

DIANA OF THE MOORLAND

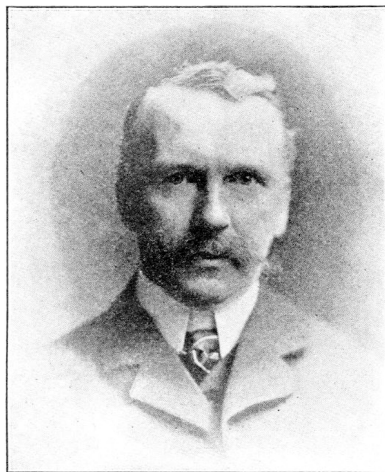
A Winter and Furneaux Mystery

Louis Tracy

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(Moderne) Karte der North York Moors.



Louis Tracy (1863–1928) was a British journalist, and prolific writer of fiction. He used the pseudonyms Gordon Holmes and Robert Fraser, which were at times shared with M.P. Shiel, a collaborator from the start of the twentieth century until about 1911.

He was born in Liverpool to a well-to-do middle-class family. At first he was educated at home and then at the French Seminary at Douai. Around 1884 he became a reporter for a local paper, *THE NORTHERN ECHO* at Darlington, circulating in parts of Durham and North Yorkshire; later he worked for papers in Cardiff and Allahabad. During 1892–1894 he was closely associated with Arthur Harmsworth, in *THE SUN* and *THE EVENING NEWS AND POST* (later *EVENING POST*), before selling his shares to Harmsworth. By his early sale Tracy missed out on a fortune when the shares greatly increased in value, but the early proceeds may have been the source of the funds he spent to feed three and one-half millions starving Londoners in the harsh depression winter of 1894. He died on 13 August 1928 at his home, Dunholme, in Sellindge, a small village outside of Ashford, Kent.



Tracy gehört auch zu den Pionieren der SF-Literatur, daneben schrieb er zunächst vor allem Abenteuerromane, in denen er u.a. seine Erfahrungen in Indien verarbeitete. Sein erster Kriminalroman war "The Strange Disappearance of Lady Delia" (1901), zugleich sein erster Roman um den Anwalt Reginald Brett, der später noch in zwei weiteren Werken auftreten sollte. Eine Überarbeitung seines Erstlings erschien 1905 in New York unter dem Titel "A Mystery Disappearance" und unter seinem Pseudonym "Gordon Holmes". In ihr ist der Name des Helden in Claude Bruce und der seines Rivalen von der Polizei

von "Inspector Winter" in "Inspektor White" geändert worden. Letzteres mag damit zusammenhängen, dass Tracy eine zweite Serie beonnen hatte, die es auf immerhin 17 Romane bringen sollte: Die Polizeiromane um Chief Inspector James Leander Winter und seinen Mitarbeiter Detective Inspector Charles François Furneaux. Und dieser Mr. Winter ist ein ganz anderes Kaliber als sein Namensvetter in den Reginald-Brett-Romanen.

Tracy hatte immer auch den amerikanischen Markt im Auge und besuchte fast jährlich die USA. Ein Kuriosum am Rande ist, dass einer seiner letzten Winter- und-Furneaux-Romane zunächst 1922 in New York unter dem Titel "*The House of Peril*" erschien. In dieser Version sind Winter und Furneaux plötzlich in New York (mit einer sehr windigen Begründung) und der zweite Teil des Romans spielt in den Adirondaks. Zwei Jahre darauf wurde die englische Version unter dem Titel "*The Park Lane Mystery*" in London herausgebracht. In dieser sind Winter und Furneaux wieder im heimischen London und der zweite Teil ist im Lake District angesiedelt.

Tracys Werke, vor allem die frühen, sind noch sehr viktorianisch, sehr steif und voll mit überzogenem Pathos, was die Lektüre für den modernen Leser nicht immer erfreulich macht. Der vorliegende Roman, der aus der späteren Phase etwa ab Ende des ersten Weltkriegs stammt, ist da ganz anders. Er besticht nicht nur durch die liebevoll gezeichneten Charaktere, die Landschaftsschilderung (Tracy lebte eine ganze Zeit lang in Whitby und kannte daher die Moore des nördlichen Yorkshires aus eigener Anschauung) und seinen Humor, sondern auch durch seine Titelheldin, eine sportliche junge Dame, die weiß, was sie will und sich auch durch- und zur Wehr setzen kann. Man lese dazu nur einmal den letzten Satz des dritten Kapitels. Einige Kritiker halten dieses Werks für Tracys besten Kriminalroman. – Immerhin sind aber einige der Romane Tracys, nicht nur Kriminalromane, in letzter Zeit neu aufgelegt worden.

Eine ausführliche kritische Biographie Tracys finden Sie unter http://alangullette.com/lit/shiel/essays/shiel_tracy.htm.

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I

The girl reined in her horse and scanned the uncertain skyline with puzzled eyes. She was lost, frankly and undeniably lost—lost as thoroughly in that sea of black heather as if it were the great Alkali Desert of Nevada.

Fortunately she was not riding across spacious Nevada, or a deadly anxiety would have chased the smiling bewilderment from her face. She had, in fact, just checked a willing hunter¹ so that she might take stock of her surroundings on a Yorkshire moor.

Here was no dirty white surface of sand, rock and grit—with all the colors of the rainbow mingling in the middle distance under the last rays of the setting sun. The horse's feet rested on springy, if somewhat treacherous, turf, and the brown and red and purple tints of the heather, rising almost to the soles of the horsewoman's dainty boots, became a solid black blur within a few yards.

Again, if Diana Fenton were really lost in the "bad lands" then heaven might help her, for man could not. But in the wildest and bleakest part of the country of broad acres she had only to use her wits in order to find some cleft, some track, leading to cultivated pastures, a road, and ultimately a house.

For all that she was perplexed. Overhead beamed a soft April sky, but the horizon, barely perceptible, loomed indistinctly through a thin mist. Find the south with sureness she positively could not. Once given the points of the compass, she knew the lie of the land. She was well aware of the rough-and-ready rule which discovers the line of the meridian by aiming the hour hand of a watch at the sun and halving the angle on the dial between the exact hour and twelve o'clock. Glancing at the watch on her wrist she saw that the time was a quarter past four.

1. Hier: ein speziell für die Jagd gezüchtetes Pferd. Hunter sind zugleich schnelle Läufer und gute Springer.

"But what is one to do when there is no sun, and the sky is all one lovely apple-green arch!" she cried aloud. "Oh, tell me that, Pat! Shall I throw the reins on your pretty neck and let your superior intelligence solve the problem?" Stooping in the saddle she stroked the hunter's glossy coat, whereupon he strained at the bit and pawed the turf impatiently, obviously saying: "Why in the world are you waiting here? I want to be in the stable by six!"

She laughed lightly.

"Wise boy!" she said. "Yes. Let us be going. Now we'll take a bee line to the right. I think we've come fairly straight thus far, so a few minutes in another direction should bring us somewhere. That sounds suspiciously like a bull, but a gentleman from Waterford should grasp my meaning readily."

She set off. Pat was minded to canter, but that she would not allow. The moorland had once supported a giant glacier. The long heather held millions of boulders brought down by the ice river from some prehistoric range of hills, while ever and anon a level, moss-covered patch of apparently firm ground concealed a bog-hole deep enough at times to swallow horse and rider.

Selecting one of the many dips in the contour of the moor she made for it. Arrived there, she chose a second hollow on the same line. Less than an hour of even partial daylight remained, but steady progress during half the time would Surely bring her somewhere. Though slightly vexed she was by no means nervous. The worst thing that could happen was that her uncle, Lord Henry Dallinger, Master of the Harrowdale Hunt, would rate her soundly at dinner.

She could even hear him now. Lifting a glass of claret, and revelling in the rich colour of the wine before drinking it, he would say, in his curiously halting and disjointed way: "Really Di—anyone but you—I gave you credit for more—How often have I told you? Imagine an old hand—Now if it was lack of experience—A fox breaks cover into a gill, and you try to short cut—across Howlsike Moor! Amateurish, I call it."

She knew she had done wrong in leaving the land of gates and fields and roads, even makeshift farm tracks. She had last seen Champion, the huntsman, who usually kept a wary eye on her, close to the hounds far below in a wooded valley tapering sharply to the moor edge.

Sir Dudley Seacroft and Arthur Flecke, each more than willing to look after her, were shut out of sight by a clump of firs. An old farmer,

who knew every inch of the country, was already jogging his cob² along the nearest crest. He it was, all unknowing, who misled her. She decided to follow. Too late she realized that the farmer was simply going home.

Then she elected a short cut, and the trick was done. The consequences might well have been serious. If a fog had come on she must have dismounted, sought an extra dense growth of heather, pulled for Pat's benefit some of the grass which flourished in occasional tufts, and reconciled herself to a cold night in the open.

Any other course might easily prove fatal. The moorland ended precipitously, for the most part, and the turf was never so smooth and open as when it fringed a wall of rock. Luckily she was spared the fog, and would meet with no more thrilling adventure than a belated ride to the Grange, leaving scant time to dress for dinner.

The air was very still. The swish of the horse's feet through heather and bracken, the explosive flight of an occasional startled grouse, only accentuated the brooding silence. Diana's ears were alert for the soft, clear note of a hunting horn, because her uncle might have detached one of the whips, or Champion himself, to look for her.

But she imagined she had not been missed from the field. At that hour half the followers of the hunt would not await the drawing of the last covert, and she might have ridden homeward with any one of half a dozen parties.

At any rate, no welcome call reached her, so she was pleased, and greatly relieved, after crossing that second saddle, to hit upon a rough track leading in the direction she had chosen. It was still more gratifying, a few minutes later, to note fresh hoofmarks. Evidently a rider had passed not long since, and could not be miles ahead. The prints were deep cut and in pairs, so the unknown guide had cantered.

"Come along, Pat!" said Diana cheerfully. "If the going is good enough for somebody else it should suit you and me."

The hunter responded readily. He was getting into his stride, yet picking his way with scrupulous care, when a grouse rose with a clatter almost from under his forefeet. Pat did not stumble. He was far too well behaved to be guilty of any such *bêtise*, but he certainly cocked an eye at the noisy fowl and, in so doing, failed to notice a moss-covered stone which sloped sharply inward and lay directly in front.

2. Ein starker, stämmiger Pferdetyp. Cobs gelten als ruhige, einfühlsame Allzweckspferde.

Both Pat and his mistress believed that an earthquake took place immediately afterwards, because Pat slipped, crossed his legs and turned a complete somersault.

Fortunately Diana was riding astride. She was thrown clear, and landed on the broad of her back, partly on rock and partly on heather. Even so, her head lay in perilous proximity to the hunter's hind feet, but Pat gathered himself together, rolled over, and was up again with the nimbleness of a cat. Then he stood still.

Diana Fenton did not move during a long five minutes; even then, when the breath came back to her body she rose very slowly, and surveyed the disconsolate horse with a bewildered stare which gradually melted into a woebegone smile.

"You silly cuckoo!" she gasped; "whatever made you behave in *that* way!"

Pat balanced himself miserably on three legs. He knew what had happened. So did Diana when she had stretched each limb, tested her collarbone, and expanded her lungs to discover whether or not a rib was broken. The analysis was favourable. Though badly shaken and sore, and bleeding from a scratch on the side of her forehead, she had escaped any real hurt. But the hunter had gone dead lame in the off fore, and a strip of scarred rock showing through the torn moss supplied a convincing cause.

Tears came into the girl's eyes. She stroked Pat's nose and neck.

"You poor darling!" she murmured. "I might have known you were not to blame. And the worst thing is that you'll simply have to walk another mile or more."

Progress was resumed, Diana trudging in front and Pat hobbling after her as best he might. The pace was dismally slow. The hunter strove gallantly to use the injured foot, but the fetlock was swelling, and soon his gait became painful even to watch. That formed the girl's chief concern. She could have wept for Pat's sake.

But she was stout-hearted and valiant. Evil as was their common plight, it could easily have been a thousand times worse. What if Pat or she herself had broken a leg? She shuddered at the thought. At any rate, there was nothing to be done but make for that mirage-like "somewhere" which had seemed so accessible a few minutes ago, and was now remote as a grove in Arcady.

There was some consolation, however, in the fact that their movements were not hampered by long and bushy heather. Diana would

have fared ill in those smart top-boots, while the horse must have endured even greater agony than was his full portion already.

To distract her thoughts, and give Pat an occasional rest, the girl examined the hoof-prints which pointed the way whenever a strip of bare turf or patch of sand rendered them visible. Some two hundred yards from the place where she fell she saw that a second rider had come on the scene. These prints were equally fresh, so she was confident that two men had scoured that section of the moor in search of her—a pleasant thing to believe, because at any moment help might come.

Then, clearing her eyes of perspiration and blood—for that refractory cut refused to be staunch by a scrap of lace masquerading as a handkerchief—she saw a riderless horse careering over the moor. The animal had seen her too. Whinnying recognition he drew near.

“Why, that ’s the new bay which Dudley was riding!” she said aloud.

Still feeling somewhat dazed she forced her mind to concentrate in accurate recollection of the valuable hunter which Sir Dudley Seacroft had bought at Tattersall’s a fortnight earlier. She had appraised him above his price only that morning. Yes, a big, powerful bay horse, with black points and a white blaze on his forehead—rather unusual markings on an English thoroughbred.

What then had happened to Seacroft? Had he, in turn, come a cropper? Was he, too, lying on the moor, and in far greater need of assistance than she herself? The suspicion was horrible and unnerving. It was a positive relief to devote her attention to catching the bay, who had trotted up readily, but at first resisted her blandishments.

Finally, by coaxing him with a bunch of grass she managed to grab the trailing reins. On no account, however, would he allow her to mount. He reared and plunged and made such a to-do that she abandoned the effort, and led both horses.

In the conditions, she decided that the only practicable course was to follow the path. The bay, who was lathering as though ridden many miles at top speed, had come from the very quarter she was aiming for, and each yard must bring nearer some small moorside farm. Yet it was a weary pilgrimage. More than once she was tempted to sit down, but resisted that siren whisper stubbornly. For one thing, she would be stiffer than ever when she rose again; for another, daylight was diminishing markedly.

She could not remember ever having seen a panorama so swiftly blotted out. It reminded her of the scenic effect in a theatre, when light

after light is extinguished, and the mind of the onlooker is thus subtly prepared for some dramatic, perhaps tragic, episode.

After covering nearly half a mile at a snail's pace, a new trouble befell. The bay, in sudden fractiousness, wrenched himself free and galloped off as though pursued by witches. She halted and called to him, time and again; he only raced over a little hill and vanished.

"Well!" she cried, biting her lower lip in vexation, "no wonder our grandparents regarded these moors as the haunts of hobgoblins! Will my worries never end?"

The words, half jest, half sheer annoyance, were scarcely uttered before her heart stood still, and her eyes dilated in real terror.

There, in a slight hollow, lay a huddled heap of scarlet and white, and she guessed, ere the dreadful knowledge took definite shape, that she was looking at Dudley Seacroft's lifeless body. He was the only member of the hunt—beyond the master, huntsman and whips—who wore pink that day.

The bay's fright was now too clearly explained. Like herself, Seacroft had been thrown, but, less fortunate, had been dragged. Merciful heaven! Could he really be dead—that handsome and gallant gentleman who, during months past, only awaited a single word of encouragement to ask her to be his wife! Her head swam, and the rolling moorland moved in fantastic waves before her eyes. Pat's bridle slipped from her nerveless fingers. She staggered on, and sank to her knees beside the motionless form.

Although her brain refused to act lucidly, she knew, in some vague and indefinable way, that frenzied efforts to evoke the least sign of consciousness were worse than useless. So torn and battered was Seacroft's face by the mad stamping of ironshod hoofs that he was almost unrecognizable.

He had been trampled on again and again. It seemed as if his horse had attacked him in a venomous rage, and had literally striven to beat the life out of him. The scarlet cloth, the white doeskin breeches, the natty top-boots, each and all bore evidence of the animal's insensate fury. Yes, this man, one who had loved her, was dead beyond recall. In the delirium of the moment she mourned him as a woman mourns the one man on earth she prizes.

But Diana Fenton sprang from a race of soldiers, and heredity proved its worth in that bitter hour. When the first dread sense of calamity and loss unutterable had passed she rose to her feet, white-faced and

with streaming eyes but otherwise self-contained and resolute. Her own minor disabilities fled before this awful affliction.

Wholly unaware of bruises or fatigue, she led her horse close, lifted the dead body to the saddle, and strapped it crosswise with the stirrup leathers. The hunter flinched under the burden and she comforted him, saying: "Never mind, Pat, darling! Each of us must suffer, but your grief will be less enduring than mine!"

Long after she deemed it a marvel that she could have behaved so coolly, and found the physical strength needed to raise a heavy and inert body to such a height. At the time she gave no thought whatsoever to these considerations. The thing had to be done and she did it, reasoning along the lines followed by generations of ancestors who had borne themselves thus in the forefront of their country's battles.

Darkness enfolded her like a pall when she renewed once more a quest, now indeed sorrow-laden and dreary, for the road that should lead to the sympathy and succour of her fellows. In the valleys it was already night, but up here on the elevated tableland there was still a glimmering-afterglow of departed day that enabled her to discern the path and give heed to her surroundings.

The lameness of the horse supplied the chief drawback during this last phase. Moreover, the mist was becoming denser. If she did not begin at once to descend steadily she would have to trust alone to the absence of heather on the track.

Finally, when the mere brushing of a frond against her feet caused a tremor, and even her stout spirit was quailing at the prospect of being benighted on the moor, a light showed far beneath. It was a strange light too—a wavering, flickering tongue of dull red flame, such as might come from a fire in the open, though, somehow, her bemused wits refused to give it that precise character, and persisted in regarding it as a will-o'-the-wisp, a phenomenon she had never seen, and which, she fancied, occurred only in marshes.

There were marshes, of a sort, on the moor itself, but none existed, or could exist, in any of the steep valleys in that part of the country. So, weird and uncanny though that fluttering flame might be, she made for it, especially as the track trended that way.

Now she was going down hill continuously, a welcome sign, though the unfortunate hunter required holding up with all her remaining strength. Soon she brought to against a gate, and was numbly aware that the worst part of a dolorous journey had come to an end, because she must be in a region of tilled land and fenced roads.

Still that queer red wraith glowed uncertainly through the gloom. The nearer she approached, the more elfin and unreal it looked. Gradually, however, a dim, yellow rectangle became visible under and to the right of the leaping flames, whereupon Diana imagined that, by singular fatality, she was bringing her own record of death and disaster to some moorland cottage which was on fire.

Nevertheless, there was nothing for it but to push on. Pat would soon collapse altogether, and she herself was hardly able to set one foot before the other. The fall had been a nasty one, or she would not have lain so long in semi-consciousness, and she was feeling the effects of it now. But she retained her critical faculties rather wonderfully, because she was aware of the discrepancy between the peaceful aspect of a lighted window with drawn blind and a blaze which would consume any ordinary dwelling in an exceedingly brief space of time.

Ere many minutes she was unfastening another gate and stumbling up an uneven cart-road leading to a house plainly silhouetted against the last faint streak of silver in the western sky. She could see, too, that the serpentlike, fiery shapes were not issuing from the main building, but from a low, squat chimney in a one-story annex; moreover, she heard the roar of a furnace and the steady clank of a blacksmith's bellows.

She was beyond the reach of astonishment, or she might have regarded this simple and commonplace explanation of a somewhat weird reality as the greater marvel of the two. The hamlet of Nuttonby, as she rightly calculated, lay fully two miles down the dale, and the moor track she had followed led absolutely nowhere except to the moor itself. That any sane man should set up a smithy in the locality was, therefore, hardly conceivable, and if Diana Fenton's need had not been so desperate she would certainly have avoided that uncanny habitation, and sought the nearest farm.

But any further wandering was not to be thought of. The hunter might lurch headlong in the next stride, and she herself could hardly summon the energy needed to climb the last few yards of the ascent.

The low building, in which such strenuous work was going on, was closed, though strips of light were visible through the chinks of wide, roughly shuttered window. The other window, with its more homely aspect, induced a degree of confidence; Diana, opening a wicket, crossed a small garden and knocked at the door. She knocked a second time, and a third, but there was no answer. Then, per force, she went to the smithy and rapped with her hunting crop on the shutter. The rhythmic

beat of the bellows ceased, and the noise of the furnace was hushed.

"Hello!" shouted a voice. "Who's there?"

The tone was querulous, but the accent was that of an educated man.

"Will you please come?" said Diana faintly

"Oh, dash it all, why should anyone come bothering me to-night?" growled the voice.

"Please, please, come!" cried the girl again.

Her utterance was husky with pain and exhaustion. Now that there was a prospect of help, her splendid resolution seemed to ebb away to vanishing point.

"Very well!" was the irritated answer. "Stand clear! The shutter opens outward."

Gruff as the speaker's mode of address might be, it was at least thoughtful on his part to give a warning. Diana's movements were slow that night. She barely avoided the swing of a heavy shutter, which creaked harshly on its hinges as though behaving inhospitably on its own account. The red glow of a fire banked up in front of an enormous bellows revealed, not a smithy, but a workshop. The place contained a lathe, a number of retorts, test tubes, and a medley of metal ores and scraps.

In the square of the window was framed the upper part of the body of a tall man attired in a mechanic's overalls. His face and hands glistened with a mixture of coal dust, oil and perspiration. Evidently he had been labouring hard when disturbed.

"Now, what is it?" he went on, with quite a vexed air, seeming to find an added grievance in the fact that his unexpected visitor remained silent.

"I'm sorry," faltered Diana, "but there has been—an accident. I—"

By this time the occupant of the solitary forge had caught sight of the hunter and the scarlet-coated body stretched so grotesquely across the saddle.

"I'm sorry, too," he said, a trifle more amiably, "but I see you have a horse, and by far the best thing you can do is to go on to the village."

"My friend is dead, and my horse is so lame that he cannot walk another yard," she pleaded.

"Oh, confound everything!" growled the man. Impatiently flinging aside some implement he held in his left hand, he vaulted clean through the window.

His action was so sudden and alarming that it imposed the last straw upon Diana's already crushing load of trouble. She collapsed where she stood, sinking weakly to her knees and tumbling sideways. Oddly enough, because of this queer development, the newcomer resented the intrusion more than ever.

"A nice fix!" he muttered. "One of these idle fox-hunters has broken his neck, I suppose, and the other drops in a faint. And to think that they should turn up here, on the one night when I must be left undisturbed or a whole month's work is wasted! Just my luck! ... However, my gay young spark, we'll soon pull you through with a nip of brandy, and then we'll examine the other one."

He stooped and picked up Diana. Her light weight surprised him.

"It's only a bit of a boy, after all!" he said, and something of real sympathy crept into his voice.

Carrying his burden with a gentle care that was distinctly at variance with his earlier manner; he strode over a rickety garden fence, unlatched the door of the dwelling, and passed into one of those wide, low, heavily raftered rooms which serve the common needs of kitchen and living-room in small moorland farmhouses. A lamp, turned low, stood on a table near the window. Against the opposite wall rested a solid oak settee, or settle, as such pieces of furniture are termed in York shire. On the hearth smoldered a turf fire.

Having disposed Diana's limp body at full length on the settle, her unwilling rescuer went to the table and turned up the lamp; he was making for a smoke-blackened corner cupboard, when he happened to glance at the slim form in its hunting costume of long-skirted coat, rather wide breeches, and patent-leather boots. Beneath a crushed hunting hat, held in position by an elastic band, peeped some loose strands of Titian red hair. A few were stained to a deeper tint by clot-tered blood. Then the man lifted a grimy hand to his chin in amazement.

"Why, it's a woman!" he cried. "And she has been hurt too? ... Good Lord! what a brute she must have thought me! And what a double-distilled ass I am not to have known sooner! ... Well, Walter, my boy, it's up to you to make amends, though it's a deuce of a bad job that hounds didn't pass this way yesterday or come along to-morrow."

Evidently he still begrudged the now inevitable interruption of his work.

After that first shock of recognition of Diana's sex he had wasted no time, however. From the corner cupboard he produced a bottle and

a wine glass. Before attempting to administer a stimulant he raced upstairs and brought an armful of pillows and bolsters, which he adjusted under the girl's head and shoulders. Then, raising her head and using a teaspoon skilfully, he contrived to make her swallow a small quantity of brandy and water.

She revived quickly. Her physique was too vigorous, her temperament too buoyant, to permit of a prolonged fainting fit. When, after a sigh and a shudder, she opened a pair of gloriously blue eyes—blue in daylight, that is, but deep violet in the feebler gleam of the lamp—she recovered her senses forthwith and strove to rise.

"How stupid of me!" she said, flushing with annoyance. "Please don't trouble about me. I'm all right."

To prove it she fell back on the pillows, as the supporting arm had been withdrawn hastily.

"If you are sensible you will rest where you are for a while. Tell me what to do and I'll do it."

She looked up at this man with soiled face and hands and wearing the clothes of a workman. She would hardly believe that the owner of that courteous and deferential voice was the same person who had spoken so curtly when first she appeared.

"Oh, I don't know," she wailed, breaking into tears in an instant flood of recollection. "But it seems awful to leave poor Dudley's body out there all alone! And my horse should be put in a stable, if you have one. Please let me assist."

"No," came the prompt assurance. "I fancy you have done more than enough already. Can you—er—can you bear up if I bring your friend's body in here? ... And—are you sure he is dead?"

She nodded miserably. Without another word her strange host went out. She heard his rapid tread on the gravelled path of the little garden, and followed each footstep as he paced back more slowly and heavily. She watched him as he laid the dead man on the floor. After one critical glance he sought for and found a table napkin, with which he covered the cruelly maimed face.

Then he hurried away again, and Diana listened to Pat's halting feet hobbling to the rear of the building. Through the wall near her head came the rattle of a headstall chain in a manger, while the clatter of a bucket told that the hunter's most urgent need was being attended to. Obviously, she and her horse had fallen into capable if somewhat reluctant hands.

Then she looked again at the inanimate figure on the floor. How awful was death! She had never before realized the immensity of the gulf which separated life from death. And she might have married the man lying there! She closed her eyes again. It was too horrible! She was afraid that some chord would snap in her brain if she allowed herself to think.

II

It was not so long as it seemed before Diana's odd-looking benefactor returned. He was carrying an old-fashioned lantern, and paused at the door to blow out the candle. Thus she saw his face in a Rembrandt effect.

His features were strong but irregular. Beneath an ample forehead a pair of singularly bright eyes were set rather widely apart under arched and bushy eyebrows. His nose was long and well shaped. Firm lips and a massive chin were eloquent of an unyielding disposition. His cheeks were decidedly hollow, and he had an abundance of dark brown hair. A scar, running diagonally from the right temple to the left eyebrow, showed in a white ridge on which the dirt of the forge refused to gather. He was lanky and angular, all bone and sinew. Diana's first impression was that he was underfed.

"I've seen to your hunter," he said quietly, after assuring himself with one swift glance that the girl had not relapsed into a faint. "Now, what can I do for you?"

Diana was surprised. She had not expected this direct question.

"Me? Nothing. I'm hardly hurt at all," she answered.

"What caused that blood on your cheek!"

"It is only a scratch. Pat crossed his forelegs and I took a toss in the heather."

"Sure you fell on heather?"

"Well, there was something hard too. I mean that the heather scratched my forehead."

He came a little nearer, walking in a half circle to avoid the dead body.

"To my thinking you are badly bruised. Are you quite certain you have sustained no serious injury?" he urged, gazing at her with penetrating eyes.

"I have walked nearly two miles since I fell, and was able to lift Dudley to the saddle of my horse," she said gravely. "No, after a little while I shall be quite well. It was a dreadful shock to find Dudley lying dead. I bore up until I came here. Then I gave in, I suppose."

"It is not to be wondered at. I would apologize for my churlishness if that would atone, but it won't."

"Why, you have been most kind and helpful," she protested.

"Yes, indeed. I am so conscious of my admirable behaviour that I don't even offer an explanation of it. But, if the effort will not distress you too much, will you tell me what happened? You see, I must go to the village with the least possible delay."

"I understand. Sir Dudley's body must be taken away, and some farmer will surely drive me home. As to Pat—"

"Pat?"

"My horse, you know."

"Ah, of course. I might have guessed. I am not quite so anxious to get rid of you, though you are justified in believing it. But, let that pass. To begin with, tell me your name?"

"Diana Fenton. I am Lady Dallinger's niece. Lord Henry is Master of the Harrowdale. I was out with hounds today and lost my way on Howlsike Moor. I wandered about till a quarter past four, and then, by chance, took a line which brought me to the cart track leading to this valley.

"About half past four Pat slipped and lamed himself. We both came down. Soon afterwards I saw and caught Sir Dudley Seacroft's horse, and within a few minutes found Dudley's body. He had been thrown, and probably dragged. At any rate, he was quite dead. The horse knew what he had done, because he tore himself loose just before I saw Dudley."

"You have gone through a good deal," was the sympathetic comment. "I think I can fill in the gaps in your story. Now, what do you recommend! Though acquainted with most of the Nuttonby folk, I am a comparative stranger in the countryside. My name, by the way, is Walter Phipps Hardy; but if I tell you that I do not know where Lord Henry Dallinger lives, nor the name of this poor fellow's estate, you will measure my ignorance."

"Our place, the Grange, is eight miles from Nuttonby. Sir Dudley's land adjoins ours. As for suggestions, I—I hardly know what to say."

Strive as she might, and did most valiantly, Diana could not conquer her weakness. She had raised herself slightly while talking, but now sank back and closed her eyes. As in a dream she heard Hardy reviling himself.

"I certainly am behaving like a precious idiot," he was saying. "The poor girl is faint for want of food! She has been in the saddle all day, and is thoroughly knocked out!"

Diana was hardly aware of the exact sequence of events during the ensuing ten minutes. She saw that Hardy carried Seacroft's body outside again, and had a dim consciousness of a clearance being made on a bench in the forge. There were sounds, too, of a vigorous washing in an outhouse; when Hardy reappeared his face and hands were astonishingly clean, he had discarded his overalls, and was transformed into an athletic-looking person in a Norfolk jacket, a flannel shirt, knickerbockers, stockings and shooting boots.

From a larder he produced a spirit lamp and some tins. Then he stirred the turf fire into a glow, and drew a deep and comfortable chair into a draft-free corner. These preparations completed, he spoke to Diana again.

"Can you walk?" he said.

"Oh, yes," she replied, eager to convince him that she was now fully recovered.

But she could not even rise from the settle, so Hardy straightway carried her to the chair.

"We have no time to lose," he explained cheerfully. "You really must eat something. I can't leave you until I am satisfied on that point. And, of course, you are stiff and bruised from head to foot. Now I'm going to administer beef extract and biscuits. There is some capital ham and tongue also, so, if you are inclined for a meal. ...

"Oh, I understand," with a smile at the protest in her eyes. "You imagine you have no appetite, but you are mistaken. Food is the main thing needed to put you right. The human body is the most perfect engine yet devised, but even the best type of it won't work without fuel."

Meanwhile he had lighted the cooking stove, and soon was pouring some brown and savoury-smelling liquid into a cup.

"Sip that," he said, "and nibble a biscuit. You will then be surprised to find how hungry you are."

She obeyed meekly. It was easier, and saved time, to pretend to eat. She was conscious of a mild novelty at hearing her body likened to an engine. Many a time had the comparison been made by governess and mistress during her school days, but never before had its trite literalness dawned upon her.

Hardy evidently regarded example as better than precept, because he staged the ham and tongue, and ate hurriedly, explaining that he had been too busy since breakfast to take other food than a pint of milk. Reading a question in her eyes he answered readily.

"I came here to be out of the world," he said. "I am interested in the manufacture of steel, and, strange as it may seem, I rented this barn of a place in order to carry out certain experiments. I happened to cross Howlsike Moor last summer, and called at this very house to ask my way. A man named Benson lived here then, and he told me he was taking a better farm near Nuttonby, meaning to let this house to people who have a fancy for moorland cottages in July and August.

"Remembering his words I wrote to the local post office a month ago, and, sure enough, my friend Benson had carried out his scheme. Two days later I was installed as tenant, and that is the one bit of luck you've experienced in a most trying ordeal, Miss Fenton, because if I were not a ha-re-brained student of metallurgy, you would not have met a living soul nearer than Nuttonby, and I very much doubt whether you or your horse could have made the journey.

"Of course you women are capable of extraordinary feats of endurance when put to the test. Possibly you might have won through, but your hunter must have given in. His fetlock is as big as my head, but I've tied a wet towel round it, and that will reduce the swelling. and give him some sort of relief. Fortunately, too, I keep a supply of hay and corn in the stable. My carrier's nag needs a square meal when he has hauled a ton of metal from the nearest station, over eight miles of bad road, and all uphill. ...

"Now, just a sandwich, cut nice and thin. After that, a glass of the best spring water in Yorkshire, and, by the time I'm back from Nuttonby, you'll be feeling quite restored."

Diana knew well that this strange-looking young man was forcing himself to talk merely to prevent her from brooding on the tragedy of the past hour. She realized, too, that she would help him, in a way, by striving to eat, so she managed to swallow the more solid fare he offered, and was pleased to see the quick relief in his face. He gave her

some of the water he had praised so highly, and never had she taken a more refreshing draft.

"That tastes good," he said appreciatively, watching her and emptying a full tumbler himself. "Our bleak moor has some rare qualities, and its water supply is one of them. Now I must leave you. I'll return in less than an hour. It is too bad that you should be left here all alone, but you may rest assured that you are alone. No one passes this way after nightfall, and precious few during the day. My plan is to get Benson and another man to bring a cart, while one of Benson's sons will cycle to Dalesford for a doctor. Do you know Doctor Petre?"

"Yes, I meet him occasionally."

Diana was astonished at the new vigour in her voice. Already she was yielding to treatment.

"All the better," said Hardy. "When he comes you will feel that your sufferings have ended, for tonight, at any rate. Good bye. I'll be here ahead of Benson. ... Oh, I was nearly forgetting the one important thing, but by this time you have seen for yourself how little used I am to entertaining angels unawares. Will you remain in that chair, or would you prefer to lie on the settle, which I can make rather more comfortable by means of a rug and a couple of blankets!"

"I'll stay here, if I may," said Diana.

"I think you are well advised. But don't move about. An hour's complete rest, together with a little food, will work a minor miracle."

Then he left her. She heard his firm, rapid tread on the garden path, and knew that he jumped the gate, which was so fixed on its hinges that it closed automatically, a necessary precaution when any attempt was made to grow flowers or vegetables in the midst of a colony of half-bred sheep. She followed his progress down the hill, and heard the clang of the larger gate which gave access to the road. The night was so still that she could even detect the rasp of hobnailed boots on the uneven surface of the road itself for a hundred yards or more.

But soon a great silence fell, and the soundlessness of the outer world was so uncanny that she was aware of a sense of companionship when Pat pawed uneasily in the stable or rattled the chain of his headstall while pulling hay from the loft. The crumbling and crackling of the turf helped, too, to dispell the creepy sensation of being left utterly alone with death. For Diana had ever present before her mind's eye the soiled and battered figure in the forge.

Poor Dudley Seacroft! What a miserable end to a gallant life! Even yet she could not bring herself to believe that she would never again hear his cheery voice, never again see the worship in his eyes.

She wondered numbly what the future might have had in store for Dudley and herself if this dreadful thing had not happened. Would she have married him? In all likelihood, yes. Why not? In the homely phrase of the county, Seacroft had "the pick and choice" of most girls of their common acquaintance. He was only thirty years of age, wealthy, as country squires count wealth, of high lineage, and very good-looking. True, she did not love him. But she had never loved any man in the sense of having found her mate.

Time had assuaged the awful sorrow of her girlhood, when the news came that her father had fallen in South Africa. Then after school-days in Brighton and Brussels she had come to Yorkshire, to her aunt, Lady Dallinger, and four happy years had sped in a household absolutely given over to sport.

Lord Henry's calendar divided the year into irregular epochs, beginning with grouse shooting and ending with the last spring meet of the Harrowdale hounds. The summer was a fallow period, enlivened by occasional horse shows, a race meeting or two, and a perfunctory visit to an elder brother's town house. The Dallingers hated London. They quitted the Grange unwillingly, and seized the first pretext to return. They were territorial magnates of the old order, and the one cloud in their lives was the lack of a male heir, because the estate, an impoverished one, would pass to another branch of the house at Lord Henry's death.

Not that Dallinger wasted many hours of a busy existence in mooning over the probable course of events after he was carried in state to the family vault in Dalesford churchyard. He had hardly ever known a moment of real tribulation; Dudley Seacroft's fate would be the first crushing blow of the kind within his experience.

Diana, of course, realized that her relatives looked to her marriage with Seacroft as solving the problem of providing for her future. Beyond a small pension, doled out by the state to the daughter of an officer killed in action, she had not a penny of her own. The Dallingers were almost as poor as the Fentons. Were it not for the generous support of other hard riding squires in the district Lord Henry could no more have afforded the mastership of the Harrowdale than the upkeep of a palace.

Diana shivered a little when she found her thoughts dwelling on this mercenary aspect of affairs. Indeed, she was profoundly distressed

by it, because the notion came unbidden that Arthur Flecke, whom she passively disliked, was his cousin's heir, and would succeed to the Seacroft estate, though the title must lapse.

"I must be really ill," she mused, "or I would not think of such horrid things!"

Glancing at her watch she found that Hardy was not yet twenty minutes gone. In the effort to distract her mind from useless speculations as to what might have happened had Seacroft lived, or would probably happen now that he was dead, she closed her eyes. Nature promptly seized the opportunity to lull her into a light doze.

She awoke suddenly, with every faculty strung to high tension. Her watch showed that she had slept more than a quarter of an hour, and she imagined that some movement of the horse in his stall had disturbed her—a belief strengthened by hearing Pat wheedling a further supply of hay through the trapdoor above the manger.

She was too tired to reason clearly, or she would have guessed that the easily recognizable sounds from the stable were already established in her mind, and a subconscious acceptance of their origin could hardly fail to reassure her. Nevertheless it was best that an unaccountable nervousness should be soothed in that way, because, when the conviction was forced upon her that someone was prowling about the exterior of the house, it had to conquer the earlier and more satisfactory explanation.

Thus, she attributed to a too vivid imagination the scrape of an iron-shod boot on a smooth and rounded cobblestone. Even when the shutter of the window in the forge creaked slightly, she put it down to the wind, though wind there was none.

Then, after a breathless interval, something fell with a clang inside the forge itself. This time there was not the slightest possibility of error as to either the nature or the direction of the noise. Some heavy implement had clattered to a stone floor. She believed it was a hammer. First came the ring of metal, followed by the softer thud of the wooden handle.

And Seacroft's body was lying there! Could it be that both Hardy and she herself had erred—that Dudley was not dead? Oh, madness lay that way! Life in the country, with its social intimacy between hall and village, and its close acquaintance with the harsher side of sport and stock-rearing, had familiarized Diana with the grim attributes of death.

Seacroft was dead—had been dead fully two hours, without counting

the time which had elapsed between the accident and her finding of the body.

Turning in the chair she looked at the closed door; each nerve was aquiver; she was all eye and ear. Against every dictate of common sense she dreaded the appearance of some spectre, some shadowy figure emerging from eternal night. She caught her breath with a gasp of genuine relief when evidence came that she was being disturbed by no ghostly visitor.

Yes, there could be no doubt about it now. Someone was clambering through the forge window, clearly preferring that means of exit to the door which must exist in the gable or rear wall of the building. Though few things could be more terrifying than those furtive and thievish rustlings, Diana strove desperately to calm her new fears and determine on the right line of action.

There was a chance that some tramp, bent only on pilfering, was even more scared than she herself when the dim glow of the furnace fire had revealed a sinister, scarlet-clad figure stretched on a bench. If that were so she would soon hear the man's hasty retreat. But she listened in vain; during the ensuing minutes—how long she hardly knew—not a sound broke the awful silence.

Examining the room with eyes that were now dark and luminous with fright, she discovered a gun-case standing in a corner near the stairs. She rose stiffly, but confident purpose lent a remarkable steadiness to her limbs. Soon she had the gun-case unlocked and unstrapped, and was adjusting stock and barrels of the hammerless twelve-bore found within. Behind the case lay a bulky cartridge bag, and Diana breathed more freely when she had slipped a couple of cartridges into the breech.

She decided, at first, not to go outside and investigate. Even if she came upon some prowler she dared not fire at him unless in actual self-defence; nor did she wish to engage in a warfare of words and threats. Obviously, the surreptitious visitor was bent on no good errand, or, seeing a light in the dwelling, he would have knocked. She determined, therefore, to sit on the settle, facing the door, with the gun across her knees, and await developments.

Many more minutes passed, and she had almost succeeded in persuading herself that she was the victim of self-delusion when there were unmistakable tokens of stealthy feet creeping along the side of the house opposite to that on which the forge was situated, and halting near the window.

The blind was a narrow strip of yellowish canvas, and she could not be sure whether or not a crevice between the blind and sash afforded a view of the interior. If it did she was being watched by some ghoul, and her gorge rose at the thought. Heedless of bruised limbs and aching bones she sprang upright, ran to the door, threw it open, and cried valiantly: "Who is there? Speak, or I shoot!"

But already a man's dark figure had raced across the garden and leaped the low boundary wall, and was now speeding down the cart road without any attempt at concealment beyond maintaining a crouching attitude.

Diana's blood boiled at this obvious cowardice coming so swiftly on the heels of slinking espionage.

"You miserable cad!" she shrilled. "I'm minded to speed your flight with an ounce of shot!"

There was no answer. The man half climbed, half stumbled, over the gate in his haste to be gone. So much Diana could see, because the mist had cleared perceptibly since sunset, and the white road formed a visible background for the black bars of the gate.

Hardly knowing what she meant to do, the girl raised the gun and fired, though aiming well above the fugitive's head. The sheet of flame that leaped from the muzzle was positively blinding, and the report rolled across the valley from hill to hill in long, drawn-out echoes.

Certainly Diana's action was inspired by the vague notion that the rascal would be chary of returning when he knew that she was armed and was not afraid to use a gun. By no means did she count on the actual outcome. Her ears were still tingling with the sound of the explosion when she heard a shout, followed by an oath and a distant scuffle. She was minded to snatch another cartridge, and, come what might, make for the road, but Hardy's voice, sharp and vibrant, reached her clearly: "Are you all right, Miss Fenton? Is there another of them?"

"Yes," she cried. "I mean that I am unharmed. Have you caught that man?"

"Oh, yes. I've got him fast enough. Is he alone?"

"I suppose so. Shall I help?"

"No need, thank you. ... Now, my beauty, will you walk, or must I kick you there?"

"You mind wot you're a-doin' of, Mr. Hardy," was the answer, in a tone in which truculence mingled curiously with a whine.

“You know me, then?” said Hardy. “That simplifies matters. I take it you prefer walking?”

“Wot have I done, I’d like to—”

Diana heard a loud smack and a subdued howl of pain.

“Evidently, you do **not** know me,” said Hardy quietly. “Next time I’ll use my knuckles, or a boot.”

Yielding, but grumbling in protest, the man stumbled back up the hill. Gun in hand, her slender form framed in the lighted doorway, Diana awaited the coming of Hardy and his prisoner.

III

As the men drew near, Diana retreated slowly into the room. She did not relinquish the gun, but held it in readiness for she knew not what emergency. The captive, however, now walking confidently enough in front of Hardy, entered boldly, pulled off a cloth cap, and leered into the girl's face.

"I'm main sorry if I frightened you, miss," he said, "but I didn't think I was doin' anythink wrang."

His speech was a curious blend of the Cockney accent and broad Yorkshire, and, if the word "poacher" were stamped legibly on his exterior it would only have added assurance to the suspicion already engendered by his appearance.

He was rough and unkempt in face and attire, and a certain wariness of eye did not tend to abate the unfavourable first impression created by his hangdog look. Apparently not more than thirty-five years of age, his short, sturdy frame hinted at physical fitness, but the palms of his hands were softer and whiter than his weather-beaten cheeks. Obviously he had long ago decided that hard work did not suit his temperament.

Diana gave him one hurried glance. Then she sank the muzzle of the gun to the floor. To her great surprise she had recognized him.

"Why, you're the man I saw in Dalesford police court last December!" she cried.

"Yes, miss. That's me. 'Rabbit Jack' they call me hereabouts. Gemme three months, his lordship did, just because I picked up a hare out of a trap on Sir Dudley Seacroft's land—him what's lyin' dead in there," and the man jerked his head knowingly, almost triumphantly, toward the forge.

"Pity the sentence was not six months," broke in Hardy. "Then you would not have been annoying this lady tonight."

"Oo's bin annoyin' her? Tell me that; an' wot for did you set abart me on the road?" came the fierce retort.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head or I'll steady your wits by a clout on the other jaw," said Hardy. "What has happened, Miss Fenton? Benson, by the way, is bringing a cart, and his son has gone for Doctor Petre."

"Nothing, really," said Diana, unloading the gun, which she replaced in its corner. Then she sank into the chair again; the cloak of fatigue momentarily lifted by fright now lay heavier than ever on her shoulders. "This man has been lurking round the house half an hour or more. I first heard him in the forge. Then he probably went to the stable. Finally, when he came to that window and tried to peer in at me, I could withstand the strain no longer, but ran to the door and called out. Fortunately I had noticed your gun and cartridges, so I was not really afraid, though it was horrified to feel that someone was watching me in such a sneaking way."

"But, look 'ere, miss—"

Hardy's hand fell heavily on the nape of Rabbit Jack's neck, and closed like a vice on a greasy scarf.

"You'll speak when requested—not before," he said. "Anything else, Miss Fenton?"

"No. He ran away, and I was so upset that I fired one barrel—not at him, you understand—just to make him run faster."

Hardy smiled dryly.

"I know exactly what aim you took," he said. "Shot fell all around me on the road—Oh, I wasn't struck, of course," he added, seeing the quick look of alarm in her face. "I was two hundred yards away, so you must have fired in the air."

Then he shook his prisoner as a gentle reminder that good behaviour was essential.

"Now, what have you to say?" he demanded.

"S'elp me, guv'nor, I didn't want to do nobody any harm," whined the man. "I just took a bit of a stroll this way from Nuttonby, an' sawr the young leddy leadin' a hoss with a body laid acorse the saddle—"

"You saw her, and never offered your help?"

Hardy's eyes blazed in sudden indignation, but Rabbit Jack faced him with more spirit than might be looked for in the circumstances.

"'Elp!" he snarled. "Why should I 'elp? Got me three months for nickin' a blinkin' 'are, he did," and again that sidelong jerk of the head indicated unerringly whom he referred to. "A nice lot of thanks I'd get for 'elp, wouldn't I? Like as not the cop would come along from Dalesford an' say I did it."

"Did what?"

"Why, bust him up wiv a stone. That's wot he looks like."

Somehow Hardy felt that, jailbird though the man was, an explanation was needed.

"Sir Dudley Seacroft was killed by falling from his horse on Howl-sike Moor," he said. "Surely anyone accustomed to a life in the open might have guessed what had occurred."

"I say nothink about that," was the dogged answer. "I kep' out of it, that's all. When you went orf to Nuttonby I just dodged arahnd a bit. It ain't my fault if the young leddy heerd me, an' was scared."

"What is your name?"

"John Bates; though if you call me that folks 'll hardly know 'oo you mean."

Hardy turned to Diana.

"Do you happen to remember this fellow's name?" he said.

"Oh, yes. He has given it correctly. The police describe him as an incorrigible poacher. Still, I was—rather—sorry for him—when he was sent to prison for such a trivial offence."

Rabbit Jack shuffled uneasily on his feet, and was seemingly minded to say something, but thought better of it.

Hardy pointed to the door.

"Be off!" he said sternly. "Don't forget that I can find you easily if you are wanted."

Bates waited until he was well out of reach before he spoke. Then, during a second or two, he hung in the doorway, twisting his cap in his fingers.

"An' don't you make any blinkin' mistake, Mister Hardy," he said. "I'm not hoppin' it this time. No more squealin' hares for me, an' no more three months in quod neether."

With that he was gone, not even having the grace to close the door behind him. Hardy shut him out into the night, and tried at once to dissipate the ill effect of the rascal's intrusion.

"I believe the fellow is telling the truth," he said. "Our stupid game laws make criminals of such men. Prison life turns them into outcasts, and they regard the law as a monstrous and oppressive device of society for their undoing. He might well dread being held responsible in some way for the accident."

Now, Diana had been taught that the preservation of game ranked next to the Commandments, and she failed altogether to appreciate the motive underlying Hardy's words.

"I don't agree with you," she said composedly. "It is odd, but I recollect enough of Bates's history to know that he brought about his own downfall. He is not a local man. He came here from the south to sell pottery, and began trading in rabbit skins. That is how he acquired his nickname. Although a Londoner, bred and born, he took to poaching during the first winter he lived in Nuttonby. My uncle regards him as a sportsman by nature. He had been fined several times, so a sharp sentence had to be imposed, if only as a warning to others."

"The earth being the landlord's, and the fullness thereof," misquoted Hardy

Then Diana realized that she was dealing with a rank Socialist, one of those extraordinary beings who figured in the talk at the Grange as the apocalyptic beast numbered 666.

"I'm afraid I have interfered sadly with your arrangements, Mr. Hardy," she said, with a quite perceptible stiffness of voice and manner. "If Mr. Benson arrives soon won't it be a good plan if he takes me to Nuttonby. Doctor Petre will use his car, and he can run me home in less than half an hour."

"That will be as you wish, Miss Fenton." After a little pause, Hardy added gravely: "You understand, of course, that, short as the journey is, the conditions will render it decidedly unpleasant? Sir Dudley Seacroft's body should be conveyed to Dalesford without delay."

"You mean that I would have to travel in the same cart—the quick and the dead together?"

"Yes."

"But why should I shirk the task merely because it is unpleasant! I have gone through so much today that one extra trial may be faced with equanimity."

"I am wondering if it is necessary—that is all. Benson's son will be in Dalesford by the time his father reaches us. You may be sure that Doctor Petre will not lose any time when Lord Henry Dallinger's

niece demands his services. In my opinion you will pass the cart in the doctor's car long before Benson is in Nuttonby again."

Normally Diana was a candid, outspoken young woman and, despite the present tension of her nerves, far too observant to miss the undertone of irony in Hardy's polite phrases. She smiled now for the first time since she had smiled wanly at the hunter after their joint disaster.

"The fright which that horrid man gave me seems to have induced a spasm of ingratitude on my part," she said. "Of course I'll be guided by you, Mr. Hardy. I am deeply indebted to you, and I am sure my uncle and aunt will want to convey their thanks in person."

"I have done very little except be rude—unintentionally of course—but none the less explicably."

"Oh, I cannot admit that. You have done everything in your power. And what would have become of me if you had not chanced to rent this place? But, please, may I ask a question or two?"

"As many as you like."

"Then, won't you sit down and smoke? Most men want to smoke when worried."

"Do you object to a pipe?"

"No, indeed. A pipe is the smoker's real joy. You see, I know all about it."

Hardy drew a kitchen chair from under the table and placed it on the opposite side of the hearth. He produced a pipe and tobacco pouch. He had covered four miles of difficult country and had interviewed Farmer Benson—all well within the hour, so his skin had taken a tint of the fresh, keen air. Otherwise he showed no sign of his exertions, and was evidently in the pink of physical condition.

"Now I'm ready to give evidence," he said cheerfully.

His somewhat stern features relaxed markedly when he smiled. Ordinarily his expression was one of intense concentration, even of austerity, but a glint of humour in the grey eyes and the curving of the firm, straight lips seemed to induce wholly new characteristics. The habitual grimness of aspect fled. He looked, if anything, rather boyish. He took on that not easily definable air which in some men of a masterful type wins the absolute confidence of women, children and dogs, but is peculiarly disrelished by wrongdoers.

"Would you mind telling me just who you are," began Diana. "It seems so extraordinary that anyone should bury himself in an out-of-the-way place like this to conduct scientific experiments."

"It is extraordinary," agreed Hardy. "In fact, nine critics out of ten, even among those qualified to judge, would regard me as slightly cracked. Probably I am, but please treat me as harmless, if a lunatic. Just to prove my sanity in commonplace matters I'll state my history and aims in a few brief sentences.

"Until the close of the Hilary Term I was lecturer on Physics in a Midland University. My salary was two hundred and fifty pounds a year, and, although strongly drawn toward practical metallurgy, I dared not abandon my position because I had a mother to support. Shortly before Easter, we—that is, mother and I—came in for a thumping legacy of a thousand pounds. Behold me, then, set free for a year at least.

"I think, I hope, that I shall be the first man to make case-hardened steel rods which will show a fibrous instead of a crystallized fracture. If I succeed I shall roll in gold and glory, and buy my mother a sable coat and a spiffing motor car. If I fail I'll go back to my lecturing, and mother and I will, as usual, take long rides into the country on Sundays in the plebeian motor-omnibus."

"You are not married, then?"

"No, nor likely to be for many a year."

"You never can tell," sighed Diana. "In the ordinary course of events I suppose that poor Dudley and I would have been married before very long. Now that dream is ended. How little do we know what life has in store for us!"

Hardy looked shocked, and dropped his pipe with a gesture of sympathy.

"Too bad!" he said, in a low tone, as if uttering his thoughts aloud. "And to think that I tried to turn you and your sorrow away from my door!"

"No, no. I won't have you say that. It is horribly unjust," and Diana colored slightly owing to the emphasis of her protest. "Forgive me for dragging in my own affairs. It was a mere impulse of the moment. Take pity on my ignorance, and tell me why the—the thing you are aiming at—"

"The fibrous fracture," he prompted.

"Yes. Why is it important?"

He hesitated. Evidently he was searching for a simile that was likely to come within her comprehension.

"You know," he said, at last, "that a strip sawed off a plank crosswise will break much more easily than a similar strip sawed off lengthwise?"

“Oh, yes; because of the grain of the wood.”

“Exactly. That is practically the difference between crystalline and fibrous strength. The latter means greater endurance under strain, whether for a second or an hour. Makers of steel have not reached that standard as yet.”

“And is that what you were busy at when I came?”

“Yes. I was in a fever of expectation. The fibrous rod might have become an actuality this very night.”

“Oh, dear! What a misfortune that I should have interrupted you!”

“But why? There still remain eleven months of my year.”

“Can you repeat your experiment tonight or tomorrow?”

Out of contrition Hardy would have lied glibly, but the bumping of cart wheels on an uneven road reached their ears.

“Here comes friend Benson!” he cried, starting to his feet. “I must go and show him a light, though he knows his way round Black Ings Farm blindfolded, I should imagine.”

Lighting the lantern he went out, and Diana was left alone to her reflections again. She had never before met any man quite resembling Walter Phipps Hardy. He had interested her, despite the fact that her acquaintance with the problems of metallurgical chemistry was nil.

She had always been under the impression that university professors and lecturers were grave and reverend seigneurs, whereas Mr. Hardy was young, thirty or thereabouts, and looked as if he might be well qualified to take a place in the butts on her uncle’s grouse moor. She knew many young men in many walks of life, but none of them had attempted to solve scientific puzzles by labouring like a blacksmith in a lonely forge.

During their brief chat Hardy had spoken only of his mother and his career. It was delightful to hear a son talking so nicely about his mother. And, somehow, she was convinced that one might even learn a good deal about fibrous fractures in case-hardened steel rods if Mr. Hardy lectured on the topic. Case-hardened; what did that mean? She must remember the word, and look it up in the dictionary.

Meanwhile, certain sounds told her that Dudley Seacroft’s body was being carried down the hill. Evidently Benson had thought it advisable to leave the cart in the road. Poor Dudley! How awful that a man’s virile life should be reft from him in such a way! The notion came unbidden that he was being taken away secretly, under cover of the dark night.

Suddenly the conviction seized her that she would never see him again, and she found tears streaming down her cheeks. Yielding to impulse she rose and went to the door. Lights were moving down there in the roadway, dim, flickering lights which threw strange gleams now on one or other of the men, now on a wheel, again on a steaming horse, and the brass bosses on a set of harness.

Voices, though pitched low, were easily recognizable—Hardy's definite, clear-cut sentences, and the slow Yorkshire drawl of the farmer and his man. Hardy was obviously giving careful instructions in which Doctor Petre's name occurred frequently.

Once, Benson spoke rather loudly, and she could distinguish the words.

"Ay, I heerd t' gun, an' thowt summat was wrang. Then, after a bit, I met yon wastrel, Rabbit Jack, but he would tell me nowt. Eh, but he's a bad 'un. If ther's ony mischief afoot I'll back him te hev a share in 't."

At last one of the lanterns was fixed to the front of the cart, which lumbered slowly down the hill. The other lantern, after a slight pause, swung nearer. Diana's glance wandered from the approaching light to that which was ever diminishing. Elsewhere was impenetrable gloom, the haze which had spread over the moorland since sunset now forming a pall of utter darkness.

So chaotic were her thoughts that she was almost startled when Hardy spoke.

"I half expected Doctor Petre's arrival about the same time as Benson," he said. "But I deemed it advisable not to delay matters. The doctor will probably meet Benson between here and Nuttonby, and will tell him where to go. You see, there will be an inquest, and there are legal formalities to be observed."

At that instant they both heard the hoot of a motor horn.

"There he is now," added Hardy. "If you don't mind being left alone again for a few minutes I'll go and have a word with him."

"May I not come with you?" said Diana.

"Can you walk so far? It must be a couple of hundred yards or more."

"Oh, yes. I am quite recovered."

She walked slowly down the garden path, and he held the gate open.

"This track is horribly rough," he said. "Let me help you a bit."

He took her arm, and supported her down the steep descent. On reaching the road, however, Diana elected to walk without assistance.

"I am absurdly stiff," she explained. "If I force my muscles into obedience I shall feel all the better for it."

They went side by side for a brief space in silence. Then Hardy put a hand under her arm again.

"The spirit is willing but the knees are weak," he said pleasantly. "You are wobbling about like a marionette. You'll be collapsing again before you know where you are."

He was so big and masterful that Diana yielded. Moreover, she was aware once more of aching bones and an abominably stiff neck.

"About Pat," she said. "I'll send a groom in the morning, but—"

"I'll take care that your horse is not compelled to walk several miles before he is fit to be moved. I'll put your man up. He will be company for me."

"But I thought you wanted to be left in peace and solitude."

"Oh, I'll indulge myself in a holiday," he said lightly. "I have been sticking to work a trifle too closely. While on the way to Nuttonby just now I saw that I had left undone one or two slight things which should be attended to, and, as the break is enforced, I shall take advantage of it."

"I can't help believing that I thrust myself and my troubles upon you at a most inopportune moment," murmured Diana.

"And I have come to the conclusion that my presence here was so fortunate that it almost atones for my—Well, no, I won't say that if it distresses you. But I really do want to assure you that you have not done the least harm to my experiments, which, after all, may prove mere moonshine when completed. Indeed, if I succeed I shall thank you, because I shall wait now for a special alloy which I had dispensed with in my eagerness to rush ahead. Drive over this way in a week or ten days, and I'll be able to report on the great undertaking."

"I promise to do. that without fail," said Diana. "My uncle will call on you too. He is sure to ask you to come and dine with us."

"But I have no evening dress clothes here."

"That won't matter. We shall not really be entertaining for some weeks. Sir Dudley Seacroft was a very dear and valued friend."

By this time they could see the indistinct outlines of a group on the roadway. Fortunately the doctor had already completed a brief examination of the body in the cart, and was about to start the engine of his car when they came in sight.

"That you, Hardy?" he cried.

"Yes. I am bringing Miss Fenton. She decided to walk this far. She is badly shaken, but a little exercise will do her no harm. And you can turn your car more easily here than higher up."

The doctor lifted his hat. Evidently, by the manner of his address, he was well acquainted with Hardy. Indeed, he would run on to Black Ings for a smoke and a chat whenever he was in Nuttonby and time permitted. He was a young man, not long a local practitioner, and his friend had unwittingly done him a very good turn by sending for him in a case in which the local magnates were concerned. His acquaintance with Lord Henry Dallinger's niece was of the slightest. Had he not been forewarned he would never have recognized her in the slim, boyish-looking figure in riding costume now revealed by the car's headlights.

"This is a dreadful business, Miss Fenton," he said. "But you shall tell me what actually happened while I am taking you to the Grange, as I gather from what Mr. Hardy says that you should reach home without delay. I can do nothing for you at the moment, I suppose?"

"No, thank you," said Diana. "I am only bruised and sore. It is very good of you to come here so quickly."

"A mere nothing at this hour. It is only half past seven."

He produced a rug, bustled her into the car, shook hands with Hardy, and made off before Benson got the cart into movement again. His chief anxiety was to remove the girl from her present surroundings, and Diana could barely wave a farewell to Hardy ere she was gone.

But the farmer had a word to say.

"I've seen a tidy few hurt by hosses in my time, Mr. Hardy," he remarked, "but I've never set eyes on anything like yon," and he nodded gravely toward the inanimate form in the cart. "T' brute must ha' fair danced on him, an' all."

"What did the doctor think?" inquired Hardy.

"Nowt mich. He said summat was settin' in."

"*Rigor mortis*."

"Ay, that's it. I reckon it meant Sir Dudley's bin dead quite a time."

"Where are you taking the body to?"

"Tiv his own place—the Hall."

"Are there any relatives—a mother, or sisters?"

"Not one, nobbut a cousin, Mr. Arthur Flecke. He'll be t' next o' kin, I reckon."

“And Sir Dudley was to have married Miss Fenton, I believe?”

“Mebbe, an’ mebbe not. This cousin was after her too. I’ve heard tell she wasn’t over keen on either of ’em, though Sir Dudley was the prize bird. Now, it ’ll be Mr. Flecke. Sike is life, Mr. Hardy. One up, one down. Well, I’ll be gannin’. Likely I’ll see you i’ t’ mornin’.”

Hardy lit his pipe and walked slowly up the hill. The door of Black Ings Farm was wide open, as Diana had left it, and the house looked intolerably empty. He was minded to resume work, and headed for the forge, but changed his mind. It would need three or four hours of persistent effort to bring to the requisite degree of heat the steel ingot with which he was dealing. Moreover, there would be further interruptions on the morrow and the next day. Possibly he might be summoned to the inquest. In any event he would now await the alloy he had spoken of to Diana, so tonight he would smoke and read, and retire early to rest.

First he gave an eye to the horse, and renewed the wet bandage. Pat seemed to be comfortable enough, and showed his good sense by allowing Hardy to handle him freely.

But the book which Hardy selected did not hold his attention. He laid it aside, and was refilling his pipe when the hoofbeats of a galloping horse came clearly from the high road. Astonished by the breakneck pace, he hurried to the door and looked out.

By that time the animal had clattered past, and was speeding down the hill toward Nuttonby. Then he realized that it must be Seacroft’s hunter, which had broken away after being caught by Diana Fenton. In all likelihood it had seen the moving lights from the moor, and had gained the road by jumping a wall or two.

Hardy listened to the racket until it died away far down the valley.

“Well,” he said, smiling to himself, “that should be the last disturbance tonight. But who knows what the morrow may bring forth?”

And, indeed, the morrow oftentimes produces unexpected things, whether in bleak moorlands or in crowded cities. Consider, for instance, the number of remarkable events which had happened since sunset that day.

IV

For some reason—probably because he was far more wearied physically than he allowed himself to admit—Hardy slept fitfully that night. Toward dawn, shortly before the hour at which he usually rose, he fell into a sound sleep.

He was awakened by the clang of the hasp on the outer gate. Springing out of bed he saw that the time was seven o'clock, and a glance through the window revealed a strange man leading a cob toward the house. The rider had dismounted to open the gate, a heavy one and ill adjusted, so it had slipped from his grasp. Hence the noise. Slung across the animal's withers was a bag of corn, and the stranger carried a small kit-bag.

"By Jove!" growled Hardy, "that must be Miss Fenton's groom, and here am I snoring like a hog!"

The simile may have been unjust, but his annoyance was real. The window was wide open; he thrust head and shoulders through.

"Are you from the Grange?" he shouted.

"Yes, sir," said the man, momentarily surprised, as he failed at first to discover the exact quarter whence the voice came.

"Sorry, but I have overslept myself," said Hardy. "Take your cob round to the back. You'll find a spare stall—the second door—it isn't locked. Miss Fenton's hunter is in there too. I'll be with you in a jiffy."

"All right, sir," said the groom, whose name, it appeared subsequently, was Bolland. "Don't hurry on my account, sir. I've brought some liniment and bandages, and I've a good half-hour's work before me."

Hardy prided himself on the fact that he could shave, go through some gymnastic exercises, and take a cold tub in exactly twelve minutes, so he was dressed and had a fire lighted downstairs long before Bolland's time-limit expired. While engaged in this housemaid's work he came upon Diana's hunting-cap. It had slipped from her grasp when he

carried her across the garden, and lay among the first tender shoots of some plant springing to life in a neglected flower bed.

Then he went to the stable, whence sundry stampings and encouraging cries of "Whoa, boy!" and "Steady now!" showed that Pat was resenting the pressure of inquisitive fingers on strained tendons.

Bolland straightened his back and saluted.

"Good mornin', sir," he said. "My hands are greasy. If you wouldn't mind feelin' in the breast pocket of my coat you 'll find a letter from Miss Diana."

It was pleasant to hear the girl spoken of in that way. The use of her Christian name was eloquent of the respectful familiarity of a privileged servant. Bolland, a neatly built little man, horsey from close-cropped hair to gaitered legs, was twenty years older than he looked. Hardy soon learned that he had been in the service of the family nearly quarter of a century

The letter was brief, but eminently friendly in tone:

Dear Mr. Hardy,

thanks to you and Doctor Petre, I reached home safely. We brought the first news of the tragedy. It seems that Mr. Benson's son met Doctor Petre at his door, and rode back with him to Nuttonby without telling his errand to any other person in Dalesford. Indeed, the boy hardly realized that Sir Dudley was dead. He imagined that there had been a serious accident, and that the immediate presence of the doctor was the main consideration. However, I shall not worry you afresh with an account of our grief here.

The man who will give you this note can be trusted to look after Pat, and is otherwise at your disposal if any errands are needed. My uncle, who is a trustee for the Seacroft estate, cannot get away this 'morning, but will endeavour to motor to Black Ings during the afternoon, about three o'clock, he thinks.

I am just able to write, but no more. I shall be stiff for days, the doctor says. Still, I hope to see you soon and thank you for all your kindness.

*Yours very gratefully,
Diana Fenton*

Before sleep finally conquered his overnight wakefulness, Hardy had dwelt upon many puzzling and contradictory features of the evening's extraordinary incidents, and Diana's frank epistle only added to his perplexities. He had imagined that the cold, clear morning air would dispel those broodings of the darkness, yet they trooped back in full force while he examined the straightforward sentences written in a rather large, well-formed hand.

Surely, it was not thus that a girl who had lost her lover would express herself on the morrow of her bereavement! It was not thus, at any rate, that he would have expected such a girl to write! Not that there was aught to cavil at, but—

He resolutely crushed these questionings. They led nowhere. On second thought, he saw that Miss Fenton might well have adopted this tone for the reason given so candidly, feeling that she had no right to intrude her personal sorrows on the attention of any chance acquaintance who had proved a friend.

"I'm afraid that the news of Sir Dudley Seacroft's death created a great sensation in Dalesford," he said, broaching the one topic that must be uppermost in the groom's thoughts.

"Yes, sir," said Bolland, tying a bandage which he had fixed deftly on the injured fetlock. "It did, an' all. What beats me is that such a well-behaved hoss as ›The Trojan‹ should savage anyone in that way."

"Was he caught last night? I believe he raced down the Nuttonby road about nine o'clock."

"He turned up at his stable shortly after ten, sir. And the queer thing is that he doesn't know the country. Must ha' taken the right road by accident like. Trotted in behind Mr. Benson's cart with the body in it."

"Is the Hall quite close to Dalesford?"

"Yes, sir. The boundary wall of the park touches the town at one end. Our place comes next."

"I gather from Miss Fenton's letter that no alarm was raised until she arrived home."

"Not a word, sir. Mr. Flecke rode over about six-thirty to say he had seen nothing of her on the moor."

"Oh, a search was made, then?"

"Yes, sir. His lordship missed Miss Diana from the field, and sent Mr. Flecke after her. A bit later he came across Sir Dudley, an' told him, too, so, you see, both of 'em was a-lookin' for her. But it's a nasty place

is Howlsike Moor when the light fails, or at any time o' day for that matter. I was bogged there meself last August, one day when I was loadin' for his lordship."

"How strange that both Miss Fenton and Sir Dudley should have fallen!"

"That's the curiosest part of it, sir. >The Trojan< was a fust-rate hunter, and Pat here can climb like a cat. Hes an Irish hoss, sir—bin hunted two seasons with the Galway Blazers."

"There's no accounting for the tricks of fate."

"So it seems, sir. Any hoss can fall, but it licks me that a well-mannered one should want to bray the life out of its master. Good Lord, sir! S'pose it had bin Miss Diana! Well, there!"

Bolland found his own imaginings too overpowering for words. He began to groom Pat, and hissed viciously.

"Have you had breakfast?" inquired Hardy.

"Yes, sir. Miss Diana sent for me last night, so I knew I had to be off early today."

"Perhaps you can manage another snack in about twenty minutes?"

Bolland recovered his equanimity, and grinned.

"Well, yes, sir," he said. "This moor air does give one an appetite."

For a small man, who was eating a second breakfast, he did ample justice to the coffee and bacon and eggs which Hardy provided. He talked during the meal, and gave his host such details as to the Dallinger family as were public property. Naturally, nothing was said by Hardy as to the engagement between Miss Fenton and the dead man, nor did the groom mention it.

When pipes were lighted, Bolland went back to the stable, and Hardy looked inside the forge. Instantly he noticed that a light sledge hammer which he used occasionally had fallen from the block of an anvil upon which it rested. He was a methodical worker. Even when thoroughly absorbed in the fusion and temperature of some elusive amalgam he knew exactly where to pick up or lay aside any implement, and he was quite certain that the hammer had not been on the floor when he vaulted through the Window and scared Diana into fainting. Nor could he remember its falling subsequently.

The anvil stood well apart from the bench to which he had carried Seacroft's body, and he could hardly have failed to recall the noise if he himself, or Benson and his man, had knocked the hammer from its

customary place while taking the dead man to the cart. Indeed, as they had passed through the door which lay in the opposite direction, that explanation became almost impossible.

Trivial though the incident was, it bothered Hardy. Without knowing why he was giving so much heed to a thing of such slight importance, he stooped and picked up the hammer, meaning to restore it to its place on the anvil. Then, indeed, he had cause for surprise, because a sovereign was lying among the litter of coal dust on the floor. It had been hidden under the head. And it must have been there before the hammer fell, because no coin, howsoever thin, could have rolled beneath that square block of chilled iron.

To make quite sure he replaced the implement just where it had lain. The sovereign undoubtedly had been covered completely. Thus, it was proved beyond question that the more precious metal held priority of position. Hardy little guessed that the bright yellow disk shining up at him from the grime of the forge was a symbol of stirring times even now swiftly enveloping his life. Yesterday, at the same hour, he would have laughed cheerfully at the discovery, treating it as a happy augury of the outcome of his experiments. But today he took that golden mascot quite seriously. How on earth had it got there? He must find out.

In the first instance, he examined the money in his own pockets, which consisted of two pounds and some odd shillings. Only three days ago he had paid certain small accounts presented by the carrier who conveyed his stores and materials from Dalesford. The man had given him the two pounds change out of a bank note.

It was absolutely certain, therefore, that this third sovereign was not his. Then, whose was it? Had it dropped out of the dead man's pocket? Yes, in all likelihood. But, if so, how account for its presence under the hammer head?

Once again he put the hammer where it had fallen. He could do this to the fraction of an inch, as he had not yet touched the coin, and a square rectangle in the dust marked the precise position. He even tried to insert a second sovereign underneath, but could not accomplish this without lifting the solid lump of iron.

Realizing the absurdity of further test he picked up the coin and stowed it in a waistcoat pocket. Hardly thinking what he was doing, he found himself, by sheer force of habit, placing the hammer on the anvil, and frowned thoughtfully at this triumph of habit. Then he examined floor and bench carefully, but came upon no more treasure-trove.

Strolling out, he eyed the irregular cobblestones, the garden, the cart road, because, if one sovereign had dropped out of Seacroft's clothing others might have done likewise. He hardly anticipated anything of the kind, because the finding of even one coin elsewhere would have negated the theory already germinating in his brain.

Soon he reached the road, and wandered some few yards up the hill until the way was barred by the gate which shut off the moor from the inclosed land. It still stood partly open; Diana stumbling through in the darkness, had had no thought for aught but the succour promised by the vague light at a little distance.

Looking back he pictured the scene as it must have presented itself to her distraught vision. How weird and unnerving must have been the leaping, curling flames of the furnace, wherein at the moment he was inducing a forced draft, aiding the bellows by a blow pipe, and fusing certain chemical agents to a temperature never attained in that desolate region since its volcanic period.

He flushed rather hotly at recollection of the reception he accorded her. But that had passed into the limbo of stupid deeds done beyond repair, so he dismissed the unpleasing memory brusquely, and brought back his random thoughts to the immediate business in hand.

Glancing at his watch he saw that the hour was not yet nine o'clock. A long winding stretch of the Nuttonby road visible from where he stood was wholly devoid of life. Probably, before noon, a policeman might call to make some inquiries, but it was possible to keep an eye on Black Ings from the next mile or more of the moorland track which Miss Fenton had followed. Perhaps, while the indications were fresh, it would be as well to examine the actual scene of the accident. One heavy shower, whipped to frenzy by such gales as swept up the valley, would obliterate nearly every trace of it.

Soon he was breasting the hill rapidly. It amused him to note how easy it was, given ample knowledge, to ascertain that a horse, lame in the off fore, had been led in the opposite direction by a lady. Patches of sand bore clearer impress of their passage than the turf or bare earth. Here was one of the girl's footprints broken by the half-circle of the hunter's near fore hoof. A yard in front was the much lighter mark left by the injured foot.

If he had not been able to deduce the pedestrian's sex from the small size of sole and heel, any dubiety on that score would have been removed when he found a lady's gauntlet glove, a rather pathetic object, since it told dumbly of relaxed and nerveless fingers.

Halting while he pocketed the glove, he surveyed the valley once more. It was still untenanted. Bolland, the groom, had come out from the stable, and was carrying a bucket to the spring which gushed from the hillside above the house. The man happened to notice him, so he waved a hand toward the crest of the moor as though to signal his objective, and Bolland seemed to understand, because he waved back. Just then, those two, a hovering hawk, and a score of black-faced sheep, had the earth to themselves. Town dwellers in crowded England would never dream that two men could be the sole human occupants of so vast an area.

Hardy had ever an eye for minted wealth along the uneven pathway, but not another coin could he see, and he rather regretted the fact, because if it were shown that even a halfpenny had fallen out of the dead baronet's clothing elsewhere than in the forge a certain nebulous suspicion already attaching itself to the conduct of John Bates, potter, poacher and dealer in rabbit skins, would thereby have been greatly weakened if not wholly dissipated.

He wasted no time, however, in a too painstaking search, as he did not wish to be away from the farm longer than was necessary to accomplish his direct purpose. He was obsessed by a strange restlessness, a mood so foreign to his ordinary well-balanced temperament that, had he troubled to analyse it, it would have puzzled him more to find an adequate explanation than to express the resistance of a steel rod of given dimensions in the cabalistic formula of the higher mathematics.

Up and up he went, moving with long, swift strides, until the first plateau of the moor spread its vastness to an undulating horizon, and a backward glance revealed that Nuttonby and its dale had almost sunk out of sight.

According to Miss Fenton's version of the accident he could not now be far distant from the place where she found the body, so he reduced his pace and devoted even closer scrutiny to marks on the roadway, which, it must be remembered, was merely a track cleared of heather, and following a serpentine route to avoid bog holes and outstanding rocks.

He came upon the scene of the tragedy somewhat suddenly. Skirting an excavation from which sand had been removed—occasional sandpits, indeed, supplied the *raison d'être* of the road, such as it was—he saw a hunting crop lying in the heather. It was a heavy one, silver mounted, and evidently had been in its owner's possession many years, because the buckhorn handle was polished with use, while the initials, "D.S." on

a tiny silver shield, were almost undecipherable, and the date beneath was wholly so.

Near by were signs in plenty of the manner in which the young baronet had met his lamentable end. The turf was tom and the underlying sandstone was revealed by yellow streaks where it had been scarred by a horse's hoofs. The depth of the indentations in soft ground bore testimony to the mad fury of the animal's plunging.

Both Diana Fenton, who had seen Seacroft lying where he fell, and Bolland, judging only from his knowledge of riding mishaps, had commented upon the peculiarity of the fact that the hunter seemed to have attacked its owner. It is, unfortunately, not a rare occurrence that a rider thrown and caught in the stirrups should be kicked to death by the frightened horse, but such a sequel is invariably the outcome of the animal's efforts to free itself.

Here an almost incalculable number of hoofmarks showed back and forth in one place only, and that the place where the body had lain, which was established beyond doubt by the undisturbed condition of the surface in that particular locality. Hardy understood now why Seacroft's injuries were so numerous and so severe. A bronze statue subjected to the same merciless ill-treatment would not have emerged from the ordeal unscathed.

At first, the multiplicity of varying hoofmarks was bewildering. A whole troop of cavalry might have passed that way for all Hardy could make of the tracks. Then he remembered that Miss Fenton had told him of two riders having taken the same path, and that she herself had caught Seacroft's horse, which, with Pat, would account for four sets of prints in the vicinity.

But she had spoken, too, of the alarmed hunter having broken away before she had actually seen Seacroft's body. Carefully observant of the least detail, Hardy endeavoured to locate this incident. His chief difficulty was that each horse was shod alike, but one set of plates was much more worn than the others, and having already identified Pat's marks, as soon as he discerned the spot where ›The Trojan‹ had wrenched himself free from the girl's hand and galloped off into the heather, it was possible by patient, minute and prolonged observation to reconstruct the sequence of events with some degree of accuracy.

Obviously one horseman—presumably the Arthur Flecke mentioned by Bolland—had made a wide cast of the moor in that part, ridden a half mile or more along the cart track, and betaken himself back over the heather in the direction of the adjacent valley, down which, miles

away, lay Dalesford. He was disposed of readily, as his semicircular course was clearly defined. Then had come a second horseman, who approached the road through a different dip, and, discovering a newly made trail, had followed it to the point where his hunter stumbled and threw him.

A good deal of this was surmise, because the aimless ranging of Seacroft's horse to and fro in the neighbourhood of the accident rendered it impossible to say definitely which of the many tracks was that originally taken by Seacroft. Nevertheless, making every allowance for error, once he had found the place where Pat fell with his mistress, Hardy was fairly confident that his survey was well founded. If he gave the whole day to the task the course of each rider could be determined beyond question, but there was no object in such a purposeless waste of time, as his vague suspicions with regard to Rabbit Jack's actions were now whittled down to the minor certainty that the wretch had not scrupled to rob a dead man.

Hardy had returned to the chief centre of interest in that lonely tableland when his mind reverted for a moment to Bates' singularly defiant attitude—singular, that is, if he had really stolen Seacroft's money—and he conducted a final search for some stray coin, which would surely have escaped from Seacroft's clothing thereabouts, it at all.

Thus, by sheer accident, as it were, he happened upon the fifth "exhibit" in this self-appointed inquiry—a man's gold signet ring. It had rolled under a clump of heather close to the edge of the sandpit, and would have remained there till it sank into the turf when a few summer showers brought forth the scanty herbage had not someone sought for it deliberately.

Hardy examined it with much interest. Originally of stout design, and fitted either to seal a document or to add disabling effect to a heavy blow, the gold hoop had worn thin and flat by half a century or more of use. The setting of the seal—a dull red stone with an intaglio of a boar's head—was massive and ornate. Evidently, since the hoop was fractured in the centre, it had been forced off the wearer's hand either by a spasmodic clenching of the fingers or by a blow. The solid base of the seal lent a springlike action to the two thin crescents. Hardy had no manner of doubt that it had belonged to Sir Dudley Seacroft.

At any rate, he had now in his possession two hunting crops, a glove, a sovereign and a ring.

Stimulated to renewed effort, he looked in every tuft of grass and growth of wiry heather within a radius of twenty feet of the spot where

Seacroft had come to his death, but met with no further success.

No sooner had Black Ings come into sight during the homeward tramp than Hardy became aware of visitors. A high, two-wheeled cart was standing in the road, with a policeman in uniform at the horse's head. Another figure in uniform, probably the superintendent from Dalesford, together with a tall, burly man in civilian's clothes, stood beside Bolland in front of the forge. Indeed, the man in mufti was looking in through the window, the shutter having been thrown wide open, though Hardy had closed and bolted it.

For an instant the sight brought a spasm of annoyance. He saw no reason why every Tom, Dick and Harry should pry and peer into his improvised laboratory merely because a sporting squire had been killed on the moor.

But that sentiment soon passed. Most probably Miss Fenton had related her experiences to the police authorities, and these men were simply examining the outbuilding to which he had conveyed the dead body from the house.

He quickened his pace, but Bolland soon saw him, and the superintendent and his companion strolled to meet him. Passing through the boundary gate they came a little way up the hill, and there awaited him.

Hardy eyed the civilian with some curiosity. The stranger had the semblance of a gentleman farmer, the type of yeoman who breeds prize stock, rides hunters from his own small stud, and holds a territorial commission—a strong, whole-hearted, generous-minded fellow, shrewd and capable, and able to take care of himself anywhere. This man, in particular, had a frank and essentially pleasing face. His prominent blue eyes, wide, firm mouth, rounded head and well-moulded chin bespoke a forceful yet agreeable temperament.

Hardy knew, ere yet they had exchanged a word, that his own measure was being taken swiftly and unerringly, though the stranger was apparently concerned about the faulty wrapping of a long, fat Havana cigar. Somehow, the notion occurred to him that if this newcomer were versed in the subtleties of steel manufacture, the briefest inspection of the interior of the forge would have revealed with tolerable precision the nature and scope of the experiments conducted therein.

The officer in uniform, a big, red-faced man, was the first to speak.

"Professor Hardy, I believe?" said he.

"Not yet professor," smiled Hardy. "I am, or was till a month ago, lecturer on physics at the Downshire University."

“Physic?” echoed the other blankly. Evidently the description did not fit in with his preconceived ideas.

“Physics, Thompson,” corrected his companion quietly. “The science of matter—heat, energy, electricity, and the rest.”

Thompson’s bronzed features assumed a deeper tint, but he laughed good-humouredly.

“Those things are rather outside my range,” he said. “Anyhow, Mr. Hardy, you’re the gentleman I want to have a few words with. I’m the superintendent from Dalesford. I’ve come here in connection with this sad affair which happened last night.”

“I thought as much,” said Hardy. Then he glanced at the other man. “Is your friend interested in the inquiry also?” he added.

“Oh, no,” was the astonishing reply. “He’s taking a busman’s holiday. Let me introduce you to Chief Inspector Winter, of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard!”

V

Hardy was momentarily taken aback. For one thing, from outer appearances he would never have guessed the identity of the best-known detective in Great Britain; for another, it was positively amazing to meet such a man in the existing conditions.

“Well,” he cried, staring fixedly at Winter. “I seem fated to receive surprises these days. Your fame has travelled ahead of you, Mr. Winter. I have read of you in connection with anarchism, celebrated murderers, and jewel thieves who never operate for a fee of less than ten thousand pounds. But I certainly did not anticipate meeting you on Howlsike Moor.”

“I am not here professionally, Mr. Hardy,” came the ready explanation. “I had some business in York, and journeyed to Dalesford on a brief visit to Superintendent Thompson. I have accompanied him today solely for the sake of the drive.”

“But what am I to do?” said Hardy, affecting a distress he was far from feeling; in reality he was rather proud of the morning’s exploits. “Here have I been playing the amateur detective, and now I am compelled to set forth my pretensions before an expert. In sheer self-defence let me tell you a few facts about primary and entectic austenite.”

Winter laughed.

“I’d listen with the utmost humility,” he said, “but I daren’t interfere with Thompson, who has a hard way with folk who use that kind of abusive language. Anyhow, may I offer you a cigar, if you don’t object to poisoning this superb air.”

“I prefer my pipe, thank you. ... Now, superintendent,” and Hardy turned to the local official, “I suppose you wish to hear my evidence?”

“If you please, sir. You’ll be wanted at the inquest, which will be held in Dalesford tomorrow at two p.m.”

Hardy filled his pipe and began his story. He gave it clearly and succinctly, omitting nothing, yet avoiding inferences or personal opinions. He saw at once that both men were keenly interested, especially when Rabbit Jack's unsavoury personality was introduced.

They did not interrupt, even to ask a question. Indeed, Hardy's straightforward narrative called for no elucidation. It was part of his life's work to make plain to the young intelligence the knotty problems of science; it would have been strange, indeed, if he failed to throw a vivid light on the events of the previous evening and his researches on the moor for this professional audience of two.

He ended by producing the ring, which he handed to Thompson, who, in turn, handed it to Winter.

"The boar's head figures on the Seacroft coat of arms," said the superintendent, contenting himself with that simple statement of fact. Truth to tell, he felt rather nervous in front of his eminent colleague, and was profoundly thankful to be assured that the baronet's death was undeniably the result of an accident.

"It will be difficult to prove theft against this wastrel, Bates," commented Winter. "Of course you may be able to frighten him out of the district, and thus get rid of him. On his own showing he knew of the affair before Mr. Hardy, and a few pertinent questions by the coroner will scare him."

"He got exactly four pounds ten shillings," said the superintendent. "Sir Dudley always carried five pounds in gold and some odd silver when hunting. Also he had some notes in a pocketbook. He liked to have plenty of money at command in case he needed it. His valet found the contents of the pocketbook intact, but the money was gone."

"How lucky that Miss Fenton heard Bates moving about," said Hardy. "Otherwise, Benson or his farm hand might have been suspected of taking this money."

"Bates's subsequent behaviour strikes me as the only puzzling feature in the affair," said Winter. "You said he was quite self-possessed, almost impertinent?"

"That was my impression."

"Can you recall his exact words as he left the house?"

Hardy repeated them, even reproducing the man's quaint mixture of accents.

Winter nodded.

"If they mean anything, such phrases imply what Bates himself would describe as 'being in the know.' Now, what could he know that was hidden from you! In a sense, the dead man was an enemy of his—had caused him to be sent to jail for poaching. Oddly enough, rascals of Bates's class seldom quarrel with the police or magistrate; their irritation is invariably directed against the person they wanted to rob, and who, in self-defence, gives evidence against them."

He turned to Thompson. "Do you remember the circumstances of this poaching affair?" he went on.

"Yes, of course. Sir Dudley himself caught Bates. He went out with his keepers one night, more by way of a bit of sport than otherwise. In nine cases out of ten he would have kicked Bates off his estate and let him go, but he was so annoyed at finding in the man's pockets a white pheasant which the guns had spared during the past two seasons that he allowed the law to deal with him."

Winter tickled the back of his right ear with the end of a match, a habit of his when thoroughly absorbed. Quite unconsciously he was taking the lead in the inquiry, though it did not concern him in the least.

"How far is it to the place where Miss Fenton found the body, Mr. Hardy?" he said suddenly.

"A little over a mile."

"Are you too tired to guide us there?"

"Tired at this hour of the morning! Why, I am stealing a day off. In ordinary circumstances I should now be trying, with indifferent appliances, to force a block of hard steel beyond the freezing point."

"Freezing point!" Superintendent Thompson could not help repeating.

"Yes, it's a useful expression. It means the point at which fluid metal begins to solidify. Water boils at 213 degrees, but steel doesn't melt till it passes 1130 degrees."

The superintendent whistled softly. His mental horizon was expanding. The three were already breasting the hill, and Winter looked round.

"I cannot imagine a place less likely than this to harbour an experimenter in metals," he said. "Aren't you working under a serious handicap, Mr. Hardy?"

"So it would seem, but, in reality, no. I do not purpose manufacturing steel rods here. I am elaborating a formula. When I am fairly certain

of my results—when I can bend a strip of steel containing a percentage of carbon which, according to present standards, would cause it to snap, I shall go to a manufacturer and tell him what I have achieved.”

“It will be a big thing, I take it?”

“A very big thing—practically the creation of a new metal.”

“I wish you success.”

“Thank you. If you have time to look in as we return I’ll tell you more about it.”

The *camaraderie* which links men of the same order was binding these two. Each admired in the other those qualities of heart and brain which are essential to real progress, whether the groper after truth be engaged in wresting scientific secrets from the close guardianship of Nature or peering into the criminal mind to lay bare its molelike burrowings.

Superintendent Thompson listened to their talk, but, being a very sensible person, took no part in it. When a constable reported Hardy’s occupancy of Black Ings, and described the furnace flames and hammerings issuing from the forge, Thompson had made it his business to examine the consignments of tools and metals passing through Dalesford. He, worthy man, was thinking of counterfeit coiners!

“Yet you came here to be alone?” laughed Winter.

“Yes. For a month I have seen no one except a farmer named Benson, a carrier, a gamekeeper, and Doctor Petre. However, the average has been raised since some few minutes before six o’clock last night.”

“Ah! That reminds me. While the times of various events are fresh in your mind you might jot them down in a notebook. It is extraordinary how a discrepancy of even ten minutes between two witnesses will affect an inquiry sometimes. I remember, though it is hardly on all fours with the present issue, how a man’s life was saved by a clock.

“A gunshot was heard at night, and a maid servant was the only witness who could fix the time definitely. She was quite positive, because a clock which kept good time struck one directly after the shot was fired. Now, if she was right a man being tried for murder would have been hanged, but there was reason to believe that the crime took place nearer midnight, in which case the prisoner had an excellent alibi.

“Still, things were going badly for him when the defending counsel was inspired to ask that the clock should be brought into court. Then it was discovered that it recorded the half hours as well as the hours, so it struck one at half-past twelve, one o’clock and half-past one. That did

the trick. The prisoner was acquitted. ... I was glad afterward," added Winter reminiscently, "because we got the right man a little later."

"What a horribly cold-blooded addendum to your story!" cried Hardy.

Winter beheaded a dandelion with a sweep of the Malacca cane he was carrying.

"What are the police to do?" he said. "They don't see the crime committed. Circumstantial evidence is a jig-saw puzzle with the main part of the picture omitted. We hang the likeliest man or woman. If, very rarely, we make a mistake, the fault is not ours, but Fate's.

"For instance, Superintendent Thompson may well act on the assumption that Sir Dudley Seacroft was killed by falling from his horse. But he is only guessing. There is always the possibility that Rabbit Jack, lying among the heather, saw his arch-oppressor riding by, and, moved by red-eyed hate, flung a stone at him, knocked him senseless, and caused the horse to rear and plunge on the prostrate body. The man himself hinted at the method of the crime. It is his invention—not mine."

Somehow, though the theory was propounded flippantly, it sank deep into the consciousness of both Hardy and the superintendent. They, be it remembered, had seen Seacroft's maimed body; Winter had not. But he had heard its injuries described, and there was a highly imaginative brain in that big round head of his.

"Do you really think there is anything to go upon?" asked Thompson seriously.

"Oh, come now!" protested the detective gayly. "You yourself said I was taking a 'busman's holiday,' yet the moment I expand a bit you call me to account. Please regard my professional vapourings as the product of sheer enjoyment. When out on a bean-feast your genuine busman sings 'You made me love you,' with a cornet *obligato*. I talk shop. Where's the difference?"

"There was something odd about Bates's behaviour last night," mused Hardy aloud. "For all that, I can scarcely bring myself to believe that he could have been actively concerned in Seacroft's death. If he were, and not only followed his victim in order to rob him but also brazened it out with me when Miss Fenton had chased him away from the house, he is a criminal of no mean order.

"Some day in the dim and distant future, when I take a number of young Hardys to Madame Tussaud's, and we all stand reverently at his

shrine, I shall say: 'Behold him, Rabbit Jack! Once I met him, even held him by the scuff of the neck!' And great will be my glory!"

Thompson alone refused to see any joke in the notion.

"I shall have him at the inquest, at any rate," he said, and his tone was so emphatic that the others laughed.

Hardy, however, did not laugh when Winter, after examining the many and confusing indications which the younger man's industry had made clear, went straight to the sandpit which they had passed a few yards short of the actual scene of the accident. Some seconds later they heard his voice. Big as he was, what between the depth of the hollow and the height of the heather, he was completely hidden.

"Here, you two. I want you!" he cried.

They joined him. He was standing in the excavation, and gazing intently at some marks in a patch of mixed sand and gravel.

"What do you make of those?" he said.

"Someone who stood there recently has been careful to obliterate his footsteps," said Thompson at once.

It was not remarkable that the superintendent should have arrived at a conclusion so promptly. Country policemen attach as much importance to footprints as their brethren in towns to finger marks. Oftentimes the evidence of a peculiarly shaped boot, or a patch put on a sole by a village cobbler, affords the only clew to the identity of the wrongdoer, whether poacher, poultry stealer, or petty raider of kitchen gardens.

"Whoever it was, he did not follow the direct track," continued Winter. "The only persons who have used that road within the past two or three days are we three and Miss Fenton. Thompson and I can prove our innocence; Miss Fenton and Mr. Hardy are above suspicion, at present; so the court asks: 'Where was Rabbit Jack about four-thirty p.m. yesterday, and what was he doing?' You see, Mr. Hardy, the vital importance of keeping a dossier when you mix with the criminal classes."

"In any event I am obliged to you for that interpolated clause—'at present,'" said Hardy dryly.

"Caution is the first element of success as a detective," countered Winter.

"I find that I have much to learn," was Hardy's rejoinder.

"Let's look for another set of footprints beyond those we recognize," put in Thompson eagerly. He was like an old hound, not easily aroused, but keen as ever when the game was flushed.

They searched the moor in ever-widening circles, and vague traces were found of a pedestrian who had gone down the valley by a circuitous route, but Winter soon recommended the abandonment of effort in that direction.

"If a fugitive understands the importance of concealing an obvious thing like a footprint you may be sure he will not leave one," he said. "But sharpers of the Rabbit Jack species have their limitations. In scraping that sand with his feet he may have lodged a sample of it in his boots and forgotten to remove it. Where does he live?"

"In Nuttonby. He was at the door of his cottage as we drove through the village," said Thompson.

"Good. Call there on the way home and examine his boots. You'll surprise him, if nothing else."

The superintendent took huge strides down the hill. His mind, slow to move, was active enough when engrossed by an idea. Thirty years of police work in a rural district, where an occasional suicide provided the utmost conceivable sensation, where a whole twelvemonth might pass without the commission of any crime sufficiently serious to call for a visit to the assizes, had forced him into a groove and kept him there. What a business it would be if Sir Dudley Seacroft's death were due to a wilful act on the part of a rogue like Bates! His mouth watered at the thought.

Winter, stepping out briskly to keep pace with him, winked at Hardy. And, indeed—grave though the circumstances—there was an element of humour in Thompson's sudden alacrity. He resembled some placid bull, grazing in lush and well-guarded pastures, who had scented a lion escaped from a menagerie.

"If Bates hasn't washed those boots already they'll keep an extra five minutes," said Winter at last. He had decided that this rapid progress interfered with the due enjoyment of *ta cigar*.

Thompson grinned, and slowed down.

"I was thinking hard," he explained. "It seems to me there's plenty of evidence to justify an arrest."

"My gracious! For what?"

"For stealing that money. If I find any gold on Rabbit Jack I'll take him into Dalesford."

"I wouldn't, if I were you."

"Why not?"

"The theft of a few sovereigns is nothing—nothing, that is, in comparison with the bigger possibility. You can always lay hands on Bates. Give him rope, and keep an eye on him. He may get drunk, for instance. Lock him up, and you stop his tongue effectually. From his remarks to Mr. Hardy I should rate him as the sort of man who simply must talk. Indeed, on second thought, rather than scare him now I wouldn't bother about his boots—at any rate, not until you have questioned him as to the exact time and place he saw Miss Fenton leading the horse with a dead body slung across the saddle."

"I'll take your advice," said the superintendent, after a slight pause. "Can't I persuade you to put off your journey to London? Wait till after the inquest, if no longer."

"Now you're dragging me into this affair, neck and crop."

"It will be a real help to me. Mind you, I don't want to take the credit—"

"Great Scott! Mention my name in connection with it—breathe one syllable about Scotland Yard—and I rush for the next south-bound train. No, no. Please leave me out of the hunt entirely. If I can serve you in any way, old man, I'll do my best. Wait till you have interviewed Bates. Then, if there is the least prospect of developments I'll wire the Commissioner and stop over till tomorrow evening."

As the three were approaching the farm, Winter turned to Hardy.

"You might give Mr. Thompson the hunting crop, the sovereign and the ring," he said. "Say nothing about them at the inquest unless at his bidding. He will post you fully before the inquiry opens. You might also suppress any reference to your two visits to the moor this morning. You see, if he decides to investigate matters further the inquest will be adjourned, so tomorrow's proceedings will be quite formal."

"What of the glove?"

"Is it Miss Fenton's?"

"Yes. She was wearing the other one."

"Return it to the lady, unless you feel romantically disposed and wish to keep it as a souvenir."

"I'll bring it to Dalesford, with her hunting crop, tomorrow."

"I don't handle these delicate matters well," sighed Winter. "Now, if one of my colleagues, a man named Furneaux, were here, he would invest that glove with fantastic attributes. You would love Furneaux if you met him, Mr. Hardy, and he would be tickled to death, as the

Americans say, by your surroundings. It's almost providential that he is not here today instead of me. By Jove, no one can guess what he would have made of this business, merely for the sake of remaining in touch with it for a day or two. Before the end of the week our poor superintendent would be many pounds lighter. Worry is fatal to adipose tissue."

"You take most things cheerfully, then?" put in Thompson, who was not quite so slow as he looked.

"I have to, or I'd be dead in a week. If I had your job I'd be twice the size."

"Climbing hills is dry work," suggested Hardy. "I have some excellent bottled beer in the house."

"Thank goodness I'm holiday making!" cried Winter. "What a pity, Thompson, you're on duty!"

"I'm none the less a Yorkshireman," said the other, his manifest disquietude yielding to the detective's chaff. "You forget our country proverb: 'See all, hear all, an' say nowt; eat all, sup all, an' pay nowt; if you do owt for nowt, do it for yersen³.' I'll sup your ale with pleasure, Mr. Hardy. I've been up and about since before six. If you have a bottle to spare, and a bite of bread and cheese, the man holding the horse can do with it too."

Hardy soon produced the refreshments. The day was so mild and sunlit that his visitors brought their glasses and eatables out-of-doors. Bolland was summoned, and, nothing loath, drank his beer with gusto. Thompson knew him well, of course, and Hardy was picking up a good deal of local information from their talk when Winter sprung a new mine on them.

"Have you a telescope, Mr. Hardy?" he inquired.

"No," was the astonished reply.

"That's a pity. A horseman's head and shoulders are showing just beyond the skyline of the moor. A rather unusual thing, isn't it!"

By this time four pairs of eyes were fixed on the hardly discernible figure on which Winter's restless vision had alighted.

"There! He's gone!" said Thompson, who, with the groom, understood best the strangeness of any mounted man putting in an appearance on that portion of Howlsike Moor early in April without having come by way of Nuttonby.

3. *owt* = everything, *nowt* = nothing, *yersen* = yourself.

"Beg pardon, sir," cried Bolland. "I think he has only dismounted."

"He is probably examining the place where Sir Dudley's body was found. I wish we hadn't hurried away. I'd give something to find out who it can be."

The superintendent spoke feelingly. Though there was nothing suspicious in some local resident riding to the scene of the accident, it was singular, to put it mildly, that a long detour across a highly dangerous plateau should be taken in preference to a road. It was not as if the visit to that particular locality arose from chance. Whosoever the man might be, he knew his bearings, and had been told exactly where to go.

"We mayn't have a telescope," said Bolland, "but I've got a hoss, an' there's no reason why I shouldn't jog up that way, an' all."

"Good for you!" agreed Winter hastily. "You're just the man we want. Off with you!"

Bolland needed no second telling. He had his cob saddled and bridled very quickly; soon he was breasting the hill. Within ten minutes he and his nag were silhouetted against the clear sky above the undulating line of the heather. Then he was lost to view, and remained hidden fully quarter of an hour. He descended more slowly than he had climbed.

As he drew near, the three men walked to the gate leading into the road. The cob was foam-flecked. Evidently Bolland had covered a good deal of ground while out of sight.

"No go, gentlemen," he said, before dismounting. "He must ha' seen us. When I reached the top he was nearly a couple of miles away. I went after him, but he was on a bigger an' stronger hoss."

"Which way was he heading?" inquired Thompson dourly.

"Malton way."

This statement meant absolutely nothing, in one sense, yet it meant a great deal in another.

Malton lay many miles beyond the range of hills.

None but a crank, or someone who did not value life and limb, would have travelled from Malton by such a route. Winter promptly ascertained the distance and nature of the ground. He held out a hand to Hardy.

"I shan't say good-bye," he said. "We'll meet in Dalesford tomorrow."

VI

For once in his life, when the law had gone off in the dogcart, Hardy felt time hanging heavily on his hands. Bolland had loosened the girths on the cob, and was walking him to and fro to cool after that sharp spin across the moor. Obviously the man was inclined to talk, but events had taken such a peculiar turn during the past hour that the tenant of Black Ings decided against anything in the nature of gossip.

"I suppose that nag of yours is up to a quiet trip to Nuttonby and back?" he said.

Bolland looked almost hurt.

"He's good for another forty miles, sir, if I don't press him too hard," he said.

"Well, there's an elderly widow, a Mrs. Judd, who arrives every Saturday with clean linen, and gives the place a scrub. She lives near Benson's farm. You might ride in and ask her if she can arrange to come here today and remain until Miss Fenton's hunter is fit to be moved. How long will that be, do you think!"

"The day after tomorrow, sir."

"Very well. Try and persuade Mrs. Judd, or you'll have to cook for yourself. I'm going to Dalesford tonight. I must attend the inquest tomorrow and I may as well be on the spot. Get Benson to lend me his dogcart. One of his men can drive Mrs. Judd here. The old lady will probably be accompanied by her daughter. They can have my room, but she had better bring a bed along, too, in case I return tomorrow evening. You see, accommodation is limited. The house has only two bedrooms, with a bed in each. I rise very early as a rule, so I'll sleep in the living room. Benson's cart will hold everything comfortably, and can take me and my bag to Dalesford. You understand, don't you? Tell Mrs. Judd I'll pay her well."

“Right, sir,” said Bolland. In another minute he was jogging quietly down the hill.

Hardy went inside and wrote letters. He dealt quickly with those of a business nature. He had quite made up his mind to carry out the more complete experiments he spoke of to Diana, and knew exactly the nature and quantities of the materials he needed. If dispatched by passenger train they would be in Dalesford next evening.

A letter to his mother demanded more care, because it contained a fairly detailed account of the minor whirlwind which had spun him out of the rut of routine since Diana. Fenton knocked timidly on the shuttered window of the forge. His chief difficulty was to describe the girl. Mrs. Hardy, a quiet womanly woman, would certainly expect a word picture of her son’s visitor, and he hesitated long before committing himself. At last he evolved something which he thought would serve.

Miss Fenton would be regarded as good-looking, even in Worcester, for which town some newspaper correspondent had the hardihood recently to claim pride of place in the British Isles in the matter of feminine beauty. She has a wealth of russet-gold hair, and wears, or wore, a remarkably attractive if somewhat startling riding costume—startling to a rapidly hardening fossil like me, that is, because it dispensed altogether with a skirt. I am sure she is intelligent, and I think she would prove most lively and entertaining if I met her under happier conditions.

Unfortunately she was to have married the poor fellow she brought dead to my door, so, my dear, any romantic notions which may have flitted through your maternal mind on reading the foregoing brief but glowing catalogue of the fair Diana’s charms are now rulely dispelled.

I fear I am writing rather at random, but the truth is that I have been brought unexpectedly in touch with a real tragedy, and my wits have hardly recovered their normal poise. If it wasn’t such a journey to Black Ings from the Midlands, or even if this semi-barn were decently habitable, I would tell you to come here for a few days. As it is, it would not be worth while to inflict on you the bother of packing and bringing a servant, because I hope to finish my work in a week or less.

And—a little whisper in your ear—I did well to bury myself in a nook of this Yorkshire moorland. Slowly but surely I have tracked

an elusive formula to its lair. You see, I simply had to work and think, in sheer self-defence against the profoundest solitude, and this time I believe I shall succeed.

He had reached thus far when the steady chug-chug of an automobile coming swiftly if a trifle noisily up the hill brought him to the door. A touring car was just halting near the gate, but the engine alone was visible, as a straggling thorn hedge hid the occupants from view. Soon, however, a sparsely built, middle-aged man of medium height and military aspect and appearance opened the gate, and mounted the steep cart road with a sprightliness that belied his years.

"Mr. Hardy?" he cried, when the younger man advanced a few paces to meet him.

"Yes. Are you Lord Henry Dallinger?"

"Ah. You knew I was—Diana told me she had sent a—Where's Bolland? Did he give you my niece's letter?"

His lordship's trick of making a number of false starts before he completed a sentence was new to Hardy, who imagined that his visitor was short of breath, in which case it was absurd that he should have climbed the short but abrupt ascent so quickly.

"Yes," said Hardy. "It was very kind of Miss Fenton to take so much trouble when she was indisposed."

"Indisposed! Diana indisposed! God bless my soul, she's as fit as a—That doctor man was too—decent fellow, though. Hadn't met him before. Our *medico* is Bowden, slow old coach. How's Pat?"

By this time Hardy had taken Lord Henry's measure more accurately. He explained why he had sent Bolland to Nuttonby, and was leading the way to the stable for an inspection of the lame hunter when Dallinger halted at the forge window.

"Is that where you put poor—Diana told me how very kind you—Of course, you'll stay with us tonight."

Hardy was rather flustered by this unforeseen invitation.

"I'm sorry. I came here for work. I'm really not presentable," he almost stammered.

"What's that? Clothes? No nonsense of that sort at—My man will lend you anything—You've got to be at the inquest. I met Thompson. Nice fellow, Thompson, but Dudley's death seems to have—What's this about adjourning the inq—The cause of death is only too—That horse smashed poor Seacroft to pieces."

Hardy guessed that Lord Henry was chairman of the Dalesford bench of magistrates, a fact which probably accounted for Miss Fenton's presence in court when Rabbit Jack was sentenced for poaching. Consequently, there was no need to maintain secrecy as to the reasons which would probably influence the coroner in adjourning the inquiry.

So, when Pat had been examined and pronounced convalescent, Hardy brought his lordship to the sitting room, provided him with a cigarette, and related all, or nearly all, the facts known to him. He said nothing, however, about the ring or the marks in the sandpit. Winter had requested silence on these matters, and he obeyed.

Dallinger might be elliptic in speech, but he could listen attentively enough. He seemed to be more puzzled by the presence on the moor of the unknown horseman than by Rabbit Jack's erratic proceedings.

"By gad!" he cried, "if it hadn't been broad daylight—No ghost could—And a solid fellow like Thompson looking on—That friend of his too—a real John Bull. Who is he?"

"Chief Inspector Winter, of Scotland Yard."

This information surprised his lordship more than ever.

"What the deuce! Scotland—How is it poss—They couldn't know Seacroft was going to be killed!"

Hardy accounted for Winter's presence—a mere coincidence.

"Ah, is that it?" said Dallinger. "I thought the thing couldn't be—No harm in having such a—What's his name? Winter, you say. I know the Commissioner. I'll get him to—"

Hardy broke in with a statement of Winter's intention to remain for the inquest, if not longer.

"Good! Good! Thompson might lose his—Fine fellow, Thompson, but what chance has he in a place like—? Someone steals a duck or fires a hayrick—gets a case once in a blue moon. Now, come along, Mr. Hardy. I'll have you at the Grange in time for luncheon."

Hardy experienced no difficulty whatever in gathering the exact meaning of Lord Henry's broken phrases. Moreover, the other generally contrived to complete at least one sentence which served as the key note for its predecessors.

"I'm afraid I must wait for Bolland," he said.

"Not a bit of it. We'll find Bolland on the—Thought I recognized one of my own nags hitched to a—I'll attend to Bolland."

It would have been churlish to resist further, though in his present mood Hardy would have preferred the comparative insignificance of Dalesford's best inn. He went upstairs, threw a few requisites into a bag, and reappeared promptly.

He did not forget to secure Miss Fenton's hunting crop and glove. He addressed and sealed his letters, too, and locked the door, not as a precaution, but to insure a halt at Nuttonby, because it was now imperative that Bolland or Mrs. Judd should have the key.

Lord Henry struck him as a genial autocrat, who liked to have his own way in most things; it would not surprise him in the least if his prospective host tried to whisk him through Nuttonby, leaving Bolland and Black Ings to Fate. Now, any such happy-go-lucky suggestions must be defeated.

But he did not know Lord Henry Dallinger well enough yet to estimate just how he would act in a given set of circumstances. His lordship was inquisitive as a jackdaw in all things appertaining to local affairs.

Thus, not only did the car halt when they met Bolland, escorting Benson's dogcart, which contained, beside the driver, Mrs. Judd, Martha Judd, an apple-cheeked lass of eighteen, and the Judd family's best feather bed, with iron framework and appurtenances complete, but it was pulled up again at Rabbit Jack's cottage. The tenement was empty and the door locked. A neighbour informed them that "t' super had called a bit sen, but Jack was i' Dalesford."

Lord Henry was annoyed. Bates should have remained at home.

"The rascal has the cheek of—Why on earth a perky little Cockney should come—By gad! Next time he comes before me!" he growled.

Hardy found the poacher's behaviour wholly inexplicable, but for more subtle reasons than his failure to await Lord Henry Dallinger's convenience. The man had seen the police driving through the village, and had set out forth with for the neighbouring town. Why? Of course he might have business there, of a sort. But it looked as though the sight of Superintendent Thompson had sent him hot foot out of Nuttonby. Was he taking flight? In that case he would certainly avoid Dalesford, of all places, because it was more than likely that Thompson would overtake him on the road. The speedy car soon reached the small town, a community of three thousand inhabitants, and exclusively agricultural in its pursuits.

Meanwhile, Hardy had to satisfy Lord Henry's curiosity as to the cause of his own presence in these parts.

Evidently it was an amazing thing that anyone with the manners and outward semblance of a gentleman should be interested in the technical side of steel manufacture—interested, that is, to the extent of labouring at it with his own hands. Had Hardy been an artist, now, or one of those writer fellows, one could understand his occupancy of a moorland cottage. But a university lecturer!

“Gad!” said his lordship, “I didn’t do much when I was up—no one worked at Oxford in my—I can’t imagine a Profess—Queer old codgers, most of ’em—But they liked a good dinner and a glass of—Are you married?”

“No,” laughed Hardy. “A wife would hardly stand that sort of thing, would she?”

“Never can tell. Rum creatures, women. They—Now, there’s my nie—*That’s* Seacroft’s place. Flecke lives *there*. Flecke gets the money and property. The title, of course, lapses. Pity—fifteenth century.”

On the one hand, Lord Henry pointed to a Georgian manor house set in a well-wooded park; on the other, to a ramshackle building, mostly stables, by the roadside.

“Though it’s a good thing for Flecke, he’s awfully—I ran him over to Malton after breakfast. Solicitor lives there, you know. I’m trustee, and that sort of—Devilish cut up, is Flecke.”

Hardy listened in silence. It was a lamentable thing that the young baronet should be lying dead in the centre of that beautiful domain, now bursting into the vivid reds and greens of spring. Yet, for the first time in his career, he was conscious of a feeling of bitterness, almost of envy. Why should all the graces and blessings of a countryside be poured into the lap of one man while so many others were denied even a glimpse of these treasures?

True, a Seacroft was dead, but a Flecke succeeded. Apparently a young goddess like Diana Fenton was the recognized guerdon for either. The estate, not the man, was weighed in the balance and found just.

Thousands of clean-minded, hard-working young fellows, hungering for knowledge and eager for self-advancement, had passed through the evening classes held for mechanics and artisans by Hardy’s university, and each one of them was a better asset to the nation than these fox-hunting squires, whose wants were fed by so many broad acres, and for whose perpetuation shy-eyed, sweet-voiced maids like Diana Fenton were reared to perfect womanhood.

Suppose, now, Seacroft and his fiancée had been happily wed—would their Offspring be yet another edition of hard-riding Dudleys

and adorable Dianas? Was that the social law? Did even the bright feminine intellect of such a girl adapt itself to the ordered existence of rural England?

Lord Henry's effervescent bubbling broke in on his reverie.

"Weird lingo—the law of entail. Everything comes to Flecke. Same in my case. I'm poor as any of my own tenants, but if five nephews and three grandnephews went to smithereens, I'd—Well, I think I'd blow my bally brains out."

Hardy glanced sharply at his companion. Somehow that concluding statement had an expectedly gallant sound. It echoed from goodness only knew how many generations of God-fearing, king-serving gentlemen.

"I believe that," he said. "I can well understand that no man would care to obtain even the most desirable of estates by means of some catastrophe which overwhelmed his kith and kin."

"By gad, no. Flecke was badly hipped last night. Even this morning he said—Well, the news of our little circle won't interest you, Mr.—By the way, there's the Grange. We'd get a better view if I—But I haven't the heart—Destroy three hundred years of growth in five minutes! Couldn't do it."

A clump of magnificent elms shut out the greater part of an Elizabethan mansion from the sight of passers-by on the highway. The trees were not needed to secure the privacy so dear to every English property owner. The Grange was nearly a mile distant, imbedded in spacious shrubberies, and sheltered from north and east by pine-clad hills. But they had been planted by some Tudor aristocrat with a taste for laying out a park, and while any man like Lord Henry Dallinger was in possession they would flaunt their leafy banners undisturbed by axe or dynamite until decay rendered them dangerous.

Altogether, by two chance comments his lordship had made a better impression on his clear-eyed companion than the latter would have deemed possible a minute earlier.

The car passed through lodge gates, standing hospitably open, and Hardy noticed that the park was put to strictly utilitarian purposes, part being pasture and part meadow. The grazing land bore cattle and sheep to its full capacity. Evidently Lord Henry had followed his appraising eye, because he cried cheerfully: "Those are my best investments. Rents only supply bread and butter. I get jam and joints out of my stock."

He was not quite a drone, then. Hardy found that he must recast certain preconceived opinions. Even a landlord demanded justice.

There was an agreeable absence of formality about the house. The very flower beds on the lawn, filled with daffodils, hyacinths and wall flowers, looked homelike and cozy. A troop of fox terriers raised a welcoming chorus.

A friendly butler led Hardy to his room, and was at hand to conduct him to the morning room in the southeast wing, where Diana received him with ready smile and outstretched hand. There, too, he met Lady Dallinger, whose marked resemblance to her niece was enhanced by that juvenility of appearance which is the dearly earned reward of the matron to whom is denied the privilege of motherhood.

Both ladies were dressed in black. Lord Henry's only tokens of mourning for the loss of a valued neighbour were a black tie and a band of crepe on his sleeve, but Lady Dallinger and Diana had accepted the situation frankly.

Diana moved with a slight stiffness, but otherwise looked extremely well, and adorably feminine.

"I have been blushing to the roots of my hair ever since I knew that uncle meant to bring you back with him," she said. "What was it I put in my letter? Some rubbish about being just able to write. Well, it was true enough at half-past five this morning, when a maid came to my room and said that Bolland was about to start for Black Ings. I really was as stiff as a stake then. But a tub and a little stroll outside soon changed all that. I made a false claim on your sympathy, Mr. Hardy."

"Lord Henry was most unfeeling when I ventured to regret your indisposition. He assured me you were fit as a—fiddle."

"Did he really say 'fiddle'?"

"Well, I gather that he meant to compare you with some highly strung and tuneful instrument."

Lady Dallinger surveyed the speaker with a new interest. Diana had described Hardy accurately, but her ladyship had been unable to construct a mental image of the kind of man who, though young and athletic, was a scientist and a worker in metals.

"Still, he might have had a fiddle's gawky stiff neck in mind," said Diana promptly.

"That sounds suspiciously like fishing for compliments," interposed Lady Dallinger. "I fear that yesterday's tragedy and its legal outcomings will make a big inroad on your time, Mr. Hardy. Can you spare it? But that is an absurd question. What I really have in mind is this: My husband and I, and Diana herself, are under a great obligation to you. Is

there anything we can do to help you in return? Suppose, for instance, we lent you Bolland and his wife while you remain in that out-of-the-way farm?"

Hardy laughed.

"There is a Mrs. Bolland, then?" he said. "I wonder what she will say when she hears that I have provided her husband with a house-keeper during my absence. Luckily Mrs. Judd is an elderly and highly respectable widow."

He was conscious instantly of a shadow on Lady Dallinger's face when he mentioned the name, Judd. Like her niece, her ladyship's features were highly expressive; he fancied, too, that a wave of surprise swept through the listening girl, though not on account of anything he had said, but rather because of her aunt's manner.

"Does Mrs. Judd live in Nuttonby?" asked the older woman, after a slight pause.

"Yes. She is my laundress, breadinaker, and occasional, very occasional, charwoman."

"She has two daughters, I believe!"

"I have only seen one—a pretty girl, not yet twenty."

"Why these mysterious delvings into the Judd family's history, aunt dear?" cried Diana wonderingly.

"I knew the other girl—the elder sister—when she was in service in Dalesford. You would not remember her. She went away before you came home from Brussels. I wished to know whether or not she had gone back to her mother—that is all."

"Nuttonby is quite a deserted village this afternoon," put in Hardy. "Rabbit Jack, too, has departed. He saw the superintendent of police driving through and evidently thought it advisable to clear out. A woman who lives next door to his cottage told Lord Henry that 'Jack' had gone to Dalesford, but I am inclined to doubt it. It would not astonish me to hear that he had left the locality for good."

Again he was aware that just as Lady Dallinger had been distressed by his reference to Mrs. Judd so was she grateful to him now for having dropped the subject so tactfully.

Diana spoke of Pat, and when his lordship entered, the conversation became general. During luncheon Hardy's attention was caught by a very old painting of a man in Elizabethan costume which occupied the best lighted wall in the room. He took it for a drawing in oils of Raleigh,

especially as there was an inscription in old English black letter on the foot of the frame, but Lord Henry, seeing his interest, told him that it was a contemporary sketch of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, one of the least known but, perhaps, most deserving among the great admirals of the Armada period.

"He's a sort of a—We claim descent in a way—Some of our people came from Devon—Fine old boy—Thought straight—Acted straight. Wrote honest stuff too. Diana, you can reel it off."

Whereupon the girl, with telling emphasis, quoted the lines: "'Give me leave therefore without offence always to live and die in this mind: That he is not worthy to live at all that for fear or danger of death shunneth his country's service and his own honour; seeing that death is inevitable and that fame of virtue immortal.'"

"A worthy thought, indeed!" said Hardy, when Diana had made an end. "And what a capital notion to keep it ever before the eye beneath the old sea-dog's portrait."

"I had it put there when her father," and Dallinger nodded toward Diana, "fell at Magersfontein—God rest his soul! Those words were written in a little diary found on his body. So, you see, a noble thought lives through the ages, and will inspire generations yet unborn."

Evidently his lordship could frame and utter well-phrased words when occasion called; evidently, too, neither universities nor cities had a monopoly of those principles which are the mainsprings of disinterested actions. But Hardy was not a man to sit in silence when candour seemed to require outspokenness.

"I owe you all an apology," he said. "I deemed you narrow-minded folk, whose thoughts and aims were bounded by the parish. I find I was mistaken. Rather is it that I myself have become pedantic. I should have remembered the teaching of the Latin poet and philosopher: 'Is not the Deity's dwelling the earth and sea and air and sky and virtue? Why seek the gods elsewhere? Jupiter is, in truth, whatever you see and wheresoever you are.'"

The butler, who had entered noiselessly, waited until Hardy stopped speaking. Then he bent over the guest's shoulder and said, in a stage whisper: "Beg pardon, sir, but a Mr. Winter, of Scotland Yard, wishes to have a word with you. He requested me to say that he would not intrude if his business was not urgent."

The anticlimax produced a peal of merriment. It was with the sound of Diana's laughter in his ears that Hardy, begging to be excused for a few minutes, left the room.

VII

Winter, making friends with the dogs, awaited him in the hall. The detective wasted no time in coming to the point.

"I'm sorry to break in on a luncheon party," he said, "but I cannot help myself. A telegram from London awaited me at the police station, and I start for the south within half an hour. I may not even delay my departure till the night train. Will you come outside for one minute?"

Though somewhat perplexed, Hardy saw that his new acquaintance was very much in earnest. Winter led him onto the lawn, well out of earshot of anyone in the house—apart even from the constable driving Thompson's dogcart.

"I take it, Mr. Hardy, you are deeply interested in this matter of Seacroft's death?" began the detective.

"That's an eminently reasonable assumption," smiled Hardy. "I don't see how I can escape from the thrall of the thing now, even if I wished it."

"Well, Thompson and I have decided to confide in you. Luckily we heard you were here, or I should have been compelled to write, the one thing I wanted to avoid. Of course you are fully at liberty to refuse the singular request I am about to make, but, whether you grant it or not, I want your promise that no one, absolutely no one, will be told what it is."

"In effect you mean to intrust me with an official secret?"

"Yes."

"Then, being a law-abiding person, I give you that undertaking."

"I was sure of you from the outset—in that respect, at any rate. Now, we have some reason to believe that Sir Dudley Seacroft was murdered.

Yes, I mean that," because Hardy was not quite prepared for such a dramatic statement and did not try to conceal his amazement at its frankness.

"I am not drawing any distinction between murder and manslaughter, but I feel convinced that the man met his death by foul play. How, I don't know; it is for the police to find out, if they can. But in a small place like Dalesford, where each trivial detail of every resident's life is known to the whole township, the very conditions which are advantageous to the police in some matters become serious drawbacks in others.

"Take this inquiry, for instance. Direct investigation in any quarter by the local police will set a thousand wits at work. We want to avoid that. Even I, who have been here only a couple of days, would be recognized as Mr. Thompson's friend. Before I asked half a dozen questions, the man or woman I was in touch with would begin to associate them with Seacroft's death, and jump at conclusions very shrewdly. You see my point, don't you?"

"Perfectly."

"On the other hand, you have already fitted into your proper niche in the public mind. You are, if you don't object to the description, an amiable lunatic, who delights in melting iron and hammering it into rigidity again."

"I have seldom heard metallurgical research-work described more pithily. But, if you mean to turn me into a detective—"

"I don't. I want you to harbour one—nothing more. If the proposition is agreeable to you a little man who looks like a comedian, and is eccentric enough to warrant his being bracketed with you in local esteem, will arrive in Dalesford tomorrow before the inquest. He is your valued friend and crony, Charles François Furneaux. He can talk to anyone about anything, and he happens to be in some respects the best detective ever discovered by Scotland Yard. He is visiting you without warning, having been told there is first-rate trout-fishing in the Nut-tonby beck. Of course he will take up his quarters in the farm, though not at your expense, I may add."

"But I shall be delighted to entertain him."

"I thought so. I knew we could depend on you. At any rate, we'll adjust the financial side of things subsequently. Now, Thompson, who has never seen Furneaux, will, to all appearance, remain an utter stranger. Don't go out of your way to introduce the one to the other. But, again,

don't shirk the necessity of an introduction if thrust upon you. In a word, behave as if Furneaux were really your lifelong friend. He will live up to the character, never fear."

"How shall I recognize him?"

"When a perky little actor man, very neatly dressed, with a face carved out of ivory, a wide mouth, big ears, and piercing black eyes, comes to you tomorrow and hails You as 'Wally,' receive him with open arms, and call him 'Frog.' After that, any sort of nonsense will serve until you are alone together, when Furneaux will soon make himself at home."

"And I am not to reveal his identity to a living soul?"

"Exactly."

"How long is this sort of thing to continue?"

"Until the mystery is solved. I give Furneaux a week."

"By the way, that fellow Bates—"

"Is in Dalesford. He doesn't mean to budge. If he bolted he would give the game away, and he is cute enough to see that. I leave him to Furneaux, who may need a guide for his fishing expeditions, and may ultimately put a line round his neck. I don't know. I cannot even guess. Furneaux's ways are not mine, but they are mighty effective."

"Good-bye, Mr. Hardy. I am very much obliged to you. Perhaps we shall meet in London one of these days. If and when we do I'll have much pleasure in giving you a night out, personally conducted, and you'll see things the existence of which in these enlightened days you would never dream of."

The two shook hands, and Winter was rattled away in the dog-cart. Hardy returned to the dining room. He was so much absorbed in thought as to this new and extraordinary development that it did not occur to him until he was seated again at the table that Lord Henry, to say nothing of the two ladies, would naturally look for some explanation of Winter's visit.

"Although I only met the man this morning I took quite a liking to him," he said readily. "We arranged to meet tomorrow, during or after the inquest but, as he has been called to town suddenly, he thought it was only polite to come and say, 'Good-bye.'"

Which he felt, with a certain relief, was sufficiently near the truth, if not the whole truth, that it would pass muster.

“Ah,” chafed Dallin’ger, “that’s too—Thompson can’t—he’s all right after stolen fowls—but this thing may be—What do you say if I telegraph to the Commissioner?”

“I believe, from what Mr. Winter said, that Thompson will conduct the inquiry quite correctly,” put in Hardy, seeing that a telegram to the head of the Criminal Investigation Department might interfere seriously with Winter’s plans.

“But what has happened, uncle?” cried Diana. “Why is Scotland Yard interesting itself in Dalesford?”

Unwittingly the girl herself had come to Hardy’s rescue. Dallinger held fast to the old-fashioned theory that one’s womenfolk must be shielded as much as possible from the sordid and ignoble things of life; at the present stage he was very unwilling that Diana should know of the cloud which was rapidly overshadowing Dalesford, and wrapping the apparently simple facts of Sir Dudley Seacroft’s death in gloom and mystery.

“It isn’t, in a sense,” he said testily.

“Some money was missed from Dudley’s pockets, and that scoundrel whom you frightened last night is suspected of the robbery.”

Diana was far too well versed in her uncle’s moods not to know that he only spoke in that downright way when thoroughly in earnest. -He was a man who took life generally with a good-natured nonchalance that found expression in careless speech. But the mannerism yielded to any real demand on his mental powers.

He was a good deal more worried by the morning’s revelations than he was willing to recognize. What would happen next, if a country gentleman could be knocked off his horse and murdered in broad daylight by some thieving hawker from London? Not that Dallinger bothered his gray head about class distinctions. They existed, like the divine right of kings. He would as soon think of questioning the rotundity of the earth as the thesis that Sir Dudley Seacroft was of a superior order of creation to John Bates.

“Perhaps we are doing Rabbit Jack an injustice,” said Hardy, quickly alive to the nature of Lord Henry’s dilemma, and anxious to help. “Give a dog a bad name, you know.”

“What can you expect? Atheism, Socialism, Criminality—the three Harpies. Modern education! Pooh!”

Lady Dallinger laughed nervously.

"Harry, dear," she said, "you forget that Mr. Hardy is distinctly a modern educationalist."

"And may I say that the Sermon on the Mount has never again been equalled as a definition of true socialism!" put in Hardy. "I cannot bring myself to believe that any question of class enters into ethics. I have found the spirit of genuine righteousness quite as highly developed among poor workingmen as among their employers."

Lord Henry was well aware that his guest was assisting him over a stile. He saw a means of escape, and took it.

"Too fine a day to talk poli—In any event, I'm busy," he cried. "Have to look into—No more hunting this season—Poor Dudley's death cancels all—Diana, give Mr. Hardy a cigar, and show him the grounds."

Diana did not revert at once to the question that was puzzling her. She led Hardy to a rock garden, famous in that part of Yorkshire because it contained twelve different species of heather, and Alpine plants beyond numbering.

"You bring a whiff of new thought into our quiet backwater," she said, glancing at her companion with that shy underlook of *blende Kagoul* blue eyes which Hardy was beginning to regard as the most attractive thing he had ever seen in woman.

"I am receiving more than I give," he assured her earnestly. "Your uncle is really a very fine character, Miss Fenton. Twice today he has surprised me by unexpected glimpses of a rare nobility. If the comparison won't shock you, he reminds me of a man in a very different walk of life. When Ruskin was buried at Coniston the richest and most beautiful flowers were heaped on his grave, but one mourner, the local tailor, surpassed all other tributes by sending a little wreath of common wild flowers, with the inscription: 'There was a man sent from God, and his name was John.' When first I heard it that story stirred my blood just as it was stirred a few minutes since by your quotation from Sir Humphrey Gilbert's diary."

"How perfect! I must remember that," and Diana wrinkled her forehead in determined effort to stow away something worth recalling. "And I'm so glad you like Uncle Harry. His only fault, if it is one, is that he puts the estate first in everything. That is why he suspects and hates certain modern tendencies. You don't really think, do you, that anyone who owns land should be taxed more than anybody else? We don't wrong our tenants, not a little bit. If uncle didn't raise stock of such high quality that he commands the best markets, the mere ownership of the Grange would mean his speedy ruin."

Thereat Hardy laughed, because Diana spoke so seriously.

"I don't know why you look on me as a case-hardened Radical," he said.

Diana almost jumped. For a young lady of twenty-two she was still very youthful in her emotions.

"There!" she cried. "Case-hardened! That is the very word I wanted to know the meaning of. Please explain."

"In Radicalism it means that if you pierce the stern outer crust of reforming zeal you come to a layer of real old Toryism. In metals it is a process of cementation by which the surface of an iron rod is converted into steel by heating the iron in a furnace which contains certain animal matter, such as bones, horses' hoofs or leather. Now you have the why and wherefore of my forge, while the discussion brings us back to the land, you see."

"I wish I was clever," sighed Diana. "Science means knowledge, doesn't it? And, as I know nothing about science, I must be dreadfully ignorant."

"Knowledge often means disillusionment too. I pray you remain as you are."

Again, as when he first glanced over the graceful sweep of the dead baronet's park, Hardy was conscious of an unaccountable bitterness of soul. It would seem, almost, that he was in revolt against influences, hitherto unsuspected, which cramped and fettered his being. *Surgit amari aliquid*. In his leisure hours he oftentimes dipped into the classics, but he had yet to learn the true inwardness of that dire verse of Lucretius.

The rock garden lay in a long-disused quarry. Winding paths, cut in the stone, led to the summit, whence a fine view of the surrounding country was obtained from a summer house sheltered by pines. Beneath lay the rolling expanse of the Grange park, while the Seacroft estate, somewhat larger and exceedingly well kept, could be surveyed from the same point.

Hardy, a prey to varying moods that day, grew aware suddenly and acutely of the folly and littleness of any feeling of envy where the hapless baronet was concerned. It was his habit to blurt out a confession of such ignoble thoughts—thus nipping them in the bud, so to speak.

"I find myself once more in an apologetic frame of mind," he said. "My confessions will bore you, I fear, but that must be my penalty. I was inclined to dispute the right of any set of men to lives so ordered and

care free as the local gentry seem to lead here, but my philosophy has only a selfish basis, after all. I think, on analysis, it will prove nothing more exalted than a certain resentment against the fate which denies me these good things."

"You are mistaken. Indeed you are," protested the girl earnestly. "We, who live in Paradise, can tell you also of serpents."

Now, Diana could hardly have uttered words better calculated to disturb one who knew that Dalesford might shortly become notorious as the place round which must cluster the unsavoury records of a brutal and cold-blooded murder.

"Why do you say that?" he blurted out.

"I—I hardly know how to express myself," and her tongue faltered a little, while she blushed furiously. "But I think I gave you a false impression last night. I spoke of Sir Dudley Seacroft as though I had promised to marry him. That is not-quite so. He wanted me to marry him, and I suppose I would have agreed—in time. But I felt suspiciously like being transferred next door with the title deeds, if I may put it that way.

"I liked Dudley as a friend, and I might have made him a good and dutiful wife, but I hated the inevitableness of the transaction. ... There, now. It is absurd to worry you with my confidences, Mr. Hardy, but your candour offered a bad example. Do you think, if I loved a man, that I would be cheerful and light-hearted on the day after his death?"

"No," said Hardy. "I don't."

His tone was so stubbornly emphatic that Diana laughed nervously.

"You had been considering that side of the question, then?" she asked.

"Yes. Why not? I wrote about you to my mother this morning, and it cost me quite an effort to put the facts, or what seemed to be the facts, on paper."

"Surely there was no undue levity in my behaviour last night?"

"Every man forms some sort of ideal of womanhood. Last night you fell short of mine."

Diana coloured again, this time with astonished resentment.

"I am afraid the chance turn of our talk is taking us rather far, but you might tell me just what you mean," she said.

"I answer you in your own words. If you loved a man you would mourn him while life lasted. And I think, too, that if a man loved you, and lost you, he could never put another in your place."

That was better, much better. It was even honey sweet, and perhaps a trifle dangerous. Still, being a true daughter of Eve, Diana took another bite at the apple.

"I hope it doesn't sound horribly egotistical to say that I agree with your estimate of my own character," she admitted, stealing a look at him. His eyes were fixed on the blue mass of Howlsike Moor, and his inscrutable face gave no clew to his thoughts. "But the sugar coating only hides the pill. I want to find out, if you dare tell me, what I did to—to lower an ideal—shall I put it?"

"Nothing," he said hastily. "I only meant to convey my own blurred conception of what love is. I seem to have-read you better than I knew. Although you were suffering from the strain of a frightful ordeal, I imagined that your subconscious self was peering into the future, not with despair, but with a sort of curious uncertainty. That is why I was bewildered when you conveyed the notion that Sir Dudley Seacroft was your affianced husband. The real and the ideal did not blend. In the language of chemistry, I formed my judgement from negative, not positive, tokens."

Diana recovered her self-possession with an effort. For a few seconds she had been swept off her feet by an overwhelming desire to clear away the mists which her own haphazard words had created. Now she must come back to hard earth, with a bump, if necessary.

"When all is said and done, girls in England are apt to attach too great importance to romance," she said. "I have plenty of friends in France who knew exactly whom they were going to marry long before they left school, not because of any boy-and-girl attachment, but merely owing to practical considerations. The French are sensible in these matters. If my father owned this estate, and it happened to be situated in Brittany, nothing on earth could save me from marrying the son of the man who owned that one," and she pointed airily to the Seacroft domain.

"Thank heaven, then, Dalesford is in Britain!" said Hardy with fervour.

"In any event the parallel does not hold good," she said. "This place passes to another branch of the family at my uncle's death. Poor Uncle Harry! He did so want to see me settled in life as mistress of the Hall. But let us chatter about something else. What mystery is this which the police are creating?"

"They have good reason to believe that Bates stole some money from—from the dead man last night."

"How horrid. How absolutely vile! Yet, it is hardly a thing that would concern Scotland Yard. I know, because the chief constable was lunching with us the other day, and when someone said that a London detective was inquiring into a jewel theft at York he explained that the man had come at the special request of the Marquis of Yarm. Even in London itself Scotland Yard does not always act. If you are robbed in Hampstead you appeal to the local police station, and not to headquarters."

"Then, in one important matter, your lore exceeds mine," laughed Hardy. "I didn't know that. But, up to the present time, there is no mystery. Chief Inspector Winter, the man who called during luncheon, was merely paying a friendly visit to Superintendent Thompson, an old friend, and happened to drive over to Black Ings with him this morning. Probably he is the very detective who was sent to York. By the way, Thompson attaches some importance to secrecy with regard to the charge against Bates."

"Unhappy Bates! I never hear the man's name that he is not in hot water with the police. Even now I can't guess why uncle should take such a comparatively trivial thing so seriously."

"There are some insignificant crimes which strike the imagination as peculiarly brutal, and robbing the dead is certainly one of them."

"Oh, in that sense it is too dreadful. Shall we go in? Aunt will be wondering what has become of us."

They descended slowly. Though she bore herself bravely, Diana still felt the effects of her fall. Any other man in Hardy's place would have helped her down the somewhat steep path, but he neither offered assistance nor uttered a word until the girl spoke again.

"How long will you be staying in that lonely house?" she said at last, obviously making conversation.

"A week—at most a fortnight," he said. Then a light broke in on him. Here was an opportunity to pave the way for Winter's deputation.

"I may not be alone all the time," he went on. "I half expect a visit from an eccentric friend of mine. I'm not sure. I look for him because I have not heard from him. He likes to drop in."

"That's friendly," said the girl. "I loathe formality."

"There is nothing formal about—Frog."

In the very nick of time he recollected that nothing had been said as to whether or not this unknown Furneaux would pass under his own

name; the pause of indecision only accentuated the humor of the nickname.

"Frog!" tittered Diana. "What a peculiar name! Is it his real one?"

"Come and see us. You promised you would. Then you will see how admirably it fits him."

Diana knew quite well that she had not been answered. She felt, too, that there was more in the attentions of the police to Rabbit Jack than met the eye. But she bided her time. Her uncle was bound to have early and reliable information as to all local police matters, and she could easily extract the truth out of him. Mr. Hardy's reticence was puzzling, but, of course, he was a stranger, and their exchange of confidences while in the summer house above the quarry had already gone a long way beyond the bounds of an ordinary chat between two people who had never met until the previous day.

The weather was remarkably mild for April, and, although fires were burning in the grates, most of the windows on the ground floor were open, so a man's voice came to the two young people clearly while they were crossing the lawn on the way to the drawing room.

It was a clear, well-modulated voice, in which each syllable was given its due sound and value. Hardy, listening, was reminded of a certain "precious" type of schoolboy, a type which he had learned to dislike.

"I have just returned from Malton, Lady Dallinger," the owner of the voice was saying. "Lord Henry very kindly drove me there this morning in his car, and we had an hour with Messrs. Childwick and Smith, who have charge of my cousin's legal affairs. I remained a little while, having some business to attend to, and am not long home; but I felt so disconsolate that I was sure you would give me a cup of tea if I came to the Grange."

"Mr. Flecke," whispered Diana, under her breath. "Mr. Arthur Flecke, the new owner of Seacroft Hall. And Dudley hated him. They were hardly on speaking terms. What a whirligig life can be when it chooses!"

Hardy would have liked dearly to ask Miss Fenton whether or not she shared Sir Dudley Seacroft's feelings toward his presumptive heir. But that was out of the question. The girl was already entering the drawing room through one of the French windows.

"How are you, Arthur?" she said, as a tall, slenderly built man in a well-cut tweed suit rose and came out of the shadows to greet her.

“How d’ye do, Diana? I’m always glad to see you, but I’d give a lot if we could meet as we met yesterday—without the knowledge that poor Dudley is gone, I mean.”

Somehow the words, simple though they might be, smacked of a set speech. Hardy, noting the terms on which the two were, felt that he had been relegated suddenly and effectually to the position of a casual acquaintance. Diana introduced him to Flecke, and the latter thanked him in those precise, staccato accents for the services he had rendered after the accident.

For some reason, Hardy did not like the man who, on closer scrutiny, added to this studied affectation a certain aloofness of manner as of one who found it necessary to assert his social position in season and out of season.

Flecke was undeniably good-looking and was as undeniably aware of the fact. Even while he was expressing his obligation to Hardy his glance was critically surveying the latter’s rather worn clothes and distinctly utilitarian boots. Between two such individualities there could be nothing in common. Probably each was instinctively aware of a born foe in the other.

Hardy did not sit down.

“If you will excuse me,” he said, making for the door, “I’ll walk into the town. I have some letters to post.”

“The post does not go till six,” put in Diana promptly. “Wait till tea is served, and I’ll come with you. I find that walking does me a heap of good.”

Hardy returned and took a chair near Lady Dallinger. He did not know whether to be glad or sorry that he had met Diana Fenton. Ever in his ears were ringing Farmer Benson’s caustic summary of the position of affairs among the great folk of Dalesford as it presented itself to the public ken: “Sir Dudley was the prize bird. Now it’ll be Mr. Flecke. Sike is life, Mr. Hardy. One up, one down.”

And how had Seacroft’s death affected the issue? Hardly at all. Amurath to Amurath succeeded, but Diana Fenton remained the predestined bride of the owner of the Seacroft estate.

VIII

Flecke took his cue from Diana forthwith. Though puzzled to find a man whom he had never seen nor heard of before that morning installed in the Grange on such friendly terms, he promptly endeavoured to make himself agreeable.

"How fortunate for Miss Fenton," he said, addressing Hardy directly, "that you chose an outlandish place like Black Ings to conduct your experiments in ironwork. My ideas are distinctly vague as to what really happened last night, but I gathered from Lord Henry's account that things might have been very awkward if you had not happened to be on the spot."

"Miss Fenton has probably magnified my services out of all proportion to their true extent," said Hardy gravely. "I am sure she has not told anybody that my first action was to order her off."

Mr. Flecke raised his eyebrows. Evidently he did not understand.

"He treated me, for a minute or two, as a young sporting squire," put in Diana, "and did not know, of course, that I was in such real need of help. Moreover, the poor man, he was just on the point of making a fibrous fracture in a case-hardened steel rod, and resented being bothered by anyone."

"Making a what?" demanded Flecke.

Diana smiled because of her new-found erudition.

"Converting crystals into fibers—changing elm into oak—only in iron. Is that correct, Mr. Hardy?"

"I could not have supplied so apt a simile," said Hardy.

Flecke gave it up, but his curiosity was piqued.

"Do you live there quite alone?" he inquired.

"Yes. You see my needs are few."

"But I have added largely to his establishment," rattled on Diana. "Poor Pat is a boarder for some days, and Bolland has gone to take care of him. Then—to look after Bolland—"

"Diana," interrupted her aunt sharply. "Mr. Flecke has come in for a cup of tea. If the truth were known I have little doubt he has not had any luncheon. Ring for Parker, and tell her to bring tea immediately."

"Is Pat badly hurt?" asked Flecke.

"Mr. Hardy tells me that Bolland hopes to walk him here the day after tomorrow," said Diana, rising to reach the bell, and tossing the words over her shoulder.

"By the way, Miss Fenton, don't let me go away without returning your hunting crop," said Hardy. "I found it lying behind the settle, and shoved it into my bag."

"Ah!" cried the girl, "I was afraid it was lost. I thought I must have dropped it on the moor—with a glove."

"I found the glove also."

"Did you? Where?"

"Half way up the hill."

"Which hill? Do you mean on the moor itself?"

"Yes."

"Have you been there this morning, then?"

"Having nothing better to do I strolled up that way after Bolland and I had breakfasted."

"Did you bring my glove with you too?"

"Yes. I put it and the hunting crop in the bottom of my bag, and forgot to hand them over at once. You see, I came away rather in a hurry. I didn't expect to see Lord Henry until later in the day."

Diana, who had already crossed the room in obedience to her aunt's request, stood still rather suddenly when she heard that Hardy had been on Howlsike Moor that morning. Obviously it was on the tip of her tongue to ask some question prompted by the knowledge, but she restrained the impulse. At that moment, too, a parlor maid entered, and Lady Dallinger gave instructions about the tea.

"You searched for me yesterday, didn't you, Arthur?" said Diana, facing Flecke with that downright air of hers.

For a fraction of a second it seemed as though he hesitated before answering. But his motive, if he did really hesitate, became apparent forthwith.

"Yes," he said gloomily. "I only wish I had found you. Then Dudley might never have been killed."

"But, why?" and the girl's eyes opened widely.

"Because, don't you see, everything might have been changed. I mean, if I had come across you it must have been a good deal earlier than half past four, which was the time Pat fell with you, Lord Henry said. In that event, Dudley, who, from what I can gather, must have taken my hunter's tracks for yours, would have overtaken both of us."

"Oh, yes, from that point of view I agree. By the way, in crossing the moor did you see anything of Bates—Rabbit Jack?"

"I don't even know the gentleman, but I certainly saw no one."

"He told Mr. Hardy and me that he had watched me bringing poor Dudley's body down the hill."

"But who on earth is he?"

"A poacher. He lives in Nuttonby. Don't you remember? Dudley caught him poaching one night shortly before Christmas, and was very angry because he had killed the white pheasant."

"Ah, I did hear something about it. But I was in London at the time."

"Heard something about what?" inquired Lord Henry, who came in at the moment.

Diana told him, and added the news that Mr. Hardy had rescued her hunting crop and glove.

"He found the glove on the moor," added the girl.

"Had you been there—I turned up pretty—What time did you go?" said his lordship.

"About nine o'clock," said Hardy.

"Did that detective chap go with you?"

"N-no—not then."

"But he did go?"

"Yes, a little later."

"Did you—it wasn't very far—did he visit the scene of the accident?"

"Yes."

Hardy saw no help for it but to state the plain facts. He would gladly have avoided this cross examination if possible, but, now that a chance turn in the talk had brought about the disclosure, he decided instantly that his best course was to be quite outspoken.

"You never told us a word about that," said Diana reproachfully.

"I'm sorry, but the thing did not occur to my mind until this moment," said Hardy.

Lord Henry held up a hand to stay his irrepressible niece. He was still obsessed by the notion that what was really needed was a long and explicit telegram to the Commissioner of Police at Scotland Yard, so that Superintendent Thompson might be given expert assistance. He took up the parable hurriedly.

"I wish I had known—he couldn't make out any—I suppose he hadn't much to say?" he asked.

"No. He seemed to form no very definite opinion at the time."

Hardy was now on tenterhooks of anxiety. He had seldom been in such an awkward predicament. If matters went much farther he would have to choose between misleading these people, who had treated him so courteously, and breaking his implied promise to Winter. True, the latter had only demanded secrecy with reference to the ring, the hunting crop marked "D.S.," the footprints in the sand pit, and Furneaux's prospective visit to Dalesford; but it would require most wary treading to avoid stumbling over one or other of these obstacles to a plain and unvarnished narrative.

As it chanced, however, Flecke extricated him from immediate difficulties.

"You are all talking in riddles," he said.

"Who is this detective, and where did he spring from?"

"If you had been here at lunch time you would have seen him," said Diana. "He came to bid Mr. Hardy a long and lingering farewell."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

Flecke's deeply recessed eyes dwelt fixedly on Hardy, and his metallic quality of voice was even more marked than usual. He seemed to resent the fact that so many incidents had taken place without any knowledge of them whatsoever being communicated to him. The feeling was, perhaps, pardonable. As his cousin's heir and next of kin it was only natural that he should expect to be kept posted on all matters appertaining to the inquiry into Seacroft's death.

"I met him this morning for the first time," explained Hardy. "He was in Dalesford by the merest accident, having come here on a friendly visit to Superintendent Thompson."

"Oh, is he a tall, stoutly built fellow, with staring blue eyes?"

"Yes; the description might be made a trifle more flattering, because he is a very fine type of man, but it is generally accurate."

"Then he is the man I saw standing at Thompson's gate when the hounds passed yesterday morning?"

"I expect so."

The maid came in with the tea, and Lord Henry glanced at his watch in surprise.

"Tea, at this hour of the day! Three o'clock!" he gasped.

"Arthur asked for it, Harry," said his wife. "You forget that he has been very much worried this morning. He has just reached home from Malton."

"How did you come, Flecke?" said his lordship.

"I rode over."

"Rode! On what? A bicycle?"

"No. On a gee. I was in treaty with a man there for a hunter last week. Seeing that I was so close to the stable this morning I went in, borrowed a saddle, and rode home."

"By the way, what has become of >The Trojan<?" said Diana. "Has anybody seen him?"

"Yes. He returned to the Hall last night. I shot him this morning at six o'clock."

"You shot him!"

"What else could I do? I couldn't keep the brute, and didn't like the notion of selling him. I tell you this, Diana, although poor Dudley's death lifts me from poverty to wealth, I feel rotten about it, absolutely rotten. I wouldn't have had it happen for all the gold in South Africa."

Flecke, who had risen to take a cup of tea from Lady Dallinger, turned and looked out of a window to hide his emotion.

"Quite right, Arthur," said Lord Henry sympathetically. "Just what I said—Mr. Hardy and I were talking—it's a perfectly damnable thing to feel—Oh, well, you know what I mean."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, let us talk about something else," protested Lady Dallinger. "I don't think I have ever cultivated nerves, but anything more calculated to give one hysteria than this constant discussion of death and disaster I really cannot imagine."

"Dearest," said her niece, "what are we to talk about? Even poor Mr. Hardy, who has no concern in our affairs, can neither hammer his

iron nor eat his luncheon in peace because of our local sensation. I'm convinced that he is only enjoying an uninterrupted cup of tea because Superintendent Thompson doesn't know we are an hour ahead of time."

"I think I'll—Have you anything to do, Hardy? Suppose we walk to—Why shouldn't we have a word with Thompson?" said Lord Henry.

He was manifestly ill at ease. As chairman of the bench of magistrates and trustee for the Seacroft estate he felt he ought to be consulted by the local police before they took any important step. In effect he was itching with curiosity. He believed that Hardy knew a great deal more than he was willing to acknowledge in the semipublicity of a drawing room, and was only awaiting an opportunity to pour a full disclosure into the magisterial ear.

"You can join us with pleasure, uncle," said Diana instantly. "Before you came in, Mr. Hardy and I had arranged to walk to the post after tea."

"I'll come with you," announced Flecke. "I suppose there is no reason why I should not hear the latest developments, if any, with regard to tomorrow's inquest. For instance, why has the name of this man—Bates, is it?—cropped up in the matter? Do you know, Mr. Hardy?"

It was impossible to refuse an answer to this direct challenge.

"Yes," said Hardy. "I believe that some suspicion attaches to him because a sum of money is missing, though it was known to be in Sir Dudley's possession when he left home yesterday morning. But the charge, if it is a charge, is vague, and almost unsupported by evidence, so I suggest the wisest course is to say absolutely nothing about it until the police have carried their inquiries to a far more definite stage."

"Is Thompson fool enough to imagine that Bates attacked and robbed my cousin?"

"No, no. I really don't think so. I found a sovereign under a hammer head in my workshop in such a position that the coin could not have rolled there. Now, there is little doubt that Bates went into the forge while I was absent at Nuttonby, summoning assistance. Miss Fenton heard him. She also heard the hammer fall, and the noise thus caused scared Bates out of the place. Please remember, this is all supposition. We are certain only that Bates was prowling about the house, because he made off when Miss Fenton opened the door and challenged him, and I caught him in the road. Moreover, he admitted that it was he who disturbed her."

"Nothing was said as to the theft, I suppose?"

"Not a word. It was impossible. I found the sovereign this morning."

"But it is rather singular, is it not, that a Scotland Yard detective should interest himself in a petty theft?"

"Mr. Winter's interest waned pretty rapidly. He travelled south this afternoon," said Hardy, with a smile.

"Give me three minutes, and I'll be hatted and gloved. Then we'll all go and squeeze information out of Superintendent Thompson," said Diana.

Lord Henry did not approve wholly of this arrangement.

"Won't it—" he began—"people will wonder—eyes all over the place, you know."

"Certainly Dalesford will talk if the four of us march in a row into the police station," agreed Diana coolly. "Mr. Hardy and I will go to the post office while Arthur and you put our big superintendent on the rack. Isn't that an excellent arrangement?"

It has been seen that Hardy was not a slow-witted young man when he really gave his mind to any problem, but he would have been dense, indeed, if he failed to perceive by this time that Miss Diana Fenton had resolutely set her face against anything in the nature of a tête-à-tête conversation with Arthur Flecke. He could not begin to guess her motive, but there was not the slightest doubt of her intent.

He saw, too, that his quasi alliance with the police had put him in a distinctly false position with reference to Lord Henry Dallinger and the other occupants of the Grange. Flecke he did not trouble about—he might never meet the man again—but Miss Fenton and her uncle figured in a different category, and he resolved to take the earliest opportunity of communicating with Superintendent Thompson and asking to be relieved from an embarrassing and altogether ridiculous situation.

Diana took her uncle's arm as they walked to the lodge, thus effectually preventing any pairing off, as she well knew that Lord Henry would be only too glad of a quiet chat with Hardy. Consequently she exerted herself to maintain a ceaseless flow of talk; but no sooner had the party reached the high road than an interruption came in the person of Doctor Petre, speeding along in his car.

He pulled up promptly at sight of Diana, and raised a hand in professional remonstrance.

"Miss Fenton," he said, "I told you to remain quiet all day—not to walk a yard more than was strictly necessary—in fact, to remain in bed unless you found that too irksome. Yet—"

"I'm the worst sort of patient, I admit," she cried. "But I feel quite well. I was stiff this morning, and grumpy too. Now I haven't an ache or a pain left."

"I am not threatening physical penalties," said Petre. "You had a great shock yesterday, and nervous strain of that sort means reaction. Still looking at you now I am bound to confess that you are the poorest sort of invalid any doctor could have on his hands... . Are you staying here, Hardy?"

"Yes. Lord Henry has most kindly offered me hospitality for the night."

A farmer's wagon passing at the moment compelled the four pedestrians to split up and move to the same side of the road as that on which the car had halted. By mere chance, Lord Henry and Petre were a few yards nearer Dalesford than Diana and Hardy. The highway was straight at that point, and, some three hundred yards ahead, Flecke's house, on the left, and the lodge gates of Seacroft Hall on the right, bounded the view.

The loud crunching of the wagon wheels, combined with the driver's shouts to his horses in steering them clear of the car, effectually drowned conversation for a few seconds, and it was at that very juncture that Hardy and the girl saw Rabbit Jack slouch into sight and deliberately turn in at the stable entrance to the Hollies, Flecke's residence. Apparently he had not observed them, and it was quite certain that neither Lord Henry nor Flecke had seen him.

Sometimes, in a crisis, intuition comes to a man's aid when ordered judgement is of no avail. Just why he intervened Hardy could never tell. At any rate, Diana was about to proclaim to all and sundry the singular fact of Bates' presence when Hardy said in an undertone, loud enough only for her ears and Petre's: "Not a word, Miss Fenton, I beg of you. I'll explain later."

The girl's eyes met his in a questioning stare which had almost an element of fright in it, but she remained silent. The doctor, too, was obviously surprised. He, of course, being seated in the car and facing the other way had not the remotest notion of the cause of Hardy's emphatic appeal.

Then the heavy wagon rumbled past, and Petre raised his hat in farewell.

"Good-bye," he said. "Don't blame me if you need a mixture of bromide and quinine in the morning, Miss Fenton. ... Good-bye, Lord Henry.

... See you tomorrow, Hardy. ... You have everybody's sympathy, Mr. Flecke. Shocking affair. But there is some consolation in knowing that your cousin suffered very little, if at all. Death was practically instantaneous. I mean, that is, that Sir Dudley was stunned straight away, and never realized what was happening. ... Good-bye."

The four walked on. Two pairs of eyes examined Flecke's establishment very keenly as they passed, but there was no sign of Bates. Meanwhile, Hardy was asking himself why he had been so anxious to conceal the man's presence. He could only come to the conclusion that he had acted in a spirit of loyalty to his compact with Winter. He was aware that the detective wished matters to remain in their present condition until his colleague arrived and took charge of the inquiry. But some more plausible explanation than a flimsy theory of that sort was due to Miss Fenton, and he proceeded to give it when Lord Henry and Flecke entered the police station.

"Please forgive my interference," he said humbly. "You saw who that man was who went into Mr. Flecke's place?"

"Bates," she said, almost in a whisper.

"Yes. I, too, recognized him. Both of us could not be mistaken, so it was he beyond doubt. Now, I'll tell you a secret. For some reason unknown to me, Mr. Winter, the Scotland Yard detective, desires that certain things which he ascertained, or guessed at, this morning should not be revealed to anyone until they are inquired into fully. I myself do not know what is in his mind, but it is only fair that I should respect his very earnest request and remain silent as to my own small share in the investigation. I think you have appreciated some of my difficulties already?"

"Not I alone," she assured him. "My uncle is sharp—far sharper than people give him credit for. They think he is rather dense because he speaks in that rambling fashion, but they are soon undeceived when it comes to bargaining about stock or carrying through some town improvement. He suspects that you are keeping something up your sleeve. I, of course, knew it at once."

It was delightful to be treated in that confidential way, but Hardy was persuaded that Diana's manner was alike to all men.

"On the whole, I'm glad that my friends find me so transparent," he laughed. "It argues a conscience without guile. As a matter of fact, Miss Fenton, I regret now having entered into any kind of bargain with Mr. Winter, but, having done so, I must keep to it until the obligation is re-

moved. I shall seize the first chance of telling Superintendent Thompson that this amateur detective work is wholly outside my sphere."

"But whatever can they be thinking?" said the girl, quite unconsciously urging Hardy to do that which he had undertaken not to do—namely, betray the trust reposed in him by Winter. "It is as though anybody could have killed Dudley. Such a thing was altogether impossible. And, granted that Bates did steal a few paltry sovereigns, why don't they lock the man up?"

"I don't know. I can only say that Mr. Winter attaches the utmost importance to Bates' presence on the moor yesterday."

"Then why should Bates want to call on Arthur Flecke?"

"That is most disconcerting. I suppose some notion of its bearing on an extraordinary case flitted through my mind when I asked you not to call attention to it."

"But shouldn't Arthur be told? To all intents and purposes he is now the owner of Seacroft."

"Exactly. Isn't that also a matter best left in the hands of the police? You don't object, I hope, to sharing a little mystery with me for a day or two. Even tomorrow's inquest may straighten the tangle beyond recognition. And I want to say one thing now, Miss Fenton. Where you are concerned I shall decline resolutely to be a party to any policy of concealment. I have given my word and shall keep it, but only until I am able to withdraw my pledge. After that, if the police need my help, it will be forthcoming only on the condition that I withhold nothing from you."

They were standing in the main street, opposite the post office, but Hardy completely ignored his surroundings, and spoke with an earnestness that slightly disturbed his hearer. Therefore, availing herself of the most troublesome weapon in woman's armoury, and displaying a fickleness she by no means felt, Diana smiled up into his somewhat solemn face.

"Aren't we making mountains out of mole-hills?" she said. "Run in and post your letters. I see uncle and Arthur Flecke coming up the street. Our wily superintendent foresaw this questioning, and will be absent from home till midnight. That is a favourite trick of his. Oh, we Dalesford folk can be very artful when we like."

"Now, if I were my uncle and wanted to know the facts, I'd jump into my car and run the fifteen miles to our worthy chief-constable's house. That is where Mr. Thompson is at this moment. But I'll not breathe a

syllable of that scheme to uncle. It wouldn't be fair to your friend, Mr. Winter, would it?"

IX

Diana was right. Superintendent Thompson was out. He was not even in the town, because he had taken his trap. Nor could the sergeant in charge of the police station say when his superior officer would return.

Lord Henry, after the first pang of the disappointed gossipmonger—despite his many excellent qualities he dearly loved a little local sensation—remembered that his guest was a stranger in Dalesford. Moreover, scenic attractions afforded a good pretext for a quiet chat.

“We are not dressing for dinner,” he said, “so we have plenty of time for a longer stroll. A very pretty if somewhat muddy path leads along the crest of the hill there, behind the Hall and my place. What do you say if we go back that way before the light fails? ... If it’s too much for you, Diana, Arthur will escort you to the lodge.”

But Diana was not at all tired. Just the reverse. This walking exercise was doing her a world of good. Flecke, however, excused himself. He had a lot of things to attend to, he said.

“Did Ohildwick and you settle the date of the funeral, Arthur?” inquired his lordship before they parted.

“We fixed on Friday at three o’clock.”

“Ghildwick will be here tomorrow, I suppose?”

“Yes. Subject to your direction, he take charge of everything.”

“Oh, I shan’t—purely nominal, this sort of trusteeship—You’re in the saddle now, my boy.”

“Not quite firmly seated yet,” said Flecke. “In any case you can’t hope to be relieved of your duties, Lord Henry. The same trustees will be reappointed.”

“Ah, well, if you want me to act—Good-bye, Arthur. No use in worrying, you know. Responsibilities steady a man, eh, what?”

When Fleeke had left them, Dallinger, obviously gratified by the younger man's attitude, proceeded to give Hardy some scraps of the family history.

"Searcely knows yet whether he's standing on his head or his heels," he said. "Mother, a Seacroft, made a sort of misalliance—was given only the life tenancy of the Hollies and a small annuity. She and her brother, Sir James, died about the same time. Dudley, very decent, continued the arrangement; but Arthur was a bit wild—you can hardly blame him—always at a loose end. Now, it's all changed. Queer thing, the law of entail—there was no limitation—who'd dream of young Dudley dying unmarried? His will, naming Arthur as the heir to the unsettled estate, was quite a *pro forma* affair."

"By the way," inquired Hardy, "who owns Howlsike Moor?"

"I do—in part," said His Lordship.

"Have you ever been told that it contains a peculiarly rich iron-stone?"

"We know it is mineralized, but the deposits cannot be worked."

"Why not?"

"No railway."

"Build one."

"Not I. I might sink every penny I possess in it—take me years to recover, even if successful. I wouldn't mind if it made Diana a rich woman, but the whole caboodle goes to my brother's sons—female succession barred—more law of entail. Let Flecke build a line. He's young enough. He owns that side of the hill which gave him the property."

"Do you mean that Sir Dudley was killed on his own land?"

"Yes."

"Poor Dudley!" sighed Diana. "If I hadn't been so foolish as to get lost he would be alive and well today."

"That is nonsense," said her uncle sharply; he found his niece somewhat hard to understand these days. "I told Arthur and Champion to look for you. Never said a word to Dudley—didn't see him, in fact. He asked one of the whips where Champion had gone. Then he made after you. Must have got pretty near you, too, from all accounts."

"So did Arthur. I noticed where the two tracks joined. It was not a hundred yards from the place where I fell."

"Queer thing none of you saw either of the others," mused Lord Henry aloud. "It's a big moor—but three people well mounted—widely

scattered too—must have covered a large area. ... What time was it when you pulled up and decided you were lost, Diana?”

“It was exactly a quarter past four.”

“And how long after that did Pat stumble?”

“Another quarter of an hour, maybe.”

“So, at half past four you were within a few hundred yards of where Dudley was lying?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“He was there then, or you must have seen him earlier?”

“Yes. I suppose so. I saw ›The Trojan‹ very soon after Pat and I began to limp along the moor road.”

“Dash it all! What fatality! I sent Arthur after you at three fifty. Champion remembers the time to a tick. There was plenty of light at that hour. Dudley must have ridden hard to cut in ahead of you.”

Hardy had listened to this conversation in silence. He recalled Winter’s advice as to the importance of noting the exact time of events which might come under the survey of the law. That gruesome story of the hour struck by a clock, which nearly resulted in the hanging of an innocent man, seemed to have an odd bearing on the talk between uncle and niece.

“Did Superintendent Thompson make many inquiries before he drove out to Black Ings this morning?” he could not help saying.

“Oh, yes. He was told everything we knew,” said Dallinger. “I wouldn’t have Diana disturbed a second time—some fool of a maid went to her before Bolland left—”

“I left word overnight that I wished to see Bolland, uncle dear,” broke in Diana.

“Well, well. You were asleep when Thompson called. But I gave him your story. He saw Champion too. And Flecke. Yes—he told me he saw Flecke.”

By degrees Hardy was able to appreciate fully the extent of the information which Winter possessed. Somehow, as the day wore, the detective’s knowledge seemed to develop ominous and sinister attributes, though it became increasingly difficult to connect the movements on the moor of the three people on horseback with those of Bates.

Suddenly it dawned upon Hardy that if the poacher had seen Diana leading the horse which carried Seacroft’s dead body he might also have seen Flecke. Would that fact, if it were a fact, account for his visit to the

Hollies? Had he something to tell the new owner of the Seacroft estate which he meant to keep hidden from the authorities?

Really, the more this affair was looked into the more complex and extraordinary it appeared. Perhaps that shrewd-eyed detective had deduced some workable theory from an odd jumble of apparently irreconcilable incidents. Yet, if everyone told the truth, the solution should be straightforward enough.

"A penny for your thoughts, Mr. Hardy," said Diana unexpectedly.

"I would give much more than a penny if I could marshal them lucidly," he fenced.

"I'll be confoundedly angry if Thompson has allowed Rabbit Jack to slip through his fingers," put in Lord Henry.

"No fear of that, I fancy," said Hardy. "Mr. Winter assured me that Bates was in Dalesford. My own view is that the man thinks he has nothing to fear. Again I would remind you that we must not condemn him unheard; the evidence against him is not only purely circumstantial but very slight."

"I'm not thinking of the theft at all. It seems to me—I really believe—can Thompson have something up his sleeve? About Seacroft, I mean. Will he try to make out—Dash it all, Diana, you saw everything. It was a pure accident, wasn't it?"

The girl took this unforeseen attack calmly.

"Uncle, dear, how could it have been anything else?" she said. "The behaviour of ›The Trojan‹ after I had caught him proves it beyond doubt. The poor beast knew he had done wrong, and was afraid he would be punished. Now, I am persuaded that Aunt Edith gave us the best advice. Let us simply stop talking about it. We'll have to cover the whole ground again tomorrow."

Hardy struck in boldly with a dissertation on the qualities of Cleveland ironstone⁴, and the mystery of Howlsike Moor was barred effectually during the remainder of the walk. It was nearly dark when they reached the Grange. Lady Dallinger and Diana retired soon after dinner, and the men were left to smoke in a spacious hall, whose old oak paneling was loaded with trophies of the chase garnered from many lands.

Contrary to Hardy's expectation, his host refrained from any attempt to review the day's doings. Indeed, it was evident at once that

4. Das dortige Eisenerz. B.L.

Lord Harry had something else on his mind.

"My wife tells me that you employ a Mrs. Judd, of Nuttonby, as a charwoman," he began, and the unhesitating nature of the question showed that he attached some importance to it.

"Yes," said Hardy, wondering what possible relation could exist between the tragedy of Sir Dudley Seacroft's death and the insignificant personality of an aged widow dwelling in a tiny hamlet like Nuttonby.

"She and her daughter are actually taking care of Black Ings farm at this moment?" went on his lordship.

"You and I met them going there."

"Ah, yes, I didn't recognize either the woman or the girl. The name, too, slipped my memory, but I recalled it at once when my wife—It's an unpleasant thing to say, Hardy, but you're mixed up in this business and you ought to know. There was a sort of a scandal here in Dalesford some three years ago. Mrs. Judd's elder daughter figured in it, and Arthur Flecke's behaviour was commented upon rather freely at the time. The thing died down,—it never came to a real *exposé*—but such incidents are not forgotten during a generation in these small towns.

"Now Flecke's name may crop up in talk at your place, and this Mrs. Judd or her daughter may be rather bitter against him—perhaps unreasonably so. My wife was distressed today when she heard who your housekeeper was—she asked me to give you a sort of—you understand, I am sure. If these women want to chatter you can let their gabble in at one ear and out at the other."

"So far as I am concerned, Mrs. Judd will find me a most unappreciative listener. I am hard at work all day; moreover, when Bolland leads Pat down the hill the Judds will go too."

"Good. I'm only telling you for your own sake. Whatever you do, never take a side in one of these Yorkshire feuds. There was nothing really dishonourable in Flecke's conduct. Naturally, if there had been, you would not have met him in my house. The Judd girl was silly enough to believe that he meant to marry her, and kicked up a shindy when she found out her mistake. Singular thing, isn't it? that so many little local issues should gather round a remote moorland farm like Black Ings, and all in the course of twenty-four hours?"

Hardy laughed.

"I am the calm centre of a whirlwind," he said. "Your man, Bolland, would know all about this disturbance you speak of?"

"Of course."

"Yet his face showed a lack of expression worthy of a Sioux Indian when I mentioned Mrs. Judd this morning."

"Oh, it would. That is the Yorkshire way. We're a terribly clannish folk, and never admit a stranger to our confidence."

Hardy said nothing more, but again his thoughts grew busy. Could Bolland have recognized the horseman who paid that surreptitious visit to the moor, and yet have withheld his knowledge?

It was possible, to say the least. The groom's eyes had been sufficiently keen to discern Hardy himself at almost as great a distance a little more than an hour earlier, and he must have approached much nearer the unknown rider, unless the latter made off almost as soon as Winter discovered his presence.

Flecke had come from Malton on horseback about that time. Was it he who rode over the moor, yet was so anxious to avoid recognition? If so, what motive could have inspired him? It was quite a natural thing that he should wish to examine the scene of the accident, but, in that event, surely he would have come straight down the hill and exchanged notes with Superintendent Thompson.

Lord Henry was aware of his guest's preoccupation, which he attributed to physical weariness.

"What do you say if we go early to bed and have a long night's rest!" he said, when they had talked for a while of general matters. "I half expected that Flecke might come in for a chat and a smoke, but he's about played out, too, I fancy."

Hardy almost committed the solecism of saying that he was by no means tired, as he had slept some hours beyond his usual limit the previous night. Luckily he reflected in time that the household at the Grange had probably been greatly disturbed by the news of the tragedy, while Lord Henry had evidently been early astir that morning. So he agreed that bed was the thing, nor was he by any means sorry when he found himself in the quietude of his room.

The two windows overlooked Seacroft Hall. Though the night was dark it was also clear, and when the light was extinguished and his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, he could discern the turrets and chimneys of the Hall etched in a black mass against a starlit sky.

Somewhere in that stately building lay the body of its late owner, and Hardy could not help reflecting on the amazing circumstances which linked his own life with that of the dead man. It seemed almost as though some intangible but active force had transferred itself from

the limp form he had lifted from off the saddle to his own vigorous personality. He saw now that he would have acted quite differently had he not been shocked out of his normal habit of thought by learning Diana Fenton's sex in such a dramatic way.

For instance, instead of sending for Doctor Petre he would have sought directions from the girl herself, and she would unquestionably have dispatched the messenger to Seacroft Hall and the Grange.

In that event Lord Henry must have hurried out in his own car, and it was extremely unlikely that he, Hardy, would now be sleeping under the same roof as Miss Fenton, while he would neither have been made the recipient of her candid confidences of that afternoon nor have met Arthur Flecke, with the truly astounding sequel that he became aware of Bates's visit to the latter's house.

He was wholly at a loss too to account for Miss Fenton's deliberate avoidance of Flecke. Were not the notion absurd and fantastic beyond all bounds he could have persuaded himself that the girl was indulging in a mild flirtation with him merely in order to keep Flecke at arm's length.

Certain vague glimpses of alluring possibilities in that direction were banished with a surprising fierceness. He vowed vehemently that ere the morrow's sun sank behind the hills he would cut himself adrift from the threatened entanglement. His first step must be a decisive one.

This little detective, now in all likelihood hurrying north by a night train, must be told emphatically that Black Ings farm was not the place whence he could conduct an inquiry. The idea was stupid on the face of it.

Here in Dalesford lay the answer to the enigma, if enigma there were, and here it must be sought. Black Ings—two miles from Nuttonby and eight miles from Dalesford! Hardy's last conscious thought was a grimly humorous one. Even that shrewd and solid fellow, Winter, had allowed his wits to go woolgathering when he even suggested such a thing.

In view of the heroic resolutions formed overnight, it was singular, to say the least, that Walter Hardy, stoic and zealot, should rise early, hasten through his dressing and hurry out into the grounds in the hope that he might meet the young lady whom he regarded as a disturbing influence. He strolled about for an hour or more, admiring well-kept lawns and shrubberies, but with ever an eye for a dainty figure that might emerge from door or French window. But his vigil was unreward-

ded. A breakfast bell rang, and he entered the morning room where a table was laid.

Soon Lord Henry appeared, cheerful, fussy, bright-eyed. He, at least, had slept soundly.

"Good mornin'!" he cried. "That chap Petre—he knows just what—you heard him warn Diana, my niece, you know—she ought to have kept quiet—she's seedy—feeling the after effects—dashed nuisance if the inquest must be adjourned on her account."

Hardy was deeply concerned at this news, but Lady Dallinger, entering at the moment, brought a reassuring message.

"Diana has a bit of a head," she announced, "but I gave her some bromide, and now she is asleep. She will be all right by luncheon time."

Thereupon Hardy explained that he could turn the morning hours to good account by a visit to the railway station and arranging for the transport to Black Ings of some materials he had ordered. In truth he meant to efface himself; his best plan would be to send a youth for his bag while the inquest was in progress and hire a conveyance to take him up the valley at its close.

About ten o'clock he passed the Hollies, and met a string of horses returning there from exercise. He guessed, which proved to be the case, that Flecke eked out a moderate income by buying and selling hunters, and probably racing a little during the jumping season.

"So you' were told to hail me as Frog, were you?" he demanded wrathfully.

"Yes, if you are Mr. Furneaux, that is," said Hardy.

"I am. I suspected that the elephantine humourist whom I met at King's Cross last night had some joke up his sleeve. He twits me with being half a Frenchman. *Sacré nom d'un pipe*, he cannot get it into that fat head of his that the French blood in my veins is the elixir of an intelligent life. Frog, indeed! What the clear-thinking Frenchman is wearying of today slow-witted John Bull will laboriously copy tomorrow."

"I didn't mean to be rude. It was understood that we should each ape a cordiality we couldn't possibly feel."

"And what else? He described me, of course, in flattering terms?"

"Most flattering. He said you were the best detective ever discovered by Scotland Yard."

"Ah, bah! I mean his references to my funny face, donkey's ears, and general aspect of a low comedian."

"Perhaps, as you recognized me so promptly, you will favour me with my own portrait as skilfully limned by an expert."

"Oh, he treated you kindly. But wait till I see him. I'll give him 'Frog.' Which way are you heading? No way in particular? Well, let's take a walk back to the Grange. You can pour forth your soul as we go. Tell me everything, particularly your maddest thoughts. They are often the sanest."

Hardy made no move, but stood squarely in front of the diminutive man who was peering up into his face with those piercing black eyes which Winter had spoken of.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I cannot take you to the Grange."

"Why not?"

"I am practically a stranger there. I cannot even claim the ordinary privileges of a guest. Lord Henry Dallinger only invited me to stay the night as a matter of convenience."

"Fudge. What's your real reason?"

Hardy was slightly nonplussed by this instant demolition of what he considered a fair pretence.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said. "These people are gentlefolk. They have received me with a courteous hospitality which I cannot repay by deception. If there is any ground whatsoever for your presence in Dalesford they are bound to learn, sooner or later, that you are a detective, and what will they think of me then?"

"Are you greatly concerned about what they think of you?"

"Of course I am."

"I wonder why? *Cré nom!* You only met the girl two nights ago!"

"If you are alluding to Miss Diana Fenton—" began Hardy stifly, but Fumeaux cackled shrilly: "Whom else should I allude to? Surely not a fussy old county magistrate and his gracious consort. You forget the wide range of Winter's descriptive powers, my friend. He has seen the fair Diana—seen her under the best possible conditions, well mounted, well groomed, booted and spurred. I haven't the least doubt she's the sweetest creature you've ever set eyes on. ... It certainly would be the funniest thing—" and Furneaux broke off to wriggle with mirth because of some conceit which tickled him.

"You see, at any rate, that I cannot introduce you to Lord Henry Dallinger and his wife and niece as a lifelong friend of mine," said Hardy, quietly determined.

"I see that you're stiff-necked as a mule—a quality that will unquestionably cause you much trouble in life," chirped Furneaux. "But there's something in your contention. My cursed profession atrophies all the finer feelings. Very well. Let's cut it out. I'll contrive things differently. If you won't walk that way kindly walk this way. And let us waste no more time. Discourse, Walter, discourse! Have you met Flecke? ... Ah, here comes the portly Thompson. Present me. You have no scruples about humbugging him, I suppose?"

"None whatsoever."

"So I should imagine," was the dry retort. "But it will please you to know that our worthy superintendent will be startled when you tell him I am Furneaux. He and you are the only two in this part of the country who will ever suspect that Scotland Yard avails itself of my valuable services, and, unless I am wronging my respected chief, Thompson expects to meet a very different person to my humble self."

"By the way, am I to use your real name?"

"Confound it, do you think I want to be addressed as Mr. Frog?"

Thompson was not startled—being incapable of any such mental disturbance—but he was distinctly surprised when Hardy described his companion as "Mr. Furneaux of Scotland Yard."

"That's queer," he blurted out.

"What's queer?" snapped Furneaux.

"I—er—thought—you—er—"

"Would be several sizes larger. Well, I'm not. Have you ascertained anything about that ring?"

Thompson was still dubious, but the question was so curiously pertinent that he was obliged to answer.

"Yes," he said "It belongs to Mr. Arthur Flecke."

"Good!" said Furneaux. "Winter and I decided in King's Cross Station last night that it ought to be his. You'll put it to him gently at the inquest, of course?"

"Yes."

"Well, so long! We mustn't indulge in a serious confab here. Walter and I are going for a stroll. We're inseparable, now that we've met. You'll see us again at the inquest. By that time I'll have this affair at my fingers' ends."

Linking his arm in Hardy's, Furneaux drew the latter away, and the burly superintendent gazed after them in a sort of dismayed stupor.

“Well,” he murmured to himself, “I suppose Winter knows what he’s doing, but if you’re the kind of detective to handle a difficult case like this, I’ll eat my hat!”

It was a rash undertaking. Before many days the chief of the Dalesford constabulary might be glad he would not be called on to fulfill it.

X

Hardy won the detective's approval by his clear and concise record of events since the fateful moment when Diana Fenton knocked on the shuttered window of the forge. Not once did the little man break the thread of the story until the narrator made an end by describing the glimpse of Bates entering the stableyard of the Hollies, which Miss Fenton and he had obtained the previous afternoon while they and the others were talking to Doctor Petre on the road near the Grange.

But Furneaux was only hiding his time. His first question took a bewildering turn.

"I gather that Sir Dudley Seacroft was a tall, well-set-up man!" he said.

"Yes."

"Tall as you?"

"Yes."

"And somewhat stouter, perhaps!"

"Yes."

"He would weigh thirteen stone, or thereabouts?"

"Quite that."

"When you carried Miss Fenton into the house you went outside again, and found the dead body stretched across the saddle. Describe its position exactly."

"It was lying face downward. Each stirrup leather had been unbuckled and readjusted as a strap."

"Was it possible, friend Walter?—I must continue the use of your Christian name, you know, to prevent any awkward slip of the tongue—"

"But what am I to call you?" put in Hardy slyly.

Furneaux favoured him with a swift upward glance.

"Let it go at 'Frog,'" he snapped. "I'll count every occasion, and score as many against my beloved chief."

"Well—you were asking—"

"Was it possible for a slightly built girl, badly bruised and shaken, to lift unaided such a heavy man onto a big hunter?"

The innuendo was more than Hardy could endure. Bristling with annoyance he tapped the detective sharply on the shoulder and glared at him.

"I am not competent to criticize your methods, Mr. Furneaux," he said sternly, "but I shall resent by every means in my power any imputation against Miss Fenton."

In this instance Furneaux did not even face that fierce stare, being quite sure that the angry inventor was no fool, and might be warned by the impish sparkle in his eyes.

"My dear Walter," he smirked, "do be reasonable! I must thresh out every practicable clew, no matter how it may seem to conflict with preconceived notions. Surely it is not unfair to ask your opinion on such a commonsense point?"

"Miss Fenton may be 'slightly built,' as you put it, but she is remarkably well proportioned, and leads an active life in the open air. Moreover, as she herself said, she had the strength of desperation. But this discussion is absolutely futile. When you meet Miss Fenton—"

He stopped confusedly. He had just remembered that he had already prepared Diana for Furneaux's visit—had even told her the detective's nickname.

"Yes, as you are saying, when I meet Miss Fenton—" prompted Furneaux, moistening his thin lips with his tongue as though enjoying himself immensely.

"If ever you do meet her," went on Hardy savagely, "you will realize how absurd is your insinuation that she may have told a lie."

"Oh, of course, if you're in love with the girl—"

"Another word and I shall forget myself," raged Hardy, now in a boiling temper.

Whereupon Furneaux cackled delightedly.

"You're too easy, Walter," he wheezed. "You really must learn to keep your feelings under better control. *Cré nom*, your temperature rises like one of those forced-draft furnaces you understand so well. I see now

that I've simply got to meet Miss Fenton, and before that inquest opens. There's no help for it. Let's head for the Grange without delay. I suppose Lord Henry is another George Washington, like your noble self, so, if I put him on his honor he won't go blabbing to everybody in Dalesford that Scotland Yard is on the job."

Despite his irritation, Hardy took thought. He wished heartily he had never been drawn into this whirlpool, but it did seem that the detective's suggestion offered the only practicable means of escape, or, as he regarded the affair, landed him on the less difficult horn of the dilemma.

"I think," he said slowly, "it is only fair to the people at the Grange that they should know the facts. I must explain matters to Miss Fenton as best I can."

"Meaning?"

"Unfortunately, I have mentioned to her already the likelihood that an eccentric friend of mine, known to his intimates as 'Frog,' might arrive in Dalesford today."

"You have prepared her thoroughly, in fact," snapped Furneaux. "But let that pass. Winter shall smart for this contumely. ... Now, mind you, Walter, much as you may want to frisk at the Grange, you must insist that your work demands your return to Black Ings tonight."

"I had determined on that course long before I met you."

Furneaux instantly dug him in the ribs.

"Don't be so d——d serious!" he cried. "'Was ever woman in such humour wooed? Was ever woman in such humor won?' No, Walter. I like you. If the chance comes I'll help you, but I'd have you reflect that Pygmalion would never have brought his statue to life if he hadn't put his arms round Galatea and squeezed her. Now, by your own reckoning, you've hugged the lady twice, so she should be waking up by this time. She didn't want Dudley, and she can't abide Arthur, so why shouldn't Walter have a look in?"

"'Pon my soul, if you talk like that I'll begin to think you're cracked," vowed Hardy. "You've never even seen the girl?"

"No, but I've heard of her, and she has heard of me. We'll get along famously together, mark my words. ... Ah, here comes an ancient! We'll extract valuable information from him, see if we don't, though the authority of Ecclesiasticus is against me. Don't you recall the verse: 'How can he get wisdom that holdeth the plow and that glorieth in the goad,

that driveth oxen and is occupied in their labours, and whose talk is of bullocks?' ... Hi, you, what's your name?"

An elderly farm labourer, plodding along the highway, halted and touched his cap.

"George Wright, sir," he said.

"And a very good name too. Now, George Wright, a girl named Judd was in service in Dalesford some three years ago. What do you know about her?"

"Why, that's hard te sa-ay," came the cautious Yorkshire reply.

"I'm sure it is. I'll wet your whistle with half a crown⁵ if it gets dry after you've played it a bit."

The old man's eyes gleamed cunningly.

"Mary Judd ye'll be talkin' of, I reckon?" he said. "Her as was in the bar at the ›White Horse‹? She took poison, 'cos of a love affair."

"That's the ticket. Go on, George. You've earned a bob⁶ already. Whom was she in love with?"

But the villager fought shy of this leading question from an utter stranger.

"Why," he said, "soom tellt yan teal an' soom anuther. But they gev' her hot water wi' salt an' mustard, an' she kem round."

"Sorry, George," said Furneaux, "but that isn't worth the extra eighteen pence⁷. Think a bit harder. The story won't go beyond this gentleman and myself"

"Is that reet, sir?"

"Absolutely."

"Why, then, they did sa-ay as Mr. Flecke led her on a bit, and shied ofi later like. Anyways, she's married now."

"Is she, though? She recovered from both the poison and the passion?"

"Ay. She an' her husband keep a pub somewhere near York, an' I've heerd tell as Mr. Flecke set 'em up in it. But, mind you, queer tales get about."

5. Eine halbe „Crown“ entspricht 2½ Shillings oder 30 Pence. B.L.

6. Ein Shilling. B.L.

7. D.i. die Differenz zwischen dem Shilling, den er sich schon verdient hat, und der halben Crown, die ihm versprochen worden ist. B.L.

"Did she marry a local man?"

"Oah, yis, sir. Jim Spence wa ostler at the ›White Horse.‹"

"So Mr. Flecke really behaved rather well?"

"Why, sir, that's for t' lass te sa-ay."

"Excellently put, George. There's your half crown."

The oddly assorted pair sauntered back through the High Street, and found that Dalesford was already bestirring itself for the event of the day. Three small groups, gathered in front of the ›White Horse,‹ were evidently jurymen summoned for the inquest—local shopkeepers, whose attire bespoke the solemnity of the occasion. Their manner was at once reserved and dignified, since it had never before fallen to the lot of anffify one among them to adjudicate in so important a matter as the death of a baronet.

"How astonished these yokels would be if they knew what you and I know!" murmured Furneaux, grinning into Hardy's face as they passed.

"Not more astonished at certain phases of the tragedy than I am myself," said Hardy.

"For instance?"

"The sheer inconsequence of it all. If Sir Dudley Seacroft was knocked off his horse by a stone or a bludgeon, how comes it that the scoundrel who harboured such a murderous purpose should be on Howlsike Moor on the particular day and at the particular hour when he could fulfill it? You have not seen the place. It is miles from everywhere. The track on which the body was found leads nowhere. The long arm of coincidence has seldom if ever been stretched farther than when it brought together victim and slayer under such conditions and in such a locality."

"Walter, you're a precise thinker," chuckled Furneaux. "Our old friend, coincidence, isn't to blame this time. In nine cases out of ten it is opportunity that creates the thief. Shakespeare came nearer the mark than you: 'How oft the means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done!' Rabbit Jack—"

"Please don't cavil at coincidence," broke in Hardy. "Here comes Bates. I wonder if he will recognize me?"

Bates had just entered High Street from a side lane, and his furtive eyes promptly discovered the tenant of Black Ings. He stopped abruptly, as though minded to disappear, but, after a moment of indecision, fumbled in his pockets for pipe and tobacco, and came on again,

affecting to be busied with filling the pipe. Nay more, greatly daring, he touched his cap to Hardy and halted.

"They've brought me 'ere for the inquest," he said, feigning a cringing humility which was considerably overdone. "I 'ope as 'ow you 'aven't said anythink ag'in me, Mr. Hardy. I've done nothink wrong, s'elp me!"

"I've told the truth, and I recommend you to do the same," said Hardy.

"But, look 'ere, guv'nor, wot 'ave I got to tell?" and the man's shifty glance wandered from Hardy to the diminutive form of Furneaux.

"You said you had seen Miss Fenton bringing Sir Dudley Seacroft's body to my house, and I, of course, informed the police. But the matter does not concern me. If Superintendent Thompson desires your presence he has some good reason, I have no doubt."

"What is your friend's name, Walter?" put in Furneaux suddenly.

Hardy was forced to smile at the absurdity of the question.

"My friend, as you term him, is John Bates, otherwise known as Rabbit Jack," he said.

"Dear me! The very man I'm looking for."

Bates was startled, and his face showed it.

"Wot d'ye mean?" he said thickly. "Lookin' for. Wot d'ye want wi' me?"

"I'm an artist," explained Furneaux suavely. "You're a perfect type. Give me a few sittings, and you'll be hung—in the Academy. Do let me persuade you to visit Mr. Hardy tomorrow morning. You live near him, I suppose?"

"Wot are ye gettin' at?" demanded Bates. Having recovered from the initial shock he found Furneaux's figures of speech little to his liking.

"I want to get you—on canvas," said Furneaux. "I'll pay a shilling an hour, and eke supply beer. It won't be a long or tiring job, I promise you. I'll sketch you as you are, just an impression in charcoal."

"Not me," was the ungracious answer.

"Ah, but do come. Well, then, two bob an hour and beer certain."

"I'll not be i' Nuttonby tomorrow."

"Nuttonby? Is that where you live? Is it far from here, Walter?" and Furneaux turned eagerly to his companion.

"Six miles. Black Ings lies two miles beyond."

Hardy could only play up to the detective's lead to the best of his ability. He admired the ingenuity which so quickly suggested an admirable role, but was almost surprised at his own readiness to take part in the comedy.

"If not tomorrow, Saturday then?" appealed Furneaux, screwing his eyes as if to survey Bates in a half light. "Come, now, lounging against a wall with a foaming tankard in one hand and a pipe in the other and pulling in two bob an hour for doing it, will surely be more profitable than catching rabbits. By the way, does one catch rabbits in April?"

"I'll come along if I'm 'ome Thursday," agreed Bates. "It all depends on wot your pal 'ere sez. The cops will put me away if they can, and I've done nothink."

Furneaux pointed a playful finger at him.

"Believe me, Bunny," he cried, "conscience doth make cowards of us all. But cheer up! Your luck is in today, or you wouldn't have met me. If any foolish policeman lays a restraining hand on you bid him avaunt. You are destined for higher things."

Bates shuffled off, convinced that Hardy's companion was mad. Oddly enough, he was quite content. It might be useful within the next day or two to be able to plead an engagement as an artist's model.

Furneaux duly noted Seacroft Hall and the Hollies. He peered in through the windows of the latter establishment, and even poked his nose into the stable yard. A red-headed man in breeches and gaiters noticed the stranger's inquisitiveness, and asked if he wanted anybody

"Yes," said Furneaux promptly, "I want to see Mr. Flecke."

"He ain't in. Will you leave a message?"

"I'm an artist, and wish to secure permission to sketch this house."

"There'll be no difficulty about that," said the man. "But Mr. Flecke can't be worried about such things now. You'll be new to these parts, I reckon?"

"Yes. I'm staying with Mr. Hardy, but will return to Dalesford early next week. My name is Furneaux. You might tell Mr. Flecke that I find his residence most picturesque, and mean to immortalize it."

"He won't be here very long now. What name did you say, mister?"

The detective spelled the name. Obviously, he meant to create an atmosphere. If he continued advertising himself at this rate half Dalesford would be acquainted with his new-found profession before nightfall.

At the Grange luck befriended him. Diana was on the lawn and came to meet Hardy. She was pale, but had lost all traces of the previous day's stiffness.

"Good morning!" she said, smiling pleasantly as she extended a hand in welcome. "Too bad of me to feel ill at breakfast time, wasn't it! Is this the friend you expected?"

Hardy determined to have done with subterfuge then and there.

"Yes. Allow me to present Mr. Furneaux, of Scotland Yard," he said.

"Of Scotland Yard!" she repeated, and her eyes rounded.

Furneaux bowed gravely.

"Mr. Hardy is accustomed to the use of sledge hammers," he said. "I have been trying to teach him gentler methods. It is a deplorable lack of tact, to say the least, to hit a lady metaphorically on the head with such an ill-omened description of a newcomer. I am acquainted with the public executioner, a most urbane person, but I would never dream of introducing him to a friend as 'Mr. Jack Ketch, the hangman.'"

Diana laughed.

"In this instance I don't know whether the hammer or the anvil is more to blame," she cried. "I was taken by surprise, I admit, but only because of the extraordinary interest which London is displaying in Dalesford these days. Besides, Mr. Hardy had spoken of you earlier."

"Described me as his dear friend, 'Frog,' I understand?"

"Yes," and Diana tittered again, for Furneaux was the last man she would have pictured as a representative of the far-famed Criminal Investigation Department.

"Ah!" sighed Furneaux; "I am fated to be the butt of heavy humour. Mr. Winter, my respected chief, fashions his jokes with a truncheon. In justice to Mr. Hardy, however, I should explain that he has rebelled against any deception being practiced where you are concerned, Miss Fenton. For my own part, I was anxious to meet you, and Lord and Lady Dallinger, if possible; but Mr. Hardy refused point-blank to bring me here under false colours. So, if part of the man is iron, there is gold in him too. And ivory as well. Did you ever see finer teeth in anybody?"

Now Hardy was blessed with teeth of remarkable whiteness and evenness, and this showing off of his good points, as it were, caused him to laugh and redden in confusion. As for Diana, she took to Furneaux at once. Subsequently, with the privileged exaggeration of her sex, she described him as "the dearest little man who ever lived."

"My uncle will be only too pleased to see you, Mr. Furneaux," she said. "Indeed, he wanted yesterday to telegraph to the Commissioner of Police in London, whom he knows well, requesting permission to detain Mr. Winter. But, will you satisfy a woman's curiosity? What is there in Sir Dudley Seacroft's death—you are here about that, I suppose?—what is there in it to bring detectives all the way from London to Dalesford?"

"Nothing, possibly. And that is why it is essential that the smallest number of local residents should associate me with the inquiry. You see, Walter, my boy, a woman's intuition has solved straight off a problem which eluded your highly trained logical faculties. Miss Fenton jumps at once to the eminently reasonable conclusion that the less said about Scotland Yard the better. Now you understand why I pose as an artist. It is a safe role nowadays. One need neither paint nor draw to be hailed as a master."

One thing Hardy was beginning to understand clearly—Furneaux could bamboozle most people at will. Already he had neatly headed off Diana from her quest for information, and, in all likelihood, would be equally successful with Lord Henry and his wife. Indeed, before five minutes were sped the little detective had secured the solemn promise of the Dallingers and their niece that his incognito would be observed most strictly.

One point, and one only, troubled his lordship, otherwise delighted at finding the inquiry intrusted to thoroughly capable hands. He raised it when the servants had quitted the dining room after luncheon was served.

"Don't you think"—he said—"Now, there's Flecke—Flecke is the next of kin, and—shouldn't he be told?"

"No, My Lord," Furneaux answered solemnly. "Mr. Flecke is the last man who must hear of my presence. Suppose we find that Sir Dudley's death was actually due to accident—a cause which we are bound to assume in the almost complete absence of any proof to the contrary—what a tribulation it would be to the relatives if they knew that the police had ever harboured the slightest suspicion of foul play! The merest hint of such a thing would add a new grief to a burden already heavy enough.

"Later, however, when we either close the investigation or carry it to the stage where definite action becomes necessary, this argument would not hold good. Then, but not till then, Mr. Flecke can be enlightened fully. In the one case, explanation may never be needed. In the other, it cannot be withheld.

"At present, I assure you, my hand will be tied if my identity becomes known outside this circle. I am free to admit that I would not have revealed myself even to you were it not for Mr. Hardy's uncompromising attitude. As I have already told Miss Fenton, Mr. Hardy declined to be a party to any concealment where the members of your family were concerned. I yielded, because I may need your help. But, once I leave your house, I am a Futurist, a Neo-Impressionist, even a Cubist—anything but a detective."

Obviously Lord Henry liked the way Furneaux talked, and a happy thought which struck him at the moment was instantly translated into unusually straightforward words.

"You'll be making Dalesford your headquarters," he said. "Why not stay here? Mr. Hardy can let his experiments rest for a few days. By gad! that's a good notion."

"I'm exceedingly sorry to be compelled to decline your lordship's hospitality," said Furneaux, and, indeed, he looked the picture of woe, because he thoroughly appreciated the probable difference between the menus of the Grange and Black Ings farm. "It is essential, for my purposes, that I should take up my quarters in Mr. Hardy's house tonight—"

"But what can you do there?" gasped Dallinger. "It's miles from—no one ever goes—at this time of the year you'll hardly see—Mr. Hardy, can't you persuade him he's making a mistake?"

Hardy found Diana's candid blue eyes dwelling upon him with an air of expectancy. Her lips parted. She was smiling approval of her uncle's project. Never before had he been so tempted. He might even have yielded if Furneaux had not interrupted.

"There is no reason why I should break up a pleasant party," he said. "Mr. Hardy can remain if he likes. All I want is a note of introduction to his housekeeper."

Now, Hardy knew quite well that the cynical little man was finding some impish satisfaction in testing him, and he steeled his resolution against the whisperings of the sirens.

"It is quite impossible that I should forego my work a moment longer than is demanded by the law," he said, and his tone was brusque, almost stiff. "Unless I am detained by the needs of justice I must return to Black Ings with Mr. Furneaux."

Diana's face fell. Lord Henry was too well bred to thrust his invitation down the throat of either man, but he was secretly surprised,

even annoyed. For a few seconds there was an awkward pause in the conversation.

Furneaux, strange compound of satire and generous impulse, took it on himself to set matters right.

“Mr. Hardy admits the prior claim of justice,” he said, “but he should also be just to himself. He is coming with me to his house in the wilds because I urged it on him two hours ago. He is sacrificing his own desires for the sake of a man whom he never saw until this morning. The fact is that his presence at Black Ings will be peculiarly useful to me. But I can say, without any reservation, that if your lordship and Lady Dallinger, and you, Miss Fenton, care to ride or motor over to our den any day, or every day, we shall be only too glad to see you, and keep you fully posted as to developments, if any.”

Then Diana’s glance rested contemplatively on Furneaux. That concluding sentence of his probed her uncle’s nature to its depths. He was an uncanny little man, after all. If she were a criminal, and she knew that Furneaux was on her track, she would be afraid, terribly afraid.

XI

That whiff of misunderstanding was dispelled by the time the party broke up. It was arranged that Hardy should accompany Diana and Lord Henry to the ›White Horse‹ Assembly Rooms, in which, owing to its importance and the widespread interest taken in it by the county, the inquest would be held.

Furneaux elected to take care of himself. He had brought a motorcycle from London, and had ridden from York early that morning. In York, too, he had purchased drawing materials, having scoffed at Winter's suggestion that he should pose as a fisherman. As a matter of fact, he could turn out a very creditable sketch, either from nature or of a genre subject, whereas he loathed what he termed the "brutality" of fishing.

"I shudder at the mere notion of impaling a wriggling worm on a hook," he would say, "not to mention the subsequent tearing of the hook out of some misguided fish's maw, and leaving the wretched creature to asphyxiate itself slowly to death."

The utterance supplied a keynote to his character. Even in the pursuit of a malefactor, he was little interested in the dangers which might attend the hunt, or the ultimate meting out of a punishment to fit the crime, but revelled in the clash of wits, in the analysis of motive, in that which may be described as the psychology of the chase.

At the hour fixed for the opening of the inquiry, two o'clock, the Assembly Rooms—speaking with exactness, the spacious dancing hall which formed their *raison d'être*—were uncomfortably crowded, while every inhabitant of Dalesford who could possibly absent himself or herself from the daily round, if unable to gain admission to the guarded interior had gathered in the High Street.

When Lord Henry and his party arrived the stage was already set for the chief actors. The jury, personally conducted by the coroner's

officer—in this case a police sergeant—had viewed the body, and the coroner, a Malton solicitor, was seated in state on a dais which, on happier occasions, accommodated a small orchestra.

A buzz of expectation arose when Lord Henry escorted his wife and niece to chairs on the platform. Hardy avoided attention by not joining them. The privileged area was apparently reserved for the great ones of the district, with whom, including the coroner, his friends were exchanging greetings. Before they missed him he had slipped into a seat found for him by Superintendent Thompson.

On the opposite side of a large table he saw Flecke, deep in consultation with a sharp-looking, rotund man, whom he guessed rightly to be Mr. Childwick, the legal representative of the Seacroft estate. Several reporters were present, and among them was Furneaux, hard at work with a crayon on a drawing pad!

The coroner, a Mr. William Dacre, coughed loudly, and everyone seemed to recognize this as a call to order, because the hum of talk died away instantly. In a few well-chosen sentences the presiding officer expressed the deep regret of the community at the untimely death of a deservedly popular gentleman like Sir Dudley Seacroft. Then he called the first witness: “Mr. Arthur Flecke.”

The reason for this choice was soon apparent; Flecke would give evidence of identification. As a matter of convenience, his general testimony would be taken at the same time.

He was pale, but quite composed. Indeed, there was a touch of artistry in the slight break in his voice when he declared that the body which the jury had seen was that of his cousin, Sir Dudley Seacroft, baronet, of Seacroft Hall, Dalesford. Then he told, quite naturally, of the incidents of the hunt on that fatal Tuesday.

He detailed his conversation with Lord Henry Dallinger, Master, and Champion, huntsman, of the Harrowdale pack, and the resultant search for Miss Diana Fenton, who was believed to have wandered on to Howlsike Moor. Champion and he agreed to follow diverging lines, Champion taking a long cast to the south, while he, Flecke, would sweep the skyline in the direction of Nuttonby. He had not the remotest knowledge of any intention on his cousin’s part to share in the search.

Once Champion and he were separated by a fold in the moorland he had seen no one until he rode down into Harrowdale again, firm in the opinion that Miss Fenton had simply abandoned the hunt for the day and gone home. The first intimation he received of Sir Dudley’s death was given by Lord Henry Dallinger, who came to his house about nine

o'clock that same evening, after Miss Fenton was brought to the Grange by Doctor Petre.

"If I may be allowed to put on record a personal note," said the witness, "I wish to take this opportunity of thanking Miss Fenton for the bravery and devotion she displayed, though herself suffering from a severe fall, when she found my cousin's body. Mere words are inadequate to express my feelings. I can only say that I am deeply obliged and grateful to her. My thanks are also due to Mr. Hardy, the—er—present tenant of Black Ings farm, who, at great personal inconvenience, assisted Miss Fenton and took charge of Sir Dudley's body."

The coroner listened in silence, and nodded his approval of these very proper sentiments. It was clear that the witness regarded his ordeal as ended. Indeed, he was about to resume his seat when the coroner stayed him with a question.

"You saw no fresh hoof marks on any portion of the moor, I take it?" he said.

"None whatsoever," came the ready response. "Had I found any I would have followed them."

"Do you know the exact spot where the accident happened?"

Flecke's trick of occasional hesitancy in speech was emphasized markedly now, but it vanished so quickly that he was obviously only marshalling his thoughts.

"Yes," he said. "I rode from Malton yesterday morning, and crossed the moor purposely in order to look at the place. Miss Fenton had described it so accurately that I had no difficulty in finding it."

Hardy glanced at Diana, and saw a stare of wonderment in her eyes. Apparently she deemed it odd that Flecke should not have mentioned this fact during his visit to the Grange. Perhaps the witness noticed her surprise, because he added: "The journey across Howlsike Moor yesterday was wholly unpremeditated. It arose from the fact that I chanced to be bringing to my stables a horse recently purchased. Till this morning I have not spoken of it to anyone."

"As the outcome of your inspection of the locality, did you arrive at any conclusions?" went on Mr. Dacre.

"Yes. So far as I could discern the tracks, and going by Miss Fenton's lucid story, I believed that my cousin had discovered the fresh hoof marks of my horse, and was riding hard on my trail, thinking it to be Miss Fenton's, when his hunter stumbled, threw him, and kicked him to death before his feet were clear of the stirrups."

"Quite so. During this examination did you notice anyone in the valley beneath, in the vicinity of Black Ings farm?"

Again the witness hesitated perceptibly.

"Yes," he said, at last. "It is a considerable distance, but I fancy I recognized Superintendent Thompson there. I—er—rode off toward Harrowdale immediately. If I must explain my action I may say candidly that I was in no mood yesterday for a sympathetic discussion of my cousin's death. I wanted to be alone. Largely for that reason I did not return with Lord Henry Dallinger from Malton, though he had very kindly taken me there in his car. That is why, also, I called for the horse I had bought, and chose the moor road. I simply couldn't bear any society. I was overwrought, almost hysterical."

The coroner waited until Flecke recovered his composure, which was shaken by these admissions.

"When you were on the moor on the Tuesday afternoon did you lose anything?" he asked.

"Lose anything?" repeated Flecke, evidently bewildered by the question.

"A ring?" prompted the coroner.

"No. I lost no ring."

"Mr. Thompson, kindly hand the ring to the witness," and the superintendent passed a small object across the table to Flecke. Forthwith, every neck in court was craned in a certain excitement. The inquiry was deviating from preconceived ideas as to its scope. People wondered what the coroner's questions portended. The reporters were writing industriously. Even Mr. Childwick looked flurried, and suddenly began to take notes.

Flecke, now absolutely master of himself, scrutinized the ring in silence.

"This used to be my ring," he said, after a distinct pause. "It is a family heirloom, of a sort, and belonged to my mother. Some time since my cousin took a fancy to it, so I gave it to him. He must have been wearing it, and it burst off his finger during his convulsive efforts to save himself from ›The Trojan's‹ hoofs."

"Assuming, of course, that it was found near the scene of his death?"

"Oh, yes. Isn't that what you meant? Who found it?"

"At any rate, it was not in your possession on Tuesday?"

"No. How could it have been?"

"I merely want to have a doubtful point cleared up," said the coroner mildly. "You see, Mr. Flecke, there are scores of witnesses who have recognized the ring as yours, but probably very few who are aware that you had given it to Sir Dudley Seacroft."

"The incident occurred only a week or ten days ago."

"What gave rise to it?"

Flecke smiled in an embarrassed way, but his reply was eminently straightforward.

"It is no secret to my friends in Dalesford that I am not a rich man," he said. "I wanted a sum of twenty-five pounds, and asked my cousin to lend it. He offered to buy the ring for that amount, though its intrinsic value is far less. I—"

Mr. Childwick rose, severe and massive on a small scale.

"I represent the relatives of the deceased and the trustees of the Seacroft estate," he said. "May I ask what bearing these facts have on the cause of Sir Dudley's death?"

"That is just what the jury and I myself are here to determine," said the coroner. "The ring was picked up near the spot where the body lay. It was identified as belonging to Mr. Flecke. Surely it is in the interests of all parties that he should be given an opportunity to state when and how it left his possession?"

"Yes, but the inquiry is travelling beyond—"

"At any rate, it goes no farther at present," put in the coroner suavely, though there were those sitting near who noticed that when next he spoke some memoranda, jotted down previously, were disregarded. Moreover, he had dodged adroitly two of Flecke's counter queries.

"After parting from Champion," he continued, "can you tell us with certainty where, and at what hour, you saw or exchanged words with any person whom you can name definitely?"

"I reached home about 5.45 p.m. and had some talk with my head lad, Storr. I saw no one on the moor, and have no recollection of passing or overtaking anyone in Harrowdale. Of course I met people on the outskirts of Dalesford, but I really cannot remember their names, even if I recognized them at the time."

After each answer Mr. Dacre recorded the witness's reply with meticulous care. Like many lawyers, he used a quill pen, and its scratching on the surface of a glazed paper suggested to Hardy's ear the persistent boring of some tiny but highly tempered steel implement into a piece of tough iron.

When he had completed the transcript of Flecke's concluding sentence, which incorporated question and answer in a statement couched in the first person, he looked up.

"I'll read, and get you to sign your deposition later, Mr. Flecke," he said. "Is there anything you wish to add?"

The new owner of Seacroft seemed to have taken umbrage at something or other since Mr. Childwick interfered.

"Yes," he said, and Hardy heard again the metallic enunciation he had caught during the conversation in the Grange while tea was being served the day before. "About that ring—it must be restored to me when the police have done with it. Also—if the matter is regarded as important—my bank, which was also my cousin's, can give details about the check for twenty-five pounds which I have mentioned."

"Thank you," said the coroner, in a colourless tone. "Next witness—George Champion."

The huntsman's evidence bore out Flecke's in every particular. It was after six o'clock when he returned to the Grange. He had not seen a soul on the moor, or within three miles of it after parting from Mr. Flecke.

Diana Fenton was then called. Her appearance created a slight stir in court. She blushed furiously when she faced so many eyes, but the wave of colour soon ebbed. Beyond a slight tremulousness of voice, however, she was apparently quite self-possessed. She had scarcely begun to relate her adventures when Mr. Childwick rose again, and, balancing a pair of gold-rimmed *pince-nez* on a nose tilted by nature to support them, said portentously: "Sir, my attention has been directed to an artist making sketches, presumably for use in some periodical. May I ask if you allow that sort of thing?"

Every eye dwelt instantly on Furneaux, who, on his part, gazed in astonishment at Mr. Childwick.

"I don't approve of the practice," said the coroner. "Perhaps, if appealed to, the gentleman in question will desist."

"Certainly, sir," said Furneaux. "I am only making studies, which are not intended for publication. But I shall be glad if you will allow me to remain in court. I am following the evidence with deep interest."

The coroner gazed at him dubiously, being minded, it would seem, to tell him that his comments were not in request, but thought better of it.

"Pray continue, Miss Fenton," he said.

During this interlude Diana smiled at Hardy. She could not help it. There was something altogether ludicrous in the ease with which Furneaux established himself in the public mind as an artist. Thenceforth he might come and go as he chose in the neighbourhood of Dalesford and be accepted without demur in his new profession.

Flecke saw that interchange of smiling comprehension between Diana and Hardy. It annoyed and puzzled him. Not till later did he learn that the artist was Hardy's friend.

Then, naturally, that which was dark became clear!

Diana's story covered no new ground, nor did Hardy's, who followed her, though the coroner gratified a general feeling of curiosity by getting the inventor to state his reasons for occupying such an out-of-the-way habitation as Black Ings.

He was not asked a syllable about his visit to the moor on Thursday morning, and, mindful of his compact with the police, made no reference to it of his own accord. Both Diana and he were complimented by Mr. Dacre. Each had, of course, alluded to Rabbit Jack, so the name of the next witness summoned to the stand caused a ripple of expectation.

"John Bates."

The man shuffled forward from the back part of the court. His manner was at once uneasy and defiant. After favouring Hardy with a furtive underlook, he fixed his small, alert eyes on the coroner, and gazed at him throughout.

In the first place, he objected to taking the oath.

"Wot 'ave *I* done?" he whined. "Wot am I 'ere for, anyhow? "

Mr. Dacre soothed his fears.

"The police think you ought to give evidence," he said. "Why should you object? You have only to tell the truth, or, if you decline to answer my questions, you are within your legal rights. But, whether you speak fully and openly or not, I must insist upon administering the oath."

Thereupon Bates mumbled the set formula after the coroner, and kissed the Bible with a loud smack that evoked an audible giggle among the spectators.

"Did you hear the statements made my Miss Fenton and Mr. Hardy?" began Mr. Dacre.

"Yuss, sir."

"Have you anything to say with reference to them?"

"Nothink, sir."

"Let me assist you. Why did you creep into the forge where Sir Dudley Seacroft's body was lying?"

"To see 'oo it was, sir."

"A harmless proceeding in itself. Why, then, did you run away when challenged by Miss Fenton?"

"I was scared, sir."

"Scared of what?"

"The perlice are dahn on me. I was afraid they'd blime me."

The blend of cockney accent and Yorkshire dialect in Bates' speech did not perplex Mr. Dacre.

"Why should the police blame you for a hunting accident?" he asked.

"'Ow should I know?" snapped the witness. "They're up to any gime wiv' a chap like me."

Superintendent Thompson smiled blandly, and the audience sniggered. The coroner held up a hand in protest.

"The jury must pay special heed to this witness's evidence," he said quietly; thenceforth a pin could be heard to drop, if pins ever do drop on such occasions.

"You have told us you went into the forge to see who the dead man was, but you informed Miss Fenton and Mr. Hardy that you had already seen the lady leading a horse with a body strapped to the saddle?"

Mr. Dacre's voice had unconsciously adopted a warning note, and everyone in court felt that there was something sinister and mysterious behind this examination. Obviously, he was treating Bates as a witness who might incriminate himself.

Bates, too, was aware of an unpleasant difference between the manner the coroner had adopted toward him as compared with the preceding witnesses.

"Yuss, I did see 'em," he said, shifting his weight from one foot to the other and twisting a greasy cap in the fingers.

"Where, exactly, had you seen them?"

"A goodish bit off."

"On the moor, or on the highway?"

"I'll s'y no more abaht it. So, there!"

"You refuse to answer that question?"

"Yuss. The cops—"

“Never mind your grievances against the police. Why did you tell Mr. Hardy that it looked as though Sir Dudley Seacroft had been ‘bust up’ with a stone?”

“I dunno.”

“Was it a figure of speech?”

“A what-a?”

“How did the notion strike you that Sir Dudley might have been hit with a stone?”

“It was just an idee—that’s all.”

“Did you see the accident happen?”

Bates faced his tormentor as at cornered rat might face an active terrier.

“Nah you want to worm aht of me where I was, but you won’t,” he yelped.

“Very well. Don’t get excited. Again you refuse to answer. That is all you need say. Merely: ‘I refuse to answer.’ You’ll admit, I suppose, that Sir Dudley Seacroft caught you poaching, and gave evidence against you, with the result that you were sentenced to three months’ imprisonment?”

“Yuss.”

“When were you set at liberty?”

“Larst Sattad’y week.”

“Now, here is another question you need not answer unless you wish. Take time before you reply. Did you bear any enmity against Sir Dudley Seacroft?”

Bates waited not a moment.

“I didn’t exactly love ‘im,” he snarled.

“Well, now, don’t you see that you are creating what is perhaps an unfair and misleading impression of your own actions if you decline to tell the court when and where you first discovered that some accident had taken place on the moor?”

“I don’t care. I’ve done nothink.”

“Who is accusing you of having done anything, as you put it? It is your own fault if suspicion is attached to your movements. Why won’t you speak out?”

“I’ve nowt to tell.”

"But you have. Next to Miss Fenton you are the most important witness."

"I've said all I've got to say," was the dogged announcement.

"Will you tell us what you meant by saying to Mr. Hardy: 'I'm not hopping it this time,' meaning, I take it, that you intended remaining in Nuttonby?"

"I'd done nothink to nobody. Why should I cut?"

"But you added a sort of vague innuendo, a hint of suppressed knowledge. You said: 'No more squealing hares for me, and no more three months in quod.' What did that imply?"

"O'ny that I'm going strite now."

"Is that all?"

"Yuss."

"How are you making a living?"

"Buyin' skins, rags an' bones—any old stuff."

"Did you expect to find commodities of that kind on Howlsike Moor?"

"Oh, I just went there for a stroll."

"Is that your explanation?"

"Yuss."

"You can stand down. Don't leave the court."

Mr. Childwick loomed in sight once more.

"May I—" he began, but the coroner broke in hastily.

"I advise you not to put any questions on points that may have occurred to you," he said. "We shall now take Doctor Petre's evidence, and the inquiry will be adjourned for a fortnight."

"Adjourned!" Mr. Childwick was manifestly surprised. Flecke, too, showed signs of agitation, and whispered earnestly to the lawyer. Obviously he was urging that a strong protest should be made against adjournment.

"Yes. The police are emphatic on that head, and I see no reason to refuse their request. Again I suggest that you leave matters today where they rest. Of course, Mr. Childwick, you are well aware that every opportunity will be given you later to examine any of the witnesses."

The solicitor sat down without another word. Flecke was excited, and inclined to be angry, but the more experienced man by his side knew that it was useless to argue the matter. A dispute would only

tend to foster the sensation which already threatened to attach itself to the inquiry.

Doctor Petre told the court briefly that the actual cause of death was hemorrhage of the lungs. He gave it as an opinion that Sir Dudley was stunned at the outset, and sustained the worst injuries while insensible, or even after death.

"Do you think Sir Dudley was stunned by falling from his horse?" he was asked.

"It is hard to say. If the horse fell with him such a thing is possible, but in that case I would expect to find the skull fractured. It was not. There is one wound on the forehead which was not caused by the horse's hoofs. It seems to me to have been the result of a blow."

"Could a stone thrown from a distance have caused it?"

"Yes. Or a blow with a stick."

"Has your opinion been fortified by other medical men?"

"Yes. Acting on instructions from Superintendent Thompson, I called in Doctors—"

"No more names at present, please," interposed the coroner hastily.

"I called in two other doctors."

"Thank you. The inquiry stands adjourned till this day fortnight at the same hour. All witnesses who have given evidence today must remain in court until they have signed their depositions, which I shall now proceed to read."

When Rabbit Jack's turn came he vowed he could not write, so he attested with a cross. Then Superintendent Thompson drew him aside.

"Where are you staying?" he said.

"At the tinsmith's in Water Lane," was the sulky answer.

"Take my advice, and clear out to Nuttonby."

"Wot for, I'd like to know?"

"Because the Dalesford folk may set about you. The police can't watch your precious carcass all the time. If you appear in public tonight you may get badly handled."

"May I! A nice thing! Wot are you kept for?"

"I have warned you," said the superintendent curtly. "Now, be off!"

Bates's truculent demeanour fled when he faced a scowling mob outside the ›White Horse.‹ He quickly sought the escort of a police sergeant and several constables. With some difficulty, they conveyed him

to his lodgings in Water Lane, dispersed the crowd, and subsequently spread the report that the man had quitted the town, a report which might or might not be true. At any rate, Rabbit Jack was seen no more in Dalesford that evening.

Sir Dudley Seacroft was well liked by his fellow citizens. The few who had been admitted to the Assembly Rooms soon enlightened the packed mob in the street, and an ugly suspicion crept into the slow-moving Yorkshire mind that the young squire had met his end not by accident but by foul play. And the slow-moving mind is terrible when aroused. It obeys the law governing storms. The squall quickly exhausts itself—the hurricane usually gives plenty of warning.

In effect, Superintendent Thompson knew his people. Give them time to think, and they might have lynched Bates.

XII

Reviewing, long afterward, the events of a week which assuredly brought new conditions into his life, Hardy was most impressed by the extraordinary influence exerted by facts so trivial, as compared with the developments arising out of them, that he was reminded of the oft-debated grain of mustard seed of the parable, "which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

Thus, it was not, to all seeming, a matter of vital importance whether he went straight to Black Ings or remained in Dalesford all night. Yet his whole future probably depended on that small issue alone.

At the close of the inquest he walked out of the court in company with Diana. Close in front were Lord Henry and Arthur Flecke, Lady Dallinger being delayed somewhat by a garrulous dowager who was anxious to know if the police meant to arrest at once that "dreadful person who refused to answer the coroner's questions."

To gain the street they had to descend a broad stairway, whence a still broader passage led to the porch of the ›White Horse‹ Hotel. On the right hand was a crowded smoking room; on the left a bar, which also served the purposes of an office, opened into a short passage leading to the yard. On such a day all doors were thrown wide, so they spied Furneaux attending to the preliminary toilet of his motor bicycle. Though busy, his glance missed none who passed.

"Hello, Wally!" he cried. "Are you ready for the road? Will you trust yourself on my carrier? It has borne a heavier if not better man than you."

The two joined him. Diana knew that her aunt would be detained at least a couple of minutes; moreover, Lady Dallinger would be visible as she came down the stairs.

"Are you still bent on going to Black Ings tonight?" inquired the girl. Then she looked round, to make sure she was not being overheard, and dropped her voice almost to a whisper. "I imagine you will find far more interesting things in Dalesford than in Nuttonby this evening."

Furneaux had perforce kept quiet so long that he was now in an impish humour. He looked up at Hardy, as though the decision rested wholly with the latter.

"I'm sorry, Miss Fenton," began Hardy, seeing that he was expected to reply, "but you heard how emphatic Mr. Furneaux was on that very point this morning. I—"

"Where are you all going to sleep?" said Diana, tackling the house-keeping difficulty with a woman's directness. "I don't know the ins and outs of the place, but it struck me as singularly ill adapted to the needs of five people."

"Five people?" repeated Hardy blankly. Till that moment he had actually not given a thought to the exceedingly limited nature of the accommodation at Black Ings. The stairs, an ordinary ladder, led straight into one small apartment. The main bedroom would be occupied by Mrs. Judd and her daughter, who must remain, as he would certainly require some sort of domestic help while the detective was his guest.

"Yes," persisted Diana. "Have you invited Mr. Furneaux to stay with you without considering such commonplace items as beds and bed-clothes, to say nothing of rooms?"

Hardy was so plainly discomfited that she laughed.

"I seem to have propounded a knotty problem," she went on, "but it is better to discuss it now than at Black Ings."

"I must send the Judds back to Nuttonby and borrow their bed," he said. Then his face brightened. "Perhaps, for tonight, Farmer Benson will look after Frog."

He brought out the nickname purposely. It was too bad of Furneaux not to assist. The wretch was placing on his shoulders the whole onus of refusing the hospitality of the Grange.

"Even then you will be compelled to put poor Bolland into the stable with Pat," cried the girl.

"No. I shall sleep on the settle. You remember how comfortable it is."

Their eyes met, and Diana reddened ever so slightly. Her first recollection of the cottage's dim interior was when she awoke to the consciousness that Hardy's left arm was round her neck and shoulders,

while he was endeavouring to administer teaspoonfuls of brandy and water with the free hand.

"I remember you had already robbed your bed of blankets and pillows to keep my poor bones off some particularly hard old oak," she said quickly. "Come, now, Mr. Hardy, own up! Two of the five will have to sit in chairs all night if you hurry off to Black Ings without warning Mrs. Judd of your intention."

"But you are ignoring my masterly suggestion as to Benson entertaining our excellent Frog."

"Your excellent Frog has changed his mind," put in Furneaux suddenly. "If Miss Fenton will persuade Lord and Lady Dallinger to renew their invitation I'll be only too glad to remain at the Grange tonight."

"My uncle will be delighted," said Diana, "I'll go and find him at once."

She hurried out into the High Street by way of the yard, and found Lord Henry and Flecke standing near his lordship's car, deep in talk with Superintendent Thompson. Flecke's staccato voice reached her ears.

"I can't understand it at all," he was saying. "It looks as if Dacre and you had settled everything without the least regard for my wishes."

"I can only repeat, Mr. Flecke, that in a matter of this sort the wishes of relatives cannot be taken into account," said Thompson firmly.

Then Diana broke in.

"Uncle, dear," she said, "Mr. Hardy and his friend find it will be more convenient if they remain in Dalesford tonight. Of course I told them—"

"Quite right, Diana," interrupted Lord Henry eagerly. "I'll enjoy their company. Where's your aunt? The car will hold—In any case, I want to stretch my legs—I'll walk."

The girl knew well that her uncle was as pleased as she herself by this change in the program. Undoubtedly he was longing for an opportunity to discuss the day's revelations with the man from Scotland Yard. She did not trouble to analyze her own feelings. She, too, wanted to hear what Hardy and the detective thought of certain incidents which her active brain had picked out as remarkable owing to the possibilities they adumbrated.

Whether or not she found Hardy's company otherwise attractive was not a matter that called for immediate consideration. He differed

greatly from the fox-hunting squires who made up the bulk of the aristocracy of Dalesford, and, much as she loved field sports, it was refreshing, to say the least, to meet a young man with a wider outlook on life than was afforded by the prospects of a good partridge season or the price of a “made” hunter.

Flecke, who had turned his back on Superintendent Thompson when Diana appeared, thereby giving the chief of the Dalesford police a chance to escape, which he took instantly, showed some interest in the conversation.

“Who is Mr. Hardy’s friend, may I ask?” he said.

Neither Lord Henry nor his niece answered at once. Then Diana’s quick wit came to the rescue.

“The little artist man who was so severely repressed by the coroner,” she cried.

“Oh, that fellow! Is he staying with Hardy?”

“He came here only today; there isn’t enough room at Black Ings to hold everybody.”

“Everybody? Who’s everybody? I thought Mr. Hardy lived there alone!”

“So he does, or did, until fate brought me to his door. Now he is entertaining Bolland, one of our grooms, and—er—a woman from the village, with her daughter. You see, having guests, he had to obtain domestics.”

Now, Diana had not forgotten the housekeeper’s name, but, being an intelligent young person, she thought it advisable, in view of Lady Dallinger’s curious reticence as to the records of the Judd family, not to go into details.

“I hope you won’t mind if I stroll to your place after dinner,” said Flecke. “Childwick is dining with me, but he leaves early. He will be here tomorrow, of course, and would stay the night if he hadn’t to attend to some important business.”

“Come at any hour that suits your convenience,” said kind-hearted Lord Henry. “You must be feeling—well, it’ll be a good job when all this fuss—Ah, Mrs. Phelps, how d’ye’ do?”

Flecke wheeled about when he heard the salutation addressed to a lady whom he had not noticed previously. The newcomer was young, distinctly good-looking in a doll-like way, with a doll’s frizzled golden hair, and bright, staring blue eyes of unusually light tint.

Like every lady who claimed to belong to the “smart set” of Dalesford, she wore black, but, in her case, a coquettish coil of cr pe round her hat announced that she was in personal mourning. She had, in fact, lost her husband some eighteen months earlier, and local gossip declared that she was not unwilling to transfer herself and her few hundreds per annum to the establishment of Mr. Arthur Flecke, chronically hard up though he was until the tragedy of Howlsike Moor had enriched him.

“Why haven’t you been to see me, Arthur?” she gushed reproachfully. “You must have known how much I sympathized with you. I expect that, like most men, you wanted to be left alone in your sorrow. But I can’t allow you to mope. Come and dine at seven-thirty—quite informally. I have a friend staying with me, such a restful creature—she won’t bore you a bit.”

Flecke was compelled to enter into polite explanations. Diana made off in search of her aunt. She successfully hid an amused smile. That silly Mrs. Phelps had been impertinent enough to warn her of a prior claim!

Meanwhile, Hardy and Furneaux were at it, hammer and tongs. Diana had scarcely quitted the yard of the inn before Hardy’s resentment broke loose.

“Stop fooling with that machine,” he said angrily, “and tell me what you mean by changing your plans in this absurd way.”

Furneaux straightened himself to his full height of five feet five inches, and met Hardy’s wrathful glance with a derisive smile, which, of course, only added fuel to the fire.

“‘Fooling’ you call it,” he sniggered. “Shows how little you are acquainted with the delicate organism of the internal combustion engine.”

“Confound you, why did you contrive to get me back to the Grange?”

“I? I left the discussion almost entirely to you. Don’t you want to go?”

“No, I do not.”

“Why?”

“I am not in the mood to give reasons for my behaviour. What I want to know is why I should become a slave to your caprice. If you were a bigger man I’d take you to some quiet place and give you a hiding.”

“If, as you say, I were a bigger man, I’d wallop you where you stand. Are you crazy? Here are circumstances conspiring to throw you into

the company of a remarkably attractive young lady, and you treat her with the cold indifference of Hamlet to Ophelia. *Que diable!* Wake up and show that you have some red blood in your veins, or I shall begin to believe you a monstrosity, an automaton built of re-enforced concrete.”

Hardy thrust his hands into his pockets and gazed at the diminutive detective. as though he were an interesting specimen of some peculiarly aggressive and noxious insect.

“Honestly,” he said, trying to speak calmly, “I don’t understand what you are driving at. It is clear enough, of course, that you ought to remain in Dalesford. I always thought it a particularly idiotic notion that you should bury yourself in a moorland farmhouse, miles away from every person even remotely connected with the business you are engaged on. But why drag me into your net?”

“My sole concern just now is to remove myself as far as possible from my present surroundings. You seem to harbour some fantastic conceit as to your ability to play the part of a special Providence in my affairs. But *you* are entirely and hopelessly mistaken. My business is to work—not to—to—”

“Spoon,” prompted Furneaux.

Hardy wished he had not been so inopportunistly at a loss for a word. Still, he was about to say something very emphatic when he saw Diana entering the yard. Furneaux instantly raised himself on tip-toe, tapped his companion sharply on the shoulder, and hissed: “You must learn to control your eyes, my friend. They belie your lips. As for me, I’m a confirmed eugenist.”

“I regard you as a confirmed lunatic,” said Hardy loudly, careless who heard, or what the consequences.

“What are you two quarrelling about?” tittered Diana.

“You,” snapped Furneaux.

“Me? Why should I provide a bone of contention?”

“Walter thinks, or affects to think—one never knows what these university men really believe; they are attracted by dialectics rather than moved by real conviction—that you have certain qualities of mind and appearance which so far surpass the average of your sex that you stand in a class apart. Whereas I, older, disillusioned perhaps—”

“Can always talk nonsense when it suits your purpose,” broke in the girl, hurrying into the hotel. “Please go and join my uncle, both of you. I must rescue my aunt. Mrs. Warren-Jones has kept her quite long enough.”

“Really?” began Hardy, when he had recovered from the shock which Furneaux’s words had given him, but the detective touched a lever, and the motorcycle set up a din like a Gatling gun as he ran it out into the street.

Eventually, he went off alone to the Grange, while the Dallingers’ car followed. When tea was served, and the domestics had left the drawing room, he was sedate as an owl, and thrilled the ladies by a cold and ruthless analysis of the known facts, proving conclusively that Sir Dudley Seacroft had been knocked off his horse by a stone flung by Bates, and then trampled to death by the terrified hunter.

Lord Henry, whose experience as chairman of the Dalesford bench had brought a smattering of legal lore, was not convinced by this theory, at first.

“You are assuming a great deal, aren’t you?” he said, knitting his brows in a judicial frown. “Surely it is hardly credible that a wastrel like Bates—He would never dare—an unprovoked attack on a man of Seacroft’s physique—well mounted too—One can’t believe it.”

“You are right, my lord,” said Furneaux serenely. “I do not imagine the attack was altogether unprovoked. Let us construct the scene. Bates is searching the moor for plovers’ eggs?”

“How do you know that?” demanded Lord Henry.

“He brought two dozen into Dalesford last night, and sold them to the local poulterer.”

“But—”

“The fact is established,” purred Furneaux. “I asked myself what the man could be doing on the moor on Tuesday afternoon. He could not possibly be poaching—in the middle of April. It was ridiculous to think he had gone there to see the hunt, because the Harrowdale hounds were not within miles of that territory that day. Therefore, I said, as a reasonable guess: ‘Plovers’ eggs.’”

“When I cycled into Dalesford this morning I saw a basket of plovers’ eggs in a shop. I went in and bought two. Before purchasing I asked if they were fresh. The shopkeeper said they were, so far as recent gathering could insure freshness, as they had been brought in the previous day.

“‘From the Nuttonby district?’ I inquired. The man grinned. ‘Odd you should mention Nuttonby,’ he said. ‘That’s just where they came from. A chap called Bates brought ’em, an’ he’s a good judge of an egg too.’ So, you see—”

"Very shrewd, very well considered," nodded Lord Henry. "By the way, Mr. Furneaux, will you have a cigar or a cigarette?"

"No, my lord. I never smoke. But I like the smell of tobacco. If I may take an Egyptian cigarette and sniff it—"

"An odd taste," laughed Dallinger. "Here you are. These are good, I believe. Never touch one myself. I prefer a pipe. But I put you off your story about those eggs. I'm sorry."

"It is always well to test an egg before swallowing it," said Furneaux. "Now, as to events on the moor. Bates is not exactly the kind of person a county gentleman likes to find prowling about among birds. He probably saw, and hid from, Mr. Arthur Flecke, and watched him until he had disappeared."

"Suppose he started up suddenly from the heather, and startled Sir Dudley's horse, neither being aware previously of the other's presence. Sir Dudley would recognize him, and, quite probably, tell him in strong language to take himself off. Bates is a stubborn and impudent cockney—you saw how he faced the coroner today—and would certainly give a rude answer."

"Suppose Sir Dudley slashed at him with his hunting crop, and the man, in sheer rage and desperation, picked up a heavy stone, and threw it, with an aim that was unfortunately only too good. The rest is easy."

"Pon my honor, a very plausible theory," said Lord Henry. "Then the whole affair resolves itself into—That isn't murder—It's manslaughter."

"Even manslaughter would be hard to establish," and Furneaux seemed to be torn by honest doubt. "That is why I must tread most warily. You all see, I am sure"—this with a comprehensive sweep of his twinkling black eyes—"the vital significance of secrecy as to my real mission here. My colleague, Mr. Winter, was soon alive to this aspect of the tragedy, and suggested it to Superintendent Thompson. Thompson realized the difficulties which the local police would encounter, and secured the permission of the Chief Constable to ask the assistance of my department."

"Exactly," agreed Lord Henry. "Just what I recommended."

"Of course a number of new facts will come out at the adjourned inquest if the police decide to carry the matter farther. If they drop it, and a verdict of 'Accidental Death' is returned, any evidence of a semi-sensational nature will be avoided. The coroner steered a middle course cleverly today. How wisely and well, for instance, he cleared up that trivial yet important point of the broken ring."

"Ah, that reminds me—who found that ring?" inquired his lordship.

"I did," announced Hardy.

"Oh!"

Lord Henry was a fairly transparent person; his exclamation betrayed some measure of annoyance. Furneaux, however, smiled sweetly, and placed the tips of his fingers together with the mildly deprecating air of a Sunday-school teacher tackling an outspoken passage in the Book of Judges.

"Poor Mr. Hardy!" he cooed. "He has been walking about all day with peas in his shoes. Mr. Winter, who has not had the honour of meeting any member of your lordship's family, extracted a promise from Mr. Hardy that he would not mention to anyone the finding of the ring. As a result, Mr. Hardy deemed himself in a false position, and has, in fact, reviled me bitterly on that account. Miss Fenton heard the conclusion of our latest quarrel, for which I now make full and ample amends."

"Oh, Mr. Furneaux!" cried Diana. "You appealed to my vanity by saying that the dispute concerned me!"

"But you knew I was wriggling, Miss Fenton. I assure you now, without any effort at strained humour, that we were indirectly arguing about a ring when you surprised us. ... Now, with your permission, Lady Dallinger, I'll take a run on my cycle. I may not return till eleven o'clock. Will that be inconveniently late?"

"No. But you will miss your dinner."

"I shall pick up some food somewhere. Indeed, I may dine in or near Malton."

He was gone before Lord Henry could think of any means of worming out of him an explanation of this curious trip to a distant town. Hardy, who was beginning to form some definite notions with regard to the eccentric little detective, was alone able to appreciate the significance of that phrase "in or near Malton." Jim Spence, married to the onetime Mary Judd, kept an inn "near" Malton. Was that where Furneaux was heading for?

Moreover, Hardy had watched the little man closely while that singularly straightforward theory with reference to Rabbit Jack's actions on the day of the tragedy was being put forward, and was convinced that Furneaux was simply amusing himself. He had not interfered, but, to his mind, it was inconceivable that the man who was responsible for Sir Dudley Seacroft's death should creep into the forge two hours later and steal money from the dead man's pockets.

Of course Bates might not have known his enemy was dead. He might have run away in a panic when Seacroft fell from his horse, and, seeing Diana subsequently from some hiding place, it was possible, though highly improbable, that he followed her, and dared a good deal in order to find out whether the baronet was dead or only injured.

This far-fetched hypothesis was helped somewhat by Bates's attempt to escape, but his truculent attitude when brought back to the farm, and again that day in court, more than discounted the circumstantial evidence, such as the obliterated footprints in the sandpit, connecting him with the crime.

A notable feature of the whole business was its tendency to grow more obscure with increase of knowledge. In forty-eight hours an accident such as happens every season in the hunting field had developed into a mystery which, if the accepted facts were published, would stir public interest to the core. He could not help asking himself why Scotland Yard was taking up the case at all, when, at the utmost, it only meant a long term of penal servitude for an insignificant scoundrel like Rabbit Jack.

So, when Furneaux disappeared, Hardy sighed in sheer bewilderment, and Diana instantly wanted to know what was distressing him.

"Dear me!" she cried. "Why so worried, Mr. Hardy?"

He recovered his poise instantly.

"That was a sigh of relief, Miss Fenton," he said. "Thank goodness, I have no more secrets from this household. There were times today when I could cheerfully have wrung that little man's neck."

"But don't you think he is extremely clever?"

"That idea of his about the plovers' eggs—very smart—very smart indeed," put in Lord Henry.

"Somehow it reminded me of Darwin's theory of the influence on the clover crop of the increasing number of old maids in England," said Hardy. Seeing that his hearers looked puzzled, he continued: "Perhaps you haven't heard it. England is famous for its clover because the British bumblebee is unique, and he alone fertilizes the clover plant. His chief enemy is the field mouse, but cats kill mice, and old maids keep cats, so, following the chain backward, you arrive at good crops of clover.

"It would be an equally strange progression of causes, seemingly wide apart as the poles, which, starting at a plover's egg, brought about the true explanation of Sir Dudley Seacroft's death."

"I have faith in Mr. Furneaux," declared Diana confidently. "When he says what he means, which I am not at all certain he has done as yet, I feel sure we shall know the truth."

Hardy looked at her. Some impulse of high emprise seized him. He wondered what she would say, or think, which is not always the same thing, if she knew the fantastic conceit which Furneaux had harped on so constantly. Dare he put her to the test, ever so slightly?

He stood up.

"Are you too tired to take a stroll in the park before the light fails?" he said, greatly daring.

"The very thing I was going to suggest," said Diana. "Anybody else feeling energetic?"

But the older people made excuses, and the two went out together.

Lady Dallinger watched them crossing the lawn and sauntering toward the rock garden.

"Dudley's death will make a great difference for Diana," she said to her husband. "It needn't," was the worldly wise answer. "Arthur Flecke is much taken with her. He carried on a bit with Mrs. Phelps only because Diana was sure to marry Dudley."

Lady Dallinger shook her head.

"I can't see Diana marrying Arthur," she said. "She doesn't like him. Soon she would hate him."

And Lord Henry left it at that. Sometimes it is politic not to demand a reason for a woman's belief.

XIII

If a man and a woman are interested in each other they will always find something interesting to talk about. It matters little what the subject matter of the conversation, or whether one talks and the other listens, every word is valued, each trivial thought is exalted to the level of epigram.

By mutual consent, Diana Fenton and Walter Hardy absolutely disregarded the tragedy which had brought them together.

"Tell me something of your work and ambitions," was the request of the girl, and the man obeyed.

Then he, in turn, sought to learn her tastes and sympathies, what writers she favoured, whose pictures she liked, the music she favoured. The artless art of love making is as old as the hills. It changes not with fashions nor centuries. It formed part of the equipment of Venus herself.

Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear,
Or, like a fairy, trip upon the green,
Or, like a nymph, with long dishevelled hair,
Dance on the sands, and yet no footing seen:
Love is a spirit all compact of fire,
Not gross to sink, but light, und will aspire.

Be sure each found in the other a sympathetic response. When Diana spoke, Walter heard the harmony of the spheres. When he, roused to strange enthusiasm, told of his hopes and aims, some alchemy not known to science gave virile life even to the dry bones of metallurgy.

Not that Hardy fell into the error of thinking that the formulas of the laboratory could make any real appeal to the lithe young goddess who moved by his side. He skimmed lightly over the technical details of his search, and dwelt rather on the boundless guerdon of success. And he was far too honest to dangle before her eyes the not hopelessly remote chance that he might achieve wealth.

"I have no certainty of making money," he said, frankly deprecative of his own genius. "The history of research shows that the man who finds the door to a new domain in manufacture seldom earns the commercial reward.

"I do not care, or, to be accurate, I have not cared hitherto, whether or not my steel shall become transmuted into gold of my own keeping. I would rather give to the world the 'Hardy process' of making steel rods than see myself chairman of the company that will exploit it. And then, I may fail. Many abler men have striven to wrest the secret from Nature's stubborn hands. It is there, strongly guarded, but I know it is there, and, if I have to go back to my university classes a disappointed inventor, I shall at least have the satisfaction of feeling that I have gone nearer the hidden shrine than any other man whose work is yet before the public."

For a little while there was silence. Diana was not deaf to that hint of altered purpose, but she literally dared not ask what it implied. Perhaps, with her womanly intuition, she guessed that this strong, dour man dared not answer. But no daughter of Eve ever yet failed to attain her end by a path other than the direct one.

"I wish the World would adopt the simple life for a change," she sighed. "Existence, decent existence, that is, grows more expensive each year. And the mad whirl of things drags everybody into the Vortex. You are content with bare necessities, you say, and I quite believe it. Yet I am sure you would like your process to become widely adopted if only that you might give your mother the little luxuries you despise yourself."

"Yes," he said. Then his heart rose to his mouth, but he added valiantly: "Some day, too, I may marry, and it is a man's natural pride that he should maintain his wife in as good a position, say, as that from which he has taken her."

"Oh, of course," agreed Diana hurriedly. Now that the fish had risen so promptly to the fly she was doubtful of her skill as an angler. "But don't you think that if there is love in marriage-and I seem to know you well enough to say that you Would not marry any girl unless you loved her-all the rest counts for very little?"

"Still, it counts," and Hardy grew dogmatic. "You won't be vexed if I draw a personal parallel. Suppose you married a poor man, a man who lived in mean streets and was compelled at times to consider the cost of things in pence, let alone pounds-would you not miss these broad lands, the delightful seclusion of your uncle's house, the riding to hounds, the pleasant society of a county?"

"Naturally, one would miss them. But is it your philosophy that a man can rise above the temptation of the fleshpots of Egypt, while a woman cannot?"

"There are some women whom no honest-minded man would wrench from the gardens they adorn."

"Yet our first mother was expelled very rudely from her garden."

"That was for the good of the race. If Eve hadn't eaten the apple Adam would never have designed a really first-rate limousine."

"So, unless you become rich you remain single?" she taunted him.

"I suppose the prospect resolves itself into that."

"Then you are not in love, Mr. Hardy?"

"I think I am on the verge," he said. Fearing he had gone too far, he took refuge in a misquotation: "If I have not plucked the rose I have lived near it."

Diana, too, drew back a little. This earnest-eyed young scientist was dreadfully serious. Even that queer little detective had twitted him with using a sledge hammer to convey his meaning.

"I shall be awfully keen to hear the result of your experiments," she laughed. "Promise you will let me know, first, if you are pleased with your work at Black Ings, and, second, how you get on with the business people. They drive hard bargains, I am told. Uncle had a small experience of that side of things last year."

"A man here, a miller, hit on a new method of grading wheat, and uncle helped him to take out a patent. But it was necessary either to build the machines, which meant heaps of money in erecting a factory, or accept a royalty from the makers of agricultural implements, so poor Cartwright, the miller, gets a sovereign per machine, and last year earned only twenty pounds."

Thus was romance banished effectually, but, being a winged creature, it might return after a brief flight into the outer darkness.

The two had wandered well beyond the confines of the quarry in which so many species of heather and Alpine plants flourished. Almost unconsciously they turned into the path they had traversed with Lord Henry the previous day, but in the reverse direction. Night came on swiftly, and when Diana awoke to the lateness of the hour she hesitated between walking through Dalesford or going back by the way they had come.

"We have rather lost sight of time," she said. "If we go into the town we shall be seen by hundreds, and that I do not care about. The quarry

road is rather long, unless we hurry. Do you mind climbing a couple of fences? There is a short cut across Seacroft Park."

"Where you lead I shall follow," said Hardy cheerfully.

The girl, to whom each inch of the ground was familiar, brought him to a fringe of firs which guarded the park on the town side. Posts and rails, though high, offered no difficulty, and Diana at once took a bee line for the clump of elms in the Grange land, the lofty network of bare branches showing black against the sky above all other trees.

A glimpse of the Hall turrets brought sudden recollection of the man lying there dead, whose maimed body would be carried forth next day to its long resting place in a vault in Dalesford churchyard. The memory induced a solemn mood hardly conducive to light-hearted chatter, and, as it happened, they neared the carriage drive in silence.

This road followed practically a straight line from the lodge until it bifurcated, one branch leading to the stables and the other to the west front. Ornamental trees and flowering shrubs, mostly rhododendrons, lined both sides, while low fences restrained any cattle which might be in the park from browsing on poisonous growths.

They had surmounted the first fence, luckily without noise, and were about to cross the roadway, when they became aware of voices in the avenue. There was no mistaking Arthur Flecke's high-pitched, well-marked accents, and Diana shrank back within the shadows.

"I don't want to meet him," she whispered. "Let us wait till he passes."

Hardy, ever resourceful in an emergency, saw that a neighbouring holly bush offered the surest means of concealment. Grasping Diana's arm, he drew her toward it, and, with a coolness that did him credit, held her rather closely, in the pretense that the size of the tree did not permit of any other course. However that may be, she did not seem to resent that protecting hand on her arm. Indeed, as the voices approached she, if anything, edged a trifle nearer. The speakers were Flecke and Childwick. Evidently they had visited the Hall before dining at Flecke's place, the Hollies.

"You need have no misgivings on that score," Flecke was saying, when his words became audible. "I'm not tied up with Mrs. Phelps or Mrs. Anybody-else. I had a narrow-enough escape from Polly Judd to avoid making a fool of myself a second time."

Mr. Childwick's lawyerlike comment was not so distinct, his speech being tinged with the unctuous quality inseparable from the utterance

of short, fat men. Undoubtedly, however, he said something about the difficulty he had experienced in preventing an action for breach of promise.

"By Jove, yes," laughed Flecke, though his mirth was forced, and it would be hard to say whether he was smiling or scowling. "I nearly fell into the trap that time. But you must remember, Childwick, that I hadn't seen Diana Fenton then—not seen her, I mean, since she was a long-legged flapper. Now, all being well, I'll marry her ... Oh, yes, I know Dudley wanted her. But it wasn't quite settled, no matter what people thought.

"Anyhow, he's not in the running now, poor chap, and I don't see why I should not be the lucky man. You must remember she's as poor as a church mouse. She has nothing but a small pension as an officer's daughter. And old Dallinger can't give her such a lot. It takes him all his time to run his own show decently. Of course I hadn't a ghost of a chance while Dudley lived, but man alive, she 'll jump at the offer!"

He broke off abruptly, leaving the rest to the imagination.

"You are certainly a very fortunate young gentleman," said the lawyer dryly. "Sir Dudley's will was quite a matter of form. You are not supposed to be aware of its contents yet, but I am breaking no seal of professional confidence when I tell you that everything goes with the estate, which, naturally, reverts to you."

"Yes. Seacroft, with Diana Fenton thrown in, is worth having. I suppose I am to be envied," said Flecke.

Soon his voice trailed away into the silence, yet Diana did not move. Hardy knew that she flinched as though she had been struck when her name was first mentioned. After that, she remained rigid as a statue, but her breath came in little gasps between parted lips, and the man holding her arm was quite sure that if he could but see her eyes they were blazing with indignation.

"Listeners seldom hear good of themselves," he ventured to whisper, when, with a sigh, the girl's tension relaxed.

"But this is the exception that proves the rule," she said bitterly. "What greater honour could be conferred on any woman than to succeed a Polly Judd, or displace a Mrs. Phelps, in the affections of Mr. Arthur Flecke?"

Now, Hardy was so transparently honest in thought that he refused to seize the advantage given by Flecke's somewhat coarse avowal. Naturally, the man did not know he was being overheard by the one woman in the world whom he would not have insulted so grossly.

"I don't think you are quite fair to Mr. Flecke," he said, compelling the words which hurt like knives. "He was speaking at random. He has had an anxious and worrying time during the past two days. He should not be judged by the haphazard admissions of a confidential discussion with a legal adviser who happens to be a trustee of the property he inherits."

Diana snatched her arm free.

"Shall we got" she said, with the *hauteur* of an angry aristocrat addressing an inferior. Hardy's heart, which had apparently been in the region of his throat during many minutes, sank suddenly to his boots. He, so eloquent before, was now stricken dumb.

They crossed the avenue. Hardy opened a way for the girl through some dense bushes. Then, beyond the second line of trees, they reached another fence, this time posts and wires. Hardy climbing on both sides of a post, got over easily, but Diana disdained his proffered help.

"No, thanks," she said coldly. "I know just how to manage."

But, if there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, it is highly probable that slips between a smooth leather sole and rounded wire which yields to pressure will be far more frequent. Diana had placed one foot across the topmost wire in safety, but, when her weight was imposed, away glided the foot, and she would have fallen if Hardy had not caught her in his arms.

Then he did a thing so utterly reprehensible that, when he realized its audacity afterward, his blood ran cold. Without any pretense that his action was due to clumsiness or accident, he strained Diana to his breast and held her there.

His action was wholly unpremeditated and involuntary. Dormant passion had leaped into tumultuous life at the mere touch of her. He could no more have resisted the impulse than withstood the fury of a volcano in eruption.

Diana was so dumfounded that she neither struggled nor protested. She felt this strenuous lover's hot breath on her forehead; he was aware only of the intoxicating fragranee of her hair. Perhaps she wished to avoid an outcry, if possible; perhaps Hardy unconsciously used more strength than he dreamed of, and crushed the breath out of her. Be that as it may, Diana was clasped in his arms during some seconds; when, in obedience to the chill dietates of reason, he released her unwillingly, he almost sobbed: "Ah, God! if I were but worthy of you!"

Then, all at once abashed and remorseful, he relaxed his grip, and they sprang apart.

"Oh!" gasped Diana, and yet again "Oh!" as if no other word in the language could gauge the depth of his offending.

A surge of savage exultation straightway rioted in his veins. She understood, then! There was to be no idle make-believe between them, no stammering apology on the one hand and lame acceptance on the other.

"I don't tell you I'm sorry, because I'm not," he said thickly. "If I must never see or speak to you again, I shall at least have the recollection of this moment throughout all the years to come."

"You-you frightened me," she whispered. "Please let us go."

His head swam. What did she mean?

"Diana," he said. "Diana, I cannot explain—"

He drew nearer, most timidly, but she did not retreat. He took her in his arms, she lifted her face to his, and their lips met. Then, in a voice inexpressibly low and sweet, she murmured: "We must both be mad, I think!"

"Thank heaven for such divine madness!" he said, kissing her once more. "Now I know that we were predestined for each other since the world itself was young."

"I-I don't know what to say," she crooned. "I dreamed of this last night. That is why my poor head ached this morning."

"My case is worse," he urged. "My very soul has ached all day."

Her face was hot, and he knew that her eyes were shining. He held her so closely that he could feel the throbbing of her heart.

"But it is impossible-yet," she pleaded.

"Nothing is impossible now, sweetheart."

"I daren't let it be known. What would people say? They would deem me utterly brazen—after two days!"

"An empire has perished in an hour. What is time to you and me? If there are barriers it is my privilege to throw them down. My love, 'I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the walls of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.'"

"I have trust in you," she said simply. "I trusted you from the first moment we met. Come to me when our present distress is forgotten. I shall wait for you, my dear. You will have faith in me, won't you?"

Obviously there was but one answer. Why waste words when Diana's lips were near? Thus a few blissful moments sped, until they were sharply called back to earth by the snapping of a dry twig. They did not

move. Why, indeed, should the girl start apart from those strong and sheltering arms?

But they listened, with every nerve alert, and heard someone moving stealthily over the grass by the roadside in the neighbouring avenue. Whoever it was, the passer-by was following Flecke and the lawyer with swift, thievish feet. Hardy was minded to vault the fence and investigate, but Diana restrained him.

"No," she breathed. "Some servant from the Hall. What does it matter? Come, let us be reasonable! They will wonder at home what has become of us."

So they waited until that sinister presence was swallowed up in the darkness, and, hand in hand, but without spoken pledge, for their hearts were too full, walked to the Grange. In the distance they caught the rapid chug-chug of a motorcycle, and the sound broke the spell.

"Can that be Mr. Furneaux?" cried Diana, and the naturalness of her tone bore no slight tribute to her powers as an actress.

"I hope so," said Hardy, less quick than his adored one to regain even the semblance of self-control.

"Why?"

"Because-the man is absolutely uncanny."

"I can't allow you to begin having secrets from me," and Diana's voice sank to a delightfully confidential pitch.

"Blame yourself, then. You dare me to tell. Furneaux seemed to arrive at a certain conclusion before ever he had seen either of us."

"What do you mean?"

"He has never ceased bidding me not to be faint-hearted. This morning, When I refused to bring him here, he taunted me with being in love With you already."

"Hush! It's too bad that Mr. Furneaux should not be here for dinner. He is such a comical little man, and so clever."

"Hello, Diana! That you?" came Lord Henry's cheery cry from the drive. "I was just thinking of—Where on earth did you get to? In another minute the car would have started on a relief expedition."

"We hadn't the least idea it was so late, nunky. We've climbed wire fences and done all sorts of things to be here in time."

"Miss Fenton is an admirable guide," contributed Hardy. "She can see in the dark."

"There, now. You hear? He's calling me a cat." And Diana sped off to her room ere the brilliant light in the entrance hall should reveal flushed cheeks and dishevelled hair.

"I'm afraid you'll regard this niece of mine as a regular tomboy," said his lordship genially, while he and Hardy followed at a more sober pace.

"She is the most charming and crystal-minded woman I have ever met," said Hardy.

Lord Henry was hardly prepared for such outspoken appreciation of the young lady. "Crystal-minded," as an adjective, was an unusual one.

"Her father was a splendid fellow," he said. "Straight as a lance-every way. Diana takes after him."

"And her mother was Lady Dallinger's sister," chimed in Hardy, who could turn a compliment deftly enough when he chose.

"Well put! By gad, I must pass that on to my wife. She will think more of you than ever. Tell you what, my boy, for a man of steel and iron you're uncommonly popular with my womenfolk."

The incident ended on this light note. But that adjective stuck in Lord Henry Dallinger's memory; when other hours brought ampler knowledge, and he recalled Diana's unembarrassed friendliness toward Hardy at the dinner table that evening, he summoned the gods to witness that a man might know a woman all the days of his life yet never understand her nature.

Furneaux arrived unexpectedly at the last moment. He did not say where he had gone, nor did anyone ask. Some chance reference was made to a *cause célèbre* then occupying much space in the newspapers, and the Scotland Yard expert entertained the others with a full, true, and particular account of the facts as apart from the garbled version which alone was allowed to gain the publicity of the law courts.

Flecke put in an appearance with the coffee. He was even more self-possessed and supercilious than when Hardy first met him. Furneaux, never at a loss, swung the talk toward the studios of St. John's Wood and Chelsea, and showed himself as thoroughly at home in the artistic circles of London as he had been earlier in the fashionable gambling dens of the West End.

Hardy and he joined issue on the vexed question of realism as opposed to interpretation in art, a discussion in which Flecke was ill qualified to take part. Once he tried vainly to inveigle Diana into the billiard room. She looked steadily at him for the first time that night.

"What?" she said. "Play billiards? You can't mean it!"

His pale face reddened.

"I had no intention of asking you to play," he said. "I thought that you and I might leave these two exponents of modern tendencies in painting to belabour each other's fads to their hearts' content."

"I have never been so interested in anything—never," vowed Diana. "One learns so much by listening to men who have really mastered such topics, don't you think?"

Arthur Flecke did not think anything of the kind, but hesitated to express an opinion. Hardy, after this decided interruption, would have abandoned the conversation, but, for some reason known only to himself, Furneaux took up the thread again, and plunged anew into a defence of the ultra-modernist school.

"It is not that which we see, but that which we don't see, which tends to form our impressions," he said. "We all acknowledge the force of intuition. Yet, what is intuition but a subconscious recognition of facts not visible to the eye? Look at the rôle played by shadow in portraiture. We talk glibly of knowing a man's face. We don't know it. We merely accept certain well-defined shadows cast by a nose, by the curve of a lip, by the contour of a cheek. Have you ever heard of dead men being mistakenly identified by their wives and children? That blunder occurs repeatedly. And why? Because, in the first place, the relatives come prepared to be horrified by discovery, but, secondly, and more frequently, because the lights and shadows on a dead man's face, seen at a near and unfamiliar angle, are completely baffling."

"That 's queer," said Lord Henry. "I never—By Jove, that's new to me."

"It is not new to the dogs I have seen in your hall," cackled Furneaux. "Does a dog take his master's likeness on trust? Not he. He verifies his belief by a far more dependable source—that of scent. If man had not atrophied certain delicate nerves by smoking rank tobacco, he might rival the dog by careful training.

"We still exercise crudely an almost lost gift. The white man cannot endure the odour of the negro, and the negro is equally aware of some disagreeable taint in the white man. I have a vague notion that the famous black trackers of Australia follow a scent like a pack of foxhounds. Suppose one of those aborigines had been turned loose on Howlsike Moor yesterday, do you think the coroner need have accepted Rabbit Jack's evasions today! Not likely. Not Bates alone, but every other per-

son who crossed that moor on Tuesday afternoon would have had his movements faithfully recorded."

Flecke stirred uneasily.

"A Scotland Yard man visited the place yesterday in company with your friend, Mr. Hardy, I am told," he said with a covert sneer. "You pay a poor compliment to our detective service if you rate his intelligence below that of a nigger."

"Have I done that?" giggled Furneaux. "Dear me! My wits must be woolgathering. Pray allow me to say that I have the greatest respect for Scotland Yard. I happen to know a man employed there What is the name of the detective who went to this moor?"

He swung round on Hardy, his eyes gleaming with impish glee.

"Winter. Chief Inspector Winter."

"A big fellow, with the face and physique of a prize fighter?"

"The description will serve."

"'Tis he!" and Furneaux's unaccountable mirth changed to solemnity. "Then the mystery of the moor with the strange name—it suggests a pack of wild dogs baying at the moon, while witches ride the storm on broomsticks—is a mystery no longer. Winter is a marvel, a freak of Nature. He looks like a heavyweight pugilist, smokes like a Burman, and tries to grow sweet peas in a Brixton backyard, yet I never see him but I hear the clank of handcuffs, the hollow reverberation of a felon's cell."

"What a pity this paragon hurried off to London!" said Flecke, lighting a cigarette. "I, for one, would have been glad of his presence. He might have stopped Dacre's stupid theorizing."

Lady Dallinger broke in with a little hysterical laugh. She could not explain her feelings, but the unforeseen twist in the conversation threatened to bring about an attack of nerves.

"Suppose we go into the hall," she said, rising hurriedly. "It is larger than this room. In any event, Diana and I will leave you soon. I am tired after today's excitement, and she is looking quite feverish."

XIV

About ten o'clock, Flecke donned overcoat and cap and announced that he must return to the Hollies. He had not succeeded in exchanging a word with Diana which the others did not hear. One incident, in particular, annoyed him. Something was said by Furneaux as to the necessity of an early departure next morning.

"We artists," said the detective, with an inimitable smirk, "cannot afford to waste day-light, and my friend, Walter, here, ought to be testing steel rods. He'll be getting married one of these days, but, first of all, he has to make his fortune, and, like every serious-minded scientist, will surely select a bride with expensive tastes and of mighty fetching appearance."

"Perhaps you would like to sketch the lady for me," said Hardy.

"Will a verbal description suffice?"

"No, no. You are too literal."

Much as he was learning to like the little man, Hardy dreaded his tongue.

"Did you sketch me in court today, Mr. Furneaux?" inquired Diana innocently.

"I had just sensed a vivid impression of you when the coroner stepped in and destroyed it with a whiff of cold officialdom. Come to Black Ings, Miss Fenton, and I'll try to do you justice in black and white."

"What on earth is there in Black Ings to attract an artist?" put in Flecke snappishly.

"I have this instant secured a most attractive subject," grinned Furneaux.

"By the way, Mr. Hardy, you told me you had brought my hunting crop and glove," said Diana.

"I put them in the morning room before breakfast."

“Did you? Where?”

Exeunt Diana and Walter, as the stage directions say. It took them fully a minute to find the missing articles. Flecke swallowed his wrath, and was going without any formal leave-taking, when Furneaux detained him.

“Walter and I will walk with you as far as the lodge,” he said suavely. “‘After dinner rest a while, after supper walk a mile’ is a sound old adage which still holds good, although we have substituted dinner for supper.”

Flecke’s first thought was to come as near being rude as he dared, but some notion crossed his mind that modified his intent.

“That will be quite pleasant,” he said.

“Why not stroll to my place, and have a whisky and soda?”

Furneaux glanced at his watch.

“It’s too late, far too late,” he said. “I only want Walter to blow the smoke out of his lungs.”

Hardy was quite at a loss to guess the detective’s motive, which, indeed, was not surprising, since Furneaux was only playing his favourite game of grouping the characters in a drama and letting them apparently follow their own bent. Lady Dallinger and Diana were retiring forthwith. Lord Henry was minded to accompany the three men, but, in obedience to a most undignified drooping of Furneaux’s left eyelid, decided suddenly to read a newspaper till they came back.

Even Flecke was somewhat reassured when he noted the placid way in which Diana bade Hardy “good night.” She did not offer him her hand, but contented herself with an airy: “Sleep well, Mr. Hardy. If I’m not too lazy I’ll see you in the morning before you go.”

When the three were outside the house Hardy tried valiantly to consider the weather—that unfailing resource of the Briton in search of a topic of conversation—but Furneaux would have none of it, remarkable though a week of fine days in April might be.

Indeed, he deliberately chose a subject bristling with thorns.

“Queer specimen of humanity, that fellow Bates, whom we saw today at the inquest,” he said. “I gather that he is a poacher.”

Hardy waited for Flecke to answer, but the latter kept obstinately silent, so he, perforce, tossed back the ball which the detective had flung in the air.

“Yes,” he said. “He admitted as much to me, you will remember.”

"I suppose he's a thief too," went on Furneaux. "The two professions are closely akin. I wonder what he was doing inside there about a quarter past seven tonight," and he jerked his head toward the neighbouring park.

"Inside where?" inquired Flecke, who, in the gloom of a moonless, starlit night, had not noticed the gesture.

"Your cousin's place, or is it yours now?"

"At a quarter past seven? Why, at that hour Mr. Childwick, the solicitor, and I walked through the park, which was absolutely deserted."

"Oh, he was there right enough. You don't remember passing me on the high road?"

"No."

"Probably you didn't see me. My acetylene lamp gave out, and I pulled my machine into the ditch in case some spanking motor ran over me. You and Mr. Childwick opened the lodge gates, and strolled by. I recognized your voices."

"Did you?"

"Oh, quite readily. I can tell you what you were talking about. Let me see. You said you were bored stiff with Dalesford, and, when everything was cleared up, you'd take your wife for a long trip round the world ... Are you married, Mr. Flecke?"

"No, but I mean to be, and soon too. Where does Bates come into the story?"

"He doesn't. He merely peeped in, so to speak. I heard someone running over the grass in the park before you appeared. The person, whoever it was, halted on the other side of my hedge, so I, being of an inquisitive turn of mind, suspended operations on the lamp, and awaited developments. Then you and the lawyer came along, and, before you had gone ten yards toward Dalesford, up popped a man's head and shoulders over the hedge. It was so dark that I couldn't possibly have known who it was if he hadn't spoken."

"To you?"

"No. It was a sort of Hamlet's soliloquy in the cockney dialect. Most quaint, I assure you. 'The blighter!' he said. 'Not at 'ome, is he! He'll be 'ome all right afore I'm through wiv 'im, or my name ain't Bites.' There! You see how nicely the scene was constructed for my benefit. And the odd thing was that Bates, or Bites, must have been alluding to either you or Mr. Childwick. Have you quarrelled with him?"

"One doesn't quarrel with rascals of that variety. I've never in my life exchanged a word with the man."

"Perhaps that's what the trouble is."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"I'm afraid my silly little yarn has vexed you."

Flecke evidently bethought himself.

"No," he said. "I'm sorry. My nerves are all on edge today. That beastly inquest upset me."

Whether rightly or wrongly Hardy neither knew nor cared, but he determined to stick a pin into Flecke on his own account. He was boiling with rage at the man's cool assumption of Diana's complaisance.

"It happens, by chance, that Miss Fenton and I can bear witness to some part of the story," he said, striving with might and main to speak in a casual tone. "We crossed Seacroft Park about the hour Furneaux has named, and we, too, heard someone running over the grass. Later, I cannot be certain how long afterward, we heard a motorcycle. Would that be you, Frog?"

Furneaux was not allowed to answer. Flecke, in a sudden heat of anger, seized upon those astounding words "Miss Fenton and I."

"And may I ask why you and Miss Fenton were crossing the park?" he said savagely.

"We were returning to the Grange after a long walk. Miss Fenton knew a short cut."

"Did you see Mr. Childwick and me?"

"We saw two people on the drive, but the trees are so dense there, even when almost leafless, that we could not distinguish you."

Flecke felt that he was being whipped with scorpions, yet there was nothing at which he could reasonably take umbrage. He laughed harshly.

"Ha, ha!" he guffawed. "Good job I'm not a jealous-minded person. Of course, being a stranger here, you are not aware that Miss Fenton and I will be married before the end of the year."

Then Hardy laughed in his turn, quite pleasantly. He saw the utter folly of bandying words on the matter, so contented himself by saying: "Miss Fenton seems to be in great request as a bride. It is not surprising. The man who wins her is to be envied."

“*Cré nom!* Yes, indeed!” chuckled Furneaux. “If I had twenty years off my count, small as I am, I’d put up a good fight against both you young sparks.”

“I am not in competition with Mr. Hardy,” snarled Flecke.

“That is quite true,” said Hardy. “But I don’t find the discussion altogether respectful to Miss Fenton. Frog, you imp, shall we go back now?”

“I’ve no doubt Mr. Flecke has had more than enough of us. ... *Au revoir, sans adieux*, Mr. Flecke!”

“Good-bye!”

The heir to the Seacroft estate quickened his pace, and was soon out of sight. The others retraced their steps without speaking until Flecke was well beyond earshot. Then Furneaux patted Hardy on the back.

“Good lad, Walter!” he said encouragingly. “I’m glad you didn’t offer to put his eyes in mourning for tomorrow’s funeral. Confound his impudence! But you’re a wonder, anyhow. I didn’t think you had it in you. I didn’t really. Did the girl give you what we call in London ‘a friendly lead’?”

Now Hardy was in no mind to banter confidences even with one who wished him well. His love for Diana was of too recent and miraculous a growth to be treated thus flippantly.

“I am beginning to appreciate your cynical humour,” he said; “but it is hardly fair to a lady whom both of us admire that we should handle her name so lightly—don’t you agree?”

“I possess other noticeable points in addition to what you are pleased to term ‘cynical humour,’” snorted Furneaux. “For instance, in my milder moods I am a quite capable detective. And what is detection? It implies discovery, either by search or observation. In my case these essentials form the mere base or pedestal for a human induction coil which gathers knowledge from the circurnambient air. You deem me a vain person, a living example of a frog puffed up to ape that bull, Winter. Ha! How’s that for a trope? I’ll give him ‘Frog,’ the beef-eater! But, to a mathematician, I must express myself in an equation:

“Let X, representing a man, walk by night in a park with Y, a maid. X and Y, while in the shelter of trees, hear N, an unknown quantity, pursuing A and B, who have just passed, and from whom X and Y are hiding. Later, X and Y are aware of a motorcycle in the distance, but are quite unable to measure the interval of time between the two events.

The first problem is to determine why X and Y were so completely oblivious of the lapse of fully ten minutes. Do you follow the exposition?"

"It is most lucid."

"Ah. Praise from a university demonstrator is praise indeed. We proceed to the second part of the equation. X and Y are dining with other letters of the alphabet. Y is continuously shooting demurely wondering glances at X, while X gazes rapturously at Y, when he thinks he isn't observed, as if he was ever discerning new beauties in a face already perfect. Both X and Y entirely disregard A minus B, though A claims a dominating interest in Y. You will observe that the double equation is now thoroughly established. Shall I give you the answer?"

"You may as well prove your method, which is certainly remarkable in its simplicity."

Furneaux smacked his lips. He knew that Hardy was amazed.

"The answer is that X hugged Y ecstatically in the park, and hugged her again in the morning room of the Grange, because Y was wearing a dress trimmed with black sequins, and a black sequin detached itself from X's waistcoat as he re-entered the hall with Y after helping her to find a hunting crop and a glove."

There was a long silence when the detective's cracked voice ceased. Then Hardy said, with a strange solemnity: "I'm profoundly thankful that X has committed no crime in telling a woman that he loved her, or he would be horribly afraid of being found out while you were in the neighbourhood."

"Pretty sharp, though, isn't it?"

"You positively bewilder me."

"Pooh, I'm not talking of myself now. You haven't let the grass grow under your feet, have you? Forty-eight hours! Name of a good little grey man, it's Napoleonic!"

Hardy stopped short, and caught his diminutive companion by the shoulder.

"Furneaux," he said in a halting, dazed way, "tell me I'm not dreaming that this happiness has truly come into my life. Shall I wake tomorrow to a grey reality, and learn that tonight's marvel is a figment of the imagination?"

"Tonight's marvel calls itself Diana, and will be known by that name for at least another generation, I hope," said Furneaux dryly. "Now, pull yourself together, my hustling dreamer. Talk about the pushful

American—you've got the average Yank whipped to a frazzle. But, in a minute or two, you'll be under the eye of Uncle Henry, and I've got to explain a portentous wink."

"I want to ask you one thing. Was Sir Dudley Seacroft's death the outcome of an accident or a crime?"

"Candidly, I don't know—yet. Both accident and crime, I think."

"But how can that be?"

"I may be able to say what I mean on Saturday or Sunday. But, in the meantime, I want your loyal and unswerving support."

"You can count on that."

"Good! Shake!"

And the two gripped hands ere they entered the house, for Hardy was gorged with emotion, and Furneaux was ever dramatic.

Sure enough, Lord Henry was agog with curiosity, which Furneaux sated by recounting the episode in which Rabbit Jack provided the central figure.

"Your lordship will see that I had to ascertain whether or not Mr. Flecke was acquainted with the man," said the detective. "Had four of us walked to the lodge I might have found it difficult to lead up to the matter in my own way. With three, Mr. Hardy being a negligible quantity, I experienced no trouble at all. Mr. Flecke was quite outspoken. He does not know Bates, probably never set eyes on him before today."

"Why, then, should Bates—I suppose he called at—Dash it! This affair grows more complex every hour."

"Your lordship can rely upon me to straighten out the tangle," and the little man's voice lost its bombastic note. "Within the next few days all that is now dark will be made clear. But I depend most implicitly on the promises of those aware of my part in the investigation to observe absolute secrecy."

"By gad! I know better than to meddle. I've given a lot of thought to this thing—a lot. And the more I think of it the less I know what to think of it."

With that enigmatical comment Lord Henry went to bed. In his own way he was quite a shrewd old gentleman.

It was by no means a singular fact that both Diana Fenton and Walter Phipps Hardy should rise early next morning, but there was a strange unanimity in their desire to examine the flower garden during a whole hour before the breakfast gong summoned them to the dining

room. What they said during that time is of interest only to themselves and has no bearing whatsoever on this record of an eventful week in the history of Dalesford.

Lord Henry insisted on placing his car at Hardy's disposal, and, as Furneaux rode his motorcycle, Lady Dallinger and Diana decided to accompany Hardy to Black Ings. The sixteen miles' run would be an agreeable change of routine, while her ladyship felt, or, by her niece's prompting, thought she felt, some desire to see a locality which she had not visited during many years, especially now that it was so intimately bound up with the tragic occurrence which would culminate that day in Sir Dudley Seacroft's funeral.

On the way they met Bolland, riding the cob and leading a lame but placid hunter. At the farm itself, Lady Dallinger was secretly amazed but outwardly unmoved by the evidences of Hardy's devotion to his work.

Mrs. Judd and her daughter were flustered by the unforeseen presence of such great folk, but Lady Dallinger quickly put them at their ease, and even inquired after the well-being of Mrs. Spence, thereby astonishing Diana, who had to be told that Mrs. Spence was formerly Mary Judd, at which she laughed and blushed, and looked at Hardy, thereby astonishing her aunt.

The ladies did not go up on the moor, as they wished to pass through Dalesford before a crowd began to assemble for the mournful spectacle provided by the funeral *cortège*.

So farewells were said, and Diana did not scruple to turn and flutter a handkerchief at the exact point in the road whence Black Ings was last visible, whereat Lady Dallinger was somewhat scandalized, because girls did not behave in that impulsive manner when Victoria was queen.

A carrier came later, with materials from Dalesford Station, and Hardy resumed work with a new determination. Furneaux, after receiving detailed instructions, hied him to the moor.

"The unfortunate turf has been trampled into insensibility long since," he said, "but the *genius loci* will be hovering near, and may be coaxed into speech."

He remained away until dusk. Indeed, Hardy was growing anxious on his account, and was speculating on the unpleasing possibility of his friend being benighted in that lonely waste when he saw the little man tramping wearily down the hillside.

They ate a good meal, which had been earned by real industry, and talked late into the night. Not a word did they say about Seacroft's

death. For one thing Hardy respected Furneaux's obvious disinclination to commit himself to any definite theory; for another, the Judds were sleeping overhead; in the deep silence of the moorland the warped boards which covered the time-worn rafters of the sitting-room kitchen would permit every word to be heard in the bedroom.

After an early breakfast, Hardy betook himself to his forge, and Furneaux lounged there, too, watching and questioning, with ever an eye on the valley through the open window.

About ten o'clock he yawned loudly, and stretched himself.

"Here comes one model to the studio, but not the one I am most in need of," he said. Hardy, watching a retort, and already grimy as a ship's stoker, darted an inquiring glance at him.

"Oh, it's all right," squeaked the detective. "You can knock off work for the next hour. Miss Diana Fenton, booted and spurred, and, 'pon my word, a most entrancing vision, is just riding up to your gateway, while that groom we met yesterday is on guard twenty lengths in the rear."

"If I leave this lot of metal now I'm dished for the day," groaned Hardy.

"Then why leave it! If the girl is as good as she's beautiful she will be only too glad to note your zealous industry. Moreover, you flatter yourself. She is coming to see me, not you. I promised to sketch her."

"Don't you dare delay her one second or I'll brain you with my biggest hammer."

"In that case I'll stand fast, and witness the meeting between beauty and the beast."

Poor Hardy was to be pitied. He could not touch his adored one's fingertips, nor even quit the furnace for a second, because the least variation of temperature would be fatal to the particular amalgam of metals he was testing.

Diana, dainty in her riding costume and flushed with rapid movement through the keen air, offered a striking contrast to the coal-blackened man in overalls who smiled a welcome when she peered at him over Furneaux's shoulder.

"Please may I come in?" she said.

"Frog!" thundered Hardy, "go and bring a chair for Miss Fenton."

"Miss Fenton doesn't need a chair, thanks," said Diana.

Placing both hands on the window sill, she vaulted lightly in.

"Don't run away with the idea that you are the only person who can do that," she went on. "In Brussels I took a prize every year for gym. And how is everybody? And is that a steel rod in the making? By the way, Mr. Furneaux, Superintendent Thompson gave me some letters for you. How he knew I would be coming here today I can't guess, but he waylaid me in High Street, and told me to be sure and not let Bolland see me handing over the packet."

"It is most kind of you," said the detective. "If you will pardon me I'll retire to another chamber of our palace and learn how my world fares."

"What a perfectly ducky little man he is!" declared Diana. "Now, some tiresome people would have stopped here and read their letters."

A few seconds later she was anxiously inquiring if there was not a black mark on her lips. Then Hardy told her that their secret was no longer a secret to Furneaux, and they agreed that the representative of Scotland Yard was a marvel; when Furneaux joined them again, after a most thoughtful interval, Diana blushed so furiously that he cackled with glee.

"I'm sorry to disturb such a tableau," he said, running an eye over the girl's natty costume and Hardy's workmanlike rig, "but I see another visitor in the oifing, and I want to try my skill as a fisherman before an audience. Rabbit Jack is on the road. I'll bring him in here, and throw a fly over him. Let's see if he will swallow it. You must watch him closely. You can do that without frightening him, because I'll be using him as a model. You can tell me later whether the fish was too wary or the angler at fault."

"But what if the fish is caught, Mr. Furneaux?" cried Diana.

"There will be no doubt left in anybody's mind then," was the significant answer.

Bates had been dubious as to the advisability of going to Black Ings at all that day, but the sight of Diana riding through Nuttonby weighed the scale in favour of keeping the appointment with Furneaux. It was learned subsequently that he quitted Dalesford late on Friday night. Probably he thought that his comings and goings were unobserved. He was mistaken. Two loafers and an unlicensed hawker had suddenly descended upon Dalesford, and, strange to relate, escaped the attentions of the local police, though, in public-house bars and the byways of the town these nondescripts had not a good word to say for the guardians of the peace.

However that may be, between the quiet observations made by his own men, and reports surreptitiously dropped into his letter box by

each of the trio of undesirables, Superintendent Thompson was able to convey to Furneaux the fullest information as to the movements of Bates and others.

The poacher touched his cap with a knowing grin when he looked in through the forge window.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said to Furneaux, "but it was today you wanted me, wasn't it?"

The detective affected dismay.

"Why, you've gone and got shaved! You've washed your face, too!" he cried.

"An' w'y not, guv'nor?"

"Man, you've destroyed your character."

"Wot's my char-ac-ter got to do wiv it?"

Bates was singularly aware of a most un- happy double meaning in many of Furneaux's utterances, but the detective said he would make the best of things, bade the model re- main where he was, and went into the house. He reappeared with a sketching block, a bottle of beer, and two glasses.

Filling one glass, he said: "Drink that. It will give you confidence."

Bates needed no urging to obey. With "'Ere's to you, miss, an' gents both!" he emptied the glass at a draft. Furneaux took it from him, filled the second glass, and posed him.

"Now, hold that a while—in the other hand—so. That's better. Lounge against this side of the window, so that the light falls on the scar over your left eyebrow—"

"By the way, Walter, how did you get your scar?" interrupted Diana.

"In a duel with sabres," he laughed.

"How perfectly horrid of you! Whom did you fight, and why?"

"One evening at Heidelberg a Bavarian was insolent because I refused to take part in a kommers, or drinking bout. I said something unpleasant, I suppose, and he challenged me to a duel. I declined, of course, and then he insulted my nationality. I was sure the man was a coward, so I agreed to fight him at once, without masks or guards. Luckily, I had taken a few lessons, and he was able only to give me this scratch."

"But what did you do to him?"

"I regret to say I lost my temper, and tried to behead him. As it was, I widened his mouth from ear to ear."

Bates listened agape, not alone to the story, but to the manner of speech between the two. He could not understand why Miss Fenton should address Hardy by his Christian name, and was fully alive to the way in which Hardy's stern eyes softened when he looked at her.

"Capital!" cried Furneaux unexpectedly. "Tell a few more tall yarns like that one, Wally, and I'll catch our worthy Bunny's real expression. ... No, you mustn't drink that beer yet. You have too self-satisfied a leer after gargling. Try and look as if you were awaiting an unfavorable verdict."

"You're a bit too thick, mister, that's wot you are," growled Bates, whose interest was thus roughly recalled to the "mad artist," such being his private description of Furneaux.

"Ah, you don't know me yet," smiled the detective. "Thick or thin, my beauty, I've got you."

"Wot the-sorry, miss, but this yer friend of yours 'as a narsty w'y of puttin' things. If I 'ave done time for nickin' a hare an' a bird or two, there's no need to rub it in."

"Drink!" snapped Furneaux. "You like my beer, at any rate. Have another bottle."

"Now you're talkin'! I don't mind if I do."

He drained the glass, which Furneaux secured as before. This time Hardy fancied that the little man handled it peculiarly. It was odd, too, that when he returned with the beer he brought only one glass, a clean one, and let Bates help himself.

Meanwhile, the sketch was progressing rapidly. In less than twenty minutes Furneaux had produced a most unflattering but accurate drawing. He had caught successfully the crafty underlook of the eyes and the droop of a weak but cruel mouth. Anyone who knew Bates would have recognized his portrait at a glance.

The sitter, however, was not at all pleased with his presentment in black and white.

"Well, Lord love a duck!" he said wrathfully, when permitted to criticize. "Do I look like that?"

"At your worst, Bunny, st your worst. Don't kid yourself that I hired you as a professional beauty," and Furneaux thrust the drawing into a portfolio.

"Is that all you want?"

"Yes, thanks. You 've come out splendidly."

"But you said something abart two bob an hour, an' I 'aven't been 'ere more'n 'arf an hour."

"I won't be mean. Here's your two shillings. Which way are you going! On to the moor?"

"No, an' if I'd known—Well, the beer was all right, anyhow. So long, mister."

Rabbit Jack shuffled away down the hillside. Furneaux watched him contemplatively until he had passed through the gate. Then he turned to Diana and Hardy.

"Well?" he inquired.

"I didn't see any fish," laughed the girl.

"And you?" This to Hardy.

"You have secured a first-rate sketch of the man, if that is what you were after."

"Even a Sargent may not be always convincing," smirked Furneaux, taking forth the drawing again and holding it admiringly at arm's length. "But with that, plus two perfect sets of fingerprints, the identification of John Bates should be complete. I'll now proceed to dust those two tumblers with powdered charcoal, and photograph the impressions. I'll have prints ready within the hour. Please don't hurry away, Miss Fenton. I want you to post a small parcel to Scotland Yard when you reach Dalesford."

"I am in no hurry," said Diana with a certain scare in her eyes. The detective had reminded her that he was engaged in a man hunt. She actually might have been hobnobbing with a murderer.

XV

Sunday passed, and Monday, but, beyond two hasty scampers on the motorcycle, Furneaux made no move. Monday morning's post brought Hardy a short note from Diana.

"My dear one," she wrote; "I daren't ride out to Black Inga tomorrow. Auntie has put her foot down—she says people are sure to talk. What are we to do? Perhaps I might manage Wednesday, especially if I'm well-behaved tomorrow and Tuesday, and go with Auntie on rounds of calls. But we can write as often and as much as we like.

"Tell Mr. F. there is no news here. Next time we meet he must make a sketch of me. It will be an excuse. That doesn't sound quite polite, but Froggie is such a dear and will know what I mean.

"I am more than anxious to hear all about the ingot you will complete tomorrow. Oh, my! If only I could look in on you at your work! Say the word, and I'll persuade uncle to fit up a spare coach-house at the Grange as a workshop. We have an empty one.

*"Thine to a cinder,
Diana*

The ingot Diana alluded to was already becoming a case-hardened steel rod. Owing to inadequate appliances, the various processes demanded a great deal of time. Results which could be achieved in a properly equipped works within a few hours needed as many days at Black Ings.

But Hardy was sufficiently master of himself not to allow a fever of impatience to spoil the conclusive experiment on which he was now engaged. It represented the matured fruits of his genius. If it failed he would waste no more of his life. He must emerge from his shell, offer his knowledge to one of the leading firms in the iron and steel industry,

and trust to hard work to win a position which would warrant his return to Dalesford as Diana's acknowledged suitor.

After reading his first love letter he went into the forge to attend to some part of the case-hardening operation; being very much in love, he took the letter from his pocket, brushed the stove lightly with it for luck, and then kissed it. Thus, in a way, did Diana look in on him at his work, and cheer and inspire him at it.

A strange thing happened on Tuesday. The postman came about nine o'clock, bringing a bulky letter for Furneaux, and, among others, missives to Hardy from his mother and Diana. Each man was immersed in his correspondence. They had just finished breakfast, and it was Mrs. Judd's habit to find occupation for herself and her daughter outside the house during meals. On this occasion the girl was sweeping the garden path with a besom, a heavy, serviceable broom made of tough heather, while Mrs. Judd was hanging some tablecloths and dusters on an improvised clothesline. Neither woman was aware of anyone approaching the house, until a stilted, evenly balanced voice inquired: "Is this where Mr. Hardy lives?"

Instantly the two at the breakfast table realized that the unexpected visitor was Arthur Flecke.

Hardy was about to rise, but Furneaux restrained him.

"Let Mrs. Judd have first innings," he whispered. "She may put him in the right frame of mind."

Of course Furneaux had been given many more opportunities than his host of judging Mrs. Judd's linguistic powers. While Hardy was toiling in the forge the detective was apparently idle for many hours at a stretch. At any rate, he seemed to have estimated the village dame correctly. She surveyed Flecke with a cold and hostile eye, and said curtly: "Ay!"

"Will you kindly tell him that Mr. Flecke wishes to have a word with him?"

"What about?"

"My good woman?"

"I'm not your good woman. Mr. Hardy is a gentleman. I reckon he'll hav' nowt te say tiv a whelp like you."

"Mr. Hardy!" bawled Flecke.

"Ay, shout, an' he'll hear ye hard enough. I hope he's listenin' te me as well. You're a bad lot, Arthur Flecke, that's what you are. 'Twas an

ill day for Dalesford when yer cousin was taken an' you left. ... Annie, get you away in! Yon wastrel isn't fit to be seen by any decent-minded girl. This is the man who well-nigh bruk yer sister's heart, an' nearly druv her to the grave. Out on ye, Arthur Flecke. Yer shadow will soil the white linen I've washed this mornin'. If I had my way?"

Furneaux would have allowed Mrs. Judd to vituperate Flecke till she ceased from sheer exhaustion, but Hardy thought it high time to intervene. Moreover, Annie Judd was ready to cry with alarm.

"Steady, Mrs. Judd!" he said. "Mr. Flecke has called to see me. Kindly go inside and close the door. ... Now, Mr. Flecke, what is it? I'm sorry you have been received with such misplaced warmth."

Flecke, who was in riding costume—his horse was tied to the gate opening into the road—gazed at Hardy vindictively in silence for a few seconds. His handsome, sullen face bore hectic red spots on both cheeks, but was otherwise white. His eyes held a somber fire. Altogether, he looked as though consumed with fever.

"So that old virago is in your service," he said, at last, seemingly finding difficulty in controlling his voice.

Hardy did not answer. He remembered a certain Bavarian student who had provoked him in similar fashion, and, above all things, he wanted to avoid a vulgar quarrel with Flecke. The latter collected his wits. He knew he had made a bad opening.

"You and I are fated to be at cross purposes," he went on. "Coming here I meant to tell you my business in a civil way. If I express myself awkwardly now you must blame that stupid woman, who had the impudence to believe, or affect to believe, that I ought to marry her elder daughter. By gad! Like mother like child. Now, this is what I want to say. You and your artist friend—I forget his name—"

"Furneaux!" squeaked a voice through the the open window. "Charles Francis Furneaux!"

Flecke slapped a gaitered leg with his riding whip. He recovered himself quickly.

"Very well, both of you, then," he sneered. "You will oblige me and Lord Henry Dallinger by not encouraging Miss Fenton's visits. She—"

"Has Lord Henry Dallinger authorized you to speak in his behalf?" broke in Hardy. Though hard driven, he choked back his anger. Again he forced the recollection that, no matter what the cost, he must steer clear of a brawl.

"Naturally, I have not mentioned the matter to his lordship. It need go no farther than ourselves. I mean to marry Miss Fenton; it is obvious that I cannot permit her to become the subject of village gossip."

"So you have been 'at home' to Rabbit Jack?" chirped Furneaux.

Flecke, puzzled by Hardy's guarded attitude, was resolved to force something in the nature of an explanation.

"Miss Fenton is young and inexperienced," he continued, ignoring Furneaux and gazing fixedly at Hardy. "The—er—curious Bohemianism of your life here makes a certain appeal to an unsophisticated girl. She must be protected. I'm sure you see my point. Give me your word as a gentleman that her presence here will be discouraged and I'll leave it at that."

He thought he had placed Hardy in a fix rather cleverly. Somehow, he did not expect to secure the guarantee he asked for, but it would suit his purpose almost as well if the man whom he now regarded as a serious rival flared into a passion, because he would then have a case to lay before Diana's relatives, the probable upshot being the speedy departure of the family to London or the Continent.

"Have you said what you wished to say?" inquired Hardy, in a voice which had suddenly taken to itself some of the quality of the steel he understood so well.

"I've heard nothing from you yet," came the defiant reply.

"Go!"

"I insist—"

"Go, or I'll not keep my hands off you!"

Hardy advanced a step. Flecke, though not a coward physically, realized he was no match for this stark, gaunt adversary, and backed away a little.

"Of course, you know the consequences," he began. Then Hardy's voice rose to a queer sort of yelp.

"Go!" he repeated.

"But, whatever you do, don't cross that fatal moor!" cackled Furneaux.

Flecke flourished his riding switch, turned on his heel and strode to the gate. Furneaux opened the door and came out. Behind him marched Mrs. Judd, with her face aflame.

"My, but you sided him," she cried. "You did, an' all. It's high time a man tackled him. Miss Diana marry him! She wouldn't tak' him if he was hung wi' diamonds!"

Each word rose in a shrill crescendo. The outburst was intended to reach her enemy and succeeded, because Flecke gave the cottage and its occupants a mocking smile as he mounted and rode off.

But Hardy was sad at heart. Flecke had declared war, and Diana would suffer. And how was she to be rescued? How would Lord Henry Dallinger, well-disposed and kindly as he might be to one who was an utter stranger, receive a proposal for his niece from a moneyless inventor? Small wonder if the sky dimmed and the world looked dark.

All at once Hardy's gorge rose at the squalor and poverty of Black Ings. The implements in the forge grew commonplace and meaningless; his experiments became a farce; they departed from every recognized principle of steel manufacture; he had failed before and would fail again; the very depth of his love for Diana forbade that he should wheedle such a girl into the gray monotony of life on five pounds a week, which sum was his present commercial value.

Furneaux, with pursed lips and brooding eyes, watched him furtively. Hardy evidently wanted to be alone. He walked slowly to the forge window and swung inside without a word. Then Furneaux watched Flecke, who sat his horse well, and looked a gallant figure as he passed down the valley.

"Yes," said the detective aloud. "Ride on, my buck! It's your last chance, I'm thinking."

He forgot that Mrs. Judd was at his elbow. She heard, but without comprehension.

"The pity is that he doesn't break his neck," she muttered.

"Good dame," said Furneaux, "one doesn't need to risk injuring a fine horse. Necks can be broken in several ways. For instance, a man might fall off a scaffold."

"Scaffold! That wastrel never did an honest day's work in his life."

Obviously, Mrs. Judd was thinking of brick-laying. The detective smiled.

"Let us now resume our interrupted labours," he said benignantly, and opened the collection of papers which he had bundled together when Flecke's high-pitched voice disturbed his meditations.

After a while he looked in on Hardy.

"Well, Walter, my son, how goes it?" he inquired.

Hardy's bad quarter of an hour had yielded slightly before the certain knowledge that the present steel rod was revealing characteristics not discernible in its predecessors.

"Thank heaven I have something to occupy my mind," he answered.

"Any message for Miss Diana? I'm going to Dalesford. I may not be back tonight."

"I'm at my wits' end. Would you tell her?"

"About Flecke? No. Why bother her?"

"But he is sure to create mischief."

"I think not. I'll attend to that. You don't mind if I leave you?"

"Try and return, if you can."

"Well, well, we'll see. But what about that message?"

"Give me five minutes. I'll write."

"Make it ten, my boy, and write double the quantity. It'll ease your mind."

So Furneaux bore a note for Diana swiftly to the Grange, calling openly at the police station on the way. As he whirled past the Hollies he noted preparations for a move. The new owner of Seacroft Hall was about to transfer himself and his belongings thither. The head lad was in the stable yard; Furneaux stopped the machine and wheeled it back to the gate.

"Mr. Flecke is not leaving here at once, I hope?" he said politely.

"No, sir," said the man. "The hosses go today. Mr. Flecke follows tomorrow. You're the gentleman who wanted to draw the house, aren't you, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, it 'll be empty this week."

"Sharp work. Stepping into a dead man's shoes, eh?"

Furneaux restarted the engine, leaped nimbly into the saddle and was off with a clatter. The man gazed after him and scratched his head.

"A rum cove, that," he communed. "But all them artists are a bit touched."

Arrived at the Grange Furneaux handed Hardy's letter to a footman and asked if Lord Henry was at home. Yes, his lordship was in the library. Lady Dallinger and Miss Diana were out in the car.

Lord Henry received the detective joyfully.

"Gad!" he cried, "I thought you were—where have you—what's going on?"

"A great deal. We make an arrest today. Can your lordship spare an hour?"

Lord Henry sprang up excitedly.

"You don't mean—have you secured evidence to warrant—Is Bates in custody?"

"He will be brought to the police station at one o'clock. It is an awkward time, but—"

The other glanced at his watch—half past twelve.

"By Jove, we'll have a snack of lunch before we start. My wife and niece have gone to York to buy hats. I'll drive you down in a dogcart. While we eat you can tell me what's coming."

For once, Lord Henry was so carried away that he completed every sentence.

But Furneaux shook his head.

"I daren't attempt to prophesy," he said. "Your lordship may be called subsequently as a witness, or, again, it is possible you may have to receive a deposition. In any case it is advisable that you should know nothing of what is on the boards until Bates himself speaks, if he does speak."

Lord Henry didn't care a jot so long as he was not left out of the business. He and Furneaux snatched a hasty meal, and arrived at the police station promptly at the appointed hour. Superintendent Thompson received them, not in his office, but in a sitting room at the back of the building. Furneaux spread some papers on a table and opened the proceedings by a brief statement.

"I purpose putting certain questions to Bates," he said. "I shall warn him that he can please himself whether or not he answers them, as he may be charged with being an accessory after the fact with regard to the murder of Sir Dudley Seacroft."

Lord Henry listened to this preamble with growing amazement.

"God bless my soul!" he cried. "Accessory after the—Then who?—Murder, did you say?"

"Yes, my lord. Please don't ask me who committed the murder. I don't know. I am only guessing. I want Bates to tell us. He knows. I mean to give him the alternative of appearing as a witness or figuring as a principal. I think I hear him coming. Kindly oblige me, gentlemen, by not interpolating a word of comment or inquiry until I have finished."

A police sergeant entered, shepherding Rabbit Jack as a collie dog might bring a reluctant sheep into the fold. Bates looked scared, as well he might, when his eyes alighted on the chairman of the bench of

magistrates and the superintendent, but he was even more surprised at sight of Furneaux. Still, his Cockney assurance did not desert him.

“Wot’s up now?” he demanded, almost truculently. “Wot ’ave I—?”

“Sit down, Grainger,” said Furneaux.

Bates started violently, and glowered at the man who had addressed him by that name, “Grainger.”

“Wot the?” he began, but again that quiet voice interrupted him.

“Do sit down, Grainger, and don’t bluster. It will be of no avail, and you will only upset yourself. I’m Furneaux of the Yard. Come, now, Billy, be reasonable. Of course you don’t remember me, because my colleague, Mr. Winter, had charge of your case. Of course I am astonished that a sharp fellow like you didn’t recognize him when he drove past your cottage in Nuttonby last Wednesday morning with the superintendent, though, for that matter, he missed you. Perhaps he wasn’t looking your way.”

Bates, who may remain under that alias, dropped into a chair.

“Well, if that ain’t a lick!” he gasped. “Wot is it, then? Failin’ to report! You’re on the wrong tack, mister. I’ve a clean ticket.”

“I know all about you. You were so obliging as to stand for your portrait, and supply your finger marks on two sticky tumblers. Here are full details,” and Furneaux tapped the bundle of documents. “But I sha’n’t touch on bygones unless you annoy me. Now I want to put a plain question: Do you understand what it means to be an accessory after the fact in a charge of murder?”

Bates’ dark face was now livid. He could only falter: “No, guv’nor. S’elp me if I do.”

“Then I’ll tell you. It means that if you have witnessed a murder, and wilfully suppress your evidence, thus striving to shield the man who actually committed the crime, you can be sent to penal servitude for life.”

“But ’oo sez I’ve witnessed a murder?”

“I do. Haven’t you already told the murderer what you saw, and demanded a price for your silence? Didn’t you go to his house on Sunday night for that very purpose?”

Bates was stricken dumb. He could only glower at Furneaux with the glistening eyes of an animal in terror.

“I am willing to adopt one of two courses,” went on Furneaux impressively. “I can either take you, step by step, through every phase of

the crime which was enacted on Howlsike Moor last Tuesday at half past four o'clock in the afternoon, or I will record the facts in your own words, in the presence of witnesses. Which shall it be?"

But Bates was either too overcome to utter a syllable, or some subtle sense warned him that if he opened his mouth he was lost. Be that as it may, he remained stubbornly silent.

Furneaux's eyelids flickered, and he smiled with the fantastic grimace often limned on a Japanese mask. If Winter were in the room he would have known that the little man's first attack had missed its objective and he was now mustering his legions for an assault which ought to be, which simply must be, irresistible. None of the others, least of all Bates, had the least suspicion of this phase in the inquiry. They regarded him as one inspired.

"I gather that you want to be sure how much I really do know," he said, with the unctuous sarcasm of a prosecuting counsel with an unanswerable brief at his fingers' tips.

"Very well. I'll take you back to, say, twenty-five minutes past four on this day week.

"You had been collecting plovers' eggs on the edge of Howlsike Moor. You were a skilled searcher, and had gathered about two dozen. You were thinking of going to Nuttonby when you saw a man in pink riding toward you across the heather. He was still some distance off, half a mile or more, and, as you dislike being found openly where game of any sort, even grouse, are preserved, you dropped into a convenient sandpit, meaning to hide until the horseman had disappeared. He was following a rough track which led close to your burrow, but, before he had quite reached you, another rider, also in pink, came galloping in the same direction.

"The first man was Mr. Arthur Flecke, the second, Sir Dudley Seacroft. Flecke halted, and a row sprang up between the two. It had reference to a lady, who was supposed, and correctly so, to have lost her way on that same moor. Sir Dudley Seacroft resented his cousin's interference, and bitter words were exchanged—with the inevitable outcome.

"Tempers ran high and a blow was struck, a sudden, rather unfair, vicious blow. Flecke was the aggressor, and he used the butt of a heavy hunting crop. His action was so unexpected that Sir Dudley could not guard against it, and received the full force of the blow on the forehead, his hunting cap having been swept off his head by a branch of a tree during a sharp run earlier in the day. He was stunned, reeled in the saddle, and fell to the ground.

"Flecke caught his cousin's hunter and endeavoured, at first, to lead him clear of the prostrate body. Then, as you fancied, he went literally mad, because he compelled the frightened horse to stamp and prance on its unconscious master. The more frenzied the animal's resistance the worse wounds it inflicted.

"You watched this terrible thing without making the least attempt to prevent it. You saw a serious assault suddenly change into downright murder, but kept mum behind your screen of heather. By so doing you became a party to the crime, and could be hanged for it, but the judge may possibly—I say possibly—tell the jury that fear for your own life stopped you from making an outcry."

Bates could no longer withstand this merciless accuser, who was also a wizard.

"That's true," he squeaked in a high falsetto induced by sheer agitation. "He'd 'ave killed me as sure as I'm here this minnit. He tole me so hisself on Sunday night."

Not a muscle of Furneaux's face relaxed, though his triumph was great. He had conquered by sheer force of imagination. No French *juge d'instruction* could have reconstructed a crime more accurately, with more convincing detail.

"You have spoken just in time!" he said severely. "When I had finished I would have asked Superintendent Thompson to take the charge which I meant to lodge against you. Now, you can complete the story yourself, and we'll go through it again in your own words."

"Bli'me, guv'nor, you ain't left much for me to say," whined Bates. "I lay there like a hare in its form till Mr. Flecke galloped off Harrowdale way. Then, just as I was about to creep out, I twigs a lydy walkin' 'er 'oss along that self-same road. So dahn I flops ag'in, an' watches 'er liftin' the body to her own saddle. I dussent offer to 'elp. I was that took aback I couldn't think clear, an' I was afeard the polis 'ud blime me."

"But you retained sufficient sense to scrape your feet in the sandpit so as to destroy your footprints?"

"Luv a duck, mister, you know everythink, an' no bloomin' error."

"Go on. Why did you follow Miss Fenton?"

"I cahn't tell yer, strite I can't. I didn't know wot I was doin' arf the time."

"You recovered later."

"Wot are ye gittin' at now! D'ye mean about Mr. Hardy?"

"No. We have that on record. I am alluding to your action when you sneaked into the forge and robbed Sir Dudley Seacroft of his money, dropped a coin in the darkness, and knocked a hammer over."

"Don't make me aht wuss nor wot I am," muttered Bates lamely. He was thoroughly beaten now. In another minute he would begin whimpering, and Furneaux wanted to keep him in talk.

"Well, let us forget your visit to the forge. A miserable theft was only in your line. What arrangement have you made with Mr. Flecke?"

"He promised me a fiver a week an' a free house as long as I lived."

"You were admitted to the Hollies by sending in word that you had something to say concerning Miss Fenton?"

"S'trewth, guv'nor, 'ow can you know that?" said Bates, almost admiringly.

"I know the whole story, you see," replied Furneaux coolly. "Now, if you're ready we'll start again from the beginning. I'll write and you dictate. You're a lucky man, Grainger. You missed death narrowly on Tuesday last. You've just escaped being sent away for the rest of your natural. And, if I am not greatly mistaken, you ran no small risk when you tackled Mr. Flecke in his own house on Sunday evening."

"I did, an' all," gurgled the other. "I b'lieve he'd ha' wrung my neck if his men an' a maid servant didn't know I was in the house. I 'ad to tell 'im pretty sharp ter keep 'is 'ands orf."

Furneaux was far too elated by the coup he had carried through with such confident skill to pay heed to the drawn horror of Lord Henry Dallinger's face when the conviction was forced on him that Flecke was veritably a murderer. He had known both victim and assassin as children. He was a trustee of the estate. Their parents had been his contemporaries. That such a crime could occur in the midst of a peaceful and law-abiding community like Dalesford was almost inconceivable; that it should involve the members of one of the oldest families in the county was a thing he would have scouted energetically an hour ago. Yet he could not refuse the evidence of his senses. Every word that Bates said, or, to be exact, that Furneaux was putting into Bates's mouth, was borne out by the inexorable logic of facts.

And his own position was wretched in the extreme. In the ordinary course of events Flecke would be brought before him for the preliminary investigation in a court of petty sessions which precedes the ultimate trial by a judge of assize. He shuddered at the thought of it! Arthur Flecke charged with the wilful murder of his own cousin!

There could be no diminution of the charge to one of manslaughter. Bates's evidence established that fact beyond a doubt. It was a deliberate and cold-blooded murder. Perhaps the absence of premeditation might be urged as a plea against the death sentence. In any event Flecke would be a convict for twenty years, if he lived so long. What a tragedy!

What a downfall for a distinguished house! When Furneaux had completed the deposition, and Bates had appended his mark, he placed the sheets of foolscap before Lord Henry for his lordship's signature as the magistrate in whose presence the record was taken.

To his manifest surprise he discovered that the old gentleman's eyes were streaming with tears. For once in his life, the mercurial little detective had been too much absorbed in the professional aspect of his work to pay heed to its emotional side. Poor Lord Henry endeavoured to explain away his distress.

"One is not prepared—for such brutalities—among gentlemen," he stammered. It would appear that one of the old-fashioned school looked for a higher standard in men of his order.

XVI

Hardy, dreaming in his forge, had already experienced the amazing developments of which trivial events were capable. At that crisis in its history Dalesford, too, was fated to be the centre of small happenings which produced results out of all proportion to their insignificant origin.

Being in need of some packing cases the head stableman at the Hollies sent a youth to the local grocer's with a barrow. The boy was trundling the boxes through the High Street when he met a police sergeant escorting Bates to police headquarters. The word had gone round like wildfire that Rabbit Jack had been arrested "for t'murder of Sir Dudley," and, short as was the passage of the presumed prisoner and his guard from the tinker's shop, in which Bates lodged, to the police station, an ever-increasing crowd followed on their heels.

Now, it will be remembered that Superintendent Thompson's office could be partly overlooked from the street, and, when it was seen that the poacher was taken to the rear of the building, the local wiseacres decided that he had been "nabbed" on a warrant, and put straight into a cell.

That was enough, though the presence of Lord Henry's dogcart at the door made assurance doubly sure. When, therefore, at half past two, Superintendent Thompson, the sergeant, and Bates himself, appeared in the doorway, a great yell went up from the throats of a packed throng of hundreds of men, women and children.

"What's all this about!" demanded Thompson angrily. "What do you gapers want here?"

Those nearest explained that they were told Bates had been "took."

"Nothing of the sort," said the wrathful superintendent. "The man is at liberty. You can see that for yourselves. He is free to come and go as he pleases. Be off—all of you! Pity you haven't something better to occupy your minds than such old wives' tales."

Certainly the demeanour of Bates, who had by this time recovered his composure and his effrontery, give the lie direct to the notion that he was in fear of the law. The mob's uproar was suddenly hushed, and Thompson promptly took advantage of the chance to make his voice widely heard.

"There is no charge against this man," he said loudly. "He must be free to move about without let or hindrance. Anyone interfering with him is liable to fine and imprisonment."

Thereupon, folk in these small Yorkshire towns having a wholesome respect for authority, the crowd melted. Thompson and the sergeant strolled out as if no such thing as a serious crime had ever occupied their attention, while Bates shuffled unconcernedly in the direction of his tinker's by-street.

The two men in uniform followed the road leading to Seacroft and the Grange. Outside the Hollies a furniture van was drawn up, its pair of horses contentedly nuzzling into nose-bags. The men in charge were grouped near the gate with a few stable boys, and their chatter ceased when the police appeared.

"Mr. Flecke at home?" inquired Thompson addressing the man to whom Furneaux had spoken a little earlier.

"Yes, sir. Do you want to see him?" came the answer.

"I'd be glad to have a word with him."

"Right, sir. I'll tell one of the maids. He's just gone in. The fact is, sir, he seemed to be rather upset by the news."

"What news?"

"The arrest of Bates, sir."

"What nonsense! I wish I knew who spread that silly story about. I'd give him a flea in his ear. Who brought the yarn to Mr. Flecke?"

.... But, never mind," he added, seeing that the head lad was about to call someone. "We can go into that some other time. Just send that message to Mr. Flecke, will you?"

In half a minute a girl came and said that Mr. Flecke must be in his bedroom, as the door was locked, but she could not get him to answer.

"He's queer tempered these days," she added, with true Yorkshire frankness. "He's either all smiles or walkin' about as though he'd lost a sovereign and found sixpence."

"Try again," said the superintendent sharply. "Knock, and say that I want him on rather urgent business. ... Which is Mr. Flecke's bedroom?" he went on, when the maid had flown.

"That one, sir," said the head lad. "He likes to give an eye to the hosses of a mornin'. It isn't the best room, but it suits him."

Thompson and the sergeant gazed up at two curtained windows on the first floor. A silence had fallen on the little cluster of men, and, as the servant had left the house door open, they all heard the rat-tat of her knuckles on the oak panels, succeeded by the announcement: "T' superintendent wants you, sir."

At that moment the curtains of one of the windows were pulled aside, and Flecke appeared, looking at them through the panes of glass. He was deathly pale, but his scornful glance met Thompson's squarely, and he smiled derisively. The superintendent had seen that smile on a man's face before, and knew what it meant.

"Come!" he said to the sergeant, and the two dashed into the house and up the stairs. The maid was yet waiting at the bedroom door, but Thompson brushed her aside and thrust his right foot against the lock with all the weight of his sixteen stone behind it. But the lock held. It was a hundred years old, and intended for use, not for display. Then he tried his shoulder. The sergeant, also a powerfully built man, helped, and a hinge yielded.

Simultaneously a shot rang out. When Thompson burst into the room Flecke was lying on the floor with the top of his head shattered. He had made no mistake as to the cause of Thompson's presence, nor did his nerve fail when he placed the muzzle of a double-barrelled gun in his mouth and pressed the trigger with a cleaning rod.



Furneaux brought the news to Hardy late that night. The younger man was inexpressibly pained and shocked by the story of the murder and Flecke's suicide, but he put a curious question to the detective.

"Why didn't you accompany the police when they went to make the arrest?" he said.

"I don't like these sensational events," replied Furneaux.

"But you couldn't possibly have foretold Flecke's action. He might have been taken unaware."

"A man of his temperament must have expected something of the sort. He carries his own special hell round with him. The appearance of Old Nick, in the garb of a policeman, is a mere incident."

"Yes—"

"I didn't go, at any rate," snapped Furneaux. "Sometimes I spare myself, occasionally I think of others."

"For instance, you left me to my work today, knowing full well that I should hate to be mixed up in these dreadful doings. It was kind and thoughtful of you. I shall not forget it."

"Well, there are memories which even a hard-hearted agent of the C.I.D. would gladly obliterate. This locality has had its surfeit of horrors. Two murders and a suicide within one short week is 'going some,' as they say in New York."

"Two murders?"

"Have you forgotten the horse? That was callous—that was brutal. Arthur Flecke has been nothing more nor less than a homicidal maniac all his life. The man who could take out of its stable an innocent animal, which had striven most loyally not to injure its master, and shoot it in cold blood, was capable of any crime. The world is a better place now that he is gone. ... But let us talk of something less wearing for the nerves. What of ingots and steel rods?"

Hardy took thought for a few seconds. Then he rose and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Come!" he said. "I'll show you an experiment. I meant to hold it over till Diana arrived tomorrow, but, after today's tragedy, she will not care to appear in public so soon. Come, then! We'll make the test tonight!"

He led the way to the forge. As the two men passed the foot of the ladder which communicated with the upper floor, Mrs. Judd's voice came timidly out of the darkness.

"Annie was lyin' awake, sir," she said, "an' she couldn't help overhearin' Mr. Furneaux's news. Is it really true that Arthur Flecke has shot himself?"

"Yes, Mrs. Judd. It is quite true."

"A good riddance of bad rubbish," was Mrs. Judd's unfeeling comment. So she and the detective were of one mind in the matter.

Within the forge, Hardy produced two half-inch steel rods, each about a foot in length. He handed them to Furneaux.

"Can you distinguish any difference between those?" he asked.

The detective took them, and examined them closely. He rang them on the anvil, and each gave forth the same sharp clink of highly tempered, brittle steel.

"No," he said. "To outward seeming they are alike."

Hardy placed a rod crosswise on a couple of iron bars, so that both ends were supported. He picked up a sledge hammer—that under which he had found the sovereign—and delivered a swinging blow in the centre of the rod, which was shattered into two pieces. Then he arranged the second rod similarly, and dealt it an even harder blow. It bent slightly.

His face blanched a little, but he seemed to be otherwise unmoved.

"The first rod shows a crystalline fracture," he said quietly. "The second, when it does yield a result which I cannot accomplish, will show a fibrous fracture."

Furneaux knew what those few words meant. He did not speak during a second or two, which was quite a long time for him.

"I have often heard of a man hewing out his own fortune," he said at last, "but it is new to me that anyone should achieve that laudable end by one blow of a sledge hammer."

"Two, to be exact."

"One," persisted Furneaux. "Any brawny idiot could have smashed the first bar. In the second he would meet the resistance of your brains. Walter, my boy, when you buy the Seacroft estate, ask Winter and me down in September. He thinks he can shoot partridges. I know I can eat them."



A tale that is twice told becomes stale in the mouth. From the moment Walter Hardy carried Diana Fenton in his arms into the safe haven of his tiny dwelling it was as certain that they would marry as that murder will out. All over the world each Jill waits for her Jack, and fortune is seldom unkind in refusing to bring them together. At any rate, those two were surely destined the one for the other. They would have been happy in poverty; they were equally happy in wealth, and that is all that any wedded pair can ask—more, far more, than many receive.

Furneaux was a true prophet. Hardy bought Seacroft Hall and its lands. The process he had discovered made him a rich man speedily, and it seemed but a fitting consummation of Diana's adventure on Howlsike Moor that she, who was apparently chosen by the gods to be mistress of Seacroft, should not be denied her lot.

On a blazing day in August the following year, when Diana and Lady Dallinger had motored to the moor to lunch with the party of guns, the

first drive of the afternoon brought Hardy quite close to the place where the unfortunate baronet lost his life.

His wife was with him. They recognized the spot, though the heather and turf between them had obliterated the last trace of a foul deed. A long way beneath, smug and cosy in the sunshine, lay Black Ings farm, where Mrs. Judd dwelt, and the young farmer who had married Annie was earning a comfortable living raising hardy cattle and moor-bred sheep. Diana looked at the homestead.

“Walter,” she said. “It is nice to own cars and horses and broad acres, but I think you and I could have eked out an existence even there.”

“Even there!” he repeated, pretending surprise. “What a way to speak of the house where I found you and earned a fortune!”

THE END