The End of Her Honeymoon

Marie Belloc Lowndes

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The End of Her Honeymoon

By

Mrs. Belloc Lowndes

Author of "The Uttermost Farthing," "The Chink in the Armour," etc., etc.

1913

CHAPTER I

"Cocher? l'Hôtel Saint Ange, Rue Saint Ange!"

The voice of John Dampier, Nancy's three-weeks bridegroom, rang out strongly, joyously, on this the last evening of their honeymoon. And before the lightly hung open carriage had time to move, Dampier added something quickly, at which both he and the driver laughed in unison.

Nancy crept nearer to her husband. It was tiresome that she knew so little
French.

"I'm telling the man we're not in any hurry, and that he can take us round by the Boulevards. I won't have you seeing Paris from an ugly angle the first time—darling!"

"But Jack? It's nearly midnight! Surely there'll be nothing to see on the Boulevards now?"

"Won't there? You wait and see—Paris never goes to sleep!"

And then—Nancy remembered it long, long afterwards—something very odd and disconcerting happened in the big station yard of the Gare de Lyon. The horse stopped—stopped dead. If it hadn't been that the bridegroom's arm enclosed her slender, rounded waist, the bride might have been thrown out.

The cabman stood up in his seat and gave his horse a vicious blow across the back.

"Oh, Jack!" Nancy shrank and hid her face in her husband's arm. "Don't let him do that! I can't bear it!"

Dampier shouted out something roughly, angrily, and the man jumped off the box, and taking hold of the rein gave it a sharp pull. He led his unwilling horse through the big iron gates, and then the little open carriage rolled on smoothly.

How enchanting to be driving under the stars in the city which hails in every artist—Jack Dampier was an artist—a beloved son!

In the clear June atmosphere, under the great arc-lamps which seemed suspended in the mild lambent air, the branches of the trees lining the Boulevards showed brightly, delicately green; and the tints of the dresses worn by the women walking up and down outside the cafés and still brilliantly lighted shops mingled luminously, as on a magic palette.

Nancy withdrew herself gently from her husband's arm. It seemed to her that every one in that merry, slowly moving crowd on either side must see that he was holding her to him. She was a shy, sensitive little creature, this three-weeks-old bride, whose honeymoon was now about to merge into happy every-day life.

Dampier divined something of what she was feeling. He put out his

hand and clasped hers. "Silly sweetheart," he whispered. "All these merry, chattering people are far too full of themselves to be thinking of us!"

As she made no answer, bewildered, a little oppressed by the brilliance, the strangeness of everything about them, he added a little anxiously, "Darling, are you tired? Would you rather go straight to the hotel?"

But pressing closer to him, Nancy shook her head. "No, no, Jack! I'm not a bit tired. It was you who were tired to-day, not I!"

"I didn't feel well in the train, 'tis true. But now that I'm in Paris I could stay out all night! I suppose you've never read George Moore's description of this very drive we're taking, little girl?"

And again Nancy shook her head, and smiled in the darkness. In the world where she had lived her short life, in the comfortable, unimaginative world in which Nancy Tremain, the delightfully pretty, fairly well-dowered, orphan, had drifted about since she had been "grown-up," no one had ever heard of George Moore.

Strange, even in some ways amazing, their marriage—hers and Jack Dampier's—had been! He, the clever, devil-may-care artist, unconventional in all his ways, very much a Bohemian, knowing little of his native country, England, for he had lived all his youth and working life in France—and she, in everything, save an instinctive love of beauty, which, oddly yet naturally enough, only betrayed itself in her dress, the exact opposite!

A commission from an English country gentleman who had fancied a portrait shown by Dampier in the Salon, had brought the artist, rather reluctantly, across the Channel, and an accident—sometimes it made them both shiver to realise how slight an accident—had led to

their first and decisive meeting.

Nancy Tremain had been brought over to tea, one cold, snowy afternoon, at the house where Dampier was painting. She had been dressed all in grey, and the graceful velvet gown and furry cap-like toque had made her look, in his eyes, like an exquisite Eighteenth Century pastel.

One glance—so Dampier had often since assured her and she never grew tired of hearing it—had been enough. They had scarcely spoken the one to the other, but he had found out her name, and, writing, cajoled her into seeing him again. Very soon he had captured her in the good old way, as women—or so men like to think—prefer to be wooed, by right of conquest.

There had been no one to say them nay, no one to comment unkindly over so strange and sudden a betrothal. On the contrary, Nancy's considerable circle of acquaintances had smilingly approved.

All the world loves a masterful lover, and Nancy Tremain was far too pretty, far too singular and charming, to become engaged in the course of nature to some commonplace young man. This big, ugly, clever, amusing artist was just the contrast which was needed for romance.

And he seemed by his own account to be making a very good income, too! Yet, artists being such eccentric, extravagant fellows, doubtless Nancy's modest little fortune would come in useful—so those about them argued carelessly.

Then one of her acquaintances, a thought more good-natured than the rest, arranged that lovely, happy Nancy should be married from a pleasant country house, in a dear little country church. Braving superstition, the wedding took place in the last week of May, and

bride and bridegroom had gone to Italy—though, to be sure, it was rather late for Italy—for three happy weeks.

Now they were about to settle down in Dampier's Paris studio.

Unluckily it was an Exhibition Year, one of those years, that is, which, hateful as they may be to your true Parisian, pour steady streams of gold into the pockets of fortunate hotel and shop keepers, and which bring a great many foreigners to Paris who otherwise might never have come. Quite a number of such comfortable English folk were now looking forward to going and seeing Nancy Dampier in her new home—of which the very address was quaint and unusual, for Dampier's studio was situated Impasse des Nonnes.

They were now speeding under and across the vast embracing shadow of the Opera House. And again Dampier slipped his arm round his young wife. It seemed to this happy man as if Paris to-night had put on her gala dress to welcome him, devout lover and maker of beauty, back to her bosom.

"Isn't it pleasant to think," he whispered, "that Paris is the more beautiful because you now are in it and of it, Nancy?"

And Nancy smiled, well pleased at the fantastic compliment.

She pressed more closely to him.

"I wish—I wish—" and then she stopped, for she was unselfish, shy of expressing her wishes, but that made Dampier ever the more eager to hear, and, if possible, to gratify them.

"What is it that you wish, dear heart?" he asked.

"I wish, Jack, that we were going straight home to the studio now—

instead of to an hotel."

"We'll get in very soon," he answered quickly. "Believe me, darling, you wouldn't like going in before everything is ready for you. Mère Bideau has her good points, but she could never make the place look as I want it to look when you first see it. I'll get up early to-morrow morning and go and see to it all. I wouldn't for the world you saw our home as it must look now—the poor little living rooms dusty and shabby, and our boxes sitting sadly in the middle of the studio itself!"

They had sent their heavy luggage on from England, and for the honeymoon Nancy had contented herself with one modest little trunk, while Dampier had taken the large portmanteau which had been the useful wedding present of the new friend and patron in whose house he had first seen his wife.

Swiftly they shot through the triple arch which leads from the Rue de Rivoli to the Carousel. How splendid and solitary was the vast dimly-lit space. "I like this," whispered Nancy dreamily, gazing up at the dark, star-powdered sky.

And then Dampier turned and caught her, this time unresisting, yielding joyfully, to his breast. "Nancy?" he murmured thickly. "Nancy? I'm afraid!"

"Afraid?" she repeated wonderingly.

"Yes, horribly afraid! Pray, my pure angel, pray that the gods may indulge their cruel sport elsewhere. I haven't always been happy, Nancy."

And she clung to him, full of vague, unsubstantial fears. "Don't talk like that," she murmured. "It—it isn't right to make fun of such things."

"Make fun? Good God!" was all he said.

And then his mood changed. They were now being shaken across the huge, uneven paving stones of the quays, and so on to a bridge. "I never really feel at home in Paris till I've crossed the Seine," he cried joyously. "Cheer up, darling, we shall soon be at the Hôtel Saint Ange!"

"Have you ever stayed in the Hôtel Saint Ange?" she said, with a touch of curiosity in her voice.

"I used to know a fellow who lived there," he said carelessly. "But what made me pick it out was the fact that it's such a queer, beautiful old house, and with a delightful garden. Also we shall meet no English there."

"Don't you like English people?" she asked, a little protestingly.

And Dampier laughed. "I like them everywhere but in Paris," he said: and then, "But you won't be quite lonely, little lady, for a good many Americans go to the Hôtel Saint Ange. And for such a funny reason —"

"What reason?"

"It was there that Edgar Allan Poe stayed when he was in Paris."

Their carriage was now engaged in threading narrow, shadowed thoroughfares which wound through what might have been a city of the dead. From midnight till cock-crow old-world Paris sleeps, and the windows of the high houses on either side of the deserted streets through which they were now driving were all closely shuttered.

"Here we have the ceremonious, the well-bred, the tactful Paris of

other days," exclaimed Dampier whimsically. "This Paris understands without any words that what we now want is to be quiet, and by ourselves, little girl!"

A gas lamp, burning feebly in a corner wine shop, lit up his exultant face for a flashing moment.

"You don't look well, Jack," Nancy said suddenly. "It was awfully hot in Lyons this morning—"

"We stayed just a thought too long in that carpet warehouse," he said gaily,—"And then—and then that prayer carpet, which might have belonged to Ali Baba of Ispahan, has made me feel ill with envy ever since! But joy! Here we are at last!"

After emerging into a square of which one side was formed by an old Gothic church, they had engaged in a dark and narrow street the further end of which was bastioned by one of the flying buttresses of the church they had just passed.

The cab drew up with a jerk. "C'est ici, monsieur."

The man had drawn up before a broad oak porte cochère which, sunk far back into a thick wall, was now inhospitably shut.

"They go to bed betimes this side of the river!" exclaimed Dampier ruefully.

Nancy felt a little troubled. The hotel people knew they were coming, for
Jack had written from Marseilles: it was odd no one had sat up for them.

But their driver gave the wrought-iron bell-handle a mighty pull, and

after what seemed to the two travellers a very long pause the great doors swung slowly back on their hinges, while a hearty voice called out, "C'est vous, Monsieur Gerald? C'est vous, mademoiselle?"

And Dampier shouted back in French, "It's Mr. and Mrs. Dampier. Surely you expect us? I wrote from Marseilles three days ago!"

He helped his wife out of the cab, and they passed through into the broad, vaulted passage which connected the street with the courtyard of the hotel. By the dim light afforded by an old-fashioned hanging lamp Nancy Dampier saw that three people had answered the bell; they were a middle-aged man (evidently mine host), his stout better half, and a youth who rubbed his eyes as if sleepy, and who stared at the newcomers with a dull, ruminating stare.

As is generally the case in a French hotel, it was Madame who took command. She poured forth a torrent of eager, excited words, and at last Dampier turned to his wife:—"They got my letter, but of course had no address to which they could answer, and—and it's rather a bore, darling—but they don't seem to have any rooms vacant."

But even as he spoke the fat, cheerful-looking Frenchwoman put her hand on the young Englishman's arm. She had seen the smart-looking box of the bride, the handsome crocodile skin bag of the bridegroom, and again she burst forth, uttering again and again the word "arranger."

Dampier turned once more, this time much relieved, to his wife: "Madame Poulain (that's her name, it seems) thinks she can manage to put us up all right to-night, if we don't mind two very small rooms—unluckily not on the same floor. But some people are going away to-morrow and then she'll have free some charming rooms overlooking the garden."

He took a ten-franc piece out of his pocket as he spoke, and handed it to the gratified cabman:—"It doesn't seem too much for a drive through fairyland"—he said aside to his wife.

And Nancy nodded contentedly. It pleased her that her Jack should be generous—the more that she had found out in the last three weeks that if generous, he was by no means a spendthrift. He had longed to buy a couple of Persian prayer carpets in that queer little warehouse where a French friend of his had taken them in Lyons, but he had resisted the temptation—nobly.

Meanwhile Madame Poulain was talking, talking, talking—emphasising all she said with quick, eager gestures.

"They are going to put you in their own daughter's room, darling. She's luckily away just now. So I think you will be all right. I, it seems, must put up with a garret!"

"Oh, must you be far away from me?" she asked a little plaintively.

"Only for to-night, only till to-morrow, sweetheart."

And then they all began going up a winding staircase which started flush from the wall to the left.

First came Madame Poulain, carrying a candle, then Monsieur Poulain with his new English clients, and, last of all, the loutish lad carrying Nancy's trunk. They had but a little way to go up the shallow slippery stairs, for when they reached the first tiny landing Madame Poulain opened a curious, narrow slit of a door which seemed, when shut, to be actually part of the finely panelled walls.

"Here's my daughter's room," said the landlady proudly. "It is very comfortable and charming."

"What an extraordinary little room!" whispered Nancy.

And Dampier, looking round him with a good deal of curiosity, agreed.

In the days when the Hôtel Saint Ange belonged to the great soldier whose name it still bears, this strange little apartment had surely been, so the English artist told himself, a powdering closet. Even now the only outside light and air came from a small square window which had evidently only recently been cut through the thick wall. In front of this aperture fluttered a bright pink curtain.

Covering three of the walls as well as the low ceiling, was a paper simulating white satin powdered with rose-buds, and the bed, draped with virginal muslin curtains, was a child's rather than a woman's bed.

"What's that?" asked Dampier suddenly. "A cupboard?"

He had noticed that wide double doors, painted in the pale brownish grey called grisaille, formed the further side of the tiny apartment.

Madame Poulain, turning a key, revealed a large roomy space now fitted up as a cupboard. "It's a way through into our bedroom, monsieur," she said smiling. "We could not of course allow our daughter to be far from ourselves."

And Dampier nodded. He knew the ways of French people and sympathised with those ways.

He stepped up into the cupboard, curious to see if this too had been a powdering closet, and if that were so if the old panelling and ornamentation had remained in their original condition.

Thus for a moment was Dampier concealed from those in the room.

And during that moment there came the sound of footsteps on the staircase, followed by the sudden appearance on the landing outside the open door of the curious little apartment of two tall figures—a girl in a lace opera cloak, and a young man in evening dress.

Nancy Dampier, gazing at them, a little surprised at the abrupt apparition, told herself that they must be brother and sister, so striking was their resemblance to one another.

"We found the porte cochère open, Madame Poulain, so we just came straight in. Good night!"

The young lady spoke excellent French, but as she swept on up the staircase out of sight there came a quick low interchange of English words between herself and the man with her.

"Daisy? Did you notice that beautiful young woman? A regular stunner! She must be that daughter the Poulains are always talking about."

And then "Daisy's" answer floated down. "Yes, I noticed her—she is certainly very pretty. But do be careful, Gerald, I expect she knows a little English—"

Dampier stepped down out of the cupboard.

"That American cub ought to be put in his place!" he muttered heatedly.

Nancy turned her face away to hide a little smile. Jack was so funny! He delighted in her beauty—he was always telling her so, and yet it annoyed him if other people thought her pretty too. This young American had looked at her quite pleasantly, quite respectfully; he hadn't meant to be offensive—of that Nancy felt sure.

"I suppose you have a good many Americans this year?" went on Dampier in
French, turning to Monsieur Poulain.

"No, monsieur, no. Our clientèle is mostly French. We have only this young lady, her brother, and their father, monsieur. The father is a Senator in his own country—Senator Burton. They are very charming people, and have stayed with us often before. All our other guests are French. We have never had such a splendid season: and all because of the Exhibition!"

"I'm glad you are doing well," said Dampier courteously. "But for my part"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I'm too much of a Parisian to like the Exhibition."

Then he turned to Nancy: "Well, you'll be quite safe, my darling. Monsieur and Madame Poulain are only just through here, so you needn't feel lonely."

And then there came a chorus of bonsoirs from host, from hostess, and from the lad who now stood waiting with the Englishman's large portmanteau hitched up on his shoulder.

Dampier bent and kissed his wife very tenderly: then he followed Monsieur Poulain and the latter's nephew up the stairs, while Madame Poulain stayed behind and helped Mrs. Dampier to unpack the few things she required for the night.

And Nancy, though she felt just a little bewildered to find herself alone in this strange house, was yet amused and cheered by the older woman's lively chatter, and that although she only understood one word in ten.

Madame Poulain talked of her daughter, Virginie, now in the country

well away from the holiday crowds brought by the Exhibition, and also of her nephew, Jules, the lad who had carried up the luggage, and who knew—so Madame Poulain went to some pains to make Nancy understand—a little English.

Late though it was, the worthy woman did not seem in any hurry to go away, but at last came the kindly words which even Nancy, slight as was her knowledge of French, understood: "Bonsoir, madame. Dormez bien."

CHAPTER II

Nancy Dampier sat up in bed.

Through the curtain covering the square aperture in the wall which did duty for a window the strong morning light streamed in, casting a pink glow over the peculiar little room.

She drew the pearl-circled watch, which had been one of Jack's first gifts to her, from under the big, square pillow.

It was already half-past nine. How very tiresome and strange that she should have overslept herself on this, her first morning in Paris! And yet—and yet not so very strange after all, for her night had been curiously and disagreeably disturbed.

At first she had slept the deep, dreamless sleep of happy youth, and then, in a moment, she had suddenly sat up, wide awake.

The murmur of talking had roused her—of eager, low talking in the room which lay the other side of the deep cupboard. When the

murmur had at last ceased she had dozed off, only to be waked again by the sound of the porte cochère swinging back on its huge hinges.

It was evidently quite true—as Jack had said—that Paris never goes to sleep.

Jack had declared he would get up and go over to the studio early, so there was nothing for it but to get up, and wait patiently till he came back. Nancy knew that her husband wouldn't like her to venture out into the streets alone. He was extraordinarily careful of her—careful and thoughtful for her comfort.

What an angel he was—her great strong, clever Jack!

A girl who goes about by herself as much as Nancy Tremain had gone about alone during the three years which had elapsed betwixt her leaving school and her marriage, obtains a considerable knowledge of men, and not of the nicest kind of men. But Jack was an angel—she repeated the rather absurdly incongruous word to herself with a very tender feeling in her heart. He always treated her not only as if she were something beautiful and rare, but something fragile, to be respected as well as adored….

He had left her so little during the last three weeks that she had never had time to think about him as she was thinking of him now; "counting up her mercies," as an old-fashioned lady she had known as a child was wont to advise those about her to do.

At last she looked round her for a bell. No, there was nothing of the sort in the tiny room. But Nancy Dampier had already learned to do without all sorts of things which she had regarded as absolute necessities of life when she was Nancy Tremain. In some of the humbler Italian inns in which she and Jack had been so happy, the

people had never even heard of a bell!

She jumped out of bed, put on her pretty, pale blue dressing-gown—it was a fancy of Jack's that she should wear a great deal of pale blue and white—and then she opened the door a little way.

"Madame!" she called out gaily. "Madame Poulain?" and wondered whether her French would run to the words "hot water"—yes, she thought it would. "Eau chaude"—that was hot water.

But there came no answering cry, and again, this time rather impatiently, she called out, "Madame Poulain?"

And then the shuffling sounds of heavy footsteps made Nancy shoot back from the open door.

"Yuss?" muttered a hoarse voice.

This surely must be the loutish-looking youth who, so Nancy suddenly remembered, knew a little English.

"I want some hot water," she called out through the door. "And will you please ask your aunt to come here for a moment?"

"Yuss," he said, in that queer hoarse voice, and shuffled downstairs again. And there followed, floating up from below, one of those quick, gabbling interchanges of French words which Nancy, try as she might, could not understand.

She got into bed again. Perhaps after all it would be better to allow them to bring up her "little breakfast" in the foreign fashion. She would still be in plenty of time for Jack. Once in the studio he would be in no hurry, or so she feared, to come back—especially if on his way out he had opened her door and seen how soundly she was

sleeping.

She waited some time, and then, as no one came, grew what she so seldom was, impatient and annoyed. What an odd hotel, and what dilatory, disagreeable ways! But just as she was thinking of getting up again she heard a hesitating knock.

It was Madame Poulain, and suddenly Nancy—though unobservant as is youth, and especially happy youth—noticed that mine hostess looked far less well in the daytime than by candle-light.

Madame Poulain's stout, sallow face was pale, her cheeks puffy; there were rings round the black eyes which had sparkled so brightly the night before. But then she too must have had a disturbed night.

In her halting French Mrs. Dampier explained that she would like coffee and rolls, and then some hot water.

"C'est bien, mademoiselle!"

And Nancy blushed rosy-red. "Mademoiselle?" How odd to hear herself so addressed! But Madame Poulain did not give her time to say anything, even if she had wished to do so, for, before Mrs. Dampier could speak again, the hotel-keeper had shut the door and gone downstairs.

And then, after a long, long wait, far longer than Nancy had ever been made to wait in any of the foreign hotels in which she and her husband had stayed during the last three weeks, Madame Poulain reappeared, bearing a tray in her large, powerful hands.

She put the tray down on the bed, and she was already making her way quickly, silently to the door, when Nancy called out urgently, "Madame? Madame Poulain! Has my husband gone out!"

And then she checked herself, and tried to convey the same question in her difficult French—"Mon mari?" she said haltingly. "Mon mari?"

But Madame Poulain only shook her head, and hurried out of the room, leaving the young Englishwoman oddly discomfited and surprised.

It was evidently true what Jack had said—that tiresome Exhibition had turned everything in Paris, especially the hotels, topsy-turvy. Madame Poulain was cross and tired, run off her feet, maybe; her manner, too, quite different now from what it had been the night before.

Nancy Dampier got up and dressed. She put on a pale blue linen gown which Jack admired, and a blue straw hat trimmed with grey wings which Jack said made her look like Mercury.

She told herself that there could be no reason why she shouldn't venture out of her room and go downstairs, where there must surely be some kind of public sitting-room.

Suddenly remembering the young American's interchange of words with his sister, she wondered, smiling to herself, if she would ever see them again. How cross the young man's idle words had made Jack! Dear, jealous Jack, who hated it so when people stared at her as foreigners have a trick of staring. It made Nancy happy to know that people thought her pretty, nay beautiful, for it would have been dreadful for Jack, an artist, to marry an ugly woman….

Locking her box she went out onto the shallow staircase, down the few steps which led straight under the big arch of the porte cochère. It was thrown hospitably open on to the narrow street now full of movement, colour, and sound. But in vivid contrast to the moving panorama presented by the busy, lane-like thoroughfare outside, was

the spacious, stone-paved courtyard of the hotel, made gay with orange trees in huge green tubs. Almost opposite the porte cochère was another arch through which she could see a glimpse of the cool, shady garden Jack remembered.

Yes, it was a strangely picturesque and charming old house, this Hôtel Saint Ange; but even so Nancy felt a little lost, a little strange, standing there under the porte cochère. Then she saw that painted up on a glass door just opposite the stairs leading to her room was the word "Bureau": it was doubtless there that Jack had left word when he would be back.

She went across and opened the door, but to her surprise there was no one in the little office; she hadn't, however, long to wait, for Madame Poulain's nephew suddenly appeared from the courtyard.

He had on an apron; there was a broom in his hand, and as he came towards her, walking very, very slowly, there came over Nancy Dampier, she could not have told you why, a touch of repulsion from the slovenly youth.

"I wish to know," she said, "whether my husband left any message for me?"

But the young man shook his head. He shuffled first on one foot and then on the other, looking miserably awkward. It was plain that he did not know more than a word or two of English.

"I am sure," she said, speaking slowly and very distinctly, "that my husband left some kind of message with your uncle or aunt. Will you please ask one of them to speak to me?"

He nodded. "Si, mademoiselle" and walked quickly away, back into the courtyard.

"Mademoiselle" again! What an extraordinary hotel, and what bad manners these people had! And yet again and again Jack had compared English and French hotels—always to the disadvantage of the former.

Long minutes went by, and Nancy began to feel vexed and angry. Then there fell on her listening ears a phrase uttered very clearly in Madame Poulain's resonant voice: "C'est ton tour maintenant! Vas-y, mon ami!"

And before she had time to try and puzzle out the sense of the words, she saw Monsieur Poulain's portly figure emerge from the left side of the courtyard, and then—when he caught sight of the slim, blue-clad figure standing under his porte cochère—beat a hasty retreat.

Nancy's sense of discomfort and indignation grew. What did these people mean by treating her like this? She longed with a painful, almost a sick longing for her husband's return. It must be very nearly eleven o'clock. Why did he stay away so long?

A painful, choking feeling—one she had very, very seldom experienced during the course of her short, prosperous life, came into her throat.

Angrily she dashed away two tears from her eyes.

This was a horrid hotel! The Poulains were hateful people! Jack had made a mistake—how could he have brought her to such a place? She would tell him when he came back that he must take her away now, at once, to some ordinary, nice hotel, where the people knew English, and where they treated their guests with ordinary civility.

And then there shot through Nancy Dampier a feeling of quick relief,

for, walking across the courtyard, evidently on their way out, came a pleasant-looking elderly gentleman, accompanied by the girl whom Nancy had seen for a brief moment standing on the landing close to her bedroom door the night before.

These were English people? No, American of course! But that was quite as good, for they, thank heaven! spoke English. She could ask them to be her interpreters with those extraordinary Poulains. Jack wouldn't mind her doing that. Why, he might have left quite an important message for her!

She took a step forward, and the strangers stopped. The old gentleman—Nancy called him in her own mind an old gentleman, though Senator Burton was by no means old in his own estimation or in that of his contemporaries—smiled a very pleasant, genial smile.

Nancy Dampier made a charming vision as she stood under the arch of the porte cochère, her slender, blue-clad figure silhouetted against the dark background by the street outside, and the colour coming and going in her face.

"May I speak to you a moment?" she said shyly.

"Why certainly."

The American took off his hat, and stood looking down at her kindly. "My name is Burton, Senator Burton, at your service! What can I do for you?".

The simple little question brought back all Nancy's usual happy confidence.
How silly she had been just now to feel so distressed.

"I'm Mrs. Dampier, and I can't make the hotel people understand what

I say," she explained. "I mean Monsieur and Madame Poulain—and the nephew—I think his name is Jules—though he is supposed to speak English, is so very stupid."

"Yes, indeed he is!" chimed in the girl whom her brother had called "Daisy." "I've long ago given up trying to make that boy understand anything, even in French. But they do work him most awfully hard, you know; they have women in each day to help with the cleaning, but that poor lad does everything else—everything, that is, that the Poulains don't do themselves."

"What is it that you can't make them understand?" asked Senator Burton indulgently. "Tell us what it is you want to ask them?"

"I only wish to know at what time my husband went out, and whether he left any message for me," answered Nancy rather shamefacedly. "You see the hotel is so full that they put us on different floors, and I haven't seen him this morning."

"I'll find that out for you at once. I expect Madame Poulain is in her kitchen just now."

The Senator turned and went back into the courtyard, leaving his daughter and the young Englishwoman alone together.

"The Poulains seem such odd, queer people," said Nancy hesitatingly.

"D'you think so? We've always found them all right," said the girl, smiling. "Of course they're dreadfully busy just now because of the Exhibition. The hotel is full of French people, and they give Madame Poulain a great deal of trouble. But she doesn't grudge it, for she and her husband are simply coining money! They're determined that their daughter shall have a splendid dowry!" She waited a moment, and

then repeated, "Oh, yes, the Poulains are very good sort of people. They're very kindly and good-natured."

To this remark Nancy made no answer. She thought the Poulains both rude and disagreeable, but she had no wish to speak ill of them to this nice girl. How lucky it was that these kind Americans had come to her rescue! Though still feeling indignant and uncomfortable with regard to the way in which she had been treated by the hotel-keeper and his wife, she felt quite happy again now.

Senator Burton was away for what seemed, not only to Mrs. Dampier, but also to his daughter, a considerable time. But at last they saw him coming slowly towards them. His eyes were bent on the ground; he seemed to be thinking, deeply.

Nancy Dampier took a step forward. "Well?" she said eagerly, and then a little shyly she uttered his name, "Well, Mr. Burton? What do they say? Did my husband leave any message?"

"No, he doesn't seem to have done that." And then the Senator looked down searchingly into the young Englishwoman's face. It was a very lovely face, and just now the look of appeal, of surprise, in the blue eyes added a touch of pathetic charm. He thought of the old expression, "Beauty in distress."

His daughter broke in: "Why, Mrs. Dampier, do come upstairs and wait in our sitting-room," she said cordially. "I'll come with you, for we were only going out for a little stroll, weren't we, father?"

Nancy Dampier hesitated. She did not notice that the American Senator omitted to endorse his daughter's invitation; she hesitated for a very different reason: "You're very kind; but if I do that I shall have to tell Madame Poulain, for it would give my husband a dreadful fright if he came in and found I had left my room and disappeared"—she

blushed and smiled very prettily.

And again Senator Burton looked searchingly down into the lovely, flushed little face; but the deep-blue, guileless-looking eyes met his questioning gaze very frankly. He said slowly, "Very well, I will go and tell Madame Poulain that you will be waiting up in our sitting-room, Mrs.—ah—Dampier."

He went out across the courtyard again, and once more he seemed, at any rate to his daughter, to stay away longer than was needed for the delivery of so simple a message.

Growing impatient, Miss Burton took Nancy Dampier across the sunlit courtyard to the wide old oak staircase, the escalier d'honneur, as it was still called in the hotel, down which the Marquis de Saint Ange had clattered when starting for Fontenoy.

When they were half-way up the Senator joined them, and a few moments later when they had reached the second landing, he put a key in the lock of a finely carved door, then he stood back, courteously, to allow his daughter's guest to walk through into the small lobby which led to the delightful suite of rooms which the Burtons always occupied during their frequent visits to Paris.

Nancy uttered an exclamation of delight as she passed through into the high-pitched, stately salon, whose windows overlooked one of those leafy gardens which are still the pride of old Paris. "This is delightful!" she exclaimed. "Who would ever have thought that they had such rooms as this in the Hôtel Saint Ange!"

"There are several of these suites," said Daisy Burton pleasantly. "In fact, a good many French provincial people come up here, year after year, for the winter."

While Mrs. Dampier and his daughter were exchanging these few words the Senator remained silent. Then—"Is your brother gone out?" he said abruptly.

"Yes, father. He went out about half an hour ago. But he said he'd be back in ample time to take us out to luncheon. He thought we might like to go to Foyot's to-day."

"So we will. Daisy, my dear—?" He stopped short, and his daughter looked at him, surprised.

"Yes, father?"

"I'm afraid I must ask you to leave me with this young lady for a few moments. I have something to say to her which I think it would be as well that I should say alone."

Nancy got up from the chair on which she had already seated herself, and fear flashed into her face. "What is it?" she cried apprehensively. "You're not going to tell me that anything's happened to Jack!"

"No, no," said the Senator quickly, but even as he uttered the two short, reassuring little words he averted his eyes from Mrs. Dampier's questioning anxious eyes.

His daughter left the room.

"What is it?" said Nancy again, trying to smile. "What is it, Mr. Burton?"

And then the Senator, motioning her to a chair, sat down too.

"The Poulains," he said gravely—he was telling himself that he had never come across so accomplished an actress as this young Englishwoman was proving herself to be—"the Poulains," he

repeated very distinctly, "declare that you arrived here last night alone. They say that they did not know, as a matter of fact, that you were married. You do not seem to have even given them your name."

Nancy stared at him for a moment. Then, "There must be some extraordinary mistake," she said quietly. "The Poulains must have thought you meant someone else. My husband and I arrived, of course together, late last night. At first Madame Poulain said she couldn't take us in as the hotel was full. But at last she said that they could give us two small rooms. They knew our name was Dampier, for Jack wrote to them from Marseilles. He and I were only married three weeks ago: this is the end of our honeymoon. My husband, who is an artist, is now at his studio. We're going to move there in a day or two."

She spoke quite simply and straightforwardly, and the Senator felt oddly relieved by her words.

He tried to remember exactly what had happened, what exactly the Poulains had said, when he had gone into the big roomy kitchen which lay to the left of the courtyard.

He had certainly been quite clear. That is, he had explained, in his very good French, to Madame Poulain, that he came to inquire, on behalf of a young English lady, whether her husband, a gentleman named Dampier, had left any message for her. And Madame Poulain, coming across to him in a rather mysterious manner, had said in a low voice that she feared the young lady was toquée—i. e., not quite all right in her head—as, saving Monsieur le Sénateur's presence, English ladies so often were! At great length she had gone on to explain that the young lady in question had arrived very late the night before, and that seeing that she was so young and pretty, and also that she knew so very little French, they had allowed her, rather

than turn her out, to occupy their own daughter's room, a room they had never, never, under any circumstances, allowed a client to sleep in before.

Then Madame Poulain had gone out and called Monsieur Poulain; and the worthy man had confirmed, in every particular, what his wife had just said—that is, he had explained how they had been knocked up late last night by a loud ringing at the porte cochère; how they had gone out to the door, and there, seized with pity for this pretty young English lady, who apparently knew so very, very little French, they had allowed her to occupy their daughter's room….

Finally, the good Poulains, separately and in unison, had begged the Senator to try and find out something about their curious guest, as she apparently knew too little French to make herself intelligible.

Now that he heard Nancy's quiet assertion, the Senator felt sure there had been a mistake. The Poulains had evidently confused pretty Mrs. Dampier with some wandering British spinster.

"Let me go down with you now," she said eagerly. "The truth is—I know you'll think me foolish—but I'm afraid of the Poulains! They've behaved so oddly and so rudely to me this morning. I liked them very much last night."

"Yes," he said cordially. "We'll go right down now; and my girl, Daisy, can come too."

When his daughter came into the room, "There's been some mistake," said Senator Burton briefly. "It's my fault, I expect. I can't have made it clear to Madame Poulain whom I meant. She has confused Mrs. Dampier with some English lady who turned up here alone late last night."

"But we turned up late last night," said Nancy quickly. "Very, very late; long after midnight."

"Still, my brother and I came in after you," said Daisy Burton suddenly. And then she smiled and reddened. Mrs. Dampier must certainly have overheard Gerald's remark.

"It was an awful job getting a cab after that play, father, and it must have been nearly one o'clock when we got in. As we felt sure this side of the house was shut up we went up that queer little back staircase, and so past the open door of Mrs. Dampier's room," she explained.

To the Senator's surprise, Mrs. Dampier also grew red; indeed, she blushed crimson from forehead to chin.

"My brother thought you were French," went on Daisy, a little awkwardly. "In fact, we both thought you must be Madame Poulain's daughter. We knew that was Virginie's room, and we've always been hearing of that girl ever since we first came to stay in Paris. She used to be at a convent school, and she's with her grandmother in the country just now, to be out of the Exhibition rush. The Poulains simply worship her."

The Senator looked very thoughtful as he walked downstairs behind the two girls. The mystery was thickening in a very disagreeable way. Both hotel-keepers had stated positively that the "demoiselle anglaise," as they called her, had slept in their daughter's room….

But what was this the lady who called herself Mrs. Dampier saying?

"My husband and I realised you thought I was Mademoiselle Poulain," said
Nancy, and she also spoke with a touch of awkwardness.

Senator Burton put out his right hand and laid it, rather heavily, on his daughter's shoulder.

She stopped and turned round. "Yes, father?"

"Then I suppose you also saw Mr. Dampier, Daisy?"

Eagerly he hoped for confirmation of the charming stranger's story. But—

"No," she said reluctantly. "We only saw Mrs. Dampier and the Poulains, father—they were all in the room together. You see, we were outside on the dark staircase, and just stopped for a minute on the landing to say good-night to the Poulains, and to tell them that we had come in."

"I suppose, Mrs. Dampier, that by then your husband had already gone to his room?" But in spite of his efforts to make his voice cordial the Senator failed to do so.

"No, he hadn't gone upstairs then." Nancy waited a moment, puzzled, then she exclaimed, "I remember now! Jack had just stepped up into a big cupboard which forms one side of the little room. He came out again just as Miss Burton and—and your son had gone on upstairs." Again she reddened uncomfortably, wondering if this nice, kind girl had heard Jack's unflattering epithets concerning "the young American cub." But no, Jack's voice, if angry, had been low.

When they were at the bottom of the staircase the Senator turned to his daughter.

"Daisy," he said quietly, "I think it will be best for this lady to see Madame Poulain with me alone." And as his daughter showed no sign of having understood, he said again, with a touch of severity in

his voice: "Daisy, I desire you to go upstairs."

"You'll bring Mrs. Dampier up again, father?"

He hesitated—and then he said, "Yes, should she wish it, I will do so."

And Daisy Burton turned away, up the stairs again, very reluctantly. Her indulgent father was not given to interfere with even the most casual of her friendships, and she already felt as if this attractive young Englishwoman was to be her friend.

Madame Poulain came slowly across the courtyard, and the Senator was struck by her look of ill-health, of languor. Clearly the worthy woman was overtaxing her strength. It was foolish of the Poulains not to have more help in, but French people were like that!

Senator Burton knew that these good folks were trying to amass as large a dowry as possible for their adored only child. Virginie was now of marriageable age, and the Poulains had already selected in their own minds the man they wished to see their son-in-law. He was owner of an hotel at Chantilly, and as he was young, healthy, and reputed kind and good-tempered, he had the right to expect a good dowry with his future wife. The fact that this was an Exhibition Year was a great stroke of luck for the Poulains. It almost certainly meant that their beloved Virginie would soon be settled close to them in charming salubrious Chantilly….

The proprietress of the Hôtel Saint Ange now stood close to Senator Burton and his companion. Her voluble tongue was stilled for once: she was twisting a corner of her blue check apron round and round in her strong, sinewy-looking fingers.

"Well, Madame Poulain," the American spoke very gravely, "there

has evidently been some strange misunderstanding. This lady asserts most positively that she arrived here last night accompanied by her husband, Mr. Dampier."

A look of—was it anger or pain?—came over Madame Poulain's face. She shook her head decidedly. "I have already told monsieur," she said quickly, "that this lady arrived here last night alone. I know nothing of her husband: I did not even know she was married. To tell you the truth, monsieur, we ought to have made her fill in the usual form. But it was so late that we put off the formality till to-day. I now regret very much that we did so."

The Senator looked questioningly at Nancy Dampier. She had become from red very white. "Do you understand what she says?" he asked slowly, impassively.

"Yes—I understand. But she is not telling the truth."

The Senator hesitated. "I have known Madame Poulain a long time," he said.

"Yes—and you've only known me a few minutes."

Nancy Dampier felt as though she were living through a horrible nightmare—horrible and at the same time absurd. But she made a great effort to remain calm, and to prove herself a sensible woman. So she added quietly: "I can't tell—I can't in the least guess—why this woman is telling such a strange, silly untruth. It is easy to prove the truth of what I say, Mr. Burton. My husband's name is John Dampier. He is an artist, and has a studio here in Paris."

"Do you know the address of your husband's studio, Mrs. Dampier?"

"Of course I do." The question stung her, this time past endurance. "I

think I had better have a cab and drive there straight," she said stiffly. "Please forgive me for having given you so much trouble. I'll manage all right by myself now."

Every vestige of colour had receded from her face. There was a frightened, hunted expression in her blue eyes, and the Senator felt a sudden thrill of concern, of pity. What did it all mean? Why should this poor girl—she looked even younger than his daughter—pretend that she had come here accompanied, if, after all, she had not done so?

Madame Poulain was still looking at them fixedly, and there was no very pleasant expression on her face.

"Well," she said at last, "that comes of being too good-natured, Monsieur le Sénateur. I never heard of such a thing! What does mademoiselle accuse us of? Does she think we made away with her friend? She may have arrived with a man—as to that I say nothing—but I assert most positively that in that case he left her before she actually came into the Hôtel Saint Ange."

"Will you please ask her to call me a cab?" said Nancy trembling.

And he transmitted the request; adding kindly in English, "Of course I am coming with you as far as your husband's studio. I expect we shall find that Mr. Dampier went there last night. The Poulains have forgotten that he came with you: you see they are very tired and overworked just now—"

But Nancy shook her head. It was impossible that the Poulains should have forgotten Jack.

Madame Poulain went a step nearer to Senator Burton and muttered something, hurriedly. He hesitated.

"Mais si, Monsieur le Sénateur."

And very reluctantly he transmitted the woman's disagreeable message. "She thinks that perhaps as you are going to your husband's rooms, you had better take your trunk with you, Mrs. Dampier."

Nancy assented, almost eagerly. "Yes, do ask her to have my trunk brought down! I would far rather not come back here." She was still quite collected and quiet in her manner. "But, Mr. Burton, hadn't I better pay? Especially if they persist in saying I came alone?" she smiled, a tearful little smile. It still seemed so—so absurd.

She took out her purse. "I haven't much money, for you see Jack always pays everything. But I've got an English sovereign, and I can always draw a cheque. I have my own money."

And the Senator grew more and more bewildered. It was clear that this girl was either speaking the truth, or else that she was a most wonderful actress. But, as every man who has reached the Senator's age is ruefully aware, very young women can act on occasion in ordinary every day life, as no professional actress of genius ever did or ever will do on a stage.

Madame Poulain went off briskly, and when she came back a few moments later, there was a look of relief, almost of joy, on her face. "The cab is here," she exclaimed, "and Jules has brought down madame's trunk."

Nancy looked at the speaker quickly. Then she was "madame" again? Well, that was something.

"Three francs—that will quite satisfy us," said Madame Poulain, handing over the change for her English sovereign. It was a gold

napoleon and a two-franc piece. For the first time directly addressing Mrs. Dampier, "There has evidently been a mistake," she said civilly. "No doubt monsieur left madame at the door, and went off to his studio last night. I expect madame will find monsieur there, quite safe and sound."

Senator Burton, well as he believed himself to be acquainted with his landlady, would have been very much taken aback had he visioned what followed his own and Mrs. Dampier's departure from the Hôtel Saint Ange.

Madame Poulain remained at the door of the porte cochère till the open carriage turned the corner of the narrow street. Then she looked at her nephew.

"How much did she give you?" she asked roughly. And the young man reluctantly opened a grimy hand and showed a two franc piece.

She snatched it from him, and motioned him back imperiously towards the courtyard.

After he had gone quite out of sight she walked quickly up the little street till she came to a low, leather-bound door which gave access to the church whose fine buttress bestowed such distinction on the otherwise rather sordid Rue Saint Ange. Pushing open the door she passed through into the dimly-lit side aisle where stood the Lady Altar.

This old church held many memories for Madame Poulain. It was here that Virginie had been christened, here that there had taken place the funeral service of the baby son she never mentioned and still bitterly mourned, and it was there, before the High Altar, to the right of which she now stood, that she hoped to see her beloved daughter stand ere long a happy bride.

She looked round her for a moment, bewildered by the sudden change from the bright sunlit street to the shadowed aisle. Then she suddenly espied what she had come to seek. Close to where she stood an alms-box clamped to the stone wall had written upon it the familiar legend, "Pour les Pauvres."

Madame Poulain took a step forward, then dropped the three francs Nancy
Dampier had just paid her, and the two francs she had extracted from Jules's reluctant hand, into the alms-box.

CHAPTER III

That the cabman was evidently familiar with the odd address, "Impasse des Nonnes," brought a measure of relief to Senator Burton's mind, and as he turned and gazed into the candid eyes of the girl sitting by his side he was ashamed of his vague suspicions.

The little carriage bowled swiftly across the great square behind which wound the Rue Saint Ange, up one of the steep, picturesque streets which lead from thence to the Luxembourg Gardens.

When they had gone some considerable way round the gay and stately pleasance so dear to the poets and students of all nations, they suddenly turned into the quaintest, quietest thoroughfare imaginable, carved out of one of those old convent gardens which till lately were among the most beautiful and characteristic features of the "Quartier."

An architect, who happened also to be an artist, had set up in this

remote and peaceful oasis his household gods, adding on this, his own domain, a few studios with living rooms attached.

A broad, sanded path ran between the low picturesque buildings, and so the carriage was obliged to draw up at the entrance to the Impasse.

Senator Burton looked up at the cabman: "Better not take off the lady's trunk just yet," he said quickly in French, and though Nancy Dampier made no demur, she looked surprised.

They began walking up the shaded path, for above the low walls on either side sprang flowering shrubs and trees.

"What a charming place!" exclaimed the Senator, smiling down at her. "How fond you and your husband must be of it!"

But his companion shook her head. "I've never been here," she said slowly. "You see this is my first visit to Paris. Though I ought not to call it a visit, for Paris is to be my home now," and she smiled at last, happy in the belief that in a few moments she would see Jack.

She was a little troubled at the thought that Jack would be disappointed at her coming here in this way, with a stranger. But surely after she had explained the extraordinary occurrence of the morning he would understand?

They were now opposite No. 3. It was a curious, mosque-like building, with the domed roof of what must be the studio, in the centre. Boldly inscribed on a marble slab set above the door was the name, "John Dampier."

Before the bell had well stopped ringing, a sturdy apple-faced old woman, wearing the Breton dress Jack so much admired, stood

before them.

Nancy of course knew her at once for Mère Bideau.

A pleasant smile lit up the gnarled face, and Nancy remembered what Jack had so often said as to Mère Bideau's clever way of dealing with visitors, especially with possible art patrons.

Mrs. Dampier looked very kindly at the old woman who had been so good and so faithful a servant to her Jack, and who, she hoped, would also serve her well and faithfully.

Before the Senator had time to speak, Mère Bideau, shaking her head, observed respectfully, "Mr. Dampier is not yet arrived. But if you, monsieur, and you, madame, will give yourselves the trouble of coming back this afternoon he will certainly be here, for I am expecting him any moment—"

"Do you mean that Mr. Dampier has not been here at all this morning?" enquired the Senator.

"No, monsieur, but as I have just had the honour of informing you, my master is to arrive to-day without fail. Everything is ready for him and for his lady. I had a letter from Mr. Dampier the day before yesterday." She waited a moment, and then added, "Won't monsieur come in and wait? Mr. Dampier would indeed be sorry to miss monsieur!"

So far so good. Senator Burton eagerly acknowledged to himself that here was confirmation—as much confirmation as any reasonable man could expect—of Mrs. Dampier's story.

This respectable old woman was evidently expecting her master and his bride to-day—of that there could now be no doubt.

"I beg of you to enter," said Mère Bideau again. "Monsieur and madame may like to visit the studio? I do not say that it is very tidy—but my master's beautiful paintings are not affected by untidiness—" and she smiled ingratiatingly.

This important-looking gentleman, whom her shrewd Parisian eyes and ears had already told her was an American, might be an important picture-buyer; in any case, he was evidently gravely disappointed at not finding Mr. Dampier at home.

"My master may arrive any moment," she said again; "and though I've had to put all the luggage he sent on some time ago, in the studio—well, monsieur and madame will excuse that!"

She stood aside to allow the strangers to step through into the little passage.

The Senator turned to Nancy: "Hadn't we better go in and wait?" he asked. "You must remember that if Mr. Dampier has gone to the hotel they will certainly tell him we are here."

"No," said Nancy in a low voice, "I would rather not go in—now. My husband doesn't want me to see the place until he has got it ready for me." Her lips quivered. "But oh, Mr. Burton, where can Jack be? What can he be doing?" She put her hands together with a helpless, childish gesture of distress. Then, making an effort over herself, she said in a more composed voice, "But I should like you to go in and just see some of Jack's pictures."

With a smiling face Mère Bideau preceded the Senator down a sunny corridor into the large studio. It was circular in shape, lighted by a skylight, and contained a few pieces of fine old furniture, now incongruously allied to a number of unopened packing-cases and trunks.

Mère Bideau went on talking volubly. She was evidently both fond and proud of her master. Suddenly she waved her lean arm towards a large, ambitious painting showing a typical family group of French bourgeois sitting in an arbour.

"This is what won Mr. Dampier his first Salon medal," she explained. "But his work has much improved since then, as monsieur can see for himself!" and she uncovered an unframed easel portrait. It was a really interesting, distinguished presentment of a man. "Is not this excellent?" exclaimed Mère Bideau eagerly. "What expression, what strength in the mouth, in the eyes!"

Senator Burton, had the circumstances been other, would perhaps have smiled at the old woman's enthusiasm, and at her intelligent criticism. But now he simply nodded his head gravely. "Yes, that is a very good portrait," he said absently. "And—and—where are the living rooms?"

"This way, monsieur!" Then, with some surprise, "Would monsieur care to see the appartement? Then I presume monsieur is a friend of my master."

But the Senator shook his head quickly. "No, no, I don't want to see the rooms," he said. "I was only curious to know if Mr. Dampier actually lived here."

As there was a suite of living rooms attached to the studio, why had the
Dampiers gone to an hotel?

"Yes, monsieur, there are three beautiful bedrooms, also a bath-room, and a room which was not used by us, but which my master is going to turn into a little salon for his lady. As for their meals—" she

shrugged her shoulders—"they will have to be served as heretofore in the studio." Then, "Does monsieur know the new Madame Dampier?" enquired Mère Bideau a trifle anxiously.

"Yes," he answered uncomfortably. "Yes, I do know her."

"And if monsieur will excuse the question, is she a nice lady? It will make a great difference to me—"

"Yes, yes—she is very charming, very pretty."

He could not bring himself to inform the good woman that the lady who had come with him, and who was now waiting outside the house, claimed to be Mrs. Dampier. It would be too—too unpleasant if it turned out to be—well, a mistake!

The Senator was telling himself ruefully that though there was now ample evidence of the existence of John Dampier, there was not evidence at all as yet that the artist had ever been at the Hôtel Saint Ange: still less that the young Englishwoman who had just now refused to accompany him into the studio was John Dampier's wife. However, that fact, as she had herself pointed out rather piteously, could very soon be put to the proof.

Slowly Senator Burton left the studio and made his way into the open air, where Nancy was waiting for him.

"Well?" he said questioningly. "Well, Mrs. Dampier, what is it that you would like to do now?"

"I don't know what I ought to do," said Nancy helplessly. She had again become very pale and she looked bewildered, as well as distressed. "You see I felt so sure that we should find Jack here!"

"The only thing I can suggest your doing," the American spoke kindly, if a little coldly, "is to come back with me to the Hôtel Saint Ange. It is probable that we shall find Mr. Dampier there, waiting for you. A dozen things may have happened to him, none of which need give you any cause for anxiety." He pulled out his watch. "Hum! It's close on twelve—yes, the only thing to do is to go back to the hotel. It's almost certain we shall find him there—" it was on his lips to add, "if he really did come with you last night," but he checked himself in time.

"But Mr. Burton? Suppose Jack is not there?"

"If he doesn't return within the next two or three hours, then I will consult with my son, who, young though he be, has a very good head on his shoulders, as to what will be the best step for you to take. But don't let's meet trouble half-way! I have little doubt that we shall find Mr. Dampier waiting for you, vowing vengeance against the bold man who has eloped, even with the best of motives, with his wife!" he smiled, and poor Nancy gave a quivering smile in return.

"I should so much have preferred not to go back to that hotel," she said, in a low voice. "I do hope Jack won't make me stay on there for the next two or three days."

And with the remembrance of what she had considered to be the gross insult put upon her by Madame Poulain, Nancy Dampier reddened deeply, while her new friend felt more and more bewildered and puzzled.

On the one hand Senator Burton had the testimony of three trustworthy persons that the young Englishwoman had arrived alone at the hotel the night before; and against this positive testimony there was nothing but her bare word.

Very, very reluctantly, he felt compelled to believe the Poulains' version of what had happened. He could think of no motive—in fact there was no motive—which could prompt a false assertion on their part.

As they were driving back, each silent, each full of painful misgivings, the kindly American began to wonder whether he had not met with that, if rare yet undoubted, condition known as entire loss of memory.

If, as Madame Poulain had suggested, Mr. Dampier had left his wife just before their arrival at the hotel, was it not conceivable that by some kind of kink in Mrs. Dampier's brain—the kind of kink which brings men and women to entertain, when otherwise sane, certain strange delusions—she had imagined the story she now told with so much circumstantial detail and clearness?

When they were nearing the hotel, Nancy put her hand nervously on her companion's arm.

"Mr. Burton," she whispered, "I'm horribly afraid of the Poulains! I keep thinking of such dreadful things."

"Now look here, Mrs. Dampier—" Senator Burton turned, and looking down into her agitated face, spoke gently and kindly—"though I quite admit to you these people's conduct must seem inexplicable, I feel sure you are wronging the Poulains. They are very worthy, respectable folk—I've known them long enough to vouch for that fact. This extraordinary misunderstanding, this mistake—for it must be either a misunderstanding or a mistake on some one's part—will soon be cleared up, so much is certain: till then I beg you not to treat them as enemies."

And yet even Senator Burton felt taken aback when he saw the undisguised annoyance, the keen irritation with which their return to the Hôtel Saint Ange was greeted by the woman to whom he had just given so good a certificate of character.

Madame Poulain was standing on the street side of the open porte cochère, as the carriage drove down the narrow street, and the American was astonished to see the change which came over her face.

An angry, vindictive, even a cruel expression swept over it, and instead of waiting to greet them as the carriage drew up at the door she turned abruptly away, and shuffled out of sight.

"Wait a moment," he said, as the fiacre drew up, "don't get out of the carriage yet, Mrs. Dampier—"

And meekly Nancy obeyed him.

The Senator hurried through into the courtyard. Much would he have given, and he was a careful man, to have seen the image he had

formed of Jack Dampier standing on the sun-flecked flagstones. But the broad space stretching before him was empty, deserted; during the daylight hours of each day the Exhibition drew every one away much as a honey cask might have done a hive of bees.

Madame Poulain did not come out of her kitchen as was her usual hospitable wont when she heard footsteps echoing under the vaulted porte cochère, and so her American guest had to go across, and walk right into her special domain.

"We did not find the gentleman at his studio," he said shortly, "and I presume, Madame Poulain, that he has not yet been here?"

She shook her head sullenly, and then, with none of her usual suavity, exclaimed, "I do not think, Monsieur le Sénateur, that you should have brought that demoiselle back here!"

She gave him so odd—some would have said, so insolent a look, that the Senator realised for the first time what he was to realise yet further in connection with this strange business, namely, that the many who go through life refusing to act the part of good Samaritans have at any rate excellent reasons for their abstention.

It was disagreeably dear that Madame Poulain thought him a foolish old man who had been caught by an adventuress's pretty face….

To their joint relief Monsieur Poulain came strolling into his wife's kitchen.

"I've been telling Monsieur le Sénateur," exclaimed Madame Poulain, "that we do not wish to have anything more to do with that young person who asserts that she arrived here with a man last night. Monsieur le Sénateur has too good a heart: he is being deceived."

The hotel-keeper looked awkwardly, deprecatingly, at his valued American client. "Paris is so full of queer people just now," he muttered. "They keep mostly to the other side of the river, to the Opera quarter, but we are troubled with them here too, during an Exhibition Year!"

"There is nothing at all queer about this poor young lady," said Senator Burton sharply—somehow the cruel insinuation roused him to chivalrous defence. But soon he changed his tone, "Now look here, my good friends"—he glanced from the husband to the wife—"surely you have both heard of people who have suddenly lost their memory, even to the knowledge of who they were and where they came from? Now I fear—I very much fear—that something of the kind has happened to this Mrs. Dampier! I am as sure that she is not consciously telling a lie as I am that you are telling me the truth. For one thing, I have ascertained that this lady's statement as to Mr. John Dampier having a studio in Paris, where he was expected this morning, is true. As to who she is herself that question can and will be soon set at rest. Meanwhile my daughter and myself"—and then he hesitated, for, well as he knew French, Senator Burton did not quite know how to convey his meaning, namely, that they, he and his daughter, meant to see her through. "My daughter and myself," he repeated firmly, "are going to do the best we can to help her."

Madame Poulain opened her lips—then she shut them tight again. She longed to tell "Monsieur le Sénateur" that in that case she and Poulain must have the regret of asking him to leave their hotel.

But she did not dare to do this.

Her husband broke in conciliatingly: "No doubt it is as Monsieur le Sénateur says," he observed; "the demoiselle is what we said she was only this morning—" and then he uttered the word which in French means so much and so little—the word "toquée."

There came another interruption. "Here come Mademoiselle Daisy and Monsieur
Gerald!" exclaimed Madame Poulain in a relieved tone.

The Senator's son and daughter had just emerged across the courtyard, from the vestibule where ended the escalier d'honneur. There was a look of keen, alert interest and curiosity on Gerald Burton's fine, intelligent face. He was talking eagerly to his sister, and Madame Poulain told herself that surely these two young people could not wish their stay in Paris to be complicated by this—this unfortunate business—for so the Frenchwoman in her own secret heart designated the mysterious affair which was causing her and her worthy husband so much unnecessary trouble.

Some little trouble, so she admitted to herself, they had expected to have, but they had not thought it would take this very strange and tiresome shape.

But the hotel-keeper was destined to be bitterly disappointed in her hope that Daisy and Gerald Burton would try and dissuade their father from having anything more to do with Mrs. Dampier.

"Well, father?" the two fresh voices rang out, and the Senator smiled back well pleased. He was one of those fortunate fathers who are on terms of full confidence and friendship as well as affection with their children. Indeed Senator Burton was specially blessed; Daisy was devoted to her father, and Gerald had never given him a moment of real unease: the young man had done well at college, and now seemed likely to become one of the most distinguished and successful exponents of that branch of art—architecture—modern America has made specially her own.

"Well?" said the Senator, "well, Daisy, I suppose you have told your

brother about this odd affair?"

As his daughter nodded, he went on:—"As for me, I have unfortunately nothing to tell. We found the studio, and everything was exactly as this poor young lady said it would be—with the one paramount exception that her husband was not there! And though his housekeeper seems to be expecting Mr. Dampier every moment, she has had no news of him since he wrote, some days ago, saying he would arrive this morning. It certainly is a very inexplicable business—" he looked helplessly from one good-looking, intelligent young face to the other.

"But where is Mrs. Dampier now?" asked Daisy eagerly. "I do think you might have told me before you took her away, father. I would have loved to have said good-bye to her. I do like her so much!"

"You won't have far to go to see her. Mrs. Dampier's at the door, sitting in a carriage," said her father drily. "I had to bring her back here: I didn't know what else to do."

"Why, of course, father, you did quite right!"

And Gerald Burton chimed in, "Yes, of course you were right to do that, father."

Senator Burton smiled a little ruefully at his children's unquestioning approval. He himself was by no means sure that he had done "quite right."

They walked, the three of them, across to the porte-cochère.

Nancy Dampier was now sitting crouched up in a corner of the fiacre; a handkerchief was pressed to her face, and she was trying, not very successfully, to stifle her sobs of nervous fear and distress.

With an eager, impulsive gesture the American girl leapt up the step of the little open carriage. "Don't cry," she whispered soothingly. "It will all come right soon! Why, I expect your husband just went out to see a friend and got kept somehow. If it wasn't for those stupid Poulains' mistake about last night you wouldn't feel really worried, now would you?"

Nancy dabbed her eyes. She felt ashamed of being caught crying by these kind people. "I know I'm being silly!" she gasped. "You must forgive me! It's quite true I shouldn't feel as worried as I feel now if it wasn't for the Poulains—their saying, I mean, that they've never seen my husband. That's what upset me. It all seems so strange and—and horrid. My sense tells me it's quite probable Jack has gone in to see some friend, and was kept somehow."

"And now," said Daisy Burton persuasively, "you must come upstairs with us, and we'll get Madame Poulain to send us up a nice déjeuner to our sitting-room."

And so the Senator found part of his new problem solved for him. Daisy, so much was dear, had determined to befriend—and that to the uttermost—this unfortunate young Englishwoman.

But now there arose another most disagreeable complication.

Madame Poulain had strolled out, her arms akimbo, to see what was going on. And, as if she had guessed the purport of Miss Burton's words, she walked forward, and speaking this time respectfully, even suavely, to "Monsieur le Sénateur," observed, "My husband and I regret very greatly that we cannot ask this lady to stay on in our hotel. We have no vacant room—no room at all!"

And then it was that Gerald Burton, who had stood apart from the discussion, saying nothing, simply looking intently, sympathetically at

his sister and Mrs. Dampier—took a hand in the now complicated little human game.

"Father!" he exclaimed, speaking in low, sharp tones. "Of course Mrs. Dampier must stay on here with us till her husband comes back! If by some extraordinary chance he isn't back by to-night she can have my room—I shall easily find some place outside." And as his father looked at him a little doubtfully he went on:—"Will you explain to Madame Poulain what we've settled? I can't trust myself to speak to the woman! She's behaving in the most unkind, brutal way to this poor little lady."

He went on between his teeth, "The Poulains have got some game on in connection with this thing. I wish I could guess what it is."

And the Senator, much disliking his task, did speak to Madame Poulain. "I am arranging for Mrs. Dampier to stay with us, as our guest, till her husband's—hem—arrival. My son will find a room outside, so you need not disturb yourself about the matter. Kindly send for Jules, and have her trunk carried up to our apartments."

And Madame Poulain, after an uncomfortably long pause, turned and silently obeyed the Senator's behest.

CHAPTER IV

The afternoon wore itself away, and to two out of the four people who spent it together in the pleasant salon of the Burtons' suite of rooms the hours, nay the very minutes, dragged as they had never dragged before.

Looking back to that first day of distress and bewilderment, Nancy later sometimes asked herself what would have happened, what she would have done, had she lacked the protection, the kindness—and what with Daisy Burton almost at once became the warm affection—of this American family?

Daisy and Gerald Burton not only made her feel that they understood, and, in a measure, shared in her distress, but they also helped her to bear her anguish and suspense.

Although she was not aware of it very different was the mental attitude of their father.

Senator Burton was one of those public men of whom modern America has a right to be proud. He was a hard worker—chairman of one Senate committee and a member of four others; he had never been a brilliant debater, but his more brilliant colleagues respected his sense of logic and force of character. He had always been unyielding in his convictions, absolutely independent in his views, a man to whom many of his fellow-countrymen would have turned in any kind of trouble or perplexity sure of clear and honest counsel.

And yet now, as to this simple matter, the Senator, try as he might, could not make up his mind. Nothing, in his long life, had puzzled him as he was puzzled now. No happening, connected with another human being, had ever so filled him with the discomfort born of uncertainty.

But the object of his—well, yes, his suspicions, was evidently quite unconscious of the mingled feelings with which he regarded her, and he was half ashamed of the ease with which he concealed his trouble both from his children and from their new friend.

Nancy Dampier was far too ill at ease herself to give any thought as

to how others regarded her. She had now become dreadfully anxious, dreadfully troubled about Jack.

Much of her time was spent standing at a window of the corridor which formed a portion of the Burtons' "appartement." This corridor overlooked the square, sunny courtyard below; but during that first dreary afternoon of suspense and waiting the Hôtel Saint Ange might have been an enchanted palace of sleep. Not a creature came in or out through the porte cochère—with one insignificant exception: two workmen, dressed in picturesque blue smocks, clattered across the big white stones, the one swinging a pail of quaking lime in his hand, and whistling gaily as he went.

When a carriage stopped, or seemed to stop, in the street which lay beyond the other side of the quadrangular group of buildings, then Nancy's heart would leap, and she would lean out, dangerously far over the grey bar of the window; but the beloved, and now familiar figure of her husband never followed on the sound, as she hoped against hope, it would do.

At last, when the long afternoon was drawing to a close, Senator Burton went down and had another long conversation with the Poulains.

The hotel-keeper and his wife by now had changed their tone; they were quite respectful, even sympathetic:

"Of course it is possible," observed Madame Poulain hesitatingly, "that this young lady, as you yourself suggested this morning, Monsieur le Sénateur, is suffering from loss of memory, and that she has imagined her arrival here with this artist gentleman. But if so, what a strange thing to fancy about oneself! Is it not more likely—I say it with all respect, Monsieur le Sénateur—that for some reason unknown to us she is acting a part?"

And with a heavy heart "Monsieur le Sénateur" had to admit that Madame Poulain's view might be the correct one. Nancy's charm of manner, even her fragile and delicate beauty, told against her in the kindly but shrewd American's mind. True, Mrs. Dampier—if indeed she were Mrs. Dampier—did not look like an adventuress: but then does any adventuress look like an adventuress till she is found to be one?

The Frenchwoman suggested yet another theory. "I have been asking myself," she said, smiling a little wryly, "another question. Is it not possible that this young lady and her husband had a quarrel? Such incidents do occur, even during honeymoons. If the two had a little quarrel he may have left her at our door—just to punish her, Monsieur le Sénateur. He would know she was safe in our respectable hotel. Your sex, if I may say so, Monsieur le Sénateur, is sometimes very unkind, very unfeeling, in their dealings with mine."

Monsieur Poulain, who had said nothing, here intervened. "How you do run on," he said crossly. "You talk too much, my wife. We haven't to account for what has happened!"

But Senator Burton had been struck by Madame Poulain's notion. Men, and if all the Senator had heard was true, especially Englishmen, do behave very strangely sometimes to their women-folk. It was an Englishman who conceived the character of Petruchio. He remembered Mrs. Dampier's flushed face, the shy, embarrassed manner with which she had come forward to meet him that morning. She had seemed rather unnecessarily distressed at not being able to make the hotel people understand her: she had evidently been much disappointed that her husband had not left a message for her.

"My son thinks it possible that Mr. Dampier may have met with an accident on his way to the studio."

A long questioning look flashed from Madame Poulain to her husband, but
Poulain was a cautious soul, and he gave his wife no lead.

"Well," she said at last, "of course that could be ascertained," and the Senator with satisfaction told himself that she was at last taking a proper part in what had become his trouble, "but I cannot help thinking, Monsieur le Sénateur, that we might give this naughty husband a little longer—at any rate till to-morrow—to come back to the fold."

And the Senator, perplexed and disturbed, told himself that after all this might be good advice.

But when he again went upstairs and joined the young people, he found that this was not at all a plan to which any one of the three was likely to consent. In fact as he came into the sitting-room where Nancy Dampier was now restlessly walking up and down, he noticed that his son's hat and his son's stick were already in his son's hands.

"I think I ought to go off, father, to the local Commissaire of Police. There's one in every Paris district," said Gerald Burton abruptly. "Mrs. Dampier is convinced that her husband did go out this morning, even if the Poulains did not see him doing so; and she and I think it possible, in fact, we are afraid, that he may have met with an accident on his way to the studio."

As he saw by his father's face that this theory did not commend itself to the Senator, the young man went on quickly:—"At any rate my doing this can do no harm. I might just inform the Commissaire that a gentleman has been missing since this morning from the Hôtel Saint Ange, and that the only theory we can form which can account for his absence is that he may have met with an accident. Mrs. Dampier has

kindly provided me with a description of her husband, and she has told me what she thinks he might have been wearing."

Nancy stopped her restless pacing. "If only the Poulains would allow me to see where Jack slept last night!" she cried, bursting into tears. "But oh, everything is made so much more difficult by their extraordinary assertion that he never came here at all! You see he had quite a large portmanteau with him, and I can't possibly tell which of his suits he put on this morning."

And the Senator looking down into her flushed, tearful face, wondered whether she were indeed telling the truth—and most painfully he doubted, doubted very much.

But when Gerald Burton came back at the end of two hours, after a long and weary struggle with French officialdom, all he could report was that to the best of the Commissaire's belief no Englishman had met with an accident that day. There had been three street accidents yesterday in which foreigners had been concerned, but none, most positively none, to-day. He admitted, however, that all his reports were not yet in.

Paris, from the human point of view, swells to monstrous proportions when it becomes the background of a great International World's Fair. And the police, unlike the great majority of those in the vast hive where they keep order, have nothing to gain in exchange for the manifold discomforts an Exhibition brings in its train.

At last, worn out by the mingled agitations and emotions of the day, Nancy went to bed.

The Senator, Gerald and Daisy Burton waited up some time longer. It was a comfort to the father to be able to feel that at last he was alone for a while with his children. To them at least he could unburden his

perplexed and now burdened mind.

"I suppose it didn't occur to you, Gerald, to go to this Mr. Dampier's studio?"

He looked enquiringly at his son.

Gerald Burton was sitting at the table from which Mrs. Dampier had just risen. He looked, if a trifle weary, yet full of eager energy and life —a fine specimen of strong, confident young manhood—a son of whom any father might well be fond and proud.

The Senator had great confidence in Gerald's sense and judgment.

"Yes indeed, father, I went there first. Not only did I go to the studio, but from the Commissaire's office I visited many of the infirmaries and hospitals of the Quarter. You see, I didn't trust the Commissaire; I don't think he really knew whether there had been any street accidents or not. In fact at the end of our talk he admitted as much himself."

"And at Mr. Dampier's studio?" queried the Senator. "What did you find there? Didn't the old housekeeper seem surprised at her master's prolonged absence?"

"Yes, father, she did indeed. I could see that she was beginning to feel very much annoyed and put out about it."

"Did she tell you," asked the Senator hesitatingly, "what sort of man this
Mr. Dampier is?"

"She spoke very well of him," said young Burton, with a touch of reluctance in his voice, "but she admitted that he was a casual sort of

fellow."

Gerald's sister looked up. She broke in, rather eagerly, "What sort of a man do you suppose Mr. Dampier to be, Gerald?"

He shrugged his shoulders, rather ill-temperedly. He, too, was tired, after the long day of waiting and suspense. "How can I possibly tell, Daisy? I must say it's rather like a woman to ask such a question! From something Mrs. Dampier said, I gather he is a plain-looking chap."

And then Daisy laughed heartily, for the first time that day. "Why, she adores him!" she cried, "she can't have told you that."

"Indeed she did! But you weren't there when I made her describe him carefully to me. I had to ask her, for it was important that I should have some sort of notion what the fellow is like."

He took out his note-book. "I'll tell you what I wrote down, practically from her dictation. 'A tall man—taller than the average Englishman. A loosely-hung fellow; (he doesn't care for any kind of sport, I gather). Thirty five years of age; (seems a bit old to have married a girl—she won't be twenty till next month). He has big, strongly-marked features, and a good deal of fair hair. Always wears an old fashioned repeater watch and bunch of seals. Was probably wearing this morning a light grey tweed suit and a straw hat.'" Gerald looked up and turned to his sister, "If you call that the description of a good-looking man, well, all I can say is that I don't agree with you, Daisy!"

"He's a very good artist," said the Senator mildly. "Did you go into his studio, Gerald?"

"Yes, I did. And I can't say that I agree with you, father: I didn't care for any of the pictures I saw there."

Gerald Burton spoke rather crossly. Both his father and sister felt surprised at his tone. He was generally very equable and good-tempered. But where any sort of art was concerned he naturally claimed to speak with authority.

"Have you any theory, Gerald"—the Senator hesitated, "to account for the extraordinary discrepancy between the Poulains' story and what Mrs. Dampier asserts to be the case?"

"Yes, father, I have a quite definite theory. I believe the Poulains are lying."

The young man leant forward across the round table. He spoke very earnestly, but even as he spoke he lowered his voice, as if fearing to be overheard.

Senator Burton glanced at the door. "You can speak quite openly," he said rather sharply. "You forget that there is the door of our appartement as well as a passage between this room and the staircase."

"No, father, I don't forget that. But it would be quite easy for anyone to creep in. The Poulains have pass keys everywhere."

"My dear boy, they don't understand English!"

"Jules does, father. He knows far more English than he admits. At any rate he understands everything one says to him."

Daisy broke in with a touch of impatience. "But with what object could the Poulains tell such a stupid and cruel untruth, one, too, which is sure to be found out very soon? If this Mr. Dampier did arrive here last night, well then, he did—if he didn't, he didn't!"

"Yes, that's true," Gerald turned to his sister. "And though I've given a good deal of thought to it during the last few hours—I can't form any theory yet as to why the Poulains are lying. I only feel quite sure that they are."

"It's a curious thing," observed the Senator musingly, "that neither of you saw this Mr. Dampier last night—curious, I mean, that he should have just stepped up into a cupboard, as Mrs. Dampier says he did, at the exact moment when you were outside the door."

Neither of his children made any reply. That coincidence still troubled Daisy Burton.

At last,—"I don't see that it's at all curious," exclaimed her brother hastily. "It's very unfortunate, of course, for if we had happened to see him the Poulains couldn't have told the tale they told you this morning."

The Senator sighed. He was tired—tired of the long afternoon spent in doing nothing, and, to tell the truth, tired of the curious, inexplicable problem with which he had been battling since the morning.

"Well, I say it with sincere regret, but I am inclined to believe the Poulains."

"Father!" His son was looking at him with surprise and yes, indignation.

"Yes, Gerald. I am, for the present, inclined not only to believe the Poulains' clear and consistent story, but to share Madame Poulain's view of the case—"

"And what is her view?" asked Daisy eagerly.

"Well, my dear, her view—the view, let me remind you, of a sensible woman who, I fancy, has seen a good deal of life—is that Mr. Dampier did accompany his wife here, as far as the hotel, that is. That then, as the result of what our good landlady calls a 'querelle d'amoureux,' he left her—knowing she would be quite safe of course in so respectable a place as the Hôtel Saint Ange."

Daisy Burton only said one word—but that word was "Brute!" and her father saw that there was the light of battle in her eyes.

"My dear," he said gently, "you forget that it was an Englishman who wrote
'The Taming of the Shrew.'"

"And yet American girls—of a sort—are quite eager to marry Englishmen!"

The Senator quickly pursued his advantage. "Now is it likely that Madame Poulain would make such a suggestion if she were not telling the truth? Of course her view is that this Mr. Dampier will turn up, safe and sound, when he thinks he has sufficiently punished his poor little wife for her share in their 'lovers' quarrel.'"

But at this Gerald Burton shook his head. "We know nothing of this man Dampier," he said, "but I would stake my life on Mrs. Dampier's truthfulness."

The Senator rose from his chair. Gerald's attitude was generous; he would not have had him otherwise but still he felt irritated by his son's suspicion of the Poulains.

"Well, it's getting late, and I suppose we ought all to go to bed now, especially as they begin moving about so early in this place. As for you, my boy, I hope you've secured a good room outside, eh?"

Gerald Burton also got up. He smiled and shook his head.

"No, father, I haven't found a place at all yet! The truth is I've been so tremendously taken up with this affair that I forgot all about having to find a room to-night."

"Oh dear!" cried Daisy in dismay. "Won't you find it very difficult? They say Paris is absolutely full just now. Why, a lot of people who have never let before are letting out rooms just now—so Madame Poulain says."

"Don't worry about me. I shall be all right," said Gerald quickly. "I suppose my things have been moved into your room, father?"

Daisy nodded. "Yes, I saw to all that. In fact I did more—" she smiled; the brother and sister were very fond of one another. "I packed your bag for you, Ger."

"Thanks," he said. And then going quickly round the table, he bent down and kissed her. "I'll be in early to-morrow morning," he said, nodding to his father.

Then he went out.

Daisy Burton felt surprised. Gerald was the best of brothers, but he didn't often kiss her good-night. There had been a strange touch of excitement, of emotion, in his manner to-night. It was natural that she herself should be moved by Nancy Dampier's distress. But Gerald? Gerald, who was generally speaking rather nonchalant, and very, very critical of women?

"Gerald's tremendously excited about this thing," said Daisy thoughtfully. She was two years younger in years than her brother, but older, as young women are apt to be older, in all that counts in

civilised life. "I've never seen him quite so—so keen about anything before."

"I hope he will have got a comfortable room," said the Senator a little crossly. Then fondly he turned and took his daughter's hand. "Sleep well, my darling," he said. "You two have been very kind to that poor little soul. And I love you both for it. Whatever happens, kindness is never lost."

"Why, what d'you mean, father?" she looked down at him troubled, rather disturbed by his words.

"Well, Daisy, the truth is,"—he hesitated—"I can't make out whether this Mrs. Dampier is all she seems to be. And I want to prepare you for a possible disappointment, my dear. When I was a young man I once took a great fancy to someone who—well, who disappointed me cruelly—" he was speaking very gravely. "It just spoilt my ideal for a time—I mean my ideal of human nature. Now I don't want anything of that kind to happen to you or to our boy in connection with this—this young lady."

"But, father? You know French people aren't as particular about telling the truth as are English people. I can't understand why you believe the Poulains' story—"

"My dear, I don't know what to believe," he said thoughtfully.

She was twenty-four years old, this grey-eyed, honest, straightforward girl of his; and yet Senator Burton, much as he loved her, knew very little as to her knowledge of life. Did Daisy know anything of the ugly side of human nature? Did she know, for instance, that there are men and women, especially women, who spend their lives preying on the honest, the chivalrous, and the kind?

"The mystery is sure to be cleared up very soon," he said aloud. "If what our new friend says is true there must be as many people in England who know her to be what she says she is, as there are people in Paris who evidently know all about the artist, John Dampier."

"Yes, that's true. But father?"

"Yes, my dear."

"I am quite sure Mrs. Dampier is telling the truth."

Somehow the fact that Daisy was anxious to say that she disagreed with him stung the Senator.

"Then what do you think of the Poulains?" he asked quietly—"the Poulains, whom you have known, my dear, ever since you were fifteen—on whose honesty and probity I personally would stake a good deal. What do you think about them?"

Daisy began to look very troubled. "I don't know what to think," she faltered. "The truth is, father, I haven't thought very much of the Poulains in the matter. You see, Madame Poulain has not spoken to me about it at all. But you see that Gerald believes them to be lying."

"Gerald," said the Senator rather sharply, "is still only a boy in many things, Daisy. And boys are apt, as you and I know, to take sides, to feel very positive about things. But you and I, my darling—well, we must try to be judicial—we must try to keep our heads, eh?"

"Yes, father, yes—we must, indeed"; but even as she said the words she did not quite know what her father meant by "judicial."

And Gerald Burton? For a while, perhaps for an hour, holding his

heavy bag in his hand, he wandered about from hostelry to hostelry, only to be told everywhere that there was no room.

Then, taking a sudden resolution, he went into a respectable little café which was still open, and where he and his father, in days gone by, had sometimes strolled in together when Daisy was going about with friends in Paris. There he asked permission to leave his bag. Even had he found a room, he could not have slept—so he assured himself. He was too excited, his brain was working too quickly.

Talking busily, anxiously, argumentatively to himself as he went, he made his way to the river—to the broad, tree-lined quays which to your true lover of Paris contain the most enchanting and characteristic vistas of the city.

Once there, his footsteps became slower. He thrust his hands into his pockets and walked along, with eyes bent on the ground.

What manner of man could John Dampier be to leave his young wife —such a beautiful, trusting, confiding creature as was evidently this poor girl—in this cruel uncertainty? Was it conceivable that the man lived who could behave to this Mrs. Dampier with the unkindness Gerald's father had suggested—and that as the outcome of a trifling quarrel? No! Gerald Burton's generous nature revolted from such a notion.

And yet—and yet his father thought it quite possible! To Gerald his father's views and his father's attitude to life meant a great deal more than he was wont to allow, either to that same kind indulgent father or to himself; and now he had to admit that the Senator did believe that what seemed so revolting to him, Gerald, was the most probable explanation of the mystery.

The young man had stayed quite a while at the studio, listening to

Mère Bideau's garrulous confidences. Now and again he had asked her a question, forced thereto by some obscure but none the less intense desire to know what Nancy Dampier's husband was like. And the old woman had acknowledged, in answer to a word from him, that her master was not a good-tempered man.

"Monsieur" could be very cross, very disagreeable sometimes. But bah! were not all gentlemen like that?—so Mère Bideau had added with an easy laugh.

On the whole, however—so much must be admitted—she had given Dampier a very good character. If quick-tempered, he was generous, considerate, and, above all, hard-working. But—but Mère Bideau had been very much surprised to hear "Monsieur" was going to be married—and to an Englishwoman, too! She, Mère Bideau, had always supposed he preferred Frenchwomen; in fact, he had told her so time and again. But bah! again; what won't a pretty face do with a man? So Mère Bideau had exclaimed 'twixt smile and sigh.

Gerald Burton began walking more quickly, this time towards the west, along the quay which leads to the Chamber of Deputies.

The wide thoroughfare was deserted save for an occasional straggler making his weary way home after a day spent in ministering to the wants and the pleasures of the strangers who now crowded the city….

How wise he, Gerald Burton, was now showing himself to be in thus spending the short summer night out-of-doors, à la belle étoile, as the French so charmingly put it, instead of in some stuffy, perhaps not overclean, little room!

But soon his mind swung back to the strange events of the past day!

Already Nancy Dampier's personality held a strange, beckoning fascination for the young American. He hadn't met many English girls, for his father far preferred France to England, and it was to France they sped whenever they had time to do so. And Gerald Burton hadn't cared very much for the few English girls he had met. But Nancy was very, very different from the only two kinds of her fellow countrywomen with whom he had ever been acquainted—the kind, that is, who is closely chaperoned by vigilant mother or friend, and the kind who spends her life wandering about the world by herself.

How brave, how gentle, how—how self-controlled Mrs. Dampier had been! While it was clear that she was terribly distressed, and all the more distressed by the Poulains' monstrous assertion that she had come alone to the Hôtel Saint Ange, yet how well she had behaved all that long day of waiting and suspense! How anxious she had been to spare the Burtons trouble.

Not for a single moment had he, Gerald Burton, felt with her as he so often felt with women—awkward and self-conscious. Deep in his inmost heart he was aware that there were women and girls who thought him very good-looking; and far from pleasing him, the knowledge made him feel sometimes shy, sometimes even angry. He already ardently wished to protect, to help, to shelter Mrs. Dampier.

Daisy had been out of the room for a moment, probably packing his bag, when he had come back tired and weary from his fruitless quest, and Mrs. Dampier, if keenly disappointed that he had no news, had yet thanked him very touchingly for the trifling trouble, or so it now seemed, that he had taken for her.

"I don't know what I should have done if it hadn't been for your kind father, for your sister, and—and for you, Mr. Burton."

He walked across the bridge leading to the Champs Elysées, paced round the Arc de Triomphe, and then strolled back to the deserted quays. He had no wish to go on to the Boulevards. It was Paris asleep, not Paris awake, with which Gerald Burton felt in close communion during that short summer night.

And how short is a Paris summer night! Soon after he had seen the sun rise over an eastern bend of the river, the long, low buildings which line the Seine below the quays stirred into life, and he was able to enjoy a delicious, a refreshing plunge in the great swimming-bath which is among the luxuries Paris provides for those of her sons who are early-morning toilers.

Six o'clock found Gerald Burton at the café where he had left his bag, ready for a cup of good coffee.

The woman who served him—the waiters were still asleep—told him of a room likely to be disengaged the next night.

The next night? But if Dampier were to come back this morning—as, according to one theory, he was very likely to do—then he, Gerald, would have no need of a room.

Somehow that possibility was not as agreeable to him as it ought to have been. In theory Gerald Burton longed for this unknown man's return—for a happy solution, that is, of the strange mystery which had been cast, in so dramatic a fashion, athwart the Burtons' placid, normal life; but, scarce consciously to himself, the young American felt that Dampier's reappearance would end, and that rather tamely, an exciting and in some ways a very fascinating adventure.

As he came up the Rue Saint Ange, he saw their landlord, a blue apron tied about his portly waist, busily brushing the pavement in front of the hotel with a yellow broom.

"Well?" he said eagerly, "well, Monsieur Poulain, any news?"

Poulain looked up at him and shook his head. "No, Monsieur Gerald," he said sullenly, "no news at all."

CHAPTER V

Nancy Dampier sat up in bed.

Long rays of bright sunlight filtering in between deep blue curtains showed her a large, lofty room, with panelled walls, and furniture covered with blue damask silk.

It was more like an elegant boudoir in an old English country house than a bedroom, and for a moment she wondered, bewildered, where she could be.

Then suddenly she remembered—remembered everything; and her heart filled, brimmed over, with seething pain and a sharp, overwhelming sensation of fear.

Jack had gone: disappeared: vanished as if the earth had swallowed him up! And she, Nancy, was alone in a foreign city where she did not know a single soul, with the paramount exception of the American strangers who had come to her help in so kindly and so generous a fashion.

She pushed her soft hair back from her forehead, and tried to recall, step by step, all that had happened yesterday.

Two facts started out clearly—her almost painful gratitude to the

Burtons and her shrinking terror of the Poulains, or rather of Madame Poulain, the woman who had looked fixedly into her face and lied.

As to what had happened to Dampier, Nancy's imagination began to whisper things of unutterable dread. If her Jack had been possessed of a large sum of money she would have suspected the hotel people of having murdered him….

But no, she and Jack had come to the end of the ample provision of gold and bank-notes with which they had started for Italy. As is the way with most prosperous newly-married folk, they had spent a good deal more on their short honeymoon than they had reckoned to do. He had said so the day before yesterday, in the train, when within an hour of Paris. Indeed he had added that one of the first things they must do the next day must be to call at the English bank where he kept an account.

She now told herself that she had to face the possibility, nay the probability, that her husband had met with some serious accident on his way to the Impasse des Nonnes. Nancy knew that this had been Gerald Burton's theory, and of her three new kind friends it was Gerald Burton who impressed her with the greatest trust and confidence. He, unlike his father, had at once implicitly believed her version of what had taken place when she and Jack arrived at the Hôtel Saint Ange.

The bedroom door opened, cautiously, quietly, and Daisy Burton came in carrying a tray in her pretty graceful hands.

Poor Nancy! She felt confused, grateful, and a little awkward. She had not realised that her nervous dread of Madame Poulain would mean that this kind girl must wait on her.

"I came in before, but you were sound asleep. Still, I thought I must

wake you now, for father wants to know if you would mind him going to our Embassy about your husband? It's really my brother's idea. As you know, Gerald thinks it almost certain that Mr. Dampier met with some kind of accident yesterday morning, and he isn't a bit satisfied with the way the local Commissaire de Police answered his enquiries. Gerald thinks the only way to get attended to in Paris is to make people feel that you are important, and that they will get into trouble if they don't attend to you promptly!"

Even as she was speaking Daisy Burton smiled rather nervously, for both she and Gerald had just gone through a very disagreeable half-hour with their generally docile and obedient father.

The Senator did not wish to go to the American Embassy—at any rate not yet—about this strange business. He had pleaded with both his young people to wait, at any rate, till the afternoon: at any moment, so he pointed out, they might have news of the missing man: but Gerald was inexorable.

"No, father, that's no use; if we do nothing we shan't get proper attention from the police officials till to-morrow. If you will only go and see Mr. Curtis about this business I promise to take all other trouble off your hands."

And then the Senator had actually groaned—as if he minded trouble!

"Mr. Curtis will do for you what he certainly wouldn't do for me, father. Daisy can go with you to the Embassy: I'll stay and look after Mrs. Dampier: she mustn't be left alone, exposed to the Poulains' insolence."

And so the matter had been settled. But Senator Burton had made one stipulation:—

"I won't go to the Embassy," he said firmly, "without hearing from Mrs. Dampier's own lips that such is her wish. And, Daisy? Gerald? Hearken to me—neither of you is to say anything to influence her in the matter, one way or the other."

And so it was with a certain relief that Daisy Burton now heard her new friend say eagerly:

"Why of course! I shall only be too grateful if your father will do anything he thinks may help me to find Jack. Oh, you don't know how bewildered and how frightened I feel!"

And the other answered soothingly, "Yes, indeed I do know how you must feel. But I expect it will be all right soon. After all, Gerald said —"—she hesitated a moment, and then went on more firmly —"Gerald said that probably Mr. Dampier met with quite a slight accident, and that might be the reason why the tiresome Commissaire de Police knew nothing about it."

"But if it was a slight accident," Nancy objected quickly, "Jack would have let me know at once! You don't know my husband: he would move heaven and earth to save me a minute's anxiety or trouble."

"I am sure of that. But Gerald says that if Mr. Dampier did try and arrange for you to be sent a message at once, the message miscarried—"

It was an hour later. The Senator had listened in silence while his young English guest had expressed in faltering, but seemingly very sincere, tones, her gratitude for his projected visit to the American Embassy. Nay, she had done more. Very earnestly Mrs. Dampier had begged Senator Burton and his daughter not to give themselves more trouble over her affairs than was absolutely necessary.

And her youth, her beauty, her expression of pitiful distress had touched the Senator, though it had not shaken his belief in the Poulains' story. He did however assure her, very kindly and courteously, that he grudged no time spent in her service.

And then, while Gerald Burton accompanied his father and his sister downstairs, Nancy Dampier was left alone for a few minutes with her own troubled and bewildered thoughts.

She walked restlessly over to one of the high windows of the sitting-room, and looked down into the shady garden below. Then her eyes wandered over the picturesque grey and red roofs of the old Paris Jack Dampier loved so well.

Somehow the cheerful, bright beauty of this June morning disturbed and even angered poor Nancy. She remembered with distaste, even with painful wonder, the sensations of pleasure, of amusement, of admiration with which she had first come through into this formal, harmoniously furnished salon, which was so unlike any hotel sitting-room she had ever seen before.

But that had been yesterday morning—infinitely long ago.

Now, each of the First Empire pieces of furniture seemed burnt into her brain: and the human faces of the dull gold sphinxes which jutted from each of the corners of the long, low settee seemed to grin at her maliciously.

She felt unutterably forlorn and wretched. If only she could do something! She told herself, with a sensation of recoil and revolt, that she could never face another day of suspense and waiting spent as had been the whole of yesterday afternoon and evening.

Going up to the brass-rimmed round table, she took up a book which

was lying there. It was a guide to Paris, arranged on the alphabetical principle. Idly she began turning over the leaves, and then suddenly Nancy Dampier's cheeks, which had become so pale as to arouse Senator Burton's commiseration, became deeply flushed. She turned over the leaves of the guide-book with feverish haste, anxious to find what it was that she now sought there before the return of Gerald Burton.

At last she came to the page marked M.

Yes, there was what she at once longed and dreaded to find! And she had just read the last line of the paragraph when Gerald Burton came back into the room.

Looking at him fixedly, she said quietly and in what he felt to be an unnaturally still voice, "Mr. Burton? There is a place in Paris called the Morgue. Do you not think that I ought to go there, to-day? It says in this guide-book that people who are killed in the streets of Paris are taken straight to the Morgue."

The young American nodded gravely. The Commissary of Police had mentioned the Morgue, had in fact suggested that those who were seeking John Dampier would do well to go there within a day or two.

Nancy went on:—"Could I go this morning? I would far rather go by myself, I mean without saying anything about it to either your father or to your sister."

He answered quickly, but so gently, so kindly, that the tears sprang to her eyes, "Yes, I quite understand that. But of course you must allow me to go with you."

And she answered, again in that quiet, unnaturally still voice, "Thank you. I shall be grateful if you will." Then after a moment, "Couldn't we

start soon—I mean now?"

"Why yes, certainly—if you wish it."

Without saying anything further, she went to put on her hat.

Gerald Burton's notions as to the Morgue were in a sense at once confused and clear. He had known of the place ever since he could read. He was aware that it was a building where all those who die a violent death are at once taken: he imagined it further to be a place where morbid curiosity drew daily many tourists. In fact in an old guide-book of which his father was fond he remembered that there ran a sentence:—

> The Morgue is certainly one of the most curious and extraordinary sights of Paris, but only those who are in the enjoyment of good nerves are advised to visit it.

As he waited for Mrs. Dampier the young man's face became very, very grave. Till now he had not envisaged the possibility that John Dampier, this unknown man across the current of whose life he, Gerald Burton, had been thrust in so strange and untoward a manner, might be dead.

Sudden death—that dread possibility which is never far from any one of us—never haunts the mind of normal youth.

But now there came to Gerald Burton a sudden overwhelming understanding of the transience not only of human life, but what means so much more to most sentient human beings, the transience of such measure of happiness as we poor mortals are allowed to enjoy.

His imagination conjured up Nancy Dampier as he had first seen her

standing in Virginie Poulain's little room. She had been a vision of lovely girlhood, and yes, far more than that—though he had not known it then—of radiant content.

And now?

His unspoken question was answered by Mrs. Dampier's return into the room. He looked at her searchingly. Yes, she was lovely—her beauty rather heightened than diminished, as is so often the case with a very young woman, by the ordeal she was going through, but all the glow and radiance were gone from her face.

"I ought to have told you before," he said impulsively, "that—that among the men who were taken to the Morgue yesterday morning there was no one who in the least answered to the description you have given me of Mr. Dampier—so much the Commissary of Police was able to inform me most positively."

And Nancy drew a long convulsive breath of relief.

They went down to the courtyard, and across to the porte cochère. While they did so Gerald Burton was unpleasantly conscious that they were being watched; watched from behind the door which led into the garden, for there stood Jules, a broom as almost always in his hand: watched from the kitchen window, where Madame Poulain stood with arms akimbo: watched from behind the glass pane of the little office which was only occupied when Monsieur Poulain was engaged in the pleasant task of making out his profitable weekly bills.

But not one of the three watchers came forward and offered to do them even the usual, trifling service of hailing a cab.

The two passed out into the narrow street and walked till they came to the square where stood, at this still early hour of the morning, long

rows of open carriages.

"I think we'd better drive?" said Gerald Burton questioningly.

And his companion answered quickly, "Oh yes! I should like to get there as quickly as possible." And then her pale face flushed a little. "Mr. Burton, will you kindly pay for me?"

She put her purse, an absurd, delicately tinted little beaded purse which had been one of her wedding presents, into his hand.

Gerald took it without demur. Had he been escorting an American girl, he would have insisted on being paymaster, but some sure instinct had already taught him how to treat Nancy Dampier—he realised she preferred not adding a material to the many immaterial obligations she now owed the Burton family.

A quarter of an hour's quick driving brought them within sight of the low, menacing-looking building which is so curiously, in a sense so beautifully, situated on the left bank of the Seine, to the right of Notre Dame.

"Mrs. Dampier? I beg you not to get out of the carriage till I come and fetch you," said Gerald earnestly, "there is no necessity for you to come into the Morgue unless—" he hesitated.

"I know what you mean," she said quietly. "Unless you see someone there who might be Jack. Yes, Mr. Burton, I'll stay quietly in the carriage till you come and fetch me. It's very good of you to have thought of it."

But when they drew up before the great closed door two or three of the incorrigible beggars who spend their days in the neighbourhood of the greater Paris churches, came eagerly forward.

Here were a fine couple, a good-looking Englishman and his bride. True, they were about to be cheated out of their bit of fun, but they might be good for a small dole—so thought the shrewder of those idlers who seemed, as the carriage drew up, to spring out of the ground.

One of them strolled up to Gerald. "M'sieur cannot go into the Morgue unless he has a permit," he said with a whine.

Gerald shook the man off, and rang at the closed door. It seemed a long time before it was opened by a man dressed like a Paris workman, that is in a bright blue blouse and long baggy white trousers.

"I want to view any bodies which were brought in yesterday. I fear I am a little early?"

He slipped a five franc piece into the man's hand. But the silver key which unlocks so many closed doors in Paris only bought this time a civil answer.

"Impossible, monsieur! I should lose my place. I could not do it for a thousand francs." And then in answer to the American's few words of surprise and discomfiture,—"Yes, it's quite true that we were open to the public till three years ago. But it's easier to get into the Elysée than it is to get into the Morgue, nowadays." He waited a moment, then he murmured under his breath, "Of course if monsieur cares to say that he is looking for someone who has disappeared, and if he will provide a description, the more commonplace the better, then—well, monsieur may be able to obtain a permit! At any rate monsieur has only to go along to the office where permits are issued to find that what I say is true. If only monsieur will bring me a permit I will gladly show monsieur everything there is to be seen." The man became

enthusiastic. "Not only are there the bodies to see! We also possess relics of many great criminals; and as for our refrigerating machines —ah, monsieur, they are really in their way wonders! Well worth, as I have sometimes heard people say, coming all the way to Paris to see!"

Sick at heart Gerald Burton turned away—not, however, before he had explained gravely that his wish in coming to the Morgue was not to gratify idle curiosity, but to seek a friend whose disappearance since the morning before was causing acute anxiety.

The man looked at him doubtfully—somehow this young gentleman did not look as people generally look who come to the Morgue on serious business. The janitor was only too familiar with the signs—the air of excitement, of dejection, of suspense, the reddened eyelids…. But, "In that case I am sure to see monsieur again within a few minutes," he said politely.

Nancy had stepped down from the carriage. "Well?" she said anxiously.
"Well, won't he let you in?"

"We shall have to get an order. The office is only just over there, opposite Notre Dame. Shall we dismiss the cab?"

"Yes," she said. "I would far rather walk across." Still followed by a troop of ragged idlers, they hastened across the great space in front of Notre Dame and so to the office of the Morgue.

At first the tired official whose not always easy duty it is to discriminate between the morbid sightseer and the anxious relative or friend, did not believe the American's story. He, too, evidently thought that Gerald and the latter's charming, daintily dressed companion were simply desirous of seeing every sight, however

horrible, that Paris has to offer. But when he heard the name "Dampier," his manner suddenly changed. There came over his face a sincere look of pity and concern.

"You made enquiries concerning this gentleman yesterday?" he observed, and Gerald Burton, rather surprised, though after all he need not have been, assented. Then the Commissary of Police had been to some trouble for him after all? He, Gerald, had done the man an injustice.

"We have had five bodies already brought in this morning," said the clerk thoughtfully. "But I'm sure that none of them answers to the description we have had of madame's husband. Let me see—Monsieur Dampier is aged thirty-four—he is tall, dressed in a grey suit, or possibly a brown suit of clothes, with a shock of fair hair?"

And again Gerald Burton was surprised how well the man remembered.

The other went into another room and came back with a number of grey cards in his hand. He began to mumble over the descriptions, and suddenly Gerald stopped him.

"That might be the person we are looking for!" he exclaimed. "I mean the description you've just read out—that of the Englishman?"

"Oh no, monsieur! I assure you that the body here described is that of a quite young man." And as the American looked at him doubtfully, he added, "But still, if you wish to make absolutely sure I will make out a permit; and madame can stay here while you go across to the Morgue." Again he looked pityingly at Mrs. Dampier.

Nancy shook her head. "Tell him I mean to go too," she said quietly.

The man looked at her with an odd expression. "I should not myself care to take my wife or my sister to the Morgue, monsieur. Believe me her husband is not there. Do try and dissuade the poor lady." As he spoke he averted his eyes from Nancy's flushed face.

Gerald Burton hesitated: it was really kind of this good fellow to feel so much for a stranger's distress.

"Won't you stay here and let me go alone to that place? I think you can trust me. You see there is only one body there which in any way answers to the description."

"Yes, I quite understand that, but I'd rather go too." Her lips quivered. "You see you've never seen Jack, Mr. Burton."

"I'm afraid this lady is quite determined to go too," said the young American in a low voice; and without making any further objection, the
Frenchman filled in a form and silently handed it to Gerald Burton.

And then something happened which was perhaps more untoward and strange than Gerald realised.

He and Mrs. Dampier were already well started across the great sunny space in front of Notre Dame, when suddenly he felt himself tapped on the shoulder by the man from whom they had just parted.

"Monsieur, monsieur!" said the French official breathlessly, "I forgot a most important point. Visitors to the Morgue are not allowed to see all the bodies exposed in our mortuary. When the place was closed to the public we went from one extreme to the other. The man whose description you think approximates to that of the gentleman you are looking for is Number 4. Tell the guardian to show you Number 4."

Then he turned on his heel, without awaiting the other's thanks; and as he walked away, the Frenchman said aloud, not once but many times, "Pauvre petite dame!" And then again and again, "Paume petite dame!"

But his conscience was clear. He had done his very best to prevent that obstinate young American subjecting the "poor little lady" to the horrible ordeal she was about to go through. Once more he spoke aloud—"They have no imagination—none at all—these Yankees!" he muttered, shrugging his shoulders.

CHAPTER VI

The janitor of the Morgue, remembering Gerald Burton's five-franc piece, and perchance looking forward to another rond, was wreathed in smiles.

Eagerly he welcomed the two strangers into the passage, and carefully he closed the great doors behind them.

"A little minute," he said, smiling happily. "Only one little minute! The trifling formality of showing your permit to the gentleman in the office must be gone through, and then I myself will show monsieur and madame everything there is to be seen."

"We do not wish to see everything," said Gerald Burton sharply. "We simply wish to see—" he hesitated—"body Number 4—" he lowered his voice, but Nancy understood enough French to know what it was that he said.

With a blind, instinctive gesture she put out her hand, and Gerald Burton grasped it firmly, and for the first time a look of pity and of sympathy came across the janitor's face.

Tiens! tiens! Then it was true after all? These young people (he now took them for a brother and sister) were here on business, not, as he had supposed, on pleasure.

"Come in and wait here," he said gravely. "This is the doctors' room, but madame can sit here for a moment while the formalities are gone through."

He flung open a door, and showed them into a curious, old-fashioned looking sitting-room, strangely unlike the waiting-room which would have been found attached, say, to an American or British mortuary.

An ornate writing-table filled up one corner of the room, and, opposite the two windows, covering the whole of the blank wall, was a narrow glass case running from floor to ceiling.

From this case young Burton quickly averted his eyes, for it was filled with wax models of heads which might have been modelled from the denizens of Dante's Inferno.

"I'm afraid I must now leave you for a moment," he said gently; "sit over here, Mrs. Dampier, and look out on the river."

And Nancy obeyed with dull submission. She gazed on the bright, moving panorama before her, aware, in a misty, indifferent way, that the view was beautiful, that Jack would have thought it so.

This bend of the Seine is always laden with queer, picturesque craft, and just below the window by which she sat was moored a flat-bottomed barge which evidently served as dwelling place for a very happy little family. One end of the barge had been turned into a kind of garden, there was even a vine-covered arbour, under which two tiny children were now playing some absorbing game.

And this glimpse of ordinary normal life gradually brought a feeling of peace, almost of comfort, to Nancy's sore heart. She wondered if she would ever be happy again—happy as those little children playing outside were happy, without a thought of care in the world: that had been the kind of simple, unquestioning happiness she too had thoughtlessly enjoyed till the last three days.

When Gerald Burton came back he was glad rather than grieved to

see that tears were running down her face.

But a moment later, as they followed their guide down a humid, dark passage her tears stopped, and a look of pinched terror came into her eyes.

Suddenly there fell on their ears loud, whirring, jarring sounds.

"What's that?" cried Nancy in a loud voice. Her nerves were taut with suspense, quivering with fear of what she was about to see.

And the janitor, as if he understood her question, turned round reassuringly. "Only our refrigerating machines, madame. We think them wonderfully quiet, considering. They whirr on night and day, they are never stilled. As for me—" he added jovially—"I would miss the noise very much. But as I lie in bed listening to the sound I know that all is well. It would be a very serious thing indeed for us if the machines stopped, even for ten minutes—" he shook his head mysteriously.

Nancy breathed a little more easily. She had not understood what it was exactly that he had said, but his voice had sounded cheerful and kind: and she remained for a while ignorant of the meaning and object of the machines by which they passed quickly in a great room filled with moving wheels, and, even on this hot June day, full of icy breaths.

As they came to the end of the engine-room their guide turned round and gave the young American a quick, warning look. "C'est ici," he said, under his breath. And Gerald stepped quickly in front of Mrs. Dampier.

"Is what we are going to see very horrible?" he whispered hurriedly. "I wish this lady to be spared as far as may be from seeing anything

especially painful."

"As to horrible—well, it depends, monsieur, on what is thought horrible! A good many of my pensioners have been dangerous customers in their time—but now? Fortunately, monsieur, the dead cannot bite!" and he smiled at his own grim joke.

Gerald Burton shuddered involuntarily, but as he and Nancy followed the man from the engine-room he gave a sigh of relief, for they had emerged into a wide, airy shed.

The place looked like a workshop of sorts, for it was lined, on one side, with what looked like gigantic chests of drawers, painted black; while standing about on the stone pavement were long white deal packing cases. Over in a corner was a black box, of which the lid was loose.

"You said Number 4, monsieur?" said the man in a business-like tone. "Well, I will get you out Number 4. Kindly stand just over there—not in the sunlight, that might prevent your seeing clearly." He added, speaking far more gently and kindly than he had yet done, "Madame must not be frightened. It will be all over in a moment."

Gerald looked down at his companion. Her face seemed to have become quite small, like that of a child, but the pupils of her eyes had dilated: as she stared up at him fearfully he likened them, in his heart, to deep unfathomable pools.

She came close up to him, and then, without stopping to think, simply following a natural instinct, he put his arm round her shoulder; so would he have done to his sister in a moment of similar distress.

"Don't be too frightened," he whispered, "it will all be over very, very soon, Mrs. Dampier. Somehow I don't think you have anything to

fear."

"Please stand over in that corner," said the janitor, pointing towards the black box Gerald Burton had noticed when they had first come into the yard. "We have a poor lady in that box who was only brought in an hour ago! She was run over, killed by an omnibus—such a pity, for she is such a nice fresh-looking lady: not more than about thirty years of age. We expect her family any moment; they will know her by her wedding ring, and by a little locket with a child's hair in it."

Even as he was speaking the man was opening a small, inconspicuous door, situated close to that which gave into the refrigerating-engine room.

Gerald's arm slipped down from Nancy's shoulder. She had put out her hand gropingly, as a blind child might have done, and he was now holding the poor little hand tightly clasped in his firm grasp.

There came a harsh rumbling sound, and then there was wheeled out into the open yard an inclined plane hitched up on huge iron wheels. To the inclined plane was bound a swathed, rigid figure.

"Here is Number 4," said the man in a subdued tone. "I will uncover his face so that madame and monsieur may see if it is the gentleman for whom they are seeking."

A strange tremor shot through Gerald Burton. He was shaken with a variety of sensations of which the predominant feeling was that of repulsion. Was he at last about to gaze at the dead face of the man who, with the one paramount exception of that same man's wife, had filled his mind and thoughts to the exclusion of all else since he had first heard the name of John Dampier? Was he now to make acquaintance with the stranger who had yet in so curious and sinister a way become his familiar?

Nancy gently withdrew her hand from his: leaning slightly forward, she gazed at the swathed stark form which might possibly—so much she had told herself at once—be that of John Dampier.

Very slowly the man drew off that portion of the sheet which covered the upper part of the body, and, as he did so, Gerald Burton heard the woman standing by his side utter a long, fluttering sigh of relief.

Thank God it was not Jack—not her Jack!

The fine, well-cut face was that of a man about Gerald Burton's own age. The features were stilled in the awful immobility of death: but for that immobility, the dead man lying there before them might have been asleep.

"An Englishman," said the janitor thoughtfully, "or perchance an American?
A finely built fellow, monsieur. A true athlete. Not a wound, not a touch!
Just dropped dead yesterday afternoon in a public gymnasium."

"How extraordinary it is," observed Gerald Burton in a low voice, "that he has not yet been claimed by his friends—"

"Oh no, monsieur, not extraordinary at all! We in this country write to our children every day when we are separated from them—that is if we can afford the stamps. Not so English or American people. They think their children are sure to be all right. In about a fortnight we shall have enquiries for Number 4, hardly before then."

"And by that time," said Gerald slowly, "I suppose the poor fellow will have been buried."

"Oh no, monsieur—" the man laughed, as if the other's remark struck

him as being really very funny. "Why, we keep some of them as long as fifteen months! Those drawers are full of them—" he pointed to the long black chests which lined one side of the shed. "Would monsieur like to see some of my pensioners? I have men, women, ay, and children too, cosily tucked away in there."

A low exclamation of horror escaped from Nancy Dampier's lips. She turned ashily pale. At last she understood what it was the janitor was saying….

The man looked at her with kindly concern. "Tiens!" he said, "isn't that strange? It happens again and again! People like madame come here—quite quiet, quite brave; and then, though overjoyed at not finding the person they came to seek—they suddenly shudder and turn pale; sometimes I have known them faint!"

"Kindly let us out by the shortest and quickest way," said Gerald quickly.

"Pardon, monsieur, the law exacts that Number 4 must remain in your presence for a quarter of an hour." The man shrugged his shoulders. "You see some people, especially ladies, are apt to think afterwards that they may have made a mistake: that their sight was at fault, and so on. That is why this tiresome regulation is now in force. I should like to oblige monsieur, but to do so would get me into trouble."

He stopped speaking, and stood waiting, at attention.

And then, as they stood there in silence, Gerald, looking beyond the still, swathed figure stretched out before him, allowed his eyes to rest on these black boxes, each containing one poor tenantless shell of humanity, from which the unquenchable spirit of man had been suddenly, violently expelled: and as he looked, he missed something that should have been there—the sign, the symbol, of the cross.

A flood of memories came surging through his mind—memories of childish prayers learnt at his mother's knee, of certain revisions which time had brought to his first innocent, unquestioning faith. And with those memories came anger and a sense of humiliation. For there was nothing, absolutely nothing, to show that these boxes before him held what had once been the dwelling-place of that daily miracle, the sentient soul of man. These defenceless dead had been subjected to a last, continuous, intolerable insult; in their flesh he felt that his own humanity was degraded. Here was nothing to separate the human dead from the beasts of the field; these boxes would have looked the same had they held merely the bodies of animals prepared for the inquisitive, probing research of science.

His young imagination, strung to the highest pitch, penetrated those shuttered receptacles and showed him on the face of each occupant that strange ironic smile with which the dead husk of man seems often to betray the full knowledge now possessed by the spirit which has fled. That riddle of existence, of which through the ages philosophers and kings had sought the key, was now an open book to all those who lay here in the still majesty of death. Yes, they could well afford to smile—to smile at the littleness which denied to their tenements of flesh the smallest symbol of belief that death was not the end of all.

His companion had also marked the absence of any sign of the Christian's hope in this house of death, and through her mind there ran the confused recollection of holy words:—

"It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory.

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep….

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Comfortable words! They seemed, merely by their flight through the tense ganglia of her brain, to break into the awful loneliness of these recent tabernacles of the spirit, and bestow on them the benison denied them in its pride by the human family from whose bosom they had been torn.

Then swiftly her mind turned to the thought of those who were still watching and waiting, in that misery of suspense of which she now knew each pang. Every one—surely every one—of these dead who now surrounded her,—silent, solitary, had been loved—for love comes in some guise to all poor human creatures. Those mouths, cheeks, eyes, those rippling waves of woman's hair, had been kissed—ah, how often. The perishing flesh had been clasped heart to heart….

There came over her soul a great rush of pity for those others, the vast and scattered company, mourning, mourning, and yet reaching out in wild hope and desire for their loved ones, whose bodies were all the while here. They did not know, yet hither came winging unerringly, like flights of homing doves, their myriad prayers, their passionate loving thoughts and wistful thirsty longing for one word, one kiss, one touch of the hand…. Surely such thoughts and prayers sanctified this charnel-house.

She herself was of that company—that company who were not sure. Some, doubtless, obstinate, refused to believe that death in any form had overtaken the missing; others feared to come here and look. She had not feared….

The janitor spoke to her, and she started violently.

"You are quite convinced, madame, that Number 4 is not he whom

you seek?"

These words, that question, evidently embodied a formula the man was bound to use.

Mrs. Dampier bent her head.

"You, monsieur, also have no doubt?"

"None at all," said Gerald briefly.

With a sudden movement the man put the sinister carriage in motion, but when he had got it close to the door of the mortuary, he stopped a moment:—"We have many compliments on our brancard," he said cheerfully. "It is very ingenious, is it not? You see the wheels are so large that a mere touch pushes it backwards and forwards. It is quite easy to wheel back into place again."

Gerald Burton took out a five-franc piece. He left Nancy Dampier standing, an infinitely pathetic, forlorn little figure, in the sunlit portion of the yard, and approached the man.

"We must go now," he said hurriedly. "I suppose it is quite easy to leave by the way we came in—through the engine-room?"

"One moment, monsieur, one moment! Before showing you out I must put Number 4 back with his other companions. There is no fear of his being lonely, poor man! We had five brought in this morning."

They had not long to wait before the concierge joined them again.

"Won't monsieur and madame stay and just see everything else there is to be seen?" he asked eagerly. "We have the most interesting relics of great criminals, notably of Troppman. Troppman was before my time, monsieur, but the day that his seven victims were publicly

exposed there—" he pointed with his thumb to the inconspicuous door through which he had just wheeled Number 4—"ah, that was a red-letter day for the Morgue! Eighteen thousand people came to gaze on those seven bodies. And it was lucky, monsieur, that in those days we were open to the public, for it was the landlord of their hotel who recognised the poor creatures."

He was now preceding his two visitors through the operating theatre where are held the post-mortems. From thence he led them into the hall where they had first gained admission. "Well, monsieur, if you really do not care to see our relics—?" He opened the great door through which so few living men and women ever pass.

Gerald Burton and Nancy Dampier walked out into the sunlight, and the last thing they saw of the Morgue was the smiling face of the concierge—it was not often that he received ten francs for doing his simple duty.

"Au plaisir de vous revoir, monsieur, madame: au plaisir de vous revoir!" he said gaily. And as the courteous old French mode of adieu fell upon their ears, Gerald Burton felt an awful sensation of horror, of oppression, yes and of dread, steal over him.

Nancy Dampier, looking up at her companion, suddenly forgot herself. "Mr. Burton," she exclaimed, her voice full of concern, "I'm afraid this has made you feel ill? I oughtn't to have let you come here!" And it was she who in her clear, low voice told the cabman the address of the Hôtel Saint Ange.

Gerald Burton muttered a word of half-angry excuse. He was keenly ashamed of what he took to be his lack of manliness.

But during the weeks, aye and the months that followed he found himself constantly haunted by the gentle, ironic words of farewell

uttered by the concierge of the Morgue: "Au plaisir de vous revoir, monsieur, madame: au plaisir de vous revoir!"

CHAPTER VII

The American abroad has a touching faith, first, in the might and power of his country to redress all wrongs, and secondly, in the personal prestige of his Ambassador.

As a rule this faith is justified by works, but in the special and very peculiar case of John Dampier, Senator Burton was destined to meet with disappointment.

With keen vexation he learnt that the distinguished and genial individual who just then represented the great sister Republic in Paris, and on whom he himself had absolutely counted for advice and help, for they were old friends and allies, had taken sick leave for three months.

Paris, during an Exhibition Year, seems mysteriously to lose the wonderful climate which a certain British Minister for Foreign Affairs once declared to be the only one that suited every diplomat's constitution!

The Senator and his daughter drove on from the American Embassy to the American Consulate, and it was with a feeling of considerable satisfaction that they were shown by a courteous janitor into the pleasant, airy waiting-room where a large engraving of Christopher Columbus, and a huge photograph of the Washington Monument, welcome the wandering American.

Even in this waiting-room there was an air of cheerful activity, a constant coming and going, which showed that whatever might be the case with the Embassy, the Consulate, at any rate, was very much alive.

"Mr. Senator Burton? Glad to see you, sir! What can we do for you?" The words fell with a cheering, refreshing sound on the Senator's ears, though the speaker went on a trifle less cordially, "We are simply overwhelmed with business just now! You can imagine—but no, no one could imagine, the length, the breadth, the scope of what people think to be our duties in an Exhibition Year!"

The distinguished visitor and his daughter were being shown into the Consul's own pleasant study. Now this spacious, comfortable apartment is hung with fine engravings of the White House and of the Capitol, and Senator Burton felt a thrill of yearning as well as of pride when he gazed at these familiar, stately buildings which looked so homelike and dear when seen amid alien surroundings.

And as he sat down, and prepared to state his business, there suddenly came over this kindly American a curious feeling of misgiving, of self-rebuke. Had he remained at home in Washington, content with all his familiar duties and pleasures, he would never have been brought into this association with a strange, unpleasant life-story.

But he soon shook off this feeling of misgiving, and as the curious tale he had to tell was being listened to, kindly and patiently, he felt glad indeed that he had at last found a fellow-countryman in whom to confide, and on whose advice he could rely.

But when Senator Burton had finished speaking, the American Consul shook his head. "I only wish we could help you!" he exclaimed. "But we can do nothing where a British subject is

concerned. We've quite enough to do looking after those of our own people who disappear in Paris! Would you be surprised to learn, Mr. Senator, that four of our countrymen have completely vanished within the last two days?" And as Daisy uttered a little exclamation of incredulous dismay, "Don't feel so badly about it, my dear young lady, I quite expect all four of them to turn up again, after having given us and their friends a great deal of useless, expensive worry."

"What I really want," said the Senator earnestly, "is not your official assistance, but a word of practical advice. What is it this unfortunate young lady, Mrs. Dampier, ought to do? We've tried the Commissaire de Police of the quarter, and he's perfectly useless: in fact my son, who's seen him twice, doesn't believe a word he says."

The Consul gave what Senator Burton felt to be a very French shrug of the shoulders.

"That don't surprise me! As regards the lower branch of the service the police here is very understaffed. The only thing for you to do is to take this poor lady to the British Consulate. They are driven to death there, just as we are here, and they'll naturally snatch at any excuse to avoid an extra job. But of course if this Mrs. Dampier is, as you say, a British subject—well, they're bound to do something for her. But you may believe me when I say, Mr. Senator, that there's probably nothing really mysterious about the case. You may find this Mr. Dampier at the hotel when you return there. It may interest you to learn"—he hesitated, and glanced at his young countrywoman—"that among our countrymen who vanish, I mean in a temporary way, there are more married men than bachelors."

And with that enigmatic pronouncement the genial Consul courteously and smilingly dismissed Senator Burton and his daughter.

The same afternoon saw the Senator and Mrs. Dampier on their way to the
British Consulate.

The day before Nancy had been unwilling to leave the hotel for even the shortest space of time, now she seemed sunk into apathetic despair—and yet, as they drove along together, the Senator still doubted, still wondered in the depths of his heart, whether the lovely young woman now sitting silent by his side, was not making a fool of him, as she had certainly done of his two children.

He caught himself again and again thinking of her as "Nancy;" already his daughter and she were on Christian-name terms with one another; and as for Gerald, he had put everything else aside to devote himself entirely to solving the mystery of John Dampier's disappearance.

At last they reached the British Consulate, and the American could not help feeling a thrill of pride as he mentally compared the Office where he had been that morning and that which represented, in this shabby side street, the commercial might and weight of the British Empire.

The waiting-room into which they were shown was a gloomy apartment looking on to an inner courtyard, and Senator Burton's card did not produce the magic effect it had done at the American Consulate; in fact he and his companion had to take their turn with a crowd of other people, and the time they were kept waiting seemed very long.

At last, however, they were ushered into the study of the courteous Briton whose difficult and sometimes exasperating duty it is to look after the rights and interests of the motley world composed of those Englishmen and Englishwomen who make a short or long sojourn in

Paris. Once they were in his presence nothing could have been kinder and more considerate than the British Consul's reception of the American Senator and his companion.

In the Consular branch of the Diplomatic Service the post of Consul in the greater cities of the civilised world is almost invariably given to an ex-member of the Diplomatic Corps—to one, that is, who is a shrewd man of the world rather than a trained business official, and Senator Burton felt it to be a comfort indeed to deal with such a one rather than with an acute but probably conventionally-minded man of commercial experience.

The Consul was moved by Mrs. Dampier's youth, her beauty, her evident, if subdued bewilderment and distress. She told her story very clearly and simply, but to the Senator's excited and yes, it must be admitted, suspicious fancy, she seemed to slur over, as of no importance, the extraordinary discrepancy between her own and the Poulains' account of what had happened on the night of her own and her husband's arrival in Paris.

The Consul asked but few questions, but those were pertinent and to the point.

"I am glad, Mrs. Dampier, that you did not come to me yesterday," he said at last, "for, thanks, as I understand, to this gentleman, you have done everything which I should have had to advise you to do."

He then turned more particularly to his American visitor:—"I suppose you have now quite convinced yourself that no kind of street accident befell Mr. Dampier yesterday morning?"

The Senator shook his head dubiously; there was a look of hesitation, of unease, on his face.

"Perhaps it would be as well," said the Consul suavely, "for Mrs. Dampier to go and wait awhile in the next room. Then you and I, Mr. Senator, might go into the matter more thoroughly?"

Unsuspiciously Nancy Dampier fell in with the plan.

And then, at last, Senator Burton was able to open out his heart, and, as the British Consul listened to the American's version of all that had taken place, when he realised how entirely the story of this young lady, who called herself Mrs. Dampier, was uncorroborated, his face became graver and graver.

"From the little opportunity I have had of judging, she impresses me as being a truthful woman," he said musingly. "Still, what I now know puts a very different complexion on the story as told me just now by her."

"That is exactly what I feel," said the Senator sighing. "From something you said just now I gather that you have heard of this Mr. John Dampier?"

"Why, yes, indeed I have—I know his name as being that of a distinguished English artist living in Paris; but he has never troubled me individually, and I can answer for it that he is very little known to our colony here. He evidently lives only amongst the French painters and their set—which means that to all intents and purposes he has become a Frenchman!" The Consul shrugged his shoulders—racial prejudice dies hard.

He looked doubtfully at his visitor:—"You see, Mr. Senator, if this lady's tale is true, if the poor little woman is a three weeks' bride, Mr. Dampier's disappearance may mean a good many things, any one of which is bound to cause her pain and distress. I do not think it likely that there has been any kind of foul play. If, as Mrs. Dampier asserts,

he had neither money nor jewels in his possession, we may dismiss that possibility from our minds."

"If anything of that sort has happened—I mean, if there has been foul play," said Senator Burton firmly, "then I would stake my life that neither of the Poulains are in any way associated with it."

"Quite so. Still, as Mrs. Dampier has appealed to me very properly for help, these hotel people—if they are as worthy as you believe them to be—will not mind consenting to an informal interrogatory from one of my clerks. I have here a sharp young fellow who knows English as well as he does French. I'll send him back with you. He can take down the Poulains' story, even cross-examine them in a friendly manner. Mrs. Dampier might also give him her version of what took place."

Senator Burton uttered a hesitating assent. He knew only too well that the
Poulains would greatly resent the proposed interrogatory.

"One word more, Mr. Senator. If there is no news of this Mr. John Dampier by to-morrow, you must persuade Mrs. Dampier to write, or even to telegraph for her friends. For one thing, it isn't at all fair that all this trouble should fall on an entire stranger, on one not even her own countryman! I cannot help seeing, too, that you do not altogether believe in Mrs. Dampier and her story. You can't make up your mind —is not that so?"

The American Senator nodded, rather shamefacedly.

"I might advise you to go to the Préfecture de Police, nay, I might communicate with them myself, but I feel that in the interests of this young lady it would be better to go slow. Mr. Dampier may return as suddenly, as unexpectedly, as he went. And then he would not thank

us, my dear sir, for having done anything to turn the Paris Police searchlight on his private life."

The Consul got up and held out his hand. "For your sake, as well as for that of my countrywoman, I hope most sincerely that you will find Mr. Dampier safe and sound when you get back to the Hôtel Saint Ange. But if the mystery still endures to-morrow, then you really must persuade this poor young lady to send for one of her relatives—preferably, I need hardly say, a man."

"At what time shall I expect your clerk?" asked Senator Burton. "I think I ought to prepare the Poulains."

"No, there I think you're wrong! Far better let him go back with you now, and hear what they have to say. Let him also get a properly signed statement from Mrs. Dampier. Then he can come back here and type out his report and her statement for reference. That can do no harm, and may in the future be of value."

He accompanied the American Senator to the door. "I wish I could help you more," he said cordially. "Believe me, I appreciate more than I can say your extraordinary kindness to my 'subject.' I shall, of course, be glad to know how you get on. But oh, if you knew how busy we are just now! When I think of how we are regarded—of how I read, only the other day, that a Consul is the sort of good fellow one likes to make comfortable in a nice little place—I wish the man who wrote that could have my 'nice little place' for a week, during an Exhibition Year! I think he would soon change his mind."

Mrs. Dampier was not present at the, to Senator Burton, odious half-hour which followed their return to the Hôtel Saint Ange.

At first the French hotel-keeper and his wife refused to say anything to the Consular official. Then, when they were finally persuaded to

answer his questions, they did so as curtly and disagreeably as possible. Madame Poulain also made a great effort to prevent her nephew, young Jules, from being brought into the matter. But to her wrath and bitter consternation, he, as well as her husband and herself, was made to submit to a regular examination and cross-examination as to what had followed Mrs. Dampier's arrival at the Hôtel Saint Ange.

"Why don't you send for the police?" she cried at last. "We should be only too glad to lay all the facts before them!"

And as the young Frenchman, after his further interview with Nancy, was being speeded on his way by the Senator, "I'm blessed if I know what to believe!" he observed with a wink. "It's the queerest story I've ever come across; and as for the Poulains, it's the first time I've ever known French people to say they would like to see the police brought into their private affairs! One would swear that all the parties concerned were telling the truth, but I thought that boy, those people's nephew, did know something more than he said."

CHAPTER VIII

The third morning brought no news of the missing man, and Senator Burton, noting Gerald's and Daisy's preoccupied, anxious faces, began to wonder if his life would ever flow in pleasant, normal channels again.

The son and daughter whom he held so dear, whose habitual companionship was so agreeable to him, were now wholly absorbed in Mrs. Dampier and her affairs. They could think of nothing else, and, when they were alone with their father, they talked of nothing else.

The Senator remembered with special soreness what had happened the afternoon before, just after he had dismissed the clerk of the British Consul. Feeling an eager wish to forget, as far as might be for a little while, the mysterious business in which they were all so untowardly concerned, he had suggested to Daisy that they might go and spend a quiet hour in the Art section of the Exhibition. But to his great discomfiture, his daughter had turned on him with a look of scorn, almost of contempt:

"Father! Do you mean me to go out and leave poor little Nancy alone in her dreadful suspense and grief—just that I may enjoy myself?"

And the Senator had felt ashamed of his selfishness. Yes, it had been most unfeeling of him to want to go and gaze on some of the few masterpieces American connoisseurs have left in Europe, while this tragedy—for he realised that whatever the truth might be it was a tragedy—was still in being.

It was good to know that thanks to the British Consul's word of advice his way, to-day, was now clear. The time had come when he must advise Mrs. Dampier to send for some member of her family. Without giving his children an inkling of what he was about to say to their new friend, Senator Burton requested Nancy, in the presence of the two others, to come down into the garden of the Hôtel Saint Ange in order that they might discuss the situation.

As they crossed the sun-flecked cheerful courtyard Nancy pressed unconsciously nearer her companion, and averted her eyes from the kitchen window where the hotel-keeper and his wife seemed to spend so much of their spare time, gazing forth on their domain, watching with uneasy suspicion all those who came and went from the Burtons' apartments.

As the young Englishwoman passed through into the peaceful garden whose charm and old-world sweetness had been one of the lures which had drawn John Dampier to what was now to her a fatal place, she felt a sensation of terrible desolation come over her, the more so that she was now half conscious that Senator Burton, great as was his kindness, kept his judgment in suspense.

They sat down on a wooden bench, and for awhile neither spoke. "Have you found out anything?" she asked at last in a low voice. "I think by your manner that you have found out something, Mr. Burton—something you don't wish to say to me before the two others?"

He looked at her, surprised. "No," he said sincerely, "that is not so at all. I have found out nothing, Mrs. Dampier—would that I had! But I feel it only right to tell you that the moment has come when you should communicate with your friends. The British Consul told me that if we were still without news, still in suspense, this morning, he would strongly advise that you send for someone to join you in Paris. Surely you have some near relation who would come to you?"

Nancy shook her head. "No. I daresay it may seem strange to you, Senator Burton, but I have no near relations at all. I was the only child of a father and mother who, in their turn, were only children. I have some very distant cousins, a tribe of acquaintances, a few very kind friends—" her lips quivered "but no one—no one of whom I feel I could ask that sort of favour."

Senator Burton glanced at her in dismay. She looked very wan and fragile sitting there; whatever the truth, he could not but feel deeply sorry for her.

Suddenly she turned to him, and an expression of relief came over her sad eyes and mouth. "There is someone, Mr. Burton, someone I ought to have thought of before! There is a certain Mr. Stephens who

was my father's friend as well as his solicitor; and he has always managed all my money matters. I'll write and ask Mr. Stephens if he can come to me. He was more than kind at the time of my marriage, though I'm afraid that he and Jack didn't get on very well together."

She looked up in Senator Burton's face with a bewildered, pleading look, and he suddenly realised how difficult a task such a letter would be to her, supposing, that is, that the story she told, the story in which even now the Senator only half believed—were true.

"I'll go up and write the letter now," she said, and together they both went, once more, indoors.

But Gerald Burton, when he heard of the proposed letter to Mrs. Dampier's lawyer, made an abrupt suggestion which both the Senator and Nancy welcomed with eagerness.

"Why shouldn't we telephone to this Mr. Stephens?" he asked. "That would save a day, and it would be far easier to explain to him all that has happened by word of mouth than in a letter—" He turned to Nancy, and his voice unconsciously softened: "If you will trust me, I will explain the situation to your friend, Mrs. Dampier."

The father and son's drive to the Central Paris-London-Telephone office was curiously silent, though both the older and the younger man felt full of unwonted excitement.

"Now, at last, I am on the track of the truth!" such was the Senator's secret thought. But he would not have been very much surprised had no such name as that of Davies P. Stephens, Solicitor, 58 Lincoln's Inn Fields, appeared in the London Telephone Directory. But yes, there the name was, and Gerald showed it to his father with a gleam of triumph.

"You will want patience—a good deal of patience," said the attendant mournfully.

Gerald Burton smiled. He was quite used to long-distance telephoning at home. "All right!" he said cheerily. "I've plenty of patience!"

But though the young man claimed to have plenty of patience he felt far too excited, far too strung up and full of suspense, for the due exercise of that difficult virtue.

The real reason why he had suggested this telephone message, instead of a letter or a telegram, was that he longed for his father's suspicions to be set at rest.

Gerald Burton resented keenly, far more keenly than did his sister, the Senator's lack of belief in Nancy Dampier's story. He himself would have staked his life on the truthfulness of this woman whom he had only known three days.

At last the sharp, insistent note of the telephone bell rang out, and he stept up into the call-box.

"Mr. Stephens' office?" He spoke questioningly: and after what seemed a long pause the answer came, muffled but audible. "Yes, yes! This is Mr. Stephens' office. Who is it wants us from Paris?" The question was put in a Cockney voice, and the London twang seemed exaggerated by its transmission over those miles and miles of wire by land, under the sea, and then by land again.

"I want to speak to Mr. Stephens himself," said Gerald Burton very distinctly.

"Mr. Stephens? Yes, he's here all right. I'll take a message."

"Make him come himself."

"Yes, he's here. Give me your message—" the words were again a little muffled.

"I can't send a message. You must fetch him." Gerald Burton's stock of patience was giving way. Again there was an irritating pause, but it was broken at last.

"Who is it? I can't fetch him if you won't say who you are."

"I am speaking on behalf of Mrs. Dampier," said Gerald reluctantly. Somehow he hated uttering Nancy's name to this tiresome unknown.

And then began an absurd interchange of words at cross purposes.

"Mr. Larkspur?"

"No," said Gerald. "Mrs. Dampier."

"Yes," said the clerk. "Yes, I quite understand. L. for London—"

Gerald lost his temper—"D. for damn!" he shouted, "Dampier."

And then, at last, with a shrill laugh that sounded strange and eerie, the clerk repeated, "Dampier—Mr. John Dampier? Yes, sir. What can we do for you?"

"Mrs. Dampier!"

"Mrs. Dampier? Yes, sir. I'll fetch Mr. Stephens." The clerk's voice had altered; it had become respectful, politely enquiring.

And at last with intense relief, Gerald Burton heard a low clear, incisive voice uttering the words: "Is that Mrs. Dampier herself

speaking?"

Instinctively Gerald's own voice lowered. "No, I am speaking for Mrs. Dampier."

The English lawyer's voice hardened, or so it seemed to the young American. It became many degrees colder. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Dampier. Yes? What can I do for you?"

And as Gerald, taken oddly aback by the unseen man's very natural mistake, did not answer for a moment or two:

"Nothing wrong with Nancy, I hope?"

The anxious question sounded very, very clear.

"There is something very wrong with Mrs. Dampier—can you hear me clearly?"

"Yes, yes What is wrong with her?"

"Mrs. Dampier is in great trouble. Mr. Dampier has disappeared."

The strange thing which had happened was told in those four words, but Gerald Burton naturally went on to explain, or rather to try to explain, the extraordinary situation which had arisen, to Nancy's lawyer and friend.

Mr. Stephens did not waste any time in exclamations of surprise or pity.
Once he had grasped the main facts, his words were few and to the point.

"Tell Mrs. Dampier," he said, speaking very distinctly, "that if she has no news of her husband by Friday I will come myself to Paris. I cannot

do so before. Meanwhile, I strongly advise that she, or preferably you for her, communicate with the police—try and see the Prefect of Police himself. I myself once obtained much courteous help from the Paris Prefect of Police."

Gerald stept down from the stuffy, dark telephone box. He turned to the attendant:—"How much do I owe you?" he asked briefly.

"A hundred and twenty francs, Monsieur," said the man suavely.

The Senator drew near. "That was an expensive suggestion of yours, Gerald," he observed smiling, as the other put down six gold pieces. And then he said, "Well?"

"Well, father, there's not much to tell. This Mr. Stephens will come over on Friday if there's still no news of Mr. Dampier by then. He wants us to go to the Prefecture of Police. He says we ought to try and get at the Prefect of Police himself."

There came a long pause: the two were walking along a crowded street.
Suddenly Gerald stopped and turned to the Senator. "Father," he said
impulsively, "I suppose that now, at last, you do believe Mrs. Dampier's story?"

The young man spoke with a vehemence and depth of feeling which disturbed his father. What a good thing it was that this English lawyer was coming to relieve them all from a weight and anxiety which was becoming, to the Senator himself, if not to the two younger people, quite intolerable.

"Well," he said at last, "I am of course glad to know that everything, so far, goes to prove that Mrs. Dampier's account of herself is true."

"That being so, don't you think the Hôtel Saint Ange ought to be searched?"

"Searched?" repeated Senator Burton slowly. "Searched for what?"

"If I had charge of this business—I mean sole charge—the first thing I would do would be to have the Hôtel Saint Ange searched from top to bottom!" said Gerald vehemently.

"Is that Mrs. Dampier's suggestion?"

"No, father, it's mine. I had a talk with that boy Jules last night, and I'm convinced he's lying. There's another thing I should like to do. I should like to go to the office of the 'New York Herald' and enlist the editor's help. I would have done it long ago if this man Dampier had been an American."

"And you would have done a very foolish thing, my boy." The Senator spoke with more dry decision than was his wont. "Come, come, Gerald, you and I mustn't quarrel over this affair! Let us think of the immediate thing to do." He put his hand on his son's arm.

"Yes, father?"

"I suppose that the first thing to do is to take this Mr. Stephens' advice?"

"Why, of course, father! Will you, or shall I, go to the Prefecture of Police?"

"Well, Gerald, I have bethought myself of that courteous President of the
French Senate who wrote me such a pleasant note when we first arrived in

Paris this time. No doubt he would give me a personal introduction to the
Prefect of Police."

"Why, father, that's a first rate idea! Hadn't you better go right now and get it?"

"Yes, perhaps I had; and meanwhile you can tell the poor little woman that her friend will be here on Friday."

"Yes, I will. And father? May I tell Daisy that now you agree with me about
Mrs. Dampier—that you no longer believe the Poulains' story?"

"No," said Senator Burton a little sternly. "You are to say nothing of the sort, Gerald. I have only known this girl three days—I have known the Poulains nine years. Of course it's a great relief to me to learn that Mrs. Dampier's account of herself is true—so far as you've been able to ascertain such a fact in a few minutes' conversation with an unknown man over the telephone—but that does not affect my good opinion of the Poulains."

And on this the father and son parted, for the first time in their joint lives, seriously at odds the one with the other.

"Give you an introduction to our Prefect of Police? Why, certainly!"

The white-haired President of the French Senate looked curiously at the American gentleman who had sought him out at the early hour of eleven o'clock.

"You will find Monsieur Beaucourt a charming man," he went on. "I hear nothing but good of the way he does his very difficult work. He is a type to whom you are used in America, my dear Senator, but whom

we perhaps too often lack in France among those who govern us. Monsieur Beaucourt is a strong man—a man who takes his own line and sticks to it. I was told only the other day that crime had greatly diminished in our city since he became Prefect. He is thoroughly trusted by his subordinates, and you can imagine what that means when one remembers that our beautiful Paris is the resort of all the international rogues of Europe. And if they tease us by their presence at ordinary times, you can imagine what it is like during an Exhibition Year!"

CHAPTER IX

In all French public offices there is a strange mingling of the sordid and of the magnificent.

The Paris Prefecture of Police is a huge, quadrangular building, containing an infinity of bare, and to tell the truth, shabby, airless rooms; yet when Senator Burton had handed in his card and the note from the President of the French Senate, he was taken rapidly down a long corridor, and ushered into a splendid apartment, of which the walls were hung with red velvet, and which might have been a reception room in an Italian Palace rather than the study of a French police official.

"Monsieur le Préfet will be back from déjeuner in a few minutes," said the man, softly closing the door.

The Senator looked round him with a feeling of keen interest and curiosity. After the weary, baffling hours of fruitless effort in which he had spent the last three days, it was more than pleasant to find himself at the fountainhead of reliable information.

Since the far-off days when, as a boy, he had been thrilled by the brilliant detective stories of which French writers, with the one outstanding exception of Poe, then had a monopoly, there had never faded from Senator Burton's mind that first vivid impression of the power, the might, the keen intelligence, and yes, of the unscrupulousness, of the Paris police.

But now, having penetrated into the inner shrine of this awe-inspiring organism, he naturally preferred to think of the secret autocratic powers, and of the almost uncanny insight of those to whom he was about to make appeal. Surely they would soon probe the mystery of John Dampier's disappearance.

The door opened suddenly, and the Paris Prefect of Police walked into the room. He was holding Senator Burton's card, and the letter of introduction with which that card had been accompanied, in his sinewy nervous looking hand.

Bowing, smiling, apologising with more earnestness than was necessary for the few moments the American Senator had had to await his presence, the Prefect motioned his guest to a chair.

"I am very pleased," he said in courtly tones, "to put myself at the disposal of a member of the American Senate. Ah, sir, your country is a wonderful country! In a sense, the parent of France—for was not America the first great nation to become a Republic?"

Senator Burton bowed, a little awkwardly, in response to this flowery sentiment.

He was telling himself that Monsieur Beaucourt was quite unlike the picture he had mentally formed, from youth upwards, of the Paris Prefect of Police.

There was nothing formidable, nothing for the matter of that in the least awe-inspiring, about this tired, amiable-looking man. The Prefect was also lacking in the alert, authoritative manner which the layman all the world over is apt to associate with the word "police."

Monsieur Beaucourt sat down behind his ornate buhl writing-table, and shooting out his right hand he pressed an electric bell.

With startling suddenness, a panel disappeared noiselessly into the red velvet draped wall, and in the aperture so formed a good-looking young man stood smiling.

"My secretary, Monsieur le Sénateur—my secretary, who is also my nephew."

The Senator rose and bowed.

"André? Please say that I am not to be disturbed till this gentleman's visit is concluded." The young man nodded: and then he withdrew as quickly, as silently, as he had appeared; and the panel slipped noiselessly back behind him.

"And now tell me exactly what it is that you wish me to do for you," said the Prefect, with a weary sigh, which was, however, softened by a pleasant smile. "We are not as omnipotent as our enemies make us out to be, but still we can do a good deal, and we could do a good deal more were it not for the Press! Ah, Monsieur le Sénateur, that is the only thing I do not like about your great country. Your American Press sets so bad, so very bad, an example to our poor old world!"

A thin streak of colour came into Monsieur Beaucourt's cheek, a gleam of anger sparkled in his grey eyes.

"Yes, greatly owing to the bad example set in America, and of late in

England too, quite a number of misguided people nowadays go to the Press before they come to us for redress! All too soon," he shook a warning finger, "they find they have entered a mouse-trap from which escape is impossible. They rattle at the bars—but no, they are caught fast! Once they have brought those indefatigable, those indiscreet reporters on the scene, it is too late to draw back. They find all their most private affairs dragged into the light of day, and even we can do very little for them then!"

Senator Burton nodded gravely. He wished his son were there to hear these words.

"And now let us return to our muttons," said the Prefect leaning forward. "I understand from the President of the Senate that you require my help in a rather delicate and mysterious matter."

"I do not know that the matter is particularly delicate, though it is certainly mysterious," and then Senator Burton explained, in as few and clear words as possible, the business which had brought him there—the disappearance, three days before, of the English artist, John Dampier, and of the present sad plight of Dampier's wife.

Monsieur Beaucourt threw himself back in his chair. His face lit up, it lost its expression of apathetic fatigue; and his first quick questions showed him a keen and clever cross-examiner.

At once he seized on the real mystery, and that though the Senator had not made more of it than he could help. That was the discrepancy in the account given by the Poulains and by Mrs. Dampier respectively as to the lady's arrival at the hotel.

But even Monsieur Beaucourt failed to elicit the fact that Senator Burton's acquaintance with Mrs. Dampier was of such short standing. He assumed that she was a friend of the Burton family, and the

Senator allowed the assumption to go by default.

"The story you have told me," the Prefect said at last, "is a very curious story, Monsieur le Sénateur. But here we come across stranger things every day. Still, certain details make the disappearance of this English gentleman rather stranger than usual. I gather that the vanished man's wife is a charming person?"

"Extremely charming!" said the Senator quickly. "And I should say quite truthful—in fact this discrepancy between her account and that of the Poulains has worried and perplexed me very much."

"Do not let that worry you," said the other thoughtfully. "If this young lady, your friend, be telling the truth, it is very probable that the Poulains began to lie in the hope of avoiding trouble for themselves: having lied they found themselves obliged to stick to their story. You see just now our hotel-keepers are coining gold, and they do not like this very pleasant occupation of theirs interrupted, for even the best of reasons. If this gentleman left the hotel the same night that he arrived there—as I can see you yourself are inclined to believe, Monsieur le Sénateur—then you may be sure that the hotel people, even if they did see him for a few moments, would not care to admit that they had done so. I therefore advise that we put them and their account of what took place out of our minds. From what you tell me, you have already done what I may call the usual things?"

"Yes," said Senator Burton frankly. "My son and I have done everything which common sense could suggest to us. Thus we at once gave a description of the missing man to the police station of the quarter where both the Hôtel Saint Ange and Mr. Dampier's studio are situated. But, owing doubtless to the fact that all your officials are just now very busy and very overworked, we did not get quite as much attention paid to the case as I should have liked. I do not feel quite sure even now that the missing man did not meet with a

street accident."

"I can ascertain that for you in a moment."

Again the Prefect pressed a pedal. A panel, and this time a different panel from the first, slid back, and again the secretary appeared.

Monsieur Beaucourt said a brief word or two, and a few moments later a tabulated list, written in round-hand, lay before him.

"Here are all the accidents which have occurred in Paris during the last ninety hours."

He ran his eyes down the list; and then, rising, handed the sheets to Senator Burton.

"I think this disposes of the idea that an accident may have befallen your friend in the streets," said the Prefect briefly.

And the Senator, handing back the list, acknowledged that this was so.

"May I ask if you know much of the habits and way of life of this vanished bridegroom?" asked the Prefect thoughtfully. "I understand he belongs to the British Colony here."

"Mr. Dampier was not my friend," said the Senator hurriedly. "It is Mrs.
Dampier—"

"Ah, yes—I understand—the three weeks' bride? It is she you know. Well, Monsieur le Sénateur, the best thing you and I can do is to look at the artist's dossier. That is quite likely to provide us with a useful clue."

The Senator felt a thrill of anticipatory interest. All his life he had heard of the dossiers kept by the Paris police, of how every dweller in the great city, however famous, however obscure, had a record in which the most intimate details of their lives were set down in black and white. Somehow he had never quite believed in these French police dossiers.

"Surely you are not likely to have a dossier of Mr. Dampier?" he exclaimed, "he is a British subject, and, as far as I know, a perfectly respectable man."

The Prefect smiled. "The mere fact that he is an English subject living in Paris entitles him to a dossier. In fact everybody who is anybody in any kind of society, from that frequented by the Apaches to that of the Faubourg Saint Germain, has a dossier. And from what you tell me this artist, who won a Salon medal, and who has already had a distinguished career as a painter, is certainly 'somebody.' Now, please tell me exactly the way to spell his surname and his Christian name. English names are so perplexing."

Very clearly the Senator spelt out—first the word "John" and then the word
"Dampier."

And as, under his dictation, the Prefect of Police wrote the two distinctive names of the missing man, there came a look of frowning perplexity and indecision over his face.

"It's an odd thing," he muttered, "but I seem to have heard that name quite lately, and in some strange connection! Now what could it have been? As you probably know, Monsieur le Sénateur, there is a French form of that name, Dampierre. But no—it is that John which puzzles me—I am quite sure that I have heard the name 'John Dampier' quite recently."

"Isn't it likely," suggested the Senator, "that the man's disappearance has been reported to you? My son and I have done everything in our power to make the fact known, and Mr. Dampier's name and particulars as to his appearance have been at the Morgue since yesterday."

"Well, that's possible, of course. Just now my poor head has to hold far more than it was ever meant to do. The presence of so many royal personages in Paris always means extra trouble for me—especially when they are here 'incognito.' By the way, it would amuse, perhaps shock you, to see the dossiers of some of these Princes and Grand Dukes! But these are, of course, kept very secret. Meanwhile, I must not forget Mr. John Dampier."

This time the Prefect did not ring his bell. Instead he blew down a tube. "You would scarcely believe it," he said, looking up suddenly, "but these tubes have only just been installed! I had a regular battle over the matter with the Treasury. But now that the battle is won, I forget half the time that the tube is there! Picot? Please send me the dossier of an artist-painter called John Dampier," he spelt the names. "English subject; living in Impasse des Nonnes. I have an impression that we have had that name before us during the last week or so—Have you any recollection of it?"

He put the tube to his ear.

And then the American Senator, looking at the Paris Prefect of Police, was struck by a sudden change which came over the listener's face. There gathered on Monsieur Beaucourt's features a look of quick surprise, followed—yes, unmistakably—by a frown of dismay.

Putting his free hand over the tube, he withdrew it from his ear and

applied it to his lips. "Yes, yes," he said rapidly, "enough, enough! I quite understand. It is, as you say, very natural that I should have forgotten."

And then he looked quickly across at the Senator. "You are right, Monsieur le Sénateur: Mr. Dampier's name was put before me only yesterday as that of an Englishman who had disappeared from his hotel. But I took him to be a passing visitor. You know quite a number of the tourists brought by the Exhibition disappear, sometimes for two or three days—sometimes—well, for ever! That, of course, means they have left Paris suddenly, having got into what the English call a 'scrape.' In such a case a man generally thinks it better to go home—wiser if sadder than when he came."

There followed a pause.

"Well, Monsieur le Sénateur," said the Prefect, rising from his chair. "You may rest assured that I will do everything that is in my power to find your friend."

"But the dossier?" exclaimed Senator Burton. "I thought, Monsieur le Préfet, that I was to see Mr. Dampier's dossier?"

"Oh, to be sure—yes! I beg your pardon."

Again he whistled down the tube. "Picot?" he exclaimed, "I still require that dossier! Why am I kept waiting in this way?"

He listened for a few moments to what his invisible subordinate had to say, and then again he spoke down the funnel, and with a certain pettish impatience. "The last entry is of no importance—understand me—no importance at all! The gentleman for whose benefit I require the dossier already knows of this Mr. Dampier's disappearance."

A moment later a clerk knocked at the door, and appeared with a blue envelope which he laid with a deep bow on the Prefect's table.

It was not a very large envelope, and yet Senator Burton was surprised at its size, and at the number of slips of paper the Prefect of Police withdrew from it.

"I do not suppose, Monsieur le Sénateur, that you have ever seen one of our dossiers—in fact I may tell you that very few people outside this building ever do see one. By the way, a great deal of nonsense is talked about them. Roughly speaking, a dossier is not a history of the individual in question; it simply records what is being said of him. For instance, the day that I became Prefect of Police my dossier was brought to me—"

He smiled wearily.

"Your dossier?" repeated the Senator in amazement.

"Yes, my dossier. I have had it bound, and I keep it as a curiosity. Everything that had ever been written about me in the days when I was a Member of the Chamber of Deputies is there. And what really made me feel angry was the fact that I had been confused with more than one of my namesakes, in fact certain misdeeds that these worthy folk had committed were actually registered in my dossier!"

He stopped speaking for a moment, and took up the blue envelope.

"But now let us consider this Mr. John Dampier. You will see that he bears the number '16909,' and that his envelope is blue. Had this gentleman ever had anything to do with the police, were he, to put it plainly, of the criminal class, this envelope would be yellow. As for the white envelopes, they, Monsieur le Sénateur, have to deal with a very different sort of individual. We class them briefly under the general

word 'Morals.'"

As he spoke the Prefect was looking swiftly through the Dampier dossier, and not till he had glanced at every item did he hand the envelope to his American visitor.

Senator Burton could not but admire the intelligent way the dossier had been prepared, and kept up to date.

On the top sheet were carefully gummed various entries from the biographical dictionaries in which mention was made of John Dampier and his career. There followed a eulogistic newspaper article containing an account of the picture which had won the artist his Médaille d'Honneur at the Salon two years before. Then came a piece of foolscap headed "General remarks," and here were written the following words:—"Lives quietly; is popular with his fellow artists; has few debts; does not frequent the British Colony."

The Senator looked up quickly. "Well, there is not much to learn from this!" he said. And then, "I notice, Monsieur le Préfet, that there was another entry which has been removed."

"Yes," said the Prefect. "That last entry was only added the day before yesterday, and told of Monsieur Dampier's disappearance. It is being written up now, Monsieur le Sénateur, with a note explaining your kind interest in him, and telling of your visit to-day."

Senator Burton rose from his chair. He could not have told exactly why, but he had the impression that his courteous host had suddenly become anxious to get rid of him.

But this impression was evidently erroneous. Even after they had cordially shaken hands, the Prefect of Police seemed in no hurry to let him go.

"One moment, Monsieur le Sénateur?" he looked earnestly into the American's frank face. "I feel bound to tell you that I am convinced there is more in this mysterious disappearance than appears on the surface. I fear—I greatly fear—that this Mr. Dampier has vanished of his own free will," he spoke with evident reluctance, "and that his poor young wife will never see him again. As I think I said before, the public, especially the vulgar, ignorant public, credit us with powers we are far from possessing. It is possible that this gentleman does not care for the trammels of married life, and that his bride, however charming she may be, has disappointed him. Such cases are commoner than you might think possible, especially among English and American people. You, in your country, if you will forgive my saying so, marry with such reckless haste; and that often means repenting at bitter leisure." The Prefect's voice lowered, a look of real distress came over his face. "Ah! what tales I could tell you—what fearful domestic tragedies have been confided to me here, within these four walls! No doubt for an artist this Mr. John Dampier was a very good fellow—what in England they call 'respectable enough.' But still, think what painters are like! Think of how Bohemian, how careless is their life, compared with that of the man who has a regular occupation—" Monsieur de Beaucourt shook his head gloomily—"In most of these stories of sudden disappearance there is no crime, as the relations are so apt to think there is. No, Monsieur le Sénateur, there is simply—a woman! Sometimes it is a new friend—but far oftener it is an old friend."

There was a pause. "God forbid," said the Prefect suddenly, "that I should accuse this unfortunate man of anything heinous! But—but, Monsieur le Sénateur? You must have learnt through our Press, through those of our newspapers which delight in dragging family scandals to light, the amazing story of Count Bréville."

The Senator was impressed, in spite of himself, by the other's manner.

"I don't remember the name," he said thoughtfully.

"Count Bréville," said the Prefect slowly, "was a man of deservedly high reputation, in fact one of the pillars of the Royalist party. He had a wife who adored him, a large family whom he adored, and they all lived an idyllic country life. Well, one day the Count's coat, his hat, his pocket-book (which was known to have been full of bank-notes, but which was now empty) were found on the parapet of a bridge near his château. It was given out—it was believed that a dastardly crime had been committed. And then, by a mere accident, it was brought to my notice—for there was nothing in the Count's dossier which could have led me to suspect such a thing—that a charming governess who had been in the employment of his Countess for some four or five years had suddenly left to join her family in the New World, and that her travelling companion was strangely like her late employer!"

"Yes," said Senator Burton uncomfortably, "I think I do remember something of that story now."

"All the world was let into the secret," said the Prefect regretfully, "for the family had confided, from the first, in the Press. They thought—what did they not think, poor, foolish people? Among other things they actually believed that the Count had been murdered for political reasons. But no, the explanation was far more simple. That high-

minded man, that Christian gentleman, this father of charming children whom he apparently adored, had gone off under a false name, leaving everything that was dear to him, including his large fortune, to throw in his lot with the governess!"

The Prefect came closer to Senator Burton. He even lowered his voice. "I had the Countess here, Monsieur le Sénateur, in this room. Oh, what a touching, what a moving interview! The poor woman was only anxious to have back her husband with no questions asked, with no cruel reminders. And now he is back—a broken man. But had he been an artist, Monsieur le Sénateur, would the Count have been traced? Of course not! Would he have returned? No, indeed! The Prefect of Police can do many things, Monsieur le Sénateur, but as I said just now, he cannot force an unwilling husband back to his wife, especially if that husband has already crossed the frontier. Come, Monsieur le Sénateur, confess that some such explanation of Mr. Dampier's disappearance has already occurred to you?"

"Well," said Senator Burton slowly, "I confess that some such thought has crossed my mind. But in that case what a tragic fate for the poor young wife!"

"Bah! Do you know the saying:—'Widowhood is the Marshal's bâton every woman carries in her knapsack!'"

Senator Burton could not help smiling. Then he grew very grave. "But Mrs. Dampier, in the case you suppose, would not be a widow, Monsieur le Préfet: she would be neither maid, wife, nor widow."

The Prefect looked surprised. "Ah yes! The English divorce laws are very conservative. But I suppose in the end such a marriage would be annulled?"

"I suppose so," said Senator Burton indifferently.

"I wish I could help you more," said the Prefect solicitously. He really wished he could, for he liked his kindly visitor. "Can you suggest anything that we could do to help you?"

"Yes," said the Senator frankly. "My son, Monsieur le Préfet, has not the same trust in the hotel-keeper, Poulain, that I feel. Neither, I am bound to tell you, has Mrs. Dampier. I think it would be a relief to the poor young lady, if the hotel could be searched for some trace of Mr. Dampier's sojourn there. You see Mrs. Dampier is convinced—or seems to be—that her husband spent a night there."

"Nothing is easier than to have the place searched," said the Prefect quickly. "I will arrange for it to be done to-morrow morning at eleven. Perhaps you, Monsieur le Sénateur, will inform the hotel people that a Perquisition is about to take place."

CHAPTER X

As he walked away from the Prefecture of Police, Senator Burton told himself that the French were certainly a curiously casual people.

How strange that the Prefect should have asked him to break the news of what was to happen at eleven o'clock the next morning to the Poulains! In America—and he supposed in England also—the hotel-keeper would have received a formal notification of the fact that his house was about to be searched, or, in the case that foul play was suspected, no warning at all. But here, in Paris, it was thought enough to entrust a stranger with a message concerning so serious a matter.

Of everything that had happened in connection with this extraordinary

Dampier affair, perhaps this having to tell the Poulains that their hotel was to be searched was the most disagreeable and painful thing of all to their American friend and kindly client.

The Senator was now very sorry, that, in deference to his son's wish, he had made such a suggestion.

On his return to the hotel he was surprised to find a woman he had never seen before installed in Madame Poulain's kitchen. Still, the presence of the stranger brought a sense of reprieve.

He, Senator Angus Burton, the distinguished politician whom most of those of his fellow-countrymen whose opinion mattered would have said to be a particularly fearless man, dreaded the task of telling Madame Poulain that a Perquisition was about to take place in her house.

He lifted his hat. "Is Madame Poulain out?"

"She won't be long, monsieur; she and her husband have had to absent themselves for a little hour."

"Are they both out?" asked the Senator. He had never in his long knowledge of the Hôtel Saint Ange known such a thing to happen—that both the Poulains should be out together.

"Yes, monsieur. They have had to take that nephew of theirs, young Jules, off to the station. They are sending him to the country. He's in a sad state—he does nothing but cry, poor lad! I suppose he's in love—I've known it take young men that way." The woman smiled, smiled as a certain type of person usually does smile when giving disagreeable or unpleasant news. "It is very awkward for the Poulains to lose the lad just now, for they are very busy. I have no doubt—" she tossed her head—"that Jules has been working too hard; the

Poulains are foolish not to have more help from outside. I came in just to oblige Madame Poulain while she and her husband accompanied Jules to the station. But I also am busy. I have my own work to attend to just as much as anybody else; and my three children are all working at the Exhibition."

The Senator left the eager gossip, and began walking round the courtyard. He felt quite wretched. Jules, at no time a very intelligent lad, had evidently been terrified out of his wits by the questionings and the cross-questionings to which he had been subjected.

And then—and then—no doubt Gerald was in a measure also responsible for the lad's state! Senator Burton had been very much annoyed when his son had told him of what had happened the night before—of how he had accused the Poulains' nephew of lying—of knowing something of the Dampier affair….

He was just about to go upstairs when he saw Monsieur and Madame Poulain emerging from the porte cochère. They both looked tired, hot, and dispirited.

He walked forward to meet them.

"I am very sorry to hear this news about Jules," he began quickly. "I hope you are not really anxious about him?"

Madame Poulain stared at him fixedly, reproachfully. "It is all this affair," she said with a heavy sigh. "If it had only been the police, our own police, we should not have minded, Monsieur le Sénateur—we are honest people—we have nothing to fear from the police," she lifted her head proudly. "But when it came to that impudent young man—"

For a moment the Senator was at a loss—then he suddenly

remembered:—"You mean the gentleman attached to the British Consulate?" he said uncomfortably. And as she nodded her head, "But surely it was quite reasonable that he should come and ask those questions. You must remember that both Mr. and Mrs. Dampier are English people. They have a right to the protection and help of their Consulate."

"I do not say to the contrary, monsieur. I am only telling you the truth, namely that that English lawyer—for lawyer I suppose he was—terrified Jules. And had it not been that I and my husband are conscious of—of our innocence, Monsieur le Sénateur, he would have terrified us also. Then your son attacked Jules too. Surely the matter might have been left to the police—our own excellent police."

"I am glad you feel as you do about the police," said the Senator earnestly, "for as a matter of fact the Prefect of Police, whom I have just been consulting about Mr. Dampier's disappearance, suggests that the Hôtel Saint Ange be searched."

"Searched?" exclaimed Monsieur Poulain, staring at the Senator.

"Searched?" shrieked Madame Poulain indignantly.

"Yes," said Senator Burton quietly, and trying to speak as if a police Perquisition of a respectable hotel was the most ordinary thing in the world. "They are sending their men at eleven to-morrow morning. Let me add that they and Mrs. Dampier are most eager to study your convenience in every way. They would doubtless choose another time should eleven o'clock be inconvenient to you."

Madame Poulain was now speechless with indignation, and yes, with surprise.
When at last she did speak, her voice trembled with pain and anger.

"To think," she said, turning to her husband, and taking for the moment no notice of her American client—"to think that you and I, Poulain, after having lived here for twenty-one years and a half, should have our hotel searched by the police—as if it were the resort of brigands!" She turned to the Senator, and quietly, not without a measure of dignity, went on:—"And to think that it is you, Monsieur le Sénateur, who we have always thought one of our best patrons, who have brought this indignity upon us!"

"I am very, very sorry for all the trouble you are having about this affair," said Senator Burton earnestly. "And Madame Poulain? I want to assure you how entirely I have always believed your statement concerning this strange business."

"If that is so then why all this—this trouble, Monsieur le Sénateur?" Husband and wife spoke simultaneously.

"I wonder," exclaimed the Senator, "that you can ask me such a question! I quite admit that the first twenty-four hours I knew nothing of this unfortunate young woman whose cause I championed. But now, Madame Poulain, I have learnt that all she told me of herself is true. Remember she has never faltered in the statement that she came here accompanied by her husband. I, as you know," he lowered his voice, "suppose that in so thinking she is suffering from a delusion. But you cannot expect my view to be shared by those who know her well and who are strangers to you. As I told you only this morning, we hope that towards the end of this week Mrs. Dampier's lawyer will arrive from England."

"But what will happen then?" cried Madame Poulain, throwing up her hands with an excited, passionate gesture. "When will this persecution come to an end? We have done everything we could; we have submitted to odious interrogatories, first from one and then from the other—and now our hotel is to be searched! None of our other

clients, and remember the hotel is full, Monsieur le Sénateur, have a suspicion of what is going on, but any moment the affair may become public, and then—then our hotel might empty in a day! Oh, Monsieur le Sénateur"—she clasped her hands together—"If you refuse to think of us, think of our child, think of poor little Virginie!"

"Come, come, Madame Poulain!"

The Senator turned to the good woman's husband, but Poulain's usually placid face bore a look of lowering rage. The mention of his idolised daughter had roused his distress as well as anger.

"Now, Poulain, do tell your wife that there is really nothing to worry about. The police speak of you both in the very highest terms! As to the search that will take place to-morrow, it is the merest formality."

"I hope, monsieur, that you will do us the honour of being present," said Madame Poulain quickly. "We have nothing to hide, and we should far prefer you to be there."

"If such is your wish I will certainly be present," said Senator Burton gravely.

And then, as he walked away to the escalier d'honneur, he told himself that on the whole the poor Poulains had taken his disagreeable piece of news very well. Gerald was not showing his usual sense over this business: he had let his sympathies run away with him. But the Senator loved his son all the better for his chivalrous interest in poor Mrs. Dampier. It wasn't every young man who would have put everything aside in the way of interest, of amusement, and of pleasure in such a city as Paris, for the sake of an entire stranger.

As to Gerald's view of the Poulains, that again was natural. He didn't know these people with the same kindly knowledge the Senator and

Daisy had of them. Gerald had been at college, and later working hard in the office of America's greatest living architect, at the time the Senator and his daughter had spent a whole winter at the Hôtel Saint Ange.

It was natural that the young man should take Mrs. Dampier's word instead of the hotel-keepers'. But even so, how extraordinary was the utter divergence between the two accounts of what had happened!

For the hundredth time Senator Burton asked himself where the truth lay.

A sad change had come over Nancy Dampier in the three long days. She could not sleep, and they had to force her to eat. The interrogatories to which she had had to submit, first from one and then from another, had worn her out. When going over her story with the Consular official, she had suddenly faltered, and putting her hand to her head with a bewildered gesture, "I can't remember," she had said, looking round piteously at the Senator, "I can't remember!"

And he asked himself now whether those three words did not embody more of the truth than the poor girl would admit. Had she ever really remembered what had happened on that first evening of her arrival in Paris?

Such were Senator Burton's disconnected and troubled thoughts as, leaving the perturbed hotel-keepers, he slowly went to join his children and their guest.

To his relief, neither Daisy nor Nancy were in the salon, and his thoughts were pleasantly forced into another channel, for on the table lay a cable from some people called Hamworth, Mr. Hamworth was one of the Senator's oldest friends: also there was a pretty clever daughter who had always shown a rather special liking for Gerald….

The Hamworths were arriving in Paris at ten the next morning, and they asked the Senator and his children to join them at lunch at Bignon's.

Mingling with a natural pleasure at the thought of seeing old friends, and of getting away from all this painful business for a short time, was added a secret satisfaction at the thought that he would thus escape being present at the search of the Hôtel Saint Ange.

CHAPTER XI

"I suppose we ought to start in about half an hour," said the Senator genially. They were sitting, he and Gerald, at breakfast.

Madame Poulain, with the adaptability of her kind—the adaptability which makes the French innkeeper the best in the world, always served a real "American breakfast" in the Burtons' salon.

As his son made no answer to his remark, he went on, "I should like to be at the station a few minutes before the Hamworths' train is due."

Senator Burton was sorry, very, very sorry indeed, that there was still no news of the missing man, on this third morning of Dampier's disappearance. But he could not help feeling glad that poor little Mrs. Dampier had stayed in bed; thanks to that fact he and his children were having breakfast together, in the old, comfortable way.

The Senator felt happier than he had felt for some time. What a comfort it would be, even to Gerald and to Daisy, to forget for a moment this strange, painful affair, and to spend three or four hours

with old friends!

Gerald looked up. "I'm not coming, father. You will have to make my apologies to the Hamworths. Of course I should have liked to see them. But Mrs. Dampier has asked me to be present at the search. Someone ought, of course, to be there to represent her." He jerked the words out with a touch of defiance in his voice.

"I'm sorry she did that," said the Senator coldly. "And I think, Gerald, you should have consulted me before consenting to do so. You see, our position with regard to the Poulains is a delicate one—"

"Delicate?" repeated Gerald quickly. "How do you mean, father?"

"We have known these people a long while. It is fifteen years, Gerald, since I first came to this hotel with your dear mother. I have received nothing but kindness from Madame Poulain, and I am very, very sorry that she now associates us in her mind with this painful business."

"All I can say is, sir, that I do not share your sorrow."

The Senator looked up quickly. This was the first time—yes, the very first time that Gerald had ever spoken to him with that touch of sarcasm—some would have said impertinence—which sits so ill on the young, at any rate in the view of the old. Perhaps Gerald repented of his rude, hasty words, for it was in a very different tone that he went on:—

"You see, father, I believe the whole of Mrs. Dampier's story, and you only believe a part. If I shared your view I should think very ill of her indeed. But you, father (I don't quite know how you do it) manage to like and respect her, and to believe the Poulains as well!"

"Yes," said the Senator slowly, "that is so, Gerald. I believe that the

Poulains are telling the truth, and that this poor young woman thinks she is telling the truth—two very different things, my boy, as you will find out by the time you know as much of human nature as I now do. When you have lived as long as I have lived in the world, you will know that many people have an extraordinary power of persuading themselves of that which is not—"

"But why—" asked Gerald eagerly,—"why should Mrs. Dampier wish to prove that her husband accompanied her here if he did nothing of the kind?"

And then just as he asked the question which the Senator would not have found it very easy to answer, Daisy came into the room.

"I have persuaded Mrs. Dampier to stay in bed till the search is over. She's just worn out, poor little dear: I shall be glad when this Mr. Stephens has arrived—she evidently has the greatest faith in him."

"I shall be glad too," said the Senator slowly: how glad he would be neither of his children knew or guessed. "And now, Daisy, I hope you won't be long in getting ready to start for the station. I should be sorry indeed if the Hamworths' train came in before we reached there."

"Father! Surely you don't want me to leave Nancy this morning of all mornings? She ought not to be alone while the search is going on. She wanted to be actually present at it, didn't she, Gerald?"

The young man nodded. "Yes, but Daisy and I persuaded her that that was not necessary, that I would be there for her. It seems that Mr. Dampier had a very large portmanteau with him. She is sure that the Poulains have got it hidden away."

"She has told Gerald exactly what it is like," chimed in Daisy.

The Senator looked from one to the other: he felt both helpless and indignant. "The Hamworths are among the oldest friends we have in the world," he exclaimed. "Surely one of you will come with me? I'm not asking you to leave Mrs. Dampier for long, Daisy."

But Daisy shook her head decidedly. "I'd rather not, father—I don't feel as if I wanted to see the Hamworths at all just now. I'm sure that when you explain everything to them, they will understand."

Utterly discomfited and disappointed, and feeling for the first time really angry with poor Nancy Dampier, Senator Burton took his departure for the station, alone.

Perquisition?

To the French imagination there is something terrifying in the very word. And this justifiable terror is a national tradition. To thousands of honest folk a Perquisition was an ever present fear through the old Régime, and this fear became acute terror in the Revolution. Then a search warrant meant almost certainly subsequent arrest, imprisonment, and death.

Even nowadays every Frenchman is aware that at any moment, and sometimes on the most frivolous pretext, his house may be searched, his most private papers ransacked, and every member of his household submitted to a sharp, informal interrogation, while he stands helpless by, bearing the outrage with what grace he may.

Gerald Burton, much as he now disliked and suspected Monsieur and Madame Poulain, could not but feel sorry for them when he saw the manner in which those hitherto respectable and self-respecting folk were treated by the Police Agent who, with two subordinates, had been entrusted with the task of searching the Hôtel Saint Ange.

The American was also surprised to see the eagerness with which the
Poulains had welcomed his presence at their unpleasant ordeal.

"Thank you for coming, Monsieur Gerald; but where is Monsieur le Sénateur?" asked Madame Poulain feverishly. "He promised—he absolutely promised us that he would be here this morning!"

"My father has had to go out," said Gerald courteously, "but I am here to represent both him and Mrs. Dampier."

A heavy frown gathered over the landlady's face. "Ah!" she muttered, "it was a dark day for us when we allowed that lady to enter our hotel!"

Gerald, putting a strong restraint on his tongue, remained silent, but a moment later, as if in answer to his feeling of exasperation and anger, he heard the Police Agent's voice raised in sarcastic wrath. "I must ask you to produce the plan before I begin my Perquisition."

"But, monsieur," exclaimed the hotel-keeper piteously, "I cannot give you a plan of our hotel! How should we have such a thing? The house is said to be three hundred years old. We have even been told it should be classed as an Historical Monument!"

"Every hotel-keeper is bound to have a plan of his hotel," said the Agent roughly. "And I shall report you for not complying with the law. If a plan of the Hôtel Saint Ange did not exist, it was your duty to have one made at your own expense."

"Bien, bien, monsieur! It shall be done," said Poulain resignedly.

"To have a Perquisition without a plan is a farce!" said the man, this time addressing Gerald Burton. "An absolute farce! In such an old

house as this there may be many secret hiding-places."

"There are no secret hiding-places in our hotel," screamed Madame Poulain angrily. "We have no objection at all to being inspected in the greatest detail. But I must warn you, gentlemen, that your job will take some time to carry through."

The Police Agent shrugged his shoulders disagreeably. "Come along," he said sharply. "Let us begin at once! We would like to start by seeing your own rooms, madame."

Gerald Burton began to feel very uncomfortable. Under pleasanter, more normal circumstances he would have thoroughly enjoyed a long exhaustive inspection of a house which had probably been remodelled, early in the eighteenth century, on the site of a mediaeval building.

For the first time since he had begun to study with a view to excelling in the profession he had himself chosen, he had forgotten his work—the work he so much enjoyed—for three whole days. This Perquisition brought some of the old interest back. As an architect he could not but be interested and stimulated by this intimate inspection of what had been a magnificent specimen of a French town mansion.

When the search party reached the bed-chamber of the hotel-keeper and his wife Gerald Burton drew back, but Madame Poulain gave him a smart tap on the arm. "Go in, go in!" she said tartly, but he saw there were tears in her eyes. "We have nothing to hide, Monsieur Gerald! This is my room of memories; the room where our beloved Virginie was born. Little did I think it would ever be dishonoured by the presence of the police!"

Gerald, thus objurgated, walked through into a large room, low-ceilinged as are all rooms situated on the entresol floor of a Paris

house.

Over the bed hung Madame Poulain's wedding wreath of artificial orange blossoms in a round glass case. Photographs of the beloved Virginie taken at various stages of her life, from infancy to girlhood, were the sole other adornment of the room, and formed an odd contrast to the delicately carved frames of the old dim mirrors let into grey panelled walls.

"What have we here?" cried the Police Agent tapping one of the panels which formed the wall opposite the door and the fireplace.

"It is a way through into our daughter's room," said Poulain sullenly, and opening what appeared to be a cupboard door.

The American took an eager step forward.

This must be the place in which, according to Nancy's account, John Dampier had stood concealed during that eventful moment when he, Gerald, and his sister Daisy, had stood looking into the tiny room.

Yes, two or three people might well stand hidden in this deep recess, for the cupboard was almost as large as the smaller of the two apartments of which it formed the connecting link.

The Police Agent, following young Burton, stepped down into Virginie's room:—his voice softened:—"A very charming room," he said, "this little nest of mademoiselle your daughter!"

"We had to cut a window out of the wall," observed Madame Poulain, "When we first came here this was a blind closet where the aristocrats, it seems, used to powder their hair—silly creatures that they were! As if anyone would like to be white before their time!"

"We had better go up this staircase," said the Police Agent, passing out of
Mademoiselle Poulain's room.

And the six of them all filed up the narrow staircase, glancing into many a curious, strange little apartment on the way.

Every inch of space had been utilised in view of the business the Exhibition rush had brought the Poulains. Still, even on the upper floors,
Gerald Burton noticed that there remained intact many beautiful suites of
apartments now divided and let out as single rooms.

Not a word had been said of the coming Perquisition to those staying in the hotel. But Madame Poulain, by some means best known to herself, had managed to get rid of them all for the morning. And it was well that she had done so, for in more than one case the Police Agent and his men lifted the lid of travelling trunks, unhesitatingly pulled out drawers, and flung open the doors of hanging cupboards.

Gerald Burton was in turn amused, interested, and disgusted. The glimpses which this search revealed into other people's lives seemed dishonourable, and instinctively he withdrew his gaze and strove to see as little as possible.

Having thoroughly examined all the street side of the Hôtel Saint Ange, the three police emissaries started their investigations on the other side of the quadrangle, that which gave on the courtyard and on the garden.

When the party came round to the rooms occupied by Senator Burton and his family, Madame Poulain came forward, and touched the Police Agent on the arm:—"The lady who imagines that we have

made away with her husband is here," she whispered. "You had better knock at the door, and then walk straight in. She will not be pleased—perhaps she will scream—English people are so prudish when they are in bed! But never mind what she says or does: there is no reason why her room should not be searched as well as that of everybody else."

But the woman's vengeful wish was to remain ungratified.

Nancy Dampier had dressed, and with Daisy's help she had even made her bed. The Police Agent—Gerald Burton was deeply grateful to him for it—treated her with consideration and respect.

"C'est bien! C'est bien! madame," he said, just glancing round the room, and making a quick sign to his men that their presence was not required there.

At last the weary party, for by that time they were all very weary, reached the top floor of the Hôtel Saint Ange.

Here were rough garrets, oppressively hot on a day like this, but each and all obviously serving some absent client of the hotel as temporary dwelling-place.

Madame Poulain looked quite exhausted. "I think," she said plaintively, "I will remain here, monsieur, at the end of the passage. You will find every door unlocked. Perhaps we ought to tell you that these rooms are not as a rule inhabited, or indeed used by us in any way. That must excuse their present condition. But in a season like this—well, dame! we could fill every cranny twice over!"

Gerald and the three Frenchmen walked along the corridor, the latter flinging open door after door of the curious cell-like little bedrooms furnished for the most part with only an iron bed, a couple of chairs,

and the usual walnut-wood wardrobe.

"What's this?" asked one of the men sharply. "We find a door plastered up here, Monsieur Poulain."

But it was Madame Poulain who came languidly forward from the end of the passage. "Yes," she said. "If you wish to see that room you will have to get a ladder and climb up from the outside. A young Breton priest died here last January from scarlet fever, monsieur—" she lowered her voice instinctively—"and the sanitary authorities forced us to block up the room in this way—most unfortunately for us."

"It is strange," said the man, "that the seal of the sanitary authorities is not affixed to the door."

"To tell you the truth," said Madame Poulain uncomfortably, "the seal was there, but I removed it. You see, monsieur, it would not have been pleasant, even when all danger of infection was gone, to say anything to our other clients about so sad an event."

The man nodded his head, and went on.

But the incident made a disagreeable impression on Gerald Burton. And when they all finally came down to the courtyard, the Police Agents being by this time on far better terms with Monsieur and Madame Poulain than they had been at the beginning—on such good terms indeed that they were more than willing to attack the refreshments the hotel-keeper had made ready for them—he drew the head Agent aside.

"There was one thing," he said, "which rather troubled me—"

The man looked at him attentively. "Yes, monsieur?" He realised that this young man, whom he took for an Englishman, had been present

on behalf of the people at whose request the Perquisition had been ordered. He was therefore inclined to treat him with civility.

"I mean that closed room on the top floor," said Gerald hesitatingly. "Is there no way of ascertaining whether Madame Poulain's story is true—whether, that is, the room was ever condemned by the sanitary authorities?"

"Yes," said the Agent, "nothing is easier, monsieur, than to find that out."

He took a note-book out of his pocket, tore out a sheet, and wrote a few lines on it. Then he called one of his subordinates to him and said a few words of which Gerald caught the sense. It was an order to go to the office of the sanitary inspector of the district and bring back an answer at once.

In a quarter of an hour the man was back.

"The answer is 'Yes,'" he said a little breathlessly, and he handed his chief a large sheet of paper, headed:

VILLE DE PARIS,
Sanitary Inspector's Department.

In answer to your question, I have to report that we did condemn a room
in the Hôtel Saint Ange for cause of infectious disease.

The Police Agent handed it to Gerald Burton. "I felt sure that in that matter," he observed, "Madame Poulain was telling the truth. But, of course, a Perquisition in a house of this kind is a mere farce, without a plan to guide us. Think of the strange winding passages along which we were led, of the blind rooms, of the deep cupboards into

which we peeped! For all we can tell, several apartments may have entirely escaped our knowledge."

"Do you make many of these Perquisitions?" asked Gerald curiously.

"No, monsieur. We are very seldom asked to search a whole house. Almost always we have some indication as to the special room or rooms which are to be investigated. In fact since I became attached to the police, six years ago, this is the first time I have ever had to carry out a thorough Perquisition," he laughed a little ruefully, "and it makes one dry!"

Gerald Burton took the hint. He put a twenty-franc piece into the man's hand. "For you and your men," he said. "Go and get a good lunch: I am sure you need it."

The Police Agent thanked him cordially. "One word, monsieur? Perhaps I ought to tell you that we of the police are quite sure that the gentleman about whom you are anxious left this hotel—if indeed he was ever in it. The Poulains bear a very good character—better than that of many hotel-keepers of whom I could tell you—better than that of certain hotel-keepers who own grand international hotels the other side of the river. Of course I had to be rough with them at first—one has to keep up one's character, you know. But, monsieur? I was told confidentially that this Perquisition would probably lead to nothing, and, as you see, it has led to nothing."

Gerald sighed, rather wearily, for he too was tired, he too would be glad of his luncheon. Yes, this search had been, as the Police Agent hinted, something of a farce after all, and he had led not only himself, but, what he regretted far more, poor Nancy Dampier down a blind alley.

He found her waiting, feverishly eager and anxious to hear the result

of the Perquisition. When the door of the salon opened, she got up and turned to him, a strained look on her face.

"Well?" she said. "Well, Mr. Burton?"

He shook his head despondently. "We found nothing, absolutely nothing which
could connect your husband with any one of the rooms which we searched,
Mrs. Dampier. If, after leaving you, he did spend the night in the Hôtel Saint Ange, the Poulains have obliterated every trace of his presence."

She gave a low cry of pain, of bitter disappointment, and suddenly sinking down into a chair, buried her head in her hands—"I can't bear it," she wailed. "I only want to know the truth, whatever the truth may be! Anything would be better than what I am going through now."

Gerald Burton came and stood by the bowed figure. He became curiously pale with that clear, not unhealthy, pallor which is induced by exceptional intensity of feeling.

"Mrs. Dampier?" he said, in a very low voice.

She lifted her head and looked at him fixedly.

"Everything that a man can do I will do to find your husband. If I fail to find him living I will find him dead."

CHAPTER XII

But it is far easier to form such a resolution and to make such a promise as that which Gerald Burton had made to Nancy Dampier than it is to carry it out.

The officials of the Prefecture of Police grew well accustomed to the sight of the tall, good-looking young American coming and going in their midst, and they all showed a sympathetic interest in his quest. But though the police officials were lavish in kindly words, and in permits and passes which he found an open sesame to the various places where it was just conceivable that John Dampier, after having met with some kind of accident, might have been carried, they were apparently quite unable to elucidate the growing mystery of the English artist's disappearance.

Early on the Friday morning Gerald Burton telephoned to Nancy Dampier's friend and lawyer the fact that they were still entirely without any clue to the whereabouts of the missing man. And, true to his word, Mr. Stephens arrived in Paris that same evening.

He found his poor young client awaiting him in the company of the new friends to whom she owed so deep a debt of gratitude, and this lessened, to a certain extent, the awkwardness of their meeting. Even so, the shrewd, kindly Englishman felt much shocked and distressed by the change which had taken place in Nancy.

Just a month ago he had seen her standing, most radiant as well as prettiest of brides, by her proud husband's side. Perhaps because she had had so lonely a girlhood there had been no tears at Nancy Tremain's wedding, and when he had put her in the carriage which was to be the first little stage of her honeymoon, she had whispered, "Mr. Stephens? I feel as if I was going home." And the lawyer had known all that the dear, to her till then unfamiliar, word—had meant to her.

And now, here she was with strangers, wan, strained and unutterably weary-looking; as she stood, her hand clasped in his, looking, with dumb anguish, up into his face, Mr. Stephens felt a thrill of intense anger against John Dampier. For the present, at any rate, he refused to entertain the theory of crime or accident. But he kept his thoughts entirely to himself.

The irruption of any human being into a small and, for any reason, closely welded together set of people produces much the same effect as does the addition of a new product to a chemical mixture. And the arrival of the English lawyer affected not only Nancy herself but, in varying ways, Senator Burton and his son.

A very few moments spent in the Englishman's company brought to the American Senator an immense measure of relief. For one thing, he was sincerely glad to know that the poor young stranger's business was about to pass into capable and evidently most trustworthy hands: also a rapid interchange of words the first time they were left alone together put an end, and that for ever, to Senator Burton's uneasy suspicions—suspicions which had persisted to the end—as to Mrs. Dampier's account of herself.

Whatever else was obscure in this strange story, it was now clear that Nancy had told nothing but the truth concerning her short, simple past life. And looking back the Senator found it difficult, as a man so often finds it difficult when he becomes wise after an event, to justify, even to himself, his former attitude of distrust.

As to Gerald Burton, he felt a little jealousy of the lawyer. Till the coming of Mr. Stephens it was to him that Mrs. Dampier had instinctively turned in her distress and suspense; now she naturally consulted, and deferred to the advice of, the older man and older friend.

But Mr. Stephens was not able to do more than had already been done. He listened to what all those about him had to say concerning John Dampier's disappearance, and he carefully went over the ground already covered by Senator Burton and his son. He, too, saw the British Consul; he, too, was granted a short but cordial interview with the Prefect of Police; but not even to the Senator did he advance any personal theory as to what could account for the extraordinary occurrence.

Members of the legal profession are the same all the world over. If they are wise men and good lawyers, they keep their own counsel.

Perhaps because he himself had a son who was Gerald's age, the English solicitor took, from the first, a very special interest in the young American architect. Soon they were on excellent terms with one another—indeed, it was with Gerald Burton that he found he had most to do. The young man naturally accompanied him to all those places where the presence of a first-rate interpreter was likely to be useful, and Gerald Burton also pursued a number of independent enquiries on his own account.

But nothing was of any avail; they were baffled at every turn, and soon this search for a vanished man became, to one of the two now so strenuously engaged in it, the most sinister and disturbing of the many problems with which he had had to deal as a trusted family lawyer.

The screen of memory bears many blurred and hazy impressions on its surface, but now and again some special dramatic happening remains fixed there in a series of sharply-etched pictures in which every line has its retrospective meaning and value.

Such was to be the case with Mr. Stephens and the curious days he spent in Paris seeking for John Dampier. He was there a whole

week, and every succeeding day was packed with anxious, exciting interviews and expeditions, each of which it was hoped might yield some sort of clue. But what remained indelibly fixed on the English lawyer's screen of memory were three or four at the time apparently insignificant conversations which in no case could have done much to solve the problem he had set himself to solve.

The first of these was a short conversation, in the middle of that busy week, with Nancy Dampier.

After the first interview in which she had told him her version of what had happened the night of her own and her husband's arrival in Paris, he had had very little talk with her, and at no time had he expressed any opinion as to what could have happened to John Dampier. But at last he felt it his duty to try and probe a little more than he had felt it at first possible to do into the question of a possible motive or motives.

"I'm afraid," he began, "that there's very little more to do than has been already done. I mean, of course, for the present. And in your place, Nancy, I should come back to England, and wait there for any news that may reach you."

As she shook her head very decidedly, he went on gravely:—"I know it is open to you to remain in Paris; but, my dear, I cannot believe that your husband is in Paris. If he were, we must by now, with the help of the French police—the most expert in the world, remember—have come across traces of him, and that whether he be dead or alive."

But Nancy did not take the meaning he had hoped to convey by that last word. On the contrary:—

"Do you think," she asked, and though her lips quivered she spoke very quietly, "that Jack is dead, Mr. Stephens? I know that Senator Burton's son has come to believe that he is."

"No," said the English lawyer very seriously, "no, Nancy, I do not believe that your husband is dead. It is clear that had he been killed or injured that first morning in the Paris streets we should know it by now. The police assert, and I have no reason to doubt them, that they have made every kind of enquiry. No, they, like me, believe that your husband has left Paris."

"Left Paris?" repeated Nancy in a bewildered tone.

"Yes, my dear. As to his motive in doing so—I suppose—forgive me for asking you such a question—I suppose that you and he were on quite comfortable and—well, happy terms together?"

Nancy looked at him amazed—and a look of great pain and indignation flashed into her face.

"Why of course we were!" she faltered. "Absolutely—ideally happy! You didn't know Jack, Mr. Stephens; you were always prejudiced against him. Why, he's never said—I won't say an unkind word, but a cold or indifferent word since our first meeting. We never even had what is called"—again her lips quivered—'"a lovers' quarrel.'"

"Forgive me," he said earnestly. "I had to ask you. The question as to what kind of relations you and he were on when you arrived in Paris has been raised by almost every human being whom I have seen in the last few days."

"How horrible! How horrible!" murmured Nancy, hiding her face in her hands.

Then she raised her head, and looked straight at the lawyer:—"Tell anyone that asks you that," she exclaimed, "that no woman was ever made happier by a man than my Jack made me. We were too happy.

He said so that last evening—he said," she ended her sentence with a sob, "that his happiness made him afraid—"

"Did he?" questioned Mr. Stephens thoughtfully. "That was an odd thing for him to say, Nancy."

But she took no notice of the remark. Instead she, in her turn, asked a question:—"Do the police think that Jack may have left me of his own free will?"

Mr. Stephens looked extremely uncomfortable. "Well, some of them have thought that it is a possibility which should be kept in view."

"But you do not think so?" She looked at him searchingly.

The lawyer's courage failed him.

"No, of course not," he said hastily, and poor little Nancy believed him.

"And now," he went on quickly, relieved indeed to escape from a painful and difficult subject, "I, myself, must go home on Saturday. Cannot I persuade you to come back to England with me? My wife would be delighted if you would come to us—and for as long as you like."

She hesitated—"No, Mr. Stephens, you are very, very kind, but I would rather remain on in Paris for a while. Miss Burton has asked me to stay with them till they leave for America. Once they are gone, if I still have no news, I will do what you wish. I will come back to England."

The second episode, if episode it can be called, which was to remain vividly present in the memory of the lawyer, took place on the fifth day

of his stay in Paris.

He and Gerald had exhausted what seemed every possible line of enquiry, when the latter put in plain words what, in deference to his father's wish, he had hitherto tried to conceal from Mr. Stephens—his suspicions of the Poulains.

"I haven't said so to you before," he began abruptly, "but I feel quite sure that this Mr. John Dampier is dead."

He spoke the serious words in low, impressive tones, and the words, the positive assertion, queerly disturbed Nancy's lawyer, and that though he did not in the least share in his companion's view. But still he felt disturbed, perhaps unreasonably so considering how very little he still knew of the speaker. He was indeed almost as disturbed as he would have been had it been his own son who had suddenly put forward a wrong and indeed an untenable proposition.

He turned and faced Gerald Burton squarely.

"I cannot agree with you," he spoke with considerable energy, "and I am sorry you have got such a notion in your mind. I am quite sure that John Dampier is alive. He may be in confinement somewhere, held to ransom—things of that sort have happened in Paris before now. But be that as it may, it is my firm conviction that we shall have news of him within a comparatively short time. Of course I cannot help seeing what you suspect, namely, that there has been foul play on the part of the Poulains. But no other human being holds this theory but yourself. Your father—you must forgive me for saying so—has known these people a great deal longer than you have, and he tells me he would stake everything on their substantial integrity. And the police speak very highly of them too. Besides, in this world one must look for a motive—indeed, one must always look for a motive. But in this case no one that we know—I repeat, Mr. Burton, no one that we know

of—had any motive for injuring Mr. Dampier."

Gerald Burton looked up quickly:—"You mean by that there may be someone whom we do not know of who may have had a motive for spiriting him away?"

Mr. Stephens nodded curtly. He had not meant to say even so much as that.

"I want you to tell me," went on the young American earnestly, "exactly what sort of a man this John Dampier is—or was?"

The lawyer took off his spectacles; he began rubbing the glasses carefully.

"Well," he said at last, "that isn't a question I find it easy to answer. I made a certain number of enquiries about him when he became engaged to Miss Tremain, and I am bound to tell you, Mr. Burton, that the answers, as far as they went, were quite satisfactory. The gentleman in whose house the two met—I mean poor Nancy and Dampier—had, and has, an extremely high opinion of him."

"Mrs. Dampier once spoke to me as if she thought you did not like her husband?" Gerald Burton looked straight before him as he said the words he felt ashamed of uttering. And yet—and yet he did so want to know the truth as to John Dampier!

Mr. Stephens looked mildly surprised. "I don't think I ever gave her any reason to suppose such a thing," he said hesitatingly. "Mr. Dampier was eager, as all men in love are eager, to hasten on the marriage. You see, Mr. Burton"—he paused, and Gerald looked up quickly:—

"Yes, Mr. Stephens?"

"Well, to put it plainly, John Dampier was madly in love"—the speaker thought his companion winced, and, rather sorry than glad at the success of his little ruse, he hurried on:—"that being so he naturally wished to be married at once. But an English marriage settlement—especially when the lady has the money, which was the case with Miss Tremain—cannot be drawn up in a few days. Nancy herself was willing to assent to everything he wished; in fact I had to point out to her that it is impossible to get engaged on Monday and married on Tuesday! I suppose she thought that because I very properly objected to some such scheme of theirs, I disliked John Dampier. This was a most unreasonable conclusion, Mr. Burton!"

Gerald Burton felt disappointed. He did not believe that the English lawyer was answering truly. He did not stay to reflect that Mr. Stephens was not bound to answer indiscreet questions, and that when a young man asks an older man whether or no he dislikes someone, and that someone is a client, the question is certainly indiscreet.

In a small way the painful mystery was further complicated by the attitude of Mère Bideau. Bribes and threats were alike unavailing to make the old Breton woman open her mouth. She was full of suspicion; she refused to answer the simplest questions put to her by either Mr. Stephens or Gerald Burton.

And the lawyer felt a moment of sharp impatience, as business men are so often apt to feel in their dealings with women, when, in answer to his remark that Mère Bideau would be brought to her knees when she found her supplies cut off, Nancy, with tears running down her cheeks, cried out in protest:—"Oh, Mr. Stephens, don't say that! I would far rather go on paying the old woman for ever than that she should be brought, as you say, to her knees. She was such a good servant to Jack: he is—he was—so fond of her."

But Mère Bideau's attitude greatly disconcerted and annoyed the Englishman. He wondered if the old woman knew more than she would admit; he even suspected her of knowing the whereabouts of her master; the more impenetrable became the mystery, the less Mr. Stephens believed Dampier to be dead.

And then, finally, on the last day of his stay in Paris something happened which, to the lawyer's mind, confirmed his view that John Dampier, having vanished of his own free will, was living and well—though he hoped not happy—away from the great city which had been searched, or so the police assured the Englishman, with a thoroughness which had never been surpassed if indeed it had ever been equalled.

CHAPTER XIII

With Mr. Stephens' morning coffee there appeared an envelope bearing his name and a French stamp, as well of course as the address of the obscure little hotel where the Burtons had found him a room.

The lawyer looked down at the envelope with great surprise. The address was written in a round, copybook hand, and it was clear his name must have been copied out of an English law list.

Who in Paris could be writing to him—who, for the matter of that, knew where he was staying, apart from his own family and his London office?

He broke the seal and saw that the sheet of notepaper he took from the envelope was headed "Préfecture de Police." Hitherto the police

had addressed all their communications to the Hôtel Saint Ange.

The letter ran as follows:

> Dear Sir,
> I am requested by the official who has the Dampier affair in hand to ask you if you will come here this afternoon at three o'clock. As I shall be present and can act as interpreter, it will not be necessary for you to be accompanied as you were before.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> Ivan Baroff.

What an extraordinary thing! Up to the present time Mr. Stephens had not communicated with a single police official able to speak colloquial English; it was that fact which had made him find Gerald Burton so invaluable an auxiliary. But this letter might have been written by an Englishman, though the signature showed it to be from a foreigner, and from a Pole, or possibly a Russian.

Were the police at last on the trail of the missing man? Mr. Stephens' well-regulated heart began to beat quicker at the thought. But if so, how strange that the Prefect of Police had not communicated with the Hôtel Saint Ange last night! Monsieur Beaucourt had promised that the smallest scrap of news should be at once transmitted to John Dampier's wife.

Well, there was evidently nothing for it but to wait with what patience he could muster till the afternoon; and it was characteristic of Nancy's legal friend that he said nothing of his mysterious appointment to either the Burtons or to Mrs. Dampier. It was useless to raise hopes which might so easily be disappointed.

Three o'clock found Mr. Stephens at the Prefecture of Police.

"Ivan Baroff" turned out to be a polished and agreeable person who at once frankly explained that he belonged to the International Police. Indeed while shaking hands with his visitor he observed pleasantly, "This is not the kind of work with which I have, as a rule, anything to do, but my colleagues have asked me to see you, Mr. Stephens, because I have lived in England, and am familiar with your difficult language. I wish to entertain you on a rather delicate matter. I am sure I may count on your discretion, and, may I add, your sympathy?"

The English lawyer looked straight at the suave-spoken detective. What the devil did the man mean? "Certainly," said he, "certainly you can count on my discretion, Monsieur Baroff, and—and my sympathy. I hope I am not unreasonable in hoping that at last the police have obtained some kind of due to Mr. Dampier's whereabouts."

"No," said the other indifferently. "That I regret to tell you is not the case; they are, however, prosecuting their enquiries with the greatest zeal—of hat you may rest assured."

"So I have been told again and again," Mr. Stephens spoke rather impatiently. "It seems strange—I think I may say so to you who are, like myself, a foreigner—it seems strange, I say, that the French police, who are supposed to be so extraordinarily clever, should have failed to find even a trace of this missing man. Mr. John Dampier can't have vanished from the face of the earth: dead or alive, he must be somewhere!"

"There is of course no proof at all that Mr. Dampier ever arrived in Paris," observed the detective significantly.

"No, there is no actual proof that he did so," replied the English solicitor frankly. "There I agree! But there is ample proof that he was coming to Paris. And, as I suppose you know, the Paris police have

satisfied themselves that Mr. and Mrs. Dampier stayed both in Marseilles and in Lyons."

"Yes, I am aware of that; as also—" he checked himself. "But what I have to say to you to-day, my dear sir, is only indirectly concerned with Mr. Dampier's disappearance. I am really here to ask if you cannot exert your influence with the Burton family, with the American Senator, that is, and more particularly with his son, to behave in a reasonable manner."

"I don't quite understand what you mean."

"Well, it is not so very easy to explain! All I can say is that young Mr. Burton is making himself very officious, and very disagreeable. He has adopted a profession which here, at the Prefecture of Police, we naturally detest"—the Russian smiled, but not at all pleasantly—"I mean that of the amateur detective! He is determined to find Mr. Dampier—or perhaps it would be more true to say"—he shrugged his shoulders—"that he wishes—the wish perhaps being, as you so cleverly say in England, father to the thought—to be quite convinced of that unfortunate gentleman's obliteration from life. He has brought himself to believe—but perhaps he has already told you what he thinks—?"

He waited a moment.

But the English lawyer made no sign of having understood what the other wished to imply. "They have all talked to me," he said mildly, "Senator Burton, Mr. Burton, Miss Burton; every conceivable possibility has been discussed by us."

"Indeed? Well, with so many clever people all trying together it would be strange if not one hit upon the truth!" The detective spoke with good-natured sarcasm.

"Perhaps we have hit upon it," said Mr. Stephens suddenly. "What do you think, Monsieur Baroff?"

"I do not think at all!" he said pettishly. "I am far too absorbed in my own tiresome job—that of keeping my young Princes and Grand Dukes out of scrapes—to trouble about this peculiar affair. But to return to what I was saying. You are of course aware that Mr. Gerald Burton is convinced, and very foolishly convinced (for there is not an atom of proof, or of anything likely to lead to proof), that this Mr. Dampier was murdered, if not by the Poulains, then by some friend of theirs in the Hôtel Saint Ange. The foolish fellow has as good as said so to more than one of our officials."

"I know such is Mr. Burton's theory," answered Mr. Stephens frankly, "and it is one very difficult to shake. In fact I may tell you that I have already tried to make him see the folly of the notion, and how it is almost certainly far from the truth."

"It is not only far from the truth, it is absolutely untrue," said the Russian impressively. "But what I now wish to convey to the young man is that should he be so ill-advised as to do what he is thinking of doing he will make it very disagreeable for the lady in whom he takes so strangely violent an interest—"

"What exactly do you mean, Monsieur Baroff?"

"This Mr. Gerald Burton is thinking of enlisting the help of the American newspaper men in Paris. He wishes them to raise the question in their journals."

"I do not think he would do that without consulting his father or me," said
Mr. Stephens quickly. He felt dismayed by the other's manner.

Baroff's tone had become menacing, almost discourteous.

"Should this headstrong young man do anything of that kind," went on the detective, "he will put an end to the efforts we are making to find Mrs. Dampier's husband. In fact I think I may say that if the mystery is never solved, it will be thanks to his headstrong folly and belief in himself."

With this the disagreeable interview came to an end, and though the English lawyer never confided the details of this curious conversation to any living soul, he did make an opportunity of conveying Ivan Baroff's warning to Gerald Burton.

"Before leaving Paris," he said earnestly, "there is one thing I want to impress upon you, Mr. Burton. Do not let any newspaper people get hold of this story; I can imagine nothing that would more distress poor Mrs. Dampier. She would be exposed to very odious happenings if this disappearance of her husband were made, in any wide sense of the word, public. And then I need not tell you that the Paris Police have a very great dislike to press publicity; they are doing their very best—of that I am convinced—to probe the mystery."

Gerald Burton hesitated. "I should have thought," he said, "that it would at least be worth while to offer a reward in all the Paris papers. I find that such rewards are often offered in England, Mr. Stephens."

"Yes—they are. And very, very seldom with any good result," answered the lawyer drily. "In fact all the best minds concerned with the question of crime have a great dislike to the reward system. Not once in a hundred cases is it of any use. In fact it is only valuable when it may induce a criminal to turn 'King's evidence.' But in this case I pray you to believe me when I say that we are not seeking to discover the track of any criminal—" in his own mind he added the

words, "unless we take John Dampier to be one!"

It was on the morning of Mr. Stephens' departure from Paris, in fact when he and Senator Burton, who had gone to see him off, were actually in the station, walking up and down the Salle des Pas Perdus, that the lawyer uttered the words which finally made up the American Senator's mind for him.

"You have been so more than good to Mrs. Dampier," the Englishman said earnestly, "that I do not feel it would be fair, Mr. Senator, to leave you in ignorance of my personal conviction concerning this painful affair."

The American turned and looked at his companion. "Yes?" he said with suppressed eagerness. "Yes, Mr. Stephens, I shall be sincerely grateful for your honest opinion."

They had all three—he and Daisy and Gerald—tried to make this Englishman say what he really thought, but with a courtesy that was sometimes grave, sometimes smiling, Mr. Stephens had eluded their surely legitimate curiosity.

Even now the lawyer hesitated, but at last he spoke out what he believed to be the truth.

"It is my honest opinion that this disappearance of Mr. Dampier is painful rather than mysterious. I believe that poor Nancy Tremain's bridegroom, actuated by some motive to which we may never have the clue, made up his mind to disappear. When faced with responsibilities for which they have no mind men before now have often disappeared, Mr. Senator. Lawyers and doctors, if their experience extend over a good many years, come across stories even more extraordinary than that which has been concerning us now!"

"I take it," said Senator Burton slowly, "that you did not form a good impression of this Mr. Dampier?"

The lawyer again hesitated, much as he had hesitated when asked the same question by young Burton, but this time he answered quite truthfully.

"Well, no, I did not! True, he seemed entirely indifferent as to how the money of his future wife was settled; indeed I could not help feeling that he was culpably careless about the whole matter. But even so I had one or two very disagreeable interviews with him. You see, Senator Burton, the man was madly in love; he had persuaded poor Nancy to be married at once—and by at once I mean within a fortnight of their engagement. He seemed strangely afraid of losing her, and I keenly resented this feeling on his part, for a more loyal little soul doesn't live. She has quite a nice fortune, you know, and for my part I should have liked her to marry some honest country gentleman in her own country—not an artist living in Paris."

"You don't attach much importance to love, Mr. Stephens?"

The lawyer laughed. "Quite enough!" he exclaimed. "Love causes more trouble in the world than everything else put together—at any rate it does to members of my profession. But to return to poor Nancy. She's a fascinating little creature!" He shot a quick glance at Senator Burton, but the latter only said cordially:—

"Yes, as fascinating as she's pretty!"

"Well, she had plenty of chances of making a good marriage—but no one touched her heart till this big, ugly fellow came along. So of course I had to make the best of it!" He waited a moment and then went on. "I ought to tell you that at my suggestion Dampier took out a

large insurance policy on his own life: I didn't think it right that he should bring, as it were, nothing into settlement, the more so that Nancy had insisted, on her side, that all her money should go to him at her death, and that whether they had any children or not! You know what women are?" he shrugged his shoulders.

"If that be so," observed the Senator, "then money can have had nothing to do with his disappearance."

"I'm not so sure of that! In fact I've been wondering uneasily during the last few days whether, owing to his being an artist, and to his having lived so much abroad, John Dampier could have been foolish enough to suppose that in the case of his disappearance the insurance money would be paid over to Mrs. Dampier. That, of course, would be one important reason why he should wish to obliterate himself as completely as he seems to have done. I need hardly tell you, Mr. Senator, that the Insurance Office would laugh in my face if I were to try and make them pay. Why, years will have to elapse before our courts would even consider the probability of death."

"I now understand your view," said the Senator gravely. "But even if it be the true solution, it does not explain the inexplicable difference between Mrs. Dampier's statement and that of the Poulains—I mean, their statements as to what happened the night Mr. and Mrs. Dampier arrived in Paris."

"No," said the lawyer reluctantly. "I admit that to me this is the one inexplicable part of the whole story. And I also confess that as to that one matter I find it impossible to make up my mind. If I had not known poor little Nancy all her life, I should believe, knowing what women are capable of doing if urged thereto by pride or pain—I should believe, I say, that she had made up this strange story to account for her husband's having left her! I could tell you more than one tale of a woman having deceived not only her lawyer, but, later, a judge and a

jury, as to such a point of fact. But from what I know of Mrs. Dampier she would be quite incapable of inventing, or perhaps what is quite as much to the purpose, of keeping up such a deception."

"From something my daughter said," observed Senator Burton, "I think you have been trying to persuade the poor little lady to go back to England?"

"Yes, I tried to make her come back with me to-day. And I am bound to say that I succeeded better than I expected to do, for though she refuses to come now, she does intend to do so when you yourselves leave Paris, Mr. Senator. Fortunately she does not know what sort of a time she will come back to: I fear that most of her friends will feel exactly as I feel; they will not believe that John Dampier has disappeared save of his own free will—and some of them will suppose it their duty to tell her so!"

"It is the view evidently held by the French police," observed the Senator.

The English lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "Of course it is! The fact that Dampier had hardly any money on him disposes of any crime theory. A wonderful thing the Paris police system, Mr. Burton!"

And the other cordially agreed; nothing could have been more courteous, more kind, more intelligent, than the behaviour of the high police officials, from the Prefect himself downwards, over the whole business.

Mr. Stephens glanced up at the huge station clock. "I have only five minutes left," he said. "But I want to say again how much I appreciate your extraordinary kindness and goodness to my poor client. And, Mr. Senator? There's just one thing more I want to say to you—" For the first time the English lawyer looked awkward and ill at ease.

"Why yes, Mr. Stephens! Pray say anything you like."

"Well, my dear sir, I should like to give you a very sincere piece of advice." He hesitated. "If I were you I should go back to America as soon as possible. I feel this sad affair has thoroughly spoilt your visit to Paris; and speaking as a man who has children himself, I am sure it has not been well, either for Miss Daisy or for your son, to have become absorbed, as they could hardly help becoming, in this distressing business."

The American felt slightly puzzled by the seriousness with which the other delivered this well-meant but wholly superfluous advice. What just exactly did the lawyer mean by these solemnly delivered words?

"Why," said the Senator, "you're quite right, Mr. Stephens; it has been an ordeal, especially for my girl Daisy: she hasn't had air and exercise enough during this last fortnight, let alone change of thought and scene. But, as a matter of fact, I am settling about our passages to-day, on my way back to the hotel."

"I am very glad to hear that!" exclaimed the other, with far more satisfaction and relief in his voice than seemed warranted. "And I presume that your son will find lots of work awaiting him on his return home? There's nothing like work to chase cobwebs from the brain or —or heart, Mr. Senator."

"That's true: not that there are many cobwebs in my boy's brain, Mr. Stephens," he smiled broadly at the notion.

"Messieurs! Mesdames! En voiture, s'il vous plait. En voiture—!"

A few minutes later Mr. Stephens waved his hand from his railway carriage, and as he did so he wondered if he himself had ever been as obtuse a father as his new American friend seemed to be.

As he walked away from the station Senator Burton made up his

mind to go back on foot, taking the office of the Transatlantic Steamship Company on his way. And while he sauntered through the picturesque, lively streets of the Paris he loved with so familiar and appreciative an admiration, the American found his thoughts dwelling on the events of the last fortnight.

Yes, it had been a strange, an extraordinary experience—one which he and his children would never forget, which they would often talk over in days to come. Poor little Nancy Dampier! His kind, fatherly heart went out to her with a good deal of affection, and yes, of esteem. She had behaved with wonderful courage and good sense—and with dignity too, when one remembered the extraordinary position in which she had been placed with regard to the Poulains.

The Poulains? For the hundredth time he wondered where the truth really lay.... But he soon dismissed the difficult problem, for now he had reached the offices of the French Transatlantic Company. There the Senator's official rank caused him to be treated with very special civility; at once he was assured that three passages would be reserved for him on practically what boat he liked: he suggested the Lorraine, sailing in ten days time, and he had the satisfaction of seeing good cabins booked in his name.

And as he walked away, slightly cheered, as men are apt to be, by the pleasant deference paid to his wishes, he told himself that before leaving Paris he must arrange for a cable to be at once dispatched should there come any news of the mysterious, and at once unknown and familiar, John Dampier. Mrs. Dampier would surely find his request a natural one, the more so that Daisy and Gerald would be just as eager to hear news as he himself would be. He had never known anything take so firm a hold of his son's and daughter's imaginations.

On reaching the Hôtel Saint Ange the Senator went over to Madame

Poulain's kitchen; it was only right to give her the date of their departure as soon as possible.

"Well," he said with a touch of regret in his voice, "we shall soon be going off now, Madame Poulain. Next Tuesday-week you will have to wish us bon voyage!"

And instead of seeing the good woman's face cloud over, as it had always hitherto clouded over, when he had sought her out to say that their stay in Paris was drawing to a close, he saw a look of intense relief, of undisguised joy, flash into her dark expressive eyes, and that though she observed civilly, "Quel dommage, Monsieur le Sénateur, that you cannot stay a little longer!"

He moved away abruptly, feeling unreasonably mortified.

But Senator Burton was a very just man; he prided himself on his fairness of outlook; and now he reminded himself quickly that their stay at the Hôtel Saint Ange had not brought unmixed good fortune to the Poulains. It was natural that Madame Poulain should long to see the last of them—at any rate this time.

He found Gerald alone, seated at a table, intent on a letter he was writing. Daisy, it seemed, had persuaded Mrs. Dampier to go out for a walk before luncheon.

"Well, my boy, we shall have to make the best of the short time remaining to us in Paris. I have secured passages in the Lorraine, and so we now only have till Tuesday-week to see everything in Paris which this unhappy affair has prevented our seeing during the last fortnight."

And then it was that the something happened, that the irreparable words were spoken, which suddenly and most rudely opened the

Senator's eyes to a truth which the English lawyer had seen almost from the first moment of his stay in Paris.

Gerald Burton started up. His face was curiously pale under its healthy tan, but the Senator noticed that his son's eyes were extraordinarily bright.

"Father?" He leant across the round table. "I am not going home with you. In fact I am now writing to Mr. Webb to tell him that he must not expect me back at the office for the present: I will cable as soon as I can give him a date."

"Not going home?" repeated Senator Burton. "What do you mean, Gerald? What is it that should keep you here after we have gone?" but a curious sensation of fear and dismay was already clutching at the older man's heart.

"I am never going back—not till John Dampier is found. I have promised
Mrs. Dampier to find him, and that whether he be alive or dead!"

Even then the Senator tried not to understand. Even then he tried to tell himself that his son was only actuated by some chivalrous notion of keeping his word, in determining on a course which might seriously damage his career.

He tried quiet expostulation: "Surely, Gerald, you are not serious in making such a decision? Mrs. Dampier, from what I know of her, would be. the last to exact from you the fulfilment of so—so unreasonable a promise. Why, you and I both know quite well that the Paris police, and also Mr. Stephens, are convinced that this man Dampier just left his wife of his own free will."

"I know they think that! But it's a lie!" cried Gerald with blazing eyes.

"An infamous lie! I should like to see Mr. Stephens dare suggest such a notion to John Dampier's wife. Not that she is his wife, father, for I'm sure the man is dead—and I believe—I hope that she's beginning to think so too!"

"But if Dampier is dead, Gerald, then—" the Senator was beginning to lose patience, but he was anxious not to lose his temper too, not to make himself more unpleasant than he must do. "Surely you see yourself, my boy, that if the man is dead, there's nothing more for you to do here, in Paris?"

"Father, there's everything! The day I make sure that John Dampier is dead will be the happiest day of my life." His voice had sunk low, he muttered the last words between his teeth; but alas! the Senator heard them all too clearly.

"Gerald!" he said gravely. "Gerald? Am I to understand—"

"Father—don't say anything you might be sorry for afterwards! Yes, you have guessed truly. I love Nancy! If the man is dead—and I trust to God he is—I hope to marry her some day. If—if you and Mr. Stephens are right—if he is still alive—well then—" he waited a moment, and that moment was the longest the Senator had ever known—"then, father, I promise you I will come home. But in that case I shall never, never marry anybody else. Daisy knows," went on the young man, unconsciously dealing his father another bitter blow. "Daisy knows—she guessed, and—she understands."

"And does she approve?" asked the Senator sternly.

"I don't know—I don't care!" cried Gerald fiercely. "I am not looking for anyone's approval. And, father?" His voice altered, it became what the other had never heard his son's voice be, suppliant:—"I have trusted you with my secret—but let it be from now as if I had not

spoken. I beg of you not to discuss it with Daisy—I need not ask you not to speak of it to anybody else."

The Senator nodded. He was too agitated, too horror-stricken to speak, and his agitation was not lessened by his son's final words.

EPILOGUE

I

It is two years to a day since John Dampier disappeared, and it is only owing to one man's inflexible determination that the search for him has not been abandoned long ago.

And now we meet Senator Burton far in body, if not in mind, from the place where we last met him.

He is standing by an open window, gazing down on one of the fairest sights civilised nature has to offer—that of an old English garden filled with fragrant flowers which form scented boundaries of soft brilliant colour to wide lawns shaded by great cedar trees.

But as he stands there in the early morning sunlight, for it is only six o'clock, he does not look in harmony with the tranquil beauty of the scene before him. There is a stern, troubled expression on his face, for he has just espied two figures walking side by side across the dewy grass; the one is his son Gerald, the other Nancy Dampier, still in the delicate and dangerous position of a woman who is neither wife, maid, nor widow.

The Senator's whole expression has changed in the two years. He

used to look a happy, contented man; now, especially when he is alone and his face is in repose, he has the disturbed, bewildered expression men's faces bear when Providence or Fate—call it which you will—has treated them in a way they feel to be unbearably unfair, as well as unexpected.

And yet the majority of mankind would consider this American to be supremely blessed. The two children he loves so dearly are as fondly attached to him as ever they were; and there has also befallen him a piece of quite unexpected good fortune. A distant relation, from whom he had no expectations, has left him a fortune "as a token of admiration for his high integrity."

Senator Burton is now a very rich man, and because Daisy fancied it would please her brother they have taken for the summer this historic English manor house, famed all the world over to those interested in mediaeval architecture, as Barwell Moat.

Here he, Daisy, and Nancy Dampier have already been settled for a week;
Gerald only joined them yesterday from Paris.

Early though it is, the Senator has already been up and dressed over an hour; and he has spent the time unprofitably, in glancing over his diary of two years ago, in conning, that is, the record of that strange, exciting fortnight which so changed his own and his children's lives.

He has read over with pain and distaste the brief words in which he chronicled that first chance meeting with Nancy Dampier. What excitement, what adventures, and yes, what bitter sorrow had that chance meeting under the porte cochère of the Hôtel Saint Ange brought in its train! If only he and Daisy had started out an hour earlier on that June morning just two years ago how much they would have been spared.

As for the fortune left to him, Senator Burton is now inclined to think that it has brought him less than no good. It has only provided Gerald with an excuse, which to an American father is no excuse, for neglecting his profession. Further, it has enabled the young man to spend money in a prodigal fashion over what even he now acknowledges to have been a hopeless quest, though even at the present moment detectives in every capital in Europe are watching for a clue which may afford some notion as to the whereabouts of John Dampier.

John Dampier? Grim, relentless spectre who pursues them unceasingly, and from whose menacing, shadowy presence they are never free—from whom, so the Senator has now despairingly come to believe, they never, never will be free….

He had stopped his diary abruptly on the evening of that now far-off day when his eyes had been so rudely opened to his son's state of mind and heart. But though he has no written record to guide him the Senator finds it only too easy, on this beautiful June morning, to go back, in dreary retrospective, over these two long years.

Gerald had not found it possible to keep his rash vow; there had come a day when he had had to go back to America—indeed, he has been home three times. But those brief visits of his son to his own country brought the father no comfort, for each time Gerald left behind him in Europe not only his heart, but everything else that matters to a man—his interests, his longings, his hopes.

Small wonder that in time Senator Burton and Daisy had also fallen into the way of spending nearly the whole of the Senator's spare time in Europe, and with Nancy Dampier.

Nancy? The mind of the watcher by the window turns to her too, as he

visions the slender, graceful figure now pacing slowly by his son's side.

Is it unreasonable that, gradually withdrawing herself from her old friends, those friends who did not believe that Dampier had left her save of his own free will, Nancy should cling closer and closer to her new friends? No, not at all unreasonable, but, from the Senator's point of view, very unfortunate. Daisy and Nancy are now like sisters, and to the Senator himself she shows the loving deference, the affection of a daughter, but with regard to the all-important point of her relations to Gerald, none of them know the truth—indeed, it may be doubted if she knows it herself.

But the situation gets more difficult, more strained every month, every week, almost every day. Senator Burton feels that the time has come when something must be done to end it—one way or the other—and the day before yesterday he sought out Mr. Stephens, now one of his closest friends and advisers, in order that they might confer together on the matter. As he stands there looking down at the two figures walking across the dewy grass, he remembers with a sense of boding fear the conversation with Nancy's lawyer.

"There's nothing to be done, my poor friend, nothing at all! Our English marriage laws are perfectly clear, and though this is a very, very hard case, I for my part have no wish to see them altered."

And the Senator had answered with heat, "I cannot follow you there at all! The law which ties a living woman to a man who may be dead, nay, probably is dead, is a monstrous law."

And Mr. Stephens had answered very quietly, "What if John Dampier be alive?"

"And is this all I can tell my poor son?"

And then it was that Mr. Stephens, looking at him doubtfully, had answered, "Well no, for there is a way out. It is not a good way—I doubt if it is a right way—but still it is a way. It is open to poor little Nancy to go to America, to become naturalized there, and then to divorce her husband, in one of your States, for desertion. The divorce so obtained would be no divorce in England, but many Englishmen and Englishwomen have taken that course as a last resort—" He had waited a moment, and then added, "I doubt, however, very, very much if Nancy would consent to do such a thing, even if she reciprocates—which is by no means sure—your son's—er—feeling for her."

"Feeling?" Senator Burton's voice had broken, and then he had cried out fiercely, "Why use such an ambiguous word, when we both know that Gerald is killing himself for love of her—and giving up the finest career ever opened to a man? If Mrs. Dampier does not reciprocate what you choose to call his 'feeling' for bet, then she is the coldest and most ungrateful of women!"

"I don't think she is either the one or the other," had observed Mr. Stephens mildly; and he had added under his breath, "It would be the better for her if she were—Believe me the only way to force her to consider the expedient I have suggested—" he had hesitated as if rather ashamed of what he was about to say, "would be for Gerald to tell her the search for Mr. Dampier must now end—and that the time has come when he must go back to America—and work."

Small wonder that Senator Burton found it hard to sleep last night, small wonder he has risen so early. He knows that his son is going to speak to Nancy, to tell her what Mr. Stephens has suggested she should do, and he suspects that now, at this very moment, the decisive conversation may be taking place.

II

Though unconscious that anxious, yearning eyes are following them, both Nancy Dampier and Gerald Burton feel an instinctive desire to get away from the house, and as far as may be from possible eavesdroppers. They walk across the stretch of lawn which separates the moat from the gardens in a constrained silence, she following rather than guiding her companion.

But as if this charming old-world plesaunce were quite familiar to him, Gerald goes straight on, down a grass path ending in what appears to be a high impenetrable wall of yew, and Nancy, surprised, then sees that a narrow, shaft-like way leads straight through the green leafy depths.

"Why, Gerald?" she says a little nervously—they have long ago abandoned any more formal mode of address, though between them there stands ever the spectre of poor John Dampier, as present to one of the two, and he the man, as if the menacing shadow were in very truth a tangible presence. "Why, Gerald, where does this lead? Have you ever been here before?"

And for the first time since they met the night before, the young man smiles. "I thought I'd like to see an English sunrise, Nancy, so I've been up a long time. I found a rose garden through here, and I thought it would be a quiet place for our talk."

It is strangely dark and still under the dense evergreen arch of the slanting way carved through the yew hedge; Nancy can only grope her way along. Turning round, Gerald holds out his strong hands, and taking hers in what seems so cool, so impersonal a grasp, he draws her after him. And Nancy flushes in the half darkness; it is the first time that she and Gerald Burton have ever been alone together as they are alone now, and that though they have met so very, very often in the last two years.

Nancy is at once glad and sorry when he suddenly loosens his grasp of her hands. The shadowed way terminates in a narrow wrought-iron gate; and beyond the gate is the rose garden of Barwell Moat, a tangle of exquisite colouring, jealously guarded and hidden away from those to whom the more familiar beauties of the place are free.

It is one of the oldest of English roseries, planned by some Elizabethan dame who loved solitude rather than the sun. And if the roses bloom a little less freely in this quiet, still enclosure than they would do in greater light and wilder air, this gives the rosery, in these hot June days, a touch of austere and more fragile beauty than that to be seen beyond its enlacing yews.

A hundred years after the Elizabethan lady had designed the rosery of Barwell Moat a Jacobean dame had added to her rose garden a fountain—one brought maybe from Italy or France, for the fat stone Cupids now shaking slender jets of water from their rose-leaved cornucopias are full of a roguish, Southern grace.

When they have passed through into this fragrant, enchanted looking retreat, Nancy cries out in real delight: "What an exquisite and lovely place! How strange that Daisy and I never found it!"

And then, as Gerald remains silent, she looks, for the first time this morning, straight up into his face, and her heart is filled with a sudden overwhelming sensation of suspense—and yes, fear, for there is the strangest expression on the young man's countenance, indeed it is full of deep, of violent emotion—emotion his companion finds contagious.

She tells herself that at last he has brought news. That if he did not tell her so last night it was because he wished her to have one more night of peace—of late poor Nancy's nights have become very

peaceful.

John Dampier? There was a time—it now seems long, long ago—when Nancy would have given not only her life but her very soul to have known that her husband was safe, that he would come back to her. But now? Alas! Alas! Now she realises with an agonised feeling of horror, of self-loathing, that she no longer wishes to hear Gerald Burton say that he has kept his word—that he has found Dampier.

She prays God that nothing of what she is feeling shows in her face; and Gerald is far too moved, far too doubtful as to what he is to say to her, and as to the answer she will make to him, to see that she looks in any way different from what she always does look in his eyes—the most beautiful as well as the most loved and worshipped of human creatures.

"Tell me!" she gasps. "Tell me, Gerald? What is it you want to say to me? Don't keep me in suspense—" and then, as he is still dumb, she adds with a cry, "Have you come to tell me that at last you have found Jack?"

And he pulls himself together with a mighty effort. Nancy's words have rudely dispelled the hopes with which his heart has been filled ever since his father came to his room last night and told him what Mr. Stephens had suggested as a possible way out of the present, intolerable situation.

"No," he says sombrely, "no, Nancy, I have brought you no good news, and I am beginning to fear I never shall."

And he does not see even now that the long quivering sigh which escapes from her pale lips is a sigh of unutterable—if of pained and shamed—relief.

But what is this he is now saying, in a voice which is so unsteady, so oddly unlike his own?

"I think—God forgive me for thinking so if I am wrong—that I have always been right, Nancy, that your husband is dead—that he was killed two years ago, the night he disappeared—"

She bends her head. Yes, she too believes that, though there was a time when she fought, with desperate strength, against the belief.

He goes on breathlessly, hoarsely, aware that he is making what Mr. Stephens would call a bad job of it all: "I am now beginning to doubt whether we shall ever discover the truth as to what did happen. His body may still lie concealed somewhere in the Hôtel Saint Ange, and if that is so, there's but small chance indeed that we shall ever, ever learn the truth."

And again she bends her head.

"I fear the time is come, Nancy, when the search must be given up."

He utters the fateful words very quietly, very gently, but even so she feels a pang of startled fear. Does that mean—yes, of course it must mean, that Gerald is going away, back to America?

A feeling of dreadful desolation fills her heart. "Yes," she says in a low tone, "I think you are right. I think the search should be given up."

She would like to utter words of thanks, the conventional words of gratitude she has uttered innumerable times in the last two years—but now they stick in her throat.

Tears smart into her eyes, stifled sobs burst from her lips.

And Gerald again misunderstands—misunderstands her tears, the

sobs which tear and shake her slender body. But he is only too familiar with the feeling which now grips him—the feeling that he must rush forward and take her in his arms. It has never gripped him quite as strongly as it does now; and so he steps abruptly back, and puts more of the stone rim of the fountain between himself and that forlorn little figure.

"Nancy?" he cries. "I was a brute to say that. Of course I will go on! Of course we won't give up hope! It's natural that I should sometimes become disheartened."

He is telling himself resolutely that never, never will he propose to her the plan his father revealed to him last night. How little either his father or Mr. Stephens had understood the relation between himself and Nancy if they supposed that he, of all men, could make to her such a suggestion.

And then he suddenly sees in Nancy's sensitive face, in her large blue eyes that unconscious beckoning, calling look every lover longs to see in the face of his beloved….

They each instinctively move towards the other, and in a flash Nancy is in his arms and he is holding her strained to his heart, while his lips seek, find, cling to her sweet, tremulous mouth.

But the moment of rapture, of almost unendurable bliss is short indeed, for suddenly he feels her shrinking from him, and though for yet another moment he holds her against her will, the struggle soon ends, and he releases her, feeling what he has never yet felt when with her, that is, bewildered, hurt, and yes, angry.

And then, when she sees that new alien glance of anger in eyes which have never looked at her but kindly, Nancy feels a dreadful pang of pain, as well as of shamed distress. She creeps up nearer to

him, and puts her hand imploringly on his arm—that arm which a moment ago held her so closely to him, but which now hangs, apparently nerveless, by his side.

"Gerald!" she whispers imploringly. "Don't be angry with me," and her voice drops still lower as she adds piteously, "You see, I knew we were doing wrong. I—I felt wicked."

And then, as he still makes no answer, she grows more keenly distressed. "Gerald?" she says again. "You may kiss me if you like." And as he only looks down at her, taking no advantage of the reluctant permission, she falters out the ill-chosen words, "Don't you know how grateful I am to you?"

And then, stung past endurance, he turns on her savagely:—"Does that mean that I have bought the right to kiss you?"

But as, at this, she bursts into bitter tears, he again takes her in his arms, and he does kiss her, violently, passionately, hungrily. He is only a man after all.

But alas! These other kisses leave behind them a bitter taste. They lack the wild, exquisite flavour of the first.

At last he tells her, haltingly, slowly, of Mr. Stephens' suggestion, but carefully as he chooses his words he feels her shrinking, wincing at the images they conjure up; and he tells himself with impatient self-reproach that he has been too quick, too abrupt—that he ought to have allowed the notion to sink into her mind slowly, that he should have made Daisy, or even his father, be his ambassador.

"I couldn't do that!" she whispers at last, and he sees that she has turned very white. "I don't think I could ever do that! Think how awful it would be if—if after I had done such a thing I found that poor Jack

was not dead? Some time ago—I have never told you of this—some friend, meaning to be kind, sent me a cutting from a paper telling of a foreigner who had been taken up for mad in Italy, and confined in a lunatic asylum for years and years! You don't know how that story haunted me. It haunted me for weeks. You wouldn't like me to do anything I thought wrong, Gerald?"

"No," he says moodily. "No, Nancy—I will never ask you to do anything you think wrong." He adds with an effort, "I told my father last night that I doubted if you would ever consent to such a thing."

And then she asks an imprudent question:—"And what did he say then?" she says in a troubled, unhappy voice.

"D'you really want to know what he said?"

She creeps a little nearer to him, she even takes his hand. "Yes, Gerald.
Tell me."

"He said that if you wouldn't consent to do some such thing, why then I should be doing wrong to stay in Europe. He said—I little knew how true it was—that soon you would learn that I loved you, and that then—that then the situation would become intolerable."

"Intolerable?" she repeats in a low, strained tone. "Oh no, not intolerable, Gerald! Surely you don't feel that?"

And this time it is Gerald who winces, who draws back; but suddenly his heart fills up, brims over with a great, an unselfish tenderness—for Nancy, gazing up at him, looks disappointed as a child, not a woman, looks, when disappointed of a caress; and so he puts his arms round her and kisses her very gently, very softly, in what he tells himself is a kind, brotherly fashion. "You know I'll do just whatever you wish," he

murmurs.

And contentedly she nestles against him. "Oh, Gerald," she whispers back, "how good you are to me! Can't we always be reasonable—like this?"

And he smiles, a little wryly. "Why, yes," he says, "of course we can! And now, Nancy, it's surely breakfast time. Let's go back to the house."

And Nancy, perhaps a little surprised, a little taken aback at his sudden, cheerful acceptance of her point of view, follows him through the dark passage cut in the yew hedge. She supposes—perhaps she even hopes—that before they emerge into the sun light he will turn and again kiss her in the reasonable, tender way he did just now.

But Gerald does not even turn round and grasp her two hands as he did before. He leaves her to grope her way behind him as best she can, and as they walk across the lawn he talks to her in a more cheerful, indifferent way than he has ever done before. Once they come close up to the house, however, he falls into a deep silence.

III

It is by the merest chance that they stay in that afternoon, for it has been a long, a wretched day for them all.

Senator Burton and his daughter are consumed with anxiety, with a desire to know what has taken place, but all they can see is that Gerald and Nancy both look restless, miserable, and ill at ease with one another. Daisy further suspects that Nancy is avoiding Gerald, and the suspicion makes her feel anxious and uncomfortable.

As for the Senator, he begins to feel that he hates this beautiful old

house and its lovely gardens; he has never seen Gerald look as unhappy anywhere as he looks here.

At last he seeks his son out, and, in a sense, forces his confidence. "Well, my boy?"

"Well, father, she doesn't feel she can do it! She thinks that Dampier may be alive after all. If you don't mind I'd rather not talk about her just now."

And then the Senator tells himself, for the hundredth time in the last two years, that they have now come to the breaking point—that if Nancy will not take the only reasonable course open to her, then that Gerald must be nerved to make, as men have so often had to make, the great renouncement. To go on as he is now doing is not only wrong as regards himself, it is wrong as regards his sister Daisy.

There is a man in America who loves Daisy—a man too of whom the Senator approves as much as he can of anyone who is anxious to take his daughter from him. And Daisy, were her heart only at leisure, might respond; but alas! her heart is not at leisure, it is wholly absorbed in the affairs of her brother and of her friend.

At last the high ritual of English afternoon tea brings them out all together on the lawn in front of the house.

Deferentially consulted by the solemn-faced, suave-mannered butler, who seems as much part of Barwell Moat as do the gabled dormer windows, Daisy Burton decides that tea is to be set out wherever it generally is set out by the owners of the house. Weightily she is informed that "her ladyship" has tea served sometimes in that part of the garden which is called the rosery, sometimes on the front lawn, and the butler adds the cryptic information, "according as to whether her ladyship desires to see visitors or not."

Daisy does not quite see what difference the fact of tea being served in one place or another can make to apocryphal visitors, so, with what cheerfulness she can muster, she asks the others which they would prefer. And at once, a little to her surprise, Nancy and Gerald answer simultaneously, "Oh, let us have tea on the lawn, not—not in the rosery!"

And it is there, in front of the house, that within a very few minutes they are all gathered together, and for the first time that day Senator Burton's heart lightens a little.

He is amused at the sight of those three men—the butler and his two footmen satellites—gravely making their elaborate preparations. Chairs are brought out, piles of cushions are flung about in bounteous profusion, even two hammocks are slung up—all in an incredibly short space of time: and the American tenant of Barwell Moat tells himself that the scene before him might be taken from one of the stories of his favourite British novelist, good old Anthony Trollope.

Ah me! How happy they all might be this afternoon were it not for the ever present unspoken hopes and fears which fill their hearts!

Daisy sits down behind the tea-table; and the cloud lifts a little from Gerald's stern, set face; the three young people even laugh and joke a little together.

The Senator glances at Nancy Dampier; she is looking very lovely this afternoon, but her face is flushed, her manner is restless, agitated, she looks what he has never seen her look till to-day, thoroughly ill at ease, and yet, yes, certainly less listless, more alive than she looked yesterday—before Gerald's arrival.

What strange creatures women are! The Senator does not exactly

disapprove of Nancy's decision, but he regrets it bitterly. If only she would throw in her lot with Gerald—come to America, her mind made up never to return to Europe again, why then even now they might all be happy.

But her face, soft though it be in repose, is not that of a weak woman; it is that of one who, thinking she knows what should be her duty, will be faithful to it; and it is also the face of a woman reserved in the expression of her feelings. Senator Burton cannot make up his mind whether Nancy realises Gerald's measureless, generous devotion. Is she even aware of all that he has sacrificed for her? Daisy says yes—Daisy declares that Nancy "cares" for Gerald—but then Daisy herself is open-hearted and generous like her brother.

And while these painful thoughts, these half-formed questions and answers, weave in and out through Senator Burton's brain, there suddenly falls a loud grinding sound on his ears, and a motor-car sweeps into view.

Now, at last, Daisy Burton understands the butler's cryptic remark! Here, in front of the house, escape from visitors is, of course, impossible. She feels a pang of annoyance at her own stupidity for not having understood, but there is no help for it—and very soon three people, a middle-aged lady and two gentlemen, are advancing over the green sward.

The Senator and his daughter rise, and walk forward to meet them. Gerald and Nancy remain behind. Indeed the young man hardly sees the strangers; he is only conscious of a deep feeling of relief that the solicitous eyes of his father and sister are withdrawn from him and Nancy.

Since this morning he has been in a strange state of alternating rapture and despair. He feels as if he and Nancy, having just found

one another, are now doomed to part. Ever since he held her in his arms he has ached with loneliness and with thwarted longing; during the whole of this long day Nancy has eluded him; not for a single moment have they been alone together. And now all his good resolutions—the resolutions which stood him in such good stead in that dark, leafy tunnel—have vanished. He now faces the fact that they cannot hope, when once more alone and heart to heart, to be what Nancy calls "reasonable."…

Suddenly he comes back to the drab realities of every-day life. His father is introducing him to the visitors—first to the lady: "Mrs. Arbuthnot—my son, Gerald Burton. Mrs. Dampier—Mrs. Arbuthnot." And then to the two men, Mr. Arbuthnot and a Mr. Dallas.

There is a quick interchange of talk. The newcomers are explaining who and what they are. Mr. Robert Arbuthnot is a retired Anglo-Indian official, and he and his wife have now lived for two years in the dower house which forms part of the Barwell Moat estate.

"I should not have called quite so soon had it not been that our friend, Mr. Dallas, is only staying with us for two or three days, and he is most anxious to meet you, Mr. Senator. Mr. Dallas is one of the Officers of Health for the Port of London. He read some years ago"—she turns smilingly to the gentleman in question—"a very interesting pamphlet with which you seem to have been in some way concerned, about the Port of New York."

The Senator is flattered to find how well Mr. Dallas remembers that old report of which he was one of the signatories. For a moment he forgets his troubles; and the younger people—Mrs. Arbuthnot also—remain silent while these three men, who have each had a considerable experience of great affairs, begin talking of the problems which face those who have vast masses of human beings to consider and legislate for.

Mr. Dallas talks the most; he is one of those cheerful, eager Englishmen who like the sound of their own voices: he is also one of those fortunate people who take an intense interest in the work they are set to do. In Mr. Dallas's ears there is no pleasanter sounding word than the word "sanitation."

"Ah," he says, turning smilingly to the Senator, "how I envy my New York colleagues! They have plenary powers. They are real autocrats!"

"They would be but for our press," answers the Senator. "I wonder if you heard anything of the scrape Dr. Cranebrook got into last year?"

"Of course I did! I heard all about it, and I felt very sorry for him. But our London press is getting almost as bad! Government by newspaper—" he shakes his head expressively. "And my friend Arbuthnot tells me that it's becoming really serious in India; there the native press is getting more and more power. Ah well! They do those things better in France."

And then Mrs. Arbuthnot's voice is heard at last. "My husband and Mr. Dallas have only just come back from Paris, Miss Burton. Mr. Dallas went over on business, and my husband accompanied him. They had a most interesting time: they spent a whole day at the Prefecture of Police with the Prefect himself—"

She stops speaking, and wonders a little why a sudden silence has fallen over the whole group of these pleasant Americans—for she takes Nancy to be an American too.

But the sudden silence—so deep, so absolute that it reminds Mrs. Arbuthnot of the old saying that when such a stillness falls on any company someone must be walking over their graves—is suddenly broken.

Mr. Dallas jumps to his feet. He is one of those men who never like sitting still very long. "May I have another lump of sugar, Miss Burton? We were speaking of Paris,—talk of muzzling the press, they know how to muzzle their press in grim earnest in Paris! Talk of suppressing the truth, they don't even begin to tell the truth there. The Tsar of Russia as an autocrat isn't in it with the Paris Prefect of Police!"

And two of his listeners say drearily to themselves that Mr. Dallas is a very ignorant man after all. He is evidently one of the many foolish people who believe the French police omnipotent.

But the Englishman goes happily on, quite unconscious that he is treading on what has become forbidden ground in the Burton family circle. "The present man's name is Beaucourt, a very pleasant fellow! He told me some astounding stories. I wonder if you'd like to hear the one which struck me most?"

He looks round, pleased at their attention, at the silence which has again fallen on them all, and which he naturally takes for consent.

Eagerly he begins: "It was two years ago, at the height of their Exhibition season, and of course Paris was crammed—every house full, from cellar to attic! Monsieur Beaucourt tells me that there were more than five hundred thousand strangers in the city for whose safety, and incidentally for whose health, he was responsible!"

He waits a moment, that thought naturally impresses him more than it does his audience.

"Well, into that gay maelstrom there suddenly arrived a couple of young foreigners. They were well-to-do, and what impressed the little story particularly on Monsieur Beaucourt's mind was the fact that they

were on their honeymoon—you know how sentimental the French are!"

Mr. Dallas looks around. They are all gazing at him with upturned faces—never had he a more polite, a more attentive circle of listeners. There is, however, one exception: his old friend, Mr. Arbuthnot, puts his hand up to conceal a yawn; he has heard the story before.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. Well, these young people—Monsieur Beaucourt thinks they were Americans—had gone to Italy for their honeymoon, and they were ending up in Paris. They arrived late at night—I think form Marseilles—and most providentially they were put on different floors in the hotel they had chosen in the Latin Quarter. Well, that very night—"

Mr. Dallas looks round him triumphantly. He does not exactly smile, for what he is going to say is really rather dreadful, but he has the eager, pleased look which all good story-tellers have when they have come to the point of their story.

"I don't believe that one man in a million would guess what happened!" He looks round him again, and has time to note complacently that the son of his host, who has risen, and whose hands grip the back of the chair from which he has risen, is staring, fascinated, across at him.

"A very, very strange and terrible thing befell this young couple. That first night of their stay in Paris, between two and three the bridegroom developed plague! Monsieur Beaucourt tells me that the poor fellow behaved with the greatest presence of mind; although he cannot of course have known what exactly was the matter with him, he gave orders that his wife was not to be disturbed, and that the hotel people were to send for a doctor at once. Luckily there was a

medical man living in the same street; he leapt on the dreadful truth, sent for an ambulance, and within less than half an hour of the poor fellow's seizure he was whisked away to the nearest public hospital, where he died five hours later."

Mr. Dallas waits a moment, he is a little disappointed that no one speaks, and he hurries on:—

"And now comes the point of my story! Monsieur Beaucourt assures me that the fact was kept absolutely secret. He told me that had it leaked out it might have half emptied Paris. French people have a perfect terror of what they call 'la Peste.' But not a whisper of the truth got about, and that though a considerable number of people had to know, including many of the officials connected with the Prefecture of Police. The Prefect showed me the poor fellow's watch and bunch of seals, the only things, of course, that they were able to keep; he really spoke very nicely, very movingly about it—"

And then, at last, the speaker stops abruptly. He has seen his host's son reel a little, sway as does a man who is drunk, and then fall heavily to the ground.

It is hours later. The sun has long set. Gerald opens his eyes; and then he shuts them again, for he wants to go on dreaming. He is vaguely aware that he is lying in the magnificent Jacobean four-post bed which he had been far too miserable, too agitated to notice when his father had brought him up the night before. But now the restful beauty of the spacious room, the fantastic old coloured maps lining the walls, affect him agreeably, soothe his tired mind and brain.

During that dreamy moment of half-waking he has seen in the shadowed room, for the lights are heavily shaded, the figures of his father and of Daisy; he now hears his father's whisper:—"The doctor says he is only suffering from shock, but that when he wakes he must

be kept very quiet."

And Daisy's clear, low voice, "Oh, yes, father. When he opens his eyes perhaps we'd better leave him with Nancy."

Nancy? Then Nancy really is here, close to him, sitting on a low chair by the side of the bed. And when he opened his eyes just now she really had bent her dear head forward and laid her soft lips on his hand. It was no dream—no dream—

And then there comes over him an overwhelming rush of mingled feelings and emotions. He tries to remember what it was that had happened this afternoon—he sees the active, restless figure of the Englishman dancing queerly up and down as it had seemed to dance just before he, Gerald, fell, and he feels again the horrible wish to laugh which had seized him when that dancing figure had said something about Beaucourt having spoken "very nicely—"

"Curse Beaucourt! Such a fiend is only fit for the lowest depths of Hell."

Again he opens his eyes. Did he say the ugly words aloud? He thinks not, he hopes not, for Daisy only takes their father's hand in hers and leads him from the room.

"Nancy?" he says, trying to turn towards her. "Do we know the truth now? Is my search at an end?"

"Yes," she whispers. "We know the truth now—my dearest. Your search is at an end."

And as she gets up and bends over him, he feels her tears dropping on his face.

THE END

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