THE TERROR

BY

EDGAR WALLACE

The Terror

CHAPTER I

O'SHEA was in his maddest mood, had been like it all night. Stalking up and down the grassy slope, muttering to himself, waving his hands at some invisible audience, cackling with laughter at his own mysterious jokes; and at dawn he had fallen upon little Lipski, who had dared light a cigarette in defiance of instructions, and had beaten him with savage brutality, and the other two men had not dared interfere.

Joe Connor sprawled on the ground, chewing a blade of grass, and watching with sombre eyes the restless figure. Marks, who sat cross-legged by his side, watched too, but there was a twisted and sneering smile on his thin lips.

"Mad as a coot," said Joe Connor in a low voice. "If he pulls this job off without getting us in gaol for the rest of our lives we'll be lucky."

Soapy Marks licked his dry lips.

"He's cleverest when he's mad." He spoke like a man of culture. Some said that Soapy was intended for the church before a desire for an easier and more illicit method of living made him one of the most skillful, and nearly the most dangerous, gangster in England.

"Lunacy, my dear fellow, does not mean stupidity. Can't you stop that fellow blubbering?"

Joe Connor did not rise; he turned his eyes in the direction of the prostrate figure of Lipski, who was groaning and swearing sobbingly.

"He'll get over it," he said indifferently. "The bigger beating he gets the more he respects O'Shea."

He wriggled a little closer to his confederate.

"Have you ever seen O'Shea—his face, I mean?" he asked, dropping his voice a note lower. "I never have, and I've done two"—he thought—"three," he corrected, "jobs with him. He's always had that coat on he's got now, with the collar right up to his nose, the same old hat over his eyes. I never used to believe there was that kind of crook—thought they were only seen on the stage. First time I ever heard of him was when he sent for me—met him on the St. Albans Road about twelve o'clock, but never saw his face. He knew

all about me; told me how many convictions I'd had, and the kind of work he wanted me for——"

"And paid you well," said Marks lazily, when the other paused. "He always pays well; he always picks up his 'staff' in the same way."

He pursed his lips as though he were going to whistle, examined the restless figure of the master thoughtfully.

"He's mad—and he pays well. He will pay better this time."

Connor looked up sharply.

"Two hundred and fifty quid and fifty getaway money—that's fair, ain't it?"

"He will pay better," said Marks suavely. "This little job deserves it. Am I to drive a motor-lorry containing three tons of Australian sovereigns through the streets of London, possibly risk hanging, for two hundred and fifty pounds—and getaway money? I think not."

He rose to his feet and dusted his knees daintily. O'Shea had disappeared over the crest of the hill, was possibly behind the hedge line which swept round in a semi-circle till it came within half a dozen feet of where the men were talking of him.

"Three tons of gold; nearly half a million pounds. At least I think we're entitled to ten per cent."

Connor grinned, jerked his head towards the whimpering Lipski.

"And him?"

Marks bit his lip.

"I don't think we could include him."

He glanced round again for some sign of O'Shea, and dropped down beside his companion.

"We've got the whole thing in our hands," he said in a voice that was little more than a whisper. "He'll be sane to-morrow. These fits only come on him at rare intervals; and a sane man will listen to reason. We're holding up this gold convoy—that's one of O'Shea's oldest tricks, to fill a deep cutting full of gas. I wonder he dare repeat it. I am driving the lorry to town and hiding it. Would O'Shea give us our share if he had to decide between an unpleasant interview with us and a more unpleasant interview with Inspector Bradley?"

Connor plucked another blade of grass and chewed on it gloomily.

“He’s clever,” he began, and again Marks’ lips curled.

“Aren’t they all?” he demanded. “Isn’t Dartmoor full of clever people? That’s old Hallick’s great joke—he calls all the prisoners collegers. No, my dear Connor, believe me, cleverness is a relative term——”

“What does that mean?” growled Connor with a frown. “Don’t try swank on me, Soapy—use words I can understand.”

He looked around again a little anxiously for the vanished O’Shea. Behind the hill crest, in a narrow lane, O’Shea’s big car was parked that would carry him to safety after the job. His confederates would be left to take all the risks, face the real dangers which would follow, however cleverly the coup was organised.

A little distance away to the left, on the edge of the deep cutting, four big steel gas cylinders lay in line. Even from where he sprawled he could see the long white road leading into the cutting, on which presently would appear the flickering lights of the gold convoy. His gas mask lay under his hand; Marks had his sticking out of his coat pocket.

“He must have a lot of stuff,” he said.

“Who—O’Shea?” Marks shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know. He spends money like a lunatic. I should think he was broke. It’s nearly twelve months since he had a big haul.”

“What does he do with the money?” asked Connor curiously.

“Spends it, as we all do,” was the laconic answer. “He talked about buying a big country house last time I saw him; he was going to settle down and live the life of a gentleman. Last night, when I had a chat with him, he said it would take half this loot to pay his debts.”

Marks examined his well-manicured nails.

“Amongst other things he’s a liar,” he said lightly. “What’s that?”

He looked towards the line of bushes a few yards distant. He had heard a rustle, the snap of a twig, and was on his feet instantly. Crossing the short intervening space, he peered over the bushes. There was nobody in sight. He came back thoughtfully to Connor.

“I wonder if the devil was listening,” he said, “and how long he’s been listening!”

“Who—O’Shea?” asked the startled Connor.

Marks did not reply, but drew a deep breath. Obviously he was uncomfortable.

“If he’d heard anything he would have come for me. He’s moody—he’s been moody all night.”

At this point Connor got up and stretched himself.

“I’d like to know how he lives. I’ll bet he’s got a wife and family tucked away somewhere—that kind of bird always has. There he is!”

The figure of O’Shea had appeared across the rise; he was coming towards them.

“Get your masks ready. You don’t want any further instructions, Soapy?” The voice, muffled by the high collar which reached to the tip of his nose, was rational, almost amiable.

“Pick that fellow up.” He pointed to Lipski, and, when the order had been obeyed, he called the cringing man before him. “You’ll go to the end of the road, put your red lantern on and stop them. By stop them I mean slow them down. Don’t let yourself be seen; there are ten armed men on the lorry.”

He examined the cylinders; from the nozzle of each a thick rubber pipe trailed down into the cutting. With a spanner he opened the valve of each, and the silence was broken by the deep hissing of the gas as it escaped.

“It’ll lie in the bottom, so you needn’t put on your masks till we’re ready,” he said.

He followed Lipski to the end of the cutting, watched the red lamp lit, and pointed out the place where the man was to hide. Then he came back to Marks. Not by word or sign did he betray the fact that he had overheard the two men talking. If there was to be a quarrel this was not the moment for it. O’Shea was intensely sane at that moment.

They heard the sound of the incoming trolley before they saw the flicker of its lights emerge from the cover of Felsted Wood.

“Now,” said O’Shea sharply.

He made no attempt to draw on a mask, as did his two assistants.

“You won’t have to use your guns, but keep them handy in case anything goes wrong—don’t forget that if the guard isn’t knocked out immediately it will shoot at sight. You know where to meet me to-morrow?”

The shrouded head of Soapy nodded.

Nearer and nearer came the gold convoy. Evidently the driver had seen the red light at the end of the cutting, for his siren sounded. From where O’Shea crouched he commanded a complete view of the road.

The trolley was within fifty yards of the cutting and had slowed perceptibly when he saw a man leap up, not from the place where he had posted him, but a dozen yards farther up the road. It was Lipski, and as he ran towards the moving trolley his hand went up, there was a flash and a report. He was firing to attract attention. O’Shea’s eyes glowed like coals. Lipski had betrayed him.

“Stand by to run!” His voice was like a rasp.

And then the miracle happened. From the trolley leapt two pencils of flame, and Lipski crumpled up and fell by the side of the road as the lorry rumbled past. The guard had misunderstood his action; thought he was attempting to hold them up.

“Glorious,” whispered O’Shea huskily, and at that instant the lorry went down into the gas-filled cutting.

It was all over in a second. The driver fell forward in his seat, and, released of his guidance, the front wheels of the lorry jammed into a bank.

O’Shea thought of everything. But for that warning red light the trolley would have been wrecked and his plans brought to naught. As it was, Marks had only to climb into the driver’s seat, and reverse the engine, to extricate it from the temporary block.

A minute later the gold convoy had climbed up to the other side of the depression. The unconscious guard and driver had been bundled out and laid on the side of the road. The final preparations took no more than five minutes. Marks stripped his mask, pulled on a uniform cap, and Connor took his place in the trolley where the gold was stored in small white boxes.

“Go on,” said O’Shea, and the trolley moved forward and four minutes later was out of sight.

O’Shea went back to his big, high-powered car and drove off in the opposite direction, leaving only the unconscious figures of the guard to testify to his ruthlessness.

CHAPTER II

IT was a rainy night in London. Connor, who had preferred it so, turned into the side door of a little restaurant in Soho, mounted the narrow stairs and knocked on a door. He heard a chair move and the snap of the lock as the door was opened.

Soapy Marks was there alone.

"Did you see him?" asked Connor eagerly.

"O'Shea? Yes, I met him on the Embankment. Have you seen the newspapers?"

Connor grinned.

"I'm glad those birds didn't die," he said.

Mr. Marks sneered.

"Your humanity is very creditable, my dear friend," he said.

On the table was a newspaper, and the big headlines stared out, almost shouted their excitement.

GREATEST GOLD ROBBERY OF OUR TIME.
THREE TONS OF GOLD DISAPPEAR
BETWEEN SOUTHAMPTON AND LONDON.
DEAD ROBBER FOUND BY THE ROADSIDE.
THE VANISHED LORRY.

In the early hours of yesterday morning a daring outrage was committed which might have led to the death of six members of the C.I.D., and resulted in the loss to the Bank of England of gold valued at half a million pounds.

The *Aritania*, which arrived in Southampton last night, brought a heavy consignment of gold from Australia, and in order that this should be removed to London with the least possible ostentation, it was arranged that a lorry carrying the treasure should leave Southampton at three o'clock in the morning, arriving in London before the normal flow of traffic started. At a spot near Felsted Wood the road runs down into a depression and through a deep cutting. Evidently this had been laid with gas, and the car dashed into what was practically a lethal chamber without warning.

> That an attack was projected, however, was revealed to the guard before they reached the fatal spot. A man sprang out from a hedge and shot at the trolley. The detectives in charge of the convoy immediately replied, and the man was later found in a dying condition. He made no statement except to mention a name which is believed to be that of the leader of the gang.
>
> Sub-Inspectors Bradley and Hallick of Scotland Yard are in charge of the case....

There followed a more detailed account, together with an official statement issued by the police, containing a brief narrative by one of the guard.

"It seems to have created something of a sensation," smiled Marks, as he folded up the paper.

"What about O'Shea?" asked the other impatiently. "Did he agree to split?" Marks nodded.

"He was a little annoyed—naturally. But in his sane moments our friend, O'Shea, is a very intelligent man. What really annoyed him was the fact that we had parked the lorry in another place than where he ordered it to be taken. He was most anxious to discover our little secret, and I think his ignorance of the whereabouts of the gold was our biggest pull with him."

"What's going to happen?" asked Connor in a troubled tone.

"We're taking the lorry to-night to Barnes Common. He doesn't realise, though he will, that we've transferred the gold to a small three-ton van. He ought to be very grateful to me for my foresight, for the real van was discovered this evening by Hallick in the place where O'Shea told me to park it. And of course it was empty."

Connor rubbed his hand across his unshaven chin.

"O'Shea won't let us get away with it," he said, with a worried frown. "You know him, Soapy."

"We shall see," said Mr. Marks, with a confident smile.

He poured out a whisky and soda.
"Drink up and we'll go." He glanced at his watch. "We've got plenty of time—thank God there's a war on, and the active and intelligent constabulary are looking for spies, the streets are nicely darkened, and all is favourable to our little arrangement. By the way, I've had a red cross painted on the tilt of our van—it looks almost official!"

That there was a war on, they discovered soon after they turned into the Embankment. Warning maroons were banging from a dozen stations; the darkened tram which carried them to the south had hardly reached Kennington Oval before the anti-aircraft guns were blazing at the unseen marauders of the skies. A bomb dropped all too close for the comfort of the nervous Connor. The car had stopped.

"We had better get out here," whispered Marks. "They won't move till the raid is over."

The two men descended to the deserted street and walked southward. The beams of giant searchlights swept the skies; from somewhere up above came the rattle of a machine-gun.

"This should keep the police thoroughly occupied," said Marks, as they turned into a narrow street in a poor neighbourhood. "I don't think we need miss our date, and our little ambulance should pass unchallenged."

"I wish to God you'd speak English!" growled Connor irritably.

Marks had stopped before the gates of a stable yard, pushing them. One yielded to his touch and they walked down the uneven drive to the small building where the car was housed. Soapy put his key into the gate of the lock-up and turned it.

"Here we are," he said, as he stepped inside.

And then a hand gripped him, and he reached for his gun.

"Don't make any fuss," said the hated voice of Inspector Hallick. "I want you, Soapy. Perhaps you'll tell me what's happened to this ambulance of yours?"

Soapy Marks stared towards the man he could not see, and for a moment was thrown off his guard.

"The lorry?" he gasped. "Isn't it here?"

"Been gone an hour," said a second voice. "Come across, Soapy; what have you done with it?"

Soapy said nothing; he heard the steel handcuffs click on the wrist of Joe Connor, heard that man's babble of incoherent rage and blasphemy as he was hustled towards the car which had drawn up silently at the gate, and knew that Mr. O'Shea was indeed very sane on that particular day.

CHAPTER III

TO Mary Redmayne life had been a series of inequalities. She could remember the alternate prosperity and depression of her father; had lived in beautiful hotel suites and cheap lodgings, one following the other with extraordinary rapidity; and had grown so accustomed to the violent changes of his fortune that she would never have been surprised to have been taken from the pretentious school where she was educated, and planted amongst county school scholars at any moment.

People who knew him called him Colonel, but he himself preferred his civilian title, and volunteered no information to her as to his military career. It was after he had taken Monkshall that he permitted "Colonel" to appear on his cards. It was a grand-sounding name, but even as a child Mary Redmayne had accepted such appellations with the greatest caution. She had once been brought back from her preparatory school to a "Mortimer Lodge," to discover it was a tiny semi-detached villa in a Wimbledon by-street.

But Monkshall had fulfilled all her dreams of magnificence; a veritable relic of Tudor times, and possibly of an earlier period, it stood in forty acres of timbered ground, a dignified and venerable pile, which had such association with antiquity that, until Colonel Redmayne forbade the practice, charabancs full of American visitors used to come up the broad drive and gaze upon the ruins of what had been a veritable abbey.

Fortune had come to Colonel Redmayne when she was about eleven. It came unexpectedly, almost violently. Whence it came, she could not even guess; she only knew that one week he was poor, harassed by debt-collectors, moving through side streets in order to avoid his creditors; the next week—or was it month?—he was master of Monkshall, ordering furniture worth thousands of pounds.

When she went to live at Monkshall she had reached that gracious period of interregnum between child and woman. A slim girl above middle height, straight of back, free of limb, she held the eye of men to whom more mature charms would have had no appeal.

Ferdie Fane, the young man who came to the Red Lion so often, summer and winter, and who drank so much more than was good for him, watched her passing along the road with her father. She was hatless; the golden-brown hair had a glory of its own; the faultless face, the proud little lift of her chin.

“Spring is here, Adolphus,” he addressed the landlord gravely. “I have seen it pass.”

He was a man of thirty-five, long-faced, rather good-looking in spite of his huge horn-rimmed spectacles. He had a large tankard of beer in his hand now, which was unusual, for he did most of his drinking secretly in his room. He used to come down to the Red Lion at all sorts of odd and sometimes inconvenient moments. He was, in a way, rather a bore, and the apparition of Mary Redmayne and her grim-looking father offered the landlord an opportunity for which he had been seeking.

“I wonder you don’t go and stay at Monkshall, Mr. Fane,” he suggested.

Mr. Fane stared at him reproachfully.

“Are you tired of me, mine host?” he asked gently. “That you should shuffle me into other hands?” He shook his head. “I am no paying guest—besides which, I am not respectable. Why does Redmayne take paying guests at all?”

The landlord could offer no satisfactory solution to this mystery.

“I’m blest if I know. The colonel’s got plenty of money. I think it is because he’s lonely, but he’s had paying guests at Monkshall this past ten years. Of course, it’s very select.”

“Exactly,” said Ferdie Fane with great gravity. “And that is why I should not be selected! No, I fear you will have to endure my erratic visits.”

“I don’t mind your being here, sir,” said the landlord, anxious to assure him. “You never give me any trouble, only——”

“Only you’d like somebody more regular in his habits—good luck!”

He lifted the foaming pewter to his lips, took a long drink, and then he began to laugh softly, as though at some joke. In another minute he was serious again, frowning down into the tankard.

“Pretty girl, that. Mary Redmayne, eh?”

“She’s only been back from school a month—or college, rather,” said the landlord. “She’s the nicest young lady that ever drew the breath of life.”

“They all are,” said the other vaguely. He went away the next day with his fishing rod that he hadn’t used, and his golf bag which had remained unstrapped throughout his stay.

Life at Monkshall promised so well that Mary Redmayne was prepared to love the place. She liked Mr. Goodman, the grey-haired, slow-spoken gentleman who was the first of her father's boarders; she loved the grounds, the quaint old house; could even contemplate, without any great uneasiness, the growing taciturnity of her father. He was older, much older than he had been; his face had a new pallor; he seldom smiled. He was a nervous man, too; she had found him walking about in the middle of the night, and once had surprised him in his room, suspiciously thick of speech, with an empty whisky bottle a silent witness to his peculiar weakness.

It was the house that began to get on her nerves. Sometimes she would wake up in the middle of the night suddenly and sit up in bed, trying to recall the horror that had snatched her from sleep and brought her through a dread cloud of fear to wakefulness. Once she had heard peculiar sounds that had sent cold shivers down her spine. Not once, but many times, she thought she heard the faint sound of a distant organ.

She asked Cotton, the dour butler, but he had heard nothing. Other servants had been more sensitive, however; there came a constant procession of cooks and housemaids giving notice. She interviewed one or two of these, but afterwards her father forbade her seeing them, and himself accepted their hasty resignations.

"This place gives me the creeps, miss," a weeping housemaid had told her. "Do you hear them screams at night? I do; I sleep in the east wing. The place is haunted——"

"Nonsense, Anna!" scoffed the girl, concealing a shudder. "How can you believe such things!"

"It is, miss," persisted the girl. "I've seen a ghost on the lawn, walking about in the moonlight."

Later, Mary herself began to see things; and a guest who came and stayed two nights had departed a nervous wreck.

"Imagination," said the colonel testily. "My dear Mary, you're getting the mentality of a housemaid!"

He was very apologetic afterwards for his rudeness, but Mary continued to hear, and presently to listen; and finally she saw. . . . Sights that made her doubt her own wisdom, her own intelligence, her own sanity.

One day, when she was walking alone through the village, she saw a man in a golf suit; he was very tall and wore horn-rimmed spectacles, and greeted her with a friendly smile. It was the first time she had seen Ferdie Fane. She was to see very much of him in the strenuous months that followed.

CHAPTER IV

SUPERINTENDENT HALLICK went down to Princetown in Devonshire to make his final appeal—an appeal which, he knew, was foredoomed to failure. The Deputy-Governor met him as the iron gates closed upon the burly superintendent.

"I don't think you're going to get very much out of these fellows, superintendent," he said. "I think they're too near to the end of their sentence."

"You never know," said Hallick, with a smile. "I once had the best information in the world from a prisoner on the day he was released."

He went down to the low-roofed building which constitutes the Deputy-Governor's office.

"My head warder says they'll never talk, and he has a knack of getting into their confidence," said the Deputy. "If you remember, superintendent, you did your best to make them speak ten years ago, when they first came here. There's a lot of people in this prison who'd like to know where the gold is hidden. Personally, I don't think they had it at all, and the story they told at the trial, that O'Shea had got away with it, is probably true."

The superintendent pursed his lips.

"I wonder," he said thoughtfully. "That was the impression I had the night I arrested them, but I've changed my opinion since."

The chief warder came in at that moment and gave a friendly nod to the superintendent.

"I've kept those two men in their cells this morning. You want to see them both, don't you, superintendent?"

"I'd like to see Connor first."

"Now?" asked the warder. "I'll bring him down."

He went out, passed across the asphalt yard to the entrance of the big, ugly building. A steel grille covered the door, and this he unlocked, opening the wooden door behind, and passed into the hall, lined on each side with galleries from which opened narrow cell doors. He went to one of these on the lower tier, snapped back the lock and pulled open the door. The man in convict garb who was sitting on the edge of the bed, his face in his hands, rose and eyed him sullenly.

“Connor, a gentleman from Scotland Yard has come down to see you. If you’re sensible you’ll give him the information he asks.”

Connor glowered at him.

“I’ve nothing to tell, sir,” he said sullenly. “Why don’t they leave me alone? If I knew where the stuff was I wouldn’t tell ’em.”

“Don’t be a fool,” said the chief good-humouredly. “What have you to gain by hiding up——”

“A fool, sir?” interrupted Connor. “I’ve had all the fool knocked out of me here!” His hand swept round the cell. “I’ve been in this same cell for seven years; I know every brick of it—who is it wants to see me?”

“Superintendent Hallick.”

Connor made a wry face.

“Is he seeing Marks too? Hallick, eh? I thought he was dead.”

“He’s alive enough.”

The chief beckoned him out into the hall, and, accompanied by a warder, Connor was taken to the Deputy’s office. He recognised Hallick with a nod. He bore no malice; between these two men, thief-taker and thief, was that curious camaraderie which exists between the police and the criminal classes.

“You’re wasting your time with me, Mr. Hallick,” said Connor. And then, with a sudden burst of anger: “I’ve got nothing to give you. Find O’Shea—he’ll tell you! And find him before I do, if you want him to talk.”

“We want to find him, Connor,” said Hallick soothingly.

“You want the money,” sneered Connor; “that’s what you want. You want to find the money for the bank and pull in the reward.” He laughed harshly. “Try Soapy Marks—maybe he’ll sit in your game and take his corner.”

The lock turned at that moment and another convict was ushered into the room. Soapy Marks had not changed in his ten years of incarceration. The gaunt, ascetic face had perhaps grown a little harder; the thin lips were firmer, and the deep-set eyes had sunk a little more into his head. But his cultured voice, his exaggerated politeness, and that oiliness which had earned him his nickname, remained constant.

“Why, it’s Mr. Hallick!” His voice was a gentle drawl. “Come down to see us at our country house!”

He saw Connor and nodded, almost bowed to him.

“Well, this is most kind of you, Mr. Hallick. You haven’t seen the park or the garage? Nor our beautiful billiard-room?”

“That’ll do, Marks,” said the warder sternly.

“I beg your pardon, sir, I’m sure.” The bow to the warder was a little deeper, a little more sarcastic. “Just badinage—nothing wrong intended. Fancy meeting you on the moor, Mr. Hallick! I suppose this is only a brief visit? You’re not staying with us, are you?”

Hallick accepted the insult with a little smile.

“I’m sorry,” said Marks. “Even the police make little errors of judgment sometimes. It’s deplorable, but it’s true. We once had an ex-inspector in the hall where I am living.”

“You know why I’ve come?” said Hallick.

Marks shook his head, and then a look of simulated surprise and consternation came to his face.

“You haven’t come to ask me and my poor friend about that horrible gold robbery? I see you have. Dear me, how very unfortunate! You want to know where the money was hidden? I wish I could tell you. I wish my poor friend could tell you, or even your old friend, Mr. Leonard O’Shea.” He smiled blandly. “But I can’t!”

Connor was chafing under the strain of the interview.

“You don’t want me any more——”

Marks waved his hand.

“Be patient with dear Mr. Hallick.”

“Now look here, Soapy,” said Connor angrily, and a look of pain came to Marks’ face.

“Not Soapy—that’s vulgar. Don’t you agree, Mr. Hallick?”

“I’m going to answer no questions. You can do as you like,” said Connor. “If you haven’t found O’Shea, I will, and the day I get my hands on him he’ll

know all about it! There's another thing you've got to know, Hallick; I'm on my own from the day I get out of this hell. I'm not asking Soapy to help me to find O'Shea. I've seen Marks every day for ten years, and I hate the sight of him. I'm working single-handed to find the man who shopped me."

"You think you'll find him, do you?" said Hallick quickly. "Do you know where he is?"

"I only know one thing," said Connor huskily, "and Soapy knows it too. He let it out that morning we were waiting for the gold lorry. It just slipped out—what O'Shea's idea was of a quiet hiding-place. But I'm not going to tell you. I've got four months to serve, and when that time is up I'll find O'Shea."

"You poor fool!" said Hallick roughly. "The police have been looking for him for ten years."

"Looking for what?" demanded Connor, ignoring Marks' warning look.

"For Len O'Shea," said Hallick.

There came a burst of laughter from the convict.

"You're looking for a sane man, and that's where you went wrong! I didn't tell you before why you'll never find him. It's because he's mad! You didn't know that, but Soapy knows. O'Shea was crazy ten years ago. God knows what he is now! Got the cunning of a madman. Ask Soapy."

It was news to Hallick. His eyes questioned Marks, and the little man smiled.

"I'm afraid our dear friend is right," said Marks suavely. "A cunning madman! Even in Dartmoor we get news, Mr. Hallick, and a rumour has reached me that some years ago three officers of Scotland Yard disappeared in the space of a few minutes—just vanished as though they had evaporated like dew before the morning sun! Forgive me if I am poetical; Dartmoor makes you that way. And would you be betraying an official secret if you told me these men were looking for O'Shea?"

He saw Hallick's face change, and chuckled.

"I see they were. The story was that they had left England and they sent their resignations—from Paris, wasn't it? O'Shea could copy anybody's handwriting—they never left England." Hallick's face was white.

"By God, if I thought that——" he began.

“They never left England,” said Marks remorselessly. “They were looking for O’Shea—and O’Shea found them first.”

“You mean they’re dead?” asked the other.

Marks nodded slowly.

“For twenty-two hours a day he is a sane, reasonable man. For two hours——” He shrugged his shoulders. “Mr. Hallick, your men must have met him in one of his bad moments.”

“When I meet him——” interrupted Connor, and Marks turned on him in a flash.

“When you meet him you will die!” he hissed. “When *I* meet him——” That mild face of his became suddenly contorted, and Hallick looked into the eyes of a demon.

“When you meet him?” challenged Hallick. “Where will you meet him?”

Marks’ arm shot out stiffly; his long fingers gripped an invisible enemy.

“I know just where I can put my hand on him,” he breathed. “That hand!”

Hallick went back to London that afternoon, a baffled man. He had gone to make his last effort to secure information about the missing gold, and had learned nothing—except that O’Shea was sane for twenty-two hours in the day.

CHAPTER V

IT was a beautiful spring morning. There was a tang in the air which melted in the yellow sunlight.

Mr. Goodman had not gone to the city that morning, though it was his day, for he made a practice of attending at his office for two or three days every month. Mrs. Elvery, that garrulous woman, was engaged in putting the final touches to her complexion; and Veronica, her gawkish daughter, was struggling, by the aid of a dictionary, with a recalcitrant poem—for she wooed the gentler muse in her own gentler moments.

Mr. Goodman sat on a sofa, dozing over his newspaper. No sound broke the silence but the scratching of Veronica's pen and the ticking of the big grandfather's clock.

This vaulted chamber, which was the lounge of Monkshall, had changed very little since the days when it was the anteroom to a veritable refectory. The columns that monkish hands had chiselled had crumbled a little, but their chiselled piety, hidden now behind the oak panelling, was almost as legible as on the day the holy men had written them.

Through the open French window there was a view of the broad, green park, with its clumps of trees and its little heap of ruins that had once been the Mecca of the antiquarian.

Mr. Goodman did not hear the excited chattering of the birds, but Miss Veronica, in that irritable frame of mind which a young poet can so readily reach, turned her head once or twice in mute protest.

"Mr. Goodman," she said softly.

There was no answer, and she repeated his name impatiently.

"Mr. Goodman!"

"Eh?" He looked up, startled.

"What rhymes with 'supercilious?'" asked Veronica sweetly.

Mr. Goodman considered, stroking chin reflectively.

"Bilious?" he suggested.

Miss Elvery gave a despairing cluck.

"That won't do at all. It's such an ugly word."

“And such an ugly feeling,” shuddered Mr. Goodman. Then: “What are you writing?” he asked.

She confessed to her task.

“Good heavens!” he said despairingly. “Fancy writing poetry at this time in the morning! It’s almost like drinking before lunch. Who is it about?”

She favoured him with an arch smile. “You’ll think I’m an awful cat if I tell you.” And, as he reached out to take her manuscript: “Oh, I really couldn’t—it’s about somebody you know.”

Mr. Goodman frowned.

“‘Supercilious’ was the word you used. Who on earth is supercilious?”

Veronica sniffed—she always sniffed when she was being unpleasant.

“Don’t you think she is—a little bit? After all, her father only keeps a boarding house.”

“Oh, you mean Miss Redmayne?” asked Goodman quietly. He put down his paper. “A very nice girl. A boarding house, eh? Well, I was the first boarder her father ever had, and I’ve never regarded this place as a boarding house.”

There was a silence,’which the girl broke. “Mr. Goodman, do you mind if I say something?”

“Well, I haven’t objected so far, have I?” he smiled.

“I suppose I’m naturally romantic,” she said. “I see mystery in almost everything. Even you are mysterious.” And, when he looked alarmed: “Oh, I don’t mean sinister!”

He was glad she did not.

“But Colonel Redmayne is sinister,” she said emphatically.

He considered this.

“He never struck me that way,” he said slowly.

“But he is,” she persisted. “Why did he buy this place miles from everywhere and turn it into a boarding house?”

“To make money, I suppose.”

She smiled triumphantly and shook her head.

“But he doesn’t. Mamma says that he must lose an awful lot of money. Monkshall is very beautiful, but it has got an awful reputation. You know that it is haunted, don’t you?”

He laughed good-naturedly at this. Mr. Goodman was an old boarder and had heard this story before.

“*I’ve* heard things and seen things. Mamma says that there must have been a terrible crime committed here. It is!” She was more emphatic..

Mr. Goodman thought that her mother let her mind dwell too much on murders and crimes. For the stout and fussy Mrs. Elvery wallowed in the latest tragedies which filled the columns of the Sunday newspapers.

“She *does* love a good murder,” agreed Veronica. “We had to put off our trip to Switzerland last year because of the River Bicycle Mystery. Do you think Colonel Redmayne ever committed a murder?”

“What a perfectly awful thing to say!” said her shocked audience.

“Why is he so nervous?” asked Veronica intensely. “What is he afraid of? He is always refusing boarders. He refused that nice young man who came yesterday.”

“Well, we’ve got a new boarder coming to-morrow,” said Goodman, finding his newspaper again.

“A parson!” said Veronica contemptuously. “Everybody knows that parsons have no money.”

He could chuckle at this innocent revelation of Veronica’s mind.

“The colonel could make this place pay, but he won’t.” She grew confidential. “And I’ll tell you something more. Mamma knew Colonel Redmayne before he bought this place. He got into terrible trouble over some money—Mamma doesn’t exactly know what it was. But he had no money at all. How did he buy this house?”

Mr. Goodman beamed.

“Now that I happen to know all about! He came into a legacy.”

Veronica was disappointed and made no effort to hide the fact. What comment she might have offered was silenced by the arrival of her mother.

Not that Mrs. Elvery ever “arrived.” She bustled or exploded into a room, according to the measure of her exuberance. She came straight across to the settee where Mr. Goodman was unfolding his paper again.

“Did you hear anything last night?” she asked dramatically.

He nodded.

“Somebody in the next room to me was snoring like the devil,” he began.

“I occupy the next room to you, Mr. Goodman,” said the lady icily. “Did you hear a shriek?”

“Shriek?” He was startled.

“And I heard the organ again last night!”

Goodman sighed.

“Fortunately I am a little deaf. I never hear any organs or shrieks. The only thing I can hear distinctly is the dinner gong.”

“There is a mystery here.” Mrs. Elvery was even more intense than her daughter. “I saw that the day I came. Originally I intended staying a week; now I remain here until the mystery is solved.”

He smiled good-humouredly.

“You’re a permanent fixture, Mrs. Elvery.”

“It rather reminds me,” Mrs. Elvery recited rapidly, but with evident relish, “of Pangleton Abbey, where John Roehampton cut the throats of his three nieces, aged respectively, nineteen, twenty-two and twenty-four, afterwards burying them in cement, for which crime he was executed at Exeter Gaol. He had to be supported to the scaffold, and left a full confession admitting his guilt!”

Mr. Goodman rose hastily to fly from the gruesome recital. Happily, rescue came in the shape of the tall, soldierly person of Colonel Redmayne. He was a man of fifty-five, rather nervous and absent of manner and address. His attire was careless and somewhat slovenly. Goodman had seen this carelessness of appearance grow from day to day.

The colonel looked from one to the other.

“Good-morning. Is everything all right?”

“Comparatively, I think,” said Goodman with a smile. He hoped that Mrs. Elvery would find another topic of conversation, but she was not to be denied.

“Colonel, did you hear anything in the night?”

“Hear anything?” he frowned. “What was there to hear?”

She ticked off the events of the night on her podge fingers.

“First of all the organ, and then a most awful, blood-curdling shriek. It came from the grounds—from the direction of the Monk’s Tomb.”

She waited, but he shook his head.

“No, I heard nothing. I was asleep,” he said in a low voice.

Veronica, an interested listener, broke in.

“Oh, what a fib! I saw your light burning long after Mamma and I heard the noise. I can see your room by looking out of my window.”

He scowled at her.

“Can you? I went to sleep with the light on. Has any one seen Mary?”

Goodman pointed across the park.

“I saw her half an hour ago,” he said.

Colonel Redmayne stood hesitating, then, without a word, strode from the room, and they watched him crossing the park with long strides.

“There’s a mystery here!” Mrs. Elvery drew a long breath. “He’s mad. Mr. Goodman, do you know that awfully nice-looking man who came yesterday morning? He wanted a room, and when I asked the colonel why he didn’t let him stay he turned on me like a fiend! Said he was not the kind of man he wanted to have in the house; said he dared—‘dared’ was the word he used — to try to scrape acquaintance with his daughter, and that he didn’t want any good-for-nothing drunkards under the same roof.”

“In fact,” said Mr. Goodman, “he was annoyed! You mustn’t take the colonel too seriously—he’s a little upset this morning.”

He took up the letters that had come to him by the morning post and began to open them.

“The airs he gives himself!” she went on. “And his daughter is no better. I must say it, Mr. Goodman. It may sound awfully uncharitable, but she’s got just as much——” She hesitated.

“Swank?” suggested Veronica, and her mother was shocked. “It’s a common expression,” said Veronica.

“But we aren’t common people,” protested Mrs. Elvery, “You may say that she gives herself airs. She certainly does. And her manners are deplorable. I was telling her the other day about the Grange Road murder. You remember, the man who poisoned his mother-in-law to get the insurance money—a most interesting case—when she simply turned her back on me and said she wasn’t interested in horrors.”

Cotton, the butler, came in at that moment with the mail. He was a gloomy man who seldom spoke. He was leaving the room when Mrs. Elvery called him back.

“Did you hear any noise last night, Cotton?”

He turned sourly.

“No, ma’am. I don’t get a long time to sleep—you couldn’t wake me with a gun.”

“Didn’t you hear the organ?” she insisted.

“I never hear anything.”

“I think the man’s a fool,” said the exasperated lady.

“I think so too, ma’am,” agreed Cotton, and went out.

CHAPTER VI

MARY went to the village that morning to buy a week's supply of stamps. She barely noticed the young man in plus fours who sat on a bench outside the Red Lion, though she was conscious of his presence; conscious, too, of the stories she had heard about him.

She had ceased being sorry for him. He was the type of man, she decided, who had gone over the margin of redemption; and, besides, she was annoyed with him because he had irritated her father, for Mr. Ferdie Fane had had the temerity to apply for lodging at Monkshall.

Until that morning she had never spoken to him, nor had she any idea that such a misfortune would overtake her, until she came back through the village and turned into the little lane whence ran a footpath across Monkshall Park.

He was sitting on a stile, his long hands tightly clasped between his knees, a drooping cigarette in his mouth, gazing mournfully through his horn-rimmed spectacles into vacancy. She stood for a moment, thinking he had not seen her, and hesitating whether she should take a more round-about route in order to avoid him. At that moment he got down lazily, took off his cap with a flourish.

"Pass, friend; all's well," he said.

He had rather a delightful smile, she noticed, but at the moment she was far from being delighted.

"If I accompany you to your ancestral home, does your revered father take a gun or loose a dog?"

She faced him squarely.

"You're Mr. Fane, aren't you?"

He bowed; the gesture was a little extravagant, and she went hot at his impertinence.

"I think in the circumstances, Mr. Fane, it is hardly the act of a gentleman to attempt to get into conversation with me."

"It may not be the act of a gentleman, but it is the act of an intelligent human being who loves all that is lovely," he smiled. "Have you ever noticed how few really pleasant-looking people there, are in the world? I once stood at the corner of a street——"

“At present you’re standing in my way,” she interrupted him.

She was not feeling at her best that morning; her nerves were tense and on edge. She had spent a night of terror, listening to strange whispers, to sounds that made her go cold, to that booming note of a distant organ which made her head tingle. Otherwise, she might have handled the situation more commandingly. And she had seen something, too—something she had never seen before; a wild, mouthing shape that had darted across the lawn under her window and had vanished.

He was looking at her keenly, this man who swayed slightly on his feet.

“Does your father love you?” he asked, in a gentle, caressing tone.

She was too startled to answer.

“If he does he can refuse you nothing, my dear Miss Redmayne. If you said to him, ‘Here is a young man who requires board and lodging——”

“Will you let me pass, please?” She was trembling with anger.

Again he stepped aside with elaborate courtesy, and without a word she stepped over the stile, feeling singularly undignified. She was half-way across the park before she looked back. To her indignation, he was following, at a respectful distance, it was true, but undoubtedly following.

Neither saw the other unwanted visitor. He had arrived soon after Mrs. Elvery and Goodman had gone out with their golf clubs to practise putting on the smooth lawn to the south of the house. He was a rough looking man, with a leather apron, and carried under his arm a number of broken umbrellas. He did not go to the kitchen, but after making a stealthy reconnaissance, had passed round to the lawn and was standing in the open doorway, watching Cotton as he gathered up the debris which the poetess had left behind.

Cotton was suddenly aware of the newcomer and jerked his head round.

“Hallo, what do you want?” he asked roughly.

“Got any umbrellas or chairs to mend —any old kettles or pans?” asked the man mechanically.

Cotton pointed in his lordliest manner. “Outside! Who let you in?”

“The lodge-keeper said you wanted something mended,” growled the tinker.

“Couldn’t you come to the service door? Hop it.”

But the man did not move.

“Who lives here?” he asked.

“Colonel Redmayne, if you want to know—and the kitchen door is round the corner. Don’t argue!”

The tinker looked over the room with approval.

“Pretty snug place this, eh?”

Mr. Cotton’s sallow face grew red.

“Can’t you understand plain English? The kitchen door’s round the corner. If you don’t want to go there, push off!”

Instead, the man came farther into the room.

“How long has he been living here—this feller you call Redmayne?”

“Ten years,” said the exasperated butler. “Is that all you want to know? You don’t know how near to trouble you are.”

“Ten years, eh?” The man nodded. “I want to see this colonel.”

“I’ll give you an introduction to him,” said Cotton sarcastically, “He loves tinkers!”

It was then that Mary came in breathlessly.

“Will you send that young man away?” She pointed to the oncoming Ferdie; for the moment she did not see the tinker.

“Young man, miss?” Cotton went to the window, “Why, it’s the gent who came yesterday—a very nice young gentleman he is, too.”

“I don’t care who he is or what he is,” she said angrily. “He is to be sent away.”

“Can I be of any help, miss?”

She was startled to see the tinker, and looked from him to the butler.

“No, you can’t,” snapped Cotton.

“Who are you?” asked Mary.

“Just a tinker, miss.” He was eyeing her thoughtfully, and something in his gaze frightened her.

“He—he came in here, and I told him to go to the kitchen,” explained Cotton in a flurry. “If you hadn’t come he’d have been chucked out!”

“I don’t care who he is—he must help you to get rid of this wretched young man,” said Mary desperately. “He——”

She became suddenly dumb. Mr. Ferdinand Fane was surveying her from the open window.

“How d’ye do, everybody? *Comment ça va*?”

“How dare you follow me?” She stamped her foot in her fury, but he was unperturbed.

“You told me to keep out of your sight, so I walked behind. It’s all perfectly clear.”

It would have been dignified to have left the room in silence—he had the curious faculty of compelling her to be undignified.

“Don’t you understand that your presence is objectionable to me and to my father? We don’t want you here. We don’t wish to know you.”

“You *don’t* know me.” He was hurt. “I’ll bet you don’t even know that my Christian name is Ferdie.”

“You’ve tried to force your acquaintance on me, and I’ve told you plainly that I have no desire to know you——”

“I wan’ to stay here,” he interrupted. “Why shouldn’t I?”

“You don’t need a room here—you have a room at the Red Lion, and it seems a very appropriate lodging.”

It was then that the watchful tinker took a hand.

“Look here, governor, this lady doesn’t want you here—get out.”

But he was ignored.

“I’m not going back to the Red Lion,” said Mr. Fane gravely. “I don’t like the beer—I can see through it——”

A hand dropped on his shoulder.

“Are you going quietly?”

Mr. Fane looked round into the tinker’s face.

Don’t do that, old boy—that’s rude. Never be rude, old boy. The presence of a lady——”

“Come on,” began the tinker.

And then a hand like a steel vice gripped his wrist; he was swung from his feet and fell to the floor with a crash.

“Ju-juishoo,” said Mr. Fane very gently.

He heard an angry exclamation and turned to face Colonel Redmayne.

“What is the meaning of this?”

He heard his daughter’s incoherent explanation.

“Take that man to the kitchen,” he said. When they were gone: “Now, sir, what do you want?”

Her father’s tone was milder than Mary had expected.

“Food an’ comfort for man an’ beast,” said the younger man coolly, and with an effort the colonel restrained his temper.

“You can’t stay here—I told you that yesterday. I’ve no room for you, and I don’t want you.”

He nodded to the door, and Mary left hurriedly. Now his voice changed.

“Do you think I’d let you contaminate this house? A drunken beast without a sense of chivalry or decency—with nothing to do with his money but spend it in drink?”

“I thought you might,” said Ferdie.

A touch of the bell brought Cotton.

“Show this—gentleman out of the house—and well off the estate,” he said.

It looked as though his visitor would prove truculent, but to his relief Mr. Fane obeyed, waving aside the butler’s escort.

He had left the house when a man stepped from the cover of a clump of bushes and barred his way. It was the tinker. For a few seconds they looked at one another in silence.

“There’s only one man who could ever put that grip on me, and I want to have a look at you,” said the tinker.

He peered into the immobile face of Ferdie Fane, and then stepped back.

“God! It is you! I haven’t seen you for ten years, and I wouldn’t have known you but for that grip!” he breathed.

“I wear very well.” There was no slur in the voice of Fane now. Every sentence rang like steel. “You’ve seen a great deal more than you ought to have seen, Mr. Connor!”

“I’m not afraid of you!” growled the man. “Don’t try to scare me. The old trick, eh? Made up like a boozy mug!”

“Connor, I’m going to give you a chance for your life.” Fane spoke slowly and deliberately. “Get away from this place as quickly as you can. If you’re here to-night, you’re a dead man!” Neither saw the girl who, from a window above, had watched—and heard.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. ELVERY described herself as an observant woman. Less charitable people complained bitterly of her spying. Cotton disliked her most intensely for that reason, and had a special grievance by reason of the fact that she had surprised him that afternoon when he was deeply engaged in conversation with a certain tinker who had called that morning, and who now held him fascinated by stories of immense wealth that might be stored within the cellars and vaults of Monkshall.

She came with her news to Colonel Redmayne, and found that gentleman a little dazed and certainly apathetic. He had got into the habit of retiring to his small study and locking the door. There was a cupboard there, just big enough for a bottle and two glasses, handy enough to hide them away when somebody knocked.

He was not favourably disposed towards Mrs. Elvery, and this may have been the reason why he gave such scant attention to her story.

"He's like a bear, my dear," said that good lady to her daughter.

She pulled aside the blind nervously and peered out into the dark grounds.

"I am sure we're going to have a visitation to-night," she said. "I told Mr. Goodman so. He said 'Stuff and nonsense!'"

"I wish to heaven you wouldn't do that, mother," snapped the girl. "You give me the jumps."

Mrs. Elvery looked in the glass and patted her hair.

"I've seen it twice," she said, with a certain uneasy complacency.

Veronica shivered.

For a little while Mrs. Elvery said nothing, then, turning dramatically, she lifted her fat forefinger.

"Cotton!" she said mysteriously. "If that butler's a butler, I've never seen a butler."

Veronica stared at her aghast.

"Good lord, Ma, what do you mean?"

“He’s been snooping around all day. I caught him coming up those stairs from the cellars, and when he saw me he was so taken aback he didn’t know whether he was on his head or his heels.”

“How do you know he didn’t know?” asked the practical Veronica, and Mrs. Elvery’s testy reply was perhaps justifiable.

Veronica looked at her mother thoughtfully.

“What *did* you see, mother—when you squealed the other night?”

“I wish to goodness you wouldn’t say ‘squeal,’” snapped Mrs. Elvery. “It’s not a word you should use to your mother. I screamed—so would you have. There it was, running about the lawn, waving its hands—ugh!”

“What was it?” asked Veronica faintly.

Mrs. Elvery turned round in her chair.

“A monk,” she said; “all black; his face hidden behind a cowl or something. Hark at that!”

It was a night of wind and rain, and the rattle of the lattice had made Mrs. Elvery jump.

“Let’s go downstairs for heaven’s sake,” she said.

The cheerful Mr. Goodman was alone when they reached the lounge, and he gave a little groan at the sight of her and hoped that she had not heard him.

“Mr. Goodman”—he was not prepared for Veronica’s attack—“did mother tell you what she saw?”

Goodman looked over his glasses with a pained expression.

“If you’re going to talk about ghosts——”

“Monks!” said Veronica, in a hollow voice.

“One monk,” corrected Mrs. Elvery. “I never said I saw more than one.”

Goodman’s eyebrows rose.

“A monk?” He began to laugh softly, and, rising from the settee which formed his invariable resting place, he walked across the room and tapped at the panelled wall. “If it was a monk, this is the way he should come.”

Mrs. Elvery stared at him open-mouthed.

“Which way?” she asked.

“This is the monk’s door,” explained Mr. Goodman with some relish. “It is part of the original panelling.”

Mrs. Elvery fixed her glasses and looked. She saw now that what she had thought was part of the panelling was indeed a door. The oak was warped and in places worm-eaten.

“This is the way the old monks came in,” said Mr. Goodman. “The legend is that it communicated with an underground chapel which was used in the days of the Reformation. This lounge was the lobby that opened on to the refectory. Of course, it’s all been altered—probably the old passage to the monks’ chapel has been bricked up. The monks used to pass through that chapel every day, two by two—part of their ritual, I suppose, to remind them that life was a very short business.”

Veronica drew a deep breath.

“On the whole I prefer to talk about mother’s murders,” she said.

“A chapel,” repeated Mrs. Elvery intensely. “That would explain the organ, wouldn’t it?”

Goodman shook his head.

“Nothing explains the organ,” he said. “Rich foods, poor digestion.”

And then, to change the subject:—

“You told me that that young man, Fane, was coming here.”

“He isn’t,” said Mrs. Elvery emphatically. “He’s too interesting. They don’t want anybody here but old fogies,” and, as he smiled, she added hastily: “I don’t mean you, Mr. Goodman.”

She heard the door open and looked round. It was Mary Redmayne.

“We were talking about Mr. Fane,” she said.

“Were you?” said Mary, a little coldly. “It must have been a very dismal conversation.”

All kind of conversation languished after that. The evening seemed an interminable time before the three guests of the house said good-night and

went to bed. Her father had not put in an appearance all the evening. He had been sitting behind the locked door of his study. She waited till the last guest had gone and then went and knocked at the door. She heard the cupboard close before the door unlocked.

“Good-night, my dear,” he said thickly.

“I want to talk to you, father.”

He threw out his arms with a weary gesture.

“I wish you wouldn’t, I’m all nerves to-night.”

She closed the door behind her and came to where he was sitting, resting her hand upon his shoulder.

“Daddy, can’t we get away from this place? Can’t you sell it?”

He did not look up, but mumbled something about it being dull for her.

“It isn’t more dull than it was at School,” she said; “but”—she shivered — “it’s awful I There’s something vile about this place.”

He did not meet her eyes.

“I don’t understand——”

“Father, you know that there’s something horrible. No, no, it isn’t my nerves. I heard it last night—first the organ and then that scream!” She covered her face with her hands. “I can’t bear it! I saw him running across the lawn—a terrifying thing in black. Mrs. Elvery heard it too—what’s that?”

He saw her start and her face go white. She was listening.

“Can you hear?” she whispered.

“It’s the wind,” he said hoarsely; “nothing but the wind.”

“Listen!”

Even he must have heard the faint, low tones of an organ as they rose and fell.

“Can your hear?”

“I hear nothing,” he said stolidly.

She bent towards the floor and listened.

“Do you hear?” she asked again.

“The sound of feet shuffling on stones, and—my God, what’s that!”

It was the sound of knocking, heavy and persistent.

“Somebody is at the door,” she whispered, white to the lips.

Redmayne opened a drawer and took out something which he slipped into the pocket of his dressing-gown.

“Go up to your room,” he said.

He passed through the darkened lounge, stopped to switch on a light, and, as he did so, Cotton appeared from the servants’ quarters. He was fully dressed.

“What is that?” asked Redmayne.

“Some one at the door, I think. Shall I open it?”

For a second the colonel hesitated.

“Yes,” he said at last.

Cotton took off the chain, and, turning the key, jerked the door open. A lank figure stood on the doorstep; a figure that swayed uneasily.

“Sorry to disturb you.” Ferdie Fane, his coat drenched and soaking, lurched into the room. He stared from one to the other. “I’m the second visitor you’ve had to-night.”

“What do you want?” asked Redmayne.

In a queer, indefinable way the sight of this contemptible man gave him a certain amount of relief.

“They’ve turned me out of the Red Lion.” Ferdie’s glassy eyes were fixed on him. “I want to stay here.”

“Let him stay, daddie.”

Redmayne turned; it was the girl.

“Please let him stay. He can sleep in number seven.”

A slow smile dawned on Mr. Fane’s good-looking face.

“Thanks for invitation,” he said, “which is accepted.”
She looked at him in wonder. The rain had soaked his coat, and, as he stood, the drops were dripping from it, forming pools on the floor. He must have been out in the storm for hours—where had he been? And he was strangely un-talkative; allowed himself to be led away by Cotton to room No. 7, which was in the farther wing. Mary’s own pretty little bedroom was above the lounge. After taking leave of her father, she locked and bolted the door of her room, slowly undressed and went to bed. Her mind was too much alive to make sleep possible, and she turned from side to side restlessly.
She was dozing off when she heard a sound and sat up in bed. The wind was shrieking round the corners of the house, the patter of the rain came fitfully against her window, but that had not wakened her up. It was the sound of low voices in the room below. She thought she heard Cotton—or was it her father? They both had the same deep tone.
Then she heard a sound which made her blood freeze—a maniacal burst of laughter from the room below. For a second she sat paralysed, and then, springing out of bed, she seized her dressing-gown and went pattering down the stairs, and she saw over the banisters a figure moving in the hall below.
“Who is that?”
“It’s all right, my dear.”
It was her father. His room adjoined his study on the ground floor.
“Did you hear anything, daddy?”
“Nothing—nothing,” he said harshly, “Go to bed.”
But Mary Redmayne was not deficient in courage.
“I will not go to bed,” she said, and came down the stairs. “There was somebody in the lounge—I heard them,” Her hand was on the lounge door when he gripped her arm.
“For God’s sake, Mary, don’t go in!” She shook him off impatiently, and threw open the door.
No light burned; she reached out for the switch and turned it. For a second she saw nothing, and then——

Sprawling in the middle of the room lay the body of a man, a terrifying grin on his dead face.

It was the tinker, the man who had quarrelled with Ferdie Fane that morning the man whom Fane had threatened!

CHAPTER VIII

SUPERINTENDENT HALLICK came down by car with his photographer and assistants, saw the body with the local chief of police, and instantly recognised the dead man.

Connor! Connor, the convict, who said he would follow O'Shea to the end of the world—dead, with his neck broken, in that neat way which was O'Shea's speciality.

One by one Hallick interviewed the guests and the servants. Cotton was voluble; he remembered the man, but had no idea how he came into the room. The doors were locked and barred, none of the windows had been forced. Goodman apparently was a heavy sleeper and lived in the distant wing. Mrs. Elvery was full of theories and clues, but singularly deficient in information.

"Fane—who is Fane?" asked Hallick.

Cotton explained Mr. Fane's peculiar position and the hour of his arrival.

"I'll see him later. You have another guest on the books?" He turned the pages of the visitors' ledger.

"He doesn't come till to-day. He's a parson, sir," said Cotton.

Hallick scrutinised the ill-favoured face.

"Have I seen you before?"

"Not me, sir." Cotton was pardonably agitated.

"Humph!" said Hallick. "That will do. I'll see Miss Redmayne."

Goodman was in the room and now came forward.

"I hope you are not going to bother Miss Redmayne, superintendent. She is an extremely nice girl—I may say I am—fond of her. If I were a younger man——" He smiled. "You see, even tea merchants have their romances."

"And detectives," said Hallick dryly. He looked at Mr. Goodman with a new interest. He had betrayed from this middle-aged man a romance which none suspected. Goodman was in love with the girl and had probably concealed the fact from everybody in the house.

"I suppose you think I am a sentimental jackass——"

Hallick shook his head.

“Being in love isn’t a crime, Mr. Goodman,” he said quietly.

Goodman pursed his lips thoughtfully. “I suppose it isn’t—imbecility isn’t a crime, anyway,” he said.

He was going in the direction whence Mary would come, when Hallick stopped him, and obediently the favoured guest shuffled out of another door.

Mary had been waiting for the summons, and her heart was cold within her as she followed the detective to Hallick’s presence. She had not seen him before and was agreeably surprised. She had expected a hectoring, bullying police officer and found a very stout and genial man with a kindly face. He was talking to Cotton when she came in, and for a moment he took no notice of her.

“You’re sure you’ve no idea how this man got in last night?”

“No, sir,” said Cotton.

“No window was forced, the door was locked and bolted, wasn’t it?”

Cotton nodded.

“I never let him in,” he said.

Hallick’s eyelids narrowed.

“Twice you’ve said that. When I arrived this morning you volunteered the same statement. You also said you passed Mr. Fane’s room on your way in, that the door was open and the room was empty.”

Cotton nodded.

“You also said that the man who rung up the police and gave the name of Cotton was not you.”

“That’s true, sir.”

It was then that the detective became aware of the girl’s presence and signalled Cotton to leave the room.

“Now, Miss Redmayne; you didn’t see this man, I suppose?”

“Only for a moment.”

“Did you recognise him?”

She nodded.

Hallick looked down at the floor, considering.

“Where do you sleep?” he asked.

“In the room above this hall.”

She was aware that the second detective was writing down all that she said.

“You must have heard something—the sound of a struggle—a cry?” suggested Hallick, and, when she shook her head: “Do you know what time the murder occurred?”

“My father said it was about one o’clock.”

“You were in bed? Where was your father—anywhere near this room?”

“No.” Her tone was emphatic.

“Why are you so sure?” he asked keenly.

“Because when I heard the door close——”

“Which door?” quickly.

He confused her for a moment.

“This door.” She pointed to the entrance of the lounge. “Then I looked over the landing and saw my father in the passage.”

“Yes. He was coming from or going to this room. How was he dressed?”

“I didn’t see him,” she answered desperately. “There was no light in the passage. I’m not even certain that it was his door.”

Hallick smiled.

“Don’t get rattled, Miss Redmayne. This man, Connor, was a well-known burglar; it is quite possible that your father might have tackled him and accidentally killed him. I mean, such a thing might occur.”

Mary shook her head.

“You don’t think that happened? You don’t think that he got frightened when he found the man was dead, and said he knew nothing about it?”

“No,” she said.

“You heard nothing last night of a terrifying or startling nature?”

She did not answer.

“Have you ever seen anything at Monkshall?”

“It was all imagination,” she said in a low voice; “but once I thought I saw a figure on the lawn—a figure in the robes of a monk.”

“A ghost, in fact?” he smiled, and she nodded.

“You see, I’m rather nervous,” she went on. “I imagine things. Sometimes when I’ve been in my room I’ve heard the sound of feet moving here—and the sound of an organ.”

“Does the noise seem distinct?”

“Yes. You see, the floor isn’t very thick.”

“I see,” he said dryly. “And yet you heard no struggle last night? Come, come, Miss Redmayne, try to remember.”

She was in a panic.

“I don’t remember anything—I heard nothing.”

“Nothing at all?” He was gently insistent. “I mean, the man must have fallen with a terrific thud. It would have wakened you if you had been asleep—and you weren’t asleep. Come now, Miss Redmayne. I think you’re making a mystery of nothing. You were terribly frightened by this monk you saw, or thought you saw, and your nerves were all jagged. You heard a sound and opened your door, and your father’s voice said, ‘It’s all right,’ or something like that. Isn’t that what occurred?”

He was so kindly that she was deceived. “Yes.”

“He was in his dressing-gown, I suppose—ready for bed?”

“Yes,” she said again.

He nodded.

“Just now you told me you didn’t see him—that there was no light in the passage!”

She sprang up and confronted him.

“You’re trying to catch me out. I won’t answer you. I heard nothing, I saw nothing. My father was never in this room—it wasn’t his voice——”

“My voice, old son!”

Hallick turned quickly. A smiling man was standing in the doorway.

“How d’ye do? My name’s Fane—Ferdie Fane. How’s the late departed?”

“Fane, eh?” Hallick was interested in this lank man.

“My voice, old son,” said Fane again. “Indeed!” Then the detective did an unaccountable thing. He broke off the cross-examination, and, beckoning his assistant, the two men went out of the room together.

Mary stared at the new boarder wonderingly.

“It was not your voice,” she said. “Why did you say it was? Can’t you see that they are suspecting everybody? Are you mad? They will think you and I are in collusion.”

He beamed at her.

“C’lusion’s a good word. I can say that quite distinctly, but it’s a good word.”

She went to the door and looked out. Hallick and his assistant were in earnest consultation on the lawn, and her heart sank.

He was helping himself to a whisky when she returned to him.

“They’ll come back soon, and then what questions will they ask me? Oh, I wish you were somebody I could talk to, somebody I could ask to help! It’s so horrible to see a man like you—a drunken weakling.”

“Don’t call me names,” he said severely. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Tell me anything you like.”

If only she could!

It was Cotton who interrupted her confidence. He came in that sly, furtive way of his.

“The new boarder’s arrived, miss—the parson gentleman,” he said, and stood aside to allow the newcomer to enter the lounge.

It was a slim and aged clergyman, white-haired, bespectacled. His tone was gentle, a little unctuous perhaps; his manner that of a man who lavished friendliness.

“Have I the pleasure of speaking to dear Miss Redmayne? I am the Reverend Ernest Partridge. I’ve had to walk up. I thought I was to be met at the station.”

He gave her a limp hand to shake.

The last thing in the world she craved at that moment was the distraction of a new boarder. “I’m very sorry, Mr. Partridge—we are all rather upset this morning. Cotton, take the bag to number three.”

Mr. Partridge was mildly shocked.

“Upset? I hope that no untoward incident has marred the perfect beauty of this wonderful spot?”

“My father will tell you all about it. This is Mr. Fane.”

She had to force herself to this act of common politeness.

At this moment Hallick came in hurriedly.

“Have you any actors in the grounds, Miss Redmayne?” he asked quickly.

“Actors?” She stared at him.

“Anybody dressed up.” He was impatient. “Film actors—they come to these old places. My man tells me he’s just seen a man in a black habit come out of the monk’s tomb—he had a rifle in his hand. By God, there he is!”

He pointed through the lawn window, and at that moment Mary felt a pair of strong arms clasped about her, and she was swung round. It was Fane who held her, and she struggled, speechless with indignation. And then——

“Ping!”

The staccato crack of a rifle, and a bullet zipped past her and smashed the mirror above the fireplace. So close it came that she thought at first it had struck her, and in that fractional space of time realised that only Ferdinand Fane’s embrace had saved her life.

CHAPTER IX

HALLICK, after an extensive search of the grounds which produced no other clue than an expended cartridge case, went up to town, leaving Sergeant Dobie in charge.

Mary never distinctly remembered how that dreadful day dragged to its end. The presence of the Scotland Yard man in the house gave her a little confidence, though it seemed to irritate her father. Happily, the detective kept himself unobtrusively in the background.

The two people who seemed unaffected by the drama of the morning were Mr. Fane and the new clerical boarder. He was a loquacious man, primed with all kinds of uninteresting anecdotes; but Mrs. Elvery found him a fascinating relief.

Ferdie Fane puzzled Mary. There was so much about him that she liked, and, but for this horrid tippling practice of his she might have liked him more—how much more she did not dare admit to herself. He alone remained completely unperturbed by that shot which had nearly ended her life and his.

In the afternoon she had a little talk with him and found him singularly coherent.

“Shooting at me? Good Lord, no!” He scoffed. “It must have been a Nonconformist—we high church parsons have all sorts of enemies.”

“Have you?” she asked quietly, and there was an odd look in his eyes when he answered:—

“Maybe. There are quite a number of people who want to get even with me for my past misdeeds.”

“Mrs. Elvery said they were going to send Bradley down.”

“Bradley!” he said contemptuously. “That back number at Scotland Yard!” And then, as though he could read her thoughts, he asked quickly: “Did that interesting old lady say anything else?”

They were walking through the long avenue of elms that stretched down to the main gates of the park. Two days ago she would have fled from him, but now she found a strange comfort in his society. She could not understand herself; found it equally difficult to recover a sense of her old aversion.

“Mrs. Elvery’s a criminologist.” She smiled whimsically, though she never felt less like smiling in her life. “She keeps press cuttings of all the horrors of the past years, and she says she’s sure that that poor man Connor was connected with a big gold robbery during the war. She said there was a man named O’Shea in it——”

“O’Shea?” said Fane quickly, and she saw his face change. “What the devil is she talking about O’Shea for? She had better be careful—I beg your pardon.” He was all smiles again.

“Have you heard of him?”

“The merest rumour,” he said almost gaily. “Tell me what Mrs. Elvery said.”

“She said that a lot of gold disappeared and was buried somewhere, and she’s got a theory that it was buried in Monkshall or in the grounds; that Connor was looking for it, and that he got Cotton, the butler, to let him in—that’s how he came to be in the house. I heard her telling Mr. Partridge the story. She doesn’t like me well enough to tell me.” They paced in silence for a while.

“Do you like him—Partridge, I mean?” asked Ferdie.

She thought he was very nice.

“That means he bores you.” He chuckled softly to himself. And then: “Why don’t you go up to town?”

She stopped dead and stared at him.

“Leave Monkshall? Why?”

He looked at her steadily.

“I don’t think Monkshall is very healthy; in fact, it’s a little dangerous.”

“To me?” she said incredulously, and he nodded.

“To you, in spite of the fact that there are people living at Monkshall who adore you, who would probably give their own lives to save you from hurt.”

“You mean my father?” She tried to pass off what might easily develop into an embarrassing conversation.

“I mean two people—for example, Mr. Goodman.”

At first she was inclined to be angry and then she laughed.

“How absurd! Mr. Goodman is old enough to be my father.”

“And young enough to love you,” said Fane quietly. “That middle-aged gentleman is genuinely fond of you, Miss Redmayne. There is one who is not so middle-aged who is equally fond of you——”

“In sober moments?” she challenged.

And then Mary thought it expedient to remember an engagement she had in the house. He did not attempt to stop her. They walked back towards Monkshall a little more quickly.

Inspector Hallick went back to London a very puzzled man, though he was not as hopelessly baffled as his immediate subordinates thought. He was satisfied in his mind that behind the mystery of Monkshall was the more definite mystery of O’Shea.

When he reached his office he rang for his clerk, and when the officer appeared:

“Get me the record of the O’Shea gold robbery, will you?” he said. “And data of any kind we have about O’Shea.”

It was not the first time he had made the last request and the response had been more or less valueless, but the Record Department of Scotland Yard had a trick of securing new evidence from day to day from unexpected sources. The sordid life histories that were compiled in that business-like room touched life at many points; the political branch that dealt with foreign anarchists had once exposed the biggest plot of modern times through a chance remark made by an old woman arrested for begging.

When the clerk had gone Hallick opened his note-book and jotted down the meagre facts he had compiled. Undoubtedly the shot had been fired from the ruins which, he discovered, were those of an old chapel in the grounds, now covered with ivy and almost hidden by sturdy chestnut trees. How the assassin had made his escape was a mystery. He did not preclude the possibility that some of these wizened slabs of stone hidden under thickets of alderberry and hawthorn trees might conceal the entrance to an underground passage.

He offered that solution to one of the inspectors who strolled in to gossip. It was the famous Inspector Elk, saturnine and sceptical.

“Underground passages!” scoffed Elk. “Why, that’s the last resource, or resort—I am not certain which—of the novel writer. Underground passages and secret panels! I never pick up a book which isn’t full of ’em!”

“I don’t rule out either possibility,” said Hallick quietly. “Monkshall was one of the oldest inhabited buildings in England. I looked it up in the library. It flourished even in the days of Elizabeth——”

Elk groaned.

“That woman! There’s nothing we didn’t have in her days!”

Inspector Elk had a genuine grievance against Queen Elizabeth; for years he had sought to pass an education test which would have secured him promotion, but always it was the reign of the virgin queen and the many unrememberable incidents which, from his point of view, disfigured that reign, that had brought about his undoing.

“She would have secret panels, *and* underground passages!”

And then a thought struck Hallick.

“Sit down, Elk,” he said. “I want to ask you something.”

“If it’s history save yourself the trouble. I know no more about that woman except that she was not in any way a virgin. Whoever started this silly idea about the Virgin Queen?”

“Have you ever met O’Shea?” asked Hallick.

Elk stared at him.

“O’Shea—the bank smasher? No, I never met him. He is in America, isn’t he?”

“I think he is very much in England,” said Hallick, and the other man shook his head.

“I doubt it.” Then after a moment’s thought: “There’s no reason why he should be in England. I am only going on the fact that he has been very quiet these years, but then a man who made the money he did can afford to sit quiet. As a rule, a crook who gets money takes it to the nearest spieling club and does it in, and as he is a natural lunatic——”

“How do you know that?” asked Hallick sharply.

Before he answered, Elk took a ragged cigar from his pocket and lit it.

“O’Shea is a madman,” he said deliberately. “It is one of the facts that is not disputed.”

“One of the facts that I knew nothing about till I interviewed old Connor in prison, and I don’t remember that I put it on record,” said Hallick. “How did you know?”

Elk had an explanation which was new to his superior.

“I went into the case years ago. We could never get O’Shea or any particulars about him except a scrap of his writing. I am talking about the days before the gold robbery and before you came into the case. I was just a plain detective officer at the time and if I couldn’t get his picture and his finger-prints I got on to his family. His father died in a lunatic asylum, his sister committed suicide, his grandfather was a homicide who died whilst he was awaiting his trial for murder. I’ve often wondered why one of these clever fellows didn’t write a history of the family.”

This was indeed news to John Hallick, but it tallied with the information that. Connor had given to him.

The clerk came back at this moment with a formidable dossier and one thin folder. The contents of the latter showed the inspector that nothing further had been added to the sketchy details he had read before concerning O’Shea. Elk watched him curiously.

“Refreshing your mind about the gold robbery? Doesn’t it make your mouth water to think that all these golden sovereigns are hidden somewhere. Pity Bradley isn’t on this job. He knows the case like I know the back of my hand, and if you think this murder has got anything to do with O’Shea, I’d cable him to come back if I were you.”

Hallick was turning the pages of the type-written sheets slowly.

“As far as Connor is concerned, he only got what was coming to him. He squealed a lot at the time of his conviction about being double-crossed, but Connor double-crossed more crooks than any man on the records, and Soapy Marks. I happened to know both of them. They were quite prepared to squeak about O’Shea just before the gold robbery. Where is Soapy?”

Hallick shook his head and closed the folder.

“I don’t know. I wish you would put the word round to the divisions that I’d like to see Soapy Marks,” he said. “He usually hangs out in Hammersmith, and I should like to give him a word of warning.”

Elk grinned.

“You couldn’t warn Soapy,” he said. “He knows too much. Soapy is so clever that one of these days we’ll find him at Oxford or Cambridge. Personally,” he ruminated reflectively, “I prefer clever crooks. They don’t take much catching; they catch themselves.”

“I am not worrying about his catching himself,” said Hallick. “But I am a little anxious as to whether O’Shea will catch him first. That is by no means outside the bounds of possibility.”

And here he spoke prophetically.

He got through by ’phone to Monkshall, but Sergeant Dobie, who had been left in charge, had no information.

“Has that woman, Elvery, left?” asked Hallick.

“Not she!” came the reply. “She will hang on to the last minute. That woman is a regular crime hound. And, Mr. Hallick, that fellow Fane is tight again.”

“Is he ever sober?” asked Hallick.

He did not trouble about Fane’s insobriety, but he was interested to learn that life in Monkshall, despite the tragedy and the startling event of the morning, was going on as though nothing had happened. Reporters had called in the course of the day and had tried to interview the colonel.

“But I shunted them off. The general theory here is that Connor had somebody with him, that they got hold of the money and quarrelled about it. The other fellow killed Connor and got away with the stuff. When I said ‘The general idea,’” said Dobie carefully, “I meant it is my idea. What do you think of that, sir?”

“Rotten,” said Hallick, and hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER X

ALL the machinery of Scotland Yard was at work. Inquiries had gone out in every direction and not even Mrs. Elvery and her daughter had been spared. By midnight Hallick learned the private history, as far as it could be ascertained, of every inmate of Monkshall.

Mrs. Elvery was a woman in fairly comfortable circumstances, and, since her husband's death had released her from a gloomy house in Devonshire, she had no permanent home. She was more than comfortably off, by certain standards she was a wealthy woman, one of that mysterious band of middle-aged women who move from one hotel to another, and live frugally in fashionable resorts in the season. You find them on the Lido in August, in Deauville in July, on the Riviera or in Egypt in the winter.

Mr. Goodman held a sleeping partnership in an old-established and not too prosperous firm of tea importers. Probably, thought Hallick, the days of its prosperity expired before Goodman retired from business.

Cotton, the butler, had the least savoury record. He was a man who had been discharged from three jobs under suspicion of pilfering, but no conviction could be traced against him. (Hallick wrote in his note-book: "Find some way of getting Cotton's finger-prints.") In every case Cotton had been employed at boarding houses and always small articles of jewellery had disappeared in circumstances which suggested that he was not entirely ignorant of the reason for such disappearance.

Colonel Redmayne's record occupied a sheet of foolscap. He had been an impecunious officer in the Auxiliary Medical Staff, had been court-martialed in the last week of the war for drunkenness and severely reprimanded. He had, by some miracle, been appointed to a responsible position in a military charity. The disappearance of funds had led to an investigation, there had been some talk of prosecution, and Scotland Yard had actually been consulted, but had been advised against such a prosecution in the absence of direct proof that the colonel was guilty of anything but culpable negligence. The missing money had been refunded and the matter was dropped. He was next heard of when he bought Monkshall.

The information concerning Redmayne's military career was news to Hallick.

"A doctor, eh?"

Elk nodded. He had been charged with collecting the information.

“He joined up in the beginning of the war and got his rank towards the finish,” he said. “Funny how these birds hang on to their military rank—‘doctor’ would be good enough for me.”

“Was he ever in the regular army?” Elk shook his head.

“So far as I could find out, no. Owing to the trouble he got into at the end of the war he was not offered a permanent commission.”

Hallick spent the evening studying a large plan of Monkshall and its grounds, and even a larger one of the room in which Connor had been found. There was one thing certain: Connor had not “broken and entered.” It was, in a sense, an inside job, he must have been admitted by—whom? Not by Redmayne, certainly not by his daughter. By a servant, and that servant was Cotton. The house was almost impossible to burgle from outside without inside assistance; there were alarms in all the windows and he had seen electric controls on the doors. Monkshall was almost prepared for a siege. Indeed, it seemed as though Colonel Redmayne expected sooner or later the visitation of a burglar.

Hallick went to bed a very tired man that night, fully expecting to be called by telephone, but nothing happened. He ’phoned Monkshall before he left his house and Dobie reported “All is well.” He had not been to bed that night, and nothing untoward had occurred. There was neither sound or sight of the ghostly visitor.

“Ghosts!” scoffed Hallick. “Did you expect to see one?”

“Well,” said Dobie’s half-apologetic voice, “I am really beginning to believe there is something here that isn’t quite natural.”

“There is nothing anywhere that is not natural, sergeant,” said Hallick sharply.

There was another case in which he was engaged, and he spent two unprofitable hours interviewing a particularly stupid servant girl concerning the mysterious disappearance of a large quantity of jewellery. It was nearly noon when he got back to his office and his clerk greeted him with a piece of unexpected information.

“Mr. Goodman is waiting to see you, sir. I put him in the reception room.”

“Goodman?” Hallick frowned. At the moment he could not recall the name. “Oh, yes, from Monkshall? What does he want?”

“He said he wished to see you. He was quite willing to wait.”

“Bring him in,” said Hallick.

Mr. Goodman came into the tidy office a rather timid and diffident man.

“I quite expected you to throw me out for I realise how busy you are, inspector,” he said, putting down his hat and umbrella very carefully; “but as I had some business in town I thought I’d come along and see you.”

“I am very glad to see you, Mr. Goodman,” Hallick placed a chair for him. “Are you coming to enlarge on your theories?”

Goodman smiled.

“I think I told you before I had no theories. I am terribly worried about Miss Redmayne, though.” He hesitated. “You cross-examined her. She was distressed about it.” He paused a little helplessly, but Hallick did not help him. “I think I told you that I am—fond of Mary Redmayne. I would do anything to clear up this matter so that you would see, what I am sure is a fact, that her father had nothing whatever to do with this terrible affair.”

“I never said he had,” interrupted Hallick.

Mr. Goodman nodded.

“That I realise. But I am not as foolish as, perhaps, I appear to be; I know that he is under suspicion, in fact, I imagine that everybody in the house, including myself, must of necessity be suspected.”

Again he waited and again Hallick was wilfully silent. He was wondering what was coming next.

“I am a fairly wealthy man,” Goodman went on at last. He gave the impression that it required a desperate effort on his part to put his proposition into words. “And I would be quite willing to spend a very considerable sum, not necessarily to help the police, but to clear Redmayne from all suspicion. I don’t understand the methods of Scotland Yard and I feel I needn’t tell you this”—he smiled—“and probably I am exposing my ignorance with every word I utter. But what I came to see you about is this—is it possible for me to engage a Scotland Yard detective?”

Hallick shook his head.

“If you mean in the same way as you engage a private detective—no,” he said. Goodman’s face fell.

“That’s a pity. I had heard so much from Mrs. Elvery—a very loquacious and trying lady, but with an extraordinary knowledge of—er—criminality, that there is a gentleman at Scotland Yard who would have been of the greatest assistance to me—Inspector Bradley.”

Hallick laughed.

“Inspector Bradley is at the moment abroad,” he said.

“Oh,” replied Mr. Goodman, getting glum. “That is a great pity. Mrs. Elvery says——”

“I am afraid she says a great deal that is not very helpful,” said Hallick good-humouredly. “No, Mr. Goodman, it is impossible to oblige you and I am afraid you will have to leave the matter in our hands. I don’t think you will be a loser by that. We have no other desire than to get the truth. We are just as anxious to clear any person who is wrongfully suspected, as we are to convict any person who comes under suspicion and who justifies that suspicion.”

That should have finished the matter, but Mr. Goodman sat on looking very embarrassed.

“It is a thousand pities,” he said at last. “Mr. Bradley is abroad? So I shan’t be able even to satisfy my curiosity. You see, Mr. Hallick, the lady in question was talking so much about this superman—I suppose he is clever?”

“Very,” said Hallick. “One of the ablest men we have had at the Yard.”

“Ah.” Goodman nodded. “That makes my disappointment a little more keen. I would have liked to have seen what he looked like. When one hears so much about a person——”

Hallick looked at him for a second, then turning his back upon the visitor, he scanned the wall where were hanging three framed portrait groups. One of these he lifted down from the hook and laid on the table. It was a conventional group of about thirty men sitting or standing in three rows and beneath were the words “H.Q. Staff.”

“I can satisfy your curiosity,” he said. “The fourth man on the left from the commissioner who is seated in the centre is Inspector Bradley.”

Mr. Goodman adjusted his glasses and looked. He saw a large, florid-looking man of fifty, heavy-featured, heavily built. The last person in the group he would have picked out.

“That’s Bradley; he isn’t much to look at, is he?” smiled Hallick. “He is the livest wire in this department.” Goodman stared at the photograph rather nervously, and then he smiled.

“That’s very good of you, Mr. Hallick,” he said. “He doesn’t look like a detective, but then no detective ever does. That is the peculiar thing about them. They look rather—er——”

“A commonplace lot, eh?” said Hallick, his eyes twinkling. “So they are.”

He hung up the portrait on the wall.

“Don’t bother about Miss Redmayne,” he said, “and for heaven’s sake don’t think that the employment of a detective, private or public, on her behalf will be of the slightest use to her or her father. Innocent people have nothing to fear. Guilty people have a great deal. You have known Colonel Redmayne for a long time, I think?”

“All my life.”

“You know about his past?”

The old tea merchant hesitated.

“Yes, I think I know,” he said quietly. “There were one or two incidents which were a little discreditable, were there not? He told me himself. He drinks a great deal too much, which is unfortunate. I think he was drinking more heavily at the time these unfortunate incidents occurred.”

He picked up his hat and umbrella, took out his pipe with a mechanical gesture, looked at it, rubbed the bowl, and replaced it hastily.

“You can smoke, Mr. Goodman, we shan’t hang you for it,” chuckled Hallick.

He himself walked through the long corridor and down the stairs to the entrance hall with his visitor, and saw him off the premises. He hoped and believed that he had sent Goodman away feeling a little happier, and his hope was not without reason.

CHAPTER XI

IT was four o'clock when Goodman reached the little station which is some four miles distant from Monkshall, and, declining the offer of the solitary fly, started to walk across to the village. He had gone a mile when he heard the whir of a motor behind him. He did not attempt to turn his head, and was surprised when he heard the car slacken speed and a voice hailing him. It was Ferdie Fane who sat at the wheel.

"Hop in, brother. Why waste your own shoe leather when somebody else's rubber tyres are available?"

The face was flushed and the eyes behind the horn-rimmed spectacles glistened. Mr. Goodman feared the worst.

"No, no, thank you. I'd rather walk," he said.

"Stuff! Get in," scoffed Ferdie. "I am a better driver when I am tight than when I am sober, but I am not tight."

Very reluctantly the tea merchant climbed into the seat beside the driver.

"I'll go very slowly," the new inmate of Monkshall went on. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

"You think I am afraid?" said Mr. Goodman with a certain asperity.

"I'm certain," said the other cheerfully. "Where have you been this fine day?"

"I went up to London," said Mr. Goodman.

"An interesting place to go to," said Fane; "but a deuced uncomfortable place to live in."

He was keeping his word and driving with remarkable care, Mr. Goodman discovered to his relief.

He was puzzled as to where Ferdie had obtained the car and ventured upon an inquiry.

"I hired it from a brigand in the village," said Ferdie. "Do you drive a car?"

Mr. Goodman shook his head.

"It is an easy road for a car, but a pretty poisonous one for a lorry, especially a lorry with a lot of weight in it. You know Lark Hill?"

Mr. Goodman nodded.

“A lorry was stuck there. I guess it will be there still even though the road is as dry as a bone. What it must be like to run up that hill with a heavy load on a wet and slippery night heaven knows. I bet that hill has broken more hearts than any other in the county.”

He rumbled on aimlessly about nothing until they reached the foot of the redoubtable hill where the heavy lorry was still standing disconsolate by the side of the road.

“There she is,” said Ferdie with the satisfaction of one who is responsible. “And it will take a bit of haulage to get her to the top, eh? Only a super-driver could have got her there. Only a man with a brain and imagination could have nursed her.“

Goodman smiled.

“I didn’t know there were such things as super-brains’ amongst lorry drivers,” he said. “But I suppose every trade, however humble, has its Napoleon.”

“You bet,” said Ferdie.

He brought the car up the long drive to Monkshall, paid the garage hand who was waiting to take it from him, and disappeared into the house.

Goodman looked round. In spite of his age his eyesight was remarkably good, and he noticed the slim figure walking on the far side of the ruins. Handing his umbrella to Cotton he walked across to Mary. She recognised and turned to meet him. Her father was in his study and she was going back for tea. He thought that she looked a little peaked and paler than usual.

“Nothing has happened to-day?” he asked quickly.

She shook her head.

“Nothing. Mr. Goodman, I am dreading the night.”

He patted her gently on the shoulder. “My dear, you ought to get away out of this. I will speak to the colonel.”

“Please don’t,” she said quickly. “Father does not want me to go. My nerves are a little on edge.”

“Has that young man been——” he began.

“No, no. You mean Mr. Fane? He has been quite nice. I have only seen him for a few minutes to-day. He is out driving a motor car. He asked me——”

She stopped.

“To go with him? That young man is certainly not troubled with nerves!”

“He was quite nice,” she said quickly; “only I didn’t feel like motoring. I thought it was he who had just come back, but I suppose it was you who came in the car.” He explained the circumstances of his meeting with Ferdie Fane. She smiled for the first time that day.

“He is—rather queer,” she said. “Sometimes he is quite sensible and nice. Cotton hates him for some reason or other. He told me to-day that unless Mr. Fane left he would.”

Mr. Goodman smiled.

“You seem to have a very troublesome household,” he said; “except myself—oh, I beg his pardon, the new guest. What is his name? Mr. Partridge? I hope he is behaving himself.”

She smiled faintly.

“Yes, he’s quite charming. I don’t think I have seen him to-day,” she added inconsequently.

“You can see him now.” Mr. Goodman nodded towards the lawn.

The slim, black figure of Mr. Partridge was not easily discernible against the dark background of the foliage. He was strolling slowly up and down, reading a book as he walked; but evidently his eyes and attention were not entirely for the literature which he studied, for he closed his book and walked towards them.

“A delightful place, my dear Miss Redmayne,” he said. “A most charming place! A little heaven upon earth, if I may use a sacred expression to describe terrestrial beauties.”

In the light of day, and without the softening effect of curtains, his face was not too pleasant, she thought. It was a hard face, angular, wasted. The dark eyes which surveyed her were not his least unpleasant feature. His voice was gentle enough—gentle to the point of unctuousness. Instinctively she had disliked him the first time they had met; her second impression of him did not help her to overcome her prejudice.

“I saw you come up. Mr. Fane was driving you.” There was a gentle reproach in his tone. “A curious young man, Mr. Fane—given, I fear, to the inordinate consumption of alcoholic beverage. ‘Oh,’ as the prophet said, ‘that a man should put an enemy into his mouth to steal away his brains!’”

“I can testify,” interrupted Mr. Goodman staunchly, “that Mr. Fane is perfectly sober. He drove me with the greatest care and skill. I think he is a very excitable young man, and one may often do him an injustice because of his peculiar mannerisms.”

The reverend gentleman sniffed. He was obviously no lover of Fane, and sceptical of his virtues. Yet he might find no fault with Ferdie, who came into the lounge soon after tea was served, and would have sat alone if Goodman had not invited him to the little circle which included himself, Mrs. Elvery and Mary. He was unusually quiet, and though many opportunities presented themselves he was neither flippant nor aggressive.

Mary watched him furtively, more than interested in the normal man. He was older than she had thought; her father had made the same discovery. There was a touch of grey in his hair, and though the face was unlined it had the setness of a man who was well past his thirties, and possibly his forties.

His voice was deep, rather brusque. She thought she detected signs of nervousness, for once or twice, when he was addressed, he started so violently as to spill from the cup of tea which he held in his hand.

She saw him after the party had dispersed. “You’re very subdued today, Mr. Fane.”

“Am I?” He made an attempt at gaiety and failed. “It’s funny, parsons always depress me. I suppose my conscience gets to work, and there’s nothing more depressing than conscience.”

“What have you been doing all day?” she asked.

She told herself she was not really interested. The question was one of the commonplaces of speech that she had employed a dozen times with guests.

“Ghost-hunting,” he said, and when he saw her pale he was instantly penitent. “Sorry—terribly sorry! I was being funny.”

But he had been very much in earnest; she realised that when she was in the privacy of her own room, where she could think without distraction. Ferdie Fane had spent that day looking for the Terror. Was he himself the Terror? That she could not believe.

CHAPTER XII

NIGHT came—the dreary night with its black mysteries and its suggestive horrors.

The telephone in the deserted lounge rang shrilly. Cotton came from some mysterious recess in a hurry to answer it. He heard Hallick's voice and winced painfully. He did not like Hallick, and wondered how soon this officer of Scotland Yard, with the resources at his disposal, would discover his own unsavoury antecedents.

"I want to speak to Dobie," said Hallick's voice.

"Yes, sir; I'll call him."

There was no need to call Sergeant Dobie; he was at Cotton's elbow.

"Is that for me?"

Cotton passed him across the instrument.

"Yes, sir...?" He glanced out of the corner of his eye and saw the interested Cotton. "Hop it," he said under his breath, and Cotton withdrew reluctantly.

"Have you found anything further?" asked Hallick.

"Nothing, sir. Another spent cartridge—you saw one of them before you left."

There was a long pause at the other end of the wire, and then Hallick spoke again.

"I've got an idea something may happen to-night. You have my private telephone number? . . . Good! Call me if anything happens that has an unusual appearance. Don't be afraid of bringing me down on a fool's errand. I shall have a car waiting, and I can be with you in an hour."

Dobie hung up the receiver as Mr. Goodman came ambling into the lounge. He wore his black velvet smoking jacket; his old pipe was gripped between his teeth. Dobie was on his way to the door when the tea merchant called him back.

"You're staying with us to-night, aren't you, Mr. Dobie? . . . Thank goodness for that!"

"You're nervous, are you, sir?" smiled Dobie, and Goodman's good-natured face reflected the smile.

“Why, yes, I am a little—raw. If anybody had told me I should get jumpy I should have laughed.”

He took out his cigar case and offered it to the detective, who chose one with considerable care.

“There’s no new clue, I suppose?” said Goodman, making himself comfortable at the end of the settee.

“No, sir,” said Dobie.

Goodman chuckled.

“If you had any you wouldn’t tell me, eh? That isn’t one of the peculiar weaknesses of Scotland Yard officers, that they wear their—I won’t say hearts, but their brains, upon their sleeves. You didn’t find the gentleman who did the shooting yesterday? I ask you because I have been in town all day, and was a little disappointed when I came back to find that apparently nothing had happened.”

“No, we haven’t found the shooter,” said Dobie.

Neither of them saw the door open, nor the pale face of Mr. Partridge peeping through.

“I was at Scotland Yard to-day,” said Goodman; “and I had a chat with Mr. Hallick. A nice man.”

“Very,” agreed Dobie heartily.

John Hallick was one of the few men at the Yard who had no enemies amongst his subordinate staff. He was the type who placed the service first, and individual kudos second, so that it was a tradition that any officer who deserved praise invariably received his full meed of recognition.

“The whole thing is really extraordinary,” said Goodman thoughtfully; “in fact, the most extraordinary thing that has ever happened. Do you know, I am developing a theory?”

Dobie paused in the act of lighting his cigar.

“You’re like Mrs. Elvery,” he said, and Goodman groaned.

“That’s the rudest thing that’s been said to me to-day! No, it is about this unfortunate man, Connor, who was found dead in this room yesterday morning. The moment I heard the name I remembered the case—the gold

robbery during the war. There were three men in it—O'Shea, the gang leader; a man named Marks—Soapy Marks; and Connor. I wouldn't like to confess as much to Mrs. Elvery for fear she never left me to myself, but I was tremendously interested in war crimes, and I am pretty sure that this dead man was Connor."

"Do you think so, sir?"

Mr. Goodman smiled.

"No, I am perfectly sure now, from your badly simulated innocence! That was the Connor, wasn't it?"

"Did you ask Mr. Hallick?" asked Dobie, and, when the other shook his head: "Well, Scotland Yard is issuing a statement to-night, so you might as well know that it was Connor."

"H'm!" Goodman frowned. "I am trying to reckon up how long he was in prison. He must have been released very recently?"

"A month ago," said Dobie. "He and Marks came out within a few hours of each other."

Mr. Goodman was beaming.

"I knew that I was right! I've got rather a good memory for names."

Dobie lingered. There was nothing for him to do, but he had a human weakness for human society.

"I suppose you're not staying on after to-night?" he suggested. "All these boarding house murders clear out the tenants and generally ruin the man or woman who's running the show."

Goodman shook his head.

"I don't know. I'm an old bachelor and I hate change. I suppose I must be a little callous, but I am not as affected as some of the other people are."

And then he went back to his original thesis.

"Now, suppose this crime is in connection with the gold robbery——"

But here he came across the official policeman. It was not a matter which Dobie could discuss, and he said so.

“Certainly—perfectly correct,” said Goodman hurriedly. “I am sorry I was so indiscreet.”

“Not at all,” replied Dobie, and Goodman saw that he was aching to tell him all he knew. “Perhaps you’re nearer the truth than you imagine.”

Whatever revelation he might have made after that was interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Elvery and her daughter. The Rev. Mr. Partridge followed, carrying in his hand a skein of wool.

Mrs. Elvery at any rate was not so reticent. She was trembling with excitement, had information to give to the bored tea merchant.

“I’m going to give you a surprise, Mr. Goodman,” she said, and Goodman closed his book with an expression of resignation. “Do you know that Mr. Partridge is an authority on spiritualism?”

“And I am an authority on good coffee,” said Mr. Goodman. Cotton had come in with a tray full of little cups, and Goodman selected one. “And if this coffee is good you can thank me, for I have taught the cook, after many years, how to prepare coffee that doesn’t taste like dish-water. Spiritualism, eh? B-r-r! I don’t want to know anything about spirits!”

Mr. Partridge was all apologies.

“You rather exaggerate, I fear, my dear friend. Do you mind my saying that? I certainly have studied the science from an outsider’s point of view, but I am no authority.”

“Then you won’t object to a few spooks?” said Goodman, smiling.

“Spooks?” The reverend gentleman was puzzled. “Ah, you mean—thank you, Cotton.” He took his coffee. “I know what you mean.”

Mary came in at this uncomfortable moment, when Mr. Partridge chose to discuss the tragedy of the previous day.

“How terrible it must have been for all you poor souls! How staggering! How——”

Mary was looking at the girl, saw her suddenly stare towards the window and turn pale. Veronica leapt to her feet and screamed.

“I saw a face at the window!” she gasped.

“Draw the curtains,” said Mr. Goodman testily.

A few minutes later Fane strolled into the room, and Mary saw there were raindrops on his shoulders.

“Have you been out?”

“Yes, I’ve been strolling around,” he said.

Mary thought he had been drinking; his speech was slurred and he walked none too steadily.

“Did you see the monk?” asked Veronica spitefully.

Ferdie smiled broadly.

“If I had I’d have called his reverence to lay the ghost.”

Mr. Partridge looked up, reproach in his eyes.

“It is all very dreadful. I only heard by accident of the tragedy that occurred here last night.”

“Don’t talk about it, please!” wailed Veronica.

“A fellow creature cut off in his prime,” said the Reverend Partridge sonorously. “I confess that I had a cold shiver run through me when I heard of this awful happening. The man’s name is not known, I understand?”

He was reaching for a cup of coffee.

“Oh, yes, it is.” It was Fane who spoke. “I wonder somebody didn’t tell you.”

Their eyes met.

“The name of the murdered man,” said Fane deliberately, “was Connor—Joe Connor.”

The coffee cup slipped from the parson’s hand and was shattered on the parquet floor. The yellow face turned a dirty white.

“Connor!” he faltered. “Joe Connor!”

Ferdie, watching him, nodded.

“You know the name?”

“I—I have heard it.”

Mr. Partridge was talking with difficulty; he was a little breathless.

“Joe Connor!” he muttered again, and soon after went out of the room.

Mary noticed this and was puzzled. She wondered if Goodman had seen, but apparently he was unobservant, and he was more interested in another inmate of Monkshall. The first moment they were together he opened his heart on the subject.

“You may not believe me, my dear, but Mrs. Elvery has been very interesting to-night. She showed me her press-cutting book—about this man Connor. There is no doubt it was he—I saw a picture in one of the cuttings. And I saw another photograph which rather interested me—had you ever met Mr. Fane before he came here?”

“Was it his?” she asked.

He hesitated.

“Yes, I think it was.”

And then she remembered. She had been in the village that afternoon and had seen Goodman at the post office, in the little private telephone booth, and the postmistress had volunteered the information, rather proudly, that he was speaking to Scotland Yard. She had thought no more of this than that Goodman was getting further details about the crime of last night, and she realised that his call had a deeper significance when he went on:—

“I have been making a few inquiries, and I think there is no doubt that Mr. Fane is—um—well, Mr. Fane is not all that he appears to be.” And then, earnestly: “I beg of you not to mention this to him in any circumstances.”

She was amazed by his vehemence, and laughed.

“Why, of course I won’t.”

“Mary”—he glanced over his shoulder—the rest of the company were engaged in their own affairs, and he dropped his hand timidly upon hers—“Mary, my dear, why don’t you leave this place— go to London?”

“How curious!” she laughed. “That is exactly what Mr. Fane suggested.”

“Mr. Fane made the suggestion for another reason,” he said, with a touch of grimness in his usually mild voice. “I suggest it because—well, because I am very fond of you. Don’t think I’m stupid or sentimental. In spite of the disparity in our ages, I love you as I have never loved any woman in my life.”

She was unprepared for the declaration, could only look at him wonderingly.

“Think it over, my dear; and if you say ‘No’—well, I shall understand.”

She was glad when Cotton came in at that moment and told her her father wished to see her about some domestic trifle. She did not go back to the room until Cotton came to the study with the request that he should be allowed to lock up.

“They’re all in bed except Mr. Fane,” he said. “I’ve got an idea he’s waiting for you, miss.”

“Why should he be?” demanded Redmayne wrathfully.

Cotton did not know.

It was a shrewd guess on his part. Ferdie Fane sat on the sofa, hoping against hope that the girl would return. There was something he wanted to tell her, an urgent message of warning he wished to give to her. He heard the door click and turned quickly. It was the Reverend Mr. Partridge.

“Pardon me,” said the clergyman, who seemed to have recovered something of his equilibrium; “I left a book here.”

Fane did not speak until the white-haired man was turning to leave the room. Then:—

“You were awfully rattled, Mr. Partridge.”

“Rattled?” The parson frowned. “That is a strange term to employ. I was naturally distressed to hear of this poor man’s death.”

Fane grinned.

“Cotton was more distressed—he had to pick up the pieces of your coffee cup,” he said. “Will you sit down for a second?”

The clergyman hesitated, and then sat down on the settee by Ferdie’s side.

“What a terrible fate—poor soul!” he muttered.

“Silly—that was what was the matter with Connor,” said Fane coolly. “You see, he wasn’t as clever as his pal—the other fellow wouldn’t have been so crude.”

“The other fellow?” Mr. Partridge appeared to be puzzled.

“Soapy Marks—you’ve never heard of him? O’Shea’s right-hand man. You’ve never heard of O’Shea? I’ll bet you’ve not only heard of him, but if you haven’t recognised him you’ll know him pretty soon.”

The other man shook his head.

“This is Greek to me. Whom am I to recognise?”

“Soapy’s got brains,” Fane went on. “I’m going to give them a chance.”

Suddenly he reached out, gripped the white hair of the clergyman and pulled. The wig came away in his hand.

“Soapy!”

Soapy Marks leapt up.

“What the hell——” he began, but the face of Fane thrust into his.

“Go whilst the going’s good,” he said deliberately. “Go whilst there’s life in you. I’m telling you, as I told Connor. You’re asking for death—and you’ll get it!”

“Well, I’ll take it,” said Marks savagely. “That’s what! I’ll take anything that’s going.”

Ferdie Fane nodded.

“You never could take a warning, could you? Clever Mr. Soapy—all brain and confidence!”

“You can’t frighten me.” Marks was breathing heavily. “You know what I’ve come for? My share of the swag—and I’m not going away till I get it!”

“You’re going out feet first,” said Fane sombrely.

“I am, am I? You think you’re damned clever, but I’ll tell you something. I knew you the moment you told me about Connor. And there’s somebody else in this house who knows you—that guy Goodman. He’s no fool—he’s knocked about the world. I saw him looking at you.”

Fane was startled.

“Goodman? You’re crazy mad!”

“Mad, am I? I was down in the village this afternoon, and he was putting calls through to London—making inquiries about you. That girl, Redmayne,

was in the post office too. That's made you sit up. What'll you do now, my dear friend? Get Goodman out of the way. I know your methods—I know that old drunk trick of yours too."
Fane had recovered from his consternation.
"Whether he knows or whether he doesn't, I'm warning you," he said sternly. "You'll go the way of Connor."
Marks moved to the door.
"That's fair warning. The man that gets me has got to be quick."
In another second he passed through the curtains which hid the long French windows. Fane heard the click of them as the man opened them and stepped into the night.
Fane waited some time; he heard a step outside in the hall and slipped out through a door which would bring him to the lawn by another route.
He saw the door open slowly. It was Mr. Goodman. He came in, grumbling to himself, looking from table to table for his pipe. Presently he found it. He put it in his pocket and was walking slowly back to the door when he saw something on the ground, and, stopping, picked it up. It was the wig that Marks had dropped in his flight. He looked at this for a long time, and then, conscious of the draught which came through the open French windows, moved towards the closed curtains.
His hand was on the point of drawing them back when two hands shot out, gripped him by the throat and drew him into the alcove.
Mary was half undressed when she heard the struggle below; heard the cry of a man in pain, and, pulling on her gown, fled down the stairs. She pushed open the door of the hall; it was in darkness, as it had been the night before.
"All right," said a voice, and the lights came on suddenly.
Ferdie Fane was standing by the window, his coat and hair dishevelled.
"Mr. Goodman!" she gasped. "I heard his voice—where is he?"
"I haven't the slightest idea," he said.

And then she saw the smear of blood across the white expanse of his shirt front. ... As she fell fainting to the ground he caught her in his arms and the blood of a murdered man stained her kimono.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was half-past two in the morning, and Monkshall was awake. The mud-stained car of Hallick's stood at the door; the carpets were rolled up, in the search for hidden traps; and Mrs. Elvery, in a pink dressing-gown, dozed and snored in the most comfortable arm-chair. There Hallick found her when he came in from a search of the grounds.

"Take my advice and go to bed," he said, shaking her to wakefulness. "It's nearly three o'clock."

Mrs. Elvery blinked herself awake and began to cry softly.

"Poor Mr. Goodman! He was such a nice man, and there are so few bachelors left!" she wailed.

"We don't even know that he's dead yet," snapped Hallick.

"There was blood all over the floor," she whimpered. "And that nice Mr. Partridge—have you found him?"

"That nice Mr. Partridge," said Mr. Hallick irritably, "is on his way to London. You needn't worry about him; he's an old lag, and his name is Soapy Marks."

Suddenly Mrs. Elvery became galvanised to life.

"Have you questioned Cotton? He's been behaving very strangely this evening. Twice he's been down to the cellar, and when he came up the last time his knees were covered with dust—and do you know why?"

"I don't want to know why," said the weary Hallick.

"He's searching for the gold that's hidden in this house. Ah, that makes you jump, Mr. Inspector."

"Superintendent," said Hallick coldly. "The gold in this house, eh? So you've got that O'Shea story, have you? Where did you get it?"

"Out of my press cuttings," said Elvery triumphantly.

"Will you kindly go to bed?" snapped Hallick, and succeeded in hustling her from the room.

His assistant, Sergeant Dobie, had a theory that needed a little investigation, and now that they were alone for a minute Dobie stated his views.

“Redmayne? Nonsense! Why should he——”

“That’s what I was going to tell you, sir. Redmayne is broke; he borrowed all his money from Goodman. The first thing he did after the disappearance of Goodman was to go up into the old man’s room, open a box and take out a promissory note. Here it is.”

Hallick examined the slip of paper thoughtfully.

“Get Redmayne here.”

The colonel almost staggered into the room. His nerve was gone, he was the wreck of the man he had been.

“I want to ask you a few questions,” said Hallick brusquely, and Redmayne scowled at him.

“I’m tired of answering questions,” he snapped.

“I’m sure you are,” said the other sarcastically. “There’s a ghost in Monkshall.” He produced the promissory note and held it out for the colonel to see. “Is that the secret of all the queer happenings in this house? Is that the real explanation of the Terror?”

“It was money I borrowed,” said Redmayne in a low voice.

Hallick nodded.

“Ten years ago you were the secretary of a military fund. There was an audit and a large sum was missing. You were almost on the point of being arrested when you found the money—you borrowed it from Goodman?”

“Yes.”

“An hour or two ago you were searching Goodman’s papers. Was it to find this?” asked the detective sternly.

“I refuse to be cross-examined by you,” said Redmayne, with something of his old spirit. “You have no right to question me as to my private affairs.”

Hallick shook his head.

“Colonel Redmayne,” he said quietly, “last night a man was murdered in your house; to-night a gentleman has disappeared in circumstances which suggest murder. I have every right to question you. I have even the right of arresting you, if I wish.”

“Then arrest me.” The colonel’s voice quavered. .

“I want you to realise the position you are in. There is somebody in this house whom no man has seen—somebody you are sheltering!”

“What do you mean?” The shaft had struck home.

“I am suggesting,” Hallick went on, “that this loan of yours from Goodman was a blind; that at the time you borrowed it you had command of immense sums of money; that you bought this house to protect a desperate criminal wanted by the police—Leonard O’Shea!”

“It’s a lie,” said the other hoarsely.

“Then I’ll tell you another,” retorted Hallick. “Somewhere in this house there is hidden hundreds of thousands of pounds in gold, the proceeds of the Aritania robbery; somewhere in these underground rooms of yours is a man half-sane, half-mad.”

The colonel cringed back.

“I did my best to keep him away. Do you think I wanted him here—where my daughter is . . .” he whined.

“We’ll get the truth about this,” said Hallick.

He signalled to Dobie, who led the unresisting man to his study. Hallick followed, and, as the door closed behind them, Mr. Ferdinand Fane came through the closed curtains. He had changed his clothes and was wearing a golfing suit.

Going back to the window, he called softly and Mary came out of the darkness.

“The coast is clear,” he said extravagantly, “and nobody need ever know that you have committed the indiscretion of walking in the dark with me.”

She pulled off her raincoat and dropped wearily into a chair.

“It is part of the night’s madness,” she said; “and yet I felt safer there than in the house.”

“I never feel safe anywhere,” said Ferdie. “I’m going to sleep in this room to-night—where’s Cotton?”

“What do you want?”

“A drink,” he said, and rang the bell. Cotton came in so quickly that he might have been standing outside the door. His coat was wet, his boots muddy.

“Hallo!” Fane eyed him keenly. “Why have you been sneaking about the grounds, my young friend?”

“Just looking round, sir. There’s no harm in that, is there?” the man’s voice was hollow and tremulous.

Then Mary remembered.

“Cotton, you have been with the detectives. What do they say?”

Fane laughed softly, and she interpreted his scorn.

“I want to know,” she said impatiently.

“I’ll tell you what they say.” He stared at her. “They think Mr. Goodman’s dead—somewhere in this room.” He leered at her. “That’s a queer idea, ain’t it?”

She shuddered.

“And they think that old parson’s dead too,” he went on with relish. “I heard Dobie telling the superintendent that the parson must have come into the room when the fight was goin’ on and that the Terror killed ’em both!”

“The Terror?” she repeated.

“That’s what they call him. They say he goes mad two hours every day. That’s a queer thing to happen, ain’t it, miss? Fancy havin’ a lunatic around, and nobody knows who he is. It might be you, sir—it might be me—it might be me.”

“Most likely you, I should think,” said Fane sharply. “Cotton, bring me a pint of champagne.”

“Haven’t you had enough to-night?” pleaded Mary.

He shook his head.

“There’s no such thing.”

She waited till Cotton was out of the room, then:—

“Mr. Fane, what happened to Mr. Goodman?”

He made no attempt to answer her until Cotton had brought the wine and gone away again.

“This really is champagne,” he said as he poured out the foaming liquor. “Gosh, I’ve got a headache.”

“I wish you’d have such a headache that you’d never drink again,” she said passionately.

“In other words, you wish I were dead?” he suggested.

He was disappointing her terribly; she had thought that in a time like this he would have been a help.

And then a thought struck her.

“What do you mean by ‘this really is champagne?’” she asked.

“I mean that this is the first drink of wine I’ve had for a week,” he said. “Don’t ask me any more about my habits—I’m a modest man.”

Was he serious? Was this drunkenness of his affected?

“What happened to-night when I found you in this room?” she asked. “When that terrible fight was going on?”

He shook his head.

“I don’t know. Some feller hit me in the jaw. I began to feel that I wasn’t amongst friends.”

Then suddenly he became unexpectedly embarrassed.

“I say, would you really like me to—sort of—well, you know, look after you?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she said. And yet she knew well enough.

“I mean, to be around when you want somebody to protect you.”

He had come closer to her, but he did not touch her.

“Do you think you’re in a fit state to protect anybody?” she asked, and knew that she was begging the question.

“Do you know, Mary, that I’d do a tremendous lot for you? You see, Mary—__”

“Must you call me Mary?” she asked.

“Unless your name’s Jemima. You can call me Ferdie if you like.”

“I don’t like—not at the moment,” she said, a little out of breath.

“Did Goodman tell you he was awfully keen on you?”

She nodded.

“Poor Mr. Goodman! Yes, he was very fond of me, and I liked him too.”

She looked round suddenly and he saw her face.

“What is the matter?” he asked quickly.

She shook her head.

“I don’t know, but I’ve got a horrible feeling that somebody is listening. I wish that man would come,” she added inconsequently.

“Expecting somebody?” He was surprised.

“Yes, another detective—Mrs. Elvery calls him the great Bradley. He is coming to-morrow morning.”

“Poor old blighter!” he chuckled. “What’s the use of bringing in a feller like that? I’m as good as a thousand detectives. I’m as good as O’Shea.” He laughed. “O’Shea! There’s a lad!”

She stepped back from him.

“I’ve heard of O’Shea,” she said slowly. “What does he look like?”

He laughed again.

“Something like me—only not so good looking.”

She nodded and her voice sank to a whisper.

“You know too well who O’Shea is.”

The accusation took him aback.

“Yesterday, when you spoke to that man Connor, I was at the window and I heard you threaten him.”

He was silent.

“I warned him,” he said at last.

As though to put an end to the conversation he wheeled an easy-chair until it faced the panelled wall, and dragged forward a screen which he placed at its back.

“What are you going to do?” she asked.

“Sleep,” was the laconic answer.

“But why do you put the chair there?” she asked in amazement.

“Old monks’ door!” he smiled. “Any ghost of a monk is bound to come through the monks’ door! If it was a ghost of a cook-general, she’d come through the kitchen door. You can’t tell me anything about ghosts.”

She was compelled to laugh at the absurdity.

Hallick came back at that moment with the colonel.

“What the dickens are you doing?” he asked.

Ferdie had found a rug, left behind by Mrs. Elvery, and this he was wrapping about himself.

“I’m going to sleep.”

“Sleep in your room,” said Redmayne harshly.

“Let him alone.” Hallick was rather indulgent to this eccentric man.

He felt a draught and pulled back the curtains. The windows were open.

“Bolt this after we go out, Miss Redmayne, and don’t let anybody in unless you hear your father’s voice. We’re going into the grounds.”

“You’d better go to your room, my darling,” said the colonel, but she shook her head.

“I’ll wait here.”

“But, my dear——”

“Leave her, leave her,” said Hallick impatiently. “He’ll do her no harm.” Ferdie, wrapped in the rug, had ensconced himself in the chair. He thought he heard her go out, but she was still there, and presently she peeped round the corner, and, seeing that his eyes were closed, switched out all the lights save one. She thought that she would speak to him, but changed her mind, tiptoed softly to the door and pulled it open. Her head was turned towards

where Ferdie sat behind the screen. She did not see the man who suddenly appeared in the doorway, within inches of her. A tall shape, draped from head to foot in black, two eyes gleaming through the slits of the cowl.

She had no warning, no premonition of her danger, till an arm like steel slipped round her waist and a great hand covered her mouth.

She looked round, frozen with horror; saw the gleam of those gloomy eyes and went limp in the arms of the black monk.

Without a sound he lifted her into the passage, closed the door softly behind him, and carried her, as though she had no weight, past the door of her father's study to a little room that was used as a store. Had she been conscious, she would have remembered the big trapdoor in the middle of the room which was always fastened. Stooping, he pulled the trap open, and, hoisting her to his shoulder, descended a flight of stone stairs. He left her for a moment, came back and fastened the trap from the inside.

CHAPTER XIV

HALLICK and the colonel visited the men they had stationed in the grounds, but nothing had been seen of the mysterious apparition, nor had any trace been found of Goodman or Marks.

“Marks is in London by now,” said Hallick as they squelched across the sodden grass to the house. “He won’t take much finding.”

“Why did he come here?”

“To get the stuff that’s hidden here—the gold your friend, O’Shea, has cached somewhere in this house,” said Hallick. “I am taking O’Shea to-night, and I advise you to keep out of the way, because I have an idea somebody is going to be badly hurt. My suggestion to you is that you take your daughter to London to-night; use one of my cars.”

“She will not go. How can I explain to her——” began the colonel.

“There’s no need for explanations,” said the other shortly. “You can tell her the truth, or you can wait till the case comes for trial. O’Shea, I presume, gave you the money to buy this house.”

“He had already bought it, before the robbery,” said the colonel. “I was in a terrible state of mind, expecting arrest at any moment. I can’t tell you how he got to know of my situation. I’d never heard of the man before. But when he offered me a loan, a fixed income, and a decent house over my head, I jumped at it. You see, I’m not a fighting soldier —I’m an army doctor; and when he explained that he had these little troubles I very naturally thought he’d be easy to deal with. I didn’t even know he was O’Shea till a year or so ago.”

They trudged on in silence, and then Hallick said:—

“Have other men been here—other boarders?” He mentioned two names, and the colonel nodded.

“Yes, they came for a day or two, and then disappeared without paying their bills.”

“They died here,” said Hallick grimly; “and died at O’Shea’s hands—if they’d had the sense to tell me that they’d located O’Shea I could have saved them. But they wanted all the credit for themselves, I suppose, poor chaps!”

“Killed them—here!” gasped the colonel.

By this time they had come to the house, and Hallick tapped gently on the French windows. There was no response. He tapped again, but there was no answer.

“We’d better come to the door and wake Cotton,” he said.

It was a long time before Cotton heard the knocking, and a longer time before he opened the door.

“Where’s Miss Redmayne?” asked Hallick.

The man shook his head.

“Haven’t seen her, sir. There’s somebody sleeping here—he’s covered up with a blanket—gave me quite a start when I peeped round the screen.”

“That’s Fane; leave him alone.”

He turned on all the lights.

And then suddenly a cold feeling came to this hardened detective, a sense of impending disaster.

“Go and find your daughter,” he said. Redmayne went out, and the detective heard his feet on the floor above. He came back in five minutes, white and shaking.

“She’s not in her room and I don’t think she’s in the house. I’ve looked everywhere.”

“Have you seen her, Cotton?”

“No, sir, I haven’t seen the young lady at all.”

“What’s that?” said Hallick.

He picked up something from the floor; it was a girdle. The two men looked at one another.

“He’s been here—the monk!” said Redmayne in horror.

Hallick had turned back the screen and dragged the chair, with its slumbering form, into the middle of the room.

“Wake up, Fane—Miss Redmayne has disappeared.”

With a quick movement he jerked away the corner of the rug that covered the sleeper's face, and started back with a cry. For the man who lay in that chair was not Fane. He looked down at the dead face of Soapy Marks!

CHAPTER XV

MARY came to consciousness with a curious sensation of discomfort. She was lying on something hard and cold. She looked up and her eyes were attracted by a pale blue lantern which hung from a vaulted roof; and to her ears came the sound of music; the deep, bass notes of an organ.

She struggled to a sitting position, and looked round. She was in a tiny chapel. In a recess stood a white-draped altar. Great wooden pillars supported the roof, and between these she saw a small organ, at which there was seated a black-robed monk.

He heard her move and, looking round, came stealthily towards her. She was paralysed with fear and could not move.

"Don't be afraid," he whispered. "There is nothing to be afraid of, my little lamb." The voice was muffled by the thick cowl that hid the face.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"Your friend—your lover—your worshipper!"

Was she dreaming? Was this some hideous nightmare? No, it was real enough.

She saw now that there were two entrances to the vault, one on either side. Two recesses whence stone steps wound upward.

"Who are you?" she asked again, and slowly he pulled back the hood.

She could not believe her eyes. It was Goodman. The grey hair was ruffled, the keen face less serene than she had known it. His eyes were like burning fires.

"Mr. Goodman!" she whispered.

"Leonard, you shall call me," he said in the same tone.

He reached his trembling hands down and caught her by the shoulders.

"Mary, my love, I have waited—oh, so long—for this glorious moment. For you are to me as a divinity."

She came to her feet and shrank back from him.

"You're not afraid of me, Mary?" She drew to herself all her reserves of courage and strength, and shook her head.

“No, Mr. Goodman. Why should I be afraid of you? I’m glad that you’re alive. I was afraid—something had happened to you.”

“Nothing could happen to me, my lamb.” His smile was full of confidence. “Nothing could happen to your lover. The very gods protected him and reserved him for this glorious reward.”

Her knees were trembling under her. She was sick, and would have fainted again, but by force of will maintained her consciousness.

“Your lover,” he was saying. “I’ve loved you all this time. Sometimes I’ve wanted you so that there was a fire in my heart and in my brain that was beyond my control.”

He took her cold hand in his and brought it to his lips. She tried to pull is away, but he held it firmly, and his eyes smiled into hers. They were bigger than she had ever seen them—wide, glowing eyes that transfigured his face.

“You’re not afraid of me?” he breathed. “Not afraid of the lover who can give you all your heart’s desire?”

Suddenly he caught her arm, and waved his hand about the room.

“There’s money here; gold—thousands and thousands of golden pieces. Beautiful golden’ pieces, all hidden away. I hid them with my own hands.”

And then he waxed confidential, and was more like his normal self.

“This chapel is full of hollow places. I found deep cavities where the bodies of the dead monks lay. I took them out and purified their charnel houses with beautiful gold.” He pointed. “That wall behind that old seat, these wooden pillars, are packed tight with it.”

She tried to keep him in that saner mood. .

“What is this place, Mr. Goodman? I’ve never seen it before.”

He looked at her strangely, and a slow smile dawned on his face.

“This is a sanctuary for my bride.” His arms went round her, and she steeled herself to offer no resistance. “Men and women have been married here,” he said. “Can’t you smell the fragrance of the bride’s hair? We will be married here,” he nodded. “And men have died here—hundreds of years ago. We may die here too.”

He laughed. She had heard that laugh in the night, and the horror of it turned her blood to ice.

“I’ve buried men here—there!”‘ He pointed. “And there!” He pointed again. “They came in search of me—clever men from Scotland Yard!”

He knelt down on the floor and put his face to the joints of a stone slab.

“There’s one there. Do you hear me, you dead man—you who came, so full of life, to catch O’Shea? Do you hear me? I am alive. And you—what are you?”

“Please, please don’t!” she gasped. “You are terrifying me!”

He chuckled at this.

“The Terror—ah! That is what they call me—the Terror that walks by night. Biblical—a strange thing to call poor old Goodman. I used to sit, smoking my pipe, in that room of ours”—he pointed up—“and hear that stupid old woman talk of the Terror. And inside me my heart was laughing. She never knew how near she was.” He reached out his long hand, and it clenched horribly.

“Mr. Goodman!” She strove to bring him back to a rational level. “You’ll let me go now, won’t you? My father will give you anything you want, will do anything for you—he has been a doctor, you know.”

Not once did his hand release the grip on her arm.

“Your father?” He was amused, and chuckled for a long time. “He’ll do as I tell him, because he’s afraid of me. You never thought he was afraid of me, but he is. He thinks I’m mad. That’s why he’s looking after me. I know he’s a doctor—of course he’s a doctor. Sometimes he used to lock me up in a cell. I used to scream and tear at the walls, but he kept me there. He’s mad—they’re all mad!”

She was swooning with fright, and with a superhuman effort tore her arm from his grip and fled to the stairs. Before one foot was on the lowest step he had caught her and dragged her back again.

“Not yet—not yet.”

“Let me go.” She did not struggle. “I swear I won’t attempt to run away again. You can believe me, can’t you?” He nodded and released her. She crouched down on the stone seat before the altar.

“I’ll play to you,” he said, with sudden inspiration. “Lovely music——”

As his fingers wandered over the keys he was talking disjointedly to himself, presently he began to play, so softly that his voice sounded harsh against that wonderful background of melody.

“You’ve heard this old organ?” He looked round over his shoulder at her. “I play to the dead and make them live! Old monks walk here—long lines of them, marching two and two. And people bring young brides to wed and old men to die. And sometimes I see men here that I know—dead men——”

He dropped again into a conversational tone. Suddenly the music stopped, and he pointed to an invisible shape.

“Look—Joe Connor!”

She tried to pierce the gloom but saw nothing. Goodman was talking now, beckoning to the invisible shape.

The organ ceased. He went across and put his arm around something that was invisible to Mary, but was plain to his crazy eyes. And so he led the thing he saw to the stone seat she had vacated.

“You shall have it, my boy. It’s all here, Connor—the good red gold that I got away with. Sit down, Connor—I want to tell you all about it. I’d bought this old house months before—you see, Connor? And I brought the gold here in the lorry by night, and I hid it in the hollow places. Weeks and months I worked, filling hollow pillars and the graves of old monks. Clever, eh, Connor? No wonder you smile.”

He rose and stood behind the ghostly shape he saw.

“I tell you this because you’re dead —and dead men never tell. And then I got Redmayne as a blind, put him in charge of the house. He had to do it, Connor”—he lowered his voice to a confidential note—“because I had a hold on him. I used to go a little queer and he looked after me—that’s what I paid him for. I was nothing—he was the master of Monkshall. He, he—that’s how I fooled the police. Nobody dreamed that I was O’Shea. You want your share—damn you! You dog! I’ll choke the life out of you, you hound!”

His voice rose to a yell as he gripped the spirit throat and, in his imagination, hurled it to the ground. He was kneeling on the floor now, his face demoniacal in its fury.

And then he remembered the girl and looked round.

“I’m frightening you.” His voice was soft. He came nearer to her and suddenly clasped her in his arms.

She screamed, but he hushed her.

“I don’t want to frighten you. Don’t scream. I love you too much to frighten you.” His lips sought hers, but she avoided them.

“No, not yet—give me a little time.” He loosed his hold on her.

“But you will love me? Did you see those little doors in the passage walls? The old monks lived there. You and I will find a bridal suite there.”

She was fighting desperately for time. At any moment this madness might pass. She knew now he was O’Shea—sane for twenty-two hours a day.

“Wait. I want to talk to you, Mr. Goodman. You said you loved me.”

“You are God to me,” he said reverently.

“You would not want me to love you if I loved some one else, would you?” His face changed at this.

“Loved some one else? No, no. I would not ask it. But do you love some one else?”

“Yes—I—I’m awfully fond of—of Mr. Fane.”

For a second he neither spoke nor moved, then his hand shot out to her throat. She thought she was doomed, but at that moment she was gripped by the arm and swung aside, and O’Shea looked into the levelled muzzle of an automatic.

“I want you, O’Shea!”

It was Fane’s voice, Fane’s arm that encircled her.

“Come away from that switch. That’s right. I don’t want to be in the dark. Farther. Now stand still.”

“Who are you?” O’Shea’s voice was surprisingly gentle.

“My name’s Bradley!” said Fane quietly. “Inspector Bradley of Scotland Yard. I want you, O’Shea. For three years I have been waiting for this opportunity, and now I know all that I want to know.”

O’Shea nodded.

“You know what I have done to Marks?”

“You killed him—yes.”

“He tried to strangle me—I think he must have recognised me. His body——”

“I found it behind the monks’ door and left it in my place. If he and Connor had taken my advice they would have been alive to-day.”

O’Shea gave a deep sigh and smiled.

“I’m afraid I’ve given everybody a lot of trouble,” he said blandly. “So you’re Bradley, the man who arrested Connor and the man who arrested our old friend, Soapy Marks, and now you have done the hat trick! Really, I deserve everything for not recognising you. Miss Redmayne, will you accept my apologies? I am afraid at times I get a little out of hand—a mere passing folly—um. May I take off this ridiculous robe?” He stripped the black robe from him, slowly.

“Be careful. He is not sane yet,” said Mary in a low voice.

He heard her.

“Oh, my dear Miss Redmayne”—he smiled—“you must be a very poor judge of sanity. And now, I suppose, inspector—or is it superintendent?—you will marry this charming young lady who has so touchingly declared her love for you? I wish I could find you a little wedding present.”

So quickly did he move that Bradley could not have escaped death had not the foot of the assassin slipped. The knife struck one of the pillars, and in the impact the rotting wood broke and a stream of gold flowed from its hollow depth.

O’Shea glared at the gold that had cost him so much, and then he began to laugh.

“A wedding present,” he chuckled.

He was still laughing when Hallick and three detectives took him by car to London.

THE END