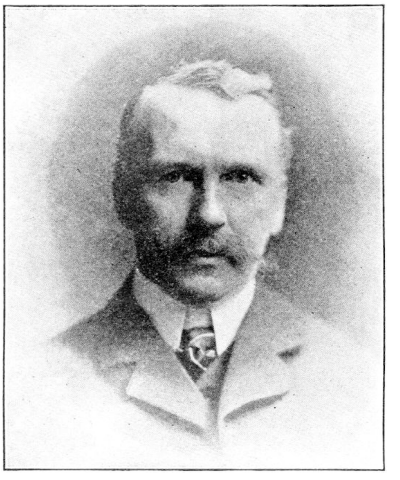
BY FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

A Winter and Furneaux Mystery

Gordon Holmes (Louis Tracy and M. P. Shiel)

Mills & Boon, London 1909

— gesetzt in XeLaTeX, Bochum 2025 —



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 Mysterius 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 von überzogenem Pathos, was die Lektüre für den modernen Leser nicht immer erfreulich macht. 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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The Circumstances

"Hope you will like the wine, sir. It is the best I could get from the Bush."

"Good wine needs no bush, Jenkins."

"Well, sir, it's a better house than the Three Tuns, an' the brand is all right if so be as the label is genuine."

The young man seated at the dining-table laughed pleasantly. On no account would he hurt the feelings of the elderly servitor, half butler, half caretaker, who had provided the feast for his home-coming.

"I am sure the claret is excellent, Jenkins," he said. "It tastes like the nectar of the gods to-night. Only by contrast can one learn to appreciate the good things of life. You hardly realize, I suppose, that many a time during the past two years I have been glad to scoop a tinful of water from a shallow puddle stirred into mud-soup by horses and bullocks?"

"No, sir," said Jenkins solemnly.

The diner began to carve a roast fowl. A puzzled smile lurked in the corners of his mouth.

"Why are you so serious, Jenkins?" he asked.

"Serious, sir?"

"Well, then, how shall I put it?—so dignified, remote, confoundedly respectful? In a word, have you forgotten my name?"

"No, sir. You will always be Master Arthur to me an' your nurse. But now you be Mr. Leigh, of the Abbey Manor, an' we try to remember it, because people do be so funny when we talk as if you were still the boy who stole the parson's peaches, an' nearly spoiled Farmer Bacon's cart foal by lamin' him to jump fences."

Seldom did Jenkins unbend so thoroughly. Despite his grave air, Arthur Leigh knew that this friend of his youth was deeply stirred.

"Ah, me!" he sighed, "the happiest days come first; don't they, Jenkins? Yet it seems but yesterday that I ran away from the Abbey. And you don't look an hour older. Deuce of a row I had with my grandfather that morning, eh? I was never so surprised in my life as when the lawyers wrote and told me he was dead, and that I was his heir. How did they keep track of me? Did he relent before the end?"

Jenkins evidently found difficulty in expressing himself. He coughed once or twice in vain effort to bring forth words that hesitated.

"Mr. Leigh mentioned your name, sir, to be sure, but—er—not exactly—that is—you remember his peculiar way, sir?"

"Kept up the appearance of a fight to a finish—is that it?"

"Just what I wanted to say, sir."

"Odd! I wonder what the old boy had in his mind? By gad, do you think he made a mistake, and left the wrong will lying about? Jenkins—you don't mean to say you burnt the parchment that disinherited me?"

"No, sir."

The disavowal came so promptly, in the orthodox tone of the well-trained servant, that Arthur Leigh laughed again.

"Good job nobody else has a shadow of a claim on the property," he said cheerily. "At best, or worst, from my point of view, he could only have devised it to some institution. Now, I want you to tell me something. I am five years older than I was on the day the Abbey doors closed on me. I can take a calmer view of things. In any event, I would refuse to harbour animosity against a dead man, who, with all his faults, made amends for his harshness. Tell me, then—why did my grandfather hate my mother?"

"I have always understood, sir, that the religious question was the cause of the whole thing."

Jenkins was on firmer ground now. The reply came readily enough.

"Are you sure? You were here before my father's marriage. Was there any dispute at that time?"

"None whatsoever, sir. It was them blessed dogs, an' cats, an' rabbits. Old Mr. Leigh would turn ag'in anybody who opposed him there. Even in his dyin' hour he refused to send for the vicar. Your mother was a dear, good lady. Many's the time I've seen her weepin' on account of the dreadful things he would say."

"Yes, I know," broke in Leigh hurriedly. "I am sorry I mentioned the matter. But it is hard to realize that in these modern days a man would embitter his whole life and cast off those who were near and dear to him simply because they could not share his outlandish views. Did he hold fast to the 'transmigration of souls theory' to the end?"

"Bless your heart, sir, we have over ninety animiles penned up in the stables at this minnit. There were one hundred an' fifteen of 'em on the day of his funeral. People came from all parts to gaze at 'em, an' a rare row there was when Mrs. Stokes saw the hutch of a one-eyed tom cat labeled with her husband's name. She broke the door with her umbrella, an' the cat flew at her. We have never set eyes on him since."

"But if I remember rightly, the cat's behaviour somewhat resembled that of the late lamented Stokes?"

"So everybody said, sir, an' that made Mrs. Stokes carry on wuss. Her langwidge about that cat was somethink dreadful."

"Who looks after these creatures now?"

"Two men are specially paid, sir. I have me doubts about some of the rabbits and a cat or two. Leastways, it's funny that far more dogs should die than cats or rabbits. You see, the men have a soft job, sir."

"Who pays them?"

"Messrs. Mowle and Mowle, sir. The cheque comes regular every month."

"I suppose I must humour my grandfather's wishes," said Leigh thoughtfully, "but I shall take most particular care that the laws of mortality are not interfered with in future. These keepers must be watched, and admitted only when others are present. After dinner I shall walk round and have a look at the menagerie. When are the poor brutes exercised?"

"The dogs get an outing or two in the week, sir, but the cats an' rabbits remain in their hutches."

"Well, of all the ridiculous nonsense—But, there! I lost my temper years ago on that subject. Any letters, Jenkins?"

"Yes, sir."

Leigh glanced at his correspondence while Jenkins was bringing in another course. A few former acquaintances in the neighbourhood wrote to congratulate him on his safe return from the South African War. Enterprising tradesmen sent circulars from the neighbouring towns of Bridgewater and Burnham. A job-master at Bristol was anxious to equip him with carriages and horses. A London tailor offered to

despatch a "representative" with a tape-measure and patterns of summer suiting, "on receipt of instructions," and, with the rest, came a bulky package from Mowle and Mowle, the family solicitors.

"My arrival in England must have been trumpeted far and wide," said Leigh. "Apparently, I have become quite an important person, Jenkins. Yesterday, in London, an ex-trooper of Paget's Horse, to-day in Somersetshire I am a country gentleman. A quick change, eh? Reminds me of De Wet."

"It was in the papers, sir," explained the butler. "It's wonderful how news spreads in these days."

Leigh opened the lawyer's missive. It contained two typewritten documents and a cheque. He examined the latter and laughed gayly.

"Four hundred and fifty pounds!" he cried. "By Jove, I have never seen so much money before. I thought I was doing well when I received forty pounds of deferred pay from the War Office, and a hundred on account from the Mowles—but this is a small fortune. How much does the estate bring in yearly, Jenkins?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. Folks used to say it was six or seven thousand, but that was when farm rents were higher. Didn't the solicitors tell you all about it, sir?"

"No. They were rather hazy. Said I might have a hundred at once, and they would write full details to the Abbey. Here they are, I fancy. But they can wait until I have had a look round. The old place does not seem to have changed an atom. Some of the shrubs are bigger, perhaps—some of the trees a trifle more stately. The greatest change is in myself, I suppose?"

"Well, sir, I must say that South Africa hasn't done you any harm. You look the picture of health and strength. Mrs. Jenkins said when she saw you bein' a woman, sir, an' your own nuss so to speak—she said"

"Come now, Jenkins. Out with it. What did Eliza say?"

"She gev it as her opinion, sir, that you'd have the pick of the county when you looked for a wife."

"Jenkins, you must repress her. She is a born matchmaker. I have not been in the Abbey an hour before she has me married and done for. How does she know I have not made my choice already?"

"Oh, of course, sir"

"Tell her to rest easy. If I break my neck on Exmoor after the North Devon staghounds this summer no young lady's heart will suffer. To-

morrow, when I go through my kit, I shall show her some pictures of Kaffir beauty, and she will realize that I am a tough subject."

Leigh swept his letters into a heap, drank his coffee, and lit a cigar. Then he walked to the fine window that gave access to a spacious balcony. He stood there many minutes, and might well be pardoned if he yielded to the pride of ownership, for his eyes dwelt on a fair domain.

The old-fashioned house occupied the site of a long-forgotten Benedictine Abbey. Carved stones built into the rubble were silent witnesses of the ruins which a Georgian builder had not scrupled to bring into fresh service. One ancient wall, retained in its entirety, flanked the rose-garden that had supplanted the cloisters. A great mound, clothed in ferns and rock-plants, and surmounted by a flagstaff, was reputed to be all that was left of an earlier dwelling destroyed by Cromwell. For the rest, the quiet taste of the early eighteenth century had utilized a singularly beautiful rock-spur on the extreme west of Polden Hill to construct a home-like, comfortable mansion. The gardens, originally planned in the Italian style, were garnished with the restful foliage of English trees and shrubs. Flowers rioted there. On this June evening the very air was heavy with their fragrance.

The Abbey Manor and its grounds filled the whole of a tiny plateau of three acres. The front of the house faced southwest. From the elevated perch of the balcony the eye traveled over the valley of the Parret, with sleepy Bridgewater lying at the head of its estuary, and the Black Down Hills closing the horizon. To the right, beyond an arable plain, the blue waters of the Bristol Channel gleamed in the rays of the setting sun. On the left, the pastoral lands that formed the manor stretched far into the heart of a country famed for the placid beauty of its vistas. Behind the house, sheltering it from the north and east, rose a dense plantation of firs; a typical Somerset orchard nestled below the lawns and flower gardens, and an outer belt of woodland girdled the house and pleasure-grounds.

Thus, the "Abbey," as it was known in the familiar parlance of the locality, was completely isolated. Even the carriage-road was hidden by elms and dense undergrowth, and climbed the ridge of rock on which the mansion stood by a steep gradient. A wide and straight main road, leading from Burnham to Bridgewater, passed through the wood beneath, yet, so cunningly was the idea of concealment carried out, that no lodge attracted the attention of passers-by. A well-kept drive, high-banked with laurels and rhododendrons, curved off among the trees, while a conspicuous notice informed all and sundry that this was a

"Private Road." From the railway, half a mile distant, or the winding Parret, another mile to the westward, the Abbey Manor and its background of firs were boldly outlined against the sky, but many thousands of tourists traversed the coast road during the summer months without the least suspicion that they had passed so close to a noteworthy residence.

The privacy thus secured was enhanced by sections of unscalable rock linked by steep brick walls that bristled with broken glass. Were not this ceinture shrouded by a wealth of well-grown timber, the Abbey might have borne some semblance of a prison. But skill in forestry and landscape gardening had prevented any such defect. The defensive works, viewed from the higher level of the gardens, merely constituted a paradise of wall-fruit, wherein peaches, nectarines, cherries, and figs, and the rarest varieties of plums and apples were not only shielded from inclement winds, but basked in every hour of sunshine.

Arthur Leigh descended to the croquet-lawn by a broad flight of steps. This lawn was the first of three broad ribands of turf that ran parallel to the front of the house. The second, a narrower strip, was a bowling green, and the third held a full-sized lawn-tennis court. Below the last was situated the rose-garden. These terraces were so deftly graduated that all were visible from the dwelling-rooms and balcony, though each was shielded from its neighbours by creeper-laden pergolas and groups of evergreens. To the left of the croquet-lawn stood the flagstaff mound, its base shrouded with azaleas and many species of flowering shrubs. A path passing between the mound and the house led to the stables, which adjoined the main courtyard and carriage entrance at the rear.

It was in the mind of the man who had so unexpectedly come into possession of this fairy-land that he would visit the stables while there was enough light to permit a close examination of his grandfather's strange pets. He had actually turned into the path, and would have reached the back of the mansion speedily, had not a drooping branch of a briar rose knocked his cigar out of his hand. He was looking at the flagstaff, and wondering what loyal instinct had moved Jenkins to hoist a Union Jack there in honour of his home-coming, and his next step crushed the cigar hopelessly.

There is a Provençal legend that credits the briar family with uncanny knowledge of human affairs. Leigh had read of it, and attributed its origin to the close poetic association of roses and lovers—for the briar is the mother of all roses, and love is the only really serious affair

in Provence.

He remembered the pretty conceit afterwards, but he gave not the slightest thought to it then. Going back to the dining-room, he secured the case he had left on the table, and lighted another cigar.

Jenkins happened to be in the room. With the privilege of an old servant, he was solicitous for his master's welfare.

"I wouldn't be too far from the house, sir," he said. "We are in for a thunderstorm."

From the balcony Leigh looked to the bad-weather quarter, where the distant line of the Channel had shone so bright and blue a few minutes earlier. The water was almost black now, and a sullen bank of cloud was rising in the west.

"By Jove, I think you are right," he cried. "That explains the sultry feeling in the air. But I am only going to the stables. If a shower comes on, I can return by the courtyard."

The colouring in the landscape was so deepened and intensified by the cloud effect that he paused again to drink in its marvelous tints. A gust of cold air sighed up from the valley, and stirred the topmost branches of the giant elms into fretful life. The fir cones rustled uneasily. A blackbird flew the length of the bowling-green with startled clutter and hasty wings. Then brooding silence reigned again, and from the unseen road far beneath came the quick panting of a motor-car driven at high speed.

It stopped suddenly. Leigh fancied that it had halted at the junction of the private road with the main thoroughfare.

"Someone coming here," he said aloud. "Now, who in the world can it be?"

A shrill scream answered him. A second time that ominous summons came from the leafy depths, and he was not one who could hear a woman's plaint unmoved.

"There has been an accident on the highroad," he shouted to Jenkins over his shoulder. "Call some of the men."

Running down the steps and across the lawn, he heard the butler's loud warning that the door leading from the rosery was locked. He waved a hand to show that he understood. Bars of iron and triple oak would not trouble him at all, unless some genius had discovered and destroyed his own particular means of eluding the vigilance of the Abbey's guardians.

From one of the side walls of the rose-gardens projected a quaint gargoyle. Originally intended to carry rain from the roof of a chapel, it had been placed by the eighteenth-century builder high in the wall as an ornament. It was a fearsome caricature of a Benedictine monk, through whose tremendous mouth many a shower must have spouted when the Abbey flourished. A stout ivy tree provided an excellent ladder to the gargoyle's broad back. Thence it was an easy matter to gain the top of thewall, and a ponderous oak, growing beyond the glass-crested boundary, threw one huge branch within reach.

Many a time had Arthur Leigh used that airy passage in his youth. It offered by far the speediest, because the most direct, means of entering or leaving the Abbey grounds. Even now, as he ran, he could see that the oak had not been lopped of that friendly arm.

Jenkins, first giving the alarm in the servants' quarters, hurried after his master with the key of the postern door, which opened directly on to the drive before it took a wide circuit through the rocks. But Leigh had vanished. The puzzled butler forced the lock with considerable difficulty, and hobbled after the gardeners who had rushed out at his cry.

By that time the athletic owner of the Abbey Manor was crashing through the brushwood at the foot of the cliff. He knew each twist and turn of the oak's great limbs and trunk, and dropped to the ground as safely as if he were speeding down a staircase. Once among the trees, he took a bee-line, and was in the open highway before the first man from the servants' hall had covered half the length of the drive.

A somewhat unexpected sight met his eyes.

Close to his feet on the grass at the side of the road, lay a lady's bicycle. Some ten yards farther away stood a motor-car. A man in the leather uniform of a chauffeur was making frantic efforts to re-start the engine. Apparently, if the rider of the bicycle were injured, she had been lifted into the limousine.

"*Que diable*, Gustave, why lose so much time?" cried a voice from the interior.

"*Sacre nom d'un nom*!" replied the wrathful Gustave, "the ignition has failed."

"Off with the bonnet, then, and put it right," came the ready order.

Though the hidden speaker used fluent French, his accent was distinctly Anglo-Saxon. In fact, he was guilty of that excess in nasal sounds which marks the uneducated linguist, and Leigh was prepared to find

some type of self-made man ensconced behind the glass front of the limousine.

Taking a deep breath or two, he approached quietly, and looked through the near window, which was lowered. A man's hand clenched the sash, but the owner was seated on the opposite side, and his rigid left arm seemed to keep prisoner a lady who occupied the seat nearer Leigh. At first glance, she appeared to be shrouded mysteriously, but fair motorists in general find delight in arctic trappings, and Leigh looked at the man, not at the woman.

"Can I be of any assistance?" he asked, in English. "I heard someone scream."

"Mind your own business," was the imperious retort.

Leigh, vastly astonished, gazed into a pale, determined face, a face that gave a fleeting impression of an actor or a barrister. He had no time to do more than note a pair of fierce eyes, a white brow, seamed with anger, and a mouth that set in a thin line of bloodless lips. At the sound of his voice Gustave sprang upright with an oath. The veiled lady, who was almost completely hidden by the angle of the limousine, uttered a choking cry and moved convulsively, only to be penned against the back of the vehicle with a ruthless pressure of her companion's elbow.

Leigh's blue eyes snapped back at the man who had answered so curtly.

"Why are you detaining that lady by force?" he demanded. "I insist on speaking to her before you leave this place. You must free her at once."

The hand on the door tightened even more firmly. The chauffeur quitted his engine. Evidently, he meant to interfere, but his employer checked him.

"Attend to your work, Gustave," he said with a curious restraint. But he did not shift his glance from Leigh.

"If you are a wise man," he went on, his calm tone being in marked contrast with his earlier brusqueness, "you will go away. My business does not concern you."

"But it does concern me," said Leigh, with equal self-possession. "I heard that lady scream, I tell you. She is trying now to communicate with me. I believe she is gagged and bound."

"Ah!"

Had Arthur Leigh been one of the stay-at-home cohort of country squires whose estates surrounded the Abbey Manor, he would most

certainly have looked into the barrel of a revolver in the next instant. But fate and South Africa had cast him in a new mould. Too often had his life depended on that prior second of prompt decision that gives the trained soldier an advantage over his enemy. He drew back, it is true, but that was a mere feint. His left hand grasped the handle of the door, his right caught the sinewy wrist of the man whose menace he had forestalled, and, without more ado, he dragged the other headlong into the road. Heedless of the bellow of pain caused by the terrific wrench it was necessary to inflict on his adversary's arm, he closed with him with a quickness born of many a hand-to-hand fight on the veldt. Gustave came running, but Leigh had secured the revolver, and its cold muzzle was pressed behind his captive's ear.

"Tell your man to keep off, for fear of consequences," he said, grimly emphatic.

"*Arretez-vouz, Gustave—la machine, je vous prie*—I will explain—let me go—God!—you are dislocating my shoulder!"

Leigh would have paid slight attention to these gasping entreaties had not the prisoner in the motor leaped, or thrown herself, bodily through the door. She stumbled and fell. Not only were her head and shoulders muffled in a heavy travelling rug, but her arms were tied.

Hearing the oncoming rush of men from the house, Leigh relaxed the tension on an arm that he had twisted almost to breaking-point. Flinging his opponent face downward in the dust, he stooped and clasped the shrinking woman round the waist, lifting her a few yards to the rear of the motor, where she would be out of harm's way if a fight took place. The revolver was loaded, but he saw that the motor party would not face superior numbers, so he put the weapon in his pocket, and strove hastily to unwrap the plaid that was stifling his fair burthen. His face flamed with anger when he found that an exceedingly pretty young woman had been gagged most brutally.

By this time three sturdy gardeners had joined him, and were asking what had happened, but he could find no words for them until the cords that kept the gag in the girl's mouth were loosed. Then, while she uttered a few incoherent words of thanks, he unfastened her arms.

Somewhat to his amazement, she showed no sign of fright. Rather was she afire with indignation, and her first clearly-expressed desire was that her assailants should be captured.

Leigh's arm had encircled her slender and supple waist during the releasing of her bonds, but, seeing that she could stand without assist-

ance, he turned to lead his cohort in combined attack on the lady's would-be abductors.

He was a few seconds too late. The chauffeur had persuaded the reluctant spark to come to life again, and the motor bounded forward in obedience to the lever. Leigh whipped out the revolver and fired at a tire. The bullet struck the rim, dented it, and glanced off on the wrong side. A second shot knocked off the axle cap, but before he could aim again the car was out of range.

He looked round at the girl and smiled pleasantly.

"If we were in any country but England," he said, "those two bullets would have gone through the coupé on the off chance. But the rascals cannot escape. We have the number of the car. See! It is X Y 302!"

2

Showing How the Circumstances Developed

They watched the motor-car through its dust-clouds until it whirled round a bend in the road.

"If I had held your pistol," said the girl, "my respect for British law and order would not have prevented me from shooting straight."

Leigh took the comment as being derogatory of his skill.

"It is not mine," he explained. "The owner has just disappeared. One wants a little practice—if I had left it in his possession he might have done better."

"But you shot splendidly—at the tire."

"Again I beg to remind you that this is Somerset, England."

His quick perception had caught a hint of the fair stranger's nationality. Her voice, her manner, certain characteristics of her finely-modelled face and figure, all tended to the assumption that she was an American. For some reason, the discovery came as a surprise. He remembered instantly that the few words exchanged with the man in the limousine suggested that he, too, hailed from the other side of the Atlantic.

"Yes," said the girl, smiling pleasantly, and endeavouring to re-arrange her ruffled hair without removing her hat, "just because it is Somerset, England, I thought there was no harm in taking a spin on one of your lovely roads. I find I was mistaken. Next time I shall be better advised."

"But surely you didn't expect to be kidnapped?"

"Well, no. Yet, I ought not to have risked it."

"You were not hurt?"

"Not in the least, except that my mouth is sore after that horrid gag."

"Come to my place and drink some milk. Milk is the best possible remedy for an injury of that kind."

A frankly quizzical look met his. Leigh thought he had never before seen such brilliant eyes in woman. The splendid poise of her head, the free elegance of her movements, were typical of the prairie rather than the town, yet her style and speech were of his own order, and he felt like thanking the well-disposed gods who had sent him to her assistance.

"You seem to be well posted in these affairs," she said.

"Yes. I've had heaps of practice—on the other side of the map."

"In the States?"

"No, in the Transvaal. Sometimes, one had to truss a Kaffir like a fowl to keep him quiet. But do come to the house, where my housekeeper will have your dress brushed by one of the maids."

She glanced at a watch on her wrist.

"You are very kind, but I ought to be returning to Burnham. I shall be there in twenty minutes if my wheel is not damaged."

"You are not thinking of going back alone?"

"Why not?"

"After such an adventure?"

"Lightning seldom strikes twice in the same place. Moreover, according to an ancient mariner who inhabits Burnham, there is no other road for miles, and I am inclined to think the bandits in automobile X Y 302 will not try this track again until they have changed their number-plate."

The girl was speaking so coolly that Leigh was vastly taken by her.

"Do you know," he said, "that in all my experience of North Somerset I have never heard of anything quite so amazing as the events of the past five minutes? Aren't you breaking some of the rules? If you followed the recognized traditions you should at least look pale, or hover on the verge of hysteria."

"We Americans are strenuous people, even in our misdeeds," she said. "Oh my! Look at that pedal!"

A gardener had picked up the bicycle, and an attempt to move it revealed that one of the cranks was badly bent, and locked under the gear-case.

"That—and the rain—should bring you to shelter without delay," cried Leigh. "We are in for a heavy shower. By the time a carriage is ready the road will be passable again."

"Please, sir," put in a breathless Jenkins, "one of the men must fetch a conveyance from the Bush. There ain't any in the stables."

"No brougham? no dog-cart?" demanded Leigh.

"No, sir."

"Then where the—what has become of them?"

"The old gentleman sold 'em, sir, the day after you went away."

Leigh reddened with vexation, but he laughed at the absurdity of it.

"Allow me to explain that I have been home not quite two hours after an absence of five years," he said to the girl. "I was so hungry that I did not even change my clothes before dinner, and I was about to make a tour of inspection when I heard your scream."

The girl looked around. She could see nothing but the straight road and the stately trees that met overhead.

"Where did you drop from, anyhow?" she asked.

"I took a bee-line. Something in your cry told me to hurry. But there is a more orthodox way. Are you sure you can walk?"

Then she remembered that he had carried her out of the threatened fight, and her fine air of camaraderie yielded to constraint. It occurred to her that explanations were needed.

"Why, of course," she cried. "Do you think those wretches meant to hurt me? Not they. They wanted dollars and cents, and wanted them badly, or they would never have tried such a daring trick in England. My father is John P. Hinton, of Philadelphia, and our yacht, the ›Mishe Nahma,‹ is lying off the Burnham pier. But now that I come to think of it, I shall be glad to straighten up a bit, and have myself and my wheel carried back in a landau. The damaged crank will serve a good purpose. It would completely spoil my father's pleasure during the remainder of the trip if he knew I ran a risk of being held at ransom, so I w r on't say a word about it, but just stop short at the point where I fell off when the automobile drove me into the grass."

"Do you mean that inquiry must not be made—that the police should not be asked to find out who owns the car?"

"Can they find out? Won't the man who planned the coup have wit enough to travel under half a dozen false numbers, and use up almost as many tints on the panels. No—the scheme failed, thanks to you, and

there is no need to worry my father with the details. I suppose you can stop your men from talking; not that they saw much. I imagine they are convinced you fired at the car to avenge the carelessness that ran me off the road."

"They saw me untying the gag and freeing your arms."

"Never mind. Tell them I am an American. That will explain most anything in England."

"I shall obey your wishes, of course. I appreciate your motive, too, so there breathes at least one Briton who would not misunderstand you, cousin."

His boldness brought a ripple of merriment to her lips.

"There you have me at a disadvantage," she said. "You know my name"

"Mine is Leigh—Arthur Leigh—spelt in a fashion expressly designed to puzzle Frenchmen—and this is the Abbey Manor, where I shall be delighted to welcome you—when you have climbed the hill."

He turned at the moment, and thus failed to notice the expression of amazement, almost of fear, that threw its shadow over the girl's face.

The lodge formed part of the lofty wall now visible. Through the gates, left open by the lodge-keeper's wife after the hasty exit of the servants, there was a charming glimpse of the drive winding upwards among the rocks and shrubberies. Miss Hinton forced herself to find words.

"How perfectly romantic!" she exclaimed. "It is like the castle porch beyond the enchanted glade in the fairy-tale."

"I wish I had come upon you bound to a tree," said Leigh. "The motor provided a fair representation of a dragon, but the remainder of the story is far too modern. For instance—"

"Why in the world did your ancestors shut themselves in behind such a high wall?" she interrupted. She scarce knew what she was saying. The discovery of her rescuer's identity seemed to have puzzled and bewildered her far more than the frustrated attempt at abduction.

"It is not so old as it looks," said Leigh. "My grandfather built the greater part. He was somewhat of a recluse, and it was a fad of his that no one should enter or leave the grounds without his permission. I broke both rules. Hence my five years' Odyssey."

They were nearing the garden door, which Jenkins had not closed behind him. Its pointed arch framed a picture of rosery and orchard that would have rapt Corot to artistic ecstasy.

"Your grandfather was a very old man if he built that," said the girl, pointing to the weather-worn stones.

"Ah, you have discovered the only bit of real Abbey that still remains intact. This is the Abbot's Port. The name lives, though no records that I could find as a boy gave the least clue to the monk's history. They were Benedictines—that is all we know. The monastery was undoubtedly destroyed in the time of Henry the Eighth, but even William of Malmesbury, who tells us all about Joseph of Arimathea bringing the Holy Grail to Glastonbury, has no mention of any shrine here. By the way, let us go to the house through the gardens. It is a short cut, and the shower may be on us at any moment."

He stood aside that she might enter. For an instant she was conscious of a shy reluctance to take another onward step. Some intangible but distinctly hostile force seemed to resist her. She even hesitated, and looked at him, while a question trembled on her lips. She smiled.

"Your wonderful Atlantic sends us rainstorms occasionally that no summer garments can defy while you walk a dozen yards," he assured her.

With a curiously determined air she passed through the arch. A delicious fragrance of roses greeted her. That vague impression of unseen hindrance was forgotten in the fresh beauty of the terraced garden.

"If I lived here," she murmured, "I would ask my father to sell the ›Mishe Nahma.‹ We should have no further use for a big yacht."

The words bubbled forth unawares. She blushed slightly, but, to her manifest relief, the owner of the Abbey Manor had not heard her, for he was telling Jenkins to lock and bolt the door. The climb, the excitement, the strangeness of their meeting, had flushed her face. Almost unconsciously, she unfastened her hat and used it as a fan.

The butler, too, seemed to be confused. He threw up his hands in amazement when his master unexpectedly ushered the young lady through the Abbot's Port. For some reason, perhaps owing to the steep ascent, he was flurried and breathless.

"Yes, sir," he gasped. Then, in the very act of obeying Leigh's order, he saw that the girl was bareheaded, and he stared at her as though she were a spirit.

"Well, of all the queer things!" he muttered.

The higher branches of the trees quivered. There was an ominous patter of heavy drops on the leaves.

"Quick, Miss Hinton!" cried Leigh. "Make for the balcony. You will find the centre window open."

She ran gracefully up the straight path by the side of the wall. Again there was a suggestion of the untrammelled life of the West in her lithe carriage, and the thick strands of her brown hair were almost rebellious of restraining coils and pins. Yet the perfect harmony of her simple dress bespoke Paris and its most fashionable cult. Here was a goddess from the wild decked by Paquin.

They just escaped the rain. Leigh was closing the window of the dining-room when the storm leaped across the estuary of the Parret and lashed the hot earth till it hissed and steamed.

"You see it was wise to seek cover," said the host. "Now I will ring for a maid to take you to Mrs. Jenkins. She is a motherly soul—my own old nurse, so I can recommend her. By the time you have removed the dust of conflict the shower will probably have exhausted itself, and I want you to admire the view from this window before your carriage arrives."

Though outwardly composed now, Miss Hinton felt ridiculously tongue-tied. It needed an effort to speak calmly, and she was angry at her own timidity.

"I am having quite a day of adventures, Mr. Leigh," she managed to say. "If it did not make you a partner in the little subterfuge I mean to use on my father, I would ask you to let me bring him here to-morrow. He revels in the examination of just such old-world homes as this."

"The very thing! Please come to lunch, with any others of your yachting party you care to invite. Why, you half reconcile me to the thought that you will be gone all too soon!"

His eagerness was no polite fiction, and the girl was grateful for its warmth, though she wondered why she was acting and talking in a manner wholly foreign to her real feelings. The Abbey seemed to have cast a spell on her.

"I must see if our arrangements permit," she said quickly, with an air of deep calculation that did not wholly escape Leigh. "There are four of us on the yacht—rather a crowd, isn't it? Well, yes, I promise—but don't forget the condition. Not a word about those horrid men in the automobile!"

"Wild horses shall not drag your secret from my lips," he vowed.

Then a maid came, and the visitor was handed over to sympathetic tendance, for the rumour quickly spread that the "master" had brought

to the Abbey a young lady who was the victim of an accident, and no woman, other than a servant, had been seen inside those jealously-guarded walls for many a year until the day of old Rollaston Leigh's funeral.

Meanwhile, the present owner of the Abbey, blithely forgetful of the edict that was paramount during his own boyhood, was beginning to piece together scattered impressions of his fair guest. Hitherto he had not met many Americans. Like most Englishmen, his opinions of eighty millions of people were formed by observation and criticism of a few scattered units, all middle-class tourists "doing" Europe for the first time. It was a revelation, and a pleasing one, that the great republic could produce the aristocratic type. The utter absence of the strident enunciation which he had come to regard as the American manner of speech shattered his chief illusion. She did not speak of her father as "Poppa," nor cry "My land!" at every other sentence, and he was sure her Christian name was not Mamie. True, there was a distinctive use of words, a pretty stress on syllables too often slurred in English diction, that had revealed her nationality while yet the dust trail of the vanished motor eddied and billowed above the roadway. But Leigh found himself admitting that he had never before heard woman speak with such sweet directness, and his soldier's heart went out to her for the audacity that leaped from her eyes when she declared that she would have striven to maim the marauders and not their vehicle.

Wondering whether or not he might be privileged to renew an acquaintance so curiously begun, he sauntered to the window and watched the progress of the storm. The valley that had smiled up at him when he stood there little more than a quarter of an hour earlier was now blotted from sight by a dense mist of rain. The trees were wildly signaling their alarm. Nature was cowed. A gray monotone replaced each brilliant tint of flower and shrub.

"Nature, like myself, is indulging in quick changes to-day," he thought. Even as he looked at the squall, a pale blue gleam irradiated garden and walls. The woodland belt beyond showed black against a flash of ghostly flame, and a low rumble came from over the sea.

"I hope she is not afraid of lightning!" he said to himself. "She doesn't seem to be the kind of girl who would fear anything. Yet she described her father as being 'of Philadelphia,' which I have always heard called 'the Quaker City.'"

He laughed at his own joke, and the fact would have supplied clear proof to a shrewd observer, had any such objectionable person been

present, that the armor of Arthur Leigh's bachelorhood was still intact, though its rivets might not withstand any severe strain.

To pass the time until his guest re-appeared, he picked up the typed documents from the solicitors. The first words that met his eye were:—

> *"This is the last will and testament of me, Rollaston Leigh, esquire, of the Abbey Manor, Polden Hill, in the county of Somerset."*

It was a copy of his grandfather's will. He skimmed through it rapidly, and soon came upon his own name. So far as he could interpret the legal jargon, he was given absolute ownership of all the real estate. Nothing was said about personality, but Leigh was not lawyer enough to discriminate between landed property and stocks and shares or bank deposits. He noted the names of the witnesses and the date, and the latter threw light on one thing that had perplexed him. The will had evidently been prepared and signed about a fortnight after the battle of Paardeberg. Leigh had won such commendation in high quarters for his conduct during the pursuit of Cronje that he was offered a commission in the Imperial Yeomanry. No doubt his name figured in some war correspondent's telegram, and the local newspapers had blazoned it forth for the honour of Somerset.

"Did the old fellow's heart kindle for a moment when he read what his son's son was doing?" he mused. "It may be so. Some memory of the past swept aside the prejudices of that fantastic theory of his about the souls of dead-and-gone friends and acquaintances passing into the bodies of animals. The instinct of race triumphed so far that he destroyed the will he held *in terrorem* over me. Well, peace to his ashes! My mother forgave him before she died, and her gentle spirit may have helped him in his final hours."

Arthur Leigh knew in his heart that the late owner of the Abbey was a despotic visionary, a fanatic who had cumbered the earth too long. But on this day of accession to his birthright he wished to be at peace, even with his memories. He carried benevolence to the point of being profoundly thankful to the modern highwaymen whose raid had brought about a most agreeable acquaintance. Certainly, it would not be his fault if Miss Hinton passed out of his life that evening. For once, he felt the spell of a woman's companionship, but, being a diffident young man where the opposite sex was concerned, he reddened at the thought that the stately home and its perfect gardens assumed a new glamor when brightened by the girl's presence.

At any rate, he was in no mood to wrestle with the complex phraseology of the will. Throwing it aside until he would be alone with a pipe before retiring to rest, he turned to the accompanying letter from Mowle and Mowle.

The storm was now at its height, and the light had failed so rapidly that Jenkins entered with a couple of lamps.

Arthur brought the papers to the table, and smoothed out the creased sheets. The opening sentence arrested his attention at once, but the butler had something on his mind.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, in his deferential way, "one of the men found this on the road, just where the motor-car stood, an' I thought you might like to have it."

He handed to his master a small flat, round stone, dull brown in colour, with three white bars crossing it in the centre.

"What is it?" said Leigh.

"A stone out of a ring, I think, sir."

"By Jove, yes. I remember now. It was on that man's hand, and it must have been forced out when I—when he began to argue with me."

"Was that it, sir? I am sure you will forgive me for mentioning it, but it was a very dangerous thing to fire at him, sir. Of course, it would have been more than sad if the young lady had been run over, but why was she bicycling along a country road with her head tied up in that extraordinary fashion?"

Leigh laughed.

"She is an American, Jenkins, and they are a strange race."

"Well, sir, our own ladies are queer enough in their goggles an' bearskins."

"Jenkins!"

"Oh, sir, I'm talkin' of those outlandish coats they wear when motorin'. But there! You always were one for a joke. You know what I mean well enough. George told me she had a cloak twisted over her hat, an' she could hardly see or hear in such a contrivance. An' you ought to feel the weight of it. It's more like a carriage-rug than a wrap. But I was goin' to ax you, sir, why you brought her to the Abbey through the Abbot's Port, an' why in the world did she take her hat off?"

"Too easy, Jenkins. Try something more difficult. We came through the garden door because it was the nearest way, and Miss Hinton removed her hat because it and her hair had been disarranged by the cloak you speak of."

"Funny!" said Jenkins.

"Is it? Tell me, then, wherein the humour lies."

The butler glanced towards the door, and listened. There was no sound in the hall. He stooped over the table, resting his weight on both hands, and glanced at Leigh with troubled eyes.

"Did you never hear the reason of your grandfather's order that the Abbot's Port should be kept locked an' bolted, sir? It was even nailed up when your dear mother came here twenty-five years ago, but the nails have rusted long since."

"No, Jenkins, I was never given any explanation. All I knew was that he forbade the door being opened."

Jenkins bent nearer. His grey-white face wore a scared look.

"He was afraid of the Belle Damosel, sir."

"What! Have we a ghost on the premises?"

"No ghost, sir, but live flesh an' blood. Surely you have heard tell that there has never been a mistress of the Abbey Manor?"

"Yes. I am aware that some extraordinary fatality has attended our house. No owner of the Abbey has ever brought his bride here."

"No, sir, nor ever will, until she enters through that door. So said the last Abbot, when Sir Roger Leigh bade him sing matins in some other retreat.

> "Ne'er will Leigh's lady abide in this hall
> Till the Belle Damosel pass my door in the wall.
> Leighs there will be for ever and aye,
> Bat the Abbot's Port turns each fair mistress away.
> Yet the Belle Damosel, with the sun in her hair,
> Will come when the roses are sweet in their flair.'

So you see, sir, there's a fate in it. You could ha' knocked me down with a feather when I saw that young lady a-standin' there without a hat, though, to be sure, there was no sunshine just then."

Leigh, who was listening with deep interest, laughed at the butler's saving clause.

"Your abbot was a poor poet," he said, "but his muse may at least have signified that the hair of the Belle Damosel would have the glint of gold in it. For goodness' sake, Jenkins, where did you learn that doggerel?"

"It's true, sir," said the old man excitedly. "That stone image has been watchin' the Abbot's Port for many a year, an' never has a Leigh's wife lived here. If it was my place, I'd have it chipped out of the wall—that I would! 'Tis said that the first Sir Roger's lady was killed by her horse stumblin' as she climbed the rock. To come to later times, I've been told that your grandfather really took to his curious ways when he lost his young wife soon after your father was born in Italy. Then, there was your poor, dear father, a picture he was, an' looked like livin' for a century, but he goes an' dies of a fever in Gibraltar. When your mother first saw the Abbey, sir, she was a widow."

Both men were so carried away from their surroundings that they were almost startled by the sudden entry of Miss Hinton.

"I ought to have knocked," she said gayly, "but I hurried in without thinking. What a dear your Mrs. Jenkins is! I do hope I shall see her again. And now I must be going. My cab is at the door, so your messenger has lost no time, Mr. Leigh."

"But it is still raining," he protested.

"No. Not even that good excuse can detain me. The sky is clear in the west."

"May I come with you a little way?"

"Need I trouble you? It is such a short distance."

"But the motor"

She glanced at Jenkins.

"They will not dream of running a tilt with a carriage and pair," she said smilingly.

So, perforce, he let her drive off alone, with her bicycle slung across the roof of the landau; and not even the last golden flicker of the sun restored to the Abbey some of the brightness that had gone from it when the horses clattered out of the paved court and the magic of her presence was withdrawn.

A moment too late, Jenkins bustled forward with the captured cloak.

"The young lady has forgotten this, sir," he cried.

Leigh took it, and opened its heavy folds.

"No," he said quietly, "that is a present to me, Jenkins. It is called *spolia opima*. Queer name, eh?"

"Very queer, sir. But, then, the world has changed a lot since I was a boy. Young ladies did not go tearin' round the country on bikes, an' such things as motor-cars were never dreamed of."

"Well, put this in my dressing-room. I am going out for a stroll."

There would be no harm, at least, if he walked along the road to Burnham, and met the empty carriage on its return journey. Lighting a third cigar, he laughed.

"Now I wonder if I shall be allowed to smoke this one?" he asked himself.

3

Wherein the Circumstances Reveal Their Force

South African warring had taught Leigh the tracker's art, but the lore of the scout was hardly needed when he stood on the main road in the dusk, and saw the sharp turn taken by the landau's wheels in leaving the Abbey drive. No other conveyance of any kind had travelled in the direction of Burnham since the rain fell. A two-wheeled vehicle, probably a dog-cart, had gone towards Bridgewater, and a big dog had accompanied it. No pedestrian had passed. The dust, now welded into yellow mud, was collected in the gutters and hollows of the road. Raindrops twinkled on every blade of grass. Even a rabbit that scampered across the highway after the thunderstorm had left its trail.

He walked slowly under the arch of the trees, his thoughts naturally reverting to the day, five years earlier, when he drove to the Abbey from Burnham at the close of a cruise in a friend's yacht, and a groom had stirred him to anger by the announcement that his favourite spaniel was impounded in the "Place of Sojourn" because old Rollaston Leigh had seen someone's "soul" looking at him through the poor creature's eyes.

Reckless of consequences, he had gone straight to the sacrosanct enclosure, had rescued the dog from its allotted den, and had defied the dotard with bitter and contemptuous words.

The elder Leigh was dominated by a strange philosophy. He cared naught for a boy's vapourings, but his worst passions were aroused when Arthur refused to restore his friend to the misery of that crowded prison in the stableyard.

If, in very truth, there was any substance in the old man's theory, the eyes of a demon rather than those of a human being glared then at his grandson. It happened to be Arthur's twenty-second birthday, and Rollaston Leigh remembered it.

"Go!" he said, pointing malevolently to the door, at the close of a painful scene. "I have kept faith with your mother for a year longer than was necessary. From this instant you are an outcast. Go and herd with the swinish mob whose views you hold. I disown you. You were disinherited long since. Now I cast you off utterly."

If seventy can be vindictive and foolish, twenty-two can be headstrong and valiant. Arthur Leigh faced the world with thirty pounds in his pocket, and a couple of portmanteaux stuffed with clothes, and a devoted spaniel. And he never regretted it. It was better that he should learn his fate thus early than find himself stranded when his grandfather died. Oddly enough, the dog helped him. A chance meeting in the train from Bristol to London led to an offer by a sporting Norfolk squire to buy the animal. Arthur refused to part with his friend, and, in a subsequent conversation, made no secret of the reason. Before Paddington was reached, he had agreed to turn his knowledge of country life to good account by becoming under-bailiff on his new acquaintance's estate. For three years he and the spaniel lived happily near Sheringham. Then the dog died, and the war broke out, and Leigh felt the call of the far lands to young blood.

He was on his way home in a troopship when a cablegram received at Madeira announced his succession to the estate. Rollaston Leigh had been dead six months, but apparently it took the lawyers all that time to discover the heir's whereabouts.

And now, for the first time, that fact struck him as noteworthy. If, as he had rightly guessed, he was described correctly in the newspapers after Paardeberg, Messrs. Mowle and Mowle could have found out instantly where he was stationed by applying at the headquarters of Paget's Horse. Why the delay? Perhaps their letter would solve that puzzle. He meant to read it carefully when he went back to the Abbey.

Daylight failed before he was clear of the wood. The wind had veered, and was now blowing steadily from the southwest, bringing up more clouds. There was no moon, and the night promised to be unusually dark for the month of June. Hearing the steady trot of a pair of horses, he halted near a stile that shielded the field-path to Bridgewater.

A carriage approached. It was the landau.

"Hello, Dobson!" he cried, for the driver was well known to him, "did the young lady and her bicycle reach Burnham all right?"

The man pulled up.

"Yes, sir," he said. "A fine job it was, too. I could do with a few more like that. Gev' me a sovereign, she did."

"Capital. Did you see the yacht?"

"Yes, sir—a real beauty. And, if I may make so bold, how are you, sir? Everybody is very pleased to hear you are back again after the war."

"Oh, I am in the best of trim. I shall look you up when I visit the village in the morning."

"Shall I drop you at the Abbey, sir?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, sir, I have to take Mr. Fensham to catch the 10:15 at Bridgewater. He's off by the mail to Switzerland, so I'll say 'Good-night,' sir."

Mr. Fensham was the vicar already mentioned by Jenkins, and one of Arthur's oldest friends. The carriage was gone before the young man realized that Fensham was an enthusiastic Alpinist, who devoted his annual holiday to mountaineering. He was among the few men with whom it was possible to discuss family affairs, and his departure that night meant absence from Somerset for six weeks at least.

Leigh blew his cigar into a red glare and held it against his watch. The hour was 9:20. There was plenty of time to walk the two miles by the path, and catch the vicar for a brief chat at the station, while Dobson would be there to bring him back to the house.

Knowing every inch of the way, he crossed the stile, and stepped out briskly between a hedge and a crop of barley. The rain had made the clay heavy; he had not gone many yards when it became unpleasantly evident that his boots must be covered with mud. That did not trouble him—he had often slept in mud, but he stopped to turn up his trousers, in doing which his elbow struck the kidnapper's revolver in his pocket, and he was reminded of the extraordinary manner in which it had come into his possession.

"'Pon my honour," he said with a quiet laugh, "this has been a day of strange incident. And I am keeping it up, for here am I, instead of smoking in slippered ease, trudging through mire to Bridgewater. It would be an odd thing if Fensham were to postpone his journey, or if I missed him."

But far odder things could happen ...!

The foot-path, after passing out of the field of barley, merged into the broad towing-track on the right bank of the Parret, made there in the days when Bridgewater was visited by many barges; but, after a couple of hundred yards, it went inland again, thus cutting off a chord of the river. This joining and disjunction of the two ways was repeated at lessening intervals, and, because the foot-path was muddy, Leigh followed the longer but firmer towing-track. Behind that slight circumstance was ambushed that night much tribulation for him.

By the time he was nearing Bridgewater the weather had grown so murky that it was barely possible to distinguish the track from the dark grass ridges on each side. Though the river, rising rapidly with the tide, flowed within a few feet, it remained invisible until the outline of a big barge loomed up close to the bank, and thus gave a standard, so to speak, whereby one might gauge degrees of blackness. A plank bridged the sloping mud shelf between the tow-path and the ungainly vessel, and Leigh would have tripped over its shoreward end had he not been walking warily.

At that instant he thought he heard a man's voice exclaiming wrathfully against some thing or person that interfered or annoyed him. The cry sounded like an oath, but Leigh could not hear what was said, and his impression was that someone, advancing from the Bridgewater direction, had come across another improvised gangway, but had failed to avoid it.

The occurrence was too trivial to engage his close attention. Its subsequent importance lay in the fact that he expected to come face to face with a fellow wayfarer, and that he was actually on the lookout for such a meeting, intending to warn the stranger of the existence of a second obstruction within a few yards.

It must be remembered that Arthur Leigh was a trained scout, with the experience of many a long night on the veldt, when his own life and the lives of his comrades depended on the accurate use of eyes and ears. If, therefore, the owner of that impatient voice was as near as the sound indicated, it was only reasonable to assume that Leigh must have seen or heard him at least as soon as his own presence became known to the other. Indeed, since Leigh had neither stumbled nor spoken, and was possessed of faculties quickened by use, it was far more probable that he would be the first to discover the newcomer's whereabouts. So he did not halt and listen. There was no need. This was the Parret, not some disputed ford of the Modder River which might be rushed at any moment by a Boer commando.

But suddenly, from out of the very heart of the chaos, he was struck a blow that tumbled him to earth, though how or by whom that irresistible assault could be delivered he had no notion. At one instant he was gazing fixedly ahead, with the dim straightness of the tow-path clear enough before his eyes for ten feet or more, and the lights of Bridgewater already twinkling through the gloom; in the next he was flung violently back and down, as though some power of the dark had suddenly yielded to a frenzy of smiting. He felt the tremendous shock of the blow on face, breast, and right thigh. Resistance was impossible, even had he been forewarned, for he might as well have striven to avert the thrust of a steam-hammer.

Yet he was practically unhurt. He was on his feet almost as speedily as he fell, and now he stood with a heart a-thump and every muscle tense for a fight. He was facing the unseen, yet he did not flinch. There was no time for balanced thought or definite purpose. He was just a human animal standing ready to defend his life against any sort of foe.

If he experienced again the half-forgotten subtle thrill evoked by the whistle of his first Mauser bullet, it is not to be wondered at. He could see nothing save the path, its black fringes of grass, and the pinpoint lights of the town—hear nothing but the lap and rush of the tide and the murmur of the wind ….

He had taught himself to be cool in an emergency, to repress the red flood of rage that clogs the brain and impairs the perfect unity of eye and hand; and if any human adversary had been within striking range of Arthur Leigh at that moment he would surely have been hit—hit with as ready a goodwill as ever a clenched fist dashed against another man's face. But though Leigh waited, and listened, and marvelled till he felt a certain creepiness in his spine and an anxiety to look on all sides at once, he was no wiser, but rather more befogged, as a minute sped, and nothing happened.

The danger, whatever it was, seemed to have gone. He began to analyse the attack. Its amazing force was no less remarkable than the small damage it had caused. Such a blow should have crushed him to a pulp, yet it appeared merely to have thrown him on his back and left him there, mud-daubed from head to heel, but comparatively uninjured otherwise.

His deer-stalker cap had been struck from his head, and he could not find it where he had fallen. He walked back a few paces, stooping, with his eyes fixed on the ground, though it needed all his power of self-control to make that search, since he did not know the second that

his mysterious enemy might return. His sense of helplessness, and the apprehension that he might be knocked senseless into the river at the next onset, were very unnerving.

He set his teeth, crouched, listened, peering around, above, beneath, incessantly. At last he found his cap, which, as well as he could judge, lay fully five yards from where he had fallen. Here was proof, if proof were needed, that his invisible assailant had come from the way of the town—from the very direction, that is, in which he was looking when attacked.

Then he did what not many men would have done, situated as he was—he ran swiftly a hundred yards or more along the way he had come. Stopping suddenly, he strained his ears to catch the least sound. It was useless. Again he was mocked by the quiet swirling of the waters and the whispers of the wind.

Angry, thoroughly bewildered, he retraced his steps. Thus, three times in less than a minute, he passed the black bulk of the barge, and this third time his foot touched something as he strode over the obstructing plank. He stopped and picked up a leather cap, such as is worn by motorists.

He did not attempt to deny to himself that this queer find gave him another thrill. The lining of the cap was still warm and damp. Beyond question, it had come from some perspiring head since he had first crossed the plank. Yet the thrill was of excitement rather than fear. Hitherto he had been striving against the unknown, fighting down uncanny thoughts of the vague forces that lie *perdu* in the unprobed depths of the imagination. But this leather cap was a tangible thing, modern, the head-gear of a chauffeur; it or its like had been worn by both "Gustave" and the other man whose attempt to carry off Miss Hinton he had foiled some two hours earlier.

And the cap had been lying just opposite the barge. … Was its owner, then, on the barge, since he was not elsewhere? Certainly, he must be somewhere. Goblins do not wear such things.

"Barge ahoy!" called Arthur Leigh, and at the same time he crouched for cover from possible shot behind a mound of the bank, as warily as though the barge was a suspected *kopje*[1].

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[1] Kopjes (Afrikaans für „kleine Köpfe"), gelegentlich auch „Inselberge" genannt, sind häufig mannshohe, aber auch bis einhundert Meter hohe, anstehende Granitfelsen, aus denen der ständige Temperaturwechsel von Tag und Nacht sowie der Wind die vielfältigsten Gebilde geformt hat. Sie stellen eine gute Deckung oder Verstecke

He waited three breathless minutes. There was no answer; and out again rang his clear shout: "Barge ahoy!"

This time, as the sound of his voice died out of his ears, there was another sound somewhere, though not an answering sound, it seemed—rather a sound like the one he had first heard, a curse, or smothered cry of wrath; but this time it did not seem to come from the direction of the town. He could not say exactly whence it came. It was like a voice out of the void, but he thought it most likely that it proceeded from the barge.

So he hailed again, but there was no answer.

And now all at once he let fall the motor cap on the path, and with an audacious heart was running—along the plank toward the barge, with the revolver which he had wrenched from the kidnapper ready for use in his fingers, and in his brain a grim and angry determination to find out what mystery was afoot on the Parret bank that night. The same darkness that covered his foes covered him, and he went swift, and straight, and tense.

He had all but reached the barge when he was again assailed, though this time he was not directly struck; but he heard a blow delivered quite close to him, and at the same moment the plank was knocked from under his feet. In his fall he uttered a cry, cast out his arms, and let go the kidnapper's revolver, which dropped into the river.

But he was then so near the barge that his hands, as he fell, caught the gunwale, and as the barge was light of cargo, and he far for'ard, only his feet were in the water. The next moment he was on board.

It was very dark, not one star alight, and hardly a sound—one of those situations where, with the avenues of sense blocked up, one is almost in the melancholy isolation of a deaf mute who is also blind. But Leigh could half see. He guessed that he stood in the barge's bows on the fo'castle deck, and after standing a full five minutes, shy now of making motion, shy of uttering a sound, at last he ventured to lift his voice, calling half daringly, half reluctantly: "Who is there? D—n you, can't you speak?"

There was no answer.

He stood again, waiting, hushed, suspended, without thought, without purpose, imprisoned in the colliery of night, conscious only that he

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dar, die größeren sind natürlich auch als Aussichtspunkte geeignet. Man trifft sie von Ost- bis nach Südafrika an.

was unarmed, in peril, and a prey to foes whose forces and ways of operation were new to his very imagination.

He crouched down on the deck, taking cover behind the darkness as behind a trench, and waited.

Then, when nothing happened, he went groping, so as to define exactly his situation. He felt all over the short deck, over the gunwales, felt the jib, a capstan, two coils of rope, a pile of sacks, three blocks, two boxes, an end of chain, an anchor; and he was thus, as it were secretly groping and prospecting on all-fours, when he happened to place his left hand unawares on empty air and dropped sideways. At the same time a sense of something weighty impending bewildered him, and caused him to lose his balance, and he went tumbling over the brink of the deck into the hold of the barge.

This stunned him. He lay there some time, not unconscious of existence, but unconscious and careless where he was, or what was doing in this world. When he came more to himself it was with a sudden tremor, all over him, a feeling of deep fear that was not all fear, but partly awe as well, imagination catching horror from the physical shock of his fall. It entered his head somehow that the barge was about to sink with him, scuttled without hands. Drowning in the dark and slimy water appeared to be a thousand times more malign and haunted a thing than death had ever appeared before; so that it was in a tremble of haste that he sprang to his feet, and when his hand happened to strike upon the ladder-way to the deck from which he had dropped, he raced up it with a sense of escape all down the small of his back.

There on the deck he again stood motionless, gathering mind and courage, waiting for his manhood to overcome the feeling of weakness that had his soul in possession. …

He forced himself to think. The barge, it seemed, was empty—empty at least of the men in charge of her, though it was odd that not even one man or boy was on board; but conceivably all were revelling mildly at Bridgewater or Burnham, the barge having discharged her cargo. If there was anyone else on board—a stranger, or strangers—then he or they were prisoners like Leigh himself, for the plank to the shore was gone.

What power had removed that plank he could no more conceive than he could conceive any of the causes that had brought him to the pass in which he stood. But his fancy, or his nerves, somehow conjectured that the kidnappers of the motor-car were after him—that by the use of some occult power they had struck him down and removed the

plank. In which case, had they made themselves prisoners in the barge? Certainly, that did not seem very likely. He was probably alone, he decided; and yet, now, strange to say, his brain received a sensation that he was not alone. He determined to investigate, to search the vessel throughout, no matter what the dark powers might be that lay in wait for his life that night.

With an intrepidity born of the same mood as Luther's when he hurled the ink-bottle at the apparition of Satan, Leigh began his search.

One step he took, but no more than one: his foot, as he now moved forward, hit upon something.

It felt like flesh, and a cry that was never uttered, but that pierced him internally through and through, shrieked that it was human flesh. He stooped to it, and in truth, a human creature lay in a wild attitude there, a man, white-skinned and nude.

Leigh bent and stared closely at it. He had an idea that he was staring at a corpse, but during the first few moments his mind was filled with neither horror, nor pity, nor terror, but with wonder—sheer wonder that that object could be lying just there where he saw and felt it. For he had previously groped all over the deck, and no naked, pale body was there up to the moment of his fall into the hold—to that much he could swear, and since the plank was gone, the body had not been brought from the shore; it could only have been brought from the after part of the barge during the moments that he lay below stunned from his fall, in which case, he thought, it must have been brought by footfalls as silently gliding as those of ghosts and by forms of the same texture and colour as the darkness.

"I say ... you ..." he murmured to the body. He touched it, shook it; but there came no answer.

Yet it did not now seem to be dead. It was still warm to the touch. He passed his hand upward toward the heart, but could feel no beating there; and he passed it up toward the neck, and there his fingers met a piece of hemp, or gut, stiff and tied in a knot, and sunken in the flesh; and he passed it up toward the face—but he started backward: there was no face, only something there that wetted his skin.

It became a pain in his heart, that sense of the unknown which was all about him; but a flood of new resolution now suddenly impelled him to kneel there staring at death no longer, but to be up and doing. Someone, he was quite sure, had come from the stern of the barge while he lay stunned, and had placed the body there, someone who was still

on board, since the bridge was gone; and Leigh meant, whether it was ghost or man, to find and face him.

He got up and crept very warily down the steps, and warily on his hands and knees he searched each square inch of the craft astern of the fo'castle during ten minutes. He even went into the blackness under the fo'castle, and then returned to the deck and searched over it, and there was no one. …

He crouched again on the deck at a spot as far removed as possible from the body. Though alert enough physically, his mind was oppressed with a gloomy horror because of the darkness of all sorts in which he found himself suddenly drowned and lost.

But as he sat there, he was aware of a new sound, one good and homely this time, that gave him a marvellous relief—the crunch of feet on the tow-path. Someone was coming from Bridgewater. The plodding step betokened a farm labourer returning home after his evening mug of beer. Leigh hurried to the port gunwale, and was about to hail, when the steps suddenly stopped, there was a crash, and a volley of hard words sputtered from the unseen man on shore.

"Who are you?" called Leigh, almost quaking at the thought of a new catastrophe.

"Why the blazes do 'ee lave this thing stickin' 'ere in folks' way?" howled the man, picking himself up from a fall over the plank, which having dropped, now thrust itself high across the path at its shoreward end.

"Are you from Bridgewater?" demanded Leigh, and the accents of the "gentry" brought a civiller reply.

"Yis, zur, I be."

"Met anyone between here and the town?"

"I haven't. But why the?"

"The gangway slipped and I am a prisoner here on the barge. Just see if you can ship this end again, will you?"

The man sullenly obeyed. Leigh, peering close over the side, caught the plank as it rose. In a few seconds it was placed in position, and the captive was hurrying away from that terrible barge.

"Have you seen or heard nothing unusual?" he asked guardedly as he stepped ashore.

"No-a, zur," was the answer: "is summat amiss?"

Arthur did not attempt to explain at once the inexplicable—it was too long—his nerves were too much in a whirl—he felt that the secret of what he had passed through was in some indefinite way his own. At any rate, it was useless to bring a bemused clodhopper into council, so he only said:

"I was under the impression that some person came along here a few minutes since. As you are from Bridgewater, and as this path leads only to Bridgewater"

The man approached and tried to make out who was airing this local knowledge.

"Beg pardon, zur, but may I ax who 'ee be?" he inquired.

"I am Mr. Leigh, of the Abbey."

"You doant say, zur. Well, I am main glad to meet 'ee. I've heerd tell of 'ee many's the time. My name's Thompson, and I live wi' Mister Bacon of Sandy Hill. And how came 'ee, zur, to be locked up in this 'ere barge?"

Pride of birth and local power again stopped Leigh from disjointed talk of ghostly murder.

"I went on board. ... The plank dropped—I don't know ... yes, the plank dropped ... what barge is it?"

"A lighter, zur. Her wur towed 'ere t'other day wi' twenty ton o' hay."

"I see. You will not forget you met me here?"

The man laughed and stooped to rub his shin.

"Not likely, zur. Yo'll not be comin' my way?"

"No."

"Well, good-night to 'ee, zur."

"Good-night."

The man went on. Leigh stood there many minutes. He believed he was deep in thought, yet he was not really thinking, only dumbly and numbly full of the consciousness of the things he had just passed through. Then, because he had meant to go to Bridgewater, he moved slowly, mechanically, in that direction, though without purpose now, even forgetting that he had started out with the intention of saying good-bye to Mr. Fensham, the vicar, at the railway station.

As he moved, his foot struck against an object which he stooped to pick up—again it was the motor cap.

Until he reached Bridgewater he walked in a state of complete unconsciousness that he had the cap in his hand. He did not realize that his feet were soaked, or that his clothes had been rolled in the mud of the roadway. He had been shaken, bodily and mentally, or he would certainly not have acted as though he had something to conceal.

At last he reached the town. The sight of the ›Feathers Hotel‹ only suggested to his scattered wits that a glass of brandy might be helpful. He entered by the guests' passage, thus avoiding the bar, and then, in a mirror, he saw himself as he really was.

"Yes, put me straight," he said to an astonished "Boots," who came at his call and was soon all a-stare. The man believed that this well-dressed stranger had met with an accident.

Leigh did not enlighten him. He was quite incapable of saying more than the literal truth—that he had fallen and rolled on the tow-path.

While the grooming process was going on, Leigh looked at the leather cap in his hand. It was a well-made article, bearing the stamp of a Paris house. There were no initials or other identifying marks inside. The exterior was singularly free from dust or rain-marks, with the exception of some patches of mud gathered probably from its resting-place on the river bank. It was impossible not to connect such an object with the two motorists of the afternoon, and therein Leigh himself found the genesis of the uncanny silence that clogged his tongue.

He put a question to the Boots. "Have you started a garage at the ›Feathers‹?"

"Yes, sir," was the answer. "Everybody motors nowadays, so we dug a pit in the coach-house."

"Have any cars called here to-day?"

"Half-a-dozen, sir. This is the coast road to Watchet an' North Devon, you know. But there's on'y one car staying the night—kem in just after the shower began."

"After the shower began. … Not X Y 302?"

"That's the very car, sir. Do you know the gentleman what owns it?"

"No. … That is, I have seen him. Is he in the hotel?"

"No, sir, he an' his chauffeur went off at once, though it was rainin' cats and dogs. … Said they had to make a call in the town. … French gentlemen, I think."

Leigh remembered Miss Hinton more definitely. He knew there was something! His promise to her blocked inquiry in this direction. But he asked:

"Who is the police inspector here now? It used to be …"

"Inspector Lawson, sir."

"Yes, Lawson, the same man. Could you bring him here, I wonder? I am rather shaken, but I want to tell him certain circumstances that have come to my knowledge."

"No doubt, sir, he can be fetched in a minute or two. What name shall I say, sir?"

"I am Mr. Leigh, of the Abbey Manor."

"Well, bless me if this ain't a real pleasure, sir!" cried "Boots," elated at the knowledge that he had seen and spoke to the man whose career was in many mouths. He brushed more vehemently than ever.

"Nice handy car, sir, X Y 302," he went on, for he had noticed the leather cap hanging over Leigh's hand, and jumped to the conclusion that the owner of the Abbey was a motorist himself. "It's a fair marvel how they can turn and twist a heavy thing like that in a small yard, sir. Weighs over a ton, I'll be bound."

At the same time he put his finishing touches to his work.

"Thank you," said Leigh, putting his hand in his pocket, a hand which till now had been covered with the motor cap. He held out half-a-crown.

"Good gracious, sir," came the sympathetic cry, "your hand is all covered with blood!"

Leigh glanced down and saw what was dry and red there. He felt a sudden loathing of it. Though he was fresh from seeing pools of that very red in South Africa, the man stretched white and nude in his wild attitude in the dark on the barge was horrid to Arthur's thought, and what of him he now saw on his hands he was all at once in a haste to wash utterly and elaborately off. … He shirked inquiry again and turned to get away.

"But as to the inspector, sir …" queried "Boots" after him.

"I'll see him later," said Arthur over his shoulder, and was gone.

He walked rapidly and eagerly homewards. Once, when a little way out of Bridgewater, he stopped short, asking himself if he ought not to give information to the police straightway. But that was a matter for thought, for slow and measured speech, which at that moment, was

entirely beyond his command. And he wanted that stain off his hand! It oppressed him!

4

The Circumstances Take a Stride

Leigh did not reach the Abbey on the night of his adventure till eleven o'clock. He was quite exhausted, but a laving of cold water refreshed him. Then he recalled the need there was that he should drink some brandy. He went to the dining-room, obtained a decanter, and for some time stood at the table lost in meditation, while he sipped the spirit. Right under his eyes was the letter of Mowle and Mowle, the lawyers, but though just conscious of it lying there, he lacked any wish to read it. He went to bed, and in the darkness and quiet of his room lived over again all that drama of mystery and death through which he had passed so recently. He did not sleep for hours, and then slept heavily.

The next morning the first waking event for him was a letter delivered by hand.

> *Dear Mr. Leigh:*
>
> *My father and I, with Mr. and Mrs. George F. Bates and Mr. Chauncey Bagot, will be most pleased to come to lunch at the Abbey at one o'clock.*
>
> *Sincerely,*
> *Elinor Gage Hinton.*

"'Elinor'—that's the name, then," he said to himself. "But Mr. Chauncey Bagot—how old, I wonder? A suitor ...?"

After breakfast on the balcony, while debating whether he should walk into Bridgewater and interview the chief of police, or send a message that he was to come to the Abbey, he took in hand, for the third or

fourth time within twelve hours, the long letter of Mowle and Mowle. But again his mind wandered, the letter sank down to lie on his knee, his cigar hung meditatively between his teeth, and his thoughts went back to the Parret bank. He saw again the barge lying in the dark on the water, and the white flesh of the corpse on the deck. It was only now, in fact, that he realized how trying to nerve and brain had been his experience. The preceding night it had affected him as when a limb is crushed, and the organism is too stunned to feel all the shock immediately, the torture being for the after-time. He had been struck down by a force, and there was no clue as to whether that force was due to human agency, or to some new malignity of his grandfather's spirit—for that weird notion, too, mingled vaguely with his musings. And was the force the same as that which had killed the dead man, which had borne and placed the body in the barge? And the wearer of the motor cap which he had found, had he anything to do with either of these forces, or with both, if both were one? The cap, of a quite unusually large size, must have covered a huge head. The wearer must be almost a giant; and a wielder of giant forces must be that being, stalking in darkness, who could strike with so long and deadly an arm! Leigh's eyes remained shut some time, and there were misshaped ideas fluttering in his mind that made him shudder.

However, his guests were coming; he had to bestir himself. He hoped he would not be bothered until they were gone. Then he would lay the facts of the night's experience before the police; and meantime—Mowle and Mowle's letter.

> Dear Sir: (he read)
>
> In re the Abbey Manor Estate.
>
> As executors of the estate of the late Rollaston Leigh, it is our duty to acquaint you with the exact circumstances under which you have succeeded to the property…

Instantly at those words Arthur started, for always in some nook of his brain, from the moment he had heard that he was the heir, there had lurked a suspicion that this thing was too good to be true of his grandfather, Rollaston Leigh. Now he had a foreboding of some trick, some spiteful device, on the old man's part. …

> … under which you have succeeded to the property.

Arthur spread the letter firmly on his knees, and bent his attention to it.

> Some six months before your grandfather's death he advised us by letter that he had appointed us executors under his will. To this we wrote a reply to the effect that the appointment was inadvisable, if not altogether invalid, since we, as his legal advisers, had drawn up his testamentary depositions, and it is not the custom of reputable firms of solicitors to settle the details of wills which they will be called upon to administer as trustees or executors. His reply was that he had revoked that will and all former wills and bequests, and had consulted another firm in the preparation of the new will, which, with other papers, he would deposit in our hands within a few days.
>
> In due course a sealed packet marked "Not to be opened until the day after my interment," and "Rollaston Leigh," was delivered to us, with a covering letter, which stated that no effort should be made to ascertain the whereabouts of Arthur Leigh until four months after the testator's death ….

"By Jove, this means trouble," muttered Arthur with decision, and he turned rapidly over the remaining leaves of the letter. There were five pages more of it; but before he could gather any more of its drift, Jenkins, rather flustrated, came to him, saying:

"Mr. Lawson, the inspector of police at Bridgewater, to see you, sir."

Arthur looked gravely at Jenkins. Not even on this bright morning was he quite himself. He repeated the words:

"Inspector of police."

"Yes, sir," said Jenkins: "I told him I thought you were engaged, but he says his business is hurgent."

Jenkins did not often misplace the letter "h"; when he did, it lent emphasis.

"Show the inspector out here, Jenkins," said Arthur.

In another minute Inspector Lawson, a man of the heavy build, whose shoe-leather uttered a cry at each step, was standing before Arthur on the balcony, note-book in hand, waiting to hear what strange deeds had been done on the previous night by the Parret.

And Arthur told his story. Mad enough in its actual occurrence, it sounded trite and lame now, even in his own ears. The policeman did not interrupt. He listened in silence and scribbled industriously.

"May I ask," he said when Leigh ceased speaking, "did you carry any sort of a weapon, sir?"

"Yes, a revolver."

"You say you started out with the intention of saying good-by to the Rev. Mr. Fensham at the railway?"

"That is so."

"Why take a revolver for that? You expected no danger …."

"True enough. But I did not take it, so to speak. It merely happened to be in my pocket. It was not even my own revolver …."

"Ah? Whose revolver was it?"

"A stranger's—the revolver of a man who passed by here in a motor-car during the afternoon."

"I see. But, will you kindly explain, Mr. Leigh, how the revolver of that passer-by came to be in your pocket?"

"Well, we had a dispute. I took the revolver from him."

"Explain, sir, please. A dispute, you say. So the car stopped, of course, and didn't 'pass' after all?"

"Yes; but really, officer, I do not see what this has to do with the matter by the river's brink"

Leigh, embarrassed by his promise made to Miss Hinton to tell nothing of the kidnapping incident, let his eyelids drop before the policeman's bovine gaze. It only now occurred to him to wonder why she should have been so anxious to cover up the incident in silence. It seemed to him unreasonable that she should have imposed silence upon him—but then, she had, and she held his promise.

"It is for the police," said the inspector heavily, "to decide what connection there may be between the murder on the barge and the dispute with a 'passerby' on a motor-car of which you speak. Kindly let me hear the story."

His manner was growing less respectful, more suspicious. Leigh was nettled.

"Well, that part of it is rather a personal matter," said he stiffly. "I'd rather not go into it."

The inspector made a note. He passed the question.

"And this revolver of the passing stranger that somehow got into your pocket," said he, "where is it? I would like to have a look at it."

"It is at the bottom of the Parret! Didn't I mention that I dropped it at the moment when the plank was withdrawn from under my feet, and I fell?"

"No, you didn't mention it, Mr. Leigh. So it is at the bottom of the Parret? Just between the barge and the bank?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well, it can be recovered easily. Did you know, by the way, that the dead man has a bullet in his left shoulder?"

"No, of course, Inspector, I didn't know a thing like that, since it was so intensely dark."

"You didn't shoot the revolver when you got the mysterious blow from nowhere you have described?"

"No, I didn't shoot."

"Then, or at any time?"

"At no time."

"And as to the motor cap?"

"That is now in my bedroom."

"I'll see it presently. You have in your possession no other object connected with this business?"

"Only the cap."

"Where are the clothes of the murdered man?"

"As if I could know, officer!"

"He was perfectly naked, you say, when you found him?"

"As far as I could see."

"And quite warm to the touch, you say?"

"Yes."

"But that means that the unfortunate man had just been murdered?"

"I think that that is true."

"Well, now, with your permission, I would like to see the clothes you wore last night, and look round your bedroom."

"Ah, you want to search my place?"

"I am compelled to."

"Then, by all means …. Have a brandy-and-soda?"

"No, thanks, Mr. Leigh, I never imbibe."

The officer closed his note-book. Then he added, as a sort of afterthought: "This is a dark business, sir."

"Dark enough," Arthur said.

"The wonder is that you did not trouble to give information last night of a serious crime—a crime committed within your knowledge."

"I ought to have done so," answered Arthur, leaning now against the balustrade, with his legs crossed, and looking down at his feet. "I had the thought, and the intention, as the 'Boots' at the ›Feathers‹ can prove, but you cannot conceive how nerve-shaking was all that inexplicable mystery. I feel that I have explained matters very badly."

"I can understand that you would be unnerved, certainly," answered Lawson: "but that was all the more reason for you to seek the assistance of the police. Still, there's no telling down what lane a man in a nervous state will bolt. 'Boots' at the ›Feathers‹ says you were very upset when he pointed out to you the blood on your hand, and that you left immediately, saying that you would see the police. But, then, you did not. You were too nervous, as you put it?"

"Is this official sarcasm?" Arthur asked himself: "is it an accusation?"

He looked the inspector squarely in the eyes.

"I am sorry now," he said, "I did not go to you, but it was my intention as soon as my guests left me to-day—I have some people coming to luncheon—to tell you what little I know, even though I assumed that you would have heard almost as much as I know myself from the bargemen, who, on their return to the barge, must have found the body."

By this time they were in the dining-room, where Arthur touched the bell for Jenkins, saying to the inspector: "I think you will not require me to follow you in your investigations, as I am busy."

"Not at all, sir," said Lawson, who, nevertheless, seemed to be surprised. "Only one other question for the present. The trail—can you tell us nothing as to that?"

"Trail?" said Leigh: "this is the first I have heard"

"You do not know, then, Mr. Leigh, that nearly all across the barley-field there is a track that seems to have been made by some enormous snake, wriggling straight through to the barge. Its object might have been to strike that poor man dead on her deck. I have read in a paper, sir, that in ancient times, ages before men were created, there were great beasts of this kind going about, elephants as big as this mansion, and creeping things a hundred yards long; and it looks as if one of them had survived till now, and woke from its sleep last night by the Parret

to set to its work again. … But I think you said, sir, that you can tell us nothing of this strange trail?"

Certainly the heavy-limbed policeman could have chosen no surer means of astounding his hearer.

"This, I repeat, is the first I have heard of it," answered Arthur, staring, with an even deeper sense of wonder at the happenings of the night.

Just then Jenkins came in answer to the bell.

"Inspector Lawson wishes to look through the place, Jenkins," Arthur said. "See to it, will you?" and in a lower tone he added: "How is the luncheon going?"

Jenkins, who had a most solemn face, assured him that the luncheon would be to his taste, on which Arthur returned to the balcony, and again took in hand Mowle and Mowle's letter. Deeply interesting though that letter was to him, minute after minute passed in which another and yet deeper interest, the interest of Inspector Lawson's manner and words, so pre-occupied him that again it remained unread. Presently, however, his eyes fell a-reading of their own accord.

> The will, a copy of which we enclose, constitutes you his sole heir, but there is a singular, and, in your interests, a most unfortunate omission: namely, that not one word is said as to the disposal of the personalty, nor have we been able to trace the existence of any monies or securities beyond a sum of £8,000 deposited in a bank, and ear-marked for a specific purpose.
>
> It will elucidate a difficult matter if we state that the probate value of the Abbey Manor estate (which for present purposes may be regarded as also its mortgage value) is £100,000. Now, a year before his death, Mr. Rollaston Leigh mortgaged the property for £150,000, a sum so excessively greater than its real value, that we asked the mortgagees, Messrs. Dix and Churchill, a well-known and reputable firm, to permit us to inspect the mortgage deed. They agreed readily, and we found it quite in order, so we can only assume that, by some private arrangement, Mr. Rollaston Leigh first advanced £50,000 to Dix and Churchill, and then had that sum returned to him, together with the actual mortgage value of the estate, while the whole sum was covered by the deed.

It was at this point in the long letter that Arthur Leigh's face blanched, as the certainty of an undreamed-of disaster, of ruin itself, began to dawn upon him. But biting upon his cigar between his teeth, he proceeded:

> It must be clearly understood that we are speaking thus plainly as between solicitors and client, since there is no positive proof in our hands of such a transaction between Mr. Rollaston Leigh and the mortgagees, Dix and Churchill. Nevertheless, on the face of it, as you see yourself, Dix and Churchill have lent one-third more than the value of the estate, though the common practice is to lend only two-thirds of that value.
>
> This mortgage falls due twelve months after the decease of the mortgagor, that is to say, about six months hence.
>
> The sum of £8,000, already mentioned, together with the accrued rents, was intended to pay the succession duty, costs, and interest on the mortgage, and was calculated so nicely that, had we not been able to save some small amounts, owing to the alteration of the death duties this year, there would have been no surplus. As matters stand, we have pleasure in enclosing a cheque for £450, which, with the £100 already advanced, represents a total of £550 at your disposal.
>
> For the rest, the most painstaking inquiry has failed to reveal the whereabouts of the large sum of £150,000 paid to Mr. Rollaston Leigh by the mortgagees, Dix and Churchill, in Bank of England notes. As Mr. Leigh never expended his annual income, the £50,000 already alluded to (which was actually realized by him through his bank just before the execution of the mortgage) probably represented his savings. It is impossible to say what has become of all this money. The mass of bank-notes may still be in existence in some hiding-place, or it may have been given away anonymously to institutions.
>
> Of course, the net result of Mr. Rollaston Leigh's action is disastrous for you. If, within six months, you cannot obtain at least £50,000, and arrange a fresh mortgage for £100,000, Dix and Churchill, the present mortgagees, will foreclose on the estate. That this was

> your grandfather's intention cannot be doubted. He meant to inflict upon you the torture of coming into possession of a splendid property, and losing it again almost as soon as you regarded it as your own. He assumed that you would be utterly unable to raise the £50,000 necessary to avert foreclosure, and, if, in fact, you cannot raise this sum, it is our duty to advise you that you are quite powerless in the matter. You will even observe that your grandfather went so far as to limit your period of possession to six months, lest perhaps you might have sufficient time to obtain the money by some means, as, for instance, by marriage.

"Your guests are now coming up the drive, sir."

It was Jenkins who spoke, and it was in a voice which the good Jenkins hardly recognized, that Leigh answered him: "That's all right, Jenkins. Kindly open the Abbot's Port. That will be more convenient for them."

Jenkins waited an instant. Probably he expected his master to hurry forth. Then he bowed himself away. But Arthur did not stir under this burden of care that had come suddenly upon his back. He sat numb, demoralized, his eyes of themselves reading, as it were apart from himself, the words: "... obtain the money by some means, as, for instance, by marriage. ..."

That made him smile bitterly ....

> Permit us to say in conclusion that we regret exceedingly that our firm should figure in any way in a transaction which is both discreditable and despicable. We should have refused to deal with it, had not your absence from England rendered it advisable that you should at least be given a chance of saving the property somehow. We have put the situation briefly and free from legal technicalities. Of course, we are entirely at your command. If you care to consult another firm of solicitors, we shall be pleased to give them all the information in our power, and with renewed assurances of our regard and deep regret,
>
> We are,
> Dear Sir,
> Your obedient Servants,
> *Mowle and Mowle.*

Then there came chatter and laughter, a little throng of footsteps sounding near, and now Arthur was on his feet, an older man by ten years, the letter crumpled into a ball by the spasm of his clenched fingers. In another moment he was out on the lawn, and declaring himself charmed.

They were a party of five, people who carried with them a certain globe-trotting, motoring, yachting atmosphere. They had travelled from Burnham in a motor-car, and Mr. Chauncey Bagot, who acted as chauffeur, duly had on a leather motor cap, while over a costume out of muslin's fairy-land Miss Elinor Gage Hinton was volumed in a great lubberly ponyskin motor coat.

"I have to acknowledge myself in your debt, Mr. Leigh," said Mr. Hinton at once, "for your kindness to my daughter yesterday in her bicycling accident, and for your invitation to this delightful place of yours."

"Of mine, he thinks!" commented Arthur sourly to himself, and the word ruin, ruin, beat regularly like a pulse in the background of his being.

Mr. Hinton was a substantial man of middle age, bearded, but with a shaven lip which gave him a severely Nonconformist air. The American "Who's Who" described him as "A well-known Philadelphia ironmaster." He looked it. It must have been from the distaff side that Elinor obtained her whiff of wood-nymph sinuosity.

As to the married couple, the two George F. Bateses, they were of a solid and middle-aged type, remarkable for nothing save a Chicago accent. But in spite of this dead weight in the way of the commonplace, the party on the whole was notable, for there was "Elinor," and far more noteworthy than even "Elinor," or than any other human being whom Arthur Leigh remembered ever to have seen, was Mr. Bagot.

At the mere mention of his name in Elinor's note, Arthur felt a twinge of jealousy, such as every young man feels as to the suspected presence of another young man dangling after a pretty girl, even in cases where the heart is not deeply concerned. But that was before the reading of Mowle and Mowle's letter. The potential lover was suddenly dead in Arthur. The only sentiment of which he was conscious now was one of annoyance. He had been forced into the pose of an impostor, making believe to be walking on rock when all below him was hollow as wind. Even if this had not been so, still he would have felt no jealousy, since Mr. Bagot appeared to be at least fifty, and was anything but an Adonis. Arthur's interest in the man was, therefore, impersonal,

such as one cannot but feel in the presence of any very extraordinary being.

After the compliments usual from visitors to the Abbey as to the beauty of the place, all moved forward over the lawn to enter the house, and Arthur's foot was on the steps of the façade, when out came a man whom, for the moment, he had almost forgotten—Inspector Lawson.

Arthur could not keep down the blush that mounted to his cheeks. The inspector had in his hand the motor cap found on the bank of the Parret, and, as he drew aside to permit the entrance of the party, he held up the cap, saying:

"I think I will take this at once, Mr. Leigh, with your permission."

At this all eyes naturally turned upon the leather cap, and Mr. George F. Bates, with half a laugh, made the remark: "Why, Bagot, one would swear that that's your cap, the one you lost last night!"

"It is it, surely!" agreed Mr. Chauncey Bagot, bending toward the cap in the inspector's hand. "May one have a look at it?"

He took the cap and examined it.

"Ah, no," he said presently, "not the same. Mine had my initials in ink on the lining. … Marvellously like it though—same maker, the very same sort of cap—but not mine."

And he handed back the cap to the inspector as the party moved inward at the summons of the luncheon gong.

5

The Circumstances Become Involved

"Oh, beware of Chauncey Bagot, Mr. Leigh!"

It was Elinor Hinton who spoke, and Arthur Leigh was hardly less astonished than he had been the night before, when, on returning to the deck of the barge from his fall, he had found there the naked dead man on a spot where he had just before groped and found nothing.

"Beware of Chauncey Bagot!"—her friend, whom she had brought to luncheon with him! Yet with so much earnestness, with so much furtiveness had she uttered those four words!

They had risen from table, were going out to the balcony, and of the five visitors Elinor was the hindermost, while Arthur came last of all; and it was over her shoulder that she had whispered it, with her lips as much on as at his ear: it was all but a touch. And that slight token of complete confidence was the strangest thing of all, for Elinor was no flirt.

Now, at table, Mr. Chauncey Bagot had declared that he had once met the dead Rollaston Leigh. He knew of the old man's belief that the souls of the dead are apt to look out of the eye of dog or cat, and when everyone at the table had smiled at this craze, Bagot did not agree, saying, "No, the thing may not be so crazy as it sounds."

Further, he expressed a wish to visit the "Place of Sojourn," which was Rollaston Leigh's name for the out-houses in which the animals were lodged, and to examine the whole delightful old place at leisure, since he had long known of and desired to look into its antiquities.

He went so far as to invite himself to call alone upon Arthur the following afternoon, and Arthur duly professed his pleasure at the prospect.

Arthur, therefore, could only assume now that this extraordinary warning of Elinor Hinton had reference to that self-invitation of Bagot's.

He could not answer. Another syllable and the two would have been observed or heard. The instant her intense warning had been whispered, Elinor was humming an air from *La Sonnambula*; and the next moment they were on the balcony.

Bagot chose the wicker chair by the balcony rail, in sitting on which he sent it singing through a series of creaks, for though hardly tall, he was portly. He looked like a mediaeval monk with a shaven countenance that bloomed like the moon and a batch of chins beneath it. His skin was pasty and coarse in the grain, his nose gross. But he was somehow not ill-looking. His hair was black and plenteous, his eyes blue—and in eyes and mouth were the clear indices of power and mind.

Arthur had found him at table a talker who knew everything and something of everybody. But the fault of his conversation was that no one else could find a chance to say anything, though Mrs. Bates every now and then suddenly found some words that needed to be said, and then, no matter who was speaking, out they ploughed their way against all comers. Thus, in the very midst of an explanation by Mr. Bagot of how Alpine glaciers are formed, Mrs. Bates on a sudden remarked:

"What a strange thing that about a body without clothing being found on a barge last night not far from here!"

At once this became the topic.

Even Mr. Bagot, who generally preferred subjects on a higher plane, such as glaciers and world-politics, took part in it: for an outline of the facts of the matter had appeared under big head-lines in a special edition of a Bristol morning paper.

"Not one of the bargemen appears to have been on the barge," remarked Mr. Hinton, "so there seems to be no question of the guilt of any of them."

"No," said Mrs. Bates, "and what bargemen would ever have had the cunning, after committing a murder, to make the body unrecognizable by removing all the clothing and destroying the face? That's 'cute, too! For murderers are generally detected by finding out someone who had a motive for the crime, but in this case no motive can ever be discovered,

since the identity of the dead man is hidden. It's 'cute, mind you, real 'cute!"

"Oh, 'never' is a hard word," said her husband. "In the first place, somebody will be missed somewhere, and sooner or later there'll be a clue to connect that missing man with this dead man."

"Now, I call that a shrewd observation," put in Bagot, moving his thick fat palms together with a movement of one washing hands, in his habitual contented way.

"As to that," said Mrs. Bates, not to be beaten, "people are always disappearing, and what is there to show which of the three or four people who disappeared in England last night is this dead man?"

"There is something in that too, Mrs. Bates," said Bagot. "It is the women, after all, who have intuition."

"But the really perplexing mystery," said Mr. Hinton, "is how the body was taken on board the barge, for, by all accounts, the labourer who was bespoken by the gentleman on the barge says that the plank connecting it with the shore had dropped down."

"And who was that gentleman?" asked Mrs. Bates. "Why couldn't his name be published? And what on earth was he doing there alone on a barge at that time of night, anyhow?"

"He may have gone there to—meditate," Bagot suggested blandly.

"You can't meditate on a barge," answered Mrs. Bates: "barges smell."

"He may have had an assignation there," suggested Bates. "Isn't there a connection between Beauty and the Barge?"

"Or the gentleman may be no gentleman, but an assassin," said Mr. Hinton.

The conversation had slipped into jest, but now Arthur Leigh, who had hitherto remained silent, thought it high time to interfere.

"No, he was not the assassin, Mr. Hinton. It was I who was on the barge."

Elinor uttered a slight cry, almost a scream. Every eye stared roundly.

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Bagot, almost hinting that Leigh's statement was a shocking one.

"Do tell!" said Mrs. Bates eagerly.

Under the circumstances, Arthur had to tell something, but he told it shortly, excused himself from offering opinions on the ground that

the affair was in the hands of the police, and at once proposed a stroll through the grounds.

They went, and by the time they were at the end of the three lawns had separated. A hundred yards down the avenue were Mr. Hinton and Mrs. Bates, then Mr. Bates and Elinor in the middle, and behind them Mr. Bagot, with Arthur, who, as he talked, kept an eye on the graceful undulations of Miss Hinton's movements.

Then the groups again transformed themselves: Mr. Bagot had something to say to Mr. Bates, trotted forward, suggested Arthur to Elinor, and soon the two were together. The two Bateses and Mr. Hinton went out of sight somewhere in front among the fruit trees, and Bagot, for his part, had gone down a side alley, apparently interested in botanizing.

It was a glorious June noonday. The sun, shining down through the foliage, dappled Elinor's hair with a pattern of gold leaves, bringing back to Arthur's mind Jenkins's repetition of the rhyme of "The Belle Damosel."

"What did you mean?" Arthur asked her.

She shrugged her shoulders prettily, and was silent for a space.

Then she said: "Do you not happen to know who Mr. Bagot is? Have you never heard his name?"

"Never."

"He has written several books on science," she said, "and one on music—he plays the violin with distinction. Till five years ago he was a professor of anthropology at Harvard."

"Ah, now I understand your warning—a professor of anthropology."

"Don't jest!" she murmured, looking before her with a grave face.

"Why not? I think I was born to laugh in the face of the devil."

She had the faintest way of shrugging the right shoulder that was somehow Spanish in its abandon, and now again she lifted it, saying:

"Perhaps I ought to tell you more of Mr. Chauncey Bagot, and since what I have to tell is nothing but good, you must pick the *raison d'etre* of my warning out of it as best you can. But I do warn you, because you were good to me yesterday, because—I choose, and because I am sometimes supposed to have instincts. In the morning I wake up knowing things. But you don't want to hear of me, but of Mr. Bagot."

"No really, there you are quite wrong," broke in Arthur.

"Mr. Chauncey Bagot—professor of anthropology — till five years ago. Since then he has lived in England. He lives in England now at 'Nielpahar,' not fifteen miles from here. He is an old and honoured friend of my father, and of many an estimable family in the two worlds—what better recommendation could you have, Mr. Leigh? Only I say that sometimes I wake up knowing things."

"I am sure you do," cried Arthur, when her silvery staccato, clear and distinct as a Florentine bell, ceased to charm his ears. "But admit, Miss Hinton, if you set yourself to say nothing but good of a person, you make it hard for a second person to 'beware' of him."

Elinor nibbled for a few moments at the stalk of a daisy that she stooped to pick up. Then she glanced half shyly into Leigh's face.

"Have you kept my secret as to the kidnapping incident of yesterday?" she asked.

"I always keep my promises," answered Arthur, wondering at the change in her manner, for there could be no mistaking the irony of her summing up of Bagot's perfections.

"Well, then, one good turn deserves another," said Elinor: "I will keep on telling you things in Mr. Bagot's favour, until I somehow suggest what I have woke up knowing. Listen! Mr. Bagot is a man with a purpose—more, he is a man with two purposes, and also with a will not of the usual 'iron,' but of that coldest drawn Bessemer steel with which the rams of battleships are made. Two purposes and a will! The first of the purposes is to possess some day, sooner or later—for his patience is great—the body and soul of a girl for whom he has conceived a passion, the name of the girl being immaterial to you, Mr. Leigh, though I may mention that she, too, has a will, and there will be a fight for it, tooth and nail."

Arthur laughed to himself, muttering: "By gad, there I believe you."

But he said aloud:

"And the second of these heroic purposes of Mr. Bagot?"

"The second is truly heroic," said Elinor, "and is no less fixedly willed than the first. It is to bring about the Millennium on a sudden, Mr. Leigh; to make of this world in a week a new world"

"Rather a tall order!" remarked Arthur, smiling.

"It sounds wild?" asked Elinor, arching at him the perfect crescents of her eyebrows, "but, then, you have seen the man's face, and there is no more of the dreamer there than in a cheese, or in a butcher with his

chopper at work—oh, to be frank, I highly admire, I should almost love, this man, if I did not—loathe him."

The last two words burst from her in a passionate whisper. Not knowing quite how to take her mood, Leigh treated it lightly.

"And I should loathe him, if you loved him," he said gallantly.

"Can you not be serious?" she asked, facing her companion full, with grave eyes.

"I must be," he said, "though it is difficult, for—shall I tell you?—you are so full of the wine of life and vitality, I catch gayety and interest from you, and forgetfulness of grief. If you were up for sale like some rare vintage, and I was rich, I believe I'd be the highest bidder present."

She stopped in her walk. "I thought, Mr. Leigh, from the way you handled that idiot who attacked me last night that you were something; but I see that you are merely—man."

"And you," he retorted, "are the best thing going, a mere girl."

"And I was speaking so frankly to this trifler!"

"Not more honest in purpose than I," protested Arthur, to whom the very incense of her presence was intoxicating.

"Mr. Leigh, listen to what I am saying."

"By all means. Let us resume our walk. You were telling me about 'The Millennium, by C. Bagot.' How does Mr. Bagot propose to introduce this golden age?"

"By means of some invention which for the last nine or ten years he has been busy at—some mechanical device which is to transform everything. Its nature probably no soul but himself yet can guess. I only know that he keeps the thing in a huge shed in the grounds at 'Nielpahar.' But the point I want you to realize is this—that this invention will cost a great deal of money to complete, and that Mr. Bagot is not rich."

"The point for me?" cried Arthur, laughing, being quite cheery, now at the notion of his own downfall. "It would be wholly in vain for Mr. Bagot to seek to bring the Millennium through me. Miss Hinton, for it so happens that not two hours since I made the stimulating discovery that I am this day as poor as a church mouse, though you see me here apparently the lord of all I survey."

At this Elinor looked him again in the face with eyes less hard.

"I'm sorry," she said. "But you take it coolly, and that is something."

"I seem to forget it in your presence. When you are gone, I'll mope."

This time she did not resent his compliment. They walked on a little way in silence.

"But about Mr. Bagot," she said presently: "one thing more. This morning, unfortunately, he was with us on the yacht—he is not properly one of our yachting party, you know, but he takes short cruises with us, then leaves us for a few days to get back to his invention. Well, after being away from us two days, he turned up this morning, so my father told him that we were going to lunch with a gentleman, and asked him to come. He refused. We pressed him. He refused, saying it was a bore. Then somebody mentioned that it was to Mr. Leigh of the Abbey Manor that we were going, and presently it was found that Mr. Bagot, who never changes his mind, was coming, too."

"Well, he happens to have known my grandfather, and wanted to see this place, no doubt. Really, I find nothing worthy of suspicion in that."

"No? But he is seeing the place now, yet he means to come again to see it on his own invitation to-morrow. Beware then."

"Of what, though?"

"Mr. Leigh, the Greeks made of Persuasion a goddess, naming her 'Peitho,' and under the inspiration of Peitho lives Mr. Bagot. I have heard my father say that merely by the use of his tongue Mr. Bagot has induced the greatest miser in the world to hand him a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars, though afterwards the miser beat his head upon something hard in asking himself: 'Why did I do it?' I don't, of course, know what Mr. Bagot wants of you, but I see fit to mention to you that, whatever it is, he will get it, if you are not exceedingly careful."

"He can't!" cried Arthur with a laugh. "Even he cannot extract blood out of stone!"

"Gold comes out of stone," answered Elinor, "and it is gold, I fancy, that he needs."

"I should not care to have you for an enemy. You are bitter, you are cruel"

"Sh-h-h— look!"

The words came in the faintest breath to Leigh's ear. Their rambling had now brought them into the rosery, and, as they were moving very slowly on a moss path, they had made no sound in coming. Hence, through a chance vista between the leafage, Elinor could spy a somewhat curious proceeding at the other side of the garden. She moved a

little to enable Leigh to see, touching him, putting pressure upon him to guide him to the right angle of vision.

It was at the far end of the rosery where the old Benedictine wall stood, and the gargoyle in it, with the ivy tree, all gnarled and twisted, clinging to its ancient ribs. Well up the wall, perched among the leaves, was Mr. Chauncey Bagot. He was intently examining the gargoyle. He seemed to have something in his hand with which he tapped the stonework. Arthur thought that it might be a tiny hammer; while tapping, he appeared to listen for some sound.

"Mr. Bagot," began Arthur—he was going to say, "Mr. Bagot is evidently an antiquarian," but Elinor checked him with another intense "Sh-h-h."

It was too late, however. The man at the gargoyle had perhaps heard that "Mr. Bagot." At all events he glanced round, for one second his implement remained uplifted in his hand; the next moment he was calling out to Elinor to come and appreciate the wonderful craftsmanship of the gargoyle.

Arthur and Elinor walked forward, and almost immediately the two Bateses and Mr. Hinton reappeared, to hear a lecture from Mr. Bagot on the antiquities of the Abbey, as to whose probable history he could tell far more than Arthur himself had ever known. But Arthur wondered what had become of the little tapper or hammer that he thought he had beheld in Mr. Bagot's hand. This was no longer in evidence.

It was now near three o'clock. Within ten minutes the "Belle Damosel," as Arthur himself had learnt to call her, had taken her departure. She and the others expressed themselves delighted with their visit, and secured from Arthur a promise to visit them on the yacht.

And now Arthur, left alone, moped, as he had vowed would be the case. The several clouds that had arisen in his sky formed themselves into one vault of darkness over him, and he uttered to himself the old saw: "Misfortunes never come singly."

He sat down and wrote to Mowle and Mowle, just saying that he saw no way out of his disaster, and had no instructions to give. Then he wrote to Inspector Lawson of Bridgewater, more particularly describing the spot at which he believed that the revolver of the motorist had dropped from his hand, in case the police should endeavour to seek it in the river. He was summoned that evening to the inquest on the body of "a man unknown." The proceedings were quite formal, and the inquiry was adjourned, to permit the police to obtain "evidence of identification."

From then to the visit of Mr. Bagot the next afternoon, he lived as in a vacuum, inert, though restless, with a sense of something impending upon him. The cloud lifted when Bagot was strolling with him in the rose garden.

What did the man want? This question kept Arthur puzzled, even as he talked architecture in the abstract, heard Mr. Bagot discourse on the violin with shut eyes of rapture, stood with him looking at the "Place of Sojourn" and its yawning inmates, sipped wine with him, or walked again in the gardens: what was Mr. Bagot after?

Arthur had no sense of boredom meantime. That big head of Mr. Bagot's was a source from which flowed oceans of entertaining discourse, and his throat knew no aching, but there was a sense of unreality somewhere; and the question still arose, what did he really want?

If it was information about the estate, about the position of Arthur's affairs that he was after, he got it without difficulty, for, to his own surprise, Arthur found himself more open-minded with Bagot than with other men. Again and again he found himself telling things that he had had no intention of mentioning. By the time the sun went down in glory clouds behind Bridgewater, Bagot had obtained from him every detail of what had happened at the Parret's bank two nights before, had learnt many facts of his late grandfather's habits and way of life, and even been posted in all the details contained in Mowle and Mowle's letter.

"The value of the estate," he said to Arthur, "is, you say, a hundred thousand. Yet your grandfather was able to effect a mortgage of a hundred and fifty thousand with Dix and Churchill. Do you know Dix and Churchill at all? Have you ever met them?"

They were now sitting out on the balcony, and day was drawing fast toward the gloaming. Bagot had a big cigar which he took away and put back to his broad mouth amateurishly, like a girl learning to smoke.

"Do I know Dix and Churchill?" repeated Arthur, a little surprised at the question: "Personally, you mean?"

"Yes."

"No—at this moment I cannot recall ever having heard their names. Do you, by chance, know them?"

"Quite well—by repute."

"But, then, Mr. Bagot, you know everybody and everything."

Arthur laughed a little.

Mr. Bagot shook up a plump right leg which, crossed over the left, showed a bit of red sock between his shoe and the end of his trousers, while his eyes struggled against the fumes of the cigar which he still puffed valiantly.

"These two men simply mean to 'do' you, if you let them, Leigh," he announced.

"Dix and Churchill? But Mowle and Mowle say in the letter that they are a highly reputable firm?"

"I believe that is true. It leads me to ask what is a highly reputable firm? Very often it means a firm that has acquired by habit the right to swindle without exciting remark. It seems to me clear enough that Dix and Churchill were deliberately in league with your grandfather to give you one taste of prosperity and then rob you of your inheritance, or they would never have taken a hand in the trick of receiving the fifty thousand from him privately, and then giving him a hundred and fifty thousand for what was only worth a hundred thousand. Depend upon it, they have some reason for being greedy to grab this place. Of course, Leigh, you will not let them?"

"'Will not' is forcible and good, Mr. Bagot," answered Arthur. "But you do not suggest whence I am to get fifty thousand pounds within six months to prevent the foreclosure."

Bagot leant nearer. "Fifty thousand pounds is not a large sum! To me, who have had much to do with millionaires, it seems little more than a puff of dust on the wind, and to a young man like you, with an agreeable physique, good breeding, and an adventurous turn, it should not be much. There are ways and means—you could marry money."

"Ah!" said Arthur, amused. That was the only passage in the solicitors' letter that he had not recited.

"I mean, of course—abroad."

"And why abroad?"

"I take it—am I right?—that you are going abroad."

"Why so? At the present moment I have no such thought."

Mr. Bagot's eyes rested some time upon him with a soupçon of surprise in them.

"Then, I mistook you," he said. "I took it that you would deem it best to cut and run until this nasty complication with the body on the barge had blown over."

At this Arthur, with his hands on his chair-arms, stared at the speaker with some amazement, making no answer.

"You did not consider that it was so bad as that, I see," said Bagot, throwing away at last the cigar which baffled him. "Innocent men won't fly when they should—'the righteous are as bold as a lion,' and so, like lions, get slaughtered, while the cautious guilty go unpunished. But this is serious, Leigh. Oh, this thing is grave, believe me. I speak as a friend, and also as an older man than yourself, who has learned the world, and the face of fate, and the way in which circumstances habitually, by their innate law, jump and turn out. Events are so often like snowballs—let them but once arise, and, as they roll, they grow to bigness. Here are you suddenly, without fault of your own, with your feet in a net: and you say, 'My feet are in a net of which the meshes are few, and with an effort or two I am free.' But there is a certain crassness and pertinacity in circumstances—at least, I seem to have observed such a fact. The course of events goes on. The meshes multiply and tighten; and to him that hath is given; and from him that hath not is taken away. Wait—you will see if I am not a son of the prophets. I hope not in this case: but I, in your place, would instantly clear out, marry in a hurry for money, defeat the scheme of Dix and Churchill, and after a year or so return to enjoy quiet and prosperity."

Arthur Leigh looked at the ground, frowning. It suddenly struck him that insensibly, little by little, Bagot had gone far in the way of interference in his private affairs! For a minute he said nothing. The lax skin of Bagot's brow, which was pushed forward quite close to Arthur's, twitched and twitched again in the silence. Then Arthur laughed quietly.

"I am hardly one of the cutting and running sort," he said; "and as to marrying money, no, that's hardly in my vein either. I'll face the music."

"Well, that's gamely said, too," said Bagot. "That's gallant. But, from another point of view, it is neither game nor gallant to give in, to be an easy victim, to let Dix and Churchill have their triumph."

"If they must, they must, I suppose."

"Oh, they needn't. You are young, full of energies, possibilities …. If there's no other way out, why, I'll advance you the fifty thousand pounds myself!"

Arthur sprang up with a start.

"You?" he almost shouted.

"That is, if I can raise it. You hear me talking big, Leigh, but I am by no means a wealthy man. I am a devising and a contriving one, however—a man made to find a way out—and doubtless I could manage

to raise such a sum, you giving me a lease of the Abbey estate for such a length of time as—"

Arthur was slowly turning away before the sentence was fully uttered. He seemed to see a light streaming upon the purpose of Bagot's visit and of all the afternoon of talk. Bagot wanted the Abbey estate! The eyes of the two men met and dwelt together during some seconds, while through the mind of Arthur passed the two thoughts: "Why does he want the Abbey?" and then, "But why should he not?" At the same time there raced through his brain a remembrance of that word of Elinor's—"Beware!" she had said, "beware of Chauncey Bagot then"—during this very visit.

But Bagot was not one who readily bred distrust, nor was it easy to guess at his inner mind. After being bathed in a long afternoon of his talk, the impression left upon the bather was that if he was inscrutable, he was honest all through and a very Solomon in wisdom.

"Let me understand you—" Arthur began. He was interrupted by Jenkins, who brought him a letter, and a parcel.

"Just open it," he said to Jenkins, meaning the parcel; and he himself, asking to be excused, opened the letter. It ran:

> *Dear Sir:*
>
> *As I shall be passing close to the Abbey Manor on the evening of the 9th instant, I shall feel it a privilege if you will then give me the opportunity of a brief interview for a discussion of affairs as between yourself and my firm. If you cannot be at home between eight and ten on that evening, perhaps you will favour me with a telegram at the above address to say so.*
>
> *Yours truly,*
>
> *E.J. Dix.*

Dix!—of Dix and Churchill—for the note bore at the top the printed style of the firm. And Mr. Dix had wished to interview Arthur on the evening of the 9th—two days gone—the very evening of Arthur's experience on the barge moored in the Parret!

Arthur looked at the date on the note—the 8th; he looked at the date on the postmark: it had not been posted till that day—the 12th. He could not understand ....

But J enkins with the parcel was at the French window leading to the balcony. Having no knife with him, he had gone within to cut the

string, and, now, as he reappeared, Arthur stepped up to him, took the parcel, and raised the cover of a green cardboard shirt-box. Inside lay folded a shirt—not a new one, nor one fresh from the laundry. It had been worn. There were two gold studs in the front; and there was blood on it; and a revolver with it.

Gazing down at it, he walked inward, without asking to be excused, without any word, leaving Bagot outside; and within he laid the box on a table, the letter from Dix beside it, to stand staring down upon both.

He saw that the shirt had been tom in the left shoulder, and knew that there it had been pierced by a bullet: it was there the blood stain was. And the revolver was the revolver of the motorist who had tried to seize Elinor; the revolver which Arthur had dropped into the Parret—the same, or one of a brace.

Several minutes he stood there staring. In his brain somehow Bagot's words kept recurring. "Events go their course" … "grow like snowballs" … "a son of the prophets."

On the lapel of the shirt in marking ink were some initials and a number: "E.J.D. No. 8," and because the note was lying there by the side of the parcel, and because his eye at almost the same moment caught the "E.J.D." on the shirt lapel and the "E.J. Dix" on the note, he started. …

All at once Jenkins was beside him again, muttering in a most awed voice:

"Inspector Furneaux, of Scotland Yard, to see you, sir!"

Even as Arthur turned to open his lips, Mr. Bagot, who had entered with an urgent and earnest furtiveness on tiptoe, was at his ear, hurriedly whispering: "Whatever it is that has come to agitate you, conceal it instantly. The officer is coming in here. … He will see! …"

He actually helped to draw over the parcel an Armenian cloth on a divan, while Arthur slipped the note into a pocket.

One moment afterwards a man, slight, but wiry, spry and bright-eyed, stood at the doorway, looking in. Behind him was Jenkins, gaping helplessly.

"Inspector Furneaux?" asked Arthur, advancing.

"Mr. Leigh?" said the stranger, and made a forward step.

6

Dark Footsteps

As Arthur and the detective faced each other Bagot's smooth voice came to them.

"I won't wait, Leigh, as you are engaged," he said, "we shall meet soon again," and he put out his hand to his host, though his eyes dwelt steadily upon Inspector Furneaux the while.

"Glad to see you at any time," was Leigh's conventional phrase.

Bagot, laying down the old violin which he had found in the house, went out, while Inspector Furneaux, for his part, remarked with a certain affableness:

"Excuse me, if I have intruded, Mr. Leigh. I couldn't quite make out what your servant meant me to do. He seems—agitated."

"That is all right, Inspector," Arthur answered. "We can talk here. Please be seated."

The inspector looked about him, then deliberately stepped forward and sat on the divan, beneath whose Armenian cloth was concealed the bloodstained shirt of "E.J.D." and the revolver that was either the same, or a pattern of, the motorist's revolver dropped by Arthur into the Parret. There, under the cloth, was quite visible the square shape of the box.

"Perhaps I need hardly state on what business I am here, Mr. Leigh," the detective said. He held his two palms on his knees; and, seated thus, he had an air of being on the point of darting up to spring at something, he being a little man with sloping shoulders, an elongated, sprightly neck, a long face which was clean shaven, and quite an attractive smile and active cat's eyes.

"Nor," he added, "need I take up much of your time, since I have here the substance of your statement made to Inspector Lawson of Bridgewater—" he showed his notebook—"only I have a question or two—thanks, thanks, I'll have one—though I never smoke—but I work always with the scent of a cigar under my nose—a question or two—as for example this one: What was the nature of the quarrel between yourself and your grandfather?"

Arthur, in the act of moving a chair so as to face Furneaux, glanced round in some surprise.

"My grandfather had certain beliefs as to the transmigration of souls which on one occasion resulted in a cruelty to a dog of mine," he said, "though before that, there never had been much love lost."

"I see," said Mr. Furneaux, moving his nose to and fro over the cigar. "Mr. Rollaston Leigh was undoubtedly a character."

He was silent a little; then he added: "But a man of no little skill in the matter of horticulture and landscape gardening; the laying out of these grounds may be somewhat out of the common, but well conceived, well conceived."

"No doubt he did understand that sort of thing," Arthur agreed, without comprehending to what this tended.

"And architecture, too," said the Inspector: "he knew his way there."

"Possibly," said Arthur, "though I am not aware that he made many changes in the house itself during his long life."

"No? Still, I think from what I have been able to gather—you, of course, were away at the time of his death, so that, if about that time he made any repairs, you would not have been aware of them?"

"He made none, I think, or I should have seen them, or been told of them."

Inspector Furneaux's eyes shot one keen underlook at the other's face. Then, rapidly, against one of the queries in his notebook, he made a pencil dot—so rapidly that he did not seem to have done more than dab the pencil against the paper.

"So that we may take it that no repairs have lately been made in the house," he said. "I ask these questions, though they have no connection with your curious experiences on the bank of the Parret, because—well, it would waste your time to explain to you my reason for each line of inquiry that occurs to me haphazard. This is a good cigar, it is what is called 'green-rolled,' and I only envy those who have the gallantry to put a narcotic poison into their mouth, sir. At any rate, we may put

that down as proved, that your grandfather was of eccentric character: and may we take it as an added fact that while leaving you apparently wealthy, he has left you really poor?"

Arthur wished to reply aloud: "Since you obviously know all about my affairs, why the deuce ask?" But something in the influence of Inspector Furneaux's gaze, whose watchfulness seemed never to wink, made him answer merely that the fact was so.

"Hence, you find yourself saddled with a mortgage to the tune of?"

"A hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

"And the necessity to raise fifty thousand pounds within?"

"Six months."

"The mortgagees being?"

"A firm called Dix and Churchill."

"Old friends of your grandfather?—or not?"

"I have no idea … though I seem now to have some recollection of hearing him speak at some time of a Mr. Churchill."

"Of Mr. Churchill: never of Mr. Dix, no?"

"To the best of my recollection, I have never heard the name of Dix till—yesterday."

"No? and how did you hear it then?"

"I saw it in a letter from my lawyers."

"Of course, that was it. So, you had not then, it seems, received a note which Mr. Dix wrote to you on the 8th of the month."

Arthur started, hesitated, and said: "No," without qualification. The note had come upon him so suddenly only some moments before, and Inspector Furneaux had come so suddenly on top of the note, that he had had no time to reflect upon its significance, upon the significance of the shirt and revolver, or upon his proper line of conduct with respect to them.

"Mr. Dix, by the way, did write you a note on the 8th, Mr. Leigh," Furneaux said, putting the cigar to alternate nostrils, keeping his eyes steadily fixed on Leigh.

"He may not have posted it."

Arthur breathed freely again. He deemed the explanation rather clever.

"Well, that is a possibility; he may not have posted it. And yet" — now the little man darted like a thunder-clap to his feet, slapping down

both hands on a chair-back—"you have that note in your pocket now, Mr. Leigh!"

Arthur, quite taken aback, half stood up, for one moment pallid, but then he remarked: "You have crushed your cigar, Inspector: have another"

And he coolly held out the cigar box. Campaigning had done that much for him, at any rate. He was not to be frightened by a policeman.

"The crushed one will do," said the inspector, with an equally sudden calm, picking up and sniffing the cigar as he sank back into his chair. "Kindly hand me that note, Mr. Leigh."

"It is here," said Arthur, producing it. Furneaux immediately seized upon it with a greed and triumph which he could not conceal, saying: "Only I do not understand why you said that you had not received it, Mr. Leigh."

"Pardon me," said Arthur: "I did not say 'I have not received it'; I answered 'No' to your question, meaning that I did not receive it on the 9th, when, if it was written on the 8th, as you said, I should have received it. As a matter of fact, I have only just received it. But you—how could you know that I had it?"

"I did not know. I assumed the fact from the discovery that when I told you that Mr. Dix had written to you, you had not the curiosity to ask what he had written to you about. So I thought: 'He does not ask, because he knows.' On the whole, I think that a certain measure of frankness would be best between us, Mr. Leigh: I, you must have observed, am all frankness—open as the day!"

"It is easy for you to be frank," Arthur replied in a low tone, with his eyelids lowered. "I, on the other hand, seem to be rather on my trial. My feet are entangled in a singular kind of net. By merely taking a walk down to the river I have been whirled through experiences which have left me in a state of indecision and broken nerve that I hardly recognize as my own. I have done no wrong, yet I am practically accused of some crime."

Inspector Furneaux answered nothing, but made two pencil dots against a query in his notebook. There was silence while he read Mr. Dix's letter.

"You tell me you have only just received this note written four days ago?" he broke out suddenly.

"I received it not five minutes before you came in. You see the post-mark for yourself."

"Yes, I—met the postman. And I can see the postmark. The letter was posted late last night—in Bayswater, London, though it was written in Oxford on the 8th. So we have the fact that a letter written in Oxford on the 8th, making an appointment with you on the 9th, is not posted to you until midnight on the 11th—from Bayswater. It was hardly posted, then, by the man who wrote it. We arrive at that conclusion simply. The handwriting on the envelope is quite different from the handwriting of the note."

"Ah? I hadn't observed that," said Arthur, craning to look again.

"Do you, by chance, know the handwriting on the envelope, Mr. Leigh?"

Arthur, gazing at it, bit his lip in sheer annoyance at the tricks fate was playing him. The handwriting, he saw, was his own—or very like it! He made no reply. The detective passed and repassed the crushed cigar two inches before his nostrils with an obstinate luxuriousness.

"Perhaps you know the writing, Mr. Leigh?" he said at last.

"It is like mine, I suppose," said Arthur, throwing himself back into his chair with a desperate callousness—"like mine—a little disguised—the inference being that I duly received Mr. Dix's note on the morning of the 9th, met him during the evening of the 9th, murdered him for some reason connected with the mortgage, then sent his note, addressed to myself in a slightly disguised hand, to a friend in London, asking him to post it to me last night, so that I might show that I had not received it until days after the murder .... It is all quite clear!"

He laughed a little, bending forward and covering his eyes with his hand.

But Inspector Furneaux had started—started twice at that word "murder" twice uttered—then thrust his face nearer, the glance of his green eyes seeming to read into Arthur's very nature, one leg under his chair, one stretched far out, as though about to dart at something; and he almost shouted aloud:

"'Murder,' sir! What causes you to dream that Mr. Dix is dead?"

At once Arthur saw that in his fit of recklessness he had said far too much.

He "dreamed" that Dix was dead, because there under the corner of the divan lay Dix's shirt with a bullet hole in it. But then, as the shirt was in hiding, his suspicion that Dix was dead should have been kept hidden, too.

"Come, Mr. Leigh! Come, sir!" said Mr. Furneaux, with frank excitement in his manner: "I await your answer: what causes you to imagine that Mr. Dix?"

"I am of the opinion that the man must be dead," said Arthur stubbornly.

"I see. You have noticed the paragraph of his disappearance in the papers, and merely opine that he is dead—is that it?"

"His disappearance? No," said Arthur, too frankly, "I haven't seen the papers for some days—I—did not know that he had disappeared; but I—in fact" He stopped, finding himself sinking deeper and deeper into the mire of the unexplainable.

The detective put a pencil dot in his notebook, and for some time sat without saying anything, looking down at the carpet, frowning with a look of puzzlement perched on his wrinkled forehead. Then he suddenly stood up, grumbling almost sullenly: "I won't encroach further upon your time, Mr. Leigh …. It seems to me that it would be a great deal better for all concerned, if people would only be candid, and tell all that they know."

"I am sorry if I seem reticent," Arthur said, rising also: "but in such a predicament as mine it be- hooves one to be careful of what one says."

"As you like. Good-day. … I forgot, though! I want to ask you whether you propose doing anything to prevent the foreclosure by the mortgagees—whether you have any plans so far?"

"None, none. I am moneyless."

"I see. We may say, then, that you have no scheme, have received no offer of help or co-operation from any person?"

"Well, I have received one offer which I have not yet had time to consider, since it was only made to me just before you came in. I do not see, however, what that has to do with your present business."

"No—nothing—only a remote connection," said Mr. Furneaux brusquely, dismissing it as of no import. "I only ask so as—to post myself in every detail. Still—on what conditions was the help offered, if I may ask?"

"On condition of a lease of the estate."

"By whom? The gentleman, you say, whom I saw with you?"

"Yes."

"His name?"

"Mr. Chauncey Bagot."

"Thanks. And—do you think of accepting?"

"I may. I have not considered it."

"No; I see .... But now about the revolver dropped in the Parret. You have accurately described in your letter to Inspector Lawson the spot at which you think it fell from your hand, but you have not described the weapon itself."

"It was a Washington Central," said Arthur, "somewhat elaborately mounted on the handle with silver discs, automatic double-action, silver fore-sight."

"And the bullets?"

"They were marked Kynoch 320."

"It was loaded, I think?"

"In four of the six chambers."

"Do you know why or when the two shots were fired?"

"I fired them myself."

"At?"

"The tire of a motor-car."

"Better tell me the circumstances, now!"

"I have explained to Inspector Lawson that for private reasons I desire to be silent as to all this part of the matter."

The detective took up his hat and stick.

"We will meet at the inquest," he said. "Until then I won't further trouble you, Mr. Leigh."

Arthur walked out behind the springy step and lightgray jacket that looked too long for the meagre figure of the inspector. They were out on the balcony before anything else was said. Once there, Mr. Furneaux suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"Oh, my green-rolled cigar! I've forgotten it—excuse me." And he was gone back inwards, with the deftness and rapid movement of a French waiter.

Arthur made a step to follow, but was too proud to seem to be watching, so he stood still with a foot on the threshold, waiting. He waited a minute, two; and then, seeing that Inspector Furneaux was long in recovering his green-rolled cigar, he, too, swift and soft, went back inwards.

Furneaux, meanwhile, had whipped the Armenian cloth of the divan from off the shirt-box, and, since it was growing dark, had stooped

closely over the blood-stain, over the bullet hole in the shirt, and the "E.J.D. No. 8"; and now the revolver was in his hand. He saw that it was a Washington Central, that the mountings were the same as the mountings of that described by Arthur, and alleged by him to have dropped into the Parret; he saw that there, too, four of the chambers were loaded, two discharged. Then, with swift fingers, he drew out one of the cartridges and saw on the brass end "Kynoch 320." His eyes were full of a bright light. And at that moment the steps of Arthur coming were near upon him.

But as Arthur entered, Mr. Furneaux was standing before a portrait of the late Mr. Rollaston Leigh, studying it, with one hand behind the rumpled end of his long jacket, the other holding the cigar before his nose.

"Perhaps you can tell me," he said with the cocked head of the connoisseur, "at what age your grandfather had this portrait painted?"

Arthur glanced at the divan, saw the cloth over the shirt-box as he had left it, and sighed with a feeling of relief as he again went out with the detective.

As Mr. Furneaux walked away down the path, Jenkins was sounding the gong for dinner. Arthur went back quickly to the shirt-box, to have it locked away out of sight, a doubt now smiting his mind whether he had done well to follow Mr. Bagot's counsel in smuggling it out of the inspector's sight. But the thing was done now. Henceforth the secret of that shirt and that revolver was a burden that he must needs bear. By whom they had been sent him—with what precise object—was a mystery too deep even to tempt his mind towards its unravelling as yet. It only seemed sure that the sender must be an enemy, and his object to enmesh Arthur's feet yet deeper in the net of suspicion. However that might be, there the things were, and an eagerness took possession of Arthur immediately to wash his hands, and clear his life clean of these tokens of death—an eagerness that was blind, feverish, touched with disgust.

First, then, he locked them in a cupboard, and as he sat toying with his dinner, remarked that the night was chilly, and asked Jenkins to light a fire in the library.

And, now, looking at Jenkins, a new disquietude took hold of him, as to whether Jenkins had raised the lid of the shirt-box when he was sent to cut the string, whether Jenkins had not seen …. Jenkins, indeed, was so correct a servant, that this seemed unlikely; but why was the

man pale? What caused his air of agitation, and shaky hands? Would he wonder at the demand for a fire on a June night?

"What is the matter with you?" Arthur asked at last, his eyes on his plate.

"Sir?" murmured Jenkins, all deference in attitude, dry-washing his hands together.

"I was wondering if anything is wrong with you. You look ..."

"A little unwell, a trifle upset, sir. I should say, sir, it was hardly my fault, that intrusion of Inspector Furneaux into the library just now before he was asked. I think, I am almost sure, that I made my meaning clear to him, but he—"

"Well, of what importance is it? It is of no consequence whatever."

Nothing more was said, though several times Jenkins looked as if he had somewhat on his tongue's tip to bring out. As a matter of fact, he thought Furneaux's behaviour was highly suspicious.

After dinner Arthur went back into the library, shut the two doors upon himself, and over the fire sat hearkening to gusts of wind soughing round the eaves, for it was a night of storm, dark also, with rain pattering on the window-panes very distinctly in the soundless house.

Ever and anon he threw fresh logs into the grate, till there was a red glow of embers, and the place grew unbearably hot. He glanced at the cupboard in which he had locked the things; and, after a long time rose and took the box with the shirt, put it upon the fire, and watched it burn. Then, after another hour's interval, he went, wrapped in an ulster, out of the house by way of the balcony. He hurried along the path until he reached the dripping rose-garden.

Springing up into the ivy on the wall, he shoved the revolver deep into the mouth of the gargoyle by the Abbot's Port, never having noticed that one of the four cartridges was gone out of it.

The place seemed haunted to him all that night. After thus disposing of the revolver he returned to the library, hot as it was, to brood anew over the grate. He listened to the wailing of the gale with rather a sinking heart. He was in that mood when solitude is an ache, and the shriek of the wainscot mouse brings the heart bounding into the mouth. The soldierly feeling was dead in him for the hour. He was almost timid. At one moment, in a lull of the rain and wind, he fancied that he heard footsteps somewhere, three footsteps, and a creak that sounded loud as a gunshot.

It could hardly be Jenkins, he thought: Jenkins had bidden him good-night and gone to bed four hours before. It might be some effect of the wind. … But for long afterwards he found himself hearkening from time to time to hear it anew. At last, he put out the lamp, and with his candlestick went up with soundless slippers that were still damp from his expedition out of the house, though on his return to the fire he had scorched them in trying to dry them rapidly.

He was soon in bed; but not to sleep, for shower and squall were causing quite a commotion outside. With his two hands under his head he lay eyeing a square of the oak-panelling, where a patch lighter, or less dark, than the rest of the darkness caught and held the tail of his eye, inspiring him with a half sort of apprehension that the spot might prove alive, and move. Five minutes after he had lain down he heard the clock on his mantelpiece strike three; then for five minutes more he lay watching that square in the panelling with an ear for the little rattlings of his windows; and now all at once his heart went cold, hearing, for the second time that night, a sound like footsteps.

Two footsteps this time, but distinctly clearer than the three which he had seemed to distinguish below. But they were quite near—behind his head they appeared to be, and like a dolphin he twisted, peering, on his knees, into the dark behind the head of the bed. Yet, even as he peered, he accused himself of some mistake, for no less clearly than he had seemed to hear footsteps was he conscious that they were footsteps going down a stair. And he knew that there was no stair anywhere near in that direction.

After peering, tensely, on his knees a minute, he was about to lie down again, when again he was quite sure of a series of sounds in the same place, and this time there could be no mistake.

A series of four sounds! It seemed to him that just there behind the bed a coin, or a ring, had been dropped, had rolled, and had dropped down four successive steps deliberately—four wooden steps without any carpet. Yet he could swear that there were no steps there, and a chill invaded his frame. But the sense of real danger nerved him.

If there was a ghost about, there was none the less a scout about. Leigh, rousing himself to it, was in a moment out of bed with soundless tread, and away on the hunt. It now struck him that about an hour before this he had been conscious of a singular howling and barking among the hounds in the "Place of Sojourn" not far from the library in which he had been brooding. At the time he had paid no heed to the racket. Nevertheless it might have signified the presence of some thief

on the place. As to the coin rolling down four steps, he told himself that, though he was sure the huge old bedroom behind the head of his bed had no steps in it, yet he might possibly have forgotten some alcove, some recess behind the arras, that had steps. Out of his door, therefore, he hastened, keen but soft, all ear, all intentness, into a corridor to the left, down it a little way, and again to the left into another corridor, and so to a door of the long-disused old room whence the sounds might have come.

The door was slightly open, and there he stood a while listening, not fearing that he might be seen, for it was dark there in daylight, and this was the darkest hour of a dark night. But there was now no sound: so now, since he had the scout's habit of going on all-fours and of covering a good deal of ground in that position, in the least possible time, he lay down to go within. In he went, on agile hands and knees, investigating each nook of the chamber. But no one was there; and no movement was audible.

This afresh had the effect of fermenting in him those fantastic feelings of fear with which mystery in darkness always infected the nerves, producing a tingling at the roots of the hair. He had now again reached the door by which he had gone in, and there on his hands and knees he remained some few minutes, gazing into the gloom, seeing again in imagination the garish flesh of the dead man as he had beheld it in the dark on the barge's fo'castle-deck, with a thought in him that just there in front his grandfather's ghost might dare to pass in grey or white before his sight!

And when, in truth, he suddenly heard some words uttered somewhere—some murmur which the air of the night just conveyed to his brain—for his ears, were keen to an even extreme degree—his fear grew great, but not greater than the transport of anger which now thrilled him throughout, making a man, or something more than a man, of him, as he sprang to his feet, stood an instant with ready hands, and then again ran to grapple with what was stirring.

He was not certain of it, but his impression was that the murmur that he had heard proceeded from directly above his head!—from a spot not so far away as the floor above; from a spot where, so far as he recollected, was only empty space! However, he was now in a mood to wrestle with demons. No awe which the darkness held hidden could thenceforth have any influence in checking his masterful inquisition. He would have confronted that which may make a man to gibber and drivel!

He ran back the way he had come with equal fleetness, equal softness, then up the main stair, and some distance into the room which, as near as he could judge, was over the spot where he had heard the murmur of words above him. It was a circular room with a groined roof, encircled by big compound columns, and having a floor of stone which struck cold to his feet as he stood listening, tense, but baffled and at a loss, like a man striving with gods, a being of five paltry senses pitting himself against the all-seeing gaze of beings of a thousand powers.

Down the length of the room, which was once used as a workshop, ran an old table of boards, and there were old benches round about, old broken boards here or there; and among these there was a movement, a shaking, perhaps due only to the wind penetrating through a broken oriel, which heightened his chilly excitement.

And, on a sudden, as he stood there, peering beneath his troubled brows round and up and down, again—distinctly—he heard a murmur as of words, this time directly beneath his feet, as it seemed, and the murmur was associated with a sound of footfalls going down a stair ....

Leigh felt his teeth-edges chatter together and his flesh took on a new chill, for he was confident that there were no stairs just there. He stood, not knowing what next to do, a prey to a thousand apprehensions, expecting every moment that some ghostly power might strike him to the ground. Ten seconds later, however, he was aware of another sound of footsteps, not directly beneath him, but some feet, or yards, farther to the east. Softly, bending double, listening, he stepped that way. In doing so he struck the crown of his head against a column near the wall. The shock enraged him. His advance thus stopped, out he ran with stealthy tread into the neighbouring chamber, bent down, listening, and once again heard two steps beneath him, making, it seemed, still eastward. But now, being at the east wall of the house, he could no farther pursue the sounds.

So out of that room, too, he ran, along a corridor and down the stairs, till he reached a door the bolts of which yielded readily, with slight noise, and out into the night he plunged.

The wind was loud, but the rain had become a drizzle, and the crescent of the moon, late risen, was moving in apparent struggle with some pitch-black clouds which she threw her glare on.

Arthur ran a little northward of the line in which, as he judged, the footfalls had passed eastward, and, almost lying in the soaked grass, he listened there several minutes, doubting afresh that he had ever heard

what he had heard, not without a sense of grotesqueness at finding himself skulking there, soaked to the skin, with his ear close to the solid ground to hear the footsteps of ghosts going about beneath it!

From beneath came up no sound, but now suddenly there came to him a renewed barking and howling of the dogs in the "Place of Sojourn" from far away at the west of the house; and in a moment he was running southward and westward ….

There was an alley of laurels opening upon the path downward from the house. Here, if he took his stand in it, he could not fail to see any being leaving the place who did not leave it through the air. He sprang in among the wet bushes, which shrouded him as with a garment, and peered out upon the path not ten yards away. Then he became aware of two shapes passing downward along it. The view of those two beings froze the current of his blood, for he was given one good glimpse of their raiment in the struggling glare of the moon. One of them appeared to be his grandfather—a small man with a bushy grey beard, a grey top-hat, a grey coat of uncommon cut—his grandfather as Arthur remembered him—the other was a female, a girl ghostly in white, with a white wrap wound round her head voluminously, whose figure, for he could not see her face, somehow brought into his brain a thought both of Elinor Hinton and of the "Belle Damosel" of the legend.

And they two, as they flitted past his vision, went, apparently, hand in hand ….

Arthur's arm held on to a branch to support his weakened knees while through his mind passed the wild thought:

"Either my grandfather and the 'Belle Damosel,' or Inspector Furneaux and Elinor Hinton." The next instant he was himself again, straining, almost flying after them ….

7

The Lease of the Abbey

As he ran out of the alley of laurels, with every muscle tense, and his fingers itching to tackle the ghostly pair that had passed down the path, he was encountered by a solid enough mass of humanity running in the opposite direction, who seized him with the cry:

"Hello, what's all this?"

Arthur, just aware that the man holding him was Inspector Lawson of Bridgewater, roared in a frenzy:

"Let me go! They are gone—that way."

"I arrest you," said Lawson, "for being unlawfully on these grounds"

"Oh, don't be an idiot," gasped Arthur, struggling fiercely to be free, "can't you see—they are gone down there—let me go, can't you? Can't you see—I am Leigh."

The officer maintained his hold.

"Who are you?" he asked with a maddening calm.

"Haven't I told you?" gasped Arthur. "I am Mr. Leigh of the Abbey!"

"Come this way, let's have a look at your face." But now the younger and more athletic man had wriggled himself free, and was gone. Too late, however: for he ran right down to the bottom of the garden and up to the bolted and barred Abbot's Port without seeing any sign of the two shapes that had passed an instant before his sight. They had seemingly vanished into thin air.

He was running back to search further in the shrubberies when he met Lawson going down at a sharp walk under an arch of foliage, where it was dark; and Lawson, peering anew at the nude feet and the wet

pyjamas that stuck to the shape, innocently asked: "Are you really Mr. Leigh?"

"Yes, yes," answered Arthur testily. "Haven't you seen two people in grey and white going down the path here?"

"Not down the path, sir," said Lawson, "nobody has passed down here."

"Oh, rot! Why, I saw them, man. If you hadn't held me, I should have laid hands on them, even though they withered me at the touch."

"Perhaps you are a little excited, Mr. Leigh. I'm sure I haven't seen …"

"Well, perhaps I am a little excited. … Why on earth did you hold me just at the wrong moment?"

"I took you for a trespasser or a thief."

"But what are you doing here, anyway?"

"I am on my way to Alvington on some business, and in passing down below ten minutes since I saw a suspicious-looking man bolt up this way, so I followed and searched the grounds, and arrested you instead of him. You are abroad late, or rather early, sir."

Arthur told him that he had thought he heard footsteps in the house, had followed, and seen two shapes, a male and a female. They parted, Arthur to go seeking through the shrubberies for yet fifteen minutes, with a curious fleeting feeling in him meantime that Inspector Lawson's story of "the suspicious-looking man" was an invention, and that the officer had purposely stopped him from pursuing the two phantoms. This, however, only occurred to him to be dismissed as an incredible thing.

At last, when he could find no trace of anyone, he returned to the house and to bed: and now, on a sudden, found the night done, and his chamber flooded with daylight, which made all that he had passed through during the night appear nothing more than a dream.

But, from breakfast to lunch, he spent the hours in ferreting about the house, especially about the room upstairs and the one directly under it, beneath which he had seemed to hear a murmur of words and footsteps going downstairs: but he could find nothing anywhere to explain the phenomena.

He was lying on his face on the floor of the circular room with the groined roof, tapping here or there with his knuckles on the stone-work,

when Jenkins of the noiseless tread came upon him bearing a telegram—from Mr. Hinton. Arthur was asked if he could dine on the yacht that night.

He was certainly in no mood for society dinners, but this dinner had attractions, and after considering it some moments he wrote his consent.

At seven o'clock he was bowing before Elinor Hinton on the deck of the ›Mishe Nahma‹—a long three-master of five hundred tons, twin-screwed, luxurious from bowsprit to poop. Arthur, for lack of better expression, called her "a duck," thought aloud that "it would be an education for a landsman like him to go over her," and Miss Elinor Gage Hinton answered: "Well, you shall."

But that was much later, about midnight, when the rim of the moon was rising above the horizon inland and had begun to illumine the smooth water in bands and pools of beauty. Bagot, seated in a group on the after-deck, was enchanting them with scraps of tunes, glad madrigals, or weary griefs, from his violin.

It had been a night of music. Two Bridgewater girls, the Vicar's daughters, had rendered the duet overture of Prometheus; there had been quadrilles, barn-dances, in the saloon—for half-a-dozen of the Bridgewater elite we re at the party—Elinor had done two coon songs and the tarantella, and Mr. Bagot, with closed eyes, had made his Bergonzi violin discourse till its wailing became almost a part of the lovely night.

Then when the moon rose late, there was strolling in twos and threes over the white expanse of the deck, the new beauty of the night inducing a new mood of silence or musing in the party, or of talk in lower tones.

Near the bows Arthur and Elinor found themselves bent over the bulwarks alone, looking out seaward, she nothing of the yachtswoman now, but a land-fairy of Mayfair on the ocean, a wisp of white with wistaria at her waist. She looked still slimmer, more lissom to him than he had seen her, with a waist as elusive as that moonbeam that peeped across the rails at her, and clambered over her to luxuriate and faint in the spirit of perfume that pervaded her being.

"Now tell me," she said, the moment she found herself alone with him, and suddenly her face changed from gay to very grave: "what did he want of you?"

"Mr. Bagot?" asked Arthur, startled.

"Oh, sh-h-h-h," she whispered, almost in distress.

"Yesterday, you mean?" he asked, dropping his voice to the deeply secret level of hers. "Nothing, I think, that will interest you."

He did not share in her unexplained attitude of distrust towards Bagot, nor did he see that it was quite fair to publish the man's more or less privileged talk in his house.

"Much, I am sure, that will interest me," she said.

"I think not," he answered lightly, smiling.

"Ah, he doesn't see ...!" she said to herself with a gesture of vexation. "Mr. Leigh," she added earnestly, "do you imagine that I am a person who would seek to pry into your affairs without adequate reason? If you will only take me on trust for the present you may find that I am neither a busybody nor a crank. And if I assure you now that I know a great deal more, I won't say of Mr. Bagot's, but of your own affairs, than you know yourself."

"How delightful! But how odd!"

"Without any seeking of mine, this knowledge has been thrust upon me. Some day—possibly—you may know how and why. I would tell you now, if I could, but, as I can't, do trust me. Answer me. Believe that I mean well, though quite a stranger."

It was no longer possible to doubt her seriousness. The beam of moonlight that from behind illumined the outline in profile of her face under her shadowy head-wrap, showed her pale with intensity, and he saw the diamond lustres on her left hand by him tremble steadily on the taffrail.

"I fear you have misinterpreted my reply," he said to her. "Surely you know instinctively that I trust you, believe that you mean well, and will answer whatever you like to ask."

"Thank you," she said, turning and lowering her face. For a while she was silent, seeming now to be staring down into the water which with a little weltering plash swirled about the ship's bows. Then suddenly she spoke again.

"Ah," she said, "it is for life that I am fighting—I tell you so—I can't help what you may think of these unasked confidences, for when it is a question of life, one is not over-squeamish and diffident. One goes straight to one's end, and fights barefaced, with convention and chivalry flung to the winds. And it will be a good fight, too, a fierce fight, to the death, and no quarter! Mr. Leigh, forgive me! I am only a girl, and there is arrayed against me the power of a great intellect—astute,

profound, ruthless, whose aim is my undoing. It is hard—it is hard. But I'll struggle to the end! And now I have an auxiliary, too—suddenly sent me—by God's goodness—one who, it seems, has an intellect, too, and may prove a trustworthy ally—wait! we shall see!"

She laughed a little with a curious grimness. Leigh, wholly at a loss to follow her, wondered what was distracting her thoughts.

"Oh, I am sorry that you are troubled about something!" he said softly. "I only regret that I am completely in the dark. I cannot enter into your feelings unless you explain."

"But you are a part of it, too!" she murmured. "Very strangely it has happened so, as you may see before long. For it is a question of—Mr. Bagot, and—Mr. Bagot is as much mixed up with you now as with me, it seems."

Each time that she uttered the word "Bagot" her voice dropped to the merest whisper and a shudder seemed to overpower her.

Arthur, for his part, did not know what to say for the best. He stood leaning on one elbow, turned toward her, his gaze dwelling on the rounded lines of her figure as she stooped over the taffrail, his breast feeling a fearful sweetness in being thus privileged to be present at the private view of her passion.

"Mr. Leigh," she said suddenly, "you know that I do not passionately love Mr. Bagot?"

"I seem to have gathered that much," Arthur answered quickly, hoping that she would revert to lighter and saner words.

"I am going to marry him, though."

"No!"

"Sh-h-h."

"But that never, never can be!"

"It can. Since I last saw you at the Abbey it seems to have been practically decided upon. … But oh, won't there be a fight for it, Mr. Leigh!"

Her lips parted, showing her sharp little teeth-edges. She was terribly in earnest.

"Decided on? By whom?" he asked.

"By Mr. Bagot, by my father, and to some extent, by myself. I have promised to think seriously of this matter, to let my decision be known within a short time, and no doubt that decision will be 'yes'—unless—by

that time—I am married, or at least about to be married, bound down fast somehow—to someone else. I—speak plainly."

All at once Arthur's heart bounded into his mouth, so that for some moments he stood straight and dumb, watching her as she looked down into the sea, and somehow there came into his head now phrase after phrase of Mowle and Mowle's letter making him a moneyless man. At last he shook his head.

"But I fail—I fail to understand anything of it," he said, and his voice had the sound of a groan.

"It is a question," said Elinor, without looking at him, "of—my father. I do not quite know of what nature is the power which Mr. Bagot has over my father, but I may tell you that it is very strong. Mr. Bagot, I have told you, can be persuasive beyond all other men, but by no mere powers of persuasion could any human being ever gain the influence over any other which he has over my father. What is the origin of it? I don't know. I have imagined that he possesses secret of facts which, if divulged, may seriously injure my father. It may be so. Or it may be that—anyway, I have always been weak as to my father—there has been a 'scene' between us—he has had tears in his eyes—he was on his knees—I have nearly yielded—"

A sob interfered with her further utterance. Her glorious head was now very low down.

A cry of utter compassion came from Arthur's lips.

"Don't—" he began to say, laying for one moment his hand on hers, but he could find no other words for his sympathy. Her voice reached him again, subdued but very clear.

"Two things only can rescue me from the consent which I foresee that I am about to give. If, before I consent, I can prove Mr. Bagot to be what I believe him to be, that would be one. Or if I can say to my father, 'I am married! I am bound! I am engaged!' that would be another."

She spoke those words in a murmur almost too low to be heard, so that Arthur, bending quite close, could only just catch them as they failed and fainted on her lips: and again he had the impression that, driven to bay, throttled by her enemy, all desperate, this girl whom he now met for the third time was—making him an offer of marriage! And how he loved her now! With what pity! With what friendship for her confidence and frank friendship for him, as though she said to him in words too mystic to be uttered by any tongue: "From of old ages my heart knew and loved your heart, and this our third meeting is our thousand thousandth."

It was on his tongue's tip to say: "My love, my love!" But, very sharply he remembered that he was poor, and she rich; remembered, too, that he seemed to be under suspicion with respect to the strange crime at Bridgewater, but chiefly remembered, sharply as by the pull of a bridle, that he was poor and she rich. At the idea of mending his fortunes by a wife's wealth something within him hissed: and standing by her side with tightly clenched hands, torn between desire and shrinking, feeling that she was awaiting a word from him which he could never utter, a lump rose in his throat, a moisture stung his eyes, and anguish like a pang of torture rankled in his heart. At last in a broken tone he brought out the unfortunate words: "Miss Hinton, your trouble—touches me. Ah! if I was but a free man …."

One second's space: and now she turned upon him a face of wonder, a face all eyes that stared at him, a wonder which, second by second, changed to rage, a paleness which each instant grew to crimson.

"'A free man'?" she said. "What do you mean?"

He made no answer, marvelling at that sudden spitfire change in her. It did not occur to him that "not a free man" might mean to her, "I am a man already engaged or married, but for which fact I should be inclined to take pity on your misery and accept your outre offer of marriage"—in which case her natural impulse would be to cover her retreat with indignation partly real enough, partly bogus, with a pretense, wrung from her anger, that he had misunderstood her wholly.

"Tell me, Mr. Leigh," she repeated vehemently, "what has your freedom or slavery to do with the matter under discussion?"

Her air of surprise, of imperial disdain and pique, appeared to him so real that he, hardly possessing much ability in deciphering the algebras of the feminine heart, at once thought within himself: "I am an idiot, she meant something else;" and he said vaguely aloud: "I meant merely to express my sincere sympathy with you in your distress, Miss Hinton."

She, for her part, was not satisfied with this, but continued still to gaze at him with scorn, as if commanding him with her eyes to go on his knees before her and beg pardon for some unpardonable presumption. Her scorn was not wholly feigned, but mostly real—being compounded of anger and horror at herself, and suddenly she was bending over the ship's rail once more, her hand over her burning brow, and a low cry burst from her lips.

But she stood straight with a laugh, due perhaps to hearing near her the footsteps of a couple coming round the pilot-house from the starboard to the port side, and nothing more was said until these had

gone and a dinghy had fluttered past with a plash of oars, going to the shore from one of the ships whose anchor lights kept their vigil of silence through the moon's reign.

From the poop came, as if from far away, some strains of music, which Arthur and Elinor thought were strains of Bagot's fiddle. But it was a lady whom Bagot had set to play in his stead, and he himself, step by step, from point to point, was moving for'ard, looking at the moon.

"If I knew anything that I could do for you ...!"

Arthur began to say with uneasy compunction.

"You can answer my questions at least," said Elinor dryly.

"As to what Mr. Bagot 'wanted' of me?" he asked. "Well, I cannot be sure that that was the original object of his visit, but he offered to take the Abbey from me on a lease."

She did not answer. Minute after minute elapsed, so that he seemed to have struck her dumb, or plunged her in the deepest thought.

"Well?" said he at last; to which she answered quite quietly, as though she had the fullest right to dispose of his actions:

"You won't, of course?"

He stood amazed.

"I may," said he; "I am inclined to."

"Ah, Mr. Leigh, you do not understand."

"I don't. And you do not either, I think. The fact is, that circumstances connected with the mortgage of the place almost compel me to accept."

"I happen to know all about the circumstances connected with the mortgage," she said, tapping impatiently with her fan on the rail.

"It is amazing, if you do," he answered. "May I ask—how?"

"I have been told; by whom I must not say."

"What an amazing interest people must take in a man who only returned to Somerset a few days ago!"

"But since you see that I know things, perhaps much more than you know yourself, I assume that you will see fit to do what I tell you."

"In most things, yes—gladly, believe me. But in a matter of business—unless, indeed, you can give me some reason."

"Don't do it, Mr. Leigh!" she cried with a sudden emphasis that was almost passion. "Don't do it! It is not for my own sake that I am speaking for the moment, but for yours. I happen to know that you need

a large sum of money soon, and Mr. Bagot will give it to you, if you let him. But don't let him! If you will only wait, the money will probably be provided in another quite unexpected fashion—I know what I am saying. But let Bagot have no lease of your place. He has a motive. Stay, I am prohibited from telling you much, but since you are in the dark, I will give you one hint: you know already, don't you?"

She got no farther, for now, as if he had sprung up out of the deck, Bagot was there with them, pacing slowly, his big, placid face turned up to the moon, his hands behind his back, pacing like some beatified Abbot, with the "exceeding peace" of Abou Ben Adhem in his demeanour; and he rolled up to them, saying: "That is Miss Phyllis who is rendering Rhodes's air in G. She does it well. This reminds me of a night of music which I spent under the moon in the shadow of the Sphinx and the Pyramids two years ago, when a somewhat remarkable incident took place ..." And he proceeded to give one of his queer anecdotes.

By the time he ended the majority of the guests were ready to depart, and as Bagot did not leave Arthur's side till he was gone, there was no further chance of talk between him and Elinor.

Nor was Bagot the man to let any grass grow beneath his feet. Before noon the next day he was at the Abbey, engaged with Arthur in earnest talk on the matter of the entanglement of the estate, the mortgage, and the lease.

Now, Arthur had been impressed by the warning of Elinor, who had evidently been about to tell him something which might have proved convincing, and, driving home under the moon, he had thought to himself: "She must have some meaning which I cannot at present fathom."

But when he woke in the broad light of day, it seemed to him that nothing could have been more outre and fantastic than that interview by the taff-rail under the moon. Elinor had now to his fantasy the glamour of some elf who has fed on honey-dew and drunk the milk of paradise. Bagot, on the contrary, talked business—the business of the City man—and the longer the interview lasted the more was Arthur disposed to fall in with the details of the financial scheme which his counsellor skilfully sketched.

However, he had not yet expressed his consent to the scheme when he had proof that someone else was alert, and working, and meant fight. In the midst of all the talk about the mortgage and the lease, Jenkins bore in a telegram—from Elinor:

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Miss Hinton urgently prays Mr. Leigh to give no promise
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before hearing from her. She prays him for her sake now
as well as his own. A letter follows.
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And Arthur, as he folded up the paper, said to himself: "So be it. Let whatever is your will be my law always."

Did Mr. Bagot know with certainty from whom that telegram came? Did he read anything in Arthur's face? Certain it was that, as Arthur folded up the paper, the other glanced at his watch, one momentary ray of angry malignancy beaming out from beneath his rough brows. It vanished instantly.

"By Jove, Leigh," he cried, "I have overrun my time. It is now 12.30, and I have a rendezvous in Bridgewater at 12.25. I am sorry I can't pursue the subject further, but I tell you what, I will turn up again this evening at seven, share potluck with you, and come then to a more definite understanding."

Arthur acquiesced in this, and, Bagot being gone, awaited from hour to hour Elinor Hinton's promised letter. He thought that she would send it by messenger, but then, from three o'clock, found himself looking out for the post. He was now decided, indeed, whether her letter arrived before Mr. Bagot or not, blindly to obey her, to say "no" to Mr. Bagot "for her sake"; so that his eagerness for the post was merely an eagerness to see her handwriting, and be somehow in communication and touch with her. But the afternoon passed into evening, and Mr. Bagot's lank hair, and curate's hat, and roll of chains, and bland visage reappeared; but there was no letter.

That there must be some specific cause for this Arthur was convinced. No neglect or dilatoriness on her part, he was sure, would prevent her from fulfilling her promise. It occurred to him that the letter might have been sent by a messenger, and the messenger might, in some way, have been tampered with ….

Never did Bagot make himself so agreeable a companion as that evening. He refused at dinner to "discuss business," and after much light talk in which he brilliantly poured forth his store of worldwide experience, he entered into a disquisition on the authorship of the Book of Revelation, a disquisition in which his keenness of penetration, the clearness and balance of his judgment, and the hoard of his learning, charmed and astonished Arthur.

When they rose from table, Arthur thought to himself: "Now for the lease business, and I have to be firm with this fascinating person."

But no; still Mr. Bagot had no wish to descend to the trivial things of life. Saying that the evening was too delicious for sitting indoors, he invited Arthur to go for a drive with him about the country in the phaeton which had brought him from Bridgewater.

"During the drive," he explained, "we can talk over the business we both have in our minds."

"With pleasure," agreed Arthur, and Bagot clandestinely glanced at his watch.

They went into the hall together, got into the phaeton, and drove off, Mr. Bagot giving the driver the direction of the drive; but even now the flow of his conversation would not admit of the discussion of leases. Passing within sight of the Parret, his talk turned upon tidal rivers, upon lock-gates, canals, upon the damming of the Nile, irrigation, and the delta of the Ganges. Then, noticing a farmyard where in the balmy twilight cows were being milked, he confessed to a childish passion for milk fresh drawn from the cow. Alighting, they went in and drank.

When this was finished, Bagot again glanced at his watch, and on the way back to the carriage proposed that they should no longer drive, but should stretch their legs a little. Again Arthur agreed. He would have fallen in with any mood of this masterful man. Bidding the coachman await them there by the farm, they went strolling down a lane, down a succession of lanes, the talk now being of Arthur's grandfather, of the old man's belief in the transmigration of souls, a propos of which Bagot gave to Arthur a synopsis of the whole complexity of the Brahmin system of theosophy, the nebulous reasons underlying the belief, and admitted that he was himself something of a Brahmin.

Their walk had now brought them out of the lanes into a road on which not a soul was to be seen. Here, on a sudden, Bagot stopped short, and held up his hand like one listening.

"Now, tell me," he murmured, "do you hear two people talking together somewhere in low voices."

Leigh humoured his whim and strove to find its cause.

"No," he said, after a few seconds' quietude. "I can only hear the plash of a water-fall in the artificial lake that lies among the trees there. The place is called the Ponds Covert, and forms part of the Pinkerton estate. Look, you can see a turret of the mansion over yonder, peeping above the trees."

"Well, I just wanted to test my hearing as compared with yours," said Bagot. "I am supposed to have an ear of quite phenomenal keenness,

like a hare's, and, of course, I hear the play of the cascade you speak of. But, besides that, I am distinctly, though vaguely, conscious of a sound of two voices in conversation somewhere. So that I, an old bookman, can beat you, a young fellow, fresh from the wilds, in the matter of our acoustic outfits."

"Stay," said Arthur, spurred to emulation, "let me listen," and a minute he stood bent, keen, nothing but an ear. Then he said: "No, you beat me—at least in fancifulness."

Bagot laughed quietly. He listened again, as if to catch the direction of the sound. "You wait here," he chuckled. "I'll go and spy."

He at once went down a path through a field to the left, holding back a restraining hand to Arthur, and Arthur could not but admire the absolute agility of stealth with which that man of bulk, fleetly but deftly, like one running the tight-rope, went speeding onward with hardly a sound. He saw Bagot reach an intersecting path and pass through a gate in the hedge bordering the covert, where there was a board printed with: "This road is private; trespassers will be prosecuted." Then Bagot disappeared.

Five minutes, and he came back, with one hand beckoning to Arthur to come, and a forefinger of the other held playfully before his lips in token of utter silence. Silently went Arthur to him. Bagot, taking him by a sleeve, whispered into his ear: "I haven't seen myself, but I know exactly where—sh-h-h— come—"

He drew Arthur within the gate, and like two thieves they went on down the grass-ride of the shooting alley, Bagot ever leading, grasping his companion's sleeve. It was dim in there under the mass of the leafage, and everywhere in the air was the song of falling water in the deepening night. They passed by the shore of a lake, where a boat lay before a rude summer-house, and next over a little bridge in a dark place where the pool of water moved smoothly to a drop forty feet deep, giving a gloomy music whose chant never ends.

Just beyond this was a thickness of fir-trees and undergrowth, and going a few steps up a steep path through the wood, Bagot, who till now had led, stepped aside, and pushed Arthur to go onward. Leigh obeyed, went on a few steps, and now, before ever he had heard a sound of talking—for the noise of the waterfall was still in his ears—he saw through the leafage two persons, a man and a woman.

Instantly he had an instinct to pull back his head, but as quickly too, his eyes were staring at them, nailed to that which they saw. In there behind the screen of trees, there was a rockery all bracken-grown. On

a rough bench sat the woman, gazing up with raised lashes into the face of the man, who was standing, and whose right hand rested on her shoulder, she speaking gravely to him, it appeared; he listening, nodding.

The twilight in there was very slight, one might almost have called it night, and the birds in their dormitories were now, after their day's work, very feebly chirping themselves with drawn-down lids into sleep.

But in a midnight without a moon Arthur would have known the woman. It was Elinor. The man's face, too, was so vividly engraved upon his mind that he could not fail to recognize him. It was the motorist, the kidnapper from whom he had rescued Elinor!

He might have heard some of their words, if he had wished. But a wild revulsion of feeling came over him. He seemed to be still the butt of the midsummer madness of elves. With the same hunter's stealth with which he had advanced, he stepped back, and with a face hard and stern, quite rigid in its hidden anguish, he walked back to Bagot's side.

They went in silence till they were beyond the covert. Then Bagot whispered:

"Was I right? Did you see?"

Arthur nodded.

"I was always remarkable for it," Bagot said. "My power of far-hearing is superhuman, or infra-human, if you like—hare-like. Were they a pair of lovers, then?"

"Apparently," said Arthur.

"Ah, I did not see them. But I knew quite well that they were there. … And now, Leigh, as we walk back we may profitably discuss the matter of the lease of the Abbey."

"Oh, you can have the place, if you want it," Arthur answered, with well-assumed indifference. "I don't give a d—n for life in this country."

8

Mr. Bagot's House

By the time the two night-prowlers had got back to the Abbey in Bagot's phaeton, after seeing Elinor and her most unexpected companion together in the depths of the covert, all the preliminaries as to granting the lease were settled, as far as nods of the head on the part of Arthur could settle anything. For Bagot talked, and Arthur sat by him agreeing mechanically, only half hearing what was said, and callous to all business that is done under the sun.

"To spare the horses," as Bagot put it, they walked up the hill together to the house, and now, as Arthur entered it, the letter that had been expected all day was handed him by Jenkins—from her. Arthur took it with a grim face and an angry light in his eyes. Begging Bagot to excuse him, he went into the library to read it—driven on by an eagerness of which he was ashamed, so anxious was he to see what words this girl could have to say to him. …

> *Dear Mr. Leigh:*
>
> *I took the liberty to telegraph you this morning at 11.25 a.m., praying you to accept no offer as to a lease of your place until you should hear further from me, and I assume that after our conversation last night on the yacht, you have had sufficient confidence in my sanity to follow my advice. But, then, why have you not answered my letter which I sent you by special messenger at 12.15 to confirm my telegram? Have you not received it? It occurs to me now that the boy may have been stopped on the way, though that seems improbable—unless it was by some more than usually persuasive intriguer?—for he assures me that he duly delivered the letter at the Abbey. Fearing, however, that you have somehow not received*

it, I now write again to repeat what I said—that in case you have had sufficient strength of mind and confidence in me to resist the blandishments of unscrupulous persons, you will in the course of a day or two receive an offer from a businesslike friend of mine, in whom you may have every confidence, to lease the Abbey from you on such terms as will free you, for the present, from all apprehension of the property falling into a stranger's hands. If I tell you that it is my good friend and yours, Mrs. George F. Bates, a lady of great wealth, who has been so kind and helpful as to make this promise you will understand that the transaction will be in every respect preferable to one entered into with those whose motives you must suspect by this time to be not quite clear. Will you therefore do me the favour, as soon as you read this note, to write that you accept Mrs. Bates as an intervener. My messenger will await a line which will prove a great relief to me.

I may add that if, at the time you receive this, you have with you a visitor whose head is of much more than usual bigness, and if you think that by some ingenuity of yours you can get a measurement in inches of the size of his head, you may keep back my messenger a little, so as to get and send me the measurement; and I will endure the delay, as that is important.

Sincerely,
Elinor Gage Hinton.

As he read the last word, Arthur's face went suddenly red. He laughed aloud, with a certain savageness, and, rushing in a fever of haste to the desk, he wrote with a glow of what was nothing more nor less than childish malice:

Dear Miss Hinton—

I have received the second of your letters, but have already made arrangements as to the subject of it.

Yours truly,
Arthur Leigh.

With almost frantic hurry he started off to give it to the messenger, who had now been waiting an hour. He was keen to defeat, to cross, to humiliate and slap her in the face, for his heart was delirious with the disease of jealousy, of spite, of distrust and vindictiveness. Once only he halted a moment. He was pricked in his conscience at the thought of

sending to a woman so short, so cruel a note. But he hardened himself again, glad to give her back a little of the agony which she had given to him in the depths of that covert; and he handed the note to the messenger, who went off with it.

Arthur remained at the door some minutes, looking down at the gravelly square of the courtyard. He was less happy now that the deed was done. As he turned to re-enter the house, an alert step caught his ear, and he saw the sprightly form of Inspector Furneaux coming to him out of the darkness, for it was now night, and the moon still far from her hour of rising.

"Mr. Leigh?" said the detective. "I want a few minutes' talk with you."

"This way, Inspector," said Arthur.

Mr. Furneaux lowered his voice.

"Have you any visitors in there?"

"I have one."

"Then, if you don't mind, I'll go round by the door on the other side, as I never like to disturb visitors by the sight of such a bird of ill-omen as I have to be sometimes, and I'll meet you in your library."

"As you please," said Arthur, and while the detective went round, he, passing through the drawing-room, expressed to Bagot his regret at leaving him, promised to be back, and going on into the library found Furneaux already there, gazing up, with his hands behind him, at old Rollaston Leigh's portrait.

"I don't know if you have heard of recent developments, sir?" said the Scotland Yard man, spinning round as Arthur entered.

"No."

"The clothes have been found!"

Furneaux's gaze rested with a steady contemplation on Arthur's face. He seemed to be awaiting his reply with a rapt attention.

"Clothes?" said Arthur. "Oh, I see—the dead man clothes?"

"You have hit it," said Furneaux, "the dead man's clothes."

Arthur, wondering "Why do his eyes search my face like that?" went all red for no reason that he could give words to.

"Take a chair," he said, and handed one.

But Furneaux sat down on his old perch on the divan, beneath whose covering he had seen the shirt-box and the revolver. He took from his

pocket the crushed cigar of that first interview to smell at, and smiled pleasantly as if to palliate a harmless piece of folly.

"You do not ask, Mr. Leigh, whereabout the clothes have been found," he went on.

"My good sir, I haven't had time, and I'm not sure that I care very much," said Arthur with a flush of anger.

"Quite so, sir. But guess where—come, I defy you to guess where!"

"You are quite right in defying me, for I have not the slightest idea."

"In"—and Furneaux dropped the cigar on the table, clapped his two palms upon his knees, and again favoured Arthur with a disconcerting stare—"in the middle of the Bristol Channel!"

Then there was silence.

"Did you ever hear the like?" demanded the detective.

"It sounds unexpected," said Arthur and his eyelids fell in spite of himself, for honest men who feel themselves suspected will sometimes wear a look of guilt.

"Yes," said Furneaux rapidly, "all the clothes of a man, except one sock, the boots, and one stud, which may have sunk, and—strange to say—the shirt. They were all hooked up close together by a fishing-boat two miles from the coast this afternoon, so that they must have been thrown overboard from some craft in a heap—thrown into the sea to sink, and by the murderer."

"Well, it shouldn't be difficult to find someone who has put out to sea within the last four days with a bundle of clothes, unless, perhaps, the murderer is a sailor."

"No, there is some hope in that, there's hope in that. I see that you know your way, Mr. Leigh—you should have been a detective: for the murderer may have been a sailor as you say—quite so. But guess, now, sir, to whom these clothes have been found to belong."

"I cannot guess."

"But did you not say to me, Mr. Leigh, at our last interview that you had private reasons to believe that the murdered man was a Mr. Dix?"

"I think that I did say something of the sort."

"Well, then, guess now to whom those clothes have been found to have belonged."

"To Mr. Dix?"

"The same! You are right, Mr. Leigh! You knew!"

"I did not know. Why the devil do you come here hinting that I am a criminal? I won't put up with it. A little more and I will"

"Be calm, Mr. Leigh. No need for excitement. That is just my dramatic way. I cannot help it, being a Jerseyite, and so, half French—such a discovery is naturally a little exciting to one groping all in the dark of a most extraordinary maze as I am. At any rate, so the fact stands. Those clothes are the clothes of Mr. Edward James Dix, the garments in which he was last seen to stand on this earth. It's a pitiful thing too—he, an old man of nearly seventy. Really, you know, it is a greater shame to murder a young man, and yet we all feel a deeper horror when gray hairs are dabbled with blood …. You said, I think, sir, that you have never seen Mr. Dix?"

"Never," growled Arthur, who felt as a sheep may feel when a snapping dog comes yelping round its heels.

"Tall old gentleman, thin, dry, with a touch of asthma, little bunch of side-whiskers on his jaw, bald head in the front—here's his photo: quiet-going old City man, as you may guess—Baptist, pillar of his chapel; lived at Wimbledon; regular as a clock in all his ways for forty years: old bachelor; an authority on roses, about which he once wrote a book—his hobby. A really nice old gentleman, quiet-going—inoffensive—white-haired—murdered! He left London early in the morning before the day of his death, with the knowledge of his partner, Mr. Churchill, chiefly in order to come down here and see you on the Abbey business. He stopped at Oxford to have a brief interview on another matter at 10.15 a.m. There he wrote you, making the appointment to see you, and, ever methodical, sent a copy of his note to you to his office, where it was duly filed under the letter 'L.' This is how I knew he had written you—you see, I am frank; open as the day! From Oxford all trace of him is lost. A porter there remembers seeing him getting into the train with a tall, pale-faced man—that's all—absolutely all, till you, Mr. Leigh, found him lying dead and naked on the barge with his face smashed in, a bullet in his shoulder, and a cord in the flesh of his throat."

"How did he get there?" murmured Arthur with a fixed stare at the floor, for the detective's breathless style was thrilling. "Was he dragged through the barley-field, thus making that trail of which I have been informed?"

"No, sir," was the prompt answer. "No body was dragged through that field. The impression left on the mind by that trail is that some snake three hundred feet long rose out of the ground, drew its monstrous carcass through the field, and struck down this ill-fated old gen-

tleman where he stood on the barge's deck …. But, then, that's dreaming—Inspector Lawson's fervent dreaming."

"He never could have stood on the barge's deck," said Arthur musingly: "for just before I fell off the deck, I groped over every square inch of it, and he was not there then."

"And yet he could not have been brought on to the deck from the shore," said Furneaux: "for I understand you to say that, as you went aboard, the plank had been knocked away into the river?"

"That is so."

"Then how, Mr. Leigh, could the body have got on to the barge? It must surely have been on it before the plank fell, only you did not grope over the deck so thoroughly as you think you did. What do you say to that?"

"I can only say that I did grope over it quite thoroughly," was the perplexed murmur.

"Then, you tell us of a miracle, Mr. Leigh."

Arthur closed his lips stubbornly. There was silence, till suddenly Inspector Furneaux was saying with an eye on a spot on the carpet:

"Then again as to the motor cap which you found, that seems something of a mystery, too. It was not the dead man's, for his head would have needed to be almost twice the size to fill it. Besides, his hat has been found with his clothes in the sea, and the cap was not yours, for the same reason. Then whence did it come? for it was still warm from the head of someone, you say, when you picked it up …. Where, exactly, Mr. Leigh, did you pick it up?"

"About fifteen yards south-east of the barge's bow."

"Thank you. Now, a certain Mr.—Mr.—I forget his name—a gentleman who had lunch with you on the day after the tragedy—begins with a 'B'."

"Bates, or Bagot," said Arthur.

"Bagot! that's it. This Mr. Bagot happens to have lost a motor-cap on that very night somehow, one so much like this one that his friends, on seeing it in Inspector Lawson's hand as they were entering the Abbey, thought it must be the same. Even Mr. Bagot himself thought so at the first glance, and said, 'Surely that's mine'; but on looking closer, he found that it hadn't his name in ink on the lining, as his own had. You were there, Mr. Leigh, I think, and remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"But a man's name in ink on his motor-cap is an unusual thing! Initials, perhaps, but not the full name. Ha! ha! Do you know what I said to myself when Inspector Lawson told me of the incident? He! he! it's amusing how the mind jumps to conclusions of itself! I said to myself: 'The cap is this Mr.—Mr.—what's his name'?"

"Bagot."

"'Is this Mr. Bagot's,' I said; 'and Bagot somehow is the name of that great snake that wriggled through the barley-field and struck down Dix on that barge's deck.'"

Arthur, hearing this extraordinary expression of opinion about the learned anthropologist in the next room, could not resist a twinge of scornful merriment.

"Better go and tell him so, Mr. Furneaux," he said. "He is out there now."

"Oh, he is out there now!—Yes, very funny, that's what at once jumped into my head. Oh, I am like that, Mr. Leigh—open as the day—I tell out all my thoughts to everybody. But, then, you see, I had soon discovered that at the hour when you say you picked up the cap warm from someone's head, this Mr.—Mr.—Bagot was having a meal in 'The Beaufort' at Chepstow, exactly twenty-nine miles away on the other side of the Channel, and no train for him to have reached there by for hours. There's an alibi for you! Cast steel! Proved by ten witnesses. So the question remains—whose was that cap?"

And Arthur thought to himself: "It was the cap of that man who is now caressing Elinor Hinton in the Ponds Covert, the motorist who tried to kidnap her: and I, like an idiot, have bound myself to be silent about the identity of a felon!"

At that moment the thought of Elinor was bitter as gall and venom in his heart.

"Yes," continued Furneaux with a low chuckle, musingly smelling the broken cigar, "I often laugh to think of the speed with which I jumped to a conclusion about this good gentleman, Mr.—er—Bagot. Oh, I am not one to pose as omniscient, Mr. Leigh, as some investigators do. I babble about my mistakes like a baby. And yet, consider with what curious coincidences things happen, as if purposely to puzzle poor detectives. This Mr.—Bagot, about the time when you say you picked up this cap, walks into 'The Beaufort' at Chepstow twenty-nine miles away—without a cap or a hat. It was noticed, and he said that his hat, not his cap, had been blown off his head in looking out of the window of

his train. Now, we know from his friends on the yacht ›Mishe Nahma,‹ that he also lost a cap that night—a hat and a cap in one night; and the cap was exactly like the one you found, except, perhaps, as to size. It is one of those little coincidences ..."

He stopped, for the bland face of Mr. Bagot appeared in the doorway, smiling. His words were affable, apologetic.

"I see you are still engaged, Leigh. I'm afraid I must be off."

Inspector Furneaux sprang nimbly to his feet with a bow.

"I shan't be detaining Mr. Leigh two minutes, sir," he said* and he remained standing with his head slightly bent, almost in reverence, still sniffing the cigar. Really, Bagot commanded respect at once.

"Two minutes, Mr. Bagot," called Arthur, and his guest disappeared.

"That Mr. Bagot?" asked the detective, in rather an awed tone.

"Yes," said Arthur.

"Is it, now?" and Furneaux looked at him with round eyes, as if lost in wonderment—"stout gentleman, thick black hair, face of a sage, fine face, powerful face, large and powerful, all wrinkled about the eyes with much thought, much study, I'm sure. Bushy eyebrows—oh, yes: walks like a cat—I didn't hear him coming, sir, did you? Stout and heavy, but the footsteps of a cat. Fine gentleman. Met him here the other evening. He is the gentleman, Mr. Leigh, who has offered to cut your financial knot—if I may ask?"

"The same," said Arthur.

"And you—agreed? You grant him the lease of the Abbey?"

"Yes."

"Oho!" purred the detective, and made a quick dot in his notebook. Then he went on: "I shan't detain you, Mr. Leigh; but what I chiefly came to say remains to be said. It is this—that somehow the revolver which you say you dropped in the river, the position of which you have so minutely described, cannot be found—somehow cannot be found."

"Ah?" growled Arthur with evident irritation, "and what can I do, if it cannot be found?"

"I simply mention the fact, Mr. Leigh," came the polite reply. "The mud has been dredged there—we have had four boys diving—yet it cannot be found."

"I dropped it there."

"Quite so, sir—but it cannot be found. It may have been privately found and removed by someone—who knows? I merely state facts—though you dropped it there, it is not now there. And so I am led to ask you, Mr. Leigh—have you, or have you not, seen that revolver since that night?"

Arthur started, stared, and made no answer.

"You do not answer, sir," said Furneaux; "so I ask you next whether this bullet that I now hand you did or did not come out of a revolver of the same calibre—" and he handed to Arthur the bullet that he had taken out of the revolver that had lain under the Armenian cloth of the divan with the shirt in its box.

Arthur took it, and looked at it. It was marked, "Kynoch 320"; and he said with a growing embarrassment:

"This certainly is a bullet of the same kind as those in that revolver. I cannot say more."

"But it actually came out of it, Mr. Leigh."

"How do you know?"

"I took it out myself."

"I thought you said that the revolver could not be found?"

"Not in the river: but was not that revolver in this room when I last was here? You know that, sir."

Arthur half sprang out of his chair, staring at the man before him, who seemed to him a wizard.

"And I want the revolver, Mr. Leigh. Will you hand it over to me?"

In a choked and hoarse tone Arthur answered: "It is no longer here."

"I know that!" cried Furneaux, his voice changing from its smooth, semi-humourous note to a sharpness that resembled the snapping of a steel trap. "But get it for me. I can tell you where to find it."

"Where?" Arthur almost whispered.

"In the gargoyle, Mr. Leigh, by the Abbot's Port!"

"Good God!" muttered Arthur. He had hidden it in the dead hours of a stormy night, and the thought passed through his mind: "Is this little man all-knowing?" Not a word of the detective's confession of "mistakes" did he believe, or of his constant declaration that he was "open as the day." He was sure that never a word or gesture of the man was quite sincere. Each phrase, apparently blurted forth on the spur of the moment, was meant to conceal a world of furtive knowledge and meaning and purpose.

"In the gargoyle?" he said brokenly, glad in his agitation to sit down again. "How is it possible that?"

"No, that is not the point, Mr. Leigh, for I know, but how you can say that the revolver is in the Parret when you have hidden it in a gargoyle of your garden."

"It may not be the same!"

"Oh, come, sir—one wonderfully like!"

"Yes, but I received it by post at the same time that I received the letter of Mr. Dix."

"Ah, now, you see, you say, sir, that you received it by post."

"I tell the truth! I tell the truth!"

"And you hid it, sir. Having received it by post, you hid it."

Arthur leapt up, as if to get air and breath, and a shout of suffocation burst from his breast. "Heaven help me!" he cried. "I seem to be incriminating myself with every word I speak and every action I perform."

"True, sir—take it as coolly as possible. But the shirt, sir! Mr. Dix's shirt! marked with his initials! with blood-stains, and a bullet hole in the left shoulder!"

Arthur leant his arm on a chair-back. His face was bloodless. He was thinking in a lost way: "Oh, well, he knows everything!"

"The shirt, sir!" cried Furneaux with a jerky kind of cry that was terrifying—"Mr. Dix's shirt! Hand it over to me this moment!"

Now Arthur spun round suddenly upon him in a mad passion.

"I cannot," he groaned.

"Mr. Leigh," said the detective with a rueful plaintiveness that was almost comically childish, "do not tell me that you have burnt that shirt."

"Yes! I have!" cried Arthur defiantly. "It was sent me by post. I thought it the act of an enemy."

But before he could utter another syllable, Mr. Furneaux had taken up his hat and stick, and the crushed cigar, and walked out of the room with an air of offended dignity that under less grave circumstances would have been ludicrous.

Arthur sank into a chair, and with his head dropped forward, sat thinking of nothing, only immersed in the consciousness that he was in misery. He forgot Bagot completely until the stout man again entered the room with a bustle that contrasted strangely with his previous entrance.

"Now, really, Leigh," he cried, "I must go …. But—what is the matter?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Arthur wearily.

"Wasn't that Furneaux of Scotland Yard who was with you?" asked Mr. Bagot.

"Yes, and I seem to be seriously involved now in the wretched crime that I blundered against when I climbed on board that barge. Do you know who the dead man has turned out to be?"

"No, who?"

"Mr. Dix."

"Of Dix and Churchill?"

"Yes."

"Why, I knew him quite well! An old man like that? But what could Mr. Dix, of Cornhill, possibly have been doing on a barge on the Parret?"

"Don't ask me. I think I am losing such few wits as I ever possessed."

"But how can they know that it was Mr. Dix—the man naked—his face smashed in."

"They have found the clothes, you see."

"Oh, they have found the clothes—good, good. Where, though?"

"Floating in the Bristol Channel."

"Funny! But that's a clue! Surely, that's a clue. Leigh, if I had charge of this case, I should undertake to have the assassin laid by the heels in three days."

"I daresay you would; and I believe this little Furneaux man would, too, if his eyes were not all befogged and prejudiced by getting it into his head that I am the guilty man. I do believe he would, for his intellect is made of lightning."

"Inspector Furneaux's intellect!" repeated Mr. Bagot, spreading his fat palms in surprise as if the word had stung him. "My dear fellow, what are you talking about? Tut! Lightning, indeed! A mere Jack-in-Office, a mind of the commonest order, I do assure you."

"Oh, you know him?"

"Know him, yes—by repute, and personally, for fifteen years and more. Queer trick, that of his, with a cigar. Not that I am much of a smoker myself. But, you see, there is hardly anyone of real notoriety whom I do not know."

"Well, I shouldn't have thought that you knew him personally from his manner just now. He seemed to say after you had gone that he had never seen you before you both met here recently."

Bagot's eyes dwelt a silent moment upon Arthur.

"Did he?" he said. "But he must have seen me somewhere else, he had some reason."

"By the way," cried Arthur, "till he fastened upon me, he thought that you were connected with the horror on the barge, from that incident of the cap—or he says that he thought so, for you never can tell whether the man is lying or not, or what he is driving at in his own mind."

"That I was connected ..." wheezed Mr. Bagot, his words broken by a chuckle, his forefinger pointing to his breast.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Arthur: "your clerical hat, sir, came into my head, and I had to laugh."

"So what made him cease to suspect me?" asked Mr. Bagot with lively amusement creasing the corners of his lips.

"He found out that you were at Chepstow at the very time!"

"I see. I was at Chepstow one night lately: I don't know if it was that night .... Oh, well, he is a mind of no real account, without imagination, without grasp. I'd pit a shrewd plowman against his wits, or the wits of any of them. But hasn't he come to any sort of conclusion about that trail through the barley-field that they are all talking about—did he say?"

"He only said that it gives the impression of some monster serpent that wriggled through and struck down Mr. Dix."

"Really! A touch of genuine imagination at last!" said Bagot, and he, too, took a turn through the room. "But as to yourself, Leigh," he went on—"is the net of circumstantial evidence seriously closing round you, as I prophesied that it might?"

"Well, it seems like it," said Arthur, now throwing himself from his restless pacing upon a sofa.

"Now, I am an older man than you," purred Bagot, "and have moreover proved myself disposed to be a friend. So hadn't you better tell me everything, and let us see if we cannot between us find a way out?"

"It is exceedingly kind of you to take such an interest in my affairs," Arthur said, and he told how he had received the shirt and pistol, what he had done with them, and how Inspector Furneaux had miraculously discovered it all.

"Here is no miracle," said Mr. Bagot, deeply pondering it with his hand propping his big head: "Furneaux, I have told you, owns a trashy mind of no account—though cunning, yes, cunning, I admit, as mediocre minds often are. But what is clear to me, Leigh, is that he really has you in his clutches, and that you should decamp."

"It is what I am thinking myself," said Arthur.

"Do it, man! Do it! Do it this very night."

"I do not see why I should not," was the moody answer. "Why should I stay here to go through this misery? I have nothing that binds me now to England. I have done no wrong, but I make such an ass of myself at every move that I am better out of it."

"Be careful, however," cooed Bagot. "There is something strange in Furneaux's whole conduct toward you. He may, for his own reasons, be only inciting you to fly in order to catch you as you go. I should travel north-east, try to gain Rouen from Hull, from Rouen get to the Americas. But now I am giving lessons in flight to a man who certainly knows his way about the world."

"But what of the lease of the Abbey as between you and me, if I disappear?" asked Arthur.

"Oh, leave that in the hands of Mowle and Mowle, your lawyers. They can deal with me. Just write to them to-night, telling them what has been agreed between us, and bidding them draw up a power of attorney which you will sign later, for you will always, wherever you are, doubtless let me know your address. Will you do this?"

"I will think over it, and decide before midnight."

"Good, farewell then, for now I really must go: I have to return to Bridgewater for a few minutes, and get to my own place, 'Nielpahar,' by ten for a long night over a very momentous experiment on which I am engaged. Happy youth, who was never caught by the enticements of science, since he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. Well, good-by, good-by; decide well, and may your new start in life be prosperous!"

Arthur accompanied Bagot down to his phaeton, and then, returning, sat fully an hour in a brown study. With regard to his meditated flight, what struck him now as singular was that the detective should have practically driven him to it by showing him how he lay in the hollow of the law's hand. The law's agent usually hides his knowledge of the guilty one's guilt, and then makes his tiger leap before flight is possible. Furneaux had done just the opposite. He had practically warned Arthur of what was coming, and had not arrested him.

What could be his motive? Did he wish to see if Arthur would prove his guilt by flight, he, Furneaux, having, meantime, his thousand eyes open round all the coast to checkmate that flight? Or did he in his heart believe Arthur to be innocent, and warn him so as to suggest safety in flight to him? Or had he some motive for getting rid of Arthur, for keeping back Arthur's evidence from the inquest? The man was so truly inscrutable! There was never any guessing what was going on behind his agreeable smile and smooth high brow. He appeared so insignificant, and so teemed with significance—he resembled an athletic boy, with that quick twist of his waist and long neck, but an old Machiavelli up above; so that gradually one's contempt for him grew into a species of fear touched with horror.

"At all events," Arthur thought, "if he catches me, when once I take to my heels, he will be even more clever than I give him credit for. I really think I'd better get away from all this worry. The world was made wide to give room for wandering in."

Poor Arthur, so astute, so sure of baffling Furneaux, so plagued by hopeless love and hostile circumstance!

He sprang up—he was out on the balcony brooding, with the moon now abroad in the sky—in order to write the letter to Mowle and Mowle *re* Mr. Bagot's scheme for the Abbey estate; but as he passed through the window—he could hardly believe his eyes—there was Elinor Hinton before him.

She was in such a haste, such an agitation, that she could scarcely speak! The glare of the rising moon full on her face showed it pale to the point of ghastliness. Her lips were slightly parted to catch her breath. A toque which she wore was askew on her hair, which was in some disarray. Her whole frame was a-tremble.

"Mr. Leigh"—she panted her words with a heaving up and sudden drop of her bosom—"I—excuse me—I—am in a hurry to reach a certain house before—before another person reaches it. I—cannot go alone—I—might fail—I—could get no one to accompany me. I am helpless—and it is partly—your business, too …. Will you come?—there is danger—but come …. Jenkins let me pass this way for fear of being seen. A motor-car is down there"

For some moments Arthur was too amazed to open his lips. The first words that rose to them were: "Could you not ask the gentleman with whom you have been in conference in the Ponds Covert at Pinkerton's to go with you?" But he uttered nothing of the sort. He agreed, though stiffly, sorry for her since she was in trouble.

"To what house are we going?" he asked.

"I can tell you in the car—to Mr. Chauncey Bagot's—come."

"In his absence from it?"

"Oh, you waste time!"

"But he will catch—us. He said he would soon be going to his place. Why are we going?"

"To search it! even though he catches us! Mr. Leigh, I implore you, don't waste a moment."

She wrung her hands together with so agonized a grace, that he, half bending into running for his cap, half hung back to look, and to say:

"But—I could not!"

"Yes, come! come!"

Her tone, the pose of her body, that "Yes, come," both familiar and pleading, was too persuasive to be withstood. To hell, if she wooed, he would pursue her, and he darted into the house. A cap he could not find, so he seized a straw hat.

Half a minute later they were running down together to a car that waited on the road. Elinor, as she leapt in, he after her, gave the word to the chauffeur, and at full speed they were away.

9

Pursued!

The driver of the car, a Panhard hired in Bristol, must have had his palm crossed with gold by Elinor Hinton, for at a quite illegal pace he played the road-hog—through Bridgewater, and toward the Black Down Hills.

For some time Arthur and Elinor, sitting side by side, seemed to fear to speak to each other.

Arthur, suddenly summoned on this mysterious excursion, of whose object he had no knowledge, left it to her to speak. She seemed to shrink from speech. In that lucid moonlight he could see her left hand near him tremble a little. Her face was elfin pale beneath a roll of blue veil that ran aslant across her forehead. Her lips were pressed together like the petals of a rosebud, as in an angry fixity. At last when she would not break the silence, he resolved to make a beginning, or an end.

"I suppose you received my note?" he asked.

"Yes," she just murmured, with an inclination of the head.

"I had already made terms with Mr. Bagot as to the lease of the Abbey when your letter reached me, so there was nothing to be said to you, except to state the fact."

Elinor threw up her eyebrows cynically.

"Is the explanation, Mr. Leigh, an apology for the shortness of your note?"

"No apology is necessary," he cried with a flush of opposition. "The shorter a note the better and more sincere, when there is nothing really to be said, except to state one's thanks."

"Still, I think the explanation was meant as an apology, Mr. Leigh—originally, though on second thoughts you discover that no apology is

necessary. Do not take it amiss if I read your mind, since I am sometimes said to be quick in that way. … But I wrote you on one subject to which your note did not even refer."

"What, about finding means to discover the size of my visitor's head? Well, but I could not be expected to take you seriously in that, since one does not Bertillonize one's guests."

For some time she made no answer. They were speeding uphill between forest walls that approached to a meeting overhead, excluding the sheen of the moon. Suddenly, as they pitched out of the shadow into a stretch of gray road, she glanced round at him with the same arching of the eyebrows, asking: "What have I done to you?"

"To me?" cried he lightly: "nothing!"

"Then, why did you decide as to granting the lease when I had begged you in my telegram not to? You must have seen by my tone that the whole thing was most serious."

"Really! But do you not see that you assume an authority over my actions and my affairs which I cannot very well admit?"

"Oh, no authority. I have explained to you that I have a knowledge of certain things which you have not and therefore."

"Granted that you have such knowledge, how am I to know what are your motives in giving me your commands, as you do? You may be my bitterest enemy for what I know, my sworn foe. Probably you are—very likely you are—I dare say you are."

"That is why you are driving with me now," said she, looking away from him over the country. "That is why you came when I called you—because you knew that as your 'sworn foe' I should be leading you to your destruction. Is it not so?"

He stared at her, and made no reply. The motor-car was picking its way noisily over a road that was strewn with broken stones for purposes of repair.

"You had my telegram in the morning," said Elinor presently. "Then, about an hour and a half afterwards, did you not receive my covering letter?"

"No," Arthur answered, "I received no letter till near eight in the evening."

"But when in the evening letter you saw that I had written you a letter in the morning which you had not received—what did you think?"

"I don't know that I thought anything. Perhaps I regarded it as odd."

"'Perhaps'! Didn't you 'perhaps' think it very odd, Mr. Leigh?"

"I—may have done so. I was irritated and upset about something which I had—witnessed—in a wood—a little while before, and I—to be frank—didn't care about any earthly thing."

At this Elinor knit her brows a little, touched with a vague trouble, a curious perplexity. Then she said:

"Please try to care now. Consider the strangeness of that letter miscarrying, and tell me what you think?"

"It was really strange. Was the messenger a trustworthy person?"

"Evidently not. He told me afterwards that he had duly delivered the letter, and it is clear he had not. So what do you make of it?"

"That he had either lost the letter, or else, somehow been tampered with."

"He was quite sober. He didn't, of course, lose it—he was tampered with. By whom, Mr. Leigh?"

"How should I know?"

"Was not the letter a document pressing you not to lease the property to a certain person? Who else than that person had any motive to prevent you from receiving it?"

Arthur started, and frowned.

"Could Bagot be capable—" he growled.

"Oh, quite!" said Elinor with half a laugh, throwing up her piquant face adorably. "It was not, indeed, Mr. Bagot himself who did the deed, since I happen to know that he was elsewhere at the time of the messenger's journey to you. Mr. Bagot generally is elsewhere, Mr. Leigh. But, oh, I assure you, he has subjects, tools, docile disciples, who do his little jobs for him with enthusiasm!"

"Why, I'd break his head, if I thought" began Arthur.

"Oh, do think, and do break his head!—if you can," said Elinor, "for it is quite true, and it is a dangerous head."

"He is a strange man!" mused Leigh aloud, "but he is also a great man! It is not easy to believe that he'd do anything mean."

Elinor glanced at his face, which was stooped, and in shadow, for the moon, which kept moving in and out among mounds of cloud, now drowned the countryside in shining, and now shrouded it in shadow.

"I am afraid that Mr. Leigh is one of those who has come under the mesmerism of Mr. Bagot's tongue," she said at last, "though I was at

the pains to warn you, sir, that he is persuasive. The vampire lulls its victims into slumber by the steady flutter of its pinions over them. Mr. Bagot achieves the same end by the honey of his tongue, so that—"

"My dear young lady," said Arthur, spinning round toward her, "will you permit me to say that you are talking nonsense? I am not the kind of man whom any mortal could stupefy in that way."

"Ah, I thought you would resent my mention of the truth," said Elinor quite calmly: "but you need not be huffy, Mr. Leigh, since you are only one of a host of people whom Mr. Bagot has persuaded and inveigled. Happy for you that you have someone to open your eyes in time—if I am in time."

Arthur made no answer. He sat deep in thought. Why, he asked himself, was she acting with such double purpose? If he had not seen. Ah, if he had not seen! Presently, starting, he said:

"Where are we tearing to on this night-ride, anyway? It is singular how you commandeer me, Miss Hinton, as though the days of slavery were not a thing of the past. Here I am with you, since you have ordered me, and, I confess, I always do enjoy a ride by moonlight through fine country. But at least it might occur to you to explain where you mean to take me."

Again Elinor glanced at him.

"What have I done to you?" she demanded.

"Nothing! Haven't I told you—nothing! Isn't my desire a perfectly natural one, to know whither I am being hurried off in this way?"

"I was quite explicit—we are going to Mr. Bagot's house."

"Extraordinary thing! You are not even at the pains to mention what for."

"But I told you at the Abbey—to search it."

"Even more extraordinary! I remember your saying that; but I remain wholly in the dark! Are we going to trespass upon private property—or what? And why?"

"We are not going exactly on our own account."

"I am glad you say 'we'—it is decidedly a case of we, isn't it?"

"I do not know what I have done that you should object to be associated with me, Mr. Leigh."

"Have I objected? I haven't! There now, you see, it is you who charge me with something. I don't object—not at all. But please continue. We are not going on our own account."

Elinor seemed to be helpless against his would-be sarcasm.

"On someone else's," she said. "Someone who wishes well to you and to me: someone who has need that Mr. Bagot's house should be searched this very night, this very hour, before Mr. Bagot again enters it; someone who could not possibly go to search it himself, having something else to do which pressingly occupies him—and who, believing in my intelligence, trusting me implicitly, agreed that I should go, when I volunteered, and suggested that you should accompany me. So, now, you know everything."

"Do I, by Jove!" laughed Leigh, bitter with the knowledge that she had many interests in life from which he was debarred. "Who on earth is this mysterious 'someone'? And why does this 'someone' despatch poor me and you to search someone else's property without his knowledge or consent, with the second someone, by the way, probably racing fast behind us now to catch us in the act, for Mr. Bagot distinctly told me an hour ago that he was about to go home."

"We must risk that much. I don't feel cold all over; do you?"

"No, the night is nice and warm. But why, why, this search?"

"Well, the someone urgently needs, first of all, to secure a hat or some headgear of Mr. Bagot's which will give him the exact size of Mr. Bagot's skilful skull. He needs, secondly, to discover something of the nature of that invention by which Mr. Bagot proposes to bring a sudden Millennium upon the earth. Now you know everything, and are satisfied."

Arthur was almost enraged with her.

"No, still I am not satisfied," he protested. "Far from it, since I still have no idea where I am … 'hat,' you say: Mr. Bagot's 'invention'; but what in the world …? First of all, who is this someone who 'wishes me well,' and 'suggested' that I should come with you on this expedition?"

A drunken song came out from a public-house in a little village through which they were rushing. The interruption gave Elinor time for thought.

"I am afraid I am hardly authorized to tell you," she said, and the next moment they dashed into shadow up a long lane.

"I seem, however, to have a right to ask," he urged.

"Oh, surely: and I a right not to reply, unless I like …. And yet I do not see why I shouldn't, for I don't definitely know that he would mind. It was Inspector Furneaux, then."

"Furneaux! What, that ubiquitous little man!—he wishes me well? Why, he is trying his very best to hang me!"

"He isn't."

"He is."

"He isn't. Association with Bagot has driven you crazy, Mr. Leigh."

"Excellent! Now we are nearer the heart of things. Yet it is not all Bagot. Perhaps I know more than you dream that I know."

She glanced sharply at him.

"How so? What are you driving at?"

"Ah, it doesn't matter to you," he cried, with the staccato utterance of a man who is enduring pain yet refuses to yield. "I am asking you to explain your association with this detective work. How is it possible that you—"

He was interrupted by Elinor calling out to the chauffeur: "Stop here!"

The motor-car drew up at a point of the lane where another road, deep in the shadow of trees, led off at an acute angle. Elinor alighted so speedily that Leigh had no time to anticipate her movements. She whispered to the chauffeur that he was to go some way up the second lane, and there await her, keeping the engine running free.

"Come," she said to Arthur.

"Are we near?" he asked as they started to walk along the straight road ahead.

"It is a few hundred yards away," she answered.

"You have been here before, then?"

"Once, with my father."

Nothing more was said. Now that they were on the very brink of their adventure, a hush fell upon them both. Only once Elinor observed in a murmur: "There may be danger …."

"Obviously," said he.

"You can go back, and wait in the car, if you like, and I'll go on alone."

"Don't be flippant," he growled.

Their footsteps sounded loud in the peace of the night that was broken only by the hum of the engine and the hoot of an owl some long distance off, a cry eerily suggestive of a phantom warning. They walked under trees through which the moonlight, peeping, dappled the

path with a pattern of leaves; and after ten minutes stood before a gate of wrought iron in a lofty brick-wall.

"Is this it?" asked Arthur.

"Yes."

"But the gate is locked."

"I expected that. There are several other gates, for this wall surrounds the whole estate; but it is useless walking round it, since it is immense, and I expect that we shall find all the other gates locked."

"Well, but there must be lodge-keepers, or somebody, somewhere."

"No, I believe that at present there isn't a soul employed on the whole place."

"So how do you propose that we get in?—if we are to get in."

"Couldn't you climb this gate, and then find some means inside of pulling me over?"

"It can be done certainly; but—I don't like it!"

"Isn't it rather late to think of that now?"

"Really," said Arthur, "you speak as though I came of my own initiative."

"Let us not quarrel," she said. "To surmount the gates—that is the difficulty. Or you can go back, if you like."

"Well, suppose I go back, or suppose I hadn't come, how would you have got in?"

"The point is deferred for subsequent consideration. No doubt I should have found a way. And you have come, so where's the good of supposing?"

They spoke in low tones, murmurously in concert with the murmuring of the night wind through the wilderness of foliage shut in by the wall. Arthur stood and eyed her in silence for a while, meditating upon her with a smile of menace on his lips which meant, "If only you were all, all, mine, you wisp of womanhood, wouldn't I glory to be a hero in your eyes!" Then suddenly he yielded. "Well, here goes," he cried, and sprang at the gate.

Elinor saw him climb, heard him drop on the other side, and then waited during what seemed to her a long time, though, in fact, it was not many minutes before she caught a sound of heavy breathing and the crunch of gravel.

"I've found a ladder!" he announced laboriously, and he put it against the wall within, mounted, drew it up, and let it down to her; she

stepped up, was soon down on the inner side with him, and they went off through the gloom of the thick covert, leaving the ladder leaning against the inner edge of the wall.

"The house is that way," said Elinor, pointing. "Look! If you peep through here you can see it."

"What a wilderness the place is!" remarked Arthur. "There seems, in truth, to be not a creature on it, except birds, squirrels, and ground-game. The ladder I found leaning against a pear-tree away yonder."

Elinor emulated his matter-of-fact tone.

"He bought the estate," she explained , "two years before he had the thought of his invention, and meant, he said, to make a paradise of it. But from the day he began his invention, everything else has gone out of his head. The man is really a monomaniac."

"Every great man is a monomaniac, and I am almost willing to believe in that invention, from what I know of Bagot. But what a state he has the grounds in! One can hardly step forward, and it is as dark as though no moon was flaming away up there …. Suppose I keep you in here, lock you up in a top room of that tower there, and never let you out till your dying day?"

"Do you wish me to die, then, so soon?"

"It would be only what you deserve—trusting yourself alone with me here, in the dead of night, too. You don't know me. You have seen me four times in your life. I am nothing to you, no, nor ever shall be."

"It is a wonder that at a time like this you have so little to occupy your mind, Mr. Leigh," said Elinor, pressing aside an obstructing bush.

"That is your fault. If you tell me nothing, my mind is naturally occupied with such idle thoughts as whir through it. You forget that I am inured to this night-work. I am not in any stew of apprehension. Look—that Gothic window high up there—that's where I shall imprison you. I say, wouldn't that be rather joyous—to have old Bagot searching all over the world for you, wanting to marry you, and you locked up in his own place all the while!"

"Quite fascinating. It only needs pluck and inclination on your part, too. When we are in the house …"

"Ah! we fall back to earth again. How are we to get into the house. We can't break anything, you know, for that's burglary, or something."

"Oh, no doubt we shall find a way. And when we are in …"

"Look," whispered Arthur suddenly, stooping low to the ground: "Someone has been here to-day."

They had now come out into an almost open lawn before the house-front: and over the grass went Arthur, bending as he crept, peering; nodding to himself. At last he straightened his back.

"Yes," he said, "someone has been here—I think to-day, possibly yesterday—someone with big feet, about Bagot's size—and he was dragging, as he went—something—something heavy, possibly a man who had fainted and so couldn't make footsteps, possibly a forked branch, or that sort of thing. Can you see it? The double track is marked quite clearly just here. Curious, isn't it? May Mr. Bagot possibly have been here at any time to-day or yesterday? Do you know?"

Elinor, too, was bent, looking at the marks in the grass, which was still wet beneath with the rain that had fallen two nights earlier.

"No," she answered, "he could hardly have been here to-day, but a visit was possible yesterday be- tween noon and seven in the evening."

Arthur said nothing. He was a good tracker, and the quest interested him. He went on following the trail, which led clearly to the front of a gloomy old building of many gables and a complication of roofs and angles.

All at once, at the portal, he beckoned to Elinor a little behind, sending out the triumphant whisper: "Here's luck!"

Elinor raising her eyes, for she, too, was intent on the grass marks, saw herself already under the shadow of the mansion. There was something in its gloom that was appalling to the heart's imagination. The stillness was profound, for the strich-owl which hardly ceased to screech far off merely increased the sense of soundlessness, and she ran to him with a feeling of comfort that he was with her, of secret thankfulness that she had not dared to come alone. He was so cool now, so splendidly unafraid. He whispered again, "Here's luck—the door is open."

She handed him from her pocket a box of wax vestas, and a miniature candle, pink and voluted, as they stepped within.

"Would it be wise to light a candle?" he said at her ear, involuntarily sinking his voice to the pitch of those engaged in nefarious business. "I think not. I'll strike the matches as we go."

"Let us look first for a hat or cap of his," she murmured.

The floors of both the outer and inner halls were of marble slabs which gave out resounding echoes, even of their wary footsteps. Moving onward, they saw antlers of stags, hat-stands, stacks of old fishing

rods, guns, an American organ, marble seats, an old mackintosh, one riding-glove, a violin without any bridge: but no hat, no cap.

"I know that he keeps some clothes here," Elinor whispered. "Perhaps we shall have to go upstairs."

The match burnt out into darkness. "That will be my chance to lock you up for ever," chuckled Arthur with his mouth at her ear.

"People who try to do two things at the same time, seldom do either," she murmured back. "Lock me up, or find the cap—you won't do both."

"Then, I'll lock you up," he whispered, "safe from the world, and all its temptations, and its false steps, and its sorrows. Oh, I am surprised at you!"

"I have not even the slightest idea what it is you are driving at," she said. "Light a match, Mr. Leigh!"

He struck another match. They made three or four forward steps, and now suddenly he halted again, gazing downward. "Look," he said, "you can see that whatever it was that was being dragged along the ground outside was brought in here—" and he showed her two little trails of dirt on the marble, parallel to each other, made by two paralyzed feet, or by something forked.

"If we could follow this trail …" suggested Elinor.

"It ceases here apparently," he announced, but some moments later when he had struck a third match, and was almost across the hall, he added: "I think the trail went up that stair," for just there a marble stairway curved upward, leaving on the left a large dining-room.

Nearly prone on the steps he moved on, searching for some trace and confirmation of his divination with that instinct of the scout which scents out where sight fails, striking his matches with impatience, his eyes everywhere while the unreliable light lasted, she following step by step, hanging upon the broken sounds of words which dropped out of his mouth.

"Yes, I think," she heard him say.

In the next instant he was upright, silent, concentrated, listening in darkness. She did not under stand, but he stretched out a hand, which happened to touch her neck. She wanted to scream, but did not. He drew her near.

"Did you hear anything?" he whispered, so secretly that she again felt that absurd inclination to shriek aloud.

"No," she managed to say.

"I thought—down there—a slight something," he told her. They stood there in the pitch darkness several minutes, waiting for the house to give out a sound, hardly breathing. But nothing was to be heard, and Arthur gave her shoulder a reassuring grip.

"Perhaps I was mistaken; come on," he said.

They crept on up with an even more utter secrecy than before, no longer venturing to strike matches. They reached the landing and found their feet on soft carpet. They pressed forward, in thick darkness, they knew not whither, but making away from the stair before striking any new light; and all at once, as they thus went, Elinor holding on to Arthur's hand, a cry of "Oh!" low, muffled, but very expressive of horror, escaped from her lips.

At the same time she had started backward with a tug, involuntarily given.

"What is it?" he whispered.

She did not answer; but he, now making a movement with his free left arm, touched something before him, and from him, too, came a sound, as he, too, shrank backward with a start.

The next moment, without stopping to think, he struck a light.

They had thought that they were in a corridor, but they saw now that they were in a large chamber with a stucco ceiling and gilt mirrors, along one wall of which they had been moving, Elinor nearest the wall. At one glance that wall had an inward projection about three feet wide, to which, in moving forward, Elinor had come, and there had touched something like flesh. A finger of Arthur's hand also had touched it a moment afterwards; and when the match was struck, both sprang backward from a thing of which they caught one flying glimpse.

It appeared to them that a man was there in the angle between the wall and its inward projection, rather more on the projection than on the long part of the wall, leaning against it, but crouched, almost kneeling; and their first half-formed impression was that he was just on the point of springing at them, for they seemed to find a wild glare in his eyes.

They were vaguely aware that he was an aged man, even more vaguely that he was very deadly pale, that they were in the presence of some strange fate, that somewhere on his face was a stain, a trace, a dull streak of glaring red, a flag of horror.

But their eyes rested on him not two ticks of the clock, nor could they have told what in that one instant they had beheld, save that it

was an impression of staring frenzy, for before ever they could even breathe, or think, to themselves, "He is dead," the echoes thundered at a pistol-shot which rang out behind them. The match was out, and they were defenseless. Arthur caught Elinor into his arms and ran wildly down the length of the apartment.

He heard her moan very low. He knew that she was wounded, yet he put his mouth to her ear with a "Sli-h-h" so soft that it could not have been heard six inches from his lips.

But this room was not carpeted, the floor being made of parquet, nor did he run far, realizing that with all his care his steps were making sounds. Even as a second shot shocked the silence of the night, he stopped against a wall, deposited Elinor almost heavily on the floor, and in a second had off the shoes which luckily he was wearing instead of boots. No ray of the moon penetrated the room, the procession of windows being all shuttered; and, catching up his burden, leaving his shoes, he now again began to run, with one hand a little out in order to encounter the wall ahead.

When he reached it, he groped along to the right for a door. There was no sound now, but a consciousness all in the night that the assassin was there behind, waiting for something to guide his aim—an assassin more awful to the fancy than an army of gunners, because, hidden in the dark, he was clothed in all the mystery, malignancy, and terror of a ghost. When, after a minute's groping along the wall, Arthur got to a great door and found it closed, he groped for the handle and turned it. Warily as he had turned it, he understood that once in the process a little sound had been made, so instantly he was down on the floor, taking his precious load with him—wisely, for a moment afterwards a third wind whistled, a third shot struck the door; but almost as it struck, he, cringing, stalking low, was through, and away, she in his arms.

Down another corridor, into a room—as it seemed—for he butted on a wall. He searched about—could find no exit.

"Put me down," whispered Elinor now, for she heard the strain and labour of his breath.

"You are wounded!" he panted.

"Nothing—a scratch."

He put her down, ran on, feeling the wall with his right hand, with his left holding her by an arm, struck his knees against what appeared to be a sofa, skirted it, went on more cautiously, but with his foot struck what seemed a hassock, which fell over. Stock still he stood now, stopped, waiting, peering, his soul in his ears.

There was no sound of pursuit, however.

"He thinks I have a revolver," he panted. "If only I had!"

She did not answer, but immediately he could feel something cold stealing into his hand, the cold of steel—a little five-chamber revolver from her pocket, a toy, but a useful one, such as many American women own.

Now he felt ready for his enemy. He laid his finger on the trigger-guard, moved on, came again to the same door by which he had unknowingly entered the room, and passed out. His object, his hope, was to rediscover the stair by which he had come up, and so to reach the front door, the shrubbery, the wall, the ladder, the road. In reality, he was making in almost the opposite direction, without any true idea of direction left in him. He longed to strike a match, for the upper part of the house seemed to be in a uniform gloom, with all shutters barred: but he dared not. However, he was not long now before he came to a stair, though not the stair which he had in his mind—came to it, and slipped down three steps, dragging Elinor with him and making a good deal of noise. He checked his fall by grasping the banisters; nor one instant too soon was he down on his face and pitching himself and her to the other side of the stair: for almost instantly, as he stumbled, that wakeful ear which hearkened in the dark, and that waiting weapon which hid in it, proved anew their presence. From fifteen yards away down a corridor that faced the stair the crack rang out; and, as it rang, there was a flash of light, and a vague shape in the glare, and with it another crack of a weapon—Arthur's this time—even as he dragged Elinor f rom one side of the stair to the other, and there lay in the darkness, waiting, waiting, thinking that the pursuer would come, would fancy that he, Arthur, had gone on down, and would come, and, in passing, would not be utterly soundless and would drop dead. He now had Elinor pressed closely to him, could feel the hurricane of her breathing, as she the mortal stress of his, and they waited while the wild heart beat, and the wild eye stared at nothing ….

But nothing came, and step by step, without rising, without a sound, moving down with the silent stealth of a glacier, they descended, till, at the bottom, they were stopped by a wall, moved along it to the left, fingering the smooth surface, came again to an open door, and passed into a room. They had been so long buried in darkness without one ray, that it was with a sense of surprise that in here they could make out each other's presence with the eye when they stood close together. For though the room, which was very large, had two windows shuttered, a

third window was only half-shuttered—though it, too, had heavy curtains which excluded the moonlight.

Anyway, some rays of light were diffused through it, and Arthur was hardly in before he was aware that there were two doors, both of which had keys; and as he locked one, ran to the other, and turned the key, he panted to himself, "Safe!"

The next instant a pistol bullet whizzed past his ear, and banged into the oak of the door which he had just locked. The omnipresent arm of his enemy was there also, and Arthur's heart thumped violently at the thought that he had locked the would-be murderer into the same chamber in which he had locked Elinor. For himself he had no care at all. He was beyond that. Instantly he, too, fired, in the direction from which some lightning instinct of his eye-corner inspired him with the idea that the flash of fire had darted forth; and, as he fired, he flew to Elinor, had her in his embrace, and was with her beneath a bed whose outlines he had perceived on his first entrance into the room.

It was an old-fashioned mahogany bedstead, with its head at one of the three windows—apparently the only furniture in the room; and a whitish drapery hanging from two of its posts had originally attracted his attention. There was a bed on it without any covering, but underneath the fugitives found a bundle of cloth which proved to be soiled sheets. They lay there on their faces some minutes, staring forth, and since there appeared to be no other furniture than the bed, Arthur thought, "If he dares shoot now, I shall see where he is, and he is a dead man."

He held his weapon in readiness, prepared to shoot quick at the first prophecy of the ghost of light or sound that struck upon his straining senses, and when a shot rang out, he fired so promptly that the two sounds were almost one, merging into a brisk demi-semi-quaver bang-bang. But Arthur's shot was too involuntary to be skilful. In fact he had seen nothing, shot at nothing, and, to his amazement, the shot which he answered made no flash that he could see; and he was bitterly aware that only two more bullets remained to him.

Three seconds, and another report sounded—three more, and there was another; and in neither case was there any sign of a flash or inflamed haze, so that now to terror was added mystery, and to mortal peril a perplexity without bounds.

Arthur could feel Elinor trembling with excitement at his left hand, and himself, too, trembling. Regularly as a clock striking the hour, every three seconds came a shot, and, as though they saw it with their eyes,

the crouching couple could picture somewhere in the dark a vindictive lip, an eye all alight with menace, an unrelenting arm.

"Firing from above," panted Arthur at Elinor's ear: for that alone at last seemed the only explanation of the firer's invisibility, though in what way "from above" he had no idea; but when he stretched his neck out beyond the bed, he could now see a gallery that ran along one wall of the room, which had once been a ballroom, and as the next probing bullet was sent out, the flash up there caught his eye. The murderer was standing in the gallery just over the bedstead, industriously shooting through the bed and its laths on the chance that one shot in fifty would do his murderous work, and Arthur thought that at his feet the man must have collected a little arsenal of weapons.

Arthur worked himself yet farther out, in spite of the restraining pull of Elinor at him, and when the next shot flashed from above, he fired his fourth shot at a blaze of light; but its only effect was an instant answer from above, and thenceforth a slight quickening in the grim regularity of the reports, the enemy, in fact, feeling himself fairly safe behind the row of massive balusters which formed the front of the gallery.

Arthur quickly understood this, and whispering to Elinor, "Come," began to move on all-fours towards the gallery; but now, as a new bullet banged down from above, his mind being ever intent on her, he was aware of a low moan of pain from her lips.

10

The Disappearance of Mr. Churchill

"You are not hurt again?" he whispered, with an agony in his voice, while his face was twisted into a horror of pity.

No answer reached him for some seconds; then a murmur in which he recognized the tone of pain, replied: "No; go on."

"This way," he whispered, and presently they had crawled from beneath the bed out under the gallery, a fact apparently unknown to their enemy, who kept on potting industriously at the bed with the regularity of a clock striking a fiftieth hour.

Arthur, meantime, was tending Elinor where she sat in a corner, bandaging with his handkerchief her right forearm in which she had received a flesh-wound—the forearm of the same arm which, higher up, had been grazed with a bullet above-stairs. This done, he left her, ran to the nearest of the three windows—large oriel Gothics, the nearest of the three no more than half shuttered—and noiselessly opening an oriel-leaf, peeped out. But the ground, an old flower bed, now grown with bush, was not less than twenty-four feet down, and he uttered a groan of despair.

He next made his way, running soft in his stocking-feet, to the other end of the gallery, hoping to find a stair by which to make a dash upward, and so with his last shot end that venomous mechanism that kept on shooting at the bed. But there was no stair.

There were pillars, however; and he thought that if he could silently climb that one nearest the bed, close behind which, somewhere, the firing was going on, and if he could intrude the barrel of the revolver

between two of the balusters, and be lucky, that might do. He crept back, then, and began the attempt; but, as the pillar was large for his embrace, and made of polished wood, he slipped back down with a thud, which, however, seemed not to have been heard above. He was trying again, when he felt his coat dragged from below, heard Elinor's terrified, "No, no, not that!" slipped back down, and now knew that a bullet had pinged, no longer into the bed, but into the floor near his feet: for the firer, having caught some sound, was leaning over the balusters to shoot underneath.

"Wait! let me!" Arthur breathed vehemently into her ear, for she still grasped his jacket.

"No—the moonlight—not that," she panted.

"Then what?" he asked.

"The sheets!" she murmured, and instantly was on her face again creeping under the bed, unchecked by the "Stop!" which he hissed at her. Yet he stood amazed at her daring in venturing again into that bullet-swept region where she had just been hit.

But she was quickly back, drawing after her the bundle that she had at once noticed under the bed. Soon with agitated hands of haste both were tying the clothes to a mullion of the oriel; the shots now penetrating well within under the gallery, but striking a little short of their position against the wall. And all at once, just when the chain of sheets was secured to the mullion, the shots ceased, and thievish fleet feet were heard above, three distinct steps, which made Arthur pant:

"He is running somewhere to cut us off."

The next moment, however, he was out of the window, going first in order to catch Elinor if her injured arm should fail her and, as he reached the ground, he looked up to see her, too, coming, and caught her as she neared him.

As they turned to run, they heard a rattle of broken glass, and then a gun-report, somewhat ahead of them, showing that the assassin had not waited to open the window, but had shot through its glass. Stooping among the brushwood, they ran in the opposite direction of their start, not knowing whether that was the way in which their ladder lay or not. The moon was just then working through cloud-masses, and the shadow tended still further to bewilder their already bewildered sense of things. But, certain that they were being pursued, they ran well, trusting in luck to lead them, crossed a path out of bush into bush, butted upon a shrubbery-wall with an open gate in it, doubled into the

shrubbery, startling some wild fowl, and in the umbrageous greenery, where a deep gloom brooded, found a summer-house, in which they sought sanctuary.

The summer-house was small, though stout, made of logs, with bolted window-shutters, and a key in the lock of its one door, which Arthur locked. There was a seat running round three sides, and upon this they threw themselves, exhausted by the long-drawn ordeal of overwrought emotion through which they had passed. And for a long time they sat there side by side in darkness, listening, without saying a word. If the man's arm clasped the woman's shoulders that was excusable. Neither seemed to be aware of this lover-like attitude.

"How is the arm now?" Arthur asked at last.

"It keeps burning in the two places," she answered with a weary resignation. "Nothing very much. You were not hit at all?"

"Not touched."

"Well, that is how it always happens in life. The woman catches it all, and the man goes off scot-free."

"It was the woman who insisted upon coming, the man didn't want to come; so it's only fair."

"Then, why did he come?"

"The woman beguiled him, and he came."

"And got her shot."

"What would have happened if he hadn't come?"

"Mr. Chauncey Bagot might have got shot instead."

"Your gratitude is overwhelming! But I do not know why you believe that Mr. Bagot was our assailant. We didn't see him."

"Ah, blessed is he who hath not seen Mr. Bagot and yet hath believed," she said dryly.

"But that man in the angle between the wall and its projection in that first room,—" his voice dropped to a whisper—"did you see him when I struck the match?"

"Yes, I saw him," she said.

"And what impression did you have of him? Tell me, so that I may find if we agree."

"He was old."

"Yes."

"He was tall and thin."

"Yes."

"He was bent double—looked as if he was going to spring at us."

"Quite so."

"There was something red on his face."

"Yes."

"He was dead."

Arthur did not answer.

And in the silence that followed, suddenly anew, their hearts leapt into their mouths. Outside their little house of rest was a stealthy tread.

They were aware that the handle of their door was softly turned, that pressure was being put upon the lock outside. Then all was still for a long time.

There they sat, Arthur holding Elinor's shoulders, she gripping tight the bottom of his jacket, both hardly breathing, listening for the malignant ghost that prowled around them. And half an hour, an hour, of suspense that tortured, passed thus.

At last the girl could bear it no longer.

"Is he still there?" she breathed at Arthur's ear.

"I fancy he is gone," whispered Arthur. "I fancy I heard his retreating footsteps."

"He is not gone far," she said. "He is under cover, and will shoot, if we show ourselves, and you have only one cartridge left. We are in prison here. He can starve us out."

Arthur made no answer, and she said again after a long time:

"This is imprisonment. And do you know where I am supposed by my father to be? Asleep in my happy bed in my stateroom on the ›Mishe Nahma.‹ I had plotted everything nicely so as to get back by midnight, steal down to bed, and look innocent in the morning. It must be morning already. Strike a match and see."

"Not safe," he whispered. "There may be a crack through which he may see the glare, and he may not at present be certain that we are here, even though he finds that the door doesn't open to him."

"But what can we do?"

"I think I'll venture out, and risk a catch-as-catch-can with him with my one shot."

"Mr. Leigh, you wouldn't dare!"

"Why so? I do dare."

"But stay—think—for me—for yourself," she pleaded with her fingers now clasped together on his shoulder. "If you go out, you cannot fail to be killed—he is in hiding, armed, and if you were killed, what would happen to me? Something far worse than being killed, I should be a prisoner—I have nearly been a prisoner here once before to-day—my friends would never know my fate. And for yourself—don't go. If anyone is to go, let it be I. You have someone you love."

She was thinking of his saying "if I were free" when he had only meant that he was poor, and he started saying sharply:

"You, at any rate, have a lover."—thinking of her interview at the Ponds Covert with the motorist, as to whose attempt to carry her off she had bound him to secrecy.

Now it was her turn to start, with an "I!" of surprise. But he did not hear, or hardly heard it, for at that moment footsteps were again without.

Whoever it might be, the newcomer was no longer careful to conceal his movements. Feet were swishing freely through the brushwood and with them was a sound of something metallic, metal acting upon metal—like the handle of a tin bucket upon the bucket when it is carried. Nor were they long left in doubt that a bucket it was, for now they were aware of the wash of some liquid dashed against the outside of the summer-house.

Dumb with conjecture and wonder, they sat hearkening for what was next to come. Again a long time passed, and there was no sound.

"He must be gone," whispered Elinor.

"Yes, he came loudly, but stole away," Arthur whispered back. "I don't quite see why?"

"Don't you know what he dashed upon the summer-house? Oil!"

"Yes, petrol. I can smell it now."

"He is intending to burn us, if he cannot get us any other way, and he came loudly to let us know, so that we might have an impulse to run, and he went softly, so that we might be uncertain whether he has stolen off for more oil, or is lurking near somewhere to shoot you, as we run. He wishes to demoralize us with uncertainty, that so we may run, and be flurried as we run."

"You conclude, then, that he prefers us to run?"

"Yes, for the fire will make a great light which may be seen."

"Then, let us stay."

Wash!—suddenly, without a warning noise this time, oil was dashed upon the summer-house on its opposite side.

After which, for a long time, all was again silence—a waiting silence, a straining silence.

"Why, it is day outside," muttered Arthur suddenly. "There is light in the place. We can see each other."

"We have been here far longer than we think—hours," answered Elinor—"and it has passed like minutes."

"What a night!" said he: "the best night of my life!"

She flinched away from him, suddenly shy. But her tongue was tart enough.

"Yes, because you haven't had your skin punctured with bullets."

"Quite so," he answered. "I have the enjoyment of contrast."

"So you are glad you came?"

"I am deeply glad."

"We may have to return; supposing we escape now. We haven't secured the hat. We have seen no sign of the invention. Will you come again, if I undertake to get all the stray bullet holes in me?"

"You make a great deal of those two scratches, Miss Hinton. You forget that some of your blood has spoiled the cuff of my shirt—look."

In an impulse he pressed his lips to the stained linen.

"No, Arthur, don't," she murmured—"no, don't," turning her face away.

"Then, I won't," he said: "I know well that I am an idiot."

She sprang up, saying feverishly: "My God!—morning: and I a prisoner in this hole. It must be broad day outside. What will everybody think of me? And why, if the man meant to burn us, did he not come back? Something must have prevented him. Perhaps he is busy, disposing in some way of that thing that crouched and had blood on it! Or perhaps he means to starve us—he could keep us in this wilderness for weeks, and no one the wiser."

"How can he," asked Arthur, "whoever 'he' may be. Did you not say that Inspector Furneaux knew that we were coming here?"

"Yes, that's true. Only let him delay long enough, and Mr. Furneaux will be at him. I believe that Furneaux has a wiser mind than Bagot. Hark! what's that?"

Arthur now, too, sprang up, hearing the approach of footsteps, of several footsteps, of voices, of laughter, and the two stood, close-linked, with wonder in their eyes.

"Bagot's voice!" growled Arthur.

Elinor, in high animation, placed her mouth dangerously near his cheek. "And Furneaux's!" she cried.

In another half-minute there was knocking at the door, and the voice of Mr. Bagot calling: "Miss Hinton! Can it be possible that you are inside? Here are friends for you!"

"Friends, Miss Hinton!" added the voice of Inspector Furneaux cheerfully.

Arthur wrung open the door, and when his eyes, blinded by daylight, recovered their sight, beheld Mr. Bagot, all smiles, Inspector Furneaux, and, in the background, a uniformed officer of the police.

"What, you, too, Leigh?" cried Mr. Bagot, laughing with boisterous good nature—"what, without boots—well!" and he grasped Arthur's hand before the other was aware of his intent.

"My good young lady!" exclaimed the detective blankly, "however did you manage to get into this scrape?"

Elinor looked in amazement at Arthur, and Arthur at Elinor. But her brain was working fast, and she presently observed: "I came to pay a surprise visit to Mr. Bagot .... Mr. Leigh came, too."

"Did he, now?" said Furneaux, like one lost in wonderment; "and then—what took place?"

"Mr. Bagot, as it turned out," said Elinor, "wasn't at home, as we imagined he might, or would soon be. So, as we couldn't get in, rather than miss seeing the place, Mr. Leigh climbed a gate, got a ladder, and we came in."

"Ah, that's how it was," said Mr. Bagot with a glance of satisfied curiosity at Inspector Furneaux, "that's how it was."

"Yes!" said Furneaux, "and then—what took place?"

"We had no sooner entered the house to look through it than some madman began shooting at us"

"Precisely as Mr. Bagot has guessed!" cried the detective—"A burglar whom you just happened to surprise! We have seen the sheets by which you climbed down and then—I have it all now!—you ran and locked yourselves up in here. Did he follow you here?"

"Yes, he threw oil on the summer-house, and was going to burn it, and us as well."

"Just at which point I must have arrived on the scene—Mr. Bagot and I!" broke in Furneaux, "and the rascal made off. Ah, but believe me, Miss Hinton, I'll have him yet."

"My good Furneaux, you won't," said Bagot, turning his bland face upon the inspector. "Take my word for it, this man was no common burglar. He knows his way, Furneaux!"

"Still, Mr. Bagot, still, sir," said Furneaux with a quick jerk of the head, "I am inclined to think I'll have him yet."

"Tut, man! you'll have to eat some more beef first."

"Fish is good, too. Splendid food, fish!"

Arthur stood looking from one to the other of the three speakers, quite at a loss what was meant.

"How did you come to appear on the scene?" he asked the detective, thinking to add to the by-play of words.

"Well," said Furneaux, "the constable there and I happened to be passing this way on a matter of business in the early morning, when we came across the driver of the motor-car which had brought you and Miss Hinton. We learnt from him the fact that you were missing. Then, in passing the entrance to the estate, we caught sight of a ladder, and thought, 'Hello, that may mean a burglary,' and in we came, to find Mr. Bagot, who had just arrived himself, and who welcomed us warmly, seeing that he had been finding traces of something odd having happened during the night. So you see, Mr. Leigh, that's how it all was."

"Not one word of any of them ever chances to be sincere," thought Arthur, throwing out a peal of laughter—"all, for some reason, lying, including Elinor. Well, I'll keep my mouth shut."

"These two poor children must be intensely tired and hungry," Mr. Bagot now said. "Come, let us be off."

He moved, they all moved, Elinor walking so as to get by the side of Mr. Furneaux; and the moment she was with him, she murmured without looking at him: "I think there's a dead body in the house."

And if one had looked close, they would have seen Inspector Furneaux actually start.

A minute of silence, of deep reflection, passed, then Furneaux was crying aloud: "Hello! what's this you say, Miss—a dead body in the house?"

"Which house?" asked Mr. Bagot.

"Why, that one," said Elinor quietly, for they had now passed through the shrubbery gate, and there was the mansion behind trees before them.

"Then, by Heaven, Jones," cried the detective, "the burglar had a mate with him, and Mr. Leigh shot him!"

"Pardon me, Inspector Furneaux," said Arthur, "I had the ill-luck to shoot no one. The man to whom Miss Hinton refers was seen by her before I had fired any shot."

"And you, too, saw him, Mr. Leigh?"

"I saw someone in the momentary light of a match; but whether he was dead or not I cannot say, for before I could see we were fired on from behind, the match went out, and we ran."

"Still, Mr. Leigh, you did see something—you can describe him even a little," said Furneaux with a certain stress of pleading in his voice which he could ill conceal.

Arthur's thought was unspoken: "At last the man has uttered something which is sincere." But he said aloud: "He seemed to be an old man, tall, thin, very pallid. He looked as if he was crouching to spring at us from a corner, and I have a fancy that there was a streak of blood on his face."

There was silence now; Inspector Furneaux's jaw ribbed itself at the corner, and shook a little. But he had some far-fetched solution for every difficulty.

"The burglar, in shooting at you, must have shot his own mate!" he cried. "That's it! If the man was really dead, or dying, as you say—Ah, pity you did not get a better view of him! Mr. Bagot, let us take this lady and gentleman with us to show us where they made this strange discovery."

Bagot, without answer, quickened his step toward the house. They all quickened their steps and, having passed in by the front door, Arthur and Elinor walked through the two halls and up the stairs, which now in the daylight seemed to them to have quite another air and mood than their air of the night and the moon.

Above Arthur put on his shoes, and he and Elinor showed the spot where they had seen the man who crouched as if to spring, but nothing was there now; and they all marched through the mansion, from turret-top to larder, prying into every nook, and the sun shone higher and higher, but no trace of anybody was found.

"Perhaps the red on his face wasn't blood at all," remarked Furneaux. "Perhaps his pallor was just a natural pallor, and he might have been alive all the time!"

"Oh," said Mr. Bagot, who led the search, "he may have been really dead, and been buried by his mate, the burglar, in the grounds, for there seems to have been plenty of time for that. In which case traces of the burying will not fail to remain. Let the grounds be searched."

"They shall be, Mr. Bagot," said Inspector Furneaux, "though that will be a long job, and as for poor Miss Hinton and Mr. Leigh, who must be nearly dead with fatigue, we had better be sending them home."

"Of course, we must," agreed Bagot. "But first I am going to cook you all, on a spirit-stove, some coffee and breakfast, as I have sometimes done for myself when I have slept here. I am a fine cook, I can tell you, and you will see it all done by magic."

"Do not trouble for me, Mr. Bagot, pray," said Elinor: "Mr. Leigh and I are not so exhausted as you may think, especially as we came so triumphantly through all the rain of futile bullets."—for she had been too proud to admit that she had been hit, and her light motor coat concealed the blood on her blouse and bandaged arm.

"I seem more and more to remember," she went on, "that I received the undoubted impression that the man was really dead. I am sure he was. The double trail which Mr. Leigh found outside was due to his feet having been dragged through the grass and bush."

"That may quite well be so," concurred Bagot instantly. "Let us, then, next examine this trail. Meanwhile, Furneaux, you won't mind lending me the constable to send a telegram to Mr. Hinton, who must be crazy with anxiety at his daughter's absence. I am afraid that you have been found out by now, my good Elinor."

"I am afraid I have," said Elinor, "but maybe it will be guessed that I am with you, and then there will be no anxiety."—and Inspector Furneaux looked from one to the other with a light in his eye which meant admiration for both.

"You may send the constable with pleasure, sir," he said.

"Then just run, Jones, to the village," said Bagot, who ordered His Majesty's officers about with the familiarity of a Chief Commissioner, "and send a message to Hinton, Yacht ›Mishe Nahma,‹ just saying: 'Elinor safe in my hands, Bagot'—that's all;" and he handed a shilling to the constable, who saluted and hurried away.

And now, Arthur leading, the party of four went out to the trail, which was so broken, and vague in the dew-laden grass that only a tracker's eye might have taken cognizance of it at all. However, when it was once indicated, there it was plain enough; and Furneaux, Bagot, and Arthur, in their interest, bent hither and thither, Furneaux now with a magnifying glass at his eye, staring intensely at every sign, while silence reigned, Bagot anon pointing to something new, anon Arthur pointing. Elinor, with her veil lowered, followed too, while they pursued the trail from the house-front a good way into a shrubbery. And all at once, Arthur, who was ahead of the others, called out:

"Hello! here's something."

Like lightning Furneaux was at his side.

"Let me see," he snapped, and had the thing in his hand a second before Mr. Bagot, too, was at it.

In a few seconds all were bending over it—an envelope that had been opened, directed to "John Churchill, Esq." A slip of paper in it was found to be an account of the GAS LIGHT AND COKE COMPANY for a quarter's gas consumed in a house in Highgate, London.

It was Bagot who broke the long silence.

"This is very strange," was his curiously commonplace remark.

No one answered. Inspector Furneaux stood tight-lipped, glancing curiously from the speaker to the open bill.

Bagot was eager to voice his theories.

"This, however, is probably without any kind of connection with the trail which we are following," he said. "You notice that it is directed to 'John Churchill.' Well, as far back as six weeks ago, a Mr. John Churchill actually spent two days in this place with me, and may possibly then have dropped the envelope."

"Was that the Mr. John Churchill of Dix and Churchill?" asked the detective.

"The same," said Bagot, after a pause that was barely perceptible.

Arthur listened with all his ears. Dix, he knew, was dead—was Churchill dead, too?

"And you say, sir," asked Furneaux, almost deferentially, "that that was some six weeks ago?"

Mr. Bagot pondered it, glancing forward to see the date on the bill; but now Furneaux was folding it leisurely up.

"I cannot be sure of the date offhand," mused Bagot aloud. "It may have been a good deal less—not more. But I can easily look it up, if you desire."

Furneaux put the bill into his pocket, and they continued to follow the trail till they came, through the shrubbery, to an open grass space, which in one spot was much crushed and trampled, the marl greatly bruised by the weight, it appeared, of some mass. On one low oak leaf, discovered by the detective, was a spot that looked like a drop of blood. Something heavy, too, had been dragged through the bush northward, at right angles to the direction in which the body, if it was a body, was conveyed. Presently there was observed a third trail, as to which Elinor, standing near Inspector Furneaux, heard him murmur to himself as his eyes first fell upon it:

"The barley-field snake again!"

For, wriggling through the grass from the south-west, over a distance of, perhaps, forty yards, this third trail reached the trampled region with a perfect suggestion of some enormous serpent having wormed its way to strike down the victim, exactly as in the case of Mr. Dix on the barge; and no word was spoken while the four pairs of eyes bent their scrutiny upon it.

The two second trails were tracked carefully to the ends, where they suddenly ceased. Then along the first, or forked, trail they slowly paced back to the house-front, still bent down, gazing at the mystery, so visible there, yet so voiceless.

Arthur was now the hindermost of the men, Elinor behind him; and, all at once, as he stooped, looking, his hat fell off—unaccountably, for he was not stooping so very deeply; so he glanced behind, to see if by chance Elinor had touched his hat. As he glanced, stopping, she was on the hat, and with two stamps had it crushed out of shape, looking up into his face the while with a mocking haughtiness, her eyes speaking defiance to him quizzingly, with her lips pressed together. He was completely at a loss to understand this massacre of an innocent hat, but she put a finger on her lips, and then very adroitly, swiftly, shot at him the words: "Borrow a hat!"

"Artful beggars they all are!" thought Arthur, "she especially, dangerous, cunning, sly to the heart, and the undoing of a man."

Nevertheless he called out what had happened, and the others stopped and looked around.

"Oh, forgive me for being so awkward!" pouted Elinor with heartfelt regret.

"You can have my hat, I'm sure, and welcome, Mr. Leigh," said Inspector Furneaux at once.

"Yes, among the liars, you are always an easy 'first among equals,'" Arthur thought, but he only said:

"No, I can't of course deprive you of your hat, Inspector. Couldn't you lend me something in that line, Mr. Bagot?"

"My dear fellow, I doubt if I have such a thing in," Mr. Bagot began.

"Oh, yes, you have," cried Elinor, "I think I saw one just now in a room—stay, I am the hat-killer—I'll just run."

And before anything more could be said, she had taken to her heels into the now near house, and was gone. Nor could any power of wit or will have stopped her, the despotism of politeness and convention being as resistless as any other, for though Arthur could very well have gone home without any hat at all, Mr. Bagot, if he wished to say so, could no more have said it than the dumb can break the bonds of their silence.

In two minutes Elinor was tripping back out, twirling a hat round and round on her hand like a flag of victory, crying, "Here it is!" She came near to Arthur. "Pray, let me, Mr. Leigh," and she put it on herself—on and on, lower and lower by degrees, till it was down over Arthur's ears, over his brows, over his neck behind; and, as Elinor said, "There!—a fit," everyone broke out laughing, Mr. Bagot pointing with a grimace of buffoonery, crying: "Nice sight! nice sight!" and he and Furneaux looked at one another, and giggled together in perfect amity.

Just then the constable who had been sent with the telegram was seen coming back, and Furneaux said to Bagot:

"Now, as to searching the place further, sir, in order to find something definite—if the constable and I may start to go over it thoroughly"

"By all means," said Mr. Bagot, "I'll come with you myself; only I must warn you that the big shed you can see the roof of over yonder is privileged. It contains the plan of an invention which is not patented, and I should hardly feel quite easy to have it stared at"

"But suppose that's just the place the burglar has used, sir, to conceal."

"Impossible, man, unless he has burst open the doors," cried Bagot testily. "It is hermetically locked up with cipher-locks, which you will find all safe and sound. But since such a thought has entered your mind, I don't mind, say, Constable Jones going in and having a thorough search, for that will be quite effective for the search of a body, while, as to my invention, I am perfectly sure that he will stare at it for

a year, and make neither head nor tail of it. But I can't have a bird of your feather, Furneaux, ferreting among my work."

"Agreed, sir—that's only fair," said the detective, who seemed to be oddly unwilling to thwart Bagot in the slightest degree. "Jones, let it be."

"Meanwhile, I shall have the honour to take back Miss Hinton to her yacht," said Arthur.

"Good," said Bagot; dropping his voice, he drew Arthur a little apart. "Are you going to be off?" he asked. "This is the inquest day …."

"I am not decided: I have thought of it."

"Have you put the matter of the lease in the hands of Mowle and Mowle, your lawyers?"

"I haven't had time! I was about it last night when I was stopped."

"Leigh, there is need for haste!"

"I'll see to it."

And they parted, Arthur walking towards the gate with Elinor, Mr. Bagot going off to the shed with Furneaux and the constable.

It was broad daylight, and the sun's rays were already hot. They passed through the gate, open now, which they had climbed during the night, came upon their chauffeur fast asleep by the roadside on his seat, and had soon set off on the sixteen-mile trip of the night before. They were in full career when, in passing through a townlet, Elinor's eye was attracted by a row of placards before a paper-shop. She called a halt, and together in silence the two stared at the words, fresh from the Bristol press: "**Strange Disappearance of a City Man**"; and again on another: "**Another Mystery of a Merchant**"; and on a third: "**Mr. Churchill follows Mr. Dix!**"

11

Trapped!

Both were stiff and tired, and Elinor's arm was sore from its wound. They felt quite unromantic, and their wits were too weary to puzzle out all they had gone through.

"Don't come any farther, Mr. Leigh," Elinor said, when the car neared the private road to the Abbey on the way to Burnham.

He bent toward her, paused in what he had on his tongue to say, but finally said it.

"It was 'Arthur'—once—last night."

"You!" said she. "Really, Mr. Leigh, you are sometimes fanciful."

"You never said that—in the summer-house!"

"I scarce know what I said at a time when I was nearly hysterical with fear and pain."

"Oh, well, let it pass. What can it matter?"

"What, indeed? A mere slip, if ever it happened. And so—good-by, for I am sure that you are dying with sleep. Just one parting question—are you still intending, after what we experienced last night and this morning, to grant the lease of your house to Mr. Bagot?"

White and wan as she was, he was minded to tease her.

"As far as I know, I think so," he said. "I have seen no reason in Mr. Bagot's behavior to cause me to be inclined to break my undertaking to him."

"All right, Mr. Leigh: but, if I was your sister—ah, I do think that sometimes you would benefit by a piece of my mind."

"And if you were my wife, I'd break you in like—like a skittish little filly that trembles when it spies a man in leggings."

"'If,' you say—that is the largest sort of conditional."

"Well, you are right there."

She looked to be offended, and justly so, but yet she had not done with him.

"By the way, bear in mind that I may have to write you urgently, when I have again seen Inspector Furneaux," she said. "Of course I had no chance to speak to him alone after the happenings of last night, but when I do, I think I can foresee that you and I may have to meet and act in a hurry."

Arthur was still pleased to be ironical.

"Your servant, I'm sure!" he growled, "though what possible connection there can be between Miss Elinor Hinton and this absolutely asinine detective?"

"Don't let it trouble you, Mr. Leigh," she said coldly, putting out her hand. "The day may come when you will know. Only pray remember, meanwhile, what I have told you, that Mr. Furneaux wishes well to me—and you."

"One follows from the other, does it not?" he asked, smiling. "At any rate, I can quite believe the first half, without an ounce of faith in the second. ... Good-by, good-by!"

He stood on the road looking after her, as she was carried away. Once, as she was about to vanish, she turned round, seeming to expect to find him still standing there. She tilted Mr. Bagot's hat to him, like a man taking off his hat to a lady, and when the last of her dust-cloud had died out, he went up to the Abbey to sleep.

He was encountered by Jenkins with very round and solemn eyes, not so much because Jenkins was aware of his master's unaccountable absence as because he had in his hand a letter which, late the previous night, had been brought by a policeman. Contact with the legal arm of the King always wrought in Jenkins a definite bathos.

Arthur tore open the letter, as Jenkins hurried off for coffee.

> *The inquest, as you know, is not till two. So you have plenty of time before it to take the advice of a friend who knows, and run. Do it. You will not be unduly tracked and hunted. Run, till things clear.*

There was no signature, but underneath, rudely drawn, was the face of a man holding a cigar at his nose—and the natural guess was—Furneaux.

Arthur, though really amazed, was too much interested in coffee at the moment to weigh the note well. Even as he drank the coffee, his eyes had a tendency to close. He was soon asleep in his clothes, and slept exactly the three hours that he had prescribed to himself beforehand. It was a trick acquired on the veldt, and he had not forgotten it.

Then he sat up to study the man with the cigar. From whom but from Furneaux? He called Jenkins to him again to ask him if he was sure that it was a constable who had brought it. Jenkins thought he was sure. Though the man was not in uniform he said he was a policeman. And it now occurred to Arthur that Furneaux might, in truth, be a friend—that all those hints of accusations, those veiled charges, which the detective had heaped upon him, might only have been in order to terrify him into flight, which flight for some reason or other Furneaux desired. And now, when Furneaux saw that Arthur did not fly, he had gone a step farther, and had sent Arthur the hint in this way, having an instinct all the time—perhaps a knowledge—that Arthur was innocent.

And Mr. Bagot, too, in the first hours of their acquaintance had wished the same, had impressed upon Arthur that he must fly .... Both strong-sighted men of the world, looking at the matter from different standpoints probably; both urged flight. Certainly it was a puzzle.

Of course, he was not fool enough to retain his confidence in Bagot after the events of the preceding twelve hours. Something more than a mere doubt had arisen in him as to that bland face and persuasive being. There were things hard to explain, though his simple-minded judgment refused to admit that Bagot had really meant to murder both Elinor and himself. Nevertheless, the fact that Bagot counseled flight would certainly prove rather a deterrent now than otherwise. But Furneaux counseled it, too! If Furneaux was a friend, then, Bagot was a friend, and if Bagot a friend, then Furneaux was equally a friend, since both advised the same thing.

How if both were enemies, and so meant to ruin him? Arthur saw that, if he once ran, he tenfold incriminated himself!

On the whole, however, he inclined to the decision that the letter was friendly. It had been brought by a constable; Elinor had twice assured him that Furneaux was acting for, not against, him. He trusted Elinor, her head, that is, but not the rest of her. Oddly enough, Elinor was even more emphatic in her assurance that Bagot was an enemy. Would Bagot, the enemy, counsel the same thing as Furneaux, the friend? They seemed to the plain soldier to be a mixed and intricate crew. He set his teeth.

"By Jove!" he vowed, "if we all lived a couple of centuries earlier, I'd strap the girl behind me on a horse, and be off with her!"

His own impulse, meanwhile, was to get out of it, out of all the misery and frustration left him by his grandfather, the imbroglio of that barge-business, the mystery, the bitter after-taste of that sight in the Ponds Covert when a man's hand rested on Elinor Hinton's shoulder, and she gazed tamely up into the man's face. The memory of it invariably maddened him. For a while he bit his mustache in a rage, until, to his real perplexity, he found himself dwelling rather on the remembrance of those long embraces during the deadly duel of the night, of Elinor's agitation when he kissed the stain on his wristband, of his own arm thrown around her neck and shoulders.

Foolish youth, he pressed the linen again to his lips, and forthwith achieved a mighty resolution. Perhaps she was yet to be wooed and won. Why should he not try? Would that other man have carried her so safely through the dark fury of the fight at "Nielpahar." To the devil, then, with mysterious motorists, and moonlit coverts, and all the witchcraft and chicanery that had beset him while he was letting slip the opportunity of winning the one woman he would ever love. When she wanted help, to whom did she come? Had she not said, even in the teeth of his bitter humour, that she might need him again? Oh, crass and blind that he should have so spurned her! It was not that he made up his mind to unbend and be penitent, but rather that he was possessed of a sickening fear that she might never forgive him. The thought soon became a torture. To end it, he must hie to Burnham and the yacht ›Mishe Nahma‹!

True, the King had ordered him to be at a certain inquest at two o'clock, but then, Furneaux, who knew a good deal more about the matter than the King, advised him to stop away.

It struck him that it would be rather subtle if he avoided the inquest, and gave the impression of flight without actually flying. How surprised everybody would be when they discovered him calmly occupying the Abbey again that evening! Being of the most open and honest nature, he chortled over this masterstroke of guile, though its genesis lay solely in the fact that he now had an excuse for visiting Elinor.

A bath and change of clothing helped in the process of rejuvenation. He was soon on the way to Burnham, whistling as he went, to keep his courage up, and thereby causing much surprise to a man who lay patiently beneath the heavy coverlet of the trees exactly opposite the

road leading to the Abbey. This watcher took no risks. He waited until Leigh's tall figure had swung out of sight. Then, with infinite pains to avoid observation, the stranger drew a bicycle from the brushwood, mounted, and rode off in the direction of Bridgewater.

Leigh's long strides made light of the few miles to Burnham. The ›Mishe Nahma‹ had steam up, but she occupied the same anchorage, and ten minutes in a boat brought him alongside.

"Miss Hinton aboard?" he asked, when a stolid sailor looked down at him from the yacht's gangway.

"I'll see, sir," said the man, who had evidently been trained in the "manners and rules of good society."

He did not return. A smart maid came instead.

"Miss Hinton is not at home, sir," she smirked.

Leigh's heart gave a great bound. Was this the beginning of the end for him?

"Not at home? Do you mean that she is not on board the yacht?"

The maid did not expect to be cross-questioned. She grew pert.

"When a gentleman is told that a lady is not at home that is usually sufficient, sir," she replied.

"But it is quite insufficient when the lady perhaps wishes to see the gentleman, and she is not told that he is asking for her. Please tell Miss Hinton."

"My mistress is asleep and must not be disturbed."

"Ah!"

Leigh smiled at the girl, and his smile was frank enough to disarm her wrath.

"Is Mr. Hinton on board?"

"It was Mr. Hinton, sir, who told me to give you that message."

A memory of Elinor's half confidence that she feared her father was in Bagot's power flashed through Arthur's mind. Hinton had been so agreeable a host during the dinner party that he certainly would not have sent so curt a dismissal to one of his guests who paid a call subsequently. What had happened in the meantime to raise his bile? Assuredly Bagot's influence was far-reaching, though its magnetism was gone where Leigh was concerned.

But he must think, and act quickly. He dived a hand into his pocket, and gave the girl a sovereign.

"What time will Miss Hinton be called?" he asked.

"At one o'clock, sir," said she, dropping her voice.

"I shall return at half-past one. Will you tell her that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Her only?"

"Yes, sir."

Away went the boat. Out of the tail of his eye Leigh was conscious of a face watching him grimly from a window of a deck saloon. It was Elinor's father, and he seemed to be in a very sour temper.

The hour was not yet noon. When Arthur landed again at the little quay he strolled among the few villas and cottages that constitute remote Burnham. His wits were keen and at work. The fight of twelve hours ago had done him a world of good. In this new clarity of mind he began to recast his views of Furneaux. It now seemed to him that the little Jersey man was a positive genius, a sprite of immense intelligence who was matching his small bright brain against the big, almost superhuman one of giant Bagot. In most affairs of life the contest would be unequal, but Leigh knew what a tremendous difference it makes if the majesty of the law is arrayed on the one side and naught but a criminal intent supports the other.

Suddenly he decided to carry out a bit of detective-work on his own account. Passing by a church, he found the door open. He went in. The place was empty. The key was in the lock of a small door leading to the belfry stairs. He took out the key, for fear of accident, climbed the stairs, ensconced himself among the bells behind the lattice-work through which their solemnities floated forth over the Somerset coast, and set himself to watch the comings and goings of people interested in the ›Mishe Nahma.‹

A boat went off from the shore occasionally, and parcels were delivered at the yacht's gangway, but these visitors were obviously local tradesmen. No one left the yacht. Arthur watched for three-quarters of an hour, and was thinking of descending from his lofty perch, when a man dashed through Burnham on a bicycle, almost leaped from his machine straight into a wherry, and was taken in hot haste to the ›Mishe Nahma.‹

Luckily, Arthur's eyesight was excellent, and he was able to see that the newcomer was met by Hinton in person. There was some talk, Hinton stepped into the boat, came ashore with the bicyclist, looked about, made an inquiry or two from shore loungers, found the boatman

who had piloted Leigh himself, and asked something that caused the man to point to the town.

"By Jove!" whistled Arthur, "I am in demand. But who on earth is the bicyclist Johnnie? I've never set eyes on him before. Can it be that beastly inquest that is pursuing me here?"

Still he hurried down and into the street. Turning a corner, he appeared on the promenade, and was seen. Instantly the iron-master waved to him, and it was quite noticeable that the fast-pedaling messenger faded away into the unknown.

"Queer!" communed Arthur. "At any rate, he doesn't want me!"

Hinton approached rapidly, with outstretched hand.

"My dear fellow," he cried, "those fools of servants of mine have only just told me you called at the yacht some time since. The idiots! I hurried on shore at once, in the forlorn hope that I might come across you. What luck!"

"What a liar!" thought Leigh.

But beyond this path of lies lay Elinor, and his new-born resolution was strong in him.

"I really meant to call again," he said with as pleasant a smile as he could summon to his aid.

"Of course you did. Now that is a nice thing to say. It shows you harbour no offence. We won't waste time signalling for the gig. What if we take this old tub that I jumped into just because it chanced to be alongside?"

"Marvellous!" said Arthur to himself. To Hinton he said: "Delighted!"

Crossing the tiny bay they discussed the weather, the yacht, the scenery, anything but the two topics that might reasonably have suggested themselves, for Arthur knew that Hinton was aware of his daughter's all-night escapade, through Bagot's telegram if by no other means, and he was equally sure that the ironmaster's change of attitude arose from something said by the mysterious rider of the bicycle.

On board the yacht he was pressed to have a cocktail and cigarette before lunch was served. He took neither. A young man who discovers that he is over head and ears in love with a young woman soon learns to be careful in these small details.

At last Elinor's swish of silk was heard. She was hurried and flurried. Arthur guessed that the maid had only just told her of his arrival.

"You ought to be at the inquest," she began.

"Well, you see I am not."

"But why?"

"I have a reason."

"What?"

"I was advised to keep away."

"Advised! By whom?"

"Elinor, my dear," broke in her father, "Mr. Leigh naturally prefers to lunch with us. It is a fine day, hot enough even here. What must it be in a stuffy—"

The girl was not to be driven aside by convention.

"Please tell me—who advised it?" she cried.

Leigh, though beginning to know her ways, was certainly taken aback by this directness. It was so utterly opposed to the tender scene he had rehearsed with his soul during the walk from the Abbey and while he kept vigil in the church-tower!

"Well, if you must have it," he said, "my friend, Furneaux."

He emphasized the word "friend." He fancied that Elinor might thus find a clue to his altered feelings.

But her fine eyes only blazed at him.

"Mr. Furneaux advised that!" she cried. "Surely there is some mistake! Why, your absence tends to incriminate you .... What have you done?

Are you sure he told you that? When did you see him?"

"I did not see him. He wrote to me. Here is his letter?"

Arthur produced the cryptic document signed with a sketch. She gave it one glance.

"He never wrote that!" she said indignantly.

"Oh, I think so."

She did not fail to catch the momentary reversion to his old stubbornness.

"How provoking you are, Mr. Leigh!" she cried. "Inspector Furneaux would not send you an important communication in that style. This is not his handwriting. Really, how easy it is to humbug you."

"Elinor!" protested Mr. Hinton again.

"But I mean it. Mr. Leigh must attend. What time is it?"

Arthur swallowed something. Instead of the colt driving the filly, here was the filly driving the colt! But he was loyal to his pact with himself, and with a strange humility he said:

"Please let me explain, Miss Hinton. I really do believe Mr. Furneaux would be pleased if I failed to put in an appearance to-day. I don't know much about these things, but I suppose I am a most important witness. With me away, the inquiry cannot proceed. There must be an adjournment, and that will be a good excuse. Don't you see? Furneaux may want more time—and less revelations."

Elinor's eyes narrowed. She seemed to discover some new and strange element in Arthur's composition. She blushed a little, and laughed.

"Oh, well," she murmured, and the storm subsided.

Hinton, protesting good-humouredly that really Elinor was mixing herself up in matters that in no way concerned her, suggested that the yacht should cruise for an hour during luncheon. There would be air in the saloon, then, and the cabins were terribly hot. Elinor was not favourable to the notion, but her father insisted. Leigh, of course, said nothing; he was content to await developments.

A perfect meal was served. Bagot's name was never mentioned, though Elinor's bandaged arm was eloquent of Bagot. Hinton was most cordial and friendly. He carried his bonhomie to the limit of rising before the coffee appeared.

"I'll just go and finish some letters," he said, "and tell the skipper to bring us to Burnham by three o'clock. You young people can entertain each other till then. Will that suit you, Leigh?"

Arthur was rendered nearly incoherent by gratitude. What a brick the man was!

Elinor favored her father with a quick glance of surprise, but he was busy lighting a cigar. That done, he took himself off.

"I have another reason for missing the inquest," began Arthur.

Elinor was peeling an apple.

"If you don't care for any fruit, you may smoke," she said.

"Please don't make my confession hard for me," he said.

"Confession! What further mischief have you been guilty of?"

"I only want to tell you what a fool I have been."

He paused. Elinor said nothing. Then he blushed, and desperation egged him on.

"Can we take up our lives just where they ended in the summer-house?" he continued.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "Lives! Ended!"

"I mean this ... I know now that I was favoured beyond all other men last night. Blind that I was!"

"You really do not deserve the nasty things you are saying about yourself. You were most good and brave while we were in that dreadful place. I hope the girl you are going to marry is not of a jealous disposition, because I mean to tell her, some day, what a chivalrous husband she possesses."

"Be as sarcastic as you like, but do listen."

"Pray, who is being sarcastic?"

"You ... Elinor. Why should you imagine yourself singing my praises to yourself?"

She lifted her left shoulder in that quizzical Spanish way of hers, yet she did not seem to resent the intimate use of her name.

"We are at loggerheads, quite," she said. "Let us talk about Inspector Furneaux. Has it never seemed strange to you"

"For a fool, I am a persistent one," he growled. "I am tired of misunderstandings. This time I mean to make myself clear, and I want to tell you, Elinor, that you are the only woman I have ever loved, or ever shall love, or shall ever want to love. You came into my life at an hour when all else was desperate, but the sun lights up deserts as well as the fair places of earth, and you have shone on my desert until my very soul aches for you. I don't care now whether you are rich or poor, or whether any other man has a prior claim on you. I did care yesterday, last night, this morning, but the divine knowledge has come to me that I would sooner die than be parted from you. Elinor, don't send me away!"

He had risen in his tense excitement and was leaning over her. After the first flash of wonder had passed from her face, she cast down her eyes, her head bent lower and lower, and her hands involuntarily crept up to shield her burning cheeks. Suddenly she burst into tears, and that maddened him.

"Oh, don't cry, Elinor! I cannot bear that! If what I have said is painful to you, well, tell me to go, and you will never see me again. ... But don't cry!"

"No, not that!" she murmured between her sobs. "I—I—what am I to say? ... Please, please, come to me—some other time."

Suddenly she sprang from the chair and raced to a window. It happened to be on the seaward side.

"I wonder what sort of towns those in South Wales are," she said in a quite natural tone. "We have never crossed the Channel. Mr. Bagot says that Cardiff and Newport are drab places, all coal-stained. You can leave the coffee and the liqueurs, Martin. Mr. Leigh will help himself."

The silent-footed man servant, whose unnoted appearance had caused Arthur to think that Elinor had lost her senses, vanished again. The girl quitted the window. She had seen nothing. Her eyes were glistening. She came near, delightfully shy. She put her hands on his shoulders.

"Now ... just once!" she whispered, and their lips met.

"No, I said 'once,'" she protested, springing away like a coy wood nymph. "You silly Arthur! There is glass on every side. Please sit over there, and smoke, and drink coffee, and talk about anything but me."

"Then I must either be dumb or babble in delirium," he cried, his every nerve tingling with a frenzy of delight.

"You will kindly be sensible. I have such a lot to tell you, now. But first answer me this—why did you say 'If I were free,' and drive me away from you?"

"Because I felt myself tied by poverty. I am poor in money—a few hundred pounds all told—but I am the richest man in the world, too, because I love"

"Not another word. I shall ring for Martin. But you are not so poor. You own that estate. Many men would count that wealth."

"I fear, my beloved, you have not exactly understood the effect of my grandfather's will."

"I think I have. Do not forget that my friend, Mrs. Bates, will find the money to pay off the mortgage—that is, if it be necessary."

"But how?"

"Has it never occurred to you that Mr. Bagot is the greatest living mesmerist? He can control almost anybody. My father is absolutely in his power. My unhappy half-brother, who has caused us trouble enough already, is wholly his dupe. It was at Bagot's bidding that he strove to kidnap me—"

"Your brother—was he the motorist?"

"Yes. I could hardly tell you at first, could I?"

Arthur leaped up, and she was in his arms again before she could protest.

"Oh, my love, my love," he said, "how cruelly have I deceived myself!"

"I shall shriek for help if you don't sit down," she cried, though she lay passive enough in his embrace. "Yet one wonders wherein you were deceived," she added.

"Bagot, the detestable, led me to the Ponds Covert, where I saw you meet the man whose arm I nearly wrenched from its socket."

"You—spied—on me!"

"No, Heaven knows I did not. Rather did I run the instant I saw who it was. Bagot brought me there—made up some plausible reason—boasted of his superior hearing or something of the sort. I was frantic, carried out of myself. That night I promised to lease the Abbey to him."

"And Harry urged me to meet him, vowing on his honour not to attempt any stupid abduction, so I went, and found him, as I thought, almost ready to leave Bagot. Ah! what a plotter the man is! He invented the explanation so as to quiet my suspicions. Well, it is a point to him, but I have scored many more. Now, you really must go to the other side of the table."

"Ring for Martin, and let me gag and blindfold him."

"Oh, dear, dear, and we have so much to say! Bagot, then, can bend most minds to his will. Few people escape. The Bateses are immune, owing solely to their stolidness. I should have fallen beneath the spell long since were it not that—that there is an aversion of the body that is stronger than the affinity of the mind. But you, you were an easy victim. I couldn't drag you from him. Did you not always feel a sense of confidence when he was present, and a positive disease when he left you?"

"Rank lunacy I call it," broke in Arthur.

"Yet I am surprised you never tried to find out why Inspector Furneaux should be in Somersetshire?"

"He is a detective, and this horrid barge affair—"

"That is a matter for the local police. He was sent for by me. I want to rescue my father and brother. It was the merest accident that he was present when that crime was committed, but now he attends to nothing else, because he is sure, and I agree with him, that it holds the key to all that has gone before."

"But Bagot didn't kill the man?"

"How do you know?"

"Furneaux himself admits that Bagot was in Chepstow, over there in Monmouthshire, at the very time the murder was committed."

"Bagot has a long arm."

"You mean he has accomplices?"

The word was out before he realized its scope, but Elinor did not flinch.

"No matter who suffers ultimately, Bagot must be stopped," she said imperiously. "The man is a blight, a curse."

"He certainly bewitched me," said Arthur, trying eagerly to take her mind off his unhappy slip. "Do you know, on the night after our luncheon-party, I was lying in bed awake when I heard noises. I got up, made a somewhat nerve-trying search, and I actually believed that I saw my grandfather and you, hand in hand, walking down the laurel path between the lawns and the orchard."

Elinor laughed, and the music of her laughter was good to hear.

"That was rather a mad trick," she cried, "but I am addicted to pranks, and Mr. Furneaux is positively a mischievous urchin in such things. It was his idea to masquerade as old Mr. Rollaston Leigh. He said you would hardly shoot your grandfather's ghost. You actually watched him while he was noting details from the portrait."

"I am still in the dark. What in the world were you and Furneaux doing in the Abbey grounds at that hour? And you were in the house, too. I heard you."

"We were searching the secret passage."

"The—what?"

"The passage that leads through the old wall and under the Abbot's Port to the mound."

Leigh looked so genuinely amazed that Elinor looked amazed, too.

"Don't you know of it?" she gasped.

"Are you serious?" he said.

"Perhaps that is why Mr. Furneaux asked me not to mention it to anyone. But this is beyond belief. Bagot, then, is really a magician. He knows—something, if not all. The plan was found in that poor Mr. Dix's clothes. It evidently escaped the murderer's search, as there were no other documents. A copy of it is in my cabin. Let me bring it to you."

She went out, blowing a kiss to him at the door.

Leigh, who did not care if she were a lineal descendant of some Lancashire witch so long as she was his, rose and looked through a port-hole. He only meant to waylay her as she returned, but his glance fell on the coast, and he was conscious of a feeling of surprise when he saw that the yacht was still moving westward, she being then abreast of Porlock, with Dunkerry Beacon raising its great hump behind the bay.

It was three o'clock, the hour fixed for their return to Burnham! He was puzzling about the matter when Elinor returned, followed closely by her father, who had seen her passing along the deck.

The girl did not mean Mr. Hinton to know what the paper was that she carried.

"There!" she said, handing a document to Arthur, "put it in your pocket and study it at leisure. It will interest you. Moreover, you will soon be leaving us, and you really must go and see about that inquest. Tell Mr. Furneaux I kept you, and he will devise some scheme to clear you with the court, because he never wrote that extraordinary letter."

"Our skipper took us a little farther than I expected," broke in Hinton genially. "Perhaps Mr. Leigh will stay for tea. Every Englishman likes tea, you know, my dear."

"Tea!" said the girl. "Why, we seem to have just finished lunch." She laughed and reddened. "Anyhow, Mr. Leigh must be ashore long before tea-time."

"Well, the yacht is doing her best. You see, we ran a little too far up."

Arthur remembered the bicyclist, and those kisses of Elinor's had wonderfully clarified his brain.

"At present, Mr. Hinton, we are many miles from Burnham, and adding to their number each five minutes," he said.

He was watching the iron-master, but he felt, rather than saw, a sudden rigidity in Elinor.

"Oh, no," said Hinton airily. "You are quite mistaken. It is very easy to confuse a coast line."

"I was bred on this coast," insisted Arthur. "If you look through that window you will see Dunkerry and Exmoor. Not far ahead you will find Chapman Barrow. We are a good thirty miles from Burnham, and running away from it as fast as the yacht can steam."

"Father!"

Elinor's voice had a ring of steel in it that Arthur had heard only once before—and that was in the agony of the fight at "Nielpahar."

"It is all nonsense," cried the older man angrily, darting a venomous glance at Arthur.

"I fear not," said Elinor with scornful coldness. "Even here Bagot's hand is felt. But both you and he seem to have forgotten that I own the ›Mishe Nahma.‹ The captain takes his orders from me. Come with me to him; you, too, Arthur. What a vile plot! And you, whom I have learned to call 'father'—a party to it! Do you ever think of my mother? Really, I am minded to shoot Bagot!"

12

Light in Darkness

There was no cheerfulness about the homeward voyage. The yacht's sailing master seemed to be surprised when Elinor, letting her father down lightly, told him to return to Burnham at once. He glanced at Hinton, who had the good grace to say:

"Yes, Pomeroy, that's all right. We have changed our minds."

Leigh half expected that when they returned to the salon for tea there would be a stormy scene between father and daughter. But nothing of the kind—Hinton suddenly reverted to his severely dignified, and, it must be said, more natural manner, suggested tea being served at once, sent the silent-footed Martin for a box of special cigars which Leigh really must sample, and generally behaved as though it was the most reasonable thing in the world that he should have tried to run off with two of the three people who were likely to prove thorns in the fat sides of Chauncey Bagot.

Arthur, of course, was at a loss to understand why Elinor should have asserted her right to control the movements of the ›Mishe Nahma.‹ It was strange, almost fantastic, that she should refuse to take her father into her confidence where Bagot was concerned. The man might have all the powers she credited him with, for Leigh himself was now beginning to fear him, but the majority of young women in her position would, at least, have striven to argue her parent into a right view—or that which she deemed to be the right view—of a plausible and dangerous scoundrel.

That she was deeply annoyed was evident. She felt humiliated. She was devoted to her father and brother—Leigh was slowly appreciating the full measure of the service she was giving them—and it cut her to

the quick to find that Bagot's slightest wish was their law. She showed the depth of her distress by a sudden question:

"When did you hear from that man—father?" and the pause was eloquent. "How came he to bid you take Mr. Leigh away from a place where his presence is so desirable just now?"

No need to ask who "that man" was. Elinor's scorn of eye and lip sufficed as labels. But Hinton merely shrugged.

"Why worry?" said he coolly. "You have had your own way. I thought I was doing Mr. Leigh a good turn, and certainly acting properly in your interests. I still think T was right, but you have chosen to thwart my wishes. Let it rest at that."

"In effect, you refuse to answer?"

"No. He sent me a message—advised the voyage, in fact."

"When?"

"About one o'clock."

"By the cyclist," Arthur could not help saying.

"Ah, you saw? Then you are an adept at concealing your knowledge, Mr. Leigh."

"Not much of the adept about me," laughed Arthur. "Ask Elinor—she will tell you what a blockhead I can be."

Then he blushed, for the name had slipped out unaware. There was a moment's silence, but he was determined that there should be no further misunderstanding where Elinor and he were concerned.

"I ought to explain, Mr. Hinton, that extraordinary circumstances have conspired to bring your daughter and myself into close communion during the past few days. Those circumstances go far to explain our present relations. I have asked her to marry me."

Hinton's face paled. It took on the severely Non-conformist aspect that was so outrageously opposed to his thick-and-thin adherence to Bagot's cause.

"It is impossible," he said, with a curious grimace. "She is promised elsewhere."

"Promised to Bagot, do you mean?"

"Well—yes."

"To a man who tried to murder her and me last night—who is more than suspected of being the author, if not the actual agent, of poor Mr. Dix's death?"

"My dear sir, who is Mr. Dix, and who says that Bagot killed him?"

"Father," broke in the girl desperately, "why do you champion Bagot?"

"Why should I not? He is of the highest probity, a man unequalled for his attainments, a man whom everybody knows; yet here is a young gentleman I have only seen twice in my life telling me coolly that he proposes to marry you, aiding and abetting you in actions which no self-respecting girl could possibly commit, and actually daring to suggest that a world's genius like Bagot is a felon. Really, you seem to be rather mad, both of you."

Elinor sighed, but made no reply. Leigh took heed of her silence. She could have said so much of Bagot, her injured arm might have given such good testimony in her behalf, that she had some powerful reason for keeping shut lips. He would imitate her example, at any rate with regard to contentious matters.

"Yes," he said, "these are first-rate cigars, but my taste for the Havana leaf has been spoiled by smoking Boer tobacco. Have you ever tried any?"

Even Hinton laughed at this wrench of topics.

"Just a word of advice to you young people," he said quietly. "Don't oppose Bagot. You, Leigh, don't carry enough guns. He could brush aside a million men if they hindered him."

"He tried to brush me aside last night," said Arthur. "With a revolver," he added.

"You will not convince my father that Mr. Bagot can do any wrong," broke in Elinor sadly. Again was there a hardly perceptible warning in her words, and Leigh refrained from extending the catalogue of Bagot's misdeeds.

The yacht ran into Burnham roadstead about seven o'clock. Somewhat earlier, Hinton went to his cabin—to finish some correspondence, he explained. Elinor's distress was shown by her sorrow-laden eyes and quivering lips.

"He is going to warn Bagot of failure," she said. "What shall I do? We seem to be groping in the dark. Even Mr. Eurneaux is powerless, and I did not dream that Bagot had my father so deeply in the toils."

"How long have you known the man?" asked Arthur, whose wits became the more entangled as his knowledge of existing conditions increased.

"Since I was a child, a girl of eight or nine. I seem now to discover a far-reaching calculation in every act of his. Mr. Hinton is not my father. My own father died when I was hardly able to walk. I do not remember him at all. My stepfather was a distant cousin, who lost his wife about the same time that my mother lost her husband. Bagot, his friend, brought about a marriage that seemed reasonable enough at the time, but at last I am beginning to appreciate his far-reaching motive. The man whom I quickly came to look upon as my father has always been under his domination. My mother and her people must have known that, and the knowledge made them distrustful. Our Philadelphia business came through her line, so, when she died three years ago, I found myself the owner of everything, while my stepfather has only a life interest—devoid of control. Perhaps Bagot arranged that too. Oh, he is subtle, and his arm is long!"

"It is you, then, who are possessed of millions?" cried Arthur, with a sudden pang of the old terror at his heart. Why should this delightful girl give herself to him? She had the world at her feet. How came it that she was ready to endow a mere stranger with her wealth and her magnificent youth?

She laughed dolefully.

"You see to what straits my millions have brought me! I, who never knew father or brother, and who apparently revelled in the possession of both when Mr. Hinton and his son came into our family circle, have been robbed of both—by Bagot. He would also steal me, nearly succeeded in fact, but you have twice prevented him. Above all, he would steal my money. He has already wrung many thousands out of Mr. Hinton, and poor Harry is completely under his thumb. I tell you he is a plague, a canker in the age. If we lived in other times I would suspect him as the Apocalyptic Beast!"

Then Leigh started like a nervous woman. He recalled Bagot's extraordinarily lucid exposition of the doctrinal peculiarities and strange allegories contained in Revelation. Though Leigh himself had no fuller knowledge of the debated *Apokalypsis Ioannou* than any other young man of fair general reading, he had followed Bagot's luminous discourse concerning the Muratorian Canon, the Alogian Rejection, the Memphitic and Thebaic exclusions, with an interest and understanding that might more reasonably be expected from him during an argument on the causes and unwritten history of the Boer War. That was due to the magic of Bagot's crystal intellect; it was passing strange to hear from Elinor's lips such a curious comparison.

The girl saw the perplexity in his face; it alarmed her.

"I don't want you to fear Bagot!" she cried. "I only dreaded his influence over you, but I want you to fight him ever, just as you fought him last night."

The appeal was not thrown away. It steadied Leigh's troubled brain.

"I shall never fear him," he reassured her, "but I do begin to feel rather helpless. And how can Furneaux cope with such a man!"

"I asked him that very question long before fate threw me, yes, literally threw me into your arms, and guess what he said."

"I could never guess what Furneaux would say."

"He said: 'I have met many criminals who were gifted far beyond me, Miss Hinton, but in each and all of them there was an intellectual kink, and when the strain came on the rope of their intelligence that kink proved fatal. Now, I have discovered Bagot's kink, which will lead to his undoing.'"

"What is it?"

"His invention—the great departure that is to bring about the millennium. You remember, I told you."

The plash of oars broke in on their eager talk. They looked out shoreward. A boat was pulling away from the yacht's side. Elinor rose instantly with the cry:

"You have been too many hours away from the Abbey. Mr. Furneaux may be wanting you. You cannot realize how your absence may be twisted to suit Bagot's ends. You must go instantly. Don't forget you have that plan. It is quite clear. Tomorrow I shall tell you more. You must not wait now. Good-night, my Arthur! I have sought and longed for you since we lost each other in Lyonnesse!"

On deck they met Hinton.

"You will stay for dinner, Leigh," he said. "What difference does it make now whether you reach home at eight or eleven?"

"I don't know, and that is why I am going now," was the stout answer.

Another boat took Leigh ashore. He shipped a second pair of oars and tried to overtake the first boat. He nearly succeeded. He was so close to the small pier when a sailor sprang on to it that he could see the letter-bag the man was carrying. He noticed, too, that the messenger went to the post-office.

"Nothing very suspicious about that," he mused, and forthwith stepped out briskly Abbey-wards. The midsummer gloaming was wrapping the valley in its cloak of mystery. A brooding peace had settled on woodland and pasture, darkening the first tints of gold in the cornfields and etching in deep tones the great patches of purple clover. Laden bees sang past his ear on the last flight of a busy day. Nature was about to sleep. It was an hour for reverie, yet his mind was full of a thousand thoughts. They had but slight cohesion. Their blurred outlines were resolved into the thrilling consciousness that he loved and was beloved. What a fairy domain was this vale of the Parret when seen through a lover's entranced eyes! It seemed quite reasonable now that Elinor and he should have wanted to fly to close embrace at their first meeting. Was she not the Belle Damosel? Jenkins was exalted into a prophet, a very seer.

"Yes, by Jove," said Arthur to himself, "Jenkins clinched matters the instant Elinor set foot within the Abbot's Port!"

At a bend in the road, on the last little knoll whence a view of Burnham was obtainable, he turned and looked at the yacht, just because she was there. In the distance he saw a dogcart approaching. He could not distinguish its two occupants, but one seemed to be a man in uniform. By the fortunate accident of the presence of a clump of bushes on the hill, Leigh knew that he himself was not visible. Giving play to the scout's instinct, he sank among the tall grass by the roadside, crept in behind the briars and honeysuckle, and waited until the vehicle passed. The horse was travelling rapidly. The driver was an ostler from a Burnham hotel, his companion a sailor, with ›Mishe Nahma‹ written in golden letters on his capband. The men were talking and smoking, but the sailor's eyes were scanning the road.

"Looking for me," thought Arthur. "He is the man sent ashore by Hinton, and he saw my boat following him. He expects to be asked if he met me on the road, and is watching for me. Well, all is fair in love and war. Here goes to surprise him!"

"Hi! hi!" he shouted, springing out of his ambush.

The trap was pulled up some forty yards ahead. Clearly, both sailor and driver were astonished at finding someone hurrying along the road over which they had just passed.

"Taking a note to Mr. Bagot?" asked Arthur cheerfully, when he overtook the vehicle.

"Yes, sir," said the sailor.

"So I understood from Miss Hinton. I thought I would save you the long drive to 'Nielpahar' by telling you that Mr. Bagot is most probably not there."

Now it chanced that the iron-master had told the man to keep his eyes open between Burnham and Bridgewater in case Mr. Bagot came that way, so Arthur had arrived at the truth by false logic.

"Do you know where he is, sir?" said the messenger.

"No; I have half a notion that he may be at my place, the Abbey. At any rate, he is almost sure to call there after dinner."

"If I thought that ..." began the sailor, scratching an ear perplexedly.

"Perhaps it will avoid all difficulty if you give me the note and I convey it to Mr. Bagot."

"But ..."

"Please yourself. I am sure you will not find him at his house. Of course, I accept full responsibility. Should he fail to turn up, say by nine o'clock, I will send one of my men with it."

The driver seemed to approve of the suggestion. The sailor was aware that Mr. Leigh, of the Abbey, was acquainted with Bagot, and his friendship with one member of the Hinton family had not been unnoticed in the forecastle.

"In that case, sir, it would suit me down to the ground if you took charge of it," he said. "The fact is, sir," he added sheepishly, "Bill here, an' myself, would like to look in at the Bush this evenin'. There's a bean-feast on."

"Lucky I hailed you. Drop me at the Abbey road."

Arthur climbed to the back seat, pocketed a letter addressed to C. Bagot, Esq., and chatted with the two men until they deposited him on his own property. It was his original intention to follow them leisurely into Bridgewater and hand the letter to Inspector Furneaux, so he stopped the dogcart somewhat short of the private road, explaining that he meant to take a short cut, but meaning really to follow the footpath by the Parret. To lend colour to the assumption that he was going to his own house, he climbed a gate on the opposite side of the road.

The horse trotted away. Sheltered by a thick hedge, Leigh watched the vehicle as it passed rapidly through the long straight avenue of trees that converted the road into an arcade of sombre boscage. The light was now deepening into dusk, and the men had almost disappeared—indeed, in another instant he would have crossed the road to reach the

stile, when he saw a figure leap out from among the trees opposite the Abbey road and peer earnestly after the diminishing dogcart.

"Steady the Buffs!" thought Leigh, and he stood fast.

The newcomer seemed to decide that the occupants of the vehicle did not demand his attention. He glanced back as though to make sure that no one was approaching from the direction of Burnham, and forthwith vanished in the shade.

"So ho!" said Leigh. "That clears a doubtful point. Now I know how Bagot ascertained that I was going to the yacht this morning. But two can play at that game."

It was like old times when he began to stalk his quarry. Many a night had he wormed himself across the garden or paddock of a Boer farmhouse and listened to the talk on the stoep in the hope that a stray phrase might reveal the whereabouts of a marauding commando. There was a keen joy now in pitting his skill against that of the spy, and he had the advantage of his boyhood's memories in the knowledge of every clump of brushwood and unmarked passage through the trees. By making a detour, he reached a slight hollow exactly opposite the junction of the roads. Worming his way across it, he crept under a mass of rhododendrons until he could see the place where the other man was in hiding; then he awaited developments.

Half an hour sped slowly. It grew nearly pitchdark in the wood, but the white roads were visible enough. At last he heard the strenuous panting of a high-powered automobile coming from Bridgewater. It slowed a long way off, and stopped almost noiselessly at the foot of the Abbey road.

"Gustave!" said Bagot's deep, musical voice.

"Monsieur," was the reply, and there was a slight movement of foliage.

"Have you seen anyone?"

"None but a sailor from the yacht, driven in a two-wheeled carriage by a man like a groom, monsieur."

"A sailor from the ›Mishe Nahma‹?"

"Exactly, monsieur."

"But the yacht left Burnham at one o'clock!"

"Undoubtedly, monsieur."

"Ah, I have it. This man was on shore, and the ›Mishe Nahma‹ sailed without him. He is looking for me, thinking I may know her first port of call."

"Just what I thought, monsieur."

"Well, he will have a pleasant drive for nothing. I do not return to 'Nielpahar' to-night. The place reeks of police. No need to remain here. Our birds are caged. Put your bicycle in the tonneau and take the wheel. I am tired. I want food and wine. Dinner awaits us at the Ponds Covert."

The car backed and turned. The fumes from the exhaust were belched into Arthur's face as he lay beneath the rhododendrons. But he laughed silently.

"Glad you are tired, Bagot," he chortled. "Otherwise you might have run on to Burnham and seen a brilliantly illuminated yacht, and that might have surprised you."

But Bagot's mention of "food and wine" had suggested the excellence of such articles, for, truth to tell, Arthur had not eaten heartily on board the ›Mishe Nahma.‹ He decided now that Jenkins was a more desirable companion than Inspector Furneaux during the next hour. Yet the atmosphere of deceit and double-dealing that Bagot had brought with him lingered there like the fumes of the petrol, and Arthur was minded, though for no very definite reason, to enter the Abbey by his own secret path. He ran lightly past the closed gate, counted the oak trees by the side of the towering wall, climbed the fifteenth, and soon found himself perched above the gargoyle.

Before dropping down among the ivy, idle curiosity impelled him to put his hand into the gaping mouth of stone. To his very great surprise, his fingers closed on the butt of the revolver hidden there in a moment of absurd panic. The amazing thing was that Furneaux had not removed it, though he knew it was there. But there was no accounting for the little man's methods. Arthur put the weapon into the pocket that already contained Hinton's letter to Bagot and Elinor's drawing of the hidden passage in the Abbey. He descended his stair of ivy branches, walked quietly up the garden, went to the dining-room window, and found it latched and bolted, though he had gone out that way in the morning.

So, after all, he had to take the side path by the stables, and every dog in the "Place of Sojourn," hearing the strange footsteps, set up a din of barking that awoke the echoes.

In the midst of the turmoil he came upon one of the under gardeners peering out into the courtyard. The man was so startled at seeing him that Arthur's suspicions were stirred. He resolved on a test that more than once had made a Kaffir deem the Baas a white witch-doctor.

"Thought I had gone off in the yacht, eh?" he said sternly.

"Well, sir ..." and nothing else came from those stuttering lips.

"It is rather rotten that one's own servants should be in the pay of people who are one's enemies," went on Leigh, pressing home the chance shaft that had struck so truly. "Now, pay heed to me, you rascal. If you endeavour to leave the Manor to-night, or I have the least cause to believe that you are giving information to anyone at any time about my business, I'll—hand you over to the police."

He was going to threaten a direct and personal vengeance, but he fancied a reference to the law would prove more potent. He strode into the hall, thinking of Bagot's "long arm," and Jenkins came swiftly at his voice.

The old man's delight at his presence was shown by a volley of eager words.

"Oh, Master Arthur," he cried, "where have you been? You were wanted by so many people, an' the inquest is adjourned, an' Mr. Lawson said he couldn't understand why you didn't turn up, an' that other one, the little man, sniffed, an' said you'd surely get yourself into trouble one of these days."

"So Mr. Furneaux called, eh? Is he coming back to-night?"

"No, sir. Said he was goin' to Bristol, as it was more than likely you'd be away till to-morrow or next day."

"All the better. Bring me some dinner, Jenkins. And, by the way, what is the name of this skunk?" Leigh pointed to the under gardener.

"Banks, sir. He's one of them that looks after the animiles."

"Kindly look after him, to-night. See that he is not allowed out, nor anybody else, for that matter, without my consent."

"And if there's any callers, sir?"

"Tell me who they are before you answer their questions."

Jenkins seemed to discover a new tone in the young master of the Abbey. It pleased him. It was with a magnificent air that he made known "Mr. Leigh's orders" in the servants' hall.

In the library Arthur picked up a letter from Mowle and Mowle, among some others of no importance. It had arrived by the evening post, and had been written that day.

> *We are favoured with instructions from a Mr. Chauncey Bagot to prepare a lease of the Abbey Manor to him.* (it ran) *Mr. Bagot says he can arrange the Dix and Churchill mortgage, but, under the*

conditions, the rent must be nominal. He informs us that exceptional circumstances may prevent you from writing to us, but asks that a member of our firm should be at hand early on Thursday morning in order that the affair can be carried through without delay. Mr. Bagot evidently wishes to act promptly, as he inclosed a check for preliminary expenses, so our Mr. Philip Mowle awaits you at the above address, whither Mr. Bagot and your good self will, as stated in his letter, arrive on Thursday before noon.

Then Arthur looked at "the above address," and learnt that the solicitor wrote from a Bristol hotel.

"Ah!" he smiled, "Bristol again! Furneaux has a finger in the pie as usual. Now, what shall I do with Hinton's letter?"

Though engaged in a very serious fight against Bagot, he had a gentleman's prejudice against opening a letter addressed to his enemy. He thought he had done right in intercepting it, but the limit of his intent was to hand it to Furneaux, and let the detective deal with it as he thought fit. This visit of Furneaux's to Bristol complicated matters. All he could do now, with any degree of plausibleness, would be to forward the letter to Bagot in the morning, and explain that he had half expected to meet him overnight; Mowle and Mowle's communication gave a peg of a sort on which to hang an excuse for the anticipated meeting.

But that brought the query: Why was Bagot so determined to become the Abbey's tenant? Why was he so sure that Arthur would ultimately agree to his terms?

The man might be a silver-tongued genius indeed, but how could he hope to charm into compliance with his desires one whom he had striven to kill, and who was supposed at that moment to be virtually his prisoner on board the ›Mishe Nahma‹? Then Arthur recollected that the solicitor must have been summoned from London before the turmoil of the previous night. By this time Bagot was aware that some part of his scheme had miscarried. But what wizard's spell had brought Furneaux to Bristol? Therein lay further puzzlement. No matter how Arthur looked at the problem, its solution seemed to rest with the lease.

Suddenly he rapped his head with clenched knuckles.

"The plan!" he muttered. "Elinor's plan … 'found in poor Dix's clothes,' she said … is that the solution?"

He took it out of his pocket, where it lay with the revolver and Hinton's letter. Before he could even unfold it, Jenkins was in the room to lay the cloth. Back went the paper again. Arthur was growing wary.

He wondered if Bagot knew that Furneaux was in Bristol.

"Did the detective, Mr. Furneaux I mean, tell you of his own accord that he was leaving Bridgewater?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Queer man he is. Shouted it out as he was driving off in Inspector Lawson's trap."

"Why shout?"

"It sort of slipped his mind, I suppose, sir, until he was nearly across the courtyard."

Leigh's hand stroked his chin. He was not wholly devoid of experience of Furneaux's candid methods. He could almost hear him chuckling: "I'm open, open as the day ... quite frank ... tell everybody everything."

"At what time was he here?" said Leigh.

"About four o'clock, sir."

"Have any of the men been out since—that fellow Banks, for instance?"

"Yes, sir, sev'ral of 'em. Banks fed the dogs an' the rest, an' went to the post."

"Does Banks drink?"

"Well, sir, he likes a glass or two, but I've never seen him the worse, as the sayin' is."

"Fill him full. Tank him up with whiskey. I would like him to feel quarrelsome about ten o'clock."

"But, Master Arthur!"

"I have my reasons. It's a waste of good liquor, but he may find his tongue that way, and I want him to talk—to yield to the pump."

Leigh dined sumptuously. Though the viands were cold, he was hungry. There was wine on the table, and Jenkins recommended it, yet it remained untasted, for Arthur thought it best to keep his head clear, and never was man more in need of a clear head than he before he slept that night.

The meal ended, a cigar lit, and Jenkins gone to attend to the tanking of Banks, Leigh was free to examine the plan. At first he could make nothing of it. A rough outline sketch of the house and gardens was so lacking in detail that he was not a minute in hitting upon a dotted line that seemed to run from the south side of the house along the west front until it reached the old wall that held the Abbot's Port. Thence it followed the high boundary wall, and turned off abruptly toward the

locality of the mound. Two crosses apparently marked the beginning and the end of what Elinor had described as "a secret passage." She was on the point of saying something about it when he himself changed the whole trend of their thoughts by discovering that the yacht was running away with them.

But near each cross was a circle, and within the circle that stood inside the plan of the house itself, were a figure and two other figures, thus: 4'6. To help in the solution of this puzzle, he tried to piece together in his memory the unnerving impressions of that haunted night when Bagot had actually forced him by auto-suggestion to destroy and hide the evidences of a crime.

He remembered the rolling of a ring or coin down a series of steps, the murmur of words, the search of the bedrooms, and the circular room. Ah, was that it? One circle, at least, assumed a certain significance. Perhaps, if he surveyed the ground, things now hidden might become patent. He went to his own room, lit the pink candle Elinor had given him, stuck it in a candlestick, and, by way of experiment, paced the floor, the corridors, and the floor of the next room. Then he learnt, for the first time in his life, that the dividing wall must be at least three feet thick, though it had no strain to bear, being a mere partition!

He saw instantly why one might live in the house fifty years and never find out this abnormality. There was nothing to guide the eye. The rooms were entered from corridors that met at a right angle. They were so large that the loss of a foot or so in each room was not perceptible. Here, then, was space and to spare for a passage. Candle in hand and cigar in mouth, he made for the lumber room overhead. Here he was at fault for a long time. He counted five columns to the left, that being the side of the phenomenally thick wall, and examined the woodwork on each side of the column. It was cracked and creaky, and sounded hollow all over, but force alone would enable him to see what lay behind. Then he applied the figures 4'6 which argued a measurement, but he took it as signifying breadth and thus wasted many minutes.

At last he came to regard it as height, but failed wholly to justify a theory of any sort until he scrutinized the stone piers thoroughly. He met with no success until he reached the fifth shaft of the compound pillar which stood approximately nearest to the probable line of the passage. Here he noted an interstice between the lesser column and its main trunk. Seemingly, the division extended from base to capital, but when Leigh's slow forefinger passed within, somewhat on a level with his shoulder, it encountered a hook, or catch, which came out under

pressure.

There is an eerieness, a phantom glimpse of the unknown, that always attends such a discovery in an old mansion. Though he knew now that Elinor and Furneaux, for motives of their own, had gone that way several nights earlier, he was conscious of a quick thrill of excitement. He had found what he was looking for, having persisted in the search because he knew that something was there somewhere, but none the less did his heart throb more rapidly when that piece of bent iron appeared from its cunningly devised hiding-place.

Attached to it was a thin, wrought-iron chain. He pulled more strongly, and heard a rumbling behind the wainscot in a section of the wall. More chain came, until a yard or so had appeared from the depths of the pillar. Then it stopped, but nothing happened until he kicked the wainscot, and a whole panel swung inward.

Again, though sure that this very thing would happen, he was so surprised that he nearly dropped his candlestick. Stooping to peer within the narrow doorway thus revealed, he relaxed his grip on the chain, and the oak panel was abruptly slammed in his face.

Then he laughed, and, if his mirth had a hollow sound in it, it arose, perhaps, from the deep arches and chill emptiness of the room. But he laughed because of the trick he had played on himself. He realized that a stout and heavy lever bolt kept the panel in its place unless the chain was held taut. Anyone within, of course, could lift the bolt without using the chain. By no more simple and effective device could absolute secrecy be attained. Short of stripping off the whole of the wainscoting, the door could never be located. Tapping was useless, even misleading: he ascertained afterwards that all the panels were clear of the wall, and the movable one was the most rigid among twenty-four.

He looked at his candle. It would last for hours yet. He felt in his pockets to make sure he had matches. He examined the revolver, saw that it was loaded in three chambers, and quite dry, as no water ever passed through the mouth of the gargoyle in its present position.

Then he pulled the chain again, placed his shoulder against the open panel, and passed within.

13

At Close Quarters

There was a sense of being immured in a tomb when the panel snapped back into its place, which it did the instant the restraint of Leigh's shoulder was removed. The candle flickered in the sudden draught, but soon recovered, and burned with placid flame again. A hasty glance to right and left showed an arched passage. On the right it dipped into obscurity; on the left it ended abruptly in a wall, the masonry of which was much more recent in construction than the rest of the stonework.

It was an odd moment for the mind to dwell on the seemingly irrelevant, but Arthur could not help recalling Inspector Furneaux's aimless questions anent Rollaston Leigh's tastes: "And architecture, too, ... he knew his way there? You were away at the time of his death; if about that time he made any repairs, you would not have been aware of them?"

Was this walling up of the passage one of the old man's "repairs"?—if so Jenkins must know something of it. Strange that Leigh's thought should perplex itself about the solid, tangible fact of the blank wall to the left, when he was faced by the intangible mystery and gloom of the open way to the right! But so it was. On the left inquiry was denied by stone and mortar; on the right it might be ceded to the bold heart and untroubled eye, and that trait of stubbornness in Arthur forthwith urged him to go to the left. He went only a few feet, peered at the wall, noted that the ancient masonry on both sides had not been cut away to permit any mortising of the new with the old, examined the paved floor, which had evidently not been disturbed for centuries, and went back to the doorway.

He paused there a little while to admire the action of the lever bolt. A block of ironwood, or it might be lignum-vitae, fitted into two slits in the wall. One end was secured to an iron bolt on which it moved easily; the other end could be lifted by the chain. This wooden bar would not warp; when raised, its downward thrust must infallibly tend to close the panel, and when at rest in the stone sockets it was tight and immovable sideways.

Somehow, its blend of scheming and honesty suggested old Leigh's character. It was at once astute and unyielding, this door that was not a door, this simple thing of everyday life twisted to the unusual. Here, Arthur fancied, the original wall had merely been hewn through. There was no fresh cement, or, at any rate, none visible. The panel entrance was an adaptation of the passage, to which admission must have been obtained from some other part of the house in former times. Surely so much hewing and delving, not to speak of the carriage of materials to an upper room in the Abbey, could not have taken place without Jenkins being aware. There must have been workmen busy for days. And Furneaux knew—but, then, he knew so many things.

Passing on, Arthur found himself at the head of a downward slope. The paving followed the line of the passage, but a few steps of deal boards had been fitted when it became steep. He understood now that these steps were located just behind his bed, and it was thence that the sounds like the dropping and rolling of a coin or ring had reached him. The boards creaked, too, under his feet, and he pictured to himself Elinor's fright when she was told, as Furneaux would certainly tell her, that the noise she made must have reached him—Leigh—if he were awake. It must have been Elinor. Furneaux would move like the ghost he caricatured.

The descent continued. There were other steps, a long straight gallery to the right, and a sloping one to the left again. It was not difficult to follow the general underground line of advance. The second turn and dip meant that the passage adapted itself to the gradient of the lawns. Soon it bent off once more to the left, and now Arthur was rather fogged. He believed the turn was made just beyond the Abbot's Port, which Elinor had spoken of, and his first impression was that the secret way would empty itself among the rocks that barricaded the west side of the garden. But no! He now entered on by far the longest straight section. He walked fully a hundred yards on the level before the passage began to climb, slightly but perceptibly.

Then, suddenly, almost without a premonitory glance, he found

himself on the threshold of a large and lofty chamber, circular in shape, and fitted with a remarkable array of empty shelves. These were deep and spacious enough to hold articles as big as a bale of cloth, or a small barrel; and with the notion of bales and barrels came the instant certainty that, no matter what the intent of the original builders, in later years this passage and chamber had provided a peculiarly valuable storehouse for smugglers.

Two wooden ladders were built into the shelves, which ran right up to the spring of the arch of the stone dome, and Arthur was wondering how such a high chamber could exist and yet remain invisible from above ground, when it occurred to him that the Georgian rebuilder had not left the heap of stones on the flagstaff mound without excellent reason. He saw, too, that the apartment was of later construction than the passage. Thus far, there was no mystery, only a discovery of much local interest, and, perhaps, of some antiquarian value.

He was surprised to find that the air, which had been fusty but dry in the passage, was quite fresh in this stronghold of free trade. As his eyes grew accustomed to the reduced light of the candle in such a large area, he soon solved this problem as well. Beneath the lowermost shelf on the opposite side—opposite to his present position, that is, the room being quite round—the passage continued. Peering into it, he had to shield the candle with his right hand, so strong was the current of air.

A step or two into the interior gave him pause. The deodorizing influence of air and water had begun to loosen the masonry. The crown of the arch was broken in many places; whole sections of the walls had caved in; not only was the tunnel almost impassable, but the slightest movement might bring down tons of rock and earth on top of anyone who ventured within.

So he returned to the domed chamber, and stood there awhile, musing, and the turbulent river of his thoughts surged incessantly around and about one stark rock of fact—Bagot wanted a lease of the Abbey—Bagot would go to any lengths to obtain it—Bagot had somehow compassed the death of Dix, a man who had held an impossible mortgage on the place—Bagot, or someone acting for him, had probably brought about the reported disappearance of the other mortgagee, Churchill.

What did it all mean? Why had Elinor warned him against Bagot and striven desperately to stop the granting of the lease? Of course she had given reasons, but she was withholding some knowledge that she shared with Bagot—and with Furneaux. Oddly enough, the remembrance of Furneaux was comforting. Bagot's apparently superhuman

faculties became less terrifying when looked at through the Furneaux lens. That kink theory was cheering, and if Bagot did really possess a kink, the little man from Jersey would test it to breaking-point.

It was rather annoying that Furneaux should have taken himself off from Bridgewater just at that moment. Of course it was more than likely he had not gone to Bristol, just because he said he was going there. Arthur believed that the detective might be found by anyone who maintained a steady watch on the house and grounds at "Nielpahar." Had not Bagot himself said that evening that he meant to dine at Pinkerton's, the Ponds Covert house? Furneaux, by some amazing prescience, knew that, and was utilizing the opportunity of searching Bagot's residence during the tenant's absence. Still, Arthur wished greatly for an interview with the Scotland Yard expert that evening. They would indulge in candour when they met—that he promised himself, for his own part.

These thoughts of time and distance caused him to look at his watch. To his surprise it was nearly ten o'clock, the hour fixed for the pumping of Banks. He must return at once. He would examine the passage with the utmost detail next day—in Elinor's company, he hoped—and with a stronger light. Meanwhile, just to placate the imp of curiosity, he would climb one of the ladders and see if all the upper shelves were as empty as they looked.

The rungs seemed sound and strong, but he decided that it was best to run no risk of a fall, which meant that he must have both hands at. liberty. The candlestick was an old brass one, with a wide, hollow base; he could balance it on his head without much chance of dropping it, and he knew that he would be able to see all the better if the light were above his eyes.

Luckily, his temperament did not incline to delay when a thing was to be done. In half a minute he was turning his head stiffly—for fear of upsetting the candlestick—to glance around the topmost shelf. Like the others, it held nothing but dust, and little of that. Slowly he untwisted his neck again, and was about to descend when he fancied he heard something. He was not sure; it might be the fall of a morsel of stone or lime in that broken part of the tunnel; but his impression was that the sound, if it were a sound, came from the long passage leading so deviously to the house.

He listened, all ear and alertness. Yes, there was a noise, faint but most clear—like the dropping of a pin in that imagined stillness when a pin can be heard to drop.

So, then, here was another adventure, to add to the store he had

accumulated since a prosaic hack brought him and his baggage from Bridgewater Station to the Abbey! But, this time, Leigh was prepared. He was fighting men now, not ghosts or creatures of the unknown. He was fighting for Elinor, not against her. He made a plan instantly and acted on it.

Up he went, until his breast was level with the edge of the shelf. He took the candle off his head, lifted himself bodily inward, searched rapidly on hands and knees until he found a knot-hole, which happened also to occur at a joining of the shrunken boards, stuck a finger in it, blew out the candle and extinguished the wick, took the revolver from his pocket and placed it between shirt and waistcoat, stood the candlestick close to the wall where he could find it at one sweep of a hand, and lay down flat on the shelf with his eyes over knot-hole and crack.

Then he listened again.

He was not mistaken. After a brief interval he not only heard the noise, but identified it—it was the tapping of a small hammer! Though enveloped in a darkness that could only be compared with the gloom of some abandoned mine in the heart of a mountain, the intermittent tap-tap of iron on stone brought his mind into the sunlit garden of Elinor's second visit to the Abbey. He was up there with her, drinking in the subtle fragrance of her presence; he felt again the thrill of that slight touch upon his arm when she said "Look!" and pointed to Bagot, clinging, like some fat monk, to the ivy surrounding the gargoyle, and tapping with his little hammer at the grotesque stone head with its Benedictine biretta.

And here was the tapping once more, the same persistently inquiring tapping, the questioning that brings its own answer to the ear of geologist or miner.

Who could it be but Bagot, and what would be the outcome if Bagot, too, climbed a ladder when he reached the vaulted chamber?

At that, Arthur smiled.

"By gad, it will be a supreme test of his nerve," he mused. "I wonder what he will say? Will it be, 'Hello, Leigh, who would have thought of seeing you here?' Or will he drop to the floor with a heavy thud? Or try to shoot me straight off? Well, in the last alternative, I shall have first pop."

The tapping came nearer. Bagot was making a preliminary survey. It would be the labour of weeks to try each stone for the hollow receptacle that might lie behind it. He was working his way along the passage

with the curiosity of a stranger rather than the set purpose of one who seeks treasure trove.

Soon a faint gleam of light shot into the room. It was fitful, and flickered in and out, though each glint of dull radiance became stronger. Bagot, therefore, was carrying a bull's-eye lantern. Leigh, in a species of commentary on Bagot's doings, asked himself how it was possible for anyone but himself to gain admission to the Abbey without the knowledge of Jenkins. It was scarcely credible that his trusted butler would allow a visitor to roam freely over the house, especially at such a late hour.

Elinor, too, sweet intruder, and that quaint ally of hers, the detective, must have entered the place secretly. Here was an item that called for investigation to-morrow; meanwhile, it was to-night, and Bagot was tapping his way up the final incline, and would soon be in sight.

Nor was Leigh in error in picturing the stout, agile form, crowned by the big egg-shaped head, with its mass of dark hair, that would emerge from the tunnel. It was Bagot himself, in evening dress, but over his black clothes and broad expense of shirt-front was a light dustcoat, and Arthur noted instantly that one outer pocket hung heavily.

To all appearance, Bagot had never before entered the circular storeroom. Just as Leigh had done, he stood at the entrance and surveyed every part. It was almost uncanny for Arthur to find Bagot's shrewd, bland eyes gazing up at him, unconsciously, from beneath their heavy brows. He had to force himself to believe that though we can see a whole city through a pinhole in a piece of paper, the whole city can see nothing behind the piece of paper. Nevertheless, so powerful is imagination, he was quite pleased when Bagot looked elsewhere.

Naturally, the newcomer's attention was drawn by the continuation of the tunnel. He went there at once, peeped in, blocked up the passage with his huge frame, and speedily withdrew it, for he was very much alive to the danger of pushing investigation too far in that direction. Standing now with his back to the air-current, he cast the lantern's searchlight up to the shelves and vaulted roof again.

Leigh felt that he himself was squinting horribly; he could afford to lose no movement of his enemy, but he hoped devoutly that Bagot would soon cross the floor to a less oblique angle of vision. The capacious shelves evidently invited inquiry; and Leigh's fingers closed on the butt of the revolver when Bagot approached the opposite ladder and gave one of the rungs a tentative shake.

But at that moment, while Bagot was measuring his weight against the crossbars, and Leigh was wondering under what exact conditions it was justifiable to shoot a man in accord with British law, a lively whistling and a jaunty step came from the long corridor. A crash of thunder could not have amazed either man more profoundly. Both, by a species of intuition, knew who it was, and each was called on to meet a new and wholly unforeseen set of circumstances.

Arthur expected that Bagot would extinguish his lantern, skulk into the broken-down passage, and, possibly, try to kill Furneaux before the detective was even aware of his presence. In that case, Leigh's tactics were definite. He would wait until Furneaux was near enough to hear, and then yell a warning that he was to advance no further. As a result, in all probability, Bagot would appear, begin to explain matters, and wonder what blight had fallen on him that a young fool of an ex-trooper of South African Horse should be for ever blocking his path.

Bagot, however, after the first shock had passed, and the sudden greenness of his face was replaced by its customary pallor, neither put out his lantern not strove to hide. His hand dropped to that heavy pocket of his overcoat, but he withdrew it again, and began to stroke his array of chins. He was of the type that allows thought to govern action. The mere killing of Furneaux, assuming that Bagot was so minded, might be an irretrievable blunder. The con- ditions demanded the exercise of wit, and Bagot prided himself on his overwhelming superiority to the detective in that essential.

Leigh, watching him, was filled with hope that there might be a struggle. He did not want to shoot the man in cold blood, but he did want to sink his fingers into that bull neck, and repay, once and for all, the torture of the chase through the wilderness of "Nielpahar," and the searing agony of those two wounds in Elinor's arm. His muscles twitched at the prospect, and not for an instant did he take an eye off Bagot, not even when Furneaux appeared, ceased whistling as though lost in astonishment, and held a lantern above his head in well-affected effort to learn who it was that already tenanted the vault.

"Well, of all the wonderful things!" gasped the little man, discovering Bagot with some such sentiment of joy as Galle must have felt when the planet Neptune swam into the field of his entranced vision.

"Apparently the earth holds but us two," laughed Bagot.

"Good, sir—just the remark I would have expected from you. Now, if I were a scientist like you, Mr. Bagot, I would cap it by saying something

about the attraction of large bodies for smaller ones. You big men draw us tiny fellows as a loadstone draws a needle."

"Pretty well put, Furneaux. Somehow, one associates a needle with a detective. Both are sharp and keen, and given to probing. But a needle should only be used on soft material. If it endeavours to carry out the functions, say of a rock-drill, it gets broken."

"No use in my trying, then, to bore a way through this granite in the attempt to solve old Rollaston Leigh's secret. Ha, ha! Rum old boy he must have been."

"Oh, is that why you are here? You have many activities, Furneaux."

"Yes, busy man; prying, too; a regular poke-nose. But would it be a liberty to suggest, sir, that you seem to find rather varied occupations?"

"Out with it, man. A plain question often wins an honest answer. You want to know what I am doing on these premises, presumably without the owner's permission?"

"No, Mr. Bagot, I know already."

"You guess, you mean."

"I never guess. I absorb information; I suckle my wits on facts. I buzz about like a bee in everybody's flower-patch, and finally produce the complete honeycomb. It may be thin stuff, but it isn't guessing!"

Bagot, it might be, resented this too successful parodying of his own elusive method of speech. He placed his lantern on the nearest shelf, leaned his broad back against the ladder, plunged his hands into his trousers pockets, and looked steadily at Furneaux, who, by this time, had deposited his lantern on the stone floor. Furneaux took a crushed cigar from his loose grey jacket, and smelt at it. The action seemed to displease Bagot more than the badinage.

"You are at liberty to dispense with parables," he said, frowning. "Personally, I like men who come to the point. Why are you spying on me, Furneaux?"

"Because you and I cannot agree as to the prospective ownership of Rollaston Leigh's hundred and fifty thousand pounds, Mr. Bagot."

"What reason have you for believing that any such sum of money is hidden here?"

"It is hidden somewhere. Both Edward James Dix and John Churchill were honest men. They humoured Rollaston Leigh's mad fancy, but they did not intend to rob his heir."

"Do you imply that I mean to rob his heir?"

"Implying and guessing are similar terms, Mr. Bagot."

"It is no secret to you that I wish to lease the Abbey from Mr. Arthur. Leigh."

"So I have been told."

"And that he has agreed to it?"

"Exactly."

"And that I have promised to find the fifty thousand necessary to prevent foreclosure?"

"There would have been no foreclosure if Messrs. Dix and Churchill were alive."

"What, then,—are they both dead?"

"Both, Mr. Bagot."

"Dear me! Dear me! Extraordinary coincidence! That poor fellow Dix was murdered, apparently, by some one who had local interests, and now you tell me of Churchill being dead, too. Was he murdered?"

"Hard to say, as yet. His body was found smashed to a pulp, on a mountain-side in Breconshire."

"Found—when?"

"This morning at nine o'clock."

"Now you mention it, there was something in today's newspapers about his disappearance. Strange thing! But you must not lose your, head, Furneaux. You are apt to think wild, you know: said to young Leigh that you actually suspected me of having a hand in the Dix affair—and going out of your way to prompt Miss Elinor to secure a hat of mine, so that you might compare measurements with that motor cap which Leigh said he picked up near the barge. Silly! Silly!"

"One has to test every little clew, Mr. Bagot," said the detective humbly.

"But there is no clew when a man says the cap was just like his, and admits the size."

"Quite true. One of my failings. No guessing, you see. Like to be sure."

"And again, suppose I was the criminal—ha, ha!"

"He, he!" laughed Furneaux.

"Supposing, then, that I killed Dix, and meant to steal that imaginary hundred and fifty thou', and, and—well, even you can't dream that I smashed Churchill to a pulp in Breconshire, yesterday—"

"—this morning," broke in the detective apologetically.

"Well, whenever the poor man was dislocated, but, granted the other misdeeds, how foolish of you to trust yourself alone with such a desperate character, alone, in this unknown gallery, with a ready-made grave in there,"—and Bagot jerked a fat thumb toward the tumbledown exit,—"and you unarmed, too, for Scotland Yard men seldom carry revolvers."

"It would have been foolish if I had done all that."

"But here you are!"

"Yes, thus far you are right. One takes risks, naturally, in my profession. One is compelled to. I might be killed here, quite secretly—as secretly as Dix, or Churchill, but the difference comes in in the presence of Inspector Lawson and a uniformed constable at the only practicable outlet. They would wonder why a small man went in, and a large one came out. They would be inquisitive. In fact."

"Pooh!"

Bagot spread out his hands deprecatingly.

"Pooh!" he said again. "A child would not reason that way. Consider, my dear Furneaux; pray regard me as a malefactor at bay. What possible deterrent is a policeman more or less in the world? One shoots one, two, or three—the number is immaterial—what better retreat could the shooter have than this very chamber? What is the result? That unfortunate devil Leigh would have another deadly crime to explain away. Really, for a Scotland Yard expert, you are too trusting. Guesswork is good occasionally. It is the basis of scientific research. You ought to have guessed, Furneaux, that a thoroughbred villain would never miss such a splendid opportunity. 'How oft the means to do ill deeds …'—you know the rest of it. Ah, you have slipped, my friend, slipped to the lip of a precipice."

Bagot, in sheer enjoyment of his analysis of Furneaux's error, threw out his hands again, and thrust them into the pockets of his overcoat.

Leigh felt a wave of electricity in the air. He would have liked to observe Furneaux's face while Bagot was talking, but he dared not take his eyes off Bagot. Something told him that Furneaux had really miscalculated Bagot's daring. It was a Napoleonic maxim to attack when his adversaries thought they were safest, and Bagot had the head, the brain, the, force of a double-sized Napoleon. Whether rightly or wrongly, Leigh believed that he must act, and act quickly. He rose to his knees, drew the revolver, and peered over the edge of the shelf.

"Of course, one reports one's movements and knowledge to one's superiors," Furneaux was saying; but Bagot only chuckled.

"I told Leigh you were devoid of intellect," he cried, with the self-satisfied smirk of a cat watching the efforts of a crippled mouse to escape. "You used to be a good man after a burglar, or a coiner, or even a commonplace murderer skulking in a London slum, but you were no good when pitted against a mind. I hate to lecture you, Furneaux, though it is a weakness of mine to point out these defects in my opponents."

Leigh aimed steadily at Bagot's expanse of chest.

"Take your right hand out of your pocket, Bagot!" he said. "And be sure that it is empty, or you drop dead!"

14

Bagot's Ebb Tide

Bagot looked up. Even he, the man who was either all nerve, or with no nervous system like unto other men's, was startled. For one supreme instant his heart stopped beating, and his sallow cheeks blanched to a dreadful whiteness.

Then he laughed gayly, waving both hands to Arthur.

"Too absurd!" he cried. "You there! What a comedy!"

"Good as a play!" murmured Furneaux, with a curious break in his voice, as though he, at any rate, had found the humour of the situation rather overpowering.

"But such interruptions should not come from the wings, or is it the flies?" guffawed Bagot. "You spoiled a fine scene, Leigh …. It is seldom one impales a detective on the horns of such a dilemma. You really ought to have permitted me to toss him gently for a while."

Though Bagot's mirth was well assumed, Arthur, looking along the barrel of his pistol, saw behind that giggling mask the malice of a disappointed fiend.

He remembered once, while crouching on a kopje to watch a Boer commando trekking across a stream, that a great black snake, disturbed in its siesta, raised its head just in front of his sheltering rock and peered at him spitefully. He dared not stir then. The slightest movement or sound might have been detected by the skilled hunters among the enemy. After a nerve-racking moment of uncertainty, the snake squirmed away into a crevice and was seen no more. But he would never forget the reptile hatred of all mankind that gleamed from its beady eyes, and Bagot's sudden access of frivolity could not altogether hide the diabolic scowl that rose from his very soul.

"Hold your hands up!" said Leigh coolly.

"My dear young friend, why change a farce into melodrama?"

"Up, before I count three. One! Two!"

"My turn to be roasted, I suppose," sighed Bagot, raising his hands.

"Now, Furneaux, search him. There is a revolver in that right-hand pocket," said Arthur.

"Capital situation!" cried Furneaux, dancing lightly up to Bagot, but taking pains to leave the line of fire open from above. "Simply ripping! Make the fortune of any budding dramatist. And so unexpected! … the very essence of stagecraft! Ah, a loaded revolver, too! 'Pon my honour, Mr. Bagot, I don't know which to admire most, you as the heavy villain, or Mr. Leigh in his star role as the valiant hero. What a pity I ain't a girl! He! he! Not got another six-shooter in the other pocket, Mr. Bagot? No. … And, well now, I do declare, if this isn't the mate of the revolver that was knocked out of Mr. Leigh's hand when he fell into the river!"

"Another remarkable coincidence! Motor hat, Exhibit A; pistol, Exhibit B; Churchill's gas bill, Exhibit C. By Jove, Furneaux, if you go on in this fashion you'll be thinking of arresting poor me!" and Bagot grinned again good-naturedly, for his eyes were lowered.

"But this is really most peculiar," chattered Furneaux, turning the weapon round and round with the careful scrutiny of a collector of china examining a rare blue piece of the Ming dynasty. "Same make, same marks, same cartridges. You have my congratulations, Mr. Bagot. If some of my brutal colleagues of the Yard had this barge murder in hand they would arrest you at once. And that would be a pity, a thousand pities! You have no idea what harm a pair of handcuffs can effect in disturbing the true line of a promising inquiry—the artistic curve, I might call it. What is an arrest in a case like this? It ought to be the first step between the narrow walls of fact—a sort of personally conducted tour to the scaffold. Too often it isn't. Suppose I grabbed you now, where would I be when some loud-voiced King's Counsel asked me how you managed to fling the warm and naked body of your victim on to a barge moored in the Parret at an hour when a dozen credible witnesses swore you were in Chepstow, capless? Imagine me in the box, and in a nice hole, too. Pretty figure I'd cut. No, no, Mr. Bagot, the case against Mr. Leigh is ten times stronger than against you, yet I haven't arrested him."

During this jerky monologue Furneaux's antics were those of an excited ape. He seemed to be unable to stand still. He whirled from the

light of Bagot's lantern to that of his own, twisting the revolver into every conceivable position, and peering at it from every point of view. But once, in a pirouette, he glanced up at Leigh, and his quick frown seemed to say, "Don't interfere—leave it to me!"

Yet Leigh was on the very pinnacle of interference, not once but twice, for twice, when the detective's back was turned, Bagot seemed to be gathering himself for a catamount spring. It was not that he crouched and made taut his muscles for a mighty leap that should submit to the lottery of chance and the vault's gloom whether or not he overcame these two men. There was no outward indication of the tiger's rage that surged from heart to brain. He remained impassive, immovable, to all seeming scornful and cynical. But magnetic rays were flowing from the man, and Leigh, strung to the tension of being judge and jury and executioner in the one fleeting instant that might decide Bagot's life or death, was probably receptive of such influences to an abnormal degree. Be that as it may, he twice met Bagot's calculating eye, and twice came off victor in the silent contest, for he often, and Bagot never, had looked death in the face and not flinched from it.

And thus passed the most trying moments of an experience rich in thrills. Leigh well knew Bagot's hope. Taken unaware, the diminutive detective might have had the revolver wrested from his fingers, and a powerful man could use his body as a shield during the subsequent duel. Furneaux, oddly enough, appeared to be blithely unconscious of the risk he ran, but at last, with a quick turn of the wrist, he opened the revolver and shook out the six cartridges, which he pocketed forthwith.

"Dangerous things, revolvers," he said, smiling at Bagot. "Never carried one myself. Detectives can't go round shooting criminals at sight. My eye! if that were allowed, wouldn't I make a record bag on a race day at Alexandra Park!"

"Do you propose to keep my revolver?" asked Bagot.

"No, sir. Why should I? I only took it to prevent hot blood between you and Mr. Leigh."

"Hot blood! Mr. Leigh!" Bagot ceased even to affect surprise. He was now airily indifferent, though he did favour Arthur with a deprecating glance. "What quarrel is there between him and me? Really, now, I looked on myself somewhat in the light of a possible benefactor of Mr. Leigh's."

"But touching that little matter of the hidden money, sir?"

Furneaux's tone was amazing to Arthur. It was reproachful yet sympathetic. It conveyed the unspoken question, "Why will you insist on

such a disagreeable topic as between gentlemen?"

"Rollaston Leigh's money may or may not be in this place. If it is, it can be found only by a navvy, a horde of navvies, armed with pickaxes. Do you honestly believe, Furneaux, that I meant to tear the secret out of these flints with my bare fingers?"

"No imputations, sir, none whatever. Now, Mr. Leigh, you might come down. The passage has been here several hundred years, and this room looks as if it would last our lives out. So we can glut our passion for research another time. Useful type of lantern you've got there, Mr. Bagot. Circular wick and dioptric lens. Saw it in the Paris Exhibition."

Arthur solved the ticklish problem of safe descent by gripping the barrel of the revolver between his teeth and swinging the candlestick from a finger. He scorned to look over his shoulder lest Bagot might be tempted to dare a final leap. But if a self-imposed code of honour governed his eyes it could not close his ears, and he knew that the man who mixed cold-blooded murder with dreams of the millennium remained in the pose he had not quitted since Furneaux's deft hands searched his clothes for concealed weapons.

But an odd thing happened when Leigh faced the others on the pavement. Bagot eyed the pink candle; its tint, its neat volutions, seemed to fascinate him.

"Strange!" he said. "Another coincidence, Furneaux! Last time I saw a candle like that it adorned a piano in the drawing-room of the ›Mishe Nahma‹."

Arthur was irritated by the absurd pretence of both men that a meeting fraught with deadly possibilities should be slurred over as a commonplace event. So he scarcely took thought ere he retorted:

"Not so strange. Miss Hinton gave it to me."

"When you paid a surprise visit to 'Nielpahar'?" asked Bagot quietly, and the younger man felt that he had spoken too quickly.

"Yes," he said, making the best of it.

Bagot chuckled.

"You poor Furneaux, how I pity you! Here we have a lady and gentleman motoring to my place at a late hour, climbing walls, carrying ladders, equipping themselves with matches and candles, ransacking my empty house, and shooting at hypothetical burglars. What do you think of it? My escapade tonight sounds feeble in comparison. I came to the front door, was admitted by Jenkins, who ascertained that his master had gone out and allowed me to await his return, and I merely

killed time by an antiquarian ramble. Honestly, Leigh, that pink candle would puzzle even Furneaux's loud-voiced K.C. to explain it away."

Arthur was stung to fury by the man's impudence. The memory of Elinor's satin skin seared by this hellhound's bullets smote him like a blow in the face, and he hungered for an excuse to clutch that well-fed carcase and crush it in mortal struggle. His eyes sparkled and his bronzed forehead grew white.

"You d—d scoundrel—" he began, but before he could say another word Furneaux was holding him in a grip of singular force.

"Good gracious, Mr. Leigh, what has gone wrong?" he asked. "Mr. Bagot meant no offence, not a particle ... perfectly harmless joke ... really directed against me. Now, wasn't it, Mr. Bagot? There, there! What we all want is a whisky and soda. Nerves, nerves—they're the curse of modern life. Mr. Bagot, will you be so good as to lead the way? Thank you, thank you. Dear me! One of the consolations of middle age is the power of ignoring lack of tact in the young."

And as Bagot passed silently in front, lighting the dark tunnel with his exhibition dioptric lens, Furneaux shook Leigh viciously, though he kept up a running fire of comments on the ways of monks, and smugglers, and the manners of the dead and gone squirearchy who turned a deaf ear to the blandishments of the King's customs officers, until Bagot raised the bar of the panel, and stepped forth under the official, though none the less astonished, gaze of Inspector Lawson and a constable.

Lawson, who evidently knew nothing of Bagot's presence in the passage, stooped to make sure that his colleague was within. Then, having a quaint trick of apt expression, he said:

"Well, now! if I didn't think you'd gone an' got yourself inflated with sewer gas, Mr. Furneaux."

Whereat Bagot laughed heartily.

"What a thing to say!" he cried. "Inflated ... sewer gas ... me!" and he dug a thumb into his well-lined ribs. "No, my excellent Inspector. I am compounded of wholesome carbon—beef—not of poisonous monoxide!"

"Fish is good, too; phosphorus; brain-forming," put in Furneaux.

"Brain? Pish!" muttered Bagot.

"I'd like to have a squint inside there myself if it's empty now," said the imperturbable Lawson when Leigh appeared in his turn.

"Certainly!" cried Furneaux at once. "You and Jones just amuse yourselves by having a look round. Don't hurry. We three are going

to chat for half an hour. But mind the broken bit beyond the arched room. That's dangerous. Nearly got myself entombed there by being too venturesome."

Leigh, though boiling with anger against Bagot, could not help but admire the play of innuendo as between him and the detective. He was beginning dimly to appreciate Furneaux's attitude. Bagot was not a mere criminal—his was a mighty mind that had permitted itself to give unbridled play to its criminal impulses. To attempt to comer such a man until escape was humanly impossible was to court disaster. Though Leigh's stock of legal lore was but the rough training of the veldt, even the summary jurisdiction that permitted the hanging of a Kaffir demanded some show of evidence, and he knew in his heart that the evidence against Bagot was of the flimsiest character.

Yet, when the three were standing in the lumber-room listening to the muffled steps of the policemen inside the passage, his gorge rose at the thought that he was expected to treat Bagot with civility, perhaps to extend some show of hospitality. He determined to have none of this pretence.

"If you two wish to talk, the library is at your disposal," he said curtly.

"What is there to be said?" demanded Bagot, with admirable coolness. "For my part, I am rather tired. Of course, Leigh, we can drop the lease business until you are in a different frame of mind. May I have my revolver, Furneaux? You know as well as I do that you can buy fifty like it by making a round of gunsmiths' shops in London. And I am really concerned about my chauffeur. He has been going all day and all night."

Furneaux handed over the weapon without a word. For a man with such a flow of chatter at his command it was odd that he should be silent at that moment. None spoke until they reached the hall, where a perplexed and anxious Jenkins met them.

"If you please, sir" he began, addressing his master, but glancing at Furneaux.

"Wait a bit, Jenkins," said Arthur. "Show Mr. Bagot to his motor, and never again admit him here on any pretence whatever."

Furneaux drew his breath in between his teeth with the grimace of one who suffers an unexpected spasm.

"Too bad!" he murmured. "Quite undeserved! Hope you won't say that to me when I come to visit you at 'Nielpahar,' Mr. Bagot?"

Bagot shook a fat forefinger at him playfully.

"One never knows," he cried. "Even the philosophic worm may turn. But come, come! I may be in forgiving mood. Goo' ni', Furneaux! *Mes adieux*, Leigh!"

And he was gone, his departure being announced by the explosions and groaning gear of the automobile in the courtyard.

"Now, Jenkins, what is it?" asked Leigh. There was a ring of steel in his voice; the admiration he once felt for Bagot had turned to bitterest gall and loathing.

"Please, sir, I couldn't keep 'em out," said the butler.

The vindictive look he gave Furneaux showed clearly that the plural pronoun referred exclusively to the agents of the law, but he was more distressed than ever when Leigh said:

"Mr. Furneaux and Inspector Lawson have my full permission to enter the house or grounds at any time, day or night, whether I am here or not. Now bring some whisky and soda to the library."

"But, sir"

"Well, out with it."

"B—Banks is full, sir."

Then Arthur laughed, and some of his spleen vanished.

"The deuce he is! I had forgotten him. I can't deal with him now. Put him to bed, and I will fire him in the morning."

"Banks—one of your stock-keepers?" inquired the detective.

"Yes."

"What of him?"

Leigh briefly told what had happened, and Furneaux pondered it.

"Let me tackle him," he said, and asked Jenkins to see that the filling of Banks was carried to excess, while it would be a good thing if the hapless wretch were then conducted into the fresh air of the drive.

"You see, sir," he explained to Leigh in the library, "if Lawson and I find him there incapable, it will be for his own good if we lock him up, and he will be a big lump of putty when he wakes in a cell to-morrow morning. With your permission I shall leave Jones here all night."

While he was speaking, he went to the French window, unlocked it, threw both sections wide open, and stood there a few seconds.

"Why?" asked Arthur, who deemed Jones unnecessary.

"We are entering on the last phase of a desperate fight, and I mean you to take no more risks. You saved my life quarter of an hour ago. The least I can do in return is to insure you a night's undisturbed rest."

"So you thought he meant to shoot?"

"Oh, I am sure of it! Just a little bit of over-confidence on my part. … He is daring, is Bagot. Lawson and Jones don't know it, but you saved them, too. He would have wheedled them into the passage and shot them without mercy—perhaps dragged all three of us out again so as to involve you."

"But, even while you were examining the revolver, you were in the gravest sort of danger."

"I did that purposely. I wanted to goad him to it. He would not have found me unprepared; I had already put the mechanism out of action, and, in the excitement, he might have said something."

"Said something?"

Furneaux helped himself from a decanter brought by Jenkins, and alternated each sip with a luxurious sniff at the broken cigar, which was now a mere mass of frayed tobacco leaves.

"Don't you see, Mr. Leigh, knowledge is not always the same thing as proof?" he said. "Now, I am going to take you into my confidence. You deserve it, because, thanks to Miss Hinton's influence, I suppose."

"By Jove!" cried Arthur vexedly, "that reminds me. I have a letter for Bagot in my pocket."

"From whom?"

"Mr. Hinton."

"Where is it?"

Furneaux deliberately opened the envelope and read aloud:

> *Sorry, but could not carry out your wishes. Leigh discovered yacht's direction, and Elinor used her authority. Better let things rest a few days. E.'s infatuation with this young fool will soon die a natural death. Why not have the police arrest him? I suppose he must have been mixed up in that murder on the barge?"*

The detective smiled.

"Not a flattering description of you," he commented; "but it is fortunate for Mr. Hinton that this note fell into my hands, very fortunate. He, like the others, is a dupe, not an accomplice. His letter proves that. The more I see of this case the more marvellous does Bagot become."

Leigh threw himself into a chair and lit a cigar.

"You spoke of confidences," he said.

"I should have revealed many things much sooner, Mr. Leigh, if you had not gone over to the enemy, bag and baggage, almost before war was declared," said Furneaux. "I simply dared not tell you how things stood. If you resisted Miss Hinton, was it likely that you would listen to me? Come now. Didn't you tell Bagot everything?"

"D—n him!" growled Arthur.

"Exactly; I concur, as the judges say in the Court of Appeal. But you nearly broke my heart when you burnt poor Dix's shirt. I should have taken it when I had the chance, but I couldn't resist the temptation of seeing what you would do with it. Sometimes, I wish I had been born in Jerusalem rather than Jersey. I am frivolous by nature, and you can't imagine a Jerusalemite frivolous, can you? Mad trick, that of mine, when I brought Miss Hinton here, though she's one woman in a thousand. You can't scare her. She only tittered when the extinguisher fell off her candlestick that night on the wooden steps, and I warned her that the noise might arouse you. And where is the lady who would be wounded, as she was at 'Nielpahar,' and say nothing about it, just to spite Bagot"

"Ah, you saw?"

"I try to see everything, Mr. Leigh."

"By the way, did you write that?" and Arthur produced the note about the inquest, with its totem signature of a man smelling a cigar.

The detective grinned appreciatively.

"No," he said. "It seems to annoy Bagot, this habit of mine."

"Well, I shall not interrupt you again."

The detective curled himself on the divan with legs crossed *à la Turque*.

"Bagot was acquainted with your grandfather, and, from what knowledge you now possess of his methods, Mr. Leigh, you will admit that an old gentleman with a bee in his bonnet would have little chance of keeping his affairs secret from such an intelligence—kindly regard that word as beginning with a capital I. But Bagot was too shrewd to visit the Abbey in those days. He induced Mr. Rollaston Leigh to drive to 'Nielpahar,' secretly, on the plea of consulting him about an invention. I learnt that fact from the man who drove him there, and I am inclined to think that your grandfather narrowly escaped with his life,

solely because of the cunning that prompted him to hide the money he received from Dix and Churchill. That Bagot was aware of the negotiations with the mortgagees is certain—he may even have suggested them—as he invited both members of the firm to 'Nielpahar' at different times, and entertained them lavishly, leaving no doubt in their minds that when the then owner of the Abbey died he would be in the market as a prospective purchaser of the estate. How he induced Dix to visit him on the 9th of this month I do not know. Perhaps he met him at Oxford ... can't say yet. I imagine he ascertained that poor Dix would not be party to any underhand dealings. At any rate, he had some good reason for murdering him, because Bagot, and none other, put the unfortunate man's body on the barge, and, were it not for your definite testimony as to time, I should have been forced to arrest Bagot next day. Don't you see, I couldn't, in the teeth of your evidence and the Chepstow alibi, which Bagot took care to bring to the ears of the police. I believe you, but I am not satisfied with the Chepstow yarn, and a colleague is at work there now. I may have news from him any day. But one thing is sure. If Bagot had been safe under lock and key, Churchill would be alive now. It was Churchill's dead body that you and Miss Hinton saw in the house."

"I cannot help it," cried Arthur, springing up excitedly, "but you said—"

"Will you oblige me by sitting quite still?" said Furneaux. "Thank you, I can talk and listen, but I cannot listen if others are moving about. Yes, I told Bagot that Churchill's corpse had been found on a Breconshire mountain early to-day. That is true. He was fully dressed, and letters and cards in his pockets proved his identity, while his face was not battered out of recognition. In a word, the manner of his death seemed to differ completely from that of his partner,—seemed to differ, I put it,—to my mind the plan is identical. It is changed only in unessential details, because it was intended that Churchill should be recognized, whereas Dix was meant to disappear absolutely. But both men were killed by garroting; a bleak hill and a deserted barge on a river are equally vague and mysterious places for the disposal of their mangled bodies. Mark that, they were not only choked—the bullet found in Dix was an afterthought—but crushed, their very bones smashed. Do you remember Inspector Lawson's simile about the snake? Well, the carcase of a goat or small deer crushed by a python would very closely resemble the condition of the bodies of these two doomed men. And I

could have saved Churchill! That gravels me! Oh, I shall never forgive myself for that!"

A curiously bitter tone had crept into the detective's voice. Leigh was almost sure there were tears in his eyes. But, howsoever keen might be Furneaux's distress, his ears were alert. He heard Lawson and the constable opening and closing the panel door quite as soon as Arthur caught the same sounds. He did not speak again until the two policemen were passing the library.

"Come in here!" he cried. "Sit down, please. If you want a drink, don't use the soda siphon."

"What's the matter with the soda?" asked Leigh.

"Nothing. It's the fizzing I object to. I want to hear."

"Hear what?"

"Bagot's motor. The engine stopped before he was clear of the wood. It has not started again. I want to know when it does start."

"Funny place, that passage," said Lawson, fixing his heavy gaze on Leigh.

"It has its humours," admitted Leigh, smiling at Furneaux, and tacitly allowing the detective's extraordinary story to be deferred in the telling.

"I mean the walled-up end," continued Lawson. "I was a stonemason myself before I joined the force. That wall was built from the other side."

Somehow, this trivial fact seemed to galvanize Furneaux into a new activity. Down came his legs, and he swung into his favourite attitude, hands on knees, and head held forward eagerly.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Positive."

"How do you know?"

"I can tell by the finish. It's amatoor work, an' built in the dark."

"Lawson," said Furneaux impressively, "and you, too, Jones, not a word of this to anybody."

Lawson replied by emptying his glass in silence. Jones was evidently moved to follow the example of his superior, the only difference being that he gurgled.

Jenkins came. His face was grey and wrinkled.

"I really don't know about Banks, sir," he explained. "He's paralytic."

"Where is he now?" asked Furneaux.

"Lying on the grass, a few yards beyond the court."

"Leave him there. And don't wait up for us, Jenkins. Mr. Leigh will let us out. See that all your bolts are in good order."

Jenkins withdrew, and the detective turned to Arthur.

"You look tired, sir," he said. "Take my advice, and go to bed."

"But what of you?" cried Arthur, who was genuinely surprised by this sudden change of plan.

"We will remain here, for some hours at least. I was quite in earnest when I said we must shun needless risks. Bagot's car has not stirred from the cover of the wood. He is waiting until our dogcart, which he saw in the courtyard, is on the Bridgewater road.

Once there, we might be mixed up in an accident. It is a dark night, and the trees add to the gloom. With your permission, Mr. Leigh, Inspector Lawson and I will sit here with Jones until Bagot makes up his mind to join his friends at Pinkerton's."

15

Wherein Furneaux Thinks He Has Caught Bagot

Leigh set himself no mental limit for sleep that night. He was roused by the bright sun pouring in through a south-east window, and, after a dreamy moment of unbelief, realized that the hour was nearly ten o'clock. He dressed hurriedly, and found a strange policeman showing an almost professional interest in the flower garden. This man had relieved Constable Jones; he said that Furneaux and Lawson had returned to Bridgewater at 5 a.m.; then Leigh gave his mind to breakfast.

He half expected and wholly hoped that there might be a note from Elinor. That she shared his views in this important matter was demonstrated by a dainty little missive brought by Jenkins when Arthur was in the second-cup-of-coffee stage.

> *My dear Arthur,* (it ran) *why no letter?*
>
> *Or is it that there was no post to Burnham after your return home last night? I suppose the explanation is prosaic, but dry-as-dust Postal regulations are sorry substitutes when one hungers for news. And what of Furneaux? Is he alive? One is moved to ask that after a visit to 'Nielpahar.' And did Bagot really call for his letter? Mr. Hinton is furiously angry with the messenger whom you despoiled. If you are not free to come to the yacht at once, do send a line quickly to say that all is well, and that you will be here—when?*
>
> *With love, Elinor.*

He laughed blithely. What a change had come over his fortunes in twenty-four hours! He could not help seeing that the words "with love"

had been squeezed in after Elinor had signed her name. He pictured her as she wrote them, smiling, blushing, arching eyebrows at herself.

"Young man waiting on a bicycle, sir," said Jenkins, staccato, catching his master's eye.

"Sounds like the name of a Red Indian," chuckled Leigh. Then, while Jenkins was puzzling his grey head to discover the bearing of a somewhat obscure joke, Arthur dashed to the writing table and scribbled a line:

> *Dear One—*
>
> *Ructions here last night. Coming as fast as a Three Tuns hack will carry me. With more love, Arthur.*

"There," he said to Jenkins, "give that to young-man-waiting-on-a-bicycle, hand him this half-crown, and ask him to ride on to the village, order a carriage for me at the gallop, and then scorch back to the ›Mishe Nahma‹."

"To where, sir?" gasped the butler.

"To Miss Hinton's yacht. And, by the way, Jenkins, you were a true prophet. Miss Hinton is the Belle Damosel of the ballad. If all goes well, she will soon give point to the Abbot's rhyme. What do you think of that, you hoary-headed tipster?"

"I knew it, sir! I said to Eliza."

"Eliza said to you, you mean. Why, man, I hadn't been in the house five minutes before she was marrying me to the 'pick of the county.' Well, I don't want to be disloyal to Somersetshire, but if there's a finer girl than Elinor between Avon and Lynn I'll eat my hat. Now, Jenkins, tell the warrior at the door to get a hustle on. The first minute I have to spare I must buy a couple of nags and a dogcart."

From which jubilant and disconnected remarks it may safely be assumed that Arthur Leigh was by no means convinced that the preceding day's events were all one amazing dream, though in his calmer moments, he might reasonably have feared that he had been woolgathering during some part of the time.

For, as he ate, and glanced out occasionally at the policeman admiring the roses and masses of blue delphiniums, he could not help marvelling at the tidings conveyed by the cut-and-thrust argument in the vault between Bagot and the detective. Both men, so shrewd, so wise, held the theory that somewhere in that dismal crypt were hidden

Bank of England notes to the value of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds. If that surmise were true, then he, the outcast soldier of fortune, was endowed with wealth enough to render marriage with Elinor Hinton not quite so fantastic.

But the presence of the man in uniform reminded him, too, that the peaceful country-side which harboured so much mystery, was still tenanted by one whose misdeeds promised to provide a national sensation.

Furneaux had roundly charged Bagot with two terrible murders, and hinted at other crimes having enlisted the attention of the authorities long before the body of the hapless Dix was flung on to the deck of the barge. Then, had not Bagot striven to slay Elinor and Leigh himself, contemplated the killing of the detective and his companions, and, even when he must have known that he was more than suspected, lurked in ambush, as it were, for hours, in expectation of a chance of sweeping out of existence his most dangerous opponent? When ultimately he made off, he could not fail to understand that Furneaux had read his intent. What would he do now? Brave it out—perhaps beat the law.

"Anyhow!" cried Arthur suddenly, "hang Bagot!"

A young man in love, his heart surging in unison with the joy of a sunlit morning in summer, is not prone to indulge in rancorous thoughts of slaughter, yet Leigh found it hard to be glad that some overt word or act had not permitted him to rid the world of a pest. How just was Elinor's estimate of the man! "A plague ... a canker in the age," she had described him. Truly, the ex-professor of anthropology at Harvard University had devoted his study of mankind to an evil end.

A second time did Arthur "hang Bagot" by interjection ere he succeeded in freeing his mind of a disagreeable topic. Then he joined the policeman in the garden, and listened to a well-informed and thoroughly appreciative lecture on his own shrubs and plants. He was jotting down the names of some new climbing roses when he heard a carriage approaching.

To save time, he opened the Abbot's Port, and darted out.

"Capital!" chirped a familiar voice from the interior of the vehicle. "I took the liberty of using the fly you ordered. You haven't got that revolver in your pocket? No? Well, run and fetch it. I want to try an experiment!"

Greatly as Leigh now appreciated the detective's assistance, he would gladly have avoided him at that special moment. You see, Elinor was waiting, and would be expecting him, and what more pressing engagement could he have than that?

Something of his thought must have darkened his face, because Furneaux continued sarcastically:

"It's all right, Mr. Leigh. I told your messenger that I was coming, too,—accompanying you, in fact."

Whereupon Arthur ran, secured the revolver from his dressing-table, and was by the detective's side in the carriage in two minutes. Though inured to campaigning, he could not help marvelling at Furneaux's air of alertness.

"You seem to thrive on excitement," he said. "To my certain knowledge you have been up early and late every day for a week, yet each time I see you you seem to be more—spry, shall I call it?"

"Call it what you like. It means that I am hot on the scent. When Bagot is safely lodged in Taunton prison, with only three clear Sundays between him and eternity, I shall take a long rest. Till then I shall be busy. This is the most remarkable case I have ever been engaged in. It has elements almost of the supernatural. In fact, I shall hate to think of Bagot hanging. The man ought to be preserved, and made to write his ideas. He is a wonder."

When Furneaux talked in that fashion his brain was usually engaged on some topic wholly foreign to his discourse. To-day he was comparing the three cartridges he had extracted from the revolver with three others taken from his pocket. He fitted the two sets carefully into the different chambers of the cylinder, took them out, peered at them through a magnifying glass, rubbed one of each lot with a handkerchief, stretched the linen tight, and scrutinized the dirt deposited on it, and generally displayed the deepest professional interest in what was, after all, an ordinary weapon and regulation shells.

"That fellow Banks was a great find of yours," he said unexpectedly, turning to his companion in the jerky manner that always seemed to take unawares the person addressed.

"By gad, I had forgotten him! Did you pick him up, then?" cried Arthur.

"Yes. He was a miserable object. Your butler evidently understands the right essence for 'filling' persons of the Banks type. After a heavy dew it was cold lying out there on the grass, so when Banks woke up, and found himself in Lawson's dogcart, he wept, and offered to tell us everything."

"What was there to tell?"

"Banks has been in Bagot's pay during the past five months. Bagot believed that your grandfather hid his money in the Dogs' Home, which he termed the 'Place of Sojourn'; our stout friend has been hunting there regularly to hit upon the cache. Personally, I believe that Lawson stumbled on to the clew last night. You will find, I imagine, that your grandfather himself walled up the end of the passage, which in former times had its entrance in the oldest part of the building, that which now forms the rear of the house. So Bagot was really right, but he neither knew of the secret passage nor possessed the key given us by Lawson. Poor Dix had a copy of the plan among his papers—which was of the utmost importance, though the door in the panel is more or less of a blind, as the walled-up section can be reached quite as easily from the 'Place of Sojourn' as from any other locality."

"My grandfather would never allow me to go inside—the fact that I found my dog there was his chief grievance against me. And to think that I have never so much as visited the place since I came home!"

Arthur paused. He had suddenly recollected something.

"By Jove!" he went on eagerly, "I was actually on my way to it when I heard Miss Hinton shriek—"

"Shriek! Why? And when?"

"That day she was captured by the motorist."

"What motorist?"

Then Leigh felt the "pins and needles" sensation of one who has blundered into a disclosure. Perhaps Elinor had never told the detective her true motive in seeking the frustration of Bagot. She would naturally shrink from exposing the weakness or folly of her stepfather and his son. Indeed, this must be so, or she would not have asked him to keep the kidnapping incident hidden, as it was absurd to suppose that Furneaux would withhold such an important fact from his uniformed colleagues.

"If you will pardon me," he said simply, "I will not go any further in that matter. You will be seeing Miss Hinton. Please leave the necessary explanation to her."

"Has it anything to do with that ass of a stepbrother of hers?" asked Furneaux dryly.

"Well, yes." Leigh laughed constrainedly. There was little use in endeavouring to burke a fact where this all-knowing brain was concerned.

"Oh, as for him," was the contemptuous comment, "he would blow the top of his head off if Bagot said it would be a good notion. Of course,

I made it my business early in the game to ascertain who was who in the Hinton household. Miss Hinton is a young lady of generous impulses, but we in the Yard cannot afford to let ourselves be swayed in that fashion. So Master Harry was carrying off his sister when you fired at him; or was it at the motor?"

"Do oblige me this once by sticking to Banks," pleaded Arthur.

"Ah, Banks! He is important only in so far as he proves motive. Bagot found that he could, not probe the Abbey's resources without a pickaxe—he said so quite candidly, you remember—it is Bagot's candour that makes him a particularly difficult kind of criminal. That is why he wanted to lease the place. You know, of course, that a partner in Mowle and Mowle is waiting at Bristol to see both Bagot and you, but what you do not know is that long before your steamer called at Madeira on the way to England, I was in communication with your solicitors, and with Dix and Churchill, too. Of course, I suspected rascality, but I never dreamed of murder, and I cannot account now for Churchill's trusting himself with Bagot. He was specifically warned. It is incomprehensible. Yet I ought to have saved him. I am bitter against Bagot for that, very bitter."

Meanwhile he seemed to have finished with the cartridges.

"Here," he said, handing one to Arthur, "you are versed in firearms, Mr. Leigh. What has happened to that brass case?"

"It has been in water," was the prompt reply. "As it was left in its chamber until dry, a small amount of verdigris has formed."

"Exactly. Bagot is ever an artist. He did really send you the actual weapon you dropped into the Parret. Someone heard the splash when it fell, and reasoned the revolver."

"But how was it recovered?"

"By the use of a fisherman's landing-net. A little deduction of my own, that—an inference from the presence of river-weeds and mud droppings on the grass. Ah, Mr. Leigh, if only you had gone to Inspector Lawson that night, we might have caught Bagot's fisherman red-handed next dawn."

"Why not Bagot himself?"

"He is a bird of the night. He never acts by day. His size makes him too conspicuous. Moreover, he was at Chepstow. No, I am inclined to think that the Frenchman, Gustave, was his deputy there—innocently, perhaps. For one thing, the thick-witted fellow speaks no English, and

Bagot spoke French that night over the telephone. For another, I question if the gang at Pinkerton's ever look at a newspaper. It is more than probable the minor culprits are not aware of any murder in this locality."

"Gang!" echoed Arthur.

"There are four of them. Bagot is the archdruid; Harry Hinton and a man named Petersen, a mad Swedish inventor, are the bards; Gustave is an ovate. Have you ever been in Wales?"

Arthur was somewhat mystified by the detective's jerky method of conveying information, but he contented himself with merely saying, "No."

"Then you don't know the language of the Eisteddfod? Well, you are visiting the Welsh border this afternoon."

"I?"

"Yes, all of us, on board the ›Mishe Nahma,‹ unless I am greatly mistaken. Ah, I wish you hadn't burnt that shirt."

"And I wish you would tell me what you are driving at."

"All in good time. You are too honest for my profession, Mr. Leigh. You blurt things out. You act on impulse. You wear your heart on your sleeve."

"Open as the day, quite candid, babble like a baby," quoted Arthur.

"If you would substitute the harmless smell of tobacco for the noxious habit of swallowing its rank juices you would soon acquire the best of my tricks," said Furneaux gravely, pocketing the revolver and producing the mangled remains of a cigar.

He began at once to enlighten Leigh as to the effect of nicotine on the brain, and showed that he was an enthusiastic believer in the Tolstoy cult. But he showed, too, that he meant to discuss Bagot no further just then, because the lecture did not end until they were nearing the gangway of the ›Mishe Nahma,‹ when Arthur was too obviously watching for the smiles of a waiting Elinor to pay heed to theories on narcotic poisoning.

Furneaux left them at once. He had business with Mr. Hinton, he said. He came back for a moment soon after arriving on board, and asked Elinor to give instructions for the yacht's immediate departure for Lydney, a town on the other side of the channel, and a long way from Burnham. Leigh noticed that she did not even ask a reason. She obeyed at once. Evidently Elinor's faith in Furneaux was of the variety that moves either mountains or yachts.

The four met at luncheon. Hinton looked pale and worried, but no word was said that had the remotest bearing on the topic that filled their thoughts to the exclusion of all others. A three hours' run at full speed brought them to a pier from which Lydney is distant a couple of miles. There an inspector of police met them, and they walked to the railway station, which is much nearer the coast than the town.

Hinton, whose uneasiness was palpably on the increase, accompanied them, and was a silent auditor of a curious conversation that took place in the station master's office.

"This is the man," said the local inspector, pointing to a ruddy-faced porter who was young enough to retain a degree of intelligence.

"Ah!" purred Furneaux, regarding the porter quizzically, "a good deal depends on you, my friend. Now, take time before you answer my questions; if you don't know a thing, don't be afraid to say so. Were you on duty here at 10:30 p.m. on the evening of the 9th?"

"Yes, sir," was the immediate reply.

"Slow, now, slow and sure. How do you pick out the evening of the 9th from any other evening, say that of the 8th or 10th?"

"Easy enough, sir. I wur married on the 11th, an' off duty on the 10th, 'avin' a final bust up. Not only that, but on the 9th there wur a 'special' to Chepstow an' Newport at 10:35."

"Excellent. On the evening of the 9th, then,—your last official night of single-blessedness—you were closing the doors of the departing 'special' when a gentleman drove up in a farmer's market cart, hurried into the station, and made for the train without a ticket?"

"Yes, sir."

"Describe him."

The porter, of course, ran his fingers through his hair in the effort to set his wits in order.

"Well, sir," he said hesitatingly, "he wur a tall, stout gentleman, very pleasant spoken, clean shaved … I'd swear to him anywhere."

"Let me help you. Though of heavy build, did he walk nimbly? Had he bushy eyebrows, and large features, with a lot of little wrinkles stretching away from the comers of his eyes?"

"That's him, sir."

"How was he dressed?"

"Wore a leather coat, sir, but ordinary trousers, black, I think, or dark, anyways, an' he had no hat."

"You shut him into a carriage?"

"Yes, sir, an' he axed me to tell the guard that he would get out at Chepstow, where he would pay, there bein' no time to buy a ticket here."

"Thank you. Sure you would recognize him again?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"I have the farmer here, too," said the police officer.

A somewhat similar dialogue ensued between Furneaux and a weather-beaten old man who said that he lived on the border of the Forest of Dean. The only material addition to his clear identification of Bagot was that the gentleman had called at his farm and asked him to supply a conveyance for himself and a heavy parcel to Lydney Station.

"It fair beat me, it did, how him and his parcel kem to be on my land," said the farmer. "A big basket it was, all full of clothes, I think, but it was covered with a waterproof sheet. Pie couldn't have carried it, that I'll be bound, because it took both of us all our time to lift it into the cart. But he paid well; oh, yes, I'll admit he paid like a prince."

"And what became of the parcel?"

"He gev' me the money to book it to Taunton by passenger train."

"Any name?"

"Yes, sir. Pinkerton, Taunton—that's it."

"You would know the gentleman again if you saw him?"

"By gum, I think so. Looked like a bishop, he did, for all his leather coat an' bare head."

"He asked you to say nothing about the adventure, I believe?"

"Well, yes, sir, that's true. But Mr. Williams here, and another gentleman, from Lunnon he said he was, pressed me so hard that I had to speak. Fair scart, I was, when they said as how there might ha' bin a dead body in the basket."

"That was my colleague's humour," smiled Furneaux, but the old man saw no fun in the idea, and said so emphatically.

"Are you going on to Chepstow, Mr. Furneaux?" asked Inspector Williams, when the Lydney inquisition seemed to be at an end.

"Yes, I have to pick up my assistant there."

"By train?"

"No, he will be waiting for the yacht at the mouth of the Wye. You will have all the witnesses in readiness when I want them—probably a week from to-morrow."

"Yes, you can depend on that."

"Why, 'a week from to-morrow'?" asked Arthur.

"Because at an early hour to-morrow I shall arrest the murderer of your two mortgagees, Mr. Leigh," said Furneaux quietly, but there was a sense of finality in his voice that told three of his hearers, at least, how completely he had fastened the chain of circumstantial evidence round Bagot.

Elinor would certainly have asked for enlightenment were it not for a smothered exclamation from her stepfather. He was pale—there was a panicstricken expression in his eyes—and he seemed to be on the verge of collapse. The girl sprang to his side and caught him in her strong arms. Her first words were a reproach, though not to the cowering man who would have fallen were she not holding him.

"Oh, why did you insist on his being present?" she asked, looking accusingly at Furneaux.

"I could not help it, Miss Hinton, indeed I could not," he muttered. "He had to be convinced. I told him everything, yet he refused to credit my statement. What would you have me do? This affair has gone beyond all bounds. Mr. Hinton had to know the risk he ran if he continued to assist Bagot in any way. I am only a police officer, and there comes a period in criminal investigation when one must consider the ends of justice, not private sentiment."

Furneaux was deeply moved or he would not have made this appeal. Leigh did not interfere. He was now only too certain that the unhappy iron-master, in realizing how he had been duped by an unscrupulous genius, was beginning to fear the consequences of the threatened disclosure. He helped Elinor to place the almost insensible man on a seat, ran to a neighbouring inn for brandy, and succeeded in pouring a small quantity of the spirit down Hinton's throat.

In a few minutes the iron-master recovered sufficiently to be placed in a carriage and driven to the pier. He was then able to walk on board the ›Mishe Nahma‹ and go to his cabin, whence he did not emerge until the incidents that set all England agog with amazement next day were almost forgotten.

For chance took a hand in the shaping of events in such fashion that even a Scotland Yard expert could not control them.

When Furneaux announced his intention to arrest Bagot "at an early hour to-morrow morning," he spoke the literal truth. He meant to surround the Pinkerton mansion, where Bagot had mostly resided of late,

with a cordon of police soon after midnight, effect an entrance with the aid of a servant whom he had half bribed, half threatened, into collusion, and pounce on Bagot while that wary person was asleep. He had good reasons for planning an arrest in that manner. He was firmly convinced now that Bagot would not face a trial. Leigh's change of attitude during the scene in the vault would have warned Bagot of the abyss. His strong, domineering character would resent the ignominy of a cell, of the gaping court, and of the scaffold. No; Furneaux knew that Bagot's first effort would be given to destroying the man who had solved his deadly riddle, and then he would take his own life. So fixed was this assumption in the detective's mind that his constant thought was to lull Bagot into the belief that he was safe until the chain of evidence was so linked together that his capture could be achieved unexpectedly. The only practicable way now was to carry out a surprise, and something of the kind would have been attempted had not the ›Mishe Nahma,‹ in swinging away from a pier below Chepstow, run her nose on to a sandbank. The tide was falling, her engines were at full speed, and she was irretrievably caught there until the tide rose again some nine hours later.

Those nine hours made a tremendous difference. The accident happened at six o'clock, and, in regard to speedy means of communication, the county of Monmouth is far more detached from the opposite coast of Somersetshire than Dover from Calais. A deserted estuary and long stretches of sand or soft mud offer a barrier always difficult to surmount, at times impassable.

Some time was lost in the endeavour to warp the yacht off into deep water. When that expedient failed, Furneaux asked how the railway would serve: here he was balked again, because the next train through the Severn tunnel reached Bristol too late to connect with the last train to Bridgewater. In a word, there was nothing to be done but wait for the tide; Leigh, whose acquaintance with the district was that of the yachtsman, tried to console the detective with stories of craft belated in both the main stream and the tidal rivers running into it.

"If you stick fast on one of these sandspits when the channel is emptying itself with the speed of a millrace, you are absolutely helpless," he said. "One can't even swim ashore until the slack. The only resource is to have a balloon on deck, already inflated. Have you a balloon, Elinor?" he went on, turning to the girl, for these two did not chafe under the infliction like Furneaux.

"The wind is blowing the wrong way," she replied; "otherwise I

would ask Martin: he generally produces everything I want at exactly the right moment."

"It is blowing the right way for Bagot," growled the detective, who was more troubled by the mishap than they could guess. "It blew in this direction when Bagot threw Dix's body out of a balloon at Bridgewater, and the guide-rope twice knocked you off your feet, Mr. Leigh. And it was blowing this way yesterday morning, when Churchill's corpse was flung on to a Brecon hill by some such devilish contrivance."

"Oh!" cried Elinor in bewilderment, and her shrill exclamation drowned the stronger phrase that Leigh blurted out. Furneaux's retort explained so much. It illumined the dark places of the mystery as a gleam of lightning makes clear a pathway through trees on a midnight of storm and gloom.

"A balloon!" gasped Leigh. The significance of the double trail of the giant snake in the barley-field and at "Nielpahar" became evident. "Why didn't I think of that before?"

"Because many a true word is spoken in jest," said Furneaux bitterly. "I am going ashore in that boat, Miss Hinton. I shall return in good time for the crossing. Meanwhile, I must keep the telegraph wires busy."

"Why is he so angry?" whispered Elinor. "We shall be at Burnham shortly after daybreak. Surely the lapse of a few hours cannot be vital to his plans!"

"Furneaux is not angry—he is afraid, sweet-heart."

"Afraid of what?"

"Lest Bagot may escape."

"But he said he meant to arrest him to-morrow."

"Furneaux veils his meanings. He never acts in the way you expect him to act. But I am getting glimpses of his methods, and you may be certain that he is very, very doubtful of laying hands on Bagot ow. I wonder why?"

16

Bagot's Flight

Now, for the first time, while she watched the gloaming from the deck of the ›Mishe Nahma‹—which handsome craft, by the way, rested on an even keel and was in no danger of careening—Elinor heard the full story of Leigh's strange adventure on the bank of the Parret.

"A balloon was the one thing that never crossed my mind," he said. "I am ashamed to confess that I thought of fiends and gnomes and the elfin shapes that terrified one's childhood, but never once did I think of a balloon. Somehow, it seems to be so opposed to Bagot's huge bulk. One pictures the man drawn by strong horses or high-powered motors rather than sailing through the air."

"Is that his invention?" mused Elinor.

"Hardly an invention. Ballooning is old enough. But there! Now I see! Bagot is so heavy that when Dix's weight was added he was unable to cross the channel after the ascent from the grounds at 'Nielpahar.' Oh, blind that I was! That big shed in the grounds is where he has a gas-making plant, and that is why he would not allow Furneaux to go within and search for the body of the man."

"Please don't talk of it," said Elinor, shuddering. "I—touched—him. Twice last night I awoke in a fright, for I dreamed of him and saw his face."

People who themselves have not borne the infliction of disturbing dreams are always ready to offer scientific sympathy.

"What actually happened was that you moved your injured arm and felt a twinge," said Arthur. "Dreams endure but a second or two, you

know. But picture to yourself the tragedy of that night by the river—Bagot's oath when he found the trail rope dragging—the blow it struck me—the falling of his hat overboard while he was striving to disentangle the corpse from the rigging. ... Perhaps it defied him for a time, mocked grimly at his efforts. Then, when I went on board the barge, and the rope swung against the plank, knocking it from under my feet, cannot you see Bagot, white-faced, perspiring, peering over the side of the car to discover who it was that shouted defiance to the unseen assailant? He would wait, still as a mouse, conscious that the balloon was slowly settling, probably revolver in hand, ready to shoot. Then he heard me fall, and with one supreme wrench he flung the body clear, and it crashed down, while the balloon bounded a couple of thousand feet skywards as if it were glad to be rid of the token of a crime."

"Oh, don't be horrid!" cried Elinor. "You make my flesh creep. Do let us find something else to discuss."

"But how inexplicable that in searching poor Dix's clothes for documents he should have missed the plan of the secret passage," said Arthur, knowing full well that no striving would take their minds off Bagot that night.

"Mr. Furneaux said it was in a hidden pocket—in a waistcoat—where men often carry paper money. And it was dark, with a strong wind blowing, and gusts of rain. He must have crossed up there, high up in the dark sky. What a man! Arthur, dear, do you believe the police will really be able to lock him up in some strong prison where he will never again be able to do us any harm?"

She was nervous and distraught. Leigh began to reassure her and tried now to divert her thoughts to the thrilling, but less ghastly, incidents of the previous night. It was too late. Despite her own protest, Elinor's imagination was busy with that eerie flight of the balloon across an arm of the sea to the Forest of Dean.

"How about Churchill?" she asked suddenly. "Bagot did not carry him to Breconshire. Of that, at least, you and I can be certain. Our testimony is strong in favour of Bagot in the case of Churchill."

"But you spoke of an invention. What more likely than that Bagot should have a small experimental balloon to which he could attach a body but no car? I am hazy in my knowledge of aeronautics, but I believe it would be an easy matter to calculate weights and gas pressures in such a way that a heavy body would detach itself after a certain time and fall, while the liberated balloon would soar off for hundreds of miles. Really, Bagot did his killing artistically. By this time next week,

Elinor, I shall be famous not only throughout Great Britain, but all over the wide world."

"Why?"

"Am I not the chief witness against him? Even now the evidence is meagre unless Furneaux has more up his sleeve than he has told us."

"Oh, I rely on Mr. Furneaux absolutely. He is a marvellous man. It was he who persuaded me to offer that money for the lease. He said it would be quite safe ..."

"You dear little conspirator! Is your name Mrs. George F. Bates, then?"

A ghost of a smile flickered on Elinor's lips.

"Mrs. Bates is really acting for me," she admitted. "She is in London now, raising the money through her solicitors on scrip that I placed under her control."

"But tell me, Elinor, what reason had you for befriending me—you, who must have been besieged by suitors innumerable?"

She blushed a little. Bagot's grim vision was driven temporarily into the background.

"You forget," she said, "that I seemed to know you quite well long before we met. And it looked like the hand of fate when you rescued me from that mad attempt on Harry's part to force me into compliance with his own and his father's wishes. And—and—I have a little confession to make. I couldn't help it, I didn't mean to listen, but on that first evening, when I came back to the library after the maid had brushed my dress, I heard that dear old man, Jenkins, telling you about the Belle Damosel."

It was exasperating that they should be sitting on the open deck of the yacht, while the crew were busily occupied in adjusting cables fore and aft to prevent any possibility of accident.

So Arthur could only whisper intently:

"I wish to goodness, Elinor, that Bagot had not stained his hands with murder. No matter what other crime he had committed I would help him to escape. I owe him the crowning happiness of my life. He brought us together!"

When the detective returned he appeared to be in his usual lively spirits. He had heard from Lawson.

"Reads like him, doesn't it?" he grinned, spreading out a telegraphic flimsy. "I wired, telling him my predicament, and asking what Bagot was doing. This is what he answered: 'Feasting at Pinkerton's.' You

always get the right word from Lawson. Feasting! Anybody else would have said 'dining,' but Bagot's appearance suggests a banquet, with the best of wines—not gross, but perfect. Bagot ought to have lived in old Rome. One can picture him a Napoleonic Nero. By the way, I wired also to Mr. Philip Mowle at Bristol, asking him to bring two reliable motor cars to Burnham at 6 a.m."

"Pinkerton's is no great distance," said Arthur.

"Bagot owns two motors, and I want at least to meet him on an equality," was the dry comment, and again there was a reticence about Furneaux's words that suggested anxiety, distrust, almost fear.

"Would you mind telling me why you are so positive that Mr. Bagot himself, and none other, killed those unfortunate men?" asked Elinor timidly.

"I am positive because I can prove it now," said he. "I knew from the instant I heard Mr. Leigh's story, but I could not prove. My first bit of real evidence was the motorist's cap; my second, the dated bill from the Gas Light and Coke Company which reached Mr. Churchill the day he left London. Being a methodical old gentleman, he put it among his papers so that it should not be forgotten. When Bagot killed him in—" Furneaux was about to say "in the summer house" but Elinor's pallid cheeks stopped him—"in the garden at 'Nielpahar,' and examined his clothes, finding another copy of the plan of the passage, he probably thrust back all ordinary letters and documents hurriedly, meaning that Churchill should be identified at once when found. But Churchill was a big man, and the dragging of his limbs through the grass drew out just that one little slip of paper. Then there were the revolvers. Bagot owned both. He purchased them eighteen months ago in Piccadilly. A 320 bullet was taken from Dix's shoulder, the floors and walls at 'Nielpahar' were riddled with bullets of 320 caliber, and I found two empty cases which Bagot had failed to sweep up when hastily removing the traces of the fight and the dead body. He had thrown petrol over the summer house, meaning to set fire to it when the sun was high enough to prevent the flames being seen a long way off. And who else could obtain petrol there? It was stored in the shed, and you heard him boast that the doors were guarded by cipher locks. The discovery of the balloon and the evidence you listened to at Lydney will go far to hang him. Of course, if I had not told the local police to inquire for a balloonist it would be more difficult."

"But how on earth did you arrive at the balloon theory?" broke in Arthur.

"There was no other possible way in which that dead man could have been flung on that barge. Look at the medical evidence of fractures and bruises inflicted after death. It was either a balloon or magic, and we pay no heed to magic in Scotland Yard."

"I suppose the loss of that shirt—" began Arthur diffidently.

"Isn't so very important," said Furneaux graciously. "You and I both saw it. We can identify others of the same pattern and material, and stamped in the same way. Bagot's advice that it should be hidden was a mistake. Extraordinarily cute at the time, now it tells against him."

"Will you arrest all the men at Pinkerton's?" asked Elinor, after a pause.

"I hope not," said Furneaux, pausing also before he replied. "Bagot had no accomplices, Miss Hinton—nothing but dupes, or hirelings, like the French chauffeur."

The admission seemed to afford her some relief. She retired early and visited her stepfather before going to her own cabin. A police constable mounted guard on the yacht's deck all night, ostensibly to arouse Furneaux in case any telegrams were received for him at the Railway station, but really to prevent any unauthorized communication with or from the shore.

The yacht was afloat before three o'clock, and an early breakfast was served at half-past five. Shortly after six they reached Burnham, and there on the promenade were Inspector Lawson, Mr. Philip Mowle, and two automobiles. Furneaux's greeting when he met his colleague was ominous.

"Bird flown?" he asked.

"Yes," said the stolid police officer.

"How?"

"Doctor was summoned from Bridgewater at midnight to physic that mad Swede, who was suffering from an overdose of a narcotic. Nothing really serious, the doctor said. But Bagot asked him for a lift back to the town. The doctor agreed. Just before the brougham reached the gate, where I had three men posted, Bagot dropped a coin in the bottom of the carriage, stooped to pick it up, and my men saw only the doctor, as Bagot insisted on sitting with his back to the horse. Ingenious for a fat man, wasn't it?"

"Were you there?"

"No. That dodge wouldn't have tricked me, I was so doubtful when I heard of the doctor's visit that I decided to act on my own responsibility. I have the others practically under arrest, but Bagot is at 'Nielpahar.'"

"How did he get there?"

"In a hack from the Bush, quite openly. I was after him in an hour, and now there are four men stationed at each gate, while others are patrolling the roads outside the walls."

"He will slip them," said Furneaux.

"Not in a doctor's carriage," said Lawson. "I admonished them."

Mr. Mowle, the solictor, though expecting developments, was very greatly surprised when he heard the police discussing Bagot as a fugitive criminal. He was destined to be shocked much more seriously before the day was far advanced. No time was lost at Burnham. Elinor, of course, remained on the yacht, though it needed some persuasion to keep her there. Furneaux and Lawson went off in the first car, and Leigh followed with Mowle in the second. They sped through Bridgewater and across the Black Down country until they neared the Nielpahar estate. Here a council of war was held, and it was decided that Furneaux, Lawson, and six constables should climb the gate which Arthur and Elinor had surmounted. Leigh and the solicitor were permitted to watch the attack, but at a distance. Furneaux was fully persuaded that Bagot would show fight; if so, none but officers of the law might call on him to surrender.

Nevertheless, astute as he was, the detective did not fathom the full resource of a genius like Bagot. From facts ascertained subsequently, it was evident that Bagot foresaw this imminent arrest, but waited at "Nielpahar" until the police put in an appearance. He probably thought it would be foolish to run before his liberty was actually threatened. The cordon at Pinkerton's which he had baffled did not constitute such a really determined effort by the authorities as this invasion of his locked gates by men in uniform. Now there could be no room for doubt. He must either oppose impossible numbers, or kill himself, or yield tamely, or fly—and as he was one of the few men living who could fly—aerial flight being his only absorbing interest—there was no question in his mind as to which course to adopt.

In that supreme hour it may well be conceived how Bagot, white-faced, but utterly self-possessed and confident, watched the police crossing the park and spreading out fanwise as they neared the house. He could not see the entrance from his perch at a small window high in the roof of the lofty shed, but it must have been easy to judge from

the behaviour of the men standing on the lawns and among the shrubs that their comrades were searching every inch in the dwelling.

At last Furneaux reappeared. How Bagot's eyes must have glinted when he saw his enemy near at hand, and pointing to the shed! Happily the man was no sportsman, and did not own a rifle, or it is possible that a fresh series of murders might have sullied the beauty of a delightful day. Elinor said once that Bagot meant to transform the Nielpahar estate into an earthly Paradise, which is a common form of speech when one wishes to limn a charming garden, embosomed in verdant lawns and shielded from the outer world by tall trees and moss-grown walls. Well, if that dream of Bagot's had been fulfilled, it might have avoided a great deal of misery and wrongdoing. But he neglected his Paradise, and now the protectors of an outraged community were marching to his last retreat over the rank grasses and weed-choked turf.

The wind, which still blew steadily from a southerly quarter, had swung round a little to the east. This was important. If Bagot had a balloon concealed among the trees, and they suddenly saw him soaring up into the cloudless sky, he would be compelled to cross sixty or seventy miles of sea before he reached land again on the southwest corner of Wales. It was evident that no monstrous globe could shoot out from the neighbourhood of the shed. Though the structure was fifty feet in height, and windowless throughout its gaunt walls of corrugated iron, it had a heavy sloping roof, solid enough, and pierced here and there by attics to admit light.

That Furneaux was dreading some startling move on Bagot's part was shown, however, by scraps of a conversation between him and Constable Jones which reached Arthur when he pressed rather closely on their heels.

"Sure you threw that engine out of gear, Jones?"

"Quite certain, sir."

"Unscrewed both suction valves?"

"Yes, sir. They're in my house now."

"And the other thing, the big box-kite—what of that?"

"I couldn't make that out at all, sir. Its carriage travelled on rails, I thought; but of such a steepness ... worse than a cliff tramway. ... And they stop at the door."

"No engine there?"

"Something wrapped in a sheet. Couldn't get up. It wasn't a body—far too small."

Furneaux broke into a run. They all ran. There was nothing to be seen but the square, ugly shed, so utterly out of place in this wilderness of rioting greenery. Its giant doors faced them blankly, but the detective was the first to note that the cipher locks hung apart.

"Ah!" he breathed. "He is within!"

Still running, he heard the hum of an engine, droning like some Goliath of bees. He glanced at Jones, and the policeman understood.

"Impossible!" he gasped. "Couldn't get 'em made in the time ... unless he had spare parts. And see. ... That is the exhaust!"

The pipe to which he pointed was noiseless and vapourless.

They were quite near now. Furneaux, active, eager, filled with the lust of the chase, took the lead. Next to him ran Arthur, who could have outstripped him, but was already disobeying orders in being so near.

With a final leap, the detective was at the double door, hammering with his fists, trying to pull the two leaves asunder, and shouting:

"In the King's name, Bagot! Open the door! No use trying to resist the King!"

Both heavy sections of oak panelling swung quickly outward. Each was twenty-five feet high and fifteen feet wide, and their combined circular sweep was irresistible. Furneaux was pushed back, and nearly fell; Arthur just stopped in time; a couple of policemen moving on the flanks were thrown to the ground.

In the dim interior those who stood directly in front caught a glimpse of two steel rails that curved from the threshold right to the top of the rear wall. Up there, surrounded by a spidery framework that carried silken wings, was Bagot. He resembled some monster moth, poised for flight. The sight of him made Furneaux hysterical. His voice cracked to a shriek.

"No use, Bagot! ... In the King's name .... I have a warrant ...."

"Out of my way, little man!" shouted Bagot triumphantly, and the airship swooped, so swiftly, so gracefully, that it seemed barely to touch its steel supports. Nor did it even touch them during more than half the descent. It gathered speed with the ease and instant perfection of motion displayed by a swallow leaving its nest. With a soft flutter of the silk planes and the purr of a free-running motor, it sprang into the air while yet ten feet from the ground. When it passed Furneaux it was rising, and he, with all the others, saw its pilot pluck a revolver from his breast. Bagot's object was plain enough. He hoped that a chance shot might free him for ever of the Oedipus who had solved his puzzle.

But that same Constable Jones, who, said Bagot not so long ago, might stare at his invention for a year "and make neither head nor tail of it," had a hobby, and his hobby was mechanics. During off hours at Bridgewater he was never so happy as when tinkering at engines; he understood and loved the whirr of living wheels and pistons; so now, before the doors were opened, his ears had told him that the "something wrapped in a sheet," which he noticed during the search for a body, was an engine. It must be a very small one, but he had read of horsepower pent within limits of weight marvellous beyond belief to one who had never examined any machine more concentrated than an ordinary steam-engine. He knew, too, how delicate such creations must be—transcending all common bounds in strength, yet fragile as a lady's watch, and as ready to resent rough treatment by sulky stoppage.

When Bagot shouted that contemptuous order to Furneaux, Jones pulled forth a pair of handcuffs and poised them in readiness for a throw. His design was to hit the engine, and trust to luck for effect, but when he caught sight of the raised pistol he flung the steel missile not at the machine, but at the man. The handcuffs struck Bagot's arm, there was a loud report, a harmless bullet sped somewhere, and the steel bands, with their connecting chain and swivel, fell among the whirling limbs of the motor.

Furneaux knew nothing of this. He was dancing in a very paroxysm of rage, and yelling in a weird falsetto:

"Bring you back from the moon, Bagot. ... Can't escape. ... Hang you yet, Bagot!" nor did he strive to dodge and cower when the weapon was pointed, but continued to gibber at his flying quarry like one whose reason was momentarily unhinged.

Nevertheless, he and every other man there did not fail to observe that Bagot's gratified leer at their dismay as he swept past seemed hardly to be borne out by his subsequent actions. He threw away his weapon, tore madly at a lever, stooped forward, and began to rummage among the cranks and cylinders with both hands. The propeller, an unbroken circle one instant, slowed into revolving but distinctly separate blades the next. So great was the impetus already attained by the aeroplane that it rose with a magnificent sweep when its broad wings met the steady thrust of the wind.

Up and up it mounted, seeming to disdain alike the laws of flight and gravity. No bird could have achieved that wonderful upward parabola against the wind. The tallest trees and the topmost chimneys of the mansion were dwarfed by that one, long-sustained effort of the rigid

pinions.

Then, at a height variously estimated between two hundred and five hundred feet, the aeroplane lurched, toppled over sideways, and began to fall.

Almost noiseless in its governed progress, it screamed aloud now that it was wounded to death. The silk planes, tilted to unstable angles, whistled and sobbed as they cleft the heedless breeze. A bellow of fear and agony came faintly through the increasing uproar as the crippled machine plunged headlong to earth. Once it lurched violently, and a heavy body, with arms and legs sprawling, was shot straight down. It struck the ground first, some yards away from the place where the aeroplane crashed itself into a twisted and shapeless mass.

Inspector Lawson, unconscious word artist, described the incident pithily.

"Bagot fell like a dead crow, but the airship came back with wind and sound," said he.

"Well, we have all recovered our senses now," chirped Furneaux, when three inquests were ended, and he had accepted Leigh's invitation to pass a quiet week-end at the Abbey while he wrote a detailed and confidential report of recent events in the Bridgewater district.

"I suppose so," said Arthur gloomily.

"Why doubt? I thought it was only the fair sex who are uncertain, coy, and hard to please, yet you must be all these and more if you are not surfeited with last month's adventures."

"I wish Bagot had not been killed," growled Arthur.

"But that is unkind. He died in the moment of victory. I am assured that his wonderful engine would have driven the aeroplane to France, or to any other country so long as he could procure petrol. I admired Bagot. I revere his memory; but he was built on too colossal a scale to dwell in the world of to-day. He ought to have lived when those great beasts you see in stone in museums were prowling about. Why, then, desire for such a genius the slow torture of the assizes?"

"It is not that. Of course, he had to be stopped one way or another, but while he was on earth he magnetized those who came in contact with him; we were either madly wise or insanely stupid; we were swayed hither and thither by currents of some tremendous force

that exuded from the man; our nerves were on a raw edge. At any rate, we lived."

Furneaux laid down a scribbling pad and pencil, and took from his coat pocket the somewhat damaged cigar which had replaced its crumbled predecessor. He sniffed it twice before he said:

"Some of us jolly near died."

Leigh did not answer. His troubled eyes sought the blue line of the Bristol Channel above the trees, and the detective watched him with an amused smile.

"Let us analyse," he said at last. "You have found your grandfather's money, and Mowle is arranging the mortgage settlement with Dix and Churchill's heirs?"

"Yes."

"And every cat, dog, rabbit, and ferret that was not worthwhile keeping alive has been chloroformed?"

Arthur consigned cats, dogs, rabbits, and ferrets to an impossible future.

"Exactly. And Miss Hinton is well rid of worthless relatives in the pair she has pensioned off since they were no longer able to rob her under Bagot's tuition?"

"That is true enough," said Leigh angrily.

"It is so true that I am deliberately glossing over Harry Hinton's cooperation with Bagot's schemes in meeting both Dix and Churchill and bringing them to 'Nielpahar' on the plea that his sister wished to see them before they met you?" snapped Furneaux.

"Well, they are gone—carrying the mad Petersen with them. They will trouble her no more."

"And Miss Hinton is well and happy on board her yacht, and enjoying the society of her trusted friends?"

"Look here, Furneaux, I know your ways," cried Arthur, with some show of heat. "Why goad me in this fashion? You are the last man to need telling that it is on Miss Hinton's account I am worried. Before Bagot's death we were good as engaged. Now—"

"Now," broke in Furneaux , "you want her to fling herself into your arms and cry 'Arthur, I am yours.' She isn't that sort of girl. Good Lord, man, be off and win her! Sitting here and mooning will accomplish nothing. By Jove, if I were in your shoes I wouldn't give her so much time to think."

That roused Arthur. He sprang up and went to the window. Furneaux grinned, and resumed his writing. Leigh sauntered out. Five minutes later the detective heard a dogcart being driven furiously down the hill.

"He felt the spur that time," said he. "Expects a girl like her to do all the courting, does he? Well, he's mistaken. There's something in heredity, after all. That old curmudgeon up there knew so little about women that he thought he could keep them out of this house for ever. His grandson takes after him, at any rate where lack of knowledge is concerned."

And Furneaux glared vindictively at Rollaston Leigh's portrait before he began to write again. He wrote steadily for two hours. Then he yawned, put his cigar under his nose, and strolled into the garden. He was gazing fixedly at the gargoyle when Jenkins hailed him familiarly, the pair having become great friends.

"Note for you, Mr. Furneaux," cried the butler.

"What's up now?" cried the detective, who recognized Arthur's handwriting. He read:

> *"You are right, as usual. Wedding fixed for 20th of next month. You really are a brick. Elinor says you must come and dine to-night, seven sharp. Sending dogcart.—A.L.*

Furneaux pursed his lips and gazed at Jenkins in silence.

"Anything wrong with the master?" asked the old man anxiously.

"No. Just the opposite. Banns and bells, Jenkins, iced cake and champagne, treats for school-children and aged poor. Seems to me, though, that Scotland Yard ought to participate in the festivities. Bless my soul, what would they have done if it hadn't been for me? But come in, my old buck, let's celebrate! I'm off duty to-day, and I want to drink to the health of the Belle Damosel."

"Oh, is that it?" cried Jenkins, with an air of vast relief. "I knew that long afore I saw you, Mr. Furneaux. When a real live Abbot took the trouble hundreds of years ago to make a verse about Leigh's lady, it ain't likely he would be mistaken, now is it?"

The End