

# **Five Tales**

## **Vol.I**

**By**

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***Free***editorial 

# Five Tales Vol.I

## THE FIRST AND LAST

"So the last shall be first, and the first last." HOLY WRIT.

It was a dark room at that hour of six in the evening, when just the single oil reading lamp under its green shade let fall a dapple of light over the Turkey carpet; over the covers of books taken out of the bookshelves, and the open pages of the one selected; over the deep blue and gold of the coffee service on the little old stool with its Oriental embroidery. Very dark in the winter, with drawn curtains, many rows of leatherbound volumes, oakpanelled walls and ceiling. So large, too, that the lighted spot before the fire where he sat was just an oasis. But that was what Keith Darrant liked, after his day's work the hard early morning study of his "cases," the fret and strain of the day in court; it was his rest, these two hours before dinner, with books, coffee, a pipe, and sometimes a nap. In red Turkish slippers and his old brown velvet coat, he was well suited to that framing of glow and darkness. A painter would have seized avidly on his clearcut, yellowish face, with its black eyebrows twisting up over eyes grey or brown, one could hardly tell, and its dark grizzling hair still plentiful, in spite of those daily hours of wig. He seldom thought of his work while he sat there, throwing off with practised ease the strain of that long attention to the multiple threads of argument and evidence to be disentangled work profoundly interesting, as a rule, to his clear intellect, trained to almost instinctive rejection of all but the essential, to selection of what was legally vital out of the mass of confused tactical and human detail presented to his scrutiny; yet sometimes tedious and wearing. As for instance today, when he had suspected his client of perjury, and was almost convinced that he must throw up his brief. He had disliked the weaklooking, whitefaced fellow from the first, and his nervous, shifty answers, his prominent startled eyes a type too common in these days of canting tolerations and weak humanitarianism; no good, no good!

Of the three books he had taken down, a Volume of Voltaire curious fascination that Frenchman had, for all his destructive irony! a volume of Burton's travels, and Stevenson's "New Arabian Nights," he had pitched upon the last. He felt, that evening, the want of something sedative, a desire to rest from thought of any kind. The court had been crowded, stuffy; the air, as he walked home, soft, sou'westerly, charged with coming moisture, no quality of vigour in it; he felt relaxed, tired, even nervy, and for once the loneliness of his house seemed strange and comfortless.

Lowering the lamp, he turned his face towards the fire. Perhaps he would get a sleep before that boring dinner at the Tellason's. He wished it were vacation, and Maisie back from school. A widower for many years, he had lost the habit of a woman about him; yet tonight he had a positive yearning for the society of his young daughter, with her quick

ways, and bright, dark eyes. Curious what perpetual need of a woman some men had! His brother Laurence wasted all through womanatrophie of willpower! A man on the edge of things; living from hand to mouth; his gifts all down at heel! One would have thought the Scottish strain might have saved him; and yet, when a Scotsman did begin to go downhill, who could go faster? Curious that their mother's blood should have worked so differently in her two sons. He himself had always felt he owed all his success to it.

His thoughts went off at a tangent to a certain issue troubling his legal conscience. He had not wavered in the usual assumption of omniscience, but he was by no means sure that he had given right advice. Well! Without that power to decide and hold to decision in spite of misgiving, one would never have been fit for one's position at the Bar, never have been fit for anything. The longer he lived, the more certain he became of the prime necessity of virile and decisive action in all the affairs of life. A word and a blow and the blow first! Doubts, hesitations, sentiment the muling and puking of this twilight age! And there welled up on his handsome face a smile that was almost devilish the tricks of firelight are so many! It faded again in sheer drowsiness; he slept.

He woke with a start, having a feeling of something out beyond the light, and without turning his head said: "What's that?" There came a sound as if somebody had caught his breath. He turned up the lamp.

"Who's there?"

A voice over by the door answered:

"Only I Larry."

Something in the tone, or perhaps just being startled out of sleep like this, made him shiver. He said:

"I was asleep. Come in!"

It was noticeable that he did not get up, or even turn his head, now that he knew who it was, but waited, his half-closed eyes fixed on the fire, for his brother to come forward. A visit from Laurence was not an unmixed blessing. He could hear him breathing, and became conscious of a scent of whisky. Why could not the fellow at least abstain when he was coming here! It was so childish, so lacking in any sense of proportion or of decency! And he said sharply:

"Well, Larry, what is it?"

It was always something. He often wondered at the strength of that sense of trusteeship, which kept him still tolerant of the troubles, amenable to the petitions of this brother of

his; or was it just "blood" feeling, a Highland sense of loyalty to kith and kin; an oldtime quality which judgment and half his instincts told him was weakness but which, in spite of all, bound him to the distressful fellow? Was he drunk now, that he kept lurking out there by the door? And he said less sharply:

"Why don't you come and sit down?"

He was coming now, avoiding the light, skirting along the walls just beyond the radiance of the lamp, his feet and legs to the waist brightly lighted, but his face disintegrated in shadow, like the face of a dark ghost.

"Are you ill, man?"

Still no answer, save a shake of that head, and the passing up of a hand, out of the light, to the ghostly forehead under the dishevelled hair. The scent of whisky was stronger now; and Keith thought:

'He really is drunk. Nice thing for the new butler to see! If he can't behave'

The figure against the wall heaved a sigh so truly from an overburdened heart that Keith was conscious with a certain dismay of not having yet fathomed the cause of this uncanny silence. He got up, and, back to the fire, said with a brutality born of nerves rather than design:

"What is it, man? Have you committed a murder, that you stand there dumb as a fish?"

For a second no answer at all, not even of breathing; then, just the whisper:

"Yes."

The sense of unreality which so helps one at moments of disaster enabled Keith to say vigorously:

"By Jove! You have been drinking!"

But it passed at once into deadly apprehension.

"What do you mean? Come here, where I can see you. What's the matter with you, Larry?"

With a sudden lurch and dive, his brother left the shelter of the shadow, and sank into a chair in the circle of light. And another long, broken sigh escaped him.

"There's nothing the matter with me, Keith! It's true!"

Keith stepped quickly forward, and stared down into his brother's face; and instantly he saw that it was true. No one could have simulated the look in those eyes of horrified wonder, as if they would never again get on terms with the face to which they belonged. To see them squeezed the heart only real misery could look like that. Then that sudden pity became angry bewilderment.

"What in God's name is this nonsense?"

But it was significant that he lowered his voice; went over to the door, too, to see if it were shut. Laurence had drawn his chair forward, huddling over the fire a thin figure, a worn, high cheekboned face with deep sunk blue eyes, and wavy hair all ruffled, a face that still had a certain beauty. Putting a hand on that lean shoulder, Keith said:

"Come, Larry! Pull yourself together, and drop exaggeration."

"It's true; I tell you; I've killed a man."

The noisy violence of that outburst acted like a douche. What was the fellow about shouting out such words! But suddenly Laurence lifted his hands and wrung them. The gesture was so utterly painful that it drew a quiver from Keith's face.

"Why did you come here," he said, "and tell me this?"

Larry's face was really unearthly sometimes, such strange gleams passed up on to it!

"Whom else should I tell? I came to know what I'm to do, Keith? Give myself up, or what?"

At that sudden introduction of the practical Keith felt his heart twitch. Was it then as real as all that? But he said, very quietly:

"Just tell me how did it come about, this affair?"

That question linked the dark, gruesome, fantastic nightmare on to actuality.

"When did it happen?"

"Last night."

In Larry's face there was there had always been something childishly truthful. He would never stand a chance in court! And Keith said:

"How? Where? You'd better tell me quietly from the beginning. Drink this coffee; it'll clear your head."

Laurence took the little blue cup and drained it.

"Yes," he said. "It's like this, Keith. There's a girl I've known for some months now"

Women! And Keith said between his teeth: "Well?"

"Her father was a Pole who died over here when she was sixteen, and left her all alone. A man called Walenn, a mongrel American, living in the same house, married her, or pretended to she's very pretty, Keith he left her with a baby six months old, and another coming. That one died, and she did nearly. Then she starved till another fellow took her on. She lived with him two years; then Walenn turned up again, and made her go back to him. The brute used to beat her black and blue, all for nothing. Then he left her again. When I met her she'd lost her elder child, too, and was taking anybody who came along."

He suddenly looked up into Keith's face.

"But I've never met a sweeter woman, nor a truer, that I swear. Woman! She's only twenty now! When I went to her last night, that brute that Walenn had found her out again; and when he came for me, swaggering and bullying Look!" he touched a dark mark on his forehead "I took his throat in my hands, and when I let go"

"Yes?"

"Dead. I never knew till afterwards that she was hanging on to him behind."

Again he made that gesture wringing his hands.

In a hard voice Keith said:

"What did you do then?"

"We sat by it a long time. Then I carried it on my back down the street, round a corner to an archway."

"How far?"

"About fifty yards."

"Was anyone did anyone see?"

"No."

"What time?"

"Three."

"And then?"

"Went back to her."

"Whyin Heaven's name?"

"She was lonely and afraid; so was I, Keith."

"Where is this place?"

"Fortytwo, Borrow Street, Soho."

"And the archway?"

"Corner of Glove Lane."

"Good God! WhyI saw it in the paper!"

And seizing the journal that lay on his bureau, Keith read again that paragraph: "The body of a man was found this morning under an archway in Glove Lane, Soho. From marks about the throat grave suspicions of foul play are entertained. The body had apparently been robbed, and nothing was discovered leading to identification."

It was real earnest, then. Murder! His own brother! He faced round and said:

"You saw this in the paper, and dreamed it. Understandyou dreamed it!"

The wistful answer came:

"If only I had, Keithif only I had!"

In his turn, Keith very nearly wrung his hands.

"Did you take anything from thebody?"

"This dropped while we were struggling."

It was an empty envelope with a South American postmark addressed: "Patrick Walenn, Simon's Hotel, Farrier Street, London." Again with that twitching in his heart, Keith said:

"Put it in the fire."

Then suddenly he stooped to pluck it out. By that command he had identified himself with this. But he did not pluck it out. It blackened, writhed, and vanished. And once more he said:

"What in God's name made you come here and tell me?"

"You know about these things. I didn't mean to kill him. I love the girl. What shall I do, Keith?"

"Simple! How simple! To ask what he was to do! It was like Larry! And he said:

"You were not seen, you think?" "It's a dark street. There was no one about."

"When did you leave this girl the second time?"

"About seven o'clock."

"Where did you go?"

"To my rooms."

"In Fitzroy Street?"

"Yes."

"Did anyone see you come in?"

"No."

"What have you done since?"

"Sat there."

"Not been out?"

"No."

"Not seen the girl?"

"No."

"You don't know, then, what she's done since?"

"No."

"Would she give you away?"



"Never."

"Would she give herself away hysteria?"

"No."

"Who knows of your relations with her?"

"No one."

"No one?"

"I don't know who should, Keith."

"Did anyone see you going in last night, when you first went to her?"

"No. She lives on the ground floor. I've got keys."

"Give them to me. What else have you that connects you with her?"

"Nothing."

"In your rooms?"

"No."

"No photographs. No letters?"

"No."

"Be careful."

"Nothing."

"No one saw you going back to her the second time?"

"No."

"No one saw you leave her in the morning?"

"No."

"You were fortunate. Sit down again, man. I must think."

Think! Think out this accursed thing so beyond all thought, and all belief. But he could not think. Not a coherent thought would come. And he began again:

"Was it his first reappearance with her?"

"Yes."

"She told you so?"

"Yes."

"How did he find out where she was?"

"I don't know."

"How drunk were you?"

"I was not drunk."

"How much had you drunk?"

"About two bottles of claretnothing."

"You say you didn't mean to kill him?"

"NoGod knows!"

"That's something."

"What made you choose the arch?"

"It was the first dark place."

"Did his face look as if he had been strangled?"

"Don't!"

"Did it?"

"Yes."

"Very disfigured?"

"Yes."

"Did you look to see if his clothes were marked?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why not? My God! If you had done it!"

"You say he was disfigured. Would he be recognisable?"

"I don't know."

"When she lived with him last where was that?"

"I don't know for certain. Pimlico, I think."

"Not Soho?"

"No."

"How long has she been at the Soho place?"

"Nearly a year."

"Always the same rooms?"

"Yes."

"Is there anyone living in that house or street who would be likely to know her as his wife?"

"I don't think so."

"What was he?"

"I should think he was a professional 'bully.'"

"I see. Spending most of his time abroad, then?"

"Yes."

"Do you know if he was known to the police?"

"I haven't heard of it."

"Now, listen, Larry. When you leave here go straight home, and don't go out till I come to you, tomorrow morning. Promise that!"

"I promise."

"I've got a dinner engagement. I'll think this out. Don't drink. Don't talk! Pull yourself together."

"Don't keep me longer than you can help, Keith!"

That white face, those eyes, that shaking hand! With a twinge of pity in the midst of all the turbulence of his revolt, and fear, and disgust Keith put his hand on his brother's shoulder, and said:

"Courage!"

And suddenly he thought: 'My God! Courage! I shall want it all myself!'

## II

Laurence Darrant, leaving his brother's house in the Adelphi, walked northwards, rapidly, slowly, rapidly again. For, if there are men who by force of will do one thing only at a time, there are men who from lack of will do now one thing, now another; with equal intensity. To such natures, to be gripped by the Nemesis which attends the lack of selfcontrol is no reason for being more selfcontrolled. Rather does it foster their pet feeling: "What matter? Tomorrow we die!" The effort of will required to go to Keith had relieved, exhausted and exasperated him. In accordance with those three feelings was the progress of his walk. He started from the door with the fixed resolve to go home and stay there quietly till Keith came. He was in Keith's hands, Keith would know what was to be done. But he had not gone three hundred yards before he felt so utterly weary, body and soul, that if he had but had a pistol in his pocket he would have shot himself in the street. Not even the thought of the girl this young unfortunate with her strange devotion, who had kept him straight these last five months, who had roused in him a depth of feeling he had never known before would have availed against that sudden black defection. Why go on a waif at the mercy of his own nature, a straw blown here and there by every gust which rose in him? Why not have done with it for ever, and take it out in sleep?

He was approaching the fatal street, where he and the girl, that early morning, had spent the hours clutched together, trying in the refuge of love to forget for a moment their horror and fear. Should he go in? He had promised Keith not to. Why had he promised? He caught sight of himself in a chemist's lighted window. Miserable, shadowy brute! And he remembered suddenly a dog he had picked up once in the streets of Pera, a black and white creature different from the other dogs, not one of their breed, a pariah of pariahs, who had strayed there somehow. He had taken it home to the house where he was staying, contrary to all custom of the country; had got fond of it; had shot it himself, sooner than leave it behind again to the mercies of its own kind in the streets. Twelve years ago! And those sleeve links made of little Turkish coins he had brought back for the girl at the hairdresser's in Chancery Lane where he used to get shaved pretty creature, like a wild rose. He had asked of her a kiss for payment. What queer emotion when she put her face forward to his lips a sort of passionate tenderness and shame, at the softness and warmth of that flushed cheek, at her beauty and trustful gratitude. She would soon have given herself to him that one! He had never gone there again! And to this day he did not know why he had abstained; to this day he did not know whether he were glad or sorry not to have plucked that rose. He must surely have been very different then! Queer business, life queer, queer business! to go through it never knowing what you would do next. Ah! to be like Keith, steady, buttoned up in success; a brass pot, a pillar of society! Once, as a boy, he had been within an ace of killing Keith, for sneering at him. Once in Southern Italy he had been near killing a driver who was flogging his horse. And now,

that darkfaced, swinish bully who had ruined the girl he had grown to love he had done it! Killed him! Killed a man!

He who did not want to hurt a fly. The chemist's window comforted him with the sudden thought that he had at home that which made him safe, in case they should arrest him. He would never again go out without some of those little white tablets sewn into the lining of his coat. Restful, even exhilarating thought! They said a man should not take his own life. Let them taste horror those glib citizens! Let them live as that girl had lived, as millions lived all the world over, under their canting dogmas! A man might rather even take his life than watch their cursed inhumanities.

He went into the chemist's for a bromide; and, while the man was mixing it, stood resting one foot like a tired horse. The "life" he had squeezed out of that fellow! After all, a billion living creatures gave up life each day, had it squeezed out of them, mostly. And perhaps not one a day deserved death so much as that loathly fellow. Life! a breath a flame! Nothing! Why, then, this icy clutching at his heart?

The chemist brought the draught.

"Not sleeping, sir?"

"No."

The man's eyes seemed to say: 'Yes! Burning the candle at both ends I know!' Odd life, a chemist's; pills and powders all day long, to hold the machinery of men together! Devilish odd trade!

In going out he caught the reflection of his face in a mirror; it seemed too good altogether for a man who had committed murder. There was a sort of brightness underneath, an amiability lurking about its shadows; how could it be the face of a man who had done what he had done? His head felt lighter now, his feet lighter; he walked rapidly again.

Curious feeling of relief and oppression all at once! Frightful to long for company, for talk, for distraction; and to be afraid of it! The girl the girl and Keith were now the only persons who would not give him that feeling of dread. And, of those two Keith was not! Who could consort with one who was never wrong, a successful, righteous fellow; a chap built so that he knew nothing about himself, wanted to know nothing, a chap all solid actions? To be a quicksand swallowing up one's own resolutions was bad enough! But to be like Keith all willpower, marching along, treading down his own feelings and weaknesses! No! One could not make a comrade of a man like Keith, even if he were one's brother? The only creature in all the world was the girl. She alone knew and felt what he was feeling; would put up with him and love him whatever he did, or was done

to him. He stopped and took shelter in a doorway, to light a cigarette. He had suddenly a fearful wish to pass the archway where he had placed the body; a fearful wish that had no sense, no end in view, no anything; just an insensate craving to see the dark place again. He crossed Borrow Street to the little lane. There was only one person visible, a man on the far side with his shoulders hunched against the wind; a short, dark figure which crossed and came towards him in the flickering lamplight. What a face! Yellow, ravaged, clothed almost to the eyes in a stubbly greyish growth of beard, with blackish teeth, and haunting bloodshot eyes. And what a figure of rags one shoulder higher than the other, one leg a little lame, and thin! A surge of feeling came up in Laurence for this creature, more unfortunate than himself. There were lower depths than his!

"Well, brother," he said, "you don't look too prosperous!"

The smile which gleamed out on the man's face seemed as unlikely as a smile on a scarecrow.

"Prosperity doesn't come my way," he said in a rusty voice. "I'm a failure always been a failure. And yet you wouldn't think it, would you? I was a minister of religion once."

Laurence held out a shilling. But the man shook his head.

"Keep your money," he said. "I've got more than you today, I daresay. But thank you for taking a little interest. That's worth more than money to a man that's down."

"You're right."

"Yes," the rusty voice went on; "I'd as soon die as go on living as I do. And now I've lost my self-respect. Often wondered how long a starving man could go without losing his self-respect. Not so very long. You take my word for that." And without the slightest change in the monotony of that creaking voice he added:

"Did you read of the murder? Just here. I've been looking at the place."

The words: 'So have I!' leaped up to Laurence's lips; he choked them down with a sort of terror.

"I wish you better luck," he said. "Goodnight!" and hurried away. A sort of ghastly laughter was forcing its way up in his throat. Was everyone talking of the murder he had committed? Even the very scarecrows?

### III

There are some natures so constituted that, due to be hung at ten o'clock, they will play chess at eight. Such men invariably rise. They make especially good bishops, editors, judges, impresarios, Prime ministers, moneylenders, and generals; in fact, fill with exceptional credit any position of power over their fellowmen. They have spiritual cold storage, in which are preserved their nervous systems. In such men there is little or none of that fluid sense and continuity of feeling known under those vague terms, speculation, poetry, philosophy. Men of facts and of decision switching imagination on and off at will, subordinating sentiment to reason one does not think of them when watching wind ripple over cornfields, or swallows flying.

Keith Darrant had need for being of that breed during his dinner at the Tellassons. It was just eleven when he issued from the big house in Portland Place and refrained from taking a cab. He wanted to walk that he might better think. What crude and wanton irony there was in his situation! To have been made fatherconfessor to a murderer, hewell on towards a judgeship! With his contempt for the kind of weakness which landed men in such abysses, he felt it all so sordid, so "impossible," that he could hardly bring his mind to bear on it at all. And yet he must, because of two powerful instinctsselfpreservation and bloodloyalty.

The wind had still the sapping softness of the afternoon, but rain had held off so far. It was warm, and he unbuttoned his fur overcoat. The nature of his thoughts deepened the dark austerity of his face, whose thin, wellcut lips were always pressing together, as if, by meeting, to dispose of each thought as it came up. He moved along the crowded pavements glumly. That air of festive conspiracy which drops with the darkness on to lighted streets, galled him. He turned off on a darker route.

This ghastly business! Convinced of its reality, he yet could not see it. The thing existed in his mind, not as a picture, but as a piece of irrefutable evidence. Larry had not meant to do it, of course. But it was murder, all the same. Men like Larryweak, impulsive, sentimental, introspective creaturesdid they ever mean what they did? This man, this Walenn, was, by all accounts, better dead than alive; no need to waste a thought on him! But, crimethe uglinessJustice unsatisfied! Crime concealedand his own share in the concealment! And yetbrother to brother! Surely no one could demand action from him! It was only a question of what he was going to advise Larry to do. To keep silent, and disappear? Had that a chance of success? Perhaps if the answers to his questions had been correct. But this girl! Suppose the dead man's relationship to her were ferreted out, could she be relied on not to endanger Larry? These women were all the same, unstable as water, emotional, shiftless pests of society. Then, too, a crime untracked, dogging all his brother's after life; a secret following him wherever he might vanish to; hanging over him, watching for some drunken moment, to slip out of his lips. It was bad to think of. A



clean breast of it? But his heart twitched within him. "Brother of Mr. Keith Darrant, the wellknown King's Counsel"visiting a woman of the town, strangling with his bare hands the woman's husband! No intention to murder, but a dead man! A dead man carried out of the house, laid under a dark archway! Provocation! Recommended to mercypenal servitude for life! Was that the advice he was going to give Larry tomorrow morning?

And he had a sudden vision of shaven men with claycoloured features, run, as it were, to seed, as he had seen them once in Pentonville, when he had gone there to visit a prisoner. Larry! Whom, as a baby creature, he had watched straddling; whom, as a little fellow, he had fagged; whom he had seen through scrapes at college; to whom he had lent money time and again, and time and again admonished in his courses. Larry! Five years younger than himself; and committed to his charge by their mother when she died. To become for life one of those men with faces like diseased plants; with no hair but a bushy stubble; with arrows marked on their yellow clothes! Larry! One of those men herded like sheep; at the beck and call of common men! A gentleman, his own brother, to live that slave's life, to be ordered here and there, year after year, day in, day out. Something snapped within him. He could not give that advice. Impossible! But if not, he must make sure of his ground, must verify, must know. This Glove Lane this arch way? It would not be far from where he was that very moment. He looked for someone of whom to make enquiry. A policeman was standing at the corner, his stolid face illumined by a lamp; capable and watchful an excellent officer, no doubt; but, turning his head away, Keith passed him without a word. Strange to feel that cold, uneasy feeling in presence of the law! A grim little driving home of what it all meant! Then, suddenly, he saw that the turning to his left was Borrow Street itself. He walked up one side, crossed over, and returned. He passed Number Fortytwo, a small house with business names printed on the lifeless windows of the first and second floors; with dark curtained windows on the ground floor, or was there just a slink of light in one corner? Which way had Larry turned? Which way under that grisly burden? Fifty paces of this squalid street narrow, and dark, and empty, thank heaven! Glove Lane! Here it was! A tiny runlet of a street. And here! He had run right on to the arch, a brick bridge connecting two portions of a warehouse, and dark indeed.

"That's right, gov'nor! That's the place!" He needed all his selfcontrol to turn leisurely to the speaker. "'Ere's where they found the body very spot leanin' up 'ere. They ain't got 'im yet. Lytestme lord!"

It was a ragged boy holding out a tattered yellowish journal. His lynx eyes peered up from under lanky wisps of hair, and his voice had the proprietary note of one making "a corner" in his news. Keith took the paper and gave him twopence. He even found a sort of comfort in the young ghoul's hanging about there; it meant that others besides himself had come morbidly to look. By the dim lamplight he read: "Glove Lane garrotting mystery. Nothing has yet been discovered of the murdered man's identity;

from the cut of his clothes he is supposed to be a foreigner." The boy had vanished, and Keith saw the figure of a policeman coming slowly down this gutter of a street. A second's hesitation, and he stood firm. Nothing obviously could have brought him here save this "mystery," and he stayed quietly staring at the arch. The policeman moved up abreast. Keith saw that he was the one whom he had passed just now. He noted the cold offensive question die out of the man's eyes when they caught the gleam of white shirtfront under the opened fur collar. And holding up the paper, he said:

"Is this where the man was found?"

"Yes, sir."

"Still a mystery, I see?"

"Well, we can't always go by the papers. But I don't fancy they do know much about it, yet."

"Dark spot. Do fellows sleep under here?"

The policeman nodded. "There's not an arch in London where we don't get 'em sometimes."

"Nothing found on him I think I read?"

"Not a copper. Pockets inside out. There's some funny characters about this quarter. Greeks, Hitalians all sorts."

Queer sensation this, of being glad of a policeman's confidential tone!

"Well, goodnight!"

"Goodnight, sir. Goodnight!"

He looked back from Borrow Street. The policeman was still standing there holding up his lantern, so that its light fell into the archway, as if trying to read its secret.

Now that he had seen this dark, deserted spot, the chances seemed to him much better. "Pockets inside out!" Either Larry had had presence of mind to do a very clever thing, or someone had been at the body before the police found it. That was the more likely. A dead backwater of a place. At three o'clock loneliest of all hours Larry's five minutes' grim excursion to and fro might well have passed unseen! Now, it all depended on the girl; on whether Laurence had been seen coming to her or going away; on whether, if the man's relationship to her were discovered, she could be relied on to say nothing. There was not a soul in Borrow Street now; hardly even a lighted window; and he took one of those

rather desperate decisions only possible to men daily accustomed to the instant taking of responsibility. He would go to her, and see for himself. He came to the door of Fortytwo, obviously one of those which are only shut at night, and tried the larger key. It fitted, and he was in a gaslighted passage, with an oilclothed floor, and a single door to his left. He stood there undecided. She must be made to understand that he knew everything. She must not be told more than that he was a friend of Larry's. She must not be frightened, yet must be forced to give her very soul away. A hostile witness not to be treated as hostile a matter for delicate handling! But his knock was not answered.

Should he give up this nerveracking, bizarre effort to come at a basis of judgment; go away, and just tell Laurence that he could not advise him? And then what? Something must be done. He knocked again. Still no answer. And with that impatience of being thwarted, natural to him, and fostered to the full by the conditions of his life, he tried the other key. It worked, and he opened the door. Inside all was dark, but a voice from some way off, with a sort of breathless relief in its foreign tones, said:

"Oh! then it's you, Larry! Why did you knock? I was so frightened. Turn up the light, dear. Come in!"

Feeling by the door for a switch in the pitch blackness he was conscious of arms round his neck, a warm thinly clad body pressed to his own; then withdrawn as quickly, with a gasp, and the most awful terrorstricken whisper:

"Oh! Who is it?"

With a glacial shiver down his own spine, Keith answered

"A friend of Laurence. Don't be frightened!"

There was such silence that he could hear a clock ticking, and the sound of his own hand passing over the surface of the wall, trying to find the switch. He found it, and in the light which leaped up he saw, stiffened against a dark curtain evidently screening off a bedroom, a girl standing, holding a long black coat together at her throat, so that her face with its pale brown hair, short and squarecut and curling up underneath, had an uncanny look of being detached from any body. Her face was so alabaster pale that the staring, startled eyes, dark blue or brown, and the faint rose of the parted lips, were like colour stainings on a white mask; and it had a strange delicacy, truth, and pathos, such as only suffering brings. Though not susceptible to aesthetic emotion, Keith was curiously affected. He said gently:

"You needn't be afraid. I haven't come to do you harm quite the contrary. May I sit down and talk?" And, holding up the keys, he added: "Laurence wouldn't have given me these, would he, if he hadn't trusted me?"

Still she did not move, and he had the impression that he was looking at a spirit startled out of its flesh. Nor at the moment did it seem in the least strange that he should conceive such an odd thought. He stared round the room—clean and tawdry, with its tarnished gilt mirror, marble-topped sidetable, and plush-covered sofa. Twenty years and more since he had been in such a place. And he said:

"Won't you sit down? I'm sorry to have startled you."

But still she did not move, whispering:

"Who are you, please?"

And, moved suddenly beyond the realm of caution by the terror in that whisper, he answered:

"Larry's brother."

She uttered a little sigh of relief which went to Keith's heart, and, still holding the dark coat together at her throat, came forward and sat down on the sofa. He could see that her feet, thrust into slippers, were bare; with her short hair, and those candid startled eyes, she looked like a tall child. He drew up a chair and said:

"You must forgive me coming at such an hour; he's told me, you see." He expected her to flinch and gasp; but she only clasped her hands together on her knees, and said:

"Yes?"

Then horror and discomfort rose up in him, afresh.

"An awful business!"

Her whisper echoed him:

"Yes, oh! yes! Awful it is awful!"

And suddenly realising that the man must have fallen dead just where he was sitting, Keith became stock silent, staring at the floor.

"Yes," she whispered; "Just there. I see him now always falling!"

How she said that! With what a strange gentle despair! In this girl of evil life, who had brought on them this tragedy, what was it which moved him to a sort of unwilling compassion?

"You look very young," he said.

"I am twenty."

"And you are fond of my brother?"

"I would die for him."

Impossible to mistake the tone of her voice, or the look in her eyes, true deep Slav eyes; dark brown, not blue as he had thought at first. It was a very pretty face either her life had not eaten into it yet, or the suffering of these last hours had purged away those marks; or perhaps this devotion of hers to Larry. He felt strangely at sea, sitting there with this child of twenty; he, over forty, a man of the world, professionally used to every side of human nature. But he said, stammering a little:

"I have come to see how far you can save him. Listen, and just answer the questions I put to you."

She raised her hands, squeezed them together, and murmured:

"Oh! I will answer anything."

"This man, then your husband was he a bad man?"

"A dreadful man."

"Before he came here last night, how long since you saw him?"

"Eighteen months."

"Where did you live when you saw him last?"

"In Pimlico."

"Does anybody about here know you as Mrs. Walenn?"

"No. When I came here, after my little girl died, I came to live a bad life. Nobody knows me at all. I am quite alone."

"If they discover who he was, they will look for his wife?"

"I do not know. He did not let people think I was married to him. I was very young; he treated many, I think, like me."

"Do you think he was known to the police?"

She shook her head. "He was very clever."

"What is your name now?"

"Wanda Livinska."

"Were you known by that name before you were married?"

"Wanda is my Christian name. LivinskaI just call myself."

"I see; since you came here."

"Yes."

"Did my brother ever see this man before last night?"

"Never."

"You had told him about his treatment of you?"

"Yes. And that man first went for him."

"I saw the mark. Do you think anyone saw my brother come to you?"

"I do not know. He says not."

"Can you tell if anyone saw him carrying thethe thing away?"

"No one in this streetI was looking."

"Nor coming back?"

"No one."

"Nor going out in the morning?"

"I do not think it."

"Have you a servant?"

"Only a woman who comes at nine in the morning for an hour."

"Does she know Larry?"

"No."

"Friends, acquaintances?"

"No; I am very quiet. And since I knew your brother, I see no one. Nobody comes here but him for a long time now."

"How long?"

"Five months."

"Have you been out today?"

"No."

"What have you been doing?"

"Crying."

It was said with a certain dreadful simplicity, and pressing her hands together, she went on:

"He is in danger, because of me. I am so afraid for him." Holding up his hand to check that emotion, he said:

"Look at me!"

She fixed those dark eyes on him, and in her bare throat, from which the coat had fallen back, he could see her resolutely swallowing down her agitation.

"If the worst comes to the worst, and this man is traced to you, can you trust yourself not to give my brother away?"

Her eyes shone. She got up and went to the fireplace:

"Look! I have burned all the things he has given me even his picture. Now I have nothing from him."

Keith, too, got up.

"Good! One more question: Do the police know you, because because of your life?"

She shook her head, looking at him intently, with those mournfully true eyes. And he felt a sort of shame.

"I was obliged to ask. Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes."

"You must not go there. And he must not come to you, here."

Her lips quivered; but she bowed her head. Suddenly he found her quite close to him, speaking almost in a whisper:

"Please do not take him from me altogether. I will be so careful. I will not do anything to hurt him; but if I cannot see him sometimes, I shall die. Please do not take him from me." And catching his hand between her own, she pressed it desperately. It was several seconds before Keith said:

"Leave that to me. I will see him. I shall arrange. You must leave that to me."

"But you will be kind?"

He felt her lips kissing his hand. And the soft moist touch sent a queer feeling through him, protective, yet just a little brutal, having in it a shiver of sensuality. He withdrew his hand. And as if warned that she had been too pressing, she recoiled humbly. But suddenly she turned, and stood absolutely rigid; then almost inaudibly whispered: "Listen! Someone outout there!" And darting past him she turned out the light.

Almost at once came a knock on the door. He could feel actually feel the terror of this girl beside him in the dark. And he, too, felt terror. Who could it be? No one came but Larry, she had said. Who else then could it be? Again came the knock, louder! He felt the breath of her whisper on his cheek: "If it is Larry! I must open." He shrank back against the wall; heard her open the door and say faintly: "Yes. Please! Who?"

Light painted a thin moving line on the wall opposite, and a voice which Keith recognised answered:

"All right, miss. Your outer door's open here. You ought to keep it shut after dark."

God! That policeman! And it had been his own doing, not shutting the outer door behind him when he came in. He heard her say timidly in her foreign voice: "Thank you, sir!" the policeman's retreating steps, the outer door being shut, and felt her close to him again. That something in her youth and strange prettiness which had touched and kept him gentle, no longer blunted the edge of his exasperation, now that he could not see her. They were all the same, these women; could not speak the truth! And he said brusquely:

"You told me they didn't know you!"

Her voice answered like a sigh:



"I did not think they did, sir. It is so long I was not out in the town, not since I had Larry."

The repulsion which all the time seethed deep in Keith welled up at those words. His brotherson of his mother, a gentlemanthe property of this girl, bound to her, body and soul, by this unspeakable event! But she had turned up the light. Had she some intuition that darkness was against her? Yes, she was pretty with that soft face, colourless save for its lips and dark eyes, with that face somehow so touchingly, so unaccountably good, and like a child's.

"I am going now," he said. "Remember! He mustn't come here; you mustn't go to him. I shall see him tomorrow. If you are as fond of him as you saytake care, take care!"

She sighed out, "Yes! oh, yes!" and Keith went to the door. She was standing with her back to the wall, and to follow him she only moved her headthat dovelike face with all its life in eyes which seemed saying: 'Look into us; nothing we hide; allall is there!'

And he went out.

In the passage he paused before opening the outer door. He did not want to meet that policeman again; the fellow's round should have taken him well out of the street by now, and turning the handle cautiously, he looked out. No one in sight. He stood a moment, wondering if he should turn to right or left, then briskly crossed the street. A voice to his right hand said:

"Goodnight, sir."

There in the shadow of a doorway the policeman was standing. The fellow must have seen him coming out! Utterly unable to restrain a start, and muttering "Goodnight!" Keith walked on rapidly:

He went full quarter of a mile before he lost that startled and uneasy feeling in sardonic exasperation that he, Keith Darrant, had been taken for a frequenter of a lady of the town. The whole thingthe whole thing!a vile and disgusting business! His very mind felt dirty and breathless; his spirit, drawn out of sheath, had slowly to slide back before he could at all focus and readjust his reasoning faculty. Certainly, he had got the knowledge he wanted. There was less danger than he thought. That girl's eyes! No mistaking her devotion. She would not give Larry away. Yes! Larry must clear outSouth Americathe Eastit did not matter. But he felt no relief. The cheap, tawdry room had wrapped itself round his fancy with its atmosphere of murky love, with the feeling it inspired, of emotion caged within those yellowish walls and the red stuff of its furniture. That girl's face! Devotion; truth, too, and beauty, rare and moving, in its setting of darkness and horror, in that nest of vice and of disorder! The dark archway; the street arab, with his

gleeful: "They 'ain't got 'im yet!"; the feel of those bare arms round his neck; that whisper of horror in the darkness; above all, again, her child face looking into his, so truthful! And suddenly he stood quite still in the street. What in God's name was he about? What grotesque juggling amongst shadows, what strange and ghastly eccentricity was all this? The forces of order and routine, all the actualities of his daily life, marched on him at that moment, and swept everything before them. It was a dream, a nightmare not real! It was ridiculous! That he should thus be bound up with things so black and bizarre!

He had come by now to the Strand, that street down which every day he moved to the Law Courts, to his daily work; his work so dignified and regular, so irreproachable, and solid. No! The thing was all a monstrous nightmare! It would go, if he fixed his mind on the familiar objects around, read the names on the shops, looked at the faces passing. Far down the thoroughfare he caught the outline of the old church, and beyond, the loom of the Law Courts themselves. The bell of a fireengine sounded, and the horses came galloping by, with the shining metal, rattle of hoofs and hoarse shouting. Here was a sensation, real and harmless, dignified and customary! A woman flaunting round the corner looked up at him, and leered out: "Goodnight!" Even that was customary, tolerable. Two policemen passed, supporting between them a man the worse for liquor, full of fight and expletives; the sight was soothing, an ordinary thing which brought passing annoyance, interest, disgust. It had begun to rain; he felt it on his face with pleasurable actual thing, not eccentric, a thing which happened every day!

He began to cross the street. Cabs were going at furious speed now that the last omnibus had ceased to run; it distracted him to take this actual, ordinary risk run so often every day. During that crossing of the Strand, with the rain in his face and the cabs shooting past, he regained for the first time his assurance, shook off this unreal sense of being in the grip of something, and walked resolutely to the corner of his home turning. But passing into that darker stretch, he again stood still. A policeman had also turned into that street on the other side. Not surely not! Absurd! They were all alike to look at those fellows! Absurd! He walked on sharply, and let himself into his house. But on his way upstairs he could not for the life of him help raising a corner of a curtain and looking from the staircase window. The policeman was marching solemnly, about twenty-five yards away, paying apparently no attention to anything whatever.

## IV

Keith woke at five o'clock, his usual hour, without remembrance. But the grisly shadow started up when he entered his study, where the lamp burned, and the fire shone, and the coffee was set ready, just as when yesterday afternoon Larry had stood out there against the wall. For a moment he fought against realisation; then, drinking off his coffee, sat down sullenly at the bureau to his customary three hours' study of the day's cases.

Not one word of his brief could he take in. It was all jumbled with murky images and apprehensions, and for full half an hour he suffered mental paralysis. Then the sheer necessity of knowing something of the case which he had to open at halfpast ten that morning forced him to a concentration which never quite subdued the malaise at the bottom of his heart. Nevertheless, when he rose at halfpast eight and went into the bathroom, he had earned his grim satisfaction in this victory of willpower. By halfpast nine he must be at Larry's. A boat left London for the Argentine tomorrow. If Larry was to get away at once, money must be arranged for. And then at breakfast he came on this paragraph in the paper:

"SOHO MURDER.

"Enquiry late last night established the fact that the Police have discovered the identity of the man found strangled yesterday morning under an archway in Glove Lane. An arrest has been made."

By good fortune he had finished eating, for the words made him feel physically sick. At this very minute Larry might be locked up, waiting to be charged might even have been arrested before his own visit to the girl last night. If Larry were arrested, she must be implicated. What, then, would be his own position? Idiot to go and look at that archway, to go and see the girl! Had that policeman really followed him home? Accessory after the fact! Keith Darrant, King's Counsel, man of mark! He forced himself by an effort, which had something of the heroic, to drop this panicky feeling. Panic never did good. He must face it, and see. He refused even to hurry, calmly collected the papers wanted for the day, and attended to a letter or two, before he set out in a taxicab to Fitzroy Street.

Waiting outside there in the grey morning for his ring to be answered, he looked the very picture of a man who knew his mind, a man of resolution. But it needed all his willpower to ask without tremor: "Mr. Darrant in?" to hear without sign of any kind the answer: "He's not up yet, sir."

"Never mind; I'll go in and see him. Mr. Keith Darrant."

On his way to Laurence's bedroom, in the midst of utter relief, he had the selfpossession to think: 'This arrest is the best thing that could have happened. It'll keep their noses on a wrong scent till Larry's got away. The girl must be sent off too, but not with him.' Panic had ended in quite hardening his resolution. He entered the bedroom with a feeling of disgust. The fellow was lying there, his bare arms crossed behind his tousled head, staring at the ceiling, and smoking one of many cigarettes whose ends littered a chair beside him, whose sickly reek tainted the air. That pale face, with its jutting cheekbones and chin, its hollow cheeks and blue eyes far sunk back what a wreck of goodness!

He looked up at Keith through the haze of smoke and said quietly: "Well, brother, what's the sentence? 'Transportation for life, and then to be fined forty pounds?'"

The flippancy revolted Keith. It was Larry all over! Last night horrified and humble, this morning, "Don't care" and featherheaded. He said sourly:

"Oh! You can joke about it now?"

Laurence turned his face to the wall.

"Must."

Fatalism! How detestable were natures like that!

"I've been to see her," he said.

"You?"

"Last night. She can be trusted."

Laurence laughed.

"That I told you."

"I had to see for myself. You must clear out at once, Larry. She can come out to you by the next boat; but you can't go together. Have you any money?"

"No."

"I can foot your expenses, and lend you a year's income in advance. But it must be a clean cut; after you get out there your whereabouts must only be known to me."

A long sigh answered him.

"You're very good to me, Keith; you've always been very good. I don't know why."

Keith answered drily

"Nor I. There's a boat to the Argentine tomorrow. You're in luck; they've made an arrest. It's in the paper."

"What?"

The cigarette end dropped, the thin pyjama'd figure writhed up and stood clutching at the bedrail.

"What?"

The disturbing thought flitted through Keith's brain: 'I was a fool. He takes it queerly; what now?'

Laurence passed his hand over his forehead, and sat down on the bed.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said; "It does me!"

Keith stared. In his relief that the arrested man was not Laurence, this had not occurred to him. What folly!

"Why?" he said quickly; "an innocent man's in no danger. They always get the wrong man first. It's a piece of luck, that's all. It gives us time."

How often had he not seen that expression on Larry's face, wistful, questioning, as if trying to see the thing with his Keith's eyes, trying to submit to better judgment? And he said, almost gently

"Now, look here, Larry; this is too serious to trifle with. Don't worry about that. Leave it to me. Just get ready to be off'. I'll take your berth and make arrangements. Here's some money for kit. I can come round between five and six, and let you know. Pull yourself together, man. As soon as the girl's joined you out there, you'd better get across to Chile, the further the better. You must simply lose yourself: I must go now, if I'm to get to the Bank before I go down to the courts." And looking very steadily at his brother, he added:

"Come! You've got to think of me in this matter as well as of yourself. No playing fast and loose with the arrangements. Understand?"

But still Larry gazed up at him with that wistful questioning, and not till he had repeated, "Understand?" did he receive "Yes" for answer.

Driving away, he thought: 'Queer fellow! I don't know him, shall never know him!' and at once began to concentrate on the practical arrangements. At his bank he drew out

L400; but waiting for the notes to be counted he suffered qualms. A clumsy way of doing things! If there had been more time! The thought: 'Accessory after the fact!' now infected everything. Notes were traceable. No other way of getting him away at once, though. One must take lesser risks to avoid greater. From the bank he drove to the office of the steamship line. He had told Larry he would book his passage. But that would not do! He must only ask anonymously if there were accommodation. Having discovered that there were vacant berths, he drove on to the Law Courts. If he could have taken a morning off, he would have gone down to the police court and seen them charge this man. But even that was not too safe, with a face so well known as his. What would come of this arrest? Nothing, surely! The police always took somebody up, to keep the public quiet. Then, suddenly, he had again the feeling that it was all a nightmare; Larry had never done it; the police had got the right man! But instantly the memory of the girl's awestricken face, her figure huddling on the sofa, her words "I see him always falling!" came back. God! What a business!

He felt he had never been more clearheaded and forcible than that morning in court. When he came out for lunch he bought the most sensational of the evening papers. But it was yet too early for news, and he had to go back into court no whit wiser concerning the arrest. When at last he threw off wig and gown, and had got through a conference and other necessary work, he went out to Chancery Lane, buying a paper on the way. Then he hailed a cab, and drove once more to Fitzroy Street.

## V

Laurence had remained sitting on his bed for many minutes. An innocent man in no danger! Keith had said it the celebrated lawyer! Could he rely on that? Go out 8,000 miles, he and the girl, and leave a fellow creature perhaps in mortal peril for an act committed by himself?

In the past night he had touched bottom, as he thought: become ready to face anything. When Keith came in he would without murmur have accepted the advice: "Give yourself up!" He was prepared to pitch away the end of his life as he pitched from him the fagends of his cigarettes. And the long sigh he had heaved, hearing of reprieve, had been only half relief. Then, with incredible swiftness there had rushed through him a feeling of unutterable joy and hope. Clean away into a new country, a new life! The girl and he! Out there he wouldn't care, would rejoice even to have squashed the life out of such a noisome beetle of a man. Out there! Under a new sun, where blood ran quicker than in this foggy land, and people took justice into their own hands. For it had been justice on that brute even though he had not meant to kill him. And then to hear of this arrest! They would be charging the man today. He could go and see the poor creature accused of the murder he himself had committed! And he laughed. Go and see how likely it was that they might hang a fellowman in place of himself? He dressed, but too shaky to shave himself, went out to a barber's shop. While there he read the news which Keith had seen. In this paper the name of the arrested man was given: "John Evan, no address." To be brought up on the charge at Bow Street. Yes! He must go. Once, twice, three times he walked past the entrance of the court before at last he entered and screwed himself away among the tag and bobtail.

The court was crowded; and from the murmurs round he could tell that it was his particular case which had brought so many there. In a dazed way he watched charge after charge disposed of with lightning quickness. But were they never going to reach his business? And then suddenly he saw the little scarecrow man of last night advancing to the dock between two policemen, more ragged and miserable than ever by light of day, like some shaggy, wan, grey animal, surrounded by sleek hounds.

A sort of satisfied purr was rising all round; and with horror Laurence perceived that this was the man accused of what he himself had done this queer, battered unfortunate to whom he had shown a passing friendliness. Then all feeling merged in the appalling interest of listening. The evidence was very short. Testimony of the hotelkeeper where Walenn had been staying, the identification of his body, and of a snakeshaped ring he had been wearing at dinner that evening. Testimony of a pawnbroker, that this same ring was pawned with him the first thing yesterday morning by the prisoner. Testimony of a policeman that he had noticed the man Evan several times in Glove Lane, and twice moved him on from sleeping under that arch. Testimony

of another policeman that, when arrested at midnight, Evan had said: "Yes; I took the ring off his finger. I found him there dead . I know I oughtn't to have done it. I'm an educated man; it was stupid to pawn the ring. I found him with his pockets turned inside out."

Fascinating and terrible to sit staring at the man in whose place he should have been; to wonder when those small brightgrey bloodshot eyes would spy him out, and how he would meet that glance. Like a baited raccoon the little man stood, screwed back into a corner, mournful, cynical, fierce, with his ridged, obtuse yellow face, and his stubbly grey beard and hair, and his eyes wandering now and again amongst the crowd. But with all his might Laurence kept his face unmoved. Then came the word "Remanded"; and, more like a baited beast than ever, the man was led away.

Laurence sat on, a cold perspiration thick on his forehead. Someone else, then, had come on the body and turned the pockets inside out before John Evan took the ring. A man such as Walenn would not be out at night without money. Besides, if Evan had found money on the body he would never have run the risk of taking that ring. Yes, someone else had come on the body first. It was for that one to come forward, and prove that the ring was still on the dead man's finger when he left him, and thus clear Evan. He clung to that thought; it seemed to make him less responsible for the little man's position; to remove him and his own deed one step further back. If they found the person who had taken the money, it would prove Evan's innocence. He came out of the court in a sort of trance. And a craving to get drunk attacked him. One could not go on like this without the relief of some oblivion. If he could only get drunk, keep drunk till this business was decided and he knew whether he must give himself up or no. He had now no fear at all of people suspecting him; only fear of himself fear that he might go and give himself up. Now he could see the girl; the danger from that was as nothing compared with the danger from his own conscience. He had promised Keith not to see her. Keith had been decent and loyal to him good old Keith! But he would never understand that this girl was now all he cared about in life; that he would rather be cut off from life itself than be cut off from her. Instead of becoming less and less, she was becoming more and more to him experience strange and thrilling! Out of deep misery she had grown happy through him; out of a sordid, shifting life recovered coherence and bloom, through devotion to him him, of all people in the world! It was a miracle. She demanded nothing of him, adored him, as no other woman ever had it was this which had anchored his drifting barque; this and her truthful mild intelligence, and that burning warmth of a woman, who, long treated by men as but a sack of sex, now loves at last.

And suddenly, mastering his craving to get drunk, he made towards Soho. He had been a fool to give those keys to Keith. She must have been frightened by his visit; and,



perhaps, doubly miserable since, knowing nothing, imagining everything! Keith was sure to have terrified her. Poor little thing!

Down the street where he had stolen in the dark with the dead body on his back, he almost ran for the cover of her house. The door was opened to him before he knocked, her arms were round his neck, her lips pressed to his. The fire was out, as if she had been unable to remember to keep warm. A stool had been drawn to the window, and there she had evidently been sitting, like a bird in a cage, looking out into the grey street. Though she had been told that he was not to come, instinct had kept her there; or the pathetic, aching hope against hope which lovers never part with.

Now that he was there, her first thoughts were for his comfort. The fire was lighted. He must eat, drink, smoke. There was never in her doings any of the "I am doing this for you, but you ought to be doing that for me" which belongs to so many marriages, and liaisons. She was like a devoted slave, so in love with the chains that she never knew she wore them. And to Laurence, who had so little sense of property, this only served to deepen tenderness, and the hold she had on him. He had resolved not to tell her of the new danger he ran from his own conscience. But resolutions with him were but the opposites of what was sure to come; and at last the words:

"They've arrested someone," escaped him.

From her face he knew she had grasped the danger at once; had divined it, perhaps, before he spoke. But she only twined her arms round him and kissed his lips. And he knew that she was begging him to put his love for her above his conscience. Who would ever have thought that he could feel as he did to this girl who had been in the arms of many! The stained and suffering past of a loved woman awakens in some men only chivalry; in others, more respectable, it rouses a tigerish itch, a rancorous jealousy of what in the past was given to others. Sometimes it will do both. When he had her in his arms he felt no remorse for killing the coarse, handsome brute who had ruined her. He savagely rejoiced in it. But when she laid her head in the hollow of his shoulder, turning to him her white face with the faint colourstaining on the parted lips, the cheeks, the eyelids; when her dark, wideapart, brown eyes gazed up in the happiness of her abandonment he felt only tenderness and protection.

He left her at five o'clock, and had not gone two streets' length before the memory of the little grey vagabond, screwed back in the far corner of the dock like a baited raccoon, of his dreary, creaking voice, took possession of him again; and a kind of savagery mounted in his brain against a world where one could be so tortured without having meant harm to anyone.

At the door of his lodgings Keith was getting out of a cab. They went in together, but neither of them sat down; Keith standing with his back to the carefully shut door, Laurence with his back to the table, as if they knew there was a tug coming. And Keith said: "There's room on that boat. Go down and book your berth before they shut. Here's the money!"

"I'm going to stick it, Keith."

Keith stepped forward, and put a roll of notes on the table.

"Now look here, Larry. I've read the police court proceedings. There's nothing in that. Out of prison, or in prison for a few weeks, it's all the same to a nightbird of that sort. Dismiss it from your mind there's not nearly enough evidence to convict. This gives you your chance. Take it like a man, and make a new life for yourself."

Laurence smiled; but the smile had a touch of madness and a touch of malice. He took up the notes.

"Clear out, and save the honour of brother Keith. Put them back in your pocket, Keith, or I'll put them in the fire. Come, take them!" And, crossing to the fire, he held them to the bars. "Take them, or in they go!"

Keith took back the notes.

"I've still got some kind of honour, Keith; if I clear out I shall have none, not the rag of any, left. It may be worth more to me than that I can't tell yet I can't tell." There was a long silence before Keith answered. "I tell you you're mistaken; no jury will convict. If they did, a judge would never hang on it. A ghoul who can rob a dead body ought to be in prison. What he did is worse than what you did, if you come to that!" Laurence lifted his face. "Judge not, brother," he said; "the heart is a dark well." Keith's yellowish face grew red and swollen, as though he were mastering the tickle of a bronchial cough. "What are you going to do, then? I suppose I may ask you not to be entirely oblivious of our name; or is such a consideration unworthy of your honour?" Laurence bent his head. The gesture said more clearly than words: 'Don't kick a man when he's down!'

"I don't know what I'm going to do nothing at present. I'm awfully sorry, Keith; awfully sorry."

Keith looked at him, and without another word went out.

## VI

To any, save philosophers, reputation may be threatened almost as much by disgrace to name and family as by the disgrace of self. Keith's instinct was always to deal actively with danger. But this blow, whether it fell on him by discovery or by confession, could not be countered. As blight falls on a rose from who knows where, the scandalous murk would light on him. No repulse possible! Not even a wriggling from under! Brother of a murderer hung or sent to penal servitude! His daughter niece to a murderer! His dead mother a murderer's mother! And to wait day after day, week after week, not knowing whether the blow would fall, was an extraordinarily atrocious penance, the injustice of which, to a man of rectitude, seemed daily the more monstrous.

The remand had produced evidence that the murdered man had been drinking heavily on the night of his death, and further evidence of the accused's professional vagabondage and destitution; it was shown, too, that for some time the archway in Glove Lane had been his favourite night haunt. He had been committed for trial in January. This time, despite misgivings, Keith had attended the police court. To his great relief Larry was not there. But the policeman who had come up while he was looking at the archway, and given him afterwards that scare in the girl's rooms, was chief witness to the way the accused man haunted Glove Lane. Though Keith held his silk hat high, he still had the uncomfortable feeling that the man had recognised him.

His conscience suffered few, if any, twinges for letting this man rest under the shadow of the murder. He genuinely believed that there was not evidence enough to convict; nor was it in him to appreciate the tortures of a vagabond shut up. The scamp deserved what he had got, for robbing a dead body; and in any case such a scarecrow was better off in prison than sleeping out under archways in December. Sentiment was foreign to Keith's character, and his justice that of those who subordinate the fates of the weak and shiftless to the needful paramountcy of the strong and well established.

His daughter came back from school for the Christmas holidays. It was hard to look up from her bright eyes and rosy cheeks and see this shadow hanging above his calm and ordered life, as in a glowing room one's eye may catch an impending patch of darkness drawn like a spider's web across a corner of the ceiling.

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve they went, by her desire, to a church in Soho, where the Christmas Oratorio was being given; and coming away passed, by chance of a wrong turning, down Borrow Street. Ugh! How that startled moment, when the girl had pressed herself against him in the dark, and her terrorstricken whisper: "Oh! Who is it?" leaped out before him! Always that business that ghastly business! After the trial he would have another try to get them both away. And he thrust his arm within his young daughter's, hurrying her on, out of this street where shadows filled all the winter air.

But that evening when she had gone to bed he felt uncontrollably restless. He had not seen Larry for weeks. What was he about? What desperations were hatching in his disorderly brain? Was he very miserable; had he perhaps sunk into a stupor of debauchery? And the old feeling of protectiveness rose up in him; a warmth born of long ago Christmas Eves, when they had stockings hung out in the night stuffed by a Santa Claus, whose hand never failed to tuck them up, whose kiss was their nightly waft into sleep.

Stars were sparkling out there over the river; the sky frosty clear, and black. Bells had not begun to ring as yet. And obeying an obscure, deep impulse, Keith wrapped himself once more into his fur coat, pulled a motoring cap over his eyes, and sallied forth. In the Strand he took a cab to Fitzroy Street. There was no light in Larry's windows, and on a card he saw the words "To Let." Gone! Had he after all cleared out for good? But how without money? And the girl? Bells were ringing now in the silent frostiness. Christmas Eve! And Keith thought: 'If only this wretched business were off my mind! Monstrous that one should suffer for the faults of others!' He took a route which led him past Borrow Street. Solitude brooded there, and he walked resolutely down on the far side, looking hard at the girl's window. There was a light. The curtains just failed to meet, so that a thin gleam shone through. He crossed; and after glancing swiftly up and down, deliberately peered in.

He only stood there perhaps twenty seconds, but visual records gleaned in a moment sometimes outlast the visions of hours and days. The electric light was not burning; but, in the centre of the room the girl was kneeling in her nightgown before a little table on which were four lighted candles. Her arms were crossed on her breast; the candlelight shone on her fair cropped hair, on the profile of cheek and chin, on her bowed white neck. For a moment he thought her alone; then behind her saw his brother in a sleeping suit, leaning against the wall, with arms crossed, watching. It was the expression on his face which burned the whole thing in, so that always afterwards he was able to see that little scene such an expression as could never have been on the face of one even faintly conscious that he was watched by any living thing on earth. The whole of Larry's heart and feeling seemed to have come up out of him. Yearning, mockery, love, despair! The depth of his feeling for this girl, his stress of mind, fears, hopes; the flotsam good and evil of his soul, all transfigured there, exposed and unforgettable. The candlelight shone upward on to his face, twisted by the strangest smile; his eyes, darker and more wistful than mortal eyes should be, seemed to beseech and mock the whiteclad girl, who, all unconscious, knelt without movement, like a carved figure of devotion. The words seemed coming from his lips: "Pray for us! Bravo! Yes! Pray for us!" And suddenly Keith saw her stretch out her arms, and lift her face with a look of ecstasy, and Laurence starting forward. What had she seen beyond the candle flames? It is the unexpected which invests visions with poignancy. Nothing more strange could Keith have seen in

this nest of the murky and illicit. But in sheer panic lest he might be caught thus spying he drew back and hurried on. So Larry was living there with her! When the moment came he could still find him.

Before going in, he stood full five minutes leaning on the terrace parapet before his house, gazing at the starfrosted sky, and the river cut by the trees into black pools, oiled over by gleams from the Embankment lamps. And, deep down, behind his mere thoughts, he ached somehow, somewhere ached. Beyond the cage of all that he saw and heard and thought, he had perceived something he could not reach. But the night was cold, the bells silent, for it had struck twelve. Entering his house, he stole upstairs.

## VII

If for Keith those six weeks before the Glove Lane murder trial came on were fraught with uneasiness and gloom, they were for Laurence almost the happiest since his youth. From the moment when he left his rooms and went to the girl's to live, a kind of peace and exaltation took possession of him. Not by any effort of will did he throw off the nightmare hanging over him. Nor was he drugged by love. He was in a sort of spiritual catalepsy. In face of fate too powerful for his will, his turmoil, anxiety, and even restlessness had ceased; his life floated in the ether of "what must come, will." Out of this catalepsy, his spirit sometimes fell headlong into black waters. In one such whirlpool he was struggling on the night of Christmas Eve. When the girl rose from her knees he asked her:

"What did you see?"

Pressing close to him, she drew him down on to the floor before the fire; and they sat, knees drawn up, hands clasped, like two children trying to see over the edge of the world.

"It was the Virgin I saw. She stood against the wall and smiled. We shall be happy soon."

"When we die, Wanda," he said, suddenly, "let it be together. We shall keep each other warm, out there."

Huddling to him she whispered: "Yes, oh, yes! If you die, I could not go on living."

It was this utter dependence on him, the feeling that he had rescued something, which gave him sense of anchorage. That, and his buried life in the retreat of these two rooms. Just for an hour in the morning, from nine to ten, the charwoman would come, but not another soul all day. They never went out together. He would stay in bed late, while Wanda bought what they needed for the day's meals; lying on his back, hands clasped behind his head, recalling her face, the movements of her slim, rounded, supple figure, robing itself before his gaze; feeling again the kiss she had left on his lips, the gleam of her soft eyes, so strangely dark in so fair a face. In a sort of trance he would lie till she came back. Then get up to breakfast about noon off things which she had cooked, drinking coffee. In the afternoon he would go out alone and walk for hours, any where, so long as it was East. To the East there was always suffering to be seen, always that which soothed him with the feeling that he and his troubles were only a tiny part of trouble; that while so many other sorrowing and shadowy creatures lived he was not cut off. To go West was to encourage dejection. In the West all was like Keith, successful, immaculate, ordered, resolute. He would come back tired out, and sit watching her cook their little dinner. The evenings were given up to love. Queer trance of an existence, which both were afraid to break. No sign from her of wanting those excitements which

girls who have lived her life, even for a few months, are supposed to need. She never asked him to take her anywhere; never, in word, deed, look, seemed anything but almost rapturously content. And yet he knew, and she knew, that they were only waiting to see whether Fate would turn her thumb down on them. In these days he did not drink. Out of his quarter's money, when it came in, he had paid his debts; their expenses were very small. He never went to see Keith, never wrote to him, hardly thought of him. And from those dread apparitions Walenn lying with the breath choked out of him, and the little grey, driven animal in the dock he hid, as only a man can who must hide or be destroyed. But daily he bought a newspaper, and feverishly, furtively scanned its columns.

## VIII

Coming out of the Law Courts on the afternoon of January 28th, at the triumphant end of a desperately fought will case, Keith saw on a poster the words: "Glove Lane Murder: Trial and Verdict"; and with a rush of dismay he thought: 'Good God! I never looked at the paper this morning!' The elation which had filled him a second before, the absorption he had felt for two days now in the case so hardly won, seemed suddenly quite sickeningly trivial. What on earth had he been doing to forget that horrible business even for an instant? He stood quite still on the crowded pavement, unable, really unable, to buy a paper. But his face was like a piece of iron when he did step forward and hold his penny out. There it was in the Stop Press! "Glove Lane Murder. The jury returned a verdict of Guilty. Sentence of death was passed."

His first sensation was simple irritation. How had they come to commit such an imbecility? Monstrous! The evidence! Then the futility of even reading the report, of even considering how they had come to record such a verdict struck him with savage suddenness. There it was, and nothing he could do or say would alter it; no condemnation of this idiotic verdict would help reverse it. The situation was desperate, indeed! That five minutes' walk from the Law Courts to his chambers was the longest he had ever taken.

Men of decided character little know beforehand what they will do in certain contingencies. For the imaginations of decided people do not endow mere contingencies with sufficient actuality. Keith had never really settled what he was going to do if this man were condemned. Often in those past weeks he had said to himself: "Of course, if they bring him in guilty, that's another thing!" But, now that they had, he was beset by exactly the same old arguments and feelings, the same instincts of loyalty and protection towards Laurence and himself, intensified by the fearful imminence of the danger. And yet, here was this man about to be hung for a thing he had not done! Nothing could get over that! But then he was such a worthless vagabond, a ghoul who had robbed a dead body. If Larry were condemned in his stead, would there be any less miscarriage of justice? To strangle a brute who had struck you, by the accident of keeping your hands on his throat a few seconds too long, was there any more guilt in that was there even as much, as in deliberate theft from a dead man? Reverence for order, for justice, and established fact, will, often march shoulder to shoulder with Jesuitry in natures to whom success is vital.

In the narrow stone passage leading to his staircase, a friend had called out: "Bravo, Darrant! That was a squeak! Congratulations!" And with a bitter little smile Keith thought: 'Congratulations! I!'



At the first possible moment he hurried back to the Strand, and hailing a cab, he told the man to put him down at a turning near to Borrow Street.

It was the girl who opened to his knock. Startled, clasping her hands, she looked strange to Keith in her black skirt and blouse of some soft velvety stuff the colour of faded roses. Her round, rather long throat was bare; and Keith noticed fretfully that she wore gold earrings. Her eyes, so pitch dark against her white face, and the short fair hair, which curled into her neck, seemed both to search and to plead.

"My brother?"

"He is not in, sir, yet."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"He is living with you here now?"

"Yes."

"Are you still as fond of him as ever, then?"

With a movement, as though she despaired of words, she clasped her hands over her heart. And he said:

"I see."

He had the same strange feeling as on his first visit to her, and when through the chink in the curtains he had watched her kneeling of pity mingled with some faint sexual emotion. And crossing to the fire he asked:

"May I wait for him?"

"Oh! Please! Will you sit down?"

But Keith shook his head. And with a catch in her breath, she said:

"You will not take him from me. I should die."

He turned round on her sharply.

"I don't want him taken from you. I want to help you keep him. Are you ready to go away, at any time?"

"Yes. Oh, yes!"

"And he?"

She answered almost in a whisper:

"Yes; but there is that poor man."

"That poor man is a graveyard thief; a hyena; a ghoul not worth consideration." And the rasp in his own voice surprised him.

"Ah!" she sighed. "But I am sorry for him. Perhaps he was hungry. I have been hungry you do things then that you would not. And perhaps he has no one to love; if you have no one to love you can be very bad. I think of him often in prison."

Between his teeth Keith muttered: "And Laurence?"

"We do never speak of it, we are afraid."

"He's not told you, then, about the trial?"

Her eyes dilated.

"The trial! Oh! He was strange last night. This morning, too, he got up early. Is it over?"

"Yes."

"What has come?"

"Guilty."

For a moment Keith thought she was going to faint. She had closed her eyes, and swayed so that he took a step, and put his hands on her arms.

"Listen!" he said. "Help me; don't let Laurence out of your sight. We must have time. I must see what they intend to do. They can't be going to hang this man. I must have time, I tell you. You must prevent his giving himself up."

She stood, staring in his face, while he still held her arms, gripping into her soft flesh through the velvety sleeves.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes but if he has already!"

Keith felt the shiver which ran through her. And the thought rushed into his mind: 'My God! Suppose the police come round while I'm here!' If Larry had indeed gone to them! If that Policeman who had seen him here the night after the murder should find him here again just after the verdict! He said almost fiercely:

"Can I trust you not to let Larry out of your sight? Quick! Answer!"

Clasping her hands to her breast, she answered humbly:

"I will try."

"If he hasn't already done this, watch him like a lynx! Don't let him go out without you. I'll come tomorrow morning early. You're a Catholic, aren't you? Swear to me that you won't let him do anything till he's seen me again."

She did not answer, looking past him at the door; and Keith heard a key in the latch. There was Laurence himself, holding in his hand a great bunch of pink lilies and white narcissi. His face was pale and haggard. He said quietly:

"Hallo, Keith!"

The girl's eyes were fastened on Larry's face; and Keith, looking from one to the other, knew that he had never had more need for wariness.

"Have you seen?" he said.

Laurence nodded. His expression, as a rule so telltale of his emotions, baffled Keith utterly.

"Well?"

"I've been expecting it."

"The thing can't stand that's certain. But I must have time to look into the report. I must have time to see what I can do. D'you understand me, Larry? I must have time." He knew he was talking at random. The only thing was to get them away at once out of reach of confession; but he dared not say so.

"Promise me that you'll do nothing, that you won't go out even till I've seen you tomorrow morning."

Again Laurence nodded. And Keith looked at the girl. Would she see that he did not break that promise? Her eyes were still fixed immovably on Larry's face. And with the feeling that he could get no further, Keith turned to go.

"Promise me," he said.

Laurence answered: "I promise."

He was smiling. Keith could make nothing of that smile, nor of the expression in the girl's eyes. And saying: "I have your promise, I rely on it!" he went.

## IX

To keep from any woman who loves, knowledge of her lover's mood, is as hard as to keep music from moving the heart. But when that woman has lived in suffering, and for the first time knows the comfort of love, then let the lover try as he may to disguise his heart no use! Yet by virtue of subtler abnegation she will often succeed in keeping it from him that she knows.

When Keith was gone the girl made no outcry, asked no questions, managed that Larry should not suspect her intuition; all that evening she acted as if she knew of nothing preparing within him, and through him, within herself.

His words, caresses, the very zest with which he helped her to prepare the feast, the flowers he had brought, the wine he made her drink, the avoidance of any word which could spoil their happiness, all told her. He was too inexorably gay and loving. Not for her to whom every word and every kiss had uncannily the desperate value of a last word and kiss not for her to deprive herself of these by any sign or gesture which might betray her prescience. Poor soul she took all, and would have taken more, a hundredfold. She did not want to drink the wine he kept tilting into her glass, but, with the acceptance learned by women who have lived her life, she did not refuse. She had never refused him anything. So much had been required of her by the detestable, that anything required by a loved one was but an honour.

Laurence drank deeply; but he had never felt clearer, never seen things more clearly. The wine gave him what he wanted, an edge to these few hours of pleasure, an exaltation of energy. It dulled his sense of pity, too. It was pity he was afraid of for himself, and for this girl. To make even this tawdry room look beautiful, with firelight and candlelight, dark amber wine in the glasses, tall pink lilies spilling their saffron, exuding their hot perfume he and even himself must look their best. And with a weight as of lead on her heart, she managed that for him, letting him strew her with flowers and crush them together with herself. Not even music was lacking to their feast. Someone was playing a pianola across the street, and the sound, very faint, came stealing when they were silent swelling, sinking, festive, mournful; having a far-off life of its own, like the flickering fireflames before which they lay embraced, or the lilies delicate between the candles. Listening to that music, tracing with his finger the tiny veins on her breast, he lay like one recovering from a swoon. No parting. None! But sleep, as the firelight sleeps when flames die; as music sleeps on its deserted strings.

And the girl watched him.

It was nearly ten when he bade her go to bed. And after she had gone obedient into the bedroom, he brought ink and paper down by the fire. The drifter, the unstable, the

good for nothing did not falter. He had thought, when it came to the point, he would fail himself; but a sort of rage bore him forward. If he lived on, and confessed, they would shut him up, take from him the one thing he loved, cut him off from her; send up his only well in the desert. Curse them! And he wrote by firelight which mellowed the white sheets of paper; while, against the dark curtain, the girl, in her nightgown, unconscious of the cold, stood watching.

Men, when they drown, remember their pasts. Like the lost poet he had "gone with the wind." Now it was for him to be true in his fashion. A man may falter for weeks and weeks, consciously, subconsciously, even in his dreams, till there comes that moment when the only thing impossible is to go on faltering. The black cap, the little driven grey man looking up at it with a sort of wonder faltering had ceased!

He had finished now, and was but staring into the fire.

"No more, no more, the moon is dead,

And all the people in it;

The poppy maidens strew the bed,

We'll come in half a minute."

Why did doggerel start up in the mind like that? Wanda! The weedflower become so rare he would not be parted from her! The fire, the candles, and the fire no more the flame and flicker!

And, by the dark curtain, the girl watched.

## X

Keith went, not home, but to his club; and in the room devoted to the reception of guests, empty at this hour, he sat down and read the report of the trial. The fools had made out a case that looked black enough. And for a long time, on the thick soft carpet which let out no sound of footfall, he paced up and down, thinking. He might see the defending counsel, might surely do that as an expert who thought there had been miscarriage of justice. They must appeal; a petition too might be started in the last event. The thing could must be put right yet, if only Larry and that girl did nothing!

He had no appetite, but the custom of dining is too strong. And while he ate, he glanced with irritation at his fellowmembers. They looked so at their ease. Unjust that this black cloud should hang over one blameless as any of them! Friends, connoisseurs of such things a judge among them came specially to his table to express their admiration of his conduct of that will case. Tonight he had real excuse for pride, but he felt none. Yet, in this wellwarmed quietly glowing room, filled with decorously eating, decorously talking men, he gained insensibly some comfort. This surely was reality; that shadowy business out there only the drear sound of a wind one must and did keep out like the poverty and grime which had no real existence for the secure and prosperous. He drank champagne. It helped to fortify reality, to make shadows seem more shadowy. And down in the smokingroom he sat before the fire, in one of those chairs which embalm afterdinner dreams. He grew sleepy there, and at eleven o'clock rose to go home. But when he had once passed down the shallow marble steps, out through the revolving door which let in no draughts, he was visited by fear, as if he had drawn it in with the breath of the January wind. Larry's face; and the girl watching it! Why had she watched like that? Larry's smile; and the flowers in his hand? Buying flowers at such a moment! The girl was his slave whatever he told her, she would do. But she would never be able to stop him. At this very moment he might be rushing to give himself up!

His hand, thrust deep into the pocket of his fur coat, came in contact suddenly with something cold. The keys Larry had given him all that time ago. There they had lain forgotten ever since. The chance touch decided him. He turned off towards Borrow Street, walking at full speed. He could but go again and see. He would sleep better if he knew that he had left no stone unturned. At the corner of that dismal street he had to wait for solitude before he made for the house which he now loathed with a deadly loathing. He opened the outer door and shut it to behind him. He knocked, but no one came. Perhaps they had gone to bed. Again and again he knocked, then opened the door, stepped in, and closed it carefully. Candles lighted, the fire burning; cushions thrown on the floor in front of it and strewn with flowers! The table, too, covered with flowers and with the remnants of a meal. Through the halfdrawn curtain he could see that the inner room was also lighted. Had they gone out, leaving everything like this? Gone out! His heart beat. Bottles! Larry had been drinking!

Had it really come? Must he go back home with this murk on him; knowing that his brother was a confessed and branded murderer? He went quickly, to the halfdrawn curtains and looked in. Against the wall he saw a bed, and those two in it. He recoiled in sheer amazement and relief. Asleep with curtains undrawn, lights left on? Asleep through all his knocking! They must both be drunk. The blood rushed up in his neck. Asleep! And rushing forward again, he called out: "Larry!" Then, with a gasp he went towards the bed. "Larry!" No answer! No movement! Seizing his brother's shoulder, he shook it violently. It felt cold. They were lying in each other's arms, breast to breast, lips to lips, their faces white in the light shining above the dressingtable. And such a shudder shook Keith that he had to grasp the brass rail above their heads. Then he bent down, and wetting his finger, placed it close to their joined lips. No two could ever swoon so utterly as that; not even a drunken sleep could be so fast. His wet finger felt not the faintest stir of air, nor was there any movement in the pulses of their hands. No breath! No life! The eyes of the girl were closed. How strangely innocent she looked! Larry's open eyes seemed to be gazing at her shut eyes; but Keith saw that they were sightless. With a sort of sob he drew down the lids. Then, by an impulse that he could never have explained, he laid a hand on his brother's head, and a hand on the girl's fair hair. The clothes had fallen down a little from her bare shoulder; he pulled them up, as if to keep her warm, and caught the glint of metal; a tiny gilt crucifix no longer than a thumbnail, on a thread of steel chain, had slipped down from her breast into the hollow of the arm which lay round Larry's neck. Keith buried it beneath the clothes and noticed an envelope pinned to the coverlet; bending down, he read: "Please give this at once to the police. LAURENCE DARRANT." He thrust it into his pocket. Like elastic stretched beyond its uttermost, his reason, will, faculties of calculation and resolve snapped to within him. He thought with incredible swiftness: 'I must know nothing of this. I must go!' And, almost before he knew that he had moved, he was out again in the street.

He could never have told of what he thought while he was walking home. He did not really come to himself till he was in his study. There, with a trembling hand, he poured himself out whisky and drank it off. If he had not chanced to go there, the charwoman would have found them when she came in the morning, and given that envelope to the police! He took it out. He had a right to know what was in it! He broke it open.

"I, Laurence Darrant, about to die by my own hand, declare that this is a solemn and true confession. I committed what is known as the Glove Lane Murder on the night of November the 27th last in the following way" on and on to the last words "We didn't want to die; but we could not bear separation, and I couldn't face letting an innocent man be hung for me. I do not see any other way. I beg that there may be no postmortem on our bodies. The stuff we have taken is some of that which will be found on the dressingtable. Please bury us together.

"LAURENCE DARRANT.



"January the 28th, about ten o'clock p.m."

Full five minutes Keith stood with those sheets of paper in his hand, while the clock ticked, the wind moaned a little in the trees outside, the flames licked the logs with the quiet click and ruffle of their intense faraway life down there on the hearth. Then he roused himself, and sat down to read the whole again.

There it was, just as Larry had told it to him nothing left out, very clear; even to the addresses of people who could identify the girl as having once been Walenn's wife or mistress. It would convince. Yes! It would convince.

The sheets dropped from his hand. Very slowly he was grasping the appalling fact that on the floor beside his chair lay the life or death of yet another man; that by taking this confession he had taken into his own hands the fate of the vagabond lying under sentence of death; that he could not give him back his life without incurring the smirch of this disgrace, without even endangering himself. If he let this confession reach the authorities, he could never escape the gravest suspicion that he had known of the whole affair during these two months. He would have to attend the inquest, be recognised by that policeman as having come to the archway to see where the body had lain, as having visited the girl the very evening after the murder. Who would believe in the mere coincidence of such visits on the part of the murderer's brother. But apart from that suspicion, the fearful scandal which so sensational an affair must make would mar his career, his life, his young daughter's life! Larry's suicide with this girl would make sensation enough as it was; but nothing to that other. Such a death had its romance; involved him in no way save as a mourner, could perhaps even be hushed up! The other nothing could hush that up, nothing prevent its ringing to the housetops. He got up from his chair, and for many minutes roamed the room unable to get his mind to bear on the issue. Images kept starting up before him. The face of the man who handed him wig and gown each morning, puffy and curious, with a leer on it he had never noticed before; his young daughter's lifted eyebrows, mouth drooping, eyes troubled; the tiny gilt crucifix glinting in the hollow of the dead girl's arm; the sightless look in Larry's unclosed eyes; even his own thumb and finger pulling the lids down. And then he saw a street and endless people passing, turning to stare at him. And, stopping in his tramp, he said aloud: "Let them go to hell! Seven days' wonder!" Was he not trustee to that confession! Trustee! After all he had done nothing to be ashamed of, even if he had kept knowledge dark. A brother! Who could blame him? And he picked up those sheets of paper. But, like a great murky hand, the scandal spread itself about him; its coarse malignant voice seemed shouting: "Paiper! Paiper! Glove Lane Murder! Suicide and confession of brother of wellknown K.C.. Wellknown K.C.'s brother. Murder and suicide. Paiper!" Was he to let loose that flood of foulness? Was he, who had done nothing, to smirch his own little daughter's life; to smirch his dead brother, their dead mother himself, his own valuable, important future? And all for a sewer rat! Let him

hang, let the fellow hang if he must! And that was not certain. Appeal! Petition! He might have been saved! To have got thus far, and then, by his own action, topple himself down!

With a sudden darting movement he thrust the confession in among the burning coals. And a smile licked at the folds in his dark face, like those flames licking the sheets of paper, till they writhed and blackened. With the toe of his boot he dispersed their scorched and crumbling wafer. Stamp them in! Stamp in that man's life! Burnt! No more doubts, no more of this gnawing fear! Burnt? A manan innocentsewer rat! Recoiling from the fire he grasped his forehead. It was burning hot and seemed to be going round.

Well, it was done! Only fools without will or purpose regretted. And suddenly he laughed. So Larry had died for nothing! He had no will, no purpose, and was dead! He and that girl might now have been living, loving each other in the warm night, away at the other end of the world, instead of lying dead in the cold night here! Fools and weaklings regretted, suffered from conscience and remorse. A man trod firmly, held to his purpose, no matter what!

He went to the window and drew back the curtain. What was that? A gibbet in the air, a body hanging? Ah! Only the trees the dark trees the winter skeleton trees! Recoiling, he returned to his armchair and sat down before the fire. It had been shining like that, the lamp turned low, his chair drawn up, when Larry came in that afternoon two months ago. Bah! He had never come at all! It was a nightmare. He had been asleep. How his head burned! And leaping up, he looked at the calendar on his bureau. "January the 28th!" No dream! His face hardened and darkened. On! Not like Larry! On! 1914.

## A STOIC

### I

#### 1

"Aequam memento rebus in arduis

Servare mentem:"Horace.

In the City of Liverpool, on a January day of 1905, the Boardroom of "The Island Navigation Company" rested, as it were, after the labours of the afternoon. The long table was still littered with the ink, pens, blottingpaper, and abandoned documents of six persons a deserted battlefield of the brain. And, lonely, in his chairman's seat at the top end old Sylvanus Heythorp sat, with closed eyes, still and heavy as an image. One puffy, feeble hand, whose fingers quivered, rested on the arm of his chair; the thick white hair on his massive head glistened in the light from a greenshaded lamp. He was not asleep, for every now and then his sanguine cheeks filled, and a sound, half sigh, half grunt, escaped his thick lips between a white moustache and the tiny tuft of white hairs above his cleft chin. Sunk in the chair, that square thick trunk of a body in short blackbraided coat seemed divested of all neck.

Young Gilbert Farney, secretary of "The Island Navigation Company," entering his hushed Boardroom, stepped briskly to the table, gathered some papers, and stood looking at his chairman. Not more than thirtyfive, with the bright hues of the optimist in his hair, beard, cheeks, and eyes, he had a nose and lips which curled ironically. For, in his view, he was the Company; and its Board did but exist to chequer his importance. Five days in the week for seven hours a day he wrote, and thought, and wove the threads of its business, and this lot came down once a week for two or three hours, and taught their grandmother to suck eggs. But watching that redcheeked, whitehaired, somnolent figure, his smile was not so contemptuous as might have been expected. For after all, the chairman was a wonderful old boy. A man of go and insight could not but respect him. Eighty! Half paralysed, over head and ears in debt, having gone the pace all his life or so they said! till at last that mine in Ecuador had done for him before the secretary's day, of course, but he had heard of it. The old chap had bought it up on spec "de l'audace, toujours de l'audace," as he was so fond of saying paid for it half in cash and half in promises, and then the thing had turned out empty, and left him with £20,000 worth of the old shares unredeemed. The old boy had weathered it out without a bankruptcy so far. Indomitable old buffer; and never fussy like the rest of them! Young Farney, though a secretary, was capable of attachment; and his eyes expressed a pitying affection. The Board meeting had been long and "snadgy" a final settling of that Pillin business. Rum go the chairman forcing it on them like this! And with quiet satisfaction the secretary

thought 'And he never would have got it through if I hadn't made up my mind that it really is good business!' For to expand the company was to expand himself. Still, to buy four ships with the freight market so depressed was a bit startling, and there would be opposition at the general meeting. Never mind! He and the chairman could put it through. And suddenly he saw the old man looking at him.

Only from those eyes could one appreciate the strength of life yet flowing underground in that wellnigh helpless carcasedeepcoloured little blue wells, tiny, jovial, round windows.

A sigh travelled up through layers of flesh, and he said almost inaudibly:

"Have they come, Mr. Farney?"

"Yes, sir. I've put them in the transfer office; said you'd be with them in a minute; but I wasn't going to wake you."

"Haven't been asleep. Help me up."

Grasping the edge of the table with his trembling hands, the old man pulled, and, with Farney heaving him behind, attained his feet. He stood about five feet ten, and weighed fully fourteen stone; not corpulent, but very thick all through; his round and massive head alone would have outweighed a baby. With eyes shut, he seemed to be trying to get the better of his own weight, then he moved with the slowness of a barnacle towards the door. The secretary, watching him, thought: 'Marvellous old chap! How he gets about by himself is a miracle! And he can't retire, they say lives on his fees!'

But the chairman was through the green baize door. At his tortoise gait he traversed the inner office, where the youthful clerks suspended their figuring to grin behind his back and entered the transfer office, where eight gentlemen were sitting. Seven rose, and one did not. Old Heythorp raised a saluting hand to the level of his chest and moving to an armchair, lowered himself into it.

"Well, gentlemen?"

One of the eight gentlemen got up again.

"Mr. Heythorp, we've appointed Mr. Brownbee to voice our views. Mr. Brownbee!" And down he sat.

Mr. Brownbee rose a stoutish man some seventy years of age, with little grey side whiskers, and one of those utterly steady faces only to be seen in England, faces which convey the sense of business from father to son for generations; faces which make wars, and passion, and free thought seem equally incredible; faces which inspire confidence,

and awaken in one a desire to get up and leave the room. Mr. Brownbee rose, and said in a suave voice:

"Mr. Heythorp, we here represent about L14,000. When we had the pleasure of meeting you last July, you will recollect that you held out a prospect of some more satisfactory arrangement by Christmas. We are now in January, and I am bound to say we none of us get younger."

From the depths of old Heythorp a preliminary rumble came travelling, reached the surface, and materialised

"Don't know about you feel a boy, myself."

The eight gentlemen looked at him. Was he going to try and put them off again? Mr. Brownbee said with unruffled calm:

"I'm sure we're very glad to hear it. But to come to the point. We have felt, Mr. Heythorp, and I'm sure you won't think it unreasonable, that a bankruptcy would be the most satisfactory solution. We have waited a long time, and we want to know definitely where we stand; for, to be quite frank, we don't see any prospect of improvement; indeed, we fear the opposite."

"You think I'm going to join the majority."

This plumping out of what was at the back of their minds produced in Mr. Brownbee and his colleagues a sort of chemical disturbance. They coughed, moved their feet, and turned away their eyes, till the one who had not risen, a solicitor named Ventnor, said bluffly:

"Well, put it that way if you like."

Old Heythorp's little deep eyes twinkled.

"My grandfather lived to be a hundred; my father ninety-six; both of them ripe. I'm only eighty, gentlemen; blameless life compared with theirs."

"Indeed," Mr. Brownbee said, "we hope you have many years of this life before you."

"More of this than of another." And a silence fell, till old Heythorp added: "You're getting a thousand a year out of my fees. Mistake to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. I'll make it twelve hundred. If you force me to resign my directorships by bankruptcy, you won't get a rap, you know."

Mr. Brownbee cleared his throat:

"We think, Mr. Heythorp, you should make it at least fifteen hundred. In that case we might perhaps consider"

Old Heythorp shook his head.

"We can hardly accept your assertion that we should get nothing in the event of bankruptcy. We fancy you greatly underrate the possibilities. Fifteen hundred a year is the least you can do for us."

"See you dd first."

Another silence followed, then Ventnor, the solicitor, said irascibly:

"We know where we are, then."

Brownbee added almost nervously:

"Are we to understand that twelve hundred a year is your your last word?"

Old Heythorp nodded. "Come again this day month, and I'll see what I can do for you;" and he shut his eyes.

Round Mr. Brownbee six of the gentlemen gathered, speaking in low voices; Mr. Ventnor nursed a leg and glowered at old Heythorp, who sat with his eyes closed. Mr. Brownbee went over and conferred with Mr. Ventnor, then clearing his throat, he said:

"Well, sir, we have considered your proposal; we agree to accept it for the moment. We will come again, as you suggest, in a month's time.

"We hope that you will by then have seen your way to something more substantial, with a view to avoiding what we should all regret, but which I fear will otherwise become inevitable."

Old Heythorp nodded. The eight gentlemen took their hats, and went out one by one, Mr. Brownbee courteously bringing up the rear.

The old man, who could not get up without assistance, stayed musing in his chair. He had diddled 'em for the moment into giving him another month, and when that month was uphe would diddle 'em again! A month ought to make the Pillin business safe, with all that hung on it. That poor funkey chap Joe Pillin! A gurgling chuckle escaped his red lips. What a shadow the fellow had looked, trotting in that evening just a month ago, behind his valet's announcement: "Mr. Pillin, sir."

What a parchmenty, precise, threadpaper of a chap, with his bird's claw of a hand, and his muffledup throat, and his quavery:

"How do you do, Sylvanus? I'm afraid you're not"

"First rate. Sit down. Have some port."

"Port! I never drink it. Poison to me! Poison!"

"Do you good!"

"Oh! I know, that's what you always say."

"You've a monstrous constitution, Sylvanus. If I drank port and smoked cigars and sat up till one o'clock, I should be in my grave tomorrow. I'm not the man I was. The fact is, I've come to see if you can help me. I'm getting old; I'm growing nervous."

"You always were as chickeny as an old hen, Joe."

"Well, my nature's not like yours. To come to the point, I want to sell my ships and retire. I need rest. Freights are very depressed. I've got my family to think of."

"Crack on, and go broke; buck you up like anything!"

"I'm quite serious, Sylvanus."

"Never knew you anything else, Joe."

A quavering cough, and out it had come:

"Nowin a wordwon't your 'Island Navigation Company' buy my ships?"

A pause, a twinkle, a puff of smoke. "Make it worth my while!" He had said it in jest; and then, in a flash, the idea had come to him. Rosamund and her youngsters! What a chance to put something between them and destitution when he had joined the majority! And so he said: "We don't want your silly ships."

That claw of a hand waved in deprecation. "They're very good shipsdoing quite well. It's only my wretched health. If I were a strong man I shouldn't dream."

"What d'you want for 'em?" Good Lord! how he jumped if you asked him a plain question. The chap was as nervous as a guineafowl!

"Here are the figuresfor the last four years. I think you'll agree that I couldn't ask less than seventy thousand."

Through the smoke of his cigar old Heythorp had digested those figures slowly, Joe Pillin feeling his teeth and sucking lozenges the while; then he said:

"Sixty thousand! And out of that you pay me ten per cent., if I get it through for you. Take it or leave it."

"My dear Sylvanus, that's almostcynical."

"Too good a priceyou'll never get it without me."

"But about a commission! You could never disclose it!"

"Arrange that all right. Think it over. Freights'll go lower yet. Have some port."

"No, no! Thank you. No! So you think freights will go lower?"

"Sure of it."

"Well, I'll be going. I'm sure I don't know. It'sit'sI must think."

"Think your hardest."

"Yes, yes. Goodbye. I can't imagine how you still go on smoking those things and drinking port."

"See you in your grave yet, Joe." What a feeble smile the poor fellow had! Laughhe couldn't! And, alone again, he had browsed, developing the idea which had come to him.

Though, to dwell in the heart of shipping, Sylvanus Heythorp had lived at Liverpool twenty years, he was from the Eastern Counties, of a family so old that it professed to despise the Conquest. Each of its generations occupied nearly twice as long as those of less tenacious men. Traditionally of Danish origin, its men folk had as a rule bright reddishbrown hair, red cheeks, large round heads, excellent teeth and poor morals. They had done their best for the population of any county in which they had settled; their offshoots swarmed. Born in the early twenties of the nineteenth century, Sylvanus Heythorp, after an education broken by escapades both at school and college, had fetched up in that simple London of the late forties, where claret, opera, and eight per cent. for your money ruled a cheery roost. Made partner in his shipping firm well before he was thirty, he had sailed with a wet sheet and a flowing tide; dancings, claret, Cliquot, and piquet; a cab with a tiger; some travelall that delicious earlyVictorian consciousness of nothing save a golden time. It was all so full and mellow that he was forty before he had his only love affair of any depthwith the daughter of one of his own clerks, a liaison so awkward as to necessitate a sedulous concealment. The death of that girl, after three years, leaving him a natural son, had been the chief, perhaps the only real, sorrow of his



life. Five years later he married. What for? God only knew! as he was in the habit of remarking. His wife had been a hard, worldly, wellconnected woman, who presented him with two unnatural children, a girl and a boy, and grew harder, more worldly, less handsome, in the process. The migration to Liverpool, which took place when he was sixty and she fortytwo, broke what she still had of heart, but she lingered on twelve years, finding solace in bridge, and being haughty towards Liverpool. Old Heythorp saw her to her rest without regret. He had felt no love for her whatever, and practically none for her two childrenthey were in his view colourless, pragmatical, very unexpected characters. His son Ernestin the Admiraltyhe thought a poor, careful stick. His daughter Adela, an excellent manager, delighting in spiritual conversation and the society of tame men, rarely failed to show him that she considered him a hopeless heathen. They saw as little as need be of each other. She was provided for under that settlement he had made on her mother fifteen years ago, well before the not altogether unexpected crisis in his affairs. Very different was the feeling he had bestowed on that son of his "under the rose." The boy, who had always gone by his mother's name of Larne, had on her death been sent to some relations of hers in Ireland, and there brought up. He had been called to the Dublin bar, and married, young, a girl half Cornish and half Irish; presently, having cost old Heythorp in all a pretty penny, he had died impecunious, leaving his fair Rosamund at thirty with a girl of eight and a boy of five. She had not spent six months of widowhood before coming over from Dublin to claim the old man's guardianship. A remarkably pretty woman, like a fullblown rose, with greenish hazel eyes, she had turned up one morning at the offices of "The Island Navigation Company," accompanied by her two childrenfor he had never divulged to them his private address. And since then they had always been more or less on his hands, occupying a small house in a suburb of Liverpool. He visited them there, but never asked them to the house in Sefton Park, which was in fact his daughter's; so that his proper family and friends were unaware of their existence.

Rosamund Larne was one of those precarious ladies who make uncertain incomes by writing fullbodied storyettes. In the most dismal circumstances she enjoyed a buoyancy bordering on the indecent; which always amused old Heythorp's cynicism. But of his grandchildren Phyllis and Jock (wild as colts) he had become fond. And this chance of getting six thousand pounds settled on them at a stroke had seemed to him nothing but heavensent. As things were, if he "went off"and, of course, he might at any moment, there wouldn't be a penny for them; for he would "cut up" a good fifteen thousand to the bad. He was now giving them some three hundred a year out of his fees; and dead directors unfortunately earned no fees! Six thousand pounds at four and a half per cent., settled so that their mother couldn't "blue it," would give them a certain two hundred and fifty pounds a yearbetter than beggary. And the more he thought the better he liked it, if only that shaky chap, Joe Pillin, didn't shy off when he'd bitten his nails short over it!

Four evenings later, the "shaky chap" had again appeared at his house in Sefton Park.

"I've thought it over, Sylvanus. I don't like it.

"No; but you'll do it."

"It's a sacrifice. Fiftyfour thousand for four shipsit means a considerable reduction in my income."

"It means security, my boy."

"Well, there is that; but you know, I really can't be party to a secret commission. If it came out, think of my name and goodness knows what."

"It won't come out."

"Yes, yes, so you say, but"

"All you've got to do's to execute a settlement on some third parties that I'll name. I'm not going to take a penny of it myself. Get your own lawyer to draw it up and make him trustee. You can sign it when the purchase has gone through. I'll trust you, Joe. What stock have you got that gives four and a half per cent.?"

"Midland"

"That'll do. You needn't sell."

"Yes, but who are these people?"

"Woman and her children I want to do a good turn to." What a face the fellow had made!  
"Afraid of being connected with a woman, Joe?"

"Yes, you may laughI am afraid of being connected with someone else's woman. I don't like itI don't like it at all. I've not led your life, Sylvanus."

"Lucky for you; you'd have been dead long ago. Tell your lawyer it's an old flame of yoursyou old dog!"

"Yes, there it is at once, you see. I might be subject to blackmail."

"Tell him to keep it dark, and just pay over the income, quarterly."

"I don't like it, SylvanusI don't like it."

"Then leave it, and be hanged to you. Have a cigar?"

"You know I never smoke. Is there no other way?"

"Yes. Sell stock in London, bank the proceeds there, and bring me six thousand pounds in notes. I'll hold 'em till after the general meeting. If the thing doesn't go through, I'll hand 'em back to you."

"No; I like that even less."

"Rather I trusted you, eh!"

"No, not at all, Sylvanus, not at all. But it's all playing round the law."

"There's no law to prevent you doing what you like with your money. What I do's nothing to you. And mind you, I'm taking nothing from it not a mag. You assist the widowed and the fatherless just your line, Joe!"

"What a fellow you are, Sylvanus; you don't seem capable of taking anything seriously."

"Care killed the cat!"

Left alone after this second interview he had thought: 'The beggar'll jump.'

And the beggar had. That settlement was drawn and only awaited signature. The Board today had decided on the purchase; and all that remained was to get it ratified at the general meeting. Let him but get that over, and this provision for his grandchildren made, and he would snap his fingers at Brownbee and his crew the canting humbugs! "Hope you have many years of this life before you!" As if they cared for anything but his money their money rather! And becoming conscious of the length of his reverie, he grasped the arms of his chair, heaved at his own bulk, in an effort to rise, growing redder and redder in face and neck. It was one of the hundred things his doctor had told him not to do for fear of apoplexy, the humbug! Why didn't Farney or one of those young fellows come and help him up? To call out was undignified. But was he to sit there all night? Three times he failed, and after each failure sat motionless again, crimson and exhausted; the fourth time he succeeded, and slowly made for the office. Passing through, he stopped and said in his extinct voice:

"You young gentlemen had forgotten me."

"Mr. Farney said you didn't wish to be disturbed, sir."

"Very good of him. Give me my hat and coat."

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you. What time is it?"

"Six o'clock, sir."

"Tell Mr. Farney to come and see me tomorrow at noon, about my speech for the general meeting."

"Yes, Sir."

"Goodnight to you."

"Goodnight, Sir."

At his tortoise gait he passed between the office stools to the door, opened it feebly, and slowly vanished.

Shutting the door behind him, a clerk said:

"Poor old chairman! He's on his last!"

Another answered:

"Gosh! He's a tough old hulk. He'll go down fightin'."

Issuing from the offices of "The Island Navigation Company," Sylvanus Heythorp moved towards the corner whence he always took tram to Sefton Park. The crowded street had all that prosperous air of catching or missing something which characterises the town where London and New York and Dublin meet. Old Heythorp had to cross to the far side, and he sallied forth without regard to traffic. That snaillike passage had in it a touch of the sublime; the old man seemed saying: "Knock me down and be dd to you! I'm not going to hurry." His life was saved perhaps ten times a day by the British character at large, compounded of phlegm and a liking to take something under its protection. The tram conductors on that line were especially used to him, never failing to catch him under the arms and heave him like a sack of coals, while with trembling hands he pulled hard at the rail and strap.

"All right, sir?"

"Thank you."

He moved into the body of the tram, where somebody would always get up from kindness and the fear that he might sit down on them; and there he stayed motionless, his little eyes tight closed. With his red face, tuft of white hairs above his square cleft block of shaven chin, and his big highcrowned bowler hat, which yet seemed too petty for his head with its thick hair he looked like some kind of an idol dug up and decked out in gear a size too small.

One of those voices of young men from public schools and exchanges where things are bought and sold, said:

"How de do, Mr. Heythorp?"

Old Heythorp opened his eyes. That sleek cub, Joe Pillin's son! What a young pup with his round eyes, and his round cheeks, and his little moustache, his fur coat, his spats, his diamond pin!

"How's your father?" he said.

"Thanks, rather below par, worryin' about his ships. Suppose you haven't any news for him, sir?"

Old Heythorp nodded. The young man was one of his pet abominations, embodying all the complacent, littleheaded mediocrity of this new generation; natty fellows all turned out of the same mould, sippers and tasters, chaps without drive or capacity, without even vices; and he did not intend to gratify the cub's curiosity.

"Come to my house," he said; "I'll give you a note for him."

"Thaanks; I'd like to cheer the old man up."

The old man! Cheeky brat! And closing his eyes he relapsed into immobility. The tram wound and ground its upward way, and he mused. When he was that cub's age twenty-eight or whatever it might be he had done most things; been up Vesuvius, driven four in hand, lost his last penny on the Derby and won it back on the Oaks, known all the dancers and operatic stars of the day, fought a duel with a Yankee at Dieppe and winged him for saying through his confounded nose that Old England was played out; been a controlling voice already in his shipping firm; drunk five other of the best men in London under the table; broken his neck steeplechasing; shot a burglar in the legs; been nearly drowned, for a bet; killed snipe in Chelsea; been to Court for his sins; stared a ghost out of countenance; and travelled with a lady of Spain. If this young pup had done the last, it would be all he had; and yet, no doubt, he would call himself a "spark."

The conductor touched his arm.

"'Ere you are, sir."

"Thank you."

He lowered himself to the ground, and moved in the bluish darkness towards the gate of his daughter's house. Bob Pillin walked beside him, thinking: 'Poor old josser, he is gettin' a back number!' And he said: "I should have thought you ought to drive, sir. My old guv'nor would knock up at once if he went about at night like this."

The answer rumbled out into the misty air:

"Your father's got no chest; never had."

Bob Pillin gave vent to one of those fat cackles which come so readily from a certain type of man; and old Heythorp thought:

'Laughing at his father! Parrot!'

They had reached the porch.

A woman with dark hair and a thin, straight face and figure was arranging some flowers in the hall. She turned and said:

"You really ought not to be so late, Father! It's wicked at this time of year. Who is itoh! Mr. Pillin, how do you do? Have you had tea? Won't you come to the drawingroom; or do you want to see my father?"

"Thaanks! I believe your father" And he thought: 'By Jove! the old chap is a caution!' For old Heythorp was crossing the hall without having paid the faintest attention to his daughter. Murmuring again:

"Thaanks awfully; he wants to give me something," he followed. Miss Heythorp was not his style at all; he had a kind of dread of that thin woman who looked as if she could never be unbuttoned. They said she was a great churchgoer and all that sort of thing.

In his sanctum old Heythorp had moved to his writingtable, and was evidently anxious to sit down.

"Shall I give you a hand, sir?"

Receiving a shake of the head, Bob Pillin stood by the fire and watched. The old "sport" liked to paddle his own canoe. Fancy having to lower yourself into a chair like that! When an old Johnny got to such a state it was really a mercy when he snuffed out, and made way for younger men. How his Companies could go on putting up with such a fossil for chairman was a marvel! The fossil rumbled and said in that almost inaudible voice:

"I suppose you're beginning to look forward to your father's shoes?"

Bob Pillin's mouth opened. The voice went on:

"Dibs and no responsibility. Tell him from me to drink portadd five years to his life."

To this unwarranted attack Bob Pillin made no answer save a laugh; he perceived that a manservant had entered the room.

"A Mrs. Larne, sir. Will you see her?"

At this announcement the old man seemed to try and start; then he nodded, and held out the note he had written. Bob Pillin received it together with the impression of a murmur which sounded like: "Scratch a poll, Poll!" and passing the fine figure of a woman in a fur coat, who seemed to warm the air as she went by, he was in the hall again before he perceived that he had left his hat.

A young and pretty girl was standing on the bearskin before the fire, looking at him with roundeyed innocence. He thought: 'This is better; I mustn't disturb them for my hat'; and approaching the fire, said:

"Jolly cold, isn't it?"

The girl smiled: "Yesjolly."

He noticed that she had a large bunch of violets at her breast, a lot of fair hair, a short straight nose, and round bluegrey eyes very frank and open. "Er" he said, "I've left my hat in there."

"What larks!" And at her little clear laugh something moved within Bob Pillin.

"You know this house well?"

She shook her head. "But it's rather scrummy, isn't it?"

Bob Pillin, who had never yet thought so answered:

"Quite O.K."

The girl threw up her head to laugh again. "O.K.? What's that?"

Bob Pillin saw her white round throat, and thought: 'She is a ripper!' And he said with a certain desperation:

"My name's Pillin. Yours is Larne, isn't it? Are you a relation here?"

"He's our Guardy. Isn't he a chook?"

That rumbling whisper like "Scratch a Poll, Poll!" recurring to Bob Pillin, he said with reservation:

"You know him better than I do." "Oh! Aren't you his grandson, or something?"

Bob Pillin did not cross himself.

"Lord! No! My dad's an old friend of his; that's all."

"Is your dad like him?"

"Not much."

"What a pity! It would have been lovely if they'd been Tweedles."

Bob Pillin thought: 'This bit is something new. I wonder what her Christian name is.' And he said:

"What did your godfather and godmothers in your baptism?"

The girl laughed; she seemed to laugh at everything.

"Phyllis."



Could he say: "Is my only joy"? Better keep it! But for what? He wouldn't see her again if he didn't look out! And he said:

"I live at the last house in the park the red one. D'you know it? Where do you?"

"Oh! a long way, Millicent Villas. It's a poky little house. I hate it. We have awful larks, though."

"Who are we?"

"Mother, and myself, and Jock. He's an awful boy. You can't conceive what an awful boy he is. He's got nearly red hair; I think he'll be just like Guardy when he gets old. He's awful!"

Bob Pillin murmured:

"I should like to see him."

"Would you? I'll ask mother if you can. You won't want to again; he goes off all the time like a squib." She threw back her head, and again Bob Pillin felt a little giddy. He collected himself, and drawled:

"Are you going in to see your Guardy?"

"No. Mother's got something special to say. We've never been here before, you see. Isn't he fun, though?"

"Fun!"

"I think he's the greatest lark; but he's awfully nice to me. Jock calls him the last of the Stoic'uns."

A voice called from old Heythorp's den:

"Phyllis!" It had a particular ring, that voice, as if coming from beautifully formed red lips, of which the lower one must curve the least bit over; it had, too, a caressing vitality, and a kind of warm falsity.

The girl threw a laughing look back over her shoulder, and vanished through the door into the room.

Bob Pillin remained with his back to the fire and his puppy round eyes fixed on the air that her figure had last occupied. He was experiencing a sensation never felt before. Those travels with a lady of Spain, charitably conceded him by old Heythorp, had so far

satisfied the emotional side of this young man; they had stopped short at Brighton and Scarborough, and been preserved from even the slightest intrusion of love. A calculated and hygienic career had caused no anxiety either to himself or his father; and this sudden swoop of something more than admiration gave him an uncomfortable choky feeling just above his high round collar, and in the temples a sort of buzzing those first symptoms of chivalry. A man of the world does not, however, succumb without a struggle; and if his hat had not been out of reach, who knows whether he would not have left the house hurriedly, saying to himself: "No, no, my boy; Millicent Villas is hardly your form, when your intentions are honourable"? For somehow that round and laughing face, bob of glistening hair, those wide opened grey eyes refused to awaken the beginnings of other intentionssuch is the effect of youth and innocence on even the steadiest young men. With a kind of moral stammer, he was thinking: 'Can I dare I offer to see them to their tram? Couldn't I even nip out and get the car round and send them home in it? No, I might miss them better stick it out here! What a jolly laugh! What a tipping face strawberries and cream, hay, and all that! Millicent Villas!' And he wrote it on his cuff.

The door was opening; he heard that warm vibrating voice: "Come along, Phyllis!" the girl's laugh so high and fresh: "Righto! Coming!" And with, perhaps, the first real tremor he had ever known, he crossed to the front door. All the more chivalrous to escort them to the tram without a hat! And suddenly he heard: "I've got your hat, young man!" And her mother's voice, warm, and simulating shock: "Phyllis, you awful gairl! Did you ever see such an awful gairl; Mr."

"Pillin, Mother."

And then he did not quite know how insulated from the January air by laughter and the scent of fur and violets, he was between them walking to their tram. It was like an experience out of the "Arabian Nights," or something of that sort, an intoxication which made one say one was going their way, though one would have to come all the way back in the same beastly tram. Nothing so warming had ever happened to him as sitting between them on that drive, so that he forgot the note in his pocket, and his desire to relieve the anxiety of the "old man," his father. At the tram's terminus they all got out. There issued a purr of invitation to come and see them some time; a clear: "Jock'll love to see you!" A low laugh: "You awful gairl!" And a flash of cunning zigzagged across his brain. Taking off his hat, he said:

"Thanks awfully; rather!" and put his foot back on the step of the tram. Thus did he delicately expose the depths of his chivalry!

"Oh! you said you were going our way! What oneers you do tell! Oh!" The words were as music; the sight of those eyes growing rounder, the most perfect he had ever seen; and

Mrs. Larne's low laugh, so warm yet so preoccupied, and the tips of the girl's fingers waving back above her head. He heaved a sigh, and knew no more till he was seated at his club before a bottle of champagne. Home! Not he! He wished to drink and dream. "The old man" would get his news all right tomorrow!

The words: "A Mrs. Larne to see you, sir," had been of a nature to astonish weaker nerves. What had brought her here? She knew she mustn't come! Old Heythorp had watched her entrance with cynical amusement. The way she whiffed herself at that young pup in passing, the way her eyes slid round! He had a very just appreciation of his son's widow; and a smile settled deep between his chin tuft and his moustache. She lifted his hand, kissed it, pressed it to her splendid bust, and said:

"So here I am at last, you see. Aren't you surprised?"

Old Heythorp, shook his head.

"I really had to come and see you, Guardy; we haven't had a sight of you for such an age. And in this awful weather! How are you, dear old Guardy?"

"Never better." And, watching her greengrey eyes, he added:

"Haven't a penny for you!"

Her face did not fall; she gave her featherlaugh.

"How dreadful of you to think I came for that! But I am in an awful fix, Guardy."

"Never knew you not to be."

"Just let me tell you, dear; it'll be some relief. I'm having the most terrible time."

She sank into a low chair, disengaging an overpowering scent of violets, while melancholy struggled to subdue her face and body.

"The most awful fix. I expect to be sold up any moment. We may be on the streets tomorrow. I daren't tell the children; they're so happy, poor darlings. I shall be obliged to take Jock away from school. And Phyllis will have to stop her piano and dancing; it's an absolute crisis. And all due to those Midland Syndicate people. I've been counting on at least two hundred for my new story, and the wretches have refused it."

With a tiny handkerchief she removed one tear from the corner of one eye. "It is hard, Guardy; I worked my brain silly over that story."

From old Heythorp came a mutter which sounded suspiciously like:

"Rats!"

Heaving a sigh, which conveyed nothing but the generosity of her breathing apparatus, Mrs. Larne went on:

"You couldn't, I suppose, let me have just one hundred?"

"Not a bob."

She sighed again, her eyes slid round the room; then in her warm voice she murmured:

"Guardy, you were my dear Philip's father, weren't you? I've never said anything; but of course you were. He was so like you, and so is Jock."

Nothing moved in old Heythorp's face. No pagan image consulted with flowers and song and sacrifice could have returned less answer. Her dear Philip! She had led him the devil of a life, or he was a Dutchman! And what the deuce made her suddenly trot out the skeleton like this? But Mrs. Larne's eyes were still wandering.

"What a lovely house! You know, I think you ought to help me, Guardy. Just imagine if your grandchildren were thrown out into the street!"

The old man grinned. He was not going to deny his relationship it was her lookout, not his. But neither was he going to let her rush him.

"And they will be; you couldn't look on and see it. Do come to my rescue this once. You really might do something for them."

With a rumbling sigh he answered:

"Wait. Can't give you a penny now. Poor as a church mouse."

"Oh! Guardy

"Fact."

Mrs. Larne heaved one of her most buoyant sighs. She certainly did not believe him.

"Well!" she said; "you'll be sorry when we come round one night and sing for pennies under your window. Wouldn't you like to see Phyllis? I left her in the hall. She's growing such a sweet gairl. Guardy just fifty!"

"Not a rap."

Mrs. Larne threw up her hands. "Well! You'll repent it. I'm at my last gasp." She sighed profoundly, and the perfume of violets escaped in a cloud; Then, getting up, she went to the door and called: "Phyllis!"

When the girl entered old Heythorp felt the nearest approach to a flutter of the heart for many years. She had put her hair up! She was like a spring day in January; such a relief from that scented humbug, her mother. Pleasant the touch of her lips on his forehead, the sound of her clear voice, the sight of her slim movements, the feeling that she did him credit—clean run stock, she and that young scamp Jock—better than the holy woman, his daughter Adela, would produce if anyone were ever fool enough to marry her, or that pragmatical fellow, his son Ernest.

And when they were gone he reflected with added zest on the six thousand pounds he was getting for them out of Joe Pillin and his ships. He would have to pitch it strong in his speech at the general meeting. With freights so low, there was bound to be opposition. No dash nowadays; nothing but gabby caution! They were a scrimshanking lot on the Board—he had had to pull them round one by one—the deuce of a tug getting this thing through! And yet, the business was sound enough. Those ships would earn money, properly handled—good money.

His valet, coming in to prepare him for dinner, found him asleep. He had for the old man as much admiration as may be felt for one who cannot put his own trousers on. He would say to the housemaid Molly: "He's a game old blighter—must have been a rare one in his day. Cocks his hat at you, even now, I see!" To which the girl, Irish and pretty, would reply: "Well, an' sure I don't mind, if it gives um a pleasure. 'Tis better anyway than the sad eye I get from herself."

At dinner, old Heythorp always sat at one end of the rosewood table and his daughter at the other. It was the eminent moment of the day. With napkin tucked high into his waistcoat, he gave himself to the meal with passion. His palate was undimmed, his digestion unimpaired. He could still eat as much as two men, and drink more than one. And while he savoured each mouthful he never spoke if he could help it. The holy woman had nothing to say that he cared to hear, and he nothing to say that she cared to listen to. She had a horror, too, of what she called "the pleasures of the table"—those lusts of the flesh! She was always longing to dock his grub, he knew. Would see her further first! What other pleasures were there at his age? Let her wait till she was eighty. But she never would be; too thin and holy!

This evening, however, with the advent of the partridge she did speak.

"Who were your visitors, Father?"

Trust her for nosing anything out! Fixing his little blue eyes on her, he mumbled with a very full mouth: "Ladies."

"So I saw; what ladies?"

He had a longing to say: 'Part of one of my families under the rose.' As a fact it was the best part of the only one, but the temptation to multiply exceedingly was almost overpowering. He checked himself, however, and went on eating partridge, his secret irritation crimsoning his cheeks; and he watched her eyes, those cold precise and round grey eyes, noting it, and knew she was thinking: 'He eats too much.'

She said: "Sorry I'm not considered fit to be told. You ought not to be drinking hock."

Old Heythorp took up the long green glass, drained it, and repressing fumes and emotion went on with his partridge. His daughter pursed her lips, took a sip of water, and said:

"I know their name is Larne, but it conveyed nothing to me; perhaps it's just as well."

The old man, mastering a spasm, said with a grin:

"My daughter-in-law and my granddaughter."

"What! Ernest married! Oh! nonsense!"

He chuckled, and shook his head.

"Then do you mean to say, Father, that you were married before you married my mother?"

"No."

The expression on her face was as good as a play!

She said with a sort of disgust: "Not married! I see. I suppose those people are hanging round your neck, then; no wonder you're always in difficulties. Are there any more of them?"

Again the old man suppressed that spasm, and the veins in his neck and forehead swelled alarmingly. If he had spoken he would infallibly have choked. He ceased eating, and putting his hands on the table tried to raise himself. He could not and subsiding in his chair sat glaring at the stiff, quiet figure of his daughter.

"Don't be silly, Father, and make a scene before Meller. Finish your dinner."

He did not answer. He was not going to sit there to be dragooned and insulted! His helplessness had never so weighed on him before. It was like a revelation. A log that had to put up with anything! A log! And, waiting for his valet to return, he cunningly took up his fork.

In that saintly voice of hers she said:

"I suppose you don't realise that it's a shock to me. I don't know what Ernest will think"

"Ernest be dd."

"I do wish, Father, you wouldn't swear."

Old Heythorp's rage found vent in a sort of rumble. How the devil had he gone on all these years in the same house with that woman, dining with her day after day! But the servant had come back now, and putting down his fork he said:

"Help me up!"

The man paused, thunderstruck, with the souffle balanced. To leave dinner unfinished it was a portent!

"Help me up!"

"Mr. Heythorp's not very well, Meller; take his other arm."

The old man shook off her hand.

"I'm very well. Help me up. Dine in my own room in future."

Raised to his feet, he walked slowly out; but in his sanctum he did not sit down, obsessed by this first overwhelming realisation of his helplessness. He stood swaying a little, holding on to the table, till the servant, having finished serving dinner, brought in his port.

"Are you waiting to sit down, sir?"

He shook his head. Hang it, he could do that for himself, anyway. He must think of something to fortify his position against that woman. And he said:

"Send me Molly!"

"Yes, sir." The man put down the port and went.

Old Heythorp filled his glass, drank, and filled again. He took a cigar from the box and lighted it. The girl came in, a greyeyed, darkhaired damsel, and stood with her hands folded, her head a little to one side, her lips a little parted. The old man said:

"You're a human being."



"I would hope so, sirr."

"I'm going to ask you something as a human being not a servant see?"

"No, sirr; but I will be glad to do anything you like."

"Then put your nose in here every now and then, to see if I want anything. Meller goes out sometimes. Don't say anything; Just put your nose in."

"Oh! an' I will; 'tis a pleasure 'twill be to do ut."

He nodded, and when she had gone lowered himself into his chair with a sense of appeasement. Pretty girl! Comfort to see a pretty face not a pale, pecky thing like Adela's. His anger burned up anew. So she counted on his helplessness, had begun to count on that, had she? She should see that there was life in the old dog yet! And his sacrifice of the uneaten soufflé, the still less eaten mushrooms, the peppermint sweet with which he usually concluded dinner, seemed to consecrate that purpose. They all thought he was a hulk, without a shot left in the locker! He had seen a couple of them at the Board that afternoon shrugging at each other, as though saying: 'Look at him!' And young Farney pitying him. Pity, forsooth! And that coarsegrained solicitor chap at the creditors' meeting curling his lip as much as to say: 'One foot in the grave!' He had seen the clerks dowsing the glim of their grins; and that young pup Bob Pillin screwing up his supercilious mug over his dogcollar. He knew that scented humbug Rosamund was getting scared that he'd drop off before she'd squeezed him dry. And his valet was always looking him up and down queerly. As to that holy woman! Not quite so fast! Not quite so fast! And filling his glass for the fourth time, he slowly sucked down the dark red fluid, with the "old boots" flavour which his soul loved, and, drawing deep at his cigar, closed his eyes.

## II

### 1

The room in the hotel where the general meetings of "The Island Navigation Company" were held was nearly full when the secretary came through the door which as yet divided the shareholders from their directors. Having surveyed their empty chairs, their ink and papers, and nodded to a shareholder or two, he stood, watch in hand, contemplating the congregation. A thicker attendance than he had ever seen! Due, no doubt, to the lower dividend, and this Pillin business. And his tongue curled. For if he had a natural contempt for his Board, with the exception of the chairman, he had a still more natural contempt for his shareholders. Amusing spectacle when you came to think of it, a general meeting! Unique! Eighty or a hundred men, and five women, assembled through sheer devotion to their money. Was any other function in the world so singlehearted. Church was nothing to it so many motives were mingled there with devotion to one's soul. A well-educated young man reader of Anatole France, and other writers she enjoyed ironic speculation. What earthly good did they think they got by coming here? Halfpast two! He put his watch back into his pocket, and passed into the Boardroom.

There, the fumes of lunch and of a short preliminary meeting made cosy the February atmosphere. By the fire four directors were conversing rather restlessly; the fifth was combing his beard; the chairman sat with eyes closed and red lips moving rhythmically in the sucking of a lozenge, the slips of his speech ready in his hand. The secretary said in his cheerful voice: "Time, sir."

Old Heythorp swallowed, lifted his arms, rose with help, and walked through to his place at the centre of the table. The five directors followed. And, standing at the chairman's right, the secretary read the minutes, forming the words precisely with his curling tongue. Then, assisting the chairman to his feet, he watched those rows of faces, and thought: 'Mistake to let them see he can't get up without help. He ought to have let me read his speech I wrote it.'

The chairman began to speak:

"It is my duty and my pleasure,' ladies and gentlemen, for the nineteenth consecutive year to present to you the directors' report and the accounts for the past twelve months. You will all have had special notice of a measure of policy on which your Board has decided, and to which you will be asked today to give your adherenceto that I shall come at the end of my remarks."

"Excuse me, sir; we can't hear a word down here."

'Ah!' thought the secretary, 'I was expecting that.'

The chairman went on, undisturbed. But several shareholders now rose, and the same speaker said testily: "We might as well go home. If the chairman's got no voice, can't somebody read for him?"

The chairman took a sip of water, and resumed. Almost all in the last six rows were now on their feet, and amid a hubbub of murmurs the chairman held out to the secretary the slips of his speech, and fell heavily back into his chair.

The secretary reread from the beginning; and as each sentence fell from his tongue, he thought: 'How good that is!' 'That's very clear!' 'A neat touch!' 'This is getting them.' It seemed to him a pity they could not know it was all his composition. When at last he came to the Pillin sale he paused for a second.

"I come now to the measure of policy to which I made allusion at the beginning of my speech. Your Board has decided to expand your enterprise by purchasing the entire fleet of Pillin & Co., Ltd. By this transaction we become the owners of the four steamships Smyrna, Damascus, Tyre, and Sidon, vessels in prime condition with a total freightcarrying capacity of fifteen thousand tons, at the low inclusive price of sixty thousand pounds. Gentlemen, de l'audace, toujours de l'audace!" it was the chairman's phrase, his bit of the speech, and the secretary did it more than justice. "Times are bad, but your Board is emphatically of the opinion that they are touching bottom; and this, in their view, is the psychological moment for a forward stroke. They confidently recommend your adoption of their policy and the ratification of this purchase, which they believe will, in the not far distant future, substantially increase the profits of the Company." The secretary sat down with reluctance. The speech should have continued with a number of appealing sentences which he had carefully prepared, but the chairman had cut them out with the simple comment: "They ought to be glad of the chance." It was, in his view, an error.

The director who had combed his beard now rose a man of presence, who might be trusted to say nothing long and suavely. While he was speaking the secretary was busy noting whence opposition was likely to come. The majority were sitting owl-like a good sign; but some dozen were studying their copies of the report, and three at least were making notes. Westgate, for instance, who wanted to get on the Board, and was sure to make himself unpleasant the time-honoured method of vinegar; and Batterson, who also desired to come on, and might be trusted to support the Board the time-honoured method of oil; while, if one knew anything of human nature, the fellow who had complained that he might as well go home would have something uncomfortable to say. The director finished his remarks, combed his beard with his fingers, and sat down.

A momentary pause ensued. Then Messieurs Westgate and Batterson rose together. Seeing the chairman nod towards the latter, the secretary thought: 'Mistake! He should

have humoured Westgate by giving him precedence.' But that was the worst of the old man, he had no notion of the *suaviter in modo*! Mr. Batterson thus unchained would like, if he might be so allowed, to congratulate the Board on having piloted their ship so smoothly through the troublous waters of the past year. With their worthy chairman still at the helm, he had no doubt that in spite of the still low he would not say falling barometer, and their unseasonable climacteric, they might rely on weathering their he would not say storm. He would confess that the present dividend of four per cent. was not one which satisfied every aspiration (*Hear, hear!*), but speaking for himself, and he hoped for others and here Mr. Batterson looked round he recognised that in all the circumstances it was as much as they had the right to expect. But following the bold but to his mind prudent development which the Board proposed to make, he thought that they might reasonably, if not sanguinely, anticipate a more golden future. ("No, no!") A shareholder said, 'No, no!' That might seem to indicate a certain lack of confidence in the special proposal before the meeting. ("Yes!") From that lack of confidence he would like at once to dissociate himself. Their chairman, a man of foresight and acumen, and valour proved on many a field and *under sea*, would not have committed himself to this policy without good reason. In his opinion they were in safe hands, and he was glad to register his support of the measure proposed. The chairman had well said in his speech: '*de l'audace, toujours de l'audace!*' Shareholders would agree with him that there could be no better motto for Englishmen. Ahem!

Mr. Batterson sat down. And Mr. Westgate rose: He wanted he said to know more, much more, about this proposition, which to his mind was of a very dubious wisdom. 'Ah!' thought the secretary, 'I told the old boy he must tell them more'. To whom, for instance, had the proposal first been made? To him! the chairman said. Good! But why were Pillins selling, if freights were to go up, as they were told?

"Matter of opinion."

"Quite so; and in my opinion they are going lower, and Pillins were right to sell. It follows that we are wrong to buy." ("*Hear, hear!*" "No, no!") "Pillins are shrewd people. What does the chairman say? Nerves! Does he mean to tell us that this sale was the result of nerves?"

The chairman nodded.

"That appears to me a somewhat fantastic theory; but I will leave that and confine myself to asking the grounds on which the chairman bases his confidence; in fact, what it is which is actuating the Board in pressing on us at such a time what I have no hesitation in stigmatising as a rash proposal. In a word, I want light as well as leading in this matter."

Mr. Westgate sat down.

What would the chairman do now? The situation was distinctly awkward, seeing his helplessness and the lukewarmness of the Board behind him. And the secretary felt more strongly than ever the absurdity of his being an underling, he who in a few well-chosen words could so easily have twisted the meeting round his thumb. Suddenly he heard the long, rumbling sigh which preluded the chairman's speeches.

"Has any other gentleman anything to say before I move the adoption of the report?"

Phew! That would put their backs up. Yes, sure enough it had brought that fellow, who had said he might as well go home, to his feet! Now for something nasty!

"Mr. Westgate requires answering. I don't like this business. I don't impute anything to anybody; but it looks to me as if there were something behind it which the shareholders ought to be told. Not only that; but, to speak frankly, I'm not satisfied to be ridden over roughshod in this fashion by one who, whatever he may have been in the past, is obviously not now in the prime of his faculties."

With a gasp the secretary thought: 'I knew that was a plainspoken man!'

He heard again the rumbling beside him. The chairman had gone crimson, his mouth was pursed, his little eyes were very blue.

"Help me up," he said.

The secretary helped him, and waited, rather breathless.

The chairman took a sip of water, and his voice, unexpectedly loud, broke an ominous hush:

"Never been so insulted in my life. My best services have been at your disposal for nineteen years; you know what measure of success this Company has attained. I am the oldest man here, and my experience of shipping is, I hope, a little greater than that of the two gentlemen who spoke last. I have done my best for you, ladies and gentlemen, and we shall see whether you are going to endorse an indictment of my judgment and of my honour, if I am to take the last speaker seriously. This purchase is for your good. 'There is a tide in the affairs of men' and I for one am not content, never have been, to stagnate. If that is what you want, however, by all means give your support to these gentlemen and have done with it. I tell you freights will go up before the end of the year; the purchase is a sound one, more than a sound one, I, at any rate, stand or fall by it. Refuse to ratify it, if you like; if you do, I shall resign."

He sank back into his seat. The secretary, stealing a glance, thought with a sort of enthusiasm: 'Bravo! Who'd have thought he could rally his voice like that? A good touch, too, that about his honour! I believe he's knocked them.'

It's still dicky, though, if that fellow at the back gets up again; the old chap can't work that stop a second time. 'Ah! here was 'old Applepie' on his hind legs. That was all right!

"I do not hesitate to say that I am an old friend of the chairman; we are, many of us, old friends of the chairman, and it has been painful to me, and I doubt not to others, to hear an attack made on him. If he is old in body, he is young in mental vigour and courage. I wish we were all as young. We ought to stand by him; I say, we ought to stand by him." ("Hear, hear! Hear, hear!") And the secretary thought: 'That's done it!' And he felt a sudden odd emotion, watching the chairman bobbing his body, like a wooden toy, at old Appleby; and old Appleby bobbing back. Then, seeing a shareholder close to the door get up, thought: 'Who's that? I know his faceAh! yes; Ventnor, the solicitorhe's one of the chairman's creditors that are coming again this afternoon. What now?'

"I can't agree that we ought to let sentiment interfere with our judgment in this matter. The question is simply: How are our pockets going to be affected? I came here with some misgivings, but the attitude of the chairman has been such as to remove them; and I shall support the proposition." The secretary thought: 'That's all rightonly, he said it rather queerlyrather queerly.'

Then, after a long silence, the chairman, without rising, said:

"I move the adoption of the report and accounts."

"I second that."

"Those in favour signify the same in the usual way. Contrary? Carried." The secretary noted the dissentients, six in number, and that Mr. Westgate did not vote.

A quarter of an hour later he stood in the body of the emptying room supplying names to one of the gentlemen of the Press. The passionless fellow said: "Haythorp, with an 'a'; oh! an 'e'; he seems an old man. Thank you. I may have the slips? Would you like to see a proof? With an 'a' you saidoh! an 'e.' Good afternoon!" And the secretary thought: 'Those fellows, what does go on inside them? Fancy not knowing the old chairman by now!'

Back in the proper office of "The Island Navigation Company" old Heythorp sat smoking a cigar and smiling like a purring cat. He was dreaming a little of his triumph, sifting with his old brain, still subtle, the wheat from the chaff of the demurrers: Westgatenothing in thatprofessional discontent till they silenced him with a place on the boardbut not while he held the reins! That chap at the backan illconditioned fellow! "Something behind!" Suspicious brute! There was somethingbuthang it! they might think themselves lucky to get four ships at that price, and all due to him! It was on the last speaker that his mind dwelt with a doubt. That fellow Ventnor, to whom he owed moneythere had been something just a little queer about his toneas much as to say, "I smell a rat." Well! one would see that at the creditors' meeting in half an hour.

"Mr. Pillin, sir."

"Show him in!"

In a fur coat which seemed to extinguish his thin form, Joe Pillin entered. It was snowing, and the cold had nipped and yellowed his meagre face between its slight grey whiskering. He said thinly:

"How are you, Sylvanus? Aren't you perished in this cold?"

"Warm as a toast. Sit down. Take off your coat."

"Oh! I should be lost without it. You must have a fire inside you. Soso it's gone through?"

Old Heythorp nodded; and Joe Pillin, wandering like a spirit, scrutinised the shut door. He came back to the table, and said in a low voice:

"It's a great sacrifice."

Old Heythorp smiled.

"Have you signed the deed poll?"

Producing a parchment from his pocket Joe Pillin unfolded it with caution to disclose his signature, and said:

"I don't like itit's irrevocable."

A chuckle escaped old Heythorp.

"As death."

Joe Pillin's voice passed up into the treble clef.

"I can't bear irrevocable things. I consider you stampeded me, playing on my nerves."

Examining the signatures old Heythorp murmured:

"Tell your lawyer to lock it up. He must think you a sad dog, Joe."

"Ah! Suppose on my death it comes to the knowledge of my wife!"

"She won't be able to make it hotter for you than you'll be already."

Joe Pillin replaced the deed within his coat, emitting a queer thin noise. He simply could not bear joking on such subjects.

"Well," he said, "you've got your way; you always do. Who is this Mrs. Larne? You oughtn't to keep me in the dark. It seems my boy met her at your house. You told me she didn't come there."

Old Heythorp said with relish:

"Her husband was my son by a woman I was fond of before I married; her children are my grandchildren. You've provided for them. Best thing you ever did."

"I don't knowI don't know. I'm sorry you told me. It makes it all the more doubtful. As soon as the transfer's complete, I shall get away abroad. This cold's killing me. I wish you'd give me your recipe for keeping warm."

"Get a new inside."

Joe Pillin regarded his old friend with a sort of yearning. "And yet," he said, "I suppose, with your fullblooded habit, your life hangs by a thread, doesn't it?"

"A stout one, my boy"

"Well, goodbye, Sylvanus. You're a Job's comforter; I must be getting home." He put on his hat, and, lost in his fur coat, passed out into the corridor. On the stairs he met a man who said:

"How do you do, Mr. Pillin? I know your son. Been' seeing the chairman? I see your sale's gone through all right. I hope that'll do us some good, but I suppose you think the other way?"



Peering at him from under his hat, Joe Pillin said:

"Mr. Ventnor, I think? Thank you! It's very cold, isn't it?" And, with that cautious remark, he passed on down.

Alone again, old Heythorp thought: 'By George! What a wavering, quavering, thread paper of a fellow! What misery life must be to a chap like that! He walks in fear he wallows in it. Poor devil!' And a curious feeling swelled his heart, of elation, of lightness such as he had not known for years. Those two young things were safe now from penury safe! After dealing with those infernal creditors of his he would go round and have a look at the children. With a hundred and twenty a year the boy could go into the Army best place for a young scamp like that. The girl would go off like hot cakes, of course, but she needn't take the first calf that came along. As for their mother, she must look after herself; nothing under two thousand a year would keep her out of debt. But trust her for wheedling and bluffing her way out of any scrape! Watching his cigar smoke curl and disperse he was conscious of the strain he had been under these last six weeks, aware suddenly of how greatly he had balked at thought of today's general meeting. Yes! It might have turned out nasty. He knew well enough the forces on the Board, and off, who would be only too glad to shelve him. If he were shelved here his other two Companies would be sure to follow suit, and bang would go every penny of his income he would be a pauper dependant on that holy woman. Well! Safe now for another year if he could stave off these sharks once more. It might be a harder job this time, but he was in luck in luck, and it must hold. And taking a luxurious pull at his cigar, he rang the handbell.

"Bring 'em in here, Mr. Farney. And let me have a cup of China tea as strong as you can make it."

"Yes, sir. Will you see the proof of the press report, or will you leave it to me?"

"To you."

"Yes, sir. It was a good meeting, wasn't it?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

"Wonderful how your voice came back just at the right moment. I was afraid things were going to be difficult. The insult did it, I think. It was a monstrous thing to say. I could have punched his head."

Again old Heythorp nodded; and, looking into the secretary's fine blue eyes, he repeated: "Bring 'em in."

The lonely minute before the entrance of his creditors passed in the thought: 'So that's how it struck him! Short shrift I should get if it came out.'

The gentlemen, who numbered ten this time, bowed to their debtor, evidently wondering why the deuce they troubled to be polite to an old man who kept them out of their money. Then, the secretary reappearing with a cup of China tea, they watched while their debtor drank it. The feat was tremulous. Would he get through without spilling it all down his front, or choking? To those unaccustomed to his private life it was slightly miraculous. He put the cup down empty, tremblingly removed some yellow drops from the little white tuft below his lip, refit his cigar, and said:

"No use beating about the bush, gentlemen; I can offer you fourteen hundred a year so long as I live and hold my directorships, and not a penny more. If you can't accept that, you must make me bankrupt and get about sixpence in the pound. My qualifying shares will fetch a couple of thousand at market price. I own nothing else. The house I live in, and everything in it, barring my clothes, my wine, and my cigars, belong to my daughter under a settlement fifteen years old. My solicitors and bankers will give you every information. That's the position in a nutshell."

In spite of business habits the surprise of the ten gentlemen was only partially concealed. A man who owed them so much would naturally say he owned nothing, but would he refer them to his solicitors and bankers unless he were telling the truth? Then Mr. Ventnor said:

"Will you submit your pass books?"

"No, but I'll authorise my bankers to give you a full statement of my receipts for the last five yearslonger, if you like."

The strategic stroke of placing the ten gentlemen round the Board table had made it impossible for them to consult freely without being overheard, but the lowvoiced transference of thought travelling round was summed up at last by Mr. Brownbee.

"We think, Mr. Heythorp, that your fees and dividends should enable you to set aside for us a larger sum. Sixteen hundred, in fact, is what we think you should give us yearly. Representing, as we do, sixteen thousand pounds, the prospect is not cheering, but we hope you have some good years before you yet. We understand your income to be two thousand pounds."

Old Heythorp shook his head. "Nineteen hundred and thirty pounds in a good year. Must eat and drink; must have a man to look after me not as active as I was. Can't do on less than five hundred pounds. Fourteen hundred's all I can give you, gentlemen; it's an advance of two hundred pounds. That's my last word."

The silence was broken by Mr. Ventnor.

"And it's my last word that I'm not satisfied. If these other gentlemen accept your proposition I shall be forced to consider what I can do on my own account."

The old man stared at him, and answered:

"Oh! you will, sir; we shall see."

The others had risen and were gathered in a knot at the end of the table; old Heythorp and Mr. Ventnor alone remained seated. The old man's lower lip projected till the white hairs below stood out like bristles. 'You ugly dog,' he was thinking, 'you think you've got something up your sleeve. Well, do your worst!' The "ugly dog" rose abruptly and joined the others. And old Heythorp closed his eyes, sitting perfectly still, with his cigar, which had gone out, sticking up between his teeth. Mr. Brownbee turning to voice the decision come to, cleared his throat.

"Mr. Heythorp," he said, "if your bankers and solicitors bear out your statements, we shall accept your offer *faute de mieux*, in consideration of your" but meeting the old man's eyes, which said so very plainly: "Blow your consideration!" he ended with a stammer: "Perhaps you will kindly furnish us with the authorisation you spoke of?"

Old Heythorp nodded, and Mr. Brownbee, with a little bow, clasped his hat to his breast and moved towards the door. The nine gentlemen followed. Mr. Ventnor, bringing up the rear, turned and looked back. But the old man's eyes were already closed again.

The moment his creditors were gone, old Heythorp sounded the handbell.

"Help me up, Mr. Farney. That Ventnor what's his holding?"

"Quite small. Only ten shares, I think."

"Ah! What time is it?"

"Quarter to four, sir."

"Get me a taxi."

After visiting his bank and his solicitors he struggled once more into his cab and caused it to be driven towards Millicent Villas. A kind of sleepy triumph permeated his whole being, bumped and shaken by the cab's rapid progress. So! He was free of those sharks now so long as he could hold on to his Companies; and he would still have a hundred a year or more to spare for Rosamund and her youngsters. He could live on four hundred, or even threefifty, without losing his independence, for there would be no standing life

in that holy woman's house unless he could pay his own scot! A good day's work! The best for many a long month!

The cab stopped before the villa.

There are rooms which refuse to give away their owners, and rooms which seem to say: 'They really are like this.' Of such was Rosamund Larne's a sort of permanent confession, seeming to remark to anyone who entered: 'Her taste? Well, you can see cheerful and exuberant; her habits yes, she sits here all the morning in a dressing gown, smoking cigarettes and dropping ink; kindly observe my carpet. Notice the piano it has a look of coming and going, according to the exchequer. This very deep cushioned sofa is permanent, however; the watercolours on the walls are safe, too they're by herself. Mark the scent of mimosa she likes flowers, and likes them strong. No clock, of course. Examine the bureau she is obviously always ringing for "the drumstick," and saying: "Where's this, Ellen, and where's that? You naughty gairl, you've been tidying." Cast an eye on that pile of manuscripts she has evidently a genius for composition; it flows off her pen like Shakespeare, she never blots a line. See how she's had the electric light put in, instead of that horrid gas; but try and turn either of them on you can't; last quarter isn't paid, of course; and she uses an oil lamp, you can tell that by the ceiling: The dog over there, who will not answer to the name of 'Carmen,' a Pekinese spaniel like a little Djin, all prominent eyes rolling their blacks, and no nose between yes, Carmen looks as if she didn't know what was coming next; she's right it's a pet and slap again life! Consider, too, the fittings of the tea tray, rather soiled, though not quite tin, but I say unto you that no millionaire's in all its glory ever had a liqueur bottle on it.'

When old Heythorp entered this room, which extended from back to front of the little house, preceded by the announcement "Mr. Aesop," it was resonant with a very clatter and a dingo of noises, from Phyllis playing the Machiche; from the boy Jock on the hearthrug, emitting at short intervals the most piercing notes from an ocarina; from Mrs. Larne on the sofa, talking with her trailing volubility to Bob Pillin; from Bob Pillin muttering: "Yees! Quiite! Yees!" and gazing at Phyllis over his collar. And, on the windowsill, as far as she could get from all this noise, the little dog Carmen was rolling her eyes. At sight of their visitor Jock blew one rending screech, and bolting behind the sofa, placed his chin on its top, so that nothing but his round pink unmoving face was visible; and the dog Carmen tried to climb the blind cord.

Encircled from behind by the arms of Phyllis, and preceded by the gracious perfumed bulk of Mrs. Larne, old Heythorp was escorted to the sofa. It was low, and when he had plumped down into it, the boy Jock emitted a hollow groan. Bob Pillin was the first to break the silence.

"How are you, sir? I hope it's gone through."

Old Heythorp nodded. His eyes were fixed on the liqueur, and Mrs. Larne murmured:

"Guardy, you must try our new liqueur. Jock, you awful boy, get up and bring Guardy a glass."

The boy Jock approached the teatable, took up a glass, put it to his eye and filled it rapidly.

"You horrible boy, you could see that glass has been used."

In a high round voice rather like an angel's, Jock answered:

"All right, Mother; I'll get rid of it," and rapidly swallowing the yellow liquor, took up another glass.

Mrs. Larne laughed.

"What am I to do with him?"

A loud shriek prevented a response. Phyllis, who had taken her brother by the ear to lead him to the door, let him go to clasp her injured self.

Bob Pillin went hastening towards her; and following the young man with her chin, Mrs. Larne said, smiling:

"Aren't those children awful? He's such a nice fellow. We like him so much, Guardy."

The old man grinned. So she was making up to that young pup! Rosamund Larne, watching him, murmured:

"Oh! Guardy, you're as bad as Jock. He takes after you terribly. Look at the shape of his head. Jock, come here!" The innocent boy approached; with his girlish complexion, his flowery blue eyes, his perfect mouth, he stood before his mother like a large cherub. And suddenly he blew his ocarina in a dreadful manner. Mrs. Larne launched a box at his ears, and receiving the wind of it he fell prone.

"That's the way he behaves. Be off with you, you awful boy. I want to talk to Guardy."

The boy withdrew on his stomach, and sat against the wall crosslegged, fixing his innocent round eyes on old Heythorp. Mrs. Larne sighed.

"Things are worse and worse, Guardy. I'm at my wits' end to tide over this quarter. You wouldn't advance me a hundred on my new story? I'm sure to get two for it in the end."

The old man shook his head.

"I've done something for you and the children," he said. "You'll get notice of it in a day or two; ask no questions."

"Oh! Guardy! Oh! you dear!" And her gaze rested on Bob Pillin, leaning over the piano, where Phyllis again sat.

Old Heythorp snorted. "What are you cultivating that young gaby for? She mustn't be grabbed up by any fool who comes along."

Mrs. Larne murmured at once:

"Of course, the dear gairl is much too young. Phyllis, come and talk to Guardy!"

When the girl was installed beside him on the sofa, and he had felt that little thrill of warmth the proximity of youth can bring, he said:

"Been a good girl?"

She shook her head.

"Can't, when Jock's not at school. Mother can't pay for him this term."

Hearing his name, the boy Jock blew his ocarina till Mrs. Larne drove him from the room, and Phyllis went on:

"He's more awful than anything you can think of. Was my dad at all like him, Guardy? Mother's always so mysterious about him. I suppose you knew him well."

Old Heythorp, incapable of confusion, answered stolidly:

"Not very."

"Who was his father? I don't believe even mother knows."

"Man about town in my day."

"Oh! your day must have been jolly. Did you wear pegtop trousers, and dundreary's?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

"What larks! And I suppose you had lots of adventures with opera dancers and gambling. The young men are all so good now." Her eyes rested on Bob Pillin. "That young man's a perfect stick of goodness."

Old Heythorp grunted.

"You wouldn't know how good he was," Phyllis went on musingly, "unless you'd sat next him in a tunnel. The other day he had his waist squeezed and he simply sat still and did nothing. And then when the tunnel ended, it was Jock after all, not me. His face was Oh! ah! ha! ha! Ah! ha!" She threw back her head, displaying all her white, round throat. Then edging near, she whispered:

"He likes to pretend, of course, that he's fearfully lively. He's promised to take mother and me to the theatre and supper afterwards. Won't it be scrummy! Only, I haven't anything to go in."

Old Heythorp said: "What do you want? Irish poplin?"

Her mouth opened wide: "Oh! Guardy! Soft white satin!"

"How many yards'll go round you?"

"I should think about twelve. We could make it ourselves. You are a chook!"

A scent of hair, like hay, enveloped him, her lips bobbed against his nose, and there came a feeling in his heart as when he rolled the first sip of a special wine against his palate. This little house was a rumtytoo affair, her mother was a humbug, the boy a cheeky young rascal, but there was a warmth here he never felt in that big house which had been his wife's and was now his holy daughter's. And once more he rejoiced at his day's work, and the success of his breach of trust, which put some little ground beneath these young feet, in a hard and unscrupulous world. Phyllis whispered in his ear:

"Guardy, do look; he will stare at me like that. Isn't it awfullike a boiled rabbit?"

Bob Pillin, attentive to Mrs. Larne, was gazing with all his might over her shoulder at the girl. The young man was moonstruck, that was clear! There was something almost touching in the stare of those puppy dog's eyes. And he thought 'Young beggarwish I were his age!' The utter injustice of having an old and helpless body, when your desire for enjoyment was as great as ever! They said a man was as old as he felt! Fools! A man was as old as his legs and arms, and not a day younger. He heard the girl beside him utter a discomfortable sound, and saw her face cloud as if tears were not far off; she jumped up, and going to the window, lifted the little dog and buried her face in its brown and white fur. Old Heythorp thought: 'She sees that her humbugging mother is using her as a decoy.' But she had come back, and the little dog, rolling its eyes horribly at the strange figure on the sofa, in a desperate effort to escape succeeded in reaching her shoulder, where it stayed perched like a cat, held by one paw and trying to back away into space. Old Heythorp said abruptly:

"Are you very fond of your mother?"



"Of course I am, Guardy. I adore her."

"H'm! Listen to me. When you come of age or marry, you'll have a hundred and twenty a year of your own that you can't get rid of. Don't ever be persuaded into doing what you don't want. And remember: Your mother's a sieve, no good giving her money; keep what you'll get for yourself it's only a pittance, and you'll want it all every penny."

Phyllis's eyes had opened very wide; so that he wondered if she had taken in his words.

"Oh! Isn't money horrible, Guardy?"

"The want of it."

"No, it's beastly altogether. If only we were like birds. Or if one could put out a plate overnight, and have just enough in the morning to use during the day."

Old Heythorp sighed.

"There's only one thing in life that matters independence. Lose that, and you lose everything. That's the value of money. Help me up."

Phyllis stretched out her hands, and the little dog, running down her back, resumed its perch on the windowsill, close to the blind cord.

Once on his feet, old Heythorp said:

"Give me a kiss. You'll have your satin tomorrow."

Then looking at Bob Pillin, he remarked:

"Going my way? I'll give you a lift."

The young man, giving Phyllis one appealing look, answered dully: "Thaanks!" and they went out together to the taxi. In that draughtless vehicle they sat, full of who knows what contempt of age for youth; and youth for age; the old man resenting this young pup's aspiration to his granddaughter; the young man annoyed that this old image had dragged him away before he wished to go. Old Heythorp said at last:

"Well?"

Thus expected to say something, Bob Pillin muttered

"Glad your meetin' went off well, sir. You scored a triumph I should think."

"Why?"

"Oh! I don't know. I thought you had a good bit of opposition to contend with."

Old Heythorp looked at him.

"Your grandmother!" he said; then, with his habitual instinct of attack, added: "You make the most of your opportunities, I see."

At this rude assault Bob Pillin's redcheeked face assumed a certain dignity. "I don't know what you mean, sir. Mrs. Larne is very kind to me."

"No doubt. But don't try to pick the flowers."

Thoroughly upset, Bob Pillin preserved a dogged silence. This fortnight, since he had first met Phyllis in old Heythorp's hall, had been the most singular of his existence up to now. He would never have believed that a fellow could be so quickly and completely bowled, could succumb without a kick, without even wanting to kick. To one with his philosophy of having a good time and never committing himself too far, it was in the nature of "a fair knockout," and yet so pleasurable, except for the wear and tear about one's chances. If only he knew how far the old boy really counted in the matter! To say: "My intentions are strictly honourable" would be oldfashioned; besides the old fellow might have no right to hear it. They called him Guardy, but without knowing more he did not want to admit the old curmudgeon's right to interfere.

"Are you a relation of theirs, sir?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

Bob Pillin went on with desperation:

"I should like to know what your objection to me is."

The old man turned his head so far as he was able; a grim smile bristled the hairs about his lips, and twinkled in his eyes. What did he object to? Why everything! Object to! That sleek head, those puppydog eyes, fattish red cheeks, high collars, pearl pin, spats, and drawlpah! the imbecility, the smugness of his mug; no go, no devil in any of his sort, in any of these fishveined, coddledup young bloods, nothing but playing for safety! And he wheezed out:

"Milk and water masquerading as port wine."

Bob Pillin frowned.

It was almost too much for the composure even of a man of the world. That this paralytic old fellow should express contempt for his virility was really the last thing in

jest. Luckily he could not take it seriously. But suddenly he thought: 'What if he really has the power to stop my going there, and means to turn them against me!' And his heart quailed.

"Awfully sorry, sir," he said, "if you don't think I'm wild enough. Anything I can do for you in that line"

The old man grunted; and realising that he had been quite witty, Bob Pillin went on:

"I know I'm not in debt, no entanglements, got a decent income, pretty good expectations and all that; but I can soon put that all right if I'm not fit without."

It was perhaps his first attempt at irony, and he could not help thinking how good it was.

But old Heythorp preserved a deadly silence. He looked like a stuffed man, a regular Aunt Sally sitting there, with the fixed red in his cheeks, his stivered hair, square block of a body, and no neck that you could see only wanting the pipe in his mouth! Could there really be danger from such an old idol? The idol spoke:

"I'll give you a word of advice. Don't hang round there, or you'll burn your fingers. Remember me to your father. Goodnight!"

The taxi had stopped before the house in Sefton Park. An insensate impulse to remain seated and argue the point fought in Bob Pillin with an impulse to leap out, shake his fist in at the window, and walk off. He merely said, however:

"Thanks for the lift. Goodnight!" And, getting out deliberately, he walked off.

Old Heythorp, waiting for the driver to help him up, thought 'Fatter, but no more guts than his father!'

In his sanctum he sank at once into his chair. It was wonderfully still there every day at this hour; just the click of the coals, just the faintest ruffle from the wind in the trees of the park. And it was cosily warm, only the fire lightening the darkness. A drowsy beatitude pervaded the old man. A good day's work! A triumph that young pup had said. Yes! Something of a triumph! He had held on, and won. And dinner to look forward to, yet. A napa nap! And soon, rhythmic, soft, sonorous, his breathing rose, with now and then that pathetic twitching of the old who dream.

### III

#### 1

When Bob Pillin emerged from the little front garden of 23, Millicent Villas ten days later, his sentiments were ravelled, and he could not get hold of an end to pull straight the stuff of his mind.

He had found Mrs. Larne and Phyllis in the sittingroom, and Phyllis had been crying; he was sure she had been crying; and that memory still infected the sentiments evoked by later happenings. Old Heythorp had said: "You'll burn your fingers." The process had begun. Having sent her daughter away on a pretext really a bit too thin, Mrs. Larne had installed him beside her scented bulk on the sofa, and poured into his ear such a tale of monetary woe and entanglement, such a mass of present difficulties and rosy prospects, that his brain still whirled, and only one thing emerged clearly that she wanted fifty pounds, which she would repay him on quarterday; for their Guardy had made a settlement by which, until the dear children came of age, she would have sixty pounds every quarter. It was only a question of a few weeks; he might ask Messrs. Scriven and Coles; they would tell him the security was quite safe. He certainly might ask Messrs. Scriven and Colesthey happened to be his father's solicitors; but it hardly seemed to touch the point. Bob Pillin had a certain shrewd caution, and the point was whether he was going to begin to lend money to a woman who, he could see, might borrow up to seventy times seven on the strength of his infatuation for her daughter. That was rather too strong! Yet, if he didn't she might take a sudden dislike to him, and where would he be then? Besides, would not a loan make his position stronger? And then such is the effect of love even on the younger generation that thought seemed to him unworthy. If he lent at all, it should be from chivalryulterior motives might go hang! And the memory of the tearmarks on Phyllis's pretty palepink cheeks; and her petulantly mournful: "Oh! young man, isn't money beastly!" scraped his heart, and ravished his judgment. All the same, fifty pounds was fifty pounds, and goodness knew how much more; and what did he know of Mrs. Larne, after all, except that she was a relative of old Heythorp's and wrote stories told them too, if he was not mistaken? Perhaps it would be better to see Scrivens'. But again that absurd nobility assaulted him. Phyllis! Phyllis! Besides, were not settlements always drawn so that they refused to form security for anything? Thus, hampered and troubled, he hailed a cab. He was dining with the Ventnors on the Cheshire side, and would be late if he didn't get home sharp to dress.

Driving, whitetied and waistcoated, in his father's car, he thought with a certain contumely of the younger Ventnor girl, whom he had been wont to consider pretty before he knew Phyllis. And seated next her at dinner, he quite enjoyed his new sense of superiority to her charms, and the ease with which he could chaff and be agreeable. And all the time he suffered from the suppressed longing which scarcely ever left him now, to

think and talk of Phyllis. Ventnor's fizz was good and plentiful, his old Madeira absolutely first chop, and the only other man present a teetotal curate, who withdrew with the ladies to talk his parish shop. Favoured by these circumstances, and the perception that Ventnor was an agreeable fellow, Bob Pillin yielded to his secret itch to get near the subject of his affections.

"Do you happen," he said airily, "to know a Mrs. Larner relative of old Heythorp's rather a handsome woman she writes stories."

Mr. Ventnor shook his head. A closer scrutiny than Bob Pillin's would have seen that he also moved his ears.

"Of old Heythorp's? Didn't know he had any, except his daughter, and that son of his in the Admiralty."

Bob Pillin felt the glow of his secret hobby spreading within him.

"She is, though lives rather out of town; got a son and daughter. I thought you might know her stories clever woman."

Mr. Ventnor smiled. "Ah!" he said enigmatically, "these lady novelists! Does she make any money by them?"

Bob Pillin knew that to make money by writing meant success, but that not to make money by writing was artistic, and implied that you had private means, which perhaps was even more distinguished. And he said:

"Oh! she has private means, I know."

Mr. Ventnor reached for the Madeira.

"So she's a relative of old Heythorp's," he said. "He's a very old friend of your father's. He ought to go bankrupt, you know."

To Bob Pillin, glowing with passion and Madeira, the idea of bankruptcy seemed discreditable in connection with a relative of Phyllis. Besides, the old boy was far from that! Had he not just made this settlement on Mrs. Larne? And he said:

"I think you're mistaken. That's of the past."

Mr. Ventnor smiled.

"Will you bet?" he said.

Bob Pillin also smiled. "I should be bettin' on a certainty."

Mr. Ventnor passed his hand over his whiskered face. "Don't you believe it; he hasn't a mag to his name. Fill your glass."

Bob Pillin said, with a certain resentment:

"Well, I happen to know he's just made a settlement of five or six thousand pounds. Don't know if you call that being bankrupt."

"What! On this Mrs. Larne?"

Confused, uncertain whether he had said something derogatory or indiscreet, or something which added distinction to Phyllis, Bob Pillin hesitated, then gave a nod.

Mr. Ventnor rose and extended his short legs before the fire.

"No, my boy," he said. "No!"

Unaccustomed to flat contradiction, Bob Pillin reddened.

"I'll bet you a tenner. Ask Scrivens."

Mr. Ventnor ejaculated:

"Scrivensbut they're not" then, staring rather hard, he added: "I won't bet. You may be right. Scrivens are your father's solicitors too, aren't they? Always been sorry he didn't come to me. Shall we join the ladies?" And to the drawingroom he preceded a young man more uncertain in his mind than on his feet.

Charles Ventnor was not one to let you see that more was going on within than met the eye. But there was a good deal going on that evening, and after his conversation with young Bob he had occasion more than once to turn away and rub his hands together. When, after that second creditors' meeting, he had walked down the stairway which led to the offices of "The Island Navigation Company," he had been deep in thought. Short, squarely built, rather stout, with moustache and large muttonchop whiskers of a red brown, and a faint floridity in face and dress, he impressed at first sight only by a certain truly British vulgarity. One felt that here was a hailfellowwellmet man who liked lunch and dinner, went to Scarborough for his summer holidays, sat on his wife, took his daughters out in a boat and was never sick. One felt that he went to church every Sunday morning, looked upwards as he moved through life, disliked the unsuccessful, and expanded with his second glass of wine. But then a clear look into his wellclothed face and redbrown eyes would give the feeling: 'There's something fulvous here; he might be a bit too foxy.' A third look brought the thought: 'He's certainly a bully.' He was not a

large creditor of old Heythorp. With interest on the original, he calculated his claim at three hundred pounds unredeemed shares in that old Ecuador mine. But he had waited for his money eight years, and could never imagine how it came about that he had been induced to wait so long. There had been, of course, for one who liked "big pots," a certain glamour about the personality of old Heythorp, still a bit of a swell in shipping circles, and a bit of an aristocrat in Liverpool. But during the last year Charles Ventnor had realised that the old chap's star had definitely set when that happens, of course, there is no more glamour, and the time has come to get your money. Weakness in oneself and others is despicable! Besides, he had food for thought, and descending the stairs he chewed it: He smelt a rat creatures for which both by nature and profession he had a nose. Through Bob Pillin, on whom he sometimes dwelt in connection with his younger daughter, he knew that old Pillin and old Heythorp had been friends for thirty years and more. That, to an astute mind, suggested something behind this sale. The thought had already occurred to him when he read his copy of the report. A commission would be a breach of trust, of course, but there were ways of doing things; the old chap was devilish hard pressed, and human nature was human nature! His lawyerish mind habitually put two and two together. The old fellow had deliberately appointed to meet his creditors again just after the general meeting which would decide the purchase had said he might do something for them then. Had that no significance?

In these circumstances Charles Ventnor had come to the meeting with eyes wide open and mouth tight closed. And he had watched. It was certainly remarkable that such an old and feeble man, with no neck at all, who looked indeed as if he might go off with apoplexy any moment, should actually say that he "stood or fell" by this purchase, knowing that if he fell he would be a beggar. Why should the old chap be so keen on getting it through? It would do him personally no good, unless Exactly! He had left the meeting, therefore, secretly confident that old Heythorp had got something out of this transaction which would enable him to make a substantial proposal to his creditors. So that when the old man had declared that he was going to make none, something had turned sour in his heart, and he had said to himself: "All right, you old rascal! You don't know C. V." The cavalier manner of that beggarly old rip, the defiant look of his deep little eyes, had put a polish on the rancour of one who prided himself on letting no man get the better of him. All that evening, seated on one side of the fire, while Mrs. Ventnor sat on the other, and the younger daughter played Gounod's Serenade on the violin he cogitated. And now and again he smiled, but not too much. He did not see his way as yet, but had little doubt that before long he would. It would not be hard to knock that chipped old idol off his perch. There was already a healthy feeling among the shareholders that he was past work and should be scrapped. The old chap should find that Charles V. was not to be defied; that when he got his teeth into a thing, he did not let it go. By hook or crook he would have the old man off his Boards, or his debt out of him as the price of leaving him alone. His life or his money and the old fellow should

determine which. With the memory of that defiance fresh within him, he almost hoped it might come to be the first, and turning to Mrs. Ventnor, he said abruptly:

"Have a little dinner Friday week, and ask young Pillin and the curate." He specified the curate, a teetotaller, because he had two daughters, and males and females must be paired, but he intended to pack him off after dinner to the drawingroom to discuss parish matters while he and Bob Pillin sat over their wine. What he expected to get out of the young man he did not as yet know.

On the day of the dinner, before departing for the office, he had gone to his cellar. Would three bottles of Perrier Jouet do the trick, or must he add one of the old Madeira? He decided to be on the safe side. A bottle or so of champagne went very little way with him personally, and young Pillin might be another.

The Madeira having done its work by turning the conversation into such an admirable channel, he had cut it short for fear young Pillin might drink the lot or get wind of the rat. And when his guests were gone, and his family had retired, he stood staring into the fire, putting together the pieces of the puzzle. Five or six thousand pounds would be ten per cent. on sixty! Exactly! Scriven young Pillin had said! But Crow & Donkin, not Scriven & Coles, were old Heythorp's solicitors. What could that mean, save that the old man wanted to cover the tracks of a secret commission, and had handled the matter through solicitors who did not know the state of his affairs! But why Pillin's solicitors? With this sale just going through, it must look deuced fishy to them too. Was it all a mare's nest, after all? In such circumstances he himself would have taken the matter to a London firm who knew nothing of anybody. Puzzled, therefore, and rather disheartened, feeling too that touch of liver which was wont to follow his old Madeira, he went up to bed and woke his wife to ask her why the dickens they couldn't always have soup like that!

Next day he continued to brood over his puzzle, and no fresh light came; but having a matter on which his firm and Scriven's were in touch, he decided to go over in person, and see if he could surprise something out of them. Feeling, from experience, that any really delicate matter would only be entrusted to the most responsible member of the firm, he had asked to see Scriven himself, and just as he had taken his hat to go, he said casually:

"By the way, you do some business for old Mr. Heythorp, don't you?"

Scriven, raising his eyebrows a little, murmured: "Erno," in exactly the tone Mr. Ventnor himself used when he wished to imply that though he didn't as a fact do business, he probably soon would. He knew therefore that the answer was a true one. And nonplussed, he hazarded:



"Oh! I thought you did, in regard to a Mrs. Larne."

This time he had certainly drawn blood of sorts, for down came Scriven's eyebrows, and he said:

"Mrs. Larnewe know a Mrs. Larne, but not in that connection. Why?"

"Oh! Young Pillin told me"

"Young Pillin? Why, it's his!" A little pause, and then: "Old Mr. Heythorp's solicitors are Crow & Donkin, I believe."

Mr. Ventnor held out his hand. "Yes, yes," he said; "goodbye. Glad to have got that matter settled up," and out he went, and down the street, important, smiling. By George! He had got it! "It's his father" Scriven had been going to say. What a plant! Exactly! Oh! neat! Old Pillin had made the settlement direct; and the solicitors were in the dark; that disposed of his difficulty about them. No money had passed between old Pillin and old Heythorp not a penny. Oh! neat! But not neat enough for Charles Ventnor, who had that nose for rats. Then his smile died, and with a little chill he perceived that it was all based on supposition not quite good enough to go on! What then? Somehow he must see this Mrs. Larne, or better old Pillin himself. The point to ascertain was whether she had any connection of her own with Pillin. Clearly young Pillin didn't know of it; for, according to him, old Heythorp had made the settlement. By Jove! That old rascal was deep all the more satisfaction in proving that he was not as deep as C. V. To unmask the old cheat was already beginning to seem in the nature of a public service. But on what pretext could he visit Pillin? A subscription to the Windeatt almshouses! That would make him talk in self defence and he would take care not to press the request to the actual point of getting a subscription. He caused himself to be driven to the Pillin residence in Sefton Park. Ushered into a room on the ground floor, heated in American fashion, Mr. Ventnor unbuttoned his coat. A man of sanguine constitution, he found this hothouse atmosphere a little trying. And having sympathetically obtained Joe Pillin's reluctant refusal Quite so! One could not indefinitely extend one's subscriptions even for the best of causes! he said gently:

"By the way, you know Mrs. Larne, don't you?"

The effect of that simple shot surpassed his highest hopes. Joe Pillin's face, never highly coloured, turned a sort of grey; he opened his thin lips, shut them quickly, as birds do, and something seemed to pass with difficulty down his scraggy throat. The hollows, which nerve exhaustion delves in the cheeks of men whose cheekbones are not high, increased alarmingly. For a moment he looked deathly; then, moistening his lips, he said:

"LarneLarne? No, I don't seem"

Mr. Ventnor, who had taken care to be drawing on his gloves, murmured:

"Oh! I thought your son knows her; a relation of old Heythorp's," and he looked up.

Joe Pillin had his handkerchief to his mouth; he coughed feebly, then with more and more vigour:

"I'm in very poor health," he said, at last. "I'm getting abroad at once. This cold's killing me. What name did you say?" And he remained with his handkerchief against his teeth.

Mr. Ventnor repeated:

"Larne. Writes stories."

Joe Pillin muttered into his handkerchief

"Ali! H'm! No! No! My son knows all sorts of people. I shall have to try Mentone. Are you going? Goodbye! Goodbye! I'm sorry; ah! ha! My coughah! ha h'h'm! Very distressing. Yehes! My coughah! ha h'h'm! Most distressing. Yehes!"

Out in the drive Mr. Ventnor took a deep breath of the frosty air. Not much doubt now! The two names had worked like charms. This weakly old fellow would make a pretty witness, would simply crumple under cross-examination. What a contrast to that hoary old sinner Heythorp, whose brazenness nothing could affect. The rat was as large as life! And the only point was how to make the best use of it. Then for his experience was wide the possibility dawned on him, that after all, this Mrs. Larne might only have been old Pillin's mistress or be his natural daughter, or have some other blackmailing hold on him. Any such connection would account for his agitation, for his denying her, for his son's ignorance. Only it wouldn't account for young Pillin's saying that old Heythorp had made the settlement. He could only have got that from the woman herself. Still, to make absolutely sure, he had better try and see her. But how? It would never do to ask Bob Pillin for an introduction, after this interview with his father. He would have to go on his own and chance it. Wrote stories did she? Perhaps a newspaper would know her address; or the Directory would give it not a common name! And, hot on the scent, he drove to a post office. Yes, there it was, right enough! "Larne, Mrs. R., 23, Millicent Villas." And thinking to himself: 'No time like the present,' he turned in that direction. The job was delicate. He must be careful not to do anything which might compromise his power of making public use of his knowledge. Yesticklish! What he did now must have a proper legal bottom. Still, anyway you looked at it, he had a right to investigate a fraud on himself as a shareholder of "The Island Navigation Company," and a fraud on himself as a creditor of old Heythorp. Quite! But suppose this Mrs. Larne was really

entangled with old Pillin, and the settlement a mere reward of virtue, easy or otherwise. Well! in that case there'd be no secret commission to make public, and he needn't go further. So that, in either event, he would be all right. Only how to introduce himself? He might pretend he was a newspaper man wanting a story. No, that wouldn't do! He must not represent that he was what he was not, in case he had afterwards to justify his actions publicly, always a difficult thing, if you were not careful! At that moment there came into his mind a question Bob Pillin had asked the other night. "By the way, you can't borrow on a settlement, can you? Isn't there generally some clause against it?" Had this woman been trying to borrow from him on that settlement? But at this moment he reached the house, and got out of his cab still undecided as to how he was going to work the oracle. Impudence, constitutional and professional, sustained him in saying to the little maid:

"Mrs. Larne at home? Say Mr. Charles Ventnor, will you?"

His quick brown eyes took in the apparel of the passage which served for hall—the deep blue paper on the walls, lilac patterned curtains over the doors, the well-known print of a nude young woman looking over her shoulder, and he thought: 'H'm! Distinctly tasty!' They noted, too, a small brown and white dog cowering in terror at the very end of the passage, and he murmured affably: "Fluffy! Come here, Fluffy!" till Carmen's teeth chattered in her head.

"Will you come in, sir?"

Mr. Ventnor ran his hand over his whiskers, and, entering a room, was impressed at once by its air of domesticity. On a sofa a handsome woman and a pretty young girl were surrounded by sewing apparatus and some white material. The girl looked up, but the elder lady rose.

Mr. Ventnor said easily

"You know my young friend, Mr. Robert Pillin, I think."

The lady, whose bulk and bloom struck him to the point of admiration, murmured in a full, sweet drawl:

"Oh! Yees. Are you from Messrs. Scrivens?"

With the swift reflection: 'As I thought!' Mr. Ventnor answered:

"Ernot exactly. I am a solicitor though; came just to ask about a certain settlement that Mr. Pillin tells me you're entitled under."

"Phyllis dear!"

Seeing the girl about to rise from underneath the white stuff, Mr. Ventnor said quickly:

"Pray don't disturb yourself just a formality!" It had struck him at once that the lady would have to speak the truth in the presence of this third party, and he went on: "Quite recent, I think. This'll be your first interest on six thousand pounds? Is that right?" And at the limpid assent of that rich, sweet voice, he thought: 'Fine woman; what eyes!'

"Thank you; that's quite enough. I can go to Scrivens for any detail. Nice young fellow, Bob Pillin, isn't he?" He saw the girl's chin tilt, and Mrs. Larne's full mouth curling in a smile.

"Delightful young man; we're very fond of him."

And he proceeded:

"I'm quite an old friend of his; have you known him long?"

"Oh! no. How long, Phyllis, since we met him at Guardy's? About a month. But he's so unaffected quite at home with us. A nice fellow."

Mr. Ventnor murmured:

"Very different from his father, isn't he?"

"Is he? We don't know his father; he's a shipowner, I think."

Mr. Ventnor rubbed his hands: "Yees," he said, "just giving up a warm man. Young Pillin's a lucky fellow only son. So you met him at old Mr. Heythorp's. I know him too relation of yours, I believe."

"Our dear Guardy such a wonderful man."

Mr. Ventnor echoed: "Wonderful regular old Roman."

"Oh! but he's so kind!" Mrs. Larne lifted the white stuff: "Look what he's given this naughty girl!"

Mr. Ventnor murmured: "Charming! Charming! Bob Pillin said, I think, that Mr. Heythorp was your settlor."

One of those little clouds which visit the brows of women who have owed money in their time passed swiftly athwart Mrs. Larne's eyes. For a moment they seemed saying: 'Don't you want to know too much?' Then they slid from under it.

"Won't you sit down?" she said. "You must forgive our being at work."

Mr. Ventnor, who had need of sorting his impressions, shook his head.

"Thank you; I must be getting on. Then Messrs. Scriven cana mere formality! Goodbye! Goodbye, Miss Larne. I'm sure the dress will be most becoming."

And with memories of a too clear look from the girl's eyes, of a warm firm pressure from the woman's hand, Mr. Ventnor backed towards the door and passed away just in time to avoid hearing in two voices:

"What a nice lawyer!"

"What a horrid man!"

Back in his cab, he continued to rub his hands. No, she didn't know old Pillin! That was certain; not from her words, but from her face. She wanted to know him, or about him, anyway. She was trying to hook young Bob for that sprig of a girlit was clear as mud. H'm! it would astonish his young friend to hear that he had called. Well, let it! And a curious mixture of emotions beset Mr. Ventnor. He saw the whole thing now so plainly, and really could not refrain from a certain admiration. The law had been properly diddled! There was nothing to prevent a man from settling money on a woman he had never seen; and so old Pillin's settlement could probably not be upset. But old Heythorp could. It was neat, though, oh! neat! And that was a fine womanremarkably! He had a sort of feeling that if only the settlement had been in danger, it might have been worth while to have made a bargain a woman like that could have made it worth while! And he believed her quite capable of entertaining the proposition! Her eye! Pityquite a pity! Mrs. Ventnor was not a wife who satisfied every aspiration. But alas! the settlement was safe. This baulking of the sentiment of love, whipped up, if anything, the longing for justice in Mr. Ventnor. That old chap should feel his teeth now. As a piece of investigation it was not so badnot so bad at all! He had had a bit of luck, of course, no, not luckjust that knack of doing the right thing at the right moment which marks a real genius for affairs.

But getting into his train to return to Mrs. Ventnor, he thought: 'A woman like that would have been!' And he sighed.

With a neatly written cheque for fifty pounds in his pocket Bob Pillin turned in at 23, Millicent Villas on the afternoon after Mr. Ventnor's visit. Chivalry had won the day. And he rang the bell with an elation which astonished him, for he knew he was doing a soft thing.

"Mrs. Larne is out, sir; Miss Phyllis is at home."

His heart leaped.

"Ohh! I'm sorry. I wonder if she'd see me?"

The little maid answered

"I think she's been washin' 'er'air, sir, but it may be dry be now. I'll see."

Bob Pillin stood stock still beneath the young woman on the wall. He could scarcely breathe. If her hair were not dry how awful! Suddenly he heard floating down a clear but smothered "Oh! Gefoozleme!" and other words which he could not catch. The little maid came running down.

"Miss Phyllis says, sir, she'll be with you in a jiffy. And I was to tell you that Master Jock is loose, sir."

Bob Pillin answered "Thaanks," and passed into the drawingroom. He went to the bureau, took an envelope, enclosed the cheque, and addressing it: "Mrs. Larne," replaced it in his pocket. Then he crossed over to the mirror. Never till this last month had he really doubted his own face; but now he wanted for it things he had never wanted. It had too much flesh and colour. It did not reflect his passion. This was a handicap. With a narrow white piping round his waistcoat opening, and a buttonhole of tuberoses, he had tried to repair its deficiencies. But do what he would, he was never easy about himself nowadays, never up to that pitch which could make him confident in her presence. And until this month to lack confidence had never been his wont. A clear, high, mocking voice said:

"Ohh! Conceited young man!"

And spinning round he saw Phyllis in the doorway. Her light brown hair was fluffed out on her shoulders, so that he felt a kind of fainting-sweet sensation, and murmured inarticulately:

"Oh! I say how jolly!"

"Lawks! It's awful! Have you come to see mother?"

Balanced between fear and daring, conscious of a scent of hay and verbena and camomile, Bob Pillin stammered:

"Yees. II'm glad she's not in, though."

Her laugh seemed to him terribly unfeeling.

"Oh! oh! Don't be foolish. Sit down. Isn't washing one's head awful?"

Bob Pillin answered feebly:

"Of course, I haven't much experience."

Her mouth opened.

"Oh! You arearen't you?"

And he thought desperately: 'Dare Ioughtn't Icouldn't I somehow take her hand or put my arm round her, or something?' Instead, he sat very rigid at his end of the sofa, while she sat lax and lissom at the other, and one of those crises of paralysis which beset wouldbe lovers fixed him to the soul.

Sometimes during this last month memories of a past existence, when chaff and even kisses came readily to the lips, and girls were fair game, would make him think: 'Is she really such an innocent? Doesn't she really want me to kiss her?' Alas! such intrusions lasted but a moment before a blast of awe and chivalry withered them, and a strange and tragic delicacylike nothing he had ever knownresumed its sway. And suddenly he heard her say:

"Why do you know such awful men?"

"What? I don't know any awful men."

"Oh yes, you do; one came here yesterday; he had whiskers, and he was awful."

"Whiskers?" His soul revolted in disclaimer. "I believe I only know one man with whiskersa lawyer."

"Yesthat was him; a perfectly horrid man. Mother didn't mind him, but I thought he was a beast."

"Ventnor! Came here? How d'you mean?"

"He did; about some business of yours, too." Her face had clouded over. Bob Pillin had of late been harassed by the stillborn beginning of a poem:

"I rode upon my way and saw

A maid who watched me from the door."

It never grew longer, and was prompted by the feeling that her face was like an April day. The cloud which came on it now was like an April cloud, as if a bright shower of rain must follow. Brushing aside the two distressful lines, he said:

"Look here, Miss LarnePhyllislook here!"

"All right, I'm looking!"

"What does it meanhow did he come? What did he say?"

She shook her head, and her hair quivered; the scent of camomile, verbena, hay was wafted; then looking at her lap, she muttered:

"I wish you wouldn'tI wish mother wouldn'tI hate it. Oh! Money! Beastlybeastly!" and a tearful sigh shivered itself into Bob Pillin's reddening ears.

"I saydon't! And do tell me, because"

"Oh! you know."

"I don'tI don't know anything at all. I never"

Phyllis looked up at him. "Don't tell fibs; you know mother's borrowing money from you, and it's hateful!"

A desire to lie roundly, a sense of the cheque in his pocket, a feeling of injustice, the emotion of pity, and a confused and black astonishment about Ventnor, caused Bob Pillin to stammer:

"Well, I'm dd!" and to miss the look which Phyllis gave him through her lashesa look saying:

"Ah! that's better!"

"I am dd! Look here! D'you mean to say that Ventnor came here about my lending money? I never said a word to him"

"There you seeyou are lending!"



He clutched his hair.

"We've got to have this out," he added.

"Not by the roots! Oh! you do look funny. I've never seen you with your hair untidy. Oh! oh!"

Bob Pillin rose and paced the room. In the midst of his emotion he could not help seeing himself sidelong in the mirror; and on pretext of holding his head in both his hands, tried earnestly to restore his hair. Then coming to a halt he said:

"Suppose I am lending money to your mother, what does it matter? It's only till quarterday. Anybody might want money."

Phyllis did not raise her face.

"Why are you lending it?"

"Becausebecausewhy shouldn't I?" and diving suddenly, he seized her hands.

She wrenched them free; and with the emotion of despair, Bob Pillin took out the envelope.

"If you like," he said, "I'll tear this up. I don't want to lend it, if you don't want me to; but I thoughtI thought" It was for her alone he had been going to lend this money!

Phyllis murmured through her hair:

"Yes! You thought that Ithat's what's so hateful!"

Apprehension pierced his mind.

"Oh! I neverI swear I never"

"Yes, you did; you thought I wanted you to lend it."

She jumped up, and brushed past him into the window.

So she thought she was being used as a decoy! That was awfulespecially since it was true. He knew well enough that Mrs. Larne was working his admiration for her daughter for all that it was worth. And he said with simple fervour:

"What rot!" It produced no effect, and at his wits' end, he almost shouted: "Look, Phyllis! If you don't want me tohere goes!" Phyllis turned. Tearing the envelope across he threw the bits into the fire. "There it is," he said.

Her eyes grew round; she said in an awed voice: "Oh!"

In a sort of agony of honesty he said:

"It was only a cheque. Now you've got your way."

Staring at the fire she answered slowly:

"I expect you'd better go before mother comes."

Bob Pillin's mouth fell ajar; he secretly agreed, but the idea of sacrificing a moment alone with her was intolerable, and he said hardily:

"No, I shall stick it!"

Phyllis sneezed.

"My hair isn't a bit dry," and she sat down on the fender with her back to the fire.

A certain spirituality had come into Bob Pillin's face. If only he could get that wheeze off: "Phyllis is my only joy!" or even: "Phyllis do you won't you mayn't I?" But nothing came nothing.

And suddenly she said:

"Oh! don't breathe so loud; it's awful!"

"Breathe? I wasn't!"

"You were; just like Carmen when she's dreaming."

He had walked three steps towards the door, before he thought: 'What does it matter? I can stand anything from her; and walked the three steps back again.

She said softly:

"Poor young man!"

He answered gloomily:

"I suppose you realise that this may be the last time you'll see me?"

"Why? I thought you were going to take us to the theatre."

"I don't know whether your mother will after"

Phyllis gave a little clear laugh.

"You don't know mother. Nothing makes any difference to her."

And Bob Pillin muttered:

"I see." He did not, but it was of no consequence. Then the thought of Ventnor again ousted all others. What on earth how on earth! He searched his mind for what he could possibly have said the other night. Surely he had not asked him to do anything; certainly not given him their address. There was something very odd about it that had jolly well got to be cleared up! And he said:

"Are you sure the name of that Johnny who came here yesterday was Ventnor?"

Phyllis nodded.

"And he was short, and had whiskers?"

"Yes; red, and red eyes."

He murmured reluctantly:

"It must be him. Jolly good cheek; I simply can't understand. I shall go and see him. How on earth did he know your address?"

"I expect you gave it him."

"I did not. I won't have you thinking me a squirt."

Phyllis jumped up. "Oh! Lawks! Here's mother!" Mrs. Larne was coming up the garden. Bob Pillin made for the door. "Goodbye," he said; "I'm going." But Mrs. Larne was already in the hall. Enveloping him in her rich personality, she drew him with her into the drawingroom, where the back window was open and Phyllis gone.

"I hope," she said, "those naughty children have been making you comfortable. That nice lawyer of yours came yesterday. He seemed quite satisfied."

Very red above his collar, Bob Pillin stammered:

"I never told him to; he isn't my lawyer. I don't know what it means."

Mrs. Larne smiled. "My dear boy, it's all right. You needn't be so squeamish. I want it to be quite on a business footing."

Restraining a fearful inclination to blurt out: "It's not going to be on any footing!" Bob Pillin mumbled: "I must go; I'm late."

"And when will you be able?"

"Oh! I'llI'll sendI'll write. Goodbye!" And suddenly he found that Mrs. Larne had him by the lapel of his coat. The scent of violets and fur was overpowering, and the thought flashed through him: 'I believe she only wanted to take money off old Joseph in the Bible. I can't leave my coat in her hands! What shall I do?'

Mrs. Larne was murmuring:

"It would be so sweet of you if you could manage it today"; and her hand slid over his chest. "Oh! You have brought your chequebookwhat a nice boy!"

Bob Pillin took it out in desperation, and, sitting down at the bureau, wrote a cheque similar to that which he had torn and burned. A warm kiss lighted on his eyebrow, his head was pressed for a moment to a furry bosom; a hand took the cheque; a voice said: "How delightful!" and a sigh immersed him in a bath of perfume. Backing to the door, he gasped:

"Don't mention it; andand don't tell Phyllis, please. Goodbye!"

Once through the garden gate, he thought: 'By gum! I've done it now. That Phyllis should know about it at all! That beast Ventnor!'

His face grew almost grim. He would go and see what that meant anyway!

Mr. Ventnor had not left his office when his young friend's card was brought to him. Tempted for a moment to deny his own presence, he thought: 'No! What's the good? Bound to see him some time!' If he had not exactly courage, he had that peculiar blend of selfconfidence and insensibility which must needs distinguish those who follow the law; nor did he ever forget that he was in the right.

"Show him in!" he said.

He would be quite bland, but young Pillin might whistle for an explanation; he was still tormented, too, by the memory of rich curves and moving lips, and the possibilities of better acquaintanceship.

While shaking the young man's hand his quick and fulvous eye detected at once the discomposure behind that mask of cheek and collar, and relapsing into one of those swivel chairs which give one an advantage over men more statically seated, he said:

"You look pretty bobbish. Anything I can do for you?"

Bob Pillin, in the fixed chair of the consultor, nursed his bowler on his knee.

"Well, yes, there is. I've just been to see Mrs. Larne."

Mr. Ventnor did not flinch.

"Ah! Nice woman; pretty daughter, too!" And into those words he put a certain meaning. He never waited to be bullied. Bob Pillin felt the pressure of his blood increasing.

"Look here, Ventnor," he said, "I want an explanation."

"What of?"

"Why, of your going there, and using my name, and God knows what."

Mr. Ventnor gave his chair two little twiddles before he said

"Well, you won't get it."

Bob Pillin remained for a moment taken aback; then he muttered resolutely:

"It's not the conduct of a gentleman."

Every man has his illusions, and no man likes them disturbed. The gingery tint underlying Mr. Ventnor's colouring overlaid it; even the whites of his eyes grew red.

"Oh!" he said; "indeed! You mind your own business, will you?"

"It is my business very much so. You made use of my name, and I don't choose"

"The devil you don't! Now, I tell you what"

Mr. Ventnor leaned forward "you'd better hold your tongue, and not exasperate me. I'm a goodtempered man, but I won't stand your impudence."

Clenching his bowler hat, and only kept in his seat by that sense of something behind, Bob Pillin ejaculated:

"Impudence! That's good after what you did! Look here, why did you? It's so extraordinary!"

Mr. Ventnor answered:

"Oh! is it? You wait a bit, my friend!"

Still more moved by the mystery of this affair, Bob Pillin could only mutter:

"I never gave you their address; we were only talking about old Heythorp."

And at the smile which spread between Mr. Ventnor's whiskers, he jumped up, crying:

"It's not the thing, and you're not going to put me off. I insist on an explanation."

Mr. Ventnor leaned back, crossing his stout legs, joining the tips of his thick fingers. In this attitude he was always selfpossessed.

"You dodo you?"

"Yes. You must have had some reason."

Mr. Ventnor gazed up at him.

"I'll give you a piece of advice, young cock, and charge you nothing for it, too: Ask no questions, and you'll be told no lies. And here's another: Go away before you forget yourself again."

The natural stolidity of Bob Pillings face was only just proof against this speech. He said thickly:

"If you go there again and use my name, I'll Well, it's lucky for you you're not my age. Anyway I'll relieve you of my acquaintanceship in future. Goodevening!" and he went to the door. Mr. Ventnor had risen.

"Very well," he said loudly. "Good riddance! You wait and see which boot the leg is on!"

But Bob Pillin was gone, leaving the lawyer with a very red face, a very angry heart, and a vague sense of disorder in his speech. Not only Bob Pillin, but his tender aspirations had all left him; he no longer dallied with the memory of Mrs. Larne, but like a man and a Briton thought only of how to get his own back, and punish evildoers. The atrocious words of his young friend, "It's not the conduct of a gentleman," festered in the heart of one who was made gentle not merely by nature but by Act of Parliament, and he registered a solemn vow to wipe the insult out, if not with blood, with verjuice. It was his duty, and they should dd well see him do it!

#### IV

Sylvanus Heythorp seldom went to bed before one or rose before eleven. The latter habit alone kept his valet from handing in the resignation which the former habit prompted almost every night.

Propped on his pillows in a crimson dressinggown, and freshly shaved, he looked more Roman than he ever did, except in his bath. Having disposed of coffee, he was wont to read his letters, and The Morning Post, for he had always been a Tory, and could not stomach paying a halfpenny for his news. Not that there were many letters when a man has reached the age of eighty, who should write to him, except to ask for money?

It was Valentine's Day. Through his bedroom window he could see the trees of the park, where the birds were in song, though he could not hear them. He had never been interested in Naturefullblooded men with short necks seldom are.

This morning indeed there were two letters, and he opened that which smelt of something. Inside was a thing like a Christmas card, save that the naked babe had in his hands a bow and arrow, and words coming out of his mouth: "To be your Valentine." There was also a little pink note with one blue forgetmenot printed at the top. It ran:

"DEAREST GUARDY, I'm sorry this is such a mangy little valentine; I couldn't go out to get it because I've got a beastly cold, so I asked Jock, and the pig bought this. The satin is simply scrumptious. If you don't come and see me in it some time soon, I shall come and show it to you. I wish I had a moustache, because my top lip feels just like a matchbox, but it's rather ripping having breakfast in bed. Mr. Pillin's taking us to the theatre the day after tomorrow evening. Isn't it nummy! I'm going to have rum and honey for my cold.

"Goodbye,

"Your PHYLLIS."

So this that quivered in his thick fingers, too insensitive to feel it, was a valentine for him!

Forty years ago that young thing's grandmother had given him his last. It made him out a very old chap! Forty years ago! Had that been himself living then? And himself, who, as a youth came on the town in 'fortyfive? Not a thought, not a feeling the same! They said you changed your body every seven years. The mind with it, too, perhaps! Well, he had come to the last of his bodies, now! And that holy woman had been urging him to take it to Bath, with her face as long as a teatray, and some gammon from that doctor of his. Too full a habitdock his portno alcoholmight go off in a coma any night! Knock off



not he! Rather die any day than turn teetotaller! When a man had nothing left in life except his dinner, his bottle, his cigar, and the dreams they gave him these doctors forsooth must want to cut them off! No, no! Carpe diem! while you lived, get something out of it. And now that he had made all the provision he could for those youngsters, his life was no good to any one but himself; and the sooner he went off the better, if he ceased to enjoy what there was left, or lost the power to say: "I'll do this and that, and you be jiggered!" Keep a stiff lip until you crashed, and then go clean! He sounded the bell beside him twice for Molly, not his man. And when the girl came in, and stood, pretty in her print frock, her fluffy overfine dark hair escaping from under her cap, he gazed at her in silence.

"Yes, sirr?"

"Want to look at you, that's all."

"Oh I an' I'm not tidy, sirr."

"Never mind. Had your valentine?"

"No, sirr; who would send me one, then?"

"Haven't you a young man?"

"Well, I might. But he's over in my country."

"What d'you think of this?"

He held out the little boy.

The girl took the card and scrutinised it reverently; she said in a detached voice:

"Indeed, an' ut's pretty, too."

"Would you like it?"

"Oh I if 'tis not taking ut from you."

Old Heythorp shook his head, and pointed to the dressingtable.

"Over there you'll find a sovereign. Little present for a good girl."

She uttered a deep sigh. "Oh! sirr, 'tis too much; 'tis kingly."

"Take it."

She took it, and came back, her hands clasping the sovereign and the valentine, in an attitude as of prayer.

The old man's gaze rested on her with satisfaction.

"I like pretty faces can't bear sour ones. Tell Meller to get my bath ready."

When she had gone he took up the other letters some lawyer's writing, and opening it with the usual difficulty, read:

"February 13, 1905.

"SIR, Certain facts having come to my knowledge, I deem it my duty to call a special meeting of the shareholders of 'The Island Navigation Coy.,' to consider circumstances in connection with the purchase of Mr. Joseph Pillin's fleet. And I give you notice that at this meeting your conduct will be called in question.

"I am, Sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"CHARLES VENTNOR. "SYLVANUS HEYTHORP, ESQ."

Having read this missive, old Heythorp remained some minutes without stirring. Ventnor! That solicitor chap who had made himself unpleasant at the creditors' meetings!

There are men whom a really bad bit of news at once stampedes out of all power of coherent thought and action, and men who at first simply do not take it in. Old Heythorp took it in fast enough; coming from a lawyer it was about as nasty as it could be. But, at once, with stoic wariness his old brain began casting round. What did this fellow really know? And what exactly could he do? One thing was certain; even if he knew everything, he couldn't upset that settlement. The youngsters were all right. The old man grasped the fact that only his own position was at stake. But this was enough in all conscience; a name which had been before the public fifty odd years in come, independence, more perhaps. It would take little, seeing his age and feebleness, to make his Companies throw him over. But what had the fellow got hold of? How decide whether or no to take notice; to let him do his worst, or try and get into touch with him? And what was the fellow's motive? He held ten shares! That would never make a man take all this trouble, and over a purchase which was really first-rate business for the Company. Yes! His conscience was quite clean. He had not betrayed his Company on the contrary, had done it a good turn, got them four sound ships at a low price against much opposition. That he might have done the Company a better turn, and got the ships at

fiftyfour thousand, did not trouble himthe six thousand was a deuced sight better employed; and he had not pocketed a penny piece himself! But the fellow's motive? Spite? Looked like it. Spite, because he had been disappointed of his money, and defied into the bargain! H'm! If that were so, he might still be got to blow cold again. His eyes lighted on the pink note with the blue forgetmenot. It marked as it were the high water mark of what was left to him of life; and this other letter in his handby Jove! Low water mark! And with a deep and rumbling sigh he thought: 'No, I'm not going to be beaten by this fellow.'

"Your bath is ready, sir."

Crumpling the two letters into the pocket of his dressinggown, he said:

"Help me up; and telephone to Mr. Farney to be good enough to come round." .

An hour later, when the secretary entered, his chairman was sitting by the fire perusing the articles of association. And, waiting for him to look up, watching the articles shaking in that thick, feeble hand, the secretary had one of those moments of philosophy not too frequent with his kind. Some said the only happy time of life was when you had no passions, nothing to hope and live for. But did you really ever reach such a stage? The old chairman, for instance, still had his passion for getting his own way, still had his prestige, and set a lot of store by it! And he said:

"Good morning, sir; I hope you're all right in this east wind. The purchase is completed."

"Best thing the company ever did. Have you heard from a shareholder called Ventnor. You know the man I mean?"

"No, sir. I haven't."

"Well! You may get a letter that'll make you open your eyes. An impudent scoundrel! Just write at my dictation."

"February 14th, 1905.

"CHARLES VENTNOR, Esq.

"SIR,I have your letter of yesterday's date, the contents of which I am at a loss to understand. My solicitors will be instructed to take the necessary measures."

'Phew What's all this about?' the secretary thought.

"Yours truly."

"I'll sign." And the shaky letters closed the page: "SYLVANUS HEYTHORP."

"Post that as you go."

"Anything else I can do for you, sir?"

"Nothing, except to let me know if you hear from this fellow."

When the secretary had gone the old man thought: 'So! The ruffian hasn't called the meeting yet. That'll bring him round here fast enough if it's his money he wants blackmailing scoundrel!'

"Mr. Pillin, sir; and will you wait lunch, or will you have it in the diningroom?"

"In the diningroom."

At sight of that death'shead of a fellow, old Heythorp felt a sort of pity. He looked bad enough already and this news would make him look worse. Joe Pillin glanced round at the two closed doors.

"How are you, Sylvanus? I'm very poorly." He came closer, and lowered his voice: "Why did you get me to make that settlement? I must have been mad. I've had a man called Ventnor I didn't like his manner. He asked me if I knew a Mrs. Larne."

"Ha! What did you say?"

"What could I say? I don't know her. But why did he ask?"

"Smells a rat."

Joe Pillin grasped the edge of the table with both hands.

"Oh!" he murmured. "Oh! don't say that!"

Old Heythorp held out to him the crumpled letter.

When he had read it Joe Pillin sat down abruptly before the fire.

"Pull yourself together, Joe; they can't touch you, and they can't upset either the purchase or the settlement. They can upset me, that's all."

Joe Pillin answered, with trembling lips:

"How you can sit there, and look the same as ever! Are you sure they can't touch me?"

Old Heyworth nodded grimly.

"They talk of an Act, but they haven't passed it yet. They might prove a breach of trust against me. But I'll diddle them. Keep your pecker up, and get off abroad."

"Yes, yes. I must. I'm very bad. I was going tomorrow. But I don't know, I'm sure, with this hanging over me. My son knowing her makes it worse. He picks up with everybody. He knows this man Ventnor too. And I daren't say anything to Bob. What are you thinking of, Sylvanus? You look very funny!"

Old Heythorp seemed to rouse himself from a sort of coma.

"I want my lunch," he said. "Will you stop and have some?"

Joe Pillin stammered out:

"Lunch! I don't know when I shall eat again. What are you going to do, Sylvanus?"

"Bluff the beggar out of it."

"But suppose you can't?"

"Buy him off. He's one of my creditors."

Joe Pillin stared at him afresh. "You always had such nerve," he said yearningly. "Do you ever wake up between two and four? I do and everything's black."

"Put a good stiff nightcap on, my boy, before going to bed."

"Yes; I sometimes wish I was less temperate. But I couldn't stand it. I'm told your doctor forbids you alcohol."

"He does. That's why I drink it."

Joe Pillin, brooding over the fire, said: "This meeting do you think they mean to have it? Do you think this man really knows? If my name gets into the newspapers" but encountering his old friend's deep little eyes, he stopped. "So you advise me to get off tomorrow, then?"

Old Heythorp nodded.

"Your lunch is served, sir."

Joe Pillin started violently, and rose.

"Well, goodbye, Sylvanusgoodbye! I don't suppose I shall be back till the summer, if I ever come back!" He sank his voice: "I shall rely on you. You won't let them, will you?"

Old Heythorp lifted his hand, and Joe Pillin put into that swollen shaking paw his pale and spindly fingers. "I wish I had your pluck," he said sadly. "Goodbye, Sylvanus," and turning, he passed out.

Old Heythorp thought: 'Poor shaky chap. All to pieces at the first shot!' And, going to his lunch, ate more heavily than usual.

Mr. Ventnor, on reaching his office and opening his letters, found, as he had anticipated, one from "that old rascal." Its contents excited in him the need to know his own mind. Fortunately this was not complicated by a sense of dignity; he only had to consider the position with an eye on not being made to look a fool. The point was simply whether he set more store by his money than by his desire forerJustice. If not, he had merely to convene the special meeting, and lay before it the plain fact that Mr. Joseph Pillin, selling his ships for sixty thousand pounds, had just made a settlement of six thousand pounds on a lady whom he did not know, a daughter, ward, or whatnot of the purchasing company's chairman, who had said, moreover, at the general meeting, that he stood or fell by the transaction; he had merely to do this, and demand that an explanation be required from the old man of such a startling coincidence. Convinced that no explanation would hold water, he felt sure that his action would be at once followed by the collapse, if nothing more, of that old image, and the infliction of a nasty slur on old Pillin and his hopeful son. On the other hand, three hundred pounds was money; and, if old Heythorp were to say to him: "What do you want to make this fuss for here's what I owe you!" could a man of business and the world let his sense of justice however he might itch to have it satisfied stand in the way of what was after all also his sense of Justice? for this money had been owing to him for the deuce of a long time. In this dilemma, the words:

"My solicitors will be instructed" were of notable service in helping him to form a decision, for he had a certain dislike of other solicitors, and an intimate knowledge of the law of libel and slander; if by any remote chance there should be a slip between the cup and the lip, Charles Ventnor might be in the soup a position which he deprecated both by nature and profession. High thinking, therefore, decided him at last to answer thus:

"February 19th, 1905.

"SIR, I have received your note. I think it may be fair, before taking further steps in this matter, to ask you for a personal explanation of the circumstances to which I alluded. I therefore propose with your permission to call on you at your private residence at five o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

"Yours faithfully, "CHARLES VENTNOR.

"SYLVANUS HEYTHORP, Esq."

Having sent this missive, and arranged in his mind the damning, if circumstantial, evidence he had accumulated, he awaited the hour with confidence, for his nature was not lacking in the cocksurety of a Briton. All the same, he dressed himself particularly

well that morning, putting on a blue and white striped waistcoat which, with a creamcoloured tie, set off his fulvous whiskers and full blue eyes; and he lunched, if anything, more fully than his wont, eating a stronger cheese and taking a glass of special Club ale. He took care to be late, too, to show the old fellow that his coming at all was in the nature of an act of grace. A strong scent of hyacinths greeted him in the hall; and Mr. Ventnor, who was an amateur of flowers, stopped to put his nose into a fine bloom and think uncontrollably of Mrs. Larne. Pity! The things one had to give up in lifefine womenone thing and another. Pity! The thought inspired in him a timely anger; and he followed the servant, intending to stand no nonsense from this paralytic old rascal.

The room he entered was lighted by a bright fire, and a single electric lamp with an orange shade on a table covered by a black satin cloth. There were heavily gleaming oil paintings on the walls, a heavy old brass chandelier without candles, heavy dark red curtains, and an indefinable scent of burnt acorns, coffee, cigars, and old man. He became conscious of a candescent spot on the far side of the hearth, where the light fell on old Heythorp's thick white hair.

"Mr. Ventnor, sir."

The candescent spot moved. A voice said: "Sit down."

Mr. Ventnor sat in an armchair on the opposite side of the fire; and, finding a kind of somnolence creeping over him, pinched himself. He wanted all his wits about him.

The old man was speaking in that extinct voice of his, and Mr. Ventnor said rather pettishly:

"Beg pardon, I don't get you."

Old Heythorp's voice swelled with sudden force:

"Your letters are Greek to me."

"Oh! indeed, I think we can soon make them into plain English!"

"Sooner the better."

Mr. Ventnor passed through a moment of indecision. Should he lay his cards on the table? It was not his habit, and the proceeding was sometimes attended with risk. The knowledge, however, that he could always take them up again, seeing there was no third person here to testify that he had laid them down, decided him, and he said:

"Well, Mr. Heythorp, the long and short of the matter is this: Our friend Mr. Pillin paid you a commission of ten per cent. on the sale of his ships. Oh! yes. He settled the money,



not on you, but on your relative Mrs. Larne and her children. This, as you know, is a breach of trust on your part."

The old man's voice: "Where did you get hold of that cockandbull story?" brought him to his feet before the fire.

"It won't do, Mr. Heythorp. My witnesses are Mr. Pillin, Mrs. Larne, and Mr. Scriven."

"What have you come here for, thenblackmail?"

Mr. Ventnor straightened his waistcoat; a rush of conscious virtue had dyed his face.

"Oh! you take that tone," he said, "do you? You think you can ride roughshod over everything? Well, you're very much mistaken. I advise you to keep a civil tongue and consider your position, or I'll make a beggar of you. I'm not sure this isn't a case for a prosecution!"

"Gammon!"

The choler in Charles Ventnor kept him silent for a moment; then he burst out:

"Neither gammon nor spinach. You owe me three hundred pounds, you've owed it me for years, and you have the impudence to take this attitude with me, have you? Now, I never bluster; I say what I mean. You just listen to me. Either you pay me what you owe me at once, or I call this meeting and make what I know public. You'll very soon find out where you are. And a good thing, too, for a more unscrupulousunscrupulous" he paused for breath.

Occupied with his own emotion, he had not observed the change in old Heythorp's face. The imperial on that lower lip was bristling, the crimson of those cheeks had spread to the roots of his white hair. He grasped the arms of his chair, trying to rise; his swollen hands trembled; a little saliva escaped one corner of his lips. And the words came out as if shaken by his teeth:

"Soso youyou bully me!"

Conscious that the interview had suddenly passed from the phase of negotiation, Mr. Ventnor looked hard at his opponent. He saw nothing but a decrepit, passionate, crimsonfaced old man at bay, and all the instincts of one with everything on his side boiled up in him. The miserable old turkeycockthe apoplectic image! And he said:

"And you'll do no good for yourself by getting into a passion. At your age, and in your condition, I recommend a little prudence. Now just take my terms quietly, or you know what'll happen. I'm not to be intimidated by any of your airs." And seeing that the old

man's rage was such that he simply could not speak, he took the opportunity of going on: "I don't care two straws which you do! I'm out to show you who's master. If you think in your dotage you can domineer any longer well, you'll find two can play at that game. Come, now, which are you going to do?"

The old man had sunk back in his chair, and only his little deep blue eyes seemed living. Then he moved one hand, and Mr. Ventnor saw that he was fumbling to reach the button of an electric bell at the end of a cord. 'I'll show him,' he thought, and stepping forward, he put it out of reach.

Thus frustrated, the old man remained motionless, staring up. The word "blackmail" resumed its buzzing in Mr. Ventnor's ears. The impudence the consummate impudence of it from this fraudulent old ruffian with one foot in bankruptcy and one foot in the grave, if not in the dock.

"Yes," he said, "it's never too late to learn; and for once you've come up against someone a leetle bit too much for you. Haven't you now? You'd better cry 'Peccavi.'"

Then, in the deathly silence of the room, the moral force of his position, and the collapse as it seemed of his opponent, awakening a faint compunction, he took a turn over the Turkey carpet to readjust his mind.

"You're an old man, and I don't want to be too hard on you. I'm only showing you that you can't play fast and loose as if you were God Almighty any longer. You've had your own way too many years. And now you can't have it, see!" Then, as the old man again moved forward in his chair, he added: "Now, don't get into a passion again; calm yourself, because I warn you this is your last chance. I'm a man of my word; and what I say, I do."

By a violent and unsuspected effort the old man jerked himself up and reached the bell. Mr. Ventnor heard it ring, and said sharply:

"Mind you, it's nothing to me which you do. I came for your own good. Please yourself. Well?"

He was answered by the click of the door and the old man's husky voice:

"Show this hound out! And then come back!"

Mr. Ventnor had presence of mind enough not to shake his fist. Muttering: "Very well, Mr. Heythorp! Ah! Very well!" he moved with dignity to the door. The careful shepherding of the servant renewed the fire of his anger. Hound! He had been called a

### 3

After seeing Mr. Ventnor off the premises the man Meller returned to his master, whose face looked very odd "all patchylike," as he put it in the servants' hall, as though the blood driven to his head had mottled for good the snowy whiteness of the forehead. He received the unexpected order:

"Get me a hot bath ready, and put some pine stuff in it."

When the old man was seated there, the valet asked:

"How long shall I give you, sir?"

"Twenty minutes."

"Very good, sir."

Lying in that steaming brown fragrant liquid, old Heythorp heaved a stertorous sigh. By losing his temper with that illconditioned cur he had cooked his goose. It was done to a turn; and he was a ruined man. If onlyoh! if only he could have seized the fellow by the neck and pitched him out of the room! To have lived to be so spoken to; to have been unable to lift hand or foot, hardly even his voicehe would sooner have been dead! Yessooner have been dead! A dumb and measureless commotion was still at work in the recesses of that thick old body, silverbrown in the dark water, whose steam he drew deep into his wheezing lungs, as though for spiritual relief. To be beaten by a cur like that! To have that common cad of a pettifogging lawyer drag him down and kick him about; tumble a name which had stood high, in the dust! The fellow had the power to make him a byword and a beggar! It was incredible! But it was a fact. And tomorrow he would begin to do itperhaps had begun already. His tree had come down with a crash! Eighty yearseighty good years! He regretted none of themregretted nothing; least of all this breach of trust which had provided for his grandchildrenone of the best things he had ever done. The fellow was a cowardly hound, too! The way he had snatched the bellpull out of his reachdespicable cur! And a chap like that was to put "paid" to the account of Sylvanus Heythorp, to "scratch" him out of lifesonear the end of everything, the very end! His hand raised above the surface fell back on his stomach through the dark water, and a bubble or two rose. Not so fastnot so fast! He had but to slip down a foot, let the water close over his head, and "Goodbye" to Master Ventnor's triumph Dead men could not be kicked off the Boards of Companies. Dead men could not be beggared, deprived of their independence. He smiled and stirred a little in the bath till the water reached the white hairs on his lower lip. It smelt nice! And he took a long sniff: He had had a good life, a good life! And with the thought that he had it in his power at any moment to put Master Ventnor's nose out of jointto beat the beggar after all, a sense of assuagement and wellbeing crept over him. His blood ran more evenly again. He closed

his eyes. They talked about an afterlifepeople like that holy woman. Gammon! You went to sleepa long sleep; no dreams. A nap after dinner! Dinner! His tongue sought his palate! Yes! he could eat a good dinner! That dog hadn't put him off his stroke! The best dinner he had ever eaten was the one he gave to Jack Herring, Chichester, Thornworthy, Nick Treffry and Jolyon Forsyte at Pole's. Good Lord! In 'sixtyyes'sixtyfive? Just before he fell in love with Alice Larneten years before he came to Liverpool. That was a dinner! Cost twentyfour pounds for the six of themand Forsyte an absurdly moderate fellow. Only Nick Treffry and himself had been threebottle men! Dead! Every jack man of them. And suddenly he thought: 'My name's a good oneI was never down beforenever beaten!'

A voice above the steam said:

"The twenty minutes is up, sir."

"All right; I'll get out. Evening clothes."

And Meller, taking out dress suit and shirt, thought: 'Now, what does the old bloomer want dressin' up again for; why can't he go to bed and have his dinner there? When a man's like a baby, the cradle's the place for him.'

An hour later, at the scene of his encounter with Mr. Ventnor, where the table was already laid for dinner, old Heythorp stood and gazed. The curtains had been drawn back, the window thrown open to air the room, and he could see out there the shapes of the dark trees and a sky grapecoloured, in the mild, moist night. It smelt good. A sensuous feeling stirred in him, warm from his bath, clothed from head to foot in fresh garments. Deuce of a time since he had dined in full fig! He would have liked a woman dining oppositebut not the holy woman; no, by George!would have liked to see light falling on a woman's shoulders once again, and a pair of bright eyes! He crossed, snaillike, towards the fire. There that bullying fellow had stood with his back to itconfound his impudence!as if the place belonged to him. And suddenly he had a vision of his three secretaries' facesespecially young Farney's as they would look, when the pack got him by the throat and pulled him down. His codirectors, too! Old Heythorp! How are the mighty fallen! And that hound jubilant!

His valet passed across the room to shut the window and draw the curtains. This chap too! The day he could no longer pay his wages, and had lost the power to say "Shan't want your services any more"when he could no longer even pay his doctor for doing his best to kill him off! Power, interest, independence, allgone! To be dressed and undressed, given pap, like a baby in arms, served as they chose to serve him, and wished out of the waybroken, dishonoured!

By money alone an old man had his being! Meat, drink, movement, breath! When all his money was gone the holy woman would let him know it fast enough. They would all let him know it; or if they didn't, it would be out of pity! He had never been pitied yet thank God! And he said:

"Get me up a bottle of Perrier Jouet. What's the menu?"

"Germane soup, sir; filly de sole; sweetbread; cutlet soubrees, rum souffly."

"Tell her to give me a hors d'oeuvre, and put on a savoury."

"Yes, sir."

When the man had gone, he thought: 'I should have liked an oyster too late now!' and going over to his bureau, he fumblingly pulled out the top drawer. There was little in it just a few papers, business papers on his Companies, and a schedule of his debts; not even a copy of his will he had not made one, nothing to leave! Letters he had never kept. Half a dozen bills, a few receipts, and the little pink note with the blue forget-me-not. That was the lot! An old tree gives up bearing leaves, and its roots dry up, before it comes down in a wind; an old man's world slowly falls away from him till he stands alone in the night. Looking at the pink note, he thought: 'Suppose I'd married Alice a man never had a better mistress!' He fumbled the drawer to; but still he strayed feebly about the room, with a curious shrinking from sitting down, legacy from the quarter of an hour he had been compelled to sit while that hound worried at his throat. He was opposite one of the pictures now. It gleamed, dark and oily, limning a Scots Grey who had mounted a wounded Russian on his horse, and was bringing him back prisoner from the Balaclava charge. A very old friend bought in 'fifty-nine. It had hung in his chambers in the Albany hung with him ever since. With whom would it hang when he was gone? For that holy woman would scrap it, to a certainty, and stick up some Crucifixion or other, some newfangled high art thing! She could even do that now if she liked for she owned it, owned every mortal stick in the room, to the very glass he would drink his champagne from; all made over under the settlement fifteen years ago, before his last big gamble went wrong. "De l'audace, toujours de l'audace!" The gamble which had brought him down till his throat at last was at the mercy of a bullying hound. The pitcher and the well! At the mercy! The sound of a popping cork dragged him from reverie. He moved to his seat, back to the window, and sat down to his dinner. By George! They had got him an oyster! And he said:

"I've forgotten my teeth!"

While the man was gone for them, he swallowed the oysters, methodically touching them one by one with cayenne, Chili vinegar, and lemon. Ummm! Not quite what they

used to be at Pimm's in the best days, but not badnot bad! Then seeing the little blue bowl lying before him, he looked up and said:

"My compliments to cook on the oysters. Give me the champagne." And he lifted his trembling teeth. Thank God, he could still put 'em in for himself! The creaming goldenish fluid from the napkined bottle slowly reached the brim of his glass, which had a hollow stem; raising it to his lips, very red between the white hairs above and below, he drank with a gurgling noise, and put the glass downempty. Nectar! And just cold enough!

"I frapped it the least bit, sir."

"Quite right. What's that smell of flowers?"

"It's from those 'yacinths on the sideboard, sir. They come from Mrs. Larne, this afternoon."

"Put 'em on the table. Where's my daughter?"

"She's had dinner, sir; goin' to a ball, I think."

"A ball!"

"Charity ball, I fancy, sir."

"Ummm! Give me a touch of the old sherry with the soup."

"Yes, sir. I shall have to open a bottle:"

"Very well, then, do!"

On his way to the cellar the man confided to Molly, who was carrying the soup:

"The Gov'nor's going it tonight! What he'll be like tomorrow I dunno."

The girl answered softly:

"Poor old man, let um have his pleasure." And, in the hall, with the soup tureen against her bosom, she hummed above the steam, and thought of the ribbons on her new chemises, bought out of the sovereign he had given her.

And old Heythorp, digesting his osyters, snuffed the scent of the hyacinths, and thought of the St. Germain, his favourite soup. It would n't be firstrate, at this time of yearshould be made with little young homegrown peas. Paris was the place for it. Ah! The French

were the fellows for eating, and looking things in the face! Not hypocrites not ashamed of their reason or their senses!

The soup came in. He sipped it, bending forward as far as he could, his napkin tucked in over his shirtfront like a bib. He got the bouquet of that sherry to a This sense of smell was very keen tonight; rare old stuff it was more than a year since he had tasted it but no one drank sherry nowadays, hadn't the constitution for it! The fish came up, and went down; and with the sweetbread he took his second glass of champagne. Always the best, that second glass the stomach well warmed, and the palate not yet dulled. Umm! So that fellow thought he had him beaten, did he? And he said suddenly:

"The fur coat in the wardrobe, I've no use for it. You can take it away tonight."

With tempered gratitude the valet answered:

"Thank you, sir; much obliged, I'm sure." So the old buffer had found out there was moth in it!

"Have I worried you much?"

"No, sir; not at all, sir that is, no more than reason."

"Afraid I have. Very sorry can't help it. You'll find that, when you get like me."

"Yes, sir; I've always admired your pluck, sir."

"Um! Very good of you to say so."

"Always think of you keepin' the flag flying', sir."

Old Heythorp bent his body from the waist.

"Much obliged to you."

"Not at all, sir. Cook's done a little spinach in cream with the soubrees."

"Ah! Tell her from me it's a capital dinner, so far."

"Thank you, sir."

Alone again, old Heythorp sat unmoving, his brain just narcotically touched. "The flag flyin' the flag flyin'!" He raised his glass and sucked. He had an appetite now, and finished the three cutlets, and all the sauce and spinach. Pity! he could have managed a snipe fresh shot! A desire to delay, to lengthen dinner, was strong upon him; there were but the soufflé and the savoury to come. He would have enjoyed, too, someone to talk

to. He had always been fond of good company been good company himself, or so they said not that he had had a chance of late. Even at the Boards they avoided talking to him, he had noticed for a long time. Well! that wouldn't trouble him again he had sat through his last Board, no doubt. They shouldn't kick him off, though; he wouldn't give them that pleasure had seen the beggars hankering after his chairman's shoes too long. The soufflé was before him now, and lifting his glass, he said:

"Fill up."

"These are the special glasses, sir; only four to the bottle."

"Fill up."

The servant filled, screwing up his mouth.

Old Heythorp drank, and put the glass down empty with a sigh. He had been faithful to his principles, finished the bottle before touching the sweet a good bottle of a good brand! And now for the soufflé! Delicious, flipped down with the old sherry! So that holy woman was going to a ball, was she! How deuced funny! Who would dance with a dry stick like that, all eaten up with a piety which was just sexual disappointment? Ah! yes, lots of women like that had often noticed 'em emptied 'em too, until you had to do with them and they made you as unhappy as themselves, and were tyrants into the bargain. And he asked:

"What's the savoury?"

"Cheese remmykin, sir."

His favourite.

"I'll have my port with it the 'sixty eight." The man stood gazing with evident stupefaction. He had not expected this. The old man's face was very flushed, but that might be the bath. He said feebly:

"Are you sure you ought, sir?"

"No, but I'm going to."

"Would you mind if I spoke to Miss Heythorp, Sir?"

"If you do, you can leave my service."

"Well, Sir, I don't accept the responsibility."



"Who asked you to?"

"No, Sir."

"Well, get it, then; and don't be an ass."

"Yes, Sir." If the old man were not humoured he would have a fit, perhaps!

And the old man sat quietly staring at the hyacinths. He felt happy, his whole being lined and warmed and drowsed and there was more to come! What had the holy folk to give you compared with the comfort of a good dinner? Could they make you dream, and see life rosy for a little? No, they could only give you promissory notes which never would be cashed. A man had nothing but his pluck; they only tried to undermine it, and make him squeal for help. He could see his precious doctor throwing up his hands: "Port after a bottle of champagne you'll die of it!" And a very good death to none better. A sound broke the silence of the closed-up room. Music? His daughter playing the piano overhead. Singing too! What a trickle of a voice! Jenny Lind! The Swedish nightingale he had never missed the nights when she was singing Jenny Lind!

"It's very hot, sir. Shall I take it out of the case?"

Ah! The ramequin!

"Touch of butter, and the cayenne!"

"Yes, sir."

He ate it slowly, savouring each mouthful; had never tasted a better. With cheeseport! He drank one glass, and said:

"Help me to my chair."

And settled there before the fire with decanter and glass and handbell on the little low table by his side, he murmured:

"Bring coffee, and my cigar, in twenty minutes."

Tonight he would do justice to his wine, not smoking till he had finished. As old Horace said:

"Aequam memento rebus in arduis Servare mentem."

And, raising his glass, he sipped slowly, spilling a drop or two, shutting his eyes.

The faint silvery squealing of the holy woman in the room above, the scent of hyacinths, the drowse of the fire, on which a cedar log had just been laid, the feeling of the port soaking down into the crannies of his being, made up a momentary Paradise. Then the music stopped; and no sound rose but the tiny groans of the log trying to resist the fire. Dreamily he thought: 'Life wears you outwears you out. Logs on a fire!' And he filled his glass again. That fellow had been careless; there were dregs at the bottom of the decanter and he had got down to them! Then, as the last drop from his tilted glass trickled into the white hairs on his chin, he heard the coffee tray put down, and taking his cigar he put it to his ear, rolling it in his thick fingers. In prime condition! And drawing a first whiff, he said:

"Open that bottle of the old brandy in the sideboard."

"Brandy, sir? I really daren't, sir."

"Are you my servant or not?"

"Yes, sir, but"

A minute of silence, then the man went hastily to the sideboard, took out the bottle, and drew the cork. The tide of crimson in the old man's face had frightened him.

"Leave it there."

The unfortunate valet placed the bottle on the little table. 'I'll have to tell her,' he thought; 'but if I take away the port decanter and the glass, it won't look so bad.' And, carrying them, he left the room.

Slowly the old man drank his coffee, and the liqueur of brandy. The whole gamut! And watching his cigarsmoke wreathing blue in the orange glow, he smiled. The last night to call his soul his own, the last night of his independence. Send in his resignations tomorrownot wait to be kicked off! Not give that fellow a chance!

A voice which seemed to come from far off, said:

"Father! You're drinking brandy! How can youyou know it's simple poison to you!" A figure in white, scarcely actual, loomed up close. He took the bottle to fill up his liqueur glass, in defiance; but a hand in a long white glove, with another dangling from its wrist, pulled it away, shook it at him, and replaced it in the sideboard. And, just as when Mr. Ventnor stood there accusing him, a swelling and churning in his throat prevented him from speech; his lips moved, but only a little froth came forth.

His daughter had approached again. She stood quite close, in white satin, thinfaced, sallow, with eyebrows raised, and her dark hair frizzedyes! frizzedthe holy woman! With

all his might he tried to say: 'So you bully me, do youyou bully me tonight!' but only the word "so" and a sort of whispering came forth. He heard her speaking. "It's no good your getting angry, Father. After champagneit's wicked!" Then her form receded in a sort of rustling white mist; she was gone; and he heard the sputtering and growling of her taxi, bearing her to the ball. So! She tyrannised and bullied, even before she had him at her mercy, did she? She should see! Anger had brightened his eyes; the room came clear again. And slowly raising himself he sounded the bell twice, for the girl, not for that fellow Meller, who was in the plot. As soon as her pretty black and whiteaproned figure stood before him, he said:

"Help me up."

Twice her soft pulling was not enough, and he sank back. The third time he struggled to his feet.

"Thank you; that'll do." Then, waiting till she was gone, he crossed the room, fumbled open the sideboard door, and took out the bottle. Reaching over the polished oak, he grasped a sherry glass; and holding the bottle with both hands, tipped the liquor into it, put it to his lips and sucked. Drop by drop it passed over his palate mild, very old, old as himself, coloured like sunlight, fragrant. To the last drop he drank it, then hugging the bottle to his shirtfront, he moved snaillike to his chair, and fell back into its depths. For some minutes he remained there motionless, the bottle clasped to his chest, thinking: 'This is not the attitude of a gentleman. I must put it down on the tableon the table;' but a thick cloud was between him and everything. It was with his hands he would have to put the bottle on the table! But he could not find his hands, could not feel them. His mind seesawed in strophe and antistrophe: "You can't move!" "I will move!" "You're beaten!" "I'm not beat." "Give up!" "I won't." That struggle to find his hands seemed to last for everhe must find them! After thatgo downall standingafter that! Everything round him was red. Then the red cloud cleared just a little, and he could hear the clock"tickticktick"; a faint sensation spread from his shoulders down to his wrists, down his palms; and yeshe could feel the bottle! He redoubled his struggle to get forward in his chair; to get forward and put the bottle down. It was not dignified like this! One arm he could move now; but he could not grip the bottle nearly tight enough to put it down. Working his whole body forward, inch by inch, he shifted himself up in the chair till he could lean sideways, and the bottle, slipping down his chest, dropped slanting to the edge of the low stooltable. Then with all his might he screwed his trunk and arms an inch further, and the bottle stood. He had done itdone it! His lips twitched into a smile; his body sagged back to its old position. He had done it! And he closed his eyes .

At halfpast eleven the girl Molly, opening the door, looked at him and said softly: "Sirr! there's some ladies, and a gentleman!" But he did not answer. And, still holding the door, she whispered out into the hall:

"He's asleep, miss."

A voice whispered back:

"Oh! Just let me go in, I won't wake him unless he does. But I do want to show him my dress."

The girl moved aside; and on tiptoe Phyllis passed in. She walked to where, between the lampglow and the fireglow, she was lighted up. White satin her first lowcut dress the flush of her first supper party a gardenia at her breast, another in her fingers! Oh! what a pity he was asleep! How red he looked! How funnily old men breathed! And mysteriously, as a child might, she whispered:

"Guardy!"

No answer! And pouting, she stood twiddling the gardenia. Then suddenly she thought: 'I'll put it in his buttonhole! When he wakes up and sees it, how he'll jump!'

And stealing close, she bent and slipped it in. Two faces looked at her from round the door; she heard Bob Pillin's smothered chuckle; her mother's rich and feathery laugh. Oh! How red his forehead was! She touched it with her lips; skipped back, twirled round, danced silently a second, blew a kiss, and like quicksilver was gone.

And the whispering, the chuckling, and one little outpealing laugh rose in the hall.

But the old man slept. Nor until Meller came at his usual hour of halfpast twelve, was it known that he would never wake.