostrils--that indescribable smell.

The Fair Hair Of Ambrosine

Claude Boucher found himself awaiting with increasing dread the approach of the 12th of December.

He still called it December to himself; the new names of the divisions of the years of liberty had never taken root in his heart, which remained faithful to many of the old traditions.

Yet he was a good servant of the new Republic and had so far escaped peril during perilous times without sinking into servile insignificance. He was a clerk in the Chamber of Deputies, well paid and unmolested. From the safe vantage of a dignified obscurity he watched greater men come and go; and ate his supper and smoked his pipe in peace while the death-carts went to and from the prisons and the Place de la Revolution--which Boucher, in his mind, thought of as the Place du Louis XVI.

He had his ambitions, but he held them suspended till safer times: he was not the man for a brilliant, fiery career ending in the guillotine; he was not, either, pessimistic; a better epoch, he would declare, would certainly emerge from the present confusion (he refused to accept it as anything else), which could but be regarded as the birth-throes of a settled state.

Therefore, being young and calm and having lost nothing by the upheaval of society, he waited, as he felt he could afford to wait, until the order of things was once more stable and established. The horrors that had washed, like a sea of filth and blood, round his safety, had scarcely touched him; this terror he felt at looking forward to the 12th of December was the first fear that he had ever known.

A fear unreasonable and by no means to be explained.

The first and main cause of his dread was a trifle, an affair so slight that when he had first heard of it he had put it from his mind as a thing of no importance.

One of the Deputies of Lille had put his finger on a conspiracy in the Department of Béarn, involving several names that had hitherto passed as those of good friends of the Republic. The matter did not loom large, but required some delicacy in the handling. The Deputy for the Department concerned was away; no steps were to be taken

until his return, which would be on the 12th of December; then Boucher, as a man reliable and trustworthy, was to carry all papers relating to the alleged conspiracy to his house at Saint-Cloud.

At first the young clerk had thought nothing of this; then he had been rather pleased at the slight importance the mission gave him. That night, over his supper in the little café in the Rue Saint-Germains, he began to think of Ambrosine, who had long been a forbidden memory.

She was a little actress in alight theatre that existed during the days of the Terror like a poisonous flower blooming on corruption.

She had lived in a little house on the way to Saint-Cloud, a house on the banks of the river, an innocent and modest-looking place to shelter Ambrosine, who was neither innocent nor modest.

Claude Boucher had loved her; and every night she had finished her part in the wild and indecent performance, he would drive her home in a little yellow cabriolet which had once belonged to a lady of fashion.

They had been quite happy; she was certainly fond of Claude and, he believed, faithful to him; he had rivals, and it flattered him to take her away from these and make her completely his, almost subservient to him; she was only a child of the gutters of Saint-Antoine, but she was graceful and charming, and endearing too in her simplicity and ardour, which she preserved despite her manifold deceits and vices.

She was not beautiful, but she had dark blue eyes and kept her skin lily pale, and her hair was wonderful, and untouched by bleach or powder; fair and thick and uncurling, yet full with a natural ripple, she kept it piled carelessly high with such fantastic combs as she could afford, and from these it fell continuously on to her thin bosom and

slanting shoulders.

Claude, sitting in his café, remembered this fair hair, and how it would fly about her when she ran from the stage, flushed, panting, half naked from the dance by which she had amused men inflamed with blood.

He thought; 'To take those papers I shall have to pass the house where she lived...'

He checked himself then his thought continued: 'Where she died.' Ambrosine had been murdered three years ago.

One day in winter she had not appeared at the theatre. As there was a new topical song for her to learn, they had sent a messenger to the little house on the river.

He found her in her bed-gown on the floor of her bedchamber, stabbed through and through the fragile body. The house was in confusion and had been stripped of its few poor valuables.

No-one knew anything: the house was lonely, and Ambrosine lived alone; the old woman who worked for her came in for a portion of the day only. It was found that she had no friends or relatives and that no-one knew her real name--she was just a waif from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

That night Claude went to see her; they had quarrelled a little, and for two days he had kept away.

Rough care had disposed her decently on the tawdry silks of the canopied bed; she was covered to the chin, and her face, bruised and slightly distorted, had the aggrieved look of a startled child.

Her hair was smoothed and folded like a pillow beneath her head,

her little peaked features looked insignificant beside this unchanged splendour of, her hair.

As Claude looked at her he wondered how he could have ever loved her--a creature so thin, so charmless; his one desire was to forget her, for she now seemed something malignant.

He paid what was needful to save her from a pauper's burial and went back to Paris to forget. No-one found it difficult to forget Ambrosine; her obscure tragedy troubled no-one--there was too much else happening in France. Thieves had obviously murdered her for her few possessions: it was left at that, for no-one really cared. The Faubourg Saint-Antoine could provide plenty such as she.

For a while she held Claude at night; with the darkness would come her image, holding him off sleep.

Always he saw her dead, with the strained, half-open lips, the half-closed, fixed eyes, the thin nose, and the cheeks and chin of sharp delicacy outlined against the pillow of yellow hair.

Always dead. Again and again he tried to picture her living face, her moving form, but he could not capture them.

He could not recall the feel of her kisses or her warm caresses, but the sensation of her cold yet soft dead cheek as he had felt it beneath a furtive touch was long with him.

But after a while he escaped from Ambrosine; he forgot.

Now, as he remembered the way his route took him on the 12th of December, he remembered.

Not that he had any horror of the house or the locality--it simply had

not happened that he had ever had occasion to go there since her death. Probably there were other people living there now, or the house might even be destroyed--in any case he would take a détour round the deserted park.

But it was absurd to suppose that he was afraid of that house or unwilling to pass the way he had last passed coming from her deathbed. It was all over and he had forgotten. So he assured himself; yet he began to recall Ambrosine, and always with a sensation of faint horror.

That night was the beginning of his fear.

He went home late to his lodging near the café and, on sleeping, dreamt very exactly this dream, which had the clearness and force of a vision.

He dreamt that it was the 12th of December and that he was riding towards Saint-Cloud carrying the papers he was to take to the Béarnais Deputy.

It was a cold, clear, melancholy afternoon, and the silence of dreams encompassed him as he rode.

When he reached the great iron gates of the dismantled park, his horse fell lame. He was not very far from his destination, and he decided to go on foot. Leaving his horse at a little inn, he struck out across the park.

He saw it all perfectly plainly--the great avenues of leafless trees, the stretches of greensward scattered with dead leaves, the carp ponds and fountains with their neglected statues and choked basins, the parterres where flowers had bloomed not so long ago, and that now looked as utterly decayed; and to his right, as he walked, always the

pale glimpse of the river, shining between the trees.

Now, as he proceeded and the dusk began to fill the great park with shadows, he was aware of a companion walking at his side, step for step with him. He could not discern the head and face of this man, which seemed inextricably blended with the shadows, but he saw that he wore a green coat with dark blue frogs.

And he at once began to conceive of this companion a horror and dread unspeakable. He hastened his steps; but the other, with the silent precision of dreams, was ever beside him. The day had now faded to that fixed, colourless light which is the proper atmosphere of visions, and the trees and grass were still, the water without a ripple.

They came now, Claude and the figure that dogged him, to a flat carp-basin, dried and lined with green moss. A group of trees overshadowed it with bare branches; a straight stone figure rose behind, faceless and ominous. Claude could not remember this place, well known as was Saint-Cloud to him.

His companion stopped and bent down to adjust the buckles of his shoe. Claude longed to hasten on, but could not move; the other rose, took his hand, and led him hurriedly across the dry grass.

They approached the bank of a river and a house that stood there, on the confines of the park.

Claude knew the house. It was shuttered as when he had seen it on his last visit to Ambrosine. The garden was a mass of tangled weeds--he noticed a bramble that barred the door across and across.

'They did not find the place so easy to let,' he found himself saying.

His companion released him, and, wrenching off the rotting shutter of

one of the lower windows, climbed into the house. Claude, impelled against his will, followed.

He saw, very distinctly (as, indeed, he had seen everything very distinctly in his dream), the dreadful, bare, disordered room of Ambrosine.

Then a deeper and more utter horror descended on him. He knew, suddenly, and with utter conviction, that he was with the murderer of Ambrosine.

And while he formed a shriek, the creature came at him with raised knife and had him by the throat, and he knew that he was being killed as she had been killed, that their two fates were bound together; and that her destiny, from which he had tried to free himself, had closed on him also.

This being the culmination of the dream, he woke; he slept no more till morning, and even in the daylight hours the dream haunted him with a great and invincible dread.

It was the more horrible that reality mingled with it--remembrance of days that had really existed were blended with remembrance of that dreadful day of the dream, recollections of Ambrosine were blended with that vision of her deserted home.

The past and the dream became one, rendering the dead woman an object of horror, hateful and repellent. He could not without a shudder recall her gayest moments or think of the little theatre where she used to act.

So three days passed, and then he dreamt the dream again.

In every detail he went through it as he had been through it before,

and by no effort could he awake until the dream was accomplished and he was in the grip of the murderer of Ambrosine, with the steel descending into his side.

And the day of his journey was now only a week off he hardly thought of trying to evade it, of pleading illness or asking another to take his place; it was part of the horror of the thing that he felt that it was inevitable that he should go--that his journey was not to be evaded by any effort, however frantic, that he might make.

Besides, he had his sane, reasonable moments when he was able to see the folly of being troubled by a dream which had recalled a little dancer with whom he had once been in love, and involved her with a certain journey near her dwelling that he was bound to make.

That was what it came to--just a dream and a recollection.

He argued in these quiet moments that it was not strange that his proposed journey to Saint-Cloud should arouse memories of Ambrosine and that the two should combine in a dream.

He distracted himself by taking a deeper interest in the wild, fierce life of Paris, by listening to all the tragedies daily recounted, by visiting all the quarters most lawless and most distressed. One day he even went, for the first time, to watch the executions. The real horror would check, he thought, the fanciful horror that haunted him.

But the first victim he saw was a young girl with hands red from the cold, a strained mouth and fair hair turned up on her small head; her eyes, over which the dullness of death seemed to have already passed, stared in the direction of Claude. He turned away with a movement so rough that the crowd, pressing round him, protested fiercely.

Claude strode through the chill and windy streets of Paris and thought of the approaching 12th of December as of the day of his death. So intense became his agitation that he turned instinctively towards his one friend, as one being enclosed in darkness will turn towards the one light.

René Legarais was his fellow clerk and his first confidant and counsellor--a man a few years older than himself, and, like himself, sober, quiet, industrious, and well balanced.

Claude found his lodging near the Pre-aux-Clercs empty; René was yet at the Chamber.

Claude waited; he found himself encouraged even by the sight of the cheerful, familiar room, with books, and lamp, and fire, and the coffee-service waiting for his friend's return.

He now tried hard to reason himself out of his folly.

He would tell René, and with the telling he would see the absurdity of the whole thing and they would laugh it away together over a glass of wine.

René, he remembered, had also been in love with Ambrosine, but in a foolish, sentimental fashion--Claude smiled to think of it, but he believed that René had been ready to marry the little creature. She had even favoured his respectful wooing (so gossip said) until Claude had appeared, with bolder methods and his vivid good looks and his lavish purse.

René had retired with the best of grace, and that was all long ago and forgotten by both; Claude wondered why he thought of it now, sitting here in the warmth and light. Only because he was unnerved and unstrung and obsessed by that weird dream.

René came home at his usual hour, flushed by the sharp wind and shaking the raindrops from his frieze coat. He was a pale young man with heavy brown hair, insignificant features, and a mole on his upper lip. He looked unhealthy and pensive, and wore horn-rimmed glasses when he worked.

'Where were you this afternoon?' he asked. 'Your desk was empty.'

'I was not well,' said Claude.

René gave him a quick glance.

Claude looked well enough now, a colour from the fire in his handsome brown face, his slim figure stretched at ease in the deep-armed leather chair and a half-mocking smile on his lips.

'I went to see the executions,' he added.

'Bah!' said René.

He came to the fire and warmed his hands, which were stiff and red with cold; they reminded Claude of the hands of the girl whom he had seen on the platform of the guillotine.

'It is the first time,' replied Claude, 'and I shall not go again.'

'I have never been,' said René.

'There was a girl there.' Claude could not keep it off his tongue. 'There always are girls, I believe.'

'She was quite young.'

'Yes?' René looked up, aware that interest was expected of him.

'And then--like Ambrosine.'

'Ambrosine?'

'You remember,' said Claude impatiently, 'the little dancer...at Saint-Cloud.'

'Oh, whatever made you think of her?' René looked relieved, as if he had expected something more portentous and terrible.

'That is what I wish to know--what has made me think of her? I believed that I had forgotten.'

'I had, certainly.'

'So had I.'

'What has reminded you?'

Claude struggled with his trouble, which now seemed to him ridiculous.

'I have to go to Saint-Cloud,' he said at last.

'When?'

'The 12th.'

'On business of the Chamber?'

'Yes.'

'And this reminded you?'

'Yes--you see,' explained Claude slowly, 'I have not been there since.'

'Not since?' René pondered, and seemed to understand. 'And lately I have had a dream.'

'Oh, dreams,' said René; he lifted his shoulders lightly and turned to the fire.

'Do you dream?' asked Claude, reluctant to enter on the subject, yet driven to seek the relief of speech.

'Who does not dream--now--in Paris?'

Claude thought of the thin girl on the steps of the guillotine. 'There is good matter for dreams in Paris,' he admitted, adding gloomily; 'I wish that I had not been to the executions.'

René was making the coffee; he laughed good-naturedly.

'Come, Claude, what is the matter with you? What have you on your conscience?'

'Ambrosine.'

René lifted his brows. 'Have you not found, in Paris, in three years, a woman to make you forget Ambrosine, poor little fool?'

'I had forgotten,' said Claude fiercely, 'but this cursed journey--and this cursed dream--made me remember.'

'You are nervous, overworked,' replied his friend; it was quite true that in these few weeks Claude had been working with a desperate energy; he snatched eagerly at the excuse.

'Yes, yes, that is it...but the times...enough to unnerve any man--death and ruin on either side and the toils closing on so many one knew.'

René poured out the coffee, took his cup, and settled himself comfortably in the armchair opposite Claude. He drank and stretched his limbs with the satisfaction of a man pleasantly tired.

'After all, you need not take this journey,' he said thoughtfully; 'there are a dozen would do it for you.'

'That is just it--I feel *impelled* to go, as if no effort of mine would release me.' He hesitated a moment, then added: 'That is part of the horror of it.'

'The horror?'

'Of the whole thing--do you not see the horror?' asked Claude impatiently.

'My dear fellow, how can I--when you have not told me what this wonderful dream is about?'

Claude flushed, and looked into the fire; after all, he thought, René was too commonplace to understand his ghostly terrors--and the thing did seem ridiculous when he was sitting there warm and comfortable and safe.

Yet it could not be dismissed from his mind--he had to speak, even if to a listener probably unsympathetic.

'It is like a vision,' he said. 'I have had it three times it is a prevision of the journey to Saint-Cloud.'

René, attentive, waited.

'It is so very exact,' continued Claude, 'and each time the same.'

'Tell me.'

'Oh, it is only that--the ride to the gate, the leaving of the lame horse, the walk through the park, and then--'

'Well?'

'The appearance of a man walking beside me.'

'You know him?'

'I hardly saw the face.'

'Well?' René continued to urge Claude's manifest reluctance. 'We went, finally, to the house of Ambrosine.'

'Ah yes, she lived there on the banks of the river--'

'Surely you remember--'

'We were never intimate,' smiled René. 'I do not believe that I ever went to her house. Of course, it was familiar to you?'

'I saw it again exactly--it was shut up; deserted and in decay. My companion broke the window shutters and stepped in. I followed. The room was in disrepair, unfurnished. As I looked round the place--'

He shuddered, in spite of his strong control.

'The fiend with me revealed himself. I knew that he was the murderer of Ambrosine, and he fell on me as he had fallen on her.' René was silent a moment.

'Why should the murderer of Ambrosine wish to murder you?' he asked at length.

'How do I know? I tell you my dream.'

'An extraordinary dream.'

'Would you take it as a warning?'

'A warning?'

'Of what will happen?'

'It is obviously absurd,' said René quietly.

'Yes, absurd--yet I feel as if the 12th of December would be the day of my death.'

'You have brooded over it--you must put it out of your mind.'

'I cannot,' said Claude wildly. 'I cannot!'

'Then don't go.'

'I tell you it is out of my power to stay away.'

René looked at him keenly. 'Then how can I help you?'

Claude took this glance to mean that he doubted his wits. 'Only by listening to my fool's talk,' he said, smiling.

'Does that help?'

'I hope it may. You see, the whole thing--that wretched girl--has become an obsession, waking and sleeping.'

'Strange.'

'Strange indeed.'

'After you had forgotten.'

'Yes, I had forgotten,' said Claude.

'So had I, to tell the truth.'

'Why should one remember? It was a curious affair.'

'Her death?'

'Her murder, yes.'

'I do not see that it was so curious. A little wanton, living alone with some spoils foolishly displayed--she courted her fate.'

'But she had so little--a few bits of imitation jewellery, a few coins; and who should have known of them?'

René shrugged and put down his empty coffee-cup.

'And they said she was liked by the few poor folk about--'

'There are always ruffians on the tramp on the watch for these chances.'

'Yes; yet it was strange--'

René interrupted with an expression of distaste. 'Why go back to this?'

Claude stared, as if amazed at himself. 'Why, indeed?'

'You become morbid, unreasonable, Claude; rouse yourself, forget this thing.'

The other laughed; it did not have a pleasant sound.

'I suppose I am haunted.'

'Why should you be? You did not do her any wrong.'

'She cared for me.'

René laughed now.

'By God!' said Claude fiercely. 'She cared for me--I believe she still cares. That is why she will not let me go...'

René rose and took a step or two away from him.

'What are you talking of?' he asked.

'I say, she cares--that is why she is trying to warn me.'

'You think it is she?'

'Ambrosine--yes.'

'You must not allow yourself these fancies, my poor fellow.'

'You may well pity me. I never cared for her; I think I hated her when she was dead. I hate her now. Why won't she keep quiet in her grave and leave me alone?'

He rose and walked across the room with a lurching step. René, leaning against the table, watched him.

'What was the house like--in your dreams?'

'I told you.'

'Decayed--deserted?'

'And tainted. It had a taint of death--like a smell of stale blood.'

'It is not likely,' said René, 'that the place is empty. Now, if it was inhabited, would not that shake your faith in your vision?' Claude stopped short in his walk; he had not thought of that.

'Now,' smiled René, 'send someone to look at the place.'

'Who could live there--after that?'

'Bah! Do you think people stop for that nowadays? If they did, half the city would be uninhabited. The place is cheap, I presume, and someone's property. I do not suppose it has been allowed to fall into disrepair. That was your fancy.'

'I might send someone to see,' reflected Claude.

'That is what I suggest--find out before the 12th, and if the house is inhabited, as I am sure it is, all this moonshine will clear away from your brain and you will undertake your journey with a good heart.'

'I will do that,' answered Claude gratefully. 'I knew that you would help me--forgive me for having wearied you, René.'

His friend smiled.

'I want you to be reasonable--nothing is going to happen. After all, these papers to the Béarnais are not of such importance; no-one would murder you to get them.'

'Oh, it had nothing to do with the Béarnais, but with Ambrosine.'

'You must forget Ambrosine,' said René decidedly. 'She has ceased

to exist and there are no such things as ghosts.'

Claude smiled; he was thinking that once René had been quite sentimental over Ambrosine; certainly he was cured of that fancy. Why could not he too completely put the little dancer from his mind?

He also had long ceased to care.

But he was ashamed to refer further to his fears and imaginings.

'You have done me good,' he declared. 'I shall think no more of the matter. After all, the 12th will soon come and go, and then the thing will cease to have any meaning.'

René smiled, seemingly relieved by his returned cheerfulness. 'Still, send someone to look at the house,' he said; 'that will send you on your journey with a lighter heart.'

'At once--tomorrow.' They parted, and Claude went home through the cold streets.

As soon as he had left the lighted room and the company of his friend, the old dreary terror returned.

He hastened to his chamber, hoping to gain relief amid his own surroundings, and lit every candle he could find.

He would not go to bed, as he dreaded the return of the dream, yet he was sleepy and had nothing to do.

Presently, he went to a bottom drawer in the modest bureau that served him as a wardrobe and took out a small parcel wrapped in silver paper. He unfolded it and brought forth a chicken-skin fan, wreathed with figures of flying loves in rose and silver tones that surrounded a delicate pastoral river scene, the banks trailing with

eglantine, the azure sky veiled in soft clouds, and a blue, satin-lined boat fastened by a gold cord to an alabaster pillar in readiness for amorous passengers.

The fan was not new: there were the marks of some spots that had been cleaned away, spots of blood perhaps, and the fine ivory sticks were stained in places.

Claude had bought it at a bric-a-brac shop filled with the plunder of chateau and hotel; it had been cheap and valuable, and at the time he had not cared that it had probably been stolen from some scene of murder and violence and that its one-time owner had almost certainly bowed her neck to a bitter fate--no, it had rather amused him to buy for the little dancer of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine the property of some great lady.

Now it seemed a sinister and horrid omen, this toy with the bloodspots scarcely erased. It had been meant as a peace-offering for Ambrosine--after their little quarrel, which was never to be mended this side of the grave.

He had had it in his pocket when he had gone to look at her for the last time.

Since then it had lain in the drawer forgotten, it had never occurred to him to give it to another woman--it was doubly the property of the dead. Now he handled it carefully, opening and shutting it in the candlelight and staring at those cupids who brought no thoughts of love and that faery scene that brought no thoughts of peace.

And as he looked he seemed to see the delicate thing in the small hands of Ambrosine as she sat up in the big bed with the gaudy draperies, and her fair hair fell down and obscured the fan.

Her fair hair...

How plainly he could see her fair hair as he had last seen it, folded into a neat pillow for her head.

He put the fan away and built up a big fire, feeding it with pine knots; he was possessed by the certainty that if he slept he would again dream of the journey to Saint-Cloud.

It seemed as if Ambrosine was in the room, trying to speak to him, to tell him something; but he would not let her, he would not put himself in her power; he would not sleep.

Among the neglected books on the little shelf by his bed was an old copy of Pascal. Claude took this down and began reading it with painful exactitude and attention. With this and strong coffee he kept himself awake till morning.

Before he left for the Chamber, he paid his landlord's son to go to Saint-Cloud and look at the house of Ambrosine, which he very carefully described, adding the excuse that he had been told of the place as a desirable house for the summer heat; above all things, the boy must notice whether it was inhabited or not.

All that day he was languid and heavy-eyed, weary from lack of sleep, with his nerves on the rack.

Through the dreary, monotonous hours he was picturing his messenger, treading unconsciously the way that had become so terrible to him, approaching the fatal house and finding it, as he had found it, three times in his dreams, deserted and decayed.

René made no reference to their conversation of the previous night, but he was more than ever friendly and pleasant.

When the intolerable day was at last over, he asked Claude to dine with him, but the other declined; his reason, which he did not give, was that he was desperately anxious to hear the news the boy had brought from Saint-Cloud.

When he reached home the fellow had returned; a boat had given him a lift each way.

Claude was foolishly relieved to see his calm cheerfulness. 'Well?' he asked, with the best indifference he could assume.

'Well, Citizen Boucher, I should not take that house at Saint-Cloud.'

'Why?' The words came mechanically.

'First of all, there has been a bad murder there.'

'How did you find that out?'

'The people on the boat told me--they go past every day.' So the thing was known--remembered.

'Never mind that, boy. What of the house?'

'It is in ruins, decay--'

'Ruins--decay?'

'Well, all shuttered up--'

'Shuttered?'

'Yes, citizen,' he began, staring at Claude, whose manner was certainly startling, 'and the garden full of weeds.'

Claude made an effort to speak rationally.

'So you did not see the house inside, eh?' he asked.

'No-one knew who had the key--the landlord lived in Paris, they said, and never came there. The place had a bad reputation because of the horrid murder done there.'

'In these times,' muttered Claude, 'are they so sensitive?'

'They are just ignorant people, citizen--those on the boat and those I met in the forest.'

'And the house was impossible?'

'It would need a good deal of repairing.'

'Ah--'

'And the weeds in the garden were monstrous--there was one great bramble across and across the door.'

Claude gave him a terrible look and dismissed him.

So it was all there, exactly like his dream.

There were only three days to the 12th--only three days perhaps to live.

When he reached his room he looked at the calendar, hoping he had made some mistake in the date.

No; in three days it would be the 12th.

He could not go to bed, but no coffee could keep him awake.

As soon as he was asleep he dreamed his dream of the journey to Saint-Cloud, nor could he rouse himself until the horrid sequence of events was complete.

He awoke shivering, unnerved and cold with sweat. He had to take brandy before he could fit himself to make his toilet and go to the Chamber.

As he hurried along the street fresh with the transient morning freshness of the city, the burden of his misery was lightened by a sudden thought. He would take a companion with him, he would take René.

That would defeat the dream.

The warning would have saved him; no-one would attack two of them and they could go armed; they need not go near the house, and they could proceed by water and not walk through the Park.

Claude felt almost himself again as he thought out this plan.

No sooner had he reached the Chamber than he found his friend and broached the scheme to him. René was agreeable, and readily accorded his company.

'I thought of it myself,' he said. 'I can easily get permission to come with you, and we will lay this ghost once and for ever.'

Claude was so relieved that he almost lost his old foreboding.

But the night before the journey he again dreamed that he was being murdered by the murderer of Ambrosine, who wore a green coat with dark blue frogs.

At the appointed hour they set out, René endeavouring to cheer

Claude, who was gloomy and taciturn, but as the journey proceeded, his spirits rose; the charm had been proved wrong in the first instance, he was not going on horseback to Saint-Cloud.

But when they reached the gates of the park, he was disappointed to find the boat stopped at the little quay and began unloading.

René had arranged with the captain; and René, it seemed, had misunderstood.

The boat went no farther.

But it was only a short walk across the park to Saint-Cloud and the Deputy's house--the captain could not understand Claude's discomfiture.

Well, they must walk--here again the dream was wrong.

He had a companion. René laughed at him; the walk would do them good this cold evening, and they would be at their destination long before dusk--as for the return, if they were not offered hospitality, well, there were good inns at Saint-Cloud.

They entered the magnificent iron gates, now always open, and started briskly across the grass.

Here it was, exactly as he had seen it in his dreams, the huge bare trees, the dead leaves underfoot, the pallid gleam of the river to the right, the expanse of forest to the left, through which now and then a fountain or a statue showed.

It was bitterly cold, the sky veiled, and presently a thin mist rose off the river, dimming everything with fog. Like the dim light of his dream.

'We shall lose our way,' he said.

'No; I know this way well.'

'You know it?'

'When I was a boy I used to live at Saint-Cloud,' said René.

They proceeded more slowly, muffled to the throats in their greatcoats, which they had worn all the journey, for it had been cold on the river also.

Claude thought of Ambrosine till his senses reeled round that one image.

Here she had walked, he with her, often enough--near was her house, near her grave.

He seemed to see her in every dimness between the trees--Ambrosine, with her fair hair mingling with the mist.

Suddenly before him a huge fountain arose with a dried basin and a featureless statue behind. And René stopped to latch up his shoe.

He was not thinking of his dream now, but he had the sensation that this had all happened before. As he looked at René, he muttered to himself, half stupidly: 'What an extraordinary coincidence!'

Then René straightened himself and slipped his hand through his friend's arm.

His mantle had fallen back a little, and Claude saw that he wore a new suit, dark green, frogged with dark blue, and again he muttered: 'What an extraordinary coincidence!'

'I know the way,' said René, and led him, as if he had been a blind man, through the shifting mist.

In a few moments they stood on the outskirts of the park and before the decayed and deserted house of Ambrosine--as he had seen it, with the weeds in the garden and the bramble across the door.

They entered the little patch of ground.

'Now we are here,' said René, 'we may as well look inside.'

So saying, he wrenched off one of the rotting shutters and climbed into the room.

Claude followed him, like a creature deprived of wits.

They stood together in the damp, dull, bare room--as they had stood together in the dream.

Claude looked at René's face, which had quite changed. 'So you murdered her?' he said in a sick voice.

'You never guessed?' asked René. 'I loved her, you see, and she loved me till you came. And then I hated both of you. I was mad from then, I think, as mad as you with your infernal dreams.'

'You murdered Ambrosine!' whimpered Claude.

'And your dream showed me the way to murder you. I have been waiting so long to find how to do it.'

Claude began laughing.

'Her fair hair--if one could open her grave one might see it again--like a pillow for her head...' He looked at René, whose pale and distorted

face seemed to grow larger, until it bore down on him like an evil thing blotting out hope.

Claude did not put a hand .to any of the weapons he had brought; he fell on his knees and held up his hands in an attitude of prayer, while he began to gabble senseless words.

And René fell on him with the knife that had killed Ambrosine.

The Hidden Ape

"Nothing at all," smiled the Doctor, "but a few bruises and shock. No, really nothing. It was a very brave thing for Joliffe to do," he added; "extremely brave."

"Of course, I understand that," said Professor Awkwright, a little stiffly. He felt that the Doctor thought him lacking in gratitude and sympathy, and he knew that he was indeed incapable of any emotional expression, also that he resented, deeply resented, the intrusion of the violent and sensational into a life that he had contrived to make exactly as he wished it to be.

But, all the same, he did feel immensely grateful to Joliffe, and said so again, snappishly, blinking behind the thick crystal spectacles that distorted his pale eyes.

"Naturally I shall do all in my power to show my deep appreciation."

The Doctor, who did not like the Professor, cheerfully remarked:

"It is rather rare, you know, for a scholar--a man who leads an intellectual and sedentary life--to be so prompt and decisive in action; it's no reflection on Joliffe to say that I would have thought him the last man--not to have the will to, but to have the power--to risk his

life for another."

When the Doctor had gone Professor Awkwright rather resentfully considered these words. He agreed with the Doctor; he secretly thought that Joliffe's action was quite amazing and the last thing he would have expected of him.

"I could never have done it," he confessed to himself ruefully. He had always, in a kindly fashion, patronized Joliffe, but now Joliffe was definitely revealed as the superior being. Really, in the Professor's estimation, the whole episode was disagreeable, and what was worse, slightly ridiculous; he was sure that the Doctor had been faintly amused.

Yet, he certainly ought to feel grateful to Joliffe and on many counts.

The incident which had first alarmed, then irritated the Professor, was this: his orphan ward Edmund had been out as usual with his tutor, Samuel Joliffe, and Charles the vicar's son, just one of the usual rambles over the lovely North Wales hills which were undertaken every day as a matter of duty; when Edmund, scrambling on ahead, had slipped, like the clumsy lad he was, over a precipice and hung, stunned, on a ledge overhanging a ravine.

Now the Professor would have thought that the jolly athletic Charles, a stout, trained youth, would really without any fuss at all have gone down the face of the rock and brought up Edmund; but Charles had done nothing of the kind; he had just "lost his head" like a silly girl and could think of nothing better to do than to run and fetch help from the nearest cottage which was some distance away. On the other hand, Samuel Joliffe, middle-aged, stiff-limbed, shortsighted, absent-minded to all appearances, cautious and timid, whom no one would expect to be quick or active, had actually lowered himself down the face of the precipice, supported Edmund till help arrived

and then, with great coolness and dexterity, with the aid only of a dubious rope and some frail saplings, hauled up Edmund and himself to safety.

It was all, Professor Awkwright thought, very grotesque, the sort of thing one would so much rather had not happened.

He peeped in at his nephew sleeping heavily on his bed behind a screen. Mrs. Carter, the housekeeper, was in charge; the wretched woman seemed to enjoy the sensation caused by the accident, as Professor Awkwright looked at the boy with the bandaged head, breathing heavily under the influence of the sleeping potion, she began to murmur the praises of Mr. Joliffe.

It was clear that the tutor would be a hero in the eyes of everyone; the Professor resented this as a fuss and an interruption to a very smooth existence, but he was, at bottom, a just, even an amiable man, and he did not wish to evade his obligations to Samuel Joliffe.

So he went downstairs rather nervously to the study where he was sure the tutor would be working and, as he went, he honestly put before himself the extent of his obligations towards Samuel Joliffe; these were very varied and deep and amounted to far more than gratitude for the rather absurd act of heroism yesterday.

Professor Awkwright was a born scholar and solitary; his one interest and passion was the most abstruse branch of archaeology, the deciphering of dead languages; he had always had sufficient means to enable him to devote himself entirely to this fascinating labor and the one interruption in a life otherwise devoid of incident had been when his only brother had died and left in his charge a sullen, unruly boy of ten years of age, of the type known as "difficult and awkward," slightly abnormal and not very lovable, but a boy who had a comfortable income from a nice little fortune that would make

him, when he attained his majority, quite a wealthy man.

Professor Awkwright had the conventional ideas of duty and subscribed, to the full, to the codes endorsed by his class and training, so he very scrupulously did his best with his unwelcome charge and made the great sacrifice of keeping with him a boy so obviously unfitted for school.

And after the Professor had found Samuel Joliffe, Edmund was no trouble at all; and the little household in the exceedingly comfortable but lonely Welsh mansion ran very smoothly and with a most agreeable, if eventless, harmony.

For Samuel Joliffe, besides being the perfect tutor, was the perfect secretary, the perfect assistant, and had thrown himself with the greatest ardor into the Professor's enthusiastic labors.

Indeed, Professor Awkwright, pausing at the door of the study, realized, in the emotional upset of the accident, that Joliffe was absolutely essential to him; after eight years of his support, help, assistance and company Joliffe was indeed indispensable; indispensable, that was the word.

"I daresay," said the little scholar to himself, pausing on the threshold, "I never quite appreciated Joliffe--of course, he has been handsomely paid and very well treated, but really I don't believe that I ever quite realized his--his sterling worth."

And Professor Awkwright thought, with a shudder, how ghastly it would have been if poor Edmund had died in that miserable way; he was fond of the unattractive boy who would probably never evoke any other affection in all his futile life.

And with that sharp realization of happiness that comes when

happiness is threatened, the Professor cast over with profound gratitude all the blessings he had hitherto taken for granted...the smooth, easy life; the congenial, successful work; the way that all four of them, himself, Joliffe, Edmund, Mrs. Carter the housekeeper, all fitted together, like hand in glove--the comfort, the peace, the ordered leisure of it all! And surely much of this was owing to Joliffe--Joliffe who was never out of humor, nor ill, nor wanted a holiday, who was never tired or dull, who had known from the first how to "manage" Edmund, who never crossed Mrs. Carter nor vexed the servants, who worked so diligently, with such enthusiasm and skill under his employer's direction...

The Professor opened the door quickly; he crossed to the desk where Joliffe was sitting (as he had known he would be), and said:

"I don't know how to thank you, Joliffe, how to express my gratitude, I really don't."

Joliffe rose and stared; this was the first time since his knowledge of him that Awkwright had expressed himself on impulse; the tutor stood humbly; behind him the huge desk was neatly piled with the manuscripts that embodied their joint labors on the subject of the Minoan language.

"But," added the Professor with even greater warmth, "I am quite resolved that you shall have your name on the book. That is only just--it is your work as much as mine, you have been far more, for years now, than an assistant--"

Joliffe's sandy face flushed.

"I could not think of that, sir, really, I couldn't; what I have done has been the greatest pleasure and honor."

He spoke sincerely, without servility; Awkwright grasped his hand.

"I know. But, of course, we are to go equal shares in this--I ought to have thought of it before."

He glowed with the pleasure of his generous action; it was no ordinary prize, no feeble glory that he offered; he believed that when his, their, book was published it would bring to the authors a fame equal to that of Champollion.

For the two secluded scholars working almost in secret were convinced that they had discovered the clue to the long-dead language of one of the most interesting civilizations of prehistoric Greece, that of Crete.

Joliffe said:

"I hope, sir, yesterday had not put this into your mind. What I did was nothing. Anyone would have done as much."

"I don't think so, Joliffe."

"Anyone, sir, as fond of Edmund as I am."

"Again I disagree. Presence of mind, coolness like that! Rare indeed. But, of course, one can't talk of rewards; absurd, of course; but--"

The Professor sat down in front of the great bow-window; his kindly, conventional and rather simple face, with the thin beard, speckled like his grey tweed coat, and the thinner hair exact and glossy over the large brow was clearly outlined against the shining laurels in the garden and the blue hills beyond.

Joliffe regarded him with meek intentness.

"But, you were saying, sir," he prompted--

"I was about to say," remarked the Professor candidly, "that a shock--like this--clarifies the air, as it were. I suppose we live rather a monotonous, rather an old-fogeyish sort of life, values get a little dimmed, one gets absorbed in the past, in one's work. One's own life gets a little unreal...until a thing like this happens..."

"I have never felt that," replied Joliffe thoughtfully.

"No? A remarkably clear brain," agreed the other with simple admiration. "I've noticed how you never lose grip on things. That's why you've been so successful with Edmund. But really, for myself, I confess that a--a revelation of this kind--what the loss of Edmund would mean--the sort of man you really are--wakes me up, puts everything clearly."

"I don't see that the fact that I rescued Edmund, in the most ordinary way, reveals the sort of man I am."

"But that kind of prompt action isn't expected of--of our type, Joliffe. It's most unusual; the Doctor said so."

"I don't think Dr. Jones knows very much."

"No, but I agreed with what he meant. And it is settled about the book."

Professor Awkwright felt very content for the rest of that day; the sense of the absurdity of the accident, the irritating, disturbing excitement had passed away. Edmund came down to tea and the household was stolidly normal again; but the Professor continued, as he had himself put it, "to see clearly"--the vast value of Joliffe, for instance, and Edmund's inarticulate and pathetic affection for him,

and the very agreeable intimacy that bound them all together; it was surprising how fond he was himself of the unattractive, slightly "mental" youth; why, he believed that if Edmund had really been killed the shock would have prevented him from finishing the book.

When the two men settled down in the study that evening after Edmund had gone to bed Professor Awkwright felt that their relationship had subtly changed; never had they been so intimate, never so frank, as if there was no possibility of any misunderstanding or irritation between them.

Joliffe seemed to "let himself go" intellectually; his usually respectful, almost timid manner mellowed, he was more candid, more brilliant, slightly, though quite unmistakably, different, Awkwright thought, from his habitual self.

One of Mrs. Carter's most tempting dinners had celebrated Edmund's escape; there had been good wine and afterwards, contrary to custom, good brandy.

Perhaps it was the brandy that stimulated the Professor's added sense of clarity, of which he had been aware all day; a most temperate man, he had always, on the few occasions when he had drunk liberally, been teased as to the right naming of his heightened perceptions. Did alcohol give everything an air of caricature, or did it allow you to see everything as it really was?

Was it, for instance, just excitement and then the brandy that made him think what a queer fellow Joliffe was?--or had he, Awkwright, always had his head so in the air that he had never before observed the strangeness of his constant companion? Joliffe sat a little more at his ease than he had ever sat before; a very tall, stiff, long-legged man, with an odd look of being featureless; the only definite object about his face was his glistening spectacles, for the rest a sandy

glow seemed to blot out any salient point in his countenance; even his profile seemed to mean nothing; a closer inspection showed his features to be sharp, small and neat, his expression composed and kindly.

He also must have been a little excited that night, also a little stimulated by the occasion and the brandy, for he forgot (to the Professor's amusement) to go up to his room and listen for the wireless news bulletin.

Professor Awkwright had always refused to have wireless, gramophone or telephone; but Joliffe, with meek persistence, had indulged in all in his own room; he had little chance of using any of these inventions and he scrupulously contrived so that they never annoyed the rest of the household; but he liked to "sneak off," as the Professor put it with indulgent irony, to listen to news, a talk, or a concert; but tonight he seemed to have forgotten even the attraction of the evening bulletin which he so seldom missed.

The two elderly men talked of their researches, of the book that was going to bring glory to both, and of the accident of yesterday which the Professor, at least, could by no means dismiss from his mind.

"It was pure impulse," said Joliffe at last; "if I had reflected at all I don't suppose that I should have done it."

"I'm sure that you would."

"No, because I always think that we attach too much importance to human life. And Edmund wouldn't really mind dying; I daresay he'd be better off in another state."

"I didn't know that you had those ideas."

"They aren't ideas. Surely, sir, you don't hold by all the orthodox

views--"

"I'd really rather--"

"Oh, the sacredness of human life, et cetera, et cetera?"

"I suppose so, I haven't quite thought it out."

"I have. I can't see, sir, how, after all your researches you can avoid a broader view...look at the East, Russia, Mexico, today--look at the Elizabethans, look at America, at Italy--and how they regard and have regarded death--"

"You don't think it matters--violent death?"

"No. An intelligent man should be able to deal with death--give it, withhold it, accept it, avoid it, according to his reason. The world was more worthwhile when this was so."

"But, my dear Joliffe, to argue like that is to condone murder," Awkwright smiled, very comfortable in his chair, "and suicide."

Joliffe did not reply, he seemed sunk in a pleasing reverie; to rouse him Awkwright said:

"I suppose one gets conventional-minded on these subjects, but I think the West is right in the value put on human life--our violences, our indifferences to right and wrong, our cowardices are nothing, I fear, but manifestations of the hidden ape, still lurking within so many of us, alas!"

Joliffe listened to this speech with closed eyes.

"On the contrary," he declared, "I believe that the hidden ape in me made me rescue Edmund."

"My dear Joliffe, as if apes--"

"They do--animal affection--animal devotion, no reason, no logic. I am fond of Edmund."

"Why?" wondered the Professor rather wistfully.

"One doesn't know. The ape again! The boy never pretends, he is very wise about some things, has extraordinary instincts! I believe I understand him as no one else ever will."

Joliffe sat up suddenly. He was smiling, his small eyes looked yellow behind the glasses, his movement seemed to dismiss the subject; they each drank some more brandy and began to discuss the book; but this speedily brought them to the same point; Joliffe remarked on the beauty of some of the Minoan seals he had been copying the very morning of the accident, and Awkwright's comment was that the artist who designed them had an evil mind.

"Why?" challenged the tutor with his new freedom.

"Well, they are evil. The Minoans were, it is acknowledged--cruel; consider their bull-leaping sports--no soul..."

"Nonsense!" Never had Joliffe expressed himself so boldly to his employer; he seemed really excited, "They were simply too civilized to put so much value on individual life--"

"The hidden ape wasn't hidden, you mean?" smiled Awkwright.

They argued keenly and at length, remaining in the study long after their usual hour for retiring; to Awkwright it was an entirely academical discussion, but Joliffe seemed to throw more and more feeling into it until he was making quite a personal point of his

contention that no civilized people would consider murder a crime.

The Professor did not know how they had got to this subject; it was strange how the accident seemed to have thrown both a little out of their stride, a little off their balance; even Awkwright felt the mental atmosphere becoming distasteful, an unpleasant sense of unreality obscured the familiar cosy room; he wished that Joliffe would not talk so much, so at random (and he had never wished that before). He roused himself out of a disagreeable lethargy to say, with a rather false attempt at authority:

"This sort of stuff is really absurd from a man like you, Joliffe." The tutor rose and stood in front of the fire; his attitude was dogmatic, his habitual featurelessness seemed to have developed into a face that Awkwright did not recognize.

"Pardon me, my dear sir, how do you know what kind of man I am?"

"We have been intimate for eight years."

"But I know you much better than you know me."

"I don't agree.

"Well, what do you know of me? You said yourself that what I did yesterday surprised you."

"But--"

Joliffe talked him down.

"You've always accepted me on my face value, you just met me through an agency. I had excellent credentials and you were quite satisfied. You never asked me why I had no relations, no friends, why I never wanted a holiday--"

"My dear Joliffe," interrupted the Professor testily, "don't try to make yourself out a mysterious person. I know you as just a solitary scholar like myself, one who happens to have drifted away from his relatives and not cared to make friends; come, come, this is all really rather childish."

"Is it?" Joliffe peered over his glasses down on the little man in the chair, his face was sharpened by what seemed a queer vanity. "So you think that you know me through and through?"

"My dear fellow, of course I do."

"Well, to begin with, my name isn't Samuel Joliffe."

The Professor tried to smile; he thought this was a joke, but it was certainly a stupid, vulgar joke, and he wished that the tutor, who must really be a little drunk, would be quiet and go up to bed.

"Do you remember the Hammerton case--ten years ago?" demanded Joliffe.

"As if I ever took the slightest interest--"

"No, I thought you didn't. Well, it was the case of a man, an educated man of means, well-connected, intelligent, being tried for the murder of his wife. The usual arsenic from weed-killer."

"I do recall something--Hammerton was acquitted, wasn't he?"

"Yes. But no one thought he was innocent; the jury just gave him the benefit of a very small doubt. A "not proven" it would have been in Scotland. He was ruined--he had to disappear."

"But I don't see what all this has got to do with anything--"

"Wait a minute. Though everyone thought Hammerton was guilty, everyone had a secret sympathy with him."

"Morbid sentimentality."

"No, his wife was such an awful woman, she nagged and whined and pestered and was always sickly, and he was a very decent fellow; he just wanted peace and quiet, and then, perhaps, one day she went too far even for his patience--"

"And the hidden ape leaped up in him? A very usual case--"

"Not at all. Perhaps he used his reason and removed a worthless, tiresome, repulsive creature--"

"If he did he was a murderer," snapped the Professor. "And, since he was acquitted, we have no right to assume that."

He rose, hoping to silence Joliffe, but the tutor leaned forward, took him by the lapel of the coat, and said with a smile: "I am Hammerton."

The little Professor twisted and squealed in grotesque (through it all he felt all was grotesque) horror.

"No," he cried, "no, we've both had too much to drink and it's time we went to bed."

But the tutor did not release his calm, steady grasp on the other's lapel.

"A man of your intelligence, sir," he said gently, "should not find my information so surprising, I merely gave it to prove a point; it can't possibly make any difference to our relationship."

"Of course you were acquitted, but, but it is very terrible, very unfortunate. And the false name..."

"I had no chance with my own. I waited for two years for an opportunity like you gave me. And I did not deceive you. My credentials were exact save for the name. I had all the attainments, the qualifications you required, and I believe that I have served you faithfully--you and Edmund."

"Of course." The Professor made a show of recovering himself, he twisted away from the other and sat down. "And then yesterday--but I wish that you hadn't told me."

"Why, what difference can it make?"

"Well, it's a shock and you spoke just now as if--as if you were--but it's absurd."

"What's absurd?"

"Didn't you say that you had--that you were--?"

"Guilty? I assumed it, yes. I don't say so definitely--let it go. I was acquitted and no one can touch me now, even if I confessed, and I don't intend to confess. We need not talk of it again."

Professor Awkwright sickened; he sat shrunk together in the big cosy, pleasant chair and felt all the agreeable, safe and familiar places of his life laid bare and devastated.

"I should like to think that it isn't true, Joliffe." The little man's eyes were pathetic behind the thick crystals.

"I can prove it if you wish. What difference can it make? There's the boy, our work, the book, all our years together. Whatever I did can't

affect any of that?"

"Quite so. Quite so."

The tutor went to bed; he did not seem in the least disturbed, he spoke of the Minoan seals he hoped to finish copying in the morning, and gave his usual "Good night, sir" cheerfully.

The Professor sat alone with his problem.

What *ought* he to do?

What did he *intend* to do?

Joliffe was essential to him, to the boy, to the book...where would he find another man who suited him so well, who would be willing to live his kind of life? Who would put up with Edmund?

Professor Awkwright groaned and began to argue speciously with himself.

Joliffe had been acquitted, a victim of a terrible misfortune; it was ten years ago and no one's business; Joliffe had put him under the greatest obligation yesterday--why shouldn't everything go on as before?

"Just forget all about it, eh? Joliffe would never speak of it again."

But there was that stern streak in the Professor that made him soon reject the easy, the convenient way, and all specious, fallacious reasonings.

He grimly tackled himself; the man was almost, on his own confession, a murderer, and one without remorse; the Professor utterly rejected all arguments about the codes of the Cretans, the

Elizabethans, Mexico and Chicago and the value of human life; he was an upright, law-abiding man; murder was murder, deceit was deceit; of course it was most extraordinary that a cultured human being like Joliffe...He returned to his own theory of the hidden ape, the ape striking down where it hated, rescuing where it loved; he shuddered before the horrid vision of Joliffe, suddenly agile as a monkey, scaling down those rocks after Edmund...he had wondered how the stiff-limbed man had done it...the Professor checked these crazy, miserable thoughts, he forced himself to be brave and cool.

After all, there was only one thing to be done. Joliffe must go.

Yes, if all the Professor's peace and happiness went with him he must go; that was the only right, reasonable and logical solution of the horrid problem.

And, screwed up to an unnatural courage that he feared would not last till the morning, Professor Awkwright went up at once to Samuel Joliffe's (for so he persisted in naming him) room.

The tutor opened the door to the timid knock of his employer. "I am afraid I must speak to you, Joliffe, at once."

Joliffe wore a camel-hair dressing-gown, rather short in the sleeves, he looked meek, surprised and of an imperturbable innocence; the Professor felt very shaky indeed as he followed him into the neat bedroom.

"Speak to me, sir, at once? About the book?"

Joliffe glanced at a pile of notes on the table by his bedside, but Awkwright glanced at the wireless set, the gramophone, the telephone.

Why had it not occurred to him before that these were outlets for the

tutor's personality which was by no means satisfied by the quiet scholarly life that, outwardly, seemed so to content him?

Perhaps he spoke to friends of the old days on the telephone, no doubt he kept in touch with the busy doings of the world by means of the wireless, and indulged personal tastes with the gramophone discs--safety valves all these for a dangerous, complex personality.

"I'm afraid"--Professor Awkwright checked himself with a cowardly clutching at a faint hope--"I suppose it wasn't all a joke about your being Hammerton?"

"It wasn't a joke. I thought I knew you well enough to tell you. But you began to say, am afraid'--?"

"I am afraid that you must go."

"I must go? You mean that I am dismissed?"

"I wouldn't put it like that--"

"But that is what it comes to--"

"I'm afraid so."

Joliffe seemed completely amazed; he took off his glasses, fidgeted with them, returned them to his nose, and asked dully:

"What about the boy?"

"It's dreadful, I know--but--"

"What are you going to tell him?"

"Oh, not the truth--some excuse--I know it is all dreadful," repeated

the Professor feebly.

"Dreadful?" repeated Joliffe shortly. "It is absurd. It means that we have never understood each other--indeed, totally mistaken each other--all these years. I thought that, under your little mannerisms, you were a broad-minded man--"

"But a question of--of--"

"Of murder? I never admitted to murder, but if I had? It can't be possible that you take the view of the man in the street about that--think of these ancient peoples we are always studying--"

"It is no use, Joliffe." Professor Awkwright was shuddering with anguish. "You must go."

"And the book?"

The little Professor's drawn face took on a livelier expression of grief.

"The book must be sacrificed"--there was heroism in his supreme renunciation. "I quite agree that you have a large share in it--but to publish it under an assumed name--or under your own!"

"Impossible?"

"Quite impossible, you must see it."

"I don't see it."

They stared at each other with the bitter hostility only frustrated affection can assume; Professor Awkwright's dry and trembling fingers stroked his thin grey beard; he felt quite sick with the temptation to "forget all about it" as he put it childishly to himself--why not, for the book's sake, the boy's sake, hush up the whole affair? It

was so long ago and who was to care now?

But the little man's innate integrity was too strong for his intense desires; Joliffe was watching him quietly, with dignity, yet as a prisoner may watch a judge about to pronounce sentence. "I'm happy here and useful," he remarked drily. "And you have nothing to go on but bare suspicion--you might consider that."

"I can't tell you quite what it is, Joliffe--" The Professor's anguish was very stressed and Joliffe's glance darkened into some emotion that seemed (the other man thought) pity mingled with disdain.

"Perhaps," he said, "you are afraid? Of me? Of what you call 'the hidden ape'?"

"That's absurd!" Awkwright made a great effort to give the whole nightmare business a commonplace, almost a jovial, air, to reduce what was so fantastically horrible and had indeed changed the aspect of everything for him, into an affair of everyday--just the giving of "notice" to a secretary, a tutor, who had proved unsuitable--a distasteful business, no more, but he shuddered with the desperate futility of this attempt; he made for the door with an uncontrollable need to get away from Joliffe's gaze.

He had said that it was "absurd" for him to be afraid--but of course he was afraid, horribly afraid, of Joliffe, of his own weakness, of something more powerful than either that seemed to fill the room like a fearful miasma.

But nothing sensational happened; Joliffe said in the most ordinary tones:

"Very well. I will go tomorrow. Of course I shall miss the book. And Edmund."

At the door Professor Awkwright mumbled:

"I shall always remind Edmund that you saved his life--what a great deal he owes you."

"Oh, there won't be any need of that--he'll remember me all right--good night, Professor Awkwright."

The Professor closed the door, and went, not to his bedroom, but to his study where he and Joliffe had worked for so long in complete harmony.

"I'm sure I've done right," he kept saying to himself, "I'm quite sure I've done right." But he found it unbearable to look at the other man's notes, at the neat evidences of his long labor, he found it impossible to rest or in any way to consider the situation calmly, and he could not for a second conceive in what manner he should deal with Edmund when that poor youth discovered that Joliffe was gone.

And there was another torturing horror working in Awkwright's mind.

"I say I am quite sure, but I never shall be quite sure--I mean if he is--or not--"

Professor Awkwright sat quite still for a full quarter of an hour; staring at the materials for his book which showed familiar yet horrible in the shaded electric lamp. He was really hardly able to grasp his misery nor the full value of all that he had sacrificed to a principle; he tried to comfort himself by the sheer strength of his integrity of purpose, the blamelessness of his own motives--but it was useless; he could make himself conscious of nothing but his great personal disaster.

The window had been set open to air the room and Awkwright became gradually conscious of the physical discomfort of the cold

draft blowing beneath the blind.

He rose at last heavily, and almost without his own volition to remedy this; exhausted by emotion he stood with the blind in his hand and stared stupidly across the lawn and the shrubbery, faintly lit by the beams of a high moon falling through a mist; he soon forgot that he had risen to shut the window, and stood patiently in the cold air which harshly stirred his loose grey hair.

Suddenly his attention was aroused and held by an object which suddenly swung into the circle of his vision and seemed immediately to become the focus of the midnight landscape and of his own mind.

A thin, darkly clad figure was proceeding across the lawn, half leaping, half crawling through the shadows; the arms looked very long, now and then the lanky, uncouth shape appeared to sink to hands and knees in a scrawling effort at haste.

Professor Awkwright dropped the blind; with no more hesitation than if an imperative hand had seized his collar he swung round, ascended the stairs and crept into Edmund's room.

Until he looked on the bed he did not know why the sight of the ape-like figure had sent him to the boy.

The cosy glow of the carefully sheltered night light showed in the warm flickers of soft illumination a lifeless body on the scarcely disarranged pillow; powerful hands had skilfully strangled Edmund in his sleep.

Again Awkwright found himself at the window, trying now to scream, to signal, to express his scattered soul; again he saw the ape-like figure, running over the fields beyond the garden, towards the gloomy hills; it seemed to proceed with a hideous exultation, a dark joy

powerfully expressed in the swinging animal movements, in the triumphant haste towards the wilderness, in the challenging thrown back head which seemed to howl at the moon that swung in an unfathomable, dreadful void.

The Sign-Painter And The Crystal Fishes

I# The River And The House

The house was built beside a river. In the evening the sun would lie reflected in the dark water, a stain of red in between the thick shadows cast by the buildings. It was twilight now, and there was the long ripple of dull crimson, shifting as the water rippled sullenly between the high houses.

Beneath this house was an old stake, hung at the bottom with stagnant green, white and dry at the top. A rotting boat that fluttered the tattered remains of faded crimson cushions was affixed to the stake by a fraying rope. Sometimes the boat was thrown against the post by the strong evil ripples, and there was a dismal creaking noise.

Opposite this house was a garden--a narrow strip of ground closed round by the blank, dark houses, and led up to from the water by a flight of crumbling steps.

Nothing grew in this garden but tall, bright, rank grass and a small tree that bore white flowers. The house it belonged to was empty and shuttered; so was every house along the canal except this one, at the top window of which Lucius Cranfield sat shivering in his mean red coat. He was biting his finger and looking out across the water at the tree with pale flowers knocking at the closed shutter beside it.

The room was bare and falling to decay. Cobwebs swung from the

great beam in the roof, and in every corner a spider's web was spun across the dirty plaster walls.

There was no glass in the window, and the shutters swung loose on broken hinges. Now and again they creaked against the flat brick front of the house, and then Lucius Cranfield winced.

He held a round, clear mirror in his hand, and sometimes he looked away from the solitary tree to glance into it. When he did so he beheld a pallid face surrounded with straight brown hair, lips that had once been beautiful, and blurred eyes veined with red like some curious stone.

As the red sunlight began to grow fainter in the water a step sounded on the rotting stairway, the useless splitting door was pushed open, and Lord James Fontaine entered.

Slowly, and with a mincing step, he came across the dusty floor. He wore a dress of bright violet watered silk, his hair was rolled fantastically, and powdered such a pure white that his face looked sallow by contrast. To remedy this he had painted his cheeks and his lips, and powdered his forehead and chin. But the impression made was not of a pink and fresh complexion, but of a yellow countenance rouged. There were long pearls in his ears and under his left eye an enormous patch. His eyes slanted towards his nose, his nostrils curved upwards, and his thin lips were smiling.

He carried a cane hung with blood-colored tassels, and his waistcoat was embroidered with green flowers, the hue of an emerald, and green flowers the tint of a pale sea.

"You paint signs, do you not?" he said, and nodded.

"Yes, I paint signs," answered the other. He looked away from Lord

James and across the darkening water at the lonely tree opposite. The sky above the deserted houses was turning a cold wet grey. A flight of crows went past, clung for a moment round the chimney-pots, and flew on again.

"Will you design me a sign-board?" asked Lord James, smiling. "Something noble and gay, for I have taken a new house in town."

"My workshop is downstairs," said Lucius Cranfield, without looking round. "Why did you come up?" He laid down the mirror and rubbed his cold fingers together.

"I rang and there was no answer, I knocked and there was no answer, so I pushed open the door and came up; why not?" Lord James regarded the sign-painter keenly, and smiled again, and pressed the knob of his clouded cane against his chin.

"Oh, why not?" echoed Lucius Cranfield. "Only this is a poor place to come to for a gay and noble sign."

He turned his head now, and there was a curious twist on his colorless lips.

"But you have a very splendid painting swinging outside your own door," said Lord James suavely. "Never did I see fairer drawing nor brighter hues. It is your work?" he questioned.

"Mine, yes," assented the sign-painter drearily.

"Fashion me a sign-board such as that," said Lord James. Lucius Cranfield left off rubbing his hands together.

"The same subjects?" he asked.

The other lowered his lids.

"The subjects are curious," he replied. "Where did you get them?"

"From life," said the sign-painter, staring at the tattered veils of cobwebs fluttering on the broken window-frame. "From my life."

The bright dark eyes of the visitor flickered from right to left. He moved a little nearer the window, where, despite the thickening twilight, his violet silk coat gleamed like the light on a sheet of water.

"You have had a strange life," he remarked, sneering, "to cull from it such incidents."

"What did you behold that was so extraordinary?" asked Lucius Cranfield.

"On one side there is depicted a gallows, a man in a gay habit hanging on it, and his face has some semblance to your own; the reverse bears the image of a fish, white, yet shot with all the colors...it is so skilfully executed that it looks as if it moved through the water..."

An expression of faint and troubled interest came over the sign-painter's face.

"Have you ever seen such a fish?" he asked.

Lord James's features seemed to contract and sharpen.

"Never," he said hastily.

Lucius Cranfield rose slowly and stiffly.

"There are two in the world," he said, half to himself; "and before the end I shall find the other, and then everything will be mended and put

straight."

"Unless you lose your own token first," remarked Lord James harshly.

"How did you know I had one?" asked the sign-painter sharply. Lord James laughed.

"Oh, you're going mad, my fine friend! Do you not feel that you must be, living alone in such fashion in this old house?" Lucius Cranfield dragged himself to a cupboard in the wall.

"How my limbs ache!" he muttered. "Mad?" A look of cunning spread over his features. "No, I shall not go mad while I have the one crystal fish, nor before I find the owner of the other."

It was so dark they could barely see each other; but the nobleman's dress still shone bright and cold in the gloom.

"Yet it is enough to make a man go mad," he remarked suavely, "to reflect how rich and handsome you were once, with what fine clothes and furniture and friends...and then to remember how your father was hanged, and you were ruined, and all through the lies of your enemy...

"But my enemy died, too," said Lucius Cranfield. He took a thick candle and a rusty tinder-box out of the cupboard.

"His son is alive," replied Lord James.

A coarse yellow flame spurted across the dust.

"I wish I had killed them both," said the sign-painter; "but I could never find the son...How badly the candle burns!..."

He held the tinder to the cold wax, and only a small tongue of feeble

fire sprang up.

"You are quite mad!" smiled Lord James. "You never killed either...and now that your blood is chilled with misery and weakened with evil days, you never will."

The candle-flame strengthened and illumined the chamber. It showed Lord James holding his sharp chin in a long white hand, and woke his diamonds into stars.

"Will you come downstairs and choose your design?" said Lucius Cranfield, shivering. "Take care of the stairs. They are rather dusty."

He shuffled to the door and held aloft the light. It revealed the twisting stairway where the plaster hung cracked and dry on the walls, or bulged damp and green in patches as the damp had come through. The rafters were warped and bending, and in one spot a fan-shaped fungus had spread in a blotch of mottled orange.

Lord James came softly up behind the sign-painter, and peered over the stairs.

"This is a mean place," he said, smiling, "for a great gentleman to live in...and you were a great gentleman once, Mr. Cranfield." The other gave him a cunning look over his shoulder.

"When I find the owner of the fish," he answered, "I shall be a great gentleman again or kill my enemy--that is in the spell." They went downstairs slowly because of the rotting steps and uncertain light. Lord James rested his long fingers lightly on the dusty balustrade.

"Do you not find the days very long and dull here?" he asked.

The reply came unsteadily from the bowed red figure of the sign-painter.

"No...I paint...and then I make umbrellas."

"Umbrellas!" Lord James laughed unpleasantly.

"And parasols. Would you not like a parasol for your wife, James Fontaine?"

"Ah, you know me, it seems."

"I know what you call yourself," said Lucius Cranfield. "And here is my studio. Will you look at the designs upon the wall?"

Lord James grinned and stepped delicately along the dark passage to the door indicated. It opened into a low chamber the entire depth of the house. There were windows on either side: one way looking onto the river, the other onto the street.

Lucius Cranfield set the candle in a green bottle on the table, and pointed round the walls where all manner of drawings on canvas, wood, and paper hung. They depicted horrible and fantastic things--mandrakes, dragons, curious shells and plants, monsters, and distorted flowers. In one corner were a number of parasols of silk and brocade, ruffled and frilled, having carved handles and ribboned sticks.

Lord James put up his glass and looked about him.

"So you know who I am?" he said, speaking in an absorbed way and keeping his back to Lucius Cranfield, who stood huddled together on the other side of the table, staring before him with dead-seeming eyes.

There was no answer, and Lord James laughed softly.

"You paint very well, Mr. Cranfield, but I must have something more cheerful than any of these"--he pointed his elegant cane at the designs. "That fish, now, that you have on your own sign, that is a beautiful thing."

The sign-painter groaned and thrust his fingers into his untidy brown hair.

"I cannot paint that again," he said.

"Sell me the sign, then." Lord James spoke quickly.

"I cannot...it is hanging there that it may be seen...that whosoever holds the other fish may see it...and then..."

"How mad you are!" cried Lord James. "What then, even should one come who has the other fish?" His black eyes blinked sharply, and his lips twitched back from his teeth.

"Then I shall find my enemy. The witch said so..."

"But you may die first."

"I cannot die till the spell is accomplished," shivered Lucius Cranfield. "Nor can I lose the fish."

Lord James put his hand to his waistcoat-pocket.

"Your light is very dim," he remarked. "I do not see clearly, but I think I observe a violet-colored parasol--"

The other lifted his head.

"They are very interesting to make."

"Will you show me that one?"

Lucius Cranfield turned slowly towards the far corner of the room.

"I began to work on that the night my father was hanged...as I sewed on the frills I thought of my enemies and how I hated them; and the night I killed one of them I finished it, carving the handle into the likeness of an ivory rose."

"You have sinned also," said Lord James, through his teeth. He took his hand from his pocket and put it behind his back. "I have been a great sinner," answered the sign-painter.

He took the purple parasol from the corner and shook out its shimmering silk furbelows.

"I will buy that." Lord James leant against the table, close to the candle flaring in the green bottle. In its yellow light the brilliant color of his coat shone like a jewel.

"The parasol is not for sale," said Lucius Cranfield sourly, gazing down on it. "Why do you not choose your design and go?" Now it was quite dark, both outside, beyond the windows, and in the corners of the long room. The waters sounded insistently as they lapped against the house. There was no moon; but through a rift in the thick, murky sky one star flickered, and the sign-painter lifted his dimmed eyes from the candle-flame and looked at it.

"What do you see?" asked Lord James curiously. He came softly up bed the other.

"A star," was the reply. "It is shining above the lonely white tree that is always knocking at the closed shutters..."

Lord James's hand came round from behind his back.

"But one can never see them both at the same time," continued the sign-painter. "When the star comes out, the tree is hidden; and only when the star sets..."

Lord James's fine hand rose slowly and fell swiftly...

Lucius Cranfield sank on his face silently, and the flaring light of the unsnuffed candle glistened on the wet dagger as it was withdrawn from between his shoulders.

Lord James stepped back and gazed with a long smile at his victim, who writhed an instant and then lay still on the dusty floor.

The sound of the water without seemed to increase his strength. The secretive yet turbulent noise of it filled the chamber like a presence as Lord James turned over the body of the sign-painter and opened his red coat.

In an inner pocket he found it, wrapped in a piece of blue satin.

The crystal fish. It was of all colors yet of no color; translucent as water, holding, like a bubble, all hues, finely wrought with fins and scales, light and cold to the hand, shining with a pure light of its own to the eye.

Lord James rose from his knees and put out the candle.

The river sounded so loud that he paused to listen to it. He thought he could distinguish the swish of oars and the latter of them in the rowlocks.

He went to the window and looked out. By the glimmer of the star and the radiance cast by the fish in his hand he could discern that there was nobody on the river, only the deserted boat fastened to the

rotting stake.

He smiled; the faint light was caught in his ribbons, his diamonds, his dark, evil eyes. As he stared up and down the black road of water, the crystal fish began to writhe in his hand. It pushed and struggled, then leapt through his fingers and plunged into the blackness of the river.

Lord James peered savagely after it, his smile changing to a grin of anger. But the fish had sunk like a bolt of iron, and thinking of the depth of the river Lord James was comforted.

He came back to the table. It was quite dark, but his eyes served him equally well day or night. He picked up his clouded cane with the crimson tassels, his black hat laced with gold, his vivid green cloak, he kissed his hand to the prone body of the sign-painter, and left the room. In a leisurely fashion he walked down the passage, pushed open the crazy front door, and stepped out into the lonely street.

He looked up at the sign on which were painted the crystal fish and the man on the gallows; then he began to put on his gloves.

As he did so the violet parasol came to his mind. He turned back.

Softly he re-entered the long studio. The noise of the water had subsided to a mere murmur. Rats were running about the room and sitting on the body of Lucius Cranfield. He could see them despite the intense darkness, and he stepped delicately to avoid their tails.

The violet parasol was on the floor near the dead man. He stooped to pick it up, and the rats squealed and showed their teeth.

Lord James nodded to them and left the house again with the parasol under his arm.

II # The River And The Garden

The garden sloped down to the straight high-road upon the side to which the house faced, and at the back ran the river dividing the pleasaunce from the meadows.

Separating the garden from the road was a prim box hedge, very high, very wide, and very old. Behind this grew the neat garden flowers, and beneath it the tangled weeds that edged the road.

Here sat Lord James on a milestone, playing Faro with a one-eyed gipsy

The summer sunset sparkled on the red gables of the house and in the clothes of Lord James, which were of crimson and blue sarcenet branched with gold and silver.

The gipsy was young and ugly; he wore a green patch over his eyeless socket, and now and then listened, keenly, to the sound of the church-bells that came up from the valley, for the village ringers were practicing for Lord James's wedding.

The two played silently. The red and black cards scattered over the close green grass shaded by the large wild-parsley flowers. Beside the milestone lay Lord James's hat, stick, and cloak. His horse was fastened by its bridle to a stout branch of a laurel-tree that bent over from the garden.

"You always win," said the gipsy.

Lord James smiled, then coughed till he shook the powder off his face on to his cravat.

"Another game," he said, and shuffled the cards.

At this a lady looked over the box hedge, and gave them both a bitter frown.

Little bright pink and blue ribbons were threaded through her high-piled white curls, round her neck was a diamond necklace, and on the front of her black velvet bodice a long trail of jasmine was pinned. Her painted lips curled scornfully, and her azure eyes darkened as she stared across and over the box hedge at Lord James.

He looked up at her, waved his hand, and rose.

"You are late," she remarked stiffly.

"I have been playing cards," he answered. "May I present you to my friend?" He pointed to the gipsy.

"No," she said, and turned her back.

The gipsy laughed silently. The sound of the bells swelled and receded in the golden evening.

"Take my horse round to the stables." Lord James grinned at the gipsy, and gathered up his hat and cloak from the grass.

"I hate those bells!" cried the lady pettishly.

"They will ring no more after tomorrow, my dear."

Lord James came round to the gate as he spoke, and entered the garden.

She gave him a side-glance, and pouted. Her enormous pink silk hoop, draped with festoons of white roses, overspread the narrow garden-path, and crushed the southernwood that edged it. Her hands rested on her black velvet panniers embroidered with garlands of

crimson carnations. There was a moon-shaped patch on her bare throat and one like a star on her rouged cheek; beneath her short skirts showed her black buckle shoes and immensely high red heels. Her name was Serena Thornton.

"I have broken my parasol," she said, looking at the gables of her house where the red-gold sunset rested. "The violet one you brought me."

"It can be mended," answered Lord James.

He came up to her, and they kissed.

"Yes," assented Serena. "I sent it to be mended today," she added. He laughed.

"There is no one here can mend a parasol like that. You must give it to me, Serena, and I will take it to town."

They moved slowly along the gravel walk, he in front of her, since her hoop did not allow him to be by her side.

It was a very pleasant garden. There were beds of pinks, of stocks, of roses, bushes of laurel, yew, and box, all intersected with little paths that crossed one another and led towards the house.

"There is a man in the village," said Lady Serena, "who is a maker of umbrellas. He came here yesterday."

"Ah?" questioned Lord James. He glanced back over his shoulder. "I heard he was painting a new sign for 'The Goat and Compasses,' and that he had made a beautiful blue umbrella for the host, so I sent down my parasol."

A slight greenish tinge, visible through the paint and powder,

overspread Lord James's handsome face.

"It was careless of you to break it," he said softly.

Lady Serena lifted her shoulders.

"I could not help it. Shall I tell you how it happened?"

They had reached a square plot of close grass round which ran the box hedge and a low stone coping. In the center stood a prim fountain, and in its clear water swam the golden and ruby carp.

"Yes, tell me how it happened," said Lord James. He pressed his handkerchief to his thin lips and looked up at the sunset.

"I wish they would stop those bells!" cried Lady Serena.

"They are practicing for our wedding tomorrow, my dear," he smiled.

They could walk now side by side, she looking in front of her, and he gazing at the sunset that was pale and bright, the color of soft gold, of pink coral, and of a dove's wings above the gables of her house.

"I was walking by the river two days ago," said Lady Serena, "and I had in my hand the crystal fish. Do you remember, Lord James, that I showed it to you just before you left for town?"

"Yes; a foolish toy," he answered.

"How pleasant the box smells!" murmured Lady Serena, in a softer tone. "Well, I walked along the bank, thinking of you, and as I looked into the water I saw another fish--it floated just as if it were swimming--and oh, it was like the one I held in my hand! Just as it neared me it became entangled in the water weeds..."

"This does not explain how you broke your parasol," remarked Lord James.

"I drew the fish to land with it--my new parasol that your little black boy had just brought me--and broke the handle."

Lord James turned his pallid face towards her.

"Did you get the fish?"

"Yes. It is just like the one I have." She pulled out a green ribbon from the white velvet bag that hung on her arm, and at the end of it dangled two crystal fishes, cut and carved finely, holding a clear light, and filled with changing colors.

Lady Serena touched one with her scented forefinger. "That is the one I found. See, it has a bright blood-like stain across the side."

"So it has," said Lord James, putting up his glass. "It is curious you should have found it. A witch gave you the other, did you not say?"

"Yes," she answered half sullenly. "And she told me that the other was owned by my lover, and that he must live in misery till he found me." She turned the blue light of her eyes on her companion.

"*You* should have had it," she said, and slipped the fishes back into her bag.

The afterglow was fading from the sky, and they turned towards the house.

"I won three thousand pounds at Faro last night," said Lord James, "and I have brought you some presents."

And he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a string of

amethysts.

"I dislike the color," said Lady Serena, and put it aside. "It is the color you wear," he answered.

She took the necklace at this with a sudden laugh, and fastened it round her long, pale throat.

They reached the three shallow steps that led to the open door of the house, and passed side by side out of the sunset glow into the soft-hued gloom of the wide hall.

In the great banqueting-room a dinner of two covers was laid. The service was of agate and silver, the glasses twisted with milk-white lines. The table was lit by six tall candles painted with wreaths of pinks and forget-me-nots, and their light ran gleaming and faint over the white cloth.

"I am going to try on my wedding-dress," said Lady Serena. "Will you wait for me?"

"It is unlucky to wear your wedding-dress before your wedding-day," answered Lord James.

But she left the chamber without a word or a smile.

The room opened by wide windows onto the terrace at the back that sloped down to the river, and the sound of the water throbbing between its banks seemed to grow in volume and to speak threateningly to Lord James as he sat at the table with the glass and silver glittering before him, and the heart-shaped candle-flames casting a flickering glow over his sickly face.

It was the same river, and he knew it. As the last flush of light faded from the heavens he could see the moon, a strong pearl color, rise

above the trees, and a great sparkling reflection fell across the river, marking with lines of silver the turbulent eddies that chased one another down the stream.

After a while Lord James rose and walked softly to the window, and his eyes became wide and bright as he stroked his chin and stared at the river.

When he turned round again, Lucius Cranfield stood in the doorway looking at him.

A spasm of fear contracted Lord James's features; then he spoke evenly.

"Good evening," he said.

"Good evening," replied Lucius Cranfield, and he bowed. "I have brought back a parasol I have mended--a lady's parasol, purple, with an ivory rose on the handle."

Between them was an ill-lit space of room and the bright table bearing the candles. They looked at each other, and Lord James's face grew long and foxy.

"How much do I owe you, Mr. Cranfield?" he asked.

"A great deal," said the sign-painter, shaking his head. "Oh, a great deal!"

Smiling, he set the parasol against a chair. His eyes were no longer bloodshot nor his cheeks pallid. His hair was neatly dressed. He wore the same red suit, and between the shoulder-blades it had been slit and mended with stitchings of gold thread.

"How much?" repeated Lord James.

Lucius Cranfield laughed.

"I do not believe that you are alive at all," sneered the other, rubbing his hands together. "How did you get away from the rats?"

"Do you hear the river?" whispered the sign-painter. "It is the same river."

Lord James came towards the table.

"I will pay you tomorrow for your work," and he pointed to the mended parasol.

"That is no debt of yours," answered Lucius Cranfield. "I did it for the lady of the house, Serena Thornton."

"She is my betrothed," said Lord James. "And I will pay you tomorrow--"

"No...tonight."

And the sign-painter smiled and stepped nearer.

"You lost the crystal fish," murmured Lord James, biting his forefinger and glancing round the dark, lonely room.

"But someone else has found it."

The other gave a snarl of rage.

"No! It is at the bottom of the river!"

At that Lucius Cranfield leant forward and seized his enemy by the throat. Lord James shrieked, and they swayed together for a moment. But the sign-painter twisted the other's head round on his

shoulders and dropped him, a heap of gay clothes, on the waxed floor.

Then he began to sing, and turned to the open window.

The river was quiet now, flowing peacefully in between its banks, and Lucius Cranfield stepped out onto the terrace and walked towards its waters shining in the moonlight.

Almost before the last echo of his footsteps had died away in the silent room, Lady Serena Thornton entered, holding her dress up from her shoes.

Her gown was white, all wreathed across the hoop with ropes of seed-pearls, and laced across the bodice with diamonds. In her high head-dress floated two soft plumes fastened with clusters of pale roses. Round her neck hung Lord James's gift of amethysts.

She stood in the doorway, her painted lips parted, her dark blue eyes fixed on the body of her betrothed husband.

Presently she went up and looked at him; then she sat down on the chair by the table--sat down, breathing heavily--with her right hand on the smooth satin of her bodice, and slow, strange changes passing over her face. She glanced at the purple parasol, resting across the chair where Lord James should have sat, and then out at the distant river, that showed white as her bridal-dress where the moonlight caught its ripples.

She heard the far-off singing of the sign-painter, and she sighed, closing her eyes.

The six candles burnt steadily, casting a rim of dark shadow round the table and the dead man on the floor, and glittering in the embroidered flowers on his gaudy coat and in the jewels of the

woman at the table.

The black clock on the mantelshelf struck ten. The sound was echoed by the chimes from the village church.

Lady Serena Thornton rose and went upstairs, he: wide hoop brushing the balustrade either side, her high heels tapping on the polished wood.

She entered her room and lit a little silver lamp on the dressing-table.

The chamber looked out upon the back; the window was open, and she could still see the river and hear Lucius Cranfield singing.

Slowly she took the feathers, ribbons and flowers out of her curls, and laid them on the tulip-wood table. Then she shook down her hair from its wire frame and brushed the powder out of it. She had almost forgotten what color it was--in reality a ruby golden-brown, like the tint of wallflowers.

She unlaced her bodice and flung aside her jewels. She stepped out of her hoop and took off her satin coat, staring at herself in the gilt oval mirror.

Then she washed her face free of paint and powder in her gold basin, and tied up her locks with a red ribbon. She cast off her long earrings, her bracelets, her rings, the necklace Lord James had given her. This slipped, like a glitter of purple water, through her fingers, and shone in a little heap of stars on the gleaming waxed floor.

She arrayed herself in a brown dress, plain and straight, and took the two fishes from their velvet bag to hang them round her neck. Again she looked at herself. Who would have known her? Not Lord James

himself, could he have risen from the floor in the solitary room below, and come up the wide stairs to gaze at her. Her face was utterly changed, her carriage different.

She blew out the lamp. A faint trail of smoke stained the moonlight that filled the room. She listened and heard the river and the sign-painter singing. On her bosom the fishes throbbed and glowed, opal-colored and luminous.

Leaving the room lightly, softly she descended through the dark to the dining-room.

The six flower-wreathed candles still burnt steadily among the glass and silver. She glanced at Lord James sorrowfully, and picked up the mended parasol.

As she did so the bells broke out in a volume of glad sound--the villagers practicing yet again for her wedding on the morrow.

Lady Serena Thornton smiled, and as Lucius Cranfield had done, and almost in his steps, went down the long room and through the open window on to the terrace. Slowly she walked towards the river, which she could see moving restlessly under the moonlight. The bells were very loud, but through them came the words of his song--

"The clouds were tangled in the trees

They broke the boughs and spoiled the fruit;

The sleeper knows what the sleeper sees--

You play spades, and I follow suit!

The clouds came down the drops of rain,

And woke the grass to blooms of fire;

The sleeper tore his dream in twain,

And sought for the cards in the bitter mire!"

The bells ceased suddenly. Lady Serena saw the dark figure of the sign-painter, standing at the edge of the water, his back to her.

"If I have won, 'tis little matter;

If I have lost, 'tis naught at all;

The wind will chill and the sun will flatter,

And the damp earth fill the mouth of all."

There was a boat before him, rocking on the argent water, and as the lady came up the sign-painter stooped over it. Then he turned and saw her.

"Good even," said Lady Serena. He took her hands and kissed her face. The sound of the river was heavily in their ears.

"I found your fish," she whispered.

He nodded, and they entered the boat. It was lined with violet silk and scented with spices.

"The villagers will have practiced for nothing," said Lady Serena. Lucius Cranfield loosened the rope that held the boat fast to a willow, and it began to drift down the stream towards the town.

"We are going to a house where a tree with white flowers knocks for admittance on the shutters," he said.

"I know," she answered; "I know."

She sat opposite to him, leaning back, and the light night wind blew apart her brown robe here and there on the gleam of the bright green petticoat beneath. Her yellow hair floated behind her, and the crystal fishes rose and fell with her breathing. Across her knees lay the purple parasol.

They looked at each other and smiled with parted lips. The boat sped swiftly under a high bank, treeless and full under the rays of the moon. Here, by a round stone, sat two figures playing cards.

Lucius Cranfield glanced up. The players turned white, grinning faces down towards the boat. They were the one-eyed gipsy and Lord James.

"Good night," nodded the sign-painter. "I do not believe you are alive at all. Why, I can almost see through you!..."

"Do you know me?" mocked Lady Serena.

And the boat was swept away along the winding river.

Lord James listened to the sign-painter's song that floated up from the dark water.

"If I win, 'tis little matter;

If I lose, 'tit naught at all;

The wind will chill and the sun will flatter,

And the red earth stop the mouths of all."

"They will never get there," grinned Lord James. "T shall go down

tomorrow and see the empty boat upside down, tossing outside the shuttered house."

"There is no tomorrow for such as you," leered the gipsy. "You had your neck broken an hour ago...presently we will go home...your deal..."

Lord James sighed, and a great cloud suddenly overspread the moon.

The gipsy began to sing in a harsh voice, and his eyes turned red in his head as he shuffled the cards.

"If I win, 'tis little matter;

If I lose, 'tis naught at all;

The wind will chill and the sun will flatter,

And the damp earth stop the mouths of all."

Far away down the river the boat flashed for the last time in the moonlight, then was lost to sight under the shadow of the overhanging trees.

THE END